**Press Release**

Alcohol treatment in Ireland: HRB publishes latest figures

Latest alcohol treatment figures from the Health Research Board (HRB) show 56,702 cases were treated for problem alcohol use in Ireland between 2009 and 2015. Treated cases increased from 7,993 in 2009, to 8,876 in 2011, then decreased year-on-year to 7,616 in 2015.

Commenting on some of the trends over time, Dr Suzi Lyons, Senior Researcher at the HRB said;

‘Alcohol remains the main problem drug that people seek treatment for in Ireland. During 2015, 7,616 people sought treatment for alcohol as a main problem drug compared to 4,732 for opiates and 2,786 for cannabis.’

‘There has been a decrease in the number of cases seeking treatment for alcohol as their main problem drug. This could be the result of a real decrease in numbers seeking treatment, a change in the participation of services reporting cases, availability of services, or a combination of these factors.’

‘The main decrease is seen in the number of new cases presenting for treatment. The proportion of new cases decreased from 54.1% in 2009 to 46.7% in 2015. This means fewer new cases are entering treatment. However, there has been an increase in the number of new cases who were classified as dependent\* on alcohol when they presented to treatment for the first time, from 41.5% in 2009 to 57.0% in 2015. This makes treatment and recovery more difficult.’

**Key findings**

* Between 2009 and 2015 56,702 cases were treated for problem alcohol use.
* The number of cases increased from 7,993 in 2009 to 8,876 in 2011. Since then the numbers have decreased year-on-year to 7,616 in 2015.

In 2015

Overview

* The proportion of new cases decreased to 46.7%, from 54.1% in 2009.
* Nearly four out of 10 cases were treated in residential facilities, similar to previous years.

Polydrug use in 2015

* One fifth (18.7%) of those treated for problem alcohol use also reported using other drugs in 2015, similar to previous years.
* **Cannabis** (63.6%) was the most common additional drug used followed by **cocaine** (39.7%).
* **Benzodiazepines** were the third most common additional drug reported among cases treated for problem alcohol use (32.6%).
* The proportion of cases reporting benzodiazepines as an additional problem increased from 17.7% in 2009 to 32.6%.
* The proportion of cases treated for problem alcohol use who reported **MDMA** as an additional problem drug **dropped** from 26.9% in 2009 to 12.9%.
* The proportion of cases who reported a **Novel Psychoactive Substance (NPS)** as an additional problem peaked at 5.5% of treated cases in 2011. Since then the proportion has dropped to a low of 0.7% in 2014, rising slightly to 1.6% in 2015.

Level of problem alcohol use

* In 2015, half of all of those in treatment for problem alcohol use **commenced drinking** alcohol at or before the age of **16 years**.
* Three out of five of all cases were classified as **alcohol dependent\***.
* Three out of five new cases (those who have never been treated for problem alcohol use before) were classified as alcohol dependent\*.

Socio-demographics

* In 2015**,** the **median age** of treated caseswas 41 years.
* Two thirds of cases were male.
* The proportion who were **homeless** increased from 4.0% in 2009, to 7.5% in 2015.

**\* Alcohol dependence:** Strong desire to consume alcohol, impaired control over use, persistent drinking in spite of harmful consequences, a higher priority given to alcohol than any other activities or obligations, increased tolerance and showing withdrawal reaction when alcohol use is discontinued. Source WHO: *The Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test (2001).*

A copy of the HRB Bulletin *Alcohol Treatment in Ireland 2009 – 2015* is available on the publications page of our website [www.hrb.ie](http://www.hrb.ie)

**ENDS**

**For more information, infographics or interviews please contact:-**

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**Notes for editors**

This paper describes trends in treated problem alcohol use in Ireland over the seven-year period 2009 to 2015, as recorded by the **National Drug Treatment Reporting System (NDTRS)**. This information will assist policy makers, service planners and public health practitioners to develop appropriate responses to problem alcohol use in the future.

It is important to note that each record in the NDTRS database relates to a treatment episode (a case), and not to a person. This means that the same person could be counted more than once in the same calendar year if they had more than one treatment episode in that year.

Since 2004 the NDTRS has collected data on cases in which alcohol was recorded as the main reason for seeking drug treatment. The process of recruiting treatment services that have not participated in the NDTRS to date is ongoing. Coverage of cases remains incomplete in some counties. It may be assumed, therefore, that figures in this report underestimate the true extent of treated problem alcohol use in Ireland.