**Headline**: Drug treatment in Ireland: HRB publishes latest figures

**Sub headline**: Embargo Wednesday 17 April at 00.01. Latest figures from the Health Research Board show 63,303 cases\* presented for treatment for problem drug use (excluding alcohol) between 2011 and 2017. The number of treated cases increased from 8,361 in 2011 to 9,892 in 2015, and then decreased to 8,922 in 2017.

* In 2017, opiates, mainly heroin, remain the most common drugs reported among cases. treated for problem drug use. However, the proportion of opiate cases has fallen in recent years.
* Cannabis, cocaine and benzodiazepines were the second, third and fourth most common drugs reported by cases in treatment in 2017.
* There was a 32% increase in the number of cocaine cases between 2016 and 2017.

Darrin Morrissey, Chief Executive at the Health Research Board says,

‘Problem drug use continues to seriously impact people throughout Irish society. This is evident in the drug treatment data presented today, as well as the HRB’s recent drug-related deaths and alcohol treatment reports. Over the recent period of economic recovery, drug treatment trends are changing and the data we analyse from the HRB information systems helps to inform health services provision and the health policy responses to problem drug use in Ireland’.

Commenting on the latest figures from the National Drug Treatment Reporting System, Dr Suzi Lyons, Senior Researcher at the HRB says,

‘There has been a notable increase in cases presenting with cocaine as their main problem drug since 2013, with a marked rise in the most recent figures from 1,138 cases in 2016, to 1,500 cases in 2017’.

‘Cannabis remains the most common drug among **cases** entering ***treatment for the first time***. Four in every 10 new cases were treated for problem cannabis use, many at a young age - the median age for ***new cannabis cases*** was 21 years, compared to 32 years for opiates and 28 years for cocaine’.

**Key findings**

In 2017, 8,922 cases were treated for problem drug use. The number of *new* cases decreased from 3,316 in 2011 to 3,257 in 2017. New cases accounted for 37% of all cases treated in 2017, as compared to 40% of all cases in 2011.

**Main problem drug (excluding alcohol)**

* **Opiates** (mainly heroin) were the most commonly reported main problem drug, accounting for 45% of cases treated in 2017.  The number of cases decreased from 4,549 in 2011 to 4,016 in 2017.
* **Cannabis** was the second most common main drug, accounting for 25% of cases treated in 2017. The number of cases increased from 2,161 in 2011 to 2,786 in 2015, and then decreased to 2,200 in 2017. Cannabis was the most common drug among *new* cases in 2017 (39% of new cases).
* **Cocaine** was the third most common main drug reported, accounting for 17% of cases treated in 2017. The number of cases treated for cocaine increased year-on-year from 2013 (708 cases) to 2017 (1,500 cases). The number of cases increased by 32% between 2016 (1,138 cases) and 2017 (1,500 cases). The number of *new* cases treated for cocaine increased yearly from 297 in 2012 to 748 in 2017. Cocaine represented 23% of new cases in 2017, as compared to 9% of new cases in 2012.
* **Benzodiazepines** were the fourth most common main problem, accounting for 10% of cases in 2017 (868 cases). Since 2013, benzodiazepines have accounted for around 10% of all cases, and a similar proportion of *new* cases.

### Cocaine in focus

* A total of 1,500 cases were treated for cocaine use in 2017, almost double the number of cases in 2011 (770 cases).
* The number of new cases treated has risen from 396 in 2011 to 748 in 2017.
* The median age for cases treated has increased from 28 in 2011 to 30 in 2018.
* Males accounted for 4 in every 5 cases (80%) over the reporting period.
* The proportion of cases in paid employment increased from 20% in 2011 to 34% in 2017.
* The proportion of cases that reported using more than one drug decreased over the period from 77% in 2011 to 63% in 2017.
* The most common additional drugs reported among cocaine cases were alcohol (58%), cannabis (48%) and benzodiazepines (25%).

**Polydrug use (problem use of more than one drug)**

* Over the period, the majority of cases reported polydrug use (61%).
* The number of cases reporting polydrug decreased from 5,514 in 2011 (66% of cases) to 5,106 (57% of cases) but fluctuated in the intervening period.
* Alcohol (1,914 cases), benzodiazepines (1,846 cases), and cannabis (1,690 cases) were the most commonly reported additional drugs in 2017.

**Socio-demographic characteristics (all drugs)**

* The median age of cases increased from 28 years in 2011 to 30 years in 2017.  For new cases, the median age increased from 24 years in 2011 to 26 years in 2017.
* Seven in every ten cases reported over the period were male.
* Young people under 18 years of age accounted for just over one in every ten new cases (13%) treated in 2017 (413 cases).
* The number of cases recorded as homeless increased from 518 in 2011 (6% of cases) to 858 in 2017 (10% of cases).
* Cases who self-reported Irish Traveller as their ethnicity increased in number from 217 in 2011 (3% of cases) to 310 in 2017 (4% of cases).
* A high level of unemployment (64%, 5,702 cases) was found among cases treated in 2017, as in previous years.
* The number of cases in paid employment increased from 670 in 2011 (8% of cases) to 1,280 in 2017 (14% of cases).

**Risk behaviour**

* The number of treated cases that had ever injected decreased from 3,054 in 2011 (37% of cases) to 2,651 in 2017 (30% of cases).

\* 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.

The full report is available to download from the HRB website at www.hrb.ie/publications and [www.drugsandalcohol.ie/30197](http://www.drugsandalcohol.ie/30197). An infographic that outlines key data is also available for download.

**ENDS**

For further information, or to organise interviews with experts, please contact:

Gillian Markey - Communications Manager, Health Research Board

**m** 087 2288514 **e** gmarkey@hrb.ie

### Notes to editors

This paper describes trends in treated problem drug use in Ireland over the seven-year period 2011 to 2017, 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 drug use in the future.

The Health Research Board (HRB) is the lead agency supporting and funding health research in Ireland. We manage four health information systems in the areas of alcohol and drug treatment, drug deaths, disability and mental health, and generate evidence to inform health policy. Our aim is to improve people's health, build health research capacity and underpin developments in health service delivery.