

National Drug Treatment Reporting System

2011 – 2017 Drug Data

Introduction

In this bulletin, trends in **treated problem drug use** (excluding alcohol) are described for the seven-year period from 2011 to 2017. The data are drawn from the **National Drug Treatment Reporting System** (NDTRS), the national surveillance system that records and reports on cases of drug and alcohol treatment in Ireland.

Overview

In the seven-year period, 63,303 cases of treatment for problem drug use were reported to the NDTRS. The number of treated cases increased from 8,361 in 2011 to 9,892 in 2015, and then decreased to **8,922** in 2017.

- The proportion of *new* cases decreased from 39.7% in 2011 to 36.5% in 2017.
- In 2017, the majority of cases were treated in outpatient facilities (62.9%), as in previous years.
- The proportion of cases treated in residential settings increased from 13.2% in 2011 to 19.7% in 2017.

Main problem drug (excluding alcohol)

- **Opiates** (mainly heroin) were the most commonly reported main problem drug. The proportion of cases treated decreased from 54.4% in 2011 to 45.0% in 2017.
- **Cannabis** was the second most common main drug among those treated. The proportion of cases treated increased from 25.8% in 2011 to 28.2% in 2015, then decreased to 24.7% in 2017. Cannabis was the most common drug among new cases in 2017.
- **Cocaine** remains the third most common main drug reported, accounting for 16.8% of cases treated in 2017. Since 2013, the number of cocaine cases has been increasing, with the largest increase occurring between 2016 and 2017 (an increase of 31.8%). The proportion of new cases with cocaine as a main problem increased yearly from 9.1% in 2012 to 23.0% in 2017.

- **Benzodiazepines** were the fourth most common main problem, accounting for 9.7% of cases in 2017. Since 2013, the proportion of cases treated for benzodiazepines has been relatively stable.
- In 2017, 0.9% of cases reported **Z-drugs** as a main problem, as compared to 0.4% in 2011.
- In 2017, 0.6% of cases reported **novel psychoactive substances** (NPS) as a main problem, as compared to 1.1% in 2011.

Polydrug use

- Over the period, the majority of cases reported **polydrug** use (61.3%).
- The proportion of cases with polydrug use decreased from 65.9% in 2011 to 57.2% in 2017, but fluctuated in the intervening period.
- Alcohol (37.5%), benzodiazepines (36.2%), and cannabis (33.1%) were the most commonly reported **additional drugs** in 2017.

Risk behaviour

- The proportion of treated cases that had **ever injected** decreased from 36.5% in 2011 to 29.7% in 2017.

Socio-demographic characteristics

- 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**.
- The proportion of cases recorded as **homeless** increased from 6.2% in 2011 to 9.6% in 2017.
- Cases with an **Irish Traveller** ethnicity increased in proportion from 2.6% in 2011 to 3.5% in 2017.
- A high proportion of cases were **unemployed** in 2017 (63.9%), as in previous years.
- The proportion of cases **in paid employment** increased from 8.0% in 2011 to 14.3% in 2017.

NDTRS cases 2011-2017

This bulletin presents NDTRS drug treatment data for the seven-year period from 2011 to 2017. Included are cases treated in all types of services: outpatient, inpatient, low threshold, general practitioners, and those treated in prison.^{1,2}

Data in this bulletin supersede all data previously published in NDTRS publications.

Between 2011 and 2017, a total of 63,303 cases treated for problem drug use (excluding alcohol) were reported to the NDTRS.^{3,4}

The number of treated cases increased from 8,361 in 2011 to 9,892 in 2015, before decreasing to 9,227 in 2016 and again to 8,922 in 2017 (Table 1). The proportion of *new* cases decreased from 39.7% in 2011 to 36.5% in 2017.

Table 1: Number of cases treated for problem drug use, by treatment status, NDTRS 2011 to 2017

	2011		2012		2013		2014		2015		2016		2017	
	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)
Revised total	8361		8005		9006		9890		9892		9227		8922	
New cases	3316	(39.7)	3272	(40.9)	3475	(38.6)	3776	(38.2)	3742	(37.8)	3526	(38.2)	3257	(36.5)
Previously treated cases	4862	(58.2)	4518	(56.4)	5239	(58.2)	5643	(57.1)	5855	(59.2)	5335	(57.8)	5242	(58.8)
Treatment status unknown	183	(2.2)	215	(2.7)	292	(3.2)	471	(4.8)	295	(3.0)	366	(4.0)	423	(4.7)

Incidence and prevalence of treatment

Annual rates for the incidence (new cases) and prevalence (all cases) of treated problem drug use were calculated per 100,000 of the population aged 15 to 64 years based on census figures from the Central Statistics Office (CSO)⁵ (Figure 1).

Incidence decreased from 106.5 per 100,000 in 2011

to 101.0 per 100,000 in 2017. Incidence peaked in 2014 at 119.3 per 100,000.

Prevalence, which includes new cases and those cases returning to treatment, increased from 270.1 per 100,000 in 2011 to a peak of 316.2 in 2014, before decreasing year-on-year to 279.8 per 100,000 in 2017.

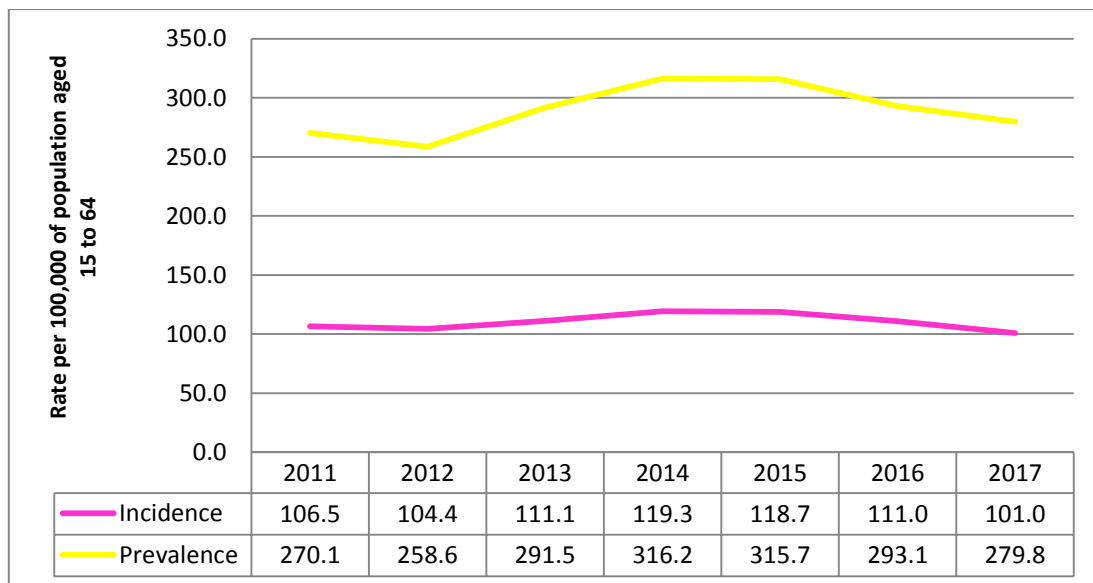


Figure 1: Incidence and prevalence of treated problem drug use per 100,000 of the 15-64 year-old population, NDTRS 2011 to 2017

Type of service provider

Outpatient facilities accounted for the majority of cases treated over the period (63.3%). In 2017, 62.9% of cases were treated in outpatient facilities, a decrease from 67.3% in 2011.

The proportion of cases treated in residential (inpatient) settings increased from 13.2% in 2011 to 19.7% in 2017.

The proportion of cases treated in low threshold settings increased from 7.7% in 2011 to 12.1% in

2015, before decreasing to 8.9% in 2017.

The proportion of cases treated in prison decreased from 9.1% in 2011 to 7.3% in 2017. However, the proportion was stable in the intervening years at around 8.2%.

Between 2011 and 2016, 2.7% of cases were treated by general practitioners. The proportion decreased to 1.3% in 2017. This reflects reduced participation of some general practitioners in the NDTRS.

Table 2: Number of cases treated for problem drug use, by type of service provider, NDTRS 2011 to 2017

	2011		2012		2013		2014		2015		2016		2017	
	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)
All cases	8361		8005		9006		9890		9892		9227		8922	
Outpatient	5623	(67.3)	5299	(66.2)	5998	(66.6)	6251	(63.2)	5818	(58.8)	5481	(59.4)	5610	(62.9)
Inpatient*	1107	(13.2)	1124	(14.0)	1233	(13.7)	1348	(13.6)	1779	(18.0)	1885	(20.4)	1757	(19.7)
Low threshold	642	(7.7)	711	(8.9)	812	(9.0)	1190	(12.0)	1197	(12.1)	886	(9.6)	792	(8.9)
Prison	761	(9.1)	642	(8.0)	747	(8.3)	844	(8.5)	827	(8.4)	737	(8.0)	651	(7.3)
General practitioner	228	(2.7)	229	(2.9)	216	(2.4)	257	(2.6)	271	(2.7)	238	(2.6)	112	(1.3)

* Includes any service where the client stays overnight, e.g., in-patient detoxification, therapeutic communities, respite and step down

Main problem drug

All cases

Opiates (mainly heroin) remain the main problem drug reported over the period. As a proportion of all cases treated, opiates decreased year-on-year from 54.4% in 2011 to 45.0% in 2017 (Table 3).

Cannabis remains the second most common main problem drug reported. The proportion of cases increased from 25.8% in 2011 to 28.2% in 2015, and then decreased to 24.7% in 2017.

Cocaine remains the third most common main problem drug reported. Between 2011 and 2013, cases with cocaine as a main problem decreased in proportion from 9.2% to 7.9%. Since 2013, the proportion has increased, the largest increase being from 12.3% in 2016 to 16.8% in 2017 (an increase of 31.8%).

Benzodiazepines were the fourth most common main problem drug, accounting for 9.7% of cases in 2017. The proportion of cases with benzodiazepines as a main problem increased from 6.8% in 2011 to 9.6% in 2013. Since then, the proportion has remained relatively stable.

The proportion of cases with **Z-drugs** as a main problem increased from 0.4% in 2011 to 1.6% in 2015, before decreasing to 0.9% in 2017.

Novel psychoactive substances (NPS) represented 0.6% of all treated cases in 2017, as compared to

1.1% of treated cases in 2011.

In 2017, MDMA, amphetamines, and volatile inhalants each continued to account for a small proportion of all treated cases.

New cases

In 2017, cannabis (39.1%) was the most common main problem drug reported by new cases, followed by opiates (24.8%) and cocaine (23.0%).

The proportion of new cases reporting cannabis as a main problem decreased marginally between 2011 (41.3%) and 2017 (39.1%), but fluctuated in the intervening years, peaking at 47.0% in 2013.

The proportion of new cases reporting opiates as a main problem drug decreased from 33.6% in 2011 to 24.8% in 2017.

The proportion of new cases with cocaine as a main problem increased yearly from 2012 (9.1%) onward, the largest increase being from 16.1% in 2016 to 23.0% in 2017.

Previously treated cases

In 2017, opiates (57.9%) were the most common main problem drug reported by previously treated cases, followed by cannabis (15.4%), cocaine (13.2%), and benzodiazepines (10.2%).

Table 3: Main problem drug (excluding alcohol) reported in 30 days prior to treatment, NDTRS 2011 to 2017

	2011		2012		2013		2014		2015		2016		2017	
	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)
All cases	8361		8005		9006		9890		9892		9227		8922	
Opiates	4549	(54.4)	4164	(52.0)	4625	(51.4)	4948	(50.0)	4732	(47.8)	4341	(47.0)	4016	(45.0)
Cannabis	2161	(25.8)	2290	(28.6)	2583	(28.7)	2730	(27.6)	2786	(28.2)	2439	(26.4)	2200	(24.7)
Cocaine	770	(9.2)	666	(8.3)	708	(7.9)	853	(8.6)	1026	(10.4)	1138	(12.3)	1500	(16.8)
Benzodiazepines	572	(6.8)	636	(7.9)	810	(9.6)	953	(9.6)	873	(8.8)	897	(9.7)	868	(9.7)
Z-Drugs*	31	(0.4)	43	(0.5)	73	(0.8)	155	(1.6)	154	(1.6)	103	(1.1)	82	(0.9)
NPS	95	(1.1)	34	(0.4)	46	(0.5)	71	(0.7)	85	(0.9)	72	(0.8)	51	(0.6)
MDMA	51	(0.6)	47	(0.6)	44	(0.5)	56	(0.6)	51	(0.5)	53	(0.6)	44	(0.5)
Amphetamines	51	(0.6)	50	(0.6)	54	(0.6)	58	(0.6)	63	(0.6)	55	(0.6)	40	(0.4)
Volatile Inhalants	26	(0.3)	21	(0.3)	13	(0.1)	15	(0.2)	15	(0.2)	11	(0.1)	6	(0.1)
Other	55	(0.7)	54	(0.7)	50	(0.6)	51	(0.5)	107	(1.1)	118	(1.3)	115	(1.3)
New cases	3316		3272		3475		3776		3742		3526		3257	
Cannabis	1369	(41.3)	1499	(45.8)	1633	(47.0)	1696	(44.9)	1693	(45.2)	1452	(41.2)	1272	(39.1)
Opiates	1115	(33.6)	1059	(32.4)	1034	(29.8)	1036	(27.4)	971	(25.9)	950	(26.9)	809	(24.8)
Cocaine	396	(11.9)	297	(9.1)	320	(9.2)	425	(11.3)	513	(13.7)	568	(16.1)	748	(23.0)
Benzodiazepines	269	(8.1)	279	(8.5)	345	(9.9)	419	(11.1)	340	(9.1)	353	(10.0)	290	(8.9)
Other	28	(0.8)	24	(0.7)	28	(0.8)	26	(0.7)	56	(1.5)	55	(1.6)	42	(1.3)
MDMA	23	(0.7)	32	(1.0)	27	(0.8)	37	(1.0)	31	(0.8)	39	(1.1)	29	(0.9)
Z-Drugs*	10	(0.3)	19	(0.6)	22	(0.6)	58	(1.5)	46	(1.2)	41	(1.2)	22	(0.7)
NPS	57	(1.7)	20	(0.6)	25	(0.7)	43	(1.1)	53	(1.4)	36	(1.0)	21	(0.6)
Amphetamines	31	(0.9)	27	(0.8)	32	(0.9)	30	(0.8)	33	(0.9)	24	(0.7)	19	(0.6)
Volatile Inhalants	18	(0.5)	16	(0.5)	9	(0.3)	6	(0.2)	6	(0.2)	8	(0.2)	~	(0.2)
Previously treated	4862		4518		5239		5643		5855		5335		5242	
Opiates	3347	(68.8)	3012	(66.7)	3463	(66.1)	3658	(64.8)	3619	(61.8)	3204	(60.1)	3037	(57.9)
Cannabis	736	(15.1)	723	(16.0)	859	(16.4)	932	(16.5)	1023	(17.5)	908	(17.0)	807	(15.4)
Cocaine	356	(7.3)	349	(7.7)	352	(6.7)	381	(6.8)	487	(8.3)	541	(10.1)	692	(13.2)
Benzodiazepines	291	(6.0)	337	(7.5)	437	(8.3)	487	(8.6)	504	(8.6)	500	(9.4)	534	(10.2)
Z-Drugs*	20	(0.4)	22	(0.5)	48	(0.9)	86	(1.5)	99	(1.7)	58	(1.1)	56	(1.1)
Other	25	(0.5)	24	(0.5)	20	(0.4)	19	(0.3)	38	(0.6)	45	(0.8)	54	(1.1)
NPS	36	(0.7)	12	(0.3)	19	(0.4)	26	(0.5)	29	(0.5)	34	(0.6)	27	(0.5)
Amphetamines	18	(0.4)	23	(0.5)	20	(0.4)	27	(0.5)	28	(0.5)	29	(0.5)	19	(0.4)
MDMA	26	(0.5)	13	(0.3)	17	(0.3)	18	(0.3)	19	(0.3)	13	(0.2)	15	(0.3)
Volatile Inhalants	7	(0.1)	~	~	~	~	9	(0.2)	9	(0.2)	~	~	~	~
Treatment status unknown	183		215		292		471		295		366		423	

* Z-Drugs are non-benzodiazepine hypnotic sedative drugs, e.g., zolpidem, zopiclone

~ Cells with five cases or fewer

Polydrug use

Over the period 2011 to 2017, the majority of cases (61.3%) reported polydrug use (problem use of more than one drug). However, the proportion of cases

that reported polydrug use decreased from 65.9% in 2011 to 57.2% in 2017 (Table 4).

Table 4: Polydrug use in cases treated for problem drug use, NDTRS 2011 to 2017

	2011		2012		2013		2014		2015		2016		2017	
	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)
Total	8361		8005		9006		9890		9892		9227		8922	
One drug only	2847	(34.1)	3083	(38.5)	3340	(37.1)	3993	(40.4)	3872	(39.1)	3524	(38.2)	3816	(42.8)
Two or more drugs	5514	(65.9)	4922	(61.5)	5666	(62.9)	5897	(59.6)	6020	(60.9)	5703	(61.8)	5106	(57.2)

In 2017, alcohol (37.5%) once again became the most common additional drug reported by cases with polydrug use, having ranked second to benzodiazepines since 2014 (Table 5).

Benzodiazepines (36.2%) were the second most common additional drug reported among cases with polydrug use in 2017, followed by cannabis (33.1%).

Table 5: Polydrug use - additional problem drugs for all cases and new cases, NDTRS 2011 to 2017

	2011		2012		2013		2014		2015		2016		2017	
	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)
All cases	5514		4922		5666		5897		6020		5703		5106	
Alcohol	2295	(41.6)	2080	(42.3)	2336	(41.2)	2078	(35.2)	2051	(34.1)	1943	(34.1)	1914	(37.5)
Benzodiazepines	1905	(34.5)	1819	(37.0)	2103	(37.1)	2294	(38.9)	2316	(38.5)	2105	(36.9)	1846	(36.2)
Cannabis	1744	(31.6)	1515	(30.8)	1836	(32.4)	2012	(34.1)	1953	(32.4)	1878	(32.9)	1690	(33.1)
Cocaine	1616	(29.3)	1274	(25.9)	1335	(23.6)	1289	(21.9)	1360	(22.6)	1475	(25.9)	1435	(28.1)
Opiates	974	(17.7)	927	(18.8)	1073	(18.9)	1082	(18.3)	1060	(17.6)	1222	(21.4)	1078	(21.1)
MDMA	625	(11.3)	500	(10.2)	481	(8.5)	431	(7.3)	519	(8.6)	465	(8.2)	384	(7.5)
Z-Drugs	157	(2.8)	210	(4.3)	307	(5.4)	355	(6.0)	436	(7.2)	438	(7.7)	334	(6.5)
Other	141	(2.6)	194	(3.9)	162	(2.9)	156	(2.6)	222	(3.7)	224	(3.9)	261	(5.1)
Amphetamines	152	(2.8)	153	(3.1)	178	(3.1)	162	(2.7)	138	(2.3)	128	(2.2)	129	(2.5)
NPS	199	(3.6)	135	(2.7)	142	(2.5)	98	(1.7)	108	(1.8)	115	(2.0)	52	(1.0)
Volatile inhalants	24	(0.4)	16	(0.3)	18	(0.3)	21	(0.4)	14	(0.2)	13	(0.2)	18	(0.4)
New cases	2077		1832		2062		2115		2077		2016		1693	
Alcohol	1024	(49.3)	939	(51.3)	1030	(50.0)	925	(43.7)	910	(43.8)	861	(42.7)	805	(47.5)
Cannabis	644	(31.0)	529	(28.9)	623	(30.2)	661	(31.3)	632	(30.4)	603	(29.9)	561	(33.1)
Cocaine	546	(26.3)	437	(23.9)	465	(22.6)	478	(22.6)	465	(22.4)	585	(29.0)	465	(27.5)
Benzodiazepines	555	(26.7)	538	(29.4)	614	(29.8)	646	(30.5)	644	(31.0)	636	(31.5)	464	(27.4)
Opiates	211	(10.2)	204	(11.1)	234	(11.3)	220	(10.4)	213	(10.3)	297	(14.7)	214	(12.6)
MDMA	291	(14.0)	232	(12.7)	260	(12.6)	237	(11.2)	253	(12.2)	237	(11.8)	195	(11.5)
Other	60	(2.9)	84	(4.6)	74	(3.6)	61	(2.9)	83	(4.0)	85	(4.2)	103	(6.1)
Z-Drugs	41	(2.0)	59	(3.2)	96	(4.7)	78	(3.7)	102	(4.9)	111	(5.5)	79	(4.7)
Amphetamines	71	(3.4)	79	(4.3)	83	(4.0)	70	(3.3)	58	(2.8)	53	(2.6)	58	(3.4)
NPS	116	(5.6)	57	(3.1)	47	(2.3)	36	(1.7)	42	(2.0)	50	(2.5)	18	(1.1)
Volatile inhalants	10	(0.5)	9	(0.5)	9	(0.4)	8	(0.4)	10	(0.5)	~	~	6	(0.4)

~ Cells with five cases or fewer

More cases reported MDMA (384) as an additional problem drug (Table 5) than a main problem drug (44) in 2017 (Table 3). However, the proportion of cases with MDMA as an additional drug decreased from 11.3% in 2011 to 7.5% in 2017.

More cases reported a Z-drug (334) as an additional problem drug (Table 5) than a main problem drug (82) in 2017 (Table 3).

The proportion of cases with a Z-drug as an additional problem increased year-on-year from 2.8% in 2011 to 7.7% in 2016, before decreasing to 6.5% in 2017.

Among new cases with polydrug use, alcohol (47.5%) was the most common additional drug, followed by cannabis (33.1%), cocaine (27.5%), and benzodiazepines (27.4%).

Risk factors

Risk factors of interest to the NDTRS include injecting behaviour, sharing of needles and syringes, and sharing of other drug paraphernalia (such as pipes and foils).

The proportion of all cases that had ever injected decreased from 36.5% in 2011 to 29.7% in 2017 (Table 6).

Among new cases, the proportion that reported ever injecting decreased over the period from 17.2% in 2011 to 11.0% in 2017.

The proportion of previously treated cases that reported ever injecting decreased from 50.0% in 2011 to 41.3% in 2017.

The proportion of all cases currently injecting (i.e., in the 30 days prior to treatment) was similar in 2011 (31.8%) and 2017 (32.5%), but fluctuated upwards during the intervening years.

Table 6: Injecting history in cases treated for problem drug use, NDTRS 2011 to 2017

	2011		2012		2013		2014		2015		2016		2017	
	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)
All cases	8361		8005		9006		9890		9892		9227		8922	
Ever injected	3054	(36.5)	2882	(36.0)	3254	(36.1)	3528	(35.7)	3330	(33.7)	2960	(32.1)	2651	(29.7)
Total new cases	3316		3272		3475		3776		3742		3526		3257	
Ever injected	571	(17.2)	590	(18.0)	591	(17.0)	642	(17.0)	541	(14.5)	476	(13.5)	359	(11.0)
Total previously treated	4862		4518		5239		5643		5855		5335		5242	
Ever injected	2432	(50.0)	2232	(49.4)	2575	(49.2)	2730	(48.4)	2701	(46.1)	2379	(44.6)	2165	(41.3)
Current risk														
All cases	3054		2882		3254		3528		3330		2960		2651	
Currently injecting*	971	(31.8)	1026	(35.6)	1182	(36.3)	1304	(37.0)	1223	(36.7)	984	(33.2)	862	(32.5)
Ever shared	1589	(52.0)	1422	(49.3)	1583	(48.6)	1744	(49.4)	1519	(45.6)	N/A**		N/A**	
New cases	571		590		591		642		541		476		359	
Currently injecting*	247	(43.3)	261	(44.2)	275	(46.5)	298	(46.4)	228	(42.1)	186	(39.1)	136	(37.9)
Ever shared	238	(41.7)	203	(34.4)	209	(35.4)	255	(39.7)	192	(35.5)	N/A**		N/A**	
Previously treated cases	2432		2232		2575		2730		2701		2379		2165	
Currently injecting*	706	(29.0)	745	(33.4)	873	(33.9)	920	(33.7)	937	(34.7)	760	(31.9)	691	(31.9)
Ever shared	1334	(54.9)	1191	(53.4)	1345	(52.2)	1431	(52.4)	1309	(48.5)	N/A**		N/A**	

*In the 30 days prior to treatment

** Not available, see description below

Prior to 2016, information on sharing of any drug paraphernalia was collected in a single question. In order to comply with reporting requirements to the European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA), this question was changed in 2016 so that sharing of 'needles and syringes' could be recorded separately from 'other drug paraphernalia'.

The transition to the new questions has resulted in a large number of unknown values. For example, in 2017, the proportion of unknown values was 44.7% for sharing needles and syringes and 65.6% for sharing other drug paraphernalia.

As a result, sharing of *any* drug paraphernalia is not reported for 2016 and 2017. Data for subsequent years will be reported as the completeness of these data increases.

Available data show the proportion of all cases (including new and previously treated) that reported ever sharing any injecting equipment decreased from 52.0% in 2011 to 45.6% in 2015. These figures should be interpreted cautiously in light of the number of unknown responses (10.2% in 2011 and 16.2% in 2015).

Socio-demographic characteristics

The median age of cases increased over time from 28 years in 2011 to 30 years in 2017 (Table 7). For new cases, the median age increased from 24 years in 2011 to 26 years in 2017.

In 2017, 6.6% of all cases were aged 17 years or younger, a marginal decrease from 7.3% in 2011. The under 18s accounted for 12.7% of new cases in 2017, as compared to 13.1% of new cases in 2011, and a peak of 15.6% in 2012.

Over the period, the majority of cases were male (72.8%).

The proportion of cases recorded as homeless increased from 6.2% (2011) to 9.6% (2017).

Cases recorded as Irish Traveller in ethnicity increased in proportion from 2.6% in 2011 to 3.5% in 2017. The proportion of Travellers in the general population is 0.7% (Census 2016).⁶

The proportion of cases recorded as having ceased education (for the first time) before the age of 16 years decreased from 38.8% in 2011 to 34.9% in 2017.

Over the reporting period, around two-thirds (65.1%) of all cases were unemployed. The lowest proportion unemployed was 63.9% in 2017. In each year, unemployment rates were higher among previously treated cases than new cases.

The proportion of cases in paid employment increased from 8.0% in 2011 to 14.3% in 2017.

Table 7: Socio-demographic characteristics of cases treated for problem drug use, NDTRS 2011 to 2017

	2011		2012		2013		2014		2015		2016		2017	
	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)
All cases	8361		8005		9006		9890		9892		9227		8922	
Median age (range)	28	17-44	28	16-44	29	17-45	29	17-45	30	17-46	30	17-47	30	17-47
Under 18	614	(7.3)	673	(8.4)	669	(7.4)	747	(7.6)	685	(6.9)	629	(6.8)	591	(6.6)
Male	6222	(74.4)	5826	(72.8)	6554	(72.8)	7202	(72.8)	7146	(72.2)	6676	(72.4)	6449	(72.3)
Homeless	518	(6.2)	464	(5.8)	581	(6.5)	840	(8.5)	910	(9.2)	886	(9.6)	858	(9.6)
Traveller	217	(2.6)	227	(2.8)	231	(2.6)	313	(3.2)	282	(2.9)	296	(3.2)	310	(3.5)
Education ceased before 16 yrs	3244	(38.8)	3047	(38.1)	3244	(36.0)	3486	(35.2)	3511	(35.5)	3236	(35.1)	3118	(34.9)
In paid employment	670	(8.0)	578	(7.2)	706	(7.8)	816	(8.3)	880	(8.9)	1028	(11.1)	1280	(14.3)
Unemployed	5411	(64.7)	5362	(67.0)	5910	(65.6)	6368	(64.4)	6368	(64.4)	6107	(66.2)	5702	(63.9)
Retired/unable to work including disability	998	(11.9)	854	(10.7)	1009	(11.2)	1135	(11.5)	1136	(11.5)	805	(8.7)	712	(8.0)
New Cases	3316		3272		3475		3776		3742		3526		3257	
Median age (range)	24	16-42	25	15-42	25	15-43	25	15-44	25	16-45	25	16-46	26	16-46
Under 18	435	(13.1)	510	(15.6)	523	(15.1)	566	(15.0)	498	(13.3)	469	(13.3)	413	(12.7)
Male	2545	(76.7)	2456	(75.1)	2656	(76.4)	2842	(75.3)	2814	(75.2)	2628	(74.5)	2446	(75.1)
Homeless	127	(3.8)	128	(3.9)	152	(4.4)	248	(6.6)	212	(5.7)	223	(6.3)	199	(6.1)
Traveller	110	(3.3)	101	(3.1)	92	(2.6)	135	(3.6)	107	(2.9)	102	(2.9)	97	(3.0)
Education ceased before 16 yrs	1049	(31.6)	1001	(30.6)	1004	(28.9)	1046	(27.7)	1011	(27.0)	969	(27.5)	834	(25.6)
In paid employment	343	(10.3)	297	(9.1)	356	(10.2)	424	(11.2)	507	(13.5)	537	(15.2)	652	(20.0)
Unemployed	1898	(57.2)	1916	(58.6)	1989	(57.2)	2091	(55.4)	2099	(56.1)	1990	(56.4)	1757	(53.9)
Retired/unable to work including disability	397	(12.0)	334	(10.2)	348	(10.0)	364	(9.6)	322	(8.6)	242	(6.9)	183	(5.6)
Previously Treated	4862		4518		5239		5643		5855		5335		5242	
Median age (range)	30	18-45	30	19-44	31	19-46	31	19-45	32	19-46	32	19-47	33	19-47
Under 18	170	(3.5)	138	(3.1)	138	(2.6)	168	(3.0)	171	(2.9)	141	(2.6)	154	(2.9)
Male	3543	(72.9)	3204	(70.9)	3695	(70.5)	4041	(71.6)	4117	(70.3)	3782	(70.9)	3686	(70.3)
Homeless	385	(7.9)	327	(7.2)	417	(8.0)	526	(9.3)	660	(11.3)	617	(11.6)	620	(11.8)
Traveller	98	(2.0)	113	(2.5)	135	(2.6)	159	(2.8)	172	(2.9)	183	(3.4)	194	(3.7)
Education ceased before 16 yrs	2134	(43.9)	1964	(43.5)	2180	(41.6)	2328	(41.3)	2440	(41.7)	2162	(40.5)	2183	(41.6)
In paid employment	313	(6.4)	263	(5.8)	326	(6.2)	375	(6.6)	354	(6.0)	464	(8.7)	562	(10.7)
Unemployed	3403	(70.0)	3348	(74.1)	3751	(71.6)	3955	(70.1)	4080	(69.7)	3872	(72.6)	3717	(70.9)
Retired/unable to work including disability	576	(11.8)	465	(10.3)	630	(12.0)	714	(12.7)	790	(13.5)	533	(10.0)	495	(9.4)
Treatment status unknown	183		215		292		471		295		366		423	

Median age entering treatment

The median age of cases when entering treatment is presented below for each main problem drug (Table 8). Overall, the age when entering treatment has increased, even for those new to treatment. This may have implications for service provision into the future.

Between 2011 and 2017, the median age of all cases with opiates as a main problem increased steadily from 31 years to 34 years for all cases. The increase was from 29 years to 32 years for new cases, and from 31 years to 35 years for previously treated cases.

Over the same period, the median age increased from 21 years to 22 years for all cases with cannabis as a main problem. It increased from 20 years to 21 years

for new cases, and remained stable at 23 years for previously treated cases.

For cases with cocaine as a main problem, the median age increased over the period from 28 years to 30 years for all cases; 27 years to 28 years for new cases; and 29 years to 32 years for previously treated cases.

The median age of all cases with benzodiazepines as a main problem increased from 24 years to 28 years for all cases; 23 to 26 years for new cases; and 24 to 29 years for previously treated cases.

MDMA was one of the few main problem drugs that showed a decrease in the median age, which fell from 24 years in 2011 to 20 years in 2017 for all cases.

Table 8: Median age when entering treatment for the main problem drugs, NDTRS 2011 to 2017

	2011		2012		2013		2014		2015		2016		2017	
	n	range	n	range	n	range	n	range	n	range	n	range	n	range
All cases	8361		8005		9006		9890		9892		9227		8922	
Opiates	31	21-45	31	21-45	32	22-46	33	22-46	33	22-48	34	23-49	34	23-49
Cannabis	21	15-39	21	15-39	21	15-40	21	15-41	22	15-41	22	15-42	22	15-43
Cocaine	28	19-41	29	19-43	29	19-44	30	19-44	30	19-44	29	18-44	30	19-45
Benzodiazepines	24	16-49	26	17-47	26	17-50	26	17-46	27	18-45	28	18-46	28	18-49
Z-Drugs	35	17-55	34	18-63	34	20-58	33	20-51	36	22-54	37	23-53	36	24-55
NPS	21	16-38	22	17-43	25	15-54	23	16-39	24	15-40	25	15-44	24	17-42
MDMA	24	17-41	23	17-45	21	15-44	22	15-39	21	17-46	18	15-39	20	15-37
Amphetamines	28	18-41	27	17-43	28	19-45	29	15-43	30	17-47	33	17-46	32	17-56
Volatile Inhalants	16	12-39	15	11-56	15	*N/A	20	*N/A	22	*N/A	20	*N/A	14	*N/A
Other	32	18-58	27	18-65	30	19-48	32	17-61	31	16-47	30	19-55	31	18-53
New cases	3316		3272		3475		3776		3742		3526		3257	
Opiates	29	20-45	30	21-44	31	20-45	31	21-47	31	21-52	32	21-51	32	21-50
Cannabis	20	15-37	20	15-38	20	15-39	21	15-41	21	15-39	20	15-40	21	15-40
Cocaine	27	19-41	26	19-42	28	18-43	28	18-44	28	18-43	27	18-43	28	18-44
Benzodiazepines	23	16-52	26	16-48	24	17-50	24	17-47	26	17-45	27	17-51	26	17-52
Z-Drugs	32	*N/A	34	*N/A	27	18-62	32	18-55	35	22-53	35	21-59	33	23-60
NPS	21	16-38	21	17-45	21	15-36	20	14-40	21	15-37	21	15-44	24	17-44
MDMA	24	16-45	22	17-46	20	14-47	18	14-38	21	17-46	18	15-38	20	14-36
Amphetamines	25	17-43	24	16-46	27	17-44	29	14-43	30	16-47	31	16-44	32	*N/A
Volatile Inhalants	15	*N/A	15	*N/A	15	*N/A	15	*N/A	19	*N/A	19	*N/A	14	*N/A
Other	28	17-61	26	18-70	32	18-48	31	15-66	30	17-48	27	18-58	29	16-57
Previously treated	4862		4518		5239		5643		5855		5335		5242	
Opiates	31	21-45	32	22-46	33	23-46	33	23-46	34	23-47	34	24-48	35	23-48
Cannabis	23	16-41	23	16-39	23	16-42	23	16-40	23	16-42	24	16-44	23	16-44
Cocaine	29	19-41	31	20-44	31	20-44	31	21-43	31	20-47	31	20-46	32	19-46
Benzodiazepines	24	17-48	26	17-46	26	18-50	27	18-45	27	18-45	28	19-45	29	19-45
Z-Drugs	42	16-55	34	23-64	35	21-55	35	21-53	36	22-52	38	24-49	38	25-51
NPS	22	17-39	29	*N/A	34	*N/A	23	18-38	26	18-43	30	18-45	24	17-45
MDMA	26	16-42	30	*N/A	21	*N/A	28	*N/A	22	*N/A	18	*N/A	20	*N/A
Amphetamines	29	*N/A	30	17-42	30	19-48	29	21-44	31	19-47	35	23-48	30	*N/A
Volatile Inhalants	20	*N/A	26	*N/A	26	*N/A	21	*N/A	22	*N/A	20	*N/A	13	*N/A
Other	37	19-58	28	17-71	30	20-58	34	*N/A	33	21-47	32	21-52	33	19-54
Treatment status unknown	183		215		292		471		295		366		423	

* N/A = not available (the range is not provided where the number of cases is small)

Cocaine

This section focuses on the socio-demographic characteristics of cases with cocaine as a main problem drug (Table 9).

The median age when entering treatment increased over the seven-year period (as previously described). The proportion of cases aged under 18 years was 1.3% in 2011 and 1.7% in 2017.

Over the period, the majority of cases were male (80.4%). The proportion of female cases increased from 17.9% in 2011 to 22.8% in 2016, before decreasing to 18.9% in 2017.

The proportion of cases in paid employment increased from 19.7% in 2011 to 33.5% in 2017.

The proportion of cases with polydrug use decreased from 76.8% in 2011 to 62.9% in 2017. In 2017, the most common additional drugs were alcohol (57.5%), cannabis (47.8%), and benzodiazepines (24.7%).

Crack cocaine was reported as the main drug for 11.5% of cases with cocaine as a main problem in 2017. This figure may be an underestimation of the proportion of cases using crack, due to the non-specific recording of cocaine instead of 'cocaine powder' or 'crack cocaine'.^{7,8}

Table 9: Socio-demographic characteristics of cases treated for cocaine as a main problem, NDTRS 2011 to 2017

	2011		2012		2013		2014		2015		2016		2017	
	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)
All cases	770		666		708		853		1026		1138		1500	
Median age (range)	28	19-41	29	19-43	29	19-44	30	19-44	30	19-44	29	18-44	30	19-45
Under 18	10	(1.3)	9	(1.4)	11	(1.6)	17	(2.0)	20	(1.9)	27	(2.4)	26	(1.7)
Females	138	(17.9)	120	(18.0)	124	(17.5)	147	(17.2)	197	(19.2)	259	(22.8)	284	(18.9)
Homeless	17	(2.2)	12	(1.8)	12	(1.7)	26	(3.0)	40	(3.9)	38	(3.3)	56	(3.7)
Traveller	17	(2.2)	11	(1.7)	16	(2.3)	16	(1.9)	21	(2.0)	30	(2.6)	42	(2.8)
Education ceased before 16 yrs	272	(35.3)	244	(36.6)	247	(34.9)	278	(32.6)	306	(29.8)	309	(27.2)	390	(26.0)
In paid employment	152	(19.7)	105	(15.8)	129	(18.2)	167	(19.9)	249	(24.3)	322	(28.3)	502	(33.5)
Unemployed	420	(54.5)	368	(55.3)	422	(59.6)	465	(54.5)	536	(52.2)	611	(53.7)	773	(51.5)
Retired/unable to work including disability	128	(16.6)	123	(18.5)	91	(12.9)	133	(15.6)	144	(14.0)	104	(9.1)	90	(6.0)
New Cases	396		297		320		425		513		568		748	
Median age (range)	27	19-41	26	19-42	28	18-43	28	18-44	28	18-43	27	18-43	28	18-44
Under 18	6	(1.5)	6	(2.0)	8	(2.5)	16	(3.8)	16	(3.1)	20	(3.5)	15	(2.0)
Female	68	(17.2)	45	(15.2)	54	(16.9)	59	(13.9)	91	(17.7)	107	(18.8)	123	(16.4)
Homeless	~	~	5	(1.7)	~	~	11	(2.6)	11	(2.1)	17	(3.0)	27	(3.6)
Traveller	12	(3.0)	7	(2.4)	10	(3.1)	12	(2.8)	12	(2.3)	15	(2.6)	19	(2.5)
Education ceased before 16 yrs	123	(31.1)	99	(33.3)	103	(32.2)	135	(31.8)	135	(26.3)	124	(21.8)	161	(21.5)
In paid employment	93	(23.5)	51	(17.2)	64	(20.0)	103	(24.2)	155	(30.2)	190	(33.5)	286	(38.2)
Unemployed	196	(49.5)	160	(53.9)	187	(58.4)	218	(51.3)	240	(46.8)	273	(48.1)	357	(47.7)
Retired/unable to work including disability	73	(18.4)	54	(18.2)	46	(14.4)	64	(15.1)	63	(12.3)	46	(8.1)	37	(4.9)
Previously Treated	356		349		352		381		487		541		692	
Median age (range)	29	19-41	31	20-44	31	20-44	31	21-43	31	20-47	31	20-46	32	19-46
Under 18	~	~	~	~	~	~	~	~	~	~	7	(1.3)	9	(1.3)
Female	68	(19.1)	73	(20.9)	64	(18.2)	77	(20.2)	102	(20.9)	144	(26.6)	151	(21.8)
Homeless	13	(3.7)	7	(2.0)	9	(2.6)	14	(3.7)	27	(5.5)	20	(3.7)	28	(4.0)
Traveller	5	(1.4)	~	~	6	(1.7)	~	~	9	(1.8)	15	(2.8)	20	(2.9)
Education ceased before 16 yrs	143	(40.2)	139	(39.8)	136	(38.6)	133	(34.9)	168	(34.9)	180	(33.3)	219	(31.6)
In paid employment	55	(15.4)	49	(14.0)	56	(15.9)	57	(15.0)	88	(18.1)	129	(23.8)	193	(27.9)
Unemployed	213	(59.8)	200	(57.3)	219	(62.2)	223	(58.5)	283	(58.1)	317	(58.6)	394	(56.9)
Retired/unable to work including disability	53	(14.9)	63	(18.1)	42	(11.9)	61	(16.0)	78	(16.0)	56	(10.4)	46	(6.6)
Treatment status unknown	18		20		36		47		26		29		60	

Community Healthcare Organisation (CHO) area of residence

In 2017, the highest number of reported cases resided in CHO 9 (Table 10) (see the following page for reference to areas included in each CHO).

As participation in the NDTRS is not uniform across the country, conclusions based on geographic analyses are limited.

Table 10: Number of cases treated, by Community Healthcare Organisation area of residence, NDTRS 2011 to 2017

	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
All cases	8361	8005	9006	9890	9892	9227	8922
CHO 1	242	305	265	297	284	367	382
CHO 2	411	402	416	356	411	402	375
CHO 3	437	392	571	809	748	779	749
CHO 4	1383	1178	1367	1390	1429	1206	1055
CHO 5	1241	1349	1454	1366	1394	1261	1170
CHO 6	380	343	458	470	470	366	401
CHO 7	1707	1538	1646	1738	1750	1640	1531
CHO 8	801	890	807	1075	1020	921	926
CHO 9	1512	1379	1748	2068	2007	1845	1876
Other/unknown	247	229	274	321	379	440	457
New cases	3316	3272	3475	3776	3742	3526	3257
CHO 1	146	178	166	149	147	159	182
CHO 2	190	173	160	126	162	185	173
CHO 3	219	203	252	381	322	361	310
CHO 4	626	526	595	589	575	513	467
CHO 5	588	601	692	611	613	537	498
CHO 6	123	143	168	200	199	149	179
CHO 7	584	544	525	572	593	543	509
CHO 8	417	452	348	479	471	434	367
CHO 9	384	404	507	587	581	530	460
Other/unknown	39	48	62	82	79	115	112
Previously Treated	4862	4518	5239	5643	5855	5335	5242
CHO 1	87	114	91	135	121	180	172
CHO 2	221	227	246	227	247	212	198
CHO 3	213	181	294	362	357	381	409
CHO 4	745	636	730	773	841	667	567
CHO 5	633	730	747	746	776	711	640
CHO 6	244	180	264	247	259	200	206
CHO 7	1071	951	1055	1025	1095	997	933
CHO 8	354	409	409	540	514	463	457
CHO 9	1090	923	1202	1376	1370	1224	1336
Other/unknown	204	167	201	212	275	300	324
Treatment status not known	183	215	292	471	295	366	423

LHO areas in each Community Healthcare Organisation area:

CHO 1 – Donegal LHO, Sligo/Leitrim/West Clare LHO and Cavan/Monaghan LHO

CHO 2 – Galway LHO, Roscommon and Mayo LHO

CHO 3 – Clare LHO, Limerick LHO, North Tipperary/East Limerick LHO

CHO 4 – Kerry LHO, North Cork LHO, North Lee LHO, South Lee LHO and West Cork LHO

CHO 5 – South Tipperary LHO, Carlow/Kilkenny LHO, Waterford LHO and Wexford LHO

CHO 6 – Wicklow LHO, Dun Laoghaire LHO and Dublin South East LHO

CHO 7 – Kildare/West Wicklow LHO, Dublin West LHO, Dublin South City LHO and Dublin South West LHO

CHO 8 – Laois/Offaly LHO, Longford/Westmeath LHO, Louth LHO and Meath LHO

CHO 9 – Dublin North LHO, Dublin North Central LHO and Dublin North West LHO

References

This document may be cited as: Health Research Board (2019) *Drug Treatment in Ireland 2011 to 2017*. Available at: www.drugsandalcohol.ie/30197 and at www.hrb.ie/publications.

1. NDTRS data are case-based which means there is a possibility that individuals appear more than once in the database; for example, where a person receives treatment at more than one centre, or at the same centre, more than once in a calendar year.
2. More detailed information on the NDTRS methodology can be found in previously published HRB Trends Series papers at: www.hrb.ie/fileadmin/publications_files/HRB_Trend_Series_12_Trends_in_treated_problem_drug_use_in_Ireland_2005_to_2010_02.pdf
3. The NDTRS interactive tables (2004 to 2016) will be updated to reflect the changes at: www.drugsandalcohol.ie/treatment-data/
4. The number of services participating in the NDTRS varies annually, making small fluctuations in the numbers of cases difficult to interpret. Coverage of services was 70% for 2017.
5. Population data is taken from the CSO at: www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/er/pme/populationandmigrationestimatesapril2018/
6. Data on ethnicity is taken from the 2016 Census from the CSO at: www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-cp8iter/p8iter/p8e/
7. Powder cocaine does not produce psychoactive effects when smoked or inhaled.
8. In November 2018, the NDTRS issued a communique regarding the accurate recording of cases with cocaine as a main or other problem, in order to improve the reporting of this data.

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