

National Drug Treatment Reporting System

2013 – 2019 Drug Data

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Introduction

In this bulletin, trends in **treated problem drug use** (excluding alcohol) are described for the seven-year period from 2013 to 2019. 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, 67,875 cases treated for problem drug use were reported to the NDTRS. The number of treated cases recorded increased from 9,006 in 2013 to 10,664 in 2019.

- The proportion of *new* cases was 38.6% in 2013 and 37.3% in 2019.
- In 2019, the majority of cases were treated in outpatient facilities (65.1%), as in previous years.

Main problem drug (excluding alcohol)

- **Opioids** (mainly heroin) were the most commonly reported main problem drug. The proportion of cases treated decreased from 51.4% in 2013 to 38.8% in 2019.
- **Cocaine** was the second most common drug reported in 2019, having ranked third since 2015. The proportion of cocaine cases increased from 7.9% in 2013 to 24.0% in 2019.
- **Cannabis** was the third most common main drug reported in 2019. The proportion of cases treated decreased from 28.7% in 2013 to 23.5% in 2019. Cannabis was the most common main drug among new cases in 2019. However, the proportion of new cases reporting cannabis as a main problem decreased from 47.0% in 2013 to 37.8% in 2019.

- **Benzodiazepines** were the main problem drug for 10.1% of cases in 2019. Since 2013, the proportion of cases treated for benzodiazepines has been relatively stable.

Polydrug use

- Over the period, the majority of cases reported **polydrug** use (58.5%).
- The proportion of cases with polydrug use decreased from 62.9% in 2013 to 55.0% in 2019.
- Alcohol (37.3%), cannabis (37.0%), benzodiazepines (35.6%), and cocaine (32.9%) were the most commonly reported **additional drugs** in 2019.

Risk Behaviour

- The proportion of all cases that had **ever injected** decreased from 36.1% in 2013 to 23.8% in 2019.

Socio-demographic characteristics

- The **median age** of cases increased from 29 years in 2013 to 31 years in 2019.
- Seven in every ten cases reported over the period were **male**.
- The proportion of cases recorded as **homeless** increased from 6.5% in 2013 to 11.0% in 2019.
- The proportion of cases with an **Irish Traveller** ethnicity was 2.6% in 2013 and 3.0% in 2019.
- The proportion of cases recorded as **unemployed** decreased from 65.6% in 2013 to 54.9% in 2019.
- The proportion of cases **in paid employment** increased from 7.8% in 2013 to 15.9% in 2019.

NDTRS cases 2013 to 2019

This bulletin presents NDTRS drug treatment data for the seven-year period from 2013 to 2019. 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 by the NDTRS.

Between 2013 and 2019, a total of 67,875 cases treated for problem drug use (excluding alcohol) were reported to the NDTRS.³

In 2019, 10,664 treated cases were recorded, an increase from 9,006 in 2013 (Table 1).⁴

The proportion of new cases decreased from 38.6% in 2013 to 37.3% in 2019. The proportion of previously treated cases decreased from 58.2% in 2013 to 55.6% in 2019. The proportion of cases where treatment status was unknown increased from 3.2% in 2013 to 7.1% in 2019.

Analysis by treatment status should be interpreted with caution due to the increase in the proportion of cases where treatment status was unknown (7.1% in 2019). The increase can be partially attributed to issues with data from some external data providers, but it is important that all services ensure that the information returned to the NDTRS is accurate and complete.

Table 1: Number of cases treated for problem drug use, by treatment status, NDTRS 2013 to 2019

	2013		2014		2015		2016		2017		2018		2019	
	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)
All cases	9006		9890		9892		9227		8922		10274		10664	
New cases	3475	(38.6)	3776	(38.2)	3742	(37.8)	3526	(38.2)	3257	(36.5)	3962	(38.6)	3979	(37.3)
Previously treated cases	5239	(58.2)	5643	(57.1)	5855	(59.2)	5335	(57.8)	5242	(58.8)	5872	(57.2)	5927	(55.6)
Treatment status unknown	292	(3.2)	471	(4.8)	295	(3.0)	366	(4.0)	423	(4.7)	440	(4.3)	758	(7.1)

Type of service provider

Outpatient facilities accounted for the majority of cases treated over the period (63.1%). In 2019, 65.1% of cases were treated in outpatient facilities, a decrease from 66.6% in 2013 (Table 2).

The proportion of treated cases reported by residential (inpatient) settings increased from 13.7% in 2013 to 19.7% in 2017, then decreased to 14.7% in 2019.⁵

The proportion of cases treated in low threshold settings was similar in 2013 and 2019, at 9.0% and 8.9% respectively.

The proportion of cases treated in prison was 8.3% in 2013 and 8.0% in 2019.

The proportion of cases treated by general practitioners decreased from 2.4% in 2013 to 1.3% in 2017, then increased to 3.3% in 2019.

Table 2: Number of cases treated for problem drug use, by type of service provider, NDTRS 2013 to 2019

	2013		2014		2015		2016		2017		2018		2019	
	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)
All cases	9006		9890		9892		9227		8922		10274		10664	
Outpatient	5998	(66.6)	6251	(63.2)	5818	(58.8)	5481	(59.4)	5610	(62.9)	6715	(65.4)	6946	(65.1)
Inpatient*	1233	(13.7)	1348	(13.6)	1779	(18.0)	1885	(20.4)	1757	(19.7)	1384	(13.5)	1571	(14.7)
Low threshold	812	(9.0)	1190	(12.0)	1197	(12.1)	886	(9.6)	792	(8.9)	887	(8.6)	948	(8.9)
Prison	747	(8.3)	844	(8.5)	827	(8.4)	737	(8.0)	651	(7.3)	1082	(10.5)	848	(8.0)
General practitioner	216	(2.4)	257	(2.6)	271	(2.7)	238	(2.6)	112	(1.3)	206	(2.0)	351	(3.3)

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

Main problem drug

All cases

Opioids (mainly heroin) remain the main problem drug reported over the period. As a proportion of all cases treated, opioids decreased year-on-year from 51.4% in 2013 to 38.8% in 2019 (Table 3).

Cocaine became the second most common main problem drug reported in 2019, having ranked third behind opioids and cannabis between 2015 and 2018. The proportion of cocaine cases increased from 7.9% in 2013 to 24.0% in 2019.

Cannabis was the third most common main problem drug reported in 2019. The proportion of cases treated for cannabis as a main problem decreased from 28.7% in 2013 to 23.5% in 2019.

Benzodiazepines were the main problem for 10.1% of cases in 2019. The proportion of cases with benzodiazepines as a main problem has remained relatively stable over the reporting period.

The proportion of cases with **Z-drugs** as a main problem increased from 0.8% in 2013 to 1.6% in 2014, then decreased to 0.7% in 2019.

MDMA (ecstasy), amphetamines, and volatile inhalants each continued to account for a small proportion of all treated cases in 2019.

In 2019, 39 (0.4%) cases reported pregabalin (Lyrica) as a main problem, an increase from 21 cases in 2018. A further 88 cases reported pregabalin as a secondary problem in 2019, an increase from 57 in 2018.

Table 3: Main problem drug (excluding alcohol) reported in 30 days prior to treatment, NDTRS 2013 to 2019

	2013		2014		2015		2016		2017		2018		2019	
	N	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)
All cases	9006		9890		9892		9227		8922		10274		10664	
Opioids	4625	(51.4)	4948	(50.0)	4732	(47.8)	4341	(47.0)	4016	(45.0)	4349	(42.3)	4133	(38.8)
Cocaine	708	(7.9)	853	(8.6)	1026	(10.4)	1138	(12.3)	1500	(16.8)	2254	(21.9)	2560	(24.0)
Cannabis	2583	(28.7)	2730	(27.6)	2786	(28.2)	2439	(26.4)	2200	(24.7)	2358	(23.0)	2502	(23.5)
Benzodiazepines	810	(9.6)	953	(9.6)	873	(8.8)	897	(9.7)	868	(9.7)	999	(9.7)	1082	(10.1)
Z-Drugs*	73	(0.8)	155	(1.6)	154	(1.6)	103	(1.1)	82	(0.9)	48	(0.5)	72	(0.7)
NPS	46	(0.5)	71	(0.7)	85	(0.9)	72	(0.8)	51	(0.6)	48	(0.5)	63	(0.6)
Amphetamines	54	(0.6)	58	(0.6)	63	(0.6)	55	(0.6)	40	(0.4)	57	(0.6)	59	(0.6)
MDMA (ecstasy)	44	(0.5)	56	(0.6)	51	(0.5)	53	(0.6)	44	(0.5)	34	(0.3)	47	(0.4)
Volatile Inhalants	13	(0.1)	15	(0.2)	15	(0.2)	11	(0.1)	6	(0.1)	10	(0.1)	6	(0.1)
Other	50	(0.6)	51	(0.5)	107	(1.1)	118	(1.3)	115	(1.3)	117	(1.1)	140	(1.3)
New cases	3475		3776		3742		3526		3257		3962		3979	
Opioids	1034	(29.8)	1036	(27.4)	971	(25.9)	950	(26.9)	809	(24.8)	719	(18.1)	676	(17.0)
Cocaine	320	(9.2)	425	(11.3)	513	(13.7)	568	(16.1)	748	(23.0)	1232	(31.1)	1258	(31.6)
Cannabis	1633	(47.0)	1696	(44.9)	1693	(45.2)	1452	(41.2)	1272	(39.1)	1505	(38.0)	1506	(37.8)
Benzodiazepines	345	(9.9)	419	(11.1)	340	(9.1)	353	(10.0)	290	(8.9)	345	(8.7)	340	(8.5)
Z-Drugs*	22	(0.6)	58	(1.5)	46	(1.2)	41	(1.2)	22	(0.7)	17	(0.4)	24	(0.6)
NPS	25	(0.7)	43	(1.1)	53	(1.4)	36	(1.0)	21	(0.6)	25	(0.6)	22	(0.6)
Amphetamines	32	(0.9)	30	(0.8)	33	(0.9)	24	(0.7)	19	(0.6)	34	(0.9)	37	(0.9)
MDMA (ecstasy)	27	(0.8)	37	(1.0)	31	(0.8)	39	(1.1)	29	(0.9)	18	(0.5)	38	(1.0)
Volatile Inhalants	9	(0.3)	6	(0.2)	6	(0.2)	8	(0.2)	~	~	8	(0.2)	~	~
Other	28	(0.8)	26	(0.7)	56	(1.5)	55	(1.6)	42	(1.3)	59	(1.5)	73	(1.8)
Previously treated	5239		5643		5855		5335		5242		5872		5927	
Opioids	3463	(66.1)	3658	(64.8)	3619	(61.8)	3204	(60.1)	3037	(57.9)	3478	(59.2)	3244	(54.7)
Cocaine	352	(6.7)	381	(6.8)	487	(8.3)	541	(10.1)	692	(13.2)	944	(16.1)	1074	(18.1)
Cannabis	859	(16.4)	932	(16.5)	1023	(17.5)	908	(17.0)	807	(15.4)	717	(12.2)	784	(13.2)
Benzodiazepines	437	(8.3)	487	(8.6)	504	(8.6)	500	(9.4)	534	(10.2)	596	(10.1)	661	(11.2)
Z-Drugs*	48	(0.9)	86	(1.5)	99	(1.7)	58	(1.1)	56	(1.1)	31	(0.5)	43	(0.7)
NPS	19	(0.4)	26	(0.5)	29	(0.5)	34	(0.6)	27	(0.5)	19	(0.3)	29	(0.5)
Amphetamines	20	(0.4)	27	(0.5)	28	(0.5)	29	(0.5)	19	(0.4)	19	(0.3)	20	(0.3)
MDMA (ecstasy)	17	(0.3)	18	(0.3)	19	(0.3)	13	(0.2)	15	(0.3)	14	(0.2)	9	(0.2)
Volatile Inhalants	~	~	9	(0.2)	9	(0.2)	~	~	~	~	~	~	~	~
Other	20	(0.4)	19	(0.3)	38	(0.6)	45	(0.8)	54	(1.1)	52	(0.9)	62	(1.0)
Treatment status unknown	292		471		295		366		423		440		758	

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

~ Cells with five cases or fewer

New cases

In 2019, cannabis (37.8%) was the most common main problem drug reported by new cases, followed by cocaine (31.6%) and opioids (17.0%) (Table 3).

The proportion of new cases reporting cannabis as a main problem decreased from 47.0% in 2013 to 37.8% in 2019.

Among new cases, cocaine increased from 9.2% of new cases in 2013, 31.6% in 2019. Between 2018 and 2019, the number of new cases with cocaine as a main problem increased by 2.1%. This is a much smaller increase compared to that observed between 2017 and 2018 (64.7%).

The proportion of new cases reporting opioids as a main problem drug decreased from 29.8% in 2013 to 17.0% in 2019.

Previously treated cases

In 2019, opioids (54.7%) were the most common main problem drug reported by previously treated cases, followed by cocaine (18.1%), cannabis (13.2%), and benzodiazepines (11.2%).

The proportion of previously treated cases reporting opioids as a main problem drug decreased from 66.1% in 2013 to 54.7% in 2019.

The proportion of previously treated cases reporting cocaine as a main problem increased from 6.7% in 2013 to 18.1% in 2019.

Polydrug use

Over the period 2013 to 2019, the majority of cases (58.5%) reported polydrug use (problem use of more than one drug).

The proportion of cases that reported polydrug use decreased from 62.9% in 2013 to 53.4% in 2018, before increasing to 55.0% in 2019 (Table 4).

Table 4: Polydrug use in cases treated for problem drug use, NDTRS 2013 to 2019

	2013		2014		2015		2016		2017		2018		2019	
	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)
All cases	9006		9890		9892		9227		8922		10274		10664	
One drug only	3340	(37.1)	3993	(40.4)	3872	(39.1)	3524	(38.2)	3816	(42.8)	4787	(46.6)	4803	(45.0)
Two or more drugs	5666	(62.9)	5897	(59.6)	6020	(60.9)	5703	(61.8)	5106	(57.2)	5487	(53.4)	5861	(55.0)

In 2019, alcohol (37.3%) was the most common additional substance reported by cases with polydrug use, followed by cannabis (37.0%), benzodiazepines (35.6%), and cocaine (32.9%) (Table 5).

More cases reported a Z-drug as an additional problem drug (208 cases) (Table 5) than as a main problem drug (72 cases) in 2019 (Table 3).

The proportion of cases with a Z-drug as an additional problem decreased to 3.5% in 2019 from a peak of 7.7% in 2016. (Table 5).

Opioids were reported as an additional substance by 20.1% of cases with polydrug use in 2019. This compares to 18.9% of cases in 2013. In 2019, more cases reported MDMA (ecstasy) as an additional problem drug (493 cases) (Table 5) than as a main problem drug (47 cases) (Table 3).

Among new cases with polydrug use, alcohol (51.3%) was the most common additional substance, followed by cannabis (38.0%), cocaine (30.7%), and benzodiazepines (27.1%) (Table 5).

Table 5: Polydrug use - additional problem drugs for all cases and new cases, NDTRS 2013 to 2019

	2013		2014		2015		2016		2017		2018		2019	
	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)
All polydrug	5666		5897		6020		5703		5106		5487		5861	
Alcohol	2336	(41.2)	2078	(35.2)	2051	(34.1)	1943	(34.1)	1914	(37.5)	2053	(37.4)	2189	(37.3)
Cannabis	1836	(32.4)	2012	(34.1)	1953	(32.4)	1878	(32.9)	1690	(33.1)	1937	(35.3)	2166	(37.0)
Benzodiazepines	2103	(37.1)	2294	(38.9)	2316	(38.5)	2105	(36.9)	1846	(36.2)	1987	(36.2)	2088	(35.6)
Cocaine	1335	(23.6)	1289	(21.9)	1360	(22.6)	1475	(25.9)	1435	(28.1)	1619	(29.5)	1928	(32.9)
Opioids	1073	(18.9)	1082	(18.3)	1060	(17.6)	1222	(21.4)	1078	(21.1)	969	(17.7)	1180	(20.1)
MDMA (ecstasy)	481	(8.5)	431	(7.3)	519	(8.6)	465	(8.2)	384	(7.5)	432	(7.9)	493	(8.4)
Z-Drugs*	307	(5.4)	355	(6.0)	436	(7.2)	438	(7.7)	334	(6.5)	278	(5.1)	208	(3.5)
Amphetamines	178	(3.1)	162	(2.7)	138	(2.3)	128	(2.2)	129	(2.5)	128	(2.3)	145	(2.5)
NPS	142	(2.5)	98	(1.7)	108	(1.8)	115	(2.0)	52	(1.0)	52	(0.9)	76	(1.3)
Volatile inhalants	18	(0.3)	21	(0.4)	14	(0.2)	13	(0.2)	18	(0.4)	20	(0.4)	21	(0.4)
Other	162	(2.9)	156	(2.6)	222	(3.7)	224	(3.9)	261	(5.1)	268	(4.9)	338	(5.8)
New cases	2062		2115		2077		2016		1693		1896		1974	
Alcohol	1030	(50.0)	925	(43.7)	910	(43.8)	861	(42.7)	805	(47.5)	929	(49.0)	1013	(51.3)
Cannabis	623	(30.2)	661	(31.3)	632	(30.4)	603	(29.9)	561	(33.1)	662	(34.9)	750	(38.0)
Benzodiazepines	614	(29.8)	646	(30.5)	644	(31.0)	636	(31.5)	464	(27.4)	480	(25.3)	535	(27.1)
Cocaine	465	(22.6)	478	(22.6)	465	(22.4)	585	(29.0)	465	(27.5)	517	(27.3)	607	(30.7)
Opioids	234	(11.3)	220	(10.4)	213	(10.3)	297	(14.7)	214	(12.6)	179	(9.4)	157	(8.0)
MDMA (ecstasy)	260	(12.6)	237	(11.2)	253	(12.2)	237	(11.8)	195	(11.5)	219	(11.6)	248	(12.6)
Z-Drugs*	96	(4.7)	78	(3.7)	102	(4.9)	111	(5.5)	79	(4.7)	51	(2.7)	26	(1.3)
Amphetamines	83	(4.0)	70	(3.3)	58	(2.8)	53	(2.6)	58	(3.4)	50	(2.6)	62	(3.1)
NPS	47	(2.3)	36	(1.7)	42	(2.0)	50	(2.5)	18	(1.1)	16	(0.8)	26	(1.3)
Volatile inhalants	9	(0.4)	8	(0.4)	10	(0.5)	~	~	6	(0.4)	6	(0.3)	7	(0.4)
Other	74	(3.6)	61	(2.9)	83	(4.0)	85	(4.2)	103	(6.1)	128	(6.8)	138	(7.0)

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

~ Cells with five cases or fewer

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 joints, straws, foil, pipes, spoons, filters, citric, water to mix drugs, and water or bleach to clean equipment).

The proportion of all cases that had ever injected decreased from 36.1% in 2013 to 23.8% in 2019 (Table 6).

Among new cases, the proportion that reported ever injecting decreased over the period from 17.0% in 2013 to 6.4% in 2019.

The proportion of previously treated cases that reported ever injecting decreased from 49.2% in 2013 to 37.3% in 2019.

The proportion of all cases currently injecting (i.e., in the 30 days prior to treatment) decreased from 36.3% in 2013 to 29.9% in 2019.

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

The transition to the new question resulted in an initial poor response whereby the data for 2016 to 2018 is not reported (Table 6). However improved responses mean that 2019 data can be reported. Data validation will continue to improve the quality of the responses however these data should still be interpreted with caution given the high number of unknown values.

Table 6: Injecting history in cases treated for problem drug use, NDTRS 2013 to 2019

	2013		2014		2015		2016		2017		2018		2019	
	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)
All cases	9006		9890		9892		9227		8922		10274		10664	
Ever injected	3254	(36.1)	3528	(35.7)	3330	(33.7)	2960	(32.1)	2651	(29.7)	2740	(26.7)	2540	(23.8)
Ever shared any equipment including needles and syringes*	1583	(48.6)	1744	(49.4)	1519	(45.6)	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Ever shared needles and syringes only*	*	*	*	*	*	*	N/A‡	N/A‡	N/A‡	N/A‡	N/A‡	N/A‡	946	(37.2)
Total new cases	3475		3776		3742		3526		3257		3962		3979	
Ever injected	591	(17.0)	642	(17.0)	541	(14.5)	476	(13.5)	359	(11.0)	314	(7.9)	255	(6.4)
Ever shared any equipment including needles and syringes*	209	(35.4)	255	(39.7)	192	(35.5)	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Ever shared needles and syringes only*	*	*	*	*	*	*	N/A‡	N/A‡	N/A‡	N/A‡	N/A‡	N/A‡	74	(29.0)
Total previously treated	5239		5643		5855		5335		5242		5872		5927	
Ever injected	2575	(49.2)	2730	(48.4)	2701	(46.1)	2379	(44.6)	2165	(41.3)	2367	(40.3)	2213	(37.3)
Ever shared any equipment including needles and syringes*	1345	(52.2)	1431	(52.4)	1309	(48.5)	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Ever shared needles and syringes only*	*	*	*	*	*	*	N/A‡	N/A‡	N/A‡	N/A‡	N/A‡	N/A‡	858	(38.8)
Current risk														
All cases	3254		3528		3330		2960		2651		2740		2540	
Currently injecting†	1182	(36.3)	1304	(37.0)	1223	(36.7)	984	(33.2)	862	(32.5)	815	(29.7)	759	(29.9)
New cases	591		642		541		476		359		314		255	
Currently injecting†	275	(46.5)	298	(46.4)	228	(42.1)	186	(39.1)	136	(37.9)	131	(41.7)	94	(36.9)
Previously treated cases	2575		2730		2701		2379		2165		2367		2213	
Currently injecting†	873	(33.9)	920	(33.7)	937	(34.7)	760	(31.9)	691	(31.9)	660	(27.9)	637	(28.8)

* Ever shared any equipment including needles and syringes was collected up to 2015. From 2016 the question changed to comply with European reporting requirements

† In the 30 days prior to treatment

‡ N/A Not available, see description above

Socio-demographic characteristics

The median age of cases increased over time from 29 years in 2013 to 31 years in 2019 (Table 7). For new cases, the median age increased from 25 years in 2013 to 26 years in 2019.

In 2019, 7.7% of all cases were aged 17 years or younger. Among new cases in 2019, the proportion aged 17 years or younger was 15.5%.

In 2019, the majority of cases were male (73.7%), while females accounted for 26.2% of cases (gender was unknown for 0.1% of cases).

The proportion of cases recorded as homeless increased from 6.5% in 2013 to 11.0% in 2019.

Cases with an Irish Traveller ethnicity increased in proportion from 2.6% in 2013 to 3.5% in 2017, then decreased to 3.0% in 2019 (3.5%).⁶

The proportion of cases recorded as having ceased education (for the first time) before the age of 16 years decreased from 36.0% in 2013 to 31.0% in 2019.

Over the reporting period, 62.9% of all cases were unemployed. The lowest proportion unemployed was 54.9% in 2019, a decrease from 2018 (61.9%). In each year, unemployment rates were higher among previously treated cases than among new cases.

The proportion of cases in paid employment increased from 7.8% in 2013 to 15.9% in 2019.

Table 7: Socio-demographic characteristics of cases treated for problem drug use, NDTRS 2013 to 2019

	2013		2014		2015		2016		2017		2018		2019	
	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)
All cases	9006		9890		9892		9227		8922		10274		10664	
Median age (range ⁷)	29	17-45	29	17-45	30	17-46	30	17-47	30	17-47	31	17-48	31	17-48
Under 18	669	(7.4)	747	(7.6)	685	(6.9)	629	(6.8)	591	(6.6)	732	(7.1)	822	(7.7)
Male	6554	(72.8)	7202	(72.8)	7146	(72.2)	6676	(72.4)	6449	(72.3)	7626	(74.2)	7859	(73.7)
Homeless	581	(6.5)	840	(8.5)	910	(9.2)	886	(9.6)	858	(9.6)	980	(9.5)	1173	(11.0)
Traveller	231	(2.6)	313	(3.2)	282	(2.9)	296	(3.2)	310	(3.5)	343	(3.3)	320	(3.0)
Education ceased before 16 years	3244	(36.0)	3486	(35.2)	3511	(35.5)	3236	(35.1)	3118	(34.9)	3551	(34.6)	3306	(31.0)
In paid employment	706	(7.8)	816	(8.3)	880	(8.9)	1028	(11.1)	1280	(14.3)	1735	(16.9)	1700	(15.9)
Unemployed	5910	(65.6)	6368	(64.4)	6368	(64.4)	6107	(66.2)	5702	(63.9)	6356	(61.9)	5852	(54.9)
Retired/unable to work including disability	1009	(11.2)	1135	(11.5)	1136	(11.5)	805	(8.7)	712	(8.0)	823	(8.0)	1251	(11.7)
New cases	3475		3776		3742		3526		3257		3962		3979	
Median age (range ⁷)	25	15-43	25	15-44	25	16-45	25	16-46	26	16-46	26	16-45	26	15-45
Under 18	523	(15.1)	566	(15.0)	498	(13.3)	469	(13.3)	413	(12.7)	537	(13.6)	618	(15.5)
Male	2656	(76.4)	2842	(75.3)	2814	(75.2)	2628	(74.5)	2446	(75.1)	3000	(75.7)	3065	(77.0)
Homeless	152	(4.4)	248	(6.6)	212	(5.7)	223	(6.3)	199	(6.1)	248	(6.3)	263	(6.6)
Traveller	92	(2.6)	135	(3.6)	107	(2.9)	102	(2.9)	97	(3.0)	109	(2.8)	112	(2.8)
Education ceased before 16 years	1004	(28.9)	1046	(27.7)	1011	(27.0)	969	(27.5)	834	(25.6)	946	(23.9)	888	(22.3)
In paid employment	356	(10.2)	424	(11.2)	507	(13.5)	537	(15.2)	652	(20.0)	943	(23.8)	901	(22.6)
Unemployed	1989	(57.2)	2091	(55.4)	2099	(56.1)	1990	(56.4)	1757	(53.9)	2029	(51.2)	1765	(44.4)
Retired/unable to work including disability	348	(10.0)	364	(9.6)	322	(8.6)	242	(6.9)	183	(5.6)	222	(5.6)	364	(9.1)
Previously treated	5239		5643		5855		5335		5242		5872		5927	
Median age (range ⁷)	31	19-46	31	19-45	32	19-46	32	19-47	33	19-47	34	19-49	34	19-50
Under 18	138	(2.6)	168	(3.0)	171	(2.9)	141	(2.6)	154	(2.9)	170	(2.9)	155	(2.6)
Male	3695	(70.5)	4041	(71.6)	4117	(70.3)	3782	(70.9)	3686	(70.3)	4328	(73.7)	4211	(71.0)
Homeless	417	(8.0)	526	(9.3)	660	(11.3)	617	(11.6)	620	(11.8)	679	(11.6)	810	(13.7)
Traveller	135	(2.6)	159	(2.8)	172	(2.9)	183	(3.4)	194	(3.7)	211	(3.6)	180	(3.0)
Education ceased before 16 years	2180	(41.6)	2328	(41.3)	2440	(41.7)	2162	(40.5)	2183	(41.6)	2460	(41.9)	2224	(37.5)
In paid employment	326	(6.2)	375	(6.6)	354	(6.0)	464	(8.7)	562	(10.7)	738	(12.6)	678	(11.4)
Unemployed	3751	(71.6)	3955	(70.1)	4080	(69.7)	3872	(72.6)	3717	(70.9)	4056	(69.1)	3714	(62.7)
Retired/unable to work including disability	630	(12.0)	714	(12.7)	790	(13.5)	533	(10.0)	495	(9.4)	563	(9.6)	782	(13.2)
Treatment status unknown	292		471		295		366		423		440		758	

Cocaine

This section focuses on the socio-demographic characteristics of cases with cocaine as a main problem drug (Table 8). In 2019, 2,560 cases were recorded with cocaine as a main problem, an increase from 708 cases in 2013.

The median age when entering treatment increased from 29 in 2013 to 30 in 2019. The proportion of cases aged 17 years or younger was 1.6% in 2019.

Over the period, the majority of cases were male (79.8%). The proportion of female cases increased from 17.5% in 2013 to 20.2% in 2019.

The proportion of cases in paid employment increased from 18.2% in 2013 to 35.0% in 2018, decreasing to 30.6% in 2019.

The proportion of cases with polydrug use decreased from 77.0% in 2013 to 58.0% in 2019. In 2019, the most common additional drugs were alcohol (57.3%), cannabis (47.6%), and benzodiazepines (28.3%).

In 2019, crack cocaine accounted for 14.3% of all cases treated for cocaine as a main problem (compared to 11.3% in 2018).

Table 8: Socio-demographic characteristics of cases treated for cocaine as a main problem, NDTRS 2013 to 2019

	2013		2014		2015		2016		2017		2018		2019	
	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)
All cocaine	708		853		1026		1138		1500		2254		2560	
Median age (range ⁷)	29	19-44	30	19-44	30	19-44	29	18-44	30	19-45	30	19-44	30	19-46
Under 18	11	(1.6)	17	(2.0)	20	(1.9)	27	(2.4)	26	(1.7)	39	(1.7)	40	(1.6)
Female	124	(17.5)	147	(17.2)	197	(19.2)	259	(22.8)	284	(18.9)	453	(20.1)	516	(20.2)
Homeless	12	(1.7)	26	(3.0)	40	(3.9)	38	(3.3)	56	(3.7)	107	(4.7)	151	(5.9)
Traveller	16	(2.3)	16	(1.9)	21	(2.0)	30	(2.6)	42	(2.8)	41	(1.8)	63	(2.5)
Education ceased before 16 years	247	(34.9)	278	(32.6)	306	(29.8)	309	(27.2)	390	(26.0)	598	(26.5)	636	(24.8)
In paid employment	129	(18.2)	167	(19.9)	249	(24.3)	322	(28.3)	502	(33.5)	790	(35.0)	783	(30.6)
Unemployed	422	(59.6)	465	(54.5)	536	(52.2)	611	(53.7)	773	(51.5)	1144	(50.8)	1267	(49.5)
Retired/unable to work including disability	91	(12.9)	133	(15.6)	144	(14.0)	104	(9.1)	90	(6.0)	136	(6.0)	240	(9.4)
New cases	320		425		513		568		748		1232		1258	
Median age (range ⁷)	28	18-43	28	18-44	28	18-43	27	18-43	28	18-44	29	19-43	28	19-44
Under 18	8	(2.5)	16	(3.8)	16	(3.1)	20	(3.5)	15	(2.0)	28	(2.3%)	30	(2.4)
Female	54	(16.9)	59	(13.9)	91	(17.7)	107	(18.8)	123	(16.4)	216	(17.5)	207	(16.5)
Homeless	~	~	11	(2.6)	11	(2.1)	17	(3.0)	27	(3.6)	50	(4.1)	67	(5.3)
Traveller	10	(3.1)	12	(2.8)	12	(2.3)	15	(2.6)	19	(2.5)	19	(1.5)	37	(2.9)
Education ceased before 16 years	103	(32.2)	135	(31.8)	135	(26.3)	124	(21.8)	161	(21.5)	284	(23.1)	269	(21.4)
In paid employment	64	(20.0)	103	(24.2)	155	(30.2)	190	(33.5)	286	(38.2)	497	(40.3)	466	(37.0)
Unemployed	187	(58.4)	218	(51.3)	240	(46.8)	273	(48.1)	357	(47.7)	570	(46.3)	560	(44.5)
Retired/unable to work including disability	46	(14.4)	64	(15.1)	63	(12.3)	46	(8.1)	37	(4.9)	65	(5.3)	104	(8.3)
Previously treated	352		381		487		541		692		944		1074	
Median age (range ⁷)	31	20-44	31	21-43	31	20-47	31	20-46	32	19-46	32	19-46	32	19-48
Under 18	~	~	~	~	~	~	7	(1.3)	9	(1.3)	10	(1.1)	9	(0.8)
Female	64	(18.2)	77	(20.2)	102	(20.9)	144	(26.6)	151	(21.8)	216	(22.9)	265	(24.7)
Homeless	9	(2.6)	14	(3.7)	27	(5.5)	20	(3.7)	28	(4.0)	46	(4.9)	70	(6.5)
Traveller	6	(1.7)	~	~	9	(1.8)	15	(2.8)	20	(2.9)	20	(2.1)	24	(2.2)
Education ceased before 16 years	136	(38.6)	133	(34.9)	168	(34.9)	180	(33.3)	219	(31.6)	298	(31.6)	320	(29.8)
In paid employment	56	(15.9)	57	(15.0)	88	(18.1)	129	(23.8)	193	(27.9)	272	(28.8)	250	(23.3)
Unemployed	219	(62.2)	223	(58.5)	283	(58.1)	317	(58.6)	394	(56.9)	538	(57.0)	600	(55.9)
Retired/unable to work including disability	42	(11.9)	61	(16.0)	78	(16.0)	56	(10.4)	46	(6.6)	62	(6.6)	123	(11.5)
Treatment status unknown	36		47		26		29		60		78		228	

~ Cells with five cases or fewer

Community Healthcare Organisation (CHO) area of residence

In 2019, the highest number of reported cases resided⁸ in CHO 9 (Table 9) (see below 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 9: Number of cases treated, by Community Healthcare Organisation area of residence, NDTRS 2013 to 2019

	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
All cases	9006	9890	9892	9227	8922	10274	10664
CHO 1	265	297	284	367	382	312	477
CHO 2	416	356	411	402	375	329	295
CHO 3	571	809	748	779	749	843	851
CHO 4	1367	1390	1429	1206	1055	1169	1216
CHO 5	1454	1366	1394	1261	1170	1277	1260
CHO 6	458	470	470	366	401	448	468
CHO 7	1646	1738	1750	1640	1531	2043	2137
CHO 8	807	1075	1020	921	926	1007	983
CHO 9	1748	2068	2007	1845	1876	2474	2531
Other/unknown	274	321	379	440	457	372	446
New cases	3475	3776	3742	3526	3257	3962	3979
CHO 1	166	149	147	159	182	147	230
CHO 2	160	126	162	185	173	132	104
CHO 3	252	381	322	361	310	417	420
CHO 4	595	589	575	513	467	530	515
CHO 5	692	611	613	537	498	554	599
CHO 6	168	200	199	149	179	213	168
CHO 7	525	572	593	543	509	664	631
CHO 8	348	479	471	434	367	460	472
CHO 9	507	587	581	530	460	765	765
Other/unknown	62	82	79	115	112	80	75
Previously treated	5239	5643	5855	5335	5242	5872	5927
CHO 1	91	135	121	180	172	150	216
CHO 2	246	227	247	212	198	163	155
CHO 3	294	362	357	381	409	396	382
CHO 4	730	773	841	667	567	627	681
CHO 5	747	746	776	711	640	671	606
CHO 6	264	247	259	200	206	227	258
CHO 7	1055	1025	1095	997	933	1315	1335
CHO 8	409	540	514	463	457	493	443
CHO 9	1202	1376	1370	1224	1336	1568	1527
Other/unknown	201	212	275	300	324	262	324
Treatment status unknown	292	471	295	366	423	440	758

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

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) ⁹ (Figure 1).

Incidence increased from 111.1 per 100,000 in 2013 to 119.8 per 100,000 in 2019.

Prevalence, which includes new cases and those cases returning to treatment, increased from 291.5 per 100,000 in 2013 to 316.2 per 100,000 in 2014. The rate then decreased year-on-year to 279.8 per 100,000 in 2017, before increasing to 325.6 per 100,000 in 2019.

Changes in incidence and prevalence should be interpreted with caution for recent years due to the increase in the proportion of cases where treatment status was unknown (7.1% in 2019).

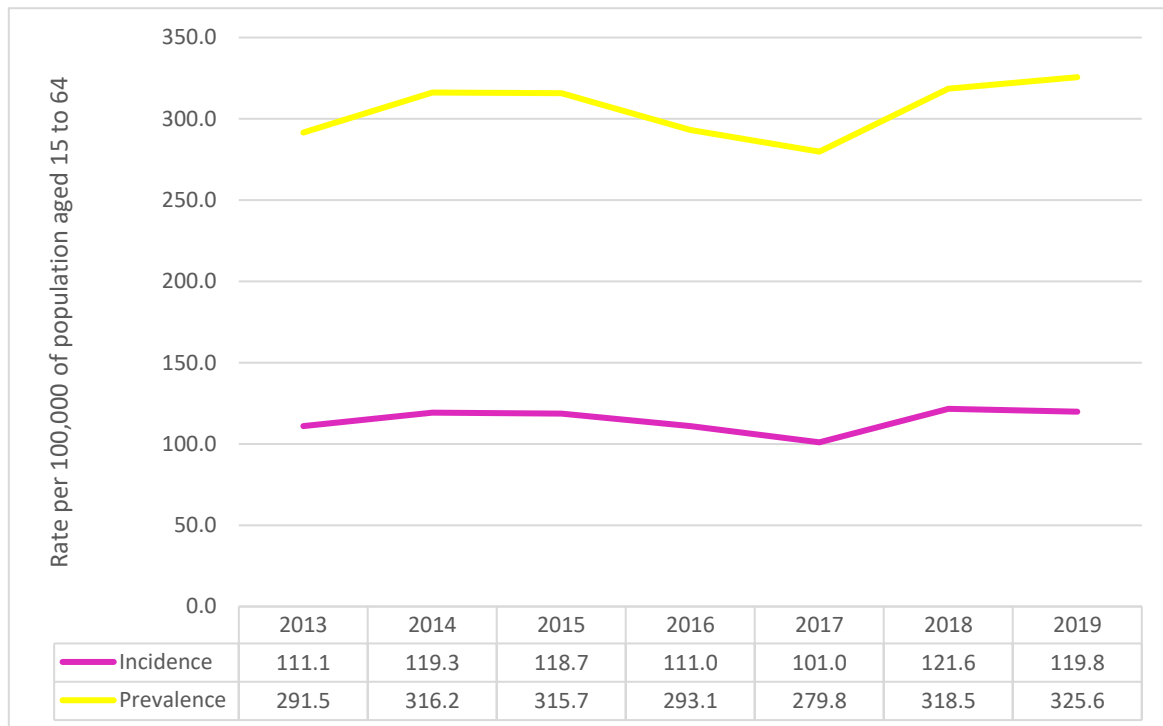


Figure 1: Incidence and prevalence of treated problem drug use per 100,000 of the 15 to 64 year-old population, NDTRS 2013 to 2019

Notes

1. This document may be cited as: O'Neill D, Carew AM, and Lyons S (2020) *Drug Treatment in Ireland 2013 to 2019*. Dublin: Health Research Board. Available at: <https://www.drugsandalcohol.ie/32094> and at www.hrb.ie/publications.
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. 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.
4. The NDTRS interactive tables will be updated to reflect the changes at: www.drugsandalcohol.ie/tables/
5. 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 69.6% for 2019.
6. Based on the 2016 Census, the proportion of Irish Travellers in the general population is 0.7% (Central Statistics Office, 2019) www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-cp8iter/p8iter/p8e/
7. Age range presented is 5th percentile to 95th percentile (90% of cases are included within this range).
8. Area of residence relates to the service user's place of residence in the 30 days prior to commencing treatment, for all service types excluding prison. Where a service user is treated in prison and have been in prison for less than six months prior to starting treatment, area of residence is the place of residence prior to imprisonment. Otherwise, the prison location is recorded.
9. Population data are taken from the Central Statistics Office at: <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/er/pme/populationandmigrationestimatesapril2019/>

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