

Trends in Drug Markets, Use and Health Impacts in Australia

COCAINE



May 2026

Cocaine availability has reached a record high globally, with production increasing to 3,708 tons in 2023. In Australia, cocaine use remains among the highest per capita globally, with 4.5% of people aged 14+ reporting past-year use in 2022-23 and wastewater data showing post-COVID increased consumption. While frequency of use remains mostly occasional, cocaine-related deaths increased between 2000 and 2023, mostly from toxicity and cardiovascular events. Hospitalisations and treatment episodes also rose.

Cocaine availability and use in Australia may remain high in the context of record global production, strong demand, and the profitability of the Australian market, although future trends cannot be predicted with certainty. Continued monitoring of cocaine markets and harms, expansion of drug checking and public risk communication systems, and improved access to effective treatment and early intervention services will be critical.

UNSW
NDARC
National
Drug & Alcohol
Research Centre

NDRI
national drug research institute

Curtin University



Burnet
research for the many



UNIVERSITY of
TASMANIA



Weekly use

Only 3% who used cocaine did so weekly+ in 2022-2023



Past year use ↑

4.5% in 2022-2023



Estimated consumption ↑

7,985 kg in 2024-25



Seizures ↑

5.6 tonnes in 2023-24



Price

\$300-\$350 per gram in 2025



Hospitalisations ↑

4.9 per 100,000 people in 2023-24



Deaths ↑

0.38 per 100,000 people in 2023

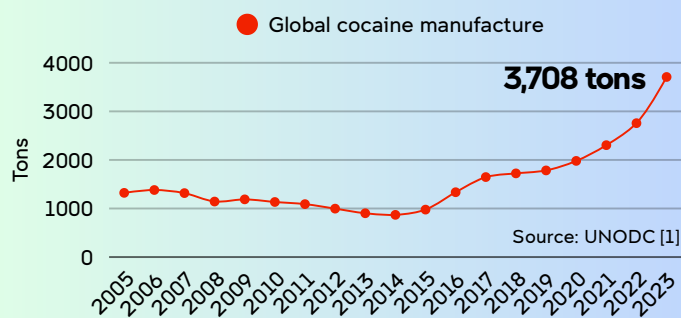


Market

The cocaine market has reached a record high globally. Production rose to 3,708 tons in 2023, making cocaine the world's fastest-growing illicit drug market [1]. In Australia, law enforcement agencies continue to intercept increasingly large cocaine shipments, including record seizures in recent years, reflecting the scale and profitability of the domestic market [2,4]. Perceived availability among those who report use has also increased, while prices have remained stable (\$300-\$350 per gram) and among the highest worldwide [5,6]. Cocaine has consistently accounted for a stable share of global cryptomarket listings, reflecting its sustained presence in online drug markets [8].

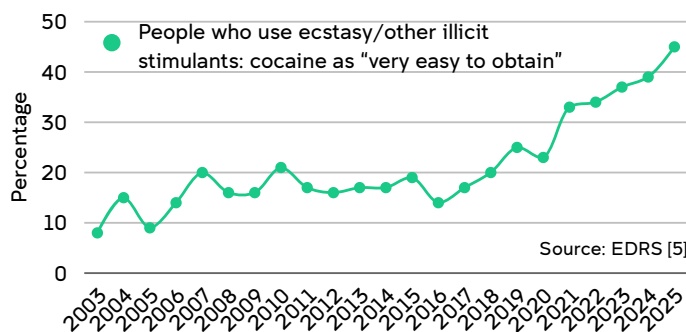


Estimated global manufacture of cocaine at 100% purity

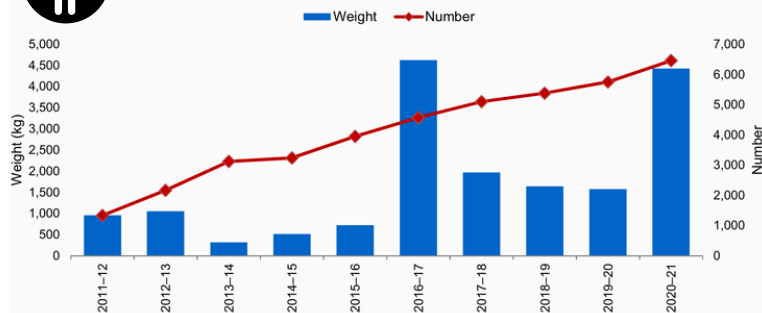


Availability

Perceived availability has risen, with over 40% of people who regularly use ecstasy and other illicit stimulants interviewed in 2025 reporting cocaine was 'very easy to obtain'.



National seizures



Source: ACIC [2]

The Australian Federal Police (AFP) and Australian Border Force (ABF) continue to intercept large maritime cocaine shipments, often exceeding 500 kg per seizure. The weight of cocaine seized nationally reached a record high level in 2020-21 of 4,421 kilograms (181% increase from 2019-20).

Recent updates

- 2022-23: AFP and ABF seized 26.8 tonnes of illicit drugs overall, with cocaine described as being intercepted at unprecedented levels, more than double the previous year.
- 2023-24: Total seizures rose to 33.7 tonnes, including 5.6 tonnes of cocaine.
- In November 2024, the AFP seized a record 2 tonnes of cocaine under Operation Tyrrendor, marking the largest cocaine seizure in Australia's history.
- 2025-2026: The AFP note ongoing large-scale cocaine seizures and the growing role of Pacific trafficking routes into Australia.

Source: AFP & ABF [4]



Drug checking

Drug checking services in the ACT and Victoria found that most samples sold as cocaine contained cocaine as expected, with around 70-86% containing cocaine only. However, some samples also contained other psychoactive substances, fillers or binders.

Source: CanTEST [15], VPTS [16]



Latest drug alerts about cocaine

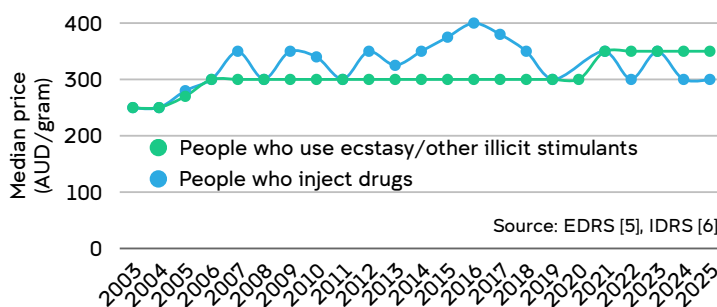
- > Multiple alerts: Opioids in cocaine (2024-2026 NSW, ACT, VIC)
- > N-ethylhexedrone found in cocaine sample (2026 ACT)
- > N-Isopropyl butylone found in a cocaine sample (2026 VIC)
- > Bromazolam and 2C-B found in white powder thought to be cocaine (2024 NSW)

Source: The Know [14]



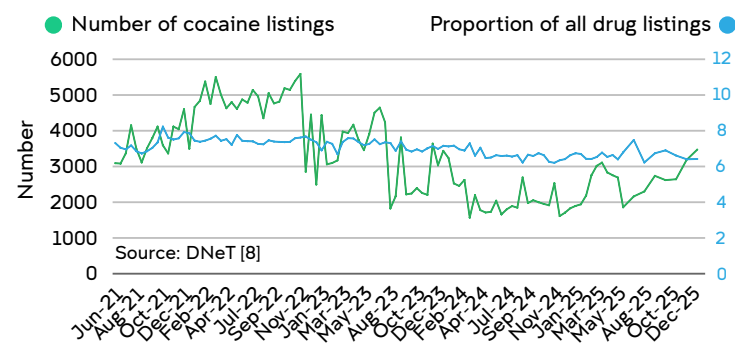
Price

Median domestic retail prices have remained high and relatively stable in recent years, sitting around AUD\$300-\$350 per gram according to interview data from people who regularly inject drugs (IDRS) and use ecstasy and other illicit stimulants (EDRS). This is substantially above international prices, which typically range from US\$50-\$150 per gram in North America and Europe, and some South American source countries reporting prices as low as US\$4-5 per gram [1].



Cryptomarket listings

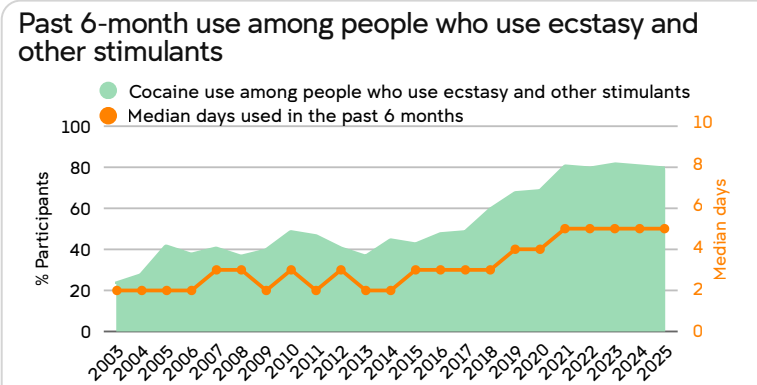
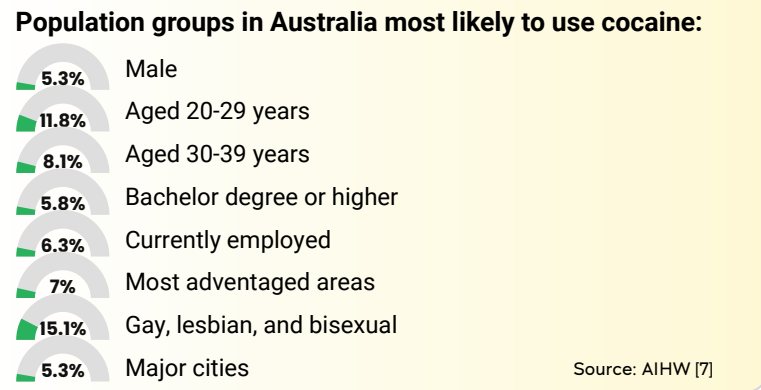
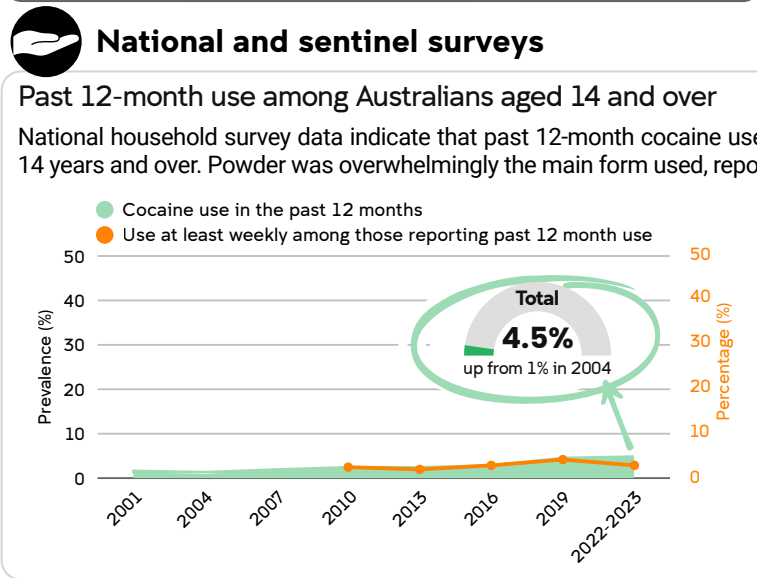
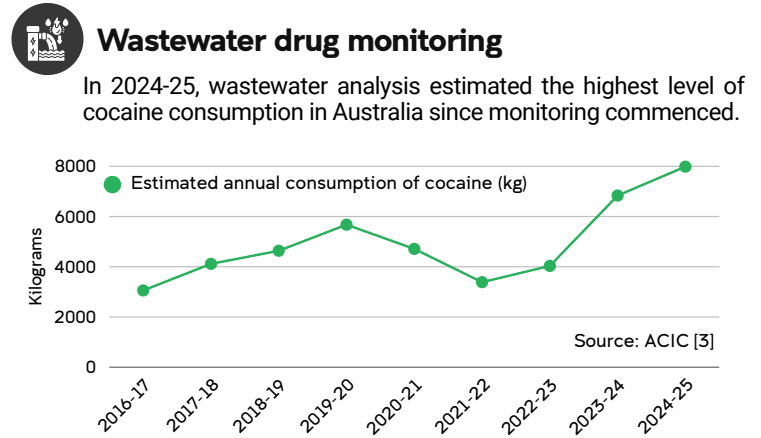
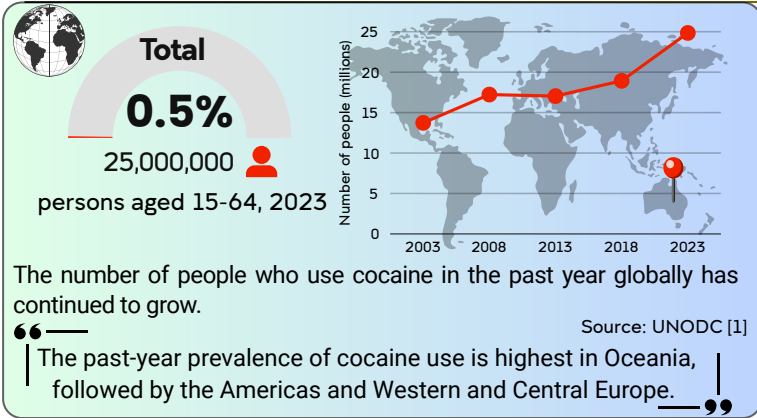
Cocaine has accounted for a relatively stable share of global cryptomarket listings over time (typically 6% to 8% of the market). Between 2024 and 2025, 46% to 63% of listings with delivery information were advertised as available to ship to Australia.



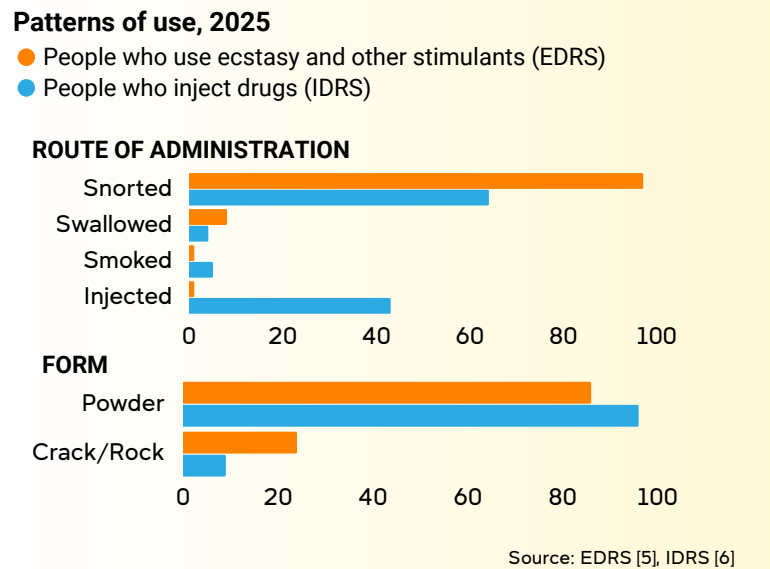
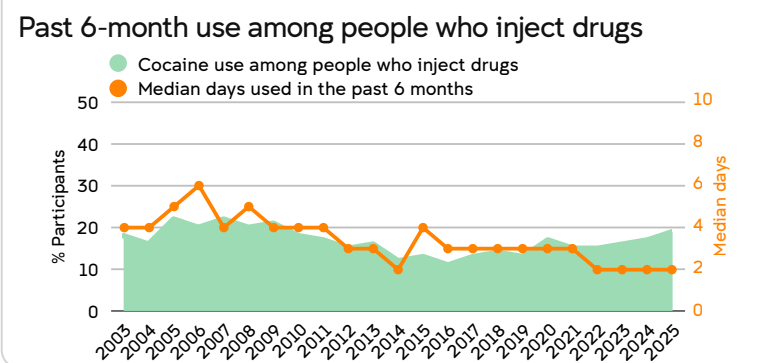


Use

The percentage reporting recent cocaine use in Australia is at its highest in two decades, although use is mostly occasional. In 2022-2023, 4.5% of people aged 14+ reported any cocaine use in the past year (1% in 2004), making it the second most used illicit drug after cannabis. However, only 3% of people who had used cocaine reported weekly or more frequent use [7]. Wastewater data also indicate consumption rose in 2024-25 relative to prior years [3]. National household survey data show that use is more common among young people, those with tertiary education, residents of major cities and people living in higher socio-economic areas [7]. People most commonly report using the powder form, and via intranasal administration [5,6].



Cocaine use has increased among both sentinel samples of people who use drugs, but remained considerably higher among people who use ecstasy and other stimulants than among people who inject drugs. Use was infrequent in both groups (less than monthly), with snorting the most common route and powder the most commonly used form.



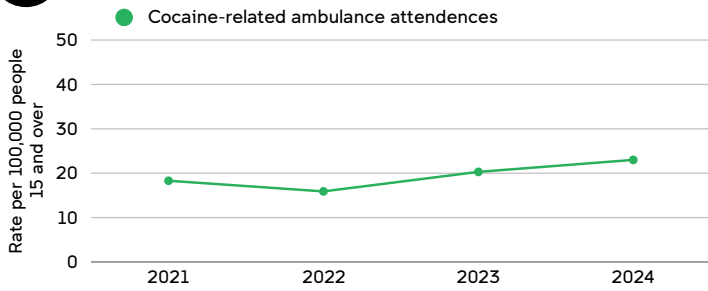


Harms & treatment

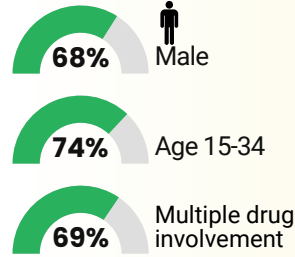
Cocaine-related harms in Australia have increased significantly over the past decade, with hospitalisation rates tripling since 2011 and deaths rising fivefold, though rates remain lower than other drugs like methamphetamine [11,12]. In 2024, illicit drug use contributed 2.9% of the total burden of disease in Australia, and cocaine accounted for 11% of the burden due to illicit drug use [10]. Rates of harms are typically higher among males, those aged in their 20s and 30s, and among people residing in capital cities [11,12]. Treatment episodes for cocaine in publicly funded alcohol and drug treatment services increased from 2.8 per 100,000 people in 2013-14 to 11.6 in 2023-24 [9].



Ambulance attendances (NSW, Vic, Qld, Tas, ACT and NT)



Characteristics, 2024



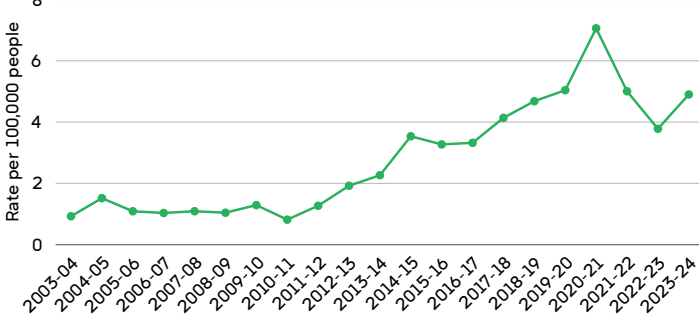
- The rate of cocaine-related ambulance attendances increased overall between 2021 and 2024.
- Over two-thirds involved males, and the majority occurred among people aged 15-34 years, with the highest rate among those aged 15-24 years (53 per 100,000 people).
- The majority of cocaine-related ambulance attendances also involved other drugs.

Source: AIHW [9]

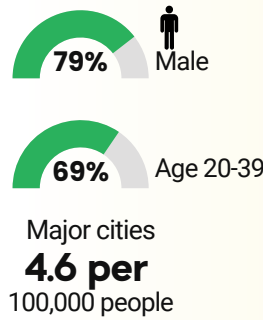


Hospitalisations

Cocaine-related hospitalisations as the principal diagnosis



Characteristics, 2022-23



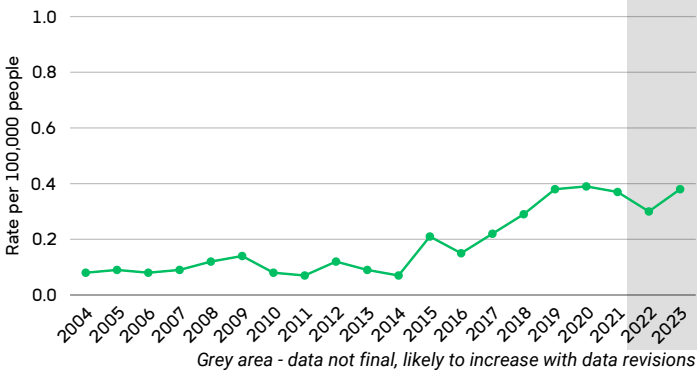
- Cocaine-related hospitalisations accounted for 1.9% of all drug-related hospitalisations in Australia in 2022-23.
- Following a sustained increase over the previous decade, hospitalisation rates declined between 2020-21 and 2022-23 before increasing again in 2023-24.
- Most hospitalisations in 2022-23 involved males and people aged 20-39 years.
- Rates were highest in New South Wales and Victoria and were concentrated in major cities.

Source: NDARC [11], AIHW [9]

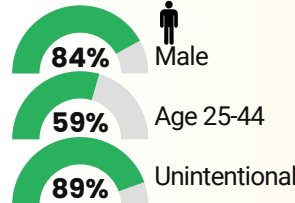


Deaths

Drug overdose deaths involving cocaine



Characteristics, 2023



Characteristics, 2000-2021

- 68% Multiple drug toxicity
- 60% Employed or student
- 28% History of mental health problems
- 71-91% Cardiovascular disease (among disease related deaths)

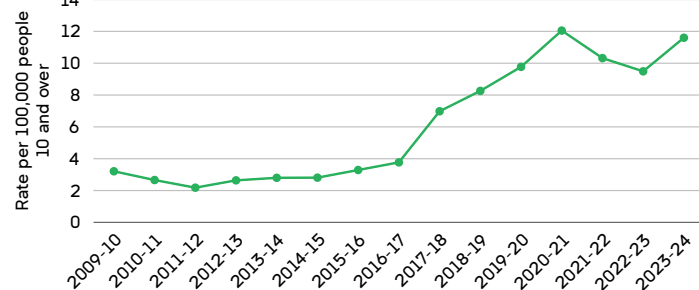
- Although absolute numbers remain relatively low, drug overdose deaths involving cocaine increased between 2004 and 2023, reaching 0.38 deaths per 100,000 people in 2023. In 2023, most deaths involved males, were unintentional, and occurred among people aged 25-44 years.
- In-depth study of deaths across 2000 to 2021 showed cocaine-related deaths most commonly involved polysubstance toxicity. Among cocaine-related toxicity deaths involving disease, cardiovascular disease was the most common condition attributed.

Source: NDARC [12], Darke et al. [13]

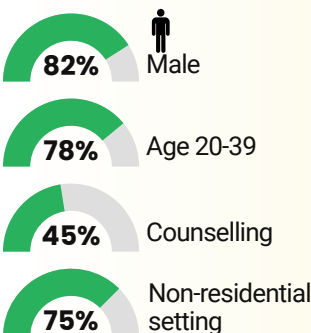


Treatment

Closed treatment episodes for own drug use - cocaine as the principal drug of concern



Characteristics, 2023-24



- Cocaine-related treatment episodes have increased over the past decade, with cocaine identified as the principal drug of concern in 1.2% of closed treatment episodes in 2023-24, increasing from 0.3% in 2014-15. In 2023-24, most clients were male and aged 20-39 years.
- Counselling was the most common treatment type, most episodes occurred in non-residential settings, and referrals were most commonly by self or from family.

Source: AIHW [9]



Policy implications and responses

Current indicators suggest cocaine availability and use in Australia may remain elevated in the near term in the context of global production, strong demand, and the profitability of the Australian market, although future trends cannot be predicted with certainty. Wastewater data, seizures, and reports of perceived availability all point to a growing and more established cocaine market in Australia.

It is important to note that current cocaine use in Australia remains mostly occasional rather than frequent. However, increased availability and, as a result, potential reductions in price may contribute to broader uptake and more frequent use over time. From a public health perspective, increasing population-level use may lead to greater exposure to cocaine-related harms, including cardiovascular and mental health problems, toxicity, and polysubstance use, and may place additional pressure on emergency departments, hospitals, and alcohol and other drug treatment services over time. Adulteration with substances such as opioids may also increase overdose risk, particularly if supply patterns change.

These trends highlight the importance of continued monitoring of cocaine markets and related harms, expanding harm reduction measures such as drug checking and timely public risk communication systems, and investing in research and service development to identify effective treatment approaches for cocaine-related problems and ensure timely access to care where needed.

Data sources

This report draws exclusively on publicly available data sources and published materials. No statistical testing has been conducted for the purpose of this report to support statements regarding changes over time. Readers should refer to the original source publications for detailed methodology, statistical analyses, and interpretation of findings.

1. UNODC World Drug Report: <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/data-and-analysis/world-drug-report-2025.html>
2. ACIC Illicit Drug Data Report: https://www.acic.gov.au/sites/default/files/2023-10/illicit_drug_data_report_2020-21_forweb.pdf
3. ACIC National Wastewater Drug Monitoring Program 2026 Annual report: <https://www.acic.gov.au/publications/national-wastewater-drug-monitoring-program-reports/report-25-national-wastewater-drug-monitoring-program>
4. AFP News Centre and Annual Report:
 - a. <https://www.afp.gov.au/news-centre/media-release/afp-seizes-268-tonnes-drugs-prevents-107-billion-harm-2022-23>
 - b. <https://www.afp.gov.au/news-centre/media-release/afp-and-abf-seize-337-tonnes-illicit-drugs-and-precursors>
 - c. <https://www.afp.gov.au/sites/default/files/2025-10/AFPAnnualReport2024-25.pdf>
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6. NDARC IDRS 2025 Report: <https://www.unsw.edu.au/research/ndarc/resources/australian-drug-trends-2025-key-findings-from-the-idrs>
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10. AIHW Australian Burden of Disease Study 2024: <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/burden-of-disease/australian-burden-of-disease-study-2024>
11. NDARC Trends in drug-related hospitalisations in Australia, 2003-2023: <https://www.unsw.edu.au/research/ndarc/resources/trends-drug-related-hospitalisations-australia-2003-2023>
12. NDARC Trends in overdose and other drug-induced deaths in Australia, 2004-2023: <https://www.unsw.edu.au/research/ndarc/resources/trends-drug-induced-deaths-australia-2004-2023>
13. Darke S, Dufflou J, Peacock A, Chrzanowska A, Farrell M, Lappin J. Clinical characteristics of fatal cocaine toxicity in Australia, 2000–2021. *Drug Alcohol Rev.* 2023; 42(3): 582–591. <https://doi.org/10.1111/dar.13581>
14. The Know drug alerts: <https://theknow.org.au/>
15. CanTEST annual report 2024-25: <https://cantest.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2026/02/CanTEST-Annual-Report-2024-25-.pdf>
16. Victorian Pill Testing Service monthly reports: <https://www.vicpilltesting.org.au/reports>

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- We thank the various national and international organisations that collect, manage, and make publicly available the data sources used in this report.
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