



Social Justice STOCKTAKE



Alcohol and Other Drugs

Attributable to General Manager, Alcohol and other Drugs, Kathryn Wright

Australia is known as a nation of drinkers yet the Stocktake reveals alcohol and other drugs as the third most important issue of concern in the Stocktake. Why do you think this is the case?

Drinking can be very social, but the misuse of alcohol and illicit drugs can also place a heavy burden on people, their families and the broader community. Often this burden is private and can carry a lot of shame and stigma. The Stocktake results around alcohol and other drugs speak to this very real and often 'hidden' concern.

It is also important to remember that the Stocktake was undertaken at a time when many Australians were experiencing the effects of COVID-19 restrictions, including lockdowns, travel restrictions, shifts to working from home and home-schooling, and for others loss of employment, income, and social connection. Alcohol consumption also increased during this time of stress and uncertainty.

Some people like to think of alcohol as not being a drug as such but that isn't the case, is it?

Drinking alcohol is a very accepted part of our culture, so it is understandable that many people don't think of alcohol as being a drug that can have real and long-term impacts on people's physical and mental wellbeing.

Alcohol misuse, just like any other drug misuse carries risk, but this risk can be under-estimated as alcohol remains generally more affordable, accessible and accepted in our society.

Do you believe the prevalence of Ice has increased the country's concern about drugs?

While crystal methamphetamine or 'ice' is not the most commonly used drug in Australia, the prevalence and harm caused by ice gets a lot of media attention as its effects can cause people to act in unexpected and dangerous ways.

Data from the 2019 National Drug Strategy Household Survey suggests overall rates of methamphetamine use have declined over recent years, but among those who do use methamphetamine, ice is the more popular form of the drug and those who use ice (as opposed to other forms of methamphetamine) are more likely to use it more regularly.

Multiple data sources also indicate harms related to ice use are increasing in Australia.¹

¹ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2020. National Drug Strategy Household Survey 2019. Drug Statistics series no. 32. PHE 270. Canberra AIHW



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What is the biggest misconception you see about people presenting with problematic use of alcohol and other drugs?

There are a lot of stereotypes about people who are struggling with drug and alcohol misuse, including that addiction is simply the result of bad choices and individual weakness and that certain people are more likely to develop addictions. Another misconception is that addiction is the only harmful effect of drug and alcohol use.

Alcohol and other drug related harms occur broadly across society. Co-occurrence with mental ill-health, financial disadvantage, and family violence definitely increases harm and often drives increased drug use in a cycle that perpetuates harm.

Stereotypes around addiction ignore alcohol and drug misuse as a health issue that can be treatable just like other disorders.

Do you believe the issue has increased during lockdown? If so, was it people with existing issues getting worse, or was it those who may not assume they have a problem?

Evidence shows that there can be changes in alcohol consumption during large-scale disasters. For some people alcohol and drug consumption increased during lockdown for a range of reasons including greater stress levels, being bored and because many of us were spending more time at home.

Several studies have been undertaken or are underway, with the specific aim of assessing the impact of COVID-19 on alcohol and other drug use.

Some people believe addiction is a moral issue or a choice. What is your opinion?

People use drugs and alcohol for many reasons; to relax, for enjoyment, to be part of a group, out of curiosity, as a coping mechanism or to minimise physical or psychological pain and trauma.

We do not believe that problematic substance use is an issue of virtue or personal choice. We see it as a health issue where the best outcomes for individuals are achieved when systems work together with pathways into and out of housing, education, training, employment, GP networks, prisons, mental health, etc.

Do you believe incarceration for being under the Influence of drugs and/or alcohol offences is effective?

Evidence shows that a criminal justice or 'punishment' response to drug and/or alcohol offences can be less effective than drug treatment and prevention programs to curtail drug and alcohol misuse. Incarceration also fails to address the reasons why people commit drug and/or alcohol-related offences in the first place and in fact can place people at increased risk of further harms and detrimental outcomes.

Using a stepped care approach, The Salvation Army matches people with a treatment that takes into consideration the needs of the whole person, not just the substance misuse issues.



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What does The Salvation Army offer when someone appears with a drug or alcohol issue?

The Salvation Army has a long and recognised history of providing alcohol and other drug services across Australia. Our core belief is that all people are worthy and deserving of love, respect and dignity. We are dedicated to creating a platform and pathways for people to build their lives in ways that are meaningful and purposeful.

Harm reduction is the overarching framework of our services. Nationally, our services include: Intake and Assessment, Counselling, Forensic Counselling, Care and Recovery Coordination, Residential Withdrawal, Home-Based Withdrawal, Case Management, Harm Reduction Programs, Needle Syringe Programs, Day Rehabilitation Programs, Residential Rehabilitation and Aftercare.