



Australasian College for Emergency Medicine

Media Release

26 June 2019

Alcohol and Other Drug Harm

Burden of alcohol and methamphetamine harm revealed in survey of emergency departments

The Australasian College for Emergency Medicine has released findings from its fifth annual Alcohol and Other Drug (AOD) Harm Snapshot Survey, conducted at 2am on Sunday 16 December 2018 in emergency departments across Australia and New Zealand.

The report shows the highest prevalence of alcohol-related presentations was found in Western Australia and New Zealand, with almost one in five presentations alcohol related in those jurisdictions at the time of the survey.

ACEM President Dr Simon Judkins says alcohol harm is one of the biggest preventable public health issues facing emergency departments. 'The use of alcohol contributes to harm including injuries related to assaults or altercations, motor vehicle crashes and acute toxication effects such as vomiting, unconsciousness and some mental health presentations', he says.

'Alcohol has never been cheaper or more heavily promoted than it is now and we see the very real effects of this in emergency departments in Australia and New Zealand. In what is already high burden environment, we bear the brunt of inadequate alcohol regulation.'

Dr Judkins is disappointed by the lack of national alcohol strategy in Australia. 'The latest federal budget sets out a whole-of-government drug strategy, but a national alcohol strategy is required to support these efforts to stop alcohol harm', he says.

'Unfortunately nothing has come of the 2017 consultation yet, but we are encouraged by Health Minister (Greg) Hunt's comments this month that a release is a matter of months away.'

This snapshot survey was the first of its kind to also quantify the burden of methamphetamine presentations to emergency departments.

Its results overall show methamphetamine to be a secondary issue in Australia compared to alcohol, but reveals more significant methamphetamine harm in presentations in Western Australia. With one in 16 (6%) presentations related to methamphetamine use – WA experienced almost double that of any other Australian jurisdiction, and six times the number of presentations in New Zealand (1%).

ACEM's Western Australia Faculty Chair Dr Peter Allely says the presentation rates to Western Australian emergency departments for methamphetamine again show the need solutions need to be implemented by the government.

'The WA government needs to implement more integrated models of care – mental health, general medical and AOD/toxicological care – within emergency departments', Dr Allely says.

'We need to see greater resourcing and availability of specialist treatment programs so that when people are at our door, we have options available to them and we can offer interventions if their drug or alcohol use is at crisis point. We also need to work to ensure EDs outside metro areas are resourced, as they in particular struggle with the physical capacity of drug and alcohol presentations and service pathways.'

Overall, more than 3100 patients (2680 in Australia and 429 in New Zealand) were receiving emergency medical care in the participating EDs at the time of the survey, with 14% of those presentations found to be related to alcohol and three per cent related to methamphetamine use.

Read the full report: [ace.mn/AOD19](https://www.acem.org.au/AOD19)

Media contact

Nicole Newton
+61 498 068 023

communications@acem.org.au

[acem.org.au](https://www.acem.org.au)