

Executive Summary

This report presents drug statistics and research findings pertaining to the New South Wales (NSW) prison population drawn from the Biennial Data Collection series. This represents the sixth survey in the series - the first of which was conducted in 1998. A fundamental role of this series is to examine the extent and nature of drug-related crime, drug use patterns (both prior to and upon imprisonment) treatment involvement and also correctional responses. Corrective Services, NSW (CSNSW) uses these drug indicators to inform preventative, treatment and security responses. The current survey was conducted with a representative discharge sample of 328 male and 52 female sentenced inmates about to be released into the community in 2009-10. Repeated measurement and a constant methodology have enabled the tracking of trends on a core set of performance measures and key variables. It is worth noting that numerous drug prevalence and criminogenic indicators show either declining or stable trends over the past decade. Further there were some significant decreases in drug problem indicators between 2007-08 and 2009-10.

Key findings

Drug-related offending

- 73% (73% of males and 77% of females) reported that at least one of their current criminal offences was related to their use of alcohol and/or other drugs. The overall rate was fairly uniform with that recorded in 2007-08.

Patterns of drug use

- Illicit drug use while in the community in the six months prior to the current prison episode was reported by close to three in four inmates (73%; 72% of males and 79% of females).
- Use of 'heavy-end' drugs (i.e. heroin, amphetamine or cocaine) in the six months prior to current imprisonment was reported by one in two inmates (50%; 48% of males and 62% of females). Across the same time period around one in three inmates (35%; 33% of males and 46% of females) reported that they had injected drugs.
- Illicit drug use on at least one occasion in the current prison episode was reported by just over one in three inmates (37%; 36% of males and 39% of females).
- Rates of both pre-prison and in-prison illicit drug use and injecting drug use declined over the decade.

Presenting drug morbidity on reception to prison

- 36% (35% of males and 44% of females) reported experiencing drug withdrawal symptoms on reception for the current prison episode. The rate of reported drug withdrawal on reception showed a declining trend over the decade.
- Prior participation in drug treatment was reported by 86% of inmates with a drug problem history (84% of males and 95% of females). This extrapolates to 74% of the entire sample reporting a history of drug treatment.

Pre-prison and in-prison drug use rates have fallen