



Australian Government

Australian Institute of
Health and Welfare

Report Profile



The health of Australia's prisoners 2015

Mental health issues, communicable diseases and risky health behaviours including tobacco smoking, excessive alcohol consumption and illicit use of drugs are key concerns for the health of prisoners in Australia. *The health of Australia's prisoners 2015* is the 4th report produced by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare on the health and wellbeing of prisoners. It was developed to help monitor the health of prisoners, and to inform and evaluate the planning, delivery and quality of prison health services. The report explores the conditions and diseases experienced by prisoners; compares, where possible, the health of prisoners to the general Australian community and provides valuable insight into the use of prison health services.

New to the 2015 report are data on the disabilities or long-term health conditions of prisoners entering the system (prison entrants), self-assessed mental and physical health status of prisoners and data on smoke-free prisons.

The prisoner population is predominately male (92% compared with 49% of the general adult population), and relatively young, with over two-thirds (68%) being aged under 40 years, compared with about 38% of the general adult population. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are significantly over-represented in the prison system. Indigenous people represent approximately 2% of the general adult population, but on 30th June 2015 comprised 27% of the prisoner population.

This report profile summarises some of the key findings of the full report.

Fast facts

A two-week long snapshot of prisoner health showed that:

78% of dischargees rated their own physical health as generally good or better

74% of entrants were smokers

50% of entrants reported using methamphetamines in the last 12 months

44% of prisoners visited their clinic in 2 weeks

43% of prisoners were taking prescribed medication

41% of dischargees thought their mental health had improved since being in prison

39% of entrants reported consuming alcohol at risky levels in the last 12 months

30% of entrants had a disability

25% of entrants reported a current chronic condition (asthma, arthritis, cardiovascular disease, diabetes or cancer)

23% of entrants had a history of self-harm

22% of dischargees were trying to gain weight while in prison.

Tobacco smoking

- 74% of prison entrants were current smokers, but half of these smokers would like to quit.
- In the general community, the proportion of people who say they have never smoked is highest among younger people, suggesting that over time, fewer young people in the general population are trying and taking up smoking. Among prison entrants, there is no apparent trend.
- Smoking bans are being progressively implemented in Australian prisons.
- Dischargees—those prisoners expecting to be released in the 4 weeks following data collection—from prisons with smoking bans were more likely to use quit smoking assistance in prison, than those in prisons allowing smoking.
- Of those who smoked on entry to prison, dischargees from prisons with smoking bans were less likely to intend to smoke after release (59%) than those from prisons in which smoking is allowed (73%).

Disability

- 30% of entrants reported a long-term health condition or disability limiting their activities or restricting participation in education or employment.
- 24% of entrants reported limits in daily activities, 16% restrictions to participation with employment and 12% to education.
- Among 35–54 year olds, some form of disability is more common among prison entrants than those in the general community.

Mental health

- 49% of prison entrants had ever been told they have a mental health disorder (including drug or alcohol abuse), and 27% were currently taking medication for mental health related issues.
- 31% of prison entrants and 19% of dischargees were experiencing high or very high levels of psychological distress. The most common issue causing both entrants and dischargees a lot of concern was family or relationships in the community.
- Following the initial prison reception assessment, 22% of entrants were referred to mental health services for observation and further assessment.
- 78% of dischargees rated their mental health as generally good or better, and 41% thought that their mental health had improved since being in prison.
- 23% of entrants had a history of self-harm, and 13% had thought of harming themselves in the last 12 months.

Alcohol and other drug use

- 39% of entrants reported consuming alcohol at risky levels during the previous 12 months. This was true for more than half (54%) of Indigenous entrants, compared with 33% of non-Indigenous entrants.
- Prison entrants aged 18–49 are more likely than those in the general community to be non-drinkers. However, among those who do drink alcohol, prison entrants are more likely to consume alcohol in greater quantities. Among drinkers in the general community, there is a clear and steady decline in heavy drinking (at least 7 standard drinks in a day), with age from 34% of 18–24 year olds, to 13% of 35–44 year olds. Prison entrants do not show this decline, with 34% of 25–34 and 35–44 year olds reporting heavy drinking, suggesting that among prison entrants who drink, heavy drinking is more likely to persist than among those in the general community.
- 67% of prison entrants reported illicit drug use during the last 12 months, with methamphetamine use reported by 50% and cannabis by 41%.

Chronic conditions

- 32% of prison entrants reported ever having been told by a doctor or nurse that they have a chronic condition—asthma (23%), arthritis (10%), cardiovascular disease (6%), diabetes (4%) or cancer (3%).
- The condition was still current for 25% of all prison entrants.

Self-assessed physical health

- 73% of entrants and 78% of dischargees rated their own physical health as generally good or better.
- Young, male prisoners gave more favourable ratings than older, female prisoners.
- Non-Indigenous prison entrants were more likely to rate their own physical health as fair or poor than those in the general community asked for a self-assessment of their health.
- 34% of prison entrants reported ever having a head injury leading to a loss of consciousness. For 18% of entrants, symptoms were noticed after the head injury, such as headaches, or changes in memory, behaviour or mood. These symptoms were ongoing for three-quarters of those who had noticed them after the injury.

Activity and weight changes

- 34% of dischargees reported that their level of physical activity had increased while in prison, and 20% thought they were less active.
- 43% of dischargees thought their weight had increased while in prison, and 22% reported that they were actively trying to make this happen. Young, male, and Indigenous dischargees were more likely than others to say that they were trying to increase their weight in prison.

Health service use

- 66% of prison entrants had consulted a health professional in the community in the previous 12 months, and 57% of entrants who had been in prison in the past 12 months had consulted a health professional while there.
- Health professionals more likely to be consulted in the community than in prison were Doctors or general practitioners, alcohol and drug workers, and radiographers. Reflecting the nurse-led care in prisons, nurses were more likely to have been consulted in prison, as were psychologists and other mental health professionals.
- During the two-week data collection period, 44% of prisoners in custody visited the prison clinic, and 43% were taking prescribed medication.
- Prisoners on average took 2.5 medications each, and made 2.2 visits to the clinic.
- The most commonly managed problems in the clinics were medication or vaccination (19%), and general health assessments (18%). Both of these are related to processing new prison entrants, reflecting the continuous flow of prisoners through the system. Psychological or mental health (12%), diabetes (9%) and pathology (8%) were also among the most commonly managed problems.
- Prisoners initiated most of the visits for dental (64%) and skin (59%) conditions. Clinic staff initiated the majority of all other types of visits, particularly psychological or mental health issues (78% initiated by staff).
- 71% of clinic visits were with a nurse, 17% with a doctor or general practitioner, and 10% with mental health professionals.
- 91% of prisoners reported that they could easily see a general practitioner or nurse in prison if they had a health problem, and 82% rated their health care in prison as good or excellent.

- The most commonly prescribed medications were antidepressants or mood stabilisers (18% of medications), repeat analgesics (16%), anti-inflammatories/antirheumatic agents (9%) and antipsychotics (8%).

Release from prison

- 88% of dischargees said they felt prepared for their upcoming release from prison.
- 83% of dischargees who were on treatment or medication for a health condition in prison, had a plan to continue care after release.
- 50% of dischargees reported having a referral or appointment to see a health professional upon release from prison.
- 75% of dischargees knew they would have a valid Medicare care available to them upon release from prison, and 11% were not sure.

About the National Prisoner Health Data Collection

The health of Australia's prisoners 2015 uses data from the National Prisoner Health Data Collection (NPHDC), which was conducted over a 2-week period in March-May 2015 in 76 out of 91 public and private prisons in all states and territories in Australia. In New South Wales, data were only collected for prison entrants, and focused on 'reception' prisons.

During the NPHDC, there were over 33,000 prisoners in custody in Australia. Detailed data were collected for 1,011 prison entrants, 437 prison dischargees, over 9,500 prisoners who visited a prison health clinic, and about 9,400 prisoners who took prescribed medication.

The table on the following pages presents a summary for all prisoner health indicators covered in *The health of Australia's prisoners 2015*. More than one-quarter of prisoners in this report were Indigenous, despite the fact that they represent only 2% of the general adult population. Because of this significant over-representation, where possible, comparisons of Indigenous and non-Indigenous prisoners are shown.

Related publications

All prisoner health related publications from the AIHW are available for free download from the AIHW website at <<http://www.aihw.gov.au/prisoner-health-publications/>>. These include:

The health of Australia's prisoners 2015 (released 27 Nov 2015):

<<http://www.aihw.gov.au/publication-detail/?id=60129553243>>.

Prisoner health services in Australia 2012 (released 14 Aug 2014):

<<http://www.aihw.gov.au/publication-detail/?id=60129548273>>

Smoking and quitting smoking among prisoners 2012 (released 22 Oct 2013):

<<http://www.aihw.gov.au/publication-detail/?id=60129544877>>.

The health of Australia's prisoners 2012 (released 23 Jul 2013):

<<http://www.aihw.gov.au/publication-detail/?id=60129543948>>.

The mental health of prison entrants in Australia 2010 (released 5 Jul 2012):

<<http://www.aihw.gov.au/publication-detail/?id=10737422201>>.

Key

Sourced from discharge form	Sourced from entrant form	Sourced from repeat medication form
Sourced from clinic form	Sourced from establishment form	Other source

Indicator	Proportion or number	Indigenous: Non-Indigenous
Socioeconomic factors		
Proportion of prison entrants whose highest year of completed schooling was below Year 10	32%	40%:29%
Proportion of prison dischargees whose highest year of completed schooling was below Year 10	36%	47%:30%
Proportion of prison dischargees who completed qualifications while in prison	9%	8%:10%
Proportion of prison entrants who were unemployed in the 30 days prior to imprisonment	48%	60%:43%
Proportion of prison dischargees who on release have organised paid employment which will start within 2 weeks of leaving prison	24%	24%:25%
Proportion of prison dischargees who on release are expecting to receive government payment through Centrelink	79%	85%:76%
Proportion of prison entrants who were homeless in the 4 weeks prior to imprisonment (including short-term and emergency accommodation)	25%	27%:24%
Proportion of prison dischargees who on release are expecting to be homeless (including short-term and emergency accommodation)	31%	38%:28%
Proportion of prison entrants who had one or more of their parents/carers imprisoned while they were a child	17%	26%:13%
Proportion of prison entrants who have children who depend on them for their basic needs	46%	53%:43%
Proportion of prison dischargees who in the last 4 weeks had contact with family, friends and/or elders	79%	76%:81%
Mental health		
Proportion of prison entrants who have ever been told by a doctor, psychiatrist, psychologist or nurse that they have a mental health disorder (including drug and alcohol abuse)	49%	44%:51%
Proportion of prison dischargees who have ever been told they have a health condition – mental health, including drug and alcohol abuse	44%	43%:45%
Proportion of prison dischargees reporting that their mental health improved or stayed the same in prison	84%	86%:84%
Proportion of prison entrants with high or very high level of psychological distress as measured by the Kessler 10 (K10) scale	31%	20%:34%
Proportion of prison dischargees with high or very high level of psychological distress as measured by the Kessler 10 (K10) scale	19%	17%:20%
Proportion of prison entrants who rate their mental health as generally good or better	67%	71%:65%

Indicator	Proportion or number	Indigenous: Non-Indigenous
Proportion of prison dischargees who rate their mental health as generally good or better	78%	78%:78%
Proportion of prison entrants who are currently taking medication for a mental health disorder	27%	25%:27%
Proportion of prisoners in custody who received medication for mental health issues	23%	18%:24%
Proportion of prison entrants, who, at reception, were referred to mental health services for observation and further assessment	22%	23%:22%
Self-harm		
Proportion of prison entrants who have ever intentionally harmed themselves	23%	26%:21%
Proportion of prison entrants who have thought of harming themselves in the last 12 months	13%	11%:14%
Proportion of prison dischargees who have intentionally harmed themselves in prison	4%	4%:4%
Proportion of prison entrants identified as currently at risk of suicide or self-harm	7%	7%:7%
Communicable diseases		
Rate of notifications of sexually transmitted infections for prisoners in custody during 2014 (source: jurisdictions)	3 per 100 prisoners received	n.a.
Proportion of prison entrants testing positive to Hepatitis C virus (source: NPEBBV&RBS)	31%	31%:30%
Proportion of prison entrants testing positive to Hepatitis B virus (source: NPEBBV&RBS)	18%	25%:15%
Proportion of prison entrants testing positive to HIV (source: NPEBBV&RBS)	0%	n.a.
Proportion of prison dischargees who were tested for a blood-borne virus or a sexually-transmissible infection	69%	77%:67%
Rate of courses of treatment for Hepatitis C commenced during 2014 (source: jurisdictions)	8 per 1,000 prisoners received	n.a.
Chronic conditions		
Proportion of prison entrants who have ever been told they have a chronic condition	32%	24%:34%
Activity and health changes		
Proportion of prison entrants who rate their physical health as generally good or better	73%	74%:72%
Proportion of prison dischargees who rate their physical health as generally good or better	78%	85%:76%

Indicator	Proportion or number	Indigenous: Non-Indigenous
Proportion of prison dischargees who report that while in prison their level of physical activity increased or stayed the same	73%	71%:74%
Proportion of prison dischargees who report that while in prison their weight increased or stayed the same	78%	79%:78%
Proportion of prison dischargees reporting that their physical health improved or stayed the same in prison	83%	84%:82%
Aspects of women's health		
Proportion of female prison entrants who have ever been pregnant	84%	79%:87%
Mean age at first pregnancy for female prison entrants	19 years	18 years:19 years
Rate of pregnant prisoners in custody during 2014	4.6 per 100 prisoners received	n.a.
Proportion of female prison dischargees who report that they were pregnant while in prison	3%	n.a.
Proportion of female prison entrants who have had a cervical cancer screening in the last two years	56%	56%:56%
Proportion of female prison dischargees who had a cervical cancer screening in prison	24%	24%:24%
Proportion of female prison dischargees who had a mammogram in prison	1 of 68	n.p.
Disability status		
Proportion of prison entrants with limitations in activities or restrictions in education or employment	30%	25%:32%
Proportion of prison entrants with profound or severe core activity limitations	2%	2%:2%
Tobacco smoking		
Proportion of prison entrants who currently smoke tobacco	74%	82%:72%
Mean age at which prison entrants smoked their first full cigarette	14 years	14 years:14 years
Proportion of prison dischargees who smoked tobacco on entry to prison	73%	80%:73%
Proportion of prison dischargees who currently smoke tobacco (in prisons allowing smoking)	74%	87%:74%
Proportion of prison entrants who currently smoke and would like to quit	50%	54%:49%
Proportion of prison dischargees who intend to smoke upon release from prison	51%	54%:51%
Illicit drug use and needle sharing		
Proportion of prison entrants who engaged in illicit drug use in the last 12 months	67%	60%:69%
Proportion of prison entrants who have ever injected drugs (source NPEBBV&RBS)	45%	46%:44%
Proportion of prison dischargees who reported using illicit drugs while in prison	10%	9%:11%
Proportion of prison dischargees who reported injecting drugs while in prison	6%	4%:6%

Indicator	Proportion or number	Indigenous: Non-Indigenous
Proportion of prison entrants who have shared injecting equipment (source NPEBBV&RBS)	18%	n.a.
Proportion of prison dischargees who reported using a needle that had been used by someone else while in prison	4%	3%:4%
Proportion of prison dischargees who accessed a needle and syringe exchange program in the community	16%	8%:20%
Proportion of prison entrants who report being on pharmacotherapy medication for opioid dependence	7%	5%:7%
Proportion of prisoners in custody who received medication for opioid dependence	3%	2%:3%
Proportion of prison dischargees on an opiate substitution program while in prison with a plan to continue after release	8%	9%:9%
Proportion of prison dischargees who reported receiving a tattoo while in prison	2%	n.p.
Proportion of prison dischargees who reported receiving a body or ear piercing while in prison	<1%	n.p.
Risky alcohol consumption		
Proportion of prison entrants who report a high risk of alcohol related harm in the last 12 months (as measured by the AUDIT-C)	39%	54%:33%
Proportion of prison dischargees who report a high risk of alcohol related harm prior to current incarceration (as measured by the AUDIT-C)	58%	71%:51%
Proportion of prison dischargees who reported consuming alcohol in prison	3%	n.p.
Proportion of prison dischargees who accessed an alcohol treatment program in prison	8%	9%:8%
Injuries, assaults and unprotected sex		
Proportion of prison entrants who have ongoing symptoms from a head injury/blow to the head resulting in a loss of consciousness	13%	14%:13%
Proportion of prison dischargees who have ongoing symptoms from a head injury/blow to the head resulting in a loss of consciousness while in prison	2%	2%:2%
Proportion of prison dischargees who had to see a doctor or nurse due to an accident or injury while in prison	26%	30%:25%
Proportion of prison dischargees who reported being physically assaulted or attacked by another prisoner while in prison	8%	8%:9%
Proportion of prison dischargees who reported being sexually assaulted by another prisoner while in prison	3%	n.p.
Proportion of prison entrants who had a casual sexual partner in the last 3 months and reported never using a condom (source: NPEBBV&RBS)	48%	n.a.
General health services		
Proportion of prison entrants who, in the last 12 months, consulted with a medical professional in the community	66%	66%:66%

Indicator	Proportion or number	Indigenous: Non-Indigenous
Proportion of prison entrants who were in prison in the last 12 months and consulted with a medical professional for their own health in prison	57%	58%:57%
Proportion of prison entrants who, in the last 12 months, needed to consult a health professional in the community but did not	34%	33%:34%
Proportion of prison entrants who were in prison in the last 12 months and needed to consult with a health professional while in prison, but did not	15%	12%:15%
Prison clinic		
Proportion of prison dischargees who received a health assessment upon entry to prison	92%	92%:92%
Proportion of prison dischargees who could easily see a medical professional (GP or nurse) if they had a health problem	91%	92%:90%
Proportion of prison dischargees who visited the prison clinic	84%	76%:88%
Proportion of prisoners in custody who used the prison clinic during the 2-week data collection period	44%	41%:43%
Proportion of prison dischargees who were diagnosed with a health condition in prison	26%	28%:25%
Proportion of prison dischargees who received treatment for a medical condition in prison	57%	54%:57%
Proportion of prisoners in custody who had a problem managed in the prison clinic during the 2-week data collection period, by problem managed	12% medication issues	10%:12%
Proportion of clinic visits during the 2-week data collection period, by service received	Treatment 62%	58%:64%
Proportion of clinic visits initiated by prisoners	34%	27%: 37%
Proportion of prison dischargees' clinic visits by type of health professional seen	Nurse 82%	75%:85%
Proportion of clinic visits by type of health professional seen	Nurse 71%	72%:70%
Proportion of prison dischargees who were satisfied with the amount of information on their condition received at a clinic visit	90%	90%:89%
Proportion of prison dischargees who received answers they could understand at the prison clinic	94%	97%:93%
Proportion of prison dischargees who were able to be involved in their treatment decision at a clinic visit	83%	88%:80%
Proportion of prison dischargees who had enough time at a clinic visit	79%	82%:80%
Proportion of prison dischargees who rated the health care they received in the prison clinic as excellent	27%	31%:27%
Medication		
Proportion of prison dischargees who were prescribed medication for a health condition in prison	56%	52%:58%
Proportion of prisoners in custody who received prescribed medication during the data collection period	43%	41%:41%

Indicator	Proportion or number	Indigenous: Non-Indigenous
Prison health services		
Ratio of full-time equivalent doctors and nurses working within the correctional system to the total number of prisoners	2.98 per 100 prisoners	..
Proportion of prison dischargees who received an immunisation while in prison	36%	36%:38%
Number of vaccinations provided by prison clinics during the 2-week data collection period	1,230	n.a.
Proportion of prison dischargees who went to a medical appointment outside the prison	25%	23%:25%
Proportion of prison dischargees who were admitted to a general or psychiatric hospital	10%	8%:11%
Proportion of prison dischargees who visited an emergency department	11%	11%:10%
Number of hospital transfers for prisoners in custody during the 2-week data collection period	540 non-acute and 198 acute	n.a.
Proportion of Indigenous prison dischargees who received treatment or consultation from an Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (ACCHO) or Aboriginal Medical Service (AMS)	13%	..
Proportion of Indigenous prison dischargees who always received culturally appropriate health care in prison	70%	..
Frequency of visits by an Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation or an Aboriginal Medical Service to a prison facility	Never: 58% of prisons	..
Release procedures		
Proportion of prisoners who had a health-related discharge summary in place at the time of their release	95% of sentenced prisoners with planned exit	n.a.
Proportion of prison dischargees on treatment or taking medication for a health condition who have a plan to continue after release	83%,	79%:84%
Proportion of prison dischargees who on release have a referral or appointment to see a health professional	50%	48%:50%
Proportion of prison dischargees who have a valid Medicare card available on release	75%	62%:79%
Proportion of prison dischargees who felt prepared for their upcoming release from prison	88%	87%:90%
Deaths		
Number of deaths in prison custody in 2012–13 (source: NDICP)	53	9:44
Crude mortality rate of prisoners within 4 weeks of release from prison (source: Department of Human Services) (2013)	13.4 per 1,000 person years	n.a.
Crude mortality rate of prisoners within 365 days of release from prison (source: Department of Human Services) (2013)	8.9 per 1,000 person years	9.1:8.8

The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare is a major national agency which provides reliable, regular and relevant information and statistics on Australia's health and welfare. The Institute's mission is *authoritative information and statistics to promote better health and wellbeing.*

© Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2015



This product, excluding the AIHW logo, Commonwealth Coat of Arms and any material owned by a third party or protected by a trademark, has been released under a Creative Commons BY 3.0 (CC BY 3.0) licence. Excluded material owned by third parties may include, for example, design and layout, images obtained under licence from third parties and signatures. We have made all reasonable efforts to identify and label material owned by third parties.

You may distribute, remix and build upon this work. However, you must attribute the AIHW as the copyright holder of the work in compliance with our attribution policy available at <www.aihw.gov.au/copyright/>. The full terms and conditions of this licence are available at <<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/au/>>.

A complete list of the Institute's publications is available from the Institute's website <www.aihw.gov.au>.

ISBN 978-1-74249-863-8 (PDF)

ISBN 978-1-74249-864-5 (Print)

Suggested citation

Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2015. The health of Australia's prisoners 2015: Report profile. Cat. no. PHE 206. Canberra: AIHW.

Australian Institute of Health and Welfare

Board Chair

Dr Mukesh C Haikerwal AO

Acting Director

Ms Kerry Flanagan PSM

Any enquiries about or comments on this publication should be directed to:

Digital and Media Communications Unit

Australian Institute of Health and Welfare

GPO Box 570

Canberra ACT 2601

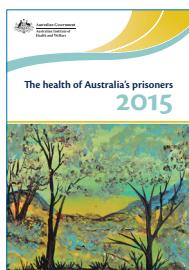
Tel: (02) 6244 1000

Email: info@aihw.gov.au

Published by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare.

Please note that there is the potential for minor revisions of data in this report.

Please check the online version at <www.aihw.gov.au> for any amendments.



A copy of the full report is available on the AIHW website.

For more information

Digital and Media Communications Unit
Australian Institute of Health and Welfare

Phone: 02 6244 1000

Email: info@aihw.gov.au