

# Substance Abuse

A substance use disorder involves using too much alcohol, tobacco or other drugs. It can also be called substance abuse, substance dependence or addiction.

Addiction happens when someone compulsively engages in behaviour such as drug taking, gambling, drinking or gaming. Even when bad side effects kick in and people feel like they're losing control, people who have addictions usually can't stop doing the thing they're addicted to without help and support.

Around 1 in 20 Australians has an addiction or substance abuse problem. It can result in changes and long-term damage to the brain and other organs. Substance abuse is a major cause of mental illness.

The most commonly abused substances in Australia are tobacco and alcohol. Smoking is the single most preventable cause of sickness and death. Around 13% of Australians aged 14 and over smoke every day, and smoking causes almost 8% of the burden of disease in Australia.

Just under 1 in 6 Australians drink at risky levels. Alcohol can lead to the short-term risk of accidents, injuries or violent behaviour as well as long-term medical complications such as liver disease and mental disorders.

Drug use disorders include the misuse of illegal drugs (such as cannabis and amphetamines) as well as the use of prescription medicines, like painkillers or sedatives, for non-medical reasons. People who use illegal drugs have much higher rates of mental illness than the rest of the population. The most commonly used illegal drugs in Australia are cannabis, ecstasy, cocaine and meth/amphetamines.

**If life is in danger, call emergency services 000.** It can be very difficult to know what to do and how to cope, but help is available.

Below are some of the places to go for information and support:

