



Illicit drugs

What are illicit drugs?

Illicit drugs include:

1. Illegal drugs prohibited from manufacture, sale or possession in Australia
2. Pharmaceutical, over-the-counter (OTC) or prescribed medications used for non-medical purposes, or in greater quantities than recommended
3. Other legal or illegal substances used in a harmful way (e.g., kava, synthetic cannabis, inhalants such as petrol).

Approximately 19% of Australian workers used an illicit drug during 2019.¹

Why do workers use illicit drugs?

Workplace culture, working conditions, and individual behaviours and beliefs all interact to shape workers' drug use.

Illicit drugs might be used to help cope with job demands, physical or mental pain, or for enjoyment.

The most common drugs used at work are:

1. pharmaceutical drugs
2. cannabis
3. cocaine.

Although these drugs might be used for a functional purpose (e.g., to alleviate pain, fatigue, or stress), they can also impair your physical and mental health and work performance, relationships, and safety.

How do drugs effect workplaces?

Drug use at work and during leisure hours can impact your workplace directly and indirectly.

Almost 1 in 5 workers used an illicit drug in the past 12 months.

Discussion Date

Supervisor/Manager

Workers' Names

Ask for help if you are struggling with illicit drug use.

Ask others if they need help.



If you attend work while intoxicated or hung over/coming down, you may:

- have difficulty completing tasks, operating machinery safely, and cooperating with co-workers, management, and the public
- make more mistakes and increase the likelihood of having an accident, sustaining a workplace injury, and/or damaging equipment or vehicles
- reduce team productivity, morale, and safety.

If you are intoxicated or under the influence:

- Do not come to work
- You are not fit for work
- You will be breaching your workplace alcohol and drug policy
- You will be asked to leave and need to attend a follow up meeting.

Health and safety risks increase if you:

1. drive a vehicle
2. operate machinery
3. work at heights
4. handle dangerous goods
5. work in safety sensitive environments.

Yearly business costs



\$10.9 bn

Poor mental health²

\$2.9 bn

Drug-related absenteeism²¹

Workers who use illicit drugs are more likely to:

1. be absent from work than other workers
2. experience poor mental and physical health (see [Online Learning Topic 5: Mental Health, Stress and Fatigue](#) and [Fact Sheet: Mental Health & Alcohol and Drug Use](#)).

Discussion topics

1. How can illicit drug use negatively impact you, your co-workers, and the workplace?
2. What can you do to help cope with workplace or life stressors and mental and physical pain?
3. What are the workplace contributors to illicit drug use?
4. What can we do reduce these contributors?
5. What can you do if you are concerned about your own drug use, or another person's?

Ask for help if you are struggling with illicit drug use.

Ask others if they need help.



How do drugs effect you?

Drugs are classified as depressants, stimulants, or hallucinogens depending on how they affect the brain and body.

Drug type	Effect
Depressants like alcohol, cannabis, GHB, opiates (heroin, morphine, codeine) and benzodiazepines (tranquillisers) can...	<ul style="list-style-type: none">cause feelings of wellbeing, calmness and relaxation, drowsinessrelieve pain and anxiety and decrease environmental awarenesscause sleepinessslow respiration and stop breathingcontribute to memory problems, depression and poor coordination.
Stimulants like caffeine, nicotine, amphetamines (speed and Ice), cocaine and ecstasy (MDMA) can...	<ul style="list-style-type: none">increase activity, talkativeness, and feelings of wellbeing, self-confidence and powerreduce fatigue and appetiteincrease irritability, argumentativeness, extreme nervousness and sleeplessnesslead to delusions and hallucinations or aggression.
Hallucinogens like ketamine, LSD, PCP, 'magic mushrooms' can...	<ul style="list-style-type: none">cause mood and perception changes, including hallucinationscause dilated pupils, rapid heartbeat, muscular weakness, trembling, nausea, chills and hyperventilationcause anxiety and feelings of panic.

Short-term impacts

The physical, mental, social, and work impacts of alcohol and drugs vary depending on the:

1. drug
 - type of drug used
 - amount and purity of the drug
 - whether other drugs, including alcohol, are also used
 - period of use
 - method of use
2. setting
 - when, where, with whom the drug is taken
3. individual
 - mental and physical health
 - gender
 - mood
 - diet
 - age
 - previous drug use.

Long-term impacts

If you use drugs for long periods of time, you may develop:

- tolerance (i.e., needing to take more of the drug to get the same effect)
- dependence (i.e., difficulty functioning when not using the drug)
- withdrawal (i.e., when the drug is stopped you experience a range of possible effects such as fatigue, hunger, irritability, anxiety, depression, cravings, stomach problems, aches or pains).

See the [Alcohol and Drug Foundation Drug Wheel](#) for more information about the effects of different drugs.

3

Ask for help if you are struggling with illicit drug use.

Ask others if they need help.



Handouts (available from the WorkLife website)

1. Alcohol, Smoking And Substance Involvement Screening Test (ASSIST Check-Up App).
2. Cracks in the Ice website:
 - What is ice?
 - Concerned about someone using ice?
 - Starting the conversation.
 - How to protect yourself and others.
 - Driving and ice use.
3. National Centre for Education and Training on Addiction (NCETA):
 - Ice and the workplace.
 - Methamphetamine use in Australia.
 - Methamphetamine effects and responses.

Worker resources and handouts are available at <https://worklife.flinders.edu.au/external-site-resources>.

Drug	National Alcohol and Drug Research Centre (NDARC) Fact Sheets	Alcohol and Drug Foundation Drug Wheel
Benzodiazepines	https://ndarc.med.unsw.edu.au/sites/default/files/ndarc/resources/NDA073%20Fact%20Sheet%20Benzodiazepines.pdf	https://adf.org.au/drug-facts/benzodiazepines/
Cannabis	https://ndarc.med.unsw.edu.au/resource/cannabis	https://adf.org.au/drug-facts/cannabis/#wheel
Cocaine	https://ndarc.med.unsw.edu.au/sites/default/files/ndarc/resources/NDA073%20Fact%20Sheet%20Cocaine.pdf	https://adf.org.au/drug-facts/cocaine/#wheel
Ecstasy	https://ndarc.med.unsw.edu.au/sites/default/files/ndarc/resources/NDA073%20Fact%20Sheet%20Ecstasy.pdf	https://adf.org.au/drug-facts/empathogens/#wheel
GHB	https://ndarc.med.unsw.edu.au/resource/ghb	https://adf.org.au/drug-facts/ghb/#wheel
Heroin	https://ndarc.med.unsw.edu.au/resource/heroin-0	https://adf.org.au/drug-facts/heroin/#wheel
Ketamine	https://ndarc.med.unsw.edu.au/resource/ketamine	https://adf.org.au/drug-facts/ketamine/#wheel

Worker resources and handouts are available at <https://worklife.flinders.edu.au/external-site-resources>.

References are available at <https://worklife.flinders.edu.au/references>.

4