

The 2010 ACT Inmate Health Survey: Summary of Alcohol, Tobacco and Other Drugs Findings

Abstract

An ACT Inmate Health Survey was conducted in May 2010 at the Alexander Maconochie Centre (AMC); the ACT's prison and remand centre. It reports on the health status, requirements and needs of a random sample of the population of the AMC. This poster summarises findings related to alcohol, tobacco and other drugs.

Participants

135 people took part in the study, comprising 67% of the AMC population. 92% of these participants were male and 17% were Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander. A majority of participants came from socially disadvantaged backgrounds.

Tobacco

85% of participants were current smokers. Of these, 32% used over 20 cigarettes per day and 20% commenced smoking while in prison.

Alcohol

33% of participants consumed 6 or more drinks daily or almost daily; 47% have been injured as a result of drinking and 16% had consumed alcohol while in prison.

Other Drugs

91% of participants had ever used illicit drugs.

ATOD at Time of Offence

79% of participants were under the influence of alcohol/other drugs at time of committing offence than lead to imprisonment

Summary of ATOD Usage Rates

Table 9: Tobacco smoking, alcohol and other drugs use by inmates, ACT, 2010.

	Number	%
Tobacco use		
Current smokers	110	85
Over 20 smokes per day ⁽¹⁾	35	32
Commenced smoking while in prison ⁽¹⁾	22	20
Attempted to quit smoking ⁽¹⁾	86	78
Would like to quit smoking ⁽¹⁾	88	80
Share accommodation with a smoker in prison	83	61
Thought tobacco smoking should be allowed in prison	119	88
Alcohol		
Consumed 6 or more drinks on one occasion daily or almost daily ⁽²⁾	41	33
Ever injured as a result of drinking ⁽²⁾	58	47
Consumed alcohol while in prison ⁽²⁾	20	16
Illicit drugs		
Ever used illicit drugs	122	91
Ever injected drugs ⁽³⁾	81	67
Ever accessed community-based needle/syringe programs ⁽⁴⁾	60	74
Currently on methadone maintenance program ⁽⁴⁾	40	53
Under the influence of alcohol/other drugs at time of committing offence that led to imprisonment ⁽⁵⁾	97	79

Source: ACT Inmate Health Survey 2010.

Note: ⁽¹⁾ denominator is the total number of current smokers (N=129).
⁽²⁾ denominator is the total number of persons reporting drinking (N=124).
⁽³⁾ denominator is the number of people who responded YES to ever used illicit drugs (N=121).
⁽⁴⁾ denominator is the total number reported YES to ever injected drugs (N=80).
⁽⁵⁾ denominator is the number of people who responded (123).

Injecting

The average age of initiation of injecting was 18.7 years (ranged from 12-36 years) and 46% of people who had ever injected drugs were 16 years or younger when they first injected. Of the people that had injected drugs, 70% had ever accessed a community based needle and syringe program.

Blood Borne Viruses

70% of participants thought that they had been immunized against Hepatitis B, with 67% of those people identifying prison as the place of immunisation. 48% of those tested for hepatitis C tested positive. 93% of participants were aware of the availability of free STI and blood borne virus testing in the AMC.

Methadone Maintenance

Of those that had reported injecting drugs, 53% were currently on a methadone maintenance program.

Mental Health

The majority of participants had mental health issues. About 70% of them had a formal psychiatric assessment at some time in their lives. Of those, 24% were deemed to be dependant on alcohol, whereas 49% were deemed to be dependant on a drug other than alcohol. Additionally, 40% of participants had experienced suicidal thoughts.

Discussion

Health service delivery in custodial settings is influenced by a range of factors, many of which are outside the control of the health service provider. There is an acknowledged need for custodial systems to ensure safety and security of the inmate population. The model of health service delivery to inmates in the ACT involves two separate organisations with responsibility for security (ACT Corrective Services) and health care (ACT Government Health Directorate) respectively.

There is growing recognition that this model provides the best outcomes for patient care. Ongoing developments in, and improvements to, health service delivery to individuals in custody in the ACT have improved access to treatment in many areas.

A key policy response to this report would be for the health and social sectors to work together with the criminal justice sector to maximise access to patients in custody to ensure re-integration into the community – acknowledging the pre-incarceration deficits in these fields.

Comparisons

When ACT results were compared to NSW Health Survey results the following general trends were observed:

- Higher rates of vaccination for hepatitis B at some stage (70% for ACT, 53% for NSW).
- Higher rates of current smokers in the ACT (85% in ACT, 76% in NSW).
- Higher rates of ever using illicit drugs in the ACT (91% in ACT, 84% in NSW).
- Higher rates of injecting in the ACT (67% in ACT, 43 % in NSW).
- Higher rates of intoxication at time of offence (79% in ACT, 61% in NSW).

Note: Results should be interpreted with caution due to methodological differences.

Conclusions

Meeting the health needs of the inmate population in the ACT constitutes a significant challenge. The correctional environment also provides a unique opportunity to improve the health status of a group who suffer poor health and may have minimal contact with health services in the community.

About

This poster was developed by ATODA based on the Summary Report of the 2010 ACT Inmate Health Survey. Visit www.health.act.gov.au for more information.

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