



PENINGTON  
INSTITUTE

# Overdose Early Warning Snapshot

May 2024



## Introduction

This year Penington Institute is releasing an overdose snapshot as an early warning for our community on overdose rates.

We do so because there is no time to waste. We cannot afford to wait until the publication of the full report in August. We cannot even afford to wait another day.

Measured against last year's report, we are seeing an alarming and devastating rise in the number of drug-induced deaths recorded year on year in Australia.

More than six Australians lose their lives to overdose every day.

In 2022, 2,356 Australians lost their lives due to overdose – that is almost double the number of Australians who died in road traffic accidents (1,276) in the same period. Let that sink in.

When the ages of those 2,356 Australians are considered, we are talking about almost 70,000 years of potential life lost (using Australian Bureau of Statistics estimates).

Unintentional overdose death is far outpacing population growth in Australia. Among Indigenous Australians, the numbers are calamitous – almost four times worse.

And our response as a nation is simply not keeping up.

We know that with the right interventions, overdose deaths are preventable.

There is not a moment to lose.

**John Ryan**

CEO, Penington Institute

## Overdose Early Warning Snapshot

This snapshot is an early look at the data that will form the basis of Penington Institute's annual overdose report. Preliminary analysis of overdose death data in 2022 shows that overdose deaths have continued to increase. This snapshot highlights key high-level insights, demonstrating the widespread impact of overdose on the community. More comprehensive analysis will be released in August in *Australia's Annual Overdose Report 2024*, ahead of International Overdose Awareness Day on 31 August - which is convened by Penington Institute and is the largest global campaign to end overdose.

### Overdose deaths snapshot in 2022

- There were 2,356 drug-induced deaths in Australia in 2022, which is 79 more deaths than in 2021.
  - This is the ninth year in a row that more than 2,000 drug-induced deaths have been recorded.
- The rate per 100,000 population of all drug-induced deaths increased from 8.7 in 2021 to 8.8 deaths in 2022.
- Almost 80 per cent (79.7 per cent or 1,878) of all drug-induced deaths in 2022 were unintentional, an increase of 138 deaths in 2022.
  - The rate of unintentional drug-induced deaths increased from 6.7 to 7.1 per 100,000 population from 2001 to 2002.
- In 2022, the number of drug induced deaths (2,356) was almost double the number of road traffic deaths (1,276).
  - The number of all drug-induced deaths first surpassed the number of deaths from road traffic accidents in 2008, and the gap has continued to widen.
- In 2022, all drug-induced deaths accounted for 69,815 years of potential life lost, 31 years per person.<sup>1</sup>

### Key contributing drugs to overdose deaths in 2022

- **Opioids** were the most common drug involved in unintentional deaths, increasing by 68 deaths since 2021.
  - Unintentional deaths involving **heroin** increased 40% (328 deaths in 2021 to 460 in 2022).
  - Unintentional deaths involving **oxycodone, morphine and codeine** decreased 13 per cent (332 in 2021 to 289 in 2022).
- Unintentional deaths involving **stimulants** increased by 4.9% (526 in 2021 to 552 in 2022).
- Unintentional deaths involving **alcohol** increased by 7.6% (343 in 2021 to 369 in 2022).
- Unintentional drug-induced deaths related to **benzodiazepines, antidepressants** and **anti-convulsants** all decreased; however these are expected to increase with data revisions.

<sup>1</sup> As calculated by Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), Years of life lost (YLL) is a measure of premature mortality that takes into account both the frequency of deaths and the age at which it occurs.

## Key demographic comparisons in 2022

- Males accounted for 1,317 unintentional drug-induced deaths, compared to 561 females.<sup>2</sup>
- Between 2021 and 2022, the number of unintentional drug-induced deaths increased in all age groups except 30-39 year olds, which remained stable.

Age group	2021	2022	% change
<b>0-19</b>	13	20	54
<b>20-29</b>	159	163	3
<b>30-39</b>	304	301	-1
<b>40-49</b>	473	502	6
<b>50-59</b>	435	441	1
<b>60-69</b>	202	276	37
<b>70 years and above</b>	154	175	14

Table 1: Number of unintentional drug-induced deaths by age group 2021-2022

- The rate of unintentional drug-induced deaths of Indigenous people is more than 3.5 times that of non-Indigenous people: 23.3 per 100,000 Indigenous people compared with 6.1 per 100,000 non-Indigenous people.
- The rate per 100,000 population of unintentional deaths of Indigenous people has increased in the past three years.

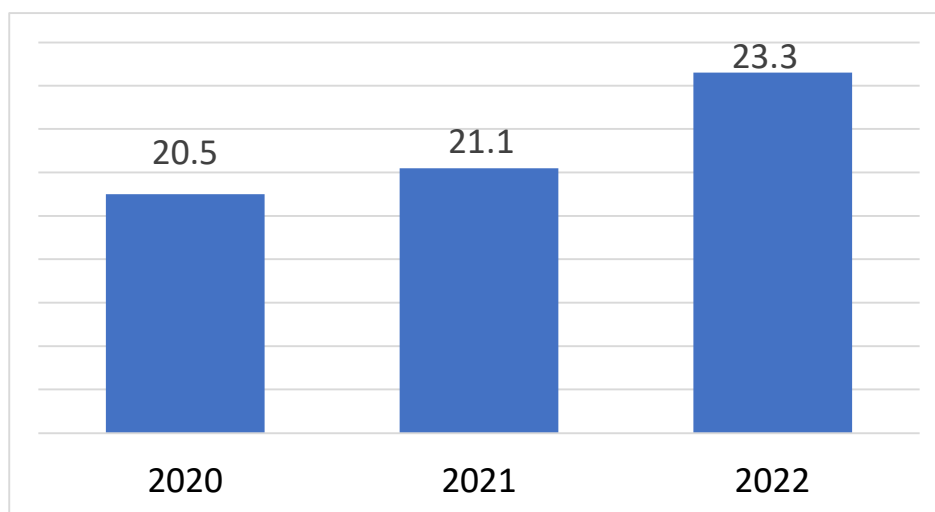


Figure 1: Rate per 100,000 population of unintentional drug-induced deaths by Indigenous status, 2020-2022

<sup>2</sup> Gender-inclusive death data is not available through the source data (Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) [Causes of Death](#)). The ABS data publication only reports 'male' and 'female'. This reflects the sex of the deceased as reported at birth, rather than at registration of death. Sex not stated may be included in totals.