

NEWS

Fatal drug use spike among older people

Madeleine Heffernan

Although pill testing and increased access to opioid dependence treatment have led to a decline in young people dying of drug overdoses, new data shows a rise in fatal overdoses among older Australians.

The Penington Institute's overdose report, released on Sunday, shows 2272 people died of a drug overdose in 2023, the latest year of national data.

This equates to six people a day, making drug-induced deaths a leading cause of death across most adult age categories. Seventy-eight per cent of these deaths – a total of 1768 people – were unintentional.

"There's been a decline [in overdose deaths] since the peak in the late 2010s, but this is still the 10th straight year with over 2000 Australians dead. It's still vastly elevated compared to 2001," said Dr Jake Dizard, director of research at the Penington Institute, a public health not-for-profit.

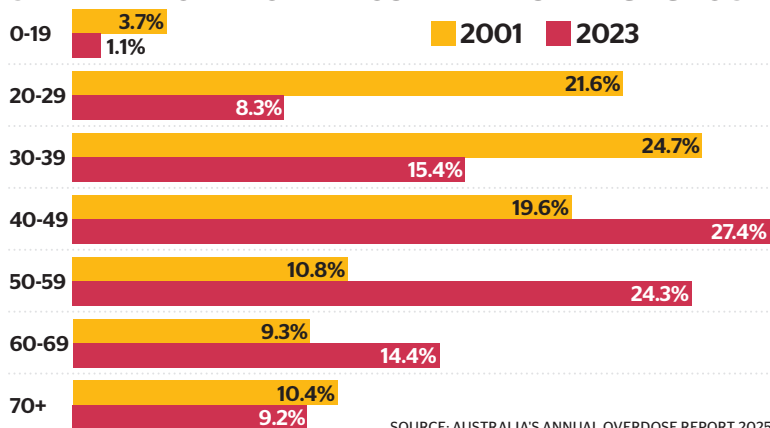
"These deaths are preventable.

Dizard said the rise in fatal overdoses among people aged 50 and over was partly due to the ageing of people who had been users of drugs in the 1990s and 2000s. Another factor was a rise in prescriptions for drugs such as antidepressants, benzodiazepines and opioids. "Overall, there's a significant rise in the number of prescriptions across lots of different types of drug groups, and that does correlate with that rise in deaths, including in older people," he said.

The institute is calling for the establishment of a national body to eliminate drug overdoses, the legalisation of cannabis, and a shift in funding from "ineffective law enforcement" to drug education and overdose prevention.

But the federal government said it provided "substantial investment into a broad range of programs and activities aimed at minimising the harms associated with alcohol and other drug use in Australia", including listing opioid dependence treatment medicines on

UNINTENTIONAL OVERDOSE DEATHS BY AGE GROUP



If you look at things like the road toll, there's Vision Zero [a push for zero deaths and serious injuries by 2050] and a road safety strategy. We don't have that for drugs."

The Penington Institute's *Australia's Annual Overdose Report 2025* said people under 40 accounted for about half of overdose deaths at the turn of the century. Now this age group accounts for just a quarter of fatal overdoses.

Dizard said it was difficult to pinpoint why young people were now less likely to die of a drug overdose. He said greater drug literacy, the wider distribution of opioid overdose reversal drug naloxone (which can be administered by any witness to an overdose), pill-testing programs, supervised injecting rooms and increased access to opioid dependence treatment had helped.

"Unfortunately, this [decline] has been more than made up for by the increases in the older demographics," said Dizard.

Since 2001, the greatest increase in unintentional overdose deaths was among people aged 50-59 – an increase of 305 per cent. Deaths among people aged 60 to 69 were up 179 per cent, and in the 40-49 category, deaths were up 153 per cent compared to 2001 figures.

the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme. Australian governments spend about \$5.45 billion on proactive responses to illicit drugs, including \$3.5 billion on law enforcement responses, a report by the Drug Policy Modelling Program found. The report said most overdose deaths were the result of using more than one drug or drug type, including alcohol, at the same time or consecutively. The report found alcohol contributed to 18.4 per cent of unintentional drug-induced deaths in 2023, while antidepressants led to 16.9 per cent.

Dizard said between 2019 and 2023, there were 580 unintentional overdose deaths where antidepressants were the sole drug consumed. In 2022-2023, 3.7 million Australians were prescribed antidepressants via the PBS.

The report also found stimulants such as amphetamines and MDMA had overtaken benzodiazepines as the second most common drug group involved in unintentional overdose deaths, contributing to one-third of fatal overdoses in 2023. Opioids were the biggest driver of deaths.

Drug overdoses were much more common among men, disadvantaged people and Indigenous people, the report found.



Chaos and drama result in

Meg Watson

In 2023, *Australian Survivor* won global acclaim for a dramatic tribal council that was lauded as the best in the franchise's history. Sunday night's epic instalment of *Survivor: Australia v The World* could well be a new contender for that title.

What was going to be a straightforward elimination vote ended up featuring the blundered blindside of US icon Parvati Shallow, several chaotic scrambles, two revealed immunity idols, one unplayed advantage, a surprise second vote and immunity challenge, a tropical rainstorm, one international player attempting to quit and two others being sent to the jury, as the Aussies took charge of the game. While the average tribal council lasts about 10 minutes or so on screen, this played for almost an hour.

Watching behind the scenes in

Samoa last year, former player turned *Survivor* podcaster Nick Iadanza called it "the best episode of *Survivor* that's ever been made" – a claim he's now walked back, instead calling it "top-tier". "No, it doesn't unseat the infamous George [Mladenov] v Simon [Mee] tribal that made world headlines, but this one is a feat of storytelling, chaos and underdog magic."

I was on a set visit in Samoa last year when the dramatic tribal council took place. Speaking with me the day after filming, host Jonathan LaPaglia – who will controversially not return next season – described it as "nuts".

"I had probably 60 questions prepared for both [votes] but I got 1½ questions out and it went in a completely different direction," he said. "As [the players] were speaking, all I could hear was the paper crumpling in my head and getting tossed away."

That's nothing unusual for the longtime host, who is well versed in pivoting to keep track of the game. But there was one moment he struggled with: when he told Kiwi contestant Lisa Holmes that if she quit in an attempt to save her Finnish ally, Tommi Manninen, another person would be voted out of the game anyway – a fact that ultimately persuaded her to stay.

"That's not the rules," he said, when asked about the tense exchange. "You're a fan, right? You know that's not the rules."

What are the rules for quitting?

There are no official rules available to fans about how these kinds of things should work, and Network Ten did not comment when asked if contestants were provided guidance before the show. But past precedent shows LaPaglia, fondly known by fans as JLP, has a point.

Tesla model recalled over window

Tim Biggs

A new recall has been issued for Tesla Model Y vehicles, affecting all 2025 variants sold in Australia, which the federal transport department said totalled more than 7300 cars.

The recall is related to a software issue that means the driver's side automatic windows may not function as intended. Specifically, they may not detect objects in the way, and close "with excessive force on any obstruction such as a body part", said the transport department, which issued the recall.

"If a body part is in the window

space when the driver's side window is closing, it can increase the risk of injury to a vehicle occupant."

Tesla will be contacting owners of affected cars in writing, and plans to remedy the issue via a software update delivered over the internet.

This is not the first time concerns have been raised about body parts being caught in Teslas. Last year, purchasers of the Cybertruck expressed worries about the sharp edges on the automatically closing boot and doors, with some influencers showing damaging results on vegetables (and fingers) even after Tesla issued a software update to make the closing safer.

And in 2022, a US recall of Model S and Model 3 reads very similarly to the latest Australian recall, with the regulators noting that the vehicles' automatic windows "may not react correctly after detecting an obstruction".

This is the second Australian recall for Tesla this year, and the 17th since 2021.

Vehicle recalls are common in Australia and affect all makes, with manufacturers that sell many different models tending to see more. In fact, in a list of the car makes that have been subject to the most recalls in 2025, Tesla isn't even in the top 20.