

# Australia's attitudes and perceptions towards drugs by region, 2019

Web report | Last updated: 15 Jul 2022 | Topic: [Illicit use of drugs](#)

## About

This report presents new analysis from the 2019 National Drug Strategy Household Survey (NDSHS) that focuses on the attitudes and perceptions of people across Australia on various drug-related issues. The interactive data map allows people to select a region to see what people who responded to the survey thought about tobacco smoking, alcohol use, cannabis, and other illicit drugs in 2019.

The 2022 NDSHS is currently in the field and will be completed in early December 2022.

Cat. no: PHE 307

- [Interactive data map](#)
- [Data](#)

### Findings from this report:

- [In 2019, more people approved the regular use of cannabis by an adult than tobacco \(20% compared with 15%\)](#)
- [72% of people in the ACT supported restricting use of electronic cigarettes in public places compared with 61% in the NT](#)
- [84% of people in Australia would support more severe penalties for drink driving to reduce alcohol related harm](#)
- [‘Reducing the number of outlets that sell alcohol’ was most supported in NT and least supported in South Australia](#)



The 2022 National Drug Strategy Household Survey is currently being conducted across Australia.

You may be selected to participate.

Find out more:  [www.aihw.gov.au/2022-ndshs](http://www.aihw.gov.au/2022-ndshs)

The graphic features a blue background with a white speech bubble on the left containing the text 'The 2022 National Drug Strategy Household Survey is currently being conducted across Australia.' To the right is a green map of Australia with state and territory boundaries. Below the map, the text 'You may be selected to participate.' is displayed, followed by 'Find out more:' and a cursor icon pointing to the URL 'www.aihw.gov.au/2022-ndshs'.

## Australia's attitudes and perceptions towards drugs by region

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### Overview

Analysis on the National Drug Strategy Household Survey from 2019 found that about 3 in 4 Australians aged 14 and over had consumed alcohol in the previous 12 months, over 1 in 10 had smoked tobacco daily, and 2 in 5 had used an illicit drug in their lifetime (AIHW 2020).

Understanding what Australians think about drug use and their level of support for government drug policies is important for policy planning, development and evaluation.

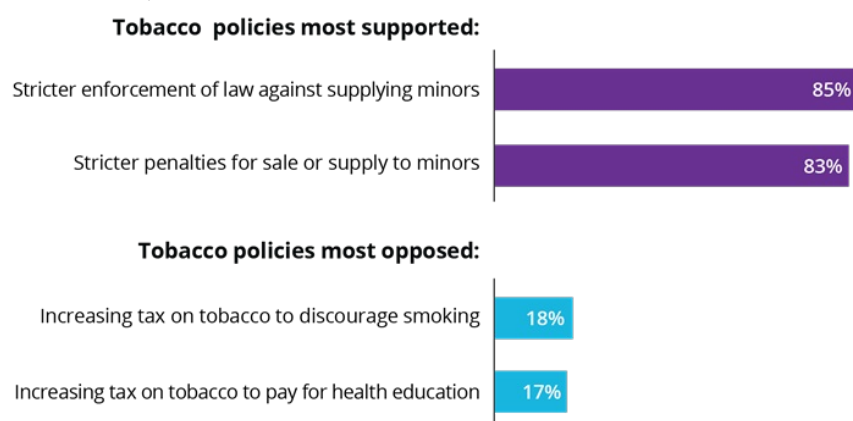
The National Drug Strategy Household Survey (NDSHS) is an important national survey that collects self-reported information from people across Australia. It asks people what they think about tobacco, alcohol and other drugs and about their use of these drugs. It also asks people about the measures that Australia takes to reduce drug use and drug-related harm. These include government laws for the sale and advertising of tobacco and alcohol, taxes on tobacco products, and government funding of rehabilitation and withdrawal management treatment programs. The survey captures important data on emerging issues such as support for pill testing/drug checking services, and emerging policy issues including electronic cigarettes/vaping and medicinal use of cannabis.

This report presents new analysis from the 2019 NDSHS that focuses on the attitudes and perceptions of people across Australia on various drug-related issues. All results are for people aged 14 and over and are based on self-reported data. The interactive data map allows people to select the region to see what people in that region thought about tobacco smoking, alcohol use, cannabis and other illicit drugs in 2019. The 2022 survey is currently in the field and will be completed in early December 2022. Households are randomly selected to complete the survey and have their say.

### **Measures to reduce tobacco use**

In 2019, most people supported government policies to reduce tobacco use and support was highest for measures related to protecting young people and minors. Measures to increase tax on tobacco products had the highest level of opposition. Support for tobacco policies was high across most regions. Explore [the interactive data map](#) for results by region.

**Figure 1: Level of support and opposition for measures to reduce the problems associated with tobacco, people aged 14 and over, 2019**



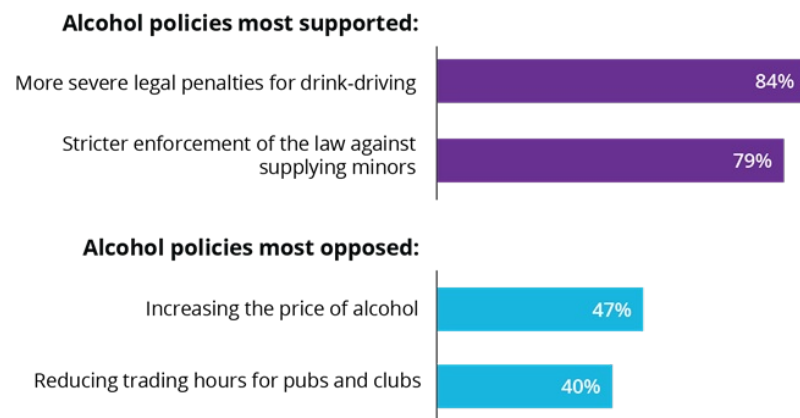
About 7 in 10 (69%) people thought the use of electronic cigarettes should be restricted in public places and have similar restrictions to traditional cigarettes. However, the level of support varies by region and by jurisdiction, with 72% of people in the ACT supporting this measure compared with 61% in the Northern Territory. Explore [the interactive data map](#) for results by region.

### **Measures to reduce excessive alcohol use**

To reduce problems associated with excessive use of alcohol, people most supported measures related to existing alcohol-related laws such as more severe legal penalties for drink-driving. Measures that would make it more difficult or more costly to obtain alcohol received the most opposition. Different policies however, had varying levels of support across jurisdictions and regions. For example, people living in

Northern Territory were more likely to support ‘reducing the number of outlets that sell alcohol’ in comparison to people living in South Australia (33% supported it compared with 24%). Explore [the interactive data map](#) for more information.

**Figure 2: Level of support and opposition for measures to reduce the problems associated with excessive alcohol use, people aged 14 and over, 2019**



### Approval of regular drug use

In 2019, nearly 1 in 2 (45%) people approved of regular use of alcohol by adults. This approval level was higher than for any other drug. Alcohol was also the only drug for which the level of approval was higher than disapproval (45% compared with 21%).

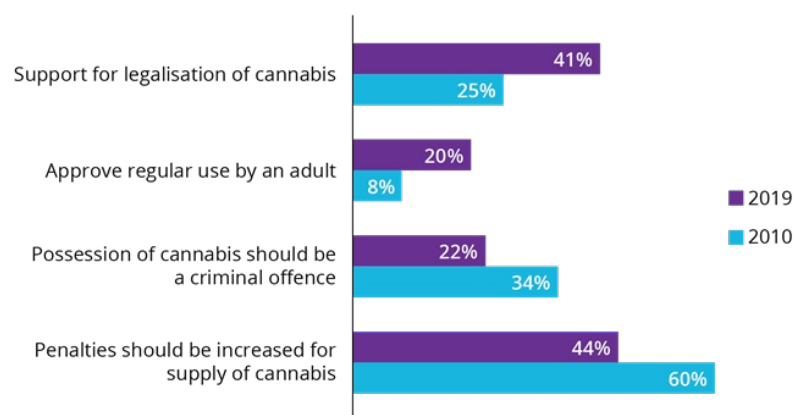


For the first time in 2019, cannabis had a higher level of personal approval of regular use by an adult than tobacco (20% compared with 15%).

### Community support for cannabis

Community tolerance for cannabis use has risen. Survey respondents were asked about their support for legalisation, penalties and actions taken against people involved with cannabis. More people supported legalisation of cannabis in 2019 (41%) than in 2010 (25%) and 2019 was the first time more people supported the legalisation of cannabis than opposed it (41% compared with 37%). Fewer people thought that possession of cannabis should be a criminal offence or that penalties should be increased for the sale or supply of cannabis.

**Figure 3: Support for measures relating to cannabis use, people aged 14 and over, 2010 and 2019**



If cannabis were to be legalised, nearly 4 in 5 (78%) people said they would still not use it. Over time, the proportion of people who said they would ‘try it’ has increased from 5.3% in 2010 to 9.5% in 2019. People living in Tasmania were less likely to say they would try cannabis if it were legal than people living in the ACT (7.5% compared with 11%).

Explore [the interactive data map](#) to see whether people in other regions showed similar levels of support.

### Other illicit drug measures

Support for the legalisation of drugs remained low in 2019 although it has increased since 2010 for some drugs. Support for legalisation of cocaine increased from 6.3% in 2010 to 8.0% in 2019 and for ecstasy increased from 6.8% to 9.5%. Support for the legalisation of heroin (5.6%) and meth/amphetamines (4.6%) has remained similar over the past decade.

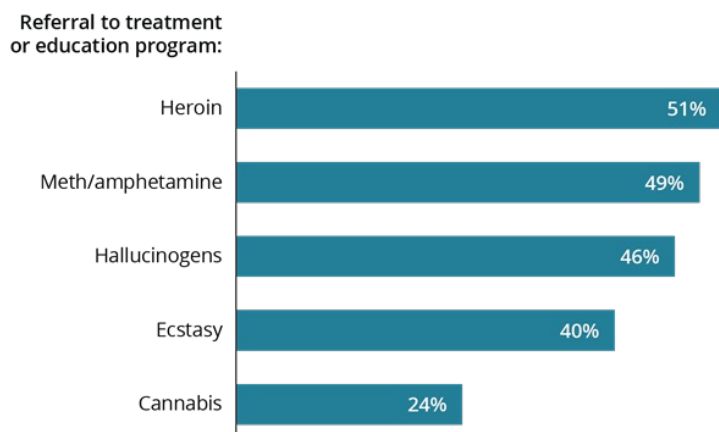
### Pill testing

Almost 3 in 5 (57%) Australians supported allowing people to test their pills/drugs at designated sites, 1 in 4 (27%) opposed this measure. There was large variation in the level of support for pill testing across Australia—people living in the ACT were the most likely to support it while people living in the Northern Territory were the least likely to support it (70% compared with 54%). Explore [the interactive data map](#) to see whether people in other regions mainly support or oppose pill testing.

### Actions for people found in possession of drugs for personal use

The most common action supported for people in possession of small quantities of selected drugs for personal use was for ‘referral to treatment or education program’. Cannabis was the only exception, where more than half (54%) of people supported ‘a caution/warning or no action’ compared with 24% for ‘referral to treatment or education program’. However, other people thought possession should result in a prison sentence (20% for meth/amphetamines; 19% for heroin).

**Figure 4: Proportion that thought referral to treatment or an education program was the best action if found in possession of selected drugs, people aged 14 and over, 2019**

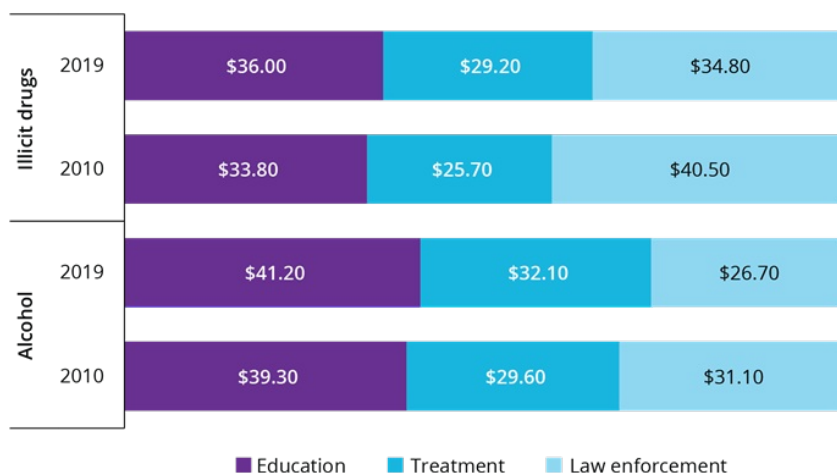


### Spending on education, treatment, and law enforcement

People’s priorities were explored by asking how a hypothetical \$100 should be split between education, treatment, or law enforcement to reduce the harm of alcohol and illicit drugs.

Education continued to receive the greatest proportion of the allotted \$100 for alcohol (\$41), and 2019 was the first time people allocated more money to education than law enforcement to reduce illicit drug use. The allotted dollars for law enforcement for alcohol and illicit drugs both fell compared with allocations in 2010.

**Figure 5: Distribution of a hypothetical \$100 to reduce the use of alcohol or illicit drugs, people aged 14 and over, 2010 and 2019**



### References

AIHW 2020. [National Drug Strategy Household Survey 2019](#). Drug statistics series no. 32. Cat. no. PHE 270. Canberra: AIHW.

## Interactive data map

The figure asks the user to enter the postcode that they want to see data for, and then displays the region containing that postcode. The user can then select Tobacco; Alcohol; Cannabis; or Other Illicit; and will then display key results about attitudes towards the selected drug and drug-related policies in the chosen region.

### What are the attitudes and perceptions towards drugs in your region?

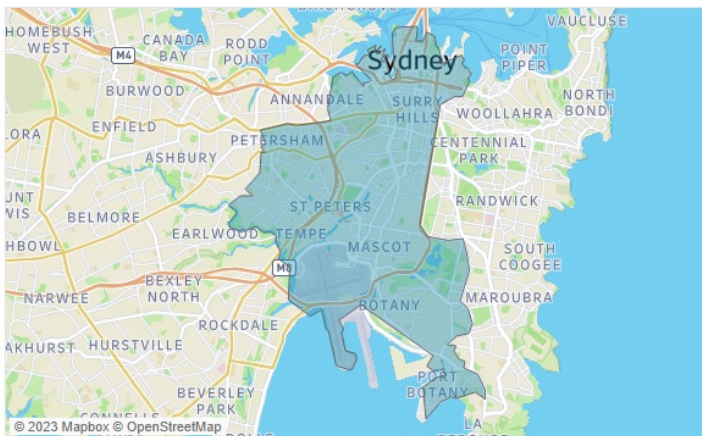
The National Drug Strategy Household Survey (NDSHS) is a national survey that asks people across Australia what they think about tobacco, alcohol and other drugs, as well as their use of these drugs.

Explore this figure to view findings on attitudes and perceptions towards drugs in your region from the 2019 NDSHS. Findings are presented for people aged 14 and over by region (using Australian Bureau of Statistics geographical classifications).

#### Step 1: Enter your postcode ▼

2000

Your postcode **2000** is in the region of **Sydney - City and Inner South (New South Wales)**.



#### Step 2: Select a drug type ▼

Alcohol



Tobacco



Cannabis



Other illicit



[Explanatory notes >](#)



## About the NDSHS

The National Drug Strategy Household Survey started in 1985 and happens every 3 years. About 20,000 people aged 14 and over are randomly selected to participate. The NDSHS collects self-reported information on tobacco, alcohol and illicit drug use as well as attitudes and perceptions toward drugs. The survey is part of the Australian Government's [National Drug Strategy](#), which aims to improve Australians' health and wellbeing. The results of the survey allow us to understand Australians' views on alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs, as well as how many people do and don't use these substances. This in turn can help Governments to develop policies and direct funding in ways that are informed by the views of the public.

The 2022 NDSHS is currently in the field and will be completed in early December 2022. People are randomly selected to participate and can choose to complete the survey online, on paper or via a telephone interview. The results of the survey are expected to be released in mid to late 2023.

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## Technical notes

### Definitions

#### Measures of support and approval

People were asked to indicate how strongly they would support or oppose specific policies, or whether they personally approve or disapprove, using a 5-point scale. Unless otherwise stated, proportions for 'support' include people who selected "Support" and "Strongly support" in the survey. Similarly, proportions for 'oppose' include responses of "Oppose" and "Strongly oppose", and proportions for 'approve' include responses of "Approve" and "Strongly approve".

Respondents who selected "Don't know enough to say" have been removed from the denominator for all proportions. As such, proportions of support or opposition are expressed as proportions of those who believed they knew enough about the statement to express their level of support.

#### Measures with the largest difference or change

The measures with the largest difference to the National proportion were chosen by examining the difference between the result for that region and the National result, relative to the National proportion.

Similarly, the measure with the largest change since 2010 were chosen by examining the difference between the 2019 proportion and the 2010 proportion, relative to the 2010 proportion.

### Geographic data

#### Household selection process

##### 2019 survey

The survey sample was selected using stratified, multistage random sampling. There were 15 strata in total, including the capital city and 'rest of state' for each state and territory, apart from the Australian Capital Territory which operated as 1 stratum.

##### Statistical Areas

Statistical Areas are a geographic classification defined by the Australian Bureau of Statistics Australian Statistical Geography Standard (ASGS). They encompass 4 levels, with increasing size and population: Statistical Areas Level 1 (SA1s); Statistical Areas Level 2 (SA2s); Statistical Areas Level 3 (SA3s); and Statistical Areas Level 4 (SA4). For population sizes of Statistical areas see [1270.0.55.001 - Australian Statistical Geography Standard \(ASGS\): Volume 1 - Main Structure and Greater Capital City Statistical Areas, July 2016 \(abs.gov.au\)](#).

For capital city strata, statistical areas level 1 (SA1s) were selected with probability proportional to the number of private households in the stratum. For the first time in 2019, the major regional centres of Illawarra, Newcastle and Lake Macquarie, Geelong, Cairns, Gold Coast, and Sunshine Coast also used this SA1 selection process, to reduce geographical clustering.

In all other areas in the 'rest of state' strata, statistical areas level 2 (SA2s) were selected for the first stage, with probability proportional to the number of households within the stratum. From within each selected SA2, SA1s were selected with probability proportional to the number of private households calculated in the same way.

##### 2010 survey

While the same 15 strata were used in selecting the sample for the 2010 National Drug Strategy Household Survey, geographic areas were instead defined according to the 2006 Australian Standard Geographical Classification (ASGC):

- For capital city strata, Census Collection Districts (CCDs) were selected with the probability proportional to the number of private households in the district.
- In all other areas, Statistical Local Areas (SLAs) were chosen as the first stage instead, with CCDs selected within each SLA proportional to the number of private households at the 2006 Census.

### Geographic presentation in this release

This data visualisation presents data at the smallest geographic area possible. For all jurisdictions except the Australian Capital Territory, this has resulted in data being presented at the SA4 level. Due to the oversampling in the Australian Capital Territory, and the relatively low number of SA3s in the area, data were robust enough to be presented at the SA3 level.

Survey data were assigned to SA4/SA3 in the 2016 ASGS based on where the household was located:

- **2019:** As SA1s are entirely located within SA3s and SA4s, survey responses were simply assigned to the relevant geographic area in 2019.

- **2010:** As many CCDs cross SA3 and SA4 boundaries, survey responses were assigned to 2011 ASGS SA2s proportionally, based on how much of the CCD was in each SA2. Then 2011 SA2s were assigned proportionally to 2016 SA2s, which were then grouped to the SA3/SA4 level.

All correspondences between SAs (both 2011 and 2016) were sourced from the Australian Bureau of Statistics release *1270.0.55.001 - Australian Statistical Geography Standard (ASGS): Volume 1 - Main Structure and Greater Capital City Statistical Areas, July 2016*. Correspondences between CCDs and 2011 SA2s were sourced from *1270.0.55.006 - Australian Statistical Geography Standard (ASGS): Correspondences, July 2011*.

### Geographic areas with missing or unreliable data

Due to the stratified random sampling approach, no data were collected in some statistical areas. This includes all statistical areas in Other Territories, those used for No Usual Address and those used for Migratory - Offshore - Shipping purposes. Additionally, the following areas had no data collected in 2019:

- Coffs Harbour - Grafton (104)
- Riverina (113)
- Western Australia - Outback (South) (511)
- South East (603)
- Canberra East (80103)
- Uriarra - Namadgi (80111)

Where data are not available for an area, postcodes have been removed from the data visualisation so that they cannot be selected.

Some statistical areas did appear in the survey collection, but the data were considered too unreliable to be reported on their own. This can occur when the sample size is too small, or when very few SA2s were sampled within an SA4 (meaning that results cannot be generalised to the broader SA4).

In these cases, SA4s were grouped together, to ensure that all data were reported where possible. SA4s were grouped together if there was a data quality issue (e.g. small sample size or large sampling error), provided they were adjacent, the sampled SA2s were located close to the neighbouring SA4, and groupings did not cross State and Territory boundaries. The approach was applied for grouping SA3s in the ACT.

Data for the following statistical areas were combined to ensure all data could be presented reliably:

- Far West and Orana (105) and New England and North West (110)
- Hunter Valley exc Newcastle (106) and Newcastle and Lake Macquarie (111)
- Illawarra (107) and Southern Highlands and Shoalhaven (114)
- Ballarat (201) and Warrnambool and South West (217)
- Bendigo (202) and North West (215)
- Darling Downs - Maranoa (307) and Queensland - Outback (315)
- Mackay - Isaac - Whitsunday (312) and Townsville (318)
- Bunbury (501) and Mandurah (502)
- Belconnen (80101) and Molonglo (80110)
- Weston Creek (80108) and Woden Valley (80109)

### Postcode selection

The data visualisation tool presents data at the SA4 or SA3 level, depending on where the selected postcode is found. Postcodes were assigned to the geographic region that they had the highest proportion of area in. Postcodes were mapped to SA2s using *1270.0.55.005 - Australian Statistical Geography Standard (ASGS): Volume 5 - Remoteness Structure, July 2016* and then aggregated to the SA3 or SA4 level.

Postcodes that map to regions where data is not available (e.g., Riverina) and those that do not map to any reported SA4 or SA3 cannot be selected in the data visualisation.

### Interviewing in remote Indigenous communities

In 2019, the stratified, multistage random sampling of SA1s across Australia returned 8 remote Indigenous communities. Despite a random sampling technique being applied, by chance, all 8 Indigenous communities selected were located in the Northern Territory - Outback SA4 (702). Residents within those communities primarily spoke Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander languages.

Due to the differences in the sample selection process (detailed in the Technical information from the 2019 NDSHS), and the unique circumstances of each of the communities, the data collected from the 8 remote Indigenous SA1s is not comparable to the data collected from Indigenous people surveyed in non-remote Indigenous communities or the non-Indigenous sample.

As a result, smaller disaggregations, such as results pertaining to the Northern Territory - Outback SA4, are likely to be altered by the inclusion of data from remote Indigenous communities. To preserve comparisons between regions, data from remote Indigenous communities are excluded from results for the Northern Territory - Outback SA4, and state results for the Northern Territory, but are included in National results.

### Non-response bias and non-sampling error



Survey estimates are subject to non-sampling errors that can arise from errors in reporting of responses (for example, failure of respondents' memories, incorrect completion of the survey form), the unwillingness of respondents to reveal their true responses, and higher levels of non-response from certain subgroups of the population.

The estimation methods used for the 2019 results take into account non-response and adjust for any underrepresentation of population subgroups in an effort to reduce non-response bias.

A limitation of the survey is that the data are self-reported. Some behaviours may become less—or more—socially acceptable over time which may lead to an increase in socially desirable responses rather than accurate responses. Any potential changes in self-reported behaviours need to be considered when interpreting survey results over time.

### **Sampling error**

All proportions that are calculated from survey data are estimates rather than true population proportions. This means they have a margin of error due to only a sample of the population being surveyed. This is called sampling error.

There are different ways of measuring sampling error associated with an estimate from a sample survey. The 2019 NDSHS uses both relative standard error and margin of error; these are included in the supplementary tables.

### **Relative standard error**

The standard error (SE) is a measure of the dispersion of estimates calculated from all possible random samples from the same population. This can be estimated using the achieved single sample. The relative standard error (RSE) is the SE expressed as a percentage of the estimate, and provides an indication of the size of the SE relative to the size of the estimate.

Results subject to an RSE of between 25% and 50% should be considered with caution and those with an RSE greater than 50% should be considered unreliable for most practical purposes. Estimates that have an RSE of between 25% and 50% are marked in the supplementary tables with \*; those with an RSE between 50% and 90% are marked with \*\* and those with an RSE greater than 90% have not been published. Only estimates with an RSE of less than 25% are considered sufficiently reliable for most purposes.

### **Margin of error**

The Margin of Error (MoE) describes the distance from the population value that the sample estimate is likely to be within, at the 95% level of confidence. This means that the “true” proportion for the entire population would be within the margin of error around the reported estimate for 95% of possible samples.



## Notes

### Data quality statement

National Drug Strategy Household Survey 2019

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# Data

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## Related material

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