

HRB Bulletin
National Drug Treatment
Reporting System

2023
Drug Treatment
Demand

Tiina Lynch, Ita Condron,
Suzi Lyons and Anne Marie Carew

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Health Research Board
Grattan House
67-72 Lower Mount Street
Dublin D02 H638

t + 353 1 234 5000
e hrb@hrb.ie
w www.hrb.ie

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National Drug Treatment Reporting System 2023 Drug Treatment Demand

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Introduction

In this bulletin, data on treated problem drug use (excluding alcohol) for the year 2023 are presented, followed by trends for the seven-year period from 2017 to 2023.¹ The data are from the **National Drug Treatment Reporting System** (NDTRS), the national surveillance system that records and reports on cases of drug and alcohol treatment in Ireland. Data in this bulletin supersede all data previously published by the NDTRS.

Background

The NDTRS follows a common and systematic European methodology for collecting and reporting core data on the numbers and profiles of those entering specialised drug treatment each year (treatment demand). The European Treatment Demand Indicator (TDI) protocol aims to provide objective, reliable and comparable information at a European level and is routinely used to identify trends and patterns in problem drug use and to assess the use and uptake of treatment facilities.²

The National Drug and Alcohol Strategy *Reducing Harm, Supporting Recovery: A Health Led Response to Drug and Alcohol Use in Ireland 2017–2025* requires all publicly funded drug and alcohol services to complete the NDTRS for all people who use services (Action 5.1.47).³ Included in the NDTRS are cases treated in all types of services: outpatient, residential (inpatient), low threshold, general practitioners (GPs), and those treated in prison.^{4, 5, 6}

Of note, this publication includes data collected since 2017, corresponding to the implementation of the national drug and alcohol strategy. Treatment data can be used to measure the impact of the strategy since its commencement.

Participation in the NDTRS

Overall in 2023, 68.9% of all eligible services provided data to the NDTRS, however this rate varies by service type.

While coverage for most service types ranges between 90.6% and 97.6% (low threshold, outpatient, residential), the main reason for the shortfall is the poor participation of GPs who provide opioid agonist treatment (OAT). In 2023, only 43.3% of eligible GPs participated in the NDTRS even though the NDTRS has a dedicated research nurse available to collect data on site. In addition, the NDTRS receives counselling data but no OAT data from the Irish Prison Service. This is despite Action 5.1.47 of the national drugs strategy stating that all publicly funded drug and alcohol services are required to return data to the system.³ This means that the number of OAT cases are underrepresented in the NDTRS, which is of particular concern as the NDTRS data is supplied to the European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA) and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), as well as being widely used to measure progress and inform drug-related planning and policy nationally.^{7,8}

Service providers are responsible for ensuring that data submitted to the NDTRS are accurate and complete. Service providers are supported through frequent training, detailed documentation and ongoing support provided by the NDTRS. Issues relating to the data collection process are monitored on an ongoing basis and addressed by NDTRS staff.

Data quality is monitored through a comprehensive set of automated validation checks which are applied to every record submitted to the NDTRS. All discrepancies are investigated and referred back to the service provider for review and correction.

Summary 2023

In 2023, 13,104 cases were treated for problem drug use. This is the highest annual number recorded by the NDTRS to date and an increase of more than one thousand cases compared to 2022.

It's important to consider the changing landscape of treatment demand when interpreting the data. While overall percentages may appear stable, the raw number of cases entering treatment may have increased or in some scenarios decreased. This highlights the need to look beyond percentages and analyse absolute figures to fully understand the trends over time.

- The proportion of *new cases* (never treated before) was 36.6%.
- The majority of cases were treated in outpatient facilities (71.5%).

Main problem drug (excluding alcohol)

- **Cocaine** was the most common drug reported in 2023, accounting for 37.6% of all cases, and a 20.5% increase from 2022 (4,923 versus 4,084 cases).
 - Cocaine remains the most common main drug among *new cases*, accounting for almost half (46.1%) of *new cases* in 2023.
 - For *previously treated cases*, cocaine accounted for 32.7% of cases, the highest number recorded to date.
- **Opioids** (mainly heroin) were the second most common main problem drug reported. The number of cases fell by 126, from 3,971 in 2022 to 3,845 in 2023.
 - **Heroin** accounted for 86.0% of all opioid cases in 2023.
- **Cannabis** was the third most common main drug reported.
- The type of drug for which treatment was sought varied by age and this has changed over time.
 - Among cases aged 19 years or younger, cannabis was the main drug generating treatment demand.
 - Among those aged 20–39 years, cocaine was the main drug generating treatment demand.
 - Opioids were the main drug generating treatment demand among those aged 40 years or older.

Polydrug use

- **Polydrug use** was reported by over half of cases (58.9%).
- Cannabis (38.8%) was the most common additional drug, followed by cocaine (36.3%), alcohol (35.7%) and benzodiazepines (31.0%).

Risk behaviour

- One-in-five cases reported that they had **ever injected** (20.3%).
- Among cases who had injected, 39.8% had shared **needles and syringes**.
- Almost three-in-ten (28.9%) cases who reported ever injecting had injected in the month prior to starting treatment.
- In 2023, the main problem among cases currently injecting was opioids (76.5%), followed by cocaine (15.0%).

Socio-demographic characteristics

- The median age of cases was 34 years.
- Almost seven-in-ten (68.8%) cases were **male**.
- One-in-eight (12.1%) cases were recorded as **homeless**.
- The proportion of cases with an **Irish Traveller** ethnicity was 2.8%.
- Almost three-in-five (59.7%) cases were recorded as **unemployed**.
- One-in-five (22.2%) cases were **in paid employment**.
- Of those with children aged 17 years or younger, two-in-five (40.1%) cases treated for problem drug use were **residing with children**.

Cocaine characteristics

- Between 2022 and 2023, the treatment demand for powder cocaine increased by 16.8% (536 cases), while the treatment demand for crack cocaine increased by 33.7% (303 cases).
- Socio-demographic characteristics of cases varied by the type of cocaine used.
 - For powder cocaine as the main problem, 22.4% were female, 40.5% were employed, and the median age entering treatment was 31 years.
 - For crack cocaine as the main problem, 46.2% were female, 6.5% were employed, and the median age was 39 years.

Benzodiazepine characteristics

- In 2023, 1,477 cases were recorded with benzodiazepines as a main problem.
- It is not possible to provide details of the specific benzodiazepines as the names were not specified for the majority of these cases.
 - For cases with benzodiazepines as the main problem, 33.4% were female, 11.5% were employed, and the median age entering treatment was 34 years.

Treatment outcomes 2023

- Half of cases exiting treatment in 2023 attended for 81 days or longer; treatment duration varied by intervention type.
- Nearly one-third (29.5%) of cases successfully completed treatment and 12.2% were referred to other drug and alcohol services for continued support. However, 31.8% of cases did not return for subsequent appointments and 14.0% refused further treatment sessions.
- At the point of exiting treatment, one-in-nine cases (11.7%) had either engaged or achieved substantial progress towards their priority care plan goals. However, 6.0% had disengaged from their care plan, if one existed.
- The majority of cases (76.3%) did not report having family members or significant others involved in their treatment.

Key trends over time (2017–2023)

- Over the period 2017 to 2023, there was a 228.2% increase in the number of cases where **cocaine** was the main problem drug. Powder cocaine increased by 197.1% over the time period, and crack cocaine increased by 594.2%.
- Between 2017 and 2023 there was a 388.4% increase among **females** who have sought drug treatment for cocaine, from 284 cases in 2017 to 1,387 cases in 2023.
- Between 2017 and 2023 there was a 259.0% increase in the number of *previously treated* cases reporting cocaine as a main problem, from 692 cases in 2017 to 2,485 cases in 2023.
- The proportion of treatment demand attributable to **opioids** has decreased year-on-year (from 45.0% in 2017 to 29.3% in 2023).
- Opioids were the main drug generating treatment demand for cases aged 40 years or older, an increase compared to earlier years where it was 35 years or older.
- Among *new cases*, the *proportion* that reported **ever injecting** decreased over the period from 11.0% in 2017 to 4.0% in 2023. However, among *previously treated cases* the numbers reporting ever injecting have increased since 2020.

National overview for 2023

Number of cases entering treatment 2023

There were 13,104 treated cases recorded in the NDTRS in 2023. This is the highest annual number recorded by the NDTRS to date, and an increase of more than one thousand cases compared to the previous year (12,009 cases).

New cases accounted for 36.6% of drug treatment demand in 2023, while *previously treated cases* accounted for 57.9% of drug treatment demand.



Figures relate to 2023

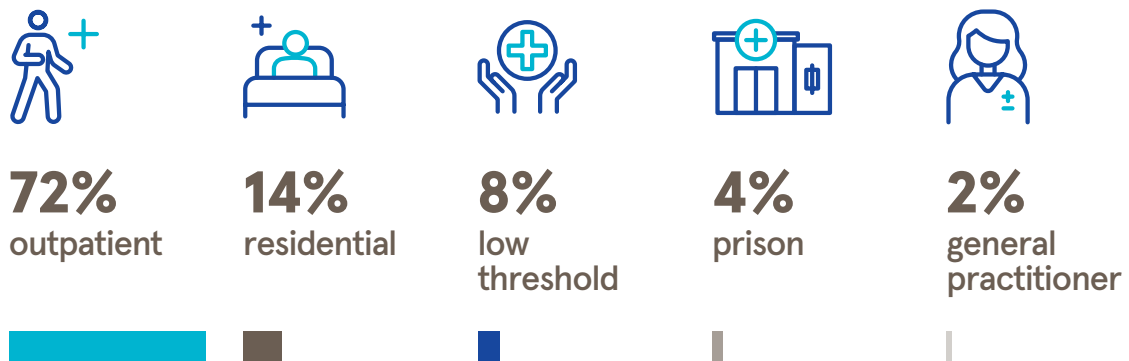
Type of service provider 2023

The majority (71.5%) of cases were treated in outpatient facilities. Residential facilities accounted for 13.7% of the cases, and 8.4% were treated in low threshold settings.

Just 4.1% of cases were treated in prison settings. The NDTRS receives counselling data but no OAT data from the Irish Prison Service.

General practitioners (GPs) accounted for the lowest proportion of cases (2.3%) which also reflects the poor participation of GPs who provide OAT. In 2023, only 43.3% of eligible GPs participated in the NDTRS even though the NDTRS has a dedicated research nurse available to collect data on site.

Service type 2023



Figures relate to 2023

Main problem drug 2023

All cases 2023

A total of 13,104 cases entered drug treatment in 2023 which is the highest annual number recorded by the NDTRS to date.

Cocaine was the most common drug reported in 2023, accounting for 37.6% of all cases, and a 20.5% increase from 2022 (4,923 versus 4,084 cases).

- Much of the increase in treatment demand between 2022 and 2023 was due to cocaine.

Opioids (mainly heroin) were the second most common main problem drug reported in 2023 (29.3%, 3,845 cases). Heroin accounted for 86.0% of all opioid cases.

Cannabis was the third most common main problem drug reported in 2023 (17.5%, 2,292 cases).

Benzodiazepines were the fourth most common main problem drug in 2023 (11.3%, 1,477 cases).

A total of 206 cases (1.6%) commenced treatment for problem use of **pregabalin** (Lyrica). Of which, pregabalin was the main problem for 63 cases and an additional problem for 143 cases.

Even though the numbers are small, the number of cases reporting a **new psychoactive substance** (NPS) as a main problem increased by 123.5% between 2022 and 2023 (51 versus 114 cases).

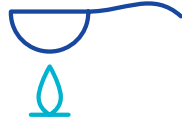
A total of 53 cases commenced treatment for problem use of **nitrous oxide** in 2023. The majority (62.3%) were aged 17 years or younger. While six cases reported nitrous oxide as their main problem drug, the vast majority (88.7%, 47 cases) reported it alongside other drugs.

In 2023, 11 cases reported vaping as a route of administration. Five of these cases were vaping their main problem drug.

Main problem drug



38%
cocaine



29%
opioids



18%
cannabis



11%
benzodiazepines



Figures relate to 2023

New cases 2023

Cocaine (46.1%) was the most common main problem drug among *new cases*. Cocaine was followed by cannabis (29.1%), opioids (10.5%) and benzodiazepines (8.7%).

- Cocaine as a main problem increased yearly from 41.3% in 2022 to 46.1% in 2023.
- The proportion reporting cannabis as a main problem decreased from 32.8% in 2022 to 29.1% in 2023.
- The proportion of *new cases* reporting opioids as a main problem was 10.5% in 2023, down from 13.4% in 2022.

Previously treated cases 2023

Opioids (41.1%) were the most common main problem drug reported by *previously treated cases*, followed by cocaine (32.7%), benzodiazepines (12.9%), and cannabis (10.2%).

- The proportion reporting opioids as a main problem decreased from 45.7% in 2022 to 41.1% in 2023.
- The proportion reporting cocaine as a main problem increased from 28.9% in 2022 to 32.7% in 2023.
- The numbers of *previously treated cases* reporting cannabis as a main problem increased, however the proportion was similar (10.4% versus 10.2%).

Polydrug use 2023

Problem use of more than one drug (polydrug use) was reported by over half of cases (58.9%), similar to previous years.

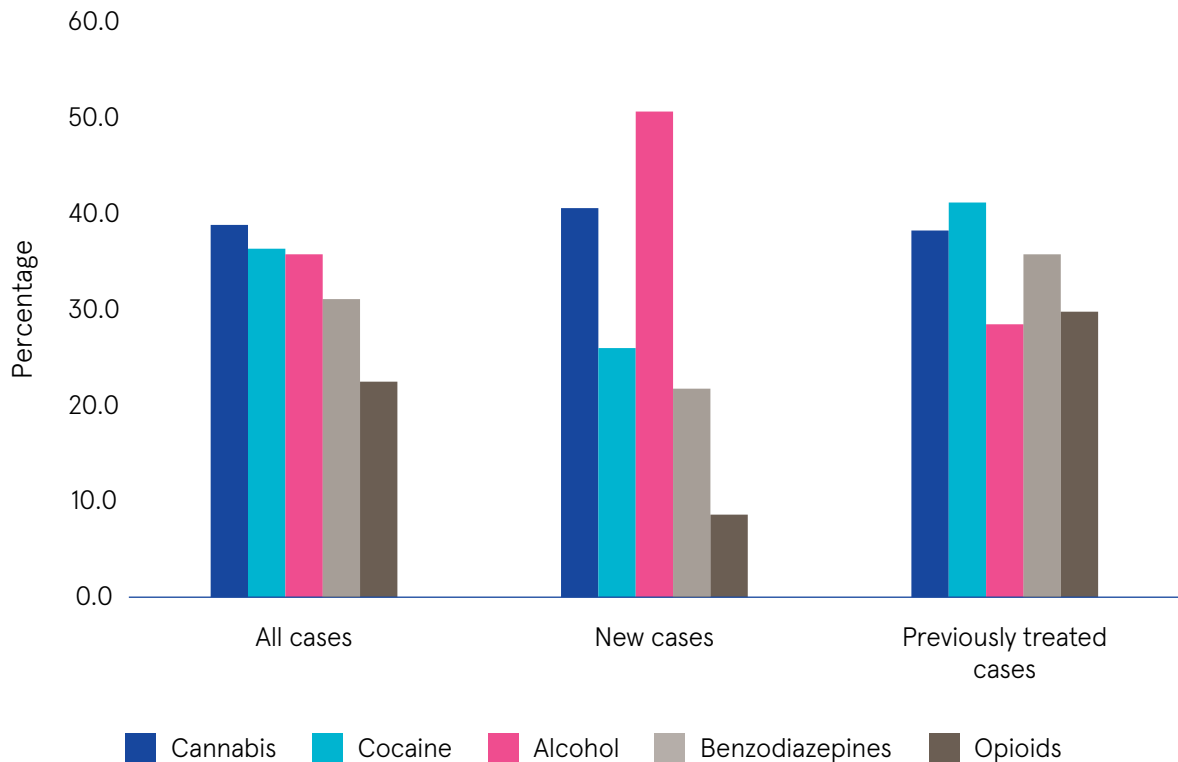
Cannabis (38.8%) was the most common additional substance reported by cases with polydrug use, followed by cocaine (36.3%), alcohol (35.7%), and benzodiazepines (31.0%). However, patterns differed by treatment status (**Figure 1**).

Among *new cases* with polydrug use, alcohol (50.6%) was the most common additional substance in 2023, followed by cannabis (40.6%), cocaine (26.0%), and benzodiazepines (21.7%).

Cocaine (41.2%) was the most common additional substance reported by *previously treated cases* with polydrug use in 2023, followed by cannabis (38.2%), benzodiazepines (35.8%), and opioids (29.8%).

Among cases with polydrug use, the most common drugs used together were (1) cocaine plus alcohol, followed by (2) cocaine plus cannabis, followed by (3) opioids plus cocaine.

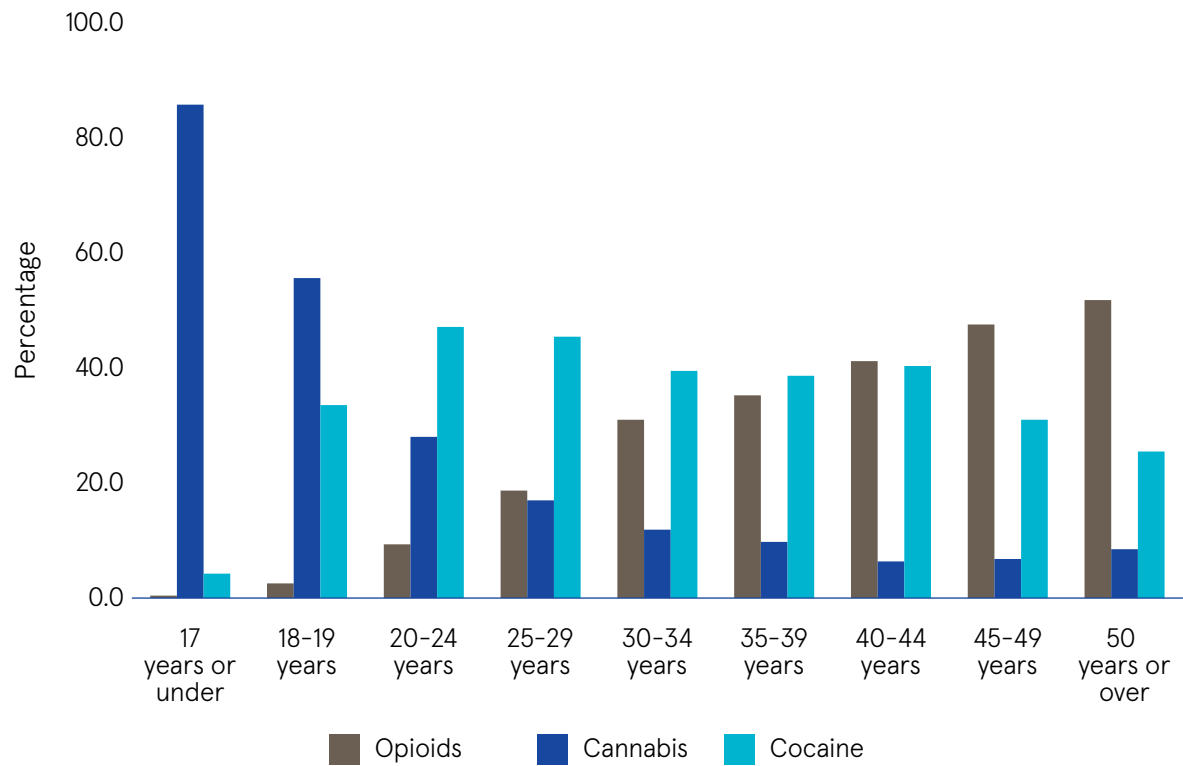
Figure 1: Additional problem substances reported by treatment status (NDTRS 2023)



Age groups 2023

Among cases aged 19 years or younger, cannabis was the main drug generating treatment demand. Among those aged 20-39 years, cocaine was the main drug generating treatment demand, while opioids were the main drug generating treatment demand among those aged 40 years or older (**Figure 2**).

Figure 2: Main problem drug reported by age group (NDTRS 2023)



Gender 2023

One-in-three (31.1%) cases entering drug treatment in 2023 were **female**. Sixteen cases identified as non-binary or in another way (**Table 1**).⁹

While the main problem drug was cocaine for males and females, the proportion for cocaine was higher among males (39.2% versus 34.1%). Females were more likely to be unemployed.

Among cases treated for the first time, females were older, had higher proportions of homelessness, and had higher rates of problem opioid use.

Table 1: Socio-demographic and polydrug characteristics by gender for cases treated for drugs as a main problem, NDTRS 2023

	Female		Male	
	n	(%)	n	(%)
All cases	4070		9009	
Median age (range ¹⁰)	34	19-51	33	17-51
Under 35	2084	(51.2)	4862	(54.0)
35-49	1737	(42.7)	3500	(38.9)
50+	245	(6.0)	638	(7.1)
Median age first used drugs (range ¹⁰)	15	12-30	15	11-23
Traveller	142	(3.5)	226	(2.5)
Education ceased before 16	1186	(29.1)	2849	(31.6)
In paid employment	712	(17.5)	2186	(24.3)
Unemployed	2561	(62.9)	5250	(58.3)
Homeless	478	(11.7)	1109	(12.3)
<i>Main problem drug reported</i>				
<i>Cocaine</i>	<i>1387</i>	<i>(34.1)</i>	<i>3532</i>	<i>(39.2)</i>
<i>Opioids</i>	<i>1316</i>	<i>(32.3)</i>	<i>2524</i>	<i>(28.0)</i>
<i>Cannabis</i>	<i>682</i>	<i>(16.8)</i>	<i>1599</i>	<i>(17.7)</i>
<i>Benzodiazepines</i>	<i>493</i>	<i>(12.1)</i>	<i>984</i>	<i>(10.9)</i>
Polydrug use	2355	(57.9)	5352	(59.4)

	Female		Male	
	n	(%)	n	(%)
New cases	1307		3471	
Median age (range ¹⁰)	30	16-51	28	15-48
Under 35	872	(66.7)	2456	(70.8)
35-49	365	(27.9)	870	(25.1)
50+	70	(5.4)	143	(4.1)
Median age first used drugs (range ¹⁰)	16	12-32	15	12-25
Traveller	32	(2.4)	70	(2.0)
Education ceased before 16	232	(17.8)	818	(23.6)
In paid employment	384	(29.4)	1179	(34.0)
Unemployed	649	(49.7)	1584	(45.6)
Homeless	97	(7.4)	237	(6.8)
<i>Time (years) to treatment for main problem drug (range¹⁰)</i>	<i>7</i>	<i>1-25</i>	<i>8</i>	<i>1-26</i>
<i>Main problem drug reported</i>				
<i>Opioids</i>	<i>188</i>	<i>(14.4)</i>	<i>317</i>	<i>(9.1)</i>
<i>Cocaine</i>	<i>504</i>	<i>(38.6)</i>	<i>1702</i>	<i>(49.0)</i>
<i>Cannabis</i>	<i>397</i>	<i>(30.4)</i>	<i>988</i>	<i>(28.5)</i>
<i>Benzodiazepines</i>	<i>140</i>	<i>(10.7)</i>	<i>276</i>	<i>(8.0)</i>
Polydrug use	646	(49.4)	1877	(54.1)

Parental status 2023

In 2023, almost half of the cases (49.9%, 6,535 cases) in drug treatment were parents who had children.

Of these, eight-in-ten (83.6%, 5,463 cases) were known to have children aged 17 years or younger. More than three-in-five (62.9%) cases with younger children were males, and almost two-in-five cases were females (37.1%) (**Table 2**).

Of parents known to have children aged 17 years or younger, 33.7% had one child, 31.4% had two children, 18.3% had three children, while 16.6% had four or more children. Half of these parents were aged 35 years or older and had on average 2.3 children.

In 2023, of parents known to have children aged 17 years or younger, 40.1% had at least one child residing with them at the time of treatment entry, while 59.9% had at least one child residing elsewhere.^{11,12} A higher proportion of females entering drug treatment reported having dependent children and living with children. Males were less likely to be residing with their children.

Table 2: Cases treated for drugs with children aged 17 years or younger, NDTRS 2023

	All cases		Female		Male	
	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)
Have children	5463		2028		3434	
Median age (range ¹⁰)	35	(24-47)	34	(24-46)	35	(24-48)
Living with child	2192	(40.1)	1054	(52.0)	1138	(33.1)
Children live elsewhere	3271	(59.9)	974	(48.0)	2296	(66.9)
In paid employment	1236	(22.6)	300	(14.8)	936	(27.3)
Homeless	617	(11.3)	224	(11.1)	393	(11.4)
New treatment entrant	1802	(33.0)	585	(28.8)	1217	(35.4)
Polydrug use	3485	(63.8)	1277	(63.0)	2207	(64.3)

Risk behaviour 2023

Risk factors recorded in the NDTRS include injecting behaviour, sharing of needles and syringes, and sharing of other drug paraphernalia (such as joints, straws, foil, pipes, spoons, filters, citric, water to mix drugs, and water or bleach to clean equipment).

Injecting behaviour

In 2023, one-in-five cases (20.3%) reported that they had ever injected. Among these, almost three-in-ten (28.9%) were currently injecting (i.e., in the 30 days prior to treatment).

- The number of cases who reported ever injecting increased from 2,492 in 2022 to 2,659 in 2023, and this is mainly due to an increase in *previously treated* cases.
- The number of cases who report *currently* injecting increased from 752 in 2022 to 769 in 2023, and this is mainly due to an increase in *previously treated* cases.

Among cases in 2023 that were known to be *currently injecting*:

- Seven-in-ten were male (70.7%), and the median age first injected (where known) was 22 years (range 15–39)
- The most common main problem drug was opioids (76.5%), followed by cocaine (15.0%)
- Almost four-in-five cases (78.8%) currently injecting also reported polydrug use
- Most were *previously treated* (81.8%), homeless and living in unstable accommodation was common (41.7%).

Sharing of needles and syringes

In 2023, two-in-five cases (39.8%) that had ever injected also reported sharing needles and syringes, similar to 2022.

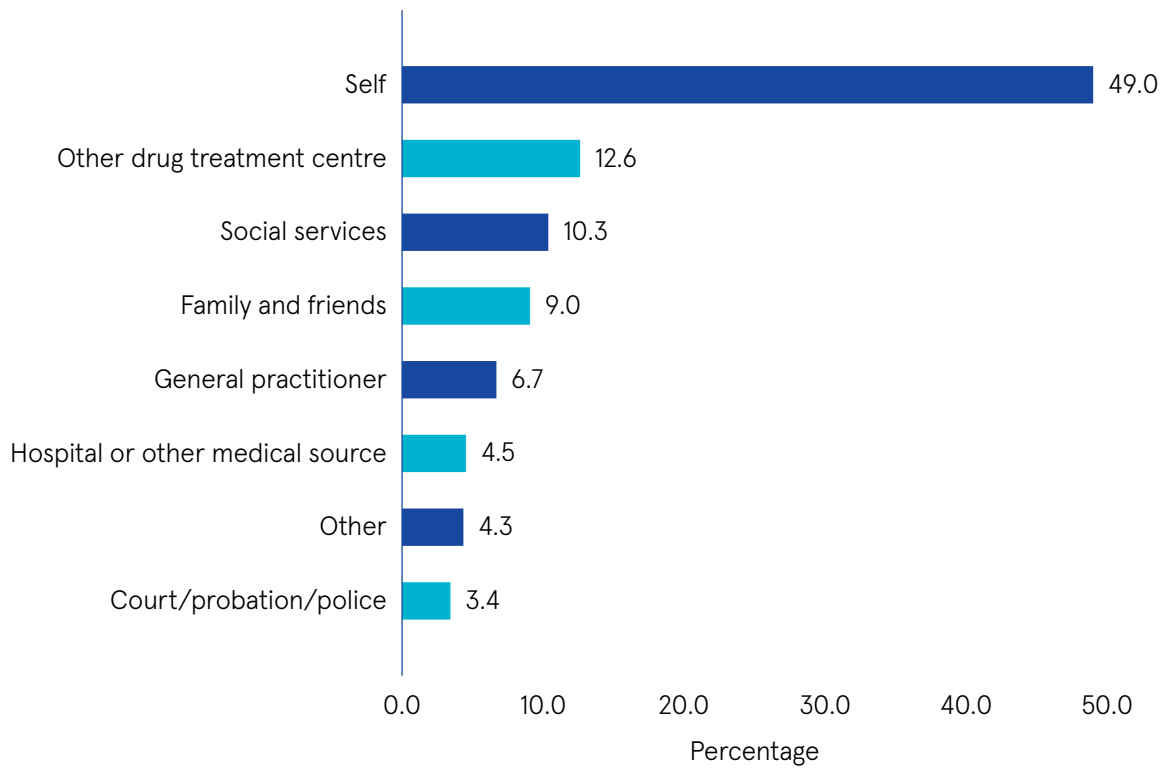
Among cases who reported current injecting, where known, 21.8% reported having shared needles and syringes in the 30 days prior to starting treatment.

Referral source 2023

Nearly half of the cases (49.0%) were self-referred to drug treatment in 2023 (**Figure 3**).

Small numbers of cases were referred to drug treatment by court/probation/police (3.4%), hospital or other medical sources (4.5%) or by their general practitioner (6.7%).

Figure 3: Source of referral (NDTRS 2023)



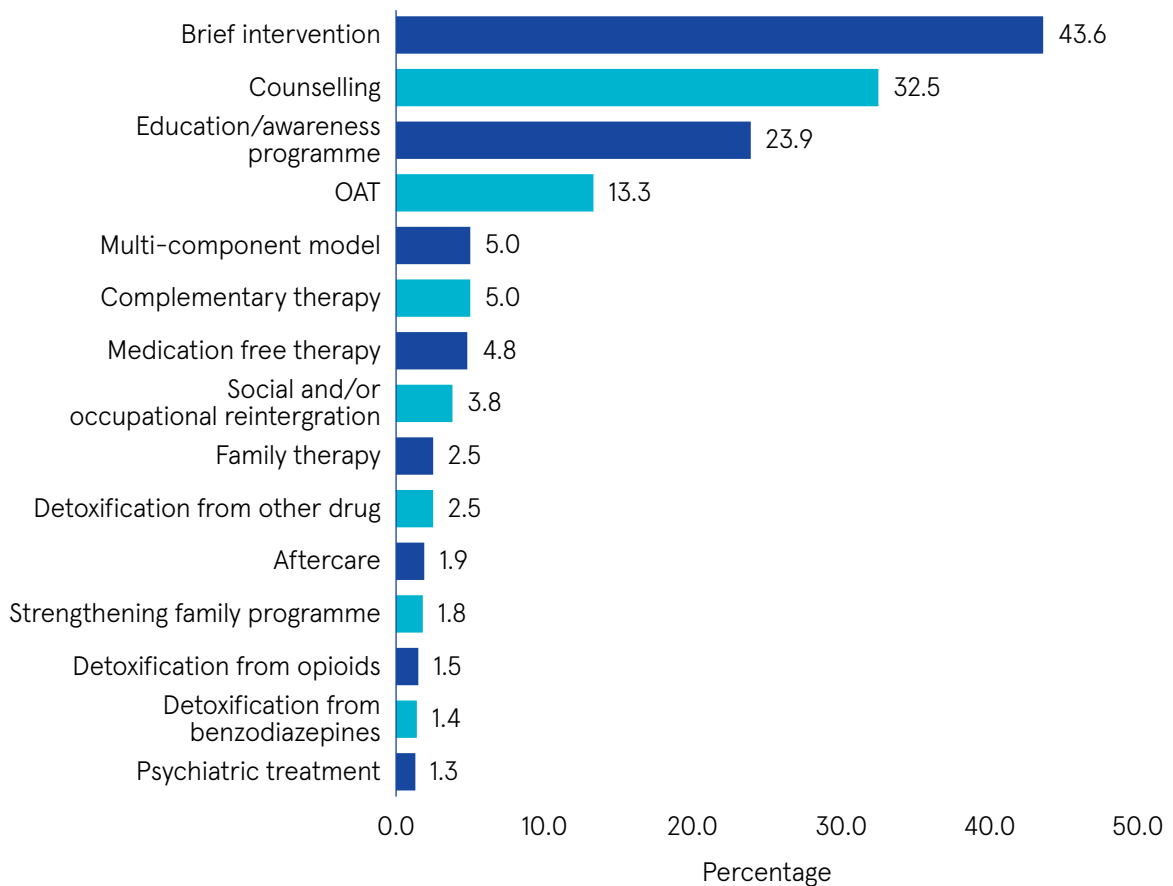
Treatment interventions provided 2023

The majority of treated cases received one initial treatment intervention (75.2%).

Of the 13,104 cases entering treatment in 2023, 43.6% received a brief intervention, 32.5% received counselling (individual or group), 23.9% attended education/awareness programmes (individual or group) and 13.3% received OAT (**Figure 4**). There has been an increase in recent years in non-medical interventions, especially brief interventions, and education/awareness programmes.

It is important to note that the figures presented for treatment interventions are based on data provided at the time of analysis and may include either initial treatment interventions (for cases still receiving treatment), or all interventions provided for cases which have been discharged. Therefore, the numbers may change over time, but the overall trends should remain consistent.

Figure 4: Percentage of treatment interventions provided (NDTRS 2023)



Continuous care cases 2023

Continuous care cases are treatment episodes which commenced their treatment in previous years and continued that treatment into the current year.

At the time of writing this bulletin and based on real-time data, there were a total of 9,632 cases who commenced treatment prior to 2023 and were still in treatment on 1 January 2023 (**Table 3**). Although continuous care cases are not presented elsewhere in this report, they may be combined with data on episodes commencing in 2023 to give a fuller picture of treatment provision for that year.

Table 3: Cases treated for drugs as a main problem, by new and continuing care cases, NDTRS 2023

	Cases commencing treatment in 2023		Continuous care cases 1 January 2023		Total (commencement plus continuous care)	
	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)
All cases	13104		9632		22736	
New cases	4792	(36.6)	2561	(26.6)	7353	(32.3)
Previously treated cases	7588	(57.9)	6604	(68.6)	14192	(62.4)
Treatment status unknown	724	(5.5)	467	(4.8)	1191	(5.2)

Treatment outcomes 2023

Characteristics of cases exiting drug treatment in 2023

The information presented in this section relates to immediate treatment outcomes for cases exiting drug treatment in 2023. Included are cases recorded as exiting treatment between 1 January 2023 and 31 December 2023 inclusive, **irrespective of when treatment commenced** (10,659 cases). This comprises of 7,330 (68.8%) cases which both entered and exited treatment within 2023, and an additional 3,329 (31.2%) cases that exited treatment in 2023 but commenced treatment in previous years.

Excluded are a small number of cases for which the service provider was unable to provide sufficient exit information. These data allow for a greater understanding of the patterns, trends, and outcomes of treatment for cases receiving treatment for drugs as their main problem substance.

Treatment duration

The duration of treatment refers to the length of time (in days) from the treatment start date to the treatment end date. Treatment duration was calculated for all cases exiting treatment in 2023 (10,659 cases).

Overall duration

- Half of cases remained in treatment for 81 days or longer.
- Treatment duration ranged from 1 to 614 days (5th–95th percentile).
- Nearly a quarter (23.4%) participated in treatment for less than a month.
- One-in-ten cases (10.9%) stayed in treatment for more than a year.

Duration by intervention type

The three most common interventions were brief intervention, counselling, and education/awareness programmes. Treatment duration varied by intervention type.

- **Brief intervention:**
 - The most common intervention (4,572 cases). Half of cases attended for two days or less.
- **Counselling:**
 - Individual counselling (3,547 cases): Half attended for 65 days or less
 - Group counselling (1,028 cases): Half attended for 50 days or less.

- **Education/awareness programmes:**

- Individual programmes (1,030 cases): Half attended for 58 days or less
- Group programmes (2,109 cases): Half attended for 42 days or less.

Reason for treatment exit

Nearly one-third (29.5%) of cases successfully completed treatment, and 12.2% were referred to other drug and alcohol services for continued support. However, 31.8% of cases did not return for subsequent appointments, and 14.0% refused further treatment sessions (**Table 4**).

Table 4: Reason for treatment exit, NDTRS 2023

	n	(%)
All cases exiting treatment	10659	
Client did not return for appointments ('no show')	3387	(31.8)
Treatment completed	3148	(29.5)
Client declined further treatment	1496	(14.0)
Transferred/referred to treatment in another drug/alcohol service	1305	(12.2)
Sentenced to prison	264	(2.5)
Premature exit from treatment for non-compliance	250	(2.3)
Medical or mental health reasons	115	(1.1)
No longer lives in the area	101	(0.9)
Died	97	(0.9)
Staffing issues (resignation/retirement/maternity etc)	85	(0.8)
Released from prison but not linked to other treatment service	76	(0.7)
Prison to prison transfer	73	(0.7)
Unable to attend due to work/study commitments	70	(0.7)
Other	16	(0.2)
Unknown	176	(1.7)

Status of care plan at treatment exit

At the point of treatment exit, one-in-nine cases (11.7%) had either engaged or achieved substantial progress towards their priority care plan goals. However, 6.0% had disengaged from their care plan, if one existed.

Involvement of family or significant others in treatment

Among cases exiting treatment in 2023 (and for whom the involvement of family/significant others was recorded), the majority (76.3%) did not have family members or significant others involved in their treatment.

Trends over time 2017–2023

Number of cases entering treatment 2017–2023

Between 2017 and 2023, a total of 75,444 cases treated for problem drug use (excluding alcohol) were reported to the NDTRS (**Table 5**).⁵ In 2023, the NDTRS recorded the highest number of cases ever, but regardless, proportions of *new* and *previously treated cases* remained relatively similar over the seven-year period.

While overall percentages may appear stable, the raw number of cases entering treatment may have increased or in some scenarios decreased. This highlights the need to look beyond percentages and analyse absolute figures to fully understand the trends over time.

Type of service provider 2017–2023

Over the period, most cases were treated in outpatient facilities (68.0%). The percentage of cases treated in outpatient facilities increased from 62.9% in 2017 to 71.5% in 2023.

The proportion of cases treated in residential settings has fluctuated over the period from 19.7% in 2017 to 13.7% in 2023 and was at its lowest in 2020 (due to Covid-19 restrictions). However, the absolute number of cases in residential facilities is the highest ever recorded in 2023 (1,797 cases).

The relative proportion of cases treated in low threshold settings decreased very slightly from 2017 to 2023 (8.9% versus 8.4%). However, as the total number of cases increased from 8,922 in 2017 to 13,104 in 2023, so too did the number of cases accessing treatment in low threshold settings (792 versus 1,098 cases). The number of cases for both low threshold and prison decreased from 2022 to 2023, while the number of cases for residential and outpatient services increased.

The proportion of cases treated in prison (counselling only) peaked at 10.5% in 2018 but decreased overall from 7.3% in 2017 to 4.1% in 2023 (**Table 6**).

Table 5: Number of cases treated for drugs as a main problem, by treatment status, NDTRS 2017 to 2023

	2017		2018		2019		2020*		2021		2022		2023	
	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)
All cases	8922		10274		10664		9702		10769		12009		13104	
New cases	3257	(36.5)	3962	(38.6)	3979	(37.3)	3796	(39.1)	4206	(39.1)	4456	(37.1)	4792	(36.6)
Previously treated cases	5242	(58.8)	5872	(57.2)	5927	(55.6)	5441	(56.1)	6090	(56.6)	6860	(57.1)	7588	(57.9)
Treatment status unknown	423	(4.7)	440	(4.3)	758	(7.1)	465	(4.8)	473	(4.4)	693	(5.8)	724	(5.5)

* The decrease in cases in 2020 coincided with COVID-19 and related restrictions, which presented increased risks for people who use drugs and alcohol, and significant challenges for treatment providers, and should be interpreted in that context.¹³

Table 6: Number of cases treated for drugs as a main problem, by type of service provider, NDTRS 2017 to 2023

	2017		2018		2019		2020		2021		2022		2023	
	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)
All cases	8922		10274		10664		9702		10769		12009		13104	
Outpatient	5610	(62.9)	6715	(65.4)	6946	(65.1)	6806	(70.2)	7568	(70.3)	8280	(68.9)	9371	(71.5)
Residential*	1757	(19.7)	1384	(13.5)	1571	(14.7)	1190**	(12.3)	1394	(12.9)	1458	(12.1)	1797	(13.7)
Low threshold	792	(8.9)	887	(8.6)	948	(8.9)	870	(9.0)	918	(8.5)	1199	(10.0)	1098	(8.4)
Prison	651	(7.3)	1082	(10.5)	848	(8.0)	754	(7.8)	652	(6.1)	660	(5.5)	539	(4.1)
General practitioner	112	(1.3)	206	(2.0)	351	(3.3)	82	(0.8)	237	(2.2)	412	(3.4)	299	(2.3)

* Includes any service where the client stays overnight, e.g., residential detoxification, therapeutic communities, respite and step down

** The reduction in residential case numbers can in part be attributed to temporary closures and reduced capacity introduced in 2020 to comply with COVID-19 restrictions

Main problem drug 2017–2023

All cases 2017–2023

Over the seven-year period from 2017 to 2023, opioids (mainly heroin) were the most common drug type reported, followed by cocaine and cannabis (**Table 7**).

The proportion of cases treated for **cocaine** as a main problem more than doubled over this time period, increasing from 16.8% in 2017 to 37.6% in 2023.

Heroin accounted for 86.0% of all **opioid** cases in 2023. As a proportion of all cases treated, opioids decreased year-on-year from 45.0% in 2017 to 29.3% in 2023.

The proportion of cases treated for **cannabis** as a main problem decreased proportionately from 24.7% in 2017 to 17.5% in 2023, though the number of cases fluctuated over the period; 2,200 cases in 2017 compared to 2,292 cases in 2023.

Benzodiazepines as a main problem increased from 9.7% in 2017 to 11.3% in 2023. The number of cases treated for benzodiazepines increased by 70.2%, from 868 in 2017 to 1,477 in 2023.

Z-drugs (non-benzodiazepine hypnotic sedative drugs such as zolpidem or zopiclone) as a main problem accounted for 0.8% of cases in 2023 and has fluctuated over the seven-year period between 0.5% and 0.9%.

The number of cases of **NPS** reported over the period is low and remained relatively static between 2017 (51 cases) and 2022 (51 cases). However, in 2023 the number of cases reporting a NPS as a main problem increased to 114.

MDMA (ecstasy) and **amphetamines** each continued to account for a small proportion of all treated cases over the period.

New cases 2017–2023

Among *new cases* entering drug treatment, the most common main problem drugs were cocaine, cannabis, and opioids (**Table 7**).

- Among *new cases*, cocaine as a main problem increased yearly from 23.0% in 2017 to 46.1% in 2023; a 195.2% increase in the number of cases.
- The proportion reporting opioids as a main problem decreased overall from 24.8% in 2017 to 10.5% in 2023.
- The proportion of *new cases* reporting cannabis as main problem drug decreased, however, the number of cases increased (1,272 versus 1,394 cases).

Previously treated cases 2017–2023

Among *previously treated cases*, the most common main problem drugs reported were opioids, cocaine, benzodiazepines and cannabis (**Table 7**).

- Between 2017 and 2023 there was a 259.0% increase in the number of *previously treated cases* reporting cocaine as a main problem, from 692 in 2017 to 2,485 in 2023.
- The proportion of *previously treated cases* reporting cocaine as a main problem increased from 13.2% in 2017 to 32.7% in 2023.
- There was 83.7% increase in the number of *previously treated cases* reporting benzodiazepines as a main problem, from 534 in 2017 to 981 in 2023.
- An overall decreasing trend was observed among proportion of *previously treated cases* for opioids, with fluctuations in the number of cases reported.
- The proportion of *previously treated cases* reporting opioids as a main problem decreased from 57.9% in 2017 to 41.1% in 2023. However, the absolute number of cases fluctuated.
- Among *previously treated cases*, the proportion reporting cannabis decreased from 15.4% in 2017 to 10.2% in 2023.

Table 7: Main problem drug (excluding alcohol) reported in 30 days prior to treatment, NDTRS 2017 to 2023

	2017		2018		2019		2020		2021		2022		2023	
	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)
All cases	8922		10274		10664		9702		10769		12009		13104	
Cocaine	1500	(16.8)	2254	(21.9)	2560	(24.0)	2619	(27.0)	3248	(30.2)	4084	(34.0)	4923	(37.6)
Opioids	4016	(45.0)	4349	(42.3)	4133	(38.8)	3559	(36.7)	3629	(33.7)	3971	(33.1)	3845	(29.3)
Cannabis	2200	(24.7)	2358	(23.0)	2502	(23.5)	2120	(21.9)	2299	(21.3)	2245	(18.7)	2292	(17.5)
Benzodiazepines	868	(9.7)	999	(9.7)	1082	(10.1)	1097	(11.3)	1218	(11.3)	1287	(10.7)	1477	(11.3)
NPS	51	(0.6)	48	(0.5)	63	(0.6)	43	(0.4)	49	(0.5)	51	(0.4)	114	(0.9)
Z-Drugs	82	(0.9)	48	(0.5)	72	(0.7)	72	(0.7)	80	(0.7)	98	(0.8)	107	(0.8)
Amphetamines	40	(0.4)	57	(0.6)	59	(0.6)	53	(0.5)	77	(0.7)	89	(0.7)	76	(0.6)
Volatile Inhalants	6	(0.1)	10	(0.1)	6	(0.1)	6	(0.1)	~	~	18	(0.1)	28	(0.2)
MDMA (ecstasy)	44	(0.5)	34	(0.3)	47	(0.4)	31	(0.3)	12	(0.1)	17	(0.1)	11	(0.1)
Other	115	(1.3)	117	(1.1)	140	(1.3)	102	(1.1)	152	(1.4)	149	(1.2)	231	(1.8)
New cases	3257		3962		3979		3796		4206		4456		4792	
Cocaine	748	(23.0)	1232	(31.1)	1258	(31.6)	1359	(35.8)	1615	(38.4)	1839	(41.3)	2208	(46.1)
Opioids	809	(24.8)	719	(18.1)	676	(17.0)	550	(14.5)	530	(12.6)	597	(13.4)	505	(10.5)
Cannabis	1272	(39.1)	1505	(38.0)	1506	(37.8)	1338	(35.2)	1479	(35.2)	1463	(32.8)	1394	(29.1)
Benzodiazepines	290	(8.9)	345	(8.7)	340	(8.5)	392	(10.3)	418	(9.9)	374	(8.4)	416	(8.7)
NPS	21	(0.6)	25	(0.6)	22	(0.6)	26	(0.7)	23	(0.5)	29	(0.7)	74	(1.5)
Z-Drugs	22	(0.7)	17	(0.4)	24	(0.6)	27	(0.7)	26	(0.6)	15	(0.3)	27	(0.6)
Amphetamines	19	(0.6)	34	(0.9)	37	(0.9)	28	(0.7)	47	(1.1)	52	(1.2)	53	(1.1)
Volatile Inhalants	~	~	8	(0.2)	~	~	~	~	~	~	14	(0.3)	25	(0.5)
MDMA (ecstasy)	29	(0.9)	18	(0.5)	38	(1.0)	21	(0.6)	8	(0.2)	12	(0.3)	8	(0.2)
Other	42	(1.3)	59	(1.5)	73	(1.8)	52	(1.4)	55	(1.3)	61	(1.4)	82	(1.7)
Previously treated cases	5242		5872		5927		5441		6090		6860		7588	
Cocaine	692	(13.2)	944	(16.1)	1074	(18.1)	1126	(20.7)	1478	(24.3)	1981	(28.9)	2485	(32.7)
Opioids	3037	(57.9)	3478	(59.2)	3244	(54.7)	2856	(52.5)	2930	(48.1)	3133	(45.7)	3119	(41.1)
Cannabis	807	(15.4)	717	(12.2)	784	(13.2)	691	(12.7)	740	(12.2)	711	(10.4)	776	(10.2)
Benzodiazepines	534	(10.2)	596	(10.1)	661	(11.2)	631	(11.6)	742	(12.2)	829	(12.1)	981	(12.9)
NPS	27	(0.5)	19	(0.3)	29	(0.5)	17	(0.3)	23	(0.4)	19	(0.3)	34	(0.4)
Z-Drugs	56	(1.1)	31	(0.5)	43	(0.7)	42	(0.8)	54	(0.9)	79	(1.2)	77	(1.0)
Amphetamines	19	(0.4)	19	(0.3)	20	(0.3)	22	(0.4)	29	(0.5)	33	(0.5)	20	(0.3)
Volatile Inhalants	~	~	~	~	~	~	~	~	0	0	~	~	~	~
MDMA (ecstasy)	15	(0.3)	14	(0.2)	9	(0.2)	8	(0.1)	~	~	~	~	~	~
Other	54	(1.0)	52	(0.9)	62	(1.0)	45	(0.8)	90	(1.5)	67	(1.0)	90	(1.2)
Treatment status unknown	423		440		758		465		473		693		724	

~ Cells with five cases or fewer

Trends in treatment demand for cocaine 2017–2023

Over the period 2017 to 2023, the biggest change in treatment demand patterns was due to cocaine (both powder and crack). This section focuses on the types of cocaine reported as a main problem drug and the socio-demographic characteristics of these cases (**Table 8**).

Cocaine (all types)

In 2023, 4,923 cases were recorded with cocaine as a main problem, an increase of 228.2% compared to 2017 (1,500 cases).

Females accounted for almost one-in-four (23.9%) cases with cocaine as a main problem over this period. The proportion of female cases increased from 18.9% in 2017 to 28.2% in 2023, a 388.4% increase over the period.

The median age when entering treatment for cocaine increased to 33 years in 2023, an increase from 30 years in 2017.

The proportion of cases in paid employment decreased from 33.5% in 2017 to 32.2% in 2023, fluctuating in the years between. The absolute numbers for cases in paid employment tripled over the period, from 502 in 2017 to 1,587 in 2023.

The proportion of cases with polydrug use remained stable throughout the seven year period, from 62.9% in 2017 to 62.7% in 2023. The number of cases, however, increased by 227% from 944 cases in 2017 to 3,087 in 2023.

In 2023, the most common additional drugs among cases with cocaine as a main problem were alcohol (52.6%), cannabis (46.0%), and benzodiazepines (27.9%).

Among females who sought drug treatment for the first time there was an increase of 309.8% from 2017 (123 cases) to 2023 (504 cases), and 32.3% increase from the previous year, 2022. In comparison, for males seeking treatment for the first time, cases for cocaine increased by 191.7% from 2017 to 2023, and 16.8% from 2022 to 2023.

A breakdown of cocaine cases by county of residence¹⁴ is presented in **Appendix A**.

While the number of cases for both powder cocaine and crack cocaine have increased year on year since 2017, differences were observed between these types of cocaine.

Powder cocaine was the most common type of cocaine generating demand for treatment. In 2023, powder cocaine accounted for 75.6% of all cases treated for cocaine as a main problem, while crack cocaine accounted for 24.4% of all cocaine cases.

In the case of powder cocaine, there was an increase of 197.0% from 1,253 cases in 2017 to 3,722 in 2023. For crack cocaine, there was an increase of 594.2% from 173 cases in 2017 to 1,201 in 2023.

Powder cocaine

In 2023, 3,722 cases were recorded with **powder cocaine** as the main problem:

- Almost eight-in-ten cases (77.6%) were male, while two-in-ten were female (22.4%)
- The median age when entering treatment for powder cocaine was 31 years
- Powder cocaine cases resided¹⁴ in every county in Ireland. Almost half (47.1%) of all cases entering treatment for powder cocaine resided in County Dublin, followed by counties Cork (7.6%), Tipperary (4.9%) and Limerick (4.7%)
- 40.5% were in paid employment, while 49.3% were unemployed
- 5.4% were homeless
- 2.5% reported having ever injected
- The most common route of administration for powder cocaine was sniff/snort (97.6%)
- The proportion of cases with polydrug use was 61.8% in 2023. The most common additional drugs among cases with powder cocaine as a main problem were alcohol (63.6%), cannabis (50.8%), and benzodiazepines (23.9%).

Crack cocaine

In 2023, 1,201 cases were recorded with **crack cocaine** as the main problem:

- More than four-in-ten cases (46.2%) entering treatment for crack cocaine as the main problem were female, while 53.6% were male
- The median age when entering treatment for crack cocaine was 39 years
- Crack cocaine cases resided¹⁴ in almost every county in Ireland, with the exception of six counties (Cavan, Kerry, Kilkenny, Monaghan, Offaly and Sligo) which had no reported cases. The vast majority (84.3%) of all cases entering treatment for crack cocaine resided in County Dublin, followed by Limerick (2.7%), Galway (1.8%) and Wicklow (1.8%)
- 6.5% were in paid employment, while 80.5% were unemployed
- 23.2% were homeless
- 36.3% reported having ever injected
- The most common route of administration for crack cocaine was smoking (97.2%)
- The proportion of cases with polydrug use was 65.4% in 2023. The most common additional drugs among cases with crack cocaine as a main problem were opioids (65.1%), benzodiazepines (39.4%) and cannabis (31.9%).

Table 8: Socio-demographic characteristics of cases treated for cocaine as a main problem, NDTRS 2017 to 2023

	2017		2018		2019		2020		2021		2022		2023	
	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)
All cocaine	1500		2254		2560		2619		3248		4084		4923	
Median age (range ¹⁰)	30	19-45	30	19-44	30	19-46	30	19-45	31	20-47	32	20-48	33	21-49
Under 18	26	(1.7)	39	(1.7)	40	(1.6)	45	(1.7)	29	(0.9)	50	(1.2)	28	(0.6)
Female	284	(18.9)	453	(20.1)	516	(20.2)	546	(20.8)	819	(25.2)	1056	(25.9)	1387	(28.2)
Homeless	56	(3.7)	107	(4.7)	151	(5.9)	150	(5.7)	252	(7.8)	386	(9.5)	479	(9.7)
Traveller	42	(2.8)	41	(1.8)	63	(2.5)	57	(2.2)	100	(3.1)	111	(2.7)	117	(2.4)
Education ceased before 16 years	390	(26.0)	598	(26.5)	636	(24.8)	644	(24.6)	865	(26.6)	1068	(26.2)	1287	(26.1)
In paid employment	502	(33.5)	790	(35.0)	783	(30.6)	791	(30.2)	1111	(34.2)	1369	(33.5)	1587	(32.2)
Unemployed	773	(51.5)	1144	(50.8)	1267	(49.5)	1321	(50.4)	1739	(53.5)	2269	(55.6)	2803	(56.9)
Retired/unable to work including disability	90	(6.0)	136	(6.0)	240	(9.4)	253	(9.7)	231	(7.1)	197	(4.8)	296	(6.0)
New cases	748		1232		1258		1359		1615		1839		2208	
Median age (range ¹⁰)	28	18-44	29	19-43	28	19-44	29	19-44	30	19-45	29	19-45	30	20-47
Under 18	15	(2.0)	28	(2.3)	30	(2.4)	34	(2.5)	20	(1.2)	37	(2.0)	21	(1.0)
Female	123	(16.4)	216	(17.5)	207	(16.5)	251	(18.5)	359	(22.2)	381	(20.7)	504	(22.8)
Homeless	27	(3.6)	50	(4.1)	67	(5.3)	53	(3.9)	85	(5.3)	101	(5.5)	146	(6.6)
Traveller	19	(2.5)	19	(1.5)	37	(2.9)	30	(2.2)	51	(3.2)	47	(2.6)	41	(1.9)
Education ceased before 16 years	161	(21.5)	284	(23.1)	269	(21.4)	271	(19.9)	378	(23.4)	377	(20.5)	467	(21.2)
In paid employment	286	(38.2)	497	(40.3)	466	(37.0)	507	(37.3)	649	(40.2)	836	(45.5)	923	(41.8)
Unemployed	357	(47.7)	570	(46.3)	560	(44.5)	583	(42.9)	777	(48.1)	843	(45.8)	1075	(48.7)
Retired/unable to work including disability	37	(4.9)	65	(5.3)	104	(8.3)	114	(8.4)	102	(6.3)	81	(4.4)	121	(5.5)
Previously treated	692		944		1074		1126		1478		1981		2485	
Median age (range ¹⁰)	32	19-46	32	19-46	32	19-48	31	20-47	33	20-48	34	21-49	35	22-50
Under 18	9	(1.3)	10	(1.1)	9	(0.8)	7	(0.6)	9	(0.6)	12	(0.6)	7	(0.3)
Female	151	(21.8)	216	(22.9)	265	(24.7)	264	(23.4)	420	(28.4)	595	(30.0)	807	(32.5)
Homeless	28	(4.0)	46	(4.9)	70	(6.5)	89	(7.9)	123	(8.3)	207	(10.4)	265	(10.7)
Traveller	20	(2.9)	20	(2.1)	24	(2.2)	22	(2.0)	43	(2.9)	58	(2.9)	69	(2.8)
Education ceased before 16 years	219	(31.6)	298	(31.6)	320	(29.8)	339	(30.1)	447	(30.2)	641	(32.4)	764	(30.7)
In paid employment	193	(27.9)	272	(28.8)	250	(23.3)	249	(22.1)	426	(28.8)	485	(24.5)	620	(24.9)
Unemployed	394	(56.9)	538	(57.0)	600	(55.9)	687	(61.0)	877	(59.3)	1296	(65.4)	1595	(64.2)
Retired/unable to work including disability	46	(6.6)	62	(6.6)	123	(11.5)	114	(10.1)	118	(8.0)	112	(5.7)	165	(6.6)
Treatment status unknown	60		78		228		134		155		264		230	

~ Cells with five cases or fewer

Trends in treatment demand for benzodiazepines 2017–2023

Over the period 2017 to 2023, the number of cases that required treatment for benzodiazepines has steadily increased. This section focuses on the socio-demographic characteristics of these cases (**Table 9**).

Benzodiazepines

In 2023, 1,477 cases were recorded with benzodiazepines as a main problem, an increase of 70.2% from 868 cases in 2017.

The median age when entering treatment for benzodiazepines increased from 28 years in 2017 to 34 years in 2023.

Both the number and proportion of cases aged 17 years or younger reporting benzodiazepines as a main problem has decreased, from 4.0% (35 cases) in 2017 to 0.5% (7 cases) in 2023.

Females accounted for one-in-three cases (33.4%) with benzodiazepines entering treatment in 2023 and this proportion has fluctuated from 29.1% (253 cases) in 2017 to 34.8% (377 cases) in 2019, then decreasing again to 29.8% (383 cases) in 2022. The proportion of cases that were males decreased from 70.4% in 2017 to 66.6% in 2023, while the number of male cases increased from 611 in 2017 to 984 in 2023.

The proportion of cases who were homeless increased from 9.0% in 2017 to 16.2% in 2023.

The proportion of cases in paid employment increased slightly from 9.8% in 2017 to 11.5% in 2023, fluctuating in the years between.

The proportion of cases who left school before the age of 16 increased from 34.8% in 2017 to 39.3% in 2023.

The proportion of cases with polydrug use increased from 64.9% in 2017 to 68.4% in 2023. The most common additional drugs in 2023 among cases with benzodiazepines as a main problem were cocaine (55.0%), cannabis (52.1%), opioids (41.0%) and alcohol (25.0%). A total of 3.9% of cases reported a benzodiazepine as both a main and an additional problem.

Table 9: Socio-demographic characteristics of cases treated for benzodiazepines as a main problem, NDTRS 2017 to 2023

	2017		2018		2019		2020		2021		2022		2023	
	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)
All benzodiazepines	868		999		1082		1097		1218		1287		1477	
Median age (range ¹⁰)	28	18-49	28	18-47	30	18-49	30	19-48	32	20-49	33	20-51	34	22-51
Under 18	35	(4.0)	36	(3.6)	40	(3.7)	29	(2.6)	19	(1.6)	13	(1.0)	7	(0.5)
Female	253	(29.1)	284	(28.4)	377	(34.8)	353	(32.2)	401	(32.9)	383	(29.8)	493	(33.4)
Homeless	78	(9.0)	82	(8.2)	146	(13.5)	149	(13.6)	198	(16.3)	195	(15.2)	240	(16.2)
Traveller	36	(4.1)	50	(5.0)	43	(4.0)	48	(4.1)	57	(4.7)	51	(4.0)	56	(3.8)
Education ceased before 16 years	302	(34.8)	358	(35.8)	368	(34.0)	389	(35.5)	447	(36.7)	476	(37.0)	580	(39.3)
In paid employment	85	(9.8)	98	(10.0)	97	(9.1)	101	(9.3)	130	(10.8)	162	(12.7)	170	(11.5)
Unemployed	617	(71.1)	700	(70.1)	690	(63.8)	735	(67.0)	851	(69.9)	932	(72.4)	1040	(70.4)
Retired/unable to work including disability	94	(10.8)	107	(10.7)	165	(15.2)	171	(15.6)	162	(13.3)	109	(8.5)	185	(12.5)
New cases	290		345		340		392		418		374		416	
Median age (range ¹⁰)	26	17-52	28	17-47	27	17-51	28	17-49	30	19-47	30	20-51	31	20-53
Under 18	20	(6.9)	20	(5.8)	26	(7.6)	20	(5.1)	12	(2.9)	8	(2.1)	5	(1.2)
Female	87	(30.0)	108	(31.3)	122	(35.9)	144	(36.7)	139	(33.3)	123	(32.9)	140	(33.7)
Homeless	16	(5.5)	27	(7.8)	26	(7.6)	49	(12.5)	57	(13.6)	38	(10.2)	54	(13.0)
Traveller	10	(3.4)	18	(5.2)	18	(5.3)	21	(5.4)	18	(4.3)	17	(4.5)	13	(3.1)
Education ceased before 16 years	92	(31.7)	96	(27.8)	104	(30.6)	124	(31.6)	124	(29.7)	120	(32.1)	136	(32.7)
In paid employment	34	(11.7)	43	(12.5)	37	(10.9)	45	(11.5)	68	(16.3)	66	(17.6)	74	(17.8)
Unemployed	196	(67.6)	228	(66.1)	187	(55.0)	258	(65.8)	273	(65.3)	247	(66.0)	262	(63.0)
Retired/unable to work including disability	31	(10.7)	39	(11.3)	63	(18.5)	49	(12.5)	51	(12.2)	43	(11.5)	54	(13.0)
Previously treated	534		596		661		631		742		829		981	
Median age (range ¹⁰)	29	19-45	30	18-46	31	19-49	32	20-48	33	20-50	34	21-51	35	23-50
Under 18	12	(2.2)	15	(2.5)	12	(1.8)	8	(1.3)	7	(0.9)	~	~	~	~
Female	153	(28.7)	153	(25.7)	229	(34.6)	187	(29.6)	244	(32.9)	242	(29.2)	318	(32.4)
Homeless	56	(10.5)	50	(8.4)	110	(16.6)	90	(14.3)	121	(16.3)	132	(15.9)	158	(16.1)
Traveller	24	(4.5)	26	(4.4)	23	(3.5)	23	(3.6)	35	(4.7)	30	(3.6)	42	(4.3)
Education ceased before 16 years	201	(37.6)	244	(40.9)	238	(36.0)	245	(38.8)	293	(39.5)	332	(40.0)	412	(42.0)
In paid employment	47	(8.8)	51	(8.6)	54	(8.2)	49	(7.8)	60	(8.1)	88	(10.6)	94	(9.6)
Unemployed	391	(73.2)	436	(73.2)	446	(67.5)	430	(68.1)	538	(72.5)	629	(75.9)	723	(73.7)
Retired/unable to work including disability	61	(11.4)	59	(9.9)	95	(14.4)	108	(17.1)	101	(13.6)	64	(7.7)	117	(11.9)
Treatment status unknown	44		58		81		74		58		84		80	

~ Cells with five cases or fewer

Polydrug use 2017–2023

Over the period 2017 to 2023, over half of all cases (56.9%) reported polydrug use (problem use of more than one substance).

The proportion of cases reporting polydrug use increased slightly from 57.2% in 2017 to 58.9% in 2023, fluctuating over the period (**Table 10**). It is important to note that although the proportion of polydrug cases has increased only slightly, there was an upward trend in number of cases which has increased by 51.2%, from 5,106 in 2017 to 7,719 in 2023.

The most common additional problem drugs over the period were cannabis, cocaine, opioids, benzodiazepines, and alcohol (**Table 11**). The absolute numbers of these additional problem drugs have increased over the period. The biggest increase in the number of cases was for cocaine and cannabis, followed by alcohol.

Among *new cases* in 2023, alcohol was the most commonly reported additional drug, followed by cannabis, cocaine, and benzodiazepines.

- The proportion reporting cannabis as an additional problem increased from 33.1% in 2017 to 40.6% in 2023.
- Half of *new cases* (50.6%) in 2023 reported problem use of alcohol with other drugs, an increase from 47.5% in 2017.
- In contrast, the proportion of *new cases* reporting cocaine as an additional problem were similar over the period, with some fluctuations, 27.5% in 2017 and 26.0% in 2023.

Among *previously treated cases*, the most commonly reported additional drugs in 2023 were cocaine, followed by cannabis, benzodiazepines, and opioids.

- The proportion reporting cocaine as an additional problem increased from 28.5% in 2017 to 41.2% in 2023, while the number of cases more than doubled.
- The proportion of *previously treated cases* reporting cannabis as an additional problem increased from 33.0% in 2017 to 38.2% in 2023.
- There was a decrease in the proportion reporting benzodiazepines in 2023 compared to previous years. However, it is important to note that the absolute number of cases reported has increased (1,314 versus 1,787 cases).

Table 10: Polydrug use in cases treated for drugs as a main problem, NDTRS 2017 to 2023

	2017		2018		2019		2020		2021		2022		2023	
	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)
All cases	8922		10274		10664		9702		10769		12009		13104	
One drug only	3816	(42.8)	4787	(46.6)	4803	(45.0)	4019	(41.4)	4501	(41.8)	5190	(43.2)	5385	(41.1)
Two or more drugs	5106	(57.2)	5487	(53.4)	5861	(55.0)	5683	(58.6)	6268	(58.2)	6819	(56.8)	7719	(58.9)

Table 11: Polydrug use – additional problem drugs for all cases, new cases, and previously treated cases NDTRS 2017 to 2023

	2017		2018		2019		2020		2021		2022		2023	
	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)
All polydrug	5106		5487		5861		5683		6268		6819		7719	
Cannabis	1690	(33.1)	1937	(35.3)	2166	(37.0)	2246	(39.5)	2633	(42.0)	2748	(40.3)	2997	(38.8)
Cocaine	1435	(28.1)	1619	(29.5)	1928	(32.9)	2092	(36.8)	2252	(35.9)	2464	(36.1)	2803	(36.3)
Alcohol	1914	(37.5)	2053	(37.4)	2189	(37.3)	1986	(34.9)	2241	(35.8)	2467	(36.2)	2756	(35.7)
Benzodiazepines	1846	(36.2)	1987	(36.2)	2088	(35.6)	2076	(36.5)	2246	(35.8)	2193	(32.2)	2394	(31.0)
Opioids	1078	(21.1)	969	(17.7)	1180	(20.1)	1062	(18.7)	1257	(20.1)	1480	(21.7)	1735	(22.5)
MDMA (ecstasy)	384	(7.5)	432	(7.9)	493	(8.4)	424	(7.5)	385	(6.1)	352	(5.2)	(309)	(4.0)
Z-Drugs	334	(6.5)	278	(5.1)	208	(3.5)	247	(4.3)	185	(3.0)	239	(3.5)	(307)	(4.0)
Amphetamines	129	(2.5)	128	(2.3)	145	(2.5)	145	(2.6)	159	(2.5)	126	(1.8)	142	(1.8)
NPS	52	(1.0)	52	(0.9)	76	(1.3)	78	(1.4)	89	(1.4)	100	(1.5)	94	(1.2)
Volatile inhalants	18	(0.4)	20	(0.4)	21	(0.4)	12	(0.2)	23	(0.4)	44	(0.6)	65	(0.8)
Other	261	(5.1)	268	(4.9)	338	(5.8)	316	(5.6)	290	(4.6)	341	(5.0)	431	(5.6)

	2017		2018		2019		2020		2021		2022		2023	
	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)
New cases	1693		1896		1974		2013		2152		2271		2530	
Cannabis	561	(33.1)	662	(34.9)	750	(38.0)	769	(38.2)	870	(40.4)	908	(40.0)	1027	(40.6)
Cocaine	465	(27.5)	517	(27.3)	607	(30.7)	633	(31.4)	631	(29.3)	677	(29.8)	657	(26.0)
Alcohol	805	(47.5)	929	(49.0)	1013	(51.3)	969	(48.1)	1075	(50.0)	1147	(50.5)	1281	(50.6)
Benzodiazepines	464	(27.4)	480	(25.3)	535	(27.1)	555	(27.6)	532	(24.7)	563	(24.8)	549	(21.7)
Opioids	214	(12.6)	179	(9.4)	157	(8.0)	143	(7.1)	155	(7.2)	187	(8.2)	215	(8.5)
MDMA (ecstasy)	195	(11.5)	219	(11.6)	248	(12.6)	238	(11.8)	184	(8.6)	160	(7.0)	140	(5.5)
Z-Drugs	79	(4.7)	51	(2.7)	26	(1.3)	34	(1.7)	32	(1.5)	38	(1.7)	54	(2.1)
Amphetamines	58	(3.4)	50	(2.6)	62	(3.1)	75	(3.7)	64	(3.0)	45	(2.0)	59	(2.3)
NPS	18	(1.1)	16	(0.8)	26	(1.3)	23	(1.1)	27	(1.3)	41	(1.8)	45	(1.8)
Volatile inhalants	6	(0.4)	6	(0.3)	7	(0.4)	~	~	11	(0.5)	33	(1.5)	43	(1.7)
Other	103	(6.1)	128	(6.8)	138	(7.0)	142	(7.1)	128	(5.9)	165	(7.3)	192	(7.6)
Previously treated cases	3230		3415		3550		3439		3923		4338		4994	
Cannabis	1065	(33.0)	1213	(35.5)	1301	(36.6)	1387	(40.3)	1682	(42.9)	1772	(40.8)	1906	(38.2)
Cocaine	921	(28.5)	1048	(30.7)	1212	(34.1)	1384	(40.2)	1553	(39.6)	1715	(39.5)	2060	(41.2)
Alcohol	1036	(32.1)	1055	(30.9)	1040	(29.3)	950	(27.6)	1108	(28.2)	1250	(28.8)	1417	(28.4)
Benzodiazepines	1314	(40.7)	1454	(42.6)	1461	(41.2)	1450	(42.2)	1648	(42.0)	1574	(36.3)	1787	(35.8)
Opioids	812	(25.1)	759	(22.2)	963	(27.1)	878	(25.5)	1069	(27.2)	1245	(28.7)	1490	(29.8)
MDMA (ecstasy)	170	(5.3)	201	(5.9)	213	(6.0)	173	(5.0)	192	(4.9)	184	(4.2)	167	(3.3)
Z-Drugs	254	(7.9)	219	(6.4)	169	(4.8)	195	(5.7)	148	(3.8)	197	(4.5)	248	(5.0)
Amphetamines	68	(2.1)	72	(2.1)	76	(2.1)	61	(1.8)	90	(2.3)	74	(1.7)	81	(1.6)
NPS	32	(1.0)	35	(1.0)	46	(1.3)	53	(1.5)	59	(1.5)	55	(1.3)	47	(0.9)
Volatile inhalants	11	(0.3)	14	(0.4)	13	(0.4)	6	(0.2)	12	(0.3)	11	(0.3)	22	(0.4)
Other	146	(4.5)	130	(3.8)	183	(5.2)	160	(4.7)	152	(3.9)	165	(3.8)	235	(4.7)

~ Cells with five cases or fewer

Risk behaviour 2017–2023

Injecting behaviour

The proportion of all cases that reported ever injecting decreased year on year, from 29.7% in 2017 to 20.3% in 2023, however, the absolute number of cases who reported ever injecting fluctuated over the period (**Table 12**). In 2023, 2,659 cases reported ever injecting, the highest number reported since 2019.

Among *new cases*, the proportion that reported ever injecting decreased over the period from 11.0% in 2017 to 4.0% in 2023.

The proportion of *previously treated cases* that reported ever injecting decreased from 41.3% in 2017 to 31.1% in 2023, but the absolute numbers increased over the period (2,165 versus 2,357 cases).

Among cases that reported ever injecting, the proportion *currently injecting* (i.e. in the 30 days prior to treatment) decreased from 32.5% in 2017 to 28.9% in 2023. There have been small fluctuations in the proportion since 2018.

- Among *new cases* the proportion has increased from 37.9% in 2017 to 42.9% in 2023, however, the absolute numbers have decreased (136 versus 82 cases).
- Among *previously treated cases* the proportion decreased from 31.9% in 2017 to 26.7% in 2023. However, it should be noted that the absolute numbers have increased in 2023 to 629 cases compared to 595 cases in 2022.

Characteristics of cases currently injecting

The majority of cases currently injecting were male (71.3%) and half of cases had started injecting before reaching 22 years of age.

There was a decline in *current injecting* rates among cases with **opioids** as the main problem, decreasing from 92.5% in 2017 to 76.5% in 2023. This decrease was observed in both *new cases* (from 96.3% to 62.2%) and *previously treated cases* (from 93.1% to 76.3%).

Conversely, there was an **increase** in *current injecting* rates among those with **cocaine** as the main problem. The proportion *currently injecting* increased from 3.7% in 2017 to 15.0% in 2023 with more than a threefold increase in the absolute number of cases (from 32 to 115 cases).

Crystal meth was the main problem among 15 *new cases* entering treatment in 2023. Crystal meth as a main problem drug, was not recorded at all in 2017.

Polydrug use increased. Eight-in-ten cases in 2023 (78.5%) involved polydrug use compared to two-in-three (65.8%) in 2017. This increase was observed in both *new cases* (from 50.7% to 79.3%) and *previously treated cases* (from 69.2% to 81.6%).

Sharing of needles and syringes 2019–2023

Sharing of needles and syringes is a risk factor for blood borne viral infections. Overall, the number of cases who reported having shared needles and syringes increased by 11.7% (from 946 cases in 2019 to 1,057 cases in 2023) (**Table 12**).

The proportion of *new cases* who shared needles and syringes increased from 29.0% in 2019 to 35.6% in 2023, however the absolute number of cases decreased (74 versus 68 cases) over the period.

Among *previously treated cases*, the proportion initially increased from 38.8% (858 cases) in 2019 to 45.8% in 2022, it decreased slightly in 2023 to 41.7% (982 cases).

Current injecting and sharing needles and syringes 2019–2023

Among cases *currently* injecting:

- While a significant number (38.7%, 1,439 cases) had **ever shared** needles and syringes, the proportion has decreased from 39.5% (300 cases) in 2019 to 37.3% (287 cases) in 2023
- There is an increase in **recent sharing** of needles and syringes (in the 30 days before treatment). In 2023, 12.5% (464 cases) reported sharing, compared to 12.8% (97 cases) in 2019 (not presented in **Table 12**).

Table 12: Injecting history in cases treated for drugs as a main problem, NDTRS 2017 to 2023

	2017		2018		2019		2020		2021		2022		2023	
	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)
All cases	8922		10274		10664		9702		10769		12009		13104	
Ever injected	2651	(29.7)	2740	(26.7)	2540	(23.8)	2260	(23.3)	2264	(21.0)	2492	(20.8)	2659	(20.3)
Ever shared needles and syringes	N/A [†]	N/A [†]	N/A [†]	N/A [†]	946	(37.2)	855	(37.8)	938	(41.4)	1064	(42.7)	1057	(39.8)
New cases	3257		3962		3979		3796		4206		4456		4792	
Ever injected	359	(11.0)	314	(7.9)	255	(6.4)	194	(5.1)	164	(3.9)	198	(4.4)	191	(4.0)
Ever shared needles and syringes	N/A [†]	N/A [†]	N/A [†]	N/A [†]	74	(29.0)	50	(25.8)	45	(27.4)	61	(30.8)	68	(35.6)
Previously treated cases	5242		5872		5972		5441		6090		6860		7588	
Ever injected	2165	(41.3)	2367	(40.3)	2213	(37.3)	1991	(36.6)	1996	(32.8)	2147	(31.3)	2357	(31.1)
Ever shared needles and syringes	N/A [†]	N/A [†]	N/A [†]	N/A [†]	858	(38.8)	784	(39.4)	886	(43.4)	984	(45.8)	982	(41.7)
Current risk														
All cases	2651		2740		2540		2260		2264		2492		2659	
Currently injecting [‡]	862	(32.5)	815	(29.7)	759	(29.9)	702	(31.1)	741	(32.7)	752	(30.2)	769	(28.9)
New cases	359		314		255		194		164		198		191	
Currently injecting [‡]	136	(37.9)	131	(41.7)	94	(36.9)	82	(42.3)	77	(47.0)	96	(48.5)	82	(42.9)
Previously treated cases	2165		2367		2213		1991		1996		2147		2357	
Currently injecting [‡]	691	(31.9)	660	(27.9)	637	(28.8)	582	(29.2)	605	(30.3)	595	(27.7)	629	(26.7)

[†] In the 30 days prior to treatment

[‡] N/A Not available, due to transition to a new question in order to comply with EMCDDA reporting, data is not reported prior to 2019

Socio-demographic characteristics 2017–2023

- The median **age** of cases increased from 30 years in 2017 to 34 years in 2023 (**Table 13**). For *new cases*, the median age increased from 26 years in 2017 to 29 years in 2023.
- In 2023, 5.0% of all cases were aged 17 years or younger, a decrease from 6.6% in 2017. However, the number of cases aged 17 years or younger has fluctuated over the time period: in 2017 there were 591 cases compared to 657 in 2023. The proportion of new cases aged 17 years or younger in 2023 was 11.4% and throughout the seven-year period was 12.7% on average.
- Over the period, seven-in-ten (72.2%) cases reported were **male**.
- The proportion of cases recorded as **homeless** increased from 9.6% (858 cases) in 2017 to 12.1% (1,588 cases) in 2023.
- The proportion of cases with an Irish Traveller **ethnicity** was highest at 3.5% in 2017 and lowest at 2.8% in 2023, though the absolute number of cases in 2023 was highest recorded in the NDTRS during this period (368).¹⁵
- The proportion of cases recorded as having ceased **education** (for the first time) before the age of 16 years decreased from 34.9% in 2017 to 30.8% in 2023.
- The proportion of all cases that were in paid **employment** increased from 14.3% in 2017 to 22.2% in 2023, the highest proportion across the time period.
- Over the reporting period, 59.5% of all cases were **unemployed**. The proportion of cases that were unemployed decreased between 2017 and 2023 from 63.9% to 59.7%.
- Each year, rates of homelessness, ceasing education before age 16, and unemployment were higher among *previously treated* cases than among *new cases*.

Table 13: Socio-demographic characteristics of cases treated for drugs as a main problem, NDTRS 2017 to 2023

	2017		2018		2019		2020		2021		2022		2023	
	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)
All cases	8922		10274		10664		9702		10769		12009		13104	
Median age (range ¹⁰)	30	17-47	31	17-48	31	17-48	31	17-48	32	17-49	33	17-50	34	17-51
Under 18	591	(6.6)	732	(7.1)	822	(7.7)	674	(6.9)	595	(5.5)	616	(5.1)	657	(5.0)
Male	6449	(72.3)	7626	(74.2)	7859	(73.7)	7167	(73.9)	7754	(72.0)	8639	(71.9)	9009	(68.8)
Homeless	858	(9.6)	980	(9.5)	1173	(11.0)	1023	(10.5)	1349	(12.5)	1667	(13.9)	1588	(12.1)
Traveller	310	(3.5)	343	(3.3)	320	(3.0)	291	(3.0)	361	(3.4)	361	(3.0)	368	(2.8)
Education ceased before 16 years	3118	(34.9)	3551	(34.6)	3306	(31.0)	3154	(32.5)	3563	(33.1)	3779	(31.5)	4040	(30.8)
In paid employment	1280	(14.3)	1735	(16.9)	1700	(15.9)	1574	(16.2)	2207	(20.5)	2643	(22.0)	2905	(22.2)
Unemployed	5702	(63.9)	6356	(61.9)	5852	(54.9)	5726	(59.0)	6333	(58.8)	7101	(59.1)	7819	(59.7)
Retired/unable to work including disability	712	(8.0)	823	(8.0)	1251	(11.7)	1165	(12.0)	1049	(9.7)	790	(6.6)	1048	(8.0)
New cases	3257		3962		3979		3796		4206		4456		4792	
Median age (range ¹⁰)	26	16-46	26	15-45	26	15-45	27	15-46	28	16-46	28	16-47	29	16-49
Under 18	413	(12.7)	537	(13.6)	618	(15.5)	548	(14.4)	468	(11.1)	495	(11.1)	546	(11.4)
Male	2446	(75.1)	3000	(75.7)	3065	(77.0)	2886	(76.0)	3100	(73.7)	3347	(75.1)	3471	(72.4)
Homeless	199	(6.1)	248	(6.3)	263	(6.6)	229	(6.0)	287	(6.8)	314	(7.0)	334	(7.0)
Traveller	97	(3.0)	109	(2.8)	112	(2.8)	100	(2.6)	129	(3.1)	113	(2.5)	102	(2.1)
Education ceased before 16 years	834	(25.6)	946	(23.9)	888	(22.3)	841	(22.2)	1031	(24.5)	1030	(23.1)	1052	(22.0)
In paid employment	652	(20.0)	943	(23.8)	901	(22.6)	903	(23.8)	1216	(28.9)	1500	(33.7)	1569	(32.7)
Unemployed	1757	(53.9)	2029	(51.2)	1765	(44.4)	1772	(46.7)	2054	(48.8)	2070	(46.5)	2234	(46.6)
Retired/unable to work including disability	183	(5.6)	222	(5.6)	364	(9.1)	308	(8.1)	299	(7.1)	237	(5.3)	300	(6.3)
Previously treated cases	5242		5872		5927		5441		6090		6860		7588	
Median age (range ¹⁰)	33	19-47	34	19-49	34	19-50	33	20-49	35	20-50	36	21-51	36	22-52
Under 18	154	(2.9)	170	(2.9)	155	(2.6)	111	(2.0)	117	(1.9)	115	(1.7)	89	(1.2)
Male	3686	(70.3)	4328	(73.7)	4211	(71.0)	3948	(72.6)	4315	(70.9)	4790	(69.8)	5069	(66.8)
Homeless	620	(11.8)	679	(11.6)	810	(13.7)	735	(13.5)	911	(15.0)	1105	(16.1)	1030	(13.6)
Traveller	194	(3.7)	211	(3.6)	180	(3.0)	174	(3.2)	216	(3.5)	227	(3.3)	251	(3.3)
Education ceased before 16 years	2183	(41.6)	2460	(41.9)	2224	(37.5)	2165	(39.8)	2357	(38.7)	2615	(38.1)	2821	(37.2)
In paid employment	562	(10.7)	738	(12.6)	678	(11.4)	605	(11.1)	917	(15.1)	1045	(15.2)	1254	(16.5)
Unemployed	3717	(70.9)	4056	(69.1)	3714	(62.7)	3722	(68.4)	4001	(65.7)	4644	(67.7)	5185	(68.3)
Retired/unable to work including disability	495	(9.4)	563	(9.6)	782	(13.2)	745	(13.7)	709	(11.6)	539	(7.9)	692	(9.1)
Treatment status unknown	423		440		758		465		473		693		724	

Community Healthcare Organisation (CHO) area of residence 2017–2023

The highest number of reported cases resided¹⁴ in CHO 9 (**Table 14**) (see below for reference to areas included in each CHO). In 2023, although the NDTRS recorded the highest number of cases ever, there was a reduction in the numbers reported from CHO 1, CHO 6 and CHO 8.

As participation in the NDTRS is not uniform across the country, conclusions based on geographic analyses must be interpreted in this context.

Table 14: Number of cases treated for drugs as a main problem by Community Healthcare Organisation area of residence, NDTRS 2017 to 2023

	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
All cases	8922	10274	10664	9702	10769	12009	13104
CHO 1	382	312	477	398	375	476	441
CHO 2	375	329	295	368	380	399	441
CHO 3	749	843	851	839	859	832	907
CHO 4	1055	1169	1216	1007	939	994	1045
CHO 5	1170	1277	1260	1082	1134	1191	1410
CHO 6	400	448	468	471	508	642	601
CHO 7	1531	2043	2137	1848	2342	2434	2612
CHO 8	926	1007	983	902	998	1054	1026
CHO 9	1877	2474	2532	2390	2889	3392	4014
Other/unknown	457	372	445	397	345	595	607
New cases	3257	3962	3979	3796	4206	4456	4792

	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
CHO 1	182	147	230	171	180	260	200
CHO 2	173	132	104	111	152	158	178
CHO 3	310	417	420	419	403	382	331
CHO 4	467	530	515	465	431	487	505
CHO 5	498	554	599	470	510	564	640
CHO 6	178	213	168	209	205	268	254
CHO 7	509	664	631	616	826	809	932
CHO 8	367	460	472	439	552	546	502
CHO 9	461	765	766	781	883	896	1157
Other/unknown	112	80	74	115	64	86	93
Previously treated	5242	5872	5927	5441	6090	6860	7588
CHO 1	172	150	216	204	187	210	230
CHO 2	198	163	155	180	176	194	197
CHO 3	409	396	382	372	437	432	558
CHO 4	567	627	681	534	496	494	532
CHO 5	640	671	606	604	617	613	757
CHO 6	206	227	258	239	278	357	329
CHO 7	933	1315	1335	1152	1399	1469	1573
CHO 8	457	493	443	440	431	476	467
CHO 9	1336	1568	1527	1459	1833	2235	2549
Other/unknown	324	262	324	257	236	380	396
Treatment status unknown	423	440	758	465	473	693	724

LHO areas in each Community Healthcare Organisation area

CHO 1 – Donegal LHO, Sligo/Leitrim/West Cavan LHO and Cavan/Monaghan LHO

CHO 2 – Galway LHO, Roscommon and Mayo LHO

CHO 3 – Clare LHO, Limerick LHO, North Tipperary/East Limerick LHO

CHO 4 – Kerry LHO, North Cork LHO, North Lee LHO, South Lee LHO and West Cork LHO

CHO 5 – South Tipperary LHO, Carlow/Kilkenny LHO, Waterford LHO and Wexford LHO

CHO 6 – Wicklow LHO, Dun Laoghaire LHO and Dublin South East LHO

CHO 7 – Kildare/West Wicklow LHO, Dublin West LHO, Dublin South City LHO and Dublin South West LHO

CHO 8 – Laois/Offaly LHO, Longford/Westmeath LHO, Louth LHO and Meath LHO

CHO 9 – Dublin North LHO, Dublin North Central LHO and Dublin North West LHO

HSE Health Regions (HR) area of residence 2017–2023

In 2023, the highest number of reported cases resided¹⁴ in HR HSE Dublin and North East (**Table 15**) (see below for reference to areas included in each HR).

As mentioned previously, participation in the NDTRS is not uniform across the country and therefore conclusions based on geographic analyses must be interpreted in this context.

Table 15: Number of cases treated for drugs as a main problem by HSE Health Region area of residence, NDTRS 2017 to 2023

	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
All cases	8922	10274	10664	9702	10769	12009	13104
HSE Dublin and North East	2462	3006	2980	2825	3517	4026	4693
HSE Dublin and Midlands	1976	2571	2746	2365	2797	2959	3063
HSE Dublin and South East	1570	1725	1728	1553	1642	1833	2011
HSE South West	1055	1169	1216	1007	939	994	1045
HSE Mid West	749	843	851	839	859	832	907
HSE West and North West	653	588	698	716	670	770	778
Other/unknown	457	372	445	397	345	595	607

	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
New cases	3257	3962	3979	3796	4206	4456	4792
HSE Dublin and North East	711	1006	971	1002	1259	1229	1481
HSE Dublin and Midlands	667	907	932	860	1038	1082	1164
HSE Dublin and South East	676	767	767	679	715	832	894
HSE South West	467	530	515	465	431	487	505
HSE Mid West	310	417	420	419	403	382	331
HSE West and North West	314	255	300	256	296	358	324
Other/unknown	112	80	74	115	64	86	93
Previously treated	5242	5872	5927	5441	6090	6860	7588
HSE Dublin and North East	1627	1826	1708	1659	2074	2519	2853
HSE Dublin and Midlands	1157	1579	1630	1414	1637	1706	1781
HSE Dublin and South East	846	898	864	843	895	970	1086
HSE South West	567	627	681	534	496	494	532
HSE Mid West	409	396	382	372	437	432	558
HSE West and North West	312	284	338	362	315	359	382
Other/unknown	324	262	324	257	236	380	396
Treatment status unknown	423	440	758	465	473	693	724

Regional health areas

HSE Dublin and North East: North Dublin, Meath, Louth, Cavan, Monaghan

HSE Dublin and Midlands: Longford, Westmeath, Offaly, Laois, Kildare, parts of Dublin and Wicklow

HSE Dublin and South East: Tipperary South, Waterford, Kilkenny, Carlow, Wexford, Wicklow, part of South Dublin

HSE South West: Kerry and Cork

HSE Mid West: Limerick, Tipperary North, Clare

HSE West and North West: Donegal, Sligo, Leitrim, Roscommon, Mayo, Galway

Incidence and prevalence of treatment 2017–2023

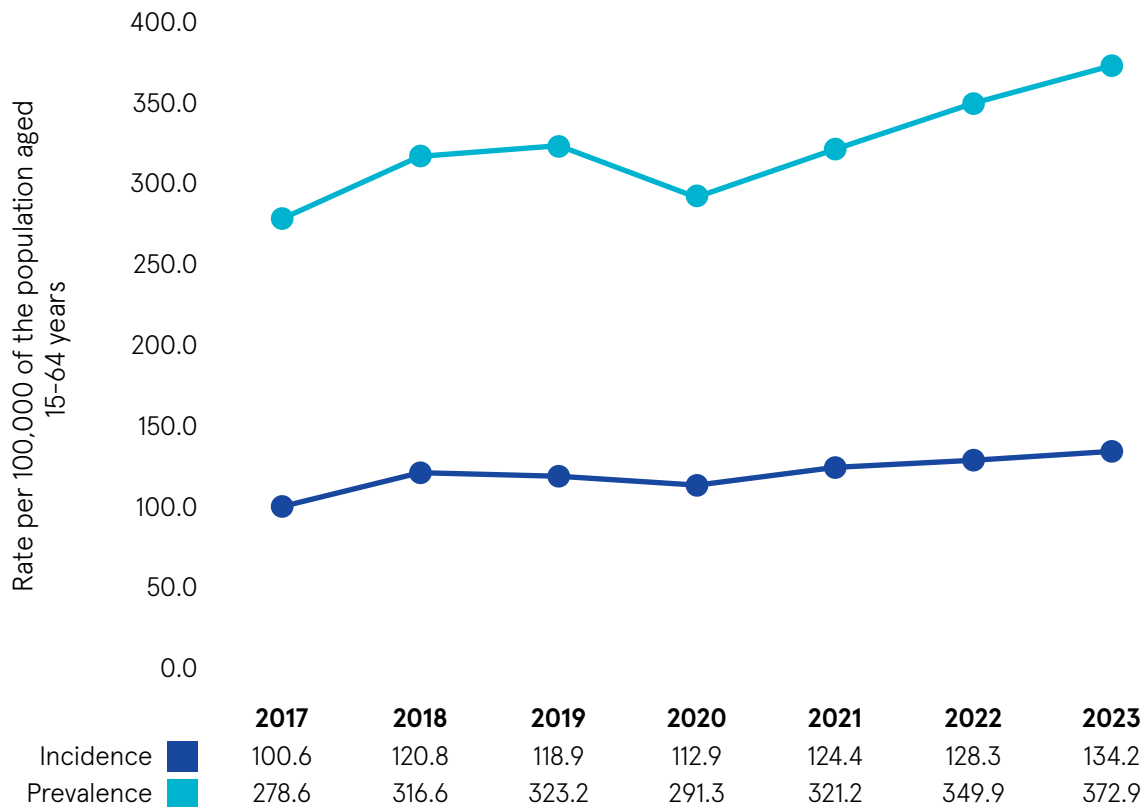
Annual rates for the incidence (*new cases*) and prevalence (all cases) of treated problem drug use were calculated per 100,000 of the population aged 15 to 64 years based on census figures from the Central Statistics Office (CSO) (**Figure 5**).¹⁶

Incidence was 100.6 per 100,000 in 2017 and 134.2 per 100,000 in 2023.

Prevalence, which includes *new cases* and those cases returning to treatment, increased from 278.6 per 100,000 in 2017 to 372.9 per 100,000 in 2023.

Changes in incidence and prevalence should be interpreted with caution due to the proportion of cases where treatment status was unknown (5.5% in 2023) and the impact of COVID-19 on case numbers in 2020.

Figure 5: Incidence and prevalence of treated problem drug use per 100,000 of the population aged 15 to 64 years, NDTRS 2017 to 2023



Acknowledgements

The NDTRS team would like to acknowledge the ongoing support of the staff in the alcohol and drug treatment services throughout the country, without whom it would not be possible to maintain the NDTRS. Their participation and cooperation are very much appreciated and valued.

Notes

- 1 This document may be cited as: Lynch, T, Condrón, I, Lyons S, and Carew A (2024) National Drug Treatment Reporting System, 2023 *Drug Treatment Demand*. HRB StatLink Series 18. Dublin: Health Research Board. Available at: <https://www.drugsandalcohol.ie/40981/> and at www.hrb.ie/publications.
- 2 European Monitoring System for Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA). (2012). Treatment demand indicator (TDI) standard protocol 3.0: Guidelines for reporting data on people entering drug treatment in European countries. EMCDDA. https://www.emcdda.europa.eu/publications/manuals/tdi-protocol-3.0_en
- 3 Department of Health. (2017) *Reducing harm, supporting recovery. A health-led response to drug and alcohol use in Ireland 2017 – 2025*. Dublin: Department of Health. <https://www.drugsandalcohol.ie/27603/>
- 4 More detailed information on the NDTRS methodology can be found in previously published HRB Trends Series papers at: www.hrb.ie/fileadmin/publications_files/HRB_Trend_Series_12_Trends_in_treated_problem_drug_use_in_Ireland_2005_to_2010_02.pdf
- 5 NDTRS data are case based which means there is a possibility that individuals appear more than once in the database; for example, where a person receives treatment at more than one centre, or at the same centre more than once in a calendar year.
- 6 The NDTRS interactive tables will be updated to reflect the changes at: www.drugsandalcohol.ie/tables/
- 7 The Central Treatment List (CTL) is the administrative database to regulate the dispensing of OAT. It was established under Statutory Instrument No. 225 (Minister for Health and Children 1998) and is a complete register of all patients receiving OAT in Ireland. However, the CTL does not collect all the information required for the EMCDDAs Treatment Demand Indicator. https://www.emcdda.europa.eu/publications/manuals/tdi-protocol-3.0_en
- 8 Bruton, L, Gibney, S, Hynes, T, Collins, D, Moran, P (2021) *Spending review 2021. Focused policy assessment of Reducing Harm, Supporting Recovery: an analysis of expenditure and performance in the area of drug and alcohol misuse*. Dublin: Government of Ireland. <https://www.drugsandalcohol.ie/34729/>
- 9 Non-binary describes gender identities outside of the female/male gender binary. Individuals identifying as non-binary may feel neither exclusively male or female, both male and female, between or beyond genders.
- 10 Age range presented is 5th percentile to 95th percentile (90% of cases are included within this range).

- 11 Service users *currently residing with* children refers to the 30 days prior to treatment. This includes children where the service user has a carer or guardianship role: non-related children such as foster children and stepchildren; and the children of a long-term cohabiting partner. Where the service user is a grandparent or other close relative and is the official guardian of a child with whom they are living, they are recorded as living with children.
- 12 Children who are *not residing with* the service user refers to children currently living with another parent; children in formal care or informal care; and children living elsewhere who are biological children/adopted children, or children who are under the official guardianship of the service user. It also refers to children who have left home, and children who are living with other family members or friends temporarily, but who are not considered by the service user to be living in care.
- 13 The capacity and functionality of treatment services were impacted by COVID-19 restrictions. In 2020, the NDTRS surveyed participating services to estimate the impact of the restrictions on treatment data for 2020 (the response rate was 80%). Around 40% of services surveyed expressed some impact on their ability to provide returns, while around 50% expected some impact on numbers (unpublished data).
- 14 Area of residence relates to the service user's place of residence in the 30 days prior to commencing treatment, for all service types excluding prison. Where a service user is treated in prison and has been in prison for less than six months prior to starting treatment, area of residence is the place of residence prior to imprisonment. Otherwise, the prison location is recorded.
- 15 The number of Irish Travellers living in the State and counted in Census 2022 was 32,949, an increase of 6% from 30,987 in the 2016 census. Irish Travellers make up less than 1% of the population. <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-cpp5/census2022profile5-diversitymigrationethnicityirishtravellersreligion/irishtravellers/>
- 16 Population data are taken from the Central Statistics Office at: <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-pme/populationandmigrationestimatesapril2023/>

Appendix A: Number of cases treated for cocaine as a main problem, by county of residence, NDTRS 2017–2023

	2017		2018		2019		2020		2021		2022		2023	
	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)
All cases	1500		2254		2560		2619		3248		4084		4923	
Carlow	11	(0.7)	15	(0.7)	24	(0.9)	28	(1.1)	30	(0.9)	42	(1.0)	49	(1.0)
Cavan	11	(0.7)	~	~	21	(0.8)	14	(0.5)	22	(0.7)	40	(1.0)	35	(0.7)
Clare	30	(2.0)	42	(1.9)	57	(2.2)	51	(1.9)	51	(1.6)	64	(1.6)	81	(1.6)
Cork	124	(8.3)	185	(8.2)	220	(8.6)	234	(8.9)	193	(5.9)	260	(6.4)	290	(5.9)
Donegal	31	(2.1)	44	(2.0)	69	(2.7)	65	(2.5)	61	(1.9)	89	(2.2)	97	(2.0)
Dublin	772	(51.5)	1195	(53.0)	1316	(51.4)	1323	(50.5)	1751	(53.9)	2204	(54.0)	2765	(56.2)
Galway	20	(1.3)	15	(0.7)	33	(1.3)	33	(1.3)	40	(1.2)	35	(0.9)	79	(1.6)
Kerry	26	(1.7)	49	(2.2)	65	(2.5)	50	(1.9)	66	(2.0)	79	(1.9)	76	(1.5)
Kildare	28	(1.9)	44	(2.0)	47	(1.8)	61	(2.3)	99	(3.0)	127	(3.1)	137	(2.8)
Kilkenny	11	(0.7)	31	(1.4)	31	(1.2)	21	(0.8)	32	(1.0)	31	(0.8)	45	(0.9)
Laois	13	(0.9)	32	(1.4)	31	(1.2)	36	(1.4)	35	(1.1)	59	(1.4)	43	(0.9)
Leitrim	~	~	~	~	~	~	~	~	~	~	9	(0.2)	10	(0.2)
Limerick	72	(4.8)	137	(6.1)	147	(5.7)	134	(5.1)	167	(5.1)	173	(4.2)	209	(4.2)
Longford	~	~	~	~	11	(0.4)	16	(0.6)	15	(0.5)	30	(0.7)	30	(0.6)
Louth	43	(2.9)	54	(2.4)	61	(2.4)	50	(1.9)	86	(2.6)	101	(2.5)	115	(2.3)
Mayo	12	(0.8)	16	(0.7)	13	(0.5)	38	(1.5)	28	(0.9)	43	(1.1)	46	(0.9)
Meath	39	(2.6)	48	(2.1)	33	(1.3)	47	(1.8)	93	(2.9)	106	(2.6)	112	(2.3)
Monaghan	~	~	0	(0.0)	~	~	8	(0.3)	10	(0.3)	9	(0.2)	11	(0.2)
Offaly	6	(0.4)	21	(0.9)	20	(0.8)	13	(0.5)	30	(0.9)	24	(0.6)	31	(0.6)
Roscommon	14	(0.9)	14	(0.6)	17	(0.7)	35	(1.3)	28	(0.9)	32	(0.8)	33	(0.7)
Sligo	14	(0.9)	14	(0.6)	17	(0.7)	20	(0.8)	15	(0.5)	23	(0.6)	17	(0.3)
Tipperary	55	(3.7)	69	(3.1)	85	(3.3)	85	(3.2)	114	(3.5)	144	(3.5)	188	(3.8)
Waterford	54	(3.6)	68	(3.0)	61	(2.4)	66	(2.5)	68	(2.1)	87	(2.1)	114	(2.3)
Westmeath	8	(0.5)	15	(0.7)	24	(0.9)	14	(0.5)	12	(0.4)	21	(0.5)	48	(1.0)
Wexford	39	(2.6)	50	(2.2)	60	(2.3)	56	(2.1)	85	(2.6)	92	(2.3)	97	(2.0)
Wicklow	49	(3.3)	81	(3.6)	87	(3.4)	102	(3.9)	94	(2.9)	143	(3.5)	130	(2.6)
Outside Ireland	7	(0.5)	~	~	~	~	11	(0.4)	18	(0.6)	17	(0.4)	31	(0.6)
Ireland Unknown	7	(0.5)	~	~	~	~	~	~	0	(0.0)	0	(0.0)	~	~
Total	1500		2254		2560		2619		3248		4084		4923	

~ Cells with 5 cases or fewer



Contact details for queries regarding
this bulletin or the NDTRS:

t + 353 1 2345 000

e ndtrs@hrb.ie

Health Research Board

Grattan House

67-72 Lower Mount Street

Dublin

D02 H638

w www.hrb.ie

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