

## Find the Facts – workshop outline and notes

### Outline

1. What is a drug?
2. How drugs are classified:
  - a. by their effects
  - b. whether they are legal or illegal (illicit)
3. Drugs and their effects – categories of psychoactive drugs
4. Which drugs are being used? Overview of statistics from National Drug Statistics Household Survey
5. Practical Activity – using the Drug Facts Activity Sheet
6. Other drug information in the library collection
7. Drug Info website overview
8. Where to get help
9. Conclusion and feedback

## INTRODUCTION

Welcome participants and introduce the session.

Drug Info provides up to date information about alcohol and drugs via a dedicated website and through public libraries in NSW. Drug Info is a joint partnership between the NSW Ministry of Health and the State Library of NSW.

In today's Find the Facts session we are going to learn about legal and illegal drugs in Australia and how to find information about them. The topics that the session will cover are:

- what are drugs?
- how are drugs classified?
- drugs and their effects
- what drugs do people use?
- group activity
- information in the library and website overview
- where to get help

## SECTION 1 - What are drugs?

**Drugs are substances that change a person's physical or mental state.** The vast majority of drugs are used to treat medical conditions, both physical and mental. Some, however, are used outside the medical setting for their effects on the mind. These are referred to as recreational drugs, and many of them are illegal in Australia.

The vast majority of drugs are used to treat medical conditions, both physical and mental.

For example a drug like paracetamol is used to treat headaches and pain and drugs such as antidepressants are used to treat conditions related to the mind.

Some drugs, however, are used outside the medical setting for their effects on the mind. In this session we are going to concentrate on drugs that affect a person's mental state.

Source: *A quick guide to drugs & alcohol, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition*

Drugs that affect a person's mental state, whether prescribed for a medical condition (for example, antidepressants or tranquilizers) or taken for recreational purposes (such as alcohol and heroin), are called psychoactive drugs.

**Psychoactive drugs affect the way a person thinks and feels—which may also affect the way they behave.**

## SECTION 2 – How are drugs classified

Drugs are usually classified according to:

- their effects
- whether they are legal or illegal (illicit).

## SECTION 3 - Drugs and their effects – categories of psychoactive drugs

There are three main types of drug: depressants, stimulants and hallucinogens.

**DEPRESSANTS** slow down the activity of the central nervous system (the brain and spinal cord), which reduces a person's alertness, coordination and concentration and also slows down functions such as breathing and heart rate. In small quantities depressants can cause a person to feel more relaxed. In large quantities they can cause unconsciousness, vomiting and death.

- Examples of depressants are alcohol, heroin, cannabis, the prescription drug group of benzodiazepines (sometimes referred to as benzos) and other prescription tranquilisers.

(Ask the group if they know what benzodiazepines are as many people have not heard of them – benzodiazepines belong to a group of drugs known as minor tranquilisers, examples of benzos are Valium and Xanax – they are prescription drugs that may be used as recreation drugs)

**STIMULANTS** increase the activity of the central nervous system, making the person more alert and aroused. They increase heart rate, body temperature and blood pressure. They can also reduce a person's appetite and cause them to have dilated pupils and difficulty sleeping, and to be talkative or agitated. Large quantities of stimulants can cause a person to experience anxiety, panic, seizures, headaches, stomach cramps, aggression and paranoia.

Strong stimulants can mask some of the effects of depressant drugs such as alcohol.

- Examples of mild stimulants are nicotine, caffeine, and examples of strong stimulants are cocaine, ecstasy and the methamphetamines, speed and ice.

**HALLUCINOGENS** make a person see, hear, smell or feel things that aren't there. Other effects of hallucinogenic drugs include dilation of the pupils, loss of appetite, increased activity, talking or laughing, a sense of emotional and psychological euphoria and well-being, jaw-clenching, sweating, panic, paranoia, loss of contact with reality, irritation or bizarre behavior, stomach cramps and nausea.

- Examples of hallucinogens are LSD, magic mushrooms, ecstasy and cannabis.

NOTE: some drugs fit into more than one category – so CANNABIS acts as a depressant by reducing a person's alertness but can also be a hallucinogen, causing someone to see, hear or feel things that are not there. The same applies for a drug such as ECSTASY which is a stimulant and can have hallucinogenic effects.

### Illegal or illicit drugs

Another way of grouping drugs is as “legal” or “illegal” (also known as illicit) drugs.

Ask the group what they think are the most common legal and illegal drugs?

The most commonly used legal psychoactive drugs, apart from drugs taken on prescription, are alcohol and tobacco. The most commonly used illegal psychoactive drug is cannabis (marijuana).

### SECTION 4 – Which drugs are being used?

The National Drug Strategy Household Survey (NDSHS) is conducted every three years and the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare has been collating and reporting on these surveys since 1998. The latest survey was undertaken in 2019.

The survey shows that alcohol, tobacco and ecstasy have the highest use with drugs such as GHB and Ketamine having a much smaller amount of usage.

Over **86%** of Australians aged 14 years and over have drunk alcohol one or more times in their lives<sup>1</sup>

**8.3%** of Australians aged 14 years and over have used pharmaceuticals (including benzodiazepines) for non-medical purposes one or more times in their life<sup>1</sup>

**36%** of Australians aged 14 years and over have used cannabis one or more times in their life<sup>1</sup>

**2.6%** of Australians aged 14 years and over have used synthetic cannabis at some stage in their lives<sup>1</sup>

**11.2%** of Australians aged 14 years and over have used cocaine one or more times in their life<sup>1</sup>

**12.5%** of Australians aged 14 years and over have used ecstasy one or more times in their life<sup>1</sup>

**1.0%** of Australians aged 14 years and over have used GHB one or more times in their life<sup>1</sup>

**10.4%** of Australians aged 14 years and over have used hallucinogens one or more times in their life<sup>1</sup>

**1.2%** of Australians aged 14 years and older have used heroin one or more times in their life<sup>1</sup>

**4.8%** of Australians aged 14 years and over have used inhalants one or more times in their life<sup>1</sup>

**3.1%** of Australians aged 14 years and over have used ketamine one or more times in their life<sup>1</sup>

**5.8%** of Australians aged 14 years and over have used meth/amphetamines one or more times in their life<sup>1</sup>

**0.7%** of Australians aged 14 years and over have used new psychoactive substances (synthetic drugs) at some stage in their lives<sup>1</sup>

**36%** of Australians aged 14 years and over have used tobacco<sup>1</sup>

## SECTION 5 – Practical activity

NSW Health Drug Facts - Demonstrate ONE booklet.

A range of Drug Facts pamphlets produced by NSW Health is available in NSW public libraries and can be accessed from the Drug Info website. They cover the essential facts on drugs, including information on short-term and long-term effects, street names, legal status, tolerance and dependence, withdrawal, quitting and particular issues associated with each drug. On the back of each booklet there is also a list of agencies and helplines which is useful if you or anyone that you know should ever need help with a drug or alcohol related issue.

The pamphlets can be downloaded or ordered online free of charge from the Your Room website

### **Know your drug facts activity sheet**

Download the Know Your Drugs Facts activity sheet from the Drug Info section of the Public Library services website and distribute a copy to each participant:

<http://www.sl.nsw.gov.au/public-library-services/services-drug-info-public-libraries-know-your-drug-facts-program/resources>

Have a set of the NSW Health Drug Facts booklets available for use.

Each person in the group should choose a Drug Facts booklet and research/read about that particular drug. They should choose ONE interesting fact (or something they did not know) about the drug to share with the group.

At the end of the time allocated ask each participant to share ONE interesting fact with the group.

## SECTION 6 – Other drug information in the library collection

*A quick guide to drugs and alcohol, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition*

There are also other items available in the library that can help you find information about drugs and alcohol such as this book *A quick guide to drugs and alcohol*. This book includes information on a range of drugs, drug effects, drugs and driving, pregnancy, treatment, statistics, drugs and the law and where to go for help and further information.

A hard copy of the book is available in all NSW public libraries. The PDF version of the book is available to download from the website.

### Books in the library collection

There are also other books in the library collection relating to drugs including these titles:

- Teenagers, alcohol and drugs
- Alcohol, other drugs and pregnancy (5<sup>th</sup> edition)
- Healthy spirit, healthy community
- A guide to coping – a book for families facing problematic drug use

There is also a range of pamphlets available (in the library) or to download from the Drug Info website. Some are specifically related to cannabis use.

## SECTION 7 – Drug Info website overview

Demonstrate the Drug Info website.

The Drug Info website provides access to an extended range of drug information with quality assured links, downloadable factsheets and access to support networks.

The main collection of information is listed under the A-Z of drugs – accessible via the homepage or under the ‘drugs’ tab

This section contains an alphabetical index to pages on individual drugs, indexed by proper and street name. Drugs may be listed twice. Drugs may also be listed by groups such as hallucinogens, analgesics, new and emerging drugs etc.

Where possible there is full text information and images.

There is information about:

- Street names
- How a drug is used
- The legal issues around the drug
- Long and short term effects
- Statistics around the use of the drug
- Other issues such as the link between mental health and use of the drug

The full text information on the website is taken from the key resource in the Drug Info collection is *A quick guide to drugs and alcohol (3<sup>rd</sup> edn.)*

There is also a yellow breakout box that contains links to other websites and PDFs under “further reading.”

If you or someone you should ever need help with a drug or alcohol related issue – you can find a list of agencies by clicking on the ‘Getting Help’ button.

Things to note:

- Counselling Online provides one-to-one counselling over the Internet or phone.
- Family Drug Support provides support to families and friends in crisis due to drug and alcohol issues
- Lifeline provides support for mental health issues and crisis support
- ADIS provides specialised information and referral and is a 24hr service – it also have a Stimulant Treatment Line (ie for ice and speed)

### OPTIONAL ADDITIONAL EXERCISE (10 mins)

Ask participants to go to the A-Z of Drugs page and choose a drug from the A-Z list:

- Have a look at the information available about the drug. Is there full text information available? If not, is there a link to another website – which website did it link you to?
- Explore the information available about your chosen drug:
  - What are its effects?

## SECTION 8 – Where to get help

If you or someone you should ever need help with a drug or alcohol related issue there are a number of places that can assist.

Firstly – for a drug and alcohol related emergency call an ambulance immediately by dialling Triple Zero (000)

If you can't wake someone up or you are concerned that they may have sustained a head injury from a drug or alcohol related fall – call an ambulance immediately – dial Triple Zero (000).

If the person has been mixing drugs with alcohol or other drugs, tell the NSW Ambulance paramedic exactly what they have taken.

Paramedics are there to help. Generally paramedics don't involve the police unless there is danger to themselves or other people/children, someone dies, or a crime (such as violence or theft) has been committed.

In this library is a copy of the book a **Guide to Coping**. This book is a guide designed to aid parents, families and friends of drug users. This resource provides help on how to deal with crisis situations such as overdose and up-to-date information on treatment options

Visit the Getting Help section of the Drug Info website for a list of support agencies and helplines.

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## SECTION 9 – Conclusion and feedback

Thanks participants for attending the workshop and ask them to complete a feedback form.