

ALCOHOL AND OTHER DRUGS



Alcohol, tobacco and other drug (AOD) use is a major cause of preventable disease, illness and death in Australia. This resource aims to support best practice and harm minimisation approaches for AOD conditions in primary care settings.

Primary healthcare practitioners, and GPs in particular, play an important role in the identification and treatment of problematic AOD use. Screening, brief interventions, motivational interviewing for improved patient behaviour and appropriate referrals can lead to better patient outcomes.

The health impacts of alcohol and other drugs are wide-ranging, complex and often intersect with other aspects of physical and mental health. Harms related to substance use and misuse can also be influenced by social determinants of health, such as income, housing, culture and social isolation.

It is often difficult for people to recognise that they have become dependent on [alcohol](#) or other [drugs](#), viewing it as temporary situation if they are in physical pain or dealing with a difficult situation such as [grief](#), loss, [anxiety](#) or [trauma](#).

- **Tobacco smoking:** is the leading preventable cause of death and disease in Victoria. While the smoking rate in Australian Aboriginal communities is decreasing, it is still almost three times the national average and leading cause of preventable death and illness in Aboriginal communities.
- **Alcohol:** In 2018, alcohol was the fifth highest risk factor contributing to the burden of disease in Australia (4.5 per cent of the total burden), and one in five (21 per cent) of Australians aged 14 and older reported being a victim of an alcohol-related incident in 2019. ([Victorian alcohol and drug statistics - AODstats](#))
- **Drugs:** Illicit use of drugs causes death and disability, and is a risk factor for many diseases. It is also associated with risks to a users' families, friends and the community. Illicit use of drugs includes use of illegal drugs, misuse or non-medical use of pharmaceutical drugs, or inappropriate use of other substances (such as inhalants).

Data source: [Alcohol, tobacco & other drugs in Australia, Data - Australian Institute of Health and Welfare \(aihw.gov.au\)](#)

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| <p>Change idea templates</p> | <p>Change idea templates help to identify focus areas for quality improvement activities using practice data. Your Quality Improvement Consultant can assist in identifying change ideas for your practice.</p> | |
| <p>PDSAs - Quality Improvement</p> | <p>Plan-Do-Study-Act (PDSA) cycles provide a framework to help develop, manage and test quality improvement activities identified in change idea templates. Your Quality Improvement Consultant can assist in developing your PDSA templates.</p> | <p>Embed smoking cessation conversations into routine care Increase recording of smoking status for patients over 15 Increase recording of alcohol status for patients over 15 Improve opioid management and reduce risk Increase uptake of Hep C therapy and treatment</p> |

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| <p>PIP QI QIM2: Smoking QIM 7: Alcohol Status</p> | <p>Smoking and alcohol status needs to be recorded/updated within the previous 24 months to be considered current.</p> <p>Murray PHN fund Topbar for all GPs which is embedded in your practice management software. At the point-of-care it highlights the relevant quality improvement measures that must be recorded for a patient.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Details on how to use the PIP QI reports is available on the Pen CS website. |
| <p>Murray HealthPathways</p> | <p>Murray HealthPathways aims to guide best-practice assessment, management and referral of common medical conditions, including when and where to refer patients, with guidance on what information is needed.</p> <p>HealthPathways contains the most up-to-date information and includes a variety of pathways in opioid management, naloxone, prescription shopping, pain management, and alcohol and other drugs. It also includes what a GP can prescribe and when extra training is required through RACGP.</p> | <p>Alcohol and drug use pathways</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alcohol Screening and Brief Intervention • Alcohol Withdrawal • Benzodiazepine Dependence and withdrawal • Cannabis Use • Drug Seeking Behaviours • Opioid Dependence • Medications Assisted treatment of Opioid Dependence (MATOD) • Opioid Pharmacotherapy Dispensing - Information for Pharmacists • Prescribing Naloxone • Psychostimulant Use • Drug and Alcohol Support • Drug and Alcohol Referrals <p>Other related health pathways</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Medicinal Cannabis Victoria • Poisoning and Drug Overdose • Clozapine Monitoring • Clozapine Prescribing Support |

CLINICAL RESOURCES

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| <p>RACGP</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alcohol and other drugs • Supporting smoking cessation: A guide for health professionals • Key principles for appropriate opioid prescribing in general practice • Drugs of dependence: Responding to requests • Training/support: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Medication Assisted Treatment for Opioid Dependence (MATOD) – I want access to training/modules |
| <p>Training/support</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Practice nurse video series Pharmacotherapy Area-Based Networks (pabn.org.au): A two-session online program designed to upskill general practice nurses, enabling them to take a more active role in the care of patients receiving opioid replacement therapy. • The Victorian drug and alcohol clinical advisory service (DACAS) is a free specialist phone consultancy service for health professionals. • ECHO Peer Support model: covers all aspects of opioid management in primary care, including prescription and illicit opioid misuse/abuse and addiction, opioids and addiction in chronic pain management, medication assisted treatments for opioid use disorder (MAT, MATOD, methadone, buprenorphine), overdose, regulations and opioid prescribing, trauma-informed care and dual diagnosis. • Opioid education and support Victorian Opioid Management ECHO (pabn.org.au) Accredited RACGP/ACRRM CPD • Victorian Opioid Management ECHO • The Pharmacotherapy Area-Based Networks Provide opioid pharmacotherapy support for primary care medical and nurse practitioners, nurses, pharmacists and other clinicians across Victoria. • Turning Point AOD intake assessment online learning program • Naloxone Community Overdose and Education program • SafeScript Training Hub - VTPHNA • Meducate On-demand education solutions for doctors and health professionals - RACGP CPD provider. • Video resource - stigma Pharmacotherapy Area-Based Networks |
| <p>MBS</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • RACGP Whole of Practice Resources – Optimising the MBS for patients who use alcohol and other drugs |
| <p>Referrals ACSO central intake for Murray PHN region for AOD treatment</p> | <p>Australian Community Support Organisation (ACSO) delivers specialist assessments, treatment planning and brokerage across a range of different support services and programs Alcohol & Other Drugs (AOD) ACSO (relevant withdrawal services)</p> <p>Referrals: If you would like to make a professional referral on someone's behalf, complete ASCO's professional intake form.</p> <p>Click here to access the professional referrals page.</p> |

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| <p>Prescribing opioid pharmacotherapy</p> <p>Medication Assisted Treatment of Opioid Dependence (MATOD)</p> | <p>The Victorian Department of Health’s Policy for Maintenance Pharmacotherapy for Opioid Dependence was amended in April 2021, to allow all medical practitioners to prescribe selected buprenorphine formulations for up to 10 patients without undertaking the formal RACGP pharmacotherapy training. This is an important change to improve patient access to pharmacotherapy.</p> <p>The formulations which any general practitioner may prescribe are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Suboxone - buprenorphine/naloxone film (daily, regularly supervised dosing) • Buvidal - buprenorphine subcutaneous depot (weekly-monthly injection) • Sublocade - buprenorphine subcutaneous depot (monthly injection). <p>The Brief clinical guidelines for long-acting injectable buprenorphine (Word document) were updated in 2021 and are available at the Department of Health Pharmacotherapy hub.</p> |
| <p>SafeScript</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SafeScript is a clinical tool that provides access to a patient’s prescription history for high-risk medicines to enable safer clinical decisions. It is a real-time prescription monitoring initiative, designed to be integrated into clinical workflow. SafeScript is available to all registered clinicians through a secure web portal at www.safescript.vic.gov.au • For prescribers and pharmacists (health.vic.gov.au) • SafeScript Training Hub - VTPHNA |
| <p>Assessment and screening tools</p> | <p>Alcohol and drug use HealthPathways:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information and Advice for Clinicians (turningpoint.org.au) • Screening and assessment tools (turningpoint.org.au) The following screening and assessment tools are commonly used: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Alcohol, Smoking and Substance Involvement Screening Test (ASSIST) – Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test (AUDIT) – Indigenous Risk Impact Screen (IRIS) • Mental health screening tools: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Psycheck – DASS 21 (Depression, Anxiety, Stress Scales) – Kessler 10 (K-10) – Mental State Examination |
| <p>Smoking and vaping</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quit Centre’s comprehensive and practical resources and training are created by health professionals with extensive knowledge of smoking and vaping cessation. • Vaping - Alcohol and Drug Foundation (adf.org.au) |
| <p>Young people</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alcohol & Other Drugs (AOD) • Alcohol, other drugs and mental health in young people - A resource package for General Practitioners - Alcohol and Drug Foundation (adf.org.au) • Contact Youth Drug and Alcohol Advice (YoDAA) on 1800 458 685 or 03 9415 8881 for information, counselling and referral to youth-specific alcohol and other drug services • Drug/alcohol support Youth solutions • Alcohol (turningpoint.org.au) |

Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander peoples

- ACSO: [Alcohol & Other Drugs \(AOD\)](#)
- [Alcohol and Other Drugs Knowledge Centre](#) provides the evidence base to reduce harmful AOD use in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.
- [Indigenous Risk Impact Screen \(IRIS\)](#)
- Smoking – [Quit services for Aboriginal communities - Better Health Channel](#)
- [Youth Solutions - Promoting Health, Preventing Harm](#)

SERVICES:

- [Winja Ulupna Women's Recovery Centre for Koori women](#), Ngwala Willumbong Co-operative ph: 03 9510 3233.
- [Albury Wodonga Aboriginal Health Service](#)
- [Bendigo and District Aboriginal Co-operative \(BDAC\)](#)
- [Mallee District Aboriginal Services \(MDAS\)](#) Mildura, Swan Hill, Kerang
- [Murray Valley Aboriginal Co-operative \(MVAC\)](#) Robinvale
- [Rumbalara Aboriginal Co-operative](#) Shepparton and Mooroopna
- [Mungabareena Aboriginal Corporation \(MAC\)](#) Wodonga
- [Njernda Aboriginal Corporation Echuca](#)

Other resources

- [Drug and Alcohol Clinical Advisory Service \(DACAS\)](#)
- [DirectLine](#)
- [Pharmacotherapy Advocacy Mediation and Support Service \(PAMS\)](#)
- [Victorian Department of Health – Medicines and Poisons](#)
- [Services Australia Prescription Shopping Program](#)

INFORMATION FOR PATIENTS, FAMILIES AND CARERS

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| Referrals | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • acso.org.au/referrals |
| DirectLine | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DirectLine is a 24/7 information and advice line that is free, anonymous and confidential. People can talk to a professional counsellor who is experienced in alcohol and drug-related matters ph:1800 888 236 • Directline service finder |
| Self-assessment tool online | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Turning Point online self-assessment tool: will help figure out if drinking levels or drug use is a problem |
| Counselling online | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Counselling Online: provides online access to counselling services |
| Youth Drug and Alcohol Advice service | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • YoDAA is Victoria's 24/7 Youth Drug and Alcohol Advice service ph: 03 9415 8881. • headspace services can provide young people aged 12 to 25 with alcohol and other drug service support. Located in Albury Wodonga, Bendigo, Echuca, Mildura, Shepparton, Swan Hill and Wangaratta: murrayphn.org.au/headspace/ |
| Peak bodies | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alcohol and Drug Foundation (ADF) • Victorian Alcohol and Drug Association VAADA |
| Harm reduction resources | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Harm Reduction Victoria/Melbourne/Resources (hrvic.org.au): has created a large number of harm reduction resources informed by and for people who use drugs. |
| Resources for carers | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • path2help - Alcohol and Drug Foundation (adf.org.au): is a portal that aims to provide the most up-to-date and credible resources to assist people looking for ways to support their loved ones who use alcohol and/or other drugs. |
| Lifestyle and nutrition | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good Nutrition in AOD Recovery: Online learning + Quick 'n Easy Cooking Guide - QNADA |
| Asylum seeker or refugees | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • AOD issues in refugee and asylum seeker background communities eLearning - QNADA |

Are you interested in undertaking an alcohol and other drug quality improvement activity?

For further information or support, please contact your local [Quality Improvement Consultant](#), email: gpsupport@murrayphn.org.au or visit the general practice support page on our [website](#)