

Tuesday 30 August 2022

Overdose deaths in Victoria continue to decline in 2021

A new report released today by the Coroners Court of Victoria, shows that overdose deaths in Victoria during 2021 continued to decline from their 2018 peak.

The report, *Victorian Overdose Deaths 2012-2021*, is the first release of the 2021 Victorian overdose data and provides an analysis of demographic information and observable trends.

In 2018, following nearly a decade of year-on-year increases, Victoria reached a peak of 543 overdose deaths. There was a slight retreat from this peak in 2019 and 2020, and this declining trend continued into 2021 with 500 overdose deaths identified by the Coroners Court of Victoria.

Other key findings in the report include:

- Males are on average twice as likely as females to die from overdose, and people aged between 35 and 54 are most at risk.
- Metropolitan Melbourne accounts for slightly over three-quarters of overdose deaths, however the overdose death rate per head of population in Metropolitan Melbourne is very similar to the rate in Regional Victoria.
- A majority (73.6%) of overdose deaths involve multiple drugs.
- Pharmaceutical drugs contribute to 75.2% of overdose deaths in Victoria, with benzodiazepines being the most frequent contributing pharmaceutical drugs in the deaths.
- Heroin-involved overdose deaths have continued to decline, with 173 deaths in 2021, compared to 187 in 2020 and 212 in 2019.
- Overdose deaths involving methamphetamines have reached their highest number in a decade, with 137 people dying in 2021 compared to 34 in 2012.
- New psychoactive substances (NPS) are still an emerging concern, and there were 35 NPS-involved overdose deaths in 2021 up from 33 in 2020.

In Victoria, all deaths from suspected non-natural causes, including suspected overdoses, are required to be reported to the Coroners Court of Victoria. Suspected overdoses are recorded by the Court in the Victorian Overdose Deaths Register (VODR), which is the data source for this report.

Victoria's coroners regularly make use of the overdose deaths data to develop prevention-focused insights into issues as diverse as how doctors coordinate patient care; the regulation of certain prescription drugs; and the need for greater awareness around emerging illegal drugs.

The Court also shares data from the VODR with State and Commonwealth governments to inform their work in reducing drug-harms.

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Quotes from the Victorian State Coroner, Judge John Cain:

"While it is encouraging to see overdose deaths decline, it remains concerning that 500 Victorians lost their lives last year."

"These deaths are preventable and it is critical that we improve access to supports, treatment and education."

"Drug-related harms are always shifting, in response to changes in drug use, availability and regulation. Through our data we can detect these shifts early and respond quickly, to save lives."

A copy of the report can be accessed at:

<https://www.coronerscourt.vic.gov.au/victorian-overdose-deaths-2012-2021>

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