HRB Bulletin
National Drug Treatment Reporting System

2015 – 2021
Alcohol
Treatment Data

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Introituction

In this bulletin, trends in **treated problem alcohol use** are described for the seven-year period from 2015 to 2021. The data are taken 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.

Overview

In this seven-year period, 50,304 cases were treated for **alcohol** as a main problem.

- The number of treated cases recorded decreased from 7,618 in 2015 to 6,859 in 2021.

- The proportion of new cases decreased slightly from 46.6% in 2015 to 44.1% in 2021.

Level of problem alcohol use

- In 2021, the **median age** at which cases first started drinking alcohol was 16 years, unchanged from previous years.

- Almost two-in-every-three (65.9%) cases were classified as **alcohol dependent**.

- In 2021, 62.3% of new cases were classified as **alcohol dependent**, compared to 57.0% in 2015.

- The proportion of previously treated cases classified as **alcohol dependent** increased from 66.7% in 2015 to 70.2% in 2021.

Socio-demographics

- In 2021, the median age of treated cases was 42 years, an increase from 41 in previous years (43 years for females; 41 years for males).

- The majority of cases in 2021 were male (62.6%).

- The proportion of cases with an Irish Traveller ethnicity was 1.9% in 2015 and 2.4% in 2021.

- Almost half (48.8%) of cases in 2021 were **unemployed**.

- In 2021, 8.3% of cases were **homeless** (females 3.9%; males 10.9%).

- The proportion of cases that were **homeless** increased from 7.5% in 2015 to 8.3% in 2021.

- In 2021, 21.2% (1,451) of cases treated for alcohol were currently residing with children aged 17 years or younger.

Polydrug use

Polydrug use was reported by almost one-quarter (23.7%) of those treated for problem alcohol use in 2021. This was an increase from 18.7% in 2015.

- **Cannabis** was the most common additional drug used. The proportion of cases reporting cannabis use declined from 59.9% in 2015 to 55.3% in 2021.

- **Cocaine** was the second most common additional drug recorded. This increased from 32.5% in 2015 to 53.9% in 2021.

- Of cases with cocaine as an additional problem in 2021, 56.9% were males and 46.8% were females.

- **Benzodiazepines** were the third most common additional drug reported (21.9%) in 2021.

- **Opioids** were the fourth most common additional drug reported (12.5%) in 2021.

NDTRS cases 2015 to 2021

This bulletin presents **alcohol treatment data** from the NDTRS for the period 2015–2021.[1] Data in this bulletin supersede all previously published data from NDTRS publications.

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 item 5.1.47).[2] Included in the NDTRS are cases treated in outpatient, inpatient, low threshold services, general practitioners and those treated in prison.[3]

In the seven-year period, a total of 50,304 cases treated for problem alcohol use reported alcohol as the main problem substance.[4,5]

The number of treated cases recorded decreased from 7,618 in 2015 to 6,859 in 2021 **(Table 1)**.[6,7] 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. Therefore, the NDTRS data for 2020 and 2021 should be interpreted in this context, where the public health restrictions affected both data returns and the capacity of some services.[8]

Between 2020 and 2021, the number of treated cases increased by 17.8%, from 5,824 cases to 6,859 cases.

The proportion of new cases (never treated before) decreased from 46.6% in 2015 to 44.1% in 2021. The proportion of previously treated cases decreased from 51.8% in 2015 to 45.1% in 2019, but increased to 52.4% in 2021.

6,859

total number of cases treated for
problem alcohol use

44%

new cases

52%

previously treated cases
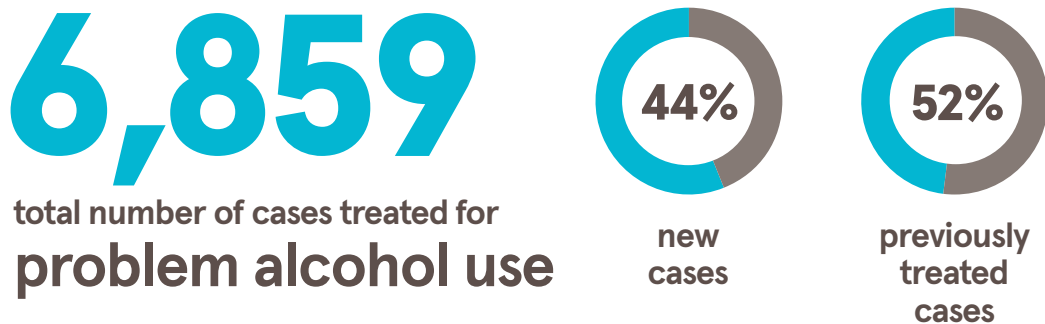
Figures relate to 2021

Type of service provider

In 2021, three-in-every-five (61.0%) cases were treated in outpatient facilities. The proportion of cases treated in residential settings decreased from 38.3% in 2015 to 28.8% in 2020 but increased to 30.6% in 2021 **(Table 2)**.[8]

In 2021, the proportion of cases treated in low threshold services was 5.9% while the proportion of cases treated in prison was 2.5%. General practitioners do not currently report alcohol treatment figures to the NDTRS.

Polydrug use

In 2021, 23.7% of cases treated for problem alcohol use reported polydrug use (problem use of alcohol and one or more other substances) **(Table 3)**.

In 2021, cannabis (55.3%) was the most common additional drug reported by cases with polydrug use, followed by cocaine (53.9%) and benzodiazepines (21.9%), similar to previous years **(Table 4)**.

The proportion of polydrug cases reporting cannabis as an additional problem decreased from 59.9% in 2015 to 55.3% in 2021.

The proportion of polydrug cases reporting cocaine as an additional problem increased from 32.5% in 2015 to 53.9% in 2021.

The proportion of polydrug cases treated for benzodiazepines as an additional problem decreased from 25.1% in 2015 to 21.9% in 2021.

Among new cases, the patterns of additional drug use are similar, with cannabis, cocaine and benzodiazepines the most commonly reported drugs.

Most common additional drugs

55%
cannabis

54%
cocaine

22%
benzodiazepines

13%
opioids
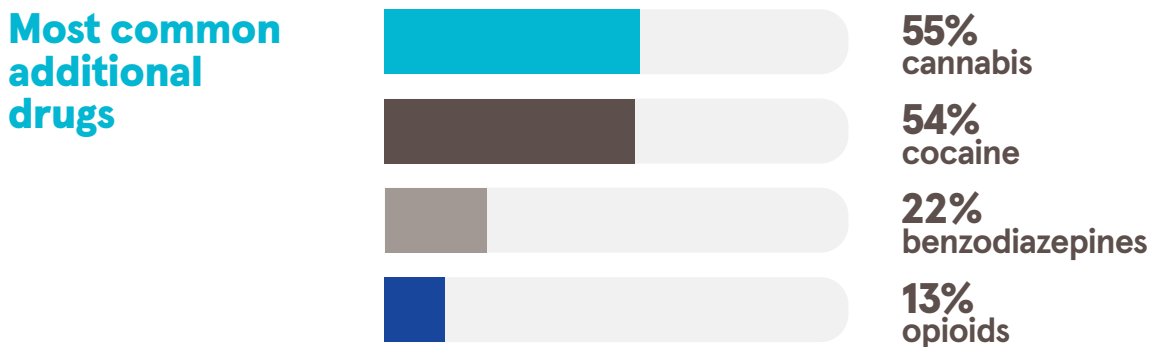
Figures relate to 2021

Table 1: Number of cases treated for alcohol as a main problem, by treatment status, NDTRS 2015 to 2021

	2015		2016		2017		2018		2019		2020		2021	
	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)
All cases	**7618**		**7643**		**7350**		**7464**		**7546**		**5824**		**6859**	
New cases	3553	(46.6)	3678	(48.1)	3500	(47.6)	3230	(43.3)	3296	(43.7)	2490	(42.8)	3026	(44.1)
Previously treated cases	3948	(51.8)	3783	(49.5)	3652	(49.7)	3705	(49.6)	3400	(45.1)	3170	(54.4)	3596	(52.4)
Treatment status unknown	117	(1.5)	182	(2.4)	198	(2.7)	529	(7.1)	850	(11.3)	164	(2.8)	237	(3.5)

Table 2: Number of cases treated for alcohol as a main problem, by type of service provider, NDTRS 2015 to 2021

	2015		2016		2017		2018		2019		2020		2021	
	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)
All cases	**7618**		**7643**		**7350**		**7464**		**7546**		**5824**		**6859**	
Outpatient	4018	(52.7)	4005	(52.4)	3894	(53.0)	4087	(54.8)	4093	(54.2)	3505	(60.2)	4183	(61.0)
Inpatient*	2916	(38.3)	2994	(39.2)	2949	(40.1)	2792	(37.4)	2806	(37.2)	1680	(28.8)	2102	(30.6)
Low threshold	480	(6.3)	495	(6.5)	436	(5.9)	451	(6.0)	469	(6.2)	467	(8.0)	403	(5.9)
Prison	204	(2.7)	149	(1.9)	71	(1.0)	134	(1.8)	178	(2.4)	172	(3.0)	171	(2.5)

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

Table 3: Polydrug use in cases treated for alcohol as a main problem, NDTRS 2015 to 2021

	2015		2016		2017		2018		2019		2020		2021	
	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)
All cases	**7618**		**7643**		**7350**		**7464**		**7546**		**5824**		**6859**	
Alcohol only	6196	(81.3)	6315	(82.6)	5898	(80.2)	5861	(78.5)	5976	(79.2)	4477	(76.9)	5231	(76.3)
Reported other additional drug(s)	1422	(18.7)	1328	(17.4)	1452	(19.8)	1603	(21.5)	1570	(20.8)	1347	(23.1)	1628	(23.7)

Table 4: Polydrug use – additional problem drugs for all cases and new cases, NDTRS 2015 to 2021

	2015		2016		2017		2018		2019		2020		2021	
	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)
All cases	**1422**		**1328**		**1452**		**1603**		**1570**		**1347**		**1628**	
Cannabis	852	(59.9)	766	(57.7)	878	(60.5)	940	(58.6)	881	(56.1)	740	(54.9)	901	(55.3)
Cocaine	462	(32.5)	470	(35.4)	607	(41.8)	772	(48.2)	844	(53.8)	729	(54.1)	877	(53.9)
Benzodiazepines	357	(25.1)	380	(28.6)	332	(22.9)	375	(23.4)	342	(21.8)	331	(24.6)	357	(21.9)
Opioids	200	(14.1)	202	(15.2)	207	(14.3)	212	(13.2)	206	(13.1)	156	(11.6)	203	(12.5)
MDMA (ecstasy)	142	(10.0)	99	(7.5)	134	(9.2)	185	(11.5)	146	(9.3)	104	(7.7)	101	(6.2)
Amphetamines	66	(4.6)	51	(3.8)	49	(3.4)	57	(3.6)	46	(2.9)	38	(2.8)	55	(3.4)
NPS	27	(1.9)	30	(2.3)	18	(1.2)	15	(0.9)	20	(1.3)	24	(1.8)	26	(1.6)
Z Drugs*	39	(2.7)	33	(2.5)	27	(1.9)	19	(1.2)	18	(1.1)	17	(1.3)	18	(1.1)
Volatile inhalants	~	~	~	~	6	(0.4)	~	~	~	~	~	~	~	~
Other	27	(1.9)	38	(2.9)	62	(4.3)	71	(4.4)	70	(4.5)	43	(3.2)	50	(3.1)
New cases	**625**		**593**		**656**		**635**		**659**		**570**		**640**	
Cannabis	385	(61.6)	340	(57.3)	408	(62.2)	390	(61.4)	394	(59.8)	325	(57.0)	373	(58.3)
Cocaine	225	(36.0)	221	(37.3)	290	(44.2)	331	(52.1)	365	(55.4)	335	(58.8)	352	(55.0)
Benzodiazepines	109	(17.4)	149	(25.1)	122	(18.6)	106	(16.7)	111	(16.8)	101	(17.7)	104	(16.3)
Opioids	50	(8.0)	62	(10.5)	63	(9.6)	45	(7.1)	46	(7.0)	40	(7.0)	43	(6.7)
MDMA (ecstasy)	72	(11.5)	57	(9.6)	57	(8.7)	77	(12.1)	64	(9.7)	55	(9.6)	41	(6.4)
Amphetamines	28	(4.5)	19	(3.2)	22	(3.4)	22	(3.5)	21	(3.2)	17	(3.0)	13	(2.0)
NPS	14	(2.2)	10	(1.7)	8	(1.2)	~	~	6	(0.9)	8	(1.4)	7	(1.1)
Z Drugs*	9	(1.4)	7	(1.2)	13	(2.0)	~	~	~	~	0	0	6	(0.9)
Volatile inhalants	~	~	~	~	~	~	0	0	~	~	~	~	~	~
Other	10	(1.6)	18	(3.0)	29	(4.4)	21	(3.3)	27	(4.1)	24	(4.2)	21	(3.3)

*   Z-Drugs are non-benzodiazepine hypnotic sedative drugs, e.g., zolpidem, zopiclone

~   Cells with five cases or fewer

Level of problem alcohol use

In 2021, the median age at which cases commenced alcohol use was 16 years, unchanged from previous years **(Table 5)**.

In 2021, the majority (65.9%) were classified as **alcohol dependent** (by the health care professional treating them), compared to 62.0% in 2015 **(Box 1)**.

The proportion of *new cases* (those who have never been treated for problem alcohol use before) which were classified as alcohol dependent decreased from a peak of 66.8% in 2017 to 57.2% in 2020 and increased again to 62.3% in 2021.

Box 1: Level of Problem Alcohol Use

Hazardous: a pattern of alcohol use that increases the risk of harmful consequences for the person. The term describes drinking over the recommended limits by a person who has no apparent alcohol-related health problems. Includes experimental drinking. [AUDIT score 8 – 15: Increasing risk][9]

Harmful: a pattern of use that results in damage to physical or mental health; can include negative social consequences. [AUDIT score 16 – 19: High risk][9]

Dependent: a cluster of behavioural, cognitive, and physiological symptoms. Typically, includes a strong desire to consume alcohol, impaired control over its use, persistent drinking despite harmful consequences, a higher priority given to drinking than to other activities and obligations, increased alcohol tolerance. Also, notably a physical withdrawal reaction when alcohol use is discontinued. [AUDIT score 20+: Possible dependence][9]

Table 5: Age first started drinking and level of problem alcohol use, NDTRS 2015 to 2021

	2015		2016		2017		2018		2019		2020		2021	
	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)
All cases	**7618**		**7643**		**7350**		**7464**		**7546**		**5824**		**6859**	
Median age first started drinking (range[10])	16	12-22	16	12-22	16	12-22	15	12-22	16	12-21	16	12-21	16	12-22
Level of problem alcohol use*														
Hazardous	673	(8.8)	748	(9.8)	711	(9.7)	746	(10.0)	864	(11.4)	807	(13.9)	830	(12.1)
Harmful	1396	(18.3)	1279	(16.7)	1174	(16.0)	1236	(16.6)	1374	(18.2)	1087	(18.7)	1284	(18.7)
Dependent	4719	(62.0)	4957	(64.9)	5290	(72.0)	5300	(71.0)	5142	(68.1)	3768	(64.7)	4522	(65.9)
New cases	**3553**		**3677**		**3500**		**3230**		**3296**		**2490**		**3026**	
Median age first started drinking (range[10])	16	12-22	16	12-22	16	12-22	16	12-22	16	12-22	16	12-22	16	12-22
Level of problem alcohol use*														
Hazardous	370	(10.4)	426	(11.6)	412	(11.8)	385	(11.9)	406	(12.3)	376	(15.1)	395	(13.1)
Harmful	802	(22.6)	731	(19.9)	674	(19.3)	677	(21.0)	714	(21.7)	633	(25.4)	661	(21.8)
Dependent	2026	(57.0)	2212	(60.2)	2339	(66.8)	2118	(65.6)	2129	(64.6)	1425	(57.2)	1885	(62.3)
Previously treated cases	**3946**		**3783**		**3652**		**3705**		**3400**		**3170**		**3596**	
Median age first started drinking (range[10])	15	12-22	15	12-22	15	12-22	15	11-22	15	12-21	16	12-21	16	12-21
Level of problem alcohol use*														
Hazardous	285	(7.2)	300	(7.9)	277	(7.6)	297	(8.0)	330	(9.7)	397	(12.5)	394	(11.0)
Harmful	572	(14.5)	515	(13.6)	445	(12.2)	479	(12.9)	450	(13.2)	417	(13.2)	578	(16.1)
Dependent	2633	(66.7)	2649	(70.0)	2865	(78.5)	2847	(76.8)	2561	(75.3)	2284	(72.1)	2525	(70.2)
Treatment status unknown	**117**		**182**		**198**		**529**		**850**		**164**		**237**	

* Where recorded. The proportion of cases where level of alcohol use is not known is not shown in the table.

Socio-demographic characteristics

The median age at which cases entered treatment remained stable at 41 years from 2015 to 2020, then increased to 42 years in 2021 **(Table 6)**.

The proportion of cases aged 17 years or younger increased slightly from 1.4% in 2015 to 1.6% in 2021.

The majority of cases in 2021 were males (62.6%), similar to previous years. A small number of cases (five cases or fewer) identified their gender as non-binary[11], an option added to the NDTRS at the end of the 2021 reporting period. The number of cases where gender was not known was also five or fewer.

The proportion of cases recorded as homeless increased from 7.5% in 2015 to 8.3% in 2021.

In 2021, 2.4% of cases identified as Irish Traveller compared to 1.9% in 2015.[12]

In 2021, 20.7% of cases reported ceasing education (for the first time) before the age of 16 years compared to 25.8% in 2015.

Just under half of reported cases in 2021 were unemployed. This rate decreased over the reporting period from 55.3% in 2015 to 48.8% in 2021.

In each year, rates of homelessness, ceasing education before age 16, and unemployment were higher among previously treated cases than among new cases.

In 2021, 21.2% (1,451) of cases treated for alcohol were **currently residing with children**[13] aged 17 years or younger. Males accounted for 46.4% (673), and females 53.6% (777) of these cases.

Over a fifth of all cases (21.4%, 1,466 cases) treated for alcohol in 2021 had children aged 17 years or younger who were **not currently residing with them**.[14] Almost three-quarters of these cases (72.1%, 1057 cases) were males, and 27.9% were females (409 cases).

42 years
median treatment age

63%
males

8%
homeless

49%
unemployed

Figures relate to 2021

Table 6: Socio-demographic characteristics of cases treated for alcohol as a main problem, NDTRS 2015 to 2021

	2015		2016		2017		2018		2019		2020		2021	
	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)
All cases	**7618**		**7643**		**7350**		**7464**		**7546**		**5824**		**6846**	
Median age (range[10])	41	21-64	41	21-64	41	21-64	41	21-65	41	22-64	41	21-64	42	22-64
Under 18	103	(1.4)	124	(1.6)	112	(1.5)	114	(1.5)	107	(1.4)	99	(1.7)	109	(1.6)
Male	4961	(65.1)	4884	(63.9)	4769	(64.9)	4812	(64.5)	4835	(64.1)	3604	(61.9)	4297	(62.6)
Homeless	572	(7.5)	613	(8.0)	620	(8.4)	713	(9.6)	654	(8.7)	494	(8.5)	567	(8.3)
Traveller	141	(1.9)	161	(2.1)	118	(1.6)	145	(1.9)	178	(2.4)	121	(2.1)	167	(2.4)
Education ceased before 16 years	1965	(25.8)	1808	(23.7)	1726	(23.5)	1727	(23.1)	1739	(23.0)	1235	(21.2)	1422	(20.7)
In paid employment	1724	(22.6)	1889	(24.7)	2056	(28.0)	2067	(27.7)	2125	(28.2)	1639	(28.1)	2111	(30.8)
Unemployed	4215	(55.3)	4110	(53.8)	3827	(52.1)	3783	(50.7)	3731	(49.4)	2865	(49.2)	3345	(48.8)
Retired/unable to work including disability	925	(12.1)	964	(12.6)	887	(12.1)	958	(12.8)	1004	(13.3)	848	(14.6)	931	(13.6)
New cases	**3553**		**3678**		**3500**		**3230**		**3296**		**2490**		**3026**	
Median age (range[10])	39	20-64	40	20-64	40	19-64	39	19-65	40	20-65	40	19-64	40	20-65
Under 18	83	(2.3)	87	(2.4)	90	(2.6)	87	(2.7)	83	(2.5)	82	(3.3)	90	(3.0)
Male	2279	(64.1)	2290	(62.3)	2234	(63.8)	2087	(64.6)	2080	(63.1)	1498	(60.2)	1841	(60.8)
Homeless	148	(4.2)	160	(4.4)	166	(4.7)	191	(5.9)	207	(6.3)	149	(6.0)	165	(5.5)
Traveller	60	(1.7)	78	(2.1)	50	(1.4)	59	(1.8)	73	(2.2)	46	(1.8)	70	(2.3)
Education ceased before 16 years	815	(22.9)	768	(20.9)	768	(21.9)	639	(19.8)	716	(21.7)	464	(18.6)	568	(18.8)
In paid employment	1014	(28.5)	1176	(32.0)	1209	(34.5)	1165	(36.1)	1116	(33.9)	890	(35.7)	1106	(36.5)
Unemployed	1725	(48.6)	1690	(45.9)	1587	(45.3)	1417	(43.9)	1458	(44.2)	1069	(42.9)	1301	(43.0)
Retired/unable to work including disability	384	(10.8)	404	(11.0)	367	(10.5)	354	(11.0)	390	(11.8)	278	(11.2)	358	(11.8)
Previously treated cases	**3948**		**3783**		**3652**		**3705**		**3400**		**3170**		**3590**	
Median age (range[10])	42	23-64	43	24-64	43	24-64	42	23-65	42	24-65	43	25-64	43	25-64
Under 18	19	(0.5)	20	(0.5)	17	(0.5)	20	(0.5)	15	(0.4)	13	(0.4)	18	(0.5)
Male	2599	(65.8)	2480	(65.6)	2394	(65.6)	2382	(64.3)	2249	(66.1)	1997	(63.0)	2285	(63.5)
Homeless	405	(10.3)	433	(11.4)	432	(11.8)	473	(12.8)	378	(11.1)	325	(10.3)	369	(10.3)
Traveller	77	(2.0)	70	(1.9)	62	(1.7)	67	(1.8)	81	(2.4)	68	(2.1)	83	(2.3)
Education ceased before 16 years	1124	(28.5)	1003	(26.5)	912	(25.0)	957	(25.8)	847	(24.9)	734	(23.2)	798	(22.2)
In paid employment	688	(17.4)	674	(17.8)	804	(22.0)	778	(21.0)	744	(21.9)	726	(22.9)	946	(26.3)
Unemployed	2423	(61.4)	2331	(61.6)	2145	(58.7)	2109	(56.9)	1914	(56.3)	1709	(53.9)	1920	(53.4)
Retired/unable to work including disability	527	(13.3)	540	(14.3)	498	(13.6)	535	(14.4)	502	(14.8)	538	(17.0)	542	(15.1)
Treatment status unknown	**117**		**182**		**198**		**529**		**850**		**164**		**237**	

Focus on gender

This section focuses on some gender differences between cases treated for alcohol as the main problem in 2021 **(Table 7)**.

Females

• Median age was 43 years; median age for new cases was 42 years.

• 30.8% aged 50 years or over.

• 3.9% were homeless.

• 63% were classified as alcohol dependent.

• 18.6% reported polydrug use; most commonly cocaine and cannabis.

• Cocaine decreased from 50.3% in 2020 to 46.8% in 2021.

• Preferred types of alcohol were spirits (36.0%) and wine (34.6%).

• Median number of standard drinks consumed on a typical drinking day was 15 (range 6–32) (among cases who had consumed alcohol in the month prior to treatment).

• The risk of harm from alcohol use increases in line with the amount consumed. The low risk drinking guidelines for females **is up to 11 standard drinks in a week** with drinks spaced out over the week, with two to three alcohol free days per week.[15]

Additional problem drug – all cases

- **males** (dark blue)
- **females** (light blue)

Cannabis	Cocaine	Benzodiaze-pines	Opioids
51% / 57%	47% / 57%	24% / 21%	15% / 12%

Figures relate to 2021

Males

- Median age was 41 years; median age for new cases was 39 years.

- 26.6% aged 50 years or over.

- 10.9% were homeless.

- 67.7% were classified as alcohol dependent.

- 26.8% reported polydrug use; most commonly cannabis and cocaine.

- Preferred types of alcohol were beer (39.8%) and spirits (38.7%).

- Median number of standard drinks consumed on a typical drinking day was 20 (range 7–40) (among cases who had consumed alcohol in the month prior to treatment).

- The risk of harm from alcohol use increases in line with the amount consumed. Low risk drinking guidelines for males **is up to 17 standard drinks in a week** with drinks spaced out over the week, with two to three alcohol free days per week.[15]

Table 7: Socio-demographic and polydrug characteristics by gender for cases treated for alcohol as a main problem, NDTRS 2021

	Female		Male	
	n	(%)	n	(%)
All cases	**2557**	**(37.3)**	**4297**	**(62.6)**
Median age (range[10])	43	21–66	41	22–64
Under 35	599	(23.4)	1362	(31.8)
35–49	1164	(45.5)	1784	(41.5)
50+	788	(30.8)	1144	(26.6)
Median age (first used alcohol)	16	12–25	15	12–21
Traveller	39	(1.5)	128	(3.0)
Education ceased before 16	405	(15.8)	1016	(23.6)
In paid employment	792	(31.0)	1318	(30.7)
Unemployed	1125	(44.0)	2218	(51.6)
Homeless	99	(3.9)	468	(10.9)
Dependent alcohol use	1612	(63.0)	2908	(67.7)
Reported other additional drug(s)	*476*	*(18.6)*	*1150*	*(26.8)*
Cannabis	*242*	*(50.8)*	*658*	*(57.2)*
Cocaine	*223*	*(46.8)*	*654*	*(56.9)*
Benzodiazepines	*112*	*(23.5)*	*245*	*(21.3)*
Opioids	*69*	*(14.5)*	*134*	*(11.7)*
New cases	**1184**	**(46.3)**	**1841**	**(42.8)**
Median age (range[10])	42	18–68	39	(21–64)
Under 35	317	(26.7)	696	(37.8)
35–49	522	(44.1)	713	(38.7)
50+	344	(29.1)	430	(23.4)
Median age (first used alcohol)	16	12–25	16	12–21
Traveller	13	(1.1)	57	(3.1)
Education ceased before 16	174	(14.7)	394	(21.4)
In paid employment	421	(35.6)	685	(37.2)
Unemployed	456	(38.5)	845	(45.9)
Homeless	26	(2.2)	139	(7.6)
Dependent alcohol use	707	(59.7)	1178	(64.0)
Reported other additional drug(s)	*190*	*(16.0)*	*449*	*(24.4)*
Cannabis	*107*	*(56.3)*	*265*	*(59.0)*
Cocaine	*98*	*(51.6)*	*254*	*(56.6)*
Benzodiazepines	*37*	*(19.5)*	*67*	*(14.9)*
Opioids	*18*	*(9.5)*	*25*	*(5.6)*

Community Healthcare Organisation (CHO) area of residence

In 2021, the highest number of cases treated for problem alcohol use **resided**[16] in CHO 9 **(Table 8)** (see below for reference to areas included in each CHO). The number of cases fluctuated for all CHOs over the period.

It should be noted, however, that poor levels of participation in the NDTRS by alcohol services in some areas affects this geographic analysis.[5] A breakdown of alcohol cases by county of residence is presented in Appendix A.

Table 8: Number of cases treated for alcohol as a main problem, by CHO area of residence, NDTRS 2015 to 2021

	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
All cases	**7618**	**7643**	**7350**	**7464**	**7546**	**5824**	**6859**
CHO 1	870	945	952	896	1000	793	882
CHO 2	430	452	395	398	438	251	324
CHO 3	489	507	487	536	570	424	483
CHO 4	1365	1411	1242	1293	1290	943	971
CHO 5	1349	1264	1316	1356	1280	979	1050
CHO 6	314	245	298	341	329	317	424
CHO 7	873	800	842	912	894	743	974
CHO 8	880	856	727	635	649	431	571
CHO 9	852	912	882	933	999	848	1102
Other/unknown	196	251	209	164	97	95	78

	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
New cases	**3553**	**3678**	**3500**	**3230**	**3296**	**2490**	**3026**
CHO 1	430	487	434	303	446	289	326
CHO 2	188	227	216	158	215	96	122
CHO 3	247	256	234	253	294	181	223
CHO 4	646	694	641	579	569	424	459
CHO 5	619	586	630	632	570	386	405
CHO 6	154	108	152	174	141	158	189
CHO 7	383	360	355	366	378	313	470
CHO 8	440	435	360	306	332	237	319
CHO 9	379	427	404	391	319	354	472
Other/unknown	67	98	74	68	32	52	41
Previously treated cases	**3948**	**3783**	**3652**	**3705**	**3400**	**3170**	**3596**
CHO 1	431	434	477	489	476	482	525
CHO 2	240	218	177	195	195	152	184
CHO 3	236	247	248	246	257	235	250
CHO 4	710	690	594	654	668	512	488
CHO 5	723	661	658	638	632	586	623
CHO 6	150	127	134	157	132	143	209
CHO 7	468	412	453	490	381	384	464
CHO 8	427	411	339	290	252	189	240
CHO 9	445	447	447	468	363	450	580
Other/unknown	118	136	125	78	44	37	33

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

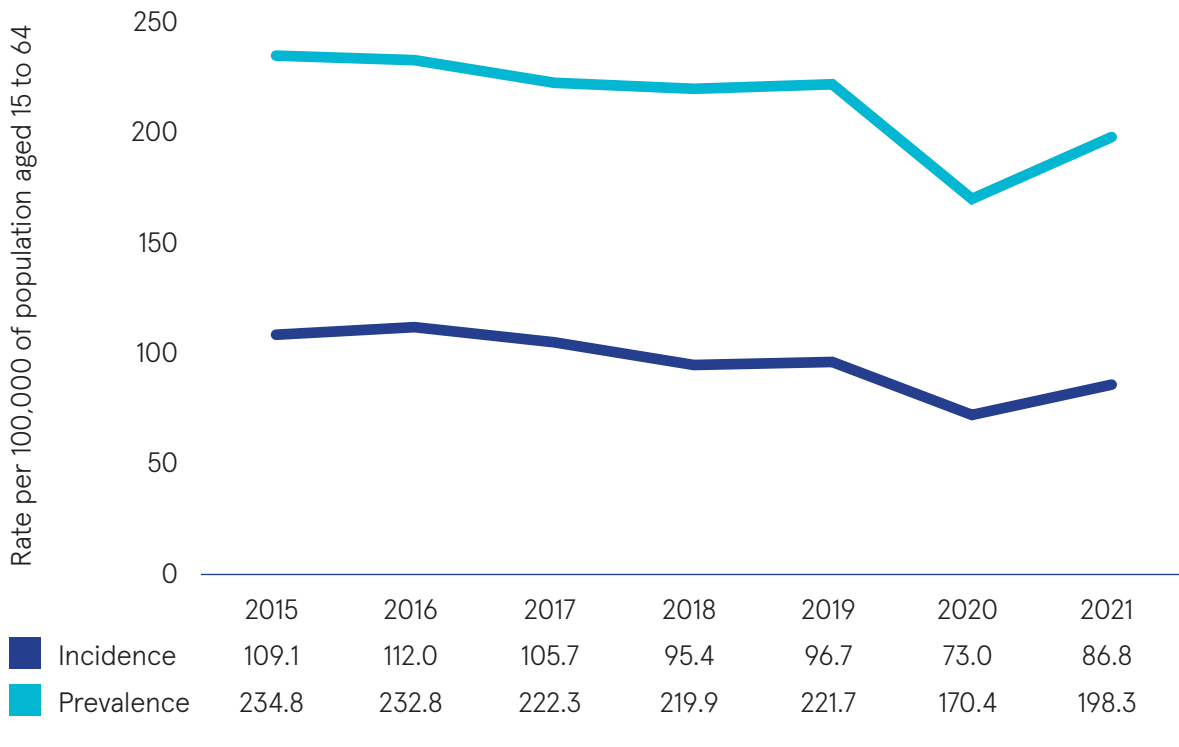# Incidence and prevalence of treatment

Annual rates for the incidence (new cases) and prevalence (all cases) of treated problem alcohol use were calculated per 100,000 of the population age 15 to 64 years based on census figures from the Central Statistics Office (CSO)[17] **(Figure 1)**.

Incidence decreased from 109.1 cases per 100,000 in 2015, to 86.8 cases in 2021.

Prevalence, which includes both new cases and those cases returning to treatment, also decreased from 234.8 cases per 100,000 in 2015 to 198.3 cases per 100,000 in 2021.

Changes in incidence and prevalence should be interpreted with caution for recent years due to the proportion of cases where treatment status was unknown (3.4% in 2021), and the challenges presented to service providers and those who avail of services due to COVID-19 in 2021.[8]

Figure 1: Incidence and prevalence of treated problem alcohol use per 100,000 of the 15 to 64-year-old population, NDTRS 2015 to 2021

	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Incidence	109.1	112.0	105.7	95.4	96.7	73.0	86.8
Prevalence	234.8	232.8	222.3	219.9	221.7	170.4	198.3

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, and especially so in a period that has been so challenging due to the COVID-19 pandemic and related restrictions.

Notes

1. This document may be cited as: Lynch T, O'Neill D, and Lyons S (2022) *Alcohol Treatment in Ireland 2015 to 2021*. StatLink Series 9. Dublin: Health Research Board. Available at https://www.drugsandalcohol.ie36072 and at www.hrb.ie/publications.

2. 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/

3. More detailed information on the NDTRS methodology can be found in previously published HRB Trends Series papers at www.hrb.ie/data-collections-evidence/alcohol-and-drug-treatment/publications/

4. It must be noted that not all alcohol treatment services were participating in the NDTRS during the period under review. Therefore, it may be assumed that the data presented in this bulletin under-estimates the true extent of treated alcohol use in Ireland.

5. Coverage of services was 70% for 2021. The NDTRS make every attempt to ensure as complete coverage of services as possible. However, the number of services participating in the reporting system varies annually, making small fluctuations in the numbers of cases more difficult to interpret.

6. 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.

7. The NDTRS interactive tables will be updated to reflect the changes at www.drugsandalcohol.ie/tables/

8. The capacity and functionality of treatment services was 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)

9. Babor T, Higgins-Biddle J, Saunders J and Monteiro M (2001) *Audit: the Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test: guides for use in primary health care*. Geneva: World Health Organization https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/audit-the-alcohol-use-disorders-identification-test-guidelines-for-use-in-primary-health-care

10. Age range presented is 5th percentile to 95th percentile (90% of cases are included within this range).

11. 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.

12. Based on the 2016 Census, the proportion of Irish Travellers in the general population is 0.7% (Central Statistics Office, 2022) www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-cp8iter/p8iter/p8e/

13. 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; nonrelated 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.

14. 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.

15. Drink guidelines are taken from the Health Service Executive (HSE) at www.hse.ie/eng/health/hl/change/alcohol/

16. 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.

17. Population data is taken from the Central Statistics Office at https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-pme/populationandmigrationestimatesapril2021/

Appendix A:
Number of alcohol cases treated, by county, NDTRS 2015 to 2021

	2015		2016		2017		2018		2019		2020		2021	
	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)
All cases	7618		7643		7350		7464		7546		5824		6859	
Carlow	117	(1.5)	86	(1.1)	99	(1.3)	100	(1.3)	82	(1.1)	54	(0.9)	65	(0.9)
Cavan	100	(1.3)	91	(1.2)	89	(1.2)	78	(1.0)	94	(1.2)	67	(1.2)	87	(1.3)
Clare	138	(1.8)	127	(1.7)	91	(1.2)	106	(1.4)	111	(1.5)	87	(1.5)	112	(1.6)
Cork	985	(12.9)	1020	(13.3)	930	(12.7)	972	(13.0)	963	(12.8)	719	(12.3)	758	(11.0)
Donegal	396	(5.2)	516	(6.8)	509	(6.9)	517	(6.9)	526	(7.0)	449	(7.7)	471	(6.9)
Dublin	1804	(23.7)	1793	(23.5)	1808	(24.6)	1907	(25.5)	1921	(25.5)	1593	(27.4)	2067	(30.1)
Galway	281	(3.7)	298	(3.9)	273	(3.7)	254	(3.4)	264	(3.5)	130	(2.2)	180	(2.6)
Kerry	380	(5.0)	391	(5.1)	310	(4.2)	321	(4.3)	327	(4.3)	224	(3.8)	213	(3.1)
Kildare	182	(2.4)	135	(1.8)	201	(2.7)	182	(2.4)	203	(2.7)	205	(3.5)	249	(3.6)
Kilkenny	140	(1.8)	137	(1.8)	142	(1.9)	173	(2.3)	134	(1.8)	97	(1.7)	133	(1.9)
Laois	74	(1.0)	96	(1.3)	137	(1.9)	145	(1.9)	122	(1.6)	58	(1.0)	85	(1.2)
Leitrim	75	(1.0)	76	(1.0)	53	(0.7)	59	(0.8)	107	(1.4)	71	(1.2)	71	(1.0)
Limerick	260	(3.4)	276	(3.6)	306	(4.2)	320	(4.3)	374	(5.0)	257	(4.4)	267	(3.9)
Longford	119	(1.6)	89	(1.2)	57	(0.8)	40	(0.5)	50	(0.7)	47	(0.8)	32	(0.5)
Louth	174	(2.3)	170	(2.2)	155	(2.1)	143	(1.9)	154	(2.0)	130	(2.2)	160	(2.3)
Mayo	99	(1.3)	111	(1.5)	83	(1.1)	106	(1.4)	110	(1.5)	54	(0.9)	60	(0.9)
Meath	143	(1.9)	129	(1.7)	128	(1.7)	125	(1.7)	131	(1.7)	87	(1.5)	104	(1.5)
Monaghan	77	(1.0)	97	(1.3)	108	(1.5)	73	(1.0)	50	(0.7)	67	(1.2)	103	(1.5)
Offaly	164	(2.2)	132	(1.7)	118	(1.6)	94	(1.3)	97	(1.3)	47	(0.8)	127	(1.9)
Roscommon	50	(0.7)	43	(0.6)	39	(0.5)	38	(0.5)	64	(0.8)	67	(1.2)	84	(1.2)
Sligo	222	(2.9)	166	(2.2)	197	(2.7)	175	(2.3)	224	(3.0)	139	(2.4)	152	(2.2)
Tipperary	354	(4.6)	329	(4.3)	338	(4.6)	367	(4.9)	368	(4.9)	267	(4.6)	294	(4.3)
Waterford	447	(5.9)	436	(5.7)	455	(6.2)	441	(5.9)	427	(5.7)	361	(6.2)	335	(4.9)
Wexford	382	(5.0)	380	(5.0)	374	(5.1)	385	(5.2)	354	(4.7)	280	(4.8)	327	(4.8)
Westmeath	206	(2.7)	239	(3.1)	128	(1.7)	81	(1.1)	94	(1.2)	62	(1.1)	60	(0.9)
Wicklow	159	(2.1)	123	(1.6)	140	(1.9)	180	(2.4)	161	(2.1)	166	(2.9)	224	(3.3)
Ireland unknown	28	(0.4)	102	(1.3)	39	(0.5)	33	(0.4)	8	(0.1)	8	(0.1)	~	~
Outside Ireland	62	(0.8)	55	(0.7)	43	(0.6)	49	(0.7)	26	(0.3)	31	(0.5)	35	(0.5)
Total	7618		7643		7350		7464		7546		5824		6859	

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