

AGEING IN THE 21ST CENTURY: ALCOHOL AND OTHER DRUG USE AMONG OLDER AUSTRALIANS

Roche A¹ & Kostadinov V¹

¹ National Centre for Education and Training on Addiction (NCETA), Flinders University

Introduction and Aims: Australia's population is ageing at a faster rate than ever before. There is increasing interest in the changing patterns of alcohol and other drug (AOD) use among older people. However, the potential impact of these trends on AOD and aged care services has received little attention. This presentation will examine emerging patterns since 2001 in AOD use among older Australians, causal and contributory factors, and projected impacts on services.

Design and Methods: Secondary descriptive and inferential analyses were conducted on data sourced from the National Drug Strategy Household Survey, hospital morbidity dataset, and alcohol and other drug national minimum dataset.

Results: Among Australians aged 60+ years, risky drinking and recent cannabis use both increased significantly ($p<.01$) between 2001 and 2013 (13% to 16% and 0.5% to 1.2%, respectively). This was accompanied by a concomitant increase in treatment episodes for alcohol and cannabis between 2002-03 and 2012-13 (1,975 to 3,693 and 28 to 187, respectively). Hospital separations due to heroin, other opioids, methadone, and other narcotics among this age group similarly increased between 2001-02 and 2011-12 (11% to 16%).

Discussion and Conclusions: Alcohol consumption, illicit drug use, and associated harms have increased among older Australians over the past decade. Quality of life and healthcare costs are likely to be adversely affected as a result. Improved strategies to identify, treat and prevent AOD use among older Australians are urgently required.

Implications for Practice or Policy: Aged care and AOD services will require substantial up-skilling to meet the unique needs of the growing population of older individuals with AOD-related problems. There is increasing need for enhanced inter-sectoral collaboration and information sharing between the aged care and AOD sectors.

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