Changing age profile of people accessing AOD treatment: 2003–04 to 2013–14

Introduction and Aim
Analysis of trends, drugs of concern and treatment types, across the age profile of alcohol and other drug (AOD) clients, has identified differences that could inform future treatment services. Data from the Alcohol and Other Drug Treatment Services National Minimum Data Set (AODTS NMDS) indicate a changing age profile of people receiving treatment between 2003–04 and 2013–14, suggesting there is an ageing cohort.

Key Findings
Episodes for clients aged 40+ are rising (Figure 1)
Since 2003–04 the median age of clients seeking treatment has risen from 31 to 33.

Figure 1: Treatment episodes by age group, 2003–04 to 2013–14

Related Data
The ageing profile of clients is also apparent for those using heroin and other opioids who are receiving opioid pharmacotherapy treatment. The National Opioid Pharmacotherapy Statistics Annual Data collection reveals that, from 2006 to 2014, the proportion of clients aged 40+ rose from 35% to 53%.

Discussion and Conclusions
Australia has an ageing population and therefore an anticipated increase in absolute numbers of older Australians with AOD issues (Dowling et al. 2008). Further, Gossop (2008) estimates that, internationally, the number of older people needing treatment for AOD issues will double between 2000 and 2020. This will have ongoing implications for the AOD service sector.

Episodes where alcohol was the principal drug of concern increase with age
In 2013–14:
• 1 in 5 (19%) of episodes for those aged 10–19 — a decrease from 34% in 2003–04
• 70% of episodes for those aged 50–59 and 82% of episodes for those aged 60+, which has remained relatively stable since 2003–04 (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Treatment episodes by principal drug of concern and age group, 2013–14

Top 4 principal drugs of concern has risen for older age groups
Since 2003–04 the proportion of episodes for the older age groups has risen.

Alcohol 50+ ▲ 6%
Cannabis 40+ ▲ 6%
Amphetamines 40+ ▲ 9%
Heroin 30–39, 40+ ▲ 16% ea