

**Australian Medical Association Limited**

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**HOLIDAY SEASON A HARD TIME FOR PEOPLE TRYING TO GIVE UP DRINKING, SMOKING, OR DRUGS**

The Christmas/New Year period can be a difficult time for people who are struggling with substance abuse or tobacco dependence, AMA Vice President, Dr Tony Bartone, said today.

“For many, the festive season is full of social commitments, and catching up with friends and family,” Dr Bartone said.

“This increase in socialising can contribute to people drinking more than they would normally, and to an increase in illicit substance and drug use.

“We know from waste water testing that the consumption of illicit substances such as MDMA and cocaine increases over the summer holiday period.

“Taking illicit substances is always risky, particularly if they are mixed with other drugs, alcohol, or prescription medications. People should not hesitate to seek medical attention if they, or someone around them, appears to be in trouble.

“This time of year can be particularly hard for people with more serious substance dependence.

“The temptation to drink alcohol, have a cigarette, or take illicit substances can be strong during Christmas and New Year celebrations, particularly if there is pressure from others to ‘just have one, it won’t hurt’ or ‘you can give up in the New Year’.

“Some people are also reluctant to disclose their struggles. If you are hosting a party or a barbecue over the holidays, it’s important to have non-alcoholic drink options for your guests, and clearly defined non-smoking areas.

“It is also a difficult time for people who have less contact with family and friends. They may experience profound loneliness over the holidays, which can increase the desire to take illicit substances or drink too much.

“But the New Year is always a good time to consider making healthy lifestyle changes. Your GP can help you make these changes.”

**Background**

According to the National Drug Strategy Household Survey 2016:

- More than four in 10 (43 per cent) of people have used an illicit drug.
- Almost one in six (15.6 per cent) had done so in the past 12 months.
- The most commonly used illicit drugs in the past 12 months were cannabis (10.4 per cent), painkillers/opioids (3.6 per cent), cocaine (2.5 per cent), and ecstasy (2.2 per cent).
- Cannabis and methamphetamine users were much more likely to use weekly or more often than ecstasy and cocaine users.
- The average age of illicit drug use has risen from 29 years in 2001 to 34 years in 2016.
- More women in their 30s used illicit drugs in 2016 than in 2013.
- More people in their 40s used illicit drugs in 2016 (16.2 per cent) than in 2013 (13.6 per cent).
- People in their 20s continue to be the mostly likely age group to have used illicit drugs in the past 12 months (28 per cent).

- The most common reasons why an illicit drug was first used are curiosity (65 per cent) and friends or family offered it or were using it (50 per cent).
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