

Alcohol Treatment in Ireland 2009 - 2015

Introduction

The **National Drug Treatment Reporting System (NDTRS)** records cases of treated problem drug and alcohol use in Ireland between 2009 and 2015.

Overview: alcohol as a main problem

In this seven-year period 56,702 cases were treated for **problem** alcohol use. The number of cases increased from 7,993 in 2009 to 8,876 in 2011. Since then the numbers have decreased year-on-year to 7,616 in 2015. In 2015:

- The proportion of new cases decreased to 46.7% from 54.1% in 2009.
- The majority of cases were treated in outpatient facilities (52.7%), similar to previous years.
- Nearly four out of 10 cases were treated in residential facilities, similar to previous years.
- Only 2.7% of cases were treated for problem alcohol use in prison.

Polydrug use

- One fifth (18.7%) of those treated for problem alcohol use also reported polydrug use, similar to previous years.
- **Cannabis** (63.6%) was the most common additional drug used followed by **cocaine** (39.7%).
- **Benzodiazepines** were the third most common additional drug reported among cases treated for problem alcohol use.
- The proportion of cases reporting benzodiazepines as an additional problem increased from 17.7% in 2009 to 32.6% in 2015.

Polydrug use continued:

- The proportion of cases treated for problem alcohol use who reported **MDMA** as an additional problem drug dropped from 26.9% in 2009 to 12.9% in 2015.
- The proportion of cases who reported a **Novel Psychoactive Substance (NPS)** as an additional problem peaked at 5.5% of treated cases in 2011. Since then the proportion has dropped to a low of 0.7% in 2014, rising slightly to 1.6% in 2015.

Level of problem alcohol use

- In 2015, half of all of those in treatment for problem alcohol use **commenced drinking** alcohol at or before the age of **16 years**.
- Three out of five of all cases were classified as **alcohol dependent**.
- Three out of five new cases (those who have never been treated for problem alcohol use before) were classified as alcohol dependent.

Socio-demographics

- In 2015, the **median age** of treated cases was 41 years.
- Two thirds of cases were male.
- Proportion who were **homeless** increased from 4.0% in 2009, to 7.5% in 2015.
- 1.9% of cases were **Travellers**.
- Over half (55.3%) of cases were **unemployed**.

Revised data

This bulletin presents **revised alcohol treatment data** from the NDTRS for the period 2009–2015. NDTRS data in this bulletin have been revised to include cases treated in all types of services: outpatient, inpatient, low threshold and for the first time, those treated in prison.

In addition, the revised statistics now include those cases with no fixed abode, no known address or an address outside Ireland, in all tables. Therefore, the data in this bulletin supersedes all previously published data from NDTRS trend papers and web updates.¹

In the seven-year period 2009 to 2015, a total of 56,702 cases were treated for problem alcohol use.^{2,3} The number of cases treated decreased by 4.7% over the period, from 7,993 in 2009 to 7,616 in 2015 (Table 1). The number of cases treated peaked in 2011 (n = 8,876) and has decreased year-on-year since then.

The proportion of new cases presenting to treatment has decreased from 54.1% in 2009 to 46.7% in 2015. This represents a drop of 17.8% in the *number* of new cases treated.

Table 1 No. of cases with alcohol as a main problem, by treatment status, NDTRS 2009 to 2015

	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Total	7993	8033	8876	8607	7817	7760	7616
New cases	4321	4258	4645	4149	3708	3772	3553
Previously treated cases	3598	3661	4110	4351	3930	3807	3946
Treatment status unknown	74	114	121	107	179	181	117

Type of service provider

In 2015, half (52.7%) of cases were treated in outpatient facilities, similar to previous years (Table 2). Four out of every ten cases (38.3%) were treated in residential care, again similar to previous years.

The NDTRS has been collecting information on treatment in prison since 2008, mainly from in-reach services (voluntary organisations providing counselling).

However since 2014 the Irish Prison Services addiction services in Mountjoy Prison have participated in the NDTRS, followed by the women's prison, Dochas, in 2015.

In 2015, 2.8% of cases were treated for problem alcohol use in prison, similar to previous years.

Currently the NDTRS does not collect data on alcohol treatment from General Practitioners.

Table 2 No. of cases in treatment with alcohol as a main problem, by type of service provider, NDTRS 2009 to 2015

	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Total	7993	8033	8876	8607	7817	7760	7616
Outpatient	4446	4179	4635	4508	4219	4133	4017
Inpatient*	3179	3227	3378	3309	2809	2803	2915
Low threshold	191	460	591	519	521	605	480
Prison	177	167	272	271	268	219	204

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

Incidence and prevalence of treatment

Annual rates for the incidence (new cases) and prevalence (all cases) of treated problem drug use were calculated per 100,000 of the population age 15 to 64 years based on census figures from the CSO⁴ (Figure 1).

Incidence has decreased from 131.0 per 100,000 in 2009, to 109.3 in 2015.

Prevalence, which includes both new cases and those cases returning to treatment, has also decreased, from 243.0 per 100,000 to 233.9 per 100,000.

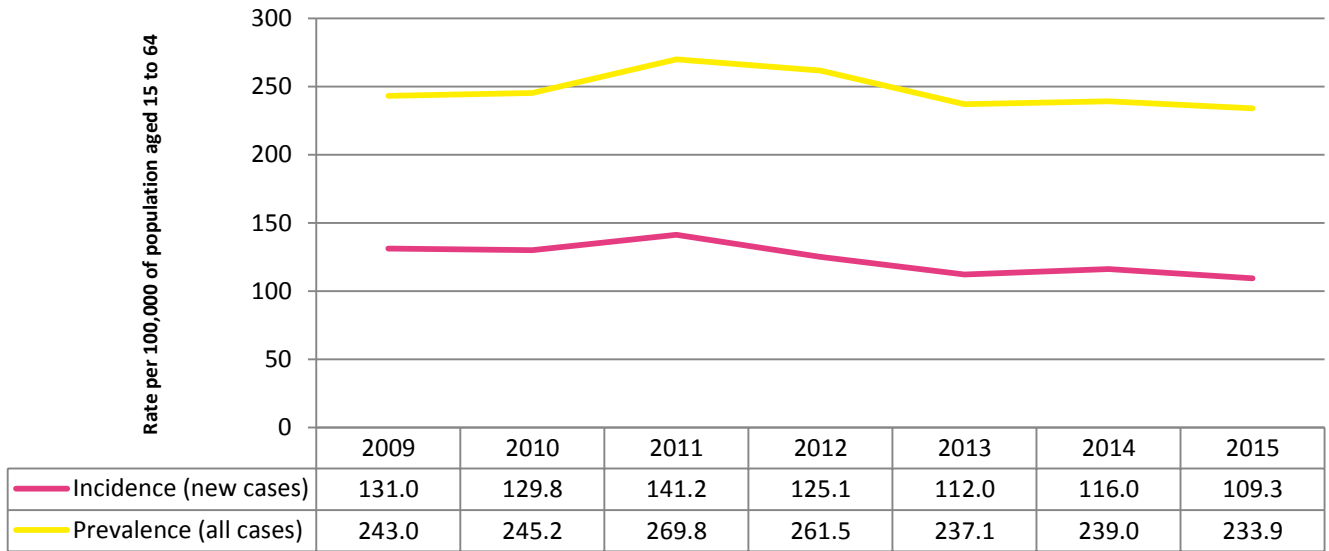


Figure 1 Incidence and prevalence of treated problem alcohol use, per 100,000 of the 15-64 year-old population, NDTRS 2009 to 2015

Polydrug use

In 2015, 18.7% of problem alcohol users reported **problem use of more than one drug** (polydrug use) (Table 3). This proportion has remained similar over the reporting period.

Cannabis (63.6%) was the most common additional drug reported by problem alcohol users in 2015, followed by **cocaine** (39.7%) and then **benzodiazepines** (32.6%). While this has been the same trend over the period 2009-2015, the proportion of cases treated reporting benzodiazepines has increased from 17.7% in 2009 to 32.6% in 2015.

In the same period the proportion of cases treated for problem alcohol use who reported **MDMA** as an additional problem drug dropped from 26.9% in 2009 to 12.9% in 2015.

In 2010, the proportion of cases who reported a **Novel Psychoactive Substance (NPS)** as an additional problem peaked at 5.5%. Since then the proportion has dropped to a low of 0.7% in 2014, rising slightly to 1.6% in 2015.

Table 3 Polydrug use in cases treated for problem alcohol use, NDTRS 2009 to 2015

	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Total	7993	8033	8876	8607	7817	7760	7616
Reported alcohol only	6556	6568	7187	6997	6256	6252	6194
Reported use of additional drugs	1437	1465	1689	1610	1561	1508	1422

Table 4 Polydrug use - additional problem drugs: all cases and new cases, NDTRS 2009 to 2015

	2009		2010		2011		2012		2013		2014		2015	
	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)
All cases	1437		1465		1689		1610		1561		1508		1422	
Cannabis	1099	(76.5)	1062	(72.5)	1239	(73.4)	1146	(71.2)	1078	(69.1)	1025	(68.0)	904	(63.6)
Cocaine	625	(43.5)	571	(39.0)	594	(35.2)	538	(33.4)	547	(35.0)	549	(36.4)	565	(39.7)
Benzodiazepines	254	(17.7)	316	(21.6)	463	(27.4)	503	(31.2)	524	(33.6)	534	(35.4)	463	(32.6)
Opiates	178	(12.4)	177	(12.1)	272	(16.1)	289	(18.0)	279	(17.9)	257	(17.0)	221	(15.5)
MDMA	387	(26.9)	333	(22.7)	292	(17.3)	290	(18.0)	233	(14.9)	218	(14.5)	183	(12.9)
Amphetamines	80	(5.6)	88	(6.0)	87	(5.2)	75	(4.7)	97	(6.2)	58	(3.8)	89	(6.3)
Z Drugs	20	(1.4)	13	(0.9)	16	(0.9)	57	(3.5)	49	(3.1)	48	(3.2)	53	(3.7)
Other	49	(3.4)	45	(3.1)	49	(2.9)	44	(2.8)	45	(2.9)	44	(2.9)	24	(1.7)
NPS	6	(0.4)	80	(5.5)	54	(3.2)	31	(1.9)	15	(1.0)	11	(0.7)	23	(1.6)
Volatile Inhalants	19	(1.3)	13	(0.9)	14	(0.8)	9	(0.6)	8	(0.5)	12	(0.8)	5	(0.4)
New cases	795		767		800		723		695		678		625	
Cannabis	623	(78.4)	565	(73.7)	613	(76.6)	536	(74.1)	504	(72.5)	459	(67.7)	415	(66.4)
Cocaine	344	(43.3)	311	(40.5)	288	(36.0)	256	(35.4)	240	(34.5)	255	(37.6)	270	(43.2)
Benzodiazepines	118	(14.8)	148	(19.3)	179	(22.4)	178	(24.6)	168	(24.2)	205	(30.2)	141	(22.6)
MDMA	238	(29.9)	179	(23.3)	161	(20.1)	139	(19.2)	128	(18.4)	119	(17.6)	89	(14.2)
Opiates	75	(9.4)	68	(8.9)	99	(12.4)	84	(11.6)	68	(9.8)	91	(13.4)	55	(8.8)
Amphetamines	37	(4.7)	42	(5.5)	26	(3.3)	36	(5.0)	38	(5.5)	18	(2.7)	34	(5.4)
NPS	~	~	54	(7.0)	19	(2.4)	11	(1.5)	6	(0.9)	~	~	13	(2.1)
Z Drugs	5	(0.6)	~	~	7	(0.9)	16	(2.2)	13	(1.9)	16	(2.4)	10	(1.6)
Other	24	(3.0)	20	(2.6)	21	(2.6)	13	(1.8)	14	(2.0)	19	(2.8)	9	(1.4)
Volatile inhalants	17	(2.1)	7	(0.9)	9	(1.1)	5	(0.7)	5	(0.7)	7	(1.0)	~	~

~ Less than 5 cases

Level of problem alcohol use

In 2015, half of all of those in treatment for problem alcohol use **commenced drinking alcohol** at or before the age of 16 years (Table 5). This trend has remained unchanged over the seven year period.

The majority of those who were treated were classified as **alcohol dependent** (by the health care professional treating them). Over the period the proportion of cases classified as alcohol dependent increased from 45.6% to 62.0% in 2015.

In 2015, the majority (57.0%) of new cases (those who have never been treated for problem alcohol use before) were also classified as alcohol dependent.

Hazardous: a pattern of alcohol use that increases the risk of harmful consequences for the user. 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]

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]

Dependent: 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]

Source: WHO. The Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test (2001)

Table 5 Age first started drinking and level of problem alcohol use, NDTRS 2009 to 2015

	2009		2010		2011		2012		2013		2014		2015	
	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)
All cases	7993		8033		8876		8607		7817		7760		7616	
Age first started drinking (range)	16	11-23	15	12-22	15	12-22	15	12-22	15	11-22	16	12-22	16	12-22
<i>Level of problem alcohol use*</i>														
Hazardous	1224	(15.3)	1424	(17.7)	1570	(17.7)	964	(11.2)	872	(11.2)	851	(11.0)	673	(8.8)
Harmful	1036	(13.0)	1321	(16.4)	1493	(16.8)	1544	(17.9)	1483	(19.0)	1417	(18.3)	1396	(18.3)
Dependent	3644	(45.6)	5078	(62.2)	5215	(58.8)	4794	(55.7)	4450	(56.9)	4644	(59.8)	4719	(62.0)
New cases	4321		4258		4645		4149		3708		3772		3553	
Age first started drinking (range)	16	11-22	16	12-22	16	12-22	16	12-22	16	12-21	16	12-22	16	12-22
<i>Level of problem alcohol use*</i>														
Hazardous	856	(19.9)	976	(22.9)	1067	(23.0)	654	(15.8)	573	(15.5)	494	(13.1)	370	(10.4)
Harmful	637	(14.7)	829	(19.5)	1000	(21.5)	956	(23.0)	911	(24.6)	858	(22.7)	802	(22.6)
Dependent	1792	(41.5)	2362	(55.5)	2337	(50.3)	2010	(48.4)	1881	(50.7)	2008	(53.2)	2026	(57.0)
Previously treated	3598		3661		4110		4351		3930		3807		3946	
Age first started drinking (range)	16	11-25	15	11-22	15	11-21	15	11-22	15	11-22	15	11-23	15	12-22
<i>Level of problem alcohol use*</i>														
Hazardous	357	(9.9)	433	(11.8)	489	(11.9)	292	(6.7)	284	(7.2)	324	(8.5)	285	(7.2)
Harmful	390	(10.8)	472	(12.9)	480	(11.7)	571	(13.1)	544	(13.8)	543	(14.3)	572	(14.5)
Dependent	1825	(50.7)	2647	(72.3)	2799	(68.1)	2723	(62.6)	2528	(64.3)	2537	(66.6)	2633	(66.7)
Treatment status unknown	69		99		112		92		161		159		99	

* Where recorded

Sociodemographic characteristics

The **median age** of treated cases has increased over the seven year period, from 38 years in 2009 to 41 years in 2015 (Table 6). In 2015, the proportion of cases (2.3%) **aged under 18 years** was highest among new cases. However this has decreased from a peak of 6.4% in 2010. The majority of cases in 2015 were **male** (65.1%) similar to previous years.

The proportion of cases who were **homeless** increased from 4.0% in 2009 to 7.5% in 2015.

For the first time, aggregated data on the numbers of cases from the **Traveller Community** are included. In 2015, 1.9% of cases were Travellers.

The proportion of Travellers in the general population is 0.7% (2016 Census).⁵

In 2015, 25.8% of cases reported ceasing education (for the first time) before the age of 16 years, similar to previous years.⁶

In 2015, over half (55.3%) of cases were **unemployed**. Unemployment rates have not decreased significantly over the reporting period. Unemployment rates were higher among previously treated cases.

Table 6 Socio-demographic characteristics of cases treated for problem alcohol use, NDTRS 2009 to 2015

	2009		2010		2011		2012		2013		2014		2015	
	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)
All cases	7993		8033		8876		8607		7817		7760		7616	
Median age (range)	38	19-61	39	18-62	38	18-61	40	19-63	40	19-64	38	20-63	41	21-64
Under 18	259	(3.2)	344	(4.3)	336	(3.8)	288	(3.3)	222	(2.8)	165	(2.1)	104	(1.4)
Male	5354	(67.0)	5275	(65.7)	5942	(66.9)	5671	(65.9)	5072	(64.9)	4966	(64.0)	4959	(65.1)
Homeless	317	(4.0)	385	(4.8)	549	(6.2)	484	(5.6)	507	(6.5)	494	(6.4)	570	(7.5)
Traveller	101	(1.3)	136	(1.7)	142	(1.6)	178	(2.1)	144	(1.8)	208	(2.7)	141	(1.9)
Education ceased before 16 yrs*	1894	(23.7)	2036	(25.3)	2334	(26.3)	2357	(27.4)	2066	(26.4)	1991	(25.7)	1964	(25.8)
Employed	2026	(25.3)	1780	(22.2)	1777	(20.0)	1647	(19.1)	1545	(19.8)	1628	(21.0)	1724	(22.6)
Unemployed	3976	(49.7)	4319	(53.8)	4943	(55.7)	4787	(55.6)	4356	(55.7)	4377	(56.4)	4213	(55.3)
Retired/unable to work including disability	849	(10.6)	803	(10.0)	1056	(11.9)	1141	(13.3)	986	(12.6)	912	(11.8)	925	(12.1)
New cases	4321		4258		4645		4149		3708		3772		3553	
Median age (range)	36	17-60	36	17-61	36	17-61	38	17-64	38	18-64	39	19-63	39	20-64
Under 18	225	(5.2)	273	(6.4)	255	(5.5)	214	(5.2)	178	(4.8)	126	(3.3)	83	(2.3)
Male	2880	(66.7)	2808	(65.9)	3077	(66.2)	2667	(64.3)	2368	(63.9)	2420	(64.2)	2279	(64.1)
Homeless	70	(1.6)	105	(2.5)	175	(3.8)	124	(3.0)	154	(4.2)	156	(4.1)	148	(4.2)
Traveller	48	(1.1)	74	(1.7)	90	(1.9)	102	(2.5)	73	(2.0)	104	(2.8)	60	(1.7)
Education ceased before 16 yrs*	919	(21.3)	973	(22.9)	1120	(24.1)	1061	(25.6)	902	(24.3)	882	(23.4)	815	(22.9)
Employed	1262	(29.2)	1124	(26.4)	1082	(23.3)	986	(23.8)	949	(25.6)	962	(25.5)	1014	(28.5)
Unemployed	1900	(44.0)	2070	(48.6)	2351	(50.6)	2036	(49.1)	1772	(47.8)	1916	(50.8)	1725	(48.6)
Retired/unable to work including disability	393	(9.1)	353	(8.3)	514	(11.1)	517	(12.5)	451	(12.2)	410	(10.9)	384	(10.8)
Previously treated	3598		3661		4110		4351		3930		3807		3946	
Median age (range)	41	22-62	41	20-62	41	20-62	41	21-63	41	22-64	41	22-63	42	23-64
Under 18	23	(0.6)	62	(1.7)	79	(1.9)	72	(1.7)	42	(1.1)	34	(0.9)	20	(0.5)
Male	2424	(67.4)	2390	(65.3)	2780	(67.6)	2925	(67.2)	2570	(65.4)	2420	(63.6)	2597	(65.8)
Homeless	239	(6.6)	268	(7.3)	352	(8.6)	356	(8.2)	342	(8.7)	325	(8.5)	403	(10.2)
White Irish Traveller	53	(1.5)	56	(1.5)	49	(1.2)	73	(1.7)	69	(1.8)	96	(2.5)	77	(2.0)
Education ceased before 16 yrs*	960	(26.7)	1039	(28.4)	1186	(28.9)	1273	(29.3)	1129	(28.7)	1072	(28.2)	1123	(28.5)
Employed	748	(20.8)	630	(17.2)	669	(16.3)	642	(14.8)	570	(14.5)	638	(16.8)	688	(17.4)
Unemployed	2042	(56.8)	2198	(60.0)	2522	(61.4)	2700	(62.1)	2485	(63.2)	2357	(61.9)	2421	(61.4)
Retired/unable to work including disability	450	(12.5)	437	(11.9)	528	(12.8)	600	(13.8)	513	(13.1)	482	(12.7)	527	(13.4)
Treatment status unknown	69		99		112		92		161		159		99	

*Updated definition to previous publications – now includes those who left school for the first time before the age of 16 years.⁶

Community Healthcare Organisations (CHO) area of residence

In 2015, the highest number of **cases resided** in CHO 4 (Table 7). The number of cases fluctuated for all CHOs over the period but by 2015, 5 out of 9 CHOs reported a decrease in number of cases treated for problem alcohol use.

The exceptions were CHO 4 and 9, which did report an increase (see overleaf for reference to areas included in each CHO). It should be noted however that poor levels of participation in the NDTRS by some alcohol services in some CHOs affects this geographic analysis.

Table 7 No. of cases treated for problem alcohol use, by CHO area of residence, NDTRS 2009 to 2015

	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
All cases	7993	8033	8876	8607	7817	7760	7616
CHO 1	1123	1213	1135	1290	864	765	869
CHO 2	542	460	502	484	449	400	430
CHO 3	481	543	494	391	456	504	489
CHO 4	1209	1555	1784	1675	1613	1617	1365
CHO 5	1631	1528	1815	1665	1411	1311	1348
CHO 6	307	270	284	255	318	345	314
CHO 7	1004	1002	1014	1079	1028	976	873
CHO 8	925	640	942	961	844	971	880
CHO 9	610	670	730	585	673	707	852
Other/unknown	161	152	176	222	161	164	196
New cases	4321	4258	4645	4149	3708	3772	3553
CHO 1	576	624	595	616	462	402	430
CHO 2	291	240	246	217	209	198	188
CHO 3	269	275	228	171	190	248	247
CHO 4	639	795	909	872	770	749	646
CHO 5	912	831	963	848	672	624	619
CHO 6	173	147	142	109	150	183	154
CHO 7	543	552	588	504	485	445	383
CHO 8	555	359	543	475	436	533	440
CHO 9	319	383	361	271	278	335	379
Other/unknown	44	52	70	66	56	55	67
Previously treated	3598	3661	4110	4351	3930	3807	3946
CHO 1	542	583	537	663	399	359	430
CHO 2	248	213	253	266	237	198	240
CHO 3	206	262	257	216	235	238	236
CHO 4	563	749	863	795	812	846	710
CHO 5	714	688	832	806	728	675	722
CHO 6	130	109	126	136	155	147	150
CHO 7	449	425	409	553	521	488	468
CHO 8	362	273	386	467	376	405	427
CHO 9	271	272	358	297	367	350	445
Other/unknown	113	87	89	152	100	101	118

* Community Healthcare Organisation areas

CHO 1 – Donegal LHO, Sligo/Leitrim/West Clare 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

References

This document may be cited as: Health Research Board (2017) Alcohol Treatment in Ireland NDTRS 2009 to 2015. Available at: www.drugsandalcohol.ie/27392 and at www.hrb.ie/publications.

1. More detailed information on the NDTRS methodology can be found in previously published HRB Trends Series papers at <http://www.hrb.ie/health-information-in-house-research/alcohol-drugs/ndtrs/ndtrs-publications/>
2. Revised historic trend data (1998 to 2015) is available at <http://www.hrb.ie/health-information-in-house-research/alcohol-drugs/publications/>. The NDTRS interactive tables (2004 to 2015) will be updated to reflect the changes at <http://www.drugsandalcohol.ie/key-info/>.
3. The NDTRS make every attempt to ensure as complete coverage of services as possible, however the number of services participating in the reporting system does vary year to year. This makes small fluctuations in the numbers of cases more difficult to interpret
4. Population data is taken from the Central Statistics Office at <http://www.cso.ie/en/statistics/population/>
5. Data on ethnicity is taken from the 2016 Census from the CSO at <http://cso.ie/en/media/csoie/newsevents/documents/pressreleases/2017/prCensussummarypart1.pdf>
6. See Department of Education at <http://www.education.ie/en/Parents/Information/A-Guide-to-the-Irish-Education-System.pdf>