Alcohol and other drugs in one page

What it is

What is a substance use disorder?

A substance use disorder is when alcohol or another drug becomes hard to control and keeps causing harm, yet you keep using. About 3.3% of Australians aged 16 to 85 had one in the past year. A GP is the usual person to see.

- Alcohol or drugs become hard to control and cause harm
- About 3.3% of Australians had one in the past year
- Rates are highest in people aged 16 to 24

The signs

What are the signs of a substance use disorder?

The main signs are using more than you meant to, trying to cut down and failing, cravings, and carrying on even when it harms your health, work or relationships. Doctors look for at least 2 signs within 12 months. A GP can assess it.

- Using more, or for longer, than you meant to
- Trying to cut down and not managing it
- Strong cravings for alcohol or a drug

How a diagnosis happens

What do I tell my GP about drinking or drugs?

Say what you use, how often, and what help you want. Book a long appointment with your usual GP. They can assess you, refer you, start a plan and, for alcohol, consider a PBS medicine.

Treatment

Do I need rehab, or are there other options?

The main options are counselling, day programs, residential rehab, therapeutic communities and a bed in a public alcohol and drug unit. You do not choose alone: an intake assessment points you to the one that fits.

- Counselling: individual, family or group, as an outpatient.

Medication

Are there PBS medicines for drinking?

Yes, two: naltrexone and acamprosate, both listed for alcohol dependence. Neither listing limits prescribing to a specialist or a hospital, so your GP can write them, with a streamlined authority code on the script.

What it costs

What does a psychiatrist add, and what does it cost?

A psychiatrist can give a full assessment and a 12-month written plan for your GP. Under MBS item 291, the schedule fee is $549.90 and Medicare pays back $467.45. You need a GP referral, the report goes to your GP within 2 weeks, and the item can be used once in 12 months.

- A full assessment and a written plan
- Your GP keeps your care going
- Medicare pays back $467.45

In danger? Call 000. Lifeline 13 11 14, text 0477 13 11 14, or chat online.

Suicide Call Back Service 1300 659 467. Free counselling by phone or video, any hour.

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