

Public opinion on what action should be taken against people found in possession of illicit drugs?

The majority of Australians would prefer non-criminal responses to drug use/possession for personal use, as shown in the below nationally representative survey data from 2022/2023, published by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW, NDSHS).

As can be seen, this applies to all drug types. It is also the case for NSW alone (last column of table).

In summary, in NSW:

93% of people prefer non-criminal responses for cannabis

84% of people prefer non-criminal responses for ecstasy

74% of people prefer non-criminal responses for heroin

73% of people prefer non-criminal responses for methamphetamines

79% of people prefer non-criminal responses for hallucinogens

Table 1: Choice of action that should be taken against people found in possession of selected illicit drugs for personal use

Drug	Preferred action to be taken	Nationally representative sample (% of population, 14 yrs +)	NSW general population (% of population, 14 yrs +)
Cannabis	A caution/warning or no action	58.6%	58.8%
	Referral to treatment or education program	21.7%	23.1%
	Fine*	12.9%	11.5%
	<i>Sub-total non-criminal response</i>	93.2%	93.4%
	Community service or weekend detention	3.2%	3.0%
	Prison sentence	2.8%	3.0%
	Some other arrangement	0.7%	0.5%
Ecstasy	A caution/warning or no action	24.4%	25.2%
	Referral to treatment or education program	37.4%	38.3%
	Fine*	21.4%	20.2%
	<i>Sub-total non-criminal response</i>	83.2%	83.7%
	Community service or weekend detention	7.0%	6.9%
	Prison sentence	8.6%	8.3%
	Some other arrangement	1.3%	1.2%
Heroin	A caution/warning or no action	5.5%	5.9%
	Referral to treatment or education program	52.4%	53.9%
	Fine*	16.1%	14.5%
	<i>Sub-total non-criminal response</i>	74.0%	74.3%
	Community service or weekend detention	8.2%	8.2%
	Prison sentence	16.2%	16.0%
	Some other arrangement	1.8%	1.5%
Meth-amphetamine	A caution/warning or no action	5.7%	6.5%
	Referral to treatment or education program	50.5%	51.8%
	Fine*	16.0%	14.4%
	<i>Sub-total non-criminal response</i>	72.2%	72.8%
	Community service or weekend detention	8.6%	9.0%
	Prison sentence	17.3%	16.7%
	Some other arrangement	1.9%	1.6%
Hallucinogens	A caution/warning or no action	18.8%	18.4%
	Referral to treatment or education program	43.9%	44.7%
	Fine*	17.1%	16.2%
	<i>Sub-total non-criminal response</i>	79.8%	79.3%
	Community service or weekend detention	7.6%	7.8%
	Prison sentence	11.0%	11.2%
	Some other arrangement	1.7%	1.7%

Note: Excludes 'don't know' respondents

*A fine can be considered either a civil/administrative sanction or a criminal sanction. A more conservative analysis would remove the % choosing a fine from the sub-total of non-criminal responses. Source: National sample: NDSHS 2022/2023 general population survey, national data, Table 11.31, AIHW. NSW sample: unit records supplied by AIHW. Choice of action that should be taken against people found in possession of selected illicit drugs for personal use

References

AIHW. (2024). National Drug Strategy Household Survey 2022-23. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/illicit-use-of-drugs/national-drug-strategy-household-survey/contents/about>

Source: National sample: NDSHS 2022/2023 general population survey, national data, Table 11.31, AIHW. NSW sample: unit records supplied by AIHW. Choice of action that should be taken against people found in possession of selected illicit drugs for personal use

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