



# Information Booklet for Employees Alcohol and Other Drugs (AOD)



NB: This policy does not apply to casual employees who are covered by the National Employment Agreement (NEA)

A message from  
Ahmed Fahour,  
MD & Group CEO



Safety at work is our top priority and one of our four culture pillars. We are firmly committed to our goal of zero injuries in our workplaces, zero harm to anyone and zero tolerance of unsafe acts.

Australia Post has invested significantly in trying to ensure that none of our people are injured at work and, over the past two years, we have made great progress in reducing the number of injuries across our business. But we cannot afford to stand still.

The unsafe use of alcohol and other drugs (AOD) can have a negative impact on our working environment – regardless of whether consumed on site or before coming to work. So, we need to ensure that the use of AOD does not compromise the safety of our people – or the quality of the service that we offer our customers.

As a result, we have developed a comprehensive strategy for the management of AOD across our business – including a combination of new policy guidance, education, testing and support to manage the risks that alcohol and other drugs pose to our workplaces.

The information contained in this booklet will help you and your family understand:

- The potential impact of alcohol and other drugs on your health and safety - and the safety of others;
- Your obligations as an employee or contractor of Australia Post; and,
- Where you can get more information and support if you need it.

Of course, what our people choose to do in their own time is not Australia Post's business. However, if your use of alcohol and other drugs poses a potential risk to your safety while on duty, the safety of your colleagues or the safety of the general public, then that is our business.

I encourage you to read this booklet and keep it on hand for future reference. If you have any questions regarding your use of alcohol and other drugs, please talk to your manager, your safety representative or contact the Employee Assistance Program.

Ahmed Fahour  
MD & Group CEO, Australia Post  
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# Introduction Why focus on alcohol and other drugs?

Alcohol and other drugs (also called AOD) in the workplace can affect your ability to perform your job safely and effectively, and the health and safety of people around you.

Even if you consume alcohol and other drugs outside work hours, they can still affect you when you are at work.

## The impacts of alcohol and other drugs at work can include:

- Incidents, injuries and near misses
- Damage to plant, equipment and property
- Absenteeism and employee turnover
- Crime
- Lower morale, productivity and quality of work.

## It's also important for you to stay safe outside work. Alcohol and other drugs can have major negative impacts on your life, including:

- Financial difficulties
- The breakdown of families and friendships
- Crime and imprisonment
- Death from accidents and AOD-related illnesses.

The impact of alcohol and other drugs is a big issue in Australian society, and that makes it a big issue for Australia Post.

If you, or anyone in your family, is having trouble managing the use of alcohol or other drugs, please use the resources at the end of this booklet to get information and free, confidential advice and support.

# Everyone is responsible

Australia Post has a legal obligation to protect your health and safety at work. We are responsible for making sure:

- We minimise the risks associated with the use of alcohol and other drugs in all Australia Post workplaces
- Australia Post and all our employees and contractors comply with any legal obligations related to AOD use.

As an Australia Post employee or contractor who performs work for Australia Post, you are responsible for:

- Making sure you don't expose yourself or others to health and safety risks at work as a result of being affected by alcohol or other drugs, especially when you are operating machinery, vehicles or equipment.

The standard of behaviour we expect from our employees is outlined in Our Ethics.



### When it comes to alcohol, we have guidelines – these are some key points:

- All Australia Post workplaces are alcohol-free. Alcohol must not be made available or consumed at any Australia Post workplace, either inside or outside normal working hours. This means after-work drinks, farewells, celebrations and team-building events held on-site must be alcohol-free.
- The only exception to alcohol-free workplaces is that alcohol may be made available at an authorised customer function held at our head office or a state office work site, and only with the approval of an Executive General Manager (EGM).
- If you attend an event sponsored or hosted by Australia Post where an authorised EGM has given approval for alcohol to be served and consumed, or an external work-related function where alcohol can be served and consumed, you are responsible for managing your consumption so you don't present a risk to yourself or anyone else.
- We treat the handling and transport of alcohol in our network like any other consignment.

### For other drugs, you need to understand that:

- The use or misuse of prescription, pharmaceutical over the counter and illegal drugs can interfere with you performing your workplace duties safely
- Employees and contractors must not consume, possess, manufacture, store, distribute, sell or purchase illegal drugs while they are on duty, in Australia Post workplaces (including our vehicles) or at any event sponsored or hosted by Australia Post.

Please also remember that if you are injured at work and the incident is found to have been wholly or largely due to the influence of alcohol and/or other drugs, it may not be covered by Workers Compensation.

Australia Post makes no moral judgements about the consumption of alcohol and other drugs by our employees or contractors.

Our first priority is helping you and other people stay safe. That is why we have high expectations about you acting responsibly and not putting yourself or anyone else at risk, especially when you are operating machinery, vehicles or equipment.

## Counselling and Assistance

We will support our employees confidentially to address any alcohol or drug issues they have, so please use the resources listed in this booklet, including the Employee Assistance Program (EAP). The EAP is a free, confidential service available to all Australia Post employees and your families. You can contact the EAP yourself any time by calling 1300 360 364, or you can be referred by your manager (manager/Assist<sup>TM</sup>).



# About alcohol

## Some basic information

The first thing to say about alcohol is that it is a toxic drug. That's why we talk about alcohol and other drugs.

Alcohol acts as a depressant, and can poison the human body if you consume it in large quantities or in combination with other drugs.

Of course, a moderate amount of alcohol doesn't harm most people, and a majority of Australians enjoy it and find it makes them feel more confident and relaxed. In Australia, drinking alcohol is seen as a natural part of most events and situations, including work-related functions.

But excessive drinking creates a higher risk of injury and, over an extended period, can cause significant health problems.

Every day in Australia, 15 people die and 430 people are admitted to hospital for alcohol-related injuries or disease. Even if we know alcohol can cause accidents and contribute to liver disease, most of us aren't aware of how much alcohol contributes to people getting a range of cancers, cardiovascular disease, digestive disease and neuropsychiatric disease.<sup>1</sup>

NCETA, Australia's national research centre focusing on alcohol and other drugs, especially in the workplace, says<sup>2</sup> that alcohol is implicated in:



So the risks are real. If you choose to drink alcohol, you should understand the risks and know how to manage them.

1. *Alcohol's Burden of Disease in Australia, 2014*

2. *Australian Guidelines to Reduce Health Risks from Drinking Alcohol, 2009*



## How can you reduce the risks to yourself and people around you?

Australia's National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) has published guidelines to reduce the health risks from drinking alcohol. You can see the full guidelines on the NHMRC website ([www.nhmrc.gov.au](http://www.nhmrc.gov.au)), but here is a summary:

- 1. if you drink less alcohol over your lifetime**, you lower your risk of disease – so healthy men and women can manage their risk by keeping to no more than two standard drinks a day (if you drink four standard drinks a day, your risk of dying from alcohol-related causes doesn't just double – it is more than five times higher than if you stayed at two drinks a day).
- 2. if you drink less on a single occasion**, you lower your risk of injury – so healthy men and women can manage their risk by drinking no more than four standard drinks on a single occasion.
- 3. Children and young people under 18** reduce their risk of harm by not drinking at all, before they are 15 years old, and by delaying when they start drinking after they turn 15 for as long as possible.
- 4. Women who are pregnant or breastfeeding** reduce the risk of harm to their developing foetus or baby by not drinking at all.



### Consider your consumption level

Drinking alcohol is a personal choice. But the NHMRC make the point that there is no "safe" or risk-free level of consumption for this drug. If you choose to drink alcohol, you need to manage the risk responsibly. They also suggest that if you drink alcohol regularly, having at least one or two alcohol free days per week is a good idea.

The NHMRC recommends no more than two standard drinks a day. You can easily find out what a "standard drink" is. It's always 10 grams of alcohol – but, depending on the type of alcohol you are drinking, the standard drink varies in size. Most labels will say how many standard drinks are in the bottle, and you can always ask bar staff or a waiter for advice. It's very important to remember that the effect of a "standard drink" on you will depend on whether you are a man or a woman, your health, your age, your weight and how much you have eaten, among other things. Be on the safe side if you aren't sure.

## Here are some other important points to remember about drinking alcohol.

- Drinking alcohol will raise your **blood alcohol level**. Then your liver will bring your level back to normal over time, at a fixed rate of about one standard drink per hour. Nothing you do (coffee, exercise, vomiting, cold showers) can speed this up, and you can't tell your blood alcohol level by how you feel. You just need to keep track of how many drinks you have had and how long your body will need to get your blood alcohol level back to normal. Lots of people still have a high blood alcohol level the day after drinking.
- If you **combine alcohol with other drugs**, the risks can increase and be unpredictable, especially if you combine alcohol with stimulants like caffeine and amphetamines. Alcohol can magnify the effects of drugs like sleeping pills, tranquilisers, prescribed medicines, cold remedies and cannabis.
- Drinking alcohol regularly can contribute to **weight gain**. Half a bottle of wine or two stubbies of beer will add 1180 kJ (280 calories) to your daily intake.
- Women's bodies contain a lower percentage of water than men's bodies, and a higher percentage of fat, so **women's blood alcohol levels rise higher than men's** after drinking the same amount of alcohol, and **women may risk greater health damage** long term.
- Anyone who regularly drinks large amounts of alcohol over a long period of time will probably experience **mental, physical or social problems**, including alcohol-related diseases and longer recovery times.
- **Risky patterns of drinking can become a habit**. It's important to stop and think about the risks and try not to let excessive drinking become a regular part of your life.



# Alcohol in the workplace

There are many ways alcohol can affect your workplace or work performance, including:

- Lower concentration
- Poor judgement, decision-making and ability to think clearly
- Reduced ability to remember information and give accurate instructions
- Absenteeism
- Aggressive or inappropriate behaviour towards co-workers or customers
- Reduced performance and lower morale, especially if colleagues have to work harder to cover for someone who isn't performing at their best because of alcohol.

The biggest risk to you and other people is **injuries and accidents**, especially if you drive or operate machinery as part of your job.

- Even small amounts of alcohol can affect your judgement of speed and distance, and your reaction times. Larger amounts of alcohol affect muscle co-ordination, reflexes, vision and hearing. Almost a third of all Australians killed in road accidents had alcohol in their blood at the time of the accident.
- Young and inexperienced workers are at a higher risk of alcohol-related accidents at work.

- If you drive or operate machinery, you need to know the legal blood alcohol limits for all types of licences.

- If you are caught driving "under the influence" of alcohol you risk losing your licence and being fined or imprisoned. If you are involved in an accident with alcohol in your blood, you can face serious criminal charges. You may also be personally liable for any damage or injuries you cause, if your insurance company won't cover you.

These risks are why Australia Post is starting our comprehensive AOD strategy with Transport Employees and Transport Contractors.

And the broader workplace risks to health, safety and performance are why we intend to go on to implement the strategy across all Australia Post workplaces.

# About other drugs

## Some basic information

Drugs are classified into three main groups, depending on how they affect the brain.

**Stimulants** include amphetamines, methyl-amphetamines (speed, ice), cocaine and ecstasy. The effects of stimulants can include increased activity, reduced fatigue, talkativeness and feelings of wellbeing, self-confidence and power.

The health and safety risks include:

- Immediate effects of irritability, argumentativeness, extreme nervousness and sleeplessness
- In larger doses, stimulants may lead to violence, delusions and hallucinations.

**Depressants** include heroin, morphine, methadone and benzodiazepines, as well as alcohol. In small doses, the effects can include feelings of wellbeing, calmness and relaxation, drowsiness or stupor.

They relieve pain and anxiety and decrease awareness of the outside world.

In larger doses, the health risks of depressants can include:

- Deep sleep
- Slowed respiration and breathing
- In some cases, memory problems, depression and poor co-ordination.

**Hallucinogens** include LSD, magic mushrooms, ketamine and PCP. A number of synthetic drugs also claim to have hallucinogenic effects, although their effects are even more unpredictable, as their contents aren't known. The effects of hallucinogens can include changes in mood, perception and hallucinations, as well as anxious feelings and panic due to loss of control. Physical effects may include dilated pupils, rapid heartbeat, muscular weakness, trembling, nausea, chills and hyperventilation.

The major health and safety risks from hallucinogens, because they distort the user's sense of reality, are accidental serious injury or death.

### Cannabis

The most widely-used illegal drug in Australia is **cannabis**. Its short-term effects can include relaxation, euphoria, heightened perceptions, disinhibition, increased appetite and difficulty in concentrating. In large doses, it can have a hallucinogenic effect.

**The health risks of using cannabis include:**

- The effects are unpredictable when combined with alcohol or other drugs
- Increased heart rate and a drop in blood pressure, which may result in fainting
- Smoking cannabis increases the risk of bronchitis, lung cancer and respiratory diseases – cannabis contains twice as many cancer-causing agents as the equivalent amount of tobacco, and a joint has about the same tar level as seven cigarettes
- Long-term use of cannabis may increase the risk of psychotic symptoms, especially in people with a history of a major mental illness like schizophrenia
- Regular use of cannabis at a young age is associated with increased risk of using other drugs.

Apart from cannabis, the level of illegal drug use in Australia remains relatively low. Most deaths involving illegal drugs are the result of accidental overdose, often involving respiratory failure, or cardiac arrest. Drug users who inject are at risk of getting hepatitis B, hepatitis C and the HIV virus (from sharing needles).

Using illegal drugs also carries risks including fines and imprisonment. Convictions for possessing, trafficking or using illegal drugs can have long term effects on your employment and travel.





## How can you reduce the risks to yourself and people around you?

**Over the counter drugs**, that you can buy from a chemist or supermarket, should only be used according to the instructions. They should only be taken short term, unless a doctor recommends longer term use.

**Prescription drugs** should be used only by the person they have been prescribed for, and only according to instructions. Unused prescription drugs should be carefully disposed of. Even over the counter and prescription drugs carry risks. It is important to be informed about the risks and benefits, so you should read the product information and talk to the doctor or pharmacist.

If you are taking over the counter or prescription drugs that affect your ability to stay safe, you should change your behaviour to manage the risk (for example, if they can make you drowsy, take them only before you sleep, or don't drive after taking them).

**Illegal drugs**, like the ones discussed on pages 14-15, all carry health and safety risks, even from small amounts or short term use. Larger amounts and long term use increase the risks significantly.

It is hard to predict the effect of consuming drugs on an individual because it can vary so much. Like alcohol, the effects of a drug can depend on the person's gender, health, size, weight, combination with other drugs and other factors. But illegal drugs, unlike alcoholic drinks, don't have "standard" serves – it's very difficult to judge the concentration of active ingredients, or in some cases, even what the ingredients are.

It's important to understand all the risks clearly before you choose to consume these drugs. Because the drugs are illegal, it is much harder to find reliable information you can trust. That makes the risks – to your health and safety and to your legal position – more difficult to manage effectively.



### Other drugs in the workplace

The physical effects of consuming drugs can have a serious effect on your ability to work effectively and safely.

The ways drugs can affect your workplace or work performance include:

- Lower **concentration**
- Poor **judgement, decision-making and ability to think clearly**
- Reduced ability to **remember** information and give accurate instructions
- **Hangover effect** of drowsiness and poor concentration, hours after taking the drug
- **Absenteeism**
- **Aggressive or inappropriate behaviour** towards co-workers or customers
- **Reduced performance and lower morale**, especially if colleagues have to work harder to cover for someone who isn't performing at their best
- Regular cannabis users can **lose energy and interest** in other activities, have decreased learning abilities and find it **hard to acquire new work skills**
- **Discomfort and anxiety for colleagues** who know or suspect illegal drug use.



The biggest risk to you and other people is **injuries and accidents**, especially if you drive or operate machinery as part of your job.

Even small amounts of any drug can affect your **judgement of speed and distance**, your **reaction times** and your ability to safely drive or operate machinery. Larger amounts of drugs can make it impossible to safely perform even very simple manual tasks.

Stimulants can make you **take more risks and drive aggressively**, and hallucinogens can affect your senses of **vision and hearing**.

If you are caught driving "under the influence" of drugs you risk **losing your licence and being fined or imprisoned**. If you are involved in an accident with drugs in your blood, you can face serious criminal charges. You may also be **personally liable** for any damage or injuries you cause, if your insurance company won't cover you.

These risks are why Australia Post is starting our comprehensive AOD strategy with transport employees and contractors. And the broader workplace risks to health, safety and performance are why we intend to go on to implement the strategy across all Australia Post workplaces.

### A few extra points about illegal drugs.

Cannabis is a prohibited plant in Australia, although each state and territory has different cannabis laws. Cultivating, selling, dealing, possessing, smoking or consuming the products of the plant is an offence and is subject to prosecution.

It is also an offence anywhere in Australia to own, use, manufacture or sell illegal stimulants, depressants and hallucinogens.

If any Australia Post employee or contractor finds out that a colleague is using illegal drugs at work, or working under the influence of drugs, you are expected to involve your manager so they can manage the safety risks and help your colleague get support.

If any Australia Post employee or contractor finds out that a colleague is selling or supplying illegal drugs on work premises, you are expected to report it immediately to a manager.

# Resources

**Employee Assistance Program (EAP):**  
1300 360 364

**Comcare:** [www.comcare.gov.au](http://www.comcare.gov.au)

## Alcohol and Drug Information Websites:

**National Health and Medical Research Council:**  
[www.nhmrc.gov.au](http://www.nhmrc.gov.au)

**Australian Drug Foundation:**  
[www.adf.org.au](http://www.adf.org.au)

**Alcoholics Anonymous Australia:**  
[www.aa.org.au](http://www.aa.org.au)

**National Drug Research Institute, Curtin University of Technology:**  
[www.ndri.curtin.edu.au](http://www.ndri.curtin.edu.au)

**Australian National Research Centre on AOD Workforce Development, Flinders University:**  
[www.nceta.flinders.edu.au](http://www.nceta.flinders.edu.au)

## Privacy Resources:

**Office of the Australian Information Commissioner:**  
[www.privacy.gov.au](http://www.privacy.gov.au)

**The Australian Privacy Foundation:**  
[www.privacy.org.au](http://www.privacy.org.au)

## State Health Departments & Resources:

**Department of Health NSW:**  
[www.health.nsw.gov.au](http://www.health.nsw.gov.au)

**Department of Health ACT:**  
[www.health.act.gov.au](http://www.health.act.gov.au)

**Department of Health South Australia:**  
[www.health.sa.gov.au](http://www.health.sa.gov.au)

**Drug and Alcohol Services South Australia:** [www.dassa.sa.gov.au](http://www.dassa.sa.gov.au)

**Tasmanian Department of Health and Human Services:**  
[www.dhhs.tas.gov.au](http://www.dhhs.tas.gov.au)

**Department of Health Western Australia:**  
[www.health.wa.gov.au](http://www.health.wa.gov.au)

**Department of Health Victoria:**  
[www.health.vic.gov.au](http://www.health.vic.gov.au)

**Better Health Channel Victoria:**  
[www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au](http://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au)

**Department of Health Northern Territory:**  
[www.health.nt.gov.au](http://www.health.nt.gov.au)

**Department of Health Queensland:**  
[www.health.qld.gov.au](http://www.health.qld.gov.au)

