

# PORTUGAL versus our TOUGH ON DRUGS

Portugal decriminalised the use of all drugs in July 2001 and the results of their changed drug policy can be compared with Australia's Tough on Drugs policy which was operative from 1998 to 2007.

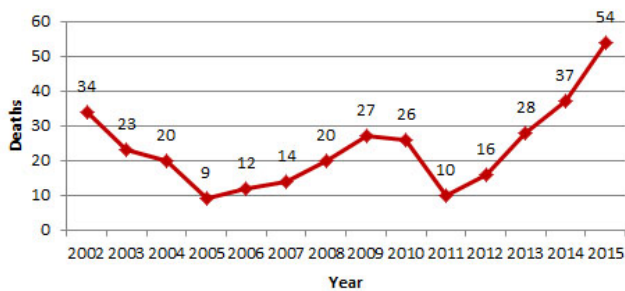
Australians should not be misled by claims painting a false picture of Portugal's results.

## The results of two drug policies compared

### Drug deaths

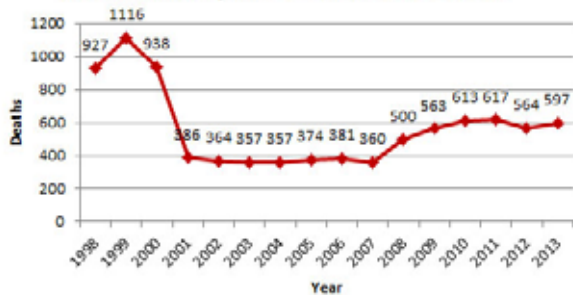
Portugal has no mortality data before 2002 which is comparable with Australia's, but they have lower drug deaths than Australia because opiates are mostly smoked or snorted and not injected as in Australia). Notably, their drug policy has failed to significantly decrease drug deaths since 2001, and steep rises since 2011 normally indicate steep rises in opiate use.

**Portugal Opiate Deaths 1998-2015**



Australia implemented Tough on Drugs in 1998, with criminal penalties intact for use of most drugs. Deaths fell by 67% until it was scrapped by a new Federal government in 2007. Deaths then again rose sharply.

**Australian Opiate Deaths 1998-2013**



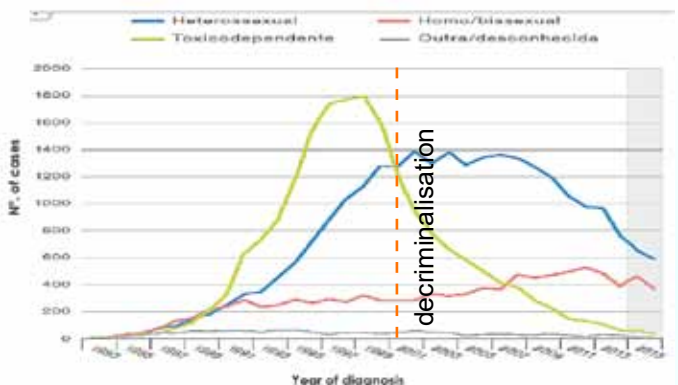
While Portugal has 'dissuasion' programs to encourage drug users to quit and spends liberally on encouraging users into treatment and rehab, decriminalisation appears to have obstructed policies that should otherwise be working.



See [www.drugfree.org.au](http://www.drugfree.org.au) document "The Truth on Portugal" for more detail, citations and graph enlargements

### HIV

In 1999 Portugal had the highest HIV levels in Europe, with 45% of drug users infected. Activists claim that Portugal's decriminalisation policy reduced HIV to 5% (green line), but the graph below shows steeper declines before/during 2001.



Clearly, programs were put in place a number of years before July 2001 which were effective and remained so. Decriminalisation was not responsible.

Australia's HIV has always been low, credited to the innovative Grim Reaper television ads of 1987, viewable on Youtube.

### False claims on decreasing drug use

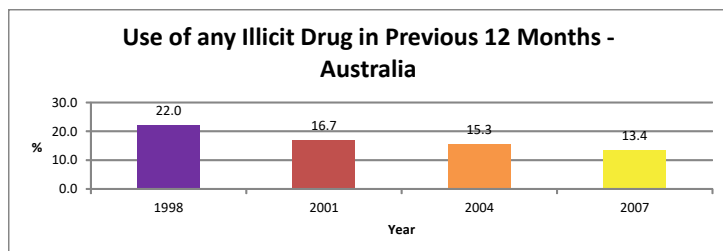
Claims are made that decriminalisation radically reduced Portugal's opiate use. Portugal's opiate use was 0.9% in 1998 but already down to 0.7% by 2000, the year before decriminalisation, indicating already successful demand reduction strategies.

## Drug use

Australians do not approve the regular use of illicit drugs, and it is thereby clear that Australians want less drugs, not more.

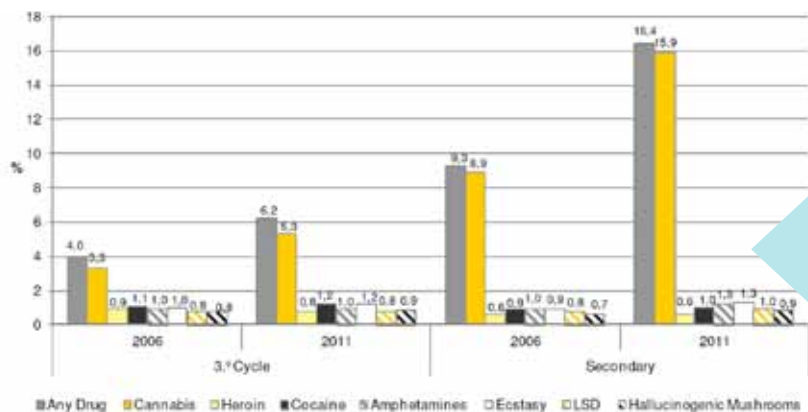
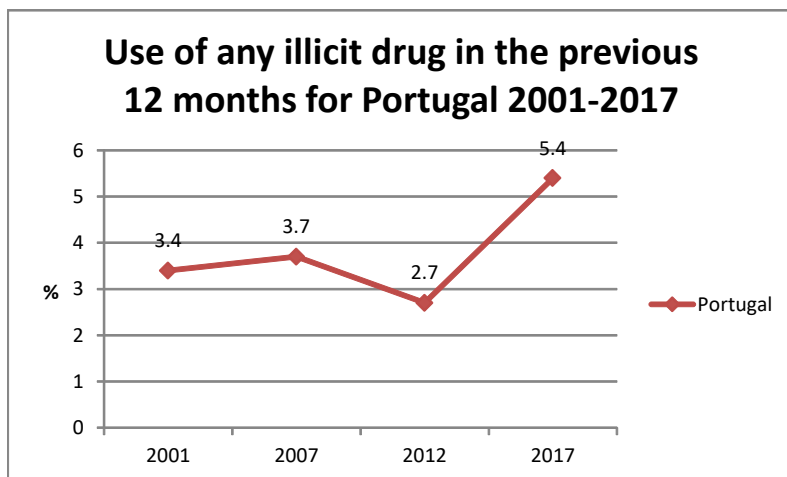
Table 9.7: Personal approval of the regular use by an adult of selected drugs, people aged 14 years or older, 2007 to 2016 (per cent)

Drug	Persons			
	2007	2010	2013	2016
Tobacco	14.4	15.3	14.7	15.7#
Alcohol	45.3	45.1	45.1	45.0
Cannabis	6.7	8.1	9.8	14.5#
Ecstasy	2.0	2.3	2.4	2.9#
Methamphetamine <sup>(*)</sup>	1.2	1.2	1.4	1.2
Cocaine/crack	1.4	1.7	1.6	1.7
Hallucinogens	1.7	2.4	3.1	3.7#
Inhalants	0.8	1.0	0.9	1.0
Heroin	1.0	1.2	1.2	1.1
Pharmaceuticals <sup>(*)</sup>	13.7	22.4	23.2	27.8#
Prescription pain-killers/analgesics <sup>(*)</sup>	n.a.	13.0	12.6	12.7
Over-the-counter pain-killers/analgesics <sup>(*)</sup>	n.a.	14.3	14.5	19.1#
Tranquillisers, sleeping pills <sup>(*)</sup>	4.1	6.4	8.2	9.3#
Steroids <sup>(*)</sup>	1.7	2.2	2.2	2.4
Methadone or buprenorphine <sup>(*)</sup>	1.0	1.2	1.3	1.3



Tough on Drugs delivered decreases in overall illicit drug use of 39% between 1998 and 2007.

Portugal's official statistics indicate significantly increased use of any illicit drug which was 59% above 2001 levels by 2017. See our website document "The Truth on Portugal" at [drugfree.org.au](http://drugfree.org.au) for all official source statistics.



Graph 15 - School Population - INME (3<sup>rd</sup> Cycle and Secondary): Last 30 Days Prevalence of use, by type of drug (IDT, I.P. 2012)

Teen drug use (left) increased by 43% over 2001 levels by 2011. We do not yet have the 2016 statistics for this national survey.

A second ESPAD 'last 30 days' survey of 16 year old cannabis use in Portugal gives increases of 60% above 1999, the last survey before decriminalisation, through to 2015.

There are many false claims eulogising Portugal's experiment with decriminalisation. But it has yielded increased drug use along with increasing overdose deaths as drug use has risen. This represents a failure in drug policy which should not be emulated in Australia.

**AUSTRALIA'S 'TOUGH ON DRUGS' DELIVERED LESS DRUG USE  
PORTUGAL'S DRUG POLICY HAS NOT**