



AIHW policy on reporting to manage confidentiality and reliability

Purpose

This document gives policy guidance on how the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) reports statistics, including counts, percentages, and averages, to manage the issues of confidentiality and reliability. These guidelines are relatively straightforward to implement and provide a degree of confidence that data will be effectively de-identified with diminished need for detailed case-by-case analysis. It is expected that any publication of aggregate information based on National Drug Strategy Household Survey (NDSHS) data will comply with the guidelines below. Only guidelines relevant to NDSHS analysis and output are included here.

This guidance does not apply to unit record data. Unit record data must not be shared with anyone who has not also had their access approved by the Australian Government Department of Health and Aged Care and the AIHW.

Background and legislation

The AIHW operates under a strict privacy regime which has its basis in section 29 of the [Australian Institute of Health and Welfare Act 1987](#) (AIHW Act) and the [Privacy Act 1988](#) (Privacy Act).

Section 29 of the AIHW Act requires that confidentiality of data relating to persons (living and deceased) and organisations be maintained. The Privacy Act governs confidentiality of information about living individuals.

AIHW has a range of policies, protocols, and processes in place to ensure the confidentiality of its data – this policy is one important example, as it deals with how data should be reported to ensure confidentiality. More information on AIHW policies related to privacy is available [online](#).

As well as the protection offered by AIHW Act and the Privacy Act, personal information held by the Institute is covered by a range of other Commonwealth, state and territory legislation.



Policy statement

To manage attribute disclosure researchers must apply the following guidelines to material within the scope of this policy.

- **Guideline 1:** Regardless of whether the data you are releasing has already been released publicly at the granularity AIHW intends to release, the data should still be assessed to determine whether further confidentialisation is required.
- **Guideline 2:** Cells in tables where the value of the cell is the same as a row, column, or wafer total (that is, all other cells in the row, column or wafer are zero) must be confidentialised.

Permission must be sought from the AIHW if you do not wish to confidentialise according to Guideline 2.

- **Guideline 4:** Guideline 2 needs to be applied to ensure that attribute confidentiality is maintained within tables and across tables using NDSHS data, including tables already released by the AIHW. That is, when assessing whether a cell needs to be confidentialised consideration needs to be given to whether there are other cells in that table, or other tables, which may require consequential confidentialisation.

To manage reliability of reporting the following guideline should be applied:

- **Guideline 5:** Rates, averages, and other statistics based on denominators of less than 100 are usually not reliable, due to volatility, and should generally not be reported. There may be exceptions to this guideline where it is deemed that data are, in fact, reliable AND where users seek such data be published. **Permission to publish data based on denominators of less than 100 should be sought from the AIHW.**

To manage specific data custodian requirements the following guideline should be applied:

- **Guideline 7:** If a researcher wishes to publish data output (e.g. tables) at a more detailed level than any of the above guidelines would allow, they must seek permission from the AIHW.