

Background - 'ADHD' Medication and Young People in Care

The following information and statistics are from reports by the Queensland Commission for Children and Young People and Child Guardian:

Age	2006 ¹	2007 ²	2008 ³	2009 ⁴
Young children (0-4 years)	6% (RC/FC)	6% (FC)	n/a	7% (FC)
Children (5-8 years)	14% (RC/FC)	18% (FC)	n/a	15.2% (FC)
Young people Foster Care (9-18 years)	16% (RC/FC)	17% (FC)	n/a	16.4% (FC)
Young people Residential Care (9-18 years)	16% (RC/FC)	n/a	21.3% (RC)	n/a

% take medication for ADHD—young children, children and young people
RC = Residential Care FC = Foster Care

The 2009 figure in the table above shows that 16.4% of young people and 15.2% of children reported taking medication for ADHD. These figures remain largely consistent with those of previous years and are well above the rate of 6.7% for the general population of children and young people in Australia (Royal Australasian College of Physicians, 2009). Of particular note is that medication rates of young children have risen over the same period from 6% to 7%.

In relation to the 2009 figures, two-thirds of respondents who reported taking ADHD medication specified the type(s) of medication they were taking. Less than half (39%) reported taking medications currently licensed for the treatment of ADHD: 21% indicated taking methylphenidate (for example, Ritalin) and 18% dextroamphetamine (for example, Dexedrine). Fifty-four per cent indicated taking antipsychotic preparations (such as Risperidone) for ADHD, 25% said they were taking antidepressants and 11% said they were taking clonidine (Catapres).

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- 1 Commission for Children and Young People and Child Guardian. 2006. *Child Guardian : Views of Children and Young People in Care : Queensland 2006*. Brisbane, Australia.
 - 2 Commission for Children and Young People and Child Guardian. 2008. *Child Guardian : Views of Children and Young People in Foster Care : Queensland 2008*. Brisbane, Australia.
 - 3 Commission for Children and Young People and Child Guardian. 2008. *Child Guardian : Views of Children and Young People in Residential Care : Queensland 2008*. Brisbane, Australia.
 - 4 Commission for Children and Young People and Child Guardian. 2010. *Views of Children and Young People in Residential Care : Queensland 2010*. Brisbane, Australia.

The most commonly prescribed medications are methylphenidates such as Ritalin and Concerta and dextroamphetamines, including Dexedrine and Vyvanse, Antipsychotic medications such as Risperdal and Zyprexa are also noted, as are antidepressants, including Prozac, Zoloft and Paxil. In a number of cases, more than one medication is prescribed.

Of the carers, 7.0% reported that the child in their care is currently taking ADHD medication. While this is similar to the rate for the general Australian population, further analyses of survey data reveal that round **30% of these children are less than 6 years of age.**

Given the prevalence of attention and conduct disorders among children and young people in care, it is not surprising that they are frequently diagnosed as having attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). Children exposed to domestic violence, child abuse or other trauma can indeed develop behaviours symptomatic of ADHD (Royal Australasian College of Physicians, 2009) and an emerging body of research points to ADHD medication being prescribed to those in statutory care at rates well above those in the general community (CCYPCG, 2006, 2008, and 2010; Simmel, Brookes, Bath & Hinshaw, 2001).

However, as the latest guidelines from the Royal Australasian College of Physicians (2009) caution, ADHD medication should only be prescribed after a comprehensive medical, developmental and psychosocial assessment, preferably by a suitably trained paediatrician or child and adolescent psychiatrist, *and only to those aged 6 years and older.*