



# **MEDICATION RELATED SUBSTANCE IMPAIRED DRIVING SURVEY**

Attitude, knowledge and behaviour of  
New Zealand drivers 2017–19

WAKA KOTAHI, NZ TRANSPORT AGENCY

16 DECEMBER 2019

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## More information

Each survey was designed, analysed and reported by evaluation consultant Anne Dowden, REWA. Data collection was sub-contracted to Consumer Link using an online survey of randomly selected respondents of current New Zealand drivers aged 18 years and over.

NZ Transport Agency  
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For more information on medication related substance impairment please visit:  
<https://www.nzta.govt.nz/medication/>

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## Substance impaired driving education programmes

Since 2012, Waka Kotahi NZ Transport Agency has led medication related substance impaired driving<sup>1</sup> education programmes as a part of its role to deliver a range of activities under the Safer Journeys strategy<sup>2</sup>.

The project aims to enhance understanding of substance impaired driving (SID), create interventions and ultimately decrease the impact of substance impaired driving by contributing to a reduction of serious injuries and deaths on Aotearoa/New Zealand roads.

The SID project is an evidence-based, multi-strand project that delivers driver education and enforcement, with a focus across the health sector, the education sector and the transport sector. This project is being led by the Transport Agency in partnership with other government agencies and sector stakeholders<sup>3</sup>.

Project activities have included working with relevant sector stakeholders to design education, including:

- Education for **drivers** published in 2015:
  - *Are you safe to drive?* information sheet for drivers.
- Education for the **health professionals** launched in 2018:
  - *Is my patient safe to drive?* information sheet for health professional
  - *Are you safe to drive?* foldout brochure for health professions to tick and hand to drivers and
  - Videos, in 6 parts, for continuing professional development (CPD) for doctors and pharmacists.
- Education for **young people** launched in 2019: A level three achievement standard in the national certificate of education achievement (NCEA) for Year 13 Health Science.
- Education resources for the **heavy transport** sector, using the 'Know. Check. Stop.' approach.
- Development of education resources for the **passenger services** sector is underway in 2019/20; this will include paper resources, e-resources and videos.

### Driver survey approach

Three online surveys of drivers were carried out in October/November 2017, September 2018 and May 2019 to capture baseline and monitoring measures of New Zealand drivers' attitudes, knowledge and behaviours in relation to substance impaired driving and education activities to promote safe driving decisions.

Drivers report (they *agree* or *strongly agree*) that "*I make plans not to drive after using or taking medications*".

- 2017 – 68%
- 2018 – 70%
- 2019 – 74%

This shows a statistically significant increase in stated plans for avoiding driving when impairment from medications may be present.

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<sup>1</sup> Definition: substance impaired driving (SID) is when drivers are at risk of driving impaired due to the effects of medication or illegal drugs, used alone or combined, with or without alcohol.

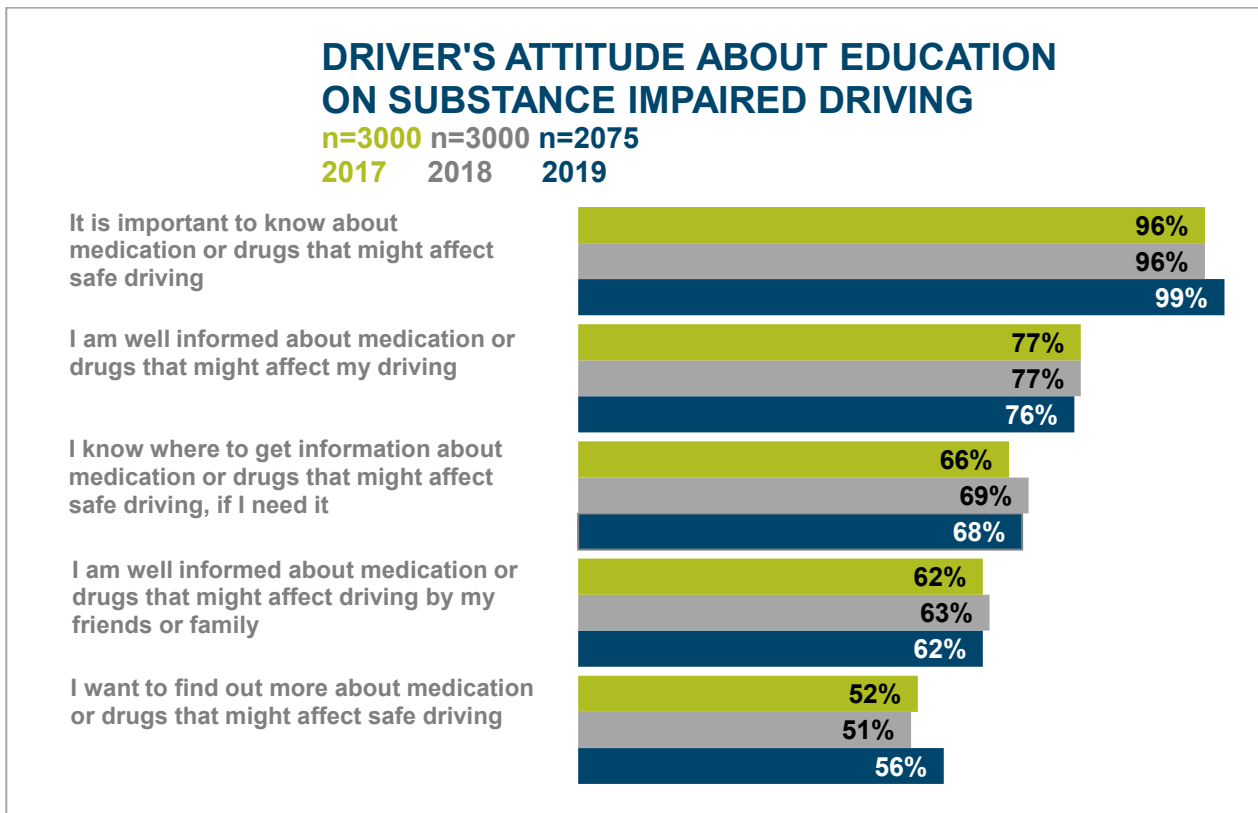
<sup>2</sup> Ministry of Transport (2010).

<sup>3</sup> Including: Ministries of Transport, Health, and Justice, the New Zealand Police, WorkSafe, Accident Compensation Corporation, New Zealand Medical Association, Royal New Zealand College of General Practitioners, Pharmaceutical Society, Environmental Science Research, New Zealand Drug Foundation, Safe and Sustainable Transport Association, The New Zealand Automobile Association, Student Against Dangerous Driving, the Road Transport Forum, and relevant transport sector stakeholders. These partners and collaborators continue to be joined by others as the project evolves.

# 1. ATTITUDES OF DRIVERS

## 1.1. Attitude about education

Almost all drivers report (*agree* or *strongly agree*) that it's important to know about medication or drugs that might affect safe driving. While two thirds to three quarters feel well informed / know where to get information, drivers are somewhat ambivalent about wanting to be better informed.



Three quarters of drivers feel well informed about which medications and drugs could affect their driving.

Two thirds of drivers know how to get information, if they need it.

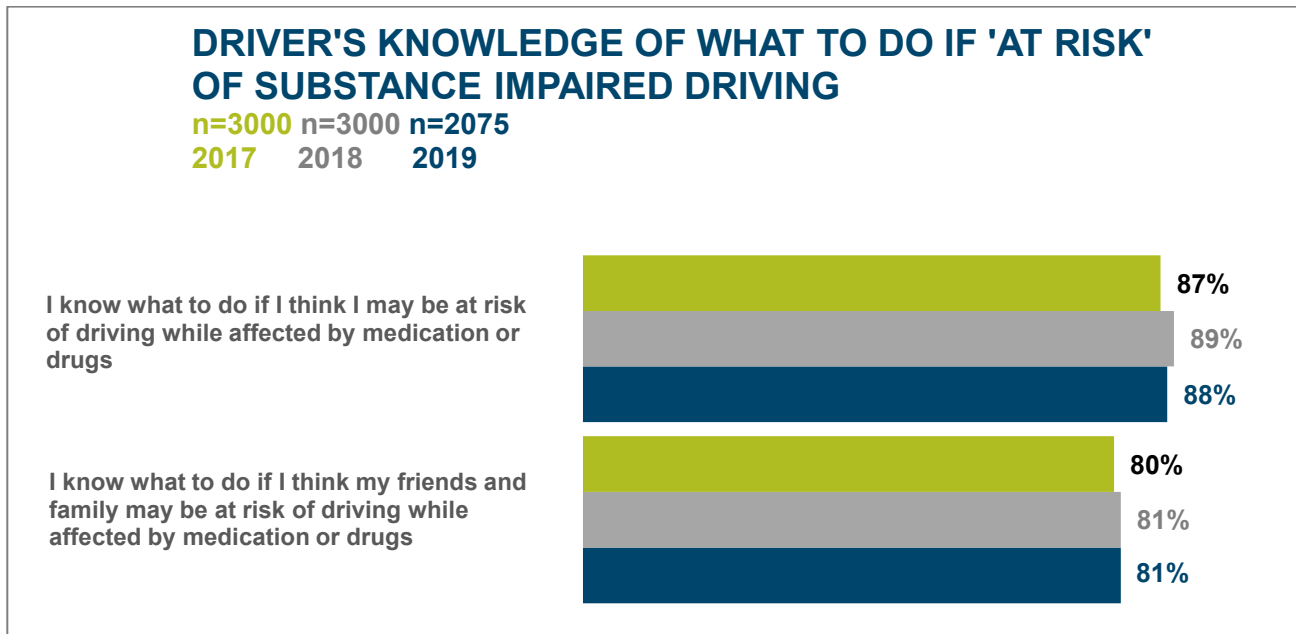
Close to two thirds of drivers feel well informed about which medications and drugs could affect others' driving.

A little over a half of drivers want to find out more about medication or drugs that might affect safe driving.

## 2. KNOWLEDGE OF DRIVERS

### 2.1. Knowledge of 'what to do' if at risk

Most drivers feel well informed (they *agree* or *strongly agree*) about what to do if they or their friends and family are at risk of substance impaired driving.

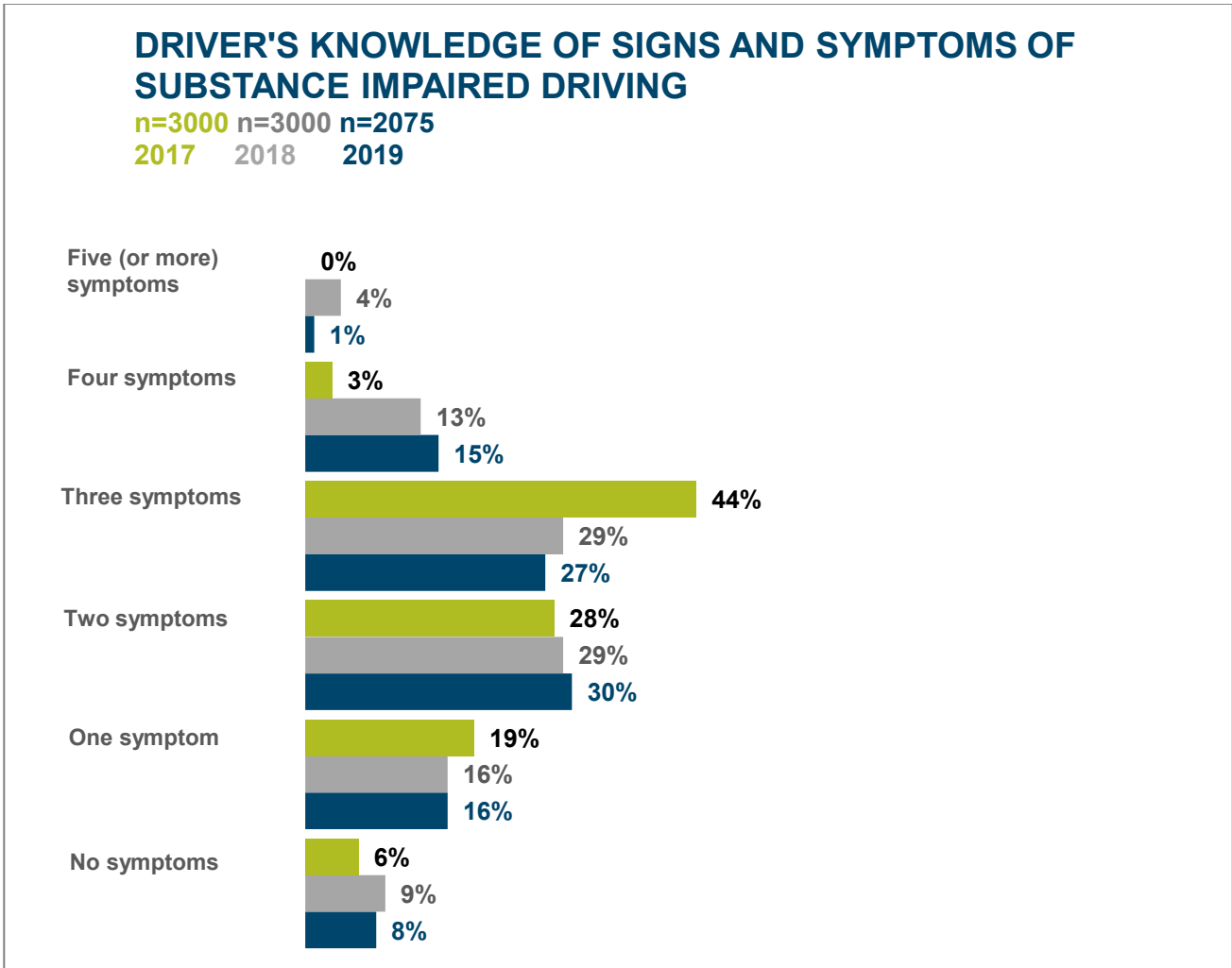


This shows that drivers are highly motivated to take action when they are aware of the risk substance impairment

## 2.2. Knowledge of impairment signs/symptoms and the law

To understand and to be able to recognise substance impaired driving in self and others, drivers need to have knowledge of the full range of signs and symptoms. Overall, drivers stated a small number of relevant impairments.

Drivers could have a higher level of knowledge of the full range of signs and symptoms of substance impaired driving. This would enhance driver's ability to recognise impairment.



The most commonly cited symptoms were drowsiness- 69%, slowed reactions- 36%, confusion- 34% and blurred vision- 29%

This was an unprompted question (lists of symptoms were not provided in the survey). Given the low levels of health literacy in the general population, it is possible that drivers did not have the words to describe potential symptoms

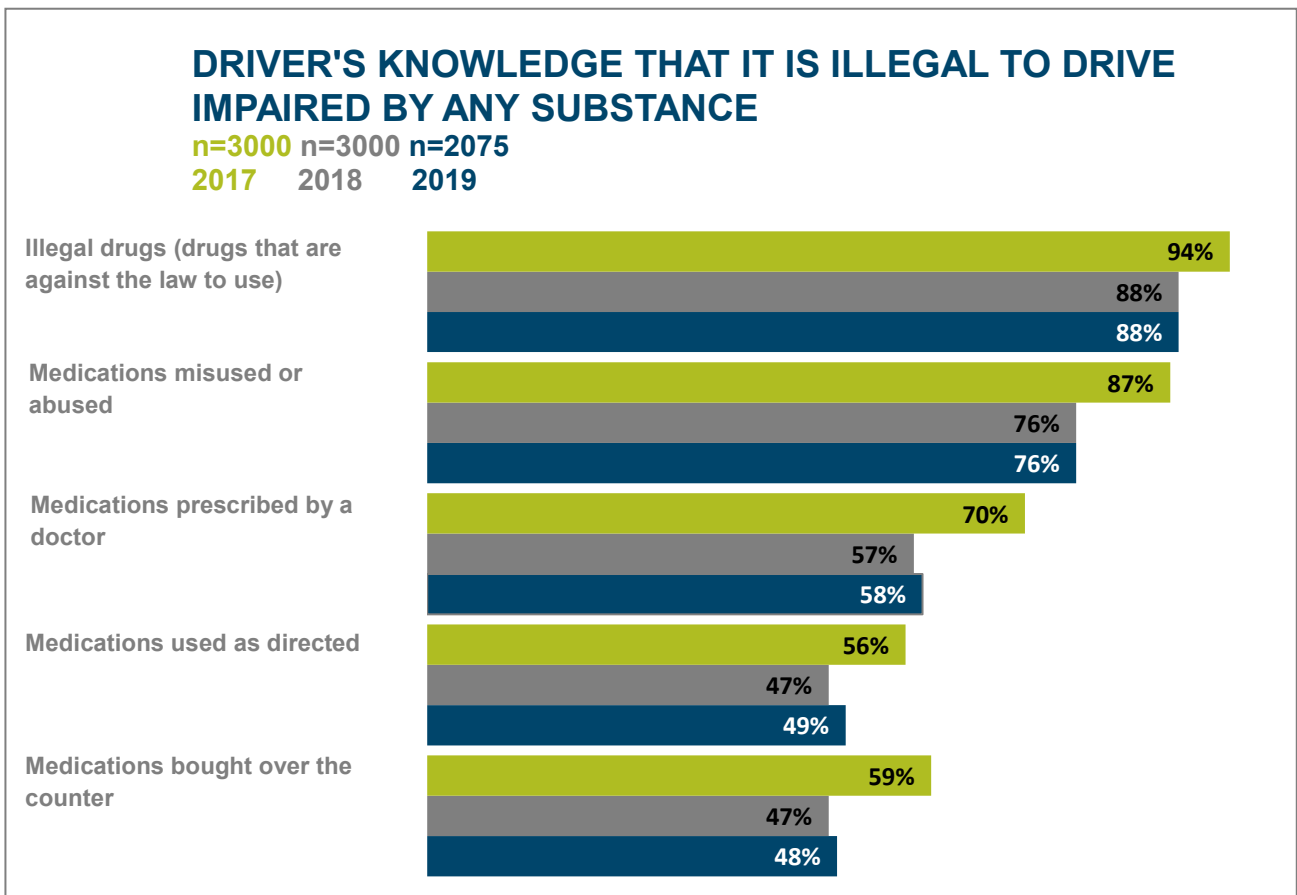
## 2.3. Knowledge of the law

Part of responding safely to substance impaired driving is having the knowledge that driving impairment can occur regardless of whether a substance is taken/used legitimately because the law focuses on driving impairment, not the substance taken.

Nearly all drivers know that it is illegal to drive when impaired by illegal drugs.

Six in 10 drivers know it's illegal to drive when impaired by legitimate use of *prescription medications*.

Half of drivers know it's illegal to drive when impaired by legitimate use of *over the counter medications* or *medications used as directed*.



This shows significant room for improvement in driver's awareness of the illegality of driving in relation to all sources of medication related impairment

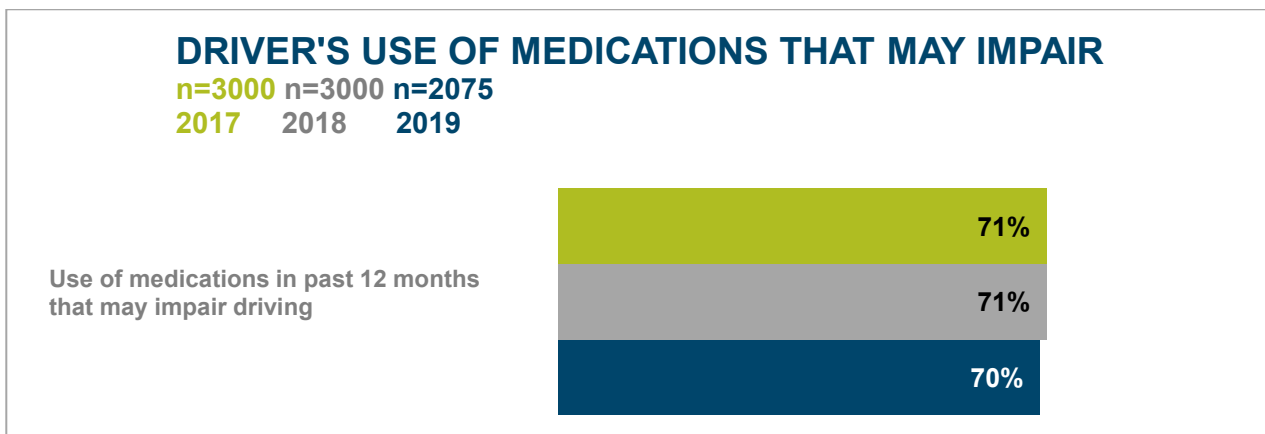


### 3. BEHAVIOUR OF DRIVERS

#### 3.1. Drivers are at risk due to use of medication

Almost all drivers are at risk of impairment from taking medication at some point every year or two.

Seven in ten drivers report that they have used or taken at least one medication that may impair driving each year.



This shows that the issue of medication related substance impairment is a substantial public health concern.

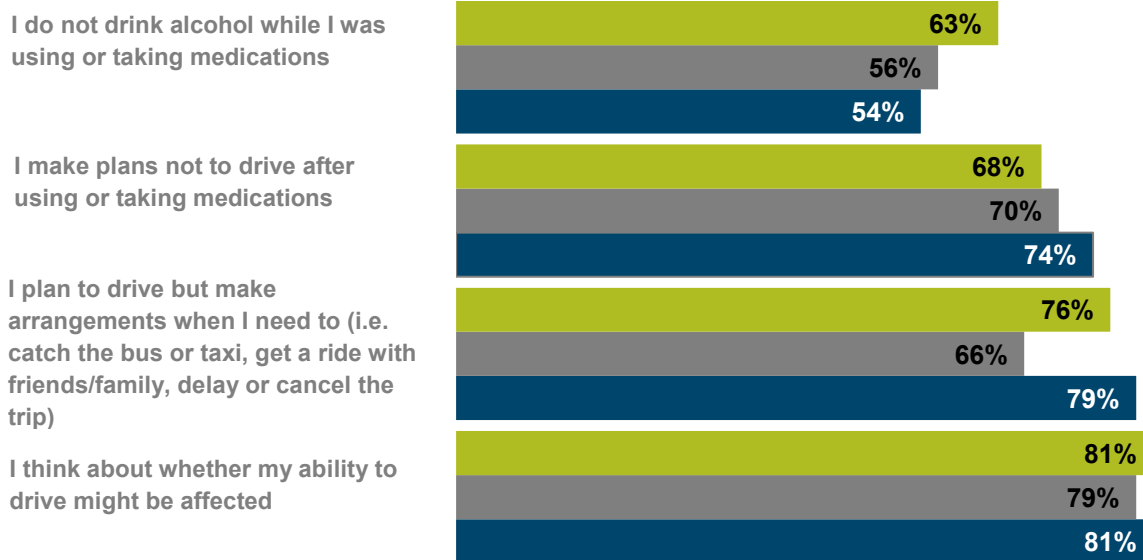
### 3.2. Drivers are at risk due to the medication or medication/drugs(illegal drugs)

Part of managing risk of impairment is forward planning and making appropriate safe driving decisions when there is the possibility of being impaired by medications or a mix of medications/drugs(illegal drugs).

The majority of drivers behave responsibly by planning ahead while taking medications or medications/drugs (see below and over page). They *make plans not to drive (always or usually) they consider whether they are affected and make arrangements if they are affected.*

#### DRIVER'S BEHAVIOUR AFTER USING/TAKING MEDICATIONS THAT MAY IMPAIR

n=113 n=144 n=153  
2017 2018 2019

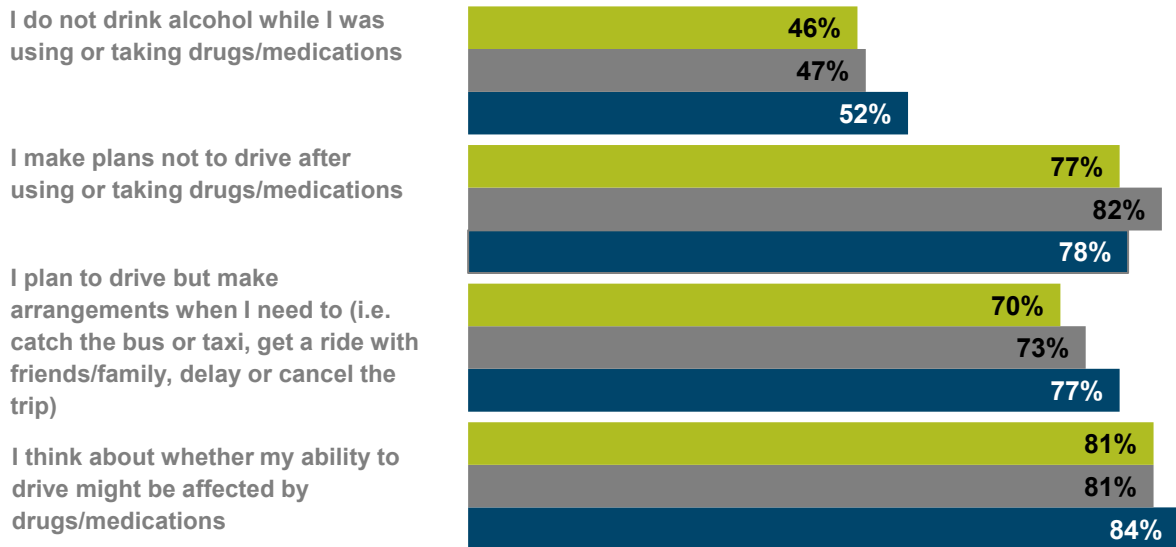


Over time there has been a statistically significant increase of the number of drivers saying that they specifically make plans not to drive after using or taking medications.

Alcohol can considerably magnify the impairing effects of medications and drugs. A significant number of people are combining alcohol with drugs/medications.

## DRIVER'S BEHAVIOUR AFTER USING/TAKING DRUGS AND MEDICATIONS THAT MAY IMPAIR

n=267 n=386 n=326  
2017 2018 2019



Overall, around three quarters or more of drivers are thinking about and planning for action when using alcohol, drugs/medication.