Data visualization

Best practices for all graph types to effectively share AMH data

1 Graph for a reason

Ask yourself:

- Why are we showing this data at all?
- Is there a compelling finding or big idea in this graph?

If there is no clear answer, don't graph it.

Unnecessary graphs distract from the useful graphs.
If you prioritize everything, you're prioritizing nothing.

2 Add a helpful title

Ask yourself:

What do you want people to take away from your graph?

Make the key takeaway your title in 6-12 words. (You can always explain a bit more in the subtitle.)

Before:
Number of client enrolments in addiction services by substance

After:
Enrolments in amphetamine addiction services have more than doubled since 2012

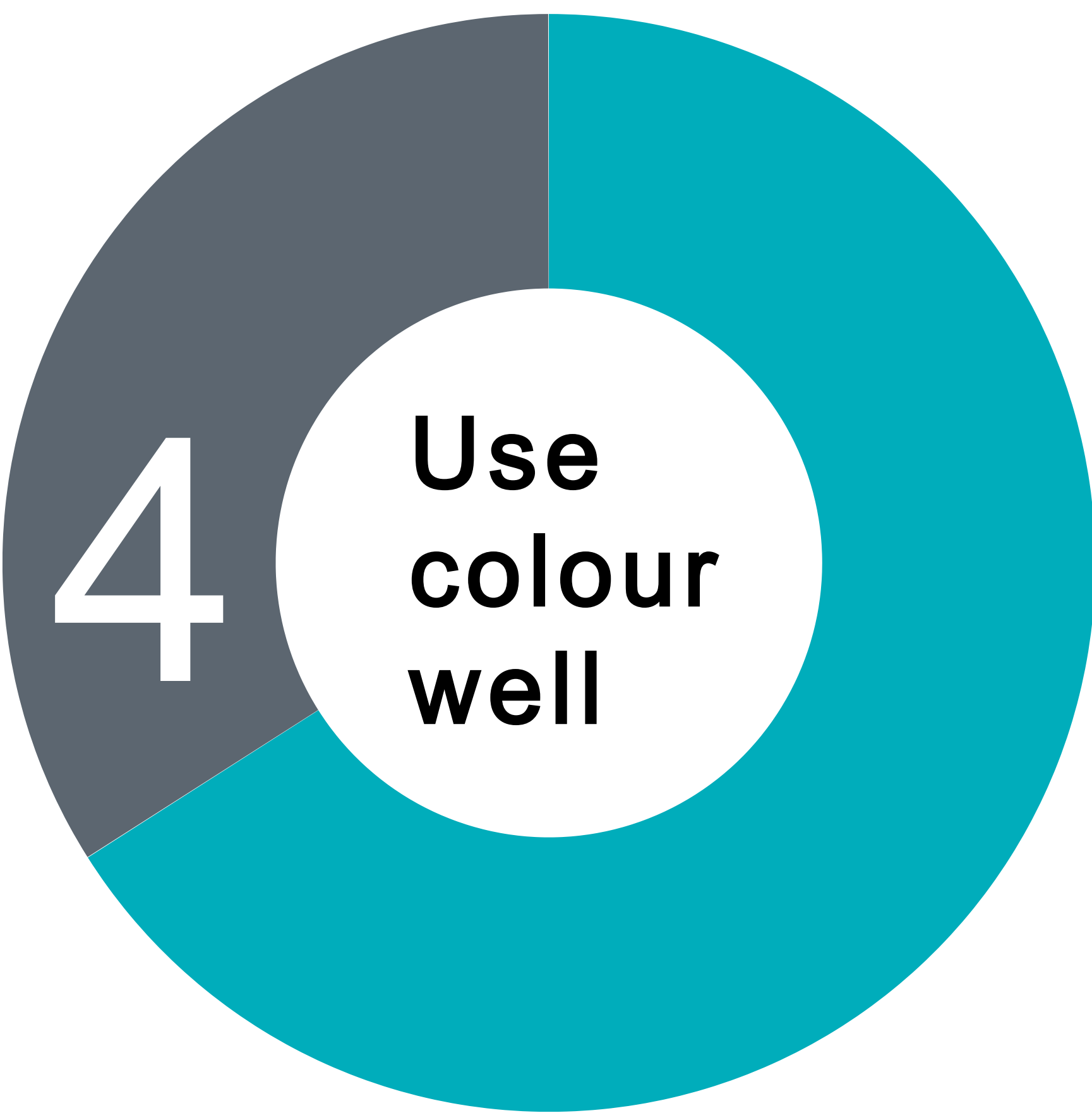## 3 Label clearly & simply

Avoid legends.
Label data directly whenever possible.

Keep all text horizontal.
This may mean making your graph bigger or your labels shorter. You may also be able to use a subtitle instead of a Y-axis label.

Use whole numbers.
Avoid decimals unless absolutely necessary for accuracy. This is rare.

4 — Use colour well

Colour should be used **intentionally** and **sparingly**.

If everything is different, nothing stands out.

Keep your base colour dark grey and **choose one or two contrasting colours** to highlight important data.

- Shades of blue are good for positive findings
- Shades of orange are good for negative findings

Don't make your readers decipher new colour schemes. Use the same colours **consistently** throughout your document.

5 — Tidy up the text

Create clean lines.
- Left align your title and subtitle.
- Other elements can be left or right aligned (avoid centre alignment).
- The goal is to create clean lines, and as few of them as possible.

Make it easy to read.
- Use black text on a white background.
- Use 1.1 or 1.2 line spacing.
- Data labels should be at least font size 9. Use a sans serif font for small text.

6 — Reduce clutter

Let the data shine.
- Never use 3D graphs.
- Remove the border, axis lines, and tick marks, or lighten to grey if they are useful.
- Size the graph appropriately for the content to be readable. Embrace the remaining white space.

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Sources

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