

## Alcohol and other drug use among South Australian secondary school students:

### Findings from the South Australian component of the 2005 Australian Secondary Students' Alcohol & Drug Survey

#### Main Findings

The results from the 2005 Australian Secondary Students' Alcohol & Drug Survey (ASSADS) are positive for South Australia. Since 2002, the proportion of students reporting use of licit and illicit drugs has either decreased significantly or not changed. This includes both recent use and use within a student's lifetime.

Reported use of tobacco, both lifetime and recent, has declined significantly from 1999–2005.

Since 2002, there have been significant decreases in:

- The proportion of students who had ever tried alcohol or who had consumed alcohol in the previous week.
- The proportion of 12, 15 and 17 year old students who reported binge-drinking behaviour.
- The proportion of students who reported lifetime and recent use (in the last week) of cannabis. This decline was most apparent among 14 and 15 year olds.

Analgesics remain the most commonly used substance (both illicit and licit), while cannabis remains the most commonly used illicit substance.

Only small proportions of students reported lifetime or recent use of other illicit drugs and no increases in use were found from 2002–2005:

- Lifetime use of ecstasy and cocaine remained stable, and a decrease in lifetime use of inhalants, amphetamines, heroin and hallucinogens was seen.
- Recent use (in the last week) of inhalants decreased between 2002 and 2005, while recent use of all other illicit drugs remained stable.

Both lifetime and recent use (non-medical) of sedatives remained stable compared to 2002.

#### Introduction

Every three years school students throughout Australia participate in ASSADS, a national survey of alcohol, tobacco and other drug use. In South Australia the survey is conducted by The Cancer Council South Australia in collaboration with the Drug & Alcohol Services South Australia.

ASSADS investigates the use of both licit and illicit substances among this population. The survey is a useful complement to other prevalence studies that provide information on drug and alcohol use among young people, such as the National Drug Strategy Household Survey,<sup>1</sup> the South Australian Health Omnibus Survey<sup>2</sup> and the National Alcohol Indicators Project.<sup>3</sup>

This bulletin reports findings from the South Australian component of the 2005 ASSADS.

## Methodology

A randomly selected sample of 2887 students aged between 12 and 17 years were recruited from South Australian Government, Catholic and Independent schools. To achieve this, a stratified two-stage probability sample was employed; schools were selected at the first stage of sampling and students selected within schools at the second stage of sampling.

The schools were stratified by the three education sectors and randomly selected from each sector.

Students were asked to complete an anonymous questionnaire. The survey covered demographic information, the use of tobacco, alcohol and a range of other licit and illicit substances. Questions pertaining to school-based drug and skin cancer education and student involvement in various health behaviours were also included.

The data were weighted to bring the sample into line with the state distribution of Government, Catholic and Independent Schools. The findings presented in this report are based on the weighted data of 2887 students, or 2873 students when analyses were conducted to ascertain differences between the sexes.<sup>4</sup>

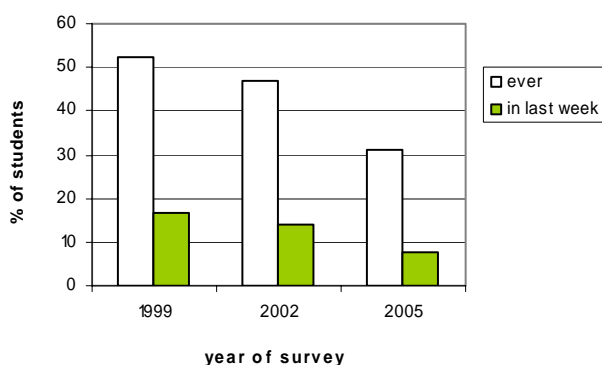
## Results

### Tobacco

Overall, the prevalence of reported tobacco use has decreased significantly since 1999.

Compared with the 1999 survey, the proportion of students in 2005 who said they had ever smoked (even part of a cigarette) was significantly lower, down from 52.2% to 31.2% (Figure 1). The proportion of students reporting tobacco use in the last week had also decreased significantly, from 16.9% in 1999 to 7.5% in 2005 (Figure 1).

**Figure 1:** Proportion of students who had ever smoked\* and who had smoked in the previous week, by survey year



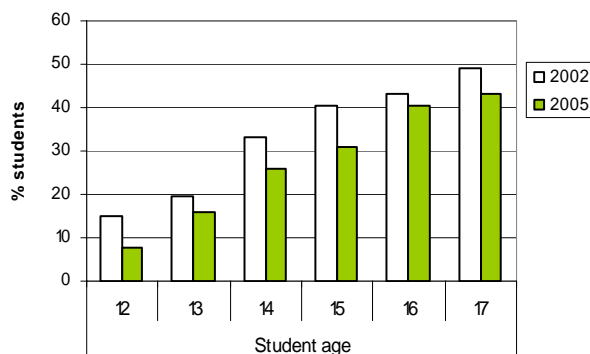
\* even part of a cigarette

For a more detailed analysis of tobacco use and smoking behaviours among students surveyed by the 2005 ASSADS, see the report produced by the Tobacco Control Research & Evaluation Program.<sup>5</sup>

### Alcohol

Since 2002, there has been a significant decrease in the proportion of students who had ever tried alcohol or who had consumed alcohol in the previous week. In 2005, 87.3% of students reported that they had tried alcohol (consumed even part of an alcoholic drink) compared to 91.8% in 2002. Around one quarter of students reported consuming alcohol in the last week, compared to one third of students in 2002. While variable decreases were seen among all ages and across both sexes (Figure 2), decreases were significant for 12 and 14 year old males and 15 year old females.

**Figure 2:** Proportion of students who had consumed alcohol in the previous week, by age and survey year



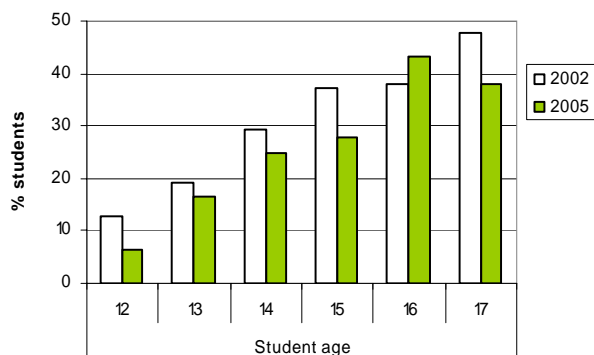
Over a quarter of students (27.3%) also participated in potentially unsafe or binge-drinking behaviour (consumption of 5 or more drinks on at least one occasion in the previous two weeks), a significant decrease compared to 31.5% in 2002. This was largely attributable to decreases in this behaviour among males, in particular, among 17 year old males (from 59.8% to 40.7%). Small decreases in binge-drinking were seen among females across most age groups between 2002 and 2005, but these were not statistically significant.

There was a significantly strong relationship between students drinking in the last week and binge-drinking behaviour. Of those who reported consuming alcohol within the last week, 59% also reported binge-drinking in the previous two weeks.

Across all age groups, there was no significant difference between the proportions of males and of females who participated in binge-drinking behaviour in 2005. This is a change from 2002, where 17 year old males were significantly more likely to report binge-drinking behaviour.

Since 2002, there has been a significant decrease in the proportion of 12, 15 and 17 year old students reporting binge-drinking behaviour (Figure 3). Other differences in this behaviour between 2002 and 2005, including the small increase among 16 year olds, were not statistically significant.

**Figure 3:** Proportion of students who participated in binge-drinking in the last 2 weeks, by age and survey year

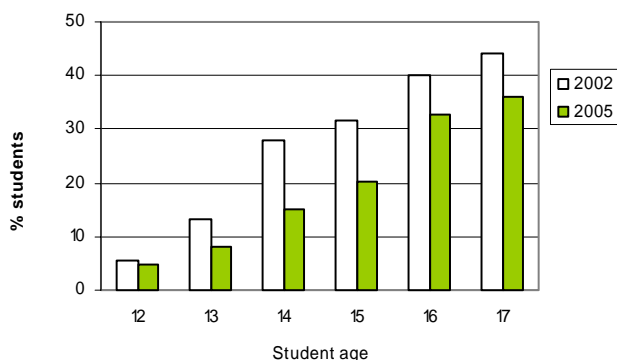


### Cannabis

Almost a fifth (18.2%) of all students reported having used cannabis in their lifetime, making cannabis the most commonly used of the illicit drugs. This was a significant decrease from 2002 when 26.8% of students reported having used cannabis in their lifetime, and continues a decline seen since 1996 when 35.5% reported lifetime use of cannabis.

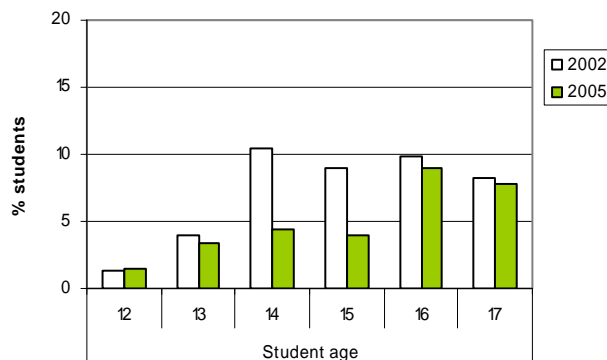
The significant decrease in lifetime use of cannabis between 2002 and 2005 was most apparent among 14 and 15 year olds (Figure 4). For all age groups there were no significant differences between males and females with regards to lifetime use of cannabis in 2005. This is a change from 2002, when a significantly larger percentage of males reported lifetime use of cannabis than females among 13 year olds.

**Figure 4:** Proportion of students who had ever used cannabis, by age and survey year



Recent use of cannabis (use in the last week) was reported by 4.7% of students, a significant decrease from 7.1% in 2002 and continuing the decline from 13.5% in 1996. The significant decrease in recent use of cannabis between 2002 and 2005, as for lifetime use of cannabis, was most apparent among 14 and 15 year olds (Figure 5). These decreases in recent use were apparent among both males and females, though overall, males were more likely to report use of cannabis in the last week (5.5% compared to 3.9% of females).

**Figure 5:** Proportion of students who have used cannabis in the last week, by age and survey year<sup>6</sup>



### Analgesics

Analgesics were the most widely used substance of all the drug types (both licit and illicit). Nearly all students had used painkillers (for any reason) at some time in their life (94%) and 41% reported they had used them in the week prior to the survey.

### Sedatives

Sedatives had been used by 14.2% of students. Less than 2% of students had used sedatives in the last week.

Both lifetime and recent use (in the last week) of sedatives remained stable compared to 2002.

### Steroids

Steroids had been used (without a prescription) by only 2.2% of students in their lifetime, and by only 0.5% of students in the week before the survey.

Both lifetime and recent use (in the last week) of steroids remained stable compared to 2002.

### Inhalants

Inhalants had been used by 13% of students in their lifetime, with 2.5% of students reporting the use of inhalants in the previous week.

There was a significant decrease in the percentage of students reporting both lifetime use of inhalants (from 15.3%) and use of inhalants in the last week (from 4%) from 2002–2005. This continues a decline seen since the 1996 survey.

### ***Amphetamines***

Lifetime use of amphetamines was reported by 4.5% of students, a significant decrease compared to 2002 when 7.3% reported lifetime use. The percentage of students reporting use of amphetamines in the last week remained stable compared to 2002, at 0.9%.

### ***Ecstasy***

Only 2.5% of students had ever used ecstasy. In the week prior to the survey, 0.4% had used this substance.

Compared with 2002, both these parameters of use were stable.

### ***Cocaine***

Less than 2% of students reported having ever used cocaine and only 0.4% of students reported using cocaine in the last week.

Since 2002, there has been no significant change in the percentage of students reporting either lifetime use or recent use (in the last week) of cocaine.

### ***Heroin***

Only 1.4% of students reported having ever used heroin (or other opiates), a small but significant drop from 2.5% in 2002. With regard to recent use of heroin, 0.3% of students indicated use of the drug within the last week, which remained stable compared to 2002.

### ***Hallucinogens***

The proportion of students who had ever used hallucinogens was 2%, with only 0.3% of students reporting use of hallucinogens in the week prior to the survey.

Since 2002, lifetime use of hallucinogens had decreased significantly from 4.2%, continuing the decline from 9.1% seen in 1999. Recent use (in the last week) of hallucinogens was stable compared to 2002.

## **Discussion**

The results from the 2005 ASSADS are positive for South Australia. Since 2002, the proportion of students reporting use of licit and illicit drugs has either decreased significantly or not changed. This includes both recent use and use within a student's lifetime.

There has been a significant decline in reported recent tobacco use from 2002–2005, suggesting that fewer students are taking up smoking. This decline has been reported since 1996. The licit drugs, analgesics, alcohol and tobacco continue to be the most commonly used substances for students aged 12–17 years.

The proportions of students reporting both lifetime and recent use of alcohol have decreased since the 2002 survey. Binge-drinking has also shown a decline particularly among 12, 15 and 17 year olds. However, still of concern is that over one quarter of students surveyed reported binge-drinking in 2005. Sixteen and 17 year olds remain an obvious focus for health promotion messages, with regard to drinking behaviour, over the coming years.

Cannabis remains the most commonly used illicit substance among South Australian secondary school children. Although the overall use of cannabis has declined significantly since the 1996 survey, particularly among 14 and 15 year olds, a substantial proportion of 16 and 17 year old students reported using cannabis in the previous week.

As with ASSADS findings in previous years, only a small proportion of the students had ever used other illicit drugs. Relatively small proportions report both lifetime and recent use, suggesting experimental rather than regular use of these substances. In addition, the use of illicit drugs has not increased since 2002.

## Notes

---

- <sup>1</sup> The latest survey is reported in: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. (2005). 2004 National Drug Strategy Household Survey: State and Territory Supplement. AIHW cat. no. PHE 61. Canberra: AIHW.
- <sup>2</sup> The Health Omnibus Survey is a face-to-face survey conducted annually since 1991 for government and non-government organisations responsible for servicing the health needs of the South Australian community. For further information visit: <http://www.health.sa.gov.au/pros>
- <sup>3</sup> In particular: Chikritzhs, T. and Pascal, R. (2004). National Alcohol Indicators – Bulletin No. 6: *Trends in Youth Alcohol Consumption and Related Harms in Australian Jurisdictions, 1990–2002*. Perth: National Drug Research Institute, Curtin University, WA.
- <sup>4</sup> Fourteen students were excluded from these analyses, because data was missing for the sex variable (but otherwise complete).
- <sup>5</sup> Hoey, M. and Miller, C. 'Smoking among South Australian Secondary Students – Results from the 2005 ASSAD survey'. Tobacco Control Research & Evaluation Program, Adelaide, August 2006.
- <sup>6</sup> The proportions for the 12 and 13 year age groups should be interpreted with caution due to the small numbers reporting use among these ages.

Drug & Alcohol Services South Australia acknowledges the contribution of the following organisations:

- Department of Education & Children's Services
- The Cancer Council South Australia
- The Cancer Council Victoria
- SA Smoking & Health Project
- Catholic Education Office
- Independent Schools Board
- Participating staff and students

## Report prepared by:

Josephine Weekley & Richard Cooke  
Clinical Services & Research,  
with acknowledgment to Melinda Beckwith.