

## Executive Summary

### The 2008 Australian Secondary Students Alcohol and Drug Survey

The 2008 Australian Secondary Students Alcohol and Drug Survey was conducted during the academic school year of 2008. This was the ninth survey in a series that commenced in 1984 assessing use of tobacco and alcohol, and the fifth to include questions on the use of over-the-counter and illicit substances. Around 24,000 secondary students aged between 12 and 17 years participated in the survey, in which they were asked about their lifetime and current use of tobacco, alcohol, analgesics, tranquillisers and illicit substances and related behaviour. In this report we present prevalence estimates of use of the different substances in 2008 within each age between 12 and 17 years for males and females. We also compare estimates found in 2008 with those from surveys conducted in 2005 and 2002 and for these analyses we focus on estimates for the age groups 12- to 15-year-olds and 16- and 17-year-olds.

### Tobacco

In 2008, around 90% of 12-year-olds had no experience with smoking and this decreased to 54% among 17-year-olds. Only 4% of all students had smoked more than 100 cigarettes in their lifetime with a peak of 10% among 17-year-old males.

Students who smoked in the seven days preceding the survey are termed 'current' smokers. The percentage of students who were current smokers increased from 2% among 12-year-olds to 14% among 17-year-olds. The proportion of students smoking in the previous week at age 14 (7%) was half that of those aged 17 (14%).

In 2008, the legal age for selling cigarettes in all Australian States and Territories was 18 years. Despite this, 20% of all students who smoked in the past week bought their last cigarette themselves. However, as was the case in previous surveys, the single most common source of cigarettes for adolescents who were current smokers was friends (45%).

The proportion of students who smoked in the week before the survey in 2008 was the lowest found since the survey series began. In 2008, 5% of 12- to 15-year-olds had smoked in the seven days before the survey and this was significantly lower than the 7% found in 2005 and the 11% found in 2002. In 2008, the prevalence of current smoking among 16- to 17-year-olds was 13% and this was significantly lower than the 17% found in 2005 and the 23% found in 2002.

### Alcohol

Eight out of every ten Australian secondary students aged between 12 and 17 years had tried alcohol at some time in their lives and 61% had consumed alcohol in the 12 months preceding the 2008 survey. The proportion of students drinking in the seven days before the survey was around 23%. Involvement with alcohol increased with age, with the proportion of students drinking in the seven days before the survey increasing from 11% of 13-year-olds to 41% of 17-year-olds. In the week before the survey just under 20% of all 17-year-old students had consumed alcohol at risky levels (7 or more drinks a day for males, 5 or more drinks a day for females). Premixed spirits were the most preferred beverage among female current drinkers, while beer and spirits were the most preferred beverages for male current drinkers. Adolescents who consumed

alcohol in the previous seven days most commonly obtained their alcohol from their parents (34%) or friends (22%) and consumed alcohol in their own home (31%) or at a party (30%).

The proportion of students aged between 12 and 17 years drinking in 2008 was lower than levels found in 2005 and 2002. The proportion of 12- to 15-year-olds drinking in the week before the survey decreased significantly between 2002 (29%) and 2008 (17%) and between 2005 (22%) and 2008. The proportion of 16- and 17-year-olds drinking in the week before the survey in 2008 (38%) was significantly lower than the proportion found in 2005 (47%) and 2002 (48%). While for both age groups, the proportion of all students drinking at risky levels in the week before the survey was lower in 2008 than in 2005 and 2002, there was no change in the proportion of current drinkers drinking at risky levels between 2002 and 2008.

### **Over-the-counter and illicit substances**

*Analgesics:* Students were asked about any use of analgesics. Analgesics were the most commonly used substance (licit or illicit) among secondary school students. By the age of 12 over 90% of students had used analgesics in their lifetime. Seventy percent of secondary students had used analgesics in the four weeks prior to the survey, and 41% had used analgesics in the week prior to the survey. The main reasons for using analgesics were headaches/migraine and relief of cold and ‘flu’ symptoms with parents the most common source of analgesics. There was no change in the proportion of students using analgesics between 2002 and 2008.

*Tranquillisers:* Use of tranquillisers other than for medical reasons among students was low, with 83% of students never having used tranquillisers. Between 4% and 5% of students aged 13 and above had used tranquillisers in the month prior to the survey. While the proportion of students who had used tranquillisers in their lifetime increased between 2005 and 2008, there was no change in the proportion using these substances in the month and week before the survey between 2002 and 2008.

*Cannabis:* Cannabis was the most commonly used illicit substance among secondary school students, with 14% of all secondary school students aged between 12 and 17 years reporting the use of cannabis at some time in their life. Cannabis use increased with age from 3% of 12-year-olds who had ever used cannabis to 26% of 17-year-olds. Six per cent of all students had used cannabis in the month prior to the survey and 4% had used it within the week before the survey. The proportion of 12- to 15-year-olds using cannabis in their lifetime, in the past month and past week in 2008 was significantly lower than in 2005 and 2002. Among 16- to 17-year-olds while lifetime use of cannabis in 2008 was significantly lower than in 2005 and 2002, use in the past month and past week in 2008 was only significantly lower than 2002.

*Inhalants:* Reported use of inhalants was more common among younger students than older students. While 19% of all students had ever used inhalants, ever use decreased from 23% of 12-year-olds to 14% of 17-year-olds. Recent use of inhalants also decreased with age, so that while 11% of 12-year-olds had used inhalants in the month prior to the survey, only 4% of 17-year-olds had used these substances recently. The proportion of 12- to 15-year-olds using inhalants in their lifetime and in the past month decreased between 2002 and 2008 but not between 2005 and 2008. Among 16- and 17-year-olds, significantly more students reported lifetime use and monthly use of inhalants in 2008 than in 2005, with the 2008 proportions similar to those in 2002.

*Hallucinogens:* Three per cent of all secondary school students reported some experience with hallucinogens. Ever use increased with age, rising from 1% of 12-year-olds to 5% of 16- and 17-year-olds. Lifetime use and past month use of hallucinogens among 12- to 15-year-olds decreased significantly between 2002 and 2008 but there was no change between 2005 and 2008. There was no change in the proportion of older students using hallucinogens between 2002 and 2008.

*Amphetamines:* The majority (96%) of secondary school students had never used amphetamines. By the age of 17, 7% of students reported having had some experience with amphetamines. Around 2% of students 15 years and over reported using amphetamines in the month before the survey. Among 12- to 15-year-olds, lifetime use of amphetamines and use in the past month in 2008 was significantly lower than proportions found in 2005 and 2002. Among 16- to 17-year-olds, the proportion of students reporting use of amphetamines in their lifetime in 2008 was significantly lower than the proportion found in 2002 but not 2005.

*Steroids:* Steroid use without a doctor's prescription was very uncommon, with around 2% of all students having ever used these substances. The proportion of 12- to 15-year-olds and 16- to 17-year-olds using steroids did not change between 2002 and 2008.

*Opiates:* A small proportion of students (2%) reported that they had ever used opiates such as heroin or morphine. There was a decrease in the proportion of 12- to 15-year-olds reporting to have ever used opiates between 2002 and 2008 but not between 2005 and 2008. There was no change in the proportion of 16- and 17-year-olds reporting use of opiates in their lifetime between 2002 and 2008.

*Cocaine:* Use of cocaine was rare among students. Only 2% of all students reported having ever used cocaine. There was a decrease in the proportion of 12- to 15-year-olds reporting cocaine use in their lifetime between both 2002 and 2008 and 2005 and 2008. However, there was no change in the proportion of older students reporting use of cocaine between 2002 and 2008.

*Ecstasy:* Only 4% of students had ever used ecstasy. Recent use of ecstasy was not common among any age group. Only 3-4% of students aged 16 to 17 years had used ecstasy in the month prior to the survey. The proportion of 12- to 15-year-olds who reported using ecstasy in their lifetime in 2008 was lower than the proportion found in 2002 but was not different from the proportion found in 2005. The proportion of older students reporting ecstasy use in 2008 was slightly higher than the proportion found in 2005 and this increase was significant for use in the past month.