

# Summary

## The 1998 National Drug Strategy Household Survey

Between June and September 1998, 10,030 Australians aged 14 years and older participated in the National Drug Strategy Household Survey. This was the sixth survey in a series which commenced in 1985 but the first to be managed by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. Respondents were asked about their knowledge of drugs, their attitudes towards drugs, their drug consumption histories, and related behaviours.

## General findings

### Tobacco

Tobacco was primarily associated with a drug 'problem' by fewer than one in 20 Australians; two in every five approved of the regular use of tobacco by adults. Two-thirds of Australians had tried tobacco at some time in their lives, and more than one in four were recent smokers.

One in seven persons indicated that tobacco was their first drug of choice, and the proportion recently smoking daily or most days declined by two percentage points between 1995 and 1998 to 22%. The average age at which smokers took up tobacco increased from 15.6 to 15.8 years in the same period. Under-age smokers (that is, persons aged under 18 years, to whom it is illegal to sell tobacco products) were likely to have been introduced to smoking by friends and acquaintances. Subsequently, two out of every five under-age smokers obtained their cigarettes from retail outlets. Further, of those teenage recent smokers, nearly 96% also reported using alcohol recently and 76% using marijuana/cannabis recently.

Of persons aged 40–49 years who had ever smoked, 60% no longer did so.

### Alcohol

About one in every seven Australians primarily associated alcohol with a drug 'problem'; three in every five approved of the regular use of alcohol by adults. Nine out of every ten Australians had tried alcohol at some time in their lives and three-quarters had recently consumed alcohol.

Two in every five persons nominated alcohol as their first drug of choice, and the proportion drinking regularly increased from 44% to 49% between 1995 and 1998. One in four persons consumed alcohol daily or on most days in a week, and two in five consumed less often than weekly. Under-age alcohol drinkers (that is, persons aged under 18, to whom it is illegal to

sell alcohol) were likely to have been introduced to drinking by relatives. Subsequently, almost one in every five under-age drinkers obtained their alcohol from retail outlets.

One in six persons admitted to driving a motor vehicle, one in ten verbally abused someone, and one in 50 persons physically abused someone while under the influence of alcohol.

Three in every ten persons had been verbally abused and one in every 16 had been physically abused by someone who had been affected by alcohol.

In terms of alcohol-moderation behaviour by recent drinkers, the most frequently cited activity to moderate the consumption of alcohol was to reduce the amount of alcohol usually consumed (29%).

## **Illicit drugs**

More than three in every four Australians primarily associated an illicit drug with a drug 'problem'; one in four approved the regular use of marijuana by adults, and fewer than one in 20 persons approved the regular use of each of the other illicit drugs included in the survey. Almost one in every two Australians had used an illicit drug at some time in their lives and over one in five had used illicit drugs in the previous 12 months. One in every two persons supported measures designed to reduce harm associated with illicit drug use.

Around one in 14 persons nominated any illicit drug as their first drug of choice, with one in 18 nominating marijuana/cannabis as first choice. The average age at which people first tried illicit drugs declined slightly from 16.8 years in 1995 to 16.6 years in 1998.

Four in every five illicit drug users were introduced to illicit drugs by friends and acquaintances. Subsequently, most illicit drug users continued to obtain their illicit drugs from friends and acquaintances.

One in 16 persons drove a motor vehicle, one in 50 verbally abused someone, and one in 200 physically abused someone while under the influence of illicit drugs. One in ten persons were verbally abused and one in 40 were physically abused by someone affected by illicit drugs.

## **Correlates of drugs use**

The survey showed that the following appear to influence drug use:

- socioeconomic characteristics such as education, employment, occupational status and cultural background;
- geographical variables such as rural/remote location and the index of socioeconomic status of an area; and
- demographic variables such as marital status.

In general, the survey showed that unemployed persons, persons with low educational qualifications, persons working in blue collar jobs, and persons who were never married were more likely than others to be using drugs.