

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. Respondents were asked about their knowledge of drugs, their attitudes towards drugs, their drug consumption histories and related behaviours. This report features results for Western Australia, based on responses from 764 participants in that state.

General findings

In Western Australia between 1995 and 1998, there was slightly higher use amongst most illicit drugs included in the survey, both in terms of lifetime use (that is, used at any time in one's life) and recent use (used in the last 12 months). Such consistent changes in lifetime and recent use of tobacco and alcohol were not evident and remained fairly stable. It appears that young females aged 14–19 years accounted for a large part of the overall increases in use of illicit substances (notably cannabis), and it appears that for some substances recent use by females is now similar to use by males.

Tobacco

In 1998, approximately two-thirds (69%) of West Australians aged 14 years and over had tried tobacco at some time in their lives, and fewer than one in four (24%) were regular smokers. The proportion recently smoking daily or most days remained relatively stable between 1995 and 1998 at around 23%. The average age at which smokers took up tobacco smoking remained stable at just over 15 years of age. The highest proportion of smokers was 42% in the 20–29 years age group. Approval of use of tobacco by adults increased from 34% in 1995 to 43% in 1998. The proportion of persons who were ex-smokers increased by six percentage points to 42% in 1998, whilst the proportion of persons who had never smoked decreased by four percentage points to 31% in 1998.

Alcohol

Approximately nine out of every 10 (93%) West Australians aged 14 years and over had tried alcohol at some time in their lives and more than half (53%) consumed alcohol regularly. In 1998, the acceptability of alcohol use by adults increased by 13 percentage points to 64%. The proportion of victims of alcohol-related incidents decreased from 93% to 65% in 1998. Approximately 24% of persons who were recent drinkers admitted to driving a motor vehicle while under the influence of alcohol, and 14% of recent drinkers verbally abused someone while under the influence of alcohol.

Illicit drugs

In 1998, 51% of the Western Australian population had used an illicit drug at some time in their lifetime. This is a substantial increase from 44% in 1995. One in every four (25%) persons in Western Australia had used an illicit substance in the previous 12 months. One in three (33%) people approved of the regular use of cannabis by adults. With the exception of analgesics (12%), fewer than one in 20 persons approved of the regular use of illicit drugs. Of

persons who had used a drug other than alcohol in the last 12 months, approximately 8% admitted to driving a motor vehicle while under the influence of drugs other than alcohol. In Western Australia, one in 10 people reported being verbally abused or put in fear by persons under the influence of drugs other than alcohol. The majority of illicit drugs were supplied to users via a friend or acquaintance. Approximately 32% of the Western Australian population supported the legalisation of cannabis use, whilst the proportion who supported heroin, cocaine and amphetamine use was less than 7%. The lowest age of initiation for illicit drugs was 19 years of age for cannabis, with the highest being 25 years of age for cocaine.