Drug and Alcohol Services South Australia

Statistical Bulletin

Number 3 - November 2012

Alcohol and other drug use among South Australian secondary school students: Findings from the South Australian component of the 2011 Australian Secondary Students' Alcohol and Drug Survey

This Bulletin is the third in a series providing the most up-to-date data available on the prevalence of alcohol and other drugs, the harms associated with misuse, and alcohol and other drug treatment services in South Australia. This issue focuses on the prevalence of smoking, alcohol and other drug use amongst South Australian secondary school students.

Summary

Since 2008, there have been statistically significant decreases in:

> the percentage of students who had ever used tobacco

> the percentage of students who had ever tried alcohol, or who had consumed alcohol in the previous week.

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

Only very small percentages of students reported lifetime or recent use of other substances:

> Lifetime use of steroids, inhalants, amphetamines, ecstasy, cocaine and heroin significantly decreased since 2008.

> Recent use (in the last week) of cocaine, heroin and analgesics significantly decreased, while recent use of all other illicit drugs remained unchanged since 2008.

Percentages of both lifetime and recent use of cannabis, hallucinogens and sedatives in 2011 remained stable compared to 2008.

Introduction

Every three years, school students throughout Australia participate in the Australian Secondary Students' Alcohol and Drug Survey (ASSADS). In South Australia the survey is conducted by Cancer Council SA in collaboration with Drug and 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[1] and the South Australian Health Omnibus Survey[2]. This bulletin reports findings from the achieved sample of 2875 students between the ages of 12 and 17 years recruited from Government, Catholic and Independent schools in 2011.

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Methodology

A randomly selected sample of 3050 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 were 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 2875 students.

Data were compared for statistical significance using a Chi-square test to assess differences in frequencies of substance use. Statistical significance was accepted at $p<0.05$.

Results

Tobacco

In 2011, 19.8% of students reported that they had ever smoked (even part of a cigarette); significantly less than in 2008 (24.3%, $p<0.001$). The percentage of students in 2011 who had reported using tobacco in the last week (4.7%) remained stable compared to 2008 (4.9%).

In 2011, a significantly larger percentage of males (21.3%) than females (18.3%) had ever smoked ($p<0.05$). The percentages of both males and females who had ever used tobacco decreased between 2008 and 2011 ($p<0.01$).

The percentage of students who had ever used tobacco decreased significantly for 13 and 15 year olds ($p<0.05$) and remained stable for all other age groups (Figure 1).

In 2011, there was no significant difference between the percentages of males and females who had smoked in the previous week. The percentages of both males and females who had recently smoked remained stable from 2008 to 2011.

The percentage of students who recently smoked (in the past week) also remained stable from 2008 to 2011 for all ages.

Trends since 1996 show that both percentages of students who have ever smoked, and who have smoked recently (in the past week) have decreased (Figure 2).

The decrease in lifetime use of tobacco from 56.1% in 1996 to 19.8% in 2011 ($p<0.05$) was primarily driven by decreases in lifetime tobacco use amongst 13 to 15 year olds. In 1996, 57.7% of students aged 13 to 15 reported having ever smoked even part of a cigarette. By 2011 this had decreased to 14.8% ($p<0.05$).

The percentage of students who reported smoking in the previous week has declined in the years since 1996 in which the survey has been undertaken. This decline has been particularly prominent amongst students more than 14 years of age. The percentage of students aged 14 to 16 who had recently smoked (in the past week) declined from 24.1% in 1996 to 6.0% in 2011 ($p<0.05$). In 1996 32.0% of 17 year olds reported having used tobacco the past week. In 2011 this had declined to 8.3% ($p<0.05$).

Figure 1: Percentage of students who had ever smoked, 2008 and 2011.*

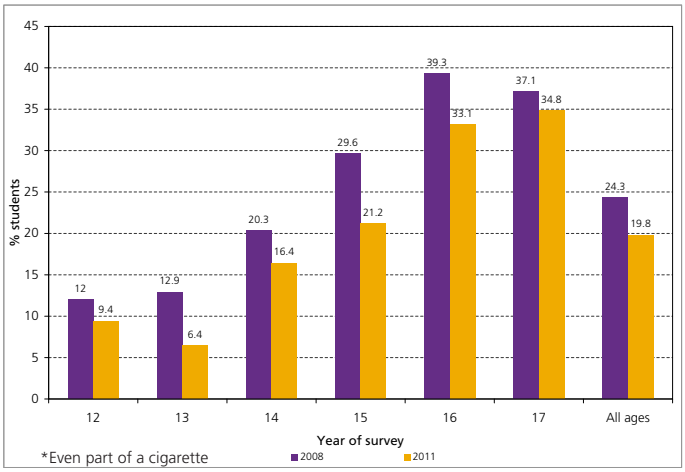
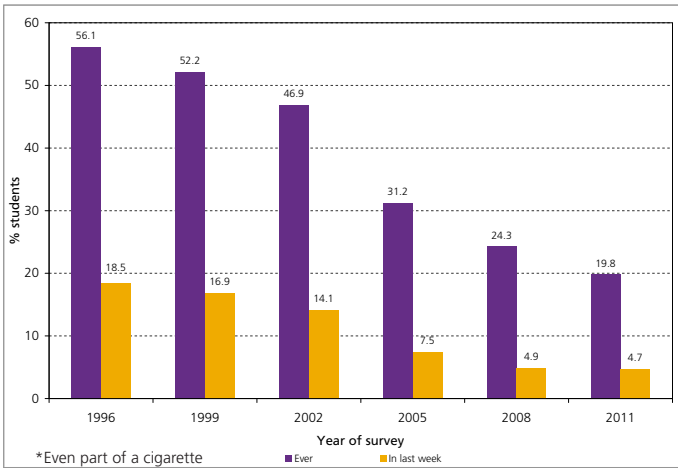


Figure 2: Percentage of students who had ever smoked and who had smoked in the previous week, by survey year.*



Alcohol

In 2011, 77.5% of students reported that they had ever tried alcohol; significantly lower than the percentage in 2008 (85.1%, p<0.01). The percentage of students who recently consumed alcohol (in the previous week) also significantly decreased from 23.0% of students in 2008 to 15.0% in 2011 (p<0.01).

In 2011, the differences between the percentages of males and females who reported having ever tried alcohol (78.3% and 76.7% respectively) were not significant.

The percentages of both males and females who had ever tried alcohol significantly decreased between 2008 (84.4% and 85.8% respectively) and 2011 (78.3% and 76.7% respectively, p<0.05).

Decreases in the percentage of students who had ever tried alcohol between 2008 and 2011 were significant for all ages (p<0.05) except 16 and 17 year olds.

In 2011, the percentages of males and females who had recently consumed alcohol (15.3% and 14.8% respectively) were not significantly different but both had significantly decreased from 2008 to 2011(from 24.3% and 21.8%, to 15.3% and 14.8% for males and females respectively, p<0.05).

Decreases from 2008 to 2011 in the percentage of students who had used alcohol use in the previous week were significant for all ages (p<0.01, Figure 3).

Overall from 1996 to 2011, the percentages of students who had ever consumed alcohol and who had consumed alcohol in the previous week have declined (p<0.05, Figure 4).

There was a small significant increase in the percentages of lifetime and recent alcohol use between 1996 and 1999, which subsequently remained stable in 2002. However, percentages of both lifetime and recent alcohol use have since significantly declined each year that the survey has been undertaken.

Since 1996, the most marked decline in the prevalence of lifetime use of alcohol occurred amongst 13 and 14 year olds. In 1996, 86.8% of 13 year olds and 91.4% of 14 year olds reported ever having consumed alcohol. In 2011 63.0% of 13 year olds and 75.9% of 14 year olds reported ever having consumed alcohol (p<0.05).

While the percentage of students who had recently consumed alcohol (in the past week) had declined between 1996 and 2011 for all ages (31.6% to 15.0%, p<0.05) the greatest decline occurred amongst students aged 14, 16 and 17 years old. From 1996 to 2011, the percentage of 14 year olds who reported having consumed alcohol in the previous week declined from 33.2% to 9.3% (p<0.05). In 1996 49.9% of students aged 16 to 17 had consumed alcohol in the previous week. By 2011 this had decreased to 27.6% (p<0.05).

Figure 3: Percentage of students who had consumed alcohol in the previous week, by age, 2008 and 2011.

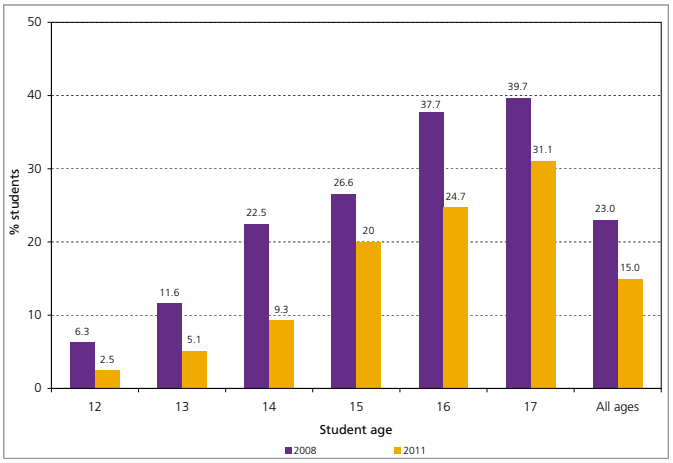
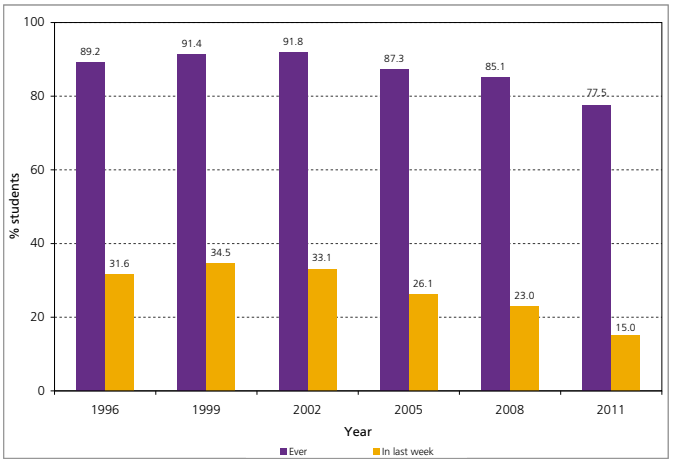


Figure 4: Percentage of students who had ever consumed alcohol and who had consumed alcohol in the previous week, by survey year.



Illicit drugs

In 2011, 17.3% of all students had ever used at least one illicit drug†, and 4.5% of all students had used at least one illicit drug in the past week. The prevalence of both lifetime and recent (in the past week) illicit drug use remained stable compared to 2008.

There was no significant difference between the percentages of males (18.5%) and females (16.1%) who reported ever using an illicit drug in 2011. The percentages of both males and females who reported ever having used an illicit drug remained stable from 2008 to 2011.

The difference between 2008 and 2011 in the percentage of students who had ever used illicit drugs was only significant for 13 year olds (from 8.9% to 4.6%, $p<0.05$).

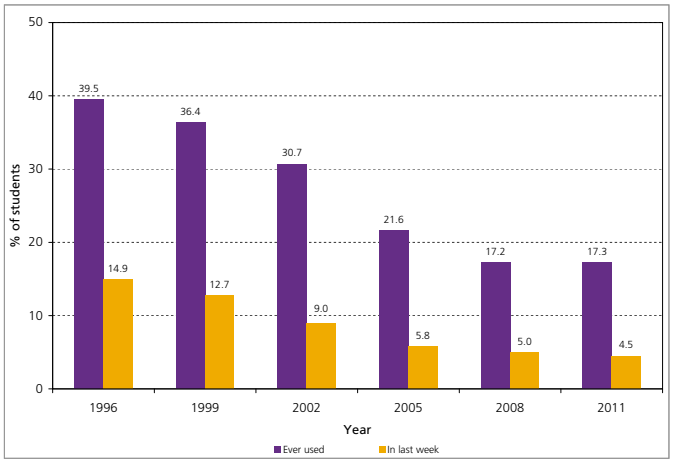
In 2011, significantly more males than females had used illicit drugs in the previous week (5.6% compared to 3.3%, $p<0.05$). Both the percentages of males and females who had used an illicit drug in the previous week remained stable in 2011 compared to 2008. The percentages of students in all age groups who reported illicit drug use also remained stable from 2008 to 2011.

Trends since 1996 show that the percentage of students who had ever used illicit drugs, and who had recently used illicit drugs (in the past week) have significantly decreased in the years that the survey has been undertaken to 2011 (Figure 5).

The decrease in the percentage of students who had ever used illicit drugs from 1996 to 2011 was driven primarily by students aged 15 years and older. In 1996, 62.1% of 17-year-old students had used an illicit drug during their lifetime. By 2011, this had decreased to 28.9%, $p<0.01$), though 17 (and 16) year olds still had the greatest percentage of students who reported ever using illicit drugs. In 1996 48.5% of 15-year-old students reported ever having used an illicit drug. By 2011 this percentage had decreased to 19.5% ($p<0.01$).

The decrease in recent illicit drug use (in the past week) since 1996 has mainly been driven by students aged 15 and 16. The percentage of 15 and 16 year olds who had recently used illicit drugs decreased from 23.2% in 1996 to 5.4% in 2011 ($p<0.01$).

Figure 5: Percentage of students who had ever used any illicit drugs and who had used any illicit drugs in the previous week, by survey year.



Cannabis

In 2011, 13.6% of all students reported having used cannabis in their lifetime and 3.1% of students reported using cannabis in the previous week, making cannabis the most commonly used of the illicit drugs. Both lifetime and recent cannabis use amongst students remained stable since 2008.

In 2011, there was no significant difference between the percentages of males and females who had ever used cannabis (14.8% and 12.3% respectively). However significantly greater percentages of 16 and 17-yea-old males reported lifetime use of cannabis than females in those age groups (30.1% compared to 20.2%, and 30.2% compared to 21.2% for 16 and 17 year olds respectively, $p<0.05$).

The percentages of male and female students who reported ever having used cannabis in 2011 remained stable compared to 2008 (14.3% and 10.7% for males and females respectively).

The percentage of students who had ever used cannabis remained stable from 2008 to 2011 for all age groups (Figure 6).

In 2011, a significantly greater percentage of males than females reported use of cannabis in the past week (4.1% compared to 2.1% of females, $p<0.01$).

The percentages of both males and females who had used cannabis in the past week remained stable between 2008 (4.4% and 2.4% respectively) and 2011.

† 'Illicit drugs' include: cannabis, amphetamines, ecstasy, cocaine, heroin (and other opiates) and hallucinogens.

There was a significant decrease in the percentage of 16 year olds who had recently used cannabis from 8.9% to 5.4% between 2008 and 2011 ($p<0.05$). The increases in the percentage of 14 and 17 year olds who had recently used of cannabis (Figure 7) and all other differences between age groups from 2008 to 2011 were not significant.

Since 1996, both recent and lifetime use of cannabis have decreased in the years that the survey has been undertaken, stabilising in 2008 (Figure 8).

The decrease in lifetime use of cannabis since 1996 has been driven by students aged 15 years and older. In 1996, 54.3% of students aged 15 to 17 years old reported ever having used cannabis in their lifetime. In 2011, that percentage had declined to 22.0% ($p<0.05$).

The largest decrease since 1996 in recent use of marijuana has been by 16 year olds, the percentage of which decreased from 26.0% in 1996 to 5.4% in 2011 ($p<0.05$).

Figure 6: Percentage of students who had ever used cannabis, by age, and 2008 and 2011.

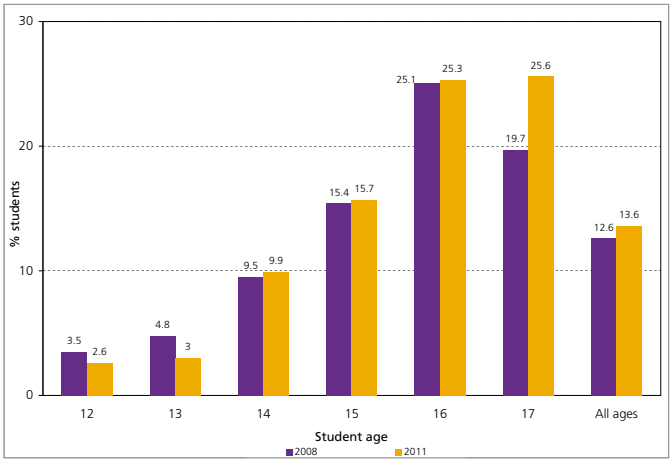
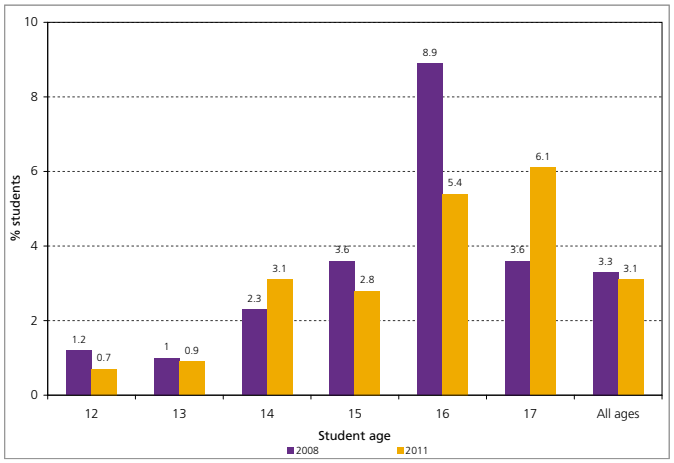
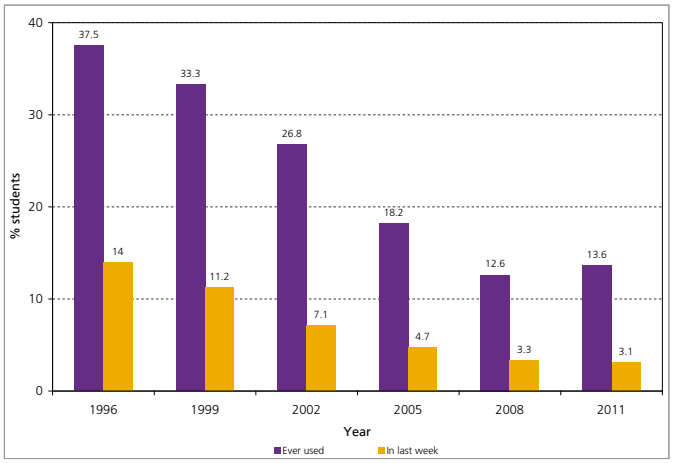


Figure 7: Percentage of students who have used cannabis in the last week, by age, and 2008 and 2011#.



Percentages for the 12 and 13 year age groups should be interpreted with caution due to the small numbers reporting use among these ages (percentages based on less than 10 students).

Figure 8: Percentage of students who had ever used cannabis and who had used cannabis in the previous week, by survey year.



Painkillers/analgesics

Analgesics (such as Disprin, Panadol or Aspro) were the most widely used substance of all drugs. Nearly all students had used painkillers (for any reason) at some time in their life (94.5%) and 39.7% reported they had used them in the week prior to the survey.

The percentage of students who had ever used analgesics remained stable compared to 2008 (94.1%). The percentage of students who had recently used analgesics (in the last week) was significantly lower in 2011 than in 2008 (43.1% to 39.7%, $p<0.05$).

In 2011, significantly more females than males had used painkillers recently (48.1% and 31.4% respectively, $p<0.05$) and at least once in their lifetime (96.7% and 92.3% respectively, $p<0.05$).

Trends since 1996 show a small overall decrease in the percentages of students using analgesics both over a lifetime (97.4% to 94.5%) and in the previous week (43.1% to 39.7%).

Other substances

Changes from 2008 to 2011 in the percentage of students who reported use of the other substances listed below should be interpreted with caution, as changes are based on small numbers of students reporting use of these substances in both years.

Sedatives

Sedatives had been used (other than for medical reasons) by 16.2% of students in their lifetime. Use of sedatives in the last week was reported by 2.2% of students.

Both lifetime and recent use (in the last week) of sedatives remained stable since 2008.

Trends since 1996 show recent use of sedatives has remained relatively stable over the years in which the survey has been undertaken, despite a significant increase in percentages from 2005 to 2008 (Figure 9).

Steroids

Steroids (without a prescription) had been used by only 1.7% of students in their lifetime, and by only 0.4% of students in the week before the survey.

The percentage of students who had ever used steroids decreased significantly from 2008 to 2011. Recent use (in the last week) of steroids remained stable compared to 2008 (0.9 %) and has also remained stable since 1996 (Figure 9).

Inhalants

Inhalants had been used by 14.4% of students in their lifetime, with 3.4% of students reporting the use of inhalants in the previous week.

There was a significant decrease ($p<0.001$) between 2008 and 2011 in the percentage of students reporting lifetime use of inhalants (from 16.2%). The percentage of students who had used inhalants in the last week remained stable since 2008 (3.6%).

Trends since 1996 show the percentage of students who had recently used inhalants has decreased over the years in which the survey has been undertaken (Figure 9).

Amphetamines

Lifetime use of amphetamines was reported by 2.2% of students, a significant decrease ($p<0.05$) compared to 2008 when 3.3% of students reported lifetime use.

The percentage of students reporting use of amphetamines in the last week, at 0.5%, was not significantly different to 2008. The percentage of students who had recently used amphetamines has remained relatively stable since 1996 (Figure 9).

Ecstasy

Ecstasy had been used by 2.2% of students in their lifetime, a significant decrease from 3.2% in 2008 ($p<0.05$).

0.5% of students had reported ecstasy use in the week prior to the survey, which remained stable since 2008.

Trends since 1996 show the percentage of students who had recently used ecstasy remained relatively stable over the years in which the survey has been undertaken (Figure 9).

Cocaine

1.1% of students reported having ever used cocaine and 0.3% of students reported using cocaine in the last week.

In 2011, the percentage of students reporting use of cocaine in their lifetime decreased significantly ($p<0.05$) from 1.8% in 2008. The percentage of students reporting recent use (within the last week) also significantly decreased ($p<0.01$) from 0.9% in 2008.

Trends since 1996 show the percentage of students who had recently used cocaine has remained low and relatively stable over the years in which the survey has been undertaken (Figure 9).

Heroin or other opiates

Only 1.2% of students reported having ever used heroin or other opiates, which was a significant decrease from 2.4% in 2008 ($p<0.01$).

Recent use of heroin and other opiates (within the last week) decreased from 1.0% in 2008 to 0.2% in 2011 ($p<0.01$).

Trends since 1996 show recent use of heroin and other opiates has generally remained stable over the years in which the survey has been undertaken (Figure 9).

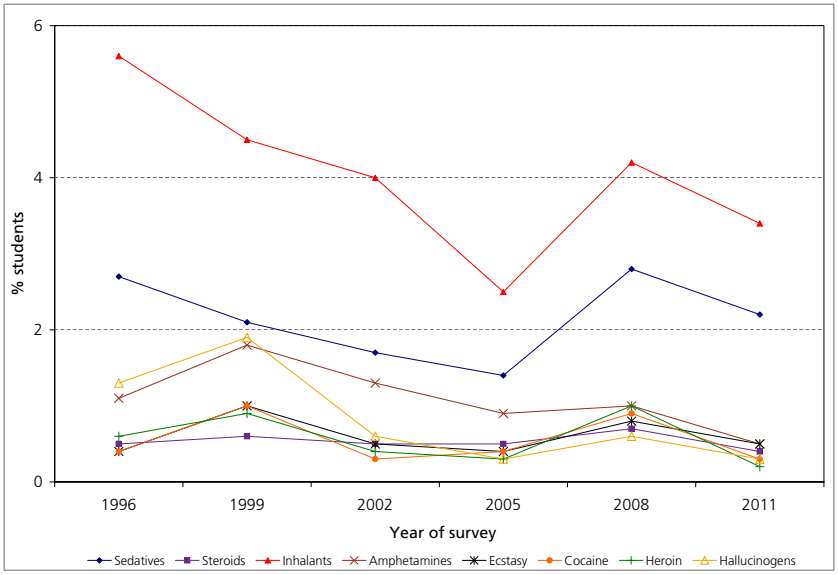
Hallucinogens

In 2011, the percentage of students who had ever used hallucinogens was 2.5%, with only 0.3% of students reporting use of hallucinogens in the week prior to the survey.

Percentages of both lifetime and recent use (within the last week) of hallucinogens remained stable between 2008 and 2011.

Since 1996, the percentage of both lifetime and recent use of hallucinogens has remained stable (Figure 9).

Figure 9: Percentage of students who had used illicit substances within the last week, by study year.



Discussion

The results from the 2011 ASSAD survey are primarily positive for South Australia.

Since 2008 the percentages of students reporting use of licit and illicit substances has decreased or remained stable.

There has been a significant decline in the percentage of students reporting lifetime use of tobacco from 2008 to 2011, suggesting that fewer students are taking up smoking. This decline has been reported since 1996. The percentage of students recently using tobacco remained stable between 2008 and 2011.

Painkillers/analgesics, alcohol and tobacco, continue to be the most commonly used substances for students aged 12 to 17 years.

The percentages of students reporting both lifetime and recent use of alcohol have decreased since the 2008 survey.

Cannabis remains the most commonly used illicit substance among South Australian school children. Overall, the percentage of students reporting ever using cannabis has declined significantly from 2008 to 2011 and has also declined significantly since the 1996 survey.

Trends since 1996 show the most marked declines in the percentages of students aged 14 and older reporting substance use. While it is to be expected that the prevalence of substance use amongst 12 and 13 year olds would be low, and remain low over time, the more pronounced decline in substance use amongst students aged 14 and older since 1996 indicates that fewer students are commencing substance use behaviours as they get older.

As with previous ASSAD surveys, only a small percentage of the students had ever used other illicit drugs, and there was no increase in either lifetime or recent use of any illicit drug. The relatively small percentages report both lifetime and recent use suggest experimental rather than regular use of these substances.

Notes

(1) AIHW (2011). 2010 National Drug Strategy Household Survey: State and territory supplement. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. Drug statistics series no. 25. Cat. no. PHE 145. Canberra.

(2) The South Australian Health Omnibus Survey (1991-2011). Face-to-face survey conducted annually for government and non-government organisations responsible for servicing the health needs of the South Australian community. http://www.health.sa.gov.au/pros.

Acknowledgements

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> Independent Schools Board

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