

Foreword and Rationale



Foreword

The NSW Department of Education and Communities has a responsibility to promote the health and wellbeing of students within its care.

Government schools promote the health of students within the context of their student welfare and Personal Development, Health and Physical Education (PDHPE) programs. These programs provide a framework for supporting the social, physical and emotional health of students.

Rationale

Drug education in secondary schools

Students learn about drugs such as alcohol, tobacco and cannabis from what they see and hear in their families, school and community. Students also learn about drugs from different media such as television, internet, magazines and movies.

Drug education lessons at school provide students with up-to-date information about drugs in a safe and caring setting. Students learn about the importance of being healthy and practice skills that help them stay safe.

While most young people do not use alcohol, statistics show a small but significant percentage do.

The 2010 National Drug Strategy Household Survey reported that the proportion of the population aged 14 years or older who consumed alcohol daily declined between 2007 (8.1%) and 2010 (7.2%). However, there was little change in the proportion of people drinking alcohol at levels that put them at risk of harm over their lifetime (20.3% in 2007 and 20.1% in 2010), or from a single drinking occasion at least once a month (28.7% in 2007 and 28.4% in 2010). As the Australian population has increased, the number of people drinking at risky levels increased between 2007 and 2010. Around one in five people still drink at levels that put their health at risk over their lifetime (consuming over two standard drinks a day on average).¹

In 2010, as in previous years, excessive alcohol use was mentioned more often than other drugs as being the most serious concern to the community.

The National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) 2007 indicates that the age at which Australians are having their first drink is continuing to decrease. Approximately 90 percent of people have tried alcohol by the age of 14, and most Australians have consumed a full serve of alcohol before the age of 16². The average age for young people to begin experimenting with alcohol is between 12-14 years of age (for both boys and girls). Often this experimentation occurs in the home or the home of relatives or friends.

The Australian secondary school students' use of tobacco, alcohol, and over-the counter and illicit substances in 2011 report indicates that:

- Around three of every four Australian secondary students aged between 12 and 17 years had tried alcohol at some time in their lives and 51% had consumed alcohol in the 12 months preceding the 2011 survey.
- The proportion of current drinkers drinking at risky levels at least once in the week before the survey increased with age. Around 8% of 13 – year olds who were current drinkers consumed alcohol at risky levels and this increased to around 37% among 17 year olds.

According to the Australian secondary school students' use of tobacco, alcohol, and over-the counter and illicit substances in 2011 report, drinking at risky levels refers to students who consumed more than four alcoholic drinks on any day in the past week.vv

Research indicates that alcohol education will be most effective if introduced before behavioural patterns are established and reinforced throughout the stages of development. This resource is intended for Years 7-10 to be introduced in the early secondary years.

1. Op. cit. The standard drink numbers cited here for risky and high risk drinking are those defined by the NHMRC in the revised Australian Alcohol Guidelines:2009.

2. AM Roche, P Bywood, J Borlagdan, B Lunnay, T Freeman, L Lawton, A Tovell and R Nicholas 2007, Young people & alcohol: the role of cultural influences, report, National Centre for Education and Training on Addiction, Adelaide, p.32.