



Substance
Misuse
Limestone
Coast

Global Problems, Local Solutions



Limestone Coast
Local Government
Association

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AOD insight revealed in region-wide Planet Youth survey

The normalisation of alcohol use at a young age among Limestone Coast teenagers has dominated the discussion of Planet Youth survey results, following online community workshops.

The pioneering drug and alcohol early intervention model has been expanded across the Limestone Coast with twelve secondary schools and 470 students from across the region participating in the 2021 survey, up from four schools in 2019.

Coordinated by Substance Misuse Limestone Coast (SMLC), the two March 3&4 sessions were facilitated by experts from Iceland's Reykjavik University Planet Youth team, taking community leaders and stakeholders through regionalised survey data.

SMLC Project Officer Sophie Bouchier said the data revealed risky levels of at-home alcohol use among the surveyed Year 10 students, with the Covid-19 pandemic playing a major role.

“From the statistics, which show that around 40 per cent of those surveyed are drinking at home, it's clear that alcohol behaviour begins at home and has become normalised, exacerbated by factors such as the pandemic,” she said.

Teenagers who spend less time with their parents, engage less in social and sporting activities and get less than 7 hours sleep a night are more prone to risky substance use, the data revealed.

Vaping or e-cigarette use was also popular with around 30 per cent of the region's teenagers smoking one during their lifetime.

Participating students completed targeted lifestyle questionnaires, with questions about their mental health, substance use, physical activity, family and school experience, internet use and screen time.

This year, students were also asked about the impact of Covid-19 on their schooling and general health with anywhere between 40-50 per cent in some council regions revealing an impact on their mental health.

There was also positive news, with results also revealing high levels of physical fitness and happiness in some council regions, with numbers of students participating in organised leisure activities and sports significantly higher than the state average.

Ms Bouchier said the statistics were the first step towards decisive community action.

“What these do is deliver some insight into the mindset of adolescent substance misuse and the environmental risk factors that may encourage it,” she said.

“Planet Youth takes a holistic approach to strengthening key protective factors and reducing risk factors that operate in the local community environment of young people,” she said.

Data generated by the surveys proved invaluable and informative to community stakeholders, Ms Bouchier said.

“Building strong community networks is key to tackling substance misuse. There is no one-size-fits-all approach to drug and alcohol problems. Every community is individual,” she said.

“The data will be used to inform the development of community-led action on the ground, tailored to the needs of that specific area over both the short and long-term.”

The normalisation of at-home alcohol use had emerged as one of the key themes from the 2019 survey and in response, Ms Bouchier said SMLC had been working with the Alcohol and Drug Foundation (ADF) to advocate for greater resources to educate parents and caregivers on the issue.

In January last year, a Planet Youth parenting resource, funded by the ADF and including key recommendations and statistics, was included in the back-to-school packs of 1,500 Limestone Coast students.

Alcohol and Drug Foundation (ADF) CEO Dr Erin Lalor said addressing obstacles and instilling new behaviours among young people and their adult influencers typically requires a concerted, ongoing approach.

“Achieving a solid change cycle can take several years of sustained effort and COVID-19’s impact over the last two years cannot be underestimated,” she said.

“It is important to continue to track trends and to use those to guide community action - which is exactly what Substance Misuse Limestone Coast and Limestone Coast regional workshop participants are doing.”

Project Officer Sophie Bouchier is available for interviews on Wednesday March 9.

Media contact: Project Officer Sophie Bouchier | M: 0429 342 175 | E: sophiebourchier@smlc.com.au