

Drugs, Alcohol and Tobacco

Tasmania is following the national trend of alcohol and drugs being a big part of modern culture and many young people will experiment with licit (legal drugs such as alcohol, caffeine and tobacco) or illicit (illegal drugs such as ecstasy, cocaine and heroin) drugs at some point in their lives. Of particular concern is binge drinking. Alcohol is the most commonly used drug, yet young people often do not see it as a drug. This can lead to misleading information and increased risk of harm. Young people are often also unaware of the serious long term harm alcohol can cause to their bodies. Young people also need to be aware of their impaired cognitive ability when under the influence of drugs or alcohol. This impairment needs to be addressed in education programs as it can often be associated with bullying, violent behaviours or poor sexual decisions.

Research indicates that young people use licit and illicit drugs for the same reasons other age groups; to enjoy themselves, relax, to fit in with their social group or to escape from problems. Excessive risk taking behaviours, such as drug taking, alcohol consumption and tobacco use can result in long term physical and/or mental harm; something that is not often considered by young people. Young people with mental health concerns may be more prone to use illicit drugs and tobacco with many using illicit drugs as a means of self medicating. It is important that programs addressing youth drug and alcohol use and criminal offending behaviour associated with drug and alcohol use, are implemented in Tasmania. These programs should be of a transitional nature to ensure they also support those in state care when transitioning from out of home care, youth detention or mental health facilities, back into the community.

Within the Tasmanian community there needs to be emphasis placed on personal and social responsibility regarding drug, alcohol and tobacco use. Education programs emphasising personal responsibility in making positive choices regarding alcohol and drugs would be a benefit to young people. It is also important that families and communities promote healthy living and decision making as young people often model behaviour they are exposed to. Future actions need to give young people the opportunity to be involved and make informed and responsible choices.



YNOT is committed to:

- Understanding youth drinking/drug culture in Tasmania and addressing the issues related to alcohol and other drugs.
- Promoting alcohol and drug education and its associated health risks.
- The provision of education resources for young people, highlighting harm minimising techniques and strategies and the risks associated with their behaviour.
- Advocating for specific youth services such as youth specific detoxification programs for licit and illicit drug users and seeing these services adapted and introduced into the youth justice space.

Future Vision

A Tasmania in which young people have support services available to assist them with any drug or alcohol problem or concern. Support programs of a transitional model are used to ensure young people can access additional support if required.

References

Better Health Channel (2013), *Drugs- teenagers*, retrieved from http://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/bhcv2/bhcarticles.nsf/pages/Drugs_teenagers.

Foundation for Young People (2004), *Profile of young Australians: Facts, figures and issues*, Sydney.