

# HILDA survey at a glance: 7 charts reveal Australians are smoking less, taking more drugs and still binge drinking

February 12 2024, by Roger Wilkins

## Smoking rates in Australia are falling

People aged 15 years and over, 2003 to 2021

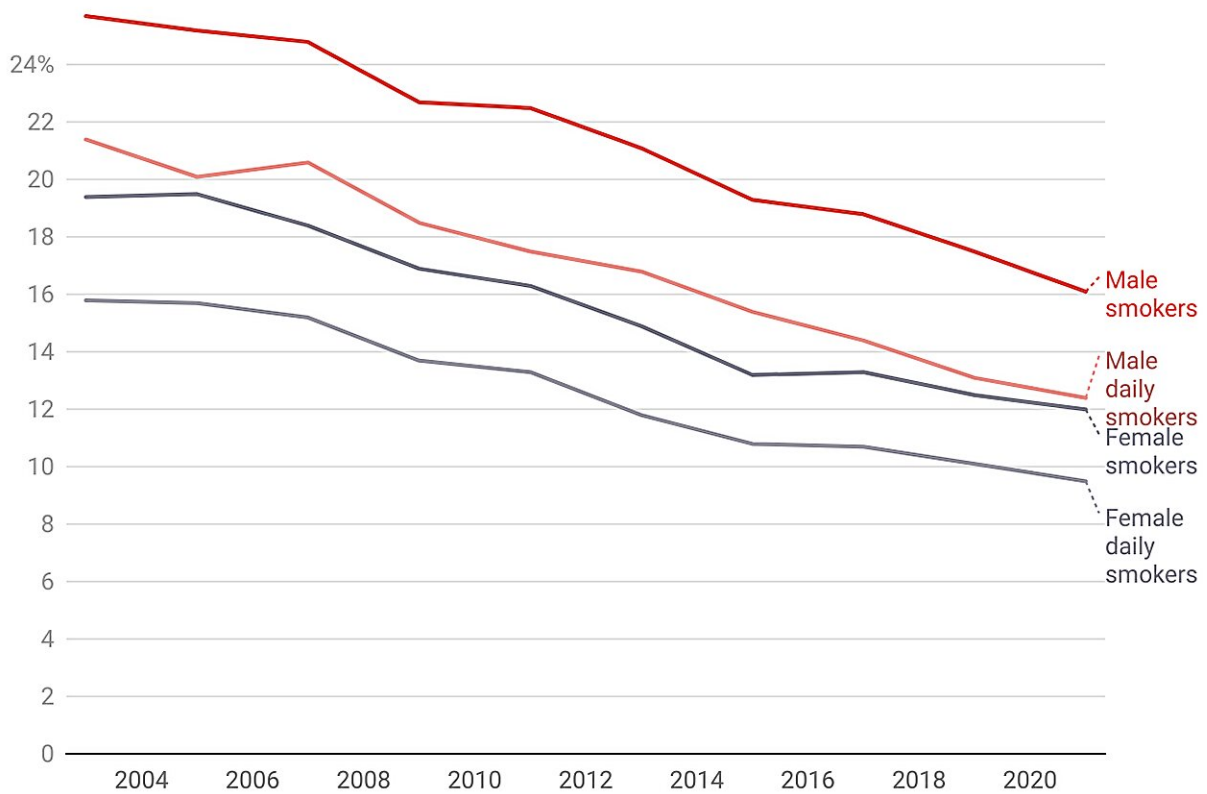


Chart: The Conversation • Source: Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) Survey • Created with Datawrapper

Credit: The Conversation

Australians' vices, including drinking, smoking and illicit drugs, have been revealed in the latest [HILDA survey](#).

The [Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia survey](#) tracks the same 17,000 Australians each year, with participants followed over the course of their lifetime. The survey collects information on many facets of life and is the only study of its kind in Australia.

## **Smoking is declining, but young people are more likely to vape**

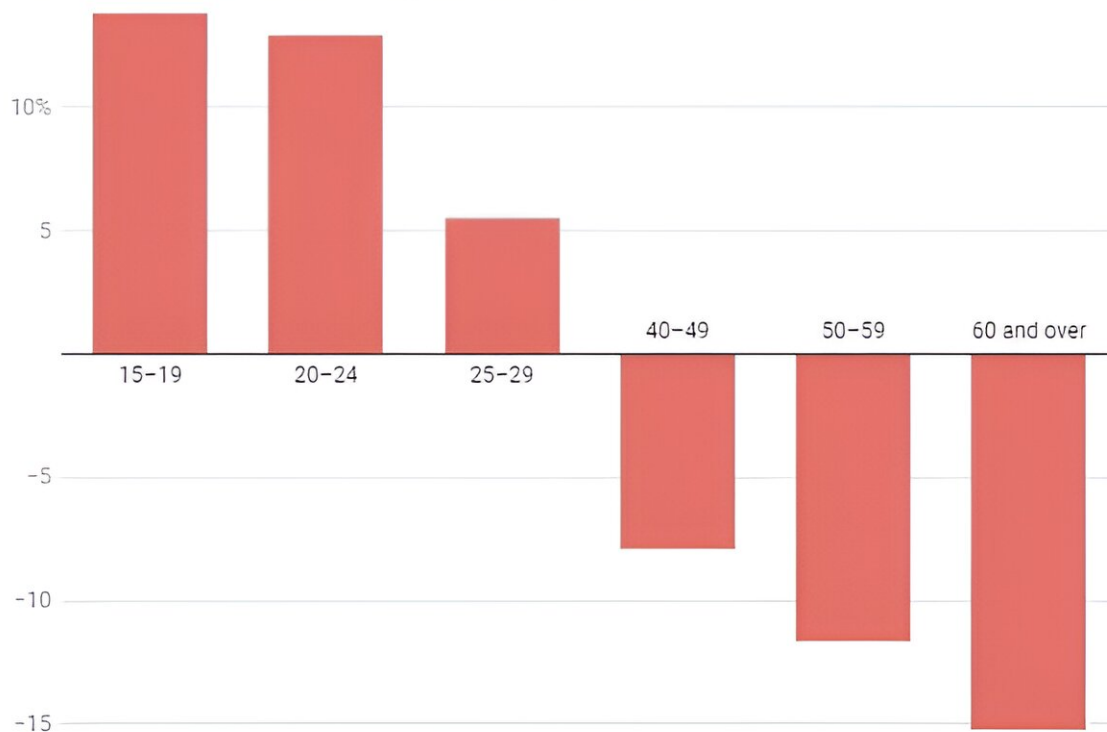
There has been [substantial progress](#) in reducing [smoking rates](#) since 2001, when 25% of males and 20% of females aged 15 and over reported being smokers. In 2021, these rates had dropped to 16% for males and 12% for females. This likely reflects the effects of tobacco control measures, as well as increased public awareness of the harmful health effects of smoking.

Declines have been the biggest for [young people](#), which reflects the fact that it is easier to prevent the take-up of smoking than it is to get smokers to quit. Indeed, HILDA shows that over 60% of people who quit smoking take it up again within three years.

The progress on reducing smoking appears to have been somewhat offset by the rise in vaping or using e-cigarettes. In 2021, 14.1% of people aged 15 and over reported having tried vaping, and 16% of these people vaped daily.

## Probability of using e-cigarettes, by age

Probabilities referenced to those aged 30 to 39 years old



Credit: The Conversation

Vaping is very much a young person's activity. It is most common among people aged 15 to 24, and also relatively common among people aged 25 to 29. Many people who report vaping also report being smokers.

## Binge drinking remains common, especially for young men

Risky drinking, here defined as usually consuming five or more [standard drinks](#) on each occasion, is relatively common, applying to over 20% of males and about 10% of females who ever drink alcohol.

After rising slightly between 2003 and 2009, there has since been a small decline in this measure of risky drinking for males. There has been little change in this measure for females.

Another measure of risky drinking, presented in the figure, is "[excessive binge drinking](#)", defined as drinking at least five (if female) or seven (if male) drinks per occasion at least twice per month. This measure of risky drinking is more prevalent, but it has declined for both males and females since 2007.

### Risky and binge drinking rates in Australia

For people who drink alcohol aged 15 years and over



Risky drinking: 5 or more standard drinks on one occasion

Excessive binge drinking: 7 or more standard drinks at least 2 or 3 times per month, from 2007 to 2021

Credit: The Conversation

Risky drinking is most common among men aged 20 to 24, followed by men aged 25 to 29. However, for both males and females, regular (but not necessarily "risky") consumption of alcohol (drinking on five or more days per week) is more common in older age groups, and highest among people aged 60 and over.

## **30 to 34 year-olds had the largest increase in using drugs**

The HILDA survey shows use of illicit drugs, such as marijuana, methamphetamine and cocaine, increased between 2017 and 2021, with annual use increasing from 15.7% to 17.6% for [males](#) and from 8.6% to 11% for females.

People aged 20 to 24 are the most likely to use illicit drugs, but the increase in use was greatest for people aged 30 to 34.

The use of multiple types of [illicit drugs](#), known as polydrug use, is common for users of methamphetamine, cocaine and ecstasy, but much less common for users of marijuana.

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