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## SEX IN AUSTRALIA: THE AUSTRALIAN STUDY OF HEALTH AND RELATIONSHIPS

The sexual health data for New South Wales, Central Sydney, and inner-eastern Sydney, reported in this issue of the *NSW Public Health Bulletin*, are part of a larger survey of sexual health behaviours and attitudes of Australians. This national survey involved telephone interviews with 19,307 people aged 16–59 years from all Australian states and territories. With a 73.1 per cent response rate, and statistical weighting of the data to reflect the location, age, and sex distribution of the 2001 Census, the sample is broadly representative of the Australian population.

### THE MAIN REPORT

The primary report of the Australian Study of Health and Relationships is published as 21 articles in the *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health*, Volume 27, Number 2, April 2003.

Each article focuses on a particular aspect of the survey or content area. The first two articles present the details of the methodology used in the survey and the rationale for this approach. The final paper considers the meaning of the overall findings and the implications for future research. Each of the remaining 18 articles presents the findings of a section of the questionnaire, with the data broken down by selected variables. Generally, these

variables are age, gender, language spoken at home, sexual identity, education, region of residence, household income, and occupation, although other variables are used as appropriate. A series of further analyses are planned to explore the data in more depth and to conduct multivariate analyses.

### CONTENT AREAS

The questionnaire used in the Australian Study of Health and Relationships covered broad aspects of sexual health. Articles published in the April 2003 issue of *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health* focused on:

- attitudes towards sex;
- characteristics of regular sexual relationships;
- first experiences of vaginal intercourse and oral sex;
- sexual identity, sexual attraction, and sexual experience;
- heterosexual experience and recent heterosexual encounters;
- homosexual experience and recent homosexual encounters;
- sexual difficulties;
- preferred frequency of sex, and sexual and emotional satisfaction;

- autoerotic, esoteric, and other sexual practices;
- commercial sex;
- sexual coercion;
- reproductive experiences;
- contraceptive experiences,
- safer sex and condom use;
- condom failure;
- history of and knowledge about sexually transmitted infections and blood-borne viruses;
- injecting and sexual risk behaviour.

The Australian Study of Health and Relationships is the largest and most comprehensive survey of sexuality ever undertaken in this country. It will provide important information to guide policy and practice for years to come.

#### HOW TO GET A COPY

Copies of the full report are available from the Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health and Society at the cost of A\$30. Cheques payable to 'ARCSHS' should be sent to *Sex in Australia*, Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health and Society, La Trobe University, Level 1, 215 Franklin Street, Melbourne VIC 3000. Alternately, requests can be made by email at [arcshs@latrobe.com.au](mailto:arcshs@latrobe.com.au) or by visiting the website [www.latrobe.edu.au/arcshs](http://www.latrobe.edu.au/arcshs).

## CONTINUOUS NSW HEALTH SURVEY: QUARTERLY REPORT ON HEALTH STATUS, HEALTH BEHAVIOURS, AND RISK FACTORS

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This is the first of a series of quarterly reports on the surveillance of the health status, health behaviours, and risk factors of the people of NSW, which will be produced from the Continuous NSW Health Survey. Ten indicators have been selected for inclusion in the report. These have been chosen either because they are of ongoing interest or because seasonal variation is possible (Figure 1). The Continuous NSW Health Survey is conducted by the Centre for Epidemiology and Research, through the Department of Health's Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing (CATI) facility. The data reported in this

report are based on the respondents described in Table 1. Although prevalence estimates are only shown in the graphs, 95 per cent confidence intervals have been calculated and these are available on request from the NSW Health Survey Program.

#### SELF-RATED HEALTH

Self-rated health is believed to principally reflect physical problems and, to a lesser extent, health behaviours and mental health problems. Longitudinal studies have shown that self-rated health is a strong and independent predictor of subsequent illness and premature death.<sup>1</sup> In 2002, 82.0 per cent of NSW residents aged 16 years and over reported their health as being either 'excellent', 'very

**TABLE 1**

**RESPONDENTS AGED 16 YEARS AND OVER BY COLLECTION QUARTER**

Quarter	Males	Females	Persons
February–March 2002	386	609	995
April–June 2002	1444	1993	3437
July–September 2002	1768	2345	4113
October–December 2002	1645	2266	3911

Source: NSW Health Survey Program, Centre for Epidemiology and Research, NSW Department of Health.