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Risky Level Drug and Alcohol Use on Rise

In statistics released for Drug Action Week (18-22 June), Kids Helpline has revealed an increase in young people reporting drug and alcohol use at high risk levels.

Kids Helpline General Manager Wendy Protheroe said that while the proportion of calls about drug use has declined in the last years, contacts from young people who are using frequently or at high risk levels has noticeably increased.

"In 2001 drug related contacts involving frequent use or urgent referral made up 37 per cent of contacts," said Ms Protheroe. "That figure rose to 41% in 2007."

"Counsellors are now speaking with more young people that are frequently use drugs including alcohol, cannabis, amphetamines (including methamphetamine), tobacco and ecstasy.

"With more young people tending to use drugs and alcohol excessively they are placing themselves at serious risk of harm."

Aside from physical consequences such as kidney, liver and heart damage young drug users face a heightened risk of committing, or falling victim to, a violent crime, suicide and self injury, infectious diseases and dangerous driving causing injury or death.

According to Ms Protheroe, almost half of the young people contacting Kids Helpline with alcohol or drug concerns were repeat users of the service or were receiving ongoing counselling.

"Many young people know they need help and they can get it by calling us. Unfortunately, although we operate 24 hours a day, seven days a week, we can only take so many calls," she said.

"In 2007 more than 570,000 young people tried to contact our counsellors, but we could only talk to about half of those who called.

Ms Protheroe said that the social cost to the Australian community if the substance abuse trend was not addressed was enormous, with the cost far more than just financial.

"Clearly, if we are to ensure Australia remains prosperous and on track, we need to create a forward and healthy future for Australian youth.

"Adolescence is a time of experimentation and for many young people this can include trying drugs and alcohol; we have to make sure that these young people do not grow into adults with drug and alcohol problems."

Parents can assist by knowing about and understanding the harmful impacts of drug use, helping young people make informed choices about responsible alcohol and legal drug use, and being good role models.

Kids Helpline is Australia's only free 24 hour, seven day a week counselling service for young people aged 5 to 25 years of age.

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