



Sweet leaf, a lifelong love affair: Prevalence and predictors of cannabis use among Australian Baby Boomers

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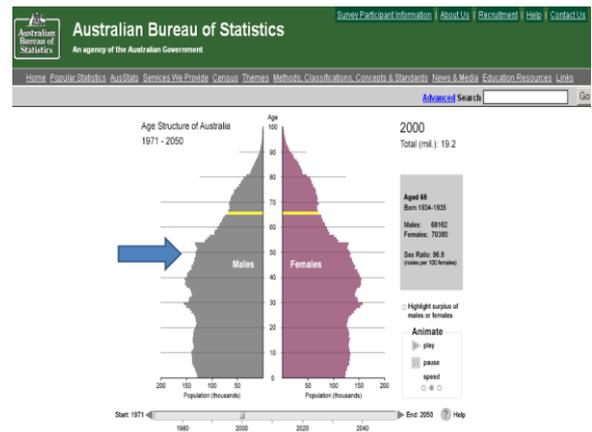
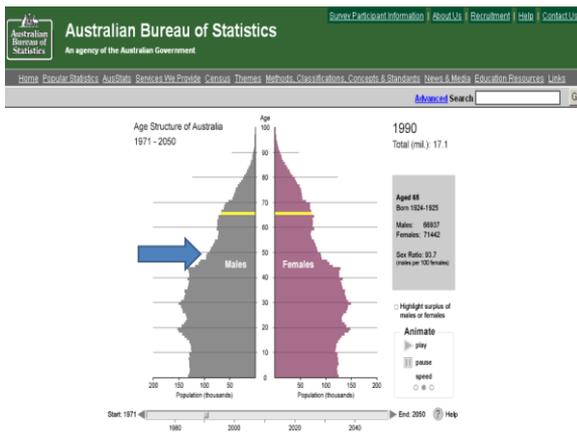
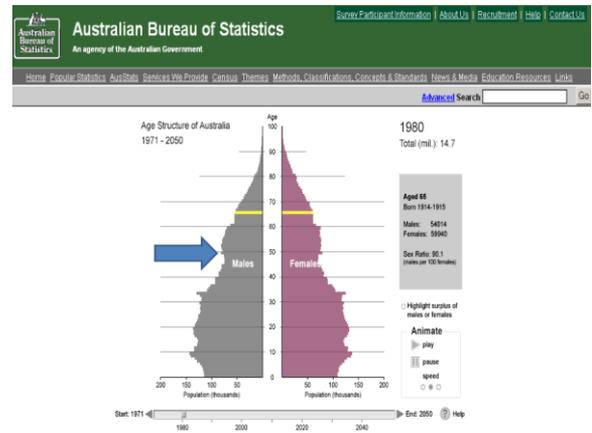
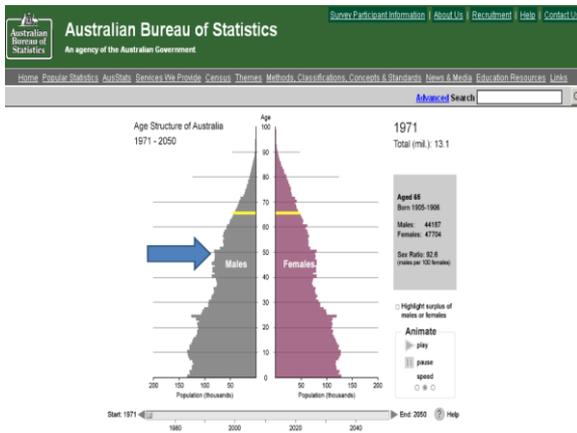
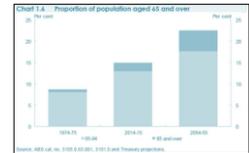
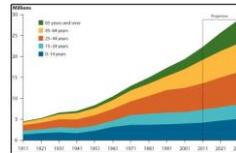
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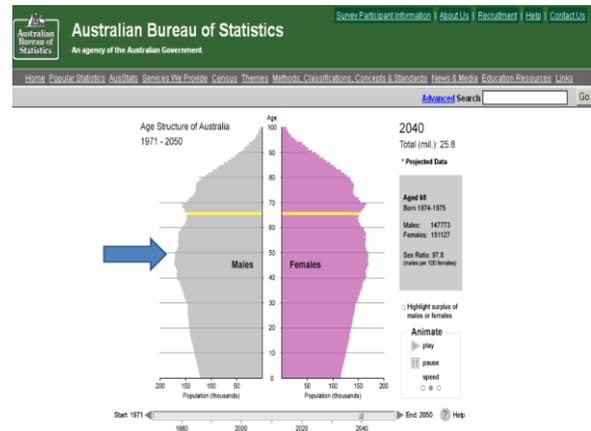
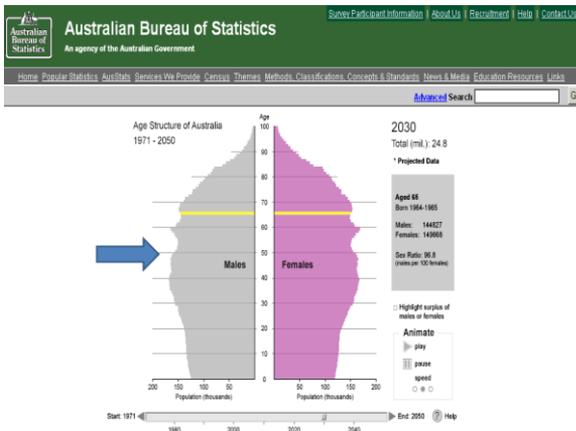
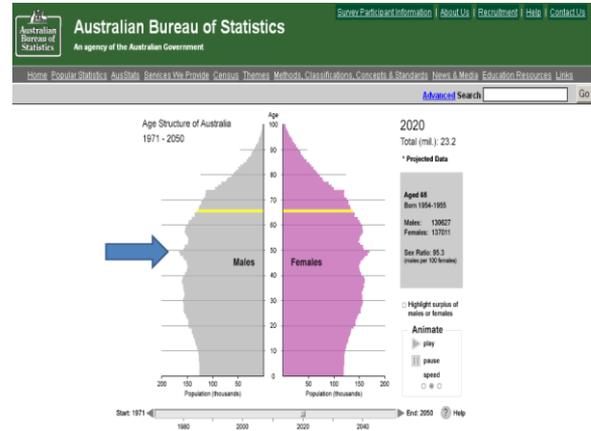
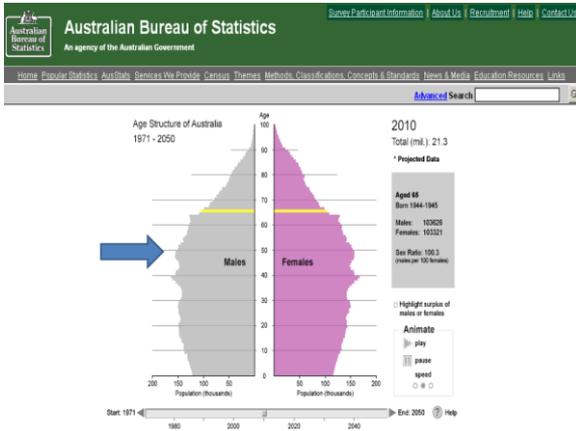
APSAD Conference

Australia's ageing population

Australia's population is ageing at an unprecedented rate

- Low fertility
- Increases in life expectancy
- Advances in healthcare





Politics of ageing

Growing interest in healthy ageing and wellbeing
Ageing not seen as a disease state nor inevitable degenerative process (restorative health)

But....

Propensity to:

- Pathologise
- Problematised
- Patronise and hold paternalistic attitudes
- Stigmatise



Risks of substance use

Older people more vulnerable to adverse effects of cannabis (and other drugs)

- > Reduced capacity to metabolise/distribute/excrete substances
- > Pre-existing physical/psychological conditions
- > Use of other prescribed drugs

Increased risk of poor physical, mental, and social outcomes



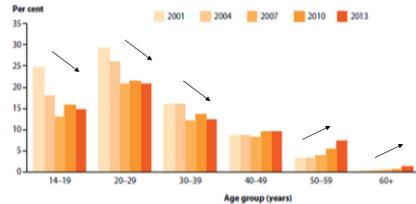
Cost of substance use

- Number of older people with substance use problems expected to double by 2020
- 15% of aged care clients have drug-related morbidities
- Illicit drug use costs aged care services \$6M annually



Changing patterns of cannabis use

Despite decreases in other age groups, cannabis use among older Australians appears to be increasing



Source: Recent use of cannabis by age from 2001-2013
Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW)
2013 National Drug Strategy Household Survey Report



Reasons for cannabis use

Possible explanations for high rates of cannabis use among older Australians:

- Higher absolute numbers of older people
- More liberal attitudes towards drug use than previous cohorts
- Greater disposable income than previous cohorts
- Healthier ageing → little incentive to change previously unproblematic use
- "Quick fix" culture



Research questions

- What are the patterns of cannabis use among older Australians?
 - How many older Australians use cannabis?
 - How frequently do older Australians use cannabis?
 - How many start using for the first time aged 50+ years?
- What demographic characteristics predict use?
- How have these patterns changed over the past decade?



Method

- Secondary analyses of National Drug Strategy Household Survey data
- 2 time points (2004 & 2013)
- Variables of interest:
 - Age
 - Cannabis use
 - Other drug use
 - Alcohol consumption
 - Smoking status
 - Self-reported health
 - Psychological distress
 - Marital status
 - Rurality
 - Number of people in household
 - Retirement status
- Analyses:
 - Frequencies
 - Logistic regression



Results: Recent use

Proportion of recent users:

Used cannabis in past 12 months	2004 (n=7127)	2013 (n=7506)
50-59 years	3.2%	7.3%
60-69 years	0.5%	2.0%
70+ years	0.0%	0.3%
All aged 50+	1.5%	3.6%

All differences between years significant (p<.05)



Results: Frequent use

Proportion of recent users who use frequently:

Use cannabis at least monthly	2004	2013
50-59 years	51.3%	56.2%
60-69 years	46.8%	55.1%
70+ years	50.5%	54.6%
All aged 50+	50.9%	56.0%

(Significance testing not conducted due to small sample sizes)



Results: Age of first use

Proportion of recent users who used for the first time aged 50 or over:

First used cannabis aged 50+ years	2004	2013
50-59 years	2.6%	0.3%
60-69 years	10.8%	4.6%
70+ years	30.8%	15.4%
All aged 50+	5.1%	2.0%

(Significance testing not conducted due to small sample sizes)



Results: Regression (2013 data)

	All 50+ OR (95% CI)	50-59 OR (95% CI)	60-69 OR (95% CI)	70+ OR (95% CI)
Age	0.90 (0.88-0.92)	0.95 (0.91-0.99)	0.91 (0.84-0.99)	n.s.
Retired	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
Married	0.46 (0.35-0.62)	0.51 (0.37-0.71)	0.31 (0.17-0.57)	n.s.
Live in rural area	n.s.	n.s.	1.78 (1.15-2.74)	n.s.
Healthy	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
Psychologically distressed	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
Live alone	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
Risky drinker	2.91 (2.33-3.64)	3.13 (2.41-4.07)	2.37 (1.50-3.76)	6.30 (1.70-23.37)
Smoker	4.45 (3.55-5.58)	4.01 (3.01-5.24)	5.62 (3.59-8.78)	n.s.
Use other drugs	3.93 (2.87-5.36)	4.15 (2.85-6.03)	3.43 (1.84-6.36)	n.s.

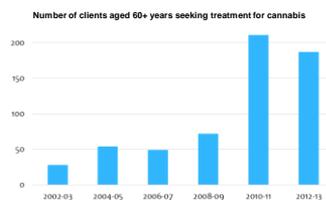
Summary

- Increasing numbers of older Australians
 - Using more cannabis
 - Using cannabis more frequently
- Patterns of use vary by age
- Other substance use strongest predictor of cannabis use (at all ages)
- Increased risk of poor health and wellbeing



Treatment demand

Increasing cannabis use among older Australians will (and already is) result in greater treatment demand



Source: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW), 2002/03 – 2012/13 Alcohol and Other Drug Treatment Services (NCETA secondary analysis, 2013).



Need for upskilling

Practitioners often reluctant to discuss drug use with older clients

- Lack of awareness/skills
- Reluctance to ask embarrassing questions
- Attributing symptoms of problematic use to ageing
- Belief that older people are "too old to change"



What's needed

1. Better assessment tools
2. Identification of 'safer' levels of use
3. Provision of support for, and collaboration with, for aged care / community services
4. Clearer advice to older people and those who live/work/interact with them to prevent problems from developing



Thank you

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"Mother, are you sure your marijuana use is purely medicinal?"

