

The Australian Secondary Students and Sexual Health Survey 1992–2025:



IMPACT REPORT

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY



La Trobe University proudly acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the lands where its campuses are located in Victoria and New South Wales. We recognise that Indigenous Australians have an ongoing

connection to the land and we value their unique contribution, both to the University and the wider Australian society.

La Trobe University is committed to providing opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, both as individuals and communities, through teaching and learning, research and community partnerships across all of our campuses.

The wedge-tailed eagle (*Aquila audax*) is one of the world's largest.

The Wurundjeri people — traditional owners of the land where the Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health and Society is located and where our work is conducted — know the wedge-tailed eagle as Bunjil, the creator spirit of the Kulin Nations.

There is a special synergy between Bunjil and the La Trobe logo of an eagle. The symbolism and significance for both La Trobe and for Aboriginal people challenges us all to 'gamagoen yarrbat' — to soar.

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INTRODUCTION

The Australian Secondary Students and Sexual Health (SSASH) survey is a periodic cross-sectional survey exploring the sexual health and wellbeing of young people aged 14 to 18 years. Running since 1992, SSASH is the only national periodic survey of secondary school aged young people focused on sexual experiences, BBV/STI prevention, sexual relationships and sexual wellbeing. To date, there have been eight iterations of SSASH, with data for the most recent iteration (SSASH 8) collected in 2024-2025.

SSASH is run by The Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health and Society (ARCSHS), based at La Trobe University in Melbourne, and is funded by The Australian Department of Health, Disability and Ageing.

SSASH collects data that directly informs targets within the National STI Strategy related to STI

prevention among young people. These data are also used by state and territory governments to inform progress against their STI or sexual health strategies. In addition, the study is used widely by the sexual and reproductive health sector to inform service planning and educational programs for young people.

BACKGROUND

The first SSASH survey was undertaken in 1992, in the early days of the HIV epidemic. At this time, the survey focused on secondary student's understanding of HIV transmission and prevention. Since this first survey, SSASH has evolved to provide a more holistic view of young people's sex and relationship experiences, including sexual health and wellbeing, access to sexual health care and perceptions of relationships and sexuality education (RSE), with recent iterations also looking at digital sexual engagement, consent and unwanted sex. The survey has also been designed to identify positive sexual health outcomes for young people, such as confidence communicating sexual needs and boundaries with partners, and comfort communicating about sexual health and relationships with parents or healthcare providers (Mitchell et al., 2014; Fisher et al., 2019; Power et al., 2022).

The most recent iterations of SSASH have included a diverse sample of over 4000 young people, including young people from: all states and territories; urban, regional and rural areas; and culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. The survey also includes sexuality and gender diverse young people.

Data for SSASH is collected via a self-complete survey instrument. From 1992–2013, data were collected in schools using a pen-and-paper survey instrument. From 2013–2024, data have been collected using an online survey instrument (2013 was hybrid, with data collected in schools and online). SSASH survey recruitment methods have changed over time. From 2018 onward, online advertising has been the primary recruitment method, with quota sampling techniques used to ensure the sample reflects key population patterns. This shift occurred as the digital environment became more accessible for survey recruitment at a time when schools were increasingly reluctant to engage with the survey. In 2024, recruitment was augmented with use of a professional survey panel and engagement with youth services. This helped to ensure the survey reached young people who may have been unlikely to view, or respond to, online advertising. With the introduction of recent social media bans for young people aged under 16 years, future iterations will be increasingly reliant on these recruitment methods.

Since its inception, the survey has relied on the support and input from key stakeholders across government and non-government sectors related to health and education. This has included promoting the survey and facilitating participation as well as providing insight into how each iteration of the survey instrument can best align with evolving

sexual health and wellbeing needs of young Australians. For example, SSASH 8 was developed in consultation with ARCSHS' youth advisory board and the Youth Affairs Council Victoria (YACVic). YACVic also promoted the study through their dedicated social media channel and worked with ARCSHS to contact youth services throughout the country in an effort to reach a diverse range of young people.

In this report, we look at where and how the SSASH survey findings have been used in policy and program development to improve young people's sexual health and wellbeing.

REPORT AIMS AND METHOD

This report aims to describe the significance and reach of the SSASH survey to demonstrate how it has contributed to better understanding of the sexual health needs of secondary-school aged young people.

A desktop review was undertaken using a blind search method, in which the titles of all seven previous SSASH survey reports (e.g. "The 7th National Survey of Australian Secondary Students and Sexual Health") were inputted into Google and Bing search engines. A snowball method was then used in which links were followed to relevant organisations, services or reports to identify where SSASH surveys had been cited and which data had been used.

Youth Affairs Council Victoria relies on national data sets to inform policy and program development, build evidence to fund quality programs, and inform local and statewide sector based networks. The SSASH is one important data set that informs our work. The survey data helped inform the basis and rationale for our Sexy and Safe Partnership project in the Southern Mallee. This project highlighted shortfalls in the delivery of rural based reproductive and sexual health education (RSE), including gaps in curriculum content and in delivery to students, and sought to create locally driven responses. The project's findings went on to inform the development of the Yeah Nah: Affirmative Consent Education project. The co-ordinator of this project stated:

“Having reliable national and statewide data, such as SSASH, helps us to show rural and regional young people that they are often on par with their metropolitan counterparts in terms of sexual health knowledge and behaviour. This, in turn, helps to reduce stigma and level the playing field when providing quality sexual health promotion and education programs and services.”

Over time, the survey has continued to keep pace with changes in behaviour, health knowledge, STI prevention technologies, and policy developments. Access to these data is paramount to our work with young people.

Youth Affairs Council Victoria



RESULTS

The desktop analysis showed that SSASH reports has been cited in publications over 1900 times since 1992 (note, this figure does not include citations of academic publications that report SSASH data). SSASH reports have been cited in academic research, policy development, sexual health education and service provision.

Thorough analysis of these search results revealed three overarching themes related to the scope and type of impact of the SSASH survey:

1. The SSASH survey is a unique dataset, being the only national periodic study collecting sexual health and wellbeing data related to school-aged young people in Australia.
2. SSASH data results are regularly used to support a range of federal and state and territory government policies and strategies related to young people's sexuality, sexual health and wellbeing and sexual experiences.
3. SSASH survey data is widely used to inform sexual health promotion strategies and programs by both government and non-government agencies.

SSASH IS A UNIQUE DATASET

SSASH is the only national periodic study collecting sexual health and wellbeing data related to school-age young people in Australia. The survey collects a large range of data pertaining to young people's sexuality, sexual experiences, knowledge of STI and HIV prevention strategies, digital sexual practices, experiences of unwanted sex and school based RSE (Power et al., 2022). For example, SSASH is the primary national data source for youth sexual health topics referenced by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) (see Table 1).

SSASH data is included in the Australian Child and Youth Wellbeing Atlas, a national database of studies relating to child and youth wellbeing (Australian Child and Youth Wellbeing Atlas, 2025). The Australian Child and Youth Wellbeing Atlas is designed to be a freely accessible, interactive resource for government agencies, researchers and community organisations to access a wide variety of geo-spatial and temporal data pertaining to various domains of young people's health. SSASH is the primary provider of sexual health data in the atlas pertaining to young people's knowledge and skills about safe sex and reproductive health behaviours, with users able to view data based on location and points in time to reveal emerging trends and disparities in the data.

Table 1: SSASH data used in reports published by the Australian Institute of Health and Wellbeing (<https://www.aihw.gov.au/>)

HEALTH TOPIC	SSASH DATA USE
Family, domestic and sexual violence: Children and young people.	SSASH is cited as a data source measuring experiences of family, domestic and sexual violence among children and young people. Data is used to highlight experiences of unwanted sex by secondary school students and experiences of non-consensual sexting and image-based abuse.
Family, domestic and sexual violence: Consent.	SSASH data is drawn on to comment on what young people think about the content and quality of consent education in secondary schools. Over time comparison of SSASH surveys is used to show that fewer young people find RSE relevant in recent surveys compared to previous years.
Health of young people.	SSASH is used to provide data on sexual and reproductive health risk factors for young people, with the data providing a snapshot of the rates of STIs, contraception uses and sources of sexual health information among young people.
Australia's youth: Health literacy.	SSASH is used in a report that looks at the sexual health literacy of year 10 and 12 students, specifically pertaining to knowledge of STIs and BBVs, and where this knowledge is being obtained.
Australia's Youth: Intimate relationships.	SSASH is used in a report exploring young people's responsible sexual behaviours, with reference to the percentage of young people who experienced positive feelings regarding their last sexual experience, and the matters of sexual health discussed with their most recent sexual partner (e.g. contraception, avoiding pregnancy, STI prevention).
National Youth Information Framework (NYIF) indicators.	SSASH is the primary source of data regarding young people's use of contraception, and how contraception use has changed over time by comparing results from the 4th and 5th surveys.

CONTRIBUTION TO POLICIES AND STRATEGIES

As a unique data source and the only national survey regularly collecting national sexual health data on school-aged young people, the SSASH surveys have helped shape federal and state/territory policies and strategies related to the sexual health needs of young people. SSASH has been cited in the following state and territory and national sexual health strategies, both past and current.

- Fifth National Sexually Transmissible Infections Strategy 2024–2030 (draft strategy)
- Fourth National Sexually Transmissible Infections Strategy 2018–2022
- Victorian Sexually Transmissible Infections Plan 2022–2030
- Victorian Aboriginal Sexual and Reproductive Health Plan 2022–30
- Western Australian Sexual Health and Blood-borne Virus Strategies 2019–2023 (and Implementation Progress Reports)
- National Bloodborne Viruses and Sexually Transmissible Infections Surveillance and Monitoring Plan 2018–2022
- Fifth National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Bloodborne Viruses and Sexually Transmissible Infections Strategy 2018–2022
- Queensland Sexual Health Strategy 2016

As a Schools and Community Educator, the SSASH survey is an integral part of the work we do at Sexual Health Victoria. We use the data to centre the voices of young people in our presentations with professionals, parents, and carers. The information contained in the report assists these groups to better support the young people in their care. We also use the data to reflect what young people are saying back to the young people we are working with. This helps to legitimise what we present, and it can be a reassuring moment for the young people attending our sessions. This report is part of the backbone that allows us, and countless others, to provide Comprehensive Relationships and Sexuality Education in Australia.

Leon Huxtable,

Schools and Community Educator, Sexual Health Victoria

The Secondary Students and Sexual Health Survey is a critical evidence base for our work across education, policy and advocacy. As Head of Education at Sexual Health Victoria, the data directly informs the design and delivery of evidence-based, inclusive relationships and sexuality education as well as clinical education program content. In my role as Chair of Sexual and Reproductive Health Australia, the survey also provides nationally significant insights that strengthen system-level advocacy, policy reform and investment in young people's sexual and reproductive health.

Sam Read,

Head of Education, Sexual Health Victoria and Chair, Sexual and Reproductive Health Australia (SRHA)

Across these strategies, SSASH is used to inform policy by providing insight into young people’s behaviours, attitudes and knowledge related to contraception use, STIs, and sexual behaviours, as well as experiences of school-based RSE. SSASH has served as a critical evidence base underpinning these strategies, playing a key role in the development of effective, research-informed sexual health education and prevention initiatives.

SSASH is also used to inform a range of state and territory education department reports and planning documents related to relationship and sexuality education (RSE), including the following:

- The Australian Department of Education (DESE) Student Wellbeing Hub hosts resources summarising SSASH and explicitly references the national SSASH reports in its RSE topics.
- The NSW Department of Education resource, *Sexuality and sexual health education in NSW government schools* (2017), uses SSASH findings to justify curriculum and RSE practice.

SSASH findings are also used by a range of advocacy and community organisations in policy submissions related to RSE as summarised in Table 2.

Table 2: Policy position statements and submissions related to RSE across Australia

NAME OF SOURCE	SSASH DATA USE
<p><i>Comprehensive relationships and sexuality education and reproductive health for children and young people at school: Policy position statement</i> (Public Health Association of Australia, 2022).</p>	<p>The Public Health Association of Australia advocate comprehensive, age-appropriate, and inclusive RSE in Australian schools. SSASH data are specifically mentioned to highlight student perspectives of RSE delivered in schools; particularly those who reported that school-based RSE was irrelevant to their needs.</p>
<p><i>Position Statement: Sexual and Reproductive Health Care for Young People.</i> (The Royal Australasian College of Physicians, 2015).</p>	<p>This position statement advocates accessible, youth-centred sexual and reproductive health services, and reinforces the unique role and responsibility health professionals play in supporting young people to engage in positive sexual health behaviours. SSASH data are cited extensively throughout the document to illustrate the number of young people who are sexually active, highlight gaps in health literacy and consent understanding, and to reinforce the role that health professionals can play in supporting young people’s sexual health.</p>
<p><i>Comprehensive sexuality education: Position statement.</i> (Sexual and Reproductive Health Australia, 2024a)</p>	<p>Sexual and Reproductive Health Australia assert the importance of RSE in supporting young people’s sexual and reproductive health, rights and wellbeing. SSASH data are used in this report to assert the importance of considering young people’s experiences of RSE in development of policy and practice.</p>

NAME OF SOURCE	SSASH DATA USE
<p><i>Scaling What Works: A National Approach to Comprehensive Relationships and Sexual Health Education Across Australia 2025–2028. (Sexual and Reproductive Health Australia, 2024b).</i></p>	<p>In this pre-budget submission, Sexual and Reproductive Health Australia recommend national scaling-up of South Australia’s ‘Focus School Program’. SSASH data demonstrate young people’s feelings towards school-based RSE, reinforcing the need to change current approaches.</p> <hr/> <p><i>“In 2021, the 7th National Survey of Australian Secondary Students and Sexual Health 7 reported that: ‘Over 95% of young people reported that they believe relationships and sexuality education (RSE) is an important part of the school curriculum, and 93.0% reported receiving RSE at school, most commonly in Years 8 and 9. However, only 24.8% reported that their most recent RSE class was very or extremely relevant to them.’”</i></p>
<p><i>Respectful Relationships Education in Schools: Evidence Paper 2021 (Our Watch, 2021).</i></p>	<p>This report presents evidence on violence prevention in schools, highlighting areas for improvement to current RSE and asserting the important role it plays in addressing gender inequality and gender-based violence. SSASH data are used in this evidence paper to highlight the number of young people who report experiencing pressure to have sex.</p> <hr/> <p><i>“The 2018 6th National Survey of Secondary Students and Sexual Health of over 6,000 Years 10–12 students across Australia found that 16% of male and 37% of female respondents reported having had unwanted sex”</i></p>
<p><i>Sexual Health and Education in South Australia: What young people need to know for sexual health and safety (Connolly, 2021).</i></p>	<p>SSASH data were used extensively throughout this report to highlight young people’s digital sexual behaviours, sources of sexual health information and rates of young people experiencing unwanted sex. This evidence reinforced the call in this report for evidence-based RSE that supports young people to have safe and healthy relationships.</p>
<p><i>Student wellbeing, working in partnerships with parents. Independent Schools Victoria (Carroll, 2021).</i></p>	<p>SSASH data pertaining to the rates of young people who have reported unwanted sexual experiences was cited to highlight the need to improve young people’s awareness, knowledge and skills to engage in healthy relationships. The SSSAH survey was also cited as a worthwhile resource for parents, schools and policymakers to better understand the sexual behaviours and attitudes of young people to support RSE curriculum development.</p>
<p><i>Sexuality and Sexual Health Education in NSW Government Schools (Department of Education, 2017).</i></p>	<p>SSASH data informed the NSW Department of Education’s 2017 report advocating the need for embedded sexuality education in schools. SSASH survey data were used to show low rates of consistent condom use and high rates of unwanted sex among young people, and highlighted that schools are a key source of sexual health information. These insights underscore the critical role of school-based programs in equipping young people with the knowledge and skills for healthy relationships and positive sexual experiences.</p>

The SHINE SA Schools Team develops and reviews the SHINE SA Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) curriculum for Years 3–10, aligned with the Australian Curriculum 9.0, and provides training to educators across the state. We use data from the Secondary Students and Sexual Health Survey to better understand the experiences of the young people we design learning for and to inform our professional development for educators, support workers and allied health professionals. Through these mechanisms, the survey supports effective planning and delivery of comprehensive sexuality education in schools, community settings and alternative learning environments.

Kirsty Jeffery

Project Lead – Curriculum and Strategic and Initiatives; Schools Education and Support, SHINE SA

Sexual Health Victoria (SHV) highly values the ongoing data that the Secondary Students and Sexual Health Survey provides. Not only does this survey provide the greatest insight we have into the sexual behaviour of young people in Australia, but we can also see changes to behaviour over time since 1992. As manager of the SHV schools, community and disability team this evidence base lends credibility to the Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) programs. This is used when advocating to schools about the importance of the programs we deliver. It is reassuring to stakeholders that this education is required and wanted. Having research insight into the issues relating to young people as described by young people is vital data for the SHV education team to understand what is relevant for young people.

Anne Atcheson,

Manager- Schools, Community & Disability, Sexual Health Victoria

CONSENT EDUCATION/SEXUAL CONSENT LAW REFORM

Whilst the SSASH survey does not explicitly collect data related to young people's experiences of consent education, SSASH has been widely cited in publications advocating the need for inclusion of consent education in school-based RSE.

SSASH data are used frequently by a range of non-government organisations in their submissions to government regarding policy and budget reforms pertaining to the delivery of mandatory consent education prior to this being actualised in 2023.

For example, findings from the seventh SSASH survey were cited in the Commonwealth Consent Policy Framework (Department of Social Services, 2023), highlighting the need for relevant and age-appropriate consent education, and for education to be delivered at appropriate times during young people's lives, given the average age of young

people's first sexual experience and exposure to sexually explicit material.

Additionally, SSASH data were cited in the Australian parliamentary review of the current and proposed sexual consent laws in Australia. The report, prepared by the Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs References Committee (2023), investigated inconsistencies in sexual consent laws across Australian jurisdictions, evaluated the implementation of affirmative consent models, and explored systemic responses to sexual violence, including education, law enforcement, and justice processes. SSASH provided crucial evidence to the inquiry, highlighting significant gaps in young people's sexual health knowledge, experiences and safety. The data were used to show that most young people become sexually active by their mid-teens, that pornography often functions as a source of sexual information, and a significant number of young people have experienced unwanted sex,



rates that are substantially higher among young women, trans and non-binary students. These results underscored the inadequacy of existing RSE programs and the urgent need for a nationally consistent, age-appropriate and inclusive approach to consent and respectful relationships education across Australian schools. The SSASH findings also informed recommendations for earlier intervention, teacher training, and curriculum content addressing gender inequality, sexual coercion, and digital sexual cultures.

The Consent Can't Wait campaign, launched by the Department of Social Services in May 2024,

draws on SSASH data to highlight the need for consent education in Australian schools. Findings from the 7th SSASH survey – showing that 78.4% of young people aged 14–18 had received, and 58.5% had sent, sexually explicit images – were used to underscore growing concerns around digital sexual engagement and support the campaign's message about the importance of consent in both online and offline contexts.

SSASH survey data are cited in several government submissions and policy statements pertaining to consent education policy and sexual consent laws, as outlined in Table 3.

Table 3: SSASH references in submissions and policy statements pertaining to consent education and sexual consent law reform

NAME OF SOURCE	SSASH DATA USE
<i>Consent policy statement (Family Planning NSW, 2021).</i>	In this statement, Family Planning NSW advocates comprehensive education on consent, aligning with legal frameworks and promoting respectful relationships. SSASH data were used to provide insight into the frequency and types of sexual behaviours that young people engage in and highlight the importance of age-appropriate consent education.
<i>Teach Us Consent and the Foundation for Young Australians: Submission to the Quality Initial Teacher Education Review (Teach Us Consent and the Foundation for Young Australians, 2022).</i>	<p>“The sixth National Survey of Secondary Students and Sexual Health reported that most students will have engaged in some form of sexual activity by the end of year 12, from deep kissing (74.4%) to sexual intercourse (46.6%). It is essential that all students have the skills required to navigate relationships, negotiate boundaries and provide and withdraw consent at any time”</p> <p>This submission was made in response to the Department of Education, Skills and Employment review of initial teacher education to improve the quality of consent education and to provide policy recommendations to ensure future teachers are competent and equipped to teach consent. SSASH data were cited through the report, highlighting the current state of RSE and young people’s views on how best to improve current RSE.</p> <p>“The National Survey of Australian Secondary Students and Sexual Health highlighted some of the problems not only with the content of the relationship and sex education and its inapplicability to their real life experiences but also how it was delivered. For many students, the content and the way it was delivered did not adequately cover sexual health and healthy and diverse relationships in a non-judgemental, affirming manner”</p>
<i>Submission to the review of sexual consent laws in South Australia (Commissioner for Children and Young People, 2024).</i>	The submission provides evidence for reviewing South Australia’s sexual consent laws, including SSASH data on the average age young people first experience sex. It advocates lowering the age of consent to 16 to align with other states and support the objectives of the National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022–2032.

The SSASH survey is a vital primary data source, providing insight into the sexual health behaviours, attitudes and realities faced by young people in Australia. For the Caddyshack Project, this evidence directly informs sexual health promotion initiatives delivered through the HIV and Related Programs Unit in the Illawarra Shoalhaven Local Health District. SSASH data has been instrumental in shaping effective digital strategies, including the award-winning On The Couch podcast and vodcast series, targeted campaigns such as Safe Sext, and the development of resources, lesson plans, and workforce education grounded in lived experience.

Maddison Stratten and Dr Diana Karamacoska,

Caddyshack, Illawarra Shoalhaven Sexual Health Program

The Secondary Students and Sexual Health (SSASH) survey helps us at True understand what Australian high school students know, think, and experience about sexual health, relationships, and the education they receive. By hearing directly from young people, the survey guides improvements in sexuality education and health services, helping us better meet students' real needs. SSASH is a valuable tool that also helps us to educate and support adults that live or work with young people, about sexually transmissible infections and HIV awareness, relationships and sexuality education, help seeking behaviour, and young people's access to sexual health services. It is one of our most important tools for promoting health and wellbeing for young people in Australia.

Natasha Milner,

Education Coordinator – Disability and Sheena Callaghan, Manager – Education, True Relationships and Reproductive Health, QLD

HEALTH PROMOTION AND EDUCATION INITIATIVES

Since the 1990s, SSASH data have informed health promotion initiatives and programs across the government (see table 4) and non-government

sectors. SSASH data have regularly been used to inform resources for educators and teachers to support the delivery of RSE, as well as resources for parents and carers to support discussions with young people about sex and relationships.

Table 4: Summary of Government-led sexual health promotion programmes and initiatives which have utilised SSASH

NAME OF PROGRAMME/INITIATIVE	SSASH DATA USE
Keep It Simple Guide to Safe Sex (K.I.S.S.S) (ANCAHRD, 1998).	This Commonwealth government funded campaign was the most widely distributed sexual health resource of its time. SSASH data helped shape its messaging around STI and HIV prevention for young people.
Talking Sexual Health (ARCSHS & ANCAHRD, 1999)	A national education framework developed by ARCSHS, commissioned by the Australian National Council for AIDS, Hepatitis C and Related Diseases (ANCAHRD), addressing knowledge gaps and promoting HIV prevention education in secondary schools.
Talk Soon, Talk Often (Western Australia Department of Health, 2024).	Funded by the WA Department of Health, Talk Soon, Talk Often is an interactive resource first developed in 2011 and updated in 2019. SSASH data were used to guide content that supports parents and carers in discussing sex and relationships with their children.
Growing and Developing Healthy Relationships (GRHR) (Western Australia Department of Health, 2002).	The WA Department of Health funded Growing and Developing Healthy Relationships (GRHR) was first launched in 2002 and has been available online since 2010. This is a curriculum resource that extensively cites SSASH findings to support inclusive education around consent, sexual orientation, and identity.
Catching on Later (Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, 2013).	Funded by the Victorian Department of Education and Early Childhood development in collaboration with ARCSHS, Catching on Later is a set of teaching resources to support delivery of RSE. Data from the 4th SSASH survey highlighted key issues such as unwanted sex, communication gaps around contraception and STIs, and gendered differences in sexual health experiences. These insights were used to inform the inclusion of activities that build students' skills in consent, communication, and decision-making.
Play Safe Pro (Sexual and Reproductive Health Australia and NSW Government, 2014).	SSASH survey data was cited throughout various resources listed on the Play Safe Pro website, a joint project between Sexual and Reproductive Health Australia and the NSW Government, to support professionals working with young people to talk about their sexual health.

The SSASH survey website and reports are listed as a resource on various non-government organisations websites. This includes the Rainbow Network, Women’s Health in the South East (WHISE), and several sexual and reproductive health organisations that are part of the national alliance, Sexual and Reproductive Health Australia (formerly Family Planning Alliance Australia).

SSASH data have also been used in a variety of clinical practice guidelines and reports to support the delivery of evidence-informed and inclusive sexual health practice for healthcare and welfare professionals who work with young people, as outlined in Table 5.

Table 5: Guidelines for health and welfare professionals

NAME OF SOURCE	SSASH DATA USE
<i>Sexual health and healthy relationships in adolescence (Clinical Nursing Manual). (Child and Adolescent Community Health, & WA Country Health Service, 2025).</i>	SSASH is used in this guideline to provide an evidence base for understanding adolescent sexual behaviour, relationships, and health needs. This resource was developed for nurses working in schools to provide primary health care for adolescents, with the focus on respectful relationships, sexual and reproductive health.
<i>Healthy Children, Healthy Futures. A review of Australian children and young people’s health. NICEF Australia and Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth (Morris et al., 2023).</i>	“...students in Years 10 to 12, 69.1% reported they had been in a romantic or sexual relationship, with 56.9% currently in such a relationship”. Statistic was used to highlight how common romantic and sexual relationships are among adolescents, reinforcing the need for comprehensive sexual health education.
<i>Clinical Practice Guidelines: Contraception. (Royal Children’s Hospital, n.d.)</i>	SSASH was used to highlight trends and concerns in sexual health among young people over time, with particular reference to increased rates of young people who are sexually active, yet decreased rates of condom usage. The findings were amongst a suit of evidence that highlighted the need for improved sexual health education, access to services and targeted public health interventions for young people.
<i>A Health Worker’s Guide to Trans and Gender Diverse Health (SHINE SA, 2023).</i>	Data from the 6th SSASH survey was used to highlight patterns of adolescent sexual behaviour, and to justify the need for comprehensive contraception education and access for young people.
<i>A Health Worker’s Guide to Trans and Gender Diverse Health (SHINE SA, 2023).</i>	This resource designed to equip health workers with the knowledge and strategies for supporting trans and gender diverse clients in their practice. SSASH was specifically cited to highlight the proportion of young people who identify as trans or gender diverse.

SUPPORTING LGBTQIA+ YOUNG PEOPLE

SSASH data are used to highlight the diverse experiences of LGBTQIA+ young people as well as advocating for evidence-based sexual health initiatives and programs for this cohort. Sexual and Reproductive Health Australia authored the report *School Guidance: Sexuality and Sexual Health Education for LGBTQIA+ Students (2025)*, a guide for NSW schools to deliver RSE for LGBTQIA+ students, using SSASH data as an evidence source to underpin

recommendations and to validate the need for inclusive RSE education.

Additionally, SSASH data were used in the Department of Justice Western Australia Equal Justice Bench Book (2021) to highlight the diversity of sexual orientation and gender identity among young people. This bench book is designed to support judicial officers in Western Australia by promoting fairness and impartiality in court proceedings, and especially regarding the ways gender, sexuality, culture and age can affect people's experiences in the justice system.

THE PRACTICAL GUIDE TO LOVE, SEX AND RELATIONSHIPS

The Practical Guide to Love, Sex and Relationships is a teaching resource developed by ARCSHS in direct response to findings in the fifth SSASH survey which showed young people were looking for more engaging RSE. Launched in 2015, the guide provides resources for teachers and educators to support the delivery of RSE through comprehensive lesson plans and videos. The guide covers topics of relationships and intimacy, sexual consent, pornography and sexual decision making. It includes lesson plans for students in Years 7–10 aligned with the Australian Curriculum and resources and videos that educators can use in classrooms or workshops with young people.

The 'Practical Guide' is frequently used. In 2025, the website received 24,000 unique visitors and 33,000 page views. The most common pages visited were those which hold resources, particularly videos, for teachers to use in classrooms.

This guide is referred to in government and non-government sector resources in Australia and referenced several times on the Australian Institute of Family Studies website as an educational resource for parents, teachers and young people to support discussions related to sexual ethics and the effects of pornography on children and young people (Fileborn, 2016; Quadara et al., 2017).

The 'Practical Guide' is also referred to on several government websites including Queensland Health and the Australian Department of Education (DESE) Student Wellbeing Hub. The guide is also listed as a useful resource on government funded sexual health programmes websites including Growing and Developing Healthy Relationships (GRHR) and Western Australia's Department of Health initiative Let's Yarn (Western Australia Department of Health, n.d.), which provides sexual health education and resources for First Nations young people.

The guide is used internationally as it is listed on the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) website in their collection of health and education resources. The New Zealand Health Educators Association (2017) also share the guide as a supplementary resource to support the delivery of consent education in New Zealand schools and it is promoted on the website of the New Zealand community-led project Te Puāwaitanga: Beyond the Birds and Bees (Te Puāwaitanga, 2025), which provides sex and relationship education and resources for young people.

THE PRACTICAL GUIDE TO LOVE, SEX AND RELATIONSHIPS

A teaching resource for Years 7 to 10

Welcome to The Practical Guide To Love, Sex And Relationships for Years 7 to 10 from the Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health and Society (ARCSHS), La Trobe University, funded by the Australian Government Department of Health. Developed in line with the Australian Curriculum, the activities link to the Health and Physical Education curriculum.

Teaching relationships and sexuality education in the classroom can be a challenge, particularly for those of you new to the material. But if you've taught it before, you'll know how much your students appreciate it and how incredibly rewarding it can be. So whether you are just starting out or an old hand this resource aims to provide you with evidence based information and clear, easy to use activities.

Taking care of me, taking care of you,
having an equal say and learning as we go.



National research carried out by ARCSHS has found that about 25% of Year 10 students and 50% of Year 12 students have had sexual intercourse. The numbers of students who have had some kind of sexual interaction with another person are much higher. In the most part their experiences were positive. However, a significant number of sexually active students have had unwanted sex, largely to being drunk, pressure from a partner, or fear. Wherever young people are at in 'being with someone', there is no question that they are learning about sexuality and relationships NOW. Australian research has found young people want opportunities to discuss the emotional and practical aspects of relationships - what to expect and how to cope, and not simply the biological and reproductive information.

The Practical Guide To Love, Sex And Relationships is inspired by [Professor Moira Carmody's](#) groundbreaking skills development approach to ethical sexual decision-making. At its heart is the concept of care of self, being aware of the impact of our actions on others, having an equal say, and acknowledging the importance of reflection and learning from experience. This resource brings together sexual health education with relationships education, to challenge the acceptability of 'pressured' sex and replace it with a new norm - one of ethical sex and ethical encounters, so that young women and men are more able to enjoy sex when they feel ready for it, that it is safe, and that it is a mutually pleasurable and consensual experience.

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CONCLUSION

SSASH is a uniquely valuable dataset for informing policy and practice because it provides long-running, nationally significant evidence on Australian secondary students' sexual health knowledge, attitudes, practices, and support needs. Conducted at regular intervals since 1992, SSASH enables policymakers and practitioners to track trends over time, identify emerging risks and protective factors, and evaluate the impact of education, health promotion, and service interventions. Its

large sample size, school-based design, and youth-centred methodology ensure robust, context-specific insights that directly inform curriculum development, sexual health education, service planning, and prevention strategies. As one of the most comprehensive and enduring datasets on young people's sexual health in Australia, SSASH supports evidence-based, targeted, and responsive policy aimed at improving health, wellbeing, and equity for adolescents.

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