

**Media release****Push for teens to find their feet as daily active travel rates take a step back**

*Fewer Aussie teens are walking or cycling to school due to safety and distance concerns*

Cancer Council is calling for increased support for younger Australians to walk or cycle to school, with new data revealing a decrease in the proportion of 12 – 17 year olds using an active mode of transport to get to school each day.

Cancer Council’s National Secondary Students’ Diet and Activity (NaSSDA) study surveyed teens on their diet and lifestyle habits. The survey found students were 29% less likely to actively travel every weekday in 2018 compared to 2009 – 10, with less than one in three Australian secondary students actively travelling to school each day.

Clare Hughes, Chair of Cancer Council’s Nutrition, Alcohol and Physical Activity Committee explained that physical activity in the teenage years is important as it sets up good habits for adulthood.

“Active school travel is an important source of regular physical activity for secondary students. Behaviours established in adolescence create lifelong patterns that promote good health. We want to encourage teens to be as active as possible to achieve the recommended 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity each day, and the school commute is a great way to fit in more physical activity.”

Physical activity reduces excess weight gain, which is a risk factor for developing 13 different types of cancer later in life. Being physically active can also reduce the risk of endometrial, breast and bowel cancer.

Overall, male students were more likely to actively travel than females. Yet the decline in active travel over time was greater for males, with males 31% less likely to use active travel every weekday in 2018 than in 2009-10 (compared to females being 25% less likely).

Safety concerns appeared to be a key barrier to active travel, especially among female students who were 21% more likely to actively travel if they felt safe walking or riding their bike in their neighbourhood during the day.

“The National Obesity Strategy identifies connected spaces such as cycle paths and walkways as important ways to support Aussies to be active within their communities. We urge all Australian governments to act on these recommendations to minimise barriers to physical activity and develop strategies for safer, more accessible environments that support active transport.”

Hughes continued, “Few (1 in 6) teens are currently meeting the recommended health guidelines of 60 minutes or more of moderate-to-vigorous intensity physical activity every day.”

“We are encouraging Australian secondary students and their parents to look for opportunities to add active travel into journeys to school. This means walking, cycling, scooting or taking public transport, even part of the way. By increasing their daily physical activity levels, teenagers not only benefit their current health but can ultimately reduce their risk of health problems, including cancer, later in life.”

- ENDS -

**For media enquiries please contact:**

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**About 'active travel'**

Active travel' between destinations is defined as actively travelling to and/or from school every weekday by walking or cycling at least part of the way.

**About the report**

'Trends and determinants of active school travel among Australian secondary school students: national cross-sectional data from 2009 to 2018' was developed by Cancer Council.

The data from the paper, published in the [Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health](#) this month, was obtained from the National Secondary Students' Diet and Activity survey.

Over a nine-year period, three surveys around diet and lifestyle habits were conducted. Nationally representative samples of Australian secondary school students in year levels 8 to 11 (ages 12 to 17 years) were surveyed in 2009-10 (n=13,790 from 238 schools), 2012-13 (n=10,309 from 196 schools) and 2018 (n=9,102 from 104 schools) using a self-report web-based questionnaire. A total sample of 33,201 secondary students was achieved.