New Zealand youth in secondary schools have demonstrated significant improvements in their health and wellbeing over the past 11 years – yet there remain areas of concern.

Speaking to the Family Planning Conference 2013, Dr Simon Denny from the University of Auckland presented The Health and Wellbeing of New Zealand Secondary School Students report published by The University of Auckland and Auckland UniServices. The report is the third in the Youth 2000 Survey Series which provides insight into adolescent experience trends from 2001. The 2012 survey was completed by 4,500 secondary school students and provides the country’s most comprehensive data on current adolescent concerns and behaviour.

The findings show broad overall improvement in the health and wellbeing of young people. In particular, the report shows a marked reduction in tobacco and alcohol consumption, binge drinking and illegal drug use as well as lower rates of dangerous driving and small positive shifts in school life. “A good social environment is essential to young people’s healthy development. There have been small improvements in aspects of school life, with more students reporting their teachers are fair, they like school and they feel adults at school care about them,” Dr Denny told delegates.

Sexual Behaviour

Twenty-five per cent of male students and 24 per cent of female students report having had sex. 18 per cent of male students and 19 per cent of female students report being ‘currently sexually active’ (i.e. they have had sex in the last three months).

“Issues around young people and sexuality are often discussed, in the media for instance, without a clear understanding of what is happening in young people’s lives. These youth surveys give us an evidence base from which we can all work. Not only do the surveys provide us with really good information, they also remind us that not all young people are having sex,” said Family Planning chief executive, Jackie Edmond.

Access to Healthcare

19 per cent of students (21 per cent females and 16 per cent males) are unable to access healthcare when they need it. This is more common in high deprivation neighbourhoods (22 per cent), compared with medium (18 per cent) and low deprivation neighbourhoods (16 per cent).

Expectations and Achievement

93 per cent of males and 97 per cent of females say that it is ‘somewhat or very important’ for them to be proud of their school work, and students at their school try to get the best grades they can (57 per cent of males and 56 per cent of females).

Four out of ten students report doing homework for at least one hour each day (47 per cent of females and 31 per cent of males). Sixty-four per cent believe that they will go on to further education or training when they leave school (71 per cent of females and 56 per cent of males). 29 per cent plan to start work or look for a job; nine per cent don’t know, have no plans or think that they will do nothing. Just one per cent intend to start a family.

LENScience Learning Experiences Outside the Classroom

Programmes support development of scientific literacy and Nature of Science understanding. Programmes are held in our specialist classrooms at the Liggins Institute, Auckland.

Full day programmes offered:
- Healthy Start to Life: Nutrition (Y7-9)
- Healthy Start to Life: Growing Up (Y9-10)
- DNA Discovery Day (Y10)
- Diabetes: An Issue For My Community (Y11)
- Healthy Start to Life: Environment (Y13)

LENScience Teaching & Learning Resources

Supporting scientific literacy development. Students explore socio-scientific issues through stories of the work of New Zealand and international scientists.

Teaching & Learning resources include:
- Type 2 Diabetes: An Issue for My Community (Y11)
- Me, Myself, My Environment – Nutrition (Y7-9)
- Ko Au, Ko Au Ano, Ko Tōku Tāiao - Te Kai (Y7-9)
- Me, Myself, My Environment – Growing Up (Y9-10)
- Blue 28 Green (Y7-10)
- Senior Biology Resource Series

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“Among students who had accessed healthcare in the last 12 months, only 37 per cent reported having the chance to talk with a doctor or other health professional in private and only 46 per cent had been assured that their healthcare services would be confidential.”

– Dr Simon Denny.