

DRUG & ALCOHOL OFFICE

UTILISATION OF SOBERING UP CENTRES, 1990-2003

INTRODUCTION

The *Detention of Drunken Persons Act 1989* was enacted on 27 April 1990 and decriminalised public drunkenness in Western Australia (WA). The impetus for the decriminalisation of public drunkenness and the establishment of sobering up centres (SUCs) arose from recommendations contained in the report of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody.

The management, development and funding of SUCs presently rests with the Drug and Alcohol Office (DAO). Initial responsibility for establishing SUCs was with the Alcohol and Drug Authority (now known as Next Step Specialist Alcohol & Drug Services), was transferred to the Health Department of WA in July 1997, shifted to the WA Drug Abuse Strategy Office in July 1998 and then assigned to the DAO in December 2001.

Sobering up centres are support services that provide a practical, harm reduction approach to the issue of public intoxication. They provide overnight care to adults who are intoxicated, who are not in need of hospital care and whose behaviour can be managed effectively and safely by sobering up centre staff. These services generally operate five nights per week, apart from the Perth SUC, which operates seven nights per week.

Sobering up services involve the provision of a substantial meal, clean bedding and sleepwear and laundering of clothes. The short stay aims to break the negative cycle of alcohol induced harm by providing care to intoxicated persons most at risk to themselves, their families and their community.

The expansion of SUCs throughout WA provides a more appropriate option to manage public intoxication. The positive impact of SUCs on the management of intoxicated persons rather than being detained in police lockups has been demonstrated at the regional level as well as for the whole state. The gains from the expansion in SUCs include:

- reductions in police time and resources previously involved in detaining and monitoring intoxicated people in lock ups;
- reduced use of court time and resources;
- reduced levels of domestic violence and other problems associated with alcohol abuse; and
- reduced burden on hospitals because of fewer hospitalisations for alcohol related illnesses and accidents.

Written by Greg Swensen (June 2004)

In Brief

- In 2003 there were 12 SUCs that had a total operating cost of \$4,000,813, which had an annual average cost of \$333,401 per centre and an average cost of \$187 per admission.
- From 1991 (the first full year of operation) to 2003 the number of admissions to SUCs increased 14 fold, from 1,533 to 21,312.
- From 1992 (the first full year of complete police data) to 2003 the number of detentions of intoxicated persons in police lockups declined by 81.9%, from 12,346 to 2,235.
- From 1990 to 2003 there was a total of 158,899 admissions to SUCs, of which 106,975 (67.3%) were males and 51,924 (32.7%) were females.
- In 2003 there were four SUCs which accounted for just over half of the total of 21,312 admissions, with 4,947 (23.2%) admissions at the Broome SUC, 2,587 (12.1%) admissions at the Perth SUC, 2,348 (11.0%) at the Derby SUC and 2,087 (9.8%) admissions at the Kununurra SUC.

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Experience has shown that over a period of time the opening of a SUC usually encourages the community to develop additional services to address alcohol related problems. These include outreach programs, community patrols, homeless support programs, alcohol and other drug education programs and community support for initiatives to restrict alcohol availability.

DEVELOPMENT & EXPANSION

The first SUC was opened in the Perth metropolitan area in 1990 and since then SUCs have opened progressively in identified high priority localities throughout the State, as follows:

- Perth in May 1990;
- Port Hedland in April 1991;
- Halls Creek in September 1992;
- Roebourne in February 1993;
- Fitzroy Crossing in March 1994;
- Kalgoorlie in June 1994;
- Wiluna in April 1996;
- Kununurra in September 1996;
- Derby in May 1998;
- Broome in February 1999;
- Midland in June 2002;
- Wyndham in December 2002;
- Anawim in February 2003; and
- Geraldton in December 2003.

This publication updates the data on the utilisation of sobering up centres previously published in *Statistical Bulletin No. 5* (June 1999) and *Statistical Bulletin No. 11* (April 2001).

COST EFFECTIVENESS

The annual operating cost of sobering up services has gradually increased as the number of SUCs has expanded from, \$319,000 in 1990/1991 to \$4 million in 2002/2003 (Table 1). This data shows that SUCs are a very cost effective service as they avoid costs that would otherwise be incurred if people had been detained or admitted to a hospital. For example, in the year 2003 there were 12 SUCs which had a total operating cost of \$4,000,813, an annual average cost of \$333,401 per centre and an average of \$187 per admission (using the 2002/2003 cost data).

Table 1:
Annual expenditure (\$) on sobering up services, 1990/1991 - 2002/2003

Year	Total	Year	Total
1990/1991	318,733	1997/1998	2,016,871
1991/1992	501,413	1998/1999	2,968,400
1992/1993	763,165	1999/2000	2,493,225
1993/1994	1,086,982	2000/2001	2,370,100
1994/1995	1,863,665	2001/2002	3,476,349
1995/1996	1,722,200	2002/2003	4,000,813
1996/1997	1,863,007		

ADMISSIONS TO SOBERING UP CENTRES

Annual admissions to SUCs increased 14 fold, from a total of 1,533 in 1991 (the first full year of operation) to a total of 21,312 in 2003 (Figure 1, page 3).

Gender

In the 14 year period from 1990 to 2003 there was a total of 158,899 admissions to SUCs, of which 106,975 (67.3%) were males and 51,924 (32.7%) were females (Table 2, page 3).

Indigenous status

In 2003 almost all those who attended SUCs located in the Central (98.6%), Goldfields (99.7%), Kimberley (99.3%), Midwest (91.3%) and Pilbara (98.9%) Health Regions were indigenous persons. There has also been a growth in the proportion of indigenous persons attending the Perth SUC, increasing from 51.4% of admissions in 1999 to 76.6% of admissions in 2003.

Regional trends

An overview of trends in annual admissions to each SUC is provided in Table 4 (page 4). In the year 2003 there were four SUCs which accounted for just over half of the total of 21,312 admissions, with 4,947 admissions at the Broome SUC, 2,587 admissions at the Perth SUC, 2,348 at the Derby SUC and 2,087 admissions at the Kununurra SUC.

This table also shows that marked fluctuations in annual admissions occurred in a number of the SUCs. For example, admissions to the Wiluna SUC dropped from 2,493 in 1997 (first full year of operation) to 904 in 2000, then increased to 1,400 in 2002 and then fell to 928 in 2003. Admissions to the Hedland SUC reached 2,237 in 1993 and has since declined to 899 in 2003.

There were notable differences in the age structure of the population that attended individual SUCs within each region. For example, the most frequent admissions at the Wiluna SUC involved the 20 to 24 age group whereas in the Fitzroy Crossing SUC most admissions involved the 30 to 39 age group.

DETENTIONS IN POLICE LOCK UPS

Over the 14 year period from 1990 to 2003 there was a total of 75,204 detentions of intoxicated persons in police lock ups in the various catchment areas served by operating SUCs, of which 56,196 (74.7%) were males and 19,008 (25.3%) were females (Table 2, page 3).

The impact of SUCs on the detention of intoxicated persons is demonstrated in Figure 1 (page 3) which shows a sharp decline has occurred in detentions since 1992 up to the present. From 1992 (the first full year of complete police data) to 2003 the number of detentions of intoxicated persons in police lockups declined by 81.9%, from 12,346 in 1992 to 2,235 in 2003.

Figure 1:
Number of admissions to sobering up centres & detentions for drunkenness in police lockups, WA, 1990-2003

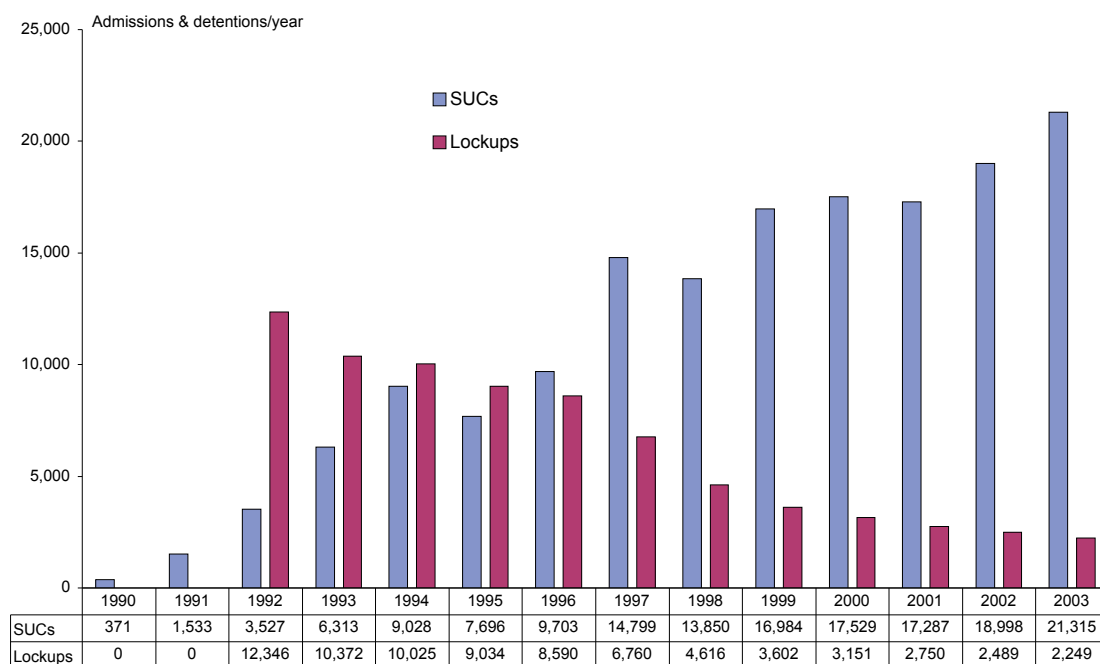


Table 2:
Annual admissions to sobering up centres & detentions for drunkenness in police lockups, WA, by gender, 1990-2003

Year	Sobering up centres			Police lockups		
	Males	Females	Total	Males	Females	Total
1990	315	56	371	-	-	-
1991	1,286	247	1,533	-	-	-
1992	2,621	906	3,527	9,000	3,346	12,346
1993	4,724	1,589	6,313	7,789	2,583	10,372
1994	6,500	2,527	9,027	7,266	2,759	10,025
1995	5,616	2,071	7,687	6,470	2,458	8,928
1996	6,641	3,057	9,698	6,356	2,006	8,362
1997	10,022	4,764	14,786	5,035	1,578	6,613
1998	9,512	4,338	13,850	3,538	966	4,504
1999	11,223	5,760	16,983	2,764	771	3,535
2000	11,432	6,096	17,528	2,443	667	3,110
2001	11,326	5,960	17,286	2,060	652	2,712
2002	11,972	7,023	18,995	1,821	641	2,462
2003	13,785	7,530	21,315	1,654	581	2,235
Total	106,975	51,924	158,899	56,196	19,008	75,204

Note: Lockup data excludes missing cases.

Table 3:
Annual admissions to all sobering up centres, WA, 1990-2003

	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003
Metro														
Perth	371	1,108	1,442	1,516	1,784	1,649	1,712	2,776	2,881	2,775	2,548	2,455	2,910	2,587
Midland	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	168	554
Anawim	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	523
Sub total	371	1,108	1,442	1,516	1,784	1,649	1,712	2,776	2,881	2,775	2,548	2,455	3,078	3,664
Midwest & Murchison														
Wiluna	-	-	-	-	-	-	1,451	2,493	1,198	692	904	1,072	1,400	928
Geraldton	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	23
Sub total	-	-	-	-	-	-	1,451	2,493	1,198	692	904	1,072	1,400	951
Goldfields & SE Coastal														
Kalgoorlie	-	-	-	-	930	1,250	1,092	1,142	1,642	1,567	1,409	1,960	1,183	1,127
Sub total	-	-	-	-	930	1,250	1,092	1,142	1,642	1,567	1,409	1,960	1,183	1,127
Kimberley														
Halls Creek	-	-	754	2,105	2,248	1,971	1,873	2,432	1,927	1,614	1,536	1,801	1,458	1,913
Fitzroy Crossing	-	-	-	-	1,225	556	409	853	736	973	645	752	810	640
Kununurra	-	-	-	-	-	-	517	2,356	1,421	1,564	1,669	1,120	1,366	2,087
Broome	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2,477	3,086	2,965	4,511	4,947
Derby	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1,006	2,141	1,785	2,047	2,228	2,348
Wyndham	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	138	1,531
Sub total	-	-	754	2,105	3,473	2,527	2,799	5,641	5,090	8,769	8,721	8,685	10,511	13,466
Pilbara & Gascoyne														
Hedland	-	425	1,331	2,237	2,053	1,402	1,251	1,179	1,566	1,465	1,902	1,447	1,208	899
Roebourne	-	-	-	455	787	860	1,393	1,555	1,473	1,715	2,045	1,655	1,599	1,205
Sub total	-	425	1,331	2,692	2,840	2,262	2,644	2,734	3,039	3,180	3,947	3,102	2,807	2,104
Total State	371	1,533	3,527	6,313	9,027	7,688	25,098	14,786	13,850	16,983	17,529	17,274	18,979	21,312

Metropolitan Health Region

There are three SUCs in the Perth metropolitan area, the Perth SUC which was established in May 1990, the Midland SUC which was established in June 2002 and the Anawim SUC which was established in February 2003.

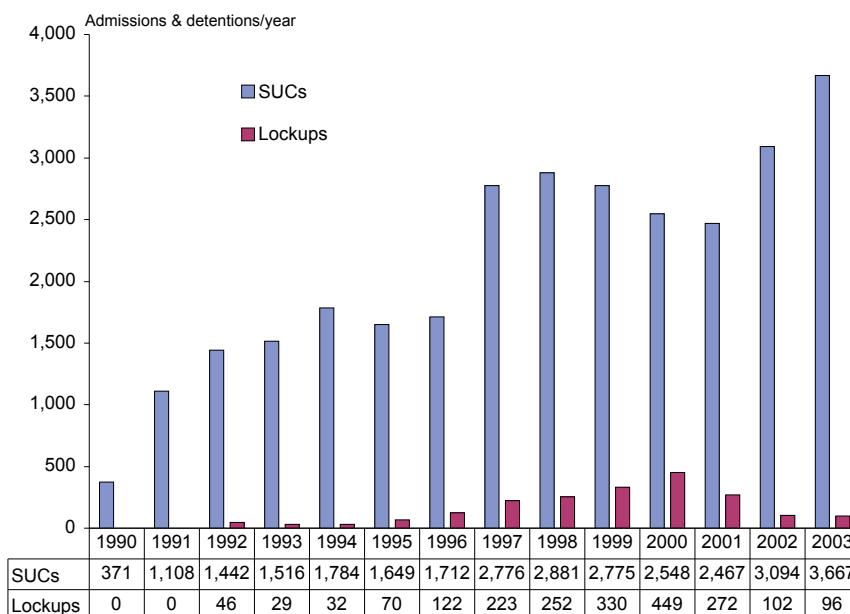
Over the period from 1990 to 2003 there was a total of 29,790 admissions to SUCs and from 1992 to 2003 a total of 2,023 detentions in police lockups in the catchment areas served by these three SUCs (Figure 2).

Perth SUC

Over the period from 1990 to 2003 there was a total of 28,514 admissions, of which 22,752 (79.8%) were males and 5,760 (20.2%) were females.

A breakdown of age related data from 1998 to 2003 is presented in Figure 3. This shows the greatest number of male admissions involved the 40 to 44 year age group, whereas for females most admissions involved the 35 to 39 age group.

Figure 2:
Number of admissions to sobering up centres and detentions for drunkenness in police lockups, Metropolitan Health Region, 1990-2003



Male admissions steadily increased from the 15 to 19 age group up to the 40 to 44 age group and then dropped with very few admissions involving males 60 years and older.

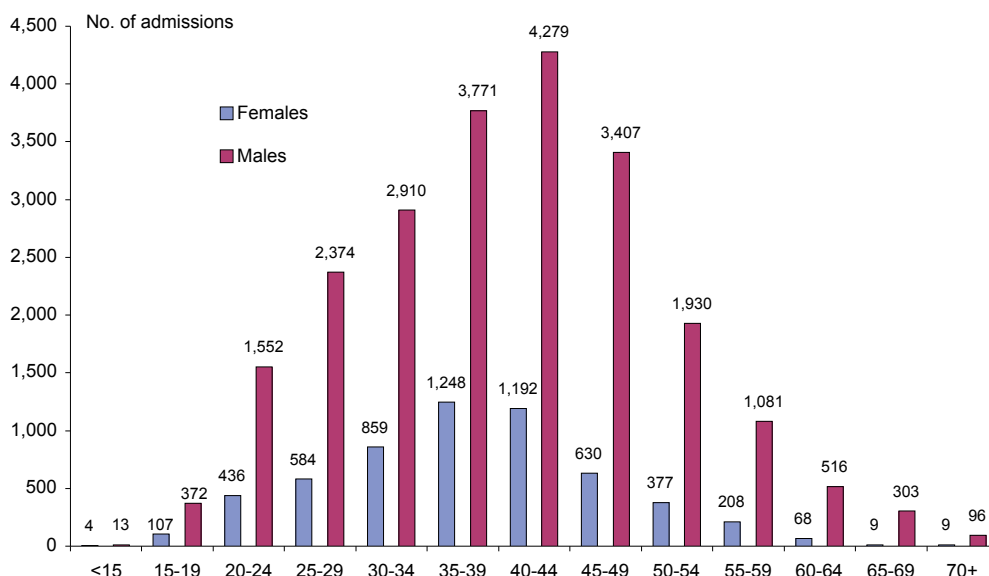
Midland SUC

Over the period from 2002 to 2003 there was a total of 722 admissions, of which 500 (69.3%) were males and 222 (30.8%) were females.

Anawim SUC

In 2003 there was a total of 523 admissions, all of which were females as this SUC provides services to females only.

Figure 3:
Admissions to Perth sobering up centre by age group, 1998-2003



Goldfields & South East Coastal Health Region

In the Goldfields and South East Coastal Health Region there is one SUC, the Kalgoorlie SUC which was established in June 1994.

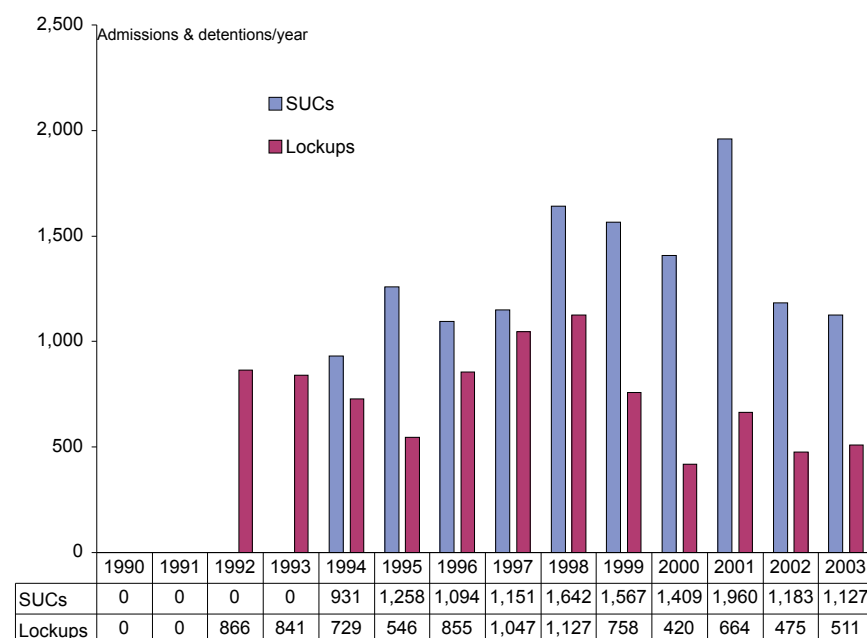
Kalgoorlie SUC

From 1994 to 2003 there was a total of 13,322 admissions to the Kalgoorlie SUC and 8,839 detentions in police lockups in the Kalgoorlie SUC catchment area .

Of the total of 13,322 admissions, 7,580 (57.0%) were males and 5,722 (43.0%) were females.

There was an initial positive impact on the number of detentions for drunkenness in the Kalgoorlie SUC catchment area. The number of detentions dropped from 729 in 1994 to 546 in 1995, doubled from 546 in 1995 to 1,127 detentions in 1998 and then dropped by 54.7% to 511 in 2003 (Figure 4).

Figure 4:
Number of admissions to sobering up centres and detentions for drunkenness in police lockups, Goldfields & South East Coastal Health Region, 1994-2003

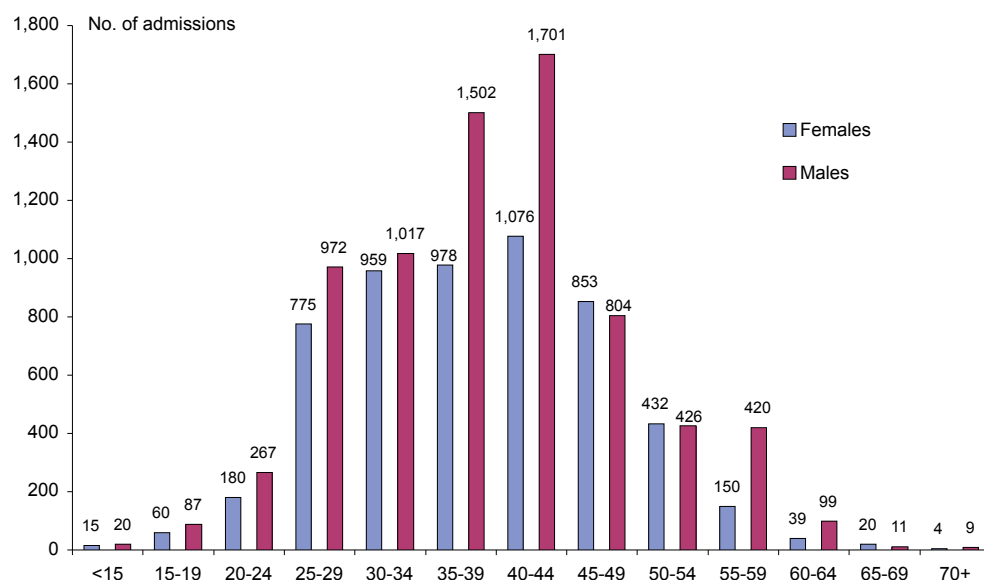


The annual number of admissions to the Kalgoorlie SUC increased by 76.4% from 931 in 1994 to 1,642 in 1998 and then declined by 31.4% to 1,127 admissions in 2003.

A breakdown of age related data from 1998 to 2003 is presented in Figure 5. Male admissions mostly involved the 35 to 44 age group, with the greatest number of admissions occurring in the 40 to 44 age group.

There were similar numbers of female admissions from the 30 to 34 age group to the 40 to 44 age group, with very few admissions involving women aged 55 years and older.

Figure 5:
Admissions to Kalgoorlie sobering up centre by age group, 1998-2003

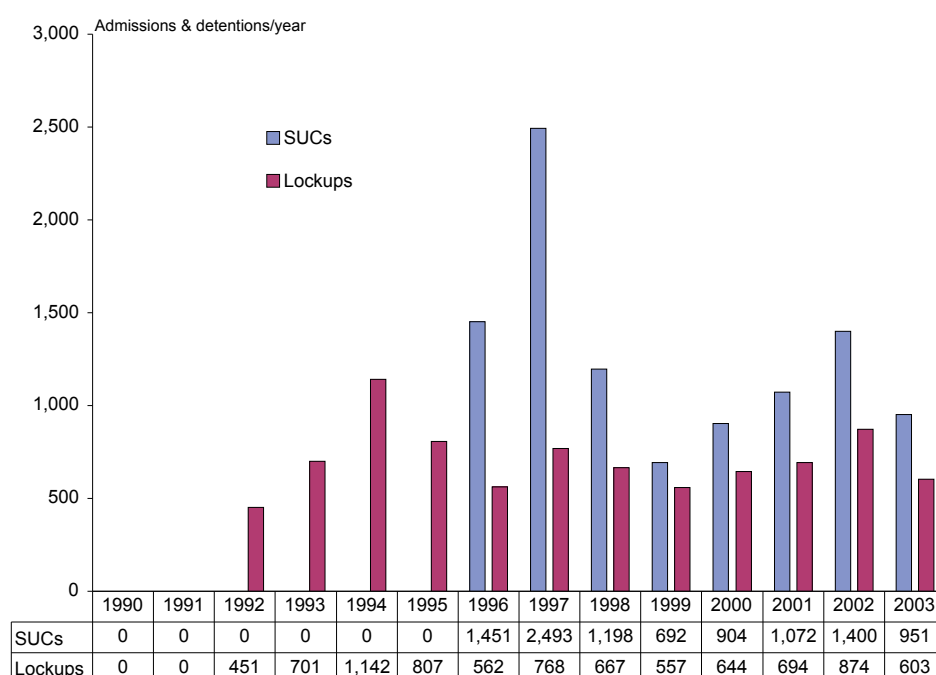


Midwest & Murchison Health Region

In the Midwest and Murchison Health Region there are two SUCs, the Wiluna SUC (established in April 1996) and the Geraldton SUC (established in December 2003).

From 1996 to 2003 there was a total of 10,161 admissions to SUCs and 8,470 detentions in police lockups in the catchment areas for these SUCs in this region (Figure 6).

Figure 6:
Number of admissions to sobering up centres and detentions for drunkenness in police lockups, Midwest & Murchison Health Region, 1992-2003



Wiluna SUC

From 1996 to 2003 there was a total of 10,138 admissions to the Wiluna SUC, of which 6,038 (59.6%) were males and 4,100 (40.4%) were females.

A breakdown of age related data from 1998 to 2003 is presented in Figure 7. Male admissions mostly involved the 15 to 29 age group, with the greatest number of admissions occurring in the 20 to 24 age group. Whilst the number

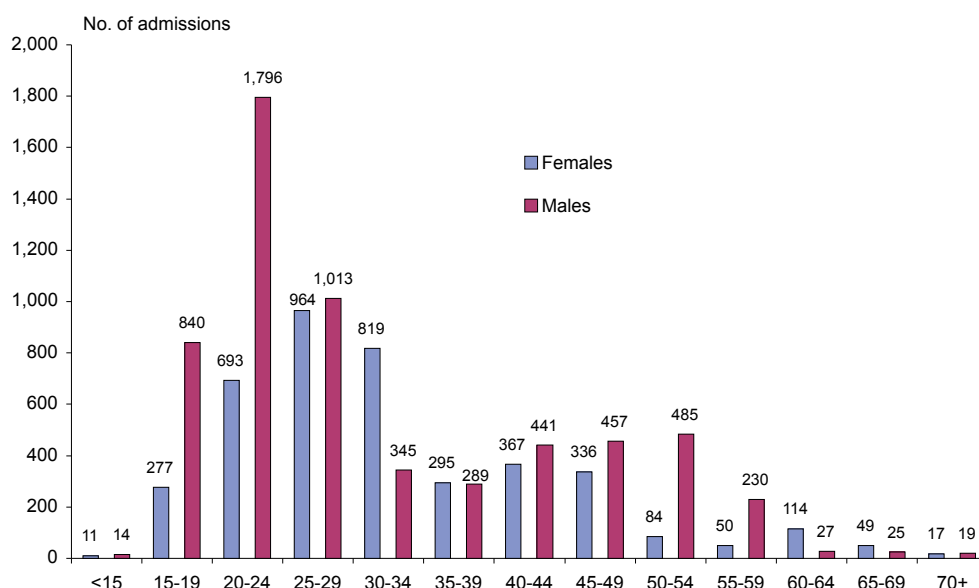
of male admissions declined with age, there was a rise in admissions from the 40 to 44 up to 50 to 54 age groups, with very few admissions occurring in the 60 years and older age group.

Female admissions were clustered in the 20 to 34 age group and then declined with age, with very few admissions occurring in the 50 years and older age group.

Geraldton SUC

In 2003 there was a total of 23 admissions to the Geraldton SUC, which represented only one month of activity.

Figure 7:
Admissions to Wiluna sobering up centre by age group, 1996-2003



Pilbara & Gascoyne Health Region

There are two SUCs in the Pilbara and Gascoyne Health Region, the Hedland SUC (established in April 1991) and the Roebourne SUC (established in February 1993).

From 1991 to 2003 there was a total of 33,110 admissions to SUCs and 11,809 detentions in police lockups in this region (Figure 8).

The annual number of detentions dropped by 38.3%, from 2,128 detentions in 1992 (the first full year) to 1,313 in 1993, then increased to 1,933 in 1996. Since 1996 detentions in this region have steadily decreased to 248 in 2003.

Overall, the number of admissions to SUCs increased by 197%, from 1,331 in 1992 (the first full year) to 3,947 in 2000 and then fell by 46.7% to 2,104 in 2003.

Hedland SUC

Over the period from 1991 to 2003 there was a total of 18,368 admissions, of which 11,588 (63.1%) were males and 6,777 (36.9%) were females.

A breakdown of age related data from 1998 to 2003 is presented in Figure 9 (page 9).

This shows a distinct pattern of age related differences in the frequency of male and female admissions. Female admissions peak in the 25 to 29 age group whereas male admissions peak in the 40 to 44 age group.

There is also an unusual spike in the number of male admissions in the 60 to 64 age group, whereas there were very few admissions involving females in the 50 years and older age group.

Roebourne SUC

Over the period from 1993 to 2003 there was a total of 14,742 admissions, of which 9,168 (62.2%) were males and 5,574 (37.8%) were females.

A breakdown of age related data from 1998 to 2003 is presented in Figure 10 (page 9).

This shows that males tended to be from younger age groups compared to females, with the majority of male admissions clustered in the 35 to 59 age group whereas female admissions were clustered in the 40 to 69 age group.

Figure 8:
Number of admissions to sobering up centres and detentions for drunkenness in police lockups, Pilbara & Gascoyne Health Region, 1991-2003

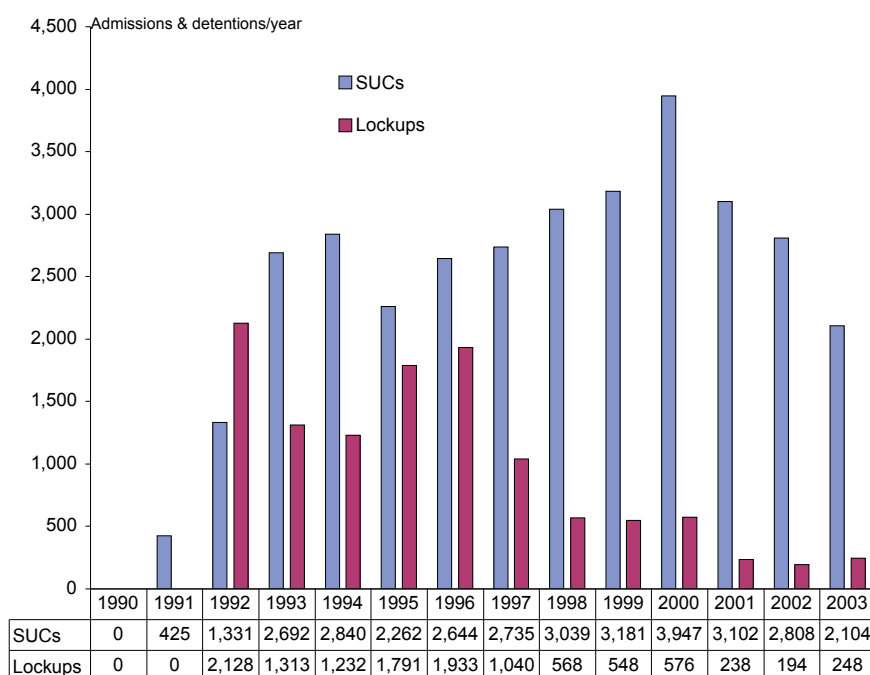


Figure 9:
Admissions to Hedland sobering up centre by age group, 1991-2003

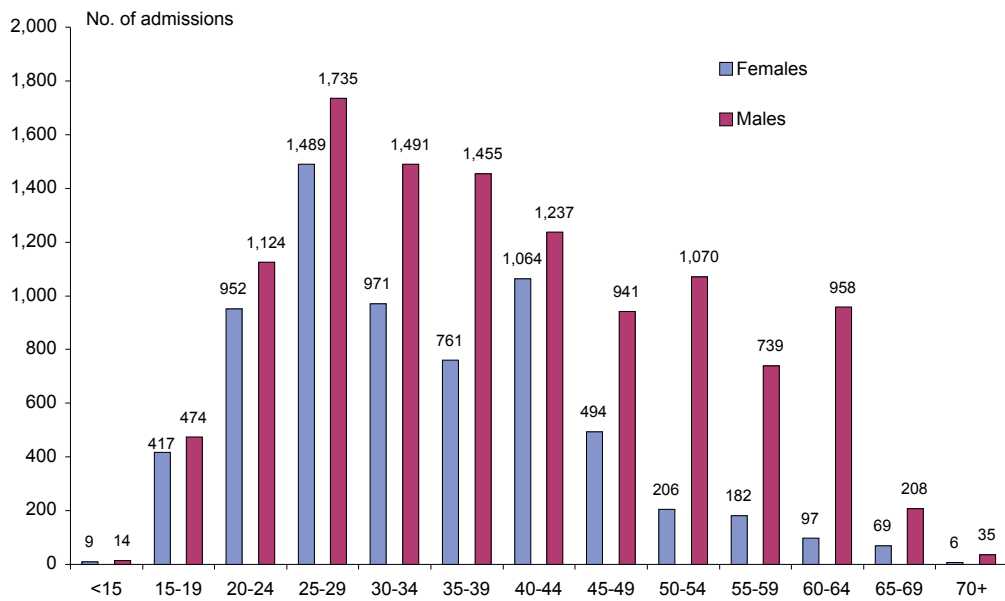
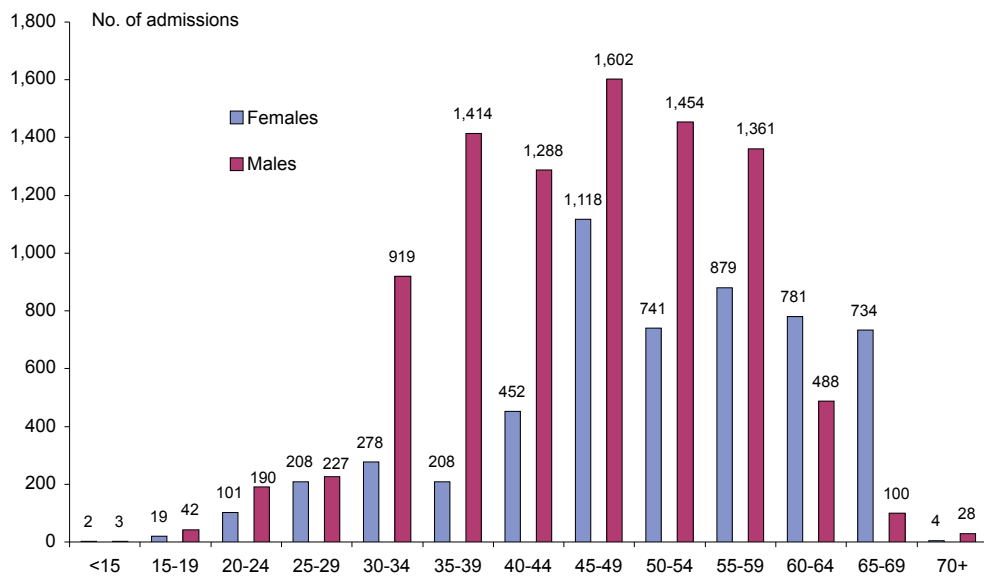


Figure 10:
Admissions to Roebourne sobering up centre by age group, 1993-2003



Kimberley Health Region

In the Kimberley Health Region there are six SUCs, the Halls Creek SUC (established in September 1992), the Fitzroy Crossing SUC (established in March 1994), the Kununurra SUC (established in September 1996), the Derby SUC (established in May 1998), the Broome SUC (established in February 1999) and the Wyndham SUC (established in December 2002).

Over the period 1992 to 2003 there was a total of 72,550 admissions to SUCs and 43,993 detentions in police lock-ups in the Kimberley Health Region (Figure 11).

There has been a marked positive impact on the number of detentions for drunkenness in this region with the number steadily dropping from 8,798 in 1992 to 695 in 2003.

In conjunction with the decline in detentions for drunkenness, the number of admissions to SUCs has steadily increased, from 754 in 1992 to 13,466 in 2003, an overall 18 fold increase in admissions to SUCs.

Halls Creek SUC

Over the period from 1992 to 2003 there was a total of 21,633 admissions, of which 15,132 (70.0%) were males, 6,500 (30.0%) were females and 1 case of missing gender.

A breakdown of age related data from 1992 to 2003 is presented in Figure 12 (page 11). This shows that both male and female admissions peaked in the 25 to 34 year age group and whereas female admissions dropped off with age there were relatively greater numbers of males in older age groups than females.

Fitzroy Crossing SUC

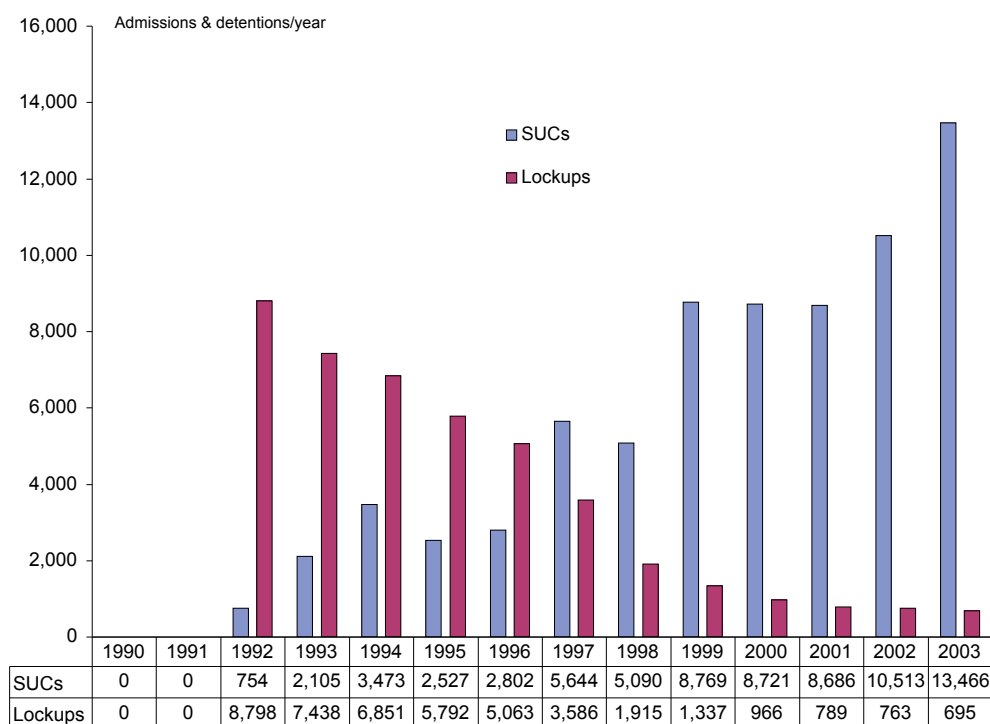
Over the period from 1994 to 2003 there was a total of 7,605 admissions, of which 4,861 (63.9%) were males, 2,732 (35.0%) were females and 6 cases of missing gender.

A breakdown of age related data from 1994 to 2003 is presented in Figure 13 (page 11). There was a similar age distribution for both male and female admissions with the most frequent admissions involving the 30 to 39 year age group for both sexes.

Kununurra SUC

Over the period from 1996 to 2003 there was a total of 12,101 admissions, of which 9,046 (74.8%) were males, 3,054 (25.2%) were females and 1 case of missing gender.

Figure 11:
Number of admissions to sobering up centres and detentions for drunkenness in police lockups, Kimberley Health Region, 1992-2003



A breakdown of age related data from 1996 to 2003 is presented in Figure 14 (page 12). This shows that female admissions peaked in the 40 to 44 year age group and then sharply dropped.

There were a number of peaks in male admissions, in the 30 to 39 age group, 45 to 49 age group and the 55 to 59 age group. There were very few male admissions in the 60 year and older age group.

Derby SUC

Over the period from 1998 to 2003 there was a total of 11,556 admissions, of which 8,143 (70.5%) were males, 3,412 (29.5%) were females and 1 case of missing gender.

A breakdown of age related data from 1998 to 2003 is presented in Figure 15 (page 12).

This shows that female admissions were mostly clustered in the 25 to 44 age group and then declined with very few admissions in the older age groups, male admissions were clustered in the 25 to 49 age group and then fell with relatively few admissions in older age groups.

Broome SUC

Over the period from 1999 to 2003 there was a total of 17,986 admissions, of which 10,989 (61.1%) were males and 6,997 (38.9%) were females.

Figure 12:
Admissions to Halls Creek sobering up centre by age group, 1992-2003

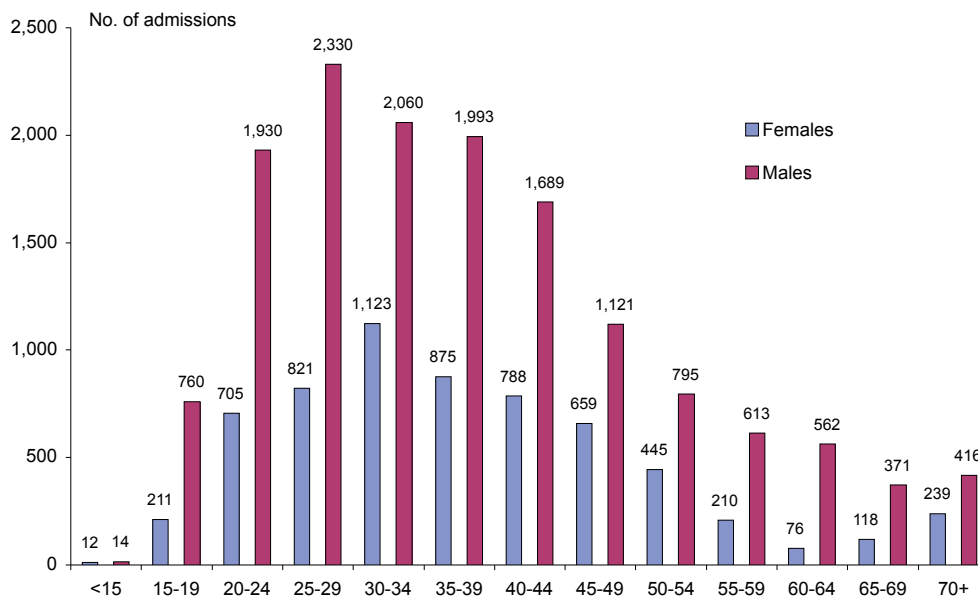
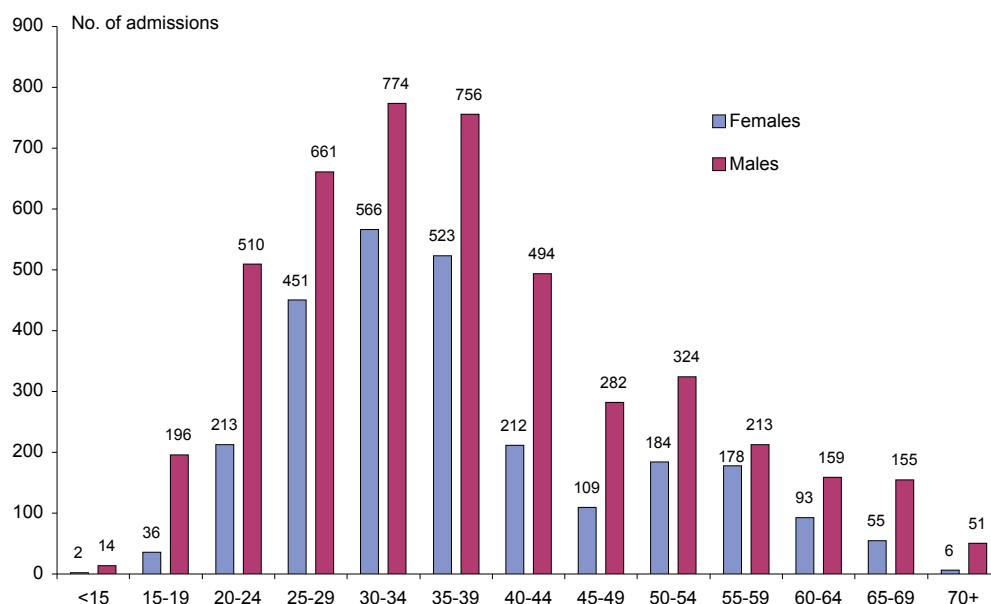


Figure 13:
Admissions to Fitzroy Crossing sobering up centre by age group, 1994-2003



A breakdown of age related data from 1998 to 2003 is presented in Figure 16 (page 13). Overall males were slightly older than females with male admissions peaking in the 30 to 39 age group, whereas female admissions peaked in the 30 to 34 age group.

It can be seen that there were greater numbers of female admissions in the 20 to 24 age group and similar numbers of males and females in both the 45 to 49 and 50 to 54 age group.

Wyndham SUC

Over the period from 2002 to 2003 there was a total of 1,669 admissions, of which 1,137 (68.1%) were males and 532 (31.9%) were females.

A breakdown of age related data from 2002 to 2003 is presented in Figure 17 (page 13). This indicates that both male and female admissions peaked in the 35 to 39 age group, with a higher proportion of admissions in the 35 to 39 age group involving males. There were relatively few female admissions involving the 40 years and older age group compared to the number of male admissions.

Figure 14:
Admissions to Kununurra sobering up centre by age group, 1996-2003

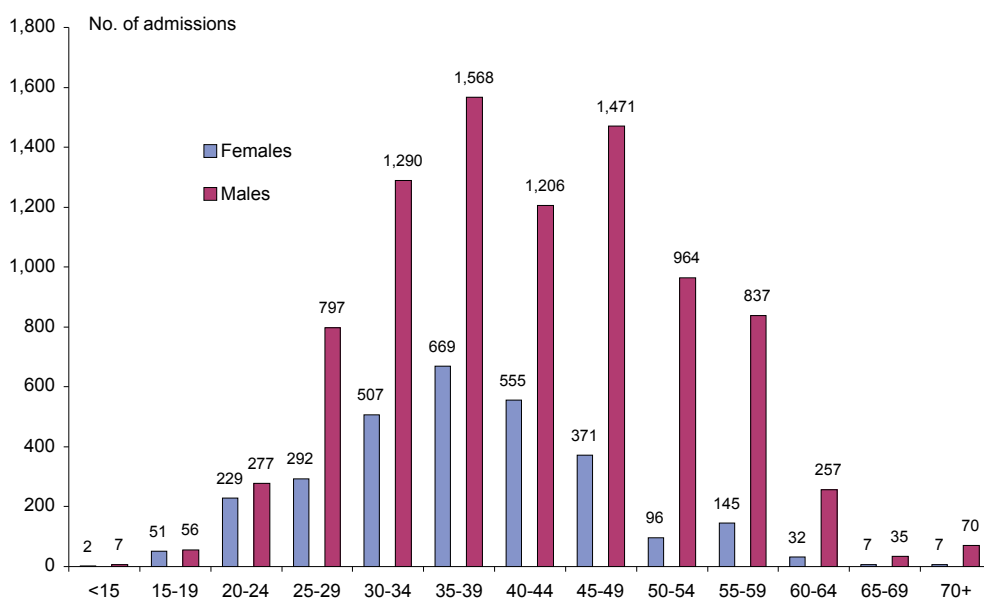


Figure 15:
Admissions to Derby sobering up centre by age group, 1998-2002

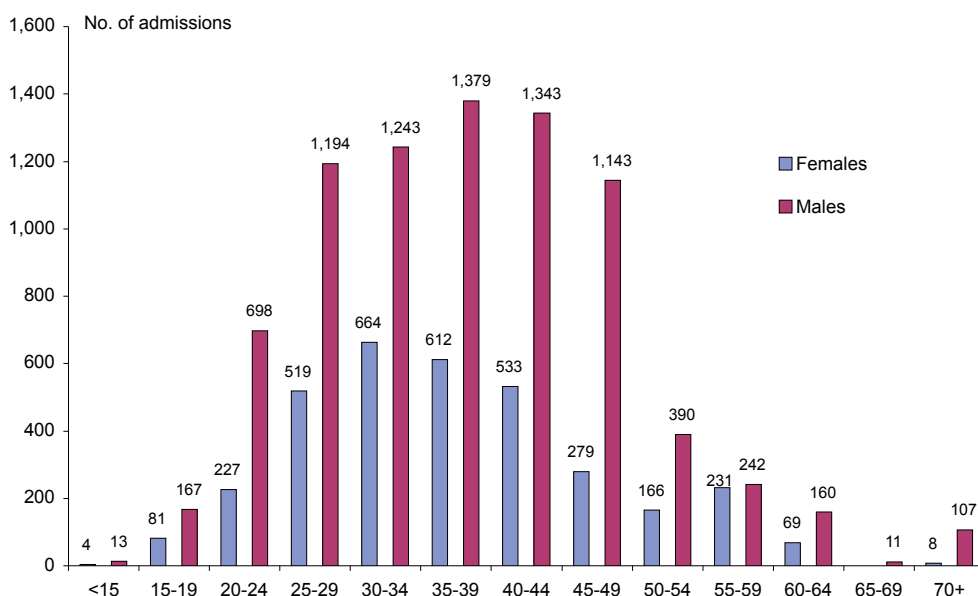


Figure 16:
Admissions to Broome sobering up centre by age group, 1999-2003

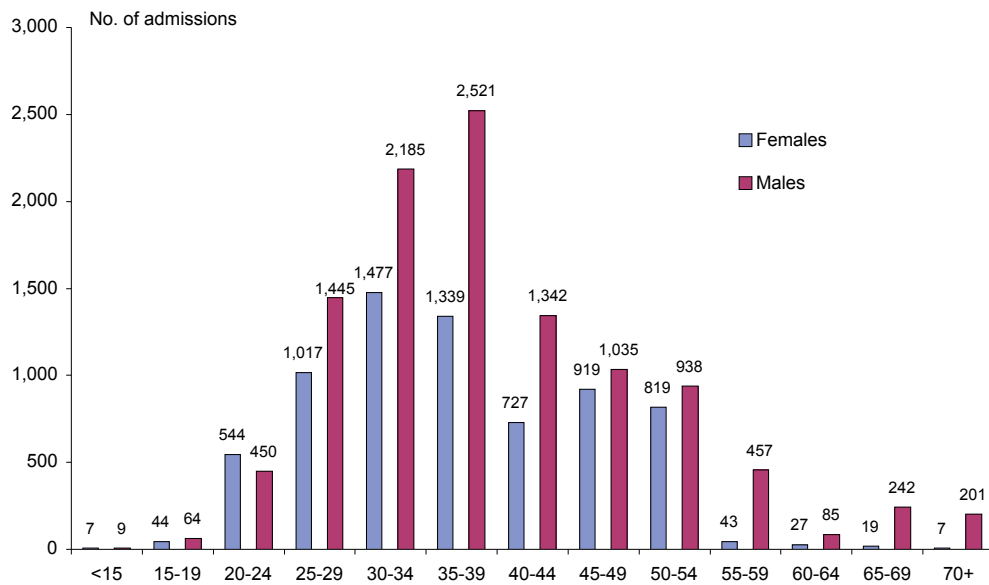


Figure 17:
Admissions to Wyndham sobering up centre by age group, 2002-2003

