

In It Together



PREMISE

NHMRC CENTRE OF RESEARCH EXCELLENCE

Do substance use and mental health issues co-occur in young people?

Substance use is a common experience among young people, however sometimes substance use can develop into more harmful use or dependence.

Co-occurring mental health and substance use affect many young people, with **48%** of young people with a mental disorder also having a substance use disorder.

How can involving young people in prevention research reduce the impacts of mental illness and substance use?

Young people are passionate about and interested in alcohol and other drug use and mental health research. Young people have unique lived experiences and seek to have their thoughts and perspectives included in a meaningful way. When young people are empowered and engaged in collaborative research, initiatives are more relevant, effective, and translatable.



How to include young people in research

What are the principles for youth engagement in research?

The PREMISE Youth Advisory Board identified 10 principles for youth engagement in mental health and substance use research. These principles were developed by young people, in hopes to inspire and encourage meaningful collaboration in research. In no particular order, these principles are:

-  **1 Involve young people** in a broad range of research and dissemination activities.
-  **2 Support the leadership** of people with lived experience, and their participation and collaboration in all stages of the research process, from priority setting to translation/implementation.
-  **3 Address barriers** to participating in research and accessing programs for rural and remote communities.
-  **4 Strive for equitable access** to research and programs through inclusion of the voices and experiences of minority groups and hard to reach populations.
-  **5 Enhance research** through collaborative research networks and the creation of interdisciplinary teams.
-  **6 Actively reduce mental health and substance use stigma** through challenging stereotypes and countering them with evidence-based information and lived experience.
-  **7 Seek to understand and address the social determinants** of health by embracing a whole-of-life and whole-of-community approach to mental health and substance use research.
-  **8 Explore the impact of intergenerational trauma** and the expectancy of life success between generations.
-  **9 Advocate for sustainable, long-term, and diverse** research and program funding models.
-  **10 Collaborate with levels of Government** to influence policy to support the implementation of evidence-based prevention programs.

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Busting myths about involving young people in research

You might be unsure about when and how to include young people in research. Below are some common misconceptions around youth research involvement, as well as some suggestions and solutions:

“Young people only want to be involved in completing surveys.”

Young people are interested in a variety of roles that can utilise and develop their skills. These include:

- ▶ Advocacy
- ▶ Social media promotions
- ▶ Community liaison roles
- ▶ Research assistant/research partner
- ▶ Creative roles – animations, graphic design
- ▶ Internships

“Young people don’t understand research.”

Young people are very attune to current issues, and have a desire to help make meaningful change. Young people provide meaningful, unique perspectives that can guide research design, interpretation or communication of research findings, or reveal novel avenues for future research.

There is also an opportunity to pair their perspectives with the technical knowledge of research teams and provide young people with educational and professional opportunities to further their understanding of mental health and substance use research.

“I don’t know where to start. How do I find young people interested in research?”

Social media can be a great way to reach young people, through platforms such as Facebook, Instagram and Twitter.

Reach out to youth-focused organisations, as they may have a network of young people to contact. These can include: education providers (schools, universities, TAFE etc.), local councils, local sports clubs, Rotary clubs, other Youth Advisory Boards and lived experience groups, Aboriginal and Community Controlled Health Organisation (ACCHO) peer groups, and other youth organisations in your state or territory. These organisations may have channels where you can reach out to young people, including: newsletters, community boards, local newspapers, school emails, and webpages.

“I don’t have enough time to engage young people.”

It is important to provide support through training and mentoring to help young people thrive in a research role. While this can seem time consuming, it enriches the quality of research. Young people can be involved in any capacity, including short term periods.

“It’s risky to ask young people about mental health and alcohol and other drugs.”

It is possible for researchers to ask young people to report experiences with mental health and drug and alcohol use in a safe way. This includes:

- ▶ Use de-stigmatising and person-centred language
- ▶ Create a duty of care plan, with access to further support such as youth focussed counselling services, crisis support services and follow-up procedures where appropriate
- ▶ Include content warnings for potentially distressing topics

“We can’t tackle alcohol and other drug issues together with mental health issues. They need to be targeted separately.”

Alcohol and other drug and mental health issues often co-occur and can be exacerbated by one or the other. While complex, it is important to understand and address these issues together, in research and program design.

