Positive Choices
Drug and Alcohol Information
Get informed, stay smart, stay safe

Do the benefits of school-based alcohol/drug prevention programs continue beyond school and into adulthood?

School-based prevention

School-based alcohol and other drug prevention programs play an important role in protecting young people from various negative harms and outcomes. Studies show that the earlier a young person starts to use alcohol and other drugs, the greater the likelihood of them experiencing these harms. This means it's important to delay the onset of alcohol and other drug use for as long as possible, and evidence shows school-based prevention programs are an effective way to prevent uptake of alcohol and other drugs. While the short-term effectiveness of some prevention programs has been well established, new research has demonstrated that their positive effects can be sustained over the longer-term too.

As young people leave school and enter young adulthood, they have increased access to alcohol, and alcohol use becomes more normative. The2019 National Drug Strategy Household Survey found that almost one in three young adults consume alcohol at hazardous levels. This means that prevention efforts to effectively reduce alcohol use and associated harms in the young adulthood age group are extremely important. Encouragingly, new research has found that alcohol prevention programs, delivered in early secondary school, continue to reduce the extent of harmful alcohol use reported by students over the long-term, and into early adulthood.

How long do the effects last?

All recommended programs included on Positive Choices are evidence-based. This means that all of the programs have been tested in a research study and were found to benefit the young people who received them. Each recommended program page on Positive Choices has a section that summarises the benefits for students who complete the program.

There is new evidence that shows that the benefits of some programs are sustained for up to 7 years after the program was delivered. Two recent Australian studies found that students who received the programs Climate Schools (now known as OurFutures) alcohol and cannabis course and Preventure in Year 8 continued to benefit seven years later at age 20.

These benefits are summarised below, and you can read the full studies here and here.

Climate Schools (OurFutures)

Climate Schools is a universal (i.e., delivered to all students regardless of their level or risk for substance use) program targeting alcohol use and related harms.The evidence showed that students who received the program in Year 8, compared to students who did not receive the intervention, experienced the following benefits seven years later in their early adulthood:

- Less likely to experience alcohol related harms.
- Less likely to engage in hazardous alcohol use
- Less frequent monthly binge drinking

Preventure

Preventure is a selective prevention program and is only delivered to students with specific personality traits that may influence risk-taking behaviours and mental health.The studies found that students that received the Preventure program, compared to students who did not receive the intervention, had the following benefits seven years later:

- Less likely to experience alcohol related harms
- Those who did experience alcohol-related harms, experienced fewer
- Less likely to engage in hazardous alcohol use
- Lower weekly alcohol use

Some international prevention programs have demonstrated long-term effectiveness as well, for example students who completed theBotvin Life Skills Training were found to have reduced rates of cannabis use 13 years after receiving the program, in a US-basedstudy.

Choosing prevention programs

Evidence of long-term effectiveness is an important factor to consider when selecting a prevention program. However, for various reasons, not all programs have been evaluated to determine their long-term effectiveness. One of the most common reasons is that newly developed programs haven't had time for long-term follow-up, so their long-term effectiveness is less certain. However, these newer programs may target emerging substances, such as e-cigarettes/vaping, or contain more modern features which makes them more suited to your needs. In these cases, you may wish to select a program that does not yet have evidence of long-term effectiveness.

To help decide which program to use, it is important to consider the components that are known to be effective in school-based prevention. Our'School-based prevention – choosing resources' factsheet lists important factors to consider and summarises program components known to be effective.

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