Positive Choices
Drug and Alcohol Information
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Factsheet

Drug prevention for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth

Evidence ratings:

This resource has undergone expert review. See our Help/Q&A section for more details.

Year: Year 7–8, Year 9–10, Year 11–12

Targeted Drugs: Alcohol, Drugs (General), Tobacco

Tags: review, evidence, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander

Origin: Australian

Cost:
Free

Attachments

Drug prevention for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth

Key Messages

Drug prevention for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander youth: What works?

When selecting resources or programs to use in your classroom, it is important to **consider the evidence from research** that shows whether they will work. Consider the cultural and personal context and note there may be different or additional strategies that work better for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth.

There is evidence about what alcohol and drug school-based programs are effective in the general population. However, there has been little research examining whether Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students benefit from these programs. However, there has been research into alcohol and drug prevention programs targeting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth in other settings (e.g. family and community settings).

What prevention programs work?

Programs that combine several strategies have been found to provide the most benefit to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth.
These strategies include:

- **Drug and alcohol education** which addresses the risks and consequences of drug and alcohol use;
- **Skill development activities:** activities that focus on developing problem-solving skills, drug and alcohol refusal skills, interpersonal skills, decision making skills and improving self-esteem and self-confidence;

- **Cultural knowledge enhancement:** such as cultural ceremonies, storytelling, and dancing, the use of culturally-specific concepts including connection to country and the use of appropriate artwork and designs;
- **Mainstream programs that are adapted** to specific cultures through collaborating with **local communities** can also be effective. Adaptation can include changing the content and delivery to reflect unique local cultural values, traditions and language).

What prevention programs don't work?

- **Prevention programs that are designed for non-Indigenous populations** and used with Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Australians, without any changes to fit with cultural context and values;
- **Programs that are forced upon the community,** without any consultation with the community;
- Prevention programs which **stigmatise people who use alcohol and other drug.** This can make people feel isolated, guilty or 'to blame'.

What's uncertain?

Not much research has looked at whether **school-based prevention programs** work to reduce drug and alcohol use and related harms among Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students, particularly for those delivered in **classrooms with students from a range of cultural backgrounds**. Research is currently underway to explore this.

Recommended Programs

A new culturally-appropriate school-based prevention program called Strong & Deadly Futures is currently under development, based on the effectiveOurFutures program. Visit Strong & Deadly Futures: Trial Opportunity to get more information on the program.

Evidence Base

This factsheet was developed following expert review by researchers at the Matilda Centre for Research in Mental Health and Substance Use at the University of Sydney, the National Drug & Alcohol Research Centre at the University of New South Wales, the National Drug Research Institute at Curtin University and Gilimbaa Indigenous Creative Design Agency (2018). Input was received from external Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal experts on theExpert Advisory Group.

The summary of what works/doesn't work is based on the conclusion reached by the following reviews:

Gray, D., & Wilkes, E. T. (2010). *Reducing alcohol and other drug related harm.* Canberra/Melbourne: Australian Institute for Health and Welfare and Australian Institute for Family Studies.

Lee, K. K., Jagtenberg, M., Ellis, C. M., & Conigrave, K. M. (2013). Pressing need for more evidence to guide efforts to address substance use among young Indigenous Australians. *Health Promotion Journal of Australia, 24*(2), 87-97.

Snijder, M., Stapinski, L., Lees, B., Ward, J., Conrod, P., Mushquash, C., Belone, L., Champion, K., Chapman, C., Teesson, M., & Newton, N. (2019). Preventing Substance Use Among Indigenous Adolescents in the USA, Canada, Australia and New Zealand: a Systematic Review of the Literature. *Prev Sci* 21, 65–85.

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