

# SUBSTANCE USE AND YOUNG PEOPLE



## FRAMEWORK PRINCIPLES

The following principles for this Framework were identified by the Substance Use and Young People Working Group — some of these are elaborated upon in this fact sheet:

- harm minimisation
- human rights
- respect
- safety
- non-discrimination
- developmental appropriateness
- holistic view of health and wellbeing
- strength-based
- social justice
- accessibility
- youth participation
- collaboration and partnerships
- professional development
- evaluation and research
- evidence-based approaches
- sustainability.

## FRAMEWORK PURPOSE AND VISION

To provide clear principles to drug and alcohol services, and more broadly, health services, on working with young people with substance use concerns. The primary focus is young people aged 14 to 18 years. While the Framework has relevance for younger and older clients, there are some age specific considerations (e.g. for child protection). It supports the vision that young people have a right to access services and there is no wrong door. However, if a young person presents to a service identified as unsuitable for their age, staff should be able to assess and refer on appropriately.

This Factsheet contains key points from the Framework (which can be accessed at <http://www.health.nsw.gov.au/aod/professionals/Pages/substance-use-and-young-people-framework.aspx>).

### Context of young people and substance use

- Young people are a diverse group, and substance use amongst young people exists across a broad spectrum of use.
- Some young people do experience problems in the short term relating to their substance use, or are at significant risk of substance-related harm in the future.
- Numerous NSW and other policies exist to guide services in appropriate and effective service provision to young people. These include the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, which stipulates the right of every young person to receive a health service.

### Adolescent substance use, risk and protective behaviours

- Decisions about a specific young person will need to be made in conjunction with them, and based upon an understanding of their neuro-developmental stages and history.

- Substance use among young people can often be experimental, and does not itself indicate a substance use problem.
- Provision of appropriate and effective services for young people requires an understanding of adolescent developmental processes. Risk taking may take place during adolescence, and professional judgement is required to determine the difference between risk taking as part of a process of development and that which indicates problematic substance use.
- Young people's substance use behaviours can relate to a range of issues, so an appropriate response requires comprehensive assessment.
- Problem behaviours among young people are generally the result of a series of risk and protective factors over time and thus need a range of response.
- Young people tend to not seek help for substance use or other health problems with health professionals in the first instance. Strategies are required to increase youth access.

## ORGANISATIONAL PREPARATION

- Scope of practice: drug and alcohol agencies need to identify which services for young people are within, and which services are not within, their scope of practice.
- Child protection: every Health worker coming into contact with a child or young person has a responsibility to protect their safety, welfare and wellbeing. The Child Wellbeing and Child Protection Policies and Procedures for NSW Health (PD2013\_003) presents tools and guidance for workers to meet their legal and policy responsibilities.
- The Working with Children Check: workers need to obtain a Working With Children Check (WWCC) clearance if they perform paid or unpaid work in a child-related role: <http://www.kidsguardian.nsw.gov.au/child-safe-organisations/working-with-children-check>.
- Legal issues: information on legal issues relating to the following issues is provided in this framework:
  - duty of care
  - confidentiality
  - consent to service provision
  - substance possession and use
  - information sharing across agencies
  - legal situations for young people.
- Accessibility: services are more accessible to young people when they are flexible, affordable, relevant and responsive to the needs of all young people.
- Professional development: appropriate, adequate and ongoing professional development, support and supervision should be available to health service providers working with young people.
- Collaboration and partnerships: with other agencies such as youth-specific services is important for multiple reasons, including ensuring appropriate referrals, allowing for shared care arrangements, and for obtaining professional advice and support on service provision for young people.
- Evidence-based approach: services and their programs should be developed according to evidence of need and of better practice from the most reliable and appropriate local, national or international source. Anecdotal evidence alone is generally inadequate.
- Sustainability: principles of sustainability need to be applied to the mechanisms identified in this framework for providing services to young people.
- Developmentally appropriate: includes sensitivity to developmental challenges faced by adolescents; attention to duty of care and confidentiality; continuous assessment of capacity; awareness of differing developmental trajectories; appropriate expectations; appropriate modes of interaction; managing tensions for vulnerable youth; and application to prevention and early intervention.
- Youth participation: occurs when young people are actively involved in the development,

implementation, review and evaluation of services. It should foster a sense of ownership of, importance to, influence within and/or belonging to that service or program, and a sense of mutual respect. Youth participation also provides for young people being involved in the decisions that directly affect them and their lives.

- Evaluation and research: Consideration needs to be given towards evaluating the organisation's capacity to provide services to young people and the organisation's effectiveness in providing services to young people. Services may also conduct research to develop the knowledge-base around substance use and young people.

## SERVICE PROVISION

- Guidelines for treatment are presented, including the involvement of family and dealing with difficult behaviours in a residential setting. Effective engagement with adolescents requires:
  - understanding of adolescent developmental issues
  - effective communication skills
  - knowledge of medico-legal issues e.g. being alone with children and confidentiality.
  - strategies for working with adolescents and their families
  - understanding the young person's cultural background and how they see themselves within it.
- Young people have requirements that are distinct from adults, and they can be vulnerable to misjudgement or exploitation. Services have a duty of care to ensure their safety, including consideration of vulnerability, circumstances of use, and association with adults in the service.
- Screening instruments need to be able to identify problematic alcohol use, including binge drinking.
- A comprehensive holistic assessment is the critical first step in the treatment of adolescent substance use. This is not a one-off event, should be staged over time and should ideally be conducted in a youth-friendly environment.
- The 'HEEADSSS' psychosocial screen can be used as a broad assessment tool with young people. It incorporates: Home, Education and Employment, Eating, Activities, Depression, Drugs, Spirituality, Safety and Sexuality.
- Motivational interviewing (MI) is an interview style for encouraging motivation for change, and can be incorporated within other treatments, e.g. brief interventions. It involves expressing empathy, developing discrepancy, rolling with client resistance, and supporting their self-efficacy.
- Other psychosocial approaches, which can be used with young people (and can incorporate the spirit of MI) include cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT), Dialectical Behavioural Therapy (DBT) and Mindfulness Base Stress Reduction (MBSR), among others.

- The NSW Clinical Guidelines for methadone and buprenorphine treatment of opioid dependence (GL2006\_019) include some guidance around the use of pharmacotherapies with young people. Young tobacco smokers should be encouraged to quit through the use of nicotine replacement therapy, where needed.
- Pharmacotherapies are occasionally used for young people, particularly those with dependence on opioids or nicotine.
- The management of withdrawal should be guided by an assessment of need. Medically supervised or hospital-based detoxification is rarely required for young people.
- The complex problems of young people require a range of services to work effectively together. Collaborations and partnerships are needed to facilitate referrals and shared care.
- Family inclusive practice is an approach recognising that individuals influence other members in their environment, and vice versa. Therapeutic interventions with families are an important consideration.
- Referral requires a number of processes to ensure the young person can provide informed consent to the referral and is supported to proceed with the referral.

## DETAILS OF SOME AGENCIES AND SERVICES FOR WORKERS SUPPORTING YOUNG CLIENTS

**Health Child Wellbeing Units (CWU):** operate in NSW Health, the NSW Police Force and the Department of Education and Communities. <http://www.health.nsw.gov.au/kidsfamilies/protection/Pages/CWU.aspx>

**Family Referral Services:** health workers can refer vulnerable children, young people and families for information, assessment and referral to a range of support services in their local area. [http://www.keepthemsafe.nsw.gov.au/initiatives/family\\_referral\\_services](http://www.keepthemsafe.nsw.gov.au/initiatives/family_referral_services)

<http://www.health.nsw.gov.au/kidsfamilies/protection/Pages/Family-Referral-Services.aspx>

**Alcohol Drug Information Service (ADIS):** telephone service for the public and health workers for support, information, advice, crisis counseling and referral to services in NSW. Tel: 9361 8000 (Sydney) or free call: 1800 422 599 (regional and rural NSW). <https://yourroom.health.nsw.gov.au/Pages/home.aspx>

**The Drug and Alcohol Specialist Advisory Service (DASAS):** for doctors, nurses, and other health professionals to use. Tel: 9361 8006 (Sydney) or free call: 1800 023 687. <https://svhs.org.au/home/our-services/list-of-services/alcohol-and-drug-service/drug-and-alcohol-specialist-advisory-service>

**headspace:** provides health advice, support and information for young people from multiple sites. headspace can assist with general health, mental health and counselling, education and employment, and alcohol and other drug services. [www.headspace.org.au](http://www.headspace.org.au)

## Youth specific drug and alcohol services

**Oasis:** drug and alcohol programs for young people, 24 hour outreach, and accommodation service. <http://salvos.org.au/oasis/>

**Ted Noffs Foundation:** includes PALM (Program for Adolescent Life Management) – a residential program for young people aged 14 to 18 years with serious substance use related difficulties <https://noffs.org.au/blank/hello/>

**The Nepean Youth Drug & Alcohol Service (NYDAS):** uses a holistic model of care to address a range of issues for young people related to their alcohol and other drug use. <http://www.nbmlhd.health.nsw.gov.au/drug-and-alcohol-service/services/danda-youth>

**The Crossing:** a mobile, intensive case-management service for young people with complex support needs, aged 18-25. Also at this premises is Reconnect Inner City (early intervention services for young people aged 12 to 18 years who are homeless, or at risk of homelessness, and their families), and Young People Connected (mobile phone service for young people). Based in Kings Cross, run by Mission Australia. Tel: (02) 9357 1144

**Triple Care Farm:** a residential, treatment and vocational training program for young people, aged 16-21 in Robertson, New South Wales. The service provides intensive support, including counselling, mediation, confidence-building and skills development. <https://www.sdmf.org.au/youth-programs/triple-care-farm>

**Youth Solutions:** aims to prevent and reduce drug use and related harm among young people in Macarthur, Wingecarribee and wider community of New South Wales by providing support services. <http://www.youthsolutions.com.au/>

Details of **other NGOs** providing drug and alcohol services for young people are in the Framework, or available from the Network of Alcohol and Other Drugs Agencies, [www.nada.org.au](http://www.nada.org.au)

A key resource used in the Framework is the Adolescent Health GP Resource Kit, available at: <http://www.health.nsw.gov.au/kidsfamilies/youth/Pages/gp-resource-kit.aspx>