

# Youth Health 2011: It's totally important!

The 8th Australian & New Zealand  
Adolescent Health Conference  
3rd IAAH Asia Pacific Congress



Sydney Convention and Exhibition Centre, Darling Harbour, Sydney **9-11 November 2011**

Co-convened by The NSW Centre for the Advancement of Adolescent Health and the Department of Adolescent Medicine, The Children's Hospital at Westmead, in collaboration with The International Association for Adolescent Health, the conference was attended by 510 delegates from 15 countries in the Region. More than 100 talented and articulate young people contributed to the sense of energy and excitement over the three conference days, and feedback received confirmed that the quality of the program content was of high order with relevance to professional roles. The level of sponsorship, including support from both State and Federal Governments and the involvement and support of stakeholder NGO groups, was unprecedented for such an event held in Australia. And among the gratifying outcomes was the rejuvenation of AAAH – the *Australian Association for Adolescent Health* – with many people signing up for the newly-constituted Council.

## Conference themes included:

- **Emerging youth health issues:** the developing adolescent brain, mental health, sexual and reproductive health, chronic and disabling conditions, preventing violence and injury.
- **The changing world in which young people live:** challenges and opportunities for young people's health in relation to new technologies, media, societal change and climate change.
- **Effective and innovative strategies:** creatively engaging and working with young people, particularly the most disadvantaged, involving young people in taking care of their health and engaging families and schools through holistic and partnership approaches
- **Raising the profile of youth health in the region:** investment in young people, promoting rights to a safe and healthy life now and into the future, whole of community responsibility, focus on indigenous young people.

## Opening ceremony

The Conference was opened by Her Excellency Ms Quentin Bryce AC, Governor General of the Commonwealth of Australia who, towards the end of her warm and inspiring address, stated the following:



*The rapidly changing environment in which we live creates many pressures for our young people. Still finding their way in the world, they are constantly confronted with new phenomena, the burgeoning world of social media, for example, which has the power to include or exclude ('though I note this Conference can be followed on Twitter!'), and constantly shifting beliefs and attitudes in the wider community towards young people. In the next days this Conference will explore innovative ways to engage and work with youth, especially those who are most disadvantaged, and who have little access to guidance, support and encouragement...My friends, we are fortunate to live in a dynamic and forward looking region. Our young ones are our single most valuable commodity.*

*In each and every country, every generation wants to make the world a better place for the next. That is our purpose, our responsibility. Again and again I have found inspiration in the words of the Preamble to the Declaration of the Rights of the Child: 'Because mankind owes to the child the best that we have to give'. I am delighted to open this Conference and to wish you well in the important work you do.*

## Conference program

Chaired by Rachel Skinner, the program committee prepared a feast of diverse selections with six pre-conference workshops, four plenaries, 25 concurrent sessions (in seven streams) totalling 120 presentations and 68 posters. Choosing which session to go to was a challenge.

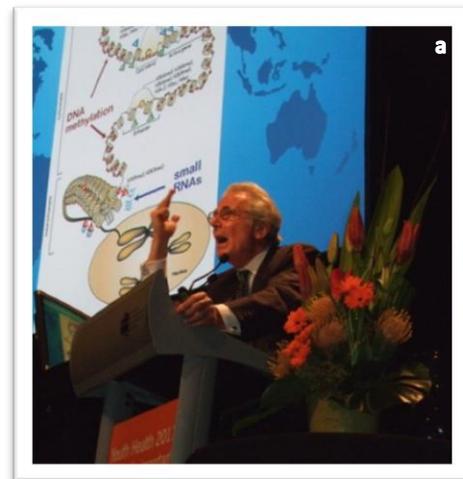
The **six preconference workshops** were attended by a total of 181 delegates:

- **Youth friendly general practice: advanced skills in youth health care**, supported by Royal Australian College of General Practitioners (RACGP), Wentwest & NSW Centre for the Advancement of Adolescent Health
- **Advancing health care rights for young people through advocacy and training**, sponsored by Royal Australasian College of Physicians (RACP), Association for the Wellbeing of Children and Young People in Healthcare (AWCH) and Children's Hospitals Australasia (CHA)
- **Using technologies to improve young people's wellbeing**, sponsored by the Cooperative Research Centre for Young People, Technology and Wellbeing
- **Delivering quality youth services: measuring impact & outcomes to improve wellbeing**, sponsored by Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth (ARACY) and Australian Youth Affairs Coalition (AYAC)
- **Building resilience in adolescents: practical school and classroom strategies**, sponsored by the NSW Commission for Children and Young People and Teachers Health Fund Australia
- **Why is my mirror fat? Understanding eating disorders in children and adolescents**, sponsored by the Eating Disorder Service, Department of Adolescent Medicine and Department of Psychological Medicine, The Children's Hospital at Westmead



**Keynote speakers** included an impressive range of international and local experts and young people.

**Professor Robert Blum<sup>a</sup>**, the William H. Gates, Sr. professor and Chair of the Department of Population, Family and reproductive Health, Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, Baltimore MA USA gave the opening keynote address. He spoke



passionately about the importance of early adolescence Conceptual framework for early adolescence), the link between the environment and genes (epigenetics) and the vitally important influence parents have over their offspring as they grow up. By the age of 15, he said, young people need to have: academic engagement, emotional and physical safety, a positive sense of self-esteem, life and decision-making skills, and physical and mental wellbeing. This was a powerful address that set the tone for the rest of the conference.

**Dr Laura Guarenti<sup>b</sup>** from Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea, provided a WHO perspective on adolescent health in the Western Pacific Region.

**Professor Louise Newman AM<sup>c</sup>**, an eminent Australian psychiatrist and Chair of the Detention Health Advisory Group, spoke on Seeking asylum in Australia – detention, human rights and mental health. Her compassionate and reality-testing address paved the way for a series of sessions to follow focussing on the rights of young people.

**Alicia Veasey<sup>d</sup>**, medical student and board member of the *Australian Indigenous Doctor's Association*, gave an inspiring description of her youth development work with Indigenous young people in Queensland, while **Associate Professor Ngiare Brown<sup>e</sup>**, a senior Aboriginal medical practitioner, outlined the importance of *Prioritising Aboriginal adolescent wellbeing*.

**Professor Miriam Kaufman<sup>f</sup>**, an eminent adolescent physician from the Hospital for Sick Children in Toronto, Canada and the 2012 *Adele D Hofmann Visiting Professor in Adolescent Medicine*, spoke on the topic: *LGBTQ youth: The good, the bad and the ugly*.

**Professor Kate Steinbeck<sup>b</sup>**, Medical Foundation Chair in Adolescent Medicine at the University of Sydney, tantalised the conference delegates with her address on *Puberty: new twists on a timeless theme*, while psychiatrist and neuroscientist **Professor Rhoshel Lenroot<sup>h</sup>** explored the latest findings about *Brain development during adolescence* and **Dr Chris Seton<sup>i</sup>** demystified *Adolescent sleep: the perfect storm*.

**Emma Byrne<sup>j</sup>**, Chair of the *NSW Youth Advisory Council* and member of the *Youth Participation Committee*, provided both an eloquent opening address and closing remarks on behalf of young people.

On both days there was a choice of seven concurrent sessions, each with a variety of speakers. At the 'New media and youth' session we heard about a new Cancer Council of Victoria initiative, sexting, the Whatworks4u mental health treatments website and research into alcohol and online social identity construction (wittily entitled 'Off your Face(book)'). Other concurrent sessions covered Indigenous youth health, young people's rights, sexual health, drugs and alcohol in young people, and a wide range of other clinical issues.



## Special events

At the **Welcome Reception** held in the Bayside Gallery on the evening of Wednesday 9 November, a heartfelt and meaningful *welcome to country* by

Michael West reminded us of our connection with the earth, our ancestors and each other. Professor Les White, NSW Chief

Paediatrician,

facilitated the

proceedings which featured an address by The Hon Jillian Skinner MP, NSW Minister for Health, who strongly stated her longstanding support for and commitment to improving the health of young people. The Rock Eisteddfod Challenge performance by St Peter's Catholic College, "F.E.A.R", examined different types of phobias and anxieties that inhibit people from normal life, exploring the notion that fear is false evidence appearing real. This exciting performance set the scene for the creativity of young people that would be on display throughout the conference.



### TranSCRIBE

#### 2011: *Young writer's competition*

**Awards** were opened by The Hon. Kevin Humphries MP, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Healthy Lifestyles, Minister for Western Sydney. Young writers between the ages of 12 and 24 considered the journey a young person may face either in their own, their family or friends' recovery from mental health issues including a range of opportunities and challenges facing young people in a multicultural society. The competition, which aims to open up dialogue as well as doors on issues related to mental health within culturally, linguistically and religiously

diverse settings, is an initiative of *Transcultural Mental Health Centre*. In 2011 the event was run in partnership with the *Centre for the*

*Advancement of Adolescent Health, Schizophrenia Fellowship (NSW)* and the *BlackDog Institute*. The winners were warmly received and their works displayed.



**A public forum** entitled *My street, my country, my world* was held on Thursday evening, 10 November 2011. Social researcher and author Hugh Mackay addressed the forum via a short film on *What is it like to be a young Australian in today's world?* while Dr Norman Swan, host of the health report on ABC Radio National, facilitated a wide-ranging discussion with a panel encompassing young people, health professionals, educators, parents and youth advocates. Communication was augmented by screened Twitter contributions from the audience and conversations and themes developed in the Forum continued throughout the conference.

A meeting of the **Youth Health Research Interest Group** was held during the Thursday lunch break, attracting interest from researchers from different disciplines.

The **Australian Association for Adolescent Health (AAAH)** was revived at an AGM on Friday 11 November 2011. The vision is for the rejuvenated AAAH is to provide an opportunity for those interested and involved in adolescent health across Australia to meet and support each other, develop contacts and networks, advocate for the health of adolescents and young adults, undertake research and influence and develop policy. All conference delegates were given free membership of the AAAH until the end of the financial year.

Agreement was gained at a **VIP Breakfast** hosted by *Business Events Sydney* on Friday morning, from national and international youth health leaders attending the conference, to make an Australian bid for the International Association for Adolescent Health Global Congress in 2017.

## Youth participation



**Fifty four young delegates** added a vibrant dimension to the conference. The youth space provided a central hub where the young delegates could drop in during breaks and connect with other young people and the support workers.

The **Youth Participation Committee**, led by the *NSW Commission for Children and Young People*, planned a highly integrated approach to the successful involvement of young people in the conference program.

A vibrant **closing ceremony**, led by the youth delegates, presented key messages arising out of their conference experience, many in the form of entertaining role plays. A DVD made by Peter Slattery and young people featured their suggestions about how to best improve young people's health and was one of the highlights of the closing ceremony.<sup>1</sup>

Two **ReachOut reporters**, Lauren and Helen, interviewed delegates for the Reachout or ReachOut Pro websites about what they had learnt from the conference and their ideas about promoting young peoples' access to health services. An article by Lauren, ReachOut.com Reporter,<sup>2</sup> Helen's article for ReachOut Pro reflects on the need for youth health professionals and young people to collaborate, and not just consult.<sup>3</sup> Other young people also wrote blogs about their experience of the conference.<sup>4,5</sup>



### A delegate's comments:

*The inclusion/partnership with young people in so many of the sessions was THE most important component of the conference. It changes the dynamics of the conference totally – having young people involved at this level puts a face to policies, standards and good ideas; keeps the conference grounded with a nice healthy informality at times; and is just so much more interesting and relevant; the creative arts performances were a wonderful inclusion.*

## Arts and performance

Helen Zigmond from the *Arts and Health Foundation* coordinated this important aspect of the program in which **young people's creativity** was showcased through musical and dance performances. A clip of the Indigenous Hip Hop Project was recorded on youtube.<sup>6</sup>



A large interactive artwork, **Doodletown**, was developed with input from delegates throughout the conference and the support of artists from the Youth Arts Program, Department of Adolescent Medicine, The Children's Hospital at Westmead. This ingenious piece of artwork provides a lasting reminder of the conference.

Young people's insights into mental health were shared at the **TransSCRIBE 2011 Young Writers Competition Awards Ceremony**, the winning entries being available in the TMHC publication *Half Way Home*.



Prior to the conference, two short films were produced by *McPhee Productions: Youth Health 2011: It's totally important!*, capturing the views of health professionals and Australian and New Zealand young people involved with Rock Eisteddfod Challenge.

## Media

With the support and involvement of Maggie Lanham from *Lanham Public Relations*, media coverage of the conference was extensive (See page 8 of this report). Further to the issues cited, additional media stories addressed: From too little to too much? Bipolar; Adolescents need to feel able to turn to medical care – but how to make hospitals and GPs friendlier to adolescents?; Positive psychology – on line; Successful project builds resilience in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people.

### Media stories:

*What's Totally Important? The future of this country – young people. A major conference in November, 2011 takes on the challenge of investigating the issues and solutions around the health of young people.*

*Australia should step up to the plate and acknowledge its responsibilities – the appointment of a National Commissioner for Children and Young People would offer a powerful focus for hearing children's voices and provide an independent view of what we need to ensure the health, wellbeing and participation of young people across Australian society.*

*Leading researchers from the US and Australia bust myths about the adolescent brain, which goes through far more development than the experts had previously thought – and that has implications for understanding adolescent behaviour.*

*Leading international expert calls for more open attitudes to the problems of young people who are Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual or transgender.*

*Immigration detention damages mental health and development, with young people likely to suffer long lasting psychological problems...*

## Sponsors and exhibitors

The conference attracted strong support from **31 sponsors** with major sponsors including the Federal Office for Youth, beyondblue, NSW Commission for Children and Young People, NSW Health and Transcultural Mental Health Centre. Of note is the funding provided by the Australian Youth Forum, NSW Commission for Children and Young People, Foundation for Young Australians and the University of Sydney to support youth participation. Thirty young people from around Australia were awarded bursaries to attend the conference which covered their registration, travel and accommodation costs.

The conference also attracted **16 exhibition stalls** where delegates could network over yummy food and enjoy delicious views of Sydney Harbour.

An additional **15 supporter organisations** provided in-kind support.



## Feedback from delegates

In addition to rating the Conference from various perspectives, delegates were asked to comment on personal highlights. (Please see feedback below).

As reflected in the comments below, 81 per cent of delegates felt that the conference engaged young people well and 91 per cent found the keynote addresses useful (with Robert Blum's address a standout). Overall, most delegates enjoyed the experience, applauded the food and the venue, and vowed to return to subsequent conferences. Opportunities for networking and for learning, especially about technology, were also mentioned. Among the suggestions and recommendations made about improvements for the future, increased speaker times and a reduction in the number of sessions were prominent.

**A Posterous blog** was created by, Hugh Stephens, enabling delegates to record their feedback about the Youth health conference<sup>7</sup>.

### What delegates said:

*A highlight was meeting Indigenous health professionals.*

*Hard to say one highlight, there was so many great things: the performances by the youth artists, Dr Blum's plenary, the talk on brain development, the fabulous presentation on puberty, the one on sleep, the plenary about detention of refugees, the youth keynotes throughout the conference, and the final wrap up with the youth (and twittering)...oh, and the food was great too!*

*Each opportunity that a young person was able to express themselves, whether performance or presentation; the ending session was brilliant as adults were able to take on board exactly what young people wanted them to hear and address.*

*I really loved the plenary sessions and some of these were incredibly inspiring and informative.*

*Meeting other people working in the region and discussing issues that were pertinent to teenage pregnancy and young parents*

*Meeting so many professionals genuinely interested in improving youth health, especially those who are open to utilising new technologies in healthcare.*

*Seeing the fantastic dancing by the beyondblue Indigenous hip hop group*

## Twitter

The conference was promoted via the **@Youth health2011 twitter account** for 12 months leading up to the event, resulting in 1,300 followers by the time of the conference. During the conference there were over 2000 tweets using #YH2011. Delegates used twitter to share insights, key points, links and material from sessions. Twitter was used to facilitate a discussion with other participants while the conference was occurring, benefiting those who couldn't attend a session or the conference. A tweet up (a meeting of tweeters) during one afternoon tea was organised via Twitter and announced to all delegates. Rolling Twitter comments on scree were part of the Public Forum and the Closing Ceremony.

**Memorable tweets** included:

*@AvenirRural #YH2011 Prof Blum: you are an inspiration.*

*@hughstephens #yh2011 dont let them be empty words. Take your lessons beyond the conference and into practice*

*@chrispytweets Having attended #yh2011, it was incredibly inspiring to see so many people wanting to initiate youth engagement #hcsmanz*

*@chelseamarie22 Had an amazing time at #yh2011 there are some amazing yp & professionals in this country & I feel so privileged to have hung out with them.*

*@doublethink87 Young people who are amazing only need to be in your life for 72 hours for you to realise the world will get better #yh2011*

*@AnnieGRow A whole lot of intergenerational love at the end of the #YH2011 conference - walking together - as it should be!*

*@mariafremaca Thanks to all who shared the #YH2011 info via their tweets - we definitely felt a part of it from Adelaide*

*@AvenirRural To our online audience, thank you for participating and enriching the experience. Wish you could have been here #YH2011*

*@ShaneCuCow Thankyou organisers for your great work, bringing yp and professionals together, and encouraging them to collaborate #YH2011*

*@dougsky "The time for action: what's next? What will you do about youth health?" #yh2011*

*@MissLaurenMoss Thank you conference planners for involving young people in a meaningful way #YH2011*

*@AvenirRural To those of you thinking the conference is nearly over: it's only just begun. Take these new ideas and make things happen #YH2011*

## Summary of Youth Health 2011 media appearances

Chris Seton on sleep deprivation common problem in young people:

- ABC 702
- Triple J
- 2DU
- 2SM
- Mandy and Wilko in the Morning
- JJJ News
- ABC Weekends
- ABC QLD Regional
- 612 ABC

Robert Blum on adolescent brain development:

- ABC Radio
- Triple J
- The Daily Telegraph
- ABC Gold Coast
- ABC Newcastle
- ABC 7.02 - Richard Glover, ABC Radio, Documentary for summer

Sloane Madden on eating disorders:

- International Business Times
- ABC (The World Today with Eleanor Hall)
- 666 ABC
- Interviewed by John D'Arcy (AM)
- Channel
- Appeared on Today Show

Norman Swan on the need for national commissioner for children and young people:

- The Daily Telegraph
- Triple J

Norman Gillespie:

- Grace of 2ST Nowra

David Bennett providing an overview of conference:

- 2UE
- 2ST Nowra
- 10 National Morning News
- Interviewed by John D'Arcy

Hugh Stephens on health for rural youth:

- Grace 2ST, ABC North Regional Queensland

Rony Duncan on confidentiality and teenagers:

- JJJ News

Melissa Kang on chlamydia:

- JJJ News

Susan Towns:

- Interviewed by John D'Arcy

Brad Ridout on "Off your Face(book)":

- Heywire (ABC), ABC Radio

Louise Newman:

- AAP

## Conference website

The conference program, photographs and presentations with permission given will be downloadable from the conference website [www.youthhealth2011.com.au](http://www.youthhealth2011.com.au).

Other:

Youth Health 2011: It's totally important! conference, 9–11 November, report by Caroline Mordaunt [http://www.acys.info/yfx/issues/number\\_183/editorial/youth\\_health\\_conference\\_report](http://www.acys.info/yfx/issues/number_183/editorial/youth_health_conference_report)

## Acknowledgements

This report was written by:

Fiona Robards,  
Chair, Youth Health 2011 Organising Committee

Clin Prof David Bennett AO &  
Clin A/Prof Susan Towns,  
Co-convenors, Youth Health 2011

Dr Carmen Jarrett,  
Member, Youth Health 2011 Program Committee

## References

- <sup>1</sup> #YH2011, video made by Peter Slattery  
<http://animoto.com/play/TjSIKEHWWjoxjInfkfWIEg>
- <sup>2</sup> Lauren, ReachOut.com Reporter:  
<http://au.reachout.com/connect/blog/youth-health-it-s-totally-important>
- <sup>3</sup> Helen, ReachOut.com Reporter,  
<http://www.reachoutpro.com.au/blog/2011/11/21/connecting-with-young-people-%E2%80%93-reflections-from-youth-health-2011.aspx>
- <sup>4</sup> Samantha Ewart's blog -  
<http://interactivemusicfordistracted.blogspot.com/2011/11/youth-health-2011-three-days-of-bliss.html>
- <sup>5</sup> Brook's blog -  
<http://encresympathetique.blogspot.com/2011/11/youth-health-2011-yh2011.html>
- <sup>6</sup> Indigenous Hip Hop Project, youtube:  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Nxn5IYwB4DU>
- <sup>7</sup> A Posterous blog, created by Hugh Stephens :  
<http://youthhealth2011.posterous.com/>

## Sponsors and supporters

### Sponsors



### Supporters

