

Submission to the Community Health Review 2008

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About NSW CAAH

The New South Wales Centre for the Advancement of Adolescent Health (NSW CAAH) is funded by NSW Health. In partnership with NSW Health and other sectoral stakeholders the Centre seeks to improve the health and well-being of young people aged 12-24 in NSW. Our mission is to protect and promote the health and well-being of young people in NSW by partnering with health care, non-government, education, academic, community and advocacy bodies to ensure better adolescent health outcomes.

Youth Health in NSW

Youth Health Services aim to improve marginalised young people's access to health services, by providing multidisciplinary primary health care to young people aged from 12 to 25 years. Youth Health Services share a common operating philosophy which values social justice, equity, and an integrated/holistic view of young people's health and well-being. Youth Health Services play a key role in accessing and engaging hard-to-reach, marginalised young people.

Research into overcoming young people's barriers to service access (Kang et al, 2005) found that on the whole Youth Health Services:

- Specifically target young people
- Promote relaxed, comfortable environments which could be described as 'youth friendly' in appearance and layout (for example providing a pool table, informal furniture settings and youth-targeted reading material and posters in the waiting areas)
- Employ multidisciplinary teams and, where appropriate, specialised professionals (such as bilingual staff and Aboriginal workers)
- Attract young people through a variety of entry points and less-threatening services (e.g. arts, drop- in, basic needs facilities such as showers and laundry), thus offering a comfortable and trusting environment where young clients are more likely to approach a counsellor, nurse or doctor to discuss other health problems
- Facilitate informal links between the YHS and other support services/sectors (e.g. education, Centrelink, accommodation, Juvenile Justice, legal services), thereby assisting marginalised and homeless young people in navigating complex systems and bureaucracies associated with wider health and well being issues
- Encourage and incorporate young people's participation and consultation

In NSW most Youth Health Services source their major funding from NSW Health and are administratively managed within the local Area Health Service as part of Community Health. IHSY (Innovative Health Services for homeless Youth) funding, a state and Commonwealth joint funding agreement, makes up a significant portion of this funding. A review of IHSY-funded services found there is a need for specialist services for marginalised young people (Community Link Aust, 2003). In particular the review found

that youth health services were able to reach their target group and that users consistently reported benefits from those services.

More recently there has been a funding increase in services based on the youth health model funded by NSW Health, the *Youth Mental Health Service Model* and *Headspace*.

Current Issues

1. Inequity of resource distribution

Due to the organic development of youth health in NSW there is an inequity in the allocation of resources across the state. While most Area Health Services (AHSs) have very few youth services, some have no specific youth health services that are part of either Community Health or the NGO and Headspace service systems.

Although the 1998 youth health policy recommended that all Area Health Service create Youth Health Coordinator positions, this either did not occur or the positions were recruited and subsequently lost. Youth Health Coordinators are resource persons designated for enhancing young people's access to health services through coordinating, planning, networking, mapping and professional development functions.

Youth Health Services (YHS) in NSW

AHS	Community Health YHSs	NGO YHSs	Youth Health Coordinator
Sydney West AHS	High Street YHS, Harris Park WAAT, Mt Druitt	The Warehouse, Penrith Mt Druitt Headspace	Yes
Central Coast /Northern Sydney AHS	Central Coast YHS, Wyong	Headspace, Gosford	Yes
SES/Illawarra YHS	Crossroads, Nowra	CHAIN, Wollongong	Yes
Sydney South West AHS	Traxside, Campbelltown The Corner YHS, Bankstown Canterbury Multicultural Youth Health Service Fairfield Liverpool Youth Health Team (Flyht) Youthblock Health and Resource Service	Headspace Central Sydney Headspace, Campbelltown	No
Hunter/New England AHS	Youth Health Team/Kaleidoscope (Greater Newcastle)	The Hunter Headspace	No
Greater Western AHS	None	Headspace Bathurst	Yes
North Coast AHS	None	Headspace, Coffs Harbour	No
Greater Southern AHS	None	None	No

2. Erosion of funding

The 2007 Youth Homelessness inquiry found that IHSY funding has eroded across time (National Youth Commission, 2008a, p266):

The NSW Association for Adolescent Health, the peak body for the youth health sector in that state, told the Inquiry that the current funding received by NSW is insufficient, that some locations have no IHSY services and that existing services have experienced an erosion in funding, with an impact on staffing levels.

Further, there has been no significant injection of funds into youth health services managed by Community Health since they were set up 10-15 years ago.

3. Youth Health Service Systems

There is a need to unite service systems regarding the youth health model. While there is more agreement about the kinds of services that are appealing to young people and increasing interest in the Youth Health Model, with three service structures now implementing this approach [Community Health, The Youth Mental Health Service Model (NSW health funded) and Headspace (Federal funding)], currently there is little communication between them.

Recommendations

Opportunities for action identified by the NSW CAAH document (NSW CAAH, 2005) *Young People's Access to Health Care: Exploring Youth Health Programs and Approaches in NSW*, were commended by Robyn Kruk, Director-General, NSW Health who "encourage(d) their widespread use to improve health care and health outcomes for young people in NSW." *Young People's Access to Health Care: Exploring Youth Health Programs and Approaches in NSW* (NSW CAAH, 2005) recommends that:

1. The health sector continues to resource and develop youth-specific health services, many of which have been particularly effective in accessing marginalised and at-risk young people.
2. All sectors support youth programming in mainstream services, while ensuring that these agencies have sufficient awareness, knowledge and skills in addressing young people's health and well being needs.
3. All services ensure consistency in youth health approaches and programming by developing standard policies, linked to relevant State/Commonwealth policies and strategies.
4. All services adopt NSW CAAH's *Access Study: Youth Health Better Practice Framework Factsheets* (NSW CAAH, 2006) for reviewing, planning and evaluating youth health-related services and programs. This practical, action-based resource was based on relevant local case studies and valuable lessons learned from services across NSW.
5. All sectors holistically address young people's health and well-being needs through 'multiple entry points', co-locating services and developing complementary partnerships.

6. All services invest in improved communication (e.g. supporting involvement in inter-agencies and other networking meetings, providing appropriate information technology) to increase awareness of, and coordination with, other services.
7. Organisations and services maximise inter-sectoral co-operation in youth health activities by establishing or linking up with existing inter-agencies, cross-sectoral youth health working groups, Youth Health Coordinator positions or equivalent.

References

Community Link Australia (2003) *Review of innovative health services for homeless young people*. Community Link Australia.

Kang, M., Bernard, D., Usherwood, T., Quine, S., Aperstein, G., Kerr-Roubicek, H., Elliott, A. & Bennett, D. (2005) *Better Practice in Youth Health: Final Report on Research Study Access to Health Care Among Young People in New South Wales: Phase 2*. Sydney: NSW Centre for the Advancement of Adolescent Health, The Children's Hospital at Westmead.

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