

Youth At Risk: Increasing Youth Workers' Knowledge And Confidence To Talk With Young People About Hepatitis C And Injecting

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Introduction

Youth at Risk is a youth-focused hepatitis C prevention program. The *Youth at Risk* training package aims to reduce the transmission of hepatitis C and other blood borne viruses among young people though increasing the knowledge and confidence of youth workers already in contact with young people who may be exposed to injecting drug use.

Youth workers are ideally placed to provide vital harm reduction information for young people at risk of injecting who may not be accessing health services.

However, many youth workers feel reluctant to raise the issue because of a lack of accurate and up to date knowledge on hepatitis C and other harm reduction services. Many are also unsure of how to raise the issue of injecting drug use with young people.

In 2016, there were 341 notifications of hepatitis C in people aged 15-24 in NSW.³

An estimated 90% of all new hepatitis C cases in Australia are linked to injecting drug use. Evidence suggests the average age of initiation into injecting drug use is around 19 and that hepatitis C is acquired less than two years after the onset of injecting.

Young injectors and young people at risk of injecting have low levels of knowledge not only about hepatitis C, but also the existence of and supports available at harm reduction services, including NSPs. They also do not see hepatitis C as relevant to them.⁴

Additionally, young people are more likely to seek help for drug use or harm reduction from youth services, rather than alcohol and other drug services. To address this issue South East Sydney Local Health District (SESLHD) developed a training package to be delivered to those who work with young people at risk of acquiring hepatitis C through injecting drug use.

“Having the knowledge makes me feel more comfortable and confident working with young people accessing our services,” training participant.

Method

The *Youth at Risk* training program consists of three modules:

- Hepatitis C in the context of young people
- Harm Reduction and Needle and Syringe Programs
- Engaging with young people around injecting drug use and harm reduction services.

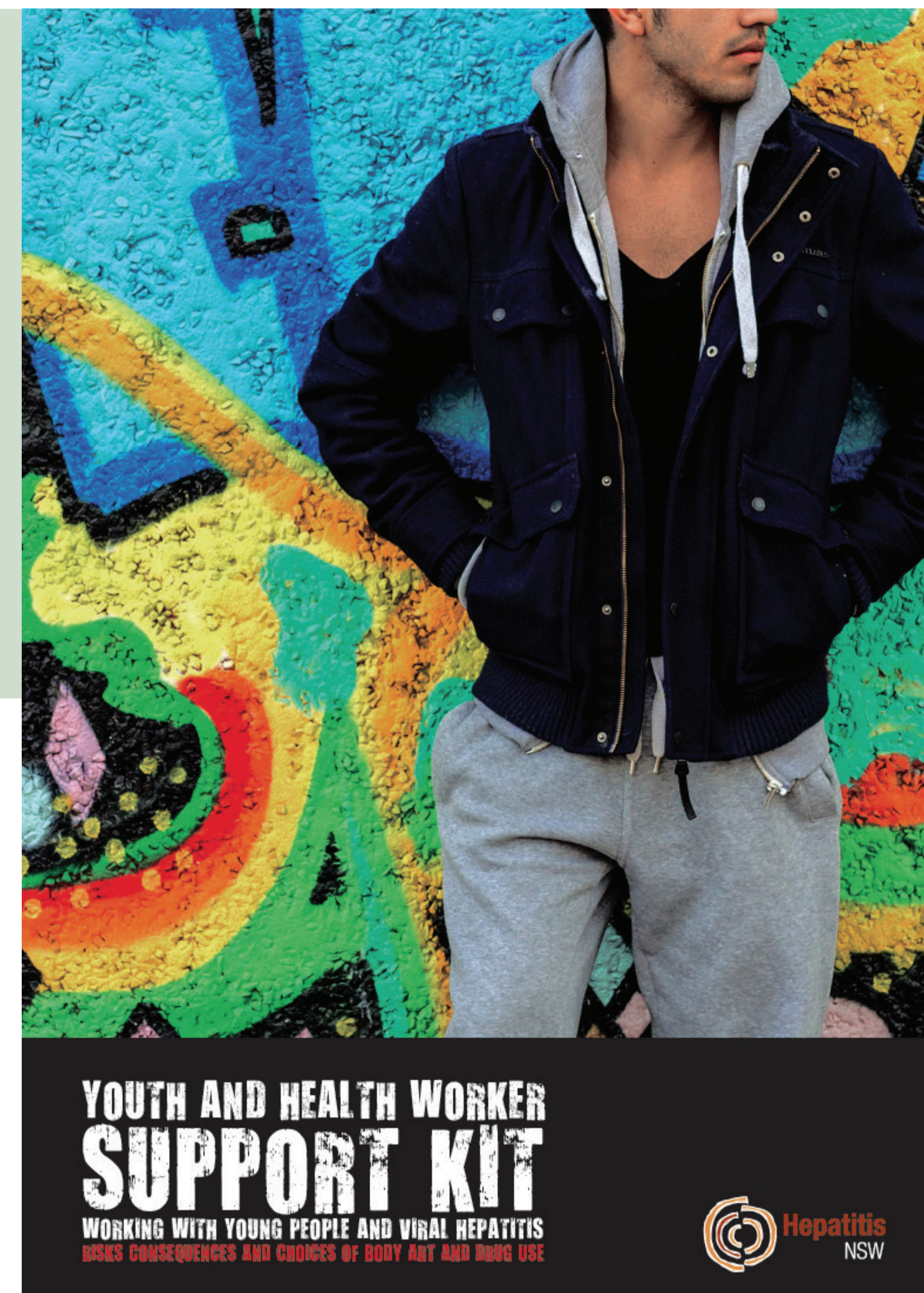
The project involves hep C education workshops delivered by Hepatitis NSW staff in partnership with experts from LHDs and harm minimisation services.

Youth at Risk builds the knowledge, skills, and confidence of youth workers and allied health staff to engage young people around issues of injecting drug use and hep C.

Results

This year we trained 144 workers from 22 organisations, across five Local Health Districts (LHDs) and many state-wide services. All participants agreed or strongly agreed the Youth at Risk training was relevant to their job role and could identify at least one aspect of the training to implement into their workplace.

“The training was again extremely well received. After completing the three modules people are feeling pretty confident about having conversations with young people and staff about hepatitis. It was great to have the three facilitators there to expand so knowledgeably on the content,” training participant.



Pre and post-course and 3-month follow-up evaluation data has been collected and analysed. Self-reported knowledge of hepatitis C increased from 37.5% at baseline to 78.5% post-workshop. Three-month follow-up data shows increases in knowledge and confidence reported after the workshops are maintained, and workplace changes are implemented.

Conclusion

Participants of the workshops leave more equipped to engage with young people at risk of injecting, and therefore prevent transmission of hepatitis C in a vulnerable population.



Health
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The Youth at Risk training package was developed as a partnership between the HIV and Related Programs Unit and Youth Health Program of South East Sydney Local Health District and assisted by an expert advisory group drawn from the following:

- Centre for Social Research in Health, UNSW
- Hepatitis NSW
- Y Foundations
- Annie Bleeker Training and Facilitation
- NSW Users & AIDS Association