

Shaping the Next Decade of School Alcohol and Other Drug Education

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Introduction: Originally developed in 1994 and last revised in 2004, the National Drug Education Principles were designed to guide effective school-based drug education in Australia. However, research has identified low to no awareness among educators of their existence, purpose, or role. In 2024, the NSW Ministry of Health and Department of Education initiated a national review to align these Principles with contemporary, evidence-informed, and future-focused teaching practices.

Method: We conducted a multi-method review, including: (i) an international umbrella review of reviews and an implementation scoping review; (ii) a national survey of educators; (iii) co-design workshops with teachers and students; and (iv) consultations with national experts and education stakeholders. Findings were synthesised to inform revisions of the Principles and the development of a practical implementation guide for schools.

Key Findings: International evidence emphasises the importance of whole-school approaches, sustained delivery, and integration within broader health and wellbeing curricula. Educator and student feedback highlighted the need for relevance to diverse cultural, geographic and socio-economic contexts, and support for teacher training and resources. The revised Principles embed these priorities, along with strategies to address implementation challenges such as curriculum time pressures, varying levels of teacher confidence and alignment with broader wellbeing initiatives.

Discussion and Conclusions: The updated Principles, to be released in 2025, are designed to bridge the gap between research and classroom practice, providing a coherent framework for consistent, engaging, and effective alcohol and other drug education nationally.

Implications for Practice or Policy: Embedding the updated Principles into school systems will require coordinated policy support, educator professional development, and accessible implementation tools. This work provides a foundation for a nationally consistent, evidence-informed approach that responds to the needs of young people and the realities of school environments.

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