

Within Your Wallet – implementing youth AOD harm minimisation strategies into rural communities through creative collaborations

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Background: Within Your Wallet is a youth early intervention project funded by the Alcohol and Drug Foundation's Local Drug Action Team (LDAT) program through the Pingelly Brookton LDAT and coordinated by the Wheatbelt Alcohol and Other Drug (AOD) Prevention Coordinator. The project ran as a pilot in 2021 and has continued throughout 2022 to 2024.

It was identified that in the Southern Wheatbelt, there was increased alcohol and cannabis use, mental health distress, suicidal behaviours and disengagement from school and community among young people (ages 10 to 18 years).

To address these concerns, 15 local stakeholders came together with an aim to improve protective factors for young people in the community, through increased access to diversionary activities and awareness of AOD and mental health service providers. In collaboration with young people, Within Your Wallet was conceptualised.

Description of Model of Care/Intervention: Within Your Wallet has had 4 iterations of the program and operates within 3 primary pillars:

- Co-designed wallet cards distributed to young people (approx. 1500) that includes information on age appropriate AOD and mental health support services
- Access to free youth diversionary programs in 7 communities by presenting wallet card upon entry, such as swimming pool entry or art classes
- An up-to-date webpage with available diversionary activities as well as support services

Effectiveness/Acceptability/Implementation: Over 3 years, approximately 5900 pool, 585 gym and 884 court hire passes have been used, with 3 mixed netball competitions, 1 ultimate frisbee competition and 4 art programs also running for young people to access. At the conclusion of the 3rd iteration, 54% of young people reported an increase in awareness of services, 56% reported an increase in confidence to access services, 62% reported their social isolation had decreased and 94% of young people wanted the program to continue.

Conclusion and Next Steps: Due to the program's success, the 5th iteration of the program is expected to begin in October 2025 within the Southern Wheatbelt due to the high demand from young people and the local community.

Implications for Practice or Policy (optional): Within Your Wallet highlights the importance of creating programs specific for rural populations that utilises existing networks, instead of trying to mold generic programs into communities. By listening to community and responding through collaboration, we can progress towards creating safer environments for young people to thrive in rural Australia.

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