

YOUNG DEADLY FREE YOUTH PEER EDUCATION PROGRAM FOR YOUNG PEOPLE LIVING IN REMOTE AND VERY REMOTE ABORIGINAL COMMUNITIES

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Background: Disproportionately higher rates of STIs and BBVs are evident amongst Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, especially in remote and very remote communities, and among young people. Peer education has been shown to be beneficial for youth sexual health promotion, however its efficacy for young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples living in remote and very remote communities in Australia is unknown.

Methods: The Young Deadly Free peer education pilot program was implemented in 19 remote and very remote communities across four jurisdictions in Australia. An independent evaluation of the program was conducted, using pre and post knowledge surveys and group discussions with the peer educators and young people. The program aimed to enhance awareness and knowledge of STIs and BBVs, and increase STI/BBV testing rates among Aboriginal young people. Regional coordinators in each jurisdiction recruited over 100 young people aged 16-29 years to attend a two-day peer education training program. Trained peer educators received financial compensation for their time and were supported to deliver peer education sessions for young people and organise community initiatives to promote sexual health.

Results: A total of 128 trained peer educators completed a pre knowledge evaluation survey; 116 completed the post knowledge survey. The mean age of peer educators was 20 years. Among the young people who participated in the peer education sessions delivered by the trained peer educators, 174 completed a pre knowledge survey (mean age 20.9 years) and 172 completed a post knowledge survey (mean age 21.5 years). The evaluation analysis is in progress and will report on efficacy of the program for different genders and across jurisdictions.

Conclusion: We will draw on the findings of the independent evaluation and report on the feasibility and effectiveness of implementing a sexual health peer education approach in remote and very remote communities.

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