

Meeting vulnerable young people where they are: Engaging Specialist Homelessness Services in sexual health promotion

Authors:

Basheer E¹, Hall M², Robin G³, Mao L⁴, Napier M⁵, Browne M⁶, Slater A⁷

¹ NSW STI Programs Unit, ² Yfoundations, ³ Sydney Local Health District, ⁴ Centre for Social Research in Health, UNSW, ⁵ Multicultural HIV and Hepatitis Service, Sydney Local Health District, ⁶ South Eastern Sydney Local Health District, ⁷ Hunter New England Local Health District

Background:

Youth services, particularly Specialist Homelessness Services (SHS), play a vital role in sexual health promotion with young people in NSW. However, staff within these services often report feeling unequipped to deliver this work. The Youth Services Project aims to increase the capacity of SHS and their staff to engage with young people around sexual health promotion. Specifically, the project aimed to improve SHS sexual health policy and practice through organisational change and to improve staff knowledge, attitudes, confidence, and practices.

Methods:

The Youth Services Project was implemented in nine organisations at 11 service locations across three Local Health Districts in NSW. The Project employed a mixed methods approach study design to evaluate change in sexual health policy and practice among SHS at both an organisational and individual worker level.

The project evaluation used data from a range of sources allowing triangulation of the findings, including self-assessment tools, pre-post collecting of sexual health training data, semi-structured interviews and a process data proforma.

Results:

Overall, the Youth Services Scale-Up Project was successful in improving the capacity and knowledge of SHS to deliver sexual health messaging to young people, from an individual and organisational approach. A comparison of the organisational checklist conducted before and after the implementation revealed positive change in 20 of the 25 sexual health promotion organisational change measures, across all implementing sites. Workers also reported increased knowledge of sexual health key messages, referral pathways and ways of working inclusively in qualitative interviews.

Conclusion:

There is significant opportunity to engage SHS in sexual health promotion through whole of service organisational change. The project will continue to scale-up in the remaining 13 NSW Local Health Districts across a two-year period.

Disclosure of Interest Statement:

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