

## **Youth Voices in Mental Health: How schools and cross-sector partnerships can foster mental health among young people.**

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### **Background:**

Young people face significant barriers to accessing inclusive, youth-friendly health information and services—particularly for mental health. The increasing recognition of social determinants of mental health, such as education, housing and community along with international case-studies, highlight the limitations of health-sector-only responses, and support the need for cross-government action. Schools are long-recognised as health-promoting settings for young people, yet the integration of preventative mental health structures remains limited. This study investigates the policy and frontline challenges limiting cross-sector partnerships and aims to provide recommendations to reduce the barriers to promoting preventative mental health care and services in Australian schools.

### **Methods:**

Co-designed from inception with young people, this study investigates the integration of preventative mental health structures in school settings in two-stages: 1) Semi-structured interviews with 30 policymakers and frontline practitioners with experience in cross-sector health-education initiatives in Australia and internationally; 2) Three Deliberative Dialogue workshops with our Youth Advisory Board (n=8), who will review and interpret findings through their lived experience and co-develop practical recommendations for improving access and engagement with mental health structures and supports in schools.

### **Results:**

This study will reveal key mechanisms for embedding youth-responsive mental health promotion and structures in school settings. Interview participants will share experiences and case studies of Australian and international initiatives, e.g., Welsh Future Generations Commission. These will be deliberated with Youth co-researchers to provide practical guidance and recommendations.

### **Conclusion:**

This study demonstrates how cross-sector partnerships can tackle complex society challenges, like mental health. By applying a youth lens to policymaker perspectives, the project will create a blueprint for effective health/education collaboration and

consequently, improve youth access to high-quality mental health information and supports.

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