

Big Distance, Bigger Impact: Implementing Creative Youth Prevention Activities in the Wheatbelt

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Background:

Young people in the Wheatbelt region of WA experience interconnected challenges including mental health concerns, harmful alcohol and other drug use, social isolation, and school disengagement. These challenges are compounded by limited youth-specific and resource-constrained services, requiring prevention responses that rely on coordinated, cross-sector collaboration. Wheatbelt stakeholders demonstrate a strong, place-based commitment to collective impact across government and non-government sectors.

Description of Model of Care/Intervention:

Through funding from the Alcohol and Drug Foundation LDAT program, a suite of locally responsive initiatives has been delivered across the Wheatbelt, co-designed with young people. In the Northern Wheatbelt, Drumming Circles (2024) engaged young people involved with the Department of Justice to build connection and emotional regulation. Year 6 Health, Wellbeing and Resiliency Forums (2025 and 2026) brought together students from across the region, delivering interactive, age-appropriate education to strengthen AOD knowledge, connection, and confidence during the transition to high school. The Back to YOUR Future program (January 2026) supported this transition period through diversionary activities.

In the Southern Wheatbelt, Within Your Wallet (WYW) (since 2021) provides young people with AOD resources and access to diversionary activities, complemented by a biannual festival combining education, physical activity, and creative engagement.

Effectiveness/Acceptability/Implementation:

These initiatives demonstrate success. At the forums, 79% of students reported increased confidence in making healthy choices. The WYW Festival increased awareness of mental health support for 93% of attendees. Since inception, the WYW program has distributed over 20,000 diversionary activity passes, indicating sustained uptake across communities.

Conclusion and Next Steps:

These initiatives demonstrate the value of flexible, place-based prevention approaches that adapt to evolving community need. Ongoing efforts will focus on strengthening reach, engagement, and sustaining programs within a constrained and variable service environment.

Implications on communities, practice, policy and/or First Nations communities:

This work highlights the necessity of integrated, cross-sector prevention models in rural and remote settings.

Disclosure of Interest Statement: These activities are funded by the ADF, YACWA and the WA Mental Health Commission.

Disclosure of Interest Statement: N/A