

CREYATEing impactful youth engagement in health research: evaluation reflections and recommendations

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Background:

Youth advisory groups (YAGs) are increasingly used to engage young people in research that affects them. However, most groups focus on primary or intervention-based research, and the processes and impacts of such engagement are rarely evaluated. This study evaluated a YAG appointed by the Centre of Research Excellence (CRE) for Driving Global Investment in Adolescent Health – the CRE Youth Advocates Team (CREYATE) – notable for comprising members aged 18–25 and engaging with research focused on secondary data. Specifically, this study examined the processes of forming and operating CREYATE, and the impacts of engagement at the individual (CREYATE and established CRE members) and organisation (CRE) level.

Methods:

This retrospective mixed-methods process and outcome evaluation received ethics approval from the Royal Children's Hospital Research Ethics and Governance Office, Melbourne. Eligible participants included current CREYATE members and current or former CRE members, regardless of their involvement with CREYATE. Data collection comprised online surveys of all participants and semi-structured interviews with a purposive subset to capture diverse roles and perspectives. Survey and interview instruments were developed based on existing youth engagement and evaluation frameworks, refined collaboratively with CREYATE members. Quantitative data were analysed descriptively, and qualitative data underwent thematic analysis. Preliminary findings were discussed with CREYATE members in a focus group to refine interpretation and recommendations.

Results:

This study identified the enablers and barriers to meaningful youth engagement and its impacts across individual and organisational levels. Additionally, it established key recommendations – co-developed with CREYATE members – to inform future research projects involving young people.

Conclusion:

Evaluating YAG processes and impacts ensures accountability and mutual benefit. This study contributes to the emerging literature on youth engagement evaluation, offering novel insights into engagement of young people (18–25 years) in secondary data research contexts.