

2nd Biennial Australian Implementation Conference – Solving Complex Implementation Problems Building a stronger system to improve youth health outcomes – learning from implementation of the NSW Youth Health Policy 2011-2016

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While the importance of responding early to young people's health needs has been recognised (1), systems and structures to support this have frequently been overlooked by policy makers and health service managers (2). The *NSW Youth Health Policy 2011 – 2016: Healthy minds, healthy bodies, vibrant futures* (3) aimed to make change happen through identifying a set of principles and priorities for improving the health and wellbeing of young people in NSW.

The Policy is based on research into promoting young people's access to services (4), a literature review focussing on 'what works' to increase resilience for at-risk and marginalised young people (5), and extensive consultation with professionals and young people (6). Appropriately, the Policy advocates for the community to take responsibility for young people's health and for greater investment in young people, to promote safe and healthy lives now and into the future.

In 2013, NSW Kids and Families collected Youth Health Reports from 18 Local Health Districts to determine the success of policy implementation.

Drawing on Hogwood and Gunn's (7) ten preconditions for perfect implementation, the success to date of the NSW Youth Health Policy was reviewed via the following questions:

- Were adequate resources allocated?
- Did service structures support implementation?
- Were communication and coordination adequate?
- Was responsibility for implementation taken up?
- Was the policy implemented as intended?

The Youth Health Reports revealed uneven progress with implementation of the Policy. The widespread variation across the State appeared to be significantly influenced by whether or not there were Youth Health Coordinators to drive change. The reports also identified a number of areas in need of increased attention:

- Redressing the historical lack of resources dedicated to youth health, particularly in rural areas
- Communication and the joining up of systems
- Performance indicators to identify need and measure progress

This presentation will outline actions being taken to enhance implementation of the Policy. These include stronger strategic alignment with other reform initiatives, improved coordination and communication, greater engagement of those responsible for implementation and better monitoring systems.

References

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