



Promoting help-seeking, mental health, and resilience in schools

Why include this strategy in LifeSpan?

Within the schools program area, the LifeSpan team is working with regional suicide prevention collaboratives to promote help-seeking, mental health and resilience in schools. Schools provide an effective way of reaching young people to prevent suicide and suicide attempts through the delivery of structured, evidence-based programs.

Evidence supporting recommended interventions in LifeSpan

Some school-based programs have been shown to reduce suicidal ideation and suicide attempts [1][2]. Black Dog Institute reviewed the available evidence for Australian and international school programs and identified three potential programs with the best evidence for reducing suicidal behaviour: Youth Aware Mental Health (YAM), Signs of Suicide, and Sources of Strength.

All three programs are supported by quality RCT evaluation results. A large randomised controlled trial in 168 schools in ten European Union countries compared several programs and found that the Youth Aware of Mental Health (YAM) intervention reduced suicide attempts and lowered the severity of suicidal thoughts [3]. The US developed Signs of Suicide program also found that students were 40% less likely to experience a suicide attempt than those not undertaking the program [4].

Help-seeking is an important factor in suicide prevention. As such, many school-based programs focus on increasing help-seeking behaviour and mental health literacy, and improving knowledge of suicide warning signs and help strategies [5][6][7][8]. The Sources of Strength program, which promotes increased connectedness among peers and adults, has been found to increase help-seeking behaviour and improve acceptability of help seeking[9].

What is happening in LifeSpan NSW trial sites?

The YAM program was selected as the most appropriate to meet suicide prevention objectives within the practicality of the schooling system. LifeSpan aims to deliver YAM to all year nine students enrolled in public, independent and Catholic high schools in the trial regions. YAM is designed to be delivered in the classroom by accredited trainers with the assistance of a trained volunteer helper or co-facilitator. The NSW Department of Education has 19 trained YAM instructors, and YAM instructors to support non-government schools have been recruited through arrangements with local partner organisations contracted by LifeSpan in each site. These organisations and their trained instructors are licensed to deliver YAM in non-government schools as well as to support the delivery in public schools if needed. Black Dog Institute will also provide advice for the implementation evaluation of the program. School-based gatekeepers (e.g. teachers and school psychologists) will also be targeted in strategies 2 and 5 with training designed specifically for psychologists and community gatekeepers.



How will this be evaluated in LifeSpan?

YAM will be evaluated using a quasi-experimental design within the broader randomised stepped-wedge design of LifeSpan. Although all schools within all sites will be encouraged to implement this program, only a sub-set of schools will be randomly selected to participate in the program evaluation. The LifeSpan intervention will be 'active' for two years within each site. The intervention (YAM) will be implemented in Year 1 of the active intervention phase and then repeated in Year 2. Students in the evaluation schools will be invited to complete surveys on four occasions: at baseline (pre-intervention), immediate post-intervention, post intervention (within 6 months of program completion) and at 12-months follow up. As students will mostly be aged 15, we will seek guardian consent to participate in data collection. The survey will measure risk factors (depression, anxiety, conduct problems), protective factors (help-seeking, knowledge, social support, coping skills), suicide stigma, and suicidal thoughts and behaviours.

Key References

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