

## Study to assess long-term effectiveness of teen drug and alcohol programs

Researchers from the National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre (NDARC) at UNSW Sydney are reaching out to young people who participated in a landmark 2012 trial to assess the long-term impact of school-based drug and alcohol prevention programs.

The CAP Study was the first randomised controlled trial to examine the effectiveness of combining universal prevention programs (delivered to all students) with selective interventions that were delivered to students with specific personality traits thought to increase the risk of developing drug and alcohol problems.

Chief Investigator, Associate Professor Nicola Newton said the original study involved 2,000 high school students aged between 13 and 15 from across New South Wales and Victoria, and the results showed clear benefits.

“Positive results included reduced alcohol use and incidence of binge-drinking, reduced harms from alcohol use, reduced mental health symptoms and increased knowledge of alcohol and cannabis-related harms over the three years following the program,” Associate Professor Newton said.

“We now want to see whether these benefits last beyond the age of 17 as few studies have examined this.

“The long-term follow up aims to address this knowledge gap by assessing the effectiveness of the interventions during the critical risk period when students transition from high school to early adulthood.”

To date, 1,085 participants (50% per cent of the original cohort) have been tracked down for follow up but with students dispersing widely after high school recruiting the other 50% has proved a challenge.

Data collection will continue until the end of 2019 and assess drinking, drug use and other risk behaviours.

Recent results from the Australian National Drug Strategy Household Survey show that the age when young Australians are first using alcohol and other drugs is increasing.

This may mean the effects of preventative interventions are similarly delayed and do not emerge until later, when participants gain more exposure to alcohol and other substances.

“This underscores the need to assess the long-term effects of these interventions,” Associate Professor Newton said.

“We know that even small reductions in alcohol and other drug use during this time can have a major impact across an entire population of people.

“Our hope is that the follow up will indicate which prevention approaches are sustainable in the long term, as this is vital information to inform policy nationally and internationally.”

Associate Professor Newton’s team is currently reaching out to original CAP participants who would like to take part in the follow-up.

**If you or someone you know was a part of the original CAP Study and would like to participate in the follow-up please express your interest on the [CAP Study website](#) or contact Ms Anna Smout: [a.smout@unsw.edu.au](mailto:a.smout@unsw.edu.au).**

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