

Youth Mental Health Screening in Schools

Developing a sustainable system to deliver early intervention for emotional health through Australian schools

About this study

More than half of Australian young people with mental health disorders do not get treatment. This study aims to transform the management of mental (or emotional) health in young people by identifying youth who are struggling with emotional distress and getting them to appropriate help early. First, we will develop a valid screening tool to allow schools to identify young people with emotional health issues, who may otherwise “slip through the cracks”. Second, we will help schools to identify the best local pathways to care that are evidence-based and accessible.

This ground-breaking research is being conducted by Macquarie University, in partnership with the NSW Department of Education and Ministry of Health, The Association of Independent Schools of NSW, and Catholic Schools NSW, along with the NSW Mental Health Commission. It is funded by the Bupa Health Foundation.

What are the benefits for my school community?

- Access to free and easy-to-deliver emotional health screening for students from Year 4 to Year 11, that will identify students who score high on symptoms of emotional distress and who may otherwise “slip through the cracks”
- Recommendations tailored to your school and community on local, evidence-based referral services, provided by expert researchers and clinicians
- Increased knowledge for your school mental health staff in methods of screening and identification of emotionally distressed youth
- Development of guides and templates for your school to use for ongoing screening and referral, if your school would like to continue screening after the study

What will my school need to do?

Your school will need to:

- Circulate information about the study to parents/guardians and collect their consent for participation (this will be written for you)
- Arrange a time and provide supervision for students to complete the screening. Screening will take approx. 30 minutes and will be completed online. All screening materials, delivery, and scoring will be provided by Macquarie University
- Ensure that a member of staff with mental health expertise (e.g., school counsellor) is available on the day of testing
- Provide appropriate information about relevant services to students who showed up on the survey with symptoms of (emotional/psychological) distress and their parent(s). Macquarie University will provide your school with a list

of students who score high on emotional health symptoms and will work with your staff and local mental health services to help you to identify the best pathways to care.

- Provide the Macquarie University Research Team with student data on school attendance and academic performance (only for students whose parents provide consent for this)
- Provide feedback to us about how you found the experience

In turn, your school will receive:

- Information and skills development for relevant staff in conducting this screening and identifying local services.
- A list of identified students from your school who are currently struggling with emotional distress. Many of these students will be known to you – but some will be newly identified.
- A detailed report on the findings of the screenings, including aggregated data for your school overall
- A comprehensive list of referral services and resources, developed by experts in youth mental health, that will be evidence-based and local to your school community
- Support along every step of the way from our dedicated researchers

When will the study take place?

- Schools will be randomly allocated to start screening either in May 2021 (Term 2, 2021) or February 2022 (Term 1, 2022)
- We will provide feedback about any students who showed up on the survey with symptoms of emotional distress as quickly as possible and you will then be responsible for providing that feedback to the student and/or their parent/guardian.

I'm interested – what are the next steps?

- If you would like for your school to participate in our study, please email our project coordinator, Dr Rebecca Kuhnert: rebecca.kuhnert@mq.edu.au. Rebecca will then send you a Principal Information and Consent form for you to sign and return.
- If you have any questions or would like more information, please email rebecca.kuhnert@mq.edu.au

This study has been approved by the Macquarie University Human Research Ethics Committee – Reference Number 52021918824322. If you have any complaints or reservations about any ethical aspect of your participation in this research, you may contact the Committee through the Director, Research Ethics & Integrity (telephone (02) 9850 7854; email ethics@mq.edu.au). Any complaint you make will be treated in confidence and investigated, and you will be informed of the outcome.