

## HEALTH RISK SCREENING AND COUNSELLING OF ADOLESCENTS IN PRIMARY CARE: A CLUSTER RANDOMISED CONTROLLED TRIAL

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### POLICY CONTEXT

Mental health issues and unhealthy behaviours usually begin during adolescence and young adulthood. With the current policy agendas of developing a National Youth Strategy, strengthening access to primary care and increasing the focus on preventive health initiatives, it is timely to consider the potential for general practice to deliver preventive health care for young people.

### KEY FINDINGS

We have surveyed 360 young people attending 35 Victorian general practices about their health risks and the GPs, nurses and practice support staff about their perceived confidence and role in dealing preventive care for young people. This survey is a preliminary phase of a trial testing whether screening and counseling young people for health risks in general practice improves health outcomes and is economically viable. Key messages about the role of general practice in the preventive care of young people, based on our preliminary findings should be:

- General Practice is an opportune place to locate and support preventive health care for young people because 96% of young people attending the study GPs had at least one significant health risk (drinking, road safety, fear and abuse, mental health and sexual health concerns), and have rarely sought help from health care providers other than general practice in the 12 months prior to our survey.
- Young people trust their GPs and practice nurses, are generally satisfied with the care they receive and have usually followed their clinician's advice and management plan (prescriptions, investigations, referrals).
- Currently most of the health risks young people experiences do not come to light in regular general practice consultations; hence the opportunities for preventive health care or early intervention are not being realised.
- Practice nurses have a positive attitude towards working with young people but lack confidence in screening and counseling for risk and some report prioritising clinical activity linked to currently funded Medicare schemes.
- Training Practice nurses and GPs in youth friendly care and screening and counseling on health risk increases their confidence and self-reported practice in preventive health care for youth.
- Most young people (14-24 years), GPs, nurses and parents of young people (14-17 years) attending our practices to date accept the notion of an annual preventive health check. Effective models for how this may be achieved require further investigation.

For more details, go to the [three page report](#).

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