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Smoking

Youth Action Policy Paper

YOUTH ACTION

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About Us

Youth Action is the peak organisation representing young people and youth services in NSW. Youth Action works towards a society where all young people are supported, engaged and valued. To achieve this, it is the role of Youth Action to:

1. Respond to social and political agendas relating to young people and the youth services sector
 2. Provide proactive leadership and advocacy and shape the agenda on issues affecting young people and youth services
 3. Collaborate on issues that affect young people and youth workers
 4. Promote a positive profile in the media and the community of young people and youth services
 5. Build capacity for young people to speak out and take action on issues that affect them
 6. Enhance the capacity of the youth services sector to provide high quality services
 7. Ensure Youth Action's organisational development, efficiency, effectiveness and good governance.
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Recommendations

1. That NSW Health develop and find a range of programs to help young people, particularly those from socially disadvantaged groups, to stop smoking
2. That the NSW and Australian Governments subsidise smoking cessation treatments, such as nicotine replacement therapy, for groups with lower socio-economic status, including young people
3. That the NSW and Australian Governments support funded community and youth services that wish to incorporate tobacco interventions into the service they provide.
4. That the NSW and Australian Governments support the development of tailored awareness campaigns around smoking risks among young people and particular youth subgroups.
5. That the NSW and Australian Governments commit to fostering harm limiting behaviours in those who continue to smoke, for their own benefit and for the benefit of those around them

Background

Whilst overall smoking rates are approximately 15.1% across all age groups, smoking rates appear more prevalent for young people, with 27.9% of males and 24.5% of females aged 16-24 years represented in smoking statistics.

International evidence has also been revealed that the tobacco industry continues to target young people to take up smoking as a life-long habit. Indeed, approximately 90% of smokers pick up the habit in their teenage years.

Smoking rates are also related to markers of disadvantage, with representation from almost 28% of the unemployed, more than 37% of single parents, about half of all Indigenous people, and an estimated 70-80% of those with mental illness.

In the long term, effects of smoking include chronic illness and disease such as cancer, heart disease and stroke. However, for young smokers the more immediate effects include a loss of fitness, increased respiratory disease, coughing and wheezing and early decline in lung functioning.

The financial impacts of smoking are also of concern, considering the link between smoking rates and disadvantage and the diversion of funds from essentials such as food, clothing and shelter towards supporting a person's nicotine addiction.

Tobacco and Social Justice

Research indicates that quit rates are lowest amongst those who suffer the most disadvantage in society. This may be due to various factors, including the prevalence of smoking in disadvantaged communities, stress relating to local circumstances and the prohibitive costs to such groups of nicotine replacement therapy.

The high financial burden of tobacco use is also of particular concern to young people, considering the limitations placed upon their earning capacity.

YAPA recognises that individuals who smoke need appropriate support and encouragement to quit smoking, rather than further marginalisation due to the fact they smoke. This is particularly so where individuals are already marginalised due to social disadvantage.

YAPA believes that youth services may have a role to play in providing support to their clients who would like to stop smoking.

Effective Anti Smoking Campaigns

YAPA believes that campaigns addressing the entire smoking population, as well as campaigns targeted at young people, are necessary in order to ensure that effective anti-smoking messages are received by young smokers and young people considering taking up smoking as a habit.

Such campaigns may also require tailoring to specific youth subgroups that are over represented in statistics on tobacco use. Young people from these groups should be involved in campaign development.

Harm Minimisation

YAPA recognises that, as tobacco is legal and readily available, complete cessation of smoking by all people is highly unlikely.

YAPA believes that further advice should be made available for smokers in order to limit the harm they suffer directly and the harm caused to others through second hand smoke.

Smokers who reside or regularly associate with non-smoking young people should be addressed, as passive smoking may have significant health impacts and/or contribute to the likelihood of non-smoking young people taking up smoking later.