

Guidelines for the design of YOUTH PARTICIPATION initiatives to safeguard mental health and wellbeing

Consider the *minimum* and additional guidelines on this checklist when designing and implementing youth participation initiatives:

Prioritise clear and respectful communication with participants from the outset.

- ☐ Be transparent about the scope of activities to reduce burnout and overcommitment.
- ☐ Define roles, responsibilities, and expectations of activities, including sharing lived experience.
- ☐ Define how contributions will be acknowledged.
- ☐ Offer regular opportunities for anonymous feedback and use this to enhance programs.
- ☐ Define who young people can approach with questions or for support.
- ☐ Ensure young people feel listened to throughout all participation processes.

Create safe spaces and flexible practices for young people.

- ☐ Ensure the space is safe by asking about needs and acknowledging power imbalances.
- ☐ Consider the diversity of the group and prioritise broad promotion of opportunities.
- ☐ Ensure that participation is flexible, and offer breaks and withdrawal.
- ☐ Provide notice regarding potentially distressing content.
- ☐ Offer remuneration for young people's time and expenses.

Facilitate social and emotional support.

- ☐ Offer debriefing where participants draw on lived experiences of mental ill-health.
- ☐ Encourage young people to create their own wellbeing plans.
- ☐ Create opportunities to foster social connection and shared enjoyment.
- ☐ Involve competent, trained adult allies to support young people.
- ☐ Consider providing access to external support and resources.
- ☐ Consider an alumni system to continue to engage with facilitators and peers.

Empower young people to participate in meaningful and impactful ways.

- ☐ Update young people on progress and impact resulting from their participation.
- ☐ Support youth decision making and shared decision making with adults.
- ☐ Where original goals are not met, discuss achievements and future opportunities.
- ☐ Create supported opportunities for young people to directly engage with stakeholders.

Support young people to develop skills.

- ☐ Provide opportunities to learn and practise skills in a safe, equitable, and empowering way.
- ☐ Link participants with organisational networks for further skill development and networking.

These guidelines are evidence-based and youth-led.
Read more in the Medical Journal of Australia:

Guo, K., Meas, D., Mautner, D., Yan, F., Al-Hadaya, I., Donohoe-Bales, A., Teesson, L., Partridge, S. R., Simmons, M. B., Mandoh, M., Barrett, E. L., Teesson, M. R., Smout, S., & Bower, M. (2024). Guidelines for the design and implementation of youth participation initiatives to safeguard mental health and wellbeing. *Medical Journal of Australia*, 221(S10).
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