

# YAM: Youth Aware of Mental Health

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The Department of Education is working closely with the Black Dog Institute to support the implementation of the Youth Aware of Mental Health (YAM) program. YAM is being progressively delivered in sites across NSW as part of the LifeSpan whole of community, evidence-based approach to suicide prevention.

YAM is a mental health program for young people aged 14 – 16 years and is a universal program delivered by accredited instructors that are external to the school. YAM uses role play and lectures to promote increased discussion and knowledge about mental health as well as developing emotional intelligence and problem-solving skills. The department is coordinating the delivery of YAM in NSW public schools and has established 16 Head Teacher positions to lead the implementation of YAM.

The Black Dog Institute reviewed Australian and international school programs with the best evidence of reducing suicidal behaviour. Analysis of YAM shows significant improvements in youth mental health by effectively reducing depression, conduct problems, hyperactivity, suicide attempts, severe suicidal ideation and suicide plans. It has also been shown to facilitate healthy lifestyle choices by young people. YAM supports the cognitive, emotional, social and physical wellbeing of students and can contribute to the **school's planned approach to wellbeing**. All Year 9 students are the identified cohort to receive the YAM program. The program is designed to be delivered to groups of up to 30 students.

Student voice is a key component of the program and our young people have actively engaged in the content and have reported they have really valued the opportunity to speak about topics that are important to

them. Having an opportunity to open up, share their points of view in a non-judgemental way allows deep conversations in order to explore their options when faced with a problem. The YAM program highlights the importance of seeking support when it is needed and not having to deal with a problem alone, connecting young people with local and online mental and general health services, as well as specific youth resources in the community.

Instructor feedback indicates that students with mild to moderate levels of intellectual disability have engaged well with the program. YAM is inclusive in its nature because the students' ideas and thoughts form the basis for the role plays and discussions and therefore are relevant to the individual contexts which allows for differentiation and adjustments. The YAM instructor acts as a facilitator, valuing each student's contribution while encouraging discussion among peers which means they learn from each other. As the program is based on dialogue and role play, it minimises the requirement for reading and writing. Furthermore, where required, School Learning Support Officers (SLSOs) familiar to the students are encouraged to participate in the groups to support the engagement of students with additional learning needs. Further information about Youth Aware of Mental Health (YAM) can be accessed at <http://www.y-a-m.org/>

Further information about LifeSpan can be accessed at <https://www.blackdoginstitute.org.au/research/lifespan>.

If you have any queries about [YAM](#) in NSW Department of Education schools, please contact Student Engagement and Interagency Partnerships on 02 9244 5610.

