

Definition of 'youth' for mental health services

Youth Mental Health Sub Network

- Around the world, the terms youth, adolescent, teenager and young person are often interchanged to mean the same thing: a period between childhood and adulthood. This is a period of life with specific health and developmental needs.
- Definitions of youth around the world vary greatly, from the broad French national policy for youth (3-30 years) to the more limited UK youth policy framework (13-19 years).
- The United Nations defines youth as 15-24 years. The UN also state "Youth is a more fluid category than a fixed age-group".
- Across Australia, headspace targets 12-25 year olds and the Australian Institute of Health and Wellbeing defines youth as 12–24 years, specifically "the three main stages of adolescence— early, middle and late—in which physical, intellectual, emotional and social changes take place. While the actual age of each stage is different for each individual, youth is the period when the balance of influences on young people's behaviour shifts from the decisions and actions of their parents and guardians to their own and that of their peers".
- The WA Mental Health, Alcohol and Other Drug Services Plan 2015-2025 defines youth for public mental health services as 16-24 years (Mental Health) and ages 12 to 17 years (Alcohol and Other Drug).
- Non-government mental health services in WA have broader age definitions eg. Youth Focus 12-25 years, Helping Minds 8-26 years.
- Developmental criteria (physical / emotional / social / thinking) are rarely taken into account in defining youth for the purpose of service delivery.

The Youth Mental Health Sub Network accept the WA Mental Health, Alcohol and Other Drug Services Plan 2015-2025 definition of youth for public mental health services as 16-24 years. However it is recognised that youth is a more fluid category than a fixed age group, and developmental needs and social circumstances may also be taken into account.

ADDENDUM 1

Western Australian Mental Health, Alcohol and Other Drug Services Plan 2015-2025

Age Appropriate Services Across the Service Spectrum

YOUTH

Ages 16 to 24 years (Mental Health) and ages 12 to 17 years (Alcohol and Other Drug)

Youth experience the highest prevalence and incidence for mental illness across the lifespan. Young people with co-occurring mental health, alcohol and other drug problems are particularly at risk of poor outcomes because their age and stage of physical, neurological, psychological and social development makes them vulnerable. Increasing service capacity to meet the needs of young people, and the expansion of dedicated youth mental health, alcohol and other drug services across all service streams are urgent priorities to progress.

Currently, mental health services are generally provided in three age streams: infant, child and adolescent (0-17 years); adult (18-64 years); and older adult (65 years and above). We aim to configure the existing and new mental health services into the following new age streams: infant, child and adolescent (0-15 years); youth (16-24 years); adult (25-64 years); and older adult (65 years and above) as soon as possible, in order to introduce a new, dedicated youth stream. All services will be expected to meet the needs of young people with co-occurring mental health, alcohol and other drug problems. Youth mental health services must also have the capability to identify and treat early psychosis.

Dedicated youth services have been referred to in various parts of the Plan: *Prevention, Community Support Services, Community Treatment Services, Community Bed-Based Services, Hospital-Based Services, Specialised Statewide Services, and Forensic Services.*