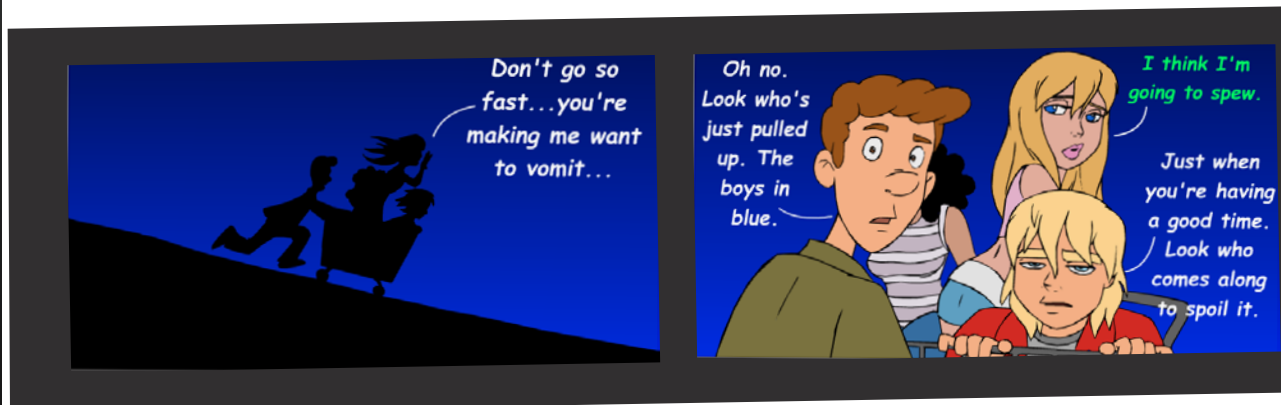


# HARNESSING THE POWER



# OF TECHNOLOGY TO PREVENT THE HARMS OF DRUGS AND ALCOHOL



**T**hree in four people with a substance use disorder will develop it before leaving school. Early initiation to alcohol and other drugs is a risk factor for the development of substance use disorders, co-morbid mental health problems, juvenile offending, and impaired educational performance, all of which negatively impact on current functioning and future life options. Effective prevention is therefore critical.

## CLIMATE SCHOOLS

The team at the *NHMRC Centre of Research Excellence in Mental Health and Substance Use (CREMS)* at UNSW has been using technology to address the critical need for effective prevention. CREMS' researchers have worked with teachers, students, parents, and designers, to develop the CLIMATE Schools programs. These programs are designed to overcome the limitations and barriers commonly faced when implementing drug prevention in schools.

## DID YOU KNOW?

Harms from drug and alcohol are among the leading causes of burden of disease in young Australians. These harms peak in those aged 15-24 years and this corresponds with the typical period of onset of these problems.

The CLIMATE Schools programs are based on the effective social influence approach to prevention, have a harm minimisation goal, and use cartoon storylines to engage and maintain student interest and involvement over time. The courses are facilitated by the Internet, which guarantees complete and consistent delivery whilst ensuring high implementation fidelity. Implemented across Years 8-10 (ages 13-16), the CLIMATE Schools modules are designed to be embedded within the school health curriculum. There are currently four modules: Alcohol Education (Yr 8), Alcohol & Cannabis Education (Yr 9), Psychostimulant & Cannabis Education (Yr 10) and Ecstasy and Emerging Drugs (Yr 10). Each module consists of a series of four to six 40-minute lessons, including two components: an internet based component and interactive activities.

*These programs are designed to overcome the limitations and barriers commonly faced when implementing drug prevention in schools.*

Six randomised controlled trials (RCTs) have been conducted to evaluate the efficacy of the CLIMATE Schools programs, involving 157 Australian secondary schools and over 14,000 students.

Results from these studies found that the CLIMATE Schools programs are effective in significantly increasing alcohol, cannabis and psycho-stimulant related knowledge, decreasing uptake in alcohol use, decreasing uptake in binge drinking, decreasing frequency of cannabis use, decreasing intentions to use ecstasy in the future, reducing truancy and reducing psychological distress up to three years following the interventions.

*The results from these trials have provided world-first evidence that eHealth preventive interventions for alcohol and drug use can be effective.*

## TAKING IT INTERNATIONAL

Given the success of the trials, in 2015, the CLIMATE Schools programs were commercialised through CLIMATE Schools Pty Ltd and launched in Australia, the UK and the US. Since launch, 320 schools (Australia 296, UK 7, US 17) and 31 organisations working with young people (Australia 18, UK 4, US 9) have formally registered to use the programs through our online portal reaching over 10,000 unique users globally and 1 in every 10 high schools in Australia. The CLIMATE Schools programs represent innovative and sustainable prevention for alcohol and other drugs which are scalable to meet the needs of young people in Australia and world-wide.

In more recent NHMRC trials across NSW, WA and QLD we are examining new prevention models that target both alcohol, drugs and mental health.

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