

Hi-Ground

STRAIGHT UP



**HARM REDUCTION
AND WELL-BEING FOR YOUTH**

This booklet was written by Brooke Walters, Hi-Ground Project Lead, Social Worker, Art Therapist and Harm Reduction Educator.

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This resource is stronger because of your knowledge, passion, and care.

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About Hi-Ground

Hi-Ground is a project of QulVAA which is a statewide, not for profit, and non-government organisation providing a variety of health and advocacy services to people who use substances throughout Queensland. The aim of Hi-Ground is to create safe and inclusive peer-led educational resources for people who use drugs. We hope that by providing information free from judgement and damaging stigmatisation, we can improve the health and well-being of our fellow Queenslanders and broader Australian Community.

We acknowledge the Traditional Owners and First Nations peoples throughout Australia.

We recognise that these have always been places of continued culture, teaching and learning.

We pay respect to their Elders – past, present and emerging – and acknowledge the important role Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people continue to play within health services and the harm reduction community, by providing education and services that are culturally appropriate and safe.

We also wish to acknowledge the harm done to communities, families and individuals affected by punitive drug policies, to those who have lost their lives, families torn apart due to incarceration and those that face discrimination and stigma.

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Hi-Ground is a project of QulVAA

Hi-Ground QulVAA



This resource has been developed for young people who use substances, have friends who use substances or would like to educate themselves in an objective way about substances. The role of Hi-Ground is to provide factual, relevant and practical information to assist people in making informed choices about drug use; to promote harm reduction, well-being, and safer consumption. Hi-Ground acknowledges that people use drugs. Therefore, they need access to resources and education to reduce harm in line with: Australia's Public Health Strategy, National Drug Strategy and Queensland Women's Health Strategy.

This resource includes topics such as drug use, trauma and mental health. We acknowledge that these issues can be confronting and encourage you to prioritise your own well-being. If you need to access support around these issues please check out the services and resources via the Hi-Ground website.

The content for this booklet is based on a survey that Hi-Ground circulated in 2024 to young people using drugs from the age range of 14 to 25 living in Queensland. From their survey responses the following recommendations for the booklet were:

Highlight Real Voices:

- Use anonymised quotes from the survey to reflect lived experiences.
- Normalize non-judgemental harm reduction messaging.

Include Practical Tools:

- Clear charts for substance interactions
- Info on safe dosages, tolerance, and drug checking
- Guidance on overdose education and how to access naloxone

Trauma-Informed Approach:

- Acknowledge the role of mental health and trauma.
- Encourage support-seeking without stigma.

Digital First:

- Prioritise formats optimised for online and social media (short reels, infographics).
- QR codes for accessibility to linking to digital resources.
- Community & Support Info:
- Provide links to peer groups, crisis lines, and free/low-barrier services.

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SUBSTANCE USE, HARM REDUCTION AND YOU

What is Harm Reduction?

Harm reduction is about keeping people safer — not by demanding they stop using drugs, but by helping them reduce the risks. Instead of focusing on punishment or zero-tolerance laws (which don't stop people from using), harm reduction offers support, education, and tools to stay safe. It's a real-world approach that respects people's choices while helping them look after their health and well-being.

You're not alone.

There are many young people across Queensland using substances for all kinds of reasons—social connection, coping, curiosity, fun. Whatever your experience, it's valid. This booklet shares real insights from other young folks who've walked a similar path—and the harm reduction strategies they say actually helped them. It also provides extra information on specific substances and topics that were identified as being the most relevant to the young people who participated in our survey.

Survey Responses of Young People in Queensland aged 15-25.

Substance Use Trends

- **Main substances used:** Alcohol, Nicotine, Cannabis
- **Other common substances used:** Amphetamines (including ADHD medications), MDMA, Cocaine, Magic Mushrooms, LSD, Ketamine, Amyl Nitrites 'poppers', Benzos and Nitrous Oxide 'nangs'.
- **Frequency of use:** Many young people report daily or weekly use of their main drug of choice.
- **Duration:** Many of the survey participants indicated they have been using a substance/s for 5+ years.
- **Age:** Half of the survey participants were aged between 24-35
- **Gender:** 8 participants identified as female, 12 identified as male, 2 identified as non-binary and 1 identified as transgender.
- **Poly Drug Use:** 54.2% of participants said they combine their substances with other ones. 33.3% said they rarely combine and 12.5% said they never combine.
- **Combinations:** The most common combination was Alcohol and Cannabis. Alcohol was also the most identified drug mixed with other substances.

WHY WE USE

- "It makes socialising easier and helps me feel less anxious." — Non-binary, 22
- "It's a release. Life gets heavy—this lets me let loose." — Female, 24
- "Being able to alter my mental state allows me to relieve stress and objectively view situations and make decisions in a more calm mind state. My use of these substances (particularly psychedelics) help me to regulate my mood and help to alleviate anxiety and depressive episodes. Or more generally they allow me to relax and relieve stress. Nootropics allow me to intake and retain information more easily helping to make up for my own perceived poor memory retention. — Male, 20
- "It feels like the world shuts up and you're left to be able to feel good without other people's opinions or the past shit to weigh down on you." — Male, 15

People shared that substances help them:

- Feel more relaxed or confident
- Cope with mental health struggles
- Escape stress, trauma, or pressure
- Be part of a social scene

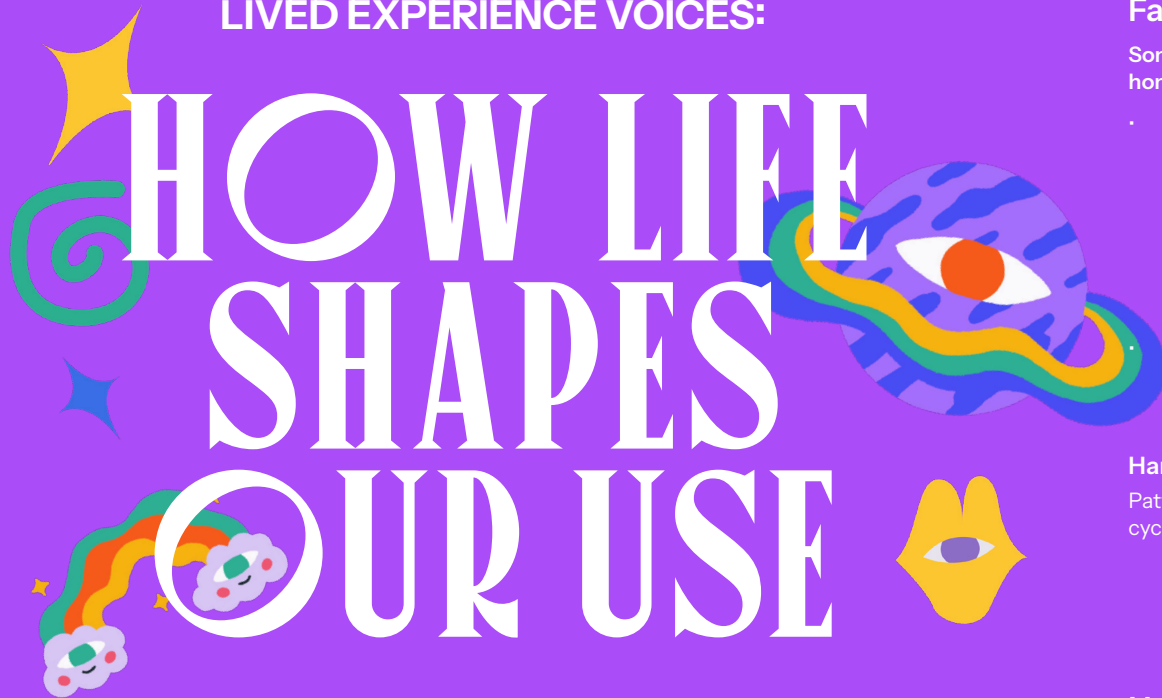
But many also said their least favourite thing about the substances they use:

- "The next day is rough. The comedowns hit hard." — Male, 20
- "I've seen the toll it takes on my body and my wallet." — Female, 23
- Health impacts
- Comedowns and hangovers
- The cost
- Dependency

What's Missing Out There?

- Young people said it's hard to find:
- Real info on mixing drugs
- What's safe or unsafe to combine
- How to access testing and support
- Legal info and your rights with Police
- What to do if someone overdoses
- "Finding people who know what they are talking about in real life." — Male, 20

LIVED EXPERIENCE VOICES:



Substance use is connected to our stories—our mental health, trauma, culture, friendships, extended family, and identity. Here's what you guys told us about the life experiences that influence your substance use.

Mental Health & Coping

- “During a mental health episode, it obviously impacted my drug use.”
– Male, 15
- “When I was younger (teenage years) I was far more open to taking a wider range of drugs due to poor mental health.”
– Male, 21
- “I use it as a crutch for my mental health, especially anxiety which I believed stemmed from my sexuality and being judged from that.” – Male, 24

Struggling with anxiety, depression, or trauma often led to increased use as a form of self-medication.

Harm Reduction Tip:

If you're using substances to manage feelings, consider pairing that with support: talking to someone, writing things down, or exploring low-cost mental health services.

Environment & Culture

- “It's very normalised in uni/as a young person to take substances and can feel isolated if I go sober + it's very common in Queer spaces to take.” – Male, 20
- “Taking substances at festivals with good friends helped me accept and embrace the eccentric person I am and cannot hide.”
– Male, 24

Where we live, party, study, and exist often shapes what's considered “normal.” Substances can be part of connection—but also peer pressure.

Harm Reduction Tip:

Check in with yourself: Are you using it because you want to, or because it's expected? You're allowed to set your own limits and maintain safe boundaries and that they are respected by your friends and peers.

Family & Community

Some people grew up seeing drugs in the home, others used in response to family pain.

- “My sister was addicted to meth and various other substances. Her use of these drugs glamorised it and made me wanna try. I became friends with people who were also interested in doing drugs and eventually all we did was drugs. I'm no longer friends with most of those people now.” – Male, 20
- “I think seeing the impacts of substances like methamphetamine from my parents has made me very cautious about trying ‘heavier’ substances” – Female, 24

Harm Reduction Tip:

Patterns don't have to repeat. You can break cycles, even one small step at a time.

Housing, Stress & Survival

- “Having unstable housing, poor mental health and a history of chronic depression, as well as being a sex worker, substances have provided a positive cushion of support to fall back on.” – Female, 25
- “Working in a marginalised industry such as sex work and experiences of homelessness” – Non-binary, 22

Eight young people also identified they experience/d negative economic outcomes in their life such as money issues, poverty and unemployment.

When life feels out of control, substances can become a way to get through. This doesn't make you “bad”—it means you're surviving.

Harm Reduction Tip:

If you're using regularly due to stress or survival, harm reduction can be a lifeline. Connect with peer support or housing services that won't judge you. Abstinence isn't the only path and it is important to find safe spaces to talk about managing your use in a way that works for you with people who understand and have been there before.



Routine, Habit & Numbness

- “I just carry on. It's all normal to me now.”
– Transgender Male, 15

Sometimes use doesn't feel like a big deal anymore—it's just there. But even habits can shift when you're ready.

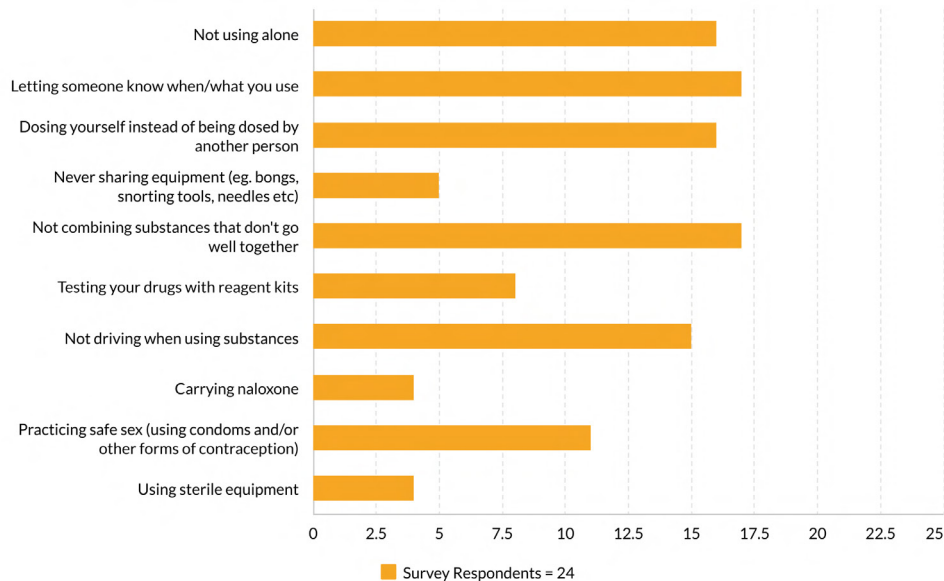
Harm Reduction Tip:

Try keeping a low-pressure “use journal” to track when, why, and how much you're using. Awareness is power.

YOUR STORY MATTERS YOUR STORY MATTERS YOUR STORY MATTERS

Everyone's journey is different. Whether you're thriving, struggling, changing, or just surviving, your story is valid. This booklet isn't here to tell you what to do—it's here to keep you safer, more informed, and more connected.

What harm reduction methods or advice have you used before?



Awareness of Risks

- "I know combining my drugs is very risky, I always check in with myself and how I feel, start low and go slow, very conscious of the role of alcohol in lowering my decision making ability."
- Female, 24
- "Understanding what the substance will do to my body pharmacologically, chemically, mentally and physically is greatly useful in preparing for any risks and possible scenarios. It is often a good idea to understand that a bad experience is absolutely possible and to plan in advance. This knowledge also helps when a bad experience actually happens, as you can understand that this experience does not last forever, and is a result of taking a substance."
- Male, 21

Despite the risks, many respondents showed awareness and made intentional choices about what and how they combined.

TRAUMA & DRUG USE

REAL TALK

If you've ever used alcohol or drugs to deal with stress, pain, or tough stuff in life — you're not alone. Lots of young people do. It's not because you're "bad" or broken. It's because you're trying to cope. This section isn't here to judge you. It's here to remind you: You deserve support, not shame.

The link between Trauma to Drug Use

When you go through hard stuff — like family drama, bullying, being unsafe, or losing someone — it can leave deep scars.

Sometimes, drugs or alcohol feel like a quick way to take the edge off or seem like the only way to cope.



What Young People Said

- "Sexual assault and parental abuse led me to using substances more often."
- Female, 22
- "Domestic violence and death and bereavement at 17yo caused me to crave an escape from pain from a young age."
- Female, 24
- "Losing a brother at 17... I started smoking after he died" - Non-binary, 24
- "I can get done what I need to get done, whilst not having to think about the negative things in my life. A survival tool."
- Male, 25

But while substances can feel like a quick fix, they often just delay the pain — and can create more over time.

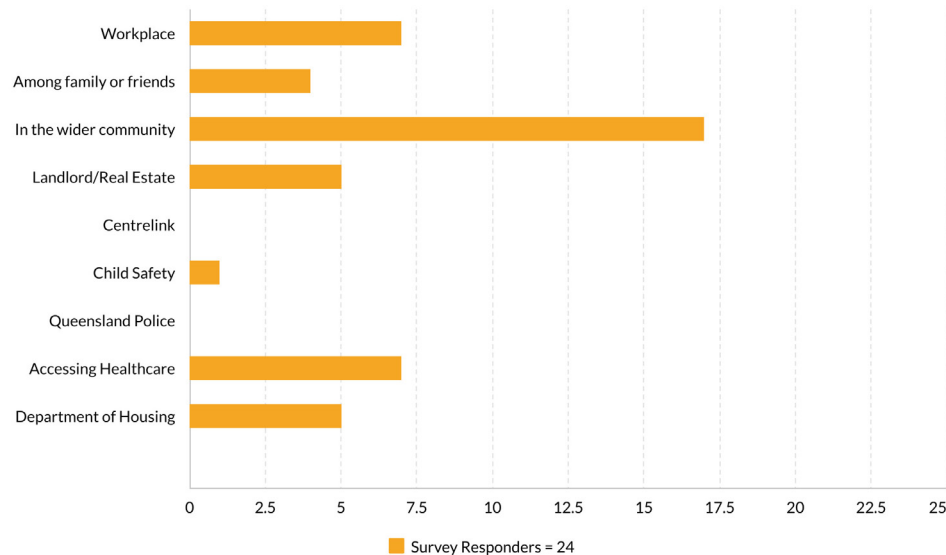
Why Shame & Punishing People Doesn't Help

Getting in trouble for using drugs — at school, with police, or from adults — doesn't solve the root problem. In fact, it can make things worse by making you feel more isolated, ashamed or hopeless. The most common experiences of stigma identified in our survey that all young people had been through were from their family and friends.

- "The legal issues/societal stigma associated with drugs forces me to hide all substance use from the vast majority of people." - Male, 20
- "Stigmatisation from family encouraged heavier use to disprove their prejudice based on propaganda about substances" - Male, 21

THE IMPACT OF STIGMA

Have you ever been discriminated against or stigmatised for substance use in any of the following situations or organisations?



People who use drugs, experience mental health challenges or have differences in sexual identity and gender, often face heavy stigma.

This can look like:

- Being stereotyped or judged
- Feeling excluded or isolated
- Being treated unfairly
- Being blamed for wider social issues

Stigma & Punishment doesn't help — it makes things worse.

When people are judged or shamed, they're less likely to ask for help, and more likely to experience poor health and social outcomes.

What actually helps?

- Being listened to
- Feeling safe
- Getting real support from people who care

Imagine if instead of getting grounded, shamed or given detention, someone said, "You okay, I'm here for you? Would you like to join me for a snack and a chat?"

You can find more information about your rights with Police on page 40 and a list of free and confidential legal support services on page 43 if you find yourself in trouble with the law.

For more information about parents talking to their kids visit: <https://adf.org.au/talking-about-drugs/parenting-talk/>

What Real Support Looks Like

Support isn't about telling you what to do — it's about walking with you through the hard stuff.

Trusted people — Find those people who genuinely care and are willing to walk alongside you. Positive connections can make all the difference. Bonus points if they bring snacks.

Safe (and safe enough) spaces — youth services, programs or hangouts where you can be yourself without fear of judgement. Sometimes accessing these spaces is vital in avoiding conflict and harm. We use the term 'safe enough' to show that this is working towards greater safety and grounded support systems. You can find links to safe spaces in your corner of Queensland at the Hi-Ground website (<https://hi-ground.org/>) or at the end of this booklet.

Mental health care — Healing isn't just about stopping drug use; it's about working through the emotions and experiences that led you there. Spoiler: It's okay not to have it all figured out and help is available, you are not alone.

Empower Yourself — Your voice matters. Getting involved in designing programmes or sharing your experiences can help shape better support systems for everyone. Because who knows what young people need better than young people?

Challenge Stigma — Speak out against the idea that drug use is just "bad behaviour." Help others understand the deeper issues behind it. Remember: compassion before judgement.

The First Step is Always the Hardest but all of these avenues or opportunities support are all around us if we know where to look. Here are some ways you can incorporate trusted and meaningful support structures and community into your life:

- **Build your support network:** Make a list of trusted people and add them to your favourites. Let them know you're struggling if you are, and reach out when you need to — leaning on others is okay.

- **Find community:** Look up local youth or community programs. You'll find a list across Greater Queensland on the Hi-Ground website. Whether it's joining an art group or simply having a safe space to hang out when things aren't great at home, community can make a huge difference.
- **Access free mental health care:** Professional support can be costly and overwhelming, but there are many free, confidential youth mental health services available. You'll find a list at the end of this booklet and a more extensive one on the Hi-Ground website. Remember, seeking help is a strength.
- **Give back:** Consider volunteering with a harm reduction organisation like Hi-Ground or your local AOD service. Many people find meaning, connection, and purpose through giving back.

Healing Isn't a Straight Line

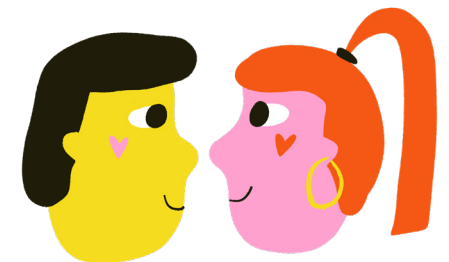
Healing doesn't mean never feeling bad or never using again. It means learning to bounce back, to ask for help, to treat yourself like someone worth caring for — because you are.

Some days will suck. Some will surprise you. That's normal.

You're not defined by your worst moment. You're more than that.

Life Tips for Tough Days

- Know what sets you off (your triggers)
- Have a "bad day" plan: safe people, safe places, go-to distractions
- Let yourself feel things — and let them pass
- Cry if you need to. Laugh if you can. Rest when you're done.



DIFFERENT BRAINS & BODIES = DIFFERENT EFFECTS

Drugs can affect everyone very differently — and that's totally normal. How you experience a substance depends on a mix of factors like your height, weight, metabolism, genetics, hormones, and whether your brain is neurodivergent (ADHD, autism, etc.) or not.

Gender isn't the full story, but hormones play a big role too. Things like:

- Birth control
- Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT)
- Steroids
- Other prescription meds

Can all change how a drug affects you or how long it stays in your system.

Pro tip: Get info that's right for your body and brain. A non-judgy doctor or youth clinic can help, and there are science-based resources that explain how different drugs affect neurotransmitters (the chemicals that help your brain communicate). Here's a basic explanation of it below.



UNDERSTANDING NEUROTRANSMITTERS + DRUGS

How drugs change your brain's messaging system

Your brain uses neurotransmitters — tiny chemical messengers — to send signals between brain cells. Different drugs affect different neurotransmitters, which is why they can make you feel energised, calm, connected, floaty, or completely off your head.

Key Neurotransmitters & What They Do

Neurotransmitter	What It Does	Drugs That Affect It
Dopamine	Pleasure, reward, motivation	Cocaine, meth, MDMA, nicotine
Serotonin	Mood, sleep, emotion, body temp	MDMA, LSD, mushrooms, antidepressants (SSRIs)
GABA	Calming, anxiety reduction	Alcohol, benzos (Valium/Xanax), GHB
Glutamate	Learning, memory, stimulation	Ketamine, alcohol (disrupts it)
Norepinephrine	Alertness, energy, fight-or-flight	Stimulants (speed, dexies), MDMA
Endorphins	Pain relief, euphoria	Heroin, morphine, other opioids
Acetylcholine	Focus, memory, muscle control	Nicotine, some hallucinogens (e.g. Datura decreases mental function)

Why This Matters

Too much or too little of these chemicals — from drug use or medication — can mess with:

- Your mood (e.g. anxiety, depression, paranoia)
- Your ability to think clearly or focus
- Your mental health over time
- Your sleep and energy

THE STRUCTURES OF NEUROTRANSMITTERS

STRUCTURE KEY: ● Carbon atom ○ Hydrogen atom ⊕ Oxygen atom ⊖ Nitrogen atom Ⓡ Rest of molecule

ADRENALINE Fight or flight neurotransmitter Produced in stressful or exciting situations. Increases heart rate & blood flow, leading to a physical boost & heightened awareness.	NORADRENALINE Concentration neurotransmitter Affects attention & responding actions in the brain, & involved in fight or flight response. Contracts blood vessels, increasing blood flow.	DOPAMINE Pleasure neurotransmitter Feelings of pleasure, and also addiction, movement, and motivation. People repeat behaviours that lead to dopamine release.	SEROTONIN Mood neurotransmitter Contributes to well-being & happiness; helps sleep cycle & digestive system regulation. Affected by exercise & light exposure.
GABA Calming neurotransmitter Calms firing nerves in CNS. High levels improve focus; low levels cause anxiety. Also contributes to motor control & vision.	ACETYLCHOLINE Learning neurotransmitter Involved in thought, learning, & memory. Activates muscle action in the body. Also associated with attention & awakening.	GLUTAMATE Memory neurotransmitter Most common brain neurotransmitter. Involved in learning & memory, regulates development & creation of nerve contacts.	ENDORPHINS Euphoria neurotransmitters Released during exercise, excitement, & sex, producing well-being & euphoria, reducing pain. Biologically active section shown.

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TAKING CARE OF *Your Mental Health*

Why Valium & Alcohol Can Make Anxiety Worse (Even If They Feel Good at First)

Drugs like Valium, Xanax, alcohol, and GHB work by boosting GABA, a chemical in your brain that helps you feel calm and switch off stress. That's why they can feel good — at first.

But here's the catch: Your brain adjusts to the extra GABA. If you use these substances often, your brain may make less natural GABA, or become less sensitive to it. This means:

- You might feel more anxious, jumpy, or panicked when you're not using
- Over time, you need more of the substance just to feel normal
- Coming down or withdrawing can feel way worse — with anxiety, insomnia, or even panic attacks

Drugs that make you feel happy or calm your brain in the short term, but long-term or regular use can mess with your natural ability to manage stress — making anxiety or depression harder to deal with overall.

Harm Reduction Tips

- Learn what neurotransmitters a drug affects — this helps you understand the risks, especially when mixing.
- Give your brain time to recover between uses — balance is key.
- If you're on prescription meds, talk to a doctor before mixing.

Your mental health matters and it deserves your attention. Self-care isn't just a buzzword — it's about finding what genuinely helps you feel grounded and well.

Knowing your triggers—those things that set off stress, anxiety, or the urge to use substances—gives you the power to respond in healthier ways. Having a plan in place when things get tough is like having your own safety net. Think of it as your personal life-hack guide. And remember, it's okay to ask for help. You don't have to go through this alone.

Mental health isn't a straight path—it has twists, turns, and sometimes epic fails. That's normal. What's important is learning from those moments and continuing to move forward. Resilience isn't about never struggling—it's about bouncing back stronger each time.

Self-care doesn't have to be fancy:

- Trashy TV?
- A long walk?
- Journalling or music?
- Spending time outdoors
- Talking, texting or chatting online with someone who gets it (and is safe)?

If you ever feel overwhelmed, reach out. You don't have to carry it all alone.

Key Takeaways

You deserve:

- Safety
- Support
- Space to heal
- Kindness

You're not defined by your worst days or your hardest struggles. There are people who want to help you navigate life's challenges and celebrate your victories. You're stronger than you think, and you have the power to build a future that feels right for you. And remember—if all else fails, there's always funny videos on the internet to lift your mood.

WARNING! THE CHART IS ONLY A REFERENCE GUIDE, LEARN MORE AND REMAIN CAUTIOUS!

LSD	DMT	DOx	NBOlMe	2C-x	2C-T-x	5-MeO-x	Ketamine	MXE	DXM	Nitrous oxide	Amphetamines	MDMA	Cocaine	a-PVP*	4-MMC*	% GHB/GBL	Opioids	Tramadol	Benzodiazepines	MAOI	SSRI
LSD	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑
Mushrooms	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑
DMT	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑
Mescaline	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑
DOx	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑
NBOlMe	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑
2C-x	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑
2C-T-x	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑
5-MeO-xT	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑
Cannabis	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑
Ketamine	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑
MXE	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑
DXM	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑
Nitrous oxide	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑
Amphetamines	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑
MDMA	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑
Cocaine	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑
a-PVP*	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑
4-MMC*	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑
Caffeine	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑
Alcohol	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑
GBH/GBL	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑
Opioids	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑
Tramadol	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑
Benzodiazepines	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑
MAOI	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑
SSRI	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑

Added by SIN: *a-PVP analogs: all PVP, PHP, PPP, pentadron, hexadron, hexan

*a-PVP analogs: all PVP, PHP, PPP, pentadron

DRUG COMBOS & WHAT NOT TO MIX

Mixing drugs (polysubstance use) is common—but some combos are way more dangerous than others.

Your body can only handle so much before things go wrong fast. Here are the mixes that young people told us they use—and what you need to know to stay safe.

Alcohol + Cannabis

Biggest risk: Greening out → Nausea, dizziness, anxiety, vomiting.

Alcohol can increase how much THC your body absorbs because alcohol can increase blood flow, which may allow for greater absorption of THC into the bloodstream when smoking. This can make the effects of cannabis feel way stronger — and not in a good way. This combo can hit hard, especially if you drink before you smoke.

What to do instead:

If you're using both, go slow and consider using cannabis before drinking — not after. Stick with people you trust and give your body time to adjust between substances.

Alcohol + Ketamine

Biggest risk: Blackouts, injury, lots of vomiting, vomiting while unconscious or unable to move → Can be dangerous or fatal.

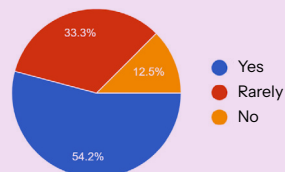
Both substances impair coordination and memory. You might fall, choke on your vomit, or lose consciousness without realising it — and alcohol makes it harder to stay aware or safe.

What to do instead:

If you're using ketamine, skip the drinks. Make sure you're in a safe place, with trusted people, and have someone who can look out for you.

Head to our lived experience story on Ketamine & Alcohol on page 20

Do you regularly combine substances?



24 Responses



Alcohol + Benzos (Xanax, Valium, etc.)

Biggest risk: Respiratory depression → You can stop breathing in your sleep.

Both slow your body down. Together? It can shut down your system completely.

Never mix alcohol with sleeping pills or anxiety meds.

Alcohol + Opiates (Codeine, Oxy, Heroin, etc.)

Biggest risk: Respiratory depression or Overdose → Often fatal without naloxone.

People don't feel how sedated they are. You could fall asleep and not wake up.

What to do instead:

If you've taken opiates, skip the drinks.

Stimulants + Downers (e.g. MDMA + GHB, or Coke + Xanax)

Biggest risk: Heart strain + unpredictable effects

One drug speeds you up, one slows you down—your body can't keep up. You may not know how high you really are, and it's easier to overdose without realising.

Stimulants + Psychedelics (e.g. Dexies + LSD, Coke + Mushrooms)

Biggest risk: Overstimulation → Panic, overheating, heart strain.

This combo can feel mentally and physically intense. Stimulants speed up your body, while

psychedelics bend your perception. Together, they can cause anxiety, confusion, rapid heart rate, or intense trips that are harder to come down from.

What to do instead:

Best to avoid this combination however if you do, use low doses of both, stay cool and hydrated, and avoid chaotic environments. Have a trusted person around and a calm space to return to.

MDMA + SSRIs (e.g. sertraline, fluoxetine, escitalopram)

Biggest risk: Serotonin syndrome → Can cause high fever, seizures, or death in rare cases.

SSRIs and MDMA both affect serotonin levels. Combining them can overload your brain's serotonin system, and reduce MDMA's effects — which might tempt redosing, increasing the risk even more.

What to do instead:

If you're on SSRIs, avoid MDMA. Talk to a doctor before stopping any meds — suddenly quitting SSRIs can be dangerous too.

MDMA + More MDMA

Biggest risk: Serotonin syndrome → High temp, seizures, even death.

MDMA takes a while to kick in. People redose thinking it didn't work. That can overload your brain's serotonin system.

What to do instead:

Wait at least 2 hours before considering more. Better yet—don't redose.

Mixing unknowns (e.g. pills from a friend, mystery powders)

Biggest risk: You don't know what's in it. Could be uppers, downers, psychedelics. In other words, it could be anything.

"I thought it was just MDMA... but I ended up in hospital." — Survey respondent

Always test your substances if you can.

Using Cannabis to 'end' a psychedelic experience

Biggest risk: You will intensify and prolong the trip

Cannabis can 'reactivate' or intensify a psychedelic experience. If you are having a bad trip or want an experience to end it is important not to try and smoke cannabis to come down as this can end up having the opposite effect. In worst cases leading to an acute psychosis. Find a safe space and someone you trust and remain calm. It will end and you will be ok.



WHAT YOU CAN DO

- Use mixing guides (like the "TripSit combo chart")
- Test your drugs: Use reagent kits (you can buy them online from Drug Policy Australia) or access free testing services (The Loop Australia, Pill Testing Australia, CANTest and CheQpoint).
- Have a sober friend around if you're combining anything
- Carry naloxone if opioids are involved

Follow this QR code to find out where you can access naloxone:



DOWN THE

Lived Experience Story

It was 7pm, my friends and I had just arrived at the party. I thought I'd have a quick smoke before going inside. Covid hasn't helped with my initial social anxiety, especially arriving to a big party. I thought I'd slowly ease myself into space.

While chatting to a bunch of friends a bump of K was offered around. I'd been drinking all afternoon so I really should have known better. I've witnessed the mix of too much alcohol with K a few times, it never ends up fun. But, when you've had too much alcohol your common sense often flies out the window...so I excitedly took up the offer. Stupidly my next thought was 'this party is about to be so much fun', boy was I wrong haaa!

Within a few minutes I was pretty confused, luckily found a friend who was sitting down having a ciggie so I joined them. Sitting down seemed like a really good idea because my head was starting to spin.

Next thing I know I'm really not feeling too well, I have no idea what's up or down so my mate helps me walk across the road to some bushes. The bushes became my home for the next hour (but felt like an eternity). Vomiting my guts up, my head was spinning so much I held onto a low set brick fence to try ground myself.

I was suddenly in not a good headspace. I was thinking about my relationship and all the negative things going on in my life. With every negative thought, I'd have to purge it out. I just wanted it to stop, but the negativity just kept coming.

Luckily my mate turned out to be a great trip sitter and really comforted me through the whole thing and kept super calm which helped me process everything going on. They helped talk me through a bunch of stuff that came to the surface, like my relationship issues, life stresses, and every time I needed to vomit they just kept repeating, 'it's all good, maybe it's best to just get it all out'.

At some point I needed to pee but I had no idea where I was, and was so disorientated, like I was on a little boat in rough seas. I found a big tree that was in the dark, my friend kept a look out so I remained in privacy and somehow managed to get through that moment okay haaa...

Everything just felt so wobbly, time completely distorted, and I was surprised at how dark mentally I got. But it also made me realise I was holding on to a lot and deep down it was affecting my mental health. By the time I finally stopped vomiting and was able to stand, I wasn't in much of a party mood. I'd just returned from hell and back and purged my way through the journey.

After over an hour of arriving at the party I finally entered inside. Everyone was having a great time, my friends were all happy to see me and wondering where the hell I'd disappeared to.

I felt really bummed that now I wasn't in the mood to dance and just didn't feel like a very happy camper. I was also extremely aware of how unhappy I was in my relationship and lots of other aspects of my life.

I found a spot with a chair and sat my gloomy ass down and sipped on some water. By this stage the embarrassment kicked in, although none of my friends were judging me, I was judging myself pretty hard! I'd promised myself years ago to never accept a bump of K, again (the mistake I made when I tried K for the first time).

The party only lasted another hour and then it was all done... I was so disappointed I blundered my night and I was sooo keen earlier to dance and let my hair down. Dancing is normally my way of shifting negative feelings and processing emotion... it's way more fun that way.



It was such a weird headspace I was in and it kinda hung around till the next day. The only positive things to come out of this experience was:

- a) discovering I've got mates who are really incredible friends and trip sitters.
- b) I was made aware and fully conscious of things in my life that were making me feel unhappy and that I needed to make changes.
- c) Ended a toxic relationship

My word of advice. NEVER DO K IF YOU'RE DRUNK. A dark puking trip down the k hole ain't fun, and spending a night in some random bushes exorcising your inner demons sucks.

Just stick to one or the other.



Cannabis is an annual, flowering herb. Cannabis plants produce a group of chemicals called cannabinoids, which produce mental and physical effects when consumed. In Australia, it is understood as a prescribed medicinal treatment, accessible through your GP.

How it's taken:

Cannabis is most commonly smoked but can also be vaporised, eaten, infused into food and beverages, tinctures, topicals, patches and ingesting raw cannabis.

Duration of effects

Inhaling (smoking or vaping)

Total Duration	1hr – 6hrs
Onset	0-10 mins
Peak	15-30 mins
Coming Down	1hr – 2.5hrs
After Effects	6hrs – 24hrs

Ingesting (eating or drinking)

Total Duration	6hrs – 12 hrs
Onset	30 mins – 2hrs
Peak	30 mins – 4hrs
Coming Down	4hrs – 8hrs
After Effects	12hrs – 24hrs

COMPOUND: THE MAIN ACTIVE COMPONENT IN CANNABIS IS DELTA-9- TETRAHYDROCANNABINOL (THC). ONE OF THE OTHER KEY COMPONENTS IS CANNABIDIOL (CBD).

OTHER NAMES: BUD, CHOOF, CONES, DOPE, GANJA, GRASS, GREEN, MARIJUANA, WEED, YARNDI

Half-life

Even though the apparent effects of the drug wear off after a few hours the half life for THC/ CBD can be far longer. This builds up over time and regular cannabis users may have the drug and its metabolites in their system for days and even weeks after stopping.

Drug Tests & Driving

Driving

Police test for THC in roadside drug tests. QLD laws have a zero-tolerance for THC (even with medical prescriptions); any detectable THC = illegal.

Detection

THC can stay in system for 12-48+ hours

Penalties

1-month minimum disqualification; fines apply

Work licences

Rarely granted for “presence of THC” detections unless strict conditions are met. If caught under the influence, you cannot obtain a work licence.

Workplace

Positive tests can result in serious employment consequences

RISKS OF USING CANNABIS

UNDER THE AGE OF 25

Cannabis (weed, marijuana, pot, yarrdi) is one of the most commonly used substances among young people. While many use it to relax, socialise, or manage anxiety, using cannabis before the brain has fully developed (around age 25) can come with specific risks.

Why Under 25 Matters

Your brain is still developing until around age 25 — especially the parts responsible for:

- Memory and learning
- Decision-making
- Impulse control
- Emotional regulation

Cannabis can interfere with these critical processes, especially with frequent or heavy use.

Key Risks of Early and Ongoing Cannabis Use

Cognitive Impacts

- Worsened memory and attention
- Slower thinking or problem-solving
- Difficulties with motivation and focus (sometimes called "amotivational syndrome")
- Some effects may be long-lasting or not fully reversible with regular, long-term use starting in adolescence.

Mental Health

- Increased risk of anxiety or depression
- Higher risk of developing psychosis (especially if you have a family history of mental illness)
- Cannabis can bring on or worsen paranoia and hallucinations, particularly with strong strains (high-THC content)

Dependence & Withdrawal

- Around 1 in 6 people who start using cannabis as teens can develop a dependency on Cannabis
- "My least favourite thing is my dependance now on cannabis for sleep" – Male, 24
- Stopping after regular use can cause withdrawal symptoms:
- Irritability
- Sleep issues
- Anxiety
- Cravings

Delayed Life Goals

Regular cannabis use in youth has been linked to:

- Lower academic achievement
- Higher school dropout rates
- Reduced work performance or early job loss

Harm Reduction for Cannabis Use

If you choose to use:

- Delay first use until you're older — the later, the safer
- Use less often — avoid daily or heavy use
- Choose lower THC or balanced THC:CBD products
- Avoid smoking — consider vaping flower or using edibles (but dose carefully!)
- Don't mix with alcohol or other drugs
- Avoid driving for at least 6 hours after use



Real Talk

- "My least favourite thing about weed is the possible carcinogenic properties as a result of its combustion." – Male, 20
- "I get paranoid sometimes" – Transgender Male, 15
- "My favourite thing is weed can sometimes help calm the internal storm inside me, however the negative is the cloudiness, lack of motivation and paranoia" – Female, 24

Using cannabis as a young person doesn't automatically mean you'll face harm — but the earlier and more often you use, and depending how you use it, the greater the risks. Knowing the facts helps you stay in control of your decisions and health.



ALCOHOL

HARM REDUCTION


Alcohol is the most widely used psychoactive drug in Australia. Given its legal status, it is widely accepted and readily available. The intoxicating ingredient, ethanol, is found in beer, wine and spirits and is produced by fermenting sugars, yeasts and starches. Alcohol is a depressant that acts on the central nervous system (CNS) slowing down breathing and heart rate making your body and mind more relaxed.

Alcohol is used by young people, often as part of socialising, partying, or dealing with stress. But drinking before your body and brain have fully developed (usually around age 25) can come with specific short-term and long-term risks.

How it's taken

Swallowed.

Duration of effects



Total duration	1.5–3 hrs
Onset	15–30 mins
Peak	15–90 mins
Coming down	45–60 mins
Hangover/after effects	1–36 hrs

Half life:

Alcohol does not have a 'half life' like other drugs and passes rapidly through your system. Alcohol is metabolised at a constant rate, but some people may feel the effects of alcohol for longer amounts of time (In general terms, your body metabolises a standard drink in 60–90 minutes). After excessive alcohol consumption you may find that your BAC (blood alcohol concentration) is still over the legal limit several hours after you have ceased drinking.

Drug Tests

Alcohol is detectable by roadside breath test, which measures the amount of alcohol in your breath. A breath test reading of 0.05 or higher is considered drink driving for fully licenced drivers in Australia (different limits apply for other licence types e.g. probationary or heavy vehicle).

Short-Term Risks

Accidents & Injuries

- Higher risk of falls, car crashes, drownings, and burns
- Alcohol is involved in 1 in 4 youth hospitalisations related to injury

Poor Decision-Making

- Increased impulsivity and risk-taking (e.g., unsafe sex, fights)
- Higher risk of legal trouble, especially with underage drinking

Alcohol Poisoning

- Drinking large amounts quickly (binge drinking) can shut down parts of the brain that control breathing, heart rate, and body temperature
- Signs include vomiting, unconsciousness, or slow/irregular breathing — this can be fatal

What Young People Said (from the survey)

- "Alcohol makes it easier to be social but also easier to make dumb choices."
- "Mixing alcohol with other stuff made me sick really fast."

Long-Term Risks (Especially With Regular Use)

Brain Development

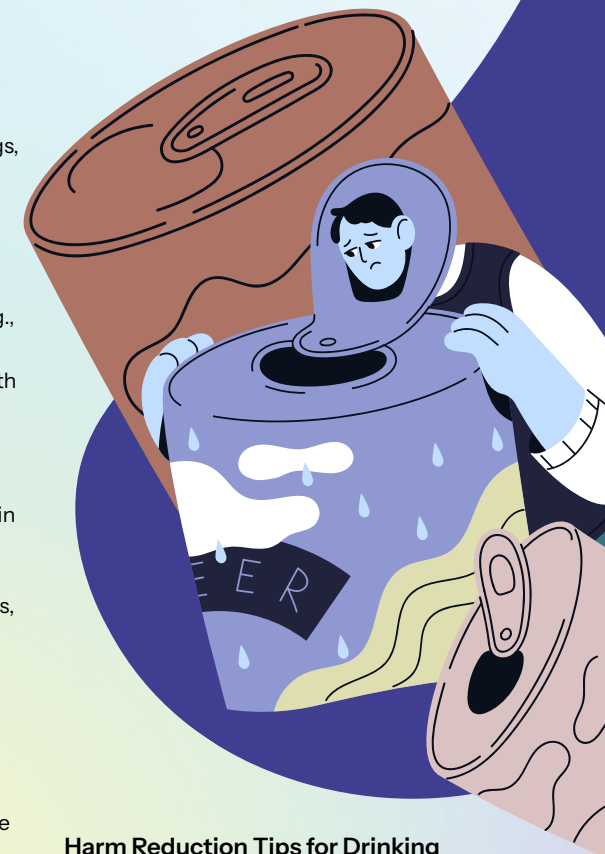
- Drinking before 25 can interfere with memory, learning, and emotional control
- Can impact your ability to focus, study, and make decisions

Mental Health

- Can increase feelings of depression or anxiety, especially the next day
- Some use alcohol to manage stress or trauma, which can lead to dependence

Dependency & Tolerance

- Your body builds tolerance over time, needing more alcohol for the same effect
- Early regular use increases risk of alcohol dependence in adulthood



Harm Reduction Tips for Drinking

- If you choose to drink:
- Eat before and during drinking
- Drink water between alcoholic drinks
- Avoid mixing with other drugs (especially benzos, GHB, or stimulants)
- Set limits before you start
- Look out for your mates, and get help if someone passes out or vomits uncontrollably

Know When to Call It

- If someone:
- Can't wake up
- Has seizures
- Has slow or irregular breathing
- Has cold, clammy, or pale skin

Call emergency services 000 immediately — it could be alcohol poisoning

DRINK SPIKING

KNOW THE RISKS

Drink spiking means putting alcohol or drugs into someone's drink without their knowledge. It's illegal in every state, including Queensland — even as a “prank.”

Why People Spike Drinks

- To steal, harm, or sexually assault
- To mess with someone for a laugh (still a crime)

Drugs like GHB, benzos, or extra alcohol are commonly used. These can make someone feel drowsy, confused, pass out, or lose memory.

Warning Signs

You may not be able to smell or taste a spiked drink.

Symptoms can include:

- Feeling way more drunk than expected
- Dizziness, confusion, nausea
- Slurred speech or blackouts
- Trouble breathing or passing out

How to Reduce the Risk

- Stick with trusted friends and look out for each other
- Buy and watch your own drinks being made
- Avoid accepting open drinks from strangers
- Don't leave drinks unattended
- Use screw-top bottles you can take with you

If You Suspect Spiking

- Tell a friend, staff member or security
- Stay with the person and keep them safe
- Call 000 if they pass out or are in danger
- Contact the police and a sexual assault service

If Assault Was Involved

You are not to blame. Ever. **Support is available whether you report or not.**

1800 RESPECT (1800 737 732) – 24/7 free support

DirectLine 1800 888 236 – Alcohol & drug counselling

Hospital emergency departments

Police – Call 000 or visit a local station

NICOTINE & VAPING

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

Not here to judge — just to help you stay informed and safer.



What's the Deal with Vaping?

Vapes (e-cigarettes) are super common among young people. Some use them socially, to reduce stress, or to quit smoking. But many vapes — especially ones bought online or from mates — contain nicotine, even if they say they don't.

"I started just for fun, but now I get cranky if I don't use it."

Risks of Vaping & Nicotine for Young People

Nicotine = Addictive

- It rewires your brain to crave it regularly, especially if you start young
- You might feel irritable, anxious, or distracted when you can't vape

Impacts on the Teen Brain

- Your brain's still developing until ~25
- Nicotine can affect memory, mood, attention, and impulse control

Lung Health

- Vapes can contain toxic chemicals, metals, and flavourings linked to lung damage
- Long-term effects? Still being studied — but cases of serious illness have been reported

It Gets Expensive

- Daily use adds up fast — \$10–40 a week is common

Real Talk from Young People

"It helped me chill at first, but now I vape constantly and feel worse without it."

"I didn't even realise how much nicotine was in mine."



Harm Reduction Tips for Vaping

Not everyone wants to quit right away — and that's okay. Here's how to reduce harm if you're vaping:

- Know what's in it: Avoid mystery vapes or ones from dodgy sites
- Don't share vapes — it spreads germs and infections
- Take breaks — even a few vape-free hours or days helps
- Stay hydrated — vaping dries out your mouth/lungs
- Avoid mixing with other drugs — especially downers like benzos or alcohol
- Notice triggers — stress, boredom, social settings? Knowing helps

Thinking About Cutting Back or Quitting?

Here are some tools that can help:

- Set limits (e.g. only vaping in certain places or times)
- Try nicotine-free options (to reduce dependence)
- Use a quit app (like MyQuitBuddy)
- Talk to someone who gets it — no judgement, just support
- You can also call Quitline (13 78 48) — it's free and confidential



MDMA

(Ecstasy, Molly, Pingas) — Stay Safer

MDMA can make you feel euphoric, connected, and energised — but it also comes with serious risks, especially if mixed, overheated, or taken in high doses. Know your body, your limits, and your options.

What is MDMA?

MDMA (3,4-methylenedioxymethamphetamine) the intended active ingredient of ecstasy, is a psychedelic stimulant. It belongs to a family of drugs called entactogens/empathogens, which means “touching within.” It boosts serotonin, dopamine, and oxytocin — the “feel-good” chemicals. It’s found in forms such as:

- Pills
- Caps
- Powder
- Crystals

How it’s taken

Most commonly swallowed

Duration of effects

Total duration	4-6 hrs
Onset	20-90 mins
Peak	2-3 hrs
Coming down	1-2 hrs
Hangover/after-effects	2-72+ hrs

Half life

Even though the effects of the drug may wear off after 5 hours, the drug is still active in your system for 10 hours after you’ve taken it. It is important to remember this if planning on taking other substances.

Drug Tests

Roadside Police

MDMA IS tested for in roadside drug tests and is detectable in saliva tests for 24 to 72 hours after use.

Risks to Know

- Overheating (especially in hot environments while dancing)
- Dehydration or water overload
- High blood pressure or heart strain
- Mood crashes for days after (comedown)
- Mixing = more risk (esp. with alcohol, stimulants, SSRIs)
- Fake or strong pills (some contain PMA or meth instead of MDMA)

Harm Reduction Tips

Test Your Stuff

- Use reagent kits (Mandelin, Marquis) to check for dangerous substitutions
- Attend drug checking services at festivals if available (e.g. The Loop or Pill Testing Australia)

“TEST YOUR DRUGS!!! CARRY NALOXONE!!!! I live by this.” — Survey respondent

Start Low, Go Slow

- 1/4 or 1/2 pill to start
- Wait at least 1.5–2 hours before considering more
- Don’t double-drop — it doesn’t make the high better, just more dangerous

Hydration: Not Too Much

- Sip small amounts of water (1 cup per hour)
- Too much water too fast can cause hyponatremia (dangerous brain swelling)

Take Cool-Down Breaks

- Rest in chill-out areas
- Remove layers, fan yourself, use water spray
- Look after mates who are sweating, dizzy or acting “off”

Protect Your Brain

- Avoid regular use — spacing it out gives your brain time to recover. Ideally the 3 month rule is recommended, or at the very least 1–2 months between uses, but ideally 3 months.
- If you take ecstasy on a regular basis, you may be releasing and depleting your serotonin before it has a chance to fully replenish itself. This means you will be operating on lower-than-normal serotonin levels and this can lead to or worsen existing depression symptoms
- Sleep and eat well before and after using
- Avoid if on SSRIs or MAOIs (risk of serotonin syndrome)

Signs of Trouble

- Get help fast if someone:
- Is overheating, dizzy or confused
- Stops sweating but feels hot
- Collapses, seizes, or won’t wake up
- Is panicking or paranoid

Call 000 — you won’t get in trouble for helping a mate in danger.

Real Talk

- “Come downs, the next day, feeling shit if I have to go to work and haven’t rested.” – Female, 24
- “Not having friends to do it with me anymore.” – Male, 20
- “MDMA gives me the euphoria, reduces my social anxiety, allows me to dance and let my inhibitions go.” – Male, 21

Aftercare = Self-Care

- Rest and hydrate
- Eat something nourishing. If you’re finding it hard to eat, try a smoothie or a soup!
- Don’t plan anything big the next day
- If the comedown hits hard, talk to someone you trust
- Try journalling, music, sunlight, favourite movie or something comforting



WHAT TO DO IF YOUR FRIEND IS OVERHEATING

It can happen fast — here's how to help.

Why It Happens

Overheating can be caused by:

- MDMA, meth, coke, or other uppers
- Dancing for hours with no breaks
- Hot crowded venues or festivals
- Not drinking water — or drinking too much too fast
- Wearing heavy or tight clothing

Overheating (also called hyperthermia) can lead to seizures, unconsciousness, or even death if not treated quickly.

Signs Someone's Overheating

Look out for:

- Hot, flushed skin
- Fast heartbeat
- Confusion, agitation, or panic
- Dizziness or fainting
- Nausea or vomiting
- Shaking or muscle cramps
- They feel "out of it" or stop making sense
- They say they're too hot but don't cool down

"My mate said he was 'just hot,' but he started talking nonsense and collapsed. I wish we'd acted sooner."

What to Do — Step by Step

1) Get them out of the heat

- Move to shade, a cool tent, or air conditioning
- If inside, get them near a fan or open window

2) Cool them down

- Remove hats, jackets, or extra layers
- Wet their skin with cool water (not ice-cold)
- Use a fan or wave something to move air
- Put ice packs or cold water bottles on their neck, armpits, and groin

3) Give small sips of water

- If they're conscious, let them sip slowly
- Don't force water if they're vomiting or out of it
- Avoid energy drinks or more alcohol

4) Stay with them and stay calm

- Reassure them
- Don't let them wander off or lie somewhere alone

5) Call 000 if:

- They're confused, fainting, or won't wake up
- They're overheating badly and not improving
- You're not sure what they've taken

You won't get in trouble for calling 000. They just want to save a life.

Harm Reduction Tips to Prevent Overheating

- Take breaks from dancing
- Sip water regularly (not too much — ~1 cup per hour)
- Wear light, breathable clothes
- Don't mix MDMA with other stimulants
- Use chill-out zones at festivals — they're there for a reason
- Stick with mates who'll look out for you

NITROUS OXIDE N2O

HARM REDUCTION & DANGERS

Nitrous oxide (also known as nangs, whippets, or laughing gas) is commonly used by young people for its short, euphoric effects. While often seen as low-risk in the short term, repeated and long-term use can cause serious health issues.

Health Risks of Frequent or Heavy Use Vitamin B12 Depletion & Nerve Damage

Nitrous oxide inactivates vitamin B12, a nutrient vital for the nervous system. Repeated use can cause:

- Numbness and tingling in hands and feet
- Muscle weakness
- Difficulty walking or balancing (can mimic MS-like symptoms)
- Long-term nerve damage (may not be fully reversible)

Breathing Risks

Inhaling directly from a canister or in enclosed spaces can cut off oxygen, leading to:

- Fainting or blackouts
- Risk of asphyxiation (especially if using many in quick succession)

Heart and Blood Issues

B12 deficiency also affects red blood cell production, increasing the risk of:

- Anaemia (feeling tired, pale, weak)
- Elevated homocysteine levels, which may harm cardiovascular health

Mental Health & Cognitive Effects

Regular use has been linked to:

- Memory issues
- Confusion
- Mood changes (depression or anxiety)
- Some users experience psychological dependence — craving the escape or "rush" it provides

Risk of Explosions or Cold Burns

Dispensers and canisters are under pressure. Misuse can cause:

- Facial burns (from freezing gas)
- Injuries from exploding canisters

Harm Reduction Tips

- Limit use — occasional use is less risky than frequent or heavy use
- Never inhale from a canister directly — always use a balloon
- Use in a safe, ventilated environment
- Supplement with B12 and have long/regular breaks (especially if using regularly — but talk to a doctor first)

Avoid mixing with alcohol or other depressants (can increase risk of passing out or injury)

Nitrous oxide might seem harmless, but it can cause permanent damage if misused regularly. Understanding the risks helps you make safer choices.

PSILO CYBIN

(MAGIC MUSHROOMS) HARM REDUCTION

Stay Grounded, Stay Safe

COMPOUND: PSILOCYBIN (4-PHOSPHORYLOXY-N,N-DIMETHYLTRYPTAMINE)

OTHER NAMES: BLUE MEANIES, FOOD OF THE GODS, FUNGUYS, GOLD TOPS, GOLDIES, LIBERTY CAPS, MAGIC MUSHROOMS, MUSHIES, SHROOMS

Psilocybin is a naturally occurring psychedelic prodrug compound produced by more than 200 species of mushrooms, collectively known as psilocybin mushrooms or more commonly-magic mushrooms. As a prodrug, psilocybin is quickly converted by the body to psilocin, which has mind-altering effects similar, in some aspects, to those of LSD, mescaline, and DMT. Nearly all of the psilocybin containing mushrooms are small brown mushrooms easily mistaken for any number of non-psychoactive, or poisonous mushrooms in the wild. This makes identifying true magic mushrooms not only difficult, but potentially hazardous and possibly lethal.

How it's taken

Swallowed

What Psilocybin Does

- Changes how you see, hear, and feel
- Can bring on strong emotions or spiritual thoughts
- Effects last 4–6 hours (but time can feel warped) The effects may linger until you have slept properly.
- Common effects: visuals, giggles, deep thinking, confusion, body waves, nausea
- Come-up in 30–60 mins (slower if eaten as food or tea)

Drug tests

Police: Standardised drug tests don't test for psilocybin however it is illegal to drive under the influence and any driver may be subject to a roadside behavioural impairment test. Wait at least 24 hours before driving.

Know What You're Taking

- Only use mushrooms you're 100% sure are psilocybin — some wild mushrooms are toxic and deadly!

Avoid mixing with:

- Alcohol (counteracts effect + more nausea)
- Stimulants (increases anxiety/paranoia)
- SSRIs/antidepressants (can dull effects)

Harm Reduction Tips:

- Dose Carefully
- Start low — especially if it's your first time
- Potency can vary greatly from one mushroom to the next so it is important to test the strength by starting with a small dose.
- Common recreational dose = 1–2 grams dried depending on body weight, tolerance, frequency of usage, and if you've eaten recently. Some people prefer taking less, known as a micro dose to feel only mild effects.
- Use a milligram scale to weigh your dose.
- Wait at least 2 hours before considering more
- If using tea or chocolate, know the dose

"You can always take more. You can't undo what you already had."

Trip With Trusted People

- Use with someone you trust and feel safe with
- Have a sober "trip sitter" if possible
- Avoid strangers or chaotic environments on your first trip

Set & Setting

- Be in a calm, comfortable place
- Avoid crowds, unfamiliar areas, or loud clubs
- Make a "safe space" with water, snacks, chill music, and blankets
- Good mindset = better trip — don't use if you're feeling unstable or deeply stressed

Long-Term Tips

- Psilocybin isn't addictive — but frequent use can lead to mental fatigue
- Take time to rest and integrate what you felt or learned
- If you had a challenging trip, talk to someone — don't bottle it up

Avoid Tripping if:

- You have a history of psychosis or bipolar disorder
- You're already in a mental health crisis
- You're using other substances at the same time
- You're somewhere unsafe or unfamiliar

Real Talk

"My best trips were with music, nature, and people I love."

"I didn't realise how emotional it would be. But I felt clearer after."

"Having a sitter saved me when things got too intense."



SO—YOUR FRIEND IS HAVING A **BAD** TRIP. WHAT DO *you* DO?

First, breathe. Seriously. Your calm energy is your most powerful tool right now. If they're panicking, paranoid, crying, or caught in a loop of scary thoughts, your job is to be the anchor in the storm.



Step 1: Reassure, Don't Reason

Trying to "logic" someone out of a bad trip usually doesn't work. Instead, offer simple, gentle reassurances like:

- "You're safe."
- "This will pass."
- "I'm here with you."

Keep your tone soft and grounded. You're not here to fix the trip. You're here to help them ride it out safely.

Step 3: Stay Close, But Not Clingy

Let them lead. If they want silence, give it. If they want to talk, listen—without analysing or judging. Just being a steady presence is often enough. If they ask hard questions like "Am I dying?" or "Is this forever?" you can gently remind them: "Nope, you're just tripping. This isn't permanent. You'll return to a normal state when it is over."

Step 2: Change the Scene

Sometimes a small shift makes a big difference. Dim the lights, put on calming music, open a window, offer a blanket. If they're okay to move, a change of space (like going outside or lying down in a quieter room) can be soothing.

Step 4: Avoid These Rookie Mistakes

- Don't tell them they're "being dramatic."
- Don't laugh at or dismiss their fears.
- Don't leave them alone, unless they explicitly ask and seem safe.
- Don't take photos or videos. EVER.



Bonus: Use Grounding Tools

Offer them something to hold (a textured object, cold water, etc.).

Encourage slow breathing. You can breathe with them.

Gently remind them of who and where they are if they get disoriented.

The truth is, a "bad trip" often isn't bad—it's just intense. With the right support, it can turn into something deeply meaningful. You don't have to have all the answers. Just be present, patient, and kind. That alone can make the difference.

Watch out for:

- Loss of consciousness
- Difficulty breathing
- Intense shaking
- Seizures
- Extreme risk-taking or attempts at self-harm.

SAFETY FIRST:

If things get truly out of control—like violent behaviour, loss of consciousness, or medical emergencies—don't hesitate to call for help. Never drive while high on psychedelics. Safety always comes first.

If someone has any concerning physical symptoms or experiences, or you feel they might be a harm to themselves or others, or you feel unsafe or things call an ambulance straight away by dialling triple zero (000).

Be safe and be kind.

POLICE POWERS

One third of our survey participants revealed they had experienced getting in trouble with the Police. More than half of them also said they felt like they had been stigmatised by the Police.

"Legal navigation information is really hard to find, like what the laws are surrounding drugs and police. I count it as harm reduction and it's really hard to get info that makes sense."

- Non-binary, 22

So here's a quick guide for young people based on the Caxton Legal Centre's "Police Powers — Your Rights" guide (QLD law, 2018):

IMPORTANT THINGS TO REMEMBER:

If you are under 18 years of age — the police MUST NOT formally question you unless your parents, a guardian or an independent person is present during questioning.

If you are an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander person — you have the right to speak privately with a support person before being interviewed and have that support person present while being interviewed.

If you have a disability that impacts your capacity to understand police questions and communicate — you have the right to speak privately with a support person before being interviewed and have that support person present while being interviewed.

If Police Stop You

- You must give your name and address
- But you don't have to answer other questions — this is your right to remain silent.

If you're under 18, tell them your age and ask for a support person (parent, lawyer, or trusted adult).

Never agree to a formal interview without legal support.

- You can ask:
- "Am I under arrest?"
- "Am I free to go?"
- "Why are you asking me this?"



If Police Want to Search You

Police can search you without a warrant if they reasonably suspect you have:

- Illegal drugs or drug tools (e.g. bongs, pipes)
- Weapons
- Stolen goods
- Evidence of a serious crime

You can say:

"I do not consent to this search."

(But don't resist physically — that can lead to charges.)

The police must follow certain rules when they search you, including:

- Respecting your dignity
- Tell you their name and station
- Tell you the reason for the search
- Ensuring any personal search only causes minimal embarrassment
- Limiting any public search to a frisk search, if possible
- Conducting any more thorough search away from public view, if possible
- Having a police officer of the same sex carry out the search, unless an immediate search is required

Strip Searches must be:

- Done in private
- By an officer of the same gender
- Only if there is serious reason (e.g. searching for drugs or weapons)

Phones/laptops:

Police can't search your device without a warrant or your permission — but they can seize it and later apply to access it.

If You're Arrested for Drugs

Police can arrest you if they:

- Believe you committed a drug offence
- Need to stop you from hiding or destroying evidence
- Want to ensure you show up in court

You have the right to:

- Call a lawyer
- Speak with a support person
- Be told why you are being arrested

Drug Testing (e.g. driving)

- Police can stop you for roadside drug or alcohol testing
- If you test positive, they may arrest you and take you to the station for more testing
- You can refuse other questions, but not the test itself

If Police Want to Search Your Home

Police need a warrant to enter your home — unless:

- You let them in
- They believe someone is in danger
- They're arresting someone inside

Tip: Say clearly if you do not consent to a search.

If You're at a Party

If police think a party is out of control (e.g. drugs, violence, trespassing):

- They can shut it down
- Fine the organiser
- Arrest people causing harm

If you're not doing anything illegal, you can still be asked to "move on" — this is a legal order, and disobeying can result in fines or arrest.



What to Do If It Goes Bad

If you feel your rights were violated:

- Stay calm — don't fight or argue with police
- Record details — time, names, what was said
- Contact a lawyer or community legal centre
- Make a complaint later (you don't have to do it on the spot)

Big Don'ts

- Don't lie to police (e.g. fake name)
- Don't run or resist — it can lead to more charges
- Don't say anything about drugs unless you've spoken to a lawyer

What to Do If You're Caught with Drugs

If you're stopped or searched by police and they find drugs on you, what you do next matters. Stay calm, know your rights, and protect yourself.

Stay Calm & Respectful

- Do not argue, run, or resist — that can lead to more serious charges.
- Stay polite, even if you're scared or upset.

You can say:

- "I do not wish to answer any questions without legal advice."

What Police Can Do

- If police reasonably believe you possess illegal drugs, they can:
- Search your bags, pockets, car or person (even strip search in some cases)
- Seize any substances or paraphernalia (pipes, bongs, pills)
- Arrest you or issue a notice to appear in court

What You Don't Have to Do

You do not have to answer questions about:

- Where the drugs came from
- Who you were with
- What you were planning to do with them

It's safest to stay silent until you get legal advice.

Ask to Speak to a Lawyer

You have the right to:

- Call a lawyer
- Have a support person with you (if under 18)
- Be told why you are being arrested

You can say:

- "I want to call a lawyer before answering any questions."

What Happens Next?

If it's a small amount (personal use):

- Police might issue a warning, a drug diversion, or a notice to appear in court (depends on state and situation)
- First-time or low-level offences may be diverted into education or counselling instead of a conviction
- For more information on drug diversion in Queensland check out our resource online <https://hi-ground.org/hi-ground-resources/police-drug-diversion/>

If it's a larger amount, or if you're charged with:

- Possession
- Supply/intent to distribute
- Trafficking

...you will likely go to court. Penalties can be serious, especially if there's evidence you were selling or supplying.

Your Rights Matter

- Don't sign anything you don't understand
- Ask: "Am I under arrest, or am I free to leave?"
- Keep a record of what happened (time, names, what was said)

If You Feel Your Rights Were Violated

After the situation:

- Write down exactly what happened
- Get legal advice
- Make a complaint if you feel mistreated (e.g. to the Police Ombudsman or Legal Aid)



Helpful Contacts (QLD)

Legal Aid Queensland
1300 651 188

Youth Advocacy Centre
(07) 3356 1002

Caxton Legal Centre
(07) 3214 6333

OVERDOSE

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

It's not about fear — it's about knowing how to keep yourself and your mates safe.

What Is an Overdose?

An overdose happens when someone takes too much of a drug — or a combo of drugs — and their body can't cope. It can be accidental. It can happen the first time. It can happen to anyone.

Drugs That Can Cause Overdose

Depressants

(Slow your body down — breathing, heart rate, consciousness)

- Alcohol
- Benzos (e.g. Xanax, Valium)
- Opioids (e.g. heroin, codeine, oxy, fentanyl)
- GHB

Overdoses from depressants are the most dangerous — especially when mixed.

Stimulants

(Speed up your body — heart rate, blood pressure, temperature)

- MDMA
- Cocaine
- Meth/ice
- ADHD meds (dexies, Ritalin)

Can lead to seizures, overheating, heart attack, or stroke if too much is taken.

Hallucinogens

Usually less likely to cause fatal overdose — but can cause psychological distress, paranoia, or unsafe behaviour (e.g. walking into traffic).

Signs of an Overdose

Depressant OD (e.g. opioids, alcohol)

- Won't wake up
- Slow or no breathing
- Blue lips/fingertips
- Choking or gurgling
- Cold or clammy skin

Stimulant OD (e.g. MDMA, meth)

- High body temp
- Fast heartbeat or chest pain
- Seizures
- Confusion or panic
- Can't stop moving or talking

"If it feels wrong, it probably is. Trust your gut and check in with your mates."

What to Do If Someone Might Be Overdosing

- Stay calm and stay with them
- Call 000 — say it's a "medical emergency" (you won't get in trouble for helping!)
- Check if they're breathing
- No breathing? Start CPR if you know how
- Breathing but unconscious? Put them in the recovery position
- Give naloxone (if opioids are involved and you have it)
- Don't leave them alone — wait with them until help arrives

NALOXONE



MEDICATION SAVING LIVES

Naloxone (aka Nyxoid or Prenoxad) can reverse an opioid overdose in minutes.

- Available free in QLD at some pharmacies, Needle and Syringe programs (NSPs) and health services
- Comes as a nasal spray or injectable
- Safe to use, even if you're unsure what they took
- No legal risk for carrying it

"Carrying naloxone is like carrying a condom. It doesn't mean you plan to use it — it means you're smart enough to be prepared."

How to Reduce Overdose Risk

- Don't use alone
- Test your stuff
- Avoid mixing drugs (especially alcohol + downers)
- Start low, go slow
- Stay cool and hydrated
- Know your limits — and listen to your body
- Look out for your mates

Real Talk

"My friend passed out and we didn't know what to do. If someone had just said 'call 000' and explained it straight, we could've helped way faster."

Knowing the signs can save a life.

Calling for help is never wrong.

STAY CONNECTED, STAY INFORMED

Most of you told us you get your info from social media. Follow trusted harm reduction pages, and check our QR codes for videos, charts, and support links.

Instagram @hi_ground_qld

TikTok @higround.qld

Facebook /higround.qld

Other great instagram accounts to follow:

@wearetheloopau
(Australian drug checking service)

@pilltestingaustraliaofficial
(Australian drug checking service)

@quihn_ltd (QLD drug health service)

@alcoholdrugfdn (drug and alcohol education)

@sesh.ed (Harm reduction education)

@the_consciousnest
(QLD festival harm reduction and safe spaces)

@dancesafe_ (Harm reduction education)

@quivaa_qld
(QLD Drug Health & Advocacy Organisation)

Enjoy watching Youtube? Check out Drugslab, a Dutch educational YouTube channel about drugs. It is in Dutch and has English subtitles but it's very entertaining and informative... we've binge watched so many episodes, trust us, you'll like it!

www.youtube.com/@Drugslab

USEFUL CONTACTS:

DRUG & ALCOHOL SUPPORT

Alcohol & Drug Information Service
1800 177 833
<https://adis.health.qld.gov.au/>

Hot House
Free and confidential alcohol and drug treatment service for people under 25
3837 5633

Clarence Street
Free and confidential alcohol and drug treatment service for people under 25
3163 8400 (Enquiries)
<https://www.mater.org.au/health-services/our-services/clarence-street>

Brisbane Youth Service (BYS)
Needle Exchange + Youth support, housing +
3620 2400
<https://brisbyouth.org>

Biala/Needle Exchange
3837 5600

QuIHN/Needle Exchange
1800 172 072
<https://www.quihn.org/>

Peer Qnect
Phoneline run by peers Mon - Fri 9am-4pm
1800 175 889
<https://quivaa.org.au/advocacy-action/>

Quitline
13 78 48

Youth Empowered Towards Independence (YETI)
Far North Queensland support agency for ages 12-25
4051 4927
<https://yeti.net.au/>

MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT

Headspace
Australia-wide mental health services to 12-25 year olds.
1800 650 890
<https://headspace.org.au/>

Kids Helpline
Telephone Counselling Support (24hrs, 7 days)
1800 55 1800
<https://kidshelpline.com.au/>

13YARN (24/7)
Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Community Support Line
13 92 76

LEGAL ISSUES
Youth Advocacy Centre (under 18)
3356 1002

Legal Aid QLD
Youth Legal Advice Hotline
1800 527 527

Aboriginal & Torres Strait Legal Centre
3025 3888

DOMESTIC, FAMILY & SEXUAL VIOLENCE

1800 Respect (24hrs)
Call 1800 737 732
Text 0458 737 7323

Zig Zag
Sexual Violence & Homeless Support
(Female, Non-Binary & Trans aged 12-25)
3843 1823
<https://zigzag.org.au/>

SEXUAL HEALTH

Stop the Rise
<https://www.stoptherise.initiatives.qld.gov.au/sti-testing/how-to-book-an-sti-test>

Queensland Health Sexual Health Clinics
<https://www.health.qld.gov.au/clinical-practice/guidelines-procedures/sex-health/services>

Children by Choice
Confidential support for all pregnancy options - State-wide
1800 177 725
<https://www.childrenbychoice.org.au/>

True Relationships & Reproductive Health
<https://www.true.org.au/>

LGBTIQAP+BS

Open Doors Youth Service (ages 12-24)
Support services for LGBTIQ+ Sistergirl and Brotherboy
3257 7660
<https://www.opendoors.net.au/>

2Spirits
Support services for LGBTIQ+SB Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Community
3017 1777
<https://www.2spirits.org.au/>

HOUSING

Homeless Hotline (16+, 24hrs)
1800 474 753

QLD Youth Housing Coalition
<https://www.qyhc.org.au/info-young-people/housing/>

For more visit our Support Service Directory online. Select 'Youth' & 'QLD' for recommendations:
<https://hi-ground.org/support-service/>





FLY
HIGH

Chill
Out

Hi-Ground