



**Title** Effectiveness of early interventions for preventing mental illness in young people

**Agency** NZHTA, New Zealand Health Technology Assessment

Department of Public Health & General Practice, Christchurch School of Medicine & Health Sciences  
PO Box 4345, Christchurch New Zealand; Tel: +64 3 364 36 78 Fax: +64 3 364 36 97; nzhta@chmeds.ac.nz

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*This is a critical review of the literature regarding prevention of mental health conditions in youth relating to substance abuse, conduct disorder, mood, eating disorders and/or anxiety, and intervention in the early stages of a mental health condition to alter its development or pathway.*

An extensive list of databases and many other electronic and bibliographic sources were searched. Searches were limited to English language material from 1995 onward and were run between mid-May and mid-June 1999.

Studies were selected and appraised if they quantitatively evaluated the effectiveness of early interventions to affect the mental health outcomes for people aged 14 to 24 years.

After applying inclusion and exclusion criteria, 35 papers of 171 identified articles were eligible for selection.

Data were extracted, reviewed by two reviewers, and synthesized according to the relevant mental disorder.

Sixteen of the 35 studies related to early interventions for substance abuse, eight to conduct disorders/violence prevention, three to mood disorder prevention, four to eating disorder prevention and four to general mental health interventions are presented in a systematic way. Also reviewed were two studies conducted in New Zealand that did not meet the criteria defined.

The report, written by B Nicholas and M Broadstock, contains a thorough discussion of the problem and concludes that, in line with mental health prevention generally, good quality research on program effectiveness is lacking. This lack of research may reflect a focus by programs to intervene in mid-childhood rather than in adolescence.

**The report ends with a summary leading to eight recommendations (abbreviated here), that**

1. early intervention program providers look to the work of others internationally and consider which program development strategies would best meet their needs,
2. early intervention program providers consider transferring programs already implemented elsewhere,
3. early intervention programs are pilot-tested on a small scale,
4. early intervention programs involve outcome evaluation strategies which are well planned, realistically resourced, and appropriately extended over time,
5. early intervention programs include process evaluations,
6. evaluations of early interventions include the cost-effectiveness of conducting the programs,
7. workforce development and training initiatives are instituted in the areas of early intervention program development, implementation, and evaluation,
8. advice and expertise on planning and conducting evaluation program is available from the early stages of developing the program.