This project is funded by the National Health and Medical Research Council, has been approved by the UNSW, Curtin and QUT Ethics Committee.
Background and Research Aims

Anxiety, depressive and substance use disorders account for three quarters of the disability attributed to mental disorders. The peak of this disability occurs in those aged 15-24 years old and corresponds with the typical period of onset of these problems. Research has shown that these disorders frequently co-occur, share similar risk factors and interact. However, there are few well-implemented programs that are aimed to concurrently prevent these common disorders. The CSC study seeks to address this gap.

_The aim of The CSC Study is to evaluate a novel internet-based prevention model for anxiety, depression and substance misuse in adolescents. The CSC study will be the first international trial of a combined approach to the prevention of substance use and mental health problems in adolescents._

This research will build on the knowledge base in _four_ important ways:

1. **Combined prevention for anxiety, depressive and substance use problems:** While programs for the prevention and reduction of symptoms associated with (i) substance use and (ii) mental health disorders exist, research is yet to determine if a combined approach is more effective.

2. **Use of innovative delivery technologies:** Problems with the implementation and dissemination of drug and mental health prevention programs are well-recognised, and programs with proven efficacy are often not widely used [5-11]. Botvin & Griffin (2003) propose that this is often due to the lack of compatibility of evidence-based programs with school curriculums. As such, schools often opt for commercial programs that are appealing, yet lack supporting scientific evidence. This novel intervention is designed to overcome obstacles to effective implementation through the use of internet-based delivery techniques and by linking the program to the school curriculum.

3. **Evidence for Climate Schools:** Research on our individual internet-based Climate Schools - Substance Use course for alcohol and cannabis supports its feasibility and efficacy in reducing both harmful alcohol and cannabis use, and related harms in adolescents [12-16]. The Climate Schools - Mental Health course for anxiety and depression has been developed in the same way as the effective Substance Use course, and preliminary research points to its efficacy in decreasing anxiety and depression symptoms. The next step is a well-conducted intervention trial combining these individual programs to simultaneously target substance use and mental health problems in adolescents.

4. **First Australian inter State trial of a school-based intervention for mental health and substance use:** Our promising Climate Schools courses are designed to link to the NSW Personal Development Health and Physical Education syllabus and the QLD and WA Health and Physical Education syllabus. These courses can either replace or supplement any existing drug and mental health education already delivered in schools.
The Climate Schools Courses

The Climate Schools courses are novel, online prevention programs delivered to all students during class, as part of their Personal Development Health and Physical Education (or Health and Physical Education) lessons. Two of the Climate Schools courses that will be used in this trial are:

- The Climate Schools - Substance Use course: consists of two modules focusing on two of Australia’s most commonly used licit and illicit drugs; alcohol and cannabis. Each module includes 6 x 40-minute lessons (i.e. 12 lessons in total), which have been designed for Year 9 students. Both modules are designed to teach resistance skills and harm minimisation strategies, with the first module focusing on alcohol and the second module focusing on alcohol and cannabis. For this trial, the first module will be delivered in Term 1, 2014 and the second module in Term 3, 2014.

- The Climate Schools - Mental Health course: includes 6 x 40-minute lessons that have been designed for Year 10 students. Each lesson in the Mental Health course aims to teach students how to identify symptoms of anxiety and depression and how to deal with these effectively. The lessons incorporate skill acquisition; psycho education, management of psychological symptoms, cognitive symptoms, and behavioural skills. For this trial the Mental Health course will be delivered in Term 1, 2015.

Lesson Structure- Each lesson in the Climate Schools courses is made up of two parts:

Part One: Online Student Component

Students spend 20 minutes completing the online computer lesson. Each online lesson contains one episode of a cartoon-based drama about a group of young people. The storylines include educational and skill based content, while holding students interest. The drama about these young people gradually develops across the lessons and thus it is important for the lessons to be delivered consecutively and in close time-proximity to one another. To run the online Climate Schools courses, all students must go to the website (www.cscstudy.org.au) and login using their confidential login (student email address) and unique password. At the end of each lesson students receive a summary of the information and skills covered in each lesson.
Teachers choose one or more of the class based activities from the program manual. This manual can be accessed by teachers on the CSC study website (www.cscstudy.org.au) prior to program implementation and all activities require minimal preparation by teachers. These manuals also contain student and teacher summaries for each lesson and explicit syllabus links.

Below are two examples of the class based activities:

**Effectiveness of Climate Schools**
Three randomised controlled trials in Australia have shown that in comparison to the control group (who received usual school drug and alcohol education), students who receive the Climate Schools - Substance Use course show significant reductions in:

- binge drinking
- alcohol consumption
- cannabis consumption
- alcohol related harms

In relation to secondary outcomes of the course, students in the intervention group also showed significant reductions in:

- truancy
- psychological distress
- moral disengagement

The Climate Schools - Mental Health course is currently being updated and is based on two modules from the online school education program ‘This Way Up’, titled ‘Overcoming Anxiety’ and ‘Combating Depression’. In revising the program, an experienced clinician has amended the script of the online cartoon component, while the illustrations have been updated to reflect current youth trends and to maintain consistency with the Climate Schools - Substance Use course. Focus groups have been conducted with approximately 30 students from two Australian secondary schools to ensure that the modifications accurately reflected realistic scenarios and language of Year 9 students.

Another key benefit of Climate Schools is the use of innovative delivery technologies such as the internet, which has shown to be an effective teaching tool. Past research has shown that students not only enjoy this method, but also exhibit greater engagement and retention of the material. Furthermore, the Climate Schools courses have been linked to the PDHPE (HPE) syllabus and may replace the usual drug and mental health education delivered by schools.

The Climate Schools programs are proven to strongly enhance adolescent wellbeing, such that students are able to reach their full potential in both the classroom and their daily lives.
The primary objective of The CSC Study is to evaluate a novel internet-based prevention model for substance misuse, anxiety and depression in adolescents. This model will be known as the Climate Schools Combined (CSC) program and includes the Climate Schools - Substance Use course and the Climate Schools - Mental Health course.

It is hypothesised that the combined prevention model (CSC) will be more effective than; (1) school based education as usual, (2) the stand-alone Climate Schools - Substance Use course, and (3) the stand-alone Climate Schools - Mental Health course, in relation to the following five outcomes:

1. Reducing the use and harmful use of alcohol and cannabis
2. Reducing substance use related harms,
3. Reducing levels of anxiety,
4. Reducing levels of depression, and
5. Increasing knowledge of alcohol, cannabis, anxiety and depression.

The Four Experimental Groups

In order to test this hypothesis a cluster randomised controlled trial will be conducted in schools across Queensland, New South Wales and Western Australia. Each school will be randomly allocated to one of the following four groups:

1. Climate Schools Combined group (CSC)
2. Stand-alone Climate Schools - Substance Use group (CS-SU)
3. Stand-alone Climate Schools - Mental Health group (CS-MH)
4. Control group (who receive school-based education as usual) (CO)

How will schools be randomised to the groups?

Randomisation will occur using the random allocation function in a statistical program (Stata) to ensure the research remains unbiased. Unfortunately, it is therefore not possible to choose the group to which your school is assigned.

What does the research involve?

Table 1 (following page) shows the timeline of activities for each of the four intervention conditions. For example, students from a school which has been allocated to the Climate Schools - Mental Health group (CS-MH) will complete the Mental Health course in Term 1, 2015 (and not the Substance Use course in 2014). In order to assess the efficacy of the program, students will also complete a total of seven confidential surveys over three years.
## Table 1: Climate Schools Combined (CSC) Study Timeline

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Survey 1</th>
<th><strong>Alcohol</strong></th>
<th><strong>Alcohol &amp; Cannabis</strong></th>
<th>Survey 2</th>
<th>Survey 3</th>
<th><strong>Mental Health</strong></th>
<th>Survey 4</th>
<th>Survey 5</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Time</strong></td>
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<td><strong>CS-MH</strong>*</td>
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<td><strong>CO</strong>*</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Key:**
- *CS-C* = Climate Schools Combined group
- *CS-SU* = Climate Schools - Substance Use intervention only
- *CS-MH* = Climate Schools - Mental Health intervention only
- *CO* = Control Group
- ✓ = Measurement occasion
- Green = Climate Schools - Substance Use 12 lesson intervention
- Turquoise = Climate Schools - Mental Health 6 lesson intervention

**Survey time points:**
- Survey 1: Baseline
- Survey 2: Post-Substance Use intervention
- Survey 3: Pre-Mental Health intervention
- Survey 4: Post-Mental Health intervention
- Survey 5: 6-month follow-up
- Survey 6: 12-month follow-up
- Survey 7: 18-month follow-up
Common Questions

Do the investigators have experience in conducting these types of trials?

Yes, we have run similar trials in over 70 secondary schools, in both NSW and VIC. We have had very positive feedback from both teaching staff and students. Here are some comments from teachers in previous trials:

‘There are many outcomes of the syllabus that can be covered by the whole program’.
‘The structure of the program is well set out and it appears to be very interactive which is an effective teaching method’.
‘The students need to make informed choices regarding behaviour and the package presents this in an informative but non-judgmental way’.
‘It’s something new and different and the boys respond to that’.

How do we ensure confidentiality?

Online data: To access online surveys and materials, students will be required to register on the Climate Schools website (www.cscstudy.org.au). Here, students must choose a unique username (school email address) and a separate password will be automatically emailed to each student. Students will use this username and password each time they complete a questionnaire or session on the online program.

Once logged in, all data collected will automatically be de-identified and the database will generate a unique ID code for each participant. The individual’s data files across sessions will be linked with this unique ID code.

SSL (Secure Sockets Layer) Security will be used to ensure any confidential communication via the website (e.g. participant registration and online surveys) will be secure. SSL provides a mechanism to verify the identity of an internet client and/or server, and to encrypt the messages sent between them.

Paper data: Some schools may wish their students to complete consent and surveys with pen and paper rather than online. In this case, students will be asked to generate a unique code and they will be required to use this code anytime they fill in a survey. Only the researcher will have access to these codes and these codes will never be linked with the student’s names.

Publication and reporting of results: No information will be published on individual cases or individual schools. All data will be de-identified and published findings will only reflect group data.

Will results of the study be provided to participating schools?

A summary of the results of this study will be provided to your school on completion of this study. The data in this summary will be collapsed, such that it will not be possible for any individual or school to be identified.
Group 1: The Climate Schools Combined group (CS-C)

What does the study involve?

Please refer to Table 2 for a timeline of research activities, specifically for schools allocated to the CS-C group.

1. **Consent**: Parental consent forms are distributed to parents of all Year 9 students during the first week of Term 1 in 2014. These forms can either be emailed directly to parents or a printed copy sent out.

2. **Baseline survey**: The baseline survey will be administered to all consenting students during weeks 3-6 of Term 1, 2014. This survey can be administered online or by paper-and-pencil and can take place during one lesson (e.g. Health and Physical Education or home class), and it takes approximately 30 minutes to complete.

3. **Climate Schools Combined intervention**: Students allocated to the CSC group will receive the *Climate Schools - Substance Use* course in Year 9, as well as the *Climate Schools - Mental Health* course in Year 10.

   The *Substance Use* course consists of two, 6-lesson modules, with each lesson taking 40 minutes to complete. Module 1 focuses on Alcohol use and will be implemented in Term 1, 2014 during Health and Physical Education classes. Module two focuses on Alcohol and Cannabis use and will be implemented during Term 3, 2014 PDHPE (HPE) classes. The 6 lesson *Mental Health* course focuses on coping skills in relation to anxiety, depression and wellbeing, and will be administered in Term 1, 2015.

4. **Follow-up surveys**: The follow-up surveys can be administered online or by paper-and-pencil. The surveys can take place during one lesson (e.g. Health and Physical Education) and take about 30 minutes to complete.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Consent forms and Baseline Survey 1</th>
<th>Climate Schools Substance Use course</th>
<th>Survey 2</th>
<th>Survey 3</th>
<th>Climate Schools Mental Health course</th>
<th>Survey 4</th>
<th>Survey 5</th>
<th>Survey 6</th>
<th>Survey 7</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Time/Grade</td>
<td>Term 1 &amp; 3 2014</td>
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Table 2. Timeline of research activities for the Climate Schools Combined group (CS-C).
Group 2: The Climate Schools Substance Use group (CS-SU)

What will be involved?

Please refer to Table 3 for a timeline of activities, specifically for schools allocated to the CS-SU group.

1. **Consent**: Parental consent forms are distributed to parents of all Year 9 students during the first week of Term 1 in 2014. These forms can either be emailed directly to parents or a printed copy sent out.

2. **Baseline survey**: The baseline survey will be administered to all consenting students during weeks 3-6 of Term 1, 2014. This survey can be administered online or by paper-and-pencil and can take place during one lesson (e.g. Health and Physical Education or home), and it takes approximately 30 minutes to complete.

3. **Climate Schools Substance Use intervention**: The first 6 lessons of the Climate Schools - Substance Use course (Alcohol) will be implemented in Term 1, 2014 during Health and Physical Education classes. The remaining 6 lessons of Climate Schools - Substance Use course (Alcohol and Cannabis) will be implemented during Term 3, 2014 in Health and Physical Education classes.

4. **Follow-up surveys**: The follow-up surveys can be administered online or by paper-and-pencil. The surveys can take place during one lesson (e.g. Health and Physical Education), and they also take about 30 minutes to complete.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Consent forms and Baseline Survey 1</th>
<th>Climate Schools Substance Use course Survey 2</th>
<th>Survey 3</th>
<th>Climate Schools Mental Health course Survey 4</th>
<th>Survey 5</th>
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<tr>
<td>Time/Grade</td>
<td>Term 1 2014</td>
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Table 3. Timeline of research activities for the Climate Schools Substance Use group (CS-SU).
Group 3: The Climate Schools Mental Health group (CS-MH)

What will be involved?

Please refer to Table 4 for a timeline of activities, specifically for schools allocated to the CS-MH group.

1. **Consent**: Parental consent forms are distributed to parents of all Year 9 students during the first week of Term 1 in 2014. These forms can either be emailed directly to parents or a printed copy sent out.

2. **Baseline survey**: The baseline surveys will be administered to all consenting students during weeks 3-6 of Term 1, 2014. These surveys can be administered online or by paper-and-pencil and can take place during one lesson (e.g. Health and Physical Education or home class), and it takes approximately 30 minutes to complete.

3. **Climate Schools Mental Health intervention**: The 6 lesson *Climate Schools - Mental Health* course will be administered in Term 1, 2015.

4. **Follow-up surveys**: The follow-up surveys can be administered online or by paper-and-pencil. The surveys can take place during one lesson (e.g. Health and Physical Education), and they also take about 30 minutes to complete.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Consent forms and Baseline Survey 1</th>
<th>Climate Schools Substance Use course</th>
<th>Survey 2</th>
<th>Survey 3</th>
<th>Climate Schools Mental Health course</th>
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<tr>
<td>Time/Grade</td>
<td>Term 1 2014 Feb-April Year 9</td>
<td>Term 1 &amp; 3 2014 Feb-April July-Sept Year 9</td>
<td>Term 3 2014 July-Sept Year 9</td>
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<td>Term 1 2016 Year 11</td>
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Table 4. Timeline of research activities for the Climate Schools Mental Health group (CS-MH).
Group 4: The Control group (CO)

What will be involved?

Please refer to Table 5 for a timeline of activities, specifically for schools allocated to the CO group.

1. **Consent**: Parental consent forms are distributed to Parents of all Year 9 students during the first week of Term 1 in 2014. These forms can either be emailed directly to parents or a printed copy sent out.

2. **Baseline survey**: The baseline surveys will be administered to all consenting students during weeks 3-6 of Term 1, 2014. These surveys can be administered online or by paper-and-pencil and can take place during one lesson (e.g. Health and Physical Education or home class), and they take approximately 30 minutes to complete.

3. **Control group**: Schools will continue with school drug education as usual. At the end of the trial, teachers will be asked to complete a brief survey to record the number of lessons related to substance use and/or mental health covered in Health and Physical Education lessons.

4. **Follow-up surveys**: The follow-up surveys can be administered online or by paper-and-pencil. The surveys can take place during one lesson (e.g. Health and Physical Education), and they also take approximately 30 minutes to complete.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Consent forms and Baseline Survey 1</th>
<th>Climate Schools Substance Use course</th>
<th>Survey 2</th>
<th>Survey 3</th>
<th>Climate Schools Mental Health course</th>
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Table 5. Timeline of research activities for the Control group (CO).
Appendix A: Abstracts of articles reporting the results from previous trials of the prevention programs:

**Climate Schools program evaluations**


Aims: To establish the long-term efficacy of a universal internet-based alcohol and cannabis prevention programme in schools. Methods A cluster-randomized controlled trial was conducted to assess the effectiveness of the Climate Schools: Alcohol and Cannabis Course. The evidence-based course, aimed at reducing alcohol and cannabis use, is facilitated by the internet and consists of 12 novel and curriculum consistent lessons delivered over 6 months.

Participants A total of 764 year 8 students (13 years) from 10 Australian secondary schools were allocated randomly to the internet-based prevention programme (n = 397, five schools), or to their usual health classes (n = 367, five schools). Measures Participants were assessed at baseline, immediately post, and 6 and 12 months following completion of the intervention, on measures of alcohol and cannabis knowledge, attitudes, use and related harms. Results: This paper reports the final results of the intervention trial, 12 months following the completion of the Climate Schools: Alcohol and Cannabis Course. The effectiveness of the course 6 months following the intervention has been reported previously. At the 12-month follow-up, compared to the control group, students in the intervention group showed significant improvements in alcohol and cannabis knowledge, a reduction in average weekly alcohol consumption and a reduction in frequency of drinking to excess. No differences between groups were found on alcohol expectancies, cannabis attitudes or alcohol- and cannabis-related harms. The course was found to be acceptable by teachers and students as a means of delivering drug education in schools. Conclusions Internet-based prevention programs for school-age children can improve student’s knowledge about alcohol and cannabis, and may also reduce alcohol use twelve months after completion.


Objective: To establish the efficacy of an internet based prevention program to reduce alcohol and cannabis use in adolescents. Method: A cluster randomised controlled trial was conducted with 764 13-year olds from ten Australian secondary schools in 2007-2008. Half the schools were randomly allocated to the computerised prevention program (n=397), and half to their usual health classes (n=367). The Climate Schools: Alcohol and Cannabis prevention course is facilitated by the internet and consists of novel, evidence-based, curriculum consistent lessons aimed at reducing alcohol and cannabis use. Participants were assessed at baseline, immediately post, and at six months following the intervention.

Results: Compared to the control group, students in the intervention group showed significant improvements in alcohol and cannabis knowledge at the end of the course and the six month follow-up. In addition, the intervention group showed a reduction in average weekly alcohol consumption and frequency of cannabis use at the six month follow-up. No differences between groups were found on alcohol expectancies, cannabis attitudes, or alcohol and cannabis related harms. Conclusions: The course is acceptable, scalable and fidelity is assured. It increased knowledge regarding alcohol and cannabis, and decreased use of these drugs.

Objective: The aim of the present study was to conduct a cross-validation trial of the efficacy of a computerized school-based intervention for alcohol misuse in adolescents.

Method: A cluster randomized control trial was carried out. Intervention and control groups were assessed at baseline, immediately after and 6 months after the intervention. A total of 764 Year 8 students from 10 independent secondary schools in Sydney, Australia participated in the study. Half of the schools were randomly allocated to the computerized prevention programme (n=397), and half to their usual classes (n=367). The six-lesson computerized intervention was evidence and curriculum based while having a focus on harm-minimization. Knowledge, expectancies, alcohol consumption (frequency, quantity and binging), patterns of use, and harms associated with one’s own use of alcohol were assessed. Results: There were significant improvements in knowledge regarding alcohol use at immediate and 6 month follow up. Average weekly alcohol consumption was reduced immediately after the intervention. No differences between groups were found on alcohol expectancies, frequency of drinking to excess and harms related to alcohol use over time.

Conclusions: The present results support the Clinical Management and Treatment Education (CLIMATE) Schools: alcohol module as an effective intervention in increasing alcohol knowledge and reducing alcohol use in the short term.


Aims: Hazardous alcohol use is a leading cause of death among adolescents and young adults world-wide, yet few effective prevention interventions exist. This study was the first to examine a computerized harm minimization intervention to reduce alcohol misuse and related harms in adolescents. Design: Cluster randomized controlled trial of a six-session curriculum-integrated harm minimization prevention program. The intervention was delivered by computer in the form of a teenage drama, which provided education through alcohol-related scenarios to which young people could relate. Setting: Schools in Australia. Participants A total of 1466 year 8 students (13 years) from 16 high schools in Australia were allocated randomly to a computerized prevention program (n = 611, eight schools) or usual classes (n = 855, eight schools).

Measurements Change in knowledge, alcohol use, alcohol-related harms and alcohol expectancies. Findings: A computerized prevention program was more effective than usual classes in increasing alcohol-related knowledge of facts that would inform safer drinking choices and decreasing the positive social expectations which students believed alcohol may afford. For females it was effective in decreasing average alcohol consumption, alcohol-related harms and the frequency of drinking to excess (more than four standard drinks; 10g ethanol). For males the behavioural effects were not significant. Conclusions: A harm minimization approach is effective in educating young people about alcohol-related risks and is effective in reducing risky drinking and harms among girls. Reduction of problems among boys remains a challenge.
Other References:


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Or access The CSC Study website:
www.cscstudy.org.au