

Summary of critical elements

Critical elements	What this means for schools
Drug education is best taught in the context of broader health skills.	Drug education is a mandatory component of the K-6 and 7-10 PDHPE syllabus and Year 11 and 12 Crossroads Course. The integrated nature of both the syllabus and the Crossroads course allows aspects of drug education to be introduced within a broad health context.
Drug education messages across the school environment should be consistent and coherent.	Whole school policies and practices should complement the curriculum and reinforce the objectives of drug education.
Drug education needs to be based on current research as to effective curriculum practice and the needs of students.	Effective programs are based on the understanding of what causes young people to use drugs and what may reduce the harms of drug use.
Objectives for drug education should be linked to the overall goal of harm reduction.	Programs need to focus on reducing the harmful effects of drug use. Strategies need to aim towards non use and for those already using, towards reduction in use or changing patterns of use. Students need to explore and discuss the benefits or otherwise of different patterns of use. These strategies may reduce harm but not necessarily reduce use.
Prevention education is best provided before behavioural patterns are established.	Programs which address drug issues need to be introduced when the prevalence of use of the particular drug is still low and before most young people are exposed to the possibility of use. Primary prevention is most effective if introduced before patterns of use are established.
Drug education programs should be relevant, developmentally appropriate and have sequence, progression and continuity.	Programs must be credible and useful to students. They need to be provided regularly at different stages of schooling and address content and issues relevant to each stage. Rather than repeat the same content, programs need to build on what has gone before.
Mechanisms should be developed to involve students, parents and the wider community in school based drug education.	Consultation and involvement of all stakeholders will provide a greater sense of ownership and programs are more likely to address the needs of all groups. Any development process for a new drug education program, particularly if it is likely to be controversial, should involve extensive consultation with the whole school community, particularly students.
Drug education should be responsive to developmental, gender, cultural, socioeconomic and lifestyle differences.	Programs that are sensitive to the different backgrounds of the students will be more relevant and effective.
Teachers should be trained and supported to conduct drug education.	The classroom teacher, with specific knowledge of students and the learning context, is best placed to provide drug education. Research indicates that adequate training of teachers in implementing programs is a vital element in effective drug education. Teachers need up to date factual information and training to further develop skills in presenting drug education.

Critical elements (cont)	What this means for schools(cont)
Programs should demonstrate adequate coverage, sufficient follow up and ability to achieve long term change.	An adequate education program should have follow up sessions at regular intervals.
Social resistance skills need to be developed.	Social resistance skills assist in motivating young people against drug use and help them identify and resist pro-drug influences. Such programs help adolescents identify internal and external pressures to use; counteract pro-drug arguments and beliefs that 'everyone uses'; and learn skills for resisting drug use when faced with situations where they may feel influenced to use.
Normative education practices need to be included in drug education programs.	Normative education teaches adolescents that most people do not use drugs or approve of using drugs. This is done by comparing their expectations of how many of their peers are regular users with actual data and by discussing their overestimates of prevalence.
Interactive teaching and learning strategies are essential for effective drug education.	Teaching and learning strategies which promote active involvement of all students, such as small group discussions and activities, have been shown to be more meaningful and effective.
Approaches should address the values, attitudes and behaviours of the community and the individual.	Responsible decisions by students about drugs are more likely where peer and community groups demonstrate responsible attitudes and practices.
Drug education programs should acknowledge the interrelationship between the individual, the drug and the environment in determining the impact of drug use.	A young person's drug experience is influenced by the interaction of these three components and students need to be aware of the importance of this interaction when discussing drug issues. As the interrelationship changes so does the impact on the individual, others and the community.
The use of peer leaders should be considered.	The research indicates that peer led approaches offer a number of advantages in terms of modelling and sharing positive attitudes and values. Peer leaders should have credibility with high risk adolescents, have well developed communication skills and show responsible attitudes. Peer leaders should be given adequate training and support to fulfil a leadership role. Drug education programs could use peer leaders and teachers in combination, where the peer leaders facilitate small group discussions on drug issues.
Programs and resources should be selected to complement the role of the classroom teacher.	The classroom teacher, with specific knowledge of students and the learning content, is best placed to provide drug education. Outside agencies and personnel should be used only where relevant and appropriate, and where they enhance existing ongoing drug education.

Adapted from Midford, R., Lenton, S and Hancock, L. (2001) A critical review and analysis: Cannabis education In schools NSW Department of Education and Training.

