

# RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

## How Do You Say “Nope” to Dope?

**Associate Professor Meg Smith from Social Justice and Social Change and Sharyn McGee from the School of Social Sciences, working with the Mental Health Association NSW, the Association of Relatives and Friends of the Mentally Ill NSW and the NSW Consumer Advisory Group (Mental Health), are examining why many young people living with mental illness use cannabis, why some develop a dependency on the drug and what can be done to educate young people about the risks to their mental health from using cannabis. This research is funded by the Mental Health Coordinating Council.**

‘Many people living with mental illness also have a substance abuse problem,’ explains Associate Professor Smith. ‘There are indications that some people may use recreational drugs to alleviate depression, cognitive difficulties and medication side effects and that the drug use begins through peer pressure. We are looking specifically at why young people living with mental illness begin to use cannabis and why they continue to use it. They are often reluctant to be referred for drug and alcohol counselling and may not see cannabis use as a problem, even though there is evidence that the use of cannabis can exacerbate mental health conditions. We are also investigating what prompts young people to stop using cannabis, so that we can develop more effective health promotion strategies based on the important factors they identify.’

The research team will develop three types of focus groups made up of young mental health consumers and their carers who will be asked about the behavioural and motivational factors in their use of cannabis or non-use of cannabis. A trial preliminary health promotion program will be developed and used with focus group members and they will be asked to comment on the program and whether it has affected their drug use.



The information gathered will be used to help those living with mental illness to reduce or withdraw from cannabis use and hopefully improve their health overall. A health promotion campaign will be developed aimed at young people living with mental illness who are at risk of developing a substance abuse problem.

**Project Title:** 'WHAT WORKS?' Research into illicit drug use by mental health consumers aged 18-30. Raising awareness and changing behaviour through targeted health promotion campaigns

**Funding has been set at:** \$56,019

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