

New hope for young people who drink to mask negative feelings

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Young people (aged 18-25) are being invited to take part in the first ever trial of an online brief intervention designed to treat co-occurring alcohol misuse and depression.

While other e-health interventions have targeted depression or alcohol use individually, The DEAL Project (for DEpression and ALcohol) is the first online brief intervention that aims to address both conditions together, in a program specially designed for young people.

Developed by researchers at the National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre (NDARC), with input from young Australians, the intervention is especially important because it circumvents many of the barriers that currently prevent young people seeking treatment. Research has shown less than 25% of young Australians with a mental disorder seek treatment due to impediments such as geographical isolation and perceived stigma.

Hopes for The DEAL Project are high as it is modelled on an existing and proven e-health intervention called SHADE. Also developed by NDARC researchers, SHADE treats co-occurring substance use and depression in the general population.

Doctoral candidate Mark Deady is leading The DEAL Project trial and explained that drinking to reduce or regulate negative emotions is a powerful predictor of heavy and problematic drinking in young people, however, few of these young people receive any form of care in traditional services.

"We know from national surveys that one in five people aged 16-25 with depression also meet the diagnostic criteria for an alcohol use disorder. Similarly, 14% of young people with an [alcohol](#) use disorder also meet criteria for [depression](#).

"Right now, there are few resources available to these young people. We're hoping The DEAL Project invention will help plug that gap.

"The intervention is online so it's easy to access and it requires minimal time commitment from participants.

"The trial will give us a lot more information on the efficacy and acceptability to young people of this type of treatment," Deady said.

The DEAL Project targets 18-25 year olds and teaches evidence-based psychological coping skills and strategies that [young people](#) can utilise to help manage their mood and/or drinking behaviour.

Participants are asked to complete one online module a week for four weeks. Assessment will take place online at baseline, five, 12 and 24 weeks to track their progress.

Those interested in taking part in The DEAL Project can apply here: dealproject.org.au/

Provided by University of New South Wales

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