

Eating disorder prevention program expands online

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A powerful education tool to help prevent eating disorders in children and young adolescents is being expanded for young adults in the high-risk years between 18 and 25.

The accredited Media Smart package, developed by the Flinders University School of Psychology, is looking for volunteers to help roll out these important messages into a national online program called [Promoting Positive Body Image Online \(PPbiO\)](#).

"The media bombards us with beautiful images of 'perfect' bodies," said Professor Tracey Wade, the Dean of Flinders University's School of Psychology.

"This has contributed in no small measure to the rise in [body image](#) issues among our school-age and [young adults](#), with 23 per cent of all young Australian women suffering from disordered eating habits which affect their wellbeing."

Media Smart is known to halve the risk of onset of clinical concerns about body shape and weight in girls while reducing obesity risk factors such as screen time and physical activity. The toolkit is available for schools to purchase through the [Flinders University website](#).

An estimated 15 per cent of women develop an [eating disorder](#) at some stage of their life, with men and boys also adding to more than one million cases in Australia a year.

While women in the 18-25 demographic dominate this growing statistic, children under 16 are emerging as another group at risk of developing more eating disorders such as anorexia nervosa, bulimia nervosa and other mental health issues related to body size.

"We're now using the success of the Media Smart school-age package to raise awareness among more young adults to combat the rise in eating disorders in our community," Professor Wade said.

"Tackling negative body image in its early stages is a good pre-emptive strike against developing eating disorders which can affect a person's lifestyle for many years once established.

Dr Simon Wilksch, Flinders Research Fellow with the School of Psychology, said the success of the Media Smart model in schools has been adapted to provide positive body image strategies for young adults at risk of developing eating disorders.

"We are now looking to expand this resource for young adult women in the 18 to 25 age group who are showing high levels of eating disorder risk such as strict dieting or high levels of shape and weight concern," Dr Wilksch said.

The Promoting Positive Body Image Online website is freely available to young adult women throughout Australia and New Zealand.

The online project, funded by the National Health and Medical Research Council, is evaluating the effectiveness of Media Smart and two other programs which support mental health and emotional wellbeing.

In addition to receiving a program, participants will be required to complete a questionnaire on four occasions. Participants who completed all four questionnaires will receive a \$50 iTunes voucher as a

reimbursement for their time, Dr Wilksch said.

Media Smart gives [young people](#) insights into how their feelings of self-worth and social value can be shaped by common images in the media.

It includes ideas for how to analyse and challenge media stereotypes of ideal body shape and tips for handling pressure placed on young people to look a certain way through adolescence.

Professor Wade said the package was a valuable way to prepare adolescents and pre-adolescents to be more critical of the body image messages they receive through constant exposure to multimedia streams including smartphone social media.

Media Smart – a practical, eight-lesson media literacy program suitable for girls and boys in late primary school or early high school – has recently been awarded the Personal Social Health and Economic Education (PSHE) Association quality mark. PSHE accreditation means the training resource has met the requirements of 10 principles of PSHE education.

PSHE is a planned program of learning through which children and young people acquire the knowledge, understanding and skills they need to manage their lives and become confident and skilful adults.

Provided by Flinders University

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