

# How do young people distinguish the ‘good oil’ from those peddling ‘snake oil’ when it comes to online sexual health information?

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## **Background:**

Reliable and readily accessible sexual health information, education and clinical services are essential to young people’s lifelong health and well-being. Research is needed to understand how we can increase young people’s awareness of, and access to relevant, evidence-based and inclusive sexual health information and services in the digital era.

## **Methods:**

This mixed-method research utilised an online national survey, in-depth interviews and online forums with 837 young people aged 16-25 years, with strong representation from LGBTIQ+, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and CALD communities.

## **Results:**

Young people highlighted the importance of being informed, and in turn, feeling empowered and in control of their health and well-being. The majority of participating young people sought sexual health information online but did not readily trust it’s accuracy. Nearly two thirds identified the internet as their most common source of sexual health information, however, only 27% reported it as their most trusted information source.

Young people were most likely to perceive sexual health information as trustworthy if the author appears to have credibility, the information is from a government source or health-related expert or organisation, or the same information is consistently published in multiple places. Young people are less likely to trust information on websites that are trying to appear too modern, fun and youth-friendly; instead preferring direct, pragmatic information with proper use of terms. “Family planning” is not a commonly understood term, with young people most commonly believing family planning services to be focused on pregnancy and how to prepare for a baby.

## **Conclusion:**

This research provides useful insights about the factors that influence how, where and why young people access sexual and reproductive health information and how to facilitate access to accurate and trustworthy information and services.

## **Disclosure of Interest Statement:**

no conflicts of interest.