

Australia's Youth Engagement Strategy

– yourtown's advocacy submission



What is it about?

The Australian Government's Office for Youth are developing a youth engagement strategy to improve how they work with young people. They asked for feedback from young people, advocates and organisations that work with young people on how young people can be engaged by the Government now and into the future.

Why is it important?

There is currently no framework for direct engagement between young people and the Australian Government. Young people deserve to be heard and have a say on issues that impact them.

Submission process

yourtown's submission is comprised of two parts. The first part sets out **yourtown's** organisational response drawing from our experience, learnings and understanding from over 60 years as one of Australia's leading charities working with children and young people. The second part provides a response direct from young people in **yourtown's** Youth Advisory Group.

Key messages from **yourtown** and **yourtown's** Youth Advisory Group:

1. Young people feel systematically excluded from meaningful discussion and solution making processes

Of foremost concern to young people is that their voice is heard and taken seriously. Issues will change and fluctuate as different opportunities and/or barriers emerge. However, the cornerstone to a youth strategy that stands the test of time, is the foundational voice of young people themselves. They need to be able to express themselves, voice their ideas, and provide solutions that positively impact policies and programs. There needs to be prioritisation of a human-centred design approach in the design and implementation of the strategy.

2. Key issues the government needs to address include:

Mental health and access to healthcare, cost of living and housing, and employment opportunities. Young people feel these are issues that disproportionately effect young people. Promoting equity and removing discrimination in these areas should be prioritised. Young people feel a extremely high level of general uncertainty with a worsening cost-of-living crisis, housing insecurity and climate change.

3. Engagement needs to meet young people where they are at

Young people want to be consulted more and in ways that make sense to them. There needs to be a greater focus on inclusion and engaging with young people from diverse background, using more creative consultations and ways to genuinely hear from young people. Young people raised that it is often only those who have the tools required to engage (e.g. computers, internet, accommodation) that are involved in engagement. Many important perspectives are left out of the engagement process.

5. There needs to be increased resourcing of local organisations who have established relationships with young people, and young people themselves.

Organisations and young people cannot be expected to bear the cost of the government's consultation without fair and equitable funding and support, and young people cannot be expected to be engaged in a consultation process without fair and reasonable compensation for their time and effort. Many local organisations have established relationships with young people. Increased resourcing of these organisations would ensure that a greater level and depth of consultation and engagement can occur. This would also ensure that engagement can focus on a local level as well as a national level.

"It seems our opinions only matter when things breakdown, it should be a regular feedback loop, intermittent feedback and 'check-ins' "

Youth Advisory Group Member

READ YOURTOWN'S FULL SUBMISSION

