



**Your**

**Voice**

# **Your Voice Update**

Prepared by: **yourtown**, July 2021



**kids**helpline  
Anytime Any Reason

**yourtown**  
let's create brighter futures



**GOVERNMENT**

**Access to services**

**EDUCATION**

**EMPLOYMENT**

**MENTAL  
HEALTH**

**Housing**

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# Introduction

## What is the Your Voice project?

In 2020 the Australian Government released funding with an aim to identify key issues for young people, hear their voices about these issues, build their ability to express themselves around areas of concern and develop ideas to assist with Government decision making.

This funding aligns with some of Australia's commitments as part of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, which includes that young people have the right to be heard, informed, and share and have their views taken into account.

**yourtown** was selected to participate in this project through Your Voice which included a national survey, a series of online forums and a youth summit. The idea of Your Voice was to identify key issues for young people through the survey, explore these issues and possible ideas for change through a series of forums and then in the summit; develop the key ideas that would be shared.

## How have young people been involved?

Through the Your Voice project the voices of young people have been key. Young people as part of our Youth Advisory Groups have informed us at each step including:

- Developing the survey questions
- Identifying avenues to share the survey and appropriate marketing for the survey
- Reviewing the findings
- Consulting on the design and delivery of the forums and
- Sense checking documents to ensure that the voice of young people is clearly heard.

So far we have heard from 3639 young people aged between 15 and 24 through the survey and 41 young people in the online forums.

In the survey 61% of respondents were female, 27% male and approximately 10% non-binary or gender diverse. All states and territories from around Australia were represented, with Victoria (28%), New South Wales (26%) and Queensland (21%) the main contributors. Almost 70% of respondents reported as coming from urban areas.

## What have we heard so far?

The views of young people came through clearly around the issues that you were facing and actions that could be taken. Key themes and ideas follow, but what came through was that young people wanted:

1. **Increased services and support**
2. **Policy changes that would reflect the changes they wanted to see**
3. **Greater accountability by politicians to young people for decisions they were making**
4. **A more equitable society**
5. **Greater inclusion of young people in policy making;**
6. **A safer place to live and**
7. **Increased information and education about key topics to support their understanding.**

You also told us that while many of you are engaged in the political process it's not always through traditional means, such as voting, but through campaigns and protests, and you're also unsure if what you say really makes a difference.

# Your Voice results are in!

You said,  
"Include us  
more in policy  
making!"



**Mental health**  
77.5%

**Education**  
67.2%



**Employment**  
54.4%



You said you  
want to increase  
mental health, income  
and affordable  
housing services and  
support!

**Housing**  
43.8%



**Environment**  
46.9%



You want to  
move towards a  
more equitable  
and inclusive  
society

**Financial aid**  
41.5%



You said,  
"Politicians need  
greater  
accountability to  
young people -  
especially when  
those decisions  
impact us"

**Disability**  
31%



**Indigenous issues**  
29.8%



**Immigration**  
20.2%



"Let's do more about  
racism, discrimination,  
education, employment  
and support for those  
who are vulnerable!"

**Transport**  
15.3%



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NB: Participants were able to identify up to 5 key areas which means that results do not equal 100%.



# Mental Health

## You told us:

- There are significant mental health concerns for young people which affects their ability to be involved in everyday life.
- When young people need support for their mental health it is not always available, affordable or accessible and appropriate services are essential.
- Those experiencing Significant Mental Illness fall through the gaps in the system and are reliant on crisis support.

I don't feel like the government is doing enough with prevention. I think it is great that the government has put mental health resourcing in the latest budget, but there was no spending on preventing sexual abuse, family violence, homelessness or much to do with unemployment either. These are major issues that are high contributors to young people's mental health issues.

You can't separate the mental health of young people from our social and environmental contexts. We grew up knowing that our world is dying, and no amount of counselling will stop the anxiety and depression that this causes. People talk about a youth mental health crisis and while access to therapy is essential, it is not enough; we need reforms surrounding education, employment, and the environment in order to have hope that we will ever be able to grow up safely into a safe world.

I was in a domestically violent situation, and they sent me a letter in the POST saying that because I hadn't contacted them, I was no longer in need of their services.

## Not being able to attend school due to mental health issues is really exhausting.

I think the fact that the mental health system is chronically underfunded needs to be addressed by all government parties. The trends we are seeing with the increased need for mental health support across Australia dictates that this continuous underfunding is not sustainable.

I think the government really needs to start addressing the stigma that surrounds mental health.

If I felt comfortable to talk to the counsellor at school, various mental health issues could have been prevented.

## It seems like it's nearly impossible to get into see a psychiatrist.

My local headspaces have wait times of 2-3 months.

Living with a homophobic or transphobic people can be very difficult.

The mental health care plan still costs too much money. It is impossible to see a psychiatrist in order to get on medication if you aren't earning good money.

I had to wait three months to see a (private) psychiatrist last year, and during that period I ended up in crisis.

Extremely hard to get any help. I had to wait for over a year to see a counsellor through head space and during that time my mental health almost became unbearable. I felt betrayed and so extremely alone for someone who throughout school is told there is always help available. It simply should not be this hard to get help. I know others my age who have had the same experience. The mental health system needs some significant improvements people are losing their lives because of this.

Mental health services are too expensive for most youth. And five sessions covered by medicare is not enough. I have tried to contact and get help with headspace, and I was waiting months after my intake interview. I've had referrals go nowhere.

**Even with subsidies it can cost \$100+ to see a psychologist and that isn't feasible for a lot of young people - especially without parent's financial support. Organisations like Headspace are known for being ill-equipped to handle long-term major mental health and are incredibly difficult to get into with long wait times. Having greater access to psychologists would be fantastic.**

**Invest more in the public mental health sector. Help to improve general facilities and provide affordable training programs to more people. If there are more people who are adequately trained, that could potentially decrease wait times. It would also mean people wouldn't have to resort to private counsel, which can be hard to access especially for younger people.**

I just think the education surrounding mental health has to be taken from a different angle. Instead of learning about mental illnesses as scientific illnesses, we should definitely be learning about micro aggressions and how to respond to peers who are struggling with mental health illnesses.

I believe we have a shortage of mental health support workers and we need to train teachers, community workers how to be empathetic and understand how to deal with people with mental health issues. It can really break down stigma and help people going through a tough period.

**There seems to be this weird middle ground with mental health resources that isn't covered. Am I too complex for this service or am I not complex enough for this service? For example, Beyond Blue and Headspace are great for early intervention.**

**The wait time is ridiculous. I've waited two weeks to see my doctor, been recommended a psychologist and then had to wait two months to be able to book an appointment. By this time, my mental health has deteriorated further.**

Expansion of services like CYMHS in Qld. I've found them to be a lot more effective than headspace at a time where pretty much all mental health professionals are closed books or have a 6 month waiting list. Having to wait so long allowed my mental health to seriously deteriorate.

**I found it really good to be able to access a psychologist who gave me tips which changed my view on how I looked at everything that I do. Before this I was very hard on myself and was comparing myself to others and how well they did things.**

**Whenever I've felt alone and needed help, it has been really easy for me to get access to online counsellors through a range of different websites.**

There could even be a national virtual hub for people who aren't able to access physical hubs which could include live chat and online resources. Having someone to talk to who can help you figure out what is happening and direct you to other resources would be incredibly handy.

**Young men are way too often told that they need to keep their mouths shut and keep their tears in. I have a male friend and he is going through but some stuff he said to me that he doesn't want to talk about it in case he is seen as less of a man.**

**I believe we have a shortage of mental health support workers and we need to train teachers, community workers how to be empathetic and understand how to deal with people with mental health issues. It can really break down stigma and help people going through a tough period.**

**Often kids won't seek help for the fear of being judged, bullied or stereotyped, if the government were to provide sources in school where bullying someone about mental health or creating a genuine safe space for people to share their struggles, kids would be more open to seeking out help rather than internalizing.**

**A holistic approach is necessary for better mental health for young people. Increasing welfare funding so that young people aren't sleeping on the streets, skipping meals, and can afford to take care of themselves is a simple way to improve youth mental health. This would have great long term effects, and treat some of the causes of poor mental health, rather than responding to the effects.**

I would suggest the integration of the work done in the mental health space for clinical and non-clinical activity to be entered into schools. There is ongoing use of lived experience alongside clinical care, but they might not enter into a school setting because it's not set up that way. Schools could use lived experience of students to influence how they provide support to others.

**There should be more normalised advertisement and/or education so kids dealing with mental health don't feel alienated and are more comfortable seeking help.**

**Implementing a youth specific service for 17-24 year olds that supports young people through...more complex cases/situations/diagnosis. If you're too much for headspace you're either have to figure it out on your own or experience care not designed for young people.**

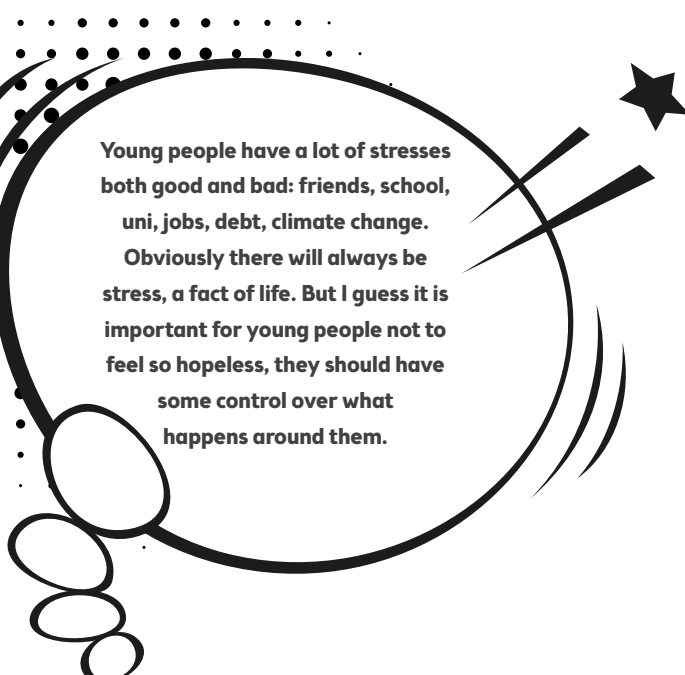




# Education

## You told us:

- You want a quality education but the system that is currently in place isn't meeting your needs.
- The system is impacting your mental health and wellbeing
- You aren't being supported appropriately to achieve the best possible outcomes for your future
- It is difficult to balance requirements regarding education and work, which can lead to detrimental wellbeing and educational outcomes



Young people have a lot of stresses both good and bad: friends, school, uni, jobs, debt, climate change.

Obviously there will always be stress, a fact of life. But I guess it is important for young people not to feel so hopeless, they should have some control over what happens around them.

Schools acknowledge how much stress and anxiety students experience during their schooling, and yet claim that this is normal. Students shouldn't be made to feel stressed almost every week over a test they have and should instead see school as a safe, nurturing environment that cares about how they feel and is willing to cooperate with or help students that are struggling with any issues, especially in regards to mental health

Most youth mental health issues are caused by school stress and not being able to do the things that we enjoy outside of school. Provide greater support to children who come from (challenging) households. These things are hard on the young mind.

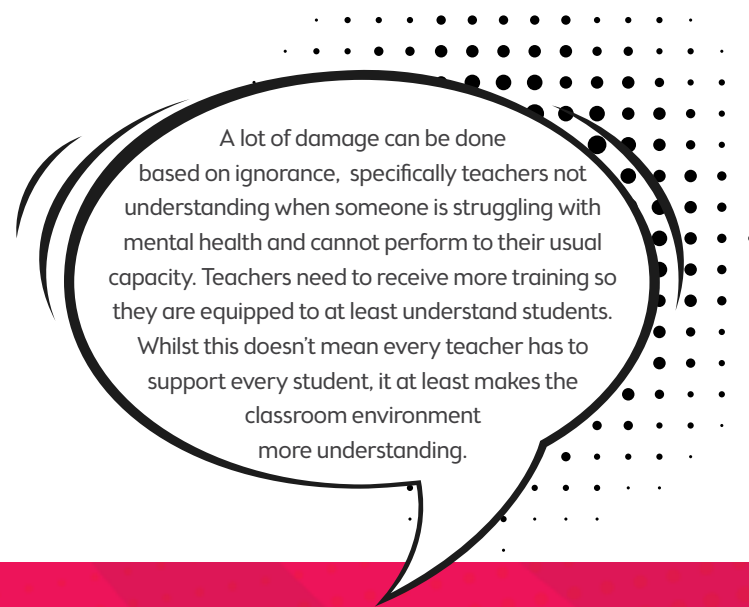
School psychologists would be a great government initiative! In my primary and high school experience, we had a chaplain but the quality of education that one must do to be a psychologist or a chaplain are vastly different. I understand if private religious schools choose to have chaplains but a fully qualified psychologist is much more appropriate.

**When I was unable to attend school due to chronic anxiety and depression as a child, the school (public and government funded) did nothing, and I had to move schools and take a year of leave to fix my mental health.**

Didn't attend school because of my anxiety and rather than being helped I was told if I didn't come to school that I would have to repeat the year level and fail instead of someone trying to help me

**Honestly, my mental health is probably the worst it's been due to the constant stresses of assignments. Unfortunately, because of assignments, I don't have the time to seek for help.**

Personally I think a lot of problems start in schools especially with the behaviour of students being the language used or actions toward other pupils, because there's a lot of homophobia, transphobia, racism and sexism in my school that's only being addressed now but has been a big problem for years.



A lot of damage can be done based on ignorance, specifically teachers not understanding when someone is struggling with mental health and cannot perform to their usual capacity. Teachers need to receive more training so they are equipped to at least understand students. Whilst this doesn't mean every teacher has to support every student, it at least makes the classroom environment more understanding.

My school also doesn't teach us any practical life skills, Zero in on youth issues relating to consent, relationships, facing family issues and balancing a personal/work Life alongside school. Give us equity we have equality.

I believe that the biggest change that needs to occur in the education system is a more accessible and friendly mental health system. We as students are constantly told to talk to someone if we need to but are denied the right to have a comfortable space to share our concerns and problems in. Mental health is one of the biggest reasons why students don't do well in school and I strongly believe that with an improved system it would help students across Australia to better their grades and education experience in general.

feel like middle achievers aren't really recognised, if you do really well you get recognised and if you do really poorly you get help, if you're in between your kind of ignored.

I'd like to see better mental health education and genuine discussion in schools, as well as transparency, clear confidentiality limits, and quality of services provided by teachers and professionals working around mental health.

## My main problem with the Australian education system is a lack of support services.

I have dyslexia and in primary school I got a personal learning plan with the school, they then helped me with specific needs

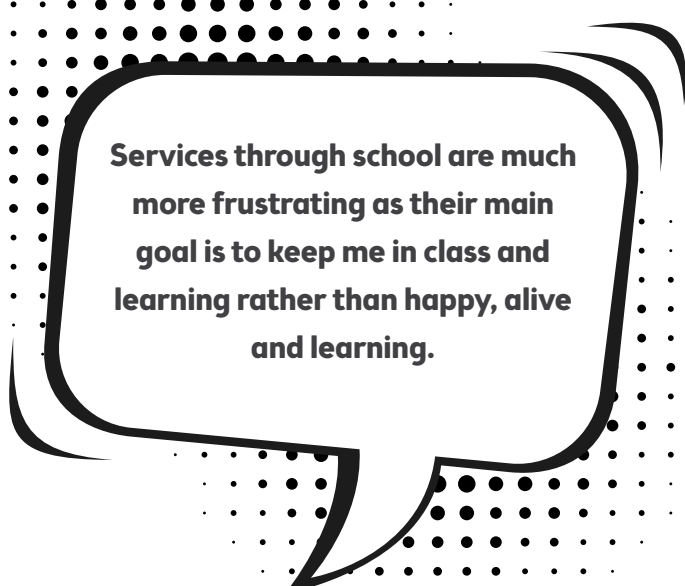
People aren't feeling safe in schools which should be a place that they can feel safe.

I can't imagine what it would be like for other students whose parents are busy and aren't able to teach them life skills.

(An ideal system would be one) where no one is discriminated against. One where young people can access help with homework/schoolwork and mental health. It is a system that is able to reach everyone no matter their race, financial situation or where they live.


I think if you are going to offer a course, you should be prepared to provide industry specific assistance. I do understand that having this additional support would mean additional staff and resourcing, but I think having more of a long-term, end-to-end outlook on the student journey instead of just leaving them after they graduate would not only benefit the students but the university as well.

I'm a university student who relies on Youth Allowance as well as two casual jobs to support myself. My studies, which are crucial to my future career, suffer because of my workload. This is on top of my volunteer work, another crucial experience needed to get a job once I've finished my degree. So many of my peers are in this same position, and many cannot rely on financial support from their families. If the government wants graduates who are knowledgeable, fully qualified and brilliant individuals, greater financial support is necessary.



**Services through school are much more frustrating as their main goal is to keep me in class and learning rather than happy, alive and learning.**





An idea I have would be for... in-house mental health support hubs, forming some sort of service that is within the education department but separate from schools, that can work with schools better than outside providers like headspace and CYMHS in QLD can.

School needs to be a place where everyone is treated with equity. It is great to treat everyone exactly the same (equality) but giving everyone the opportunities to do the same thing their own way I feel is more important

Youth Allowance that was easier to access and provided enough money to actually live on - as a student relying on youth allowance living in shared accommodation in Melbourne, the current rates do not even cover my rent.

Having school counsellors and learning advisers would set everyone up for success and allow those students who may struggle an opportunity to grow instead of falling back in class due to the lack of support.

I told a bit of time off of school because of personal things happening at home and something called the FLO program intrigued me so I asking my parent to consider it and as soon as I got into the program I loved it and love going to school

My school runs a personal development program, which (sometimes) teaches life skills and such. Maybe all schools should have this sort of program, or if it already exists, they should actually listen to students and find out what they want to learn. Maybe governments could push programs that encourage more teacher-student cooperation? Healthy Harold for growing up!

I believe that the school education system needs to prepare students for practical skills that they will need in adulthood. It would be helpful to have classes about taxes, how to save money efficiently etc. More help about how to get internships or experience in our chosen fields would be beneficial.



I think opportunities to make connections as part of your study through internships is important. Also good for companies, like say marketing companies, to get fresh perspectives.

# Employment

## You told us:

- It's not easy to find and get a job
- You want to work and have an education that prepares you for work
- You want to develop your skills for the future but there are many barriers

It is definitely easier if you come from a more privileged background (parents/friends have connections) or live in a more urban area. It is hard for those outside of this criteria I think. It can feel like you can't get a job unless you graduate from university. Then, in university, it can feel like you can't get a job because you need experience which is sometimes hard because you need to get good grades too!!

## I am also concerned about the likelihood of finding full time employment after I graduate.

The sort of support I need is for employers to be more understanding and less demanding.

**Many young people are employed but don't have access to dependable work. For instance, I was told that I can't have one regular shift a fortnight on the same day, as under new federal laws, if a casual worker has the same shift over a period of six months, they have right to request conversion to permanent employment.**

Nowhere wants to give you a job no matter how hard I work for it. Even if you have qualifications.

I have huge dreams, and I want to achieve them more than anything, but it seems impossible with the current job market.

I live in a rural area with poor transportation services and I'm only on my Ls, so I'm not even trying to get a job until I can drive myself independently.

Even after 13 volunteer positions and 5 internships while I was studying my Bachelor's degree, I never managed to get a job in my field. I then had to go on to postgrad study to eventually get a job outside of customer service.

**I think at the moment, employers are expecting so much of candidates which makes it really difficult to get an entry level job out of uni. I've seen advertised positions for entry level roles are asking for 3+ years experience where the job description is 3 separate roles in one.**

I have thankfully finally found a job but for the 5 years I was looking it was extremely stressful, demeaning, dehumanising, and honestly resulted in intense depression for myself. People don't realise how mentally painful it can be to be unemployed. For myself I felt like I wasn't valued in society and that I didn't deserve to be alive or like I was a burden. It is also extremely difficult to find a job without connections. Every young person I know is struggling to an extremely demoralising point with unemployment. A lot of them feel hopeless and lost. It would be great if we could be more empathetic as a society towards those struggling to find work. We don't do it on purpose. We are trying so hard but industry is just not letting us in the front door.

**I have been in youth job seeker programs before, and while I was lucky and had a case manager who was focussed on wellbeing as well as assisting me get back in the work force, he was unable to keep this focus with the pressure from higher ups to get kids into work with no regard for wellbeing.**

**I have found it difficult to find a job and along with my mental health, it's much more difficult for me to put myself out there**

I had an awful experience with ... a disability employment service who kept trying to push me into full time work and calling me lazy when I said I couldn't. I dreaded going in and cried after (and even during) many of my meetings. They didn't tell me that I needed to update Centrelink once I'd got an autism diagnosis, and generally didn't seem to think it was relevant.

Having a long-term mentor in the industry who is able to help you form a career path, help you prepare to enter the industry and give you feedback while you're in the industry would be great



Trying and failing multiple times to keep jobs was something that embarrassed me and something I beat myself up about so much. Trying to speak to professionals about this was difficult for them to understand as they were older than me and/or just reinforced my negative thoughts and feelings about my failures instead of giving any advice or support.

**I think that it's accessible for young people these days to use technology and seek, LinkedIn and other platforms/websites to find work. However, not everyone has access to technology... Many people looking for jobs can't afford the luxury of phones or laptops.**

From my experience, they want people who already know what they're doing so they don't have to spend time/money on training them - which leaves young people at a disadvantage. The government has brought in initiatives such as Job Maker and Job Trainer, but it needs to be looked at on a wider scale and not just for trades.

**I wish I had someone to talk to while I was at uni who had the knowledge to help me map out my path to my chosen career.**

**All of the time I had spent at employment agencies had absolutely 0 outcome**

**I would love increased internship programmes in universities and high schools to give young people the chance to make the connections they need in order to find work. Without networking it is impossible to find a job.**



# Environment

## You told us:

- Climate change needs to be prioritised, with more consideration given to young people and their future when decisions are being made
- We don't have an understanding of what the government is currently doing and why that's happening.

I don't think private industry should be influencing government policy.

**I really think we should be considering renewables more seriously. I think that we could and should be world leaders. It could expand industry for us and also be really profitable in the long run.**

**What am I even working so hard towards in school? Who knows what the state of the world will be when I'm an adult, thanks to the irreversible effects of climate change.**

We shouldn't have to protest and fight for our voices to be heard about protecting our environment and saving our planet. This is our future and we don't want to die or have our world die because of climate change.

I would like them to know that all this, bushfires, floods, extreme heat etc. is only going to get worse. And it's their children, their grandchildren and so on that will be affected.

**Accelerate the rollout of renewable energy, come up with a renewables export strategy for trade, put in First Nations protections, start restoring environmental damage, start planning infrastructure that will help with the rollout of renewable energy with will in turn create more jobs.**

**Better urban planning and design is needed too, to avoid things like urban heat islands.**

**I honestly can't stand to think so long on climate change as a global issue because it seems so hopeless**

**I think it just needs to be treated as the serious issue it is. Why would individuals feel the need to protect the environment when the government don't seem too worried about it?**

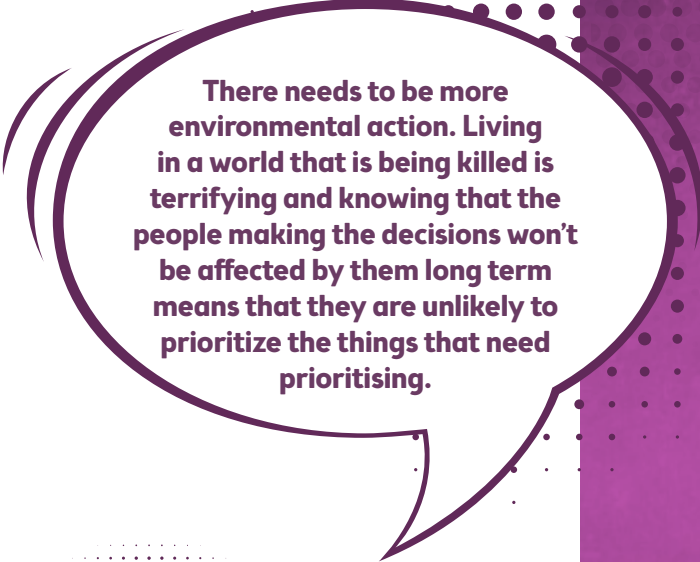
I mean the most concerning thing is the thought that I won't even get a real future. I am afraid of not getting to enjoy the world like generations before me.

My biggest concerns is that the wildlife and environment around us is slowly disappearing.

**I think it's just I get afraid I'll have to live through complete environmental collapse or have to make the hard decision whether to have children of my own based on the way the world is.**

**They should have been saving or set aside a plan to put towards greener and renewable energy and ways to improve our future that would meet the 2030 target.**





**There needs to be more environmental action. Living in a world that is being killed is terrifying and knowing that the people making the decisions won't be affected by them long term means that they are unlikely to prioritize the things that need prioritising.**



### **Why has the environment become a political volleyball?**



**Something small that can be done by all levels of government is designing their buildings to be more environmentally friendly. Using low impact materials, plenty of green space and including solar panels wherever possible.**

The targets should be 0 emissions as soon as possible. We are lagging behind.

## **The government needs to lead by example.**

More reporting on the state of emissions targets, but a need for increasing the overall funding for research.

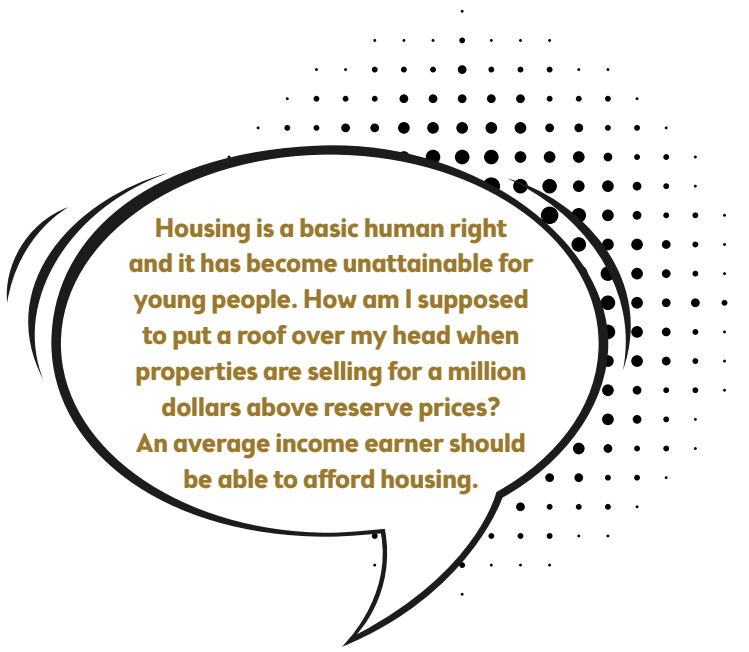
**I think taking real actions to build the renewable sector would give us all hope.**

**I think it would be best if the government tried to get ahead of the promises they've made in relation to carbon emissions and the year 2050.**

# Housing & cost of living

## You told us that:


- The current cost of living is having a significant impact now and on your future
- Not all young people have access to support from their parents and carers
- That you're struggling to find affordable housing and are worried about how you will afford this in the future.



Housing is a basic human right and it has become unattainable for young people. How am I supposed to put a roof over my head when properties are selling for a million dollars above reserve prices? An average income earner should be able to afford housing.



I have tried to access homelessness services but found it to be a little out of reach and difficult to approach so personally I just couch-surfed for a bit.



I have contacted Link to Home, and they had nothing available for me. I spent hours on hold for them to tell me that there were no available refuges. I have also stayed in a Project Youth Refuge, the process to get in wasn't too difficult but they kicked me out after 4 weeks because my mental health was too complex and sent me in an ambulance to the nearest hospital.

So I was out on the streets last year during COVID, I was 14 there were no hostels where I could stay CPFS was useless at finding me somewhere to stay and when I turned 15 and got into a hostel while I was there my mental health depleted and then I had been kicked out kind of thing they gave me my stuff back, and they left me at my friend's house all because I was wrongly accused of using heroine

**Services with homelessness takes ages I was living on the street for 6 months before I was able to be put into housing. Which meant I'd miss school, I struggled to feed myself etc. They really need to get a more efficient way to combat this issue**

Youth Allowance should be raised. Living either as a student or job seeker. As a student youth allowance has been dreadfully low.

I know many of my generation want to own a house and have kids, but that's soon becoming a luxury that they don't think they'll be able to afford.

However, the specialist cost over \$300 per session and only \$200 of that was refunded through Medicare. If I had wanted to see this specialist 3 month prior, I would not have been able to afford it.


**I also think it would be a more accessible and supportive system if the government provided greater subsidies instead of raising the prices of uni degrees. This solution doesn't address the root cause of the employment problem and pushes low socio-economic students out of education.**

**Wage growth would be great... it's been like 30ish years since wages have grown but cost of living keeps going up... How are we meant to find jobs that even keep us afloat?**

Shouldn't have to worry about whether or not they or their family can afford for them to have a healthy mental well-being

**Education, housing, toiletries and food are basic human rights and for people as vulnerable as teenagers and children, they need support given to them.**





**The government needs to look at how they can give more rights to young workers in the gig economy, increase Job Seeker, and bring legislation in to control the currently out-of-control housing market.**

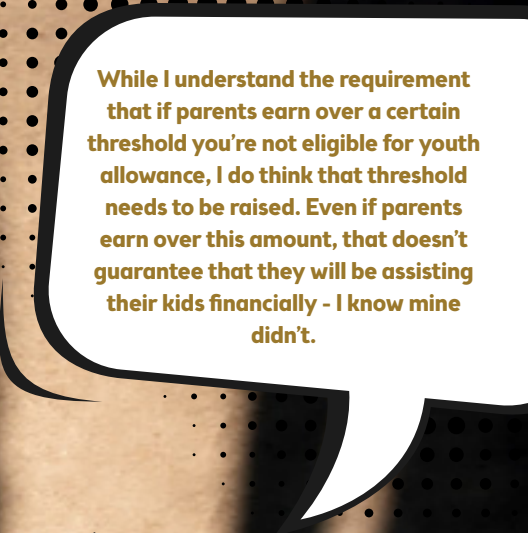
1.5 million people on the JobSeeker payment and Youth Allowance live on just \$44 a day - far below the poverty line. If we want people to be able to eat, clothe, and house themselves, that number needs to be doubled.

I moved to a different city and started unstable casual work living on \$200 a week when my rent was \$150 a week. I wasn't eligible for any government support and my parents were unable to financially help me either. It took me 2 years of working casual and part time roles in customer service to eventually get a full time job. It was a terrible time and I felt incredibly unsupported.

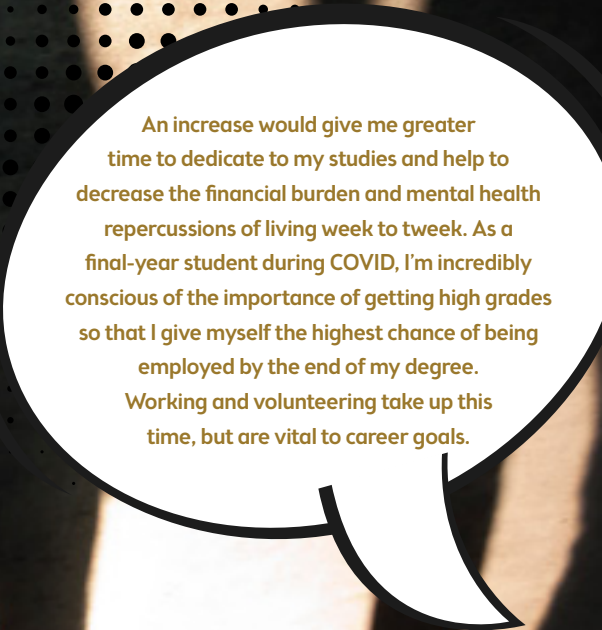
Left abusive home at 14, because my mother was still technically my legal guardian and still claiming Centrelink. It made the process incredibly hard.

## **Youth allowance and study assist need to be reviewed.**

I got kicked out of housing commission as I was trying to escape an abusive family member. They refused to help me. I was left to couch surf for over 6 months before finding a place to rent (which is so expensive that I struggle to buy food).



**While I understand the requirement that if parents earn over a certain threshold you're not eligible for youth allowance, I do think that threshold needs to be raised. Even if parents earn over this amount, that doesn't guarantee that they will be assisting their kids financially - I know mine didn't.**



**An increase would give me greater time to dedicate to my studies and help to decrease the financial burden and mental health repercussions of living week to tweek. As a final-year student during COVID, I'm incredibly conscious of the importance of getting high grades so that I give myself the highest chance of being employed by the end of my degree. Working and volunteering take up this time, but are vital to career goals.**

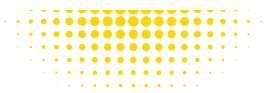
# Youth Empowerment

## You told us:

- You are aware of what is happening around you
- You want to be involved in the political and decision making process
- You are concerned about whether decision makers are considering your needs and hearing your voices.



**We have ideas. There are things we want to put in place we just need someone to listen to us.**



The prioritisation of adults, pre-existing systems and ideals has a profound impact on the quality of life for younger people. It would be wise to seek more valued input from youth into these sectors to prevent further harm.

**We're a generation who is not looking forward to the fact that the problems in our current world are going to be 10 times worse by the time they're up to us to deal with that's why we're trying to take action now.**

**I would tell them to actually put in the effort and listen to what young people today have to say ... rather than thinking that they know what is right for us.**

To listen more to young people... attend all schools in the local area and working with younger voters (or those just under the age to vote) as decisions made will always affect them the most

**Young people are very passionate about helping others and the environment. I believe there are a lot of smart and sophisticated young people in Australia whose voices would contribute a great deal to the community**

**I believe the young people of Australia deserve better. We deserve to be represented in parliament.**

It would be good if there was a forum where students could bring up concerns ... speaking through their own experiences. I agree that student councils are often popularity contests. When they aren't they're often limited to high achievers who don't generally offer a diverse set of viewpoints.

## Why are you ignoring us?

Conducting more forums like this one, or sending out emails/texts/ads to see if young people are willing to participate in surveys that they will collect and utilise data from. It would be great especially if there was a general Australia-wide consensus, then smaller ones that are more specific to councils, as they can target different suburbs and areas where perhaps there are different issues, becoming more effective with their resources and helping more people in need.




**Just want to say that it has been really interesting over the last few days seeing how much we all have to say. It really just goes to show that while we may be on the younger side of society, we have such a diverse range of opinions and ideas that can be valued.**



**More direct democracy. MPs and parliaments should frequently hold forums where constituents can raise their concerns.**





I think that many young people have the drive to create change but don't feel they have the means to create meaningful change. Stakeholders like politicians, departments of gov, corporations seem so far away.





# Safety Inclusion

## You told us:

- Young people don't always feel safe to be who they are
- Feeling safe contributes to wellbeing and this impacts our schooling, mental health and future
- Stigma towards young people is creating barriers and issues in the community, at school and at home

**There should be more information given to the public about LGBTQ people, specifically trans people.**

**These concepts should be taught in schools so students don't feel broken or weird.**

There needs to be more education for primary schoolers, and bullying in primary schools for kids starting to explore their gender and sexuality needs to be taken much more seriously. Explaining to younger children the different sexuality/gender expressions will help the kids who aren't cis/straight understand their feelings without feeling isolated

Normalising non binary genders/non binary as a gender is important

**Schools are out of control with bullying.**

**The (systemic) discrimination indigenous students STILL face is disgusting. There needs to be more funding for indigenous youth (health, mental health support, education, and funding for the continuation of their culture(s)), particularly in rural communities.**

They need to do something about the bullying that lgbtq and disabled students receive in schools.

Kids should learn how to understand one another, rather than concealing things that encourage bullying.

Please let kids be kids. All kids, including trans kids, deserve to feel safe. Kids deserve to be treated with respect

Schools are very hard on students, most people I know are suicidal because of how hard it is on us. Schools shouldn't make people want to commit suicide.

**There's a lot of people who apply for youth allowance and are denied because their parents earn too much, but their parents say "you're 17 get out of my house."**

There are not enough systems in place to support this nation's youth who belong to a minority group or who do not have significant familial support. There needs to be a bigger safety nets to stop these people falling through the cracks in order to give them the skills they need to live healthily and happily and contribute to the Australian economy

I would discuss the police and indigenous people. My friends were pepper sprayed at the Invasion Day rally this year, a peaceful rally and march.

YHP helped me with medium term housing, but the department of housing took 2.5 years to find me a place. I was 16 when I became homeless, because my family home was abusive.

There needs to be some sort of safety net for lgbtq+ youth to protect and take care of them instances of being disowned by family for who they are, discriminated against in school in environments and provide clear access to the services they need become safe and independent without having to alert potentially unaccepting parents. This extends on to services for transgender youth seeking to legally and physically transition as the currently system seems to make harder for them to reach their potential.

Not enough is being done for young minorities, especially queer people, disabled people and ethnic minorities. Often cycles of disadvantage impact these groups and not enough is being done.

I would also like to talk about the fact that lgbtqia+ and gender diverse people are given hardly any support and have no idea how to access anything. Many young people in these situations are facing hate from those around them, including family. We need support, and we need to know how to find it. There also needs to be something that taught EVERYONE that being lgbtqia+ or gender diverse isn't wrong. It is a thing, and it is who we are, and they shouldn't get to tell us that we are bad and hurt us.

# Access to services

## You told us that:

- Services can be difficult to find and complex to access and when you are faced with multiple barriers and come from marginalised groups this is even more difficult
- You need assistance to understand what is required
- When services are available they are not always suitable for young people



**There were no services to help me. I felt confused, stressed and alone.**



There is a need for information that is available and accessible so that young people can be informed appropriately.

It took me years to find a GP who could empathetically address my concerns who didn't want to put me on medication right away. I believe even this alone would help de-stigmatise mental health support.

Educating and introducing students to (services) in schools to help them know how it works at a basic level as so later in life its less confronting.

**I never received or knew of any help for my couch surfing situation.**

**Community disability services are very hard to get into. NDIS is even harder to get into when you need the constant and urgent support. When you do finally get into either services, you have to do some mismatching until you get services that treat you correct.**

There aren't a large amount of services related to disability or support about that, those that do exist are overworked

**The system is designed to give us disabled people as little support as possible. We are assumed to be faking our disabilities unless we can provide a mountain of evidence from a variety of specialists, which costs A LOT of money.**

**(I) am not taken seriously because my disability is not obvious**

LGBTIQ+ people need to be included in planning and developing the policies and service that affect them

Most GPs I've seen are older doctors and from my experience aren't very empathetic or understand issues that young people go through.

**I have spent hours and hours on the phone trying to resolve issues with Centrelink, which is a massive barrier for people with mental health difficulties as it is so time consuming and stressful to communicate with them.**

When I turned 22 they took away my disability support as well as if I suddenly had miraculously been cured on the eve of my birthday.





**Dealing with Centrelink is a nightmare. I have had continual contact with them for nearly a year, getting different requests for different documentation every time I call them. It is draining, and I can imagine that for people who have difficulty with communication (eg people with social anxiety, depression, autism) it would feel even more difficult. Greater availability to submit specific information to Centrelink online would be useful. Another solution, that I understand may be unlikely to happen, or only in severe cases, would be to have a support worker to assist with navigating this system.**



**The welfare system needs to be much more flexible to accommodate people with different situations.**



Centrelink makes many payments, especially Disability Support Pension, impossible to access. This means that people like myself, with a psychiatric disability, are just left to rot in financial limbo.

**It was quite a daunting experience having to go to Centrelink and arrange income support, I was never offered a social worker or anything to assist me and no compassion was shown even though I was only 15. They needed to contact my parents, and this became quite a traumatic experience for me, so I quit the application the first time and tried again in 2 years.**

Centrelink is immensely stressful and often caused my mental health to decline at times because I worried, I wouldn't be able to feed myself or I would end up homeless and lose everything

**The quality of the service is atrocious. It is dehumanising, painful, embarrassing, exhausting and overall, the worst thing in my life. It destroys my mental health.**

My experience with mental health services was very dissatisfying. They didn't establish a secure trust in the client (me) therefore I was unable to share my struggles as I didn't trust therapist. I have been dealing with many mental health issues with little help as I now refuse to get counselling because it is a waste of my time as I have never improved.

For me being neurodivergent it's so hard to find support services financially to help cover things I need like tuition and sometimes psychology.

I remember one of the psychologists even accused me of attending for fun. And that maybe I didn't need to go. I had seen her all of two times. I knew I had depression and anxiety (and have since been diagnosed). It felt like a slap in the face to be dismissed like that.

The people I saw didn't help anything, if anything they made some stuff worse.

The services I accessed were for adults it was very difficult to find youth related homelessness support in local areas, I think there should be at least one place for homeless youths in every suburb.

**All public and community services... need to have accessible assessment and sign up forms and processes.**



**I do think they should be a bit more transparent, clearer and more engaged with its users and the community.**





### **I am clueless about how everything works**



I feel like telehealth is a great tool, but it should not be the sole way to access support. telehealth creates new challenges like a lack of privacy ... technology issues.

**I don't feel like there's enough resources for youth with chronic illness and I don't get the help I need**

Getting appointments for physical health problems is a pain to get into especially if you need a certain specialist (such as neurologist) the wait list are 18months long or are full and get told that we need to go somewhere else (but there is nowhere else to go apart from 2 hr trip to Sydney)

**There is only very limited access to them where I live in rural South Australia**

Educate the community more on LGBTQ+ issues and mental health because my experience is that overall, there's a lot of misunderstanding around them which hinders people in these groups from getting the help and support they need.

**Getting help can be extremely difficult and there are a lot of places that shuffle you around like a game of pass the parcel**

I live in rural Victoria, not many services available and no one is trained to deal with more severe mental illness, I have been passed around to many people without receiving real help or been taken seriously, as no one knows how to manage my disorder

### **Costs a lot of money to be diagnosed so I cannot access services**

Listen to what barriers disadvantaged communities face and then use tailored support to assist them based on their situation. E.g. for refugees they may have difficulties with English so they may need language support. A mentorship with a store clerk would help them build confidence and their language skills

I was given a learning access plan which has helped me with assignment extensions, but no other support and my disability supervisor was very rushed. At one point when I mentioned I was struggling she just emailed me a link to a how to study better guide. I have autism. I wasn't even stressed about studying.

**I was sick for 6 months while I waited for a diagnostic procedure. During this wait my health declined significantly.**

**A lot of the time I didn't feel heard and had little hope of getting better.**

Increase promotion of resources by having community/online hubs where young people can easily access them.

**My older sister receives NDIS funding, and this has helped her with engaging with the community, as well as being able to afford her needs**

I have a fused spine and That is my disability, all services are very helpful and can assist me if I need a wheelchair or anything else when my back get really bad and painful.

The NDIS is great for my brother and Dad and help them loads

The NDIS has been complicated to get into

Getting a spectrum test is too harrowing. I've been told it'd good to get the funding and resources but it's so expensive and time consuming!


**There's difficulty determining what services are available nearby. Perhaps clearer lists of services might help.**



**I live in the country and I need to travel 4 hours to Adelaide to get help**







The government needs to understand the perspective of students that they are presenting information to. That is why the milkshake consent ad failed. It treated teenagers and even the topic of consent as a joke. So having a youth voice in making youth-targeted advertisements for education is vital.

I started using ice, marijuana and regularly drinking alcohol at the age of 14. Tried accessing assistance to help me get off drugs & alcohol but due to my age no one was able to help me.



# Summary

Throughout Your Voice we have heard from thousands of young people throughout Australia who are informed and passionate about their communities, peers and future. We have heard about your experiences, the struggles that are being faced and the concerns that you have.

But in this we have also heard the passion that is present for improving your communities and ensuring that all Australians have the best possible opportunity to contribute to a brighter future.

You are also telling us that your needs, now and in the future, have to be considered. If you can have a strong start in life you will have the opportunity to contribute and grow.

This is particularly relevant when you are transitioning in the school system and from education into employment, as these times are stressful and can be difficult to manage without support.

Finally, it was clear that there is a need to consider the holistic support that young people need and that there are clear intersections between different areas and issues.

You told us that Safety and Accessibility are closely linked, as are Education and Employment. A key part of Mental Health is housing and affordability, but it is significantly impacted if you don't feel safe.

This means that while there are some specific areas of need that have been highlighted through this process, even one change could have significant impacts now and for your futures.



**We have also heard the passion that is present for improving your communities and ensuring that all Australians have the best possible opportunity to contribute to a brighter future.**

# Where to next?

Using all of the information and ideas that have been provided, we have worked with the Youth Advisors to develop some policy ideas that will be discussed and developed as part of Youth Summit.

Many of the issues that you talked about were linked, such as Mental Health and Education, so where appropriate these issues were linked together and ideas were developed that considered holistic solutions.

These ideas are outlined in the table over the page.

## At the summit we will be talking about:

If we have heard you

Are these ideas appropriate

What these ideas might look like in practice

The changes that this might make for young people and their future and

Are there other ideas that need to be considered?

Once the ideas are finalised and reviewed we will then be working with representatives to deliver them to the Federal Government so that they can hear Your Voice.

Thanks for your participation and we look forward to the next stage.

If you have any feedback for us please contact the team at [yourvoice@yourtown.com.au](mailto:yourvoice@yourtown.com.au).



# Comparison of Themes, Identified Issues and Policy ideas

Issue	Policy Idea	Policy Details could include
<p><b>Young people are concerned about the current actions related to climate change.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>There is a sense of hopelessness and helplessness around the environment at this time</li> <li>Young people are concerned that these actions are not sufficient to make the required changes</li> <li>There is a belief that decisions are not being made based on the needs of young people and the future</li> </ul>	<p>That the Federal Government commit to action that will limit global temperature increases to 1.5 degrees by 2030 that is independently assessed and reported.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide tax relief for urban projects reduce the carbon footprint</li> <li>Reduce the reliance on fossil fuel and the ability of lobbyists to influence decision making</li> </ul>
<p><b>Young people feeling that their views are not being heard in decisions that affect them.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Young people want to be heard and listened to in regards to issues that affect their lives and future</li> <li>There is a need for meaningful involvement in decision making for young people</li> <li>The voices that are heard are generally privileged backgrounds, there is a lack of representation of diverse voices</li> <li>Young people are pessimistic about politics at this time</li> </ul>	<p>The Federal Government have youth engagement and participation as a requirement for local members during their term.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Federal Members should be provided with targeted funding to run a youth forum in each electorate during their term where they can hear directly from young people (up to 24 years old)</li> <li>Continuation of Your Voice Funding</li> </ul>
<p><b>Information regarding government policy, programs and supports is not accessible for young people.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Information and paperwork about payments and supports is difficult to find and processes are confusing</li> <li>Minimal support is available to identify and understand this information</li> <li>Those from diverse backgrounds find it particularly difficult to access the information</li> </ul>	<p>The development of youth-based communication strategies, in consultation with young people, to allow for information about government policies and processes to be accessible.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Youth consultants and co-designed communication strategies</li> <li>Strategies developed for areas such as the environment, Youth Allowance and finances</li> </ul>
<p><b>Young people require an individualised and flexible approach to assist with periods of life transition.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>There is a lack of appropriate support and appropriately qualified workers in the education system to assist young people</li> <li>There is significant pressure during education and it is difficult to access support</li> <li>There are ongoing concerns about the future of employment and young people's holistic wellbeing</li> </ul>	<p>Wellbeing hubs are developed in educational institutions in partnership with the local community, employers and philanthropic organisations to provide educational, employment, transitional and wellbeing support.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Qualified Case Management and drop in support</li> <li>Travelling or community based hubs for rural areas</li> <li>Partnerships with local employers and training organisation</li> </ul>



Issue	Policy Idea	Policy Details could include
<p><b>Access to adequate financial support can be difficult for young people and when study or personal circumstances require young people to rely on welfare payments they struggle to afford necessities.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Young people on welfare payments find it difficult to afford basics and at times they have to choose between essential items including housing, food and health care, exacerbating mental health concerns</li> <li>• Lack of support creates greater daily stress and can impact on the ability to complete study; leading to long term mental health and career impacts</li> <li>• The process to access support is demanding and there are issues with accessing support for those with parents earning over the combined parental income threshold and those living in unsafe environments</li> <li>• Many course now require placements or internships which mean that young people cannot work at that time or experience adverse outcomes due to the pressures of study and work at that time</li> <li>• Access to affordable and appropriate housing now and in the future is of significant concern</li> </ul>	<p>Increased flexibility and equity in decision making regarding support for young people that takes into account the needs of the individual and their circumstances.</p> <p>Rates of welfare payments and allowances should be increased to cover an individual's basic needs, and should be based on changes to the average wage and cost of living.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Relaxation of independence requirements from parents and carers, particularly for those studying</li> <li>• Inclusion of internships and placements in the PaTH program</li> <li>• Immediate increase to rates of welfare payments</li> <li>• Increased flexibility in supplementary payments</li> <li>• Changing welfare payments based on changes to the minimum wage</li> </ul>
<p><b>Diverse young people (including LGBTIQ+, CALD and those with Disabilities) lack safety when accessing information, services and supports.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Services have inbuilt barriers that impact diverse individuals throughout the process</li> <li>• Information lacks consideration of inclusivity eg. LGBTIQ+ inclusive sex education</li> <li>• Inequitable service delivery occurs because of stigma and othering of diverse individuals by workers</li> <li>• The lack of safety causes long term impacts regarding mental health, health, education and employment</li> </ul>	<p>The government influences education, industry and business to increase the inclusion and acceptance of diversity through requirements in tenders and funding to provide welcoming, safe and appropriate support for diverse individuals.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Minimum training requirements eg. Mental Health First Aid</li> <li>• The development of action plans for diverse groups are a requirement as part of funding</li> <li>• Imbed consent education and respectful relationships in the curriculum</li> </ul>
<p><b>Support for the diagnosis and treatment of Mental Health Conditions (the missing middle) is difficult to access.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Long waits and expensive to access support for complex Mental Health presentations and for diagnosis of Mental Health Conditions</li> <li>• There is a lack of awareness among front line workers (GP's, school staff, mental health support workers)</li> <li>• Young people find that there is still considerable stigma present regarding mental health</li> </ul>	<p>Increased funding to mental health services to developed more comprehensive referral pathways and support systems to allow timely access to appropriate support for those that require specialised and intensive support that is not complex in nature.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased funding for sessions covered by mental health care plans</li> <li>• Improved peer and lived experience workforce development</li> <li>• Improve affordable access to psychologists and psychiatrists</li> <li>• Improved training and level of qualifications</li> </ul>







Housing

GOVERNMENT

Access  
to services

Your

Voice

EMPLOYMENT

MENTAL HEALTH

EDUCATION