

Anti-Bullying Rapid Review

Summary of yourtown and headspace's advocacy submission 2025

What is it about?

The Australian Government established the Anti-Bullying Rapid Review to look for advice on: best practice in relation to preventing and responding to bullying in schools; types of actions, resources and supports that are working to address or prevent bullying in Australian schools; and possible models and content for a consistent national standard for responding to bullying in schools and its underlying causes in school contexts. The information from this consultation will inform the findings or recommendations of the final report that will be provided to the Australian Government Minister for Education and shared with Australian Education Ministers.

Why is it important?

Bullying significantly impacts on physical and mental health and wellbeing. It can be traumatic and affect performance at school, university, TAFE or work. Our data indicates that bullying is a significant concern for young people. headspace National's Youth Mental Health Survey in 2025 found 48% of young people experienced some form of bullying in the last year (either in person or online). For Kids Helpline, approximately 3,500 responses undertaken in 2024 were directly related to bullying, accounting for about 5% of contacts. The most frequently reported concerns alongside bullying contacts were emotional wellbeing, suicide-related issues, and mental health challenges. Furthermore, 13% of bullying contacts reported experiencing current thoughts of suicide, with the highest prevalence among 10- to 14-year-olds.

Some of yourtown and headspace's key messages:

1. Young peoples' voices and experiences must be at the heart of prevention and response strategies

Schools should ensure students are actively involved in shaping anti-bullying policies and initiatives. Whole-of-school approaches are more effective, relevant and impactful when they integrate student perspectives. These approaches should include regular feedback mechanisms, transparent reporting systems, and a collaborative approach between students, teachers, parents, and the wider community to foster a unified response. In addition, young people and their families must be involved in shaping a national standard for responding to bullying.

2. Governments should work together to consider evidence-based ways to expand anti-bullying initiatives beyond traditional school settings to include workplaces, TAFEs, and universities

Limiting the Review to incidents during school hours and on school grounds overlooks the broader reality that bullying extends into children and young peoples' lives beyond these boundaries. Young people are working outside of school. In addition, young people are completing their secondary school education by going into TAFE and taking up traineeships and apprenticeships. Kids Helpline data indicates that bullying is a consistent concern among the older age group of 19- to 25-year-olds. This suggests that young people are experiencing bullying beyond school into workplaces, TAFEs and universities.

3. Digital supports and resources are crucial for school staff by offering accessible, scalable, and well-structured strategies that empower them to prevent and address bullying effectively

Schools should leverage evidence-based digital resources, including Kids Helpline @ School and headspace initiatives such as eheadspace and Mental Health Education Program, to assist staff to identify, address and prevent bullying. In addition, schools should actively promote support services that allow students to seek help anonymously, recognising that privacy is a key concern for young people.

4. Online bullying needs to be addressed explicitly in school standards, policies and processes

Online harassment can be a constant (and anonymous) presence, extending in-person bullying beyond school hours. Given the links between and impact of different forms of bullying, school standards must address both in-person and online bullying.

4. A holistic, whole-of-school approach to promote respectful behaviours and wellbeing should be implemented alongside bullying prevention initiatives

Tackling bullying in isolation ignores the deeper social and emotional challenges young people face. Bullying interventions may stop incidents temporarily, but do not always change underlying behaviours, whereas respectful behaviour programs can enhance lifelong social skills, mental health, and resilience. This approach can reduce bullying, create safer and healthier school environments and improve student outcomes.

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