



Your Voice

Your Voice Recommendations Report

Prepared by **yourtown** October 2021



kidshelpline
Anytime Any Reason

yourtown
let's create brighter futures



yourtown acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of Country throughout Australia and recognises their continuing connection to the land and their waterways.

We particularly acknowledge the Tyerenotepanner, Panninher, Lettermairrener, Ningy Ningy, Awabekal, Tommeginne, Darkinjung, Kamilaroi, Palawa, Yugambeh, Turrabal, Nukunu, Narangga, Dharawal, Darug, Quandamooka, Yuggera, Yugarapul, Kurna, Wonnarua, Gubbi Gubbi, Tommeginne, Tyerrernotepanner, Paredarerme, and Nuenonne people upon whose lands we operate various programs throughout Australia. We pay our respects to them, their culture, and their Elders: past, present, and emerging.

Artwork: Jason Passfield, Many Communities, Many Schools, Many Rivers



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Acknowledgement

We want to acknowledge the over 3,500 young people from around Australia for the privilege of letting us hear, and pass on what you have to say. You have both challenged and inspired us.

Thanks also to **yourtown's**: Your Voice Youth Advisory Group (Tianna Stevens, Jenn Racine, Chloe Reynolds); Youth Participation advisors; Kids Helpline and **yourtown** clients and staff; the youth services and networks around Australia that supported us; and the Australian Youth Affairs Coalition and their co-ordination of the National Youth Advocacy Network.

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To every young person we work with across Australia – thank you. Thank you for trusting us with ‘your voice’. Thank you for telling us how we can make Australia a better place for today and tomorrow, so that it is a place where you are empowered, you can thrive, and your voice brings positive change.

We are in this with you. We walk beside you. We see you, we hear you, and we commit to amplifying your voice in all that we do.

I felt heard and like what I had to say was important.

Youth Advisor's Forward

Each generation experiences a defining event – or several – that shapes the way they interact with their world.

My generation has recently, and aptly, been nicknamed the COVID generation. We will bear the weight of the social, cultural, political, and economic consequences of this catastrophe the longest. Our futures were uncertain enough as it was. Today, what feels like a lifetime into this pandemic, the future isn't any clearer.

The world is a challenging place, from environmental issues and pandemics. For young people this is all the more challenging while trying to manage becoming an adult... It's overwhelming, isolating, and frankly, frightening. However, at such an uncertain time, I have never felt so proud of my generation as I have felt reading their Your Voice responses.

yourtown's Your Voice has been both a confronting and uplifting experience for me and the other young people in the Youth Advisory Group (YAG). Being able to represent young people has been a deeply meaningful experience for myself and the rest of the **yourtown's** Your Voice YAG. Our involvement has also meant that we have got to see other young people's responses from across the country and have had the privilege of reading some incredibly intelligent, insightful, and considered opinions on the state of the world and ideas on how we can move forward together.

It is not often that you are given the space to speak as a young person and to be taken seriously. To have my and the experiences of other young people considered, has been incredibly empowering for myself and every other young person involved.

What I want moving forward is for all young people to have the opportunity to have their voices truly heard. If we have a collective, confident voice then I believe we can really make impactful change for the better of all of Australians, young and old. And maybe, just maybe, using the findings of Your Voice, we can provide my generation with a little hope to help them navigate the uncertain future.

Tianna Stevens, 22,
they/them/theirs

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2021, over **3,500** young people from around Australia engaged with **yourtown's** Your Voice Project. The project was designed to provide a mechanism for young people (aged 15-24) across Australia to provide input into Australian Government decision-making processes on issues affecting them and their future.

Young people told us that they face multiple, varied and complex issues in all aspects of life. This includes:

- How their mental health has been impacted by COVID-19, multiple and long lockdowns, and the fear and uncertainty about COVID-19's long-term impacts to health and society
- The many barriers young people face in accessing appropriate and timely support; and how services (particularly, mental health services) are not always designed to meet their needs, and practitioners often do not understand, or know how to help or work with them
- How the education system leaves them stressed, and they don't have the supports they need to help them achieve their best
- How they feel under-prepared to enter the workforce, and are worried about finding a job that will pay enough to support them
- How they feel financially stressed by the high cost of living, including housing and transport, particularly if they rely on welfare, while they are unemployed or studying
- How they do not feel safe
- How those from diverse groups often struggle with accessing assistance and preparing themselves for the future
- Many felt hopeless because of climate change, and uncertain about what government was doing about it and its priorities
- A generalised lack of knowledge and trust in government and its processes.

We also heard the positives about services and supports. This includes:


- Welcoming the increase to the number of sessions available under the Mental Health Treatment Plan and the expansion of telehealth services
- The extra funding for helplines, as these are an essential resource when other services are not available
- That quality support in school was invaluable, as it allowed them to focus on and finish their education
- That the COVID-19 supplement was essential in supporting young people and their families during lockdown, as it led to the ability to afford essentials, pay off debt and access medical treatment
- Funding for specialist youth services assists with improving safety and access to support.

94 participants workshoped options for reform and recommended the Government consider:

1. **Supporting the development of Youth Wellbeing Hubs** in educational facilities and community settings to provide educational, mental health, employment, transitional and wellbeing support
2. **Co-designing youth-specific communication strategies**, in partnership with young people, so government policies, processes and supports are accessible to youth of all ages, backgrounds, and needs
3. **Increasing income support and allowances** with regular reviews to ensure they are sufficient, flexible and equitable to meet basic needs
4. **Increasing funding to youth mental health services** for comprehensive, specialised and intensive supports
5. **Obligating funded organisations** through service agreements to **provide a welcoming, safe, and supportive environment, that caters for the diversity** of all youth (Gender diverse, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, Culturally and Linguistically Diverse and young people with a disability)
6. Committing **all members of Parliament to actively engage with youth in their electorates** as part of serving their constituents
7. Committing to, **and independently assessing, actions to limit global temperature increases** to 1.5 degrees by 2030.

These recommendations were driven by what young people saw is essential to maintain their health, access safer support, develop connections with their community, build trust in government, maintain the environment, assist them to gain sustainable employment and help them to have a future as productive, independent members of society.

I think that many young people have the drive to create change but don't feel they have the means to create meaningful change.



What young people told us

What young people told us about Mental Health

At the moment mental health services seem to be overrun. I sought help because I was in an incredibly dark place and realised that things couldn't go on. But I am lucky if I am able to visit my psychologist more than once a month because she is so booked out. This seems to be the case for a lot of people. More so, even with the Medicare rebate these sessions are expensive, costing me \$170 with an \$87 rebate.

Key insights:

- **1,519** respondents spoke about their experiences with mental health services
- **77.5%** of respondents want action on mental health
- **47%** of respondents who had accessed support were satisfied with the quality of service they received. With feedback regarding helplines and private practice being particularly positive.
- Safe and supportive relationships increased the quality of support
- **42%** of respondents were satisfied with their ability to access mental health support
- Respondents provided **1,337** comments about their experiences including barriers they faced in accessing mental health support.

“You can’t separate the mental health of young people from our social and environmental contexts”:

Young people told us they face stress and uncertainty, which affects their mental health, including:

- **Stress:** related to school, including assessments and due dates, particularly when they also have work and/or caring responsibilities
- **Bullying:** experiencing bullying and not feeling safe, or their safety is not prioritised
- **Unemployment:** young people want to be independent and able to look after themselves
- **Cost of Living:** their ability to afford essentials and housing now and in the future makes them anxious
- **Climate change:** young people are concerned about climate change and unsure whether they will have the same opportunities or future as their parents.

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 in a safe world.

“Getting help can be extremely difficult”:

Young people told us they experience barriers to accessing mental health support, including:

- **Service navigation:** difficulties finding the right service and navigating a complex mental health system
- **Wait times:** long waitlists and wait times for services including Headspace, Kids Helpline and public and private mental health services
- **Cost:** having no alternative but to pay up to \$150 out of pocket to see a psychologist or psychiatrist, particularly if they need urgent help
- **Length of support:** receiving short-term support when they require ongoing help
- **Limited options:** limited options for mental health services, particularly in school settings and regional and rural communities
- **Trust in services:** is lacking due to lack of safety and experiences of being dismissed, which have made things worse.

Young people spoke about how these barriers affected their mental health, leading some to exit support early and be less likely to seek help in the future. Those unable to access support reported increased suicidal ideation and involvement with crisis support.

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?

Young people told us about the importance of action to:

- Address stigma and see more examples of positive lived experience stories
- Support for GPs and mental health professionals to provide youth-friendly, accessible, and safe services
- Appropriate strategies to help manage their mental health issues
- To be taken seriously and to be meaningfully engaged in the support process.

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 [the] therapist. I have been dealing with many mental health issues with little help. I now refuse to get counselling because it is a waste of my time, as I have never improved.

As in, rather than helping me, they would make me angry, hurt, defensive and unheard. I had suicidal thoughts and never felt comfortable enough to tell any of them. At the hour mark I'd be kicked out, even if I was in clear distress. And I would often feel worse after going. Often I would have suicidal thoughts as a result of the sessions.

A former psychologist also told me I should hide my ADHD from society because it's not polite to talk about and compared it to my being bisexual, which he also obviously thought I should hide.

An enormous waiting list to see a psychiatrist, limit on amount of psychology sessions (even for people with severe issues), high prejudice among mental health workers (a GP did not want to look into my dizziness, fainting and tiredness because they thought my physical symptoms were due to anxiety. I pushed for a blood test and turns out [it] was iron deficiency. Their only comment was so you weren't making it up).

I haven't been able to find a psychologist in months as they are all booked out. Most of my psychologists have been good but a few have been bad, and they made me feel guilty and bad for feeling what I'm feeling.

You had to go through constant intrusive surveys in a public area. I had to wait months and months to see anybody, and that's if the appointment wasn't cancelled last minute. I was constantly getting handed off to inexperienced psychologists/councillors just about every year. And they were absolutely terrible.

I was quite suicidal a couple years back and was interviewed for different support groups. They deemed me not suitable, but I feel as though I were and didn't particularly understand me during the interviews.

Government-funded mental health support has provided me with the bare minimum to not be dead. I have spent years with [public] health where I have been managed on a crisis basis rather than given any form of actual treatment.

I have seen a psychologist for the past two years and she is amazing.

I have reached out to Kids Helpline multiple times and it really helps me.

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

The Mood Team provided no support after my discharge from Hospital due to an eating disorder. The public hospital kept me in the medical ward due to their being no beds on psychiatric, then discharged me without any psychiatric admission.

I saw a psychologist and I just spoke to her and I didn't get help or strategies to help my anxiety.

Only good experience was with CYMHS, Headspace Cairns and YSUSD Cairns who saved me.

I've gone through many therapists and none of them could help me. I've just given up now.

Having access to a psychologist that suited me close to my regional town was impossible, I didn't even utilise all my free sessions because this person told me to just get off my phone and all my problems will be solved instead of taking the time to get to know me.

Services like Headspace have helped me improve my mental health by providing me resources on how to stress manage myself better.

I was diagnosed with complex PTSD , anxiety and depression and I didn't want to face the fact I have a hard time opening up to anyone, but my time with Headspace helped me realise it's better to tell someone about how I feel.

I was lucky enough to have a strong support network when I began struggling with mental health. They pointed me in the direction of the school counsellor who helped me deal with my stresses from schooling. I also looked to articles and other services from sites such as beyond [blue].

There are no services to help me, I felt confused stressed and alone... It destroyed my mental health; I remember one of the psychologists even accused me of attending for fun and that maybe I don't need to go. I had seen her all of 2 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 and it was very difficult to find youth specific supports.

There were very empty answers that didn't help even though it seemed the person was trying to help. Each time I talked to this service I got the same reaction and that calmed me down temporarily. The service made me feel as if my mental health was not taken seriously and my problem was 'dumbed down'.

I attended ... counselling sessions upon the advice of my doctor. Whilst the sessions were helpful, I am disappointed that no one picked up on my depression. It remained undiagnosed for another 6 months after my final session, in which time my mental health had plummeted.

I tried to tell my doctor about being depressed and having social anxiety over the last 3 years. He told me it was just grief because my Mum died two months ago, and then gave me breathing exercises which give me panic attacks.

It's been a very comforting feeling knowing that there's usually help whenever I would need it, of course it has been hit or miss.

I'm on private health insurance and have gotten pretty good access to psychologists. Helplines are also very helpful and accessible.

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 which I was not as good at.

I was recently an inpatient in hospital at an adolescent private ward and I learnt some great skills, however, I would say a lot of the public mental health system is quite difficult and hard to get that tailored help you need as a young person.

I contacted Kids Helpline [when] I was suicidal when I was 14. They were very helpful and accessible by email which was cool.

Not being able to attend school due to mental health issues is really exhausting. The support from schools themselves is very poor.

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

I have chronic mental health issues. I have found that it is very hard to get required hospital admissions as I am often [not] acute enough for the public hospital but too acute for the private hospitals. I find that the private supports are a lot harder to access but for the illnesses that I have they are better at supporting.

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.

I've struggled finding adequate and quality mental health that's bulk billed and worth going to.

What young people told us about Education

[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.

Key insights:

- 67.2% of respondents highlighted education as a key issue
- 65% of those who highlighted education as an issue felt they only had limited access to support at school
- 65% of young people reporting a lack of support from the education system
- 14% of young people indicated that they left school due to a lack of support
- Appropriate and timely support was essential in assisting young people with educational and behavioural needs

“There is a lack of support services”:

Young people told us that there is a lack of support services in education, which includes support for:

- **Mental Health and Wellbeing:** that is timely and delivered in a safe space
- **Learning:** that takes into account different learning styles and disabilities
- **Teachers:** to understand the needs of young people and provide appropriate support
- **Disengaged young people:** to help them identify alternative education and training options when they want to return to education
- **Financial Support:** Assistance to address their financial concerns while completing higher education to avoid debt and be able to focus appropriately on their education.

The top concerns that young people sought mental health support for included stress related to due dates and assessments, pressure to succeed, concerns about what they will do if they are not successful, and concern about their future.

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.

Some young people told us that it was primarily the delay in accessing support that was a concern. Not all schools have support available for particular concerns and teachers required professional development to provide support for particular needs, such as disabilities or learning support. Where specialists were available positive experiences were reported.

The school I went to provided really good education on alcohol and other drugs which is [something] that they did right.

“The education system needs to prepare students for adulthood”:

Young people told us they want the education system to be accessible and equitable, offering holistic support particularly in school settings, including:

- **Life skills:** Programs that assist them to develop independence
- **Information:** About higher education, including entry requirements, courses, and pathways
- **Employment:** Opportunities to enter the workforce, including work experience, internships and traineeships
- **Transition support:** Support to transition between schools, support between different levels of schooling and between school and further education.

This support would help young people be more confident in their ability to manage future transitions and be a success.

Went to school wellbeing, they helped me out heaps.

In terms of domestic violence and violence towards women, it is disgusting that nothing more has been done to make women feel safer. Instead of teaching me at school that as a girl, there are high statistics of women in domestic violence and rape situations, teach boys not to!!?

“People aren't feeling safe in schools”:

Young people who identified as LGBTQIA+, with a disability or from a culturally and linguistically diverse background expressed experiences of bullying, discrimination, and exclusion. Those outside of these groups also expressed that this was an issue. They raised concerns that this treatment meant that minority groups were left behind.

Young women particularly highlighted the need for safety for women and girls in educational settings. Incidents of sexual harassment and issues with consent that are present at school were often unaddressed leading to issues with equity.

They reported that this lack of safety resulted in disengagement from schooling and social activities, leading to further complications.

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

You need to make sure girls and women are safe and can get the education they want. They shouldn't feel scared all the time. Same with LGBTQIA+ and Aboriginal people. We chose you to fight for us.

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.

I have found very little in the way of help with my disability, not even in school support systems. I had to transfer to online school and it was still inadequate.

[There's] not enough support for young people in high schools/during school, or support for reporting mental health and bullying.

Left due to lack of support.

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

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'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.

My mental health took a drastic turn in mid-2019 when I was bullied out of a school, I had been attending for most of my life. My mental health had started [to deteriorate] at about 2017 and the more I ignored it the worse it got. I eventually, after a lot of confusion and dramatic events moved to an online school where I socially withdrew for months due to anxiety and depression. This also happened during COVID-19 in 2020 where things were extremely tough, I had many suicidal thoughts and struggled to get out of bed. At the end, I was able to get support through Headspace and have an assessment, which I was then diagnosed with depression and generalised anxiety disorder.

There is too much responsibility placed on students. Although I agree that our education system is great, the amount of damage it is causing is atrocious. My childhood is destroyed by anxiety attacks and depressive episodes. I have woken up, more times than I can count on my two fingers [hands], panting and sweaty with tears running down my face because I was so worried for the new academic year. It's not just one or two people affected, an entire generation is anxiety-ridden and depressed. [In] A country where suicide is the leading cause of mortality in adolescents, a country where one child takes their life every day [this] is not where I want to grow up.

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.

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

You NEED to teach boys and men about the importance of consent. I've heard too many rape stories of the guys getting off fine and the women being told their clothes were an invitation.

What young people told us about Safety and Inclusion

Please listen to your people. Some of us are struggling and aren't being heard. Our differences shouldn't set us apart. Everyone deserves respect and human decency, a safe place, a home, stable income, support, and a welcoming country. We need to improve our country for the benefit of [all] our people, so please help us.

Key insights:

- Almost $\frac{3}{4}$ of gender diverse young people have had issues with the accessibility and quality of services and 59% reported feeling unsafe
- 20% of young people who provided comments were impacted by some form of abuse
- 17% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people reported experiencing discrimination. For many this was in the context of non-Indigenous settings or mainstream services
- 15% of young people felt that many of the professionals they had interacted with to both get a disability diagnosis and support, treated them poorly and had very limited understanding of their condition, which impacted on the quality of the support available.

Services such as Headspace were very inclusive, would love to see more safe spaces, support groups, pride events and education/support in schools.

“Please let kids be kids”:

Young people told us that they don't always feel safe to be who they are. Their concerns around safety and inclusion include:

- **Bullying and discrimination:** young people feel that bullying, especially for LGBTQIA+ youth, was creating a lot of disharmony, impacting safety in the community and affecting people's mental health
- **Abuse:** young people experience abuse in their own homes when they express themselves
- **Stigma:** young people feel 'othered' for being who they are. This is particularly true for transgender and gender diverse people, and people with a disability. It also means that they will hide information, rather than disclose essential information to doctors and service providers resulting in appropriate services being offered
- **Trauma:** the approaches used by some organisations can re-traumatise, creating further barriers to help seeking.

This results in inequitable service delivery where diverse young people don't feel safe and therefore do not access services until crisis point, affecting their long-term health, mental health, social connection and employability. It can also mean that young people remain in violent and abusive situations, putting their safety at further risk.

That LGBTQIA+ kids need some real help, we get no queer sex education, no education on discrimination so kids grow up to be homophobic because they were never taught any different.

“The treatment of Aboriginal Australians is deeply rooted in subtle racism”:

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people and those from culturally and linguistically diverse groups told us they face racism and discrimination on multiple fronts:

- Young people from diverse backgrounds including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island people and culturally and linguistically diverse groups experience overt and subtle racism. The micro-racism experiences included stereotyping, inappropriate jokes, ignorant comments, or others having low expectations of them based on their race
- Some have to continually defend their eligibility for support due to their physical characteristics
- There is a lack of education on the true history of Australia resulting in a lack of awareness and understanding.

“I feel comfortable... feel more accepted”:

When young people are able to access inclusive and accessible services, they feel safe and comfortable to share, and receive the support they require. This occurs when support is culturally competent, designed for their needs, timely, supportive of their identity, and trauma informed.

It's just so difficult for a young aboriginal man like me to get help. They make it so confusing and unhelpful that most of us just give up, which is what they want.

When I was 18, I left a DV relationship and went on the streets. I went into a youth shelter and was very happy with the process of the place. However, it was such a long waiting period and I had to be referred to this shelter, so it isn't easy to get in. I wish more places like this existed. I used to see people waiting at the door asking to come in. It's sad- everyone is under 24. Big demand low supply of beds.

Left abusive home at 14, because my mother was still technically my legal guardian and still claiming Centrelink. It made the process incredibly hard. Additionally, because of my age I fit too close to youth allowance for special benefit but was under 16 so ineligible for youth allowance.

I have faced racism due to me being light skinned and people claiming I'm not Aboriginal due to my pale complexion where people should be educated on how people of aboriginal culture don't have a certain look.

Being a Torres Strait Islander, accessing services is not hard and easy to find. However, I find that there is more discrimination as I am mixed race.

Every day I experience some form of racism, whether it be in the form of jokes or just plain discrimination and use of stereotypes.

Stop protecting your boys club; recognise the voice of women and do more to increase female representation and close the wage gap. Get the misogyny out of parliament. Do better.

I have first-hand experienced being silenced and I believe that it is vital to the well-being of minor's mental health as well as physical health to create a support system for children who have experienced family violence. What this would aim to do is empower young people to find their voice and speak up about violence. I want to help young people like myself be empowered and gave a voice. In order for our country to have future we have to invest in our young people. If we don't help young people who are in desperate need of out help then we will not only see a plummet in the amount of students in education, but also the amount of children living with a roof over their head.

More needs to be done in terms of safer environments for children living in a domestic violence situation. If it wasn't for my family, a child who attends school with my brother would be homeless.

From the personal stories from others and workers in the sector of foster housing and regulation, there are plenty of issues and trauma that is being swept under the mat.

To help people in violent home situations move out by helping them financially and finding accommodation.

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 [net] 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 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 are also needs to be something that teaches 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.

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.

There needs to be some sort of safety net for LGBTQIA+ 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.

LGBTQIA+ people are being invalidated.

If you're a young person and your parents aren't good. As in abusive, not supportive, homophobic that's literally bad luck and there's not much help. 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.

I have been very accepted in the services I have accessed- my home life is the part that doesn't allow me to feel accepted.

What young people told us about Employment

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. 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.

Key insights:

- **65% (679)** of respondents aged 18-24 highlighted employment as a key issue
- **54%** of respondents wanted more action regarding employment, particularly around skill development, support during internships and job security.

There needs to be a reform of employment services for youths, and improved cooperation from recruiting providers.

“Too few jobs. Too many [young people] unemployed”:

It is not easy for young people to find a job. They told us they are concerned about:

- **Pathways to employment:** that higher education and training may not lead to full time employment
- **The labour market:** young people want to work but are often unable to find suitable opportunities, leading to feelings of shame
- **Availability of support:** the limited support available to help them successfully transition to work and overcome the barriers that come from being unemployed
- **Mental health:** the impact of unemployment on their mental health and wellbeing particularly when dealing with employment agencies and the expectations of income support
- **Finances:** young people want the skills to be independent and secure work so they can provide for themselves now and in the future.

Young people on income support reported overwhelming negative experiences. They view staff as ill-equipped or lacking in empathy to assist them. Those who identify as LGBTQIA+ and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander find it particularly challenging to find employment and get assistance.

They told us that the level of support that was available made it difficult to move into employment. They often lacked the money to have interview clothes available or to access transport to get to work. They also found it difficult to remain healthy enough to work when opportunities arose due to the cost of living.

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 have huge dreams, and I want to achieve them more than anything”:

Young people want meaningful support to find long-term employment including:

- Skills training from the employment sector
- Guidance on how to build their careers
- Access to technology and the internet to support job application process
- Internships and traineeships are an important step into employment and these programs should be widely available and flexible.

When discussing employment with young people none of them expressed a desire to be reliant on welfare for the rest of their lives. They wanted to find stable employment that would allow them to be independent.

I'd like to tell them that employment, especially for young adults or teens need[s] to be better accessible and available. This comes down to university and levels of education beginning to not be as valuable to employers anymore. It seems that experience is more valuable and so people who spend years at university or further education may not be guaranteed a good paying job anymore. Is going to university even worth it anymore? (Unless wanting higher educated jobs such as medical, engineer etc.)?

In the strides for equality, you are completely overlooking equity. Not everyone has access to the same supports as each other. There aren't houses, families, jobs, or opportunities for everyone. I cannot access the same level of opportunity as someone with structured support or housing.

That there is too many laws and requirements to leave school and continue higher level studies I feel that as a school leaver that I get looked down on but there is no support for me to [continue on to] further studies. I have had to fight for my right to receive enrolment in certain courses. Another thing is income support as a school leaver under 18 I do not receive any support from the Government. I make minimum wage and find it hard to pay [for] things like car fuel, phone bill[s], groceries I do not understand how they expect a full time worker on little money make money to use in the future.

We are underemployed and unemployed. Our fiscal security is non-existent, and we are terrified for our futures. The gap between rich and poor continues to grow, and women still get paid less than men - less again if they are women of colour.

As someone who has applied for over 70 jobs and not received a single interview, despite a grade 12 education the system in place is terrible. I cannot receive Centrelink payments beyond \$75 a fortnight because I have parents that work.

As a graduate with a bachelor's degree in Psychology, most of the jobs available to me are with NDIS service providers. I had a terrible experience working for the NDIS, and I'm struggling to find employment outside this area.

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 had an awful experience with ... as 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.

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.

Many young people are employed but don't have access to dependable work.

Hard to find appropriate resources.

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

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

Please give more educational opportunities to young people in order to increase employment opportunities and income in the future.

People of our age are more concerned about employment in the future. If I don't have the corresponding diploma, I will not be able to find a job.

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

I wish everyone had the opportunity to have access to appropriate education and employment but it's lacking at the moment.

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 studied a 6 month course in community services online independently. The job proceed and the company of the course couldn't find me a placement, so now I don't get my certification.

What young people told us about the Environment

Our environment is dying, people are dying. We are getting shut down and ignored. We have problems too, please help us fix them. We need to act faster against climate change. Young people are the ones who will have to deal with everyone's mistakes. We need to ban single use plastics, such as plastic bags and straws, so we stop polluting the oceans.

Key insights:

Young people have a sense of urgency and hopelessness when it comes to environmental issues.

- Almost **half** of respondents (47%) want focused action on climate change and the environment
- Climate change and the environment was the **third most** important issue for young people aged 15-17 and sixth highest for young people aged 18-24
- **No responses** supported current policies relating to the environment.

The government needs to lead by example.

Climate Change needs to be addressed immediately and cannot wait any longer. It is rarely addressed and is often skimmed over.

"I am afraid of not getting to enjoy the world like generations before me":

Young people are concerned for their future and the future of their children. They feel as though they don't have any input which is causing stress. They want to see a greater focus on:

- **Transparency and accountability:** young people want greater transparency and accountability from the Australian Government regarding strategies to address climate change and updates on our progress towards achieving international commitments
- **Awareness raising:** young people want more education on environmental issues including how to thrive in a changing world and what impacts climate change may have on their lives
- **Our Indo-Pacific neighbours:** sufficient action to stem sea rises for our neighbouring countries and support with adaptation strategies
- **Acting now:** to improve environmental sustainability and reduce the burden on future generations
- **Wellbeing:** support to maintain healthy lifestyles and wellbeing into the future
- **People and planet:** ensuring business interests do not outweigh the need to protect the environment and people.

"I really think we should be considering renewables more seriously":

Young people are aware of the changes other countries are making, including transitioning from fossil fuels and increasing investment in renewable technology.

They want Australia to develop a renewable industry to assist with the development of employment opportunities.

I think it would be best if the government tried to get ahead of the promises they've made.

"It is something that we can do now - it's not a future problem":

Young people believe action must be taken now to address the environmental issues they stand to inherit, including:

- Taxation and regulation of non-renewable energy sources
- Financial incentives to encourage the use of renewable energy and technologies, such as electric vehicles
- Incentives to support environmentally friendly urban planning and development.

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.

Take our environmental impact into consideration when making big decisions and keep in mind that young people have valid opinions.

They should have been saving or [developed] a plan towards greener and renewable energy and ways to improve our future that would meet the 2030 target.

What young people told us about Housing and the Cost of Living

As the young generation, who soon will start to lead, we look to you to care for our problems, not as a handout but a gesture of good will and humanity. 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.

Key insights:

- 41.5% of young people wanted action on income support
- 543 respondents had experience with income support with almost half expressing difficulty in accessing support
- 44% were dissatisfied and 20% were very dissatisfied with access to income support and the quality of the support they received through Centrelink
- 29% found it difficult to access support to find and maintain secure housing.

There are so many people that are homeless or are struggling so much financially that they are at risk of being homeless and this NEEDS to change. It is absolutely necessary for the homeless to be obtaining better support.

"People need to be able to eat, clothe, and house themselves":

Young people are struggling to afford essentials and how they will afford housing in the future. They are concerned about:

- **Eligibility requirements:** young people want more information about the income support available to them
- **The cost of living:** income support has not kept up with the cost of living, leaving young people unable to afford basic living expenses including rent, food, transportation, medication, and education
- **Financial instability:** the impact financial instability has on their mental health and wellbeing
- **Balancing work and study:** young people are working multiple jobs to meet their living expenses, leaving little time for education, placements, and internships
- **Homelessness:** a lack of housing policies tailored to young people. Many young people raised the link between limited income support and increased risk of homelessness.

Housing for young people the pricing of rent isn't fair, a lot of you people don't have that kind of money and end up living on the streets or couch surfing.

Young people want to see an increase in income support and more flexible eligibility criteria.

The increased payments during COVID-19 were essential for young people and their families as they allowed them to pay off debt, cover medical bills, but most importantly reduce fear about affording essentials.

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 week.

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.

"The pricing of rent isn't fair":

Young people reported difficulty in accessing appropriate support. This was particularly challenging for those at risk of or experiencing homelessness, with many forced to stay in abusive relationships, live rough, or couch surf.

Young people able to access accommodation support found that services did not often have the skills to support their mental health, affecting housing stability.

That 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.

1.5 million people on the JobSeeker payment and Youth Allowance live on just \$44 a day - far below the poverty line.¹

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.

1. <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2021-02-26/jobseeker-data-breakdown-coronavirus-pandemic-age-gender-stats/13193908>
https://melbourneinstitute.unimelb.edu.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0007/3889393/Poverty-Lines-Australia-March-2021.pdf

What young people told us about Youth Empowerment

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. The voices that are heard are generally privileged backgrounds, there is a lack of representation of diverse voices.

Key survey insights:

- **More than half (65%)** of respondents had been involved in democratic processes
- **83%** of those who were of compulsory voting age were enrolled to vote
- **23%** reported having had contact with a local representative (federal, state, or local government)
- Only **22%** felt very confident with their skills and knowledge regarding participation in the democratic process
- **18%** felt very confident their participation made a difference
- **26%** did not feel confident they had the skills and knowledge required to participate in the democratic process
- **38%** felt that their participation did not make a difference.

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.

Why are you ignoring us?

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

Young people want to be involved in political and decision-making processes. However, they told us during **yourtown's** Your Voice that:

- They feel their voices are not being heard.
- Young people are frustrated as they want to be involved in designing policies and services to better meet their needs
- Opportunities to participate in government and decision-making processes are only provided to a select group, which is not representative of marginalised voices
- Previous consultations with young people have been tokenistic and they want meaningful involvement in decision-making and parliamentary processes
- Government does not focus on or prioritise the needs of young people
- Young people want to be able to trust the government and have opportunities to connect and share their insights on decisions that will shape their future.

A key issue is there is not enough information provided to them to be able to take part in electoral and decision-making processes.

They believe the education system should empower young people by equipping them the skills and knowledge to understand and participate in government processes.

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.

I believe the young people of Australia deserve better.

You want to have help to change? Give us a chance, listen to the youth experiencing those issues and actually assist them with this by hearing them and putting their thoughts into action!

“I know you guys are trying but you need to listen”:

Young people also told us that they understand that being part of government can be difficult as there is a need to balance the needs of different groups.

I appreciate the work you do for the country and hope that you vote positively on progressive legislation and policies to ensure a sustainable future for everyone.

You are doing a good job but there are some young people in Australia who need more help than others and we need to help them.

What young people told us about Access to Services

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.

Key insights:

- Almost 60% of respondents indicated that they were not satisfied with the accessibility of Australian Government services. This was particularly the case for young people needing to access the NDIS, transgender young people and those seeking accommodation due to family issues.
- **Over 500** respondents wanted services to be more accessible
- **17%** felt they were not heard or suffered poor treatment from health professionals, and this had a significant impact on their ability to get the right diagnosis and appropriate support and treatment
- **46%** reported difficulty in accessing income support, with waiting times a key concern
- **7%** reported poor treatment when they sought support including being made to feel worthless and ashamed
- **15%** reported very positive experiences and felt it was easy to access support. This group was generally helped by youth services to access support.

“The quality of the service is atrocious”:

Young people told us that the lack of safety and waitlists were key elements of access. They also raised:

- **Accessibility:** not all services are able to be accessed (due to physical barriers, technology access, transport issues and eligibility issues) and there are also limited services available for specific needs and in rural areas
- **Information and paperwork:** they are not provided with clear information about services and processes and paperwork is confusing and lacks clarity, making it hard to provide the required information
- **Support:** they don't always have someone they can ask questions or get support from to identify what support is available and how to access it - this is particularly a barrier for those who have faced trauma
- **Eligibility:** the age and geographic requirements of services can make them difficult to access
- **Parental earnings** also affect access to support which does not always take into account the ability or willingness of the parents to support their child.

Lack of services mean that young people feel isolated and excluded, have reduced help seeking, creating further barriers in their future.

All supports and services need to be more inclusive and accessible.

Waiting lists and quality of services trying to get help for chronic pain and fatigue has been something that's extremely difficult to deal with.

“The welfare system needs to be much more flexible”:

Young people are very vocal about what they believe services should look like. Young people who reported having positive experiences accessing services noted being assisted by a secondary services such as a youth service and, that they found services targeted towards specific cohorts to be safe and helpful. This included services which used youth friendly material.

They were very welcoming and non-judgemental. I enjoyed my time there as I felt I was able to talk freely about my issues without judgement and safely too.

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.

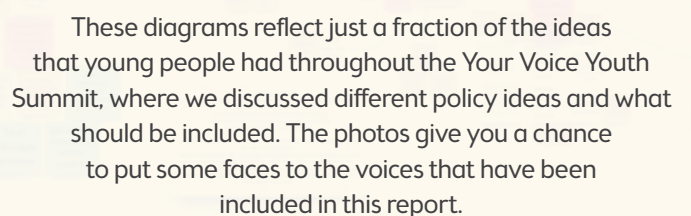
They told us that:

- Processes need to be less onerous
- They need clearer information, particularly when reviews of decisions were required
- Those with barriers require extra support to move through the process
- Services need to be more accessible and tailored to the individual.

Listen to what barriers disadvantaged communities face and then use tailored support to assist them based on their situation.

Impossible, I have to wait months each time to see the specialist, and there is only very limited access to them where I live in rural South Australia.

I don't feel like there's enough resources for youth with chronic illness and I don't get the help I need. It's easy enough to get access if you can afford privately



20



**Group Photo
@ Youth Summit**




The Youth Policy Framework & Key Recommendations

The Youth Policy Framework was released in 2020 to express the different government priorities for young people in Australia and was used as the basis for the Youth Advocacy Support Grants. There were six different areas identified in the framework, that are represented in the outer ring of the diagram. At the bottom of the diagram are the seven recommendations that the young people made as part of **yourtown's** Your Voice Project.

The inner ring shows which priority areas are impacted by the policy recommendations. This demonstrates the connected nature of not just the issues that young people expressed, but also the impact that these recommendations could have.

Each of the Policy Recommendations correspond to multiple benefits. Definitions of these benefits are detailed on page 39.





RECOMMENDATIONS KEY

1

Youth wellbeing hubs

2

Youth specific communication strategies

3

Improved welfare support

4

Increased mental health support

5

Accessible services and supports

6

Youth engagement activities

7

Environment

Youth Wellbeing Hubs - Recommendation 1

Policy Recommendation:

Support the development of Youth Wellbeing Hubs based in Education Institutions and the community that provide educational, mental health, employment, transitional and wellbeing support for young people.

These hubs should be formed and supported through a Government and community partnership, which includes members of the local community, employers, and philanthropic organisations, to assist with meeting the diverse needs and unique challenges of local communities.

Policy Benefits:

Health and Wellbeing
Access
Independence
Connection
Employment

What we heard from young people:

Throughout **yourtown's** Your Voice Project, we have heard that Education is a key issue that requires action from the Australian Government. Young people want to be independent from their parents and not require welfare support. They want to be successful at school and in their career and they want to be able to access support when it is required.

Key elements of this recommendation include:

- Inclusion in the National School Reform agreement
- A flexible approach including travelling and online hubs
- Case Management and qualified support
- Independent from the school system to increase safety.

I dropped out of grade 12 because my teachers were putting me down constantly while I was going through the hardest time of my life so far. If they had some empathy and were trained in how to respond, I might have been a successful student.

Wellbeing hubs providing skill development and linking in with professionals, psychologists, career counsellors. Not just something run by or linked with the school but outside the school.

It's not just one or two people affected, an entire generation is anxiety-ridden and depressed. 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?

Youth specific communication strategies - Recommendation 2

Policy Recommendation:

Commit to the development of youth specific communication strategies, developed in consultation with young people, to allow for information about government policies, processes and supports to be accessible for all people regardless of their age, background, or diverse needs.

Policy Benefits:

Health and Wellbeing

Access

Independence

Connection

Trust

What we heard from young people:

When young people require information about the Australian Government, they have found it is difficult to access, find it hard to understand and there is a lack of clarity. This was the case in many different areas such as for Centrelink, forms, and policy.

Key elements of this recommendation include:

- A youth specific website to provide information
- Young people consulting and co-designing government documents
- Information being available in multiple formats to increase accessibility.

A service that's hard to access
isn't worth being there.

Youth policy documents become everyone's
documents because they are more attractive,
easier to read, and generally more personable.

Improved welfare support - Recommendation 3

Policy Recommendation:

Regularly review and increase the rates of welfare payments and allowances to cover an individual's basic needs based on changes to the average wage and cost of living.

AND

Increase flexibility and equity in decision making regarding welfare support for young people, which takes into account the needs of the individual and their circumstances.

Policy Benefits:

Health and Wellbeing

Access

Independence

Employment

Extra payments mean young people do not have to choose between essential medications and eating, rent, or bills.

In five years, we don't want to be on these payments so we can have our own independence and not have to rely on the government.

What we heard from young people:

Young People that access welfare have identified through **yourtown's** Your Voice Project that they cannot afford essentials such as bills, food, rent, transport, and medical and personal hygiene products. This means it is difficult to move into work, become independent and manage health issues. It also leads to long-term impacts, as they cannot access support.

Key elements of this recommendation include:

- Regular reviews of payments to ensure that they are above the poverty line and people can be healthy
- Tiered payments system based on individual circumstances
- Relaxation of independence requirements
- Inclusion of qualification-based internships on the PaTH program.

Increased Mental Health Support - Recommendation 4

Policy Recommendation:

Increase funding to mental health services to develop more comprehensive referral pathways, increase training opportunities, and support systems. To allow for timely access to appropriate support, for those that require specialised and intensive support that is not complex in nature.

Policy Benefits:

Health and Wellbeing
Access
Independence
Connection
Environment

What we heard from young people:

Young people are struggling with their mental health and the system that is supposed to support them. This is owing to long wait times, support is expensive, and it is difficult to access appropriate and safe support for diverse individuals. The system also lacks connection and an inability to support young people when they face complex situations.

Key elements of this recommendation include:

- Long-term support for those with complex mental health and neurological conditions
- Increased access to diagnostic support
- Holistic support to assist with recovery, including case management
- Increased funding and incentives for those wanting to work in the field to allow for the extension of services.

You can be too complex or not complex enough. [You either] get yourself better to access support or get worse to access crisis support.

You can't separate the mental health of young people from our social and environmental contexts ... 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.

Accessible services and supports - Recommendation 5

Policy Recommendation:

Require all Australian Government funding, tenders, and grants; including those for education, health, industry, and business; to provide a welcoming, safe, and supportive environment for diverse youth.

Policy Benefits:

Health and Wellbeing

Access

Independence

Connection

Employment

What we heard from young people:

Aboriginal and Torres Strait islanders, Culturally and Linguistically Diverse communities, People with Disabilities and Members of the LGBTQIA+ community told us that they feel judged and unsafe when accessing services. This affects their access to services and can lead to long-term issues and crises.

Key elements of this recommendation include:

- Development of a Diversity Action Plan as part of the key criteria for funding conditions
- Assessment of suitability is made with representatives of diverse communities
- Future funding is assessed against actions that promote inclusion
- Incentives are provided to support inclusive businesses.

More people would be inclined to reach out for help and support if they feel safe to do so. If they know the service is going to be open to them and support them.

This could benefit people's mental health and reduce the need [for] future support.

Youth Engagement Activities - Recommendation 6

Policy Recommendation:

The Australian Government to commit all members of Parliament to actively engage with youth in their electorate as part of serving their constituents.

Policy Benefits:

Health and Wellbeing
Access
Independence
Connection
Trust
Environment

Young people are able to express issues and solutions that are relevant to their community.

Young people are experts on their own lives and in this setting, they are able to share their expertise and knowledge.

What we heard from young people:

Young people want to be heard; they are passionate, knowledgeable, and interested in government. However, they don't feel that their views are considered, they don't know how to get involved in politics, they are unaware of what the Australian Government is doing, and they lack trust in politics at this time.

Key elements of this recommendation include:

- Requiring members to spend portion of their electoral allowance to run youth forums that are accessible for all young people in their electorates
- Activities to be run in partnerships with young people through the development of Youth Advisory Groups
- Youth advocacy funding for projects such as **yourtown's** Your Voice to be continued
- Ensuring that there are youth appropriate activities during election periods and handovers.

Environment - Recommendation 7

Policy Recommendation:

Commit to action, which is independently assessed and reported, that will limit global temperature increases to 1.5 degrees by 2030.

Policy Benefits:

Health and Wellbeing

Employment

Trust

Environment

What we heard from young people:

Young people are concerned about climate change. They are worried about rising temperatures, environmental disasters, and the loss of ecology. They also don't know if humanities lifestyle will be sustainable and if it will be safe for them to have children. It was also expressed that they couldn't find reliable information about the current actions and environmental policy of the Australian Government.

Key elements of this recommendation include:

- Partnerships between Government and Business to increase investment in renewables
- Support the use of renewable technologies for both public and private consumers
- Support retraining for those effected by the transition
- Develop an accurate and independent reporting framework.

If this policy is successfully set in place, then society may feel more at ease and less threatened by impending doom.

Allow Australia to be a leading force in the action against climate change and influence other countries to make similar changes.

6



BACKGROUND

yourtown's Your Voice project was designed to facilitate young people (aged 15-24) experiencing marginalisation across Australia to access and provide input into Australian Government decision making processes on issues affecting them and their future.

The project gathered the views of young people about issues important to participants. It also worked with young people to build their knowledge and capacity to engage with and advocate for their concerns in line with the priority areas in the Australian Government's Youth Policy Framework.

A variety of approaches to consult with young people were used. This included:

- **Stage 1:** A national online survey exploring the views of over 3,000 young people
- **Stage 2:** Six online forums that explored the key issues with survey participants
- **Stage 3:** A combination of 8 online and face-to-face summits with young people from around Australia that worked through a structured decision-making process to identified key policy actions, their different elements, and benefits for now and in the future.

yourtown fostered the development of young people's engagement capabilities through:

- Sharing ideas and information with participants about different ways to engage in thinking and speaking up, and exploring policy ideas, including online training to strengthen an understanding of, and skills in advocacy.
- Engaging Youth Advisors in the design and decision-making process to develop their leadership, planning, issue identification and analytical skills.

A lot of my mental health issues centre around being alone and COVID has really tested that, working has been the best thing for me at the moment, but if that gets taken away, I don't know what I'll do.

COVID-19

A supplementary survey was conducted to provide insight into the ongoing impact of COVID-19 on young people. It received 190 responses, 62% of those were in lock down at the time of responding

"I've been on a rollercoaster":

COVID-19 and associated lockdowns have had a significant impact on young people around Australia. Young people told us they felt disconnected, isolated from their social groups, and they had lost significant educational, employment and social development opportunities.

Key findings:

- **97%** felt that they have been negatively impacted by the pandemic
- **92%** experienced multiple negative impacts, such as social isolation, loss of work and lack of social interaction.
- **74%** told us that they experienced a significant personal impact
- **38%** felt under significant psychological distress.

Young people face significant vulnerabilities and exhaustion in the COVID-19 environment. The findings of the survey suggest that young people exposed to longer periods of lockdown experience greater impacts both in the immediate and longer term. These findings are of relevance for educational settings as young people return to learning, and need to have access to support in the short and longer term.

"Process, grieve and overcome":

Young people were generally supportive of the actions taken by governments to address COVID-19. They support health directives, vaccinations, lockdowns and the cancellation, and restrictions on events. If lockdowns are required, they told us that:

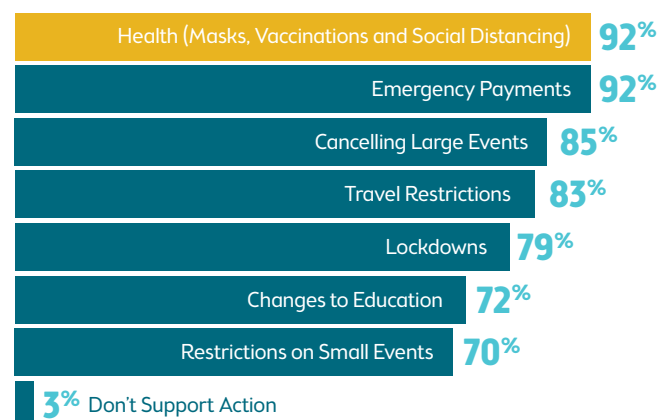
- There needs to be investments to improve the quality of online learning
- They need to be able to maintain face to face connections with friends and family and
- Financial support is key to maintaining their wellbeing

As lockdowns and restrictions are lifted, young people said that:

- There needs to be a focus on managing anxiety and distress
- That greater focus should be given to wellbeing and
- That support needs to be provided to assist them to catch up on their education and have hope for the future.

"We have ideas. We just need someone to listen to us.":

"Nothing About Us Without Us". If decisions are being made about young people, they want to be involved.



The Your Voice Process

Engagement with
young people to
plan and design
Your Voice

Your Voice Survey
22nd March -
16th May

3,639 participants

Key groups were those with a mental
health condition, the LGBTQIA+
community and those from low
socioeconomic backgrounds

Mental Health,
Education,
Employment,
Environment,
Cost of Living
Increased support,
Greater accountability,
Increased equity,
Inclusion of young people,
Safety, Information

Analysis of
responses and
identification of
key areas

Online forums using
Hum Hub exploring
key issues and solutions

**41 participants
over 6 forums**

Mental Health,
Employment and
Financial Security,
Education,
Environment,
LGBTQIA+, and Safety
and Having your say

Collaborate with
Youth Advisors and
participants to identify
relevant policy ideas

53

participants

7 policy

recommendations

Youth summit to
explore and prioritise
recommendations

Delivery of policy idea
to government

Benefits:

improved health and wellbeing, increased
independence and trust, feeling connected and able
to access support, being ready for employment and
that the Environment will be protected.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

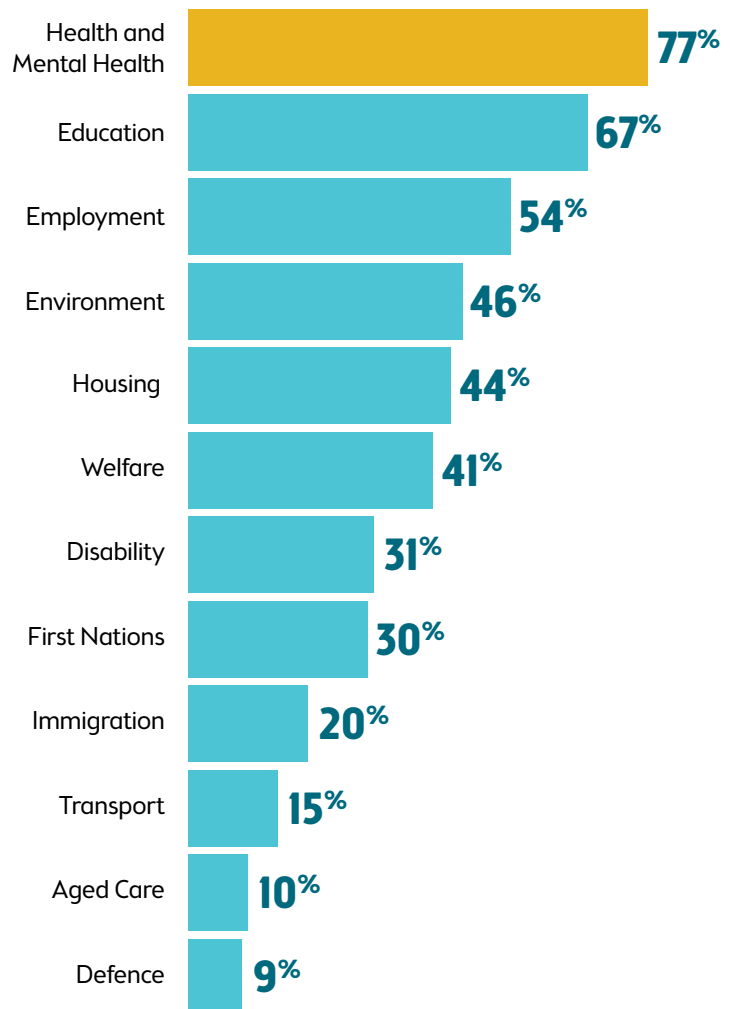
The government needs to see for themselves what [it] would be like as a teen, in these times to understand the full extent of the issues.

The information below is based on the views of 3,496 young people that participated in Stage 1 - the **yourtown's** Your Voice Project survey.

Participants were asked to: rate services accessed; identify areas requiring change; and identify their involvement and level of confidence in being involved with democratic processes.

Over 2000 comments were received in the survey from young people on key issues. The analysis of these responses identified additional key issues and areas of concern, while providing feedback regarding primary areas of the consultation.

Participants were asked to select five top areas under the survey that mattered to them most. These overall top areas were then identified as the key issues for exploration in Stage 2 – The Forum. The key issues were:



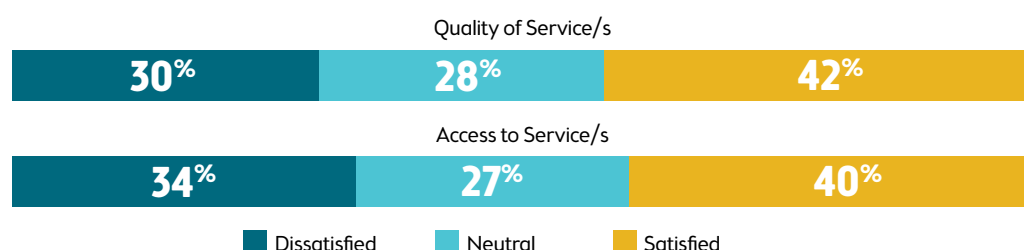
Please listen:

Young people identified safety, equality, accountability, access to services and inclusion in decision making in their comments as key themes.

There isn't enough support for kids:

Young people provided their views on services, their accessibility and quality. Participants were asked to rate the quality and accessibility of services they had contact with. This included mental health, health, income support, education, and disability support.

Young people were generally more dissatisfied with access to Mental Health services (57%), Income Support (69%), and services for the gender diverse community (71%). Areas where young people were more satisfied included the quality of Mental Health Support (47% satisfied) and carer supports (49% expressing satisfaction with access and 52% satisfied with quality).



We just want to be heard and respected:

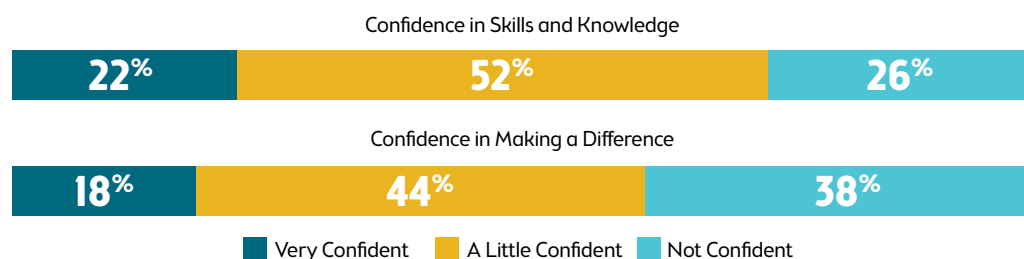
65% of respondents have engaged with government at some point, with activism being the main activity. Of 18-to-24-year olds, 82.7% were enrolled to vote, with 59% of these having previously voted.



The level of confidence in their ability to participate and make meaningful change as part of engaging with government was not high. With a 12% decrease in their confidence levels when comparing skills and knowledge to making a difference.

When comparing the age groups, when you are between the ages of 15-17 years old you are roughly 10% more likely to be very confident than the 18-24 year old cohort in their ability to participate and that they could make a difference as part of the democratic process.

However, a key message from the comments made by young people was that they do not feel heard which influences their level of trust in government and its processes.



Your Voice Summary

Responses by Age

15-17 year olds

49.1% of participants

49% have never participated
in democratic processes

40% have been involved in activism

Key Issues include:

80% Health & Mental Health

73% Education

49.5% Environment

46% Employment

41% Housing

18-24 year olds

50.9% of participants

59% have voted in an election

37% have signed petitions

Key Issues include:

73.8% Health & Mental Health

62.5% Employment

61% Education

47.5% Income Support

46.5% Housing

Responses by State

NSW 26%

NSW Top Issues:

Health & Mental Health 81%
Education 74%
Employment 52.5%

Main approach to democratic participation

39% Never Participated
or Activism
68% Enrolled to vote

VIC 28%

VIC Top Issues:

Health and Mental Health 70%
Education 62%
Employment 58%

Main approach to democratic participation

37.5% Petitions
85% Enrolled to vote

QLD 21%

QLD Top Issues:

Health and Mental Health 80.4%
Education 66%
Employment 51.8%

Main approach to democratic participation

40% Voting or Activism
87% Enrolled to vote

SA 8%

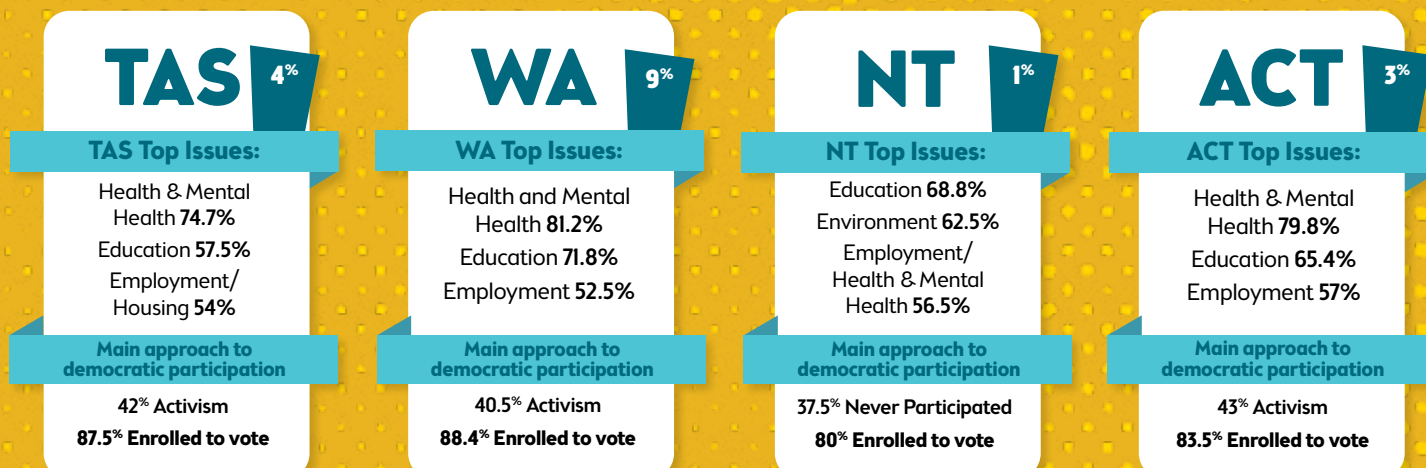
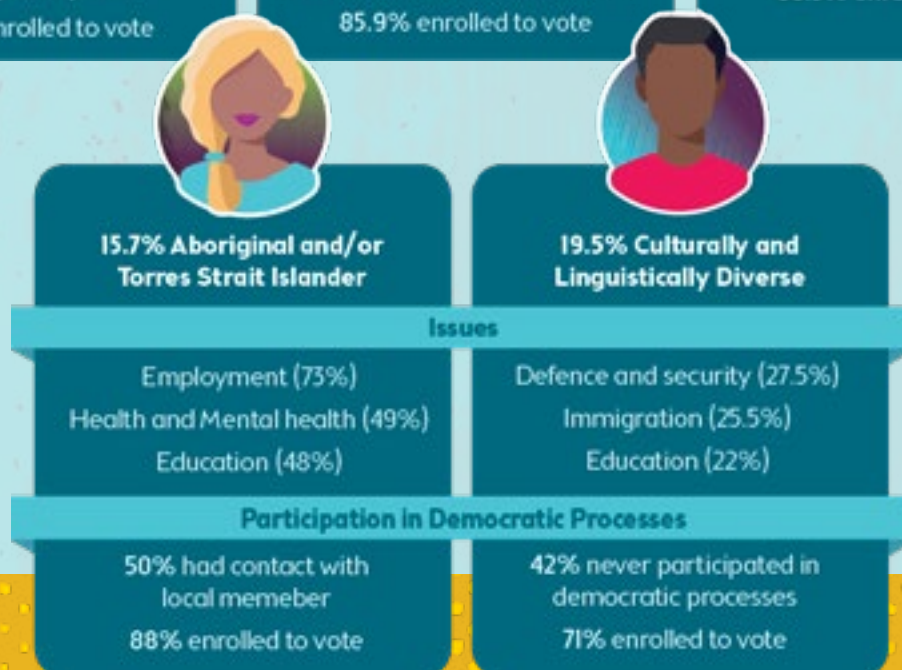
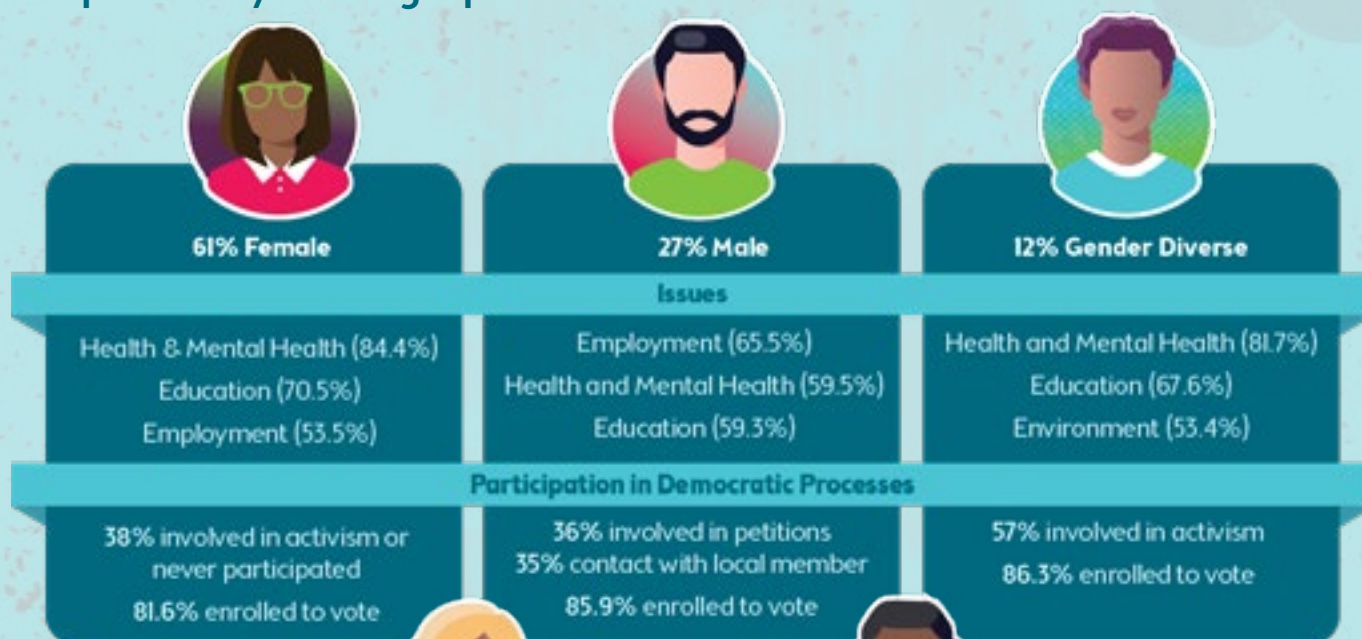
SA Top Issues:

Health & Mental Health 79.8%
Education 65.4%
Employment 57%

Main approach to democratic participation

46.5% Never Participated
68% Enrolled to vote

Responses by Demographic





Glossary:

Young Person: person aged 15-24.

LGBTQIA+: Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer/questioning, and / or asexual.

Gender Diverse: describes gender identities that demonstrate a diversity of expression beyond the binary framework.

Mental Health Condition: a diagnosed mental illness that affects a person's ability to function.

Missing Middle: people whose needs are not met by current mental health services as they are either too unwell for primary care, or not unwell enough for state-based services.

Transition: movement between distinct levels in education and from education into employment.

Inclusion: the practice or policy of providing equal access to opportunities and resources for people who might otherwise be excluded or marginalized.

Equity: the practice or policy of providing equal access to opportunities and resources for people who might otherwise be excluded or marginalized.

No wrong door: people can access help regardless of which service or agency they connect with.



Benefits Definitions:

Health and Wellbeing: young people have the skills and ability to live a healthy life free from significant stress, anxiety, and hardship. They are able to afford what is required to live a safe and healthy life that reduces the need for long term and crisis-based support. For those with health or mental health conditions they are able to access appropriate and timely diagnosis and support, reducing the burden of disease on future generations and maximise their social and economic participation.

Access: young people are aware about the available services and supports, and are able to freely access them in a timely manner, without concerns for their affordability, accessibility, appropriateness, and safety. This also means that those who are isolated due to travel requirements, geographical location or personal limitations have equitable access.

Independence: young people are provided with appropriate development opportunities and supports to assist them to gain the knowledge and skills required to participate in society, the democratic process, education, and employment. This means that young people can look after themselves and reduce the level of support, which they require.

Connection: young people are connected with their peers, politicians, supports, and others living in their community, without the fear of stigma or being 'othered' for who they are. This means that all people are accepted, and feel that they are worthy of being a member of the community, receive support and are able to voice their opinions confident of being heard. This can lead to better engagement in society, education, politics, and employment.

Employment: this includes the ability to and increased opportunities for people to enter the workforce. It also means the maintenance and creation of employment opportunities in the future.

Trust: in government services, processes, and politicians, as they become more aware of their rights, the democratic process, government actions and connect with local politicians.

Environment: maintaining Australia's unique ecology and environment, to sustain our lifestyle, wellbeing and employment opportunities, which rely on our environment.

Listen to Us

