



Australian Youth
Affairs Coalition

About the Australian Youth Affairs Coalition Policy Platform

The Australian Youth Affairs Coalition (AYAC) is Australia's non-government youth affairs peak body, which represents young people aged 12-25 and the sector that supports them. In order to best represent AYAC's membership, this Policy Platform has been developed to clearly articulate our views on key issues affecting the rights and interests of young people and the youth sector that supports them.

The Policy Platform aims to:

- Summarise the key policy issues affecting young people and youth affairs
- Guide the day-to-day policy and advocacy work of AYAC
- Advise governments, the media and other stakeholders on AYAC's positions on key policy matters relevant to young people
- Frame AYAC's policy aims in a positive and aspirational way
- Offer examples of good practice
- Provide a starting point for further inquiry and assistance

Each position statement emphasises the human rights of young people, in particular the right of young people to have genuine and meaningful input into the making of decisions that affect them. The interests of young people facing extra barriers to inclusion are also promoted. Our Policy Platform encourages sustainable solutions, best practice and evidence-based approaches, and innovative strategies.

Our Policy Platform is a "living" document and is reviewed regularly via ongoing consultations with members to ensure that AYAC's policy positions remain current. We welcome your feedback.

The policy position statements are available for downloading at www.ayac.org.au



AYAC Policy Platform

INDEX

Page 3	Health and wellbeing
Page 5	Mental Health
Page 6	Body Image
Page 7	Bullying
Page 8	Disability
Page 9	Education
Page 12	Employment
Page 13	Housing and Homelessness
Page 14	Juvenile Justice
Page 16	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Young People
Page 18	Youth Sector
Page 20	Rural and Remote Young People
Page 21	Income Support
Page 22	Alcohol, Tobacco and Other Drugs
Page 24	Gender, Identity and Sexual Orientation
Page 26	Young People from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Backgrounds
Page 28	Young Carers
Page 29	Child Protection and Out-of-Home Care
Page 31	Youth Participation and Political Engagement
Page 33	Technology and cybersafety

Health and Wellbeing

Good health for young people requires a holistic approach that aims to support and promote their physical, emotional, mental, social and sexual wellness. AYAC affirms that significant caring relationships and connectedness, a sense of spirituality, access to economic resources as well as low family stress, are all critically important factors affecting the health of young people.

Young people experiencing health issues are often reluctant to seek help. Obesity, epidemic levels of sexually transmitted infections, chronic and disabling conditions, drugs and alcohol addiction, are all major health concerns for Australian young people. Many young people from “at risk” backgrounds are routinely alienated from the health care system. AYAC also acknowledges the vast gap in the health status of Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians.

Any adequate health system must recognise and target care towards the unique and differing needs, backgrounds and experiences of young people. Good health for young people is a whole-of-community responsibility, in which young people’s health and wellbeing is valued and supported.

AYAC believes that...

- Young people are competent to make many of the decisions about their physical health.
- ‘Youth friendly’, no-cost health services are urgently needed to deliver team-based models of health care that include access to doctors, nurses, midwives, counsellors, youth workers and other support workers.
- Young people should be empowered to be involved in taking care of their own health.
- Prevention and other health initiatives should be based on meaningful consultation with young people.
- Governments should prioritise a new model that focuses on health promotion and prevention that focus on young people who are especially vulnerable to health issues and reduced well-being.
- All young people, especially those from disadvantaged groups, should have access to spaces for exercise and recreation.
- Disadvantaged and at risk young people should be better supported to develop good nutrition and healthy eating habits.
- Health providers should respect young people’s confidentiality.
- Good physical health must be complemented by appropriate support for young people’s mental and emotional health.
- A holistic approach to sexual health is essential to ensure that young people can make positive choices around unwanted pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections.
- Creative approaches - including social media and the latest technology - are necessary to effectively engage young people in good health practices.

Further information:

[Kids Helpline](#) – Free call: 1800 551 800

[YEAH](#) – educating young people around sexual health, sexuality and respectful relationships.

[HealthInsite](#) – online gateway to Australian health information.

[Women's and Children's Health Network](#) - news and practical health information for young people.

[Australian Institute of Health and Welfare](#) - provides comprehensive information on the status of child and youth health and wellbeing.

[The Nest](#) – building a national action plan to improve the health, wellbeing and life opportunities of all young Australians.

Mental Health

Mental health is the number one health issue that affects young people in Australia, with mental disorders such as anxiety and depression more prevalent amongst young people aged 16-24 than any other age group. Fears of stigma or prejudice prevent many young people from seeking professional help. Suicide is one of the leading causes of death amongst Australian young people, and in particular among Indigenous youth and young men.

The current mainstream mental health system is not well-designed or resourced to address young people's mental health issues. Young people in rural areas, in particular, have difficulties in accessing appropriate services, with many services stretched to capacity (if there are any youth-friendly services at all). AYAC recognises that good mental health is a whole-of-community responsibility, and people with mental illness and their families and carers are to be supported to live full and rewarding lives.

AYAC believes that...

- Policy makers need to listen to the perspectives of young people in designing and planning the delivery of mental health services.
- Family and community support and adequate economic and social resources – such as education, paid employment and secure housing - play a powerful protective role in relation to mental health.
- Detecting and treating mental health problems at the earliest possible stages is the best way of minimising the impact of mental illness on a young person's life and provides the best chance of improving their mental health outcomes.
- Youth-friendly, holistic and easily accessible services are essential if we are to properly deal with the specific health needs of teenagers and young adults.
- Greater investment needs to be made in a range of integrated services and outreach youth services.
- The use of online technology is essential to reach young people with mental health information and assistance.
- Community awareness campaigns are needed to increase mental health literacy and to also reduce the stigma surrounding mental health issues, mental illness and suicide.

Further information:

[Reachout.com](#) run by [Inspire](#) - provides young people with help, support and connections to manage mental health difficulties.

[Young and Well Cooperative Research Centre](#) - explores technologies as settings to strengthen the resilience, mental health and wellbeing of young people.

[Beyond Blue](#) - provides information and assistance to help manage depression and anxiety.

[Somazone](#) - a safe online space for young people to ask questions, share stories and get help for mental health issues, sexual health, relationships, abuse, body image, and drug use.

[Headspace](#) (National Youth Mental Health Foundation) - provides health advice, support and information from Headspace centres around Australia.

Body Image

Concern about body image is one of the top worries of young people today. Young people are under enormous pressure to conform to the unrealistic depictions of ideal beauty relentlessly promoted by the media and advertising. Body-dissatisfaction is on the rise and it affects an increasing number of young people each year, including young males.

Disordered eating and eating disorders that involve issues of body image are one of the most common chronic illness in young people, with the number of young people hospitalised having tripled in the last decade. Well-meaning efforts to combat the problem by governments and others have failed to make an impact and need to be reviewed. By the time most young people with eating disorders access treatment, a majority of them have life-threatening physical complications from their illness.

AYAC is committed to seeing all young people maintaining a strong sense of self worth and the broader community embracing body acceptance and diversity.

AYAC believes that...

- Initiatives that help build young people's resilience to body image pressures are essential to combating body image worries.
- Young people need to be well supported to resist the pressures of chronic dieting, self-criticism and body bullying.
- Prevention and early intervention programs that help young people in the earliest stages of developing eating disorders are essential to properly support young people before they develop a chronic illness.
- More specialist services to treat young people with disordered eating and eating disorders are urgently needed, particularly in rural and regional areas.
- Governments should mandate strong industry guidelines to make sure that the media, advertising and fashion industries adopt more body image friendly practices.
- Education providers should embed positive body image policies and practices in school environments.
- Community education is needed to increase understanding surrounding negative body image, disordered eating and eating disorders.

Further information:

[The Butterfly Foundation](#) - the leading national charity focused on eating disorders and negative body image, to expand their body image education services

[Reachout](#) –information, stories and services relating to body image and disordered eating.

[Headspace](#) –information and links to professional help for eating disorders.

[Tune In Not Out](#) – factsheets and videos made by young people on body image

Bullying

Bullying is a very common problem facing young people and can have a damaging effect on a young person's wellbeing. Bullying and harassment does not just happen in school but it also affects young people at home, on public transport, and in the workplace. It can also happen online on social media sites and via mobile phones (however, AYAC recognises that the overall impact of technology on the lives of young people is overwhelmingly positive).

AYAC believes that...

- All young people have the right to be treated with respect, and to live, learn and work in a safe and supportive environment that is free from bullying and harassment.
- Anti-bullying programs and resources should be developed by young people or in close consultation with young people.
- Programs need to focus on early intervention and prevention through in-touch, realistic strategies for dealing with bullying and encourage empathy for the young people who are the targets of bullying.
- Whole-of-school approaches that promote pro-social behaviours should be promoted to help create environments that limit the invisibility and acceptability of bullying.
- A restorative justice approach can be very effective in preventing and transforming bullying behaviour.
- Peer education, mentoring and peer support models are often effective mechanisms for addressing bullying amongst young people.
- Wider support networks, such as youth workers, teachers, religious workers, and family friends, are essential to help combat the damaging effects of bullying on young people.
- Prevention strategies are needed to specifically manage covert bullying – like gossip and social isolation - that can be harder to detect than physical or verbal bullying.
- Anti-bullying strategies should acknowledge that the use of mobile and online technology is overwhelmingly a positive experience for young people.
- Social network providers need to support new, evidence-based initiatives against cyber bullying.

Further information:

[Project Rockit](#) - an interactive anti-bullying and youth leadership program that is run by young people for young people in school and university settings.

[Bullybin](#) – regional NSW youth-run website where bullies and the bullied can come together for support and advice to mitigate bullying.

[Roar educate](#) – anti-bullying e-learning modules developed with the assistance of young people.

[Bullying No Way](#) - Australian Government online education resources for young people, parents and teachers.

Disability

Around 9% of all young people in Australia experience disability and 2% of all young people (that's 300,000) are living with one or more severe or profound disabilities.

Young people with disabilities are often disadvantaged not only by their disabilities, but by the community's lack of understanding of what it means to live with disability. Young people who have disabilities are at greater risk of being teased, bullied or ill-treated. Young people with disabilities are often excluded from employment and education, and often miss out on meaningful opportunities for participation in social and community life. The disadvantage of those living with disability is also compounded by the additional disadvantage of their youth.

Nationally, Australia's response to young people with disabilities must reflect our obligations under the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities as well as the National Disability Strategy. These instruments acknowledge that people at different life stages have different needs for care and support.

AYAC believes that...

- Young people with disabilities have the right to self-representation and to be represented by national organisations that support young people to represent themselves and all young people with disabilities.
- Young people with disabilities have the right to access education, employment, public spaces, transportation, health care and recreation.
- Young people with disabilities have the right to adequate care, supports, equipment and technology, and this responsibility should be collectively shared and not left solely to the families and carers of young people with disabilities.
- Young people with disabilities have the fundamental human right to bodily integrity and to express their sexuality and reproductive freedom, including the right to be protected from nontherapeutic sterilisation.
- Australia's young people urgently need a national disability insurance scheme that provides an equitable system of support and considers the needs and rights of all young people with disabilities.
- Young people with disabilities have the right to choose to live with their families, or with carers and accommodation of their own choice, with appropriate support.
- Policy makers should engage directly with young people with disabilities when making decisions that affect them and the youth agenda should be considered when policy is made for the whole disability sector.
- The Disability Standards for Education should be strengthened so that they are compulsory, ensure students' rights are protected, and create an adequate audit and compliance process.
- Young people with disabilities who need full-time supported accommodation and care services have the right to be appropriately housed in specific youth-care facilities.
- Brothers and sisters of young people with disabilities have the right to be recognised as a vulnerable group that also needs support.
- "Hidden disabilities" – such as chronic illness, mental illness and learning disabilities – should be recognised under national definitions to provide sufficient and well-funded interventions for young people living with these disabilities.

Further information:

[Youth Disability Advocacy Service](#) – provides one-on-one support and engages in systemic advocacy for young people with disabilities in Victoria.

[Children with a Disability Australia](#) - the national peak body which represents children and young people (aged 0-25) with disability and their families.

[People With Disability Australia](#) - national peak disability rights and advocacy organisation.

[The Australasian Network of Students With Disabilities](#) - advocates and campaigns on disability issues in the tertiary education sector.

[Women With Disabilities Australia](#) – national peak body for women with disabilities

[Every Australian Counts](#) – a national campaign for the introduction of a National Disability Insurance Scheme

[Human Rights Commission](#) – information about disability rights and making complaints about disability discrimination.

[Siblings Australia](#) - provides support for brothers and sisters of people with disability.

[Youngcare](#) - dedicated to helping young people get out of aged care and nursing homes.

Education

Young people have never been so willing to engage with education, with numbers leaving school at the minimum age falling sharply in recent years. Increasingly, young people are expected to remain in education and beyond, and tertiary education has been accessed by so many young people. However, AYAC acknowledges that modern schooling needs to meet the distinctive needs of young people disengaged from traditional delivery methods. Keeping young people in education is an admirable goal, however, one-size-fits-all policies like standardised NAPLAN testing and 'Earn or Learn' rules fail to match the individual and diverse needs of young people. The degree to which the young person benefits from learning is one important measure of a successful education system.

AYAC believes that...

- Young people have the right to affordable, high-quality, safe and supportive education.
- Learning is a life-long endeavour aimed at developing young people socially, intellectually, physically and emotionally - not solely for the future labour market.
- Educational institutions should be young person-centred, and celebrate the diversity of young people and the ways in which they learn.
- Education planners should actively consult with young people as primary consumers of education and as key stakeholders within the education system.
- Policy-makers should acknowledge the diverse learning styles and particular learning difficulties facing disadvantaged young people, and should provide sufficient flexible learning programs that complement or provide alternatives to mainstream schooling.
- School-based youth workers, social workers and psychologists are needed to assist young people throughout primary and secondary schooling.
- Efforts to increase Year 12 attainment need to focus on disadvantaged groups who face the greatest challenges and have the greatest needs for support.
- "Closing the gap" schooling targets must be underpinned by community-led and culturally appropriate strategies adopted by governments to target the areas of Indigenous enrolment, attendance and academic achievement.

Further information:

[Going To Uni](#) - provides information about higher education, as well as sections on fees, loans and scholarships, courses and providers, resources and overseas study.

[MyUniversity](#) - allows students to compare all of the nation's tertiary education institutions.

[National Union of Students](#) - National representative voice for *Australian* students.

[Young Achievement Australia](#) – a non-government organisation that provides business enterprise education to secondary, tertiary and post graduate students and youth at risk groups.

["Learning Choices"](#) from [Dusseldorp Skills Forum](#) - data on inclusive and flexible learning programs in locations across Australia.

["How Young People are Faring"](#) – Foundation For Young Australians report on the annual series on the employment and education situation of young Australians.

[Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians](#) - State, Territory and Commonwealth Ministers of Education released the Melbourne Declaration in 2008 which sets the direction for Australian schooling for the following decade.

Employment

AYAC acknowledges that broad changes in today's labour market offer both challenges and opportunities to young people, and require radically new ways of preparing young people for employment. AYAC is strongly committed to seeing young people able to access appropriate and stable employment that meets their needs and lets them remain in their own communities.

Times of economic uncertainty, an insecure labour market, and more flexible and precarious forms of employment all mean that young people more than ever, need greater assistance to develop the kinds of skills and competencies that will help them transition from education to work and navigate the new world of work. Some groups of young people are more at risk from these labour market changes - people living in regional and remote areas and those from particular backgrounds such as Indigenous youth and young people with disability - and therefore require special attention so they can be properly supported to enter or re-enter the workforce.

AYAC believes that:

- Young people are entitled to fair and equal pay and conditions for equal work.
- Young people need spaces and support to develop 'soft skills' such as problem solving, enterprise and creativity, all of which contribute to their employability.
- Disadvantaged young people need targeted support to enter employment or initiate commercial activities that will enable them to move from welfare dependency toward a sustainable future.
- Policy makers should develop youth employment targets, direct job creation and employer subsidy programs to better address youth unemployment and underemployment.
- Young people require youth-friendly professional career guidance during and after secondary schooling and should have access to adequate transitional programs and supports so that they are genuinely job-ready.
- The Australian Government's national employment services system needs to be more youth-centred and should more adequately meet the needs of young people, especially those facing multiple disadvantage.
- Investing in young people's education and transition into the workforce requires an increase in Youth Allowance and Newstart payments, which should be raised to the recognised poverty line and a level that is adequate to buy the essentials of life.

Further information:

[Job Services Australia](#) – a national network of organisations dedicated to addressing skills in demand and helping individual jobs seekers, particularly disadvantaged job seekers, find sustainable employment.

[Job Guide](#) - an in-depth look at a range of occupations, and their education and training pathways.

[Lawstuff](#) – information about young people's rights and responsibilities at work.

[Australian Apprenticeships Pathways](#) - provides students, careers advisers, job seekers and employers with a broad range of Australian Apprenticeships information and resources.

Housing and Homelessness

Young people aged 12 to 24 have the highest rate of homelessness of any group in Australia with 43% of the Australian homeless population under the age of 25. While some are rough sleepers, much youth homelessness is invisible with young people 'couch surfing' or living in boarding houses or emergency accommodation.

Family conflict, violence, mental illness, substance abuse and financial stress are all common causes of youth homelessness. The highest rates of youth homelessness exist among Indigenous and refugee populations. Homelessness has a severe impact on children and young people, and may be the first step on a path to lifelong disadvantage.

When it comes to accessing housing generally, young people face barriers and discrimination. High rental costs, low incomes, insecure share housing, and the low availability of affordable housing and public housing stock all make independent living a challenge for many young people.

AYAC believes that...

- Young people need safe, secure and affordable housing options, and also better income support so that they can successfully access private and public housing.
- While crisis accommodation is essential, it is critical that governments and non-government organisations work to *permanently* end homelessness for young people.
- Young people need access to well-supported, independent longer-term accommodation and integrated services that are tied to education, training and employment.
- Greater resources should be invested in specialist youth services – including mental health and alcohol and other drug services - that assist in addressing the complex causes of youth homelessness holistically.
- Prevention, early identification and intervention programs at the primary and high school level would help to address the under-reporting of youth homelessness and dramatically reduce homelessness rates.
- The distinct needs of Indigenous, newly arrived and same sex attracted and sex and gender diverse young people must be specifically addressed by service providers and policy makers to help reduce homelessness rates amongst these groups.

Further Information:

[Yfoundations](#) - peak body that seeks to end youth homelessness and to represent the needs of young people at risk of, or experiencing, homelessness.

[National Shelter](#) – peak body that advocates for better housing outcomes for low-income and disadvantaged Australians.

[National Youth Coalition for Housing](#) – a group of organisations working to end youth homelessness and create youth housing solutions. See also the [NYCH Charter of Rights](#).

[“The Oasis”](#) – a feature length documentary about young people facing homelessness.

Juvenile Justice

Evidence shows that young people are more likely to be victims of crimes than perpetrators yet they are more likely to be unfairly portrayed as a threat to the general public. The majority of young people are living successful lives untouched by the justice system.

Young people, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds, are disproportionately represented in the legal system. Indigenous youth are 28 times more likely to be detained than non-Indigenous youth. The causes of juvenile crime stem from youth disadvantages such as physical and mental health problems, drug and alcohol addictions, and care and protection issues.

AYAC recognises that incarceration does not reduce offending and may even increase the risk. There are many young people currently in detention who are unsentenced. What is most needed is adequate resourcing and support for crime prevention programs and strategies that address the social causes of much offending behaviour.

AYAC believes that...

- Detention should only be an option of last resort when diversionary methods have failed.
- No young person should ever be detained in an adult prison.
- Bail laws should be amended so that no young person is held in detention on remand without sentencing.
- Detention facilities for young people need auditing to ensure compliance with human rights principles.
- Early intervention and diversionary support programs for at risk young people should be multi-faceted and adequately resourced.
- Special support programs such as in-custody and post-release education and training programs are essential to break the cycle of offending.
- Initiatives are needed that support young people in transition from custody with mental and physical health, housing, education and employment.
- Affordable legal advocacy and casework services for young people are essential.
- There should be balanced portrayals of juvenile offending in the mainstream media.
- Young people should be consulted on policing and detention policies so that policies foster trust between young people and the authorities.
- The juvenile justice system must incorporate strategies that are appropriate to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people, and that build on their strengths and work towards empowering young Indigenous offenders to make positive changes in their lives.

Further information:

[Lawstuff](#) – information about young people’s legal rights and navigating the criminal justice system.

[National Children’s and Youth Law Centre](#) - Australia’s only national community legal centre

[The Youth Justice Coalition](#) - NSW network of youth workers, children's lawyers, policy workers and academics who work to promote the rights of children and young people.

[Legal Aid](#) around Australia.

[The National Association of Community Legal Centres](#) around Australia.

[Australian Institute of Criminology](#) - a comprehensive listing of resources, statistics and a listing of the juvenile court system for each state and territory.

[“Young people and the criminal justice system: New insights and promising responses”](#) – a snapshot of current juvenile justice system

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Young People

AYAC acknowledges the past injustices and present inter-generational trauma that so profoundly affects this generation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people. AYAC is working to see the removal of inequality between Indigenous and non-Indigenous young Australians, which has resulted from a legacy of colonisation and injustice. AYAC proudly celebrates and acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and culture and is committed to supporting Indigenous leadership and success.

AYAC believes that...

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people should not suffer discrimination in any form.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people have the right to the same access to education, healthcare and employment opportunities as all young Australians.
- Genuine opportunities to learn traditional languages and culture are offered to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders young people.
- Recognition should also be given to the role that family and community plays in the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people should have a national voice and be empowered to advocate on their own behalf.
- Relevant policies, programs, and incentives must be created *with* rather than *for* Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people, and they should have meaningful input into the making of decisions that affect them.
- Policy solutions that address Indigenous disadvantage should be funded for the long-term to ensure ongoing and positive impact.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people have the right to choose what type of youth service they access, whether a specific Indigenous service or a generalist youth service, or both.
- Youth workers working in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities – whether rural, remote or urban – need relevant cultural competency and undergo cultural engagement training.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people who are in out-of-home care - particularly those who cannot be placed in their own community - should be supported to ensure their connection with their extended family, community and culture is not lost, if and where it is safe to do so.
- A collaborative and holistic approach is needed to significantly reduce the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders in youth detention.
- An ongoing commitment by governments to 'Closing the Gap' is essential if we are to eliminate the 17-year life expectancy gap.

Further Information:

[National Centre of Indigenous Excellence](#) - a place for young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians to participate in life-changing programs in the arts and culture, health and wellness, learning and innovation, and sport and recreation.

[Closing the Gap Clearinghouse](#) - a collection of information on what works to overcome Indigenous disadvantage.

[Victorian Youth Indigenous Advisory Council](#) – the sole youth-led Indigenous advocacy body in Australia.

[Doing Time – Time for Doing](#) – Inquiry into the high level of involvement of Indigenous juveniles and young adults in the criminal justice system

[Generation One](#) - a movement to advance education, training, mentoring and employment as the best means for ending Indigenous poverty.

[Reconciliation Australia](#) – national organisation promoting reconciliation between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and the broader Australian community.

[National Congress of Australia's First Peoples](#) – the national voice for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

AYAC's [submission](#) to the 2010 Inquiry into the high level of involvement of Indigenous juveniles and young adults in the criminal justice system

Youth Sector

The youth sector has a considerable and positive impact in the lives of young people in Australia and AYAC strongly values the work performed by youth workers, organisations and other professionals committed to the rights and needs of young people. We are committed to supporting the youth sector to ensure that it is unified, well resourced and professional.

The nature of youth work is diverse and youth support services often deal with a variety of complex and difficult issues. Youth workers may work as a part of a general youth service or in contexts where drugs and alcohol, homelessness and mental health are additional areas of concern. Often these can intersect.

AYAC is working closely with key stakeholders to better articulate the uniqueness of youth work and foster greater understanding of how youth workers help young people to flourish. AYAC is also working with the youth sector to close the gap on pay parity, reduce staff burnout, and improve resourcing to rural and remote youth services.

AYAC believes that...

- Youth support services are essential community services and have a strong role to play in generating broad community harmony.
- Young people deserve a youth sector that is healthy, diverse and professional.
- There should be greater community recognition of the unique and positive role that youth workers and other youth support practitioners play in the lives of young people.
- Youth work pay and conditions reflect the complex skills and expertise required by these roles.
- An appropriate range of youth work education and training should be available in all states and territories, including in rural and remote areas.
- Acknowledgement and sufficient support for youth workers in rural and remote areas is a priority area as they face a range of challenges additional to urban youth workers.
- Appropriate and ongoing government funding should be provided to youth sector organisations.

Further Information:

AYAC's [Future Focussed](#) research report

For further information on youth work in your state or territory contact the peak body in your state:

NSW – [Youth Action and Policy Association](#)

VIC – [Youth Affairs Council of Victoria](#)

ACT – [Youth Coalition of the ACT](#)

SA – [Youth Affairs Council of South Australia](#)

WA – [Youth Affairs Council of Western Australia](#)

TAS – [Youth Network of Tasmania](#)

QLD - [Youth Affairs Network of Queensland](#)

NT – Does not currently have a peak body but we encourage you to contact [NTCOSS](#)

[Western Australian Youth Work Association](#)



[Victorian Youth Work Association](#)

[Australian Clearinghouse for Youth Studies](#) – houses a range of youth sector information, including research, news, programs and initiatives, and sector contacts details.

Rural and Remote Young People

Growing up in a rural or remote area can be a wonderful experience, and young people who live in these areas have great strengths, capacity and resilience. However, AYAC acknowledges that there are huge gaps when it comes to services for remote communities – such as education, housing, employment, mental health, and disability support – and AYAC is committed to working with young people and youth workers to maximise their opportunities.

AYAC believes that...

- Young people have the right to adequate and appropriate youth-specific programs and support regardless of geographic isolation.
- Youth support services are essential community services and have a strong role to play in generating broader community harmony.
- Youth services significantly impact the wellbeing of remote young people and should be long-term, sustainable and based on best practice principles for working with young people.
- Youth programs in rural and remote Australia are tailored to best serve individual communities, and decision-makers should channel resources to support and sustain local initiatives.
- Young people need greater support to stay in their communities so that they are not compelled to move away for further educational or employment opportunities, and those who do leave should be supported to return to their communities.
- When developing programs for rural and remote youth, decision-makers consult young people as a primary stakeholder.
- Equality of access to information, especially via the internet, is critical for young people living in rural and regional communities.
- Accessible, appropriate and relevant training is essential for rural and remote youth workers.
- Additional educational, support should be provided to young people living in areas affected by economic decline caused by drought and flood.

Further information:

[Heywire](#) – ABC’s online space for young people in regional Australia.

[Relationships Australia](#) – Information about rural and remote relationship support services.

[Kids Help Line](#) – Information sheet about rural and remote young people.

Bush Crisis Line - 24 hour phone service 1800 805 391

Policy Platform – Income Support

In the absence of full employment in Australia, adequate income support does not act as a disincentive to work or study and can enable young people to move towards independence. When young people are looking for work or undertaking study, they all need an adequate income to effectively navigate this transition and many will require government assistance. AYAC is committed to ensuring all young people get a fair chance to responsibly prepare for their future without being put at further risk of extreme hardship.

AYAC believes that...

- Young people on low incomes are entitled to income support payments that reflect real living costs so that they can afford life's essentials - like food, rent, health, education, clothing and transport.
- Young people should be consulted about their income support needs in all related policy decisions.
- Youth Allowance for people living independently of their parents should be increased to – at least - the recognised poverty line.
- There needs to be equity and consistency between pensions and allowance payments.
- Allowance payments should be indexed by legislation to wage price increases and community living standards.
- All young people should be immediately eligible for the full rate of independent Youth Allowance if they move away from home for tertiary education.
- Rent Assistance should be increased to better reflect the real costs of renting and that the government should abolishing unfair sharers rules.
- Application and appeals processes within the Centrelink system should be more youth-friendly.
- Administrative processes and activity test requirements amended to take into account the unique needs of young people experiencing multiple disadvantage.

Further information:

[Centrelink](#)

AYAC's [submission](#) to the Review of Student Income Support Reforms.

[The National Welfare Rights Network](#) - provides information, advice and representation about social security law and administration.

[Australian Council of Social Service](#) - the national voice for the needs of people affected by poverty and inequality.

[National Union of Students](#) – a national tertiary student organisation that campaigns on fairer income support for university students.

Alcohol, Tobacco and Other Drugs

Alcohol, tobacco and other drugs are a part of Australian society. While many young people will use legal and/or illegal drugs at some point during their lives, many will not. Young people might use drugs for many reasons including curiosity, to have fun or experiment and to escape or avoid problems. Effective policy must be realistic about drug use and acknowledge that some young people use drugs.

AYAC recognises that all drug use attracts some level of risk but that not all use becomes problematic. Problematic use can affect all young people and their families and communities, but young people experiencing disadvantage, such as those in out-of-home care or homeless, are more likely to develop problems with drugs.

Rather than sensationalising and stigmatising young drug and alcohol users, the focus should be on preventing and minimising drug-related harms - especially mental and physical health problems, personal and family violence, and involvement with the criminal justice system. AYAC is particularly concerned with young people receiving criminal convictions for minor drug offences, such as occasionally smoking cannabis that creates very little harm to themselves or to other people.

AYAC believes that...

- Alcohol, tobacco and other drugs should be treated as health issues, not criminal justice issues.
- Effective alcohol, tobacco and other drug policy must involve young people in their development, implementation and evaluation.
- All alcohol, tobacco and other drug policy, services and supports must be evidence-based and should support young people to make informed choices.
- The most effective approaches to preventing and reducing drug related harms amongst young people are holistic and emphasise prevention, treatment, information and education.
- As problem drinking is not unique to young people, understanding the wider Australian drinking culture and listening to young people within this context are both critical in combating problematic drinking.
- Alcohol and drug policy and program responses should acknowledge the different barriers and needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and culturally and linguistically diverse young people.
- Information and education resources and programs should be current, factual, strengths-based, youth-friendly and available in a range of ways, including online and mobile technologies.

Further information:

[Somazone](#) (Australian Drug Foundation) - the national youth portal of the to ask questions, get advice, and tell your story.

[ReSet](#) (Manly Drug Education and Counseling Centre) – a self-assessment lifestyle health check for young people and also provides further wellness information.

[Hello Sunday Morning](#) – an online youth-led initiative to transform Australia’s drinking culture via a short-term sobriety challenge and opportunities to blog about the experience.

[Tune In Not Out](#) - an online portal focusing on youth-relevant issues with factsheets, blogs and real stories produced by young people.

[Centre for Youth Substance Abuse Research](#) (University of Queensland) – a research centre that promotes the health and well-being of young people in relation to alcohol use.

Gender Identity and Sexual Orientation

AYAC is committed to ending the stigma and discrimination against people due to their actual or assumed sexual orientation. We want an Australia where every young person can feel safe and accepted, one that values and respects sexual diversity.

While AYAC recognises that Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Trans, Intersex, Queer/Questioning (GLBTIQ) is the most used terminology, AYAC refers to these groups as Same Sex Attracted and Sex and Gender Diverse (SSASGD), as it's focus is on sexual practices rather than sexual identities.

SSASGD young people often feel isolated, confused or concerned about harassment and abuse on the basis of their sexuality or gender (homophobia and transphobia). Suicide and substance abuse rates are among the highest with SSASGD young people and they also experience a high incidence of homelessness.

AYAC believes that...

- All human services that connect with young people should develop policies and practices and provide appropriate training to ensure that workers understand and support sexual and gender diversity.
- Schools and tertiary education institutions need to comprehensively address homophobia and transphobia that leads to bullying and discrimination.
- Schools and tertiary education institutions should challenge homophobia and transphobia by working actively to support and include gender and sexuality diversity issues into mainstream initiatives.
- Mental health and other support services that specialise in SSASGD young people should be adequately funded.
- Legal equality of same-sex couples with heterosexual couples is essential for their genuine inclusion in Australian society.
- All SSASGD young people have the right to self-determination over their physical bodies including the right to decide on appropriate medical interventions.
- Safe, non-intimidating spaces are essential for young people to explore their emerging sexual identities.
- Sexual health and relationship education programs should be inclusive of diverse gender identities and sexual orientations, and also specifically target the needs of young SSASGD young people.
- Youth-specific gender centres are necessary to provide services and activities to enhance the ability of young people with gender issues to make informed choices, and these should be funded in each state and territory.
- All SSASGD young people who require temporary and permanent accommodation have the right to access safe and inclusive housing.
- All at-risk SSASGD young people who require out-of-home care should always be provided with safe, open and affirming care and adoptive placements.

Further information:

[Kids Helpline](#) – a confidential telephone and online counselling service for young people Free call 1800 55 1800. Also provides links to state-based gay and lesbian helplines.

[Minus18](#) – Victorian-based, and Australia's largest support network for SSASGD teenagers.

[Twenty 10](#) - NSW-based free and confidential support service for young SSASGD people.

[Organisation Intersex International Australia](#) (OII) – provides support and advocacy for intersex people.

[The Pinnacle Foundation](#) - provides scholarships to SSASGD people who are marginalised or disadvantaged.

[The National LGBTI Health Alliance](#) – an advocacy body for health-related programs, services and research targeting SSASGD people.

[Safe Schools Coalition](#) – Victorian-based "gay/straight alliance" of schools and individuals that promotes sexual diversity in schools by improving teacher training on homophobic bullying, providing a space for sharing resources, and building peer networks.

[Freedom Centre](#) – Western Australian peer-based drop-in centre and also provides health promotion programs for SSASGD youth people.

[The Zoe Belle Gender Centre](#) – Victorian-based, and Australia's only transgender centre. Provides comprehensive list of national youth support services and resources links.

Young People from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Backgrounds

Multiculturalism is a good news story for Australia. AYAC celebrates Australia's cultural and religious diversity as strengths, and affirms the importance of a vibrant multiculturalism to our national identity.

AYAC also recognises the strengths, experiences and achievements of young people from multicultural backgrounds, however, the challenges of settlement and negotiating cultural dislocation can put enormous pressures on newly arrived youth. Barriers such as language, culture, unfamiliarity with Australian systems, racism and discrimination place these young people at risk of social isolation and economic disadvantage.

AYAC believes that...

- Cultural and religious diversity is an important and welcome part of Australian life and has a fundamental and meaningful role to play in a national social inclusion agenda.
- Achieving a truly vibrant multiculturalism requires political leadership that models and cultivates shared understanding and respect for cultural and religious diversity.
- All young people who come to Australia seeking asylum must be relocated from immigration detention into community care with specialised support.
- Public participation strategies and programs should be sensitive to the barriers facing young people from diverse backgrounds.
- National community and school-based awareness programs are essential to combat negative stereotypes, racism and discrimination against young people from diverse backgrounds.
- Service providers should directly consult with young people from diverse backgrounds when designing youth service programs.
- Settlement programs should be youth-specific and provide targeted support to newly arrived young people.
- Targeted support and flexible approaches to learning would enable newly arrived young people to more effectively access education, employment and training.
- Greater cross-cultural competency would enhance the ability of generalist youth services to meet the distinct needs of newly arrived young people.
- Programs that provide opportunities for young people to engage positively and build relationships with local police are needed to reduce conflict between young people and law enforcement.
- Culturally appropriate support and education is essential to deal with the sensitivities of newly arrived youth in the juvenile justice system.

Further information:

[Multicultural Youth Advocacy Network](#) - a national policy and advocacy body representing the rights and interests of migrant and newly arrived young people.

[Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia](#) – a national peak body representing Australians from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

[Settlement Council of Australia](#) - the national peak body representing migrant and refugee settlement agencies across Australia.

[Refugee Council of Australia](#) – the national umbrella body for refugees and the organisations and individuals who support them.

[ChilOut](#) - works to end the immigration detention of children in Australian detention centres.

[Giving Racism The Finger](#) – a national campaign against racism.

[Australian Human Rights Commission](#) - provides resources for dealing with racism and can hear formal complaints about racial discrimination.

Young Carers

Around 5% of Australian young people under the age of 25 regularly care for a family member with an illness, a disability, a mental illness or an alcohol or drug dependency. AYAC recognises the considerable contributions that young carers make in the community. A young carer may assist with domestic tasks, personal care, emotional care, sibling care or even financial care. Young people's unpaid care is often underestimated and many young carers are 'hidden'. That is, they do not identify themselves as carers nor use formal services for carers, particularly in situations involving mental illness, or drugs and alcohol.

There are both positive and negative outcomes of caring for young people. Many young carers do value the contribution they make that help their families, but can also experience high levels of physical fatigue and emotional stress as well as the stigma associated with challenging family circumstances. Many young carers also experience exclusion due to their inability to participate in peer activities and difficulties juggling school, work or tertiary study with their caring responsibilities.

AYAC believes that...

- Policy-making for young carers should be based on real consultation with young people themselves.
- There needs to be an increased awareness and promotion of the role and positive contribution of young carers, particularly by governments and education and health service providers.
- Holistic, family-centred support models that recognise that young carers are closely linked with their families should be piloted as a way to best connect with young carers.
- Young carers need greater access to generalist youth services as well as additional support services that address the specific needs of young carers such as: transport assistance, advice, counselling, peer support, mentoring, tutoring, and skills development.
- There should be greater income support for young carers who experience financial hardship due to their caring activities.
- Flexible learning options in schools and tertiary institutions are essential for good educational outcomes for young carers.
- Opportunities for young carers to participate socially with the wider community and regular respite from their immediate family for study or recreation will help reduce their social isolation.

Further information:

[Young Carers](#) (Carers Australia) – a national body that runs The Young Carers Respite and Information Services Program. Free call: 1800 242 636

[The Young Carer Program](#) – a national service providing information, advice, referral and resources for young carers, teachers, families and health professionals.

Commonwealth Respite and Carelink Centre - For time out, extra support and emergency support available 24 hours a day. Free call: 1800 052 222

Child Protection and Out-of-Home Care

Young people in out of home care are one of the most vulnerable groups in the community. Young people in care often experience social isolation and stigma, and feel disempowered by their circumstances. Prior to entering care, many young people have experienced significant abuse or neglect and have often been removed from their birth families in traumatic circumstances.

The number of children in out-of-home care across Australia continues to increase, with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children ten times more likely to be placed in out-of-home care. Young people in care experience poorer outcomes in health, education, wellbeing and development. When young people exit care, they face higher rates of homelessness, unemployment and contact with the criminal justice system.

AYAC is committed to seeing more flexible, collaborative and responsive services, at key points, such as when young people leave out-of-home care or come into the juvenile justice system. AYAC recognises that their situations are complex and services - including those for homelessness and mental health - need to work together.

AYAC believes that...

- Young people in care have the same rights as all young people - to an adequate standard of living, housing, health care, education and services, and social, cultural and recreational activities – and they have the right to have these needs assessed and attended to in a timely way.
- Early intervention for young people at risk is essential to keep young people out of the care system unless absolutely necessary.
- Young people have the right to participate in decision-making during their time in care. The care system should offer not only protection for young people, but recognise the importance of supporting their quality of life.
- Young people should be placed with carers who can assist them to overcome the impact of neglect and abuse and who can provide them with stability and continuity.
- The child protection system should prioritise specialist adolescent-specific care provision.
- Young people should be supported to develop their personal identities by safely and appropriately maintaining connection with their family of origin and their cultural communities.
- Keeping young people safe is a shared responsibility between the government and non-government sector, parents and community organisations working together to best meet the needs of vulnerable young people.
- More out of home care and early intervention programs and services should be outsourced to child welfare agencies as many are better placed than government departments to handle care services.
- Child protection services should properly monitor how children are performing in education, whether their needs being met, whether they are placed in the right care processes and systems, and what sort of ongoing therapy and supports the children and young people have.
- Young people should have the necessary support to maximise their educational outcomes – including minimising unnecessary movements and disruptions.

- Child protection services should provide and focus on stronger 'leaving care' and transitional care for older adolescents to help them adjust to independent living.
- A national legislative framework that provides for consistent and minimum uniform leaving care standards across all states and territories.
- When dealing with young people from culturally and linguistically diverse and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds, the care and protection system needs to appropriately and sensitively consult with families and communities, and should place young people with carers from similar cultural and religious backgrounds.
- Specialised support services are needed to assist the parents of young people from refugee backgrounds to make cultural adjustments necessary to keep their children out of the care and protection system.

Further information:

[CREATE Foundation](#) - the peak body representing the voices of all children and young people in *out-of-home care*.

[Australian Foster Care Association](#) - a membership based voluntary organisation supporting and representing the voices of foster carers, their families and the children they care for throughout Australia.

[Child and Family Welfare Association of Australia](#) – the national peak body for child, adolescent and family welfare in Australia.

[Families Australia](#) - an independent, peak, not-for-profit organisation dedicated to promoting the needs and interests of families.

Youth Participation and Political Engagement

Young people make significant contributions to society. Their issues and interests are important and they have the most to gain when it comes to most policy reforms. AYAC is committed to seeing young people have access to mechanisms that allow them to be directly engaged in decisions about issues that affect their rights and interests, and on which they have opinions.

When it comes to youth participation and political engagement, young people are energetic and active. While the membership of young people in political parties and trade unions has declined, young people are creating their own space for political participation and activism outside of mainstream spaces. There is a growing movement of youth led organisations who are engaging young people in social action and social enterprise, some of which have more members than Australia's major political parties.

AYAC believes that...

- Youth participation in Australia's public policy debates is vital to the future of our democracy and young people need to be supported to make their important contribution.
- Genuine public policy debates are essential if young people are to be political engaged on issues of concern.
- Governments and political organisations should engage young people more meaningfully in all formal political processes and design consultation mechanisms that are suited to young people.
- Empowering youth participation practice involves simplifying policy development processes and clearly articulating opportunities for young people to contribute at all levels.
- Special consultation strategies should be created that support marginalised young people to participate in public policy making.
- The voting age should be lowered to 16, and voting should be voluntary from the age of 15.
- First-time voter enrolment should be conducted on Election Day rather than the day the writs are issued.
- Online enrolment and enrolment alterations are the best way to ensure young people meet their voting obligations.
- There should be greater investment in programs and education that support young people's understanding of political processes.

Further information:

Youthled.org.au – a hub for Australia’s youth-led organisations to communicate and share resources.

[Left Right Think-Tank](#) - a non-partisan youth think-tank that aims to involve young people in public policy.

[Australian Youth Forum](#) – an online space through which the Federal Government engages with young Australians.

[GetUp!](#) - an Australian activist group that campaigns on issues important to its members.

[Young Liberal Movement](#)

[Young Labor](#)

[Young Greens](#)

[Young Nationals](#)

Technology and Cyber-safety

The use of digital technology is now a vital part of the lives of young people. New online and mobile technologies helps young people seek information, test boundaries, proclaim their opinions, experiment with relationships, volunteer their energies, build community, challenge adult norms and develop their identities – all positive and enriching experiences for young people. However, the ever-increasing use of technology sets the stage for increases in threats to cyber- safety and much has been written about the risks of online activity with “sexting”, cyber-stalking and online grooming a particular focus. While these risks are the subject of regular media commentary and hype, they should be considered in the context of a wider exposure to inappropriate content in entertainment, the media and advertising, and alongside the positive benefits of technology for young people. AYAC recommends that governments, corporations and communities strive to maximise the opportunities afforded by online and networked media, whilst minimising the risks.

AYAC believes that...

- The growth of digital technologies is an overwhelmingly positive trend and should be employed to deliver services that benefit young people and facilitate their economic, social and political participation in society.
- Responses to cyber safety issues should start by trusting and empowering young people themselves as experts on their own use of technology.
- Cyber safety solutions should be based on youth-centred research and consultation on how young people use technology and their own views and strategies for managing risk.
- Governments must approach cyber safety with evidence-based responses to cyber safety, rather than those based on hype or stereotypes.
- Education programs for parents, educators and policy makers should promote appropriate action and a clear understanding of cyber risks.
- To promote safety and wellbeing in digital contexts, young people should be supported to develop their broader critical literacy skills, and social and emotional learning.
- All young people should be supported to develop their media and technological literacy.
- Equitable access to digital technologies – especially for the most disadvantaged young people - is critical for young people’s social and economic inclusion.
- The youth support sector needs to incorporate digital technologies into their work with young people, especially in delivering programs and services to rural and regional areas.

More information:

[Childnet International](#) - a multi-media cyber safety training program for teachers, parents and young people developed in consultation with young people

[ThinkUknow](#) cyber-safety education program - delivers interactive training to parents, carers and teachers through primary and secondary schools.

[eSmart](#) – an evidence-based and tested system to help schools manage cybersafety and deal with cyberbullying and bullying.

[SuperClubsPLUS Australia](#) – a safe alternative to the wider-known social networks.

[Young and Well Cooperative Research Centre](#) – explores the role of technologies in improving young people's mental health and wellbeing.