



Australian Government



**NATIONAL
STRATEGY
FOR YOUNG
AUSTRALIANS**



JOINT FOREWORD BY PM AND MINISTER ELLIS

We are both very proud to be releasing the National Strategy for Young Australians.

Investing in young people is essential to prepare Australia and its people for the challenges of the future. Providing young Australians with the support they need to succeed is part of governing in the long-term national interest.

We are determined to elevate the quality and rigour of Australian Government policy making for young people and we want to do so hand in hand with young people. This Strategy will help guide future government policy making to ensure that young people's needs and perspectives are taken into account in all government business and that we have an eye for the consequences of tomorrow as well as today.

Growing up is a challenge and the transition to adulthood can be a difficult one for some young people. This Strategy recognises that today's generation of young Australians face new and unique challenges—challenges like different social and family patterns, rapidly changing technology, an evolving labour market and climate change.

The Strategy builds on the work of the Australian Government since the establishment of the Office for Youth. Importantly, the Strategy also reflects what young people themselves have been telling us through the Australian Youth Forum. We would like to thank the thousands of young Australians, their families and the youth sector for their valuable input into this important document.

The National Strategy for Young Australians reaffirms the commitment we all share to ensure that young people develop the confidence, resilience and skills they need to be involved and productive citizens. Our aim has been to capture young people's perspectives on what matters most to them and also to carve out a clear role for both young people and government for taking action in the future. It is essential that we work together to prepare young people for the challenges that will be faced by Australia in the future—an Australia that young people will inherit.

Young Australians have a tremendous amount to offer this country and it is through them that the long-term safety, stability and promise of our nation will be secured.

The Hon Kate Ellis MP
Minister for Youth

The Hon Kevin Rudd
Prime Minister



VISION

THE AUSTRALIAN
GOVERNMENT'S VISION IS
FOR ALL YOUNG PEOPLE
TO GROW UP SAFE,
HEALTHY, HAPPY AND
RESILIENT AND TO HAVE
THE OPPORTUNITIES AND
SKILLS THEY NEED TO
LEARN, WORK, ENGAGE
IN COMMUNITY LIFE AND
INFLUENCE DECISIONS
THAT AFFECT THEM.

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WHY A YOUTH STRATEGY

The National Strategy for Young Australians articulates the Australian Government's aspiration for all young people to grow up safe, healthy, happy and resilient. It aims to guide future government policy making to ensure that this aspiration can become a reality for all young Australians.

This Strategy is also an important part of providing a youth perspective on the Government's broader agenda for building a stronger, fairer and healthier Australia, the Education Revolution, Closing the Gap on Indigenous disadvantage, and preparing for the challenges of the future. The Strategy draws on a range of evidence and experience to describe how we can build communities that equip young Australians to take on new responsibilities and to fully participate in all aspects of Australian life.

EVERY YOUNG PERSON MATTERS

Young people aged 12 to 24 make up a fifth of our population and are important to our society. They are valuable now and the way they develop will influence the type of adults they will become. It is in all our interests and our responsibility to support young people and provide them with every opportunity to succeed.

Youth is an important life stage in human development. It covers a wide age range, with young people entering as children and moving through adolescence on their way to becoming independent adults. It is a significant period of development—physically, psychologically, emotionally and socially.

It is also a period of enormous change in how young people relate to themselves, each other and the world around them. At this time, most young people question their identity, values, interests and relationships.¹ In the quest to find answers to these questions young people experiment and re-negotiate multiple relationships. They navigate transitions from home to independent living, school to work, single to partnered and form families of their own.

ADDRESSING NEW CHALLENGES

The challenges of growing up span generations and cultures, however every generation also faces their own specific challenges. For this current generation, being young involves tackling some unprecedented challenges including climate change, terrorism, ageing societies and infrastructure, changing job markets, technological advances, the increasing influence of popular culture and changing family and social structures.

Two of the most significant challenges young people face now that will have a major impact on their social and economic futures are climate change and our ageing population. These issues are already shaping the Australia young people live in. Australia is one of the hottest and driest continents on Earth and will therefore be among the hardest and fastest hit by climate change.²

As the population ages, Australia will also face new challenges in health, aged care, post-retirement income support and social security.³ Young people will play a significant role as the nation confronts these and other challenges.

The rate of technological advancement is another significant difference for this generation, which has been born into a world of two-way digital media where people produce cultural content rather than simply consume it. Today's young people have never known a world without constant access to mobile phones, internet and email. Young people are leading the way with new technology, the way it transforms our access to information and knowledge, and our ability to communicate and connect with each other.

Today's economic and social conditions are transforming families and communities. The redistribution of work and wealth, long working hours for some and underemployment for others, changing gender roles, shrinking households and changing family structures all impact on how families

1 Based on Erikson's eight stages of psychosocial development.

2 Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme: Australia's low pollution future, White Paper, Volume 1 (2008), Commonwealth of Australia, Executive Summary, p. xv.

3 Commonwealth of Australia, Population ageing briefing book for the 42nd Parliament, 2008, retrieved 8 December 2009, www.aph.gov.au/library/pubs/BriefingBook42p/17SocialPolicy-ImmigrationandPopulationAging/Population.htm.

and communities are able to support young people.⁴ For instance, with changing time pressures young people are spending more time with friends and often looking to each other for advice.

The influence of popular culture has always been significant but today's young people face particular pressures. They are increasingly the focus of corporate interests and consumer marketing. News and current affairs media present stories that stereotype young people as selfish, materialistic and dangerous. Commercial interests also expose young people to an unprecedented number of sexualised messages and images.⁵

For all of these reasons we need to continue to improve the support available to young people to navigate these challenges. As a nation we must do more to develop a stronger, fairer and more inclusive society for young Australians.

ACHIEVING OUR VISION

Our vision is for all young people to grow up safe, healthy, happy and resilient and to have the opportunities and skills they need to learn, work, engage in community life and influence decisions that affect them.

The Australian Government cannot achieve this vision alone. This Strategy provides a framework for us to work with young people, other governments, families, communities and the youth sector to make this vision a reality.

The Strategy aims to:

1. empower young people to build their own lives
2. enable young Australians to learn to take responsibility for their actions

3. build resilience in young Australians to navigate life's challenges
4. build a healthier, safer and more productive Australia.

These aims recognise that there are multiple influences on young people's lives including having supportive and healthy relationships with the important people in their lives, and being able to access and thrive in education and work. Equally influential are personal qualities and skills like confidence and optimistic thinking, enjoying stable and secure living arrangements, and feeling a sense of connection and belonging within families, communities and to the wider society.

To achieve this vision, the Strategy focuses on eight priorities for supporting young people to succeed and build lives of their own choosing:

1. Improving the health and wellbeing of all young people.
2. Equipping young Australians to shape their own futures through education.
3. Supporting young Australians within their families.
4. Empowering young Australians to take part and be active in their communities.
5. Equipping young Australians with the skills and personal networks they need to gain, and be successful in, employment.
6. Enabling young Australians to participate confidently and safely online.
7. Strengthening early intervention with young Australians to help prevent any problems getting worse and to help young people get their lives back on track.
8. Establishing clear cut legal consequences for behaviours that endanger the safety of others.



4 McKay H, Advance Australia... where?, Hachette Australia, Sydney, 2007, pp. 27–60, 79–87, 163–183, 210–236.

5 Sexualisation of children in contemporary media, 2008, Standing Committee on Environment, Communications and the Arts, Commonwealth of Australia, pp. 2, 16.

BEING A YOUNG AUSTRALIAN



This Strategy identifies and prioritises eight areas for action. The Australian Government has prioritised these areas to reflect and respond to what it's like to be young in Australia today. To fully understand young people's experiences and needs, we have:

- established the Australian Youth Forum and National Conversation to listen to young people and ask their views on what should be in the Strategy
- consulted with the youth sector, researchers, families and other experts
- examined a wide range of academic and research writings
- published *State of Australia's Young People: a report on the social, economic, health and family lives of young people* which describes how young people are faring
- published *Investing in Australia's Young People: a stocktake of Australian Government initiatives for young people* which lists Australian Government youth initiatives.

The following snapshot is taken primarily from the report, *State of Australia's Young People*. This report

draws together existing findings and re-examines large and national data sets to draw out new insights about young people between 12 and 24 years old. Complementing the statistical and empirical research are findings from focus groups that give young people's own perspective on how they're faring and what they're most concerned about. Together these findings present a picture of young people's lives. This is important because:

- young people see their lives as a whole
- governments traditionally work in specific areas like health, education and justice
- the separate areas of a person's life have an impact on each other and the whole. Wellbeing is linked to how well you do at school. Your education is linked to how well you do at work and so on. The whole-person-whole-life perspective is important so the Strategy can identify and make the links, and make the way government works more effective.

The full report is available at www.youth.gov.au.

SNAPSHOT⁶

- Young people aged 12 to 24 represent nearly 20 per cent of the Australian population and 28 per cent of all households contain a young person.⁷
- 66 per cent of 12 to 19 year olds live at home with two parents and a further 20 per cent live with one parent.⁸
- 1 in 5 Australian young people were born overseas.
- The majority of young people are in some form of education (43 per cent in secondary school, 20 per cent in tertiary education, and 6 per cent in vocational education and training).
- Young people contribute approximately \$50 billion to the gross national income.
- 15 to 19 year olds exceed 40 hours a week in productive activities and 20 to 24 year olds approach or exceed 50 hours a week.

6 References to young people included in this section refer to young people aged 12 to 24 except where otherwise noted.

7 Muir K, Mullan K, Powell A, Flaxman S, Thompson D, Griffiths M (2009), *State of Australia's Young People: a report on the social, economic, health and family lives of young people*, Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra, 2009, p. 14.

8 All figures referred to in 'Snapshot', unless otherwise stated, are from Muir et al. (2009), pp. 12–15, 68.

- Young people spend on average 40 hours a week with their family.
- 94 per cent of young people report having friends they can confide in and on average spend 20 hours a week with friends.
- 9 out of 10 Australian families have an internet connection and three in four have broadband internet.
- Suicide remains the leading cause of death for young people aged 15 to 24 years, but rates in this age group have declined by 48 per cent between 1997 and 2007.⁹

AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT

We are making progress in areas like preventing disease and drug abuse and improving employment prospects, however significant challenges remain.

- 1 in 4 young people aged between 16 and 24 are living with a mental disorder and 1 in 3 experience moderate to high levels of psychological distress.¹⁰
- Male and female teenagers aged 15 to 19 years had the highest hospitalisation rates for acute intoxication among all the groups. A large number of young people are drinking at levels which place them at risk.
- Almost 1 in 100 young people report being homeless.
- Young people are more likely to become victims of some violent crimes (including sexual offences and assaults) and are less likely than older victims to report a violent crime.

- 1 in 3 young people who had engaged in sexual intercourse reported having unwanted sex at some point in their lives, and only two-thirds of sexually active young people use condoms.¹¹
- 1 in 3 young people are an unhealthy weight (either over or under weight).

FOCUSING ON THOSE MOST AT RISK

There are a number of factors that can affect outcomes for young people. These include gender, Indigenous status, educational attainment, work status, income levels and health status. These differences can see some young people at risk of falling behind.

Indigenous young people are less likely to be enrolled in education (almost half of the Indigenous 15 to 19 year olds are not enrolled in education compared to 23 per cent of non-Indigenous young people of this age), are more likely to be obese than non-Indigenous young people and are over-represented in both the juvenile justice system and the adult prison population.¹² Indigenous young people are also more likely to be a victim of violence than non-Indigenous youth.

Just over 1 in 10 young people report having a disability or long-term condition that restricts their daily lives. These young people are less likely to finish their education or engage in permanent employment. They are likely to spend less time per week with friends and more time alone, increasing their risk of social exclusion.

They are also significantly more likely to be the victim of a violent crime and are more likely to have a substance abuse disorder.

In 2004, the Year 12 completion rate for school students living in the three poorest communities was 59 per cent, compared with 79 per cent for the three wealthiest communities. Young males are at greater risk than females of violence and substance abuse.



We are making progress in areas like preventing disease and drug abuse and improving employment prospects, however significant challenges remain.



9 Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2009. ABS 3303.0 Causes of Death, Australia, 2007. ABS: Canberra.

10 All figures referred to in 'Areas for improvement' are from Muir et al. (2009), pp. 1, 17–18, 114, 123.

11 Muir et al. (2009), p. 123.

12 All references contained in 'Focusing on those most at risk' are from Muir et al. (2009), pp. 17, 19, 38, 72, 96, 103, 111, 115.

SHOWCASING THE YOUTH SECTOR

There are many not-for-profit organisations around Australia that are supporting young people to develop their full potential. Some of these organisations are run by young people, while others rely heavily on their contributions. Nearly all of them are successful because they have been able to recognise and harness the passion, expertise and potential that young people have to improve the lives of others, society more broadly and ultimately the world. The following organisations demonstrate the scale and diversity of the important contribution that is being made by the not-for-profit sector to the development of young people in Australia.



THE AUSTRALIAN YOUTH CLIMATE COALITION

With 50,000 members, the Australian Youth Climate Coalition (AYCC) is inspiring people to take action to solve climate change. It is a coalition of most of Australia's major youth organisations and its mission is to build a generation-wide movement to solve climate change before it's too late. Young people involved with AYCC are working through schools, TAFES, universities and communities to influence behaviours and attitudes and work towards a sustainable future for their generation and those to come. For more information visit www.aycc.org.au.

STEP BACK THINK

Step Back Think is changing attitudes towards youth violence and raising awareness of its devastating consequences. The group aims to teach young people about the consequences one punch can have. It is a campaign that is run by a group of young Victorians through a range of projects including online discussions, DVDs and education. The group also runs programs in schools, developing a network of 'respect champions' who can spread the message of violence prevention to their mates. For more information visit www.stepbackthink.org.



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THE INSPIRE FOUNDATION

Through Inspire, young people are getting involved in the delivery of innovative and practical programs that provide information and reduce stigma to improve young people's mental health and wellbeing.

Through two youth focused internet resources, Reach Out and ActNow, Inspire is providing information to young people on mental health issues and supporting them to take action on the social issues they are most concerned about. For more information visit www.inspire.org.au.

STUDENT YOUTH NETWORK

The Student Youth Network (SYN) is a volunteer-based organisation which actively encourages young people aged 12 to 25 to engage and participate in the media-making process.

SYN showcases media produced by young people through its radio and live youth television networks, and a regular e-zine. For more information visit www.syn.org.au.

CREATE FOUNDATION

CREATE Foundation is the peak consumer body for children and young people in care. CREATE provides both advocacy and direct services to children and young people with a statutory care experience. It aims to connect and empower children and young people and to change the care system, in consultation with children and young people, through advocacy to improve policies, practices and services. It also aims to increase community awareness.

For more information visit www.create.org.au.

LINKZ

Linkz is a not-for-profit youth organisation that establishes connections and partnerships between Indigenous young people living in remote parts of Australia and non-Indigenous Australians. Linkz provides opportunities for young people's personal development through volunteering in Indigenous communities and utilises the 'ripple effect' to encourage and support volunteers to share their experiences with the broader community. Linkz aims to build a widespread sense of pride in the strength, diversity and value of Australia's Indigenous culture. For more information visit www.linkz.net.au.

THE OAKTREE FOUNDATION

The Oaktree Foundation is working to end global poverty. Run by young people under 26, Oaktree is:

- fundraising for projects in developing countries
- advocating for justice
- helping other young people to be leaders in this movement for social change.

These young people are also supporting projects around the world which provide greater education pathways for children and young people. For more information visit www.theoaktree.org.

LEFT RIGHT THINK TANK

Left Right Think Tank is involving young people in public policy and embracing the ideas of young people by:

- facilitating discussion
- advocating policy ideals
- educating young Australians
- empowering our next generation.

Left Right Think Tank is Australia's first independent think tank of young people aged 15 to 24. For more information visit www.leftright.org.au.

YOUNG PEOPLE'S PERSPECTIVE ON THE STRATEGY

This Strategy has been developed with young Australians because their perspective and expertise is critical to generating good ideas and delivering on action.

GIVING YOUNG PEOPLE A VOICE

The Australian Government is determined to give young people a voice and to provide opportunities to influence decisions that affect them.

Since being elected in 2007, the Australian Government has been reaching out, talking and listening to young people. Just months after re-establishing youth as a ministerial portfolio, the Government hosted the Youth 2020 Summit in April 2008. In October that year, the Minister for Youth launched the Australian Youth Forum (AYF).

The AYF is a new and innovative way for young people and government to connect with each other and have an ongoing discussion about their lives, their hopes and what they need from government. The AYF is managed by the Office for Youth and uses multiple media so that all young people have access and can choose when and how they participate. They can attend events, web-chat, link via satellite, email, post or tweet.

THE AUSTRALIAN YOUTH FORUM AND THE OFFICE FOR YOUTH

The AYF has gone to young people in local communities and partnered with service providers to make sure the voices of even the most disadvantaged young people can be heard. Thousands of young people have participated in the AYF on a diverse range of topics from bullying to body image, violence to poverty. Through the AYF young people have the chance to influence the decisions Government is working on right now.

One of the key elements of the AYF is a website, which has proven to be a successful mechanism for interaction between government and young people. In 2009, there were around 83 000 visits to the AYF website, 14 discussion topics hosted and 455 posts on the discussion topics. Feedback is provided to young people on their contributions to the discussion topics and any young person can propose a future topic.

The Office for Youth makes sure young people's voices reach the Minister for Youth and, through the Minister, the Government. It was established in 2008 and works across the Australian Government from the point of view of young people, looking at all aspects of a young person's life and making links across government.

More information about the AYF and the Office for Youth can be found at www.youth.gov.au.



The Australian Government is determined to give young people a voice and to provide opportunities to influence decisions that affect them.

Throughout October and November 2009, the AYF hosted an intensive discussion with young people, youth-led organisations, youth sector organisations and other youth experts on what could and should be included in this strategy.

Entitled, the National Conversation—National Strategy for Young Australians, this process included:

- topic specific roundtable meetings with government officials to hear the discussions and views of participants
- 'host your own forums' led by MPs and community groups in their local areas
- facilitated online forums and AYF web discussions including some targeted organisations providing youth services
- video commentary through the AYF YouTube channel, which provided another way for young people and others to share their views
- National youTHINK—a live and online event where hundreds of young people around the country joined a central discussion with the Minister for Youth using webcasting and online interactive polling
- one-on-one meetings and written submissions allowing individuals, academics, experts and community groups to give more detailed thoughts on the development of the Strategy and needs of young people.

The National Conversation was also supported by the Prime Minister's and Minister for Youth's Twitter profiles.

WHAT YOUNG PEOPLE THINK

Through the National Conversation young people agreed that governments can and should do better to engage and support them. Some young people want a more active role in shaping major government decisions and others want it to be easier to understand and connect with government. Some want to feel that government is genuinely interested in young people.

Overwhelmingly young people welcome the idea of a National Strategy for and about them.

The National Conversation yielded lively discussion and debate about what should and should not be included in a National Strategy for Young Australians. Participants came from diverse backgrounds with differing perspectives and experiences, but common themes did emerge:

- Participation, inclusion and having a say on things that affect them is important to young people.
- Pathways into education, work and training should be flexible to cater for different people's needs and allow young people a way back if they make mistakes or change their mind.
- Services should be youth friendly and people centred.
- Safety is an important issue across all the domains of a young person's life, including online.

More details about what young people said during the National Conversation are included in this section.

YOUNG PEOPLE ARE PART OF THE SOLUTION

Some young people expressed the view that they felt excluded, misunderstood and distrusted by government and society. In this context, some were concerned that the Strategy would treat them as problems to be solved and would find solutions that seek to correct their behaviour by doing things to them. Young people want the Strategy to acknowledge that external factors play a role in problem behaviours and allow them to play an active and constructive role in finding solutions.

Young people also expressed a desire to be involved in government decision making. While they were realistic in their expectations, they had strong ideas on contemporary issues including climate change, improving urban design and strengthening the health system. Young people's experiences and perspectives mean they can provide fresh insight into our policy development and into tackling matters of national significance.



EDUCATION IS IMPORTANT AND SHOULD BE FLEXIBLE

Educational institutions and particularly schools were seen as a good place to address a range of issues faced by young people today, including violence and safety, alcohol and drug abuse. Transitions through school and from school to work were recognised as key steps in a young person's life. Young people saw school as not only a pathway to their future careers but as a way to connect with their peers, and establish life long skills and friendships. It was felt that provision of education needed to be more flexible, recognising different non-academic skills. Some young people felt disadvantaged due to high transport costs to travel to educational institutions. Some also felt their career choices were limited due to issues around access to educational institutions and industry.

ACCESSIBLE AND AFFORDABLE HEALTHCARE

Health was reported as a serious issue, and the need to address specific health issues as well as service delivery was a focus. Perceived lack of and difficulty accessing health resources and community care services (including GPs and mental health care) were raised as areas of concern. It was felt that it was important to have relevant information readily available regarding all levels of health, with a focus on prevention and promotion of a healthy lifestyle through targeted programs. Easy access to information was also seen as an important way of communicating health messages to young people who are reluctant to seek help from professionals. There was also a need to remove the stigma amongst young people about mental health issues.



HELP FOR PARENTS TO SUPPORT YOUNG PEOPLE

The family unit was seen as critical to the health and wellbeing of young Australians. Young people reported the need to recognise diversity in families, including single and foster parents and blended families. Supporting and empowering families in all forms was seen as beneficial for young people as well as broader society. A common theme was the need for greater community and parental involvement in how to deal with young people's issues and the importance of support for young people and their families and communities when things get difficult.

PERSONAL SAFETY

Young people reported the need for them to be educated on how to avoid harmful situations. They felt that to address issues including violence and other harmful behaviours, there should be a collective effort involving families, communities, government and the justice system. Some commented that young people are best equipped to influence each other's choices and behaviours. They also argued for the need for more information on the consequences of negative behaviour. Some wanted a focus on legal consequences, others felt it was important to stress prevention, rehabilitation and support strategies.



The family unit was seen as critical to the health and wellbeing of young Australians.





TECHNOLOGY

Young people reported their diverse online experiences. The online environment was seen as a source for information, entertainment, creative expression and social networking. Given this personal connection to the online environment, young people felt there was a need to inform and educate them about online safety and the potential legal consequences of cyber bullying throughout the community and schools. Parental education and support was identified to enable parents to educate young people on how to participate safely and confidently online. Young people were particularly passionate about both the speed of and their access to the internet. The need to ensure Australia has world class, high speed internet was raised consistently.



INCLUSION AND PEER-TO-PEER SUPPORT

Young people reported that to foster a fair society that includes all young people, there must be acknowledgment that some young people face greater levels of disadvantage than others. As some of these young people felt disempowered and isolated from society, using peer-to-peer approaches was seen as an effective way to empower, enable and mentor all young Australians, resulting in a more connected society.



ENVIRONMENT

The environment and climate change were issues of concern. Young people see climate change as having direct impact on them and their future and many indicated that they would welcome bold government action to address climate change and other environmental issues.



Young people reported that to foster a fair society that includes all young people, there must be acknowledgment that some young people face greater levels of disadvantage than others.



IMMEDIATE PRIORITIES FOR ACTION



To achieve our vision for the Strategy, the focus is on eight priorities:

- health and wellbeing
- education
- families
- communities
- online
- work
- early intervention
- safety.

These areas have been prioritised because research, expert opinion and young people tell us that each can influence their ability to lead safe, healthy, happy and resilient lives. While inroads are being made, there is more that can be done in each area and to be effective, we need to draw the different elements together from a young person's perspective.

The Australian Government has already announced a number of immediate initiatives to support action in these priority areas:

- The creation of five **Arts, Business and Community Centres** for Young Australians through funding of \$10 million, reflecting one of the top ten ideas from the Youth 2020 Summit. The Centres will connect young people with employment, community and useful personal networks.
- Additional funding of \$700 000 bringing the **Youth Development Support Program** to a total of \$1.2 million. This program helps eligible non-government organisations inspire and encourage young people to develop skills and build connections within their communities.

- Equipping young people in disadvantaged areas to develop their personal and leadership skills through \$50 000 funding to the **High Resolves Citizenship and Leadership Program**. High Resolves operates in schools and uses interactive simulations, role-playing exercises and small group discussions to inspire and motivate young people.
- Encouraging young people and their families to connect, spend time together and have fun through \$400 000 for **Think Family, Think Community** — a new one-off grants program held during the 2010 calendar year, which funds non-government organisations to run events and activities for young people and their families.
- Empowering young people to be active change makers in their communities through \$120 000 for the **Prime Minister's AYF Challenge**— which will assist some of these ideas to become a reality, while encouraging other young people to get active in community life.
- Giving young people a visible and positive presence in their communities through \$20 000 funding for **Online Community Youth Spaces**. Young people in ten communities will receive equipment and training to create their own community based websites.
- Making Australia a safer place for young people by examining what works in policing and other interventions to respond to youth violence across Australia.

Further information on government initiatives for young people, including across the eight priority areas can be found in *Investing in Australia's Young People* at www.youth.gov.au.



These areas have been prioritised because research, expert opinion and young people tell us that each can influence their ability to lead safe, healthy, happy and resilient lives.

IMPROVING THE HEALTH AND WELLBEING OF ALL YOUNG PEOPLE

I... notice that when I go to the gym I'm just a happier person and if I eat more fresh foods I'm not as lethargic as when I eat junk food, for me it's more of a health issue... [and] a lifestyle choice.

(Female, 18 to 21 years, Adelaide)¹³

WHAT DID THE NATIONAL CONVERSATION REVEAL ABOUT IMPROVING YOUNG PEOPLE'S HEALTH AND WELLBEING?

The importance of health and wellbeing in the lives of young people came through clearly in the National Conversation. Young people are acutely aware of health issues, including the impact of these issues on their friends. Young people were particularly concerned about mental health, body image, sexual health, and drug and alcohol problems. They and their families also highlighted the importance of being able to access youth friendly health services.

The National Conversation also indicated that families and the community are acutely aware of young people's health issues but can find it hard to communicate with young people.

WHY IS IMPROVING YOUNG PEOPLE'S HEALTH AND WELLBEING A PRIORITY FOR ACTION?

Young people's health and wellbeing, whether physical, emotional or mental, is a crucial factor in their later life outcomes¹⁴ and is vital for Australia's future.¹⁵ While most young people rate their health as good or excellent,¹⁶ there are some serious health issues with the potential to undermine wellbeing, including mental disorders, overweight and obesity and problems with substance abuse.^{17,18}

The last decade saw an increasing focus on the wellbeing of young people. Wellbeing is an overarching term that encapsulates quality of life, happiness, satisfaction and good physical and

mental health. These are underpinned by economic security, safety, shelter, connection to others, decision making power and having positive personal relationships.¹⁹ There is increasing recognition that the environment has a role in wellbeing²⁰ with environmental health having an impact on human physical and psychological states.

Research with young people in Australia shows that in thinking of their wellbeing, they place emphasis on having decision making power, control over their lives and a positive sense of self.²¹

13 Elliott and Shanahan Research, Qualitative research—State of Australia's Young People report, unpublished, 2009, p. 124.

14 Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW), Young Australians: their health and wellbeing, 2007, p. 118.

15 AIHW, Making progress: the health, development and wellbeing of Australia's children and young people, AIHW, Canberra, 2008, p. 4.

16 Muir et al. (2009), p. 94.

17 Muir et al. (2009), p. 103.

18 Eckersley R, Never better or getting worse? The health and wellbeing of young Australians, 2008, Australia 21, Canberra, p. 4.

19 Wyn J, Youth health and welfare: the cultural politics of education and wellbeing, Oxford University Press, South Melbourne, 2009, p. 107.

20 AIHW, Young Australians: their health and wellbeing 2007, p. 69.

21 Wyn (2009), p. 107.

Providing youth friendly spaces and help for young people who are going through a tough time, through 30 **headspace** shopfronts across the country, young people with problems around mental health, alcohol or other drugs can drop into for a chat, get information about the things that matter to them or get help from professionals. Funding of \$50.6 million has been committed to headspace.

Helping schools promote better mental health and resilience in young people by increasing the capacity of schools and teachers to look after the mental health needs of students through **MindMatters** (\$11.2 million) and **KidsMatter** (over \$11 million).

Looking after people at risk of suicide or who have been affected by suicide, through the \$127 million **National Suicide Prevention Program**, which aims to reduce the number of deaths by suicide and the impact these have on families, friends, workplaces and communities.

Helping young people to learn about and understand cannabis, including the harm it can do to them, through the \$14 million **National Cannabis Prevention and Information Centre**.

Helping prevent future dental health problems in young people aged 12 to 17 by supporting their families with the costs of dental checks through the \$490.7 million **Medicare Teen Dental Health Plan**.

WHAT IS THE AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT ALREADY DOING TO IMPROVE THE HEALTH AND WELLBEING OF YOUNG PEOPLE?



FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The Australian Government will continue to build on our existing work across a broad range of areas to improve the health and wellbeing of young people. This includes a focus on physical and mental health services, resilience building and the development of positive lifestyle habits. Working in partnership with health care professionals, schools, community groups and young people themselves we will:

- continue improving access to youth friendly health care services through a National Health Reform Plan and increased emphasis on preventative health, including in the areas of mental health and drugs and alcohol. In December 2009, the Australian Government and state and territory governments agreed to start work immediately on a National Health Reform Plan and also endorsed ongoing work to support health and wellbeing in young people in areas such as cyber bullying, resilience building and body image
- build resilience, optimism and positive relationships among young people through the promotion of positive psychology in schools
- continue to promote sport, physical activity and good nutrition to build the health and wellbeing of the nation's young people
- use social marketing techniques to equip young people with information to help them avoid risks and harm associated with a range of behaviours including smoking, unsafe sex, binge drinking and illicit drug use, and to emphasise harms associated with ecstasy, cannabis and ice
- promote positive body image messages and practices, and respond to the National Advisory Group on Body Image's report, Proposed National Strategy on Body Image, which includes a voluntary industry code of conduct.

EQUIPPING YOUNG AUSTRALIANS TO SHAPE THEIR OWN FUTURES THROUGH EDUCATION

It's very important to get a good education. If you finish Year 12 there are more opportunities out there for you.

(Male, 15 to 17 years, Brisbane)²²



WHY IS EDUCATION A PRIORITY FOR ACTION?

Education has the power to help young people become successful learners, confident and creative individuals and active and informed citizens.²³ An evolving body of knowledge indicates a close link between student wellbeing and their ability to learn.²⁴ Particularly in the school setting, there is strong evidence that a culture of high expectations leads to high performance.²⁵

Healthy and happy students are more likely to achieve higher academic results, complete Year 12, and engage positively in society.

We know that young people who attain Year 12 or an equivalent qualification have more choices in life including improved employment prospects.²⁶

While most young people are currently in some form of education,²⁷ there are some challenges in making education options flexible and responsive to different learning styles. Some young people with caring responsibilities or with learning and physical disabilities find it difficult to fit within the timetable of learning institutions.²⁸ Others leave formal education, but find later that they'd like to return.

- 22 Elliott and Shanahan Research, Qualitative research—State of Australia's Young People, pp. 71–72.
- 23 Ministerial Council on Education, Training and Youth Affairs, Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians, MCEETYA, 2008, www.curriculum.edu.au/verve/_resources/National_Declaration_on_the_Educational_Goals_for_Young_Australians.pdf.
- 24 Eckersley R, Never better or getting worse? The health and wellbeing of young Australians, Australia 21, Canberra, 2008, p. 24.
- 25 Burke T, 'High expectations and achievement', The primary principal journal, 1995, p. 5 cited in NSW Department of Education and Training, Raising expectations: achieving quality education for all, Department of Education and Training, Sydney, 2005, p. 6, www.lowsesschools.nsw.edu.au/wcbcontent/uploads/psp/file/Resources/inductiontoolkit/docs/Raising_expectations.pdf.
- 26 AIHW, Making progress, p. 34.
- 27 Muir et al. (2009), p. 12.
- 28 Mukherjee S, Sloper P & Lewin R, 'The meaning of parental illness to young people: the case of inflammatory bowel disease', Child care, health and development, 2002, vol. 28, no.6, pp. 479–85 cited in AIHW, Young Australians: their health and wellbeing 2007, p. 96.

WHAT DID THE NATIONAL CONVERSATION REVEAL ABOUT YOUNG PEOPLE AND EDUCATION?

Young people identify education as central to how they will live their life and what they will achieve. Some expressed concern for those young people who drop out of education and training, and the negative effects that this disengagement can have on their health and safety. Young people also commented that most schools are not good enough at engaging those who are struggling. They suggested there should be different learning options and settings for those young people. Even young people coping well in education and training want assurance that a variety of pathways will be available after they leave school.

Another theme throughout the conversation was the importance of supporting peer-to-peer learning. Young people and educators saw this as a way of fostering young people's desire to learn. Young people called for more mentors, coaches and youth workers in schools so that schools could be more than just a place to learn. Young people and parents spoke of the positive role that education and educational settings can play in supporting social and emotional development.



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WHAT IS THE AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT ALREADY DOING TO EMPOWER YOUNG PEOPLE THROUGH EDUCATION?

- Offering young people more flexibility, opportunities and incentives to get involved in education and training; get from school to further study or employment successfully; and attain a Year 12 or equivalent qualification through the Council of Australian Government's (COAG) \$623 million **National Partnership Agreement on Youth Attainment and Transitions**.
- Supporting a world-class learning environment for young people through the provision of school buildings and other infrastructure under the \$16.2 billion **Building the Education Revolution** program.
- Helping prepare young people to live and work in a digital world through a \$2.2 billion **Digital Education Revolution** investment in schools.
- Giving young people in the training sector faster internet access that will transform the way training is delivered, no matter where they live, through a **Vocational Education Broadband Network** (\$81.9 million).
- Giving young people from low socio-economic backgrounds the opportunity to realise their academic potential by improving their access to university and then providing them with the support they need to succeed in their studies. Universities are being funded to do this through the \$433 million **Higher Education Participation and Partnership Program**.
- Helping to make school a positive experience for all young people by contributing \$2.5 billion to the **Smarter Schools National Partnerships** on teacher quality, literacy and numeracy and low socio-economic status school communities.
- Making it easy and accessible for young people to learn a trade by providing \$2.5 billion to establish **trade training centres** in secondary schools around Australia.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The Australian Government has an ambitious reform agenda for the nation's education system and is working hard at improving access, equity and quality for all young people. The end result will see more young Australians deepening their education and skills.

Future policy will focus on helping all young people to engage with education and training and achieve a qualification by:

- ensuring that young people experiencing educational disadvantage have access to flexible, high quality education and assistance. This includes:
 - improving access to accomplished teachers
 - providing more student support services in disadvantaged schools
 - working with states and territories to make the transition from education to work easier
 - helping young people access the assistance they need when they need it.
- improving the literacy, numeracy and ICT skills of all young Australians
- finding out what works to increase student wellbeing so that health risks can be reduced and learning outcomes improved
- improving the quality of vocational training through more effective and national regulation. This will give young people confidence in the quality of their training and ensure they have the skills they need to succeed in the workplace
- increasing the amount of information available about training providers, allowing young people to make better and more informed choices about their education options
- making it simpler to get started at university and to move between universities
- ensuring more young people can get a university degree by reforming funding for universities to better match demand for places
- improving the student income support system to provide more help to young people from low to middle income families to attend university.



The Australian Government has an ambitious reform agenda for the nation's education system and is working hard at improving access, equity and quality for all young people.



SUPPORTING YOUNG AUSTRALIANS WITHIN THEIR FAMILIES

You want the best of both worlds. You want to be independent, but at the same time you want someone to look after you.

(Male, 22 to 24 years, Sydney)²⁹



Families are important in the lives of young people, no matter what form they take. They influence a young person's emotional and physical development and how they come to understand themselves and their place in the world.

WHY ARE FAMILIES A PRIORITY FOR ACTION?

Families are important in the lives of young people, no matter what form they take. They influence a young person's emotional and physical development and how they come to understand themselves and their place in the world.

Being part of a strong family unit is crucial to a young person's sense of self-esteem, safety and wellbeing.³⁰ Strong families help ensure that young people are properly equipped to cope with challenges, transitions and difficulties.

However, sometimes families can find it hard to support young people. Families living with poverty, joblessness, high levels of stress, conflict and substance abuse issues are less likely to be able to provide a stable and supportive environment for young people.³¹ Research shows that family conflict is associated with increased risks of disruptive behaviour and psychological distress in young people.³²

The Australian Government recognises the critical importance of strong families in the lives of young people and will continue to assist families as they support their young people by fostering a society that values parents and families. This includes equipping families with the skills and opportunities to have healthy relationships, and participate effectively in broader community life.

WHAT DID THE NATIONAL CONVERSATION REVEAL ABOUT YOUNG PEOPLE AND FAMILIES?

Young people and parents identified family as critical to the overall health, wellbeing and development of young Australians. Strong families were seen as pivotal in creating strong young Australians. Some participants recognised the need for extra supports for some families and young people, such as young carers. Family violence was also raised as an issue of concern with participants stating it was vital that all children and young people grow up and develop in families free of abuse.

A recurrent theme was the need to educate parents on issues facing young people today. Some parents and carers expressed their frustration at not understanding the electronically-driven world in which their children were maturing. There was a call for specific education, resources and tools to help parents support their young people. Young people also expressed the need to support parents to understand contemporary youth issues.

29 Elliott and Shanahan Research, Qualitative research—state of Australia's young people, p. 81.

30 AIHW, Young Australians: their health and wellbeing, p. 8.

31 Muir et al. (2009), p. 118.

32 AIHW, Young Australians: their health and wellbeing, p. 23.



WHAT IS THE AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT ALREADY DOING TO SUPPORT YOUNG PEOPLE WITHIN THEIR FAMILIES?

- Making sure that every child and every family can have a basic standard of living, the Family Support system including the **Family Tax Benefit A and B** (around \$17 billion), **Parenting Payment** and various other payments and benefits helps ensure that families raising children are supported.
- Helping children to grow up in safe and well functioning families that are able to provide the love and support they need. The \$350 million **Family Support Program** (including **Family Law Services**) provides early intervention and post separation counselling and other support services to families and children.
- Treating children who might need more help and families that don't have jobs as a priority for support and assistance. We are making this a standard business practice by implementing the **Social Inclusion Agenda**.
- Helping to make Australia a safer place for all children and young people through provision of an additional \$63 million COAG's endorsed **National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009–2020**.
- Supporting parents to connect with and understand their children as they get older through the \$2 million **Raising Children website**. In 2010 the website www.raisingchildren.net.au will provide helpful tools and resources to support parents of children in early adolescence.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Our already substantial investment in family wellbeing demonstrates the Australian Government's recognition of the critical role families play in the lives of young people. We will continue to support families economically, in their relationships and in the workplace by:

- continuing to focus on enhancing the economic wellbeing of vulnerable Australian families and targeting additional assistance to those families most in need
- prioritising the needs of the most vulnerable families including those who are jobless by making help services more effective and easier to access
- maintaining a child centred approach to family policy
- applying findings from current initiatives and trials to future service delivery. Family Centred Employment Projects are currently being tested where service providers work in partnership to respond to the needs of the family as a whole to help in finding employment
- encouraging individual responsibility of young people and their families
- providing more choice and options for young people with caring responsibilities so they can complete school, access further learning and job opportunities while still fulfilling their caring role
- helping Australians to balance their work with family and caring responsibilities through family friendly policies.

EMPOWERING YOUNG AUSTRALIANS TO TAKE PART AND BE ACTIVE IN THEIR COMMUNITIES

Respect for your self, and respect from... the wider community is needed so that young people get involved and people can see all the good stuff we do.

(High school student, Longman Youth Forum, Sunshine Coast, Queensland)

WHY ARE COMMUNITIES A PRIORITY FOR ACTION?

Being involved and connected to a community is important for the wellbeing of individuals and of broader society.³³ Communities are where we grow and live. Communities can also develop around shared interests that cross physical boundaries. For many young people communities exist, at least partly, in the online environment.

For young people to feel empowered to participate in and contribute to their community, they need to feel connectedness and sense of belonging with that community. We know that young people already participate in their communities in a wide variety of ways.³⁴ But we also know through the National

Conversation and through research that many young people feel disempowered in the mainstream community, which they feel constrains their participation.³⁵

This Strategy acknowledges how important connections and a sense of belonging are for young people's wellbeing and will focus on ways to build this. At the same time, communities will also benefit from the ideas and skills of young people.³⁶ Feeling empowered within communities will allow young people opportunities to contribute, develop a sense of achievement and develop networks and skills to support them in other areas of life.³⁷

WHAT DID THE NATIONAL CONVERSATION REVEAL ABOUT YOUNG PEOPLE AND THEIR COMMUNITIES?

During the National Conversation young people described the importance of having a voice to be able to identify their own priorities. Young people noted that their experiences were different from older people.

Young people want to experience respect in the places they spend time—in schools, on public transport, in shopping centres and in their families. Young people also raised the need for more safe and youth friendly spaces for them. Families of young

people and the wider community also noted that they want young people to respect them and to respect themselves.

Similarly, young people felt that to be connected to their communities there needs to be greater access to services and support. Many were unaware of services available to them. They also identified obstacles that prevented their involvement in communities, including a lack of positive social experiences outside of school.

Young people were very conscious of their role in tackling challenges facing the nation, such as climate change. Many were already active in their communities and some who weren't expressed their interest in being more involved.

Many young people spoke about leadership and feeling unequipped for being a leader in the future. Young people who had gone through particular programs tended to be more confident.

33 VicHealth, Access to economic resources as a determinant of mental health and wellbeing, Victorian Health Promotion Foundation, Melbourne, 2005, cited in Wyn.

34 Muir et al. (2009), p. 69.

35 Wyn (2009), p. 93.

36 AIHW, Young Australians: their health and wellbeing, p. 106. www.aihw.gov.au/publications/aus/yathaw07/yathaw07.pdf.

37 Eckford M, Young people in decision making, 2005, www.engagingcommunities2005.org/abstracts/Eckford-Matthew-final.pdf.



WHAT IS THE AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT ALREADY DOING TO EMPOWER YOUNG PEOPLE TO TAKE PART AND BE ACTIVE IN THEIR COMMUNITIES?

- Giving young people and the youth sector a voice and the opportunity to participate in ongoing public debate on the issues that affect their lives through the \$8 million **Australian Youth Forum**, and by using the ideas from the **2020 Youth Summit** to inform government directions.
- Supporting the youth sector by providing \$400 000 for the **Australian Youth Affairs Coalition** (AYAC), Australia's national non-government youth affairs peak body. AYAC will work to develop and strengthen the youth sector.
- Encouraging and funding young people aged between 12 and 25 to develop skills and to connect with and support their community through the \$500 000 **Youth Development and Support Program**.
- Giving young people from rural and regional Australia the opportunity to be creative and express themselves and their ideas to the rest of Australia through funding of \$280 000 for **Heywire**.
- Challenging young people to come up with innovative and creative ways to get involved in their community. The \$120 000 **Prime Minister's AYF Challenge** will assist some of these ideas to become a reality, while encouraging other young people to get active in community life.
- Developing young people's entrepreneurship by establishing **five business and community centres** with funding of \$10 million to support them in their new and creative business and social endeavours.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Community plays an important role in the lives of young people, and the Australian Government supports the community sector, including youth-led organisations, through funding, partnerships and expertise sharing. We will continue to foster strong communities that welcome the contributions of young people by:

- giving young people direct and clear opportunities to have a say and voice their ideas through channels like the Australian Youth Forum and online community youth space websites
- working with non-government organisations, in line with the National Compact with the Third Sector, to deliver a range of services that enhance the wellbeing of children, young people, families and communities
- continuing to provide leadership on social inclusion, knowing the difficulties faced by some young people in being involved in broader community activities
- exploring ways to encourage the greater participation of young people in their local communities including through developing the National Volunteering Strategy
- giving young people more control, and better support and assistance when they need it, including by making better links between services.

EQUIPPING YOUNG AUSTRALIANS WITH THE SKILLS AND PERSONAL NETWORKS THEY NEED TO GAIN, AND BE SUCCESSFUL, IN EMPLOYMENT

Everyone has the dream of being successful and good at what you are doing and no one wants to be unemployed and not have any money and not be happy.

(Female, 15 to 17 years, Ipswich)³⁸



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- 38 Elliott and Shanahan Research, Qualitative research—state of Australia's young people, p. 51.
- 39 AIHW, Making progress, p. 35.
- 40 Morrell S, Taylor R & Kerr C, 'Unemployment and young people's health', Medical journal of Australia, vol 168, no.5, 1998, pp. 236–40 cited in AIHW, Young Australians: their health and wellbeing, p. 122.
- 41 Fuller A, 'Into the mystery of the adolescent mind', Byron Child, vol.16, Dec 05–Feb 06, p. 19. www.andrewfuller.com.au/free/TheAdolescentBrain.pdf, retrieved 12 January 2010.
- 42 Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2009, 6202.0 Labour Force Australia, November 2009, www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/6202.0.

WHY IS EMPLOYMENT A PRIORITY FOR ACTION?

Being in work is critically important for individuals as well as the broader economy. While a job can lead to economic security, it is more than just income. Having paid work contributes to a person's sense of identity, connectedness and wellbeing, and is an opportunity to connect with others and participate in society.³⁹ Unemployment can contribute to disadvantage across several dimensions of life, including ill health, a loss of skills, psychological distress and harm, social exclusion, housing stress and criminal behaviour.⁴⁰

Young people are an important part of Australia's working age population. Working people pay income taxes that support government spending, including on health and aged care, the social safety net and education. Young people's

participation in the workforce will become increasingly important to the economy as the population ages.

This generation of young people face some additional challenges in employment. Emerging technologies and the fast pace of change mean that many of the jobs in 2050 don't exist now.⁴¹ Young people (15 to 24 year olds), who have grown up during a period of prosperity, are now feeling the effects of the global economic recession—the youth unemployment rate rose to 11.8 per cent in March 2010 from 8.7 per cent in September 2008 at the onset of the global financial crisis.⁴² It is worth noting, however that the youth unemployment rate has declined from its peak of 12.2 per cent in June 2009.

WHAT DID THE NATIONAL CONVERSATION REVEAL ABOUT YOUNG PEOPLE AND WORK?

Young people identified the transition from school to work as a difficult period and highlighted the need for better connection of schools with the employment sector.

Many suggested that increasing the availability and awareness of work experience opportunities during the final years of school is a way of addressing this. Young people stressed the need for a greater understanding of alternative employment choices and pathways, including

when they are at school. Young people also suggested the need for more robust career advice in schools, including helping them choose subjects that are relevant to their future career prospects.

Young people indicated that they would welcome more information on options such as flexible school options, school based apprenticeships and work experience. There were also calls for increased awareness of young people's rights in the workplace.

WHAT IS THE AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT ALREADY DOING TO HELP YOUNG PEOPLE WITH WORK?

- Guaranteeing every young Australian a place in education or training to help equip them with the skills they need to take up the jobs of tomorrow. This guarantee is in our \$277 million **Compact with Young Australians**.
- Helping young people who are struggling with their studies to make the best decision they can about staying in school or linking up with further education. This is being achieved through the \$623 million **National Partnership on Youth Attainment and Transitions** as well as the new **Youth Connections** program.
- Increasing opportunities for young people to enter traditional trade training and improve their chances of engaging with long-term employment through the \$100 million **Apprentice Kickstart Package**.
- Building the workplace skills and experience of young people aged 17 to 24 who are facing barriers to starting work. A total of 10 000 places are on offer in the \$77.2 million **National Green Jobs Corps**.
- Helping young people who are most at risk from joblessness and unemployment to get a job by supporting them with specialist and tailored assistance through the \$4.9 billion **Job Services Australia**.
- Informing young people and answering their questions about employment and workplace relations issues through the **Young Workers Toolkit**. The Toolkit is funded as part of the Fair Work Education and Information Program funded for around \$8 million.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Employment opportunities for young people have been a key priority for the Australian Government. We'll continue to work with young people, other governments, local employers, community organisations, unions, Job Services Australia providers and training providers to:

- develop adaptability and resilience in our young people, to help give them the attitudes and knowledge to flourish in a constantly changing labour market
- focus on young people and job readiness by capturing opportunities that prepare them for the workplaces of the future
- provide early intervention and extra support for those young people who need the most help at key transition points
- create more work experience, training and employment opportunities for young people by working with business. From 2010 more schools will have connections with business through the Business–Schools Connections Roundtable
- expand youth mentoring opportunities, including peer-to-peer mentoring, to support young people to make the transition to work
- reform the apprenticeship system to make it more attractive to young people and provide easier access and more support.

ENABLING YOUNG AUSTRALIANS TO PARTICIPATE CONFIDENTLY AND SAFELY ONLINE

Technology, it's essential. We'd be lost without it! We're addicted to technology because it allows us to do these simple things when we are out. It makes us feel like our lives are a little easier.

(Females, 25 to 30 years, Coffs Harbour)⁴³



Access to the internet is increasingly important for almost every aspect of life. Most young Australians have access to the internet and are confident and expert users of its resources.

WHY IS ONLINE PARTICIPATION A PRIORITY FOR ACTION?

The online environment is a community in which young people learn, connect with peers, develop networks and have fun. It is as much a setting for their lives as school or family, but one that cuts across and links other settings together.

The internet is increasingly the passport into the knowledge economy.⁴⁴ It is also an important tool for social interaction. This makes digital technology an important fact of life and a powerful enabler for young people building their own lives.⁴⁵ It's vital that young people have access to technology and digital literacy skills so they can operate in this environment.

While it provides opportunity there are also risks that need to be monitored to ensure this environment is safe.

Access to the internet is increasingly important for almost every aspect of life.⁴⁶ Most young Australians have access to the internet and are confident and expert users of its resources. But some young people, including those from Indigenous or non-English speaking backgrounds, those not in the labour force and those living in small country towns, are less likely to have access to computers or the internet.⁴⁷ These young people are at risk of becoming increasingly isolated as the importance of these technologies continues to grow.

43 Elliott and Shanahan Research, Research report—effective communication with young people, unpublished, 2009, p. 115.

44 Australian Bureau of Statistics, 'Internet access at home' in 4102.0 Australian Social Trends, 2008, www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@nsf/Lookup/4102.0Chapter10002008.

45 Hulme M, Life support: young people's needs in a digital age, YouthNet, 2009, www.youthnet.org/, p. 4.

46 Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2008.

47 Muir et al. (2009), p. 65.



WHAT DID THE NATIONAL CONVERSATION REVEAL ABOUT YOUNG PEOPLE AND THE ONLINE ENVIRONMENT?

Today's young Australians are innovative users of information technology. However, young people reported feeling frustrated that their skills were invisible or trivialised by their families, teachers and other older people. They felt that not enough value is placed on the ability to work both technically and creatively with technology.

Parents and carers indicated a desire to have a better understanding of technology and the ways in which their young people use it.

Significant numbers of young people talked about not feeling safe online, but stressed that online safety is only one aspect of young people's personal safety. Several participants

had experienced or seen cyber bullying in practice, not just via the use of the internet but also mobile phones. Yet young people overwhelmingly saw the internet as a positive part of their lives and said its ability to connect them with others was very important.

Some young people reported feeling anxious that they didn't know enough about how to be safe online and stressed the role of parents and teachers in addressing this. Young people also emphasised the importance of access to high-speed, world-class internet and the need to ensure this is provided by Australia's technology infrastructure.



Young people overwhelmingly saw the internet as a positive part of their lives and said its ability to connect them with others was very important.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Technology is an important area of focus for the Australian Government—we have been working to improve infrastructure, make the internet a safe place for young people and to encourage them to develop personal responsibility in their use of technology. We will continue to work with industry and the community to help young people make the most of the benefits of technology and the digital environment. This includes:

- continuing to build Australia's technology infrastructure capacity and improve access for all young people, including making broadband accessible through schools
- providing digital platforms that help young people be heard and provide outlets for creativity
- working to protect young people from risks, including cyber-bullying, breaches of privacy, exposure to inappropriate content and falling prey to online predators or other people who use the anonymity of the internet to take advantage of vulnerable people
- supporting young people's online experience by providing better access to information and advice for parents and teachers through the ACMA Outreach activities and Cybersmart website, and the Australian Federal Police ThinkUKnow website
- encouraging young people to use the internet and mobile technologies positively by promoting their safe use.

WHAT IS THE AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT ALREADY DOING TO ENABLE YOUNG PEOPLE TO BE SAFE AND CONFIDENT WHEN ONLINE?

- Establishing a company, NBN Co, to build the **National Broadband Network**, that will invest up to \$43 billion to rollout and operate high speed broadband network to all Australians.
- Ensuring young people have computer access and can increase their computing skills by making \$2.1 billion worth of new computers available to young people in secondary schools over six years through the **Digital Education Revolution**.
- Making the internet a safer place for young people through the comprehensive **Cyber-Safety Plan** (\$125.8 million) that includes law enforcement, filtering and education. This includes:
 - engaging and listening to young people, industry and experts in the field through the **Youth Advisory Group on Cyber Safety** and a consultative working group on cyber-safety to address online issues facing young people
 - **education programs** about online safety run by the Australian Communications and Media Authority and aimed at parents, children and teachers, and establishing **www.cybersmart.gov.au** which provides tips, age appropriate resources, and access to online counselling through Kids Helpline
- reducing the chances that young people will inadvertently access material that is considered so harmful it has been refused classification in Australia. This is being done by **filtering** this type of content at the internet service provider level and funding providers to establish further levels of filtering to families who want more control over the internet service they receive
- supporting schools to help students feel safer in the online environment. This involves funding the **Alannah and Madeline Foundation** to conduct a national pilot project aimed at addressing cyber-bullying in Australian schools.
- Improving internet access and skills for young Indigenous Australians in remote communities through the \$6.7 million **National Partnership Agreement on Remote Indigenous Public Internet Access**.

STRENGTHENING EARLY INTERVENTION WITH YOUNG AUSTRALIANS TO HELP PREVENT ANY PROBLEMS GETTING WORSE AND TO HELP YOUNG PEOPLE GET THEIR LIVES BACK ON TRACK

It took me years to get help for myself. I was too scared and always thought that my problems were too insignificant. But now I know that they're not and I'm glad that I did seek help.

(Female, 17, Western Australia)⁴⁸

WHY IS EARLY INTERVENTION A PRIORITY FOR ACTION?

Intervening early is recognised as a good practice approach to addressing a range of social problems, including educational disengagement, risk taking behaviours and mental⁴⁹ and physical health issues.⁵⁰

Strengthening early intervention with young Australians recognises the interconnectedness of young people's lives and that addressing problems in one area can also prevent problems in others.⁵¹ For example, we know that experiencing a mental disorder is associated with lower educational attainment, joblessness and poorer physical health,⁵² all of which have costs for the individual and society.

We also know there is a tendency for disadvantage to be concentrated in particular areas, with 1.7 per cent of Australia's postcodes experiencing up to seven times more than their fair share of intergenerational poverty, including

low income, early school leaving, physical and mental disability and long-term unemployment.⁵³

Early intervention for young people is important because the biological and social development that occurs in young people, coupled with greater responsibility for decision making,⁵⁴ makes them more vulnerable to risk taking behaviours with potential serious impacts. Research indicates that interventions for young people can have positive impacts on self-control, self-discipline and motivation.⁵⁵ It is also in the broader national interest, reducing costs on health care or extra support later in life.⁵⁶

Early intervention works not only to prevent future problems such as substance abuse and criminal behaviour, but also to create the conditions that enable all young people in Australia to maximise the opportunities available to them.

48 www.headspace.org.au/home/my-headspace/your-stories/story/?story=988.

49 Fourth National Mental Health Plan, Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra, 2009.

50 Preventative Health Taskforce, Australia: the healthiest country by 2020—National Preventative Health Strategy—overview, Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra, 2009.

51 Australian Institute of Criminology, What works in reducing young people's involvement in crime? Review of current literature on youth crime prevention, ACT Chief Minister's Office, Canberra, 2003, cited in Young people in detention centres Queensland 2009, Commission for Children and Young People, Brisbane, 2009, p. 19.

52 DHAC, Responding to the mental health needs of young people in Australia. Discussion paper: principles and strategies, DHAC, Canberra, 2004, cited in AIHW, Young Australians: their health and wellbeing 2007, p. 23.

53 T. Vinson, Dropping off the edge: The distribution of disadvantage in Australia, Jesuit Social Services/Catholic Social Services Australia, Richmond VIC and Curtin ACT, 2007, p. xi.

54 National Public Health Partnership, The National Injury Prevention and Safety Promotion Plan: 2004–2014, NPHP, Canberra, 2004, cited in AIHW, Young Australians their health and wellbeing, p. 30.

55 Heckman JJ & Cunha F, Investing in our young people, 2006, retrieved 6 January 2010, www-news.uchicago.edu/releases/06/061115.education.pdf.

56 Queensland Council of Social Services (QCOSS), Cost effectiveness of early intervention programs for Queensland, QCOSS, South Brisbane, 2007, p. 1.



WHAT DID THE NATIONAL CONVERSATION REVEAL ABOUT THE IMPORTANCE OF EARLY INTERVENTION AND PREVENTION?

Young people supported early intervention strategies as a way of preventing issues from building or situations from becoming too complex. In the National Conversation, young people talked about the need to respond broadly and holistically to the needs of all young people. The need to provide extra support for some young people was raised, including Indigenous Australians, those from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds (particularly refugees), young people with disability or caring responsibilities, and those from rural and regional areas, or low socio-economic communities.

Some young people suggested that starting programs for youth from the age of 12 would help early intervention and prevention programs from being implemented too late in a young person's lifecycle. There were also suggestions that early intervention needs to be based around tailored, individual approaches that best suit the needs of each young person, their problem and their context—different people demand different solutions.

Moreover, young people also called for a single point of access for support services, 'irrespective of whether they have problems at the time'. This was seen as a way of preventing problems in the first instance.

WHAT IS THE AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT ALREADY DOING TO PREVENT PROBLEMS EARLY?

- Improving schools in poorer communities so that they can offer the best possible learning experiences for students, and helping students who are struggling with literacy and numeracy. This is being done through the COAG \$2 billion **National Partnership Agreements on Low Socio-economic Status School Communities and Literacy and Numeracy**.
- Helping to break the cycle of entrenched and multiple disadvantages for young people in particular neighbourhoods and communities through the **Social Inclusion Agenda**. We have identified **20 priority employment regions** and **29 remote priority areas** as experiencing or at particular risk of disadvantage and have been trialling a number of innovative approaches in these areas.
- Breaking the cycle of homelessness among young people by providing counselling, group work, mediation and practical support to the person's whole family. Through the \$48 million **Reconnect** program, young people who are homeless are also provided with the help they need for any other struggles they are facing, such as mental health, education and employment.
- Tackling the problem of binge drinking among young Australians. The \$53.5 million **National Binge Drinking Strategy** is empowering and educating the community to support young people to make good decisions about alcohol consumption.
- Engaging Indigenous students in their schooling and improving their education, training and employment outcomes by connecting them with their love of sport. These outcomes are being achieved through the \$41 million **Sporting Chance Program**.
- Giving young Australians with disability the opportunity to access employment, and the economic and social rewards that this brings, through the new \$1.2 billion **Disability Employment Services (DES)**, commencing in March 2010. DES will enable providers to commit to early intervention partnerships with schools so that eligible students with disability can access the help they need to transition from school to employment.
- Tackling the unacceptable levels of sexual assault and domestic and family violence in Australia by working with states and territories through COAG, and by direct investment of over \$40 million in a national counselling and advice service, research and prevention activities.



Some young people suggested that starting programs for youth from the age of 12 would help early intervention and prevention programs from being implemented too late in a young person's lifecycle.





The Australian Government is working in early intervention across a range of areas to help all young people live their best possible lives.



FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The Australian Government is working in early intervention across a range of areas to help all young people live their best possible lives. Future work includes a continued focus on building partnerships with young people, community services, other levels of government, mental health experts, medical professionals and law makers to identify good practice around ways to:

- address the precursors of serious physical and mental health disorders and identify practical, evidence-based ideas to help people overcome adversity
- reduce stigma and create more supportive attitudes towards vulnerable and disadvantaged young people and continue the effort to provide holistic responses and alternative pathways
- increase awareness of and access to existing services and implement a 'no wrong door' approach to providing services
- reduce and prevent homelessness with early interventions including wrap around services to connect individuals to education, employment and counselling
- develop and implement the National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women to help Australian women, children and families live free of violence, within respectful relationships and in safe communities
- assist those living in areas of entrenched disadvantage through the National Action Plan on Social Inclusion currently being developed with states and territories
- re-establish a nationally consistent youth protocol to ensure effective support for young people exiting state care
- help families and young people learn to identify early warning signs that a problem may be developing
- encourage and test the benefits of peer-to-peer interventions aimed at helping and supporting young people through challenging times.

ESTABLISHING CLEAR CUT LEGAL CONSEQUENCES FOR BEHAVIOURS THAT ENDANGER THE SAFETY OF OTHERS

You don't go out in fear, but you definitely go out and be aware of what's going on around you and steer clear of it. Even just looking at someone the wrong way or at the wrong time and you could cop it.

(Male, 18 to 21 years, Brisbane)⁵⁷

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- 57 Elliott and Shanahan Research, Qualitative research—state of Australia's young people, p. 111.
- 58 Muir et al. (2009), p. 114.
- 59 Muir et al. (2009), p. 115.
- 60 Muir et al. (2009), p. 114.
- 61 AIHW, Making progress, p. 36.
- 62 Lauritsen JL, Sampson RK & Laub JH, The link between offending and victimisation, Criminology, vol. 29, no.2, 1991, pp. 265–92, cited in AIHW, Making progress, p. 114.
- 63 Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, Australia's welfare 2007, AIHW, Canberra, cited in AIHW, Making progress, p. 114.

WHY ARE CLEAR CUT LEGAL CONSEQUENCES A PRIORITY FOR ACTION?

The need for young people to be and feel safe is an important priority. We know that young people are more likely to become victims of some violent crimes including sexual offences and assaults⁵⁸ and almost a quarter of young people feel unsafe walking alone at night.⁵⁹ Although they are more likely to be victims of crime, they are less likely than older victims to report a violent crime.⁶⁰

Although juvenile offending rates have been declining steadily in recent years, violent crime is still an issue for young people, as victims as well as offenders. In fact, adolescence is the peak period for both being victimised and offending.⁶¹

As well as the direct cost to young people through crime, being a victim of crime places these young people at greater risk of later victimising others.⁶² Experiencing victimisation can also impact negatively on the educational outcomes and mental health of young people.⁶³

A minority of young people do the wrong thing and endanger the safety of others. Some repeatedly exhibit harmful, anti-social, unacceptable behaviour. For these people there must be clear cut consequences to ensure the community is safe for everyone, and break the cycle of reoffending.

WHAT DID THE NATIONAL CONVERSATION REVEAL ABOUT YOUNG PEOPLE AND LEGAL RESPONSIBILITIES?

Young people identified safety, crime and violence as key issues of concern with significant numbers talking about not feeling safe, including at home alone after dark, in public places, when out socialising and on the internet. Some also indicated that young people need to take responsibility for their decisions and actions.

Parents and other members of the community who were worried that their children, their friends' children or other innocent bystanders may become victims of violence through no fault of their own, echoed this view.

There was a call for a better understanding between young people and authority figures, including the police. The link between violence and excessive alcohol consumption or drug use was identified, together with the need for education about the consequences of certain behaviours, especially from other young people who may have experienced violence themselves. More use of mediation between the offender and their victim was preferred as a first step, coupled with more severe punishment for more violent crimes or repeat offenders.

WHAT IS THE AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT ALREADY DOING TO KEEP YOUNG PEOPLE SAFE AND ENSURE LEGAL CONSEQUENCES ARE APPROPRIATE?

- Examining the impact that violence has on young Australians and the most effective way of addressing this, including by talking to the public and young people themselves. This is being done through the **House of Representatives Standing Committee on Family, Community, Housing and Youth** which is conducting an inquiry into the impact of violence on young Australians.
- Protecting young people from experiencing violence by working with state and territory governments to develop and introduce the most effective ways of preventing and responding to antisocial and illegal behaviours.
- Diverting young Indigenous Australians away from contact with the criminal justice system through the \$36.2 million **Indigenous Justice Program**.



FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Young people's safety and their development of personal responsibility is a key priority because while most young people do the right thing, those whose actions endanger the safety of others need clear cut consequences and support to make better choices in the future.

We will work with states and territories, including with police and non law-enforcement agencies, to develop and promote best practice policing that targets areas of greatest need and addresses the diverse needs of young people. This could include:

- targeted police effort in areas with a history of anti-social and violent behaviour and weapons use
- restorative justice conferencing, which can require young offenders to face their victims and confront the impact and consequences of their actions, and complete community service and other reparations
- bans to prevent serious and persistent offenders from entering entertainment precincts (containing licensed premises) and reducing access to alcohol through strict enforcement of licensing legislation
- ensuring that young people are dealt with by police as soon as possible following criminal incidents when they are still fresh in a young person's mind.

WHERE TO FROM HERE

This Strategy is a statement about how the Australian Government intends to make its vision a reality for all young Australians. It is a guide for future action and the basis of our continuing conversation with young people through the Australian Youth Forum.

This Strategy commits us to do better for young Australians by talking more with young Australians and thinking about everything we do on their behalf, from their point of view.

It sets the direction for future action which will focus on:

- empowering and enabling young people to take charge of their own lives
- coordinating and linking government efforts
- developing and delivering services that are people centred
- preventing problems from starting or getting worse
- providing targeted help to the most disadvantaged young people.

It is also an important step and a significant milestone in the ongoing process of Building a Stronger and Fairer Australia.

As well as articulating what we will do, the Strategy has been written so that families, communities, the youth sector and other levels of government can get

involved. It is a call to action and an invitation for:

- young people to be active, get involved, look after each other, have fun, change the world and take charge of their own lives
- parents, families and communities to remember being young, understand that life is different today, invite young people to participate and not to be afraid to get involved, and provide guidance when it's needed
- the youth sector to keep helping young people, have more of a voice in government policy, build their capacity and provide platforms for young people to lead change and take action
- governments to think about policy from young people's point of view, connect with young people more often and in better ways, and make life easier by being clear about who does what and where young people can go for help if and when it's needed.

This Strategy will encourage us to work together towards a society in which:

- young people are valued and encouraged to make a contribution
- young people are actively supported to negotiate the challenges they face and grow up safe, healthy and with the skills, confidence and resilience to participate fully in community life
- differences in education, health, income and wellbeing amongst young Australians are reduced and all young Australians enjoy improved health, happiness and quality of life



This Strategy will encourage us to work together towards a society in which young people are valued and encouraged to make a contribution.

- communities and all sectors of the economy reach out to those young Australians who need extra support to empower them to shape their own lives
- young people are expected and enabled to take responsibility for their own actions and to shape their own lives.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

More information can be found at www.youth.gov.au



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