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Office of the Advocate for
Children & Young People

The NSW Strategic Plan for Children and Young People

2022-2024





We acknowledge the Traditional Owners of Country throughout Australia and recognise their continuing connection to lands, waters and cultures.

We pay our respects to their Elders past, present and emerging.

We would also like to acknowledge the important role of Aboriginal people and culture within the NSW community.

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Advocate's Foreword

There are 2.5 million children and young people in the state of NSW. They learn, live and grow in this state. They dream, hope and lead in this state and importantly, they want to be seen in the policies and processes we have.



Wherever children and young people are in this state they have a right to be heard, considered and should be reflected in our parliament, laws and governance.

Governments and businesses are layered with plans, project documents, proposals and strategies. Many focus on ensuring that customers and the people of NSW have the best facilities, services and opportunities. We want NSW to be the best state for people to thrive and live in.

This Plan acknowledges the work that the NSW Government has committed to for the benefit of children and young people. It asks the reader to see how they can commit to better serve children and young people in this space and it aims to hold us all, government, business and the community, to account for the promises we have made to children and young people.

This Plan is special. It is co-designed by children and young people. It is their words and it focuses on their hopes and goals. It considers children and young people from across NSW and has a particular focus on our most vulnerable.

It is purposefully bold and hopeful because children and young people are bold and they have, and deserve to, hope. We can agree that all children and young people should be given every opportunity to thrive and to choose the outcomes and opportunities that they want. We also know that there may be stumbles along the way and that we have a duty and obligation to support them through those times.

The team at ACYP are passionate about their work and this Plan. We are passionate because we have listened to children and young people, we have been challenged by them to do better and because they will hold us accountable. We are excited to work with government,

business and community to ensure children and young people are heard, and that we include them in the design, implementation and evaluation of our work.

I thank the many government agencies and the non-government sector for their work and their support of this Plan. I want to acknowledge the Ministers who are charged with ensuring children and young people are heard – both for their support of this Plan and the ongoing work they are focused on.

This is not ACYP's Plan. This is the Plan for the children and young people of NSW. We are forever grateful for their generosity of time and voice, for their honesty and for their bravery in telling us what we do well and what we need to do better.

We hope children and young people are proud of this Plan, we hope that government, business and community see how they can support children and young people better and we look forward to demonstrating positive outcomes.

The children and young people of NSW regularly highlight to us the importance of leading with love, empathy, and listening deeply.

We are certain that over the coming years they will continue to bring us new insights, tell us where the opportunity for change is and help us understand how best to solve the problems that are impacting on their lives. Our collective challenge as a community is to listen – both by creating spaces for children and young people to have their voices heard and ensuring that their perspectives are given weight and influence over the policies and decisions that impact their lives.

Zoë Robinson
Advocate for Children and Young People

Governments, businesses and communities are often swept up in the notion that children and young people are the future and, although I believe this to be true, it is not entirely accurate. Children and young people are not just the future, they are the here and the now - not a single moment needs to be wasted for children and young people to be given a voice in this state.



I believe this Strategic Plan does just that. It is thoughtfully enriched by the voices of the children and young people of this state acting as an invaluable piece of material that is both purposeful and considered.

I would like to acknowledge the relevant Ministers for their support in the development of the Plan. I commend the Advocate for Children and Young People, Ms Zoë Robinson, for her development of the Plan, listening to children and young people, reflecting their voices and needs in this Plan, and being committed to encouraging government, business, and community to develop policies and deliver services to improve the lives of children and young people, to listen to children and young people and to feature them actively in decisions that affect them. I must particularly

mention the Office of the Advocate for Children and Young People who have been instrumental in facilitating the Plan, and making the voices of children and young people central to their work.

Finally, I would like to thank the children and young people of NSW who have contributed to the Plan. My hope is that this Plan is reflective of our needs. As the 2021 NSW Youth Advisory Council Chairperson and a young person in this state, I feel proud of this Plan and I am confident in the commitments of ACYP and the NSW Government to carry out the goals outlined in this Plan with compassion, empathy and consideration for children and young people - today, tomorrow, and every day forward.

Lua Pellegrini
Chairperson, 2021 NSW Youth Advisory Council

Introduction

The Advocate for Children and Young People (ACYP) is committed to building a future where all children and young people are given the opportunity to thrive and reach their fullest potential. We want a community that celebrates the diversity of children and young people, encourages their participation in society and gives them every chance to flourish. ACYP invites the reader to join in this commitment.

Under the Advocate for Children and Young People Act 2014 (the Act), the Advocate is required to prepare, in consultation with the relevant Minister(s), a three-year strategic plan for children and young people in NSW. The focus of *The Strategic Plan for Children and Young People 2022-2024* (the Plan) is to:



Elevate the voices of children and young people



Identify the key issues and needs that children and young people have articulated and provide them with an opportunity to influence the solutions



Provide a roadmap that responds to their stated needs by identifying relevant Government priorities and initiatives.

Over the past two years children and young people across NSW have faced unprecedented challenges – ranging from bushfires, floods and drought, right through to a global pandemic with extended lockdowns leading to periods of high youth unemployment and mental illness. There are toddlers who have not known life before disasters and some children entering their third year of school (Year 2) who have never had a full year in the classroom. The graduating class of 2021 spent much of their senior years learning from home. Some missed school camps, sports tournaments, birthdays or their first foray into university culture. Others missed weddings, funerals, or have been unable to visit overseas family members for more than two years.

These events have impacted children and young people, as well as their families and primary carers, in profound and unique ways, and addressing the flow-on repercussions will require a focused effort by the whole community. All of these challenges have been in addition to the normal everyday pressures associated with growing up in the modern world. Yet despite all of these added challenges, children and young people are resilient and resourceful. They continue to be a voice of hope in the community and to find new ways to engage, interact and overcome. Even in the midst of a state-wide lockdown last year, two in three young people in NSW told us that they generally feel positive about their lives overall. Whilst 57% of children and young people described themselves as resilient¹, every day ACYP witnesses the strength, fortitude and adaptability of children and young people across NSW.

The content of this Plan is primarily driven by direct consultation with children and young people themselves. In this way, we are not relying on what we assume children and young people need and want, but speaking to them directly, ensuring they are co-designers in their future. Over the past six years, ACYP has been meeting with children and young people wherever they are: in schools, at sporting events, in youth justice centres, through youth councils and wherever else we can reach them. We discussed what's working and not working well for them, where they would like to see change and what the priorities for the NSW Government should be. The findings from those consultations were the foundation of this Plan and relevant findings have been included, in part, throughout the document.

The Plan’s six core commitment areas were developed in response to what children and young people told us was important to them, and these commitment areas will help to direct the NSW Government’s efforts to better support and respond to children and young people’s needs. They are also an invitation for all who serve children and young people to participate in building this future.

As such, under this Plan we commit to working together to build a NSW where children and young people have:



Hope for the future



Love, connection and safety



Health and wellbeing



A good standard of living



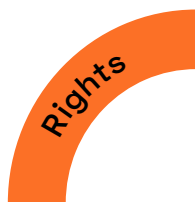
Environments for joy and fun



Respect and acceptance



Have we listened to children and young people, taken their point of view seriously and given them an opportunity to impact the outcome of decisions made about them?



Are we upholding and promoting children and young people’s rights?









Are children and young people able to access this initiative or program?

Each of the commitments has priority areas for action and goals associated with those priorities, which will be a focus over the course of the Plan.

The progress against these goals will be measured by a series of indicators. In measuring progress as the Plan proceeds, we hold ourselves accountable to improving the lives of those we are committed to serve.

Our Commitments

	 Hope for the future	 Love, connection and safety	 Health and wellbeing	 A good standard of living	 Environments for joy and fun	 Respect and acceptance
We will build a NSW where...	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Children and young people's individual learning and interests are fostered through education, training and skills development which supports them to grow and prepares them for their future. They are supported to be independent, engage in society and to join the workforce. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Children and young people feel safe, loved and nurtured. They can connect and build friendships with others. They feel that they belong to a wider community, social or cultural group. They are free from neglect, abuse and violence. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Children and young people's mental, physical and emotional health is nurtured and supported to enable them to flourish. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Children and young people are provided with the necessities they need to thrive. Children and young people do not live in poverty and are provided with adequate services and resources to operate in society. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Children and young people have spaces and opportunities to engage in activities for recreation and leisure. These spaces are enjoyable, welcoming and safe. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Children and young people feel respected, accepted and included in society. They are part of a community that supports them to be proud of their culture, diversity and individual identity. They are free from discrimination, racism and structural violence.
Priority areas for action	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Stress and anxiety related to school or study. Lack of practical life skills resources for young people. Lack of employment opportunities for young people. Disengagement from education from early childhood to high school. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bullying and cyberbullying Domestic and family violence Concerns around consent and respectful relationships Lack of a sense of belonging 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support for children and their carers during the first 2000 days of life. Childhood death and accidental injury. Suicide and self-injury. Lack of informal mental health supports. Long waiting times for professional mental health supports. Lack of support for young people experiencing addiction or problematic use of alcohol and other drugs. COVID-19 public health response for children and young people. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Childhood poverty. Financial instability and the cost of living. Inability to access safe, stable and affordable accommodation. Youth homelessness. Lack of transport in regional areas. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lack of access to organised activities for socially excluded children and young people. Lack of safe, youth friendly and accessible spaces. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Racism and discrimination related to age, disability, religion, gender or sexuality. Overrepresentation of Aboriginal children and young people in the Youth Justice and Out-of-home care (OOHC) systems.
Goals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Decrease the level of stress and anxiety related to school or study. Increase access to practical life skills resources. Decrease difficulty for young people in finding work. Increase the number of young people in employment, education or training. Increase engagement in learning and education, including early childhood education and transition to school. Decrease school exclusion and suspensions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Decrease the prevalence of bullying (including cyberbullying). Decrease the number of children and young people experiencing domestic or family violence. Create cultural shift in understanding of consent and respectful relationships. Increase the number of children and young people reporting connection to a community, or social group outside of their family. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increase the proportion of women attending their first antenatal visit within the first trimester. Increase the proportion of children having developmental checks at age 2, 3 and 4 years. Decrease in deaths among infants and children. Decrease in childhood injury. Decrease in suicide for children and young people. Decrease in intentional self-injury among children and young people. Increase mental health literacy for adults who serve children and young people. Increase capacity for young people to provide peer mental health support. Decrease waiting times for professional mental health supports. Increase access to youth specific services to support young people who have engaged with alcohol and other drugs. Increase access to and uptake of COVID-19 vaccination in accordance with public health advice. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Decrease the number of children and young people living in poverty. Decrease the number of young people reporting financial instability. Decrease the number of young people reporting difficulty in finding safe, stable and affordable accommodation. Decrease youth homelessness. Increase children and young people's access to transport in regional areas. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increase opportunities for children and young people to participate in organised recreational activities. In particular, those engaged with Youth Justice, in OOHC, refugees, asylum seekers and those living with disability. Increase access to child and youth friendly spaces to gather, play, and study. Increase the safety of public spaces. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increase the number of children and young people reporting that they feel respected and accepted. Decrease the number of children and young people experiencing racism or discrimination due to age, disability, religion, gender or sexuality. Decrease in the overrepresentation of Aboriginal children and young people in the OOHC system. Decrease in the overrepresentation of Aboriginal children and young people in the Youth Justice system.

Principles underpinning this strategic plan



Voice

Children and young people must be able to meaningfully contribute to decisions made about them



Rights

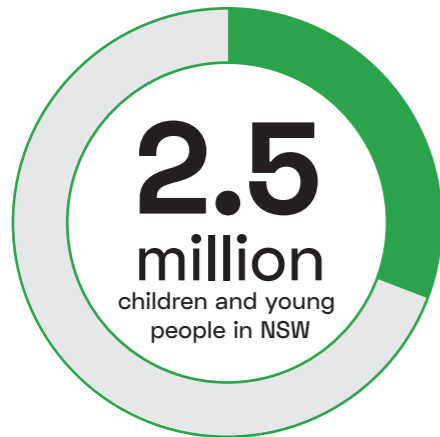
Supports must exist to ensure our obligations to children and young people are met



Access

Supports must be delivered in a way that is accessible to those who need them

Snapshot of Children and Young People in NSW



This represents one third of the total population²

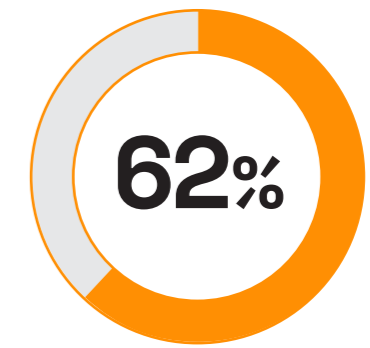


6%

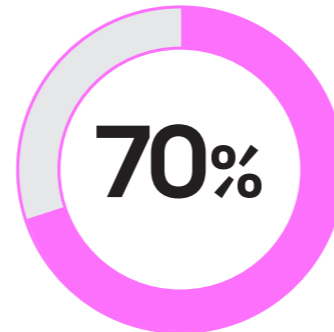
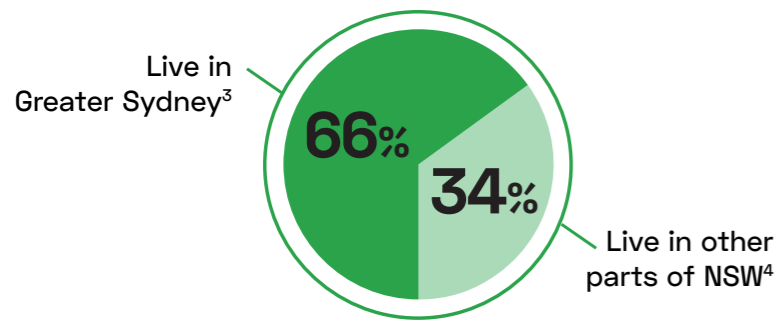
Identify as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander⁸



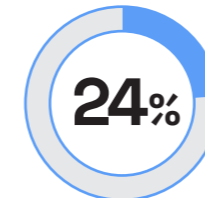
Over one in four households speaks a language other than English at home¹¹



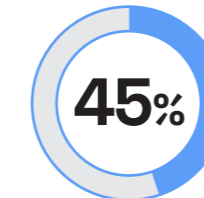
Identify as religious¹³



Year 12 attainment rate¹²

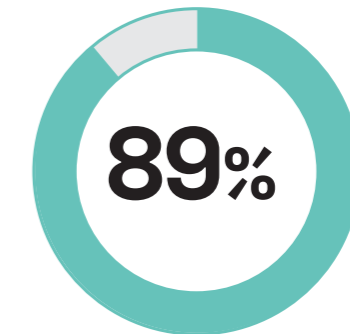


15-19 year olds



20-24 year olds

Are studying for a non-school qualification of Certificate III or above¹⁴



Engaged in either education, employment or training¹⁵ (aged 15-24)



Engaged full time in either work, study or a combination¹⁶



Engaged part time in either work or study¹⁷



3 out of 5

Live at home with their family or carers⁵ (aged 15+)



2 out of 5

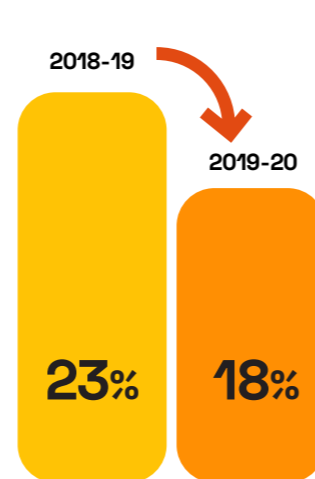
Live independently such as with friends, a partner, or by themselves⁶ (aged 15+)

9,042

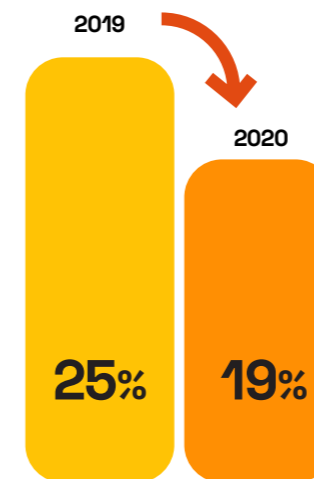
Young people are homeless

3,963

Children are homeless⁷



In 2019-20 there was a decline in the number of children getting the recommended levels of physical activity they need⁹



In 2020 participation rates in sports and active recreation declined in comparison to 2019¹⁰ (0-14 year olds)

YAC

Currently **more than 50%** of local councils in NSW have a youth advisory council

6 Supporting the Children and Young People of NSW

There are currently more than 2.5 million children and young people in NSW under the age of 25¹⁸. That represents close to 31% of the total population of the state¹⁹. Children and young people live across a wide range of regional and metropolitan areas of NSW, come from varied cultural backgrounds and engage with their communities in many different ways.

The Plan aims to reflect the diversity of all children and young people who live in NSW. Our collective challenge as a community is to think about how we can all work collaboratively to support children and young people to reach their fullest potential and be proud of their unique and intersecting identities. In some cases, this means that, while we celebrate their varied life experiences, we must also respond to the vulnerabilities that some children and young people may face.

Under the Act, the Advocate is required to give priority to the interests and needs of vulnerable and disadvantaged children and young people. When thinking of the commitments we make to children and young people, we are mindful of the unique circumstances some children and young people face and that sometimes additional focus or specific work needs to be done to enable them to flourish.

One in three children and young people currently live in regional NSW and experience the joy of growing up in wide open spaces and often tight-knit local communities. However, there are unique challenges faced by those in regional areas such as difficulties accessing public systems and services, differences in supply chains, different patterns of employment and education, and the

need to travel longer distances, not only for Government services but also to engage with friends, family and the broader community.

Children and young people with disability face unique challenges. In ACYP's 2021 Strategic Plan Survey of young people in NSW, only a quarter (25%) of those with disability were positive about their mental health. Young people with disability were also more likely to report that they were facing financial difficulties and that they had experienced discrimination and bullying. There are also many young people in NSW who care for a family member or friend with a disability or long-term medical condition and face additional challenges and responsibilities as a result²⁰.

In 2018, 6.7% of children and young people in NSW lived with disability²¹.

In 2018 there were 83,700 young carers aged 25 and under in NSW²².

While many LGBTQIA+ children and young people lead happy, vibrant lives, many also experience social exclusion, isolation, harassment and violence due to ongoing stigma and discrimination. In the 2021 Strategic Plan Survey, only one in five (20%) young people identifying as LGBTQIA+ reported being positive about their mental health. Young people who identify as LGBTQIA+ also reported relatively low levels of respect and acceptance at school and in their local community and were among those most likely to report experiencing discrimination and bullying.

Culture is centrally important to children and young people in NSW. Communities across the State are diverse, with approximately 18% of children and young people being born overseas, 28% living in a home where a language other than English is spoken and almost 6% identifying as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander²³.

Connection to culture plays a key protective factor in supporting children and young people to thrive and flourish.

Children and young people who come to Australia as refugees or asylum seekers bring with them rich cultural backgrounds that contribute to the diversity of the NSW community. In ACYP's past consultations with those who have a refugee or asylum seeker background, many young people told us that the process of settling in NSW offered many new exciting opportunities. However, they also told us they faced a number of barriers related to settling in a new community, such as needing to learn a new language and form new social networks, difficulties navigating an unfamiliar service system, and issues relating to stigma, discrimination and bullying. They also spoke about trauma and the ongoing impact it can have on their everyday lives as an individual as well as their family and wider community.

In the 2021 Strategic Plan Survey, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people reported a strong connection to a broader community. They were more likely to report they had someone to confide in outside of friends and family members compared with non-Indigenous participants. However, due to the ongoing impacts of dispossession, intergenerational trauma and poverty, many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people and their families across NSW continue to face significant socio-economic disadvantage and other barriers. In the same survey, they were more likely to report lower scores than non-Indigenous young people on 'standard of living' indicators such as having enough clothing and items for day to day life, financial resources and the ability to easily access services and support.

This ongoing socio-economic disadvantage, combined with other structural factors, has resulted in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people being disproportionately represented in both the OOHC and youth justice systems. They are also over-represented among young people experiencing a range of poor physical and mental health outcomes.

As a result of broad social and economic factors, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people are 9.5 times more likely to be in OOHC²⁴ and 11 times more likely to be in custody than non-Aboriginal children and young people²⁵.

At present more than one in six children in NSW are living below the poverty line²⁶. Poverty and socio-economic disadvantage can have a significant impact on a child or young person's life, including increasing the likelihood of poor health, shortened life expectancy, poor educational outcomes, substance abuse, reduced social participation, violence and anti-social behaviour²⁷. A number of other factors can also increase the risk of poor outcomes for children and young people – including exposure to family violence; contact with the OOHC and youth justice systems; and poor access to safe, affordable and quality housing.

17.7% of children and 13.4% of young people in NSW live in poverty²⁸.

Children and young people who experience issues with housing – including over-crowding, housing stress and homelessness – can often experience food insecurity, school disruption and other challenges, as well as being at risk of adverse outcomes in the future. Children and young people who experience homelessness are a particularly vulnerable group and are at a heightened risk of mental health problems and increased likelihood of ongoing housing instability²⁹. Young people also face particular challenges relating to disruption of their progression from childhood to adulthood – such as transitions from education to employment and the formation of stable social networks³⁰.

In 2016, 3,963 children and 9,042 young people were homeless³¹.

Children and young people in OOHC are another particularly vulnerable group and often have a range of complex and co-existing needs and challenges, regularly relating to experiences of trauma and distress. This can result in increased physical, mental and social health needs, which are unfortunately often coupled with limited access to resources. As a result, there is a need to continue to work to ensure that children and young people in OOHC have access to the supports and holistic wraparound services that they need to thrive.

In 2019-20 there were 18,779 children and young people in OOHC across NSW³².

Children and young people who are in contact with the criminal justice system also often experience multiple and complex vulnerabilities such as “family dysfunction, intellectual disability, poor mental health, dislocation from education and homelessness”³³. Coming into contact

with the criminal justice system at a young age also increases the likelihood of entering the justice system as adults and increases the risk of a number of other poor future outcomes. The 2021 Strategic Plan Survey found that children and young people across NSW who had experience with the youth justice system were more likely to rate both their physical and mental health poorly. They were also more negative about their lives overall and less likely to be hopeful about their future compared with other children and young people.

On an average day across 2019-20, there were 251 children and young people in youth justice centres across NSW³⁴.

Process of Developing the Strategic Plan for Children and Young People

This Plan is a whole-of-government strategy focused on ensuring that all children and young people in NSW aged 0-24 years are provided with the support and opportunities they need to thrive. However, as it is grounded in the articulated needs and hopes of children and young people, our aspiration is that this Plan could be used by business, non-government and community groups to guide their efforts to serve children and young people.

In preparation for the development of the Plan, ACYP conducted a review of *The Strategic Plan for Children and Young People 2016-2019*, which was tabled in Parliament in May 2021. Overall the review process found that significant and meaningful change had been made over the course of the previous plan to support the needs of children and young people across NSW. The review process allowed ACYP to consider where positive changes had occurred and continued areas for improvement in the future. Findings from that process have shaped the development of the 2022-2024 Strategic Plan.

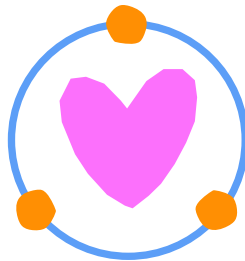
Since 2015, ACYP has heard from over 41,000 children and young people - through face-to-face consultations, surveys and other engagement activities. This has included speaking to more than 12,300 children and young people in face-to-face consultations and engaging with over 28,700 through surveys and other participation activities. In the past 12 months alone, ACYP has engaged with over 5,000 children and young people. Collectively, all of these voices have informed the development of *The Strategic Plan for Children and Young People 2022-2024*.

In order to develop The Plan, ACYP began by undertaking a macro-analysis of this existing consultation data. In undertaking this analysis, ACYP considered what issues had remained important for children and young people over this period and what new issues had emerged. From this initial macro-analysis, we synthesised what we heard from children and young people into six core themes. While we asked children and young people to articulate both positives and negatives about their experiences, many of the conversations focused on the supports they needed and what issues they would like to see addressed. As such, the six core themes could be understood as the six main areas of concern that children and young people had raised.

However, in building an equitable future for children and young people, it was important to take a strengths-based approach and articulate the 'ideal' rather than the 'issue'. Where children and young people told us, for instance, that some of the key issues impacting their lives were facing bullying, loneliness or disconnection from culture, we have said that they deserve, and we will commit to build them a future where they have love, connection, and safety. These six commitment areas form the framework for the Plan:



1. Hope for the future



2. Love, connection and safety



3. Health and wellbeing



4. A good standard of living



5. Environments for joy and fun



6. Respect and acceptance

To further inform the development of the Plan, ACYP consulted with key stakeholders from across both the government and the non-government sector.

This involved holding a series of online forums in July 2021 which were aimed at working collaboratively to determine initiatives and actions that responded to the key focus areas that children and young people had identified. Stakeholders were also offered the opportunity to provide written feedback on the Plan framework and propose initiatives for incorporation.

ACYP also undertook online and face-to-face consultations with children and young people to confirm the six commitment areas accurately reflected their needs and views. These consultations took place in July and August 2021 through a series of focus groups with children and young people, who ranged in age from 5-24 years old and were from both metropolitan and regional/rural areas. Findings from these consultations and the macro-analysis have been included throughout the Plan.

In addition, ACYP undertook quantitative research to form a baseline measure for how children and young people are faring across the six key commitments of the plan. As previously noted, the 2021 Strategic Plan Survey involved a 15-minute online survey with children and young people in NSW aged 10 to 24 years. ACYP has committed to undertake annual research to enable progress to be measured across the course of the Plan.

Following the development process the Plan was tabled in NSW Parliament by the relevant Ministers.

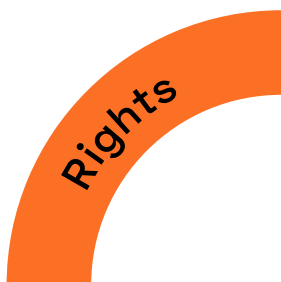
Guiding Principles

In examining the consultation data collected since 2015, two key themes emerged alongside the issues raised by children and young people: the desire to be heard and the need to be able to access any supports that were offered to them. These themes played out across each of the six core areas we have committed to focus on. Further, ACYP holds children's rights as articulated in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) as fundamental to our obligations and responsibilities to children and young people across NSW.

As a result, we have developed three guiding principles that sit across the entire Plan. These three ideas are central to ACYP's work. In order to ensure that we can serve children and young people well, these three over-arching principles must be our guide.



Have we listened to children and young people, taken their point of view seriously and given them an opportunity to impact the outcome of decisions made about them?



Are we upholding and promoting children and young people's rights?



Are children and young people able to access this initiative or program?



Voice

Children and young people always tell us how important it is for their voices to be heard and to have adults listen and take them seriously. They are eager to be part of conversations about the world and are invested in decisions we, as a society, make. Children and young people want to have their opinions heard, treated with respect and taken seriously. Children and young people’s experience also brings innovation and solutions that those around them may not have considered.

It is important to note that promoting the ‘voice’ of children and young people is about more than “giving children and young people a say”. Meaningful participation is about providing children and young people with a safe and inclusive space to express their views, supporting them to voice their views and perspectives, ensuring that there is an appropriate audience to listen to those views, take those views into consideration and, wherever feasible, that their ideas and suggestions have influence and are put into effect³⁵. When we provide children and young people with the opportunity to participate in a meaningful way everyone benefits. The advantages to organisations and government include better and more responsive service delivery, greater engagement and increased awareness of both the issues that are important to children and young people and the services that are available to support them.

Some of the benefits for children and young people include greater confidence, increased connectedness, empowerment and engagement in the civic process.

A key principle of the Plan is that children and young people should be given the opportunity to have their voices heard and meaningfully participate in the decisions that impact their lives.

“I would like to see the government providing more opportunities for the youth to voice our opinions and causes that need to be heard.”

Female, 17 years old





Rights

Children and young people have the same general rights as adults, but they are also entitled to additional rights which recognise that they have specific needs to help them survive, thrive and reach their full potential³⁶. Children and young people are also entitled to special protections because they are more vulnerable to exploitation and abuse³⁷.

These special rights are outlined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and include: that children and young people have the right to be treated fairly; the right to have a say about decisions that affect them; the right to live and grow up healthy; and the right to be safe no matter where they are³⁸.

Australia ratified the UNCRC in 1990. As a result, all children and young people across the country are entitled to the rights enshrined in the Convention and the Government is obliged to promote and fulfil these rights.

We all have a responsibility to ensure that we are acting in the best interests of children and young people and that our obligations to children and young people are met.

A key principle of the Plan is to ensure that we are consistently considering how we can better uphold and protect children and young people's rights.



Access

Children and young people often tell us that programs and initiatives are not always designed in a way that is accessible to them, or that there are other barriers that might get in the way of them being able to access a particular opportunity.

When designing initiatives to support children and young people, it is important to think about 'access' in a broad sense. For example, a young person with a physical disability might not be able to access a public space or a playground because the space has not been designed in a way that is accessible to them. Whilst another young person might not be able to go to the playground or access other important services in the community because there is no public transport in their local area and they don't have the financial resources required to own a car. Similarly, there might be a great program focused on supporting young people to become trainees but, if the application process is difficult to navigate or relies on access to internet and technology, it may exclude those who need that assistance the most.

A key principle of the Plan is to ensure that when programs and initiatives are designed, due consideration is given to how to reduce or remove any barriers that might prevent children and young people from accessing that initiative, service or opportunity.

ACYP has a number of existing resources which can support organisations and local communities to consider how to apply these principles to their work³⁹.

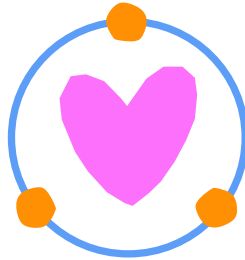
Six Commitments to Children and Young People

The following section outlines in detail the six commitments that we are making to children and young people.

Children and young people have articulated to us what it means for them to thrive and it is our intention to work collaboratively with government, non-government and community stakeholders towards this future.



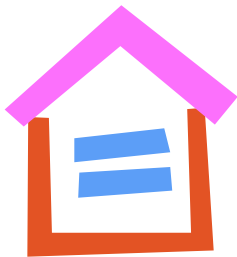
1. Hope for the future



2. Love, connection and safety



3. Health and wellbeing



4. A good standard of living



5. Environments for joy and fun



6. Respect and acceptance

Each chapter in this section includes:



What we've heard from children and young people;



How children and young people are tracking at the moment; and



Our commitment to children and young people.



What we've heard from children and young people is a brief summary of the main themes raised by children and young people during our consultations. Findings are drawn from specific consultations conducted with children and young people throughout 2021 and are supplemented by existing consultations conducted over the past six years. The recent 2021 consultations included a series of face-to-face and virtual group discussions where young people were asked to review these commitments and describe what was important to them about each issue or idea.

Broad themes have been presented in order of how often they were mentioned, however, we note that the burden of some issues is more acute for a small number while other issues are less acute, impacting a larger cohort. We note that where findings are qualitative in nature (that is, drawn from group conversations and interviews) they should not be considered statistically representative.



How children and young people are tracking at the moment represents findings from the 2021 Strategic Plan Survey. ACYP will undertake this tracking study each year throughout the Plan to determine whether the input and efforts from NSW Government have made a difference to these over-arching commitments to children and young people.

All survey data has been conducted with a representative sample such that findings at a state-wide level are statistically representative with a 95% confidence level and a margin of error of +/-3.4%.



Our commitment to children and young people outlines the priority areas for action under which sit a series of goals and indicators linked to these as closely as possible. Each goal is further linked to a corresponding ACYP action and one or more Government initiatives. We note that some of the Government initiatives are relevant to more than one goal and sit across multiple commitments. These are noted and linked where appropriate.

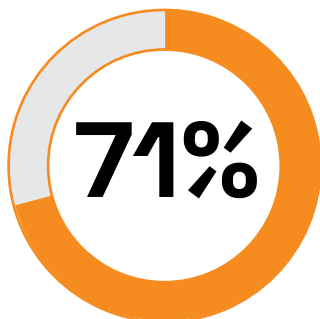
Each of the priority areas for focus has been chosen based on the views of children and young people. We have also aimed to include some priority areas that may not have been directly raised by children and young people, either because they relate to children who would be too young to articulate their needs, or because the issue is systemic and directly impacts vulnerable groups of children and young people. This is a requirement under our Act. We note that the Plan is not intended to be an exhaustive list of all the NSW Government's goals that relate to children and young people. Rather, the focus of this Plan is to respond to the needs of children and young people by elevating key priority areas for focus.



1. Hope for the future

Children and young people's **individual learning and interests** are fostered through **education, training** and **skills development** which supports them to grow and prepares them for their future.

They are supported to be **independent, engage in society** and to **join the workforce**.



of children and young people said they felt **hopeful about their future in general**



1. Hope for the future



What we've heard from children and young people.

Education is a key source of hope but also of concern and stress for children and young people. In the 2020 Youth Week Survey⁴⁰, we asked just over 1,000 young people what the biggest issues that young people in NSW faced were and, unprompted, stress related to their education was second only to mental health concerns.

However, we also asked what the best parts of life were for young people in NSW and the opportunity to get a good education was among the top three responses. In the 2021 Youth Week Survey, 972 young people selected the biggest issues young people faced from a list and 60% nominated stress related to study – making it the number one issue.

Young people can also see the clear link between school and their future work opportunities. When children and young people have spoken to us about school, they have often discussed how it could or should prepare students for the future. In the 2020 Youth Week Survey⁴¹, unemployment and the lack of job opportunities was mentioned, unprompted, at the same rate as stress about school and study. It remained a theme in the 2021 Strategic Plan Survey.

In both Strategic Plan and broader engagement consultations over the past six years, we have asked children and young people to unpack their ideas about education and employment.

Education

As outlined above, stress related to school and broader study is a major concern for children and young people.

This has been raised by those in primary and high school as well as in tertiary education across many consultations conducted by ACYP. The pressure to do well at school impacts the every day lives of many students. For some this is about the pressure of the HSC and the implications for their future career. Other young people have mentioned the pressure of exams and assignments throughout their schooling – particularly where they have multiple assessments due around the same time. Stress was also an issue raised in the context of NAPLAN assessments as students feel the pressure to do well at every age. Some students felt this could be addressed if schools put less focus on exams, while others felt a more flexible timetable at school would help them to manage their workload.



1. Hope for the future

Young people also felt poor mental health could act as a barrier to success in school. While we note this is a slightly separate issue to that of school stress, young people often highlighted the connection between the two and felt school could be a key source of support.

“Too much pressure at school, everything is busy and fast and it is hard to find quiet time.”

Male, 12 years old

Children and young people frequently mention the need for schools to teach practical life skills in addition to the current curriculum. Students raise examples such as taxes, renting accommodation and applying for jobs. Young people want the curriculum to be relevant for their future and they see an opportunity for schools to meet that need. In the 2021 Youth Week Survey where 60% of young people said school stress was one of the biggest issues children and young people face, 34% nominated the need for practical life skills to be taught at school. This was higher among those who were working (39%) and those who were unemployed (49%) indicating that many felt this was important retrospectively and wished they had learnt more during their schooling years.

Indeed, many young people have noted that schools often do not accommodate the needs of a diverse group of students. They felt that all young people have a great deal of potential but that not all young people can access that potential through the academic processes of schools.

Young people often call for opportunities to allow those who are not academic to follow their strengths, interests and abilities in order to reach their goals.

For some, this is about opportunities to integrate apprenticeships and work experience into their learning experience. Others hope for a more tailored learning experience so that those with different academic abilities can progress in a class at their own pace. Still others note the need for alternatives to the traditional schooling pathway and raise concerns for those who disengage from school.

Children and young people are acutely aware of inequity when it comes to educational opportunities, both when they have experienced disadvantage themselves and when they can empathise with other groups experiencing disadvantage.



1. Hope for the future

“Cos like, you get the kids that are really good at [school]. And then you get the kids like us, who lack the concentration and then we get in trouble for that or, we get suspended for that, you know what I mean? So it’s like, what’s the point of going if I’m not going to get help at school.”

ACYP Juvenile Justice Report

Children and young people in regional areas raised the impact of poor access to transport, noting this limits their ability to access education and training opportunities and those in both regional and metropolitan areas are aware of the disparities many of those in regional areas face when it comes to secure, stable internet access. Many also raised the difficulties faced by those experiencing low income or from areas with low socio-economic status. Beyond the impact on their schooling years, they pointed to a need for tertiary education scholarships and noted that cost can be a major barrier to university entry.

Many young people said they were eager for careers advice and particularly for this to be provided throughout their schooling. Some said they wanted more advice about alternatives to university as they feel there is a bias towards this as the “best” option after school, though it may not suit all students. They would like to see less emphasis on university and hear more about opportunities through TAFE and stepping directly into the workforce. Others seek clearer information about different career pathways, including current and future industry demand and information about salaries.

Students often raise work experience as an important opportunity to learn about different occupations and to develop the social and soft skills needed to operate in a work environment. Some feel work experience should be incorporated sooner and more frequently throughout their schooling years.

Young people also want to be supported in the years after school. A frequent comment in consultations is the need for an ongoing support service to help young people with careers advice, navigating the workplace and managing the transition to independence.



1. Hope for the future

Work and employment

When it comes to their hopes for their careers, views among young people were mixed with some displaying confidence and hope for their future, and others expressing concerns about job availability. Many young people were optimistic about their career prospects – 45% according to the 2021 Youth Week Survey, though more than a quarter (28%) felt somewhat or very pessimistic.

This survey demonstrated young people's ongoing concerns about their careers in that 75% felt it was hard for young people to find a well-paid job, 70% felt it was hard to find a permanent job, and 68% felt it is hard for young people to find a job doing what they want to do. 58% were confident that they would be able to pursue a career in their chosen field, indicating more than 4 in 10 were either not sure about this or did not expect to be able to pursue their career goals.

This concern was exacerbated for those in regional areas. According to the same survey, those in regional areas were more likely to take any job offered to them, even if it were not in their field of interest (51% vs 40% of those in metropolitan areas). They were also more likely to feel that in the future, there would be fewer jobs for young people (56% vs 46% in metropolitan areas).

“Finding a job, it’s hard to get a job at times because many employers are looking for a person with experience or certifications, it’s hard to start somewhere.”

Female, 20 years old

In consultations, some young people spoke about their struggle with wanting to pursue one career, while feeling forced into another by their parents, guardians or carers. For these students, their parents' desire is for them to choose careers affording a degree of income stability, though some note preference for some careers over others based on perceived social status.

In the 2021 Strategic Plan Survey, when asked what Government could do to make life better for young people, the second most frequent answer – after mental health support – was to create more job opportunities for young people.



1. Hope for the future



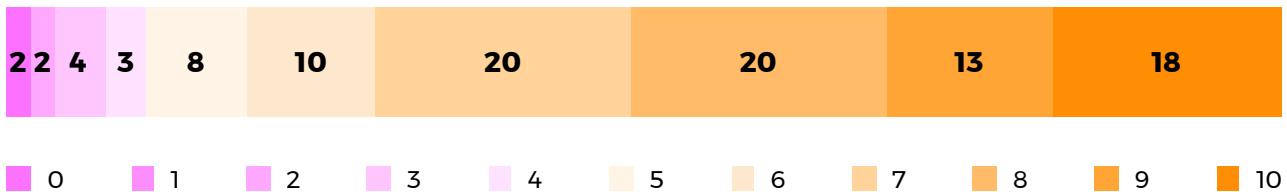
How children and young people are tracking at the moment

Most young people feel optimistic about their future. However, there are some groups who are consistently less hopeful such as those who have had contact with the justice system, those feeling financially insecure and LGBTQIA+ young people.

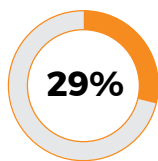
Young people were asked to rate how hopeful they felt about a few aspects of their lives on a scale of not hopeful at all (0) to extremely hopeful (10).

Future in general

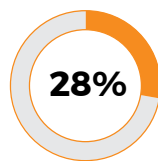
Regarding their 'future in general', 71% were optimistic (rating 7 or more out of 10) while 10% were not as hopeful (rating 0-4 out of 10)



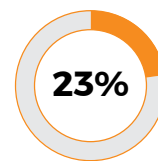
Hopelessness (rating 0-4 out of 10) was highest among:



Those who have had contact with the **justice system**



Those in the **LGBTQIA+** community



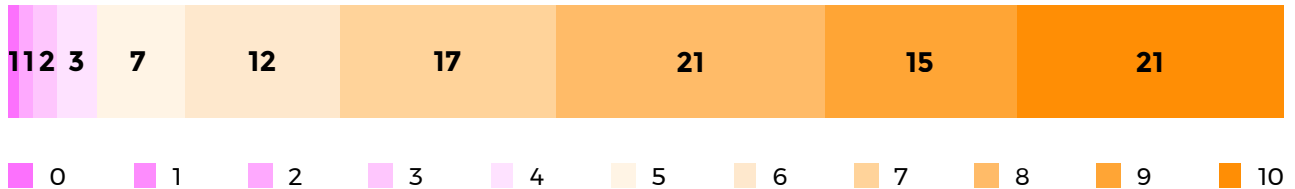
Those who were **financially insecure**



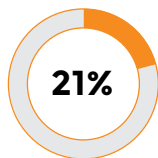
1. Hope for the future

Education and training

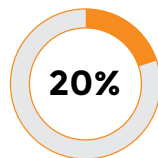
In rating their ability to get the education and training they needed to achieve their goals, **74% were optimistic** while **7% were not as hopeful**.



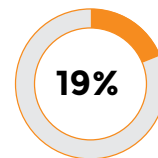
Scores indicating **hopelessness** were highest among:



Those who have contact with the **justice system**



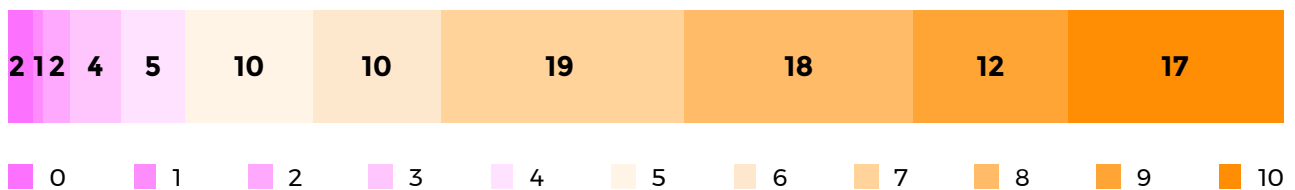
Those who were **financially insecure**



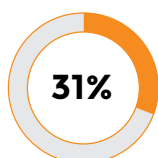
Those **not currently working or studying**

Getting a job

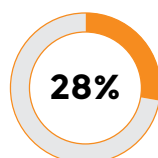
Children and young people were less optimistic about their ability to get a job in a field they were interested in; **67% were optimistic** while **13% were not as hopeful**.



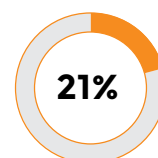
Those most likely to give scores indicating they were **not hopeful** were:



Those in the **LGBTQIA+** community



Those who were **financially insecure**



Those with **disability**



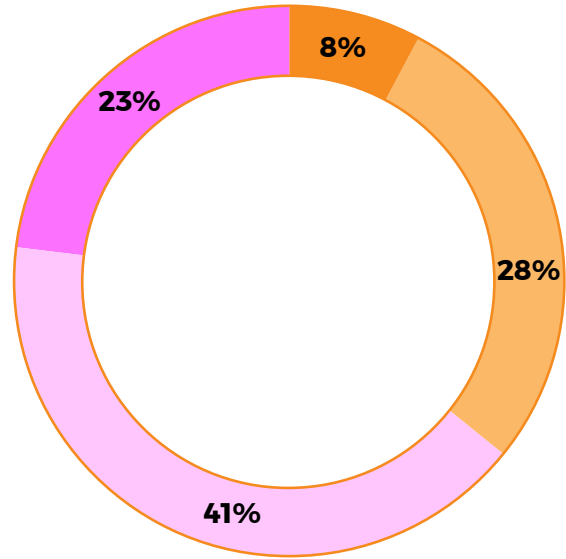
1. Hope for the future

School or study-related stress

Students (across primary, secondary and tertiary study) were asked about the extent of their stress or anxiety related to their studies.

- I do not experience any stress or anxiety
- Very little stress or anxiety
- Moderate amount of stress or anxiety
- A lot of stress or anxiety

Levels of stress were **higher for high school and university students** compared with those in primary school or studying at TAFE.





1. Hope for the future



Our commitment to children and young people

Children and young people's **individual learning and interests** are fostered through **education, training** and **skills development** which supports them to **grow** and prepares them for their future.

They are supported to be **independent, engage in society** and to **join the workforce**.

We commit to the following key areas of focus:

Priority areas for action	Goals	Indicator (including baseline)	ACYP's Commitment/Actions	Government Initiatives
Stress and anxiety related to school or study	Decrease the level of stress and anxiety related to school or study.	64% of young people reported they experienced a lot or a moderate amount of stress related to their studies (2021) ⁱ	Work with the Department of Education, Independent Schools and Catholic Schools to highlight the nature of student stress and to share and disseminate supports and programs that children and young people say are helpful.	1.1; 1.2; 1.7; 1.10; 1.13; 1.15; 3.24; 3.28
Lack of practical life skills resources for young people	Increase access to practical life skills resources.	Number of downloads, views and dissemination of ACYP's Practical Life Skills Resources ⁱⁱ	Develop 4 practical life skills videos and a website linking to additional support. ACYP will launch each video and promote them widely.	1.1; 1.7; 3.15
Lack of employment opportunities for young people	Decrease difficulty for young people in finding work.	Nationally, the median length of time spent looking for work for those aged 15-24 is 15 weeks. (July 2021) ⁱⁱⁱ		1.1; 1.3; 1.4; 1.5; 1.11; 3.15
	Increase the number of young people in employment, education or training.	Nationally, 233,500 young people aged 15-24 reported having difficulty in finding work (2020) ^{iv} 89% of young people aged 15-24 are either fully or partially engaged in some form of employment, education, or training (2020) ^v	Work with Industry Peak Bodies to include young people in business planning and strategies. Support Service NSW in the development of Careers NSW.	1.1; 1.3; 1.4; 1.5; 1.6; 1.11; 1.14; 3.15
Disengagement from education from early childhood to high school	Increase engagement in learning and education, including early childhood education and transition to school.	Nationally, 90% of eligible children were enrolled in preschool in the year before school (2017) ^{vi}		1.2; 1.7; 1.8; 1.9; 1.10; 1.11; 1.12; 1.13; 1.14; 1.15; 3.15; 3.27; 3.28
		92.8% of children aged 4-5 who were enrolled for 600hrs or more of preschool actually attended for 600hrs or more (2020) ^{vii}		
		74.9% attendance level. The proportion of full-time students in Year 1-10 whose attendance rate in Semester 1 is equal to or greater than 90 per cent (2019) ^{viii}	Work with Department of Education around ensuring that student voice is included in evaluation of the Behaviour Strategy.	
		Year 12 certification rate, 70% (2019) ^{ix}		
	Decrease school exclusion and suspensions.	Those awarded the HSC as a proportion of the total population for that age group 4.2% of students received a short suspension and 1.7% of students received a long suspension (2019) ^x		1.7; 1.8; 1.9; 1.13; 1.15; 3.24;



1. Hope for the future

What's happening in this space:

- 1.1** **NSW Education Standards Authority (NESA)** is in the process of reform after the NSW Curriculum Review. The priorities for reform include strong foundations in Mathematics and English skills in the first years of schooling; reducing the burden on teachers to ensure more time is spent on teaching; strengthening post-school pathways by linking learning in senior school to future employment and study options; and refining the curriculum with syllabuses focused on essential knowledge and skills. [NSW Department of Education, NSW Education Standards Authority]
- 1.2** **Stay Healthy HSC** is a website providing resources for HSC students to manage their study and self-care. [NSW Department of Education, NSW Education Standards Authority]
- 1.3** The establishment of **Careers NSW** will work to support people of all ages to find work in NSW. This includes career advice through a digital channel to book the community into career advisors. Careers NSW will be piloted by Service NSW commencing on 25 October 2021 before a full roll out is expected in June 2022. This was a recommendation of the NSW Review of Vocational Education and Training released in 2021. [Service NSW]
- 1.4** **The Regional Industry Education Partnerships program** creates connections between industry and secondary schools to support students to plan their future career pathways. [NSW Department of Education, Training Services NSW]
- 1.5** The NSW Government offers a range of **apprenticeships, traineeships and graduate programs**. While each is operated with the goal of inclusivity, the following programs have been highlighted based on their specific focus on engaging with underrepresented or vulnerable groups.
 - 1.5.1** The **LAHC Apprenticeship Program** provides career pathways, with a focus on young people aged 16-25, people accessing housing assistance, women, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and people with disability. The program includes funding for students to contribute to construction of social housing and provides opportunities for students to study social housing tenancy and property management. [NSW Land and Housing Corporation]
 - 1.5.2** The **NSW Infrastructure Trainee Program** is a two-year program to provide paid training opportunities for those completing school during the COVID-19 pandemic. The program started in 2021. [NSW Department of Education]



1. Hope for the future

1.5.3 The **Regional and Outer Metropolitan (ROM) Entry Level Program** is one of many initiatives from Transport for NSW (TfNSW). This program begins with engagement with regional school students in order to highlight the various apprentice and traineeships available through TfNSW. [Transport for NSW]

1.5.4 The **Aboriginal Vocational Education and Training (VET) Cadet and Aboriginal HSC Scholarship program** supports Sydney based and regional Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people to achieve certifications in a higher school and vocational space and provide ongoing employment outcomes. [Transport for NSW]

1.5.5 The NSW Department of Communities and Justice (DCJ) has a number of programs for those who have been in OOHC. Examples include the **Smart and Skilled scholarship program** for those aged 15 and over, and the **DCJ Education Scholarship** for those 15-18 in OOHC or in social housing. [NSW Department of Communities and Justice]

1.5.6 The Office for Regional Youth and the Department of Education are running an **18 month pilot program to deliver work experience and cultural training** for Year 8 and 9 students at Taronga Zoo in Dubbo. The program aims to incentivise vulnerable youth to re-engage with schooling and complete year 12 or gain stable employment. [NSW Office of Regional Youth]

1.5.7 Many NSW Government departments offer **scholarships for university level study for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students**. Some are specific to an area of study, such as the DPIE scholarship for undergraduate studies in town planning, while others are broader in scope, such as the DCJ Scholarship Program. [Various NSW Departments]

1.6 The **Regional VET Pathways Initiative** supports young people aged 15-19 years not in study or in a job to find pathways into education, training and work. It offers services to re-engage young people such as access to career mentoring, planning and brokerage of pathways to training and employment. [Training Services NSW]

1.7 **RISEUP Fit Programs:** The Fit to Learn, Fit to Work and Fit for Service programs encourage young people to engage in education and work. While Fit to Learn and Fit for Work focus on the skills and strengths required to study and to operate in the work environment, The Fit for Service program assists those with an interest in Policing specifically. There are also other Fit for Programs aimed at supporting young people to build resilience and develop the skills they need to engage with their community. [NSW Police with PCYC]



1. Hope for the future

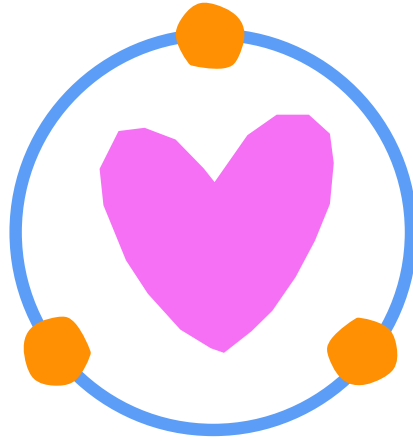
- 1.8** The ***School Success Model*** aims to scale best practice in school governance and teaching across the school system so that decisions can be made based on “what works”. The Model includes specific targets for attendance, HSC attainment and student performance as well as the opportunity to learn from high performing schools. [NSW Department of Education]
- 1.9** ***Attendance Matters***: Attendance is a key priority for the Department of Education with the ongoing work of schools supported by the Attendance Matters resource hub. This acts as a central source of information and resources that school leaders and teachers can use to improve attendance. [NSW Department of Education]
- 1.10** ***Research on the impact of wellbeing and attendance***: The Department of Education has partnered with the University of Queensland to research the impact of student wellbeing and student engagement on attendance. [NSW Department of Education]
- 1.11** The ***Young Carers Program*** supports young people caring for a family member or friend with disability, illness or other ongoing dependency. The program includes general support, information and resources to help young carers and works to improve their education and employment outcomes. [NSW Department of Communities and Justice with Carers NSW]
- 1.12** The ***OOHC Education Pathway*** supports pre-school and school aged children and young people to engage in education regardless of whether they attend a government or non-government school. The pathway involves casework planning to support learning and access to supports as needed, for example accessing the school’s homework centre or a tutor. [NSW Department of Communities and Justice]
- 1.13** The ***Student Behaviour Strategy*** will work to shift the classroom approach from behaviour support and management to an evidence based multi-tiered care continuum of behavioural support. The strategy is broad in its approach to behaviour change, supporting both students and teachers, but also includes changes to suspension policy that will lead to a decrease in the length of suspensions and aims to decrease the frequency of suspensions. [NSW Department of Education]
- 1.14** The ***Perfect Presence Pilot program*** aims to support students showing early signs of disengagement from school so that they feel stronger connections to school and learning and are supported to build on personal and social capabilities. [NSW Department of Education]



1. Hope for the future

1.15 *Getting on Track in Time (Got It!)* is a program designed to reduce the emergence of conduct disorders. It supports children aged 5-8 and their parents and teachers through targeted interventions delivered by Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services in the school setting. There is also a 'Got It!' pilot developing culturally informed adaptations for Aboriginal children. The program works with education staff to provide a universal social-emotional Learning Program in schools developing skills for social communication, relationship building, problem solving and learning that complements a targeted intervention, reduces stigma and creates an environment for support. [NSW Department of Health]

1.16 Service NSW and the NSW Department of Customer Service (DCS) have delivered a *Youth Landing Page* to make it easier for young people to access NSW services and supports. These sites can be found at <https://www.youth.nsw.gov.au/> and <https://www.service.nsw.gov.au/nswgovdirectory/youth-nsw>. Continued cross government collaborations ensures that these sites are maintained with relevant and up-to-date information [NSW Department of Customer Service, Service NSW]



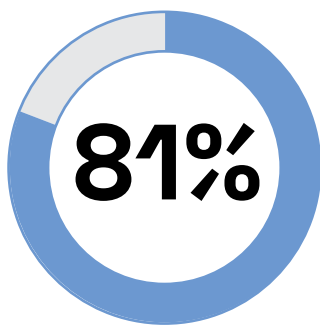
2. Love, connection and safety

Children and young people **feel safe, loved and nurtured**.

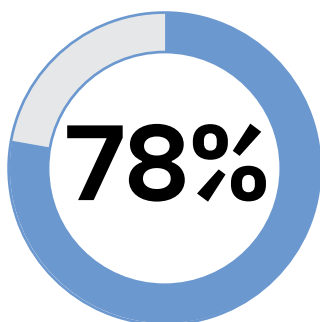
They can **connect** and **build friendships** with others.

They feel that they **belong to a wider community, social or cultural group**.

They are **free from neglect, abuse and violence**.



said they had a good relationship with their **immediate family**



said they had a good relationship with their **friends**



2. Love, connection and safety



What we've heard from children and young people

Relationships are incredibly important to children and young people and are central factors in their perception of their individual health, wellbeing and sense of belonging.

Friends and family

The strongest theme to emerge from consultations with children and young people was about the importance of positive and healthy relationships. Children and young people highlighted the importance of friendships when it came to feeling connected, both with their peer group and their wider community.

Children and young people spoke about how their friendships made them feel safe, both at school and in public, and provided a level of protection against some negative peer experiences such as bullying and cyberbullying which they saw as the inverse to good, healthy relationships.

“Having a role model to look up to and that’s what young people need when they are trying to figure out who they are.”

Male, 10 years old

Children and young people also stressed the importance of having a supportive person in their lives who could serve as a role model and support when needed. For many children and young people these role models were seen as ‘wiser’ or ‘more experienced’ within their family and peers, who could help them with a variety of issues and advice.

Relationships

Whilst in general children and young people said their relationships were positive and healthy, children and young people also emphasised the critical importance of learning what makes a healthy and respectful relationship and strategies for identifying when a relationship may become unhealthy or coercive. Children and young people said they felt that schools had an important role to play in providing objective information about how to engage in healthy, safe and supportive relationships.

Some acknowledged that healthy relationships are not always experienced at home. They recognised that the more a child or young person witnesses or experiences an unhealthy behaviour, the harder it is to unlearn, potentially creating much larger intergenerational concerns.



2. Love, connection and safety

Social media

Many children and young people across our consultations raised the increasing importance of social media when connecting with their peers and wider community. Some recognised that social media presented opportunities for those who may find face-to-face interaction more challenging. However, they also said that this needed to be balanced with the potential for the more negative aspects of social media such as cyberbullying.

When discussing connection on social media, children and young people also highlighted that technology was not accessible for all of their peers. This was a perspective that was strongly held in our rural and regional consultations, where young people spoke about not having the same access to technology or the internet and the importance of finding alternative ways to keep those young people connected.

“Make resources and technology more readily available for people.”

Male, 15 years old

Connection to community

Children and young people were interested and eager to engage with their broader community but did not always know how to connect. They wanted more opportunities to participate in events and activities, which

bring children and young people together and foster connectedness and community cohesion. Children and young people spoke positively about local youth groups which allowed them to share social connection, talk through problems and support their peers. They also spoke positively about interschool events and other activities which brought together schools and groups of young people that may not otherwise know or interact with each other and gave them the opportunity to meet people with different backgrounds and life experiences.

“Each Wednesday we go to the youth group and we can meet our friends from different schools...it really helps us to find new friends.”

Female, ACYP Refugee Report

Some children and young people also often reported feeling connected and safe in the broader community when they came from a large family which facilitated cross-community connections. This sentiment was especially strong for those children and young people who identified as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander or who were from other culturally diverse communities where families are defined more broadly than those who you are biologically related to.



2. Love, connection and safety

Children and young people who had a refugee or migrant background said further support was needed for them to feel connected to community, as the transition to life in Australia brought with it additional challenges. One of the key barriers they spoke about was racism. This issue is discussed further in the respect and acceptance commitment area. One positive aspect that they spoke about was how sport and recreation helped them to connect to their community and make friends. However, many reported not being able to afford the membership fees. Young people said that it would be helpful if they could get some financial assistance to be able to engage in sporting activities.

“Continue pushing out support for young people (such as focus groups, support groups and more fun activities for local communities). These activities can be done by local councils, but something to connect a suburb together, and make new friends to socialise with.”

Male, 16 years old

Cultural identity and awareness

Cultural awareness and inclusivity was centrally important to children and young people. While this theme was most prominent within consultations with culturally and linguistically diverse communities, across a broad range of consultations participants raised the need for more cultural awareness opportunities for young people to share their culture and learn about others.

Aboriginal children and young people often spoke passionately about the importance of their connection to culture. Specifically, they reported enjoying cultural and community events and gala days that foster a close-knit community where everyone is friendly and gets to know each other.

“A lot of us boys who come in doesn’t even know things about our culture, we just know the name but we don’t know what we stand for...how to become a man.”

Male, ACYP Juvenile Justice Report

Some children and young people further shared that they liked the cultural support they received at school as Aboriginal students, such as having a safe room specifically dedicated to their wellbeing at school.



2. Love, connection and safety

Linked to this, Aboriginal children and young people with experience in the OOHC system spoke about the need for more Aboriginal caseworkers who understand the importance of connection to culture and cultural identity.

Aboriginal young people in youth justice spoke about the positive impact of cultural programs in relation to promoting a sense of identity, pride and connection to their culture and community. Some Aboriginal young people said that not everyone knew about their family or background.

They wanted to see more programs which involved Elders teaching traditional skills and knowledge. In our consultations, we have also heard from both children and young people and service providers of the importance of Aboriginal owned and controlled organisations, wherever possible, delivering services and supports to those who identify as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander.

“As a proud Wiradjuri woman I had no family follow-up or family finding done for me whilst in care. So I was also placed with non-Indigenous carers, which then led to the fact that I had a piece of me missing for most of my life until I actually left care and did cultural finding and understanding and practices by myself, without that support.”

Female, 21 years old



2. Love, connection and safety



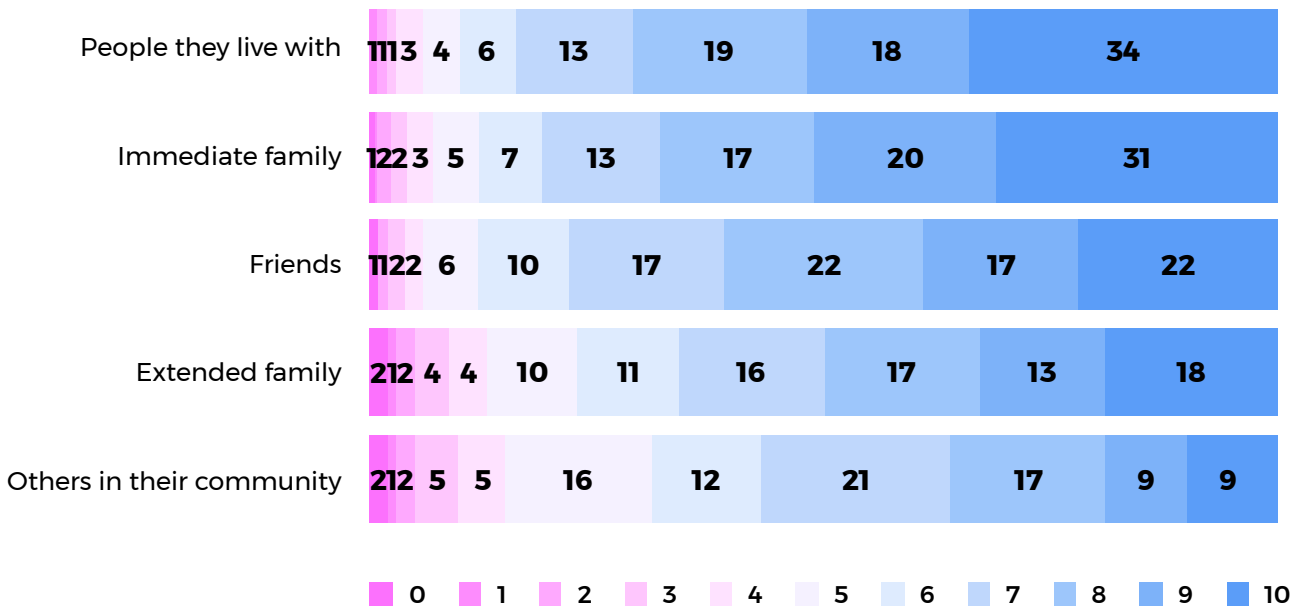
How children and young people are tracking at the moment

Quality of relationships

Students were asked to rate the quality of their relationships with different groups on a scale of very poor [0] to excellent [10].

Many children and young people had high quality relationships (rating 7 or more out of 10 with their **immediate family (81%) and friends (78%)**. While most still had good relationships with **extended family (64%) and the community (56%)**, there were fewer children and young people giving these a high rating.

Children and young people reported the most positive scores for **the people they live with**, with **84% giving a high rating** and only **6% giving a poor rating**.



14-17 year olds
were least positive
about their relationship
with immediate family

10-13 year olds
were most positive
about all of their
relationships



2. Love, connection and safety

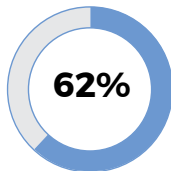
Groups more likely to say they have **poor relationships** (rating 0-4 out of 10) with one or more groups were:

- Those who have had contact with the **justice system**
- Those who are **financially insecure**
- Those who are **not currently working or studying**
- Those in the **LGBTQIA+** community

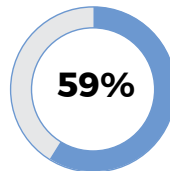
Someone to confide in

We asked young people whether they had someone - either a friend, family member or someone else - who they felt they could confide in.

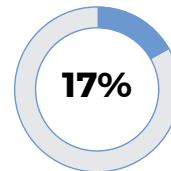
While the vast majority of children and young people (**93%**) **have at least someone in whom they can confide**, some do not have friend or family support networks they can speak to.



A friend



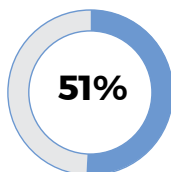
A family member



Someone else

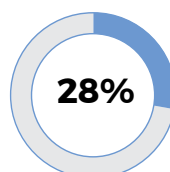
The groups with the **lowest scores** for different relationships were:

10-13 year olds



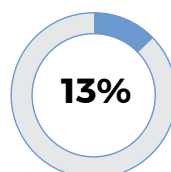
had a friend

Those who have had contact with the **justice system**



had a family member

14-17 year olds



had no one to confide in
(this group had the highest proportion to say this)



2. Love, connection and safety



Our commitment to children and young people

Children and young people feel safe, loved and nurtured.

They can connect and build friendships with others. They feel that they belong to a wider community, social or cultural group. They are free from neglect, abuse and violence.

We commit to the following key areas of focus:

Priority areas for action	Goals	Indicator (including baseline)	ACYP's Commitment/Actions	Government Initiatives
Bullying and cyberbullying	Decrease the prevalence of bullying (including cyberbullying).	31% of young people reported experiencing bullying in the past 12 months (2021) ^{xi}	Support the work of the eSafety Commissioner, including by disseminating eSafety resources via ACYP social media platforms. Conduct consultation on children and young people's experiences of social media and advocate on regulation. Engage with children and young people about their experiences of bullying.	2.1; 2.2; 1.13; 5.24; 5.25
Domestic and Family Violence	Decrease the number of children and young people experiencing domestic or family violence.	9,805 children and young people were victims of domestic violence related assault according to offences recorded by NSW Police (Apr 2020-Mar 2021) ^{xii}	Work in partnership with the sector, with a focus on elevating the voices of children and young people who have been victims/survivors of domestic or family violence.	2.3; 2.4; 2.8; 2.10; 2.11; 3.6; 4.4
Concerns around consent and respectful relationships	Create cultural shift in understanding of consent and respectful relationships.	75% felt they had received sufficient information on sexual consent and respectful relationships (2021) ^{xiii} 58% agreed people their age who they know have respectful romantic and sexual relationships (2021) ^{xiv} 46% agree people of any age in the community have respectful romantic and sexual relationships (2021) ^{xv}	Work with Department of Education around implementation of the Statement of Intent. Work with key stakeholders to improve access to additional consent education in schools. Continue to undertake consultation with children and young people around consent and respectful relationships, and represent their views to Government and the community.	2.8.8; 2.9; 2.10
Lack of a sense of belonging	Increase number of children and young people reporting connection to a community or social group outside of their family.	78% of young people gave a positive rating (7+/10) for the quality of their relationships with friends (2021) ^{xvi} 56% of young people gave a positive rating (7+/10) for the quality of their relationships with others in their community (outside of friends and family) (2021) ^{xvii}	Empower youth advisory councils across the state to encourage engagement in local events, activities and engagement with community, in particular through youth week.	1.7; 1.15; 1.16; 2.12; 2.13; 3.15; 5.1; 5.3; 5.6; 5.8; 5.9; 5.12; 5.14; 6.8.2



2. Love, connection and safety

What's happening in this space:

- 2.1** *Anti-bullying* now forms part of the **Student Behaviour Strategy**. Schools develop an individual school Anti-Bullying Plan, supported by a newly refurbished Anti-Bullying website. It provides advice and resources on bullying and cyberbullying to parents, teachers and students. The Department also participates in the National Day of Action and other anti-bullying and behaviour initiatives each year. [NSW Department of Education]
- 2.2** *Creating child safe organisations by implementing the Child Safe Standards*. There is a specific standard on creating child safe online environments. Perpetrators exploit situations where they can be alone with children or use the online environment to extend their connection and influence. To address this, children can be provided information about online safety and regularly encouraged to tell staff about negative experiences. Staff and parents are provided information about risks in the online environment, such as online grooming, cyber bullying and sexting. [Office of the NSW Children's Guardian]
- 2.3** *2021 Mandatory Child Protection Training* for all employees of the Department of Education focused on identifying and responding to domestic and family violence. This included a focus on coercive control (in the secondary school pathway it included a case study of a peer relationship as well as family settings). [NSW Department of Education]
- 2.4** *Targeted Earlier Intervention Program* – delivers flexible support to children, young people, families and communities experiencing or at risk of vulnerability. Services are delivered under two broad streams:
- Community strengthening – activities that build cohesion, inclusion and wellbeing across all communities, and empower Aboriginal communities.
 - Wellbeing and safety – activities that support families and individuals, including activities that strengthen protective factors and respond to known risk factors and provide opportunities for personal development. [NSW Department of Communities and Justice]
- 2.5** *Family Connect and Support program* offers help as early as possible, bringing together families, support services and community resources flexibly tailored to a family's individual needs, so that our children and young people are safe and well. [NSW Department of Communities and Justice]



2. Love, connection and safety

- 2.6** Establishment of **two statewide specialist mental health inpatient units** to accommodate mothers with mental health problems and their infants. These units allow intensive mental health and clinical care to be provided in a safe environment that supports carer/infant attachment as well as ensuring early parenting skills and parenting confidence. [NSW Health]
- 2.7** The **NSW Family Focused Recovery Framework 2020-2025** supports an intentional shift for mental health services to include considerations of the impacts of mental illness on the family. The Framework continues and expands the established wellbeing supports for Children of Parents with a Mental Illness as a key prevention and early intervention priority. The Framework also focuses on parents with a mental health issue and highlights the significance of the parenting role on self-esteem, personal goals and on the parent's recovery journey. The Framework guides the work of NSW Mental Health Services to develop coordinated and integrated care processes with opportunities to enhance engagement, support mutual goals, facilitate risk assessments and broad inter-agency and cross-sector collaboration. [NSW Health]
- 2.8** Under the **Youth Justice Domestic and Family Violence Strategy 2019-2022** (DFV Strategy), Youth Justice NSW (YJNSW) is progressing several initiatives intended to identify and support young people experiencing and/or using violence in the home to ensure that they receive the specialist support that they need. Actions in the DFV Strategy include:
- 2.8.1** Development of localised referral packs for young people and their families.
 - 2.8.2** Strengthening court-related support services for young people involved in domestic and family violence.
 - 2.8.3** Developing a safety planning tool suitable for use with young people (by end of 2021).
 - 2.8.4** Enhancing workforce capability through training conference convenors, youth officers and caseworkers on identifying and responding to domestic and family violence where the young person is a victim of and/or using violence.
 - 2.8.5** Development of the Safe Spaces DFV perpetrator intervention for young people in contact with YJNSW.
 - 2.8.6** Increased awareness of the issues for young people who are victims of and/or use violence.



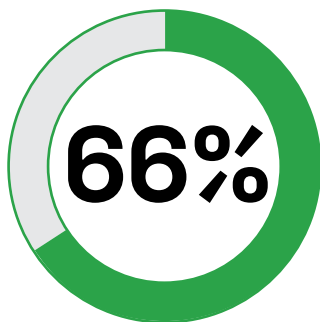
2. Love, connection and safety

- 2.8.7** Expanded the referral network for Youth on Track. Youth on Track is an early intervention scheme for 10–17 year-olds that identifies and responds to young people at risk of long-term involvement in the criminal justice system. Youth on Track provides the NSW Police, NSW Department of Education, Youth Justice NSW, Justice Health and Forensic Mental Health, solicitors, Community Services, Out-of-home care Providers, Community Health, Family Connect and Support, headspace and other mental health services with an opportunity to refer young people, known to be at medium to high risk of offending, to a support service without requiring a legal mandate.
- 2.8.8** My Journey My Life is an Aboriginal specific program which aims to address violence within relationships. It seeks to facilitate participants' movement from relationships based on power and control, towards relationships based on respect. The program was originally designed for young Aboriginal men/boys and in 2021 was adapted through co-design with young women for use with Aboriginal young women/ girls, with plans to roll out the new program in early 2022. [Youth Justice NSW]
- 2.9** In partnership with the National Association for the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect (NAPCAN), Youth Command Officers are being trained to facilitate the **Lovebites Respectful Program** in schools, in conjunction with the School Liaison Police presentation on respectful relationships. [NSW Police]
- 2.10** The NSW Government joined **Our Watch** on 1 July 2019. Our Watch was established in July 2013 by the Commonwealth and Victorian Governments through the National Plan to drive nationwide change in the culture, behaviours and attitudes that underpin and create violence against women and children. [NSW Government - various]
- 2.11** **Whole Family Teams (WFT):** Whole Family Teams provide intensive specialist mental health and drug and alcohol services to vulnerable families many of whom may be experiencing domestic or family violence. They work intensively with families to improve health and safety outcomes for parents and their children. [NSW Health]
- 2.12** The **Multicultural Youth Linker** Pilot program is free for young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds who would like advice and help with settling in Fairfield, NSW. A Multicultural Youth Linker is a young person from a migrant, refugee and refugee-like background who helps other young people to get connected, feel supported and explore opportunities to reach their goals. This program will be expanded over the next three years and the next site to have a Youth Linker will be Liverpool. [Multicultural NSW, Service NSW]
- 2.13** The **Youth Opportunities Program** funds youth-led and youth-driven projects through the allocation of grants. The funded projects aim to grow community connection and inclusion. [NSW Department of Communities and Justice]

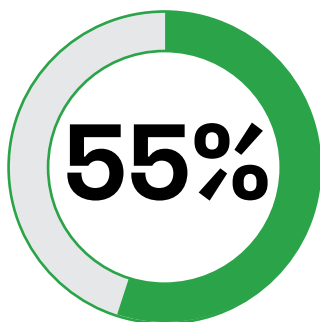


3. Health and wellbeing

Children and young people's **mental, physical** and **emotional health** is **nurtured** and **supported** to enable them to **flourish**.



rated their overall **physical health** as good



rated their **mental health** as good



3. Health and wellbeing



What we've heard from children and young people

Children and young people are passionate about mental health. While this commitment area is about a broader view of health and wellbeing and includes physical, mental and emotional health, the central importance of mental health in young people's minds cannot be understated. In almost every conversation ACYP has with young people, there is a clear and consistent call for better, ongoing mental health support.

Mental health

In the 2021 Strategic Plan Survey mental health came up unprompted as the most frequently mentioned issue children and young people face and further analysis indicated it had the single greatest impact on how children and young people felt about life overall. The following themes about mental health were extremely strong in Strategic Plan consultations but have also been consistently prominent across ACYP's consultations over the past six years.

Many young people were concerned about the ability to access professional support for their mental health. Children and young people raised frustration with the wait times associated with seeing private psychologists, as well as wait times to access mental health support services, such as headspace.

Children and young people were concerned that those seeking help for more moderate mental health issues are sometimes unable to access support as those who are facing more acute challenges are prioritised.

Young people said it is often while waiting for support that those moderate concerns become more serious and young people are left feeling they are unsupported during a period of crisis. Many young people were frustrated with this cycle and expressed concerns that they should not have to wait "until breaking point" to access the help they need.

"[Government should] recognise the need for far more mental health services. I haven't been able to find a clinical psychologist because they are far too booked up."

Female, 17 years old



3. Health and wellbeing

In discussing various mental health services, headspace was one service mentioned frequently and was viewed positively by many young people. Headspace was often described as the “go-to” service both for those who had a history of mental health concerns and those who did not. However, some who had experience accessing headspace reported feeling “caught in the middle” in that, by the time they were able to access support, their mental illness or concern had progressed beyond the level of support headspace provides.

In regional areas, many young people raised issues with accessing local support. Children and young people were passionate about this issue and did not feel they should be required to travel long distances to access the support they need.

Across both metropolitan and regional areas, many young people spoke about the high costs associated with seeing a private psychologist and felt children and young people should be able to access free services without a limit on the number of sessions.

The need to increase mental health literacy among both adults and their peers is another major passion for many children and young people. Children and young people spoke about the importance of everyone in the community having a greater understanding of mental health, which they felt would work in part to diminish the stigma that children and young people often feel is associated with seeking help.

“Make mental health institutes such as psychologists and/or therapists free.

If the government cares so much they would show it more by not restricting people to go get help.

Another way would be to allow free services online to see a psychologist or therapist.

Additionally, to do checks on or create rules for psychologists and or therapists to make it less traumatic to see one since some aren't capable of giving out help.”

Female, 21 years old



3. Health and wellbeing

Young people with a culturally and linguistically diverse background often raised concerns that discussions of mental health are not common and not encouraged in their families and communities. Many would like to see this change.

Indeed, stigma about seeking mental health support was frequently mentioned as a key issue for children and young people across NSW. For those in regional areas, this was compounded by fewer available services and gossip in small communities.

“Improve mental health facilities for the young particularly in high school and make them more accessible and affordable i.e. build them into schools.”

Male, 17 years old

While young people in ACYP’s various consultations have reported mixed views about the impact of counsellors in schools (such as frustration with confidentiality or experiencing social barriers to accessing help), many still felt this was an important initiative and would like to see more mental health support provided in schools. Some felt the role of the counsellor should be to both provide support but also to address the stigma associated with seeking professional help.

For instance, young people regularly recommend in ACYP consultations that all Year 7 students should be encouraged to see the school counsellor at the beginning of their high school years, to provide an initial introduction and overcome the early barriers associated with seeking help.

In ACYP’s consultations, young people often raised suggestions about changes to the types of supports they feel are currently available to them. Views about service delivery are mixed and, naturally, depend on the circumstances of the individual. Some hope to engage virtually or have an anonymous conversation. However, conversations with young people experiencing lockdown as a result of COVID-19 revealed that some young people would like to be able to seek support face-to-face and telehealth was not their preferred delivery mode.

Some young people raised specific mental illnesses throughout consultations, though we note that we do not encourage young people to discuss their personal health experiences in a group context. In addition to experiences of general anxiety and depressive disorders, some young people spoke about external factors exacerbating mental illness, such as the impact of social media. Many note the impact of social pressures on self-esteem and a healthy self-image and a few linked this specifically to eating disorders.



3. Health and wellbeing

“Making sure that doctors have some sort of professionalism in regards to when talking about mental health.

I went to a [local] Dr and when talking about my anxiety he told me to “calm down” and that it’s “just life”.

Female, 21 years old

Physical health

Perspectives on physical health were much less passionately held for most young people. However, when prompted to discuss the physical dimensions of wellbeing, young people raised the importance of sport, nutrition and the need for a greater understanding of the healthcare system (such as understanding how Medicare works).

Some young people noted the impact of cost on their ability to be physically healthy, such as the fact that healthy food was not always affordable. Others noted young people were unable to access gyms or sporting activities without associated costs.

Throughout consultations, when young people discuss their experiences with GPs, some feel their doctor is not able to engage or

communicate well with young people. This has flow on effects for the young person’s ability to access the help they need.

COVID-19

COVID-19 has had a major impact on the lives of children and young people. ACYP conducted regular research throughout 2020 and 2021 to understand the impact of the pandemic and associated lockdowns, and young people were clear in the major disruption it had caused in their lives in terms of their physical, mental, emotional and social wellbeing.

While some young people reported fear about the virus itself, most focused on the impact of lockdowns and other restrictions.

For many, lockdown was characterised by feelings of boredom and isolation, while others experienced heightened feelings of anxiety and distress. Many young people reported increased mental health concerns and we note there have been record numbers of young people accessing support through Kids Helpline and Lifeline services.

Consultations conducted throughout the vaccine roll out showed that many young people were positive about receiving the vaccine. However, this positivity was coupled with concerns from a small number about the safety of the vaccine and fears it had been developed too quickly. Misinformation about vaccines was a source of concern for some and frustration for others and some young people recounted stories of fear and conspiracy theories from their family and friends.



3. Health and wellbeing

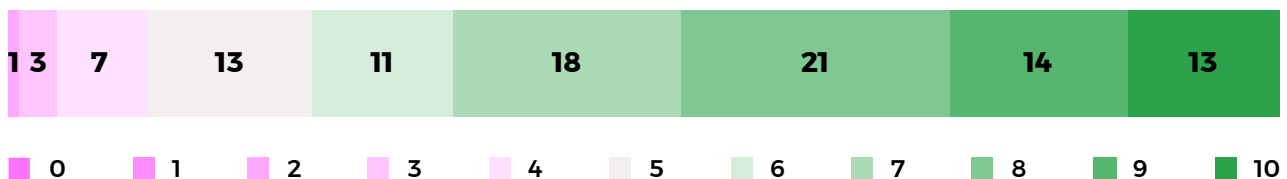


How children and young people are tracking at the moment

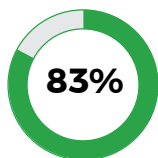
Most children and young people rated their physical health more positively than their mental health. Those with consistently lower scores for both include those identifying as LGBTQIA+, those with disability, those who are not financially secure and those who have had contact with the justice system.

Physical health

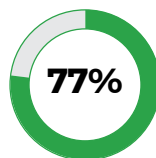
Two thirds of young people (**66%**) rated their own physical health **positively** (7+ out of 10) while **one in ten (11%)** gave a **negative** rating (0-4 out of 10).



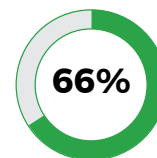
Those **most likely to be positive** about their physical health were:



10-13 year olds

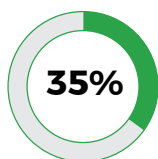


Those who viewed themselves as **highly resilient**

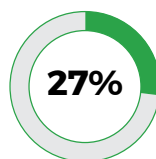


Those who felt they were **financially secure**

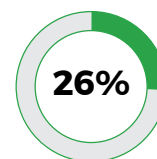
Those **most likely to be negative** about their physical health were:



Those who have had contact with the **justice system**



Those who felt **financially insecure**



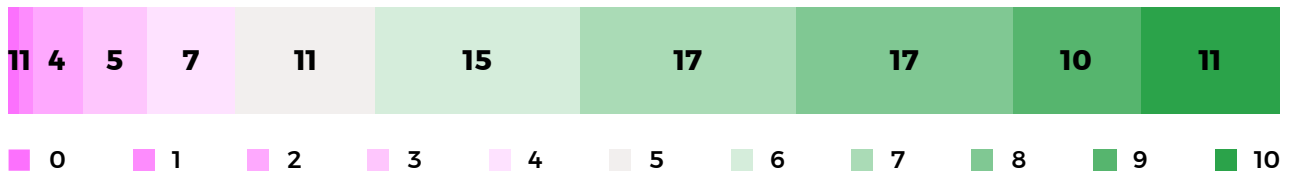
Those identifying as **LGBTQIA+**



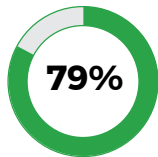
3. Health and wellbeing

Mental health

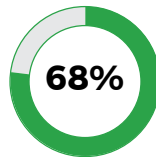
Just over half of children and young people (**55%**) rated their mental health **positively** (7+ out of 10) while **two in ten (19%)** gave a **negative** rating (0-4 out of 10).



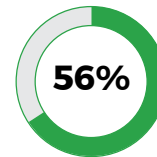
Those **most likely to be positive** about their mental health were:



10-13 year olds

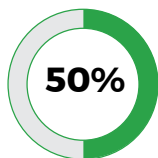


Those who viewed themselves as **highly resilient**

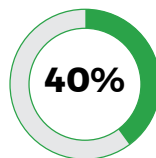


Those who felt they were **financially secure**

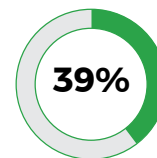
Those **most likely to be negative** about their mental health were:



Those identifying as **LGBTQIA+**



Those with **disability**



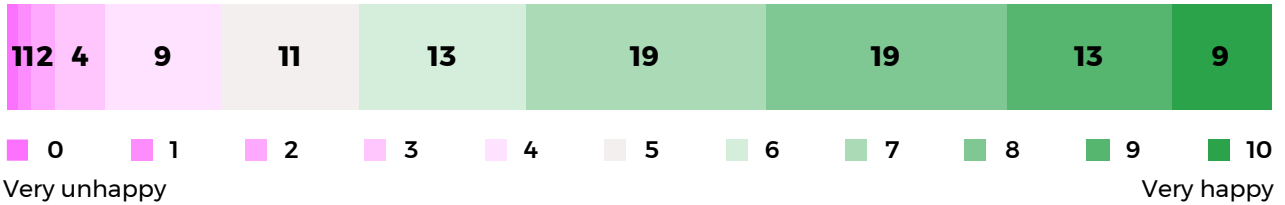
Those who have had contact with the **justice system**



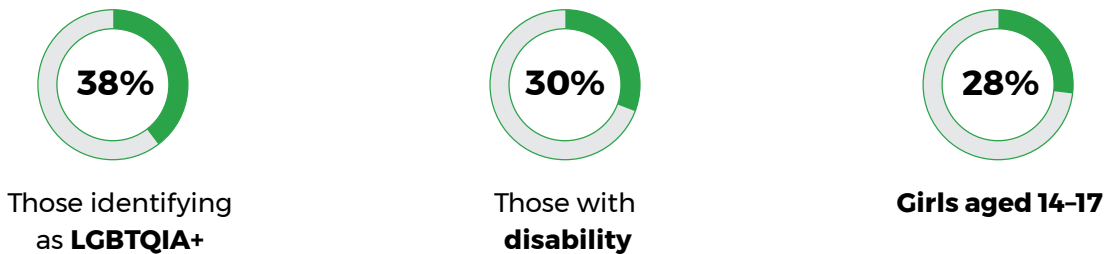
3. Health and wellbeing

Emotional measures

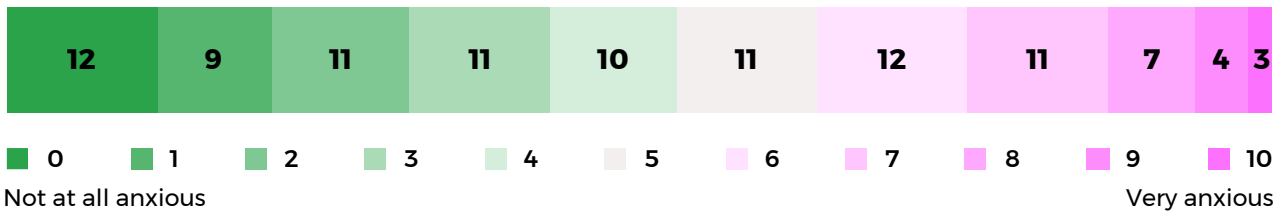
We also asked young people about some emotional measures. At that point in time, **59% described their level of happiness as 7 or more out of 10** while **17% rated between 0 and 4**.



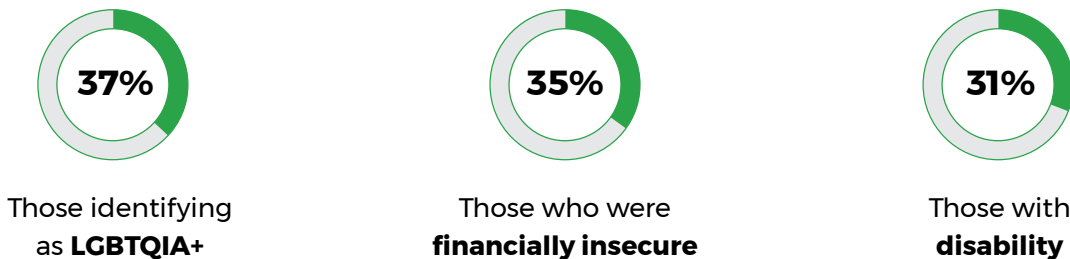
Those most likely to give **lower ratings** of happiness were:



By contrast, levels of anxiety were much lower. **24% rated their level of anxiety as 7 or more out of 10** and **54% gave a rating between 0 and 4**.



Those most likely to experience **higher levels** of anxiety were:

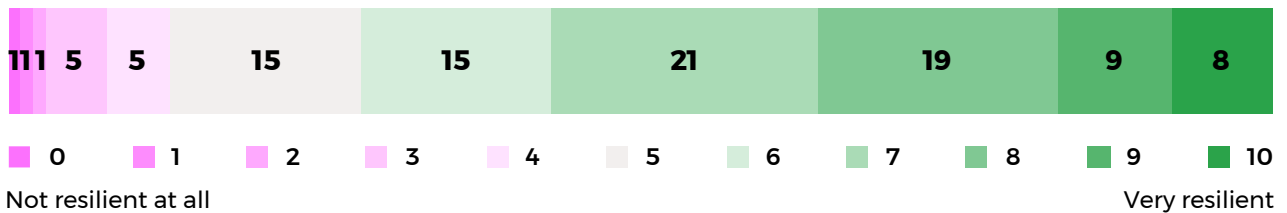




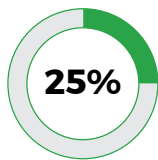
3. Health and wellbeing

Resilience

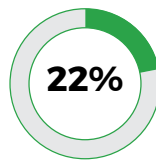
Young people were also given an opportunity to rate the extent to which they saw themselves as a resilient person. **57% reported high levels of resilience** (7 or more out of 10) and **13% gave lower ratings** (0-4 out of 10).



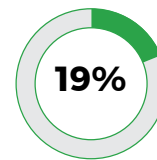
Those most likely to give **lower scores** were:



Those identifying as **LGBTQIA+**



Those with **disability**



Those who have had contact with the **justice system**



3. Health and wellbeing



Our commitment to children and young people

Children and young people's mental, physical and emotional health is nurtured and supported to enable them to flourish.

We commit to the following key areas of focus:

Priority areas for action	Goals	Indicator (including baseline)	ACYP's Commitment/Actions	Government Initiatives
Support for children and their carers during the first 2000 days of life	Increase proportion of women attending their first antenatal visit within the first trimester.	79.6% of women in NSW attended their first antenatal visit within the 14 weeks of pregnancy This figure was lower for those aged 19 and under at 71.5% (2019) ^{xviii}	Support the implementation of the First 2000 Days Strategy, such as promoting information about childhood health and development to parents and supporting targeted programs for young parents.	3.1; 3.2; 3.3; 3.4; 3.5;
	Increase in the proportion of children having development checks at age 2, 3 and 4 years.	While not currently published, this figure will be available through the First 2000 Days Implementation Plan		
Childhood death and accidental injury	Decrease in deaths among infants and children.	Infant mortality rate 3.5 per 1,000 live births (2019) ^{xix} Death rate per 100,000 population: Aged 0-4: 77.7 Aged 5-9: 7.0 Aged 10-14: 10.6 (2019) ^{xx}	The Advocate will continue to serve on the Child Death Review Team. Work with the NSW Ombudsman, NSW Health, the NSW Department of Communities and Justice and other organisations to implement the findings and recommendations of the Child Death Review Team.	3.1; 3.2; 3.3; 3.4; 3.5; 3.6;
	Decrease in childhood injury.	Hospitalised injury rate for those aged 0-14: 1,181.1 per 100,000 population (2018-19) ^{xxi}		
Suicide and self-injury	Decrease in suicide for children and young people.	126 deaths by suicide for those aged 24 and under in 2020 (2020) ^{xxii}	The Advocate will continue to participate in the Adolescent Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Interagency Meeting.	3.7; 3.8; 3.9; 3.10; 3.12; 3.13; 3.14; 3.15; 3.17; 3.21; 3.24; 3.27; 3.28; 3.31
	Decrease in intentional self-injury among children and young people.	Hospitalisations of those aged 15-24 due to intentional self-harm: 225.9 per 100,000 population (2018-19) ^{xxiii}		
Lack of informal mental health supports	Increase mental health literacy for adults who serve children and young people.	Completion rates of the Youth Mental Health First Aid course among Government agencies supporting children and young people <i>*Note: Further work required to identify data sources for this indicator</i>	Work to promote the Youth Mental Health First Aid course and advocate for higher completion rates in NSW. Empower local youth advisory councils to advocate for Teen Mental Health First Aid training. Support the work of the Four You Alliance.	3.7; 3.11; 3.18; 3.19; 3.20; 3.21; 3.22; 3.24; 3.25;
	Increase capacity for young people to provide peer mental health support.	Number of young people who had completed a teen mental health first aid course in the financial year 2020-21 <i>*Note: Further work required to identify data sources for this indicator</i> 72% were confident in their ability to support their friends with their mental and emotional wellbeing (% rating 7+/10) ^{xxiv}		



3. Health and wellbeing

We commit to the following key areas of focus (continued):

Priority areas for action	Goals	Indicator (including baseline)	ACYP's Commitment/Actions	Government Initiatives
Long waiting times for professional mental health supports	Decrease waiting time for professional mental health supports.	<p>Headspace wait times: 25.5 days is the average wait for the first therapy session (Nationally, 2018)^{xxv}</p> <p><i>*Note: Further work required to identify data sources for this indicator</i></p>	Work with relevant agencies to advocate for tracking of wait times for young people to receive professional mental health support.	3.7; 3.23; 3.25; 3.28; 3.29; 3.30; 3.31;
Lack of support for young people experiencing addiction or problematic use of alcohol and other drugs	Increase access to youth specific services to support young people who had engagement with alcohol and other drugs.	ACYP would establish a baseline understanding of current access and make recommendations to improve this over time.	Work to understand children and young people's level of access to existing supports, particularly in regional areas, and identify any barriers to participation.	3.23; 3.32;
COVID-19 public health response for children and young people	Increase access to and uptake of COVID-19 vaccination in accordance with public health advice.	Vaccination rates for children and young people will be included as the vaccine becomes available to a wider age cohort of children and young people.	<p>Throughout the pandemic ACYP has worked alongside NSW Health to ensure communications are targeted to young people and that they are getting the information they need.</p> <p>ACYP has and will continue to engage children and young people to ensure NSW Government decision making includes their voices.</p>	3.33; 3.34



3. Health and wellbeing

What's happening in this space:

- 3.1** The ***First 2000 Days Framework*** aims to highlight the importance of the first 2000 days of a child's life and what action people within the NSW Health System will need to support them. It includes greater awareness of the importance of this period among health staff, parents and others who care for children. The Strategy will be implemented by Local Health Districts and Specialty Health Networks as appropriate for their districts. [NSW Health]
- 3.2** The ***NSW Health Maternity care policy***: 'Connecting, listening and responding: A Blueprint for Action – Maternity care in NSW' (the Blueprint) will be launched in 2022. The Blueprint has a holistic scope, taking a 'life course approach' to maternity care in NSW in line with the First 2000 Days Framework. The Blueprint focuses on providing women with family centred, responsive care during the perinatal period to improve experiences and optimise maternal and neonatal outcomes. An implementation plan will accompany the Blueprint and will include activities to connect women to information and care early in pregnancy. [NSW Health]
- 3.3** The ***Aboriginal Maternal and Infant Health Service*** (AMIHS) provides antenatal and postnatal care, from as early as possible in pregnancy and up to eight weeks after the birth of the baby. Midwives and Aboriginal health workers work together to provide a high-quality maternity service that is culturally safe, women-centred and provided in partnership with Aboriginal people. Care is provided in the community and links closely with mainstream maternity services. [NSW Health]
- 3.4** ***Building Strong Foundations*** (BSF) for Aboriginal Children, Families and Communities services provide culturally safe child and family health services for Aboriginal children and families from birth to school age. Services are provided by teams of Aboriginal health workers and child and family health nurses. In some locations there are other allied health workers including social workers and speech pathologists. [NSW Health]
- 3.5** ***Perinatal and Infant Mental Health Services*** are offered in most local health districts and provide specialist mental health treatment and care for pregnant or postnatal women with children (up to 2 years of age) where the parent has severe, acute, or complex mental illness. The service supports the parent's recovery as well as supporting the parent-infant relationship and their skills, safety and confidence in attending to their child's needs. NSW Health also funds several organisations providing mental health services to parents and their young children, including Karitane, Tresillian, the Gidget Foundation and Mums and Kids Matter. [NSW Health]



3. Health and wellbeing

- 3.6** **SAFE START** universal mental health and psychological screening is managed by Safe Start coordinators, who are mental health workers, and is delivered through Maternity staff and Child and Family Health nurses. Care planning and referrals link various relevant perinatal services. [NSW Health]
- 3.7** The Mental Health Commission of NSW has developed **Living Well in Focus 2020-2024**, a strategic plan for community recovery, wellbeing and mental health in NSW. The Plan aims to improve mental health across the whole NSW population but, of relevance to these goals, the scope includes suicide prevention; prevention and early intervention; improved health literacy; increasing capacity of the formal peer workforce; addressing workforce shortages; and improving system navigation. [Mental Health Commission of NSW]
- 3.8** **National Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Agreement** (NMHSPA): NSW Department of Premier and Cabinet (DPC) and NSW Health have led negotiations on the NMHSPA and associated bilateral agreement between NSW and the Australian Government. The NMHSPA will support NSW's existing work to improve mental health and suicide prevention outcomes. [NSW Department of Premier and Cabinet, NSW Health]
- 3.9** Initiatives under the **Towards Zero Suicides Premier's Priority**, which include supports specific to young people and across the population. The Priority aims to reduce the rate of suicide deaths in NSW by 20% in 2023. [NSW Department of Premier and Cabinet, NSW Health]
- 3.10** The **Child Death Review Team** reviews the deaths of children in NSW and works to prevent and reduce child deaths. It is convened by the NSW Ombudsman and the Advocate for Children and Young People and the Community and Disability Services Commissioner are ex-officio members. [NSW Ombudsman]
- 3.10.1** Each year DCJ also reviews the deaths of children in NSW who had been known to the Department. This includes infants who died in circumstances related to premature birth and those who died by suicide.
- 3.11** **Investment in health literacy and unintentional injury prevention.** In 2021-22 the Ministry of Health will invest \$827,600 to support Youth Action, Youthsafe, Kidsafe and the Association for the Wellbeing of Children in Healthcare to develop and maintain health literacy and injury prevention information and resources. [NSW Health]



3. Health and wellbeing

3.12 The Department of Education provides a series of **mental health supports to students** with central aims of preventing suicide and acute mental illness.

3.12.1 Youth Aware of Mental Health: a 3-week mental health and suicide prevention program designed to develop peer support between students and develop emotional intelligence [NSW Department of Education with Black Dog Institute].

3.12.2 Batyr@school: speakers with lived experience of mental illness share their story and provide information and education about support available. Targeted at those in Year 9-12 [NSW Department of Education with Batyr].

3.12.3 PAX Good Behaviour Game: an in-class exercise for public schools teaching emotional regulation and impulse control. While contributing to general wellbeing and a host of other health benefits, it has been shown to decrease prevalence of suicidal thoughts in students. [NSW Department of Education]

3.12.4 NSW Health also funds **suicide prevention activities** in schools in collaboration with headspace. Sessions are available to parents, teachers and students. [NSW Health]

3.13 The Department of Education has contracted Orygen to evaluate the effectiveness of **postvention initiatives in NSW High Schools**. This was a recommendation of the Child Death Review Team biannual report 2016-17 and findings and recommendations are due to be published throughout the period of this Plan. [NSW Department of Education]

3.14 Youth Aftercare Pilots are being delivered in four locations across NSW, providing age appropriate psychosocial support for children and young people following suicidal thoughts or attempts including significant incidents of self-harm. The program is co-designed by young people with a lived experience and aims to assist young people and their families to improve resilience and problem solving, pursue personal goals and connect to community. [NSW Health]

3.15 The Youth Community Living Support Service is a community outreach mental health service for young people aged 15 to 24. The program in partnership with local mental health support, provides case management and psychosocial support, working with young people with moderate to significant mental health concerns to promote recovery and wellbeing. This program also helps young people work towards their identified goals including those related to education, vocation and accommodation. [NSW Health]

3.16 Touch, Feel and De-Stress is a project co-designed with Justice Health to prevent self-harm at Acmena Youth Justice Centre. The project aims to use sensory tools for sensory modulation. [Youth Justice NSW]



3. Health and wellbeing

- 3.17** The Mental Health Commission of NSW has partnered with Western Sydney University in the final development stage of **Moody Tunes**, an innovative, evidence-based smartphone app for youth mental health. Designed with young people for young people, Moody Tunes works in the background as users listen to music on Spotify, prompting users to record the effect that music has on their moods. In turn the app creates playlists of the music they love which best supports their wellbeing and provides appropriate referral and resources. Funding from the Mental Health Commission will support the final development stage of Moody Tunes to: enhance visual and interactive elements of the app to hold greater appeal to young people; enhance the app's potential to increase help-seeking behaviours; and roll out the app free to young people across NSW, Australia and internationally. [Mental Health Commission of NSW with Western Sydney University]
- 3.18** **Youth Mental Health First Aid** is a training course to provide the equivalent of physical first aid to a young person who may be experiencing symptoms of mental illness or distress. At present, this course is being rolled out to teachers and other staff in schools, NSW Police Youth Command, as well as those involved with the Youth Justice system through various initiatives associated with each agency. [NSW Department of Education, NSW Police, Youth Justice NSW, NSW Health]
- 3.19** Staff who are involved in the Youth Justice system are required to receive **training** to support the mental health of young people they work with. Youth Justice and Youth on Track staff are required to complete training in trauma informed care. All Youth Justice Psychologists and Justice Health clinicians have completed Dialectical Behaviour Therapy (DBT) training as an intervention for young people engaging in self-harm and/or suicidal ideation. [Youth Justice NSW]
- 3.20** Department of Communities and Justice Case workers, carers and service providers refer to the **NSW Therapeutic Care Framework**, which ensures trauma-informed care is at the centre of their practice. The focus is on supporting children and young people to recover from trauma, with a goal of reducing time in intensive OOH services and achieve permanent homes where children and young people can thrive. [NSW Department of Communities and Justice]
- 3.21** The establishment of **12 Community Wellbeing Collaboratives** has been funded by NSW Health where headspace and Lifeline will support communities with populations at high risk of suicide and increasing rates of self-harm among young people. [NSW Health with headspace and Lifeline]



3. Health and wellbeing

3.22 *OurSpace* and *LINKS to Healing are trauma* treatment services for children and young people in OOHC that ensure children are supported by care teams in a trauma-informed approach. Carers are empowered to develop the skills they need to address the mental health needs of children and young people in their care. [NSW Department of Communities and Justice]

3.23 *The Futures Planning and Support pilot program* provides connection and support to young people 17-24 years of age leaving OOHC to address mental and physical health, mentoring and coaching, case work to address substance addiction, and managing engagement with the Justice sector. The service is being piloted in the Mid-North Coast region and the pilot will be completed at the end of 2022. [NSW Department of Communities and Justice]

3.24 Alongside a range of professional development opportunities related to wellbeing, the Department of Education supports the following programs to assist teachers and school staff to care for the wellbeing of students:

3.24.1 *Be You*: develops mental health literacy among teachers and early childhood educators. [NSW Department of Education with Beyond Blue]

3.24.2 *Project Air Strategy for Schools* provides schools with resources to better recognise and respond to young people with complex mental health problems. [NSW Health]

3.24.3 *SAFEMinds Schools* and *Families Enhancing Minds* provide schools and families with resources to improve their ability to provide early intervention mental health support. [NSW Department of Education with headspace]

3.24.4 *Youth In Distress*: Includes the Managing Suicidality and Self-Harm training and Responding to Anxiety and Depression Toolkit. [NSW Department of Education with Black Dog Institute]

3.24.5 The Department is currently developing *a universal mental health professional learning module for staff* that has been developed in consultation with young people. [NSW Department of Education]

3.25 The *Police Ambulance and Clinical Early Response (PACER) model* embeds mental health clinicians with Triple Zero responders to provide specialist advice and appropriate care for those experiencing mental health distress. While this initiative is not targeted to young people, it will increase the level of support they receive from both the mental health clinician and the first responder. [NSW Police, NSW Health]



3. Health and wellbeing

- 3.26** *Teen Mental Health First Aid* is a training course for young people to provide the equivalent of physical first aid to their peers who may be experiencing symptoms of mental illness or distress. The course is currently available to students when individual schools sign up to the training. [NSW Government with Mental Health First Aid]
- 3.27** Most Local Health Districts have a **School-Link Coordinator**, working closely with local schools and TAFE to link students to Child, Adolescent and Mental Health Services as well as other community services. They also play a role in early identification and referral of mental health issues and building school staff capacity in supporting students' mental health. School-Link supports setting informed mental health resources including learning modules for educators on best-practice approaches to mental health and wellbeing issues such as: supporting students who refuse to attend school because of their mental health issues; and supporting students with complex mental health challenges. School-Link also supports schools with supporting students who are suspended or expelled from school. [NSW Department of Education, NSW Health]
- 3.28** NSW Government funding has been allocated to **expanding the Student Support Officer and counselling workforce** between 2020 and 2023. Every Government high school will have a full-time counselling allocation as well as a full-time student support officer. This will mean 100 additional school counselling positions and 350 additional student support officers. [NSW Department of Education]
- 3.29** The Department of Education has established a **telepsychology service and a fly-in fly-out psychology service** for students in regional and remote NSW. [NSW Department of Education]
- 3.30** The **Wellbeing and Health In-Reach Nurse Coordinator program** establishes a wellbeing nurse position in identified schools in selected communities across NSW. The role of the wellbeing nurse is to identify and address the health and social needs of students and families, coordinate appropriate early intervention, assessments and referrals and build effective referral pathways with health providers. The NSW Government committed funding for 100 new positions in the 2020-21 state budget. These positions are in addition to the six positions established in 2018 and 2020. [NSW Department of Education, NSW Health]
- 3.31** **25 Safeguards Child and Adolescent Mental Health Response Teams** to be established over four years were funded in the 2020-21 state budget. Safeguards teams will provide specialist mental health support to children and adolescents experiencing moderate to severe mental health issues and their families and carers. [NSW Health]



3. Health and wellbeing

3.32 NSW Health has established various supports across NSW for **young people with substance use issues**:

3.32.1 Eleven non-government services have been funded to provide youth specific alcohol and other drug treatment across NSW, including access to withdrawal management and psychosocial support.

3.32.2 Multidisciplinary service hubs delivering treatment to young people and their families have been established in five local health districts and the Sydney Children's Hospital Network.

3.32.3 Increased specialist clinical support is being provided through a Youth Addiction Medicine Fellowship Program operating from three sites in NSW. [NSW Health]

3.33 The NSW Government has taken a whole-of-government approach to ensuring **the needs of children and young people are met during the COVID-19 pandemic**, particularly during periods of lockdown, home learning and throughout the vaccine roll out. [NSW Government - various]

3.34 NSW Health has developed **targeted communications for young people about the COVID-19 public health response** in partnership with ACYP, Youth Ambassadors, Youth Action and the Young and Resilient Research Centre. A series of social media videos featuring Youth Ambassadors and clinicians have been developed so that young people can ask trusted experts from NSW Health the questions that matter to them. [NSW Health]

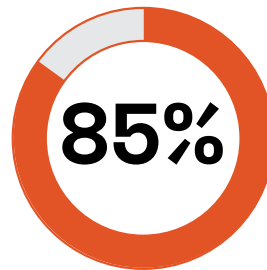


4. A good standard of living

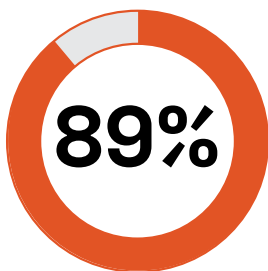
Children and young people are provided with **the necessities they need to thrive**. Children and young people **do not live in poverty** and are provided with **adequate services** and **resources** to operate in society.



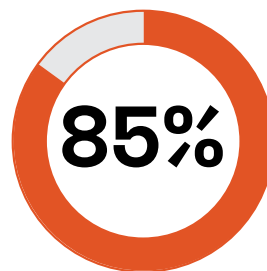
said they had a safe and secure **place to live and sleep**.



said they were able to eat **a healthy and balanced diet** if they wanted to.



said they had **enough clothing and other items** that they need for their day-to-day life.



said they could easily **access services and support** (such as transport and healthcare).



4. A good standard of living



What we've heard from children and young people

Children and young people see the impact that a good standard of living has on different aspects of their lives and, even where young people had experienced a relatively good standard of living, they could empathise with those who had not and could see, for instance, the importance of a roof over their heads, a balanced and nutritious diet and access to comforts and amenities.

Our engagement included children and young people across the spectrum of experiences and each had unique insights into the importance of a solid foundation for a good standard of living. Key themes are outlined below.

Education, training and employment

Two elements of a good standard of living that children and young people felt were interconnected were the domains of education and employment. While these are explored in more detail in the *Hope for the future* commitment area, children and young people often highlighted the importance of education, future employment and paid work as a stepping stone to achieving a good standard of living and being able to purchase the necessities.

Some young people commented that the cost of education can be expensive and at times prohibitive. They felt that young people needed to be provided with more access

to the necessary resources to support their learning and education, such as textbooks, uniforms and laptops. They also spoke about needing more information about the supports and scholarships that are available to them.

Young people also discussed the need for greater support to get a job and earn an income. This included practical skills around resume and cover letter writing, interview preparation and the softer skills around appropriate workplace behaviour and expectations. Young people also raised that they wanted to know what their rights were as employees and what was appropriate for their employer to expect.



4. A good standard of living

Housing

Children and young people often highlighted that access to safe, stable and affordable housing – whether it be for families, single parents, or young people living alone – is critical for a good standard of living. In the 2021 Strategic Plan Survey, most children and young people (92%) reported having a safe and stable place to live and sleep. Some children and young people that we spoke to in school consultations noted that this was not the reality for all children and young people in the community, and called for more housing options, crisis accommodation and support services for young people.

Young people who were transitioning out of the family home and trying to enter the housing market often said they were discriminated against because of their age, in comparison to those older people who might have higher disposable income or appeared to be a more preferable candidate. Many young people said there needed to be more information provided to support young people trying to enter the rental market. For example, in one consultation a young person highlighted that there was purpose-built affordable housing for young people in some council areas, but many young people were unaware of it.

Young people who had lived experience of homelessness often spoke about the need for more wraparound and holistic supports to be available for young people. Examples of these services included services focused on mental and general health; services supporting training and employment opportunities; and supports

around accessing government subsidies.

They spoke about all of these aspects as being important to achieving a good quality of life and transitioning out of homelessness. They also spoke about the need for more information in community about how to access these services.

Financial stability

Young people in our consultations commented that a good standard of living is sometimes dependent on their parents' socioeconomic status and that when families are struggling financially, this can put undue pressure on young people, even if self-imposed. As a result, some young people called for greater holistic support for young people and families who were struggling.

“Explore additional financial opportunities to get people into their own homes. Living in rental properties are expensive and cost of deposits for a home or unit to own is way too high for the majority of the population and what they are earning. This will help reduce homelessness also.”

Female, 23 years old



4. A good standard of living

As young people looked to transitioning towards greater independence from family, many highlighted the need for supports to be available to young people living out of home.

The topic of financial instability was also raised in a number of our targeted consultations with children and young people who are socially excluded. For example, children and young people experiencing or at risk of homelessness felt stressed and anxious about their financial insecurity. Young people receiving social security payments reported difficulties covering their basic needs and said that meals were often skipped in order to pay for transport, school books or TAFE fees. Some young people also reported never having any money left over to “go to the movies or just do something fun.” Young people reported the difficulties they encounter due to the inflexibility and ineligibility of the social security system, “if you miss an appointment with your welfare officer, your payment gets cut”.

Mental and physical health

Children and young people discussed the importance of good physical and mental health as central to a good standard of living. Whilst this is covered in more detail in the health and wellbeing commitment area, a number of young people spoke about the link between financial insecurity and reduced health outcomes.

Some children and young people spoke about the importance of proper nutrition and healthy living and how this could impact wellbeing. For example, children and young people discussed the greater role that schools could play in providing nutritious food and

breakfast programs, particularly for those who may not be able to afford it outside of school. Children and young people also expressed the importance of having access to open green spaces and other public spaces for recreation, exercise and play.

Children and young people also recognised that critical to a good standard of living was access to adequate healthcare. Some raised the issue of prohibitive costs of accessing some services such as mental health support plans. This is further explored in the *Health and wellbeing* commitment area. Within this context, some children and young people said that being able to access more youth friendly medical providers would make them feel more comfortable about seeking medical attention when they needed to as there were often times when children and young people did not feel seen and heard by their health providers. One issue that was specifically raised was the need for GPs to be educated around how to work respectfully with young people who identify as LGBTQIA+.

The experiences of children and young people in rural and regional NSW

Children and young people from rural and regional communities had many similar experiences to those in metropolitan areas, but also spoke about additional challenges they faced in accessing a good standard of living.

Many spoke about needing access to reliable and affordable transport options – to enable them to get to education and training, employment, support services, places and opportunities to socialise, and sports and



4. A good standard of living

recreation activities. Children and young people recognised that access and affordability to transport for each of these domains had a specific connection to their standard of living. Through accessing education, training and employment, children and young people are gaining the necessary skills and experience to pursue a career in their chosen profession.

Children and young people appreciated the challenge of distance for those living in rural and regional NSW, which was especially apparent when it came to accessing support services to ensure their standard of living is adequate. For instance, where reporting for Centrelink and other social security payments specifies that in person attendance is required, a lack of transport can significantly impact an individual's ability to meet these requirements.

“To provide more opportunities for young people to find jobs in the workplace and by increasing small regional towns and upgrading/making it more modern by building new infrastructure or providing more jobs in the area.”

Male, 15 years old

Children and young people noted that the ability to partake in sport and recreation was critical for both their physical and mental wellbeing, which directly impacted their standard of living. For those in rural and regional communities having the capacity to access these opportunities can be further complicated by a lack of transport and affordability around accessing this.

Another reported challenge was access to shops and services, both in terms of distance and delays in getting goods and products. These issues were particularly highlighted in consultations with children and young people following disasters. Whilst some noted an increased focus on supporting communities after these events, they also said that support quickly dissipated after communities appeared to recover – leaving long-term issues unresolved.

Access to good technology and internet is a challenge in rural and regional communities. The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the inequality of this digital divide. Those with outdated technology and limited data sources, reported that online learning and being able to socialise with peers during lockdown was a significant problem.



4. A good standard of living

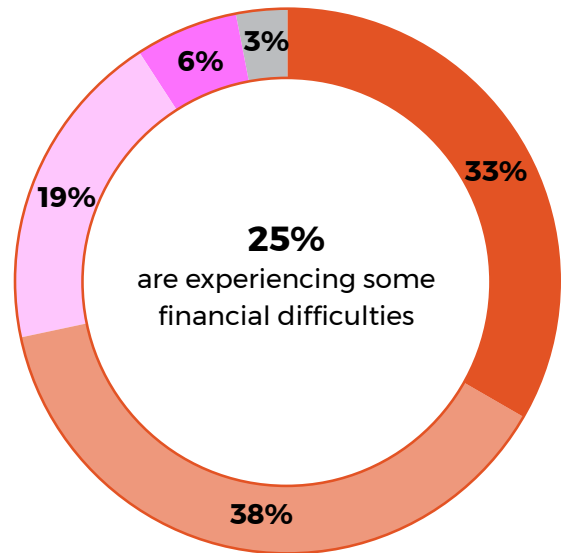


How children and young people are tracking at the moment

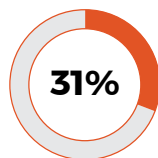
Financial situation

A quarter (25%) of the young people surveyed reported experiencing **some financial difficulties** either just getting by or struggling to make ends meet and cover basic living expenses.

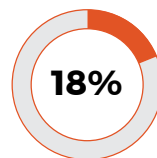
- I am doing well and feeling comfortable
- I am doing okay and making ends meet
- I am having some difficulty but making ends meet
- I am having a lot of difficulty making ends meet and covering basic living expenses
- I'd rather not say



Around one in three young people who live independently were **struggling financially**, which includes **8% who faced a lot of difficulty covering basic living expenses**.

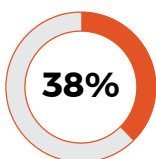


Those **living independently**

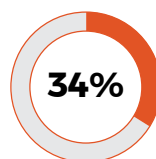


Those **dependent on parents (or guardians)**

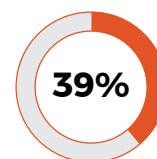
Groups with **higher rates of financial difficulty** included:



Those who identify as **LGBTQIA+**



Those who have had contact with the **justice system**



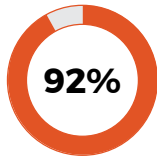
Those with **disability**



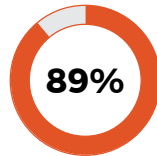
4. A good standard of living

Standard of living

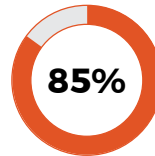
Young people were asked to rate their agreement with different statements about their standard of living from strongly disagree [0] to strongly agree [10]. Many indicated having **a good standard of living** (rating 7 or more out of 10).



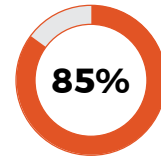
Agreed they had a safe and **secure place to live and sleep**



Felt they have **enough clothing** and other **day-to-day items**



Said they were able to eat **a healthy and balanced diet**

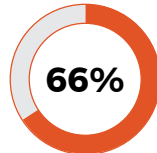


Reported having access to **essential services and support**

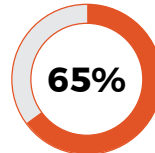
Among those **struggling financially**:



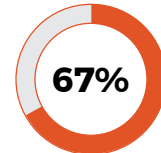
Agreed they had a safe and **secure place to live and sleep**



Felt they have **enough clothing** and other **day-to-day items**



Said they were able to eat **a healthy and balanced diet**



Reported having access to **essential services and support**

Those most likely to give **lower ratings** for one or more of these indicators (0-4 out of 10) include:

- Those who have had contact with the **justice system**
- Those who identify as **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander**
- Those **not currently working or studying**



4. A good standard of living



Our commitment to children and young people

Children and young people are provided with the necessities they need to thrive.

Children and young people do not live in poverty and are provided with adequate services and resources to operate in society.

We commit to the following key areas of focus:

Priority areas for action	Goals	Indicator (including baseline)	ACYP's Commitment/Actions	Government Initiatives
Childhood poverty	Decrease the number of children and young people living in poverty.	17.7% of children and 13.4% of young people in NSW live in poverty (2019) ^{xxvi}	Support the work of Anti-Poverty Week – highlighting childhood poverty in NSW. Support agencies to track the extent of childhood poverty in NSW.	4.1; 4.2; 4.3; 4.7
Financial instability and the cost of living	Decrease the number of young people reporting financial instability.	31% of young people who live independently report financial difficulties (noting those experiencing homelessness and acute financial difficulties are less likely to be able to access the survey) (2021) ^{xxvii}	Support young people to access information and resources about financial counselling. Work in partnership with Revenue NSW to support inclusion of children and young people's voices to identify gaps and opportunities for improvement of the Hardship Support program.	4.1; 4.2; 4.3; 4.7;
Inability to access safe, stable and affordable accommodation	Decrease the number of young people reporting difficulty in finding safe, stable and affordable accommodation.	Nationally, 28% of those aged 15-24 and 45% of those living independently, lived in lower income households experiencing housing stress (2017-18) ^{xxviii}	Work in partnership with the Real Estate Institute and other relevant stakeholders, to develop greater awareness and knowledge about Rent Choice products which are available for young people. Support the dissemination of information about renters' rights amongst young people.	4.4; 4.5; 4.6; 4.8; 3.15
Youth homelessness	Decrease youth homelessness.	13,005 or 0.6% of children and young people 0-24 experienced homelessness ^{xxix} This figure is based on the 2016 Census. Updated figures for the 2021 census will become the benchmark figures when provided. However, we note the next census will occur outside the reporting period for this Strategic Plan. In June 2021, 12,990 children and young people aged 0-24 accessed specialist homelessness services, representing 52.8% of the total number of clients accessing support ^{xxx}	Continue to work collaboratively with government, NGOs and the business community to increase the availability and accessibility of youth foyers, and other models designed and proven to work with young people . Support the dissemination of communications around Link2Home and crisis support services.	4.4; 4.5; 4.6; 4.8; 3.15
Lack of transport in regional areas	Increase children and young people's access to transport in regional areas.	ACYP will track children and young people's self-reported access to transport	Work with the Office of Regional Youth and Transport NSW to increase understanding about available concessions and learner driver licensing programs.	4.2; 4.3; 4.9; 4.10; 4.11



4. A good standard of living

What's happening in this space:

- 4.1** *The Hardship Support Program* seeks to address the burden of fines and debts on children and young people. The program includes initiatives which are: identifying youth in OOHC with fines and debts for write off or other action (e.g. Work and Development Orders or Payment Plans); working with Transport for NSW and other agencies to increase access to public transport for vulnerable youth; and, educating young people regarding fines and the consequences of receiving them. [NSW Department of Customer Service, Revenue NSW]
- 4.2** *Transport for NSW* offers a variety of **concessions and rebates for children and young people**, including; Apprentice/Trainee Concession, Tertiary Student Concession, Apprentice Registration Rebate and lower fares for bus customers in rural and regional NSW. [Transport for NSW]
- 4.3** *School Student Transport Scheme* (SSTS) and the *School Drive Subsidy* (SDS) provide free or subsidised travel from home to school, state-wide. SDS subsidises travel by car, motorbike or boat, to drive an eligible student all or part of the way to school or nearest pick-up point. [Transport for NSW]
- 4.4** Through their Portfolio Strategy, Local Area Strategies and Housing Pipeline; the Land and Housing Commission (LAHC) actively pursues opportunities that **deliver more and better access to social housing for young people and families**, including those needing crisis accommodation and the new Youth Foyer Model. Further, LAHC is finalising a Functional Design Brief (FDB) for Core and Cluster crisis accommodation, which has a child focused design, assisting with the treatment of women and children that are escaping traumatic situations. LAHC is proposing to use the Functional Design Brief to address the current crisis accommodation portfolio, ensuring that LAHC-owned crisis accommodation better caters for women and children. LAHC also has a portfolio of crisis accommodation that targets women and children escaping domestic violence, including renewed existing properties and purpose-built accommodation. Support for children is also provided through the delivery of OOHC, through the 'Meanwhile Use' of properties awaiting redevelopment. [NSW Department of Planning, Industry and Environment]
- 4.5** *Housing Strategy 2041*: the NSW Housing Strategy is a 20-year plan for better housing outcomes in NSW and considers housing across the spectrum, from crisis housing to social and affordable housing, to private rental and specialist housing, to homeownership. The strategy also includes investigation into alternative financing arrangements for first homebuyers in addressing concerns that young people are finding it increasingly difficult to afford home ownership. [NSW Department of Planning, Industry and Environment]



4. A good standard of living

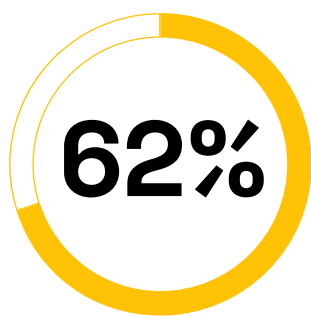
- 4.6** *Youth Justice* offers a holistic and coordinated approach for children and young people in contact with the Youth Justice system to gain secure accommodation. This includes the Youth Justice Bail Assistance Line, crisis accommodation and A Place to Go Pilot Program. A Place to Go Pilot Program supports children and young people aged 10 to 17 in contact with the youth justice system, with a focus on children and young people on remand. A Place to Go draws on services from across NSW Government, including the Department of Communities and Justice, the Department of Education, Justice Health and Forensic Mental Health Network, as well as other non-government service providers. It aims to connect young people with suitable study options, provide legal assistance and necessary healthcare and assistance to find short-term accommodation. [Youth Justice NSW]
- 4.7** The *Cost of Living Program* helps NSW residents find and access more than 40 rebates and savings offered across NSW Government agencies. This includes the Rent Choice Youth, which provides private rental assistance in the form of a subsidy for young people aged 16-24 years for up to three years. [Service NSW]
- 4.8** *Homeless Youth Assistance Program* supports young people and unaccompanied children aged 12-15 experiencing or at risk of homelessness to reunite with their families or transition to longer term stable accommodation. [NSW Department of Communities and Justice]
- 4.9** The *16 Regional Cities Services Improvement Program* objective is to improve public transport services within 16 nominated cities around NSW, undertaking planning of bus service improvements to provide additional services to better meet customer needs through improved connections to key locations such as the CBD, hospitals, university/TAFE, and employment. [Transport for NSW]
- 4.10** The *Transport Access Regional Partnerships* (TARP) Grants Program has small scale funding available to support initiatives to improve services and outcomes for sections of the community that need improved transport. Funding is available for projects that focus on transport for disadvantaged groups within the community. A number of projects have been delivered for school students in regional areas including: access to recreational activities in larger regional centres (Youth Force on the Move - Nambucca), and transport for young mothers to access health and social services (Mums and Bubs – Kyogle). [Transport for NSW]
- 4.11** *Country Passenger Transport Infrastructure Grants Scheme* (CPTIGS) provides subsidies to support the construction or upgrade of bus stop infrastructure generally owned and maintained by local councils across regional NSW. The subsidies are aimed at assisting councils and communities to improve accessibility and quality at rural and regional bus stops, more accessible passenger transport, especially better connections between bus stops and surrounding communities; an increase in the use of passenger transport in country areas through improved awareness of bus stop locations, kerbside information and improved security; and the development of minor infrastructure to complement passenger service development. Funding is allocated regionally to facilitate an equitable distribution of the grant support and projects. [Transport for NSW]



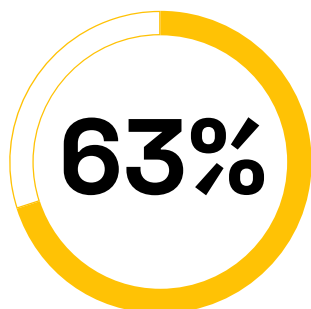
5. Environments for joy and fun

Children and young people have **spaces** and **opportunities** to **engage in activities** for **recreation** and **leisure**.

These spaces are **enjoyable, welcoming** and **safe**.



said they feel satisfied they can **participate in fun activities**



said they feel **safe in public areas** around the community



5. Environments for joy and fun



What we've heard from children and young people

Children and young people value opportunities to play, have fun and enjoy themselves – whether that be going to cafes, concerts, galleries or movies, spending time in parks, playing sport or enjoying nature. In the ACYP 2020 Youth Week survey, young people in NSW reported that three of the best parts of their life were ‘having lots of activities to do and events to go to’ (24%), ‘access to outdoor and natural spaces’ (17%) and ‘having a good social life and connecting with friends’ (29%).

Children and young people regularly told us that they wanted more spaces and opportunities to engage in fun activities and things to do. Whilst this is a theme that comes up across most consultations, including both metropolitan and regional areas, it was particularly prominent in consultations with children and young people which focused on the experience of disasters. In addition, children and young people who are with disability, in youth justice, in OOHC or have recently arrived in Australia often highlighted specific challenges and barriers in accessing activities and opportunities. Overwhelmingly, children and young people want safe spaces to have fun, to play, to study, but also just to be.

Activities and opportunities to have fun

In our Strategic Plan consultations, children and young people told us that they wanted more community events and a more diverse range of activities to be available. Some young people said they wanted more funding for local sports clubs so they can run more youth-focused programs, whilst other young people

wanted more activities (other than sport) such as music, art, cooking, school holiday programs and school camps. Young people in regional areas reported that there were often lots of sporting activities available but not as many other options.

“Improving opportunities to engage in fun activities and strengthening community bond.”

Male, 20 years old

When we spoke to children and young people about their experience of disaster, including bushfires, floods and droughts, many spoke about the impact of disaster destroying facilities and cancelling events, and the desire for activities to be made available to them. Children and young people in youth justice, in OOHC and experiencing homelessness have also told us that they want more access to programs and spaces to hang-out after hours and on the weekend.



5. Environments for joy and fun

Some children and young people have told us that they want culturally tailored activities and programs. For example, Aboriginal young people said they would prefer programs to be presented by Aboriginal workers with a focus on connection to culture. Other children and young people have told us they want more opportunities to engage in activities with children and young people who are different to them. For example, young people from refugee backgrounds have told us that whilst they enjoyed activities and opportunities to socialise with young people like them, they also wanted to socialise with other young people.

Youth friendly and safe spaces

Children and young people have also told us they want spaces that are enjoyable, welcoming and safe.

In our Strategic Plan consultations young people told us that they often feel unsafe on public transport, in shops, in parks and other public spaces. They said this was, in part, related to infrastructure – such as poorly lit pathways and empty public spaces. They also felt unsafe because of other people in the community – for example they spoke about people being under the influence of drugs and alcohol in public spaces.

“More opportunities in our community for positive youth events and safe spaces for meeting friends.”

Female, 12 years old

Young people said they wanted more youth-specific spaces. They suggested that there should be more youth centres and spaces that were open for all young people to be able to relax and have fun in a safe space. For example, some young people said there should be more outdoor event spaces that offered a range of different initiatives aimed at young people – such as music, sport, art activities and cinemas. Others spoke about the need for services and youth-friendly spaces to be open at times that meet the needs of young people in the community – such as being open later into the evening.

“Have more open and green spaces...and better connectivity – i.e. better transport, better walking tracks, safe places – even if that is more lights on pathways.”

Female, 23 years old

Children and young people often said there should be better utilisation of existing community spaces near them for a range of activities. They suggested that schools should be open during the weekends and school holidays so young people could use those facilities, rather than having to build new ones. Children and young people also told us that more community centres and libraries should be used to run activities and have youth specific times for young people to come and relax in the space.



5. Environments for joy and fun

Improving accessibility

Some people said they were frustrated that even when spaces exist, they are still inaccessible for a variety of reasons. Children and young people said that transport, cost, lack of information and advertising, as well as the physical inaccessibility of some spaces were issues of concern.

Young people in regional areas said that the further you go out from a main town or city, the less transport options there were. When there were still some transport options available, children and young people reported that transport services needed to be more frequent and that they did not always feel safe.

Children and young people also told us that cost was sometimes a barrier to them being able to access a program or activity. They wanted more low-cost opportunities for young people and families. They spoke positively about government initiatives like the Creative Kids and Active Kids programs, as they allowed them to do activities that they wouldn't have been able to do previously.

Children and young people also raised their frustration that they didn't always know what events, activities and services were available in their local community. They wanted more information around what services and programs were available. They suggested that schools could play a role in communicating this information, and that there should be more posters and advertising on social media.

In consultations with children and young people with disability, they regularly said they feel excluded from spaces and activities – often because of the inaccessibility of the physical environment and other barriers. Young people said they wanted spaces to be designed in a way that was more inclusive and enabled all children and young people to participate.

Caring for the environment

While many of the conversations we had with children and young people are framed around their immediate experiences and needs, many young people also commented on the bigger picture and referenced issues that take a broader social lens. Children and young people often speak about the importance of caring for the environment and the natural world. When asked what advice they had for government, children and young people regularly said that they wanted the government to protect the environment, including by responding to climate change. Young people also report wanting more access to nature, including increased access to green public spaces including parks and walking trails.

“Take care of the environment and more outside places for kids in cities to play.”

Female, 11 years old



5. Environments for joy and fun

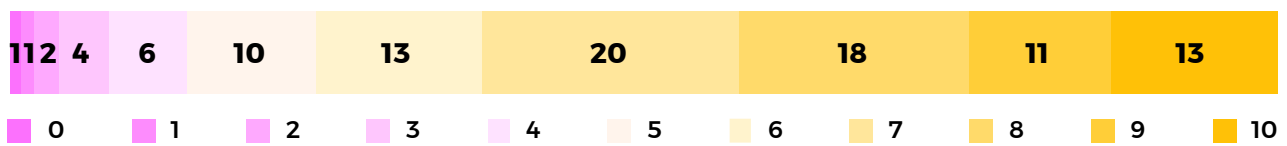


How children and young people are tracking at the moment

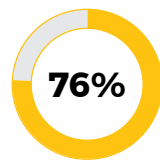
Activities and opportunities to have fun

The majority of children and young people surveyed **were satisfied** with their ability to participate in fun activities, with 62% rating their satisfaction as 7 or more out of 10.

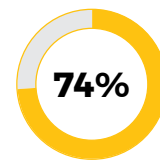
Dissatisfaction (rating 0-4) was low at 14%.



Satisfaction (rating 7 or more out of 10) was **highest** among:



Those aged **10-13 years**

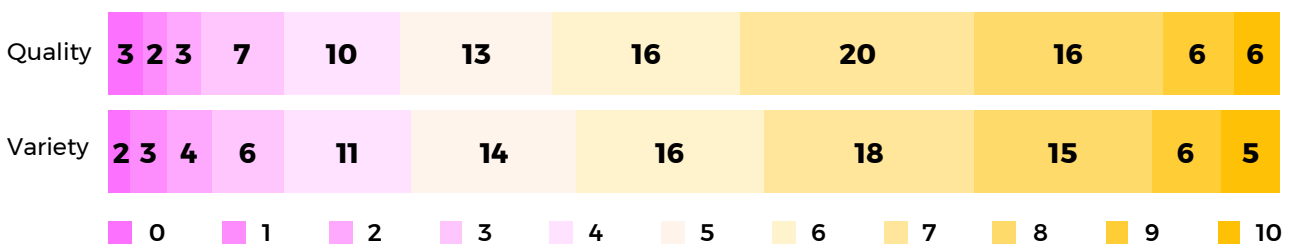


Those who also rated themselves as **highly resilient**

Dissatisfaction (rating 0-4 out of 10) was **highest** among:

- 29% Those who were **struggling financially**
- 29% Those who identify as **LGBTQIA+**
- 27% Those **not working or studying**

However, children and young people were **less satisfied with the variety and quality** of fun activities available in their local area (with 44% and 48% rating 7 or more out of 10 for each).



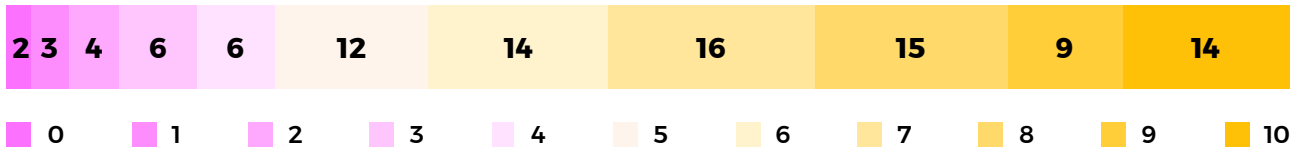
Those who were **struggling financially, not working or studying**, those who identify as **LGBTQIA+** and those with **disability** were **least satisfied** with both of these attributes.



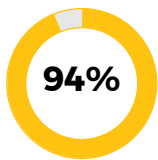
5. Environments for joy and fun

Physical activity

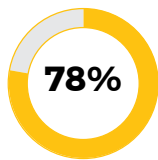
Almost all young people surveyed reported taking part in sport or physical activity with some regularity with **79% doing so at least once a week**.



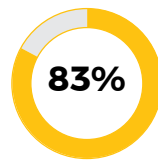
Those aged **10-13 years** had **higher rates** of weekly exercise, though this decreased with age.



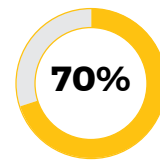
Males aged 10-13 years exercised weekly



Males aged 18-24 years exercised weekly

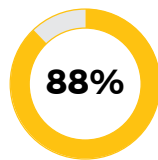


Females aged 10-13 years exercised weekly

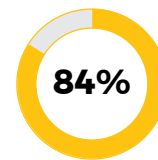


Females aged 18-24 years exercised weekly

Aside from age differences, weekly or **more frequent exercise** was **highest** among:

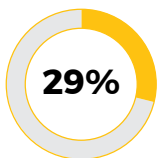


Those who identify as **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander**

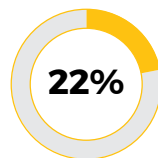


Those who also rated themselves as **highly resilient**

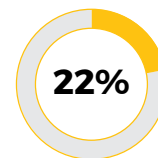
Those most likely to say they only exercise **every few months** or **less frequently** include:



Those **not currently studying or working**



Those **struggling financially**



Those who have had contact with the **justice system**

Children and young people appear to have an **awareness of the importance of exercise**, in that **those who exercised most frequently** were also the **most satisfied** with their level of participation in sport or physical activity. **Those who exercise infrequently** were significantly **less satisfied**.

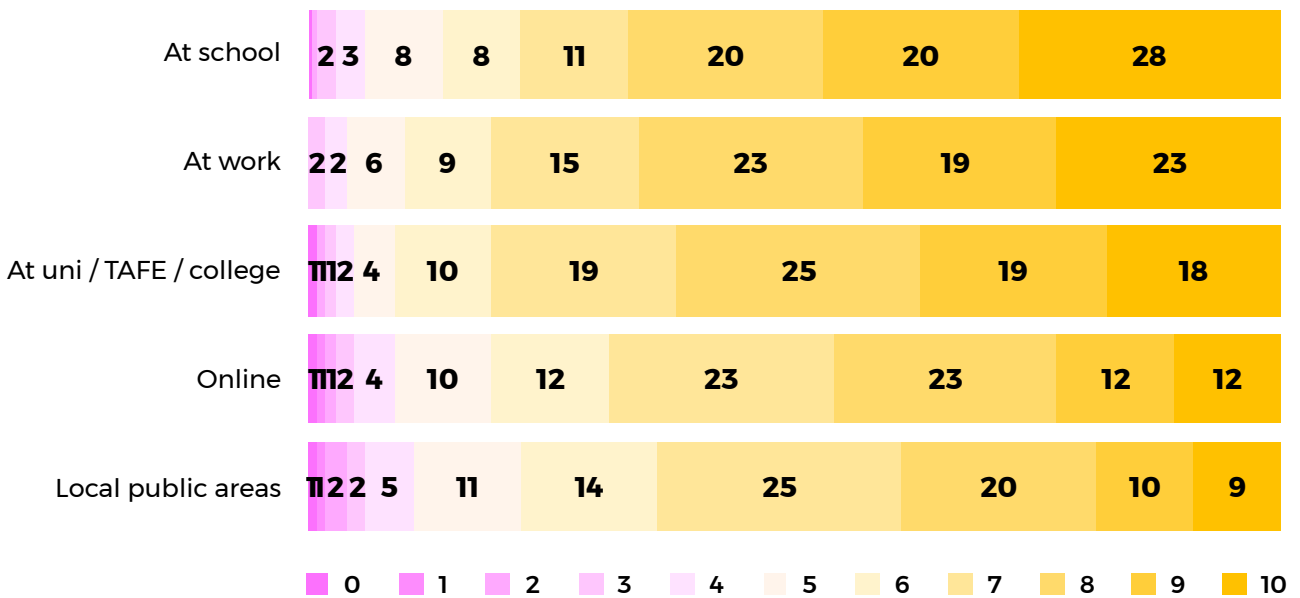


5. Environments for joy and fun

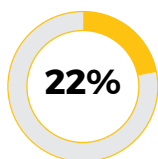
Feeling safe

We asked children and young people **how safe they felt in particular spaces**, using a scale from not at all safe [0] to completely safe [10].

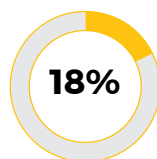
Most young people reported high feelings of safety (rating 7 or more out of 10) in education and work settings. **Views varied slightly more in public spaces**, though most still felt safe.



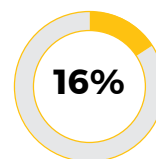
Those who identify as **LGBTQIA+** were more likely than other groups to **feel unsafe** (rating 0-4):



In public areas

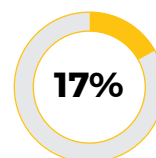


At school



At work

Females aged 14-17 were more likely than other groups to **feel unsafe online.**





5. Environments for joy and fun



Our commitment to children and young people

Children and young people have spaces and opportunities to engage in activities for recreation and leisure.

These spaces are enjoyable, welcoming and safe.

We commit to the following key areas of focus:

Priority areas for action	Goals	Indicator (including baseline)	ACYP's Commitment/Actions	Government Initiatives
Lack of access to organised activities for socially excluded children and young people	Increase opportunities for children and young people to participate in organised recreational activities. In particular, those engaged with Youth Justice, in out-of-home care, refugees, asylum seekers and those with disability.	62% of young people are satisfied with their ability to participate in fun activities (% rating 7+/10) (2021) ^{xxxii}	<p>Work with Youth Justice, Create NSW, the NSW Office of Sport and other relevant organisations to determine what activities are available to children and young people in these cohorts and remove any barriers to participation.</p> <p>Continue to coordinate and promote NSW Children's Week and NSW Youth Week, which aim to grow children and young people's participation and inclusion in community life through a variety of activities.</p>	5.1; 5.2; 5.3; 5.4; 5.5; 5.6; 5.7; 5.8; 5.9; 5.10; 5.11; 5.12; 5.14; 5.17; 6.4
Lack of safe, youth-friendly and accessible spaces	Increase access to child and youth friendly spaces to gather, play and study.	59% of young people are satisfied with their ability to access public spaces to relax, meet with friends, study, or spend time alone. (% rating 7+/10) (2021) ^{xxxii}	Work collaboratively with the Office of Children's Guardian around implementation of the Child Safe Standards.	5.16; 5.17; 5.18; 5.9; 5.10
	Increase the safety of public spaces.	<p>63% of young people feel safe in public areas around their community (those rating feelings of safety as 7+/10) (2021)^{xxxiii}</p> <p>70% of young people feel safe online (those rating feelings of safety as 7+/10) (2021)^{xxxiv}</p>	<p>Support youth advisory councils to highlight areas of their local communities where children and young people feel unsafe and empower them to take action at a local level through advocacy training.</p> <p>Promote the Everyone Can Play resources to youth advisory councils and local governments across NSW.</p> <p>Promote existing materials about online safety.</p>	<p>5.19; 5.20; 5.21; 5.22; 5.23</p> <p>5.24; 5.25</p>



5. Environments for joy and fun

What's happening in this space:

- 5.1** *Active Kids Program* which aims at increasing participation of school-enrolled children in sport and physical activity, covering the cost of registration and membership fees. [Service NSW, NSW Office of Sport]
- 5.1.1** *Active Youth Program* is an offshoot of the Active Kids Program; The Active Youth Program targets the regions with the lowest uptake of Active Kids Vouchers – Eurobodalla, Bathurst and Kempsey – and provides school outreach programs, after school programs, and school residential camps. Office for Regional Youth is funding the school residential camps. [NSW Office of Regional Youth]
- 5.2** *Holiday Break Program* provides free and subsidised activities during the school holidays for young people impacted by natural disasters – with a focus on providing young people with the opportunity to enjoy a range of activities, to connect, learn new skills and have fun. [NSW Office of Regional Youth, NSW Office of Sport with PCYC and Local Governments]
- 5.3** *Creative Kids Program* provides a \$100 voucher annually (2019 to 2022) for school-aged children and young people to participate in creative and cultural activities, such as performing arts, visual arts, Aboriginal cultural learning, coding, languages, creative writing, music and film. [Create NSW, Service NSW]
- 5.4** *The School Sport Unit* has a variety of participation opportunities for children and young people with disability. This includes ***Come-and-Try Athletics and Multi-Sport days*** being delivered across NSW, including in rural and remote areas. This will allow for an additional 3,500 students with disability to access sport and physical activity events specifically designed to meet their needs. In addition, the representative sport pathway is being expanded to provide greater opportunities for students with a disability who are recognised as having high potential in sport. [NSW Department of Education]
- 5.5** The ***Connections Program, run by the Department of Education's Arts Unit***, provides a range of inclusive teaching, learning and performance opportunities in dance, visual arts, music and drama. Each year the Art Unit offers arts projects and programs that invite students and their teachers to create and showcase their own works based on a central theme. Schools and students are then invited to showcase their work in NSW. [NSW Department of Education]
- 5.6** *NSW Youth Week* aims to grow children and young people's participation and inclusion in community life through a variety of activities. [NSW Department of Communities and Justice]



5. Environments for joy and fun

5.7 **My Community Project** is all about local ideas, local projects and local decisions. My Community Project provides NSW residents with an opportunity to propose and vote for funding to be provided to new projects in their local area. [Service NSW]

5.8 Programs for young people to participate in arts and culture across all artforms are a priority under **Create NSW's Arts and Cultural Funding Program** (ACFP). ACFP programs also involve children and young people from other priority groups: Aboriginal children and young people, those from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, those in regional NSW and Western Sydney and children and young people with disability. These programs also support young people to make social connections that link them to local and broader communities and cultural experiences. [Create NSW]

5.9 The **State Cultural Institutions in the arts portfolio** (Art Gallery of NSW, Australian Museum, Powerhouse Museum, State Library of NSW, State Archives and Records Authority, Sydney Living Museums and Sydney Opera House) have rich and varied programs to engage, entertain and educate young people, including exhibitions, workshops, discussion groups, events and performances. This includes programs for children and young people with disability and those in other priority groups. The State Cultural Institutions provide curriculum-linked cultural education experiences such as excursions, online excursions, and professional development for preschool, primary, secondary and tertiary students and teachers. [Department of Premier and Cabinet, State Cultural Institutions]

5.10 **Cultural Infrastructure**, such as theatres and other performing arts venues, galleries, museums, libraries and Aboriginal Cultural Centres, Keeping Places and language centres, ensures people can enjoy quality cultural experiences across NSW. Create NSW manages the planning and delivery of key cultural infrastructure projects. Most of these projects have outcomes that increase community access to child and youth-friendly spaces to gather, play, and study. For example:

5.10.1 The recently completed **Australian Museum Project Discover** significantly expanded the Museum's role as a world-class educational and cultural facility, providing additional exhibition and public spaces, and enhancing visitor experience.

5.10.2 **The Sydney Modern Project**, to be completed in 2022, will add close to 8,000 sqm to the Art Gallery of NSW, offering ample new space for children and young people to engage with art.

5.10.3 The development of **Powerhouse Parramatta**, expected to open in 2024 with 18,000 sqm of exhibition and public spaces, will have a science and technology focus and include the largest planetarium in Australia. This will be complemented by a dedicated play and learning space devoted to STEAM and children's spaces.



5. Environments for joy and fun

5.10.4 In 2022, the **Sydney Opera House will launch the Centre for Creativity** – a permanent, dedicated onsite venue and online hub for students, children, families, and lifelong learners.

5.10.5 The **Regional Cultural Fund has funded 146 cultural infrastructure projects in regional NSW**, ranging from new exhibition and performing arts centres, refurbishments of libraries, theatres and museums through to digitisation projects and small community projects. Examples include: the Bundanon Riversdale Masterplan, which will enable the Bundanon Art Museum to increase its work connecting at risk youth with the arts; a dedicated youth area at Narrandera Library; and expanded facilities at the Flying Fruit Fly Circus in Albury.

5.10.6 Communities across NSW will benefit from new and improved cultural infrastructure through the new **Creative Capital program**. [Create NSW, State Cultural Institutions]

5.11 The **Art Gallery of NSW's Djamu Youth Justice program** provides personal development and education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people in NSW Youth Justice centres through sustained artmaking projects, learning from significant Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists, curators and cultural leaders. Reduced recidivism is a key goal of the project. [Art Gallery of NSW]

5.12 The **Duke of Edinburgh International Award** is a global youth development program, empowering young people aged 14-24 to explore their full potential and find their purpose, passion and place in the world, regardless of their location or circumstance. The Award is a fully inclusive program and has no social, political, or religious affiliations. The Office of Sport is currently supporting a project to upscale the Award program, with a goal of ensuring that an even greater number of young people across NSW are able to participate in the program. [NSW Office of Sport]

5.13 The **First Lap voucher program** provides \$100 vouchers for parents, guardians and carers of children aged 3-6 years towards the cost of swimming lessons. [NSW Office of Sport, Service NSW]

5.14 **'Her Sport, Her Way'** strategy includes a number of initiatives aimed at increasing the number of girls and women playing sport and investing in the provision of sport facilities that support girls and women. This includes a focus on improving the retention of adolescent girls in sport. [NSW Office of Sport]



5. Environments for joy and fun

5.15 NSW Department of Education and Youth Justice NSW collaboratively work to **enhance program provision in youth justice centres**, including:

5.15.1 The Department of Education, in partnership with Youth Justice, is working to gain young people's insights and concerns regarding program provision during school vacation periods in Youth Justice Centres. New ideas and concepts will be piloted in 2022.

5.15.2 The Department of Education has engaged the University of Sydney to undertake a review of the current extended school year model of education available to schools in Youth Justice Centres. The findings of the review, which includes a literature review of like jurisdictions will inform future planning for Department of Education and Youth Justice NSW. [NSW Department of Education, Youth Justice NSW]

5.16 **Implementation of the Child Safe Standards** in child-related organisations, including schools, to create safe environments for children and young people, where they are free from harm. [Office of the NSW Children's Guardian]

5.17 **Everyone Can Play best practice toolkit and grants program**, focused on promoting the development of inclusive playgrounds and spaces across NSW. [NSW Department of Planning, Industry and Environment]

5.18 **Share Our Space program** which turns hundreds of school grounds into safe, green spaces for the entire community to use freely, every school holidays. [NSW Department of Education]

5.19 **Operation Unite** where PCYC clubs (or alternate space if unavailable) are open once every 6 weeks on a Friday night. [NSW Police]

5.20 **Operation Redirect** where Youth Command staff make Friday or Saturday night visits to public spaces frequented by young people. [NSW Police]

5.21 **CCTV grants program** which aims to promote community safety by providing funds to 10 LGAs in Western Sydney and South Western Sydney, to support the installation of CCTV cameras. [NSW Department of Communities and Justice, NSW Police]

5.22 **Interagency meetings** aimed at supporting children and young people and increasing community safety, such as Youth Action Meetings (YAMS) convened in collaboration with NSW Police to provide a coordinated whole-of-government and services support response to vulnerable or disadvantaged young people in 7 sites across NSW. [NSW Police, NSW Government – various]



5. Environments for joy and fun

5.23 *Transport for NSW Innovation Challenge, Safety After Dark initiative*, focused on improving safety for women travelling at night. The three initiatives selected for development and ongoing testing include a tool to quantify Passive Surveillance; development of a tool to incorporate gender and safety into routing in journey planners; and artificial intelligence trained to detect fighting at stations. [Transport for NSW]

5.24 *National eSafety education resources* developed by the eSafety Commissioner, which provide targeted resources for children and young people, as well as parents, carers and teachers. [eSafety Commission]

5.25 *NSW Digital Citizenship resources* and accompanying Department of Education policy that governs student use of digital devices and online services. [NSW Department of Education]

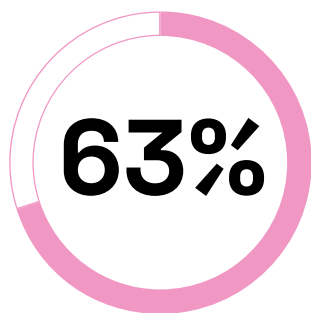
5.26 Facilitating government collaboration to support place-based approaches to social wellbeing and diversion, such as *Maayuma-Li GEM Lightning Ridge Youth Program*. The project will involve the employment of two Activities Officers to run youth sports competitions, informal diversionary activities, school engagement and the NSW Police RISEUP programs. Multiple departments are collaborating on the project; Office for Regional Youth, Mining Exploration and Geoscience, Education, the Office of Sport and the Aboriginal Housing Office. [NSW Government - various]



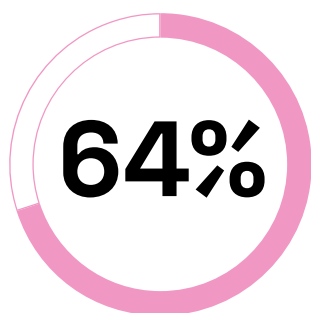
6. Respect and acceptance

Children and young people feel **respected, accepted** and **included** in society.

They are part of a community that supports them to be **proud of their culture, diversity** and **individual identity**. They are **free from discrimination, racism** and structural **violence**.



said they felt **respected** in their local community



said they felt **accepted** in their local community



6. Respect and acceptance



What we've heard from children and young people

Children and young people told us they want to live in a community where children and young people of all ages, cultural backgrounds, religions, abilities and gender and sexual identities, are made to feel like they belong and have access to the services and supports they need to flourish.

In our consultations, children and young people told us about the far-reaching impact of discrimination on their lives - including a loss of trust, impact on education and employment, and feeling unsafe and unwelcome. For example, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people, as well as young people who have had refugee or migrant experiences, and those who identify as culturally and linguistically diverse, have often spoken about the impact of racism and discrimination on their everyday lives - including the flow-on impact this has on their feelings of belonging and trust.

Whilst children and young people with disability have told us that discrimination can impact their education, training, employment and ability to navigate services and activities. Young women have told us that they often feel unsafe in public spaces, whilst young people who identify as part of the LGBTQIA+ community have spoken about feeling unwelcome. Overwhelmingly, children and young people have told us that discrimination has a detrimental impact on their lives and wellbeing.

“The main thing is that I am viewed as someone of equal status. That my background, my race, my religion doesn't affect who I am as a person.”

Male, 21 years old

Views on discrimination

Many young people told us that discrimination is not talked about enough, and that they sometimes feel as though adults don't listen when they raise issues. Children and young people often said that they feel as though their views are not taken seriously or considered because they are 'too young' and don't vote. Young people told us that they wanted adults to actively listen to what they are saying, and really respond to what is being said. Many young people also highlighted the importance of adults listening to the views of younger children as well.



6. Respect and acceptance

Another key theme from the consultations is that children and young people want there to be less bullying and to see more respect in schools. Children and young people have said they have a fear of being judged by their peers. In particular, they often reported feeling concerned about ‘fitting in’ and meeting a certain social status. Some young people said they felt as though they were being judged because of how much money their family had, or the postcode or area that they lived in. Young people with disability said bullying at school was a key concern for them, whilst young people who identified as LGBTQIA+ said they often felt discriminated against at school.

Some people also spoke about bullying being broader than just peer-to-peer, and highlighted concerns about how they were viewed by teachers and the broader community. For example, some young people who identified as LGBTQIA+ spoke about fear of being judged and not accepted by some teachers and said this had a negative impact on their mental health.

Many young people raised the issue of social media sometimes being a space where discrimination occurred. However, they noted that discrimination occurs in lots of spaces, with the digital world being an extension of their everyday physical environments (including school, community, transport and public spaces). In talking about the role of online spaces in relation to discrimination, many young people spoke about how social media platforms can often normalise bad behavior and bad language. Some also said there needs to be more attention focused on what information is being made available to young children in the mainstream media.

“Help stop discrimination and bullying as it affects people’s well-being. My African friend was discriminated against and told me he want to kill himself. I stopped him and helped him...stand up to his bullies.”

Male, 20 years old

Children and young people also spoke about how young people’s views can be influenced by several different spheres – including family, friends, school and broader community groups. A few young people spoke about the role of common interest clubs and groups (e.g. music, sewing, sport) in helping to build connections between different groups of people, and people outside of their family group. Others spoke about how particular cultural activities and groups which celebrated diversity in their community helped make them feel like they belonged and proud of their individual identity. Some young people also raised the issue of role models, and the need for young people to see examples of people being respected. Others said it was important that this generation of young people grew up with strong values around respect and acceptance, so they could be good role models for the next generation.



6. Respect and acceptance

Importance of promoting diversity and inclusion

Another regular theme that we heard from children and young people is that beyond eliminating discrimination, there also needs to be a greater focus in both schools and the wider community on promoting diversity and inclusion. Children and young people acknowledged that there are some existing education and awareness raising efforts focused on these issues such as schools or communities holding regular events or days focused on celebrating diversity or highlighting a particular issue. Some young people spoke positively about these events, and said they helped them to feel connected. Others raised concerns that events sometimes felt tokenistic. Young people's experiences of these events varied across schools and community, in terms of both the information provided and the amount of space they allowed for discussion of the issues. They suggested that awareness days would be more meaningful if schools and community groups provided more information and there was more space for open discussion about the meaning and background behind the day. Young people also said that, on a broader level, they wanted more focus on talking about the importance of respect and acceptance from a younger age.

Impact of discrimination on wellbeing

In ACYP's 2021 Youth Week Survey, 34% of young people in NSW said that racism was one of the most important issues impacting young people. This figure was significantly higher amongst young people living in metropolitan

areas (38%) and participants who identified as culturally and linguistically diverse (46%).

The link between discrimination, racism and overall health and wellbeing is an issue that is regularly raised by young people. For instance, in consultations with young people from refugee backgrounds, young people spoke about experiencing peer-to-peer discrimination and highlighted the impact that this behaviour has had on their mental health.

In ACYP's ongoing consultations with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people, discrimination and racism are also regularly raised as key issues. Some Aboriginal young people reported that peer groups at school are defined by race. Other Aboriginal young people spoke about homophobia, sexism and experiences of racism at school. Some Aboriginal young people also spoke about feeling as though they were targeted by police because of their race and said that some shopkeepers have stereotypes about Aboriginal young people. Many Aboriginal young people said that the behaviour and attitude of other people can often make them feel unwelcome. This included the person's tone of voice; being spoken down to; being excluded from activities and events; and simply negative attitudes towards young people.

Overall, children and young people said they wanted a greater focus on tackling discrimination, and ensuring that all children and young people feel respected and accepted.



6. Respect and acceptance

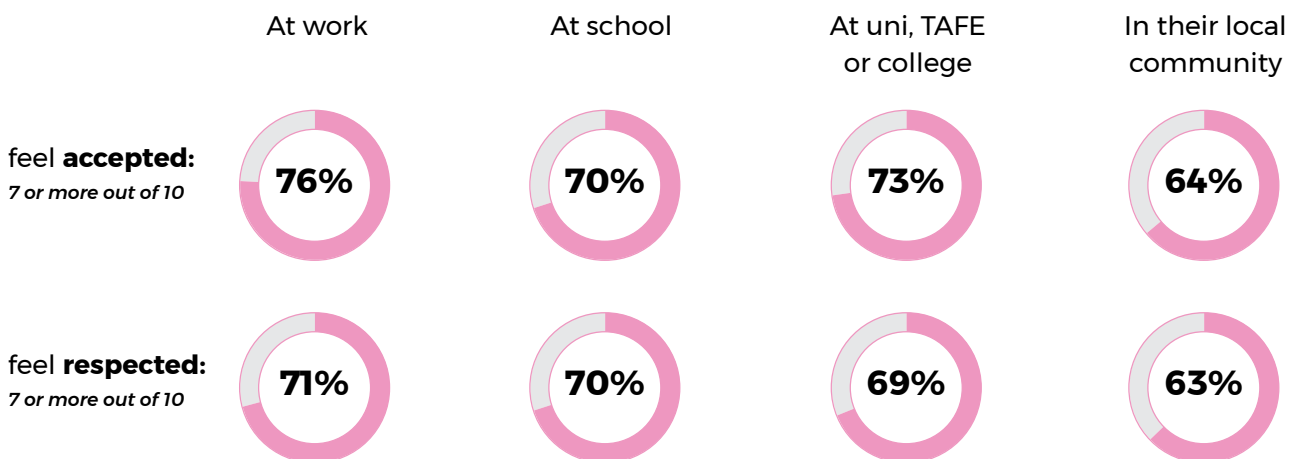


How children and young people are tracking at the moment

Overall, a majority (around two-thirds to three-quarters) of young people surveyed told us that they felt respected and accepted in their everyday environments – although more so in workplaces and educational settings than in the general community.

Levels of respect and acceptance

Children and young people were asked to rate their **level of satisfaction** with the levels of respect and acceptance they experienced in different settings on a scale of very dissatisfied [0] to very satisfied [10].



Young people with **disability**, those identifying as **LGBTQIA+** and **females aged 14-17** were more likely to report **not feeling accepted or respected** (rating 0-4 out of 10) at school or in the local community.

Those with **disability** also reported **lower scores** for the level of **respect** they receive at work.

Young people who were **struggling financially** were more likely to report **low scores** for **acceptance** at work, and also rated **low scores** for **respect** at university, college and TAFE.

Young people who had been **in contact with the justice system** also reported feeling **less accepted** in their local community.



6. Respect and acceptance

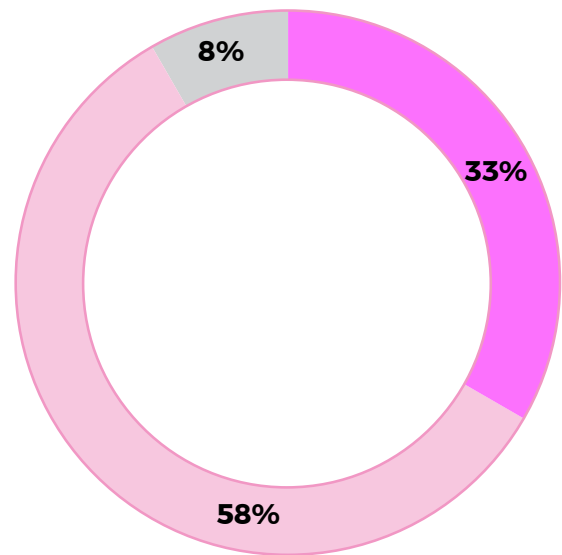
Discrimination

One in three (33%) of those surveyed **reported experiencing discrimination** in the past year, with it occurring weekly for one in five young people. Appearance, ethnicity and gender were the most common reasons for discrimination.

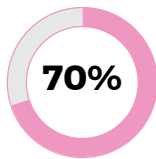
■ Yes

■ No

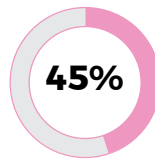
■ Not sure



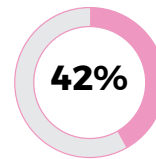
Discrimination was **most likely to occur**:



At school

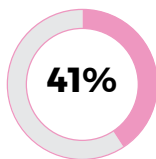


At work

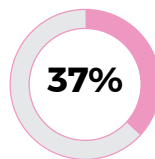


In the community

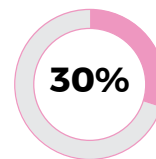
Overall, discrimination was **most commonly related to**:



Appearance or weight

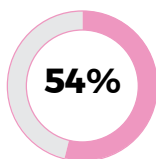


Ethnicity or skin colour

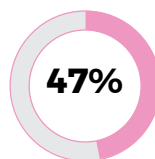


Gender

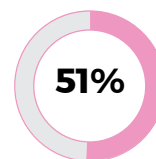
The following groups were significantly **more likely to have experienced discrimination**:



Those who identify as **LGBTQIA+**



Those with **disability**

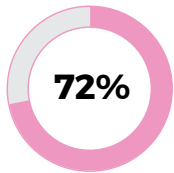


Those who are **struggling financially**

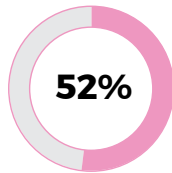


6. Respect and acceptance

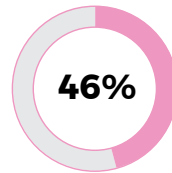
Those who identify as **LGBTQIA+** who experienced discrimination said it was related to their:



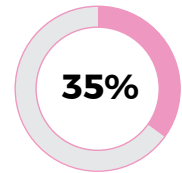
Sexuality



Gender

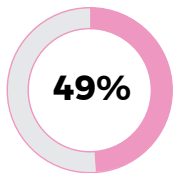


Appearance or weight

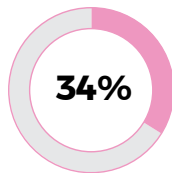


Mental illness

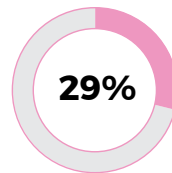
Those struggling financially said discrimination occurred most often in relation to their:



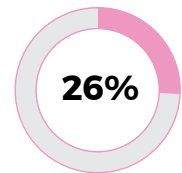
Appearance or weight



Ethnicity or skin colour

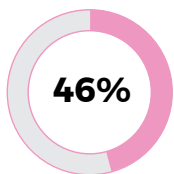


Mental illness

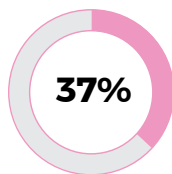


Gender

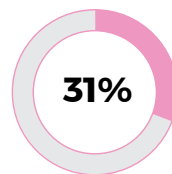
Those with disability said discrimination occurred most often in relation to their:



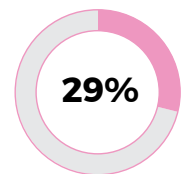
Appearance or weight



Gender



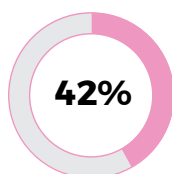
Mental illness



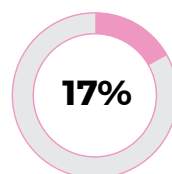
Sexuality

24% said it was related to a disability or health issue (other than mental illness).

Females were significantly more likely than males to experience gender-based discrimination, especially those aged 14 years or older:



Females



Males



6. Respect and acceptance



Our commitment to children and young people

Children and young people feel respected, accepted and included in society.

They are part of a community that supports them to be proud of their culture, diversity and individual identity. They are free from discrimination, racism and structural violence.

We commit to the following key areas of focus:

Priority areas for action	Goals	Indicator (including baseline)	ACYP's Commitment/Actions	Government Initiatives
Racism and discrimination related to age, disability, religion, gender or sexuality	Increase the number of children and young people reporting that they feel respected and accepted.	63% of young people were satisfied with the level of respect they feel in their local community 64% were satisfied with the level of acceptance they feel in their local community (2021) ^{xxxv}	Work collaboratively across government to identify structural and systemic issues and advocate for changes that will create a service system which is more responsive to children and young people's needs. Collaborate with relevant agencies and organisations to increase children and young people awareness of their rights, including through ACYP's advocacy training program.	6.1; 6.4; 6.5; 6.6; 6.7; 1.15
	Decrease the number of children and young people experiencing racism or discrimination due to age, disability, religion, gender or sexuality.	33% of young people had experienced discrimination in the past 12 months (2021) ^{xxxvi}	Provide Child Rights training to adults who serve children and young people across NSW. Support and promote development of anti-racism initiatives. Consult with young people who identify as being part of the LGBTQIA+ community and elevate their voices. Disseminate resources to support children and young people's participation and the development of Youth Advisory Councils at the local level, including ACYP's Participation Charter, Participation Guide, Youth Advisory Council Guide and other child rights resources.	6.2; 6.3;
Overrepresentation of Aboriginal children and young people in the Youth Justice and out-of-home care systems	Decrease in the overrepresentation of Aboriginal Children and young people in the out-of-home care system.	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people were 9.5 times more likely to be in out-of-home care than non-Aboriginal children and young people (2019) ^{xxxvii}	Elevate the voices of children and young people in the out-of-home care system, through consultations and related advocacy.	6.8; 6.9; 6.10; 3.23
	Decrease in the overrepresentation of Aboriginal children and young people in the Youth Justice system.	Average daily number of young people in custody with Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander background: was 112, representing 45% of all young people in custody (2019-2020) ^{xxxviii}	Continue to work in collaboration with Youth Justice NSW to elevate the voices of children and young people in contact with the youth justice system.	6.11; 6.12; 6.13; 1.15; 2.8.8; 3.23



6. Respect and acceptance

What's happening in this space:

- 6.1** *Community Partnership Action (COMPACT) grants program* which provides funds to community projects which are focused on building social cohesion and promoting community resilience when individuals, groups and communities are faced with hate, fear and division. [Multicultural NSW]
- 6.2** *Remove Hate from the Debate website* hosts tools and resources about online hate and how to begin countering hate so that we can live in a harmonious world. The focus is on building community resilience by empowering young people with the tools and techniques they need to counter hateful and divisive rhetoric. [Multicultural NSW]
- 6.3** *Child Safe Standards* and accompanying resources developed by the Office of the NSW Children's Guardian, which cover issues relating to the standard on equity and diversity. [Office of the NSW Children's Guardian]
- 6.4** *Inclusive Education Policy* for students with disability which highlights schools' responsibility to contribute to an education environment free from harassment and unlawful discrimination on the basis of disability; and develop and implement strategies to prevent harassment and victimisation of students with disability. This includes reasonable adjustments for students with disability to support them to participate in all aspects of school life. [NSW Department of Education]
- 6.5** *Establishment of two statewide services* and an enhanced model of care to support care and treatment of trans and gender diverse (TGD) children, adolescents and young adults. In 2021-22 NSW Health will invest \$3.4million for TGD services to increase access to treatment and support, strengthen rural outreach and establish statewide coordination of TGD services. [NSW Health]
- 6.6** In 2021-22 the Ministry of Health will commission ACON to deliver the *Welcome Here Project*, which will involve the roll out of comprehensive education, training and mentorship to the Child and Adolescent mental health workforce (initially in 10 local health districts) to ensure public mental health services to be as welcoming and culturally safe for LGBTQIA+ young people. ACON has been funded to work with LHD/SHNs informed by the Health and Wellbeing Equality Index (HWEI) which benchmarks current LGBTQIA+ inclusive service delivery across Australia within the health and wellbeing sectors. [NSW Health]



6. Respect and acceptance

6.7 *Staff training and development programs*, for example:

6.7.1 *Cultural competence and awareness training*, to ensure Aboriginal young people are being supported through culturally appropriate practices. [NSW Department of Communities and Justice, Legal Aid NSW, Youth Justice NSW]

6.7.2 *Mandated Disability Standards for Education Training* for all school leaders across NSW. This training covers discrimination and the rights of students with disability. [NSW Department of Education]

6.8 The NSW Government recognises a whole-of-government approach is core to intervening early to address the risks of re-offending for young people and delivers initiatives including:

6.8.1 *Youth on Track early intervention program* for 10-17 year old young people at risk of long-term involvement in the criminal justice system. NSW Police, the Department of Education and other agencies can make discretionary referrals to Youth on Track.

6.8.2 *Youth Frontiers* is an early intervention youth mentoring program supporting young people 10-17 years in contact with the youth justice and child protection systems, with the aim of increasing their wellbeing and connection to the community, and avoid further contact with the justice system.

6.8.3 The ***Youth Koori Court (YKC)*** was established in response to the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people coming into contact with the criminal justice system. The YKC currently operates in both Parramatta and Surry Hills. The YKC has the same powers as the Children's Court but uses a different process to better involve Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people, their families and the broader Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community in the court process.

6.8.4 *Joint Protocol* to reduce the contact of young people in residential OOHC with the criminal justice system. The Joint Protocol provides a framework and guidance to Funded Service Providers and NSW Police around responding to young people in residential OOHC in a trauma informed way, rather than criminalising a young person's behaviour.

6.8.5 The ***Short-Term Remand Project*** is developing a number of initiatives aimed at reducing the number of children and young people experiencing avoidable short-term remand in NSW. [NSW Department of Communities and Justice]



6. Respect and acceptance

6.9 Numerous targeted programs aimed at addressing the significant over-representation of Aboriginal young people in the youth justice system, including:

6.9.1 *Dthina Yuwali* is an Aboriginal specific alcohol and other drugs program, delivered in community and custodial environments, which focuses on addressing the relationship between substance abuse and interaction with the youth justice system.

6.9.2 The **Aboriginal Reintegration and Transition Program** (Nowra) is an initiative that provides intensive support for young Aboriginal people after they leave custody or community supervision. The program is being delivered throughout the Shoalhaven and Far South Coast areas by the Aboriginal Medical Service. The program aims to build resilience and wellbeing and reduce the risk of reoffending, with a key focus of building cultural identity by strengthening connections to country and family.

6.9.3 In 2020, Youth Justice implemented a new initiative, the **Small Grants Aboriginal Engagement and Innovative Activities Program (AEIA)**. The AEIA program was developed to provide new avenues for Aboriginal employees to embed Aboriginal cultural practices into their day to day work with Youth Justice clients. A key aim of the AEIA Small Grants Program is to drive innovation in practice. [Youth Justice NSW]

6.10 The **Justice Advocacy Service (JAS)** supports adults and young people with cognitive impairment who are in contact with the NSW criminal justice system – as victims, witnesses and suspects/defendants. The service supports clients to exercise their rights and fully participate in the process. [NSW Department of Communities and Justice]

6.11 Numerous reforms aimed at reducing the proportion of Aboriginal children in OOHC, including:

6.11.1 Implementation of the **Family Is Culture report's recommendations**, which will facilitate child protection and OOHC systems that are responsive to the needs of Aboriginal families.

6.11.2 Implementation of the **Permanency Support Program (PSP)**, which aims to ensure every child can grow up in a stable and secure home.

6.11.3 Implementation of the **Aboriginal Case Management Policy (ACMP)**, which aims to engage early with Aboriginal families to keep children safe with their families and community.



6. Respect and acceptance

6.11.4 Strengthening of compliance with **Aboriginal Child Placement Principles** through review of the DCJ and case management policy. [NSW Department of Communities and Justice, Office of the NSW Children’s Guardian]

6.12 The **Family Preservation services system** is currently being redesigned, with a focus on ensuring effective family preservation systems are working with families to reduce the number of children who enter OOHC. The new service system includes a specific service stream for Aboriginal community-controlled service providers and DCJ will work with them to co-design a new model of service delivery for Aboriginal families. [NSW Department of Communities and Justice]

6.13 **Family Law / Care and Protection legal services support** provided to families early and where possible in the community or through relevant community agencies. This includes identifying Aboriginal children and their families as priority clients and reducing the administrative burdens which may prevent such families from accessing legal services in a timely manner. [Legal Aid NSW, in partnership with the broader community legal assistance sector]

Measuring Impact

This Plan is designed to capture what is important to children and young people and bring together, in one document, how the NSW Government are responding to their needs. In addition, throughout the Plan ACYP has also outlined a series of key actions we will take as an agency to support the priority areas of focus.

ACYP's intention is that the Plan can be utilised not only by Government, but also by broader stakeholders, to understand the key issues that are of concern to children and young people and consider what role they can play in supporting positive change at their local community level.

Throughout the three years of the Plan, ACYP will continue to elevate the voices of children and young people across Government and the community to ensure their views are represented. To progress and monitor change across the Plan, ACYP will:



Focus on two of the commitment areas each year

Including by encouraging collaboration between government, non-government organisations and the private sector. This could include opportunities to celebrate good work in the space, support innovation and foster learning.



Publish an annual tracking report

To measure change in both the indicators for the over-arching commitments as well as the goal-specific indicators. This will include a annual poll of children and young people's experiences and perspectives against the six commitments areas, as well as other publicly available data linked to specific goals within the Plan.¹



Publish a progress report at the conclusion of the Plan

To measure impact across the three years of the Plan. We note that evaluation of the success of each Government initiative listed in the Plan is the responsibility of the relevant Government department or agency. However, ACYP will continue to work alongside Government to ensure the three guiding principles of voice, rights, and access are considered.

¹ We note that while most indicators relate to numerical data, some are more qualitative in their approach, though we have attempted to limit these as much as possible.

Endnotes

- 1 ACYP 2021 Strategic Plan Survey. This involved a representative, online survey of n=815 young people aged 10-24 years. Data from this survey was used to inform the Plan and has been included throughout.
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- 14 Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), 'Table 12: Current study at Certificate III level or above' [data set], [Education and Work](#), ABS website, 2021, accessed 1 September 2021.
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- 39 ACYP's existing resources include: [Participation Charter](#); [Participation Guide](#); [Youth Advisory Group Guide](#); [Top 10 Tips for Participation](#); and [other child rights resources](#).
- 40 ACYP's 2020 Youth Week Survey. This involved a representative, online survey of n=1,031 young people aged 12-24 years. Data from this survey was used to inform the Plan and has been included throughout.
- 41 ACYP's 2021 Youth Week Survey.

Strategic Plan Indicators

- i ACYP 2021 Strategic Plan Survey.
- ii These resources are in development and are not yet published. ACYP will include these figures in subsequent tracking reports.
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- xxv headspace, [Increasing demand in youth mental health: A rising tide of need](#), headspace, 2019, accessed 7 October 2021.
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- xxvii ACYP 2021 Strategic Plan Survey.

- xxviii Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW), [Australia's youth: Housing stress](#), AIHW website, 2021, accessed 1 September 2021.
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