Government of South Australia

human services

Youth Action Plan 2024-2027

Consultation Report 2023

Contents

Acknowledgement of Country

The Department of Human Services acknowledges and respects Aboriginal Peoples as the State's first people and recognises Aboriginal Peoples as traditional owners and occupants of lands and waters in South Australia. We acknowledge that the spiritual, social, cultural, and economic practices of Aboriginal peoples come from their traditional lands and waters, that they maintain their cultural and heritage beliefs, languages and laws, which are of ongoing importance, and that they have made and continue to make a unique and irreplaceable contribution to the state. We are committed to ensuring that the needs and aspirations of Aboriginal young people are incorporated in the design, development, and implementation of the Youth Action Plan.

Executive Summary

The South Australian Government is developing a new Youth Action Plan, to deliver fair and equitable access to opportunities, resources and supports to young people. The Youth Action Plan will result in a set of actions in response to the key themes that young people and youth stakeholders identified through consultation.

To support the consultation, the SA Youth Action Plan Discussion Paper was drafted, which utilised the Child Development Council's South Australian Outcomes Framework for Children and Young People to seek responses from young people and youth stakeholders within five outcome areas:

1. Physical health, and social and emotional wellbeing and mental health
2. Safety and justice
3. Education and employment
4. Connections and access to resources
5. Citizenship and participation

The consultation occurred between 7 July and 6 August 2023, with over 880 people engaged through a YourSAy survey, workshops and written submissions. 728 of these were young people. The South Australian Government was supported by Youth Opportunities and Multicultural Youth South Australia in undertaking the consultation process.
South Australian young people and youth stakeholders provided broad feedback across all outcome areas, with the following six key themes being the most important to young people and youth stakeholders:

Increased access to mental health support

Increasing the provision of mental health support for young people, especially those who experience vulnerabilities, was noted as the key need. Young people reported their preferred model of mental health support is local, community-based, non-clinical, peer-to-peer and informed by lived experience.

Increased connection to services and activities available in the young person's community

Providing young people with information on the activities and support services available in their region. This includes information on assistance available for young carers or parents, those who are at risk of homelessness, financially vulnerable and those in need of physical and mental health, social, educational, employment or parenting support services.

Increased access to sport and recreation activities

Age appropriate, affordable, and accessible recreation activities or opportunities were identified as a key area of improvement, providing young people with an environment to connect, play and develop safely with their peers.

Increased support with post-school pathways, including the teaching of 'life skills' and 'how to adult'

Young people reported feeling underprepared to begin adulthood, and were seeking support and education to gain their independence and prepare themselves for work or further study post-school.

Improved access to housing and rental accommodation

Access to secure and affordable housing was identified as a significant area of concern for young people, especially for those aged 20 to 25, noting access to housing is an important factor for young people's physical, mental, social, and economic wellbeing.

Inclusion of young people in decision making

All stakeholder groups discussed the importance of involving young people in the design, decision making and implementation of policy or initiatives which affect, or are intending to engage young people.

This consultation is just the start of an ongoing process of active engagement with young people and youth stakeholders, as we develop and implement the SA Youth Action Plan.

1 Engagement Summary

During the four-week consultation period, the South Australian Government engaged with over 880 young people, parents and carers, service providers, the youth sector, peak bodies, public sector, and other interested parties. Of these, 728 of respondents were young people aged 12 to 25 years of age.

Feedback was collected through:

- the survey, where 725 surveys were completed, including 656 by young people.
  - this includes surveys completed in collaboration with Kurlana Tapa Youth Justice Centre, Multicultural Youth SA, and a citizen science approach implemented by Youth Opportunities.
- targeted workshops, forums and focus groups, where 126 people attended, including 72 young people.
  - the following groups participated in workshops: Youth Ministerial Advisory Committee, South Australian Youth Forum, Local Government Youth Development Network (Regional and Metropolitan workshops), Southern Youth Round Table, No Capes for Change, Northern Youth Services Network, Enabled Youth Disability Network, and YMCA Youth Parliament.
- written submissions, noting 29 submissions were received, including four from young people and youth councils.

1.1 Social media interaction

The consultation was promoted by the Department of Human Services between 7 July 2023 and 6 August 2023 using a variety of media, including radio, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Snapchat, TikTok and LinkedIn. Seven advertisements on various Department of Human Services (DHS) social media channels generated approximately 3,365,333 impressions, 17,864 clicks, 1,368 reactions and 2,983 shares.

2 Consultation feedback

The feedback provided by young people and youth stakeholders through consultation has been collated into key themes, with further details provided below.

Equality and education were raised as issues by respondents throughout consultation, however, instead of being recognised as standalone key themes, they have been considered within each focus area because of their relevance as enabling factors to multiple other outcomes.

2.1 Mental health and wellbeing

2.1.1 Access to mental health support

The most frequently highlighted area for improvement through the consultation process was access to mental health support.

- This was identified as the most important area of concern by approximately 20% of young people. This was even more evident for young people from regional or remote areas (26%).

Young people and youth stakeholders recognised **affordability and availability** as the biggest barriers for young people to access mental health support, noting long waitlists and a lack of services. Additionally, there are further limitations on services that meet the language and cultural needs for young people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

Loneliness and its impact are also key concerns, and the loss of **social connections** was reported to be heightened by the COVID-19 lockdowns. Young people noted that a lack of awareness and the stigma associated with loneliness makes it difficult to reach out for support and can contribute to feeling increasingly isolated. Young people want increased skills to help each other and foster meaningful quality relationships, recognising the importance of social connection to health and wellbeing.

Young people advocated for **mental health support** that is local, community-based, non-clinical, peer-to-peer and informed by lived experience, where they feel safe to express how they feel with someone who understands their environment. This was supported by those who work with young people, who highlighted the need to develop a mental health-based peer workforce.

All stakeholder groups recognised that increasing the capacity of local **peer-to-peer** mental health support would increase access, flexibility, and the timeliness of targeted support to young people who are Aboriginal, from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, LGTBIQA+, carers, parents, and living with disability and/or neurodivergent, especially in regional or remote locations.

The interconnection between mental health and other areas of a young person's life, including general health, community participation, housing and employment was highlighted.

2.1.2 Impact of racism and bullying

Racism and bullying were frequently raised as key issues negatively impacting young people's mental health and wellbeing, especially for young respondents aged 12 to 14.

- LGBTIQA+ advocates reported that 81% of young people who identify as LGBTIQA+ display signs of high or very high psychological stress, attributable to increased experiences of harassment based on their sexuality or gender identity, occurring mostly at school.
- Over one in four young people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds who completed the online survey identified racism as a key area for improvement.

Throughout the consultation, young people highlighted the need for increased **awareness and education** to develop a more welcoming and inclusive society, as well as increased protections from, and ramifications for, those who engage in bullying behaviours at school. Young people want **increased intervention and support** to those who engage in bullying behaviours, and victims of bullying in schools.

2.2 Connection to services and information

2.2.1 Services and information

Young people reported difficulties in accessing youth services and activities due to challenges in **finding information**. Young people told us that they need information on local activities and support services for various needs, including housing, finance, mental health, education, employment, parenting, and general health, such as maintaining a healthy lifestyle on a budget and accessing youth-friendly health services. Youth service providers advocated for youth-designed and youth-supported solutions, for example, a centralised online information application.

Young people called for an increase in **health education and support.** This includes a better understanding of nutrition, and the health impacts of diet choices, also noting young people reported that the increased cost of living is impacting young people's ability to purchase healthy food. Addiction to social media and gambling was also reported as a growing concern needing increased education and support, including engaging in more in-person activities, fostering a balance between online and offline experiences. Young people with disability and those who work with them reported that the impact on young people with chronic pain is not well understood, accepted, or treated.

Respondents called for increased education on **healthy relationships and consent**, emphasising the need for increased awareness on the psychological and legal aspects of violence and abuse. Young people stressed the importance of education to identify manipulative behaviours in relationships and how to safely withdraw from unsafe situations. Additionally, young people highlighted the need for consent education, proposing its initiation in primary school.

Young people advocated for **early intervention and harm reduction** campaigns on substance misuse which includes vaping, drugs, alcohol, and high caffeine intakes, with a focus on the impact of social pressures. The online survey also highlighted the need to better understand why young people are vaping and how they can be educated and supported in a way which best meets young people's needs.

2.2.2 Healthcare and sexual health

Young people indicated that accessing **affordable, trauma informed, and culturally appropriate** healthcare is a major barrier to accessing health services, most notably for women, Aboriginal young people and young people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

Young people who attended targeted consultation workshops identified the need for **increased education and earlier support** with sexual health and female hygiene, especially young people first experiencing menstruation.

Accessibility of health services was perceived as poor, particularly by young people with disability, and especially for sexual health clinics, where health professionals often don't understand their needs.

2.2.3 Support for those most vulnerable to social disadvantage

Young people advocated for raising the age of criminal responsibility from 10 to 14, emphasising the increased use of **restorative practices** over punitive measures.

Respondents called for increased identification, monitoring and support for young people at risk of entering the **youth justice system**, as well as young people and families at risk of engaging with the **child protection system**. This includes prevention services which address social disadvantage through early interventions for vulnerable young people and families, along with support for young parents to prevent lifelong disparities.

Respondents also advocated for increasing the capacity of the **youth services sector** to deliver positive outcomes, especially for the most vulnerable young people and families.

2.3 Recreation, community hubs and activities

Young people highlighted the importance of **increased sport and recreation options**, with minimal or no barriers to entry, to enable them to pursue activities which interest them and support them to form connections with like-minded peers. Cost was identified as a major barrier to participation. Workshop participants noted the positive impact of recreation on wellbeing and development outcomes for young people from low-income households.

Young people reported the need for specific play spaces for teenagers, noting they often don't feel safe using the current provision of community recreation options, and the stigma attached to young people gathering in groups in the community impacts young people **feeling welcome** to utilise public spaces.

Young people with disability called for the increased frequency and awareness of **inclusive activities**.

In regional and remote communities, young people raised the need for increased opportunities to participate in **creative arts and culture** activities, such as visual arts, music, dance, theatre, and literature arts. There was a call for the increased availability of **community hubs** to facilitate unstructured, non-competitive, and fun recreational activities to support wellbeing, and provide a location for community connection and services for young people within their own community.

Young people would also like to see an increase in green spaces, especially in the city and low-socioeconomic regions, identifying a link between the frequency and quality of these spaces and positive wellbeing outcomes.

2.4 Transition to adulthood

2.4.1 Life skills and transition to adulthood

Throughout consultation, education was predominantly discussed in the context of **preparing young people for life beyond school**, focusing on essential life skills and financial literacy. Young people expressed feeling ill-equipped for adulthood and sought support for practical matters. This included obtaining a birth certificate, Medicare card, driver's license and Tax File Number as well as creating a resume and navigating job applications and interviews. This was especially applicable for those in, or out of, the care system and young parents.

There was a unanimous call for increased support and education to teach **essential life skills** such as cooking healthy meals and making positive independent choices. The failure to provide support for vulnerable young people to live independently was described as putting them at risk of various challenges, including poverty, insecurity, homelessness, involvement in the justice system, and long-term poor health outcomes.

2.4.2 Post-school pathways

Young people reported that they need more support with post-school pathways, most notably in identifying what interests them and which jobs are available, especially in new and emerging industries.

2.4.3 Education

Where education was discussed outside of preparing young people for life after school, young people called for creating education environments that instil a sense of **acceptance, safety and belonging**, especially for vulnerable young people. Respondents told us that educators need to cater for individual learning styles, as well as providing **greater flexibility** in how education is delivered, with some young people noting the potential to increase the capacity and quality of online learning. Youth service providers stressed the importance of providing food to vulnerable students and to support education engagement and attainment.

Young people also cited the up-front and long-term **costs** associated with completing tertiary education, in addition to the limited earning capacity through this period as being a barrier to achieving higher education. This includes the up-front costs associated with purchasing the required textbooks, materials, and IT equipment.

2.4.4 Transport

Respondents emphasised the vital role of transport to help young people gain **independence** and attend education, work, and recreation opportunities. Young people highlighted the **cost of public transport** as a hindrance to their independence and advocated for more affordable or free options, particularly for those with limited income. In regional and remote areas, poor access to public transport was noted, limiting opportunities for independent living.

For vulnerable young people, including those in, or out of, the care system, obtaining a driver's license posed a significant challenge due to the associated costs of lessons and completing learner driver hours. Participants called **for an increase in the capacity of driving programs,** citing long wait lists. Young people emphasised that the inability to obtain a driver's license affected their employment prospects, especially in industries facing workforce shortages, such as hospitality, aged care, and disability support, which often require employees to hold a driver's licence.

2.4.5 Employment and rights

Respondents highlighted a scarcity of **entry-level jobs and meaningful volunteer opportunities** that support young people to develop the skills and knowledge they require to enter the workforce, particularly in regional areas and for young people with disability. In addition, respondents advocated for the need for **increased flexibility** in education to integrate training and work experience.

Employed respondents identified concerns with understanding workplace rights and fair financial remuneration and called for **equal pay for equal responsibility**.

2.5 Housing and cost of living

Young people aged 20 to 25 identified housing as a significant concern, with 24% highlighting the need for affordable and available housing. Respondents emphasised the critical role of **secure and affordable housing** in supporting wellbeing, particularly for those experiencing intersecting disadvantages, such as family violence, substance abuse, and mental health challenges. Youth service providers called for enhanced school-based interventions, increased capacity for youth-focused housing, and support services facilitating pathways back home or identifying suitable housing for at-risk youth.

Housing affordability was linked to the **rising cost of living**, with young people calling for increased financial support and advocating for a higher Youth Allowance.

2.6 Participation

2.6.1 Shared decision making

Respondents emphasised the importance of **involving young people in designing and implementing policies affecting them**. Young people urged the creation of youth advisory groups, especially in local councils, to ensure meaningful and accessible strategies and programs. Young people with disability, young parents, and young carers stressed the need for diverse representation in consultations to enhance service design.

Young people highlighted the importance of being informed of how their views have been considered and seeing **tangible changes after consultations**, expressing frustration when this doesn't occur.

2.6.2 Climate change

Young people called for increased shared decision making on policies and initiatives which impact the environment and climate, suggesting citizen assemblies to inform climate policies.

Young people highlighted their desire for **increased education and action** to combat climate change, particularly to grow green industries and set the foundation to ensure the future workforce can utilise green technologies and to ensure that businesses value renewable energy and sustainability. This cohort also called for their voice to be heard when decisions are made which could impact the environment and climate.

2.6.3 Civic education

Respondents identified that increasing the **understanding of citizen rights and obligations**, and the processes to implement societal change, as well as increased **awareness of participation opportunities** would support young people to successfully participate in and shape their communities. Young people called for the development of resources and guides on how young people, especially vulnerable young people, can engage and participate to shape policy and initiatives which impact them.

Young people described the importance of increased education in helping young people to understand their **legal rights,** such as talking to police, responding to incidents of abuse – especially within workplaces, how to vote, and how to assess political parties and representatives.

3 Next steps

This consultation report reflects the voices and submissions of the public consultation process between 6 July 2023 and 7 August 2023.

The State's new Youth Action Plan will be developed in collaboration with State Government departments and local governments, and reviewed by young people and youth stakeholders to ensure it accurately reflects the feedback provided, responds to the aspirations of young people and that it makes a positive difference to the lives of young people in South Australia.