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YOUTH POLICY
AND EDUCATION
PRACTICE

**2025
AUSTRALIAN
YOUTH
BAROMETER**
UNDERSTANDING
YOUNG PEOPLE
IN AUSTRALIA
TODAY

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NOVEMBER 2025

ABOUT US

The Monash Centre for Youth Policy and Education Practice (CYPEP) is a multidisciplinary research centre based in the Faculty of Education at Monash University. By focusing on issues that affect young people, and on developing policy and educational interventions to address youth disadvantage, CYPEP aims to identify the challenges to, and opportunities for, improved life outcomes for young people today and throughout their lives. Our vision is for education that creates lifelong and life-wide opportunities for young people and enables them to thrive. Our mission is to connect youth research to policy and practice. We do this by working with policymakers, educators and youth-focused organisations on research that addresses emerging needs and respects and includes young people. Working at the nexus of young people and policy, we raise awareness of the challenges faced by young people today and explore how education can harness the capacity of young people to contribute to building thriving communities.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors gratefully acknowledge the excellent work of Roy Morgan in collaborating with CYPEP on this research. The authors are also grateful to the team supporting our work, including Lorenn Wilks and Anna Bui, who have played a key role in bringing the complex array of data together in this report and communicating it to you.

Massive thanks to CYPEP's Youth Reference Group (Stephen Bahn, Zarin Fariha, Andrew Leap, Yuqi Lin, Isobel Thomas, Rebecca Walters, Mark Yin and Candice Chuning Zheng) for their contributions to CYPEP over the years. We also acknowledge the advice and guidance of our colleagues in the Faculty of Education and Monash University in making CYPEP, and consequently this report, possible. Finally, thanks to the CYPEP Advisory Board and Management Committee for their guidance, support and insights.

CITATION

Walsh, L., Huynh, T. B. & Deng, Z. (2025). The 2025 Australian Youth Barometer: Understanding young people in Australia today. Monash University, Melbourne: Centre for Youth Policy and Education Practice. <https://doi.org/10.26180/30184270>

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01

INTRODUCTION

The 2025 federal election was a turning point in Australia. For the first time, Gen X, Millennials and Gen Z outnumbered those born before 1966 across all states and territories.¹ According to the 2021 census, Generation Alpha (2011–2021) made up 7.5% of the population, Gen Z (1996–2010) 21.5%, and Millennials (1981–1995) 19.3%. Gen X (1966–1980) accounted for 21.5%, Baby Boomers (1946–1965) 18.2%, and the Interwar cohort (1945 and earlier) 12%.¹

Now, more than ever, is the time to listen. Younger Australians have told us that they face insecure work, financial hardship, and difficulties accessing affordable housing. Mission Australia's 2024 Youth Survey of 15- to 19-year-olds reported that their top concerns were cost of living (56%), climate change (27%), violence and crime (25%), and mental health (23%).²

The 2024 Australian Youth Barometer reinforced most of these concerns, with young people aged 18–24 ranking affordable housing (73%), employment opportunities (52%), climate change (40%), racial inequality (32%), and gender inequality (29%) as top priorities.³ Taken together, five recurring concerns emerge: health, housing affordability, employment and financial security, climate change, and equity/discrimination. Underlying these concerns is a pervasive sense of insecurity—psychological, financial, and existential—mirroring global generational anxieties.⁴

This is compounded by growing distrust in political institutions. A 2024 Lowy Institute poll found that, while 72% of Australians believe democracy is preferable to any other form of government, younger Australians are less likely than older generations to agree, with the gap widening since 2022.⁵

Younger generations are less party-loyal and more policy-focused, demanding practical solutions over rhetoric.⁶ As former treasury secretary Ken Henry remarked, *"We should all be angry at our collective failure to design economic structures, including environmental regulations, that underpin confidence in a better future for our children and grandchildren"*.⁷ Governments must deliver tangible results on housing and cost of living. The trust of younger Australians depends on delivering these results.

Yet the evidence on youth political satisfaction is mixed. Research from the Australian National University suggests younger Australians (18–34) are more likely to express satisfaction with the nation's direction compared to older cohorts.⁸ Conversely, the Lowy poll indicates that optimism about Australia's economic outlook has declined most sharply among younger groups.⁵

Although younger Australians are diverse, many are issue-driven voters, united by overlapping insecurities around housing, employment, inequality, climate, and health. Economic precarity, in particular, not only deepens insecurity but also shapes electoral decisions.⁹ A longer-term generational shift is taking place—one that politicians can no longer afford to ignore.

LOOKING FORWARD BY LOOKING BACK: THE VOICES OF CYPEP'S YOUTH REFERENCE GROUP

We conclude this introduction to the final Australian Youth Barometer with insights provided by CYPEP's Youth Reference Group (YRG) over the years that continue to resonate today and provide a pathway forward.

In 2025, the cost of living crisis was a major issue for all Australians in the Federal election. But this is by no means a new phenomenon.⁹ Back in 2023, Mark, Rebecca, Andrew and Yuqi from the YRG highlighted the severe impact of the cost of living crisis on young people via a relatable vignette: *"You laugh before you remember spending your whole pay check on groceries yesterday, and your rent is due next week."* The 2023 Barometer found that:

- 90% of young people aged 18–24 experienced financial difficulties
- 20% faced food insecurity
- 44% had been unemployed in the previous year

Some things have improved, but only a little. In 2025:

- 85% young people aged 18–24 experienced financial difficulties
- 18% faced food insecurity
- 44% had been unemployed in the previous year

A longer-term generational shift is taking place—one that politicians can no longer afford to ignore.

The YRG noted that these pressures were acutely felt by marginalised young people—those with disabilities, mental health conditions, and First Nations backgrounds. They highlighted the testimony of a young woman from Queensland, who captured the wider shock many felt:

“

“I feel like everything just rose in price, all of a sudden, quite quickly ... I haven't seen anything about people getting pay raises. So I guess it's just people losing money at this point.”

Over the years, home ownership has become increasingly out of reach. The YRG noted a young South Australian woman's stress in 2023: *“I did overhear that [the landlords] might be selling this house ... and given that it took us so long to find one it's already stressful.”*

In 2025, less than one third (30%) of young people thought it likely or extremely likely that they will be able to afford a comfortable place to live in the next 12 months. Thinking further into the future, less than half (42%) of young people thought it likely or very likely that they will be able to purchase a property or house.

In 2024, Andrew, Mark, Steven and Candice observed a social inertia amongst many young Australians. They highlighted key findings in 2024, including:

- 20% rated their mental health as poor or very poor
- 98% reported anxiety or pessimism
- 86% faced financial hardship
- 62% believed they would be worse off financially than their parents

One year later, although some of the figures have largely remained unchanged, increased proportions of young people have reported poor or very poor mental health and feeling that they will be worse off than their parents.

- **26% rated their mental health as poor or very poor,**
- 99% reported anxiety or pessimism,
- 85% faced financial hardship,
- **79% believed they would be worse off financially than their parents,**

Drawing on the physics principle of motion, Andrew, Mark, Steven and Candice wrote, *“We move nevertheless with a sense that our broader circumstances are beyond our control ... That we are moving at pace until certain forces act to change it.”*

Many survey and interview respondents felt constrained in building their lives or even beginning adulthood: *“Many young people feel like they are missing out on being young.”* This echoed an observation in 2023 by Mark, Rebecca, Andrew and Yuqi that *“for many young Australians, their sense of control over their own lives is slipping through their fingertips.”*

As suggested above, their relationships with institutions have continued to erode. In 2024:

- 39% felt government housing support was insufficient
- 26% said financial support was lacking
- 21% believed not enough was being done about mental health

In 2025 the figures have grown:

- 49% felt government housing support was insufficient
- 34% said financial support was lacking
- 24% believed not enough was being done about mental health

The YRG highlighted the frustration of two young people interviewed for the 2024 Barometer. One 19-year-old Queenslanders felt *“like it's a little bit hard to get represented in a way when ... [we are not] the ones that are more the homeowners and the taxpayers.”* A 23-year-old man from Victoria said *“Anytime I try to say anything, I find a lot of people don't listen. So I just don't try anymore.”*

The consequences of this are felt existentially. Mark, Rebecca, Andrew and Yuqi noted the findings from the 2023 Barometer that showed dwindling faith in action on climate, with only 31% believing it would be addressed by the government. In 2025, 44% of young people identify climate change as the issue that needs immediate action, but only 24% of young Australians believe it is likely or very likely that climate change will be combated in the future.

The YRG has called for policy shifts in education in financial literacy, housing, and food security, along with local programs and mutual aid initiatives. They also want to see more government support for secure housing and adequate income.

In 2022, the YRG reflected on how the COVID-19 pandemic altered day-to-day life, especially in education and employment. Andrew highlighted that:



“It’s undoubted that the COVID-19 pandemic has permanently changed a lot of the ways we approach our day-to-day living ... The rapid activation of remote learning and working has provided greater flexibility ... particularly those who live rurally or remotely. Policymakers should consider investing and supporting initiatives and organisations to maintain and upscale their online capabilities to ensure all young people have the opportunity to access their offerings.”

Mark reflected on the value of secure employment and the need for systemic reform:



“I think it’s striking how important (secure) employment was for young

people ... there is still an important window of opportunity to transform school and work for young people and secure our futures as we emerge from the crises of the past few years.”

Turning to education, with other avenues of learning taking place, Rebecca urged further investigation into the popularity of informal learning:



“I think it’s important to further explore the finding that 75% of young people engaged in informal learning opportunities ... Perhaps it is a response to the suggestions young people gave for improving education such as ‘having greater choice around content and delivery’ and ‘more inclusive and accepting education institutions’.”

But effort alone wasn’t enough in a system characterised by Mark, Rebecca, Andrew and Yuqi in 2023 as working against young people:



“When so many young people are doing ‘extra stuff’ to get a job, it’s no longer extra—it’s just a stacked system.” They called particular attention to inequality in education: “The disparity between education experiences, particularly between public and private institutions, is deeply troubling.”

With 80% of Australians projected to need a tertiary qualification by 2050, they stressed the urgency of meaningful reform.

The YRG recommended moving away from short-term political cycles and toward systemic investment in education, housing, mental health, and infrastructure like transport. They emphasised that this was not the responsibility of the government alone, but a shared effort involving communities, NGOs, businesses and educators. In 2023, Mark, Rebecca, Andrew and Yuqi urged collaboration:



“We especially encourage those who might not regularly interact with young people ...”

Last year, the YRG reaffirmed young people's desire to co-create a better future: *“This is not just about taking control of our own personal development ... it is about working towards a collective future that looks after the planet and its future generations.”* They urged, *“We must disrupt this experience of inertia and chart a new path for us and future generations to come.”*

This remains true in 2025. A new intergenerational social contract needs to be created that responds to policy and youth transitions inertia; one that addresses rapid change and pervasive uncertainty in the lives of young Australians. The challenges identified by the YRG have not gone away—most have only grown. Given recent demographic shifts described at the start of this introduction, the voices of young people will be increasingly heard at forthcoming elections and beyond. We need to keep listening and working with young people to move from just surviving and adapting to thriving.

Professor Lucas Walsh

Director, Monash Centre for Youth Policy and Education Practice

Youth Reference Group: Stephen Banh, Andrew Leap, Zarin Fariha, Yuqi Lin, Isobel Thomas, Rebecca Walters, Mark Yin and Candice Chuning Zheng.

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02

ABOUT THE 2025 AUSTRALIAN YOUTH BAROMETER

METHOD AND APPROACH

Now in its fifth iteration, the method and approach of this year's Australian Youth Barometer is largely identical to the 2023 and 2024 editions. We used a concurrent mixed-methods design where data were generated through interviews and an online survey. This was complemented by a review of existing data from nation-wide studies of young people's lives in Australia. We focused on data that included the experiences of young people aged 18–24 to align with the Barometer data; however, because definitions of youth and the age ranges used in studies of young people vary greatly, we have also included secondary data that used age ranges that intersected with our 18–24 age category. Additionally, the language surrounding how gender diverse people and First Nations young people are referred to in original sources is retained.

Across each of these data sources, we explored a range of topics including education, employment, health and wellbeing, finances, housing, civic participation, relationships and the impact of COVID-19. By analysing specific questions in relation to young people's responses as a whole, we aim to develop an interconnected understanding of young people's lives.

Ethics approval was granted by the Monash University Human Research Ethics Committee prior to the collection of data. Participation in the survey and interviews was voluntary. The findings are not representative of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

SURVEY

The survey was completed by 527 participants aged 18–24 with an average completion time of 18.35 minutes. The questionnaire contained a mix of closed, Likert-style and open-ended questions. The analysis in the Barometer uses probabilistic weights to make the sample representative of Australian young people in terms of age cohort, gender and region. Table 1 shows a comparison of survey participants' characteristics with and without probabilistic weights.

Stata 16.0 was used to conduct the quantitative analysis. All 527 respondents are included in the quantitative analysis. One participant selected '[5] Moved between capital cities' but commented that "I accidentally clicked it. I haven't moved" and thus was recoded as 'no movement'. Comparisons across demographic groups (including age, gender, First Nations, disability, socioeconomic background (SES), location of remoteness, and state) with $p < 0.05$ in chi-square tests are included in this report. Comparisons have been conducted using the original categories, although some categories have been combined for convenience when reporting the results (e.g. combining 'often' and 'very often' as one category). Although Fisher's exact test is recommended when the expected number of observations are less than 5 in the cells, it is not available for tests with survey weights. Therefore, caution should be taken when interpreting the results where cells have expected values smaller than 5. Categories which have frequencies smaller than 5 are not included even though it is significant (except that some small-size categories, such as non-binary/gender diverse, physical disability and so on, were presented to make the descriptions complete). The sum percentages after rounding may not be equal to 100% (some are 99% or 101%).

For consistency with the 2023 and 2024 Barometers, we have re-coded SES and location based on survey respondents' postcodes. SES corresponds to the 2021 Australian Bureau of Statistics Index of Economic Resources (IER), which focuses on "the financial aspects of relative socio-economic advantage and disadvantage".¹ This has been re-coded as Low (deciles 1 to 3), Medium (deciles 4 to 7) and High (deciles 8 to 10), with a low score indicating a relative lack of access to economic resources.

Remoteness is also based on postcode and measured according to the Remoteness Areas Structure within the Australian Statistical Geography Standard (ASGS).² The original categories were re-coded as Remote (Outer Regional Australia, Remote Australia and Very Remote Australia), Regional (Inner Regional Australia), and Metro (Major Cities of Australia). For postcodes that cover different types of locations, we used the largest part of the type to represent the location of this postcode.

TABLE 1: SURVEY AND WEIGHTED SAMPLE BY DESCRIPTIVE CHARACTERISTICS (N = 527)

	NUMBER	%	WEIGHTED NUMBER	WEIGHTED %
AGE				
18	71	13.5%	71.6	13.6%
19	64	12.1%	63.7	12.1%
20	67	12.7%	67.3	12.8%
21	80	15.2%	78.7	14.9%
22	75	14.2%	75.6	14.4%
23	91	17.3%	91.7	17.4%
24	79	15%	78.3	14.9%
GENDER				
Woman	252	47.8%	253.3	48.1%
Man	260	49.3%	259.5	49.2%
Non-binary/gender diverse/ agender	9	1.7%	8.6	1.6%
Prefer not to say	6	1.1%	5.7	1.1%
EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT				
Postgraduate degree level	22	4.2%	22.9	4.3%
Graduate diploma and graduate certificate level	19	3.6%	19.1	3.6%
Bachelor degree level	125	23.7%	123.1	23.4%
Advanced diploma and diploma level	32	6.1%	30.9	5.9%
Certificate level	80	15.2%	78.8	15.0%
Secondary education	245	46.5%	247.7	47.0%
Primary education	1	0.2%	1	0.2%
Pre-primary education	1	0.2%	1	0.2%
Other education	2	0.4%	2.4	0.4%
STATE				
ACT	14	2.7%	13.6	2.6%
NSW	173	32.8%	162.8	30.9%
VIC	3	0.6%	3.4	0.6%
QLD	100	19%	108.6	20.6%
SA	31	5.9%	34.7	6.6%
NT	11	2.1%	8.9	1.7%
TAS	143	27.1%	139.5	26.5%
WA	52	9.9%	55.4	10.5%
LOCATION (BASED ON POSTCODE)				
Metro	438	83.1%	441.5	83.8%
Regional	65	12.3%	61.1	11.6%
Remote	24	4.6%	24.5	4.6%
SES (BASED ON POSTCODE)				
Low	179	34%	177.1	33.6%
Medium	182	34.5%	184.7	35.1%
High	166	31.5%	165.2	31.3%
BORN IN AUSTRALIA				
Australia	423	80.3%	422.2	80.1%
Abroad	104	19.7%	104.8	19.9%
FIRST NATIONS				
No	494	93.7%	494.3	93.8%
Yes	26	4.9%	25.9	4.9%
Don't know/prefer not to say	7	1.3%	6.8	1.3%
DISABILITY				
No	349	66.2%	347.8	66.0%
A physical disability	8	1.5%	7.9	1.5%
A long-term illness	14	2.7%	13.6	2.6%
A mental health condition	94	17.8%	96.9	18.4%
Something else	14	2.7%	13.6	2.6%
Multiple conditions	33	6.3%	32.3	6.1%
Prefer not to say	15	2.8%	14.9	2.8%
Total	527	100%	527	100.0%

INTERVIEWS

Semi-structured interviews lasting approximately 60 minutes were conducted with 30 young people aged 18–24. These interviews were conducted via Zoom and then professionally transcribed for analysis. Interviews were conducted with young people from all Australian states and territories, with the exception of the Northern Territory (See Table 2). Despite the relatively small sample size, efforts were made to engage young people from diverse cultural and geographic backgrounds. Eleven interviewees disclosed that they were a member of the LGBTIQA+ community, and two identified as gender diverse.

Interview responses were collaboratively analysed using directed content analysis with the aid of QSR NVivo software (version 14).³ As a starting point, predetermined codes were used to organise the interview responses in relation to the topics included in the Barometer (education, employment, etc.). From this, we engaged deeply with the codes to generate descriptions of common and novel perspectives offered by young people, as well as to identify interconnections between topics in their interview responses.

TABLE 2:

INTERVIEW SAMPLE BY DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS (N = 30)

	NUMBER	% ^a
AGE		
18	4	13.3%
19	6	20.0%
20	5	16.7%
21	3	10.0%
22	3	10.0%
23	5	16.7%
24	4	13.3%
GENDER		
Woman	13	43.3%
Man	15	50.0%
Gender diverse	2	6.7%
STATE		
ACT	3	10.0%
NSW	7	23.3%
NT	0	0.0%
QLD	5	16.7%
SA	3	10.0%
TAS	1	3.3%
VIC	8	26.7%
WA	3	10.0%
LOCATION		
Metropolitan	23	76.7%
Regional or remote	7	23.3%
CURRENT LIVING ARRANGEMENT		
At home with family	13	43.3%
Alone or independently	7	23.3%
With friends or in a share house	5	16.7%
With partner	4	13.3%
Homeless	1	3.3%
CULTURAL BACKGROUND		
Anglo Australian	18	60.0%
Diverse backgrounds ^b	11	36.7%
First Nations	1	3.3%
LGBTIQA+		
Yes	11	36.7%
No	19	63.3%

^aPercentages may not add to 100 due to rounding.

^bDue to small numbers, individual backgrounds are not listed.

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03

YOUNG PEOPLE AND THE ECONOMY

KEY FINDINGS

- 1** 85% of young Australians experienced financial difficulties to some extent in the last 12 months, with 28% reporting that they did so often or very often.
- 2** 79% of young Australians think they will be financially worse off than their parents.
- 3** 46% of young Australians think it is likely or very likely that they will achieve financial security in the future.
- 4** 74% of young Australians who experienced financial difficulties report family members as the main source of financial support when running short of money.
- 5** 43% of young Australians report being often or very often able to save part of their income.
- 6** 42% of young Australians think it is likely or very likely that they will be able to purchase a property or house in the future. Purchasing property is a key financial aspiration for young people, but many felt it was out of their reach.
- 7** Financial security was a major concern for young people. Some young people were only able to achieve financial security through family support, while others did not feel financially secure.

REVIEW OF EXISTING DATA

Many young people were remaining in the family home for longer, feeling home ownership was increasingly out of reach.

HOUSING

The majority (90%) of young people aged 15–19 reported living in a privately owned or rented home in 2025.¹ Among young people aged 13–28 who rented a property, 73% reported being in rent stress, spending more than 30% of their income on rent. Additionally, 74% of young renters believe they will move out within the next month due to rent stress.²

Many young people were remaining in the family home for longer, feeling home ownership was increasingly out of reach.³ Young people felt that increased living costs undermined their ability to save up to buy a house and to create a better life,⁴ and 20% of young people aged 13–28 believed that they will never be able to afford a home.²

This is in part due to house prices increasing faster than wage growth: the median house price in June 2024 was 10.5 times the average annual earnings for a full-time worker.³ Structural constraints, such as access to affordable housing, were the main obstacle to home ownership for young people, with personal factors such as poor saving habits, short term financial planning, and employment precarity playing a comparatively minor role.⁵ Despite this, home ownership remained a goal for many young people, with 55% of young Australians aged 18–35 optimistic about owning their own home.⁶

In 2024, 9% of young people aged 15–19 had experienced homelessness. Gender diverse young people were more likely to experience homelessness and 15% had experienced homelessness in the previous year.¹ Young women and gender diverse young people aged 18–30 struggled to secure rental properties, with gender diverse young people often feeling the need to hide their identities when applying for rentals.

FINANCIAL SECURITY AND ASPIRATIONS

Cost of living was a major concern, with 49% of young Australians aged 18–29 likely to worry about their finances often or all the time.⁷ Further, 64% of young Australians aged 19–30 lived pay to pay, 43% struggled to pay living expenses each month and 41% worried that they will not be able to retire with financial comfort.⁸ Similar research showed that 79% of young people aged 16–28 found it difficult to budget for a whole month, with 6% saying that they struggled to make ends meet.⁹ Almost half of young people (45%) felt unprepared for a major unexpected expense and 95.1% had noticed an increase in the cost of everyday items.¹⁰

The top financial aspirations for young people aged 18–29 were having a good work/life balance (57%), having a successful career (54%), owning a home (52%) and achieving financial independence (52%).⁷ For many young people, financial independence and wellbeing meant having no financial stress or worries (51%) and having the financial freedom to make choices (51%). To achieve their goals, many young people sought to diversify their income, with 29% building additional income streams, and 22% investing in shares.

Many young people look to older generations for financial advice: 75% of young people aged 16–28 turned to their older counterparts, 61% turned to their parents and 24% turned to social media and social media influencers for advice.⁹ Young people were also more likely to receive financial support from older family members, with 60% of young people aged 18–29 receiving gifts, support for travel, childcare expenses, or housing assistance from grandparents.⁷ In particular, young people were likely to need assistance with understanding taxes (39%) and investment strategies (39%).⁷

2025 INTERVIEW AND SURVEY FINDINGS

The majority of young Australians thought they will be financially worse off than their parents.

CURRENT FINANCIAL SITUATION

Most young Australians (85%) experienced financial difficulties at some point in the last 12 months, with 28% reporting that they experienced financial difficulty often or very often. Higher proportions of young women (88%) or non-binary/gender diverse young people (100%) reported experiencing financial difficulties compared with young men (81%). Similarly, higher proportions of young Australians who identified as First Nations (93%) experienced financial difficulties compared with those who did not identify as First Nations (84%), and higher proportions of young people in regional (89%) and remote (93%) areas experienced financial difficulties than did those in metropolitan areas (84%).

The young people we spoke to expressed varying degrees of financial security. Some felt that they were financially secure and independent. Other young people felt somewhat secure, but were not comfortable with their current financial situation, and some felt that they were financially insecure:



I'm secure, but I'm not comfortable with the money that I have right now ... I know that ... I wouldn't have zero dollars in my account the next month, but ... it's not that I don't worry about it ... I would like for my balance to be more than it is." MAN, 23, VIC



The paycheque that I get, it's not enough ... I rent, and that takes the majority of my pay and then I've got electricity, water, internet, phone, car payments. Altogether I can't save even a dollar because of how much it just eats at all my money." WOMAN, 21, NSW

A number of interviewees acknowledged that they were only financially secure due to having parental support:



[My parents are] very financially secure and I'm pretty much under their umbrella at this point in my life ... I'm not financially stable with my own money."

WOMAN, 21, NSW

Most survey respondents (74%) who experienced financial difficulties turned to family members for support when running short of money. This was relatively consistent across demographic groups, except for young people who identified as non-binary/gender diverse (51%), a smaller proportion of whom relied on family members compared with those who identify as women (80%) or men (70%). This was reflected by the young people we interviewed, who largely turned to family members for financial support. Some young people also received financial support from the government, though this was felt to be inadequate:



I do feel somewhat financially secure and also because I do have family that is willing and able to support [me]."

WOMAN, 21, WA



I'm on Centrelink Youth Allowance ... I get about \$150 from them, which again is not enough." WOMAN, 21, NSW

FINANCIAL SECURITY

Being financially secure was of great importance to the young people we interviewed. They discussed how being financially secure enabled them to do the things they wanted, and helped to alleviate feelings of anxiety:

“

Everything honestly ... if you know that you can pay to do the things you want to do, you have flexibility and stuff, that just alleviates so many more anxieties.

WOMAN, 21, NSW

Young people understood financial security to mean having the ability to pay for necessities, as well as being able to afford some extras. Other common understandings of financial security included not having to worry about money, having enough saved up for emergencies, and being financially independent:

“

Financial security would be being able to afford a place to live along with all the necessary utilities, your food and some money to do some fun stuff.”

MAN, 24, QLD

“

I wouldn't look at the prices of any items that I wanted, I would just put them in my trolley and assume that I could pay for it and I would want to be able to, like, buy something nice, like, every few weeks or so.”

MAN, 18, TAS

Importantly, young people also highlighted the need for stability in order to feel financially secure:

“

Financial security means to me that I have a proper regular form of income from a secure place, one that I know isn't just going to sink ... I think it's just knowing that no matter what you've got, you've got something to fall back on.”

WOMAN, 19, SA

The majority (79%) of young Australians thought they will be financially worse off than their parents. This was more common among young women (85%) or non-binary/gender diverse young people (86%) than among young men (75%). Higher proportions of young people born in Australia (83%) thought they will be financially worse off than their parents compared with those born in other countries (66%).

FINANCIAL ASPIRATIONS AND PLANS FOR FINANCIAL SECURITY

Similar to previous years, buying property was a major financial aspiration for young people. However, many interviewees believed that buying property was out of reach, and could only be achieved if they were very fortunate, or at a much later stage of their lives:

I don't need to be mega rich. I don't have any aspirations of being, like, a millionaire. I'd like to own my own house and hopefully an investment property by the time I'm, like, I don't know, 50.”

MAN, 23, SA

Other financial aspirations included being able to support their current or future families, being able to travel, or making specific purchases such as a car. Some young people also saw financial security as being part of a general lifestyle that they aspired to:



Having enough money to have a family ... Being able to single-handedly support a family.” MAN, 18, TAS



In terms of money, not having to worry about it ... have the job I want, have some hobbies ... be a lot more social, more involved in the community probably, and I'd have a really nice garden ... and a pet, that would be awesome.” WOMAN, 19, QLD

Despite these aspirations, less than half (46%) of young Australians thought it likely or very likely that they will achieve financial security in the future. This was shared across demographic groups, with a lower proportion of young women (37%) or non-binary/gender diverse young people (24%) believing they could achieve financial security compared with young men (54%). Similarly, fewer young people who identified as First Nations (19%) believed it likely or very likely that they could achieve financial security compared with those who did not identify as First Nations (47%).

Many of the young people we interviewed saw work as the main pathway to achieving their financial aspirations. Some interviewees indicated that a good worth ethic was a general means to achieving financial security:



I'm studying now so I want a good job from that and a good full-time job, and I'm going to work hard for it ... Just work hard I guess, as often as possible, save money, be smart with spending, pretty much.” WOMAN, 23, QLD

Compared to previous years, more interviewees pointed to investing as a way to achieve financial security. Some young people had already begun to invest on advice from their parents, while others looked to investing in the future:



I am trying to get into finance or trading stuff ... if I learn how to do, like, proper trading, I might be like in a really good position financially.” WOMAN, 23, VIC

Interviewees also saw saving money as helping to achieve financial security. More than forty per cent (43%) of young Australians reported they were often or very often able to save part of their income. First Nations young people were less likely to have this ability (17%) than other young Australians (44%). Strategies for saving included putting aside money to build towards financial goals and cutting down their current expenses through budgeting or frugal living:



Making sure I'm saving every week, not overspending, not overindulging ... majority of the time just putting money away for the future.” MAN, 20, NSW

Less than half of young Australians thought it likely or very likely that they will achieve financial security in the future.

“

I won't eat out ... I'll have, like, cost friendly meals and I think for probably, possibly, another five years, I'll live with my parents, so I'll pay a small amount in rent in exchange for saving more money.”

WOMAN, 18, VIC

A number of young people interviewed did not have clear plans for achieving financial security and hoped to figure out things at later date:

“

I can't guarantee anything ... manifestation and prayer is what I rely on.” MAN, 22, WA

ENABLERS AND BARRIERS TO FINANCIAL SECURITY

When discussing enablers of financial security, a majority of the young people we interviewed emphasised the importance of finding a good job or successful career. Some interviewees believed they could achieve this by themselves, while others felt that support would be needed:

“

It's a question of whether I can find a full-time job after university ... I think I can. Yeah, it will be difficult and there is a bit of doubt in my mind about it, but I do think I can and, even then, my parents and my family, they will be able to support me.” WOMAN, 19, VIC

However, young people also pointed to future employment as a potential barrier to financial security. This could be because their current jobs were low paying, or the career paths they aspired to were in low demand or difficult to access:

“

The industry that I want to start a career in is a very small industry and it gets smaller every year. So, there is always the question of [whether I] will be able to get a job in that industry in the first place.” WOMAN, 18, VIC

Some interviewees also pointed to structural barriers to financial security, such as the current economic and political climate, as well as general uncertainties about the future:

“

The cost of living crisis is definitely something that is something I do consider day to day. Like, you know, food is expensive and feels more expensive every time I go grocery shopping and housing is, like, scarily out of my reach.” MAN, 19, QLD

In contrast, some young people saw individual concerns, such as a lack of experience or connections, the possibility of emergencies upsetting their plans, or other personal reasons as potential barriers to financial security:

“

Emergencies are, you know, they're spontaneous, you can never really pick them ... you never really know what it's going to throw at you, but it's just getting through it and working it out when you can.” WOMAN, 19, WA

“

I have a lack of confidence in taking risks, financial risks. I just feel that getting to a really comfortable point in life is more and more about the family you were born [into] ... and how much money they have for you to work off of, and I come from a very poor family, so I just feel that I'm kind of at a disadvantage.” MAN, 18, TAS

A number of young people pointed to a diverse array of potential barriers. This speaks to the complex and multifaceted nature of the challenges that many young people face:

“

Cost of living and housing crisis are pretty big barriers at the moment, but also just for me particularly it's, yeah, a lot of mental health difficulties and then the physical health stuff on top of that doesn't help either ... I don't even know what things are going to look like in the next five years and there could be new barriers popping up.” WOMAN, 19, QLD

CHOOSING FINANCIAL PRODUCTS

Most (72%) young Australians reported having a savings account. Other forms of saving investment were less common: 18% had a superannuation fund, 13% of young people invested in shares, equity or stock that they managed on their own, 11% invested in cryptocurrency, 10% in exchange traded funds (ETFs), and 7% had a term deposit. Slightly less than one-fifth (19%) of young Australians reported that they do not have any savings or investment products (see Figure 3.1).

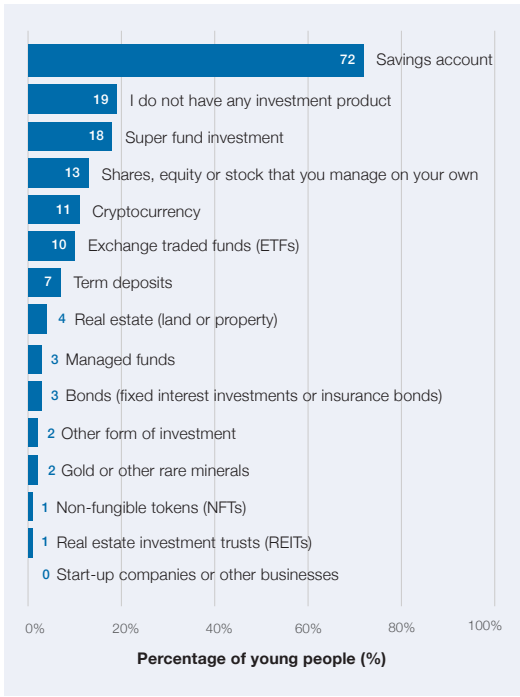


Figure 3.1. Adoption of savings and investment products (N = 527)

More than half (51%) of young Australians have applied for some form of loan from a bank or financial institution in the last 12 months (see Figure 3.2). The most commonly used credit products, according to our survey, are buy now, pay later services (27%) and credit cards (25%). Among those who used buy now, pay later services, the most common purchases were clothes (82%), entertainment (77%), and leisure activities (70%).

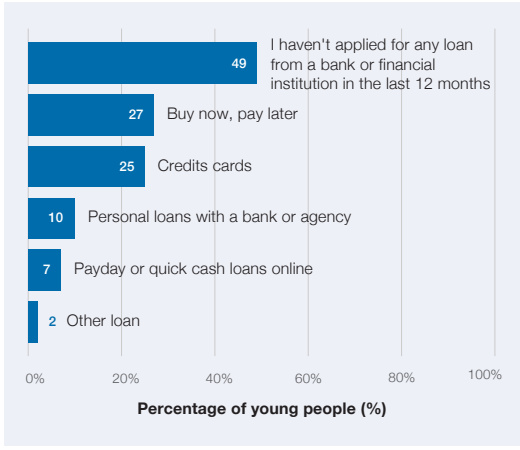


Figure 3.2. Adoption of credit products (N = 527)

The young people we interviewed were largely ambivalent about financial products. For those who used financial products such as buy now, pay later services or credit cards, the main benefit was being able to pay for purchased goods over a longer period of time. However, participants also pointed to the need to take care when using financial products:



If I do need to make a really big purchase and I don't have the funds right now, I just use After Pay ... I just pay it off slowly, slowly over time ... it's just helping me break down the payment."

MAN, 22, NSW



If you stick realistically to how much you earn, I think then it's, then you can use a credit card, like, smartly. Like, you won't fall behind, you won't pay interest, it will just be so you can buy something that you need at that moment and you'll be able to repay it back with no interest, like, once you get paid." MAN, 18, ACT

However, many young people preferred to use their own money to make purchases and chose not to use financial products, wary of the potential to fall into debt. Other reasons for not using financial products included a lack of knowledge, not trusting their own spending habits, or not trusting the products that are offered:



I avoid those like plague ... I don't like falling into massive amounts of debt. Spending money I don't have can quickly spiral as proved by credit card company's massive profits ... Unless something is desperately needed immediately, I will not spend money I do not have." MAN, 20, ACT

A number of interviewees discussed using other financial products, such as loans or investments. When choosing these financial products, most young people sought advice from their parents or did their own research to assist them in making their decisions:



My mum is very switched on about that stuff ... I used to invest as well, so I've sort of being doing it since I was 17, 18 and I just buy like ETFs."

WOMAN, 23, NSW

HOUSING ARRANGEMENTS

More than half (58%) of young Australians lived in their family home, 20% lived in a house-sharing arrangement, 10% lived independently on their own, 11% lived independently as a family or couple and the remaining 1% lived in other situations (see Figure 3.3). Younger people were more likely to live in their family home. A higher proportion of young people who were born in Australia (61%) lived in the family home compared with those who were born in other countries (50%). Young people from a high socioeconomic background (73%) were more likely to live in their family home compared with young people from medium (60%) and low (43%) socioeconomic backgrounds.

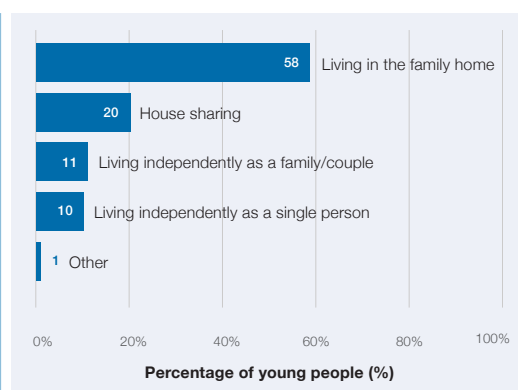


Figure 3.3. Housing arrangements (N = 527)

One young person we interviewed was currently homeless and another had experienced homelessness in the past. When faced with homelessness, the young people we interviewed turned to subsidised housing and youth shelters for support, although these could be difficult to access:

“

I was kicked out when I was, like, 16, so I've been in youth housing for a couple of years ... there's definitely been challenges, difficulties ... there is very limited availability ... I've been told that it's just the demand has skyrocketed with the housing crisis, cost of living crisis.” WOMAN, 19, QLD

Sixty-four per cent (64%) of young Australians thought it likely or extremely likely that they will stay in their current accommodation in the next 12 months. Less than one-third (30%) thought it likely or extremely likely that they will be able to afford a comfortable place to live in the next 12 months.

Looking to the future, 58% of young people thought it likely or very likely that they will live in a comfortable home in the future. A lower proportion of young people from high socioeconomic backgrounds (54%) thought they would live in a comfortable home compared with those from medium (57%) or low (65%) socioeconomic backgrounds.

Less than half (42%) of young people thought it likely or very likely that they will be able to purchase a property or house. Young men (48%) were more likely to think that they could purchase a property or house compared with young women (36%) or non-binary/gender diverse young people (11%). This lack of confidence was reflected by the young people we interviewed, many of whom felt that purchasing or renting a house or other property was out of their reach:

“

Unless I was magically given, like, a million dollars, I wouldn't be able to buy a house. Even then one million dollars probably won't even cover it in this day and age ... it's just very inconceivable, very unattainable.” MAN, 24, VIC

“

It's such a huge renting crisis. I mean, like I said, I would love to own my own house, but again, you know, it's just a, even if it's 5%, it's still such a big amount of money that it would take me a very long time to achieve by myself.”

WOMAN, 21, NSW

Despite their lack of confidence, owning their own house or property remained a key financial aspiration for many young people. Many of the young people we interviewed acknowledged that this goal would only be achievable with substantial support from their families, or if they were fortunate enough to inherit property:

“

It would be nice to own my own house, which I think, let's get real, that will happen on account of the fact that my dad owns property and it will be in the will and stuff, but like that's a bit grim.”

TRANSGENDER PERSON, 20, QLD

POLICY AND RESEARCH IMPLICATIONS

Young Australians
aspire to stability
and security but
face systemic
financial barriers.

Young Australians are navigating rising living costs, insecure work, and increasingly inaccessible housing markets. While some can rely on family support, many lack such safety nets and face systemic barriers to financial security. Policymakers must act to reduce inequality, enhance financial wellbeing, and create secure futures for young people.

- Almost all young Australians continue to face significant degrees of financial distress. Although some young people can achieve financial security, for many this is only possible through familial support. System-wide approaches are needed to support young people who may not have help from their families. Reducing financial distress requires:
 - introducing targeted financial support for young people without familial assistance (e.g. income supplements, subsidies, student cost-of-living relief); and
 - system-wide reforms that recognise youth as a distinct group requiring structural supports.¹¹
- Owning property continues to be a core financial aspiration, but young people increasingly feel that purchasing property is unattainable. Young people's current and future needs are not adequately addressed in policy domains such as taxation, where existing arrangements remain highly inequitable.^{12,13} Wide-reaching housing policy and taxation reform, alongside more targeted forms of support, are needed to assist young people to progress from renting to home ownership. This includes:
 - reforming housing policy and taxation to make home ownership attainable;
 - providing targeted rental assistance and shared equity schemes for first-time buyers; and
 - expanding affordable housing developments in areas with strong youth demand.¹²

- Homelessness is an unacceptable feature in the lives of some young people. Where support is available, services can be difficult for young people to access and are inadequate to their needs. More immediate support with housing is needed, as is long-term action to improve young people's access to secure, safe, and appropriate accommodation. This requires:
 - increasing immediate access to emergency housing tailored to young people;
 - investing in long-term housing solutions that provide safe, stable, and appropriate accommodation; and
 - simplifying access pathways to homelessness services and ensuring that services recognise the complexity of youth homelessness.¹⁴
- Secure work and career progression are the primary avenues for achieving financial security, but uncertainty about future careers presents significant concerns for young people. Better career support is needed to enable young people to navigate changing job markets and enter stable and rewarding careers. Targeted efforts are needed to:
 - expand career counselling, mentoring, and vocational pathways that are aligned with emerging industries;¹⁵
 - incentivise employers to provide stable roles with clear career progression; and
 - reduce reliance on insecure work among young people through regulatory action.¹⁵
- Young people face a multifaceted array of barriers to financial security, such as rising living costs, volatile economic conditions, and uncertain career prospects. Addressing these barriers requires wide-reaching economic action, as well as targeted support for young people to navigate increasingly uncertain futures. Comprehensive economic and cost-of-living supports are needed, including:
 - macroeconomic policies that address intergenerational inequality; and
 - targeted supports (e.g. transport subsidies, study-related cost relief) to reduce the burden of rising living expenses.^{11,12}

- Many young people are wary of, or lack knowledge of, financial products. This presents a challenge, as some financial products, such as investments or bank loans, may help young people achieve their financial goals. Further guidance is needed to assist young people to choose and access financial products appropriate to their needs, including:
 - expanding financial literacy programs in schools, TAFEs, and universities;¹⁵
 - providing freely accessible guidance on safe use of financial products, such as loans and investments;¹² and
 - ensuring young people are protected from exploitative financial practices.

Young Australians aspire to stability and security but face systemic financial barriers. A coordinated national strategy addressing housing, employment, financial literacy and cost-of-living pressures is critical to ensuring all young people can build secure futures.



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04

YOUNG PEOPLE AND WORK

KEY FINDINGS

- 1** 33% of young people currently in work or employment work full-time, 25% work part-time and 32% work casually. The most common industry sectors are retail trade (21%) and education and training (17%).
- 2** 44% of young people experienced unemployment at some point in the last 12 months; 60% of young Australians experienced underemployment at some point in the last 12 months.
- 3** High salary/payment (78%), location (73%) and long-term contract/being a 'secure' job (71%) were important or very important aspects of work.
- 4** 63% of young people think it likely or extremely likely that they will work in a job they like in the future.
- 5** 85% of young Australians sought advice from different people, developed job application and interview skills, or looked for vocational work experience with the intention of improving their chances of getting a job.
- 6** Interpersonal relationships and enjoying the work they did were important positive aspects of work. Conversely, long work hours and feeling disrespected were the main negative aspects.
- 7** Perceived enablers of future employment success include education, practical experience through internships and having industry connections. Conversely, a lack of qualifications, lack of experience, and gender discrimination were barriers to future employment success.

REVIEW OF EXISTING DATA

Employers reported that young workers brought enthusiasm, creativity and fresh perspectives.

YOUTH LABOUR MARKET

In 2024, more than half (53%) of young people aged 15–19 were in paid employment, 29% were looking for work and 19% were not looking for work.¹ For older young people aged 19–30, 51% were working full time, 31% were working part time, 3% were employed on a temporary or freelance basis and 7% reported either not working, or being unpaid.² Changing labour markets have contributed to a rise of part-time work for young people, particularly in the service industries. Industries with high numbers of young applicants included accommodation and food services, retail, and manufacturing.³

Eighty-two per cent of employers who had applications from young people hired at least one young person. Medium and large businesses were more likely to hire a young person. Of all employers, 47% reported specifically targeting young people, 31% of employers did not target young people and 21% sought the best candidate regardless of age.³

Twenty-two per cent of young people aged 19–30 no longer work in their intended industry or careers. Reasons young people gave for changing their career paths included better work life balance (36%), job market conditions and availability (33%), better career growth (25%), more flexible hours (23%) and changed interests or new passions (23%).² Meaningful work is important for young Australians: 92% of young people aged 19–30 considered a sense of purpose to be very or somewhat important for their job satisfaction and well-being. Further, 40% of young people had rejected an employer based on personal ethics and beliefs and 52% had left a job because it lacked purpose.² Young Australian workers expected employers to hold cultural and ethical positions that aligned with their own values, and valued employers who offer flexible employment, opportunities for career progression, a respectful working environment and good work-life balance.⁴

In April of 2025, 8.9% of young Australians aged 18–24 were unemployed; this was more than double the overall unemployment rate (4.1%).⁵ The main reason young people gave for not looking for work was because they were studying or returning to study (50% for young men and 62% for young women).⁶ Young people under 24 were the most affected by precarious work, and were less likely to benefit from workplace reforms, being less able to access the traditional jobs that reforms target.⁴

EMPLOYMENT ASPIRATIONS AND CONDITIONS

The top career aspirations for young people aged 19–30 were achieving financial independence (21%), maintaining a good work/life balance (20%), achieving job stability and security (14%), becoming an expert in their field (10%) and continuous learning and development (8%).²

Young Australians aged 13–28 were the least happy with their work, with 50% reporting being happy with their jobs. Main sources of dissatisfaction included their salaries (41%), senior leadership (39%), career progression opportunities (39%), and the degree of corporate social responsibility in areas such as environmental, social and governance concerns (37%).⁷ For young Australians aged 19–30, 27% considered their job as a source of anxiety and stress. Contributing factors include not being adequately recognised or rewarded (49%), not having enough time to complete work tasks (46%) and not feeling that decisions at work are made in a fair and equitable way (44%).² Conversely, the main drivers of happiness at work for young Australians aged 13–28 include their team and colleagues (62%), location of work (60%) and work life balance (57%).⁷

Employers reported that young workers brought enthusiasm, creativity and fresh perspectives, and that they sought young applicants who had the right attitude, good communication skills and relevant experience. However, employers also reported encountering challenges related to skills, work experience and other job requirements when hiring young people. The main reasons for not hiring young people included lack of experience (35%), lack of qualifications or skills (16%) and poor availability (9%).³ The majority (89%) of young Australians aged 19–30 believed that on the job learning and practical experience were the most effective tools for career growth and 33% believed that their workplace learning needs would be best supported by one-on-one mentorship.²

2025 INTERVIEW AND SURVEY FINDINGS

CURRENT OR RECENT EMPLOYMENT

Employment was a major concern for young people, with many worried about finding a good job that could be balanced with other aspects of their lives:



To be honest my biggest concern is ... the job stuff ... it's really challenging to find a proper one, especially for students who are like me studying."

WOMAN, 23, VIC

Less than two-thirds (62%) of young Australians were working for wages or salary, 13% had multiple work statuses and another 16% were not currently working or employed. The remaining 9% were doing volunteer work, had a work experience position without pay, worked in a family business, performed housework and/or caring work without pay or had other work arrangements. Young people aged 24 (71%) and 23 (70%) had the highest proportion of working for wages or salary compared with those in other age groups (51% to 66%).

Among those currently in work or employment (N=447), 33% were in full-time employment, 25% were in part-time employment and 32% were in casual employment. Another 4% were in multiple types of employment and the remaining 5% were between jobs. Young people in older age groups were more likely to work full-time. A higher proportion of young women (32%) and young men (33%) worked full-time compared with those who identified as non-binary/gender diverse (10%). First Nations young people were more likely to be employed full-time (43%) or to be looking for their first job (11%), and less likely to be employed casually (17%) than other young Australians (33%, 2% and 32% respectively).

The young people we interviewed discussed complex employment situations, with no clear distinction between casual, part-time and full-time work. Several participants expressed a desire to be working more hours than they currently were:



Casual but some weeks I will work 70 hours and then some weeks I'll work 15."

MAN, 20, VIC



If I had more hours it would probably be better ... I would definitely work more hours." MAN, 18, ACT

The five most common industries among those currently or recently working (N=433) were retail trade (21%), education and training (17%), accommodation and food services (13%), other industries (12%) and health care and social assistance (12%) (see Figure 4.1).



Figure 4.1. Industry of employment (N = 433)

More than one-third of young Australians participated in the gig economy at some point during the previous month.

Figures were similar among interview participants, many of whom worked in retail or food services. A number of young people were employed in other areas, such as labouring, caring work, administration and education:



I'm just working as a casual retail salesperson ... I work at a baby clothing store." WOMAN, 21, NSW



Just working in containers, just unloading containers ... it's casual work ... It's not the greatest but pays the bills."

MAN, 22, WA

A number of interviewees had transitioned into full-time careers. These young people were employed in areas such as education and agriculture:



I am an occupational therapist working with children ... it's full-time position."

WOMAN, 24, NSW

Some of the young people we spoke to discussed being employed in many jobs over the course of their working lives, illustrating the complex world of work that young people participate in:



I worked at Maccas for four years, then I was a maths tutor at a tutoring company. I've been a GP receptionist, I've been a physiotherapy receptionist, I've been a swimming teacher instructor. I've worked, like, two or three jobs at the same time ... I've worked as a waitress. Yeah, lots of gigs."

WOMAN, 23, NSW

More than one-third of young Australians reported participating in the gig economy at some point during the previous month (38%), previous six months (40%) and previous 12 months (41%), with 12% stating that they did so often or very often in the previous 6 months and 11% often or very often in the previous 12 months. Our survey defined gig work as a short-term work arrangement in which self-employed workers are matched directly with customers through a digital platform, such as Uber food delivery, Airbnb, or MTurk. Gig work was also undertaken by some interviewees, who viewed it as supplementary to their other jobs:



I also sometimes Door Dash on the side ... if I want a bit of extra cash, I go around and do that ... I get to just drive around and listen to music, so it's pretty chill."

WOMAN, 23, QLD

More than forty per cent (44%) of young people experienced unemployment at some point in the previous 12 months, with higher proportions of young people in younger age groups having experienced unemployment. A higher proportion of young people with long-term illness (44%), mental health conditions (59%), and multiple conditions (42%) had experienced unemployment compared with those without disabilities (39%). Almost two-thirds (62%) of young people who experienced unemployment did so for six months or less: nearly one-third (31%) reported that they were unemployed for between two and three months and one-fifth (20%) reported that their unemployment lasted between four and six months. More than one-quarter (26%) of young Australians had been unemployed for between 10 and 12 months.

A number of interviewees were not currently working because they were studying full time. Some young people who were not working received government payments as their main source of income. Some participants were actively looking for work, but were unable to find employment:

“

I've applied to a lot and gotten very few responses back and I've only gotten one or two interviews in the past six months that I've been looking ... I would take anything that will accept me honestly.”

WOMAN, 18, VIC

POSITIVE ASPECTS OF WORK

Young Australians gave similar ratings to multiple work characteristics. Of particular importance were high-salary/payment (78%), location (73%) and long-term contract/being a 'secure' job (71%), which were all rated as important or very important (see Figure 4.2). The importance of these aspects was also highlighted by interviewees:

“

Definitely getting paid a decent wage. Like, just because it's minimum wage doesn't mean I can live off it.”

WOMAN, 18, VIC

“

Definitely job security, like, making sure it's a long-term thing.”

WOMAN, 24, NSW

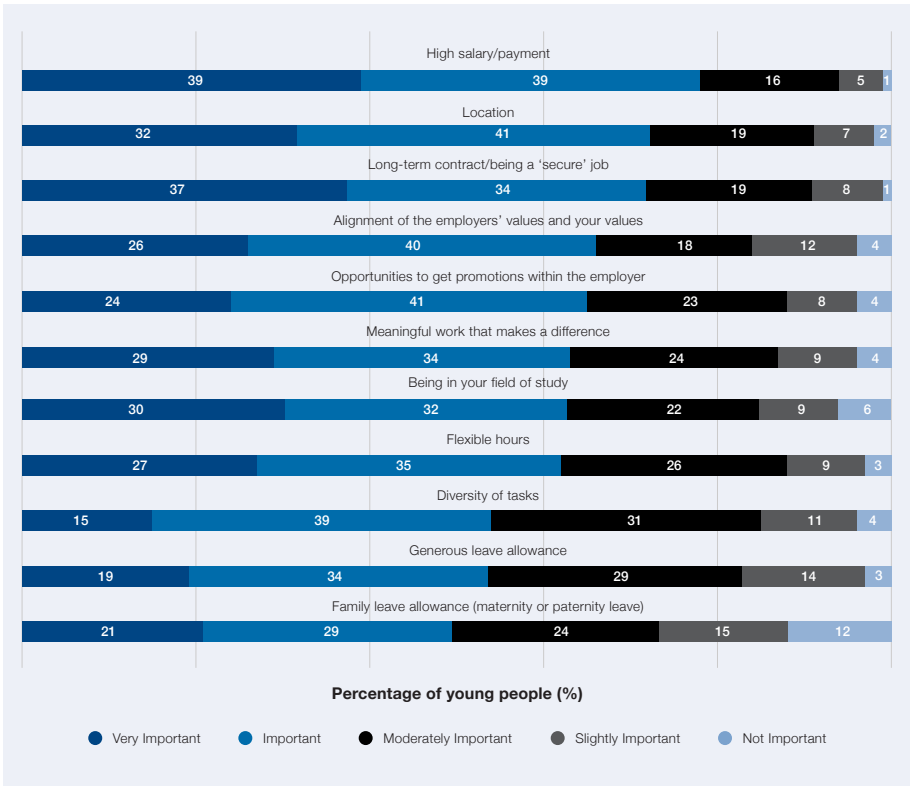


Figure 4.2. Perceived importance of characteristics of work (N = 527)

Other positive aspects of work identified by interview participants included enjoying being around the people they worked with and good relationships between employees and employers. These aspects could make otherwise unappealing jobs more enjoyable:

“

I would say the only redeeming quality about that job really was, were, the other people who I worked with, because they were very, I mean we made good conversation and we just, we were able to relate to the pain of working there.” WOMAN, 19, VIC

Some of the young people we spoke to also pointed to the work they did being interesting and leading to positive experiences, or being fairly easy and undemanding. A number of young people enjoyed feeling that their jobs were meaningful, and could contribute to the happiness of others or to improving society as a whole:

“

It was a nice environment to be in, just, people are happy everywhere, you know. I like to think of it as me contributing to their happiness in a sense.” MAN, 23, VIC

Interviewees also discussed a number of desirable aspects that they considered were important when looking for work. These included having a healthy work environment, having employers that aligned with their ethical beliefs, opportunities for career progression and working in fields that related to their studies:

“

If the company is ethical in their practice, I think, is a big thing for me. There's always things like if there is space to grow or kind of develop or if it's going to be stagnant ... Definitely job security, like making sure it's a long-term thing and I would probably also say, yeah, I guess the skill progression.” WOMAN, 24, NSW

NEGATIVE ASPECTS OF WORK

While relationships with others were generally viewed as a positive aspect of work, some interviewees also pointed to relationships as a negative aspect. This could involve dealing with co-workers and customers, or with management:

The customers were very rude, I was always working during the dinner rush, so I didn't really get to connect with my co-workers very much and it was just very stressful.” WOMAN, 18, VIC

“

I'm not the biggest fan of, like, the hierarchy as well with, like, managers and upper management ... sometimes we're not even seen as humans.”

WOMAN, 21, NSW

Other negative aspects included work being stressful, having to work long hours, work being physically tiring, having poor work life balance, having no chance for career progression, and feeling disrespected in their job:

“

I often found the really long shifts to be a bit grating because they were eight hour shifts and I was just absolutely obliterated by the end of it.” MAN, 20, ACT

“

A bad job would be a bad paying job. A job where you don't feel like your position is respected or you feel as if your position will be replaced the next day if something were to happen to you.”

MAN, 22, WA

Some participants also pointed to specific work tasks that they found unappealing:

“

We have to clean toilets, which is disgusting because we work with truck drivers constantly, so that's not so great.”

WOMAN, 19, WA

BEING A YOUNG PERSON AT WORK

Interview participants also spoke about their experiences of being a young person in the working world. A number of interviewees felt that being a young person did not have a marked effect on their work experiences, or had positive effects:

“

There's obviously not many male teachers, especially young male teachers, so a lot of schools are quite open and want to have a male teacher on their staff. So, it works in my favour.”

MAN, 24, QLD

However, many interviewees felt that being a young person had negative effects on their experiences of work. These included facing discrimination from older people who considered them less experienced or skilled, or feeling that they needed to put in more effort to be respected and recognised. One interviewee noted that they did not mention their age when applying for jobs, as they felt this could be detrimental to their chances of success:

“

They tend to see the age of the person rather than their skill set.” MAN, 20, VIC

“

A lot of places want someone older or more experienced to work for them, so I try and keep my age off of my résumé unless they specifically ask for it, just to try and up my chances of getting a reply.” WOMAN, 18, VIC

Interviewees spoke about the importance of being able to balance work with other aspects of their lives. This was particularly important for young people who were also studying. Many young people felt they were able to adequately balance work and study due to having flexible work or receiving good support from their employers:

“

I'm very close to my boss, she's absolutely amazing and she accommodates all my needs which is incredible. I also, because I'm a trainee, I go to TAFE every Friday, so getting that extra support as well, getting Fridays off to help with my homework. So yes, I'm definitely looked after.” WOMAN, 21, NSW

However, other young people found it difficult to balance work and study. Most interviewees in this situation prioritised work, and felt that they did not have enough time for their studies. Some also discussed how concerns about balancing work and study influenced their decision to work fewer hours, to not work at all, or to leave jobs they had been working at:

“

If I decide to work on a day when I'm supposed to be at uni, I have to then reschedule things and see when I can go back and re-watch the lecture or re-watch the seminar and all that sort of thing.” MAN, 20, VIC

“

I am not [currently working] ... I started working about two years ago. I worked as a bartender for about, like, a couple of months, but then I saw my grades declining and I thought there wasn't any end to it.” MAN, 23, VIC

CAREER ASPIRATIONS

Sixty-three per cent (63%) of young people thought it likely or very likely that they will work in a job they like in the future. A lower proportion of young people with a physical disability (44%) thought it likely or very likely that they will work in a job they like than did those without disabilities (68%).

When discussing their future work aspirations, the two main factors young people pointed to were finding work in the field that they were currently studying, or chasing after passions or interests:

“

I guess it would be health professionals or, like, allied health professionals because I have that degree.” WOMAN, 24, NSW

“

I would like to work in the political field because I've always been really passionate about it and I just have a massive interest in.” WOMAN, 18, VIC

Notably, some interviewees discussed having complex aspirations across multiple fields of work and had supplementary aspirations in case they could not find work in their main area of interest. This speaks to the uncertain and complex worlds of work that young people inhabit, which can require flexibility and adaptable career goals:

“

I'll probably start off working maybe public service ... and I'll see where I go ... I would like to work for a big company I guess, but I guess once you, like, once you get a family you need to be more flexible.” MAN, 18, ACT

A number of participants were happy in their current jobs, and aspired to stay in these careers long term. Some wanted to stay in the same career and progress through various positions in the career hierarchy:

“

My final goal is to become a forensic mortuary technician, so this is my foot set in the door. I will stay in admin for a few years to get that knowledge and experience and then when a job opens up ... I will then apply, hopefully get the job and then keep rising until maybe, you know, manager level in the next 20 or 30 years.” WOMAN, 21, NSW

Some of the young people we spoke to did not have clear career aspirations. However, while they were unsure of their work future, these interviewees discussed seeking jobs that would be enjoyable and able to sustain their broader life goals:

“

I'm really not fussed on what I want to do as a job ... as long as I enjoy it and they see me as a human being, but also as long as I have the freedom to, you know, work on other projects and do other things that I want to do.” WOMAN, 19, SA

Most (91%) young Australians have received some kind of career advice. The most common sources of this advice were parents or carers (49%), teachers at school (32%), friends or peers (30%), teachers at school (32%), friends or peers (30%) (see Figure 4.3).

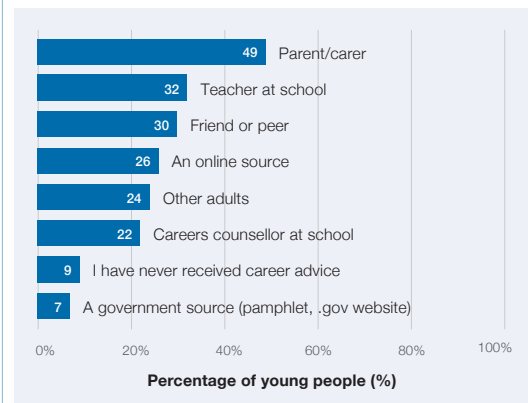


Figure 4.3. Most important source of career advice (N = 527)

Reflecting this, many interviewees nominated family, teachers, and other key relationships as the main sources for their career aspirations:

“

I'd probably say my parents definitely shaped me. They had a huge part in my upbringing and desire to do more. I would probably also say my partner shaped me in kind of yeah, what I'm looking for and what that would mean for the future. I think friends less shaped me and more supported me in choosing what I chose.” WOMAN, 24, NSW

“

I personally really appreciated all my teachers growing up, they were really a father figure in my life and I guess I want to provide that experience that some of my male teachers provided me for other students in a similar position.”

MAN, 24, QLD

Outside of close personal relationships, pursuing lifelong passions was a major influence on young people's career aspirations:

“

The acting, I've been interested in it since I was around five years old ... I joined the theatre when I was like five or six and I'm still doing that to this day.”

WOMAN, 19, SA

Other factors that influenced young people's career aspirations included feeling that they were particularly talented or well suited to a certain field, or a desire to help others:

“

Not to brag but I am pretty flipping good at drawing. I've been practicing for my entire life, so it would seem sort of silly to not use that for something.”

TRANSGENDER PERSON, 20, QLD

I have dealt with some really awful stuff and been through a lot. I know what it's like to be in that deep dark hole of depression ... so I want to be able to help people get out of that hole.” WOMAN, 19, QLD

When looking for work, 39% of young Australians preferred a full-time job, 31% preferred part-time work and 28% preferred casual work. The remaining 2% preferred other arrangements. Young people in older age groups were more likely to prefer a full-time job. A higher proportion of young people who identified as First Nations preferred a full-time job (62%) than a part-time job (19%) or a casual job (16%) compared with other young Australians (38%, 32%, and 29% respectively). Young people with long-term illness (50%) were most likely to prefer a part-time job.

ENABLERS OF FUTURE CAREERS

The majority (85%) of young Australians participated in one or more activities with the intention of improving their chances of getting a job. (See Figure 4.4) The most common activities were seeking advice from parents, carers or friends (47%), developing job application skills (42%), looking for vocational work experience related to their intended career pathway/s (38%) and developing interview skills (36%). The least common activity was seeking advice from a careers counsellor, reported by only 17% of young Australians.

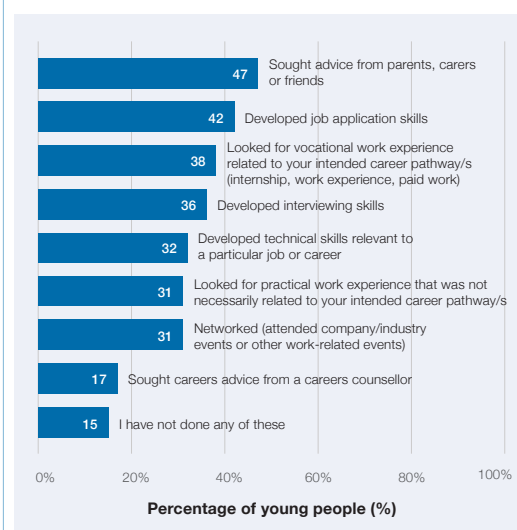


Figure 4.4. Participation in activities to improve employability (N = 527)

Less than half (47%) of young people declared gaining a formal qualification with the intention of getting a job and 49% said they chose specific subjects in their final years of high school with the same intention. Completing a short certificate and volunteering were other activities chosen by 20% and 18% of young Australians, respectively, with the intention of getting a job (see Figure 4.5).

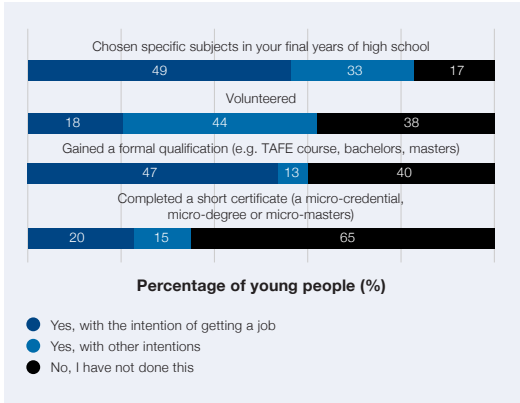


Figure 4.5. Conducting different activities with different intentions (N = 527)

Interviewees saw education as a major enabler for their future careers, though some young people were cynical about the value of formal qualifications. Beyond obtaining degrees, a number of interviewees emphasised the support they had received from their educational institutions as a key enabler:

“

I guess just actually completing studying stuff. Like I just need to tick the boxes, go to uni, probably do a lot more research into career paths and what I actually need to do next.”

WOMAN, 19, QLD

“

I think especially with this uni course ... there is a lot of stuff about how to get a job in the industry, you know. These days they provide a lot of assistance and development into understanding how to actually be successful in the industry.” MAN, 19, QLD

Other key enablers included undertaking internships and gaining real-life work experience. Some young people felt that being a part of certain communities or having connections would also assist them in achieving their career aspirations:

“

I’m looking at a bunch of internships at different companies that I’m interested in ... so I can experience things and maybe learn a bit more.” WOMAN, 21, NSW

“

I’m really lucky in that I’m a nepo baby. My parents have a lot of connections. So, like I don’t really want to rely on them, mostly out of pride, [but] at the very least I always know even if I crash and burn, my parents can, like, help me get something.” TRANSGENDER PERSON, 19, NSW

BARRIERS TO CAREER ASPIRATIONS

Although education was seen as an enabler, some young people also viewed education as a potential barrier; specifically, the need for educational qualifications and the cost of education:

“

You need education to be able to rise in the ranks and get certain positions ... I think it's a barrier because without education, there are some jobs that you actually cannot get.” WOMAN, 24, VIC

“

I think a barrier would be going to university, because the university near me doesn't have that course, so I'd have to move and that's a very costly thing to do.” WOMAN, 19, WA

A number of interviewees mentioned structural barriers that were outside of their control, such as lack of jobs within their desired industries, competition for jobs within the industry, or jobs only available in locations away from where participants lived:

“

There is not too many jobs and it's quite hard to get into the property valuers' job within government in Melbourne. There is plenty of opportunities up in New South Wales, but at this stage, I'm not really willing to move states for a role.” MAN, 20, VIC

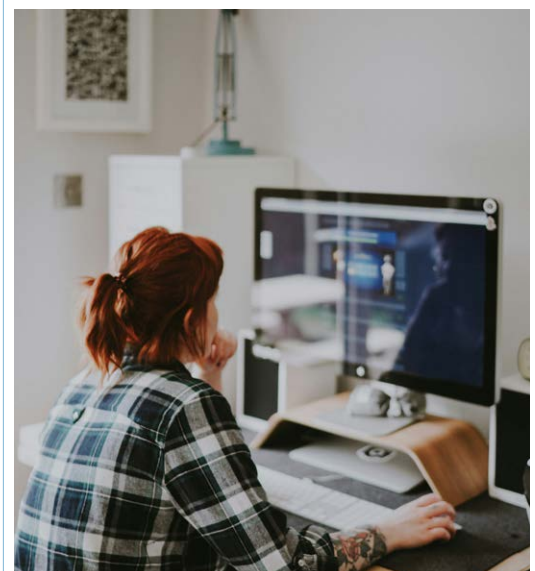
Other barriers included not having enough money, desired career paths being potentially low paying, being inexperienced and general uncertainty about the future. Young women in particular discussed a fear of discrimination and the possibility of starting a family as potential barriers:

“

The biggest thing holding me back is my lack of experience, but there is nowhere I can really go and get any relevant experience because there is no entry level jobs for the kinds of things that I'm looking for.” WOMAN, 18, VIC

“

As a young woman, one of the big things I always think about is, like, babies and marriage and stuff. Again, I'm not planning on getting married any time soon ... but that is always in the back of my head.” WOMAN, 23, NSW



POLICY AND RESEARCH IMPLICATIONS

A number of interview participants also pointed to personal shortcomings, such as not being fit enough for certain jobs, not having clear routines, or not actively working towards their career aspirations, as potential barriers. Many of the young people we spoke to referred to mental health challenges as a key barrier to their career aspirations:

“

I think, probably, just like my mental disposition ... at school I have, like, accommodation, like, disability accommodations, and whilst work does have some of those it's, like, not nearly as, I assume, not nearly as forgiving. So, I think that would be the biggest thing that would hold me back.”

TRANSGENDER PERSON, 19, QLD

Some participants felt that there were no real barriers to their career aspirations, provided that they were willing to work hard and put in the effort:

“

If you put the work in you can do anything, you know. I don't think there is any excuses that I can make ... I don't think there is anything that can hinder me.” MAN, 18, ACT

Young Australians continue to face significant challenges in the labour market, including unemployment, underemployment, insecure work, and workplace discrimination. These challenges intersect with broader issues such as education, health, and socio-economic disadvantage. A coordinated policy approach is needed to safeguard young people's rights, enhance pathways to meaningful work and fosters inclusive workplaces. Targeted support, such as educational institutions and employers providing young people access to internships and other forms of work experience, is valued by young people.

- Unemployment and underemployment continue to impact disproportionate numbers of young people, particularly those in disadvantaged groups, and often for reasons outside of their immediate control. Efforts to address youth unemployment and underemployment must take the complex situations that young people face into account. Addressing youth unemployment and underemployment demands:
 - early intervention case management tailored to disadvantaged youth (e.g. those with disability, caring responsibilities, or regional disadvantage);
 - wrap around supports (financial, social and mentoring) to address structural barriers, particularly for disadvantaged groups; and
 - targeted support for young people in at-risk cohorts, who often experience longer unemployment spells.^{8,9}
- Casual and gig work remain key elements of young people's employment. Recent policy action has begun to address the precarity of young people's work and continued attention is needed to ensure that young people are protected from job insecurity and exploitation. Strengthening protections in casual and gig work requires:
 - extending and enforcing regulations on pay, predictable hours, and leave entitlements;
 - adapting Fair Work legislation to protect young gig and casual workers from exploitation; and
 - promoting employer best practice guidelines on youth employment.^{9,10}

- Healthy relationships and a good work environment continue to be features that young people value in their work. While these require organic development within work places, steps need to be taken to ensure that workplaces provide a safe, healthy and welcoming environment for young people. Fostering healthy and inclusive workplaces requires:
 - workplaces adopting youth-friendly practices, such as mentorship programs, anti-discrimination policies and flexible scheduling;
 - providing accessible reporting mechanisms for harassment or unsafe environments; and
 - ensuring workplace safety and inclusivity, as valued by young people.¹⁰
- Some young people face discrimination in their workplaces and when applying for work. Action must be taken to ensure that young people feel welcome and valued in their places of work and to allow them to access jobs in a fair and equitable manner. To combat discrimination and ensure equitable access, we need to:
 - strengthen legislation and monitoring to prevent workplace discrimination based on age, socio-economic status, or experience;¹⁰
 - incentivise employers to recruit from underrepresented youth groups through grants or subsidies;³ and
 - provide clear, youth-friendly complaint processes.¹⁰
- Pathways to education, training and work experience can be expanded by:
 - increasing access to internships, apprenticeships, traineeships, and work placements, with fair remuneration where possible;^{8,10}
 - strengthening employability skills (literacy, numeracy, career management) in curricula;⁹ and
 - incentivising partnerships between education providers and employers.³

Supporting young Australians will improve their long-term wellbeing and productivity, while also strengthening the national economy. Policy responses must be sustained, evidence-based, and inclusive of young people's voices.

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05

YOUNG PEOPLE AND EDUCATION

KEY FINDINGS

- 1** 49% of young people were studying full-time, 18% were studying part-time, 1% were studying both full-time and part-time and 32% were not studying.
- 2** 30% of those currently studying were doing so exclusively face-to-face, 14% were studying fully online, 51% were studying both face-to-face and online and 4% had some other arrangement.
- 3** 61% of young Australians have taken some form of online informal classes.
- 4** 57% of young people agreed or strongly agreed that their education has prepared them for the future.
- 5** Young people were generally satisfied with their studies, although many felt that they had missed out on the social aspects of a university experience.
- 6** Young people were divided on whether online learning was a positive or negative experience, but some felt that it did not provide a genuine learning experience.
- 7** Young people turned to family, friends, the internet and AI tools as sources of informal learning. They evaluate trustworthiness by checking information across multiple sources and testing it against lived experiences.

REVIEW OF EXISTING DATA

Young Australians felt that increased fees for university programs restrict their choice of career pathways.

EDUCATIONAL ENGAGEMENT

In 2024, 86.6% of young people aged 15–19 were fully engaged in education, training or work, down from 87.3% in 2023.¹ A similar trend was seen among young people aged 20–24, with 75.1% fully engaged in education, training or work in 2024, down from 77.4% in 2023.² Full-time participation rates for younger people of school age were consistently higher, as this age group includes a higher proportion of secondary school students for whom education is compulsory.

Of young people aged 15–19, 81% were studying full-time and 9.1% were studying part-time. More young women (86%) were studying full-time than young men (76%). A higher proportion of gender diverse young people reported not studying (18%), than did young women (7.1%) and young men (12%).¹ For young people who were still in secondary school, 95% stated that they intended to complete Year 12, 61% planned to go to university after school, 37% planned to get a job and 27% planned to travel or take a gap year.¹

Among an older cohort of people aged 19–30 in 2024, 21% were pursuing a trade qualification, 33% were pursuing a university degree, and 2% were pursuing a high school certificate. In this cohort, 9% had gained a high school certificate and were not seeking further education and 35% had gained a university degree.³ Thirty-one per cent of young people aged 19–30 reported that they had decided not to pursue higher education. For 56% of young Australians, financial constraints were a major reason not to pursue higher education, notably higher than for young people globally (40%). Other reasons for not pursuing higher education included a desire for flexibility and learning on own terms (33%), seeking career paths that do not require higher education (31%), concern about future burden of student loans (30%) and family or personal circumstances (30%).

CONCERNS AND EXPERIENCES WITH EDUCATION

School and study were the biggest concern for young people aged 15–19 in 2024 (45%). Young women were more likely to be extremely or very concerned about schooling (45.2%) compared with young men (23.6%).¹ Young Australians aged 19–30 also expressed concerns about higher education systems, including the high cost of tuition (56%), quality of education (30%), length of time required to get a degree (24%), lack of flexibility in learning options (21%) and limited opportunities for practical experience (20%).³

Overall, young people 15–19 were satisfied with their education, with 61% reporting that they were very satisfied or satisfied, while 9.4% reported being dissatisfied or very dissatisfied. Young women were more likely to be very satisfied or satisfied with their education (64%), compared with young men (59%) or gender diverse young people (52%). Gender diverse young people were more likely to be dissatisfied or very dissatisfied (23%) compared to young women (8%) or young men (9.9%).¹

Young Australians aged 12–25 felt that increased fees for university programs restrict their choice of career pathways. Young people also nominated accumulating student loan debt, teacher shortages and barriers to opportunity for rural or underprivileged students as key areas of concern.⁴ These challenges faced by school leavers and university graduates are compounded by a sense that rising costs of education reflect growing intergenerational inequality.⁵



2025 INTERVIEW AND SURVEY FINDINGS

STUDENT EXPERIENCE

According to our survey, 52% of young Australians had completed a post-secondary qualification (including certificate, diploma, advanced diploma, bachelor degree, graduate certificate, graduate diploma and postgraduate degree). Slightly less than half (49%) of young people gained an educational qualification after attending a mixture of online and face-to-face classes, 10% did so only through online classes and 23% did so using only face-to-face classes. Another 1% obtained a qualification through some other arrangement and 17% had not gained any form of educational qualification.

Most of the young people we interviewed had completed secondary level education and viewed their time with mixed feelings. Positive aspects of secondary schooling included the ability to socialise with friends, feeling good about their studies and having good teachers:

“

I actually really did like high school. I think I'm a very sociable person so I loved the social side of high school.”

MAN, 20, VIC

“

Teachers were really good. I went to a pretty small school, so ... you had a much more personal relationship with your teachers.” MAN, 19, QLD

Negative experiences of secondary education included being exposed to bullying, not doing well in their studies, or attending schools with limited resources:

“

High school sucked ... I dealt with bullying and stuff which wasn't great. The school didn't handle it very well ... by the time I was leaving school, they had built up their, like, student wellbeing centre or whatever, but for me it was a bit too little, too late. WOMAN, 19, QLD

Young people who were currently studying at university also expressed mixed feelings about their experiences. Positive aspects of being a university student included being interested in what they were studying, practical learning, the flexibility of study and feelings of freedom and independence. Overall, interviewees found university to be more positive than secondary education:

“

I'm really enjoying it, it's a really good degree in terms of getting me to think about the art form and the craft in a way I hadn't really considered it and it's a very practical degree.” MAN, 19, QLD

“

I like being a uni student, I find I have a lot more freedom than with high school and I get to see my friends a lot more often.” WOMAN, 19, VIC

However, some interviewees emphasised the limited social aspects of university life. Other negative experiences included feeling that their studies were pointless, a lack of support, not being interested in their studies, and university not being what they expected. Indeed, some students felt that they had missed out on a university experience:

“

I just don't see university as something that benefits me in any sort of real way ... it feels like I've been coerced into going to uni because that's what society expects you to do ... it's just like, it's just a necessity to where I want to get to.”

MAN, 20, ACT

“

I was more excited about ... the idea of what uni brings, like meeting a bunch of people, friends, people in all different studies ... but I didn't get the uni experience of what I was expecting.”

WOMAN, 21, NSW

Almost half (49%) of young people surveyed were studying full-time, 18% were studying part-time, 1% were studying both full-time and part-time and 32% were not studying. A number of interview participants were not currently studying. Reasons for not studying included being in full-time work and having already graduated from tertiary study. A number of interviewees had previously been studying at university, but had withdrawn from their degrees. Some participants also expressed a desire to go university but were unable to do so, while others had decided not to go to university. For students who had not gone to university, high fees played an important role in their decision:

“

I was saying the entire time I was in high school, I wanted to go to uni ... halfway through Year 12 I was looking through all the courses and looking at the HECS that came along with them and I was like, this is crazy, this is so much money.”

MAN, 23, SA

“

Truthfully there was nothing at uni that interested me, any careers that it would be leading me to ... also because university is so expensive, I wouldn't want to get myself in a HECS debt for the rest of my life.”

WOMAN, 19, WA

Among those who were currently studying, 30% were doing so exclusively face-to-face, 14% were studying fully online, 51% were studying both face-to-face and online, and 4% had some other arrangement. Interview participants were ambivalent about online studying, with some feeling that it offered greater flexibility, while others felt that online learning made it harder to engage:

“

I'm using an online study, so I don't need to travel, I don't waste time or spend money on travel which is good and I'm finding it very fun.”

WOMAN, 24, VIC

“

I don't really like Zoom tutorials ... I never watched a single lecture after they all became online recordings, I just couldn't personally stand watching them.”

MAN, 24, QLD

Our survey also asked young people about their participation in micro-certifications, defined as short courses, offered by a university or Technical and Further Education (TAFE) institute, that certify those who complete them as having a particular skill. More than one-third (36%) of young Australians reported that they had participated in a micro-credential, micro-degree or micro-masters, 11% said they participated in a micro-credential through online classes only, 15% did so through face-to-face classes only and 12% had a mix of face-to-face and online classes.

When asked about skills gained through formal education, 77% of young Australians were very or somewhat satisfied with the development of problem-solving skills, 73% were very or somewhat satisfied with the development of critical thinking skills and 68% were very or somewhat satisfied with the development of group work and collaboration skills. Young people tended to be less satisfied with learning about environmental issues, with 47% being very or somewhat satisfied in this area (see Figure 5.1).

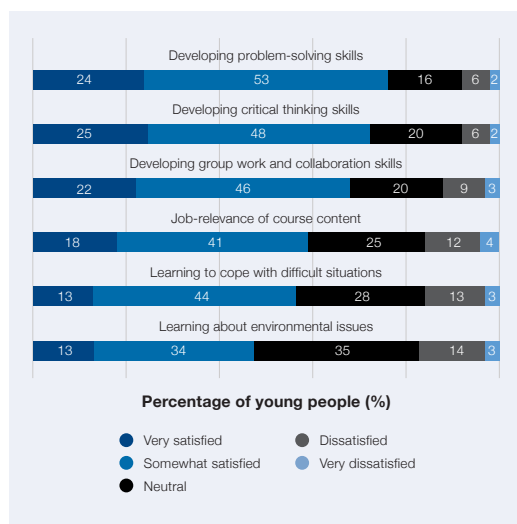


Figure 5.1. Satisfaction with aspects of formal education (N = 527)

More than half (57%) of young people agreed or strongly agreed that their education has prepared them for the future. The ACT (80%) had the highest proportion of young people agreeing or strongly agreeing that their education has prepared them for the future compared with other states or territories (between 27% and 76%). More young people without disabilities (62%) thought that higher education prepared

them for the future than did those with a physical disability (37%), long-term illness (40%), mental health conditions (48%), something else (54%) and multiple conditions (45%).

Overall, the young people we spoke to were ambivalent about how well schooling had prepared them for later studies, employment, or life after education. Some interviewees believed that education had prepared them well, but that this required personal effort and an engagement with broader aspects of education. Other participants felt that education had given them academic knowledge, but did not provide real life skills such as cooking, public speaking, budgeting, taxes, applying for rent or workplace skills:

“

If you are disciplined enough yes, but if you are not then you might not be well prepared ... If you just purely focus on the studying and then do nothing else for the rest of your time, then you are actually missing out something compared to your peers.” MAN, 22, SA

“

They are making you book smart and everything, but I feel like they don't teach you the realities of life and being an adult ... they didn't really teach you much about the real stuff of life like budgeting and taxes and all that sort of stuff, and the prices of everything.”

WOMAN, 23, QLD

Young people were ambivalent about how well schooling had prepared them for later studies, employment, or life after education.

CHANGES TO EDUCATION

As in previous years, interviewees who had not completed secondary education expressed some regret at not completing high school, focusing on both the educational and social aspects of graduation:

“

I would have liked to be able to finish high school. I don't know, I missed out on, you know, like formal and ... semi-formal ... events, social stuff.”

WOMAN, 19, QLD

For interviewees who were studying at university, a number expressed a desire to have studied a different degree, to have begun their current degree earlier, or to have completed their education sooner:

“

I think if ... I'd done a three-year degree where they gave you the time to, like, mingle with students ... I think I would have enjoyed it a lot more.”

WOMAN, 21, NSW

“

Instead of doing part-time, continuing doing full-time, because I would have finished my uni degree a lot earlier and started working more early.”

WOMAN, 24, NSW

Personal engagement continues to be an aspect that participants wanted to change about their educational experiences. This included putting more effort into their studies, engaging with the opportunities provided by their institutions, or engaging with the social aspects of education:

“

I would have probably liked to have joined some of the clubs at uni, because I've learnt from friends recently, that's the way you get to meet girls ... Maybe I should have kept in contact with more of the people that were in my classes.”

MAN, 21, WA

Other participants wished the content of their education could be improved to be more interesting or relevant, or more practical in preparing them for future work and adult life:

“

I wish the work was a little more interesting to me. I suppose part of the reason that I dislike this course so much is because it's all ... nothing work, it just feels pointless.”

MAN, 18, TAS

“

There should be more practical onsite work and placements, as really working on the job is the only thing that really properly prepares you ... There is some useful theory and background knowledge that is developed at university but there is not enough that develops your actual on the job skills.”

MAN, 24, QLD

While teachers were generally seen positively, some interviewees were dissatisfied with some aspects of their teaching. These included wanting more personal engagement with teachers and having teachers who were passionate about their subjects. Young people wanted less emphasis on testing and an updated the curriculum. They also expressed a desire for increased levels of support, particularly in areas such as mental health, financial wellbeing, and support for studies:

“

A few of my teachers were very, ‘Here’s a PowerPoint, copy from the PowerPoint’ ... I didn’t really learn well from that. I prefer discussions and question and answers, that sort of teaching, rather than just copy this, here’s a test on everything you’ve written down.” WOMAN, 23, QLD

“

Mental health support in school ... just wasn’t very good ... there was just, I don’t know, not a lot of help ... that’s just really shit, in my opinion.”

WOMAN, 19, QLD

When discussing what aspects of education they felt they had missed out on, young people often expressed missing out on forming meaningful relationships. This included both friendships and finding potential romantic partners:

“

For the past year and a half, I kind of just went to class and then went home again and I was like, ‘Why don’t I know anyone? Why do I have no friends?’”

WOMAN, 19, QLD

“

My mum and dad met at university at the pub ... that doesn’t happen anymore. Yeah, so yeah, not very social at uni. It’s like go to study and just head home.” MAN, 21, WA

Online learning continued to divide opinion among young people, with some feeling that the increase in online learning led to them missing out on important aspects of their education. Some participants expressed a desire for less online learning, while also recognising that their peers might not agree:

“

I feel like everything is going online a little too much ... It sort of takes back from the university experience and it’s more like I’m learning from my laptop, not by a university I’m paying thousands of dollars to.” MAN, 23, VIC

“

Students would complain about it, but you would learn more ... if you were in person more ... it’s more flexible but it means it’s harder to turn off and on ... just, like, more traditional university would be nice.” WOMAN, 23, NSW

While some students value the flexibility of online learning, others feel it diminishes engagement and educational quality.

INFORMAL LEARNING

Young people looked to informal learning for acquiring practical skills such as cooking, household repairs, managing finances, driving, and applying for jobs:

“

Managing money, you learn, like, from other adults, like your parents, you learn from friends ... Another thing is driving, like, driving you get taught by friends and family.” WOMAN, 24, VIC

Young people also emphasised the importance of informal learning as a supplement to formal education and as a way to develop and pursue hobbies. Some interviewees discussed how informal learning was a key site for personal development, with human skills such as resilience being learnt outside of formal educational:

“

I've learnt a great deal from YouTube, you know those videos where they have some Indian guy explaining computer problems and all that ... I actually self-taught myself a lot of film stuff, like how to properly frame and do lighting.”

MAN, 21, WA

“

A certain amount of resilience in different situations and how to keep trying even when things kind of don't go the way you wish them to ... I guess that counts as an informal as well.”

WOMAN, 24, NSW

Young people looked to family and friends as a valuable source of informal learning. Some interviewees also stressed the importance of community and forming connections with others for learning outside of formal education:

“

I'd look towards my mum for that ... I work with my colleagues, I talk with them. So, I guess I seek advice from those around me.” MAN, 24, QLD

“

I learned more about people, you know, like, connecting. More like worldly stuff, like stuff that really matters.” MAN, 22, WA

The internet continued to be a major source of information for young people. Google and YouTube were popular sites for informal learning and social media apps such as Instagram or TikTok were popular for keeping up to date with world events. Notably, some young people turned to AI tools such as ChatGPT to assist their informal learning:

“

It would just be like Google, just looking up different things, even TikTok a little bit. I search out TikTok videos. Nowadays I use ChatGPT a lot for questions ... I find it to be quite good.” MAN, 20, VIC

Almost two-thirds (61%) of young Australians have taken some form of informal online classes. The most common places for informal learning online were through an online platform (31%), social media (30%), a training company's own online platform (24%), and through any other online platform (13%) (see Figure 5.2). More young people living in metropolitan areas (64%) participated in online informal learning compared with those living in regional (45%) and remote (57%) areas.

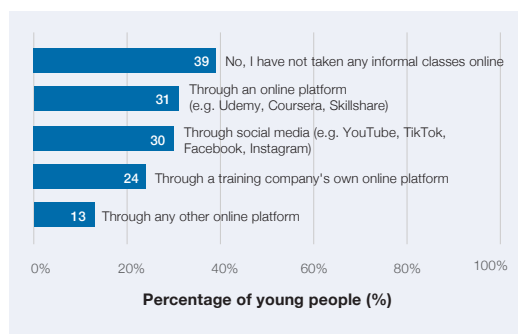


Figure 5.2. Participation in informal online learning (N = 527)

EVALUATING INFORMATION

Young people's main method for evaluating the trustworthiness of online information was to check multiple sources; they saw doing so as a personal responsibility:



You can't really take one bit of information, like, at face value, you have to do a bit more research and if things correlate to each other ... you just do research, see if multiple things are the same sort of thing, and come to your own decision.” MAN, 20, ACT

Young people were more likely to believe information if it had come from trusted sources, such as the ABC, university databases and government websites. Trust could also be established if there were many positive comments available and if information appeared professionally designed and well presented:



If it's a government website or ends in .gov, I find that's usually got good backing. Otherwise if it is, like, a written paper or, like, documentation by ... a certain profession.” WOMAN, 23, VIC



The first thing I would look at would be overall UI design, like, the website design. Because often the lower quality, more mediocre sources have really, really poorly designed web pages that look like they're from the mid-1990s, while more prestigious stuff will have more funding and thus have better website design.” MAN, 20, ACT

Participants also stressed the importance of personal experience. This could be gained by discussing information with others or by testing information for themselves:



I'd send it to my mum. I'd be like, 'Is this right?' ... I feel like you need experience from someone to get that experience.” WOMAN, 21, NSW



Trial and error. Like you've got to try it ... If they tell you something and then you try it, it's pretty easy to see whether it works or not.” MAN, 23, SA

POLICY AND RESEARCH IMPLICATIONS

A number of participants were confident in their skills in evaluating information, based on an intuitive sense for determining trustworthiness. This was the case with AI generated content, which was seen as generally untrustworthy:

“

Just the gut feel mostly ... I don't find it very difficult to differentiate between something that's a fact and something that's an opinion and if something doesn't seem right, it usually feels pretty obvious.” MAN, 20, ACT

“

Since the rise of AI slop and all that in YouTube, you can quite often tell when something's, like, terrible on the internet ... you can just tell.” MAN, 21, WA

Some interviewees discussed the difficulty of determining if information was trustworthy, and expressed a degree of resignation about information being unreliable:

“

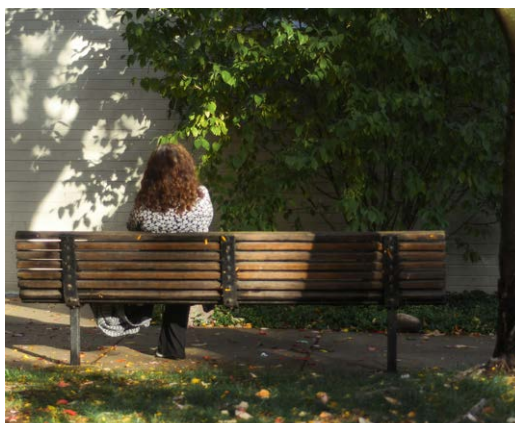
Nowadays there is a lot of hoaxes, a lot of truth going out ... even with, let's say, news nowadays, there is so much propaganda in the news that you don't know what's real and what's not.”

WOMAN, 21, NSW

Young people value education and are generally satisfied that it prepares them for their future, but high course fees can inhibit career choices and rising student debt is leaving some young people questioning whether university is worth the cost. While online learning offers flexibility, concerns about quality, engagement and access underscore the importance of better hybrid models, staff training, infrastructure and student input into their design. Responsible integration of AI in education has also emerged as a key issue in 2025.

- The average HECS-HELP debt has more than doubled since 2010.⁶ Young people increasingly see university as too expensive and many are uncertain whether the investment is worthwhile. Reducing financial barriers requires:
 - expanding subsidies and targeted grants for low- and middle-income students;
 - reviewing course cost structures to better align fees with long-term benefits; and
 - strengthening policies that reduce debt burden, such as recent student debt indexation reforms.⁷
- Students reported missing out on social interaction and connection, especially due to COVID-19 disruptions, which negatively impacted wellbeing.^{8, 9} Supporting social and community aspects of education requires:
 - investing in campus programs promoting student belonging, peer mentoring, and clubs;
 - providing safe, welcoming student spaces and wellbeing supports; and
 - monitoring belonging and social satisfaction as part of regular student experience surveys.^{8, 9, 10}
- While some students value the flexibility of online learning, others feel it diminishes engagement and educational quality. Barriers to online learning include lack of access to digital services and support.^{11, 12} Ensuring genuinely flexible and high-quality online learning requires:
 - improving hybrid learning options to support diverse student needs;
 - investing in staff training for online pedagogy and robust digital infrastructure;

- evaluating effectiveness of online modes for different cohorts;^{11, 12} and
 - actively incorporating direct student input in course design to improve relevance and satisfaction.¹³
- Many students regret course choices. They want more personalised guidance and transparent information that helps them align their studies with their interests and possible career outcomes.¹³ Providing this support requires:
 - radically overhauling career counselling and programs to help the transition from secondary to tertiary education and during post-secondary education; and
 - adopting a holistic approach that incorporates up-to-date advice with wellbeing support.
 - More young people are using AI tools for informal learning. Universities and training providers are beginning to explore co-designed approaches to embed AI responsibly into teaching.¹⁴ Harnessing AI tools responsibly requires:
 - continuing to fund research into AI's role in learning, including informal contexts;
 - developing guidelines co-designed with students on ethical AI use; and
 - ensuring equitable access to AI resources and literacy training.¹⁴



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06

YOUNG PEOPLE, HEALTH AND WELLBEING

KEY FINDINGS

- 1** 26% of young Australians rated their mental health as poor or very poor; 41% rated it as good or excellent.
- 2** 99% of young Australians reported having at least one feeling of anxiety or pessimism.
- 3** 23% of young people sought and received mental health support, 9% sought but did not receive such support and 65% did not seek mental health support.
- 4** 18% experienced food insecurity at some point in the past 12 months. Lack of money was a key factor in young people's experience of food insecurity, with some turning to less healthy or potentially dangerous foods as a result.
- 5** Young people took a multidimensional view of health, made up of a number of intersecting aspects, including the ability to engage in the activities they wanted to and feeling in control of their lives.
- 6** Young people generally felt that support for their health was good, but professional services and healthcare systems could be expensive and difficult to access.

REVIEW OF EXISTING DATA

Mental health support continues to be inaccessible for many young Australians.

MENTAL AND PHYSICAL HEALTH

Mental health is an important concern for young people aged 15–19, being the third biggest concern (20%), after school and study (45%) and personal relationships (21%).¹ Similarly, mental health was the second highest concern for young people aged 19–30 (25%), after cost of living (55%).²

More than half of young people aged 15–19 (57%) reported overall happiness with their lives. A higher proportion of young men (61%) reported overall happiness, compared with young women (54%) and gender diverse young people (35%). A greater proportion of gender diverse young people (33%) reported feeling sad or very sad, than did young women (8.5%) and young men (7.8%).¹ For young Australians aged 19–30, 49% felt stressed or anxious most or all of the time in 2024. The main causes of stress or anxiety were their longer-term financial future (47%), day to day finances (42%), health and welfare of family (38%), family or personal relationships (35%), and physical health (33%).²

The proportion of young Australians aged 18–24 who were currently or previously in mental health therapy increased from 48% in 2023 to 53% in 2024. Factors that contributed to poor mental health included experiencing anxiety (56%), low self-esteem (43%), poor body image (41%), social anxiety (40%), loneliness (35%), and depression (35%). Those who reported their physical health as fair or poor decreased from 33% to 29%. Diet and exercise were key aspects of physical health, with 81% of young people saying they exercised at least weekly, and 78% saying that their diet was extremely, very, or somewhat healthy.³

In a 2024 survey of young Queenslanders, 87% of young people aged 18–25 reported negative changes to their health and wellbeing in the previous year. These included feeling more stressed or anxious (53%), having lower energy than usual (45%), putting on weight (35%), being less physically active (35%), having more body aches (34%), being less resilient or capable of bouncing back (26%) and worse eating habits (22%).⁴ Young Australians aged 18–24 also reported that figuring out their future (56%), fatigue and energy levels (56%), cost of living (53%), burnout (51%) and mental health (48%) negatively impacted their wellbeing.³

SUPPORT FOR MENTAL HEALTH

Mental health support continues to be inaccessible for many young Australians aged 12–25.⁵ Out-of-pocket costs for youth accessing mental health services rose 79% between 2020 and 2023, limiting access.⁶ Barriers are greatest in rural and remote areas.⁷ Addressing this requires developing partnerships between youth and welfare services, maintaining partnerships with specialised mental health services, and a national network of youth services.⁸

Faced with this inaccessibility, many young people turned to social media. Seventy-three per cent of young people aged 16–25 have used social media for mental health support, with 51% of young people using it as a substitute for professional mental health support. However, 47% of young people also reported that using social media encouraged them to seek professional help, with 40% going on to receive professional support.⁹

Young people used social media to find practical coping strategies (72%), reassurance (71%), information on specific mental health concerns (69%) and connection with others (65%). Mental health professionals were the most trusted source of online mental health support (53%), followed by content creators with personal experience (47%). Young people's preferred platforms for mental health support were TikTok (31%), YouTube (26%) and Instagram (15%).⁹

2025 INTERVIEW AND SURVEY FINDINGS

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE HEALTHY?

Young people understood being healthy as multidimensional, encompassing aspects such as physical, mental, financial, spiritual and emotional health. Many interviewees stressed how various facets of health intersected, with overall health and wellbeing based on a need to balance these aspects:

“

You can look at physical health, mental health and like spiritual health, I guess. But healthy, I guess, just means that today, like, you are able to be happy and do all the things that you love.”

WOMAN, 19, VIC

“

You can be mentally healthy, physically healthy and emotionally healthy which is under that as well. So for me, I want to make sure I'm balancing.” MAN, 22, NSW

Some young people took a broader view of health, pointing to aspects such as self-care, being considerate of oneself and others, maintaining spiritual focus and having a clear purpose:

“

Being healthy means taking care of yourself, loving yourself ... discipline, looking out for others as well. Just, yeah, just considering and just being self-aware.” MAN, 22, WA

“

I think having something like a purpose to live for is probably the most crucial thing to being mentally sound and being mentally healthy.” MAN, 18, ACT

Some participants, particularly those faced with complex physical or mental health concerns, understood health in terms of the issues they faced. For these participants, being healthy meant being free from ailments and free from the need for constant care and medical attention:

“

When I think of my health and stuff, that's usually what I first think of, like, my ailments, essentially.”

TRANSGENDER PERSON, 19, NSW

With regards to physical health, many young people understood being healthy as a capacity to perform a variety of everyday actions such as walking, running or playing sports and being free from physical ailments such as obesity, pain or diseases.

“

Being able to go for a walk or a hike without feeling nauseous or lightheaded ... regular physical activity and having the energy to do that.” WOMAN, 19, SA

Many interviewees pointed to the importance of exercise as a way to maintain and improve physical health. This included general forms of exercise such as walking or stretching, as well as going to the gym or playing sports. Young people also focused on eating balanced and nutritious meals, eating vegetables and avoiding junk food. Some young people also worked physically demanding jobs, which they saw as helping to keep them healthy:

“

Having a balanced nutritional diet and, like, regular consistent exercise, whether that be ... going to the gym and going for runs and going for walks or, like, doing sports or things like that, those are all really important.” MAN, 19, QLD

“

Work definitely does help since I'm constantly lifting heavy stuff and moving and going up down, up down.”

WOMAN, 19, WA

Some interviewees faced a range of health challenges and thought that good health was not easily achievable for themselves or other young people. Factors contributing to this included genetic conditions, mental ill health, chronic diseases, lack of financial stability, and societal and personal pressures to maintain an ideal of health:

“

I don't know if there is, like, an end point or an attainable goal there, but I know that right now I'm not it, it doesn't feel like it. I don't know anyone my age that feels very healthy or very stable either, so I don't know, not really sure.”

WOMAN, 19, QLD

MENTAL HEALTH STATUS

Slightly more than one-quarter (26%) of young Australians rated their mental health as poor or very poor, while 41% rated it as good or excellent. A lower proportion of young men rated their mental health as poor or very poor (18%) compared with young women (34%) or those who identified as non-binary/gender diverse (46%). A higher proportion of young men rated their mental health as good or excellent (49%) than did young women (34%) or non-binary/gender diverse young people (10%). A higher proportion of young people who identified as First Nations (40%) rated their mental health as poor or very poor compared with other young Australians (26%). A lower proportion of young people who identified as First Nations (35%) rated their mental health as good or excellent compared with other young Australians (41%).

More than one-fifth (23%) of young people sought and received mental health support, 9% sought but did not receive support and 65% did not seek mental health support. The remaining 2% preferred not to respond. Non-binary and gender diverse young people were more likely to report seeking and receiving mental health support (56%) compared with young women (30%) and young men (14%).

Almost all (99%) young Australians reported having at least one feeling of anxiety or pessimism to some extent (including rarely, sometimes, often, or very often). Young people reported that they often or very often worried about their ability to live a happy and healthy life in the future (51%), felt like they were missing out on being young (46%), worried about their ability to cope with everyday tasks in the future (40%), felt like they had 'lost' a year of their lives (37%) and worried or were anxious about the current or upcoming political events (37%) (see Figure 6.1). Although these feelings were broadly shared among demographic groups, young people with disabilities and young people who identified as non-binary/gender diverse were more likely to report having these feelings.

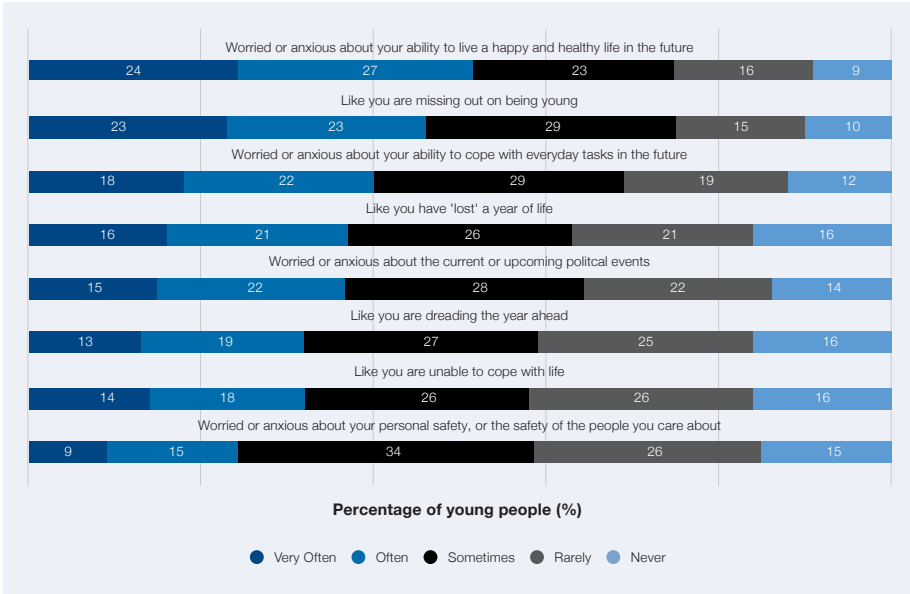


Figure 6.1. Feelings of pessimism and anxiety (N = 527)

LOOKING AFTER MENTAL HEALTH

The young people we spoke to had a broad understanding of mental health and discussed being mentally healthy as being comfortable with oneself and having the capacity to engage in a range of activities. Mental health was also understood as feeling in control of one’s emotions:

“I think there is definitely an aspect of it that requires you to understand who you are as a person and, like, being comfortable with who you are and then also growing to be, like, what you want to be.” MAN, 19, QLD

“It’s sort of stability ... it’s me feeling in control of my emotions ... not my emotions controlling me. It’s a sense of calm; it’s structure and schedules.” WOMAN, 23, NSW

Young people also spoke about the importance of maintaining mental health and how they tried to practice positive thinking and avoid falling into patterns of mental ill health:

“I think it’s important to be reflective and kind of pay attention to what you are thinking and how you are thinking. I think your thought processes have a really big impact on how you approach the world. I think a lot of people get caught up in the negative and let that negative take control of everything. I try not to, I try to be fairly positive.”

MAN, 19, QLD

In lieu of professional help, some young people turned to alternative means of mental health support, such as social media or AI.

Other interviewees discussed more active means of maintaining good mental health, including engaging in activities that they enjoyed and doing regular physical exercise:

“

Going for a spirited drive or a motorcycle ride. That helps a lot ... you have to be so concentrated on operating the machine and going around, you just don't have any opportunity to be thinking about anything that makes you unhappy.”

MAN, 20, ACT

“

I have been doing water colouring recently. It helps me not look at my laptop or phone, so I can tune the world out and not have to worry ... I've also been riding my bike recently around my neighbourhood, just to get some air and exercise in.”

WOMAN, 19, VIC

One particularly important way for young people to stay mentally healthy was by maintaining strong connections and relationships with their family, friends, and communities:

“

The most important thing, like, you should never stop talking, whether that's to your friends, your family or therapist or your cat ... if you need help, accepting help and seeking out that help.”

WOMAN, 18, VIC

Professional help was also seen as a positive way to maintain mental health, although this could be hard to access for some young people. Some participants who were able to access professional support acknowledged that they were in privileged positions and that support would be more difficult to access for others:

“

[My therapist] has helped me through so much ... she's absolutely amazing ... truthfully, I think therapy is an amazing tool and I don't understand why more people don't use it.”

WOMAN, 19, WA

“

I'm in a very privileged position: my mum is a doctor. It meant that not only was I identified very early on and diagnosed very early on, the quality of mental health practitioners I was able to see was very high.”

WOMAN, 23, NSW

In lieu of professional help, some young people turned to alternative means of mental health support, such as social media or AI, although these were usually understood as inferior alternatives. A number of interviewees described having limited support and strategies for maintaining mental health and waited for episodes of ill health to pass.

“

Yeah, this sounds so depressing, but I was at one point talking to ChatGPT and telling it all this depressing stuff ... But I know it's, like, it's not a real person, so it's, yeah.”

MAN, 21, WA

“

Usually I just, like, sleep it off honestly ... shower and ... hopefully get, like, dinner if I can ... I've learned ... not to beat myself up.” TRANSGENDER PERSON, 19, NSW

BARRIERS AND SUPPORTS FOR HEALTH

Many interviewees expressed difficulty in maintaining their ideal of health and faced a number of barriers in doing so. One major barrier was cost, with young people feeling that they could not afford nutritious food, health services, or professional support:

“

The better medication costs more money, going to the gym costs money ... paying doctors' appointments for, like, X-rays or anything more to look for the root of the cause of the problem [costs money].” MAN, 24, VIC

Other barriers to maintaining health included a lack of time, balancing life with work and studies, lacking knowledge about ways to maintain health and cultural pressures:

“

I still don't understand about mental health ... I feel like I even don't understand whether I'm depressed or not.” WOMAN, 23, VIC

“

I have a good mate, but his family kind of sees it as taboo to be sad or depressed, you know, men aren't supposed to cry, which I believe was absolute bull. We are all human, we all deserve to have a good cry after a bad day ... there is help if you seek it, but it's the seeking part that's really difficult for young teens.” WOMAN, 21, NSW

The young people we spoke to generally felt that support for maintaining their health was good, particularly as Australia had social healthcare systems such as Medicare:

“

I think Australia is really good with health just because of our health, because of Medicare. So, it's really, really easy to just take care of your health when it is bad.” WOMAN, 24, VIC

However, some young people also discussed how receiving specific forms of support that they needed could be difficult. Factors that made accessing health support difficult included not qualifying for certain types of government support, encountering unsympathetic medical practitioners, long wait times, and having difficulties finding the right healthcare professional:

“

I'm diabetic. For some reason the government says, 'Oh, you are 21! Oh, you don't have diabetes anymore, so we are not going to pay for a lot of things now!' ... I have to kind of buy that pump and it's like a \$40,000 pump which I can't pay for.” WOMAN, 21, NSW



“

It took ages ... to actually find a psychologist. Like, that took a long time and had I needed it immediately, it could have been a problem.” MAN, 20, ACT

When asked about ways in which support for their health could be improved, the young people we spoke to emphasised the importance of making current services more affordable and accessible and making sure that support systems operated as intended:

“

Making it cheaper ... like, [mental health practitioners] need to get paid really well because what they do is amazing. I feel like the fees are really high, or the government should help out a lot more than they do. Like, put it on Medicare completely.” WOMAN, 23, QLD

“

Not necessarily that we need new services, we just need the existing services to be free, accessible and at a higher standard than they already are.”

WOMAN, 19, QLD

DIET AND FOOD INSECURITY

Eating well was seen by many young people as an important part of health and wellbeing, with interviewees highlighting the importance of balanced nutrition and avoiding sugary and highly processed food. This contributed to both physical and mental wellbeing:

“

As my mental health has gotten better and I have matured a little bit I know that food is a human right and that includes me and it's something that is worth me spending my money on.”

WOMAN, 19, SA

Despite this, some young people expressed difficulties maintaining a healthy and balanced diet due to a range of issues, including addiction to junk food, poor self-discipline, not being able to cook for themselves and over-reliance on food delivery services:

“

I lived in town for about six months maybe three years ago and I'd never put on weight so fast, because there's just Door Dash and, like, deliveries and, like, I'd get hungry at 11 o'clock at night and I'd be, like, fuck it I'll just order a pizza, like, it was so easy. I was spending heaps of money on it as well.”

MAN, 23, SA

Less than one-fifth (18%) of young Australians experienced food insecurity at some point in the past 12 months. A higher proportion of young people living in regional areas (31%) reported experiencing food insecurity compared with those in metropolitan (16%) and remote (15%) areas. A higher proportion of young people from a medium socioeconomic background (24%) reported experiencing food insecurity compared with those from low (15%) and high (14%) socioeconomic backgrounds. First Nations young people were more likely to experience food insecurity (46%) than other young Australians (16%), as were young people with a physical disability (34%) compared with young Australians without a disability (12%).

At least once in the past 12 months, 68% of young Australians ate only few kinds of food, 64% ate less than that they thought they should, 60% were hungry but did not eat, 60% were unable to eat healthy and nutritious food, 51% had to skip meals, 51% worried they would not have enough food to eat, 46% lived in a household that ran out of food and 42% went without eating for a whole day due to a lack of money (see Figure 6.2). Young people with disabilities and who identify as First Nations were more likely to experience all these situations.

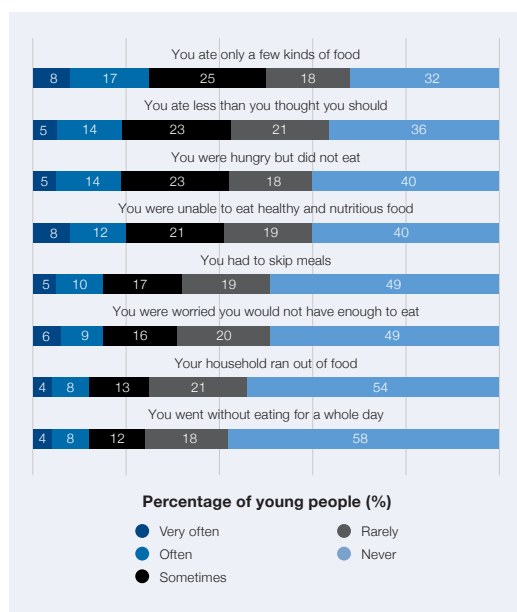


Figure 6.2. Problems with accessing food (N = 527)

Lack of money also prevented 76% of young Australians from going out to eat with friends or family, 43% of young Australians shopped for food more than an hour away from home and, for 61%, the food that they wanted to buy was not available in the suburb or town where they lived (see Figure 6.3). This was especially the case for young people with a physical disability, all (100%) of whom reported that they could not go out to eat with friends or family due to lack of money and that they shopped for food more than an hour from home. A high proportion (85%) of young people who reported a mental health condition also could not go out to eat with friends or family due to lack of money. Almost all (93%) young people who identified as First Nations reported that they could not go out to eat with friends or family due to lack of money and 80% reported that the food they wanted to buy was not available in the suburb or town where they lived.

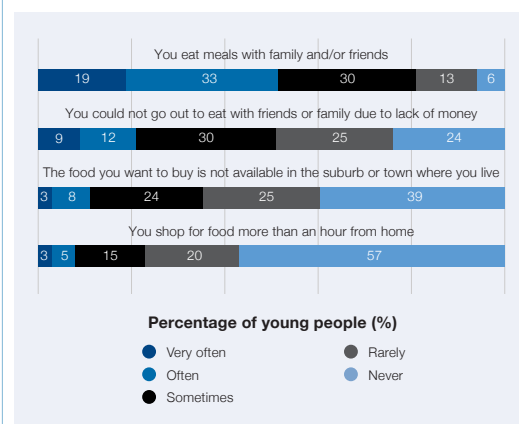


Figure 6.3. Other experiences with accessing food (N = 527)

This was reflected in interviews. Many young people reported that they had experienced food insecurity due to financial reasons and that this was a major consideration when deciding what they were able or not able to eat:

Many young people reported that they had experienced food insecurity due to financial reasons.

“

I was unemployed, I wasn't able to buy the nutrients that I need, the protein that I need, the produce, I wasn't able to get those items that my body needed.”

MAN, 22, NSW

Financial concerns also led some young people to purchase and eat food that was less healthy or potentially dangerous, such as food that had passed its use-by date. However, young people felt that they were forced to take these options due to lack of finances:

“

We always eat cheap food. We always eat discounted food ... it's just, like, been reduced because it's going out of date or out of date yoghurt, that kind of thing. Probably just lots of mould and slugs and whatever else is in there.”

WOMAN, 18, VIC

“

When I'm looking at pasta it's like \$2 verses like \$7, it's like well, one is probably slightly better for you and like slightly, you know, less likely to give you cancer, but I'll take cancer over spending \$5 more.” MAN, 19, QLD

Some young people also expressed not being able to eat the food they wanted due to health reasons, such as being on restrictive diets or due to medical reasons, or because certain foods were unavailable in their region because of broader supply issues:

“

Tomatoes have been not very popular at the minute, because it's been cold, and I love tomatoes. Or eggs – eggs had that big shortage and I couldn't grab eggs for a while.” WOMAN, 23, QLD

Interviewees who had not experienced food insecurity often acknowledged that they were in privileged positions, and could rely on support from their families. Some young people also stated that without these supports, they would be in more precarious situations:

“

My mum's always worked very hard, so she's always been able to support us and get us the kind of food we need to be able to eat, so really all thanks to her.”

WOMAN, 18, VIC

POLICY AND RESEARCH IMPLICATIONS

Young Australians view health not just as the absence of illness, but as the intersection of physical health, mental wellbeing, financial security, social belonging and freedom from structural barriers. These interconnected health challenges cannot be resolved through narrow interventions. A holistic, well-funded and accessible service system—informed by the lived experiences of young people—is needed to address determinants of health and improve long-term wellbeing outcomes.

- Australian policy reviews highlight inconsistent integration of social determinants of health into youth-focused policies, despite evidence of their central role in wellbeing.¹⁰ Adopting a holistic youth health framework should:
 - embed social determinants of health into youth service policy, ensuring assessment covers finances, housing, food and educational wellbeing alongside physical and mental health; and
 - expand collaboration and integrate approaches across health, education, housing and social services sectors.¹¹
- National youth surveys consistently identify mental health as a major concern among young people, who use a broad range of activities to manage wellbeing.¹ With a holistic view in mind, diverse approaches to mental health are needed that:
 - fund research to explore how young people from varied backgrounds maintain mental wellbeing;
 - integrate mental health literacy and self-care strategies into schools and youth services; and
 - expand peer-led and community-based programs.^{7,11}
- Cost-of-living pressures and wait times are significant barriers to young people trying to access services.^{1,6,11} Expanding affordable and tailored services requires:
 - increasing Commonwealth and state funding to reduce out-of-pocket costs for youth seeking professional help;

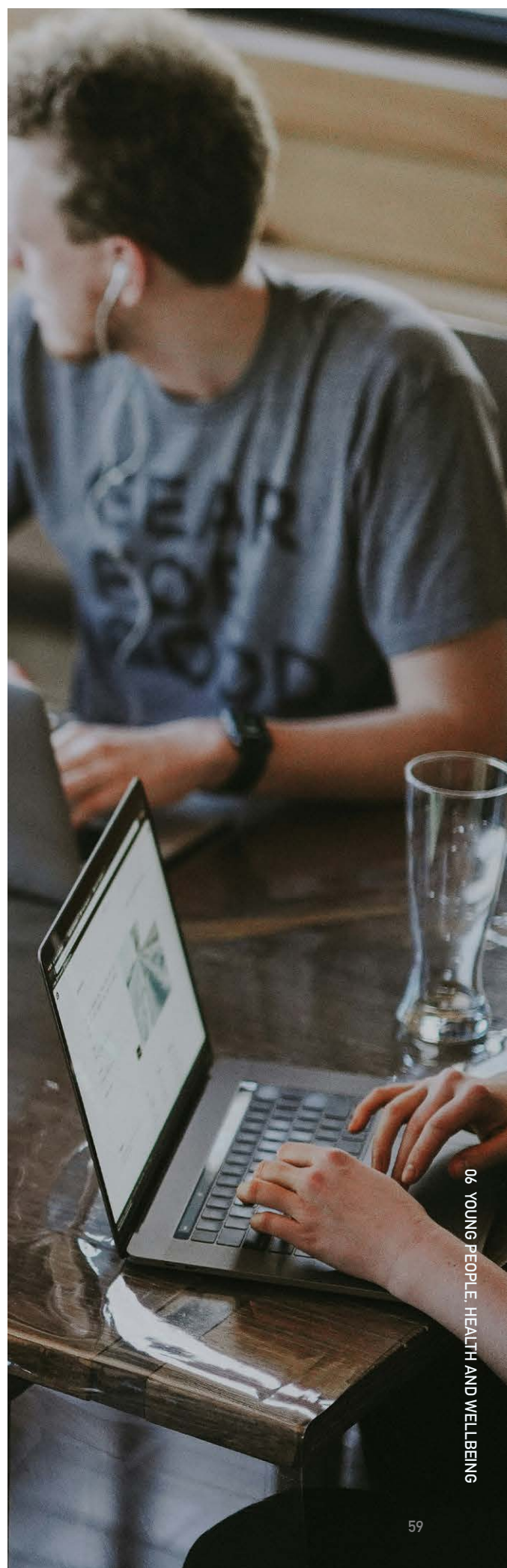
- supporting culturally responsive and Indigenous-led services to address structural and cultural barriers;⁷
- expanding telehealth, outreach and regional youth health hubs;
- providing sustainable funding for youth health services, including headspace and community health centres; and
- monitoring access and equity using disaggregated data on income, location and cultural background.

- Food insecurity disproportionately affects young people¹² and negatively impacts wellbeing.¹³ Service funding and monitoring needs to be strengthened to:
 - embed food security screening in youth health assessments;
 - provide immediate relief through subsidies, vouchers and food relief programs;
 - implement systemic measures such as regulating food affordability and improve access in food deserts; and
 - reduce structural barriers such as long wait times and restrictive eligibility.
- Research priorities include:
 - longitudinal research on the impact of cost-of-living pressures on youth health;
 - evaluation of holistic, multi-sectoral service models; and
 - youth participatory action research capturing diverse youth perspectives on wellbeing.

Despite the presence of youth-specific services such as headspace, significant challenges remain with access, affordability and cultural appropriateness of health care. Rising costs of living, food insecurity and gaps in service provision threaten the health and wellbeing of young people.

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07

YOUNG PEOPLE AND THEIR RELATIONSHIPS

KEY FINDINGS

- 1** 53% of young Australians were single, 42% were in a relationship, and 4% were casually dating; 66% of young people thought it likely or very likely that they will live in a long-term relationship with someone.
- 2** 50% of young people thought it likely or very likely that they will have children.
- 3** 66% of young Australians often or very often felt like they belonged when they spent time with friends in the past 12 months, 63% felt this way when they spent time with family and 46% reported feeling like they belonged when they were at work.
- 4** 42% of young people agreed or strongly agreed that it is easier to connect with others online than in person.
- 5** 70% of young people thought that gender relationships have become more or much more equal at work or in employment compared with their parents' generation; 68% believe they have become more equal in the household and 66% in education contexts.
- 6** A majority of young Australians believed that gender did not determine who does most child-rearing and household tasks, except for household repairs, which 52% thought were determined by gender.
- 7** Belonging was seen by young people as being important for a sense of safety and acceptance. However, many young people faced explicit or implicit forms of discrimination, which could make them feel unsafe and objectified.
- 8** Young people were ambivalent about the role of social media. Social media was a necessary tool for connection, but also created pressure around expectations and did not provide a conducive environment for building genuine relationships.

REVIEW OF EXISTING DATA

Belief in traditional gender roles has declined across generations.

RELATIONSHIPS AND SUPPORT

Personal relationships were the second biggest personal concern for young people aged 15–19 (21%), after school and study (45%). Although many young people reported problems in their social lives, having difficulty making new friends, and challenges with family members, 49% of young people rated their family's ability to get along as excellent or very good.¹ Young men were more likely to rate their family's ability to get along as excellent or very good (53%) compared with young women (46%) or gender diverse young people (23%). However, 30% of young people had trouble fitting in and 29% found it hard to turn to family and friends if they needed help.¹ Making new friends could also be difficult for young people aged 18–24, with 40% struggling to make new friends.²

Sixty-nine per cent of young people aged 18–24 felt a general sense of inclusion and belonging in their everyday lives. The most common sources for social connection include friends (80%), family (66%), partners (40%), work (38%), tertiary education (26%) and social media (24%).² Similarly, friends and family were the most important factor for a sense of identity for 64% of young Australians aged 19–30.³

Social connections provide a vital source of support, with 64% of young people aged 15–19 turning to their friends, 59% to parents or guardians and 33% to siblings for help with important issues. A higher proportion of young women turn to their friends (70%) compared with young men (58%) and gender diverse (60%) young people. A higher proportion of gender diverse young people turn to the internet (30%) and to their GP or a health professional (30%).¹

LONELINESS

Loneliness, a distressing emotional state arising from a perception that social relationships are inadequate, continues to be an important issue for young people. Loneliness can have harmful effects on mental and physical health, along with social and economic consequences for individuals and their communities.⁴ In 2024, 70.3% of young people aged 18–24 reported feeling lonely at least some of the time.⁵ Gender diverse young people aged 15–19 were more likely to feel lonely most or all the time (44%), compared with young women (23%) and young men (17%).¹

GENDER RELATIONS

On average, belief in traditional gender roles has declined across generations. However, young Australian men aged 13–28 were more likely than previous generations to believe in traditional gender roles, while young Australian women aged 13–28 were less likely to believe in traditional gender roles.⁶ This aligns with research on young people globally, which shows that 57% of Gen Z men believed women's equality discriminates against men compared with 36% of Gen Z women. According to a 30-country survey, 28% of Gen Z men believed that a man who stays at home to look after children is 'less of a man' compared with 19% of women.⁷



2025 INTERVIEW AND SURVEY FINDINGS

IMPORTANT RELATIONSHIPS

More than half (53%) of young Australians were single, 42% were in a relationship and 4% were casually dating. The remaining 1% had another relationship status. When thinking about the future, 66% of young people thought it likely or very likely that they will have a supportive social network, 66% thought it likely or very likely that they will live in a long-term relationship with someone and 50% thought it likely or very likely that they will have a child/children. These perceptions were largely shared among most demographic groups. Interviewees also shed light on important relationships for young people. These predominantly included relationships with partners, family and friends, and having a positive relationship with oneself:

“

My sister is my best friend, and my other best friend ... both live in Bunbury and I try and go down there about once a month to see them. That's always good, I'll always go down and see my mum and my stepdad and them, and they're such a good social network for me. They make me very, very happy.”

WOMAN, 19, WA

“

I like doing stuff on my own, you know, just little stuff. Just going down to the beach, down to the café, have a little self-date, yeah, just shit like that ... It's good being able to do stuff on your own.”

MAN, 22, WA

Young people were generally satisfied with their social lives, spending time with friends, family and co-workers. Young people were able to meet new people through avenues such as school, work, travel, or through friends and family. Some young people expressed a desire to be more social and wanted to spend more time with friends. Importantly, forming relationships was seen as a key aspect of good mental health:

“

I'm trying to hang out with my friends more often. I'm trying to meet new people ... I'm trying to engage with the students at university ... meet new people, see what their experiences are, learn more about them ... they contribute to my mental health as well. Like, I love meeting new people.”

MAN, 22, NSW

However, some young people expressed difficulties with making new friends, citing factors such as not having enough time, not feeling confident and being geographically isolated.



EXPERIENCES OF BELONGING

In the past 12 months, 66% of young Australians often or very often felt like they belonged when they spent time with friends and 63% felt this way when they spent time with family. Resolving problems with others helped 50% feel like they belonged. Less than half (46%) of young Australians reported feeling they belonged when they were at work, 38% felt they belonged when at school or their educational institutions, 36% when facing challenges with others and 28% felt they belonged when they were involved in organised sports (see Figure 7.1). These feelings were broadly shared among demographic groups, except for young people who identified as First Nations and those with disabilities, who were less likely to feel like they belonged in many scenarios.

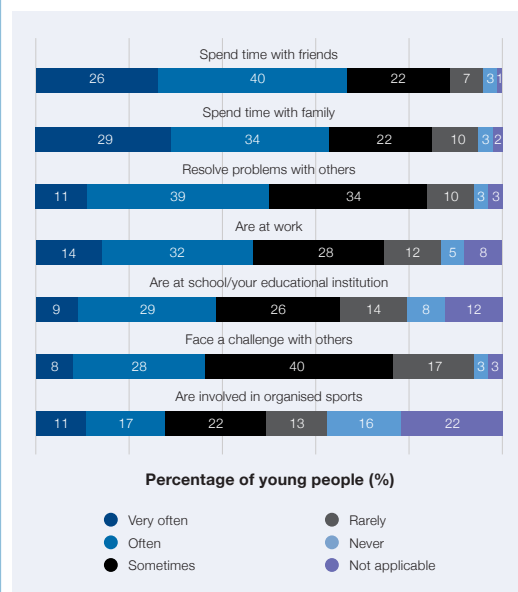


Figure 7.1. Feeling a sense of belonging in different scenarios (N = 527)

Most (71%) young Australians who were currently studying agreed or strongly agreed that they felt like they belonged at their educational organisation. This perception is shared across different demographic groups.

Reflecting the survey findings, interviewees identified friends, partners, and families as key sites of belonging. Many young people emphasised that being with certain people, rather than being in a place gave them a sense of belonging:

“It’s not the place, it’s the people I guess. Like, it’s corny as hell but, like, the being around my friends, no matter where we are, like, it’s somewhere I feel that I belong.” TRANSGENDER PERSON, 19, NSW

Interviewees pointed to school and work as places where they felt like they belonged. Some young people also noted specific communities that they were a part of, such as religious communities or communities that shared in their interests or political values, as places where they belonged:

“Even at work, I feel like I belong. Like, I feel like I’ve been there long enough now that I’ve kind of, like, become like an integral member of the, I suppose, community or workplace.” MAN, 19, QLD

“Uni is okay, there is, like, there is the gay club that’s got a proper name, the Queer Collective or whatever, you know, for the local queer people and stuff and that’s nice. I hang out there sometimes.”

TRANSGENDER PERSON, 21, QLD

Home was also identified as a safe place where young people could feel comfortable and be themselves:

“

I like being at home. I’m quite a private sort of introverted person. I do like hanging out with people but it, like, it makes me tired. I recharge when being alone.” TRANSGENDER PERSON, 20, QLD

Interestingly, a number of interviewees discussed how they felt like they most belonged when they were doing a certain activity. These activities gave young people a sense of peace and fulfilment, which made them feel like they were where they wanted to be:

“

I mean, anytime I’m on stage I feel like I belong ... anywhere where I’m the centre of attention is where I belong ... Or even dancing. If I dance, I’m feeling safe and like where I belong.” WOMAN, 21, NSW

Some young people felt that there were no spaces where they belonged, or they actively chose not to think about belonging or not belonging:

“

I don’t want to think about the fact I don’t belong, I don’t want to think about that. I never really thought about, like, somewhere where I don’t belong or anything like that.” MAN, 18, ACT

IMPORTANCE OF BELONGING

Most (78%) young Australians declared that it is quite important or very important for them to feel like they belonged to their family, 75% felt this way about belonging to their friendship group, 56% felt this way about their work and 54% felt this way about their interest group. Feeling like they belonged to a religious community or to their neighbourhood is quite important or very important for 20% and 23% of young Australians, respectively (see Figure 7.2).

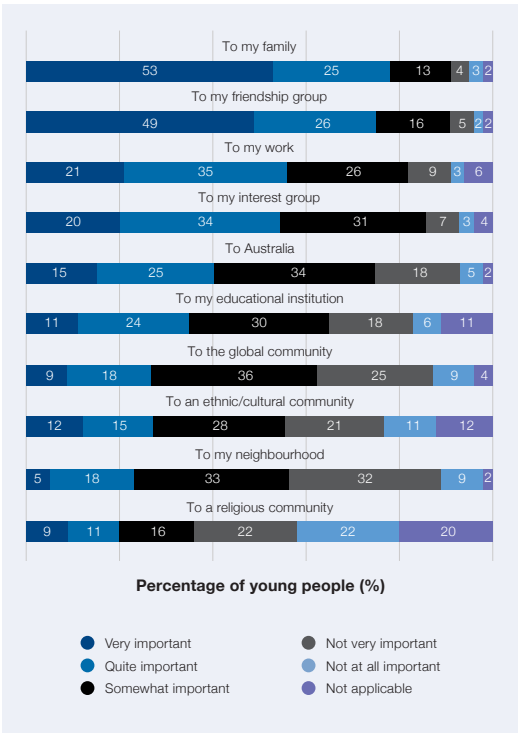


Figure 7.2. Importance of belonging to different groups (N = 527)

Interviewees felt that belonging was generally important for a sense of wellbeing, for a sense of connection, and for preventing loneliness and mental ill health:

“

Connection is, like, it stops me from spiralling ... it just feels like I'm wanted, and I don't have to, I don't have to reach out first ... it just, like, makes me feel connected.” MAN, 2, VIC

When asked about what gave them a sense of belonging, many interviewees pointed to the importance of feeling that they were accepted. This made young people feel acknowledged, and that they could be who they were:

“

Like, it shows that they acknowledge me, they are trying, they want me to hang out with them even more. So, like, that just shows acceptance in a way.”

MAN, 22, NSW

Other factors that contributed to a sense of belonging included sharing interests and beliefs, and a sense of comfort and ease when with others:

“

I don't have to be aware of the fact that I'm projecting this homosexual flare whether I like it or not. I can't really choose to turn that off, so at least with these people I don't have to worry about whether it's on or off, right, because everyone else is just the same.”

TRANSGENDER PERSON, 21, QLD

“

With my friends I think ... because I've known them for over four years ... we can talk about just about anything and we'll always get a laugh out of each other.” WOMAN, 19, VIC

NON-BELONGING AND EXCLUSION

Although school and work could be sites of belonging, some of the young people interviewed felt that they did not belong in these areas because the people around them expressed opposing values, or because they were a different age compared with the majority of people:

“

Definitely in my Year 12 classes, there was lots of boys in there who just had, like, really awful racist, sexist, homophobic opinions about everything and, yeah, I got really frustrated sometimes and I kind of felt like, what was I doing there.” WOMAN, 18, VIC

“

I felt like I'd outgrown the place. A lot of the staff were getting younger and just felt like I just kind of didn't belong there much anymore, so that's why I ended up leaving.” MAN, 20, NSW

Some interviewees discussed not feeling like they belonged when they were with friends because they felt they needed to express themselves in a certain way, or because it had been a long time since they had last met:

“

Sometimes, when I come back to the coast to hang with friends, sometimes it feels awkward due to the long periods of time that I haven't been there and feeling a bit like an outsider.” MAN, 24, QLD

Young people felt that they did not belong in certain groups or communities that did not share their interests or beliefs or where they were treated poorly. Being in certain social settings, such as at night clubs or parties, could also make young people feel like they didn't belong:

“

Previous roommates who did not, who started to treat me badly and kicked me out. Online spaces that didn't like how I perceived their story ... Just different things, people that didn't click with me and all that.” MAN, 24, VIC

“

Going clubbing. Like, I'm 21 and I'm supposed to love clubbing, it just gets boring and, you know, repeats all the same time.” WOMAN, 21, NSW

Some interviewees expressed a general sense of non-belonging and discussed how they sometimes felt that they did not belong anywhere:

“

I actually don't feel like I belong anywhere ... I just don't feel like I just belong... even in my house I don't feel like I belong here, like I belong somewhere else.” MAN, 22, WA

When asked about the things that made them feel like they did not belong, interviewees mentioned a number of factors, including being made to feel unwelcome, facing a language barrier, unequal power dynamics, and feeling unsafe:

“

Feeling excluded, like, even unintentionally ... like when people hang out without you or they don't invite you to things and stuff like that ... there is a real sense of loneliness.”

TRANSGENDER PERSON, 19, NSW

“

Anytime that I feel that there is a power imbalance ... I don't feel safe because I don't feel heard and I don't feel seen.”

WOMAN, 21, NSW

A number of young people reported that they had faced instances of discrimination. Gender and sexual presentation were key sites of tension. This made participants feel disrespected, objectified, and unsafe:

“

I mean, the whole thing of blue hair and pronouns: that's a big one because a lot of people, especially, like, men in their 50s, they don't really see me as a person. They either see me as an object of desire, or they see me as something to pick on.” WOMAN, 19, SA

Home was identified as a safe place where young people could feel comfortable and be themselves.

“

Definitely as a woman, that's inevitable. Like, walking through carparks with your keys between your fingers, like, that is never fun, but it's just the reality of the world we live in.” WOMAN, 19, WA

Some interviewees also discussed how they felt discriminated against as a young person. This was particularly prevalent at work and when applying for jobs:

“

With some jobs I applied for, I feel like perhaps being a uni student might have been something I was discriminated against on, being a uni student.” MAN, 20, ACT

Discrimination could be explicit, but could also be implied and expressed through how young people were treated by others in public:

“

Especially out in public. I'll be out in the shop trying to just walk around, you know? Like, see what I'm trying to buy, and I'll be followed, bro, just because of my appearance, and, like, I'm not even trying to put in no racial card or anything, but, like, this is, always seems to be the same case.” MAN, 22, WA

“

Not explicitly. So, nothing where there are any slurs or attacks that were specifically because I was one thing or another, but I would get looks. I started presenting more androgynous and queer in real life because I feel I'm in a safer spot to do that now and I will get looks from, especially older people, who will look at me weirdly.” MAN, 24, VIC

A number of interviewees said that they had never faced discrimination. However, these participants acknowledged that they were in privileged positions, which had possibly protected them from discrimination:

“

I have a number of privileges going for me, I'm white, upper class from an educated background, so I don't, fortunately for me, I tend not to face that. Even as a woman in engineering I am yet to face significant discrimination.” WOMAN, 23, NSW

RELATING WITH OTHERS ONLINE

More than half (54%) of young Australians agreed or strongly agreed that they pictured the other person in their mind when they read email or messages online, 42% agreed or strongly agreed that it is easier to connect with others online than talking in person and 42% agreed or strongly agreed that they felt they could communicate online on the same level with others. Eleven per cent of young Australians agreed or strongly agreed that writing insulting things online was not bullying and 16% agreed or strongly agreed that there are no rules online so they could do whatever they want (see Figure 7.3).

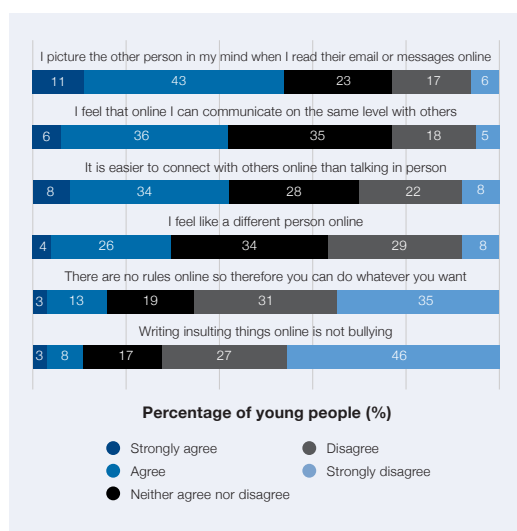


Figure 7.3. Perceptions of social media (N = 527)

The young people we interviewed expressed a range of views about the role of social media in promoting a sense of belonging. Many young people saw social media as a tool that could be used to maintain existing relationships, keep in touch with others over long distances, or connect with others more generally:

“

With me and my friends, we’ve always been able to use it to help stay connected with each other and send things that we know will entertain others, so sending reels on Instagram or, like, calling on Discord. We use that to stay connected.” WOMAN, 19, VIC

Others thought social media had more negative effects. Many interviewees saw social media as a useful way to form and maintain connections, but not as an adequate substitute for face-to-face interactions:

“

It’s the problem and the solution, because we have some sort of connectivity and sense of belonging and community online, but that sort of sense of belonging ... it’s sort of this like artificial band aid as a solution to this sort of isolation that a lot of us experience.” WOMAN, 19, QLD

Other interviewees noted how relationships formed online were different from those formed in person, with in person relationships generally being preferred. However, interviewees also recognised that social media had become necessary for connections and was the main way that many young people communicated with each other.



“

I look at social media as, like, a way to stay connected with people you can't see in real life ... But I think if you're not seeing anyone in real life and you are just connecting with people through social media ... I don't think it's very healthy ... It's not the same, it's definitely not the same.” MAN, 23, SA

“

It's just sort of how it's done now ... if you don't have Instagram, no one knows what you are up to and it's, like, you don't talk to anyone.” TRANSGENDER PERSON, 20, QLD

Overall, interview participants discussed having negative personal relationships with social media. A number felt that they were using social media too much, while others felt that social media created too much pressure to present themselves a certain way. Further, the corporate nature of social media did not create an environment that was conducive to forming healthy relationships:

“

Like, a lot of expectations obviously come from social media – expectations on how to present myself, whether that's in the alternative community or just in general. Like, I feel like if I'm not aesthetic, I don't have the right to exist.”

WOMAN, 19, SA

“

I think those sorts of interactions are kind of not, kind of not encouraged by social media, I suppose. They kind of encourage you to stay online and keep scrolling and keep giving them your attention and it's like, I think, having a corporation controlling the platforms that you engage with every single person that you know and love isn't probably the best idea.” MAN, 19, QLD



GENDER RELATIONS

The majority of young Australians believed that the distribution of child-rearing and household tasks was not determined by gender. These tasks included washing the dishes (65%), organising the household money (64%), teaching children discipline (64%), household shopping (61%), paying bills (60%), making the main meals (57%), household cleaning (56%), home-schooling children during school lockdowns (56%), washing and ironing (54%), looking after children when they are sick (54%) and looking after children under five years old (51%) (see Figure 7.4). However, 52% thought that gender somewhat or completely determined who does household repairs. These perceptions are broadly shared across demographic groups.

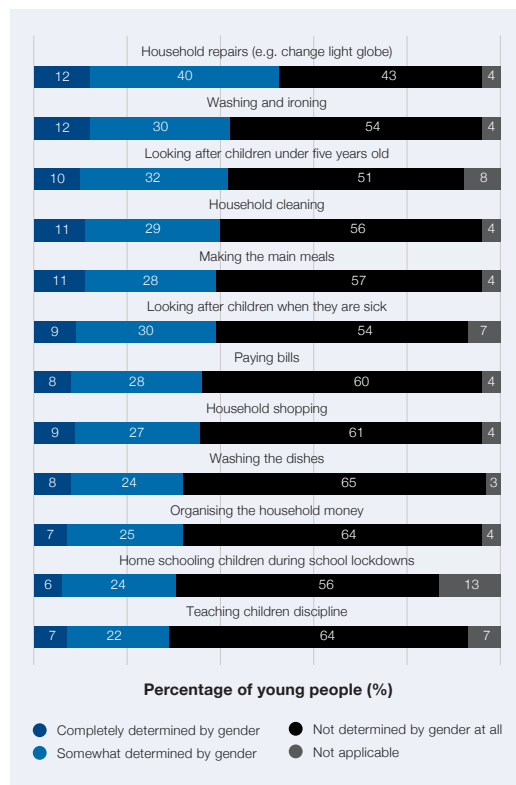


Figure 7.4. Perception of extent to which gender determines child-rearing and household tasks (N = 527)

The majority of young Australians thought that education and career development, such as the ways junior workers are treated by senior staff in the workplace (64%), the type of career pathway young people choose (64%), the opportunities to progress and advance career pathways (63%), the amount of money young people get paid in the workforce (59%), the course of study students choose when they attend university or vocational education (55%) and the subjects students choose in their final years of secondary school (51%), were somewhat or completely determined by gender (see Figure 7.5).

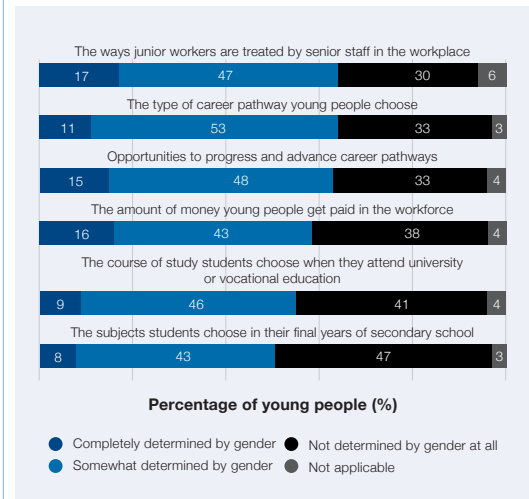


Figure 7.5. Perception of extent to which gender determines education and career development (N = 527)

Comparing gender relationships in their generation with that of their parents, the majority of young people thought that gender relationships have become more or much more equal at work or in employment (70%), in the household (68%), in education contexts (66%), in intimate or romantic relationships (65%), in peer relationships or friendships (64%), in mental and physical health care (62%), in finance (62%) and in politics (55%) (see Figure 7.6).

The majority of young Australians thought that education and career development were somewhat or completely determined by gender.

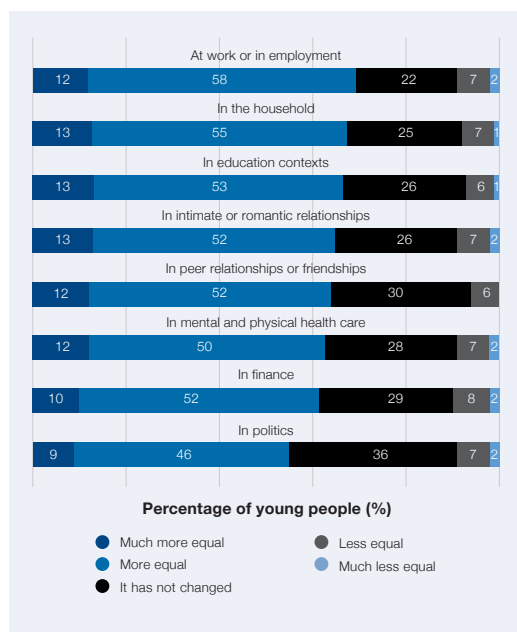


Figure 7.6. Perceived changes in gender relations compared with parents' generation (N = 527)

GEOGRAPHICAL MOBILITY

Young people have different experiences of geographical mobility: 60% of young people have not moved within Australia in the past five years, 19% have moved within the same city or town, 7% moved from regional areas to capital cities, 2% moved from capital cities to regional areas, 2% moved between capital cities, 3% moved between regional areas and 6% moved for multiple reasons. For their most recent move within Australia, the main reasons were family reasons (22%), affordable housing (20%), educational opportunities (16%), employment opportunities (12%), relationship with romantic partner(s) (11%) and a different lifestyle (10%) (see Figure 7.7).

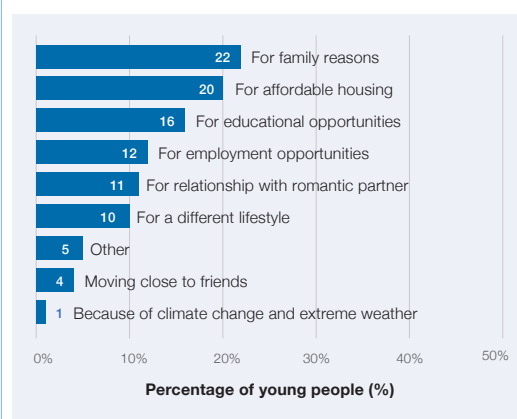


Figure 7.7. Major reasons for most recent move (N = 210)



POLICY AND RESEARCH IMPLICATIONS

Belonging and social connection are foundational to young people's wellbeing. Yet many young people, especially those from minoritised backgrounds or who experience discrimination, report difficulties in building friendships, feeling safe in institutions such as school or work and navigating social media in ways that enhance rather than undermine belonging.

- Young people often rely on family, peers, school, work or community groups to feel connected. However, some report challenges in making new friends or integrating into social networks, particularly migrant youth.^{8,9} To foster belonging in communities, we need to:
 - provide stable funding for youth clubs, cultural and faith-based groups, sports and arts organisations, particularly in under-resourced and regional areas.
- Young people, especially from minoritised groups and young women, report discrimination, harassment and exclusion in schools, workplaces and other social institutions.^{10,11} These experiences negatively impact health, wellbeing, and sense of belonging.^{9,10} Consequently, there is a need to:
 - review policies in schools, workplaces, and tertiary settings to ensure they are effective in preventing discrimination and harassment;
 - embed measures of belonging into institutional quality frameworks;^{11,12}
 - expand peer mentoring, inclusion initiatives and structured opportunities for young people to build connections, particularly for migrants, First Nations youth, and those in isolated communities;⁸ and
 - strengthen legal responsibilities of organisations to eliminate discrimination;
 - launch public awareness campaigns; and
 - support accessible legal and psychological services.^{11,12}

Social media is widely used among young Australians. It can facilitate connection and identity, but also exclusion, harassment and comparison and many young people are ambivalent about its role in fostering belonging.¹³ Expanding digital literacy education and encouraging safer online moderation practices need to be reviewed and improved. Older cohorts of young people, who have grown up with social media and will fall outside the new social media age restrictions, would also benefit from digital literacy education and safer online moderation practices.



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08

YOUNG PEOPLE'S PARTICIPATION IN SOCIETY

KEY FINDINGS

- 1** 82% of young people identified affordable housing options, 64% nominated employment opportunities for young people and 44% nominated climate change as the top issues that need immediate action.
- 2** 62% of young Australians volunteered in organised activities at least once in the past year. The most common volunteering activities were arts and cultural services (42%), environmental-related activities (39%) and welfare-related care and services (35%). 90% of young Australians felt there was something preventing them from being involved in volunteering.
- 3** 49% of young people thought there was not enough government support for housing, 34% thought there was not enough government support for finance and 24% thought there was not enough government support for mental health.
- 4** 40% of young Australians said they have used their social media profiles in an attempt to create social change. However, young people were ambivalent about the role of social media. Although it could be a powerful tool for spreading awareness and forming connections, social media could also spread misinformation and create social division.
- 5** Young people had a broad understanding of what it meant to be politically engaged, ranging from being aware of current political and social events to more active participation in protests and activism.
- 6** Compared with previous years, young people were positive about the possibility of achieving change. However, they acknowledged that change could not be achieved alone and could take a long time.
- 7** Although young people felt that they are better represented than previously, they still felt that they lacked formal political representation and were not taken seriously in public discussion, which can lead to disengaging from participation.

REVIEW OF EXISTING DATA

Despite feeling unrepresented, one-third of young Australians expressed being interested in politics.

IMPORTANT ISSUES IN TODAY'S AUSTRALIA

As reported by Australia's UN Youth Representative, the top four issues of concern to young Australians aged 12–25 in 2024 were education, climate change, mental health and financial security. Reasons that young people gave for caring about these issues included future impacts, poor policies, effects on their identity, impacts on their community and feeling like they are unable to fix the issue.¹ Similar priorities were raised in another study of young people aged 14–25, where most were concerned with mental health, the cost of living, the housing crisis, social media, educational systems and racism and discrimination.²

The most important issues to young people aged 15–19 were cost of living (56%), climate change and the environment (27%), violence, safety and crime (25%), and mental health (23%). Young women were more likely to be concerned about climate change and the environment (31%) compared with young men (22%). Young men were more likely to be concerned with housing and homelessness (19%) compared with young women (15%). The main concern for gender diverse young people was discrimination and inequality (30%).³

For older young people aged 19–30, the top concerns were cost of living (55%), mental health (25%), climate change and protecting the environment (20%), crime and personal safety (16%) and sexual harassment (15%). The environment and climate change were important issues for young Australians, with 60% having felt worried or anxious about the climate in the previous month. Additionally, 68% of young people said they were willing to pay more to purchase environmentally sustainable products or services, 73% considered a company's environmental credentials or policies when evaluating a potential employer and 45% said that they and their colleagues have put pressure on their employers to act on protecting the environment.⁴

Looking towards the future, 69% of young Australians aged 12–25 felt they were capable of creating positive change and 56.9% felt optimistic about their own future. However, only 46.1% felt optimistic about the future of youth in Australia and only 30.3% felt optimistic about the future of youth around the world.¹

COMMUNITY AND POLITICAL REPRESENTATION

Community plays an important role for young people, with 78.3% of young Australians aged 12–25 saying that their communities respect who they are.¹ Similarly, 51% of young people aged 15–19 were proud to be part of their communities and 50% agreed that their communities had what they needed to have a positive future.³ However, many young people did not feel that their concerns are shared by their communities, or were given the same importance.¹ Only 36% of young people aged 15–19 agreed or strongly agreed that they had a say on matters that were important to them, with 23% disagreeing or strongly disagreeing.³

Young Australians expressed diverse views of political engagement, with 31.4% of young Australians aged 12–25 feeling that they were represented in Australian politics.¹ Despite feeling unrepresented, 33.2% of young Australians aged 18–24 expressed being interested in politics.⁵ Young people aged 18–34 were most likely to express confidence in the Australian government (47.0%) compared with those aged 35–54 (42.5%) and those aged over 55 (35.1%).⁵

During the 2022 federal election, 47% of young Australians aged 19–27 voted because they did not want to receive a fine. Other reasons given include feeling that voting makes a difference (22%), feeling that it was their duty (17%), having a party or candidate they wanted to vote for (11%) and being interested in politics (4%).⁶ Although voting is compulsory in Australia, some young people did not vote. Reasons for not voting included being sick on election day (23%), not being interested in politics (19%), forgetting (18%), thinking that voting did not make a difference (13%) and not having a party or candidate they wanted to vote for (11%). Reasons young people gave for not registering to vote included not being interested in politics (23%), having no party or candidate they wanted to vote for (23%), not knowing that they had to enrol (18%), thinking that voting did not make a difference (16%) and not knowing how to enrol to vote (12%).⁶

2025 INTERVIEW AND SURVEY FINDINGS

YOUNG PEOPLE'S POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT

Young people understood political engagement to mean many things. One aspect of political engagement discussed by the young people we spoke to was having an awareness of what was happening in the world, for both formal politics and broader social events:

“

Keeping up to date with what's the current policy or parties, like viewpoints and positions on some of the major points and politics, like housing economy, cost of living, and for me, anything to do with schools and education.” MAN, 24, QLD

For many young people, basic awareness of an issue was seen as the minimum level of engagement, but being politically engaged meant going beyond just being aware. More active forms of engagement included taking a position on social and political issues and being involved in various forms of advocacy and activism:

“

Pay attention and have beliefs ... because you can pay attention to politics and believe in nothing and then that wouldn't exactly say you are politically engaged because you are just sitting there looking at it as opposed to actually engaging in it.” MAN, 20, ACT

“

Engaging in conversations about politics and how different policies and different actions from countries could affect people ... There is also things one could do, like going to protests and sharing information about what people or countries have done in particular.”

WOMAN, 19, VIC

Many young people discussed how there were different levels of political engagement, with more and less overt forms of engagement being available:

“

There are different degrees of political engagement. Being a member of a political party would be the most obvious ... and maybe things like attending or organising or attending protests ... people post political things on social media—that's also a form of engagement ... I'm a level below that, I just read the news.” MAN, 20, ACT

This was reflected in how individual interviewees considered themselves to be politically engaged. Some young people felt that they were particularly engaged and expressed how they kept aware of events, were interested in policies, supported causes that were important to them, and engaged with formal politics. Others noted how political engagement was mandatory and affected all Australians:



“

I'm very left-leaning, so I'm supporting of Indigenous Australians and supporting of Ukraine, I'm supportive of Sudan, I'm supportive of Palestine ... my bag has, like, a pro-Palestine thing and a bunch of queer flags and stuff like that, so I'm, like, very, very open about my political alliances.” MAN, 24, VIC

“

I generally stay engaged to it because you can hide from politics, but politics won't hide from you, so you've got to think about it. It's also mandatory.”

MAN, 20, ACT

Some interviewees expressed a desire to be more politically engaged, but could not do so due to a lack of time, interest, energy, knowledge or motivation. For many of these young people, they felt that they were engaged on some level, but wanted to be more actively engaged:

“

Very lazy, like to stay at home in my bed ... So, I guess politics is more like an interesting social sort of investigation for me.” TRANSGENDER PERSON, 21, QLD

A number of interviewees stated that they were not engaged with politics. For some, this was because they were not interested in politics or there were no current issues that captured their attention. However, other interviewees discussed making a conscious decision to disengage, due to feeling disillusioned, feeling that there was nothing they could do, feeling that politics negatively impacted their mental health or being required to be politically neutral as part of their jobs:

“

Honestly ... I feel like nothing really happens that's important [enough] to be that politically engaged with.” MAN, 18, ACT

“

I know what's going on most of the time, but I try not to think about it as much, if that makes sense, because I get quite worked up about it ... Thinking about that gets me really angry and it makes me really want to do something to, like, change the world, but I can't really do it on my own.” WOMAN, 23, QLD

A number of interviewees discussed taking part in activities that matched their understanding of what it meant to be politically engaged, but did not consider themselves to be personally engaged:

“

I just like to learn what's going on around the world, you know, like seeing the political aspect of this, of that, etc., etc. But I wouldn't say I'm engaged with these things.” MAN, 22, NSW

“

I'd say I'm very politically aware, but I'm not necessarily engaged in anything substantial at the moment.” WOMAN, 19, QLD

Despite the ambivalence towards political engagement on a personal level, many interviewees felt that, overall, young people should be more politically engaged. Young people spoke about the importance of having their voices heard and how not having their voices heard could be discouraging and lead to disengagement.

“

My parents were voting for ... politicians that are going to put in policies that help older Australians and not really help the younger Australians. Whereas I wanted to vote for a minister that was going to help ... the young Australians.” MAN, 20, VIC

“

I just think we're not very engaged in it because we don't see a point in being engaged because every time, even with voting, every time we vote for something it always goes the other way, and I just don't think we see a lot of promise in what we're asking for.”

WOMAN, 19, WA

Many interviewees felt a broad sense of connection to their local areas and were also connected and engaged in their communities. These communities included schools, religious groups, ethnic communities, clubs and interest groups:

“

There is, like, a lot of community events that goes around in my town. So, I like to support the community ... set up these events, help these events out. I like to take part in these things, and I just like to help the people out as well ... Community is a happy place and everyone else is going to be affected by that.” MAN, 22, NSW

Some young people did not feel engaged or connected to their communities. As with political engagement, young people listed a lack of time, resources and motivation as reasons why they were not as connected to their communities as they would like. Some interviewees also noted that many communities had moved online, making it harder to connect.

“

A lot of places that are, you know, a couple of hours train from my house and I have to work around the schedules of the rest of my family to be able to get to and from the train station. So, I'm just not able to meet up with the people that I'd want, or get involved in communities that I'd like to.” WOMAN, 18, VIC

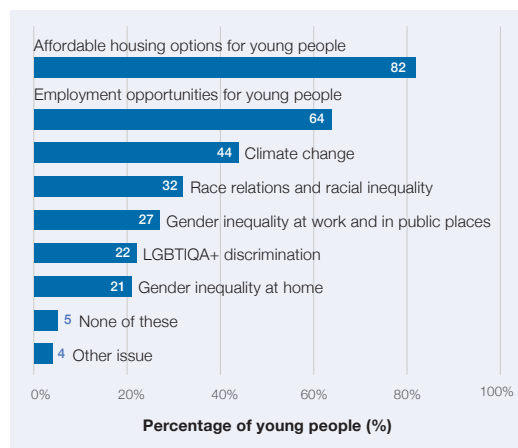


Figure 8.1. Issues that need immediate action (N = 527)

Compared with previous years, more interviewees were positive about the possibility of achieving change. Young people discussed how change could be achieved if they were passionate enough about an issue and if enough young people were engaged. Some young people stressed that shared values could unite people across many demographics and work towards meaningful change:

“

Values unite people, no matter if they are younger or older. At the end of the day, we're all people ... we are all living, feeling, breathing humans. The sooner we can unite properly rather than it being a, 'Oh well they are younger than me, they have no idea what they're talking about', or 'Oh well they're older they are still stuck in the past' [change will be achieved].” WOMAN, 19, SA

Some young people believed that change could be achieved, but remained less optimistic. For these interviewees, change could not be achieved as an individual, could only be limited in scope, or would occur too late to be meaningful to current young people:

“

Maybe give it 50 years. Okay, so it might be useful for the youth in 50 years but, like, if anything is changeable or fixable, it's not fixable in the time that the [current] youth are still here.”

WOMAN, 21, NSW

When discussing ways in which change could be achieved, many young people mentioned the importance of raising awareness about political concerns, in keeping with their understanding of political engagement. This ranged from small actions, such as sharing information on social media, to more overt actions such as attending protests. Young people emphasised the need to make their voices heard, particularly by those with the power to make decisions:

“

Probably just spread awareness at first. I know there is a lot out there but it's not enough. Like, little, I wouldn't say protests or marches as such, but more just, like, information available – maybe people will start to realise okay something needs to be done.” WOMAN, 23, QLD

“

Making your voice heard is important through protesting, through sending through information that is valid information and backed up with evidence, to people who are in power and can make those choices or changes.” WOMAN, 24, NSW

Compared with previous years, there were more comments from interviewees about engaging with formal political systems as a way to achieve change. This was possibly due to the 2025 federal election. Actions included voting for certain candidates, advocating for legislation, contacting local representatives and joining political parties:

“

Go hound your local members. But if it's more of a broader societal change, as opposed to something specific, with legislation.” MAN, 20, ACT

For some young people, change did not seem possible. Interviewees discussed how young people had no power or voice in current discussions, did not know where to begin to make change, or had become disillusioned by failed past attempts at achieving change:

“

I don't know where to start looking. Who do I email? Who do I contact? Who do I put my voice out there to? I think that's with a lot of young Australians as well. Who do we go to, to get our, like, our questions and concerns about?”

WOMAN, 21, NSW

“

I think if there were a chance that change could be made, then yes, I think a lot more people would be involved. But because it's been proven time and time again that we aren't heard and they don't really care about our opinions, that we've all, kind of, just given up.” WOMAN, 19, WA

Less than two-thirds (62%) of young Australians volunteered in organised activities at least once to some extent (including rarely, sometimes, often, or very often) in the last year. A higher proportion of young people living in metropolitan (64%) and regional (56%) areas volunteered in organised activities at least once compared with those living in a remote area (36%). A higher proportion of young people born in other countries (73%) volunteered in organised activities at least once than did those born in Australia (59%).

Among all young people, the most common volunteering activities were arts and cultural services (42%), environmental-related activities (39%) and welfare-related care and services (35%). Volunteering for heritage or conservation groups (27%), emergency services (28%) and political parties or organisations (29%) were the least common volunteering activities (see Figure 8.2).

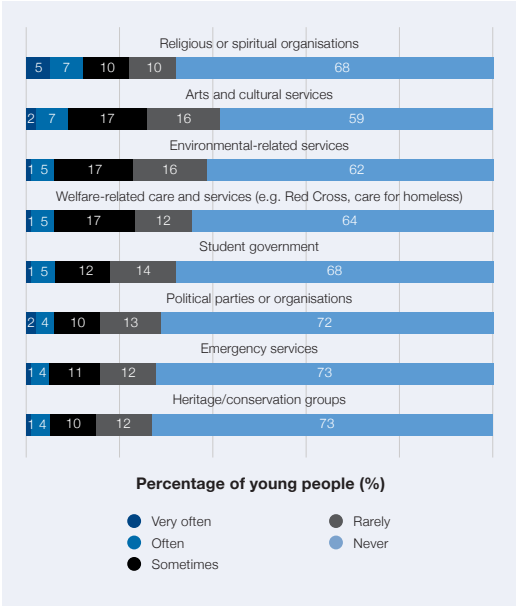


Figure 8.2. Volunteering in organised activities (N = 527)

Young people emphasised the need to make their voices heard, particularly by those with the power to make decisions.

Volunteering was also a feature of political and community engagement for many of the young people we interviewed. Young people volunteered for youth groups, in teaching-related roles, as part of religious organisations, at specific community events and as part of formal volunteering organisations. Overall, young people enjoyed their experiences of volunteering, although some expressed a concern that their actions were not as impactful as they would like:

“

I've been volunteering since last year ... and it is genuinely one of the best things that I've ever done ... I'm putting so much effort in helping people, so it's, like, genuinely nice.” MAN, 24, VIC

“

My only complaint about it is that ... it doesn't feel as impactful. So, we meet less often and for less time, but I found the people to be great.” WOMAN, 19, VIC

Reasons that young people gave for engaging in volunteering included wanting to give back to the community, wanting to help others and being able to spend time with others. Some interviewees also expressed more pragmatic reasons, such as learning skills and gaining an advantage in the job market:

“

It's always a good thing to be doing because it's something somewhat social that I can do in person ... and it's always a good thing to have on a resume. The fact that you do something for no financial gain is always a good thing to say.” MAN, 20, ACT

Most (90%) young Australians felt there was something preventing them from being involved in volunteering (see Figure 8.3). The most common reasons were how time-consuming volunteering was, (41%), lack of interest (33%), how expensive the activities were (31%) and being unsure about what they can do (22%). Twelve per cent of young people said they did not participate in organised activities because they did not think they could make a difference by being involved.



Figure 8.3. Barriers that prevent young people from volunteering in organised activities (N = 527)

Interviewees pointed to health concerns, financial barriers, lack of energy and a lack of motivation as reasons they were not currently volunteering:

“

Because my income is low, if I had the choice to choose [between] getting paid or a volunteer program where I don't get paid, I unfortunately choose the one where I get paid. WOMAN, 23, NSW

ROLE OF DIGITAL MEDIA IN CIVIC PARTICIPATION

More than one-third (40%) of young Australians said they have used their social media profiles in at least one of the ways depicted in Figure 8.4. More than one-fifth (22%) used their profiles to encourage others to take action on issues that are important to them, 15% searched for details of political protests in their local area with the intention of attending in person, 14% participated in an online group related to an issue or cause and 13% updated or amended their profile pictures to indicate support for a particular cause.

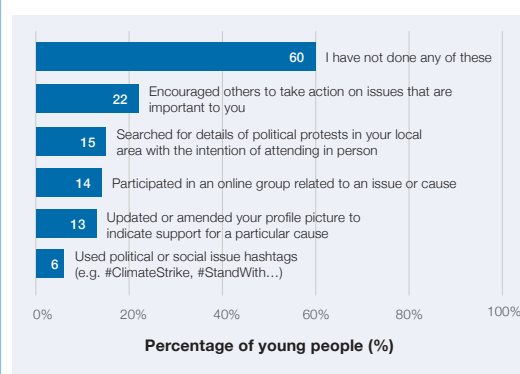


Figure 8.4. Actions for change taken on social media (N = 527)

Interviewees saw social media as an important tool for political engagement. Most importantly, they saw social media as a place where young people could express their voice:

“

I think it allows people to have a voice that they wouldn't normally be given ... Like, young people have this power with social media, whether it be on, like, TikTok or Instagram or Twitter or Facebook even; like, they have this ability to get their voice out and be heard and have, like, engagement ... There is that democratising of people's voices.” MAN, 19, QLD

Alongside the importance of raising awareness as a form of political engagement, young people believed social media was important for gaining access to and sharing information in a quick and efficient way. Because of this, social media was understood to play a major role in shaping popular opinion and could be leveraged by organisations such as political parties:

“

Social media ... makes news spread very quick, so people have a lot of access to information. Whether it's good information or bad information, the access is immediate.” WOMAN, 24, VIC

“

Labour and Liberal both have social media accounts where they post, like, relevant memes to whatever social media it's into at the time, to try and get people to vote for them ... I think that that affects a lot of young people who probably take that to heart.” MAN, 18, TAS

Young people also expressed that social media could be used for more active forms of political engagement, such as forming connections around political causes, starting protests, participating in fundraising or other community events and encouraging individuals to sign petitions:

“

It can also be a very powerful thing because people can unite from, you know, every place around the world and people create communities ... not just where they live but like thousands and millions of people from around the world ... I think that's such an empowering thing and such a beautiful thing that people find others to work towards a specific cause or a goal.” WOMAN, 19, SA

Some interviewees felt that social media was more representative of young people and that young people were more inclined to connect and engage with politics through social media.

“

Social media is probably, like, the politics for the youth. Like, that's what the youth are more invested in. So, if they see, you know, like, someone ... that's around their age, someone who looks like them, whatever, start doing better shit, I feel that's when they start paying more attention, being more invested.” MAN, 22, WA

Despite the importance of social media in young people's lives, many were ambivalent about the importance of social media. Young people were asked about the degree to which they agreed with statements about the role of social media, as shown in Figure 8.5. Sixty-six per cent of young Australians thought that people become side-tracked from important issues because of social media and 63% thought that people who think they are making a difference using social media are not always doing so. At the same time, 64% of young people thought that social media helps underrepresented groups amplify their voice, 60% thought that social media means that important issues receive attention they might not get otherwise and 54% thought people with power can be held accountable more easily on social media (see Figure 8.5).

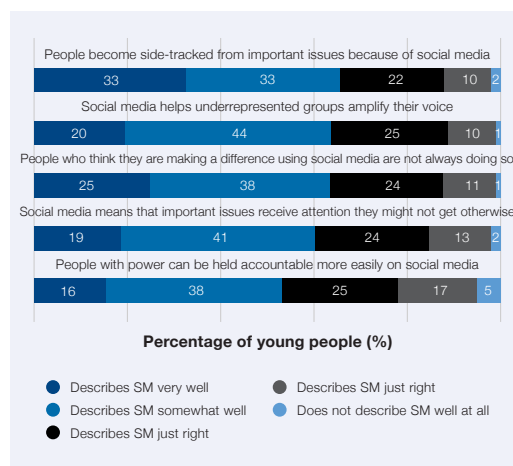


Figure 8.5. Perceptions of usefulness of social media to bring about change (N = 527)

Young people also discussed negative impacts of social media on political engagement. Some interviewees felt that social media was a tool used by political parties to try and target them and push certain political agendas:

“

I see a lot of content on social media that comes from political parties or other organisations that have political agendas and it just, the content just seems obviously aimed at young people.” MAN, 20, ACT

Some interviewees discussed how social media could be used to spread information, which could negatively sway people's engagement with politics, and how its algorithms could reinforce existing opinions and isolate people from engaging with diverse ideas:

“

It's a great tool, but also a great propaganda tool ... It can help a lot with informing, but it also depends on where someone is looking to get their information. They could be just looking for information that backs up, maybe, their own views of the world that are misleading and aren't based in reality.”

MAN, 24, QLD

“

The way an algorithm works is that it will, the people who need to, who should, the people who the messages are targeted towards, probably aren't going to be able to hear it because their algorithm won't show them that.”

WOMAN, 23, NSW

Social media was also seen as having negative impacts on social and community wellbeing, as it could expose people to damaging information and divide people based on their political beliefs:

“

It is sensational and it also allows people with bad opinions and bad beliefs that, kind of, are really ... antisocial in a way that ... undermines that, kind of, general social cohesion that people need for a functioning society to exist.” MAN, 19, QLD

YOUTH REPRESENTATION IN PUBLIC DISCUSSIONS

Compared with previous years, some young people we spoke to in 2025 were more positive about being represented in public discourse and some believed that their views had become slightly more important over time:

“

The representation of young people in politics is something people talk about, is obviously, in itself, like, the fact that they've been represented better. Like, I'd say probably 20 years ago, 20 to 30 years ago, like, no one talked about, are young people represented in politics.

MAN, 18, ACT

Despite this, most interviewees felt that representation remained inadequate. Some interviewees felt that young people were only taken seriously on youth affairs, but not on broader issues. Other interviewees felt that young people only began to be taken seriously when they became older:

“

I think the current government has made some benefits to our generation and is working towards improving some things, but there is some sectors that I think they might be missing [such as] cost of living and housing.” MAN, 24, QLD

“

Most of the time, unless the position is specifically related to youth ... people aren't really going to listen to young people.” WOMAN, 19, VIC

Young people believed social media was important for gaining access to and sharing information.

Older generations were seen as thinking young people were lazy or uneducated, and did not listen to young people's opinions. This was often viewed as untrue and hypocritical:

Government continually says that they value young individuals' voices; however, they seem to value older individuals' voices who have more perceived experience, life experience."

WOMAN, 24, NSW

“

They look at us as the future [but] they would rather criticize you than help you ... They don't care enough to guide you. They care enough to comment on you."

MAN, 22, WA

This led many young people to feel that politicians and older people were disconnected from their experiences and they were cynical about politicians adequately representing them and their interests:

“

I think a lot of politicians are, like, three generations above the majority of people currently experiencing, like, financial policies and things like that ... The generational split for people in politics versus people that are getting affected by those policies is quite a few decades."

WOMAN, 24, VIC

Some young people felt that formal politics in Australia was largely concerned with older people:

“

I think that women are poorly represented in Australian politics. I think people of colour are poorly represented in Australian politics. I think that people under the age of 40 are not well represented. I think what they want, and their ideas, are not well represented in Australian politics, and I think that definitely Gen Z doesn't have much of a voice. Despite the fact that we are now, Gen Z and Millennials are now, one of the biggest voting groups in the country, I still think that a lot of politicians are still concerned with people their own age."

WOMAN, 23, NSW

Given this, some young people had become disillusioned with politicians and did not think that they were taken seriously:

“

There are a lot of things that is going to affect the future generations and I don't think the government is trying to hear the political views. They are not trying to look at the future ... It's just going to make things more difficult for the future generations." MAN, 22, NSW

Some interviewees felt that young people were targeted by politicians as a tactic to gain votes, and were not represented in a genuine or meaningful way:

“

I feel like a lot of parties see it more as a market they have to get ... once we've got them that's it, it's like we don't really need to do anything more about that." TRANSGENDER PERSON, 19, NSW

“

I think a lot of the politics try to take the view, like, to bring in the youth and sell themselves ... It feels like a lot of the time the youth is just a sale tactic and ... we are not actually represented.”

WOMAN, 21, NSW

Possibly due to the 2025 federal election, many interviewees described how they did not feel represented in formal politics, pointing out that most candidates were older and that there were few younger representatives in parliament. Several interviewees indicated that they felt the Greens were the party that best represented young people and that the Greens' electoral failures were indicative of a lack of representation:

“

When it comes to representation in, like, ... the House of Representatives or the Senate, definitely not ... we aren't exactly represented in the literal sense of having a representative.” WOMAN, 19, VIC

“

I feel like the party that would have most represented young people this year was the Greens. They didn't really get that many seats compared to the others, so I feel like we are just not that represented in our struggles and what needs to be changed to make our lives better.”

WOMAN, 18, VIC

When it comes to levels of support, 49% of young people felt that there was not enough government support for housing, 34% thought there was not enough government support for finance and 24% thought that there was not enough government support for mental health. Political participation (26%), education (33%) and emergency services (33%) were seen as areas that received enough or more than enough support (see Figure 8.6).

A higher proportion of young people in the ACT (21%) and Tasmania (27%) reported that there was not enough government support for education compared with other states and territories (between 0% and 16%). Higher proportions of young women (30%) and gender diverse young people (31%) thought there was not enough government support for employment compared with young men (18%).

Slightly less than a quarter (24%) of young Australians believe that it is likely or very likely that climate change will be effectively combated in the future. This perception is shared across different demographic groups.

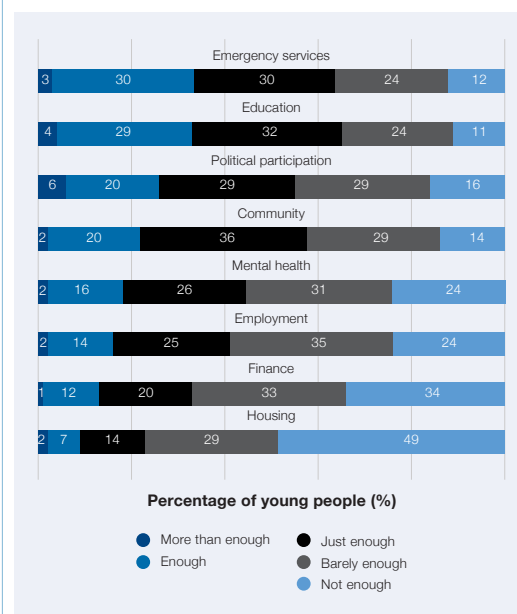


Figure 8.6. Perceptions of government support (N = 527)

POLICY AND RESEARCH IMPLICATIONS

Young Australians are concerned about social and political issues, with affordable housing, employment and climate change among their priorities. Although they participate in volunteering and issue-based activism, many feel policymaking spaces don't sufficiently include young people or incorporate their perspectives.^{7,8} Social media is a double-edged sword: useful for mobilization, but also a source of misinformation and division.

- Young people want meaningful engagement with policymakers. Steps to enable young people to participate in policymaking include:
 - expanding mandated youth advisory councils at local, state and federal levels so young people have real influence over policies that affect them, such as housing, employment and climate policies; and,
 - requiring that government consultation processes include young people from diverse backgrounds and publicly report how young people's input shaped policy outcomes.
- Young people often view formal political institutions (political parties, legislatures) as unresponsive or disconnected. Although voter turnout and enrolment among young people have improved, many feel alienated from traditional political channels. Improving formal political representation of young people requires:
 - incentivising political parties to recruit and support young candidates;
 - considering lowering age thresholds for some political roles or offices, where appropriate; and
 - supporting civic education in schools that demystifies formal political processes and rights.⁷
- Volunteering remains a major mode of engagement, motivated by a desire to contribute and connect. However, barriers such as time constraints, awareness of opportunities, and cultural or socioeconomic factors limit participation.^{9,10,11} Reducing barriers to volunteering and community engagement requires:
 - funding and infrastructure for and by organisations, such as not-for-profits/for purpose, charities, etc., that facilitate youth volunteering;

- developing toolkits and outreach programs to help young people, especially those from marginalized backgrounds, access volunteering opportunities;^{9,8} and
- recognising volunteering in formal credentials or employment pathways.¹⁰
- Young people leverage social media to communicate, organize, and engage, but they also report concerns about misinformation, echo chambers, harassment and polarisation.¹² Recommended responses include:
 - developing digital literacy curricula that include misinformation awareness, civic engagement online and ethical media consumption;
 - enforcing transparency and accountability from platforms, including how content is moderated, recommendation algorithms and safety mechanisms; and
 - assessing the effects of policies (such as social media age restrictions) on political engagement and mental health.¹²
- Following the recent federal election, some young people are more optimistic about their ability to influence change via formal mechanisms. It is essential to sustain and support this optimism by:
 - celebrating and publicising successful youth-led initiatives and policy wins to reinforce belief in effectiveness; and
 - ensuring mechanisms are in place to match optimism with opportunity, including accessible voting, clear pathways for participation and support for activism that aligns with young people's values and priorities.^{7,8}

Recent trends show growing optimism among youth about their capacity to effect change. Young Australians are eager to engage in political and social issues but feel their voices are under-heard and under-represented. Policies that institutionalise youth participation, reduce barriers to volunteering, responsibly manage social media's role, and foster formal representation will help translate young people's optimism into real influence. Promoting these changes strengthens democratic legitimacy and helps ensure policies are more responsive to the needs of younger generations.

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