



Australian Government



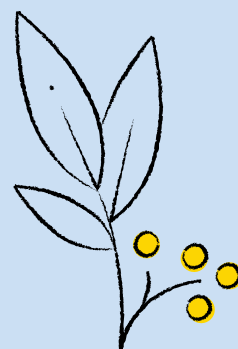
DISCUSSION PAPER

DEVELOPING THE AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT'S NEW YOUTH STRATEGY!

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

The Australian Government acknowledges the Traditional Owners of Country throughout Australia where we gather, live, work and stand. We acknowledge all Traditional Custodians, their Elders past and present, and we pay our respects to their continuing connection to their culture, community, land, sea, water and skies.

We extend this respect to all First Nations young people and acknowledge the importance of First Nations young people having a strong connection to their culture and Country. We also recognise and support the right of First Nations young people to self-determination and to share decision-making with the Australian Government.



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INTRODUCTION

Young people in Australia are navigating a range of pressures, including housing affordability, cost of living, mental health concerns, climate change and changing pathways through education and work. The 2025 National Youth Survey also highlighted that young people want a stronger voice in decisions affecting their lives and futures.

The Australian Government is developing a new Youth Strategy and wants to hear from young people and organisations that work with young people across Australia.

The purpose of this discussion paper is to seek your views on how the Australian Government can work with young people (aged 12-25), involve them in decision-making, and ensure youth perspectives influence policies and services that impact them.

THE ROLE OF THE OFFICE FOR YOUTH

The Australian Government is committed to ensuring young people across Australia have meaningful opportunities to influence decisions that affect them, and that government policies are informed by their experiences, aspirations and expertise.

The Australian Government's Youth Engagement Model reflects this commitment through the model's four components:

The Youth Engagement Model

Office for Youth (OFY)	The Australian Government, through OFY, creates opportunities for young people to participate in government decision-making and shape policies, programs and services that affect them.
Youth Steering Committee	A group of young people who work with the Minister for Youth and have supported design and implementation of the current youth engagement strategy, <i>Engage! A strategy to include young people in the decisions we make (Engage!)</i> . They also provide advice on government policies and programs that impact young people.
Youth Advisory Groups	Groups of young people that provide advice on priority policy areas, in partnership with a government agency working within the relevant portfolio. They provide advice on the design and implementation of policy and program work.
Youth Advocacy and Support Grant	A funding mechanism for a youth sector organisation to work with OFY, represent youth perspectives and support the effective operation of the Youth Steering Committee.

OFY leads the implementation of the Youth Engagement Model across the Australian Government, working with agencies and key sector partners to strengthen youth participation and embed young people's perspectives in policy and program design.

DEVELOPING THE YOUTH STRATEGY

Young people are affected by government decisions every day. These decisions influence education, employment, health, housing and many other aspects of a young person's life.

The Australian Government's current youth engagement strategy, *Engage!*, has been delivered by OFY since 2024. This has created more opportunities for young people aged 12–25 to contribute to government decision-making.

As *Engage!* concludes in March 2027, the Australian Government is seeking feedback to inform a new Youth Strategy that builds on its progress and further embeds young people in government decision-making.

We want to know how the Australian Government can strengthen youth engagement and what the priorities and scope of the Youth Strategy should include.

The Australian Government, through OFY, has identified initial areas for feedback and discussion, including **proposed cross-government priorities** and **proposed policy areas** for a new strategy.



Cross-government priorities The proposed cross-government priorities focus on how government works with young people.	Policy areas The proposed policy areas focus on issues affecting young people and priorities for government.
1. Stronger youth engagement mechanisms , enabling young people to share their views and contribute to government decision-making.	1. Mental Health, Health and Wellbeing 2. Climate, Environment and Sustainability 3. Economic and Housing Security 4. Education and training 5. First Nations Youth Engagement * See page 8 for more information about these policy areas and the related issues.
2. Stronger capability and support for youth governance , empowering young people to participate in decision-making and APS employees to engage effectively with them.	
3. Stronger transparency and visible action in response to youth engagement , closing the feedback loop with young people on how their views have informed government decisions.	
4. Enhanced leadership from OFY on youth participation and policy , promoting consistent and meaningful youth participation across government.	

We invite your views on whether these priorities and areas reflect the issues that matter most to young people, and what changes or additions should be considered.

The new Youth Strategy is intended to guide how government listens to young people and incorporates youth perspectives into policy development, rather than establish new funding programs or legislative reforms.

HOW YOU CAN HAVE YOUR SAY

We want to hear from young people, organisations and communities across Australia to inform the development of the new Youth Strategy.

There are several ways to share your views. Consider what method will work best for you!

The 2026 National Youth Survey

The survey gives young people aged 12–25 the opportunity to share which issues matter most to them and why.

They can also advise the Australian Government on how it should respond and how young people would like to be involved in government decision-making.

Young people can complete the 2026 National Youth Survey via our **survey form** or by following the link from **youth.gov.au**.

Respond to this discussion paper

This discussion paper seeks feedback from the youth sector, Australian Government agencies and other organisations that work with or support young people. These responses will paint a picture of the issues that are most impacting young people in Australia and how a new Youth Strategy can address this.

Young people who wish to share their views directly are encouraged to complete the 2026 National Youth Survey; however, they may also respond to this discussion paper.

You can submit your responses to the discussion paper via our **feedback form** or by following the link from **youth.gov.au**.

For more information contact the Australian Government Office for Youth at **youth@education.gov.au**

KEY DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

The questions below are informed by young people's views, relevant research and lessons from *Engage!*. They are intended to directly inform the priorities, policy areas and overall direction of the new Youth Strategy.

The background section from page 6 provides further context for consideration when preparing your response.

Vision and ambition

What outcomes and priorities should shape a new Youth Strategy.

1. Which issues and policy areas have the greatest impact on young people, and do the proposed policy areas reflect their experiences and priorities?
2. What emerging issues will affect young people over the next decade, and what changes should government make to respond?

Engagement mechanisms

What changes could strengthen how government engages with young people.

1. What does "young people playing an active role in government decision-making" look like in practice?
2. Where are the most critical gaps, overlaps, or inefficiencies in current government approaches?

Capability

What skills and capabilities can be strengthened to support youth governance.

1. What skills, knowledge or support do young people need to effectively engage in government decision-making?
2. What capabilities do government officials and/or ministers need to better work with young people?

Accountability

What mechanisms can strengthen accountability to young people.

1. What would need to change for the Australian Government to be seen as responsive and accountable to young people?
2. What practical mechanisms would most improve accountability to young people?

Whole-of-government approach to youth policy

What the Australian Government's approach to youth policy looks like in practice.

1. What are the biggest coordination gaps across the Australian Government that are affecting young people?
2. What would a coordinated youth policy system look like in practice?

BACKGROUND

This section provides a high-level overview of young people's experiences in Australia, drawing on sources including the Australian Government's National Youth Survey, the Mission Australia Youth Survey, Australian Bureau of Statistics data, and insights from OFY's Youth Advisory Groups and Youth Steering Committee. It provides context for the discussion questions and is not intended to be a comprehensive review of the evidence.

Life as a young person in Australia

There are approximately 4.3 million young people aged 12-25 living across Australia.¹ Young people are growing up in a world that is rapidly changing, in a period of their life marked by significant changes, growth and transition.

Being a young person is about much more than age. It is a period of life characterised by exploration, learning and increasing independence.

During this time, young people may:

- Move from primary school to secondary school
- Finish school and enter further education, training or employment
- Begin managing their own finances
- Move out of home or become more independent from parents and carers
- Develop their identity, values and sense of belonging
- Build friendships, relationships and community connections
- Participate in civic life and have a greater say on issues that affect them.

These transitions can be exciting and create opportunities for growth. They can also be challenging, particularly when they occur at the same time and with limited support.

¹ Australian Bureau of Statistics, *National, state and territory population*, ABS website, 2025, accessed 17 July 2026

Learning and work

Young people are making decisions about their future education, training and employment while building the skills and confidence needed to participate in a rapidly changing economy.

Currently, 63% of young people are at school or enrolled in further study and young people make up 73% of apprentices and trainees.²

Financial independence

As young people become more independent, they often begin managing their own finances, paying bills, saving money and planning for the future.

For many young people, rising costs and housing affordability pressures are making this transition more difficult than in previous generations. Cost of living consistently ranks among the issues young people are most concerned about.

In 2021, young people aged 12-24 were estimated to make up 23% of Australia's homeless population.³

Experiences of homelessness can have lasting impacts for young people, disrupting education and pathways into work, as well as the ability to build stable, healthy social connections.

2 Australian Bureau of Statistics, Education and Work, ABS website, 2025, accessed 18 August 2026

3 Australian Bureau of Statistics, Estimating Homelessness: Census, ABS website, 2023, accessed 18 August 2026

Identity and belonging

Young people are developing a stronger sense of who they are and where they belong as they grow older.

Based on the 2021 Census, young people in Australia come from many different backgrounds and experiences:

- 5% are Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander
- 16% are born overseas
- 4% are carers
- 14% have disability⁴
- 3% are parents
- 10% are lesbian, gay or bisexual⁵
- 25% live in regional and remote areas.

Strong connections to family, culture, community and Country can play an important role in helping young people thrive.

Participation and influence

Young people are not only preparing for the future. They are already shaping it.

Young people contribute to their schools, workplaces, communities and organisations every day. They volunteer, advocate for causes they care about, participate in community activities and increasingly want opportunities to influence decisions that affect their lives.

While a majority (98%) of young people who responded to the 2025 National Youth Survey believe it is important for the Australian Government to consider their views when creating a policy or program, only 35% feel that the government does.⁶ By comparison, 70% of OFY program participants felt they had influenced a government policy or program.⁷ This demonstrates the value of OFY's work and the opportunity for the new Youth Strategy to strengthen young people's participation and influence in government decision-making.

4 This includes young people aged 15-24. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW), People with disability in Australia 2024, AIHW website, 2026, accessed 20 July 2026

5 This includes young people aged 16-24. Australian Bureau of Statistics. Estimates and characteristics of LGBTI+ populations in Australia, ABS website, 2024, accessed 22 July 2026

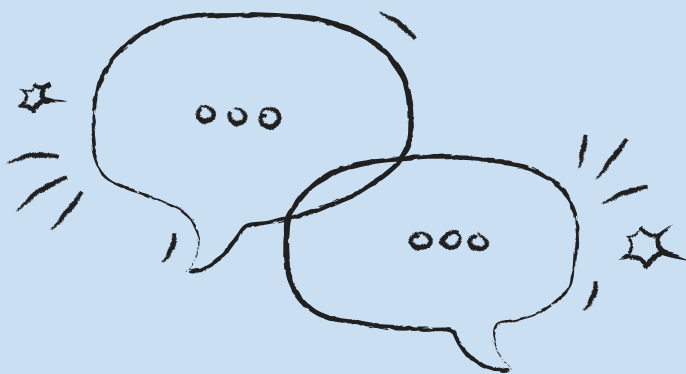
6 Office for Youth, 2025 National Youth Survey Summary Report, Australian Government, 2026, accessed 17 July 2026

7 Office for Youth, Engage! Impacts and Insights 2025-26, Australian Government, accessed 26 August 2026

OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

Young people are optimistic about the future and the opportunities available to them, but also face significant and interconnected challenges.

Research, including the Australian Government's National Youth Survey and Mission Australia's Youth Survey, consistently identifies cost of living, mental health, housing and climate change as key concerns. The proposed policy areas below reflect these issues and government priorities, including continued support for First Nations young people to share decision-making with government.



What do young people care about?

Mental Health, Health and Wellbeing

	What are we seeing?	Why does it matter?
Mental Health	Mental health is one of the biggest concerns for young people in Australia. It is also one of the biggest health challenges facing young people in Australia. ⁸	Mental health shapes young people's ability to learn, work, build relationships and participate in their communities.
Health and Wellbeing	Young people's wellbeing is influenced by their relationships, sense of belonging, safety and ability to maintain healthy habits.	Strong wellbeing supports young people to feel connected, manage challenges and participate in everyday life.

Climate, Environment and Sustainability

	What are we seeing?	Why does it matter?
Climate Change	Many young people are concerned about climate change and its impacts on their lives, communities and future.	Climate change affects young people now and will affect young people's lives and opportunities in the future. These impacts span all elements of young people's lives.
Environment and Sustainability	Young people are concerned about environmental issues such as pollution, waste and damage to natural environments.	Healthy environments and sustainable systems shape the future young people inherit.

8 Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, *Health of Young People*, AIHW website, 2026, accessed 17 July 2026

Economic and Housing Security

	What are we seeing?	Why does it matter?
Economic Security	Young people consistently rank cost of living as a major issue affecting their lives. ⁹	Young people struggling with cost of living expenses may experience impacts on their wellbeing, studies or employment.
Housing Security	Housing costs and affordability pressures are seen as contributing to concerns about future housing security for young people.	Safe and secure housing provides a foundation for wellbeing, learning, employment and social connection.

Education and Training

	What are we seeing?	Why does it matter?
Education	Young people want accessible education and training that support their interests, aspirations and future pathways.	Positive learning experiences help young people build knowledge, skills and confidence for further study, work and life.
Training	Young people want secure and meaningful job opportunities that align with their skills and career goals.	Positive employment experiences help young people build skills, financial independence and confidence for the future.

9 Mission Australia, *Youth Survey Report 2025*, Mission Australia, 2025, accessed 17 July 2026

First Nations Youth Engagement

	What are we seeing?	Why does it matter?
Culture, Country and self-determination	First Nations young people have said that strong connections to culture, Country, family and community support them to participate confidently in decisions that affect them. ¹⁰	Supporting self-determination and respecting cultural duality helps empower First Nations young people to advocate on the issues that matter most to them.
Culturally safe and shared decision-making	First Nations young people can face barriers to participating when engagement is not culturally safe, accessible or designed in partnership with them and their communities.	Culturally safe engagement that respects First Nations ways of knowing, being and doing supports genuine participation, builds trust and leads to better policies and services.



10 Office for Youth, 2025 Engage! A strategy to include young people in the decisions we make., Australian Government, 2024, accessed 17 July 2026

WHAT WE'VE DONE SO FAR

Since 2022, the Australian Government has strengthened youth engagement across government through *Engage!* and broader collaboration across government. You can learn more about the outcomes of *Engage!* in our annual reports available on youth.gov.au.

Monitoring of *Engage!* shows that many young people value opportunities to engage directly with government and want these opportunities to continue. *Engage!* has also shown the importance of creating clear pathways for participation, supporting diverse young people to get involved, and demonstrating how young people's views influence decisions.

Establishing youth engagement mechanisms

OFY has introduced a range of actions to help young people participate in decisions that affect their lives. This included:

- Establishing an annual **National Youth Forum**, bringing together young people from across Australia to discuss issues, develop ideas and provide advice to government
- Continuing the **Youth Steering Committee**, which works directly with the Minister for Youth and helps guide the implementation of youth engagement initiatives
- Delivering **Youth Advisory Groups** that connect young people with government agencies and ministers to provide advice on specific policy issues.

Since 2024, Youth Advisory Groups have provided advice on issues including climate change, mental health, civic participation, creative industries, sport, First Nations policy, prevention of gender-based violence, and national security.

Supporting youth advisory councils across government

OFY has helped other Australian Government agencies establish youth advisory mechanisms and connect directly with young people.

This includes supporting the Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water to establish the **Youth Advisory Council on International Climate Change** and supporting the Department of Home Affairs to establish the **Youth Advisory Council for a Safer Australia**. These Councils provide young people with opportunities to contribute their perspectives and experiences to government policies and programs.

By helping agencies create their own youth engagement mechanisms, OFY has expanded opportunities for young people to have a say on issues that matter to them across different areas of government.

Making it easier for young people to access information

Young people told us they wanted clearer and more accessible information about government programs, services and opportunities. In response, OFY developed the **Digital Youth Hub** and expanded its social media presence to help young people:

- Find government services and support
- Learn about opportunities available to them
- Understand government policies and initiatives
- Access information about participation and engagement opportunities.

Use of these platforms has grown significantly since they were introduced, helping more young people connect with government information and opportunities.

Building young people's confidence and leadership

Engage! also recognised that some young people face additional barriers to participating in decision-making.

To address this, OFY delivered **youth engagement grants** that support young people to build leadership, advocacy and engagement skills. This included programs specifically designed to support:

- First Nations young people
- Young people from regional, rural and remote communities.



youth.gov.au