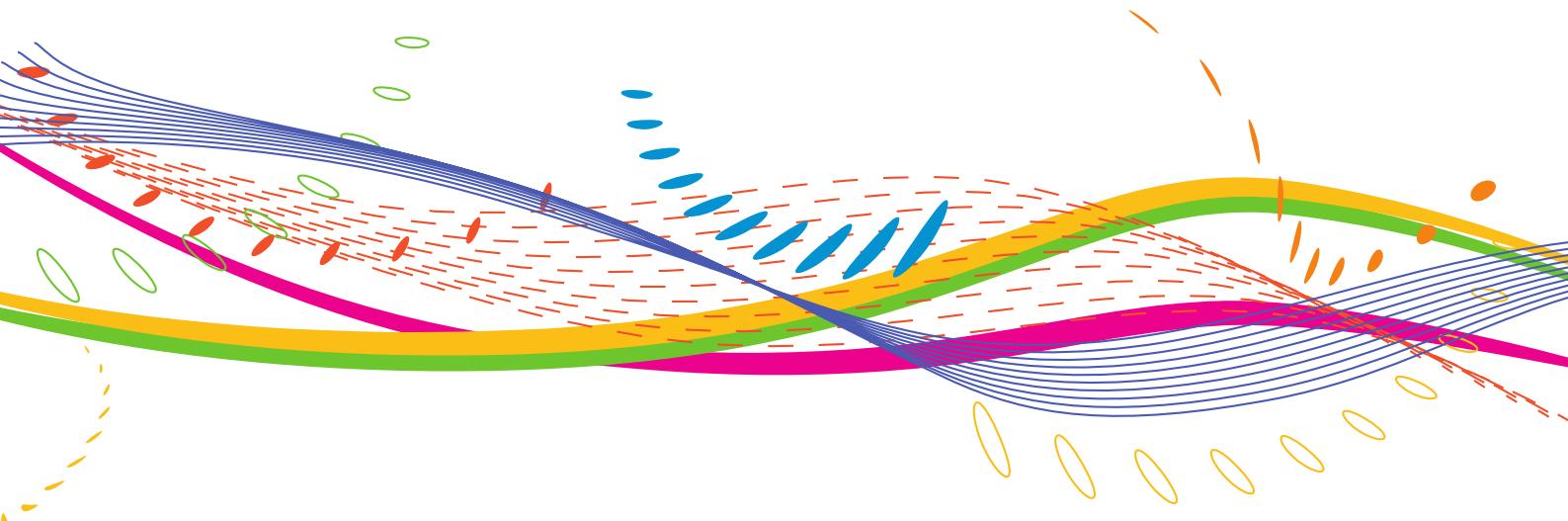


# **headspace Youth Consultations: Report for the Office for Youth**

**October 2015**



# Introduction

## About headspace

**headspace** is the National Youth Mental Health Foundation of Australia. **headspace** provides early intervention mental health services to 12-25 year olds. The service is designed to make it as easy as possible for a young person and their family to get the help they need for problems affecting their wellbeing. This covers four core areas: mental health, physical health, work and study support and alcohol and other drug services.

**headspace** currently has over 80 centres around Australia and 19 centres in Victoria. These services are located in both metro and regional areas.

As part of the consultation process for the development of the new Victorian youth policy framework, **headspace** facilitated consultations with 42 young people in 5 headspace centres. The purpose of the consultations was to elicit the views of young people on the issues and challenges that young people face today in order to feed into the development of the new youth policy.

# Methodology

**headspace** adopted a qualitative methodological approach to the youth consultations. A total of five consultations were carried out with Youth Reference Groups at **headspace** centres in: Ballarat, Bentleigh, Geelong, Hawthorn and Mildura. Three case studies on young people were also included in the consultation process.

## Participants

A total of 42 young people participated in the consultations aged between 15-25. The cohort of young people involved in the consultations were young people with lived experience of mental health issues and/or young people who are passionate advocates for youth mental health. Young people consulted were located both in metro and regional areas.

## The consultations

**headspace** has a model of youth participation that supports youth engagement at both national and local level. Young people are involved in many areas of the organisation and its activities, including service development, media, community awareness, advocacy, research and more. At a local level, **headspace** centres have 'Youth Reference Groups' who ensure that the services delivered are appropriate, relevant and youth friendly.

The consultation process utilised local Youth Reference Groups to engage young people. Staff at the local **headspace** centre contacted the Youth Reference Group with the opportunity to participate in the consultation.

Young people were also given the opportunity to take on a 'facilitators' role. The youth facilitators (one or two per centre) formed a smaller working group and supported the development of youth consultation questions and process; organised the consultation with their Youth Reference Group; and facilitated the consultations. The youth facilitators were also provided with more detailed information about the Victorian youth policy and its development process.

The consultations were youth-led, facilitated by young people at the centre with support from a young **headspace** Youth National Reference Group (hY NRG) member.

One consultation was conducted per centre lasting 120 minutes each. The consultations were facilitated in a focus group format using the consultation guide developed (Appendix A) with guiding questions and prompts. The consultations were audio-recorded on consent of the participants (one consultation did not consent to audio-recording). Butchers paper was used in the discussion to help facilitate conversation. A reporting template was completed following the consultation by the hY NRG member or youth facilitator and allowed young people to identify which themes from the conversation were most important.

## Analysis

The Youth Participation Advisor received reports, pictures of the butchers paper notes and audio recordings of the consultation. Thematic content analysis was conducted to draw out key themes across consultations.

## Demographic information

Total number of participants	Age	Gender	Place of birth
42	14-18 ( <i>n</i> =11) 18-20 ( <i>n</i> =9) 21-25 ( <i>n</i> =22)	Male ( <i>n</i> =13) Female ( <i>n</i> =29)	Australia ( <i>n</i> =35) Overseas ( <i>n</i> = 7)

# Results / Outcomes

Dominant themes that arose in a higher number of consultations are presented first in the results section. Themes that arose in a lesser number of consultations or only one consultation but were considered especially important to the group consulted follow.

The following key focus areas were highlighted in the consultations.

- Mental health
- Education
- Culturally and Linguistically Diverse populations
- Employment
- Disadvantaged / marginalised groups
- Drug and alcohol use
- Transport
- Housing and homelessness

## Key themes- What is important to young people?

Young people in the consultations were asked what issues are important to them. They were then asked to choose the three most important issues to them and define actions the government should be taking to address these issues. Described below are the key themes that arose from the consultations identified as most important by the young people themselves.

### Mental health

The young people across all consultation sites discussed mental health as an important issue for young people today. They discussed ways that mental health impacts- and is impacted by- other key issues in their lives. This theme consistently ran through the consultation discussions.

A need for mental health information, intervention and support for young people was clearly identified in all consultations. Schools were considered an important environment to promote mental health. It was emphasised that mental health should be included in the school curriculum and mental health first aid training should be given to all students. Acknowledging that young people often turn to their friends first if they are not feeling ok, the importance of ensuring all young people are receiving information about mental health and are able to support their peers was highlighted. Ensuring the entire school community is well-informed about mental health also promotes an environment of understanding and one free of stigma where the young person feels comfortable speaking up and seeking help.

*'Nine out of ten times the first person that a young person will talk to if things are not going well is their friends. It is important that all young people are able to talk about mental health' (Female, Mildura)*

Three consultations also discussed the importance of teachers having increased capacity to address mental health concerns amongst young people. Teachers should receive training in mental health and be given skill in identifying mental health issues and providing appropriate support. This is seen as currently lacking by the young people consulted. Mental health training should be included in all teacher training and the young people emphasised that any program delivered to teachers should be followed up to ensure appropriate mental health support is being provided to students.

The importance of building an understanding of mental health issues amongst parents was also considered important across consultations. Parents play an important role in supporting the young person and detecting when things are not going well.

Waiting lists for mental health services (such as **headspace**) were described as far too long. Whilst online services such as **eheadspace** were considered as very important for young people, particularly those in rural areas, waiting times here are also long.

*'When young people reach out for support from a mental health service, they are generally at their worst. So for them then to have to wait 3-4 weeks. It's too long' (Female, Ballarat)*

*'I recently called eheadspace and the wait was so long... I think I waited about 3 hours before I could speak to someone' (Female, Geelong)*

Another consultation discussed the varied availability of mental health services for students at different schools and emphasised that all schools should work better with mental health services to ensure all young people have the same access to support.

One consultation was in strong agreement that current mental health programs provided limited information as they only address anxiety and depression in young people. The young people believed there is a need to provide information beyond anxiety and depression to include other mental illnesses such as psychotic illness, personality disorders, etc. Better and broader knowledge will help with early detection as well as reduce stigma around these more complex mental health issues.

*'Awareness needs to be raised about these mental health disorders so stigma can be reduced.  
I have Borderline Personality Disorder and PTSD and when I tell people that they look on their faces. It is just crazy how people are just so unaware of what it means to have these illnesses.'*  
(Female, Geelong)

*'I think we have done a good job with depression and anxiety and I think people can now speak up about it. But I suffer from an eating disorder and OCD and you say that to someone and they freak out.' (Female, Geelong)*

Bullying and the impact of this on a young person's mental health was of high concern in one consultation. Schools should have a clearer approach to bullying and have this documented so students are aware of the

consequences. However it was also recognised that bullying is not solely a problem for schools to solve and the community including parents should be involved in the response.

*'Bullying is an issue that is left for schools to manage. And schools are not doing it well.' (Male, Ballarat)*

The importance of ensuring youth participation in the development and delivery of mental health programs was also highlighted. The most effective mental health programs involve talks by young people themselves who had experienced mental health challenges.

*'I think people who have experienced mental health illness and have accessed the services need to come into schools and talk to young people. They need to talk about the reality of mental health, in an honest way, and explain what services are available and how to access help. Explain what the services look like. Young people will relate to that better' (Female, Geelong)*

*'The only way we can reduce stigma is by speaking up about our own experiences. We can be like, hey you have been through this too. I think having young people talking about their lived experiences is so powerful' (Male, Hawthorn)*

## **Education**

Four of the consultations agreed that whilst education at school was important, there is currently far too much pressure placed on them to perform well in grade 12 and get a high ATAR score. This pressure creates an environment that promotes stress.

*'There is so much pressure. From school from society from family. So much pressure to do well in grade 12' (Male, Hawthorn)*

According to consultation participants, pressure to perform in grade 12 leads to school drop-out and can impact a young persons' mental health. A young person may not see themselves as capable if a score is not achieved and this impacts self-worth and self-confidence. There is an urgent need to reduce pressure and address the stress inducing environment, and young people should be made aware of the alternative pathways and options if a certain grade 12 score is not achieved.

*'There is definitely too much pressure for people in grade 12. I think there should be a program explaining all the different options available. I didn't have that in grade 12. There are so many options that are not university and there are so many other pathways.' (Female, Ballarat)*

*'Often people feel that because of the limited options they see they look at year 12 and just think they can't do it and drop out. That there is not going to be any support if they are struggling.' (Female, Geelong)*

*'We are also seeing high suicide rates amongst VCE students. Maybe parents also need to be educated around supporting young people in their VCE. Parents also don't know the different options so they pressure young people to do well in grade 12'. (Female, Mildura)*

The need for broader life skills education was also highlighted.

*'It's like because the score is so important they only teach you the maths and English that are going to get you the high score. But we are not taught life skills. When I finished school I couldn't keep myself alive!' (Male, Hawthorn)*

### **'Take the Scenic Route'**

The stress and distress surrounding year 12 and ATAR score was considered as a key issue for Bentleigh Youth Reference Group. Pressure from parents, teachers and society to get a high VCE score is too much for young people to handle.

The Group suggested a campaign that demonstrates that the ATAR score does not determine ones life and there are many options if you don't get the score you need to enter university. '*Take the scenic route*' campaign places more emphasis on experience rather than a ATAR score and encourages young people to volunteer and travel. It stresses that young people have lots of time to achieve the things they want in life and a successful and fulfilling life and career is not dependent on an ATAR score.

#youvegottime #takethescenicroute

### **Case Study- Sharon**

The usual generic 'deciding your career' and 'how to get through VCE' workshops were the standard in our high school and most other Melbourne schools with my other friends. Despite attending all these well-intended workshops, I had no clue what I wanted to do in the future as a career. I mean, I would have to potentially spend the rest of my life working in this field, of course I had to choose something meaningful to me. These workshops addressed all the generic questions such as 'what pathways it could lead into uni to get the degree I wanted', yet my transition into university took such a different turn.

There is so much emphasis on getting a high ATAR score, yet this simple number that I stressed about had no relevancy at all to the degree I ended up transferring into. I had a failed attempt at a first degree which took me 1.5 years to realise I had no interest in, had little to none job prospects for and left my family thousands of dollars out of pocket to pay for.

If there was professional help or even organisations that would give real life experience and perspective on what actually needs to be addressed during your VCE and youth years, such as maintaining your wellbeing, emphasising that high school and the ATAR score plays the tiniest role in your life or even just more personalised workshops that aided our own personal hardships, I would not have spent two years of my life and my family's money even just *figuring out where I wanted to be*. My advice would be to explore options and even get advice from those who have already been in your current position or from organisations that specialise in that area of professional help. Organisations specialising in professional help dealing with youths and their upcoming life choices should be more available definitely in the younger community to aid them in sculpturing and transitioning into the beginning of their adulthood.

## Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) populations

Four of the five consultations highlighted the unique issues faced by CALD communities and the challenges they face as they have more limited knowledge about available services in Australia.

CALD communities face unique mental health challenges. There is limited knowledge and education about mental health in CALD communities and mental health education is not targeted towards these communities and often not in their language. Young people with parents who were born outside Australia have more limited support and experience challenges accessing services.

*'I think there needs to be more support for people from different backgrounds, about how they can access services and more education around mental health. There are all these people coming here from backgrounds of torture and rape and horrific things. I just think they need to know what services are out there and we needed to help them access services.'* (Female, Geelong)

*'For people from different backgrounds, mental health is still so stigmatised. And they don't recognise the mental illnesses that we do.. We have a lot of mental health information in English, but not really in other languages. We are becoming more multicultural so it is only going to become more important'* (Female, Geelong)

Young people from CALD communities, including first generation Australians, also face challenges with education as family support may be more limited.

*'I am a first generation Australian and making decisions in VCE for my future was really difficult because I didn't have that support from parents. They didn't know what happens in Australia. I didn't know what to do. More support for those young people is needed.'* (Female, Geelong)

The consultations also highlighted that young people of CALD communities are being taken advantage of by employers whilst international students are underpaid, isolated and need support but do not know where to go.

*'I came over to Australia as an international student. I did not have my family with me. I didn't know what services are available and there is no one asking you how you are adapting.'* (Female, Hawthorn)

Consultation participants emphasised that it was important for young people within these communities to lead education efforts. Empowerment of CALD young people was considered the best approach, whilst more support and funding for organisations working with multicultural youth was considered as needed.

## Employment

Employment was considered important to young people across all consultations. Youth unemployment was a concern and young people shared some of the challenges they experienced in getting a job. The young people

consistently discussed the need to have experience to get a job, and with little experience their employment options were limited.

*'A lot of people go through university and don't get any work experience, which is highly valued by employers. Getting that work experience and support to do that is important.'* (Female, Mildura)

A lack of knowledge about available employment opportunities for young people was also discussed. Two consultations also suggested that volunteering opportunities should be made more available and young people encouraged to volunteer, however employers also need to value volunteering as real work experience.

Three consultations indicated a need for more vocational education services and support that are affordable for young people. These services need to be free and accessible for all young people, including disengaged youth. Job readiness forums that encourage job seeking for young people and explaining there are many options for young people are also needed according to the young people consulted. Such forums could be run by young people who have completed grade 12.

Leadership programs are often only offered to those young people who are excelling, however other young people are not given these opportunities. All young people should be given the opportunity to attend such programs so they gain confidence and develop skills that are useful when seeking employment.

*'I see all these high achieving young people going to leadership camps and I wish I could do that. All those young people going already had so much confidence, but there was nothing for those that weren't leaders in the school'* (Female, Geelong)

Young people also described being taken advantage of by employers as they either did not know their employment rights or were too scared of losing their job to address the issues with their employer.

*"Especially those young people in their first job. They get underpaid and taken advantage of, yet they don't have the confidence to speak up or even know that what is happening is wrong"*  
(Female, Hawthorn)

## Disadvantaged / marginalised groups

The higher prevalence of mental health challenges in specific groups was highlighted across consultations. Groups discussed include LGBTIQA+ young people, transgender young people and young people with a disability. Discrimination and stigma exists against these groups, also leading to more limited employment and other opportunities.

The lack of comprehensive sexuality education particularly for young LGBTIQA+ people at school was highlighted. Young people are taught how to have safe heterosexual sex, but not safe homosexual sex. Sexuality education would also help address stigma against LGBTIQA+ youth. Cameron's case study below explains his story.



### **Case Study- Cameron**

I am 21 and live with my family in Malvern, Melbourne. I completed my VCE in an all boys private school. I am an extrovert, and had many friends growing up. Anxiety was something that I struggled with frequently, although I never acknowledged it until finishing school. I began to question my sexuality in late primary school, wondering if I might be gay. I found it difficult hearing friends' parents make comments like "thank god my son isn't gay", and so through high school experienced great anxiety trying to convince myself that I was "straight". I really looked up to my "straight" older brother, who was my role model. Due to the nature of my all boys school, it was too much to come out during school and I never talked to anyone about the confusion I was experiencing. The school counsellor was the chaplain and had strong views against homosexuality. So, I waited until he finished school to 'come out' and this was one of the most daunting conversations of my life. My family was very supportive and told me they loved me regardless of my sexuality.

I found it difficult only having received heterosexual-relevant sex education. I want to see sexuality education in school and I think this is the best way to show students they are all equal regardless of sexuality or gender. I also wish schools had greater assistance to support students who might be unsure of their gender or sexuality, and that the option of a secular counsellor should be available to young people.

I took a gap year after year 12, and then spent 3 months volunteering as a teacher in a rural village in Eastern Ghana. During this time in Ghana I was challenged by the death of one of my 15 year old students battling HIV and tuberculosis. I returned home feeling increasingly withdrawn, and my anxiety "blew up". The following year I moved interstate to begin a degree in Medical Science and hoped my anxiety would "go away" if he got busy with studies. My anxiety worsened and I began to experience symptoms of Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD). I had to return home.

I wish that all students were taught about mental health in school, and this needs to happen in Primary Education. That is, how to recognise early signs of mental illness in themselves and their friends. I was never taught about mental illness. I think that people need to be more open about their own mental health challenges in order to reduce the stigma.

I am now studying a Bachelor of Arts (French, Psychology) and have learnt the importance of mental health self-care. I hope that in the future young people will have more support when going through a hard time, and will be openly respected and praised for seeking help.

An in depth case study with Natalia, a young woman with cerebral palsy, gives us insight into the challenges that a young person with a disability faces and the issues that need to be addressed.

### **Case study- Natalia**

I am 21 and live in Footscray, Melbourne. I have cerebral palsy and so I have to move around on walking sticks. I have experienced numerous challenges and believe much more needs to be done to better support young people with disabilities.

I went to a mainstream primary and high school. Special schools were not an option as I was too bright. I am now in my final year studying forensic psychology and will do my master's degree in social work next year.

I have had significant mental health challenges. Young people with disability are more likely develop mental health problems. I have experienced isolation and find the way I am often treated depressing. More mental health information should be targeted towards persons with disability and a better awareness and open discussion about mental health is needed amongst disability groups. More training is needed with clinicians about how disability can impact perception of self and mental health.

I have also experienced discrimination from employers, submitting numerous job applications and never hearing back. My experience with disability employment agencies has been negative. I found they had no focus or interest on what I wanted to do. Instead, I felt like I was just a number and a quota needed to be filled. I think the needs of a young person who is a job seeker is different to someone 30-40 years of age, and there should be youth specific employment services for people with disability.

Drug use amongst people with a disability is also not discussed, but an important issue to address. I have experienced dependence on opiates, which is common amongst those with a disability who take medication for pain. Young people with disability often talk about how they are already damaged so why not use drugs? I believe drug use and dependence is a silent but extremely prevalent issue amongst young people with a disability and urgently needs to be addressed.

Currently, disability services are for children up to 16 and then there is a separate service for adults. There are no disability services for young people to support around youth issues such as puberty and sexuality. There should be services that are specific for those in the 18-25 year old category that are dealing with particular issues that a young person faces.

I also feel there is a lack of disability role models in the media and amongst professionals. This also needs to change.

Challenges facing a young person with a disability are many. However I believe that with the right

## **Drug and alcohol use**

Drug and alcohol use was also considered an issue amongst young people and was discussed in depth in one consultation. Recognising that young people use drugs and will continue to use drugs, the need to target recreational and experimental drug users with harm minimisation interventions was considered as needed.

*'All my friends use drugs. Really when I think about it, almost all of them do. My friend recently went to hospital after taking too much ecstasy. But he is still taking it! So young people are always going to take drugs... I think it is more about educating young people how to use drugs safely.'* (Male, Hawthorn)

## **Housing and homelessness**

Housing affordability for young people was highlighted as an important issue in two consultations.

*'How are we ever going to afford a house? We are going to be at home until we are 30, rent is so expensive'.* (Male, Hawthorn)

Homelessness was also discussed as an important issue amongst young people in two consultations. Lack of housing for homeless youth was also highlighted as particularly important in regional areas.

*'There are no services for young homeless people in Mildura. Nowhere for them to go.'*  
(Male, Mildura)

## **Transport**

Transport was highlighted as a key issue for the young people in the three regional consultations.

*'I live an hour away from Geelong and public transport is very bad. A little while ago I was experiencing a mental illness and I could not get to services because my parents both work and there was no transport.'* (Female, Geelong)

# Recommendations

The following key recommendations were drawn from the youth consultations with young people at **headspace** centres:

- 1. Mental health awareness, early intervention and literacy programs for young people, parents and teachers.**
  - Include mental health first aid in school curriculum and ensure all young people receive quality, evidence-based mental health information.
  - Provide mental health training to all teachers so they have skill in identifying issues and providing support, stigma is reduced and early help seeking in schools is promoted.
  - Support mental health education programs that target parents to increase early intervention and so young people experiencing mental health issues are given needed support in their family environment.
- 2. Reduce pressure on young people to get high scores in their VCE.**
  - Place less emphasis on grade 12 results.
  - Make young people aware of alternative pathways in education and in life.
  - Value and encourage volunteering and life experience.
- 3. Address the mental health needs of young people from CALD communities, including international students.**
  - Increase awareness of available services in CALD communities.
  - Mental health programs that are designed with and for young people in CALD communities. Mental health organisations should work with organisations targeting CALD youth.
- 4. Develop accessible vocational education and other job readiness programs for young people.**
  - Vocational support services targeting both those disengaged and those who are excelling at school.
- 5. Ensure unique needs of marginalised young people such as LGBTIQA+, transgender and young people with a disability are addressed.**
  - Comprehensive sexuality education in schools that addresses sexuality and sexual health for young people of diverse sexual and gender identities.
  - Services urgently need to better address the needs of young people with a disability, including mental health, employment and disability services.
- 6. Address drug and alcohol use.**

- Drug education that focuses on risk and harm reduction for young people.

**7. Improve transport for regional and rural young people.**

**8. Address youth homelessness.**

- Housing including emergency and transitional accommodation for homeless youth in regional areas is needed.

**9. Ensure participation of young people.**

- Young people should be involved in policy and service development, and implementation of all programs targeting young people.
- Promote and invest in peer education and support programs.

# Conclusion

**headspace** welcomes the opportunity for **headspace** Youth Reference Group members to be involved in the consultation process for the new Victorian youth policy. A number of key themes and recommendations can be drawn from these consultations with young people connected to **headspace** centres.

Mental health was highlighted as a top concern and priority by the young people consulted. Mental health was a concern for young people at school particularly those in grade 12, for young people who identify as LGBTIQA+, transgender young people, young people with a disability and young people from CALD communities. The importance of ensuring all Australians are reached with quality mental health information was described as especially important. In addition to ensuring mental health services are targeting young people, there is a need to reach parents and teachers who are able to provide needed support, and to reach the broader community to reduce stigma associated with mental illness.

The young people consulted also believed that addressing challenges that young people face must involve young people from the communities most affected. For example, young people with mental health issues should be involved in providing information to their peers; young people from CALD communities should be empowered to implement programs in their communities; young people with disabilities should be role models; and successful young people who have finished school and not taken the traditional path should be involved in programs that aim to reduce pressure amongst those completing grade 12.

The young people involved in the conversations were passionate and concerned about issues that impact young people in Victoria. The continued involvement of young people in the development of the Victorian Government youth policy will be crucial for ensuring a relevant and effective policy environment that appropriately addresses the issues that young people face today.

## **What's Important to YOuth Consultation guide**

### **Background**

The Victorian Government is developing its new Youth Policy Framework and they want to hear from YOU about what is important to you and to young people in your community.

The policy is a whole-of-government policy and will look at a wide range of issues that impact young people. It will focus particularly on disadvantaged and disengaged youth.

Your voice will help us tell the government:

- How government can improve its support to you and young people in your community
- Which issues need to be focused on
- Where money needs to be invested

### **The consultation**

The consultation will last approximately 60-90 minutes. The consultation will be audio recorded and the recording will be sent to **headspace** National Office.

The results of your consultation will be combined with the results of a number of other consultations in Victoria and sent to the Government.

### **General issues**

1. What issues are important to young people in your community?
  - a. Why is this issue important?

### **Prompts**

- ***Education*** – especially the quality of schools, improving the educational achievements of young people and supporting young people as they transition into further education.
- ***Employment*** - especially the level of youth unemployment in Victoria and the difficulties for young people entering the job market.
- ***Training*** – especially rebuilding TAFEs, improving training's responsiveness to industry needs and strengthening the quality of training available.
- ***Mental Health*** – especially the delivery of services and standards across all acute and community mental health settings and expanding the Safe Schools Program to support same-sex-attracted and gender-diverse students
- ***Alcohol and drugs*** – especially binge drinking and alcohol-related violence and reducing the use of ice.
- ***Discrimination*** – especially the importance of promoting community harmony, celebrate diversity and multiculturalism and support women's full economic and social participation.
- ***Housing*** – especially the availability of social housing, homelessness and the affordability of housing for young people.
- ***Transport*** – especially improving public transport so that it is more available and accessible for young people.

[Write each issue identified by the young people up on the top of butchers paper and why it is important]

2. Which of these issues is most important to you? Why are these issues most important?
3. Thinking about the top 3 issues identified, how do you think the government could tackle these issues? What action should the government be taking?

*For example:*

- *Changing the law of policy*
- *Offering new or better programs or services or*
- *Doing things differently*

[use the butchers paper to write down what the government should be taking action on]