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30 October, 2015
Youth Central
Office for Youth
50 Lonsdale Street
Melbourne, 3000

RE: Submission to 'What's important to youth?' discussion paper

Dear Office for Youth,

The Australian Christian Lobby (ACL) welcomes this opportunity to comment on the development of the Victorian Government's new youth policy. ACL would like to provide feedback to the 'What's important to youth?' Discussion paper.

ACL has read the discussion paper and is concerned that the proposed policy does not contain a section addressing the specific issues that concern young women as a group. These issues include the alarmingly high rates of self-harm as highlighted by recent studies, high levels of sexual assault and alarmingly high rates of eating disorders.

ACL believes that the issues facing young women should be given greater attention in Victoria. ACL submits that a new paragraph detailing these issues as policy focus areas should be included in the policy document.

Rates of self-harm among young women

National youth mental health foundation, Headspace, cites a number of studies that highlight the self-harm issues facing young women. Their website states:

*The number of young people who die by suicide in Australia each year is relatively low compared with the number who self-harm. It is difficult to estimate the rate of self-harm as evidence suggests that less than 13% of young people who self-harm will present for hospital treatment (4). Evidence from Australian studies suggest that 6-8% of young people aged 15-24 years engage in self-harm in any 12-month period (8,9). Lifetime prevalence rates are higher, with **17% of Australian females** and 12% of males aged 15-19 years, and **24% of females** and 18% of males aged 20-24 years reporting self-harm at some point in their life (10). The mean age of onset is approximately 17 years (10). While suicide is more common among young men, self-harm is more common among young women.ⁱ [my emphasis added]*

A recent research paper, commissioned by Suicide Prevention Australia, revealed that there has been a 50 percent increase in young women presenting with self-harm injuries since 2000.ⁱⁱ

Levels of assault and sexual assault among young women

According to Commonwealth Parliament's e-brief on "Measuring domestic violence and sexual assault against women: a review of the literature and statistics", based on ABS data, one in five women (19 per cent) have

experienced sexual violence at some stage in their lives since the age of 15 and one in three women (33 per cent) have experienced physical violence at some stage in their lives since the age of 15.

Most sexual assault victims are female and the age of those females with the highest rates of sexual assault should be of such significance that it should be included in Victoria's policy direction.

According to the same parliament e-brief cited above:

statistics, taken from ABS Recorded Crime Victims 2003 data, show that females consistently recorded higher rates of sexual assault than males irrespective of age. For females, the highest sexual assault victimisation rates are for the 10-14 and 15-19 year age groups (475 and 520 per 100 000 population); over three times the rate for the general female population and fifteen times the rate for the general male population.ⁱⁱⁱ

This means that girls between the ages of 10 and 14 were the greatest proportion of victims and young women between 15 and 24 years were the second largest group.

Eating disorders

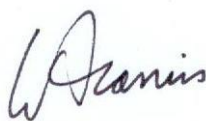
The serious impacts of eating disorders on young women who are disproportionately represented as a group is concerning. ACL believes that particular focus should be given to the issue in the policy document.

The following statistics are taken from the website 'Eating Disorders Victoria' which cites a range of research papers:^{iv}

- Eating disorders occur in both males and females before puberty, with the ratio of males to females approximately 1:10 during adolescence and decreasing to 1:20 during young adulthood.
- Approximately 15% of women experience an eating disorder at some point during their life.
- An estimated 20% of females have an undiagnosed eating disorder.
- Eating disorders are the 3rd most common chronic illness in young females.
- Between 1995 and 2005 the prevalence of disordered eating behaviours doubled among both males and females.
- Eating disorders are increasing in both younger and older age groups.

We trust that the issues our submission seeks to raise are given thoughtful consideration by the Office for Youth. I am available for to meet or make oral representations to the Office for Youth should you wish to discuss these issues further with me.

Regards,



Wendy Francis
Spokesperson for Women
Australian Christian Lobby

ⁱ <http://headspace.org.au/health-professionals/self-harm-and-suicidal-behaviours/> The sources cited for the research include the following studies: 8. De Leo, D., & Heller, T. S. (2004). [Who are the kids who self-harm? An Australian self-report school survey.](#) *Medical Journal of Australia*, 181(3), 140-144.; 9. Moran, P., Coffey, C., Romaniuk, H., Olsson, C., Borschmann, R., Carlin, J. B., & Patton, G. C. (2012). [The natural history of self-harm from adolescence to young adulthood: a population-based cohort study.](#) *The*

Lancet, 379(9812), 236-243.; 10. Martin, G., Swannell, S. V., Hazell, P. L., Harrison, J. E., & Taylor, A. W. (2010). [Self-injury in Australia: a community survey](#). *Medical Journal of Australia*, 193(9), 506.

ⁱⁱ <http://suicidepreventionaust.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/Suicide-and-Suicidal-Behaviour-in-Women.pdf>

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http://www.aph.gov.au/about_parliament/parliamentary_departments/parliamentary_library/publications_archive/archive/violenceagainstwomen

^{iv} <http://www.eatingdisorders.org.au/key-research-a-statistics>