

MISSION
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we stand

What's important to YOUth?

Response to
discussion paper



What's Important to Youth?

Mission Australia is a community service organisation that has been helping people regain their independence for over 150 years. Our services across Australia include early learning and youth services, extensive family support and homelessness initiatives, the provision of affordable housing and efforts to strengthen communities.

Mission Australia welcomes the Victorian Government's commitment to a new youth policy. We particularly welcome the focus on those young people who are disadvantaged, disengaged or facing challenges in life. Mission Australia works with young people on many of the important issues identified including marginalisation, identity and belonging, education, employment and mental health.

We believe that policy development and service delivery should be informed by the voices of the people affected. Accordingly, the findings and recommendations in this submission draw on what we've heard from young people themselves, gained through: our annual Youth Survey; and consultations specifically for this submission.

Key Recommendations:

While all of the areas raised in the discussion paper are important, based on the feedback from young people and from service staff working with young clients in Victoria, Mission Australia has prioritised the following 5 recommendations:

- 1.** Young people who are at risk of or who have disengaged from mainstream education require support to re-engage including making available alternative learning environments. This includes alternative education models such as Flexible Learning Options in South Australia and more youth-focussed registered training organisations to offer alternatives to TAFE. Young people who are disengaged from education are also missing out on valuable work experience opportunities and more needs to be done to fill this gap.
- 2.** A youth transitions program which focuses on the needs of the most vulnerable and marginalised young people and supports them on the path to meaningful work is needed. The Youth Connections program was a lifeline for disengaged young people and it appears that none of the proposed programs at the Commonwealth or state level are going to fill this gap.
- 3.** Alcohol and drugs was a priority issues for young people in both the policy consultations and the youth survey. More youth-specific detoxification and rehabilitation facilities are required to reduce waiting times and increase access for young people to these vital services.
- 4.** Youth homelessness needs to be addressed as a priority including a zero tolerance approach to young people exiting care into homelessness and a greater investment in early intervention programs including family engagement and place-based services.
- 5.** Young people on the margins need a holistic case management approach and assertive outreach to enable the supports they need in a cohesive and trauma-informed way.

Youth Survey

Mission Australia conducts the *Youth Survey* which is the largest annual survey of young people in Australia, with 13,600 respondents in 2014. This included 3,115 young people from Victoria aged 15 to 19 years with state based and national results referenced below. Most youth survey respondents are in full-time education and their participation is organised through their schools. These results therefore reflect the experience of young people overall, rather than focussing on disadvantaged young people.

Consistent with national results, Victorian young people valued friendships and family relationships, followed by school or study satisfaction and physical and mental health. Almost one in five young people did not report such a positive experience of family relationships, rating their family's ability to get along as either fair or poor. Major issues of personal concern were 'school and study problems' and 'coping with stress'.

The most important issues in Australia today for Victorian young people were politics and societal values, the economy and financial matters and alcohol and drugs. The identification of alcohol and drugs as an important issue increased among respondents compared to the past two years. Close to one in five respondents also identified *equity and discrimination, mental health and population issues* as major issues.

Mission Australia has analysed the *Youth Survey* data in several different ways to give better insights into the lives and concerns of particular groups of young people. This includes a breakdown by socio-economic status, a focus on Mission Australia's young clients, an analysis of mental health across the years and a more in-depth look at young people with alcohol and drug concerns. These sub-reports are referenced throughout this submission and can be found on our website alongside the full annual youth survey data at:

<https://www.missionaustralia.com.au/publications/research/young-people>

The 2015 Youth Survey Results are due for release on 30 November 2015.

Consultations with young people

Mission Australia facilitated consultations with 50 young Victorians in relation to this discussion paper. This included young people who are residing in or have recently exited out-of-home care; young people in, or exiting the youth justice system; Aboriginal young people; and young people from a refugee or Pacific Islander background. MA delivers a range of programs for these young people across Victoria.

Our consultations with young people demonstrate that 19 participants (38%) identified Alcohol and Other Drugs (AOD) as the most important issue, whilst 11 participants (22%) identified it as the least important issue. 76% of clients with a disclosed youth justice background rated AOD in their top three issues.

Education was also considered as an important issue, with a total of 32 participants (64%) ranking it as number 1, 2 or 3. Followed closely behind education, the key focus areas of mental health and employment were also considered as important issues. Almost 50% of participants ranked mental health (48%) and employment (46%) with either a number 1, 2 or 3.

100% of participants who have been involved or are currently involved in the out-of-home care system (Residential Care), rated housing in their top four issues. 50% of Indigenous participants noted the key theme of discrimination to be an important issue. These participants identified that they would like to see improvement of discrimination law and public awareness.

Note that the quotes scattered throughout this submission are from the young people we engaged with as part of this consultation process.

Educational, training and employment opportunities

Educational, training and employment opportunities are important issues for young people as they transition to adulthood and many young people face significant barriers when making this transition.

Our consultations with young people pointed to the lack of jobs available as well as the specific barriers facing some groups such as young people with criminal records or early school leavers.

Results from the *Youth Survey 2014* indicate that:

- 73% of Victorian young people planned to attend university after school which was higher than the national rate of 65% and by far the most frequently chosen option. Many young people also indicated plans to travel or go on a gap year (30%) or get a job (26%). Education, hard work and talent were the three most commonly cited influences on future career opportunities among both males and females from Victoria.
- When breaking down the national results by Socio-Economic Status (SES), we found variety in post-school plans. Young people in low or moderate SES areas were less likely to say they planned to go to university than those in high SES areas. Those in low or moderate SES areas were more likely than those in high SES areas to say they planned to get an apprenticeship or attend TAFE or college.
- Some young people, across all SES groups, expressed concerns about whether they would be able to afford further education or training.

In light of the various post-school pathways that are available and desirable for young people, it is important that young people are connected with the necessary information, guidance and support services to facilitate their transition from school to further education. Opportunities for career advice, mentoring and work experience early in life, particularly while still at school, will improve transitions to employment. Information should also be provided to parents and carers so they can support young people's decisions and transitions.

Post-school work experience and mentoring opportunities are also important, as are youth specific employment programs that help young people gain access to low skilled jobs, provide avenues to higher skilled jobs and address complex needs for more disadvantaged young people.

Young people have told us – and the evidence supports this – that there is a need for a greater focus and investment in education, training and employment for young people. There are significant economic and social benefits that flow over many years from participation in the workforce, and we

need to support young people in the transition from school to work, school to training or further study, and from training/study to work.

Supporting the aspirations of young Australians

The *Youth Survey 2014* results suggest a gap exists between the aspirations of young Australians and what is perceived as achievable. The divergence in aspirations and achievability suggests requirements both to support young people in the pursuit of their aspirations, and to build their resilience and life skills to respond to an increasingly competitive environment.

Aspirations that are formed in adolescence towards future employment and education play a critical role in helping young people transition from school into work, training and higher education.ⁱ The development of aspirations is a highly significant process for young people as it has been found to encourage greater engagement when transitioning from school to work and further study, and can ultimately aid the realisation of those aspirations.ⁱⁱ

Mission Australia's research has revealed that young people who are exposed to opportunities and pathways that lead into further education or employment, and who are encouraged to believe that these opportunities are available to them regardless of their background, are well placed to both discover and achieve their imagined futures.ⁱⁱⁱ

It is critical that the aspirations of young people are supported and developed early. Family, community and the area in which a young person grows and develops have all been revealed to impact on the development of aspirations.^{iv} For the first time, the *Youth Survey 2014* asked if where you lived would influence their career opportunities, and 48.4% of respondents reported they felt it would.

Ensuring families, schools and communities are equipped to support the development of aspirations remains critical, as does the perception of opportunities being available to all young people regardless of where they live. This includes a role for families, schools, mentors and community leaders to provide a range of opportunities and role models for young people to engage with.

Investing in services and supports is necessary to help young people to achieve their aspirations. In addition to fostering the development of aspirations, there is a need to support young people to achieve those aspirations. Navigating the opportunities available to them can be challenging, and ensuring there is awareness of the supports, education and training opportunities available to young people is important. Raising awareness of the opportunities and supports available to young people involves investing in educational networks such as youth programs and career guidance counsellors in schools, TAFE and universities.

There is also a need for greater mentoring of young people to promote awareness of the pathways into further education and employment. This includes pre- and post-employment mentoring, where support for young people once placed in work can improve longer term outcomes.

“The government should have role modelling / motivation programs”

Programs such as Youth Connections and Indigenous Youth Career Pathways (IYCP) have also achieved outcomes for disadvantaged young people in ensuring their continued connection to education and work. These programs have been shown to help improve school retention and

increase access to mentors, work experience and training. Other programs of this nature need to be continued. A strength of these approaches is the ability to work with families – the impact of family support cannot be under-estimated.

Encouraging young people to develop aspirations for the future and equipping them with the knowledge to achieve these aspirations is crucial and takes the ongoing commitment of governments, schools, communities, business and civil society.

Education

Ensuring access to the level of education necessary to fulfil aspirations is also critical. The *Youth Survey 2014* revealed an increasing level of concern around education in Australia. In addition to concerns around achieving career aspirations, young people are increasingly identifying education amongst the most important issues in Australia today, with 15.8% of respondents identifying education as an important issue (up from 10.9% in 2012).

One of the most important key themes from the youth policy consultations was also education. 64% of participants identified education within their top three issues. As such, a key recommendation is to reinstate and/or provide successful assertive outreach models to ensure disengaged young people are supported to re-engage with, and remain engaged in education.

The YACVic, Submission to the Education State (July 2015) identified that each year 10,000 young Victorians in Years 9-11 leave school and do not go on to any other education or training. Even more vulnerable are those young people who disengage earlier still, some before reaching secondary school. Furthermore, 6,000 young people leave school to enrol in training, only to exit entirely from education within a year. Apprenticeship and traineeship student numbers have dropped by 40% since 2012.^v

“Often young people are kicked out of school too soon, and not given any chances”

Programs that keep disengaged young people in education are essential for those having a hard time. Alternative education options need to be available where mainstream school settings are not appropriate as we know early school leavers have increased difficulty accessing the job market later in life.

The Flexible Learning Options (FLO) program in South Australia is a good model of alternative education. Mission Australia works with approximately 400 young people and their families providing case management to build effective relationships and empower young people to identify their own barriers to engagement. Early reports suggest the investment made between 2007 and 2010 will result in a total increase in economic value in South Australia in the order of \$7.7 million in the period to 2016. A benefit over twice the initial expenditure.

Greater integration between alternative and mainstream schooling is also required. Funding arrangements between governments should ensure that young people can access fully-funded education or training until they have acquired their year 12 or equivalent qualification, regardless of the setting.

There are large numbers of Victorian young people who are disengaged from education at both the primary and secondary level. To address this, an outreach based service needs to exist to assist these young people to reengage with education.

Further, school welfare in primary and secondary schools is of paramount importance and should be a core responsibility for all staff. Young people need to be able to turn to trusted adults for support when needed and school provides a strong platform for access to other supports.

Ensuring access to affordable and quality education will be critical not only to support the achievement of young people's aspirations but also to equip young people for the workforce needs of the future. As one respondent stated 'the cost of university needs to be lowered to help accommodate those students from lower socio-economic backgrounds. University needs to be equitable for all who wish to continue their studies'.

"The government should increase funding for people who are studying."

Training

Expanded training and apprenticeship programs are needed and these should reflect growth industries and sectors in demand, such as aged care and early childhood education, and not be limited to traditional trades.

"There needs to be more 'hands-on' training made available"

More local and reputable youth-focused registered training organisations are required to provide high quality programs for young people. Better integration between alternative education, TAFE and registered training organisations is also required. These training opportunities should also be widely available and not exclude specific groups of young people such as young refugees or young people from New Zealand.

"Not being able to afford TAFE is an issue"

Barriers to Employment

Nationally, over eight in ten young people indicated that achieving career success was extremely or very important to them, but over 40% of those respondents felt that career success was only somewhat likely, slightly likely or not at all likely to be achievable.

Across Australia around three in ten 15-19 year-olds are not fully engaged in work, school or training.^{vi} Despite the comparative strength of the Australian economy, we still have rates of youth unemployment above 12% for 15-24 year-olds, and above 20% in some particularly disadvantaged areas.^{vii} Demand for low-skilled labour has declined, reducing the number of entry level job opportunities – this has a disproportionate effect on young people who have lower skills and qualifications.

For young people, the labour market hasn't picked up since the global financial crisis, leaving this generation at risk of being stuck in a high unemployment/underemployment limbo. The 'scarring' that occurs when someone is out of work for a lengthy period can have negative impacts on the person's mental health and reduces the likelihood of future employment.

The International Monetary Fund has explored the "scarring effects" of early unemployment and noted that "those who experience unemployment early in their life are more likely to be unemployed again in later years. Moreover, they are likely to earn less over their working life than are their peers who find jobs more easily...Those scarring effects are the result of such factors as deterioration of skills and forgone work experience. But they can also come from potential employers' belief that these workers will not be productive."^{viii}

A range of policy responses should be considered:

- Youth programs that build links between education, training and employment for young people must continue. These programs ensure that young people can successfully navigate this period of change and support the aspirations of particularly disadvantaged young people.

'It can be very stressful finding work and if you do not have support with finding work, you start giving up on life'.

- The Youth Connections program, which provided support to around 30,000 disadvantaged young people each year to re-engage with education or employment, has been an important program of support for young people at a difficult time of transition. A program offering equivalent support to the most disengaged youth is needed to address the persistent high unemployment amongst youth.
- Programs designed to meet the needs of young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people such as the Indigenous Youth Careers Pathways (IYCP) need to continue.
- There is a need to review and potentially increase the number of incentives available to employers to hire young people, as well as in-work supports and mentoring to ensure young people acquire the skills to maintain a job. Wage subsidies could be targeted at particularly vulnerable groups such as young people with experience in the out-of-home-care or youth justice systems who face particular barriers entering the job market.
- Opportunities for meaningful work experience for young people are needed.^{ix} This is particularly important for young people who have disengaged from mainstream education. Young people with no work experience should also be offered youth specific work readiness programs.

"The Government should offer more work experience opportunities for young people so that it makes it easier to get a job."

- Work for the dole must be provided in real and relevant work situations with personal support and training and based on the young person's strengths. Opportunities should be

expanded to different types of employment such as office or administrative work and government traineeships.

- Specialist youth co-ordinators could be introduced in Australia's priority employment areas to work with local employers and the local school community. These co-ordinators could help identify young people at risk of leaving school early or of unemployment and secure and promote employment opportunities for these young people, smoothing their transition from school.

Youth Transitions Programs Victoria

Mission Australia runs several youth specific programs in Victoria that are tailored to young people's specific needs, including experiences of marginalisation and disadvantage as set out below.

"Having a criminal record makes it difficult to obtain employment"

Springboard is an intensive case management support program to assist young people aged 16 to 18 years in residential out-of-home care, and up to 21 years who have left residential care, to gain secure long-term employment by re-engaging with appropriate education, training and/or supported employment opportunities. MA currently delivers Springboard across the Southern and Northern Metropolitan Regions of Melbourne.

WorkOut delivers an individualised, responsive and assertive service facilitating quality sustainable training and employment outcomes for young people within Youth Justice Custodial Services across Victoria. The service is an integral support for young people exiting custody as part of their case planning. WorkOut staff and Youth Justice Custodial Services Coordinators work in collaboration to ensure there are no gaps that a young person can slip through, and that together they provide comprehensive and consolidated case planning and case management processes

Synergy Repairs is a social enterprise based in North Melbourne that offers customers a full suite of smash repair services, while providing on-the-job training and work experience for marginalised youth; notably young people who have had trouble with the law. The program harnesses participants' interest in cars and aims to help them build a career in a field that matches their interests.

Charcoal Lane is a social enterprise in Fitzroy that combines a restaurant specialising in native flavours with a comprehensive training program for young people who have experienced vocational and non-vocational barriers to employment. Charcoal Lane enables Aboriginal and other young people to gain both accredited hospitality qualifications and professional experience within a supportive developmental environment. On completing traineeships at the restaurant, young people are well prepared to move into careers in hospitality, or other industries.

Mental Health

Mental health and depression have increased as issues of concern amongst young Australians. In terms of personal concerns, around one in five respondents to the *Youth Survey 2014* were either extremely concerned or very concerned about depression. Further, since 2012 mental health has increasingly been identified as a key issue facing the nation, increasing for the last three years from 12.7% of respondents in 2012 to 18.3% in 2014.

Mission Australia recently released findings from the *Youth Survey* looking at young people's mental health across the years, in collaboration with the Black Dog Institute. The report presents findings from 2012-14 on the rates of psychological distress in young Australians, aged 15-17, the concerns that are related to high levels of psychological distress and the help seeking behaviour of young people. The full report can be found here:

<http://my.missionaustralia.com.au/OurOrganisation/News/Pages/Young-people's-mental-health-over-the-years.aspx>

In Victoria, the likelihood of probably serious mental illness was 19.2% and there was little variation between young people living in Melbourne and the rest of the state. While integrated models such as Headspace are a positive step, more locations are needed. More active outreach is also required to assist young people who are struggling with mental health issues such as anxiety and depression rather than expecting that the young person will actively seek help themselves. Further, GPs should be equipped with the skills to appropriately and effectively respond to young people with mental health issues. This is particularly important in areas of disadvantage where other supports may be lacking.

Nationally, key results included:

- One in five young people aged 15 to 17 had a level of psychological distress that indicated a probable serious mental illness.
- Young females were almost twice as likely to have a probable serious mental illness than young males (26.5% of females, compared to 13.9% of males).
- The prevalence of probable serious mental illness among young people increased between 2012 to 2014 (from 18.2% to 20.0%). This was due to an increase in the prevalence of probable serious mental illness among young females (from 23.2% to 26.5%). The prevalence among young males remained relatively stable over the three years.
- The three issues that young people were most likely to be 'very' or 'extremely' concerned about were coping with stress, school and study, and body image. Although this was the case for young people in general, young people with a probable serious mental illness were much more likely to be 'very' or 'extremely' concerned about these issues than young people without a serious mental illness. They were also more likely to be 'very' or 'extremely' concerned about depression.
- Young people with a probable serious mental illness said that they would be most comfortable seeking help from friends, the internet, parents, and relatives or family friends.

Key policy recommendations arising from this analysis include:

- Providing young people with skills to cope with stress when it arises.
- Providing universal programs through schools to improve mental health and mental health awareness, reduce stigma, encourage help-seeking and provide pathways to support.
- Provide evidence based online supports to young people alongside face-to-face services where needed.
- Equipping friends, family and other important people in young people's lives to provide effective support.
- Engaging young people and their families in the design and development of services and programs that are youth-friendly and appealing.

Body image

More generally in the *Youth Survey*, body image arises as a persistently high concern across the years. In 2014, concern about body image was considerably higher among females, with 41.1% indicating body image was a major concern, compared with 13.5% of males. Body image also appeared amongst the top responses to the question of 'most important issue in Australia today'.

This persistently high level of concern over body image suggests that young people's sense of identity, confidence and their physical health remains a challenge. It also suggests that the strategies being developed to address this issue are inadequate in the face of intense social and cultural pressures. While a number of initiatives have been introduced to promote positive body image among young people in Australia, careful evaluation of these initiatives is needed in order to understand their impact and inform future policy initiatives.

Stress and resilience

The *Youth Survey 2014* again reveals high levels of concern amongst young people about coping with stress and school and study problems: 41.6% of respondents indicated they were extremely or very concerned about coping with stress and 40.8% responded that school or study problems were a major concern. This continues to emphasise the need for supports for young people dealing with change in their lives and also their outlook for work, education and other aspirations.

As one respondent suggested, 'there needs to be more done on picking up on problems that people, especially students going through stressful situations, are going through. More support should also be given to all students to deal particularly with stresses'. Looking ahead, combining these pressures with the challenges of achieving aspirations around career and stable housing in a changing labour and housing market means building the resilience of young people is as important as ever.

Family relationships play an important role in young people's lives and building resilience. Despite a largely positive view of family relationships in the *Youth Survey 2014*, one in five (20.0%) young people indicated that they were either extremely concerned or very concerned about family conflict. For young people who are already attempting to cope with school and study pressures, the absence of a supportive family environment and the need to manage the additional stressors of family conflict can make life especially challenging, and limit their ability to achieve their aspirations.

It is important that programs work with young people and their families. Building the capacity for strong and supportive family relationships is particularly necessary, given the role these relationships can play in ultimately supporting young people.

Many programs lack the funding to address the broader needs of young people in the family context. Without family support, Mission Australia has found that wider issues and challenges can arise in vulnerable young people, including issues with housing, mental health and safety which necessitate much higher levels of external support.

We know that strong community networks and positive family relationships are important, and programs designed to engage family and community continue to be needed. It is crucial that young people are aware of the various staff (for example, school counsellors and teachers) and services (for example, community agencies, telephone hotlines and online counselling services) available to them in school and the wider community that they can turn to for support to enable them to cope with, rather than be overwhelmed by, family and other issues.

With friends and parents being identified as the top two sources of help for young people (87.7% and 76.2% respectively), there is a need to educate parents and young people on ways to identify and respond to concerns and to connect young people with information about the range of support services available. Young people's reliance on their friends as well as increasing use of online social networks and the internet as a source of information suggests that it is also important to develop peer-led programs which build young people's capacity to support each other and to be able to effectively help their friends to access appropriate specialised and professional services when it's needed. There is also an important role for 'trusted advisors' – the aunt or family friend who can play a significant role in supporting a young person where their immediate family may be unable to do so.

Ongoing investment in programs designed to help youth deal with stress, stay connected to school or work, and supporting family and communities in this work, remain critical to supporting Australia's young people to build and achieve their own aspirations.

PHaMS Employment

Mission Australia runs several PHaMS Employment sites in Victoria. PHaMS provides increased opportunities for recovery for people aged 16 years and over whose lives are severely affected by mental illness, by helping them to overcome social isolation and increase their connections to the community. PHaMS Employment Services provide support for people with a mental illness receiving income support who are engaged, or willing to engage, with employment services and who have economic participation as a primary goal in their Individual Recovery Plan.

Alcohol and Drugs

The youth consultations conducted in Victoria clearly demonstrate that alcohol and other drugs (AOD) is an extremely important key theme. A total of 76% of participants, in particular young people in youth justice custodial precincts, identified AOD within their top three issues.

A large number of participants identified that it proves difficult to access rehabilitation and detox facilities due to lengthy waiting lists. A key recommendation is to increase resources in this area, to reduce waiting lists and improve access. There is a clear gap in service provision creating drastic flow-on effects. For example in April 2015 the ABC reported that a detox service in Ballarat has four beds and caters for the whole of south-west Victoria.

Young people in Victoria also rated alcohol and drugs as the third most important issue in Australia in the *Youth Survey 2014*. It was also the third most important issue nationally.

In the *Youth Survey Alcohol and Drug* report, those who were highly concerned by alcohol and drugs were compared against those expressing a low level of concern about these issues. These two groups of young people were compared across the range of questions from the *Youth Survey 2014* including personal and national concerns, where these young people went for help and how well their families got along.

Young people with high levels of concern about alcohol and drugs were found to also express high levels of concern across a number of indicators, which is suggestive of an increased vulnerability and a lower level of general mental wellbeing for these respondents. Heightened concerns about issues such as bullying and emotional abuse, personal safety and discrimination appear to be inter-related with alcohol and drug concerns and may be indicative of an environment in which substance use and attendant issues, such as alcohol-fuelled violence, are more likely to occur.

Importantly, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents to the *Youth Survey 2014* were more likely to report high levels of concern about alcohol and drugs than non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people (11.9% compared with 3.2%). Greater proportions of young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with high concern about alcohol and drugs expressed heightened concern about family conflict and indicated lower levels of family cohesion when compared with non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents with high concern about the same issues.

Young people living in a jobless family were around three times more likely to be highly concerned about alcohol and drugs than those with a parent in either part-time or full-time work (9.1% compared with 2.8%). Almost one third (31.3%) of those with high concern about alcohol and drugs reported that their family's ability to get along was fair or poor, compared to 19.5% of those with low alcohol and drug concern.

Over a third (36.0%) of young people with a high level of general concern about alcohol and drugs also identified these issues in qualitative commentary as being among the most important in Australia today. Half (49.0%) of those highly concerned about alcohol and drugs also expressed heightened concern about gambling, compared to a tiny minority (1.1%) of those with little to no alcohol and drug concerns.

For young people with high levels of concern about alcohol and drugs and a complex array of other serious concerns, prevention and early intervention remains the key to addressing substance abuse issues in the family and also reducing risk factors for the young person's later abuse of alcohol and other drugs. Prevention programs should be universal and provide holistic support both in early childhood and throughout a young person's schooling years, and targeted to areas of high needs. The high levels of concern among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people also point to the need for culturally appropriate solutions.

Where a young person has problematic alcohol and drug use, youth specific facilities that address the comorbidity of mental health and substance abuse concerns are crucial. Young people with high levels of concern about alcohol and drugs may have additional challenges including problem gambling and a lack of job readiness. Providing additional supports to families and communities through early intervention programs may go some way to alleviating these issues. Finally, integrated services which address the interrelated areas of need will be important in ensuring successful transitions into education and employment.

However, issues surrounding alcohol and drugs are broader than merely dealing with an individual's substance abuse and the policy environment needs to grapple with the broader repercussions of drugs and alcohol in society including intersections with public safety, family violence, mental health, drug and alcohol fuelled crime and more broadly with homelessness and community functioning.

Victorian results

There were 98 young people in Victoria with high AOD concerns in the *Youth Survey 2014* sample: 45 (45.9%) were male and 53 (54.1%) were female. One in four young Victorians with high AOD concern indicated that their family's ability to get along was either fair (5.1%) or poor (21.4%).

The top three concerns for young people from Victoria who were highly concerned by alcohol and drugs were **coping with stress** (extremely concerned: 42.3%; very concerned: 20.6%), **school or study problems** (extremely concerned: 41.2%; very concerned: 21.6%) and **depression** (extremely concerned: 43.9%; very concerned: 17.3%).

Around six in ten young Victorians who were highly concerned by alcohol and drugs were also highly concerned by **suicide** (extremely concerned: 42.9%; very concerned: 17.3%) and **personal safety** (extremely concerned: 40.6%; very concerned: 18.8%).

One in ten young Victorians with high AOD concern indicated that their happiness levels were at the lowest point on the available scale

Recommendations

In order to address young people's high levels of concern about alcohol and other drugs, the following policy changes are recommended. These recommendations cut across all levels of government and require inter-governmental cooperation as well as funding support:

- Greater investment in early intervention and prevention in both early childhood and throughout young people's school years.
- Increased alcohol and drug education within schools.

- Youth specific drug and alcohol services which support comorbid mental health issues and work with clients over the long-term including appropriate after care.
- Integrated service provision for young people and their families that includes the capacity to develop skills and aspirations and address problem gambling amongst the varying and complex needs presented.
- Investment in specific services developed and owned by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in recognition of higher levels of concern about alcohol and drugs.
- Services that are responsive to cultural and linguistically diverse clients who may have different attitudes, behaviours and access to services around alcohol and drugs
- Alcohol and drugs are addressed as a broader social problem rather than focussing solely on young people's use.
- More research is conducted to increase the evidence base around young people's concerns about alcohol and drugs and identifying the effective initiatives to ameliorate these concerns.

Ice

Our consultations with young people as part of this youth policy process have pointed to ice use being a growing issue for young people. They raised the need for more detox and rehabilitation facilities to reduce current waiting times. These facilities should be youth specific such as Mission Australia's Triple Care Farm model in New South Wales (outlined below).

"The drug 'Ice' is a big issue"

Young people identified that they find it difficult to get into a detox facility without the assistance of a support worker. Support workers identified that young people can't wait six months. If they can't find young people a place in detox or rehab within a realistic timeframe, the young person may end up in jail or beyond their reach.

Mission Australia made a submission to the Ice taskforce based on feedback from our national service staff which can be found here: https://www.missionaustralia.com.au/publications/policy-submissions/other/doc_download/361-combatting-ice-in-our-community

Ice was universally recognised as a serious and growing problem with wide-reaching ramifications for the individual ice user, their family and the broader community. While population data suggests that meth-amphetamine use has not increased, services supporting people using alcohol and other drugs have seen a marked shift. Most services noted increasing presentation of ice use amongst client groups in the last five to eight years. The aggressive and violent behaviours and desperate presentations were particularly concerning to staff as were the flow on effects to homelessness, crime and family estrangement. The impact on family members who bear the burden of care or whose parenting is compromised by addiction was also concerning as was the impacts for the community more broadly where the links between drugs, crime and safety become evident. The

starkness of the impacts of ice use in rural and regional areas was also noted, with less service capacity despite high usage rates.

In addition to a criminal and public health response to the use of ice, community services can play a vital role in addressing this wide reaching problem. However these key services are being stretched by the resource intensiveness of supporting ice users who increase the need for safety precautions and require longer term and more persistent engagement. Greater investment is needed to allow continued outreach and casework support to vulnerable clients.

Mission Australia's residential rehabilitation services for young people have been particularly effective avenues for treatment and support. This includes services for those aged 13-18 who are in contact with the juvenile justice system and those up to the age of 25 who are in need of a youth friendly environment and a holistic approach to their care. A core part of these successful services is effective after care when the young person exits residential rehabilitation. Without these follow up services, the risk of relapse is substantial.

Government efforts to combat ice use need to focus on education and early intervention where feasible (including in schools) and also target the existing group of ice users for whom a positive future depends on the availability of appropriate detoxification and rehabilitation facilities. The absence of appropriate detoxification facilities, particularly for young people, remains a considerable barrier to effective interventions and treatment. When a person with ice use is motivated to seek change, appropriate detoxification and rehabilitation facilities need to be available to capitalise on what is often a narrow window of opportunity. Detox facilities for young people under the age of 16 are required to target particularly vulnerable adolescents including those involved with the juvenile justice system. A proposal has also been developed for a detox facility at Triple Care Farm, one of Mission Australia's youth residential rehabilitation services, which would enable earlier support to be provided to 16 to 24 year olds.

In addition to providing the necessary opportunities for recovery for ice users, governments at all levels should provide support to families who bear much of the burden but also have a strong role to play in supporting recovery. Efforts should also be made to promote research and awareness that facilitates greater workforce development around dealing with the complex needs of ice users.

In developing the national strategy, the taskforce should pay close regard to the need for closely coordinated services. In the case of ice users, concerns around health, mental health, criminal justice and housing and homelessness are likely to be co-occurring. Attention also needs to be given to addressing users' issues around: addictive personality disorders, sense of belonging to community and self-identity. This supports a case for community inclusion and community development initiatives in communities with a higher prevalence of ice use.

Government agencies and community service providers need to provide integrated services in order to effect sustained change. Treatment programs need to be provided through the health and justice systems in collaboration with community services, and housing needs to be addressed as a priority to provide a stable foundation for change. Care also needs to be continuous with entry and exits to and from services properly coordinated to provide a seamless experience for the client where possible. Ice users should not be exited to homelessness and a housing model with wrap around supports is required to address the complex need of ice users.

A holistic approach to recovery which addresses the underlying issues promoting substance abuse is also a necessary component of turning lives around. Mission Australia's integrated approach to service delivery, which includes community services, employment, housing and early learning services, means we can help people access the right support, when they need it at the earliest point possible time.

A series of recommendations to address current service gaps is provided below.

- Increased investment in community services is required by State and Commonwealth government to provide a multilayered response that goes beyond crime and health and allows outreach into all sections of society.
- Early intervention programs, including education programs, need to be made far more widely available within schools.
- Existing effective models of care should be built on and expanded, including the successful Mission Australia models for youth specific rehabilitation services which include a strong emphasis on long-term after care.
- A new network of detox facilities should be made available for young people aged under 25, including access for those under 16 years of age to improve outcomes and allow for earlier intervention. There is currently a severe shortage of places and this should be an urgent priority.
- Family support services should be funded and linked to outreach and rehabilitation services as well as new programs developed to work with the entire family to address intergenerational substance use problems.
- The intensity of symptoms and behaviours experienced by ice users requires a greater investment in improving the knowledge and skills of all workers in contact with users through improved training. This includes health, mental health, casework and law enforcement staff.
- Service specifications and funding for successful treatment models should be adjusted to reflect the higher intensity and length of time required to work with ice users in comparison with people using other substances.
- A new supported housing model should be developed which accounts for the complex needs of ice users, their high risk of becoming homeless and difficulty in maintaining a tenancy, so that it can provide a stable base for sustained recovery.
- Government and non-government services should be better coordinated to facilitate continuous care and a holistic approach to recovery in order to facilitate sustained change; particularly where there is evidence of other underlying problems (such as a history of trauma, abuse or mental illness) which may have contributed to the substance abuse in the first place.

- Supports and treatment should be provided to ice users who are incarcerated both during and after they leave custody to ensure that they do not exit into homelessness or fall straight back into a pattern of drug use and offending behaviour.

Mission Australia Youth Focussed Alcohol and Drug Rehabilitation Services

Triple Care Farm

Triple Care Farm (TCF) is a residential Alcohol and Other Drugs (AOD) rehabilitation and treatment program for young people aged between 16 and 24 years. Located on 110 acres in the NSW Southern Highlands, TCF is a national service receiving referrals Australia-wide and has been operating for more than 20 years. The program specialises in treating young people with co-morbid mental illness and drug and alcohol problems. The treatment model is a holistic psychosocial rehabilitation program based on harm minimisation and health promotion.

Triple Care Farm's vision is to provide "a safe place for change" and the program operates with the goal of treating every student as an individual, catering for his or her specific needs in order to create "a life worth living". This includes providing vocational and educational training so young people can re-engage with education and find pathways to employment. Importantly, at Triple Care Farm there is a six month period for follow up and after care.

The operational model at Triple Care Farm is evidence-based and involves a continuous process of service review to adapt to the changing needs of young people. Triple Care Farm has won several awards for excellence in quality development; clinical and non-clinical services supporting recovery; mental health services for adolescents; and services supporting young people.

Triple Care Farm receives only 12% of its funding from the Commonwealth Department of Health with the remainder coming from private sources including over 50% from the Sir David Martin Foundation.

A social return on investment was recently conducted on Triple Care Farm showing a \$3 return for every \$1 invested. The full report and summary can be found here:

<https://www.missionaustralia.com.au/publications/research/young-people>

Mission Australia would welcome visits by Victorian government officials to Triple Care Farm should there be interest in replicating this successful model of care.

Junaa Buwa and MAC River

Junaa Buwa and MAC River are Mission Australia's residential rehabilitation centres for teenagers who have entered, or are at risk of entering, the juvenile justice system and have a history of alcohol and other drug use. Funded by NSW Juvenile Justice, they offer residential and outreach services as well as educational and living skills training and aftercare support. The services cater for young people aged 13-18 years in New South Wales, with Junaa Buwa located in Coffs Harbour and MAC River in Dubbo. Young people undertake residential rehabilitation for 12 weeks which is followed by 12 weeks after care. The services take a holistic approach including case management addressing

mental, physical, social and inter and intra personal challenges. Over 80% of clients are Aboriginal young people.

The Drug and Alcohol Youth Service (DAYS)

DAYS is a 24 hour residential rehabilitation service provided by Mission Australia to young people aged 12 to 19 years throughout Western Australia who are experiencing alcohol and other drug issues. This facility provides a 3 month structured rehabilitation program that is evidence based and client directed where possible. Consultation and collaboration is at the cornerstone of the program. From the point of referral the young person is invited to engage in a comprehensive assessment process. Treatment plans belong to the client and reflect treatment pathways they want to engage in.

Clients have access to a range of integrated services allowing a continuum of care throughout their stay and post-treatment. Service integration provides a single point of entry into the core drug and alcohol youth services and supports comprehensive data collection and monitoring of service delivery.

Housing

To enable the achievement of the whole-of-government youth policy draft objectives, a primary focus on ensuring all young people have access to affordable and suitable housing is pivotal. Without stable accommodation, it proves increasingly difficult to address other barriers young people face such as alcohol and other drugs, mental health, disengagement from education and training and unemployment.

Housing for young people needs to be suitable and affordable. Mission Australia is particularly concerned about young people exiting out-of-home care into homelessness or inappropriate settings either immediately or shortly after exiting care. For those young people in the consultations who have resided in residential out-of-home care, all had negative experiences in this type of environment. Participants identified that upon exiting residential care, there are very few affordable and suitable housing options, which meant that they ended up becoming homeless.

While the funding of five youth foyers is a positive step in addressing youth homelessness, our experience is that this model does not cater well for the most marginalised young people including those with alcohol and drug problems or with criminal convictions. It also does not provide the intensive case management supports required by young people who have experienced severe trauma and hardship.

There needs to be more capacity in the public housing system to reduce the waiting list and more accommodation options for young people at risk of homelessness including those exiting out-of-home-care. There is also a need for tenancy support programs for young people to equip them with the skills and knowledge required to live in the private rental market and decrease the possibility of eviction.

Homelessness

Mission Australia's goal is to reduce homelessness and strengthen communities across Australia. Our homelessness action plan includes targets of halving youth homelessness by 2020, halving total homelessness by 2025 and halving rental stress to reduce the risk of homelessness. Within the homelessness action plan, there are two actions relating to addressing youth homelessness:

- Young people experiencing family conflict are still significantly over-represented in the homeless population. Proven early intervention models should be expanded – especially family engagement services like Reconnect (which works with young people and their families in flexible ways, including counselling, mediation and practical support) and place-based models such as the Ryde Project (which works with schools to identify and support young people at risk).
- A 'zero tolerance' approach should be adopted to people becoming homeless when they exit state care including hospitals and drug and alcohol facilities, correction facilities, detention centres and mental health institutions, as well as young people in the out-of-home care system. Supports need to be provided to people well before they exit institutions and governments should be held accountable for these outcomes over the medium term.

“There are a lot of young people who are at risk of being homeless. There are also a lot of young people sleeping under bridges.”

Youth homelessness generally refers to young people aged 12 to 24. The 2011 Census identified that 26,238 young people aged 12-24 were homeless, which accounts for 25 per cent of the homeless population. Most of these were living in severely crowded dwellings (56%) or in supported accommodation for the homeless (28%).^x

Of specialist homelessness services clients in 2013-14, more than a quarter were aged under 18, and 16 per cent were under 10 years old.^{xi} Homelessness services data does not account for couch surfing and is therefore likely to underestimate youth homelessness.^{xii}

Family breakdown and Domestic and Family Violence are major risk factors for young people becoming homeless, and services focussed on young people need to strengthen family connection. Children may also become homeless with their families, usually their mother or another female family member as a consequence of domestic and family violence and/or relationship breakdown.

Some young people face extreme barriers to independent living and a heightened risk of homelessness when exiting foster care or juvenile justice. 63 per cent of homeless young people surveyed in a joint Mission Australia research project had been placed in some form of out-of-home care before the age of 18.^{xiii} Young people who have been abused or neglected are also disproportionately represented among the long-term homeless.^{xiv}

Youth unemployment is a significant issue and affordable housing options are in short supply for jobless young people. Young people may have greater barriers to accessing rental accommodation due to a lack of rental history and assumptions about unstable incomes. These factors make it more likely that young people who cannot live at home will experience homelessness.^{xv}

“People who are receiving Centrelink payments should have their rent reduced.”

Early intervention measures are particularly vital for young people to prevent a transition to chronic homelessness which can result in problems such as substance abuse and mental illness. It is also more cost effective for government because costs increase as problems worsen and become more difficult to resolve.^{xvi}

MA Approach

Mission Australia operates several programs which provide tailored prevention and early intervention strategies to young people experiencing or at risk of homelessness, including services which promote family connection and assist young people in contact with the juvenile justice system or exiting out of home care.

Reconnect

Reconnect is an example of a successful early intervention program for young people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. It is a Commonwealth-funded program that works with young people and their families in flexible ways, including counselling, mediation and practical support. It has a focus on responding quickly to referrals. Reconnect results in significant positive outcomes for young people and their families, particularly in terms of housing stability and family reconciliation^{xvii}.

Springboard

In Victoria, Mission Australia delivers the Springboard program which provides intensive youth focussed assistance to those aged 16 to 18 in residential out-of-home care, or up to 21 years who have left residential care. It is intended to support both these groups to gain secure long-term employment by re-engaging with appropriate education, training and/or supported employment opportunities. Whilst young people who fit the above criteria are the priority group, the program is also available for those who are currently in or have been in foster care or kinship care and are disengaged from education, training or employment.

The program provides young people with flexible one-on-one case work support that helps them identify and negotiate access to appropriate re-engagement, education, training or employment opportunities. The young people in the program tend to have complex needs and multiple barriers and are likely to have experienced childhood trauma as well as multiple disruptions to their education. It is a culturally sensitive service with expertise in working with Aboriginal young people and refugees.

Springboard is funded by the Victorian Department of Human Services. The program is delivered across the entire Southern Metropolitan Region by Southern Metropolitan Region Springboard Consortium which is led by Mission Australia.

The Ryde Project

The Ryde Project is a joint initiative between schools and local agencies including Mission Australia, that assists young people who need support to better engage with school or who are experiencing difficulties in their lives. The Ryde Project uses a multi-step strategy to quickly identify young people and their families who could benefit from additional support. The strategy includes: voluntary completion of a survey by every student in participating secondary schools to identify program participants; the school and a local agency make an offer of support to each identified student and their family; and a support plan containing specific goals is developed for each student to work towards. The Ryde Project is based on a proven early intervention model first developed in Geelong which recognises that the best outcomes for young people can be achieved if difficulties are identified, and support provided, as soon as possible.

Housing affordability

“Housing needs to be affordable and support provided to assist with developing independent living skills.”

Home ownership is widely seen as desirable by young Australians, with around three quarters of young people responding to the *Youth Survey* attributing high importance to owning their own home in the future. Around seven in ten of those respondents also felt that this aspiration was extremely or very likely to be achieved. This is an interesting result given the declining share of the population achieving home ownership and the lack of affordable housing in Australia, with particular implications for young people. However young people in low SES areas were less inclined to see owning your own home and being financially independent as highly likely than those in moderate or high SES areas.

“I believe it is important for young people to have more help with rental payments if they don't live at home and create more opportunities for young people to be able to buy or rent a house. Prices of housing and rental are too high and it would increase the number of homeless people as a result.”

Despite the aspirations of young people, home ownership amongst 25 to 34 year-olds has fallen from 56% in 1991 to 47% in 2011 according to Census data.^{xviii} For those who have managed to enter the housing market, the levels of financial stress are also rising and disproportionately impact on younger Australians. As NATSEM reports: *Generationally, it is the young who experience the most housing stress. Stress levels decline with age and we find that those over 65 years of age face very little housing stress. A concerning result is that First Home Buyers (FHBs) have by far the greatest stress of any group. Sixty per cent of FHB households pay more than 30 per cent of their after-tax income on housing. Seventeen per cent spend more than 50 per cent and 11 per cent fall into the 30/40 rule. This is the group that has been hit the hardest by the recent escalation in house prices. They have been forced to buy into a red hot housing market and crystallised the housing gains of the older generation.*^{xix}

“Housing prices (both buying and renting) are too high. This issue is a major cause for the large number of homeless people.”

Significant policy reform and investment are needed if home ownership is to be a reality for young Australians today and into the future. Further the young people Mission Australia supports who are not actively engaged in education are less focussed on home ownership with concerns expressed around the affordability of rent for young people on low incomes.

“Private rental is not affordable for young people”

If young people are unable to access sustainable, affordable housing either through home ownership or the rental market, and this remains unavailable into the long-term, housing stress will place an increasing strain on young people's lives.

The following policy responses address these concerns:

- Development of a national strategy to address the growing housing affordability crisis, co-ordinating roles across governments including actions to:
 - reform taxation and transfer settings including the adequacy of Commonwealth Rent Assistance (CRA)
 - harness institutional investment
 - adopt inclusionary zoning
 - subsidise the yield gap
 - better utilise existing housing
 - renew legacy public housing and strengthen disadvantaged communities
 - support high-needs tenancies, and
 - facilitate home ownership.
- Recognising in housing policy and planning decisions the significant role of adequate and affordable housing in contributing to people’s health and wellbeing, and its positive impact on other areas of government expenditure as well as its influence on people’s ability to participate in employment by being able to live in or access transport to areas of high labour demand.
- Continuing the investment in housing that is affordable for people on low and moderate incomes at both the federal and state levels to address the growing need for affordable, stable housing, particularly for young people and disadvantaged families and individuals.

“Need to give people who are on the dole cheaper rent”

Discrimination

“People assume you are bad because of how you talk, dress, being young and being with a group of people.”

Of the 3,115 young Victorians who responded to our *Youth Survey 2014*, 2.2% identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander, 17.5% stated they were born overseas and 24.4% reported speaking a language other than English at home.

In 2013, discrimination was the number one issue for young Victorians and was an issue of concern for 1 in 3 people, particularly for females. More can be done to combat racism, sexism and other forms of discrimination that impact on young people directly and on society more broadly.

“There is too much racism in Australia”

In 2012, Mission Australia conducted conversations with young people on the Richmond Estate. Those who participated in focus groups spoke of their experiences relating to racial discrimination and feeling a sense of disconnectedness from the wider community. And 31% of those surveyed indicated they had concerns about racial discrimination. Almost all focus group participants disclosed that they had been affected by racial slurs or subtle social exclusion from other residents – mostly adults.

Studies have shown that young people who have experienced forms of racism feel higher levels of hopelessness and lower self-esteem contributing to increased levels of anxiety and depression. Young people need to have people to turn to when these concerns arise including family, teachers and counsellors when needed.

Education programs in school provide a universal platform for raising awareness about discrimination and its impacts and skills to combat it such as the bystander approach. Young people also need opportunities to talk about cultural and other identity issues and build a sense of belonging. Opportunities to engage in activities with young people from different backgrounds will also help to breakdown stereotypes.

“Young people discriminate particularly against gay males”

Governments can also promote broader efforts to combat discrimination through human rights laws and enforcement bodies and media campaigns to promote positive and inclusive attitudes. There is also a role for corporates and community groups in combatting discrimination and promoting positive attitudes including through equal opportunity employment schemes, mentoring programs and sporting initiatives.

Young people’s suggestions for the youth policy included:

- Increased awareness around discrimination;
- Teaching indigenous culture in primary and secondary schools; and
- Create stricter laws around discrimination.

Public transport

A lack of transport and public infrastructure impacts on most areas of life, including work, education, health and social networks. Public transport services are an important contributor to local economies and the sustainability of many communities. Businesses and residents often rely on public infrastructure to facilitate the production and consumption of goods and services and without this infrastructure, economic growth can be stifled.

Lack of public infrastructure, particularly public transport, can also be a major barrier to gaining employment. Such barriers often entrench the social exclusion of individuals and groups in these communities. Young people in particular, with limited or no access to a vehicle, often have restricted access to economic and social opportunities.

For young people living in areas of high youth unemployment transport links are essential, especially for young people living outside or on the outskirts of city centres. This should be factored into community development plans for locations of persistent disadvantage. Young people in our Victorian services raised particular concerns around the reliability of public transport.

There is a need for increased and more frequent public transport, particularly in regional and rural areas and across the suburbs as opposed to towards the central business district. Further, fines are a disproportionate response to young people fare evading on public transport and can have flow-on effects. Not paying fines can have serious consequences including spiraling debt and a criminal record. These fines act to entrench disadvantage for already disadvantaged and vulnerable children and young people and increase their interactions with court system. Parents often pay fines, however young people without this support face court and a record and possibly even jail.

A Work Development Order (WDO) scheme such as that used in NSW may be an effective mechanism for reducing hardship faced by disadvantaged young people imposed with fines.

'It should be cheaper for people that do not have a job',

What else should be done

Focus on disadvantaged and disengaged young people

As outlined in the discussion paper, there should be a strong focus on those young people who are disadvantaged, disengaged or facing challenges in life.

From an analysis of our youth survey results by the Socio-Economic Status (SES) of where they lived, we found that young people in low or moderate SES areas were less likely to feel positive or very positive about the future than those in high SES areas. Young people in low SES areas were also more likely to be highly concerned about bullying/emotional abuse than those in moderate or high SES areas. They were also more likely to be concerned about depression, family conflict, personal safety, family relationships, discrimination, drugs, alcohol and gambling.

Young people from low SES areas need appropriate supports, programs and services to address their concerns and help them achieve their aspirations. This includes addressing heightened concerns about bullying and emotional abuse, depression and family conflict. It also involves providing pathways to training, tertiary education, jobs, financial independence and stable housing. Young people's opportunities should not be limited by the area in which they live. To address this, local responses are needed in areas or places of socio-economic disadvantage.

Interventions need to commence earlier for disadvantaged young people to build their skills, aspirations and networks prior to age 15. Laying strong foundations from early childhood supports social inclusion and greater opportunities for employment participation.

Young people living in low SES areas were less likely to be involved in sporting, cultural or other community activities than young people living in high SES areas. Young people's participation in extra-curricular activities should be encouraged to build skills, networks and understanding of employment pathways. These activities allow young people to form social connections beyond their families and immediate peers which are more likely to foster later employment opportunities and are particularly beneficial for more disadvantaged young people.

A focus on disadvantaged and disengaged young people also requires a strong focus on young people transitioning from correctional facilities into the community and from out-of-home care into independent living.

Strengthening Communities

Place-based responses that engage and build the whole community are essential if long term disadvantage is to be addressed. Lowering overall inequality, investing in human capital and promoting a socio-economic mix within neighbourhoods will help to provide opportunities and promote mobility.

In some places in Australia, disadvantage is concentrated, persistent and entrenched. For example, the *Dropping Off The Edge* research shows that in Victoria, just 27 postcodes (4% of total) account for 28.2% of the highest rank positions across 22 indicators of disadvantage. These postcodes show high rates of unemployment, criminal convictions, disability, low education, child maltreatment, family violence and psychiatric admissions. Disadvantage is also persistent with 10 of the current top 12 'most disadvantaged' locations in the 'most disadvantaged' list in 2007.^{xx}

In such locations, it is not enough to work at an individual or family level – we need a whole-of-place approach. Community development approaches can be effective in generating improved social and economic outcomes for young people – as long as they are developed with a community – not imposed on it – and as long as there is a true commitment to stick with it over the long-term (greater than ten years).

Mission Australia is taking a community development approach in Clarendon Vale and Rokeby in Tasmania which is in the top ten per cent of disadvantaged communities in Australia. Mission Australia Housing has been commissioned to manage 500 homes in these adjacent communities for Housing Tasmania over the next decade - including maintenance, property upgrades and new homes.

Mission Australia is taking this opportunity to implement a ten year strengthening community plan. The plan is designed to promote social, physical and generational change within the community, including through improvement projects. This includes rebuilding relationships with the local high school. Mission Australia is creating paths out of intergenerational poverty for young people living in the community. It also provides access to education for other residents to improve their long-term employment opportunities.

Holistic care and active outreach

Some young people are disengaged from all services and miss out on the support they need. Many services are very focussed with constrained criteria and do not have the capacity or flexibility for outreach. Once they are engaged with youth services, more specific referrals are available, however without active outreach their first contact may be with police.

Jobactive is not effectively referring young people to the holistic youth-focussed community service supports required. Police and Centrelink are often the first point of contact and should be able to refer to generalist youth caseworkers who can take a holistic approach to the young person's needs.

“Providing young people with a support worker to help young people develop their independent living skills”.

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