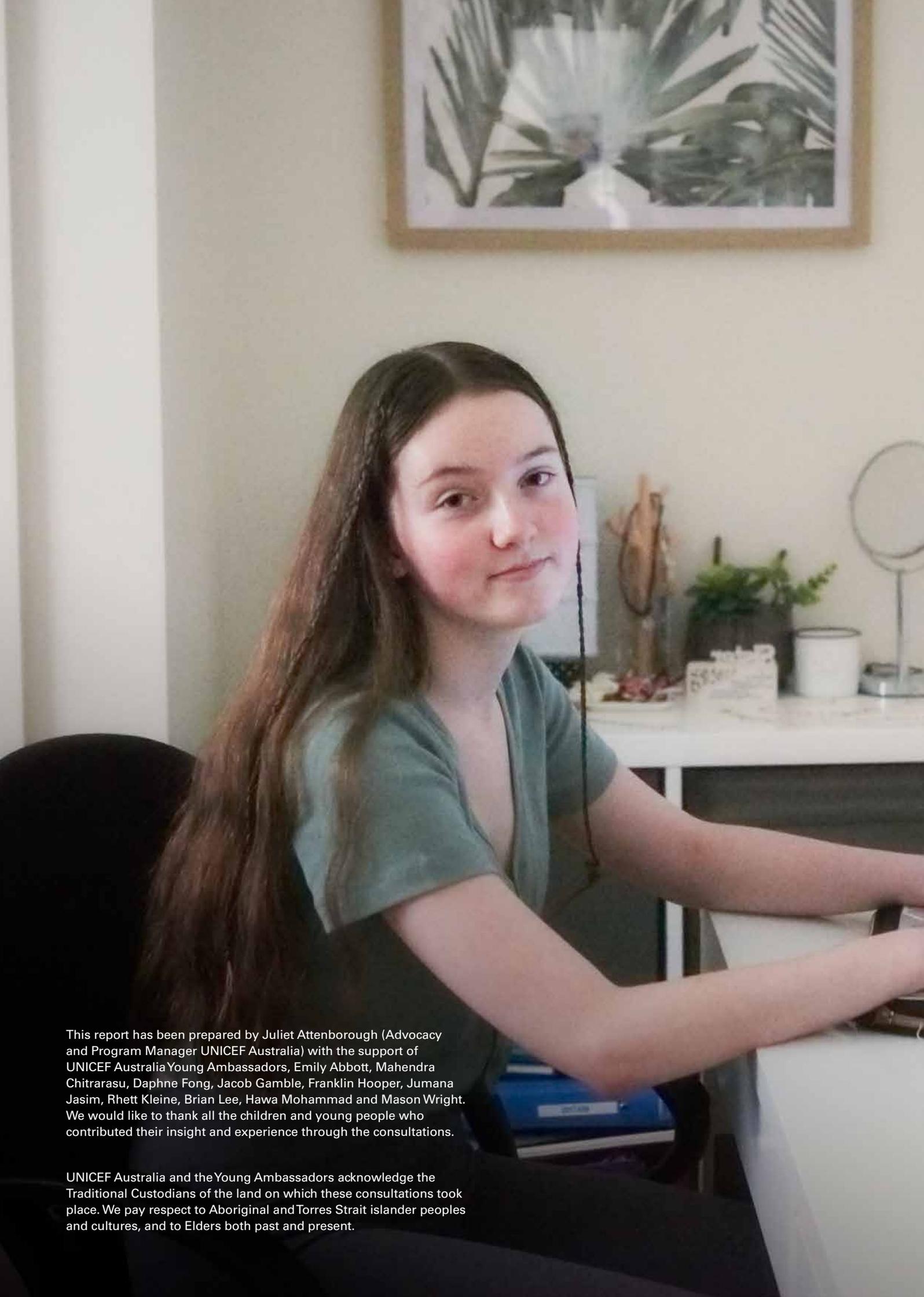


# Children's Voices in a Changing World

2021 UNICEF Australia Young  
Ambassador Report





This report has been prepared by Juliet Attenborough (Advocacy and Program Manager UNICEF Australia) with the support of UNICEF Australia Young Ambassadors, Emily Abbott, Mahendra Chitrarasu, Daphne Fong, Jacob Gamble, Franklin Hooper, Jumana Jasim, Rhett Kleine, Brian Lee, Hawa Mohammad and Mason Wright. We would like to thank all the children and young people who contributed their insight and experience through the consultations.

UNICEF Australia and the Young Ambassadors acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the land on which these consultations took place. We pay respect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander peoples and cultures, and to Elders both past and present.



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# A MESSAGE FROM THE Young Ambassadors



UNICEF Australia Young Ambassadors (from L - R) Mason Wright, Rhett Kleine, Daphne Fong, Mahendra Chitrarasu, Jumana Jasim, Franklin Hooper, Hawa Mohammad, Brian Lee, Emily Abbott, Jacob Gamble.

The past two years have been extraordinary to say the least. Off the back of a crippling drought, children and young people across Australia have navigated the devastation of the 2019-20 Black Summer bushfires and unprecedented disruptions to their lives due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Fuelled by the ongoing climate crisis, the Black Lives Matter movement, and increasing inequality due to the pandemic, young people are rising up and calling for bold climate action and demanding social justice and equality. In an unprecedented time of disaster and disruption, children and young people have shown resilience, but they have also done it tough. For some, the challenges and hardship of these past two years will impact them for many years to come. For others, this has been a period of growth and learning, of new experiences and perspectives, and of gratitude and sometimes even hope. However positive or negative their experience, it is fair to say that every child and young person in Australia has lived through a time of enormous change and uncertainty.

It is imperative that we listen to children and young people, and ensure they have a voice in issues that affect them. This is a right enshrined in Article 12 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. But it is also critical to ensure that the policy decisions taken to support children and young people are indeed the right ones. In short, listening to children and young people is the smart thing to do, as well as the right thing to do.

Children and young people have told us about their lives, their priorities and their concerns. They have told us about the things that are important to them, about the things that worry them, and about the things that they hope for. They have shared their views so that leaders can make better decisions that ensure their rights and wellbeing and safeguard their future.

They have also called for change. For stronger mental health and psychosocial support services, for bolder leadership and action to tackle climate change, for an end to inequality and discrimination, for more practical and equitable education, for platforms to have their voice heard on matters that affect them, and for greater accountability from our political leaders. And they recognise the need to build back better – and greener – from the COVID-19 pandemic to secure Australia’s future.

Many of these are long-standing issues that have long been called out as priorities. We, as a group of young leaders, share the frustration of our peers that there hasn’t already been more action on some of these big issues. COVID-19 has shown us that when communities work together and are led by science and public interests, Australia can achieve remarkable things. Children and young people have been inspired by the experiences of 2020 and they want to see the same level of commitment and collective action on other priorities impacting their lives and futures.



As UNICEF Australia Young Ambassadors, we are privileged to be able to listen to children and young people from across the country. We have been inspired and impressed by the clarity, creativity and commitment of children and young people to build a better future for us all. We want to thank everyone who participated in our national consultations for sharing your lives and perspectives with us. Through this report, and our engagement with leaders across the country, we are committed to amplifying your voices and ensuring that decisionmakers hear from you.

Children and young people have a lot to say – it is the job of us all to listen, and then to act.

*Nava Alhammad*

*Daphne*

*Jgamble*

*Mahiyah*

*Jumana*

*Ellie*

*Jo*

*Deva*

*Brian Lee*

*Mahesh*



[Growing up today could be better if] the future problems were not haunting us now, and if the world leaders [would] 'be the change' and inspire global hope.

– Male, Years 10-11, Sydney NSW

## The world that children and young people will inherit

Young people want action today to safeguard the world they will inherit

Across our national consultations, many children and young people talked passionately about their concerns about the future. They want a sustainable and equitable future, and they want today's leaders to take bold action to improve the world they will inherit. And just as they want adults to safeguard the world for them, they also see themselves as having a responsibility to protect the world for future generations.

“ **The role we have is to set up a future for the next generation that comes after us and have a better life than we have.** ”

– FEMALE, YEAR 11, REGIONAL NORTHERN TERRITORY

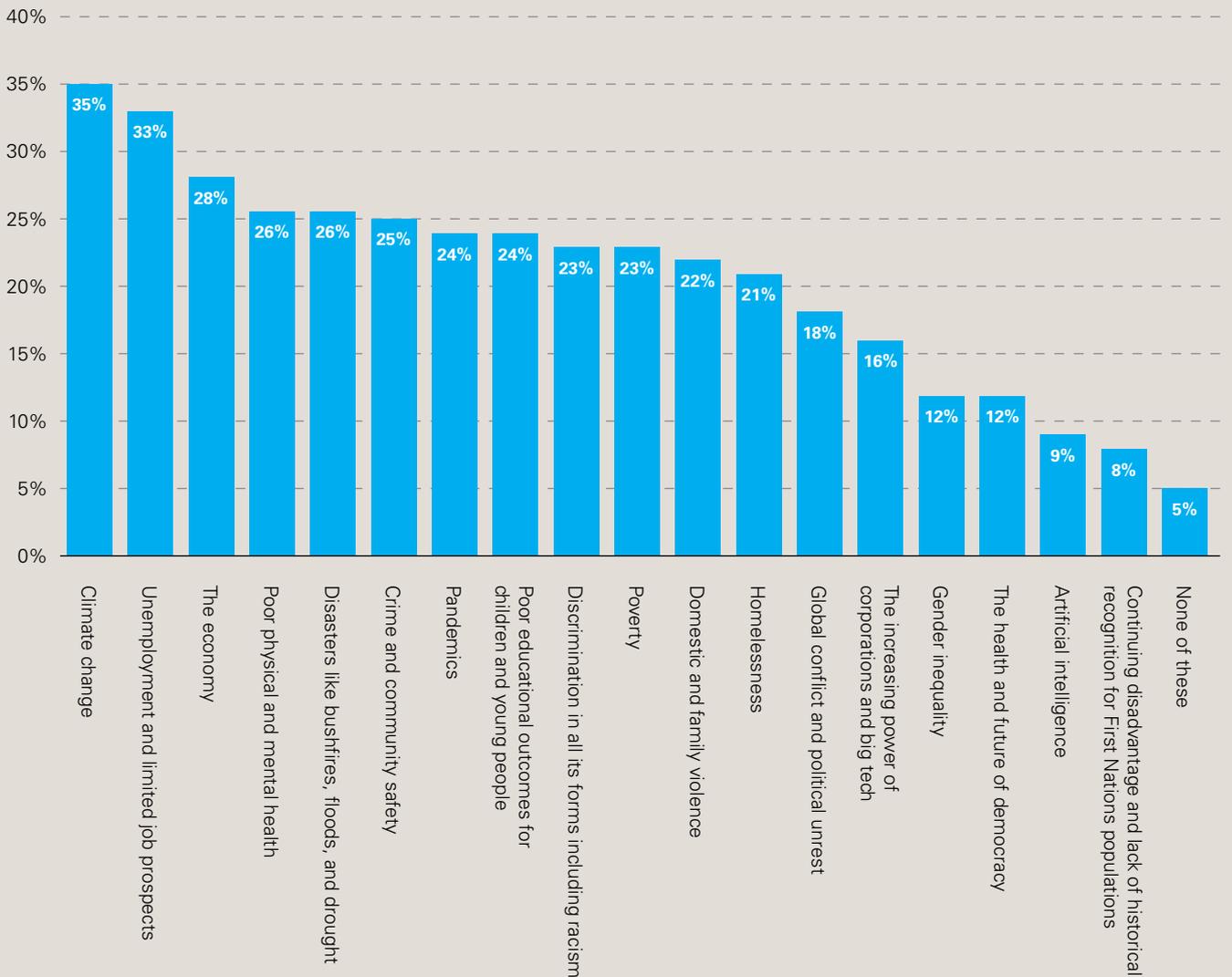
Overall, young people aged 13-17 years view climate change (35%) as the greatest threat to the future wellbeing and livelihood of children and young people in Australia, followed closely by unemployment and limited job prospects in the future (33%). The economy (28%), disasters (26%), poor physical and mental health (26%), crime and community safety (25%), pandemics (24%), poor educational outcomes (24%), poverty (23%), discrimination including racism (23%), domestic and family violence (22%), and homelessness (21%) are also seen as major threats.

Across the national consultations, there was a common frustration at the lack of action by current leaders in tackling the big threats that threaten their future. They are angry and worried about inaction on many big issues by today's leaders. In the case of climate change, they are genuinely concerned that it will be too late to fix when they are adults. And they are resentful that many issues are being ignored and 'left' for the next generation to deal with.

Many of the children and young people we spoke to were politically engaged and keyed into social movements. They were ready to roll their sleeves up and be part of the solution – and they have a lot to offer, with extraordinary energy and creativity that can help to shape solutions to the big issues facing the world. But they worry that they can't do it alone. They are asking today's leaders to listen to them, to work with them, and to take action to safeguard the world that they inherit. The recommendations of this report provide a starting point for action.

*I am ready to make and contribute to change, but I need the support and belief from the generation before.*  
 - Female, Year 12, Perth, Western Australia

### Greatest threats to the future wellbeing and livelihood of children and young people in Australia and their communities:



# Creating a better world for children and young people

Based on what children and young people have told us, we call on decision-makers to take decisive action in the following areas. Our full Platform for Action is in Part 3 of this report.

## Accelerating COVID-19 recovery

- Monitor the social and economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and recovery on children and young people
- Provide platforms for children and young people to shape the trajectory of Australia's COVID-19 recovery
- Strengthen disaster risk reduction education through schools

## Improving mental health and wellbeing

- Strengthen the mental health system to be more holistic and strengths-based.
- Engage children and young people in the design and delivery of mental health and psychosocial support initiatives
- Support children and young people to navigate social media and online spaces

## Protecting the environment and tackling climate change

- Recognise children and young people as agents of change in climate action
- Place children and young people at the centre of the development and delivery of climate change strategies and response plans, and protect children from the impact of climate change and environmental degradation
- Take bold and concrete national action to reduce emissions and pollution
- Increase investments in Indigenous land management

## Fostering equality and Inclusion

- Improve data on children and young people's experiences and understanding of inequality, discrimination and exclusion
- Diversify media coverage and representation of young people from under-represented groups
- Establish a National Commissioner for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people
- Strengthen the quality and scope of sex education curricula in schools including respectful relationships
- Ensure that student complaints of discrimination, harassment or abuse in school settings are managed respectfully and appropriately

## Enhancing learning

- Build the analytical and critical thinking skills of children to safely and effectively navigate information, including online content
- Embed child rights and human rights education into school curricula
- Expand access to practical life skills in school curricula

## Supporting child and youth participation and building trust

- Create mechanisms to listen to and be directed by young people on matters that affect them
- Political parties to set clear commitments for supporting, engaging and listening to children and young people
- Equip children and young people to understand political processes and how to advocate and shape public policy

## About the Young Ambassador Program

The UNICEF Australia Young Ambassador Program provides young people aged 15-24 with a platform to learn about children’s rights, listen to children and young people across the country, and speak up about the issues that matter most to them. Recruited from across Australia, they are trained in leadership, media and communications, government advocacy, and engaging with children and young people. The program aims to build their capacity to advocate for children’s rights at a local, national and international level, so they can help to create a fair Australia that protects and supports every child.

Each year, the UNICEF Australia Young Ambassadors meet with thousands of children in their communities to find out what matters to young people. They then raise the issues they hear with key decision-makers.

The work of our last cohort of Young Ambassadors culminated in the 2019 A Climate For Change Young Ambassador Report.

Our current cohort of 10 Young Ambassadors commenced their tenure in 2019. These incredible Young Ambassadors have come together from across Australia to raise the voices of the children and young people living in their communities. They have unique and diverse experiences, perspectives and ideas, but a common goal: to ensure every child in Australia has a fair chance. In their time as Young Ambassadors, they have been learning and listening to children across the country, conducting 178 consultations with 3,263 children and young people aged 7 to 20 years. This report brings together what they have heard.



## About this report

This report is structured into three parts.

### Part 1

is a special section sharing the findings of the third phase of research by UNICEF Australia and the Young Ambassadors into children and young people’s lived experience through the COVID-19 pandemic in Australia. It follows the two previous reports which were released in May 2020 (Living in Limbo) and September 2020 (Swimming with Sandbags).

### Part 2

presents the key findings and recommendations of the Young Ambassador national consultations, which ran from late 2019 to late 2020, complemented by the findings of the Young Ambassador survey, which was completed over the 2020-2021 summer.

### Part 3

presents the Young Ambassadors’ Platform for Action – a summary of their key recommendations, including from the third phase of COVID-19 research.

### The Annex

includes information on the methodology for this work.



## Part 1

# The views and experiences of young people in Australia almost a year into the COVID-19 pandemic

In early 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic erupted globally, drastically changing the lives of children and young people. Australia has successfully suppressed the COVID-19 health crisis, but it has come at a high social and economic cost. As their lives changed rapidly, many children and young people found themselves under exceptional levels of stress. They managed remote learning, domestic responsibilities, social isolation, and, at times, worked in frontline roles to support themselves and their families. And while Australia has fared well compared to other countries, the economic costs of the pandemic will be felt for years to come.

At the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, UNICEF Australia committed to tracking and elevating the views and lived experiences of children and young people throughout the pandemic. Supported by the Young Ambassadors, UNICEF Australia embarked on a three-phase analysis, which led to two reports being released in May 2020 (Living in Limbo) and September 2020 (Swimming with Sandbags). This chapter is the third phase of analysis and follows up on key trends reported in the earlier reports.

## Young people's ability to cope has continued to improve since September

Due to COVID-19, children and young people across Australia of all ages and backgrounds have had to navigate significant challenge, change and uncertainty. However, over nine months into the COVID-19 pandemic, there are good signs that the wellbeing of young people aged 13-17 is beginning to recover, with two thirds (65%) saying that their ability to cope right now is good. While this number

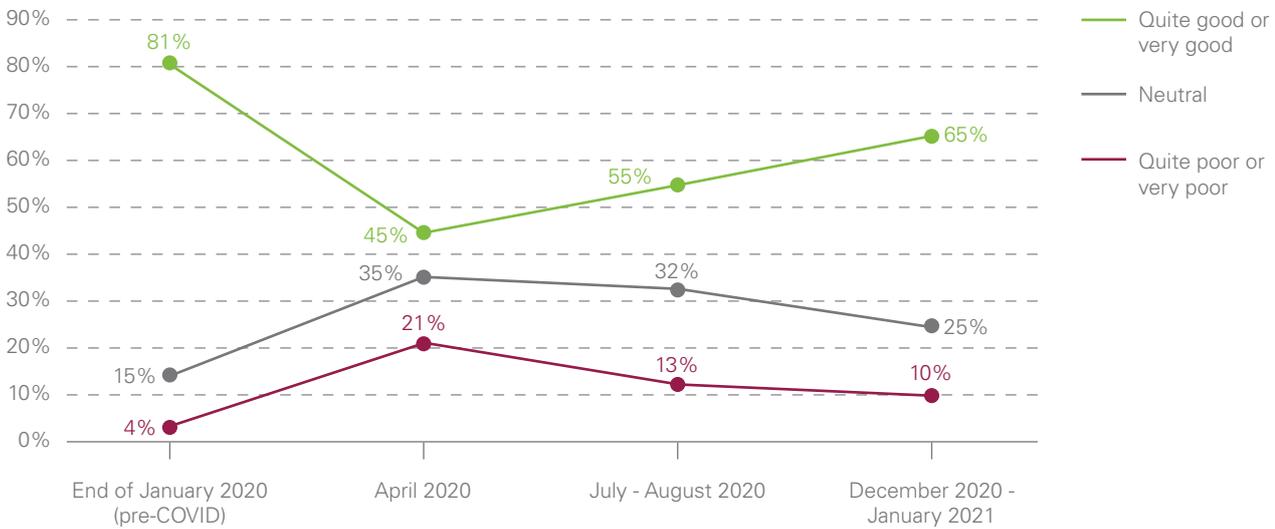


is still lower than the three quarters (81%) who felt their ability to cope at the beginning of 2020 was good, it is significantly higher than April 2020, when less than half (45%) felt their ability to cope was good. Similarly, while the 10% who feel their ability to cope today is poor is still higher than at the beginning of 2020 (4%), it represents a significant decline compared to April 2020 (21%), when the proportion of young people struggling to cope had more than quadrupled from January.

“ So I'd say it's gotten a lot better that most people are now normalising it in a way, sometimes a bit too much, but it's a lot better than it was at the start. ”

– FEMALE, SYDNEY, NSW

## Ability to cope



That said, many children and young people have experienced significant stress and isolation, which has challenged their mental health and wellbeing. While there is an overarching positive trend in young people’s coping, it is important to remember that some young people are struggling to ‘bounce back’ from lockdowns, disruptions to learning, and changes to their social connectivity. For these young people, it is critical that there be accessible, appropriate, and acceptable support services available now and into the future.

**“ [COVID-19] doesn’t create much new, it just amplifies what already exists. So, the students who struggle with school, the students who prosper in school, who thrive in it and Coronavirus emphasises that. There’s individuals who struggle with mental health and there’s individuals who don’t and coronavirus amplifies that. It amplifies the negatives in a sense... ”**  
 – MALE, YEARS 10-12, MELBOURNE, VICTORIA

Surprisingly, by the end of 2020, more young people feel positive than negative about the impact of COVID-19 on many aspects of their lives, including: their day-to-day life (40% positive compared to 24% negative), their level of hope (40% compared to 24%), their social connectedness (38% compared to 28%), and their overall mental wellbeing (35% compared to 24%). That said, young people are more likely to say their levels of stress and anxiety have been negatively impacted (31% compared to 29% positive).

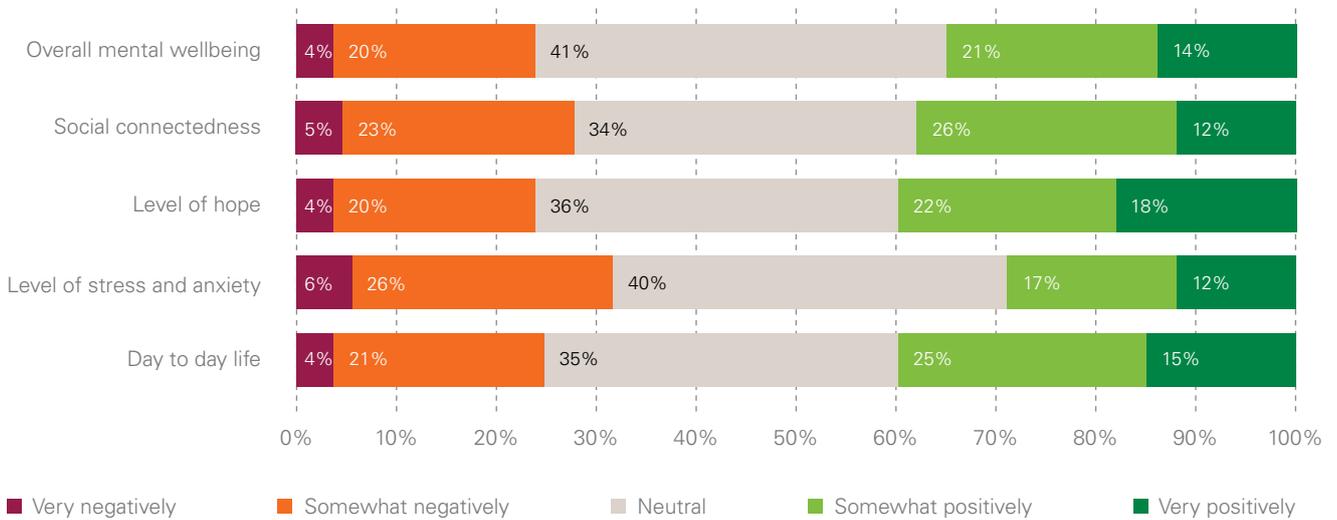
This is a significant shift – in the first two phases of our analysis, young people were more likely to report negative impacts across all aspects of their life, particularly in the first months of the pandemic. This is another positive sign that many young people have been able to return to some level of normalcy with the suppression of the virus in Australia. Indeed, the pandemic may have left some young people with new positive perspectives and life experience, building their resilience.

**“ It’s like what we’ve learnt and how we’ve learnt to cope will stay with us for the rest of our lives. ”**  
 – FEMALE, YEAR 11, ACT

**“ I think now is hard but we’re learning those coping skills now because we’re forced to... So I think that development of resilience has come from the shock, from some actual hardship being [put] on to all of us. ”**  
 – MALE, YEAR 11, SYDNEY NSW



## Impact of COVID-19 on:



## 2020 has shown how important meaningful connections to family, community and friends are for the wellbeing of children and young people

Throughout 2020, we tracked the various experiences young people had faced due to COVID-19. In this third phase of research, we asked young people to reflect on the worst impacts of the pandemic. Isolation from friends (48%) was the most commonly reported worst outcome, followed by: disruptions to education (45%), the pause on usual extracurricular activities (38%) as well as being unable to see close family for a long time (32%). One in five (19%) young people say the worst thing to have happened during the pandemic was their parent/s or carer/s losing part or all of their income. One in 10 have been personally financially impacted, either by being made unemployed or unable to work (9%), or by having to contribute to their household's income (9%), while a similar number have also experienced racism in relation to the pandemic (9%). While a small number, it is still worrying that 3% of young people have lost their accommodation due to COVID-19.

“ All the restrictions have been put in place and it's harder to reach out and find people to talk to, especially if it's family because it's harder to see the family, like even if they're not in Australia or in other states because it's kind of harder to reach out as you can't see them in person. ”

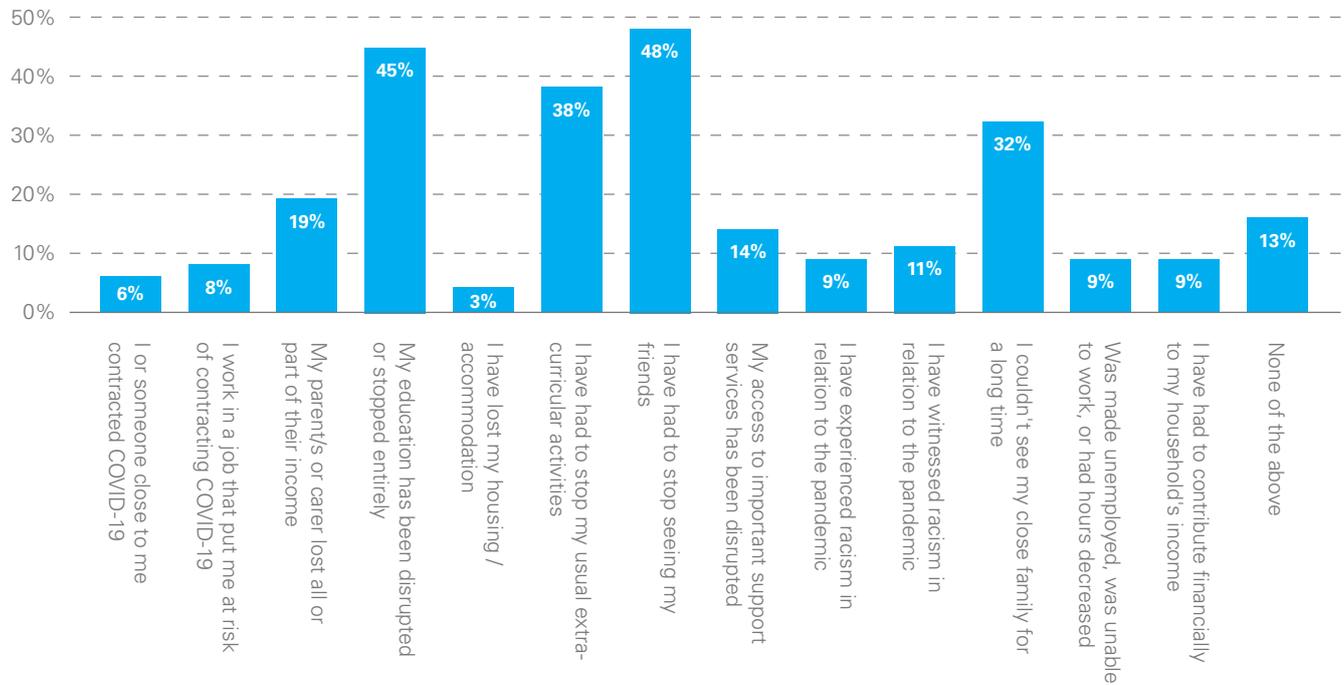
– MALE, SYDNEY, NSW

“ I think being away from our grandparents is definitely a big issue for many especially people in, like if they're in hospital or nursing homes we can't even go visit them. ”

– FEMALE, MELBOURNE, VICTORIA

Young people seem to fare better when they have access to good information, the opportunity to develop skills and tools to adapt to a COVID-19 world, and an opportunity to contribute their perspectives and concerns to the national response. As we move forward, it is critical that we commit to empowering and building the resilience of children and young people, and that we make sure that even in the most uncertain and stressful of times, that we create safe and inclusive spaces for them to understand what is happening and to provide meaningful input into solutions. With COVID-19 coming on the back of drought and bushfires, young people are acutely aware of the risks that disasters pose the community – they want to be better equipped and empowered to navigate other disasters in the future.

Which of the following if any, were the worst things that happened to you during the COVID-19 pandemic? (Respondents had 5 choices)



### The pandemic continues to shape many aspects of young people’s lives, including their education and home responsibilities

The ongoing impact of COVID-19 on the education of young people in 2020 is reflected in the fact that close to half (45%) say they are behind in their schooling compared to where they were before the pandemic. While still high, this is an improvement on the September findings, where 55% felt they were behind. Having been forced to stay away from school considerably longer than those in other states, Victorians have been hit particularly hard, with over half (55%) saying they are behind in their education, compared to those living in Queensland (43%) and New South Wales (39%)<sup>1</sup>.

Equity in education remains a concern for many young people – we have heard from students who lacked access to digital technology during lockdown and who feel that they were disadvantaged.

“ Not everyone has access to laptops, I don't have Wi-Fi at home so post that sort of lockdown... the school recently got like even Wi-Fi sticks and I had to get one of those so up until then I didn't have any Wi-Fi during the online learning. ”

– FEMALE, SYDNEY, NSW

During national consultations, it was clear that the pandemic continues to create uncertainty for some students, particularly those living in regional and remote communities and other areas where local study options are limited.

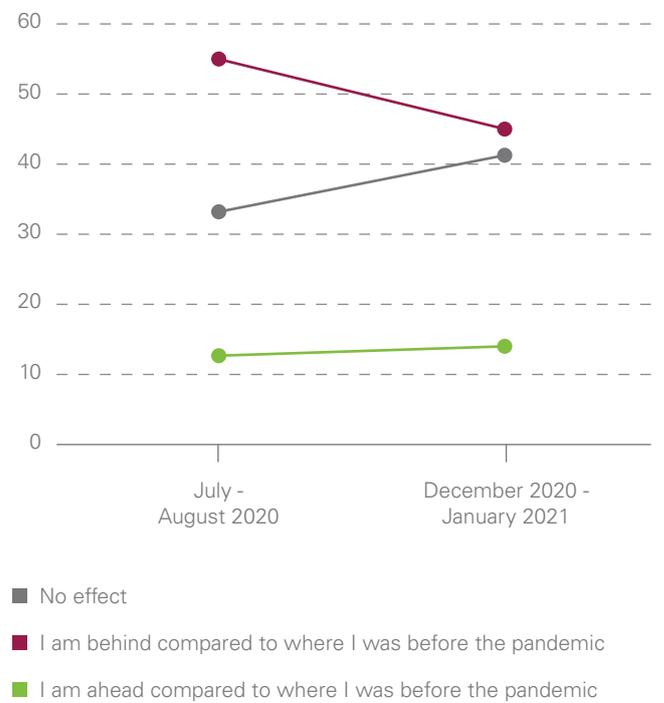
“ Because they only have one university, we are limited for options for university or for courses... We also have to decide whether to move out to another state and if they're moving out what state is actually COVID-free so that we can maybe come back to Darwin to visit our family again. ”

– MALE, YEAR 12, DARWIN, NORTHERN TERRITORY

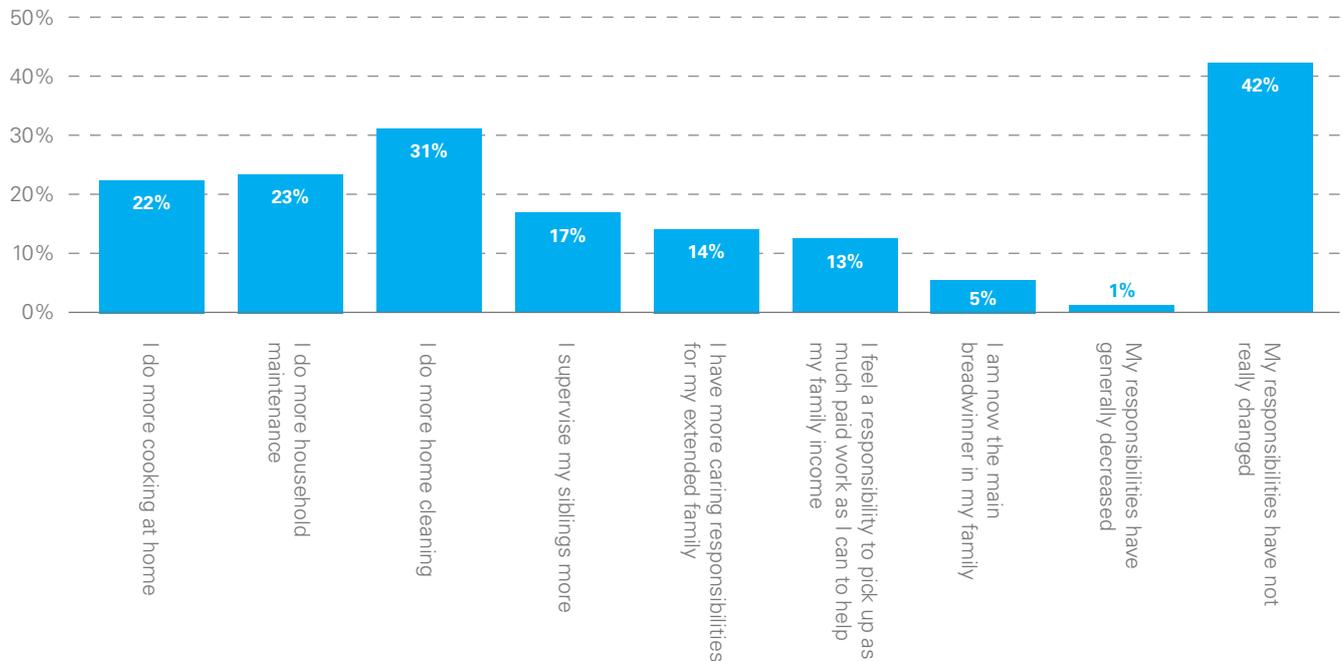
It has also impacted students in their school transitions. There has been a lot of discussion about the impact of the pandemic on Year 12 students, but it has also impacted younger students. One Year 7 student told us that returning to school after lockdown felt like their first day of school all over again.

Young people’s home responsibilities have also changed as a result of COVID-19, with over half of young people (57%) taking on additional responsibilities to support their families. Three in ten (31%) young Australians now do more cleaning around the house, while one in four are also doing more household maintenance (23%) and cooking (22%). Other household responsibilities that young Australians aged 13-17 have had to take on include looking after siblings (17%), caring for extended family members (14%), and picking up paid work to help the family income (13%). Importantly, one in 20 young people (5%) are still saying they have become the main breadwinner for their household. These findings are consistent with what young people told us about their home responsibilities in September 2020. Given the significant economic fallout of the pandemic on some families, it will be important to track whether the additional responsibilities taken on by young people are managed without impeding their rights and wellbeing, including their right to education.

### Effect of COVID-19 pandemic on schooling



## How has the COVID-19 pandemic and responses affected your responsibility at home?



### The long-term economic fallout of the pandemic is an ongoing concern to young people

Even before the COVID-19 pandemic hit Australia, many young people were concerned about their economic prospects, including job opportunities and barriers to entering the housing market. With youth unemployment on the rise and Australia facing a long economic recovery, young people are more worried than ever about their future prospects.

“ Even in the early stages of COVID, we're in a recession worse than the GFC and that was felt years after it actually happened, and this is a lot worse and still getting worse. So like even by the time I've finished a uni degree and looking for a career, there will probably still be offset effects of COVID and some industries will really be struggling, so there'll be like less opportunities. Yeah, and it's just quite scary looking like really far long term. ”

– FEMALE, SYDNEY, NSW

### Young people want to see Australia build back better – and greener

Since the early weeks and months of the COVID-19 pandemic, young people have been struck by the speed and magnitude of the national response. They told us that in responding so effectively to COVID-19, Australia has proven our ability as a nation to rapidly address and adapt to complex problems. They have issued us all a challenge: if the Australian community and our decisionmakers can all rally together and enact extraordinary change to respond to a threat like COVID-19, why can we not more effectively address other complex priority issues in our community, such as climate change and domestic violence?

As we move towards a post-pandemic world, young people are acutely aware of other existential threats facing themselves and the world. And they want serious and urgent action.

“ I think a green recovery would be good. Like how everything has kind of shut down like nothing is going on. We kind of need to use this time to think about how we [become] more environmentally friendly. ”

– MALE, YEAR 10, SYDNEY, NSW



**“ I think [the priority] would be equality - so just everything being equal to one another and that is evident, and like Black Lives Matters, everyone is equal. ”**

– STUDENT, YEARS 10-12, MELBOURNE, VICTORIA

Throughout 2020, young people spoke to us a lot about the way that the pandemic had exacerbated many existing inequalities in our society. They are very aware that not everyone has been impacted equally and were concerned that there were inadequate concessions and supports for young people most at risk of falling behind.

**“ I would say that like there's a total inequality in how COVID has affected young people. We in [an affluent Sydney suburb] get to go home to a home that has Internet, that have a laptop that we can do our schoolwork with. We can email teachers, we can email the classroom... We're not going home to public housing, where we struggle to access technology. We haven't come to a public school that can't give us laptops to take home... To say that we're all in this together I think is really inaccurate because it's not, it's depending on who you are, what family you come from, the impact that you'd experience is vast. ”**

– MALE, YEAR 11, SYDNEY, NSW

As we turn our minds more and more to recovery, young people have called on Australia to ensure that we work to address inequalities across all aspects of children and young people's lives. This needs to include investment to ensure that children and young people who fell behind or disengaged from school during and after periods of online learning are supported to catch up and re-engage in their learning.

## Recommendations:

- Continue to monitor the social and economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and recovery on children and young people of all ages, recognising that some will require significant longer-term support. This should include close monitoring of any rise in inequity, including in education.
- Provide platforms for children and young people to contribute to and shape the trajectory of Australia's recovery from COVID-19, including through a strong investment in youth unemployment.
- Strengthen disaster risk reduction education through schools to better equip and empower young people to navigate future emergencies and disasters.



## Part 2

# Children and young people in a changing Australia

## Wellbeing

COVID-19 took a significant toll on children and young people's wellbeing. Our 2020 Living in Limbo and Swimming with Sandbags reports about young people's experiences of the pandemic highlighted the heavy toll that 2020 took on the mental health and wellbeing of young people. This is consistent with other reports, such as data from headspace which found that the ability of young people aged 12-25 to cope with stress and carry out daily activities had declined from 2018 to 2020<sup>2</sup>. It is important to keep in mind that children and young people's wellbeing was under strain prior to the pandemic. For example, Australia fared poorly in a 2020 UNICEF report on child wellbeing, being ranked 35 for mental well-being, 28 for physical health, and 19 for skills across 38 OECD countries.<sup>3</sup>

### Many young people have a positive outlook on various aspects of their wellbeing

At the end of an incredibly tumultuous year, our latest survey from December 2020 and January 2021 shows that the vast majority of young Australians aged 13-17 have a positive outlook on many of the most important aspects of their wellbeing and personal life, including their relationships with family and friends (84%), both their physical (79%) and mental (71%) health and wellbeing, their ability to manage their emotions (68%), and their connection with their culture (62%). Furthermore, despite the ongoing pandemic and climate crisis, three quarters (73%) nevertheless say their level of hope for the future is good or very good (33% say 'very good').<sup>4</sup>

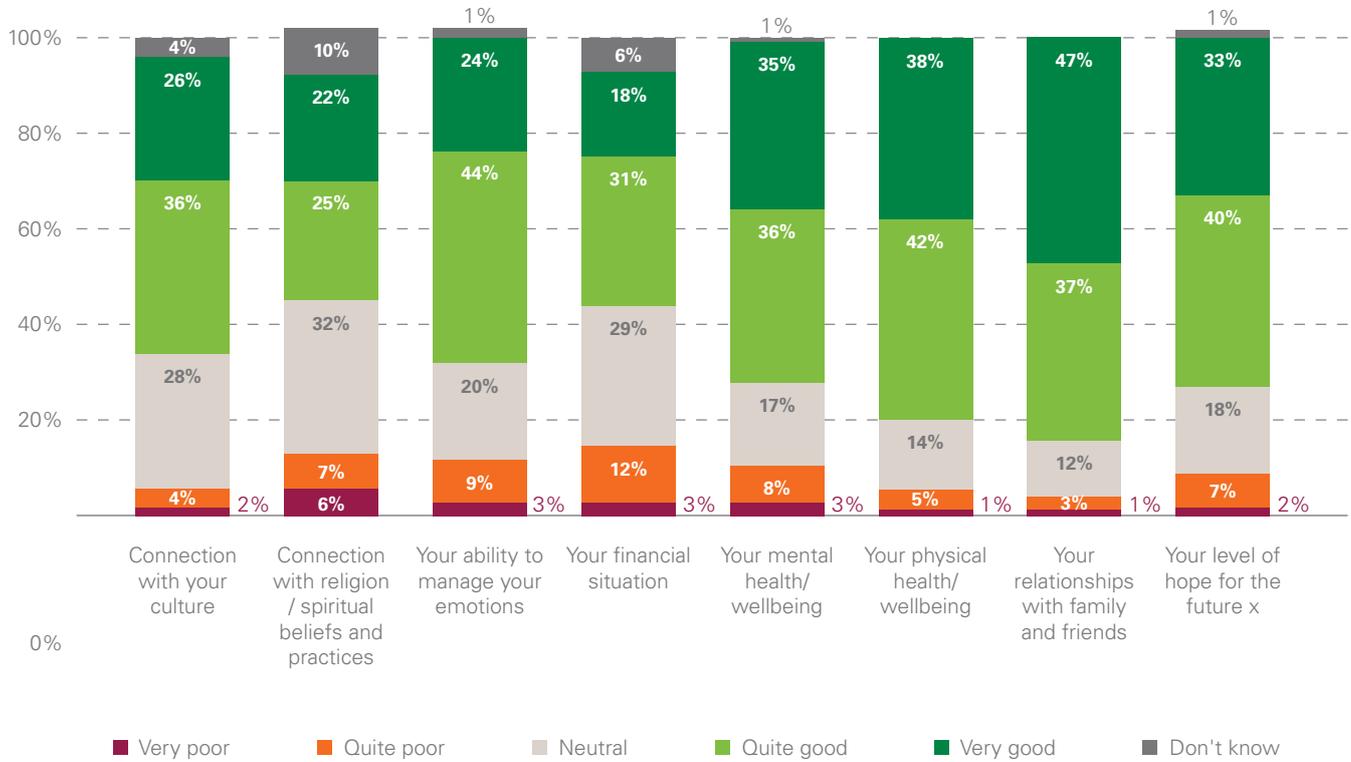
Despite this generally positive outlook, however, only half (49%) feel good about their financial situation, while one in six (16%) view their current financial position as 'poor'. Interestingly, this is reasonably consistent with the findings from the Young Ambassador's 2019 report, in which 17 per cent of young people in Australia viewed their financial situation as being "bad" (5 per cent very bad), while 36 per cent said it was "quite" to "very good" .

It is a testament to the adaptability of children and young people, and the strong collective action taken to protect Australia from some of the worst potential impacts of COVID-19, that there hasn't been a more notable decline in some of these wellbeing measures since 2019.

Beyond just mapping how young people feel about their mental health and wellbeing, we wanted to also understand what factors had positive or negative impacts on mental health and wellbeing over the course of 2020.



## How would you rate your outlook on the following?



### Social connectedness is key for young people’s sense of mental health and wellbeing

Since the start of the pandemic in March, family (54%) and friends (46%) have had the most positive impact on the mental health and wellbeing of young Australians aged 13-17. In addition to family and friends, play and leisure time (29%), school and schooling (24%), social media (24%), and sport, exercise and extracurricular activities (23%) have also had a major positive impact on the mental health and wellbeing of young Australians.

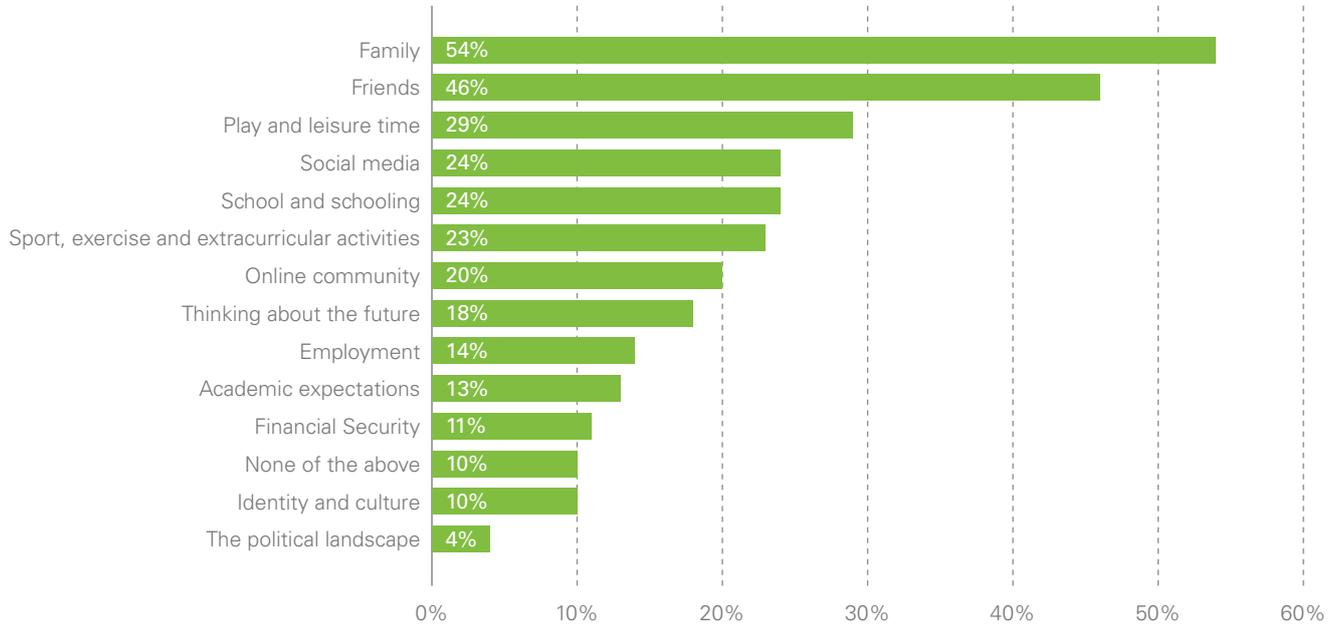
Conversely, being isolated from friends (34%) and school and schooling (34%) are the two things that have most negatively impacted upon the mental health and wellbeing of young Australians aged 13-17 years since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition to the isolation and impacts on schooling, one in four (28%) say that thoughts about the future have negatively impacted upon their mental health and wellbeing during the COVID-19 pandemic.

One in four (25%) young Australians also say their mental health and wellbeing has been negatively impacted by family issues and tensions. Restrictions on sport, exercise or extracurricular activities (25%), academic expectations (24%), and social media (23%) have also taken their toll over the past 9 months.

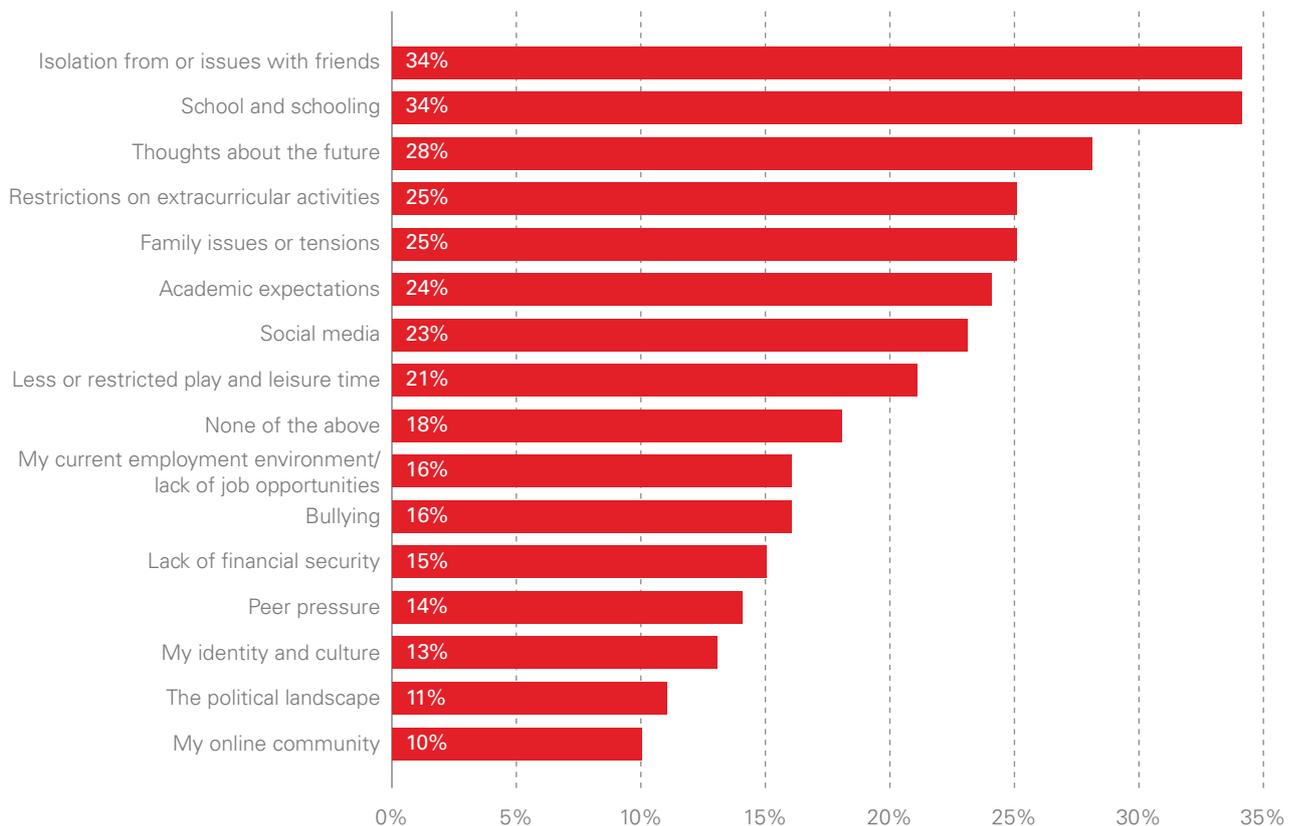
Interestingly, one in five (18%) young people said that none of the listed factors had negatively impacted their mental health and wellbeing.

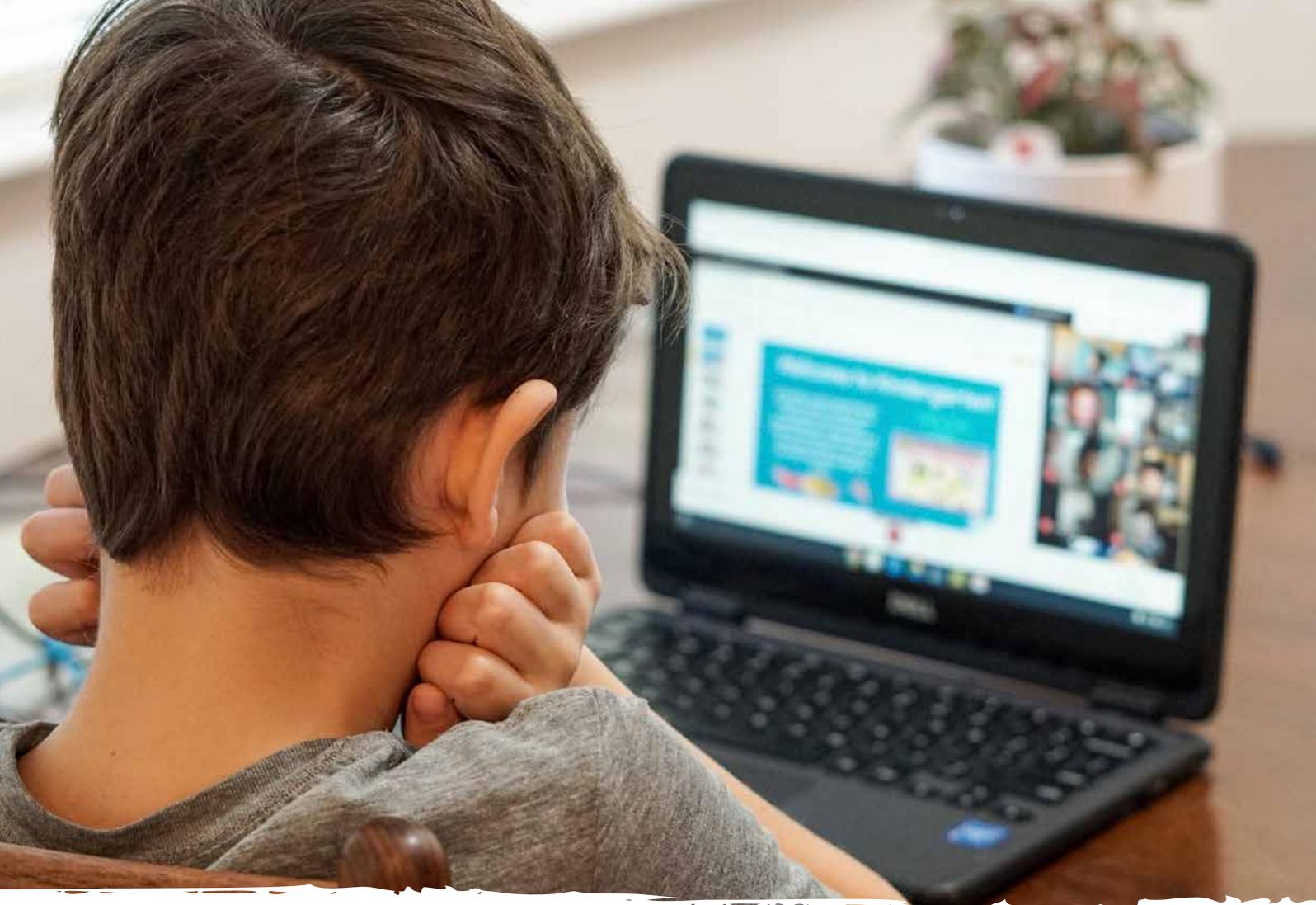
During consultations, young people talked about the negative mental health impacts of academic stress (covered in more detail in the Learning section of this report) as well as expectations from parents and misunderstandings due to intergenerational differences.

## What has had a positive impact on your mental health and wellbeing in past 9 months?



## What has had a negative impact on your mental health and wellbeing in past 9 months?





## The digital world can be hard to navigate, and the stakes are high

During national consultations, children and young people talked about the profound and growing impact of social media on their lives, and the way in which it has the potential to adversely impact their mental wellbeing. In addition to social media, there were concerns around bullying, particularly cyberbullying and the impact of abuse which now arises in spaces traditionally considered a safe harbour: their homes. Given the sensitivity of discussing bullying issues in group forums, it is unsurprising that it was in written feedback that many students provided feedback on the issue.

Social media platforms deliver young people a constant stream of news and information, and indeed misinformation. Young people feel over-exposed and are struggling to navigate this information cycle, which can lead to feeling helpless and anxious.

**“ For us, we just open our phone and see there has been a bombing somewhere. We have just got access to that information so quickly and especially for people a little bit younger than us, that might be very scary. ”**  
– STUDENT, YEARS 10 AND 12, ADELAIDE, SOUTH AUSTRALIA

During consultations, young people explained the burden of keeping up with social media trends and the expectations of people their age. Young people have told us that the stakes are high, putting huge pressure on them: a ‘good’ social media presence and a higher social media follower count can determine popularity, acceptance, self-confidence, and the state of their wellbeing. This can lead to young people feeling they need to shape and even suppress the way they express themselves and their identity.

**“ I think like the way you act on social media affects your social status at school and the sort of person that you are. ”**  
– STUDENT, YEARS 7-10, REGIONAL TASMANIA

**“ I feel like some people hide things in their personality so that they can be accepted, because they feel like if they do talk about them, then they’ll get rejected by their friends. ”**  
– STUDENT, YEAR 10, ADELAIDE, SOUTH AUSTRALIA

Many conversations about social media would quickly turn to societal expectations in terms of body image, material possessions, social status and other unrealistic ideals. Young people are keen to learn practical skills to help navigate body image pressures, particularly given the immense pressure they face to ‘fit in’.

“ To fit into a group, you've got to be like them and act like them. ”

– STUDENT, YEAR 12, REGIONAL QUEENSLAND

During consultations, young people raised bullying and cyberbullying as an issue, with social media creating a new outlet for continuous abuse that follows them home through their screens.

“ Nowadays people take photos of it and put it on social media, and you get to leak it straight out and then they have this like incredible like surrounded by like a wall of shame for quite a long time. ”

– STUDENT, YEARS 11-12, DARWIN, NORTHERN TERRITORY

Social media has exacerbated pressures surrounding physical appearance, social identity, belonging and overall wellbeing. Children across the country took issue with the profound impact social media can play on mental health and wellbeing and called for better regulation and stronger support mechanisms to reduce these negative impacts.

Mental health matters and is a prevalent issue in our society. After losing a friend because they weren't supported and felt like there was no other way out, I realised that the government doesn't help young people as much as they need to.

– Female, Year 11, Perth, Western Australia

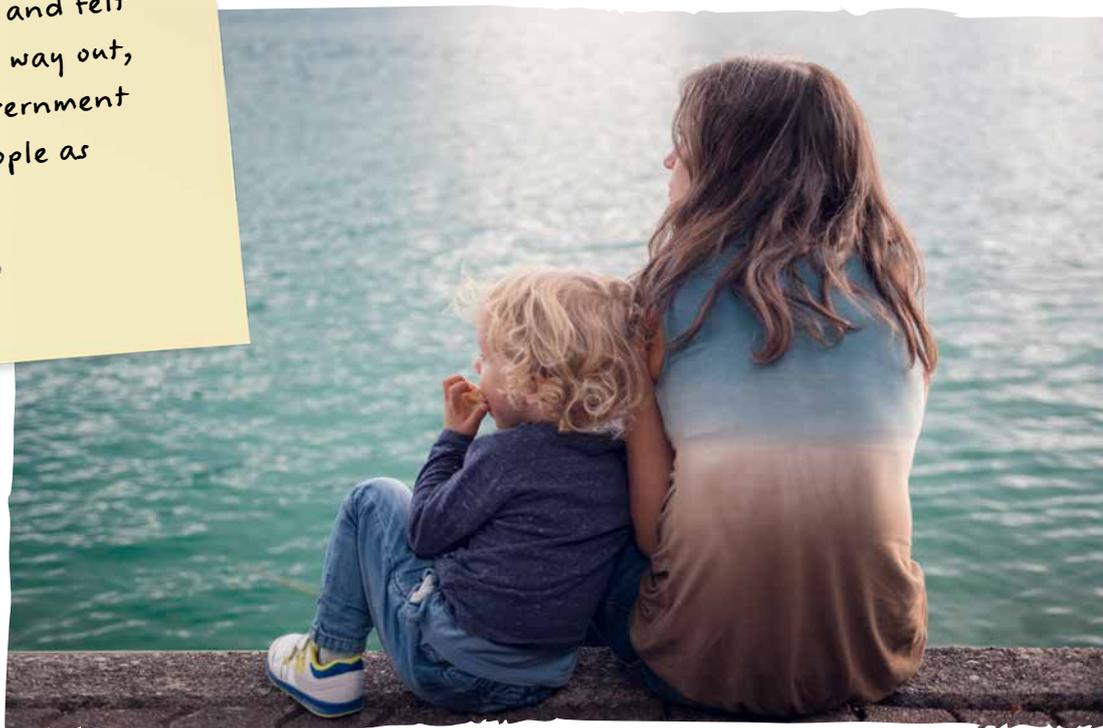
## The mental health system needs to be less stigmatising, more accessible and more holistic

During our consultations, children and young people told us that stigma around mental health created embarrassment and fear about being seen to be having problems or seeking help, creating significant barriers for accessing support.

“ It's hard to kind of deal because they think, 'This isn't normal. Why am I like this?' It's harder for them to realise and try to help themselves in something that they don't even know is going on. ”

– STUDENT, YEARS 7-9, REGIONAL NORTHERN TERRITORY

In some consultations, young people emphasised the importance of supporting those struggling with their mental health, including to support them to seek professional support as situations became complex. At the same time, students talked about the importance of building resilience and learning to 'bounce back' after facing everyday stressors, and in turn, developing greater self-confidence. The young people we heard from don't want to feel stigmatised for struggling, and they want positive avenues to seek support without relying on medical mental health models.



School is an important factor in young people's mental health – ensuring that teachers are well supported to identify and support students who are struggling is key.

**“ I don't think like anyone is afraid to make mistakes but if the teacher is not really understanding how you're struggling, then you can't really get the help that you need and the support that you need. ”**

– STUDENT, YEAR 9, REGIONAL NSW

Despite the Government's investment in mental health, which has increased in response to COVID-19, young people have consistently raised concerns about the suitability of Australia's child and youth mental health framework. They are concerned that the current mental health framework centres on medicalised treatment, insufficient communication with children and young people, and that it seldom acknowledges that hardship can be a normal part of life that many children and young people need to navigate. The ongoing stigma of seeking mental health and wellbeing support also continues to be a point of concern.

**“ I personally think [a big issue is] mental health awareness and the support that we can get especially within a rural community because there is such a stigma - like everyone is scared to sort of seek help because everyone's going to find out in your small town. ”**

– FEMALE, YEAR 10, REGIONAL NSW

Some young people were concerned that there was inadequate support available for children and young people in crisis, leading to devastating consequences. The availability of even limited services and supports was a particular issue for young people in regional and remote areas. Even in smaller urban areas, access to services was an issue – one student in Darwin told us that it was a nine-week waiting time to see a therapist at one of the few services available locally.

**“ Well, as a student said, there's not a lot of these services available in Darwin. And plus they don't advertise themselves as much, so if I need help I wouldn't even know where to go. ”**

– MALE, YEAR 11, DARWIN, NORTHERN TERRITORY

From what we have been told, there is a clear need for reform of the mental health system for children and young people, ensuring that it is informed by evidence and the needs and priorities of children and young people themselves. A key component of this reform should be making the system more holistic and person-centred, empowering children and young people by building their resilience, and making broader psychosocial support more available.

These psychosocial support mechanisms should aim to address not just cases of mental illness, but also the stigma that still surrounds mental illness. During national consultations, young people repeatedly told us that stigma was a key barrier to accessing support and treatment for those who are in distress. These mechanisms should be aimed at young people directly. During the national consultation, young people reported that they want and need agency over their understanding of the effects and causes of mental illness. They called for mechanisms such as peer-to-peer support networks and easy-to-access resources tailored for children and young people.

## Recommendations:

- Invest in strengthening the mental health system to be more holistic and strengths-based, with strong psychosocial support available including to reduce the stigma of mental illness.
- Engage directly with children and young people in the design and delivery of mental health and psychosocial support initiatives to ensure they are relevant, accessible, strengths-based, and destigmatising.
- Support children and young people to safely and positively navigate social media and online spaces through education and skills building, while also strengthening protections to keep children safe on social media platforms and in other online spaces.



## The environment and climate change

Climate change was a spotlight issue in the 2019 Young Ambassador Report A Climate for Change. In that report, UNICEF Australia's Young Ambassadors called for a commitment to real climate change action. They proposed a youth summit be held across Australia and the Pacific to inform approaches to achieving Sustainable Development Goal targets on climate action, along with the creation of a 10-year plan for action.

Two years on, the environment and climate change remain priority issues for children and young people across Australia. Indeed, some young people expressed a feeling of hopelessness at the lack of policy action in response to the student-led climate strikes of 2019. It is disappointing, for example, that one year on from the 2019 UN Climate Action Summit, Australia was excluded from the speaking list of the 2020 UN Climate Ambition Summit due to its lack of ambition.

**“ We've been going to climate rallies and... we've been buying metal straws for the turtles and using keep cups instead of throwaway cups, but as young people, there's not really much we can do, we're really just relying on our voices being heard and then, like the government could actually act on it and help us out. ”**

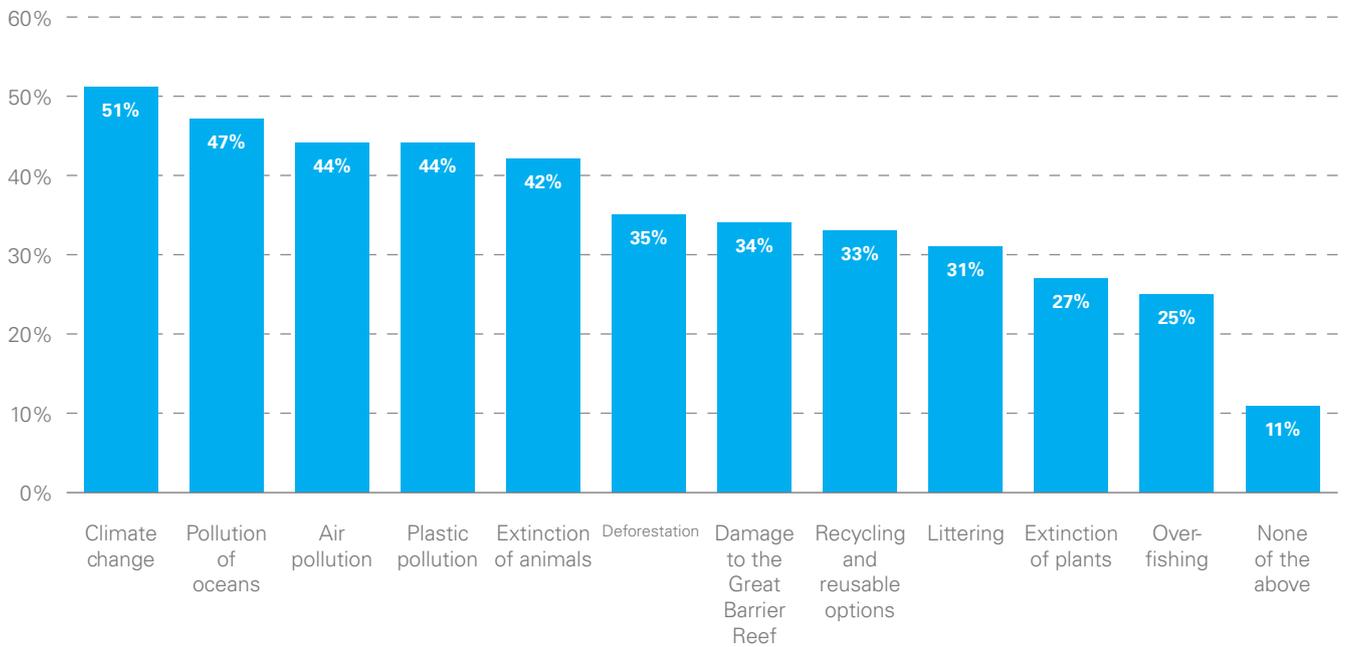
– STUDENT, YEAR 11, ACT

The 2019-20 Black Summer bushfires brought home the threat of extreme weather events and climate change to many young people.

**“ I think the Prime Minister needs to take climate change seriously. This summer was the worst of my life with smoke compromising access to clean air and the ability to go outside. I am terrified. ”**

– STUDENT, YEAR 12, ACT

## Which of the following environmental issues most concern you at the moment?



### Young people see climate change as a priority issue impacting the world now and into the future

Young people aged 13-17 years are deeply concerned about a range of environmental issues, but climate change stands out as the biggest environmental concern for them (51%). After climate change, the pollution of the oceans (47%), air pollution (44%) and plastic pollution (44%) are the next most concerning issues, followed by the extinction of animals (42%).

Throughout consultations, children and young people demonstrated a firm understanding of climate change and environmental issues. Their discussions included topics such as fossil fuels, greenhouse gas emissions, pollution, rising sea levels, an increased frequency of natural disasters, loss of cultural heritage, and forced migration.

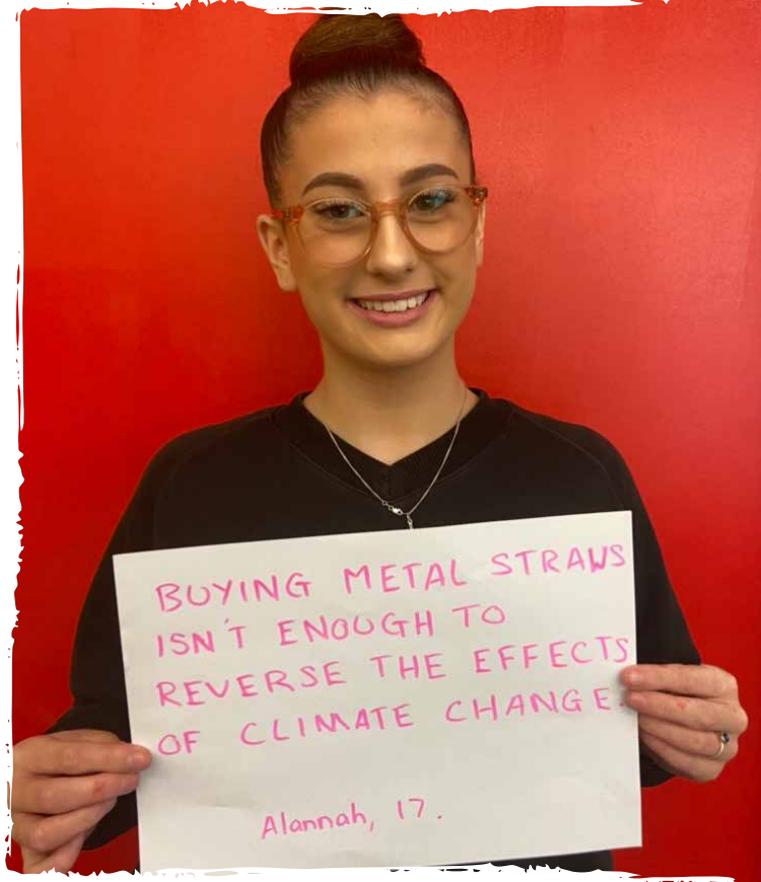
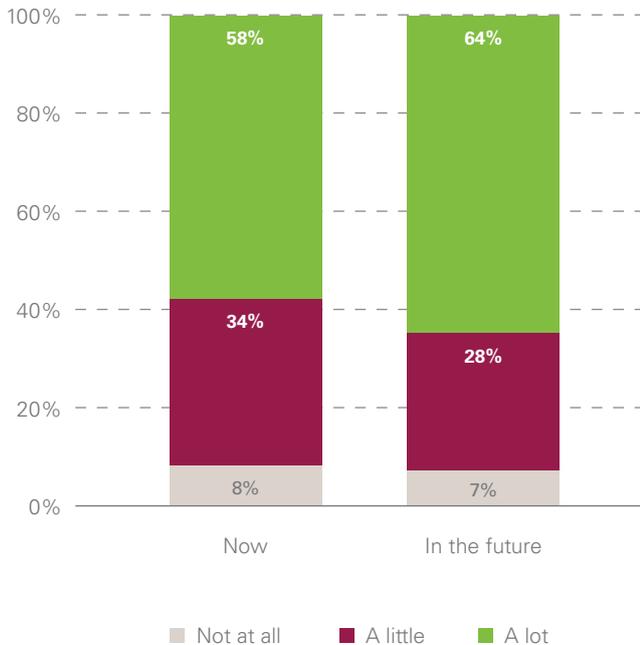
**“ We burn fossil fuels and greenhouse gases and it's coming out and it's heating the earth so it's making the earth more hot and it's making the sea levels get hotter and more cyclones and earthquakes and things like that. ”**

– STUDENT, YEARS 5–6, REGIONAL NORTHERN TERRITORY

Despite the polarising nature of public debate on climate change, young people overall consistently recognise the impact climate change is having on the world. Nearly all (92%) young Australians aged 13-17 agree that climate change caused by human activity is currently affecting the world, with 58% agreeing that the world is currently being affected a lot by human-induced climate change. Young people are equally unanimous in their agreement that climate change will affect the world in the future (93%), with two thirds (64%) agreeing that human-induced climate change will affect the world a lot in years to come.



## How much do you think climate change caused by human activity affects / will affect the world



While these figures show significant agreement among young people, there has been a very slight reduction in consensus around these issues since the 2019 Young Ambassador report findings, when only 2% of young people thought climate change was having no effect now or in the future.

During national consultations, young people talked about climate change with a sense of urgency. Many talked about feeling anxious over fears about the dangers of climate change and the impact it will have on their future. As one female high school student from Sydney put it: "We are running out of time to save planet Earth. We must take action, now."

**“ It makes me anxious to think about nature and to think about the fact that, you know, if I bring kids into this world, I'm bringing them into this world with the same problem. ”**

– STUDENT, YEAR 11, DARWIN, NORTHERN TERRITORY

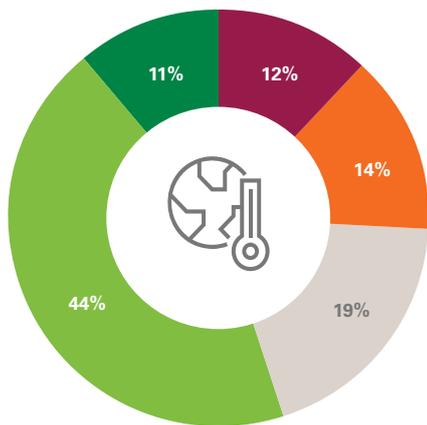
## Young people want better leadership and action in combatting climate change, including more investment in renewable energy

Two thirds (63%) of young people believe we should be taking the lead on climate action, with 44% agreeing that Australia needs to lead by example by taking action on climate change and playing our part in helping the world stop its worsening effects. Just 12% believe that taking action to reduce climate change will have negative economic impacts, while a slightly greater proportion (14%) believe that Australia is too small to make a difference when it comes to global climate action.

**“ The government... they're not really doing anything about it, so everyone else in Australia is trying to do something. But we need the starting step: the government doing something about it. ”**

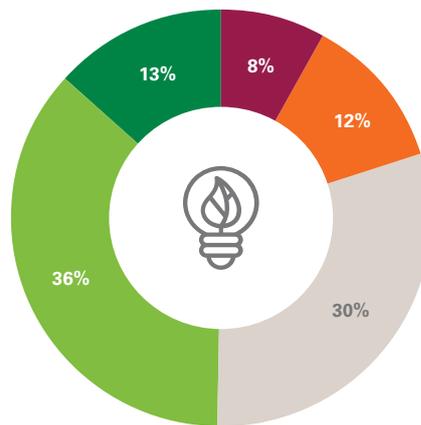
– STUDENT, YEAR 9, ACT

### Which statement most accurately reflects your opinion on climate change and how Australia should be responding to it?



- Taking action to reduce climate change will have negative impacts on our economy such as rising electricity prices
- Even if climate change is real or is caused by human activity, Australia is too small to make any difference to global climate action by taking action
- Even if climate change is not real, by taking action we end up with a cleaner, better planet anyway
- Australia needs to lead by example by taking action on climate change and play our part in helping the world stop its worsening effects
- I don't have a view on Australia taking action on climate change

### How should Australia produce energy now and into the future?



- By staying with fossil fuels (coal, oil, gas)
- Mainly use fossil fuels (coal, oil, gas) but also use renewable energy (solar, wind, hydro) to some extent
- Slowly increase our reliance on renewables, (solar, wind, hydro) while gently decreasing reliance on fossil fuels (coal, oil, gas)
- Move into renewables (solar, wind, hydro) as fast as we can (helping communities to adapt as we go)
- Don't know

Two thirds (67%) of young people think that Australia should be moving to renewable energy sources as our main source of energy production into the future, with one in three (36%) agreeing that we should make the transition as fast as we can, helping communities to adapt as we go. On the other hand, fewer than one in ten (8%) feel we should stick with fossil fuels. These findings are broadly consistent with 2019 data, albeit with a slight decline in the focus on moving to renewables.

During consultations, many young people expressed their frustration that the government has not invested more in renewable energy technologies.

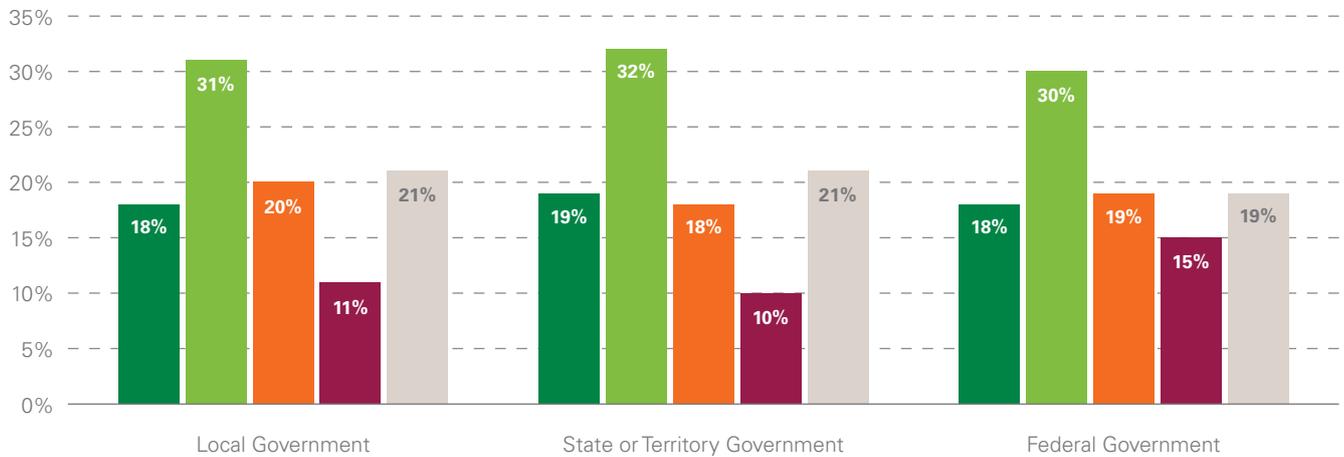
“ **There's no good reason why we can't be transitioning to renewable energy rather than making new coal plants and it doesn't make any sense to me because there's only so much coal that we can dig out of the ground. But if we set up a system that's gonna work to the future and for a long, long, long period of time that just seems so much more logical and people can still have jobs.** ”

– STUDENT, YEARS 7-9, REGIONAL NSW

“ **I think we should bring back the carbon tax. I think it was a good idea, despite what the Minerals Council says. It was the first time in Australian modern history that our emissions went down. It didn't wreck the economy, it didn't force people out of retirement, like Rupert Murdoch said it would.** ”

– STUDENT, YEAR 10, MELBOURNE, VICTORIA

## How well are each level of Australian government responding to climate change?



- Very well - I think the actions they are taking will help make real improvements
- Somewhat well – while they are doing something, they could do quite a lot more to make a difference
- Somewhat poor - The things they are doing are for show and are not really helping at all
- Very poor - they are pretty much doing nothing at all
- Don't know

### Many young people are dissatisfied with government responses to climate change

Half of young people aged 13-17 agree that State and Territory governments (52%) are responding very well or somewhat well to climate change, followed by Local (49%) and Federal (48%) Governments. Interestingly, around one in five young people said that they didn't know how each level of government was responding – there seems to be a gap in terms of their understanding of government interventions despite the importance of the issue for young people.

During consultations, some children and young people said that they felt the Federal Government's energy policies prioritises economic growth over environmental sustainability. Young people were frustrated with the lack of a long-term plan to transition to renewables.

“ [The Prime Minister's] destroying our future, tell him that, and he never does anything about climate change, even though the scientists and the professionals are saying, he just won't believe it and he's ruining our children's future and a bit of his future by not doing anything. ”  
– STUDENT, YEAR 5, ACT

“ I think our Government needs to stop doing dodgy climate accounting with international agreements and stop humiliating us on the global stage. We are in a position where we have large amounts of desert where it would be great to put some solar panels. I think our government needs to stop being scared of rural mining communities and work with them to transition us to being sustainable. ”  
– STUDENT, YEAR 10, MELBOURNE, VICTORIA

Young people are also worried about the influence of some corporations and the fossil fuel industry in lobbying the major political parties, seeing this as a failing of the political system, and a roadblock to action.

“ Capitalism [is the problem]. Government lawmakers and politicians who focus more on making profit than about the environment, or who are being paid off by corporations. ”  
– STUDENT, YEAR 8, PERTH, WESTERN AUSTRALIA

“ I think we're ruled by big corporations, not by the government. The corporations have power and control. The reason why so much hasn't been done is because if we make any progress they're going to lose out, they're going to lose profits. ”  
– STUDENT, YEAR 12, PERTH, WESTERN AUSTRALIA



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## Young people are being proactive in demanding stronger climate action

Young people's frustration with government policy on climate change coupled with their sense of urgency, anxiety, and hopelessness surrounding this issue has driven many of them to engage in climate advocacy and direct action. They feel a civic and ecological duty to protect the environment, but collective action and protesting is also an expression of their agency, strength and hope—a way for young people to have their voice heard and shape decision-making when other formal participatory mechanisms, like voting rights, are unavailable to them.

**“ Young people have a responsibility to hold the Government accountable for what they're doing. ”**  
– STUDENT, YEARS 11-12, ACT

**“ I would like to kid myself into feeling hopeful, but there's a part of me which just says, "Don't bother." Not "Don't bother trying," but, "Don't bother waiting for someone else to do something because that's not going to happen." You're going to have to step up and do it yourself. What's the point of waiting for someone else to acknowledge climate change when you're just sitting here? You need to do something about it or it's never going to get better. ”**  
– FEMALE, YEAR 11, ADELAIDE, SOUTH AUSTRALIA

**“ Despite all the challenges, it's amazing watching everyone band together to grow, because climate change, it was a thing but it wasn't as widely known and now everyone knows about it and it's just an interesting thing to watch the world grow. ”**  
– FEMALE, SYDNEY, NSW

**“ You can't have children as politicians, so I think the climate strike that happened was good, because even though that's not an actual policy being put in place, it's young people saying, "Hey, we want to do something. We think this is a problem." ”**  
– FEMALE, YEARS 11-12, SYDNEY, NSW

## Young people had a lot of ideas about what they wanted to see change

Some young people talked about the impact of colonisation and the industrial revolution on environmental sustainability, and talked about the need to draw on traditional ecological knowledge and practices in handling and preventing environmental disasters such as bushfire.

**“ When the British came [to Australia], the Aboriginals were looking after this planet for 40,000 years plus and didn't make any mistakes. As soon as we came, look what we've created, we've got greenhouse gases, we've got plastic, we've got pollution, things dying. It was just such a happy place and then we came in and destroyed it all. ”**  
– STUDENT, YEAR 5, ADELAIDE, SOUTH AUSTRALIA

**“ It really is like a band-aid fix - like the bushfires have happened but instead of listening to Indigenous people who have been burning their land for years they just have the bushfires and think we're going to fix that. There's so many band-aid solutions but nothing is actually happening. ”**  
– FEMALE, YEARS 10-12, SYDNEY, NSW

Young people also felt that their curricula should reflect the world that they live in and include greater emphasis on sustainability in schools. There was optimism that if everyone knew how to be personally sustainable from a school age, we could mitigate a significant portion of environmental impacts humans cause today.

**“ In terms of education about sustainability... unfortunately it's a political issue and so I think that curriculums and educators should work harder to provide an unbiased education on the matter and an unbiased opinion so that people are equipped with the tools to make a decision for themselves ”**  
– STUDENT, YEARS 9-12, REGIONAL NSW

**“ About climate change. I believe that the first step towards action is education. This would lead to a positive social stigma to help push for a) informed policy and legislation; and b) better consumer habits. ”**

– STUDENT, YEAR 4, MELBOURNE, VICTORIA

Finally, young people were adamant that profit-driven businesses were a driving force behind ecological destruction. Young people recommended that corporations be held more responsible for their ecological footprint, and that governments support them in transitioning to more sustainable models of business.

**“ We need the big companies to start making big changes so that it can actually have an effect on our environment. ”**

– STUDENT, YEARS 10- 12, SYDNEY, NSW

**“ [We need to] provide business incentives to businesses to switch to more renewable options or in regards to their energy consumption and also to the products they're making. ”**

– STUDENT, YEAR 11, ACT

While Canberra continues to struggle to reach consensus on climate policy, there is a movement of young people determined to push for a cleaner, more sustainable future. It is time for decision-makers to stand with and for children and young people and commit to bold climate action as a matter of urgency.

## Recommendations:

- Recognise children and young people as agents of change in climate action. This requires greater education and empowerment of children and young people coupled with access to platforms to share their views and concerns with decisionmakers
- Place children and young people at the centre of the development and delivery of climate change strategies and response plans, and include measures to protect children from the impact of climate change and environmental degradation
- Urgently commit to bold and concrete national action to reduce emissions and pollution, including by demanding greater accountability by high-emissions sectors
- Increase investments in Indigenous land management to help reduce the risk of disasters such as bushfires due to unsustainable land management practices





## Equality and inclusion

Over the past year, young people have spoken passionately and with concern about rising inequality in Australia.

### Young people are worried about a wide range of inequality and social exclusion issues

During the national consultations, young people talked extensively about various manifestations of inequality and social exclusion, including racism, sexism, homophobia, Islamophobia and ableism.

For many children and young people, the COVID-19 pandemic has brought these issues into even sharper focus.

**“ A lot of people have realised that normal [pre-COVID-19] society wasn't a good thing. 'Normal' was people getting discriminated for who they were; 'normal' was people having less opportunities than another person because of their gender, their religion, their race and their skin. ”**

– FEMALE, YEAR 11, MELBOURNE, VICTORIA

Overall, young people aged 13-17 years agree that race (40%), sexual orientation (38%), socioeconomic status (36%) and disability (35%) are the most common factors through which people their age are treated unfairly or discriminated against. Additionally, gender (30%), culture (30%), age (30%), and being a migrant (26%) or refugee/asylum seeker status (26%) are also perceived as sources of discrimination. On the other hand, young Australians are least likely to feel discriminated against for their political views (18%).

**“ Australia claims to be so multicultural, but [as a new Australian] I've had to deal with things that I've never dealt with before, like racism. ”**

– FEMALE, YEAR 12, ACT

**Racism:** The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated many young people's experience of racism. A study of racism among multicultural youth in Victoria during COVID-19 found that a staggering 85% of participants from multicultural backgrounds reported experiencing direct racism<sup>5</sup>, while hate crimes against Asian Australians were also on the rise<sup>6</sup>. Many young people in the national consultations reflected on the systemic and structural aspects of racism. As one young person living in an area with a significant Aboriginal community noted:

**“ [The police] think more criminals are young...they assume you're doing something wrong. ”**

– MALE, YEAR 11, REGIONAL NORTHERN TERRITORY

Racial inequality and structural injustice were front of mind for many young people during the national consultations, amplified by the Black Lives Matter movement which was gaining prominence globally at the time of the consultations. Many young people are committed to speaking out and taking action against such mistreatment: they want adults to also step up and do the same.

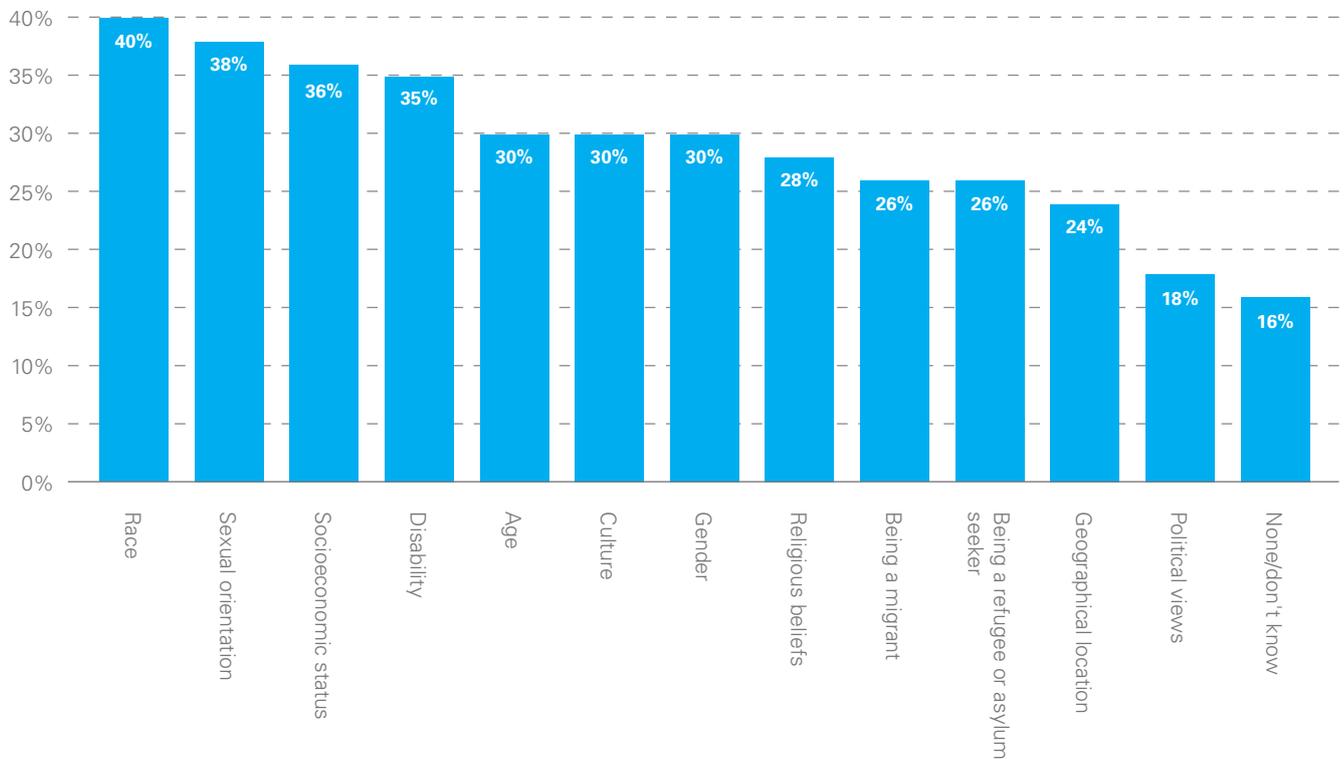
**“ Equality is a big issue right now, especially with the issue with policemen and George Floyd. ”**

– STUDENT, YEAR 10, REGIONAL VICTORIA

**“ I won't stop talking about police brutality and social injustice of the First Nations people. ”**

– FEMALE, YEAR 12, SYDNEY NSW

## Most common ways in which young people are treated unfairly or discriminated against



“ [Adults need to] reflect on their actions and abandon extreme, traditional, misogynist and racist rules.” ”  
- FEMALE, YEAR 10-12, SYDNEY NSW

**Islamophobia:** Young Australian Muslims told us that they are desperate for wider Australian society to understand that being Muslim is not synonymous with terrorism. Students at an Islamic College in Perth talked about the anxiety that comes with being Muslim as a young person in Australia.

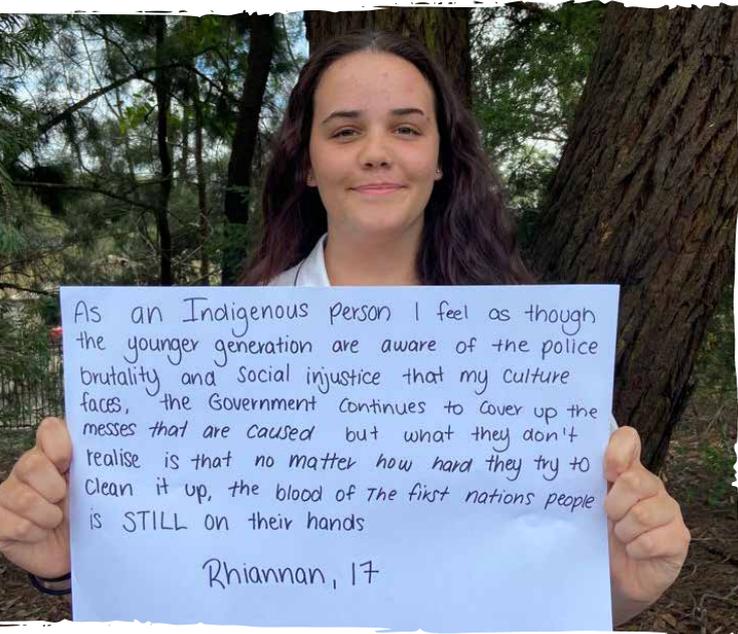
“ We are worried [to leave the house] because someone is going to judge us... think bad of us.’ ”  
- YEAR 8, PERTH, WESTERN AUSTRALIA

“ [Society has] prejudice against us...because other Muslims are doing bad things; they think all of us are like that. ”  
- YEAR 8, PERTH, WESTERN AUSTRALIA

These feelings of anxiety also stem from witnessing Muslim women within their community being harassed. One student from Western Australia shared how their

Mum, has been ‘attacked and called a terrorist all the time.’ These experiences support a report which found that 72% of victims of Islamophobic attacks were Muslim women accompanied by their children.<sup>7</sup> Young Australian Muslims attributed the spread of this Islamophobia to the Australian media. One student expressed that harmful stereotypes about Muslim communities go unchecked as there is ‘not enough representation,’ resulting in ‘the media just portraying the negatives of the Muslim community.’ For young Australian Muslims to feel a sense of belonging to this country, politicians and media channels must stand firm against this anti-Muslim rhetoric.

**Gender inequality and gendered violence:** Children and young people across Australia, particularly girls, have also highlighted the impacts of gender inequality on them. Girls talked about systemic barriers that deny them the same opportunities as their male counterparts, and which can leave them feeling unsafe and disrespected. For example, one student in year 6 from regional Tasmania said, “My dream career path has an unfair wage for women;” highlighting the consequences of ingrained sexism within society.



**“ Being a woman in this society is still hard due to inequalities like pay and harassment. ”**

– FEMALE, YEAR 10, SYDNEY, NSW

**“ I feel unsafe sometimes walking around and being catcalled. Most girls I know have been catcalled and feel unsafe. ”**

FEMALE, YEAR 11, MELBOURNE, VICTORIA

Gender-based violence was also raised as a concern. Girls worried about being believed when making allegations, and called for greater support to empower girls and women:

**“ Some teachers can actually make you feel really unsafe... When I was in, like, year seven or eight, and we were in the changing room, and he looked in and we locked eyes and he was just staring, and I was half naked, and that's where I felt really unsafe, and I reported it and everything, but it's my word against his, so nobody believed me and that's when I felt really unsafe and really cranky. ”**

– FEMALE, YEAR 11-12, SYDNEY, NSW

**“ I've been in lots of situations which it's been totally normalised - things that have been happening to me that I don't feel comfortable with - and I feel like we should have more of a support system for people to be able to [learn to] stand up and be like, “Stop, what are you doing?” ”**

– FEMALE, YEAR 11, MELBOURNE, VICTORIA

One student, during a discussion on safety in public spaces and what young women want to change, talked about the need to prevent the full spectrum of rape culture that enables gendered violence and harassment:

**“ Take the little things more seriously because the little things lead to big things. Little things, like men thinking they're entitled to women's attention, can lead to big things, like domestic violence and men murdering women because they didn't get what they thought they were entitled to. ”**

– FEMALE, YEAR 11, MELBOURNE, VICTORIA

The recent reporting of widespread personal testimonies of sexual assault and harassment across schools in Australia as part of an online petition calling for greater education on consent and respectful relationships<sup>8</sup> is a stark reminder of the need for stronger action to prevent gender-based violence among children and young people. As part of the 2019 Young Ambassador report, young people raised related concerns about the inadequacy of sex education in schools. These calls for better sex education were echoed in national consultations this year. The 2019 Young Ambassadors report also called for better data on the prevalence of violence against children and the development of more targeted plans so that children can be safe to learn, safe at home and safe in the community. This remains an important priority. Approaches to address gender-based violence in schools and elsewhere should be informed by the lived experiences and perspectives of young people themselves – their direct input are critical to designing and delivering a quality response.

**Homophobia:** During national consultations, some young people talked about having frequent experiences with homophobia within their communities. One Year 12 student in Canberra cited homophobia as “One of the things that [they have] never had to deal with before [coming to Australia].” Young people have both witnessed and endured homophobia and have told us that these experiences have had a severe impact on their feelings of safety and belonging.

**Disability:** Young people with a disability reported feeling marginalised and ridiculed by society. This feeling of alienation comes from bullying at schools and the lack of opportunities young people with disabilities are presented with. When an 11-year-old from regional South Australia was asked what would make growing up better, their response was, “Not being bullied about my dyslexia.” A Year 12 student in Perth said, “It's really hard to get a job nowadays, especially when you are disabled.” This ableism makes young people with a disability feel forgotten in society as they are perceived as less than. However, the young people of Australia are determined to challenge these ideas. Students conveyed this by drawing upon the discrimination Greta Thunberg has received because of her Asperger's Syndrome diagnosis, with one Year 11 student stating, “You shouldn't devalue people based on the fact they have a particular disability.”

**Socioeconomic status:** Many young people also talked about the way that a child's socioeconomic background can determine the opportunities they are presented with. They do not believe that children and young people enjoy equitable access to resources. This was an issue raised even before the pandemic.

**“ There is a great sort of position between the richer and the poorer. ”**

– FEMALE, YEARS 10-12, SYDNEY, NSW

Young people have witnessed the tangible effects that differences in income can create in a society. The strain on finances during COVID-19 means young people have experienced first-hand how financial insecurity minimises opportunities.

**“ There are parents...who can't send their kids to school anymore because they don't have clothes and... you know it's just really bad. ”**

– STUDENT, YEAR 11, REGIONAL NORTHERN TERRITORY

**“ I get very worried about all the people that lost their jobs. I can't imagine what it would be like to go through. ”**

– STUDENT, YEARS 10-11, SYDNEY, NSW

**Recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander rights:** During consultations, some children and young people called for better recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander rights, culture, and history, including through the Constitution. The harmful legacy of Australia's colonial past continues to be felt by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children today. Recognition and celebration of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and identities is critical, as is confronting not only past injustices but today's ongoing inequities, including the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in the out-of-home care and justice systems.

**“ The Constitution [should] be modified so it acknowledges Indigenous people in a positive way. ”**

– STUDENT, YEARS 11-12, ACT

**“ My people [need to] have a treaty, reconciliation and a voice. ”**

– FEMALE, YEAR 9, SYDNEY, NSW

Young Australians are also demanding reform of school curricula, with some concerned with the current accounts of history taught in schools. Many young people felt that better education about the country's colonial history and its ongoing legacy is a crucial step towards reconciliation and proper acknowledgement and celebration of the rich Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture, history and people.

**“ [Stop] glorifying the First Fleet and Captain Cook's arrival and have it more focused towards Indigenous people and how their communities are affected. ”**

– STUDENT, YEARS 11-12, ACT

Consistent with recent analysis showing that younger Australians are less supportive of keeping 26 January as Australia Day<sup>9</sup>, some young people expressed concern about the implications of the date.

**“ Australia Day isn't the day that we're celebrating when Australia became Australia. It's actually just Invasion Day, the day that we killed thousands of Aborigines and the owners of our land. ”**

– STUDENT, YEARS 5-6, REGIONAL TASMANIA

## Recommendations:

- Invest in improved disaggregated data on the understanding and experiences of children and young people, including those from diverse backgrounds, of inequality, discrimination and exclusion
- Diversify media coverage and representation of young people from under-represented groups, including bringing their voices into public discussions and debates about national priorities
- Establish a National Commissioner for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people<sup>10</sup>
- Strengthen the quality and scope of sex education curricula in schools, including covering themes such as respectful relationships and consent
- Invest in frameworks, standards and capacity building to ensure that complaints by students of discrimination, harassment or abuse in school settings are managed respectfully and appropriately



## Learning

Education can be a source of stress – some young people struggle to find balance

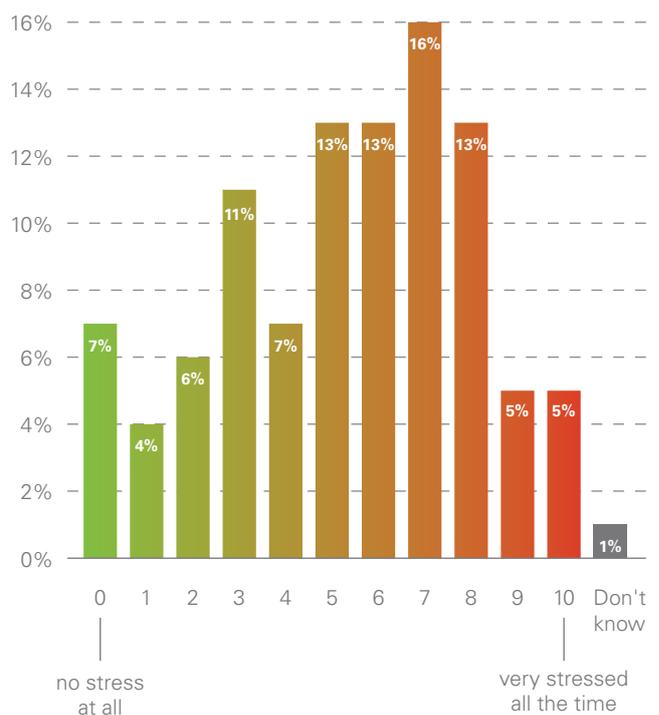
The many challenges that 2020 posed to children and young people in Australia is reflected in the fact that nearly half (47%) have felt stressed about their education this year, including 10% who have felt very stressed.

During national consultations, young people talked a lot about school pressures, including academic expectations. Young people find the pressure to comply with societal expectations and get high marks stressful, particularly for year 11 and 12 students. Young people told us that parents, extended family and peers were the primary sources of academic pressure.

**“ I feel like there is a lot of external pressure as well from school and lots of friends as well - we're trying to sort of juggle everything and keep it all under control. ”**  
 – FEMALE, YEAR 9, ACT

Some students talked about feeling guilty for any relaxation or leisure time, feeling that any downtime should be used to catch up on extra work.

Level of stress this year over education



## Young people are worried that the education system is inequitable

During national consultations, young people talked with concern about educational inequalities. Their concerns are supported by data: a 2018 UNICEF Innocenti analysis of educational equality among high income countries highlighted particularly high educational inequality among children and young people in Australia<sup>11</sup>. Interestingly, even students who thought they were benefiting from educational inequalities, such as students at independent schools from high-income areas, expressed worry about the way privilege and money is shaping educational outcomes and therefore young people's futures. Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been widespread concern by young people that existing inequalities in education have been exacerbated, making this an even more urgent policy issue to address.

**“ It's very hard to get an advantage in our society because if you have money you're automatically privileged. The majority of people in this room, you're paying to go to school and it's not like you're living without other necessities because of your education, so it's something that puts people ahead. But it's not only private schools that get that advantage... [Selective schools] used to be something that was offered to people with low socioeconomic background but wanted to be in a very academically focused school environment, whereas now it's become more something where kids get tutored and they spend so much money trying to get their kid into a selective school that it's not necessarily benefitting people who can't afford to go to a private school, it's benefitting people who could afford it but don't want to pay that money. ”**  
– FEMALE, YEARS 9-11, SYDNEY, NSW

Young people seem to understand that education is a fundamental right that should not be determined by socio-economic status – more equitable distribution of investment is needed to ensure every child's right to a quality education irrespective of their financial situation.

## Young people want more practical, relevant and self-directed learning

During national consultations, children and young people told us that they want more education about their rights so that they can be exercised and upheld. For children to be able to claim their rights, they need to know what they are – embedding child rights knowledge into school curricula is a key first step towards empowering children. For some young people we spoke to, the national consultations were one of the first – if not the first – opportunity they had to talk about, or learn about, their child rights.

**“ We do have a lot of child rights but the problem is kids don't know about their rights. We have them but they are no good if kids don't know about them, so I think they need the knowledge about them and the information because that will then create awareness and if you have awareness that will create change. ”**  
– STUDENT, YEAR 7, SYDNEY, NSW

Some young people also called for more practical life skills to be part of their core learning. They are frustrated that school doesn't equip them with core skills that will help navigate adult life. One group of young people in a regional town, when asked whether more practical life skills are the responsibility of parents, were quick to recognise that these are essential skills and not all parents are themselves equipped to teach them. They didn't want such important skills to be left to chance: they want them to be available through schools.

**“ So adding things to our education that will help us in everyday things like how to do taxes, how to, I don't know, how to... I don't know anything about it, it would be nice to know! But, and also like how to start doing a resume or something. Real life everyday things. ”**  
– STUDENT, YEAR 9, SYDNEY NSW

Young people also called for better quality education on sensitive topics such as sex education and drug safety. Specifically, they want less 'preaching and shaming' and more focus on practical and pragmatic information and advice to empower children and young people to protect themselves and make informed and safe choices. Recent reporting of the widespread sexual harassment and assault of school-aged girls, with a call for better consent education, makes these changes even more urgent and necessary.

Children and young people are growing up in a digital age where information (and misinformation) moves at lightening speeds. Now more than ever children and young people need the critical thinking and analytical skills to navigate and interrogate online information. During the national consultations, many young people seemed to understand the harm and confusion caused by online misinformation, and they recognised that not all 'news' was balanced and factual.

**“ Misinformation - that's the biggest [threat]. Just being misinformed or other people influencing your opinion for their own benefit. I don't really like that. ”**  
– MALE, MELBOURNE, VICTORIA

[It would be good if] school taught you how to think and how to learn instead of teaching you what to think and what to learn.

– Male, Year 10, Adelaide, South Australia

“ They will see something they like...and if everybody agrees with it they won't fact check it, they are just going to upload it to their social media and say see look this is happening with how horrible the other side is and a lot of people who like agree with them will just take that as fact because again that's what they believe instead of fact checking themselves so definitely like kids should be taught more about critical thinking. ”

– STUDENT, YEARS 11-12, DARWIN, NORTHERN TERRITORY

Young people told us that knowledge about online issues is not enough – they need the practical skills to be able to navigate the digital world and the pressures and dangers it presents. This is a key aspect of improving young people's skills and resilience to promote better mental health and wellbeing (detailed in the Wellbeing section of this report).

“ It's obviously necessary to educate people on cyber bullying and everything involved in social media [but] I feel like we know now to do it but we are not really told how to actually fix problems - rather we are just told that the problem is... Like especially to do with body image and perfect lives on social media: we can recognise that they exist but how do we actually gain the skills to recognise it and then step away and evaluate the situation rather than just noticing it? ”

– STUDENT, YEARS 11-12, DARWIN, NORTHERN TERRITORY

More broadly, there was a strong desire for school to be focused more on learning how to think critically rather than just rote learning facts and figures. Children and young people want to nurture their independent thinking – skills to critically analyse information and ideas, not just remember them, is fundamental to that learning process. Similarly, some students felt that their curriculum was too restrictive, leaving them unable to choose what they study and fully pursue their educational interests.

“ It's not very often at school that you get to choose what you want to learn. At school there is always a guideline of what you can do and I feel like it's important to focus on your interests and the bigger picture. ”

– STUDENT, YEAR 10, SYDNEY, NSW

Some young people felt that important issues like climate change and sustainability are still not adequately covered in the curriculum – these are issues young people feel strongly about and they want more space to delve into these issues at school. Again, young people want quality information that will empower them to develop informed positions and ideas. They aren't looking for a list of facts to recite: they want the knowledge and skills to engage meaningfully in these complex issues, and indeed to help generate solutions.

“ I feel like there's... a lack in education surrounding the things that, like we take it on ourselves independently to learn about the issues in our world rather than being educated about those issues. ”

– FEMALE, YEARS 9-12, REGIONAL NSW

## Recommendations:

- Invest in building the analytical and critical thinking skills of children to safely and effectively navigate information, including online content
- Embed child rights and human rights education into school curricula and ensure that every child in Australia understands their rights and to how claim them.
- Expand access to practical life skills in school curricula, including financial literacy, employment readiness, sex education, alcohol and other drug education and mental health and wellbeing self-care, ensuring that students have mechanisms to identify priority life skills they need support to develop

## Participation and Trust

Young people have only limited opportunities to share their views on important issues, particularly outside their home and school

“ I think there's just a lack of representation of young people across the board, whether that's in media, whether that's in politics, and it all kind of feeds into not being heard and not having a voice. So, yeah, just an overall lack of representation on all fronts. ”  
 – FEMALE, YEARS 10-12, SYDNEY, NSW

Two out of three (64%) young Australians aged 13-17 say that they are rarely or never consulted nor given opportunities to participate in important government-related issues that affect them. A majority (51%) also feel similarly excluded from consultation and participation in community issues that affect them. On the other hand, more than half (57%) say they feel always or mostly consulted at home, while one in three (36%) say they are usually consulted or given opportunities to participate in issues at school that affect them.

During national consultations, many young people showed a keen interest and awareness of politics, coupled with a frustration that their perspectives and insights were so often overlooked by decision-makers. Some talked about being under-estimated due to their age and others were concerned that decisions were being made for them, not with them.

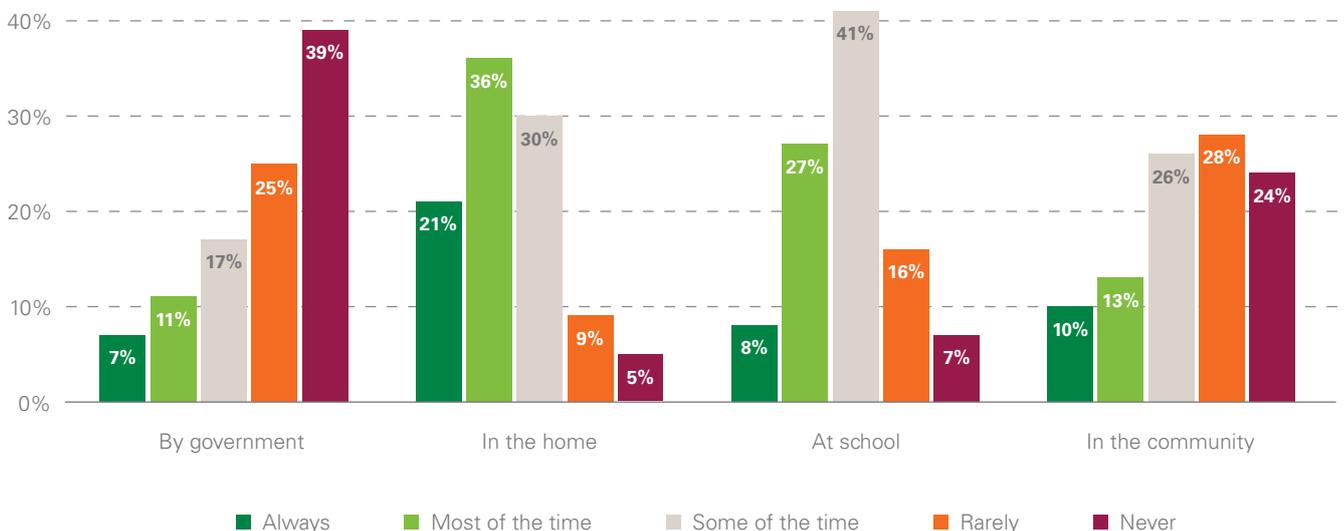
“ [I really want everyone to know] that young people aren't incapable of making decisions and ignorant of politics. We are able to make decisions and we are more passionate about politics than ever before. ”  
 – FEMALE, YEARS 10-12, SYDNEY, NSW

“ There's a lot more activism in our generation. We are more inclined to say that something is wrong. But a lot of the time, our voices still aren't counted as valid as those who are older, even though we may have the exact same ideas, the exact same point of view, or we may have done more research than people who are older. We still get pushed to the side. ”  
 – STUDENT, YEARS 7-9, REGIONAL NSW

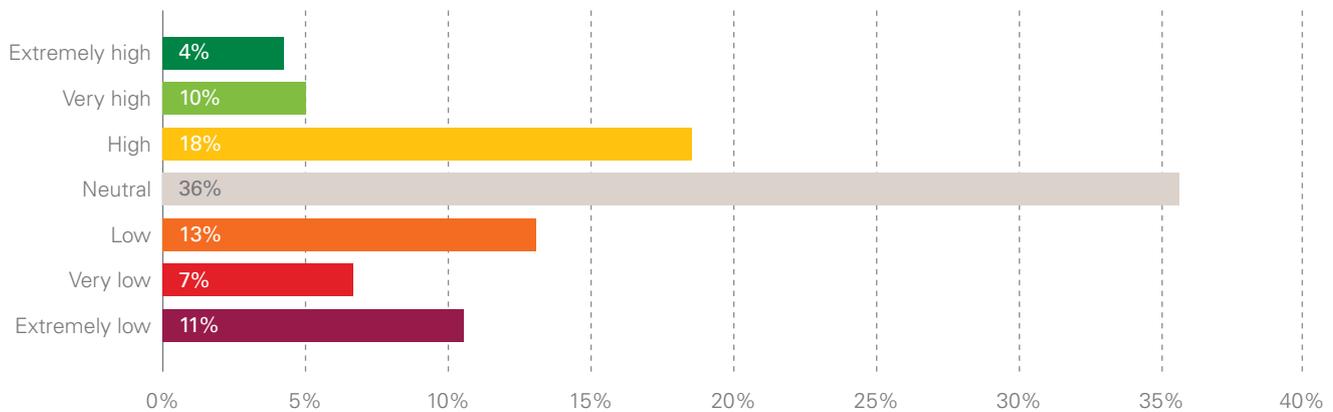
“ I feel like they don't trust us...we're not seen as people, we're seen as like things to take care of. ”  
 – YEAR 11, DARWIN HIGH SCHOOL, DARWIN, NORTHERN TERRITORY

These are long-standing concerns by children and young people – the lack of tangible action to address them to date is concerning.

How often are you consulted and given opportunities to participate on the important issues that affect you?



## Level of trust in Australia's federal politicians



### Politicians need to do more to build trust with Australia's children and young people – keeping their promises is the first step

Young people in Australia are divided over whether or not they trust Australia's federal politicians, with a similar proportion considering them trustworthy (33%) as considering them untrustworthy (31%). At the extreme ends of the scale, however, young people are more than twice as likely to say their trust is extremely low (11%) as extremely high (4%). Interestingly, the most common response was a neutral one. This might reflect a lack of insight into federal politicians or could reflect a perception that some federal politicians are more trustworthy than others.

During national consultations, young people were less divided: they spoke passionately about their frustration at the current state of politics. They talked about their distrust of politicians, who some saw as being driven by power and short-term wins rather than being driven by public interests. Many young people felt that it was their future that was being ransomed.

**“ It's frustrating as a young person to see these people in government who don't really know what they're talking about, or not thinking about how their actions are affecting society, and thinking instead in terms of power and just staying within government. ”**

– FEMALE, YEAR 11–12, ADELAIDE, SOUTH AUSTRALIA

**“ They're doing things for their own good, not for the future. ”**

– MALE, YEAR 9, ADELAIDE, SOUTH AUSTRALIA

**“ We're in a world that's being run crisis by crisis. Nothing is looked at in the long term anymore. No politician is like, “In 15 years' time, we're going to do this, and we're going to work towards that goal.” ”**

– STUDENT, YEARS 10–12, SYDNEY NSW

Unlike adults, children don't have the ability to leverage the political process to vote to see their priorities realised. It is critical that politicians invest more in listening to children and bolstering their accountability to these constituents.

**“ They don't really see us as important and they don't really see our voices as mattering, even though it's our future and we're the ones that are going to be left to clean up the mess—which is very frustrating. When you try to talk to politicians and they just try to skate around it and just try to make you feel dumb, like, “You don't know what you're talking about,” so you arm yourself with all these facts and information, and you're just trying to make a change and they just ignore you. ”**

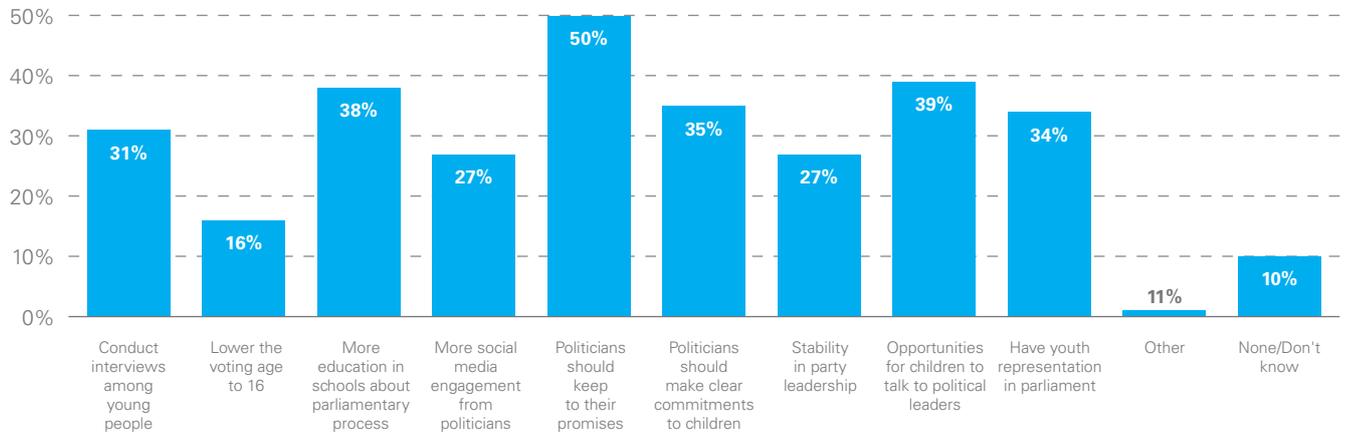
– STUDENT, YEAR 11, DARWIN, NORTHERN TERRITORY

According to young Australians aged 13–17, the number one thing politicians should do to build trust with young people in Australia is to keep their promises (50%). The need for politicians keeping their promises was also the most common response to this question in the 2019 Young Ambassador Climate for Change report. The need for greater accountability was also raised during national consultations.

**“ I would love to see politicians more accountable for their actions because, yes, we can sign all these declarations, yes, we can say that they are not keeping refugees detained, but the reality is, this is what's happening. ”**

– FEMALE, YEARS 10–12, SYDNEY, NSW

## Steps politicians should take to build trust with young people



The perceived lack of climate action despite overwhelming evidence is often raised as a particular source of frustration and distrust. The current spotlight on culture and accountability issues in Federal Parliament is likely to further erode young people's trust in politicians.

In addition to keeping their promises, young Australians also believe: they should be given more opportunities to talk to political leaders (39%); there should be more education about parliamentary processes in schools (38%); politicians should make clear commitments to children (35%); and there should be youth representation in parliament (34%). Other things that young people believe politicians should do to build trust with them include: conducting more polling and interviews among young people (31%); ensuring stability in party leadership (27%); and relevant social media engagement (27%). Interestingly, just 16% view lowering the voting age to 16 as a way for politicians to build trust with young people in Australia.

Importantly, young people want their interactions with politicians to be meaningful. They don't want tokenistic gestures – they are calling for genuine engagement and action.

**“ I think politicians should stop having such token gestures... having their meetings where they are like OK we are going to try and listen to the youth and see what they are saying, but they never really take anything what we've said on board. ”**

– FEMALE, YEARS 10–12, SYDNEY, NSW

One young person also raised an important equity issue, recognising that children and young people often need resources to be able to participate, and that it is rarely on their own terms.

**“ [I wish] there was more voice for young people and their issues, and ways they could have their opinions heard and respected without sacrificing their time/ education/ privacy. ”**

– FEMALE, 15 YEARS, REGIONAL NSW

Overall, children and young people want the Government and public to take their experiences and concerns seriously:

**“ We truly care about the society and life that is passed onto us and the world for future generations. Please take our concerns seriously and try to understand that many of us take a lot of time and effort to form our opinions and they aren't just based on our 'youth' or our immaturity. ”**

– STUDENT, YEARS 11–12, ACT

### Recommendations:

- Create meaningful and inclusive participatory mechanisms to listen and be directed by young people on matters that affect them, including key public policy issues
- Political parties to establish - and track progress in delivering on – clear commitments for supporting, engaging and listening to children and young people as part of their core work
- Ensure children and young people are equipped to understand political processes and how to harness opportunities to advocate and shape public policy

**Part 3**

# A Platform for Action

1

## Accelerating COVID-19 recovery

- Monitor the social and economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and recovery on children and young people of all ages, including rises in inequality, recognising that some will require significant longer term support.
- Provide platforms for children and young people to contribute to and shape the trajectory of Australia's recovery from COVID-19, including through a strong investment in youth unemployment.
- Strengthen disaster risk reduction education through schools to better equip and empower young people to navigate future emergencies and disasters.

2

## Improving mental health and wellbeing

- Invest in strengthening the mental health system to be more holistic and strengths-based, with strong psychosocial support available including to reduce stigma.
- Engage directly with children and young people in the design and delivery of mental health and psychosocial support initiatives to ensure they are relevant, accessible, strengths-based, and destigmatising.
- Support children and young people to safely navigate social media and online spaces through education and skills building, while also strengthening protections to keep children safe on social media platforms and in other online spaces.

3

## Protecting the environment and tackling climate change

- Recognise children and young people as agents of change in climate action by educating and empowering them and giving them access to platforms to share their views and concerns with decisionmakers.
- Place children and young people at the centre of the development and delivery of climate change strategies and response plans, and include measures to protect children from the impact of climate change and environmental degradation
- Urgently commit to bold and concrete national action to reduce emissions and pollution, including by demanding greater accountability by high-emissions sectors.
- Increase investments in Indigenous land management to help reduce the risk of disasters such as bushfires due to unsustainable land management practices.

4

### Fostering equality and Inclusion

- Invest in improved disaggregated data on the understanding and experiences of children and young people, including those from diverse backgrounds, of inequality, discrimination and exclusion
- Diversify media coverage and representation of young people from under-represented groups, including bringing their voices into public discussions and debates about national priorities.
- Establish a National Commissioner for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people.
- Strengthen the quality and scope of sex education curricula in schools, including covering themes such as respectful relationships and consent.
- Invest in frameworks, standards and capacity building to ensure that complaints by students of discrimination, harassment or abuse in school settings are managed respectfully and appropriately.

5

### Enhancing learning

- Invest in building the analytical and critical thinking skills of children to safely and effectively navigate information, including online content
- Embed child rights and human rights education into school curricula and ensure that every child in Australia understands their rights and how to claim them.
- Expand access to practical life skills in school curricula, including financial literacy, employment readiness, sex education, alcohol and other drug education and mental health and wellbeing self-care, ensuring that students have mechanisms to identify priority life skills they need support to develop

6

### Supporting child and youth participation and building trust

- Create meaningful and inclusive participatory mechanisms to listen and be directed by young people on matters that affect them, including key public policy issues
- Political parties to establish - and track progress in delivering on – clear commitments for supporting, engaging and listening to children and young people as part of their core work
- Ensure children and young people are equipped to understand political processes and how to harness opportunities to advocate and shape public policy

## Appendix A

# Methodology

UNICEF Australia is committed to child rights, including article 12 of the Convention of the Rights of the Child which seeks to ensure that children can express their views about matters that affect them. The Young Ambassador program adopts a peer-to-peer approach to listening to the views and perspectives of children and young people and elevating their voices to inform decision-making about issues of concern to them.

### National Consultation Locations

These are the locations of all the YA Consultations that took place (in-person and online throughout COVID).



## National Consultations

The Young Ambassadors ran national consultations from 17 November 2019 to 28 October 2020. Up till early 2020, a total of 138 consultations were conducted in person. Due to COVID-19, 40 subsequent consultations were conducted online. The Young Ambassadors conducted a total of 178 consultations with 3,263 children and young people aged 7 to 20 years. Consultations were conducted in a range of settings, including public, primary, independent, distance education, boarding, and religious schools; young people from regional and remote areas who participated in the 2019 NSW Youth Drought Summit convened by UNICEF Australia; Girl Guides; and Disability Sporting/ Inclusion Foundation.

### New South Wales 44 Locations

- Toongabbie Girl Guides
- Penshurst Girls Campus
- Northholm Grammar School
- Kotara High School
- Hunter School of The Performing Arts
- Sylvania High School
- Ryde Public School
- Engadine High School
- Our Lady of Mercy College, Parramatta
- Strathfield South High School
- Riverside Girls High School
- Barker College
- Hurlstone Agricultural High School
- Hunter School of The Performing Arts
- Merewether High School
- St Paul's Primary School
- Wiripaang Public School
- Cardiff High School
- Newcastle High School
- Edmund Rice College
- The Scots College
- Marrickville High School
- Fort Street High School
- Penshurst Girls Campus
- MLC School
- Oakhill College
- Roseville College
- Gilroy Catholic College
- Wiley Park Girls High School
- Davidson High School
- Mitchell High School
- Trundle NSW (*Drought Summit Participant*)
- Warialda NSW (*Drought Summit Participant*)
- Gunnedah NSW (*Drought Summit Participant*)
- Moree NSW (*Drought Summit Participant*)
- Spicers Creek NSW (*Drought Summit Participant*)
- Mummulgum (*Drought Summit Participant*)
- Armidale (*Drought Summit Participant*)
- Booligal (*Drought Summit Participant*)
- Ballimore (*Drought Summit Participant*)
- Bumbaldry (*Drought Summit Participant*)
- Tullamore (*Drought Summit Participant*)
- Darbys Falls (*Drought Summit Participant*)
- Gulargambone (*Drought Summit Participant*)

### Queensland 5 Locations

- St. Mary's College, Toowoomba
- Good Samaritan College
- St Saviour's Primary School
- St James College
- Miami State High School

### Northern Territory 7 Locations

- Ludmilla Primary School
- Driver Primary School
- Katherine South Primary School
- Casuarina Street Primary School
- Darwin High School
- Katherine High School
- Katherine School of the Air

### Victoria 13 Locations

- St Leonard's College
- Corpus Christi Primary School
- Suzanne Cory High School
- University High School
- Altona Primary School.
- Melbourne Grammar School
- Mercy Regional College
- Warrnambool College
- Emmanuel College St Paul's Campus
- Sacred Heart Girls' College
- Scotch College
- Nossal High School
- East Doncaster Secondary College

### Western Australia 5 Locations

- Guildford Grammar School
- Bassendean Primary School
- Australian Islamic College Kewdale
- Shenton College
- Home schooling students

### Tasmania 7 Locations

- Spreyton Primary School
- Burnie Primary School
- Devonport High School
- Boat Harbour Primary School
- Penguin District School
- Don College
- Deloraine Primary School

### ACT 9 Locations

- Canberra College
- Miles Franklin Primary School
- Aranda Primary School
- St John Paul II Catholic College
- Narrabundah College
- Red Hill Primary School
- Marist College Canberra
- Daramalan College.
- Hawker College

### South Australia 6 Locations

- Glenunga International High School
- Rostrevor College
- St Paul's College
- Seymour College
- Uraidla Primary School Don College
- Deloraine Primary School

## Quantitative Survey

YouGov Galaxy conducted a nationwide online survey between 21 December 2020 and 6 January 2021. Across Australia, 815 young people aged 13-17 years completed the survey. The data was weighted by age, gender and region to reflect the latest Australian Bureau of Statistics population estimates. This was the third survey conducted by YouGov since the start of 2020 – the previous two surveys were reported in the *Living in Limbo* and *Swimming with Sandbag* reports.

In terms of educational status of the survey participants, one in three (37%) currently attend public non-selective schools, with a further 30% attending private schools and one in five (20%) attending a public selective school or selective stream. As well as this, 4% currently attend TAFE college.

Across the survey sample, 13% identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander; 6% identified as LGBTQI+; 4% identified as living with a disability; 15% were born outside Australia; and English was a second language for 9%.

## Limitations

Due to COVID-19 restrictions, consultations for much of 2020 had to be conducted online in smaller groups. Accordingly, many consultations were held with schools that had adequate connectivity and with students within the school who were interested but also able to participate online. It also limited our plans to conduct some targeted consultations with less represented groups of children and young people which would require more intensive and specialised in-person consultations. As such, feedback from the national consultations should be seen as indicative and illustrative rather than nationally representative – some of the most vulnerable and excluded children and young people may not have been able to participate in this particular process.

The YouGov survey included a question asking young people how safe they thought people their own age were in various settings. However the responses proved difficult to interpret and there was a risk of underestimating the very real safety issues that we know all too well that children and young people face. To avoid presenting distorted or misinterpreted findings, we have taken the decision to exclude the data from this report.

## Safeguarding considerations

Consistent with UNICEF Australia's Child Safeguarding Policy, the Young Ambassador program's first priority is to ensure that children and young people are safe at all times. This includes the Young Ambassadors themselves as well as the children and young people who participate in the national consultations. All Young Ambassadors are trained on child safeguarding and those over 18 years hold current Working With Children Checks. Throughout their time as Young Ambassadors, they are provided with training, support and oversight by the Child and Youth Participation Coordinator with additional support and oversight by the UNICEF Australia's Child Safeguarding focal points.

If any potential child protection issues were identified in the consultation process, schools were provided with as much information as possible to make sure the child or young person was adequately supported and the appropriate next steps were taken.

This report draws heavily on the direct voices of children and young people across Australia who shared their views with us. To protect their identity and ensure their confidentiality, names of individuals and schools have been removed from the direct quotes.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Disaggregated data is not available for other states and territories with smaller populations.

<sup>2</sup> <https://headspace.org.au/assets/Uploads/Insights-youth-mental-health-and-wellbeing-over-time-headspace-National-Youth-Mental-Health-Survey-2020.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.unicef-irc.org/publications/pdf/Report-Card-16-Worlds-of-Influence-child-wellbeing.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> A-Climate-for-Change-Young-Ambassadors-Report-2019.pdf (unicef.org.au)

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.cmy.net.au/resource/hidden-cost/>

<sup>6</sup> Biddle, "The experience of Asian-Australians during the COVID-19 pandemic: Discrimination and wellbeing," 1-3.

<sup>7</sup> Iner, "Islamophobia In Australia II (2016 - 2017)," 4 - 5.

<sup>8</sup> NSW police to brief private school heads after viral petition on student sexual assault | Australian education | The Guardian

<sup>9</sup> <https://theconversation.com/new-research-reveals-our-complex-attitudes-to-australia-day-110035>

<sup>10</sup> This recommendation has been made across several platforms, most recently in the UNICEF Australia and ARACY publication Kids at the Crossroads: Evidence and Policy to Mitigate the Effects of COVID-19

<sup>11</sup> [https://www.unicef-irc.org/publications/pdf/an-unfair-start-inequality-children-education\\_37049-RC15-EN-WEB.pdf](https://www.unicef-irc.org/publications/pdf/an-unfair-start-inequality-children-education_37049-RC15-EN-WEB.pdf)

