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AUSTRALIA

for every child

**FACT SHEET**

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# “LIVING IN LIMBO”

## The views and experiences of young people in Australia at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic and national response.

Across Australia, COVID-19 and the national response to the pandemic has profoundly altered the lives of children and young people.

In mid-April, UNICEF Australia surveyed over 1,000 young people aged 13-17 years across Australia to understand how the pandemic has impacted our youngest generations – a voice that has been missing from many of the COVID-19 conversations to date. We also conducted online consultations with young people from regional and urban areas. Our aim was not only to listen to young people’s lived experiences, but to ensure their voices go on to inform future responses as Australia navigates this crisis.

This survey is the first of a three-phase investigation into the views and experiences of young people in Australia living through the coronavirus pandemic. UNICEF Australia will

conduct a similar survey in the middle of the year and again towards the end of the year. This will help us to understand the changing impacts that COVID-19 is having on young people across Australia as the nation moves from response to recovery and beyond.

In addition, UNICEF Australia staff, along with our UNICEF Young Ambassadors, have been conducting online consultations with young people across the country. These consultations, which inform this report, will continue throughout the year as part of our ongoing commitment to hearing and elevating the voices of children and young people across Australia.

# Young people say their ability to cope is in decline

The proportion of young Australians who feel they are coping at this time is dropping. Just 45% said they are coping well, compared to 81% when they were asked to think back to how they were coping in January 2020. Only 31% of young people expect to feel able to cope by June if the COVID-19 response stays on the same trajectory it was on when the survey was completed in April. Conversely, 20% of young people said their ability to cope now is poor, up from just 4% in January 2020.

*“This limbo that we’re living in it feels like it’s going to go on for the rest of the year. And I know there were concerns about making year 12s repeat next year...I don’t*

*think I could do it for another year. I don’t have any aspirations at the moment. I just get up and I do what’s asked of me and then email and end my day with a walk. It’s really, really disheartening at the moment. It’s a lot different to the attitude I had at the beginning of the year when we were talking about going to Hobart and doing you know law studies... We’re just missing out too much.”*  
 Female, regional Tasmania.

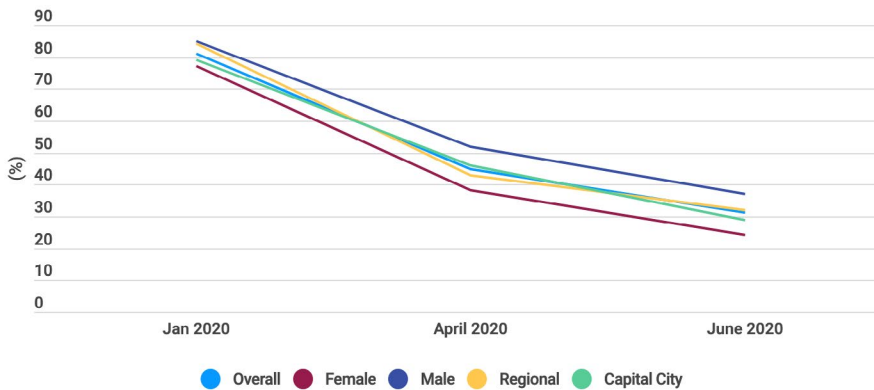
Boys were slightly more likely to report being able to cope well than girls. (52% compared to 38% when asked how they feel they are coping at the moment).

# 45%

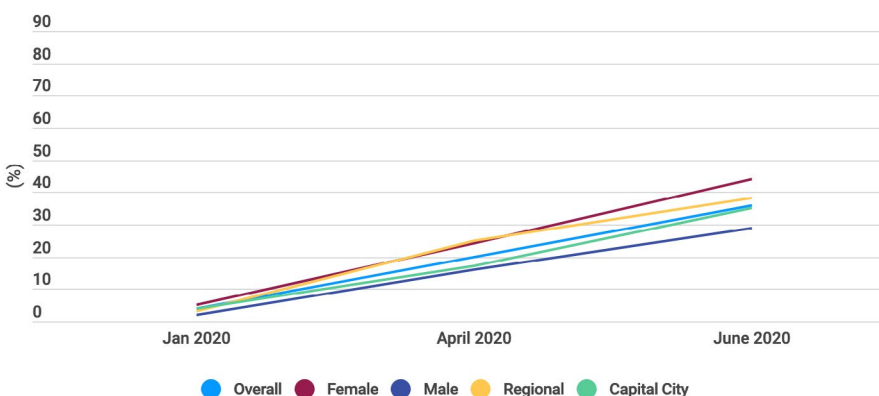
Just 45% of young people said they are coping well, compared to 81% when they were asked to think back to how they were coping in January 2020.

“This limbo that we’re living in it feels like it’s going to go on for the rest of the year. I don’t have any aspirations at the moment. I just get up and I do what’s asked of me and then email and end my day with a walk. It’s really, really disheartening at the moment.”  
 - Female, regional Tasmania.

**FIGURE 1: Ability to cope = good**



**FIGURE 2: Ability to cope = poor**



*“Personally, I wasn’t very stressed. It was more just frustration as to not being able to you know, go out or visit my friends or go to school and get my work done... very difficult to stay at home and be disciplined... more the frustration of not knowing what was going to happen or how long would it take? And I knew it was going to get better eventually, but it was just the annoyance of being unsure.”* Male, Perth WA.

Interestingly, young people in regional settings reported a slightly larger decline in their coping between January and April: they were more likely to say they had been coping well in January than their urban peers (84% compared to 79%), but this dropped to 43% compared to 46% for young people in cities.

During online consultations, young people explained that containment measures such as physical distancing and the closure of schools have made it harder to cope and stay motivated.

*“Kids in my Year 12 are struggling to just get out of bed and do their work in the morning, or during the day - they’re not having that structure.”* Female, regional NSW.

*“When I was texting people during isolation, the sort of common theme that I noticed...in regards to doing their schoolwork is that they feel battered or drained...”* Male, Perth WA.

Good digital access and support for learning and social connectedness were important for coping, as was creating new routines and structures to help manage their time while they were distancing at home.

*“...especially with the technology like zoom and stuff. I can contact my friends through social media nearly every day. So even though it’s not face-to-face, I can stay connected and sort of cope with that... even though it wasn’t the more normal way of socialising there’s still other routes.”* Male, Perth WA.



**“Kids in my Year 12 are struggling to just get out of bed and do their work in the morning, or like during the day - they’re not having that structure.”**

- Female, regional NSW.

## COVID-19 has changed young people’s lives in myriad ways

When the survey was completed in April, the COVID-19 pandemic had already directly impacted almost every young person surveyed. The three most common changes young people reported experiencing were: having to stop seeing their friends; their education being disrupted or stopped; and having to stop their usual extracurricular activities.

The overwhelming majority of Australian young people had to stop seeing their friends (88%). This was more widely reported by females (93%) than males (83%).

*“I was at work at [the supermarket]... on check out... there’s a lot of people (who aren’t going by the guidelines - you will see the same people three times there in the shift and it’s just a bit worrying because [my friend], she does a lot of babysitting, and so she’s working for a woman who’s pregnant at the moment. And it’s just, she doesn’t like to be near me after I’ve been at work because she’s worried that if I’ve got it then she’ll get it then she’s out of work.”* Female, regional NSW.

*“It kind of showed in terms of friends how strong your friendship is. I could not talk to them for like a week or two weeks, and after that you’d start talking and it’s like nothing had happened... the contact was definitely very, very intermittent... and it was just that repeated over. I think at first that’s ok... but then I think after a few days when you’re obviously just not talking to anyone, it starts to really take its toll.”* Male, Sydney NSW.

Similarly, most young people had their education disrupted or stopped entirely (86%). Older students were more likely to report impacts on their education (71% for 13-year-olds compared to 93% and 89% for 16 and 17-year-olds respectively).

*“I’ve basically had to stop going to school altogether for a bit... then we started to... get some sort of video conference going... I do two [subjects] from distance education... And that all goes alright, but it’s the other subjects that I have a bit of trouble with... it takes time for any work to be established, creating systems, switching from one system to another is always going to be difficult. I just haven’t figured that out.” Male regional NSW.*

During consultations, a number of young people raised a concern that not all students were impacted equally by the move to remote learning:

*“Everyone likes to say we’re all in the same boat. But different schools are really giving out different levels of help to the students.” Female, regional NSW.*

*“...staying at home would have sort of exacerbated the difference between wealthier schools and some less fortunate schools in that the wealthier schools will have all the equipment and provisions... so I think the less fortunate schools would be really at a disadvantage.” Male, Perth WA.*

Seven in ten young people (71%) say they had to stop their usual extra-curricular activities.

*“I really miss having a team sport to do... I was really keen for water polo, it’s something that gets me really excited during the week. Something to look forward to other than hanging out with my friends at school. Walking with my parents is not the same - like it just doesn’t help...” Female, regional NSW.*

To a lesser extent, just over one in four (28%) have had their parent/s or carer lose all or part of their income.

*“I still have a job, so I am grateful for that. But my mum [is] nearly out of her job. And I know that was something we never had to consider - having to save money just in case mum’s not in a job in the next week. It’s just been a bit crazy... At the moment it’s a bit hard to look forward to things.” Female, regional Tasmania.*

One in five young people say they work in a job that could put them at risk of contracting the virus (21%).

*“My sister is pregnant... my nan has Alzheimer’s... sometimes we have to take care of her... I’m hesitant to go and help [because] I work at [a supermarket]... and I’m still having to talk to customers and having to help them. And with the increase in customers, I’m not sure whether or not I’m going to get it. And I’m fine if I get it - I know that I’ll probably most likely be able to get through it and be fine - but I’m more worried about what if I don’t know I have it and I give it to somebody and they get sick and they die? I think there’s loads more to worry about.” Female, Sydney NSW.*

**86%**

Most young people (86%) had their education disrupted or stopped entirely.

**28%**

One in four young people (28%) have had their parent/s or carer lose all or part of their income.

**21%**

One in five young people (21%) say they work in a job that could put them at risk of contracting the virus.

Of particular concern, some young people employed as essential workers reported during consultations that they had experienced abuse in their workplace.

*“So, I work at the supermarket so we had to implement all of the social distancing and like bollard things so that you could stand on certain sides of the shop. And I had to twice now call the police on people that have verbally abused me and things. So, I have had to put in two written statements in the last three months of customers that don't want to follow protocol and it's making it difficult to go to work at the moment.”*  
Female, regional Tasmania.

For one in five young people (21%), their access to important services such as counselling services and youth centres has been disrupted.

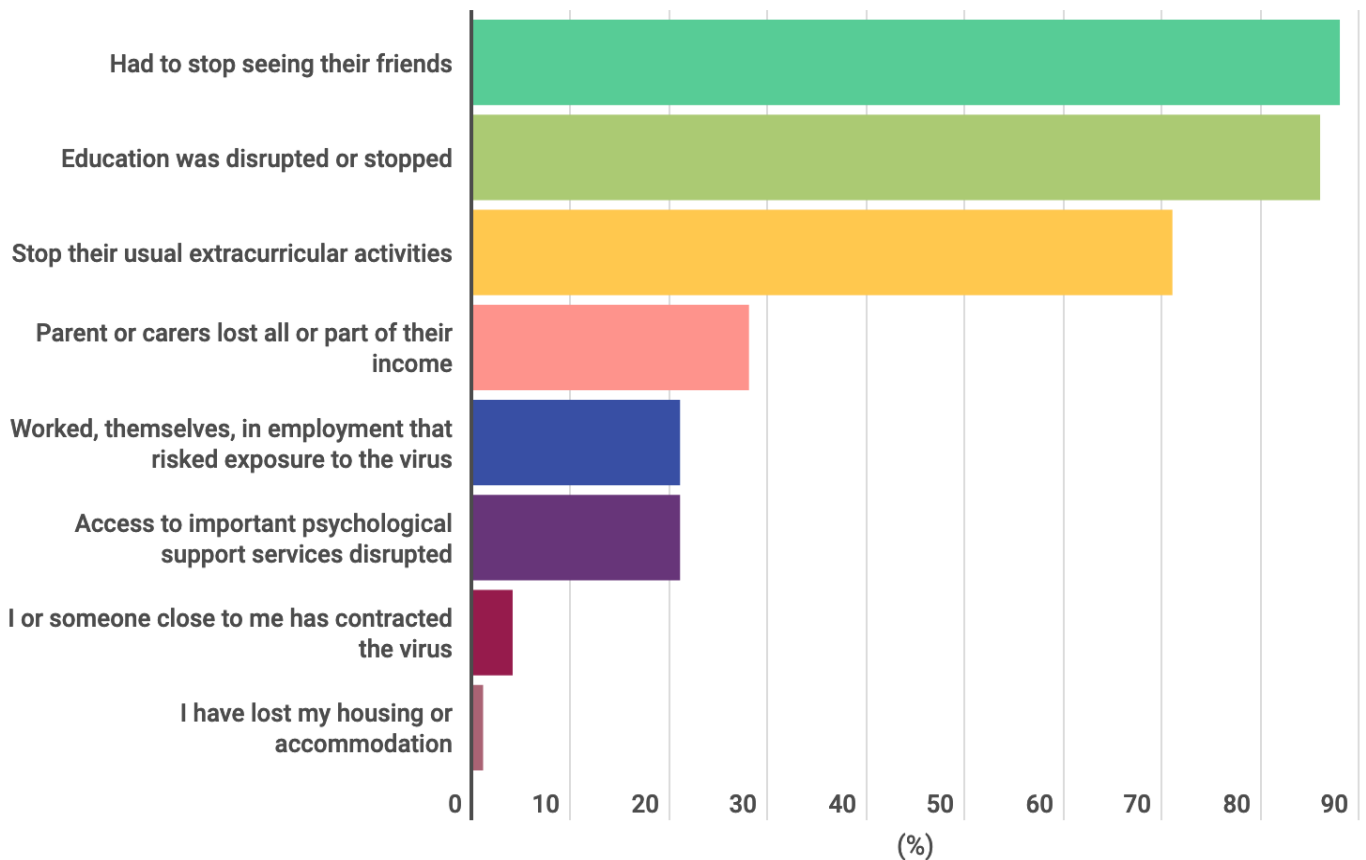
More young people have been impacted by containment measures than by the virus itself: only 4% of young people surveyed had contracted or knew someone who had contracted COVID-19.



**“Everyone likes to say we're all in the same boat. But different schools are really giving out different levels of help to the students.”**

- Female, regional NSW.

**FIGURE 3: What has changed for young people since the response to the pandemic began**





# COVID-19 has impacted young people’s day-to-day life, social connectedness, stress and anxiety, and level of hope

The pandemic and response has negatively impacted the social connectedness of seven out of ten young people (70%). During consultations, young people talked about the challenge of maintaining social networks while being physically distanced.

*“I guess you’re spending all this time on your computer doing schoolwork. And then to interact with your friends, you have to go on your phone again. And then it’s just so much screen time. So, then you start cutting down the minutes... it’s like, if you want to reach out to support, you’re going to have to use technology. And then there’s those people without access to technology. But then also finding those platforms and where to go for help and all that kind of stuff.”* Female, regional NSW.

Six in ten young people (61%) say that it has negatively impacted their day to day life. In consultations, young people pointed to a wide range of impacts, including significant changes to their daily routine and structure, as well as changes for some young people in their home and care responsibilities.

*“Even I’m thinking about... I have to make sure my brother’s okay and he’s doing his school work so I have to take time into making sure my brother’s school work’s fine because he’s only in Year 2 and so he needs full attention. So, I’ve never had to do that because he’s gone to school.”* Female, Sydney NSW.

*“Just on physical exercise... for me it’s a massive disruption. I usually train a fair amount... I just found myself it’s [disrupting my] schedule - I have to go out of my own way to do my training at home... I just feel mentally that does affect you a lot. I just personally don’t have that motivation.”* Male, Perth WA.

Just under half (47%) young people report that COVID-19 has negatively impacted their levels of stress and anxiety, including one in six (14%) who say they have been very negatively impacted. Females (56%) were more likely than males (38%) to report negative impacts on their stress and anxiety.

*“I know for me specifically my stress levels have just gone through the roof... a lot of news articles are specifically about kids and metropolitan areas, who go to really expensive schools, saying how bad their experience is, and how stressed they are. What about the kids who don’t even have basic internet access? I can imagine how they are feeling.”* Female, regional NSW.

# 47%

Just under half (47%) young people report that COVID-19 has negatively impacted their levels of stress and anxiety, including one in six (14%) who say they have been very negatively impacted.



**“I know for me specifically my stress levels have just gone through the roof... What about the kids who don’t even have basic internet access?”**

- Female, regional NSW.

“I wasn’t really stressed on a macroscopic level. I had trust in our government and several other institutions who sort of take into account this stuff, like the pandemic... I definitely became a lot more stressed on a personal level with my ability to sort of carry out work and keep doing online classes and do all the assignments and homework and all those sorts of things on time from home, staying in my bedroom where my desk is, or always being tired every day.” Male, Perth WA.

While one in three young people (34%) say that their level of hope has been negatively impacted, one in four (24%) said that the COVID-19 pandemic has had a positive impact on their level of hope. Females were more likely to report negative impacts on their level of hope than males (42% compared to 27%), whereas males were more likely to report positive impacts (29% compared to 19%).

“When we stopped going to school and I stopped seeing friends I think that’s when my hopes started to go down a bit. And then because I do Economics, I was looking at the economic loss - a lot of the people who lost jobs and stuff - and that definitely impacted my levels of hope.” Female, Sydney NSW.

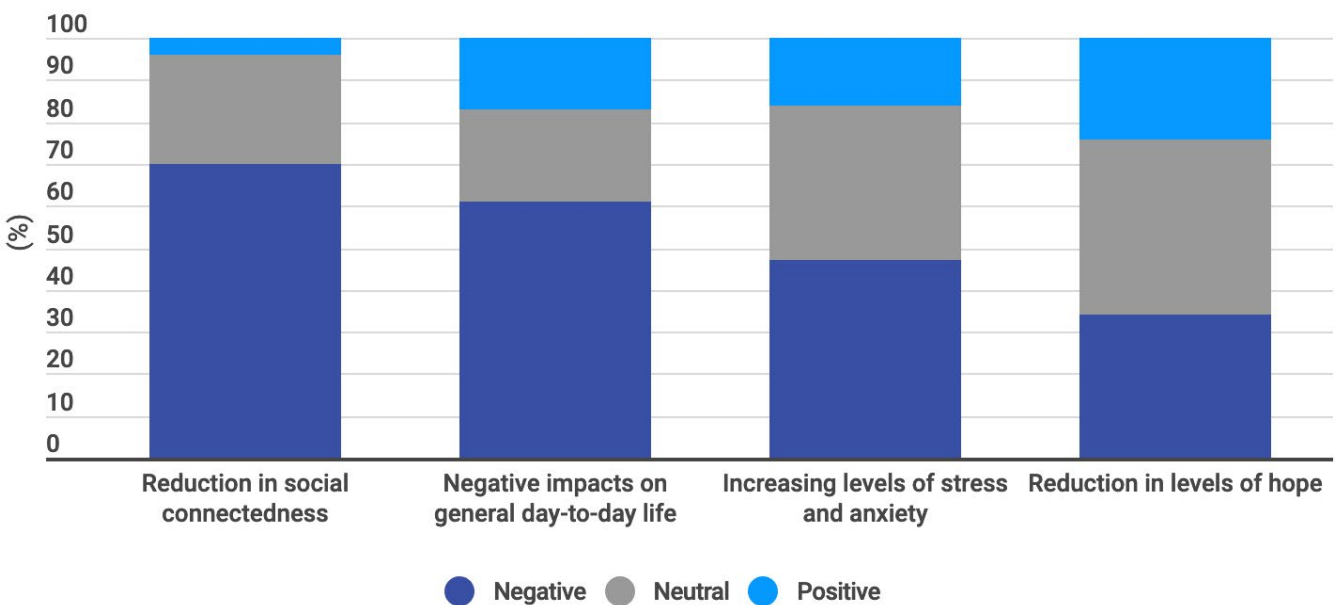
“It’s kind of scary to think that after this there may not be kind of like job security moving forward - being in Year 12 and wondering how HSC is going to pan out, and university offers are going to pan out. And then adding onto that fact, there may not even be like a workforce to join after all of this happens.” Female, regional NSW.

Conversely, some young people saw an opportunity to learn from the success of Australia’s response to COVID-19 in addressing other complex issues.

“Just to add to that I reckon if this pandemic has proved anything it’s that when governments work together and when countries work together, scientists come together, I reckon we can achieve anything... But we’ve been talking about climate change for 20 years and we haven’t had a reaction like this because it hasn’t financially affected us yet. So, I just think we need to learn from this that climate change and fixing climate change is so achievable, and I don’t know why we haven’t done anything about it.”- Female, Sydney NSW.

Older young people were more likely to report negative impacts on social connectedness, day-to-day life and stress and anxiety levels.

FIGURE 4: How the changes young people have lived through have impacted upon them



# Young people are worried about the impacts of COVID-19, especially on their education, friendships and the health and safety of friends and family

As part of the survey, we asked young people to tell us what they were most worried about, choosing up to five responses from a list of 15 possible options.

Two thirds (67%) of young people were worried about their education being disrupted or held back. This was also raised as a concern during online consultations.

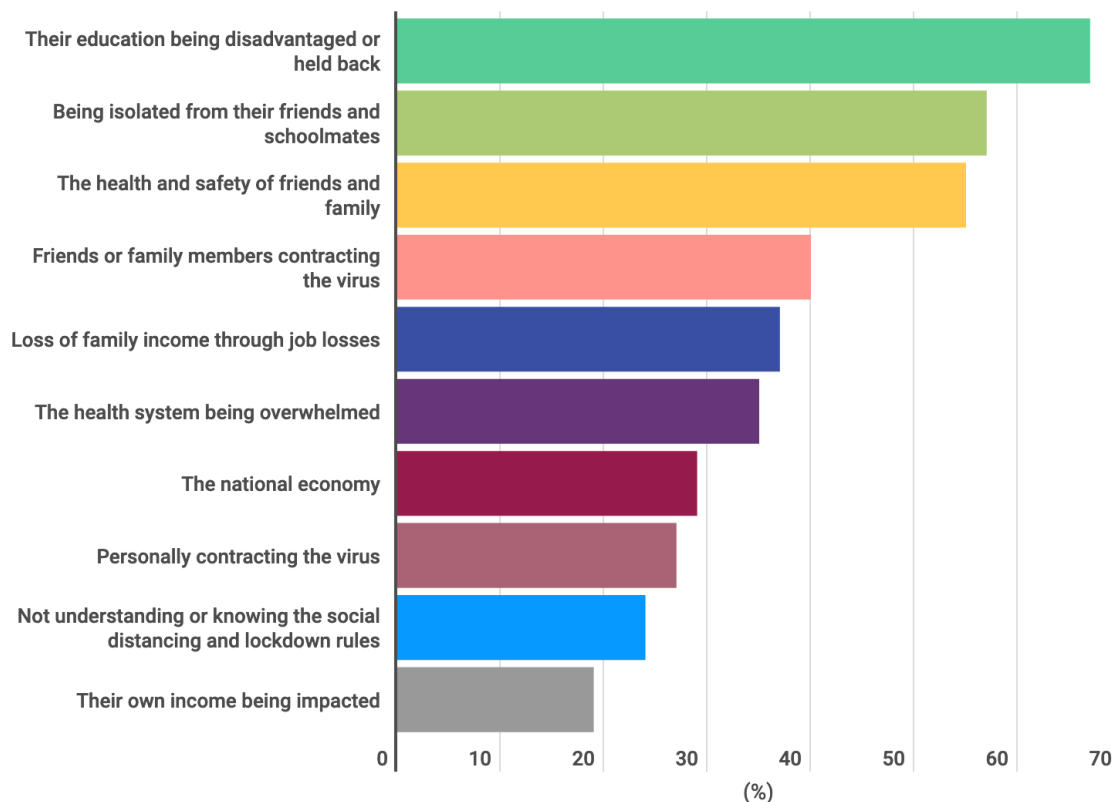
*“So, I think a really sad reality for our community in the Northwest Coast, is that this will be pretty damaging for our year 12 attention especially this year, and even in earlier years like in kids in year 10. Cos school is having somewhere to go and having a purpose each day*

*to go somewhere, even if you’re not a super into academics and school isn’t necessarily for you... and now that that’s taken out of the equation and you’re not face-to-face with teachers, and you have to actually put in a bit of effort, it’s really difficult. I think this will really hinder a lot of students and their ability to achieve to their fullest potential.” Female, regional Tasmania.*

*“...in sort of a classroom setting you’re sitting next to your friends, and even if you’re sort of doing school work and learning, you’re also chatting with them and making comments... Being on the screen, there’s sort of that physical barrier and you feel like well now I’m so isolated that I can’t get involved...*

*none of us are going to be able to make comments under our breath in class and like whisper to each other... even with learning with the teacher... So I do maths - trying to learn like complex numbers and integration by parts through a screen is just, I find it really difficult. Cos in class I just kind of, if I don’t get something I go, oh that’s weird and I say, ‘oh can you explain that on the white board?’ But you can’t sort of have that same explanation through a computer screen.” Female, regional NSW.*

FIGURE 5: What young people are worrying about because of the pandemic and response





More than half are worried about being isolated from friends and schoolmates (57%). Again, this was also highlighted by some young people in consultations.

*“[Online is not the same because] ... when you go to school you see your friends and you talk about life and stuff like that... and also our community has a band night every month and all young bands they all play their new songs... and get together... and I feel like that’s really impacted everyone’s mental health because we can’t... it’s kind of really upsetting... I think it’s that whole one-on-one human interaction that it really counts.” Male, regional NSW.*

More than half are also worried about the health and safety of friends and family (55%), and over a third are worried about a friend or family member contracting the virus (40%).

*“My Mum’s a teacher in the school and it could be there because she’s teaching all the nurses’ kids who can’t be off.... then it’s just worrying if you’ve got grandparents in town cos I think we’re safe but if you’re in contact with grandparents or other people you could be passing it on to them.” Female, regional NSW.*

*“So, I live with my 87-year-old Grandma, so obviously she’s someone that’s at risk for this disease. Basically, when that sort of happened, our family decided that we just go full lockdown. So, we have a government carer for our house that cleans and looks after my Grandma some days. But we’ve sort of changed that so now that person goes shopping for us, so we don’t have to leave the house. Then we disinfect it when it arrives and bring it into the house and that’s basically been how our routine’s been. And since coming back to school, as soon as I get home I have to disinfect all of my stuff, then I go for a shower immediately, put my clothes in like this like corona pile I*

*guess, and then I just go to my room and just stay away from my Grandma at all times.” Male, Perth WA.*

Over a third are also worried about a loss of family income through job losses (37%) and the health system being overwhelmed (35%).

*“As a person that’s in kind of in the frontline, being face-to-face with a lot of people, my boss requested that everyone get tested... I got tested last week... I was told 2 to 4 days to get my results back and I still haven’t received them. Um, now that’s not only affected me, it’s affected my mum as well because we got tested on the same day... and she’s actually been stood down from work at the moment because I haven’t got my test results back... it feels bad for me because I know like that I can’t really control it, but I’m affecting my mum’s work and income and everything like that... I rang them up this morning to see if they had them yet and they didn’t have anything, so...” Male, regional Tasmania.*

To a lesser extent, young people are also worried about the national economy (29%) and not knowing or understanding the social distancing and lockdown rules implemented as part of the response and getting in trouble with the law (24%). Interestingly, just one in four (27%) are worried about contracting COVID-19 themselves.

One in five young people (19%) surveyed were worried about their own income levels, a concern that was echoed by some of the consultation participants.

*“I lost my part time job which is pretty bad in itself but the thing is, I’m actually not old enough to receive the Job Seeker payment, so filling up my car with petrol, all those little small expenses are starting to add up. I used to have savings but I’m actually struggling to fill up my car now.” Female, Perth WA.*

## 1/3

Over a third of young people are worried about a loss of family income through job losses (37%) and the health system being overwhelmed (35%).



**“I still have a job, so I am grateful for that. But my mum [is] nearly out of her job. And I know that was something we never had to consider - having to save money just in case mum’s not in a job like in the next week.”**

- Female, regional NSW.



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- Female, Perth WA.

# Young people are largely keeping themselves informed about COVID-19, but effective communication is critical

Underlying many of the concerns, and much of the discussion among young people in Australia in relation to the pandemic and the national response, sits communication and information sharing – from the media, governments, and the community.

Two in three (69%) Australian young people feel they have a good understanding of what is happening through reading and watching the news and other announcements. In online consultations, young people talked about the range of ways they kept informed about the pandemic, with many seeking out reputable sources such as news and Government sites.

*“I am subscribed to the ABC, the BBC and The Guardian on my phone and I see them as quite reputable sources... they all seem to say very, very similar things. And so at least in my experience they’ve all been very, very reliable and everything they said is going to happen has happened and they haven’t been wrong.” Male, Perth WA.*

Six in ten (58%) young people also discuss developments with their family and carers.

*“My mum’s always on Facebook... she [talks about] what she thinks... then obviously if you see a lot of something, then there’s got to be an underlying thing... there’s places that you can go [to check] like the government websites - they’re going to have the accurate information.” Female, regional NSW.*

At the same time, one in two (51%) Australian young people think that there hasn’t been enough effort put into communicating effectively with children and young people in an inclusive manner, including one in six (17%) who strongly agree. During consultations, young people talked about how helpful good communication can be.

*“We’re mostly kept updated by office staff. Our Head, he sends us emails on our school accounts. They actually email us with [information] coming from different Universities... so we’re kept in the loop. I think, you know, I feel pretty up to date with all the coronavirus.” Male, Perth WA.*

## 2/3

Two in three (69%) Australian young people feel they have a good understanding of what is happening through reading and watching the news and other announcements.

## 1/2

One in two (51%) Australian young people think that there hasn’t been enough effort put into communicating effectively with children and young people.

More than four in ten (45%) say they feel confused about what is happening as a result of the volume of conflicting information about the outbreak and the Government and Community’s response.

*“You don’t really know who to believe because there’s so many different stories of how many cases there are, what you need to watch out for, and what are the symptoms.” Male, regional NSW.*

Females are more likely than males to discuss developments with family and carers (female 63%, male 54%); to feel like there is so much conflicting information that they become confused (females 52%, males 39%); and to think that not enough effort is made to communicate inclusively with children and young people (females 56%, males 45%).

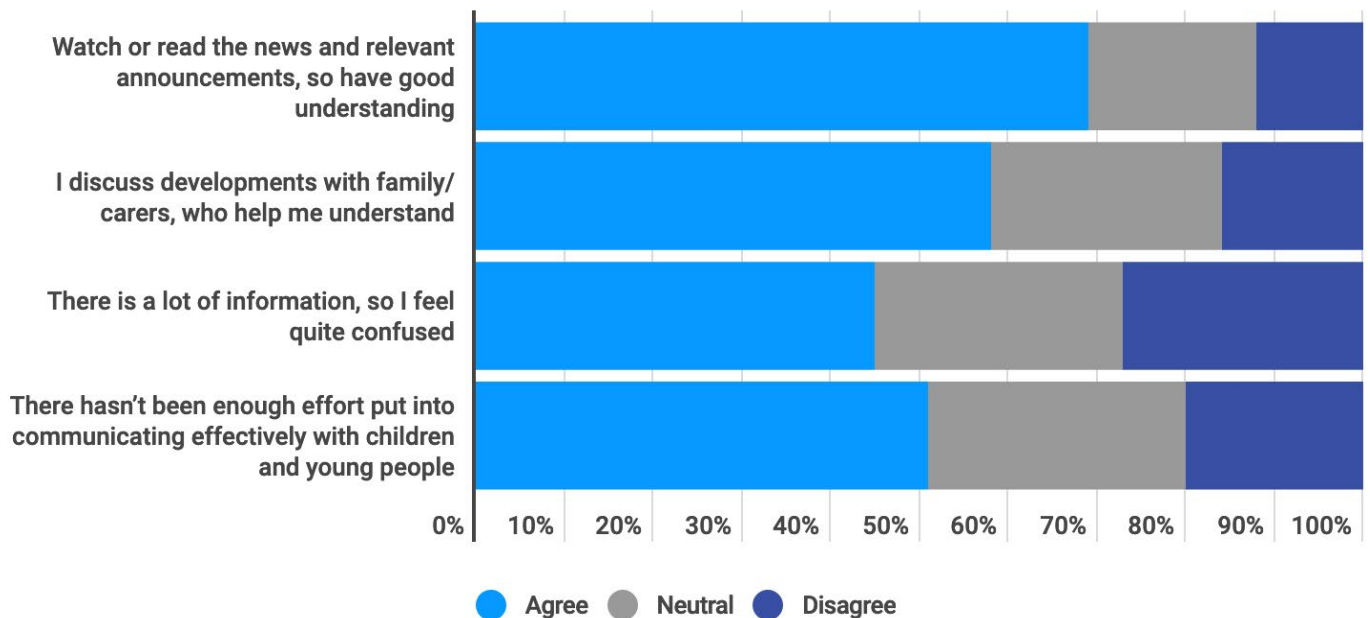
When asked as part of the survey in April to tell us the thing they most wanted to understand better, young people wrote about a wide range of often overlapping issues. Around one in five young people said they were mainly worried about the timeline for the pandemic, wanting clarity about when it will be over and when restrictions will end. Some of the responses included:

- *“How long will this last? Because this affects my schooling and my sporting life, if schooling is going to be online, I will need more support and help, and I want to play sport to stay fit.”*
- *“When it will end, are there any side effects to the disease? e.g. will there be a second wave? Will it affect [sic] [my] ability to have children? Is it going to be safe again?”*
- *“How the government is going to respond in the long term.”*

About one in 10 wanted to understand more about the government response. They were concerned about why the response seemed so slow to start; why details seem so unclear and often contradictory between federal and state/territory announcements; why response initiatives, such as social distancing, seemed inconsistently applied between jurisdictions; and why there appears to be so much changing. A similar proportion were worried about finding a cure and were wanting more facts about the virus itself.

Less common but repeated questions included the future after COVID-19 and the effects on the economy as well as worries about prevalence, hot spots, the flattening of the curve and its origins.

**FIGURE 6: Communication and information**



# Young people should be better recognised as stakeholders in the COVID-19 pandemic

One in four young people in Australia (25%) feel that children and young people are not considered to be equal stakeholders to other cohorts in society in the national pandemic and response.

*“I find in the media that all we’re [made out] to be caring about is school.”  
Female, regional NSW.*

*“I feel like ... with climate change and all that, when us young people are starting to speak about things, and starting to gain a voice, and get recognised and actually acknowledged that what we’re saying matters... with this it’s like, you know ‘be quiet just go to school, focus on school’, ‘you don’t have to worry about it, you’re not an issue!’” Female, Sydney NSW.*

Over two fifths of young people in Australia (44%) feel that there has been little recognition that many young people are on the front line as workers.

*“I work in the pharmacy at home and I know especially a lot of the stock has been completely taken, we can’t order stock in... it’s simple stuff, like paracetamol or children’s Nurofen... those people who need Ventolin have to have a prescription and to get into a doctor’s appointment in town it takes at least a month to book ahead so it’s been such a stressful thing. I know personally I’ve had to turn down someone coming in for Ventolin and she was, she had to go to the hospital because she practically couldn’t breathe and we just couldn’t give her anything because we didn’t have any stock...” Female, regional NSW.*

# 25%

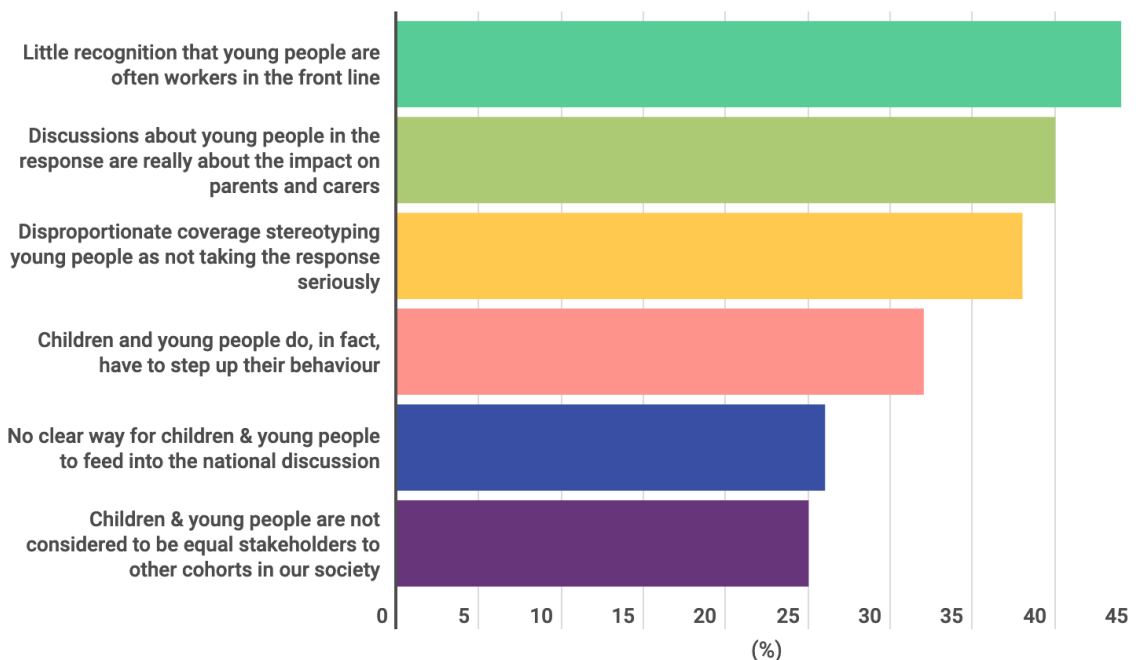
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**“I find in the media that all we’re [made out] to be caring about is school.”**

- Female, regional NSW

**FIGURE 7: Recognition as stakeholder in the pandemic and national response**



Two in five (40%) also believe that many of the discussions about children and young people (e.g. school closures) are more about the impact on parents and carers and believe that they should be included as a primary consideration.

*“In terms of decisions, like should we be in schools and stuff like that, I feel the onus hasn’t really been on the students, but rather the teachers and specialists who know what’s best for us. And I guess there really hasn’t been much opportunity for young people to make decisions on the matter. But I don’t see how that could be different. I think the only thing that could be done is just hearing [conversations like this]... so they are seeing how people are feeling, and also observing behaviours.” Male, Perth WA.*

Australian young people are divided on the subject of whether or not young people are taking the virus seriously enough: 38% believe that there has been a disproportionate emphasis on young people in the media as examples of people who are not taking the pandemic response seriously, and that most people are clearly trying to do the right thing; but 32% say that children and young people need to step up and take more responsibility when it comes to following social distancing rules.

*“I just wanna say that the only time that I’ve seen young people depicted on the media is when we’re doing the wrong thing. And it’s young people out having parties... and it only reinforces that idea that we don’t listen, you know, that we can’t listen to them in big situations... but that’s a small minority of people. A lot of us are doing the right thing, and the fact that they just keep showing... ‘oh that generation’ - it’s frustrating.” Male, Sydney NSW.*

*“Sometimes the younger people in society have been kind of projected as sort of unknowing carriers - so sort of like stay away from kids, cos they can be carrying, some of them won’t show symptoms, but they could potentially pose a threat to the older people.” Male, Perth WA.*

One quarter (26%) consider that there is no clear way for children and young people to feed into the discussion about who has been affected and how the virus, its impact and responses are being communicated.

*“I personally don’t think we have really had any kind of voice [during the pandemic]. I don’t think we have been depicted as anything. I think we have been depicted more as stats and facts... [we] don’t have any sort of representation.” Female, Perth WA.*

*“I think the government and everybody who’s older than us forgets that we’re the future... we’re the one who are going to make that change later on. We’re the ones who are gonna continue on this life and change it... I guess we need to have more conversations and really have our voices heard... nobody’s really listening.” Female, Sydney NSW.*

**44%**

Over two fifths of young people in Australia (44%) feel that there has been little recognition that many young people are on the front line as workers.

**26%**

One quarter of young people (26%) consider that there is no clear way for children and young people to feed into the discussion about who has been affected and how the virus, its impact and responses are being communicated.

“

**“I personally don’t think we have really had any kind of voice [during the pandemic]. I don’t think we have been depicted as anything. I think we have been depicted more as stats and facts... [we] don’t have any sort of representation.”**

- Female, Perth WA



# While many young people feel confident accessing support from family or friends, COVID-19 has impacted on some young people’s ability to access support services

Throughout the consultations we held with young people in various locations, mental health and wellbeing was frequently raised as a concern. When survey participants were asked an open question about the things decision-makers should do to support children and young people through this period, over one quarter suggested providing and promoting more mental health and online counselling services, while a fifth raised concerns about physical health and being sedentary.

The majority of Australian young people say they feel confident in turning to their family/carers (58%) or their friends (55%) for any support they might require for their psychological wellbeing throughout this crisis. Moreover, one in four (38%) say they have a good idea of where to

turn for support outside of their family for living through the COVID-19 pandemic, and that these options for support have been communicated well. However, one in five (22%) say that they are unsure if the options for support that existed prior to the COVID-19 pandemic still apply, or if there are new options specific to our current situation.

Three in ten (30%) Australian young people say that social distancing rules have impacted their ability to effectively access support options outside their family.

*“...out here we’ve had to order to get more internet and data access... we do everything basically through video conference so it’s nothing different... so it’s probably made it a bit harder in the*

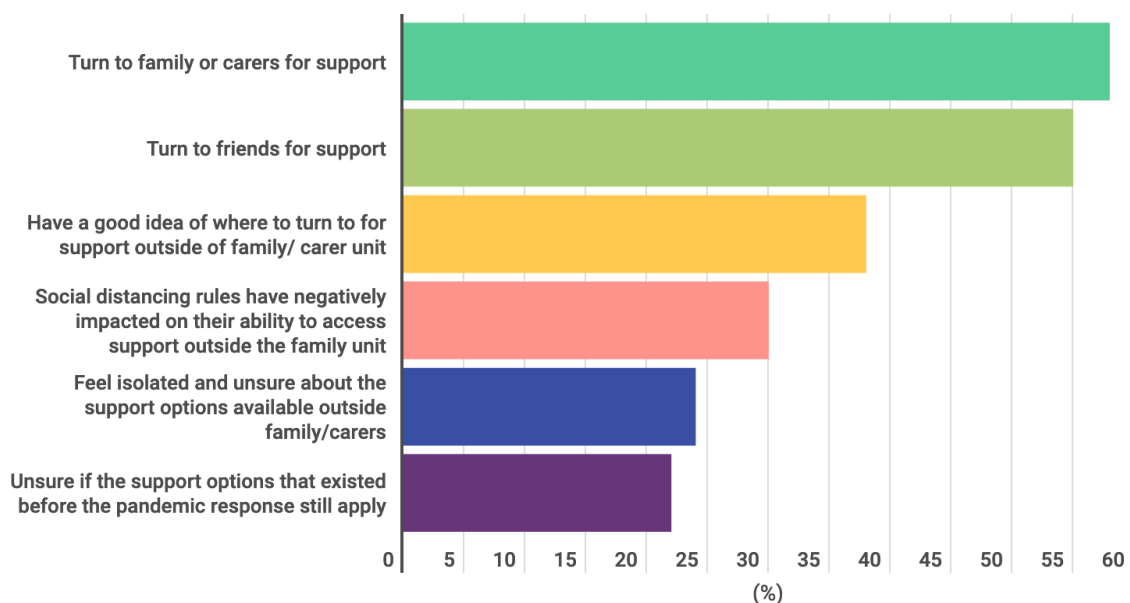
# 24%

One in four (24%) say they feel isolated and unsure about the support options available to them outside their family.

*sense that we can’t travel to get there and talk to them face-to-face but it’s also probably made it a bit easier because you can contact them whenever you need to and it’s right there at your fingertips.”*  
Female regional NSW.

Finally, one in four (24%) say they feel isolated and unsure about the support options available to them outside their family.

**FIGURE 8: Sources of psychological support**



# CONCLUSION

The COVID-19 pandemic and nation-wide responses have impacted many aspects of young people’s lives, putting strain on their ability to cope as well as their overall mental health and wellbeing. While many young people are particularly concerned about their education, this research shows that it is also having far wider impacts on young people’s lives: it is changing their employment experience, their ways of connecting with friends and family, and their perception of the future.

Based on young people’s feedback, there are several issues that decision-makers could take into account throughout Australia’s response to – and recovery from – COVID-19.

**Mental health and wellbeing:**

Ongoing support for mental health and wellbeing of young people is particularly important during this time of heightened stress and uncertainty. Working collaboratively with young people in the design and delivery of responses will help ensure that services and supports are accessible and appropriate.

**Social connectedness and resilience:**

Technology is helping many young people stay connected to family and friends, but this is no substitute for the physical connection which has been lost. As public health restrictions are slowly lifted, it will be important to support young

people to reconnect and invest in building their resilience moving forward.

**Digital Access:**

The pandemic has exacerbated existing inequalities and disparities around digital access which is impacting on children’s connectedness, learning and wellbeing. A systems approach is needed that brings together stakeholders to ensure that every child – especially the most remote, vulnerable, and disadvantaged – has digital access.

**Education:** Changes to schooling have disrupted education for many young people. Support will be needed to help young people re-engage in their studies, with additional support provided for those who are at risk of falling behind or dropping out.

**Communication and information:**

Young people are working to stay informed throughout this pandemic, but when information and advice is unclear or contradictory, it causes worry and confusion. Clear, effective communication with young people is critical as this pandemic progresses.

**Building Hope:** The impacts on young Australians and the sacrifices they are making should be publicly acknowledged. For young people, hope can be bolstered

by providing assurances that they will have an active role in solving the country’s challenges and shaping its future, and will not disproportionately shoulder the burden of the economic recovery.

**Economic participation and social protection:**

Young people must be protected in their workplace and those who remain unemployed, provided with adequate support. Public acknowledgment of front-line workers should include recognition that many young people are among them, making sacrifices and contributions as well – both now and into the future.

**Participation and involvement in decision making:**

As this crisis evolves, it is critical that decision makers take account of the experiences of young people, paying attention to the participation and engagement of young people in the COVID-19 response and recovery. In doing so, it is important to connect with a diverse range of young people to best understand the myriad ways that COVID-19 is impacting on young people across the country and to support them to actively participate in solutions and decision making.

## Methodology

YouGov Galaxy was engaged to conduct a national statistically representative survey of 1007 young people aged 13 to 17 years, which ran from 7 to 16 April 2020. The data was weighted by age, gender, and region to reflect the latest ABS population estimates.

In addition, UNICEF Australia staff and our Young Ambassadors conducted two regional online video consultations with young people from regional New South Wales and regional North West Tasmania – a COVID-19 hotspot in that state. We also conducted two capital city consultations with young people in year 11 and 12 from Perth and Sydney.

# SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

## 1. The number of young people who are coping is in decline

**Coping:** Just 45% said they feel they are able to cope well, compared to 81% before the pandemic. This number is forecast to decline to less than a third (31%) of young people if the same pressures continue into mid-year.

**Stress and Anxiety:** Almost half said it has negatively impacted their levels of stress and anxiety (47%)

### Isolation:

- A quarter (24%) said they feel isolated and unsure about where to turn for support.
- Despite being a digital generation, seven in ten young Australians said COVID-19 has impacted negatively on their social connectedness.

## 2. Young people are shouldering a large amount of responsibility and worry

### Work:

- One in five work in a job that could put them at risk of contracting the virus
- Some young people employed as essential workers reported experiencing abuse in their workplace.

**Education:** Two thirds (67%) of young people are worried about their education being disrupted or held back as a result of the changes being made to schooling as part of federal, state and territory government pandemic responses.

**Social isolation:** More than half are worried about isolation from their friends and schoolmates (57%)

### Health:

- Over a third are worried about a friend or family member contracting the virus (40%)
- More than half are worried about the health and wellbeing of their friends and family members (55%)
- Just one in four (27%) are worried about contracting COVID19 themselves.

### Money:

- More than a third are worried about loss of family income through job losses (37%)
- One in five young people are worried about their own income levels (19%).

### The future:

- More than a third are worried about the health system being overwhelmed (35%)
- Almost a third of young people are worried about the national economy (29%)
- A quarter are worried about not knowing or understanding the social distancing and lockdown rules and therefore getting in trouble with the law (24%).

## 3. Not all young people are equally impacted by COVID-19

For some young people in regional areas this is the second or third crisis within a year, after drought and bushfire.

COVID-19 has exacerbated many of the existing challenges that young people in regional and rural Australia already face, such as limited digital access, and less opportunities for social connectedness.

Young people feel that students in better resourced schools are better able to manage online learning than those in less resourced schools.

## 4. Young people feel underrepresented in discussions about the future

One quarter consider that they have not been afforded the same stakeholder importance as other groups and that there is no clear way for children and young people to feed into the discussion about who has been affected and how the virus, its impact and responses are being communicated.

## Five things decision makers can do to support young people:

- 1.** Ensure young people have access to appropriate support and services to support their mental health and wellbeing, and to promote social connectedness and resilience
- 2.** Communicate clearly and effectively with young people about the pandemic, and avoid confusing or inconsistent information
- 3.** Take account of the experiences of young people, paying attention to the participation and engagement of young people throughout the COVID-19 response and recovery.
- 4.** Address inequities that have been exacerbated by COVID-19, such as digital access
- 5.** Acknowledge the contribution that children and young people have already made in flattening the curve, and those they will make in the recovery stage.