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“SWIMMING WITH SANDBAGS”

The views and experiences of young people in Australia five months into the COVID-19 pandemic (August 2020)

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I feel there is the same expectation of being great... It's like you still need to be great and get the best ATAR and do all this blah blah, go to uni blah blah. But we have 20 other things just being thrown on top of us. So there is added pressure which I find really hard to deal with sometimes because I don't know if I can be what everyone wants me to be under these circumstances...

It's like when you are in a swimming race and you are swimming with the corona-free person who has had the greatest year 12 experience. But I am with all these bags of sand on my back trying to swim the same race. It seems like you are not going to win in that sense.

- Female, Melbourne, during Stage 4 lockdown

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This is phase two of a three phase exploration into the views and lived experiences of young people in Australia in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic and the government response to it.

In May 2020, UNICEF Australia released [Living in Limbo](#), a summary of the views, experiences and concerns of young people in Australia at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. At the time, the pandemic was new and extremely uncertain, but was already profoundly altering people's lives. This new report explores how the COVID-19 pandemic has been impacting on young people since then.

Between 9 July and 4 August, UNICEF Australia conducted a second nationally representative survey of 1,289 children aged 13-17 years. This was soon after the national lockdown was lifted on June 20. During this time, increasingly tighter restrictions were imposed for Melbourne and Victoria, culminating on 2 August with a state-wide lockdown along with Stage 4 restrictions for Melbourne. UNICEF Australia Young Ambassadors and staff have continued to consult with young people since the pandemic began – this report draws on online consultations conducted between May and August.

Five months into the pandemic, young people are finding ways to adapt to the challenges that COVID-19 has introduced. It's been a difficult time. And while young people are charting a path forward and learning and adapting as they go, even finding some positives along the way, there are still clear signs of strain and stress, and significant concern about how this pandemic will impact their future.

The many unknowns in relation to transmission of the virus and vaccine development are a concern for young people. The impacts (known and unknown) on their education loom large. Mental health and psychosocial support impacts continue to chart unevenly for many, though some young people are finding some positive outcomes along the way. Young people are increasingly concerned that they are not viewed as equal stakeholders, have few real platforms to contribute to decision making, and are being negatively stereotyped. They are also worried about the inequitable impacts of the pandemic, recognising that it has exacerbated existing disparities and left some particularly vulnerable and excluded.

Against this backdrop there is a need for greater action to support young people in Australia. The key recommendations that have emerged from this engagement with young people are:

- Invest in targeted research and specialist consultations to better understand the lived experience and risks for the most vulnerable and excluded young people across Australia throughout this pandemic.
- Implement targeted strategies to re-engage students who have not yet returned to school or who are at risk of disengagement, and ensure catch-up support is provided to all students in need.

- In co-design with young people, identify opportunities to diversify and strengthen mental health and psychosocial support initiatives, including through schools, to foster skills to manage young people's mental health and wellbeing, with an emphasis on strengths-based, community-driven and peer-to-peer support models.
- Invest in clear and accessible communication with children and young people on matters that affect them (such as changes to health orders and school or education arrangements). This could include government-run social media platforms and child-friendly public briefings.
- Create platforms and mechanisms for children and young people to meaningfully engage as key stakeholders in reimagining Australia beyond COVID-19.

This report is structured into three parts: Part 1 is a brief summary of key themes, findings and recommendations; Part 2 is a comprehensive thematic analysis of the quantitative and qualitative data collated for this report; and Part 3 provides an overview of the report approach and methodology.

PART 1: SUMMARY OF KEY THEMES, FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Young people are adapting to a COVID-19 world, but their wellbeing is still under strain.

Young people feel slightly more able to cope, with 55% rating their ability to cope as good in July-August compared to 45% in April. Young people in Victoria, however, have shown no improvement at 44%. Young people's ability to cope is better than they expected it would be by the middle of the year back in April, but it remains far worse than it was in January before the pandemic (81%).

Young people are still reporting negative impacts in their social connectedness, day-to-day life, and stress and anxiety, but these are now at lower levels than April. The impacts reported in Melbourne however are slightly worse than in other parts of Australia. This is consistent with the finding that young people's overall coping and wellbeing improves with an easing of restrictions. Interestingly, more young people are now reporting a positive impact on their level of hope (36%) than a negative one (25%), a reversal on April trends.

The easing of restrictions in much of the country at the end of June brought more structure and connectedness to young people's lives through a combination of returning to school, the reintroduction of some extra-curricular activities, and the opportunity to spend time with friends in person once again.

Many young people, including in Melbourne, are also taking practical actions to manage and adapt to their circumstances - an important element in fostering a sense of agency during challenging times. Some young people feel that the earlier lockdowns

provided a chance to build new skills and experiences, and that they are now better equipped to manage any future restrictions.

Over the past five months, the initial shock and uncertainty of the 'new world' of the pandemic seems to have been tempered somewhat by the day-to-day reality of living with it, of learning to understand and adapt to changes, and starting to understand the real effects they will have. That said, the concerns and pressures triggered by this crisis have in no way fallen away.

While survey findings are trending in a positive direction, they do not represent the entire picture. There are many vulnerable and excluded young people across the country who might not easily be able to participate in online and school-based consultations. With the pandemic compounding so many existing issues and inequities, these young people may have a very different lived experience and are likely under more strain than some of the young people we have consulted with. The young people we spoke to were keenly aware of this: they expressed significant concern for the inequitable impacts of the pandemic on young people, recognising that it has exacerbated existing disparities and left some young people particularly vulnerable and excluded.

“I think most of us have some sort of increase in like stress or anxiety or, not necessarily having as good mental health as before but...we need to look more so at [other disadvantaged people]



“Probably at the start we all thought, ‘Oh, you know, it will boil over. Like, nothing will be different’. Whereas now we are having to change the way we are, and then now slowly going back to normal. But it probably won’t ever be properly normal again.”

- Female, Regional Victoria

rather than necessarily us, because at a private school we do have a lot of stuff that we already need, I mean obviously we can do better but I think we have the foundations of what we need to improve the lives of young people, whereas other people don't have any of this, so maybe establishing the foundations for them rather than looking at how to put the cherry on top for us.” - Male, Melbourne, Victoria, during Stage 4 lockdown



Recommendation:

Invest in targeted research and specialist consultations to better understand the lived experience and risks for the most vulnerable and excluded young people across Australia throughout this pandemic.

Young people are worried about the more personal impacts of the pandemic: information and experience are both powerful tools to help young people navigate these unprecedented times.

While still common experiences, young people are now less likely to report disruptions to their education, seeing their friends, or their extra-curricular activities than they were in April. They have told us that these activities have been crucial in restoring some normalcy and wellbeing for young people.

Young people are particularly worried about how the pandemic will impact on their education (45%) their connection to friends (46%) and the risk of a friend or family member contracting COVID-19 (42%). These worries were also the most common in April. Beyond these more personal impacts, which have remained front of mind, young people's broader worries are evolving with the pandemic. For example, as it was clearer that the first wave of the pandemic was indeed under control, young people's concern turned to the implications of future outbreaks that might force a return to lockdown.

In terms of what they want to know more about, young people primarily want to understand how the pandemic directly affects their life, but they also want to understand the wider impacts to the world around them.

Over time, some concerns and worries about transmission have increased. This includes concern about things like contracting the virus, but also people's compliance with physical distancing rules. There is ongoing uncertainty about the trajectory of the pandemic, and young people are identifying what they regard as mixed messages in some of the public health advice, particularly

around distancing rules in schools, resulting in confusion and stress.

“What I want to know from my government is if they are doing a vaccine, not a cure. How far are they getting into [it]. What's the main problem with it and when can we see it distribute.” - Male, Regional New South Wales

Young people now have five months of experience living with this pandemic and these experiences seem to be shaping what they worry most about. For example, less disruption and greater certainty about school arrangements coincides with a significant reduction in levels of worry about educational impacts. Similarly, fewer young people are experiencing disruptions to seeing their friends, and they are also less worried about being socially isolated. Conversely, young people are more worried now than in April about various transmission issues, which remain uncertain and often volatile as illustrated by Victoria's second wave. This is something many want more information about. Looking at changes to young people experiences and worries, as well as what they want to know more about, there is a sense that lived experience and good information are both important factors in determining how young people will navigate the pandemic, and what they will worry most about.

Information is power, and the more information young people have about changes and decisions that will affect their lives, the more able they will be to actively chart a path through the pandemic.

Recommendation:

Invest in clear and accessible communication with children and young people on matters that affect them (such as changes to health orders and school or education arrangements). This could include government-run social media platforms and child-friendly public briefings.

45%

45% of young people are worried about how the pandemic will impact on their education.

42%

42% of young people are worried the risk of a friend or family member contracting COVID-19.

Many young people are accessing support to catch up on their education, but a worrying equity gap is emerging.

One of the areas of life that young people are concerned has been most dramatically impacted during the pandemic is their schooling. Over half (55%) of young people consider that they are now behind in their education, compared to where they were before the pandemic. This rises to 59% in Melbourne. At the same time, just over one tenth, only 12%, consider that they are now in a better position.

Schools are doing the heavy lifting in providing support to catch up students: 87% of young people who felt they were behind said that they are receiving some support from their school to catch up. That said, there is a smaller but potentially vulnerable group of young people who report having fallen behind with school and who are receiving no school assistance to catch up with their schooling. Over half of young people (53%) said that they are also receiving some form of after-school support, either from their school or teacher, their parent or carer, or a paid tutor / tuition class.

Despite this positive overall picture, the young people we spoke to in consultations highlighted the risk of a rising equity gap in educational outcomes due to the pandemic. They talked about students who had struggled during the lockdown to stay on top of their studies, and who are now less engaged with school despite a return to classrooms and

falling further behind. They also reflected on students who have been reluctant to return to school. This resonates with recent reports that over 3,000 students in NSW public schools have not returned to school after remote learning ended. It is vital that our most vulnerable students do not fall out of education due to the disruptions of the pandemic measures: these are the young people who we need to really understand and support lest they fall under the radar and disengage from education permanently.

"Personally I see that some people have struggled at home. and it might be easier at school, but [they] just feel really overwhelmed. And then when they came back to those sessions where there is a lot of work, and then they get given more work, it just kind of adds this extra stress. And then they almost just sit there at the back of the class almost feeling like ... I can just tell they are not feeling like right." - Male, Sydney, New South Wales.



"I see that some people have struggled at home. and it might be easier at school, but [they] just feel really overwhelmed. And then when they came back to those sessions where there is a lot of work, and then they get given more work, it just kind of adds this extra stress. And then they almost just sit there at the back of the class almost feeling like ... I can just tell they are not feeling like right."

- Male, Sydney, New South Wales



Recommendation:

Implement targeted strategies to re-engage students who have not yet returned to school or who are at risk of disengagement, and ensure catch-up support is provided to all students in need.

The pandemic has amplified the need to destigmatise and diversify our approach to mental health and wellbeing for young people.

Young people have consistently raised mental health and wellbeing as a major issue throughout the pandemic, an issue that was of significant concern even prior to the pandemic.

A majority of young people (62%) feel confident that they can turn to their family or carers for any support they require. This is very slightly higher than it was at the beginning of the pandemic (58%). However, less young people feel confident that they can turn to their friends for support, with 37% saying this, down from 55% in April. Reassuringly, the proportion of young people in Australia who say they feel isolated and don't know where to turn outside their family/carers has more than halved from 24% to 11%.

In consultations, young people flagged the need to diversify and destigmatise mental health and psychosocial support approaches. Many young people want to see more coverage of mental health and wellbeing in the school curriculum. They also want a positive, skills-based approach rather than just information

on 'mental illness'. Some talked about the importance of normalising the idea that 'it's OK to not be OK' and to push back against the stigma associated with feeling like you need additional support to maintain good mental health. Some also talked about the stigma of visiting counsellors or mental health services, and recognised that other options need to be in place. A quarter of young people said they want more information about how to stay positive during the pandemic.

This feedback is consistent with observations made by [young people in NSW impacted by drought](#) during UNICEF Australia's 2019 consultations and summit. They similarly called for strengths-based and community-driven psychosocial support, as well as peer-to-peer support models that avoid pathologising the distress, grief and sadness that come from living through a profoundly stressful experience like drought – and in this case, a pandemic.

“Don't put us in a corner [if we] go to counselling. Give us the opportunity to

say why should we do this, why not, is there any other option I can do? Maybe I can put my stress onto something else instead of having to speak to someone - because it just doesn't work for every single person. So being aware that people respond differently, and not by alluding it's something that can just be taught, I think would be the most beneficial way to talk about it and make it seem it's alright.” - Female, Melbourne, Victoria

Recommendation:

In co-design with young people, identify opportunities to diversify and strengthen mental health and psychosocial support initiatives, including through schools, to foster skills to manage young people's mental health and wellbeing, with an emphasis on strengths-based, community-driven and peer-to-peer support models.

Lockdown has changed family life for many young people, many of whom have taken on new home responsibilities.

It is clear that the pandemic has led to a range of changes in family life and levels of responsibility for many. Over half (57%) of young people reported they have had to take on more responsibility at home during the pandemic. This is reasonably consistent between females (60%) and males (55%). These responsibilities include cooking (24%), cleaning (35%), household maintenance

(25%), supervising or looking after siblings, including with schoolwork, or babysitting (19%), and caring for extended family members, including grandparents (13%).

A small but significant segment have had to contribute to household income, including about 1 in 20 young people (a small proportion too easy to overlook)

who report having become the main breadwinner. For these young people taking on additional work responsibilities, it is important that they are supported to do so without undermining their education, health, or development.

During consultations, many young people brought these findings to life. Some spoke positively about contributing to

the family through taking on additional responsibility, and some talked about learning new skills. Others talked about these responsibilities creating a challenge for them to manage online schooling. Additionally, while lockdown brought a lot of additional time together as a family for many, in some cases it also brought its own stresses – and some young people expressed particular concern for their peers who were navigating lockdown in unsupported or unsafe homes.



“Yeah, so I have more responsibilities, I come from a pretty big family, my mum’s just had two bubs recently, and then my dad’s an essential worker. So, it was just her at home. So, I found I had to help mum around the house more, taking care of them. And it kind of put my responsibility of school work out - so more family home responsibility but less school.”

- Female, Brisbane, Queensland

Young people lack platforms to contribute to decisions that affect them: we are talking ‘about’ young people, but not always ‘with’ them.

Young people continue to be discerning in navigating information about the pandemic. Most (64%) feel they have a good understanding of what is happening through reading and watching the news and other announcements, and they are increasingly likely to discuss developments with their family and carers (69% in July/August compared to 58% in April). While still at a worrying level, young people are slightly less likely to think there hasn’t been enough effort put into communicating effectively with children and young people (46% compared to 51% in April). And 43% feel confused due to the volume of conflicting information.

The overwhelming majority (96%) of young people trust their parents or guardians to provide them with accurate information about the pandemic and the response measures. The next most trusted sources for young people are the Chief Medical Officers and Health officials at the federal and state levels (90%), followed by teachers and schools (88%). About four in five (78%) trust state and territory leaders to provide accurate information while three in four

(74%) trust federal government leaders. Only 42% say they trust social media for accurate information about the virus, pandemic, and responses.

Young people increasingly feel that their issues and needs are considered. However, many feel they are being talked ‘about’, but too often decision-makers are failing to talk ‘with’ them. In April, 25% of young people in Australia felt that children and young people were considered equal stakeholders in the pandemic. By July-August, this rose significantly to 59%. While a positive step, 41% of young people still don’t feel like an equal stakeholder. In April 40% believed that many of the discussions about children and young people (e.g. school closures) are more about the impact on parents and carers. This almost doubled by July-August to 75%.

There has been a dramatic rise in young people who think there is no clear way for children and young people to feed into the national discussion (from 26% in April to 65% in July-August). This has been a particular point of emphasis in consultation discussions around the country.



“It feels like they keep on talking ‘about’ us and they are not talking ‘with’ us. So, they are kind of imaging they are us and putting themselves [in the picture] sort of thing. But they have actually got no consideration to what our actual opinions are.”

- Female, Sydney, New South Wales



Recommendation:

Create platforms and mechanisms for children and young people to meaningfully engage as key stakeholders throughout the pandemic, including in reimagining Australia beyond COVID-19.

Young people will bear the legacy of this pandemic into the future: they need to play a key role in reimagining a post-pandemic Australia.

In terms of the ‘big issues’ young people are worried about, the pandemic and its impacts are understandably front of mind. Across the country, the COVID-19 pandemic and response is the most common concern (36%) for young Australians at the moment. Consistent with other findings in this report, they are also concerned about the erosion of education opportunities (30% and 36% for Melbourne). One in four (26%) are also concerned about the future of the economy over the next 12 months. That said, in both the survey and consultations, young people also reflected on the importance of a wide range of other issues, including the environment and various social justice issues.

Many young people feel that the world is at a turning point of sorts. While many young people see this as an opportunity to reset and refocus on moving toward a better world, they can also see the potential for a negative trajectory. Young people want the post-COVID world to be more connected, more cooperative, more kind, more equitable, and more balanced.

Young people know that they are the future, and they stand ready to play an active role in reshaping and reimagining our country as we emerge from the challenges of the pandemic. But they are worried that insufficient progress by decision-makers on a range of big issues will mean that these will be passed on to the next generation to address without support. They also want real, concrete opportunities to be able to make a genuine and recognised contribution to the decision-making process. It is firmly the view of this generation of young people that the actions and decisions of today’s leaders will determine the future that they inherit: it is critical that they have accessible and impactful platforms to help shape those decisions.



Recommendation:

Create platforms and mechanisms for children and young people to meaningfully engage as key stakeholders throughout the pandemic, including in reimagining Australia beyond COVID-19.



“I think that with COVID, of course there needs to be an amount of attention on it, but I think that other major issues shouldn’t have lost all the attention like they did. I think attention should have been put onto COVID-19 and on solving it and stuff but also [put] the same amount of attention on these long-term issues because of course they aren’t going to disappear after this. Sure, we may have a COVID free world but we’re not going to have a racism or homophobic or sexism free world.”

- Female, Regional Northern Territory

PART 2: YOUNG AUSTRALIANS AND THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC: THEMATIC ANALYSIS

This section reports on the quantitative and qualitative data in detail, structured by key themes.

Young people are adapting to a COVID-19 world, but their wellbeing is still under strain

In July-August, young people overall reported fewer negative impacts and experiences due to the pandemic than in April. However, there are still clear signs of strain and stress.

An easing of restrictions in much of the country has brought more structure and connectedness back to young people's lives, with a return to school, some extra-curricular activities, and time with friends. Young people have told us that these are all important for their sense of wellbeing which may help to explain some of these improvements.

That said, young people in Melbourne overall are also faring slightly better than

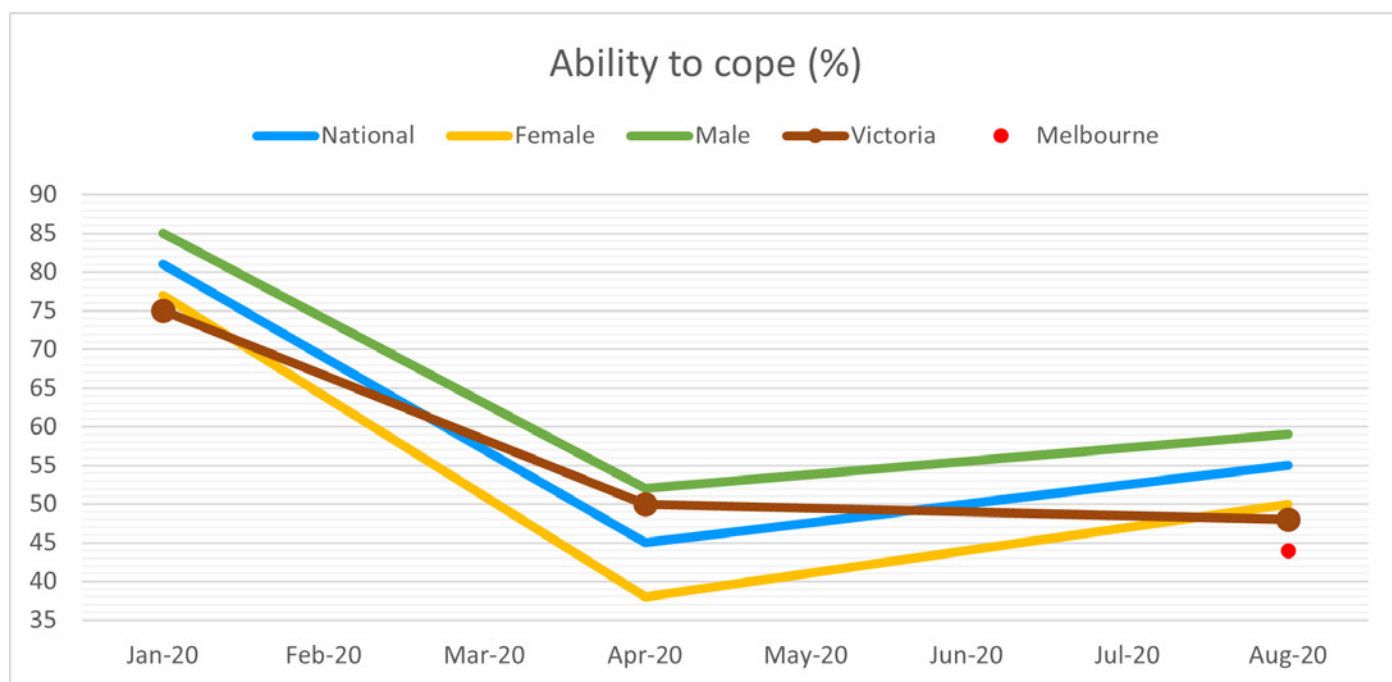
in April despite being back in lockdown. This might suggest that young people are also building some level of experience and even resilience as they've adapted to the pandemic. The initial shock of the 'new world' of the COVID-19 pandemic has been tempered somewhat by the day-to-day reality of living with it. Despite this adaptation, many of the challenges triggered by this crisis remain.

Ability to cope

In April, only a month into Australia's national response to COVID-19, young people felt that their ability to cope had declined since January (from 81% to

45%), and they anticipated that it would be even lower by June (31%) if the pandemic continued on the trajectory it was back in April.

As of July-August 2020, more young people rated their ability to cope as good (55%). Young people in Melbourne showed no improvement (44%). While there is a modest improvement, it remains concerning that only around half of young people think their ability to cope is good. That said, they are faring better than they expected to when asked in April to anticipate how they'd be coping by the middle of the year.



During online consultations, young people talked about learning to adapt and navigate the uncertainty and restrictions of living through the pandemic. While changes to health orders have invariably brought more confusion and concern, young people seem to have been taking practical action where possible to manage, which is an important element in fostering a sense of agency during challenging times.

“These past two weeks [of Stage 4 lockdown] have been really confusing I guess mainly like moving into... ‘Cause I’m in Year 12 so exam period and things like that... I feel like everything is very unknown currently, but I have just been trying to control what I can control and working how I can right now.” - Female, Melbourne, Victoria (during Stage 4)

Some young people explained that their experiences so far this year have meant they will now be better able to anticipate and manage the challenges of future lockdowns because of the new skills and experience they have built over this period. However, some also anticipate that future lockdowns might be harder because they now know what to expect.

“I feel like we would be able to cope better [if the pandemic continues till the end of the year] because once you do something really hard... like, the world doesn’t seem as scary.” - Female, Sydney, New South Wales

Feedback from young people in Melbourne about being back in lockdown has been mixed: some feel they are managing this lockdown better than the first, but others are finding it harder this time around. Young people overall

anticipate that their ability to cope by the end of this year will largely depend on the extent to which restrictions continue to disrupt and curtail their lives.

“It probably just depends on what restrictions are still in place, like how isolated everyone is. Because if it’s something like this for the rest of the year, then that’s probably going to negatively impact on how people can cope. But if by the end of the year, it’s pretty much back to normal with only a couple of restrictions in place, then I think it will just be a lot easier for the vast majority...” - Female, Regional Victoria

Some young people shared a sense of optimism that they will ultimately get through this, but they feel that ‘normal’ will look different on the other side of the pandemic; that the broader community will have been irrevocably changed by this experience.

“Probably at the start we all thought, ‘Oh, you know, it will boil over. Like, nothing will be different’. Whereas now we are having to change the way we are, and then now slowly going back to normal. But it probably won’t ever be properly normal again.” - Female, Regional Victoria

55%

55% of young people said they are coping well, compared to 45% in April – a month into Australia’s national response to COVID-19. However, Melbourne showed no improvement, with just 44% of young people saying they are coping well.

“

“I feel like everything is very unknown currently but I have just been trying to control what I can control and working how I can right now.”

- Female, Melbourne, Victoria (during Stage 4)

“

“Our lives in Australia were put on pause - we didn’t know what was happening and then the worst part was we didn’t know when it was going to end. I think now coming out of it, that yes there’s a little hope.”

- Female, Melbourne, Victoria

Impacts on day-to-day life, stress and anxiety, social connectedness, and levels of hope

There have also been similar small improvements in the proportion of young people who report that the pandemic has had a negative impact on their day-to-day life, stress and anxiety, social connectedness, and levels of hope. Again, young people in Melbourne reported less positive feedback than other young people in the country, but were still showing improvements in terms of social connectedness and day-to-day life.

In April, the pandemic and response had negatively impacted the **social connectedness** of 70% of young people. By July-August, this had dropped to 42% (47% females compared to 37% males). Although Melbourne was higher at 55%, it still remained lower than April levels. Young people talked extensively about the improvements they felt in their sense of connection, and even their level of motivation, once the isolating impacts of the lockdown were lifted, restrictions eased, and school returned.

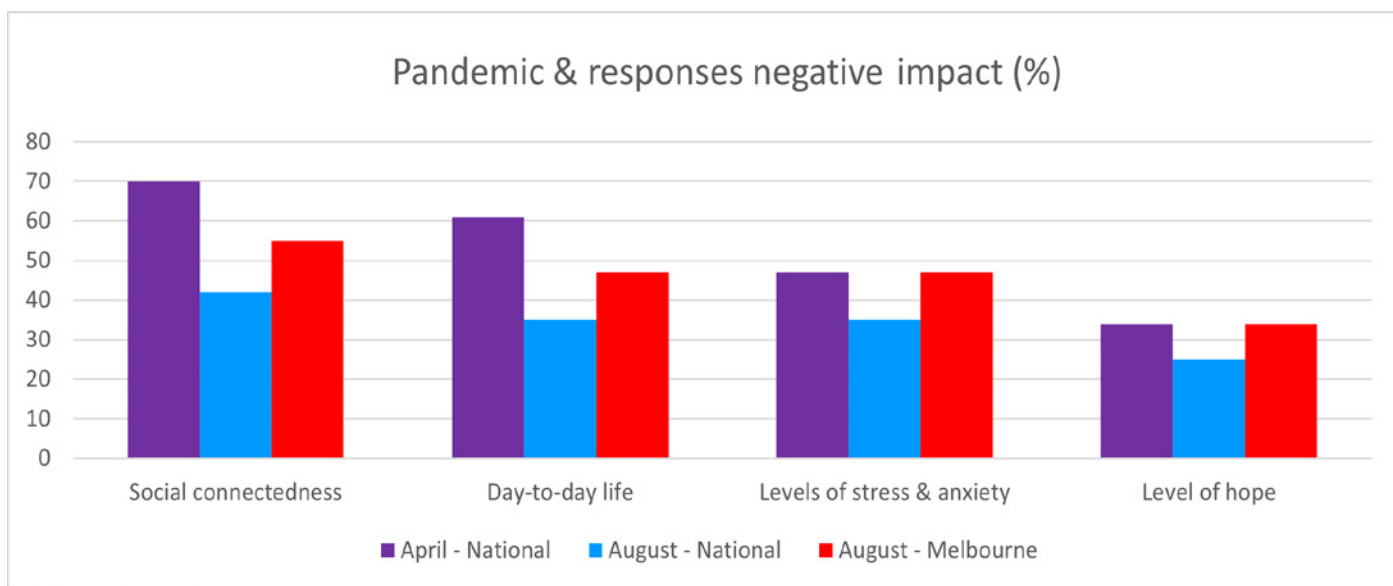
"I think it also cuts off a lot of social interaction with people who aren't necessarily your closest friends, just people you'd see around, you'd say hi to, you might talk to for a bit. But unless yeah, if you don't go out of your way to call a lot of people... So now that we're back at school it's great because there's a lot of people you'd see who I just didn't contact - I get to talk with them again." - Female, Sydney, New South Wales

"It's not exactly that I didn't have anything to do. It's just in some cases... I feel like I didn't have the motivation to do anything else because of the depriving environment that was, I suppose like isolation, I guess. I'm not sure how to describe it because it's like something is there right in front of you, but you just really don't feel like it because everything around you is just sort of closing in and it just feels depriving, I guess." - Male, Melbourne, Victoria

Young people's lives and families are incredibly diverse and the changes to their **day-to-day life** that they describe is similarly varied. Some

young people said the pandemic response measures had disrupted their access to family members. Some also reported concerns about how things like custody arrangements might be impacted, highlighting the need for young people to have clear information quickly about the way changes to health orders might affect their living and family circumstances. Students living in boarding arrangements also reported a lot of changes to rules that impact on their routines and movements. Students in regional Northern Territory told us that some local young people, who usually attend boarding school, were now staying in town and studying from the local school.

"Well, since they started bringing in the rules about staying at home and not having people come over... because my parents are divorced and my dad lives somewhere else, I was really worried for a while that I wouldn't be able to go and see him or see my other family." - Female, Sydney, New South Wales



Interestingly, some young people reflected that, with the easing of restrictions, they had found a new appreciation for changes that they made to their day-to-day lives in order to navigate the lockdown. Some talked about appreciating time and connections with their family, while others felt they'd learnt to slow down and appreciate simple things more and not take things for granted.

Where, in April, just under half (47%) young people reported that COVID-19 has negatively impacted their **levels of stress and anxiety**, by July-August, this proportion had fallen to 36% (41% of females and 31% of males), remaining at 43% in Melbourne.

"Before all this happened, I did a lot of stuff after school. So, I had like two jobs, sport and then there was school. And I felt like home was my relax point and everything kind of stopped there and I could relax. But now I have to do school work there, which makes home for me stressful - and then there's like nothing that I can, nowhere that I can go to make home a relaxful place because now that's my stress point." - Female, Sydney, New South Wales

"With mental health, like anxiety and depression, you are left alone with your thoughts a lot more and you don't really have, it's harder to tell your friends over text that you are struggling with things as opposed to in person. So I think like that gets amplified during this time as well." - Female, Melbourne, Victoria (Stage 4 lockdown)

While, in April, one in three young people (34%) said 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**. This proportion had effectively reversed by July-August with a quarter (25%) saying it had negatively affected their level of hope (somewhat higher in Melbourne - 34%) and 36% reporting it had positively affected their levels of hope. This may again be a sign that lived experience has offset some of the unknowns that young people were grappling with at the start of the pandemic.

"I think personally my hope was really low because I think because of this uncertainty that was attached to the whole quarantine situation. Our lives in Australia were put on pause - we didn't know what was happening and then the worst part was we didn't know when it was going to end. So, I think the whole fact that we didn't know when it was going to end, what we were supposed to do, what are we supposed to be making the most of this situation, what about our mental issues as well... I think now coming out of it, that yes there's a little hope about the fact that we're still in quarantine. The fact that we still can't do a lot is damaging a bit and yeah it does restrict us in many ways." - Female, Melbourne, Victoria

42%

In July-August, 42% of young people say the pandemic and the response is negatively impacting their social connectedness. In April, this was as high as 70% of young people.

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“With mental health, like anxiety and depression, you are left alone with your thoughts a lot more. It's harder to tell your friends over text that you are struggling with things.”

- Female, Melbourne, Victoria (Stage 4 lockdown)

Equity impacts

Young people repeatedly told us that while everyone is having to navigate the COVID-19 pandemic, not everyone experiences the impacts of the pandemic equally. Key equity factors young people spoke about included digital access, the resourcing of schools and teachers, socio-economic status of households, and the capacity of parents and carers to offer support. They also talked about their concern for children and young people living in unsafe or unsupported homes, for those at risk of disengaging from school, for those who are isolated by location and/or through limited digital access, and for those living with disability or mental illness. Some young people thought that younger students might be finding it particularly hard to study from home.

"I think absolutely all were affected differently, I think it meant a lot where you lived you know economic sides all of

that, who were with like housing I think yeah, I don't think any child was affected in the same way, it was all different." - Male, Year 11, Regional Northern Territory

Many young people, particularly those from well-resourced private schools, recognised their access to equipment and support as an opportunity that not all students across the country shared. They want to see investment and support to prevent widening disparities now and into the future.

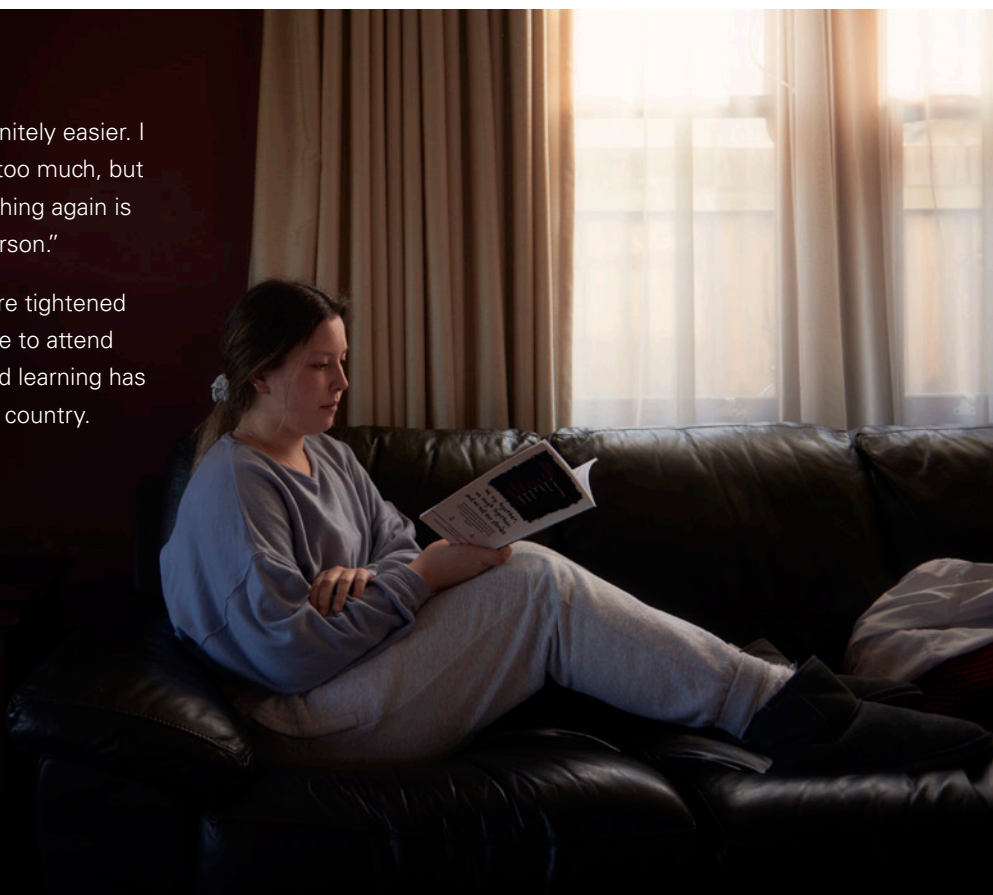
"I think most of us have some sort of increase in like stress or anxiety or, not necessarily having as good mental health as before but...we need to look more so at [other disadvantaged people] rather than necessarily us, because at a private school we do have a lot of stuff that we already need, I mean obviously we can do better but I think we have the foundations of what we need to improve the lives of young people, whereas other people don't have any of this, so maybe

establishing the foundations for them rather than looking at how to put the cherry on top for us." - Male, Melbourne, Victoria (during Stage 4)

New [snapshot reports](#) from the Victorian Commission for Children and Young People offer welcome insights into the impact the pandemic is having on a diverse group of children and young people living in Victoria: more initiatives like this that harness the direct voice and experience of children and young people, including the most vulnerable and excluded, are needed.

"I feel like the first time around it was definitely easier. I was super productive, and I didn't mind it too much, but I just think the content and learning everything again is very different online than it would be in person."

As second wave lockdown restrictions were tightened in Victoria, many young people were unable to attend school. Dealing with the reality of disrupted learning has been a key issue for teenagers around the country.



Young people are worried about the more personal impacts of the pandemic: information and experience are both powerful tools to help young people navigate these unprecedented times

Understandably, young people are primarily focused on the direct impacts of the pandemic on their lives and loved ones. They have now amassed five months of experience living with this pandemic and these experiences seem to be shaping what they worry most about. For example, less disruption and greater certainty about school arrangements coincides with a significant reduction in levels of worry about educational impacts. Similarly, fewer young people are experiencing disruptions to seeing their friends, and they are also less worried about being socially isolated. Conversely, young people are more worried now than in April about various transmission issues, which remain uncertain and often volatile as illustrated by Victoria's second wave. This is something many want more information about. Looking at changes to young people experiences and worries, as well as what they want to know more about, there is a sense that lived experience and good information are both important factors in determining how young people will navigate the pandemic, and what they will worry most about.

Experiences due to the pandemic

Young people are now less likely to report disruptions to their education, seeing their friends, or their extra-curricular activities than they were in April. They have told us that these activities have been crucial in restoring some normalcy and wellbeing for young people.

Although Melbourne and some other parts of Victoria had re-entered lock down when the national survey was conducted, many of the broader, community-wide experiences young people were having in that state were still being reflected at the same levels nationally - possibly an indication that response measures implemented across government were having the desired impact (employment, health support). That said, social and educational experiences, which impact directly and personally on young people, manifested in Melbourne closer to April levels, despite reducing elsewhere in the country.

In April, an overwhelming majority - nine in ten young people in Australia - reported they had had **to stop seeing their friends** (88%). By July-August, this proportion had dropped to just over six in ten (63%) – though it remained a much more common experience in Melbourne (78%) and in Victoria as a whole (72%). Females (68%) were more likely to report this experience than males (58%).

“So, the way it's impacted me is, I can't see my friends any more so that's pretty annoying and also, like parks are roped off with that weird tape stuff so I can't go to parks, and also I can't go to libraries.”
- Female, Home Schooling, Western Australia (primary school age)

In April, 86% reported having their **education disrupted or stopped**. By July-August, this had also reduced significantly to 61% - also remaining slightly higher in Melbourne and Victoria overall (both 68%).

63%

63% of young people surveyed in August reported they have had to stop seeing their friends. In April this was as high as nine in 10 young people (88%).

While some young people told us during online consultations that they'd navigated remote learning well, many found it challenging in a number of ways. Reasons included a lack of supervision and support from teachers, a lack of structure to their day, isolation from friends, and declining levels of motivation. Many young people also talked about the lack of separation between home life and school life.

“For starters I wasn't getting much work done which made me start to get a bit behind in my classes. And then I was getting angry about that. I didn't take it out on anyone, thank goodness - there was no one to take it out on. But look I just got angrier which meant I didn't want to do work. Which means I got more behind and the cycle went on and on and on until I basically lost it.” - Male, Regional New South Wales

While it is important to recognise that students have been learning remotely, rather than home schooling, young people who have been home schooled did offer some insights for other students based on their experience. They highlighted the value of mixing up the schooling day and not pushing too hard on one subject or a problem that is a sticking point, of taking short breaks between tasks, and of trying to stay relaxed.

A similar reduction has taken place in the proportion of young people who have had to **stop their usual extra-curricular activities**. A month into Australia’s pandemic response, this was the experience of 71% of young people, but by July-August, this had reduced to 52%, though it was still a more common experience in Victoria (60%).

Many young people we spoke to in June talked about their excitement at sport and other extra-curricular activities starting to resume, even with social distancing measures in place. The return

of these activities has been important in giving young people more structure and social connection in their days, which in turn seems to improve their sense of coping. For some young people, a lack of extra-curricular activities, particularly sport, had left them feeling unmotivated and ‘flat’, and unsure how to structure their day.

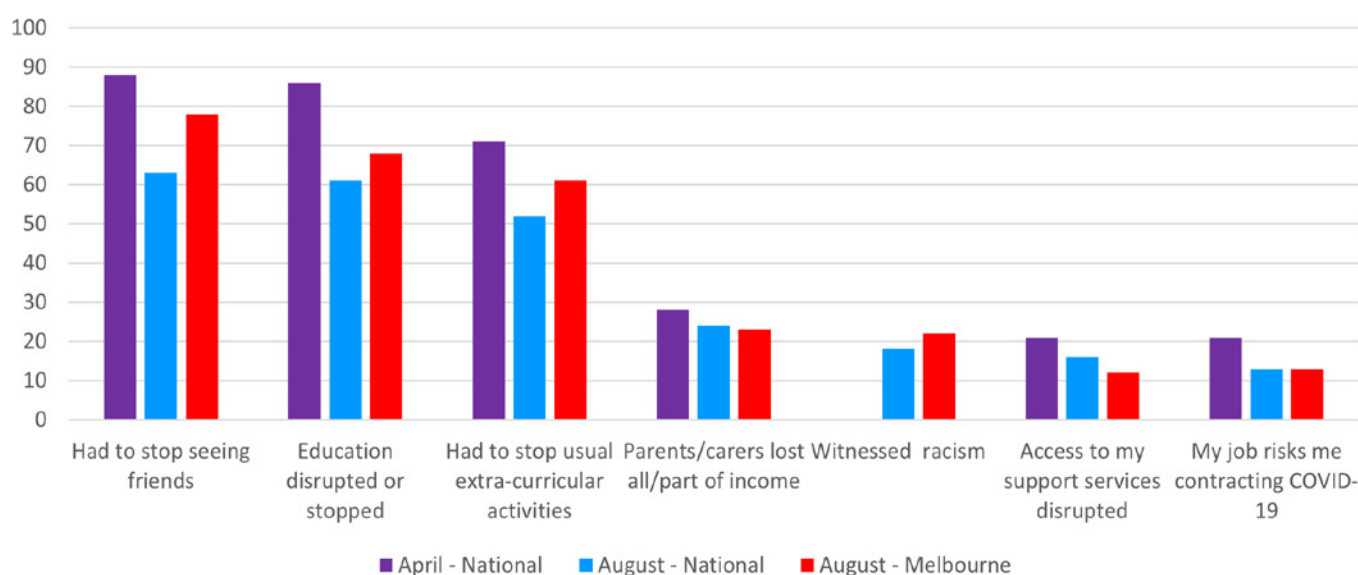
“Yeah, like lack of direction really... Because I haven’t been doing sport, I don’t know, just my kind of motivation to doing things is less. I notice with my friends we’re not playing sport at the moment, you’re just kind of...we had interaction before, it’s like “What’s wrong with you, why are you all down?” I say, “I dunno.” There’s nothing happening, there’s nothing to do... I felt and some others feel a bit down and kind of not actually like depressed, like what am I supposed to do.” - Male, Brisbane, Queensland

“

“I wasn’t getting much work done which made me start to get a bit behind in my classes. And then I was getting angry about that. I didn’t take it out on anyone, thank goodness - there was no one to take it out on. I just got angrier which meant I didn’t want to do work. Which means I got more behind and the cycle went on and on and on until I basically lost it.”

- Male, Regional New South Wales

Experiences during the pandemic & responses (%)



“I have a big role in sports around here. It’s just hard, like because you’re not used to doing nothing all the time.” - Male, Regional Northern Territory

The proportion of young people who have had **their parent/s or carers lose all or part of their income** has remained largely steady between April and August, from 28% to 24%. The fact that it’s been recorded as a less common worry in August compared to April may be a sign that government financial support measures have provided some assurance for young people and their families.

“My mum has been looking for a job for a while because like she got unemployed a few months ago. And now that a lot of jobs and places have closed down it’s been, she’s struggling to find a job. So financially we have to kind of be aware of what we’re spending our money on a lot more.” - Female, Sydney, New South Wales

Whereas one in five in April said they **“work in a job that could put them at risk of contracting the virus”** (21%), by July-August, this has dropped to 13%. This might be due to young people feeling less at risk when at work given the good management of the pandemic. Throughout the first wave of the pandemic, many young people told us about issues at work trying to manage physical distancing and panic buying. Over the past couple of months, young people have raised less work-related issues related to physical distancing rules or panic buying. However, they have continued to reflect on changes to their work situation, either losing work or taking on additional or different work responsibilities.

“Well I’ve been working for the family business for part time work which likely enough I can still work from home and do paperwork and stuff. So, I know I haven’t been affected, but I know a couple of my friends lost jobs. Some were able to keep them cause they work at supermarkets and things - so they’re essential workers.” - Female, Regional Victoria

In July-August, 18% of young people said they had **witnessed racism in relation to the pandemic** and 8% said they had **experienced racism**. It was less common for young people to recount detailed personal stories of experiencing racism during consultations, but there were indications that it was something some students were indeed having to navigate.

“I know, especially with the Asian community, racist remarks have been like brought up and you know... like my mentality isn’t that great as well. So just knowing I need to focus on what I’m doing now and not what other people are saying - and I need to support the people who are a part of my community and the people who are like family - so basically just thinking about what I need to do and what I believe in and advocating and supporting.” - Female, Sydney, New South Wales



“My mum has been looking for a job for a while because like she got unemployed a few months ago. And now that a lot of jobs and places have closed down it’s been, she’s struggling to find a job. So financially we have to kind of be aware of what we’re spending our money on a lot more.”

- Female, Sydney, New South Wales

24%

In July-August, 24% of young people said their parent/s or carers have lost all or part of their income, similar to 28% in April.



Worry about a loss of family income fell from 37% in April to 26% in July-August. This may be a sign that government financial support measures have provided some assurance.

Worries due to the pandemic

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, shaped by open-ended questioning in the first phase of the research, as well as observations that came out of the ongoing consultations.

Young people remain particularly worried about impacts that could directly undermine their personal achievement and their relationships with friends and family: in both April and July/August, the top three worries related to isolation from friends and family, disruptions to education, and a friend or family member contracting COVID-19. But their worries are also evolving with the pandemic. For example, as it was clearer that the first wave of the pandemic was indeed under control, young people's concern turned to the implications of future outbreaks that might force a return to lockdown. Topical issues were also front of mind: there was a noticeable increase in the number of young people talking about worries related to racial inequality when public discourse around the Black Lives Matter movement spiked.

Around half of young people are worried about being **isolated from friends and schoolmates**, but this has dropped from 57% in April to 46% in July-August and 52% in Melbourne. Almost a quarter (23%) were concerned about being **separated from family members** by July-August, up slightly from 18% in April.

“So, when like COVID started, my dad was supposed to come back. But then the airports, they were shut down, so like I didn't see my dad for about three months. And yeah that was like a huge impact on my family because it was really hard to live without him.” - Female, Sydney, New South Wales

Positively, the proportion of young people who are **worried about their education being disrupted** or held back as a result of the changes to schooling, has dropped significantly from 67% in April to 45% in July-August, but again slightly higher in Melbourne (50%). Uncertainty about arrangements for final exams caused confusion and concern, particularly for Year 12 students, and they really appreciated increased clarity about these arrangements once available. For some young people, the rapid return to school also threw their study routines out and introduced new stresses and worries.

“Everyone saying it will be best for the kids to go back into an environment where they have got other friends. But for me, I get overwhelmed very easily and stressed and I feel very pressured all the time. And I feel like... one day a week was good because you could still see people - like we weren't getting pushed straight back into the environment where you have to be cautious. And now all a sudden we have to go back, but we are still not allowed to be close... we have to be close, but we have sanitise... I find that personally stressful and I get overwhelmed very easily. But no-one kind of said, 'Is that you want?' They kind of just forced us to have to be in that situation.” - Female, Sydney, New South Wales

The proportion who worried about **a friend or family member contracting the virus** remained steady (from 40% in April to 42% in July-August). This is understandably slightly higher in Melbourne (47%). Roughly a third (30%) were concerned about **a second peak of the virus** taking place in Australia, as it has in Victoria and in many countries overseas. The same proportion were concerned about **contracting COVID-19 themselves**.

“My mum has really bad lungs, so like if I were to get it and to transfer to her

then it would be really bad. So, a lot of my friends have been going out and I have been invited places, but I'm not able to go. So, you do feel a little bit left out when people like post stuff about it. But at the end of the day, it's like what you have to do so, yeah.” - Female, Sydney, New South Wales

“For me it's the fear of the second wave, I guess, that's because I think recently, we had eight new cases and there's obviously that fear that its going to spread like again and we have to go through this again.” - Male, Melbourne, Victoria

During online consultations, some young people expressed concern about how the return to schooling may have increased their risk of exposure to COVID-19, particularly during the period in June when rules about returning to school were changing frequently. Their concerns about whether they would be at risk – or put others at risk – are an important reminder of the need to clearly communicate changes to health orders, and the rationale for them, directly to children and young people.

“It was first of all really weird that they just decided all of a sudden, that we're all gonna go back full time, because they were being really cautious about it earlier. They were sending every school, every year back one day a week in certain areas - social distancing, there was hand sanitizer everywhere, they were wiping the desks and everything. And then all of a sudden they've just thrown everybody back in school, which means no more social distancing. There's around 10 times more people than there normally would be. So, there's not going to be as much cleaning, there's not gonna be as much anything. So, it was kind of weird just to be thrown in that situation. I think that it's important for kids to go back to school because a lot of kids have been not as on top of their work as they had been when

they were with teachers in a classroom. But the kind of sickness side of it is a little bit scary." - Female, Sydney, New South Wales

The fifth highest area of worry (29%) was about **people not following physical distancing** or hygiene rules enough, up from 24% in April. Worry about **not knowing or understanding the social distancing and lockdown rules** and getting in trouble with the law dropped from 24% to 8%. This drop might be explained by young people having more time to become familiar with and adjust to the rules.

Young people found it frustrating when physical distancing rules seemed confusing or contradictory, particularly at times when distancing wasn't being observed at school but was being observed in other settings. This was particularly front of mind as schools were first reopening.

"Especially going to a school with like 1200 kids you cannot [socially distance] - it just does not work. Like, after every class - and I think our schools getting to its capacity - it'd be like shoulder to shoulder and especially the stairwells you know you literally try and get up the stairs and yeah doesn't work." - Female, Regional Northern Territory

"We're under the same kind of things as retirement homes, so pretty much once we get back from school at 3.30pm we go into isolation, like we pretty much are in the boarding house and we've just got to pretty much stay in our rooms. We're allowed to go out for a walk or a run - that's really the only activities we're allowed to do. So we are practicing social distance because kind of they have to, otherwise the government will shut the school down. But it's just difficult because you go to school and you're not

practising anything and then you have to come back and, yes, so." - Female, Regional New South Wales

Worry about a **loss of family income** fell from 37% in April to 26% in July-August. Similarly, worry about the **national economy** dropped from 29% in April to 19% in July-August. In April, 19% of five young people were worried about **their own income levels**, but this dropped to 12% in July-August. These findings could be a sign that job support measures have provided some level of assurance to young people and their families. That said, some young people recognise that the full economic impact may not be understood for months if not years and that it is young people who will bear the brunt of an economic downturn.

"I think if we do go back to normal by the end of the year, I feel like maybe the damage has already been done: lots of us have lost our jobs and then when we like turn on the news, it's always talking about like what the effect of Corona is going to have on the next five years."
- Female, Melbourne, Victoria (Stage 4 lockdown)

In both April and July-August, the top three worries for young people related to isolation from friends and family, disruptions to education, and a friend or family member contracting COVID-19.

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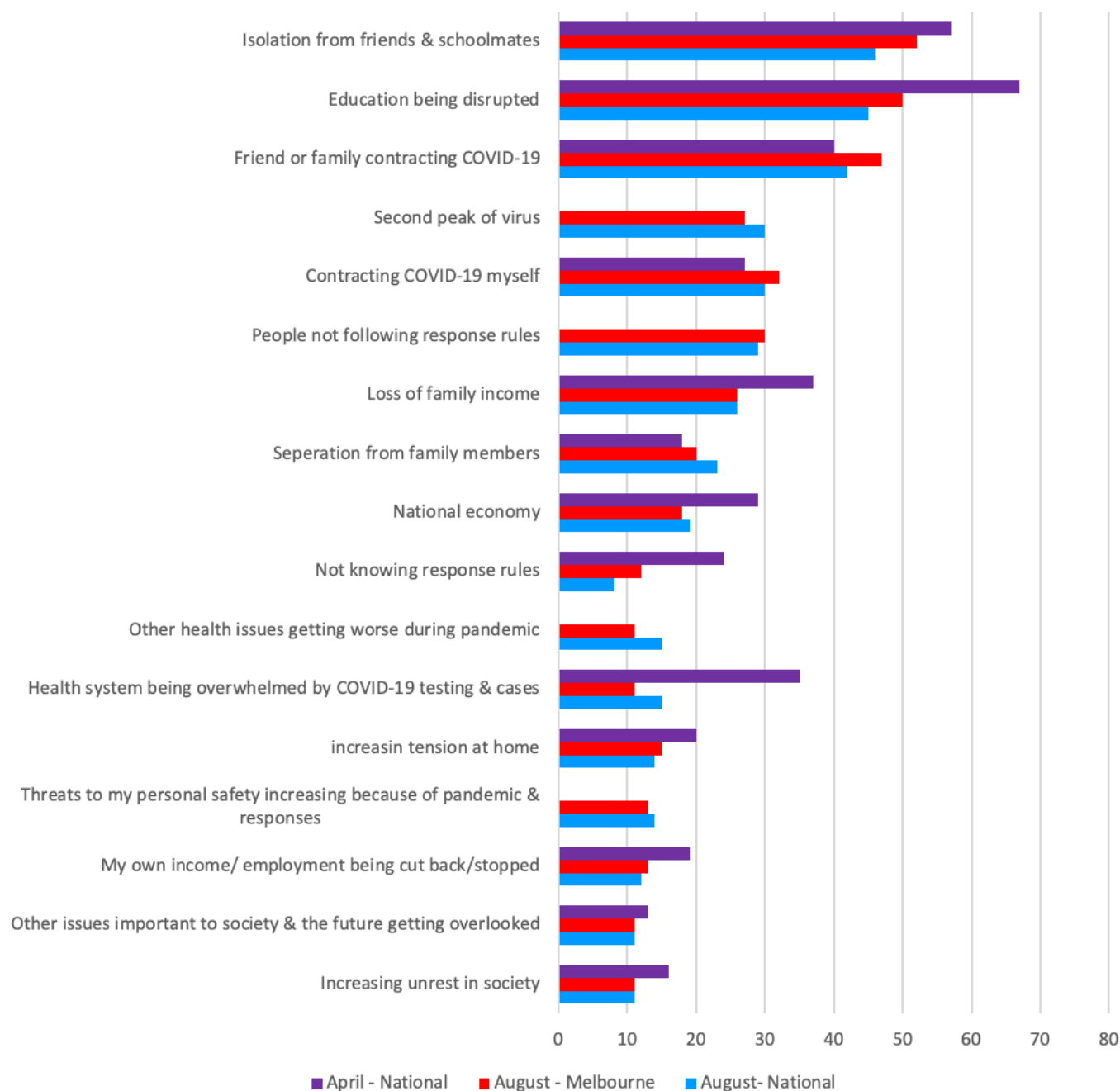
"When COVID started, my dad was supposed to come back. But then the airports, they were shut down, so like I didn't see my dad for about three months. And yeah that was like a huge impact on my family because it was really hard to live without him."

- Female, Sydney, New South Wales



"It's kind of frightening to know that a lot of people are dying, and I was sad that it happened."

Things young people are worrying about during the pandemic (%)



What young people want more information about

When asked to choose the top three things they want to know more about from a list of 10 options, young people primarily want to understand how the pandemic directly affects their life before broadening their thinking to the wider impacts on the world around them. They were particularly keen to know more about various COVID-19 transmission issues.

Two in five (42%) young people want to know more about **'where we are in terms of finding a cure and effective treatments and vaccinations that reduce long term negative health impacts'**. This was a bigger concern in regional Australia (48%) than in capital cities (38%). One in three (36%) wanted more information about **'the virus itself,**

how it is transmitted and how it is changing'. Almost a third (32%) want to better understand **'the number of cases and related deaths and whether we have it under control in the state where I live'**. A similar proportion (31%) wanted better insight into **'the real likelihood and possible impact of a second peak of community infection'**, although this was lower in Victoria (17%), which may be understandable given they were already directly experiencing a second wave.

"What I want to know from my government is if they are doing a vaccine, not a cure. How far are they getting into [it]. What's the main problem with it and when can we see it distributed." - Male, Regional New South Wales

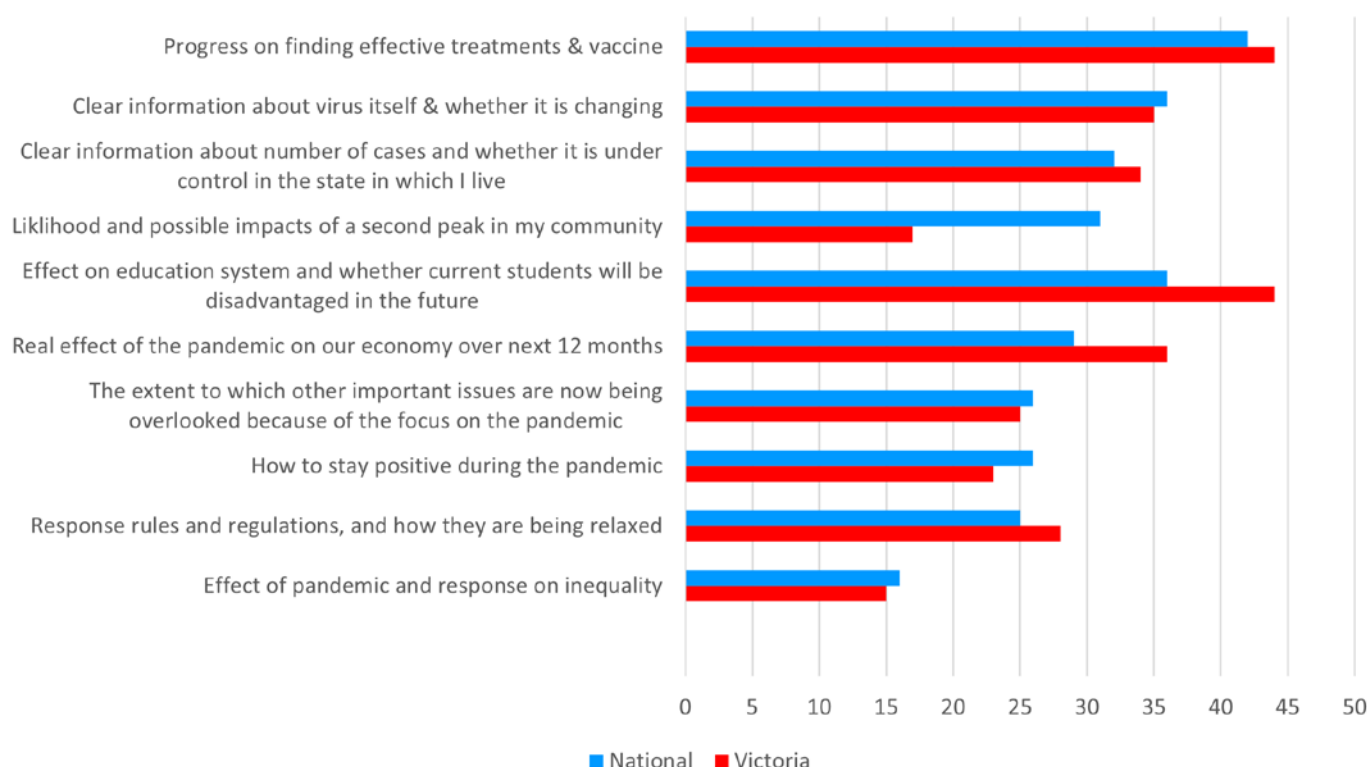
"I heard a thing on the radio the other day and they said it's actually like never

going to go away. So, is this going to be like one of the new common ways people die - just like forever, similar to like cancer or something?... If it's never going to go away, it's kinda scary." - Female, Sydney, New South Wales

"It's the fear of the second wave, I guess... I think recently we had eight new cases. There's obviously that fear that it's going to spread again and we have to go through this again." - Male, Melbourne, Victoria

In terms 36% of young people wanted to know more about **'the effect the pandemic and response has had on the education system, and whether current students will be disadvantaged in the future because of it'**. This was a bigger concern across Victoria (44%), including in Melbourne (46%).

Things young people want to better understand in relation to the pandemic (%)



It becomes clear at this point that after the transmission and health impacts of the virus, a broader level of concern and desire for insight about the world beyond immediate personal physical and psychological safety needs begins to manifest.

The economy and the effect the pandemic and response will have on it over the next twelve months

is something 29% wanted to better understand. This was a much bigger question to those in Victoria (36%), possibly indicating the real alarm caused by the second lockdown in Melbourne.

"[The communities] went through the drought and then they were like, oh the Corona, I can't go through that! So, they shut their businesses and they're not re-opening them, some of them." - Female, Regional New South Wales

Across the nation, 26% of young people want better understanding of **the extent to which the attention being afforded to the COVID-19 pandemic is distracting from and**

causing other important issues (such as the environment, climate change, inequality, homelessness etc.) to be overlooked. At the same time, 26% also want a better understanding of **how to stay positive throughout the pandemic.** On a related note, 16% wanted a better understanding of **the impact the pandemic and responses is having on the levels of inequality in our community.**

A quarter (25%) of young people also want better understanding of **the rules and regulations that are part of the response and how lockdown measures are being managed.** This is only slightly higher in Melbourne (29%), possibly indicating that public information about the return to lockdown was relatively clear or that, having been through it before, young people had developed a level of understanding about it.

42%

Two in five (42%) young people want to know more about 'where we are in terms of finding a cure and effective treatments and vaccinations that reduce long term negative health impacts'.

“

"I heard a thing on the radio the other day and they said it's actually like never going to go away. So is this going to be like one of the new common ways people die - just like forever, similar to like cancer or something?... If it's never going to go away, it's kinda scary."

- Female, Sydney, New South Wales

Many young people are accessing support to catch up on their education, but a worrying equity gap is emerging

One of the areas of life that young people are concerned has been most dramatically impacted during the pandemic is their schooling. Over half (55%) of young people consider that they are now behind in their education, compared to where they were before the pandemic. This rises to 59% in Melbourne. At the same time, just over one tenth, only 12%, consider that they are now in a better position.

Schools are doing the heavy lifting in providing support to catch up students who have fallen behind: 87% of young people who felt they were behind said that they are receiving some support from their school to catch up. Still, that means that one in 10 young people who have fallen behind are not receiving school support to catch up. Over half of young people (53%) said that they are also receiving some form of after-school support, either from their school or teacher, their parent or carer, or a paid tutor / tuition class.

Despite a positive overall picture, the young people we spoke to in consultations highlighted the rising risk of an equity gap in educational outcomes due to the pandemic. They talked about students who had struggled during the lockdown to stay on top of their studies, and who are now less engaged with school despite a return to classrooms and falling further behind. They also reflected on students who have been reluctant to return to school – for example, one young person wanted to remain at home as they had benefited from some respite from bullying during remote schooling. These concerns resonate with recent reports that over 3,000 students in NSW public schools have not returned to classrooms following the end of remote learning.¹ These are the young people we need to really understand and support lest they fall under the radar and disengage from education permanently.

55%

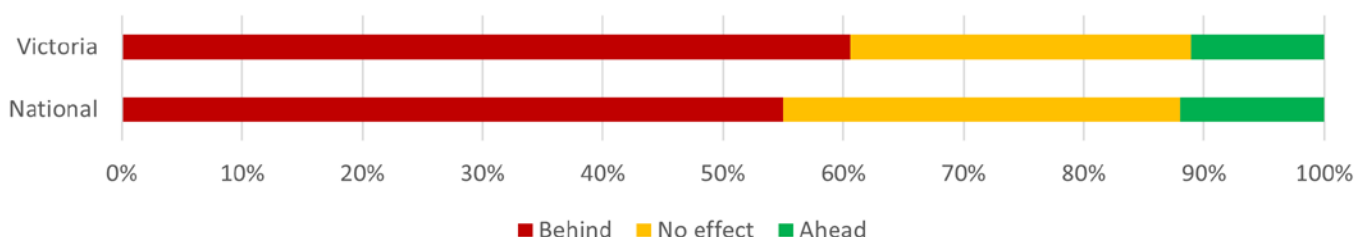
Over half (55%) of young people consider that they are now behind in their education, compared to where they were before the pandemic. This rises to 59% in Melbourne.



“The aim of the schooling system is that we all have this level playing field. But... through online learning already we’re at an advantage going to such an overly privileged school. It just widens this gap and it really sets these people down so much further than what they could do and it really like puts a block in their potential.”

- Female, Sydney, New South Wales

Effect on schooling compared to before the pandemic



1. <https://www.smh.com.au/national/nsw/thousands-of-nsw-students-never-returned-to-school-after-lockdown-20200901-p55rai.html>

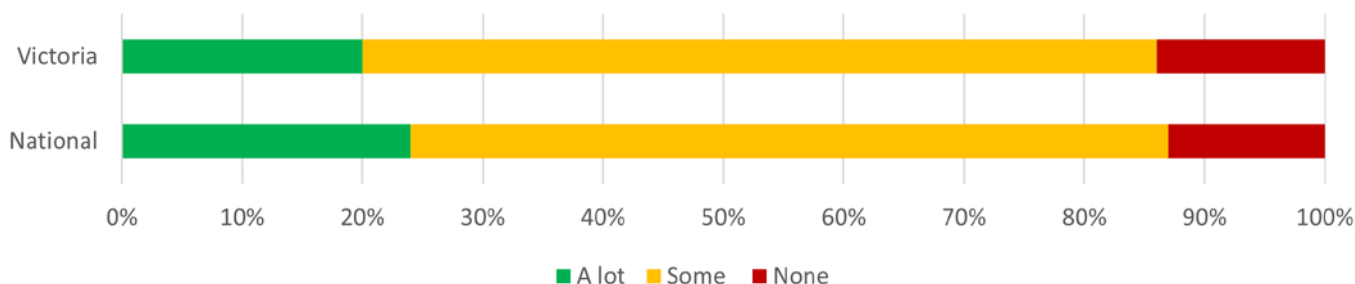
"The aim of the schooling system is that we all have this level playing field - we all get this [compulsory] education and then we all try to get whatever mark we can to get into whatever course we're eligible to get into. But...through online learning already we're at an advantage going to such an overly privileged school. It just widens this gap and it really sets these people down so much further than what they could do and it really like puts a block in their potential... obviously we've got no idea what that's like but I can only imagine that it would be so hard to try come back and compete with us with this 24/7 loving teachers that really care about us and this complete opposite view on education." - Female, Sydney, New South Wales

"Personally, I see that some people have struggled at home. and it might be easier at school, but [they] just feel really overwhelmed. And then when they came back to those sessions where there is a lot of work, and then they get given more work, it just kind of adds this extra stress. And then they almost just sit there at the back of the class almost feeling like ... I can just tell they are not feeling like right." - Male, Sydney, New South Wales

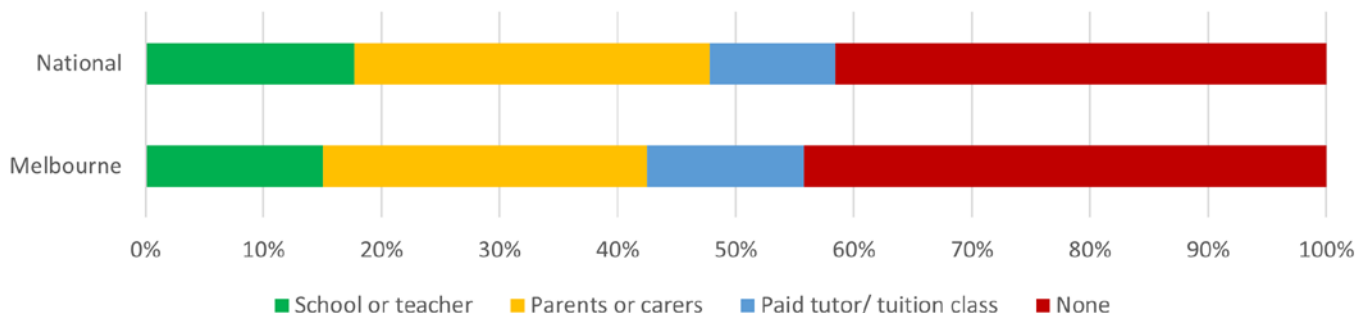
87%

87% of young people who felt they were behind said that they are receiving some support from their school to catch up.

Level of support from school for students who have fallen behind to catch up



Receive additional education support after school from...



The pandemic has amplified the need to destigmatise and diversify our approach to mental health and wellbeing for young people

Throughout the consultations we have 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 during the initial national lockdown 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.

The majority of young people (62%) **feel confident they can turn to their family or carers for any support they require**. This is very slightly higher than it was at the beginning of the pandemic (58%). However, less young people **feel confident turning to their friends for support** (37%, down from 55% in April). This decline warrants further understanding – it could be that the shifts into (and then out of) lockdown have somehow eroded some of the peer support avenues that young people might normally rely on. It might also be recognition that more young people now have support needs beyond what friends can and will provide and/or beyond what they want to seek from friends.

Very reassuringly, the proportion of young people in Australia who say they **feel isolated and don't know where to turn outside their family/carers** has more than halved from 24% in April to 11% in July/August. This is broadly consistent with the reduced level of worry about being socially isolated, and fact that young people are now less likely to report having to stop seeing their friends.

The proportion of young people who say that **social distancing rules have impacted their ability to effectively access support options outside their family** has also fallen to a third of what it was in April, from 30% to 11%. This likely reflects an easing of restrictions and return of some face-to-face services.

Discussions in consultations often highlighted the need to diversify and destigmatise mental health and psychosocial support approaches. Many young people want to see more coverage of mental health and wellbeing in the school curriculum. They also want a positive, skills-based approach rather than just information on 'mental illness'. Some talked about the importance of normalising the idea that 'it's OK to not be OK' and to push back against the stigma associated with feeling like you need additional support to maintain good mental health. Some also talked about the stigma of visiting counsellors or mental health services, and recognised that other options need to be in place.

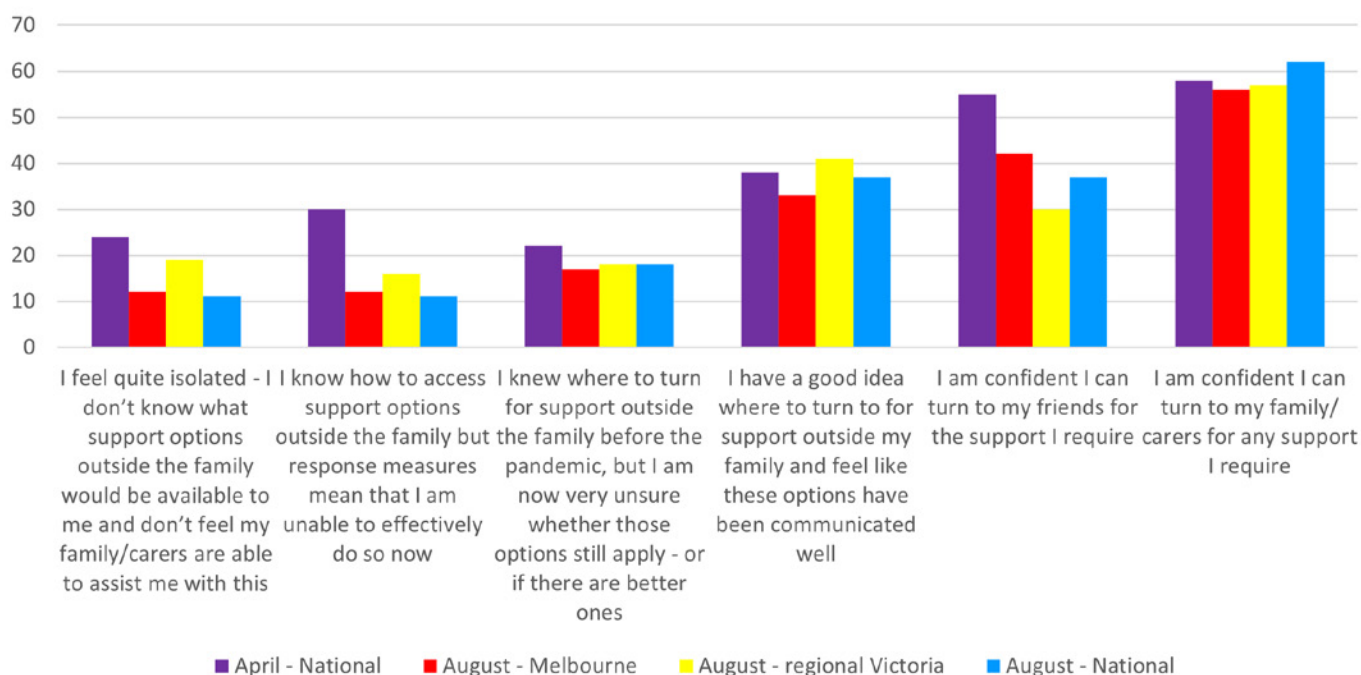
"Don't put us in a corner [if we] go to counselling. Give us the opportunity to say why should we do this, why not, is there any other option I can do? Maybe I can put my stress onto something else instead of having to speak to someone - because it just doesn't work for every single person. So being aware that people respond differently, and not by alluding it's something that can just be taught, I think would be the most beneficial way to talk about it and make it seem it's alright." - Female, Melbourne, Victoria

This feedback is consistent with observations made by [young people in NSW impacted by drought](#) during UNICEF Australia's 2019 consultations and summit. They similarly called for strengths-based and community-driven psychosocial support, as well as peer-to-peer support models that avoid pathologising the distress, grief and sadness that come from living through a profoundly stressful experience like drought.

62%

The majority of young people (62%) feel confident they can turn to their family or carers for any support they require. This is very slightly higher than it was at the beginning of the pandemic (58%).

Sources of psycho-social support during pandemic (%)



Lockdown has changed family life for many young people, many of whom have taken on new home responsibilities

The pandemic has led to changes in family life and home responsibilities for many young people.

Over half (57%) of young people have had to take on increased responsibilities at home during the pandemic. This is reasonably consistent between females (60%) and males (55%). These responsibilities include cooking (24%), cleaning (35%), household maintenance (25%), supervising or looking after siblings, including with schoolwork, or babysitting (19%), and caring for extended family members, including grandparents (13%).

“Yeah, so I have more responsibilities, I come from a pretty big family, my mum’s just had two bubs recently, and then my dad’s an essential worker. So it was just her at home. So I found I had to help mum around the house more, taking care of them. And it kind of put my responsibility of school work out - so more family home responsibility but less school.” - Female, Brisbane, Queensland

“I find because dad is continuously working, he’s finding it a bit hard and stressing a bit more. So, he tries to work a bit more than often, so my mum’s constantly, “Do the chickens, make your

bed, do the chores around the house.” And then my dad’s just recently come home with a knee injury, so I have to look after, like, I have to look after him, I have to look after my sister, my chickens, my pets, the dog, all that. And I find that it can be a challenge, but it can be a new experience too.” - Male, Sydney, New South Wales

Some young people (15%) are contributing to household income by taking on additional paid work. Over 1 in 20 young people (7% - a small proportion too easy to overlook) reported having to become the primary breadwinner for the

family. It is important that if young people take on additional work responsibilities, that they are supported to do so without undermining their education, health, or development.

“I’ve had to take on more hours at work and help kind of pay the bills and stuff.” - Female, Darwin, Northern Territory

During consultations, young people brought these findings to life. Some spoke positively about contributing to the family through taking on additional responsibility, and some talked about learning new skills. That said, others talked about these responsibilities creating a challenge for them to manage online schooling.

Lockdown also brought a lot of additional time together as a family. For some it was an opportunity for positive family connection and a chance to build new skills and give back to their families. But in some cases that brought its own stresses, and young people were particularly concerned for their peers who were navigating lockdown in unsupported or unsafe homes.

“I think with the assistance of our parents who have been supporting us our entire life - to be able to turn that on its head and to be able to support them through their businesses, through making life at home just that extra bit easier, has been an incredible learning curve for a lot of teenage boys who haven’t had to do that before – [they] have [had] their mum’s kind of coddle them and make sure that they’ve just got to get off to school with their sandwiches and their lunch and their drink bottle and their sport uniform, and come home and have a nice dinner - and to flip that, and you be the one at home doing all that for them, is really positive thing and a good way to look at what the world’s been going through.” - Male, Sydney, New South Wales

57%

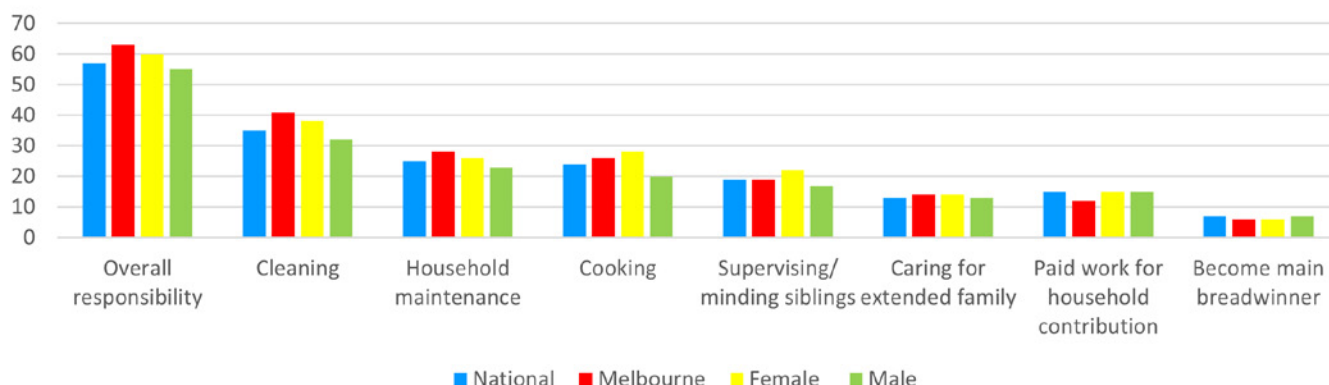
Over half (57%) of young people have had to take on increased responsibilities at home during the pandemic.

“

“I’ve had to take on more hours at work and help kind of pay the bills and stuff.”

- Female, Darwin, Northern Territory

Increased responsibilities at home (%)



Young people lack platforms to contribute to decisions that affect them: we are talking 'about' young people, but not always 'with' them

Information and knowledge are power. And they both have the power to shape the way we respond to a situation, depending on our level of understanding. Young people continue to be discerning in seeking out and navigating information about the pandemic, but there is a question about the extent to which they are recognised as a meaningful cohort of stakeholders with the capacity to participate and add value to decisions that affect them. From the point of view of young people, they are in the discussion are being talked about, but too often decisionmakers fail to talk 'to' them.

Information and communication

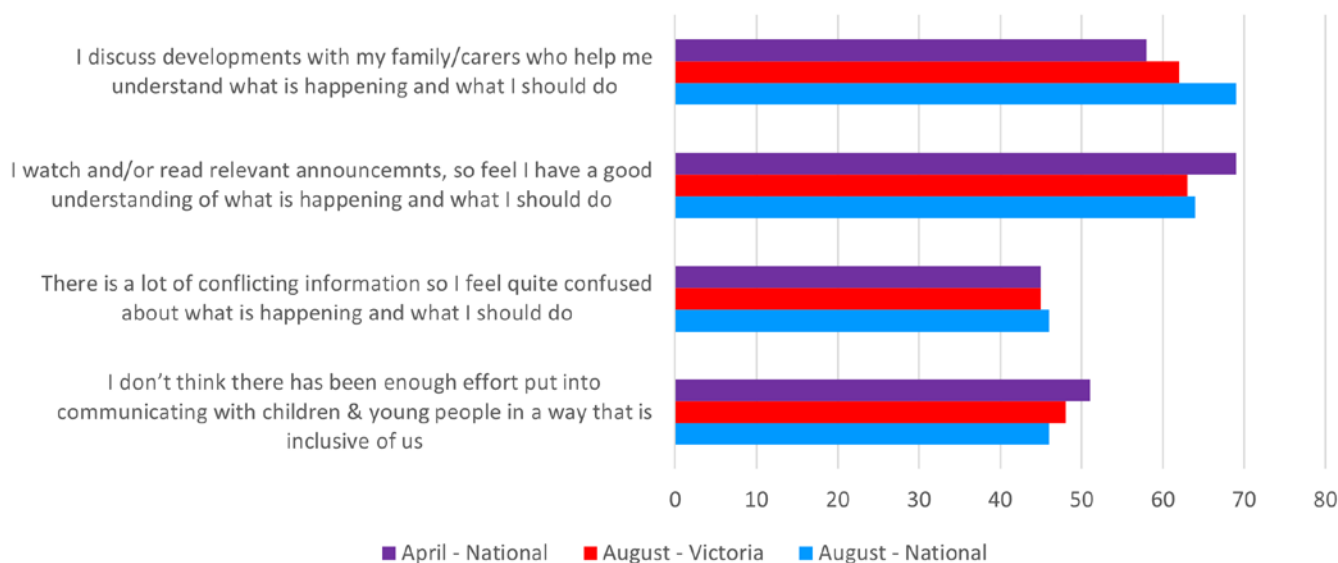
Underlying many of the concerns, and much of the discussion among young people in Australia in relation to the pandemic and the national response, sits communication and information sharing – from the media, governments, and the community.

Most Australian young people (64%) still feel they have a good understanding of what is happening through **reading and watching the news and other announcements**. Some young people talked about the need to sometimes 'turn off' from updates and announcements, particularly during peak times of the pandemic.

"There was a point where I just couldn't be bothered to read the news anymore because it was all so upsetting, and it was just figures and it just kept getting worse and worse every day. It was really tiring to keep up with it. And I think, especially when you follow so many media sources, or you have social media, it's really hard to filter out what's important. It's very easy to get buried in everything." - Female, Sydney, New South Wales

Young people are more likely to **discuss developments with their family and carers** than earlier in the pandemic (69% in July/August compared to 58% in April). Some young people reflected on the need to apply judgement in navigating

Communicating COVID information with young people (%)



information, whether that be from friends and family, or from the media.

“Mainly my parents and my friends [is where I get information from] but, of course, you always have to have a critical mind when you see that stuff. So, none of it I truly think, “Oh this is fact.” When I watch the news, when I see news when I hear things, I trust my parents because I know they have a good judgement but I also trust my judgement so when I see the news I don’t automatically believe that’s what’s going to happen so it’s kind of iffy.” - Female, 15 years old, Home schooling, Western Australia

At the same time, the proportion of young people in Australia who think that there **hasn’t been enough effort put into communicating effectively with children and young people** has dropped slightly from 51% at the beginning to 46%, with significantly more females sharing this view (50%) than males (42%), while a quarter (24% - same for both genders) disagree with this statement.

However, young people still feel like they are being talked about, rather than being included in communications. It is critical, particularly during times of change or uncertainty, that communication is directed to children and young people in an accessible way. Some young people in Melbourne suggested that the government establish child- and youth-friendly communication channels where updates can be provided. Ideally, these channels would also enable young people to send any questions they have about the rules and what is expected of

them through. Some also felt that certain decisions – including managing the return to school – might have been improved if young people had been consulted.

“I think that you know the current information about restrictions...could [be] more accessible towards young people. Especially I think when they were discussing if school should be closing or not, they weren’t actually addressing young people most of the time, it was regarded to parents and stuff. But it’s like impacting us so I think we should have access to that information.” - Female, Sydney, New South Wales

“Maybe they could before [the press conferences] get a couple of students to write in about maybe certain things or they could maybe even get a young person to maybe curate like social media even. Because that could definitely appeal out to young people - to give their voice and so then it can be spread a lot more amongst young people I guess.” - Female, Melbourne, Victoria

“I feel like if the government had talked to like the youth about going back to school, I feel we would know more information about like bus stops and how many people there are. So, I feel if they had asked us, it would have been a decision like for the better.” - Female, Sydney, New South Wales

The proportion of young people who 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 has remained

steady at 43% (45% in April), though almost three in ten (28%) disagree with that view.

“I found it quite confusing because, in school there’s a lot of what the media says and what we’re being told, there’s a lot of double standards. We’ve been told two different things and it kind of makes it confusing because we don’t know who to trust.” - Female, Sydney, New South Wales

An observation made repeatedly, and discussed across different contexts, concerned the frustration for many young people about the inconsistency and confusion of changes to social distancing rules, with many commenting that there was often no context or explanation given for why some situations attract different rules. For example, many didn’t understand why school (a largely group activity) could return, but they couldn’t yet congregate outside of school.

They highlight the critical point that children and young people need to receive clearer information, not only about what is changing, but also about why and what it means for them and the wider community. It is also important for them to have appropriate platforms to ask questions and to seek clarification on anything that is confusing. While schools and parents can help to translate information, it is important not to rely on these mechanisms.

After five months of pandemic response measures, including various lockdown periods, young people in Australia are demonstrating that they are very discerning and analytical about where they seek out information about this ongoing situation, as well as being very clear about the sources they trust.

The overwhelming majority – almost all (96%) – of young people trust their **parents or guardians** to provide them with accurate information about the pandemic and the response measures. The next most trusted sources for young people are the **Chief Medical Officers and Health officials** at the federal and state levels (90%). After that, a similar proportion - 88% - trust their **teachers and schools**.

A common theme emerging from consultations was that young people recognise the expertise and authority

of health experts. Many also talked about trusting their teachers and schools with decisions about making school safely. However, they would appreciate opportunities to feed their perspectives and experiences into decisions that affect them.

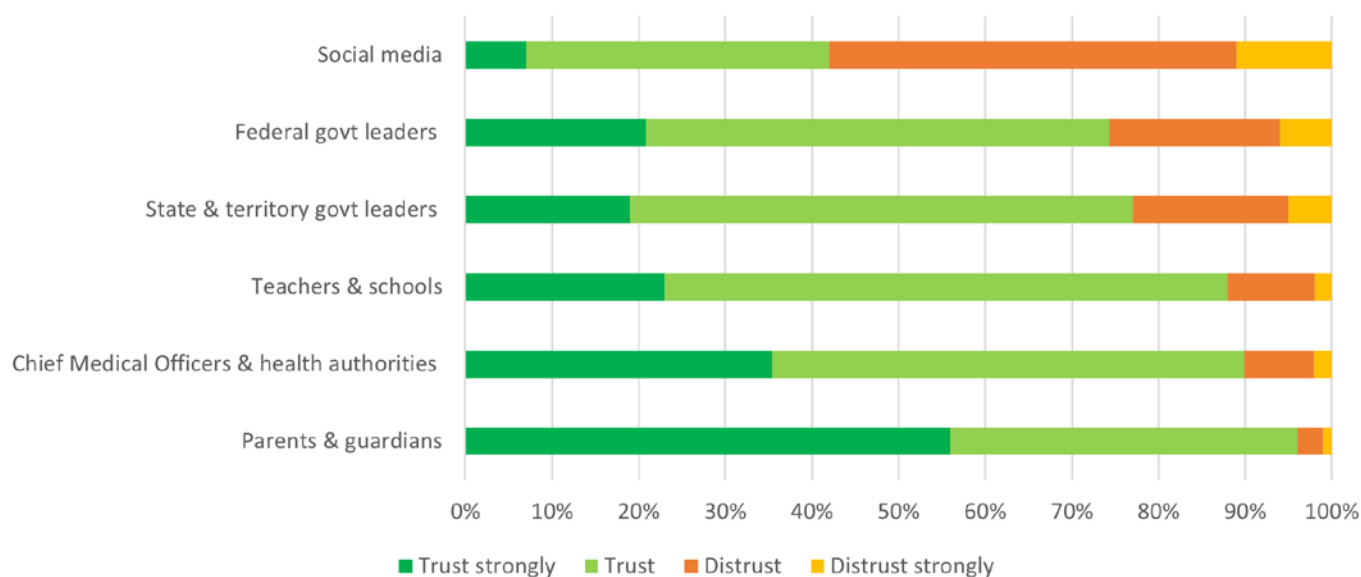
When it comes to political leaders, about four in five (78%) trust **state and territory leaders** to provide accurate information. Three in four (74%) trust **federal government leaders**.

A dramatically smaller proportion of young people in Australia (42%) say they trust **social media** for accurate information about the virus, pandemic, and responses.



“I think that you know the current information about restrictions...could [be] more accessible towards young people. Especially I think when they were discussing if school should be closing or not, they weren't actually addressing young people most of the time, it was regarded to parents and stuff. But it's like impacting us so I think we should have access to that information.” - Female, Sydney, New South Wales

Level of trust in information sources about the pandemic & responses





Young person 1: “This is the first time that we’ve been asked anything like this.”

Young person 2: “Having a voice.”

Young person 3: “For people to take us seriously.”

- Discussion between young people, Regional Northern Territory

While young people don’t necessarily feel completely excluded from public discussions about the pandemic, many feel they are treated as subsidiary players, and the overwhelming majority cannot see a meaningful way to feed into the decision-making process – a perspective that has hugely increased as time has passed.

In April, 25% of young people felt that **children and young people were considered to be equal stakeholders/ participants in the pandemic**. By July/ August, this had risen to 59%. Despite this positive trend, 41% of young people still don’t feel like an equal stakeholder. Furthermore, in April 40% believed that **many of the discussions about children and young people (e.g. school closures) are more about the impact on parents and carers**. This almost doubled by July-August to 75%.

In consultations, some young people said they were comfortable that their needs were being accommodated, despite the lack of opportunity to contribute to those discussions directly. Others felt that their needs were deprioritised compared to

other stakeholders – one observation was that it felt like an ‘adult’s ball game’.

Overall, young people tend to say they would like to be consulted about their concerns and their views on the way forward out of the pandemic. They recognise that they can bring a unique perspective to problems, that might indeed help foster better solutions.

“It feels like they keep on talking ‘about’ us and they are not talking ‘with’ us. So, they are kind of imaging they are us and putting themselves [in the picture] sort of thing. But they have actually got no consideration to what our actual opinions are.” - Female, Sydney, New South Wales

Of concern, the proportion of young people who 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, has more than doubled from 26% in April to 65% in July/August.

“I definitely think there’s an opportunity for young people to voice their opinion

towards the government and stuff. It doesn’t have to be the final stage. But just so that those bigger bodies sort of understand what we’re going through as well... Like having more youth representation in government, whether it is through giving advisory councils a more prominent role...” - Female, Sydney, New South Wales

At the beginning of the pandemic, just over two fifths of young people in Australia (44%) felt that there was **little recognition that many young people are on the front line as workers**. By July/August, this view had risen to an astonishing four in five (79%) of young people.

At the same time, the proportion of young people who consider there has been a **disproportionate emphasis on young people in the media as examples of people who are not taking the pandemic response seriously**, while most people are clearly trying to do the right thing, has risen from just under four in ten (38%) to almost seven in ten (67%).²

2. In both March and July-August, participants were asked if they thought that children and young people need to step up and take more responsibility when it comes to the pandemic and following social distancing rules. Between these surveys, the proportion that said yes rose very significantly from 32 to 70%. However, this measure lacks context as they were not asked to what extent they held this same view about older generations and whether young people were, in their view, any more or less irresponsible than older age groups. For this reason, this data has not been included in this analysis – and questioning in this regard will be rectified in phase 3 of this longitudinal study.

During online consultations, many young people expressed concern that the media's perception of young people was overly simplistic and stereotyping. many consider that there has been a lack of positive representation of young people, and a feeling that that the perceptions and experiences young people are having that are relevant to, and a consequence of, the pandemic and response measures are not being listened to.

"I feel like you're one or the other - like you're either Greta Thunberg or you're like a lazy Tik Toker... like there is no in between." - Female, Sydney, New South Wales

Many talked about young people being blamed for not following health

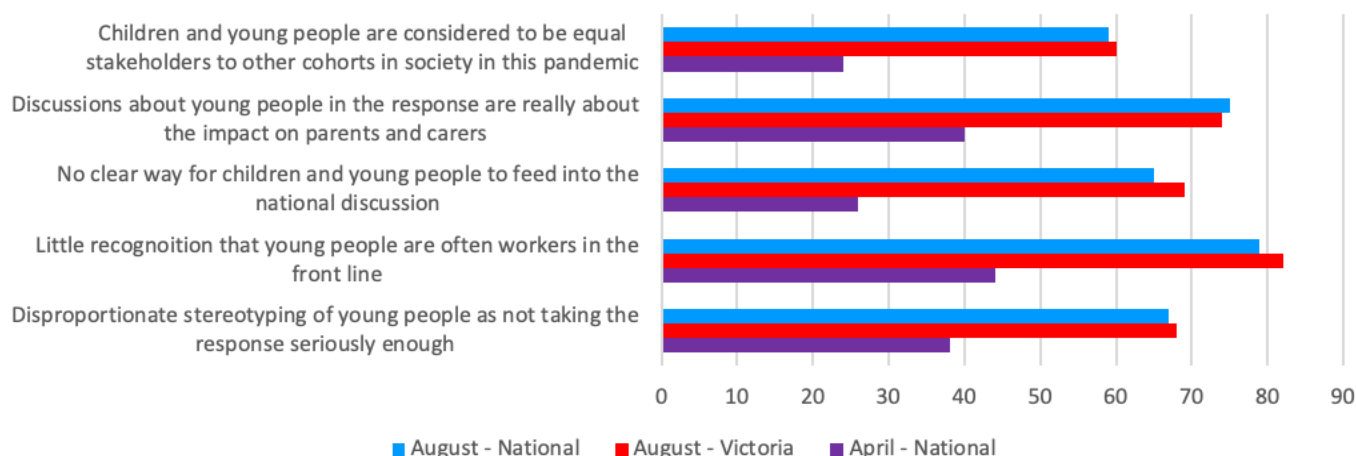
orders, instead of having a constructive discussion with young people about how to help their peers understand and follow the rules.

"I think it's more they're just blaming and then not giving anyone a solution. I think there should be more done to understand maybe how we can help young people understand more about the pandemic and certain ways we can improve this. I think our voice... doesn't get heard as much. And I think there could be more young people's input on ways that we could appeal to other young people in understanding what's going on I guess." - Female, Melbourne, Victoria

79%

At the beginning of the pandemic, just over two fifths of young people in Australia (44%) felt that there was little recognition that many young people are on the front line as workers. By July/August, this view had risen to an astonishing four in five (79%) of young people.

Representation & role of children & young people during pandemic (%)



Young people will bear the legacy of this pandemic into the future: they need to play a key role in reimagining a post-pandemic Australia

We asked young people to consider the big issues of the world around them, including the pandemic, and to rank their top three. The list they were provided was drawn from research conducted as part of the UNICEF Australia 2019 Young Ambassador Report [A Climate for Change](#), as well as the first phase of our COVID-19 research, [Living in Limbo](#). Consultations included wide ranging discussions about the biggest issues facing young people, about the world young people want to see on the other side of this pandemic, and about what should be done to reimagine and realise that world.

Across the country, **COVID-19 pandemic and response** is unsurprisingly and consistently the greatest concern (36%) for young Australians at the moment. As other lines of questioning have shown, there is also concern about the **erosion of education opportunities** (30% and 36% for Melbourne). One in four (26%) are also deeply concerned about the future of the **economy over the next 12 months**.

Online consultations echoed these themes, with many young people flagging the direct and indirect impacts of the pandemic as critical issues impacting on young people's lives.

"I think the biggest issue facing young people right now, obviously right now it's gotta be due to Coronavirus, it's the lack of social interaction that we're able to have outside of school and during school even as well with all the regulations in

place." - Male, Brisbane, Queensland

"Well, the pandemic of course I'm worried about, that is one, but what I'm mostly concerned about is my education and if I'm going to be able to see my family members like I used to..." - Male, Regional New South Wales

"I know this sounds a little adult stuff but I'm worried about the economy as well... It might collapse because we've already had a worse economy than the Great Depression." - Male, Home Schooling, Western Australia

Just under a quarter (22%) are concerned about **society losing focus on other big issues** because of the pandemic and responses. During consultations young people were pragmatic about the need to focus on the pandemic at the moment. But many also felt that other issues that preceded COVID-19 remain important and they were worried about losing focus on those other issues.

"We kind of went from drought, fire, COVID and then all through this time, yeah it's rained but drought is still going on and everyone has gone "Oh my god, COVID" and forgot about drought. It's raining and yeah there is green grass coming up but we're still kind of in a little bit of drought." - Female, Regional New South Wales

"I think that with COVID, of course there needs to be an amount of attention on it, but I think that other major issues shouldn't have lost all the attention like they did. I think attention should have

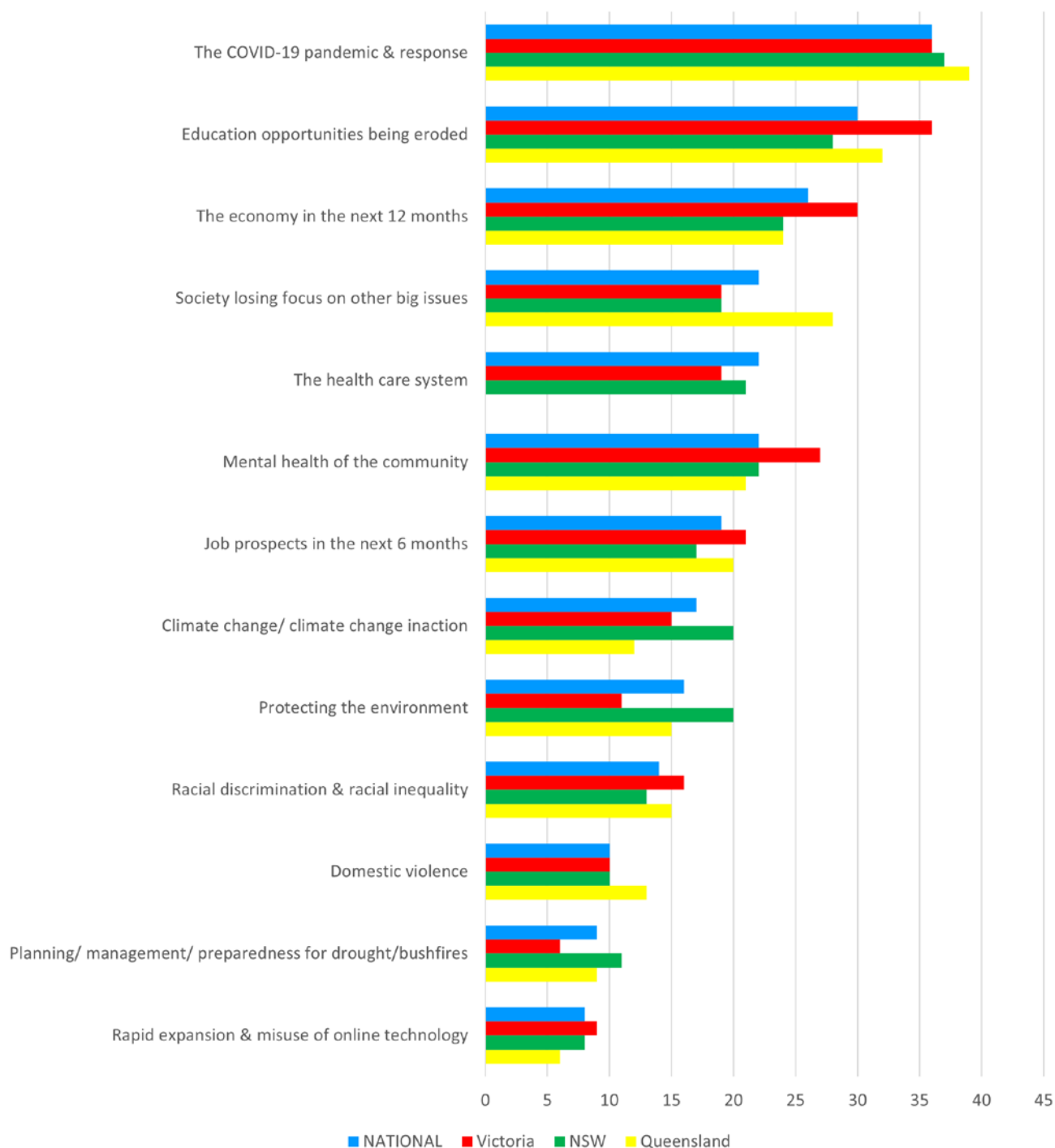
been put onto COVID-19 and on solving it and stuff but also [put] the same amount of attention on these long-term issues because of course they aren't going to disappear after this. Sure, we may have a COVID free world but we're not going to have a racism or homophobic or sexism free world." - Female, Regional Northern Territory

The same proportion (22%) list both the **healthcare system** and the **mental health of the community** as concerns. Concern about the mental health of the community is higher in Melbourne (28%).

Other concerns include **job prospects over the next six months** (19%), **climate change** (17%), **protecting the environment** (16%), **racial discrimination** (14%), **domestic violence** (10%), **drought and bushfire management** (9%), and the **expansion and misuse of online technology** (8%). The proportion of females (14%) concerned about domestic violence is double that of males (7%).

During consultations, various issues - particularly climate change, mental health and a range of social justice and inequality issues - were raised at different times. For example, students in regional NT want to see significant change in the negative and punitive attitudes of police and other adults towards vulnerable young people, with more understanding, support, and activities such as sport, particularly those young people coming in conflict with the law. Some of the consultations coincided with a significant uptick in

Top 3 things that concern young people in Australia today (%)



media attention and public discourse on the Black Lives Matter movement.

This was clearly front of mind for many young people during that time, with many highlighting the need for greater action and activism.

One group of male students in Melbourne discussed wanting to see a greater focus on combatting toxic masculinity, including through approaches such as educating boys at a younger age about gender equality and respectful relationships. Other young people talked about the need to take action on significant humanitarian and human rights issues around the world.

Young people want to see strong and focused action on these various big issues coming out of the pandemic. Many also want improved preparedness planning for future emergencies including pandemics, drawing on the learning from COVID-19.

“I think at least to plan solutions to those problems not to just keep them off and push them from the back of our minds so that when this sort of dies down a little we can implement those instead of having to start planning them after corona is over.” - Female, Melbourne, Victoria

There was a strong sense that this pandemic has become a catalyst for change, a turning point – young people don’t feel that returning to ‘normal’ is an option. Despite all the challenges and stresses of 2020, young people can envisage a better world ahead if we can collectively harness the learning from this pandemic. In particular, young people spoke extensively about the positive impact the pandemic has had on the environment.

“A lot of crazy things have happened while Coronavirus has been happening, and I think as a world we need to take...

obviously it’s a horrible situation but we need to take out some of the good that’s happened during this, like for instance our climate is looking better than it has in the past 40 years. So, if we come out of Coronavirus and we realise the little things that we can stop doing sustainably like certain factories being open 24/7. Just do little things for the environment. We can use Coronavirus as almost a test period for this and the small things that have stopped happening, you know, I’m no longer catching a bus or going to get a coffee, I’m just making one at home. All these little things that we can now do sustainably which in the long term would affect the environment.” - Male, Brisbane, Queensland

While many young people see this as an opportunity to reset and refocus on moving toward a better world, they can also see the potential for a negative trajectory. Young people want to the post-COVID world to be more connected, more cooperative, more kind, more equitable, and more balanced. They think the pandemic response has proven the need to follow evidence and expert advice and science rather than letting politics drive decisions. A lot of young people also talked about the importance of maintaining some of the good hygiene practices now being followed into the future.

“It will probably be quite interesting to see because of the pandemic it’s either really going to push everyone apart or it’s going to bring everyone together so either those divisions are going to get a lot worse or they’re going to get a lot better. Like obviously hoping that they get better and that we can all work together that there is a possibility that we will all be separated like especially like there was a spike in racism against Chinese people when it started.” - Female, Regional Victoria

“

“We kind of went from drought, fire, COVID and then all through this time, yeah it’s rained but drought is still going on and everyone has gone “Oh my god Covid” and forgot about drought. It’s raining and yeah there is green grass coming up but we’re still kind of in a little bit of drought.” – Female, Regional New South Wales

“

“[One issue is] having young people being heard and represented, because a lot of the policies that are being passed are going to impact our future so it would be great if we had a say.” - Female, Sydney, New South Wales

In one consultation, participants discussed the need for a greater focus on practical life skills in the school curriculum to better equip them for life after school. They identified the need for more access to practical skills on things like buying a house, parenting, cooking, and paying taxes.

“I didn’t know what my human rights were until I read a children’s book on it a couple of months ago, you know, and I think there’s so many really, really important life skills that just aren’t taught at school.” - Female, Regional Northern Territory

Despite some powerful and often optimistic discussions about life beyond COVID-19, it’s important to recognise that this is still a deeply stressful time and for some young people the pandemic and its impacts feel too immediate and uncertain to be able to envisage a world beyond the pandemic. Many young people are understandably worried about their future.

“I actually have no idea what post-COVID is actually going to look like. Right now, I can’t picture 90,000 people sitting in the MCG watching a footy match, you know? I honestly have no clue what it holds. I think in terms of like the workplace and stuff, for example at my work, in an attempt to cut down shifts they put three people on a shift that usually eight people do, and they operated to perfection. So, does that mean now that those other five people post-COVID are going to lose their position because three people were able to do the job of eight?” - Male, Melbourne, Victoria

Young people know that they are the future, and they stand ready to play an active role in reshaping and reimagining our country as we emerge from the

challenges of the pandemic. But they are worried that insufficient progress by decisionmakers on a range of big issues will mean that these will be passed on to the next generation to address without support. They also want real, concrete opportunities to be able to make a genuine and recognised contribution to the decision-making process. It is firmly the view of this generation of young people that the actions and decisions of today’s leaders will determine the future that they inherit: it is critical that they have accessible and impactful platforms to help shape those decisions.

“I think there is a lot of pressure at the moment to go out and fix a lot of issues in the world that have been left to us which we do feel need to be changed and need to be fixed but it’s a lot of responsibility to take on at such a young age I think. And it can cause a lot of people a lot of stress in their daily lives just to be thinking about it because we’re so hyper-aware of what is going on in the world, which is a good thing but at the same time its stressful especially in formative years...” - Female, Melbourne Victoria

“[One issue is] having young people being heard and represented, because a lot of the policies that are being passed are going to impact our future so it would be great if we had a say.” - Female, Sydney, New South Wales

*“Most people know that we’re the future of the country and that if they f**k it up for us now there’s not going to be a future.” - Male, regional Northern Territory*

CONCLUSION

This pandemic continues to impact young people’s lives in myriad ways. Five months into the pandemic, young people in Australia are learning to navigate the so-called ‘new normal’ of the COVID-19 pandemic, drawing on their lived experience and adapting as they go. They are doing it tough, but they are also doing their best. An easing of restrictions in much of the country has been important in restoring some sort of normalcy to young people’s lives – if Melbourne can contain the current wave, and if Australia can avoid further outbreaks and accompanying lockdowns, we hope that by the end of the year young people might show further improvements in their wellbeing. At the same time, even with restrictions easing, their wellbeing is still under strain and it is not yet clear what impact this year will have on their futures. Strong supports to navigate the adverse impacts of the pandemic,

including on education and mental health and wellbeing, are more important than ever.

UNICEF Australia, like the young people we listened to, is deeply concerned that the pandemic is exacerbating existing disparities and even creating new ones. A strong equity lens is necessary as we move through the pandemic response and recovery – we cannot let our most vulnerable young people fall off the radar, or deeper into disadvantage and exclusion.

It is disappointing that young people feel even less able to feed into discussions about how we navigate this crisis than in April. They have unique and nuanced insights and solutions to offer and we will all benefit from their inputs. They will bear the legacy of this crisis into the future: they should have a say in the future we create.



RECOMMENDATIONS

The key recommendations that have emerged from this engagement with young people are:

- 1.** **Recommendation 1:** Invest in targeted research and specialist consultations to better understand the lived experience and risks for the most vulnerable and excluded young people across Australia throughout this pandemic.
- 2.** **Recommendation 2:** Invest in clear and accessible communication with children and young people on matters that affect them (such as changes to health orders and school or education arrangements). This could include government-run social media platforms and child-friendly public briefings.
- 3.** **Recommendation 3:** Implement targeted strategies to re-engage students who have not yet returned to school or who are at risk of disengagement, and ensure catch-up support is provided to all students in need.
- 4.** **Recommendation 4:** In co-design with young people, identify opportunities to diversify and strengthen mental health and psychosocial support initiatives, including through schools, to foster skills to manage young people's mental health and wellbeing, with an emphasis on strengths-based, community-driven and peer-to-peer support models.
- 5.** **Recommendation 5:** Create platforms and mechanisms for children and young people to meaningfully engage as key stakeholders throughout the pandemic, including in reimagining Australia beyond COVID-19.

PART 3: ABOUT THIS REPORT

Timeline and approach

This report is part of a three-phase approach to understanding and tracking young people’s lived experience of living through the COVID-19 pandemic during 2020.

UNICEF has an international mandate to uphold the rights and wellbeing of children and young people around the world – to help create a fair chance for every child. UNICEF Australia is interested in understanding the broad spectrum of impacts that this rapidly evolving situation is having on our youngest generations. This work is part of our ongoing commitment to listen to them and to help elevate their voices.

Between 7 and 16 April 2020, the first nationally representative survey of over 1,000 young people age 13-17 years was conducted, mere weeks after the national lockdown response was implemented on March 20. The findings of this survey were reported in UNICEF Australia’s [Living in Limbo](#) report, the first phase of this longitudinal examination.

Between 9 July and 4 August, a second nationally representative survey of 1,289 children aged 13-17 years was conducted. This was soon after the national lockdown was lifted on June 20. During this time, increasingly tighter restrictions were imposed in Victoria, including with Stage 3 restrictions for Melbourne from July 8. The survey closed just before Victoria entered a state-wide lockdown and Stage 4 restrictions in Melbourne on August 2. To better understand the impact of returning to lockdown for young people, Melbourne was over-sampled in this survey.

Since the pandemic began, UNICEF Australia Young Ambassadors have continued to consult children and young people in schools across the country, in city and regional areas, using online platforms. Some non-school groups have also participated, such as young people in home schooling and from drought-affected areas. These consultations are intended to expand on and complement the survey findings, rather than to simply corroborate them.

Young Ambassador consultations have continued throughout the year as part of our ongoing commitment to hearing and elevating the voices of children and young people across Australia.

It is our hope that this work will provide valuable insights into how the pandemic and the national response is affecting our young people, and will assist decisionmakers to develop appropriate policy responses to meet the needs of children and young people throughout the pandemic response and recovery.

Methodology and Limitations

Qualitative: with the support of UNICEF Australia staff, UNICEF Australia Young Ambassadors conducted 19 online consultations and heard from 167 children and young people from New South Wales, Victoria, Queensland, Western Australia, and the Northern Territory. There was a mix of public, private, and independent schools, from city and regional locations, as well as a home-schooling group from Western Australia and a group of young people affected by drought in New South Wales. The children and young people were

between 8 years old and 18 years old, with most consultations focused on students in Years 10-12 at school.

The qualitative findings are intended to be indicative and illustrative rather than representative. This year has been extremely challenging for schools, and some teachers and students will feel better equipped than others to participate in these consultations. This will invariably skew some of the qualitative findings.

Quantitative: UNICEF Australia engaged with YouGov Galaxy to conduct a national statistically representative survey of 1,289 young people aged between 13-17 years. The survey ran from 9 July – 4 August 2020. Victoria was over-sampled with 403 respondents, with 350 being in Melbourne to gain insight into their particular situation. Despite best efforts, we were unable to secure representative samples for every other state and territory.

Some of the most vulnerable and excluded young people in Australia may not be in a position to participate in either the national survey or the online consultations. The findings of this report need to be viewed with an understanding that this shortcoming exists and that their lived experience may be significantly different to other young people, particularly as the pandemic has compounded many existing issues and inequities.

Acknowledgements

This fact sheet was prepared by Brinsley Marlay (External Communications Manager), Juliet Attenborough (Programs and Advocacy Manager) and Vanessa Kutcher (Child and Youth Participation Coordinator). We would like to thank the teachers for supporting their students to participate in the consultations as well as all the young people who contributed their insights and experiences. All consultations were run by UNICEF Australia Young Ambassadors – we thank them for their contribution and support, and for their ongoing commitment to listening to children and young people across Australia and elevating their voices.