Designing the Future

Research and ideas for action from the 2022 UNICEF Australia Young Ambassadors, to improve outcomes for children and young people.





UNICEF Australia acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of Country of the land and communities in which we, our partners and Young Ambassadors live and work throughout Australia, and their connection to their lands, waters, and communities. We pay respect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and cultures, and to Elders past, present and emerging. We extend this to the lands on which our project partners, *DrawHistory*, and the Young Ambassadors live and work throughout the country.



About the

Young Ambassador Program

The UNICEF Australia Young Ambassador program gives young people aged 15-24 the opportunity to speak up for children's rights and what matters to Australia's young people. Recruited from across Australia, they are trained in leadership, advocacy, media and communications, and engaging with children and young people.

Young Ambassadors <u>bring their skills and lived-experiences to the issues that UNICEF Australia advocates for.</u> Each year, they hear from children and young people in their communities and find out what matters to young people. They then raise these issues with our nation's key decision-makers.



"We are not the problem, we are the solution. We don't want to be boxed. We don't want ceilings. We want freedom to be whatever a human mind can dream."

Excerpt from the The Imagination Declaration, August 2019



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Introduction

The voices of children and young people are often only used as a data source to detect and highlight issues, while the policy addressing these issues is left to adult decision makers. This year's program sought to improve this approach by embedding the participation and engagement of the Young Ambassadors through the entire policy development process. Empowering children and young people to not only voice their concerns, but to actively contribute with meaningful solutions.

The Young Ambassadors co-designed a research survey, consulted with, and distributed it to 2000 children and young people across Australia, crafted policy solutions to address the challenges identified and made the following recommendations.

"In a future that can often feel hopeless for young people, what policy solutions can we propose to develop and implement to ensure young people are empowered to take civic action on issues that matter most to them?"

- Question posed to Young Ambassadors during Policy Incubator

How we got here:

Undertaken an intensive, modular learning program in policy development and advocacy.

Co-designed and administered the 2022 Youth Survey to almost 2,000+ Australian children and young people.

Engaged in a 3-day design sprint to synthesise the data and insights from our national survey, in order to develop bold policy solutions.

Ideas for Action



Every Public and Independent school provides free Mental Health First Aid training to all teaching staff



Create a National framework for consistent and meaningful civic engagement education in all public and independent schools



Every Primary Health Network
(PHN) throughout Australia include
positions for at least two young
people on their Community Advisory
Committee (CAC)



Create an online, accessible, open-data platform dedicated to responding to what matters to young people, when it matters

Developed the 2022 UNICEF Australia Young Ambassadors Ideas for action that will be lobbied in Canberra and beyond.

This program provided 11 Young Ambassadors with working knowledge and skills of youth policy development (from ideation to advocacy) and mentored and supported them in the practice of skills and knowledge in real time, on real issues of significance.

Designing the Survey

The National Youth Survey was co-designed by young people, for young people. Through two interactive sessions, the Young Ambassadors discussed the current state for children and young people, what the ideal future state they

would like to advocate for looks like, and what insights the survey could provide to support this advocacy. Through this process, the survey's three themes were identified.

SESSION 01	ACTION 01	THEME 01
In Co-Design Session 1, we discussed general observations around the current state for youth and the ideal future state we'd like to make from our advocacy.	Outputs include key topics and major themes	"Youth Voice, participation and Trust"
	ACTION 02 Outputs include key research questions	
SESSION 02	ACTION 03	THEME 02
In Co-Design Session 2, we nailed down further insights we'd like to get	Survey questions are developed	"Education and Civic Engagement"
from the questionnaire that would enhance our advo- cacy work	ACTION 04 Survey questions are formatted into questionnaire and consultations	THEME 03 "Post-Pandemic Hopes and Concerns"

The Three Survey Themes

Through this process, the survey's three themes were identified: youth voice, participation and

trust; education and civic engagement; and post-pandemic hopes and concerns.

Youth voice, participation and trust	Education and civic engagement	Post-pandemic hopes and concerns
How can the voice of young people be translated into decision-making in political systems? How can they feel like they're heard?	Are young people being given the educational tools to think and make decisions politically for themselves? What do young people want to explore and learn more about to be able to think critically for themselves?	What are the hopes and worries of young people in a changing Australia? Sub-themes include social media, mental health, and climate change and green economy.
"As a young person in Australia how much do you think decision-makers listen to and value your opinions?"	"How much do you feel that school discusses social issues you care about?"	"How much has COVID-19 changed the way you look at the future?"



Who Answered the Survey

Children and young people between the ages of 14 and 25 from across Australia participated in the survey and/or consultation, administered by UNICEF Australia and the Young Ambassa-

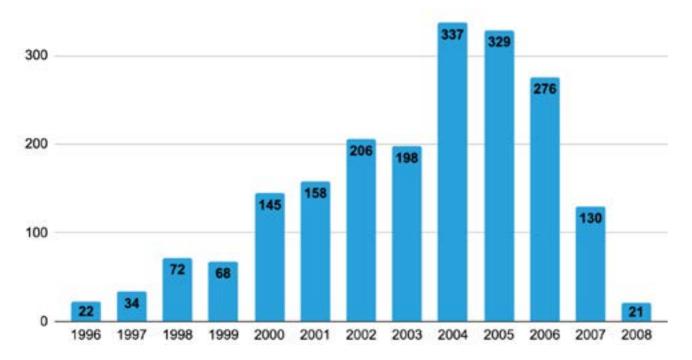
dors from the period of 21 May to 30 June 2022. We received 1996 completed responses from a diverse and representative cohort.

Of the children and young people surveyed:

- 77 people identified as Aboriginal and/ or Torres Strait Islanders (3.86%)
- 384 people identified as being a part of the Culturally and/or Linguistically Diverse communities (19.25%)
- 480 identified being a part of the LGBT-QIA+ communities (24.06%)
- 360 people with disabilities (including mental health related) (18.04%)

- 31 people having an out-of-home-care experience (1.55%)
- 77 people experienced/ing homelessness or housing stress (3.86%)
- 25 people identified as refugees and/or asylum seekers (1.25%)
- 8 people are young carers and/or having caring responsibilities (0.40%)

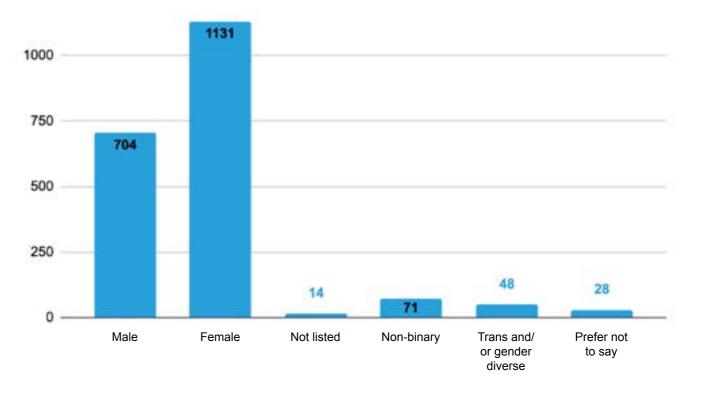
Our respondents were born in...



Our respondents came from...



Our respondents primarily identify as...



THE YOUTH SURVEY

What They Told Us

A major recurring theme of the survey results was trust. This finding was demonstrated by responses of high levels trust in the people that we know and high levels of distrust in the people that lead, but are so far away from us. Most respondents stated that their families / parents

cared the most about their concerns. This was then followed by their friends.

In contrast, respondents felt that political decision-makers cared the least.

Respondents were asked to ranked the following people/groups based on who they can openly express their opinions to from most to least

- 1. With friends (49% ranked friends the first)
- 2. With parents or family (32.5% ranked them second, with 24.8% ranked them first)
- 3. With educators (31.5% ranked them third)
- 4. On social media (23.1% ranked them third, 19.5% ranked them fourth and 26.8% ranked them fifth)
- 5. With local community (37.8% ranked them fifth)
- 6. With politicians (83.6% ranked them sixth)



Respondents did express feeling more listened to by their local councils and their educators than political decision-makers (state and national levels). Despite this, children and young people want to engage more with decision-makers face-to-face.

The ways in which respondents expressed how they want to engage in social issues



- "Social media" is most mentioned in the context of how they are currently engaging with social topics.
- "Politicians" is the word second most mentioned in the context of young people wanting to have face-to-face conversations with. This includes "decision-makers" and the "parliament".

Respondents also feel a sense of hopelessness about the present moment, but remain optimistic about the future. While they feel critical

about how they can individually impact change, they remain optimistic about their ability to be impactful as a collective.

"I believe our generation is motivated people who have an increasing presence in society and that we can all collectively create change in issues that are at the forefront of our lives."

- Responses from the Survey

"It's hard for one person to make a change or advocate for a change of a major issue which impacts the wellbeing and lifestyle of youth individuals living within this society."

- Responses from the Survey

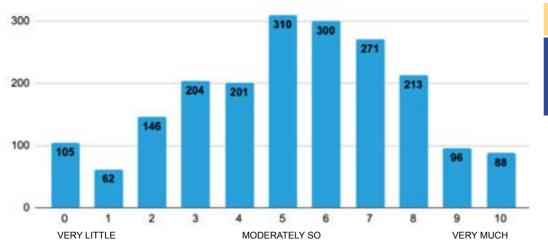
THE YOUTH SURVEY

What They Told Us

Overall, respondents did not see their main outlet for civic engagement - via social media - as being effective, with many expressing that more face-to-face engagements with political decision-makers was necessary to hold them

accountable. There was also a desire to discuss social issues more in educational settings as a way of building confidence and skills to advocate.

How much do you feel that your school or educational institution discuss(ed) the social issues that your care about?



The graph on the left shows how respondents rank the said question.
The X axis shows the rank

AVERAGE: 5.09

Respondents were also asked to rate the confidence in their ability to make a positive change to the above issues.

In terms of the issues of facing the current generation of young people and children in Aus-

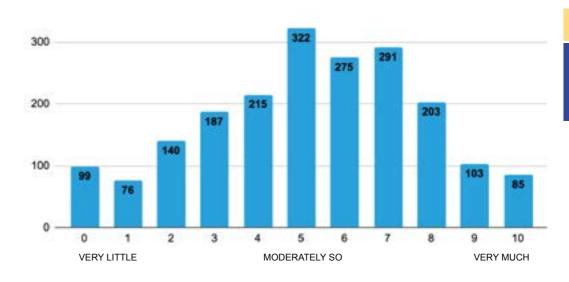
tralia, respondents identified cost of living and mental health as the most concerning.

How respondents rated social issues based on their level of importance to them (from most important to least important)

- 1. Cost of living
- 2. Mental health
- 3. Education
- 4. Housing and homelessness
- 5. Emergencies and disasters
- 6. Climate change
- 7. Early childhood education and care

- 8. Online protection, data and privacy
- 9. Gender equity
- 10. Refugee and asylum seekers
- 11. Youth unemployment
- 12. Health

And how much does (did) your school or educational institution help you to feel more confident about engaging with the issues that matter most?



AVERAGE: 5.09
MEDIAN: 5

The graph on the left shows how respondents

shows how respondents rank the said question. The X axis shows the rank on a scale of 0-10 and the Y axis represents the number of respondents.

IDEAS FOR ACTION 1

Every Public and Independent school provides free Mental Health First Aid training to all teaching staff

Promoting positive mental wellbeing, rather than placing a focus on an absence of mental health issues, has the power to significantly decrease the prevalence of mental illness in the future. We recommend that every Public and Independent school provides free Mental Health First Aid Training to all teaching staff.

Young people spend most of their time in school for at least 12- 14 years of their life and this solution benefits both teaching staff and the students, by providing staff the skills they need to help provide mental health support.

Research from the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare shows 1 in 7 children aged 4 - 17 years experienced a mental illness in the last 12 months. Further, Australian young people are 5 times less likely than the adult population to seek help at time of psychological distress. At the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic, approximately 1 in 3 young people experienced high levels of psychological stress. These statistics show a disturbing incline of mental health issues for children and young people and highlights a need for greater support and prevention.

We appreciate the amount of stress and pressure teachers are currently undergoing. We therefore also propose that the training is part of their required professional development. In Australia, many people struggle to afford to see a mental health professional, or are placed on a waiting list for months at a time. This training would be an investment that would save many young people's lives and have a positive impact, if we equip the people who see our future everyday with the skills to support young people with mental health. This will have both short- and long-term benefits for everyone in our communities. We want mental health support to be proactive for our future.

What children and young people told us

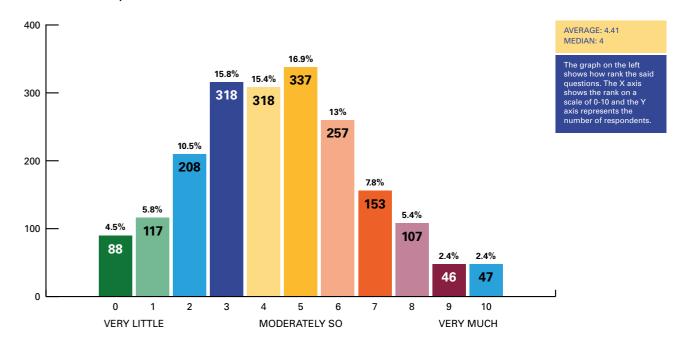
Positive mental health requires prevention, promotion, treatment and support. Currently, there are a serious lack of mental health resources and supports in schools. This is preventing cultural safety in schools, which by foundation, should be established in order to promote the full development of a child's identity. Consistent with The National Principles for Child Safe Organisations - 10 principles agreed by all Australian governments that give organisations across Australia a consistent approach to promoting a culture of child safety and wellbeing - creating cultural safety empowers people and enables them to contribute and feel safe to be themselves. In a child safe, culturally safe organisation, children, young people, family and community members feel that their culture and identity are respected.

Young people are constantly balancing several duties all at once; schooling, work, and extra commitments, all while being required to rapidly adapt and overcome crises such as COV-ID-19. As a result, it is no surprise mental health was highlighted as the second most important social issue amongst young people in Australia. Notably, out of 1,996 young people surveyed, only 2.4% felt that decision-makers took action in their interest.

Decision-makers cannot ignore young people's common voices, concerns, and needs for change. Our policy directly fulfils these demands and bridges the gap between what is needed and what can be achieved. Young people spend most of their time at school; our survey supports the fact that young people feel teachers and coaches listen to them the most. This is a powerful strength that presents the perfect opportunity for decision-makers to leverage

Respondents were asked to rate how much they think decision-makers take actions in their interest on a scale of 0 to 10.

As a young person in Australia, how much do you think decision-makers take actions in your interest?

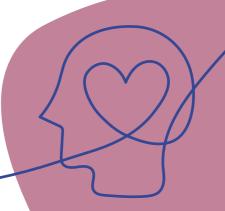


and address mental health. This is evidently one of the important social issues currently concerning young people between 17-24 years of age. With our policy, and with those connections already in place between students, teachers and the wider local community, we can effectively and strategically introduce free Mental Health Aid Training in schools.

How this will create further impact

We envision that this recommendation will be the first step in creating a school environment that is more supportive of prioritising mental health, both for students and teachers. By ensuring that teaching staff are educated in this particular form of first aid training, we can encourage teachers to look after their own mental health, exemplify this behaviour, and be a stable support system for students. This will initiate meaningful change in terms of decreasing the rates of depression, anxiety and suicide in adolescents. This is because teachers - the people

with whom they spend the most time every day - will be equipped to recognise the indicators and detrimental effects of poor mental health, and take action. It is our vision that this policy will act as a catalyst for further change in the future, as it ties into our three-prong approach. After establishing this policy, we suggest the introduction of a Liaison Officer in Local Government councils who can proactively channel the leadership and ideas of young people in strategic community planning. Supplementary to this, it would be ideal to tie all of this together and empower youth civic action by creating more recreational spaces for young people to connect and build community resilience. It takes a village to build a positive, stigma-free support system, and the mental health sector is no exception.



Create a National framework for consistent and meaningful civic engagement education in all public and independent schools

Empowering schools as local agents for civic engagement education will ensure all young Australians are equipped with theoretical and practical knowledge to support them in their own change-making endeavours. It will also increase confidence in decision makers and our democratic system. We recommend the creation of a National framework for consistent and meaningful civic engagement education in all Public and Independent schools.

Young people care deeply about social issues. Often, it is young people who are the most vocal about the most pressing social issues of our time, from climate action to consent laws, and mental health to LGBTQIA+ rights. However, most young people say they lack the confidence to make change. According to our national survey, participants gave a median score of 5 out of 10 in their "confidence in change-making." Further consultations with young Australians revealed that despite their deep passion, young people feel a sense of disillusionment and pessimism towards our government and civic systems to create positive change. If our goal is to instil a culture of civic engagement in future generations, increasing young people's confidence is essential.

Survey participants said they prefer civic engagement through face-to-face connection with the people they are engaging with. This could explain why participants ranked their connection to key decision makers (such as politicians) as very low. Young people feel disconnected from decision-makers, which leads to a climate of distrust surrounding democratic and political institutions. If we want to create a stable, thriving democracy, it is vital to ensure young people feel engaged and connected to decision-makers and the political system.

What children and young people told us

Schools are a good launch pad for building capacity and confidence for civic action because they are a safe educational setting for young people.

Our survey respondents said that:

- Young people feel listened to by educators
- Young people feel comfortable engaging in conversations on social issues with their teachers and friends
- Young people often get resources on social issues from their school, which help them gain an understanding of issues in the community and world.

All of these things mean that schools are the perfect base to develop civic action in young people.

To implement consistent civic engagement education programs across the country, the Federal Government will need to play the key leadership role of co-designing a framework, and advocating for this education to be adopted by all states. The Federal Government can lead collaboration between the different levels of government to ensure effective implementation. In the first instance, Federal MPs could coordi-

nate a round table discussion with their state and territory counterparts to reach consensus on how best to include civic education in Australian schools. The Federal Government could involve the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority to consult with civic engagement experts, and then design the framework which would guide the state and territory adoption.

State and territory governments, with the support of the federal government, would then have the responsibility to administer this civic education framework for schools to adopt.

Schools could choose to either deliver civic education programs internally, or collaborate with local partners to deliver civic education in schools. Local organisations could partner with schools to deliver civic education workshops in line with the framework, to take the burden off school staff in under-resourced schools.

A feasible first step to wider implementation could be piloting a program in selected schools and monitoring its impact and effectiveness. The Federal Government could fund this along-side the Australian Government Youth Steering Committee, as a way of equipping youth with the skills and desire to contribute to this body.

How this will create further impact

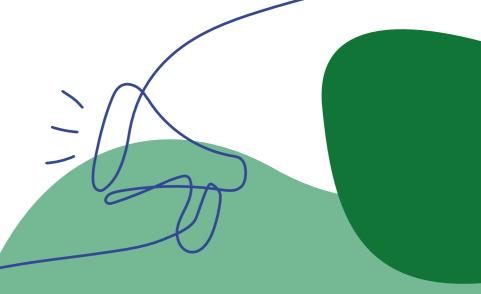
There are also significant benefits for decision-makers at all levels of government. There will be a significant increase in youth participation, with direct channels to youth developed in their electorates. Decision-makers will be able to develop positive relationships with current and future constituents. This will be achieved through improving their image, as they will be

seen as showing leadership on engaging with young people. In addition, they will be given a chance to address young people's concerns specific to their electorate, instead of being voted out by frustrated youth who were not given the tools to engage meaningfully.

In our survey, young people stated their desire for a channel to decision-makers. They also stated that they felt they could make the most impact at the local level. This was supported in our consultations with young people in Australia.

In a consultation with year 7-11 high school students from North Sydney Girls, New South Wales, the students expressed a keen interest in a program which facilitated connections between local MPs. These young people revealed they felt ignored by decision-makers and that youth advocacy was dismissed as an annoyance, citing negative responses from decision-makers to protests they had attended. Furthermore, while many had participated in civic action and advocacy through protests, petitions and social media, only one of the consultation participants had ever personally interacted with a local MP. The majority of participants shared that their family members had written letters or conversed with the local MPs to share concerns regarding local issues, however these issues were not addressed and no changes were made. These negative interactions contributed to their disillusionment with decision-makers.

By guiding students through civic participation routes and creating a connection with decision makers, young people will have a more direct channel to drive positive change.



Every Primary Health Network (PHN) throughout Australia include positions for at least two young people on their Community Advisory Committee (CAC)

Young people are experts of their own experience and are best placed to ensure supports are relevant and effective for young people. Young people on CACs can provide lived expertise to better inform service delivery and work together with health providers to systematically solve existing and emerging issues that could not be solved by one group alone. We recommend every PHN throughout Australia include positions for at least two young people on their CAC.

Young people have been disproportionately, negatively affected by the global COVID-19 pandemic. However, young people have also used their lived experiences for advocacy, leading young people to be described as "the driving force for change after COVID-19" by the OECD (2022). As the Australian Youth Affairs Coalition has stated, "young people don't just want to be heard. We want our seat at the table to create change for everyone. We are putting our hand up and want our chance to be a part of the solution." (2022)

As part of their funding requirements, PHNs must recruit CACs comprised of consumers and carers who have lived and living experiences with the local health system. CACs provide governance, ensuring the PHN's decisions, investments, and innovations are patient-centred, cost-effective, locally relevant, and aligned to local care experiences and expectations.

PHNs are required to ensure that CACs are representative of the diversity of the community served. For example, of the six PHNs in Victoria, only one has a young person, who is also the only person on the CAC. Thus, PHNs are not fulfilling their requirement to be representative of the communities they serve if they do not include young people.

What children and young people told us

Young people are ready and willing to advocate, however many do not have access to meaningful opportunities. Our national survey reported that young people see face-to-face engagements with decision-makers as necessary to hold them accountable and feel more listened to by local decision-makers, rather than state and national levels. By appointing young people to CACs as a governing body of PHNs, they have direct access to local decision-making stakeholders.

Before connecting with young people, it is best practice to utilise demographic data to refine approaches to further strategies, such as workforce planning, staff training and development, or youth engagement strategies. This is important as young people are not homogenous - a youth community in one PHN may have very different needs or priorities to young people in another region.

Another key element is to prioritise youth voices that are often disproportionately affected by health challenges, including multicultural and multifaith young people, regional and rural young people, LGBTIQ+ young people, Aboriginal young people and young people with disability. Young people are a highly diverse group with differing health-related needs and service preferences, and connections with trusted community partners will be key to ensuring safe engagement.

This recommendation does not require additional resourcing as PHNs and their CACs are already established and resourced. By introducing young people as CAC members, PHNs can further optimise resource allocation and ensure investments best align with local youth care needs and expectations.

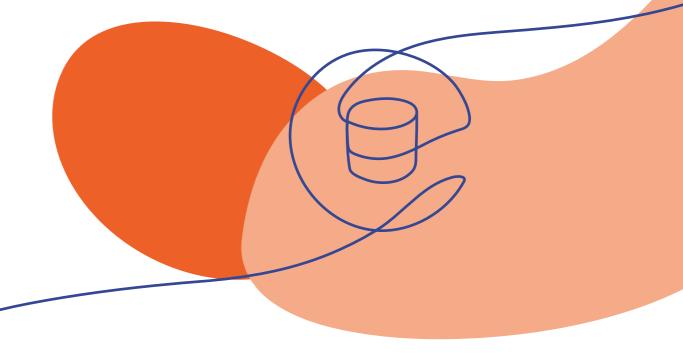


How this will create further impact

There has been significant development in youth policies and frameworks, including the introduction of the Australian Government's National Youth Policy Framework. The result of significant youth consultations, the Framework highlights what matters to young people in its priority areas: "youth empowerment and engagement" and "health and wellbeing". The importance of youth empowerment and health is also reflected in state Youth Strategies (DFFH, 2022) and is further backed by the State/Territory Youth Peaks (2022) across Australia, emphasising embedding "decision-making mechanisms that includes youth voices and lived experiences."

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There has been a shift in healthcare to include lived experiences and community partnerships as key components of best-practice healthcare, particularly for diverse communities. Young people are diverse in needs and experiences (DFFH, 2022) and require localised supports that are relevant to them. PHNs are "local agents of change in Australia's health system" (DH, 2016). They gain a strong understanding of people's health needs in their region, and commission health services to meet those needs, minimising gaps or duplication.



IDEAS FOR ACTION 4

Create an online, accessible, open-data platform dedicated to responding to what matters to young people, when it matters

What children and young people told us

According to our survey, young Australians currently don't feel like their voices are being heard in decision-making. To be sure, young people are engaged in politics, the Australian Election Survey shows that they are more involved than older generations when it comes to online communications, and involvement in offline processes is comparable between the two groups. In effect, while programs and opportunities exist for young people to contribute to the national discussion, these are largely inaccessible to young people outside of specific demographics.

We found there were many reasons for this view, including that:

- Consultation participation is for only a very privileged few. Barriers to participation identified included a lack of time, geographical isolation, and socioeconomic status.
- Consultations at present are slow to action their recommendations and do not create timely support for young people; or they don't report back to young people on the outcomes they have created.
- While young people want to take action in their own communities, their efforts are often hampered by a lack of resources or the evidence necessary for their efforts to be successful.

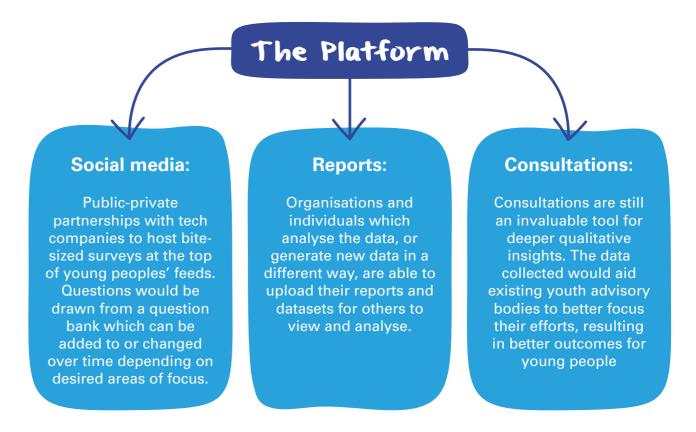
The public has access to regularly-updated de-identified data through examples like the Suicide and Self-Harm Monitoring system from the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. This data, collected by health services on the front line, is accompanied by reports from third-parties. These reports are publicly accessible data and offer a stepping-stone for more easily accessible than traditional academic journals. All prominent social networks regularly used by young people have also used messages at the top of feeds in the past for public-service announcements, and have polling functionality already built-in to their platforms.

Survey insight: Social Media was the most mentioned way young people want to engage in scial issues.

How this will create further impact

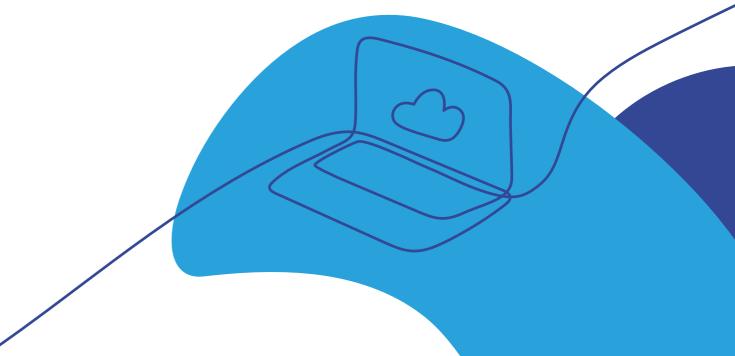
The foundation of this platform is to meet young people where we are - on social media - and deliver timely and relevant data to identify trends, emerging areas of concern, and inform policy responses, while simultaneously giving our young change-makers the tools they need to take action in their own communities.

The platform would have three key methods for collecting data that will then be accessible to young people.



This recommendation is easy to implement. Social media polling exists on all major platforms, and the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare has built a national platform for publicly accessible live data. It's effective, too - it offers a base for longitudinal 'temperature checks' of

youth attitudes over time, while significantly reducing the need for duplicate surveys and vastly increasing the quantity, quality and breadth of data that is readily adaptable to different issues that affect young people.





<u>UNICEF Australia Young Ambassadors are passionate, motivated and experienced.</u>

From mental health professionals and education advocates to award winning public speakers and community leaders, these incredible young people have come together from across Australia to raise the voices of the children and young people.



Emily 24, Victoria

We have a fundamental right to be involved in decision making



Harrison 18, Queensland

My interest is improving the quality of education



Amber 22, Western Australia

I am passionate about making young peoples voices heard



<u>Isabelle</u> 22, New South Wales

Young people have more power to change the world than we are told



Zara 19, Tasmania

During a young ambassador session was the first time I felt heard



Daniel 16, South Australia

Both my parents were born in low-income countries



<u>Grace</u> 19, Northern Territory

Nyikina woman and university student



Kbora 24, South Australia

I can never forget receiving donations of school supplies when I was young



Christopher 16, Victoria

I was born in New York City and attended a diverse primary school in Brooklyn



Manon 19, Queensland

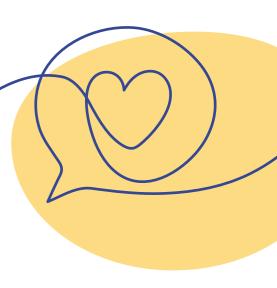
I live by the phrase; have courage and be kind

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<u>Jahin</u> 21, Australian Capital <u>Territory</u>

I want to be a torchbearer for young people who don't feel heard







/DrawHistory

About UNICEF Australia

From the most remote island communities to the heart of wartorn conflict zones, every child has rights to survival, education, health care, shelter, good nutrition, safe water and protection from war and disaster. These universal rights are guaranteed by the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, but they are often threatened by poverty, violence and discrimination.

That's why UNICEF stands up as a global champion for children's rights. We protect and support millions of children around the world with our development programs, advocacy and rapid response during humanitarian emergencies. UNICEF Australia raises funds to finance life-changing programs for children in some of the world's most disadvantaged communities. We also work with governments and civil society partners to strengthen and advance the systems that protect children's rights.

About DrawHistory

DrawHistory is a strategy and design consultancy in the Asia Pacific helping mission-driven people approach problems in fresh ways. We're a team of strategists, designers, communicators, researchers, and project managers. Together, we believe that progress only happens when you refuse to play things safe.

We have worked with more than 150 brands who are solving wicked societal problems, from leading global brands to fierce grassroots movements. Collectively, our people have worked on and led brand initiatives, digital transformation projects and research for Google, UNICEF, Population Services International, Centre for Social Impact, St John of God Health Care, Neami National, Australian Government, Change.org, and Wikimedia Foundation, parent nonprofit of Wikipedia.

DrawHistory is Western Australia's first agency to be a Certified Benefit Corporation.

