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A Climate for Change

2019 Young
Ambassador
Report

A Climate for Change:

2019 Young Ambassador Report

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Foreword



This year is the 30th anniversary of United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (the Children's Convention), and a year of action for children and their rights.

UNICEF Australia initiated the Young Ambassador Program as part of our mandate to amplify the voices and support the participation of children and young people across Australia in matters that concern them, either directly or indirectly. It is a significant part of our continuing work to ensure a fair chance for every child.

The ability and opportunity for children to participate in this regard is an essential principle that informs UNICEF Australia's way of working.

It is about children and young people having the opportunity to express their views, influence decision-making, to share their stories and achieve meaningful change. It is about being recognised as the stakeholders that they are. It is also about being provided with their rightful place at the table, alongside the rest of civil society.

There is a clear rationale at UNICEF Australia for ensuring that children and young people participate in our work. Firstly, the Children's Convention on the Rights of the Child (the Children's Convention) enshrines the right of children to say what they think should happen when adults are making decisions that affect them, and to have their opinions taken into account. On that basis, the participation of children is central to our mandate, vision, organisational values, our child rights-based approach, and our theory of change. We view children as citizens and social actors in their own right. And we hold the firm belief that, when we ensure the participation of children in the early stages of policy development and programming, we will not only improve our chance of getting it right for children and young people, but that governments are made more accountable.

The design of the UNICEF Australia Young Ambassador Program is drawn from peer to peer models of good practice. The program works to build upon the existing capacity of the Young Ambassadors, mentoring them further to have important conversations with children and young people across the country and to hear their views, as well as to represent those views to governments, decision-makers and influencers.

To this end, the Young Ambassadors consulted with over one and a half thousand children and young people across the country from pre-school, through high school, into young adulthood. Taking direction from the issues they discussed as being most impactful on their lives now and in the future, they compiled a questionnaire and conducted a national survey of young people aged 14 to 17 years – those who will soon be of voting age.

To some degree, it is probably not surprising to see the issues that we were told are of most concern to children and young people today. Broadly they sit under the banners of wellbeing, safety, learning, equality and the environment. However, it is the other message that we have received loud and clear, which goes straight to the heart of participation.

Children and young people in Australia today want action – and action on many fronts. They are often dissatisfied and frustrated by the ideology and politicisation that has enveloped the huge issues that they consider are shaping their lives, now and into the future.

It is no surprise that, in addition to wanting action, they want change. And to them, the greatest symbol of their thirst for action and change is an issue that they repeatedly told us was one of the greatest threats to their safety, now and into the future – that issue is **climate change**.

It is for this reason, we have made it the spotlight issue of this Young Ambassador report. Our title, *A Climate for Change*, not only references this issue, it speaks to the urgency children and young people feel for action on many fronts. It also highlights the fact that children and young people living in Australia today think that the time - the moment - for change nationally and globally is quite simply, now.

In 2019, thirty years after the Children's Convention was adopted, UNICEF Australia reaffirms its commitment to children, and invites the Australian Government to do the same. I congratulate and thank our eight Young Ambassadors who conducted this research - Ashleigh, Atosha, Eva, Indiana, Joshua, Lachlan, Steve and Xavier. This is a significant achievement. And they are among our future leaders.

Now it is my absolute pleasure to commend the 2018-19 UNICEF Australia Young Ambassador's report, *A Climate for Change*, to you.

Faithfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Tony Stuart". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal line above the name.

Tony Stuart
Chief Executive

At a Glance



Most children and young people in Australia have

Good Relationships

with family and friends
(71% aged 14 to 17 years have this)



Children and young people's perspective on

Safety in Public Places

becomes more considered as they grow older
(23% aged 14 to 17 feel unsafe in public spaces during the day compared to 73% at night)



The majority of children and young people, across age groups view

Climate Change

As being real and caused by human activity.
(Among those aged 14 to 17, 73% view it as affecting the world "a lot" now, and 84% "a lot" in the future.
59% view climate change as a threat to their safety)



From mid primary school onwards, children were aware that students have different learning styles and consider

Flexible and Consultative Teaching Styles

(70% aged 14 to 17 see effective teachers as being "approachable" and 68% as being prepared to "listen to students")



The concerns of children are, from a young age, influenced by

News Media

which they often access directly through friends and family (54% of those aged 14 to 17 get their news from articles posted by news outlets on social media - only 16% trust social media news to be "accurate, unbiased and truthful")



From a young age, children and young people equate

Education and Employment

(Among those aged 14 to 17 years, 89% are concerned about unemployment and getting a job, 73% want to learn about recruitment skills and 69% want to learn more about practical on-the-job skills)



From primary school onwards, children and young people still value

"Traditional" Subjects

in the curriculum (Among those aged 14 to 17, 66% value maths and 62% value English)



Across age groups, children and young people want Australia to embrace

Renewable Energy

(88% per cent want to move out of fossil fuels to renewables – only 3% want to stay with fossil fuels)



Mental Health

issues are a concern children begin to raise from Year 5 onwards (One quarter of young people aged 14 to 17 -24% - assess themselves as having bad mental health)



Children and young people, across age groups, are disheartened and frustrated by

Lack of Action on Climate Change

(•Three quarters [75%] aged 14 to 17 want Australia to take action • **69% want Australia to reduce its carbon emissions**)



From primary school onwards, children are very concerned about the effect of

Plastics and Pollution

on the environment (Among those aged 14 to 17, 64% are concerned about plastic pollution, 63% pollution of the oceans and of the air, 56% with littering)



Children and young people, across age groups, have low levels of

Trust in Politicians

(• 55% aged 14-17 have a low level of trust, compared to • 65% of new voters aged 18 and 19 years)



From a young age, some children and young people in Australia report feeling

Unsafe Online

(19% aged 14 to 17 feel unsafe online)



Children consistently discuss being

Bullied at School

from mid primary school onwards (43% aged 14 to 17 have been bullied in the last two years – only 35% of these reported it to the school)



Children, from a young age, can see that

Equality and Fairness

Is not always experienced by everyone to the same degree (Almost a third – 29% - of young people aged 14 to 17 have often been treated unfairly because of who they are)



From early primary school, the vast majority of children say they are quite

Safe at Home

(94% aged 14 to 17 experience this)



Executive summary

This first comprehensive research report from UNICEF Australia's relaunched Young Ambassador Program is, we hope, the first of many.

The voices, attitudes and opinions of children and young people in Australia are a critical component of the effective functioning of our country's democracy. And while their active participation in civil society is their right, protected by the Children's Convention, it is not always something that is fully observed and encouraged in practice.

For this program, the Young Ambassadors consulted directly with 1,517 children and young people in city and regional Queensland, New South Wales, the Australian Capital Territory, Victoria, South Australia and Western Australia. Additionally, we surveyed 1,007 young people aged 14 to 17 years – the cohort who will vote in the federal election following the 2019 election – from all states and territories. (See Appendix 1 – Methodology.)

This Young Ambassador research shows, very strongly, that they are not only sharply observing the actions of decision-makers, leaders and adults around them, but they are learning from them. From a young age they begin making deeply considered assessments of what they see, increasing in sophistication as they grow older and closer to adulthood.

They are not only learning from the successes they perceive among adult decision-makers – be they politicians, business leaders, academics, teachers, parents – but from their observations and experiences of their mistakes and short-comings as well. Their assessments are made from the clear perspective of the impact of those decisions on the world in which children and young people are living and the consequent effect they will have on their futures.

In general, their views and assessments are two-fold. They see a number of areas and issues as persistently challenging and pervasive – many of these are issues concerning wellbeing (including matters of physical and mental health), safety, education and equality.

Others they consider to be absolutely critical, current and urgent. Many of these concern what they consider to be paralysing inaction on environmental matters. And the most urgent – the issue they see as the greatest threat to their safety – is inaction on climate change.

We have structured the findings of this report around these areas, including the selection of the first "spotlight" issue – one that is over-arching in its importance and interrelationship with the others – one that children and young people generally believe will play a defining role in their future. One – among many for which they want action – which they consider to be acute and urgent. That issue is **climate change**.



Wellbeing

From a young age in Australia, children and young people are strongly engaged with their personal level of wellbeing, as well as the factors that impact both positively and negatively upon this wellbeing. They recognise early that support is vital in the development and maintenance of positive wellbeing. And for this support, naturally, in their younger years, they rely heavily on their immediate carers. From the early years of primary school, they begin to widen this support network to include the positive mutual benefit of having mutually meaningful friendships.

Among children and young people in Australia, mental and physical health are widely considered as measures of the level of wellbeing they are experiencing in their lives.

From mid primary school, more and more children become aware of the external factors that influence their wellbeing, and they look beyond the family unit for support in managing this impact. This wider sphere of support begins to include specialist providers – such as doctors, teachers and counsellors.

Ultimately, this set of support providers and influencers widens to include the expectation that government will assist (and take responsibility) – through policies, laws, initiatives and regulation. For example, they clearly see a role for government in health issues such as tobacco misuse, obesity and mental health services. At the same time, they recognise a less direct avenue of governmental responsibility to mental and physical health via the school curriculum.

Children and young people continue to make this very considered assessment of the factors that influence their wellbeing by evaluating the wellbeing of others around them, as well as the way these same factors exert influence on others. Not only do they include their immediate loved ones in their thinking, but they draw upon the experiences of colleagues and acquaintances, as well as observations of members of their wider community, and of people and issues they learn about at school and through media reports.

In this regard, a large majority of young people aged 14 to 17 years in Australia (71 per cent) have **good relationships** ("quite good" or "very good") with and among their family and friends.

In terms of factors that impact upon their wellbeing, a similarly high proportion of young people (79 per cent) consider themselves to have a “good” or “neutral” connection with culture, religion, spiritual belief or practices. However, factors that will become more important to them as they move into adulthood are causing them concern in terms of their future wellbeing. For example, well over half (57 per cent) are “very concerned” about housing affordability and the cost of living.

Young people in Australia today view their physical, and particularly their mental health, as the most significant measures of their personal wellbeing. In consultations, many children and young people identified health support, particularly the quality and availability of mental health services, as critical to the maintenance of positive levels of wellbeing. They discussed their interpretation of the provision of health care services, including mental health care and support services, as being less accessible outside large urban centres, being least accessible in small rural towns and communities. They also expressed their common view that online provision of such services is significantly inferior to a physical, face-to-face delivery.

An overwhelming 94 per cent of young people of in Australia today are concerned about their **health and fitness**, with 52 per cent being very concerned. While half (51 per cent) of young people judge their physical health/wellbeing to be “quite” or “very good”, a very significant 18 per cent view their physical health and wellbeing as “bad” with 4 per cent reporting “very bad”. In consultations among these age groups, young people often raised the pressure of school assessment and exams as a factor that prevents exercise, and pointed to a lack of physical activity among students if they did not take sport or exercise-related subjects.

Similarly, over half (55 per cent) are very concerned about **mental health**, with the concern being noticeably greater among females (63 per cent) compared to males (48 per cent). This level of being “very concerned” about mental health, was much higher among students who identified as LGBTIQ+ (80 per cent).

A very concerning one quarter (24 per cent) of young people assess themselves to be in “poor” mental health, with 5 per cent saying their mental health/wellbeing is “very poor”. This “very bad” proportion is an alarming 30 per cent higher among young people who identify as LGBTIQ+ (35 per cent). At the same time, almost half (47 per cent) of Australian young people say they have “quite” or “very good” mental health/wellbeing, with a further 28 per cent judging it to be “neutral”. A quarter of young people (25 per cent) consider themselves to have “poor control over their emotions/ emotional health/ wellbeing”, with 45 per cent of LGBTIQ+ identifying young people making this self-assessment.

In relation to their mental health, during consultations, children and young people commonly cited **stress created by workloads at school** as being at unacceptably high levels. Many children talked about their anxiety about the increase in this type of stress when faced with the transition to high school. Almost three quarters (71 per cent) of young people in Australia say they experience above normal stress levels at school with 35 per cent reporting very high levels of stress. With this in mind, many children and young people talked about personal stress management regimes, which included taking time to exercise. Though, as mentioned, finding that time was commonly considered difficult.



Safety

We know from research that safety is a critical factor for continued healthy development in children, and that early childhood and adolescence are two critical moments in this development where children are most vulnerable. In fact, research shows that, to this end, children instinctively seek safety.

While children at the youngest ages may not be able to clearly articulate what the concept of ‘safety’ means to them, slightly older children – throughout primary school ages – consistently refer to **‘home’ and ‘parents’** when talking about safety. While this perspective is maintained as children grew older, it widens among older primary school children to include friends, and gradually other influential people in their lives, such as teachers.

From a young age, participants are aware that not all children are safe in their home, with domestic violence, child abuse and drug and alcohol problems seen as causal factors.

However, across the country, in and outside capital cities, 94 per cent of young people aged 14 to 17 years feel “quite” or “very safe” at home.

As children grow older, they start to become aware that they need to start to take personal responsibility for their own safety - that they need to become and stay aware of what is going on around them in order to be able to make good decisions that will prevent them being placed in unsafe situations.

The online world provides another threat to safety that can take place within the home. Interactional activities online are providing children with potentially hazardous experiences with other people. Though children discuss having these experiences at a young age, with the support of their parents, most quickly learn to become “online savvy”, with the assistance of parents, school, teachers, friends and their own research.

In Australia today, though one fifth of young people (19 per cent) say they feel unsafe online, the remaining four fifths (81 per cent) feel safe. Concern about cyber safety and security is very high, with 90 per cent of young people “concerned” about it and 45 per cent “very concerned”.

For the majority of children and young people in Australia, the first major experience outside the home where safety can become an issue is the **school system**. Conversations about school invariably led to experiences or observations about feeling unsafe, mostly as a result of bullying.

Bullying is experienced from a young age, where it tends to take the form of teasing and excluding, evolving into more complicated manifestations in high school, including the use of technology.

That said, most young people in Australia (89 per cent) say they feel safe at school, while a significant one tenth (9 per cent) feel unsafe.

Though close to half (45 per cent) of young people in Australia between the ages of 14 and 17 say they have not been bullied in the last two years, it is very clear that bullying is a significant problem for young people. A total of 43 per cent of young people aged 14 to 17 have been bullied at school in the last two years. This proportion is 14 per cent higher outside capital cities (52 per cent) than in them (38 per cent). An 11 per cent higher proportion of young people who identify as LGBTIQ+ (54 per cent) have been bullied at school in the last two years. One fifth (20 per cent) of young people have been bullied in the classroom.

Children and young people who have experienced bullying, often simply want recognition from the perpetrator of the harm and negative impact they are having on the lives of the recipient. They see a great need for a different and improved approach to discussions in schools about bullying and its effects and consequences. They would like to see it feature more in classes, as well as see teachers take more responsibility for it. Generally, teachers are considered to be ineffectual in dealing with bullying as it arises.

Just under half - a total of 45 per cent - of children and young people who reported experiences of bullying to their school felt any action taken by the school had little effect - 31 per cent felt the school had tried to address it while 14 per cent had been bullied by the same people again. Only a fifth (20 per cent) felt the school had taken the bullying seriously.

Though they generally feel safe in **public places** in Australia during the day, as they begin to live significant parts of their lives outside the home and school (77 per cent of young people feel "quite" or "very" safe), children and young people feel far less safe at night. Girls and young women express a heightened awareness of their surroundings in public in relation to their safety, increasing as night falls (while 73 per cent of the total population of young people aged 14 to 17 feel unsafe in public places at night, 90 per cent of females feel unsafe).

From a young age, children are not only aware of violence in the home and the wider community, but they are highly cognisant of the fact that it disproportionately affects women and girls.

Violence against women and children is an issue that attracts a very high level of concern among young people in Australia (62 per cent are "very concerned"). Over a third of young people, 35 per cent, identify family violence as a threat to their safety.

Threats to safety from the wider world, such as **terrorism**, are something children and young people in Australia seem to be aware of largely through the media, and to some extent through classes at school. However, their perspective on such factors and events is well considered, with a strong appreciation of the level of impact these things may have according to where they live in the world, and on a more local level, in Australia. They often point - in varying degrees - to a need for governments to play a strong representative and guiding role in taking responsibility for matters of community and individual safety by sending the right messages in their public positioning.



Learning

The most common theme among children and young people around the country - across age, location and gender - is that education is the foundation for successful futures and positive wellbeing that is driven by informed and well considered individual decision-making. However, there is a high concern that access to education is not equal for everyone in Australia or around the world.

This **inequality in accessing quality education** is strongly driven by issues of expense, including school and university fees, as well as various inconsistencies and gaps in the way education is delivered, even for the same subjects in different locations. Children and young people fear there is a quality divide between regional and urban centres. And they consider that a high level of responsibility for inconsistencies in quality of education can be attributed to the widely varying characteristics and attitudes of teaching staff across the country.

This concern is extremely high among young people in Australia aged 14 to 17 years, with 92 per cent being "concerned" about accessing quality education and 55 per cent being "very concerned".

As we already know, from an early age, children and young people in Australia begin to correlate their education with the **practical life skills** that they will need once they grow up and become independent. They identify these measures as including skills that relate to securing employment (89 per cent of young people aged 14 to 17 years are "concerned" about unemployment and getting a job, while 52 per cent are "very concerned"), managing everyday financial and taxation responsibilities, practicing good health and nutrition, and entering and continuing their sexual life in a positive, healthy and safe manner. Though they see the education systems in Australia as largely failing to deliver the life skills they consider that they require to navigate adulthood, they recognise the importance of traditional subjects as foundational to this desired broader curriculum.

Ranking the types of subject they see as pivotal to a good quality education, a very high proportion of young people aged 14 to 17 place the highest value on practical financial skills (79 per cent),

recruitment skills (73 per cent), problem solving and logical thinking (73 per cent), practical on-the-job skills (69 per cent), practical life skills (67 per cent) and sex education (56 per cent).

At the same time, similarly high value is also placed on long-standing curriculum subjects such as mathematics (66 per cent), English (62 per cent), computer skills (53 per cent) and science (49 per cent).

Children and young people in Australia are also highly cognisant of the influential role that their **relationship with teachers** has on their ability to receive a quality education. In fact, they possess a high level of clarity and insight into the role teachers play in motivating them to learn, and to this end, the characteristics a teacher must possess to be successful in this regard.

They firmly hold the view that good education involves the recognition that different students learn in a variety of different ways, and that this is a significant challenge in successful teaching outcomes. And to this end, they perceive a common error among teachers is the temptation to concentrate on a particular cohort of students in the class (for example, high achieving, or low achieving) and thus failing to adequately engage with others, running the high risk that many are left behind.

Among the qualities that young people in Australia aged 14 to 17 years consider to be the most important for quality teaching and good outcomes are: being respectful (72 per cent), being approachable (70 per cent), listening to students (69 per cent), wanting students to learn and gain knowledge (65 per cent), being enthusiastic and inspiring (64 per cent), providing extra help when needed (63 per cent), trying to make subjects interesting (60 per cent), deeply understanding the subjects they teach (57 per cent) and being fair (54 per cent).

Essentially, students view their educational success and the enthusiasm with which they engage with their learning and the subject matters they are being taught, as a direct function of the subject knowledge, enthusiasm to teach and impart knowledge, and commitment to student engagement and responsiveness in their teachers.

Equality

Children and young people in Australia tend to view the concept of **equality** in the community through the prism of fairness. Their sense of fairness is profound and comes through in discussions about the groups of people in our community who are most likely to experience disadvantage because of factors that are beyond their control.

Children and young people in Australia are an extremely diverse cohort. This highly varied experience comes through in the way they address the relative fairness and lack of fairness around them, based to varying degrees on direct personal experience or indirect means such as observation of the world around them or through depictions in the media.

Though their commitment to equal treatment for everyone and to fairness is clear, from a young age, children can articulate circumstances for the existence of exceptions - certain areas where limitations of rights or freedoms might be necessary. For example, they will often point to convicted criminals as a group of people who may experience certain restrictions to the full experience of "equal access" to rights, such as the ability to move freely in the community. Equally, there was a certain level of recognition among older primary school and high school-aged participants that additional measures and initiatives may be needed to achieve fairness for some people in the community, most often exemplified as assisting people with disability.

Many children and young people consider that there needs to be more gender and racial diversity in leadership positions in our country, including in politics.

Almost a third (29 per cent) of young people in Australia aged 14 to 17 say they have been **treated unfairly because of who they are** "several times" to "frequently". This proportion is 11 per cent higher among males (34 per cent) than females (23 per cent), and 13 per cent higher among young people who speak English as a second language (42 per cent).

In most cases, discussion among consultation participants of being treated unfairly because of traits such as their gender, racial background, level of disability, relative wealth, sexual orientation and/or migration status was observational in nature. In many cases, "someone I know" or "my friend" would be cited as an example of this lack of fairness, inequality or discrimination.

Almost two thirds of young people aged 14 to 17 years in Australia consider that other young people are most likely to be treated differently because of the race (64 per cent) or because they live with disability (63 per cent). Half or more have the same view about young people on the basis of their sexual orientation (58 per cent), gender/gender identity (55 per cent), religious beliefs (52 per cent), culture (51 per cent) or socioeconomic status (50 per cent).



The Environment

Children and young people in Australia today are extremely worried about what they see as the ongoing failures of governments, businesses and communities to act as effective stewards for a clean and liveable environment.

Children and young people living in Australia today take the view that most of our daily decisions have some form of impact on the world around us. They are abundantly aware that they have a role to play and responsibility, as much as adult generations, in assisting with the protection of the environment from damage, harm and the general negative impacts of human activity. And while they recognise their responsibility in relation to making decisions that are positive for the environment, they direct a high level of frustration and disappointment at Australian politicians, principally from the federal government, for not taking action. As examples, adverse impacts

on the Great Barrier Reef, the environmental threats posed by the Adani mine and the mounting garbage disposal and recycling crisis are commonly cited.

They point to vested interests and a “profit” and “economy first” mentality when it comes to the way Australia’s decision-makers mostly seem to view the country’s relationship with its environment. From a very young age, they are extremely frustrated and discouraged about what they consider to be rampant **pollution** of our air, land, waterways and oceans. They highlight plastic as an entrenched and enduring pollution problem with little action taken to combat it. They are deeply concerned about **deforestation** and habitat loss for Australia’s terrestrial and marine life, culminating in evident anxiety about **wildlife extinctions**.

The overwhelming majority (95 per cent) of young people in Australia aged 14 to 17 years are concerned about pollution of the land, sea and air, with 59 per cent being “very concerned”. The forms of pollution that are seen as most important because of their impact are plastic pollution (64 per cent), ocean and air pollution (both 63 per cent), littering (56 per cent) and the issue of recycling and re-use (53 per cent).

Almost two thirds (63 per cent) place high importance on the threat of extinction of animals, while 59 per cent place high importance on the issue of deforestation and damage, bleaching and destruction of the Great Barrier Reef.

Climate change: Our spotlight issue:

But overlaying all of this, children and young people in Australia today are overwhelmingly worried about the threat of **climate change** and the ongoing failure and seeming unwillingness of successive governments to take any effective action to mitigate what they consider to be a formidable threat. Children as young as Year 5 start to clearly express these opinions. During discussion across age groups, the perspective that climate change is happening and is caused by human activity is largely “a given”. They are, at the same time, just as frustrated about ongoing inaction and ideology in relation to the production of energy, which they appreciate is intrinsically related to climate change. In essence, their view is that older generations are failing to safeguard the future for them and subsequent generations.

The majority of young people aged 14 to 17 years in Australia view climate change as taking place, consider human activity to be playing a significant role in the phenomenon, and want committed and effective action taken. Rather than listening to political arguments based in ideology, they view them as masking considered assessments that align with scientific evidence.

The vast majority (86 per cent), view climate change as some form of threat to their safety, with 59 per cent considering it to be a significant or large threat. Only 14 per cent consider it to be no threat at all.

The vast majority also hold the view that climate change caused by human activity is not only affecting our planet now, but that these effects will get worse in the future. Three quarters (73 per cent) consider that climate change caused by human activity is affecting the world “a lot” now, while 84 per cent think it will affect the world “a lot” in the future.

Three quarters (75 per cent) want Australia to be **taking action on climate change**, mostly because they want Australia to lead by example and play our part in helping the world to stop its worsening effects (61 per cent). Others (14 per cent) admit they may not definitively know whether climate change is real, but if action results in a cleaner planet, we will be better off in the long

run. Just over one tenth agree with some commonly proposed counter views on taking action, with 8 per cent considering that taking action would have too many negative impacts on our economy and 5 per cent taking the view that we are too small a nation to make a difference. Only 4 per cent either do not accept that climate change is real or that it is caused by human activity.

Attitudes about energy are seen as an extension of these views about climate change and the government inaction driven by ideology and science-denial. Children and young people are generally as equally frustrated by debates about **energy production**, as they are by debates about climate change, because they tend to view them as being built on similarly wrong-footed foundations. Though, depending on the age of the child, the level of appreciation of the link to climate change may vary widely. From as young as Year 3, they overwhelmingly want to see Australia’s energy generation come from solar, hydro and wind-generated options rather than from continuing high use of fossil fuels.

When it comes to taking action, almost all young people aged 14 to 17 years consider it important for Australia to **reduce its carbon emissions** – 69 per cent see this as “very important”, with a further 28 per cent seeing it as “quite important”.

With this in mind, the vast majority (88 per cent) of these young people favour renewable technologies (solar, wind, hydro) as the sources for our energy production, and are very considered about how this should be achieved. Almost half (47 per cent) favour an orderly transition, considering that “we should increase our reliance on renewables while gently decreasing reliance on fossil fuels (coal, oil, gas)”. At the same time, a further 41 per cent favour a more rapid change to our energy system, saying “we should move into renewables as fast as we can”.

A small 5 per cent prefer that we “mainly use fossil fuels, but also use renewable energy to some extent”. Only 3 per cent want Australia to “stay with fossil fuels”.

Electricity prices, which have become inextricably bound up in the public debate in Australia about climate change, present a more complex response from young people.

For example, though 47 per cent of young people view it as “very important” that “we need to make energy/ electricity prices lower”; this view is held by a 10 per cent higher proportion of young people who live outside (53 per cent) than in capital cities (43 per cent).

Finally, consultations revealed that children and young people are more engaged with **news media** than conventional wisdom would tend to indicate. Discussions were often heavily informed by events and discussions that were running in the media at the time. In fact, 51 per cent of young people aged 14 to 17 years get their news from traditional news media articles and stories posted on social media by media sites or friends, while 58 per cent get news from television news bulletins.

That said, participants very often indicated low levels of **trust** in news media, just as they expressed high levels of disillusionment and low levels of trust in politicians. Again, over half (55 per cent) of young people have low trust in politicians. Just under two thirds of young people aged 14 to 17 years (61 per cent) and new voters aged 18 and 19 years (65 per cent) blame this on politicians not keeping their promises. Additionally 45 and 54 per cent respectively cite instability in leadership.

The findings in this research represent the matters that children and young people in our country see as most impacting upon their quality of life and the effective fulfilment of their rights. They are the areas that will most affect their futures. And they effectively represent their **platform for action**.

A message from the Young Ambassadors



As the Children's Agency, UNICEF is mandated under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (Children's Convention) to protect and promote the rights of children and hold governments to account.

We, as UNICEF Australia's Young Ambassadors for 2018-19, have had the opportunity to hear directly from children and young people across Australia about the big issues in their lives, and what they believe to be of national importance.

We hope, through sharing what we've heard, that you will see how children and young people critically analyse and interpret the world around them and how this enhances and evolves over time. Children and young people have considered and insightful perspectives, opinions and views developed through their own lived experience.

We also hope this report will both impact on the way children and young people are viewed in society, as well as help to influence the Australian policy sphere, particularly in relation to decisions that are made every day that affect children.

With 2019 being an election year, there are many young people who will be voting in a federal election for the first time. If they miss the federal election, there are a number of state and territory elections happening in the near future. During election campaigns, hopeful politicians take issues that are important to the community into the election. Often, the voices of children and young people are forgotten or invisible – even though children and young people are citizens and critical stakeholders in discussions and decision making about Australia's future.



We want to change this.

Globally, UNICEF conducts research into the lives of children and their experiences of childhood. It is the recognised authority on children's rights and known for translating these rights into meaningful action.

The children and young people we consulted with were clearly excited to share their ideas, opinions and insights with us about what it is like to be a child or young person in Australia. They also believed that it is important for decision-makers to take their ideas seriously. We were told that they valued the opportunity they were presented with and could not wait to see what comes of their involvement.

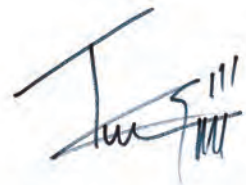
Through the combination of producing this report, and our subsequent discussions with government officials, we aim to amplify the voices of the children and young people who participated in our consultations and to help ensure that their perspectives are added to the Australia we so desperately need for our collective future.

A hard and digital copy of this report has been sent to every school and organisation involved in the consultations.

To the 1517 children and young people we spoke to face to face and the 1007 who participated in our national survey, **THANK YOU!** We hope we do you proud.

L. W. Arthur 

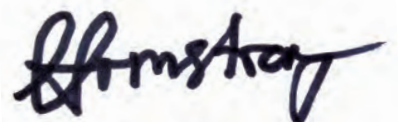






X. Berry





An issue that is important to me is...

- The chance for all children to receive quality education, regardless of financial situation, status, ethnicity, etc. As children are the hope of the next generation, giving them all an education will increase the chances of them making well-informed choices in the future, and allow them to better their own chances at maintaining a sustainable, healthy life.

(Female, 16, Radford College, ACT)

I think decision makers should...

Commit to more long term decisions instead of saying they will and then never doing it

(Female, 12, Northcote High School, Vic)

I think that every adult should know...

That To Treat Kids Like adults and Have rights because we are the same species Just an age Differences

(Male, 12, Bundaberg State High School, Qld)

I think decision makers should...

include others ideas. and I know Scott Morrison will probably not listen to me. because I am a child.

(Female, 10, Ryde Public School, NSW)

An issue that is important to me is...

I am concernd that every thing will just harder and more expensive to get and that I wont be able to afford anything or do what I want to do

(Female, 13, Northcote High School, Vic)

An issue that is important to me is...

The issue of Asylum seekers and Refugees. I feel like they are disadvantaged when facing the Australian Government and that they don't have as many opportunities as people who are Australian citizens. I also feel like there are stereotypes associated with them which are disadvantage and limit them

(Female, 17, Sylvania High School, NSW)

An issue that is important to me is...

Climate change the government should be doing more to help the problem rather than just saying that nothing is happening.

(Female, 13, Northcote High School, Vic)

1. The UNICEF Australia Young Ambassador Program

What is the UNICEF Australia Young Ambassador Program?

The UNICEF Australia Young Ambassador Program is a unique and exciting initiative which provides young people aged 15 to 24 years, from across Australia, with a platform to speak up for children's rights. Young Ambassadors have the opportunity to exercise leadership and to develop new skills in government advocacy, communications, media engagement and consulting with children and young people. This role aims to build capacity among young people to become advocates for children's rights at a local, national and international level.

The Young Ambassador Program is one of the ways that UNICEF Australia actualises meaningful participation with children and young people, as it is mandated to do in the Children's Convention. Through the Young Ambassador Program and engagement with schools and community groups, children are educated about their rights. This engagement with children and young people develops and informs the work of the UNICEF Australia team. And it deepens UNICEF Australia's knowledge and capacity to help deliver a fair chance for children in Australia and in the countries in which we work overseas.

Long term, the Young Ambassador Program is developing lifelong child rights advocates. Alumni of the program have gone on to apply a child rights and human rights based approach to their areas of further study, professions and vocations.

Why is it important to consult with children and young people?

We often point to the fact that children are experts in relation to their own experience.

Everybody was a child at some point. But, the way childhood is experienced changes over time and is due to many factors. For example, the opportunities and threats presented by the growth of the digital world didn't exist 30 years ago. Every day, adults and decision-makers are making choices that impact on the lives of children, sadly with very little input from these very stakeholders.

We know that, active stakeholder engagement is part of a core human rights based approach. Governments frequently consult with stakeholders in society who are impacted by decisions being made about their lives or communities. By consulting with children and young people, we can confidently provide evidence and research-based suggestions and recommendations to decision makers that will help them more effectively support and improve the lives of children and young people in Australia, as well as our future adults.

This report shows that children are very much aware of and curious about the world around them, while also being able to critically analyse and make meaningful and informed decisions, based on their own level of development.

Each year our report will have a spotlight issue

This is our first report from our relaunched Young Ambassador Program and with it, we will announce our first spotlight issue. Each report from the UNICEF Australia Young Ambassador Program will feature a spotlight issue that has arisen from our consultations and quantitative research as a matter of great importance to the children and young people of Australia. (See Appendix 1 for an outline of the methodology.)

We are proud and excited that this year's spotlight is **climate change**.

It has been clear to us that children and young people are very concerned about this issue. In fact, it has emerged as a defining issue for these young generations.

There is an ever-growing body of research pointing to climate change needing urgent attention before irreversible damage occurs to our planet. In many scientific quarters, it is being referred to as a climate emergency, such is the projected long-term effects of present human activity on our planet.

Reacting to this, there has been increased advocacy and momentum in this area from a host of sectors such as the business community, farmers, educators, the energy sector, the travel industry, the banking sector, migration experts, the humanitarian sector and national governments from countries that have the highest of exposures to the disastrous impacts of climate change.

The voices of children and young people are not only among the last to be added on heard, but one of the largest of cohorts engaged with this issue. In the last year, for example, we have seen the School Strike 4 Climate movement, which is led by children and young people, taking place simultaneously in Australia and across the world.

Young people care deeply about this issue – an issue they see as rapidly changing the world in which they live – an issue that they see as defining the adult world they are growing into.

The Young Ambassadors and the children and young people of Australia have also identified it as an area of frustrated and vexing political and ideological debate. In addition, our Pacific neighbours, who are extremely vulnerable to rising sea levels and other effects of climate change, are calling for leadership from Australia and the international community.

A note on the Sustainable Development Goals

During the last two decades of the 20th century, the United Nations was subject to much international criticism.

In September 2000, leaders of 189 countries came together in New York City at the UN to discuss its global role for the 21st century. At the time, it was the largest meeting of world leaders in history.

The agreed objective of the meeting was to help citizens in the world's poorest countries to achieve a better life by the year 2015 through addressing issues such as eradicating extreme poverty, reducing child mortality and combatting disease. To that end, they signed the Millennium Declaration, committing signatories to eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) which spelled out the framework to progress delivery on this objective.¹

By the end of the MDG period in 2015, measurable improvement had taken place. For example, globally, the number of people living in extreme poverty had declined by more than half, falling from 1.9 billion in 1990 to 836 million in 2015. Most of this progress had occurred since 2000.

The number of out-of-school children of primary school age worldwide had fallen by almost half, to an estimated 57 million in 2015, down from 100 million in 2000. Many more girls were now in school worldwide.

The global under-five mortality rate had declined by more than half. Since 1990, the maternal mortality ratio had declined by 45 per cent worldwide and most of the reduction had occurred since 2000.

While there had been some progress made on the MDGs, there was still a long way to go and it became apparent that there needed to be a post-2015 agenda. **Additionally, the MDGs were criticised by young people and civil society groups for failing to consult and involve young people in their design.**

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), first officially proposed by the government of Colombia at the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development in Rio de Janeiro in 2012, were devised to pick up where the MDGs would end in 2015, specifically emphasising collective action by all countries.

In July 2014, the UN General Assembly Open Working Group met for the creation of the 17 goals which were officially adopted by the 193 countries of the UN General Assembly under the 2030 Development Agenda titled, '*Transforming Our World: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*'.

The SDGs work harmoniously with the Children's Convention, providing an important framework through which we can view some of the most pressing global issues of our time, such as poverty, inequality, climate degradation, peace and justice. Essentially, the SDGs work together with the aim of ensuring that nobody gets left behind.

With over 1.8 billion people in the world today, we are at a point where our world has the largest youth population in history. And they will inherit all these very pressing global challenges.

2. Participation: Why is it so important?

Every child has the right to say what they think should happen when adults are making decisions that affect them and to have their opinions taken into account. This is enshrined in the Children's Convention, which is at the heart of UNICEF Australia's mandate.

Every day, decisions are made that drastically change the lives of young people across Australia. Holding consultations with children and young people has allowed us to grant them the opportunity to make contributions to such processes by way of this report, which will be delivered to decision-makers around the country.

The right to participate is a gateway to realising all other rights. For this reason, we discussed children's participation and child rights at the beginning of each consultation.

Child and youth participation at UNICEF Australia

UNICEF Australia is committed to realising every child's right to participate in any matter concerning them, either directly or indirectly. This involvement must always involve the free, prior and informed consent of children, young people and their parents/guardians.

We believe that realising the right to participation will lead to the fulfilment of other rights and deliver the best outcomes for children. To this end, an evolving capacities approach to child and youth participation shapes our direct engagement with children and young people.

We make every effort to ensure participation is realised as shared decision-making, power and responsibility between adults, young people and children within our organisation.

UNICEF Australia has adopted a two-track approach to children's participation – children's rights education as well as genuine participation with strategic outcomes and relevance to UNICEF Australia's work.

How have successive Australian federal governments encouraged the participation of children and young people?

In 2014 the Abbott Government discontinued government funding of the national non-government youth peak body, the Australian Youth Affairs Coalition, which was established in 2002. It also disbanded the Australian Youth Forum. The Australian Youth Affairs Coalition represented the views of those aged 12 to 25 years to government, while providing youth-informed policy advice, as well as support to policy makers for consulting with young people. The Australian Youth Forum was an opportunity for children and young people to have their voices heard and provide input through the federal Department of Education to public policy and debates.



Subsequent federal governments have not retained dedicated youth portfolios to oversee child and youth issues. This means that the current federal government has no formalised mechanism to directly engage with children and young people.

Without exception, every group of children and young people that we consulted with said that they wanted to be able to contribute to decisions that would affect them.

Children and young people were quick to identify the ways they should be able to participate

Interestingly we heard from younger consultation participants that they wanted the voting age lowered to between eight and ten years old. Older participants in high school seemed unsure about voting. They were apathetic about politicians and felt as if they were not doing what the public wanted them to.

"I think it's difficult for them to kind of gauge a response from young people because most of them can't be bothered. So it's hard for them to kind of know what we're thinking. This is very good - where we can actually express our opinions without having a vote"

(Female, Year 10, Radford College, ACT)

"Kids are smart enough to have their voices heard."

(Ellen, 12, Vic)



At the time of writing this report, Australian citizens were required to vote once they reached 18 years of age. In 2018, the youngest ever Senator, Jordan Steele-John, established a joint committee to lower the voting age to 16.



3.1 Wellbeing

The World Health Organisation (WHO) Constitution defines health as a “state of complete physical, mental and social wellbeing and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity”²

It describes wellbeing as a general evaluation of the quality of one’s life. Thus wellbeing is a highly subjective concept which is difficult to interpret, measure and compare between individuals.

This ill-defined nature of wellbeing was exemplified when the children we consulted were asked, “What does it mean to be well?”

Children’s definitions of wellbeing varied from “*health...it means to be happy*” and “*the opposite of sick*” (Male, Year 6, Hewett Primary School, SA) to “*feelings and emotions and stuff, and what we think about them*” (Female, Year 5, Macquarie Grammar School, NSW).

Students from Sylvania High School, NSW, were studying the subject Community and Family Studies and shared with us their interpretation of wellbeing, which included social, physical, emotional, economic, cultural and spiritual wellbeing components.

Wellbeing and the Children’s Convention

Many rights in the Children’s Convention relate to children’s wellbeing. These are covered in the following articles:

- 6: Children have the **right to live a full life**. Government should ensure that children survive and develop healthily;
- 16: Children have the **right to privacy**. The law should protect them from attacks against their way of life, their good name, their family and their home;
- 17: Children have the **right to reliable information from the media**. Mass media such as television, radio and newspaper should provide information that children can understand and should not promote materials that could harm children;
- 24: Children have the **right to good quality health care, clean water, nutritious food and a clean environment so that they will stay healthy**. Richer countries should help poorer countries to achieve this;
- 27: Children have the **right to a standard of living that is good enough to meet their physical and mental needs**. The government should help families who cannot afford this; and
- 31: Children have the **right to relax, play and to join in a wide range of leisure activities**.

Wellbeing and the SDGs

Wellbeing cuts across many of the SDGs, most notably:



Of particular note, Goal 3 aims for healthy living and promoting wellbeing at all ages.

Though there is no overarching wellbeing policy or administrative framework for children and young people in Australia, the Australian Government Department of Education and Training did release The Australian Student Wellbeing Framework³ in September 2018.

Based around the five key elements of leadership, inclusion, student voice, partnerships and support, it is built upon the principal that:

“The wellbeing of children and young people is enhanced and their learning outcomes optimised when they feel connected to others and experience safe and trusting relationships. Students who feel connected, safe and secure are more likely to be active participants in their learning and to achieve better physical, emotional, social and educational outcomes. Educators who feel valued and supported are more likely to engage positively with students and build stronger connections within the school community. Enhancing the wellbeing of students and their educators delivers overall long-term social, health and economic benefits to the Australian community.”⁴

UNICEF released the *Child poverty in perspective: An overview of child well-being in rich countries, Innocenti Report Card 7*, in 2007, which measures wellbeing across six domains: material wellbeing, health and safety, education, peer and family relationships, behaviours and risks, and young people’s own subjective perceptions of wellbeing.⁵

What is the current state of wellbeing among children and young people in Australia?

According to Mission Australia's annual youth survey, stress and mental health are a key issue for young people.⁶ In 2017, the Australian Bureau of Statistics reported that, among countries for which data is available, Australia ranks second highest for girls and sixth highest for boys in terms of the percentage who feel "a lot" of pressure at school. Suicide continues to be the leading cause of death among people aged 15 to 24 years in Australia. Over a third of deaths among young people aged 15 to 24 years are a result of self-harm.⁷

A recent survey conducted by the Australian Child Wellbeing Project found that most children in Australia between the ages of 8 and 14 feel positive about their wellbeing and their future.⁸ However, a significant share of young people experience poor wellbeing, with 31 per cent of children reporting more than two health complaints at least once a week, 19 per cent saying they go to school or bed hungry at least sometimes, and 17 per cent saying they had been bullied.

Further, the survey found 'marginalised' children (those identifying as a young carer, culturally or linguistically diverse, materially disadvantaged, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and/or having a disability) felt less positive about their future. They were more likely to be bullied, more likely to have health complaints and more likely to miss school once a week or more compared to their 'non-marginalised' counterparts.



(Female, 5, Pre-Junior Girl Guides, NSW)

What elements do children and young people in Australia identify as contributing to their wellbeing?

Young Ambassadors began each of consultation by asking participants what they felt they needed to have a 'good life', while also outlining their rights and the difference between 'wants' and 'needs'. Participants were asked to think about the bare basics that they could not live without.

Generally, their responses were about the things that they require to grow up 'healthy'. Their discussions centred on matters of basic material wellbeing and social connection, naming healthy food, clean water, shelter and clothes.

The vast majority of children and young people considered **parents and guardians** to be those most responsible for making sure they experience general wellbeing – the elements of a 'good life'. In discussion, children and young people also viewed friends as playing a high level contributing role to a sense of wellbeing.

They viewed friends and family as people who they would talk to if they needed assistance in taking care of themselves.

"Having support is really important - like having friends and family to guide you."

(Female, Year 10, Radford College, ACT)

"What makes me safe is having friends that I can trust."

(Female, Year 8, Wodonga Middle Years College, Vic)

However, some participants pointed out that not all parents/guardians are easily approachable or safe. In these cases, they felt reliance may therefore be greater on friends, teachers, grandparents, aunts/uncles, extended family, sports coaches or family friends.

Children and young people also identified their own responsibility for ensuring the wellbeing of their friends. They thought they should check in on them and, where possible, offer to assist with issues they might be facing.

Almost three quarters (71 per cent) of young people have "quite" or "very good" relationships with friends and family.

Just under a quarter say the state of these relationships is "neutral". Only six per cent report these relationships as being "bad", with only one per cent judging them to be "very bad".

Children and young people also saw **"the government"** as an important actor contributing to their wellbeing. Though the existence of 'government' was apparent among most participants, a more formed concept of what government did, only began to emerge among children from Year 4 upwards.

A significant minority of very young participants – mid primary school and below – referenced the role of **religion** – mentioned in terms of 'God', 'Jesus and 'The Holy Spirit' – as contributing to wellbeing and the good life. However, religion was rarely raised by high school students in discussions. This outcome is reflective of findings in the 2016 Census data, which saw the most common response of "no religion" increase from 22.3 per cent in 2011 to 30.1 per cent in 2016.⁹

While one fifth (21 per cent) of young people in Australia view themselves as having a "bad" connection with culture, religion, spiritual belief or practices,

a very high proportion (79 per cent) of young people consider themselves to have a "good" (38 per cent) or "neutral" (41 per cent) connection.

"I think every adult should know..."

Culture is important & should be taught at a young age

(Male, 21, Apollo House Community Centre, Dubbo, NSW)

Financial matters were only identified as impacting upon wellbeing among older participants, who discussed issues such as housing affordability and youth unemployment. Most participants either lived with their parents or guardians, or boarded at school, which

meant their exposure to financial stressors would mainly be through and a reflection of the experiences of these carers. As expected, observations about the difficulty participants may face with regard to financial matters, such as home ownership, began to emerge among adolescents.

"Another problem is that young people are never really going to have a chance to buy their own home, let alone rent one cause the prices of rent are just skyrocketing... and Gympie is one of the cheaper towns to rent in. It's getting more and more every year."

(Female, 18, Gympie Flexible Learning Centre, Qld)

While a significant **17 per cent of young people in Australia view their financial situation as being "bad"** (5 per cent very bad), 36 per cent say it is "quite" to "very good".

Well over half of young people in Australia (57 per cent) are very concerned about **housing affordability and the cost of living**. This proportion is 14 per cent higher among females (64 per cent) than males (50 per cent).

Though these elements were prominent features of consultations across the country, by far, children and young people identified their mental health and physical health as their greatest contributing factors in relation to their wellbeing.

Physical health

Discussions about physical fitness and physical health were mostly anchored in the school experience. Younger children tended to equate fitness and exercise with play. Children in both primary and high school expressed a desire to spend more time outside running around and playing sport. In this regard, a common criticism among older participants was that unless you chose 'Health and Physical Education' subjects for senior (Years 11 and 12), you would not have any physical exercise during school hours. There would then be reliance on extra-curricular activities or sport, which frequently incur a cost to parents and carers.

"There could be a national standard of having like an hour a week or two hours a week of physical activity. Like at the moment if you don't do one sport subject, you don't get any chance other than recess at lunch, like there should be a dedicated lesson to maybe not even just a workout but, more engagement in physical movement, then it's your choice at recess and lunch."

(Male, Year 12, Macquarie Anglican Grammar School, NSW)

"Some classes don't go out for fitness lessons that often. So we would like to go outside more often."

(Female, Year 6, Hewett Primary School, SA)

An overwhelming 94 per cent the young people of in Australia today are "concerned" about their **health, and being healthy and fit**, with 52 per cent being "very concerned". This concern is equally held among males and females.

Other key physical concerns for children and young people included the use of tobacco and Australia's obesity epidemic, with many students concerned about the cost and availability of healthy food. Children as young as Year 1 (aged 6 to 7 years) began to raise issues around junk food and healthy food. Concerns about tobacco were discussed by children as young as Year 2 (aged 7 to 8 years). Observations about the outcomes of consumption of poor food, or

of poor eating habits commonly began to emerge among children in Year 8 (aged 13 to 14 years), where concerns about obesity were common.

Tobacco use is the single largest cause of cancer globally, however Australia is a world leader on the public health management of tobacco consumption. Regular cigarette smoking is most likely to be established in adolescence which makes tobacco use in this age group a key indicator for cancer prevention. As of 2014, approximately one per cent of Australians aged 12 to 17 smoked daily, though more than 80 per cent of that age group had never smoked.¹⁰ Both these indicators contribute to Australia's position as a world leader for low smoking rates among children.

This attitude was supported by discussions in consultations across age groups and locations. Despite Australia's tough anti-tobacco legislation participants commonly expressed the view that even tougher regulations were required.

"As much as people have been trying to make cigarettes higher cost, they should just ban them and not even sell them."

(Female, Year 6, Hewett Primary School, SA)

Young Ambassador: *"What do you do to stay healthy?"*

Participant: *Not smoking, drinking or taking drugs.*

(Male, Year 3, Macquarie Anglican Grammar School, NSW)

Further, many children also said they felt intimidated or polluted by smokers in public places. Others cited environmental concerns.

"Sometimes you just walk past people with cigarettes and they will just blow in your face. They don't care at all."

(Female, Year 6, Hewett Primary School, SA)

"I don't feel safe when my mum smokes around me."

(Male, Year 5, Bassendean Primary School, WA)

"Ban cigarettes... Because when people finish them, they just drop them, and they might drop them on dry grass and start a fire."

(Female, Year 6, Hewett Primary School, SA)

Across age-groups, children we consulted with were concerned about the levels of **childhood obesity**. They referenced possible solutions such as making healthy food more readily available, incorporating more physical activity into school curriculums and investing in local facilities for exercise, such as sport facilities and playgrounds. Participants had a high awareness of Australia's worsening obesity epidemic.

"Obesity as a national problem. A lot of Australia is obese... in turn they [obese children] are really inactive. So I really feel strongly about this because I love the outdoors and love doing active stuff. So it makes me really sad that a lot of people don't get to enjoy that because of their choices in food. And then they just don't know how bad a life they're living, and their unhealthy life choices and then they put it on to their children as well."

(Male, 17, Toormina High School, NSW)

"Maybe instead of bringing an iPad you could bring like a skipping rope or maybe play outside and have a run."

(Female, Year 2, St Leonard's College, Vic)

An estimated 26 per cent of Australian children are overweight or obese. Obesity is a risk factor for Type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular disease, hypertension, some types of cancer and multiple other diseases. As children who are overweight or obese often become obese adults, reducing childhood obesity is essential to preventing children from suffering multiple morbidities as adults.¹¹



“What is important to me is being given healthy food every day even though I don’t eat most of it”

Josef, 9, WA

Children were also concerned with the cost of **healthy food** compared to junk food. In consultations, children and young people often put forward the view that the prevalence of junk food in society is largely to blame for childhood obesity. This is supported by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, which report that only 2.5 per cent of children aged between 5 and 14 years and 3.3 per cent of young people aged between 15 and 24 years eat enough fruit and vegetables.¹² A significant number of focus group participants, across age groups, raised the prospect of a “junk food tax” or “sugar tax” may be a solution to the worsening childhood obesity epidemic.

“Some more taxes on sugar because sugar is related to some diseases that people have like diabetes and it’s a big problem and people are getting overweight.”

(Male, Year 8, Glenunga International High School, SA)

“At shops they put the junk food first. So that’s the first thing you see and the first thing you want to buy. And then they put all the healthy stuff at the back. I think it should be the opposite.”

(Female, Year 6, Hewett Primary School, SA)

The worries of child obesity because when these children grow to be adults it will be harder for them to become healthier.

(Male, 11, Macquarie Anglican Grammar School, NSW)

Just over half (51 per cent) of young people assess their physical health/wellbeing to be “quite” or “very good”, with a further third (31 per cent) seeing it as “neutral”. A very significant **18 per cent of young people in Australia view their physical health and wellbeing as “bad” with 4 per cent reporting “very bad”**.

Mental health

There are limitations in the extent to which matters of mental health can be discussed, particularly in groups where individuals may not feel comfortable about public disclosure. As the Young Ambassadors are not trained psychologists or mental health experts, and to ensure the safety of participants, all sessions were supervised by a classroom teacher who would be able to refer the participant to appropriate services and support.

Public recognition of the prevalence of mental ill health in Australia has become higher in recent years, with a number of effective campaigns and notable public personalities promoting the issue. This has helped to start to reduce the stigma associated with mental ill health, as well as the barriers to discussing it. The Australian Government’s Department of Health’s *Australian Child and Adolescent Survey of Mental Health and Wellbeing* reported that almost 1 in 7 (13.9 per cent) of children aged 4 to 17 years had a mental health disorder in the last 12 months. Of those with mental health disorders, 20.6 per cent did not have their healthcare needs met. It was also noted that children living in inner regional (14.8 per cent), outer regional (19 per cent) and remote areas (14 per cent) all experienced mental health disorders at higher rates than those living in major cities (12.9 per cent).¹³

that kids struggle with problems beyond ~~from~~ their knowledge. And we might look fine on the outside but are dying on the inside. We struggle with depression and I think they should bring up the conversation instead of waiting for us to speak up.

(Year 6, Macquarie Anglican Grammar School, NSW)

Australian young people have a high level of concern about the issue of mental health – **91 per cent are concerned about mental health, with 55 per cent being very concerned**. Mental health is of greater concern for females (63 per cent) than males (48 per cent) very concerned and highest amongst those two identified as LGBTIQ+ (80 per cent).

Across age groups from mid primary school upwards, consultation participants frequently associated wellbeing with mental health. Some major concerns for many children were that there continues to be a silence associated with mental illness and that there is still a lack of awareness of mental health amongst young people.

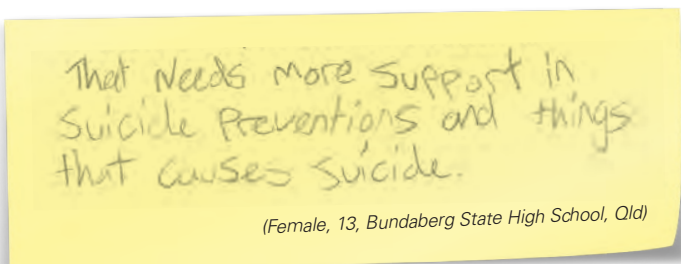
“I actually know a lot of young people seem to struggle with feeling mentally well and things like depression and anxiety. And, I think, like grown-ups approach is to, like you know, try to force people to talk about it - but they don’t necessarily - I don’t think a lot of my friends necessarily want to talk to people about it - and like there isn’t much awareness about that for, you know, 12 year olds.”

(Female, Year 7, Northcote High School, Vic)

Mental health began to be mentioned in consultations from Year 5 (10 to 11 year olds) upwards. They were able to articulate different types of mental health issues including anxiety and depression as well as anorexia, though not from any point of experience or observation.

A male Year 5 student from Bassendean Primary School in Western Australia explained that:

"If you do get mentally sick or something like that... if you speak to people sometimes and they know about it, I think it's their place to say something. You need to speak to a counsellor or you need to go to see somebody who can help you. And if they don't do that, then they're not helping you very well."



By contrast, high school and senior school participants identified positive progress in relation to proactive discussions about mental health in schools during their years of school attendance. They also raised the need to address the stigma associated with mental ill health, as well as the need of opening public discussion about lesser known mental health issues, to assist in this regard. Some of the reasons posited for this change include the addition of programs within schools to address the issue, as well as the increases in funding and availability to services such as headspace and eheadspace.

"A lot of stigma around mental health has been taken away - like about depression and anxiety - but I feel like some of the less well-known mental health issues [have been] kind of pushed away and still have the stigma - like OCD or borderline personality disorder and stuff like that. We kind of choose what mental health problems that we think [we] can ...discuss, but a lot of them are left not being discussed... I think that it's really important to kind of take away the stigma around those to make sure that people that are struggling with those disorders can talk about it and come out about it."

(Female, Year 10, Radford College, ACT)

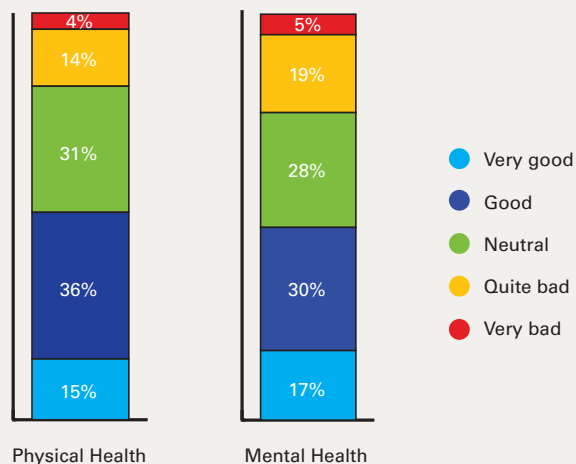
A very concerning **one quarter (24 per cent) of young people assess themselves to be in "bad" mental health, with 5 per cent saying their mental health/wellbeing is "very bad"**.

This "very bad" proportion is an alarming 30 per cent higher among young people who identify as LGBTIQ+ (35 per cent), with a total of 54 per cent of LGBTIQ+ identifying young people saying their mental health/wellbeing is "bad".

At the same time, almost half (47 per cent) of Australian young people say they have "quite" or "very good" mental health/wellbeing, with a further 28 per cent judging it to be "neutral".

A quarter of young people (25 per cent) consider themselves to have "poor control over their emotions/ emotional health/wellbeing", with 45 per cent of LGBTIQ+ identifying young people making this self-assessment. A further quarter (25 per cent) of young people report their control over their emotions to be "neutral" and 45 per cent "quite" to "very good".

Self assessment of physical health compared to mental health



Healthcare provision

The Children's Report, released by UNICEF Australia in 2018, found that;¹⁴

"...children and young people face unique, age specific barriers that can limit their access to health care services. These include concerns about confidentiality, often linked to needing parent or carer support to access a service; inexperience with accessing health care independently; or a lack of knowledge about the different components of the health system, including referral mechanisms and how to coordinate their care. Access may be further compromised by practical barriers, including limited availability of transport and geographical distance from health supports. These complexities are compounded for marginalised children and young people, who are likely to require a more overt sense of safety when accessing services, or may face additional barriers including stigma or lack of culturally appropriate service."

In fact, *in their own words: the hidden impact of prolonged drought on children and young people*, UNICEF Australia reported;¹⁵

"In addition to recognising the clear need for greater long-term investment in mental health services for children and young people living in rural communities, more could be done to prioritise and invest in policy and community-based measures to strengthen the resilience and wellbeing of children living in drought-affected areas. To benefit children and young people who are most severely impacted by drought, investments and interventions should be delivered at a family, school and community level."

One of the recommendations from the report was that the Australian Government develop a targeted national youth mental health strategy which is informed by youth perspectives.

There was a perception among many groups outside main urban centres that the healthcare provided to children and young people in rural and remote areas was less accessible compared to the care available in cities. Discussions focussed on accessibility as the physical availability of services in terms of the vastness of the geography outside main urban centres, as well as the ability to locate relevant information. There was concern that existing mental health facilities were not well advertised, so many young people did not even know what services are available.

Generally, children and young people consider the 'online' provision of services and information as being significantly inferior to being able to have a face to face conversation with a practitioner or provider.

"Put more funding into, like, the wellbeing and the mental health and the hospitals and stuff like that."

(Female, Year 11, Wodonga Senior Secondary College, Vic)

"Provide more places for young people to talk and people who can help them during different things like mentally and physically... and then make it more known to the public so more people can use it."

(Male, Year 8, Glenunga International High School, SA)

"Especially for smaller towns, not especially Wodonga... 'cause they're smaller they don't feel it necessary for them to have mental health services in place. But then it's hard for people who are out there, because they have to find a way to be able to get to those clinic facilities."

(Female, Year 11, Wodonga Senior Secondary College, Vic)

In fact, children from both urban and rural locations often expressed concern about the quality and availability of healthcare provided to people in regional and remote areas. The gap in the healthcare received by people living in urban versus regional and remote areas is well documented, but the fact that children living in all areas see this as a pressing issue indicates this is a matter of priority for all Australians.

"I think there should be a doctor who often goes to the outback and places where people don't very often get doctors because... you might be sick for a long time and not have a doctor to look after you and be all alone."

(Female, aged 10, Baulkham Hills Junior Girl Guides, NSW)

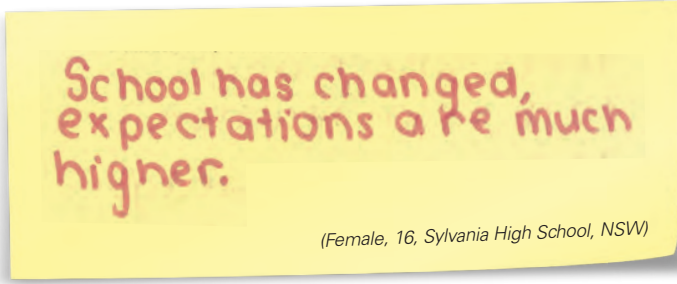
"And with health, maybe get more doctors from Sydney to come to Dubbo - people that are battling with cancer and have to constantly go to Sydney - they can come out to Dubbo and just do it at pretty much at home."

(Year 8, Macquarie Anglican Grammar School, NSW)



Stress at school

"I think every adult should know..."



Alarming, many children believed that their schooling was contributing to poor wellbeing, with many claiming their study workload caused stress and that their school schedule did not allow for them to complete enough physical activity to help alleviate it. This provided an interesting extension of the more general concern, earlier in this chapter, about diminishing levels of physical exercise, particularly among older students during exam periods.

Stress was an aspect of wellbeing that was raised in both primary and high school consultations. The youngest consultation it appeared in was a Year 3 group where a student reflected that:

"One reason why I don't like doing maths is because my parents kind of push me too far to do it."

(Male, Year 3, Trinity Grammar Preparatory School, NSW)

This was echoed by a Year 5 student that:

"...some schools have a lot of homework - and kids get stressed because they have so much work and they don't feel like they have [time] to finish it and sometimes they don't have much free time to do anything like playing with your friends."

(Female, Year 5, Ryde Public School, NSW)

Students in Years 5 and 6 (10 to 11 year olds) talked about their stress levels at school, having to manage multiple and different type of assignments. While they considered this level of stress to be "somewhat manageable", they expressed their nervousness about going to high school, which would mean not only a new environment, but also more subjects and teachers. They expected that stress levels would increase in high school.

Since the majority of our consultations were held in Term 4 of 2018, most high school students had just finished or were in the middle of their exam periods. Many high school students expressed frustration with the stress they were under, particularly if the exam style did not suit them.

"There's a bit of pressure to perform more because, if you want to go into a high paying job after school, you need to perform pretty well in the exams at the end of the year, which will determine whether or not you're set back a year or... to where you want to go."

(Female, Year 12, Macquarie Anglican Grammar School, NSW)

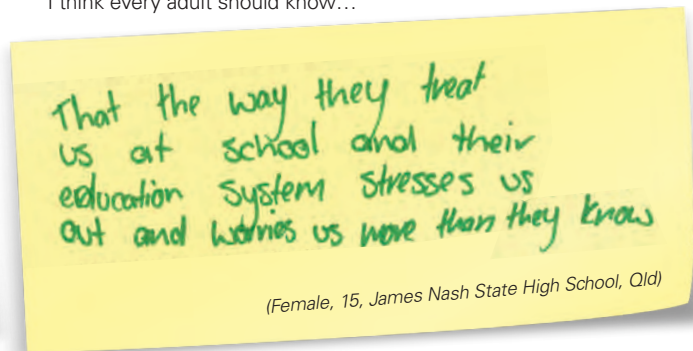
"Some people learn through face to face talking and, if you're sitting there looking at the board and the teacher is yelling at you... you don't get it right."

(Male, Year 10, James Nash State High School, Qld)

"School and test seasons stress you out."

(Male, Year 11, Sylvania High School, NSW)

"I think every adult should know..."



Some students had actively implemented their own approaches to personal stress management. Year 10 female participants from Radford College (ACT) explained their techniques and approaches to managing stress in relation to their studies:

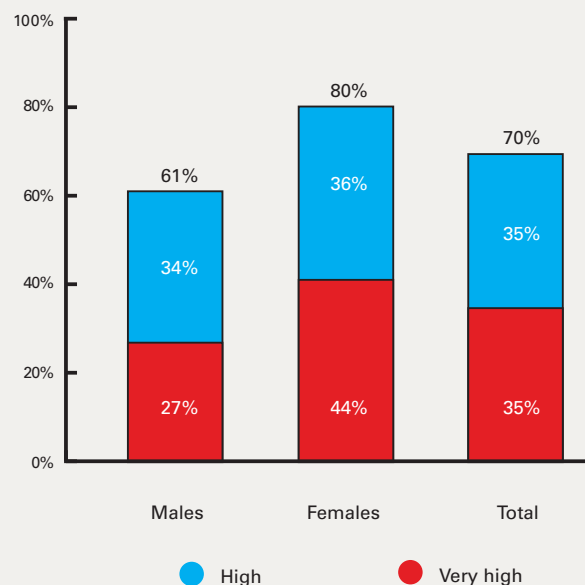
"Exercise is good [for your] health - like being able to let loose and clear your mind - or even your passions. Like, I'm a dancer, so I love to dance and really de-stress when I do that - so having something on the side that you know you can just go to when you need to get away for a bit."

"Good health is not now only about being physically healthy, not being sick. It's also a lot to do with mental health. So, I play piano... that has ... to sort of do with music and de-stressing. And I think that's a really good way to like clear your mind at the end of the day like you said."

On a self-assessment scale:

- **71 per cent of young people in Australia report experiencing above normal stress levels at school** including 35 per cent reporting "very high" levels of stress.
- A 17 per cent higher proportion of females (44 per cent) experience "very high" levels of stress at school than males (27 per cent).

Self assessment of stress at school





3.2 Safety

Safety is important for all children across the life cycle. Research shows that safety and attachment are particularly critical for healthy development in the early years of childhood.

In 2014, UNICEF convened a 'Building Better Brains'¹⁶ symposium in New York that brought together leading international scientists from specialised neuroscience disciplines to explore the connections between multiple adversity and early brain development and function.

Among other points of discussion, the symposium highlighted the fact that the human brain develops at its most rapid pace in the first few years of life (the brains of young children form new connections at the rate of 700 to 1,000 per second), which makes caring, good health, nutrition, and stimulation for all young children greatly important during this period.

By extension, the interaction between adequate nourishment, the right kind of positive stimulation and nurturing care, and a sense of **safety and security** has an effect on the brain's ability to develop properly — and therefore on the ability of children to reach their full potential.

Among the general messages from the symposium were two related directly to the importance of safety. Toxic stress and exposure to violence, abuse, and neglect during early childhood has a lifelong impact, with the potential to disrupt healthy brain development. Scientists pointed out that, "[in order] to restore regular brain development, the brain must detect features of safety." In short, **safety is a pre-requisite for early childhood development.**

A 2014 paper on the effects of stress and the developing brain, by The National Scientific Council on the Developing Child in the United States, stated that:

"human studies with infants and children... have shown that adverse early infant experiences (e.g., neglectful maternal care)... can lead to short-term neurobehavioral and neurohormonal changes in offspring that may have long-term adverse effects on memory, learning, and behaviour throughout life."¹⁷

UNICEF's 2017 publication, *The Adolescent Brain: A Second Opportunity*, explains that this phase of childhood development is also a period of vulnerability.

This is a period during which children become more vulnerable to mental health issues, to suicide, to social isolation/rejection and bullying.

The adolescent brain is extremely sensitive to stress. And during this phase of development, safe environments, safe carers and safe adults are critical for continued healthy development.

The right to life, survival and development is a core guiding principle of the Children's Convention - the safety of children is a foundational right which must first be met before other rights can be met.

Safety and the Children's Convention

Safety is rarely explicitly mentioned or placed as its own issue in the Convention of the Rights of the Child (Children's Convention). Nevertheless, it features across multiple areas and issues.

For example:

- Governments should ensure that **children survive and develop healthily** (Article 6),
- only separate families if the parent is **mistreating or neglecting** a child (Article 9),
- children have the right to get and to share **information** (Article 13),
- to **privacy**, and to be **protected from attacks** against their way of life, their good name, their family and their home (Article 16),
- as well as protection from **violence, abuse and neglect** (Article 19),
- work that is dangerous or might harm their health or education (Article 32),
- dangerous **drugs** (Article 33),
- **sexual abuse** (Article 34),
- **being abducted or sold** (Article 34),
- **activities that could harm their development** (Article 36),
- **being treated cruelly** even if they broke the law (Article 37), and
- special protection in **warzones** (Article 38).

Safety and the SDGs

Similar to the Children's Convention, the concept of 'safety' is broad and is generally referred in the SDGs as a basic component to many fields. For example,



- **food** should be safe and nutritious (#2),



- **health care** should be safe, effective, quality and affordable (#3),



- **education facilities** should be safe, non-violent, inclusive and effective (#4),



- **water** should be safe and affordable, even if reused (#6),



- **working environments** for young people should be safe and secure (#8),



- safe, orderly, regular and responsible **migration policies** (#10,) and



- **cities and human settlements** to be inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable (#11).

The safety of children and young people is a priority area for UNICEF Australia and UNICEF globally, with a particular focus on ending violence (in all its forms) against children.

In Australia, the federal government's *National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009-2020* is approaching its conclusion. Based on the findings of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, there has been increased focus and resourcing towards ensuring the safety of children across all areas, which engage directly with children and young people. Most recently, this has resulted in the *Principles for Child Safe Organisations*, released by the Australian Human Rights Commission and the National Children's Commissioner. While there has been some progress, there is still much more work to be done in this area.

During workshops conducted as part of their training in 2018, the Young Ambassadors settled on safety as a broad concept to be discussed in their national consultations. The decision was made to broaden discussions beyond UNICEF's priority of 'violence'. This was in recognition of the fact that events, situations and incidents that impact upon a person's physical and emotional safety cover a wider canvas of experience that feeds into their overall sense of wellbeing. This allowed us to explore the concepts with all age groups in far more accessible terms and in conversations in which they would be comfortable.

When introducing the safety topic, participants were reminded to only share what they felt comfortable with. They didn't need to use exact details and could always use the example of someone they know of. Participants were asked for examples of what made them feel safe or unsafe.

'Home' as safety

For most younger children in the Young Ambassador consultations, typically those up to the end of primary school, 'parents' - and 'home with their parents' - was expressed as the primary place they equated with 'safety'.

After the concept of 'home', 'bed' was the second most common response from children in this age group. (This reflects the finding from a 2018 Australian Institute of Health and Welfare study which found that 88.7 per cent of adults felt safe at home during the night).¹⁸ The most common response after 'bed' was 'school'.

While the majority of participants verbally explained that they feel safe at home, they were aware that other young people do not necessarily have the same experience. A male Year 7 student from Toormina High School (NSW) said that *"it can be a danger going home"* due to problems at home, but that if they would also *"feel unsafe if I was homeless"*.

Supporting reasons offered by participants included that not all parents are good parents, there could be drugs or alcohol involved and in some cases domestic abuse or child neglect. Mental health repercussions were also flagged as a potential consequence:

"Just living in a stable environment, so, I guess, lots of changes for people can lead to anxiety and all that because they have a set comfortable position that they feel, and lots of changes can get them out of that, kind of, comfort zone."

(Female, Year 11, Wodonga Senior Secondary College, Vic)

The notion that "home" provided the highest level of safety was supported by our national survey. Across the country, in and outside capital cities, **94 per cent of young people say they feel quite or very safe at home.**

The concept of 'safety' as children grow up

When asked to expand this concept of safety, most children and young people recognised that they needed to become and stay aware of what is going on around them in order to make good decisions that will prevent them from being placed in unsafe situations. In younger children this was typically illustrated through references to 'stranger danger'.

As participants grew older, especially in the transition to high school and senior school, the notion that they had to take personal responsibility for their own safety increased with experience. They increasingly referred to other needs and influences coming into play and impacting upon their perception and interpretation of safety.

Young Ambassador: *"Who is responsible for keeping you safe?"*

Female, Year 8: *"Yourselves, in some situations and like the people who look after you."*

(Female, Year 8, Wodonga Middle Years College, Vic)

"Just yourself making the right decisions like yeah, if you had the decision where to go, you wouldn't go to the dark alley, you'd go somewhere else."

(Female, Year 8, Glenunga International High School, SA)

Safety online

A key finding in UNICEF's *2017 State of the World's Children* report was that, while the digital world can help to prevent children from being left behind – particularly in relation to education and social connection - more needs to be done, more rapidly, to protect children online.¹⁹ Specifically, the report highlighted the need for more investment and faster action. Broadly speaking Australia is considered one of the world's leaders in this space for children.

In our consultations, many children discussed safety in terms on the online world – using their phones or computers, or gaming. Social media and games most frequently referenced during the consultations included Fortnite, IBF (Internet Best Friends), Facebook, Instagram and Snapchat. Gaming, namely Fortnite, was consistently mentioned from Years 4 to 9 (ages 8 to 14 years).

Participants in Year 5 considered searching online was potentially – indirectly – "unsafe" because of viruses and not being able to close off particular websites.

More direct threats are also experienced - many mentioned that they had been talking to people online who had tried to meet up with them and get their phone numbers. If numbers were exchanged, there became unwanted phone calls. In this situation, most, but not all children felt comfortable talking to their parents about the issue to make the problem go away. Generally, they expressed a high level of embarrassment that it happened. When the parents stepped in, the number was blocked and contact would cease. Most children contextualised this as a learning opportunity, became more savvy online, and were able to warn their friends about what they had learned.

"Technology can affect you in a good way or a bad way like it can inspire you to do something but it could take away your social life and it could you may get like cyber bullied."

(Female, Year 6, Wodonga South Primary School, Vic)



Acknowledging there is no way to completely avoid online safety issues, other than going off the grid, children and young people said they had been developing their skills for navigating online, were keeping themselves updated about potential issues to their safety and were trying to take appropriate actions to address safety issues.

"I know what I'm looking for, I know what to say if someone is trying to contact me" [How have you gotten to the point where you know?] "I've been told by past teachers and everything about cyber safety and what not to do on the internet and what to do if someone does contact you."

(Year 7, Toormina High School, NSW).

Older participants were more equipped with the skills to navigate their way through social media and online. Some said they were using social media to communicate feelings and emotions as a substitute for doing this face to face with peer groups and friends - a tendency that is both positive and negative in real terms.

"Especially in our age group, about social media, that's a big thing about communication, we're like, all good talking online, and sharing out our ideas, but then in person, I think that's another reason why it's hard for you to release your emotions and that, because you're always like, you can't express it to someone else in person. Feel like you're less judged."

(Female, Year 11, Wodonga Senior Secondary College, Vic)

One fifth of young people in Australia (19 per cent) say they feel unsafe online – 15 per cent "not very safe" and 4 per cent "very unsafe" - with the remaining four fifths (81 per cent) saying they feel safe.

Concern about cyber safety and security is very high, with 90 per cent of young people in Australia being concerned about it and 45 per cent very concerned.

Safety at school

If school was mentioned as an unsafe space, this was typically presented in terms of bullying or being isolated by not having friends. This was most frequently mentioned during primary school consultations.

School-based consultations would commonly cite bullying as something that reduced feelings of safety. More than likely due to a common lived experience and acknowledgement within the school system, it was also the area students identified as most needing change.

The forms of bullying discussed by children tended to change as they advanced in age. In primary school, it usually took the form of teasing and excluding, evolving to more complicated manifestations in high school, including through technology and online.

Most young people in Australia (89 per cent) feel safe at school, while one tenth (9 per cent) feel unsafe.

Bullying was first brought up earliest as a topic by Year 3 students and would consistently be mentioned from Years 4 through to 8. It was consistently volunteered across genders, age and location.

“I feel unsafe most of the time because, since I don’t have that much friendships, that when I’m by myself I would get scared that someone’s gonna take advantage of me and try to hurt me. I also feel unsafe when people are actually being physical at school.”

(Female, Year 5, Vic)

“When I came to school for the first [time], one of the first days of Year 1, lots of people were teasing me and that sort of thing and that didn’t really work for me [at my old school]... everyone was just like talking...”

(Female, Year 5, NSW)

As a solution, younger students were more likely to suggest that additional classes should be taught about bullying so that they could become better equipped to address it in the future.

Participants who raised bullying from their personal experience frequently indicated they wanted the bully to understand what the negative and often damaging impacts of what they were doing from the perspective of the person who they had been bullying.

“I wish we could focus more on the impact of someone’s bullying and how it can affect, well, the people that are being bullied and stuff like that.”

(Male, Year 5, Vic)

Many schools we visited had recently conducted school-wide discussions about bullying and how it was not tolerated at the school.

In one consultation, students in Years 3 and 4 reflected on how a student was being bullied because of the colour of her skin. While this student was away during the consultation, the remaining students pointed out that the names she had been called were not appropriate and would hurt her feelings. The school had explained that if the bullying continued, offending students would be expelled.

“I feel safe when everyone’s being happy and kind but I don’t feel safe when for example at school people are bullying each other”

(Female, Year 5, Vic)

From late primary school, students were able to explain – with a certainty and conviction that very often seemed to come from direct or indirect personal experience – the ongoing negative effects of bullying.

“Bullying can lead to a lot of things that affect your wellbeing, like eating disorders and sexual assault.”

(Female, Year 5, NSW)

Many pointed to consequences for the victim, relating to mental health, including anxiety and depression, as well as low self-esteem. There was strong recognition that, in extreme cases, it could lead to or contribute to suicide.

Among young people in Australia aged 14 to 17 years, **42 per cent consider bullying to be a threat to their safety.**

Though **close to half (45 per cent) of young people in Australia between the ages of 14 and 17 say they have not been bullied in the last two years**, it is very clear that bullying is a significant problem for young people.

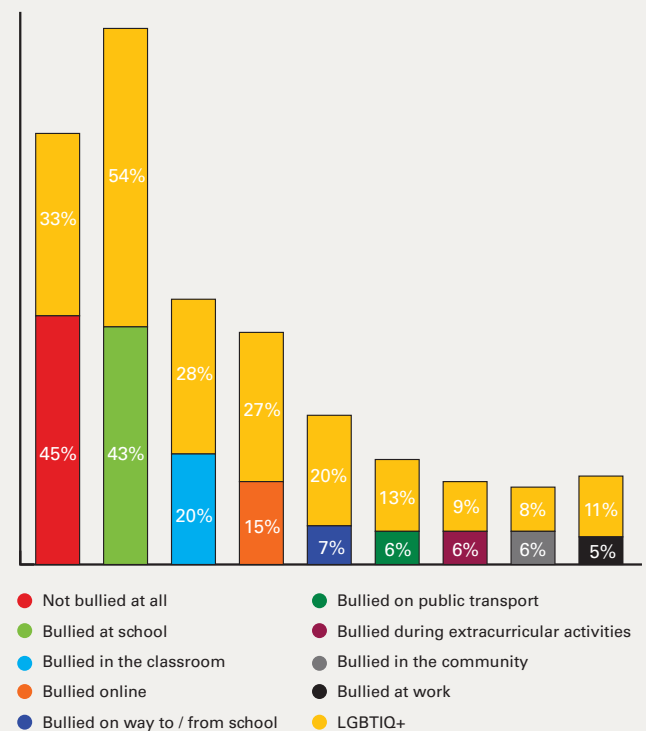
A total of 43 per cent have been bullied at school, and this proportion is 14 per cent higher outside capital cities (52 per cent) than in them (38 per cent). An 11 per cent higher proportion of young people who identify as LGBTIQ+ (54 per cent) have been bullied at school in the last two years.

One fifth (20 per cent) of young people have been **bullied in the classroom**, a proportion that is 10 per cent higher outside capital cities (27 per cent) than in them (17 per cent).

A total of 15 per cent of young people have been bullied online, which almost doubles (27 per cent) among LGBTIQ+ young people.

The prevalence of bullying among LGBTIQ+ young people is also roughly double to triple that among the entire population **on the way to and from school** (20 per cent versus 7%), **on public transport** (13 versus 6) and **at work** (11 versus 5).

Experience of bullying over the last two years



In these situations, many primary school students explained that talking to the teacher was the best way to address bullying. However, this attitude was not shared among high school students, who did not see talking to teachers as an effective way of addressing the situation. From as early as primary school, it was common for students to tell us that they felt teachers were both not taking bullying seriously and not taking any action to address it.

"Teachers don't do anything. You feel like you can't tell anyone 'cause nothing is going to happen."

(Female, Year 7, Qld).

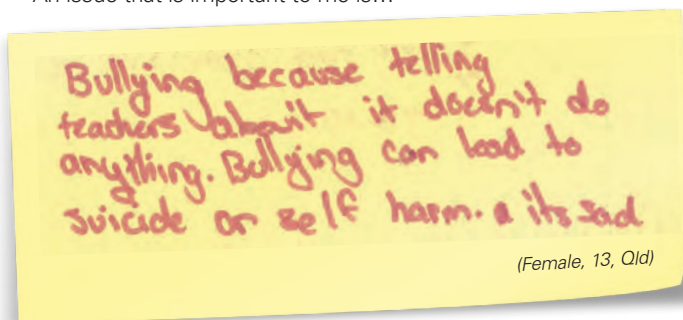
"And with the bullying subject, [teachers] never really follow up with it and they put the blame on the victim instead of the other person that's doing it. They begin to brush it off and they don't follow it until the person either gets to the point where they think suicide is the option."

(Female, Year 11, Vic)

"Bullying is important because teachers don't do anything for us. My friends and I have told teachers many times and nothing has happened to the bully."

(Female, Year 7, Qld)

"An issue that is important to me is..."



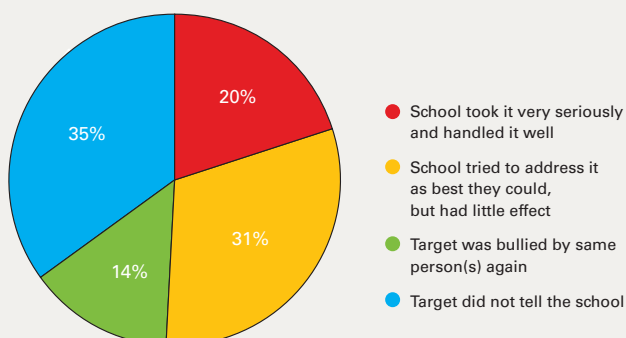
(Female, 13, Qld)

Over a third of young people in Australia (35 per cent) who have been bullied at school did not report the bullying to the school.

A fifth (20 per cent) reported it and felt the **school had taken it seriously and handled it well**, a feeling that was 17 per cent higher among females (27 per cent) than males (10 per cent).

However, just under half - a total of 45 per cent - felt any action taken by the school had little effect. A third (31 per cent) felt the school had tried to address it, but had little effect, while 14 per cent had been bullied by the same people again.

Results of reporting bullying to the school



Safety in public places

In very young children, any fear of being unsafe generally appeared to be an awareness created by having been taught about "stranger danger"; and similar safety concepts.

"Don't talk to strangers."

(Male, Year 1, Nollamara Primary School, WA)

"When you're walking alone and you see people being mean to each other."

(Female, Year 5, Bassendean Primary School, WA)

As many of these young participants at primary school had been learning about safety, they were often able to explain who they should talk to and what to do when there were safety problems.

"We can ask the police, we can ask the fire engine, we can ask the ambulance or we can call for help."

(Female, 5 years old, Alma St Pre-Prep, Qld)

"The teachers can look after you."

(Male, 4 years old, Castle Hill Uniting Church Wesley Preschool)

As children grew older and developed a more independent relationship with their surroundings, they talked about having more diverse life experiences in a variety of locations away from the home and school.

In these circumstances, the perspective on 'safety' changed to a more palpable threat with a greater understanding of motivation and consequences.

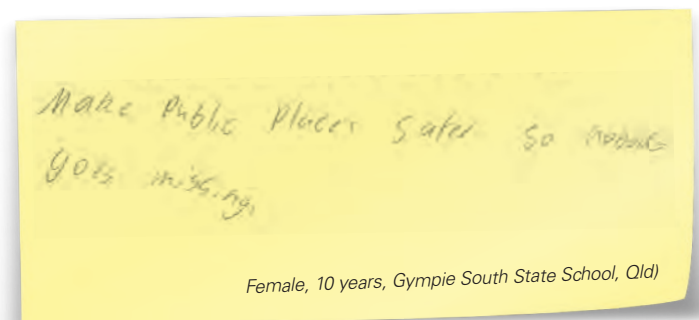
"At night people come out like, drunk people or something... they start harassing you. And when you're a kid, or like a woman or something, you can't do anything. So, unless someone's with you, sometimes they can take your phone, or [rob] you, or kidnap you or something. So, that's like, if you just put lights and security there, near apartments and things like that."

(Female, Year 5, Ryde Public School, NSW)

"I wouldn't really feel safe at 2 in the morning unless I had my brother or my dad... I feel like my dad or my brother could protect me if something bad were to happen"

(Female, Year 8, Glenunga International High School, SA)

"I think decision-makers should..."



Female, 10 years, Gympie South State School, Qld)

During discussions, it was not uncommon for female students to link their fears to their gender.

"I don't feel safe at night going out, especially if I am on my own if I'm walking to the bus stop or something. I think that is a real systemic problem in our society where - and this is me speaking as a woman - often times [we] don't feel safe going out at night or walking out [or] going to the restroom on their own."

(Female, Year 10, St Leonard's College, Vic)

"Me personally, I feel unsafe going anywhere alone, and that's just because I'm a girl, and I don't know self-defence, so I can't protect myself against anyone."

(Female, Year 11, Wodonga Senior Secondary College, Vic)

"Walking alone at night, my mum says I have to take my brother around to my friend's house to pick me up... she feels as though it's ok for my brother to walk alone but for a girl to walk the streets at night, she doesn't feel [it's responsible or safe]... Then there's lots of people saying we should have police around, but... that's not going to work, no matter how many policeman you have. You kind of need to trust society that it's going to be a safe place."

(Female, Year 11, St Leonard's College, Vic)



"I believe that everyone should feel safe enough to walk around alone at night"

Emma, 16, VIC.

In some consultations, a distinction was made between feelings of safety in cities and smaller communities.

"[In a] smaller town where there's more of a community and you kind of know the people around you"

(Female, Year 12, Macquarie Anglican Grammar School, NSW)

Under a quarter, 23 per cent, of young people in Australia feel "unsafe" (not very safe or very unsafe) in public places during the day. Females are twice as likely (30 per cent) than males (15 per cent) to feel "very unsafe" or "not very safe" [i.e., unsafe] in public places during the day.

This picture changes dramatically as night falls. **Three quarters (73 per cent) of young people feel unsafe in public places at night**, rising to 90 per cent of females, a third more than the 57 percent of males.

Drugs and alcohol and safety

Interestingly, young people who brought up drinking, drug taking and smoking, often did so during discussions about safety, rather than in the context of health and wellbeing.

Mostly, this discussion stemmed, not from them actively engaging with or using the substances, but from their reaction to the anti-social and unpredictable behaviour of those who are using and are affected by alcohol, drugs and smoking.

Children tended to take a strong stance on anti-alcohol, drugs and smoking from as young as Year 2, with recommendations to ban them completely.

"People that drink really, I think all alcohol should be banned - well, illegal - because it can actually make people go really crazy."

(Female, Year 5, Bassendean Primary School, WA)

"You can feel unsafe around someone who has had alcohol or substance abuse."

(Female, Year 8, Glenunga International High School, SA)

"Other people that may have, like, substance abuse, or, issue that haven't been dealt with properly... that could definitely make someone feel unsafe."

(Female, Year 11, Wodonga Senior Secondary College, Vic)

"Especially around teens... unsafe going to a party, teens and children... children just being exposed to alcohol abuse and substance abuse"

(Female, Year 11, Wodonga Senior Secondary College, Vic)

Among young people in Australia aged 14 to 17 years, 47 per cent consider drugs and alcohol to be a threat to their safety.



Safety and gender

Conversations in consultations across the country revealed that, though 'home' represents the highest symbol of safety for children and young people (as discussed at the beginning of this chapter), they are also very concerned about violence making it unsafe.

2017 data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics and Australian Institute of Criminology shows that: on average, one woman a week is murdered by her current or former partner; one in three Australian women have experienced physical violence since the age of 15;²⁰ one in six Australian women has experienced physical or sexual violence by current or former partner²¹ and one in four Australian women has experienced emotional abuse by a current or former partner.²²

Australian women are nearly three times more likely than men to experience violence from an intimate partner.²³ And one in three men are the victim of sexual abuse or domestic violence.²⁴

Gender, sexual abuse and domestic violence first began to be specifically mentioned in consultations with Year 5 students. However, children at this age often reference it in terms of news reports.

"Some people can feel unsafe even with their own family, because children are getting abused. You might be getting abused... like, if you have a husband or wife or girlfriend or boyfriend, you may be getting abused by them too. So you might not feel safe [because] you may not be able to leave that relationship."

(Male, Year 5, Bassendean Primary School, WA)

When sexual assault was raised, which was infrequently, it was generally discussed as a common fear. Many demonstrated a heightened awareness of it.

"I feel like nowadays it's always near you... shared rumours or stories about sexual assault... even if you've never experienced it, you know that anytime you go out after seven or something, you feel like there is always [someone] around the corner to jump out at you."

(Female, Year 7, Northcote High School, Vic).

Older participants were concerned about domestic violence, reflecting that the home is not safe for everyone. At times, this came from personal experience, and extra care was taken to ensure that everyone felt safe in the consultation.

A Year 11 female participant from Wodonga Senior Secondary College (Vic) observed that child abuse and family violence is everybody's business:

"Raising awareness and telling people about child abuse as well - that's a big thing for me personally, so, like, basically... don't hit your kid because look at the effects of what could happen later on in life."

Some of her peers also suggested parenting in a domestic setting was not as easy for everyone as it is popularly made out to be.

"Giving parents proper discipline techniques, without having to resort to physical violence or mental abuse or anything like that."

(Female, Year 11, Wodonga Senior Secondary College, Vic)

In a consultation with the Student Representative Council from Toormina High School (NSW), participants were asked to identify issues that were of importance on the community, national and international level. On the domestic level in terms of violence, students were concerned about domestic violence in the Coffs Harbour region.

"Domestic violence in Coffs Region."

(Male, 14, NSW)

"Drugs and people and violence."

(Male, 17, NSW)

When considering issues of global impact on children and young people, violence against women and children was still also seen as a top priority concern:

"Domestic violence between parents are addressed too lightly."

(Male, 16, NSW)

"Violence against women."

(Female, 12, NSW)

When asked to explain why violence against women was an important issue, a Year 7 female student from Toormina High School explained:

"Global - I choose violence against women because everyone should be treated the same – men and women – and all that. And its, women around the world get treated not so great. Women should have the [same] rights that guys do... they want to say that men can do more things than women can do... there are some things that girls can do, women can do... if they're not treated the same, there's a lot of things that could play in to all that."

Consultation participants had an understanding that violence goes beyond the physical and also includes other forms of abuse including neglect, exploitation and sexual abuse. The manifestation of 'being safe' comes from many contributing factors. In terms of neglect, a young woman from Year 11 from Wodonga Senior Secondary College said:

"Some parents are completely oblivious about what their children do. They're getting into those unsafe environments because their parents aren't looking out for them, they're not knowing what they're doing. So the children think because their parents are never telling them 'look you can't do this, this is unsafe' they think it's okay to keep doing it."

She provided an alternative which she thought might be workable for them:

"If the parents are gonna say 'don't do this' they're gonna do it, however, those things can be avoided when we just say, like, when parents support their kid and allow them to do things to a degree, but don't do it so bad that it's going to affect everything, like, just say 'hey, I support you, I'm okay with what you do as long as you do it safely and you're not gonna harm yourself or anyone else'."

Children frequently pointed to what they considered to be gaps in their education, contributing to their high level of concern about this issue. In particular, older high school children, particularly females, said sex education was inadequately addressed and, where it was, the problem of sexual violence was mostly not considered.

Though there was strong awareness about abuse and assault, some young people felt they were being taught about the issue from a biased perspective that tended to concentrate solely on violence committed by men against women, without being provided the context of other scenarios.

For example:

"I think it is really good we are having more education about things like sexual assault, but I feel like the education that we do get is quite narrow-minded, like it's just one perspective as I can only kind of learn about men raping or sexually assaulting women. There [are] more diverse things that happen and like even talking about men and sexual assaults. There is a lot of stigma around men when they have been sexually assaulted or if you can help with that and I feel talking about in school and early on - not too early but even just in the sex education."

(Female, Year 10, Radford College, ACT)

Some young people argued that this broadening on the information and perspectives would assist in de-stigmatising the issue as well as introduce young people to the realities of the world. Hopefully this would foster respectful conversations and challenge the social norm.

UNICEF Australia acknowledges that, while domestic and family violence is pervasive, data also confirms that it is largely committed by men.

Violence against women and children is an issue that attracts a very high level of concern among young people in Australia – **94 per cent of young people are concerned** about this issue, with 62 per cent being "very concerned". This issue significantly impacts girls more than boys in this age group with 13 per cent more female young people (68 per cent) saying they are concerned than males (55 per cent).

Over a third of young people, **35 per cent, identify family violence as a threat to their safety.**

Other factors that may impact on personal safety

As participants became older and their awareness about the potential of the government and their surroundings to impact upon their lives increased, so too did their awareness of situational factors that made them safe. Many participants pointed out the government's role in addressing safety issues. For example:

"Governments should make solutions which will end up in world peace."

(Male, Year 5, Toormina Public School, NSW)

"The Government who is here to protect the people."

(Female, Year 10, St Leonard's College, Vic)

Some students, typified by one male Year 10 student from James Nash State High School in Queensland, expressed their frustration that governments no longer seemed to have representation of the public as a core principle:

"The government is not actually doing things for the people they're serving – they are caught up in internal bickering –stop arguing and help people."

In widening the scope of discussions, older participants discussed various high-profile events and issues, which played to notions of safety across various arenas, saying these also have the potential to impact on their own sense of personal safety. It was clear that a high proportion of the responses and discussion from all age groups often correlated to what they had heard on the news and had discussed with their parents.

For example, at the beginning of the consultations young people identified needles in strawberries and other food as a threat to their safety. Towards the end of the consultations, terrorism was a high concern, noting that news about an attack in Melbourne was highly profiled in news media.

Some of the more significant world events that children and young people considered could impact their personal safety included discussion of the #MeToo movement, the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, abuses in Aged Care, protection and detention of children in the Northern Territory, a reduction of faith in online security, cyber safety, a rise in fear of terrorism and the intensifying impacts of climate change.

Around the country, children and young people demonstrated high awareness about whether the threats to their safety were realistic or hardly possible. For example, participants in Dubbo explained that the threat of terrorism is unlikely in their part of the world unless the Royals were in town (as they had been just before our visit). They reflected that terrorist attacks are more likely to happen in capital cities and where there are larger concentration of populations.

"I reckon the news threatens your safety because it can make people scared or anxious all the time. Like car crashes, murders, terrorist attacks."

(Male, Year 6, Hewett Primary School, SA)

"When like all of like war and poverty and like terrorist stuff comes on the news, makes me feel unsafe."

(Male, Year 7, Toormina High School, NSW)

Young Ambassador: *"Do you think terrorism is a threat to you in Dubbo?"*

Participant: *"No but in like the big cities like Sydney it could be."*

(Male, Stage 2, Macquarie Anglican Grammar School, NSW.)

Among young people in Australia aged 14 to 17 years, 54 per cent consider **terrorism** to be a threat to their safety.





3.3 Learning

Education has long been recognised as the great equaliser. It can build social mobility and lift people out of poverty, reduce inequalities, and strengthen economies.

The experience of education in Australia

In October 2018, UNICEF released *Report Card 15 An unfair start: Inequality in children's education in rich countries*, a report on access to quality education across forty-one of the world's richest countries, all of which are members of the OECD and/or the European Union.

These countries were ranked in relation to equality in the three stages of the education system - in pre-school, primary school and secondary education.

The report found that, in the world's richest countries, some children do worse at school because of the circumstances into which they were born – circumstances that are beyond their control. That is, the location in which they are born, their first language and the occupation and household income of their parents.

As these children can enter the education system with a disadvantage, unless governments commit to changing the policies and practices that make the picture unequal, they will continue to fall behind.

The underlying point in relation to these comparatively wealthy countries, including ours, is that not all children have a fair chance, or equal opportunity to develop their interests or pursue their curiosity.

In *Report Card 15*, Australia was ranked in the bottom third for equality of access to early childhood, primary and secondary education.

This poor access is most apparent in the unacceptable education rates for **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children**. Only 82 per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children attended school in 2018, a figure which is down from 2014. This is 11 per cent lower than the attendance rate for non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. Attendance rates are even worse in rural and remote areas, with only 63 per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children attending school.²⁶ The retention rate for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in Years 10-12 in government schools is under 60 per cent.²⁷

The reasons these children do not attend school are many and varied. For example, they can include the distance they live from school, flooding and other environmental issues, gaps in the cultural competency of teachers and school administrators, a lack of engagement by the school with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents, as well as irrelevance of the curriculum to their culture and lived experience.

In fact, *The Children's Report* found that, in Australia:²⁸

"A child's background is having a greater impact on their ability to succeed at school, with direct and indirect barriers that impede access to education including absence of birth registration, poverty, experiences of violence and bullying, remoteness, lack of cultural safety for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and children from refugee and migrant backgrounds, and limited individualised support for children with disabilities."

Rural communities also tend to have poorer educational outcomes. A stark contrast of 78 per cent of students in major cities complete Year 12 or equivalent compared to only 43 per cent of students in very remote areas.²⁹

It is no surprise, then, that children from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, ethnic communities or rural areas are significantly less likely to make the transition from primary school to secondary school, and are more likely to be delayed in moving up a year level.³⁰

Learning and the Children's Convention

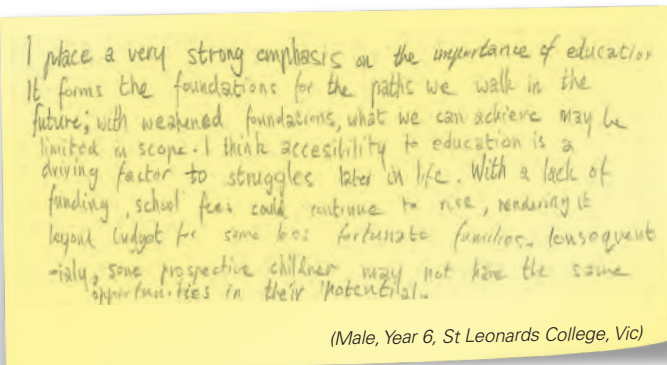
The right to have an education is enshrined in the Children's Convention. Article 28 of the Children's Convention states that it is the right of all children to have **access to quality education**. Article 29 asserts that education must **develop every child's talents and abilities**. As a signatory to this convention, the Australian Government is obliged to provide a quality education to all its citizens.

Learning and the SDGs 2030



The fourth SDG is 'Quality Education' aims for all children and young people to have access to inclusive and equitable education that promotes lifelong opportunities for all.

"Something that is important to me is..."





Discussions about education and learning

In consultations, most groups of participants talked about many children around the world being unable to access quality education due to entrenched poverty or, in Australia, because of being homeless.

They expressed concern for children and young people in this situation and thought that the government should take action to ensure that every child in Australia has the opportunity to get a good education.

Following this theme of income inequality, many high school students expressed concern about the difficulty and costs associated with accessing tertiary education, especially for rural students.

The vast majority of young people in Australia (92 per cent) are concerned about receiving a quality education, with more than half (55 per cent) being very concerned.

In consultations, young people commonly explained that they consider the curriculum to lack practical application, leaving them unprepared for life after secondary schooling.

"I feel like there is a lot of things that adults and teachers... [don't] tell kids about, because they think they won't understand and stuff. But kids do get it. And we need to learn about... things like mental illness and things that are going to happen to us later on in life... they either don't teach us or they don't teach us until its way too late."

(Female, Year 7, Northcote High School, Vic)

Across age groups, participants expressed opinions about the most helpful areas for them to be learning about. Though this was often discussed in terms of **practical life skills** that would assist them with gaining employment and generally functioning effectively in adulthood, it was not, however at the exclusion of traditional subjects. If participants did not enjoy a particular subject or sub-topic within a subject, this did not necessarily mean that they discounted the whole subject as being useless or not valuable.

For example, younger participants in primary school, often said they thought it important to learn more about nutrition and cooking, so that they would be able to feed themselves. They also commonly said they wanted to learn about financial skills because they thought this information would be important to understand when they become adults. The majority of these younger participants also viewed mathematics, English and science as core skilling for being able to gain employment as adults.



Many, particularly males, wanted to spend more time learning sport and being outside exercising. Typically, soccer was the sport of choice.

"I guess things like maths and spelling and English, they help you in the real world...because school helps you, university and high school helps you in the real world."

(Female, Year 5, Toormina Public School, NSW)

This view was held more assertively among high school students, who mostly felt that the current curriculum was far from adequately preparing them for their first steps into adult life.

"School needs more hands-on subjects... this is what they're going to use in life, so why not start in school?"

(Male, Apollo House Community Centre, Dubbo, NSW)

This idea was further expanded by some students who suggested that 'life skills' such as resume-writing and job application skills be taught in schools. Participants said that not only did they need these skills to be able to navigate the world once they become an adult, but adults seemed to assume that they knew these things already - meaning there was a gap between what they needed to know and what their parents, potential employers and others thought they were being taught.

"Maybe how to do some basic like to get a job because when you go out of high school or maybe university you might want to have a job and you might not know how to get one."

(Male, Year 5, Ryde Public School, NSW)

Considering the 'life skills' lens through which students tend to view the purpose of their education, **89 per cent of Young people in Australia aged 14 to 17 years are concerned about unemployment and getting a job**, with 52 per cent being very concerned.

The results of the World Children's Day Survey in 2018 corroborated the fact that children and young people in Australia are very concerned about their future employability and about having exposure to the practical skills associated with applying for and interviewing for jobs. They are also concerned with being adequately skilled to manage the day to day responsibilities of being an adult - tasks such as household budgeting, basic finances, health, nutrition and fitness.

The Young Ambassadors took the view that this interest in practical skills should be investigated further in their national survey - for example, what do young people see as the gaps in an already over-crowded curriculum in relation to social and emotional skills and other important life skills.

Participants were asked to consider twenty subjects that feature in curriculums around the country. **Though practical life skills dominate the ten most desired learning areas, young people in Australia seemingly continue to value core curriculum subjects that have traditionally formed the basis of an education.**

Mathematics, English, computer skills, and science all feature prominently as valued subjects, with half or more young people considering it important to study them.

1. 79 per cent Practical financial skills (how to budget, open accounts, managing household costs like food, power, telecoms etc)
2. 73 per cent Recruitment skills (application writing, interview skills, resume writing)
3. 73 per cent Problem solving, logical thinking
4. 69 per cent Practical on the job skills (work experience, dress codes, behaviour)
5. 67 per cent Practical life skills (nutrition, health, fitness, exercise)
6. 66 per cent Mathematics
7. 62 per cent English language, comprehension and writing
8. 56 per cent Sex education
9. 53 per cent Computer skills
10. 49 per cent Science (physics, chemistry, biology).

Young people illustrated an insightful and considered approach to assessing the information presented to them. It can be argued that they see mathematics and computer skills as related to and providing foundational support to learning about practical financial skills, problem solving and logical thinking. Similarly, English as pivotal to recruitment and job skills. Sex education can be argued to sit with practical life skills.

In looking at differences between male and female respondents, the most significant departure is in relation to the position of mathematics. In a gender-based top ten list, maths sits at number 3 (71 per cent) for males and number 7 (51 per cent) for females. Other subjects (including cooking) are positioned similarly.

Sex education

Students in Years 10 to 12 (aged 15 to 17 years) expressed anxiety about what they saw as vastly inadequate school-based education in relation to sex.

The general level of concern centred upon an education system that touched on the issue very lightly and too briefly, without taking into account the very “real world” in which teenagers are commonly already having sex.

Students frequently said they had many questions, concerns and anxieties relating to subjects including sexual behaviour, sexual health, consent, abuse, advice and support. As one student said, the lesson of “putting a condom on a banana” just simply isn’t enough.

Concern was often expressed that young people were therefore being placed in the position of turning to the internet as a more reliable source of finding information on this subject matter than anything they had briefly touched on – if at all - in class.

The first times the discussion about sex education appeared was among female students in Year 10.

Though this was not one of the core issues discussed in consultations among these age groups, nationwide, it seemed more often a discussion point raised among females. However, Young Ambassadors noted there tended to be more females in the consultations in these age groups.

Additionally, students mostly discussed sex-related subject matter in terms of people they knew, rather than from the perspective of personal experience – the implication being that this was a safer way to have the discussion.

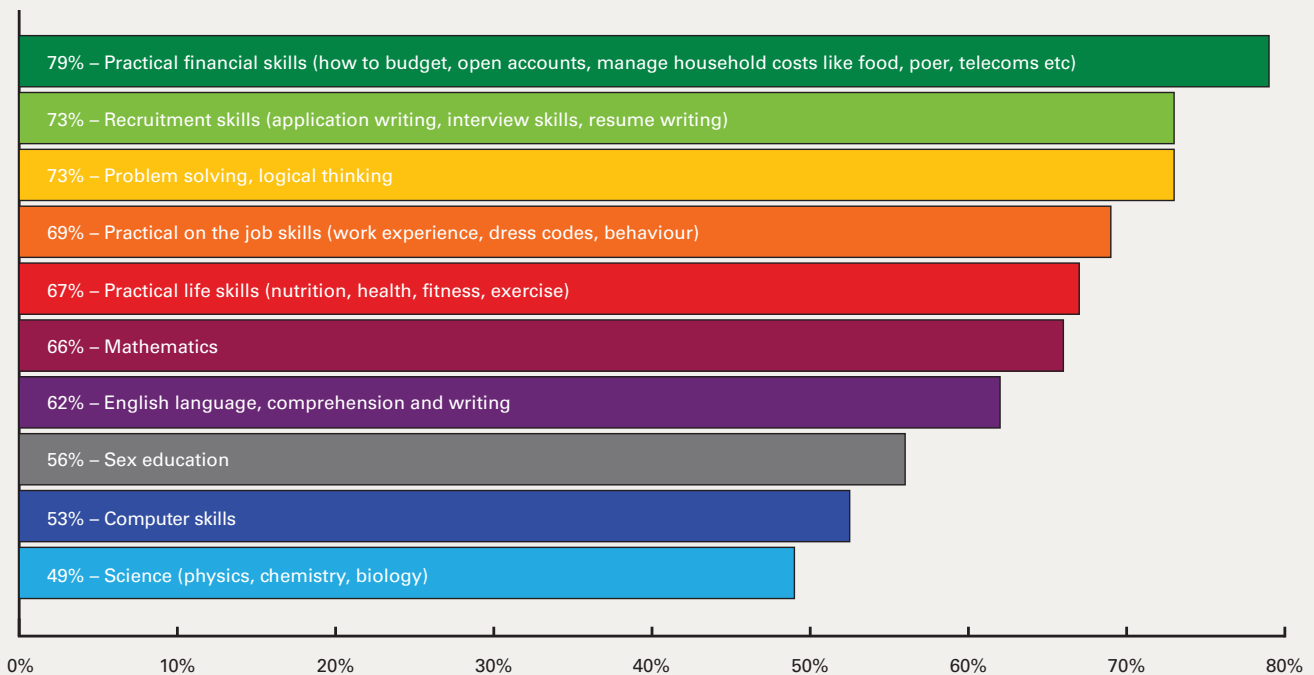
“We should have a sex education class... my friends at a Christian school [did not learn about it] and that’s not gonna work.”

“We’re like 16, 17 year olds. It’s kind of just obviously at that age now... I mean being in today’s society so I think we should be prepared for better than that.”

“Yeah and teaching people about contraception and like STD’s that like if you are concerned that you might have an STD if you go on medication for it then it... I learnt that online and not in school.”

“The teacher needs to teach about STD’s and contraception before then because you don’t want 12 year olds getting pregnant and having AIDS later.”

Most valued area of learning



The teacher/student relationship

Children and young people spend most of their week at school, interacting with teachers. Hence it is no surprise that not only are the relationships with teachers extremely important, but that children and young people have strong and well considered views about the characteristics and behaviours that are common to “good” teachers. These discussions were had across all age groups and locations.

Respected work undertaken by Professor John Hattie, Director of the Melbourne Educational Research Institute at the University of Melbourne in his work and book, *Visible Learning*, provides a useful backdrop. In a paper written with colleague, Gregory Donoghue, *Learning strategies: a synthesis and conceptual model*, they explain their model of learning, which is built around the three inputs students bring to their education - “skill, will, and thrill”.³¹

They argue that, among students, these are critical factors in successful academic achievement—going beyond their skills and knowledge, acting as drivers of their learning dispositions and motivation.

Research conducted by UNICEF Australia, most recently for this report and last years’ World Children’s Day education survey, indicates that children and young people see a strong role for teachers to be inspiring students to “skill, will and thrill”.

In UNICEF Australia’s World Children’s Day national education survey last year, 1001 secondary school students were asked to consider their proficiency in English reading, writing and comprehension as the measure of their education.

This approach was applied because it recognises that proficiency in reading is a necessary skill for studying many other subjects at school. It also recognises that reading and English are gateway skills to other areas of achievement. This approach was based on that utilised by UNICEF in its 2018 global report about educational equality called *An Unfair Start: Inequality in Children’s Education in Rich Countries (Report Card 15)*.³²

In the World Children’s Day education survey, we found that achievement and having a good teacher are highly related: and students are not only aware of this, but want teachers who are skilled, inspirational and driven.

The results of that survey showed that over half (54 per cent) of children who considered themselves to among the highest achieving in their classes attributed their success to a positive relationship with their teacher. Over half (57 per cent) of students who said they have a positive motivation for their schooling also said they have a good teacher. Among the students who identify as being at the bottom of their classes, 73 per cent said that one of the main things that would have helped improve their academic performance was if they had a better teacher.

In Young Ambassador consultations, one of the most repeated observations among participants concerned the fact that everybody learns differently and the current education system and way of schooling does not suit all.

“I feel like you could give people different ways to teaching. Not everyone learns the exact same ways as another person... some people need more visual learning, others are happier writing down on paper and stuff like that... also some people don’t like sitting in classrooms with desks, tables and chairs. Some people have to have like other equipment and more colour and not just plain classroom.”

(Female, Year 7, Toormina High School, NSW)

To this end, teachers who find different ways to communicate the content to students, based upon their learning style, were generally highly regarded among participants, as were teachers who knew their subjects well and were able to impart that knowledge.

“Just like having the ability to even go to your teacher after class and be like ‘hey I don’t understand this’ that’s really helpful for me, and I think that’s really positive. Not all the kids are able to do that or feel comfortable to be able to go up to their teachers.”

(Female, Year 10, Radford College, ACT)

“Staff here actually help... they actually care about your wellbeing and don’t just say go to class and do this and that, they actually ask you what you need in life.”

(Female, 18, Gympie Flexible Learning Centre, Qld)

Conversely, teachers who are stuck in their ways and would not adjust for individual learners, or neglected ‘middle rung’ students to focus on the top students or the very bottom students, were not well regarded.

“We’re basically told to sit there and shut up and it just turns kids off, they don’t want to listen at all, they don’t want anything to do with it cause we don’t have a choice. If [only] we were given more freedom.”

(Male, Year 10, James Nash State High School, Qld)

“Some teachers only focus on the students who are paying attention, and the kids who struggle listening or learning fall behind.”

(Female, 16, Sylvania High School, NSW)

Young people in Australia are clear about **the qualities and behaviours they consider pivotal for teachers to have** in order to establish and maintain this positive relationship.

Respectfulness, approachability and the capacity to listen emerged as the top three aspects of a strong teacher-student relationship:

1. 72 per cent Be respectful
2. 70 per cent Be approachable
3. 69 per cent Listen to students
4. 65 per cent Want me to learn and gain knowledge
5. 64 per cent Be enthusiastic and inspire me
6. 63 per cent Provide extra help when needed
7. 60 per cent Try to make subject areas interesting
8. 57 per cent Deeply understand the subjects they teach
9. 54 per cent Be fair
10. 50 per cent Care about more than just my results at school.

More than occasionally, discussions about negative character traits in teachers included comments about bullying, disrespectful or abusive experiences:

"I've been to a lot of schools and at one of these schools, there was this teacher - I was in like Year 3 - and she would treat us like we were in kindy. So, when we were learning something, she would always write it in big letters and stuff and sometimes she would tell us how to spell things that were like, word by word - easy words that we probably would know"

Young Ambassador: *What did you think the teacher should do instead?*

"Treat us like the age that we were and... like young people."

(Female, Year 6, Casuarina Steiner School, NSW)

"In my old school... if you did something wrong, they used to, like, say bad words about you in front of everyone to make you feel bad. And then everyone would, like, not be friends with you because you got a bad comment from the teacher. And they would put bad things about you in your report."

(Female, Year 5, Ryde Public School, NSW)

"There was a kid in my class and he had a mental disability... It was difficult for him to concentrate... and like, he wasn't up to where everybody else was and the teacher just... she was a substitute, and she just got really angry and it was like nobody wanted to say anything because they were scared and everyone just got really scared."

(Female, Year 9, Epping Scouts, NSW)

Language and culture

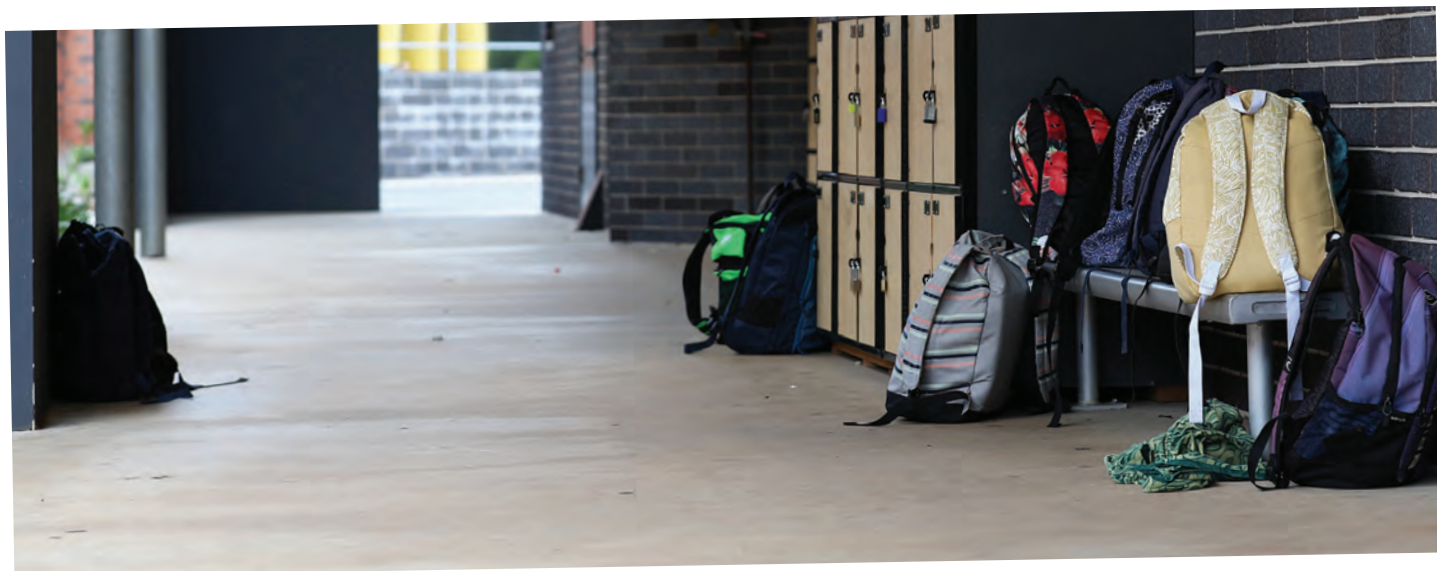
When we asked young people in Australia to consider the value of learning about language and culture in subjects at school, we found that the following proportions of participants saw high value in each case:

- 62 per cent** English language
- 30 per cent** Languages other than English
- 19 per cent** Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander cultures and history
- 7 per cent** Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander languages.

When asked if they saw "some value" in these subjects, the proportions increased to 93, 78, 61 and 46 per cent respectively.

Considering the high value Australian young people place on subjects with practical implications for their ability to successfully enter into adulthood, it can be argued that there is not sufficient case made for knowledge of languages other than English or Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander cultures, history and languages to be similarly considered. Equally, the value of these subjects would be likely to increase in more specialist or niche situations, where they become relevant to a certain set of life circumstances.

It is interesting to note, however, that at 7 per cent, the proportion of young people who highly value Indigenous language is higher than the proportion of the general Australian public who is Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (2.8 per cent) as well as the proportion of the population of children (18 and under) who are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (4.8 per cent).



Young Ambassador case study

“My name is Xavier Berry and I’m a proud Gumbaynggir man living in Coffs Harbour.”



Language

The language in my local area is Gumbaynggir. Language is significant to Aboriginal culture because there are different languages all around. Language also helps identify where you’re from. Growing up as a Gumbaynggir boy, I didn’t know about my culture until I was in Year 7 and then I was confused that I was never told that I was Aboriginal. So then I asked if I could get into the Australian Indigenous Mentoring Experience through school so then I could get some help with my schooling as I was struggling.³³ AIME has helped me manage my work better.

I never got to learn my language as much as I wanted to. My school was offering the local Indigenous language but because only three students chose it, the class did not run. I was angry and confused why I didn’t get to learn my cultural language. **Article 30** of the Children’s Convention says that “Children have the right to learn and use the language and customs of their families whether or not these are shared by the majority of people in the country where they live, as long as this does not harm others”. I believe that I have not had access to this right.

A similar desire for connection to community, culture and language was expressed by a male participants from Apollo House Community Centre, Dubbo, NSW. One reflected that “If we learned more about culture, maybe we would have stayed in school”, while another expressed that the disconnect with language has meant that -

“Once that happened, you can’t just go down the street and meet an Indigenous kid and expect them to speak their language. You can’t get that. So it’s very important the way we grow up, we need that, because it’s a part of who we are. And it’s important for us to for when we

Culture and community

Culture is significant to everyone, not just those from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, but for me in particular, culture was something that I never got to learn, which I wish I did. I wish I had the opportunity to learn this from a young age.

The Gumbaynggir community is quite strong and close knit. I have noticed that they are always helping each other and enjoying their time spent together.

I grew up in Bowraville. There were three boys that I was friends with and they grew up in the Aboriginal community and one day they took me up there. They accepted me and my Nan. Everyone accepted me because of my grandparents.

While I haven’t seen these friends for a long time, they’re still close friends and it is almost like no time has lapsed.”

grow up with our kids, because we can’t lose it. It’s the most important thing to us, our culture and our family. And I guarantee, I can’t speak my language and guarantee that no one else in Dubbo does too, unless they’re elders. That’s about it. We should be getting taught that in schools. It’s just the way we are, we lost that connection years ago.”



3.4 Equality

Research and experience in public policy has shown that the achievement of higher levels of equality within a society correlates with the delivery of benefits to the whole community, as well as to individuals. These benefits can include better public health, greater levels of trust across communities and more cohesive societies which can manifest in the form of lower rates of crime and greater levels of social connection, to name a few. Essentially, in more equal societies, we all win.

Globally, under the MDG's, we saw important developments in relation to addressing the worst forms of poverty. However, at the same time, the global community experienced greater concentrations of wealth and the greatest inequality gaps in our world history.

What does equality for all children and young people in Australia mean?

Children and young people in Australia are an extremely diverse cohort. And though they tend to have a good quality of life overall, there are some groups of children that experience discrimination, exclusion and hardship persistently and more frequently than others in our country.

In the Young Ambassador consultations around the country, children of all ages repeatedly pointed to the differences between individuals that influence the outcomes they experience and, consequently, the equality of opportunity they experience - whether that be in health care provision, education, levels or safety or other areas.

This diversity among our young population is a critical factor in working toward ensuring equality. Children rightly recognise that it is not enough to ensure policies, laws and initiatives are in place simply to provide equality, or "a level playing field," for everyone – that is, formal equality.

The achievement of real equality means taking into account the many differences between people and their experiences that impact upon their ability to be treated equally to others in any given situation. This is the principle of substantive equality.

The Western Australian Equal Opportunity Commission has a simple, straightforward, explanation of the principle on its website:³⁴

"Substantive equality recognises that policies and practices put in place to suit the majority... may appear to be non-discriminatory but may not address the specific needs of certain groups of people. In effect they may be indirectly discriminatory, creating systemic discrimination."

UNICEF Australia's *The Children's Report*, found that:³⁵

"...children and young people consistently recounted personal experiences of discrimination in all areas of public life, and at times, in their private lives. This included being treated differently simply 'because you're young', and extended to changing their behaviour or concealing aspects of themselves in order to avoid negative repercussions or to ensure their personal safety."

Australian governments have over time made commitments to address inequality. To show its commitment to these issues, the federal government ratified the Children's Convention and signed up to the SDGs.

Equality and the Children's Convention

Non-discrimination is a core principle of the Children's Convention, and can be seen clearly in Article 1 - the Children's Convention applies to everyone under 18, Article 2 - applies to everyone regardless of race, religion, abilities, whatever they think or say, whatever type of family they come from and Article 23 - Children with a disability should receive extra support so they can live a full and independent life.

Equality and the SDGs 2030

Equality is a broad concept and is central to many of the SDGs. This includes:



- Goal 1 No Poverty,



- Goal 5 Gender Equality,



- Goal 10 Reduce Inequalities and



- Goal 16 Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions.

Australia's legal framework for equality

In Australia, it is unlawful to discriminate on the basis of a number of protected attributes including age, disability, race, sex, intersex status, gender identity and sexual orientation in certain areas of public life, including education and employment.

Legislation has been enacted at the federal, state and territory levels to address discrimination. (See Appendix 2 for an outline of Australia's legal framework for equality.)

Australia's young population at a glance

While Australia's population continues to change, there are key groups of people across our society who are consistently left behind. The headline statistics about our population are:

- according to the 2016 Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) Census data, people who identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander makeup 2.8 per cent of the Australian population - children and young people, up to 25 years, make up 53 per cent of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population;³⁶
- between 1st April 2010 and 31st March 2015, 27 per cent of people migrating to Australia were under 18;³⁷
- ABS also reported that 4.5 per cent of children aged 0-14 identified as having a gender other than male or female, increasing to 27.7 per cent of young people aged 15-24 not identifying as male or female;³⁸
- it is estimated that in Australia there are 43,500 homeless children, with the majority of those are living in extremely crowded dwellings;³⁹
- according to the 2018 *Poverty in Australia* report found that there are just over 3 million people (13.2 per cent) living below the poverty line of 50 per cent of median income – including 739,000 children (17.3 per cent).⁴⁰

What does 'equality' mean to Australia's children and young people?



"The most important thing is equality and how people should respect one another. It doesn't matter what colour you are, deep down we are all the same."

Bella, 13, Qld.

When asked if everyone should be treated equally, the vast majority of children and young people in consultations said, "Yes". Though the measure they used to understand this concept was, most often, their profound sense of 'fairness', most believed every person should be treated equally.

However when this concept was explored and discussed it further in groups, many saw argument for exceptions to the rule in specific cases. For example, some suggested convicted criminals should not have the same right to freely move through the community as everyone else.

Younger children in primary school generally needed the meaning of the principle of 'equality' to be explained to them. But when reframed, they were able to talk in detail about who was and was not being treated fairly.

"It's unfair if you treat them differently and it could hurt their feelings."

(Male, Year 7, Bundaberg State High School, Qld).

By contrast, among older children from Year 10 onwards, it was very clear that they had a very developed understanding, equity being of high importance.

"An issue that is important to me is...

Creating a society that focuses towards equity rather than equality. Quite often disadvantaged groups are not advocated for. We need to reduce barriers that create inequality whether they are cultural, geographical or economical.

(Female, 17, St Leonard's College, Vic)

Almost every child and young person in consultations could identify the groups or cohorts of people that are more likely to experience inequality or a lack of fairness. Most consultations included responses about groups such as women (and gender), especially in the older age groups. However the issue of gender equality was debated more than the others.

Other groups identified as being more likely to be treated unfairly included Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, homeless people, people with a disability, refugees and asylum seekers, LGBTIQ+ people and people experiencing poverty, specifically people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

That everyone is born different and they can't change who they are but they can embrace it.

(Male, 13, Northcote High School, Vic)

Younger age groups largely saw the only way to solve the problem of inequality was to just treat people fairly.

As a 13 year old female student from James Nash State High School in Queensland, put it simply:

"Everyone should be treated the same and to not be judged on what they look like."

However, the older age groups very much focused on politicians as role models for society, arguing that they should set the standard for society. They often described the complicated relationship between society and the government and considered that the two together create a problematic contribution to community attitudes that can result in inequalities.

Many of the adolescent participants spoke of the importance of opportunities for people who are struggling, something they tended to frame as equity. Being nice was very important to all age groups, generally expressing trouble understanding why it was so hard for people older than them to be decent and fair.

Almost a third of Australian young people (29 per cent) say they have been **treated unfairly because of who they** are several times to frequently. This proportion was 11 per cent higher among males (34 per cent) than females (23 per cent). A 13 per cent higher proportion of young people who speak English as a second language (42 per cent) said they had this experience several times to frequently.

"Everyone is different in different ways and the thing I want to say is that everyone should be treated the same because no matter if they're any different religion and believe in different things, they should be treated fairly."

(Year 4, Baranduda Primary School, Vic)

"we're being treated differently because the other students don't know what we do in here... we actually do the exact same work [in structured learning], but at a slower pace.. and that is also like, it gets explained more... we might not understand our law and stuff like that, our health care, that is why people get treated differently."

(Male, Year 8, James Nash State High School, Qld)

"Well I am very close to a lot of autistic and albino kids and I, they have told me that they get bullied because of what they have but my cousin he's very autistic and... so people purposely pick on him like at home my cousins, my other cousins will try and make him mad and so he will start to get physical and yell and stuff. He doesn't want that to happen."

(Year 5, Melrose Primary School, Vic)

Gender

An important distinction around the importance of gender equality was put by a female Year 10 student from Radford College, ACT, *"It's about women as well but it's also about a diverse selection of women and not just like privilege with white strong women."*

Across age groups, both male and female participants considered that the main issue of concern to them in relation to gender equality was equal pay. Young girls do not want to grow up and enter the workplace, only to find they will earn less than their male equals. Among younger participants in late primary school, male participants often mentioned that they are equally able to contribute to the household as their female counterparts. By extension, they saw this as women being able to make equal contributions to the workforce. Older males frequently stated that pay inequity was simply not fair.

"The man doesn't do anything different to what the woman does, so why does she get paid less?"

(Male, Year 5, Toormina Public School, NSW)

Both male and female participants recognised that gender was a barrier for gaining respect and access to positions of leadership –

"I think women and especially like women aren't really represented very well in government/ I especially think a lot of women are put in government and have to quit their political roles because of men like sexually assaulting or bullying them because you know they think they have a lot of power over them and they think they can do whatever they like to them. I think that that's why when I see things like that it does not necessarily wanna do things like- wanna have a political role or anything because I know I wouldn't feel safe being a part of the government where women aren't treated equally."

(Female, Year 7, Northcote High School, Vic)



Homelessness

Children and young people, particularly younger children, most commonly raised the situation of homeless people, when asked to identify groups that are disadvantaged in Australian society. This appeared to stem from school-based discussions. Homeless children were also identified as a group who were most likely missing out on gaining a good education.



"Help homeless people more."

Slater, 9, Old.

Many young people talked about the responsibility of governments to drive down the rates of homelessness.

"I think that they [the government] should support people that don't have what we have because we're very lucky - the homeless people on the streets because they usually don't have a blanket... or something like that. I think they should support [by giving] some money to the homeless people... because each year more people are getting homeless because of like houses and rent and everything that [they] need [is getting] more expensive."

(Female, Year 4, Macquarie Anglican Grammar School, NSW)

Other conversations about addressing homelessness involved the supply of services to "...go around with big trucks with food and water and give food and water to the homeless children" (Year 4, Casuarina Steiner School, NSW) and to "...help people that's homeless. Give them, maybe, food and like water" (Male, Year 3, Trinity Grammar Preparatory School, NSW).

Race

Many children and young people understood Australia to be one of the most culturally diverse countries in the world, with a rich multicultural society, but were worried it also has a reputation of being racist. They generally expressed the view that people are not born racist, but are influenced by those around them and what they see on the media.

Young people from primary school age were able to identify instances in the media which they felt encouraged racist perspectives: US President Trump's language about wanting to build a wall between his country and Mexico, and media reporting of groups of young people from certain ethnic groups in Melbourne causing a public nuisance.

Many participants put forward the view that this behaviour and discrimination is not appropriate and should not be tolerated. They talked about wanting to see more diversity in the leadership of the country, observing that the majority of people in leadership positions are white men, which they felt did not allow for much diversity in perspective.

"Not only should we let different genders in parliament, but also different races. Because you see mainly white people, and hardly any other race. So it would be better to see a more diverse parliament."

(Female, Year 9, Trinity College Gawler River School, SA)



"Racism could start World War 3."

Othery, 12, WA.

In these conversations, most children and young people mentioned discrimination and inequality experienced by **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples** though, this mainly seemed to be drawn from the subjects they had studied at school. For example, a 16 year-old from Victoria mentioned approaches that prevented Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples from voting in Australia.

Some children pointed to education differences that they understood Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students experienced:

"Some people can't get an education cause it costs too much, some people can't get there."

(Male, Year 7, Toormina High School, NSW).

A small number of participants spoke from lived experience:

"I'm Aboriginal and so my family doesn't get treated equally and assumptions get made."

(Female, 13, St Leonard's College, Vic)

Disability

When children and young people discussed disability discrimination, they predominantly focused on the emotional impacts for those living with disability and the importance of caring for all people in society.

A Year 5/6 class at Ryde Public School, NSW talked about some of the impacts of what happens when you do not treat people fairly:

"The possibility is depression and suicide, that or people go and get angry and do things that they wouldn't normally do."

Young people were also conscious of those around them who are living with disability, beginning to demonstrate this awareness from Year 3 onwards.

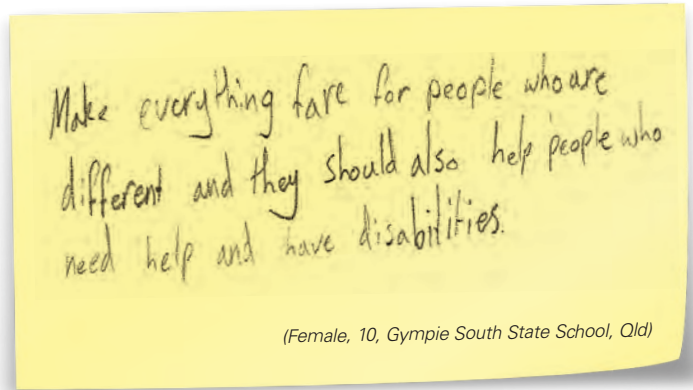
"Kids that have a disability that's not bad enough to go to like a special school, they go to mainstream school. And then the teachers will get confused because they behave differently. They don't have enough training to, like, teach them well enough."

(Male, 14 years old, Epping Scouts, NSW)

"I feel like [there] should be more programs and things to help kids... just anyone who [has a] disability or hearing issues and sort of just make more programs and things to help them... get things that they need to help them, like wheelchairs. I feel like there are a lot of kids that need a lot of [things] but can't get it because they don't realise it straight away or their parents don't have enough money... I feel like the government should have a lot more [of] that sort of stuff especially with the people that need help."

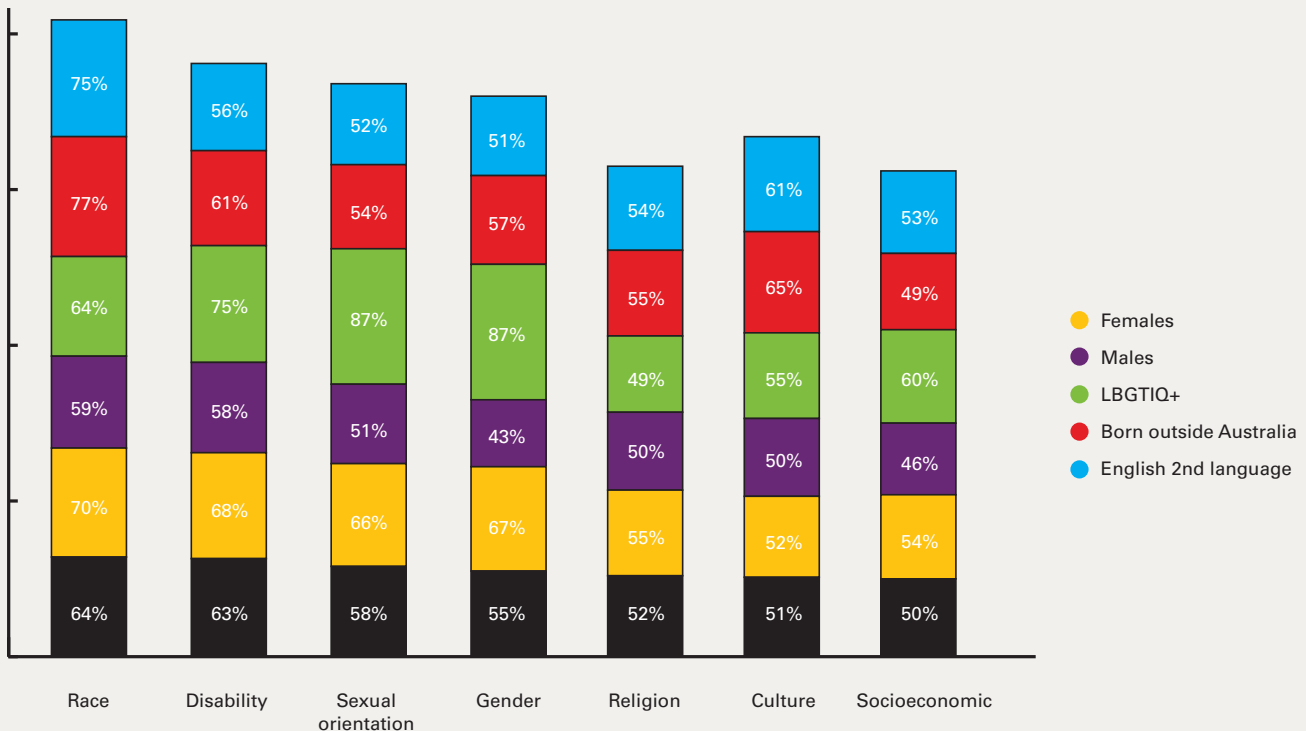
(Female, Year 6, Macquarie Anglican Grammar School, NSW)

Young people also stressed the importance treating everyone fairly and equally, and that disability should not have an impact on how you treat people.



(Female, 10, Gympie South State School, Qld)

Basis on which young people most commonly experience inequality



Asylum seekers, refugees and migrants

Although the younger age groups were not necessarily able to define the categories of asylum seekers, refugees or migrants, they were able to articulate that people from other countries often get treated differently in Australia.

A Year 5 male student from Toormina Public School (NSW) said so plainly, "Just because they come from overseas doesn't mean they should be treated differently."

Young people also often made the observation that Australia is a nation of immigrants - "Everyone in Australia is a migrant except for Aboriginal people" (Male, Year 5, Ryde Public School, NSW) - implying that discrimination against people born in a different country made no sense.

Young people tended to be familiar with the situation faced by refugees that are coming to Australia, based on media coverage about the issue.

As a male Year 7 student from Bundaberg State High School in Queensland said:

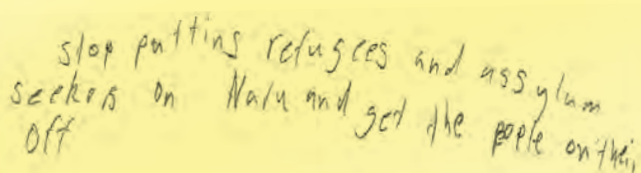
"They put the refugees like some place where they have to stay there. They just have to like wait and wait for years and years and wait for them to get released to go into Australia."

When prompted to consider if this is a fair way to treat people, "No" was the immediate answer. Many volunteered the view that, "...[refugees] have been through hell" (Female, Year 11, Wodonga Senior Secondary College, Vic).

More so than the other issues of inequality and discrimination, the topic of asylum seekers and refugees featured discussion about the need for humane action from the Australian government.

"I think that the government needs to have more empathy for them and stop denying the illegal things that are going on"

(Female, Year 7, Northcote High School, Vic.)



stop putting refugees and asylum seekers on Nauru and get the people on their off

(Female, 11, Bassendean Primary School, WA)

Sexual orientation



(Male, 11, Bassendean Primary School, WA)

When sexuality was brought up as a topic under equality, young people had an understanding of what that meant and stressed that it was not a choice, but rather something that people are born with. As put by a female Year 11 student from Wodonga Senior Secondary College in Victoria:

"People were born a certain way and they can't change it, so instead of diminishing it, why can't we just accept it?"

"If you're gay or lesbian or bi or also trans you get treated differently sometimes."

(Male, Year 6, Macquarie Anglican Grammar School, NSW)

"LGBTIQ+ people get treated differently because ... a lot of people assume that a boy dates a girl and a girl dates a boy, but if someone doesn't feel that that is the right thing they won't want to do it - and bisexual people get treated differently the same way for the same reason - and transgender people get treated differently because a lot of people think that you're born one gender and you're supposed to be that gender."

(Female, Year 5, Toormina Public School, NSW)

"Gay people and lesbians are treated unfairly by some people."

(Male, Year 5, Bassendean Primary School, WA)



Something important that was raised, by high school students was that no matter how a person identifies, they are still just like everyone else and therefore should be treated as such.

The topic of LGBTIQ+ came up much more frequently among teenagers because they were much more aware of the issues that feature in news reports.

For example a female Year 11 student from Wodonga Senior Secondary College in Victoria talked about marriage equality and the debate about Catholic schools having the right to turn away students from the LGBTIQ+ community.

"We only recently got, like, our right to get married and all that, and that was the beginning of this year/ the end of last year. But there've been some issues with that - with how Catholic schools are now refusing gay students and teachers and parents and all this other stuff - all because it's their religion."



"Gay people have rights."

Georgie (11) and Brendan (12), Qld

Poverty and socio-economic status

According to the Australian Council of Social Services & University of New South Wales report, *2018 Poverty in Australia*, one in eight adults and more than one in six children are living in poverty, with many of those affected living in deep poverty.⁴¹ Most commonly, these children are from single parent households, usually single mothers, and they live in prolonged poverty.

Most children and young people in consultations had come into some form of contact with the experience of poverty, even if it was only observational. Though they shared many personal anecdotes about poverty they had seen, a significant amount focussed overseas children they had either encountered when travelling or seen in the media.

"I went on holiday to Lebanon at this restaurant there was this little boy - he was like 9 years old - and he was cleaning the bathroom for money because his family didn't have money."

(Male, Year 3, Trinity Grammar Preparatory School, NSW)

Australian children, it seems, tend to see themselves as lucky, with extreme poverty being largely viewed as an overseas issue. Their appreciation of the poverty in which other children live in Australia is limited, by comparison.

The majority of young people in Australia aged 14 to 17 years consider that **other young people most commonly experience inequality on the basis of their:**

- 64 per cent - Race
- 63 per cent - Disability
- 58 per cent - Sexual orientation
- 55 per cent - Gender/gender identity
- 52 per cent - Religious beliefs
- 51 per cent - Culture
- 50 per cent - Socioeconomic status.

A proportion of about 10 per cent more young female Australians see unfair treatment as likely on the basis of race and disability, than do males. This differential rises to 15 per cent and 14 per cent respectively when it comes to sexual orientation and gender/gender identity.

Significantly higher proportions of young people who identify as LGBTIQ+ perceive unfair treatment on the basis of gender/gender identity (32 per cent higher), sexual orientation (29 per cent), disability (12 per cent) and socioeconomic status (10 per cent).

While 51 per cent of young people identify culture as a basis on which other young people would commonly be treated unfairly, 41 per cent also identify "being a refugee or asylum seeker" and 38 per cent "being a migrant". A ten per cent higher proportion of young people who speak English as a second language attribute unfair treatment to these characteristics as well as to race. A proportion of 14 per cent more young people born outside Australia see culture as a basis of unfair treatment.



3.5 The Environment and Climate Change

"...since Earth is our only home, we are the only ones that can do something about that. We need to realise that we are a part of nature, we are not apart from nature. And to betray nature is to betray us. To save nature is to save us... We need to realise that no matter what you're fighting for - racism, equality, feminism, gay rights - it won't matter at all, because if we don't work together to save the world, we'll all be extinct."

(Male, 16, Student Representative Council at Toormina High School, NSW)

All human beings depend on the environment in which we live. A safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment is integral to the full enjoyment of a wide range of human rights, including the rights to life, health, food, water and sanitation.

Without a healthy environment, we are unable to fulfil our aspirations or even live at a level commensurate with minimum standards of human dignity. At the same time, protecting human rights helps to protect the environment.

When people are able to learn about, and participate in, the decisions that affect them, they can help to ensure that those decisions respect their need for a sustainable environment.

The United Nations Environment Programme has proposed that there are "three main dimensions on the interrelationship between human rights and environmental protection:

- The environment as a pre-requisite for the enjoyment of human rights (implying that human rights obligations of States should include the duty to ensure the level of environmental protection necessary to allow the full exercise of protected rights);
- Certain human rights, especially access to information, participation in decision-making, and access to justice in environmental matters, as essential to good environmental decision-making (implying that human rights must be implemented in order to ensure environmental protection); and
- The right to a safe, healthy and ecologically-balanced environment as a human right in itself (this approach has been debated)."⁴²

Every year, more than 2 million deaths and billions of cases of disease are attributed to pollution.

All over the world, people experience the negative effects of environmental degradation and ecosystems decline, including water shortage, fisheries depletion, natural disasters due to deforestation and unsafe management and disposal of toxic and dangerous wastes and products.

Indigenous peoples suffer directly from the degradation of the ecosystems that they rely upon for their livelihoods.

Threat to safety

National survey participants were asked to consider high profile issues that have been talked about and discussed by politicians and governments, as well as in the media, in terms of safety.

Among young people aged 14 to 17 years, **59 per cent said climate change is a threat to their safety.**

Climate change and children

Climate change is exacerbating many of these negative effects of environmental degradation on human health and wellbeing and is also causing new ones, including an increase in extreme weather events and an increase in spread of malaria and other vector borne diseases.⁴³

It is also an unavoidable fact that climate change accentuates inequality:

- between this generation and future generations that are inheriting a world with a depleted natural environment,
- between nations who emit the highest levels of carbon and those (mostly poorer) nations that are suffering the ramifications of those emissions,
- between those nations with the wealth to be able to rapidly adapt to the effects of rapid environmental and climate change and those that do not.

It is estimated that over the next decade approximately 175 million children a year will be affected by climate-related disasters, and that by 2050 an estimated 25 million more children will be undernourished as a result of climate change.

Yet, though children are recognized as most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, worldwide, we continue to fail to include them in the forefront of climate change policy, advocacy and research.

Taking action to mitigate the impacts of climate change will make a very significant contribution to efforts to safeguard the future of current generations of children, and their adulthood.

Yet, even though we accept that children are the least responsible for the causes of climate change while they will unfairly inherit its destructive legacy, we continue to fail to invite them to participate in work towards solutions for this unprecedented crisis.

Though the Children's Convention is the most widely ratified human rights treaty in history, with 193 nations as signatories, the risks created by climate change mean that it will become much harder, particularly for developing countries, to maintain many of their commitments under it.

Since 2008, the United Nations Joint Framework Initiative on Children, Youth and Climate Change has been coordinating efforts to empower young people to take adaptation and mitigation actions as well as to enhance their effective participation in decision-making processes.⁴⁴

Though the projects that have resulted have been invaluable, they have generally been short-term and highly specific. Yet, despite the recognition that this engagement must take place on a much more long-term basis, children and young people still face numerous challenges that prevent them from being recognised as relevant partners in combating climate change and building climate change resilience.



"Nature rules!"








Alex, 11, NSW

The Environment and the Children's Convention

Article 24 of Children's Convention states that "Children have the right to **good quality health care, clean water, nutritious food and a clean environment** so that they will stay healthy." As a result, if environmental issues are not addressed, it will be hard to fulfill the obligation stated in Article 24.

The environment and the SDGs 2030

The environment is a broad theme and therefore cuts across many of the SDGs including:

-  - **Clean Water and Sanitation;**
-  - **Affordable and Clean Energy;**
-  - **Sustainable Cities and Communities;**
-  - **Responsible Production and Consumption;**
-  - **Climate Action;**
-  - **Life Below Water;** and
-  - **Life on Land.**

The attitudes of Australian children and young people to the environment

A very commonly held view among children and young people around the country is that many, if not all, of the decisions that we make on a daily basis have some form of impact on the world around us:

"I think we are threatening the environment... we created pollution."

(Male, Year 5, Ryde Public School, NSW)

They discussed their concerns about plastic pollution and consequent impacts on marine life, the scepticism and denial among politicians about climate change - which they mostly stressed needed immediate attention - and the urgency of finding sustainable and clean energy sources.

"The government needs to be preserving our world better... doing less deforestation and trying to reduce the pollution from the cars... by making more renewable energy resources ...the power outlet on the car and then the car can drive on renewable energy."

(Male, Year 3, Trinity Grammar Preparatory School, NSW)

The over-riding theme of discussions with children and young people across age groups and locations was that they were not only concerned about the issues impacting upon the environment, but they want urgent and effective action.

Their clear perspective is, though decision-makers (mainly politicians) are seen as being in the best position to enforce action, their actions have mainly fallen short of the level they consider required and necessary across all environmental issues.

"And I also think that as a government, because they have so much power, they can also assist a lot of these companies in either implementing these new rules or regulations, or for example just buying equipment that's more eco-friendly. Because I know, it's like they're not willing to move forward in to being ecologically sustainable because of the cost."

(Female, Year 10, Radford College, ACT)

Environmental issues of most concern

In consultations across the country, younger participants (preschool to mid primary school) tended to discuss 'the environment' in more definitional, affectionate, sensory and positive ways, using terms such as 'green', 'plants', 'animals', 'nature' and 'flowers'.

From Years 5 to 8, children began to raise concerns about environmental threats, including recycling, sustainability, deforestation, climate change and the world getting hotter.

This level of concern became far more pronounced among older participants from Year 9 upwards, who overwhelmingly had a negative perspective on the treatment of the environment, choosing to focus on what humanity has done to it, using words including 'death', 'destruction' and 'hopelessness'.

"Waste. Mainly just the big corporations. Because I know that everyone says that there are small things that we can do. And yeah we can. But ultimately if these corporations are still polluting and stuff, it doesn't matter if we've reused the same plastic bag five times because they are still treating the world even worse"

(Female, Year 11, Sylvania High School, NSW)

Responsibility for environmental action

During consultations, children and young people stated they believe that adults and decision-makers – principally the Australian government - are not doing enough to take care of and protect the environment, commonly citing the looming Adani coal mine, threats to the Great Barrier Reef and society's crisis with garbage disposal.

They also identified their own responsibility in making active decisions and choices to help the environment.

In the majority of consultations children and young people argued strongly that climate change is an urgent issue that needs to be addressed immediately, rather than taking the view they saw being put forward by some adults and people in power that economic growth should be prioritised ahead of the environment.

"There's so much hype and there's so much raising awareness and stuff, but there's nothing following through after that. Like...it doesn't seem like there's anybody actually doing anything."

(Female, Year 11, Wodonga Senior Secondary College, Vic)

"[We should] not trash all of the environment with junk."

(Male, Year 8, James Nash State High School, Qld)

"Its fine saying it is adult's fault, but we then don't do anything either."

(Female, Year 11, St Leonard's College, Vic)



Pollution

Children and young people in Australia are concerned about the different types of pollution caused by humans and the effect it is having on the environment. Common points of discussion included the overuse of plastics. The fumes from cars and big factories were also highlighted, as well as waste making its way into waterways and impacting on animals and aquatic life.

"It's a lot of big companies - and I think the government needs to hold them accountable. Sometimes I feel like they don't think that the problem as pressing. But we are the future generation, the one's that are going to live with what comes of pollution - so I think that should be a high priority."

(Female, Year 10, Radford College, ACT)

A male Year 7 student from Bundaberg State High School in Queensland shared his concerns about pollution by stating that:

"If it (pollution) doesn't stop, Earth is gonna get more polluted and we're gonna have to go to Mars even faster."

A female Year 11 student from Sylvania High School, NSW, linked pollution to the financial world:

"People are polluting, and people are just worrying about money and not how they are affecting the environment. Like Adani. It is here... It is ruining our environment and all the wildlife and everything that lives there. But they are just worried about the money that is coming from it."

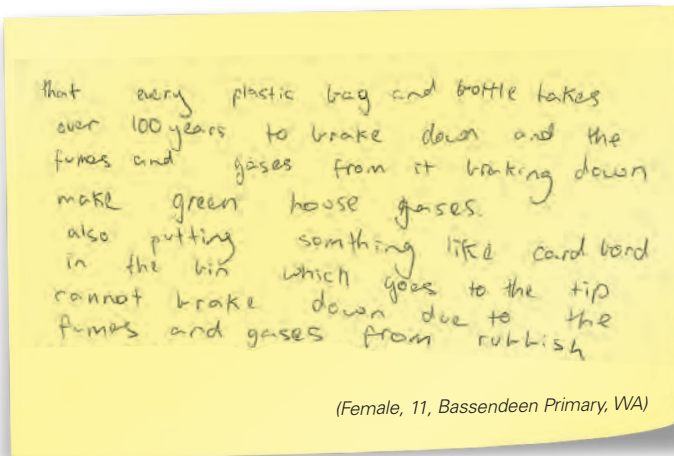
An overwhelming majority (95 per cent) of young people aged between 14 and 17 years in Australia are **concerned about pollution of our land, sea and air** – 59 per cent are "very concerned".

Plastic, recycling and re-using

Many children and young people identified the overuse of plastics in the form of plastic bags and straws, as well as the unnecessary packaging of fresh food as having a negative impact on the environment.

"PLASTIC! Single use plastic should be banned! Re-using and recycling should be a strict world policy."

(Female, Year 7, Northcote High School, Vic)



(Female, 11, Bassendean Primary, WA)

Participants commonly brought up the July 2018 decision by the two major supermarket chains to replace free, single use plastic bags with more durable, thicker plastic bags being introduced at a cost of 15 cents each. A fee for each plastic bag was used to deter shoppers from getting too many bags and encouraging them to bring their own. Children and young people repeatedly raised their concern that the alternative plastic bags that were available for purchase were thicker and therefore able to be used more times, but also take longer to break down.

Plastic bags were seen in particular to be harming terrestrial and marine animal life.

10 year old Molly Steer from Cairns started her Straws No More campaign in April 2018.⁴⁵

"Stop using plastic bags because it goes into the seas and then turtles think a plastic bag is food."

(Male, Year 3, Trinity Grammar Preparatory School, NSW)

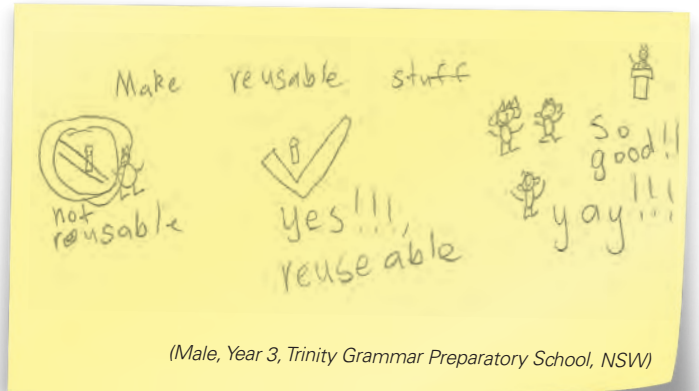
The amount of waste being produced and thrown away without recycling is a significant concern to children and young people. They are deeply concerned about the amount of unrecycled waste – that, out of the 3 million tonnes of plastic being produced each year by Australians, only 12 per cent is recycled⁴⁶.

"Reusable items [are needed] instead of just using packaging that you have to throw way into the bin and make waste that then pollutes the air and the ocean and kills the animals."

(Male, Year 6, Wodonga South Primary School, Vic)

"Ban all plastics [from] use, like all the plastics that hurting the environment, and put more recycle bins everywhere so we can recycle more plastics."

(Male, Year 6, Hewett Primary School, SA)



(Male, Year 3, Trinity Grammar Preparatory School, NSW)

Wildlife

In total, four consultations were held with pre-school students (4-5 years old), which revealed that animals on land and in the sea were of particular concern to younger participants. They saw the connection between littering and how this affects wildlife.

A preschool student at Alma St Pre-prep in Queensland noted,

"It can end up in the drain and the ocean and fish can eat them and die."

Older participants also realised that human activity has a negative impact on survival of wildlife:



"Animals should have rights not to be killed. Global warming should stop."

Jack, 10, WA

"We don't really talk about how the environment is affecting our animal life. It is something we have to live with. We are potentially killing our animals just for fun."

(Male, Year 10, James Nash State High School, Qld)

With wildlife in mind, participants want governments and adults to take better care of the environment:

"I think we need to take care of the oceans more and stuff and don't keep dumping in it."

(Female, 17, Gympie Flexible Learning Centre, Qld)

"So the Government needs to be preserving our world better... all our animals are getting killed and our native animals like kangaroos, wombats they'll die out very soon. And Tasmanian devils are close to full extinction - so they should stop cutting down trees and start doing something."

(Male, Year 3, Trinity Grammar Preparatory School, NSW)

The ten environmental impacts considered most concerning by young people aged 14 to 17 years in Australia today are:

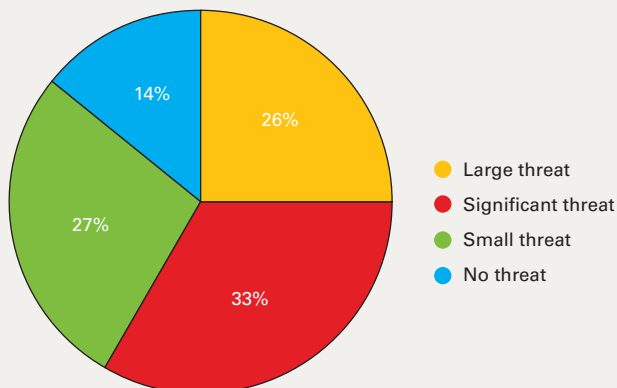
- 71 per cent Climate change
- 64 per cent Plastic pollution
- 63 per cent Pollution of the oceans
- 63 per cent Air pollution
- 63 per cent Extinction of animals
- 59 per cent Damage to/ bleaching/ destruction of the Great Barrier Reef
- 59 per cent Deforestation
- 56 per cent Littering
- 53 per cent Recycling and reusable options
- 45 per cent Over-fishing of oceans and seas
- 42 per cent Extinction of plants

There is a significant, 13 percent, difference in level of concern for the Great Barrier Reef between females and males (females 66 per cent, males 53 per cent) and 10 per cent difference on deforestation (females 64 per cent, males 54 per cent).

Correlating with climate change being viewed as the number one threat to safety, it is also seen as the number one threat to the environment.



Young people aged 14 to 17 who consider climate change to be a threat to their safety



Climate change: Our spotlight issue

Under the Children’s Convention, children have the right to participate in matters that relate to them. They also represent the future generations, as yet unborn, whose lives are very likely to be significantly negatively impacted by the present world’s poor environmental practices.

National governments tend to be influenced by electoral cycles that run to no more than four or five years, so this means that they are often ill equipped to take action that involves short-term hardship as sacrifice for the long-term good. In the exceptional circumstances of climate change, where the benefits of people in the present seem to stand in conflict with the rights of people in the future, the concept of intergenerational justice is therefore pivotal to solution-finding.

In Australia, there is an even bigger gap between our comparatively short three-year election cycle and the kind of long-term commitments required to take domestic action to address the gripping challenge of climate change, as well as play our part on the global stage. The last decade has witnessed a paroxysm of paralysis in this regard, witnessing successive leaders and governments removed in the face of ideological arguments and the extreme politicisation of climate change, the science behind it and solutions proposed.

This has not been missed by children and young people in our country and they are disheartened by it. They can see what they are inheriting and are deeply frustrated by the dire lack of action and what they see as irresponsible excuses for it. Around the world, children and young people are among the biggest proponents for climate change action. They want their views considered in the development of solutions.

In fact, on 30 November 2018, during the period in which the national consultations were conducted, 15,000 children and young people from across the country protested the government’s lack of action on climate change and environmental protection in most states and territories. The Prime Minister and some Ministers criticised the school strike, saying “there should be more learning and less activism in schools”. However, ‘School Strike 4 Climate’ children responded to the Prime Minister’s criticism by saying that they are taking action because the adults were hesitating to take action on

climate change. In addition, children and young people from across the world are taking legal action and suing their respective governments for failing to take action on preventing climate change and environmental degradation. A second strike was held on 15 March 2019.

From many angles, **the majority of young people aged 14 to 17 years in Australia view climate change as taking place, consider human activity to be playing a significant role in the phenomenon, and want committed and effective action taken.** It is also evident from their responses that, rather than listening to political arguments based in ideology, they are masking considered assessments that align with scientific evidence.

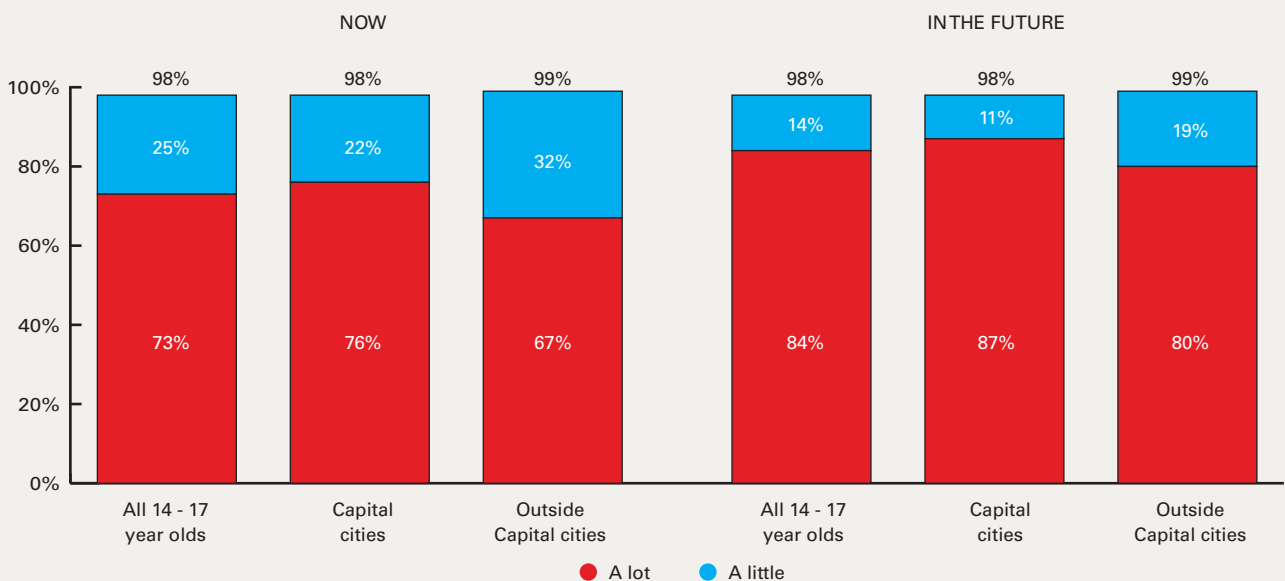
When asked about the extent of the threat, **59 per cent of young people aged 14 to 17 years in Australia view climate change as a meaningful threat to their safety** (33 per cent view it as a significant threat and 26 per cent, a large threat). A further 27 per cent consider it to be a small threat, with only 14 per cent considering it to be no threat at all.

The majority of young people are also interpreting events that are happening across the globe as evidence that climate change is, not only taking place, but is caused by human activity. And it is their view that the effects of climate change are getting steadily worse.

Three quarters of young people in Australia (73 per cent) hold the view that climate change caused by human activity is affecting the world “a lot” now, with a quarter (25 per cent) saying “a little”. A 10 per cent higher proportion held this view in capital cities (77 per cent) than outside (67 per cent).

However, 11 per cent shift their view from “a little” (14 per cent) to “a lot” (84 per cent) when asked **the extent to which climate change caused by human activity would affect the world in the future.** And this difference in view narrowed between participants who live in capital cities (87 per cent) and outside (80 per cent).

Extent to which climate change caused by human activity is affecting the world

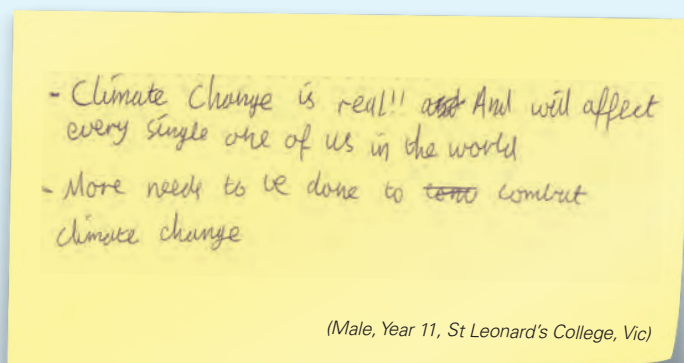


During consultations, climate change was one of the biggest single-issue concerns discussed by children and young people.

It came up organically in discussions about the environment in the majority of sessions. From Year 4 onwards participants were able to articulate what they viewed as contributing factors to climate change, offering their concerns that “humans” are not taking enough care of the environment and that this is leading to the world getting hotter.

They were able to point to physical evidence of the ramifications on our environment, frequently expressing worry about how this impacted other forms of life and specific ecosystems (though, they did not use that word).

“I think every adult should know...



(Male, Year 11, St Leonard's College, Vic)

Though some children referred to the presence of scepticism in public debate about climate change, there was no indication that this had persuaded them away from their view that climate change was both happening and caused by human activity. The intensity with which this view was held ran from simple disagreement with the scepticism to impassioned positions and a sense of outrage.

“Climate change is a real thing... just because it's not gonna affect your generation, it doesn't mean it's gonna have no impact on ours. Why are you leaving this big mess for us to clean up? Like, all these protests with our school-age children and you're still not listening. Why have we gone into school to get educated if you don't even listen to people who are educated?”

(Female, Year 11, Sylvania High School, NSW)

“It's not the Earth's fault - global warming. , Its everyone's fault who's doing it ... you can see because they destroy all the trees and once all the trees are gone there's like deforestation and the oxygen goes.”

(Male, Year 5, Bassendean Primary School, WA)

Among the youngest children, this concern about climate change tended to manifest in terms of negative impacts on animals and sea-life, while children from later primary school onwards began to talk more holistically about the impacts on the environment and the role of energy production as a contributing factor.

A female Year 7 student from Northcote High School, Victoria, reflected on adults being unsure if climate change was real:

“I think there are still quite a few people who are denying things like climate change because they don't wanna have to deal with it... I think it's the politician's jobs to, you know, say 'This is happening, we have to stop it. ...we are ruining all these kids' lives and it's not fair.' And they have to just like realise what they're doing and decide to make a change because otherwise it's just not fair.”

“Global warming does exist, having and living in a bubble of denial isn't sustainable and isn't good for our society anymore. We need to have our politicians kind of wake up to the truth.”

(Male, Year 10, St Leonard's College, Vic)

A young woman in Year 10 from Radford College, ACT, expressed the collaboration required to address the issue:

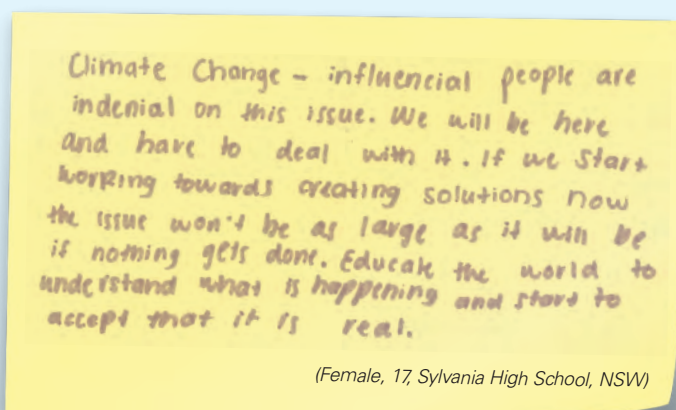
“I also think because climate change is much like a joint effort - not like where one person can stand on the stage and try and make a difference - everyone does like have to acknowledge that it exists first and then actually have to actively do something in the process. This is why, like, big businesses have such a larger role in this - they're not recognising it first, and then it kind of flows on into other generations and, like, younger groups which aren't recognising it - because they're seeing it as, 'I'm doings as much as I could'”

Across consultations, nationwide, children and young people generally expressed a strong desire for genuine and effective action.

“Put more money into fixing global warming and more money into investigating global warming and climate change... eliminating coal powered factories and putting in solar power.”

(Male, Year 8, Trinity College Gawler River School, SA)

“An issue that is important to me is...



(Female, 17, Sylvania High School, NSW)

Three quarters (75 per cent) of young people in Australia aged 14 to 17 years consider our country should be taking action on climate change. This perspective is made up of two viewpoints:

- 61 per cent align with the statement: "Climate change is real and caused by human activity – we need to lead by example and play our part in helping the world to stop its worsening effects"
- A further 14 per cent align with the statement: "I don't know whether climate change is real or not, but if we take action and end up with a cleaner planet, we are better off in the long run"

Only 13 per cent hold the view that we should not take action, regardless of whether climate change is real or not:

- 8 per cent because "taking action would have too many negative impacts on our economy", and
- 5 per cent because "we are too small a nation to make a difference."

Only 4 per cent of young people in Australia do not accept climate change as being either real or caused by human activity - "climate change is a huge false alarm/ not real/ a natural cycle humans have nothing to do with".

The remaining 7 per cent do not have a view on climate change.

Energy production

The way we are obtaining our energy and the environmental impacts of these decisions are a very significant concern to children and young people.

"Stop exporting coal. And I know we can't just stop using coal altogether, but make a more gradual plan to like, every year use less coal so that we start ... You can't keep using it, so we may as well stop like now before it's too late."

(Male, Year 7, Northcote High School, Vic)

From late primary school (Year 4 onwards) participants began to talk about the burning of coal leading to the steady increase in greenhouse gases. Some would make the link between the burning of these fossil fuels to create energy with its role in making the world hotter. While they were not always able to mention the exact terminology for alternative energy sources, they often discussed the possibilities and desirability of sourcing our energy from the sun (solar), water (hydro) and using wind farms.

In a consultation with Year 5 and 6 students (aged 10 to 12 years) at Toormina Public School, NSW, students combined a debate about the best way to create energy with issues of managing Australia's waste problem. One student was concerned with China was no longer taking Australia's recycling and waste, and suggested that we burn the rubbish, while another student observed that this would also cause serious problems by releasing more detrimental material into the atmosphere and ultimately contribute to making it hotter.

Overwhelmingly, children and young people want to see Australia's energy generation come from solar, hydro and wind generated options rather than the continuing high use of fossil fuels. Children as young as Year 3 (aged 8 to 9 years) talked about replacing coal with "green energy" and "those windmill things"

"Also using our resources like solar and electric, we don't need coal mines. Think about long term not just now. We need to raise awareness and take action."

(Female, Year 7, Northcote High School, Vic)

"The government is ignoring the feasibility of solar power farms. There's a lot of renewable energy that has already been tested which is worth spending money on... You can export it all over the globe. We just ignore it..."

(Male, Year 9, Trinity College Gawler River School, SA)

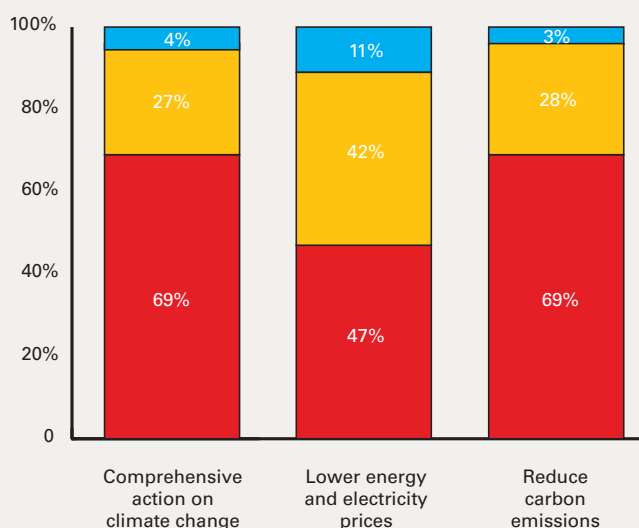
"The government could develop our renewable energy resources so that, like, every house runs on solar energy or wind energy."

(Female, Year 5, Ryde Public School, NSW)

"I think we should put in the solar stuff. Because in China for example, it looks pretty bad and people are wearing masks and stuff because they can't breathe."

(Male, Year 8, Trinity College Gawler River School, SA)

Climate change related action



When it comes to taking action, the views of young people in Australia aged 14 to 17 years seem to come, once again, from engaging with the science.

A large majority - 69 per cent - of young people consider Australia's need to reduce carbon emissions as "very important", with a further 29 per cent seeing it as "quite important" (that is a total of 98 per cent consider reducing emissions as being important).

Electricity prices, which have become inextricably bound up in the public debate in Australia about climate change, present a more complex response from young people. There are indications that this may be attributable to different geopolitical pressures.

For example, though 47 per cent of young people view it as "very important" that "we need to make energy/ electricity prices lower"; this view is held by a 10 per cent higher proportion of young people who live outside (53 per cent) than in capital cities (43 per cent). It is also held by an 11 per cent higher proportion of Queenslanders (58 per cent), where electricity costs are very high.

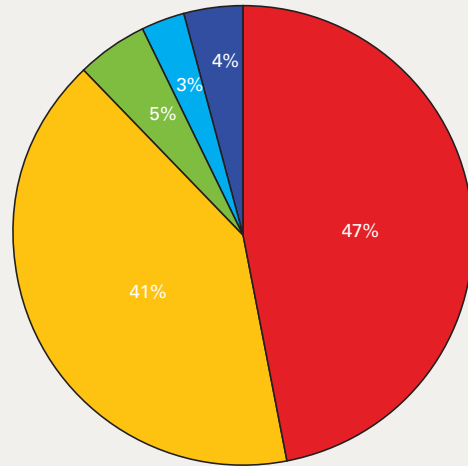
When asked about **how Australia should produce its energy and electricity**, the vast majority of young people favour renewable energy (solar, wind, hydro). However, their views are, once again, very considered.

Almost half, 47 per cent consider that "we should increase our reliance on renewables while gently decreasing reliance on fossil fuels (coal, oil, gas). A further 41 per cent favour a more rapid change to our energy system, saying "we should move into renewables as fast as we can".

A small 5 per cent prefer that we "mainly use fossil fuels, but also use renewable energy to some extent"; **while only 3 per cent want Australia to "stay with fossil fuels".**

Overall, the results from both consultations, and our national survey, indicate that young people are very engaged with the information that is debated in the public domain about climate change and energy and that they are taking the time to carefully consider this information and arrive at their own conclusion - which are consistent with their overall high level of concern about the state of the planet's environment.

How should Australia produce its energy?



- Increase our reliance on renewables while gently decreasing reliance on fossil fuels
- Move to renewables as fast as we can
- Mainly use fossil fuels but use renewable energy to some extent
- Stay with fossil fuels
- Don't know





3.6 Trust in media and politics

During consultations participants often raised issues that did not fit easily into the five preceding chapters. These discussions tended to broadly concern the two areas of the media and the future.

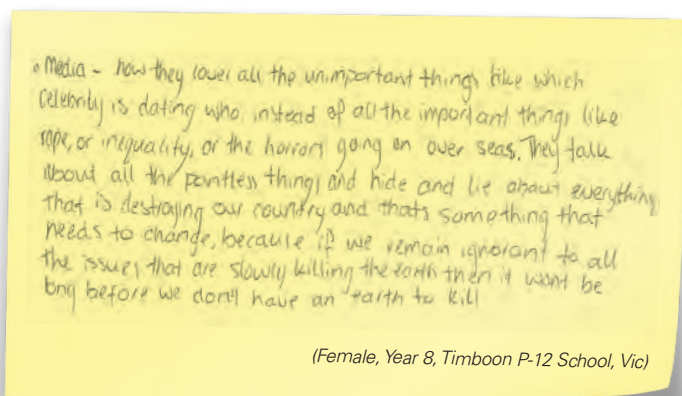
Children and young people have a multi-faceted relationship with the media

Children and young people from primary school onwards talked about the influence and quality of 'the media', which they described as including print, television news and current affairs, social media and online services like YouTube. These discussions tended to be a subset of a wider discussion on subjects such as violence or the environment, rather than a discrete discussion about media itself.

Discussions that addressed social media tended to be peripheral, being less common than one would expect, given the public profile attributed to young people and their relationship with it.

Traditional news media (print, television, radio) was, however, frequently mentioned in both positive and negative contexts. Consultation participants often referred to positive influence including its role in informing them about issues in the world around them and in learning about new things. More indirectly, they referred to the media's activities in misrepresenting issues (science was most often mentioned in this regard, as were issues of community violence) when talking about matters they considered adults and decision-makers were inadequately addressing.

"An issue that is important to me is..."



"In this day in age we aren't really shown what is right, we just see on TV people killing each other and beating each other up. That is all you see. So it is set as normal in our heads now."

(Male, Year 10, James Nash State High School, Qld)

The control the media has over perception was important to young people who made correlations between the way media presents certain groups and the way they are treated by Australians. Examples of these groups included refugees and asylum seekers as well as gangs. Participants also identified that children and young people are often not well represented in the media – typically shown as misbehaving, or the extremely high achievers, rather than your average young person.

Some young people considered that the government used the media in order to project an inaccurate or advantageous representation of themselves.

"[Politicians] are all trying to like look real good in the eyes of the media so they're all going off like shaking farmers hands and like giving them hundred like pay or something but it never really did anything, they just gave them a temporary fix."

(Male, Year 8, Macquarie Anglican Grammar School, NSW)

Others said the media, itself, was not completely innocent in this relationship, pointing for example to the portrayal of female politicians in particular:

"I feel like that the media has a big part in it too because like you know Julia Gillard, someone took photo of her in some outfit and everybody was critiquing her about it. They never take a photo of a man."

(Female, Year 11, Sylvania High School, NSW)

Young people in Australia aged 14 to 17 years get their **news about what is happening in Australia** and the world from a large number of sources.

Almost three quarters (71 per cent) get news through **social media** (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter etc.). However, there is more complexity to the way young people source news through this social media than it appears at first glance:

- 54 per cent get their news from news articles posted by either the news outlets themselves or their friends, and
- 48 per cent get their news from personal opinions or views posted by friends and influencers on social media.

Additionally, 50 per cent get news from family and 44 per cent from friends.

At the same time, 58 per cent get news from television news bulletins – 38 per cent from commercial television news and 32 per cent from ABC television news.

Only 16 per cent trust social media news to be "accurate, unbiased and truthful".



Children's participation builds trust in leadership

As the preceding chapters of this report illustrate, 'trust' in decision-makers and adults is an issue that tended to permeate discussion about a number of issues throughout consultations. At certain points, children and young people indicated, directly and indirectly, that they had occasion to distrust adult figures such as parents and teachers in relation to decisions in their lives. However, more frequently, attitudes of distrust were directed at government, politicians and the various types of businesses, particularly those in the health, packaging and energy sectors.

"So there should be probably stricter regulation on how the businesses can affect the environment and have bigger penalties for contributing to climate change... I know a lot of the thing is it's like they're not willing to move forward into being ecologically sustainable because of the cost but I think because the government does have the ability to just dedicate more resources to this sector and like kind of plan in to the future..."

(Year 10 female, Radford College ACT)

Just before commencement of our consultations, there was a leadership spill. This created confusion among the younger participants.

"It used to take a lot of time to change prime ministers, but now we do that every couple of months."

(Male, 14, Epping Scouts, NSW)

With six Prime Ministers in the last 10 years, some participants thought that this was the norm and that a Prime Minister could only stay in the job for a year or two. Others felt as if politicians were too busy fighting to do anything else.

Resoundingly, we heard that participants simply don't trust politicians.

"They say that they are going to do something and they just don't do it."

(Male, Year 5, Wodonga South Primary School, Vic)

This observation was echoed by a male student in Year 7 from Bundaberg State High School, Queensland:

"And if they are trying their best, well their best ain't enough."

...and a female student in Year 7 at Toormina High School, NSW:

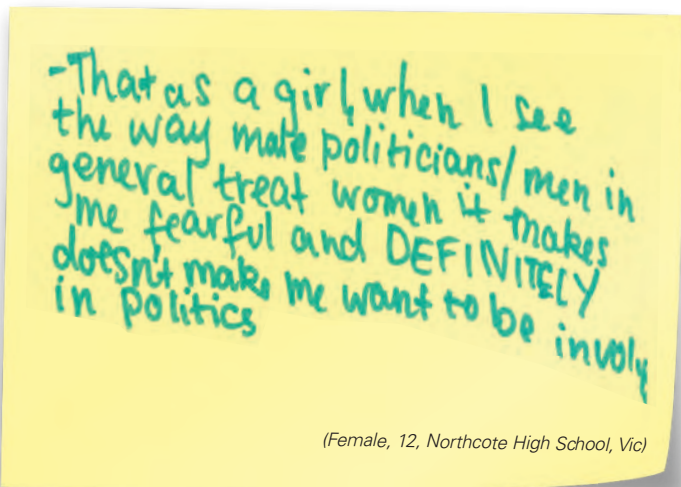
"I feel like they say that they'll listen and then they don't, and then they say they'll do something and they won't."

This disappointment was a feature in every single group that we consulted with, as was the view, when asked, that participants do not feel like they are heard by politicians. This included the electorate of the incumbent Prime Minister at the time.

"...the government took action on something other than self-interest."

(Female, Year 5, Casuarina Steiner School, NSW)

Similarly, young people were unimpressed with the treatment of female politicians and with political bickering.



(Female, 12, Northcote High School, Vic)

Young people and children wanted the government to listen to their views:

"Politicians talking and interacting with young people... when they do, it's a very select group and it's very biased to those people [who share] their experiences [and] also their advantages... I think, maybe more collaboration between different kinds of groups would help."

(Female, Year 10, Radford College, ACT).

Over half of young people in Australia aged 14 to 17 years (55 per cent) have a low level of trust in Australia's federal politicians, including ten per cent whose level of trust is 'extremely low'.

Our additional survey of young people aged 18 and 19 years, showed a proportion of 11 per cent more new voters have a low level of trust in federal politicians (ie 66 per cent).

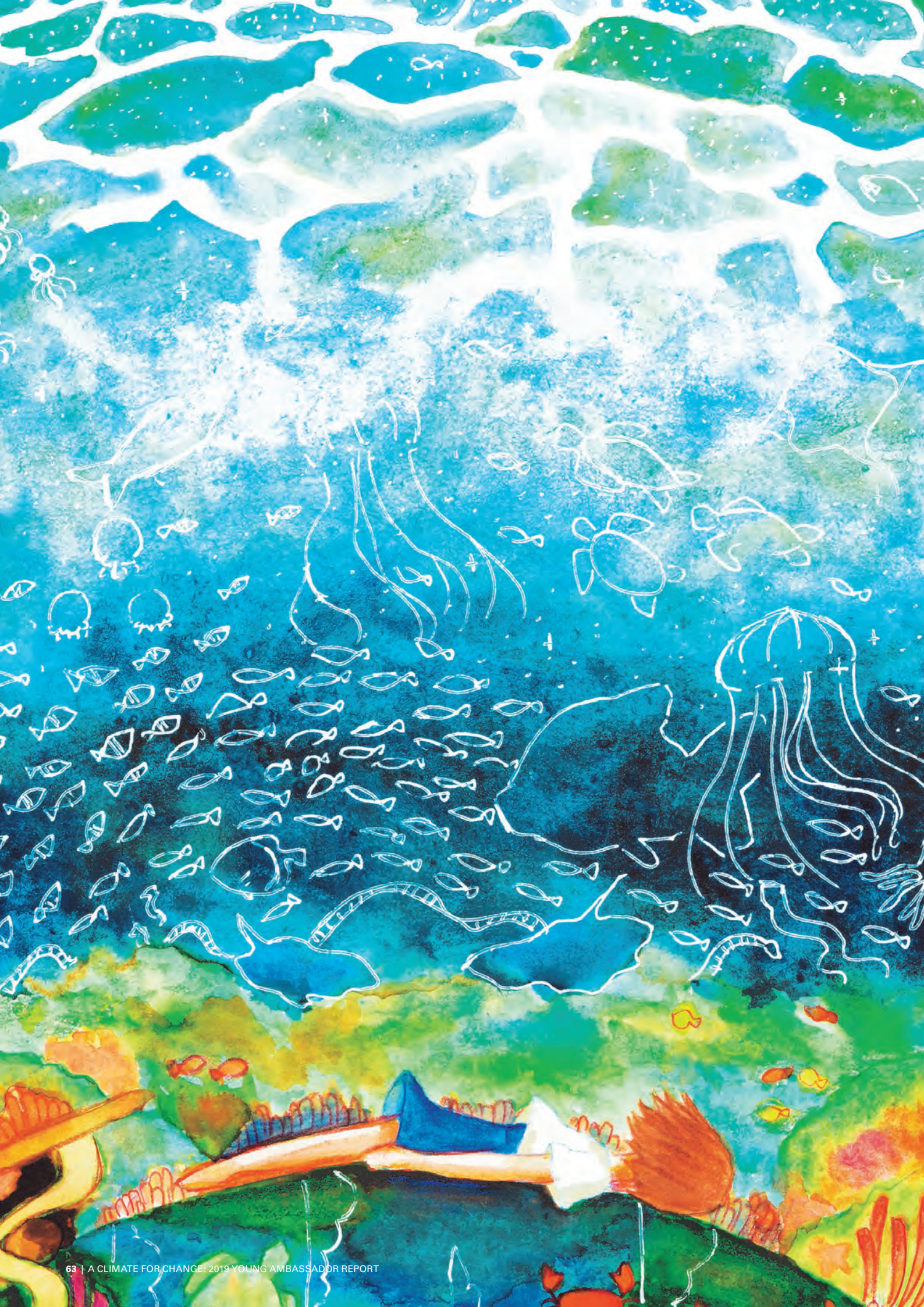
To rebuild trust among young people, 61 per cent of young people aged 14 to 17 years and 65 per cent aged 18 and 19 want them to "keep their promises".

Almost half (45 per cent) of young people aged 14 to 17 years and just over half of new voters aged 18 and 19 (54 per cent) would be persuaded by 'stability in leadership'.

Around two fifths of young people in both age groups would like to see better and more formalised opportunities for children and young people to participate with government as valued stakeholders:

- 42 per cent of young people aged 14 to 17 years and 44 per cent aged 18 & 19 want to see 'youth representation in parliament'
- 38 and 37 per cent respectively want more 'opportunities for children to talk to political leaders'
- 38 and 33 per cent respectively want 'politicians to make clear commitments to children'.





4. Conclusion: A program for action from the Young Ambassadors

UNICEF Australia's Young Ambassadors are aware that sharing the perspectives and stories of children and young people carries great responsibility.

Children and young people are citizens and stakeholders in our country and democracy. To this end, the Young Ambassadors have now amassed evidence that children and young people of Australia often feel locked out of decision-making. They consider Australia's decision-makers to be asleep at the wheel – either unable or unwilling to make difficult decisions - when it comes to the pressing issues that face their generations as they move into adulthood - into their and our country's future.

To Australia's children and young people, one of the greatest symbols and illustrations of this decision-making paralysis – one that is creating immense concern and anxiety among their ranks – is inaction on climate change. As two young people told the Young Ambassadors:

“Global warming does exist, having and living in a bubble of denial isn't sustainable and isn't good for our society anymore. We need to have our politicians kind of wake up to the truth.”

“Climate change is a real thing... just because it's not gonna affect your generation, it doesn't mean it's gonna have no impact on ours. Why are you leaving this big mess for us to clean up?”

This concern and disillusionment about the future that decision-makers are bequeathing them directly leads to the high level of distrust children and young people have in our country's politicians:

“And if they are trying their best, well their best ain't enough.”

There is a clear and present need for decision-makers to rebuild their trust among children and young people. They are asking decision-makers to take decisive and urgent action, and not to gamble with their future.

The Young Ambassadors' research has shown that children have a real expectation that the Australian Government should not only lead on climate change action, but invest in a Platform of Action – one that also includes other priority issues - to give them a fair chance in life and a sustainable future.

The children and young people in this country want assurance and action that ensures Australia is a healthy and safe country to grow up in – one in which they have the fairest of chances at positive wellbeing, safety, strong and equal opportunities to learn, protection from discrimination, all in a protected, respected and sustainable environment.

Based on this research, and as peers of the children and young people they have consulted with and whom they represent in Australia, the Young Ambassadors propose a five-point **Platform for Action**.

PLATFORM FOR ACTION

1. Commit to real climate change action:

Hold a youth summit across Australia and the Pacific to inform approaches to achieving the SDG 13 on Climate Action – and create a ten-year plan for action.

2. Commit to our safety and protection:

Gather better data on the prevalence of violence against children and develop more targeted plans so that children can be safe to learn, safe at home and safe in the community.

3. Commit to our learning:

Develop teacher training that has a specific focus on positive student-teacher relationships/student engagement to improve the quality of children's education.

4. Commit to building resilience and belonging:

Fund a national, youth well-being strategy and include children in the design of related support services.

5. Commit to building a fair and inclusive society:

Create a national strategy for ending child poverty so that children can participate better at school, and in society.

Appendix 1 – Methodology

Who

Across Australia, UNICEF Australia's Young Ambassadors conducted 75 consultations with 1,517 children and young people between the ages of 3 and 22 years old. They had varied lived experiences and were from diverse geographical locations. They included, but were not limited to children and young people: from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds; with disability; who identify as LGBTIQIA+; are culturally and linguistically diverse; are new migrants; are young parents; who have experiences in out of home care; and who have experiences with the juvenile justice system. Overall, they are intended to represent the views of the children and young people in the broader community.

In order to further test that these views were representative, and to provide further evidence, we commissioned a YouGov Galaxy survey of 1007 young people aged 14 to 17 years. The questions in this survey were based upon the findings of the Young Ambassador consultations. We are very extremely grateful to Peter Matthew and Mag van Gennip from YouGov Galaxy for their depth of expertise and professionalism in conducting this aspect of the research and assisting with analysis and providing advice in the writing of this report.

Aim and approach

In preparing for the national consultations and this subsequent report, the Young Ambassadors referred to work that has been done before, including the 'Things that Matter' report which was produced by the 2014-15 UNICEF Australia Young Ambassadors. They also spoke with policy experts from the fields of forced migration, juvenile justice and child rights in business as well as child rights generalists.

Across the nation, our aim was to listen and hear about what matters to children and young people who are often overlooked on the process of decision-making in relation to the issues that concern them. The Young Ambassadors adopted a peer-to-peer model in which young people consult with children and young people in line with best practice.

The five core topics in this research were prepared during a five-day workshop, and were further developed during experiences and discussions with other children and young people. These are issues that not only impact the lives of children and young people, but also strongly relate to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child which provides UNICEF with its mandate.

When and where

Qualitative consultations: The Young Ambassador consultations ran from the 18th September to 12th of December 2018. They were conducted in the areas where the Young Ambassadors live, go to school or university, as well as to other locations where we were invited. Consultations were conducted in regional and capital city locations across Queensland, New South Wales, the Australian Capital Territory, Victoria, South Australia and Western Australia.

Consultations were conducted in pre-schools, primary schools, secondary schools, a flexible learning centre, as well as in Scouts and Girl Guide halls. Each consultation varied in length and ranged between 15 minutes to and 75 minutes. Sessions were recorded and the audio transcribed. Each child and young person, as well as their parent or guardian, signed a permission slip before taking part in consultations. This ensured free, prior and informed consent for the process.

A discussion guide for use in consultations was developed with the assistance of staff members from UNICEF Australia's Policy and Communications teams. At the completion of the consultation phase, this guide and the content of the discussions, were also used to inform the development of the questions in the quantitative survey.

Quantitative survey: The YouGov Galaxy online survey was conducted nationwide across all states and territories. Respondents consisted of 1007 young people aged 14 to 17 years. This survey was open between the 18 December 2018 and 11 January 2019. The data was weighted by age, gender and region to reflect the latest ABS population estimates.

At the same time, YouGov Galaxy ran a national online survey devoted to the issues of 'trust in decision-makers'. This survey consisted of an additional national sample of 804 young people aged 16 to 19 years. This data was broken into sample populations of young people aged 16 and 17, who are approaching voting age, and new voters aged 18 and 19.

A gender balance was sought in both surveys.

Considerations

In relaunching the Young Ambassador program, we encountered unplanned circumstances that exerted some influence on the age range in our consultations – such as the commitments and time tables of schools and universities had made during the time period we had allocated for consultations, as well as time taken to relationship build with schools in areas where we have had no previous contact or presence.

In appreciation of the fact that conversations about unsafe home environments can be sensitive and may influence the comfortable levels of participants during discussions, we were committed to ensuring all children and young people felt safe at all times. If potential child protection issues were found in the handwritten or drawn responses, schools were provided with as much information as possible to make sure the child or young person was adequately supported and the appropriate next steps were taken. Additionally, though this is a report drawn from the attitudes and views of children and young people across Australia, and direct quotes are used throughout, some names and locations have been removed to protect their identities in relation to sensitive subjects such as bullying and family violence.

Participating schools and organisations

The UNICEF Australia Young Ambassadors 2018-19 would like to warmly acknowledge the 1517 children and young people and following schools and organisations for participating in the national consultations:

- 1st Reservoir Brownie Guides
- Alma Street Pre-Prep
- Apollo House - Leader Life
- Baranduda Primary School
- Bassendean Primary School
- Baulkham Hills Girl Guides units
- Bundaberg State High School
- Canberra College
- Castle Hill Uniting Church Wesley Preschool
- Casuarina Steiner School
- Edmund Rice - Gympie Flexible Learning Centre
- Epping Scouts
- Glenunga International High School
- Gympie South Primary School
- Hewett Primary School
- James Nash State High School
- Macquarie Anglican Grammar School
- Melrose Primary School
- Nollamara Primary School
- Northcote High School
- Radford College
- Ryde Public School
- St Leonard's College
- Sylvania High School
- Timboon P-12 School
- Toormina Public School
- Toormina High School
- Trinity College - Gawler River School
- Trinity College - South School
- Trinity Grammar Preparatory School
- Wodonga Middle Years College
- Wodonga Senior Secondary College
- Wodonga South Primary School

Appendix 2 – Australia’s legal framework for equality

In Australia, it is unlawful to discriminate on the basis of a number of protected attributes including age, disability, race, sex, intersex status, gender identity and sexual orientation in certain areas of public life, including education and employment.

Legislation has been enacted at the federal, state and territory levels to address and prevent discrimination.

At the federal level, the Australian Government has the following legislation to address discrimination:

- Age Discrimination Act 2004
- Disability Discrimination Act 1992
- Racial Discrimination Act 1975
- Sex Discrimination Act 1984
- Australian Human Rights Commission Act 1986

These Acts are administered by the Australian Human Rights Commission, which has the statutory power to receive, investigate and conciliate complaints of unlawful discrimination under Australia’s anti-discrimination legislation.

Each state and territory government has also enacted anti-discrimination legislation. Individuals can also lodge complaints about discrimination, harassment and bullying with the relevant state and territory body according to the legislation it administers.

Australian Capital Territory Human Rights Commission

- ACT Human Rights Act 2004
- ACT Human Rights Commission Act 2005

Anti-Discrimination Board of New South Wales

- NSW Anti-Discrimination Act 1977
- Fair Work Act 2009

Northern Territory Anti-Discrimination Commission

- Anti-Discrimination Act 1993

Anti-Discrimination Commission Queensland

- Human Rights Act 2019
- Anti-Discrimination Act 1991

The Equal Opportunity Commission in South Australia

- Equal Opportunity Act 1984
- Racial Vilification Act 1996
- Civil Liability Act 1936
- Whistleblowers Protection Act 1993

The Office of the Anti-Discrimination Commissioner, Tasmania

- Anti-Discrimination Act 1998

The Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission

- Equal Opportunity Act 2010
- Racial and Religious Tolerance Act 2001
- Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006

Western Australian Equal Opportunity Commission

- Equal Opportunity Act 1984

Images and authorship

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Page 35 and 36 – Children Drawing Universe by Dejan Ristovski, Stocksy

Page 49 – Contamination Of The Oceans, Result Of A Human Activities by Dejan Ristovski, Stocksy

Page 52 – A Boy Watches Water Pouring From S Grate Onto A Beach by Tim Booth, Stocksy

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