

2021
AUSTRALIAN
YOUTH
BAROMETER
UNDERSTANDING
YOUNG PEOPLE
IN AUSTRALIA
TODAY

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NOVEMBER 2021

MONASH
YOUTH POLICY
AND EDUCATION
PRACTICE



MONASH
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ABOUT US

The Monash Centre for Youth Policy and Education Practice (CYPEP) is a multi-disciplinary research centre based in the Faculty of Education at Monash University. We undertake research into the social, political and economic factors, forces and trends that affect young people's lives. By focusing on issues that affect young people, and on developing policy and educational interventions to address youth disadvantage, CYPEP aims to identify the challenges to, and opportunities for, improved life outcomes for young people today and throughout their lives.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors gratefully acknowledge the excellent work of Roy Morgan in collaborating with CYPEP on this research. The authors are also grateful to the team supporting our work, including Lorene Wilks, Wendy Mears and Gina Chow, who have played such a key role in bringing the complex array of data together in this report and communicating it to you. We also acknowledge the advice and guidance of our colleagues in the Faculty of Education and Monash University in making CYPEP, and consequently this report, possible. Finally, thanks to the CYPEP Advisory Board, Youth Reference Group and Management Committee for their guidance, support and insights.

CITATION

Walsh, L., Waite, C., Magyar, B., Gallo Cordoba, B., Mikola, M., & Cutler, B. **2021 Australian Youth Barometer: Understanding Young People in Australia Today.** Monash University, Melbourne: Centre for Youth Policy and Education Practice; 2021. DOI: 10.26180/16910956



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01

INTRODUCTION

As the title of this report suggests, in constructing the 2021 Australian Youth Barometer we have attempted to ascertain some of the pressures experienced by young people today.

The impetus for this paper came from a desire to draw together existing data collected by organisations throughout Australia. Some of that data is included in each chapter of this year's Youth Barometer. We then collected new data to enable young people in 2021 to speak for themselves. Within this document you will find survey responses to a wide variety of questions. These are complemented by in-depth interviews with 30 young Australians from diverse backgrounds. These interviews add nuance and detail to the survey responses. In coming months, we will provide more detailed examinations of both the pre-existing data and the survey and interview data collected by the Centre for Youth Policy and Education Practice (CYPEP) in collaboration with Roy Morgan.

Young people in Australia are not a homogeneous group—they are diverse. The standard definition of youth adopted by the United Nations (15–24 years) and other such indicators are limited because of the different ways that economists, health professionals, sociologists and others define young people. Experiences of being young are elastic and change across time. This report does not provide a complete picture of young people in Australia and we would never claim to present one, but we have attempted to collect as diverse a range of voices as possible. Ideally, we would have included more voices from regional and remote areas, and in future years we will explicitly seek to do so. For this first iteration of the Australian Youth Barometer, we present more of a mosaic of attitudes, feelings and opinions.

You will see that the concerns and opinions described herein are by no means confined to young people. Concerns about climate change, precarity at work, health and wellbeing, and technology (among others) are shared by many Australians across a wide variety of age groups. This is part of the point. The attitudes and views of young people in this report provide windows onto wider worlds that we all inhabit and that should consequently concern us all.



METHOD AND APPROACH

The authors wrestled with some challenging problems when designing the survey and interview questions. We did not want to replicate what other organisations and researchers were already doing well, but needed to cover a few overlapping areas to compare and contrast findings. We analysed responses to questions in relation to other question responses so that they could inform and enhance interconnected understandings of data. Because our aim was to complement existing work, in our first draft of questions we undertook the difficult process of deciding what to include and what to exclude. For example, in the first iteration of the survey, there were more questions about bullying and discrimination, which is a major concern for many young people (and their families).

This is an area in which much good work is already being done, so some questions were ultimately excluded from our questionnaire.

Our research had a concurrent mixed-methods design. We conducted interviews and ran an online survey simultaneously. Interviews were semi-structured and the survey had a mix of closed, Likert-style questions and open-ended questions. An original questionnaire was developed by CYPEP researchers and piloted before final implementation. In both types of empirical investigations, we explored a range of topics including education, employment, health and wellbeing, finances, housing, civic participation, and the impact of COVID-19.

In total, 30 young people were interviewed and 505 individuals completed the survey. Participant recruitment was undertaken by research consultancy company Roy Morgan, who implemented the survey and scheduled

the interviews, which were then conducted by CYPEP researchers. Interviews were approximately one hour long and they took place between 25th August and 1st September, 2021. All interviews were conducted using Zoom video conferencing software and were transcribed for subsequent analysis. The survey took approximately 14 minutes to complete and data collection took place between 27th August and 23rd September, 2021. Ethics approval was granted in June 2021 by the Monash University Human Research Ethics Committee.

The results have been analysed to garner complementary insights drawing on participant's open-ended discussions alongside insights from a representative sample. Interviews were analysed thematically with the aid of qualitative analysis software QSR NVivo! A broad book of codes was developed to aid the identification of themes that crossed multiple interviews. This was complemented by an iterative process that identified new or unexpected findings that emerged during the data analysis process. Patterns of meaning were identified by a team of researchers who worked closely together to ensure a coherent, transparent analysis process.

Survey data was analysed using R and SPSS, resulting in frequency calculations and chi-square tests for differences across demographic groups for the variable of interest, using survey weights. The analysis of the survey data used probabilistic weights to make the sample representative of young people in terms of age and gender. Socioeconomic status corresponds to the Australian Bureau of Statistics Index of Relative Socio-Economic Advantage and Disadvantage for the participant's postcode, which has been re-coded as low (deciles 1 to 3), medium (deciles 4 to 7) and high (deciles 8 to 10).

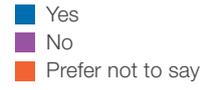
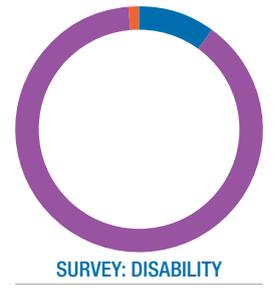
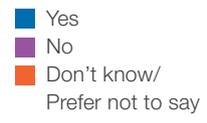
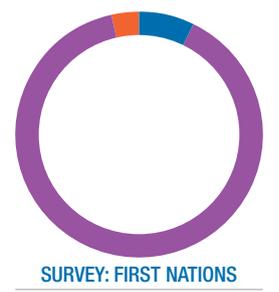
Interview participants were evenly spread across genders (see Table 1.1), with three identifying as non-binary. Among survey participants, there were more female than male participants, with approximately 4% reporting they were non-binary or gender diverse. The age range of participants was 18 to 24 years. The median age of interview participants was 20 years; the median age of survey participants was slightly younger at 19 years. Most participants lived in metropolitan areas (24 interview participants and 83% of survey participants). All Australian states and territories were represented, although most participants resided in New South Wales, Victoria and Queensland.

Among interview participants, 20 lived at home with family, seven lived with a partner and three lived with a friend or in a shared house. Just over 10% of survey respondents lived with a disability.

Most survey participants (86.7%) were born in Australia. More than one-third of interview participants described diverse backgrounds, including African, Scottish, Vietnamese, Burmese, Filipino, Indian, Afghan, Greek or Lebanese, Malaysian or Chinese. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders comprised 7.4% of survey respondents.

TABLE 1.1.
PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS:
SURVEY AND INTERVIEWS

	INTERVIEW		SURVEY (WEIGHTED)	
	NUMBER	%	NUMBER	%
GENDER				
Women	14	46.7	236	47.1
Men	13	43.3	244	48.9
Non-binary/ Gender diverse/Agender	3	10.0	20	4.0
STATE				
ACT	4	13.3	17	3.3
NSW	7	23.3	150	29.9
VIC	8	26.7	132	26.4
QLD	4	13.3	103	20.6
SA	3	10.0	37	7.4
NT	1	3.3	1	0.2
TAS	0	0.0	10	2
WA	3	10.0	51	10.2
LOCATION				
Metro	24	80	413	83
Regional/Rural	6	20	85	17
ETHNIC BACKGROUND				
Anglo Australian	18	60.0		
Other	12	40.0		
BORN IN AUSTRALIA				
Australia	-	-	433	86.7
Abroad	-	-	64	12.8
Prefer not to say	-	-	3	0.6
FIRST NATIONS				
Yes	-	-	37	7.4
No	-	-	446	89.1
Don't know/ Prefer not to say	-	-	17	3.4
DISABILITY				
Yes	-	-	50	10.1
No	-	-	444	88.7
Prefer not to say	-	-	6	1.2
SES (POSTCODE)				
Low	-	-	77	15.5
Medium	-	-	190	38.2
High	-	-	230	46.3



KEY FINDINGS

The following data, collected from the surveys and interviews but not included in the chapters to follow, helps to understand the context of young Australians during the pandemic.

Unsurprisingly, the most common concern expressed by young people in our data was how COVID-19 lockdowns had a negative impact on their abilities to socialise and see family. Almost two-thirds (65%) of young people were affected by COVID-19 in some way. Forty-five per cent indicated COVID-19 had an impact on their mental health; 41% felt that their education or employment was significantly or very significantly impacted. Women and non-binary/gender diverse young people reported higher effects on their mental health. Education and employment were other areas of significant concern, followed by the impact of COVID-19 on young people's housing, and on their relationships with their families and partners. Many of these effects were perceived by young people across different demographic backgrounds, but Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people saw their relationships with family and their financial situation more significantly impacted. Young people with disabilities reported more significant impacts on their work situation. The youngest cohort (18–21 years) reported more significant effects on their education or learning experiences.

Security, from the personal to the societal, is subtly threaded throughout the responses. Many participants discussed financial insecurity as a source of anxiety. As one participant told us:



I was doing okay for myself just before COVID. I was bringing in [enough money, but] since COVID, I don't even have enough to pay bills.

WOMAN, 22, QLD

A corollary of insecurity, uncertainty is a second thread woven throughout the responses. Several young people articulated struggling with a sense of uncertainty compounded by the pandemic and the impacts it had on everyday lives.

A third thread relates to the future. Despite their concerns, the young people who participated in this research felt optimistic about different aspects of their future. Sixty-one per cent of young people felt optimistic or very optimistic about living in a comfortable home and 59% felt the same way about living in a long-term relationship with someone and working in a meaningful job. However, 31% of young people were pessimistic or very pessimistic about living in a world in which environmental issues are addressed effectively and 24% felt pessimistic or very pessimistic about having children.

There are nuanced differences and complex relationships between security and the future. For example, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people were more optimistic about achieving financial security, but less optimistic about having a supportive social network around them. Young people living in regional or rural Australia were also more optimistic about achieving financial security and having children, but young people with disabilities were less optimistic about achieving financial security, working in a meaningful job and living in a world in which environmental issues are addressed effectively.

Climate change and the environment (also unsurprisingly) emerged as concerns, and are inextricably tied to feelings about the future. Non-binary/gender diverse young people were less optimistic about the environmental situation and having children.

These threads were woven into a tapestry marked by a complex mix of optimism and anxiety.

As one participant said in relation to the latter:



I feel like, as a young person specifically, we get the raw deal out of almost everything at the moment and there is not a lot for us to cling on to that's looking good. That can get really, really overwhelming.

MAN, 24, NSW

The opening chapter of the 2021 Australian Youth Barometer is deliberately focused on education. As the name of our centre suggests, we are interested in education and policy.

School belonging was generally high in all age groups, with 64% agreeing or strongly agreeing that they belong at school, but young men expressed stronger agreement compared with young women. Great teachers were described as passionate, caring, knowledgeable, patient and persistent. Satisfaction with online learning was generally high, despite the fact that data were collected 18 months after switching to remote learning because of COVID-19. Older participants (22–24 years) were more satisfied with online learning than their younger peers (18–21 years). At the same time, almost every interviewee was deeply critical of the education system because it did not prepare them with what they saw as necessary life skills, such as getting a job or completing tax returns.

Responses relating to employment reflected deeper and longer trends. Having a job was important for financial independence. As one participant said:



Having a job means freedom. It gives you the freedom to have that little bit of extra money to, to kind of, you know, do whatever it is you want to do, or to enjoy things more. Without that constant feeling of money being a problem, if that makes sense. It gives the opportunity to, you know, be out in the community and feel, I guess, feel useful in society.

NON-BINARY, 20, WA

The 'ideal job' was both personally fulfilling and matched a young person's values and skills. While some young people had committed to their ideal job early in life, others were open to being flexible to different opportunities. General job satisfaction, satisfaction with gig work and job usefulness were closely and positively related. This suggests that those opting for gig work did not necessarily do this as a response to dissatisfaction with their work in general. On the other side of the employment ledger, 60% of young people experienced unemployment and 63% experienced underemployment in the last two years. These trends reflect more pervasive and long-term conditions of uncertainty and insecurity in relation to employment.

The chapter on health on wellbeing features striking findings of poor wellbeing that were likely amplified by the pandemic. Just under one-third (29%) reported having poor or very poor mental health. A similar proportion (31%) had accessed mental health support, while 12% sought support but did not receive it. Nearly half (46%) experienced significant stress and felt stuck in life. More than half (52%) thought that social media had a negative impact on their mental health, while others found social media to be a source of connection and comfort. Food insecurity was a notable issue. Twenty-one per cent of young people reported not having sufficient food.

The chapter on finance deepens our understanding of young people's insecurity. One-quarter (25%) of young people reported having financial difficulties, often having to prioritise accommodation and food. One-third received financial support from family or Centrelink. Perspectives of personal finance provide further insight. Nearly one-quarter (23%) of respondents had used 'buy-now-pay-later' services regularly, with 49% believing this had a negative impact on their financial behaviour. The wider picture of imagined futures is also striking. Just under half (49%) reported saving part of their income on a regular basis, but 53% expected to be financially worse off than their parents.

Housing is another aspect of security. Most respondents (70%) indicated that buying a house was an important goal. A similar proportion (69%) believed that it was the government's responsibility to ensure access to affordable housing for everyone. Owning a house was often seen as a sign of financial security; however, young people felt that the fluctuating housing market was stacked against them. For some renters, the fluctuating housing market also influenced their housing security.

Security has another very personal dimension. The chapter on risk and justice includes experiences of bullying and discrimination. One-third of interviewees discussed experiences of bullying or discrimination at school. One in six spoke about similar experiences at work, and some felt that they were not respected because of their age. Young women, some of whom who identified as transgender, discussed how gender inequality made them feel unsafe and ignored.

Turning to civic participation, 75% of young people indicated volunteering for organised activities, especially in the arts, environment, and welfare. Although young people appreciated the ability to vote, they did not feel that politicians actually listened to their voices. Nearly all (91%) wanted the government to provide more social services.





Obviously, we're going to be the future leaders, presidents, prime ministers and treasurers and all that, so we have to make sure that we have our priorities set now, going into the future, so that when we do take over, we know what plans and goals to achieve and what action to take.

MAN, 20, VIC

Our findings show the powerful role of educators in building a sense of belonging in education settings—our interviews were replete with multidimensional reflections on the role of educators. Those reflections show how young people thought deeply about this role, drawing from a variety of experiences related to their education, both positive and negative, throughout their lives. In contrast, views of elected representatives were less positive, underscoring the need for politicians to engage with young people to gain a better understanding of the complexity of their lives.

We are also aware of the ways in which education can reproduce social, economic, political, psychological and cultural problems, challenges and inequities. At the same time, we firmly believe in the power of education to be transformational and, by extension, we believe in the power of teachers, school leaders and students as potential agents of change and possibility.

At CYPEP, we are seeking transdisciplinary, multi-sector responses to the issues raised in this report. The data presented here is intended to start conversations about young people that are neither overly romantic nor deficit in nature, but which stimulate and affirm productive responses drawing on the strengths of young people, education and policy to make a real difference in their lives.

This year's Australian Youth Barometer is undeniably shaped by the spectre of the COVID-19 pandemic and the uncertainties and insecurities that have emerged in its wake. Uncertainty and insecurity pervade the lives of many of us. A question for us as researchers, parents, carers, educators, leaders and policymakers is how we can contribute and work with young people to construct better, sustainable futures.

Monash University's new strategic plan, *Impact 2030*, charts the path for how the University will actively contribute to addressing the challenges of the age through its research and education, and in collaboration with government, industry and community. The challenge of creating thriving communities requires transformative responses built not for, but *with* communities, such as Australia's young people and those supporting them on their journeys. This report aims to contribute to our understanding of young people, and to lay the groundwork for creative and innovative solutions to the issues raised. We invite you to collaborate with us in this endeavour.

At the core of CYPEP's governance and operations are the members of the Youth Reference Group. The seven inaugural members of the Youth Reference Group are playing a vital role in shaping the direction of CYPEP's work and have been incredibly generous in sharing their experiences, perspectives and insights. They ensure that our research empowers young people and those supporting them. Reflecting on the key findings of the report, a member of our Youth Reference Group, Rebecca Walters, rightly noted that:



It is crucial that young people see themselves in research reports, understand what they can do about these issues and how they can influence change.

This report presents our initial findings, and we have begun to develop possible educational and policy responses. These Policy Bites will be published over the next 12 months, accompanied by deeper dives into the data collected for the Barometer.

Stay tuned.

Professor Lucas Walsh
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Education Practice

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02

PROLOGUE

We asked members of the CYPEP Youth Reference Group to comment on the key findings from the 2021 Australian Youth Barometer.

ON EDUCATION DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

“ The finding that 46% of young people experienced significant stress and felt stuck in life is something that I really resonate with. It's profound to think about the amount of time we've spent studying online and being in lockdown, [it] does make you feel like you're missing out on so much of your life. But we also need to make the most of our education and this highlights the importance of making sure that our studies prepare us for life after school and after lockdown. I think the point that the young people were critical of how their education did not provide them with life skills would resonate with a lot of young people.

STEVEN

ON INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

“ When talking about young people, you must also consider international students. The biggest concern for us is the uncertainty ahead. Not only in terms of our lives and how we will live, but also what kind of life, what kind of career we want, and whether our degrees will be recognised by the local government and labour force. To deal with this uncertainty, for me, it is important to see international students' positive experiences on social media. Hearing the positive side and knowing that I have a virtual support system helps me keep going in these uncertain times.

YUQI

ON MENTAL HEALTH AND THE ENVIRONMENT

“ What stood out to me was the number of young people who experience stress or poor mental health. Past literature has actually suggested that young people who have found their identity or sense of self will have better wellbeing. However, this is not always the case and COVID-19 has definitely had an impact on people's wellbeing. So, I think the findings about young people's health and wellbeing are very important. I think this report also reflects that climate change is a big concern for young people. In our generation, we are going to be most affected by climate change. We all say that it is so difficult not to pollute our planet, but we are already facing sea-level rising, heatwaves, droughts, bushfires, and so on. Governments should take action to combat climate change and protect our environment.

CANDICE





ON FINANCIAL SECURITY

“ As young people, we are often bearing the brunt of the casualisation of the workforce and I think this plays an important part in young people’s financial security. Over the past year, it’s been lucky that there’s been disaster support payments, but it will be interesting to see which financial supports stay in the future. I think that this casualised workforce also contributes to the feeling that it is pretty impossible to buy a house as a young person in this day and age; prices keep going up and it feels harder and harder to earn enough money to meet these rising prices. Policymakers need to carefully consider how to best prepare and equip young people to succeed in the long term for a sustainable future. It’s difficult to be optimistic when it feels like the odds are stacked against us.

ANDREW

“ Thinking about young people’s experiences of safety and financial security, what struck me is how dangerous the workforce can often be for young people, especially with the casualisation of the workforce. It’s hard working in retail and hospitality. They’re two sectors that are dominated by young people and, because they are not necessarily unionised fields, young people don’t have access to a lot of support. So this report not only brings to the fore that it can be hard to get a job, but even when you’ve got a job, it can be an unsafe work environment and young people don’t always have the support to navigate that.

ISOBEL

ON CIVIC AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

“ The findings about young people’s civic participation are really important. I think for young people, informal civic participation is much more prevalent because they face structural barriers in accessing formal means of participation. Young people are protesting and using social media to share their voices and enact their agency. It is important that the diversity of young people’s voices are being listened to, encouraged, and supported. Resources like the Youth Barometer present an opportunity for young people in seeing themselves reflected and having their experiences validated.

REBECCA

“ It was really interesting to see that young people aren’t necessarily involved in political volunteering. I think there’s this impression that the institution of politics is for middle-class white people and that it’s quite an inherently exclusive institution. I don’t think that there’s a lot of reasons for young people to feel optimistic about politics, especially when they don’t ‘fit the mould’. It’s also interesting that 91% of young people want more government services and this suggests to me that financial equality is not just a ‘young people vs adults’ issue. I feel like there’s a need for wider discussions about how young people experience the same issues that all other people do, just in different ways and often more acutely. It is important for policymakers to consider how all issues, not just conventionally ‘youth issues’, affect young people.

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03

YOUNG PEOPLE AND EDUCATION

KEY FINDINGS

- 1** Young Australians' engagement in education and training remains high throughout post-school life stages. The proportion of engagement is about 65% among 20–24-year-olds.
- 2** An increase in the number of students completing postgraduate university degrees between 2016 and 2019 is driven by increases in international students. Overall completion rates for postgraduate programs increased by 24.5%, compared with an 8.9% increase in undergraduate completions.
- 3** VET completions have decreased across most demographic groups between 2016 and 2019, although they remained popular among young Indigenous Australians.
- 4** Management was the most popular field of study among postgraduate university students (32.6% of course completions in 2019) and for VET students (41.6% of course completions).
- 5** Students were largely satisfied with their educational experience and with online learning during the pandemic.
- 6** Students from all age groups felt a strong sense of school belonging. This had a range of positive downstream effects, such as civic engagement.
- 7** Students indicated that they felt their education prepared them for the future, but still wanted more focus on developing practical skills, such as those that helped them to gain employment, vote and understand taxes.

POLICY AND RESEARCH IMPLICATIONS

- A greater understanding of demographic trends affecting the higher and vocational education sectors is needed, as both are closely linked to emerging occupational stratification of the post-pandemic future workforce.
- Improvements to flexible delivery could help re-invigorate Australia's education export market following the negative effects of the pandemic and the slow recovery of international travel. The rapid and relatively successful shift to online course delivery during the COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated that higher education institutions can offer online programs in study areas previously deemed unsuited for remote learning.
- Higher education programs could improve the relevance of course content by including a greater focus on developing skills that lead to better job outcomes.
- Social and economic support for international students should be scaled up within higher education institutions and their local communities. International students living in Australia have faced challenges and material deprivations as a result of the pandemic, such as loss of employment and limited access to government financial support). Many are struggling to access adequate food and rely on food-aid charities.
- Health and mental health support for students should be prioritised in schools and higher education. Initial teacher education programs should provide knowledge and training in this area and dedicated mental health professionals could work alongside teachers and school leaders in schools.
- Educational institutions could offer more opportunities for young people to develop financial literacy in relation to the growing array of financial products and resources on the market beyond traditional banking.
- Low levels of satisfaction with learning about the environment highlight the need to prioritise environmental education throughout all sectors of formal learning.

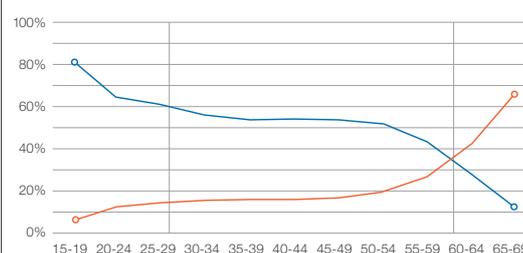
REVIEW OF EXISTING KNOWLEDGE

Engagement in learning remains high throughout post-school life stages

The ABS measure of Engagement in Employment, Education and Training demonstrates high levels of engagement post-school. Given that a considerable amount of learning happens in the workplace ('on the job'), the employment, education and training measure is a valuable indicator that captures engagement with learning more broadly. (See Figure 3.1)

People are active learners until about the age of 60, at which point the proportion of those not engaged in learning rapidly increases. Although the engagement rate continuously decreases after compulsory schooling, it changes relatively little beyond the 25–29 age cohort. Engagement stays stable for about two more decades and only begins to decline approaching 60. It is evident that the education system in Australia has set a strong foundation for a love of learning that lasts for decades in the many contexts in which it is manifested in post school life phases.

FIGURE 3.1.
**ENGAGEMENT IN EMPLOYMENT,
EDUCATION AND TRAINING
BY AGE COHORT**



Source: ABS, Census of Population and Housing, 2016¹

Pre-pandemic, international postgraduate student completions in higher education grew rapidly

There are approximately 1.6 million students in 185 higher education providers, which includes Australia's 42 universities.² Nearly one-third (32.5%) of all students in the higher education sector are international.³ We explored degree completions in higher education between 2016 and 2019, with respect to mode of attendance (on-campus versus online), field of education, level of education (undergraduate versus postgraduate), and international status. (See Appendix A: Table A.1)

International students are choosing postgraduate programs in increasing numbers. By 2019, the number of international students completing on-campus postgraduate programs had increased by 62.9% since 2016, compared with an increase of only 18.1% in international undergraduate completions. The increase in international postgraduate completions was also significantly larger than that for domestic students. In 2016, half (49.9%) of on-campus postgraduate completions were international students. This increased to nearly two-thirds (63.6%) by 2019.

Domestic students are choosing online study options. Online postgraduate completions for domestic students increased by 21% from 2016 to 2019, whereas on-campus completions decreased by 9.2% over the same period. Online postgraduate completion for international students decreased by 7.4% during this time.

Undergraduate study is overwhelmingly undertaken on-campus by both domestic and international students. Although online study accounts for only about 8% of all undergraduate completions, the vast majority of these were domestic students in both 2016 (92.1% of online completions) and 2019 (92.6% of online completions). The four most popular fields of study among domestic online students (Society and Culture, Education, Management, and Health) collectively account for 85.5% of 2016 and 81.6% of 2019 completions in this cohort.

Management is the most popular study option for students in higher education

Management was the most popular field of study for postgraduate students, accounting for approximately one-third of completions in both 2016 and 2019. This was followed by studies in society and culture, and in health. These preferences remained unchanged from 2016 to 2019, although information technology overtook the education and engineering fields for fourth place in 2019. The same field of study preferences were seen in undergraduate completions.

International students outnumbered domestic students in management studies. In 2016, international students accounted for 61.9% of postgraduate completions in management studies, increasing to 74.5% of completions in this field in 2019. More domestic students than international students were enrolled in society and culture (81.2% of postgraduate completions in 2016 and 75.7% in 2019) and in health (87.4% of postgraduate completions in 2016 and 85% in 2019) programs.

Interest in education as a field of study differs between domestic and international students. Domestic student completions decreased by 2.4% in undergraduate, and by 12.4% in postgraduate education programs between 2016 and 2019. For domestic undergraduates, the decrease in completions from 2016 to 2019 was greater for online programs (down 10.3%) than for on-campus programs (down 1.9%). Education programs had the lowest proportion of international completions both in 2016 (2.8%) and in 2019 (4.4%). For domestic postgraduates, on-campus completions in education fell by 30.4%, but this was partially offset by a 7.2% increase in online completions.

VET programs remain popular but completions are decreasing

Vocational education is an important post-school transitional pathway. VET programs are popular in Australia, with nearly half of senior secondary students enrolled in VET, higher than the OECD average of 42%.⁴ Vocational programs in the metropolitan areas have the highest numbers of completions, although the overall number of VET completions has decreased across most demographic groups in recent years. We explored VET completion trends in relation to age, gender, geographic location, and Indigenous status. (See Appendix A: Table A.2)

Domestic students are choosing online study options. Online postgraduate completions for domestic students increased by 21% from 2016 to 2019, whereas on-campus completions decreased by 9.2% over the same period.



The next largest decrease was among non-Indigenous women (18.9%). The drop in the number of VET completions among Indigenous young people in the 15–19 age group was much lower, at only 7.5% for men and 3.4% for women.

In both 2016 and 2019, the number of VET completions was highest among young people aged 15–19, irrespective of gender, Indigenous status, or geographical location (metropolitan, regional or remote). The number of people in this age group was approximately double the number in the next two age groups (20–24 years and 25–29 years). The largest decrease in the number of VET completions between 2016 and 2019 was among non-Indigenous men aged 15–19, which dropped by 20.2%. The next largest decrease was among non-Indigenous women (18.9%). The drop in the number of VET completions among Indigenous young people in the 15–19 age group was much lower, at only 7.5% for men and 3.4% for women.

Management is the most popular study choice in VET

VET programs in management were the most common study destinations among all cohorts across all qualification levels, with 41.6% of all completions in this study area; however, there were differences between cohorts. International students dominated management studies at level 5 (diploma) and level 6 (advanced diploma), with 66.8% of level 5 and 87.6% of level 6 completions in this field. In contrast, only 42.8% of level 4 (certificate IV) completions in management are international students.

The next most popular programs were studies in society and culture (14.9% of all completions), education (8.9%), health (8.7%), engineering (6.4%) and food and hospitality (5%). Distribution of completions by cohort was very uneven.

Programs in society and culture at levels 4 and 5 were more popular among domestic than international students. Domestic students completed 86.3% of level 4 and 80.2% of level 5 programs in this area. This changed at level 6, where only 37.6% of completions in this field of study were domestic students, although total numbers were low. These programs were also more popular among women than men across both age groups, particularly so with female domestic students, who were responsible for 52.5% of completions in this area. Finally, studies in health were also preferred by domestic students over international students. Domestic students were responsible for 83.4% of completions in this field.

2021 INTERVIEW AND SURVEY DATA

Study mode

Nearly half (48.5%) of our survey participants were undertaking formal education on a full-time basis. Full-time study was common among 18–23-year-olds who had a participation rate of between 45% and 58.9%, whereas only 27.9% of 24-year-olds studied full-time. Full-time study was more prevalent among men (53.8%) than women (42%).

Only 23% of survey participants studied part-time. Part-time study was much more common among 18-year-olds (39.5%) than among 19–24-year-olds (from 19.1% to 26.8%). The part-time study participation rate was similar among women (24.7%) and men (20.8%).

More than two-thirds of survey participants (70%) were enrolled in some type of formal education at the time of data collection. Participation decreased with age: 87.1% of 18-year-olds were enrolled in formal education, compared with only 46.7% of 24-year-olds. In general, more men (73.3%) than women (65.5%) reported being formally enrolled in education.

Online learning during the pandemic

During the COVID-19 pandemic, education delivery moved to online learning in most parts of Australia. The vast majority of our participants (356 people, or 70.5%) had experience with online learning. Nearly half (48.3%) of these learners studied exclusively online; only 9% attended educational institutions exclusively in person. More than one-third (36.6%) of participants experienced a mixed-service delivery. It was slightly more common for regional and rural learners to attend schools in person (13.4%) than it was for their metropolitan peers (8.3%).

The switch to online education delivery did not appear to have a negative effect on the quality of learning. This finding aligns with recent research from Monash University that documented a shift towards a greater appreciation of teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic.⁵ In all age groups, the combined proportion of learners who were satisfied or very satisfied with their online learning experience significantly outweighed those very dissatisfied or dissatisfied. Older participants tended to be more satisfied with their online learning experience than younger learners.

Satisfaction with the educational experience

We explored satisfaction with the following nine dimensions of formal learning: educational content, problem solving, teaching skills of educators, critical thinking, job relevance of course content, group work and collaboration, social relations, health and mental health support, and learning about environmental issues. These dimensions were selected on the basis that they covered different areas of both academic and social aspects of learning. Participants were generally satisfied with all aspects of their learning, with only slight differences between the various dimensions.

FIGURE 3.2.
RELATIVE SATISFACTION WITH ASPECTS OF FORMAL LEARNING

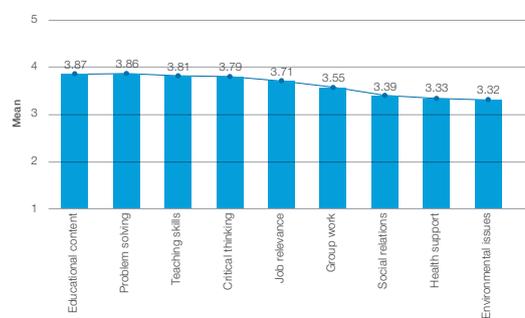


Figure 3.2 shows young people's relative satisfaction with different aspects of learning in decreasing order, based on means, and reflects the generally high quality of educational content delivered by Australian institutions. Satisfaction with the development of problem-solving skills and of critical thinking skills is high, as is satisfaction with the quality of teaching. Satisfaction with the job relevance of course content is also high. In contrast, satisfaction with the development of group work skills, with social relations, and with health and mental health support are lower. Satisfaction with learning about environmental issues is the lowest among the areas investigated.

School belonging

Schools are not only sites of academic learning but also places where social relationships are formed. We explored school belonging with the following proposition: 'I feel like I belong at the educational organisation I am enrolled in'. Respondents were given five categories to choose from, between strongly disagree and strongly agree. Nearly two-thirds (66.2%) of survey participants answered this question. (See Table 3.1).

TABLE 3.1.
DEGREE OF BELONGING (N=334)

	Number	Percentage
Strongly disagree	9	2.6%
Disagree	33	9.9%
Neutral	77	23.1%
Agree	140	41.9%
Strongly agree	75	22.5%

School belonging was closely and positively related to all aspects of satisfaction with education. Correlation coefficients between school belonging and each of the nine dimensions of satisfaction with education ranged between .448 (health and mental health support) and .301 (teaching skills of educators). This highlights the importance of high-quality health and mental health support in creating a strong sense of belonging among students.

School belonging was also closely and positively associated with volunteering. We asked participants about their volunteering experiences with respect to eight different types of activities in the last two years. A strong sense of school belonging was associated most closely with frequency of volunteering in political parties or organisations (Pearson $r[332] = .192, p < .001$) and with participating in student government-related activities (Pearson $r[332] = .187, p < .001$). The magnitude of the relationship between school belonging and volunteering in emergency services was lower but statistically still significant (Pearson $r[332] = .127, p = .02$). Finally, volunteering for religious or spiritual organisations was the only measure that lacked any association with school belonging. (See Chapter 9: Citizenship, Belonging and Inclusion for further discussion on volunteering and civic participation.)

For all age groups, the proportion of those agreeing or strongly agreeing with the statement that they felt like they belonged at their institution far exceeded the proportion of those who disagreed or strongly disagreed. Young men reported a significantly higher level of school belonging than young women. Although it appeared that two in five (40%) of non-binary/gender diverse/agender participants did not experience a sense of school belonging, the small sample size for this group (15) means that firm conclusions cannot be drawn from our data. However, frequencies among those who did respond suggest this is an issue that warrants more investigation. Other surveys of secondary students indicate that gender and sexually diverse young people experienced a much lower sense of school belonging in comparison to students in general.⁶



Strengths and shortcomings in education

In the interviews, young people discussed the types of skills that they saw as important to develop during their education. They highlighted the social skills that allowed them to work with people from diverse backgrounds; the metacognitive skills that supported their problem-solving and self-management; and basic literacy skills of reading, writing, spelling and speaking. Several interviewees also valued how their education instilled a sense of self-confidence as they moved into future work or study.

Some young people were deeply critical of the perspective that academic performance was the most important outcome of learning. They indicated that this led to a focus on rote learning, rather than empowering them to hone their critical thinking skills.



The conventional education system is not geared towards effective education. We're trending towards a rote learning system ... where they just throw the textbook at you, you memorise the textbook, and they ask you to repeat the textbook. Instead of giving you the opportunity to actually think critically, form your own impressions and apply the knowledge that you've gained.

NON-BINARY, 24, NSW

Some interviewees also pointed out how traditional examination models were insufficient in capturing the nuanced ways in which they experienced success in their education. Specifically, they did not think that these methods valued their intrinsic engagement, effort, persistence, excitement for learning, or whether they learned from their mistakes.



Performance is hard to measure, because there's going to be students that are built for a classroom, and students that are not built for it ... It's important that your students have improved at the end of the year, even if it's only by a little. They essentially leave smarter than when they came to you.

WOMAN, 22, ACT

Good teachers

Participants expressed that good teachers cared about and believed in their students. They took the time to build respectful and trusting relationships, and valued students' opinions. Good teachers were patient, persistent and flexible, and ensured that all students felt valued and made progress regardless of their starting point.



The teachers at this school really cared about the students. They spoke to you like you were a person instead of just a number ... They treated you like you were an adult. They let you be you.

WOMAN, 18, ACT

Some young people spoke about great teachers having expert content and pedagogical knowledge, which was, crucially, underpinned by the teacher's passion. This passion made the learning engaging and also 'humanised' teachers so that the interviewees felt comfortable to approach them with questions or problems.



I think passion; so, passion not only for teaching, but for the subject that they are teaching. I think those two can be different. Sometimes those two aren't in educators, and I think that really changes how someone enjoys their learning.

WOMAN, 24, NT

A few participants also talked about how their relationships with educators underpinned their sense of belonging at school. They indicated that, when teachers fostered inclusive, collaborative and engaging learning environments, and were invested in their students, students felt a strong sense of belonging in the classroom.



Well, my favourite classes; I loved drama in school ... My drama teacher just made classes really fun and he just wanted us to do well and to learn about drama because he loved it and, like, it was very communal, the class. Like the vibe of the class was really just nice and we were quite close.

WOMAN, 19, NSW

Preparing students for the future

Young people reflected on how their education had prepared them for the reality of the 'real world'. Several young people suggested that schools need to focus more on teaching those skills related to school-to-work transition (such as gaining employment), being an active citizen (voting) or financial management (including taxation). A number of participants also emphasised that education played a crucial role in addressing pressing social issues of reconciliation, racism and gender inequality.



I think [teachers are] pretty much responsible for shaping the generation, educating [young people] to be part of the world and be contributors to society.

MAN, 22, SA

While some of the interviewees recognised that education played a role in gaining employment, others suggested that this was changing in the current job climate. They indicated that their studies were overly theoretical and that they desired a greater focus on practical skills in order to be competitive when applying for jobs.



It's quite apparent to me that [the job market] is really competitive and getting grades and going to school isn't quite enough to cut it. I hear, so it makes me feel like, I need to get internships and work experiences, that kind of edge, to be competitive.

WOMAN, 21, ACT

Finally, young people also spoke about how COVID-19 had impacted their education. Many spoke about how learning from home was difficult because of increased distractions and technical challenges. Others indicated how the increase in flexible course offerings and the ability to study from a safe personal space benefited their studies. Several young people also indicated that they had changed their study plans in response to the pandemic, including pursuing health-related courses. They saw the demand for professionals in these areas, and these courses enabled them to keep working during the pandemic.



When everything moved online, I stopped enjoying [my graphic design course], and I then moved to study midwifery ... Now I can still work. Everyone else has to work from home and ... I still get to go into the hospital, which is exciting.

WOMAN, 20, NSW

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04

YOUNG PEOPLE AND EMPLOYMENT

KEY FINDINGS

- 1** The employment rate of 20–24-year-olds has been declining since the global financial crisis and in 2012 dropped below that of the overall working population. This trend continued during COVID-19.
- 2** There are considerable differences between employment rates of men and women among the 20–24-year-old age group: the proportion of young men in employment in this group dropped from 83.8% in 1978 to 74.8% in 2021, whereas employment rates for women increased from 62.6% to 75.2% over this period.
- 3** An increasing proportion of 20–24-year-olds are combining full-time study with work, from an average of 41% in 1991–93 to 56% in 2017–19.
- 4** Young people are overrepresented in the types of industries that have a large proportion of casual, temporal, insecure work with few opportunities for career development.
- 5** Over the past three decades, workers have experienced a decline in the number of hours worked per week, with younger workers (20–24 years) more affected. Younger workers now work 5.8 fewer hours than they did in 1992, compared with prime-age workers (25–54 years), who work 2.6 fewer hours per week.
- 6** Young workers are generally satisfied with their jobs across all industry categories, including those in roles with a high prevalence of job insecurity and precarity such as gig work, and view their jobs as socially useful.



POLICY AND RESEARCH IMPLICATIONS

- In Australia, students are largely left to their own devices to navigate early transitions into work. Multi-stakeholder collaborations could be used to scale up work-integrated learning initiatives in the higher education sector.
- Consideration should be given to piloting a limited 'youth basic income' scheme in parts of the country to scope its broader potential. Such a scheme could be modelled on existing universal basic income trials and would be applicable to 16-24-year-olds, similar to Youth Allowance.

REVIEW OF EXISTING KNOWLEDGE

The composition of the workforce is changing

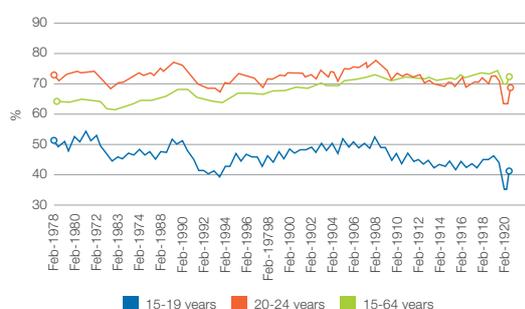
In the last four decades, the employment-to-population ratio (EPR), defined as 'the proportion of the total population who are employed, relative to those who are unemployed or not in the labour force'¹ has been consistently high for young people.

In February 1978, 51.7% of the youngest cohort (15–19 years) of the working age population was employed. This fell to 48.3% by May 2021 (see Figure 4.1). However, there were differences between young men and young women: EPR for young men dropped from 54.4% in 1978 to 43.7% in 2021, whereas for young women, it increased from 49% to 53.2%. In the older cohort of 20–24-year-olds, the average EPR changed little over time (73.2% in 1978 to 75% in May 2021), although differences between men and women became even more pronounced. In 1978, 83.8% of men in this age group were employed; this fell to 74.8% by May 2021. Women's rates of employment rose from 62.6% in 1978 to 75.2% in 2021.

The gender composition of the workforce across all age cohorts has changed during this period. While the ratio of working women in the workforce increased dramatically, from 45.6% to 72.3%, the proportion of working men to population decreased only slightly, from 82.6% to 79.3%.

While the ratio of working women in the workforce increased dramatically, from 45.6% to 72.3%, the proportion of working men to population decreased only slightly, from 82.6% to 79.3%.

FIGURE 4.1.
OVERALL EMPLOYMENT-TO-POPULATION RATIO BY AGE BETWEEN 1978 AND 2021



Source: ABS (2021), *Labour Force, Detailed*, catalogue no. 6291.0.55.001, Table 01²

The employment rate of 20–24-year-olds has been dropping since the global financial crisis

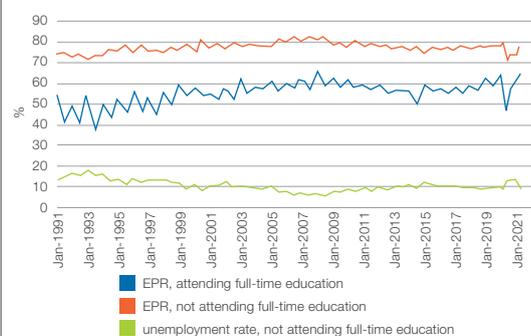
It is expected that the EPR for 15–19-year-olds would be lower than older workers, as much of their time is occupied by school-related activities.

Employment trends have not been linear for young people and both younger cohorts were impacted by economic crises. The negative effects of the economic crises in the early 1990s and late 2000s, and during COVID-19, are visible in Figure 4.1. During the global financial crisis, the EPR for 20–24-year-olds started to drop until, in 2012, it fell below that of the overall working age population for the first time. Since then, 20–24-year-olds are less likely to be employed than people 25 and older. This trend has continued during the COVID-19 pandemic. May 2020 represents the lowest point of the COVID-19 pandemic for 20–24-year-olds, when the EPR decreased to 63.5%. However, in the overall working cohort, EPR only decreased to 69.9%.

Young people are increasingly combining full-time study with work

Study and work are intertwined activities that occupy a significant proportion of young people’s time. As participation in higher education has increased in recent decades,³ the student experience has changed considerably with respect to study and work. Figure 4.2 captures the intertwined relationship among full-time education, employment-to-population rate and unemployment for 20–24-year-olds.

FIGURE 4.2.
EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT AND UNEMPLOYMENT: 20–24 YEARS



Source: ABS (2021), *Labour Force, Detailed*, catalogue no. 6291.0.55.001, Table 03⁴

Comparing the average employment to population ratio of young people (20–24 years) enrolled in full-time education with those who are not in full-time education shows that the proportion of full-time students who also work is increasing over time. Two three-year periods were compared in order to capture a robust snapshot of specific periods: January 1991 to December 1993 and January 2017 to December 2019 (immediately prior to the economic disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic). The average EPR for full-time students in 1991–93 was 41%, increasing to 56% in 2017–19, an increase of 36.6%. In contrast, the average EPR of those not in full-time education rose slightly from 75% in 1991–93 to 79% in 2017–19, an increase of only 5.3%.

Unemployment among 20–24-year-olds not in full-time employment decreased from 15.2% in 1991–93 to 8.7% in 2017–19, an effective decrease of 42.8%. Although decreasing youth unemployment is a welcome trend, it must be considered in the context of fewer weekly hours worked.



The number of hours worked per week is declining

Over the past three decades, younger workers (20–24 years) have experienced a sharper decline in the number of hours worked compared with prime-age workers (25–54 years).⁵ (See Figure 4.3) Workers in the older cohort worked 1.8 fewer hours in March 2020 (the latest pre-pandemic labour data) than they did in June 1992, whereas young workers worked 4.9 fewer hours. The gap between the two age groups continued during COVID-19, with both groups losing further hours. The most recent data from June 2021 shows prime-age employees worked 2.6 fewer hours and young employees worked 5.8 fewer hours compared with June 1992. Although the number of hours worked started to increase after the worst impacts of COVID-19 were felt, the effects on young people entering the labour market may last up to 10 years.^{6,7,8} The systematic evaluation of various governmental wage-replacement schemes (such as the two JobKeeper policies in Australia) are still underway, but early analyses document a mix of positives and negatives.^{9,10}

FIGURE 4.3.
CHANGE IN AVERAGE WEEKLY HOURS OF WORK



Source: ABS (2021), *Labour Force, Detailed, catalogue no. 6291.0.55.001, Table EM1a*¹¹

Young workers are concentrated in low wage, low-quality jobs

The type of work young people do matters. Young people are overrepresented in industries that have a large proportion of casual, temporary, insecure work with few opportunities for career development. Forty-five per cent of workers in accommodation and food services are aged between 15 and 24, along with 31% of retail trade workers and 23% of arts and recreation workers.¹² The average weekly earnings in these industries are low compared with other employment sectors with relatively few younger workers.¹³

2021 INTERVIEW AND SURVEY DATA

Work arrangements and job satisfaction

Most young people surveyed (60.6%) reported that they worked for wages or a salary; 19.4% worked in unpaid positions, either undertaking work experience, volunteering or working unpaid in a family business. (Note that these categories are not mutually exclusive.) Only 29.7% worked full-time, 24.6% worked part-time, 20.2% worked in a casual position, and 25.3% were not working or unemployed. (See Appendix A: Table A.3)

Young people are not evenly spread throughout different employment sectors of the economy, but are concentrated in certain areas. The five most common industries in which young people worked were: retail trade (21%), accommodation and food services (15%), education and training (13%), health care and social assistance (9%) and financial and insurance services (7%). More than one-quarter (26.3%) of survey participants worked in the gig economy. Patterns of gig work have not changed significantly over the last two years, ranging between 30% and 34% over this time.

In addition, over one-quarter of our participants (26.3%) participated in gig work. The comparison across four time periods (last month, two to six months prior, last year, and the past two years) suggests that gig work patterns have not changed significantly in the last two years. For example, the combined proportions of those who worked in gig jobs often or very often were fairly similar (ranging between 30% and 34%) in all of the four time periods.

Forty-three per cent of respondents indicated they were satisfied or very satisfied with their current or recent jobs, 19.1% were neutral, and only 10.1% were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied. Young people were generally satisfied with their jobs in all industry categories, including those in roles with a high prevalence of job insecurity and precarity.

Sixty-one per cent of respondents who worked in the gig economy were either somewhat or very satisfied with that type of work, and 29% were neutral. Only 11% of young gig workers in our study were somewhat or very dissatisfied.

Job usefulness

The overwhelming majority of study participants agreed or strongly agreed that their jobs were useful to society. Fewer than one in five young people indicated they felt neutral, and only 6% of participants expressed disagreement or strong disagreement with the notion of job usefulness. Job usefulness was closely and positively correlated with general job satisfaction and with satisfaction with gig work. This suggests that those opting for gig work do not necessarily do so as a response to their dissatisfaction with their general employment conditions.

Full-time vs part-time work

Survey participants were generally more interested in looking for full-time than part-time employment (46% and 35% respectively), and only 19% were interested in casual work. However, older participants had a much stronger preference for full-time work than younger people, who sought part-time and casual jobs. (See Figure 4.4) More men (51%) expressed a preference for full-time work than women (43%). Differences between men and women seeking part-time work were even more pronounced, with 41% of women preferring part-time employment compared with men (27%).

FIGURE 4.4.
PREFERENCE FOR TYPES OF EMPLOYMENT IN JOB SEARCH BY AGE

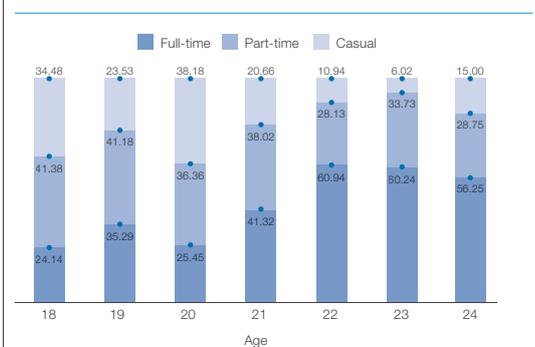
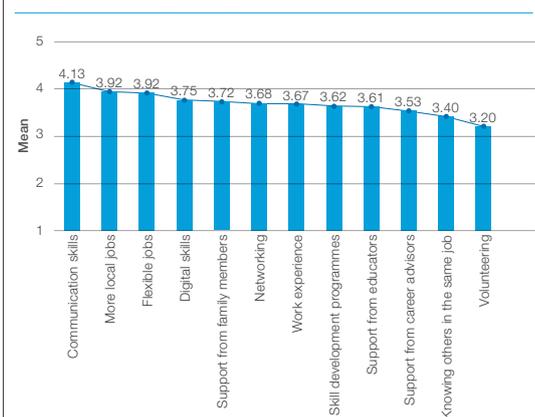


FIGURE 4.5.
RELATIVE IMPORTANCE OF FACTORS IN GETTING A JOB



Unemployment and underemployment

Sixty per cent of young people experienced unemployment in the past two years, with 22.3% unemployed for between four and six months. Another 21.6% were unemployed for between two and three months. Underemployment was experienced by approximately 63% of young people in the past two years. Twenty-eight per cent of young people spent between two and three months underemployed.

Career and job aspirations

Interviewees were asked to describe their employment aspirations, what their ideal job would look like in the future, and what having a job means to them.



I love and hate this question, because it's always asked and I never know what I actually want to do in the future.

MAN, 19, WA

Although participants tended to have a general idea of a sector in which they would like to work in the future, several expressed the need to remain open and flexible in their pathways to achieve particular goals.



I've always wanted to work with kids, whether that be as a teacher or childcare worker. I've always known that was where I was going, but also thought that [it] could be at a school, as a school counsellor. I could also open up my own practice. I could also work in a hospital, working with kids in paediatric units.

WOMAN, 22, ACT

Some interviewees thought that their future job would need to align with their personal values and unique skills, whereas others were more pragmatic. Achieving financial independence through wage employment emerged as an important aspect of having a job.



Having a job means freedom. It gives you the freedom to have that little bit of extra money to kind of, you know, do whatever it is you want to do, or to enjoy things more. Without that constant feeling of money being a problem, if that makes sense. It gives the opportunity to, you know, be out in the community and feel, I guess, feel useful in society.

NON-BINARY, 20, WA

Barriers to ideal careers and jobs

Young people listed both external and internal factors as barriers to achieving career goals or an ideal job. Citizenship status was one of the external factors that limited employment possibilities for some participants. Other external factors included competition with other job-seekers, long commutes, or a requirement to relocate. Some respondents described internal barriers, such as the need to undertake further study to secure qualifications that would allow them to gain desired employment in the future.



I think it would mainly be myself and how hard I apply myself. You know, if I'm not willing to put in the effort, then I probably won't get those results that I want.

MAN, 22, SA

COVID-19 and employment

Disruptions in employment conditions during the pandemic severely affected young people, particularly those working in the retail, hospitality and childcare sectors. At the time of the interviews in August 2021, young people were variously affected by changing guidelines at their place of work, reduced working hours and, in some cases, complete discontinuation of work. This was the case particularly in Victoria, NSW and the ACT, which experienced long term restrictions and lockdowns in 2020 and 2021.



It's just annoying when it gets to the heightened point of COVID, when shutdowns happen and I can't work. I work in hospitality.

MAN, 19, QLD



I work casually, so I haven't had work for about a month and a bit I think, because I work in before- and after-school care. And so, when the numbers for that went down, I haven't had work. So, I'm still employed, but I haven't been having any hours and I also normally nanny two days a week, which I am not doing at the moment as well.

WOMAN, 20, NSW





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05

HEALTH AND WELLBEING

KEY FINDINGS

- 1** Young people's sport participation rates were the lowest among all age groups. Only 1.9% of 15–17-year-olds met the physical activity guidelines, while 15% of those aged 18–64 years did so.
- 2** The proportion of those in their 20s abstaining completely from alcohol more than doubled, from 8.9% in 2001 to 22% in 2019.
- 3** 26% of 16–24-year-olds had an anxiety, mood or substance use disorder.
- 4** 65.6% of young men and 54.4% of young women reported feeling happy with their lives overall. Young women were twice as likely than young men to feel stressed all of the time or most of the time (53.9% of women compared with 26.8% of men).
- 5** Nearly 60% of young people reported emotional or psychological impacts associated with encountering risks online.
- 6** 18% of university students from low socio-economic backgrounds, 19% from regional places, and more than a quarter (27.2%) of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander university students indicated they 'regularly go without food or necessities'.
- 7** Demand for food aid has doubled during the COVID-19 pandemic, with 65% of aged 18–25-year-olds unable to afford enough food at least once a week.

POLICY AND RESEARCH IMPLICATIONS

- There is a strong case for investment in, and attention to, the mental health and wellbeing of young people, including a dedicated service stream for young people by the end of 2022.¹
- Schools should be better equipped to support the social and emotional wellbeing of students. More evidence, and evidence-based activities, are also needed in this context.
- Sex education needs to reinforce consent in intimate relationships and go beyond discussions of protection and sexually transmitted diseases.
- Improved mechanisms to link data across multiple services between sectors are needed to track an individuals' interactions with support services and improve macro-level understandings of youth people's service needs.
- More research is needed to gather up-to-date measures and better understandings of food insecurity among young people in Australia.

REVIEW OF EXISTING KNOWLEDGE

Young people are not physically active

Only 1.9% of 15–17-year-olds met the physical activity guidelines, whereas 15% of those aged 18–64 years did so. Only 10.3% of those aged 15–17 years reported doing an hour of daily exercise; 15.8% stated that they did toning or strength-training physical activity on at least three days in the previous week.² Young people also report the lowest rates of participation in sports of all age groups. Although 90.5% of 18–24-year-olds reported participating in sports in the previous 12 months, only 66.9% reported doing so over the previous seven days.³ Further, fitness and going to the gym are main forms of fitness for 18–24-year-olds, followed by running and walking.³

The most common motivation for engaging in sports for 15–24-year-olds was 'physical health or fitness' (65.1%), followed by 'fun/enjoyment' (34.6%), 'social reasons' (22.7%), 'psychological/mental health/therapy' (15.3%), and 'to lose weight/keep weight off/tone' (13.4%). The main barrier to participation for 15–17-year-olds was 'not enough time/too many other commitments'.³

During the 2020 COVID-19 lockdowns, young people suffered a greater impact when compared with older Australians.

Of those who were already involved in sport, fewer young people reported participating in sports during the week prior to the survey period.³

Young people with a disability still experience workplace discrimination

In 2018, less than 10% of people aged 15–24 lived with a disability (either physical or mental/behavioural), using the Australian Bureau of Statistics' definition of disability as at least one limitation, restriction or impairment to everyday activities, for at least six months.⁴ This is among the lowest prevalence rates of disability for all age groups. Almost one in five (18.9%) 15–24-year-olds with a disability experienced discrimination. In almost half of those instances, the source of discrimination was an employer.⁴

Obesity for people aged 18–24 years increased from 38.9% in 2014–15 to 46% in 2017–18. For younger children (5–17 years), rates of obesity (24.9%) have remained more stable during this time.²

During 2017–18, 73,000 young people aged between 15 and 24 were impacted by injuries requiring hospitalisation most commonly attributed to transport accidents. In 2018 there were 35 deaths per 100,000 people aged 15–24 years. Overall, the death rate among young people has fallen over time.⁵

Substance use is on the decline

Illicit drug use and daily alcohol consumption for young people is on the decline.^{6,7} Only 1.2% of those aged 20–29 drank alcohol daily. Further, the proportion of those in their 20s abstaining completely from alcohol more than doubled from 8.9% in 2001 to 22% in 2019.⁶ The majority of Australian Youth Safety Survey respondents aged 14–25 (83%) reported having drunk alcohol.⁸ Three-quarters (76%) were aged under 18, and two-thirds (65%) were under 16 years. Two-thirds (65%) indicated binge drinking at least once (defined as consuming five drinks in one session), including 28% of those aged under 16 years. For younger cohorts (14–19 years), smoking on a daily basis has reduced by about 80% since 2001. However, the proportion of people aged 18–24 years who have never smoked decreased from 75% in 2001 to 64% in 2019.⁹

Cannabis was the most commonly reported illicit substances, with 16% of people aged 12–17 years having used it at some point, and 8% using it in the past month.⁷ However, in the Australian Youth Safety Survey (which included young people aged 14–25) a higher proportion indicated that they had used cannabis at least once (33%) and 17% of those were aged under 16 years.⁸

Other illicit drugs that high-schoolers reported using included ecstasy (5%), synthetic drugs (3%), performance enhancing drugs (2%), cocaine (2%), heroin (1%) and ethno-botanicals (1%).⁷ Most (69%) reported that they had friends who used drugs.⁸

Ninety-five per cent of young people in secondary school (12–17-year-olds) also reported using over-the-counter drugs such as analgesics, most commonly for headaches, with use increasing with age. Other common over-the-counter drugs were tranquilisers, which 3% of high schoolers reported using in the past week. Nineteen per cent of these users indicated they used them for non-medical reasons.⁷

Obesity for people aged 18–24 years increased from 38.9% in 2014–15 to 46% in 2017–18.

...

Cannabis was the most commonly reported illicit substances, with 16% of people aged 12–17 years having used it at some point, and 8% using it in the past month.⁷

Suicide was the leading cause of premature death in Australia's young adults, accounting for around one-third of deaths among people aged 15–24.¹⁴

Young people are knowledgeable about sexual health but some still experience unwanted sexual encounters

Young people are knowledgeable about sexual health, are engaging in sexual activity (particularly older students), can talk about sex, and are using protection.¹⁰

While notification rates for chlamydia, the most frequently notified sexually transmissible infection in Australia, in those aged 20–24 have remained relatively stable in the five years between 2013 and 2017, rates in the 15–19 age group had declined by 13% in 2017.¹¹

Just over one-third (35%) stated that they were attracted to the same gender, or multiple genders. The majority of secondary students (74.4%) reported that they had engaged in sexual activity, including 'deep kissing'. Almost half (46.6%) had engaged in sexual intercourse. These rates were higher among those in the older years.¹⁰ Among those who indicated they were sexually active, eight in ten (81.2%) indicated that they had discussed having sex, including using protection prior to having sex (76.9%). Of these, 56.9% said that they were using condoms, and 41% indicated using oral contraception.

Most sexually active young people reported that they 'felt good' about their most recent sexual experience. However, 28.4% reported having an unwanted sexual experience at least once.¹⁰ Approximately half of women and one-third of men aged 16–17 years reported experiencing 'unwanted sexual behaviour' in the previous year. Further, 12.5% of men, and approximately 8.3% of women (16–17 years) said that they had 'engaged in unwanted sexual behaviour towards someone else' in the previous year.¹²

One-third (33%) of young people reported having 'sexted' in the previous two months, generally with a sexual partner or friend.¹⁰ The internet represented a source of information about sexual health for most young people (78.7%). Sixty per cent of those who received requests for nude or nearly nude images or videos said they felt uncomfortable, 43% felt disgusted, 26% felt pressured, 26% nervous, and 21% felt mad/angry. Fifteen per cent reported receiving unsolicited nude or nearly nude images. This was more common among older teens.¹³

Just over half (55.5%) of young people indicated having 'moderate levels of trust' in information found online. General practitioners, followed by mothers and community health services, represented more trustworthy sources of information about sexual health.¹⁰

Young people's mental health brought to the fore

Of all age groups, young adults reported the highest rates of mental illness. Twenty-six per cent of 16–24-year-olds had an anxiety, mood or substance use disorder and reported relatively high rates of psychological distress.¹⁴ In the context of COVID-19, doubt about the future, isolation from peers and family, employment precarity, and financial stress, young people's mental health has been brought to the fore.¹⁵

There are gender differences in mental health among young people. Young women are more likely to feel 'extremely or very concerned' about coping with stress (55.5% of women compared to 24.8% of men), body image (45.9% vs 15.7%), mental health (43.4% vs 20.7%) and school or study problems (40.5% vs 21.4%).¹⁵ Anxiety disorders were more common among women, whereas suicide and self-inflicted injuries were the main burden of disease among men.⁵ Suicide was the leading cause of premature death in Australia's young adults, accounting for around one-third of deaths among people aged 15–24.¹⁴

For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people of the same age, the main mental health impacts for both genders include suicide and self-inflicted injuries, followed by anxiety disorders, alcohol use disorders and road traffic accidents.^{9,14} Suicide rates among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are more than double that of other Australians, with young men particularly at risk.

Gender diverse and transgender young people aged 14–25 years also self-reported various mental health issues. For example, stress (48%), gender dysphoria (46%), anxiety disorder (44%), depression (40%) and gender identity disorder (33%).¹⁶ Almost three-quarters (74.6%) of transgender young people aged 14–25 had been previously diagnosed with depression and 52.2% had a current diagnosis. Just over three-quarters (75.8%) of those with a current diagnosis were receiving treatment, while a similar proportion (76.4%) experienced moderate to severe symptoms in the two weeks prior to completing the survey.¹⁷

Two-thirds (66%) of young trans people reported having seen a mental health professional in the previous 12 months. A similar proportion (60%) were mostly or very satisfied with their experience and 15% were very/mostly dissatisfied.¹⁶ Sixty-seven per cent of LGBTIQ+ youth sought professional mental health support; among trans respondents, 82% had sought mental health support. However, 16.5% reported having difficulty discussing gender with mental health professionals, 36% said they had difficulty discussing sexuality, and 13% indicated having difficulty discussing their intersex status.¹⁸

Young women are less likely to feel happy and more likely to feel stressed

Over half of 15–19-year-olds (58.6%) reported feeling ‘very happy/happy with their lives overall’. Young men were more likely (65.6%) than young women (54.4%) to report feeling that way. Further, 10.7% of men and women reported feeling ‘either sad or very sad with their lives as a whole’. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people (15–19 years) were less likely to say they felt ‘happy or very happy’ with their lives (45.4%) when compared with other young people in 2020.¹⁵ However, prior to the pandemic Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in a slightly older cohort (15–24 years) reported higher rates of happiness. Seventy-six per cent said they felt ‘happy all or most of the time’ in the previous month despite 66% reporting one or more ‘personal stressors’, including being unemployed. One-third reported ‘being treated unfairly because they were Indigenous’, 67% reported experiencing ‘low to moderate levels of psychological distress’, and 33% reported ‘high to very high levels of psychological distress’.⁹

Over half (55.5%) of all young people said they felt ‘very positive’ or ‘positive’ about the future, and 13.9% said they felt ‘negative’ or ‘very negative’ about the future. The top personal concerns of respondents were coping with stress (43%), mental health (34%) and body image (33%). Further, 42.6% of young people report feeling stressed ‘all of the time or most of the time’, and the rate of those feeling stressed was double for women when compared to men who ‘felt stressed all of the time or most of the time’ (53.9% compared with 26.8%).¹⁵

Nearly half of young people (48.2%) reported seeking support online. Of these, young women were more likely (30.7%) to seek support from mobile apps than young men (18.9%), or from the internet more generally (51.4% of women compared with 43.9% of men). Less than half (41.9%) of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people indicated that they would seek help online. Overall, the internet was the fifth most common avenue of support, after friends, parents/guardians, relatives/family friends, and brothers/sisters.¹⁵

Young people understand the risks of social media but still feel the impacts

Nearly 60% of young people reported emotional or psychological impacts associated with encountering risks online, including not feeling good about themselves (36%), feelings of anger, fear, helplessness and powerlessness (35%), feeling left out or losing friends (24%), damaged reputation (11%) and distancing from family or friends (9%).¹⁹ Over half of young people (55.5%) reported that they are concerned about social media.¹⁵

Twenty per cent of young people reported having acted negatively towards others online, including ‘calling someone names, deliberately excluding people, spreading lies or rumours’. Of those who reported doing so, 90% stated that they had been the victims of such behaviour themselves.¹⁹

Twenty per cent of young people reported having acted negatively towards others online, including ‘calling someone names, deliberately excluding people, spreading lies or rumours’.





Food insecurity is a significant but hidden issue among young people

Food insecurity is defined as 'limited or uncertain availability of individuals' and households' physical, social, and economic access to sufficient, safe, nutritious, and culturally relevant food'.²⁰

Food insecurity is a complex, and dynamic phenomenon. Although financial stress is the main trigger of food insecurity, other factors include problems procuring healthy food, geography, and limited nutrition literacy, or understanding how to cook and prepare ingredients. The impacts of food insecurity are both psychological and physical, and can include stress, shame, and embarrassment related to the stigma of being unable to pay for food.²¹

The most recent national measure of food insecurity in Australia identified that 5.5% of people had, in the previous 12 months, lived in a household that had run out of food and could not afford to buy more or where someone went without food when they couldn't afford to buy any more. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are more likely to experience food insecurity compared to the general population, with 22% indicating that they were 'living in a household where someone went without food when household supplies ran out'.²²

Studies of food insecurity among students at Australian universities suggest higher rates of prevalence among young people compared with the general population. Fourteen per cent of domestic students reported going without food or other necessities because they were unaffordable. Rates among particular groups were higher: 18% of students from low socio-economic backgrounds, 19% from regional places, and more than a quarter (27.1%) of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students indicated they 'regularly go without food or necessities'.²³

In two studies conducted before the COVID-19 pandemic, 38% of students at the University of Tasmania²⁴ and 48% of students at the University of Newcastle²⁵ experienced food insecurity. Different rates of reported food insecurity can be partly attributed to the different measures used and the application of more expansive, or narrower interpretations of food insecurity, but also reflect the difficulty inherent in measuring hidden experiences of food insecurity.

The financial impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic have made food less affordable for many people over a short period of time. Foodbank has reported an increase in demand for food aid during the pandemic. In 2019, 15% of Australians who experienced food insecurity sought food relief at least once a week; in 2020, this doubled to 31%. Twenty-eight per cent of food aid recipients reported that they had not experienced food insecurity prior to COVID-19. New groups accessing food aid include young people, the casual workforce and international students. Young people were found to be the age group most affected. Sixty-five per cent of 18–25-year-olds reported being unable to afford enough food at least once a week.²⁶

2021 INTERVIEW AND SURVEY DATA

Physical health

Regular physical activity was cited by many interviewees in response to prompts about maintaining healthy lifestyles. However, many described physical and mental health as two sides of the same coin. Being healthy was a multifaceted area of their lives that they maintained using diverse strategies and coping mechanisms.



Being healthy for me is living under a roof, having your bills sorted, paying them off and having food. That's being healthy, and then I guess another type of health would be mental health. Trying to take care of yourself, and a little bit of self-care.

MAN, 23, VIC



I guess the idea of being healthy would be being able to function in society properly. Health is mental and physical.

WOMAN, 18, ACT

Health was rarely conceptualised in one-dimensional terms, and was also considered alongside positive social relationships, and support from professional health services.



I think exercise, being able to go to the gym, that's healthy. I think having a healthy social network and relationships and getting help from a professional where needed is important.

WOMAN, 24, NT

Interviewees endeavoured to combat sedentary lifestyles brought on by COVID-19 lockdowns, particularly in NSW, VIC and ACT.



[During lockdown] I use my hourly allocated exercise time to go for a walk around the neighbourhood and just sort of breathe in and to detach from society a little bit, detach from all the stress.

NON-BINARY, 24, NSW

Mental Health

Beyond the physical impacts of being in lockdown, some participants explained how their expectations for managing their mental health and happiness during COVID-19 were modified. For these participants, a lower mood was described as acceptable in light of the hardships of the pandemic.



At the moment ... my standard [of mental health] is probably a bit lower. Like, as long as being happy and bored and all those sort of things are balanced and I'm not finding myself sad or anxious more than I'm finding myself happy [then I'm okay].

WOMAN, 20, NSW

Rating their mental health, 29% of young people reported having poor or very poor mental health. However, this was much higher for non-binary, gender diverse or agender young people (77%), those with a disability (45%), and those born overseas (41%).

Almost one-third (31%) of young people received mental health support within the last two years, and an additional 12% sought mental health support but did not receive it. Non-binary, gender diverse or agender young people were more likely to receive mental health support (72%), and to seek support but not receive it (19%). Fifty-two per cent of people with disabilities received mental health support and 27% reported seeking support but not receiving it. Thirty-six per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people received support, with a further 23% seeking but not receiving support. Of those who received mental health support, most (70%) were satisfied with it, with no significant differences in satisfaction across demographic groups.



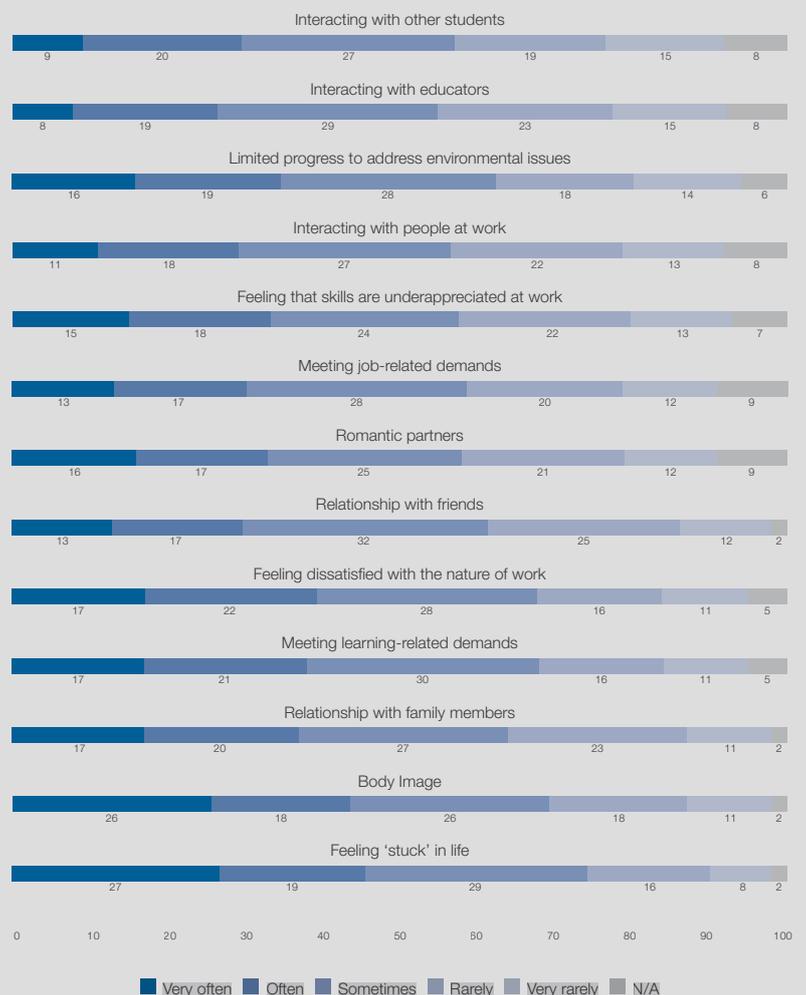
Sources of stress and managing stress

Almost half (46%) of young people reported experiencing significant stress due to ‘feeling stuck’ in life (either often or very often). Women (52%), non-binary, gender diverse or agender young people (60%), and young people with a disability (55%) were more likely to report feeling stressed because they were often or very often stuck in life. Another source of stress for young people was body image. Forty-four per cent of young people reported feeling stressed often or very often because of body image. Women (52%) and non-binary, gender diverse or agender (62%) young people were more likely to report feeling stressed about body image often or very often.

Most young people described similar sources of stress irrespective of demographic group. However, young people with disabilities reported more frequently feeling stressed about their relationship with their family and romantic partners, their learning demands and their interaction with people at work.

Several interview participants spoke about managing personal stresses. For some, stress was related to combining multiple needs across work, study and social relationships. Participants also referenced external stressors related to the broader political context, the environment and other larger issues as causes of anxiety.

FIGURE 5.1.
SOURCES OF SIGNIFICANT STRESS FOR YOUNG PEOPLE (N=505)



I work about 35 hours or so and I study ... so it can be quite a lot, but I've just moved out with my partner ... We're both really, really busy, especially to be doing extra stuff like making dinners and things like that. Yes, so it can be a bit hard to manage that time, I'd say, and also to manage having a social life as well within that.

WOMAN, 20, WA

Social media and mental health

More than half (52%) of young people thought that social media has a very, or slightly, negative impact on young people's mental health. For non-binary, gender diverse or agender young people, this proportion is higher (65%), but otherwise the perceptions are similar across other demographic groups.

For a few interview participants, social media was occasionally a source of anxiety and stress and they responded by removing themselves from harmful online spaces.



Throughout the day, in order to ground myself and calm down, I will actually try and remove myself from technology and digital media ... Usually I just want some quiet, something away from all of the noise and hassle.

NON-BINARY, 24, NSW

For many participants, social media was also a source of connection and comfort. Being able to stay in contact with friends and family was a valued affordance. Online communities promoting body-acceptance were another form of support available on social media.



Being able to communicate [using Facebook messenger is important], because a lot of my family and friends are separated well beyond being able to even go out and see them, so it's being able to communicate with them, video chat with them and have that as a communication method.

MAN, 22, NSW

Food Insecurity

Food insecurity is a problem among young Australians. Approximately 21% of young Australians reported running out of food and being unable to purchase more in the past two years. Fifty-two per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people reported running out of food and being unable to purchase more—almost three times other young Australians. Thirty-four per cent of young people with a disability reported running out of food and not being able to purchase more, compared with 19% of young people without a disability.

In interviews, a small number of participants indicated that they experienced different forms of food insecurity. For these participants, access to healthy and nutritious food was curtailed by financial struggles. The impacts of COVID-19 had exacerbated the effects of food insecurity among these participants. Food insecurity was also associated with stress and anxiety. Some interviewees also described difficulties accessing adequate food due to religious requirements or to maintaining a vegetarian or vegan diet.



[COVID-19] definitely did [make accessing food harder]. To be honest, it became a lot more difficult, I guess, to go out and take the time to go through what the cheaper options were, and what I should be buying that are better for myself or better physically, if that makes sense.

NON-BINARY, 20, WA

Among those few who had experienced substantial food insecurity, stress and anxiety associated with financial struggle was a keenly felt dimension of their experience.



Sometimes there've been times where I've been broke, so I'd rather get my daughter and my partner something, before I get something for myself. That's pretty much all that's really happened ... [there is] definitely the lack of food sources down here [in rural South Australia].

WOMAN, 24, SA





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06

YOUNG PEOPLE AND MONEY

KEY FINDINGS

- 1** Financial wellbeing (the ability to meet financial commitments and unexpected expenses, feeling comfortable with money) among young people was 18% lower than that of people aged over 65.
- 2** The proportion of young people in severe or high financial stress/vulnerability was equivalent to that of the overall population, but young people were only half as likely to be financially secure.
- 3** Only 42% of young men (18–24 years) and 22% of young women in Australia were financially literate, compared to 63% of men and 48% women in the overall population.
- 4** Young people were looking to the future and adopting saving and investing strategies to achieve financial security.
- 5** 25% of young people reported experiencing financial difficulties in the last two years; young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and young people with disabilities were more likely to report experiencing financial difficulties.
- 6** Family and government agencies were the preferred sources of help for young people when experiencing financial difficulties.
- 7** 53% of young people reported having used buy-now-pay-later services, despite almost half thinking these services had a negative impact on financial behaviour.

REVIEW OF EXISTING KNOWLEDGE

Young people experience lower financial wellbeing

Financial wellbeing is measured as an index that includes three aspects: meeting financial commitments (having enough money to buy groceries, pay bills and loans on time, and saving); feeling comfortable (having enough money now and foreseeing a future with enough money to enjoy life); and resilience (being able to cope with unexpected expenses or a drop in income).¹⁻⁴

Between March 2018 and March 2020, financial wellbeing for young people aged 18–29 years was 5% lower than for people aged 30–44 years, and 18% lower than that for those over 65 years.¹ These differences are linked to the accumulation of assets such as property, superannuation and savings.^{2,3} In April 2020, young adults had 2.4 months of their income value in savings, whereas the overall population had 5.9 months of income value in savings.⁴

Not all young people experienced the same levels of financial wellbeing. Those who lived with their parents had a 5% higher average financial wellbeing score than those who lived outside the parental household.¹ This difference is more pronounced for young people who were unemployed, worked part-time or lived in a household below the median income. Those who lived with their parents had an average financial wellbeing score 14% higher than those who did not.¹

Young people are as financially vulnerable as everyone else but not as financially secure

People experience financial stress or vulnerability when they are at risk of not being able to cope with unexpected changes in expenses or income. They are considered to be financially secure when they can access the economic resources, financial products and services, financial knowledge and social connections that would allow them to cope with a difficult financial situation.⁵⁻⁸

Although young people are classified as being in severe or high financial stress/vulnerability in similar proportions to the overall population (one in ten people), they are only half as likely to be classified as financially secure.^{5,6} (See Table 6.1) This reduced financial security is linked to other characteristics of young people, such as housing and unemployment.⁷

POLICY AND RESEARCH IMPLICATIONS

- Young people are the group most vulnerable to sudden drops in their income or extra expenses and are in most need of support to make ends meet.
- Targeted structural solutions are needed to address significant gaps in financial literacy among groups that often experience marginalisation, such as young people with a disability, those from migrant and refugee backgrounds, and those living in remote areas.
- Financial education needs to prepare young people to understand and critically judge both traditional and emerging financial market products and services, so that they understand the risks and benefits, and take advantage of services that best suit their needs and preferences.
- Young people are strategic in the way they manage their money, but not all have the same opportunities to save and invest. There is a clear need for policy support but also for policymakers to listen to young people to understand the most effective ways to support them.
- More research is needed to understand the investing strategies young people use to deal with financial vulnerability. Understanding why they decide to adopt investing strategies can help to create financial products that adapt better to their needs and potentially allow regulators to put measures in place to mitigate financial risk.



TABLE 6.1.
FINANCIAL RESILIENCE LEVELS,
2015 AND 2016

	FINANCIAL STRESS/VULNERABILITY			FINANCIAL SECURITY
	SEVERE	HIGH	LOW	
2015				
Young people (18–24 years)	0%	14%	70%	16%
Overall population	0.7%	10.4%	53.2%	35.7%
2016				
Young people (18–24 years)	1%	17%	70%	12%
Overall population	0.6%	12.0%	56.3%	31.2%

Source: Compiled from Muir, K. et al, 2016⁵ and Marjolin, A. et al 2017⁶ Note: Figures for young people approximated from graphs.

Young women have the lowest levels of financial literacy

Financial literacy refers to the skills and knowledge that everyone needs to interact with the traditional financial market, especially having a working understanding of interest rates, inflation and diversification.⁹

In 2016, 55% of adult Australians were financially literate. There is a significant gender difference: 63% of Australian men were financially literate compared with 48% of Australian women. This gender difference is persistent across age groups. People in the youngest age group had the lowest level of financial literacy. Of those aged 15–17 years, only 28% of men and 15% of women were financially literate; this increases to 42% of men and 22% of women aged 18–24 years.⁹ In 2016, 64% of people aged 18–35 years did not know what a credit score was or had never heard of it, compared with 58% of the overall population.¹⁰

Evaluations of financial literacy among teenagers in Australia took place in 2015 and 2018, when fourteen thousand 15-year-olds participated in school PISA tests.^{11,12} The assessment placed

Australia in the top five participating countries. In 2015, the average financial literacy score was 504, compared to 489 for all OECD; in 2018, Australian students scored 511, compared to 505 for all OECD. The results revealed profound inequalities among Australian students in terms of indigenous status, socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds, metropolitan vs regional schools and between young men and young women. For example, 48% of Indigenous students did not reach the baseline proficiency level, compared with 18% of non-Indigenous students.¹¹

Young people are more likely to use buy-now-pay-later services

‘Buy-now-pay-later’ services that allow customers to defer the payment of their purchases by making multiple instalments are often associated with online purchases and brands like Afterpay, Zip and Certegy.

Young people are over-represented among users of buy-now-pay-later services: in 2018, 26% of users were aged 18–24, an age group that makes up only 12% of the Australian population.¹³ During 2018–19, young people were more likely to incur late payments using these services. Of the buy-now-pay-later users who missed a payment in the previous 12 months, 47% were aged 18–29. Young people were also more likely to divert funds from other household expenses in order to make payments. Forty-nine per cent of the buy-now-pay-later users who reported cutting back on essentials in order to meet payments were aged 18–29, as were 50% of users who took an additional loan, and 50% of users who reported being late paying other bills, including other loans.¹⁴

Young people are over-represented among users of buy-now-pay-later services: in 2018, 26% of users were aged 18–24, an age group that makes up only 12% of the Australian population.¹³ During 2018–19, young people were more likely to incur late payments using these services.



2021 INTERVIEW AND SURVEY DATA

Financial security

When prompted to describe perceptions and attitudes towards financial security, interviewees spoke about a sense of security coming from having money to live on. Financial security for young people meant that their material needs were met and they were not in a position where any of these needs had to be removed.



Financial security would be not having to worry about whether there'll be food on the table, or if I'm going pay my rent on time, Not having to consistently check your bank account to see if there's money there.

MAN, 23, VIC

Almost half of young people (49%) reported saving part of their income often or very often. Those who lived in regional or rural Australia were 1.7 times more likely than those who lived in metropolitan areas to report saving their income very rarely or rarely.

Many participants also explained that saving money from their regular income was at the centre of their plans for achieving financial security. All participants indicated that they understood the importance of managing their finances so that they could save money for future large purchases, such as a car or a house.



I do have plans to save [for] a car, a house, potential unemployment, because obviously you need to have savings in case you're unemployed, that's just common sense.

WOMAN, 22, ACT

Several interview participants highlighted their strategy for managing money in their day-to-day lives to ensure they lived within their financial means.



I previously used to use tools to do budgeting ... The phone worked as a tracking app. You would input all of your spending and all of your income, and it would give a visual of how much money you have set aside for things.

NON-BINARY, 20, WA

Another common plan outlined by participants for achieving financial security centred on investments. While some people indicated they were unsure which direction to take when investing their money, several discussed detailed investment plans.



[I have invested my money because] I don't think that my money would grow in a way that would make a significant difference if I had just kept it in cash or kept it in the bank. That would be a wasted opportunity, so I just keep it in assets that I know can grow, and that I've done research in.

WOMAN, 21, ACT

More than half (53.2%) of participants think that young people today are financially worse off than their parents. This is especially the case for non-binary, gender diverse and agender young people, as none of the survey participants thought that their financial situation will be better (either slightly or much better) than their parents'. However, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders were more likely to think they will be financially better-off than their parents.

Several participants understood financial security in the context of a stable career path that would provide a competitive salary. For some, this involved their current plans to complete their tertiary education.



[Financial security means] trying to find a secure paying job that's going to go on long term or, like, trying to find a career that I'm going to be happy to stick with, that's both going to support me in my life, and be something I'm going to enjoy doing.

MAN, 20, VIC

Almost half of young people (49%) reported saving part of their income often or very often. Those who lived in regional or rural Australia were 1.7 times more likely than those who lived in metropolitan areas to report saving their income very rarely or rarely.



Financial security is ... getting the diploma and the degree, to ensure that I'm in a position where I can maintain work, that will allow me to earn enough money to live comfortably.

WOMAN, 19, QLD

Financial difficulties

Twenty-five per cent of young people experienced financial difficulties often or very often in the last two years, but 41% experienced financial difficulties only rarely or very rarely. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders were twice as likely as other young Australians to report experiencing financial difficulties often or very often. Young people who had a disability were 1.7 times more likely to report experiencing financial difficulties often or very often compared with those who did not have a disability.

In the interviews, money was talked about by some as a source of stress and anxiety. A few articulated a close connection between their mental health, and the problems that emerge when financial stability is in question.

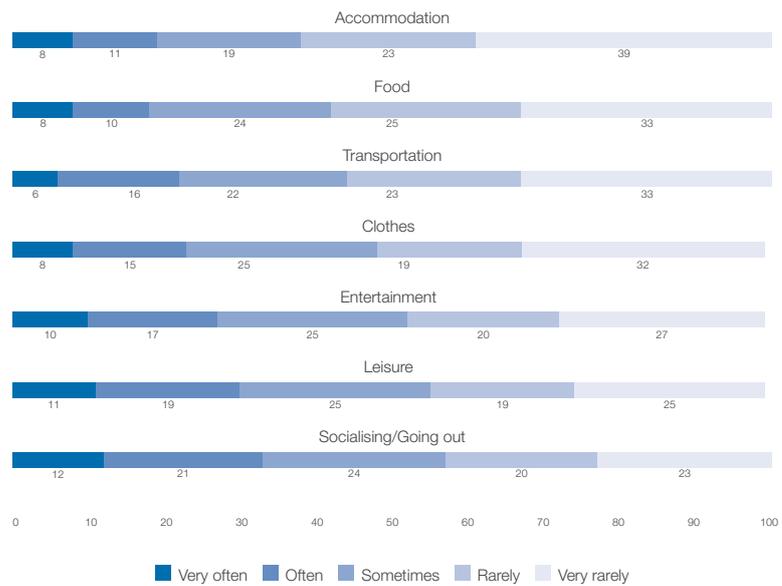


Having financial security is a great thing, but when you don't have it, it becomes stressful in the sense that you have so many extra things to worry about.

NON-BINARY, 20, WA

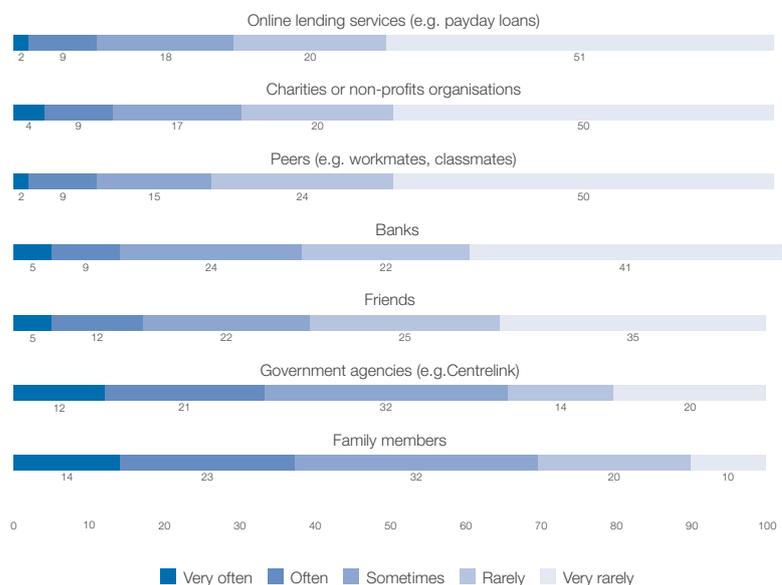
When running short of money, young people reported prioritising accommodation and food. Participants reported rarely or very rarely running out of money for accommodation (62% of participants) or for food (58%). Forty-three per cent reported rarely or very rarely running out of money for socialising and 48% reported rarely or very rarely running out of money for leisure. While there are no detectable differences in the frequency with which young people ran out of money for clothes and leisure, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people reported running out of money for food, accommodation, entertainment and transportation more often than other young people. Young people with disabilities also reported running out of money for transportation more often than those who did not have disabilities. Participants from regional and rural Australia reported running out of money for entertainment and socialising more frequently than those in metropolitan Australia.

FIGURE 6.1.
PROPORTION OF YOUNG PEOPLE WHO HAVE RUN SHORT OF MONEY FOR DIFFERENT ITEMS (N=505)



The most common sources of financial support sought out by young people were family members and government agencies. Thirty-seven per cent reported seeking support from family often or very often; 33% reported seeking out support from government agencies often or very often. Charities and online lending services were the least frequent sources of financial help, with only 13% of young people turning to charities often or very often, and 11% to online lenders. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders reported seeking financial support from friends, peers, online lending agencies, banks and charities more frequently than other young Australians. Men reported seeking financial help from banks and charities more frequently than women and non-binary, gender diverse or agender young people. Young people with disabilities reported seeking help from government agencies, banks and charities. Participants who were not born in Australia reported more frequently seeking financial support from their families.

FIGURE 6.2.
SOURCES OF FINANCIAL SUPPORT FOR YOUNG PEOPLE (N=505)





Buy-now-pay-later services

Buy-now-pay-later services were popular among young people, used by 53.2% of young people. Almost one-quarter (23%) of young people reported using buy-now-pay-later services often or very often. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people were 1.5 times more likely to report using these services often or very often. Despite high use, 49.4% of young people thought that these services have a negative effect on young people's financial behaviour. These views were shared across demographic groups.

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07

HOUSING

KEY FINDINGS

- 1** 47.9% of people aged 18–24 live in their family home. 72% of these homes are family owned.
- 2** 75% of young people who live in a shared house and almost half (47%) of those who live alone or as a couple, live in a rental property.
- 3** 32.1% of young households live in unaffordable properties, spending more than 30% of their income on rent.
- 4** 60.4% of young people aspire to independent home ownership and 70.1% prioritise security and safety in their long-term aspirations.
- 5** In 2018, 34% of Australians aged 18–24 reported having had a time when they did not have a permanent place to live.
- 6** Young people see rising house prices as a threat to their ability to secure housing.
- 7** Young people in regional/rural Australia were 50% more likely than their metropolitan counterparts to declare that owning a house in their lifetime is extremely important.



Young people are receptive and willing to receive advice on strategies that help them save for a deposit, but educational strategies will not be enough while the growth in individual incomes does not match the growth in property prices.

POLICY AND RESEARCH IMPLICATIONS

- Over two-thirds (69%) of young people across all demographic groups thought that it was the government's responsibility to ensure access to affordable housing for everyone.
- Young people who are unable to return to their family home during periods of financial stress are particularly vulnerable and need additional support to access public housing, enter the private rental market or save for a deposit.
- Young people are receptive and willing to receive advice on strategies that help them save for a deposit, but educational strategies will not be enough while the growth in individual incomes does not match the growth in property prices.
- Structural interventions to improve housing affordability could include demand-side policies, such as increasing subsidies for young renters who cannot save for a deposit, or supply-side interventions, such as increasing the provision of affordable public housing, including via better public-private partnerships.
- More research is needed to understand the follow-on impacts of unstable accommodation, including on educational, financial and labour market outcomes, and what strategies work to support young people.

REVIEW OF EXISTING KNOWLEDGE

One-half of young Australians live in their family home and one-third live independently

In 2018, 47.9% of young people aged 18–24 lived in their family home, 21.4% lived independently as a family or couple, 20.1% lived in a shared house and 10.6% lived alone.¹

The most common tenure type was private rental: 75% of those who lived in a shared house rented privately, as did 47% of those who lived independently (either alone or as a family or couple). Private rental is less common for those living in their family home (24%). Seventy-two per cent of young people who lived with their families did so in a property owned by their family. However, 17% of young people who lived in a shared house, 39% of young people living alone and 41% of young people living independently as a family or a couple also owned their property.¹



Young people who returned to live in the family home after a period of living independently did so for financial considerations. Thirty-five per cent moved back to their parental home because of reduced income, 25% due to affordability constraints and 23% due to insecure employment.¹ Of those young people aged 15–19 who remained in the parental home and had never moved out to live independently, 73% cited housing costs, 65.1% cited financial stability, and 43.1% cited the availability of housing.² Of 15–19-year-olds whose parents or guardians were not in paid employment, 17.6% cited the lack of family support as an additional obstacle to moving out, compared to 9.9% of young people whose parents or guardians were in paid employment).²

Relationships outweigh financial considerations when it comes to living in a shared house. Thirty-six per cent of young people who lived in a shared house claimed that they enjoyed living with friends, and 30% cited affordability considerations.²

The rental market is unaffordable for young people

Young households (those where the breadwinner is 15–24 years old) spend 25.4% of their income on housing costs.³ Almost one-third (32.1%) of young households lived in a property they could not afford (where the cost of housing amounts to over 30% of income), compared with 17% of all households.⁴ Among low-income households with a young person as the main breadwinner, 55.3% lived in a property they could not afford, more than twice the proportion for all Australian low-income households (27.3%).⁴

In 2018, 9.4% (122,416 people) of Commonwealth Rent Assistance recipients were under 24-years-old. Among these young recipients, 65% were unable to make their rent payments on time, even after receiving the payment.⁵ Vulnerable young people, such as 38% of those in receipt of Youth Allowance (at the end of 2019), relied on rent assistance to pay for their accommodation.⁶

There was a shortage of affordable rental properties (those requiring less than 30% of income) for people who received Youth Allowance.^{7–11} (See Table 7.1) During August 2020, when the coronavirus payment supplements were in place, only 0.81% of available rental properties in Australia were affordable for recipients of Youth Allowance; the figure was even lower, at 0.61%, for those looking for a shared house.¹⁰ After those supplements were removed in March 2021, there were no affordable properties in Australia for Youth Allowance recipients.¹¹

TABLE 7.1.
RENTAL PROPERTIES AFFORDABLE FOR THOSE RECEIVING YOUTH ALLOWANCE AND EARNING MINIMUM WAGE

	YOUTH ALLOWANCE – SINGLE PEOPLE		YOUTH ALLOWANCE – SINGLE PEOPLE IN SHARED HOUSE		MINIMUM WAGE – SINGLE PEOPLE	
	% OF PROPERTIES	NO. OF PROPERTIES	% OF PROPERTIES	NO. OF PROPERTIES	% OF PROPERTIES	NO. OF PROPERTIES
MAR-18	0	2	0	2	2.9%	1,952
MAR-19	0	1	0	1	2.23%	1,552
MAR-20	0	2	0	3	2.41%	1,688
AUG-20	0.81%	625	0.61%	473	1.66%	1,277
MAR-21	0	0	0	0	1.16%	859

Source: Anglicare Australia Rental Affordability Snapshot: 2018–2021^{7–11}

The economic downturn caused by COVID-19 has had a strong impact on young people. By May 2020, 44% of renters aged 18–24 reported that they had failed to pay their rent on time. This was in contrast to 24.3% of renters aged 25–34 years.¹² Younger people were more likely than other age groups to report that they struggled to get by and to afford basic necessities.¹³ Landlords were less willing to negotiate with younger tenants. Twenty-one per cent of renters aged 18–24 tried to reduce or defer their rental payments; just over half (53.3%) were successful. This contrasts with 82.5% of renters aged 25–34 who successfully renegotiated their rental agreements.¹² Young renters were more likely to apply for the Superannuation Early Release Scheme than older renters (19% of renters aged 18–29, compared to 12.1% of those aged 50–64).¹³



Young People aspire to home ownership and security

More than half of all Australians worried about the ability of future generations to buy their own home.¹⁴ Most 18–24-year-olds (60.4%) sought independent home ownership¹ and a similar number thought home ownership was part of ‘the Australian way of life’.¹⁴ Less than 10% of young people felt alternative tenure types (renting, shared ownership, living with family) would fulfil their aspirations, regardless of their current living arrangements.¹ Despite this, 32% of people aged 18–24 did not intend to buy a place to live or did not think it was possible for them to do so.¹

Most young people (70.1%) prioritised safety and security when thinking about their long-term housing aspirations. Other considerations included paying off the mortgage (43.6%), wealth creation (40.5%), having an asset to fund retirement (35.2%), and owning an asset to leave to children (31.4%).¹ To achieve their housing aspirations, 32.5% of young people were willing to increase the number or hours they worked, 30.9% were willing to live with their family to save for a deposit, and 27.2% were willing to compromise on their location to cut down costs. In fact, people aged 18–34 were more likely to report living too far away from ideal location (20%) and to spend too much time commuting (16%) as the impacts of unmet housing aspirations, compared with 15% and 12% respectively for the 35–54 years old group.¹⁵

Homelessness is a prevalent and repetitive problem for young people

The ABS classifies homeless people as those who live in improvised dwellings, tents, sleeping out, in supported accommodation for the homeless, boarding houses or other temporary lodgings, and people staying temporarily with other households or living in severely crowded dwellings. Homelessness among young people in Australia has increased to almost double the rate among the overall population. (See Table 7.2) According to the 2016 census, 17,725 people in the 19–24 age group, or 95.3 per 10,000, were homeless. This compares with 49.8 per 10,000 people for the overall population.¹⁶

TABLE 7.2.
HOMELESS IN AUSTRALIA
(RATE PER 10,000 OF THE POPULATION)

	YEAR	19-24 YEARS OLD	OVERALL POPULATION
2006	2006	75.4	45.2
2011	2011	83.1	47.6
2016	2016	95.3	49.8

Source: ABS. Census of Population and Housing 2016¹⁶

In 2018, 34% of Australians aged 18–24 reported a period of homelessness; more than half of these periods of homelessness (53%) were experienced in the previous year.¹

Approximately 44,000 people aged 15–24 accessed specialist homelessness services each year between 2011–12 and 2018–19. Sixty-two per cent of these were women. Young people represented between 15% and 18% of all service users. For comparison, people over 55 years old represent between 6% and 8% of users.⁵

Almost all young people who presented to specialist homelessness services for the first time were already homeless (51%) or at risk of homelessness (48%). Fifty-six per cent of young people requiring services in 2018–19 were previous users.⁵ At the end of the service, 42.4% of young users were living in private housing but 39.7% were homeless. Young people who were already homeless when they accessed specialist homelessness services were 4.6 times more likely to be homeless at the end of the service and 2.3 times less likely to be in private housing, than those who were not already homeless.⁵ (See Table 7.3)

TABLE 7.3.
HOUSING STATUS OF SPECIALIST HOMELESSNESS SERVICES USERS AT THE END OF SERVICE (2011–12 AND 2018–19)

	ALL 15-24 USERS	15-24 AT RISK OF HOMELESSNESS	15-24 HOMELESS	ALL USERS
HOMELESS	39.7%	13.7%	63.9%	31.9%
PUBLIC OR COMMUNITY HOUSING	14.7%	21.1%	8.8%	21.2%
PRIVATE HOUSING	42.4%	60.2%	25.9%	44.0%
INSTITUTIONAL SETTINGS	3.1%	4.9%	1.5%	2.9%

Source: AHURI Research Centre 2020⁵

Current housing

Most young people lived with their families, but this was not uniform across demographic groups. Just over half (51%) of young people lived in their family home, 19% in shared accommodation, 16% lived independently with their own families or partners, and 12% lived independently on their own. Younger people were more likely to live in their family home, while older people were more likely to live independently with their own families. Young women and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people were more likely to live independently with their own families, while non-binary, gender diverse or agender young people were more likely to live in their family home.

More than half of young people agreed that their current accommodation allows them to afford somewhere to live, live in a more comfortable place, live in their preferred town or suburb, save for a deposit or mortgage to buy property, interact with other people, and live with other people, even if they were able to afford living independently. Overall, these perceptions were shared across demographic groups. However, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people were less likely to agree that their current accommodation allows them to save for a deposit or mortgage to buy property. Additionally, young people with disabilities were less likely to agree that the place where they lived allowed them to interact with other people.

Buying a house

Approximately 70% of young people thought it was very or extremely important to buy a house on their own. Those who lived in regional/rural Australia were 50% more likely than those who lived in metropolitan areas to declare that this is extremely important. Similarly, young people with a disability were also more likely to declare it is important for them to buy their own house. Most young people (69%) agreed or strongly agreed that it is the government's responsibility to ensure access to affordable housing for everyone. This perception was shared among young people across different demographic backgrounds.

In the interviews, young people spoke about their desire to own a house in the future. For many, owning a house was seen as a sign of financial independence and security; however, for many, this was a goal that was seen to be at least five to ten years away.



I think that will give us that stability and financial security, saying 'Oh look, we've got the house'. You know, you don't have all that stuff about renting. We've got something to our name and, if something does go wrong, at least we're more secure.

MAN, 22, SA

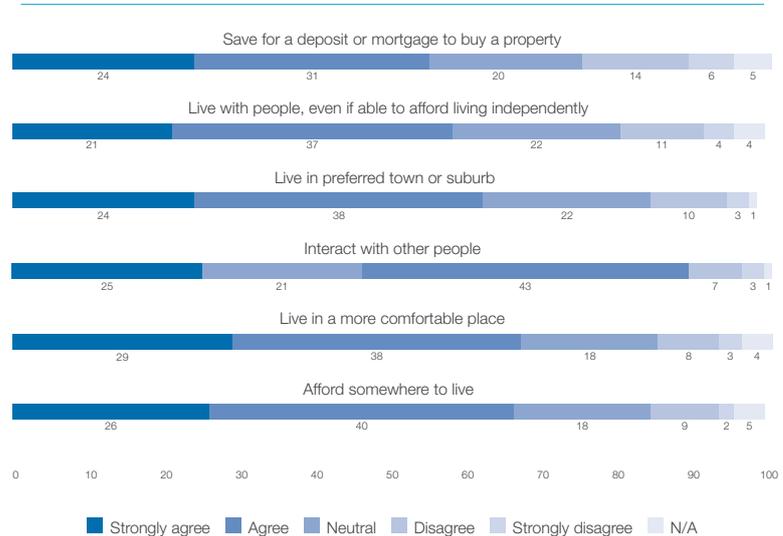
Several young people spoke about how their plans for future home ownership were influenced by familial or social expectations. Some felt resigned towards these expectations, but also suggested they were unreasonable given the wider economic context.



I have been told I have to buy a house ... Then it's like, but I can't afford a house, so I'm expected just to live at home until I save a stupid amount of money to go buy a shoe box. That's not enjoying my life. That's saving up money for the sake of just ticking off that home ownership thing ... It's ridiculous.

MAN, 24, NSW

FIGURE 7.1. ALLOWANCES AFFORDED BY CURRENT ACCOMMODATION (N=505)





In light of ever-increasing housing prices, a significant majority of the young people interviewed were greatly concerned about not having enough savings to purchase a home. Many were taking proactive steps to try and address this challenge, including living with their parents for longer periods of time or making compromises on other purchases. However, some felt that, despite these actions, the fluctuating housing market was stacked against them.

“

I think the fact that the Reserve Bank keeps pushing down interest rates so much, means that it's difficult to save for a deposit. It means that people who already have money can afford to borrow huge amounts of more money to buy more property. It means that because they can afford to borrow more, it pushes up the price of housing ... It hasn't added anything productive. There's nothing there actually allowing Australia to realise more wealth or anything like that.

MAN, 24, SA

For young renters, the fluctuating nature of the housing market also influenced their current living situation. Many indicated that their weekly rent was their largest expense and that it often impacted their ability to save. A small number of young people also discussed how the unstable housing market was negatively impacting their current housing security.

“

So, the market in Queensland at the moment is very skint because a lot of people are moving to Queensland area. So, I've had friends that have had to move in with me because it's a hot market for selling at the moment. So, the rentals just get sold underneath them and now so many people are becoming homeless, which is a bit scary.

WOMAN, 21, QLD

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08

YOUTH JUSTICE, SAFETY AND RISK

KEY FINDINGS

- 1** Common offences committed by young people include illegal downloading (74% of offences committed by young people); less common offences include property theft (35%) and carrying a weapon (14%).
- 2** The likelihood of experiencing physical and/or sexual violence is eight times higher for women aged 18–24 than for women aged 55 years and over.
- 3** 71% of young people report not feeling listened to by the police.
- 4** Nearly two-thirds (59.2%) of young people say they would seek out the support of peers in an unsafe environment.
- 5** 50.8% of students in years 9–12 have been hit or harmed physically by another person.
- 6** 38% of young people aged 14–25 years have been bullied, threatened or humiliated on social media, the internet or via their mobile phone.

POLICY AND RESEARCH IMPLICATIONS

- More focus is needed on fostering stronger, more trusting relationships between young people and the police.
- More research is needed on what shapes and informs young people's feelings of safety in public and private places, including the strategies and coping mechanisms that engender a sense of safety in online places.
- In light of COVID-19 lockdowns, there is a need to focus on the home and on online spaces as sites of intervention, to address unfair treatment experienced and perpetrated by young people.

REVIEW OF EXISTING KNOWLEDGE

Incarceration rates of young people are declining

The youth justice system in Australia deals with young people aged 10–17 years. In some states, those aged 18 and above may be included among those 'supervised' in the youth justice system. This includes community-based supervision, detention, and other types of supervision.¹

In 2018–19, there were 5,694 people aged 10–17 years under youth justice supervision in Australia. On an average day, the majority of these (84%) were being supervised within the community and 17% were in detention. The median time spent under all forms of supervision in 2018–19 was 132 days, or about four months. The median time spent in community-based supervision was 105 days; the median time for 'completed periods of detention' was eight days.¹

TABLE 8.1.
YOUNG ADULTS IN PRISON: % OF TOTAL PRISON POPULATION

AGE IN YEARS	2014			2017			2020		
	MEN	WOMEN	ALL	MEN	WOMEN	ALL	MEN	WOMEN	ALL
18 AND UNDER	0.1	0.0	0.1	0.1	0.0	0.1	0.5	0.5	0.5
19	1.4	1.2	1.4	1.4	1.2	1.4	1.2	1.1	1.1
20–24	13.4	13	14.8	13.4	13	13.3	11.5	12.7	11.6

Source: ABS, *Prisoners in Australia 2014, 2017 & 2020*^{2–4}

Young people aged 10–17 years fall under the jurisdiction of the youth justice system and are not included in these figures, hence the low figures for young adults aged 18 and under. Higher proportions of those aged 20–24 years are recorded because this group represents a larger age range. There appears to be no significant gender differences, with young men and young women represented in similar proportions in prison populations. Since 2014, the proportion of 20–24-year-olds in the prison has declined by 3.2%; the proportion of prisoners has not changed substantially for the younger age groups.

TABLE 8.2.
YOUTH HOMICIDES:
VICTIMS AND OFFENDERS

18–24 YEARS	OFFENDERS	VICTIMS
MEN	60	23
WOMEN	8	5
TOTAL	68	28

Source: Bricknell, S. & Doherty, L. 2021, *National Homicide Monitoring Program 2018–9*⁵

Only a very low proportion of young people are involved in homicides. Young men are represented in substantially higher numbers than women as both offenders and victims.⁶ (see Table 8.2)

The Australian Youth Safety Survey in 2019/2020 asked young people if they had committed a range of offences, including graffiti, vandalism, petty theft, group fights, illegal downloading, or drug dealing, among others. The majority of respondents (81%) said they had at some point committed one of these offences. The most common offence was illegal downloading, with three-quarters (74%) having done so at least once. More than one-third (35%) indicated that they had committed property theft, and a small group (5%) reported that they had committed a violent offence. Fourteen per cent stated that they carried a weapon, 11% said they sold drugs or helped someone else to do so, and 4% indicated they had hurt an animal on purpose.⁷

Indigenous youth and those who received treatment for drug and alcohol abuse are more likely to be under youth justice supervision

The likelihood of 10–17-year-olds being under youth supervision was substantially higher for some demographic groups than others.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth were 16 times more likely than non-Indigenous youth to be under youth justice supervision, 15 times more likely to be in community-based supervision and 22 times more likely to be in detention.¹

Young men were four times more likely than young women to be under supervision.¹

Young people from very remote areas were nine times more likely to be under supervision compared with those from major cities.¹

Those from the lowest socioeconomic areas were five times more likely to be under supervision than people from higher socioeconomic areas.¹

Other associations linked to young people's involvement in the criminal justice system include experiencing neglect or abuse,⁸ problematic use of alcohol and other drugs,⁹ receiving out-of-home care,¹⁰ and receiving child protection.¹¹

Young people under youth justice supervision were 30 times more likely to have been in drug and alcohol services than the same age group in the general population. They were 33 times more likely to have received alcohol and drug treatment for cannabis, 27 times more likely for alcohol abuse, and 50 times more likely for amphetamine use.⁹

Those who had received child protection were also overrepresented in the youth justice system. More than half (54%) of young people under supervision in 2018–19 had also received child protection services from 2014–19.^{11,12}

Young women and LGBTIQ+ youth experience high rates of gender-based violence

Gender based violence is another dimension of harm experienced and perpetrated by young people. Men in the 20–29 and 30–39 age groups exhibited the highest rates of image based sexual abuse offences including creating images without consent, distributing images without consent and threatening to distribute images without consent.¹³

The likelihood of experiencing physical/sexual violence was eight times higher for young women aged 18–24 compared with those aged 55 years and over.

The likelihood of coercive control was six times higher for young women compared with those 55 and older. The COVID-19 pandemic was a contributing dynamic in women's experience of domestic violence.¹⁴

High proportions of young LGBTIQ+ people reported experiencing different forms of abuse in different locations. Sixty-six per cent had experienced verbal abuse because of gender expression and 21% experienced physical abuse.¹⁵ Four per cent had been a victim of hate violence in the last year, with 60% indicating that it was because of their gender or sexuality.⁷ More recent reports indicated a reduction in experiences of verbal abuse and hate speech, with 40.8% experiencing verbal abuse, 9.7% physical abuse, and 22.8% sexual abuse. Experiences of abuse occurred more often for trans women, trans men and non-binary people compared with cis women and men.¹⁶ In terms of the location of abuse, 42% experienced abuse on the street, 38% in school, 32% on public transport, 25% in the home, and 25% at a social occasion.¹⁵

Young people are more likely to turn to their peers for support in an unsafe environment than their parents

Young people aged 10–18 years identified school, sporting teams, holiday camps and church as spaces they spend time in and in which they feel safe.¹⁷

Several themes emerged around what makes young people feel unsafe: women feeling unsafe due to sexual harassment/assault; racism ‘rife within Australian culture and society’; police perceived to be untrustworthy due to ‘incompetence and biases within the services’; young people with mental health issues ‘feel(ing) scared’; sexually and gender diverse young people feeling unsafe due to homophobia, and transphobia.⁷

Young people surveyed about what sources of support they might draw on to achieve a sense of safety agreed that their education institution was able to, and had a role in, responding to safety issues.¹⁷ Half of respondents agreed that adults within those institutions would only know of safety issues if they were told by a young person. Nearly two-thirds (59.2%) indicated that in an unsafe environment, they would draw on the support of peers. Just over one-half indicated that they would seek their mother, while just over one-third stated they would turn to their father. The main hurdle to gaining support at school was not being able to speak to adults about sensitive topics due to feelings of discomfort.

Fifty-nine per cent of young people reported that police ‘sometimes or almost never treat young people with respect’, 54% stated that police ‘make fair decisions with young people’, and 59% indicated that police ‘explain their decisions and actions to young people’. Most respondents (71%) indicated that ‘police sometimes or almost never listen to young people’. Two-thirds (62%) believed police treated young people unfairly based on race, ethnicity, or foreign origin, and 51% claimed unfair treatment based on sexuality or gender. Despite these negative responses, 65% reported that they ‘generally trust the police’.⁷

Social cohesion and feeling safe in the community

Prior to the pandemic, 72% of young people aged 14–25 years reported neighbours are generally understood to be trustworthy, although not close. Only 38% felt that their neighbours knew them.

Twenty-six per cent reported that their neighbours would prefer that residents in the area are mostly white.⁷ These statistics point to the sense of social cohesion in neighbourhoods, based on relationships with neighbours, from the perspectives of young people.

Among high school students, 24.6% indicated that they felt safe in their local area all of the time, while 32.5% stated that they felt safe ‘only sometimes or less’. One-third of girls at high school stated that they felt safe in their local area ‘sometimes or less’.¹⁸

When taking public transport such as buses and trains, 23.5% of high school students felt safe sometimes and 7.1% reported that they never felt safe. Girls were more likely to report not feeling safe on public transport, with one-third indicating they never, or ‘only a little bit of the time’ felt safe using buses or trains.¹⁸

Two-thirds (64%) of young LGBTIQ+ people reported that they did not have access to spaces where they felt safe and comfortable.¹⁹ Factors that contributed to feelings of safety included: others engendering a feeling of safety via their interactions; spaces run by LGBTIQ+ organisations; places with welcoming and understanding staff; spaces with visible displays of LGBTIQ+ identities; and spaces where there are not too many adults.

Violence and abuse is experienced in the community, the home and online

Eighty-seven per cent of young people reported being a victim of some form of violence, such as robbery, assault, theft, hate speech, hate violence, cyber bullying, parental violence, or parental maltreatment. More than half (55%) reported being victimised during the previous 12 months.⁷ Forty-two per cent indicated that they had been a victim of hate speech due to religion, language, skin colour, social/ethnic background, gender or sexuality at some point in their lives.⁷ Gender diverse and transgender young people reported high rates of verbal abuse (66%) due to their gender expression.^{15,20}

Just over half (50.8%) of students in years 9–12 indicated that they had been hit or harmed physically by another person. Young men reported higher rates of physical violence (55.7%) than women (44.7%). Among gender diverse and trans young people, between 17.8% and 21% report physical abuse.^{15,20} Common locations of reported violence included home (53.2%) and school (43.6%). Two-thirds (62.8%) of young people in years 4–12 indicated they felt safe at home all of the time, while just over one-quarter (27.4%) said that they felt safe most of the time. However, most physical violence against girls (72.5%) happened in the home, and nearly half of all girls reported that they do not feel safe at home all the time.¹⁸ Whilst the home was the most likely site of physical violence for girls, most physical violence against boys occurred at school (57.4%).¹⁸ Among young LGBTIQ+ people, abuse took place at educational institutions (21.2% verbal, 4.7% physical, 6.7% sexual), in the home (1.03% verbal, 2.3% physical, 2.0% sexual), in public (18.3% verbal, 3.4% physical, 8.5% sexual), and at work (4.9% verbal, 0.5% physical, 3.5% sexual).¹⁶

Another sphere where young people were unsafe was online. Thirty-eight per cent of young people aged 14–25 years indicated that they had been bullied, threatened or humiliated on social media, the internet or via their mobile phone, with 41% reporting that cyber bullying referenced gender or sexuality. One in five (20%) indicated that this had occurred within the past year, and three quarters (75%) reported that they knew the offenders.⁷

2021 INTERVIEW AND SURVEY DATA

During interviews, young people were asked about their feelings of safety and their experiences of bullying, discrimination, exclusion or harassment. Almost one in three interviewees discussed experiences that occurred at school. The majority of young people indicated that they were bullied because of a single aspect of their identity, such as their cultural background, but a few interviewees also spoke about how they were targeted because of intersecting identities.

“

They'd call me 'muzzie-dog' or 'curry muncher' ... At the time, I was just like whatever, it doesn't matter, but looking back now I'm like, that wasn't right. They shouldn't have said that.

WOMAN, 24, VIC

“

I was bullied for being fat. I was bullied for being disabled. I was bullied for having a voice ... So, I went through a really hard time in that sense.

WOMAN, 22, QLD

Several indicated that experiences of discrimination in their workplace related to their gender identity or cultural background. A few interviewees also felt that it was due to their age.

“

I was the only man in my office. I was told I had ideas that I floated that I was told were just a white man's view of the world, which it genuinely wasn't. Also, I'm white but I'm a Greek-Lebanese, so I wasn't as white as that person who said that. I had a lot of age discrimination that because, I felt I wasn't the most junior person, but I'm also incredibly young. A lot of times I am dismissed because I am young.

MAN, 24, NSW

A small number of the interviewees reflected on how they were able to move past these incidents of bullying and discrimination or dismiss them, and that doing so provided a sense of closure and resilience.

“

I don't even understand why I got bullied and I try not to make sense of it. What's the point of finding out why you were bullied? It's not going to help me recover. I just became stronger from being bullied and knowing how cruel people can be, knowing when you see bullies, you should stop them instead of just joining.

WOMAN, 21, NSW





Several young people who self-identified as women, some of whom also identified as transgender, discussed how gender inequality and the actions of politicians contributed to feelings of being unsafe, excluded and ignored. For one participant, the exclusion of questions pertaining to gender identity in the 2021 Australian Census led to feelings of being erased, while another young woman spoke about a perceived lack of understanding and inaction from the country's leaders.



In parliament there are people who are getting sexually assaulted and the government doesn't say jack shit about it, they just cover it up and say 'As prime minister, I don't understand how it feels to be a woman'. You don't understand the dangers of being a woman, we could just be walking down the street, and then someone could harass us, and you can't see what's wrong with that. That's something, I just don't understand.

WOMAN, 21, NSW

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09

CITIZENSHIP, BELONGING AND INCLUSION

KEY FINDINGS

- 1** Young women are more likely to cite equity and discrimination, mental health and the environment as top issues of concern compared with young men.
- 2** 90% of young Australians support immigration and cultural diversity.
- 3** 87% of young people report using social media to get news of current events and just over half of 16-year-olds say they follow the news every day.
- 4** Between one-third and one-half of high school-aged young people report volunteering in their community.
- 5** Up to 95% of young people agree with the need to address climate change.
- 6** Relationships are important to young people, but friends take priority. 82.5% of young people listed friends as their most important relationships compared with 78.9% listing family relationships as most important.

POLICY AND RESEARCH IMPLICATIONS

- School is clearly an important sphere in which young people learn about, and engage in civic participation. Comprehensive survey data that compares and links attitudinal data with civic participation are required to better understand the pathways that lead young people to become active citizens beyond secondary school years.
- More evaluation is needed of how the curriculum can support critical discussions around civic participation, inclusion and belonging in schools. This should include how educators are supported to facilitate discussions, and how they engage with and challenge polarising and divisive discourses amongst students.
- Tailored programs on belonging and inclusion in schools and tertiary education need to be developed and targeted to different cohorts of students, including those in different geographical areas and socio-economic groups.

REVIEW OF EXISTING KNOWLEDGE

The main issues of concern for young people were COVID-19, mental health and the environment.

In 2020, COVID-19 (39%) and mental health (31%) emerged as key issues nominated by young people in Australia.¹ Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the most commonly cited issues identified across multiple surveys¹⁻⁵ were:

1 Environment, including pollution, climate change, and water shortages

2 Education

3 Health

4 Equity and discrimination

5 Mental health

6 Employment, including getting a job and unemployment

Young peoples' employment or student status, cultural background, gender and geographical location influenced which issues were more important to them.³ Those employed full-time were more likely to cite tax policy as a top issue, while apprentices, trainees and those who spoke English as a second language were more likely to list education policy reform as a key issue. People from a migrant or refugee background, university students, part-time or casually employed, as well as those with a disability, were more likely to support improvements to asylum seeker policy.³

Women were more likely to cite equity and discrimination (45.1% of women compared with 34.1% of men), mental health (35.1% of women, 25% of men) and the environment (33.4% of women, 25.3% of men) as top issues of concern.¹

Young people in rural and regional areas were more likely than those in metropolitan areas to identify issues associated with infrastructure as important.



Climate change and its impacts are key concerns

A suite of recent surveys identified climate change and its impacts on the environment as substantial concerns for young people. Between 76% and 95% of young people expressed concern about the future of the planet. Ninety-five per cent were concerned about pollution of Australia's sea, air and land,⁶ 76% agreed that climate change is a serious and pressing issue,⁷ and 85% were concerned about the broad impacts of climate change.⁸

It is unsurprising that the majority (88% to 95%) of young people aged 18–24 stated that they believed in climate change, with 75% indicating that 'humans are largely causing it'.^{9–10}

Most agree that democracy, immigration and diversity are important

There was a difference between young people aged 18–29 and older cohorts regarding the importance of democracy, although this has narrowed from previous years. Thirty per cent of people aged 18–29 years agreed that 'in some circumstances, a non-democratic government can be preferable.' Only 55% of young people said that they prefer democracy, compared with 68% of people aged over 30.¹¹

Younger Australians were also more positive about immigration than older age groups. Eighty-eight per cent of 18–24-year-olds agreed with the statement that 'immigrants are generally good for Australia's economy', and 96% said that 'multiculturalism has been good for Australia'. A minority (17%) of 18–24-year-olds agreed with the view that immigration in recent years has been too high, compared with 25% of people aged 25–34, 46% aged 45–54, and 50% of 65–74-year-olds. A significant proportion (31% to 33%) of young people demonstrated negative attitudes towards immigrants from Iraq, China and Sudan, although rates among older groups were even higher.¹²

Attitudes towards Australian diversity among secondary school students were also positive. Most agreed that migrants should be encouraged to maintain their culture (90%), that all Australians should accept different beliefs and practices (88%), that Australia benefits from migrants (87%), that Australians should learn about different beliefs and practices at school (80%), that Australia is a better place when people from different backgrounds come to live together (80%), that Australia will stay peaceful with more migrants (78%), and that different cultures/backgrounds make it easier for country to be united (76%).²

Attitudes towards Australian Indigenous cultures were also positive among secondary school students, with between 89% and 92% agreeing with affirmative statements on support, responsibility to improve quality of life, recognition of traditional land ownership, understanding that all Australians can learn from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and an opportunity to learn about reconciliation.²

It is unsurprising that the majority (88% to 95%) of young people aged 18–24 stated that they believed in climate change.



Online modes of participation in civic activities are common, but volunteering is less prevalent

Among year 10 students, the most common civic-related communication activity was ‘use the internet (including social media) to get news of current events’ (87%), followed by ‘watch news or television’ (64%). The least commonly reported form of communication was ‘post or share a comment or image about a political or social issue on the internet (including social media)’ (15%).² A similar picture emerges from other surveys, with just over half of 16-year-olds (52%) saying that they ‘follow the news everyday’, including from social media feeds, and online papers.⁴

Young LGBTIQ+ people aged 14–25 years were more frequent users of online platforms to participate in their communities or society more broadly.¹³ Their modes of participation included: ‘liked social media site (83%), signed petition (80%), improved understanding through conversation (70%), participated in a march or rally (52%), created blog (30%), uploaded a video to internet (20%), and started a Facebook group (15%).^{13,14} Young LGBTIQ+ people also reported that they stepped up for rights at school/work (33.9%).

Approximately two-thirds of year 10 students indicated that they had participated in civics and citizenship activities in school. The most commonly cited activity was voting for a class representative (70%), followed by participating in activities in the community (61%).²

Only one-third of this cohort reported that they had participated in the community within the previous year. The most common community activities cited included being part of ‘a voluntary group doing something to help the community’ (33%), and ‘collecting money for a charity or social cause’ (31%). Girls were more likely to take part in community activities, as well as activities at school, compared with men.²

The Longitudinal Study of Australian Children¹⁵ identified higher rates of volunteering among a similar age cohort (16–17-year-olds).¹⁶ Fifty per cent of respondents indicated they had volunteered in the last year. Common volunteering activities were sport and recreation (19%), school and children’s groups (15%), and community or welfare organisations (13%).

The likelihood of volunteering was higher for certain groups of 16–17-year-olds, particularly young women, those with parents who also volunteer, those whose parents have tertiary qualifications, those who attended a Catholic or independent school, and those from non-English speaking backgrounds.¹⁶

Relationships are important to young people

Among 15-19-year-olds, 82.5% agreed that friendships are ‘extremely or very important’ and 78.9% indicated that they felt the same about family relationships.¹ Among young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, 70.5% consider friendships extremely or very important and 72.4% said the same about family relationships.¹

Students in years 7–12 agreed that they had enough friends (85.2%) and just over half (54.5%) said that they were ‘very good at making and keeping friends.’ Just under half (46.5%) reported that they ‘felt their friends care about them a lot’. However, satisfaction with friendships dropped slightly as students got older, with 18.5% of students in years 10–12 reporting that they ‘did not feel they have enough friends.’¹⁷

Social inclusion remains a significant challenge for young people. Mission Australia frame findings about young people’s friendships as a measure of inclusion; however, if high rates of satisfaction about friendship suggest positive rates of inclusion, this is contradicted by young people’s concerns about equity and discrimination. More young people identified equity and discrimination as a key issue in recent surveys compared with in previous years. Twenty-seven per cent of young people claimed that they had encountered unfair treatment. Gender was the top reason cited, with race and cultural background the main reasons for young men to be treated unfairly (35.4%).¹

Social inclusion remains a significant challenge for young people. Mission Australia frame findings about young people’s friendships as a measure of inclusion; however, if high rates of satisfaction about friendship suggest positive rates of inclusion, this is contradicted by young people’s concerns about equity and discrimination.



Most students report a sense of school-based belonging

More than half (59.7%) of young Western Australians in years 7–12 agreed that they ‘feel like they belong in their school’, 24.1% were unsure, and 16% said they ‘don’t feel like they belong’ in their school.¹⁷

There were clear differences according to gender and geography. Boys were more likely to say they felt like they belonged (67.2% compared with 52.9% of girls). Girls were more likely to say they were ‘unsure’ about whether they felt they belonged at school (29.5%, compared with 18.8% of boys).¹⁷ Students in remote areas were more likely to say they ‘spend time with friends everyday’ (42.4%) compared with those in regional or metropolitan areas (26.6% and 22.6% respectively). Young people in remote areas were also more likely to say they ‘feel like they belong in their community’ (69.9%) compared with 58.2% of regional students and 55.5% of metropolitan students).¹⁷

Among a more age diverse cohort of young LGBTIQ+ people aged 14–25, a sense of belonging was tied to speaking out and activism. Sixty-two per cent of young LGBTIQ+ people explained that activism made them feel heard and feel better. Sixty per cent said that they felt better about their gender identity and 57% said that they had fun. Just over half (55%) reported that activism helped them to feel part of a community.¹⁴

2021 INTERVIEW AND SURVEY DATA

Social service provision

The current level of availability of social services is not sufficient for young people. This is especially apparent for those with disabilities. A large majority (91%) of young people want the government to provide more social services. This opinion was widely shared among demographic groups, but young people with a disability were twice as likely (44% vs 21%) to strongly agree that they would prefer the government to provide more social services, in comparison to young people who did not report having a disability.

Volunteering

Volunteering was common, with 75% of young people volunteering in organised activities and almost two-thirds of them participating in more than one type of these activities. These trends were shared among young people across different demographic groups, but it was more common for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people (81%) to participate in multiple types of organised activities.

The three most common volunteering activities were arts and cultural activities, environment-related activities, and welfare-related care and services such as caring for the homeless, or working with the Red Cross. The least common activities were volunteering for political parties or organisations, heritage/conservation groups, and emergency services. Young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people were more likely to volunteer in all these activities. Young men were more likely to volunteer for arts and cultural activities, emergency services, heritage/conservation groups, political parties or organisations, student government, and welfare-related care and services. Young people living with disabilities were more likely to participate in environment-related activities, and people living in postcodes with a low SES were more likely to volunteer for religious or spiritual organisations.

FIGURE 9.1.
PROPORTION OF YOUNG PEOPLE WHO HAVE VOLUNTEERED IN DIFFERENT ACTIVITIES (N=505)

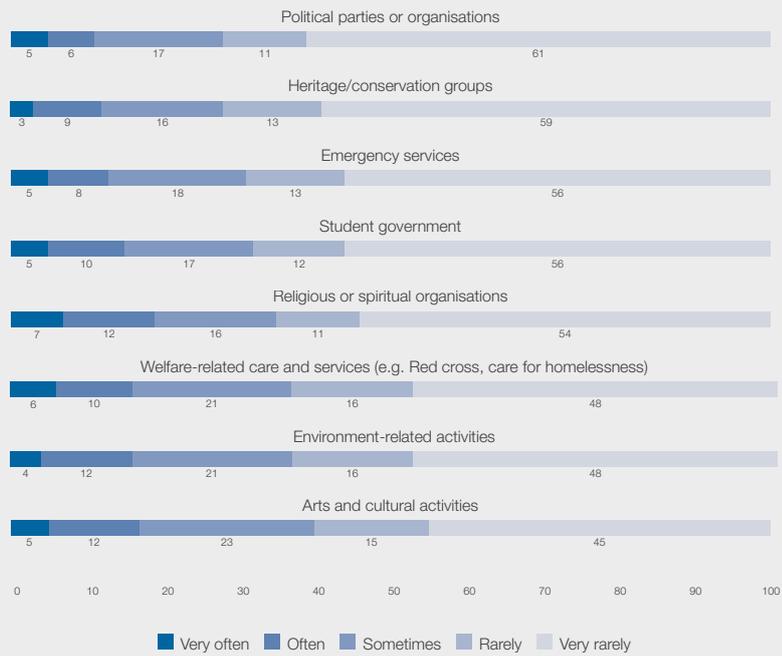
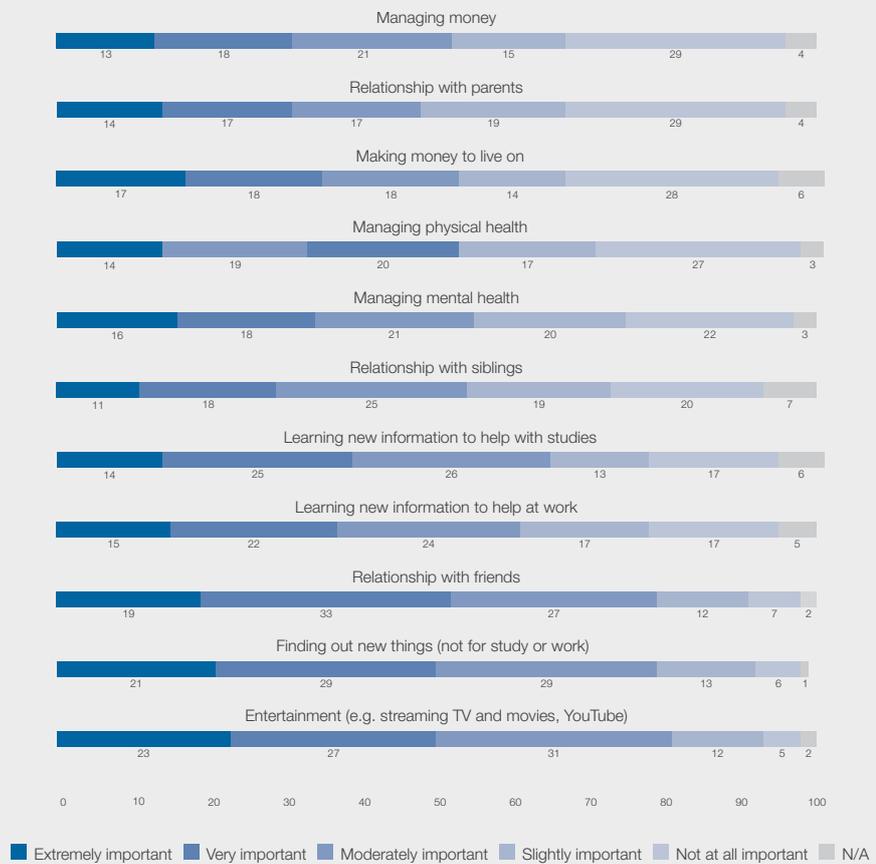


FIGURE 9.2.
PROPORTION OF YOUNG PEOPLE WHO PERCEIVE SOCIAL MEDIA PLAYS A ROLE IN DIFFERENT ASPECTS OF THEIR LIFE (N=505)



Political participation and achieving change

Young people also shared their opinions on the extent of, and limitations to, having a say in matters that affect young people. Social media was a key medium, as was protest alongside formal practices like voting.

Most young people reported that social media was important for entertainment, finding out new things and for their relationships with friends. Only 5% to 7% of young people indicated that social media was not important at all for these issues. Although at least 70% of young people stated that social media was important to some extent for the life aspects explored in Figure 9.2, social media played a less important role in managing money, relationships with parents, and as a source of income. Overall, these patterns were the same regardless of young people's demographic background.

The majority of interviewees mentioned social media as an important medium in discussions that affect young people. Most young people perceived social media as both an opportunity and an inhibitor of healthy public debate among, and with young people.



It kind of potentially dilutes the importance of any single issue, but I don't know enough to know whether that's a bad thing. I would say it probably does give the capacity to bring a larger number of people together, which can create change.

MAN, 20, VIC

Interviewees also talked about social media as a platform which brought young people and decision-makers closer together. At the same time, young people acknowledged the limitations of social media and that possibilities for civilised, democratic debate were often limited.



I think it's very difficult to find a formal, proper debate, like a fair debate, nowadays. It's mainly just screaming matches, really, like metaphorical screaming matches. I think a lot of time can be wasted on the whole, just trying to have debates about this, because it's very difficult to find proper debates.

WOMAN, 24, SA

Despite the substantial role that social media plays in young people's civic participation, young people's physical presence in public space was perceived as important in the context of demanding and achieving change. Protest, as well as engagement in social and political movements in matters that affect young people, were generally perceived as more effective than, say, signing petitions.

While the ability to vote was appreciated as an important aspect of civic participation, young people often reported that they had limited power to change things.

“

This is the saddest part. We are allowed to vote, we're allowed to elect who is in parliament and stuff like that, but at the end of the day, young people don't have a voice. Young people are smart, as smart as people who are older than us, we are equally aware of the challenges as well.

WOMAN, 21, NSW

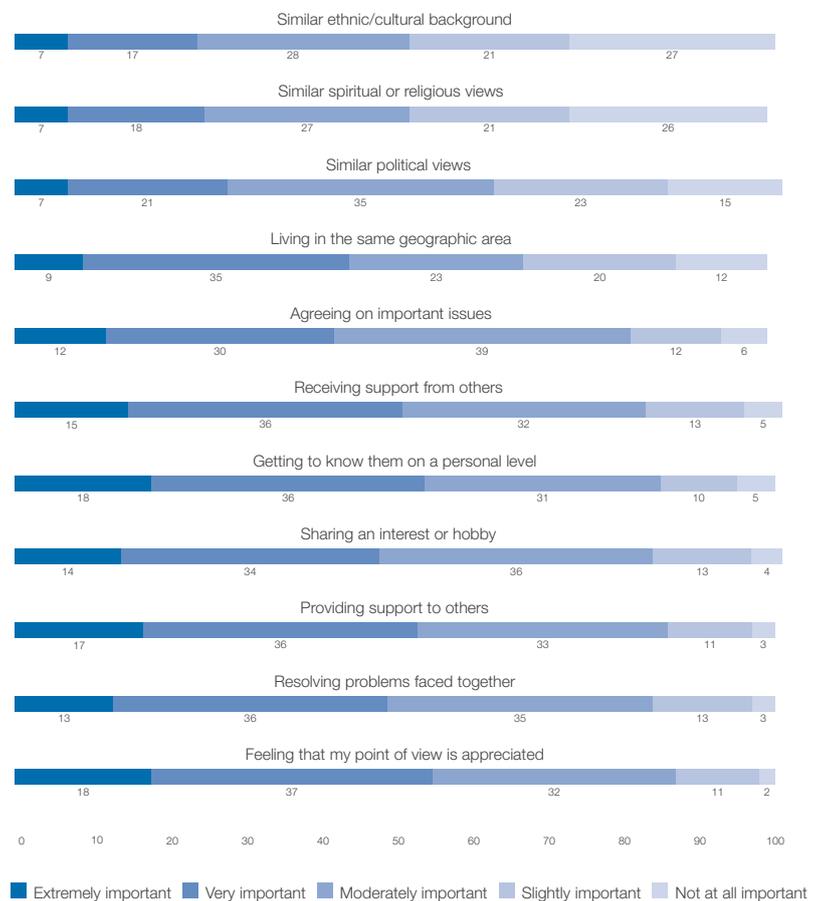
Belonging

Schools and workplaces were commonly mentioned as places where young people sometimes felt like they did not belong.

This was particularly the case for young people who felt that they were different to other people, and who felt it was more difficult to fit in. (See Chapter 3. Young People and Education) Factors that overwhelmingly helped young people feel a sense of belonging included feeling that their point of view was appreciated (98%), solving problems faced together (97%), and providing support to others (97%).

Of the other factors that contributed to a sense of belonging, agreeing on important issues, receiving support from others, and living in the same geographic area were more important for young people who lived in a postcode with high socioeconomic characteristics. Living in the same geographic area was more important for those born in Australia. Young people who lived in metropolitan areas thought it was more important both to receive support from others and to support others than did those who lived outside of metropolitan areas. Supporting others was also important for young people with disabilities. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders felt that a similar ethnic/cultural background was a more important aspect of belonging compared with non-Indigenous young people.

FIGURE 9.3.
IMPORTANT ASPECTS FOR FEELINGS OF BELONGING (N=505)



Interviewees touched on a variety of aspects involved in the process of belonging, such as place (where they feel that they belong most), circumstances that led to a sense of belonging, feelings associated with it, and personal experiences of rejection, bullying and discrimination.

As with survey findings, interviews demonstrated that common interests or shared worldviews were perceived as having a positive impact on a sense of belonging.



I think we all just were all very similar people. Like, we have the same interests, we like doing the same things, so we just got along really well and we'd have lots of fun together.

MAN, 24, ACT

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APPENDIX A

EDUCATION DATA

TABLE A.1.
COMPLETIONS IN HIGHER EDUCATION BY PROGRAM CHARACTERISTICS:
2016 AND 2019

		Year	2016				2019			
Level of education	Attendance		On-campus		Online		On-campus		Online	
	Field of education	Int. status	Domestic	International	Domestic	International	Domestic	International	Domestic	International
Under-graduate	Natural Sci.		14,471	2,512	392	-	14,825	3,747	530	8
	Inform. Tech.		3,117	3,358	229	12	4,044	5,318	402	31
	Engineering		7,387	4,810	516	5	7,450	5,910	465	18
	Architecture		2,879	830	119	-	3,176	1,325	248	6
	Agriculture		1,406	333	245	5	1,311	345	256	2
	Health		20,203	4,593	2,117	30	21,945	5,726	2,741	22
	Education		7,013	203	2,517	67	6,882	324	2,258	99
	Management		18,361	30,396	2,279	914	19,158	32,260	2,657	948
	Soc. & Culture		24,847	3,966	4,308	49	24,467	4,983	5,256	117
	Creative Arts		12,286	2,978	407	48	12,123	3,828	1,017	5
	Total		111,970	53,979	13,129	1,130	115,381	63,766	15,830	1,256
Post-graduate	Natural Sci.		14,471	2,512	392	-	14,825	3,747	530	8
	Inform. Tech.		3,117	3,358	229	12	4,044	5,318	402	31
	Engineering		7,387	4,810	516	5	7,450	5,910	465	18
	Architecture		2,879	830	119	-	3,176	1,325	248	6
	Agriculture		1,406	333	245	5	1,311	345	256	2
	Health		20,203	4,593	2,117	30	21,945	5,726	2,741	22
	Education		7,013	203	2,517	67	6,882	324	2,258	99
	Management		18,361	30,396	2,279	914	19,158	32,260	2,657	948
	Soc. & Culture		24,847	3,966	4,308	49	24,467	4,983	5,256	117
	Creative Arts		12,286	2,978	407	48	12,123	3,828	1,017	5
	Total		111,970	53,979	13,129	1,130	115,381	63,766	15,830	1,256

Source: Department of Education, Skills and Employment [internet]. Canberra: DESE; Higher Education Statistics; 2021; [accessed: 5 July 2021]; available from: <http://highereducationstatistics.education.gov.au>; extracted using uCube. Multi-modal attendance, and mixed fields are excluded. Food and hospitality data are also excluded due to low cell counts.

TABLE A.2.
VET COMPLETIONS BY AGE, GENDER, INDIGENOUS STATUS, AND REMOTENESS:
2016 AND 2019

Age group	Year	2016				2019			
		Men		Women		Men		Women	
	Indigenous status/Remote	Indigenous	Non-Indigenous	Indigenous	Non-Indigenous	Indigenous	Non-Indigenous	Indigenous	Non-Indigenous
15–19	Metro	2,590	67,000	2,605	66,130	2,460	54,270	2,475	52,515
	Regional	2,995	32,555	3,045	31,255	2,875	25,505	3,120	26,600
	Remote	850	2,705	870	2,265	620	1,785	710	1,695
	Age total	6,435	102,255	6,520	99,645	5,955	81,560	6,300	80,810
20–24	Metro	1,255	40,530	1,260	34,785	1,235	34,385	1,200	30,765
	Regional	1,530	17,605	1,180	13,315	1,390	16,010	1,300	12,145
	Remote	550	1,165	290	640	325	995	280	540
	Age total	3,335	59,300	2,730	48,740	2,950	51,390	2,775	43,455
25–29	Metro	695	30,005	835	28,950	725	25,230	770	25,145
	Regional	980	10,230	820	9,115	950	9,865	810	8,365
	Remote	360	945	210	685	330	725	175	505
	Age total	2,035	41,180	1,865	38,750	2,005	35,815	1,755	34,015
Total, overall		11,805	202,740	11,115	187,140	10,910	168,770	10,840	158,275

Source: National Centre for Vocational Education Research [internet]. Adelaide: NCVER; Total VET students and courses; 2021; [accessed 2 July 2021]; available from: <https://www.ncver.edu.au/research-and-statistics/data/databuilder#total-vet-students-courses>; extracted using DataBuilder.

TABLE A.3.
YOUNG PEOPLE'S MULTIFACETED RELATIONSHIP WITH WORK (N=505)

Item wording:	YES		NO	
	N	%	N	%
I currently work for wages or salary	306	60.6	199	39.4
I currently work full-time (i.e., 35+ hours per week)	150	29.7	355	70.3
I currently work part-time	124	24.6	381	75.4
I currently work as a casual	102	20.2	403	79.8
I currently have a work experience position without pay	33	6.5	472	93.5
I currently work in a family business without pay	15	3.0	490	97.0
I currently do volunteer work without pay	50	9.9	455	90.1
I am not currently working or employed	128	25.3	377	74.7
Not yet worked, but looking for a job	47	9.3	458	90.7
Neither working nor looking for a job	37	7.3	468	92.7

Note: Some categories may overlap due to asking each question separately.

APPENDIX B

NOTES ON SOURCES AND METHODS

CHAPTER 3: YOUNG PEOPLE AND EDUCATION

The Federal constitutional arrangement in Australia makes the systematic analysis of the education system challenging. The Commonwealth Constitution outlines that schooling is the responsibility of state and territory governments. Early childcare education, primary, secondary, and special education are not discussed in this chapter, but detailed reports are available from the Commonwealth Department of Education, Skills and Employment (DESE) and elsewhere.

DESE sets national agendas outlined in declarations which are revised every ten years. The most current one is the 'Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration', which was accepted in December 2019 and came into effect in January 2020. Achieving its progressive and ambitious goals is a challenging task, given that a significant proportion of the population was born overseas, and the two layered (Commonwealth and States) administration affecting the delivery of educational services in the country. Curriculum design, course accreditation (including in higher education), regulating school policies and programmes (including refugees), student assessment and funding VET are responsibilities of the states and territories. For a better understanding of the complex funding arrangements of the education system, readers are advised to consult relevant detailed reports on the subject.

Additional references:

Australian Bureau of Statistics [internet]. Canberra: ABS 2021. National, state and territory population. [Accessed on 11 June 2021] Available from: <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/population/national-state-and-territory-population/dec-2020>

Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) [internet], National Report on Schooling in Australia 2019. [Accessed on 11 January 2020] Available from: <https://www.acara.edu.au/reporting/national-report-on-schooling-in-australia/national-report-on-schooling-in-australia-2019>

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Engagement in lifelong learning:

Lifelong learning has been an established policy agenda for decades, yet in our youth focused investigation an age-based cut off is warranted. In general, the age group referred to is 15–24 years, although in certain contexts a 24–29 age cohort is included. Age categorisation follows ABS standards. While setting a cut off is always somewhat arbitrary, ABS data on lifelong participation in education allow us to concentrate on those under 30.

Based on Census of Population and Housing, 2016, ABS generated a new measure labelled as Engagement in Employment, Education and Training (EETP). EETP is an individual measure based on responders' answers to the age, study status (full-time/part-time), work status and hours worked questions on the census form.

Additional references:

Australian Bureau of Statistics [internet] Canberra: ABS; Age Standard 2014; [Accessed on 19 April 2021] Available from: <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/standards/age-standard/latest-release>

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Higher education:

The Australian higher education sector is unique in that it has the largest proportion of international students on a per-population basis. Nearly one-third of all students in the higher education sector are international. Education is an important export industry which generated about \$37.6 billion to \$41.1 billion in revenue in 2019 and supported about 250,000 jobs. International education is the largest service-based export industry in Australia, behind only iron, coal, and natural gas. Alongside significant tuition fees, the breakdown of the economic contribution of the broader education sector shows that more than half of the revenue generated by international students came from the consumption of goods and services.

Additional references:

Department of Education, Skills and Employment [internet] Canberra: DESE; Higher Education Statistics; Selected Higher Education Statistics – 2019 Student data. [Accessed on 17 June 2021] Available from: <https://www.dese.gov.au/higher-education-statistics/student-data/selected-higher-education-statistics-2019-student-data>

Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade [internet] Canberra: DFAT; Trade and Investment; Australia's trade in goods and services 2020. [Accessed on 19 June 2021] Available from: <https://www.dfat.gov.au/trade/resources/trade-statistics/trade-in-goods-and-services/australias-trade-goods-and-services-2020>

Vocational education and training:

A detailed analysis of trends and dynamics of VET course completion is beyond the scope of this report, but limited comparisons can be made between 2019 (the latest year available through NCVET) and 2016 across a few key demographic characteristics: age, gender, Indigenous status, and geographical remoteness which is based on ABS's remoteness structure.

Additional references:

National Centre for Vocational Education Research [internet]. Adelaide: NCVET; Total VET students and courses. [Accessed on 2 July 2021] Available from: <https://www.ncver.edu.au/research-and-statistics/data/databuilder#total-vet-students-courses>

CHAPTER 4: YOUNG PEOPLE AND EMPLOYMENT

Workforce composition

There are several statistical measures to express the share of employed people in a given population. The most common ones are employment to population ratio (EPR) and workforce participation. A major difference between them is that while EPR includes only employed people, workforce participation counts

unemployed people in the relevant population. As tracking specific employment outcomes of young people of particular interest in this report, EPR is used. The two measures tend to change in similar ways (they both decline during economic crises), but workforce participation is always higher given the share of jobseekers in it.

Although labour data are available for the period spanning the COVID-19 pandemic, a period immediately before this is selected to allow meaningful comparisons.

Employment rate of 20–24-year-olds

Youth employment is often explored through a wide age range encompassing those between 15 and 24 years. We have taken a disaggregated approach based on separating those 15–19 and 20–24. This is necessary as the younger of these two cohorts is affected by the compulsory school leaving age requirement, which is about 17 years across states and territories.

Additional references:

Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) [internet], National Report on Schooling in Australia 2019. [Accessed on 14 February 2021] Available from: <https://www.acara.edu.au/reporting/national-report-on-schooling-in-australia/national-report-on-schooling-in-australia-2019>

Interview and survey data

Contemporary work arrangements are complex and accordingly, young people's experience with employment is more diverse than ever before. For a more complete understanding of young people's encounters with work, we asked a series of questions that go beyond conventional frequency measures of unemployment, full-time and part-time participation.

The perceived social usefulness of one's own job has increasingly been considered in workforce satisfaction and general wellbeing measures in recent years. We measured job usefulness with a single item based on agreement with the following statement: 'My job is useful to society'

We explored the perceived relative importance of twelve factors that could all contribute to successful job search for young people on the labour market. These factors were: availability of flexible hours, availability of more jobs in my local area, sufficient previous work experience, communication skills, technical and digital skills, knowing other people working in the same job, skill development programs such as CV writing workshops, volunteering experience, support from educators, support from career advisors/coaches, support from family members, and networking.

CHAPTER 5: HEALTH AND WELLBEING

The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare's (AIHW) comprehensive report on Australian children in 2019 identified a series of gaps in the available data on young peoples' health and wellbeing. While AIHW's reporting concerned a somewhat younger cohort (0–14 years), many of these gaps remain relevant for an older age group.

There is a deficit of data about particular demographic groups, including children from refugee and asylum seeker families; children with CALD backgrounds and children born overseas; those in out-of-home care; incarcerated young people; those with a disability; LBGTIQ+ and gender diverse young people. There is limited capacity to link data, making it difficult to track young people who are moving through various services across different sectors. Young people's voices are not adequately captured in large data sets. Notions of subjective wellbeing and sense of identity are limited and not captured over time. For example, the ABS personal safety survey and the Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) Survey are focused on people aged 15 years and older. High quality data collected by geographic area is missing, making it difficult to ascertain how far people have to travel to access services in different regions. There is a lack of standardised, national-level reporting on community services, for example, maternal and child health information is needed to contribute to more complete understanding of service use.

Additional references:

Australian Bureau of Statistics [internet] 2014. Canberra: ABS; Australian Health survey: Nutrition First Results—Foods and Nutrients. [Accessed: August 2021] Available from: <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/health/health-conditions-and-risks/australian-health-survey-nutrition-first-results-foods-and-nutrients/latest-release>

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CHAPTER 6: YOUNG PEOPLE AND MONEY

The review of existing data covers four key aspects of interactions of young people with the financial market: financial wellbeing, vulnerability, literacy, and the use of a product outside the formal financial market (buy-now-pay-later arrangements). Most of the reports summarised here were not targeted towards young Australians but report their findings by age group. Many other reports on the consumer-side of financial markets often do not report on young people's experiences.

The surveys and interviews conducted by CYPEP researchers asked young people about financial security, their plans for achieving it, whether they face financial difficulties and the strategies they use to cope with it and whether they use buy-now-pay-later services and what they think of them.

CHAPTER 7: HOUSING

The review of existing data covers five key aspects of young people's housing experiences: accommodation arrangements, home ownership, housing affordability, housing aspirations, and homelessness. The review mainly highlights the work from the Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute (AHURI) and Anglicare Australia that covers different demographic groups but also reports on relevant findings for young people. The review focused on reports with national coverage, excluding reports specific to a state or city.

The surveys and interviews conducted by CYPEP researchers asked young people about their current accommodation, what it enables them to do, and their aspirations of home ownership. During the interviews, participants were not asked directly about housing, but discussion of their current concerns and what financial security means to them often resulted in contemplations around the housing market and home ownership.

Additional references:

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CHAPTER 9: CITIZENSHIP, BELONGING AND INCLUSION

Democracy, immigration and diversity

This chapter outlines recent research on young people in Australia, their civic participation and belonging. Several surveys have been conducted that provide a detailed view of this area. Recent data collections have included a combination of older teens, and those in their 20s, as well as larger representative surveys alongside smaller, more niche populations. Larger surveys incorporating the experiences of those aged 15–25 are rarer.

In some instances, different surveys covered similar attitudinal data about young people's perspectives on important issues concerning young Australians (for example the Lowy Institute Poll and the Scanlon Foundation both conducted surveys about the top issues of concern for young people). In such cases, the most recent data representing young people aged 15–25 years was chosen for inclusion. The 15–25 year age group is consistent with the definition applied throughout this report, and the most recent findings are more likely to cohere with contemporary concerns of young people today.

Interview and survey data

Young people were asked about their recent volunteering experience and whether they thought that the government should provide more social services. In the interviews, participants were encouraged to reflect on questions related to civic participation in a broader sense. Besides sharing examples of their individual civic involvement, including volunteering experiences, interview respondents also reflected on the ways that young people can achieve change in matters that they are not happy about.

We surveyed young people about the importance of the following factors to feel like they belong: agreeing on important issues, feeling that point of view is appreciated, getting to know them on a personal level, resolving problems faced together, living in the same geographic area, providing support to others, receiving support from others, sharing an interest or hobby, similar ethnic/cultural background, similar political views and similar spiritual or religious views. Participants were also asked about their experiences of belonging and non-belonging in the interviews.

CHAPTER 8: YOUTH JUSTICE, SAFETY AND RISK

Drawing on large data sets compiled by AIHW, the ABS, the National Homicide Monitoring Program, Mission Australia, Speaking Out Survey, Australian Youth Safety Survey among other smaller datasets, this chapter presents recent data on young people's interaction with the youth justice system, as well as young adults' interaction with the prison system. Young people's perceptions of safety at home, in the community as well as within institutions such as school are outlined.

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