



## **Youth Issues on the Agenda**

Youth Action's policy priorities to achieve strategic goals for 2017 - 2020

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## ABOUT YOUTH ACTION

Youth Action is the peak body for young people and youth services in NSW.

We represent 1.25 million young people and the services that support them.

Youth Action works towards a society where all young people are valued, engaged and supported. To achieve this, it is the role of Youth Action to:

1. Respond to social and political agendas relating to young people and the youth services sector
2. Provide proactive leadership and advocacy and shape the agenda on issues affecting young people and youth services
3. Collaborate on issues that affect young people and youth workers
4. Promote a positive profile in the media and the community of young people and youth services
5. Build capacity for young people to speak out and take action on issues that affect them
6. Enhance the capacity of the youth services sector to provide high quality services
7. Ensure Youth Action's organisational development, efficiency, effectiveness and good governance.

Youth Action's strategic plan 2017 – 2020 outlines the following goals:

- Decision making processes in NSW value the diverse range of young people as experts in their own lives
- The NSW Youth Sector is recognised as professional in youth development
- Key systemic issues for young people are put on the NSW agenda
- Youth Action is a respected and sustainable peak body for young people and the youth sector

We want our **members to engage** with us and **hold us to account**.

## CREATING POSITIVE OUTCOMES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

### How we work

Youth Action is committed to improving the lives of young people in NSW. We identify issues that are important to young people, and represent their interests to decision makers to influence positive outcomes, and to put key youth issues on the policy and political agenda. The activities we undertake to do so are referred to as 'policy and advocacy'.

As a peak body, Youth Action sits at the intersection of young people, the youth sector, and the social policy environment, which comprises of, for example, other peak bodies, research, the media, and various events and forums. This position assists Youth Action to identify issues, with the expertise of young people and the youth sector. These three spheres shape the policy and advocacy work of Youth Action, and assist in identification of policy priorities, and advocacy work.



Youth Action has a small but dedicated team who are committed to producing meaningful work that utilises our limited resources effectively. We use a framework to guide how we prioritise decisions, making sure we work in the gaps, don't duplicate and partner with other organisations to achieve high impact.

## POLICY PRIORITIES

Our policy and advocacy work is directly shaped through consultation with young people and youth services. We asked over a hundred youth services and hundreds more young people 'what does the future hold for young people?'.

The result is a clear directive from our constituency, which outlines our policy priorities.

As nominated by young people and youth services in NSW, the core priority areas for Youth Action's advocacy and policy work are:



We will provide leadership in our core priority areas, while staying committed to being responsive to general social and political agendas impacting young people and youth services in NSW.

### Other Issues

The following issue areas, also highlighted by youth services, youth workers and young people, will continue to guide how Youth Action responds to additional and arising opportunities and agendas.

- Mental health, health and wellbeing
- Youth participation
- Child protection
- Transport and public spaces
- Access to services
- Young people and the law

Education and training, housing and homelessness, and work and employment are the themes that will underpin the core policy work of Youth Action. Following is an overview of the themes including a brief context of each issue for young people in NSW.

## EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Young people have the right to an education that effectively prepares them for the present and the future.<sup>1</sup> All young people should have access to high-quality, affordable, safe and supportive education that meets their individual and diverse needs. Education encompasses life-long learning that supports young people to develop socially, intellectually, physically and emotionally, as well as to engage in the labour market.

Across NSW there are over 540,000 young people aged 12 to 17,<sup>2</sup> with around 507,000 persons (as at 2015)<sup>3</sup> eligible young people positively participating in education. However, some young people are neither engaged in education or training. The school retention rate for NSW is one of the lowest across Australia, and although young people are increasingly at school, some are disengaging, and others are not achieving.<sup>4</sup> Over 21% are still not attaining a Year 12 qualification, and 25% are neither engaged in education nor employment Australia wide.<sup>5</sup> Other research estimates that 20% of young people are not attending school, and a further 20% do not feel they belong in their school.<sup>6</sup> Australian rates of youth participation in education are below those of many other Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries.<sup>7</sup>

Inequalities in educational outcomes persist in NSW. Young people from low SES, Aboriginal or from rural backgrounds as well as young people with disabilities continue to be at a disadvantaged in our education system.<sup>8</sup> Australian education, when compared with other OECD countries, is less equitable.

Young people report an increased sense of pressure and stress in relation to education including the cost of education and its ability to help them secure work, as well as ongoing concerns in relation to bullying and racism at school.

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<sup>1</sup> A Wierenga and J Taylor, 2015, *The Case for Inclusive Learning Systems: Building More Inclusive Learning Systems in Australia*, Dusseldorp Forum, Sydney, accessed via <[http://dusseldorp.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/Dusseldorp\\_Forum\\_The\\_Case\\_for\\_Inclusive\\_Learning1.pdf](http://dusseldorp.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/Dusseldorp_Forum_The_Case_for_Inclusive_Learning1.pdf)>

<sup>2</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), 2016, *Australian Demographic Statistics*, 'Table 8 Estimated resident population, by age and sex—at 30 June 2016', data cube: Excel spreadsheet, cat no. 3101.0, accessed via <<http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/Lookup/3101.0Main+Features1Sep%202016?OpenDocument>>

<sup>3</sup> Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation, 2016, *Schools and Students: 2015 Statistical Bulletin*, Issue 5, NSW Department of Education, Sydney, accessed via <[https://www.cese.nsw.gov.au/images/stories/PDF/2015\\_Statistical\\_Bulletin\\_v8.pdf](https://www.cese.nsw.gov.au/images/stories/PDF/2015_Statistical_Bulletin_v8.pdf)>

<sup>4</sup> A Wierenga and J Taylor, op.cit., p. 11.

<sup>5</sup> *ibid.*, p. 4.

<sup>6</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth (ARACY), 2013, *Report Card: The Wellbeing of Young Australians*, p. 20 accessed via <<http://www.aracy.org.au/documents/item/126>>

<sup>8</sup> Foundation for Young Australians, 2011, *How Young People Are Faring*, accessed via <[http://www.fya.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/HYPAF-2011-Full\\_Report.pdf](http://www.fya.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/HYPAF-2011-Full_Report.pdf)>

As the opportunities for work and employment shift, so too should our education system's response to equipping young people for their future. However, some hold concerns that 'education is not preparing young people with the skills that will be needed in the future of work.'<sup>9</sup>

Education systems in NSW need to address the barriers that prevent some young people from education and schooling that meets their needs. In addition, there should be a particular focus on ensuring outcomes for those experiencing disadvantage and those disengaging from traditional delivery methods.

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<sup>9</sup> FYA, 2015, *Unlimited Potential: an information and data resource on Australian young people*, accessed via <<http://unlimitedpotential.fya.org.au/snapshot/young-people-are-facing-new-challenges-that-are-publishing-their-transitions-to-adulthood-back-to-an-older-age/#start>>

## HOUSING AND HOMELESSNESS

Adequate and affordable housing is pivotal to a person's mental, physical and social wellbeing. Housing impacts on all aspects of a young person's life such as access to education and skill development and work opportunities.

In NSW the housing context for young people today is characterised by declining homeownership rates, decreasing housing and rental affordability, a decline in the availability of social housing, and rising youth homelessness.

When it comes to accessing housing generally, young people face barriers and discrimination. High rental costs, low incomes, insecure share housing, and the lack of affordable housing and social housing stock all make independent living a challenge for many young people. While some young people are staying at home for longer, for others this simply is not an option.

Many young people have turned to the private rental market as an alternative to the increasingly unaffordable housing market. Between 2005 to 2012, there was a 14.1% increase in young households renting (aged between 15 and 24 years) from 2005 to 2012.<sup>10</sup> Indeed, in 2012, 77.7% of households headed by 15 - 24 year olds in Australia were renting in the private rental market.<sup>11</sup> However, the rental market is also becoming increasingly unviable for young people due to problems with the affordability and stability of renting in NSW. According to the Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute (AHURI), four out of five 'very low-income' households pay an unaffordable rent.<sup>12</sup> Young people tend to be low income earners. By virtue of their age and stage in life, young people are also less skilled and experienced in the workforce, which accounts for their occupation of lower-paid and lower-level positions. On average those in full-time employment earn between \$600-\$900 per week, and those in part-time employment earn around \$180-\$380.<sup>13</sup> A quarter of low-income households pay rent in excess of 50% of their total income.<sup>14</sup> In Sydney specifically, there is only one affordable and available rental dwelling for every 15 very low-income households.<sup>15</sup>

Young people often need to live close to transport, work, and educational institutions. This means that they must often move to urban areas where rent is high. This compels young people to cover their living expenses by foregoing other

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<sup>10</sup> M Lovering, 2014, *Evidence review 058: Marrying later, renting longer*, Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute (AHURI), Melbourne.

<sup>11</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> AHURI, 2015, 'How great is the shortage of affordable housing in Australia's private rental market?', *Research and Policy Bulletin*, Issue 144, Melbourne.

<sup>13</sup> ABS, 2012, 'Average weekly earnings(a), By age group', graph, *Year Book Australia*, cat. No. 1301.0, accessed via, <<http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Lookup/by%20Subject/1301.0~2012~Main%20Features~Earnings~299>>

<sup>14</sup> AHRUI, 2015, *op.cit.*

<sup>15</sup> *ibid.*

essentials such as food, which is the case for an estimated 17% of students.<sup>16</sup> This lack of affordable housing has resulted in concerning trends such as overcrowding, shared accommodation and informal leases. Rental accommodation is insecure in tenure, and young people are seen as 'risky'. As a result, it becomes increasingly difficult for young people to access what little affordable rental accommodation there is.

Social housing plays an important role in assisting some young people to transition to independence, as it provides them with housing affordability and stability. Social housing is not, however, a substitute for an affordable housing market that allows young people to afford rental properties and transition to homeownership where desired and relevant. Moreover, cutbacks in government funding over time mean that social housing is limited. Indeed, as of 30 June 2016, there were 59,907 applicants on the NSW social housing waitlist.<sup>17</sup> Urban areas in and around the City of Sydney (including the South Eastern Sydney and Northern Sydney districts) and South West Sydney had particularly long expected waiting times, with most people waiting for more than ten years for social housing in a majority of suburbs in these regions.<sup>18</sup>

Housing and rental unaffordability have increased the risk of youth homelessness. Young people are particularly vulnerable to homelessness.<sup>19</sup> More young people experience homelessness in NSW than in any other state with almost 7000 young people those aged 12-24 experiencing homelessness. Young people are overrepresented in the homelessness population, representing approximately 25% of the homelessness population in NSW,<sup>20</sup> despite only being 18% of the NSW population.<sup>21</sup> In comparison with other states and territories, NSW has the largest number of young people experiencing homelessness when compared with other states and territories. Youth homelessness figures are generally accepted as vastly underestimated, with ongoing difficulties in accounting for those who are couch surfing, or living in overcrowded accommodation for example.

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<sup>16</sup> E Bexley, S Daroesman, S Arkoudis & R James, 2013, *University Student Finances in 2012: A study of the financial circumstances of domestic and international students in Australia's universities*, The University of Melbourne, Melbourne, p. 8

<sup>17</sup> FaCS, 2016, *Expected Waiting Times for Social Housing June 2016 - Overview*, accessed via <<http://www.housingpathways.nsw.gov.au/how-to-apply/expected-waiting-times>>

<sup>18</sup> *ibid*

<sup>19</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW), 2014, 'Housing outcomes for groups vulnerable to homelessness', Cat. No. HOU 274, Canberra, p. 4, accessed via <<http://www.aihw.gov.au/WorkArea/DownloadAsset.aspx?id=60129548949>>

<sup>20</sup> ABS, 2013, 'Table 3: STATE AND TERRITORY OF USUAL RESIDENCE, Number of homeless persons-by selected characteristics-2001, 2006 and 2011' *Census of Population and Housing: Estimating homelessness*, data cube: Excel spreadsheet, Cat. No. 2049.0, 2011, accessed via <<http://abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/DetailsPage/2049.02011?OpenDocument>>

<sup>21</sup> ABS, 2014, 'Table 8: Estimated resident population, by age and sex-at 30 June 2014', *Australian Demographic Statistics December 2014* data cube: Excel spreadsheet, Cat. No. 3101.0, accessed via <<http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/DetailsPage/3101.0Dec%202014?OpenDocument>>

Homeless young people, rental stress and poverty, as well as the decrease in homeownership are interrelated products of poor housing affordability.

## EMPLOYMENT AND WORK

Young people have enormous potential and they are a vital resource for the NSW economy and community. Employment is important for young people to attain financial security, independence, wellbeing, a sense of belonging and achievement, as well as skill development.

Young people today are navigating new and different challenges to past generations. Youth unemployment and underemployment are high, the transition to work is harder and opportunities in the labour market itself are changing.

Young people are facing some of the highest rates of unemployment and underemployment in recent times. Young people under 25 years of age make up more than 40% of the unemployed,<sup>22</sup> and approximately 30% of young people in Australia are unemployed or underemployed.<sup>23</sup> Youth unemployment is at a 40 year high, sitting at 13.3% (as at March 2017) in Australia, over double the unemployment rate (5.9%).<sup>24</sup>

In NSW, 84,900 young people are experiencing unemployment. The youth unemployment rate is 12.7%,<sup>25</sup> compared with 5.6%<sup>26</sup> of the general population. Youth unemployment rates spike even higher in certain parts of the state, in some cases over four times that of the general population.<sup>27</sup>

The impact of unemployment is significant, and vast. Young people's financial and psychological wellbeing is at risk in the short-term, but unemployment and underemployment is scarring, as it increases the chance of long term or cyclical

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<sup>22</sup> Brotherhood of St Laurence, 2015, 'The Teenage Dream Unravels', *Trends in Youth Unemployment*, p. 6, accessed via <[http://www.bsl.org.au/fileadmin/user\\_upload/files/campaign/The\\_teenage\\_dream\\_unravels\\_trends\\_in\\_unemployment\\_MAR2015.pdf](http://www.bsl.org.au/fileadmin/user_upload/files/campaign/The_teenage_dream_unravels_trends_in_unemployment_MAR2015.pdf)>

<sup>23</sup> FYA, 2015, op.cit.

<sup>24</sup> M Janda, 2017, 'Unemployment jumps to 5.9pc with 6,400 jobs lost: ABS', *ABC News*, accessed via <<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-03-16/abs-employment-jobs-data-february/8359312>>

<sup>25</sup> ABS, 2017, *Labour force, Australia, Detailed Electronic Delivery*, 'Table 16. Labour force status for 15-24 year olds by State, Territory and Educational attendance (full-time)', time series spreadsheet, cat. no. 6202.0, accessed via <<http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/DetailsPage/6202.0Feb%202017?OpenDocument>>

<sup>26</sup> ABS, 2017, *Labour force, Australia, Detailed Electronic Delivery*, 'Table 4. Labour force status by Sex, New South Wales - Trend, Seasonally adjusted and Original' time series spreadsheet, cat. no. 6202.0, accessed via <<http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/DetailsPage/6202.0Feb%202017?OpenDocument>>

<sup>27</sup> Brotherhood of St Laurence, 2016, *Australia's Youth Unemployment Hotspots*, Snapshot, March 2016, accessed via <[http://library.bsl.org.au/jspui/bitstream/1/9004/1/BSL\\_Aust\\_youth\\_unemployment\\_hotspots\\_Mar2016.pdf](http://library.bsl.org.au/jspui/bitstream/1/9004/1/BSL_Aust_youth_unemployment_hotspots_Mar2016.pdf)>

unemployment.<sup>28</sup> Moreover, youth unemployment is also related to poorer health outcomes and lower educational attainment when young people are older, and may translate into lower lifetime earnings.<sup>29</sup>

Youth unemployment has implications far into the future, particularly as the ageing population increases. As the need to fill workforce gaps and deliver services for the burgeoning retiree population increases, there should be a dual focus on increasing the earning potential of young people and helping to improve their access to the labour market.

Research shows young people are increasingly 'churning' through work and other activities after finishing school.<sup>30</sup> Five transition pathways for young people aged 15 to 24 are identifiable:

- move directly into employment
- combine work and study and then work after attaining their post-school qualification
- work or work/study but take longer to get full-time work
- 'churn' through spells of work interspersed with other activities
- have a prolonged period of not being in the labour force.<sup>31</sup>

Barriers to both gaining and keeping work are both 'individual' and 'structural'. Structural barriers to employment include 'geographic disadvantages in labour market opportunities; lack of full-time, entry-level opportunities; shift to service sector jobs, lacking career structures; insecure, casual and precarious work; reduced numbers of apprenticeships and traineeships; and concentrations of young people "at risk" in particular schools'.<sup>32</sup> Individual barriers include 'individual aspirations and motivations, employability and "soft" skills and the role and responsibilities of families and social networks, education and training providers, governments, NGOs, agencies and employers in addressing youth unemployment'.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Brotherhood of St Laurence, 2014, *On the Treadmill: Young and Long-term Unemployment in Australia*, accessed via

<[http://library.bsl.org.au/jspui/bitstream/1/6974/1/On\\_the\\_treadmill\\_young\\_long-term\\_unemployed\\_2014.pdf](http://library.bsl.org.au/jspui/bitstream/1/6974/1/On_the_treadmill_young_long-term_unemployed_2014.pdf)>

<sup>29</sup> Brotherhood of St Laurence, 2015, op.cit.

<sup>30</sup> J Fry, and I Boulton, 2012, 'Prevalence of transition Pathways in Australia', Productivity Commission Staff working paper, Canberra.

<sup>31</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> J Skattebol, T Hill, A Griffiths & M Wong, 2015, 'Unpacking Youth Unemployment', *SPRC Report 15/2015*, Social Policy Research Centre, UNSW Australia, Sydney.

<sup>33</sup> *ibid.*

The employment market has changed, with less low skill and entry-level positions. Research estimates that 70% of entry-level positions young people move into are at high risk of automation.<sup>34</sup>

Young people are also at a skill and experience disadvantage in the current context where there are more people competing for jobs than there are jobs. In November 2016 there were 181,000 job vacancies,<sup>35</sup> with 748,100 people unemployed (as at February 2017)<sup>36</sup>. That is one job for every four job seekers.

While these challenges are complex for most young people living in NSW, there are others who experience additional difficulties. This includes young people who are living in regional and remote NSW, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people, refugee and migrant young people, young people with disability, young people who are in or have been in out-of-home care, and more.

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<sup>34</sup> FYA, 2015, *How are Young People Faring in the Transition from School to Work?* Report Card 2015, accessed via <<http://www.fya.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/How-young-people-are-faring-report-card-2015-FINAL.pdf>>

<sup>35</sup> ABS, 2016, *Job Vacancies, Australia, Nov 2016*, cat. no. 6354.0, accessed via <<http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/Lookup/6354.0Main+Features1Nov%202016?OpenDocument>>

<sup>36</sup> Labour Market Information Portal, 2017 'Employment Regions Data – Unemployed (15+)', February 2017, Commonwealth of Australia, accessed via <<http://lmip.gov.au/default.aspx?LMIP>>