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NSW Budget: funding shift away from prevention risks having more young people end up in crisis

Youth advocates have expressed concern at the significant shift in the NSW Budget away from prevention and early intervention initiatives and towards programs that only kick in once young people are in crisis.

Youth Action, the peak organisation for young people in NSW, said that while it welcomed investment in young people who are dealing with the challenges of homelessness, mental health problems, alcohol and other drugs, unemployment, and domestic and family violence, doing so at the expense of prevention work risked allowing more young people to reach crisis point.

The organisation welcomed a focus on youth unemployment, which is currently above 20 per cent in parts of the state, but it warned that current initiatives were not adequate, with young people missing out on the bulk of the 141,800 new jobs Treasurer Gladys Berejiklian celebrated.

Youth Action also raised concerns that funding to the Children, Youth and Family Services stream had decreased, while education funding appeared to simply be matching growth in student numbers and previous commitments rather than providing additional resources.

Youth Action CEO Katie Acheson said it was concerning that despite a healthy budget surplus, young people were still not getting the level of support they need to ensure access to quality education and training, affordable housing, and jobs.

“While there are some positives in this budget, too much focus has been placed on dealing with problems once they reach crisis point, rather than focusing on prevention,” Ms Acheson said.

“In justice, we see a huge investment in new jails, but not programs that could divert young people before they reach the juvenile justice system.

“Likewise, too little is being done to prevent domestic and family violence through education programs in schools.

“Youth support services – the bedrock of our early intervention system that prevents the future need for homelessness services, for child protection, and for treatment services for alcohol and other drugs — have largely gone without.

“Time and again research shows a ten-fold return for every dollar invested in preventing young people from reaching crisis point, making early intervention both socially and financially the most responsible approach.”

See over page for a breakdown of the key elements of the 2016 NSW Budget for young people.

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What the 2016 NSW Budget delivers for young people:

Youth Participation:

- \$3.9 million for youth participation, including \$2.6 million for Youth Frontiers, \$1.1 million for Youth Opportunities, and \$270,000 for Youth Week in NSW
- \$2.8 million to support the Advocate for Children and Young People

Employment and jobs:

- \$100 million commitment to build skills and actively match those most in need of a job with growth sectors
- \$10 million through social impact investing to support regions with high youth unemployment

Education:

- \$50 million of continued government commitment to school counsellors, flexible wellbeing resources to provide student support and targeted support for both Aboriginal and refugee students
- \$367 million for National Education Reform Agreement (Gonski)
- an additional 50,000 funded places at TAFE
- \$97 million to upgrade and construct new TAFE facilities

Alcohol and other drugs:

- \$16 million over four years for youth detox and treatment, allowing treatment of more than 1000 young people
- \$8 million for a youth specific early intervention innovation fund

Mental Health:

- \$11 million for rollout of the Child and Adolescent Mental Health GOT IT early intervention in schools program
- \$8 million over four years for a suicide prevention fund

Refugees:

- \$8.4 million for a range of programs including community hubs, a school liaison program, an employment triage model and youth peer mentoring
- \$2.2 million to support unaccompanied minors

Justice:

- continued funding of \$40.3 million for Countering Violent Extremism initiatives
- \$2.8 million for grants to community projects that foster community engagement

Youth Homelessness:

- \$40 million over four years in new funding for youth homelessness initiatives that adopt an investment approach and prioritise young people leaving out-of-home care who are at high risk of homelessness
- \$188 million for crisis homelessness services and refuges

Youth Services:

- Earlier Intervention for Vulnerable People and Support for Communities funding decreased from \$325 million last year to \$319 million, despite increase of \$195 million to the FACS budget overall
- \$370 million over four years to meet increased demand for out-of-home care
- \$190 million over four years to reform child protection and out-of-home care systems through targeted earlier intervention and building on Safe Home for Life child protection reforms
- \$15 million over four years for the continued funding of Aboriginal Child and Family Centres

Domestic and Family Violence:

- New \$20 million innovation fund will be created for prevention, early intervention and crisis responses

Housing:

- Extension of social housing scholarships offered to year 12 students will be extended to year 10 students (\$3.2 million over four years)
- \$22 million for the expansion of private rent assistance, including a new medium-term rental subsidy to support households to sustain a tenancy in the private rental market