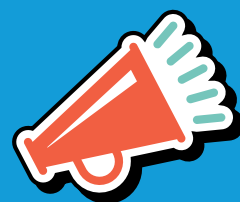


Consultation Paper

NSW Strategic Plan for Children and Young People 2027–2030

April 2026



**Office for
YOUTH**

We acknowledge the Traditional Owners of Country throughout Australia and recognise their continuing connection to lands, waters and cultures.

We pay our respects to their Elders past, present and emerging.

We would also like to acknowledge the richness and strength Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and cultures bring to the NSW community.

We acknowledge past injustices and present day impacts experienced by many First Nations children and young people and their families.

The Advocate for Children and Young People and the NSW Office for Youth are committed to creating opportunities for First Nations voices at the heart of our work.

This paper contains references to topics that may be upsetting. If you or someone you know requires support, there is always hope and there is always help available.

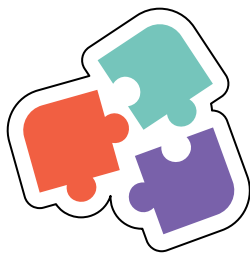
For support, contact:

- NSW Mental Health Line on 1800 011 511
- Lifeline on 13 11 14 (at any time, 24/7 or visit [lifeline.org.au](https://www.lifeline.org.au))
- Kids Helpline on 1800 55 1800 (at any time, 24/7)
- 13YARN on 13 92 76 (at any time, 24/7).

We're developing a new strategic plan for children and young people.

The Strategic Plan for Children and Young People 2027–2030 will be a statewide plan to make New South Wales (NSW) a better and fairer place for all children and young people aged 0 to 24 years.

The Strategic Plan will focus on:



Systemic issues



Children and young people with unmet needs



Voices of children and young people

The Advocate for Children and Young People, through the Office for Youth, will lead the Strategic Plan from start to finish, including its development, implementation, and monitoring. An independent evaluation will be conducted at the end of the Strategic Plan to measure its effectiveness.

To deliver this Strategic Plan, the Advocate will work with the NSW Youth Advisory Council, NSW Government agencies, sector partners and most importantly, children and young people in NSW.

About the Advocate for Children and Young People

The Advocate is an independent statutory officer set up under the *Advocate for Children and Young People Act 2014*. The Advocate leads the NSW Office for Youth, a team within the NSW Department of Communities and Justice.

The Advocate works to improve the safety, welfare and wellbeing of all children and young people in NSW. They do this by talking with children and young people across NSW, listening to what they say, and ensuring the voices of children and young people influence decisions.

One of the Advocate's responsibilities under the Act is to develop a **NSW Strategic Plan for Children and Young People**.

The new Strategic Plan will build on previous strategies

The 2022–2024 NSW Strategic Plan for Children and Young People focused on six commitments to support children and young people in NSW.



Hope for the future



Love, connection and safety



Health and wellbeing



A good standard of living



Environments for joy and fun



Respect and acceptance

An independent evaluation of the plan highlights we can do better in our next plan with:

- more targeted advocacy
- clearer ways to measure success
- better coordination across government
- stronger visibility of the Advocate's work.

About this consultation paper

Since the establishment of the *Advocate for Children and Young People Act 2014*, we've spoken with almost 70,000 children and young people from across NSW and with diverse lived experiences.

There's already a lot happening to support children and young people across NSW – but there are still some important issues and gaps to address.

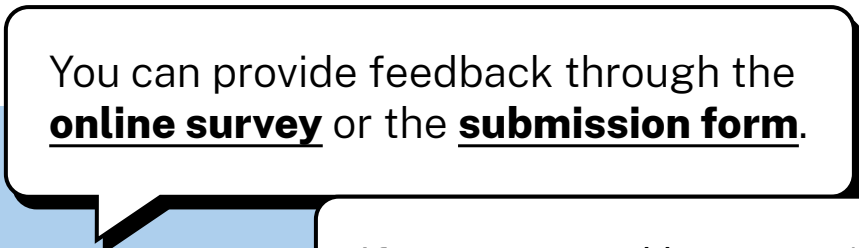
This consultation paper highlights key insights gathered from what children and young people have told us, supported by research and data. It provides a strong starting point for understanding what action is needed.

It also outlines some of the current government initiatives underway. Consultation with NSW Government agencies will provide a more comprehensive overview and inform any future actions for inclusion in the final Strategic Plan.

How to provide feedback

You're invited to share your thoughts and ideas for the NSW Strategic Plan for Children and Young People 2027–2030.

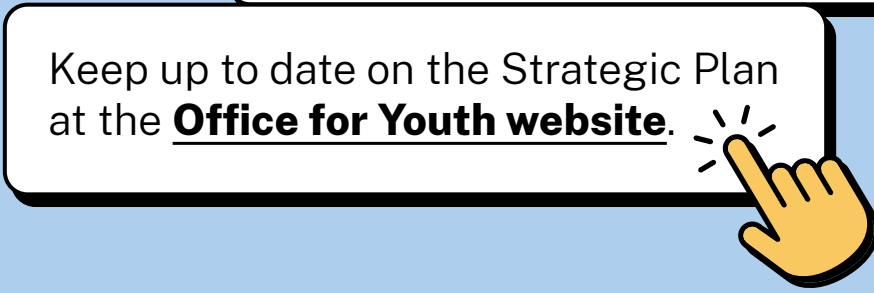
We'd like to know your ideas on what works in your community or on how to fix the things children and young people have told us don't work. We've provided questions under each theme in this consultation paper.



You can provide feedback through the **online survey** or the **submission form**.



If you are aged between 14–24 years, you can also register to attend an **online consultation here**.

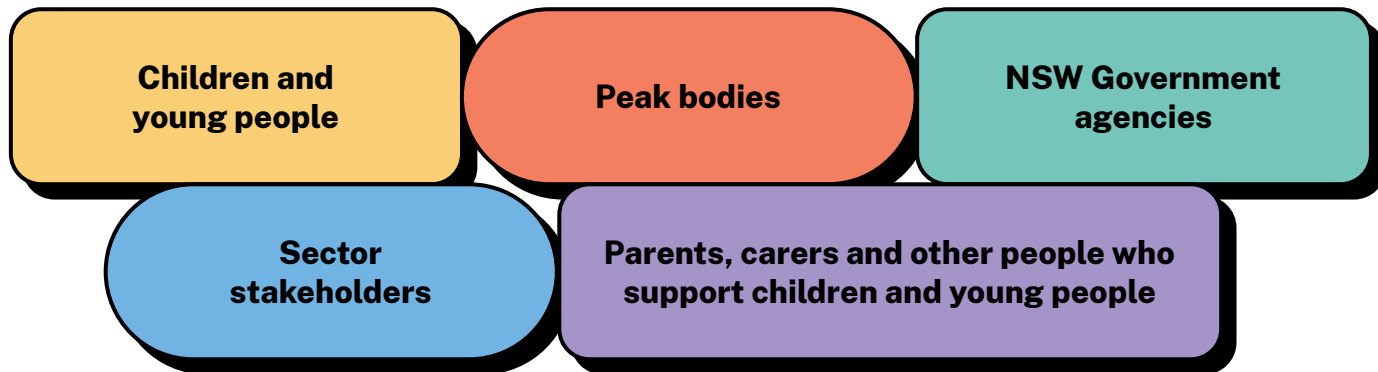


Keep up to date on the Strategic Plan at the **Office for Youth website**.

Consultation timeline and process

The Office for Youth is engaging with stakeholders from across NSW from April to June 2026, both face-to-face and online, to develop the Strategic Plan.

These include:



We will be doing this through:



Feedback will inform the development of the final Strategic Plan, which will be released in late 2026. A 'what we heard' paper will also be released following consultation to share key findings.

What informed this consultation paper?

What we asked:

- the most important issues for children and young people in NSW
- how you would like the NSW Government to engage with you
- what you think the NSW Government needs to focus on.

How we did this:

- desktop research and literature review
- annual youth polling
- NSW Youth Summit 2024
- targeted consultation with children and young people
- NSW Youth Advisory Council.

What themes did we hear?



Educated and thriving
Pages 11-14



Community connection
Pages 15-20



Supported and safe
Pages 21-26



Healthy and well
Pages 27-31



Voice and influence
Pages 32-33

These themes build on the NSW Performance and Wellbeing Framework, which maps key priorities and reports on progress. This will help us to address evaluation feedback to improve the ways we measure success.

For each theme we've highlighted:



An overview of current NSW Government work



What children and young people told us



What the evidence shows



Questions for you to consider

Children and young people in NSW

Around **2.6 million** children and young people live in NSW.¹

This represents 30% of the NSW population.

66% live in Greater Sydney.

33% live in Regional NSW.



475,600

0 to 4 years old



701,700

5 to 11 years old



627,700

12 to 17 years old



782,900

18 to 24 years old

NSW children and young people have diverse experiences



6%

identify as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander.

Almost 52% of the Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander population in NSW is under 25.



11%

were born outside Australia.²

Top places of birth outside Australia: China, Nepal, India, New Zealand and England.



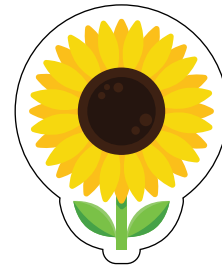
6%

are not Australian citizens.³

Children and young people represent 18% of everyone in NSW who isn't a citizen.



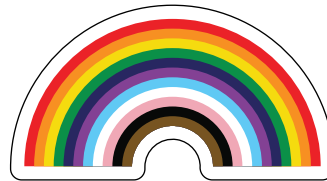
1 in 4
speak a language other
than English at home.⁴



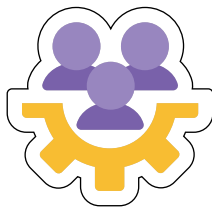
12%
live with disabilities.⁵
Up 8% from 2018.



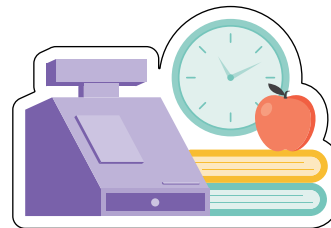
1 in 20
have caring roles.⁶
That's approximately
132,100 young carers.



10%
of young people aged
16 to 24 identify as
LGBTIQA+.⁷



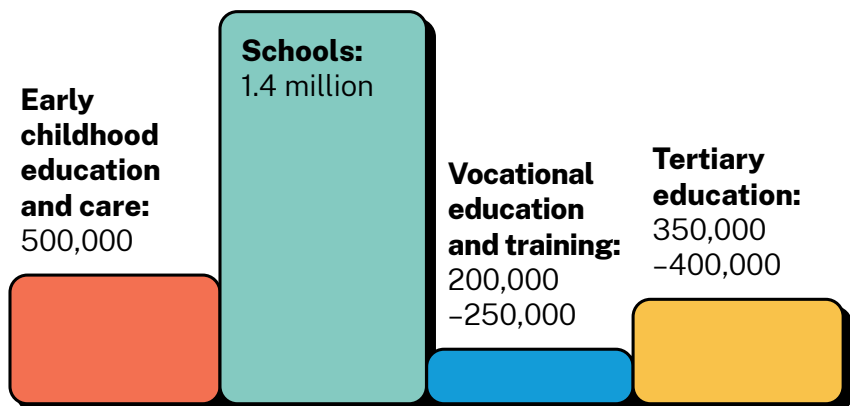
Around **681,100** of young
people aged 15 to 24 years are
employed. This makes up 15%
of the total NSW workforce.⁸



83% of young people
aged 15 to 24 years
were engaged in work
and/or study.⁹



An estimated **2.5 million**
participate in the
education system.



Cost of living

Affordability is one of the biggest things young people are talking about.

Costs keep going up – for rent, groceries, public transport, the GP, preschool, or for fun, social activities.

Because it impacts on so much, you'll see cost of living come up in multiple parts of this consultation paper.



Intersectionality

We recognise that children and young people have multiple, intersecting identities – like cultural background, disability, gender, family circumstances or where you live.

While some sections do highlight the impacts of themes on specific cohorts, this paper takes a strengths-based approach.

The needs of children and young people from priority populations will be a focus in targeted consultations.



“I’ve been putting off seeing a specialist for a long-term medical condition as I can’t afford the gap payment to see the specialist, let alone the cost of the ongoing medication I should be taking.”

Young person

“It’s like an out-of-body-experience adapting to the culture around you and moving into places where people don’t understand such an essential part of who you are.”

Young person

Educated and thriving



Our goal: Children and young people have the knowledge, skills and opportunities to learn, participate and succeed now and into the future.

Early childhood education and care (ECEC)

The NSW Government recently announced reform that centres the best interests of children, prioritises child safety and improves transparency for families in decision making. This includes separating out an independent regulatory authority and the introduction of an Early Learning Commissioner.

Research and data tell us:^{10,11}

- Safe, high-quality ECEC is linked to better long-term educational and social outcomes for children.
- Growth in for-profit providers, combined with inconsistencies across the system, raises concerns about the quality and safety of the ECEC sector.
- There are long waitlists for high-quality ECEC providers.
- Affordability is a significant challenge for many NSW families.

Children say:¹²

- Relationships made with friends, teachers and the community when in ECEC is important.
- ECEC provides opportunities to be creative, explore and play in ways they cannot do at home.
- Being in ECEC lets children try new things and access experiences they wouldn't otherwise have.

Primary and secondary school

The NSW Government is implementing multiple strategies to create an equitable education system and to provide safe, inclusive learning environments.

Research and data tell us:

- The gap between public schools and non-government schools is widening, with 97% of NSW schools with a high concentration of disadvantage being in public schools.¹³
- Most students experience school related stress, with 2 in 5 rating their stress as high.¹⁴
- Some students are missing more school than others.¹⁵ This includes students with additional needs, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and students living in remote areas.¹⁶
- By Year 12, nearly 1 in 5 students have been suspended or expelled. Suspension rates are twice as high for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and students living with disability, and more than three times higher for students in care.¹⁷

Children and young people say:

- School stress can lead to avoiding school, arguments at home and with friends, and trouble concentrating or sleeping.¹⁸
- Some students experience higher stress and feel less belonging at school, including students living with disability, in support classes, and with culturally diverse backgrounds.¹⁹
- Schools are very HSC-focused and students would like more options to learn about their interests.²⁰
- Many suspensions feel unfair and don't address needs.²¹
- Suspensions make students feel worse, often increasing loneliness, boredom and isolation.²²



Why do you feel stressed about school?

“Teachers not understanding me. My ADHD causes me to not be able to concentrate and I’m having friendship problems.”

Young person



Post-school pathways

The NSW Government is working together with the vocational and higher education sectors to improve post-school and lifelong learning pathways, provide micro-credentials, apprenticeships and traineeships, support youth employment, meet future workforce needs, and deliver better equity outcomes.

Research and data tell us:

- By 2035, 9 out of 10 jobs are expected to require post-secondary qualifications.²³
- Domestic undergraduate commencements have fallen to 2013 levels, reflecting a national decline.²⁴
- Cost is a major barrier to tertiary education.²⁵
- Scholarships and support programs reduce financial stress and improve student retention and completion rates.²⁶
- Regional students are half as likely to get a university degree due to reduced local access and course options.²⁷
- Many young people don't know what jobs or careers are available.²⁸
- Fewer young people are starting apprenticeships and traineeships, especially in non-trade fields, but completion rates are going up.²⁹

Young people say:^{30,31}

- It's hard to choose between studying and working full time just to afford basic living costs.
- Young people, especially in regional areas, often move away from home to study or work. This can lead to financial stress, housing pressures, and social isolation. Online education options allow people to stay local and not have to move for study.
- Many students feel stressed about money and go without food or essentials.
- Unpaid blocks of "prac" requiring students to take time off paid work to finish their degree or qualification is a challenge.
- They don't have enough knowledge on workplace rights, discrimination, obligations, awards and wages.³²

“There is an expectation that young people will be in education and will also juggle employment and other commitments.”

Young person

“I work three different jobs and I used to do a lot of volunteering but with the rising cost of living I can no longer afford to and have had to prioritise paid employment.”

Young person

Think about:

1.

What would make it easier for you to attend and do your best in school, work or university?

2.

What do you think would help to:

- make early childhood education more accessible and affordable
- improve school engagement
- support pathways to university, work or training
- reduce cost of living pressures
- make education and career pathways more accessible and affordable?

3.

Is there anything else you want us to consider?

Community connection

Our goal: Children and young people are connected to their communities, feel they belong, and are proud of who they are.



Play and create

The NSW Government is creating more opportunities for children and young people through grants and programs that support community sports, boost girls' participation in sports, open school infrastructure during the holidays, encourage participation in arts, recreation and cultural activities, and more.

Research and data tell us:

- NSW has high arts and cultural participation, with many children and young people attending events, cultural venues and the cinema.³³
- Children and young people in regional NSW have fewer local arts, cultural and creative opportunities.
- Swimming, soccer, basketball, netball and AFL are some of the most popular sports. More girls and young women are playing sports like soccer and AFL than ever before.³⁴
- Cost is a main barrier to participation in sport, arts and cultural activities.

Children and young people say:³⁵

- Children and young people who don't currently participate would like to do music, dance or cultural activities.
- Learning about and experiencing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures is important.
- There is a need for more diverse activities, including in sport, outdoor adventure, volunteering and the creative arts.
- Having a say in what's available is important.

Belonging and inclusion

The NSW Government is rolling out belonging and anti-bullying programs for schools, including through the new NSW Anti-Bullying Framework and other educational campaigns.

Other NSW Government initiatives include festivals, events and projects that build and strengthen community connection, celebrate diversity, and support young people to participate fully in their local communities and reach their full potential.

Research and data tell us:

- Young people are generally more accepting of diversity than older people.³⁶
- Some young people experience high rates of discrimination due to race, religion, sexuality, gender or ability.³⁷
- Students' sense of belonging at school has been declining in both primary and secondary schools since 2017.³⁸
- Feeling part of a community reduces isolation, builds resilience and supports healthier coping during stressful times.³⁹

Children and young people say:⁴⁰

- Spending time with friends (69%) and family (61%) is central to sense of belonging.⁴¹
- More opportunities to learn from and connect with people from different cultures and backgrounds are needed.
- Racism, bullying and other forms of discrimination are still common experiences and impact on feelings of belonging.
- Public displays of support and celebrations like Pride Month and Wear it Purple Day help LGBTIQ+ young people to feel included and safe.
- It's important to remove stigma and make activities more accessible for children and young people living with disability.



“I want to have a future where I’m surrounded by many people. I want to meet and connect with new people. I hope to be in a supportive and collaborative community where we can be creative.”

Young person



“A little sticker saying ‘LGBT welcome’ goes a long way.”

Young LGBTIQ+ person



Youth spaces

The NSW Government has developed design frameworks and is investing in quality and vibrant public spaces, like parks, playgrounds and local streets. More ways to support youth hubs and partner with a range of organisations to deliver more community spaces are also being explored.

The NSW Government also commissioned an independent evidence review on community strengthening to better understand what makes spaces and services safe, accessible and inclusive for young people.

Research and data tell us:

- Vibrant, safe and well-designed public spaces support wellbeing. Youth friendly, accessible spaces make it easier to make friends and get support.
- 1 in 3 women under 25 years feel unsafe in public spaces after dark, compared to 1 in 10 young men.⁴²
- Youth hubs function as preventive social infrastructure, reducing disengagement, justice involvement and long-term social cost.⁴³
- Young people who get involved in their community are less likely to feel long-term loneliness.⁴⁴

Children and young people say:

- It's hard to find inclusive, low cost or free places to socialise outside of school.⁴⁵
- Young people want youth groups, community centres, libraries and social activities that are affordable and open evenings and weekends.⁴⁶ This can help reduce boredom and isolation.
- Safety in public spaces at night, including in streets, parks and on transport, is a common worry.⁴⁷
- Accessible spaces are important, such as quiet spaces, sensory rooms, and all-abilities parks and playgrounds.

“**We need a bit more diversity of things to do for older youth. The main priority seems to be building playgrounds.**”

Young person from regional NSW



Connection to Culture and Country

The NSW Government provided additional Closing the Gap funding for language revitalisation projects, community-led justice initiatives, infant health services, supports for Aboriginal students, and pathways from school to further study or work.

Research and data tell us:^{48,49,50}

- Cultural continuity, including ongoing connection to language, traditions and identity, is fundamental to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children's development.
- Strong culture is fundamental to improved life outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people.
- Promoting self-determination empowers Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people to lead and control their own solutions.
- Aboriginal community-led approaches, including partnerships with Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations, make sure responses are culturally grounded and strengths-based.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people say:⁵¹

- Culture brings identity, pride, belonging, safety and purpose.
- Disconnection from family, community and culture is deeply harmful.
- Racism is a constant and damaging experience.
- Being able to access recreational activities and programs is essential.
- Having safe and supportive relationships is important.
- It's important to learn in culturally safe spaces and with adults/peers who understand and share culture.

“**To have a culture at the heart of who we are. Aboriginal culture being rich in our lives and being able to feel a part of community.**”

Young Aboriginal person

“**Our culture's sleeping at the moment. We need to wake it back up. We need to learn more about our culture. We need someone there to help us do that cos we can't just do it on our own.**”

Young Aboriginal person

Transport

The NSW Government is upgrading public transport infrastructure to be more accessible and partnering with councils to support walking and cycling to school. Regional children and high school students can get discounted fares for regional trains and coaches.

Research and data tell us:

- Young people are highly dependent on public transport to get to school, work, appointments, and to meet up with friends and family.⁵²
- Young people in regional areas have less access to public transport and often feel less safe when using it.
- More parents are accepting and allowing their children to use rideshare services unaccompanied.⁵³
- More than 10,000 fines were issued to people under 25 years for travelling without a valid ticket in 2023–24.⁵⁴

Children and young people say:

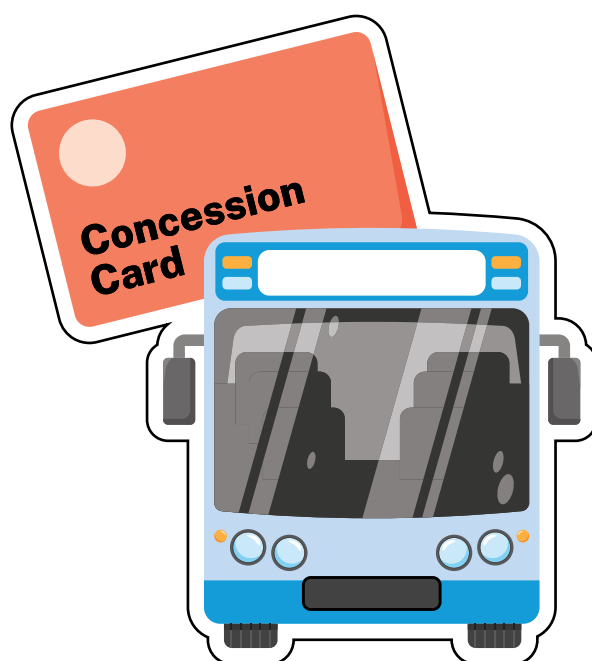
- Young people think public transport is unaffordable⁵⁵ – especially for young parents, young people in out-of-home care (OOHC) or experiencing homelessness.
- Eligibility criteria for concessions are hard to understand and leave out some people such as part-time students, international students, and young people who are not studying.
- Some risk receiving fines because they can't afford fares.⁵⁶

“**Cost of living essentials like transport impacts how much I can hang out with my friend.**”

Young person

“**I would love if they reduced transport cost. Even with the concession card I'm easily spending \$150 a month on transport. This is my main fixed expense as of now.**”

Young person



Think about:

1.

What would help you to feel more connected to your community, family or culture?

2.

How would you like to see your culture represented in community spaces?

3.

What activities or programs would you like that are not available now?

4.

What are the main barriers to joining in or participating?

5.

What do you think would help to:

- support belonging and inclusion
- improve transport access
- encourage anti-racism and prevent discrimination in all its forms
- increase participation in arts, culture, sports and recreation?

6.

Is there anything else we should know?

Supported and safe



Our goal: Children and young people are cared for and protected from harm. People, places and services help them be safe, happy and able to grow.

Safe and affordable housing

The NSW Government recently announced rental reforms and appointed the NSW Rental Commissioner to improve fair, quality and affordable renting. It is also implementing the NSW Homelessness Strategy 2025–2035 and Action Plan 2025–2027, with a dedicated youth action plan in development.

Research and data tell us:

- 65% of young people aged 18 to 24 living independently spent more than 30% of their income on accommodation in 2023 – an indication of housing stress.⁵⁷
- 1 in 2 people accessing homelessness services in NSW are under 25.⁵⁸
- Some people are overrepresented in homelessness services: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people, LGBTIQ+ young people, young people leaving OOHC, and young people exiting the justice system.⁵⁹
- Couch surfing and overcrowding are common forms of homelessness for young people.⁶⁰
- The capacity of youth homelessness services is not meeting current demand resulting in waitlists.⁶¹

Children and young people say:⁶²

- Affordable rentals close to work, TAFE or universities are hard to find.
- Increasing living costs and housing prices are keeping young people from moving out of home.
- The competitive rental market causes stress and anxiety.
- Some young people help to pay for their family's rent or mortgage.

“My friends and I all live at home. It’s not a healthy situation for me, but I can’t afford to move out.”

Young person

“The generational cycle of family and domestic violence is really difficult to break because you don’t know any different.”

Young person

Healthy homes and relationships

The NSW Government is working to prevent domestic, family and sexual violence and support young people by expanding respectful relationships education and increasing specialist services for children and young people in refuges and homelessness programs.

Under the NSW Domestic and Family Violence Plan 2022–2027, the NSW Government recognises children and young people as victim-survivors in their own right.

Research and data tell us:

- Children and young people can experience domestic and family violence (DFV) directly from partners or family members. They can also experience DFV when they see and hear a parent or family member’s violence towards others.
- Around 30% of victim-survivors of DFV are under 25.⁶³ This includes both intimate partner violence and family violence.
- DFV impacts physical health, mental health and wellbeing, education, employment and housing.
- There is a need for more awareness about what harm is, and support can be hard for young people to access.
- Young women are more likely to experience sexual assault.⁶⁴
- Problematic and harmful sexualised behaviour by children and young people is increasing.⁶⁵

Children and young people say:^{66,67}

- Violence makes them feel unsafe, anxious and unsure of who to trust. It can also become harder to make friends and socialise.
- Young people experiencing violence at home often avoid home, instead spending time in libraries, at school, friends’ houses or public spaces.
- Some are saving for or looking for other accommodation.
- For young women experiencing intimate partner violence, they are more likely to seek help from friends and family than health services. Sometimes they’re unsure if their situation fits the common definitions and stereotypes of assault or abuse.⁶⁸

Disability services and inclusion

The NSW Disability Inclusion Plan 2026–2029 outlines actions to create liveable and safe communities, improve children’s access to mainstream services, support students with disability to learn at their local school, and coordinate across governments to deliver foundational supports for children with low to moderate needs.

The NSW Anti-Bullying Framework provides guidance to all schools on evidence-based strategies to reduce bullying, with examples specifically to support the inclusion of students with disability.

Research and data tell us:

- 12% of children and young people live with disability and 6% have profound or severe disability.⁶⁹
- 1 in 4 students in NSW public schools live with disability.⁷⁰
- Early intervention, along with access to education, employment and community spaces like playgrounds, venues, sport facilities and public toilets, is key for inclusion.
- Children and young people with disability are more likely to experience bullying and discrimination – online, at school, on public transport and in the community.⁷¹

Children and young people say:⁷²

- Fair and equal access to the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) is needed.
- Consistent relationships with support workers and teachers make a big difference.
- Supports need to be more equitably available across NSW.
- There’s a need for more youth-focused health services for young people living with disability.
- Having a say in decisions that impact children and young people living with disability is very important.



“Kids need to get support before things get too bad. Support should be available to everyone.”

Young person living with disability



“Transition to work program gets you ready and teaches you all the skills that you need for work.”

Young person living with disability

Out-of-home care (OOHC)

The NSW Government announced a \$1.2 billion investment in OOHC reforms in 2025. This includes increasing foster care allowances, investment in residential care homes, workforce support and Aboriginal service and system reforms to support the rights, safety and wellbeing of children and young people in care.

Research and data tell us:

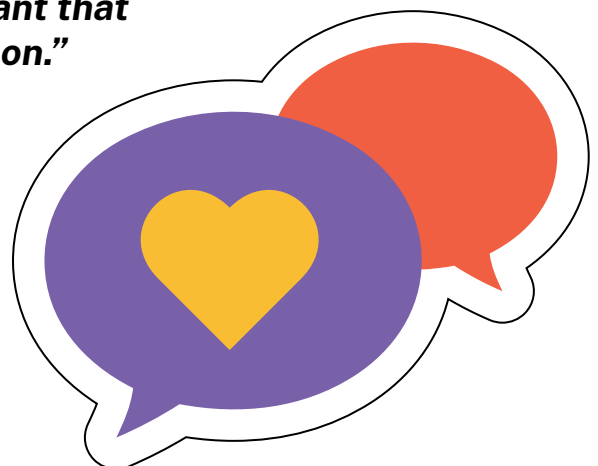
- The number of authorised foster carers decreased by 13% between 2021 and 2024, resulting in more children entering emergency or short-term care.⁷³
- Aboriginal children are 10 times more likely to be in OOHC.⁷⁴ Care works best when Aboriginal children and young people are supported to maintain connection to Aboriginal cultures and communities.
- Caseworker capacity is not meeting demand, leaving many risk of significant harm (ROSH) reports and concerns without timely follow-up.^{75,76}
- A history of OOHC increases the likelihood of young people needing homelessness services by 17%.⁷⁷

Children and young people say:⁷⁸

- Being told the truth about what's happening – especially during removals, placement changes and court processes – is important.
- They feel left out of decisions about their care which leads to feeling powerless.
- More support is needed when leaving care.
- More support for parents could prevent the need for OOHC.
- Improve screening of carers.

“Just being honest with everything is also very important because you're better off just being honest. I think it's really important that the kid knows everything that's going on.”

Young person with OOHC experience



Experience with the justice system

Youth Justice NSW is undergoing major reform to respond to the National Agreement on Closing the Gap and create better outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, families and communities in contact with the criminal justice system. This includes investing in place-based initiatives that provide after hour activities for children and young people.

Research and data tell us:^{79,80,81}

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people are disproportionately represented in the justice system.
- Diversion and early support leads to better outcomes than justice system involvement.
- Community-led, place-based approaches work better than punitive responses.
- Early school exclusion, unstable care, service availability, substance use and some policing practices increase the risk of custody.
- Education, stable housing and community and health supports help reduce justice system contact.

Children and young people with experience in the justice system say:^{82,83}

- Having fun and meaningful things to do, especially at night, can deter offending.
- More support is needed when exiting the youth justice system.
- Education, training, cultural programs and supportive staff make a positive difference in custody.
- Rehabilitation, skill building and preparation for community life are essential.
- Trusted relationships with adults – caseworkers, youth justice officers, mentors and teachers – are an important protective factor.

“**The issue young people in the justice system face is that even through all the interventions and supports young people receive in custody, a majority will be exited into the same situations they were in before custody.**”

Young person with youth justice experience

“**One day you are released back into the real world, and most young people don’t have the tools to deal with the stress and discomforts they once experienced prior to entering custody.**”

Young person with youth justice experience



Think about:

1.

What helps you to feel safe at home, school, work, in your community or online?

2.

What would make it easier to ask for and/or get help when things aren't going well?

3.

What do you think would help children and young people:

- while in out of home care, and during the transition out of it
- experiencing domestic, family or sexual violence
- at risk or experiencing homelessness
- while in the youth justice system, or transitioning out of it
- who live with disability and require additional supports
- foster healthy and safe relationships across family, peer and community settings?

4.

Is there anything else we should know?

Healthy and well



Our goal: Children and young people grow up physically healthy, mentally strong, and have confidence in their ability to handle difficult times.

Social media and online safety

The NSW Government is rolling out safer AI tools like NSW EduChat within the Department of Education, doing research into screen time, and providing resources to promote safe digital use. The NSW Government is also working with the eSafety Commissioner to support the social media delay.

Research and data tell us:

- Before the social media delay, most young people used social media and messaging platforms to chat.⁸⁴
- Online harm is common: 74% have seen harmful content, 53% have experienced cyberbullying, and 3 in 5 have witnessed online hate.⁸⁵
- 2 in 5 young people aged 12–17 had played games with gambling like features.⁸⁶
- AI chatbots and companions designed to simulate personal relationships are growing in popularity.⁸⁷

Children and young people say:⁸⁸

- Social media can be a safe space, especially for LGBTIQ+ young people and young people living with disability.
- The delay could limit access to information, connection and their rights.
- Online influencers and content create unrealistic body image and behavioural standards that negatively impact self-esteem.

Mental health

The NSW Mental Health Commission is developing a new NSW Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy and Suicide Prevention Plan, as well as a dedicated Aboriginal Suicide Prevention Plan. The new strategy will provide the roadmap for the mental health service system in NSW and explore broader social, cultural and economic impacts on wellbeing. The NSW Government is also expanding its mental health peer workforce.

Research and data tell us:

- Around 1 in 7 children and young people aged 4 to 17 years experience a mental health condition.⁸⁹
- 30% of mental-health-related Emergency Department visits are by people under 25.⁹⁰
- Wait times are increasing, with many young people waiting more than a month for mental health services.
- Access to mental health services can be a challenge in regional, rural and remote areas.
- Culturally appropriate and trauma-informed services are most effective.
- Suicide is the leading cause of death for young people aged 15 to 24 years.⁹¹

Children and young people say:

- Mental health is one of the biggest concerns for their age group.
- Clear information about how to get support is important.
- Bullying, both in person and online, is a major cause of distress.
- Many go to family and friends first for help.
- Confidential, 24/7 mental health support options are important.
- There aren't enough resources or affordable services, and the 10-session cap is a major barrier.

“There isn't enough support out there for young people going through mental health issues. I struggle with this, but have been told that I have exceeded my 10 sessions of counselling and now I have to pay for more which I cannot afford.”

Young person

If you or someone you know requires support, there is always hope and there is always help available.

For support, contact the NSW Mental Health Line on 1800 011 511, Lifeline on 13 11 14 (at any time, 24/7 or visit lifeline.org.au), Kids Helpline on 1800 55 1800 (at any time, 24/7), or 13YARN on 13 92 76 (at any time, 24/7).

Healthy habits

The NSW Government continues to inform children, young people and their families and carers about vaping, alcohol and drug use, healthy eating, and other health-related behaviours.

Research and data tell us:

- Keeping physically healthy and active is important to support lifelong health outcomes – but children and young people are exercising less.⁹²
- 1 in 5 young people aged 16 to 24 use e-cigarettes daily or occasionally.⁹³
- Cost is the main factor influencing sports participation, with high-income families more likely to participate in sports programs.
- Healthy eating is important for growing and learning. Some families don't know about nutrition and others are skipping meals or eating unhealthy due to cost of living.⁹⁴

Children and young people say:

- Young people are avoiding seeing a GP or specialist due to the upfront costs.⁹⁵
- Stress is a driver of vaping behaviour, and more action should be taken to address vaping.⁹⁶
- Many know and understand the dangers of vaping, alcohol and other drugs and wish that more safe-use education was provided. There is concern around what is being consumed.⁹⁷

“It’s really hard to have a healthy balanced diet when you have to worry about the cost of the food you’re buying.”

Young person

“Once you start, you can’t stop. You don’t feel happy if you can’t vape.”

Young person



Climate and environment

The NSW Government is delivering programs like the Resilient Kids Program and Recovery Youth Support Service to support disaster-affected children and young people. The NSW Environment Protection Authority's Youth Engagement Strategy outlines proactive approaches so the voices of young people are reflected in initiatives to protect the environment.

Research and data tell us:⁹⁸

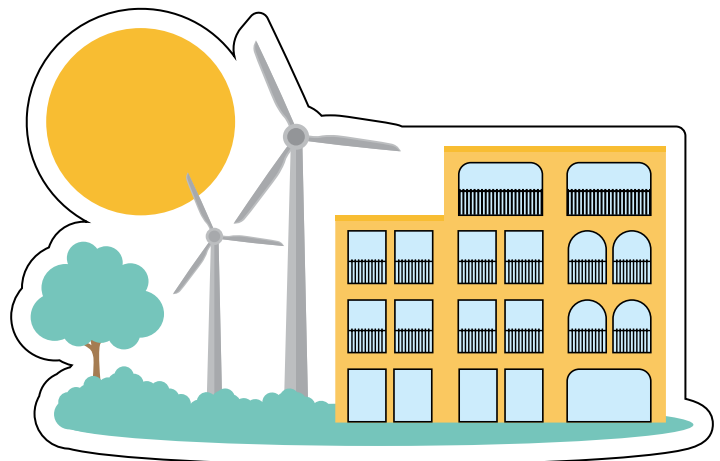
- Bushfires, floods and prolonged drought have affected thousands of children and young people in recent years.
- Children and young people in disaster affected areas experience trauma, mental health challenges, disrupted education and displacement.
- School attendance remains low in the Northern Rivers following the floods.⁹⁹

Children and young people say:^{100,101}

- They want a clean and healthy earth.
- Thinking about climate change can result in feeling hopeless and impact on mental health.
- There needs to be stronger action on climate change.
- They feel left out of conversations and decisions about the environment and climate change policy.

“**There needs to be a bigger strive towards intergenerational equity, meaning that more needs to be done for young people with the housing crisis and environmental issues.**”

Young person



Think about:

1.

What is working well to support children and young people to be healthy and well?

2.

What do you think would help support children and young people to:

- maintain and improve mental health and wellbeing
- create healthy habits
- make it easier to ask for help
- be safe online
- manage social media
- use AI safely?

3.

Is there anything else you want us to consider?

Voice and influence

Our goal: Every child and young person has the chance to share what they think and is involved in the decisions that impact them.



The NSW Government established the Office for Youth in 2025 to make sure the voices of children and young people are included in decision making.

The NSW Youth Advisory Council, DOVES, Mental Health Youth Advisory Group, and other NSW Government youth advisory groups play an important role in informing policies, programs and other initiatives.

Children and young people say:¹⁰²

- The NSW Government is not listening to their voices and opinions.
- Being included in decision making is important.
- They want more meaningful ways to be involved, and to see feedback about action taken. Opportunities include:
 - updates via school newsletters
 - information shared on social media
 - direct communication from Ministers in school and at events like the NSW Youth Summit
 - opportunities to ask questions to senior government leaders and Ministers
 - more workshops and discussions, including in regional NSW
 - an annual online youth survey to regularly share their views with decision-makers.
- Provide opportunities to have a say for children and young people who may not typically be heard.

Youth Week Polling

In 2026, 3 in 5 young people agree the NSW Government listens to them and considers their opinions when making decisions. Some young people are less likely to feel heard.¹⁰³



“**We have a lack of trust because the government (current and previous) consistently deprioritises the things young people call for, like access to affordable housing, support in the cost of living crisis, affordable access to mental and physical health services and the protection of our natural environment.**”

Young person in Greater Sydney

“**Living in regional NSW, I feel young voice is lost in governance.**”

Young person in regional NSW

Think about:

1.

What words would you use to describe the future you want for children and young people in NSW?

3.

How would you like to be informed and engaged in an informal or ongoing way?

2.

Do you have any ideas on how the NSW Government could help children and young people be heard?

4.

Is there anything else we should know?

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Office for YOUTH

The NSW Strategic Plan for Children and Young People 2027–2030 Consultation Paper

With support from the NSW Office for Youth

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