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Pre Budget Submission

The Australian Youth Affairs Coalition (AYAC) calls for the Australian Government to guarantee that young people will be a priority focus of this budget and the planning for economic recovery in response to COVID-19. While young people are disproportionately impacted by COVID-19, they are also the solution to our long-term economic wellbeing in Australia.

Investing in young people now will ensure our economic and social fabric is the strongest it can be leading into the future. Urgent action is needed to mitigate the grim reality of significant and prolonged youth unemployment due to the COVID-19 crisis, and damaging flow-on effects such as mental ill health and homelessness. AYAC calls on the Federal government to commit funds to eight key areas:

- 1. Implement a national strategy for youth-specific job creation**
- 2. Prioritise youth voice and participation in government processes that impact the young**
- 3. Maintain and expand income support for young people**
- 4. Invest in safe, secure and affordable housing for young people**
- 5. Close the existing equity gap in education**
- 6. Ensure equitable access to affordable, reliable and safe communications**
- 7. Support service continuity and funding for youth services**
- 8. Address systemic barriers for young people in the tax and transfer system**

Australia's young people want the opportunity to collaborate with the Australian Government to develop real solutions to ensure that current and future generations can play a pivotal role in our collective economic recovery, for the benefit of all Australians.

AYAC is the national youth peak body in Australia, representing young people and the services that work with them. AYAC has broad networks with Australia's diverse youth sector, young people and youth-led organisations with more than 70 member organisations in all states and territories. AYAC is currently playing a key role in supporting and coordinating policy responses in the context of the COVID-19 crisis.

Young people are disproportionately impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic as they navigate unprecedented disruptions to education and training, employment and social participation – at a time when they are establishing life-long foundations and navigating transitions for successful economic, social and civic participation. The long-term implications of this pandemic will be felt most acutely by those young people who are already marginalised by systemic inequality and exclusion.

AYAC calls on the federal government to commit funds to:

1. Maintain and expand income support for young people

Permanently increase JobSeeker and Youth Allowance to ensure young people can meet basic needs. Measures should include

- Implementing the recommendations of the Newstart Inquiry
- Increasing the Disability Support Pension in line with increases to JobSeeker
- Extending income support payments to all young people affected by COVID-19 disruption – including young people who are full-time students, international students and young workers on temporary visas who have lost jobs.

2. Invest in safe, secure and affordable housing

Invest in low-income housing and provide protection for vulnerable young people in the social and private rental markets. This should include

- Addressing social housing shortages and a flawed model that discriminates against young people
- Protecting young people from eviction from rental properties during and beyond the immediate COVID-19-related economic crisis
- Extending housing support for young people in out-of-home care to the age of 21 or until they have secure and affordable housing.

3. Implement a national strategy for youth-specific job creation

Develop and implement a Youth Employment Strategy that provides meaningful and secure work for all young people. This should include

- Committing to a youth jobs guarantee with industry, government and community to ensure that all young people have access to meaningful and secure work
- Reviewing and improving current employment services with a focus on outcomes related to sustained employment rather than job placement
- Creating targeted strategies and wraparound supports for young people who face additional barriers to employment
- Providing localised pro-youth economic stimulus to regions and industries most impacted by the pandemic, especially in the university, arts, hospitality, tourism, community and childcare sectors.

4. Close the existing equity gap in education

Invest in addressing inequity in access and opportunity in education for young people. This should include

- Immediate funding for tutoring, and literacy and numeracy programs in order to close the COVID-19 education gap
- Increasing funding to tertiary and vocational education to support quality of education, access, and study and wellbeing supports
- Reversing proposed higher education reforms to restructure university course fees and HECS-HELP coverage, which jeopardise educational access and quality.

5. Support service continuity and funding for youth services

Invest in a skilled and broad-based youth sector to help young people navigate the recovery. This should include

- Funding generalist youth workers and specialist youth workers so that all young people have the necessary support in their local area to lead meaningful lives
- Increasing investment in proven prevention and early intervention youth services
- Developing the youth sector workforce by funding scholarship and incentive programs to attract, train and support youth workers from diverse communities and backgrounds.

6. Prioritise youth voice and participation in government processes

Establish national youth voice and participation mechanisms to support the development of effective and relevant advice to decision-makers. This should include

- Reinstating funding for the national peak body Australian Youth Affairs Coalition, supporting the networks of evidence-based policy advice across all States and Territories to government
- Ensuring the coordination of youth policy across Government recognising the impact on young people of decision making across portfolios
- Supporting the direct voices of young people into decision making structures including Parliament.

7. Ensure equitable access to affordable, reliable and safe communications

Invest in fair and equitable access to online education, telehealth and government services. This should include

- Ensuring online access for all young people including rural and regional young people and young people from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds.

8. Address systemic barriers for young people in the tax and transfer system

Invest in an independent review of the tax and transfer system to examine the impact of current tax and superannuation settings on young people's economic prosperity. This should include

- Review of the impact of the tax free threshold of superannuation and early release superannuation policy on young people
- Review of the impact of age based tax offsets on young people
- Review of the impact of property tax settings on young people.