



yourtown
POWERING **kids**helpline

Measuring what matters — second consultation process

A submission to: Australian Government,
The Treasury

May 2023

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yourtown is a trusted provider of services for young people, with a focus on mental health and wellbeing, long-term unemployment, prevention of youth suicide, child protection, as well as support for those experiencing domestic and family violence. **yourtown** has evolved to helping hundreds of thousands of young people each year by powering a range of service offerings that support them through difficult challenges.

Our services

- Employment, education, and social enterprise programs to help long term unemployed young people re-engage with education and/or employment
- Kids Helpline, providing professional counselling and support to 5–25-year-olds across Australia since 1991
- Kids Helpline @ School and Kids Helpline @ High School, which deliver early intervention and prevention programs through primary and secondary schools
- My Circle, a confidential, private, online peer support network for 13–25-year-olds to share information and build coping skills
- Mental health service/s for children aged 0–11 years old and their families, with moderate mental health needs
- Domestic and family violence refuge, accommodation, and therapeutic supports for women and their children, including post-refuge support
- Accommodation and therapeutic supports for young parents and their children at high risk
- Parentline, a telephone and online counselling and support service for parents and carers in the Northern Territory and Queensland
- Expressive Therapy interventions for young children and infants who have experienced trauma and abuse, or been exposed to violence, and
- Young Parents Program providing parenting support to help with child development, life skills and health and wellbeing activities in safe, supportive environments.

Kids Helpline

yourtown's Kids Helpline is Australia's only free and confidential 24/7 phone and online counselling service for any young person aged 5 to 25. It offers children and young people a range of care options that are right for their needs and circumstances.

Our commitment to being there anytime, and for any reason, has meant that we have responded to more than 8.7 million contacts from children and young people nationally in the 32 years since our service was first established, whilst also providing tens of millions of self-help interactions via our website and social channels. In 2022, our Kids Helpline counsellors responded to nearly 145,000 contacts from children and young people across Australia, including 5,026 crisis responses for children and young people at imminent risk of harm.

Parentline

Parentline offers free confidential phone and webchat counselling and support for parents and carers of children in Queensland and the Northern Territory. Parentline offers a safety-net for families by providing support when it's most needed. This includes after hours, weekends, where families may feel isolated and where local services are unavailable.

In 2022, our Parentline counsellors provided 8,729 responses to parents and carers in Queensland and the Northern Territory.

yourtown welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Australian Government Treasury's second consultation to support development of a new standalone Measuring What Matters Statement. We strongly support Treasury's engagement with a broad range of Australians, and the intent to hear directly from children and young people regarding what 'wellbeing' means to them.

yourtown recognises that children and young people are experts in their own lives. In developing this submission, we worked directly with a group of young people aged 18 to 26, to hear their thoughts and ideas on what wellbeing means to them, and what should be included in the Wellbeing Statement. The following sets out their responses to the discussion questions, showcasing quotes that best represented the overall feedback provided during the consultation process.

What are the top five issues most important for your wellbeing?

Young people told us that the top five issues most important for their wellbeing were:

1. Affordable and accessible healthcare – including both physical and mental health:
"The impossibly long wait lists for services making them inaccessible in a productive timeframe."
 LT., 18 - 26
2. Cost of living – affordable, essential necessities in particular, groceries and housing:
"Basic necessities and services, such as food and rent, are taking up more and more of my income, leaving me little left over to save and plan for the future."
 ZK., aged 18 - 26
3. Infrastructure – including access to nature, reliable public transport, and accessible spaces:
"Walkable spaces, safe bike tracks, public transport to reserves/national parks for hiking."
 LT., aged 18 - 26
4. Financial and job security:
"I should not have to choose between having a secure job or having a psychologically safe job however this is the reality for a lot of young people."
 ZK., aged 18 - 26
5. Support networks – including friends, family, and community support:
"Building and maintaining healthy relationships and having a sense of belonging."
 CR., aged 18 - 26

What are the top five issues most important for your community's wellbeing?

Young people told us that the top five issues most important for their community's wellbeing were:

1. Cost of living - affordable essential necessities in particular, groceries and housing which are secure and equitable:
"The cost-of-living crisis has hit the most vulnerable in our society the most.... It is difficult to understand how we are meant to make ends meet if the stuff we need to buy is getting increasingly expensive yet our wages are remaining the same."
 ZK., aged 18 - 26
2. Community infrastructure – having community spaces that are safe, welcoming, allow for person-person interaction, and consider the needs of different groups:
"It feels there are very few public spaces that young female or gender-diverse individuals feel fully safe in without fear of being approached, harassed, antagonised or worse."
 ZK., aged 18 - 26

3. Accessible and affordable healthcare – including both physical and mental health:
"I believe these are significant factors which impact the wellbeing of a community, also identified as social determinants of health."
 CR., aged 18 - 26
4. Community education and decision making – education and knowledge sharing on issues that affect and benefit the community. The ability for groups to have their voices heard:
"It sometimes feels like young people are screaming into the void with how little action is being taken on issues important to them."
 ZK., aged 18 - 26
5. Community engagement – opportunities for engagement and giving back:
"Young people not recognising the physical & mental benefits of outdoor physical activity."
 LT., aged 18 – 26

Throughout the consultation with young people, there was an observable overlap between what they considered was important for their own personal wellbeing, and their communities wellbeing. In particular, the impact of cost of living, non-affordable/non-accessible health care, and financial security were key issues for individuals, and their communities.

How do your priorities, and those of your community, align with the policy themes described above?

Young people told us that the policy themes articulated in the consultation paper aligned with their priorities and those of their community. However, they also indicated they related to, and viewed each of these themes from their own lens and whether they were personally of importance to them. They stated:

Inclusive¹:

"I think it's important that those of all abilities are included and encouraged to participate in the community. It's also important that we have a society that not only supports but also values diversity."
 JY., aged 18 - 26

"Cost of living relief would provide people with the energy and space to more fully engage[d] with education and training. How can you effectively learn when you are hungry and homeless?"
 FB., aged 18 – 26

Sustainable²:

"The existential reread myself and my peers experience about our planets future is real and definitely impacts our mental health. All of the points in this section align with the need for climate action gen z-res like myself are pushing for."
 FB., aged 18 – 26

Cohesive³:

"Accessible systems and spaces will mean more people can safely participate. In-person interactions in dedicated groups/spaces will create meaningful connections."
 LT., aged 18 – 26

¹ Inclusive - A society that shares opportunities and enables people to fully participate.

² Sustainable - A natural environment that is valued and sustainably managed in the face of a challenging climate for current and future generations.

³ Cohesive - A safe and cohesive society that celebrates culture and encourages participation.

Healthy⁴:

"Medicare has far too many gaps, there are not enough registered professionals in many healthcare fields this is having a massive impact on the health outcomes and trajectory of many young peoples lives."

FB., aged 18 -26

While the consultation paper notes that the proposed Statement will be relatively high-level, and as meaningful to as many people as possible, questions were also raised by the young people during the consultation regarding the ability to truly give effect to the policy themes.

"I would say the policy themes are important to myself and many others most likely in being able to achieve wellness and living a fulfilling life. I also believe that these things heavily depend on power, structure and agency. My question would be, how do we incorporate these policy themes into lives when there are serious imbalances between things such as power, structure and agency."

CR., aged 18 – 26

Which of the above policy themes are most important to you? Which are less important?

Overall, young people told us it was hard to choose themes that were 'most important' to them. They highlighted the indivisible nature of each of the policy themes and their interdependence:

"All the policy themes identify as important to me and I don't think I could pinpoint specific ones as more important vs less important, since these all play a crucial role to the wellbeing of individuals. For example, you can have a society where people feel well and are in good physical and mental health now and into the future, but you cannot maintain that without a society that shares opportunities and enables people to fully participate."

CR., aged 18 - 26

When choosing themes that resonated as 'most important' there were varied responses:

"The people-centred/smaller-scale themes seem the most urgent to me: start with inclusive, healthy & sustainable values and the rest will come from that."

LT., aged 18 - 26

"Cohesiveness, Sustainability and Healthiness are the most important policy themes to me. I think prosperity and inclusiveness are important too, but I feel like they overlap or flow on from the other themes."

ZK., aged 18 - 26

"Inclusive & Prosperous are the most important but they all have a place. I wouldn't say any are less important but the fundamentals to me have to be prosperous in order to feed in the others. Maybe it's just personal opinion, but unless an individual feels prosperous and thriving they are in a state of survival and the other themes are not really helping in my opinion."

KT., aged 18 - 26

"The policy surrounding health is definitely one of the most important things for myself as a disabled lgbtqia+ person. Access to supportive and affordable healthcare is extremely important not only for people in a similar circumstance to me but also to every person."

JY., aged 18 - 26

⁴ Healthy – A society in which people feel well and are in good physical and mental health now and into the future.

Is there something that you think you or your community might care about in the future that you are less concerned about right now?

Issues raised that might be of greater concern to the community in the future are set out below. Health and mental health were a reoccurring concern:

"I anticipate teenagers caring a lot more about health issues such as vaping, overly processed foods, and social media mental health issues in ten or fifteen years."

LT., aged 18 - 26

"In the future, the community may care about more about the long-term impact of mental health issues on children and adolescents. The emphasis may change from raising awareness about mental health to providing young people with ongoing resources and assistance so they can maintain their mental health."

MC., aged 18 - 26

"Technology and ethical development of technology. As we have seen recently, there have been concerns around AI and how it is developing. Whilst this is not on most people's radar, I think as technology develops, we will increasingly have to contend with ethical questions around it. For example, how far is too far when using AI? How do we balance privacy with increasing surveillance? How do we balance endeavours like crime prevention with the inherent issues and current limitations (e.g., recognition of POC) of facial recognition?"

ZK., aged 18 - 26

"How to navigate the future in a changing environment".

KT., aged 18 - 26

"I think a lot of people undermine the impact of mental and physical health on overall well-being and involvement with the community. I think it will become a much larger focus in the future as more people realise the full impact it can have on people."

"A second issue would be that of climate change, I believe as it starts impacting the world more, people will become more concerned about it, but by the time we reach this stage it may already be too late."

JY., aged 18 - 26

When it comes to your wellbeing, what do you care about that isn't captured above?

The general feedback provided during the consultation highlighted that the diverse experience and wellbeing needs of all of the young people represented could not be captured through categorising or lumping all the participants into a homogenous group; namely 'young people'. Each young person had a viewpoint nuanced by their personal experience, culture, values, and needs. Therefore, while there were common themes, they wanted their individuality, particular issues and diversity recognised:

"Trans rights. Many trans people are discriminated against in the workplace."

BF., aged 18 - 26

"... having access to inclusive and diverse support services that cater to their specific needs. This might involve, among other things, cultural awareness, LGBTQ+ inclusiveness, and assistance for kids with impairments."

MC., aged 18 - 26

"Better access to good and affordable healthcare, as well as more acceptance, understanding and movement towards more rights for LGBTQIA+ and BIPOC⁵ people."

JY., aged 18 - 26

⁵ BIPOC stands for Black, Indigenous, People of Colour.

"Access to additional support networks that are interlinked together, a very big drive into mental health support."

KT., aged 18 - 26

"The burden that many young people feel trying to feel like they have to fix a world that doesn't seem to take them seriously or care about them. I feel as a young person, I am constantly undermined or underestimated purely on the basis of my age yet have limited opportunities to try and shape the world we are inheriting."

ZK., aged 18 - 26

"More emphasis on the climate crisis - 'sustainability' won't be enough - what we really need is massive legislative change. Clear recognition of the financial stress many young people are currently under and how this stress is impacting every other facet of wellbeing."

LT., aged 18 - 26

What do you think members of your community would like to see represented in the above list that aren't currently captured? What would you replace in the list above to include it?

The young people indicated they would not replace any of the policy themes but recommended expanding them to reflect the diverse needs and experiences of young people:

"... community members who feel taken care of, supported, protected and listened to will naturally have more motivation to be productive and more confidence to be innovative - organically enhancing the economy."

LT., aged 18 - 26

"To include targeted support for bullying or cyberbullying, one option could be to replace an existing item on the list with "Promoting Bullying Prevention and Safe Online Environments."

MC., aged 18 - 26

"Appropriate interventions for people with mental health and substance use issues that doesn't involve imprisonment. Restructuring the justice system, culturally appropriate interventions and supports for all citizens. More appropriate and available supports for people escaping abuse of any kind (DV, FV, religious groups). More support for refugees and migrants."

ZK., aged 18 - 26

"representation of targeted support for children and adolescents experiencing bullying or cyberbullying. This could involve strategies for prevention, intervention, and fostering safe and respectful online environments."

MC., aged 18 - 26

"Specific focus on more diverse communities. Whilst inclusivity clearly includes the advancement of equality for everyone, including diverse communities, I believe it is important to acknowledge and address the specific goals for individual diverse communities (e.g.: disabled/neurodivergent people's experience of and pathways to wellbeing are very different to abled bodied/neurotypical people), similar to the focus on Closing the Gap for First Nations people. I do acknowledge though that is not feasible to capture the goals of all diverse groups"

ZK., aged 18 - 26

Is there any additional information you would like to see in the Measuring What Matters Statement? Did they leave anything out? Will it provide adequate guidance to decision-makers?

Young people provided a range of responses to these questions. Their feedback reiterated the importance of the sub-groups they belonged to and represented. However, they also indicated understanding and expressing wellbeing requires a thorough understanding of the nuances and impact faced by sub-groups and sub-cultures of young people, they said:

"How do you realistically incorporate these themes into society when considering the extent to which social issues present as a barrier."

CR., aged 18 – 26

"Acknowledgement of the transformation currently happening for the neurodivergent community! Many Australians are finally learning the words to describe themselves and their experiences and need the broader community and legislative support to back them up in situations such as negotiating accommodations at work/uni, accessing faster and more affordable formal diagnosis, and navigating support services."

LT., aged 18 - 26

"Information focused on young people and their well-being. Often times young people as a distinct group are left out of these sorts of policies."

ZK., aged 18 - 26

"Just a big drive on supporting parents and family, so many families feel alone and unsupported. Lost and don't actually know what support they need."

KT., aged 18 - 26

"Value in the mental and emotional development and respect of children and youth. I feel as though children and youth are presented with less opportunity and less equality due to being young, the voices of youth should be celebrated not undermined due to age."

JY., aged 18 - 26

"I think a guideline to follow will help a great deal in improving the involvement and wellbeing of Australians, especially if it's able to benefit those with less opportunity and those of minority status who often struggle most to be involved in the community and have their voices heard."

JY., aged 18 - 26

"... data on the reach and accessibility of Kids Helpline services, including information about remote or underserved areas. This would help assess the impact and effectiveness of the helpline in reaching all children and adolescents in need."

MC., aged 18 – 26

Do these themes cover the key principles we want considered when policies are developed?

Young people were resoundingly supportive that the themes presented covered the key principles that should be considered when developing policies:

"need for proactive education and awareness programs to promote mental health literacy among children, adolescents, and their families. These programs can help reduce stigma, increase early intervention, and improve overall mental health outcomes."

MC., aged 18 - 26

"Should be more specific/explicit emphasis on listening to First Nations Peoples, and on taking the climate crisis incredibly seriously."

LT., aged 18 – 26

One young person however reiterated the need for decision makers to be cognisant of the impact of policy decision made on all groups of Australians and the need to move away from decisions which can benefit some, but not all.

Concluding remarks

Where young people are impacted by a policy change, they want the right to be heard and listened to, and directly shape the measures intended to support them. By working in consultation with young people, as well as the Office for Youth, the first Wellbeing Statement and resulting framework should capture what wellbeing means to young people and how they believe it should be measured. This is in keeping with the Government's commitment to: "...provide young Australians with strong and formalised engagement in government and policy making" recognising that "young people need and deserve a say on the issues that impact them".⁶

While this consultation process has allowed for community organisations including **yourtown** to consult with and develop a better understanding of what wellbeing means to young people. **yourtown** recommends that young people have direct involvement in developing wellbeing statements, and frameworks. This means giving young people a meaningful voice and facilitating direct participation in building and co-producing solutions with government around all wellbeing measures and proposals.

yourtown strongly advocates for the Treasury to engage more widely. There needs to be concerted effort to engage young people (including those with disability) outside of the urban region/s so the Wellbeing Framework reflects the full diversity of views on wellbeing. The measure of inclusiveness of the Measuring What Matters Statement is dependent upon the level of deliberate engagement with a diverse range of young people.

yourtown, has established mechanisms to directly engage with, and work with young people on a regular basis. For example, **yourtown**'s Youth Advisory Groups and the Kids Helpline website provide us with opportunities to conduct broad national surveys. If more time was provided for consultation **yourtown** we would be happy to conduct a larger survey and collate the results on behalf of Treasury.

Recommendation 1:

That Treasury work with yourtown to conduct a national survey, through our Kids Helpline website to better understand what wellbeing means to young people, especially those in rural and remote locations.

We welcome the opportunity to explore these ideas with you in further detail. Should you require further information about any issues raised in the submission, please do not hesitate to contact Dr Marion Byrne, Head of Strategic Partnerships and Advocacy at **yourtown** via email at mbyrne@yourtown.com.au.

⁶ See Labor's new youth engagement model (2021). Accessible at: <https://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/search/display/display.w3p;query=Id%3A%22library%2Fparty%2F8047454%22;src1=sm1>