



We believe in the power of
inspired young people

Pre-Budget Submissions

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YMCA Australia Pre-Budget Submission

2020-21 Federal Budget

24th August 2020

1.0 Introduction

YMCA Australia (the Y) welcomes the opportunity to provide our input to the Pre-Budget Submission process for the 2020-21 Federal Budget.

In Australia the Y employs approximately 12,000 staff (including 7,000 young people under the age of 30), is supported by 1,400 volunteers and is active across 600 sites in every state and territory¹. Although severely disrupted during the last quarter due to COVID-19 the Federal Government's support packages such as JobKeeper and the Early Childhood Education and Care package has allowed us to retain connection and often employment with our young people. The Y believes in the power of inspired young people and while our programs, services and initiatives support individuals and communities across the lifespan, we are united by our positive impact on young people.

We acknowledge the significant challenges facing our nation as we collectively navigate the economic, social and health implications of the COVID-19 pandemic.

There can be no doubt that young people are among the most significantly impacted with upheavals in their education, training and employment pathways and disruption to social connections at a time when they are establishing life-long foundations for successful economic, social and civic participation. The Y is extremely concerned about the toll these issues will have on the confidence and optimism of young people which can have a devastating effect on their mental wellbeing.

Unfortunately, many of the issues experienced by young people as a result of COVID-19 are not new. Disengagement from education, insecure employment or underemployment, unstable housing or homelessness and mental health issues are among the key concerns that have faced many young people in Australia for some time. We know the post COVID-19 environment will exacerbate these issues further.

¹ Indicative of figures prior to the onset of COVID-19 in Australia.



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While we understand the systemic inequality and exclusion faced by many young people, we also recognise the strength, resilience, creativity and innovation inherent in young people during this time.

Importantly, we also recognise the critical role that young people will play in our economic and social recovery and the Y strongly believes that young people must be at the centre of how we re-imagine our future as a nation, for the benefit of all Australians.

This submission is focused on Federal Budget considerations that will not only support young people experiencing the immediate and direct impacts of COVID-19, but also the investment required to ensure young people are leading and informing our economic and social recovery into the future.

Young people of today will be the 30 and 40 somethings of tomorrow – so unless we collectively make the investment in young people now, our future tax base, our future workforce, and our future leadership will be eroded. Our economic recovery depends on it.

2.0 Summary of Recommendations:

In developing the 2020-2021 Federal Budget, the Y urges the Federal Government to prioritise:

Employment and economic participation

- the restructure of policy and service systems to focus on prevention and early intervention, mitigating the risk of disengagement from the labour market;
- long-term investment in demand driven strategies such as job creation through infrastructure projects, the development of the carers economy² and industry partnerships with a particular attention to growth and future-focused sectors; and
- collaboration and co-design with young people to develop innovative new approaches.

Mental health

- a continued investment in mental health for all Australians, with a particular focus on young people's mental health;
- mechanisms to ensure that young people are consulted and engaged in service planning to ensure service delivery is tailored to their specific needs and preferences; and
- a renewed commitment and investment in prevention and early intervention to ensure hard to reach and particularly vulnerable young people are supported to seek help before the onset of crisis.

Safety

- investment in e-safety to ensure schools, services and parents/carers are trained and supported to ensure children and young people are engaging in positive online behaviours and have clear mechanisms to report their concerns;
- an ongoing commitment to the National Children's Commissioner position and the Protecting Australia's Children framework; and
- commitment to additional investment in the prevention of family violence and the ability of children and young people to seek help and support and report their concerns in a safe and protected way.

Supporting youth voice into Government

- a commitment to long-term investment in youth advocacy via youth peaks and other organisations supporting and representing young people;
- a commitment to establishing a stand-alone Youth Ministerial portfolio; and
- a commitment to funding young people themselves to provide policy advice and representation to government portfolios through established and supported advisory structures.

² Carers economy: Job opportunities that will not be disrupted by AI. Jobs where empathy and care interpersonal skills are required to undertake the work. Jobs such as childcare, disability, community services, aged and youth work. Ref: Andrew Charlton – Director AlphaBeta

3.0 Employment and economic participation

The immediate impacts of COVID-19 on the labour market have resulted in deep fissures in the already unstable and uncertain employment landscape for young people. A pre-COVID state for many young people was already characterised by employment in highly casualised sectors such as hospitality, tourism and the arts; an escalation of the occurrence of wage theft; the precarious and unregulated nature of the gig economy; the depletion of entry level jobs; and the inadequate level of jobseeker and youth allowance payments. COVID-19 has significantly exacerbated the systemic inequity and exclusion faced by many young people with damaging flow-on effects such as mental ill-health and homelessness.

Young people already marginalised in the employment market such as those in regional, rural and remote communities, young LGBTQIA+ people, those living with disability, culturally and linguistically diverse young people and young Indigenous Australians are facing even greater challenges as we collectively navigate the impacts of COVID-19 on our economy and society.

We acknowledge the positive impact of the implementation of the JobKeeper program and also the expansion of JobSeeker payments during this critical period. We also note however, that access to this support is limited for many young people who have not met the eligibility requirements. While various economic stimulus measures such as the JobKeeper program are having a positive effect in the short-term, Australia requires a commitment to longer term solutions and a reframing of our economy and social support sector to ensure young people are equipped for the future.

Ensuring young people are a priority of Australia's economic recovery will require complex and nuanced solutions and we now have a unique opportunity to make a commitment to systemic and long-term investment in our young people. We recognise that young people are the experts in their own lives, bringing an innovative mindset, a willingness to adapt to change and a strong sense of creativity. It is critical therefore, that young people are part of designing the solutions and we must ensure their voices are heard at this time.

Solutions that seek to address underemployment and unemployment of young people must be focused on prevention and early intervention with a restructuring of the existing service system to ensure that young people don't fall through the cracks in the labour market. Once disengagement from the labour market has occurred for a young person, it is a far greater challenge for this to be reversed.

Moving towards a COVID-normal world, we now have an opportunity and a clear imperative to build a new way for young people to secure gainful, meaningful employment.

Young people are more likely to transition to full time employment when they are provided the opportunity to gain workplace experience, to develop enterprise and entrepreneurial skills, have access to jobs in growth and future focused sectors and be supported to build resilience and an optimistic mindset. Young people who are provided with an opportunity to build their career portfolio with a suite of transferable credentials and skills will be well positioned to navigate a complex and rapidly changing employment market in a COVID-normal world.

In developing the 2020-2021 Federal Budget, the Y urges the Federal Government to prioritise:

- **the restructure of policy and service systems to focus on prevention and early intervention, mitigating the risk of disengagement from the labour market;**
- **long-term investment in demand driven strategies such as job creation through infrastructure projects, the development of the carers economy and industry partnerships with a particular attention to growth and future-focused sectors; and**
- **collaboration and co-design with young people to develop innovative new approaches.**

4.0 Mental health

Already a significant issue for Australia's young people, mental health concerns have sharply escalated and are becoming more prevalent than ever before. Disruption to schooling, missing social connection with friends, cancellation of sporting and cultural activities, loss of employment and worrying about the health of family members are just some of the many concerns resulting in young people feeling anxious, sad and lonely during this time. This also follows the devastation of our recent bushfire season and the impact this has on young people's mental health and resilience.

For young people who may have already been experiencing significant psychological distress, seeking treatment for anxiety, depression and/or eating disorders, the onset of COVID-19 has also meant a severe interruption in access to counselling and other support services. While the rapid adoption of tele-health and online counselling services is seeking to provide continued support to young people at this time, concerns remain about the efficacy of online support in the long-term and also the impacts on help-seeking behaviours for young people. Organisations focused on youth mental health such as headspace, Reachout, Orygen, Beyond Blue and Kids Helpline have all reported a significant increase in demand over the past 6 months and are anticipating this will continue as the long-term impacts of COVID-19 emerge.

The commitment and investment made by the Australian Government to date, including the release of the National Pandemic Mental Health Response Plan is strongly welcomed.

In developing the 2020-2021 Federal Budget, the Y urges the Federal Government to prioritise:

- **a continued investment in mental health for all Australians, with a particular focus on young people's mental health;**
- **mechanisms to ensure that young people are consulted and engaged in service planning to ensure service delivery is tailored to their specific needs and preferences; and**
- **a renewed commitment and investment in prevention and early intervention to ensure hard to reach and particularly vulnerable young people are supported to seek help before the onset of crisis.**

5.0 Safety

Issues of online safety have been a concern facing children and young people for many years with cyberbullying, image-based abuse, abuse and hate speech based on race, gender, sexuality and religion. The requirement for online learning due to COVID-19 restrictions, social isolation and disconnection from sporting and cultural activities has significantly increased the risk for an escalation of harmful online behaviours and also increased the risk of exposure to perpetrators seeking to engage with children and young people online.

In addition to online safety, stay at home requirements and other restrictions have increased the exposure of children and young people to the risk of family violence where access to services and support may be limited.

In developing the 2020-2021 Federal Budget, the Y urges the Federal Government to prioritise:

- **investment in e-safety to ensure schools, services and parents/carers are trained and supported to ensure children and young people are engaging in positive online behaviours and have clear mechanisms to report their concerns;**
- **an ongoing commitment to the National Children's Commissioner position and the Protecting Australia's Children framework; and**
- **commitment to additional investment in the prevention of family violence and the ability of children and young people to seek help and support and report their concerns in a safe and protected way.**

6.0 Supporting youth voice into Government

Young people in Australia today are as diverse as any cohort in the population and the experiences and needs of young people are as complex and diverse as young people themselves. Young people aged 12 to 25 years comprise approximately 18% of our total population and of our Indigenous population, more than 50% are under the age of 25. With migration and cultural diversity a defining characteristic of the social fabric in Australia, approximately 13% of young people in Australia under the age of 25 years were born overseas. Approximately 9% of young people aged 12 to 25 are living with disability.

A search of the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission (ACNC) register shows more than 11,000 organisations supporting young people aged 12 to 25 years. These organisations will be operating across a diverse and broad range of portfolio areas from health, education, employment, housing, sporting, the arts, Indigenous organisations, cultural organisations, the environment, disability, LGBTQIA+, social enterprise, human rights, justice and advocacy.

Similarly, the diverse and complex issues facing young people require an integrated response from the majority of government portfolios such as Health; Education, Skills and Employment; Social Services; Home Affairs; Foreign Affairs and Trade; Finance; Treasury; Defence; Agriculture, Water and the Environment; Industry, Science, Energy and Resources; and Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Communications.

Developing an integrated and whole of government response to the issues facing young people is a challenge, but one that can be met with intentional and well-resourced mechanisms to ensure the voice of young people and the diverse organisations that support them are heard and inform policy.

As the experts in their own lives, the voice of young people is critical in informing our collective response to the current COVID-19 crisis and beyond.

The Y welcomes the recent announcement of \$1million in funding to support youth advocacy until the end of FY 21, however the need for long-term investment in ensuring clear mechanisms for youth voice into Government remains.

In developing the 2020-2021 Federal Budget, the Y urges the Federal Government to prioritise:

- **a commitment to long-term investment in youth advocacy via youth peaks and other organisations supporting and representing young people;**
- **a commitment to establishing a stand-alone Youth Ministerial portfolio; and**
- **a commitment to funding young people themselves to provide policy advice and representation to government portfolios through established and supported advisory structures.**