

YACVic's response to the Department of Education and Early
Childhood Development discussion paper 'Towards a health and
wellbeing service framework'

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About the Youth Affairs Council of Victoria

The Youth Affairs Council of Victoria (YACVic) is the peak body representing the youth sector in Victoria. YACVic provides a means through which the youth sector and young people voice their opinions and concerns in regards to policy issues affecting them. YACVic works with and makes representations to government and serves as an advocate for the interests of young people, workers with young people and organisations that provide direct services to young people. YACVic also promotes and supports the participation of young people in debate and policy development areas that most affect them. YACVic's resources are primarily directed towards policy analysis and development, research and consultation and to meeting the information, networking, education and training needs of our constituency.

Some key considerations

The development of a new health and wellbeing framework for 0-18 year olds by the DEECD provides an important opportunity to strengthen and consolidate the capacity of student wellbeing services delivered through the Department. It also offers an important opportunity to improve the cross-sectoral approaches to supporting children, young people and their families. We believe stronger cross-sectoral responses can be achieved through partnerships and collaboration between student wellbeing services within the Department and broader child, youth and family services. YACVic welcomes the opportunity to submit a response to the Health and Wellbeing discussion paper. YACVic would also welcome future opportunities to input into the development of service and program responses to support the wellbeing of children and young people, particularly in the area of building stronger partnerships between departmental health and wellbeing services and broader youth services.

The value of a cross sectoral approach to supporting children and young people's wellbeing in both policy and practice

YACVic acknowledges that a key objective of the proposed framework for health and wellbeing is to ensure that 'departmental health and wellbeing services can work in a

coordinated way'¹ to improve health and wellbeing outcomes for children and young people. The framework relates to the provision of health and wellbeing services funded by the Department in the following areas:

- early childhood health and wellbeing services and program
- school based health and wellbeing services and programs, and
- regional or network health and wellbeing services.

It does not relate to other initiatives funded by the Department which are not currently characterised as services, such as the School Focussed Youth Service and Best Start. Nor does it relate to youth support services funded through other Government Departments and operating outside of school settings.

YACVic also acknowledges that the Victorian Auditor General's February 2010 Report '*The Effectiveness of Student Wellbeing Programs and Services*,' recommended the development of a new overarching policy on student wellbeing. The report noted that:

DEECD's 1998 Framework for Student Support Services...does not constitute a comprehensive and up-to-date, overarching framework that links DEECD's current student wellbeing objectives with the goals and objectives of related programs and service, and the expected outcomes for student wellbeing. Moreover, there is no single document that integrates all of DEECD's student wellbeing programs and services and shows how, for example, school nurses, student welfare coordinators and student support service officers align with other wellbeing staff in schools.²

YACVic sees the process of developing a new framework for a health and wellbeing service framework as an important opportunity to strengthen and consolidate student wellbeing programs and services. It is also an important opportunity to ensure that DEECD student wellbeing services and programs can be clearly placed within the collaborative, cross-sectoral and inter-departmental approach reflected in the *Vulnerable Youth*

¹ Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, 2010. *Towards a health and wellbeing service framework*. p. 4.

²²² Victorian Auditor-General's Report, February 2010. *The Effectiveness of Student Wellbeing Programs and Services*. p. viii

Framework (VYF) Discussion Paper, of which the Hon. Bronwyn Pike MP, Minister for Education was a signatory; along with the Hon. Lisa Neville Minister for Community Services, Maxine Morand MP, Minister for Children and Early Childhood Development and the Hon. James Merlino MO, Minister for Sport, Recreation and Youth Affairs.

The approach taken in the *VYF Discussion Paper* recognises that improving outcomes for vulnerable children and young people is a cross-sectoral objective. It is best achieved when schools, children's and youth services and other community health and wellbeing services work collaboratively to provide holistic support to children, young people and their families. It is critical then, that frameworks for service delivery are clearly aligned and fundamentally compatible, across the education, youth and broader community health sectors.

The *Towards a health and wellbeing service framework* discussion paper places some focus on the need for DEECD's student wellbeing service's to work collaboratively with communities and other support services. For example, in the discussion relating to the proposed shared principle 'Partnerships with communities', the paper recognises that:

Improved outcomes for children and young people are the collective responsibility of families, the community and government, requiring shared action and accountability.³

The framework falls short however of clearly listing the specific role of youth, family and community services in sharing this collective responsibility.

The role of 'external services' is acknowledged in the discussion paper in relation to the 'Universal access' principle proposed. Here, the discussion paper acknowledges that:

It is important that there are no 'wrong doors' and that children, young people and families can be put in contact with the services they need, regardless of which service they first approach. However, some services are tailored for and target particular groups and therefore have specific criteria for access. This means that health and wellbeing services need to be well-informed about the range of services available and establish clear referral

³ DEECD, 2010. *op.cit.* p.10

pathways both within the Department and with other external services.⁴

The framework needs however to be more specific in identifying, even broadly, these 'external services'. Without clearly linking the relationships between student wellbeing services and the broader children, youth and family services sector, it is hard to understand how his policy framework will support stronger partnership and referral between student wellbeing services and the broader service system.

It is YACVic's recommendation that in order for this framework to be up-to-date and comprehensive, it needs to clearly place student wellbeing services within the broader community context of child, youth and family support services. This will require the framework to articulate a strong relationship between student wellbeing services and broader children, youth and family support services, at both the policy and practice levels.

How does this framework relate to the Vulnerable Youth Framework?

YACVic has strongly supported the cross-departmental approach taken in the development of the Vulnerable Youth Framework (VYF) Discussion Paper. The VYF Discussion Paper recognises an 'Opportunity for change – an integrated policy approach.'⁵ It states that:

The *Vulnerable Youth Framework* will underpin all policy development related to vulnerable young people. It is the mechanism by which efforts can be concentrated across government to create consistent responses and coordinated approaches both locally and across the state. There is already considerable investment in youth-focussed interventions. A focus of this framework is on coordinating existing effort to ensure that current activity is as effective and efficient as it can be.⁶

A large part of the 'considerable investment in youth-focussed interventions' referred to here is invested in DEECD's student wellbeing programs and services. A total of \$116.3 million was allocated to student wellbeing programs and services in the 2009-10 State

⁴ DEECD, 2010. *op.cit.* p.9.

⁵ Department of Human Services, Department of Planning and Community Development, Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, 2008. *The Vulnerable Youth Framework Discussion Paper.* p.5.

⁶ *Ibid.*

Budget. The Auditor General's report *The Effectiveness of Student Wellbeing Programs and Services* provides a summary of the amount of funding allocated to student wellbeing programs and services in that Budget. The following is a broad breakdown of those allocations:

Program	Funding 2009-10 (\$mil)
Investment in student welfare and support	92.4 total
Student Support Services Program (SSSP)	59.9
Primary Welfare Officers Initiative (PWOI)	20.3
Student Welfare Coordinators Initiative (SWCI)	12.2
Child health and support service	13.8 total
School Focussed Youth Service ⁷	7.0
Primary School Nursing Program (PSNP)	6.8
Adolescent Health Services (schools)	10.1 total
Secondary School Nursing Program (SSNP)	10.1
TOTAL	116.3

(Source: Victorian Auditor-General's Report, February 2010, *The Effectiveness of Student Wellbeing Programs and Services*. pp 3-4.)

Although a considerable amount of the State Budget spending on youth support services cited in the VYF Discussion Paper is in student wellbeing in schools, the DEECD does not clearly align the development of the health and wellbeing services framework with the approach or objectives outlined in the VYF Discussion Paper. YACVic appreciates that the Vulnerable Youth Framework is yet to be finalised, however we are concerned that there may be a 'disconnect' between the broader cross-sectoral objectives and approach of the VYF and the framework determined for student well-being services and programs.

This lack of clear connection with the VYF is of particular concern given the focus in the VYF on schools as the universal platform through which vulnerable young people can be identified early and then referred for appropriate support. The VYF Discussion Paper recognises the important role of student support services, but describes the critical importance of improving cross-sectoral collaboration between schools and specialist youth services to improve outcomes for vulnerable young people:

Schools sometimes lack either the expertise or the ability to mobilise the supports that young people may need from wider health and community services. School Focussed Youth Services Coordinators are available to support schools

⁷ Please note that whilst the Auditor General's report included the costs of the School Focussed Youth Service within its report evaluating *The Effectiveness of Student Wellbeing Programs and Services*, they are not included within the scope of the DEECD's *Towards a Health and Wellbeing Framework Discussion Paper*.

to link with these services. The Strengthening Student Support Services initiative, the extension of Primary Welfare Officer Initiative and the existing student wellbeing resources and policy support aims to improve system and school capacity. However, specialist service capacity and limited ability to coordinate this with school approaches remains a challenge.⁸

The development of a new Health and Wellbeing Framework provides a valuable opportunity to embed a strengthened collaborative approach to supporting young people, particularly vulnerable or disadvantaged young people. This will strengthen our capacity to holistically support children and young people's wellbeing and educational engagement.

YACVic recommends that the DEECD Health and Wellbeing Framework closely align with the objectives and approach outlined in the Vulnerable Youth Framework Discussion Paper.

Does the framework draw from the learnings of the Better Youth Service Pilots?

Building on the work done in developing the Vulnerable Youth Framework Discussion Paper, in 2008, the Victorian Government initiated the Better Youths Services Pilot's (BYSP's) in Frankston, Bendigo, the Yarra Ranges and Wyndham. The pilots 'aimed to improve the current arrangements for:

- the early identification of risk for vulnerable young people
- the collection of youth services data, and
- youth service planning and delivery at the local level.

Projects in each of the pilot sites were requested by the Office for Youth to address the following three questions:

1. How can vulnerable young people be identified and supported earlier and more systematically?
2. What data is needed to enable better planning of local services to improve outcomes for vulnerable young people?

⁸ Department of Human Services, Department of Planning and Community Development, Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, 2008. *op.cit.* p.22.

3. What can be done to improve existing State Government funded youth service coordination and delivery?

Whilst the findings from each of the pilots differed, commonly the pilot reports made recommendations in regards to:

- strengthening the capacity of schools to identify vulnerable young people early and to support those young people; and
- improving the collaborative work done between schools and local services, in the planning and delivery of supports for vulnerable young people.

We have made reference to some recommendations from the Wyndham and Bendigo BYSP reports later in this submission in relation to the importance of student wellbeing staff holding relevant equalisations and preferably not carrying a teaching load.

YACVic recommends that the findings of the Better Youth Services Pilots are considered and inform the development of the DEECD's health and wellbeing framework.

Other key supporting frameworks: the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities and the Code of Ethical Practice for the Victorian Youth Sector

A health and wellbeing framework for 0-18 year olds needs to make clear reference to the responsibilities that state schools and DEECD funded services have under the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities. It would also benefit by drawing from, and acknowledging the Code of Ethical Practice for the Victorian Youth Sector, as the key practice Code guiding youth work and youth services provision.

The Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities

YACVic notes that whilst the discussion paper lists a number of Government policy documents and frameworks to illustrate the policy context in which the delivery of health and wellbeing services to students operates, no reference is made to the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities. The Charter imposes 'an obligation on all public authorities to act in a way that is compatible with human rights'⁹ including public schools and services delivered in schools through the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development.

⁹ *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006*. s.1(2c). p.2.

Whilst the Charter does not contain sections specifically about the provision of education or wellbeing services, it does however oblige public schools and Departmental services to ensure that they uphold the rights of children and young people, as outlined in the Charter, including (but not limited to):

- rights to protection as is in his or her best interests and without discrimination;¹⁰
- cultural rights;¹¹ and
- rights to privacy.¹²

Further, the Charter seeks to foster and develop a culture of respect for rights in Victoria. YACVic strongly believes that children and young people's health and wellbeing is strengthened when their rights are being respected. Health and wellbeing services for children and young people need to be underpinned by a rights based approach.

YACVic recommends that the responsibilities of state schools and departmental services under the Charter be articulated in the health and wellbeing framework. Further, YACVic recommends that consideration to the human rights of children, young people and their families should be embedded throughout the principles of the health and wellbeing framework.

The Code of Ethical Practice for the Victorian Youth Sector

In 2007, the Child Safety Commissioner Bernie Geary AOM, launched the *Code of Ethical Practice – A First Step for the Victorian Youth Sector* (the Code). The Code was developed by YACVic through an extensive consultative process with members of the Victorian youth sector. It provides an agreed framework and set of values for professional, ethical and safe practice in the delivery of youth services. A copy of the Code has been provided with this submission as an appendix.

Currently, it is a voluntary Code. It is relevant to all qualified youth workers and to others working with young people without a youth work qualification. It is now a key part of curriculum in Youth Work courses taught in Victoria and is being adopted as a fundamental platform from which organisational policies, practices and programs are being developed within youth services.

¹⁰ *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006*. s.17 (2). p. 14.

¹¹ *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006*. s. 19. p.14.

¹² *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006*. s. 13. P.12.

The Code of Ethical Practice is highly relevant to both program development and on-the-ground practice within student wellbeing services. It would be a valuable resource to student wellbeing staff, as it has been to youth support services outside the education system. As the Code simply outlines the fundamental Principles and Practice Responsibilities of youth workers (or others working with young people in a youth services context) it is applicable to service delivery in a range of settings.

YACVic recommends that the DEECD Health and Wellbeing Framework refer to and acknowledge the Code of Ethical Practice as a key framework shaping youth support service delivery and as a highly relevant resource for student wellbeing services.

Some comments about clarity of terms and language:

Defining ‘Health and Wellbeing’ services and the role of the youth sector

The framework would benefit from a clearer definition of ‘health and wellbeing services’, that articulated the role of youth services within that spectrum of services. At various times through the discussion paper, reference is made to services that are not DEECD student wellbeing services, without achieving clarity about which services are being referred to. There are references to ‘stakeholders’, to ‘services provided by other departments and community organisations’ and to ‘other workforces within and outside of the Department’. Reference is also made to a ‘health and wellbeing services system’, without it being clear as to what services this encapsulates and how they are systematically delivered. YACVic is aware that currently there is no comprehensive youth services system in Victoria in spite of the fact that the term is used within policy documents.

YACVic recommends that the framework include more detailed definitions as to what type of services it is making reference to beyond student wellbeing services within DEECD. A clear articulation of the range of services that play a role in supporting children, young people and their families would assist to strengthen the framework’s focus on relationships and partnerships.

Ensuring young people don’t get overlooked

Whilst YACVic acknowledges that it is a legitimate use of the term child to refer to people aged under 18 years, it is important that the framework utilises language that is meaningful to, and respectful of, young people. By referring directly to ‘young people’ wherever

relevant the policy framework is also more likely to assist services and schools to consider the specific needs of young people as an age cohort and the necessary difference in approach to service delivery when supporting young people as opposed to children.

YACVic acknowledges that the term 'young people' is used regularly in the framework discussion paper, however, there are some areas where it does not appear and should. For example, the Principle for Service Delivery of 'Child and Family Centred Practice' should be amended to read, 'Child, Youth and Family Centred Practice.'

It is also YACVic's experience that the specific needs of young people can be overlooked or downplayed where policy frameworks incorporate service responses to both children and young people as adolescents. This has historically been experienced in the area of child protection. YACVic warns that unless policy frameworks use language that clearly and specifically names 'young people' and articulates what is specific and different about supporting them as opposed to supporting children, there is a risk that the needs of young people may not receive the attention they need.

The importance of hearing from young people directly

YACVic believes strongly that the process of developing a health and wellbeing service framework needs to involve hearing directly from children and young people themselves. The final framework developed should reflect young people's voices alongside the considerations of the department and of services.

For this reason, YACVic consulted with members of our Youth Reference Group on some issues relating to student wellbeing and have included a summary of the responses received as Appendix A of this submission.

YACVic recommends that the development of a DEECD health and wellbeing framework involve meaningful consultation with young people.

Responding to the questions in the discussion paper

The following is YACVic's feedback in response to the proposed elements of the health and wellbeing services framework and to some of the questions posed in the discussion paper.

Shared principles for service delivery

YACVic believes that it is important that student wellbeing services share common principles for service delivery. YACVic also acknowledges the value of shared language across programs and service domains. To improve health and wellbeing outcomes for children and young people, shared language across departmentally funded student wellbeing services and broader child, youth and family services would be a valuable asset.

As the discussion paper describes, the ‘shared principles for services delivery’ will be ‘incorporated into the policies, guidelines, standards and practices that inform and constitute the day-to-day work of health and wellbeing services.’¹³ YACVic observes however, that the principles suggested in the discussion paper read broadly as ‘objectives’ of the department in the delivery of student wellbeing programs, rather than principles to guide the actual day-to-day delivery of services directly to children, young people and their families. It is YACVic’s view that many of the principles are concerned with some key elements of program/service development, however are not necessarily principles that guide the delivery of effective, ethical and empowering support services within schools.

For example, YACVic considers the principles of ‘Universal access’ and ‘Child and Family Centred Practice’ as being principles for service delivery. However, an ‘Integrated approach to service delivery’ is not a principle as such. Instead it describes a valuable approach to service delivery, or a way of working.

YACVic recommends that the Department consider differentiating between ‘Principles’ and ‘Key approaches to practice’ or ‘Key Practice Responsibilities’ within the framework. ‘Principles’ for service delivery should refer to the underpinning values of the service delivery approach and should reflect a ‘rights based’ approach in line with the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities. ‘Key approaches to practice’ or ‘Key Practice Responsibility’ can describe the ‘ways of working’ that help to achieve the Principles, such as ‘integrated service delivery.’

The following is some brief comment on each of the proposed shared principles for service delivery. Where relevant, reference has been made to the Principles or Practice Responsibilities contained in the Code of Ethics so as to illustrate where they align with the draft principles contained in the discussion paper.

¹³ DEECD, 2010. *op.cit.* p.8.

Universal access

YACVic strongly agrees with the following statement in the discussion paper:

‘Accessing health and wellbeing services should be quick and easy for all children, young people and families, regardless of socio-economic status, race, faith, culture, ability or geographic location.’¹⁴

It is YACVic’s firm belief that, in order for this to be achieved it is critical that the delivery of services is underpinned by a human rights framework. YACVic suggests then that this principle would be strengthened if it made clear reference to children and young people’s rights to access services equitably and without discrimination.

Focus on outcomes

YACVic agrees that ‘services should be accountable for how they improve outcomes for children and young people’ and that an agreed set of measurable outcome should be set and tracked. However, YACVic does not believe that a ‘Focus on Outcomes’ is an appropriate ‘Principle’ for service delivery.

YACVic suggests that instead this should be referred to within the framework as a ‘Key Approach to Practice’ or a ‘Key Practice Responsibility’.

Evidence – based services

Again, YACVic agrees that health and wellbeing services ‘should be based on current and relevant evidence that identifies practices that are effective in improving outcomes for children and young people,’¹⁵ however does not consider this to be a Principle of service delivery as much as a ‘Key Approach to Practice’ or a ‘Key Practice Responsibility’.

YACVic also believes that the Department has a key role to play in providing up-to-date information, evidence and data to wellbeing services to assist in the process of designing and delivering evidence based services. YACVic notes that ‘Evidence-based services’

¹⁴ DEECD, 2010. *op.cit.* p.9.

¹⁵ DEECD, 2010. *op.cit.* p.9.

align closely with the Code of Ethical Practice *Practice Responsibility* of ‘Knowledge Skills and Self-Care.’¹⁶

Integrated approach to service delivery

Again, YACVic supports a strong focus on an integrated approach to service delivery, however does not consider this to be a Principle of service delivery as much as a ‘Key Approach to Practice’ or a ‘Key Practice Responsibility’. YACVic agrees that an ‘integrated approach to services delivery brings together services which have a common purpose and encourages partnerships between diverse services.’ It would be valuable for this section to clearly promote an integrated approach to service delivery between student wellbeing services and broader child, youth and community services. YACVic notes that an ‘Integrated approach to service delivery’ aligns closely with the Code of Ethical Practice *Practice Responsibility* of ‘Cooperation and Collaboration.’¹⁷

Child and family centred practice

YACVic believes that children, young people and their families should be at the centre of the work of student wellbeing services. The strong focus in this section of the discussion paper on the central role of families is very important. However, YACVic believes that this section needs to place a stronger focus on young people in order to reflect real value in the ‘youth specific’ approaches of some student wellbeing services and of broader youth services.

For example, as has already been suggested earlier in this submission, the title should be amended to read ‘Child, youth and family centred practice’. This recognises that the practice of working with children can be significantly different to the practice of working with young people. It also assists to ensure that young people don’t receive less focus than younger children within the framework.

The importance of youth-centred practice is perhaps even more relevant in cases where young people live independently, are experiencing homelessness or where there is a high

¹⁶ Youth Affairs Council of Victoria, 2007. Code of Ethical Practice – A First Step for the Victorian youth Sector. Available for download from <http://www.yacvic.org.au/policy/items/2009/01/256701-upload-00001.pdf> See p. 18 for a description for the ‘Knowledge, Skills and Self-Care’ Practice Responsibility.

¹⁷ Youth Affairs Council of Victoria, 2007. Code of Ethical Practice – A First Step for the Victorian youth Sector. Available for download from <http://www.yacvic.org.au/policy/items/2009/01/256701-upload-00001.pdf> See p. 18 for a description for the ‘Knowledge, Skills and Self-Care’ Practice Responsibility.

level of family dysfunction. In these cases young people are highly vulnerable and it may not be realistic or possible for student wellbeing services to work closely with families..

In describing 'child and family centred practice', the discussion paper states that:

Services should also recognise and respect the voices of children and young people many of whom are able to participate in shaping their care and education arrangements.¹⁸

This is not a strong enough statement to relay the central importance of respecting children and young people's rights to participate in decision-making that affects them about their education or the support they receive. Nor does it reflect the reality that the great majority of children and young people can participate in shaping their care and education arrangements.

YACVic recommends that a separate principle regarding children and young people's rights to participate in decision-making be developed and that this section be strengthened to read:

Services must recognise and respect the voices of children and young people and their right to participate in shaping their support and education arrangements.

YACVic notes that, 'Child and Family Centred Practice' aligns closely with the Code of Ethical Practice *Practice Responsibility* of 'Young People as the Primary Consideration.'¹⁹ YACVic recognises however, that 'Young People as the Primary Consideration' is a youth work specific practice, which may not be relevant to other professionals working in student wellbeing services such as family therapists or social workers.

Partnerships with Communities

YACVic strongly agrees with the following statement from the discussion paper:

¹⁸ DEECD, 2010. *op.cit.* p.9.

¹⁹ Youth Affairs Council of Victoria, 2007. *op.cit.* See page 11 for a description of the 'Young People as the Primary Consideration' Practice Responsibility.

Improved outcomes for children and young people are the collective responsibility of families, the community and government, requiring shared action and accountability.²⁰

YACVic believes that the importance of working in partnership with child, youth and family services to improve outcomes for children and young people should be explicitly mentioned in this section.

Commitment to workforce excellence

YACVic agrees that a skilled, knowledgeable and supported health and wellbeing workforce is essential in the delivery of effective services to children, young people and their families. A key element of this is in ensuring that *all* wellbeing staff are appropriately qualified and have appropriate resources to deliver those services. Currently, this is not always the case.

The *Wyndham Better Youth Services Pilot Final Report*, in its discussion of how to enhance the capacity of primary and secondary schools to support vulnerable young people, states that:

It is important that schools commit to student wellbeing and have appropriately skilled staff dedicated to wellbeing, without teaching responsibilities...Resources that reflect the significance and importance of a high standard of student wellbeing must be made available to be used strictly for this purpose. While all schools should have to meet a high standard benchmark, additional resources should be available to schools that are deemed to require additional support.²¹

Similarly, the Better Youth Services report from the City of Greater Bendigo made the following recommendations:

Recommendation 2: That it is preferable that welfare/wellbeing staff should not have the role combined with a teaching load to ensure that this practitioner is best placed to have a primary

²⁰ DEECD, 2010. *op.cit.*p.10.

²¹ Wyndham City Council, (2009) *Wyndham Better Youth Services Pilot*. p.16.

focus on student support and act as an effective advocate for the young person.

Recommendation 3: Schools should give strong consideration to the employment of welfare/wellbeing staff that have a professional background in the area/s of social work, psychology, counselling, welfare or youth work.

Whilst it is critical to ensure that appropriately skilled people are working in wellbeing roles, it is also important to ensure that those staff are adequately resourced and supported. The *Code of Ethical Practice* is an excellent resource to guide student wellbeing staff, which could be incorporated into induction, supervision and project/service planning processes.

The discussion paper notes that ‘workforce planning must also take into account challenges in recruiting and retaining staff in some rural and remote areas.’²² The framework would benefit from also acknowledging that access to training opportunities is also particularly difficult when services are geographically isolated. Being available to engage in training often takes significant time out of a role due to travel requirements. For part time workers this can be particularly difficult.

Finally, adequate resources and remuneration are key to workforce excellence. The Department must ensure that wellbeing staff are resourced not only to deliver excellent support services within schools, but also to participate effectively in broader service networks and to engage in partnerships with broader child, youth and family services to improve collaborative approaches to providing support. A key element of resourcing is ensuring that student wellbeing staff have access to adequate professional supervision. Through YACVic’s discussions with representatives from the Better Youth Service Pilots, we have been told that there is a lack of adequate supervision and support for student wellbeing staff.

In summary, **YACVic recommends:**

- That all student wellbeing staff have relevant qualifications for the role (for example, youth work, social work, psychology) and that student wellbeing staff do not also have a teaching load;

²² DEECD (2010). *op.cit.* p. 10.

- That the framework recognise not only the difficulties sometimes experienced in recruiting and retaining staff in rural and regional areas, but also recognise the challenges these staff can face in accessing training and professional development opportunities;
- That the framework recognise the key importance of adequate resourcing and remuneration for wellbeing staff and the importance of resourcing partnerships between departmental wellbeing services and broader children, youth and family services.
- That all student wellbeing staff have access to regular, high level, professional supervision.

Discussion Question: What should be done to improve the access to and responsiveness of services for disadvantaged children and young people?

YACVic notes that this is the only question in the discussion paper that relates specifically to ‘disadvantaged children and young people’. While YACVic firmly believes student support and wellbeing services must be available to all children and young people. We encourage and welcome a focus within the framework on children and young people experiencing disadvantage.

Through YACVic’s work with The Rainbow Network,²³ the Youth Disability Advocacy Service (YDAS)²⁴ and the Victorian Indigenous Youth Advisory Council²⁵ we understand the added obstacles and difficulties disadvantaged young people can face at school. Same sex attracted and gender questioning young people report alarming rates of bullying and violence, often in school settings²⁶. Anti-bullying and anti-homophobia programs and policies must be developed and enacted in schools to address these issues. Student wellbeing officers must receive adequate training and support to work with this cohort of young people who show higher rates of suicide and self harm²⁷.

²³ The Rainbow Network Victoria is a network for workers with same sex attracted young people. Further information can be found from their website <http://www.rainbownetwork.net.au> (accessed 27/04/10)

²⁴ The Youth Disability Advocacy Service works alongside young people with disabilities between the ages of 12 and 25 to raise awareness of their rights and to support them to achieve what they want. For further information see their website <http://www.ydas.org> (accessed 27/04/10)

²⁵ The Victorian Indigenous Youth Advisory Council is a state-wide network of volunteer Indigenous young people between 12 and 25 years who provide a voice to government and community on issues of importance to them. For further information see their website www.viyac.org.au (accessed 27/04/10)

²⁶ Social Policy Branch, DHS (et al) (2005), *Report on Progressing Health and Wellbeing for Same Sex Attracted Young People in Victoria: Government, Community and Young People Working Together*. p4.

²⁷ *Ibid*.

YDAS reports that many of their individual advocacy cases relate to students with a disability not receiving the appropriate level of support and aid they need to fully participate in school life. School exclusion is a common experience for students who present with behavioural challenges. Schools claim to lack the resources to adequately support these students. It is of concern to YACVic that no specific mention of students with disabilities is made in the discussion paper. We advocate this framework explicitly includes support for young people with disabilities.

Indigenous children and young people do not do as well as their non-Indigenous counterparts in the education system across all indicators. Rates of educational attainment and school retention rates²⁸ are of particular concern. Indigenous young people need culturally appropriate and specific services to ensure they remain engaged and supported in their educational endeavours.

In terms of improving service responses to vulnerable young people, YACVic would like to see investment in the initiatives outlined in the VYF Discussion Paper. YACVic has long been advocating for investment in a comprehensive youth services system through which young people can access timely support along a continuum of service support ranging from prevention/early intervention to secondary level (specialist) support to tertiary level support for acute crisis. Currently in Victoria there is no youth services system as such and there is 'patchy', inconsistent service delivery across the state.²⁹ This presents a significant barrier to vulnerable young people accessing services universally or in a timely manner.

YACVic recommends that the State Government invest in the initiatives outlined in the Vulnerable Youth Framework discussion paper.

²⁸<http://www.abs.gov.au/Ausstats/abs@.nsf/0/C6A56799E3D43B07CA25743900149F78?opendocument> (accessed 27/04/10)

²⁹ See YACVic & VCOSS (2006) *Who's Carrying the Can? A report into Youth Service Gaps in Victoria* for an examination of gaps in youth service provision in Victoria. Available for download from <http://www.yacvic.org.au/policy/items/2009/01/259381-upload-00001.pdf>
Also, see YACVic's response to the Vulnerable Youth Framework Discussion Paper for a detailed analysis of how the initiatives in that framework could improve outcomes for disadvantaged young people. Available for download from <http://www.yacvic.org.au/policy/items/2009/01/259368-upload-00001.pdf>

* Short description of each of the programs

<http://www.abs.gov.au/Ausstats/abs@.nsf/0/C6A56799E3D43B07CA25743900149F78?opendocument> (accessed 27/04/10)

YACVic recommends that Student wellbeing staff receive adequate training and support to work with same sex attracted and gender questioning young people.

YACVic recommends that the framework explicitly include support for young people with disabilities.

YACVic recommends that DEECD ensure that all Indigenous children, young people and their families are able to receive culturally appropriate student wellbeing services.

Discussion Question: Are there any principles that should be added or deleted?

As has been already discussed, YACVic believes that the principles for service delivery need to be realigned, with some remaining as 'Principles' and other's being categorised instead as 'Key approaches to practice' or 'Key Practice Responsibilities'.

YACVic also recommends that the following 'Principles' be included in the framework:

- Respect for children and young people's right to participate in decision-making that affects them;
- Respect for diversity and ensuring cultural competency;
- Recognition and respect for the cultural safety of Indigenous children, young people and families;
- Equitable access to support for all children, young people and their families.

YACVic recommends that the framework also include 'efficiency of service delivery' as a 'Key Approach to Practice'.

Common service delivery domains

YACVic recommends that the common service delivery domains be extended to include:

- Supporting and promoting the rights of children and young people; and
- Building on the strengths of children and young people.

Stronger relationships and partnerships

YACVic welcomes the focus in the draft framework on stronger relationships and partnerships. We believe that building stronger relationships and partnerships between DEECD health and wellbeing services and broader children, youth and family services is critical to improving responses and support. This is particularly so in cases where children, young people or families are experiencing disadvantage are vulnerable or have multiple or complex needs.

Discussion Question: What is the best way to inform early childhood educators and primary and secondary teachers about health and wellbeing services?

YACVic recommends that early childhood educators and primary and secondary teachers initially be informed about health and wellbeing services as part of their training at TaFE or University. They should also be supported by the Department to access local service networks, perhaps through information sharing in-service sessions facilitated by the Regional Offices of the Department.

Discussion Question: How can health and wellbeing services better support educators to improve children and young people's health and wellbeing?

YACVic recommends that health and wellbeing staff better support educators to improve children and young people's health and wellbeing by offering professional, secondary consult support to educators. This would involve wellbeing staff drawing on their professional skills (in social work, youth work or psychology for example) to advise educators on a case-by-case basis on appropriate ways of responding to children or young people needing support.

This secondary consult support could be offered to educators by either Departmental wellbeing staff or by staff from external children, youth or family services provided they were adequately resourced.

Discussion Question: What else needs to be done to start building stronger partnerships between departmental health and wellbeing services and the broader health and wellbeing system that supports children and young people?

YACVic recommends the following strategies to build stronger relationships between departmental health and wellbeing services and the broader health and wellbeing service system that supports children and young people:

- More effective communication needs to exist between the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development and children and youth service sector peak bodies and service networks. Ongoing dialogue needs to be established, and advice needs to be sought directly from representative service sector peaks such as YACVic, the Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare, the Centre for Multicultural Youth, the Council to Homeless Persons and the Victorian Drug and Alcohol and Drug Association, amongst others.
- A common language needs to be developed and understood between the DEECD and the broader service sectors in relation to children and young people's wellbeing.
- Formal partnerships can be established between schools and local child, youth and family services, to enable secondary consults.
- Partnership approaches need to be resourced. Educators, wellbeing staff and services need to be supported to free up staff to engage in partnership development and information sharing activities.
- Student wellbeing staff and programs need to draw from the expertise and resources of the broader child, youth and family services sectors. For example, the approach outlined in the *Code of Ethical Practice* should inform the work of student wellbeing staff. This is made difficult if student wellbeing staff also having a teaching load.

A summary of recommendations

- **It is YACVic's recommendation** that in order for this framework to be up-to-date and comprehensive, it needs to clearly place student wellbeing services within the broader community context of child, youth and family support services. This will require the framework to articulate a strong relationship between student wellbeing

services and broader children, youth and family support services, at both the policy and practice levels.

- **YACVic recommends** that the DEECD Health and Wellbeing Framework closely align with the objectives and approach outlined in the Vulnerable Youth Framework Discussion Paper.
- **YACVic recommends** that the findings of the Better Youth Service Pilots are inform the development of the DEECD's health and wellbeing framework.
- **YACVic recommends** that the responsibilities of state schools and departmental services under the Charter be articulated in the health and wellbeing framework. Further, YACVic recommends that consideration to the human rights of children, young people and their families should be embedded throughout the principles of the health and wellbeing framework.
- **YACVic recommends** that the DEECD Health and Wellbeing Framework refer to and acknowledge the Code of Ethical Practice as a key framework shaping youth support service delivery and as a highly relevant resource for student wellbeing services.
- **YACVic recommends** that the framework include more detailed definitions as to what type of services it is making reference to beyond student wellbeing services within DEECD. A clear articulation of the range of services that play a role in supporting children, young people and their families would assist to strengthen the frameworks focus on relationships and partnerships.
- **YACVic recommends** that the development of a DEECD health and wellbeing framework involve meaningful consultation with young people.
- **YACVic recommends** that the Department consider differentiating between 'Principles' and 'Key approaches to practice' or 'Key Practice Responsibilities' within the framework. 'Principles' for service delivery should refer to the underpinning values of the service delivery approach and should reflect a 'rights based' approach in line with the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities. 'Key approaches to practice' or 'Key Practice Responsibility' can describe the 'ways of working' that help to achieve the Principles, such as 'integrated service delivery.'

- **YACVic recommends** that a separate principle regarding children and young people’s rights to participate in decision-making be developed and that this section be strengthened to read:
 - Services must recognise and respect the voices of children and young people and their right to participate in shaping their support and education arrangements.

- **YACVic recommends:**
 - That all student wellbeing staff have relevant qualifications for the role (for example, youth work, social work, psychology) and that student wellbeing staff do not also have a teaching load;
 - That the framework recognise not only the difficulties sometimes experienced in recruiting and retaining staff in rural and regional areas, but also recognise the challenges these staff can face in accessing training and professional development opportunities;
 - That the framework recognise the key importance of adequate resourcing and remuneration for wellbeing staff and the importance of resourcing partnerships between departmental wellbeing services and broader children, youth and family services.
 - That all student wellbeing staff have access to regular, high level, professional supervision.

- **YACVic also recommends** that the following ‘Principles’ be included in the framework:
 - Respect for children and young people’s right to participate in decision-making that affects them;
 - Respect for diversity and ensuring cultural competency;
 - Recognition and respect for the cultural safety of Indigenous children, young people and families;
 - Equitable access to support for all children, young people and their families.

- **YACVic recommends** that the framework also include ‘efficiency of service delivery’ as a ‘Key Approach to Practice’.

- **YACVic recommends** that The State Government invest in the initiatives outlined in the Vulnerable Youth Framework Discussion Paper.

- **YACVic recommends** that Student wellbeing staff receive adequate training and support to work with same sex attracted and gender questioning young people.
- **YACVic recommends** that the framework explicitly include support for young people with disabilities.
- **YACVic recommends** that DEECD ensure that all Indigenous children, young people and their families are able to receive culturally appropriate student wellbeing services.
- **YACVic recommends** that the common service delivery domains be extended to include:
 - Supporting and promoting the rights of children and young people; and
 - Building on the strengths of children and young people.
- **YACVic recommends** that early childhood educators and primary and secondary teachers initially be informed about health and wellbeing services as part of their training at TaFE or University. They should also be supported by the Department to access local service networks, perhaps through information sharing in-service sessions facilitated by the Regional Offices of the Department.
- **YACVic recommends** that health and wellbeing staff better support educators to improve children and young people's health and wellbeing by offering professional, secondary consult support to educators. This would involve wellbeing staff drawing on their professional skills (in social work, youth work or psychology for example) to advise educators on a case-by-case basis on appropriate ways of responding to children or young people needing support. This secondary consult support could be offered to educators by either Departmental wellbeing staff or by staff from external children, youth or family services provided they were adequately resourced.
- **YACVic recommends** the following strategies to build stronger relationships between departmental health and wellbeing services and the broader health and wellbeing service system that supports children and young people:
 - More effective communication needs to exist between the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development and children and youth service sector peak bodies and service networks. Ongoing dialogue needs to be established, and advice needs to be sought directly from representative

service sector peaks such as YACVic, the Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare, the Centre for Multicultural Youth, the Council to Homeless Persons and the Victorian Drug and Alcohol and Drug Association, amongst others.

- A common language to be developed and understood between the DEECD and the broader service sectors in relation to children and young people's wellbeing.
- Formal partnerships can be established between schools and local child, youth and family services, to enable secondary consults.
- Partnership approaches need to be resourced. Educators, wellbeing staff and services need to be supported to free up staff to engage in partnership development and information sharing activities.
- Student wellbeing staff and programs need to draw from the expertise and resources of the broader child, youth and family services sectors. For example, the approach outlined in the *Code of Ethical Practice* should inform the work of student wellbeing staff. This is made difficult if student wellbeing staff also having a teaching load.

Closing remarks

In closing, YACVic commend the DEECD for embarking on the development of a health and wellbeing service framework. YACVic would be happy to work with the Department to contribute to the future development of this important policy framework to ensure that children and young people receive the best quality integrated supports through their schools.

Appendix A:

The following is a summary of feedback from YACVic Youth Reference Group members in response to YACVic's questions to them relating to the delivery of student support services.

- 1. Drawing on your own experiences or those of your friends, can students who might need some assistance with a personal problem receive fast and appropriate support through student support services in schools? (You don't need to tell us about a personal issue you may have faced, instead we'd like to know about your thoughts on whether students can access the support they need through services at schools, such as school counsellors.)**
 - At my school there is a counsellor that is called in if they need to. There are also 2 'student support' people there who we can go and talk to if any issues arise. I think what's provided is appropriate for the welfare of the students. Students are able to get help if they want it very quickly.
 - My school often promotes the awareness of both the student counsellor and psychologist as support networks for any concerns. However, there is no real opportunity outside your friendship group to confide in someone your own age or just a student in general.
 - At my school there was a fairly strong pastoral care program in place which meant that it was easy for myself and my friends to get the support we needed. However being a Christian school this program was something set up by the sisters (nuns) who are partnered with the school. However the public school in my area was not so lucky. I have heard from friends that the school did not offer support for any problems and didn't even offer referral.
- 2. What would you like to see in place to help student's access better support through their schools? For example, do you have any ideas on types of programs, or approaches schools could be taking to support the health and well being of student?**
 - A counsellor there every day would be better then what is offered now. I am not sure of any programs that could be done but, a message that needs to get out there

is that you shouldn't bottle up your thoughts if you're feeling down... it's better to talk about them with someone even if it's only one of your friends.

- Stronger peer-support networks. It is really important that people are exposed to a variety of characters and feel comfortable in the school environment, so more exposure or opportunities to work with peers for both social and academic support.
- I like the pastoral care program my school had set up. There was a team of staff that were offered PD training in counselling which meant that there were a few people you could access for help not just one counsellor. This meant that students could go to a teacher they had a good rapport with in most cases.
I also like the idea of peer support programs where older students take younger students under their wing to ensure a smoother transition into the school. Unfortunately this too often stops after primary school. I think it would be a great way to give some students support and the other students skills (possibly leadership type training) that would assist them later on in life.

3. Should this support always be offered by staff at a school? Do you see a role for youth services outside of schools to be working to assist students too? If so, what do you think might be useful?

- I think this sort of support should always be offered as it is very beneficial to the students mental health. I think youth services could have a huge involvement in helping students out at schools. Things they could do could include things like workshops. They could even bring their services into schools and get students coming into youth services in their local area.
- I think it needs to be focused on in the school premises just on the basis that 7 hours of one's day is spent there and many kids are already involved in extracurricular activities.
- I think there is a role for youth services WITHIN schools. I believe that schools should be encouraged to form relationships with youth services that will ensure the well-being of their students. There is a lot to be said for inter professional collaboration in this sense. I also believe that there is great merit to the youth work profession in regards to counselling and looking after young people's welfare interests as it is a core principle which youth workers are governed by. Teachers

however are traditionally more education focused and the welfare is a smaller part of the training for this profession than it is in youth work.

4. Are there some key considerations, or principles, do you think should underpin the way that support services take to working with students? Another way to look at this question is – are there some ways of working that you think are really important in the way that support services should go about offering support to students?

- Not sure on this one.

- Definitely allowing students to be exposed to more peer-based activities. Youth can gain a great insight into life through other individuals of a similar age both alike in character and not. So encouragement within the social arena probably being the most prominent.

- - Confidentiality: a student's trust is easily broken and lost.
- Primary Client: the first person the schools should be worried about is the student and that includes their welfare not just their cognitive development.
- Inter professional Collaboration: I believe that the youth work and teaching fields are complimentary to one another.