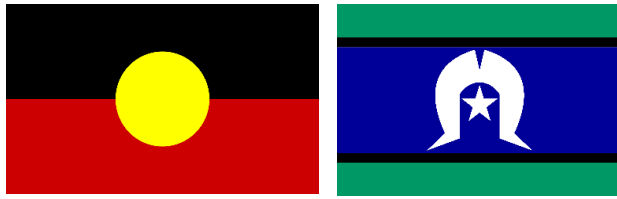




Youth Affairs Council Victoria 2024 Listening Tour Wrap Up

**Amplifying the voices of young people and
the youth sector in Victoria**

Acknowledgement of Country



Our work takes place across Victoria. YACVic's head office is on the lands of the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin Nation in Naarm (Melbourne). We also have offices on the lands of the Gunditjmara Nation in Warrnambool, and on the lands of the Wemba Wemba and Wadi Wadi Nations in Swan Hill.

YACVic pays our respects to Elders past and present for their wisdom, strength, support and leadership. Bunjil's lore states that those who walk on this land must care for Country and the waterways as well as care for the children and young people.

We stand in solidarity to pay respect to the ongoing culture and continued history of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander nations. Sovereignty was never ceded.

This always was, and always will be, Aboriginal land.

About YACVic

Youth Affairs Council Victoria (YACVic) is the peak body and leading policy advocate for young people and the youth sector in Victoria.

Our vision is that the rights of young people in Victoria are respected, and they are active, visible and valued in their communities. **Our mission** is to propel action that inspires positive change for young people and the youth sector.

About YACVic Rural

YACVic Rural is a core agency of the [Youth Affairs Council Victoria](#) (YACVic).

We know that young people and youth professionals in rural and regional Victoria often have unique insights and face different challenges to those in metropolitan Melbourne. In response, YACVic Rural expands our state-wide advocacy for young people in regional communities and the rural youth sector. We focus our presence across the Great South Coast and Southern Mallee regions. YACVic Rural also coordinates and implements a range of targeted projects across regional and rural Victoria including in response to disasters.

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What emerged; insights at a glance

From April to September 2024, YACVic travelled across Victoria to speak and listen to young people, the youth sector and other stakeholders. We heard their stories, gathering insights about their needs, priorities, aspirations and challenges.

We heard from 256 people - young people, youth workers, Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations, youth-led groups, and other values-aligned individuals and organisations - across regional, rural, and metropolitan Victoria. These conversations shaped three key areas of our work: our 2025–26 Budget Submission, our new Strategic Plan, and the refresh of our advocacy agenda.


Key challenges and themes were raised repeatedly across communities, these issues are deeply interconnected and often compound one another. Common concerns included:

- Mental health challenges, social isolation, climate anxiety, and rising substance use
- Discrimination and a lack of safe, inclusive places to connect
- Barriers to accessing specialist services due to lack of services and system complexity, workforce issues, particularly in rural areas
- Housing insecurity and limited crisis accommodation
- Transport disadvantage, especially outside metropolitan areas
- Educational barriers, teaching workforce shortages, and unclear career pathways
- Financial instability driven by cost-of-living pressures and insecure employment and inadequate support payments
- Sector-wide challenges around staffing, funding, and service continuity

We also heard clear reflections on the strengths of young people and the sector:

- Youth participation; a strong culture of youth voice and co-design
- Deep collaboration and resilience across the sector
- Dedication; deeply rooted passion and commitment from young people as well as the tireless dedication of youth workers despite significant structural challenges

Communities shared a clear call to action for YACVic. Young people and youth workers told us they want YACVic to:

- Be a stronger voice for young people and the youth sector to government for systemic change
 - Create more platforms for youth participation and leadership
 - Convene networks, build sector capacity, and lead knowledge-sharing
 - Support youth work as a profession, via raising the profile of youth work as well as via training and development
 - Be more visible, accountable, and connected across the state
- 

A note of thanks; acknowledging our contributors

We want to extend our heartfelt thanks to every young person, youth worker, community member and organisation who welcomed us, shared their time, and contributed so generously to the YACVic Listening Tour.

Your stories, reflections, and insights helped shape this wrap-up and, more importantly, continue to guide our work each day. Whether you joined us in person or online, at a community event or a roundtable - we are deeply grateful.

We also wish to express our sincere appreciation to Natalie Suleyman MP, Minister for Youth and the staff from the Office for Youth in the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing, for joining us in listening. Your presence and engagement underscored the importance of collaboration and mutual respect in shaping a brighter future for young Victorians.

This document offers a high-level summary of what we heard, not an exhaustive record. But every conversation, every insight, and every challenge raised has helped inform our strategic direction, advocacy priorities, and our 2025-26 Victorian Budget Submission.

This Listening Tour wasn't just about gathering feedback - it was about showing up, listening with care, and working in partnership.

Thank you for your trust, your honesty, and your vision for a stronger youth sector and a better future for young people across Victoria. We're proud to walk alongside you.

With thanks,



Mary Nega
YACVic CEO



The purpose behind our tour; grounding our work in community voice

YACVic's 2024 Listening Tour was designed to facilitate meaningful conversations across Victoria and gather insights into:

- the immediate and long-term priorities, aspirations, strengths and challenges facing young people and the youth sector that supports them
- the solutions both young people and the sector identify to improve outcomes
- how YACVic can better support young people and the youth sector.¹

As well as:

- introduce YACVic's new CEO to the youth sector
- provide YACVic staff the opportunity to hear directly from young people and communities.

To achieve these goals, YACVic engaged with a broad range of stakeholders including:

- 86 young people
- 170 members of the youth sector, including:
 - youth work organisations
 - youth-led organisations
 - Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCO's)
 - youth workers
 - peer workers
 - other values-aligned organisations
 - civil society organisations

Altogether, we engaged with 256 people.

The Listening Tour informed three major pieces of work:

- 1) YACVic's 2025-26 Budget Bid on behalf of Young People and the Youth Sector
- 2) YACVic's new Strategic Plan
- 3) YACVic's advocacy efforts

YACVic is committed to elevating the voices of young people and the youth sector across all areas of our work. We strive to ensure that our advocacy and

¹ See [APPENDIX](#) for a copy of the consultation questions.



representation are grounded in the real experiences, needs, and aspirations of young people and the sector that supports them.

Meaningful youth participation is central to our approach - creating opportunities for young people to shape the policies, programs, and decisions that affect them.

We also recognise that local communities are best placed to understand their own strengths and challenges, and we are committed to supporting place-based solutions that reflect and respond to those unique contexts.

These principles guided the purpose behind our listening tour.

How we engaged; listening with intention and respect

Meeting people where they are, discussions were facilitated through targeted roundtables, participation at youth services meetings, informal consultations, attendance at community events and other forums, ensuring accessibility and inclusivity in diverse settings.

Consultations were non-prescriptive, inviting young people and the sector to openly discuss their needs, issues and strengths as they identify them.


Our work was guided by:

- The Code of Ethical Practice
- Child safe practice
- Recognising lived experience
- Accessibility, including online and face-to-face options
- Youth participation

Where we went; a statewide conversation

Alongside consultations in metropolitan Melbourne and online, we visited four major regions across Victoria:

Great South Coast (23rd–25th April)

- Youth Strategic Advocacy Group
 - Peer workers at the Yeah/Nah Training
 - Winda-Mara Aboriginal Corporation
 - Glenelg Shire
 - Brophy Youth Services
 - Warrnambool Foyer
- 

Southern Mallee (20th – 22nd May)

- Murray Valley Aboriginal Cooperative
- Our Place Robinvale
- Swan Hill and District Youth Services Network
- Headspace Swan Hill
- Murray Mallee LLEN
- Swan Hill Rural City Council Youth Services Program (Youth Inc)
- Novo Youth Council
- North Central LLEN
- Charlton LLEN
- Kerang Northern District Community Health

Northeast/Alpine (3rd – 7th June)


- Future Proof Northeast Partners
- Gateway Health
- Rainbow Network
- Albury Wodonga Aboriginal Health Service
- Junction Support Services
- Windbreak 3690
- NELLEN
- Alpine Shire Council
- RAYS Youth Advisory Group

Southeast/Gippsland (17th – 19th June)

- Latrobe Youth Space
- Gippsland Lakes Complete Health
- Future Proof Gippsland Partners
- Members of the Youth Focused Network
- Gippsland and East Gippsland Aboriginal Co-Operative
- Wellington Live4Life

Metro Melbourne/Sunshine (23rd August)

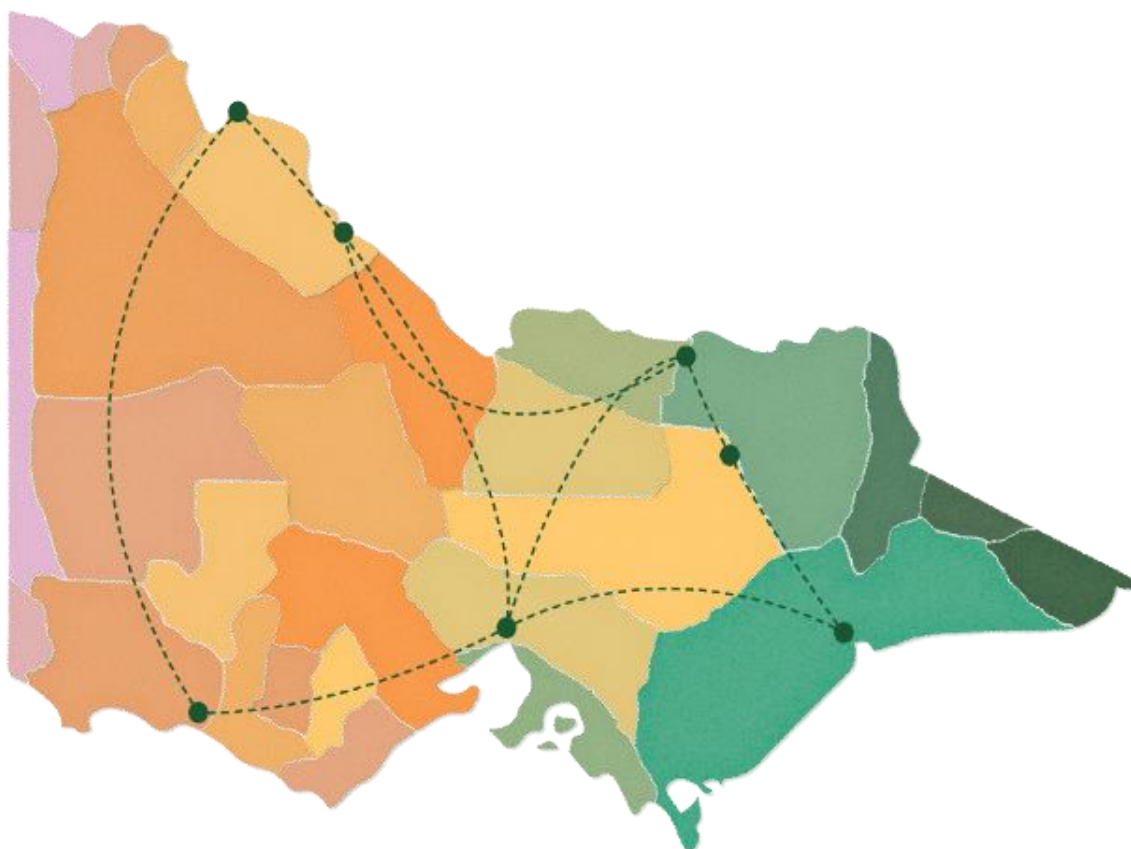
YACVic facilitated Code of Ethical Practice for the Victorian Youth Sector, offered at no cost to participants, held in Sunshine. This session was attended by:

- Local Youth Sector Workers
 - RMIT Youth Work Students
 - Minister for Youth, Hon. Natalie Suleyman
 - Representatives from the Office for Youth
- 

Online Consultations:

We held a series of online consultation sessions with the following groups:

- Youth Participation and Policy Network (YPPN), 18th July
- Youth Sector Leaders Huddle, 15th August
- Rural and Regional Youth Workers, 19th August
- Youth Sector Open Session, 27th August
- Victorian Student Representative Council (VicSRC), 5th September



What we heard; building a shared understanding of what matters

Key Challenges

The Listening Tour discussions with young people and youth workers revealed many critical challenges impacting their communities.

Below is a snapshot of the key themes that emerged. It's important to note that this isn't an exhaustive list of everything we heard, but it captures the core issues that were consistently raised.

We also want to acknowledge that while we've identified these key themes, none of them exist in isolation. They are deeply interconnected, and often, the impact of one issue can amplify or worsen the others.

Mental Health

Mental health challenges remain a significant concern for young people, including experiences of low self-esteem, anxiety, depression and suicide.

The COVID-19 pandemic – particularly social distancing, remote learning, and the reduction of face-to-face interaction – has exacerbated youth mental health challenges.

Also, the lack of [access to specialist services and support](#), coupled with other barriers such as mental health stigma, has made it harder for young people to seek help and access appropriate services when they need it. Current service access barriers – particularly in rural and regional communities – mean many young people are accessing support far too late, at the point of acute or crisis intervention

Key issues raised by young people and youth workers include; isolation and loneliness; climate anxiety and fear about the future; and substance use.

Isolation and loneliness

Social isolation and disconnection have emerged as major challenges for young people, reflected in rising rates of 'school can't' and declining participation in programs and services. Youth workers and young people report that lengthy wait times, alongside limited access to safe and welcoming spaces, have made it harder for young people to connect.

Since the COVID-19 lockdowns, many have faced ongoing disruptions to education, social lives, and community involvement - leading to reduced confidence and connection.

While social media can provide some sense of community, it can also amplify feelings of exclusion and anxiety.



The lack of opportunities to build relationships and engage in shared activities has contributed to increasing levels of loneliness, disconnection, and mental health concerns.

Increased complexity in Mental Health Presentations

Youth workers told us there has been a reported a rise in the complexity of mental health presentations among young people. Many are experiencing multiple, intersecting challenges - such as trauma, anxiety, housing instability, and family stress - that require more intensive and specialised support. This growing complexity is placing additional pressure on already stretched services, making it harder for young people to access timely and appropriate care.

Climate anxiety

Climate anxiety is a growing concern, with many young people experiencing fear and uncertainty about the future of the planet and the effects of climate change - including through direct exposure to disasters, and indirect exposure such as observing or thinking about climate change. This anxiety is compounded by the aftermath of recent natural disasters, such as floods and fires, which have caused emotional and psychological distress.

Access to youth spaces and peer support

Young people and youth workers consistently highlighted the lack of safe, accessible spaces for young people as a major barrier to connection and engagement.

In many communities, there are few places where young people feel welcome to meet, seek support, or participate in activities without cost or judgment. Youth spaces can play a vital role in fostering belonging and early support, particularly when staffed by trusted youth workers and supported by peer-led initiatives.

This absence limits opportunities for social connection, skill-building, and early intervention, contributing to isolation and reduced future engagement with services.

Substance use

There has been a noticeable rise in substance use, particularly in the form of vaping. This trend has raised concerns about the potential long-term health implications and the factors driving increased use, such as stress and anxiety, and the perceived harmlessness of vaping.

Discrimination and a Lack of Social Connection

Rising discrimination and a lack of social connection have emerged as significant concerns for young people, with many facing social isolation due to a shortage of



safe, inclusive and accessible services, programs, and events within their communities and outside of school.

Youth workers have observed a noticeable decline in young people's engagement. This may be linked to a lack of safe, accessible spaces where young people feel comfortable, alongside increased caseloads and long wait times that create additional barriers to connection and support.

Discrimination in schools

Youth workers raised concerns about the rising levels of bullying and discrimination in schools, particularly towards First Nations young people, LGBTIQ+ young people, and disabled young people. Alarming, this discrimination is not only coming from peers but also from teachers and school staff, creating unsafe and unwelcoming learning environments.

These experiences of bias and exclusion have a direct impact on school engagement, leading to increased 'school can't', disengagement from learning, and, in some cases, early school dropouts. The ongoing effects extend beyond education, contributing to long-term mental health challenges, diminished self-esteem, and reduced access to future opportunities.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural safety & connection

Youth workers from ACCO's emphasised that cultural connection and an understanding of history and heritage are essential for fostering a strong sense of belonging and wellbeing among First Nations young people. These connections help young people build identity, resilience, and a sense of pride in their culture.

However, many First Nations young people face significant challenges in accessing culturally safe services, and programs tailored to their needs. This is partially due to funding constraints, as well as a need to strengthen allyship of mainstream organisations – who play a key role and shared responsibility for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander justice and cultural safety.

Factors like intergenerational trauma and systemic discrimination can also worsen social disconnection, further limiting ability to engage with cultural and community supports.

Neurodiversity

Young people and youth workers shared concern for a significant lack of understanding and support for neurodiverse young people across school, work, and family environments.

Many young people experience barriers to having their access needs met, leading to feelings of exclusion, frustration, and, in some cases, disengagement.



LGBTIQA+ young people

LGBTIQA+ young people, especially those who identify as trans, gender diverse, or non-binary (TGDNB), face rising discrimination and vilification in mainstream media, online, and in-person. LGBTIQA+ young people are increasingly disengaging from services due to the ongoing threats and cancellations of pride events, particularly in rural and regional areas. These disruptions not only limit opportunities for celebration and visibility but also contribute to a broader sense of isolation and insecurity.

The absence of safe, affirming spaces and events can make it harder for young people to access vital support services, connect with peers, and build a sense of community, ultimately impacting their mental health and wellbeing.

Lack of places to socialise outside of school

Many young people are struggling with a lack of inclusive, in-person spaces to socialise outside of school, without fear of discrimination or exclusion. There was a strong call for more ‘third spaces’—places that are neither home nor school—where young people can gather, build community, and access peer-support in an informal setting.

Importantly, young people emphasised that these spaces must be truly accessible and inclusive, ensuring they are culturally safe, physically accessible, and free from discrimination

Access to specialist services and support

Many young people – specifically those living in rural and regional areas – face significant barriers in accessing the specialist services they need, when they need them. These barriers include:

- inadequate transport,
- prolonged waiting times,
- the geographic location of services,
- and limited awareness of available and appropriate services.

These challenges disproportionately affect marginalised groups and prevent young people from receiving timely and effective support.

Lack of accessible information & system complexity

Young people told us there was a lack of accessible and youth-specific information about the specialist services available in their communities. Many were unaware of or confused about what specific services provide, which ones are best suited to meet the needs of marginalised groups, and how services interact with each other. System complexity and a lack of accessible information leaves young people unsure of how to seek appropriate support.



Lack of services & siloes

Due to the scarcity of specialist services in regional and rural areas, young people often need to travel long distances, sometimes over several hours, to access services. This is made worse by inadequate public transport options as many young people do not have access to a car or have their driver's license.

The lack of connectivity between services compounds this issue, requiring young people to visit multiple locations and repeatedly recount their personal circumstances, which can be emotionally taxing.

Staffing

Youth workers identified systemic challenges in maintaining adequate service provision, including recruitment difficulties, housing insecurity for staff, and reliance on short-term contracts. These issues directly affect the availability and quality of specialist services, further limiting young people's access.

Housing


Housing affordability and accessibility emerged as major challenges in every region we visited during our Listening Tour. These issues are significantly impacting young people's ability to access education, secure employment, and make use of essential support services.

Youth workers reported a rise in homelessness, with demand for housing support far exceeding available services. Many young people are forced to rely on short-term accommodation, which only adds to their instability and increases stress.

Shortage of affordable housing

Young people and youth workers shared concerns about the severe shortage of affordable housing in their communities, a challenge that is particularly acute in rural and regional areas. This shortage is exacerbated by the limited availability of long-term leases, creating significant uncertainty and stress for people trying to secure stable housing.

The lack of long-term housing options means many young people are faced with frequent relocations, disrupting their sense of stability and increasing anxiety. Youth workers emphasised that access to longer-term lease arrangements would provide much-needed security, allowing young people to focus on other aspects of their lives, such as education and employment, without the constant fear of housing instability. This issue is not only impacting young people but also the youth workers themselves, who report experiencing similar stress and uncertainty regarding their own housing situations.



Shortage of crisis accommodation & homelessness support

A consistent concern raised by both young people and youth workers is the lack of adequate short-term and crisis accommodation. When young people face housing emergencies, there is often little available support, leaving them vulnerable to homelessness or unsafe living conditions. The lack of immediate, appropriate accommodation options can have long-lasting impacts on young people's physical and mental health.

Inadequate support payments

Many young people expressed dissatisfaction with the perceived inadequacy of government support for housing and financial stability, particularly in rural and regional areas. They noted that current financial assistance, such as Centrelink payments, often falls short of covering basic living expenses, leaving them in a constant state of financial strain. This lack of financial security makes it difficult for young people to meet their everyday needs.

Transport

Young people and youth workers told us that limited and unreliable public transport makes it hard to access school, work or training, or social activities within their communities. Without access to a car or licence and limited public transport many young people told us they feel isolated and struggle to stay connected to community.

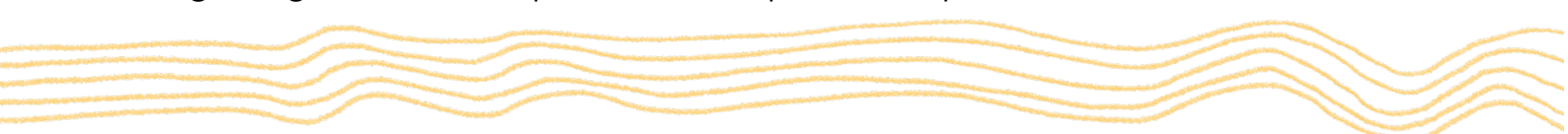
Many young people told us that safety on public transport was a key concern, especially when traveling in the evening or at night.

These issues were particularly challenging in rural and regional areas, where public transport may not reach the entire community or may be non-existent. While transportation challenges are more severe in these areas, young people in metropolitan areas also raised concerns about long commutes, scheduling and accessibility issues, and safety.

Education, Training and Employment

Education continues to be a critical priority for young people and the youth sector. However, the lack of clear and accessible pathways for education and employment poses a significant challenge.

Factors such as teacher workforce shortages, staff burnout, and insufficient specialised support are adversely affecting students' experiences in school. Additionally, youth workers told us they are increasingly concerned about the growing reliance on suspensions and expulsions as punitive measures for



attendance issues, which further alienates vulnerable students.

Education Pathways

Many young people told us that the courses and pathways offered in secondary schools often do not align with their interests, strengths, or career aspirations, leaving them feeling unprepared for employment or further study. This issue is worsened by limited subject offerings and hands-on learning opportunities at TAFEs, particularly in regional and rural areas.

Impacts of COVID-19 Pandemic

Youth workers told us there is an increase in school disengagement and school can't, particularly among young people whose education was disrupted by COVID-19. The pandemic highlighted significant gaps in the education system, including insufficient mental health support and a lack of tailored learning approaches. As schools resumed face-to-face learning, many schools were unable to meet the evolving needs of students, resulting in greater difficulty for them to remain engaged and supported.

Teacher Staffing

Youth workers and young people told us that teachers are experiencing workforce challenges, including large class sizes, heavy administrative workloads, and limited resources. This has resulted in insufficient time for teachers to provide individualised support.


Employment

Employment remains a key concern for young people, with many facing significant barriers to securing work. While some industries offer entry-level jobs, young people can struggle to gain experience with limited training opportunities and employer hesitancy to hire inexperienced workers.

Additionally, growing rates of insecure work, including casual and part-time roles, and low pay rates for young people make it even more difficult to secure stable employment. Many young workers told us they face unpredictable hours, a lack of benefits, and limited job security, which can lead to financial instability and increased stress.

Cost of Living Pressures

The rising cost of living is disproportionately affecting young people, exacerbating the existing financial strain many already face. Limited employment opportunities, inadequate government support, and high living expenses are significant factors contributing to financial insecurity. These financial pressures not only impact young people's immediate well-being but also hinder their ability



to pursue education, secure stable employment, and achieve long-term financial independence.

Employment

Young people in rural and regional areas reported a lack of job opportunities in their communities. Restricting their ability to achieve financial independence, increasing financial insecurity, and reducing the likelihood of staying in the communities where they grew up.

Access to Essential Items

Youth workers told us that some young people are struggling to afford essential items like food and hygiene products due to the rising cost of living. This financial strain forces them to make difficult decisions about how to allocate their limited resources, choosing between basic needs such as transportation, housing, and healthcare.

Workforce

Youth workers told us that the high cost of housing and limited options, especially in regional and rural areas, are creating challenges for the sector. Many workers experience long commutes or have difficulty securing stable housing. The shortage of available homes in these areas makes it harder for workers to stay in locations with fewer resources and may lead to workers leaving the sector.

Youth workers told us that they occasionally use their personal funds to support young people when funding gaps occur. This includes covering costs for essentials, transportation, and activities to assist the young people they work with.

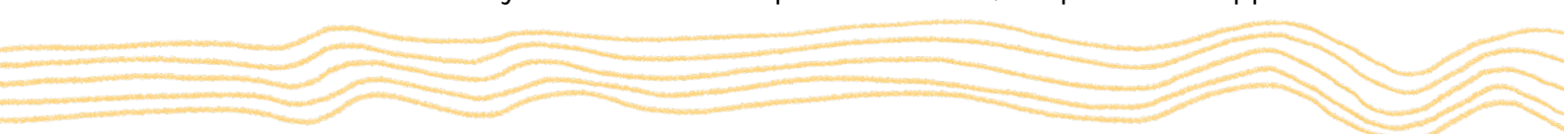
Youth Sector Wellbeing

Youth workers emphasised the vital role of youth work as a form of early intervention—particularly in supporting young people with mental health, employment, and housing challenges. They also highlighted the value of youth work as a generalist support.

We heard that the sector is experiencing significant workforce pressures. These include rising operational costs, stagnant or declining funding, an increasing number of complex cases, and high levels of staff burnout. Stakeholders also raised concerns about the lack of recognition for the value of youth work and the professional status of youth workers.

Generalist Youth Workers

Youth workers told us there is a critical need for generalist youth workers across the sector. Generalist youth workers can provide flexible, wrap around support that



responds to the diverse and evolving needs of young people. Unlike specialist roles that focus on a single issue, generalist youth workers ability to work across multiple areas - such as education, mental health, housing, and community engagement - makes them an essential part of early intervention and prevention efforts.

Place-Based Services

Both young people and youth workers expressed concerns about the reliance on outreach services, which are often delivered on a fly-in-fly-out basis. This model can lead to distrust and disengagement.

Stakeholders strongly advocated for a shift towards place-based services, which involve active community participation in developing priorities and programs tailored to the specific strengths and needs of local communities. Place-based services focus on building trust, fostering meaningful connections, and creating opportunities that are relevant and responsive to the unique needs of each community.

Flexible Funding Allocation

Youth workers told us that flexible funding is essential for meeting the diverse and evolving needs of young people within the youth sector. Current funding models often impose restrictions, limiting the ability of services and organisations to respond effectively to local challenges. A more adaptable funding approach would allow youth services to allocate resources where they are most needed, based on immediate priorities and community-specific issues.

Funding and Employment Stability

Youth workers expressed serious concerns about the ongoing lack of adequate and secure funding for youth sector organisations. They reported that insufficient funding prevents organisations from offering long-term, stable employment, which undermines staff retention and creates uncertainty around financial security and career progression.

This funding instability contributes to high turnover rates across the sector. Frequent staff changes disrupt the continuity of care and result in the loss of trusted relationships between workers and the young people they support. Consistent relationships are a key strength of youth services, helping young people feel supported and connected. Maintaining these relationships is crucial to achieving positive outcomes.

Staff Wellbeing

An increased demand for youth workers, alongside limited resources, has placed additional pressure on staff to manage higher workloads and broader responsibilities. Without adequate support, this demand impacts staff wellbeing -



contributing to fatigue, stress, and, in many cases, burnout.

Key Strengths

Youth Voice and Participation

A key strength identified by young people and the sector is the sector's focus on youth participation and the value of involving young people and enabling them to speak for themselves. Young people have the contemporary, real-world knowledge and experience of issues and opportunities impacting them and their communities. The sector works to create spaces where young people can be heard and influence the development of policies, programs, and initiatives that affect them directly.


Through co-design practices, young people actively contribute to the creation and implementation of services that meet their needs. By prioritising youth input and leadership, the sector helps young people feel a sense of ownership and control, enabling them to shape their own futures and contribute to their communities. This approach improves the relevance and effectiveness of services, while empowering young people to become confident, engaged citizens who can drive positive change in society.

Sector Collaboration

Collaboration between organisations in the youth sector has been essential in overcoming funding challenges. These partnerships promote innovation and enable organisations to deliver more cohesive and impactful services, often through peer-support and shared goals. By pooling resources and sharing expertise, the sector enhances its capacity to support its workforce and improve the quality of services offered to young people.

Dedication

Young people across Victoria are demonstrating remarkable resilience, adaptability, and leadership in navigating the complexities of today's world. This dedication is evident in the proactive steps young people are taking to overcome challenges, whether by pursuing education, engaging in community service, or advocating for causes they believe in. Young people are increasingly establishing or contributing to youth-led movements and initiatives, stepping into leadership roles, driving initiatives that promote inclusivity, sustainability, and social justice. Their innovative approaches and willingness to challenge the status quo are inspiring positive transformations within communities and institutions.



The dedication of youth workers plays a crucial role in ensuring young people receive the support and opportunities they need to succeed. Despite facing challenges such as limited funding and large workloads, youth workers remain committed to their roles, advocating for improved outcomes and delivering vital services. Their passion and persistence drive positive change, strengthening the sector's capacity to uplift and empower young people in communities throughout the state.

Expectations of YACVic

Young people and youth workers shared their expectations of YACVic, offering valuable insights on how the organisation could strengthen its support for both young people and the broader youth sector.

They provided feedback on how YACVic could enhance its role as the peak body, suggesting ways to improve advocacy, resources, and services to better meet the needs of the youth sector and help young people thrive.

Youth Voice

Many young people told us they have strong desire for more opportunities to have their voices heard in meaningful, transparent, and accountable ways. They highlighted the importance of having clear processes in place for organisations to respond to their input and concerns.

Additionally, young people indicated a desire to engage directly with government bodies, seeking opportunities to provide meaningful input on policy reforms that impact their lives. They emphasised the need for their perspectives to be considered in decisions that shape their futures.

Capacity Building and Professionalisation of Youth Work

Youth Work Education and Training

Youth workers told us there are limited opportunities for further education and professional development for youth workers. Strengthening connections between TAFEs, universities, and the youth sector was identified as a key strategy to provide ongoing support for both young people and youth workers, building a more skilled and knowledgeable workforce.



Youth Work Profile

Youth workers also highlighted the importance of raising the profile of youth work as a profession. By professionalising the field, it can attract the recognition and funding needed to ensure youth workers are properly supported and valued for the crucial work they do in the community.

Resourcing and Information Sharing

Convening

Youth workers expressed a desire for YACVic to continue convening specialist networking and advocacy groups, along with organising conferences. They also highlighted the need for more networking opportunities to foster connections with peers and strengthen the sector's collective efforts.

Information Sharing

Youth workers expressed a desire for YACVic to support evaluation and evidence gathering across the sector. They highlighted that smaller youth services and individual workers often struggle to stay updated with both current and emerging methods. They also emphasised the importance of sharing effective practices across the sector to improve outcomes.

Peak Body

Youth workers and young people told us they want YACVic to play a more visible role as a mainstream advocate and peak body for both young people and the youth sector. They noted that a stronger presence in advocacy would help amplify their voices and raise awareness of the issues affecting them.

Concluding remarks; key insights and next steps

The 2024 YACVic Listening Tour has provided valuable insights that will guide our ongoing efforts to support young people and strengthen the youth sector across Victoria. Through statewide consultations, we heard about the challenges young people and the youth sector face, including housing and homelessness, mental health, limited access to specialist services, discrimination, transport issues, barriers to education and training, cost-of-living pressures, and workforce concerns in the sector.

The tour also highlighted the strengths of young people and the youth sector, such as youth-led initiatives, cross-sector collaboration, and the dedication of youth workers.



These insights have shaped YACVic's 2025-26 Budget Bid, Strategic Planning, and advocacy efforts, ensuring that young people's voices help guide our priorities. We are committed to building a future where young people's rights are fully respected, and their voices are central in decision-making.

Appendix

Questions

Each session was conducted in a variety of settings—from formal roundtable discussions to more informal gatherings such as lunches, events, or one-on-one conversations. The format was carefully tailored to the specific group composition and meeting context, with a focus placed on what communities felt YACVic needed to hear rather than being too prescriptive. Attendees were asked targeted questions designed to suit their circumstances, and the key questions posed during these sessions are outlined below.

- 1. We know there is a range of issues for young people today, thinking about your local community and this area what is the number one issue/key issues for young people today and/or young people who live, work and play in your local community?*
- 2. What are you passionate about?*
- 3. What is your sense of the strength and wellbeing of the youth sector?*
- 4. What could YACVic do to help support this issue?*
- 5. What are your expectations of YACVic as an organisation that represents young people and the youth services sector? What should we start, stop, continue?*
- 6. What is one change or investment that would have the most significant positive impact on young people in the area?*
- 7. What haven't we heard, what do you want to tell us?*

