

## Fact sheet: Investing in young people and the youth sector

Every young person deserves the support and opportunities to be active, visible and valued in their communities. But there are significant gaps in services for young people across mental health, housing, education, justice and more which means thousands of young people across Victoria are falling through the cracks. The more we invest in young people now, the better Victoria's community and future will be. As the Victorian peak body for young people and the youth sector that supports them, YACVic has identified three key reforms that will transform the Victorian youth sector and change the lives of a generation of young people:

- 1. Increase investment in early intervention and prevention services for young people**
- 2. Embed meaningful youth participation in decision-making processes so young peoples' voices are heard**
- 3. Secure a strong and sustainable youth sector to support our young people**

### 1. Increase investment in early intervention and prevention services for young people

We know that prevention is better than a cure, not only in terms of how effective a treatment or program is but also in terms of how much it costs to deliver, with Deloitte's 2026 Social Return on Investment study showing that for every \$1 invested in the youth sector, young people and the community gain \$2.96 in benefits. Youth services across Victoria are delivering incredible prevention and early intervention programs which are supporting young people to stay engaged with their education, have somewhere safe to live, stay out of contact with the criminal legal system, to be physically and mentally healthy and so much more. However, most of the Victorian funding for youth services occurs at the crisis point where it is more challenging and costly to have an impact. Investment in early intervention and prevention services for young people will provide transformational change for the next generation of Australians who are currently coming of age, entering the workforce, and engaging with the democratic system as voters for the first time.

#### Practical mechanisms to achieve this change:

- Invest more in generalist youth services and community-based programs for all young people, especially those facing additional marginalisation.
- Invest in specialist early intervention youth programs where young people are already disengaging or at-risk (e.g. mental health, interaction with criminal legal system, family violence, education, housing, employment).
- Provide investment mechanisms to establish or repurpose community spaces into youth hubs to expand the availability of safe, accessible and inclusive spaces where young people can engage in activities, events and programs outside of school.

### 2. Embed meaningful youth participation in decision-making processes so young peoples' voices are heard

When young people are involved in decisions that impact them, solutions are more targeted, effective, and sustainable. However young people are largely underrepresented in government or community decisions and too often, young people are left out of the conversation because of their age, given limited meaningful opportunities to contribute, or engaged too late as a 'tick box' exercise. Excluding young people from community

responses can lead to feelings of disconnection, alienation, and disengagement from both the community and democratic processes. In contrast, when youth participation is done properly, it builds community cohesion, sense of purpose, trust in the government, capacity and skills to engage with civic processes, and hope about the future.

Practical mechanisms to achieve this change:

- Embed minimum, funded youth participation requirements in grants and service agreements funded by the government including:
  - Expanding the use of paid youth lived experience roles (e.g. peer workers, youth advisors, co-design consultants), recognising participation as both a contribution and a pathway into employment.
  - Utilising best practice to trial progressive forms of youth participation within government by bringing young people into funding and priority project decisions.
- Encourage Youth Advisory Groups in all relevant contexts.
- Develop a mechanism for young people in Youth Advisory Groups in local councils and community services across the state to connect, share and build their advocacy efforts.

### 3. Secure a strong and sustainable youth sector to support our young people

A strong and sustainable youth sector means professionals working with young people have the resources, skills, and training needed to improve young people's lives. When Victoria's youth sector is strong, young people are better supported to reach their goals and participate as active members of the community. However, for decades, the youth and community sector has been operating within a context of underfunding including short term funding. This restricts stability, impact, and collaboration. Investing in a skilled and diverse youth sector workforce ensures young people are getting the best support and services available. Connecting, collaborating and sharing information across the youth sector is crucial to ensuring young people have access to integrated and seamless care. To enable nation-leading early intervention and prevention youth services, Victoria needs to build sector workforce capacity and invest more in sector cohesion, information sharing and efficiency, including via YACVic's role as the peak body.

Practical mechanisms to achieve this change:

- Provide funding stability so youth services can plan for and deliver long term programs and ongoing support to young people by increasing default contract lengths for funding agreements between the government and community sector organisations to at least five and preferably seven years, as recommended by the Productivity Commission.
- Build a sustainable youth sector workforce and address student placement poverty by:
  - Working with the Commonwealth government to introduce support payments for youth work students undertaking unpaid placements.
  - Providing subsidies to create entry level jobs, traineeships and 'earn and learn' pathways within the youth and community services sector, aligned to growth industries and skills shortages.
- Provide funding for First Nations and multicultural youth specialists and stronger culturally responsive practice across the youth sector to support the Yoorrook Justice Commission's recommendations on self-determination and representative workforces, and the one in two young Victorians from a refugee or migrant background.
- Provide adequate core funding to YACVic to provide expert training, advice and cohesion, serving as backbone and convenor of the youth sector, and coordinating key initiatives.

Find out more and get involved at: [www.yacvic.org.au/supported-connected-strong](http://www.yacvic.org.au/supported-connected-strong)