

SUBMISSION TO

Tasmania's Child & Youth Wellbeing Strategy Discussion Paper January 2021



Ynot

youth network of Tasmania

The Youth Network of Tasmania (YNOT)

YNOT is the peak body for young people aged 12-25 years and the non-government youth sector in Tasmania. YNOT works to ensure policies affecting young people in Tasmania are relevant, equitable and effective and that young people have a voice on issues that matter to them.

Our Vision

A Tasmania where all young people are valued and can achieve anything.

Our Purpose

To drive positive change with young people and the youth sector in Tasmania.

For further information

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All quotes used in this document were provided to YNOT during consultations with young people around Tasmania.



Connecting Young Tasmanians aged 18-25 years to opportunity and enhancing wellbeing

*“We need to know our pathways to independence.
Where to go? Where does the road keep going?”*

YNOT congratulates the Tasmanian Government on the Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy Discussion Paper, developed in consultation with Tasmanian children and young people, the Commissioner for Children and Young People and other key experts.

The strategy’s overarching framework is strong, informed by evidence and provides a robust launching pad for policy that will benefit Tasmania’s children and young people.

YNOT supports the strategy’s focus on the first 1000 days of life, recognising this critical time for influencing health and wellbeing outcomes. Government investment in early intervention and prevention strategies is paramount for the wellbeing of future generations of Tasmanians.

YNOT also supports the strategy’s focus on Aboriginal child health and wellbeing, acknowledging the disparity between outcomes in this area for first nations people and non-indigenous people.

Importantly the strategy spotlights key moments of physiological and social development and acknowledges the scaffolding needed to support our children and young people to maximise opportunities and minimise risks.

YNOT believes the strategy would be strengthened further through explicit acknowledgment and inclusion of the unique needs of young Tasmanians aged 18-25 years across the strategy’s domains. The 18-25-year age range is the key transition period from adolescents to emerging adulthood, marking the phase when systems and society expect independence, self-reliance and ambition from these members of our communities.

This time is acknowledged within the strategy as the point at which young people emerge from education systems into post-secondary education/training and job seeking. However, the need for specialist support and programs at this time is not carried through from previous stages, instead noting systems and policy approaches for this group that are developed for Tasmanian adults. In doing this, the strategy creates the expectation that Tasmania’s emerging adults will move from supported systems to those expecting independence in this final transition to adulthood.

While many of our young people will make the transition successfully in spite of challenges along the way, the entire cohort would benefit from a system that acknowledges these last steps to independence may create an insurmountable barrier for some.

Supported transition for emerging adults

The evidence supports recognition of this period when young people are pulling away from childhood but not quite yet adults as a crucial period of development with high levels of both opportunity and risk.¹

In Tasmania, many entrenched issues of poverty and inequality increase barriers to successful transition at this time, making it absolutely essential that emerging adults are supported in the shift from juvenile systems and supports into those designed for adults.

For example, we know from speaking with young Tasmanians aged 18-25 years that they are eager to leave home and live on their own for the first time. However, attempting to negotiate and enter the rental system without appropriate supports is daunting. The median rental prices in our major cities alone exceeds youth allowance by \$80-\$120 per week.²

Young people aged 16-25 years comprise approximately one third of Tasmania's social housing register and yet only a small percentage are allocated housing. If a young person turns to social housing to assist, they face wait times of more than a year to be potentially offered an affordable place to call home.³

Approximately 6,500 (14.8%) young Tasmanians are unemployed with an estimated 9,500 young people underemployed.⁴ In Australia, 14% of young people live below the poverty line, adding to the barriers to participating in our economy and finding safe, appropriate and affordable accommodation.⁵ This impacts on young people's dreams for future careers and creates a sense of defeat before they have even started.

"It is so hard to find stable housing without a rental history or work."

In addition, 75% of mental health disorders develop by the age of 25 years and higher risk-taking behaviour is characteristic for males in this age group.^{6,7} Contemporary research suggests that a supported, graduated transition from child and adolescent mental health services and adult mental health services is intrinsic to reducing harm and improving wellbeing outcomes for the young clients.⁸

Child and youth wellbeing strategies in other countries, in particular New Zealand, recognise the 18-25 year transition point as equally vital and in need of specialist support as earlier interventions at ages three and 12.⁹ The New Zealand plan outlines one of its actions as to:

Support life transitions ... a range of programmes to support young people into employment or training ...

Most children and young people are resilient and successfully transition into adulthood.

However, some experience behavioural challenges or poor mental health, and most serious mental illnesses begin before 25 years of age.

Importantly, the voices of Tasmania's emerging adults also speak to the fundamental importance of developmental decision-making at this stage of life.

While the discussion paper details a vision of participation specific to children and young people under 18 years, there is little detail around the barriers to social and economic participation faced by young Tasmanians aged 18-25 years; at a time when young people leave the secondary school system and disperse across industries, education services and begin to engage with social assistance services as independent adults.

“We need people to help us when we think we don’t need it ... which is challenging.”

In part, this omission points to the difficulties in engaging this dispersed cohort in consultation and highlights the need to capture the voices and experiences of young people aged 18-25 years within this strategy.

In order to meet the needs of all Tasmanian children and young people for which the strategy is designed, it is imperative that ongoing input from young people aged 18-25 years is included throughout the life of the strategy.

Recommendation

YNOT recommends that the strategy explicitly acknowledge the core life transition stage for young people aged 18-25 years, integrating research, discussion and identification of current policies in place to address and support this group across the strategy’s domains.

As part of implementing this recommendation, further consultation with Tasmanian young people in this age group will be required to provide a baseline from which current and future targeted programs and services can be evaluated, monitored and improved upon throughout the strategy’s timeframe.

References

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- ¹ Wood D. *et al.* 2018. Emerging Adulthood as a Critical Stage in the Life Course. In: Halfon N., Forrest C., Lerner R., Faustman E. (eds) Handbook of Life Course Health Development. Springer, Cham.
 - ² Calculation based on weekly Youth Allowance rate of \$231.25 and median rental price as of 28/01/2021: Real Estate Institute of Tasmania 2021. REIT Media Release. Powerhouse market continues to defy the odds.
 - ³ Department of Communities 2019. Social Housing data request for social housing of young people 16-25 years. 13/11/2019.
 - ⁴ Figure extrapolated based on national youth underemployment rate ABS 2021, 6202.0 Labour Force, Australia. Table 22. Accessed 1/03/2021.
 - ⁵ ACOSS and UNSW Sydney 2020. Poverty in Australia 2020. Part 2: Who is affected?
 - ⁶ McGorry P. 2011. Is this normal? Assessing mental health in young people. Australian Family Physician 40,3.
 - ⁷ Sancu L., Webb M. & Hocking J. 2018. Risk-taking behaviour in adolescents. Australian Journal of General Practice 47.12.
 - ⁸ Broad K.L. *et al.* 2017. Youth experiences of transition from child mental health services to adult mental health services: a qualitative thematic synthesis. BMC Psychiatry 17, 380.
 - ⁹ New Zealand Government. 2019. Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy.