

ACTION ON YOUTH PARTICIPATION AND ENGAGEMENT IN GOVERNMENT POLICY

2024/25

BUDGET PRIORITIES STATEMENT



Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge the palawa and pakana people as the traditional, original and continuing custodians of lutruwita (Tasmania) and the continuing connection that Tasmanian Aboriginal people have to the land, sea, sky and waterways. We pay our respects to the Elders past and present.

About Us

The Youth Network of Tasmania (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 and programs 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.

The Youth Network of Tasmania (YNOT) is funded by the Tasmanian Government.

For further information

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Frustrated at being shut out

Young Tasmanians have been telling us for a number of years now that systems and programs designed to meet their needs are not working for them. For too long, Tasmania has chosen to overlook the views and insight of young people and have set about developing systems and policies that are not fit for purpose.

In recent years, the Tasmanian Government has taken steps to seek the views of children and young people to inform policy and systems design, but this approach is often considered tokenistic by young people. More often than not, the rights of Tasmania's children and young people, to have a say on matters impacting them, are not upheld. Young Tasmanians feel as though their voice is excluded, ignored or even silenced when it comes to strategic planning and decision making across government and community.^{i,ii}

"I've done my fair share of youth participation. In a few of the gigs that I've done with youth participation, it feels quite tokenistic. Sometimes it feels like they want a young person for the sake of having a young person."

Tasmanian Youth Forum participant 15, North (2023)

Many young people aged 12-25 years, and the Tasmanian youth sector, are looking to YNOT to do more to ensure an independent voice to government informs thinking and action on a range of important public policy areas.

This YNOT Budget Priorities Statement offers two key ways government can better support young people: first, by adequately funding YNOT's capacity to bring its experienced and trusted advice to youth participation initiatives, policy deliberations and effective solutions; and secondly, by investing in a standalone child and youth housing and homelessness plan to improve housing outcomes for young Tasmanians.

This submission also supports the community sector industry proposal for the immediate introduction of an indexation formula to provide relief to organisations facing financial difficulties.

"What YNOT is doing for the young people of Tasmania is incredible and cannot thank you enough for the opportunity to be part of it."

Young Person 21, West Coast (2023)

Sustainable funding for YNOT

YNOT continues to operate on limited resources and cannot fulfil its obligations to government or stakeholders under current funding arrangements, nor can it meet community expectations to undertake work that is considered core functions of a Youth Peak Body.

Significant government reform aimed at improving the health, safety and wellbeing of Tasmania's children and young people, and commitment to strengthening youth participation activity across government agencies, has seen a significant increase in demand for our expertise and service.

A demand that we can no longer meet.

"I find they set a high level when it comes to their events, I have always walked away from events feeling empowered and ready to put what I have learned into practice with my own youthwork."

YNOT member (2023)

Ongoing funding constraints

YNOT's recurrent Peak Body funding is just \$157,255 per annum and despite being indexed since 2019, has steadily eroded in value since 2010. The recent sharp increase in inflation and inadequate indexation has exacerbated this.

Our funding supports operating costs and 1.0 FTE which includes the CEO and Finance Officer salaries. Together we deliver:

- Sector leadership
- Stakeholder engagement
- Media commitments
- Member relations
- Financial management
- Support to the volunteer Board, and
- Participation on a multitude of government and non-government round tables, forums, committees, consultations, submissions and working groups across all Tasmanian State Government Departments.

Underinvestment in the State's Youth Peak Body, coupled with an increased demand for our expertise on the back of significant government reform in youth affairs, has significantly impacted our ability to meet core peak body functions namely: to *support policy development and provide advice and proactively engage with the sector and population priority groups*. It has also placed YNOT's small and dedicated team under significant pressure to deliver outcomes and meet expectations of young people, government, YNOT members and our sector. Our ability to deliver core peak body functions to date has only been possible through deficit funding and a separate project grant.

Youth reform agenda

The release of the Tasmanian Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy *It takes a Tasmanian Village* in 2021, Commission of Inquiry Report into the Tasmanian Government's Responses to Child Sexual Abuse in Institutional Settings 2023, Youth Justice Blueprint 2024-2034 and the Tasmanian Youth Jobs Discussion Paper 2023, recommend or have taken strategic action to seek the views of young people to inform government policy and systems design and to ensure a person centred approach to service provision.

Government has committed to acting on, and implementing, all 191 recommendations of the Commission of Inquiry Report as a priority. This includes recommendation 15.7 **empowering children and young people** to contribute to decision making that impacts them, and to have a say in departmental strategies, policies, procedures and protocols relevant to them. Importantly, it recommends that this work be adequately funded and resourced.ⁱⁱⁱ

The Youth Justice Blueprint recognises the importance of engaging with children and young people through entities such as the Commissioner for Children and Young People and youth peak bodies to ensure its successful implementation.^{iv}

The Youth Jobs Strategy discussion paper outlines the critical role YNOT played in building youth voice into the development of the Strategy, and the need for continued engagement of young people by YNOT in the Strategy's implementation and evaluation.^v

In addition, YNOT has, and will continue to play a key role in supporting the Tasmanian youth sector and YNOT members to prepare for the introduction *Child and Youth Safe Organisations Standards* in Tasmania.

This work has, and will continue to see an increase in demand from Government agencies, and the private and community sectors, to support meaningful youth participation initiatives. Community, business, industry and government are turning to YNOT to ensure they are sufficiently equipped and confident to engage with young people in a safe, authentic and meaningful way. However, without sufficient peak body funding YNOT does not have capacity to respond.

Expertise, credibility and trust in youth participation

Youth participation and engagement underpins everything we do at YNOT. We define youth participation as a process by which young people exercise their right to be involved in decisions that affect their lives directly or indirectly according to their age and evolving capacities. We are recognised for our expertise in youth participation nationally and statewide, and importantly we are trusted by young Tasmanians.

“The Tasmanian Youth Forum, hosted by the Youth Network of Tasmania (YNOT), was a remarkable event that brought together young people from various diverse areas across the state.

“The forum provided a platform for representation, with young people attending from both rural and urban areas, spanning different ages, genders, and diverse backgrounds and experiences. Witnessing this level of inclusivity and diversity was truly humbling. The forum's ability to consistently offer a safe space for such a diverse group of young people year after year is a testament to its importance and also the hard work put in by the YNOT team.

“One of the most significant aspects of the event was the opportunity it provided for the collective voice of young people to be heard. The forum served as a medium for their perspectives, concerns, and ideas to be collated and shared with decision-makers.

“This level of youth engagement is unique and in my experience is rare when trying to gather a group of young people who are represented in such a diverse way.

“The Tasmanian Youth Forum, through its commitment to inclusivity and empowering young voices, showcased the power and potential of youth participation in decision-making processes. I believe the event was a resounding success and served as a beacon of inspiration for similar initiatives around the country. It is a testament to the Youth Network of Tasmania's dedication to supporting and amplifying the voices of young people in the state.”

Will Smith, Director JCP Youth (2023)

We know that there is no one approach to youth participation. The model and mechanisms used to engage with young people need to be determined based on organisational capacity and readiness, resourcing and budgetary considerations, and the purpose of engagement to name a few.

“Working alongside the remarkable team at YNOT was an exceptional experience for me and what stood out to me the most was the genuine sense of being heard and respected for whatever we could bring to the table. I was also able to acquire invaluable skills in professional communication, administration, governance, strategy, and marketing, which have undoubtedly contributed to my overall growth and development.”

Youth Transitions Steering Committee member, 24 South (2023)

YNOT uses the Lundy Model of Participation based on Article 12 of the United Nations Conventions on the Rights of the Child to inform our youth participation activity.^{vi} This model presents a balanced and accessible approach that upholds the rights of the child and emphasises essential standards for meaningful participation. It recognises that participation is not limited to simply giving young people a voice but also involves creating opportunities for them to contribute meaningfully, influence decisions, and take part in actions that address the issues affecting them.

“I felt there were real outcomes from working with [YNOT] and the focus group. It was really interesting to experience talking about the issues, working on the plans for the forum and then actually participating on the day... I got to see how I can make a difference by getting involved in the community and sharing ideas with other young people. I think it’s important that we share our thoughts and ideas on the important issues that impact our lives as young people.”

Tasmanian Youth Forum participant 16, North-West (2022)

Our approach to youth participation is underpinned by evidence, is inclusive, places young people at the centre and embeds the principles of child safety throughout. Over the past 30 years, YNOT has built and maintained extensive networks across the Tasmanian youth sector, and substantial experience working with young Tasmanians, government and non-government stakeholders to:

- design and deliver statewide consultations to young people 12-25 years of age
- develop and facilitate youth advisory groups to inform policy, project and program design
- undertake comprehensive audits of youth participation action frameworks
- inform the development of youth communication strategies
- support and inform the development of youth participatory models
- deliver youth leadership summits and leadership workshops on advocacy

We are well placed to support the Tasmanian governments youth reform agenda through provision of evidence based youth participation and engagement activity. However, stretching resources too thinly does not achieve the outcomes that government, our sector, and Tasmania’s children and young people want or need.

“[YNOT’s] advice was pivotal in helping me design a survey that was as accessible and engaging as possible, and much appreciated. The responses we’ve received so far are very moving, affirming, and – perhaps not surprisingly for yourselves to hear, given your expertise in engaging with children and young people – very consistent.”

Tasmanian Government stakeholder (2023)

Investment in YNOT will increase our capacity to respond to the needs of key stakeholders, improve our ability to meet our peak body funding obligations, and support the Tasmanian Government Youth Reform Agenda.

Recommendation 1

Increase YNOT’s capacity to respond to increased demand for statewide youth participation expertise.

1. Invest in a Youth Participation and Engagement Project Manager (1.0 FTE (a) = \$120,729) and Project Officer (0.6 FTE (b) = \$65,495)
2. Invest in a Communications Officer (0.8 FTE (b) = \$87,327)

Total investment \$273,551 per annum.

(a) Based on SCHADS Level 6; includes leave loading, superannuation and indexation.

(b) Based on SCHADS Level 5; includes leave loading, superannuation and indexation.

Sector-wide Indexation

YNOT's sustainability, and that of our members, is increasingly in jeopardy as the gap between operational costs and funding continues to widen. This is largely attributed to inflation and inadequate indexation applied to funding agreements.

YNOT urges the Tasmanian Government to immediately implement a transparent indexation formula to ensure the ongoing viability of the community services industry. We support the indexation formula proposed by TasCOSS, 70% WPI and 30% CPI (waged to CPI) split in organisational costs, including the superannuation guarantee (0.5%).

We recognise that the Government has committed to addressing indexation through the indexation review project. However, until this work is completed the Government must adopt the formula proposed by TasCOSS to immediately alleviate financial difficulties experienced by organisations and to provide greater funding certainty. This will support organisations to strategically plan for the future, deliver services that meet the current and emerging needs of Tasmanians and ultimately improve outcomes.

Recommendation 2

The Tasmanian Government immediately apply the indexation formula of 70% WPI and 30% CPI, plus the superannuation guarantee (0.5%) to all contracts with community service organisations.

Child and youth homelessness and housing insecurity

Child and youth homelessness and housing insecurity for young Tasmanians has reached unprecedented levels in recent years. This profoundly impacts the health and wellbeing, safety, educational attainment, employment outcomes and social participation of many young Tasmanians.

The recent release of Tasmania's first 20-year Housing Strategy recognises that children and young people are disproportionately represented in the State's homelessness population.^{vii} Concerningly however, unaccompanied homeless children presenting alone to specialist homelessness services, and young people aged 12-25 years experiencing homelessness, have been overlooked in the Strategy. These children and young people face significant vulnerabilities and are at increased risk of harm, abuse and exploitation.

The strategic policy directions of the Housing Strategy, intended for all Tasmanians, **fail to respond to the unique and often complex housing needs of all children and young people. This is despite 39% of Tasmania's homeless population being under the age of 25 years.**^{viii}

The Strategy also fails to respond to a fragmented youth homelessness service system under considerable strain, and the much-needed development the workforce.

In recent times, the Tasmanian Government has invested in targeted, developmentally appropriate, whole-of-government strategic policy directions for Tasmania's children and young people including the *Tasmanian Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy*, *Youth Jobs Strategy*, *Child and Student Wellbeing Strategy* and the *Youth Justice Blueprint*. This is recognition by government that strategies and solutions designed for adults are not suitable for children and young people.

This strategic policy approach must extend to housing solutions for all young people in our State. The only effective way to end child and youth homelessness is to ensure a pathway for all young Tasmanians to be securely housed, supported by a sustainable, coordinated and robust service system.

An optimal response would be the development of a standalone child and youth housing and homelessness strategy and action plan. A strategy that aligns with existing whole of government policy directions for children and young people is needed to drive government policy in a unified and holistic way, to achieve tangible outcomes, and maximise return on investment.

However, at a minimum, **a dedicated youth housing and homelessness action plan, under the new Housing Strategy, is essential.** A clear commitment to strengthening the youth specialist homelessness service system to respond to the increasingly complex needs of children and young people and meet legislative requirements is needed.

The Action Plan must:

- explicitly recognise the drivers of, and distinct pathways into and out of, homelessness for children and young people
- consolidate and build on existing youth housing and homelessness initiatives
- include key performance indicators, measures, targets and timelines to achieve identified goals
- be developmentally appropriate and has lived experience at its core
- be underpinned by contemporary evidence and rights based principles
- respond to the needs of the youth housing and homelessness sector by including sustainable funding models, staff retention strategies and professional development opportunities
- build on and strengthen existing government initiatives.

This approach will deliver a more cohesive youth housing and homelessness service system that provides safe, age appropriate care and housing solutions for children and young people, and leaves no-one behind. Importantly, it will support greater cross agency collaboration and accountability in government, better alignment of effort and remove the potential for duplication.

Recommendation 3

The Tasmanian Government act immediately to invest in a standalone Child and Youth Housing and Homelessness Plan that extend to 25 years of age.

Recommendation 4

The Tasmanian Government commits to working collaboratively with youth specialist homelessness service providers, peak bodies and key stakeholders to determine appropriate and sustainable funding models for organisations to ensure compliance with legislative and regulatory requirements, including the two-worker practice model, and to meet demand.

Recommendation 5

The Tasmanian Government invests in YNOT to facilitate the meaningful engagement of young Tasmanians in the development of housing solutions that meet their needs.

Recommendation 6

The Tasmanian Government appoints YNOT to relevant Housing and Homelessness Reference Groups to amplify the views and lived experiences of housing challenges facing young Tasmanians, and solutions.

Recommendation 7

Greater collaboration and cross agency coordination of youth housing and homelessness initiatives across government and improved communication with youth housing and homelessness service providers.

Recommendation 8

The Tasmanian Government works with Shelter Tasmania to determine an appropriate and sustainable workforce development model to deliver professional development opportunities to youth housing and homelessness service providers to respond to the increasingly complex needs of young people presenting to their service.

References

- ⁱ YNOT (2022) Tasmanian Youth Forum: 'I AM ME' Consultation Report.
- ⁱⁱ YNOT (2023) Tasmanian Youth Story 2022-23 Consultation Report.
- ⁱⁱⁱ Tasmanian Government (2023). Commission of Inquiry into the Tasmanian Government's Responses to Child Sexual Abuse: Report August 2023.
- ^{iv} Department for Education, Children and Young People (202). Youth Justice Blueprint 2022, Tasmanian Government.
- ^v Jobs Tasmania (2023). Youth Jobs Strategy Discussion Paper. Tasmanian Government.
- ^{vi} YNOT & YACSA (2023). Youth Participation Toolkit.
- ^{vii} Homes Tasmania (2023). Tasmanian Housing Strategy 2023-2043. Delivering more homes for a growing Tasmania and ending homelessness. Tasmanian Government.
- ^{viii} Australian Bureau of Statistics (2021). *Census of Population and Housing*. Australian Government. Accessed March 2023.