

Youth Policy Synthesis

Young People's Recommendations for Victoria

Sebastian Antoine

Zachary Campbell

Sabrina Choo

Mia Frederiksen

Luke Rycken

Miranda Watson

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Executive Summary

This synthesis brings together the voices of thousands of young people who have generously shared their experiences and recommendations over a significant period of time. They have genuine and valuable insights into life as a young person in Victoria and a keen understanding of what needs to change.

Young People and Reports

Young people are a key stakeholder in every single decision made by the Victorian Government, precisely because young people have to live with the consequences of these decisions for the longest period of time.

Young people have a wide variety of identities and experiences and their lives are influenced by every single portfolio in the Victorian Government. Each of the 833 recommendations was allocated to the most relevant portfolio. The portfolios which are attributed to the largest number of reports and recommendations are Education, Mental Health, Youth Justice, Youth and Jobs, Innovation and Trade.

Consultations and Cohorts

The synthesis identifies the number of young people consulted across the included reports. Thirty-two per cent of reports explicitly state the number of young people consulted and 41% state the location of consultations.

Key trends emerge about the number of young people consulted and the location of

consultations. The voices of rural and regional young people and disabled young people are largely sidelined. Very few reports specifically engaged young people in rural and regional areas on state government issues, although they are usually well consulted for place-based policies and programs. None of the included reports stated that they consulted with any young disabled people. This includes reports that were specifically attributed to the Disability, Ageing and Carers portfolio. While some disabled young people were undoubtedly consulted, their participation has not been recorded and this represents a significant gap.

The reports demonstrate a variety of consultation mechanisms including short surveys, focus groups, in-depth interviews, deliberative forums and other innovative research methods. Many reports were built on meaningful and exciting examples of youth participation.

The analysis identifies that young people with particular identities – including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, Culturally and Linguistically Diverse,

LGBTIQA+, homeless, justice-involved, out-of-home care, disabled and rural and regional young people – had recommendations to make about the particular portfolios which most influence their lives. However, young women and carers are likely additional cohorts that have been under-consulted in recent years. There is also insufficient data about discrepancies between different age groups in reports included in the synthesis. It will be important to collate data and identify discrepancies between the ideas and recommendations of different age groups in future work.

Cross-Cutting Themes

The analysis categorises recommendations into cross-cutting themes that generally describe the type of action suggested by each recommendation. In order of prevalence, these themes are, 'Increase Investment', 'New Strategy or Policy', 'System Change', 'Early Intervention and Prevention', 'Education Reform', 'Service Redesign', and 'Co-Design'. This analysis provides a unique insight into the suggested changes of reform required across portfolios.

Key Recommendations

The 833 recommendations have been synthesised to produce a short list of key

recommendations for most portfolios. The short lists include priority recommendations which are consistent across reports. If implemented, these recommendations would have a major positive influence on the lives of all young people in Victoria.

Opportunities and Gaps

The synthesis identifies several important opportunities for future consultation with young people. This includes an analysis of which portfolios are unlikely to require further consultation to determine recommendations. Importantly, disabled young people, international students, young women, young carers and those from rural and regional areas have been under-consulted.

The synthesis also identifies gaps in recent consultations and the need to undertake consultation among selected portfolios:

- Prevention of Family Violence
- Priority Precincts
- Roads
- Small Business
- Suburban Development
- Women
- Tourism, Sport and Major Events
- Veterans
- Victim Support

Key Reports

This synthesis report brings together 833 findings and recommendations from 138 publications relevant to young people in Victoria. It identifies key recommendations for the Victorian Government and points towards specific areas and strategies for future consultation with young people.

Methodology

This section outlines the reports used in the synthesis by linking them to relevant portfolios in the Victorian Government and identifying where reports focus on a particular cohort. This section demonstrates that all portfolio areas in the Victorian Government are relevant to young people and that the majority of portfolios have been identified in existing reports and recommendations.

Reports by Portfolio

The portfolio with the highest number of reports is Mental Health, reflecting the fact that many organisations made submissions to the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System. This is consistent with young people identifying mental health as their primary issue of concern¹ and the emergence of three quarters of all mental health disorders before the age of 24.²

Following Mental Health, the themes with the greatest number of reports are Youth, Education and Youth Justice. Chart one identifies the number of included reports which have a focus on a particular portfolio.

Number of Recommendations by Portfolio

The majority of reports include recommendations relevant to a number of portfolios. Chart two illustrates the number of recommendations for each portfolio across all reports. This analysis identifies that the Education portfolio is associated with the largest number of recommendations. This is primarily due to a large number of reports attributed to a variety of portfolios making recommendations for education reform. Mental Health, Youth Justice and Jobs, Innovation and Trade are all attributed to a large number of recommendations.

Number of Reports and Young People Consulted by Portfolio

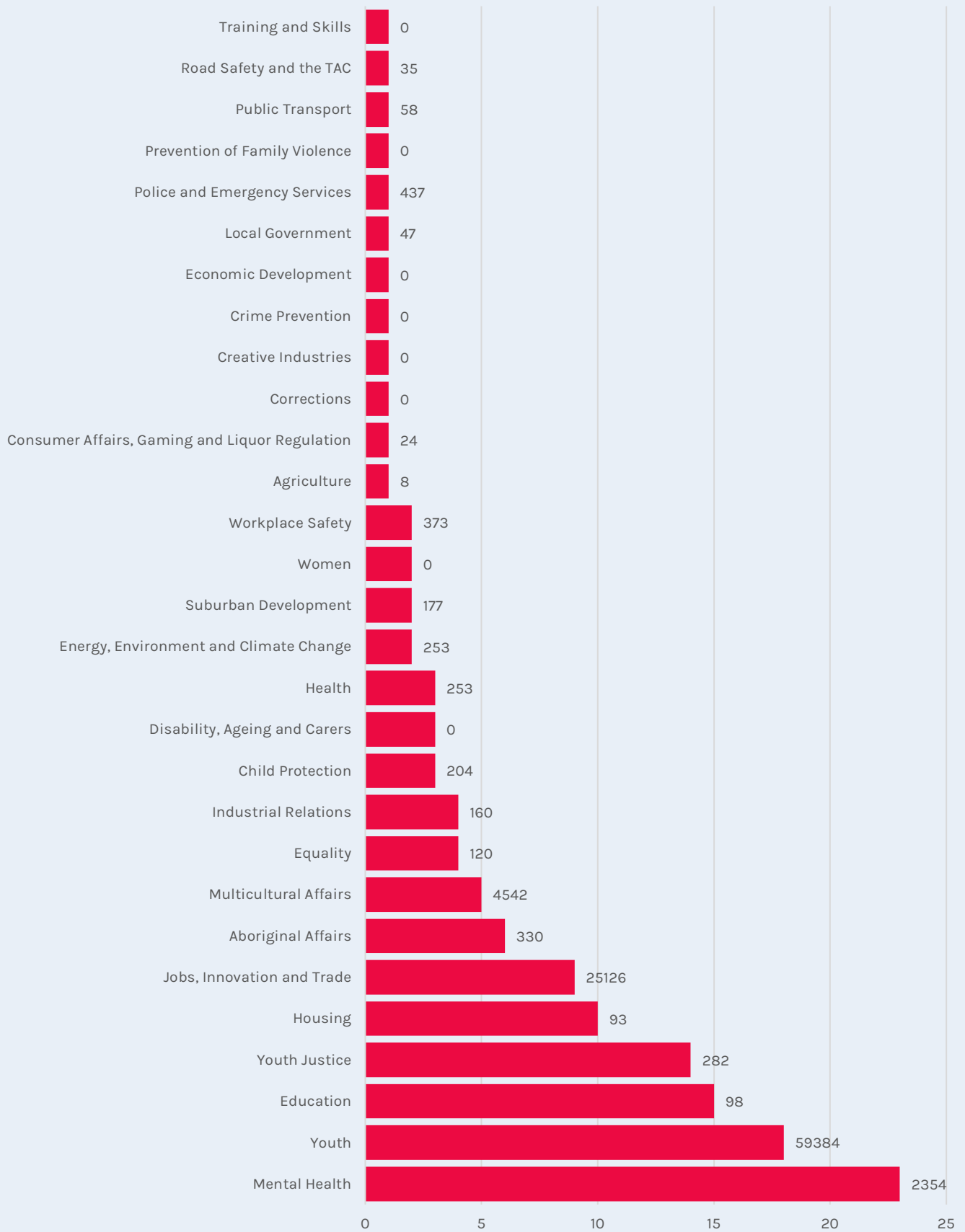


Chart 1 – The number adjacent to each bar represents the total number of young people consulted for all reports attributed to each portfolio.

Number of Recommendations by Portfolio Across All Reports

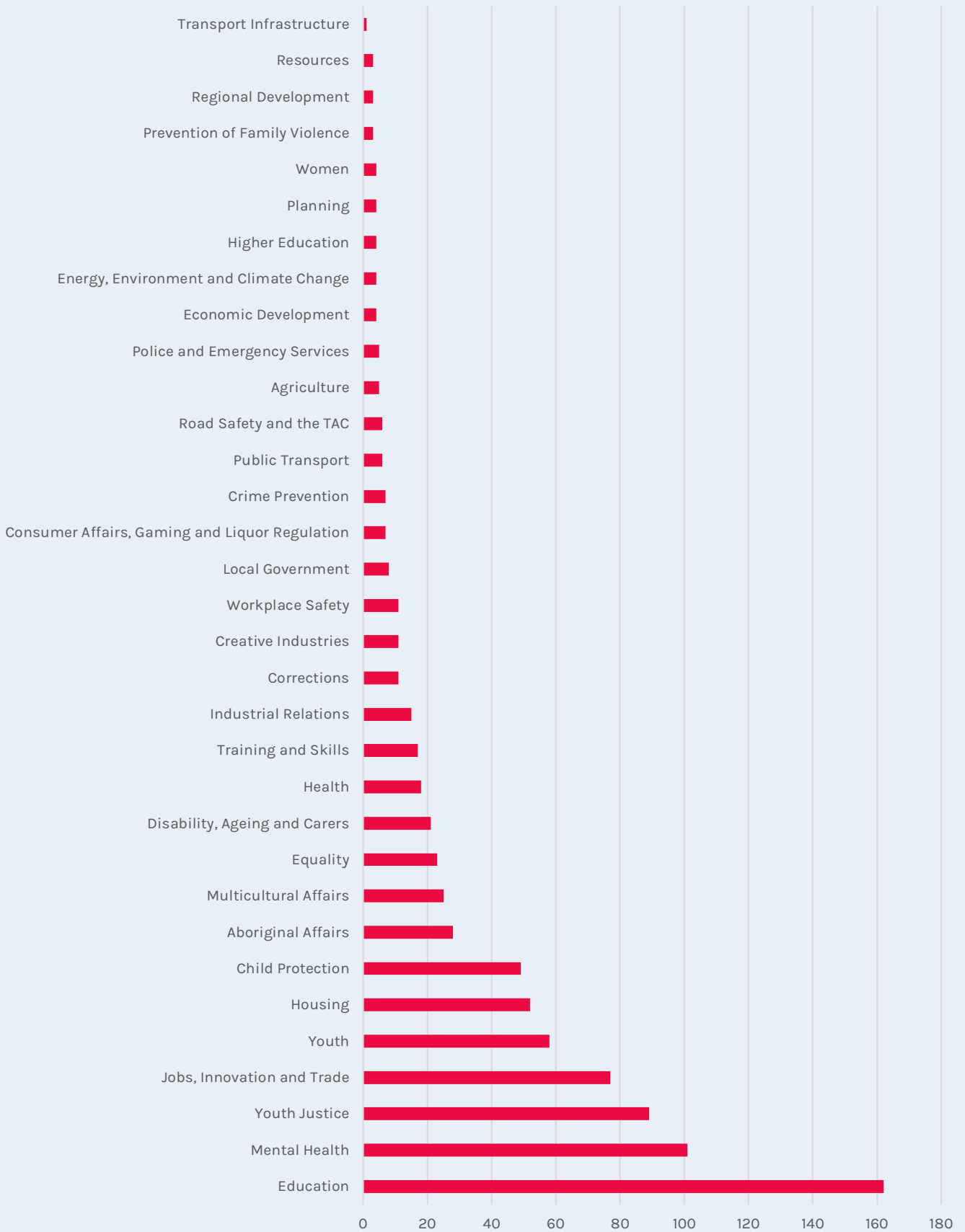


Chart 2

Consultations

The synthesis identifies the number of young people consulted across the included reports. Thirty-two per cent of reports explicitly state the number of young people consulted and 41% state the location of consultations.

Consultations by Portfolio and Location

Table one shows the number of young people consulted by portfolio area and location of consultation. The numbers of young people consulted are included in this table if they shaped a recommendation about a specific portfolio, even if the report was primarily attributed to a different portfolio. While this approach leads to counting many consultation participants more than once, it

helps track the influence of participants on all the recommendations they shaped. While most of the reports included in the synthesis were shaped by consultations with young people, not all of these reports explicitly state the number and location of young people consulted. Some reports were not informed by consultation with young people and were instead informed by reviews of literature or consultation with workers in the youth sector.

Portfolio	Metropolitan	Rural and Regional	Statewide	Total
Aboriginal Affairs	0	0	7,534	7,534
Child Protection	0	0	620	620
Disability, Ageing and Carers	0	0	0	0
Education	282	229	7,547	8,058
Equality	160	0	624	784
Health	180	229	49	458
Housing	0	0	93	93
Industrial Relations	0	0	160	160
Jobs, Innovation and Trade	100	0	54	154
Mental Health	277	49	10,084	10,410
Multicultural Affairs	117	0	4,542	4,659
Training and Skills	60	8	0	68
Workplace Safety	0	0	373	373
Youth Justice	79	0	7,525	7,604
Youth	297	229	7,671	8,197

Table 1

Rural and Regional Consultation

Young people in rural and regional areas are relatively under consulted when compared with their metropolitan counterparts. This is partly due to the uneven population distribution between metropolitan and regional areas – approximately 22% of young people reside in rural and regional areas – but may also be caused by insufficient engagement in rural and regional areas. This difference may also be due to the nature of regional consultations, which often only shape reports on rural and regional topics rather than statewide matters. In reports shaped by statewide consultation, the voices of young people in rural and regional areas are included alongside the voices of young people in metropolitan areas. The likely outcome of this is that the particular experiences and recommendations of rural and regional young people are eclipsed or diluted.

It is important to note this trend because the experience of young people in rural and regional areas is markedly different from the experience of young people in metropolitan areas and regional cities. Young people in rural and regional areas face different kinds of barriers when accessing services due to distance, lack of access to transport and the poor distribution of specific services. Young people in rural and regional areas have poorer access to quality and diverse education options and diversity of careers options. Many young people from regional areas move away from home earlier than those from metropolitan areas in order to pursue further study or work. Young people

from marginalised backgrounds highlight the sometimes-conservative nature of regional communities as damaging, while others praise the community spirit as more common in regional areas than in metropolitan areas. The findings of several reports highlight the difference in experience of young people in rural and regional Victoria. One of the findings of the YACVic *Ending Homelessness* report was that young people prioritised building social housing in their local area, so they were not forced to travel away from their existing support networks to find a place to live.³ More than 1,000 young people who shaped *Elevate: Macedon Ranges Shire Council Youth Strategy 2018–2028* identified access to public transport as one of the top three issues of personal impact.⁴ These experiences are locally specific but require a significant response from the Victorian Government in partnership with local government and communities.

The experiences of young people are undoubtedly shaped by their location across the state. Location influences the choices they have available to them and the services they can access. There are great examples of young people shaping the development of their local communities and broader regional areas. This is important because place-based and community-driven solutions are valuable. There is an opportunity, however, to bring together young people from regional and rural areas to shape statewide policy that might affect all young people, regardless of geographic location.

Consultation Types

There was a great variety of consultation types identified in the reports. Some reports conducted an online survey, others facilitated focus groups, some were the product of in-depth interviews and some reports were developed through deliberative forums led by young people. Each of these consultation mechanisms have strengths and weaknesses which were identified in the reports. All of the consultation mechanisms used in the reports are valid and provide a valuable opportunity to engage with young people.

There are a large number of young people consulted for reports attributed to the Youth

and Jobs, Innovation and Trade portfolios.

This is due to two separate reports written by Mission Australia after conducting wide-reaching national surveys with young people aged 12–19. While published in different years, using a different sample, it is likely that some young people participated in both surveys and are counted twice. This may be true for other reports.

Many reports provide examples of genuine and meaningful engagement of young people in a range of portfolios. The Victorian Student Representative Council's *Congress Report*⁵ and the Youth Affairs Council Victoria *Ending Youth Homelessness* report³ provide important examples of youth participation.

Cohorts

The synthesis identifies the number of young people and cohorts of young people who have been recently consulted in Victoria.

Young People Consulted by Cohort

Chart three shows the number of young people belonging to a specific cohort consulted to prepare reports. The data used to create this chart is limited because of the lack of detailed information available in reports about the numbers of young people consulted. The chart only shows the number

of young people with a particular identity who contributed to a report with that theme. It does not count young people's identities when contributing to a report with a different theme. For example, young people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds may not be identified when they are consulted for a report about their experiences of homelessness.

Number of Reports and Young People Consulted by Cohort

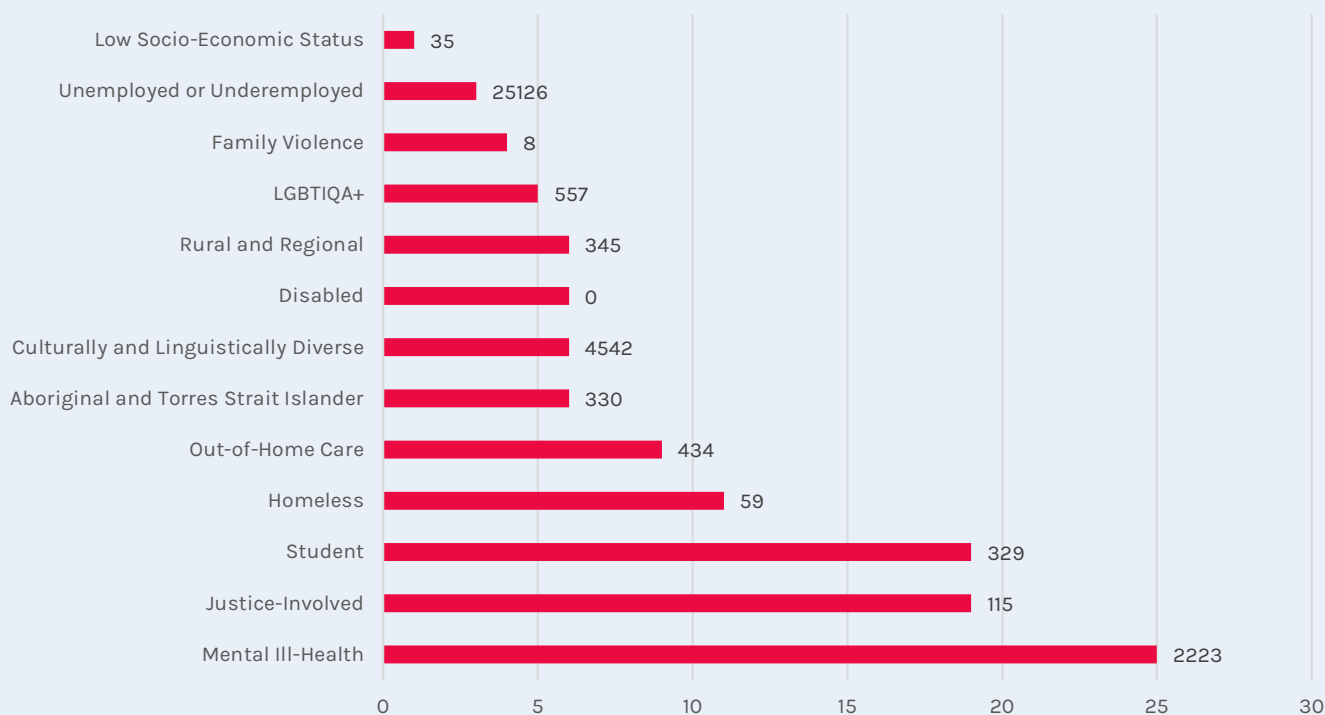


Chart 3 – The number adjacent to each bar represents the total number of young people consulted for each cohort. The size of each bar corresponds with the total number of reports attributed to each cohort.

Two reports are shaped by surveys of large numbers of culturally and linguistically diverse and unemployed and underemployed young people. Apart from these anomalies, the number of young people consulted across reports is unsurprising. Many young people with experience of mental ill-health have been consulted as organisations make submissions to the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System. Deeper analysis of the types of young people consulted is made difficult as this data is not explicitly stated in all reports. It is important to note that young people have many intersecting identities, the complexities of which cannot be accurately captured in reports included in the synthesis.

A clear distinction emerges between the portfolios that are relevant to a large proportion of young people – such as Mental Health, Youth and Education – and portfolios that are relevant to a smaller, often marginalised proportion of young people – such as Youth Justice, Housing, Aboriginal Affairs, Multicultural Affairs, Equality and Child Protection. A wide range of young people are likely to have a meaningful opinion about these former portfolios while only young people with particular experiences or identities may be consulted about the latter category of portfolios.

Age Differentiation

The reports included in the synthesis rarely state the different experiences and opinions of young people of different ages. Young people under the age of 18 are more likely to

be in full time education whereas young people aged 18–25 are more likely to be in higher education, employment or looking for work. This difference in life stages likely influences the issues that young people are concerned about and in which consultations they choose to participate. School-aged young people are likely to be more concerned about their education being fit-for-purpose whereas young people who have finished school might be more concerned about career development. For example, YACVic's survey of young people's experience of COVID-19 showed that school-aged young people were mainly concerned about the loss of social interaction and the negative impacts on their education. Conversely, young people over 18 were more concerned about financial stability.⁶ Issues of exploitation at work, discrimination in the community and lack of access to proper housing or support affects all young people, no matter their age. However, it is important to collate data and identify discrepancies between ages in future work.

Women

There are few reports included in the synthesis which specifically included consultation only with young women. However, young women were consulted to shape reports without necessarily being identified as a specific cohort. It is possible that young women are overrepresented in some consultations.

Carers

Young people who are carers were only specifically identified as consultation participants in one report. This is because only one of the included reports had a focus on the lives of carers of all ages. Within this report, it appears that only two young people were consulted. Young people's caring responsibilities are only infrequently considered when discussing other issues like mental health or education. Carer's Victoria represents the interests of carers in Victoria and recognises that young carers are an important but often missed group in policy decisions. Young carers are likely to have been involved in consultations around other themes, given that one in ten young people are young carers.

Cross-Cutting Themes

The synthesis identifies several themes across recommendations from all portfolio areas. These cross-cutting themes illustrate the type of change identified among a large number of recommendations.

Themes

The 833 recommendations included in the synthesis have been assigned one or more cross-cutting themes where appropriate. These themes generally describe the type of action included in the recommendation. The themes identified are:

- Increasing Investment
- New Strategy or Policy
- Early Intervention and Prevention
- System Change
- Education Reform
- Service Redesign or Expansion
- Co-Design

Chart four shows the number of each cross-cutting theme across all portfolios. The most common theme is 'Increase Investment', which was the theme of around 20% of all recommendations. The next most common are 'New Strategy or Policy', followed by 'System Change' and 'Early Intervention and Prevention'. The cross-cutting themes of 'Education Reform', 'Service Redesign' and 'Co-Design' are less common but are distributed across many different portfolios.

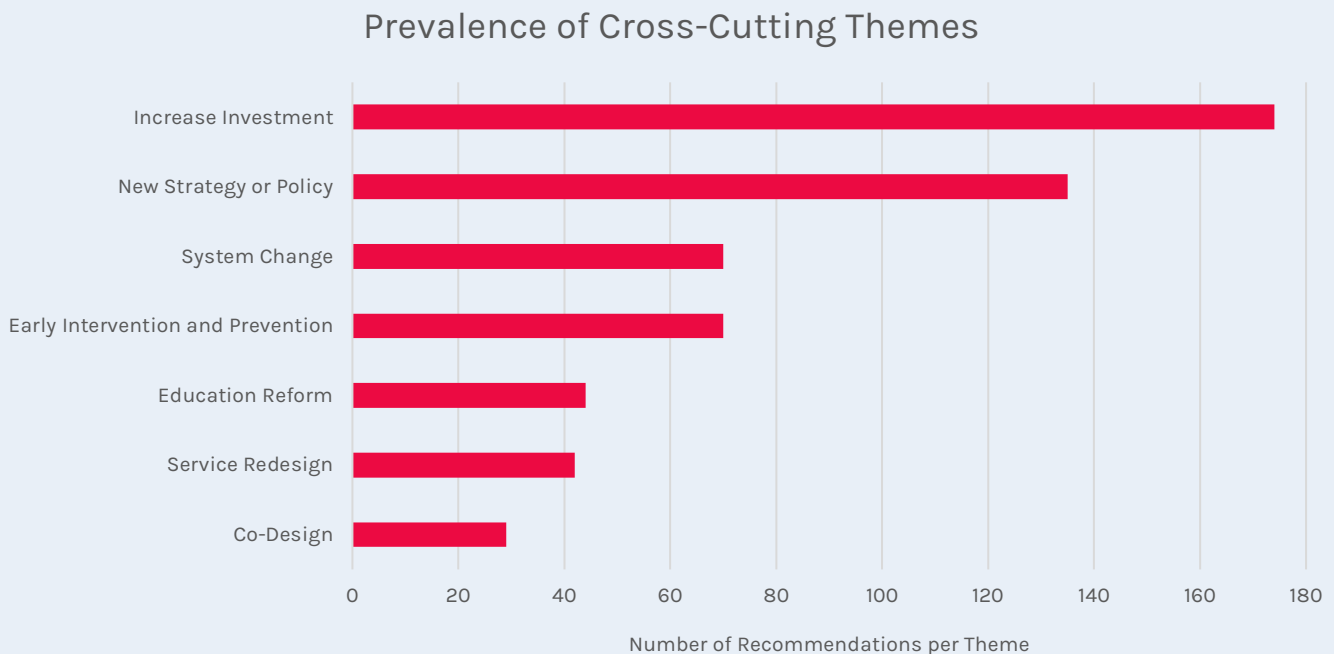


Chart 4

Co-Design

The cross-cutting theme of Co-Design appears in many reports. Reports often include a specific recommendation to involve young people in shaping the delivery of the remainder of the recommendations listed. Co-design regularly features in reports about the following portfolios:

- Aboriginal Affairs
- Agriculture
- Child Protection
- Education
- Energy, Environment and Climate Change
- Health
- Housing
- Local Government
- Mental Health
- Multicultural Affairs
- Youth Justice
- Youth

The prevalence of co-design among recommendations confirms the importance of working alongside young people to design, implement and evaluate policies and programs. Co-design aligns with the three core principles of Youth Participation: empowerment, purposeful engagement and inclusiveness.⁷

Increase Investment

The prevalence of cross-cutting themes within each portfolio was calculated as a proportion to allow comparison between portfolios with different numbers of recommendations. Chart five details the proportion of recommendations within each listed portfolio that call for an increase in investment.

Increase Investment Recommendations

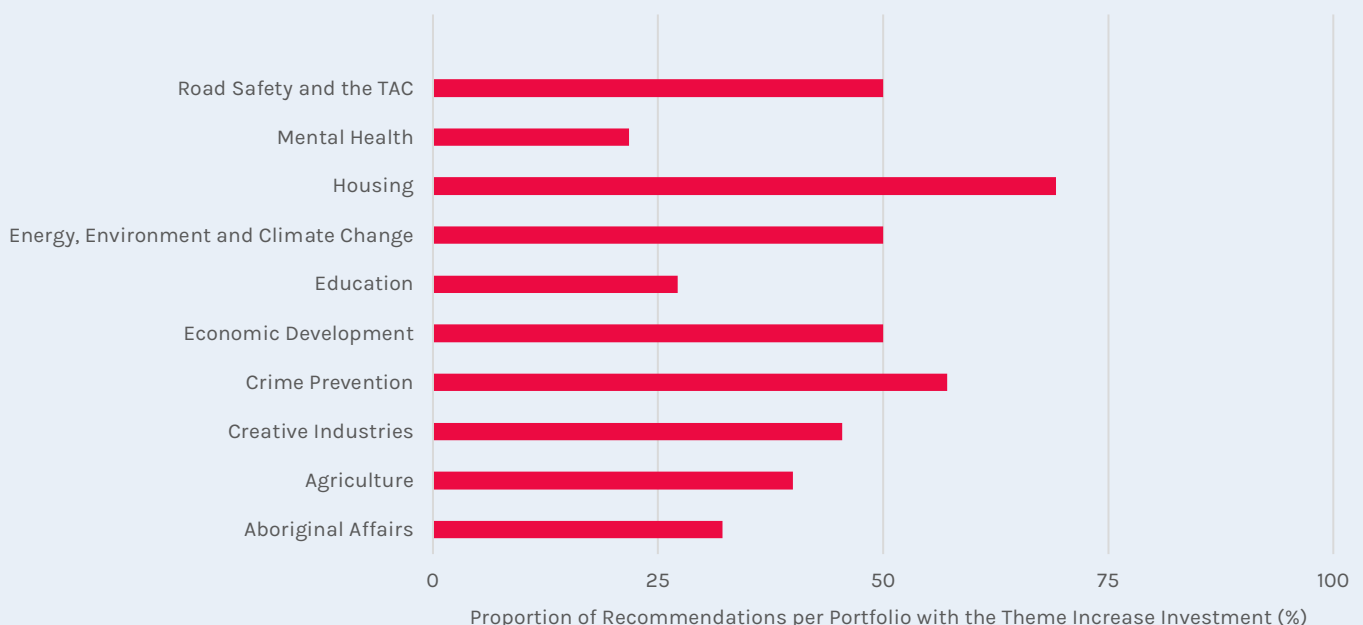


Chart 5

New Strategy or Policy

Chart six details the proportion of recommendations in each listed portfolio that call for the development of a new strategy or policy. It is significant that of the 49 recommendations made about Child Protection, 28 (57%) call for the development of a new strategy. Of the 162 recommendations made to the portfolio of Education, 50 (31%) call for a new strategy.

New Strategy or Policy Recommendations

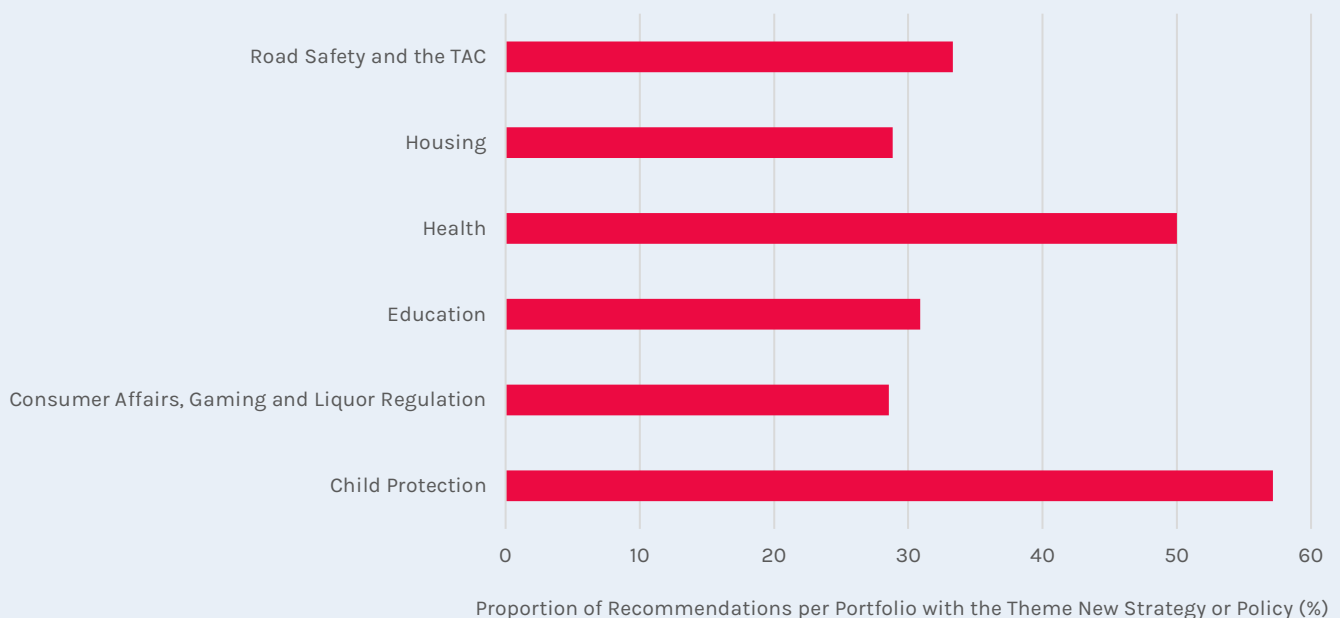


Chart 6

Key Recommendations

This section lists key recommendations for a selection of portfolios that are consistently identified by young people as important.

Overall Recommendations

The recommendations included in this section are a synthesis of the most frequently cited recommendations attributed to each portfolio. These recommendations have been listed identically in several reports, demonstrating that young people and organisations agree on solutions and opportunities for change.

The most comprehensive national consultation of young people is conducted each year by Australia's Youth Representative to the United Nations. In 2019, Kareem El-Ansary consulted with young people across the nation to consider how young people's voices could shape a future Australia. The recommendations made in the Youth Representative report align with a variety of recommendations made in other reports included in this synthesis.⁸

Aboriginal Affairs

Aboriginal Affairs is the theme of six reports in the synthesis. Eleven reports related to other portfolios include recommendations about Aboriginal Affairs. In total, there are 28 recommendations relevant to the Aboriginal Affairs portfolio. Three hundred and thirty young people were consulted to form the six reports specifically about Aboriginal Affairs and a further 7,204 young people were consulted for the 11 additional reports. Many recommendations relevant to the Aboriginal Affairs portfolio are connected with the Youth Justice, Education and Mental Health portfolios. The key recommendations call for ensuring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people are safe and connected to culture, family and community. Self-determination is seen as paramount in implementing all recommendations and policies connected to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people. The most frequently identified recommendations are:

1. Create just and equitable systems that:
 - a. address the over-representation of Aboriginal children in out-of-home care;
 - b. address the over-representation of Aboriginal children in the youth justice system;

- c. keep Aboriginal children safe and strong in their families and communities; and
 - d. recognise the importance of contact with family, community and culture while in the system.
2. Invest in place-based, community-led responses to address structural disadvantage in Aboriginal communities.
 3. Empower Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations through long-term, sustainable funding models to provide holistic services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people.

Child Protection

Three reports included in the synthesis are primarily relevant to Child Protection. However, many reports about other portfolios include recommendations specifically about Child Protection. Forty-nine recommendations were made about Child Protection from reports on various other portfolios including Aboriginal Affairs, Youth Justice, Mental Health, Public Transport and Education. The most common recommendation from young people and the sector is that the age of state care should be extended from 18 to 21. Most reports argue for a deeper consideration of the structural and underlying causes of inequality. Statewide, 620 young people with lived experience of the out-of-home care system were consulted and shaped the following recommendations:

1. Extend the out-of-home care age to 21

2. Commit to reducing the over-representation of Aboriginal children in out-of-home care and:
 - a. provide greater support for kinship care;
 - b. build the cultural competency of organisations delivering services to Aboriginal children in out-of-home care; and
 - c. ensure Aboriginal children in out-of-home care have meaningful access to their culture.
3. Develop and resource an integrated, whole-of-system investment model and strategy which addresses child and family disadvantage and involves a commitment to building a fair and inclusive society.
4. Invest in programs to end the over-representation of children in out-of-home care entering the justice system.
5. Genuinely listen and respond to the voices of young people in shaping their own treatment in the out-of-home care system and shaping the broader system.

Disability, Ageing and Carers

Disability, Ageing and Carers is the theme of three reports included in the synthesis. Seven reports about other portfolios include specific recommendations about Disability, Ageing and Carers. Across all reports there are 21 recommendations, although none of the reports about disability explicitly state the number of young people consulted. This highlights the direct need to work collaboratively and proactively with young people to determine their needs and

understand their recommendations about the Disability, Ageing and Carers portfolio. The key recommendations listed in the reports include creating a detailed strategy to guarantee the equal rights of young people with a disability in education, supporting meaningful employment and focusing on strengthening the transition from school to the workforce by funding Disability Employment Service Programs. The most frequently identified recommendations are:

1. Design and fund a detailed strategy to ensure the equal rights of people with a disability in education.
2. Strengthening the transition of students with a disability into meaningful employment.
3. Redirect funding into an expanded Disability Employment Services program and give automatic access to people with a disability when looking for work
4. Develop guidelines to address bullying of people with a disability.
5. Improve service coordination between the NDIS, primary care and youth mental health systems.

Education

Education is the theme of 15 reports included in the synthesis. Thirty-six reports about other portfolios include recommendations relevant to the Education portfolio. Across all reports, there were 162 recommendations made on the theme of Education, reflecting the importance of education in the lives of young people. Education has the highest number of recommendations and these

come from reports with a wide variety of themes including Jobs, Innovation and Trade, Women, Equality and Mental Health. Many recommendations attributed to the Education portfolio also involve the Higher Education and Training and Skills portfolios. A major theme from reports is ensuring the education system is flexible and responsive so that it works for all young people. Many recommendations reflect the issues discussed by students at Victorian Student Representative Council's 2019 Congress.⁵ Eight thousand and fifty-eight young people were consulted to shape the 162 recommendations on Education. The most frequently identified recommendations are:

1. Reform the curriculum to include:
 - a. advocacy skills;
 - b. life skills;
 - c. financial literacy;
 - d. careers counselling;
 - e. respectful relationships;
 - f. anti-racism;
 - g. anti-bullying and anti-harassment;
 - h. practical and relevant civics education;
 - i. disability awareness education;
 - j. inclusive sex education;
 - k. mental health first-aid training and programs that promote positive mental health wellbeing;
 - l. broad cultural awareness training; and
 - m. comprehensive and locally relevant education on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander history, language and culture.

2. Expand funding to existing programs to support young people to continue engaging in education.
3. Make schools properly inclusive for disabled young people, LGBTIQ+ young people, young people experiencing disadvantage and young people who are bullied.
4. Implement evidence-based approaches to improving educational outcomes.
5. Ensure alternative forms of education, including VCAL, TAFE and VET are well resourced and respected.
6. Embed student voice so young people are formally involved in the design and reform of educational curricula and assessment models.

Energy, Environment and Climate Change

Four reports include specific recommendations about the Energy, Environment and Climate Change portfolio. Climate change is an increasingly important topic for young people both globally and in Victoria and the 'environment' is now the second most commonly cited issue of national importance by respondents to the Mission Australia Youth Survey.¹ Similarly, the continued School Strike for Climate movement emphasises the importance of the Energy, Environment and Climate Change portfolio to young people. Young people who were consulted resoundingly recommend that the Victorian and Commonwealth Governments:

1. Commit to real climate change action.
2. Hold a youth summit across Australia and the Pacific to inform approaches to

achieving Goal 13 of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals⁹ and create a ten-year plan for action.

3. Protect and enhance the region's natural assets and reduce the impact of climate change.
4. Partner with young people in climate change mitigation efforts.
5. Respond more proactively to the ongoing threat of climate change.

Equality

Equality is the main theme of four reports included in the synthesis. Nine reports with different themes include specific recommendations about Equality. Across all reports, there are 23 recommendations following consultation with 557 LGBTIQ+ young people. The most frequently identified recommendations are:

1. Dismantle the structural barriers and systemic discrimination that exist for young people based on sexuality, religion, gender, ability and other minority groups.
2. Ensure that policy, legislation, resources and other structures actively promote gender equality.
3. Improve health and mental health outcomes for diverse young people by:
 - a. broadening care beyond gender-affirmative health care;
 - b. enhancing and upskilling service providers to deliver safe and inclusive services; and
 - c. investing more in LGBTIQ+ specific services.

4. Create spaces for LGBTIQ+ young people to find connection, build confidence and celebrate identity to empower the next generation of leaders by expanding funding to successful programs, especially in rural and regional Victoria.

Health

Health is the theme of only two reports within the synthesis and eight reports with different themes include specific recommendations about the Health portfolio. Among these reports, there are 18 total recommendations shaped by consultation with over 250 people. The key recommendations focus on young people's access to peer-led and inclusive sex education, mandating affordable health care access for young people and ensuring that public health promotion campaigns are co-designed with young people. The most frequently identified recommendations are:

1. Ensure all young people have access to affordable primary health and community services that cater to their needs with a focus on prevention and early intervention.
2. Support a peer led education campaign to reduce the stigma of sexual and reproductive health for young people.
3. Implement consistent state and national curriculum of sex education for years 7–10 in all secondary schools, taking into account cultural sensitivity, and be inclusive of, and appropriate for, same sex attracted and gender diverse young people and informed/co designed by young people.

Housing

Housing is the main theme of nine reports included in the synthesis. Eight reports relevant to other portfolios make specific recommendations about Housing. In total there are 52 recommendations, shaped by consultation with at least 93 young people with differing lived experiences of homelessness. Whilst many recommendations address different strategies, they all include similar goals and aims. The key recommendations for Housing include greater investment in early intervention and prevention strategies, improving and expanding current services and developing an effective Youth Homelessness Plan for Victoria. The most commonly identified recommendations are:

1. Improve and expand existing services for young people experiencing homelessness or at-risk of homelessness.
2. Increase investment in early intervention and prevention for young people at-risk of homelessness.
3. Develop a Youth Homelessness Plan for Victoria.
4. Increase funding to existing homelessness services.
5. Build at least 6,000 new social housing units each year for the next 10 years.
6. Change and improve the social housing model to ensure it works for young people.
7. Make a fair private rental market for young people and enforce minimum

property standards to ensure all rental properties are liveable.

Industrial Relations

Industrial Relations is the main theme of four reports included in the synthesis. Three reports with different themes included recommendations about Industrial Relations. In total, 18 recommendations are included, shaped by consultation with 160 young people. Recommendations relevant to Workplace Safety, and the Jobs, Innovation and Trade portfolios are commonly linked to Industrial Relations. The key recommendations include increasing minimum wages and improving workplace environments to ensure workers' safety and wellbeing. The most frequently identified recommendations are:

1. Make wage theft a crime.
2. Enforce higher pay and real minimum wages for workers in the gig economy and expand definitions of 'employer' and 'employee' to include dependent contracting arrangements.
3. Ensure that secondary students aged 14 and over receive education concerning workplace rights and safety.
4. Investigate the creation of an online platform to allow young workers to report employer responses to workplace bullying, health and safety.
5. Support WorkSafe to develop a bullying code to improve employer compliance with the *Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004 (Vic)* and refine systems to enable more confidential reporting of bullying.

Jobs, Innovation and Trade

Jobs, Innovation and Trade is the primary theme of nine reports included in the synthesis. Among those reports, there were 77 recommendations and over 25,000 people involved in the consultation process. The key recommendations include ensuring the marketplace is responsive to young people's needs and developing a Youth Employment Strategy for Victoria. The most frequently identified recommendations are:

1. Develop and resource a Youth Employment Strategy.
2. Support young people in casual and part time work by enforcing their working rights and providing pathways to part-time and full-time employment.
3. Invest in creating wider employment access for young people with disabilities by making workplaces more accessible.
4. Invest in an online platform to promote internship, placement opportunities and entry-level work for young people across Victoria.

Mental Health

Mental Health is the main focus of the largest number of reports included in this synthesis, with 22 reports relevant to the portfolio. Fourteen additional reports with different themes include recommendations relevant to Mental Health. These additional reports are relevant to the Aboriginal Affairs, Multicultural Affairs, Education, Equality, Suburban Development, Housing and Energy, Environment and Climate Change. In total, 101 recommendations have been included,

shaped by various consultations involving 10,410 young people. The high number of reports and young people consulted is primarily linked with the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System. The most frequently identified recommendations are:

1. Improve integration and coordination of youth mental health services and implement a cross-sector approach to addressing mental ill-health.
2. Implement better support and engage with peers, families and carers of young people who are experiencing mental ill-health.
3. Develop and invest in trauma-informed programs that help to assess the presence and impact of trauma in young people.
4. Invest in the expansion of youth mental health services in order to provide equal access to young people in all areas of Victoria.
5. Address the 'missing middle' and better support young people with moderate to severe mental illness by investing in accessible community services.
6. Ensure that all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, Culturally and Linguistically Diverse and migrant and refugee young people have access to culturally competent mental health services.
7. Reduce the long wait times for access to mental health services and ensure young people can access mental health services at no cost.

Multicultural Affairs

Multicultural Affairs is the theme of five reports included in the synthesis. There are 25 recommendations relevant to Multicultural Affairs across all reports. Among these reports, 4,542 young people were consulted regarding issues about Multicultural Affairs. The key recommendations include providing targeted services and actively removing systemic barriers that impact culturally and linguistically diverse young people and those from refugee or migrant backgrounds. The most frequently identified recommendations are:

1. Remove systemic barriers preventing refugee or migrant young people from reaching their full potential.
2. Continue to invest in targeted supports and programs that assist young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds to transition into employment and remain engaged in education.
3. Offer incentives to employers to create paid internship and/or work experience for young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds.
4. Implement pre-employment programs targeting young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds including:
 - a. volunteering opportunities and meaningful work experience;
 - b. careers counselling, advice and support in schools that encompass job readiness activities such as resume development, interviewing techniques and familiarisation

with the Australian workplace;
and

- c. parent engagement in schools to provide information to young people and parents on employment, training pathways and options.
5. Introduce Racial Equity Tools to guide policy making.

Training and Skills

There is only one report included in the synthesis with Training and Skills as the main theme, however six other reports made specific recommendations about Training and Skills. In total, 14 recommendations were made, shaped by consultation with 68 young people. The recommendations are from reports attributed to various portfolios including Agriculture, Aboriginal Affairs, Education, Youth, Housing and Multicultural Affairs. A reoccurring theme in the recommendations is the transition between education and employment and young people's preference for greater resources to support this transition. The most frequently identified recommendations are:

1. Provide support and resources specific to disadvantaged young people in need of assistance to transition from education to training and employment.
2. Invest in general programs for all young people to support them to develop skills and networks to successfully enter the workforce.
3. Fully fund vocational and applied learning in school and community settings.

Workplace Safety

Workplace Safety is the main theme of two reports included in the synthesis. There is a total of 11 recommendations across three reports. While there are few reports in this portfolio, 373 young people have been consulted statewide. The main recommendations highlight the need for additional training relevant to work health and safety. The most frequently identified recommendations are:

1. Include mandatory training on work health, safety and rights in the high school curriculum.
2. Review the *Occupation Health and Safety Act 2004 (Vic)* and accompanying legislation to ensure that companies operating in the gig economy are clearly responsible for the health and safety of their workers
3. Compel franchisors to establish incident and hazard reporting mechanisms that are rolled out consistently across their franchise system.

Youth Justice

Ten reports included in the synthesis are related specifically to the Youth Justice portfolio and another 13 reports include at least one recommendation relevant to Youth Justice. In total there are 89 Youth Justice recommendations. Reports relevant to the Aboriginal Affairs, Education, Mental Health and Child Protection portfolios made specific recommendations about Youth Justice. These reports included consultation with 7,604 young people. Many reports identify the overrepresentation of young people with

specific backgrounds in the youth justice system, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people. The need to raise the age of legal responsibility in Victoria from 10 to 14 is a frequently cited recommendation among the included reports. The most frequently identified recommendations are:

1. Raise the age of legal responsibility from 10 to 14.
2. Invest in place-based initiatives to end disadvantage for young people involved, or at risk of contact, with the justice system.
3. Take action to address the disproportionate representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and culturally and linguistically diverse children and young people in the justice system.
4. Rebuild a youth justice system that acknowledges the systemic bias that young people encounter.
5. Establish and fund – through justice reinvestment – community-wide systems of prevention and early intervention that support young people at risk of contact with the youth justice system.
6. Expand bail support programs with an emphasis on integrated and after-hours services for children and young people and retaining provisions in the *Child, Youth and Families Act 2005 (Vic)* that prohibits children being charged with breaching bail conditions.
7. Transition to small-scale, local, and therapeutic youth justice facilities with

approximately eight beds while closing the existing large youth justice centres.

Youth

The Youth portfolio is the main theme of 11 reports included in the synthesis. Fourteen reports with different themes include recommendations about the portfolio and in total, there are 56 unique recommendations. The 25 reports include consultation with 8,197 young people and workers. Many reports stated that young people have a clear vision of what should change, and that action is now required to implement their recommendations and ideas. Reports overwhelmingly advocate for increased youth participation in decision-making and service design. A number of reports include recommendations relevant to the Commonwealth Government, including funding the Australian Youth Affairs Coalition and raising the rate of Newstart and Youth Allowance payments. The most commonly identified recommendations for the Youth portfolio are:

1. Support and mandate youth participation in all decision-making and policies that affect young people. This should also include:
 - a. requiring youth participation for the design of services and programs relevant to young people; and
 - b. establishing governance positions for young people in organisations and government agencies.

2. Lower the voting age for local and state elections to 16.
3. Support the development of the youth sector and provide funding for more youth services including:
 - a. local government youth services;
 - b. generalist youth services; and
 - c. specialist youth services.
4. Implement state and local Youth Action Plans or Youth Strategies which mandate youth participation.

Opportunities and Gaps

The synthesis allows identification of several important opportunities for further consultation with young people and how the Victorian Government should embed youth participation.

Every Portfolio

Young people in Victoria should be included and considered in all portfolios of the Victorian Government. The evidence from this policy synthesis shows that young people must be considered by every Department and Minister when making decisions. Only six per cent of recommendations included in this synthesis primarily relate to the Youth portfolio. Ninety-four per cent of the 833 recommendations are attributed to other portfolios. Some portfolios have an impact on many young people, while other portfolios have a large impact on a small group of young people. The whole-of-government analysis of this strategy provides the opportunity to begin involving young people in the decision making of all portfolios.

Over-Consultation

Young people in Victoria have been extensively consulted and it is important to ensure that young people are not unnecessarily consulted on issues which have already been thoroughly examined. Instead, existing recommendations should be implemented with the input and support of young people.

While there has been some action in implementing the recommendations that young people have made in the last three years, many recommendations made by young people have not yet been considered or planned. Importantly, further consultation with young people about what is important to them or what they think should change is disingenuous without a commitment to act on existing recommendations that young people have already made.

The following portfolios are least likely to require further consultation – instead young people should be included in the implementation of relevant recommendations:

- Education
- Mental Health
- Jobs, Innovation and Trade
- Youth Justice
- Housing

In consideration of the existing consultation with young people on these topics, the Victorian Government should communicate with young people to explain how their past and future participation will shape decisions. Where young people's recommendations have not yet been acted upon, it should be

clearly explained why this is the case before engaging in further consultation. This process aligns with core values three and seven of the International Association for Public Participation.¹⁰

Identity

YACVic recognises that young people carry with them multiple, intersecting identities including, but not limited to, their culture, age, gender, ethnicity, class, migration status, sexual orientation, rurality, history of trauma, incarceration in the justice system, involvement in out-of-home care, disability, homelessness status, experience of mental ill-health, education status or employment status. These identities shape the experiences that young people have and issues that are likely to discuss. All parts of the Victorian Government should similarly recognise these intersecting identities and experiences.

Information from the synthesis shows that young people of particular identities have been consulted to shape recommendations for relevant portfolios. In particular, young people involved in out-of-home care, young people involved in the youth justice system, young people from multicultural backgrounds and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people have been well represented in consultations included in the synthesis. Their voices have been meaningfully included in the reports which proves the importance of collaborating with key organisations in the youth sector to engage with young people with particular identities. Furthermore, many of the

consultations conducted with young people from these marginalised groups were peer-led, creating a valuable safe space to discuss personal and traumatic issues. In all its work, the Victorian Government should commit to collaborating with young people and partner organisations by meaningfully involving young people from particular cohorts in culturally and contextually appropriate methods.

Disability

Several reports included in the synthesis discuss the experiences and recommendations of disabled young people. However, none explicitly state if young people were involved in creating each report. Given the importance of many portfolios in the lives of disabled young people, it is important to meaningfully engage them to inform all government decisions. To do this, YACVic recommends that the Victorian Government collaborate with Youth Disability Advocacy Service – the only advocacy service specifically for disabled young people in Victoria – to meaningfully engage with disabled young people.

International Students

YACVic believes that international students across Victoria have not been adequately consulted when designing policies. This is despite the significant social and economic contributions international students make to Victoria. Revenue from international students' education is an important part of the economy and indirectly supports the livelihood, education and employment of

many people. In Victoria, one in seven young people are international students.¹¹ If Victoria aims to continue being a destination of choice for students from other countries, we should meaningfully include international students in shaping government decisions.

Rural and Regional Young People

Young people living in rural and regional areas face different kinds or heightened barriers in life but should not be disadvantaged due to their location. Rural and regional young people are often well-consulted on local issues. Many regional local governments consult with young people when developing youth strategies and various regional organisations worked with young people to develop reports included in the synthesis. However, there is a lack of reports that bring the voices of young people in rural and regional Victoria together at a state level. Young people from rural and regional areas should be consulted to specifically identify their collective recommendations and ideas for improving rural and regional Victoria.

Women

Young women have been included in consultations to shape recommendations for a range of portfolios. It is positive that young women are included in many consultations, but the lack of specific reports about young women's specific experiences is disappointing. The Women's portfolio should commit to meaningfully involving young women in shaping its decisions to truly support all women.

Carers

Young carers are likely to have been included in consultations about a range of issues, but the lack of reports about their specific experience represents a gap. Being a carer undoubtedly influences young people's lives and has complex implications for their own education, career and mental health. Further consultation is necessary to better understand the lives of young carers and provide the evidence for policy change.

Youth Sector

The evidence from this synthesis demonstrates the need for investment in Victoria's youth sector. There are a significant number of recommendations that identify a greater need for early intervention and prevention as well as a greater need for general support for young people. This includes a recommendation that the previous Victorian Government Youth Policy (developed in 2016) 'clearly supports' youth sector development. While there has been positive investment in some parts of the youth sector, greater investment and support for the generalist youth sector is needed.

Youth work and targeted youth work programmes have been shown to reduce criminal activity and anti-social behaviour, increase numbers of young people in education, employment or training, and reduce substance abuse. Youth work and early intervention programmes have also been demonstrated to provide significant cost savings in the areas of justice, mental

health, education and welfare.¹² The youth sector in Victoria comprised 2,600 youth workers at the time of the 2016 Census.¹³ This group of workers is integral to the wellbeing of young people in Victoria and should be involved in delivering solutions for young people.

Youth Participation and Consultation

A number of reports included in the synthesis demonstrate brilliant examples of youth participation, including decision-making working groups and entirely youth-led processes. There are a wide range of consultation mechanisms identified in the reports included in this synthesis, including online consultations, focus groups and large in-person deliberative forums.

Portfolios Requiring Consultation

The following portfolios were not regularly discussed by young people in the reports included in the synthesis. These portfolios have a significant influence on the lives of many young people, so this represents a missed opportunity. The Victorian Government should prioritise involving young people in the decisions made in these portfolios:

- Prevention of Family Violence
- Priority Precincts
- Roads
- Small Business
- Suburban Development
- Women

The portfolios of Priority Precincts, Roads, Suburban Development and Transport

Infrastructure were relatively sparsely represented among reports included in the synthesis. This demonstrates a missed opportunity for these portfolios to meaningfully involve young people. The decisions that are made in these portfolios will affect young people for the longest time, so they should be involved in decision-making processes. The lack of youth participation is especially concerning when considering that young people are key users of Public Transport and are users of public amenities.

Few reports discussed young people's experiences and recommendations through a lens of Women or Prevention of Family Violence. Young women are well represented among the sample of young people consulted in reports included in the synthesis. However, there is an opportunity to further involve young women to discuss specific issues relevant to the portfolio of Women.

It is likely that the lack of consultation with young people on Prevention of Family Violence included in this synthesis is because of the extensive consultation contributing to the Royal Commission into Family Violence. The Commission was active between 2015–17, during which time many young people contributed to submissions and reports. Young people should still be involved in delivering outstanding recommendations from the Royal Commission and evaluating the impact of these recommendations.

There are also a number of other portfolios that are relevant to young people but were not included in the synthesis due to no relevant reports being identified:

- Tourism, Sport and Major Events
- Veterans
- Victim Support

These portfolios represent areas that require consultation with young people through targeted youth participation with relevant departments.

Other Portfolios

The following portfolios were not regularly discussed by young people or the youth sector in the reports included in the synthesis. The decisions made in these portfolio areas will influence the lives of young people, but they may not represent priority areas for further consultation.

- Ambulance Services

- Fishing and Boating
- Ports and Freight
- Racing
- Solar Homes
- Water

The portfolios of Ambulance Services, Fishing and Boating, Ports and Freight, Racing, Solar Homes and Water have only indirect influence on the lives of young people. Young people may participate or be employed in these sectors, in which case there is an opportunity to consult with them about their experiences. The Departments and Ministers responsible for each portfolio should still consider embedding youth participation in their practice, to ensure young people are heard and valued in these areas.

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