

# Our promise, *Your future*

Created with  
thousands of  
young Victorians







# Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as the first peoples and Traditional Owners and custodians of the land and waterways on which we live.

## *We honour and pay our respects to Elders past and present*

We recognise all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and their ongoing strength and resilience despite the past and present impacts of colonisation and dispossession. We acknowledge the important role that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people play as leaders in their communities and across Victoria.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples represent the world's oldest living culture. We celebrate and respect this continuing culture and strive to empower Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people as they draw on the strength of their community, families and culture to build a bright future.

## Treaty in Victoria

We are deeply committed to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander self-determination and to supporting Victoria's treaty process. We acknowledge that treaty will have wide-ranging impacts for the way we work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Victorians. We seek to create respectful and collaborative partnerships and develop policies and programs that respect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander self-determination and align with treaty aspirations.

We acknowledge that Victoria's treaty process will provide a framework for the transfer of decision-making power and resources to support self-determining Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to take control of matters that affect their lives.

We commit to working proactively to support this work in line with the aspirations of the First Peoples' Assembly of Victoria.







## Artwork by *Nakia Cadd*, 23 years old



**Though the young people come from diverse backgrounds and experiences, these figures are united and connected to community**

### Artist bio

Nakia Cadd is a Gunditjmara, Yorta Yorta, Dja Dja Wurrung, Bunitj, Boon Wurrung woman who grew up in the Northern suburbs of Melbourne. Nakia's work has strong design elements of line work that connect with her family lines and landscapes of her Countries. Her artwork is also inspired by her motherhood journey, family and Country. She likes to use art opportunities and platforms to creatively honour and retell her families' stories that symbolise immense strength and resilience.

### Artwork story

In this artwork I wanted to capture the voices of the various young people in Victoria while also recognising their resilience, strength and spirit—thus the three layers within the people. Though the young people come from diverse backgrounds and experiences, these figures are united and connected to community. This is represented using the gathering circles and the links between them. Below that are the 'U' shapes, which symbolise and reflect how a person receives support from the wider community to help amplify the voices of our young people and leaders. The black circles are in bold as I wanted them to stand out to represent the voice and impact of changes that are taking place on the sacred and unceded lands of Aboriginal people across Victoria. The sacred lands, skies and waters where we each live, work, learn and grow are incorporated on either side of this artwork. I wanted to acknowledge the Traditional Owners, Elders, their ongoing resilience and their stories. Young people are paving a way forward for future generations in Victoria and that is something to be immensely proud of. The footprints recognise the journey of young people and those before them. It honours the voices of those heard and unheard, and the past movements that have shaped our communities today.



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## Language statement

Language is important and can change over time, and words can have different meanings for different people.

We recognise the diversity of Aboriginal people, communities and culture throughout Victoria. While the terms 'Koorie' or 'Koori' are commonly used to describe Aboriginal people of southeast Australia, we have used the term 'Aboriginal' to include all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who live in Victoria.

We are guided by the preferences of young people on the wording in this strategy, which is why we have chosen to use the term 'disabled young people'. We know that people have different preferences about how language is used; some people want to be acknowledged with their identity first and other people prefer person-first language. This reflects the different ways people think about their own identity, their experience of disability and its relationship to the community.

The words 'our' and 'we' in this document refer to the Victorian Government.

We define certain words and phrases on **page 71**.

## Thanks

Thank you to the thousands of young people who contributed to developing this strategy, including the 2020–21 Victorian Youth Congress.

Thank you for generously sharing your stories and providing us with your vision and ideas for Victoria.

You elevated your voices during the hardest years in our recent history, which took a significant toll on young people across Victoria. We are so grateful for your commitment to ensuring this strategy reflects your voices and makes a difference to the lives of millions of young people across our state.

And thank you to the former Parliamentary Secretary for Youth Josh Bull MP for his passionate and extensive contribution to the strategy and the consultation process.



## *A five-year strategy to redefine how we work*

This strategy sets out a framework that will inform every step of our work over the next five years. We aim to take meaningful and sustained action over time. Shifting how we go about our work and delivering genuine change does not always happen quickly or easily. This strategy marks the start of a new chapter in how we work with young people and the youth and community sectors to improve young people's outcomes.



# Victorian Government *foreword*

Young people bring strength, energy and optimism to Victoria. They are leaders in our schools, universities, TAFEs, workplaces and communities. They are making Victoria stronger, fairer and more sustainable.

Victorians have been through the most challenging years in our recent history. This unprecedented pandemic gives us an opportunity to look at how we can have the best future possible. We have a chance now to make sure we are setting every single young person in our state up for success—to achieve their dreams and to have a secure future.

Because if we are going to come out of this stronger, we need to do things differently.

We must open doors for more young people to be involved in government decision making. This means including young people with diverse lived experience, and who come from many different backgrounds and communities. And we must listen. This strategy will set the bar on meaningful engagement with young people and elevate their voices on issues that matter to them and their future.

Now more than ever, it is vital that every Victorian young person has equitable access to opportunities—in education, jobs and career pathways, community, recreation, safety and much more.

We will better coordinate our efforts to ensure young people have what they need to get through life's challenges. This strategy provides a framework for how we can work together more effectively to support and empower young people.

Delivering this strategy will take a collective effort—with young people at the centre and the support of the sector, organisations, industry, parents, carers, families and communities.

This strategy will help build the momentum needed to improve young people's lives and unleash their potential. It is an exciting step forward. But it is just the start of an ongoing partnership with young people, the youth and community sectors and across government.

A special thank you to the young people whose ideas and feedback have helped shape this strategy. It exists for you, and it is also better because of you. We look forward to continuing to work with you as we implement this strategy.



A handwritten signature in black ink.

**The Hon. Daniel Andrews MP,  
Premier of Victoria**



A handwritten signature in blue ink.

**The Hon. Ros Spence MP,  
Minister for Youth**



A handwritten signature in black ink.

**Katie Hall MP, Parliamentary  
Secretary for Youth**



# Victorian Youth Congress



The past years have been some of the toughest in living memory. Young people have been one of the demographics hardest hit by the coronavirus pandemic. With changes to schools, increased social isolation, damage to our collective mental health and massive effects to employment, it has never been more important that young people's voices are heard.

This strategy is important even without the effects of COVID-19. A mental health crisis, lack of access to services and a massive housing shortage are only a few issues that affect young people.

We have all heard the struggles that young people face, but who is asking young people about solutions?

That is what this strategy is about. This is our strategy.

*Our promise, Your future* is putting young people first, and it is the first strategy that can genuinely say it was designed and developed in partnership with young people.

Young people are seldom involved in decision making, and this needs to change. Young people cannot continue to have decisions made for us. That changes with this strategy. The Victorian Government has given young people the green light to speak their truths and to tell government what we really think and feel about our lives as young people in Victoria. More importantly, we have the opportunity to tell our stories and shape the future we see for Victoria.

This strategy has the potential to make long-lasting and systemic change. Through the strategy's vision, outcomes framework and guide for future efforts, this strategy will genuinely change the futures of young people in our state.

This strategy has listened to and learnt from young people right across Victoria. It is written with every Victorian young person in mind.

To every young person reading this, we hope we have made you proud.







# Listening to Victoria's *young people*



# Victoria's young people *at a glance*



Young people are one of our state's greatest assets. Young people have a clear vision for the future they want and a passion to effect change. In recent times we've seen young people use their voices and talents to make our country and our world a fairer place. This includes racial and gender equality, LGBTIQ+ rights, economic fairness and climate justice.

This generation of young people live in a rapidly evolving world with new technologies and changes to industries and the job market. They are constantly finding new ways of communicating and engaging with friends, peers, families and the wider community on issues they are passionate about.

No two young people are the same.

They represent a wide range of ages, identities, cultures, personalities, perspectives and communities. They have multiple experiences that influence their development and journey through life. The period from early adolescence to young adulthood is a time of significant change and growth. This generation of young people is exploring and embracing their individual identities and aspirations like never before.

**12%**

of Victorian young people aged 18 to 24 identify as LGBTIQ+<sup>1</sup>

*THERE ARE MORE THAN*

**125,300**

international students who hold a student visa in Victoria<sup>2</sup>

*AROUND*

**10%**

of all Victorians aged 15 to 24 have a disability<sup>3</sup>

*VICTORIA'S*



**1,200,000**

young people aged 12 to 25 years make up 18 per cent of the population<sup>4</sup>



**22%**

of young people in Victoria live in rural or regional areas<sup>5</sup>



Victoria's young people *at a glance*

AROUND

**9,900**

children and young people aged under 18 in Victoria were living with carers in 2018<sup>6</sup>

THERE ARE

**71,600**

young carers under the age of 25 in Victoria<sup>7</sup>

YOUNG PEOPLE (12-17)  
USE ON AVERAGE

**4**

different social media services<sup>8</sup>

**86%**

of Victorian young people in the labour market are employed<sup>9</sup>

YOUNG PEOPLE ARE EMPLOYED  
AT A HIGHER RATE IN REGIONAL  
VICTORIA—UP TO

**4.5%**

more than in Greater Melbourne<sup>10</sup>

MORE THAN

**50%**



of Victoria's Aboriginal population is under 25<sup>11</sup>

MORE THAN

**17,000**



young Aboriginal people live in Victoria<sup>12</sup>

**48%**

of Victoria's young people were born overseas or have at least one parent born overseas; and that number continues to increase<sup>13</sup>

**644,500**

students are enrolled in government schools in Victoria<sup>14</sup>

**431,300**

students are enrolled in non-government schools in Victoria<sup>15</sup>

# What we did

## A note on what we did...

We developed this strategy during the coronavirus pandemic, which has been particularly hard on young people. We reached out to hear from young people across the state. But we certainly missed some voices. Some young people were not in the headspace to engage in this consultation. We will keep speaking to Victorian young people as we implement this strategy.

## How young people shaped this strategy

Thousands of young people and community members shared their experiences and ideas with us. These diverse voices and experiences have fed into this strategy. We held an extensive public consultation process where we tested ideas and solutions, and we also asked questions through an online **discussion paper** <engage.vic.gov.au/Victorian-youth-strategy>.





## What we did

Housing and homelessness



*MORE THAN*

**1,100**

young people and community members completed an online survey, sharing what matters to them most and their solutions.

*IN PARTNERSHIP  
WITH THE YOUTH SECTOR,  
WE HELD ALMOST*

**30**

online forums to gain insight into young people's and community members' visions for the future and solutions to current issues.

*WE RECEIVED ALMOST*

**120**

written submissions from young people, organisations and businesses covering priorities, recommendations, best practice, research and experiences.

We held place-based online forums across the state. We also held consultations with specific groups of young people. These included Aboriginal young people, disabled young people, international students, LGBTIQ+ young people, women and girls, Pasifika young people, refugee and migrant young people, and young people in youth justice centres.

We posted creative online activations through TikTok—a first for the Victorian Government. We asked young people to describe their heroes, giving insights into their vision for the future. We heard about young people's lives through more than 100 personal stories.

We held a series of ministerial roundtables with young people with lived experience and sector leaders to deep dive into sensitive issues that warranted greater exploration. These included housing and homelessness, transport and family violence.



# What we heard

## Young people want a *bold strategy* that drives *genuine*, lasting change

### Young people want to get involved but not at any cost

Young people highlighted the importance of the government meaningfully embedding youth voice across all its work, at all stages. Young people called on us to value their lived experience and reach out to them in their spaces. They asked us to involve them as genuine collaborators and decision-makers to create better outcomes across policies and programs.

They want to know what government is doing for them and how they can get involved. Information that's easy to understand and delivered through young people's preferred formats will help them stay informed and be active citizens.

We heard that the community, government and organisations have a strong role to play in giving young people power to make decisions. Currently, young people are often only given responsibility to educate, raise awareness and advocate on systems and structures that they've inherited and cannot influence. We've seen young people united as change-makers through their advocacy for intergenerational equity—on climate change and many other important issues for our state, and our globe. But this commitment can also wear young people down when they are constantly asked for their voices and solutions without their work resulting in genuine change.

### Young people want to see a greater focus on mental health

Mental health is the top issue for young people. They want age-appropriate, accessible and culturally safe services that understand and respond to their diverse identities. They want to get help when they need it and action to break down stigmas around mental illness. They want services that can help prevent them from reaching crisis mode and recognition of the everyday impacts of anxiety and loneliness. Young people want services that look at their whole-of-life circumstances and understand that mental ill-health affects nearly every aspect of their life. The coronavirus pandemic has affected many young people's mental health. Because young people are more connected virtually than ever before, issues such as online bullying and climate anxiety can feel relentless.

“

**A perfect Victoria is where young people feel safe and included**

Refugee and migrant youth forum participant

## Young people want financial stability

Financial stability, access to opportunities and inclusivity are core issues. They are deeply interconnected with all aspects of a young person's life, including socioeconomic status, poverty, family, housing, mental health, wellbeing and social and community networks.

Young people know that education, training and employment are the keys to building independence and financial stability. They want education that responds to their individual needs as learners. They also want the life skills they need to feel confident in their transition to independence. Young people want access to a variety of education and career options that help them find the path that suits them. Entering the workforce is highly competitive and young people are finding it hard to compete with others who have more experience. They are calling for support to enter the workforce.

The coronavirus pandemic has affected young people's financial stability, which is impacting on their ability to access stable housing that they can afford. Young people living in rural and regional Victoria spoke about their desire to stay in their region and that they shouldn't have to move away from home to find opportunities. They want more avenues to celebrate and build their talents in their local communities and affordable transport options that get them where they need to be.

## Young people want everyone to feel safe, valued and supported

Young people who have experience with family violence, homelessness or contact with the justice system, or the out-of-home care system, told us that they need accessible supports and information that recognise the weight of their trauma and complex experiences, and respect their agency as individuals. These young people want support to help them get back on their feet. They called for transformation at the highest levels of decision making to address structures that create disadvantage and improve their safety.

Young people want accessibility and inclusivity built into our policies and programs as a core design principle—not as an afterthought. Young people can experience barriers and discrimination in schools, training and higher education, services and workplaces. Barriers like colonialism and dispossession, ageism, racism, sexism, ableism and homophobia are just a few examples highlighted by young people. How young people experience discrimination is shaped by their unique identities and lived experience.

We repeatedly heard young people's desire to live in a Victoria that truly understands and appreciates cultural diversity and does not limit people based on stereotypes or assumptions. They want to see themselves depicted positively in the media and recognised for their contributions.



**Equality is important to me because everyone deserves to be equal and shouldn't live a poorer life because of the way they were born**

Survey respondent, 12–15 years old



**“ Young people feel like their voices are heard and their opinions valid. Youth have an active role in policies that impact them and are not tokenistic**

Refugee and migrant youth forum participant

### **Young people want more support for their struggling families**

Young people start to explore the world through the perspective of their families, particularly in early adolescence. This means we need to support young people and consider them in the context of their families. Many young people spoke about the value of family and its influence in shaping their values and behaviours throughout their life. An absence of a strong family connection was also highlighted as a key issue for some young people. This included the impacts of negative behaviours from parents or other family members and the ongoing trauma that occurs when family members cannot get the support they need.

### **Young people want well-designed, developmentally informed services**

Finally, young people and the youth sector told us we need to focus on smooth service delivery that is backed by investment. They want a focus on prevention and early intervention. Stepping in early reduces the likelihood of barriers and trauma in a young person's life.

This means considering expanding what we mean when we refer to 'young people', which typically includes those aged 12 to 25 years old. We heard that we need to bridge the gap for people aged 10 to 12 years old. Targeted, age-appropriate services for this younger age group will give them a head start as they move into adolescence and prepare to move into secondary school. It will also ensure services respond better to young people who have faced multiple barriers and challenges during childhood.

While references to 'young people' in this strategy relate to people aged 12 to 25 years old, *Our promise, Your future* commits to doing further work to better understand what the Victorian Government's definition of 'young person' should be.

**“ I would want spaces to be more inclusive, and for mental health issues to be accepted as a valid health concern and not a myth or excuse. I would want more spaces available for young people to go to if they need an escape from a situation where they feel unsafe**

Survey respondent, 19–21 years old



There are *important* points of difference for young people who *experience marginalisation*

Although common experiences exist, some groups of young people come up against specific barriers and challenges. This strategy recognises that young people's identities are layered and complex, and cannot be explained by single categories such as gender, race or sexual orientation. While we mention specific groups of young people in this section, we understand that every young person's experience is uniquely shaped by multiple interconnected structures that create and maintain systems of inequality that marginalise and disadvantage some young people.

“

**... young people's meaningful participation in decision making and shaping the policies and influences that affect our lives. We should be involved in the planning, delivery and evaluation of all policies and projects that impact us**

Survey respondent, 22–25 years old



## Aboriginal young people

Self-determination needs to be at the foundation of everything we do with Aboriginal young people. Aboriginal young people want policies and programs that help build their connection to Country and support them to be proud and strong. They are exhausted from being asked for their ideas, sometimes without any tangible result. Without their participation in design, rollout and evaluation, programs will not meet their needs. Aboriginal young people told us they need culturally safe, strengths-based information and prevention and early intervention supports. They want Aboriginal services such as Aboriginal community-controlled organisations that recognise their complex challenges and celebrate their identities to provide these supports.

## LGBTIQ+ young people

LGBTIQ+ young people need to feel safe and supported within communities, particularly at school, TAFE and university. Many LGBTIQ+ young people take on the role of educator—teaching their communities how to be aware and inclusive of all identities. They need healthcare services that meet their needs and health professionals who understand how to support LGBTIQ+ young people, particularly trans and gender diverse young people and young people with intersex variations.

## Disabled young people

Disabled young people told us that we must continue to challenge community attitudes towards disability. Access and inclusion remain the key issues because they are enablers in all aspects of disabled young people's lives including work, housing, infrastructure and education. Disabled young people want transport they can use, support to develop life skills, and safe and accessible health care.

## Multicultural and multifaith young people

Multicultural and multifaith young people told us they want to feel proud of their cultural identity and welcomed in all parts of Victorian society. Too often they feel the burden to bridge the gap between their communities and mainstream services. International students, refugees, migrant young people and young people seeking asylum want to feel welcome in Victoria regardless of their mode of arrival or visa status and to have access to secure work and to safe and affordable services. Many young people experience overlapping forms of discrimination and marginalisation. It is crucial that we understand and respond to all aspects of a young person's identity and culture.



**Teaching young people the life and functional skills that they'll need for their entire lives needs to be the priority, so that they can manage life, stress, bullying, etc. better.**

Survey respondent



What we heard

“ A place where young people are able to fulfil their passions and dreams while contributing to social good

Survey respondent, 22–25 years old

“ Even at my age I’m worrying—maybe a little too much—on my future. What my career will be and who I will know. I want my future to be something I’ll enjoy and be happy with

Survey respondent, 12–15 years old

What I want for my future is...

“ My education is the pathway to my future

Survey respondent, 16–18 years old

“ Climate change is really important because if we don’t fix it then the Earth will become uninhabitable

Survey respondent, 12–15 years old

“ My end goal in life is to find a job that makes me happy

Survey respondent, 16–18 years old

“ Where every citizen can have their voices heard. Where everyone feels safe. Where the government listens to its people and is more representative of our diverse population

Refugee and migrant youth forum participant

“ [I want Victoria to be] a place where you don’t need to come out—just automatically accepted and validated. We don’t need to hide our love. We can be entirely open and unashamed

LGBTIQ+ youth forum participant





What we heard



Our promise, *Your future*

# Our priorities & commitments





# Our strategy at a glance

## Our vision

A Victoria where young people are healthy, well, safe and secure

Young people are respected and central in decision making

Young people have inclusive and accessible support to achieve their goals and feel optimistic, motivated and inspired about their future

## Our design principles

Moving beyond giving voice

Taking a strengths-based approach

Understanding a young person's development

Focusing on prevention first

The importance of place and culture

Centring diversity, inclusion and accessibility

## Our priorities

#1

Young people are healthy and well

#2

Young people are safe and secure

#3

Young people achieve their goals through education, training and employment

#4

Young people are respected and involved in decisions in their communities

#5

Young people are confident and strong in their identity and culture and are supported in their community

#6

Services are coordinated, responsive and accessible

# Our design principles

Design principles help to express what we aim to achieve and directly inform how we will deliver this strategy.

## Moving beyond giving voice

It is time to start inviting young people into rooms where decisions are made. Their lived experience means they have unique knowledge and skills, enabling meaningful contributions that can help influence decisions.

### Giving young people a seat at the decision-making table

In 2019, YMCA set up a Youth Affairs Subcommittee attached to its board. The subcommittee has six young board members, including two who also sit on the YMCA Board. It oversees strategy for youth services, young staff and volunteer engagement and manages the youth services budget. The subcommittee ensures young people are involved in decision making at the highest level of the organisation.

## Taking a strengths-based approach

While we need to acknowledge challenges and issues, let's also start highlighting young people's strengths. This approach builds on what is within their control and develops their confidence and skills. The right support helps young people tackle life's challenges.<sup>16</sup>

### Building government's capacity to involve young people in decision making

The Young Voices project in the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing is creating resources to help government meaningfully involve children and young people with lived experience of its services in the design, rollout and evaluation of policies, programs and services. The project guides how to plan and run youth participation sessions that are safe and enjoyable for young people and also coordinates a platform for staff to improve their skills and understanding of working with young people. As Young Voices continues to develop, it will be shared with community services organisations to support youth participation across the community.

## Understanding a young person's development

Significant changes and transition points shape every young person's identity. Young people are developing physically, building new relationships, learning new skills and moving towards independence.

### Recognising the ages before and after 12 to 25 are just as important...

Childhood and early adolescence are important in setting up a young person for positive experiences during their youth. The families and communities that young people are born into are strong influences and key enablers to successfully moving into early adolescence and beyond the age of 25.

Socioeconomic disadvantage such as poverty, a lack of access to supports, and other experiences including discrimination can restrict the opportunities available to young people. As a result, they may be unable to achieve their goals and actively participate in social, economic and civic life.

## The importance of place and culture

Place-based approaches build on the unique strengths of local communities. They provide greater opportunities to recognise and celebrate the cultural, historical, social, religious and economic relevance of specific locations or areas.

### Young people finding solutions to local issues

Banyule Voice is a platform for young people to share issues with the Banyule Council. At the Banyule Youth Summit, young people discuss priorities and recommendations for action. Following the summit, action groups design and deliver solutions. Examples include:

- the Banyule Youth Climate Action Grant
- the 'Made Australia Home' campaign promoting the positive contributions of young refugees in the community
- 'IN/VISIBLE'—an online art exhibition celebrating young LGBTIQ+ people.

A year after the summit, young people invite the wider community to a public event to hear and celebrate their achievements.

## Focusing on prevention first

Focusing on prevention can reduce the barriers in a young person's life and strengthen their families and communities. Prevention can stop problems from occurring in the first place. It can foster strengths and skills that help young people thrive.<sup>17</sup>

## Centring diversity, inclusion and accessibility

We can increase young people's sense of wellbeing and belonging through:

- addressing power imbalances in their lives
- recognising their complex lived experience and how it shapes who they are
- providing services that are culturally safe and more local opportunities to celebrate culture
- empowering them within their own identity.



# Our priorities



This strategy recognises that all issues that matter to Victoria matter to young people. In recent years, the Victorian Government has invested around \$8.6 billion<sup>18</sup> to improve young people's outcomes.<sup>19</sup> While we have set out six priorities, this strategy will:

+ *Build on & strengthen* +  
existing work

*Better coordinate*  
efforts to improve  
what we achieve

*Set out new ways*  
of engaging and  
supporting young people.



# #1



*Young people are  
healthy & well*

Young people have the *best possible health* and can draw on their strength, *optimism* and *support* from their families and communities to *recover* from adversity.

*Our promise, Your future* understands that when young people have good mental and physical health, they have a solid foundation for the rest of their lives. Safe, tailored and inclusive access to health and mental health services enables young people to thrive and take full part in education, work and their communities.<sup>20</sup>

Under *Our promise, Your future*, young people will get mental health support when and where they need it. We are working towards all young people having access to safe, timely, appropriate and family-focused mental health care that meets their needs. Importantly, this must include multicultural and multifaith young people, regional and rural young people, LGBTIQ+ young people, Aboriginal young people and disabled young people. Appropriate mental health support for young people affected by family violence, sexual abuse and other forms of crime is another priority in recognition of the trauma these crimes cause in both the short and long term. This builds on our commitment to implement all recommendations of the historic Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System. This work is making system-wide changes to address young Victorians' mental health needs.<sup>21</sup>

Almost two out of three young Victorians place a high value on physical health.<sup>22</sup> Despite this, sports participation levels drop suddenly at age 15. More than 40 per cent of 14 to 18-year-olds' diets are made up of meals not consistent with a healthy lifestyle.<sup>23</sup> This strategy bridges this gap. We will help young people get engaged in sport, understand how to stay healthy and know what to do when they have a health issue.

Young people will feel confident that they can find providers and community groups that understand them and can meet their needs. They are looking for services and relationships that recognise their whole self and how different parts of their identity (such as culture, gender and family) can affect their health and wellbeing. Community sport, recreation, arts and events also play a big role in creating inclusive places that foster positive health and wellbeing. Importantly, whole families will be considered by services because we know that young people rely on their loved ones for their health and wellbeing.



**Creating safe spaces, conversations about mental health, more awareness about it, especially with Pasifika men. It is considered taboo. We want our men and women to know it's okay not to be okay.**

Pasifika youth forum participant





## Our commitment to young Victorians is...

### #1.1

Set up ways to enable young people with diverse lived experience to be involved at all stages of rolling out recommendations from the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System.

### #1.2

Expand access to evidence-based mental health and positive wellbeing supports for all young people across the state. This will include through primary and secondary schools and in partnership with the youth sector.

### #1.3

Promote positive health and wellbeing in schools by providing contemporary and inclusive relationship, sexuality and consent education, including supporting resources.

### #1.4

Improve the population health and wellbeing outcomes of young people. Reduce health inequalities through evidence-informed prevention and early intervention activity.

### #1.5

Embed self-determination by empowering Aboriginal communities to deliver health programs to Aboriginal young people. Build cultural safety into all health programs, including mental health.

**“ I am a person of colour, a sibling to a person with a disability and a carer to a person with Alzheimer's. Living life through the lens of otherism is how I've lived my life so far**

Survey respondent, 22-25 years old

**“ Young mob find it difficult to link in with services when the worker is non-Indigenous and/or culturally unsafe**

Aboriginal youth forum participant

PRIORITY 1  
*Young people are healthy & well*



**#1.6**

Creating healthier food environments in schools, early years services, sport and recreation facilities, clubs and across government agencies.

**#1.7**

Build a community-wide approach to reducing barriers young people face in taking part in sport. This includes improving the inclusivity and accessibility of community sport and recreation.

**#1.8**

Continue to promote sport and recreation for girls and young women. This will include statewide campaigns and setting up a strong evidence base on the connection between sport and future leadership opportunities.

**#1.9**

Promote the benefits of physical activity for young people, encourage active transport and connect young people to camping and outdoor activities for health and wellbeing.

**#1.10**

Continue the Get Active Kids Voucher Program to enable more children and young people from low-income households to participate in sport and recreation.

**#1.11**

Provide access to nature and support youth-led and youth-friendly action to help mitigate and adapt to climate change and eco-anxiety through environmental volunteering tools, platforms and opportunities.

**#1.12**

Continue the Active Schools initiative to build on existing programs and funding to boost support and resources for schools to get kids moving.

**“ Nothing else matters if we can’t stop climate change**

Survey respondent, 12-15 years old



**“ Mental health isn’t taken seriously enough in young people, especially men. It’s so stigmatised and it’s just not good enough**

Survey respondent, 19-21 years old



## Case study: Centring on diversity & inclusion matters

**I am 17 and a transgender male, and I first fully understood my identity at the age of 14.**

Young person, 17 years old



At the time I was absolutely terrified and deeply struggling from the distress of going through female puberty. After coming out, I was lucky that my parents were supportive and willing to help me through the process of gender transition. A major part of that process simply involved beginning to live my life socially as male. However, since much of my discomfort was related to physical aspects of my body, I knew I also wanted to begin the process of medical transition.

Trying to locate information on the resources available to me as a young transgender Victorian was incredibly difficult. Most searches on the internet led to hateful or misguided articles. Eventually I did manage to find out about the gender clinic at the Royal Children's Hospital, the only service available for young trans people in Melbourne and its outer suburbs.

It took three months after my initial referral to get an appointment with a nurse, and in total I waited 1.5 years between my initial referral and being able to start medical transition. The only help I was given in the meantime was some limited information about mental health services.

Those 1.5 years were intensely difficult, and the overwhelming distress I was in affected all aspects of my life including my mental health, friendships and ability to perform at school. I felt very alone because I didn't know anyone I could go to for information or emotional support with such a specific life experience.

It's now been over three years since I first came out and my life is a lot easier. But I know there must be many young trans people in Victoria experiencing the exact same struggles I went through. There needs to be accessible services for all intersections of the community, including teenagers, and a more organised way for LGBTIQ+ people to find out what health care is actually available to them.

My hope for the future is that young transgender Victorians will be able to come out and explore their gender without the experience of isolation and hardship I went through.





# #2



Young people are  
safe & secure

PRIORITY 2  
*Young people are safe & secure*

Young people experience *security*, are safe from harm (*discrimination, neglect, emotional, physical and sexual abuse*) and live in a stable home that is *affordable & nurturing*.

*Our promise, Your future* sets out a path for a safer, fairer and more equitable Victoria. We want every young person to feel safe at home, in school, online, catching public transport or walking around their neighbourhood. This means more than physical safety—it is also about safety to express yourself without fear of judgement, rejection or harassment.

More than one in six young people have been through some type of homelessness.<sup>24</sup> LGBTIQ+ young people, Aboriginal young people, young people experiencing family violence and young people leaving the out-of-home care system are all more likely than other young people to experience homelessness.<sup>25</sup>

Under *Our promise, Your future*, we are building on transformative reforms such as the *Roadmap for Reform: children and families* and Victoria's Big Housing Build. Young people will have the stability and safety they need to focus on navigating their youth and becoming independent. This often means stepping in early so young people and their families do not come up against multiple barriers to a safe and nurturing home.

*Our promise, Your future* recognises that discrimination affects young people's ability to feel safe, particularly young people from marginalised backgrounds. Under this strategy, young people will have targeted programs to prevent sexual violence that better consider gender. We are working towards a justice and family violence system that better recognises young people as victim survivors in their own right. A young people's toolkit will include a more detailed understanding of their rights, from consent and their consumer, workplace and legal rights, to the right to information as a carer.

Through *Our promise, Your future* we are working to make our justice system more trauma-informed. Our approach will recognise the developmental stage young people are at and move through as they grow older. We will provide greater community support and have better ways to prevent young people from coming into contact with tertiary and crisis systems. Our most vulnerable young people need care and the opportunity to thrive.





## Our commitment to young Victorians is...

### #2.1

Work with the youth and community sectors to position the voices of diverse young people with lived experience as key evidence in decision making across policy, practice and governance in a range of tertiary and acute services.

### #2.2

Continue to roll out changes to transform the children and families system. This will include a focus on early intervention, wraparound supports and evidence-informed models of care. These models will improve support for key groups including Aboriginal young people and families.

### #2.3

Ensure we support the needs of young people in care and that every young person has the stable foundation to begin their transition to independence. This will include expanding the Home Stretch and Better Futures programs to extend state support up to the age of 21.

### #2.4

Expand supports for young people aged 10 to 13 years in and at risk of entering the youth justice system. This will prevent more or escalating offending through linking young people with positive life opportunities, education and improved family supports.

### #2.5

Build protective factors and reduce the risk factors that lead to over-representation of Aboriginal young people and multicultural and multifaith young people in the justice system. Build on successful place-based models that partner with families and communities and self-determination initiatives for Aboriginal young people.

### #2.6

Apply a gender lens to ensure girls and young women at risk or in contact with the justice system are supported.

### #2.7

Deliver community programs for young people to prevent sexual violence including through education about affirmative consent.



**[If I could change one thing about Victoria] I would have the safety and security of young people at the core of decision making**

Survey respondent, 22–25 years old



## PRIORITY 2 *Young people are safe & secure*



### #2.8

Improve the response of the justice and broader service systems for young people who have experienced or used family violence, or experienced or committed sexual harm.

### #2.9

Increase young people's understanding of consent, their rights and the different forms of family and sexual violence.

### #2.10

Support young people's access to legal services and advice.

### #2.11

Improve safety for young people travelling on public transport, with a focus on young women, including new ways of reporting and communication campaigns.

### #2.12

Lessen the impact of fines on young people experiencing vulnerability and disadvantage. Pilot new ways to deal with offenders and update guidelines for enforcement agencies.

### #2.13

Roll out the recommendation of the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System to deliver 500 new supported housing places for young people with mental illness. Co-design this program with young people with lived experience of mental illness.

### #2.14

Recognise the unique needs of young people within the Victorian Government's new *Ten-year social and affordable housing strategy*.

### #2.15

Develop a Victoria Police youth strategy to improve understanding of the factors that lead to offending and victimisation. Set up a coordinated approach with police to better meet the needs of young people.



**We were too young to go through what we went through but it happened. We aren't too young to be involved in what happens next**

Roundtable participant



PRIORITY 2  
*Young people are safe & secure*

#2.16

Implement Victoria Police's Schools Engagement Model to promote positive and effective relationships between police and schools that is inclusive and promotes the safety of young people and the community.

#2.17

Improve referrals from police to community services in direct response to the reasons young people have contact with police.

#2.18

Roll out more diversion initiatives to reduce the contact children and young people have with the formal criminal justice system. Focus on over-represented groups including Aboriginal young people, and ensure initiatives are developed using principles of self-determination.

#2.19

Develop statewide programs and services targeted to adolescents using family violence, including in the home and in intimate partner relationships.

#2.20

Support workforces to better recognise when young people are affected by, or using, family violence and help them to access the right support when delivering services to young people across education, health, housing, community and justice services.

**“Your home should be the place you go to feel safe and that’s hard to feel if your family is not doing the best**

Survey respondent, 12–15 years old

**“You can’t tell if what is happening to you is normal when you come from another country and don’t speak the language... I wish that I had known it was okay to speak up and that I didn’t have to worry about being abandoned**

Roundtable participant





## Case study: A *prevention-first* approach builds young people's *strengths*

**My story begins by leaving a broken and traumatic home at age 16 and becoming homeless in a world I did not know nor trust.**

Young person, 24 years old



I eventually found out about Centrelink but I was put through a long, complicated and negative experience. After a while I was able to stand on my own two feet to some degree.

Only three years later after much financial struggle and an unstable living situation, the streets found me again. This time I was fortunate enough to go through a program in a dedicated and outstanding private organisation. By the end I was successful in re-establishing my financial security but this time 100 per cent independent, stable and in a great state of mental health for the long term.

This could have been achieved much earlier, easier and without the unnecessary struggles back when I was still at home, had the government understood the issue of domestic abuse and its correlation with homelessness. Youth homelessness is mostly caused by severe struggles at home that are not self-inflicted.

Trying to navigate where to go for help and what to apply for is quite difficult, unclear or, like in my case, I was not even aware they existed. We need government to understand the complexity of young people's situations and to address them with specific or unique services, not one way for all.

Many young people are rejected or given insufficient or ineffective services that only have short-term effects. Our welfare system needs to cater for the complexity of their circumstances and make the process more simplified, faster and understandable to make them feel more comfortable, supported and cared for appropriately.

They also need ease of access to supports of their choice when they need it and without troublesome requirements such as access points. We also need an unprecedented awareness campaign of these services that reaches out to the youth.

We have the answers, we have the knowledge and the know-how... we just need the government to listen to the experts and take action.





#3



*Young people achieve  
their goals through  
education, training  
& employment*

### PRIORITY 3

*Young people achieve their goals through education, training & employment*

Young people are *positively engaged* with and progress in education and have the knowledge and *skills* to successfully transition to meaningful further education and *employment*.

Under *Our promise, Your future*, education and training prepares young people for future employment but also does so much more. We recognise that education and training can empower young people and their families to:

- establish their own values
- understand and embrace their identities
- connect to their community
- set and realise their goals
- live their best lives today and in the future.

This strategy will ensure young people have a stronger sense of belonging at school. This will build young people's resilience and ability to respond to challenges.<sup>26</sup> This is particularly relevant for young people facing marginalisation or disadvantage who need all education settings (schools, training and university) to be places of inclusivity and safety. For our international students, feeling welcome is even more important as they adjust to new environments.

*Our promise, Your future* recognises and responds to the many changes that young people go through at this time in life. This includes the physical and emotional changes of puberty and adolescence and the moves from primary to secondary school into training, further education, jobs, entrepreneurship and volunteering. Young people will have an education that is more suited to their lifelong needs. As a priority, this strategy builds young people's life skills, such as literacy skills, accessing welfare support, financial literacy, paying bills, tax, registering to vote, applying for rental properties and jobs, so they feel well equipped to be independent. It also focuses on healthy and respectful relationships, living independently and developing a better understanding of rights and responsibilities.

Young people will have more ways to develop the skills and capabilities they need to build a sustainable and fulfilling career. This includes greater access to hands-on, work-based learning opportunities while they are at school to increase their ability to get the job they want.



### PRIORITY 3

## Young people achieve their goals through education, training & employment

Entering the workforce is highly competitive. With many young people in insecure work and industries highly impacted by the coronavirus pandemic, young people are finding it harder to achieve their goals and meet their day-to-day needs. Financial insecurity has been a reality for too many young people, pushing them to draw on their superannuation to meet immediate needs. Young women drew on their superannuation at high rates, decreasing their balances by up to 80 per cent and creating long-term financial vulnerability that exacerbates existing gender inequalities.<sup>27</sup> *Our promise, Your future* focuses on getting more young people into jobs that help create financial security. It builds on the Victorian Government target of 38,000 new jobs each year and the *Local Jobs First* Major Project Skills Guarantee that requires major construction projects to use apprentices, trainees or cadets for at least 10 per cent of the total estimated labour hours.

Without equitable opportunities, many young people who live regionally or rurally have to move to find work and study opportunities. This is despite many expressing a strong desire to stay in their region. Young women, multicultural and multifaith young people, Aboriginal young people and disabled young people also face barriers and discrimination in entering the workforce. These difficulties can continue without early, targeted supports and changing how we recruit and work. *Our promise, Your future* sets out a path to give all young people the confidence, support and opportunities they need to secure a job that will fulfil them, to build a career and set them up for financial independence.



**I am a student and I am concerned about how well the education system prepares us for adult life and future employment**

Survey respondent, 16–18 years old



## PRIORITY 3

*Young people achieve their goals through education, training & employment*



## Our commitment to young Victorians is...

### #3.1

Support secondary school students to build the skills and confidence they need to become independent. Focus on building financial literacy skills and developing an online skills-for-life toolkit developed with young people.

### #3.2

Continue to roll out Senior Secondary Pathways Reform to:

- provide excellent senior secondary education for all students through:
  - an integrated senior secondary certificate, with a vocational major embedded in the VCE
  - improving student access to high-quality VET courses
  - celebrating excellence in vocational and applied learning
  - boosting VET teacher, trainer and school capacity to deliver high quality vocational and applied learning
- set students up for the future by:
  - transforming careers education
  - creating the Victorian Pathways Certificate to replace Foundation VCAL
  - supporting all students to stay in education and training
- provide skills for the modern economy by:
  - expanding Head Start apprenticeships and traineeships program to all government school students across Victoria
  - ensuring all students have equitable access to high-quality VET programs regardless of where they live
  - equipping students with the skills, knowledge, and confidence they need for the world of work
  - preparing them to transition into successful pathways into higher education, training or employment.

### #3.3

Engage with employers to improve employment pathways for young people into the private and not-for-profit sectors by increasing access to learn and earn pathways such as apprenticeships, traineeships and cadetships, job-ready training through Free TAFE and Learn Locals, and expanding work placement opportunities.

### #3.4

Improve the accessibility and affordability of public transport for disadvantaged school students. This will reduce barriers to taking part in education, work and the community.



**Add more diversity programs into schools as that is not only where we learn A, B and C's but is where we first discover our identities**

Refugee and migrant youth forum participant

## PRIORITY 3

# Young people achieve their goals through education, training & employment

### #3.5

Expand targeted job support to young people through Jobs Victoria Services. Provide personal assistance to build work readiness and get jobs through:

- Jobs Victoria Services
- access to career counselling
- work opportunities via traineeships and wage subsidies through the Jobs Victoria Fund.

### #3.6

Strengthen commitments to employ young people who face significant barriers through Victoria's Social Procurement Framework.

### #3.7

Build Victoria's future creative workforce through supports for young people who want a career in the creative industries.



**I have struggled for some time to get a job. You need experience in every single job you apply for but can't get experience without being given a chance**

Survey respondent, 22–25 years old

### #3.8

Build on successful initiatives to deliver additional support for rural and regional education that improves students' experiences and outcomes.

### #3.9

Support school leaders and teachers to activate student agency, voice and leadership in school decision-making processes, including learning, assessment and review.

### #3.10

Through government policy, help schools to identify and respond to young people who face barriers to completing their education early on. Focus on young people with experiences of trauma and homelessness, and on young carers.

### #3.11

Embed the voices of students and their families in planning, rolling out and monitoring education reforms. This includes the work of the new Diverse Learners Hub, a centre of excellence in meeting the educational needs of diverse learners such as students with autism, ADHD, dyslexia and dyscalculia.

## PRIORITY 3

# Young people achieve their goals through education, training & employment



### #3.12

Expand job opportunities for young people across the Victorian Public Sector. This includes paid short-term roles that build skills and experience.

### #3.13

Work with employers and unions to tackle racism, wage theft, gender inequity, systemic discrimination, unsafe work practices and exploitation of young people in the workplace, including sexual harassment. Work with schools, TAFEs, Apprenticeships Victoria and employer and community services peak bodies to build young people's understanding of their rights in the workplace.

### #3.14

Increase young people's awareness of future jobs growth sectors to support their career decisions, as well as their right to safe and secure work.

### #3.15

Support young people's access to accreditation to help them enter or stay in the sport and recreation sector.



“

**As a young person who keeps getting knocked back from jobs, I wish there was more available. I live in a rural area and everyone keeps telling me to move to the city to find work**

Survey respondent, 19–21 years old



PRIORITY 3

*Young people achieve their goals through education, training & employment*

## Case study: Taking a developmentally informed approach to transitions

**I'll always remember the class 'circle time' sessions we had towards the end of grade 6, where we would simply share our concerns about secondary school.**

Young person, 14 years old

I worried about not fitting in and struggling with schoolwork. Primary school was the place where the foundation of the majority of my lifelong skills and education developed. I learned how to read and write for the first time but also how to socialise and make friends. Without this foundation I would have never been able to let go of my worries, let alone transition to secondary school.

I started my first year of grade 7 in an all new secondary schooling environment. Moving away from the place I had been educated in for the last seven years of my life was scary at first. Attending the school's open night, however, where I was led on a small tour of the school by students, helped me feel more comfortable. I got a taste for how the campus looked and heard from former grade 7s about how happy they were at the school, which definitely

made me feel comfortable in myself and safe in the environment of the school community. I also had the support of my family who would eventually help me shake the nerves off on my first day.

Overall, my strong primary school education foundation, familial support system, accommodating school faculty and my development of time management and other skills all contributed to making me feel positive and stable in my transition to secondary school. I was now ready and confident to spend the next five years of my life there.



# #4



*Young people are  
respected & involved  
in decisions in their  
communities*

**Young people are supported to have their voices, lived experience and solutions heard, and have genuine, meaningful opportunities to influence decisions.**

*Our promise, Your future* ensures young people will be involved in decisions that affect them. From our response to climate change and recovery from the coronavirus pandemic, to ensuring we have a connected and accessible public transport network and mental health system, every issue our state faces is an issue of importance to young people.

This strategy shifts the burden that young people have of being educators, awareness-raisers and advocates—often for systems and structures they have inherited. Instead, young people will have structures in place that turn their ideas and experiences into action.

*Our promise, Your future* helps create a future where young people have more control and power in their lives. Young people will shape our policies, laws, services and infrastructure, making them more relevant to their needs. Through this, we will create intergenerational equity that benefits both current and future generations. We are setting a new standard for working with young people across policy reform, systems change, service design, roll out and evaluation.

This strategy also increases the positive way young people are shown in the media, tackling discrimination that many young people experience. On an average day, only 1 per cent of stories directly quote a young person; only 11 per cent include the views or experiences of young people.<sup>28</sup> Young people will have more opportunities to be listened to and represented in media about them.

*Our promise, Your future* is working towards more equitable opportunities for young people. This strategy calls on decision-makers across government to recognise the collective efforts needed to actively address the structural power imbalances that directly affect some young people's lives.

**“ Prevention starts with young people and children who are breaking intergenerational cycles. We need to go beyond giving voice**

Roundtable participant





## Our commitment to young Victorians is...

### #4.1

Increase representation of young people aged 25 or under on Victorian Government boards.

- We will develop resources to make boards more inclusive and empower youth to take part.
- We will improve how we promote board positions to young people, so they are aware and supported to access opportunities.
- We will promote opportunities for young people that can lead to future board appointments—for example through experience on advisory committees and other relevant bodies.

### #4.2

Develop an evidence-based menu of youth engagement and youth-led action models. All Victorian government departments will use this menu to ensure young people take an active role in decision making. The menu will also be available to local governments across Victoria.

### #4.3

Work with Aboriginal young people to create more direct communication opportunities across the Victorian Government. This will give Aboriginal young people the opportunity to discuss specific issues, priorities and areas of importance to them.



**They might listen but what will they actually do about it?**

Aboriginal youth forum participant

### #4.4

Support opportunities for young people to directly engage with Ministers on important issues.

### #4.5

Expand opportunities for young people to engage with civics and citizenship education within schools.



**Allow young people more presence in political spaces and government decision making. We are the future of Australia; we are the future of the world and everything happening today that we have no say in impacts our lives far longer than those in power are affected for**

Survey respondent, 19–21 years old

## PRIORITY 4

# Young people are respected & involved in decisions in their communities

### #4.6

Promote ways for youth council members and leaders across local government and advisory groups to connect with and support young people. This will allow young people to contribute to and lead decision making and to organise place-based action on important issues.

### #4.7

Establish the Koorie Youth Council as a principal youth sector partner with the Office for Youth, alongside the Youth Affairs Council Victoria and the Centre for Multicultural Youth. Provide annual funding for policymaking and advocacy, noting the future partnership opportunities of Victoria's treaty process.

### #4.8

Promote youth engagement in Victorian TAFEs by increasing student engagement and participation in TAFE decision making and campus activities.

### #4.9

Increase the visibility of young people in the media and public discussions. Ensure this includes disabled young people, LGBTIQ+ young people, Aboriginal young people and young people from multicultural and multifaith communities.

### #4.10

Set up opportunities for young people to work on Victoria's response to climate change. Do this through our roll out of *Victoria's Climate Change Act 2017*, including setting future emissions targets for the state.



**Youth need to engage more in the outside world and really get involved in big decisions that will end up impacting our future! We are the future! Our voices and needs need to be met and heard**

Survey respondent, 12–15 years old



**There should be a solution to commit government to better communications with young people on the complexities and big decisions [like] public drunkenness, community health solution work**

Aboriginal youth forum participant

## Case study: *Building young people's strengths nurtures them as leaders*

**Young people have fresh ideas and a burning passion to improve our world.**

Young person, 21 years old

Young people are fuelled by the terrifying reality of their futures sinking under water, going up in flames, and harbouring constant fear. We are desperate to be heard, and for our voices to be put into action.

I was 16 when I first heard that climate change was a result of core systemic faults and a symptom of disconnection from our planet. It is a helpless reality, witnessing the loss of our natural world continue, when the impacts of our ignorance are already so obvious. I shared my observations alongside other high school students at the OECD, and at the UN COP24. We were met with ignorance from adults, and our voices were tokenised to improve the credibility of other's projects. We had so much to share, and solutions to offer, but weren't respected, even at the most important decision-making tables.

It wasn't until I was 19 that I found myself sitting in a room of educators talking about what climate education offered me that I felt my story was used as a tool for change. The conversation flowed, as what I was saying was noted and discussed as a case study for education reform. I then talked to the students, and my passion for young people's involvement in these conversations was reignited.

Surrounding myself with other young people comforts me with a sense of solidarity and determination, as we're all on the same page: wanting to be seen, listened to and valued for our ideas and contributions. When discussing this experience with my peers, we shared a feeling of young people's voices being valued and heard.





#5



*Young people are confident and strong in their identity & culture and are supported in their community*

## PRIORITY 5

*Young people are confident and strong in their identity & culture and are supported in their community*

# Young people are *connected* to their culture, language, beliefs and identity and feel *accepted & valued* within their communities.

*Our promise, Your future* gives young people more ways of connecting to their communities, accessing opportunities locally and celebrating their culture and diverse identities. Establishing—and re-establishing—connections with friends, peers and the wider community has never been more important as we learn to live with coronavirus.

We will learn from and build on the work of so many young people who are bravely speaking up to make our state a better and fairer place. This strategy recognises the power of young people to create social change and tackle the big issues. Whether it's fighting for social justice through the Black Lives Matter movement, calling out sexual harassment and gender inequality, or demanding real action on climate change, this strategy will invest in young people to create positive change.

*Our promise, Your future* wants every young person to know that their identity and culture is valuable and unique. We know that deeply understanding a young person means recognising that their lived experience is informed by the many parts of their identity. For young people who experience marginalisation, challenging or negative experiences are often fuelled by structures of power imbalance and discrimination (for example ableism, racism, homophobia, sexism). We want every young person to know they are seen and valued for every part of who they are.

This strategy is helping to ensure every young person across Victoria maintains and strengthens their connections to community and culture in ways that support their wellbeing including:

- culturally safe supports that work towards Aboriginal self-determination
- local events that celebrate culture
- opportunities to get involved in their community through sports, recreation and arts
- study and job opportunities in regional and rural communities so young people can stay close to home and their networks.



**As a disabled queer person, I have had some experiences with discrimination and it can really negatively impact on my ability to be involved in my community**

Survey respondent, 19–21 years old



## PRIORITY 5

*Young people are confident and strong in their identity & culture and are supported in their community*

### Our commitment to young Victorians is...

#### #5.1

Partner with local government and the community sector to provide local youth hubs in priority areas. Co-design these with young people, drawing on lessons from the Latrobe Youth Space co-design process.



**Improved public transport and bike lanes can address both environmental and financial issues... the city does not need to be so car-dependent**

Survey respondent, 22–25 years old

#### #5.2

Support access to local mentoring and work experience opportunities for young people, partnering with business, government and community leaders and role models.

#### #5.3

Embed the diverse voices and needs of multicultural, multifaith and Aboriginal young people in the roll out of the new anti-racism strategy.

#### #5.4

Partner with Aboriginal communities to deliver youth services, noting the need for flexibility to align with any future iterations of a self-determined and ongoing representative body for Aboriginal Victorians and Traditional Owners established through the treaty process. Focus on investing in strengths-based youth programs including mentoring and culturally based support services.



**90 per cent of young mob don't even see themselves moving away, because that is so foreign to them [while] there are young mob who do that. But it is too overwhelming for most. Their comfort zone is where they live since they don't have anyone to show them the steps and navigate that**

Aboriginal youth forum participant



## PRIORITY 5

# Young people are confident and strong in their identity & culture and are supported in their community

### #5.5

Under Victoria's volunteering strategy, increase volunteering opportunities for young people across a broad range of sectors including arts, entertainment and sport. Improve communication and flexibility around volunteering opportunities.

### #5.6

Target the needs of disabled young people through Victoria's new state disability plan. This includes removing barriers to social, civic and economic participation, and supporting equitable access to services, information and opportunities.

### #5.7

Support young LGBTIQ+ people to foster connections with peers and older LGBTIQ+ communities.

### #5.8

Improve supports, including access to mental health and wellbeing services, for LGBTIQ+ young people in regional and rural Victoria.

### #5.9

Promote community connections and support the health and wellbeing of trans and gender diverse young people.



**The pressure to be 'young leaders' when young mob are seen to be doing well in community. They can't or are unable to make mistakes because they are torn between being a role model and being young**

Aboriginal youth forum participant



**Many young people have to leave regional and rural areas to study or gain employment as these opportunities are not available in their local areas. Services such as doctors or mental health support can also be inaccessible. Public transport is also a massive issue in regional/rural areas as it is a large preventative factor in attaining employment or education**

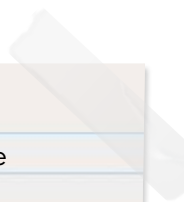
Survey respondent, 19–21 years old



## Case study: The *impact* of recognising place and culture

**My name is Maddison. I am a proud Wurundjeri girl and I started at the Aboriginal Wellness Foundation back when I was 12 to 13 years old.**

Young person, 17 years old

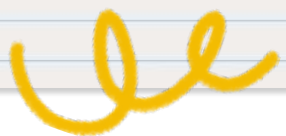


I'm now 17 and I'm in my fourth year of the program, I'm also studying year 10 in high school. Throughout the program I was faced with some amazing opportunities. I travelled to Adelaide for the Dupang Festival twice, danced on the MCG for Essendon at the dreamtime game, went on multiple camps, made damper at Bunnings, participated in multiple flag-raising ceremonies and danced on different Countries.

Throughout the program I have helped with the kids in the younger group, playing traditional games and keeping an eye on them when needed. I have had some tough times during the program with mental health and with some people, but I always had someone to help me in the group.

I was lucky enough to make some incredible things and participate in activities such as making a possum skin pouch (first year), making an emu feather belt for dancing (first and third year), making a possum skin belt for dancing (second year), participating and trying to make a basket and making some clapsticks.

The Aboriginal Wellness Foundation has had a massive impact on me over the four years. It has really helped me be more confident with myself and my culture and has given me so many experiences I will always remember.



#6



*Services are coordinated,  
responsive & accessible*





**Services *work together* to effectively identify and respond to young people's *individual needs* and circumstances. ←**

Under *Our promise, Your future*, we are working towards more streamlined, high-quality, age-appropriate services that work in partnership with young people to improve their lives. Young people will come up against fewer barriers to accessing services that meet their needs, at the time and in the place they need them. We will also focus on communicating better with young people in ways that suit them so they know what services are available and how to access them.

This strategy recognises that young people want services that understand that their needs are unique and shaped by multiple interconnected factors, lived experience, context and social dynamics. Young people want culturally inclusive and safe services that see and respond to them as a whole person. Across government and the sector, we will improve the flow of relevant information between child, youth and adult services so the workers who support them quickly get to know their history, their goals and the agreed plan forward. Young people will have smoother and safer entry points through the places where they spend time. To do this, we know that self-determination must be the basis of everything that we do with Aboriginal young people.

*Our promise, Your future* focuses on prevention first. This strategy aims to better focus and coordinate our collective efforts to intervene before problems occur, or step in early where needed, to steer young people away from crisis services and reduce exposure to trauma and harm.

**“ Provide services for kids on an ongoing basis. Services are provided on short-term contract basis, which are disruptive for kids, parents and communities**

Worker, regional Victoria

**“ Regional funding needs to be provided equitably. Distance from metropolitan Victoria does not seem to factor into equitable distribution of funding to regional catchments**

Worker, regional Victoria



## Our commitment to young Victorians is...

### #6.1

Explore changing the Victorian Government's age definition of youth by further considering the needs of young people from 10 years of age, including the potential impacts to service providers and the support needed for rollout.

### #6.2

Improve how we collect data on outcomes for young people, including through funded services, programs and research. This will help us design better prevention and early intervention initiatives.

### #6.3

Explore how we can improve the children and families service system to:

- help young people and families use the system and find what they need more easily
- improve sector and community referral to the right help for children and families in need.

### #6.4

Improve the way child protection, family violence, sexual assault and child and family services work together through the *Roadmap to Reform*.

### #6.5

Pilot a new approach, Putting Families First, for families to try wraparound supports and models of care across the health, human services and justice service systems.

### #6.6

Partner with the Koorie Youth Council, in consultation with the First People's Assembly of Victoria, and other relevant Aboriginal organisations to develop a Victorian Aboriginal youth engagement framework led by Aboriginal young people that embeds the principles of self-determination.

### #6.7

Partner with young people to review the Victorian Government's Youth Central website and social media channels to improve communication with young people and provide a one-stop shop for young people to get information about services and supports.

### #6.8

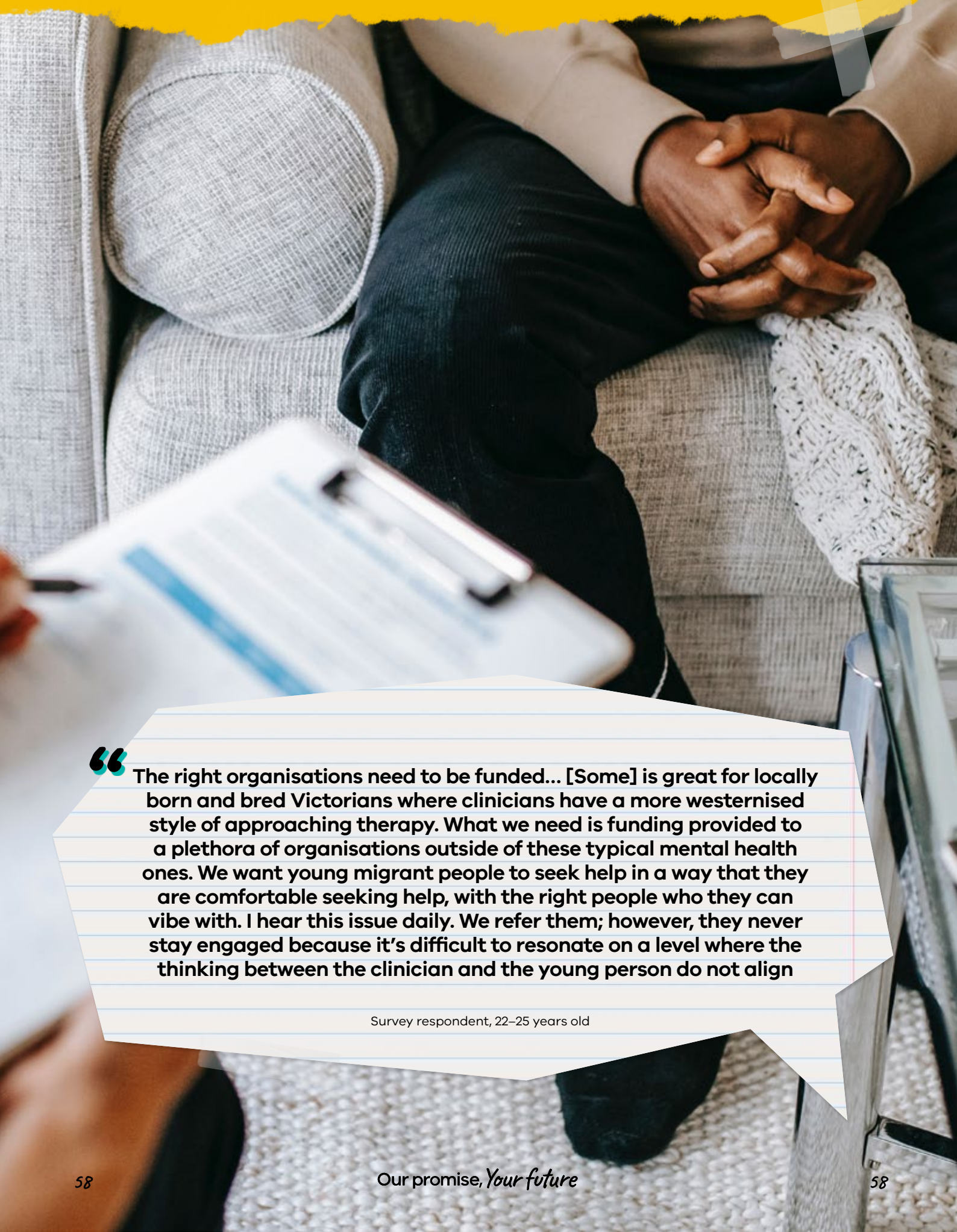
Promote increased youth sector collaboration by:

- supporting communities of practice
- sharing tools and resources
- promoting evidence and evaluation.



PRIORITY 6

*Services are coordinated, responsive & accessible*



**“** The right organisations need to be funded... [Some] is great for locally born and bred Victorians where clinicians have a more westernised style of approaching therapy. What we need is funding provided to a plethora of organisations outside of these typical mental health ones. We want young migrant people to seek help in a way that they are comfortable seeking help, with the right people who they can vibe with. I hear this issue daily. We refer them; however, they never stay engaged because it's difficult to resonate on a level where the thinking between the clinician and the young person do not align

Survey respondent, 22–25 years old





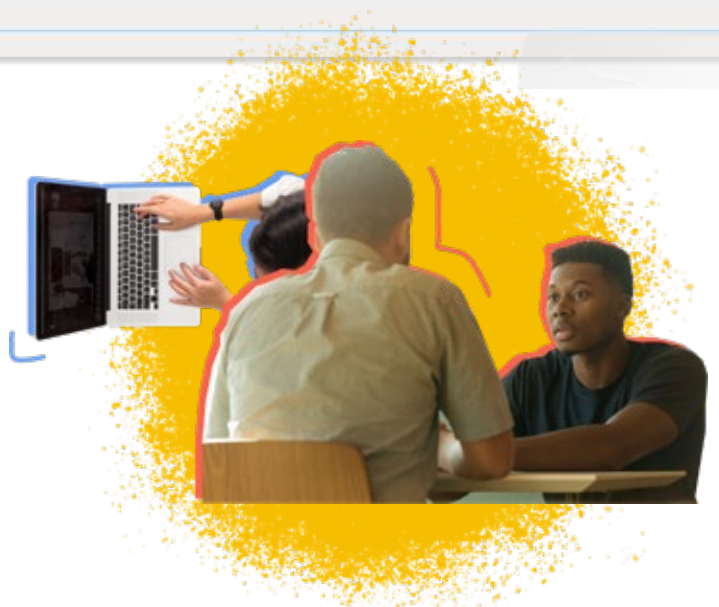
## Case study: Delivering an *integrated, place-based* approach to prevention

**Foundry offers young people aged 12 to 24 health and wellness resources, services and supports—online and through integrated service centres in communities across British Columbia.**

Foundry, Canada

The centres provide low-barrier, integrated services for young people and their families in a 'one-stop shop' setting. In addition to offering primary care, social services, peer support and system navigation assistance, Foundry also offers mental health and substance use services through a co-created integrated stepped model of care. Foundry's focus on reaching young people earlier by providing prevention-oriented interventions, supporting families and matching the level of service to the level of need is providing young people with easy access to care.

Part funded by the Government of British Columbia, each Foundry centre is supported by strong partnerships across government and local service providers, building on community-level collaborations to promote prevention and early intervention.



*Our priorities*



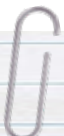
  
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FOR BANY DIFFERENCE

# Measuring *and reporting* on progress





# Focusing on results



An outcomes framework sets out the intended end result of this strategy. It is a tool that helps government and the youth and community sectors to have a shared understanding of what we hope to achieve. It is a way of checking whether we are on track to achieve our goals. This framework is not about putting the onus on young people to change.

This strategy sets out eight high-level outcomes (refer to the 'result for young people' column in the tables over the page). These results are interconnected and reflect the social and broader economic and environmental factors needed to improve the futures of young people. The outcomes and indicators are intentionally ambitious and aspirational.

## → *Data helps us understand young people's experiences*

Data can be a powerful tool that helps us understand people's experiences, attitudes and connections with government and non-government policies and services. We often rely on data to establish baselines, set standards and set goals to keep moving forward.

In developing this strategy, we found significant data gaps. We found there are few data sources that collect data regularly (for example, yearly) or at the state level. One-off data collection is much more common. Available data is either too broad or too specific and time-based. This limits our ability to gain insights into the continued experiences of particular groups of young people such as LGBTIQ+ young people, multicultural and multifaith young people or young women in contact with the justice system. We also found that

available data is often deficit-based, meaning it focuses on harm or poor outcomes, rather than measuring desired outcomes. The current state of our data shows that young people are often missing from the conversation at the systemic level.

This strategy will shift the data we capture so we have a stronger understanding of young people's experiences. We know that capturing difficult realities is important and should not be underestimated. But we also know that capturing data from a strengths-based perspective can be equally powerful.

A phased outcomes approach over the next five years will allow time to get important baseline measures or expand data sources where needed. It will help track our progress under this strategy.

# DOMAIN 1

## Healthy, well, safe & secure



### Result for young people

#### I am healthy and well

Goals for young people	Measures
<p><b>My mental wellbeing improves</b></p>	<p>Proportion of young people experiencing psychological distress</p> <p>Rates of self-harm, suicide ideation/completion among young people</p> <p>Young people who have a high level of emotional wellbeing</p>
<p><b>I have better physical health and engage in more physical activity</b></p>	<p>Proportion of young people who are engaged in a healthy level of physical activity</p> <p>Proportion of young people who engage in potentially harmful behaviours (e.g. smoking, alcohol consumption, illicit drugs, unhealthy eating habits, eating disorders)</p>
<p><b>I report improved social and emotional wellbeing</b></p>	<p>Proportion of young people who report positive health and wellbeing</p> <p>Proportion of young people who feel positive about their future</p>

### Result for young people

#### I am safe and live free from harm and abuse

Goals for young people	Measures
<p><b>I am more safe where I live, work, learn, socialise and play</b></p>	<p>Proportion of young people who report feeling safe</p> <p>Proportion of crimes and offences committed against young people, by type, location and relationship of the young person to the offender</p> <p>Number of child protection investigations leading to a substantiation</p> <p>Number of young people who experience family violence</p>
<p><b>My relationships are more safe, healthy and respectful</b></p>	<p>Proportion of young people who have offended or reoffended, by offence type</p> <p>Proportion of young people who understand what constitutes healthy, supportive and safe relationships</p> <p>Proportion of young people who report having safe and healthy relationships</p>
<p><b>I am in safe and secure housing</b></p>	<p>Proportion of young people experiencing homelessness</p> <p>Proportion of young people who live in suitable, stable and affordable housing</p>
<p><b>I have less experiences of discrimination, racism, harassment or vilification</b></p>	<p>Proportion of young people who have reported experiencing some form of discrimination, racism, vilification and harassment (in the last 12 months)</p> <p>Proportion of young people who know where to report (or have reported) an incident of discrimination, racism, vilification or harassment</p>

## DOMAIN 2 *Education, training, learning & employment*



### Result for young people

#### I am supported to actively participate in learning, education and training

<b>Goals for young people</b>	<b>My education experiences are more meaningful</b>	<b>I have more positive transition pathways</b>	<b>I have more independent living skills</b>
<b>Measures</b>	<p>Average number of absence days from school</p> <p>Proportion of young people engaged in education</p> <p>Proportion of young people who are supported with their learning and development needs</p> <p>Proportion of young people who have positive relationships with their teachers and peers</p>	<p>Proportion of young people who are participating in further education, training or employment pathway</p> <p>Proportion of young people who have completed higher education and training</p>	<p>Proportion of highest training or educational qualification achieved by young people</p> <p>Proportion of young people who successfully secured a job or further training opportunities within 12 months of leaving school or higher education and training</p>

### Result for young people

#### I am in meaningful employment and contribute to the economy

<b>Goals for young people</b>	<b>I have more employment, training and development opportunities</b>	<b>I am in secure, fulfilling and relevant employment</b>
<b>Measures</b>	<p>Proportion of highest training or educational qualification achieved by young people</p> <p>Proportion of young people who successfully secured a job or further training opportunities within 12 months of leaving school or higher education and training</p>	<p>Proportion of young people who are unemployed or underemployed</p> <p>Proportion of young people in full-time / part-time / casual employment</p> <p>Proportion of young people who are engaged in full-time education or work (or a combination of both)</p> <p>Proportion of young people who cannot access employment, education or training due to a lack of transport</p> <p>Proportion of young people who report having secure and stable employment (includes experiences of wage theft and/or exploitation, and job satisfaction)</p>



## DOMAIN 3

# Empowerment and connection to culture & community



### Result for young people

## I am empowered and self-determined to make choices about my life

Goals for young people	Measures
<p><b>I feel that my voice and contributions have been heard and are reflected in key areas of my life</b></p>	<p>Proportion of young people who feel they have been consulted on their ideas and opinions</p> <p>Proportion of young people who feel valued by society or the extent to which they have opportunities to have a real say on issues that are important to them</p>
<p><b>I participate and engage in social, community and civic life</b></p>	<p>Proportion of young people who participate in, and are involved in, social and community groups or civic and political groups</p> <p>Proportion of young people who participate in recreational activities (performing and visual arts, music, dance, sport and recreation activities)</p> <p>Proportion of young people who volunteer</p>
<p><b>I am involved in decisions on matters that affect my life</b></p>	<p>Proportion of young people 18 years or older who are enrolled to vote and who do vote</p> <p>Proportion of young people who feel able to make choices and take action about their own lives, experiences and relationships</p>

### Result for young people

## I participate in and am connected to culture and community

Goals for young people	Measures
<p><b>I have a greater sense of belonging and connectedness to culture, community and support networks</b></p>	<p>Proportion of young people who report having a trusted adult or family member in their lives</p> <p>Proportion of young people who participate in organised community, cultural and religious events and activities</p> <p>Proportion of young people who report having contact with their friends and peers, by the reported frequency of contact</p>
<p><b>I feel safe and proud to express my culture and individual and collective identity</b></p>	<p>Proportion of young people who feel safe and proud to confidently express their identity and culture</p>

DOMAIN 3 (cont'd)  
*Empowerment and connection to culture & community*

Result for young people

**I live in sustainable, thriving  
and vibrant communities**

Goals for  
young people

**I experience more connectivity  
and liveability in my  
neighbourhoods and cities**

**I have more capacity to influence  
and adapt to the impacts of climate  
change and natural disasters**

Measures

Proportion of young people who regularly cycle or walk  
Proportion of young people who report they can access  
services, supports and local amenities in their local  
community

Proportion of young people involved in decision making  
on environmental issues, climate change and disaster  
preparedness and recovery





DOMAIN 4  
*Responsive service system*

Result for young people

**Services are accessible, coordinated and respond to my evolving needs**

Goals for young people

**I have more equitable access to locally available and culturally responsive services**

**Services are better coordinated and tailored to my needs and circumstances**

**I am more involved in designing, delivering, leading and evaluating services, policies and programs**

Measures

Proportion of young people who report having access to safe (including age-appropriate and culturally safe) services that they need

Proportion of young people who feel they can make a complaint about a service if needed

Proportion of young people who feel satisfied that the services they received met their needs and circumstances

Proportion of young people who are clients of services and who are involved in co-design or decision making with service providers

Proportion of services that have involved the voice of young people with lived experience in the design, delivery, governance and evaluation of services, policies and programs





# The way forward



This strategy will inform every step of our work over the next five years. It is the start of an ongoing conversation with young people and the youth and community sectors about how we will partner to improve the futures of our young people.

We are committed to engaging regularly with young people, including young people with lived experience, to inform how the strategy is rolled out over the next five years. The Victorian Youth Congress will play a key role in driving implementation and evaluation of the strategy.

We will regularly report on progress through the life of the strategy and continue to seek out the views of young people—for example, through regular surveys and consultations. This will form a key part of our monitoring and evaluation approach.

We will also set up an advisory group with equal membership between young people and representatives from the youth sector to advise government and guide the strategy rollout.







# Appendix





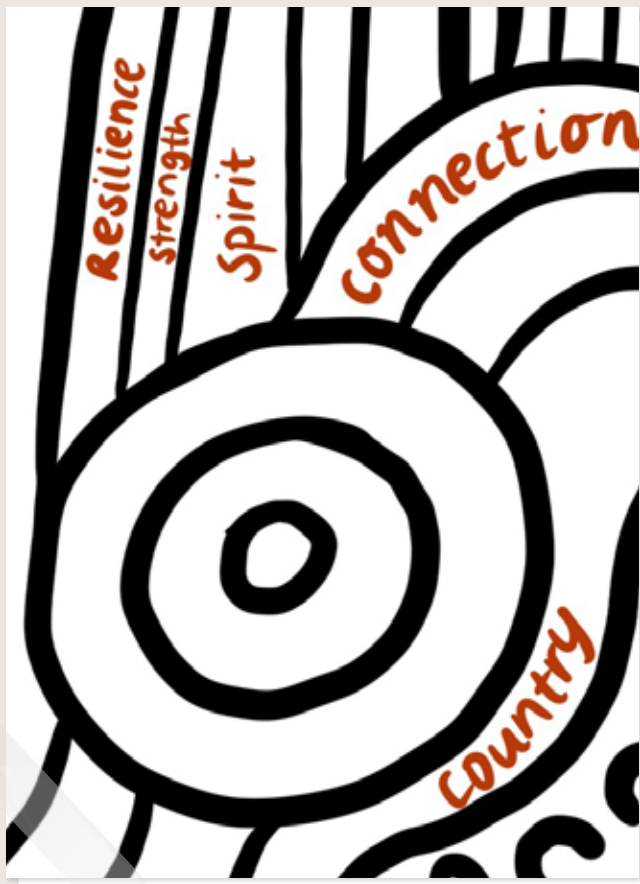
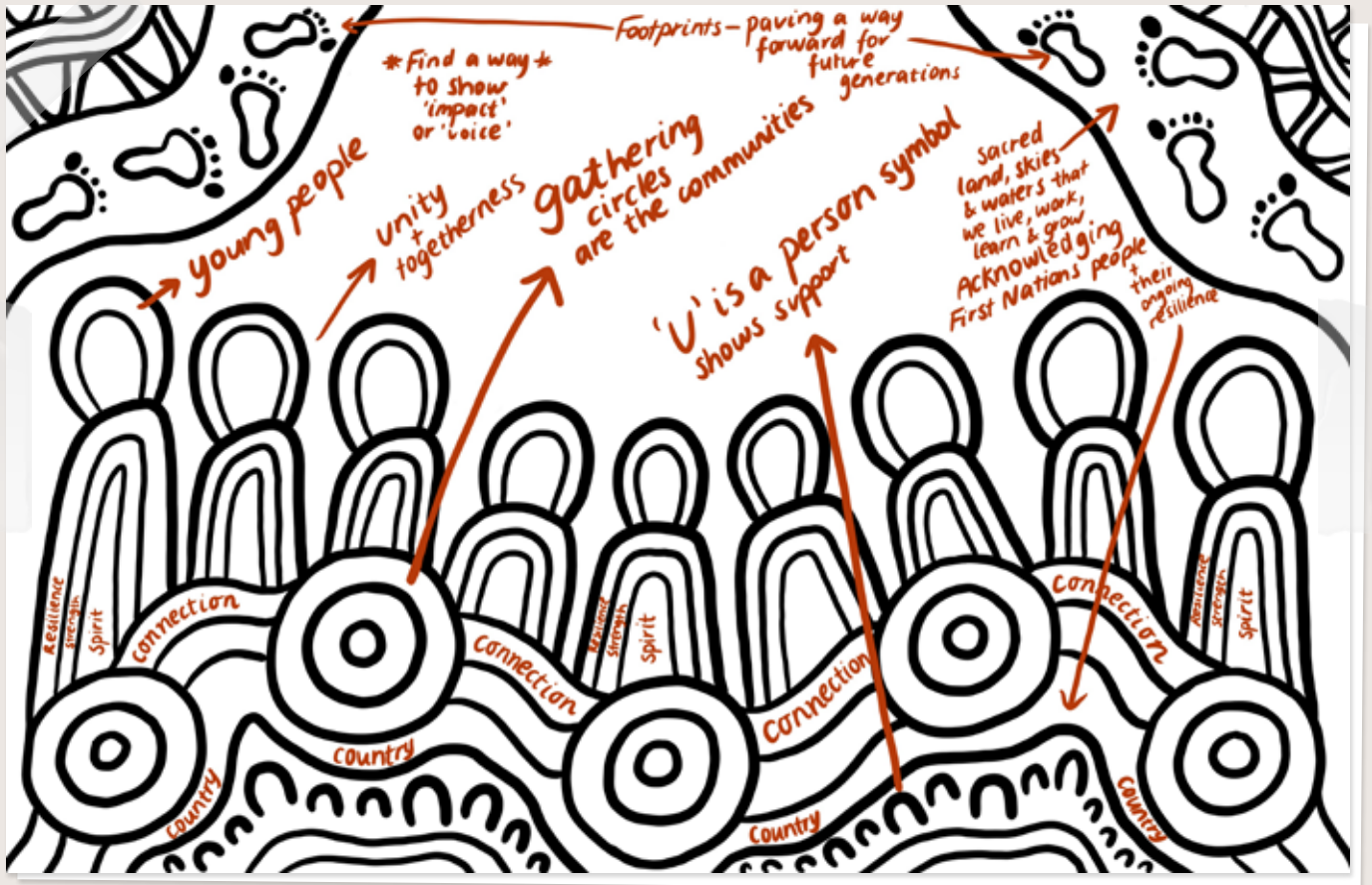
## Definitions

<b>Accessibility</b>	Making sure young people have the same opportunities to access services, information and physical and online spaces, and fully participate in their communities.
<b>Cisgender</b>	People whose gender identity and expression matches the biological sex they were assigned when they were born.
<b>Co-design</b>	The process of including the intended users of goods and services when designing those goods and services. It is based on the principles of sharing power, prioritising relationships, using participatory means and building capability.
<b>Communities of practice</b>	A group of people who share a common interest and come together to share knowledge, experience, resources or solutions.
<b>LGBTIQ+</b>	<p>Lesbian: used to describe a person who identifies as a girl or woman who is attracted to someone of the same identified gender.</p> <p>Gay: most commonly used to described someone who is attracted to someone of the same identified gender.</p> <p>Bisexual: an attraction to someone of the same gender and other genders. Everyone’s experience is a little different, and bi doesn’t necessarily mean being attracted to only two genders.</p> <p>Transgender: sometimes gender diverse people feel that their gender doesn’t match the sex they were assigned at birth (for example, someone born with a penis might identify as a girl)—this is referred to as being transgender. Sometimes trans people change their name, their clothes, or even their bodies. Sometimes they don’t.</p> <p>Intersex: people are born with different kinds of bodies. People who are intersex are born with natural variations in their body that differ from what we might expect to be ‘typically’ male/female. This can include (but is not limited to) variations in hormones, chromosomes and sexual organs.</p> <p>Queer: a common umbrella term used to mean anyone who is same-gender attracted or gender diverse.</p> <p>Questioning: most people will question their sexual or gender identity at some point throughout their life. It can be a confusing time, but it is also normal.</p> <p>+: used to describe communities outside heteronormative and cisgender identities that fall under the queer umbrella.</p>

<b>Lived experience</b>	Personal knowledge about the world gained through direct, firsthand involvement in everyday events rather than through representations constructed by other people.
<b>Marginalised</b>	Sometimes also called social exclusion—refers to people being pushed to the fringes of society due to a lack of access to rights, resources and opportunities.
<b>Prevention</b>	Services offered to the general population to avoid a future negative impact, as well as services or initiatives aimed at identifying risk factors for, or early signs that may create, negative impacts.
<b>Self-determination</b>	Self-determination means different things to different people. The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples describes self-determination as the ability for Aboriginal people to freely determine their political status and pursue their economic, social and cultural development. It also describes self-determination as a right that relates to groups of people, not only individuals.
<b>Socioeconomic disadvantage</b>	A lack of access to material and social resources, potentially reducing the ability to participate in society.
<b>Strengths-based approach</b>	A focus on determining an outcome that draws on a person, group or place's strengths and resources.



# Annotated artwork by Nakia Cadd





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