ACADEMY OF THE SOCIAL SCIENCES IN AUSTRALIA

NOVEMBER 2022

QUEENSLAND YOUTH STRATEGY

ACADEMY OF THE SOCIAL SCIENCES IN AUSTRALIA SUBMISSION TO:

**OFFICE OF YOUTH
QUEENSLAND GOVERNMENT**

Summary

The Academy of the Social Sciences in Australia (the Academy) welcomes the opportunity to engage with the Queensland Government (the government) on the development of a new Queensland Youth Strategy (the new Strategy).

The Academy strongly supports the government's commitment to improving outcomes for young people in Queensland. Ensuring youth succeed in their transition to an autonomous life is of critical importance to our national future.

The Academy is an independent, not-for-profit organisation that draws on the expertise of its over 750 elected Fellows to provide practical, evidence-based advice to governments, businesses, and the community on important social issues.

Our submission provides six recommendations aimed at enhancing the Queensland youth policy framework; it also provides a high-level summary of some key challenges facing young people.

Underpinning this submission is significant research from the social sciences, including relevant work on important issues not covered in detail in this submission. These include studies on youth justice, the experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth, and youth with disabilities.

The Academy would welcome the opportunity to connect the government with the contributors to this submission. Should this be of interest please contact Andrea Verdich (Policy Manager) on 0438 218 352 or andrea.verdich@socialsciences.org.au.

Recommendations

The Academy recommends:

1. The new Strategy recognises the uncertainties and impacts created by climate change and intergenerational equity as key global transformations shaping the modern youth experience, and especially notes that the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated their effects.
2. The Queensland Government extends its commitment to youth engagement through comprehensive participatory engagement models, including up-to-date digital approaches, so that diverse young people can contribute to meaningful change across all areas of government policy and the policy cycle.
3. The new Strategy recognises the cross-cutting and interconnected nature of youth policy and identifies coordination mechanisms to deliver policy, programs, and services.
4. The Queensland Government investigates opportunities and structures to support focused youth research and to foster collaboration across policymakers, practitioners, and researchers in the field of youth.

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5. The new Strategy is underpinned by youth-centred indicators together with a monitoring and evaluation framework, which has been developed in consultation with young Queenslanders and experts in youth outcomes measurement.
6. The new Strategy incorporates cross-cutting themes of social and emotional wellbeing, financial security, and access to affordable housing.

The context

The period of adolescence to young adulthood is a critical developmental stage. Physiological changes, transitions from school to employment, and changing relationships with peers and parents typically present challenges to young people's identities and their financial security, potentially increasing their vulnerability.

This period is characterised as a 'turning point' where subsequent life trajectories and adult outcomes are particularly malleable.[1]

This already complex and vulnerable period has been compounded by global transformations, such as climate change and intergenerational inequality[2], which have created significant uncertainties for young people. These global transformations have profound implications for young people now and as they develop into adulthood.

The Consultation Discussion Paper (the Consultation Paper) highlights the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on young people (p.1 and p.7). However, it's important to recognise that the issues are not new, rather that the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated pre-existing, and in many cases long-standing, issues in youth mental wellbeing, employment, education. and social connectedness.

Recommendation 1: *The new Strategy recognises the uncertainties and impacts created by climate change and intergenerational equity as key global transformations shaping the modern youth experience, and especially notes that the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated their effects.*

Key principles for youth policy

The development of a new Strategy is a vital opportunity for government priorities and policies to reflect the contemporary and emerging needs of young people and to support their aspirations.

Given Australia's commitments as a signatory to international covenants and conventions on the Rights of the Child, of Persons with Disabilities, and on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, among others[3], the Academy encourages the government to adopt an approach that expressly sets out how the rights of young people from all backgrounds and cultures will be supported and upheld.[4]

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[1] Baxter, J., Lam, J., Povey, J., Lee, R., & Zubrick, S. R. (Eds.) (2022). *Family Dynamics over the Life Course: Foundations, Turning Points and Outcomes.* (Life Course Research and Social Policies). Springer.
[2] Allen, Liz. *Australia's living standards are going backwards, and it's young people who will suffer the most.* The Guardian. November 2022.
[3] *International human rights system.* Australian Government. Accessed 24 November 2022.
[4] Numbers and People Synergy. *Australian Youth Development Index 2020.*

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While there is no global framework or standards for youth policy design, implementation, and evaluation there is some international consensus on the leading practice principles.[5]

These principles recognise that adopting a youth strategy alone is not sufficient, rather, the principles highlight that governments must ensure strategies are evidence-based, adequately resourced, transparent and accountable. In addition, that youth stakeholders from diverse backgrounds are involved in their design and implementation. Ensuring youth are considered across all areas of 'adult' policy, not just 'youth' policy is crucial.[6,7] This is supported by a body of leading practice examples and comparative assessments across OECD countries.[8]

Drawing on this work, the Academy identifies four key principles that would improve outcomes for young people in Queensland if operationalised in the new Strategy:

1. Participation and inclusion of young people

The Academy welcomes and supports the initiatives undertaken by the government to engage young Queenslanders in the new Strategy and government policy more broadly, including the Youth Strategy Engagement Group and Queensland Youth Engagement Charter.

Young people are a significant asset to policymaking and have important, creative, and innovative insights about how to address the complex needs of their generation. Moreover, the experiences that young people have when engaging with government shape their broader views of democracy and can influence their sense of trust and political efficacy.[9,10]

Genuine participatory approaches in which young people from diverse social groups contribute to meaningful change, can provide key insights and ideas for improvement. Youth action movements highlight a diversity and richness in the ways that young people engage with issues that are important to them.[11]

The Academy suggests the government extend their commitment to youth engagement by going beyond the traditional formal, structured, consultative mechanisms to engage with young people where they most often make social and civic connections and participate in everyday political life—on the internet, digital, and social media, and via (ever-changing) mobile technologies. These practices are vital to young people's sense of civic and political agency, but policy and engagement approaches often fail to harness these opportunities.[12,13]

[5] Bacalso, Cristina and Farrow, Alex (2016). *Youth policies from around the world: International practices and country examples.* Youth Policy Working Paper.

[6] As above.

[7] OECD. *Delivering for youth: How governments can put young people at the centre of the recovery.* March 2022.

[8] OECD. (2020) *Governance for Youth, Trust and Intergenerational Justice: fit for all?* OECD Public Governance Reviews, OECD Publishing, Paris.

[9] Collin, P. and McCormack, J. (2020) *Young People and Democracy: A Review.* Sydney: Whitlam Institute.

[10] Numbers and People Synergy. *Australian Youth Development Index 2020*.

[11] Collin, Philippa. *How to engage youth in making policies that work for us all.* The Conversation, April 2015

[12] Harris, Anita. (2020) *How young digital citizens are changing civic engagement in society.* ADI Policy Briefing Papers. Volume 1, No. 2. Alfred Deakin Institute for Citizenship and Globalisation.

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Further development and implementation of the new Strategy also needs to keep asking: whose voices are not being heard and what questions are not being asked? In this respect, the Academy notes that more than half of Queensland's youth were born overseas or have a parent born overseas, 8.2 per cent have a disability[14] and 8 per cent identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander.[15] They are geographically dispersed across urban, regional, rural and remote communities. Their voices need to be heard, as sometimes logistically difficult as that may be.

Participation should also span the policy cycle—the development, implementation, and monitoring of policies across government—and address the genuine sharing of power between decision-makers and young people. There is sometimes a tendency to involve stakeholders in the first phase of the policy cycle, and then to forget them. The Academy urges the government to ensure full-cycle engagement of young people.

The delivery of youth policies, programs and services should harness existing youth organisations such as Multicultural Youth Queensland and the Youth Affairs Network of Queensland and Indigenous organisations such as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Health Service Brisbane and Queensland Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Child Protection Peak and consider strengthening these entities.

Recommendation 2: *The Queensland Government extends its commitment to youth engagement through comprehensive participatory engagement models, including up-to-date digital approaches, so that diverse young people can contribute to meaningful change across all areas of government policy and the policy cycle.*

Cross-cutting and coordinated

The Consultation Paper outlines a number of important issues facing young Queenslanders (p.17). However, to optimally address the full range and depth of issues that affect the lives of young people, the new Strategy should adopt a holistic approach and explicitly recognise that the issues and challenges are often interlinked and interdependent.

As examples, financial security and access to affordable housing are both determinants of social and emotional wellbeing, a strong link exists between climate change and physical and mental health[16] and support for families—particularly single parents—is crucial to addressing child poverty.[17]

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[13] Swist, T., Collin, P. (2021). *Innovating Youth Engagement and Partnerships to Progress the SDGs.* In: Leal Filho, W., Azul, A.M., Brandli, L., Lange Salvia, A., Wall, T. (eds) Partnerships for the Goals. Encyclopedia of the UN Sustainable Development Goals. Springer, Cham.

[14] Australian Bureau of Statistics (2018), *Disability, Ageing and Carers, Australia: Summary of Findings*, ABS Website, accessed 25 November 2022.

[15] Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2021) *Youth justice in Australia 2019-20*, AIHW, Australian Government, accessed 25 November 2022.

[16] Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2021) *Contributions from young people*, AIHW, Australian Government, accessed 25 November 2022.

[17] Campbell, Alice and Baxter, Janeen. *If we want Australian children to grow up free from poverty, we must support those raising them – especially sole parents.* The Power to Persuade, October 2022.

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Young people see meaningful and tangible connections between different aspects of their life, from education and employment, to housing, relationships and wellbeing.[18] They are also seeking more active government intervention to address challenges across these areas.[19] Responses by the government to the challenges faced by young people should accordingly adopt a coordinated and integrated approach that takes into consideration the various dimensions of young people's lives—particularly their health and wellbeing.

The Consultation Paper outlines a range of policy initiatives already underway across government (p.4). However, the new Strategy would be strengthened if it identified more clearly how the delivery of programs and services are or will be coordinated across Queensland Government departments. Relatedly, the new Strategy could usefully point to genuine and resourced opportunities to enhance coordination and avoid fragmentation in policies and service delivery, as well as to avoid unintended or adverse outcomes. This could include inter-ministerial or inter-departmental bodies that are designed to oversee the implementation of the new Strategy's commitments and relevant programs and services, as well as appropriate transparency of actions, timelines, and outcomes.

Recommendation 3: The new Strategy recognises the cross-cutting and interconnected nature of youth policy and identifies coordination mechanisms to deliver policy, programs, and services.

2. Research and evidence

Young people in Queensland are not a homogeneous group and their lives and realities are fluid and changeable. To better understand and accommodate this, independent and continuing youth research is required to ensure policies reflect the modern and changing needs, challenges, and ambitions of young people.

Australia has a strong body of national knowledge on youth psychology, sociology, policy, citizenship, and justice with centres of expertise including the Monash Centre for Youth Policy and Education Practice, the Australian Research Council Centre of Excellence for Children and Families over the Life Course, the University of Melbourne, Youth Research Centre, the Alfred Deakin Institute for Citizenship and Globalisation, the Western Sydney University Young and Resilient Research Centre, the Griffith School of Criminology and Criminal Justice and the QUT School of Justice.

Notwithstanding this national excellence, it is important that research continues to ensure contemporary and further evidence, in particular, around compounding forms of discrimination and disadvantage in relation to gender and sexual identities, ethnicity, socioeconomic background, disability and so forth. Also, there is a need to give more visibility to and recognition of the issues faced by First Nations queer people as well as multicultural and multifaith queer people.[20]

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[18] Walsh, L., Gallo Cordoba, B., Waite, C., & Cutler, B. (2022). *The 2022 Australian Youth Barometer: Understanding Young People in Australia Today.* Centre for Youth Policy and Education Practice.
[19] As above.
[20] Cutler, B. Gallo Cordoba, B., Walsh, L., Mikola, M., & Waite, C. (2022). *Queer Young People in Australia: Insights from the 2021 Australian Youth Barometer.* Centre for Youth Policy and Education Practice.

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To support the development and implementation of the new Strategy, the government could investigate opportunities and structures to support focused youth research, as well as foster improved collaboration among policymakers, practitioners and researchers in the field of youth. A "community of practice" model would facilitate real-time data and information sharing to inform policy.

Recommendation 4: *The Queensland Government investigates opportunities and structures to support focused youth research and to foster collaboration across policymakers, practitioners, and researchers in the field of youth.*

Measured and evaluated

The Academy notes progress against the 2017 Queensland Youth Strategy, and how this provides a snapshot of the achievements across four building blocks*.* The Academy proposes the new Strategy builds upon this reporting through the development of youth-centred indicators[21] and a more structured monitoring and evaluation framework.

This will be crucial to translate the commitments of the new Strategy into tangible outcomes as well as to ensure that services and programs are responsive to changing contexts and developments in the lives of young people. For example, the New Zealand *Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy,* identifies 36 indicators that measure progress towards each of the six wellbeing outcomes for children and young people. In that instance, almost half of the data is collected via a Youth Health and Wellbeing Survey and progress reports are produced annually. Similar indicators and approaches to effective monitoring should be developed with young people in Queensland.

Recommendation 5: *The new Strategy is underpinned by youth-centred indicators together with a monitoring and evaluation framework, which has been developed in consultation with young Queenslanders and experts in youth outcomes measurement.*

Cross-cutting themes for priority action

Social and emotional wellbeing

The Consultation Paper presents 'wellbeing' as an important theme for the new Strategy (p.11). The Academy proposes that this be reframed as Social and Emotional Wellbeing (SEWB). SEWB is a multidimensional concept of health used by many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as well as by non-Indigenous peoples. It includes mental health, while also encompassing domains of health and wellbeing such as connection to land, culture, family and community.[22] Adopting a SEWB-frame for the new Strategy would better recognise the very broad social and cultural determinants of mental health.[23]

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[21] Collin, P, Lala, G, Palombo, L, Marrades, R & Maci, G, Vromen, A. (2016). *Creating benefit for All. Young people, Engagement and Public Policy.* Young and Well Cooperative Research Centre, Melbourne.
[22] *Social and Emotional Wellbeing.* Australian Government. Accessed, 24 November 2022
[23]Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2021) *Australia's welfare 2021: data insights*, AIHW, Australian Government, accessed 25 November 2022.

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This would be critical because adolescence is a period that is marked by increased prevalence of mental health issues, with almost two in five young Australians reporting a mental health disorder and one third having an anxiety disorder in the past 12 months.[24] Also, in 2020 injuries were the leading cause of death among young people (73 per cent) and more than half of those were caused by self-intentional harm.[25]

The mental health of young people can influence how likely they are not only to achieve better educational outcomes, but also to make a successful transition into full-time work, adulthood, and family life. Mental health service use and the experiences of severe psychological distress both increased during the COVID-19 pandemic.[26]

Research with young people indicates critical relationship links across employment, education, belonging and wellbeing.[27] For some young people, such as LGBTQIA+ young people, the connections between these are pronounced and influence their sense of belonging at their place of work or study, their perspectives about the future, and their overall mental health.[28] Such concerns can have flow-on effects about these young people's expectations for meaningful future employment and achieving financial security.

Financial security

The Consultation Paper presents 'success' as an important theme for the new Strategy (p.9). The Academy proposes that this be reframed as 'financial security' in a way that also includes food security and the changing way that young people are navigating financial lives.

Job losses during the COVID-19 pandemic, lack of affordable housing and the rapid rise of digital financial services such as 'buy now, pay later' (BNPL) schemes are contributing to profound changes to the financial landscape for young Australians.[29] Over 25 per cent of young Australians experience financial difficulties, despite having a job, particularly those who live independently.[30,31] Young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and young people with disabilities are even more likely to report experiencing financial difficulties.

The employment rate of young Australians has been declining since the global financial crisis, a trend that continues during COVID-19.[32] More broadly, the ways in which young people are navigating their personal finances is changing. 53 per cent of young Australians

[24] Australian Bureau of Statistics (2020-21), *National Study of Mental Health and Wellbeing*, ABS Website, accessed 25 November 2022.

[25] Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2022) *Health of young people*, AIHW, Australian Government, accessed 25 November 2022.

[26] As above.

[27] Walsh et al. (2022). *The 2022 Australian Youth Barometer: Understanding Young People in Australia Today.* Centre for Youth Policy and Education Practice.

[28] Cutler et al. (2022). *Queer Young People in Australia: Insights from the 2021 Australian Youth Barometer.* Centre for Youth Policy and Education Practice.

[29] Gallo Cordoba, B., Walsh, L., Waite, C., Cutler, B., Mikola, M. (2022). *Young people's financial strategies: Insights from the Australian Youth Barometer.* Centre for Youth Policy and Education Practice.

[30] Walsh, L., Waite, C., Magyar, B., Gallo Cordoba, B., Mikola, M., & Cutler, B. (2021). *The 2021 Australian Youth Barometer.* Centre for Youth Policy and Education Practice.

[31] Gallo et al. (2022). *Young people's financial strategies: Insights from the Australian Youth Barometer.* Centre for Youth Policy and Education Practice.

[32] Walsh et al. (2021). *The 2021 Australian Youth Barometer.* Centre for Youth Policy and Education Practice.

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used BNPL services, despite almost half thinking these services had a negative impact on their financial decision-making behaviour.[33]

Young people's financial situations are closely linked to their wellbeing. Changes to the financial landscape for young people matters because their financial experiences are deeply interconnected with other aspects of their lives.

Even before recent inflationary pressures and rising cost of living, a quarter of young people were struggling with debt. Saving, going into debt, and experiencing financial difficulties do not occur in isolation. They are connected to family, housing, work, and wellbeing. Cost of living pressures and unaffordable accommodation are compounding these challenges.

One major consequence of financial precarity is food insecurity. Over 20 per cent of young people aged 18 to 24 report experiencing food insecurity. This occurs when they lack social, economic and physical access to food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences, and that may prevent them from leading a healthy and active life.[34]

At a time when cost of living pressures are rising, young people's access to nutritious food requires greater attention because it is connected to wider challenges, such as adverse health outcomes and depression, isolation, delimited study and decreased workforce productivity.[35] Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people, and young people with a disability, are more likely to experience food insecurity[36] and targeted support for these young people is crucial. Serious adverse outcomes early in life have long-term impacts for the individual and consequences for government and communities now and in the future.

Access to affordable housing

The Consultation Paper includes 'housing' under the theme of 'success' (p.9). The Academy proposes that access to affordable housing is such a significant issue that it should be a stand-alone theme of the new Strategy.

Access to affordable, safe, and secure housing is a fundamental requirement to enable participation in education and employment, as well as connection to family, friends, and community. A lack of housing security has the potential to significantly impede young people's transitions by either delaying their moves from the parental home or by returning to the parental home multiples times throughout their early adulthood.

The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated the unaffordability of housing for all people in Queensland, especially in regional and rural areas outside of Brisbane.[37] The decision by a young person—whether in Queensland cities, regional or rural areas—to stay, leave, or

[33] Gallo et al. (2022). *Young people's financial strategies: Insights from the Australian Youth Barometer.* Centre for Youth Policy and Education Practice.
[34] Waite, C., Gallo Cordoba, B., Walsh, L., Mikola, M., & Cutler, B. (2022). *Realities of food insecurity for young people: Insights from the 2021 Australian Youth Barometer.* Centre for Youth Policy and Education Practice.
[35]As above.
[36]As above.
[37] Pawson, H., Martin, C., Sisson, A., Thompson, S., Fitzpatrick, S. and Marsh, A. (2021) *COVID-19: Rental housing and homelessness impacts – an initial analysis*; ACOSS/UNSW Poverty and Inequality Partnership Report No. 7, Sydney.

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return to the parental home are often not choices, but rather imposed by financial factors such as housing availability, affordability and proximity to employment opportunities. [38,39]

Home ownership rates among Australians in their mid-to-late 20s are continuing to decline.[40] This year Queensland properties have moved further out of reach for first-home buyers with prices in some suburbs jumping more than 40 per cent in 12 months.[41]

Gentrification appears to be driving young people further out of capital cities where work is more readily available. High rents, combined with a lack of entry level jobs, are driving some to homelessness. The 'increasing "suburbanisation of disadvantage"' in states such as Queensland 'has been rapid and is having profound consequences for the equality of access to both housing and employment opportunities for those on a low income'.[42]

Young people who are studying or outside of the labour market and who are relying on income support experience the highest rates of rental stress in the country. Nationally, more than half of Austudy and Youth Allowance (student) recipients, spend more than 50 per cent of their income on rent.[43]

The Consultation Paper notes an even more stark statistic for Brisbane with around 97 per cent of Youth Allowance being required to rent a studio or one bedroom property in the city. These extreme rates of rental stress mean that young people in housing either go without essentials, such as food, or they are excluded from the private rental market altogether. A lack of affordable housing makes it extremely difficult for already vulnerable young people to stabilise their lives.[44]

Exclusion from housing not only undermines the capacity to keep safe, but also the capacity to participate in society.[45] Young people in Queensland should be able to contribute to their communities but the limited supply of housing subverts these aspirations.

Recommendation 6: *The new Strategy incorporates cross-cutting themes of social and emotional wellbeing, financial security, and access to affordable housing.*

[38] Walsh et al. (2021). *The 2021 Australian Youth Barometer*. Centre for Youth Policy and Education Practice.

[39] Tomaszewski, Wojtek, Smith, Jonathan F., Parsell, Cameron, Tranter, Bruce, Laughland-Booÿ, Jacqueline and Skrbiš, Zlatko (2017). *Young, anchored and free? Examining the dynamics of early housing pathways in Australia.* Journal of Youth Studies, 20 (7), 1-23.

[40] Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2022) *Home ownership and housing tenure*, AIHW, Australian Government, accessed 25 November 2022.

[41] Ruddick, B. *Brisbane's median property values race to a record high, jumping more than 40 per cent in some suburbs.* ABC News, 10 April 2022.

[42] Parkinson, S., Batterham, D., Reynolds, M. and Wood, G. (2019). *The Changing Geography of Homelessness: A Spatial Analysis from 2001 to 2016,* AHURI Final Report 313, Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute Limited, Melbourne.

[43] Productivity Commission. (2022). *In need of repair: The National Housing and Homelessness Agreement.* Australian Government.

[44] Kuskoff, Ella, Parsell, Cameron, Plage, Stefanie, Ablaza, Christine and Perales, Francisco (2022). *Willing but unable: How resources help low-income mothers care for their children and minimise child protection intervention.* The British Journal of Social Work, 52 (7), 3982-3998.

[45] Parsell, Cameron (2012). *Home is where the house is: The meaning of home for people sleeping rough.* Housing Studies, 27 (2), 159-173.