

## Young people's health and wellbeing: we must not leave them behind

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The Youth Health Forum, coordinated by the Consumers Health Forum, has welcomed the \$206.5 million for additional Early Psychosis Youth Services (EPYS) to support the mental health of young people and other inclusions such as enhancements to headspace, and community-based eating disorder treatment services.

"The pandemic, natural disasters, steep rises in the cost of living, housing pressures and the general climate of global uncertainty have cumulated to hit young people hard," said Ms Roxxanne MacDonald, a spokesperson for the Youth Health Forum.

"Healthcare, employment, education and social connection has been disrupted in unprecedented ways, dashing the hopes and aspirations for many young people. The situation facing young people commands a robust response, particularly in the form of accessible and affordable mental health services," said Leanne Wells, CEO of the Consumers Health Forum of Australia.

According to ABS and AIHW data, one in four young people in Australia will experience a mental illness, a further one in four of those young people have not accessed treatment for their illnesses. A young person with a complex mental illness will find getting help difficult and expensive, often with excessive wait times.

And rural and regional young Australians face major additional challenges in accessing mental healthcare.

The Australian Health Consumer Sentiment Survey released yesterday by CHF [and research partners](#), is a reminder of the serious levels of mental distress in the community, and of the barriers to care faced by many. Barriers such as affordability of healthcare and medicines are amplified for young people," said Ms Wells.

"The outlook for young people is stark: many fear an uncertain future. While the announcement of continued funding for the Early Psychosis Youth Services and its expansion is a great start, more needs to be done. Young people who are not in the high-risk categories covered by EPYS, need more support with more funding towards improving all young people's access to essential mental and general health care."

**Contact:** Jenna Gray, 0429 111 986  
**Consumers shaping health**

Without more action, many young people’s mental illnesses will progress and continue until they reach a higher risk category and place increasing pressure on acute mental health services.”

“We also need to pay crucial attention to wider social determinants of youth health and wellbeing. The proportion of money spent by the average young person to cover the basics has ballooned over the last few years. Even before the most recent cost of living increases, many young people still had to make choices between accessing the care they need, paying rent and buying essentials like food and medication,” said Ms MacDonald.

We also welcome the much needed jobs aimed at young people, with the announcement of more wage subsidy support for apprentices. More can and must be done – investment in renewable energy and manufacturing will create greater certainty for the future for young Australians. A focus on future jobs should extend beyond apprenticeships and into higher education and other emerging sectors is essential to build a prosperous and safe Australia.

“Instead of malaise, we want young people to have hope and aspirations about a brighter future. To deliver this, we need a comprehensive set of measures organised under a National Youth Health Plan that focuses on not just on mental health, but on general health care, wellbeing and the root causes of poor physical and mental health outcomes for young people,” said Ms Wells.

The Plan should start with the six challenges identified in the YHF’s 2021 [\*Life Transitions and Youth Pathways to Health Services report\*](#): trusting healthcare services, transitioning to adult healthcare, delivering digital healthcare, navigating the healthcare system, building a more equitable healthcare system and developing health literacy.

The Youth Health Forum ensures the voices and experiences of young health consumers are a part of the national conversation on health and social services. We stand ready to work with governments to improve and promote youth health and wellbeing.

“Unless we address the overarching issues that concern young people, we cannot hope to stem the tide of mental and physical illnesses that greatly affects our communities,” said Ms Wells.

## Media enquiries

Jenna Gray  
Tel 0428 111 986  
Email: [J.Gray@chf.org.au](mailto:J.Gray@chf.org.au)

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**Consumers shaping health**