

MEDIA RELEASE

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Young people from across Australia call on PM to stick to his commitment and resource a national youth peak

For immediate release

Young people from across Australia have called on the Prime Minister to resource the national youth affairs peak body and keep his election commitment to young people.

In June, the Australian Government's Office for Youth ceased "funding for the Australian Youth Affairs Coalition (AYAC) to support its critical role in youth advocacy, engagement, and research".

As the national peak, AYAC represents the almost 5 million young people in Australia. AYAC engages with thousands of young people annually through its consultations, engagement, research and advocacy work.

AYAC youth members have joined forces nationally to demand the Australian Government provides peak funding and enable the organisation to continue representing and supporting youth advocacy.

Raghu Vijayan, a South Australian-based AYAC youth member said that, 'It is not fair for the Prime Minister to say "Young people are important and deserve a say" and yet on the other hand backflip on the commitment to AYAC to help make that happen.'

'AYAC provides advocacy and opportunity for young people to speak up and have a say on issues that are important to them – without that we risk a whole cohort of the population without representation which will lead to disengagement from civic life.'

Nayonika Bhattacharya, a NSW-based AYAC youth member, said that, 'There seems to be a big difference between stated intent that young people matter and the actions that the Government takes.'

'A decision to defund our national youth affairs peak body says to young people that we will make decisions about you, without consulting with you to find out what you think and need.'

This decision comes despite the Albanese Government's early commitments to rebuilding youth engagement. In its first term, the Labor Government appointed Anne Aly as Minister for Youth and re-established a youth steering committee, restoring formal youth consultation mechanisms dismantled in 2013 with the abolition of the Youth Advisory Council and the former Office for Youth. AYAC was also reinstated as the national youth peak body during this period.

To arrange interview or further comments from young people contact:

Joanna Rostami, CEO, AYAC – 0458235511

Additional quotes from young people acting as spokespeople in their state or territory:

“It’s incredibly disappointing to see funding cut for the Australian Youth Affairs Coalition, particularly when addressing the intergenerational gap has been presented as a key government priority, especially during the Federal Budget. To me, it feels contradictory to defund Australia’s peak body representing and advocating for young people, and it begs the question: how can the government say addressing the intergenerational gap is a priority while defunding Australia’s peak body for young people?”

Through my experience with AYAC, I’ve personally seen the value of having a national organisation that creates genuine opportunities for young people to contribute to policy, advocacy, and decision-making. AYAC has empowered young people to have honest and meaningful conversations with decision-makers while building skills that often aren’t taught in schools, such as civic engagement, advocacy, policy development, and community consultation.

Personally, AYAC has significantly increased my understanding of civic education and the complexities of public policy. It has also given me the confidence to speak up, advocate for issues I care about, and engage meaningfully with government and decision-makers. I know this experience has resonated with many other young Australians involved with the organisation.

Beyond its advocacy, AYAC has given young people the confidence and knowledge to stand up for issues that matter to them and work collectively towards positive change. It has provided opportunities that many young Australians would otherwise never have access to, connecting us with policymakers and ensuring our voices are represented at a national level.

In my view, organisations like AYAC were already operating with limited resources, and these funding cuts risk weakening one of the few national platforms dedicated to ensuring young people’s perspectives are heard in decisions that directly affect them.”

- Chris Hatano, QLD

“As the ACT spokesperson, I am proud to help amplify the voices of the more than 79,000 young people who call the ACT home. AYAC has been instrumental in ensuring that young people are not only consulted but genuinely represented in national conversations. As a young Papua New Guinean- Australian, AYAC has provided me with opportunities to engage in leadership, policy and advocacy, giving me a seat at the table and demonstrating the value of investing in young people from diverse and underrepresented communities. National youth representation matters because the decisions made today will shape the future my generation inherits. Organisations like AYAC play a vital role in ensuring young people have a meaningful voice in that future.” - Mijica Lus, ACT

“AYAC has never been just an organisation. It has been the national bridge between young people, the youth sector, and government since Dr Anne Aly announced her support to redevelop the youth sector in 2022. Over the past two years, thousands of young Australians have shared their experiences, shaped policy, built leadership skills, and engaged directly with decision-makers because AYAC created those opportunities. These opportunities allow young people - in cities, in the regions, across different socio-economic brackets, and with different lived experiences to honestly and passionately share their stories.

Defunding AYAC doesn't just affect one organisation; it dismantles the national infrastructure that enables young people to be heard. At a time when governments continue to say they value youth participation, removing the very organisation that makes meaningful participation possible is difficult to reconcile.

*Young people have earned their place at the table. Their voices should not depend on changing political priorities. A healthy democracy doesn't just listen to young people when it's convenient. It invests in the structures that ensure they are heard every day. Organisations like AYAC do not just build young people up, they build the future of this beautiful country.” - **Nayonika Bhattacharya, NSW***

“The value of the Australian Youth Affairs Coalition cannot be measured numerically. Its value is seen in the young people who have discovered their voice, their sense of self, and their passion directly because of AYAC's work. What makes the organisation most valuable is that it functions like a community group, a place where young people gather to raise their voices, share their opinions, and build the power to act on them.

AYAC transformed me, from a shy individual into an advocate and a policy officer with the eSafety Commissioner. That transformation came through grassroots work that cannot be replicated elsewhere. It depends on knowledge, experience and culture that AYAC has spent years nurturing.

To diminish the spirit of AYAC would be to diminish the voice of young people. From personal experience, youth consultation and advocacy can be an exclusionary space, where grassroots opportunities to get involved and upskill are increasingly rare.

Young people who are marginalised, disengaged, or unaware of their own potential would be left without a future they can shape, because AYAC does not merely provide opportunities. It advocates alongside young people, championing social cohesion, digital safety and civic engagement, amongst others.

As younger generations enter the workforce and the voting age, it is of the utmost importance that they have a grassroots organisation that supports them, raises their concerns, and represents them at the national level.

Every voice AYAC raises today is a future public servant, a leader, a future this country has not yet had to imagine without them.

*I urge you not to silence that voice.” - **Raghu Vijayan, South Australia***