

PURPOSE & IMPACT STATEMENT

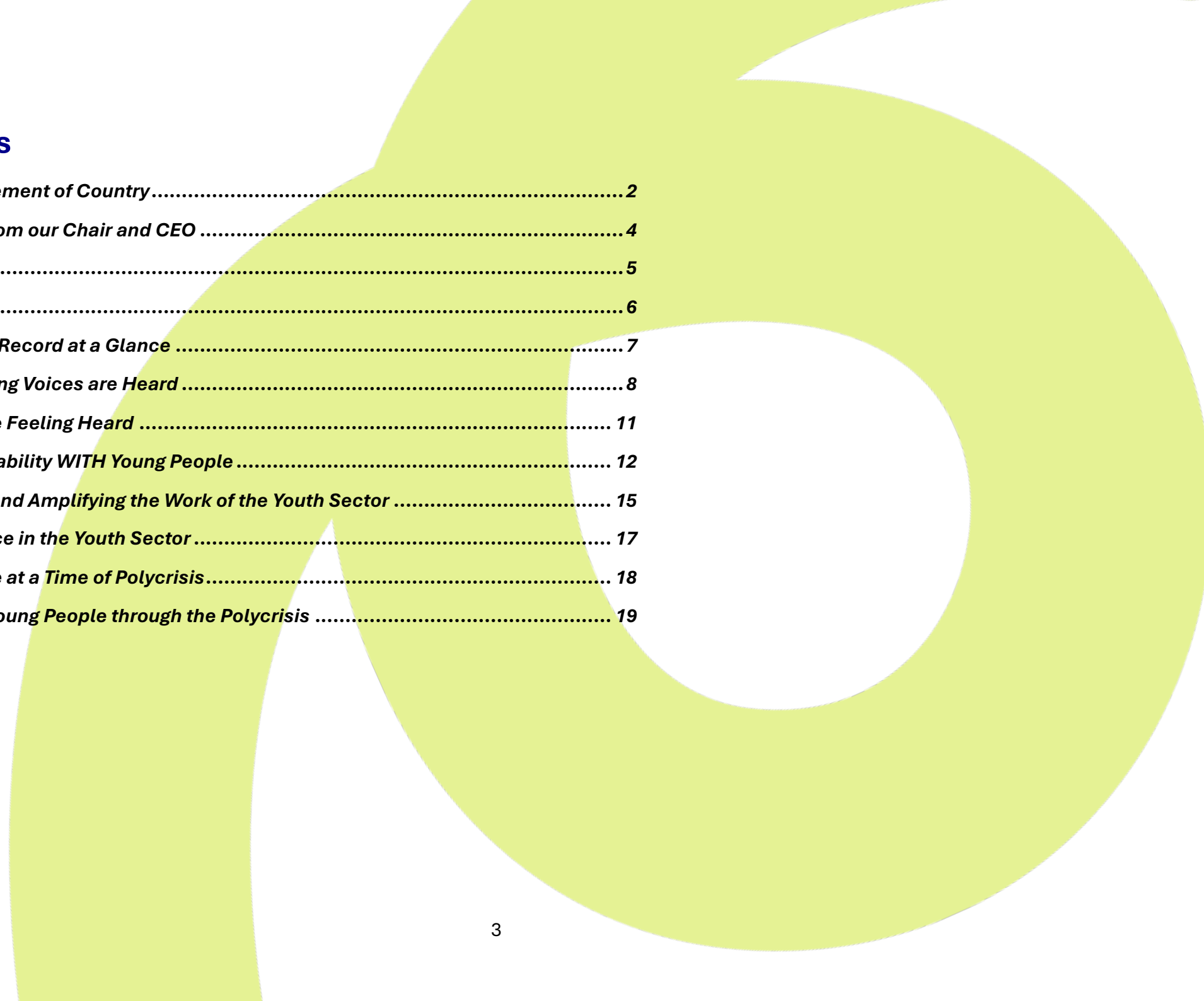
2023-26

Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge the Traditional Owners of Country throughout Australia and recognise their continuing connection to land, waters, and culture. This report was prepared on the lands of the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin Nation. We pay our respects to their Elders past and present and extend that respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

As the national peak body for young people, we acknowledge First Nations young people as the future custodians of this land. We recognise the urgent need to actively engage in the essential work toward reconciliation and provide platforms for First Nations young people to lead positive change. AYAC remains steadfast in its commitment to supporting the Uluru Statement from the Heart and stays true to its values of supporting the leadership and self-determination of First Nations young people.

Always was, always will be



Contents

Acknowledgement of Country2

A Message from our Chair and CEO4

Who We Are5

Our Board6

Our Reach & Record at a Glance7

Ensuring Young Voices are Heard8

Young People Feeling Heard 11

Building Capability WITH Young People 12

Connecting and Amplifying the Work of the Youth Sector 15

A Valued Voice in the Youth Sector 17

Young People at a Time of Polycrisis..... 18

Supporting Young People through the Polycrisis 19

A Message from our Chair and CEO

At the Australian Youth Affairs Coalition (AYAC) we are proud of our achievements, engagement and outreach. We take our role as the national youth affairs peak body very seriously – it comes with huge responsibility to represent, advocate and support the 5 million young people who live in this country. The young people we represent and the sector we support demands an exceptionally high standard of work from our organisation. We seek to demonstrate this commitment in all the work that we do. Young people, aged 12-26 years, have always faced unique challenges that comes with this time of transition and growth towards adulthood. Often under-represented, or not consulted on key decisions impacting them, there has always been a need for a national youth peak body to represent, advocate and support this cohort.

For over 30 years, AYAC has provided this voice to ensure young people are heard on critical issues, including housing and homelessness, education, employment, climate, social cohesion and community.

At times the organisation has faced its own challenges with funding and resourcing, but the need for this important work continues.

In the past few years alone, AYAC has engaged with thousands of young Australians from around the country. We have consulted, trained, empowered and enabled young people to engage in decision-making, develop new skills and speak up on the issues impacting them most.

Critical to our work is capacity building for the sector that supports young people – the Australian youth sector. Our work cannot be achieved without their support, and the future of Australian young people relies upon a skilled, resourced and empowered youth sector.

In the following pages you will read about our work, impact and contributions and see that our work remains critical to ensuring a positive future for young Australians.

We currently receive funding through key philanthropic partners and in commitment to our mission to represent and support young Australians, we are open to new work partnerships and opportunities.

Jemma Rule, Chair

Joanna Rostami, CEO

Who We Are

Young people are not simply the future of Australia — they are shaping our communities, economy and democracy today. Yet too often, the policies that affect them are developed without meaningful engagement with their experiences, expertise and aspirations.

A strong national youth peak helps bridge this gap.

The Australian Youth Affairs Coalition (AYAC) is Australia's national peak body for young people and the youth sector. We connect young people, governments, practitioners, researchers and community organisations to ensure policy is informed by evidence, lived experience and meaningful participation.

As an independent, member-driven organisation, AYAC provides a trusted national platform where young people are heard, the youth sector is strengthened, and governments are better equipped to make decisions that improve outcomes for current and future generations. Our members and subscribers include young people, youth organisations, youth-leds, practitioners and academics.

As the national peak body, AYAC has consistently advocated for the rights, wellbeing and participation of young people, while strengthening the capability of the organisations that support them.

Like many pieces of Australia's civic infrastructure, AYAC has experienced periods of growth and uncertainty. Following several

years of defunding, the Australian Government recognised the importance of rebuilding a national youth peak and reinvested in AYAC in late 2022.

Since then, AYAC has rebuilt organisational capability, renewed national partnerships and re-established itself as a trusted source of policy advice, research and youth engagement.

Today, AYAC once again provides Australia with a national platform that brings together young people, government and the youth sector to create better public policy and stronger communities. This document provides evidence from across 2023-2026 to support this claim



Our Board



Jemma Rule
Chairperson



Jane Hickey
Deputy Chairperson



Zeynep Yesilyurt OAM
Treasurer



Maia Giordano
Board Member



Rana Ebrahimi
Board Member



James McDougall
Board Member



Raghu Vijayan
Board Member



Lena Nabizada
Board Member

AYAC Staff

Joanna Rostami	Chief Executive Officer
Dr Dean Farquhar	National Youth Engagement Lead
Reyhan Aksoyoglu	Operations Manager
Nellie Wotherspoon	National Youth Policy and Project Officer

Our Reach & Record at a Glance



3400+

members and subscribers,
including young people,
youth organisations,
youth-leds, practitioners
and academics



6000+

social media followers
across Instagram and
Linked In



48

newsletters to young
people, practitioners and
partners in 2025/26



132

stakeholder meetings
outside of funded work to
offer advice and build sector
coordination in 2025/26



4300+

young people engaged
through programs,
workshops, consultations
and surveys since refunding



700+

sector professionals
engaged through
roundtables, workshops and
training since refunding



14

submissions to
government offering
youth-centred policy
advice since refunding



6

reports inclusive of policy
advice, ministerial
briefings and best practice
insights since refunding

Ensuring Young Voices are Heard

AYAC is committed to building an Australia where young people's right to have a say on the matters that affect them is realised in practice through meaningful youth involvement in decision-making. Across all our work, we ensure that young people's voices are not only platformed but are heard.

Recognition of First Nations Young People

AYAC recognises and values the histories, cultures, perspectives, and strength of First Nations young people, and actively works to promote cultural safety and the inclusion of young First Nations voices.

AYAC wholeheartedly respects the leadership and right to self-determination of First Nations people, and we also recognise that First Nations sovereignty has never been ceded or extinguished. In this spirit, and guided by the leadership, courage, and wisdom of Australia's First Nations peoples, AYAC has been proud to support the Uluru Statement from the Heart and its call for Voice, Treaty, and Truth since 2017.

In 2023, AYAC declared a resounding 'YES' to amend the Australian Constitution to acknowledge the First Peoples of Australia by establishing an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice. AYAC believes that amending the Constitution will increase Parliament's accountability by ensuring First Nations people will always have a say in matters that affect them, regardless of which government is in power. Listening to First Nations people will lead to better policy outcomes and advance progress towards safeguarding their inherent human rights outlined within the *United Nations Declaration on the*

Rights of Indigenous Peoples, to which Australia is a signatory.

Despite the unfortunate outcome of the referendum, AYAC remains supportive of a First Nations voice and other forms of constitutional recognition, including the ratification of Treaty.

AYAC is committed to walking alongside First Nations young people in their advocacy journeys and ensuring their voices and lived experiences help shape programs and opportunities.

Australian Government Office for Youth

AYAC was a leading advocate for the establishment of the Australian Government Office for Youth and for a Minister for Youth.

Following its election victory in 2022, the Albanese government signalled its shared vision for youth engagement by committing to establishing an Office for Youth and funding AYAC as the national peak. Our hope was to build back an important part of the youth ecosystem that promotes the youth influence over decision-making, and advances coordinated sectoral advocacy and advice on youth affairs across the national space.

AYAC was named as an integral part of the government's youth engagement strategy. In this role, AYAC supported the development and delivery of the Youth Steering Committee, which was established to support the government's progression of its engagement strategy. We also assisted with wider administrative elements of project delivery, including the processing of honoraria at scale. In addition, AYAC delivered consultations, roundtables, sector workshops and

survey work that formed the basis of policy advice to the government and enabled greater coordination and collaborations across the youth sector. Much of this work was oriented to moving beyond the positive steps taken by the government to embed youth voice in decision-making. More on this below.

AYAC used its funding from the Albanese government to extend and deepen its operations as the national peak.

eSafety Commission

AYAC supported the eSafety Commission to establish its Youth Advisory Council and has worked closely with the department to ensure youth voice is meaningfully integrated into policy development and implementation.

AYAC was approached by eSafety to lead its consultations with young people on the implementation of the Social Media Minimum Age (SMMA). Over 50 young people from across Australia participated in the consultations. The resulting report detailing their thoughts further shaped the industry guidance offered by the eSafety Commissioner, as well the online resource hub designed to support parents/carers, educators and young people adapt to the legislative change.

Reset.Tech

AYAC was invited by Reset.Tech to support the delivery of a series of workshops and consultations with young people on online safety and privacy. This included opportunities for young people to lead meetings with key decision-makers, including a meeting with Privacy Commissioner, Carly Kind. The evidence collected through the

engagements also supported the development of a Children's Online Privacy Code.

Parliamentary Friends

Utilising its position as the national peak, AYAC had convened three Parliamentary Friends of Young People (PFoYP) meetings since refunding. These meetings connect young people with policymakers and showcase the value of their perspectives to live policy debates.

The first meeting in 2023 was in collaboration with Academy of Social Sciences and marked the launch of the 2023 Australian Youth Barometer by the Monash Centre for Youth Policy and Education Practice. Attendees also heard from the Minister for Youth, the Hon Dr. Anne Aly, on the commitment of the Australian Government to involve young people in decision-making.

The 2024 meeting focused on the topic of Young People and Civic Engagement and provided an opportunity for young people to share their experiences with formal politics and civic engagement with MPs and Senators. Three young people spoke about their experiences and 15 Youth Steering Committee members from the Office for Youth attended the meeting.

The group reconvened in 2026, after being dissolved post-election cycle, with the topic of Young People and Social Cohesion. Three young people spoke about their experiences of social cohesion in Australia as young people from migrant backgrounds, and highlighted areas where change and growth are needed.

These meetings helped educate and inform MPs and other stakeholders on key youth issues by platforming youth voices and creating a receptive space for dialogue and sharing.

Policy Advocacy & Research

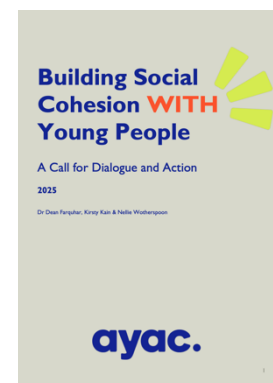
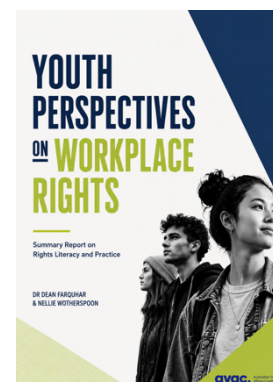
AYAC owes its recent period of rebuilding to sustained pre-budget and election advocacy. In 2022, AYAC advocated for a refunded national peak and the establishment of an Office for Youth at the Federal level. These asks were granted upon the election of the Albanese government.

Since then, AYAC has continued to make government submissions to strengthen youth sector infrastructure and policy outcomes for young people. It has provided evidence to a range of government inquiries, covering cost of living, education, employment, housing, youth justice, social security and digital technologies.

AYAC has striven to ensure the lived experiences and perspectives of young people informing our advocacy are heard by decision-makers. This has included ensuring that young people have a valued seat at the table to speak to their experiences at meetings with decision-makers and larger scale national policy roundtables. It has also meant ensuring that young people are platformed not only at election time through initiatives like You Ask the Questions, but throughout the year through our Raise Your Voice Blog and ongoing consultative work. Finally, it has meant working hard to ensure our research reports and recommendations centre the voices of those we work with.

With its small team, AYAC has contributed 14 submissions to government and has disseminated 6 research reports to key decision-makers in recent years.

Despite recently no longer receiving funding from the Australian Government, AYAC continues to be actively sought to contribute to many federal consultation and policy processes. This includes in areas such as social services, social media and tax decision-making processes.



Young People Feeling Heard

“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.”

“For me true advocacy begins when someone like AYAC helps you find your voice and gives you the courage, knowledge, and confidence to use it for others. Thank you for nurturing my advocacy skills, strengthening my purpose, and empowering me to stand for meaningful change in my community.”

“Through my experience with AYAC, I’ve 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.”

“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.”

Building Capability WITH Young People

AYAC draws on the expertise of professional youth workers across all areas of delivery, ensuring that capability-building responds to the needs, interests and experiences of young people. The AYAC team prioritises interactive, non-formal approaches that empower young people to actively shape the learning process. Our approach emphasises experiential, activity-based learning, enabling young people to learn through discussion, reflection and collaboration.

CAMPAIGN

CAMPAIGN is AYAC's signature advocacy program, combining political literacy workshops with practical application. Targeted primarily at those with more limited experiences of advocacy, CAMPAIGN begins with a series of workshops on values and beliefs, structures of government and advocacy techniques. Following the workshops, the group works together on a pitch for a youth-led event, which following feedback from sector professionals is to be delivered with the support of the AYAC team.

Two iterations of CAMPAIGN have been completed to date, and evidence from monitoring and evaluation has been positive. Evaluation questionnaires across the programs show learning across government and advocacy, as well as communication, teamwork and leadership skill development.

Participants also provided positive feedback:

"I found the Campaign Program to be highly interactive and engaging. It helped me develop practical skills I can use in the future, such as communication, teamwork and stakeholder engagement."

"From the first workshop, I felt supported and surrounded by peers who were equally motivated to learn. The structure of the program had a good balance between theory and practical stuff. The engaging workshops, working on the collaborative campaign project, and reflections from the pitch were all highlights. I am feeling more confident and inspired to apply what I've learned and would recommend it to others to give it a try."

Tellingly, all found CAMPAIGN fun and engaging, and would recommend the program to others.

You can check out the two events led by participants below:

- [Young Migrants: Getting Migrant Voices Heard](#)
- [Swipe Right on Respect: Young People Building More Respectful Online Spaces.](#)

Following their events, members from both cohorts have continued to engage with AYAC and have received feedback on their advocacy from decision-makers.

Australian Government's Youth Steering Committee

AYAC supported the recruitment, onboarding and facilitation of the Youth Steering Committee charged with supporting the development and implementation of the Australian Government's, *Engage! A strategy to involve young people in the decisions we make.*

AYAC coordinated a series of online and in-person meetings in partnership with OFY. This included the facilitation of multiple trips to Canberra, enabling the group to provide feedback to government stakeholders and attend annual *Youth Meets Parliament* events. It also entailed undertaking needs analyses and delivering corresponding capability-building workshops.

AYAC delivered a series of interactive workshops to support the development of transferable skills concerning communication, teamwork and leadership. The workshops were designed around the promotion of rights-based youth engagement, and covered advocacy messaging, digital content creation and the design of resources explaining youth perspectives on models of participation.

Further supporting skills development, AYAC facilitated additional sessions outside of official business that enabled the group make submissions to government on the themes of digital regulation and anti-bullying.

Feedback from the group on AYAC delivery was positive:

"It was great. We had a good community element. It was great to see how we can all work together and work towards what we agreed on... Each of us showed leadership by taking ownership of our parts and key areas."

"The pitch was a great way to start in small scale what our teamwork will look like as we move forward as a group. You got a better understanding of those in the group and got to make better connections."

AYAC's work was also valued by parents and carers:

"My son was treated with respect and given the guidance and care to understand that his voice matters. His confidence grew with the support he had from the AYAC national team. AYAC gave clear expectations and gentle support, which enabled him to step into the role. He was prepared well and encouraged ask questions on matters which were important to him. AYAC's supportive nature bought out the best in the youth on the committee, continuous encouragement and a fun attitude led to great results."

"AYAC seamlessly supported my son. I witnessed firsthand how the AYAC team built deep, meaningful connections with a highly diverse group of young people aged 12 to 25. Their kindness, encouragement, and intentional care created a safe, solid foundation that empowered these young leaders to be highly effective. AYAC has not only accelerated his personal development but has truly empowered him to embrace critical leadership opportunities and engage with government to advocate for his community."

eSafety's Youth Advisory Council

AYAC facilitated capability-building workshops with eSafety's Youth Advisory Council (YAC). These were interactive and focused on

developing the communications, teamwork and leadership skills that would enable effective participation.

Feedback from the YAC members was positive:

“We learnt there are different parts of what makes a good facilitator. You made us think about it all.”

“I learnt about the extent to which I can be involved. I learnt about the different ways to engage with people and how to act around them and acknowledge that it is okay sometimes to step back and create space.”

eSafety’s Youth Council Support Team also positively appraised the workshops:

"Our members really enjoyed your session. Thank you for making it an enjoyable training session for them, there were plenty of learnings that they will be able to apply on the Youth Council and in other opportunities they are engaged in."

Fee For Service

AYAC offers bespoke fee for service training for young people, covering governance, participation and communications. Tailored to meet the specific needs of the young people in the group, the training calls upon a diverse range of non-formal engagement methods that centre dialogue, creative expression and practical learning.

Feedback on the training from young participants has been positive:

“You could tell there was a lot of effort and preparation. We all learnt something to take away. It was good and we would do more of the sessions.”

“I was a big fan of last night’s online training. I didn’t expect it to be so interactive. Definitely some key takeaways I’d love us to implement into our meetings.”

“AYAC created a welcoming and inviting atmosphere that helped people not feel silly when speaking up.”

Organisational partners have also provided positive reviews:

“The recent online training provided by the Australian Youth Affairs Coalition was a resounding success. It was thoughtfully designed specifically for our purpose and tailored to the unique needs of our consumers and the broader Youth Cancer Services. AYAC did a wonderful job crafting bespoke content that truly resonated with our consumers. The sessions were well facilitated, creating a collaborative and inclusive environment that encouraged active participation. It was fantastic to see such strong attendance from our YAG members, reflecting the value and relevance of the training. We would have no hesitation in working with AYAC again in the future and greatly value their expertise and collaborative approach.”

Connecting and Amplifying the Work of the Youth Sector

AYAC takes its role in connecting and amplifying the work of the youth sector seriously. Every day we see the positive impact that workers across the sector make in the lives of young people. The youth sector provides an ecosystem of encouragement and support that enables young people to feel safe, supported and heard. Sharing expertise and fostering partnerships across the sector has been an important part of our work.

Advocacy of Youth Work

AYAC champions youth work as a valuable profession that makes a distinctive contribution to the lives of young Australians. Back in 2013, AYAC convened the youth sector to agree a national definition of youth work:

“Youth work is a practice that places young people and their interests first.

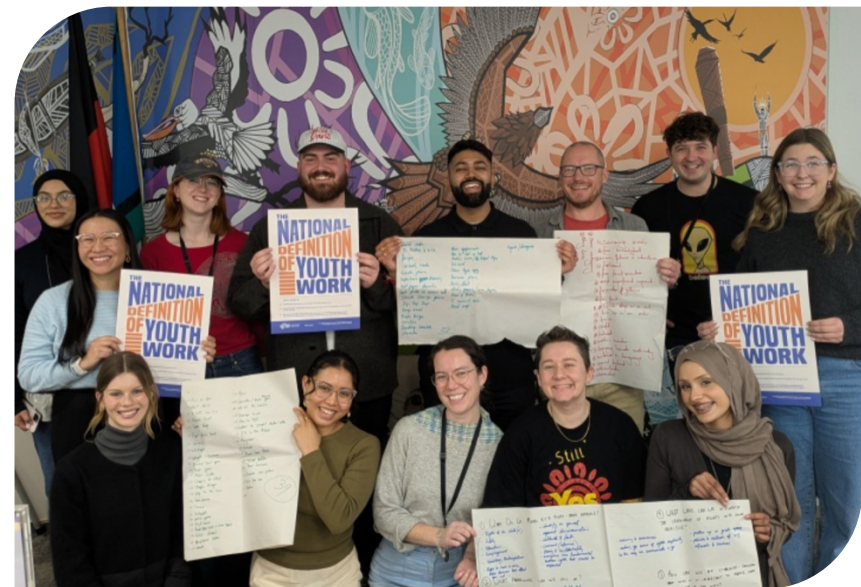
Youth work is a relational practice, where the youth worker operates alongside the young person in their context.

Youth work is an empowering practice that advocates for and facilitates a young person's independence, participation in society, connectedness and realisation of their rights.”

This definition has since proved important to the development of a professional identity among youth workers, enabling them to explain the values underpinning their work with clarity.

AYAC has sought to add to this clarity through its support of the Youth Workers Australia initiative to develop an agreed National Statement of Ethical Youth Work Practice.

A belief in the power of youth work informs everything we do.



Spotlight Series

AYAC launched the Spotlight Series in 2024 to enable experts to share their insights with the youth sector through an informal interview and Q&A.

Participants have heard from a variety of leading academics, specialists and practitioners working nationally and internationally. Topics have focused on youth work practice, intersectionality, the ethical engagement of lived experience, safeguarding, co-design and participation.

National Youth Practitioners' Network (NYPN)

Later in 2024, AYAC established the NYPN to provide practitioners with additional opportunities to collaborate, share ideas and build sectoral capacity at a national level.

Through the NYPN we have brought sector leaders, academics, practitioners and young people together for a series of roundtable discussions aimed at advancing the rights and inclusion of young people. We have further held a series of workshops supporting the dissemination of research and best practice across the sector.

To further support the dissemination of insight across the sector, we launched a sector blog, *NYPN Briefing*.

Sector Training

AYAC has delivered a series of training workshops with youth sector professionals. These workshops leverage the expertise of AYAC staff and our growing body of evidence-informed approaches to practice.

Training workshops have focused on approaches to rights-based youth engagement, including the Nested Model of Youth Work, co-authored by our National Youth Engagement Lead, Dr Dean Farquhar.

Feedback from participants has been positive:

“A good mix of theory and practice with the interpretation of activities and fun bits. I liked the easy-to-understand concepts in the nested model – the model gives a really good vocabulary to articulate complex theories.”

“I learnt more about the UN convention articles and got a clearer understanding of how to explicitly integrate it into work. It provided opportunity for reflection and offered language to express my ideas.”

“We learnt about ways in which a rights-based and strengths-focused approach can really be used to benefit the young person you’re working with.”

A Valued Voice in the Youth Sector

“Youth Workers Australia stand in solidarity with AYAC and the excellent work they have done. We enjoy a productive and active relationship with the national peak, partnering to build ethical practice, shared advocacy and sector connectedness. AYAC empower young people to participate as active citizens. It has been a pleasure to work together.”

Youth Workers Australia

“AYAC has been a crucial partner in helping us understand the public policy issues that matter to young people. It has provided us with key insights into their views and experiences and offers us guidance in how we support their participation and leadership.”

Australian Child Rights Taskforce

“As the national peak body for multicultural youth, MYAN proudly supports AYAC in its endeavour to ensure the voices of Australian young people are represented in the decisions that affect them and values its role as a critical partner in this work.”

Multicultural Youth Advocacy Network

“A strong national youth peak is important not only for advocacy, but for identifying emerging issues, connecting expertise from across the sector, and helping governments respond to the changing needs of young people.”

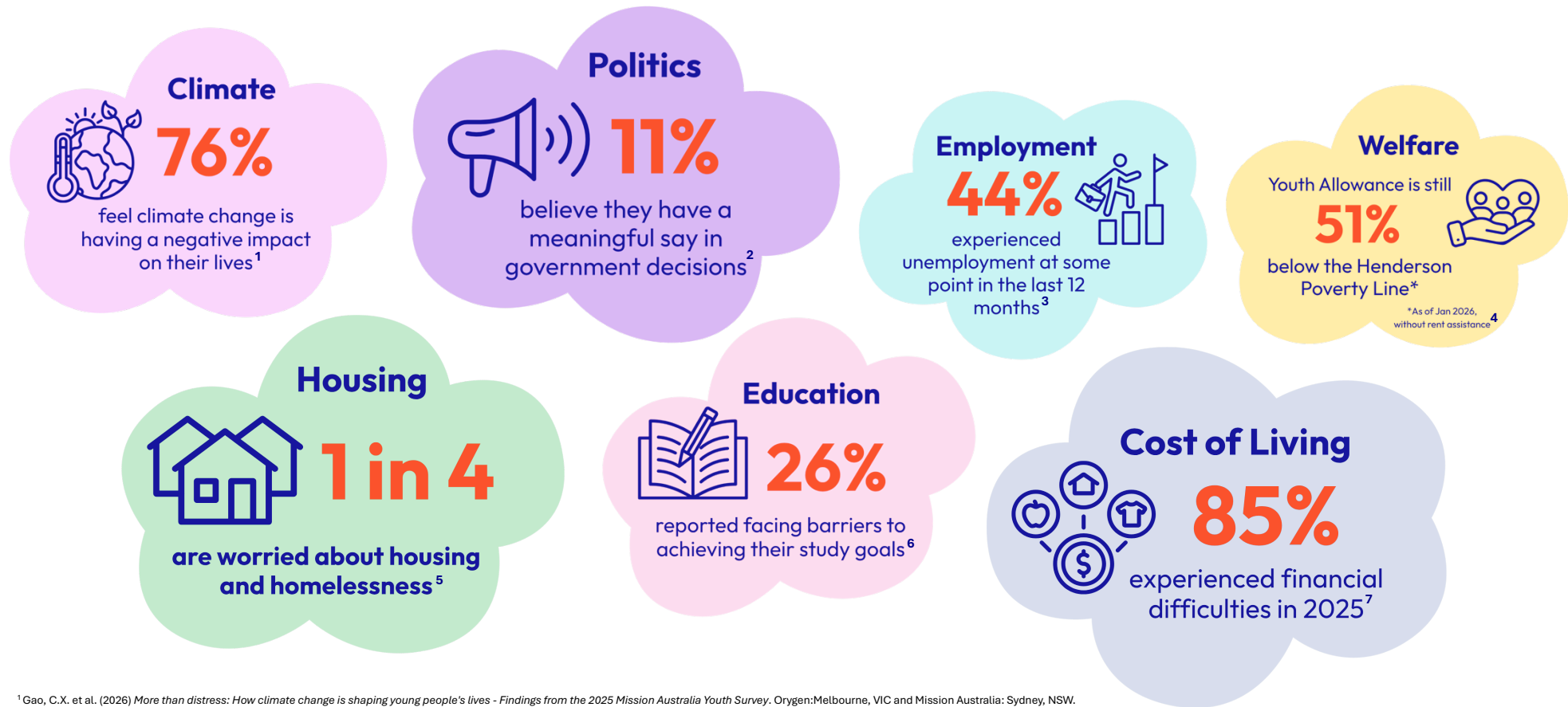
“The national peak body plays a critical role in ensuring that the voices of young people are heard, that policy responses are timely and informed, and that investment is directed toward early intervention rather than crisis response.”

“AYAC performs an important role in the advocacy that ensures young voices are part of policy and decision-making in areas that affect them.”

State and Territory Partners

Young People at a Time of Polycrisis

Young Australians are growing up at a time of polycrisis. A time when cost-of-living pressures overlap with ecological breakdown, geopolitical polarisation, anxieties around digital technologies, challenges to social connectedness, and falling levels of trust in political institutions. The figures are clear, young people are profoundly affected by these challenges:



¹ Gao, C.X. et al. (2026) *More than distress: How climate change is shaping young people's lives - Findings from the 2025 Mission Australia Youth Survey*. Orygen: Melbourne, VIC and Mission Australia: Sydney, NSW.

² Biden, E. et al. (2026) *Young Australians' civic engagement*. Australian Institute of Family Studies: Melbourne, VIC.

^{3,6,7} Walsh, L. et al. (2025) *The 2025 Australian Youth Barometer: Understanding young people in Australia today*. Monash University, Melbourne: Centre for Youth Policy and Education Practice.

⁴ Melbourne University. (2026) *Poverty Lines: Australia, March Quarter 2026*. Melbourne Institute of Applied Economic and Social Research: Melbourne, VIC

⁵ McHale, R. et al. (2025) *Youth Survey Report 2025*. Mission Australia: Sydney, NSW.

Supporting Young People through the Polycrisis

AYAC supports young people navigate the polycrisis and works tirelessly to ensure their voices are heard. While important steps have been taken to embed youth voice in decision-making across Australia, AYAC remains an important part of the wider ecosystem. As the national peak, AYAC plays an important role in fostering cooperation and coordination within and across sectors, as well as between those sectors and young people.

AYAC sits at a unique intermediary position within the network comprising young people, service providers, civic society organisations and government. They are trusted by:

- **Young people**, because of sustained, culturally safe, non-transactional relationships formed through rights-based and strengths-focused approaches to meeting them where they are at;
- **Service Providers**, because they work directly with practitioners and understand on-the-ground realities;
- **Civic Society**, because they partner with a range of other civic society organisations to build greater co-ordination and a more shared understanding of youth affairs;
- **Government**, because they provide credible, evidence-informed insight that reflects real experiences across regions and communities.

This position enables the national peak to act as two-way translators of policy:

1. From lived experience to policy

AYAC gathers insight from young people and local practice, especially from those facing systemic barriers, and translate this into policy advice, evidence, and recommendations that decision-makers can act on.

2. From policy to practice and participation

AYAC interprets policy, programs, and reform agendas back to civic society and young people, supporting implementation, understanding, and meaningful engagement.

Even as AYAC has had its funding removed, the enduring need for it to fulfil this roll remains. Operating at significantly reduced capacity, AYAC continues to receive requests for advice and support from government, service providers, civic society and young people.

After years of hard work and dedication to build back the national peak following a prolonged period of defunding, young Australians now have a credible national peak.

These gains must be consolidated and built upon into the future to continue to meet the evolving needs and aspirations of young Australians.

