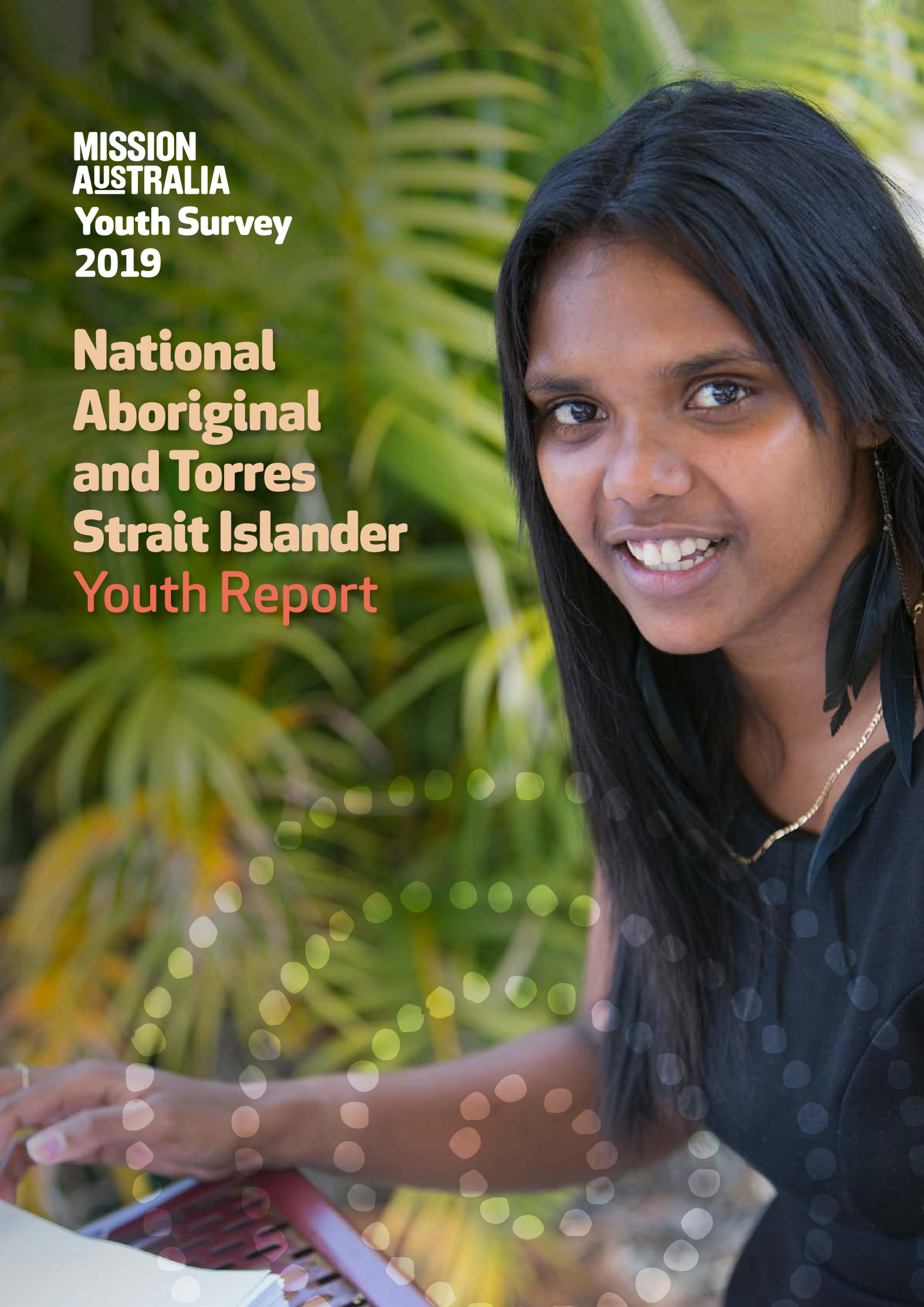


**MISSION
AUSTRALIA**
**Youth Survey
2019**

**National
Aboriginal
and Torres
Strait Islander
Youth Report**



A message from Elle Davidson

As a proud Balanggarra woman and member of Mission Australia's Service Impact Committee, I am excited that Mission Australia has produced its fourth National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Youth Report.

The depth of research and analysis provided in Mission Australia's National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Youth Report 2020 is invaluable and provides a strong platform for listening and learning. This report brings together rich knowledge, experiences and voices of today's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people, who are our future leaders and who carry the legacy of our people.

The findings highlight the importance of family, culture and community for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people, which informs a strengths-based approach to Mission Australia's services. This powerful advocacy platform highlights the ways we can all work in partnership and learn from each other with common goals of reconciliation and ensuring all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people can thrive, now and into the future.

Mission Australia respects and honours the resilience and courage demonstrated by every

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young person who is facing challenges or difficulty in their lives.

We also celebrate the achievements and aspirations of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people, including those who our service staff work alongside. We hope the recommendations within the report will instigate change as we seek to empower their voices by creating a space for them to flourish and become leaders in their community.

We thank Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people for their contributions to this report and to Australian society. We acknowledge the strength and power they each hold to create a bright future for our Nation and we encourage all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people to think big and follow their dreams.



Elle Davidson

Proud Balanggarra woman from the East Kimberley and member of Mission Australia's Service Impact Committee

We acknowledge the traditional custodians of lands throughout Australia, and we pay our respects to the Elders past, present and future for they hold the memories, the culture and dreams of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. We recognise and respect their cultural heritage, beliefs and continual relationship with the land, and we recognise the importance of the young people who are the future leaders.

Many people have contributed to the writing of this report. We would like to thank Mission Australia's staff who gave us feedback, case studies and advice in the writing of the report. A reference group met in the writing phase and helped analyse the data, and they have continued to stay engaged throughout the development of the report. We would like to thank the members of this group and other staff who have contributed feedback and examples: Dale Towns, Gilliann Frew, Stephen Thorpe, Keru Singe, Delwin Sellin, Vivian Bromley, Jye Ryan, James Mulholland, Teegan Paasi, Joannah Hack, Rebecca Pye, Debbie Muir, James Manhire, Jade Arndell and Jade Smith. This group provided us with invaluable feedback and without their contribution this report would not have been written.

As well as internal feedback, we would like to thank Pat Dudgeon, Kate Derry and Abigail Bray for their assistance and comments on the work, and for providing guidance and direction. Tom Calma has also acknowledged the importance of this report by taking time to write the foreword and we are very grateful for this. Our thanks must also be extended to Richard Weston at SNAICC for taking the time to read and comment on the report.

This report would not be possible without the engagement of young people who undertake the Youth Survey each year. The purpose of the report is to bring their voices and concerns to the forefront of policy; we are grateful for their continued engagement with us.

A note on COVID-19. This research was conducted before the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. Mission Australia recognises the challenges faced by young people during this time. It is important to note that the pandemic and its effects are likely to be long lasting and may result in increased levels of disadvantage and economic hardship for many young people in Australia, especially for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, as well as an increased need for services.

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Foreword **A message from Professor Tom Calma AO**

Mission Australia's *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Youth Report: Youth Survey 2019* analyses the responses of more than 1,500 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people, providing a deep understanding of their wellbeing, strengths and challenges, as well as their concerns and aspirations for the future.

This report adds to existing research and offers rich insights into the experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people, both by comparing the relative differences with non-Indigenous young people, as well as looking at their absolute results. Both ways of looking at the data give us some clues as to what supports and interventions are most needed.

Importantly, I'm pleased that there is much to celebrate in this report. Many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents say they are happy, they're engaged in education, they highly value their family and friendships, are confident in their ability to achieve their goals and are optimistic about their futures.

However, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people also told us that they're facing unique difficulties such as unacceptably high levels of bullying, that we know is linked to racial discrimination, as well as poor mental health, homelessness and insecure housing. They also experience a range of personal concerns in much higher proportions than non-Indigenous young people. Far too many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people are also experiencing distress, feel negative about their future and are facing barriers to achieving their aspirations. All of these issues are likely to be made worse by the COVID-19 pandemic, making the policy and service response for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people now more critical than ever.

Policy leaders must be serious about reconciliation and enhancing the social and emotional wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people and come together with them and prioritise tackling these issues with practical solutions. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people should be actively involved in services design and delivery. After all, they hold the knowledge and wisdom about what it means to be an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander young person today.

We need to make sure that services intended for them are culturally safe, age appropriate and enrich their entire social and emotional wellbeing including their sense of cultural connection.

Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations have a key role to play in ensuring that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have control over the design and delivery of policies and programs that affect them. Mainstream agencies should follow suit and also provide culturally-appropriate programs and services and – wherever possible – partner with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, communities and organisations, who are the experts in the solutions that are most needed.

Every Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young person must also be protected from harm caused by bullying and racial discrimination, with a strong focus on supporting schools to enhance student knowledge, understanding and compassion about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages, cultures and histories.

It goes without saying that all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people should also have a safe and secure place to call home.

With unacceptable levels of housing instability experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people and their families, we need more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-controlled social and affordable homes, particularly in remote areas. Additionally, to better prevent homelessness and poverty, a permanent increase to income support is paramount.

From a broader perspective, Australia sorely needs a comprehensive and coordinated national plan so we can better support and improve Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander wellbeing in all senses of the word.

We must build a better future for every Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young person, so they have the support, connection, stability and opportunities they need to flourish.

In Australia, everyone – irrespective of where they live – should have a chance to thrive. I urge politicians and bureaucrats to read the report, respond to the recommendations and hear the voices of Australia's young people and particularly, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people.



Professor Tom Calma AO

Chancellor, University of Canberra,
and Co-Chair, Voice to Government
Senior Advisory Group

Executive Summary

This report draws on Mission Australia's 18th annual *Youth Survey* of young people aged 15 to 19 years to provide unique insight into the experiences of the 1,500 respondents who identify as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

We use quantitative and qualitative findings, drawn from the *Youth Survey 2019*, throughout this report to highlight the strengths, concerns, views and challenges identified by these young people.

The report contains four main sections: an introduction that outlines current knowledge about each of the topics covered by the survey; a summary of the key findings from the *Youth Survey 2019*; detailed data breakdowns of the survey results; and a discussion of a range of policy recommendations.

The report incorporates reflections from frontline Mission Australia staff who work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people across Australia on a daily basis. It also provides case studies of successful programs working with young people in communities around Australia, including many run by Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs), with some of which Mission Australia is privileged to work in partnership.

Over 1,500 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people across Australia

shared their hopes and concerns in the *Youth Survey 2019*.

This report looks in detail at their responses to the survey and the implications of these for government and societal action.



The voices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people and the right to self-determination

Four in 10 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents felt they have a say *all of the time* when with my family (39.6%) and with my friends (39.5%) (compared with 44.5% and 45.7% of non-Indigenous respondents). By contrast, 18.0% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people felt they have a say *all of the time* when at school/TAFE/university, while one in eight (12.8%) felt they have a say *all of the time* in public affairs (compared with 14.6% and 6.7% of non-Indigenous respondents).

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people have a right to be involved in discussions on issues that affect them, and bring unique skills and perspectives that are essential for identifying solutions. They must be included in discussions about policy development and decision making.

Recommendations 1, 2 and 3

Social and emotional wellbeing

The *Youth Survey 2019* touches on a range of issues relating to social and emotional wellbeing, including family, culture and community, and the confidence of young people in adult family and community members as sources of guidance and support. A large majority of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents to the *Youth Survey 2019* highly valued *family relationships* (76.4%) and significant numbers sought support from *parent/s or guardian/s* (69.5%), *relative/family friends* (63.8%) and *brother/sister* (53.7%).

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people were much more likely to highly value *culture* than their non-Indigenous peers (47.4% compared with 25.3%), and many were involved in community activities such as *sports (as a participant)* (64.5%), *sports (as a spectator)* (53.8%), *volunteer work* (46.0%), *arts/cultural/music activities* (43.0%), *youth groups and activities* (38.6%) and *student leadership activities* (32.5%).

Social and emotional wellbeing is holistic and deep-rooted in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community. It is a multi-dimensional concept of health that encompasses connection to body, mind and emotions, connection to family, kinships and community, and connection to spirituality, land and culture.¹ This must be recognised in all programs that are designed for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people.

Recommendations 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5



¹ Gee et al. 2014

Mental health

Young people were asked about a range of issues related to mental health in the *Youth Survey 2019*. *Coping with stress, suicide, alcohol and drugs, body image and bullying* were significant issues, both for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous young people.

While over half (51.4%) of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents felt *happy/very happy overall with their lives* (compared with 61.4% of non-Indigenous young people), and more than half (52.1%) of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents felt *very positive or positive about the future* (compared with 58.7% of non-Indigenous respondents), more than three in 10 (31.7%) Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents indicated some form of *distress* (compared with 26.7% of non-Indigenous respondents).

Mental health is an important domain of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander social and emotional wellbeing, linked also to the social, emotional, physical, cultural and spiritual dimensions of wellbeing.² In many cases, responding to population mental health challenges means addressing the deeper and structural causes of those challenges. These should be identified and solutions co-designed and co-implemented under Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community leadership, including ACCOs that deliver health services.³

Recommendations 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5

Discrimination and bullying

Close to three in 10 (29.9%) Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents reported that they have been bullied in the past year (compared with 20.3% of non-Indigenous respondents). Bullying may be a form of racial discrimination if it happens because of race, and discrimination also emerged as an issue for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents. Close to one in seven (16.8%) of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people identified *discrimination* as a personal concern (compared with 9.9% of non-Indigenous young people). Around a quarter also identified *equity and discrimination* as an important issue for Australia (24.3%), similar to the rate of non-Indigenous respondents (24.9%).

The consequences of racial discrimination and bullying on the social determinants of the health, wellbeing and life chances of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people are serious and ongoing. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people must be protected from racial discrimination and bullying at school, at work and in their community.

Recommendations 1, 5 and 6

² Gee et al. 2014

³ Dillon 2016

Disability

Nearly three quarters (74.5%) of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents felt their community is supportive of people who are living with disability (compared with 83.0% of non-Indigenous respondents). However, close to half (49.0%) of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents thought that people living with disability are treated *unfairly* (comparable to 50.5% of non-Indigenous respondents).

Of those with disability, over six in 10 (61.9%) Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents stated that their disability made it hard for them to feel like they *fit in (at school, work or socially)* (compared with 54.4% of non-Indigenous respondents).

It is essential that services and supports provided to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are inclusive, accessible, culturally appropriate and work in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

Recommendations 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5

Housing and homelessness

The vast majority of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people who responded to the *Youth Survey 2019* lived with their parents (83.3%) and indicated that their housing situation was adequate and stable. However, nearly three times the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents indicated they have experienced a time when they had no fixed address or lived in a refuge or transitional accommodation when compared with non-Indigenous respondents (16.2% vs 5.9%). Over double the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people reported a couch surfing experience (28.9% compared with 12.0% of non-Indigenous young people).

A supportive and stable home is important for young people's physical and psychological wellbeing. When young people have early experiences of homelessness, this has both immediate and long-lasting negative impacts on their education, physical and mental health, employment and housing outcomes. A range of policy and service responses to homelessness among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people are needed, including the development of a national plan to end homelessness, early intervention and prevention measures, effective and targeted supports for those who do enter homelessness, and an adequate supply of affordable and social housing.

Recommendations 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 7 and 8



Education

A large majority of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people were engaged in either full-time (83.1%) or part-time (5.8%) study. A significant minority, however, were not engaged in study at all (11.0%, compared with 3.5% of non-Indigenous respondents). Of those who were still at school, the vast majority indicated that they were going to complete Year 12 (89.7% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students compared with 96.4% of non-Indigenous students).

Over four in 10 (43.3%) Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents indicated high levels of confidence in their ability to achieve their post-school study/work goals (compared with 47.0% of non-Indigenous respondents).

Supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people to remain engaged with education is a key strategy for improving educational outcomes. Challenges to attendance and retention can be magnified by schools' lack of knowledge of local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community cultures and histories, and their failure to develop culturally appropriate relationships with the children, young people and their families,⁴ as well as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people's experiences of racism at school.⁵

Recommendations 1, 6 and 8

Employment

The employment profile of respondents to the *Youth Survey 2019* indicates that over one third of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people were employed, the majority in part-time roles. They were, however, more likely than non-Indigenous students to be not in paid employment but looking for work (43.0% compared with 33.8%).

To address issues that have a direct impact on Aboriginal or Torres measures must be co-designed with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. This includes establishing programs which are driven by demand, flexible in scope, and provide intensive person-centred mentoring and employment support, while also being culturally appropriate for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people.

Recommendations 1, 2, 3 and 8

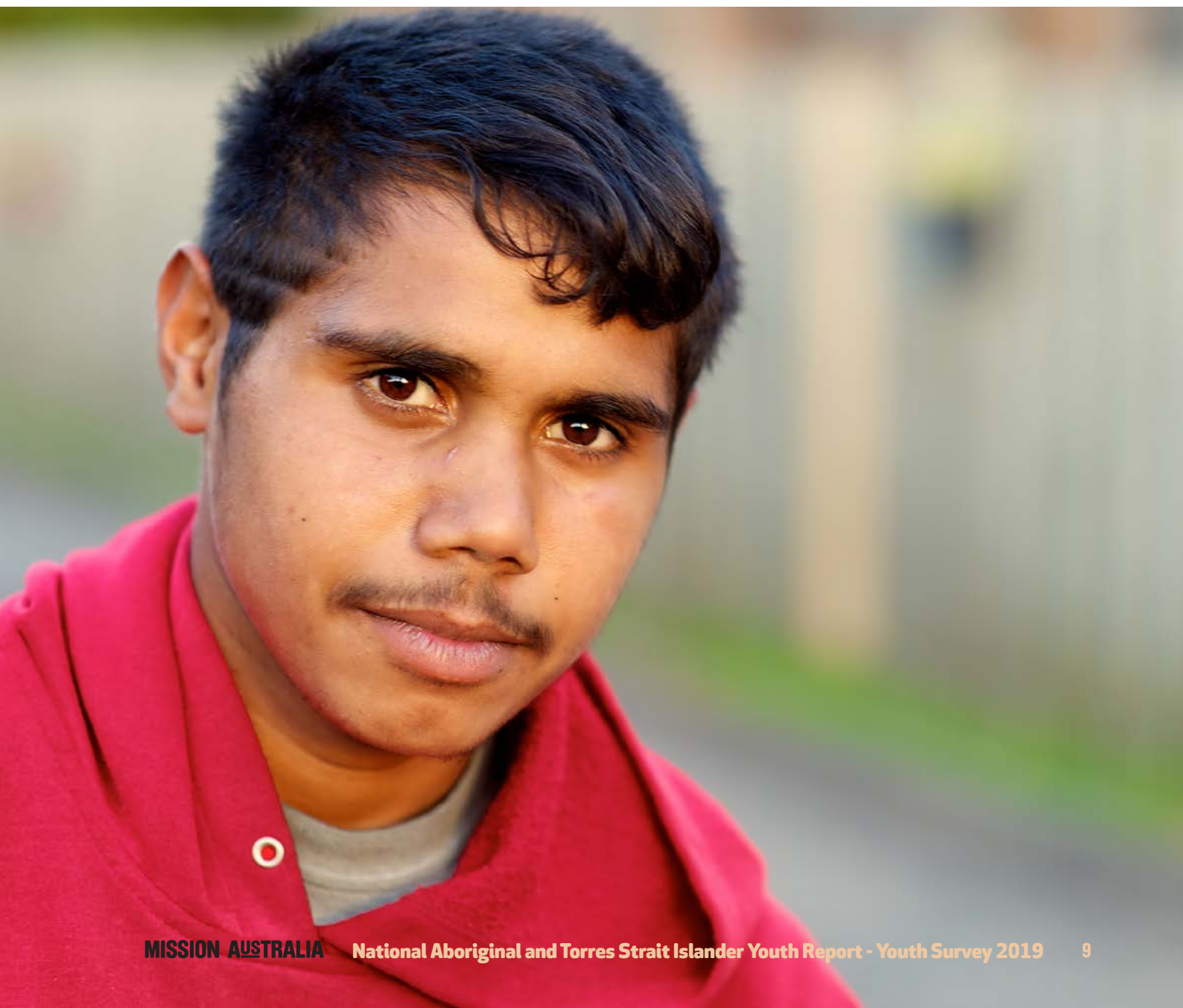
⁴ Brackertz 2016
⁵ Moodie et al. 2019



As a society, we need to ensure that culturally safe programs that acknowledge Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voices and the right to self-determination are in place to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people.

Supports should be provided to ensure they are able to pursue their post-school goals, to overcome the challenges they face to achieving them and to address their pressing personal concerns.

We need to work together with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people, drawing on their skills, perspectives and strengths, to enhance their social and emotional wellbeing, as well as their cultural and economic wellbeing.



Policy recommendations summary

Eight central recommendations address the key issues and themes of this report:

- 1. Young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people need to be at the centre of service design and development** and should be supported to lead the development of solutions alongside their communities, recognising and respecting the cultural differences that young people will bring to this work.
- 2. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people should have control over the design, implementation, delivery and evaluation of policies, programs and services that affect them.** Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations must play a key role in this and should receive direct funding to provide services that support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, families and communities.
- 3. Wherever possible, mainstream agencies should seek to work in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people,** communities and organisations and, when delivering services in partnership, work towards developing a transparent strategy for Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations to become the lead provider.
- 4. Programs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people must be designed to support all domains of social and emotional wellbeing,** including connection to body, mind, emotions, family, kinships, community, spirituality, land and culture. Specifically, programs must recognise and build into design the need for cultural connection, and be culturally appropriate and age appropriate.
- 5. Given the intersectionality of the issues facing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people, a comprehensive and coordinated national plan is needed to support and improve Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander social and emotional wellbeing,** including their health, mental health, education, employment and housing.
- 6. Schools have a vital role to play in the elimination of racial discrimination and bullying.** School curriculums should provide both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous children and young people with information about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures, both as a means of connecting to culture and a universal mechanism for increasing understanding of and reducing discrimination against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.
- 7. The Australian Government needs to lead the development of a national plan to end homelessness,** alongside State and Territory Governments, with clear targets including a special focus on ending youth homelessness and addressing the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people among the homeless population.
- 8. A permanent increase to income support payments is needed for all young people and their families,** including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people and families, to keep them out of poverty and support them to maintain a stable connection with education, employment and housing.

Introduction

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people are custodians of one of the oldest living cultures in the world and future leaders of their families, communities and Country. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people have an abundance of strengths, connection to community, and culture and family are central to them. It is vital that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people are not defined through the lens of disadvantage.

In 2019, a group of young people wrote a follow up to the 2017 Uluru Statement from the Heart. In the Imagination Declaration they stated:

When you think of an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander kid, or in fact, any kid, imagine what's possible. Don't define us through the lens of disadvantage or label us as limited. Test us. Expect the best of us. Expect the unexpected. Expect us to continue carrying the custodianship of imagination, entrepreneurial spirit and genius. Expect us to be complex. And then let us spread our wings, and soar higher than ever before.¹

We agree and, through this report, we want to acknowledge and celebrate the strength, resilience and creativity of young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. The findings of this report and other research² shows that they are strongly connected to family, community and culture, are engaged in education and have high levels of confidence in their ability to achieve their goals.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people make up 5% of Australia's total youth population.³ Among them, 91% identify as Aboriginal only; 5% identify as Torres Strait Islander; and 4% identify as both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander.⁴ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are more likely to live in urban and regional areas than remote areas, with 81% living in Major cities, Inner regional or Outer regional areas and about one in five living in Remote and Very remote areas.⁵ There are important differences between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders who live in urban/regional areas compared to those who live in remote areas, which relate to their wellbeing (in terms of use of language and connection to culture, land and kin), as well as the social determinants of health (such as access to housing and education). Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders who live in remote areas are more likely to identify with a clan, tribe or language (79% compared to 58% in non-remote areas) and are more likely to have participated in selected cultural events, ceremonies or organisations in the last 12 months (82% compared to 57% in non-remote areas).⁶

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people face challenges due to Australia's history of colonisation and its aftermath, including intergenerational trauma, racism, social exclusion and disconnection from culture and identity. These have a destructive impact on the social and emotional wellbeing and resilience of young people⁷ and ultimately can manifest in higher rates of psychological distress, self-harm and mortality.⁸ It is important to understand this context when interpreting the findings of the *Youth Survey 2019*, and its

¹ AIME 2019

² Eades 2019

³ AIHW 2018

⁴ AIHW 2018

⁵ AIHW 2019

⁶ AIHW 2019

⁷ Dudgeon 2017

⁸ SCRGSP 2009

continued impact on the social and emotional wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people. Supporting young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to bring their unique perspectives, skills and creativity to discussions about issues that affect them and their futures is a central theme of this report.

Social and emotional wellbeing

Social and emotional wellbeing is a multidimensional concept of health that covers a range of domains, including mind, body, community, Country and spirituality.⁹ The most recent formal description of social and emotional wellbeing for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is the *National Strategic Framework for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples' Mental Health and Social and Emotional Wellbeing 2017-2023*,¹⁰ which identified nine guiding principles to emphasise the broad nature of wellbeing for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people:

1. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health is viewed in a holistic context, that encompasses mental health and physical, cultural and spiritual health. Land is central to wellbeing. Crucially, it must be understood that when the harmony of these interrelations is disrupted, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ill health will persist.
2. Self-determination is central to the provision of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health services.
3. Culturally valid understandings must shape the provision of services and must guide assessment, care and management of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's health problems generally, and mental health problems, in particular.
4. It must be recognised that the experiences of trauma and loss, present since European invasion, are a direct outcome of the disruption to cultural wellbeing. Trauma and loss of this magnitude continues to have inter-generational effects.
5. The human rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people must be recognised and respected. Failure to respect these human rights constitutes continuous disruption to mental health. Human rights relevant to mental illness must be specifically addressed.
6. Racism, stigma, environmental adversity and social disadvantage constitute ongoing stressors and have negative impacts on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' mental health and wellbeing.
7. The centrality of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander family and kinship must be recognised as well as the broader concepts of family and the bonds of reciprocal affection, responsibility and sharing.
8. There is no single Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander culture or group, but numerous groupings, languages, kinships, and tribes, as well as ways of living. Furthermore, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people may currently live in urban, rural or remote settings, in traditional or other lifestyles, and frequently move between these ways of living.
9. It must be recognised that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have great strengths, creativity and endurance and a deep understanding of the relationships between human beings and their environment.

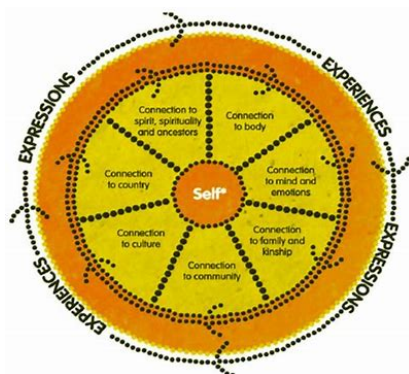
Gee et al.'s¹¹ (see Figure 1) depiction of the domains of social and emotional wellbeing illustrates the broad and interconnected reach of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's perspective on health and wellbeing.

⁹ Gee et al. 2014

¹⁰ Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet 2017

¹¹ Gee et al. 2014

Figure 1: Social and Emotional Wellbeing from an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders' Perspective



Gee, Dudgeon, Schultz, Hart and Kelly, 2014

There are many influences on social and emotional wellbeing, ranging from everyday activities and stressors to major life events. For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, a number of events in the past have had a serious ongoing impact on their social and emotional wellbeing. These include dispossession from their lands and the impact of the policies and actions that followed, including the forced removal of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their families and homelands, continued colonisation and racial discrimination.

Connection to culture, Country and community are protective factors for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.¹² Based on analysis of the 2014-15 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey (NATSISS) a majority of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people recognised their traditional homelands (61%), were involved in cultural events in the past year (69%), and identified with a clan, tribal or language group (53%).¹³ For young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people language is not only about communication, it also provides a sense of belonging and empowerment and a connection to the past.¹⁴

Whereas connection to culture, Country and community are protective, experiences of life stressors can be a risk factor.¹⁵ Life stressors are major life events that have the potential to cause stress for an individual or their family. Common life stressors include witnessing violence, experiencing abuse or a violent crime, experiencing discrimination, divorce or separation, not being able to get a job or losing a job, the death of family/close friend, serious illness or disability, or serious accident.¹⁶ For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in particular, as noted in the *National Strategic Framework for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples' Mental Health and Social and Emotional Wellbeing 2017-2023*, racism, stigma, environmental adversity and social disadvantage are ongoing stressors.

Exposure to life stressors is related to psychological distress, poor health outcomes and higher rates of risky health behaviours such as regular smoking, excessive drinking and illicit substance use.¹⁷ The 2014-15 NATSISS found 61% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people aged 15-19 had experienced one or more personal stressors in the previous 12 months.¹⁸ Research has shown that compared to young people who experienced two or fewer significant life events in the previous 12 months, young people who had experienced three to six life stressors were 1.8 times more likely to develop significant social and emotional difficulties.¹⁹ Analysis of NATSISS data identified around 11% of young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people had experienced three or more stressors. There was also evidence of a relationship between the number of stressors experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people and their level of psychological distress.²⁰ Young people experiencing three or more stressors were more likely to experience

¹² Zubrick et al. 2004

¹³ AIHW 2018

¹⁴ Marmion et al. 2014

¹⁵ Zubrick et al. 2004

¹⁶ Stevens et al. 2014

¹⁷ Holt-Lunstad et al. 2010

¹⁸ AIHW 2018

¹⁹ Zubrick et al. 2005

²⁰ AIHW 2018

high levels of psychological distress than those experiencing less than three stressors.²¹ While most Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people experienced low to moderate levels of psychological distress, one third reported high to very high levels of psychological distress.²²

Supporting the broad spectrum of the social and emotional wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people is a critical approach to policy development and service delivery, as discussed in the Policy context section of this report.

Mental health

Mental health conditions include a broad range of disorders varying in severity. However, the effects on individuals and the family can be profound. National data identified the top conditions contributing to the overall burden of disease in young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as being mental health-related conditions, including suicide and self-inflicted injuries, anxiety disorders, alcohol use disorders, and depressive disorders.²³

Nearly three in 10 (29%) Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people, aged 15-24, report having a long-term mental health condition, which is notably higher than the 16% of non-Indigenous young people with a long-term mental health condition.²⁴ This varies based on remoteness, with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people living in non-remote areas more likely to have a mental health condition than those living in remote areas (25% compared to 11% respectively).²⁵

Given the considerable contribution of mental health conditions to the burden of disease for young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, the need to access adequate, appropriate and timely mental health services is important. A considerably higher proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people in non-remote areas are able to access GP and hospital services in their local area compared with those living in remote areas.²⁶ However, a higher proportion of young people living in remote areas have access to Aboriginal specific medical or community services compared with those living in non-remote areas.²⁷

Nevertheless, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people access health services at much lower rates than the non-indigenous population.²⁸ Access to services is not only about the provision of services, but also about the relationship of the services within the community.²⁹ Unfortunately, in some cases there is a poor relationship between the services and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community, which can create a barrier to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people maintaining good health.³⁰

A key driver in the accessibility of services, community connections, family, friends, education and employment is having appropriate transport options. Over nine in 10 (91%) of young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living in non-remote areas have access to local public transport, whereas only one in three (35%) in remote areas has access to local public transport.

The importance of culturally appropriate and age-appropriate services for young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is highlighted throughout this report.

²¹ AIHW 2018

²² AIHW 2018

²³ AIHW 2018

²⁴ AIHW 2018

²⁵ AIHW 2018

²⁶ AIHW 2018

²⁷ AIHW 2018

²⁸ Warwick et al. 2019

²⁹ Warwick et al. 2019

³⁰ Warwick et al. 2019

Racial discrimination

Racial discrimination is legislated against in Australia under the Racial Discrimination Act (1975), which makes it clear that:

Offensive behaviour because of race, colour, or national or ethnic origin is unlawful for a person to do an act, otherwise than in private if: (a) the act is reasonably likely, in all the circumstances, to offend, insult, humiliate, or intimidate another person or group of people; and (b) the act is done because of the race, colour or national or ethnic origin of the other person or of some of all the people in the group.³¹

Racial discrimination against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people in Australia is a complex, intersectional (including sexism and ableism), intergenerational phenomenon which has been supported by a lengthy history of racist policies and practices. These have resulted in social marginalisation, poverty, lack of fair access to education, employment, health care, human rights, housing and food security, and historic and intergenerational trauma for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people.

Racial discrimination can affect an individual's education, employment, health, wellbeing and sense of agency.^{32,33} The experience of racial discrimination is a major life stressor which is found to have significant mental and physical effects, including intergenerational family impacts.^{34,35,36} NATSISS 2014-15 data reveal that one third (34%) of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people reported being treated unfairly because of their race in the previous 12 months.³⁷ The most common forms of unfair treatment were racial comments or jokes (69%), followed by name calling, teasing or being sworn at (56%).³⁸ Of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people who had experienced discrimination, one third (33%) experienced discrimination in an educational setting, while 10% had experienced discrimination at work or applying for work.³⁹

Disability

Disability describes a person's impairment of body or function, a limitation in activities or a restriction in participation when interacting with their environment.⁴⁰ Disability status is based on levels of activity limitation in performing one or more core activities such as self-care, mobility or communication.⁴¹ Disability types may include physical, intellectual, sensory, neurological, psychiatric disabilities or a developmental delay.⁴² Individuals can have more than one type of disability.

In the 2014-15 NATSISS, a majority of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people reported not having a disability, while nearly one third (32%) of young people reported having a disability.⁴³ The most commonly reported disabilities were sight, hearing or speech-related disabilities (29%), followed by physical disability (27%), intellectual disability (20%) and psychological disability (13%).⁴⁴

³¹ Racial Discrimination Act 1975

³² Department of Economic and Social Affairs 2018

³³ Zubrick et al. 2004

³⁴ Priest et al. 2012

³⁵ Paradies et al. 2008

³⁶ Pascoe et al. 2009

³⁷ AIHW 2018

³⁸ AIHW 2018

³⁹ AIHW 2018

⁴⁰ NDIS 2020

⁴¹ AIHW 2018

⁴² NDS 2020

⁴³ AIHW 2018

⁴⁴ AIHW 2018

Housing and homelessness

Stable housing is necessary to provide security, shelter and safety, all of which are essential to ensuring good health and wellbeing.

Homelessness in Australia is defined by the Australian Bureau of Statistics as living in a dwelling that is inadequate, has no tenure (or this is short and not extendable) or does not allow control and access over space.⁴⁵ In 2016, one quarter (25%) of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people aged 10-24 lived in overcrowded dwellings, with 4% living in severely overcrowded dwellings.⁴⁶ Overcrowding is defined as a dwelling needing one or more bedrooms to comfortably house the occupants. Severe overcrowding is commonly defined as a dwelling requiring four or more bedrooms to house the occupants.⁴⁷ Living in overcrowded dwellings has been associated with poor cognitive development and educational outcomes, poorer family relationships and poorer health outcomes.⁴⁸ This is particularly prevalent in regional communities. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people living in remote areas are more than 17 times more likely to live in overcrowded dwellings (17% compared with 1% of those in non-remote areas).⁴⁹

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living in social housing are more likely to experience overcrowding than those living in other tenure types.⁵⁰ A lack of culturally appropriate social housing options, which takes into consideration cultural customs such as accommodating extended family and kinship care relations, is a significant contributor to the degree of overcrowding experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.⁵¹ Social housing has generally been determined in terms of its appropriateness for a non-Indigenous 'nuclear family', which in turn makes much social housing inadequate to the needs of the Aboriginal community.⁵²

At the last Census in 2016, it was estimated that 4% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people aged 10-24 were homeless.⁵³ Of these, 84% of the young people classified as homeless were living in severely overcrowded dwellings.⁵⁴ Based on Specialist Homelessness Service (SHS) data from 2018-19, more than half (53%) of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients were under 25 years old.⁵⁵

Education

Education is an essential element to preparing young people for the future. Positive progressions and transitions through school are important to improve social mobility and intergenerational outcomes.⁵⁶ Education is strongly related to better employment prospects, higher income, greater personal development and social capital and better health.⁵⁷ Research has also shown strong links between education and positive health outcomes.⁵⁸

The 2020 *Closing the Gap* report showed that in 2019 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students attended school for just over four days a week on average (attended school 82% of the time). The attendance rate has remained consistent for the past five years, as has the gap in attendance between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous students.⁵⁹ The attendance rate for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students of 82% was on average 10% less than non-Indigenous students (92%).⁶⁰ However, there have been positive strides made in school completion rates, with the latest data revealing that Year 12

⁴⁵ ABS 2012

⁴⁶ AIHW 2018

⁴⁷ AIHW 2018b

⁴⁸ SCRGSP 2016

⁴⁹ AIHW 2018

⁵⁰ AIHW 2019

⁵¹ Lee et al. 2005

⁵² Homelessness Australia 2016

⁵³ AIHW 2018

⁵⁴ AIHW 2018

⁵⁵ AIHW 2019b

⁵⁶ Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet 2020a

⁵⁷ AIHW 2014

⁵⁸ Hart et al. 2017

⁵⁹ Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet 2020a

⁶⁰ Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet 2020a

attainment for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people had increased in the past decade from 45% to 66%.⁶¹

The Year 12 attainment rate of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people decreases considerably with remoteness. The proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people attaining a Year 12 or equivalent education is 85% in major cities compared with 38% in very remote areas.⁶²

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people who complete Year 12, or a higher qualification, are considerably more likely to be employed, work full-time and work in higher-skilled occupations than those who do not complete Year 12.⁶³ The likelihood of completing Year 12 is related to a range of factors including prior education experience, academic ability, access to secondary school, and financial and other support from parents.⁶⁴

It has been found that students succeed most in schools that are connected to the community, promote and teach culturally inclusive curriculum, provide appropriate support and focus on the wellbeing of the students, and have aspirational teachers.⁶⁵

Employment

Participation in employment provides financial independence and economic security and can contribute to a feeling of autonomy.⁶⁶ Employment status is also related to positive outcomes for physical and mental health, social and emotional wellbeing, living standards and lower rates of incarceration.⁶⁷

The employment rate for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people has remained relatively stable over the past decade. Between 2008 and 2018–19, the employment rate for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people increased only slightly (from 48% to 49%).⁶⁸ The employment rate for non-Indigenous Australians over the same period remained relatively stable at around 75%.⁶⁹ According to the 2016 Census, 37% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people aged 15–24 years were employed.⁷⁰ This is notably less than the 55% of non-Indigenous young people, aged 15–24 who were employed.⁷¹ The Indigenous employment rate varied considerably by remoteness. In 2018–19, the Indigenous employment rate was highest in non-remote areas and lowest was in very remote areas (59% and 35% respectively).⁷²

The enablers and barriers to employment for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are inextricably linked to social, cultural, geographic and economic factors. Acquiring particular skills, notably in literacy, numeracy, and problem solving, is associated with better employment outcomes.⁷³ A key driver in the disparity between the employment rate of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and non-Indigenous people is the level of educational attainment. Research has found that among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with post-school qualifications (such as a degree) there is almost no discernible employment gap.⁷⁴

The experience of racial discrimination is another barrier to employment for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.⁷⁵ While it is challenging to know the degree to which racial discrimination impacts employment opportunities and outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, it is reasonable to expect that it does play a role in the employment gap. Based on analyses from the NATSISS 2014–15, labour

⁶¹ Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet 2020a

⁶² AIHW 2018

⁶³ Dinku & Hunt 2019

⁶⁴ Biddle et al. 2012

⁶⁵ OECD 2017

⁶⁶ Gray et al. 2017

⁶⁷ Hunter et al. 2013

⁶⁸ Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet 2020a

⁶⁹ Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet 2020a

⁷⁰ ABS 2016a

⁷¹ ABS 2016a

⁷² Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet 2020a

⁷³ Shomos et al. 2014

⁷⁴ Karmel et al. 2014

⁷⁵ Duncan et al. 2019

market discrimination was experienced by 8% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Further, a 2014 survey by *Beyond Blue* found that nearly one in 10 (9%) non-Indigenous people would not hire an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander person for a job.⁷⁶ Considering this, it is unsurprising another study found that the experience of discrimination was one factor responsible for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people choosing not to engage in the labour market.⁷⁷

The impact of COVID-19

This report addresses survey responses that were collected prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, so its impact is not evident in the results presented here. However, emerging research is showing that COVID-19 and the associated lockdowns will have a particularly devastating impact on young people. We know, for example, that:

- Young people are likely to fall behind in their educational trajectories as a result of disconnected from school, particularly if they do not have access to resources to support home learning;⁷⁸
- Young people are likely to be disproportionately affected in labour markets by the COVID-19 pandemic;^{79,80}
- Young people are feeling anxious and depressed about the dangers of COVID-19 and its long-term effects on health systems and employment rates;⁸¹
- Increased rates of unemployment are predicted to increase suicide among young people.⁸²

Now more than ever, Government action needs to support efforts to secure the social and emotional wellbeing as well as the cultural and economic wellbeing of young people across Australia.



⁷⁶ Beyond Blue 2014

⁷⁷ Hunter et al. 2001

⁷⁸ Lamb 2020

⁷⁹ Borland 2020

⁸⁰ Productivity Commission 2020a

⁸¹ Kang et al. 2020

⁸² Dolgin 2020

Method

In 2019, Mission Australia conducted its 18th annual survey of young people, receiving 25,126 responses from young people aged 15-19 years, 1,578 of whom identified as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders.

As well as collecting valuable socio-demographic data, the *Youth Survey 2019* sought to capture the views and perspectives of young people on a broad range of issues. Topics covered by the survey include education and employment, perceived challenges to achieving post-school plans, housing circumstances, participation in community activities, experience of bullying, general wellbeing, values and concerns, preferred sources of support, as well as feelings about the future.

The *Youth Survey* includes a measure of non-specific psychological distress: the Kessler 6 (K6). Young people were asked to indicate the frequency of particular moods over the past four weeks according to a six-item, five-point scale. The scale ranges from 1-5, where 1 indicates *all of the time* and 5 represents *none of the time*. Scores across the six items are summed to produce a total. Based on established scoring criteria, the K6 can be used to classify *Youth Survey* respondents into two groups – those who experience some form of distress and those who do not.

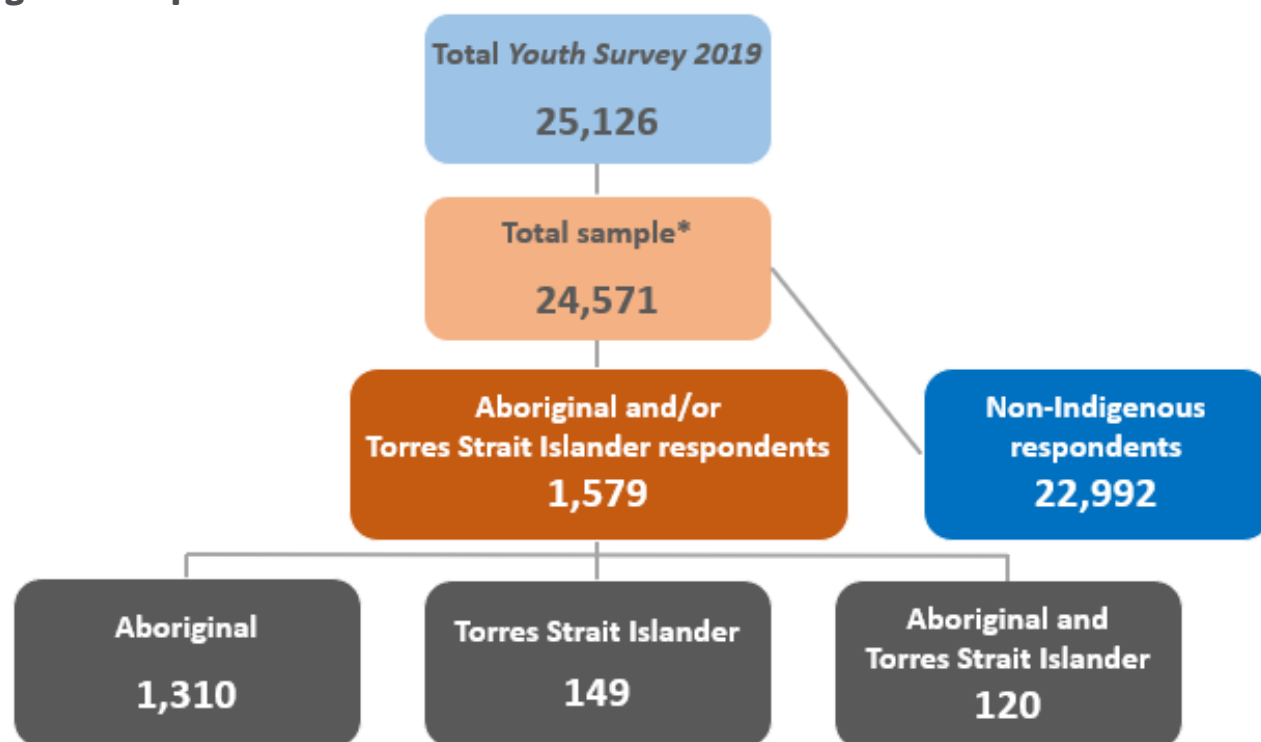
It should be noted that there are limitations to the K6, and that there is a need for mental health and wellbeing assessment tools specifically for Aboriginal and Torres Strait populations. Particularly those that can account for cultural differences and experiences like racism and other challenges that disproportionately impact upon Aboriginal and Torres Strait people. Mission Australia will continue to work with mental health experts to explore culturally and other appropriate ways of assessing the mental health and wellbeing of young people in future surveys.

Please note that throughout the report and in the data tables that the responses of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people are compared to non-Indigenous respondents. The data tables also contain a breakdown of key data by gender. Please also note that percentages in all tables, figures and text are rounded to one decimal place and may not necessarily total 100%. The quotes included in the policy section of this report are taken from responses to open-ended questions from young people identifying as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander in the *Youth Survey 2019*. Not all respondents answered all survey questions. The data presented for each question are for those who responded.

Profile of respondents

This report is based on the responses of 25,126 young people who took part in Mission Australia's *Youth Survey 2019*, 6.4% (n=1,579) of whom identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander. This report details the findings specific to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents, while highlighting areas of similarity and difference between the responses of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous young people. See Figure 2, below, for a detailed breakdown of the sample in terms of respondents' identification as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander.

Figure 2: Sample breakdown



* Number of *Youth Survey 2019* respondents who responded to the question on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander status.

State/Territory breakdown

Table 1 indicates the percentage of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents from each State and Territory, compared to the corresponding percentages of non-Indigenous respondents. Four in 10 (40.6%) Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents to the *Youth Survey 2019* lived in major cities, while the remaining 59.4% lived in regional areas.

Table 1: Percentage of Youth Survey respondents by state/territory

	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents %	Non-Indigenous respondents %
ACT	1.0	1.3
NSW	36.9	25.2
NT	5.4	0.9
QLD	22.5	23.9
SA	8.1	13.2
TAS	7.6	6.0
VIC	8.4	18.5
WA	10.0	11.0

Gender breakdown

Nearly half (49.6%) of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents to Mission Australia's *Youth Survey* were female and 42.7% were male. There were 4.1% Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents who identified as other and 3.6% who preferred not to say.

Language background other than English

A total of 68 (4.3%) Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents reported speaking an Indigenous language at home.

Disability

A total of 218 (13.8%) Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents identified as living with disability. The most frequently cited disabilities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents were (in order of frequency): autism, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder and learning disabilities (equal second) and anxiety disorder.



Key findings

Demographic profile of respondents

A total of 25,126 young people aged 15-19 years responded to Mission Australia's *Youth Survey 2019*. The largest number of responses came from New South Wales (26.2%), Queensland (23.6%) and Victoria (17.7%).

In total 1,579 (6.4%) young people identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander. Nearly half (49.6%) of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents were female and 42.7% were male. There were 4.1% who identified as other and 3.6% who preferred not to say.

A total of 68 (4.3%) Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents reported speaking an Indigenous language at home. A total of 218 (13.8%) Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents identified as living with disability.

Around four in 10 (41.4%) Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents to the *Youth Survey 2019* lived in major cities, 51.0% lived in regional areas, 5.1% in remote and 2.4% in very remote areas.

Please note, the results in this report relate to those Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people who responded to the *Youth Survey 2019* and we recognise that this is not representative of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people across Australia. In particular, because schools are a key channel through which young people hear about the *Youth Survey 2019*, many respondents are currently engaged in education. Due to lower participation and attendance rates for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people, we may therefore not capture the voices of those disengaged from education. The *Youth Survey's* strength is its focus on the experiences and views of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people in major cities and regional areas.

Issues rated as the most important in Australia

- Around three in 10 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people identified *mental health* (28.9%) and *alcohol and drugs* (28.1%) as important issues in Australia today (compared with 36.3% and 20.3% of non-Indigenous respondents).
- Around one in four Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents reported that *equity and discrimination* (24.3%) and *the environment* (23.7%) are important national issues (compared with 24.9% and 35.0% of non-Indigenous respondents).

What do young people value?

- *Family relationships* were considered *extremely/very important* by more than three quarters (76.4%) of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents (compared with 82.1% of non-Indigenous respondents).
- Over seven in 10 (71.2%) Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents highly valued *friendships* compared with 83.4% of non-Indigenous respondents).
- Higher proportions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents highly valued *culture* (47.4% compared with 25.3% of non-Indigenous respondents) and *getting a job* (54.6% compared with 46.3%).

Personal concerns

- *Coping with stress* was the top issue of concern for nearly four in ten Aboriginal and Torres Strait and non-Indigenous respondents 38.4% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents were *extremely or very concerned* about this issue (compared with 45.4% of non-Indigenous respondents).

- Around three in 10 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents were *extremely* or *very concerned* about *body image* (31.7%), *mental health* (31.5%) and *school or study problems* (30.5%) (compared with 31.2%, 33.5% and 34.7% respectively for non-Indigenous respondents).
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents indicated higher levels of personal concern than non-Indigenous respondents about *domestic/family violence* (16.9% compared with 8.6%), *drugs* (14.5% compared with 7.0%), *discrimination* (16.8% compared with 9.9%), *alcohol* (11.7% compared with 4.9%) and *suicide* (20.5% compared with 13.9%).

Mental health

- Over half (51.4%) of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents felt *happy/very happy* overall with their lives (compared with 61.4% of non-Indigenous respondents).
- More than three in 10 (31.7%) Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents indicated some form of distress (compared with 26.7% of non-Indigenous respondents).
- More than half (52.1%) of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents felt *very positive* or *positive* about the future (compared with 58.7% of non-Indigenous respondents).

Sources of support

- *Friend/s* (74.9%), *parent/s or guardian/s* (69.5%) and *relative/family friend* (63.8%) were the three most frequently cited sources of help for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people (compared with 83.5%, 75.6% and 57.1% of non-Indigenous respondents).
- A higher proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people compared with non-Indigenous respondents said that they would go to a *community service* for help with important issues (20.4% compared with 12.3%).

Experience of bullying

- Close to three in 10 (29.9%) Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents reported that they have been bullied in the past year (compared with 20.3% of non-Indigenous respondents).
- Over seven in 10 (72.5%) Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents reported that the bullying took place *at school/TAFE/university* (compared with 80.8% of non-Indigenous respondents).
- Notably higher proportions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents who have been bullied reported that they experienced this *at home* (30.1% compared with 16.9% of non-Indigenous respondents) or *in my neighbourhood* (16.8% compared with 5.5% of non-Indigenous respondents).
- Nearly three quarters (72.5%) of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people reported that they experienced *verbal bullying* (e.g. *name calling, teasing*) (compared with 71.5% of non-Indigenous respondents).
- For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents who have been bullied in the past year, the top three methods that helped them deal with bullying were *ignoring it* (39.4%), *removing myself from the situation* (29.9%) and *talking to close friends or family* (26.9%).
- Close to six in 10 (55.8%) Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people reported that they had witnessed bullying in the past year (compared with 47.2% of non-Indigenous respondents).
- Over three quarters (76.1%) of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people reported that they witnessed bullying at *school/TAFE/university* (compared with 86.0% of non-Indigenous respondents).
- More than four in 10 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people (42.3%) indicated they had seen bullying *online/on social media* (comparable to 42.5% of non-Indigenous respondents).
- A much higher proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people stated they had witnessed bullying *in my neighbourhood* (16.4% compared with 6.6% of non-Indigenous respondents).

Disability

- Nearly three quarters (74.5%) of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents felt their community is supportive of people who are living with disability (compared with 83.0% of non-Indigenous respondents).
- Close to half (49.0%) of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents thought that people living with disability are treated *unfairly* (comparable to 50.5% of non-Indigenous respondents).
- Of those with disability, over six in 10 (61.9%) Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents stated that their disability made it hard for them to *feel like they fit in (at school, work or socially)* (compared with 54.4% of non-Indigenous respondents).

Community participation

- The top three activities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people were *sports (as a participant)* (64.5%), *sports (as a spectator)* (53.8%) and *volunteer work* (46.0%). Likewise, the top three activities identified by non-Indigenous respondents were *sports (as a participant)* (68.5%), *sports (as a spectator)* (56.8%) and *volunteer work* (47.2%).

Family

- Close to half (45.7%) of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents rated their family's ability to get along positively (compared with 54.9% of non-Indigenous respondents).

Living arrangements

- The majority (83.3%) of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people reported living with their *parent/s* over the past three months (compared with 95.6% of non-Indigenous respondents).
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents were almost four times more likely than their non-Indigenous peers to report that they had lived *somewhere else*, other than with their parents, over the past three months (16.7% compared with 4.4% of non-Indigenous respondents).
- A higher proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents reported that they had *lived alone* (23.5% compared with 18.3% of non-Indigenous respondents).
- A smaller proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents reported having lived in a *privately owned or rented house/flat* (61.6% compared with 88.8% of non-Indigenous respondents).
- Almost four times the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents reported that they have lived in a *public/social housing house/flat* (15.7% compared with 4.3% of non-Indigenous respondents).
- Much higher proportions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents rated their housing as *much less than adequate* or *less than adequate* in terms of *number of bedrooms* (15.7% compared with 4.4% of non-Indigenous respondents), *access to services you need* (12.2% compared with 3.3% of non-Indigenous respondents) and *distance from public transport* (19.6% compared with 11.8% of non-Indigenous respondents).
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents were twice as likely as non-Indigenous respondents to have moved three times (8.3% compared with 4.6%) or four times in the past three years (4.0% compared with 1.8%) and over five times as likely to have moved five or more times (8.6% compared with 1.7%).

Experiences of homelessness

- A much higher proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents indicated they have experienced a time when they had no fixed address or lived in a refuge or transitional accommodation (16.2% compared with 5.9% of non-Indigenous respondents).
- Over double the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people reported a couch surfing experience (28.9% compared with 12.0% of non-Indigenous young people).
- Close to three in 10 (29.7%) Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents who have couch surfed, reported that they had first done so when they were 12 years old or younger (compared with 17.0% of non-Indigenous respondents).
- Close to three in 10 (27.4%) Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people have couch surfed on more than 10 occasions (compared with 23.4% of non-Indigenous respondents).
- A much higher proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents reported spending more than six months away from home on each couch surfing occasion (14.1% compared with 4.5% of non-Indigenous respondents).

Aspirations for study

- The majority (83.1%) of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents were studying full-time (compared with 94.1% of non-Indigenous respondents).
- Around one in 10 (11.0%) Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people, reported not studying at all (compared with 3.5% of non-Indigenous young people).
- Close to six in 10 (56.5%) Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents said that they were *very satisfied* or *satisfied* with their studies (compared with 68.4% of their non-Indigenous peers).
- The majority of young people planned to complete Year 12. Almost nine in ten (89.7%) of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents stated that they intended to complete Year 12 (compared with 96.4% of non-Indigenous respondents).
- Four in 10 (40.1%) Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people planned to *go to university* after finishing school (compared with 66.7% of non-Indigenous young people).
- A higher proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people reported plans to *get a job* after finishing school (39.9% compared with 33.3% of non-Indigenous young people).
- Over four in 10 (43.3%) Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents indicated high levels of confidence in their ability to achieve their study/work goals (compared with 47.0% of non-Indigenous respondents).

Employment

- Over four in 10 (43.0%) Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents indicated that they were looking for work (compared with 33.8% of non-Indigenous respondents).

Challenges to study/work goals

- Over half (53.1%) of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents indicated that they felt there were challenges that would impact upon the achievement of their study/work goals (compared with 48.7% of non-Indigenous respondents).
- The top three challenges that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people saw as impacting upon the achievement of their study/work goals were *academic ability* (16.2%), *mental health* (14.2%) and *financial difficulty* (12.7%). These were the same top three challenges as for non-Indigenous respondents: *academic ability* (20.6%), *mental health* (17.0%) and *financial difficulty* (12.5%).

Detailed findings

Issues rated as the most important in Australia today

Young people should have their voices heard and be actively involved in decisions affecting their lives. Young people were asked to list the three issues they considered to be the most important in Australia today. The information provided by respondents was categorised and is listed in order of frequency in Table 2.

The top three issues identified by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people were *mental health*, *alcohol and drugs* and *equity and discrimination*. For non-Indigenous respondents they were *mental health*, *the environment* and *equity and discrimination*. Nearly three in 10 (28.9%) Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people indicated that *mental health* is an important issue in Australia today (compared with 36.8% of non-Indigenous respondents). A higher proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents identified *alcohol and drugs* as an issue (28.1% compared with 20.3% of non-Indigenous respondents). Around one in four Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents reported that *equity and discrimination* (24.3%) and *the environment* (23.7%) are important national issues.

Gender differences

The top three issues identified by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander females were *mental health*, *equity and discrimination* and *the environment*. For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander males, *alcohol and drugs* and *mental health* were the top two issues in Australia, ahead of *equity and discrimination* and *the environment* in equal third position. Higher proportions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander females than males identified *mental health* (35.7% compared with 25.3%), *equity and discrimination* (28.1% compared with 21.5%) and *bullying* (17.3% compared with 10.7%) as important issues facing Australia today. Conversely, higher proportions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander males than females regarded *alcohol and drugs* (31.2% compared with 26.6%) and *politics* (11.9% compared with 7.9%) as key issues in Australia.

In comparison, higher proportions of non-Indigenous females than males identified *the environment* (39.5% compared with 28.7%), *mental health* (41.4% compared with 30.9%) and *equity and discrimination* (27.0% compared with 21.9%) as important issues facing Australia today. Conversely, higher proportions of non-Indigenous males than females regarded *politics* (14.8% compared with 8.2%) and *alcohol and drugs* (22.9% compared with 18.7%) as key issues in Australia.

A lower proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander females identified *mental health* and *alcohol and drugs* than non-Indigenous females (35.7% and 26.6% compared with 41.4% and 39.5%). Higher proportions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander males were concerned about *alcohol and drugs* than non-Indigenous males (31.2% compared with 22.9%). A lower proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander males were concerned about *mental health* than non-Indigenous males (25.3% compared with 30.9%).

Table 2: Most important issues in Australia today

	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents %	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander females %	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander males %
Mental health	28.9	35.7	25.3
Alcohol and drugs	28.1	26.6	31.2
Equity and discrimination	24.3	28.1	21.5
The environment	23.7	27.3	21.5
Crime, safety and violence	14.4	17.1	13.1
Bullying	13.4	17.3	10.7
The economy and financial matters	10.5	9.9	11.7
Politics	10.1	7.9	11.9
Education	8.5	9.4	7.9
Homelessness/ housing	8.0	10.2	6.2

	Non-Indigenous respondents %	Non-Indigenous females %	Non-Indigenous males %
Mental health	36.8	41.4	30.9
The environment	35.0	39.5	28.7
Equity and discrimination	24.9	27.0	21.9
Alcohol and drugs	20.3	18.7	22.9
The economy and financial matters	14.8	13.3	17.3
Crime, safety and violence	12.1	12.4	11.8
Bullying	11.7	12.9	10.3
Politics	11.0	8.2	14.8
Education	9.1	9.0	9.3
Homelessness/ housing	7.9	8.8	6.9

Note: Respondents provided three open-ended responses, which were coded and aggregated.
This table shows only the top 10 issues for survey respondents.

Do young people feel they have enough of a say on important issues?

Young people were asked whether they felt they have enough of a say about important issues. Responses to this question were rated on a 3-point scale that ranged from *all of the time* to *none of the time*. Table 3 shows that four in 10 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents felt they have a say *all of the time* when *with my family* (39.6%) and *with my friends* (39.5%). Close to one in five (18.0%) Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people felt they have a say *all of the time* when *at school/TAFE/university*, while one in eight (12.8%) felt they have a say *all of the time* in *public affairs*.

The results highlight that *in public affairs*, more than half (51.2%) of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people felt they have a say *none of the time* (comparable with 52.6% of non-Indigenous respondents). One third (33.7%) of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people also felt they have a say *none of the time* while *at school/TAFE/university* (compared with 28.4% of non-Indigenous respondents).

Gender differences

A higher proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander females felt they have a say *none of the time* in *public affairs* (55.5% compared with 46.7% of males), whereas a slightly higher proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander males reported feeling they have a say *none of the time* when *at school/TAFE/university* (34.7% compared with 31.0% of females). In comparison, a higher proportion of non-Indigenous females felt they have a say *none of the time* in *public affairs* (55.5% compared with 48.3% of

non-Indigenous males), whereas a slightly higher proportion of non-Indigenous males reported feeling they have a say *none of the time* when *at school/TAFE/university* (29.7% compared with 26.9% of non-Indigenous females). The responses between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander females and non-Indigenous females and between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander males and non-Indigenous males were similar.

Table 3: Young people's voice on important issues

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents	All of the time %	Some of the time %	None of the time %
With my family	39.6	46.0	14.5
With my friends	39.5	49.1	11.4
At school/TAFE/university	18.0	48.3	33.7
In public affairs	12.8	36.0	51.2
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander females	All of the time %	Some of the time %	None of the time %
With my family	38.5	50.2	11.3
With my friends	39.3	52.9	7.8
At school/TAFE/university	15.4	53.6	31.0
In public affairs	7.9	36.6	55.5
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander males	All of the time %	Some of the time %	None of the time %
With my family	41.3	44.1	14.6
With my friends	41.0	46.7	12.3
At school/TAFE/university	20.3	45.0	34.7
In public affairs	15.9	37.4	46.7
Non-Indigenous respondents	All of the time %	Some of the time %	None of the time %
With my family	44.5	45.5	10.0
With my friends	45.7	47.5	6.8
At school/TAFE/university	14.6	57.0	28.4
In public affairs	6.7	40.7	52.6
Non-Indigenous females	All of the time %	Some of the time %	None of the time %
With my family	44.6	46.1	9.2
With my friends	46.3	47.8	5.9
At school/TAFE/university	13.2	59.9	26.9
In public affairs	4.8	39.6	55.5
Non-Indigenous males	All of the time %	Some of the time %	None of the time %
With my family	45.1	45.0	10.0
With my friends	45.0	47.5	7.5
At school/TAFE/university	16.7	53.6	29.7
In public affairs	9.1	43.6	48.3

What do young people value?

Young people were asked how important a number of items had been in their lives over the past year. Responses for these items were rated on a 5-point scale ranging from *extremely important* to *not at all important*. In Table 4, the summed responses for *extremely important* and *very important* are presented for each item.

The three most highly valued items for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents were *family relationships*, *friendships (other than family)* and *physical health*. The next most highly valued items were *mental health* and *school or study satisfaction*. *Family relationships* were considered *extremely/very important* by more than three quarters (76.4%) of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents (compared with 82.1% of non-Indigenous respondents). Over seven in 10 (71.2%) Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents highly valued *friendships (other than family)* (compared with 83.4% of non-Indigenous respondents). In comparison, much higher proportions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander than non-Indigenous respondents rated *culture* (47.4% compared with 25.3%) and *getting a job* (54.6% compared with 46.3%) as *extremely/very important*.

Gender differences

Family relationships and *friendships (other than family)* were rated as the two most important items by both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander females and males, as shown in Table 4. The third top item for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander females was *mental health*, while for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander males it was *physical health*. The proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander females who placed a high value upon these and the majority of the other items was higher than the proportion of males. *Family relationships* were highly valued by 82.5% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander females, compared with 74.2% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander males. Greater proportions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander females placed a high value on *school or study satisfaction* (67.8% compared with 49.5% of males), *mental health* (68.5% compared with 53.9%) and *culture* (53.5% compared with 43.3%).

In comparison, *friendships (other than family)* and *family relationships* were rated as the two most important items by non-Indigenous females and males. The third top item for non-Indigenous females was *school or study satisfaction*, while for non-Indigenous males it was *physical health*. The proportion of non-Indigenous females who placed a high value upon these and the majority of the other items was higher than the proportion of non-Indigenous males. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander females were more likely to value *culture* and *getting a job* (53.5% and 54.9%) compared to non-Indigenous females (25.3% and 47.5%), but were less likely to value *friendships* and *school or study satisfaction* (73.5% and 67.8%) compared with non-Indigenous females (85.2% and 75.7%). Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander males were more likely to value *culture* and *getting a job* (43.3% and 56.7%) compared with non-Indigenous respondents (23.7% and 44.9%), and a lower proportion valued *friendships* and *school or study satisfaction* (71.5% and 49.5%) compared with non-Indigenous males (81.5% and 63.6%).

Table 4: What young people value

	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents %	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander females %	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander males %
Family relationships	76.4	82.5	74.2
Friendships (other than family)	71.2	73.5	71.5
Physical health	61.2	63.6	61.9
Mental health	60.3	68.5	53.9
School or study satisfaction	57.1	67.8	49.5
Getting a job	54.6	54.9	56.7
Financial security	50.5	51.8	51.8
Culture	47.4	53.5	43.3

	Non-Indigenous respondents %	Non-Indigenous females %	Non-Indigenous males %
Friendships (other than family)	83.4	85.2	81.5
Family relationships	82.1	84.7	79.7
School or study satisfaction	70.1	75.7	63.6
Mental health	67.1	72.3	60.5
Physical health	66.0	66.5	66.3
Financial security	55.6	57.7	52.7
Getting a job	46.3	47.5	44.9
Culture	25.3	26.4	23.7

Personal concerns

The *Youth Survey* asked young people how personally concerned they were about a number of issues. Responses are on a five-point scale (from *extremely concerned* to *not at all concerned*) and Table 5 below combines the *extremely* and *very concerned* responses.

Coping with stress was the top issue of concern for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents and non-Indigenous respondents alike. Nearly four in 10 (38.4%) Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents indicated that they were *extremely* or *very concerned* about this issue (compared with 45.4% of non-Indigenous respondents). Around three in 10 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people were *extremely* or *very concerned* about *body image* (31.7%), *mental health* (31.5%) and *school or study problems* (30.5%).

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents were more likely than non-Indigenous respondents to indicate high levels of personal concern about the vast majority of issues listed. In particular, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents indicated higher rates of personal concern about *domestic/family violence* (16.9% compared with 8.6%), *drugs* (14.5% compared with 7.0%), *discrimination* (16.8% compared with 9.9%), *alcohol* (11.7% compared with 4.9%) and *suicide* (20.5% compared with 13.9%).

Coping with stress was the top issue of personal concern for both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander females and males. The second most concerning personal issue for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander females was *body image*, ahead of *mental health*. Conversely, for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander males the second most concerning personal issue was *physical health*, followed by *school or study problems*. The proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander females who were concerned about these issues (and many of the other issues) was much higher than the proportion of males.

Gender differences

In comparison, *coping with stress* and *school or study problems* were the top issues of personal concern for non-Indigenous females and males. The third most concerning personal issue for non-Indigenous females was *body image*, while for males it was *mental health*. The proportion of non-Indigenous females who were concerned about these issues (and many of the other issues) was much higher than the proportion of males. The responses between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander females and males and non-Indigenous females and males were similar.

Table 5: Issues of personal concern to young people

	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents %	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander females %	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander males %
Coping with stress	38.4	51.9	23.0
Body image	31.7	42.9	18.7
Mental health	31.5	42.7	18.8
School or study problems	30.5	40.0	19.3
Physical health	25.6	29.1	21.1
Family conflict	23.3	29.7	14.8
Personal safety	22.4	26.2	16.6
Financial security	21.2	24.3	16.8
Suicide	20.5	25.4	13.3
Bullying/emotional abuse	20.0	23.7	14.0
Domestic/family violence	16.9	18.0	12.9
Discrimination	16.8	16.9	13.1
Social media	16.5	20.5	10.6
Drugs	14.5	14.1	11.9
LGBTIQ* issues	13.4	11.9	9.9
Alcohol	11.7	9.8	12.0
Gambling	7.9	5.0	7.9

	Non-Indigenous respondents %	Non-Indigenous females %	Non-Indigenous males %
Coping with stress	45.4	58.9	26.4
School or study problems	34.7	43.7	22.2
Mental health	33.5	41.9	20.9
Body image	31.2	42.9	14.3
Physical health	25.1	29.2	19.6
Family conflict	17.8	21.8	11.9
Financial security	17.6	20.6	13.2
Personal safety	17.4	20.3	13.0
Social media	14.6	19.0	8.3
Bullying/emotional abuse	14.0	16.9	9.6
Suicide	13.9	15.8	10.2
LGBTIQ* issues	10.1	11.5	6.2
Discrimination	9.9	10.9	7.6
Domestic/family violence	8.6	9.6	6.7
Drugs	7.0	6.8	7.1
Alcohol	4.9	5.1	4.3
Gambling	3.0	2.5	3.4

Note: Items were ranked according to the summed responses for *extremely concerned* and *very concerned* for each item. *Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Intersex, Queer (LGBTIQ) issues.

Mental health

How happy are young people?

Young people were asked to rate how happy they were with their life as a whole. As Table 6 shows, over half (51.4%) of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents felt happy overall with their lives (compared with 61.4% of non-Indigenous young people). However, almost double the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents felt *very sad/sad* with life as a whole (18.9% compared with 10.6% of non-Indigenous respondents).

Gender differences

A higher proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander males than females reported feeling *happy/very happy* with their lives as a whole (59.2% compared with 47.8%). Similarly, higher proportion of non-Indigenous males than females reported feeling *happy/very happy* (67.2% compared with 58.2%).

A smaller proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander females reported feeling *happy/very happy* compared with non-Indigenous females (47.8% compared with 58.2%) and feeling *very sad/sad* (18.8% compared with 11.4%). A smaller proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander males than non-Indigenous males reported feeling *happy/very happy* (59.2% compared with 67.2%), while a higher proportion reported feeling *very sad/sad* (12.1% compared with 8.3%).

Table 6: How happy young people are

	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents %	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander females %	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander males %
Happy/Very happy (70-100)	51.4	47.8	59.2
Not happy or sad (40-60)	30.5	33.4	28.7
Very sad/Sad (0-30)	18.0	18.8	12.1

	Non-Indigenous respondents %	Non-Indigenous females %	Non-Indigenous males %
Happy/Very happy (70-100)	61.4	58.2	67.2
Not happy or sad (40-60)	28.0	30.4	24.5
Very sad/Sad (0-30)	10.6	11.4	8.3

Experience of distress

The *Youth Survey* includes a measure of non-specific psychological distress: the Kessler 6 (K6). Young people were asked to indicate the frequency of particular moods over the past four weeks according to a six-item, five-point scale. The scale ranges from 1-5, where 1 indicates *all of the time* and 5 represents *none of the time*. Scores across the six items are summed to produce a total. Based on established scoring criteria, the K6 can be used to classify *Youth Survey* respondents into two groups – those who experience some form of distress and those who do not.

As seen in Table 7, based on their responses to the K6, more than three in 10 (31.7%) Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents indicated some form of distress, compared with 26.7% of non-Indigenous respondents.

Gender differences

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander females were much more likely to respond in ways that indicate some form of distress than males (38.5% compared with 20.7%). In comparison, non-Indigenous females were much more likely to respond in ways that indicate some form of distress than non-Indigenous males (33.2% compared with 16.5%).

Both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander females and males were more likely to report some distress than non-Indigenous females and males.

Table 7: Indications of distress (based on the Kessler 6 scale)

	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents %	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander females %	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander males %
Experience of some form of distress	31.7	38.5	20.7

	Non-Indigenous respondents %	Non-Indigenous females %	Non-Indigenous males %
Experience of some form of distress	26.7	33.2	16.5

How do young people feel about the future

Young people were further asked how positive they felt about the future and to rate their response on a five-point scale from *very positive* to *very negative*. As shown in Table 8, more than half (52.1%) of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents felt *very positive* (13.1%) or *positive* (39.0%) about the future. This was slightly lower compared with non-Indigenous respondents (58.7% feeling *very positive* or *positive*). More than double the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents felt *negative* or *very negative* about the future (16.3% compared with 11.9% of non-Indigenous respondents).

Gender differences

Higher proportions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander males than females reported feeling *very positive* (15.3% compared with 9.9%) or *very negative* (8.0% compared with 3.4%) about the future. In comparison, higher proportions of non-Indigenous males than females reported feeling *very positive* (16.4% compared with 11.3%) while similar proportions of non-Indigenous females and males reported feeling *very negative* (2.6% and 2.9% respectively) about the future.

A higher proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander males than non-Indigenous males reported feeling *negative* about the future (15.7% compared with 10.7%). A higher proportion of non-Indigenous males than Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander males reported feeling *positive* (62.5% compared with 54.6%). Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander females and non-Indigenous females reported similar feelings about the future.

Table 8: Young people's feelings about the future

	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents %	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander females %	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander males %
Very positive	13.1	9.9	15.3
Positive	39.0	43.5	39.3
Neither positive nor negative	31.6	33.5	29.8
Negative	8.5	9.7	7.7
Very negative	7.8	3.4	8.0

	Non-Indigenous respondents %	Non-Indigenous females %	Non-Indigenous males %
Very positive	13.3	11.3	16.4
Positive	45.4	45.7	46.1
Neither positive nor negative	29.4	31.0	26.8
Negative	8.9	9.4	7.8
Very negative	3.0	2.6	2.9

Experience of bullying

Have young people experienced bullying?

Young people were asked whether they have been bullied over the past year. A higher proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents reported that they have been bullied in the past year (29.9% compared with 20.3% of non-Indigenous respondents).

A higher proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander females than males reported that they had experienced bullying over the past year (33.4% compared with 22.0%). In comparison, a higher proportion of non-Indigenous females than males reported that they had experienced bullying over the past year (21.0% compared 18.4%).

Where have young people experienced bullying?

Young people who reported that they had experienced bullying over the past year were then asked to identify from a list of suggested locations where the bullying took place. Table 9 shows that, of the 29.9% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents who have been bullied in the past year, over seven in 10 (72.5%) reported that the bullying took place *at school/TAFE/university*. Notably higher proportions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents who have been bullied reported that they experienced this *at home* or *in my neighbourhood* (30.1% and 16.8% compared with 16.9% and 5.5% of non-Indigenous respondents).

Gender differences

A higher proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander females than males reported they had been bullied *online/on social media* (43.0% compared with 33.6%). Conversely, a much higher proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander males than females reported that they had experienced bullying *in my neighbourhood* (23.3% compared with 7.4%) and *at work* (17.8% compared with 9.3%). In comparison, a higher proportion of non-Indigenous females than males reported they had been bullied *online/on social media* (36.7% compared with 26.9%).

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander females were more likely to report they had been bullied *at home* than non-Indigenous females (27.1% compared with 17.6%), and *online/on social media* (43.0% compared with 36.7%). Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander males were more likely to report they had been bullied *at home* than non-Indigenous males (27.4% compared with 13.3%). Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander males more

less likely to report being bullied *at school/TAFE/university* than non-Indigenous males (72.6% compared with 83.4%).

Table 9: Locations of bullying in the past year

	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents %	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander females %	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander males %
At school/TAFE/university	72.5	74.8	72.6
Online/on social media	40.9	43.0	33.6
At home	30.1	27.1	27.4
In my neighbourhood	16.8	7.4	23.3
Other	16.4	6.6	19.2
At work	15.8	9.3	17.8

	Non-Indigenous respondents %	Non-Indigenous females %	Non-Indigenous males %
At school/TAFE/university	80.8	79.7	83.4
Online/on social media	33.4	36.7	26.9
At home	16.9	17.6	13.3
At work	7.8	8.1	6.5
Other	7.0	5.7	7.5
In my neighbourhood	5.5	3.7	6.9

Note: Respondents were able to choose more than one option

What kinds of bullying have young people experienced?

Young people who reported that they had experienced bullying over the past year were also asked to identify the kind/s of bullying that they had experienced from a list of suggested items. Of the 29.9% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents who had experienced bullying in the past year, nearly three quarters (72.5%) of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people reported that they experienced *verbal bullying* (e.g. *name calling, teasing*) (see Table 10). Close to six in 10 (56.9%) Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people indicated they had experienced *social bullying* (e.g. *rumours, being embarrassed or excluded*), while 46.3% reported they had experienced *cyberbullying* (e.g. *hurtful messages, pictures or comments*). Double the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents had experienced *physical bullying* (e.g. *hitting, punching*) (39.2% compared with 19.7% of non-Indigenous respondents).

Gender differences

Of the 29.9% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people who had experienced bullying over the past year, higher proportions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander females than males reported they had experienced *social bullying* (e.g. *rumours, being excluded or embarrassed*) (60.9% compared with 49.3%) or *cyberbullying* (e.g. *hurtful messages, pictures or comments*) (49.6% compared with 35.6%). Conversely, more than double the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander males than females reported that they had experienced *physical bullying* (e.g. *hitting, punching*) over the past year (55.5% compared with 26.0%).

Higher proportions of non-Indigenous females than males reported they had experienced *social bullying* (e.g. *rumours, being excluded or embarrassed*) (69.9% compared with 50.4%) or *cyberbullying* (e.g. *hurtful messages, pictures or comments*) (38.7% compared with 29.7%). Conversely, double the proportion of non-Indigenous males than females reported that they had experienced *physical bullying* (e.g. *hitting, punching*) over the past year (27.3% compared with 13.7%).

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander females were more likely to report they had experienced *social bullying* (e.g. *rumours, being excluded or embarrassed*) than non-Indigenous females (49.6% compared with 38.7%) and *physical bullying* (e.g. *hitting, punching*) (26.0% compared with 13.7%). Aboriginal and Torres Strait

Islander males were more likely to report they had experienced *physical bullying* (e.g. *hitting, punching*) than non-Indigenous males (55.5% compared with 27.3%).

Table 10: Kinds of bullying in the past year

	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents %	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander females %	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander males %
Verbal (e.g. <i>name calling, teasing</i>)	72.5	70.2	76.0
Social (e.g. <i>rumours, being embarrassed or excluded</i>)	56.9	60.9	49.3
Cyberbullying (e.g. <i>hurtful messages, pictures or comments</i>)	46.3	49.6	35.6
Physical (e.g. <i>hitting, punching</i>)	39.2	26.0	55.5
Other	11.7	3.9	13.7

	Non-Indigenous respondents %	Non-Indigenous females %	Non-Indigenous males %
Verbal (e.g. <i>name calling, teasing</i>)	71.5	69.4	75.2
Social (e.g. <i>rumours, being embarrassed or excluded</i>)	62.0	69.2	50.6
Cyberbullying (e.g. <i>hurtful messages, pictures or comments</i>)	35.7	38.7	29.7
Physical (e.g. <i>hitting, punching</i>)	19.7	13.7	27.3
Other	5.0	4.4	4.7

Note: Respondents were able to choose more than one option.

What helped young people to deal with their experience of bullying?

Young people who reported that they have experienced bullying over the past year were then asked about what helped them to deal with their bullying experience from a list of suggested items, as shown in Table 11. For the 29.9% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents and who have been bullied in the past year, the top three methods that helped them deal with bullying were *ignoring it* (39.4%), *removing myself from the situation* (29.9%) and *talking to close friends or family* (26.9%).

Gender differences

A higher proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander females than males reported that *removing myself from the situation* (35.3% compared with 27.4%), *distracting myself through other activities* (33.7% compared with 21.2%) and *talking to close friends or family* (37.6% compared with 18.5%) helped them deal with their experience of bullying. Conversely, a higher proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander males than females reported that they dealt with bullying by *confronting the bully/ies* (26.7% compared with 14.7%).

In comparison, a higher proportion of non-Indigenous females than males reported that *talking to close friends or family* (43.0% compared with 24.9%), *removing myself from the situation* (41.6% compared with 32.6%) and *talking to a support person* (20.9% compared with 12.6%) helped them deal with their experience of bullying. Conversely, a higher proportion of non-Indigenous males than females reported that they dealt with bullying by *confronting the bully/ies* (23.6% compared with 18.0%).

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander females and males were less likely to report all items as helping them deal with their experience of bullying compared to non-Indigenous female and male respondents.

Table 11: Strategies that helped young people most to deal with bullying

	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents %	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander females %	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander males %
Ignoring it	39.4	41.1	43.8
Removing myself from the situation	29.9	35.3	27.4
Talking to close friends or family	26.9	37.6	18.5
Distracting myself through other activities	26.7	33.7	21.2
Confronting the bully/ies	19.0	14.7	26.7
Nothing helped me	17.7	16.7	15.1
Talking to a support person	17.5	21.7	16.4
Other	10.9	6.6	10.3

	Non-Indigenous respondents %	Non-Indigenous females %	Non-Indigenous males %
Ignoring it	46.9	46.2	49.2
Removing myself from the situation	38.0	41.6	32.6
Talking to close friends or family	35.3	43.0	24.9
Distracting myself through other activities	33.6	36.2	30.2
Confronting the bully/ies	20.0	18.0	23.6
Talking to a support person	17.7	20.9	12.6
Nothing helped me	13.0	13.0	11.7
Other	6.0	4.6	7.7

Note: Respondents were able to choose more than one option.

Have young people witnessed bullying?

Close to six in 10 (55.8%) Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people reported that they had witnessed bullying in the past year (compared with 47.2% of non-Indigenous respondents).

Gender differences

A higher proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander females than males reported that they had witnessed bullying over the past year (59.3% compared with 51.4%). In comparison, equal proportions of non-Indigenous females and males reported that they had witnessed bullying over the past year (47.1% each).

Where have young people witnessed bullying occur?

Young people who reported that they had witnessed bullying over the past year were then asked to identify from a list of locations where they witnessed the bullying take place. Table 12 shows that, of the 55.8% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents who had witnessed bullying in the past year, over three quarters (76.1%) reported that they witnessed bullying at *school/TAFE/university*. More than four in 10 (42.3%) indicated they had seen bullying *online/on social media*. A much higher proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people stated they had witnessed bullying *in my neighbourhood* (16.4% compared with 6.6% of non-Indigenous respondents).

Gender differences

There were some notable differences in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander female and male responses to the question regarding where they had witnessed bullying take place. A higher proportion of Aboriginal and

Torres Strait Islander females than males reported they had seen bullying online/on social media (50.8% compared with 31.2%). Conversely, a higher proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander males than females reported that they had witnessed bullying in my neighbourhood (19.9% compared with 11.4%). In comparison, a higher proportion of non-Indigenous females than males reported they had seen bullying online/on social media (48.0% compared with 34.5%).

A higher proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander females reported they had witnessed bullying take place in my neighbourhood than non-Indigenous females (11.4% compared with 5.0%). A higher proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander males had witnessed bullying take place in my neighbourhood than non-Indigenous males (19.9% compared with 8.0%), at home (14.5% compared with 4.9%) and at work (12.8% compared with 6.0%). A higher proportion of non-Indigenous males had witnessed bullying at school/TAFE/university than Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander males (87.2% compared with 73.9%).

Table 12: Locations of witnessing bullying in the past year

	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents %	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander females %	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander males %
At school/TAFE/university	76.1	80.4	73.9
Online/on social media	42.3	50.8	31.2
In my neighbourhood	16.4	11.4	19.9
At home	14.6	12.7	14.5
At work	11.4	8.5	12.8
Other	9.2	4.5	11.3

	Non-Indigenous respondents %	Non-Indigenous females %	Non-Indigenous males %
At school/TAFE/university	86.0	85.6	87.2
Online/on social media	42.5	48.0	34.5
At work	7.1	7.6	6.0
In my neighbourhood	6.6	5.0	8.0
At home	6.6	7.3	4.9
Other	4.3	3.4	5.2

Note: Respondents were able to choose more than one option.

Disability

Young people were asked whether they felt their community is supportive of people who are living with disability. Nearly three quarters (74.5%) of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents indicated that they felt their community is supportive of people who are living with disability (compared with 83.0% of non-Indigenous respondents).

Young people were also asked whether they thought that people living with disability are treated *unfairly* because of their disability. Close to half (49.0%) of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents thought that people living with disability are treated *unfairly* (which was comparable to 50.5% of non-Indigenous respondents).

An additional question was directed specifically to respondents who reported living with disability that asked about challenges they face around access, independence and inclusion (see Table 13). Over six in 10 (61.9%) Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents with disability stated that their disability made it hard for them to *feel like they fit in (at school, work or socially)* (compared with 54.4% of non-Indigenous respondents). Around half of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents with disability indicated that their disability made it hard for them to *do everyday activities as other young people their age usually do* (52.3%) and to *do things in public places with friends (e.g. go to shopping centres, sporting or music events)*

(47.2%). Higher proportions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander than non-Indigenous young people indicated that their disability made it hard for them to *move around the community* (e.g. using footpaths or public transport) (37.2% compared with 19.5%) and *make choices and feel independent* (45.0% compared with 33.3%).

Gender differences

There were some notable difference in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander female and male responses to this question. Higher proportions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander females with disability reported challenges around access, independence and inclusion compared with males. Likewise, higher proportions of non-Indigenous females than males with disability reported challenges around access, independence and inclusion.

Higher proportions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander females reported all items as challenges compared with non-Indigenous females. A higher proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander males than non-Indigenous males reported most items as challenges.

Table 13: Does your disability make it hard for you to...

	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents %	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander females %	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander males %
Feel like you fit in (<i>at school, work or socially</i>)	61.9	77.8	51.0
Do everyday activities as other young people your age usually do	52.3	63.0	39.6
Do things in public places with friends (<i>e.g. go to shopping centres, sporting or music events</i>)	47.2	51.9	37.5
Feel supported by other people if you need help with something	45.0	50.0	32.3
Make choices and feel independent	45.0	48.1	35.4
Move around the community (e.g. using footpaths or public transport)	37.2	31.5	26.0

	Non-Indigenous respondents %	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander females %	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander males %
Feel like you fit in (<i>at school, work or socially</i>)	54.4	60.4	48.1
Do everyday activities as other young people your age usually do	47.4	53.6	39.9
Do things in public places with friends (<i>e.g. go to shopping centres, sporting or music events</i>)	39.5	44.4	32.8
Feel supported by other people if you need help with something	35.0	40.0	28.3
Make choices and feel independent	33.3	36.5	28.6
Move around the community (e.g. using footpaths or public transport)	19.5	18.6	17.8

Note: This question was directed specifically to respondents who reported having disability. Respondents were able to choose more than one option.

Sources of support

Respondents were asked to indicate out of a number of sources where they would go for help with important issues in their lives. Table 14 shows that *friend/s*, *parent/s or guardian/s* and *relative/family friend* were the three most frequently cited sources of help for all respondents.

More than half (53.7%) of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people indicated that they would go to their *brother/sister* for support with important issues in their lives. Around four in 10 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people would turn to a *GP or health professional* (42.0%), *the internet* (38.6%) or a *teacher* (37.6%) as a source of help. A higher proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people said that they would go to a *community service* for help with important issues (20.4% compared with 12.3% of non-Indigenous respondents).

Gender differences

Higher proportions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander females than males indicated that they would turn to a *school counsellor* (34.7% compared with 27.5%), a *GP or health professional* (45.8% compared with 38.8%) or a *teacher* (41.3% compared with 36.0%) for help with important issues. A higher proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander males would turn to a *community service* for support (22.5% compared with 18.8% of females). In comparison, higher proportions of non-Indigenous females than males indicated that they would turn to the *internet* (49.0% compared with 43.0%) or a *GP or health professional* (48.1% compared with 42.7%) for help.

A higher proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander females indicated they would turn to a *relative/family friend* than non-Indigenous females (67.8% compared with 56.8%) but fewer reported they would turn to *friend/s* than non-Indigenous females (78.8% compared to 85.4%) and *parent/s or guardian/s* (70.8% compared with 75.5%). A higher proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander males indicated they turn to a *community service* than non-Indigenous males (22.5% compared with 12.6%). A higher proportion of non-Indigenous males would turn to *friend/s* than Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander males (81.7% compared with 75.8%).

Table 14: Where young people go for help with important issues

	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents %	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander females %	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander males %
Friend/s	74.9	78.8	75.8
Parent/s or guardian/s	69.5	70.8	72.0
Relative/family friend	63.8	67.8	63.1
Brother/sister	53.7	54.4	55.2
GP or health professional	42.0	45.8	38.8
Internet	38.6	38.9	37.3
Teacher	37.6	41.3	36.0
School counsellor	30.8	34.7	27.5
Community service	20.4	18.8	22.5
Social media	19.1	17.6	17.2

	Non-Indigenous respondents %	Non-Indigenous females %	Non-Indigenous males %
Friend/s	83.5	85.4	81.7
Parent/s or guardian/s	75.6	75.5	77.1
Relative/family friend	57.1	56.8	58.2
Brother/sister	50.5	52.6	48.1
Internet	46.7	49.0	43.0
GP or health professional	45.7	48.1	42.7
Teacher	35.9	36.4	35.7
School counsellor	30.3	31.1	29.4
Social media	14.4	15.3	12.5
Community service	12.3	11.9	12.6

Community participation

The importance of community participation is well established. Community participation ensures that young people have a sense of belonging, feel part of the community and are given opportunities to participate in activities and events that allow them to develop relationships with others.

As shown in Table 15, the top three activities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people were *sports (as a participant)* (64.5%), *sports (as a spectator)* (53.8%) and *volunteer work* (46.0%). Likewise, the top three activities identified by non-Indigenous respondents were *sports (as a participant)* (68.5%), *sports (as a spectator)* (56.8%) and *volunteer work* (47.2%).

Gender differences

Sports (as a participant) was the top activity for both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander females and males. The second top activity for females was *volunteer work*, ahead of *sports (as a spectator)*. The second top activity for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander males was *sports (as a spectator)*, followed by *arts/cultural/music activities*. Notably higher proportions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander females than males reported taking part in *volunteer work* (55.3% compared with 36.7%) and *youth groups/activities* (45.0% compared with 33.3%) over the past year. Conversely, higher proportions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander males took part in *sports (as a spectator)* (59.4% compared with 50.0% of females) and *sports (as a participant)* (68.2% compared with 62.4%) in the past year. In comparison, higher proportions of non-Indigenous females than males reported taking part in *arts/cultural/music activities* (48.8% compared with 33.1%) and *volunteer work* (51.0% compared with 42.2%) over the past year. Conversely, higher proportions of non-Indigenous males than females took part in *sports (as a spectator)* (63.4% compared with 52.7%) and *sports (as a participant)* (72.5% compared with 66.5%) in the past year.

Table 15: Activities young people were involved in over the past year

	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents %	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander females %	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander males %
Sports (as a participant)	64.5	62.4	68.2
Sports (as a spectator)	53.8	50.0	59.4
Volunteer work	46.0	55.3	36.7
Arts/cultural/music activities	43.0	46.4	40.2
Youth groups and activities	38.6	45.0	33.3
Student leadership activities	32.5	34.9	31.0
Religious groups/activities	22.4	24.4	17.7
Environmental groups/activities	16.7	17.1	14.5
Political groups/organisations	10.6	9.5	9.9

	Non-Indigenous respondents %	Non-Indigenous females %	Non-Indigenous males %
Sports (as a participant)	68.5	66.5	72.5
Sports (as a spectator)	56.8	52.7	63.4
Volunteer work	47.2	51.0	42.2
Arts/cultural/music activities	42.5	48.8	33.1
Student leadership activities	33.2	36.5	28.7
Youth groups and activities	29.4	31.4	26.4
Religious groups/activities	23.9	25.8	21.4
Environmental groups/activities	13.4	14.9	10.8
Political groups/organisations	7.0	7.4	5.9

How well do young people feel their family gets along?

Young people were asked how well they felt their family gets along with one another. As shown in Table 16, a notably lower percentage of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents rated their family's ability to get along positively (45.7% compared with 54.9% of non-Indigenous respondents). Three in 10 (29.8%) Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people indicated their family's ability to get along was either *fair* (16.5%) or *poor* (13.3%). Compared with non-Indigenous respondents, almost twice the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents rated their family's ability to get along as *poor* (13.3% compared with 7.3%).

Gender differences

A higher proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander males than females rated their family's ability to get along as *excellent* (24.5% compared with 14.6%), whereas around twice the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander females rated their family's ability to get along as *fair* (22.5% compared with 10.8% of males). In comparison, a slightly higher proportion of non-Indigenous males than females rated their family's ability to get along as *excellent* (24.9% compared with 21.5%).

A higher proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander females rated their family's ability to get along as *poor* or *fair* compared to non-Indigenous females (34.2% compared with 23.0%) and fewer reported *excellent* or *very good* (40.3% compared with 53.2%). Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander males and non-Indigenous males rated their family's ability to get along similarly.

Table 16: Family's ability to get along with one another

	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents %	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander females %	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander males %
Excellent	19.6	14.6	24.5
Very good	26.1	25.7	29.3
Good	24.5	25.5	24.1
Fair	16.5	22.5	10.8
Poor	13.3	11.7	11.3

	Non-Indigenous respondents %	Non-Indigenous females %	Non-Indigenous males %
Excellent	22.7	21.5	24.9
Very good	32.2	31.7	33.5
Good	23.8	23.9	23.5
Fair	13.9	15.1	12.2
Poor	7.3	7.9	6.0

Living arrangements

A supportive and stable home environment is a particularly important aspect of a young person's life. Stable housing is essential for good physical and mental health; it has positive impacts upon educational outcomes as well as social relationships; and, it provides a platform for other supports in the community, through schools or neighbours.

Where young people lived

Survey respondents were asked whether they had spent most of their time over the past three months living with their parent/s or somewhere else. As indicated in Table 17, the majority (83.3%) of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people reported living with their *parent/s* over the past three months (compared with 95.6% of non-Indigenous respondents). However, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents

were almost four times more likely to report that they had lived *somewhere else*, other than with their parents, over the past three months (16.7% compared with 4.4% of non-Indigenous respondents).

Gender differences

A slightly lower proportions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander females than males indicated having lived somewhere else (13.8% compared with 16.9%). In comparison, similar proportions of non-Indigenous females than males indicated having lived somewhere else (4.2% compared with 4.4%).

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander females and males were more likely to indicate having lived somewhere else than non-Indigenous male and female respondents (13.8% and 16.9% compared with 4.2% and 4.4%).

Table 17: Young people living with parents over the last three months

	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents %	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander females %	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander males %
Yes, with parent/s	83.3	86.2	83.1
No, somewhere else	16.7	13.8	16.9

	Non-Indigenous respondents %	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander females %	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander males %
Yes, with parent/s	95.6	95.8	95.6
No, somewhere else	4.4	4.2	4.4

Of those reporting having lived somewhere other than with their parent/s over the last three months, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents were most likely to have lived with *non-related persons* (34.6%), followed by *friends* (28.5%) and *relatives/siblings* (24.2%). Comparatively, non-Indigenous respondents also most commonly reported having lived with *non-related person/s* (42.8%), followed by *friends* (26.3%) and *relatives/siblings* (26.3%). A higher proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents reported that they had *lived alone* (23.5% compared with 18.3% of non-Indigenous respondents).

Gender differences

Of those who indicated they had lived somewhere other than with their parents over the last three months, a higher proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander females than males indicated that they had lived with *non-related person/s* (40.6% compared with 30.6%). A higher proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander males than females who had lived away from their parent/s reported that they had *lived alone* (18.9% compared with 14.2%). Likewise, a higher proportion of non-Indigenous females than males indicated that they had lived with *non-related person/s* (47.7% compared with 37.7%). A higher proportion of non-Indigenous males than females who had lived away from their parent/s reported that they had *lived alone* (18.9% compared with 14.2%).

Table 18: Adult/s lived with over the last three months

	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents %	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander females %	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander males %
Non-related person/s	34.6	40.6	30.6
Friends	28.5	31.1	29.7
Relatives/ siblings	24.2	26.4	25.2
I live alone	23.5	14.2	18.9
Foster parents	9.2	8.5	9.9

	Non-Indigenous respondents %	Non-Indigenous females %	Non-Indigenous males %
Non-related person/s	42.8	47.4	37.7
Friends	26.3	28.3	23.1
Relatives/ siblings	23.1	22.9	24.8
I live alone	18.3	14.2	18.9
Foster parents	5.9	5.3	6.7

Note: Respondents were able to choose more than one option.

Young people were also asked to choose from a list of options which residential setting best describes where they stayed most of the time over the past three months. As seen in Table 19, the majority of young people reported living in a *privately owned or rented house/flat*. However, a smaller percentage of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents reported having done so (61.6% compared with 88.8% of non-Indigenous respondents). Almost four times the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents reported that they have lived in a *public/social housing house/flat* (15.7% compared with 4.3% of non-Indigenous respondents).

Gender differences

A greater proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander females than males indicated having lived in a *privately owned or rented house/flat* (67.7% compared with 57.9%), while greater proportions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander males reported having lived in each of the other residential settings listed. In comparison, a greater proportion of non-Indigenous females than males indicated having lived in a *privately owned or rented house/flat* (90.1% compared with 85.7%), while greater proportions of non-Indigenous males reported having lived in each of the other residential settings listed.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander females and males were less likely to report living in a *privately owned or rented house/flat* than non-Indigenous females and males (67.7% and 57.9% compared with 90.1% and 85.7%). Both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander females and males were more likely to be living in a *public/social housing house/flat* than non-Indigenous females and males (14.7% and 17.4% compared with 3.2% and 5.6%).

Table 19: Residential setting lived in over last three months

	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents %	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander females %	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander males %
Privately owned or rented house/flat rented house/flat	61.6	67.7	57.9
Public/social housing house/flat	15.7	14.7	17.4
Somewhere else	11.9	8.2	12.7
Boarding school	7.7	6.8	9.3
Out-of-home care	3.2	2.6	2.7

	Non-Indigenous respondents %	Non-Indigenous females %	Non-Indigenous males %
Privately owned or rented house/flat rented house/flat	88.8	90.1	85.7
Public/social housing house/flat	4.3	4.3	5.2
Somewhere else	4.4	3.9	4.9
Boarding school	2.8	2.4	3.4
Out-of-home care	0.5	0.4	0.6

Housing adequacy

Young people were further asked how adequate their housing was in relation to access to services, comfort, distance to public transport, distance to family/friends and number of bedrooms. Responses to this question were rated on a 5-point scale that ranged from *much more than adequate* to *much less than adequate*. Table 20 shows that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents were more likely than non-Indigenous respondents to rate their housing as inadequate. In particular, much higher proportions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander than non-Indigenous respondents rated their housing *much less than adequate* or *less than adequate* in terms of *number of bedrooms* (15.7% compared with 4.4%), *access to services you need* (12.2% compared with 3.3%) and *distance from public transport* (19.6% compared with 11.8%).

Gender differences

Overall, slightly higher proportions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander males than females rated their housing as inadequate. Likewise, similar proportions of non-Indigenous females and males rated their housing as inadequate.

Higher proportions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander females rated their housing as *much less than adequate* for *access or services* and *number of bedrooms* when compared to non-Indigenous respondents (10.3% and 12.3% compared with 3.0% and 4.2%). Higher proportions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander males rated their housing as *much less than adequate* for *access or services*, *comfort* and *number of bedrooms* (11.4%, 11.5% and 13.2% compared with 2.4%, 2.6% and 4.5%).

Table 20: How adequate is young people's housing?

	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents %	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander females %	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander males %
Access to services you need			
Much more/ more than adequate	58.5	61.9	56.9
Adequate	29.3	27.7	31.7
Much less/ less than adequate	12.2	10.3	11.4
Comfort (e.g. light, temperature)			
Much more/ more than adequate	64.0	68.2	62.9
Adequate	25.7	25.6	25.7
Much less/ less than adequate	10.4	6.2	11.5
Distance from public transport			
Much more/ more than adequate	48.2	50.9	46.6
Adequate	32.3	31.2	34.5
Much less/ less than adequate	19.6	17.8	19.0
Distance to your family/friends			
Much more/ more than adequate	46.1	47.3	46.4
Adequate	33.2	33.5	34.4
Much less/ less than adequate	20.7	19.3	19.3
Number of bedrooms			
Much more/ more than adequate	52.0	54.8	52.0
Adequate	33.4	32.8	34.7
Much less/ less than adequate	15.7	12.3	13.2

	Non-Indigenous respondents %	Non-Indigenous females %	Non-Indigenous Islander males %
Access to services you need			
Much more/ more than adequate	78.6	80.4	76.8
Adequate	18.1	16.5	19.8
Much less/ less than adequate	3.3	3.0	2.4
Comfort (e.g. light, temperature)			
Much more/ more than adequate	83.1	85.0	81.3
Adequate	14.2	12.5	16.1
Much less/ less than adequate	2.7	2.5	2.6
Distance from public transport			
Much more/ more than adequate	64.7	66.7	62.2
Adequate	23.6	21.7	26.0
Much less/ less than adequate	11.8	11.6	11.8
Distance to your family/friends			
Much more/ more than adequate	58.9	60.0	58.0
Adequate	28.0	27.5	28.5
Much less/ less than adequate	13.2	12.6	13.6
Number of bedrooms			
Much more/ more than adequate	70.2	71.8	68.8
Adequate	25.4	24.1	26.7
Much less/ less than adequate	4.4	4.2	4.5

Number of times moved

In order to gauge levels of housing stability, young people were asked how many times they have moved in the past three years. As seen in Table 21, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents were more likely to report having moved in the last three years. In particular, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents were almost twice as likely as non-Indigenous respondents to have moved three times (8.3% compared with 4.6%) or four times in the past three years (4.0% compared with 1.8%) and over five times as likely to have moved five or more times (8.6% compared with 1.7%).

Gender differences

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander females and males indicated very similar frequencies of moving house over the past three years. Non-Indigenous females and males also indicated very similar frequencies of moving house over the past three years.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander females and males indicated they had moved more frequently over the past three years than non-Indigenous females and males.

Table 21: Number of times moved in the last three years

	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents %	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander females %	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander males %
0	51.6	50.1	55.2
1	17.1	17.0	18.3
2	10.4	11.4	10.0
3	8.3	9.3	7.1
4	4.0	5.1	2.8
5 or more	8.6	7.2	6.7

	Non-Indigenous respondents %	Non-Indigenous females %	Non-Indigenous males %
0	67.3	67.5	67.4
1	17.1	15.9	17.8
2	8.0	8.2	7.8
3	4.6	4.9	4.1
4	1.8	1.9	1.6
5 or more	1.7	1.6	1.4

Experiences of homelessness

Time without a fixed address or lived in a refuge or transitional accommodation

The *Youth Survey 2019* asked young people if they had ever experienced a time when they had no fixed address or lived in a refuge or transitional accommodation. As shown in Table 22, 16.2% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents indicated having experienced such a time (compared with 5.9% of non-Indigenous respondents).

Gender differences

A slightly higher proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander females than males indicated having experienced a time when they had no fixed address or lived in a refuge or transitional accommodation. Likewise, a slightly higher proportion of non-Indigenous females than males indicated having experienced such a time.

Higher proportions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander females and males indicated having experienced a time when they had no fixed address or lived in a refuge or transitional accommodation than non-Indigenous males and males (15.7% and 13.4% compared with 6.0% and 5.2%).

Table 22: Experienced a time without a fixed address or living in a refuge or transitional accommodation

	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents %	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander females %	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander males %
No	83.8	84.3	86.6
Yes	16.2	15.7	13.4

	Non-Indigenous respondents %	Non-Indigenous females %	Non-Indigenous males %
No	94.1	94.0	94.8
Yes	5.9	6.0	5.2

Adult/s lived with over the last three months

Young people who reported having experienced a time when they had no fixed address or lived in a refuge or transitional accommodation were asked whether or not a parent/guardian had been present with them during any of these experiences. Of the 16.2% Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents who reported such an experience, almost half (47.1%) indicated that a parent/guardian had been present during all of these experiences. Around one in five (19.6%) indicated that a parent/guardian had been present during some but not all of these experiences. Almost double the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents indicated that a parent/guardian had not been present during any of these experiences (33.3% compared with 17.6% non-Indigenous responses).

Gender differences

A higher proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander females than males reported having had a parent/guardian present during all of their experiences of a time when they had no fixed address or lived in a refuge or transitional accommodation (55.3% compared with 42.4%). A much greater proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander males than females reported not having a parent/guardian present during any of these experiences (37.6% compared with 21.1%). In comparison, a slightly higher proportion of non-Indigenous females than males reported having had a parent/guardian present during all of their experiences of a time when they had no fixed address or lived in a refuge or transitional accommodation (70.6% compared with 67.2%). A slightly greater proportion of non-Indigenous males than females reported not having a parent/guardian present during any of these experiences (17.9% compared with 15.2%).

Table 23: Parent/guardian present during experience of a time with no fixed address, living in a refuge or transitional accommodation

	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents %	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander females %	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander males %
Yes, during all experiences	47.1	55.3	42.4
Yes, but not during all experiences	19.6	23.7	20.0
No	33.3	21.1	37.6

	Non-Indigenous respondents %	Non-Indigenous females %	Non-Indigenous males %
Yes, during all experiences	67.5	70.6	67.2
Yes, but not during all experiences	14.9	14.2	14.9
No	17.6	15.2	17.9

Couch surfing

Young people were also asked if they had ever spent time away from home because they felt that they couldn't go back (used as a proxy for couch surfing). Over double the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people reported a couch surfing experience (28.9% compared with 12.0% of non-Indigenous young people).

Gender differences

A higher percentage of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander females than males reported having couch surfed (32.4% compared with 22.5%). Likewise, a higher percentage of non-Indigenous females than males reported having couch surfed (12.5% compared with 8.6%).

A higher percentage of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander females and males reported having couch surfed than non-Indigenous males and females (32.4% and 22.5% compared to 12.5% and 8.6%).

Table 24: Spent time away from home because they felt they couldn't go back

	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents %	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander females %	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander males %
No	71.1	67.6	77.5
Yes	28.9	32.4	22.5

	Non-Indigenous respondents %	Non-Indigenous females %	Non-Indigenous males %
No	88.0	80.3	84.9
Yes	12.0	12.5	8.6

Age first couch surfed

For the majority of those who have couch surfed, the first occasion of couch surfing occurred between the ages of 12 and 16 (64.9% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents and 76.2% of non-Indigenous respondents). Close to three in 10 (29.7%) Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents who have couch surfed, reported that they had first done so when they were less than 12 years old (compared with 17.0% of non-Indigenous respondents).

Gender differences

A higher proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander males who have couch surfed indicated they had first spent time away from home when they were under 12 years old (28.9% compared with 23.1% of females). A higher proportion of females than males reported that they have first couch surfed between the ages of 12 and 16 (71.6% compared with 64.0%).

A higher proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander males who have couch surfed indicated they had first spent time away from home when they were under 12 years old compared to non-Indigenous males (28.9% compared with 16.6%).

Table 25: Age on first occasion of couch surfing

	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents %	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander females %	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander males %
Less than 12 years	29.7	23.1	28.9
12-16 years	64.9	71.6	64.0
17-19 years	5.4	5.3	7.0

	Non-Indigenous respondents %	Non-Indigenous females %	Non-Indigenous males %
Less than 12 years	17.0	16.4	16.6
12-16 years	76.2	77.0	76.0
17-19 years	6.9	6.6	7.4

Frequency of couch surfing

Young people who have couch surfed were further asked how many times they have ever done so. As shown in Table 26, among the 28.9% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people who have couch surfed, 70.1% indicated they have done so on more than one occasion (compared with 71.1% of their non-Indigenous counterparts). Close to three in 10 (27.4%) Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people have couch surfed on more than 10 occasions (compared with 23.4% of non-Indigenous respondents).

Gender differences

A greater proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander females than males reported they have couch surfed on more than one occasion (73.7% compared with 62.6%). In comparison, a slightly higher proportion of non-Indigenous males than females reported they have couch surfed on more than one occasion (81.8% compared with 80.3%).

Table 26: Young people who have couch surfed by the number of times ever spent away from home

	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents %	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander females %	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander males %
Once	15.8	12.2	24.4
2-5 times	33.1	33.0	37.4
6-10 times	9.6	11.3	7.3
More than 10 times	27.4	29.4	17.9
Not sure	14.2	14.0	13.0

	Non-Indigenous respondents %	Non-Indigenous females %	Non-Indigenous males %
Once	19.2	19.7	18.2
2-5 times	37.1	37.7	38.3
6-10 times	10.6	11.2	9.7
More than 10 times	23.4	23.4	21.5
Not sure	9.7	8.0	12.3

Of the 28.9% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people who have couch surfed, close to four in 10 (38.0%) reported typically spending between one day to one week away from home (compared with 47.9% of non-Indigenous respondents). A much higher proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents reported spending more than six months away from home on each occasion (14.1% compared with 4.5% of non-Indigenous respondents).

Gender differences

A higher proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander females than males reported spending between one day to one week away from home (43.2% compared with 36.1%) or between one week to one month (22.7% compared with 9.0%). In comparison, a higher proportion of non-Indigenous females than males reported spending between one day to one week away from home (51.7% compared with 41.4%).

Non-Indigenous females were more likely to report spending between one day to one week away from home than Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander females (24.1% and 51.7% compared with 14.1% and 43.2%).

Table 27: Typical length of time spent away from home for young people couch surfing

	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents %	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander females %	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander males %
One day or less	20.1	14.1	32.0
One day to one week	38.0	43.2	36.1
One week to one month	16.9	22.7	9.0
One month to six months	10.9	11.4	11.5
More than six months	14.1	8.6	11.5

	Non-Indigenous respondents %	Non-Indigenous females %	Non-Indigenous males %
One day or less	27.1	24.1	34.2
One day to one week	47.9	51.7	41.4
One week to one month	14.0	13.8	14.2
One month to six months	6.6	6.6	6.6
More than six months	4.5	3.6	3.9

Aspirations for study

Education

All young people should have the best foundation for learning and development and be able to participate as valued members of society. Table 28 shows that the majority (83.1%) of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents were studying full-time (compared with 94.1% of non-Indigenous respondents). Around one in 10 (11.0%) Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people, however, reported not studying at all. This a notably higher proportion compared with non-Indigenous young people (3.5%).

Gender differences

A slightly higher proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander males reported not studying at all (11.6% compared with 8.1% of females). In comparison, a slightly higher proportion of non-Indigenous males reported not studying at all (4.2% compared with 2.6% of non-Indigenous females).

A smaller proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander females and males were *studying full time* than non-Indigenous respondents (86.8% and 82.3% compared with 95.8% and 92.5%).

Table 28: Participation in education

	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents %	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander females %	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander males %
Studying full-time	83.1	86.8	82.3
Studying part-time	5.8	5.0	6.2
Not studying	11.0	8.1	11.6

	Non-Indigenous respondents %	Non-Indigenous females %	Non-Indigenous males %
Studying full-time	94.1	95.8	92.5
Studying part-time	2.4	1.7	3.2
Not studying	3.5	2.6	4.2

Of those who were still at school, the vast majority of young people indicated planning to complete Year 12: 89.7% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents stated that they intended to complete Year 12 (compared with 96.4% of non-Indigenous respondents). Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents were almost three times more likely than non-Indigenous respondents to report that they were not intending to complete Year 12 (10.3% compared with 3.6%).

More than twice the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander males said they were not planning to complete Year 12 (14.0% compared with 6.3% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander females). In comparison, more than twice the proportion of non-Indigenous males said they were not planning to complete Year 12 (5.5% compared with 2.1% of non-Indigenous females).

Study satisfaction

Respondents who reported that they were currently studying were asked how satisfied they were with their studies. Table 29 shows that close to six in 10 (56.5%) Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents said that they were *very satisfied* (10.8%) or *satisfied* (45.7%) with their studies (compared with 68.4% of their non-Indigenous peers).

Gender differences

A higher proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander females than males said that they were *very satisfied* or *satisfied* with their studies (60.8% compared with 53.9% respectively). In comparison, a slightly higher proportion of non-Indigenous females than males said that they were *very satisfied* or *satisfied* with their studies (69.7% compared with 67.6%).

A lower proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander females than non-Indigenous females said they were *very satisfied* or *satisfied* with their studies (60.8% compare to 69.7%). A lower proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander males than non-Indigenous males said they were *very satisfied* or *satisfied* with their studies (53.9% compared to 67.6%).

Table 29: Satisfaction with studies

	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents %	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander females %	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander males %
Very satisfied	10.8	8.6	12.7
Satisfied	45.7	52.2	41.2
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	32.3	30.3	34.2
Dissatisfied	5.9	5.8	5.3
Very dissatisfied	5.4	3.0	6.6

	Non-Indigenous respondents %	Non-Indigenous females %	Non-Indigenous males %
Very satisfied	12.3	11.8	13.0
Satisfied	56.1	57.9	54.6
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	24.4	23.9	24.4
Dissatisfied	5.6	5.3	5.9
Very dissatisfied	1.6	1.1	2.0

Plans after leaving school

Of those who were at school, the majority of respondents planned to *go to university* after finishing school (see Table 30). Nonetheless, a lower proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents reported that they planned *go to university* compared with non-Indigenous young people (40.1% compared with 66.7%). A higher proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people reported plans to *get a job* after finishing school (39.9% compared with 33.3% of non-Indigenous young people). Around one in five Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents indicated *travel/gap year plans* (21.5%) or *plans to get an apprenticeship* (19.3%) after school (compared with 28.7% and 10.6% of non-Indigenous respondents).

Gender differences

A greater proportion of young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander females than males reported plans to *go to university* after school (50.0% compared with 30.8%), *travel/gap year plans* (27.9% compared with 14.6%) or to *go to TAFE or college* (17.9% compared with 12.5%). Conversely, a much greater proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander males than females reported plans to *get an apprenticeship* (31.4% compared with 8.7%).

In comparison, a greater proportion of young non-Indigenous females than males reported plans to *go to university* after school (73.8% compared with 57.2%) and *travel/gap year plans* (33.7% compared with 21.2%). Conversely, a much greater proportion of non-Indigenous males than females reported plans to *get an apprenticeship* (19.3% compared with 4.4%).

A greater proportion of young non-Indigenous females and males planned to *go to university* after school than Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander females and males (73.8% and 57.2% compared to 50.0% and 30.8%). A higher proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander females planned to *get a job* after school than non-Indigenous females (42.6% compared to 33.5%). A higher proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander males planned to *get an apprenticeship* after school than non-Indigenous males (31.4% and 19.3%).

Table 30: Plans after leaving school

	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents %	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander females %	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander males %
Go to university	40.1	50.0	30.8
Get a job	39.9	42.6	38.2
Travel/gap year	21.5	27.9	14.6
Get an apprenticeship	19.3	8.7	31.4
Go to TAFE or college	15.6	17.9	12.5
Join the defence or police force	11.7	10.7	14.2
Other	8.3	5.4	9.7
No choices are available to me	1.9	1.4	1.9

	Non-Indigenous respondents %	Non-Indigenous females %	Non-Indigenous males %
Go to university	66.7	73.8	57.2
Get a job	33.3	33.5	32.9
Travel/gap year	28.7	33.7	21.2
Go to TAFE or college	11.5	11.9	10.6
Get an apprenticeship	10.6	4.4	19.3
Join the defence or police force	7.9	5.9	10.7
Other	4.8	3.3	6.3
No choices are available to me	0.7	0.5	0.8

Note: Respondents were able to choose more than one option.

Confidence in achieving study/work goals

Respondents were asked how confident they were in their ability to achieve their study/work goals after school. As shown in Table 31, over four in 10 (43.3%) Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents indicated high levels of confidence in their ability to achieve their study/work goals: 11.5% reported that they were *extremely confident* and 31.8% stated that they were *very confident*. In comparison, 47.0% of non-Indigenous young people indicated high levels of confidence. Close to one in seven (14.6%) Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people were less confident in their ability to achieve their goals: 10.0% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people indicated they were *slightly confident*, while 4.6% were *not at all confident*.

Gender differences

A higher proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander males reported that they were *extremely* or *very confident* in their ability to achieve their study/work goals after school (49.5% compared with 37.9% of females). Similarly, a higher proportion of non-Indigenous males than females reported that they were *extremely* or *very confident* in their ability to achieve their study/work goals after school (54.1% compared with 42.7%).

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander females and males reported similar levels of confidence in their ability to achieve their study/work goals after school as non-Indigenous males and females.

Table 31: Confidence in achieving post-school goals

	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents %	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander females %	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander males %
Extremely confident	11.5	7.9	14.0
Very confident	31.8	30.0	35.5
Somewhat confident	42.1	47.4	36.9
Slightly confident	10.0	11.1	8.7
Not at all confident	4.6	3.6	4.9

	Non-Indigenous respondents %	Non-Indigenous females %	Non-Indigenous males %
Extremely confident	9.7	7.4	13.0
Very confident	37.3	35.3	41.1
Somewhat confident	42.2	45.1	38.0
Slightly confident	8.2	9.6	5.9
Not at all confident	2.5	2.6	2.1

Employment

Respondents were asked whether they currently have paid work. Those who indicated that they were engaged in paid employment were asked to specify how many hours they worked per week, on average. Table 32 shows participation in paid employment among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous respondents. Only a small minority of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents who reported paid employment were employed full-time (2.3% compared with 0.7% of non-Indigenous respondents). However, this is unsurprising given the proportion of respondents to the *Youth Survey* who were still at school.

Over one in three (35.1%) Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents reported that they were employed part-time. Over six in 10 (62.7%) Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents indicated that they were not in paid employment: more than four in 10 (43.0%) stated that they were looking for work, while one in five (19.7%) were neither working nor looking for work. The proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents who indicated that they were looking for work was higher than for non-Indigenous respondents (43.0% compared with 33.8%).

Gender differences

A higher proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander females were employed part-time (38.1% compared with 31.5% of males). Similar proportions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander females and males reported they were looking for work (43.7% and 43.9%, respectively). In comparison, a higher proportion of non-Indigenous females than males were employed part-time (48.0% compared with 38.2%), while a higher proportion of non-Indigenous males reported they were looking for work (36.7% compared with 31.5% of non-Indigenous females).

A higher proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander females and males than non-Indigenous females and males were *not in paid employment, looking for work* (43.7% and 43.9% compared with 31.5% and 36.7%).

Table 32: Young people's participation in paid employment

	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents %	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander females %	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander males %
Employed full-time	2.3	0.7	2.5
Employed part-time	35.1	38.1	31.5
Not in paid employment, looking for work	43.0	43.7	43.9
Not in paid employment, NOT looking for work	19.7	17.5	22.0

	Non-Indigenous respondents %	Non-Indigenous females %	Non-Indigenous males %
Employed full-time	0.7	0.5	0.9
Employed part-time	43.7	48.0	38.2
Not in paid employment, looking for work	33.8	31.5	36.7
Not in paid employment, NOT looking for work	21.9	20.0	24.3

Note: Part-time employment is considered to be less than 35 hours per week, while full-time employment is considered to be 35 hours or more.

Challenges to the achievement of post-school goals

Young people were asked whether they felt there were any challenges that may impact upon the achievement of their study/work goals after finishing school. Over half (53.1%) of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents indicated that they felt there were challenges that may impact upon the achievement of their study/work goals, with a greater proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander females (58.8%) than males (47.1%) reporting the presence of challenges. In comparison, 48.7% of non-Indigenous respondents indicated that they felt there were challenges that may impact upon the achievement of their study/work goals, with a greater proportion of non-Indigenous females (54.4%) than males (39.9%) reporting the presence of challenges.

All respondents who stated that they felt there were challenges were asked to indicate from a number of items the challenge/s that may impact upon the achievement of their post-school goals. Table 33 shows the percentage of respondents who reported each item as a challenge. The top three challenges that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people saw as impacting upon the achievement of their study/work goals were *academic ability* (16.2%), *mental health* (14.2%) and *financial difficulty* (12.7%). These were the same top three challenges as for non-Indigenous respondents, although higher proportions of non-Indigenous respondents rated *academic ability* and *mental health* as a challenge. Slightly higher proportions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people indicated that *lack of family support* (6.2% compared with 4.0% of non-Indigenous respondents), *transport* (8.0% compared with 6.0%) and *discrimination* (4.6% compared with 2.7%) would impact on their achievement of study/work goals after school.

Gender differences

There were some notable differences in the challenges to achieving study/work goals reported by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander females and males. The top three challenges to achieving post-school study/work goals for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander females were *mental health* (19.2%), *academic ability* (18.3%) and *financial difficulty* (16.1%), while for males the top challenges were *academic ability* (15.3%), *where you live* (10.3%) and *financial difficulty* (9.9%). Higher proportions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander females indicated that most of the items were challenges to achieving their study/work goals, when compared to their male counterparts. In comparison, the top three challenges to achieving post-school study/work goals for non-Indigenous females and males were *academic ability* (24.4% and 15.2%), *mental*

health (21.2% and 10.3%) and *financial difficulty* (15.2% and 8.4%). Higher proportion of non-Indigenous females indicated that most of the items were challenges to achieving their study/work goals when compared to their male counterparts.

A higher proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander females than non-Indigenous females reported family responsibilities as a challenge to achieving their study/work goals (14.4% compared with 10.3%). A higher of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander males than non-Indigenous males reported transport and where you live as a challenge to achieving their study/work goals (9.3% and 10.3% compared with 5.3% and 6.4%). Fewer Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander females than non-Indigenous females reported admission/job requirements a challenge to achieving their study/work goals (14.0% compared with 10.1%).

Table 33: Challenges to the achievement of study/work goals

	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents %	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander females %	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander males %
Academic ability	16.2	18.3	15.3
Mental health	14.2	19.2	9.1
Financial difficulty	12.7	16.1	9.9
Family responsibilities	10.1	14.4	6.3
Where you live	9.7	9.9	10.3
Transport	8.0	8.0	9.3
Admission/job requirements	7.8	10.1	5.7
Lack of jobs	7.2	7.2	7.5
Lack of information	6.9	8.8	5.1
Lack of school support	6.5	7.1	5.4
Lack of family support	6.2	7.9	4.5
Physical health	5.4	6.1	4.5
Discrimination	4.6	4.5	3.4
Cultural responsibilities	3.4	3.4	3.1

	Non-Indigenous respondents %	Non-Indigenous females %	Non-Indigenous males %
Academic ability	20.6	24.4	15.2
Mental health	17.0	21.2	10.3
Financial difficulty	12.5	15.2	8.4
Admission/job requirements	11.6	14.0	8.1
Family responsibilities	8.3	10.3	5.4
Lack of jobs	8.3	9.5	6.3
Where you live	8.1	9.1	6.4
Lack of information	6.9	8.0	5.3
Transport	6.0	6.7	4.7
Lack of school support	5.3	6.3	3.7
Physical health	4.5	5.0	3.5
Lack of family support	4.0	4.6	2.9
Discrimination	2.7	2.7	2.4
Cultural responsibilities	1.6	1.8	1.4

Note: Respondents were able to choose more than one option.

Policy context

Policy recommendations summary

The *Youth Survey 2019* provides valuable information on the circumstances, values, concerns and activities of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people, grounded in their own responses to a range of questions.

Based on these findings, this report details a number of recommendations for enhancing the social and emotional wellbeing as well as the cultural and economic wellbeing of young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Eight central recommendations address the key issues and themes of this report:

1. Young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people need to be at the centre of service design and development and should be supported to lead the development of solutions alongside their communities, recognising and respecting the cultural differences that young people will bring to this work.
2. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people should have control over the design, implementation, delivery and evaluation of policies, programs and services that affect them. Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations must play a key role in this and should receive direct funding to provide services that support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, families and communities.
3. Wherever possible, mainstream agencies should seek to work in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, communities and organisations and, when delivering services in partnership, work towards developing a transparent strategy for Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations to become the lead provider.
4. Programs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people must be designed to support all domains of social and emotional wellbeing, including connection to body, mind, emotions, family, kinships, community, spirituality, land and culture. Specifically, programs must recognise and build into design the need for cultural connection, and be culturally appropriate and age appropriate.
5. Given the intersectionality of the issues facing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people, a comprehensive and coordinated national plan is needed to support and improve Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander social and emotional wellbeing, including their health, mental health, education, employment and housing.
6. Schools have a vital role to play in the elimination of racial discrimination and bullying. School curriculums should provide both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous children and young people with information about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures, both as a means of connecting to culture and a universal mechanism for increasing understanding of and reducing discrimination against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.
7. The Australian Government needs to lead the development of a national plan to end homelessness, alongside State and Territory Governments, with clear targets including a special focus on ending youth homelessness and addressing the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people among the homeless population.
8. A permanent increase to income support payments is needed for all young people and their families, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people and families, to keep them out of poverty and support them to maintain a stable connection with education, employment and housing.

The need for action on these recommendations, and the detailed supplementary recommendations that underpin them, are described in the discussions throughout this report.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities have endured and survived a traumatic and deeply challenging colonisation period that affected all aspects of their collective lives, and which continues to challenge communities, families and individuals today. Many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people share a history of intergenerational trauma, challenges to wellbeing associated with intergenerational poverty, and challenges with identity, discrimination and racism.

This shared history informs some of the circumstances and experiences of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people who responded to the *Youth Survey 2019* and is part of the context within which policies and programs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people are developed, implemented and delivered.

We acknowledge this history, but we also want to acknowledge and celebrate with this report the strengths, skills and creativity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people. It is vitally important that young people are able to bring these strengths and skills to policy discussions, and that young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are placed at the centre of the design and delivery of policies and programs that affect them.

We also acknowledge the differences in the family and cultural backgrounds of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people who responded to the *Youth Survey 2019* and the need for recognition and respect of cultural difference for all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the development of policies and programs to support them.⁸³

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people who responded to the *Youth Survey 2019* are diverse. They come from different family groups with different histories and cultures. They live in diverse geographical regions across Australia, across each of the States and Territories, some in major cities and some in rural and regional areas. In particular, Torres Strait Islander language, culture and history is distinctive from Aboriginal languages, cultures and histories.⁸⁴

The Closing the Gap Framework

For a number of years, policies and programs that affect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have been guided by the 'Closing the Gap' framework and associated targets. The Closing the Gap targets are a longstanding effort by Australian governments to reduce the discrepancy in life outcomes between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous Australians, including for young people.

However, the most recent data available show that, despite some improvements, only two targets are on track to be met: increasing the proportion of Indigenous four-year-olds enrolled in early childhood education, and halving the gap In Year 12 attainment or equivalent.

In the lead-up to the ten-year anniversary of Closing the Gap, the former Council of Australian Governments (COAG)⁸⁵ agreed to a 'refresh' of the Closing the Gap agenda and targets, and committed to working in formal partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to finalise the refresh and implement the new agenda. A new Joint Council on Closing the Gap was created out of a partnership agreement between the National Coalition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peak Organisations and Commonwealth, State/Territory and local governments signed in March 2019.⁸⁶

The Joint Council embeds shared decision-making between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and governments for the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the Closing the Gap agenda and recognises that self-determination is critical to achieving changes in the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

The new National Agreement on Closing the Gap⁸⁷ was signed into effect in July 2020, and included four priority reforms:

⁸³ Dudgeon & Ugle 2014

⁸⁴ Dudgeon, Wright et al. 2014

⁸⁵ On 29 May 2020, the Prime Minister announced that COAG would be replaced by the National Federation Reform Council (NFRC), centered around the National Cabinet. This was in response to new working arrangements developed to address the COVID-19 pandemic. The National Cabinet is comprised of the Prime Minister and State Premiers and Territory Chief Ministers.

⁸⁶ Coalition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peak Organisations and the Council of Australian Governments 2019

⁸⁷ Coalition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peak Organisations and the Council of Australian Governments 2020

1. Shared decision-making: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are empowered to share decision-making authority with governments to accelerate policy and place-based progress on Closing the Gap through formal partnership arrangements.
2. Building the community-controlled sector: There is a strong and sustainable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled sector delivering high quality services to meet the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people across the country.
3. Improving mainstream institutions: Governments, their organisations and their institutions are accountable for Closing the Gap and are culturally safe and responsive to the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, including through the services they fund.
4. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led data: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have access to, and the capability to use, locally-relevant data and information to set and monitor the implementation of efforts to close the gap, their priorities and drive their own development.

The new Agreement also introduced 16 new targets. The new targets cover a range of issues including child protection, education, employment, health and mortality. While a suicide reduction target has been included, there are still no broadly-based social and emotional wellbeing or mental health targets, despite evidence demonstrating that these are foundational to achieving positive outcomes. They also include no mention of racial discrimination, the elimination of which is critical in achieving health and education targets for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people.

The voices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people and the right to self-determination

The development of policies and programs to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people is taking place against the backdrop of an increasing acceptance by governments that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people must be central to the design and delivery of policies and programs that affect them.

Self-determination is a right enshrined in international agreements including the *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights* and the *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*. In the Australian context, it specifically applies to the right of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to meet their social, cultural and economic needs, and to have control over the development and implementation of policies, programs and services that affect them.⁸⁸

As reflected throughout this report, Mission Australia supports efforts to ensure that Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs) design, implement, deliver and evaluate policies, programs and services that affect them. Responses led by local communities will ensure better outcomes for communities and the people – particularly young people – living within them.

Responses of young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to the *Youth Survey 2019* indicate that this will need to be carefully considered in places of education and in political discussions. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people generally felt that their voices are heard in some settings, and that they had a say on important issues *with my family* and *with my friends* at least some of the time. However, significant proportions felt they had no say at *school/TAFE/university* (33.7%) and *in public affairs* (51.2%). This was similar to results for non-Indigenous respondents, a high proportion of whom also reported that they had no say at *school/TAFE/university* (28.4%) and *in public affairs* (52.6%).

The involvement of young people in, for example, the climate change and Black Lives Matter movements demonstrate their determination to have their voices heard on issues that affect them and their future. Young people have a right to be involved in discussions on issues that affect them, and bring unique skills and perspectives that are essential for identifying solutions.⁸⁹ The recently announced Commonwealth

⁸⁸ Australian Human Rights Commission undated website a

⁸⁹ Azzopardi et al. 2020

Government funding for Youth Advocacy Support Grants is a welcome initiative.⁹⁰ Organisations such as the Koorie Youth Council, Northern Territory Youth Roundtable⁹¹ and Aboriginal Health Council of Western Australia Youth Committee⁹² alongside projects such as the Kimberley Empowered Young Leaders Forums⁹³ provide opportunities for young people to engage with policy and decision makers.

Koorie Youth Council

The Koorie Youth Council is the representative body for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people in Victoria. It is led by an Executive Council of 15 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people, and advocates to government and community to advance the rights and representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people.

The recent Ngaga-dji (hear me) report⁹⁴ from the Koorie Youth Council reports the stories of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people who have been in contact with the youth justice system in Victoria. The Council proposes a range of solutions: give children services that work; keep children safe and strong in their culture, families and communities; community-designed and led youth support systems; and create just and equitable systems.

Kimberley Empowered Young Leaders Forums 2019⁹⁵

In 2017 Aarnja Ltd as the Empowered Communities backbone for the West Kimberley, held a youth suicide prevention forum – run by Kimberley Aboriginal young people for Kimberley Aboriginal young people. The work undertaken by this group of emerging young leaders produced a report to the Commonwealth outlining the views and recommendations of Kimberley young people, including the nomination of youth representatives elected to drive the work forward. The report was presented to the Kimberley Aboriginal Suicide Prevention Trial Working Group where it was agreed that separate follow up forums would be held in the West and East Kimberley. In addition, the young people engaged through these follow up forums would form part of an ongoing Kimberley Aboriginal youth peer to peer network.

As part of Mission Australia's commitment to becoming a child and youth safe organisation, we are working to ensure that the voices of young people are heard. For example, 156 children and young people who were engaging with our services shared their views about what Mission Australia could do to help them feel safe. Themes included everyone knowing their rights and responsibilities, having a safe physical environment, having someone to talk with and provide support, including family, protecting boundaries and taking privacy seriously.

VOICE AND SELF-DETERMINATION: POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people need to be at the centre of service design and development and should be supported to lead the development of solutions alongside their communities.
2. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people should have control over the design, implementation, delivery and evaluation of policies, programs and services that affect them. Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations must play a key role in this and should receive direct funding to provide services that support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, families and communities.
3. Wherever possible, mainstream agencies should seek to work in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, communities and organisations and, when delivering services in partnership, work towards developing a transparent strategy for Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations to become the lead provider.

⁹⁰ Department of Health 2020a

⁹¹ Azzopardi et al. 2020

⁹² Aboriginal Health Council of Western Australia 2019

⁹³ Aarnja Ltd 2019

⁹⁴ Koorie Youth Council 2018

⁹⁵ Aarnja Ltd 2019

Social and emotional wellbeing

Social and emotional wellbeing is holistic and deep-rooted in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community. It is a multi-dimensional concept of health that encompasses connection to body, mind and emotions, connection to family, kinships and community, and connection to spirituality, land and culture.⁹⁶ At a national level, this is recognised in the *National Strategic Framework for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples' Mental Health and Social and Emotional Wellbeing 2017-2023*.⁹⁷

Community-led programs that build on cultural determinants and address the social determinants of social and emotional wellbeing should be supported to help provide Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people with protective factors against the issues that concern them.

The *Youth Survey 2019* touches on a range of issues relating to social and emotional wellbeing, including family, culture and community, and the confidence of young people in adult family and community members as sources of guidance and support.

Family relationships

The *National Strategic Framework for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples' Mental Health and Social and Emotional Wellbeing 2017-2023* recognises the 'centrality of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander family and kinship as well as the broader concepts of family and the bonds of reciprocal affection, responsibility and sharing'.⁹⁸ Connection to family and kinship is an important component of social and emotional wellbeing from an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspective.⁹⁹ A large majority of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents to the *Youth Survey* highly valued family relationships (76.4%) and significant numbers sought support from parent/s or guardian/s (69.5%), relative/family friends (63.8%) and brother/sister (53.7%).

However, the integrity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander family and kinship networks was deliberately destroyed by colonisation, including through policies of forced child removal and resettlement.¹⁰⁰ This has had devastating consequences for historical and intergenerational trauma experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and ongoing interruptions to family and kinship networks into the present day.¹⁰¹

Services that support positive family functioning and help young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to understand their family, history and culture can act to help develop and protect family relationships. In order to support this, services should work to meaningfully and respectfully engage with family and kin networks to provide culturally appropriate holistic support to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people.¹⁰²

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Family Wellbeing Services, QLD¹⁰³

The Queensland Government has invested \$33.34 million per annum to roll out 33 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled services to support families experiencing vulnerability across the state. These services work with: various culturally appropriate universal, secondary and specialist services; placement services; Family Participation Program services; and individual families to provide tailored, holistic and coordinated supports to meet each family's unique needs. Data from the first 12 months of operation demonstrate that the 33 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations that deliver early intervention

⁹⁶ Gee et al. 2014

⁹⁷ Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet 2017

⁹⁸ Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet 2017, 3

⁹⁹ Gee et al. 2014

¹⁰⁰ Dudgeon, Wright et al. 2014

¹⁰¹ Atkinson et al. 2014

¹⁰² Hunt 2013

¹⁰³ Family Matters 2019

support to families have achieved half the rate of re-notifications to the department compared with mainstream, non-Indigenous organisations.

Family violence

More than one in ten Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people indicated that their family's ability to get along was poor (13.3%) and nearly one quarter (23.3%) were concerned about *family conflict* (compared with 7.3% and 17.8% of non-Indigenous respondents respectively). Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people were also more likely than non-Indigenous respondents to be concerned about *domestic/family violence* (16.9% compared with 8.6%).

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and children experience family violence at significantly higher rates than non-Indigenous women and children. Family violence is defined differently in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander than non-Indigenous communities, and in general the term 'family violence' rather than 'domestic violence' is used to acknowledge a wider context of violence within extended families and the wider community, rather than a single intimate partnership.¹⁰⁴

Whereas mainstream approaches to domestic and family violence are focused on separating victim-survivors from perpetrators and on policing and justice responses, these are not regarded as the most effective way of responding to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander family violence.¹⁰⁵

It is also important to note that a majority of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have non-Indigenous partners, and that family violence does not solely occur in families where all members are Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander.¹⁰⁶ Non-Indigenous partners, and predominantly male non-Indigenous partners, can be perpetrators of family violence, challenging assumptions about the violence perpetrated against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and children.

Because family violence is conceptualised in terms of wider family and community relations, holistic responses that focus on violence prevention, integration with cultural health and healing families have been seen as preferred ways of addressing family violence in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.¹⁰⁷

New approaches to family violence in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities include a focus on social and emotional wellbeing that draws on connection with law, cultures and spirituality as protective factors against the occurrence of family violence and putting Elders (male and female) at the centre of interventions wherever possible.¹⁰⁸

Culture

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people were much more likely to highly value *culture* than their non-Indigenous peers (47.4% compared with 25.3%).

A vibrant culture and connection to community are significant factors in strengthening the resilience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people,¹⁰⁹ which is essential to achieving positive wellbeing, education and other outcomes.¹¹⁰ Conversely, a limited connection to culture may challenge Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people's self-esteem and self-identity.

This need for cultural connection should be recognised and built into programs that work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people. Services should also be made available in the local community where possible, rather than expecting young people to travel away from family and Country, which may have negative impacts.

¹⁰⁴ Olsen & Lovett 2016

¹⁰⁵ Olsen & Lovett 2016

¹⁰⁶ Biddle 2013

¹⁰⁷ Blagg et al. 2018

¹⁰⁸ Blagg et al. 2018

¹⁰⁹ Western Australian Commissioner for Children and Young People 2011

¹¹⁰ Gee et al. 2014

Traditional Cultural Camps

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Service (QLD) runs cultural camps for young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in partnership with Mission Australia. The cultural camps help Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people to connect with their cultural identity. The camps involve two-night trips on local, traditional Country with local Elders. They offer a safe place for local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people who are involved in the criminal justice system and are at high risk of reoffending to engage in cultural activities. Connecting with cultural identity and developing a strong sense of cultural identity and belonging improves wellbeing and can be a protective factor during times of transition.

These camps are based on the premise that connection to mob and to Country is an essential part of health as an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander person. The cultural camps aim to enhance the self-esteem and cultural pride of young people, particularly those who may feel disconnected from their cultural identity. After the camp, the elders, who act as mentors for young people, maintain regular contact with the participants.

Community-driven healing models and programs with a focus on cultural healing and cultural renewal have increased in prominence in recent years.¹¹¹ These include both individual-level and community-level interventions that address the social, emotional and psychological outcomes of traumatic experiences,¹¹² including the intergenerational trauma experienced by many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people. Programs that address cultural healing and renewal should be supported and funded by governments.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Healing Foundation¹¹³

The Healing Foundation is a national Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisation that partners with communities to address the ongoing trauma caused by actions including the forced removal of children from their families. Their work includes:

- Developing the evidence base for healing through research and resource development, to inform best-practice strategies and build support for more effective policy and frameworks
- Building leadership and capacity in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities
- Strengthening the healing workforce by providing training and support
- Communicating about the impact of trauma and intergenerational trauma on Stolen Generations survivors and their descendants, and the importance of healing in addressing a wide range of health and social issues.

Community

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander society is structured around the community, which is formed by strong family and kinship ties. Community membership carries with it obligations and commitments including obligations to family, being active in various community initiatives, and representation in political issues.¹¹⁴

Many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents to the *Youth Survey 2019* were involved in community activities. Significant proportions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people were involved in *sports (as a participant)* (64.5%), *sports (as a spectator)* (53.8%), *volunteer work* (46.0%), *arts/cultural/music activities* (43.0%), *youth groups and activities* (38.6%) and *student leadership activities* (32.5%).

¹¹¹ Gee et al. 2014

¹¹² Atkinson et al. 2017

¹¹³ Healing Foundation undated webpage

¹¹⁴ Dudgeon, Wright et al. 2014

Being involved in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities as well as other communities is important for reducing social isolation and enhancing social and emotional wellbeing among young people. When young people live in communities that are inclusive and encourage belonging, research shows that they have more positive futures and are less likely to engage in risk taking behaviours.¹¹⁵ Participation in cultural activities within the community, such as in art, sport and ceremony, has been found to foster cultural strength, pride and enhanced self-esteem. Involvement in community activities has also been credited for improving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people's long-term physical and mental health, as well as for increasing social cohesion in communities.¹¹⁶

Programs that promote connection to community have a critical role to play in enhancing young people's wellbeing through reducing isolation and support their connections with family, kin and wider networks. For example, Dardi Munwurro, an Aboriginal-owned organisation based in Melbourne, run the Bramung Jarn (Youth Journeys) program which supports young Aboriginal men to build positive networks with their peer group and the broader community.

Dardi Munwurro Bramung Jaarn Program¹¹⁷

Dardi Munwurro's Bramung Jaarn Program is a program that works with young Aboriginal males aged 10 to 18 years of age. Trained facilitators, Elders and a small pool of voluntary mentors deliver the program, which assists the young men to build positive support networks within their peer group and the broader community.

Young people in the program are supported to participate in weekly structured group sessions, camps, and group based activities during the school holidays; one-on-one support and case management is available to clients with complex needs.

The Bramung Jaarn team work closely with family and carers, schools, and support services involved with the young person. Family members impacted by family violence can also access support from Dardi Munwurro's Family Safety team.

The objective of the Program is to 'engage and empower young Aboriginal males to heal and build resilience, with the aim of diverting them from the criminal justice system. The program includes strengthening activities to build resilience, knowledge and capacity across six domains including culture, emotional intelligence, physical and emotional health, healthy relationships, taking responsibility and spirit'.

Team sport can be a good way of engaging young people¹¹⁸ in activities that promote connect to community and other positive outcomes. For example, the National Aboriginal Sporting Chance Academy uses health, sport and cultural programs to help promote positive education and employment outcomes and leadership skills among young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

National Aboriginal Sporting Chance Academy

The National Aboriginal Sporting Chance Academy (NASCA) is an Aboriginal governed not-for-profit organisation based in Redfern, NSW that operates across a number of Aboriginal communities across Australia. It works with Aboriginal young people to empower them through health, education, sport and cultural programs, using elite athletes as role models and engaging with business partners and sports organisations to deliver positive and effective programs. These programs aim at increasing school attendance and completion rates, building employment aspirations and improving employment outcomes, and increasing cultural pride, confidence and leadership skills amongst Aboriginal young people.

¹¹⁵ Williams et al. 2010, vii.

¹¹⁶ SCRGSP 2016

¹¹⁷ Dardi Munwurro, 2016-17

¹¹⁸ Dudgeon et al. 2019

Act-Belong-Commit

Mission Australia works in partnership with the Black Dog Institute, National Rugby League, the Department of Sport and Recreation, Centre for Rural and Remote Mental Health, Richmond PRA and local communities to deliver the Act-Belong-Commit Community education sessions across the Western and Far Western Regions of NSW.

Act-Belong-Commit is a comprehensive health promotion campaign that encourages individuals to take action to protect and promote their own mental wellbeing and encourages organisations that provide mentally healthy activities to promote participation in those activities. Wayne Wigham (former Balmain Tigers player), Dan Hunt (former St George Illawarra Player) & Percy Knight (former Balmain and Canberra Raiders Player) co presented and discussed the A-B-C guidelines for positive mental health to the group. The A-B-C guidelines for positive mental health provide a simple approach that can be adopted to become more mentally healthy by keeping mentally, physically, socially and spiritually active. Having a sense of belonging and purpose in life all contribute to happiness and good mental health.

Sources of support

The top three sources of support identified by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents were *friend/s*, *parent/s or guardian/s*, and *relative/family friend*. These were also the top three sources of support for non-Indigenous respondents, although the proportions varied (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people were somewhat more likely to identify *relative/family friend* and somewhat less likely to identify *friend/s* and *parent/s or guardian/s* than their non-Indigenous peers).

Adult family and community members have a critical role to play in supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people. Young people need well-informed, accessible and knowledgeable sources of advice in order to support their social and emotional wellbeing. The early age of onset of health risks and poor outcomes among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people highlights the need for communities, families and health providers to provide an enabling environment in which young people can access services while also being respectful of their emerging autonomy.¹¹⁹

Young people also need support from adult family and community members to engage with the community in being involved in decisions on issues that affect them. The most successful models of engaging young people in participatory decision making enable young people's control and responsibility, coupled with supportive adults and community. This recognises the critical role that adults play in supporting health and access to services, and is consistent with the evolving capacities of young people.¹²⁰

Providing direct support for young people with health, mental health and other issues of concern is also a critical role for adult family and other community members. With a high proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents to the *Youth Survey 2019* citing parents, friends and relatives as sources of help, it is important that they have the information and understanding to identify issues young people may be facing and avenues of support. Families need knowledge and confidence to support the young people in their lives with the concerns they have identified, including coping with stress, mental health, school or study problems, body image, physical health and suicide.

¹¹⁹ Azzopardi et al. 2020

¹²⁰ Azzopardi et al. 2020

Aboriginal Mental Health First Aid¹²¹

Mental health first aid is the help provided to a person who is developing a mental health problem, experiencing a worsening of an existing mental health problem or in a mental health crisis. Evidence-based MHFA courses, such as the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Mental Health First Aid Course (AMHFA), teach mental health first aid strategies to members of the public.

Research has found this course to be effective and culturally appropriate, in that it empowers Aboriginal people and provides information that is highly relevant in assisting Aboriginal people with a mental illness.

Peer support networks and peer education initiatives can equip young people with the knowledge and skills to recognise mental health issues and to provide assistance to friends. Peer networks also enhance connectedness, thereby reducing the sense of isolation that many individuals who are developing a mental illness might experience.¹²²

SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL WELLBEING: POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Programs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people must be designed to support all domains of social and emotional wellbeing, including connection to body, mind, emotions, family, kinships, community, spirituality, land and culture. Specifically, programs must recognise and build into design the need for cultural connection, and be culturally appropriate and age appropriate.
2. Given the intersectionality of the issues facing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people, a comprehensive and coordinated national plan is needed to support and improve Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander social and emotional wellbeing, including their health, mental health, education, employment and housing.
3. Wherever possible, services that support social and emotional wellbeing should be funded in the local area, rather than requiring young people to travel away from family and Country.
4. Funding should be given to services that support positive family functioning and help young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to understand their family, history and culture. These interventions need to work with both the young person and their family.
5. Approaches to family violence in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities that focus on social and emotional wellbeing and put Elders at the centre of interventions should be supported.
6. Adult family and community members should be supported with resources and knowledge to understand the range of issues identified by young people that are related to mental health including substance misuse, body image challenges and bullying.
7. Peer support networks and peer education initiatives should be invested in to equip young people with the knowledge and skills to recognise mental health issues and to provide assistance to their friends and relatives when needed.

Mental health

Young people were asked about a range of issues related to mental health in the *Youth Survey 2019*. *Coping with stress, suicide, alcohol and drugs*, and *body image* all arose as significant issues, both for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous young people.

Mental health is an important domain of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander social and emotional wellbeing, linked also to the social, emotional, physical, cultural and spiritual dimensions of wellbeing.¹²³

At the population level, higher rates of mental health issues among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are intertwined with entrenched poverty, substandard and overcrowded housing, health conditions and disabilities, intergenerational un/under-employment, stressors and trauma, racism and discrimination,

¹²¹ See for example Headspace 2020

¹²² Wyman et al. 2010

¹²³ Gee et al. 2014

and at-risk behaviours in response to sometimes desperate situations.¹²⁴ In particular, the members of the Stolen Generations and their descendants are more likely to have had contact with mental health services, with children in their care often challenged by higher rates of emotional and behavioural difficulties.¹²⁵

In many cases, responding to population mental health challenges means addressing their deeper, structural causes. These should be identified and solutions co-designed and co-implemented under Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community leadership, including ACCOs delivering health services.¹²⁶

The needs of young people should be prioritised as directed by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and their representative organisations, and young people's voices included in identifying issues and solutions. For example, Gayaa Dhuwi (Proud Spirit),¹²⁷ the new peak body for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander social and emotional wellbeing, mental health and suicide prevention is introducing a youth reference group to support their work, which is an important step in making sure that the voices of young people are incorporated into policy and service design.

Community-led programs that build on cultural determinants of social and emotional wellbeing are needed to provide Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people with protective factors against mental health challenges, and particularly against suicide, by supporting a strong sense of social, cultural and emotional wellbeing that includes a positive cultural identity. These cultural determinants vary but can include culturally shaped connections to family, kin, community and Country.¹²⁸

Yet, in many cases, mainstream health and mental health programs fail to incorporate culturally appropriate practices or awareness when working with or treating Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people experiencing challenges to their wellbeing.¹²⁹

Program funding must be flexible enough to provide for differences, tailor services to meet community and individual needs and to support younger age groups where critical issues arise. It is essential that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people have access to culturally and age-appropriate mental health services that are in close proximity to their homes. The Australian Government should continue to invest in building the capacity of ACCOs delivering health services to deliver these services in communities. They have already made an early investment following the new Closing the Gap Agreement, committing \$46.5 million over four years to build the capacity of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled service delivery sector,¹³⁰ and this investment must continue in order to support the development and capacity building of the sector.

Telehealth services are also an important component of service delivery, but are hampered by a lack of digital inclusion in some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Developing technological capacity in all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, alongside telehealth responses including a national helpline are critical response measures.¹³¹ This helpline should be designed and run by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to address the various mental health needs of young people, including suicide prevention and assistance with alcohol and other drug dependency.

In 2020, young people's mental health has been severely affected by the global COVID-19 pandemic. COVID-19 has caused multiple stresses for young people, including uncertainty about their future and social isolation, increasing rates of unemployment and financial distress. This is reported to be increasing psychological distress among young people making them more vulnerable to mental ill health, with a concurrent rise in suicide rates predicted.¹³² Modelling by the Brain and Mind Centre at Sydney University demonstrates that taking a holistic approach to suicide prevention post COVID-19 would have positive outcomes in terms of both mental health and economic benefits. This, they note, is achievable by investment in a combination of specialised mental health services (provided by mental health GPs, psychiatrists and allied

¹²⁴ ABS 2016b, Hunter 2007

¹²⁵ AIHW 2015a, Healing Foundation 2017

¹²⁶ Dillon 2016

¹²⁷ Gayaa Dhuwi 2020

¹²⁸ Lindstedt et al. 2017

¹²⁹ Lindstedt et al. 2017

¹³⁰ Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet 2020b

¹³¹ Dudgeon et al. 2020

¹³² Dolgin 2020

health services, and community mental health services) with IT-enabled coordinated care and post-suicide attempt assertive aftercare (active outreach and enhanced contact to support someone after an attempt).¹³³

Although the Australian Government has committed additional funding for mental health support as a result of COVID-19,¹³⁴ it has largely been directed towards mainstream agencies.¹³⁵ Governments must support an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led approach to address the mental health needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, including children and young people. Any post COVID-19 response in relation to mental health requires additional funding and support for local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's services and programs that address the risk factors that contribute to mental ill health and may compromise social and emotional wellbeing, whilst strengthening protective factors that enable self-care and resilience.¹³⁶

Partnership between Bloodwood Tree and Mission Australia

In Hedland, within the Pilbara region of WA, Bloodwood Tree and Mission Australia work collaboratively including on an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander component of the Integrated Primary Mental Health Service. A Bloodwood Tree Cultural Worker provides support to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people experiencing difficulties with their mental health and wellbeing. They will work with people of all ages and will refer people, including children and young people, in need of more intensive support to the Mission Australia Integrated Care Specialists.

Bloodwood Tree and Mission Australia also work together on the provision of Alcohol and other Drug preventive strategies. This includes the identification of and provision of support to young people engaging in volatile substance use (VSU).

Meekatharra Aboriginal Reference Group

In Meekatharra, in the Midwest Region of WA, Mission Australia works with and takes advice from the Meekatharra Aboriginal Reference Group (MARG). Such advice includes ensuring the provision of culturally secure services to children and families participating in services such as the Remote School Attendance Service, Aboriginal Mental Health Service, Intensive Family Support Service and Nyarlu Duwa (Woman House) Family and Domestic Violence Service. The MARG will also guide the establishment of the Outreach Drug and Alcohol Treatment Service in Meekatharra and surrounding areas.

Suicide prevention

The rate of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander suicide is a critical public health challenge for Australia. Over the five years from 2013 to 2017, one in four Australian children and young people aged 5-17 years who died by suicide were Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders.¹³⁷

The accumulation of underlying trauma, community dysfunction relating to a lack of self-determination, exposure to life stressors, interpersonal racism and lack of access to appropriate services are some of the many factors that influence higher rates of suicide among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.¹³⁸

Designed to complement the mainstream National Suicide Prevention Strategy, the 2013 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Suicide Prevention Strategy¹³⁹ was developed to respond to this public health challenge. It recognises the need for investment in holistic and integrated approaches that helps individuals, families and communities have hope for, and optimism about, the future. An updated National Aboriginal and

¹³³ University of Sydney 2020

¹³⁴ Department of Health 2020b

¹³⁵ Dudgeon et al. 2020

¹³⁶ Dudgeon et al. 2020

¹³⁷ ABS 2017

¹³⁸ Dudgeon et al. 2017

¹³⁹ Dudgeon et al. 2016

Torres Strait Islander Suicide Prevention Strategy is currently being developed in a process led by Gayaa Dhuwi.

In addition to mainstream integrated approach interventions, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Suicide Prevention Evaluation Project (ATSISPEP) highlighted the need for community-led, locally-based and culturally appropriate 'upstream' preventative activities to address community-level challenges associated with suicide.

Further, ATSISPEP underlined the need for programs that build on cultural determinants of social and emotional wellbeing and its protective factors to have a positive impact against complex mental health challenges, including risks of suicide.¹⁴⁰

Recognising the intersectionality between mental health, suicide and substance dependence, the *National Strategic Framework for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples' Mental Health and Social and Emotional Wellbeing 2017-2023* requires the integration of mental health, alcohol and other drug, and suicide prevention services in communities.¹⁴¹ However, the Strategy needs a focused implementation plan that is properly costed and operationalised if it is to shape the mental health space.

Supporting youth leaders in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander suicide prevention efforts is another important approach to addressing this issue. An Empowerment and Accountability in Indigenous Youth Suicide Prevention Workshop identified this as a critical pathway, with supporting activities to include appropriate remuneration, community-based leadership training and 'stepping up' opportunities, and strategic mentoring opportunities from Elders and others.¹⁴²

Unfortunately, the new Closing the Gap targets have missed an opportunity to address suicide prevention in an holistic context of social and emotional wellbeing. While Target 14 will work towards a significant and sustained reduction in suicide rates for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, it is not supported by targets for improvement in other aspects of social and emotional wellbeing.

Gift of Gallang

The Gift of Gallang program in Inala Queensland emerged in response to local needs, as identified by a number of community based organisations, including Mission Australia. The need for creating hope, resilience and wellbeing in the community of Inala was evident after a cluster of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child and youth suicides occurred in 2016 among the local community. The wellbeing of individuals and families had been negatively impacted in the Inala region as a result of these deaths.

Two main components of the Gift of Gallang program were established, one being ongoing community engagement via cultural nights and the other a school-based prevention program targeted at primary school aged children (years 4-6).

Overall, the evaluation showed that the program had been successful in strengthening cultural identity, pride and sense of connection for families attending the cultural nights and students who participated in the Gift of Gallang program. For the program to have long-term outcomes, Mission Australia advocates that its ownership needs to remain within the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community and be progressed from being a pilot to an on-going project.

¹⁴⁰ Dudgeon et al. 2016

¹⁴¹ Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet 2017

¹⁴² Dudgeon et al. 2019

Alcohol and drugs

For some young people, drug and alcohol dependence can be a serious issue requiring access to effective and appropriate treatment. However, many treatment facilities are only available to those over 18 years of age and may be inappropriate for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people.

Access to culturally appropriate detoxification and rehabilitation facilities in or close to communities are vital to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people overcome the challenge of alcohol and drug dependence. This includes service provision that is respectful of young people's preferences around being supported by someone of the same gender.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-run and -controlled services, based on the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and their communities, have been shown to provide better access to care, make the health care provided more appropriate, provide a more holistic approach to better serve people with complex needs, and improve health outcomes.¹⁴³ However, where mainstream agencies are able to adapt to provide culturally appropriate and holistic approaches, these can also be effective.¹⁴⁴ In designing and delivering culturally appropriate services, mainstream agencies should work in partnership with community-led agencies wherever possible.

Youth-specific facilities that cater for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people, take a holistic approach to young people's needs, and provide a safe, secure and encouraging environment are much more likely to succeed long-term and should be invested in. Given the importance of family and community relationships in the lives of many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, the involvement of family and community members can be critical in achieving positive outcomes.¹⁴⁵ For example, CAAPS is a family-focused Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-run AOD program in the Northern Territory that provides youth AOD services in a family-focused setting.

CAAPS Aboriginal Corporation¹⁴⁶

CAAPS Aboriginal Corporation is an Aboriginal community-controlled organisation based in Darwin that provides counselling, social and emotional wellbeing services and residential AOD treatment for individuals and families from across the Northern Territory. CAAPS Youth Services provide day or live-in intensive assessment programs along with a residential substance treatment program for young people aged 12 to 24 years. The program was established to address issues related to trauma and subsequent volatile substance, alcohol or other drug use. Length of stay in the program is determined by assessing the young person's individual circumstances and progress against agreed goals.

The provision of aftercare is another important aspect of service delivery. Services need to support access to housing, employment, education and other community-based services for people who have recovered from alcohol and/or drug dependence. For example, Mission Australia's Drug and Alcohol Youth Service (DAYS) in WA provides follow up support for young people until they are 23 years of age.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander alcohol and drug workers play an important role in preventing and responding to alcohol and drug related harm and are supported by the *National Alcohol and other Drug Workforce Development Strategy* (NADWFDS).¹⁴⁷ Heavy workloads, challenges of isolation when working in remote areas, and dealing with clients with complex comorbidities and health and social issues make such positions a challenge.¹⁴⁸ Yet the status and pay of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander alcohol and drug workers often does not reflect the important role they have and difficulties they face.¹⁴⁹ More support for this workforce is required.

¹⁴³ NIDAC 2014

¹⁴⁴ NIDAC 2014

¹⁴⁵ NIDAC 2014

¹⁴⁶ CAAPS Aboriginal Corporation 2018

¹⁴⁷ National Centre for Education and Training on Addiction 2014

¹⁴⁸ National Centre for Education and Training on Addiction 2014

¹⁴⁹ National Centre for Education and Training on Addiction 2014

Body image

For young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, concerns about body image may be as a result of exposure to traumatic life situations and the experience of racial discrimination.¹⁵⁰ Other research has also highlighted the prevalence of body image concerns among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people, finding that they are more likely than their non-Indigenous peers to engage in strategies to lose weight, increase weight, and increase muscles¹⁵¹ and have at least as high rates of eating disorders.¹⁵²

Further research and tailored, culturally appropriate supports are needed for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people who are concerned about body image.

MENTAL HEALTH: POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The causes of population mental health challenges should be identified and solutions co-designed and co-implemented under Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community leadership, including ACCOs that deliver health services. In particular, the voices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people must be present in this work.
2. Community-led programs with flexible funding are needed to ensure that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people have access to culturally and age-appropriate mental health, suicide prevention and alcohol and other drug services that are in close proximity to their homes.
3. Technological capacity for the introduction of more widespread telehealth services requires development in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, including a national helpline that is designed and run by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to address the various mental health needs of young people.
4. The *National Strategic Framework for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples' Mental Health and Social and Emotional Wellbeing 2017-2023* and the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Suicide Prevention Strategy need to be properly funded and fully implemented to address mental health challenges.
5. More support is required for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander alcohol and drug workforce.
6. Further research and tailored, culturally appropriate supports are needed for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people who are concerned about body image.

Discrimination and bullying

The bullying data in the *Youth Survey 2019* provides vital information on the stresses that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people endure and their response to this, and an opportunity to reflect on how talking about 'bullying' can conceal destructive, uncivil, and unlawful forms of racist discrimination. Bullying may be a form of discrimination if it happens because of race,¹⁵³ and acts of racial discrimination are in breach of the Racial Discrimination Act (18C), which is unlawful and a violation of the human rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people.

One fifth of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people indicated that *bullying/emotional abuse* was of personal concern to them (20.0% compared with 14.0% of non-Indigenous young people). They were also more likely to have experienced bullying in the past year, with around one third of young Aboriginal women and one fifth of young Aboriginal men indicating they had been bullied.

Respondents also indicated that *discrimination* was a significant issue. Close to one in seven (16.8%) of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people identified *discrimination* as a personal concern (compared with 9.9% of non-Indigenous young people). Around a quarter also identified *equity and discrimination* as an important issue for Australia, as did a quarter of non-Indigenous respondents. A small proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents also expected *discrimination* to impact on the achievement

¹⁵⁰ Butterfly Foundation undated

¹⁵¹ McCabe et al. 2005

¹⁵² Hay & Carriage 2012

¹⁵³ See for e.g. Australian Human Rights Commission undated website b

of their post-school plans, but this was at about twice the rate of their non-Indigenous peers (4.6% compared with 2.7%).

The *Youth Survey 2019* did not ask about the type of discrimination that young people are concerned about, but racial discrimination is likely to be a primary concern for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people responding to the survey. In the *Youth Survey 2016*, which asked supplementary questions on this topic, of the four in 10 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people who reported experiencing discrimination, more than half reported discrimination on the basis of race or cultural background.

Although bullying is now recognised as a chronic social problem, impacting on the psycho-social health and wellbeing of minority children and youth in particular, the discourse around bullying can risk minimising the extent of this offence. Bullying is an ongoing and repeated misuse of power in relationships, and it can include harassment, violence and discrimination.¹⁵⁴ Acts of assault can be referred to as bullying (it may be described as 'physical bullying'), as can acts of psychological and emotional abuse, including instances of race hate (which may be described as 'verbal bullying'). Physical bullying can include acts of violence including serious offences like wounding and assault, including sexual assault.¹⁵⁵ By referring to these as 'bullying', it can minimise the harm caused, rather than recognising them as acts that interfere with young people's health, wellbeing, and right to be free from discrimination.

The consequences of racial discrimination and bullying on the social determinants of the health and wellbeing, and life chances, of young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are serious and ongoing. Individuals who are exposed to racism are much more likely than others to have anxiety, depression, be at suicide risk, and have poor overall mental health.¹⁵⁶

The Black Lives Matter movement has highlighted the institutional and personal forms of racism that exist in Australia, and that young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are subjected to on a widespread and chronic basis. Racial discrimination extends across Australian institutions, including schools, where persistent forms of racism are responsible for negative experiences of and engagement with education for many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people (see discussion in Education section). It is also a significant issue in workplaces.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people should be protected from racial discrimination and bullying at school, at work and in their community. With places of education identified as a significant site of bullying by survey respondents, schools need the resources to address bullying and racial discrimination, including intersectional and gendered forms of racism. Further professional training in this area for teachers would also be beneficial, as would the evaluation of specific anti-bullying programs.¹⁵⁷

Responses to online bullying for all young people are critically important, and a culturally appropriate resource to address cyberbullying for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people needs to be funded and developed.

Further investment is needed in community, organisational and media interventions to combat racial discrimination across Australia. This includes highlighting the impacts of racism as well as building knowledge and pride in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander history and culture. For example, beyondblue's Invisible Discriminator campaign highlights the impact of racism on the social and emotional wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Education initiatives are also needed to address the attitudes and behaviours of young people directly. Introducing these programs into schools is a critical mechanism for helping children and young people to better understand Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander history and culture.

¹⁵⁴ Bullying. No Way! 2020

¹⁵⁵ See Youth Advocacy Centre 2020 and Bullying. No Way! 2020

¹⁵⁶ Priest et al. 2011

¹⁵⁷ Rigby and Johnson 2016

Reconciliation Australia's Narragunnawali program

Reconciliation Australia's Narragunnawali program is designed to support early learning services, primary and secondary schools in Australia to develop environments that foster a higher level of knowledge and pride in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures and contributions. Participating schools and early learning services are assisted to find meaningful ways to increase respect, reduce prejudice and strengthen relationships between the wider Australian community and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Healing Foundation's Stolen Generations Resource Kit for Teachers and Students

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Healing Foundation's Stolen Generations Resource Kit for Teachers and Students has been created to educate young people about the Stolen Generations. It makes it easy for school communities to start the conversation and inform classroom discussions using facts, real examples and stories.

Cultural consultation and guidance from Stolen Generations survivors has been an essential part of this project. The Healing Foundation has also worked closely with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous teachers, parents, early childhood specialists and curriculum writers.

This teaching resource has been developed to introduce students from the first year of school through to Year 9 to the firsthand experiences of Stolen Generations survivors. While the policies and suffering of the Stolen Generations is only one part of the ongoing story of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, it is an essential one to learn and to teach so students have a full understanding of the history of Australia.

Racism. It Stops With Me

The Racism. It Stops With Me campaign from the Australian Human Rights Commission engages with organisations and communities to develop anti-racism activities, materials and educational tools to support change.

DISCRIMINATION AND BULLYING: POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Schools have a vital role to play in the elimination of racial discrimination and bullying. School curriculums should provide both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous children and young people with information about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures, both as a means of connecting to culture and a universal mechanism for increasing understanding of and reducing discrimination against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.
2. Further investment is needed in community, organisational and media interventions to combat discrimination across Australia.
3. Whole of school strategies are needed to prevent and respond to bullying, including classroom work on building empathy and inclusiveness, restorative practices, building resilience and education initiatives that address the attitudes and behaviours of young people directly to reduce discrimination. Strategies should be co-designed with students and parents.
4. Young people and their families should be aware of resources that support positive decision-making around strategies to deal with bullying, especially online bullying.
5. A culturally appropriate resource to address cyberbullying for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people needs to be funded and developed.

Disability

In the *Youth Survey 2019*, a total of 218 (13.8%) of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people reported living with a disability. While three quarters of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents indicated that their community was supportive of people living with a disability, around half also thought that people living with disability were treated unfairly. Significant proportions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents living with disability reported that their disability made it hard for them to *feel like you fit in, do everyday activities, do things in public places with friends, feel supported by other people, make choices and feel independent and move around the community*.

It is essential that services and supports provided to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are inclusive, accessible, culturally appropriate and work in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

The National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) is now a significant part of the disability service landscape in Australia. While there is a commitment to tailored Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander services in the NDIS *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Engagement Strategy*, it is unclear how this would be provided in the current market. Additional funding and support is required to develop the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander disability sector and ensure that ACCOs providing disability services can provide support to young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with disability. Information on the broader community and mainstream services and resources available is essential to ensure those young people who are not eligible for the NDIS are provided with adequate services.

Culturally appropriate written and other forms of information about disability specific support and services, including the NDIS, is of crucial importance in ensuring that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people and their families know about the supports that are available to them.

Additional outreach and engagement work also needs to be undertaken to ensure that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities are aware of the NDIS and the broader community and mainstream supports available to them.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander NDIS community engagement project

Mission Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander NDIS community engagement project in Perth, WA, was established in November 2019 to raise awareness of the National Disability Insurance Scheme while identifying and addressing challenges experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in accessing appropriate support and services. Mission Australia had identified a gap in the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people accessing the NDIS and sought funding to ensure that community engagement with the NDIS could be improved.

A team was established to facilitate linkages with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander service providers and community members and assist them to overcome challenges faced when accessing NDIS, as well as utilising supports. The engagement team identified organisations and agencies where they could deliver information sessions to their staff members who then passed on this information to the wider community. Highlights of the program include:

- Linkages between Mission Australia and Aboriginal Medical Services in working together to support common clients' access to the Scheme. This has provided families with direct support and assistance to gather necessary information that allows for the testing of eligibility.
- Cultural awareness training delivered to Local Area Coordinators. As well as building cultural knowledge this has also assisted each office to create welcoming and culturally appropriate meeting spaces.
- Material being developed in the local Noongar language to assist people living throughout the Perth metro region understand the NDIS, how to prepare for planning and how to use their funding.

DISABILITY: POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Services and supports provided to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people must be inclusive, accessible, culturally appropriate and work in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.
2. Funding is required for ongoing outreach and engagement efforts that support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to understand the disability supports available to them, including through the NDIS.
3. Further clarity is required on how the NDIS will ensure that NDIS services and supports will be tailored for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, as outlined in the NDIS Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Engagement Strategy.

Housing and homelessness

A supportive and stable home is important for young people's physical and psychological wellbeing. When young people have early experiences of homelessness, this has both immediate and long-lasting negative impacts on their education, physical and mental health, employment and housing outcomes.

The vast majority of young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who responded to the survey lived with their parents and indicated that their housing situation was adequate and stable. However, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents were more likely than their non-Indigenous peers to indicate a range of concerning housing situations, including living in out-of-home care, inadequate housing, unstable housing arrangements or homelessness.

Out-of-home care

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people are hugely overrepresented in out-of-home care (OOHC) settings across Australia. For many Aboriginal people, this has resonance with the experience of the Stolen Generations, and for many people '... casework practice reinforces the memory of the authoritarian state that dominated and subjugated Aboriginal lives during the protection era. It animates real fear.'¹⁵⁸

Nationally, at 30 June 2019, 44,906 children were in OOHC, of whom 40% were Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.¹⁵⁹ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander care leavers are less likely to have finished school, are less likely to go on to further education and training, and are disproportionately represented in the youth criminal justice system¹⁶⁰ and among those experiencing homelessness.¹⁶¹

A large number of inquiries and reviews have been conducted into Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in OOHC over the past decades, with governments failing to address their full sets of recommendations. Governments need to implement the full range of recommendations made by these inquiries and revisit the *Bringing Them Home* report as the basis for further action, including the establishment of national standards for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in care.¹⁶²

Given the traumatic history of the Stolen Generations and the ongoing failure of child protection systems with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, it is critically important that engagement with children, families and communities is at the centre of child protection responses and that it contributes to culturally appropriate supports and responses. Mission Australia supports the full implementation of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Placement Principle and its recognition of the vital importance of connection to family,

¹⁵⁸ Davis, M p.xvi 2019

¹⁵⁹ Productivity Commission 2020b

¹⁶⁰ Australian Institute of Family Studies 2016

¹⁶¹ Council to Homeless Persons 2014

¹⁶² SNAICC 2015

community, culture and Country in child welfare policy and practice and the need to increase the level of self-determination of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in child welfare decisions.¹⁶³

Central Australian Aboriginal Congress' Nurse Family Partnership Program and Family Support Services, Northern Territory¹⁶⁴

Central Australian Aboriginal Congress delivers a range of child and family services, including evidence-informed early childhood health and development programs and parenting and family support programs. The Family Partnership Program (FPP) is run in partnership with the Australian Nurse-Family Partnership Program. It is a voluntary maternal and child home visiting service for mothers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children (during pregnancy and up to two years post birth). Nurses and Aboriginal community workers support mothers to stay healthy during pregnancy, make their homes safe for them and their families, access relevant services, set goals and work out ways to reach them, develop job skills or continue education and connect with other mothers. An evaluation of this program found that it had significant positive impacts on preventing child neglect and Aboriginal children entering out-of-home care.

The Family Support Services program aims to prevent child neglect and entries into out-of-home care by working with highly vulnerable families, using evidenced-informed programs focused on primary and secondary prevention. This program also has significant positive impacts, with only one out of 153 children supported during 2018 being placed in out-of-home care.

Housing adequacy and homelessness

Overcrowding is a serious issue that has been linked to health, safety and child protection risks and poor educational outcomes. A large proportion (70%) of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who were classified as homeless on Census night in 2016 were living in severely crowded dwellings,¹⁶⁵ although the relationship between homelessness and crowded housing is acknowledged as complex for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and related to family and cultural responsibilities.¹⁶⁶

Mission Australia recognises the need for a range of policy and service responses to overcrowding and homelessness among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people, including the development of a national plan to end homelessness, early intervention and prevention measures, effective and targeted supports for those who do enter homelessness, and an adequate supply of affordable and social housing.

As an overall measure, the Commonwealth should develop a national plan to end homelessness in conjunction with the States and Territories and in collaboration with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. The plan should have a strong focus on prevention and rapid access to supports including for young people and should address the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people among the homeless population.

For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people, as for their non-Indigenous peers, responses that either prevent homelessness or intervene early in the homelessness pathway are critical, as is the provision of appropriate housing and wraparound supports when homelessness does occur.

Preventing exits into homelessness from institutional care is a critical approach to homelessness among young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people are significantly overrepresented in both the OOH and juvenile justice systems, comprising about 40% of children in OOH¹⁶⁷ and more than half (53%) of all young people in detention in Australia.¹⁶⁸ Research has shown strong links between OOH, juvenile justice and homelessness, with young people who are involved in

¹⁶³ SNAICC 2017

¹⁶⁴ Family Matters 2019

¹⁶⁵ ABS 2018

¹⁶⁶ ABS 2013

¹⁶⁷ Productivity Commission 2020b, figures as at 30 June 2019

¹⁶⁸ AIHW 2020, figures as at reference night in 2019

any one of these systems having an increased risk of being involved in the other two.¹⁶⁹ Subsequent analyses have also shown that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people are overrepresented among young people who are involved in two or more of these systems.¹⁷⁰

Young people leaving these and other institutional settings, including hospitals and mental health facilities, need intensive supports when integrating back to the community. State and Territory governments should adopt a 'zero tolerance' approach to young people becoming homeless when they exit any form of state care. Supports need to be provided to young people well before they exit these institutions and governments, as designated guardians of young people, should be held accountable for these outcomes over the medium term.

The extension of support for all care leavers until 21 years would have a significant impact on a major stream of vulnerable young people becoming homeless,¹⁷¹ including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people. Mission Australia is a member of the Home Stretch campaign¹⁷² which advocates for such an extension in each State and Territory.

Reconnect is another early intervention strategy that works to prevent homelessness by intervening early with families and young people to stabilise and improve their housing situation and improve their level of engagement with family, education, training, employment and their local community. The case study below illustrates the positive outcomes across a range of domains that early intervention services such as Reconnect can support, including improved personal health, relationships, safety and community connectedness.

Mission Australia has been collecting outcomes data across a range of services, including Reconnect services, to support continuous service improvement. One of the key sets of questions in the Client Wellbeing Survey is a validated measure of subjective wellbeing, the Personal Wellbeing Index (PWI).¹⁷³ This index is designed to be sensitive to fluctuations in a person's circumstances and encompasses the constructs of satisfaction with the following domains: standard of living, health, achieving, relationships, safety, community and future security. We also collect information about a range of other outcome areas, which for Reconnect services includes housing, family relationships, engagement with education/training and knowledge, skills and behaviour.

Case study: Maddy*

Maddy is a young Aboriginal woman who was referred to Mission Australia's Reconnect service in Whyalla, South Australia. She was referred to the service by her school when she was 16 years old. At the time of referral, Maddie was dealing with a number of issues including mental health issues and family conflict that impacted on her education. She had witnessed domestic and family violence growing up and had family members who were drug dependent.

At the time of her referral Maddy indicated that she intended to address her mental health issues including self-harm and work towards achieving her education and employment goals. Her case manager made a number of referrals and accompanied her to headspace for an initial assessment. Maddy indicated that headspace was not the right service for her. Her case manager then worked with the school staff including the school counsellor, to focus on her mental health issues.

The case manager engaged with Maddy's mother and the school to better understand her needs, as well as Maddy's needs. Maddy's mother indicated that with one sibling dependent on drugs, being at home was disrupting Maddy's education and was supportive of her daughter's decision to find independent accommodation.

¹⁶⁹ AIHW 2012

¹⁷⁰ AIHW 2015b

¹⁷¹ MacKenzie et al. 2020

¹⁷² Home Stretch Campaign 2020

¹⁷³ International Wellbeing Group 2013

Maddy did not have identity documents, preventing her from opening bank accounts and accessing financial support. With the support of her case manager Maddy was able to get her birth certificate and other identity documents, open a bank account and successfully apply for income support payments.

She was also linked with a career counsellor who assisted Maddy to develop a resume and build her confidence. Her case manager also worked with Maddy to get her a learner's license. Maddy has recently exited from the service, and she is still working with her mental health and career counsellors and is linked in with Housing Support Services whilst waiting for independent housing.

*name has been changed for privacy

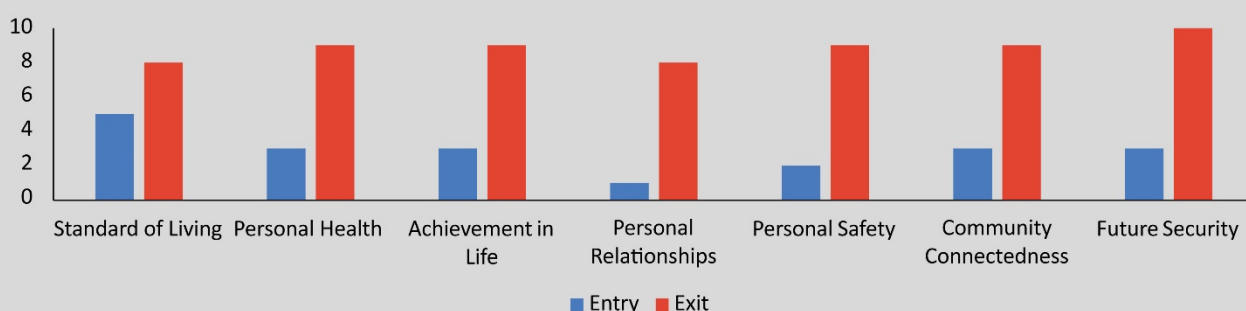
Case study

Attended Reconnect
Whyalla, SA



Aboriginal
Female
Aged 16

Personal Wellbeing Index Domain Scores at Entry and Exit



Improved wellbeing and mental health



Increased in total PWI score from **28.53** at entry to **88.52** at exit
Sense of control increased from **3** at entry to **8** at exit

Improved knowledge, skills and behaviour



Case plan goals **reached**
Confident to deal with issues independently at exit

Improved family relationships



Family functioning improved from **poor** to **fair**

Improved engagement with education/training



Confidence to achieve study and/or work goals increased from **slightly confident** to **very confident**

Stable housing



Accommodation situation **improved** at exit
Financial needs **mostly met** at exit

Once young people have entered into homelessness, effective, targeted and culturally appropriate supports are required to help them move out of homelessness and into stable housing.

Supported accommodation coupled with intensive case management and coordinated supports including educational supports, such as the Youth Foyer model, may be an appropriate option for some young people.

Youth Foyer model

The Youth Foyer model assists young people, usually aged 16-24 years, to engage in education and employment, and gradually to reduce their dependence on social services. Youth Foyers generally have self-contained accommodation, onsite support workers, education programs, variable levels of support where a young person can progress to more independent living, onsite facilities and employment supports. Participation in education, training and employment is a condition of the accommodation. In these ways and because of their focus on independence, Youth Foyers are different from traditional supported accommodation models and suit a specific cohort of young people who are ready to intensively engage with education and employment.

Improving the housing supply is another critical approach to addressing homelessness. Increasing housing for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people and their families will not only reduce homelessness, but also improve health and education outcomes while ensuring that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people can receive the benefit of strong support from their families and communities.

However, due to the increasing demand for social and affordable housing, young people are less likely to qualify for priority access to social housing. Considering this gap in demand and access to social housing, there is a need to develop youth-specific social housing options that provide the appropriate levels of support that young people need, while scaling up rents over time as young people progress through education or training and gain access to employment.¹⁷⁴ This housing should be co-designed with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people to ensure that it is culturally appropriate and meets their needs.

Given the impact of poverty as a driver of homelessness, ensuring that income support payments are adequate to keep people out of poverty are critical. A permanent increase to income support is required to assist young people to remain stably housed.

HOUSING AND HOMELESSNESS: POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Governments need to revisit the *Bringing Them Home* report as the basis for further action, including the establishment of national standards for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in care.
2. The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Placement Principle needs to be implemented in full in each jurisdiction.
3. The Australian Government needs to lead the development of a national plan to end homelessness, alongside State and Territory Governments, with clear targets including a special focus on ending youth homelessness and addressing the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people among the homeless population.
4. Governments should replicate and fund youth-specific, culturally appropriate programs that prevent Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people from becoming homeless and provide them with appropriate, stable forms of housing.
5. Governments need to adopt a whole-of-government approach to prevent young people becoming homeless when they exit all forms of state care including out of home care, hospitals, drug and alcohol facilities, detention centres and mental health institutions.
6. Governments need to extend support to all young people leaving out of home care to 21 years across all States and Territories and mandate 'care leaving plans' for all young people leaving out of home care with clear measures in relation to long-term, stable and sustainable housing.
7. Governments should consider funding Youth Foyer models to address homelessness and engagement with education, training and employment among young people.
8. A permanent increase to income support payments is required to help young people remain connected to stable housing.

¹⁷⁴ MacKenzie et al. 2020

Education

Education is strongly linked to a range of positive outcomes for young people including health, employment, income and social capital. Improving the engagement of young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in education has been at the forefront of policy efforts for a number of years. It is included in the Closing the Gap targets relating to participation in early childhood education, attainment of Year 12 or equivalent qualification, completion of a tertiary qualification, and engagement in post-school employment, education and training.

Education participation and study satisfaction

A large majority of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people were engaged in either full-time (83.1%) or part-time (5.8%) study. A significant minority, however, were not engaged in study at all (11.0%, compared with 3.5% of non-Indigenous respondents).

Of those who were still at school, the vast majority indicated that they were going to complete Year 12 (89.7% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students compared with 96.4% of non-Indigenous students).

More than half (56.5%) were either *satisfied* or *very satisfied* with their studies, and about the same proportion (57.1%) indicated that they highly valued *study satisfaction*. These numbers are encouraging, but indicate lower rates of satisfaction than their non-Indigenous peers, suggesting that schools need to do more to fully engage Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

Supporting young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to remain engaged with education is a key platform in improving educational outcomes. Challenges to attendance and retention can be magnified by schools' lack of knowledge of local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community cultures and histories, and their failure to develop culturally appropriate relationships with the children, young people and their families.¹⁷⁵

Racial discrimination against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people in schools has significant negative impacts, including withdrawing from school, de-identifying as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, emotional distress and internalisation of negative beliefs about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander intelligence and academic performance.¹⁷⁶ The incorporation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge, languages, cultures and histories in the school curriculum is a key strategy to reduce discrimination in school settings.¹⁷⁷

Parental engagement in education is another key factor in children succeeding at school and results in a range of positive educational outcomes for children.¹⁷⁸ However, creating partnerships between families and schools to support children's education can be challenging for some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families, including where parents felt unwelcome in the school, where parents themselves had a negative experience of schooling or where the school has a lack of cultural knowledge.

Successful strategies for promoting parental engagement in children's education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families can include school staff relating to parents and extended family outside of school and in creative ways, including through involving them in art, dance, song, storytelling and language, and ensuring that teachers have access to professional learning in Aboriginal cultures.¹⁷⁹ Schools need adequate support and resourcing to be able to implement these and other locally-developed strategies for family engagement.

School Aboriginal Liaison Officers¹⁸⁰ can also play a critical role in working with students, teachers and family together and can promote positive educational experiences and outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people. They can advocate for children and young people who might otherwise fall through the

¹⁷⁵ Brackertz 2016

¹⁷⁶ Moodie et al. 2019

¹⁷⁷ Jackson 2015

¹⁷⁸ Emerson et al. 2012

¹⁷⁹ Woodrow et al. 2016

¹⁸⁰ Or Aboriginal Education Officers. The title varies by State/Territory.

cracks of the education system. Aboriginal Liaison Officers can help to provide a bridge between school and community, but need support from the school to fully engage and work with the community, not just within the school.¹⁸¹

Early intervention in a school-based setting is important for identifying students who are at risk of poor educational outcomes. In Mission Australia's service experience, some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are failing to be identified early as being at risk of poor educational outcomes (for example, hearing or literacy difficulties not being diagnosed at an early age). Research indicates that many children who are behind at certain developmental stages will recover to succeed in later stages, suggesting that schools and other services can positively influence the educational trajectories of young people if they are able to identify those at risk and intervene.¹⁸²

Where young people are at risk of disengaging from school, culturally appropriate and targeted support programs are needed to re-engage them with education and training pathways.

Girls on the GO and Boys on the BOUNCE

Dandenong and District Aborigines Cooperative Limited (DDACL) is sub-contracted by Mission Australia through the Communities for Children program to deliver the 'Girls on the Go' and 'Boys on the Bounce' programs to facilitate school engagement with and support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and families. This is the only program of its kind in the City of Greater Dandenong, as such it provides an essential support to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in a culturally safe and supportive environment. Participants are referred through local primary schools, local services and the DDACL

Girls on the GO program is a culturally tailored program for Aboriginal girls to help maintain their participation in school while supporting girls through later primary years and the transition to secondary school. Boys on the BOUNCE runs a similar culturally tailored program for Aboriginal boys which supports their school engagement through later primary years and the transition to secondary school.

Both programs also develop complementary education/information and support for parents, grandparents and partners, and facilitate referrals into other services offered by the DDACL and additional appropriate mainstream services.

The program incorporates a range of different activities which support students with: social and emotional well-being; healthy eating; trust and confidence; physical activity; reconnecting to culture; body image; personal safety; and finish with a celebration at the end of the program.

The programs are delivered through an empowerment and positive role modelling approach. Facilitators encourage the participants to actively make decisions about their own health needs, which supports the continuation of positive practices at the completion of the program.

The flexible approach of this program provides ongoing support and mentoring for children experiencing challenges. The responsive nature of the program has been proven to support children achieve positive outcomes, including increased school engagement.

Post-school plans

A high proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people were either *extremely* or *very confident* that they would be able to achieve their post-school plans (43.3%) and a further four in ten (42.1%) were somewhat confident. However, around half (53.1%) of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people who responded to the survey anticipated challenges to their plans for post-school work and study.

¹⁸¹ Woodrow et al. 2016

¹⁸² Lamb et al. 2015 and The Smith Family 2018

Similarly, to their non-Indigenous peers, the top three challenges identified were *academic ability* (16.2%), *mental health* (14.2%) and *financial difficulty* (12.7%). Young women were also concerned that *family responsibilities* would be a challenge (14.4%).

The challenges that young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people identified to achieving their post-school goals can be addressed through a range of potential measures.

Supporting young people with career guidance and planning at school will assist them to achieve their post-school goals. This will be particularly critical in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, which is likely to drive high levels of youth unemployment. High-quality career guidance will help young people to identify their career goals, navigate an uncertain jobs market, and connect them with training, work experience and employment assistance.¹⁸³

Four in ten (40.1%) Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander school students planned to *go to university* after finishing school, compared with 66.7% of non-Indigenous respondents. High-achieving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students are less likely than high-achieving non-Indigenous students to aspire to go to university. A number of factors may contribute to this, including geographic remoteness and bonds to community, family and culture, social and racial isolation, and financial costs, and universities should focus on removing these barriers in order to address the underrepresentation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students at university.¹⁸⁴

Other post-school options also need to be viable for those who do not want to seek a university education.¹⁸⁵ That means having appropriate entry pathways and support for those wanting to go to TAFE or college, seek an apprenticeship or go directly into work. Access to TAFE and apprenticeships should be improved, particularly in regional and remote areas. Further, vocational options should be better and earlier integrated into the school curriculum to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students through these pathways.

Aboriginal Access Centre, TAFE SA

TAFE South Australia's (SA) Aboriginal Access Centre provides support for Aboriginal students to access and participate in TAFE. This includes individual case management and tutorial support. When an Aboriginal student participates in the centre's programs, a Training Support Officer is assigned to them for the duration of their course. The Training Support Officer works with the young person to develop an individual learning plan that maps their education pathway. The Aboriginal Access Centre offers a variety of programs through many TAFE SA sites, including regional and remote locations.

Institute for Urban Indigenous Health (IUIH) School Based Traineeships

School-based trainees work across a range of settings and to train as allied health assistants. Trainees complete one or two days a week of work experience and rotate each term through the Deadly Choices health promotion team, the Work it Out chronic disease rehabilitation program and children's therapy services.

Trainees receive a comprehensive introduction to work as an allied health assistant, and are mentored by Allied Health and Health promotion staff.

IUIH is committed to mentoring trainees through their traineeship and into work and/or further study after training. Over half of the 2013 trainee graduates are currently enrolled in the University of Queensland Tertiary preparation program. IUIH is partnering with University of Queensland to launch Deadly Pathways. This program provides intensive support for Indigenous children from disadvantaged families to access practical pathways into secondary and tertiary education.

¹⁸³ ACOSS 2020

¹⁸⁴ Gore 2017

¹⁸⁵ Shergold et al. 2020

Lack of financial resources can be a major inhibitor for young people in accessing further education and training, particularly those from low socioeconomic backgrounds or young people from rural and regional areas who may need to relocate to pursue their study or career goals. A permanent increase to Youth Allowance payments is a critical step in supporting young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to remain engaged with education and training.

Further investment in scholarship programs and targeted supports for under-represented groups is also required to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people's engagement in education. The 2017 Federal Government Indigenous Student Success Program (ISSP), for example, aims to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to meet the challenges of university by offering scholarships, tutorial assistance, mentoring and establishing safe cultural spaces on campuses.

EDUCATION: POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Schools must be supported to provide education in local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture and languages, to build relationships with students and their families and to engage parents and other family members in their children's education.
2. Early intervention strategies are critical for identifying and supporting children and young people at risk of disengaging from school.
3. Culturally appropriate and targeted support programs should be funded to help young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people re-engage with schools.
4. Universities should focus on removing barriers to participation for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, including geographic remoteness and bonds to community, family and culture, social and racial isolation, and financial costs.
5. Vocational options should be better and earlier integrated into the school curriculum to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students through these pathways, and access to training should be improved particularly in regional and remote areas.
6. Financial barriers to post-school pathways need to be addressed through increases to income support payments and an expansion of scholarship programs.

Employment

The employment profile of respondents to the *Youth Survey 2019* indicates that over one third of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people were employed, the majority in part-time roles. They were, however, more likely than non-Indigenous students to be *not in paid employment but looking for work* (43.0% compared with 33.8%).

Other results from the *Youth Survey 2019* indicate that employment is a key issue for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people. Over one half (54.6%) placed a high value on *getting a job* - a higher proportion than non-Indigenous respondents (46.3%) - and while they were somewhat less likely than non-Indigenous respondents to highly value *financial security* (50.5% compared with 55.6%), they were more likely to be personally concerned about it (21.2% compared with 17.6%).

A range of challenges are likely to impact on the employment of some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people, particularly in regional or remote areas. There are fewer labour market opportunities in regional and remote communities. Family responsibilities can also challenge participation in work and education, particularly for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people, and some but not all of these responsibilities are cultural.

As noted in the Discrimination and bullying section, racial discrimination can also impact on young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the workplace. While direct labour market discrimination is one factor contributing to the gap in employment rates between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous young people, discrimination can also be experienced in other areas such as within the criminal

justice or education systems, which can have an indirect effect on employment outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.¹⁸⁶

To address issues that have a direct impact on Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander young people engaging with employment, a range of measures must be co-designed with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. This includes establishing programs which are driven by demand, flexible in scope, and provide intensive person-centred mentoring and employment support, while also being culturally appropriate for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people.

Social enterprises can also play an important role in supporting young people in the workforce. Social enterprise programs provide work and education opportunities for people who are often excluded from the workforce based on long-term unemployment or disengagement from schooling, or experiencing generational disadvantage and/or disengagement from the community. These programs also reduce the risk of social isolation, alcohol and drug dependence related issues and engagement with the criminal justice system for the young people involved.

In 2020, we are seeing the immediate effects of the global pandemic COVID-19 on employment, with strong restrictive measures having a substantial effect on the economy while time-limited government support packages work to mitigate against its impact. Unemployment in Australia has risen to above 7.6% in recent months, and is predicted to rise higher among the entire adult population and higher still for young people. The impacts of unemployment are felt inequitably by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people due to their experiences of racial discrimination and other barriers to workforce participation.

As a support mechanism to help Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people and their families get through periods of unemployment and remain connect to the labour market, income support payments including Youth Allowance, Jobseeker and Commonwealth Rent Assistance should be increased.

EMPLOYMENT: POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1.** A permanent increase to income support payments is needed for all young people and their families, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people and families, to keep them out of poverty and support them to maintain a stable connection with education, employment and housing.
- 2.** Targeted employment services that are engaging, culturally sensitive and youth-orientated should be made available to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people and should be able to cater for the varying and complex needs of individuals.
- 3.** Measures should be adopted to replicate social enterprise models that provide flexible training and apprenticeship opportunities for young people and respond to local needs.

¹⁸⁶ Biddle et al. 2013

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