



*The Youth Health Forum is a network of over fifty young leaders from across the country who came together in September 2018 to discuss our perspectives on the current health system. We are not health policy experts, but experience matters. Our views highlight key areas that will help shape the health of Australians in the future.*

## **Our vision for the future**

The Youth Health Forum, believe young people need more say in the health system. Good health begins early in life yet young people have little say about what works best for them.

We believe that long-term changes to the health system must begin with policies, laws, funding models, and research priorities that are determined by young people.

Our health system is not keeping up with the needs of an increasingly sick and aging population. Rates of preventable disease are rising. Young people are increasingly time poor and face unprecedented living pressures. This is something that we, as future leaders and healthcare users, worry about.

We need the government to invest in keeping Australians healthy and to focus on making the health system more supportive and easier to navigate.

Consumers should be included in decision-making and at all levels of the health system to ensure that the support provided is what people want and need. At a minimum, consumer involvement should include leadership, system design, peer support worker, and educator roles. Young people have views on the health system and want to be included and equipped to participate in the decisions affecting us.

## **Empowering and equipping young people to help themselves**

We believe that health is a life-long investment. Good habits start early. Providing young people with knowledge, tools and resources to manage their health and well-being should be at the heart of any health strategy. Investment in education and preventative health is cost-effective and reduces the burden of ill health on society.

Providing young people with reliable health information, teaching an effective and engaging national health curriculum, and implementing technology and research initiatives would make a difference to the way we experience the health system now and into the future.

## **Designing services for people, not providers**

We believe that health services should be supportive and accessible for everyone regardless of financial need and personal circumstances. The focus should be on what the person needs, not what they can afford. People should receive respectful and effective healthcare regardless of their culture.

The need is greater than ever for safe, appropriate and accessible mental health services which meet the unique needs of people aged 12 to 25. More youth specific services with greater investment are needed and the transition for those moving between the paediatric and adult systems warrants greater attention.

## Strategies for Action

*Genuine change based on deep consultation with healthcare users could take years: Australians cannot afford to delay change. The Youth Health Forum called for immediate steps to strengthen the voice of youth in health care, including school surveys to ascertain students' health needs, support for more peer-supported youth-friendly mental health services, transition measures to bridge the gap between paediatric and adult health services, and focused mental health training for emergency staff.*

### Work with young people and their communities to refine health education

Parents, communities, cultural leaders and educators need to understand what young people are interested in and their current perceptions of health before they can build healthy behaviours that will continue from childhood to adulthood. A good place to start is to involve young people in designing the national health education curriculum.

**Action:** *Conduct a longitudinal study surveying what Year 7 students want from health education and repeat the research at various points during their high school years.*

**Support:** *Funding for the Youth Health Forum to design and conduct this study in collaboration with a research organisation such as the Centre of Research Excellence in Adolescent Health.*

### Ease the transition to adult services

For frequent users of the health system, the transition between a very supportive paediatric system and an adult system can be difficult to navigate and result in poor experiences of care. The movement can see young people disengaging from the system during an important time and it is essential that health professionals are given more power and resources to make this a gradual, collaborative and flexible process if needed.

**Action:** *A national review of current local transition initiatives to identify areas that need support and funding to provide better transition services. A national consultation with consumers, Local Hospital Networks, community health services, General Practitioners, and Primary Health Networks.*

**Support:** *Funding to conduct the review and consultation, and a commitment to implement the recommendations around transition support services. Consumers must be involved at all stages.*

### Embrace lived experience and peer-support in youth mental health services

Peer support services have potential to meet high levels of demand for alternative, approachable, and youth friendly mental health services. These services can offer a platform where safe and culturally appropriate sharing can happen, and trained peer support workers are recognised and employed as part of a comprehensive mental health team.

**Action:** *Youth Health Forum to partner with headspace to develop mental health peer support guidelines.*

**Support:** *Funding for the implementation and expansion of online and face to face mental health peer support services through a national service provider such as headspace.*

### Emergency services for mental health crises

People experiencing a mental health crisis can interact with police or paramedics in their transport to the emergency department. Mental health training is part of basic training for all first responders, including emergency department workers, however, there is variation in their practical experience and the depth of their mental health training. Young emergency service workers at the Youth Health Forum expressed concern that their basic training had been inadequate in providing a sensitive response to the growing number of people experiencing a mental health crisis. This recommendation aims to raise the base level of mental health training that first responders receive.

**Action:** *A commitment to fund mental health first aid training for first responders (police, paramedics and emergency department workers) in providing a sensitive response and keeping people safe while connecting them to appropriately trained mental health professionals e.g. psychologist, mental health nurse.*

**Support:** *Funding for training and resources to improve the first response, support and transfer of people experiencing a mental health crisis.*