



Youth health leaders call for action on the “missing middle”

MEDIA RELEASE Wednesday 20 October 2021

Young leaders have released a Call to Action to promote a much stronger role for young Australians in the design of health services to meet the “missing middle” needs of teenagers and young adults in health policy.

The Call to Action seeks innovations including the creation of a youth healthcare card, a National Youth Commissioner and education in schools to promote understanding of the health system.

The call flows from the recent Youth Health Forum National Summit which brought together hundreds of advocates and young people from across Australia to discuss the health system challenges experienced by people aged 18 to 30.

This age group has been identified in the report *Life Transitions and Youth Pathways to Health services* report as the “missing middle” in healthcare, experiencing limited engagement in the health sector and worsening outcomes.

“Changes need to be made within the health system to ensure that young people are able to live their healthiest lives. For these changes to be effective and sustainable, we are directly engaging and listening to young health consumers who are most impacted by the system,” the spokesperson for the Youth Health Forum, Roxxanne MacDonald, said.

“At the Summit we identified some clear values that the young people in attendance held as key aspects of improving youth health. The values the forum identified were:

- Equity
- Person focused care
- Sustainability
- Inclusivity
- Active Participation

“Throughout the summit, we discussed the concept of co-design, participation and what it entails. We identified that consumer participation and co-design were important aspects of service delivery, policy development and health research.

“One of the strongest concerns that came out of the 2021 YHF summit was the lack of youth voices in Parliament and federal bodies, particularly on youth relevant issues. The concern is that young people are not able to effectively be represented in the halls of power.

“The patchy community response to the negative consequences of the COVID pandemic on the mental health of many young people has been one example of the failure of the health system to respond promptly and effectively to what has been a huge issue for many young people,” Ms MacDonald said.

The CEO of CHF, Leanne Wells, said the enthusiastic response by young leaders at the Youth Health Forum summit to youth-oriented initiatives was evidence of the real appetite for change.

“Health policy makers do struggle to engage with young people in meaningful ways, be it in the use of existing health services or involving young people in authentic co-design. The Call To Action, by bringing considerations for and by young people into that policy making, would respond to what is a missing link in health,” Ms Wells said.

The Call To Action has identified five headline recommendations for proposals to move health policy to become more responsive to the needs of young Australians.

- **Health service navigation:** The creation of a secular education role to teach school age young people about health systems navigation and use, and nurse navigators within the health system to guide young people.
- **Youth voices in governance:** A National Youth commissioner, and changes to the subsidisation of mental health services and the introduction of a youth healthcare card.

- **Economic participation:** Back the Raise the Rate campaign and call on the federal government to raise income support for young people. Also call changes to the subsidisation of mental health services and the introduction of a youth healthcare card
- **Diversity and inclusion:** Medical training colleges, peak medical and allied health bodies, and the Australian Medical Council to work with health consumers to establish accreditation standards for working with diverse communities. And the Introduction of LGBTQI+ questions on the census and other data capturing initiatives; and for the universal service guarantee to include mobile coverage across Australia.
- **Climate change:** That the federal government address the duty of care on climate change with a national strategy on climate, health and well-being for Australia and for a strengthening of health systems in rural and regional communities in preparation for climate change impacts

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