

Young voices for a healthy future

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Young consumer health leaders have described their concerns and prescribed some solutions in the latest edition of the Consumers Health Forum ejournal, [*Health Voices*](#).

Anxiety about the climate, mental health services for young people and how young Australians can take more control of their futures are among the themes covered in the new edition.

It follows [the Call to Action](#) resulting from the recent Youth Health Forum national summit. *Health Voices* includes articles by presenters at the summit.

Luke Catania, Youth Health Forum national coordinator, writes that the Summit produced three over-arching program themes: What issues young people currently face, Building skills and capacity for young people and Setting the future focuses of youth health.

“We focused on ensuring that young people were at the core of any discussion or event on the day. There was a clear theme of giving power over to the young consumers and letting them take control,” Mr Catania said.

Milly Burgess, of the Climate and Health Alliance, writes that eco-anxiety is increasingly common among children and young people globally. She cites a recent survey of 10,000 16-25 year olds from across the globe, almost half of whom said that their feelings about climate change negatively affected their daily lives. This isn’t surprising when the same

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survey showed that three quarters of young people believe that the “future is frightening” and more than half believe that “humanity is doomed.”

While some politicians have recently suggested that climate activism is “alarmist” and can “cause mental health problems for young people, feelings of anxiety or distress about the climate crisis are entirely valid and reasonable given the trajectory we are on for catastrophic global warming, says Ms Burgess.

“We know that taking action on climate change, no matter how small, can help us to manage our own distress. Acting personally and collectively can contribute to climate solutions and can be the best antidote to despair and helplessness.”

David Titeu a youth health ambassador, and member of Youth Health Forum and CHF’s Mental Health Consumer Special Interest Group, says In the area of youth mental health, 15 years of investment appears to have done little. “Mental health inquiries are more frequent than iPhone updates, yet on many indicators, we seem to be going backwards.”

What is needed is a comprehensive, community-driven approach to mental health and wellbeing that provides support for families, jobs, education that goes beyond only seeing a medical professional, Mr Titeu says.

The [recent data from UNICEF Australia](#) has demonstrated that young people are concerned about their lack of voice in decision-making and in

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being negatively stereotyped. Providing children and young people with a voice on their experiences has never been more important. These individuals need to be working hand-in-hand with policy makers to ensure services are personalised and interconnected

Neil Pharaoh, a consultant with experience in community campaigning, says young people need to realise they can wield power. It's a matter of organisation. Fewer than two per cent of young Australians, by joining join the Liberal/National Party or Labor Party would be able to together control almost every elected position in Australia. That could shift the dial for both major parties for decades to come – around healthcare, environment, education and all the other causes that young Australian's feel they are missing out on, says Neil

The CEO of Consumers Health Forum, Leanne Wells, says that given the challenging issues confronting young people, the Youth Health Forum Summit presented a notable opportunity for young leaders to discuss their issues and solutions.

“Against the backdrop of the pandemic, life is not easy for many young people, whether it be concern about jobs, housing and/or mental health. And over-shadowing these issues is apprehension for their future on an Earth transformed by climate change.

“These gloomy considerations however failed to dampen the enthusiasm and creativity on display at the Summit. The Summit has vindicated the aspirations that prompted the founding of the Youth Health Forum with CHF support three years ago. Those aims included providing a voice for the “missing middle” in health care and to harness the energy and ideas of young Australians for better health care,” Ms Wells said.

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