

# 2017 AUSTRALIAN YOUTH REPRESENTATIVE CONSULTATION REPORT



**O'CONNOR**

6 CLEAN WATER AND SANITATION



7 AFFORDABLE AND CLEAN ENERGY

# ABOUT

**THE YOUTH REPRESENTATIVE TO THE UN IS A ROLE APPOINTED ANNUALLY BY UN YOUTH AUSTRALIA IN PARTNERSHIP WITH THE DEPARTMENT OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND TRADE.**

**R**unning since 1999, the Youth Representative holds an extensive, nationwide consultation tour to engage with and discover the issues that are most important to young Australians.

During the tour, the Youth Representative tours the country, engaging and collaborating with young Australians through extensive consultation with students, community organisations and other institutions, in an effort to identify the issues that are most important to youth across the nation.

After the Consultation, the Youth Representative travels to New York as a member of the Australian Mission to the UN where they will attend the the UN General Assembly,

presenting the findings of the Consultation to the General Assembly's Third Committee.

Paige O'Connor is the 2017 Youth Representative to the United Nations. She is passionate about the role young people can play in international affairs, and educating their peers.

In 2015 and 2016, Paige was recognised for her work by Pro Bono Australia as the youngest ever recipient of the 'Impact 25: The 25 Most Influential People in the Social Sector' award. In 2017, Paige was named as a state finalist for the NSW Young Woman of The Year award.

With some of the team of UN Youth WA volunteers who helped facilitate the WA elements of the Consultation.



Delegates at UN Youth Australia's National Conference held in Perth in 2017.

Presentation of Australia's Youth Statement to the UN General Assembly. In the company of Australia's Permanent Ambassador to the UN- Gillian Bird, and Senator Gavin Marshall.



You can find more stories, photos, and data by following along online, or emailing the Youth Representative with a request.

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# FROM THE YOUTH REPRESENTATIVE

PAIGE O'CONNORON

In 2017, I wanted to try and answer the question 'what would society look like if we saw our young people as a product of their values, experiences, knowledge, creativity, and not just of their age?'. For too long we have dehumanised young people by imagining them as merely young.

This year I asked tens of thousands of young Australians to tell me what they wish their representatives knew, and considered, about them when making policy.

I travelled over 100,000 kilometres meeting tens of thousands of young Australians. My team and I went to hundreds of schools, and community groups. We went to universities, festivals, markets, and conferences.

We ran thousands of consultations, and took them to the United Nations General Assembly. But it didn't end there. We collected data from every Australian Federal Electorate, and I wanted to share it with you. I want you to share the joy of reading the nuanced, complicated, and thoughtful opinions of the young people who live in your electorate.

Young people all over Australia spoke to me about issues relating to the cost of living, unemployment, and economic productivity. They shared the impact of education—both formal and informal on their lives. They told me of their desires for certainty in the realms of global peace and security. They articulated the importance of access to health services, programs, and quality public infrastructure. Young people expressed their experiences of environmental disaster, of unemployment, of forced migration, and of family violence. They shared their gratitude for fantastic educators, and life-changing programs.

If I've learnt anything this year, it's that our voices get stronger the more we listen. And I hope that listening closer to the young people in your electorate brings you as much joy as it has brought me. Thank you for taking the time to read this report.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Paige O'Connor'.





# THE 2017 CONSULTATION

## WHO? WHERE? HOW? WHAT?

The consultation took place from November 2016 to August 2017. Whilst a large majority of the consultation and data was collected face-to-face through use of paper surveys, online forms were made available to those unable to make it to a session of the Youth Representative's national tour.

The Youth Representative spent approximately one month in every Australian state and territory over the course of the year, working with a team of UN Youth Australia's facilitators to run consultations. Typically, a consultation lasted 1.5 hours.

All Australians between the ages of twelve and twenty five (inclusive) were able to participate in the consultation.

The team visited schools, universities, other educational institutions, community groups, non-profit organisations, festivals, markets, conferences, and held open events to reach more young people. Approximately 45,000 young Australians participated in face-to-face workshops with the Youth Representative and team. Around 2,500 completed web forms, and thousands more followed along with the stories online.

The Consultation aimed to answer the overarching question "what would society look like if we imagined young people in their full complexity?" and the survey took form to ask questions of five broad areas.

### 1. Engagement:

- Can you name your local Federal MP?
- Do you feel that your opinions are represented in government policy?
- As a young person, do you feel like your opinions are taken seriously by those in power?
- Do you read the news/follow every day?
- Where do you get your news?

### 2. Youth issues:

- What is the most important issue facing young people in your local area?
- What do you think is the most important issue facing young people in Australia?

### 3. General issues:

- Which issues would you like to see the government taking more immediate action on?
- Why are these important to you? Do you have suggestions for solutions?

### 4. Stories:

- What do you wish the government knew, and considered about you and your life when making policy?

### 5. Learning:

- Are you interested in learning more about current events?
- Are you interested in learning more about the United Nations?
- Are you interested in learning more about how politicians /the government make decisions?

And we threw in some ice-breakers for good measure:

- Cats or Dogs?
- Marvel or DC?
- Netflix or YouTube?
- Winter or Summer?
- Internet or TV?
- Bushwalk or Ocean Swim?





# WESTERN AUSTRALIA

The average age of the Western Australians who participated in my consultation was 15.9. Western Australians are passionate about a large range of issues from mental health to education inequality. The top five issues that young Western Australians would like the government to take action on can be found over the page.

21% of young Western Australians in the consultation say that they feel like their opinions are represented by those in the government.

Responses like Brittany's (17): "I am so aware that there are others far worse off than I am, and this just gives more reason to why youth need to have a say in how their lives are run. We are the future, but feel as though we have no access to the stepping stones for a successful one." are typical across Western Australian electorates, with about 60% indicating that they do not feel respected by their representatives.

47% of young people across Western Australia follow the news every day. They

draw on a variety of sources, including, but not limited to: free-to-air broadcast television, national broadcasters, social media feeds (predominantly Facebook, YouTube, and Instagram. Occasionally Snapchat, and Reddit), local papers, radio, online foreign news services, and new media companies such as Junkee, Pedestrian, and Buzzfeed.

Slightly less than half (45%) of young Western Australians can name their local Federal Member of Parliament.

## “What is the important issue facing young people in your local community?”

1. Drugs/Alcohol abuse
2. Mental Health
3. Unemployment/job opportunities
4. Cost of education
5. Education inequality
6. Cost of housing
7. Harassment and abuse
8. Cost of living
9. Discrimination
10. Climate Change

62% of the young Western Australians in the Consultation know what they plan to do for a career, with many concerned about job pathways, and relevant education with frequent talk about the “future of work” leaving them slightly uncertain about their futures.

Curious, we asked about some preferences that young people have for a range of things. 82% prefer the internet to television. 76% prefer dogs to cats. 63% prefer movies to books. 86% of young people in Western Australia would rather Marvel over DC. 59% prefer YouTube to Netflix. 54% prefer Summer to Winter. And 60% prefer a swim in the ocean to a bushwalk.

## What some young people in Western Australia wish you knew, and considered about their stories when making policy:

“Young people are politically active and hard-working. We’re not an economic burden and we want our rights and to be educated”  
Aryanne, 17.

“I wish they knew that I really do care about and have a knowledge of topical issues. I wish they knew that I am trying to engage with them, because I believe in speaking out and making change. I wish they knew that we have ideas and possible solutions and that young people ARE able to and should be an active part of the political system.” Ruby, 16.

“Although I am extremely grateful for the opportunities I have been given I can’t help but feel that there is an imbalance of opportunity and education between wealthy suburbs and poorer suburbs, which needs to be focused on to make this imbalance less prominent in Australia’s society.” Faith, 18

**82%**  
are interested in learning more about current events

**21%**  
feel that their opinions are accurately represented in government.

**63%**  
are interested in learning more about how the government makes decisions

**1** **Improving healthcare**  
**Top issue raised in Western Australia.**  
“It’s harder than it looks, give us a break. Mental health is a real part of our lives.”  
Wil, 17

**2** **Marriage equality**  
**Action on marriage equality was raised by young Western Australians.**  
Things like marriage equality ... are so incredibly powerful to young LGBT Australians” Akio, 16

**3** **Gender equality**  
**Equality between genders is important for young Western Australians.**  
“Everyone on the planet is equal and should have access to the same opportunities.” Lachlan, 15.

**4** **Cost of tertiary education**  
**Rising education costs were raised frequently.**  
“I care about my future and the opportunities I will have in life.” Lara, 15

**5** **Climate change**  
**Environmental responsibility is important to young Western Australians.**  
“I personally have been fortunate enough to not suffer many hardships but I do strongly believe we need to be active about climate change and conserving our environment” Ava, 16

# STORIES FROM WESTERN AUSTRALIA



"I wish the government knew that people don't live in government housing because we want to, we live in government housing because we have nowhere left to turn and would otherwise end up homeless. I have lived with my grandparents in government housing my entire life and am grateful that Australia has sufficient infrastructure to support people who need it. But there is a damaging stigma that comes with it, and unfortunately the government perpetuates that stigma by using harmful rhetoric and creating uninformed social housing policy. My grandfather was conscripted to Vietnam over 50 years ago and is one of the many government housing tenants who have a unique personal story. The class divide is only widening and none of us deserve to be reduced solely to an addiction, an economic status, or a disability. Government housing should be used to empower people at a disadvantage rather than used as a political punching bag." Deni, 19, WA.



"I wish the government understood the challenges and barriers faced by people living in rural and remote Australia. Most people living in the metropolitan centres cannot comprehend the distance and remoteness of our rural areas, particularly in a state as large as Western Australia. My town is a half day drive to the nearest regional centre and can be a two day journey to Perth. This distance and isolation impacts on almost every facet of every day life. In particular, I wish the government would take the time out from their (mostly) metropolitan offices to come out and truly understand the strain of resources and the lack of access to basic services in small rural towns. As a registered nurse working in the Pilbara, every day I witness the struggles that people face - and it's not simply reduced access to specialised resources but to access basic essential health services including having a dentist, an optometrist, a physiotherapist. For any sort of treatment, patients may have to leave town for weeks and be away from their families, support systems, and their land. Not only is the person in critical need not getting essential care, but it also exhausts limited local services. In towns such as this one, doctors are locum, and nurses often pass through for a few weeks to a few months. This severely impairs the ability for the local health services to provide quality continuity of care, and promote wellbeing. Repeatedly, essential funding gets withdrawn or redistributed and I wish the government tried harder to remember us living in rural and remote Australia." Sammi, 23, WA.



"I wish the government would realise that approaching youths and their issues in a condescending manner won't achieve anything, but also that it is vital to sit down and listen to our ideas. The dominant narrative in society seems to dictate that we are "too young to understand" and that our struggles are just part of growing up. The danger in this, is that it leads us to let young people's journeys with mental health be trivialised, delegitimised and unheard." Isabel, 17, WA.



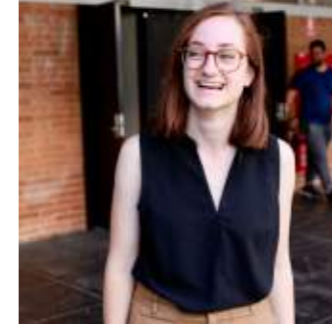
"I wish the government knew that young people are a lot more committed than they think when it comes to the things we're passionate about. There seems to be an unspoken but super common misconception that we're unreliable, reckless and not as valuable as older generations when it comes to politics. What I really wish the government knew is that my opinion on these issues isn't the one they should be listening to. They should be listening to the views of those people whose voices have been ignored for far too long, and for whom these issues have a profound and devastating effect - Australia's First Peoples." Cormac, 20, WA.



"I wish the government understood that Closing the Gap actually requires listening to the voices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. The treatment of First Australians has been and continues to be, the darkest chapter in Australian history. Yet, it is far too often met with cheap rhetoric and a failure to genuinely engage with the enormously complex social and institutional challenges that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples continue to face. We need solutions developed and supported by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples for their own communities. Community-centred approaches provide the foundation for dealing with the long-term impact that these tragic issues have. Such community approaches aren't crafted in an office in Canberra, and nor should they be. The voices calling for a drastic change in how we work towards closing the gap have long been there, but have for too long been ignored. When we talk about closing the gap, it's also important not to forget how large that gap is. This isn't from a bygone era of our history that we've since corrected. This is Australia right now. What I really wish the government knew is that my opinion on these issues isn't the one they should be listening to. They should be listening to the views of those people whose voices have been ignored for far too long, and for whom these issues have a profound and devastating effect - Australia's First Peoples." Cormac, 20, WA.



"I wish the government saw Arts funding in regional Australia as a beautiful opportunity and not an inconvenience. The face of Australia to the international community is largely the bush, the beaches and the outback, so it doesn't make sense to me that the government is not actively funding the people and the organisations who will share the stories of these places. I've grown up in Denmark and Albany, towns in the Southwest region of WA. To be successful in these places, you have to leave them; because there just aren't enough opportunities for young people to work or to study. It's exhausting to hear friends say, "There's nothing to do here," when we live in one of the most beautiful regions in the world. I wish the government realised how valuable young people and the arts are to creating and sustaining beautiful communities in these regions and showing the rest of the world the beauty and diversity of regional Australia." Katie, 20, WA.



"I was hesitant to talk about this issue, because it still seems to be such a taboo issue that faces lots of backlash. But I've decided that THAT is really the reason why I should discuss this more. I wish the government considered my body as my own, and that society saw that menstrual products are not a luxury item, but a real necessity." Katherine, 21, WA.



"We need to support accessible early childhood education and care in remote areas. Childcare centres create stability for families, cultivate resilience and empathy, and can ensure intergenerational wellbeing. Centres able to respond to the needs of families in remote areas, and particularly those led by Aboriginal women, are falling through the cracks of funding models. We need to invest in preventative measures to properly respond to states of crisis. I wish the government were listening to the evidence and to the knowledge of Aboriginal women and organisations." Laura, 17, WA.



"I wish the government knew the huge impact that sexual assault centres have the capacity to provide. The compassionate, specialised and honest approaches taken are immensely different to other avenues of support, which are often limited in their abilities to act both respectfully and realistically. Cuts to sexual assault centres and programs further restrict what is already minimal access to crucial services, limiting choice and accessibility and introducing impossible delays to getting help at the most important times. Cuts also contribute to a culture where trauma is shoved under a rug and expected to fix itself and never be spoken of again. I need the government to know the value of these services, and that providing them selectively and sparsely is not enough." Sara, 19, WA.



"I am educated and have an opinion that is just as valid as someone my senior. I want to do something with my life considered unconventional and that should be encouraged, not a cause for me to be silenced or disregarded." Patricia, 16, WA.



"I wish the government realised that underestimating the potential of young people based on labels or stereotypes derived from how we look or sound is deeply unhelpful in achieving meaningful social progress. I am incredibly proud to be a gay first-generation immigrant; but that doesn't mean that my identity is solely defined by my sexual orientation, my ethnicity, or my age. The government needs to recognise that our identities and values are shaped by complex factors that extend beyond these visible labels. The sooner the government begins to celebrate the rich diversity of young people who call Australia home, the sooner our society will begin to appreciate the immense potential of young people in leading powerful social change." Anish, 22, WA.



"I wish the government knew that I really do care about and have a knowledge of topical issues. I wish they knew that I am trying to engage with them, because I believe in speaking out and making change. I wish they knew that we have ideas and possible solutions and that young people are able to and should be an active part of the political system." Ruby, 16, WA.

# 56%

of young people in O'Connor can name their Federal MP



# YOUR ELECTORATE

## THE FOLLOWING INFORMATION RELATES TO THE FEDERAL ELECTORATE OF O'CONNOR

The average age of the young person engaged in my consultation in O'Connor was 16.6.

A large range of issues were raised in the electorate. (Results of top 5 issues they would like action on IN AUSTRALIA over the page in the blue column).

44% of those consulted said that they read/follow the news every day, with the majority of them getting their news from free-to-air TV, with a significant portion getting information from the radio.

58% of young people consulted in O'Connor can name their local Federal MP. Only 16% of young people in O'Connor say that they feel like their opinions are

accurately reflected in current government policy. 45% of the young people consulted say that they feel, as a young person, that their opinions are taken seriously by those in positions of power.

In lighter news, 75% prefer dogs to cats. 58% of young people in O'Connor prefer movies to books. 54% prefer an ocean swim to a bushwalk, and 63% prefer Summer to Winter.

### “What is the important issue facing young people in your local community?”

1. Drug/alcohol use
2. Discrimination
3. Mental health services
4. Job opportunities
5. Education funding
6. Curriculum reform
7. Climate change
8. Housing affordability
9. Cost of education
10. Youth engagement in politics

# 55%

of young people in O'Connor know what they want to do for a career

### What some young people in O'Connor wish you knew, and considered about their stories when making policy:

“I wish the government knew that even though I am not a voter who they technically need to keep happy, the decisions they make affect me immensely. They affected where I went to school, they affect what I'm doing in my first year out of school, and they will affect my choices as I enter first university then the workforce. Someone who is young, from a regional area and needs financial support to study (such as myself) relies on the government a lot. It's great that I can do that, but the fact that policy often focuses on things that look good but don't achieve much and not on figuring out how to equip the country's young people with the tools to make Australia an even better place is something that needs to be considered.” Olivia, 17.

“I do believe that they should, or at least consider our opinions, particularly youth opinions as we are who will be running the country. Instead, I feel like our opinions aren't as valued as people who are in the older age bracket as they seem to be making decisions for our future without necessarily being a big part of it.” William, 17.

“I wish they understood people in remote areas as well as metropolitan areas.” Lara, 17.

“I think that they should look towards the future and consider sustainable options that will actually last generations.” Kayla, 18.

“That country towns and more secluded areas need more help and support for mental illnesses and not just being brushed off as “you're a teenager, you will get over it.” Alina, 15.

“Farming is a tricky business with a VERY varied income each year. Please take this into consideration when making laws regarding the band farmers are put into for tax.” Zara, 18.

# 1

## Improving healthcare

**Was the top issue raised in O'Connor**  
“I believe mental health issues are the most important problems faced by young people in Australia.” Jasmine, 17.

# 2

## Housing affordability

**is a concern**  
“I'll never be able to buy a house like my parents did if things stay the same.” Emma, 17.

# 3

## Climate change

**Young people want action**  
“We are the generation that is going to have to clean up after the carelessness of past generations! Yes climate change is real, we know that, now let's act like we care.” Ella, 17.

# 4

## Cost of tertiary education

**Education costs were raised frequently.**  
“Uni costs a lot of money and teens need more education support because our parents can't afford it.” Indiarna, 17.

# 5

## People seeking asylum

“Immigration policy: be more empathetic, have less of an intolerance/refusal to let in asylum seekers off Manus, for example.” Isabella, 17.

# 77%

are interested in learning more about current events

# 48%

are interested in learning more about the United Nations

# 60%

are interested in learning more about how the government makes decisions

# THANKS TO OUR PARTNERS

WITHOUT YOU, THE 2017 YOUTH REPRESENTATIVE PROGRAM WOULD NOT HAVE BEEN POSSIBLE

## PLATINUM PARTNERS



## COMMUNITY PARTNERS



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All opinions expressed in this report reflect the views of young people consulted and do not reflect any policy or position of sponsors, the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, or UN Youth Australia.

