

# 2017 AUSTRALIAN YOUTH REPRESENTATIVE CONSULTATION REPORT



**HIGGINS**

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.**

Running 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 Burton 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.

Team of UN Youth Victoria volunteers who helped facilitate the Victorian elements of the Consultation.



First consultation of the year, at Scotch College, Melbourne.

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 BURTON

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 that reads "Paige Burton".





# 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?





# VICTORIA

The average age of the Victorians who participated in my consultation was 16.2. Young Victorians are passionate about a large range of issues from regional development, to curriculum reform. The top five issues that young Victorians would like the government to take action on can be found over the page.

14% of young Victorians in the consultation say that they feel like their opinions are represented by those in the government.

Responses like Finley's (17): **"I wish that they listened to the countless, passionate young voices pleading for change. I wish they did more to preserve the environment, economy and infrastructure so that we can feel like a legitimate priority."** can be seen across most Victorian electorates, with many young people calling on their representatives to take them seriously. Of the young Victorians involved in the 2017 consultation, 37% of them feel like they are taken seriously as a young people, by those in positions of power.

57% of young people across Victoria follow the news every day. They draw on a variety of sources, including, but not limited to: social media feeds (predominantly Facebook, YouTube, and Instagram. Occasionally Snapchat, and Reddit), local papers, free-to-air broadcast television, national broadcasters, radio, online foreign news services, new media companies such as Junkee, Pedestrian, and BuzzFeed.

Slightly more than half (52%) of young Victorians can name their local Federal Member

- "What is the important issue facing young people in your local community?"**
- 1. Mental health services**
  - 2. Cost of education**
  - 3. Youth engagement with politics**
  - 4. Education inequality**
  - 5. Job opportunities**
  - 6. Cost of housing**
  - 7. Discrimination**
  - 8. Harrassment and abuse**
  - 9. Drugs/alcohol abuse**
  - 10. Public transport**

of Parliament.

60% of the young Victorians 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. 97% of young people in Victoria prefer the internet to television. 72% prefer dogs to cats. 58% prefer movies to books. 76.5% of young people in Victoria rather Marvel than DC. 56% prefer YouTube to Netflix. 53% prefer Summer to Winter. And 64% prefer a swim in the ocean to a bushwalk.

**What some young people in Victoria wish you knew, and considered about their stories when making policy:**

"I wish the government knew the importance of safe injecting spaces around Australia. The criminalisation of, and stigma against drug use is more detrimental than beneficial. It stops so many, especially people in my area, from seeking help. Safe injecting spaces would not encourage drug usage, but rather encourage safely for themselves and the people around them, and work towards rehabilitation." Isabella, 16.

"I wish they knew that my mental illness/disability didn't just disappear when I turned 22, and that cutting my benefits then has meant I have lived in poverty since." Amy, 24.

"That I as an individual seriously want to go to university to further my education to eventually help and benefit others. But the price of university and housing in capital cities is daunting and makes me worried for my future." Brandon, 18.



**1 Housing affordability**  
**Top issue raised by young Victorians.**  
 "Going into adulthood is difficult enough without worrying about the cost of housing" Emily, 17.

**2 Climate change**  
**Was a frequent concern for young Victorians.**  
 "We need immediate action on climate change - and to meet those targets quickly. We can invest in renewables, power our homes, and the economy" Joanna, 22.

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

**4 Marriage equality**  
**Young people in Victoria called for government action on marriage equality.**  
 "Marriage equality is easy! We can get it done and move on to other, important issues" Aurora, 13.

**5 Healthcare**  
**Improving mental health and disability services were of significance.**  
 "My town is full of heartache and received a mental health support institution after the last person to take their life. There needs to be much more support in rural areas." Lillian, 20.

# STORIES FROM YOUNG VICTORIANS



"It's incredibly frustrating that somehow every issue has become political and our politics has become so polarised. From anti-bullying programs, to the urgent infrastructure needs of a city such Melbourne that's growing by 100,000 people each year, to climate change and the very future of our planet's survival. It feels as though everything is an opportunity to come against something, attack the other side, no matter the policy, even if there is little separating our politicians, compromise isn't an option, a political wedge will be found and further drive people apart. I just wish our politicians would put down their swords and be the inspiring, hopeful leaders we need to take on the challenges we face as a nation."

Simon, 23, Victoria.



"I wish the government understood how important the implementation of anti-bullying and education programs nationwide are to young LGBT+ people. As someone who has worked in the space, I know how crucial their work is to the youth of Australia. These programs are saving lives and yet they are constantly being attacked for trying to make a difference."

Nell, 17, Victoria.



"I wish the government knew how much passion exists in our community for a response to climate change that sees it as a challenge to the status quo, a wake-up call, and an incredible opportunity: to revolutionise our economy and create a fairer future for everyone. Right now, we have the chance to build a clean energy future and cooperative, resilient communities, with the wellbeing of people and our environment at the centre. We have the science, technology, and willpower for action- and we can't afford to debate or delay any longer."

Alex, 19, Victoria.



"I wish the government knew how important initiatives such as HECS-HELP and regulated university fees are for my future. Coming from a low socioeconomic background, these safety nets have allowed me to attend a great university and set myself up for a positive future. It's great knowing I can get an education and make a difference regardless of my financial situation."

Luke, 189, Victoria.



"I wish our government knew that young people aren't blindly idealistic. If we hold an opinion, it's based on fact, it's based on statistics, and it's based on our own experiences. Young people's experiences are not less worthy than an older person's experience. If you deem our voices as less important or not justified simply because of our age, you're disregarding a major section of the population, and this is the opposite to the government's role. Please, listen to us, let us help. We may even vote for you."

Daniel, 18, Victoria.



"I wish the government knew how failing to provide sexual education to maturing young adults can not only negatively impact the individual, but also the families who often feel morally obliged to provide financial support. Many families are already unable to provide adequate care and sufficient resources for their children. Removing the taboo of 'sex' and providing adequate education is the first step in minimising these permanent consequences and relieving the strain of unplanned pregnancies on individual citizens, their families and society."

Stephanie, 19, Victoria.



"I wish the government knew how little time young people are allowing themselves to maintain their own mental health. In Year 11 and 12, many students internalize the message that the only way to get a good ATAR is to spend every available hour on study and exam practice, rather than trying to maintain a healthy work-life balance. What's worse is that the culture of relentless work carries on into uni; even if you're not taking a course that demands a large amount of work, you're told that you need to spend that extra time applying for internships or gaining work experience if you want your degree to be of use. It becomes easy to feel guilty whenever you take time to yourself, and before you know it, you can reach the end of your studies and realise you never stopped to enjoy what you were learning."

Sam, 20, Victoria.



"I wish the government knew how important it is for every young person to have access to a quality education. Every young person has the fundamental right to a good education regardless of disability, gender, location or socio-economic status."

Zoe, 20, Victoria.



"I wish the government knew that being a young person in Australia can be bloody hard. Internships, studying, volunteering and working are difficult to balance, and that's before you add in the stress of making ends meet and paying rent every month. The contribution young people make to this country should be recognised and celebrated."

Kellie, 22, Victoria.



"I wish the government considered the impact of discrepancies between the States and the Territories of Australia in terms of educational resources and quality. A few months before my year 12 exams in Darwin, Northern Territory, one of my teachers had to stop teaching and leave. Due to not being able to find a replacement teacher, we were responsible for our own independent exam preparation. I wish the government knew how much this affected my year 12 exam results and how unfairly disadvantaged I felt. Such a division in educational quality due to lack of resources should not hinder anyone's opportunity to a good standard of life, as that begins with equal opportunity."

Eylem, 21, Victoria.



"I wish the government knew that the filter tunnel vision that comes with standardised testing is compressing our creativity and innovation. Optimism and experimentation is so pivotal for young leaders, and such important qualities to not only myself, but many young people around the world. By implementing education in multiple choice bubbles, short answer questions and essays, we don't see the ticking minds of practicality and social awareness. These must be treasured; harnessed in order to raise the standard of our young people past a traditional form of systematic compression of education in a changing society."

Ishra, 17, Victoria



"I wish the government knew that intelligence cannot be measured simply by how well you do in an exam, or through an ATAR. We're often told how we are valued, how what we do matters. But when it comes down to the laws that are passed and the benchmarks we are set, intelligence is judged through a means without context, as if we wanted the measure the intelligence of a computer, not a person."

Alex, 17, Victoria.



"I wish the government knew just how harmful their rhetoric with regard to refugees and people seeking asylum are. I feel this is an issue endemic of both of the major political parties, and one that is incredibly damaging. I've volunteered at law firm that specialises in immigration for the past 9 months, and I have first hand heard the plight of some of these people. Many of them flee war, famine and persecution, enduring at times, torture and the death of parents, siblings and other loved ones. Only to come to this country and be labelled as "illegals" or "boat people". Such rhetoric is not only harmful, but delegitimises their plight and reduces them to "criminals".

I wish that the government knew that irrespective of their stance on immigration, they need not resort to such harsh labels when referring to these people. As with all things, a little bit of compassion goes a long way."

Bahe, 19, Victoria.



"I wish the government respected my right to love my girlfriend. I am not defined by my sexuality."

Renee, 18, Victoria.



"I wish that the government knew the massive difference that small barriers in accessing services for mental health can make to young people's ability to participate in society."

Jess, 22, Victoria.

"I wished that the government had a more genuine understanding of the infrastructure needs and interests of young people, especially with regard to outer suburbs. Having good friends in the outer suburbs it always baffles me that it is virtually impossible to get around these parts of town without a car, and during peak periods, even with a car it can take hours to get anywhere. Better infrastructure planning, especially for those who don't want to "live the dream" of car ownership would do wonders not just for the residents of the quickly built outer suburbs of big cities, but for many others too."

Josh, 17, Victoria.

# 68%

of young people in Higgins can name their Federal MP

# 65%

of young people in Higgins knew what they want to do when they finish school



# YOUR ELECTORATE

## THE FOLLOWING INFORMATION RELATES TO THE FEDERAL ELECTORATE OF HIGGINS

The average age of the young person engaged in my consultation in Higgins was 16.1. A range of issues were raised in Higgins. These are seen in responses to "what issues should the Australian Government be taking action on?" (Results of top 5 issues over the page in blue).

70% of those consulted with said they follow the news every day. The majority get their information from online papers (ABC, Fairfax, NewsCorp, The Guardian). A significant number still get information from free-to-air broadcast TV news.

68% of young people consulted in Higgins can name their local Federal MP. 6% of young people in Higgins say that they feel

like their opinions are accurately reflected in current government policy. 40% of the young people consulted saying that they feel, as a young person, that their opinions are taken seriously by those in positions of power.

In lighter news: 77% prefer dogs to cats. 45% prefer books to movies. 51% prefer Winter to Summer. 71% would rather an ocean swim than a bushwalk.

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

1. Mental health services
2. Youth engagement in politics
3. Cost of education
4. Housing affordability
5. Education funding
6. Climate change
7. Social media use
8. LGBTI Rights
9. Curriculum reform
10. Discrimination

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

"It's easy to dismiss young people as idealistic, but fundamentally, we are this country's future leaders and are galvanised when our potential is harnessed and when we can see a bold vision rooted in truth and justice. Before making any policy decision, politicians should think about how it would impact not only people like myself, but also them if they were my age. Perspective is key." Cam, 18.

"I wish the government knew that young people actually care about what happens to them and want to be thought about. We are the future of this country and they should by trying to create long term solutions for us instead of focusing on what benefits them in the short term. We care more about our future than avocado toast!" Eve, 17.

"I know a lot of people who suffer from mental health issues and just getting a counsellor/therapist is a struggle for them. I think education about mental illness is EXTREMELY important. I also think that marriage equality is something that is taking too long to legalise - some people, including me, might dream of marrying someone of the same sex and by not legalising it, the government is basically saying that people are lesser." Anon, 14.

"I wish the government embraced greater diversity (cultural, age, gender, economic status) when making decisions, as it seems like there is a lack of representation for people directly impacted by changes in policy." Nell, 17.

"I don't think there's anything important about me that the government doesn't already account for in its considerations of my demographic. Listen to marginalised voices." Sam, 20.

# 96%

are interested in learning more about current events

# 83%

are interested in learning more about the United Nations

# 74%

are interested in learning more about how the government makes decisions

## 1 Climate change

was the top issue raised in Higgins

"Climate change and all the problems it causes are very real to me and it's hard to sit by an idle government who treat the problem with a low sense of urgency. Our planet is more than what we pull out of the ground, it's the natural features and the wildlife, yet we continue to destroy without any recognition of the impact we will have." Alyssa, 16.

## 2 Housing affordability

was mentioned often

"I will be going to uni and hopefully graduating after that, but the price of this education and housing is extremely high, I don't think I'll be able to buy one." Lucy, 14.

## 3 Marriage equality

was raised often

"Legalise marriage equality without a postal vote. It's the right thing to do." Aleks, 21.

## 4 Gender equality

was raised often

"We need greater funding for women's shelters and domestic violence support services, as well as preventative measures and educational programs around domestic violence and gender equality." Cameron, 17.

## 5 Healthcare

was mentioned often

"So much action isn't being taken by the government. It doesn't represent us as youths dealing with major issues like mental health." Jem, 16.

# THANKS TO OUR PARTNERS

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

## PLATINUM PARTNERS



## COMMUNITY PARTNERS



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