




Have Your Say Day - 2024 Report

Voices of young people on the Northern Beaches



northern
beaches
council



We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the Northern Beaches and their Country. By these words we show our respect to all Aboriginal people. We acknowledge Elders past, present and emerging and the spirits and ancestors of the Clans that lived in this area.



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Introduction

Have Your Say Day is a youth-led initiative providing an annual platform for young people across the Northern Beaches to engage directly with elected leaders, youth sector professionals and community members on important topics impacting them.

Now in its third year, Have Your Say Day gives voice to local young people on issues directly impacting them. Young people aged 12 to 24 are surveyed and the results are used to inform presentations given by school leaders to local representatives and decision makers.

The initiative is coordinated by School Captains and Vice Captains from high schools across the Northern Beaches, known as the Beaches Leadership Team, with the support of Northern Beaches Council.

The following report provides a summary of the survey findings, together with transcripts from the 8 presentations shared on the night.

This report is available on Council's website and shared with local schools, youth services, community and elected representatives to inform policy and strategic decision making relevant to young people.



Survey results

In order to identify and raise the collective voices of young people, a survey is distributed to young people aged 12 to 24 across the Northern Beaches to help inform the topics on which they present. The questions encourage respondents to consider the issues from a personal perspective. Key questions include:

- Identify the top 3 issues that impact you as a young person on the Northern Beaches
- Why are these the most important issues?

In addition to these, several demographic questions were asked including:

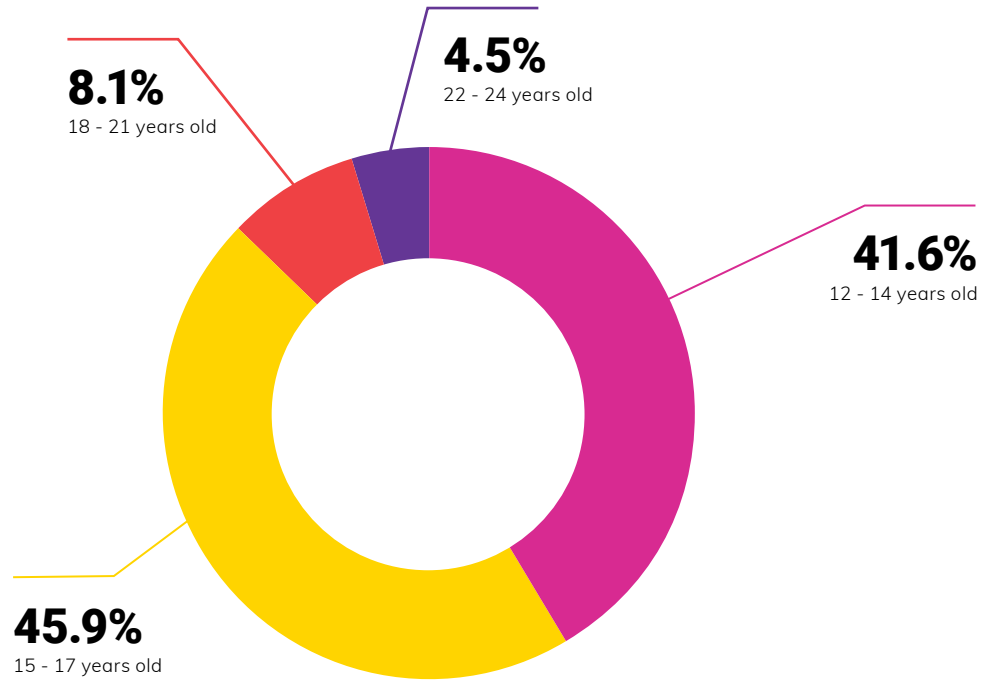
- How old are you?
- What gender do you identify with?
- What postcode do you live in?
- What is your occupation?

The survey was open from 19 February to 8 May, with 606 responses from young people who live, work or study on the Northern Beaches.

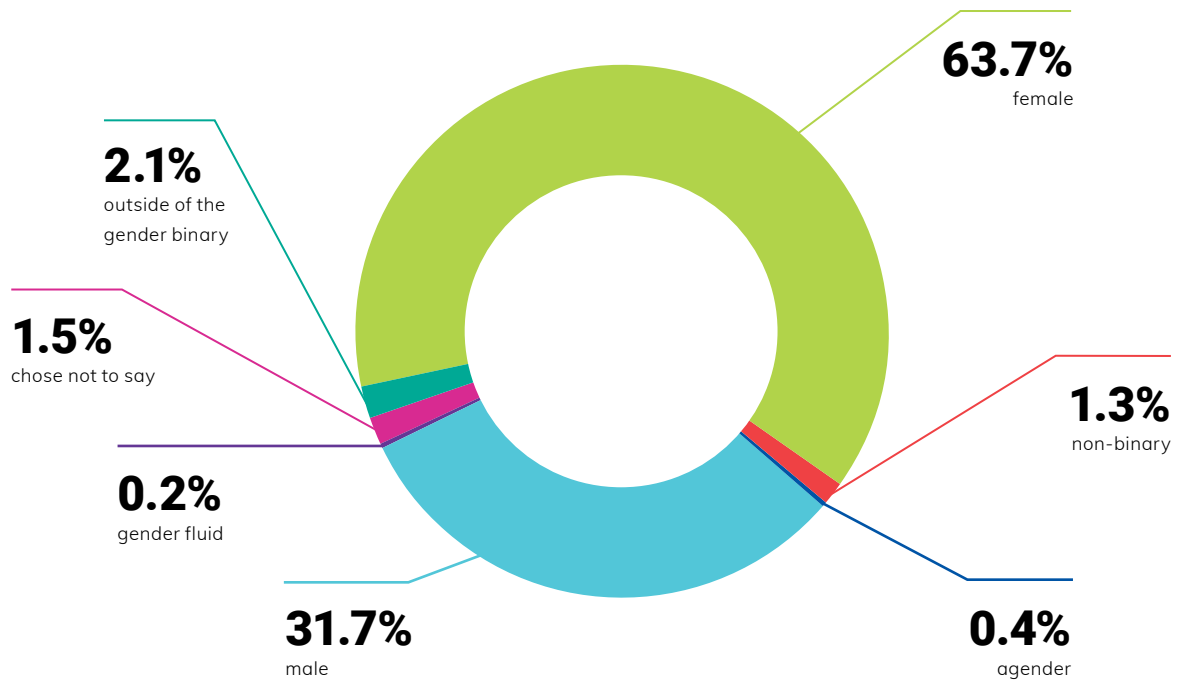


Demographics

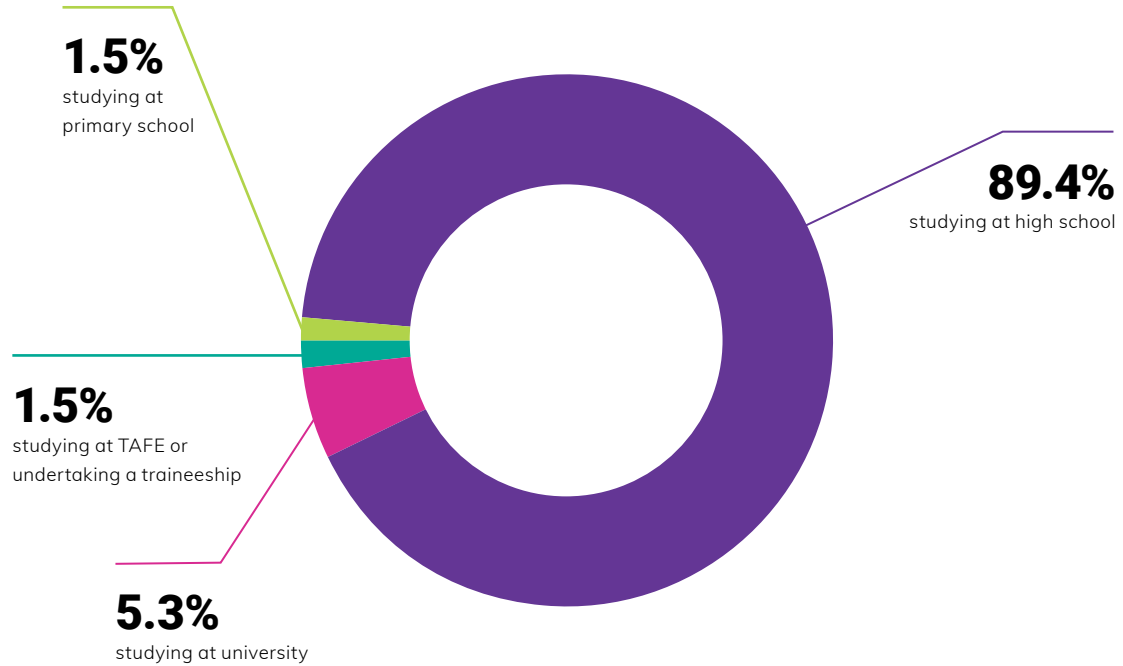
How old are you?



What gender do you identify with?



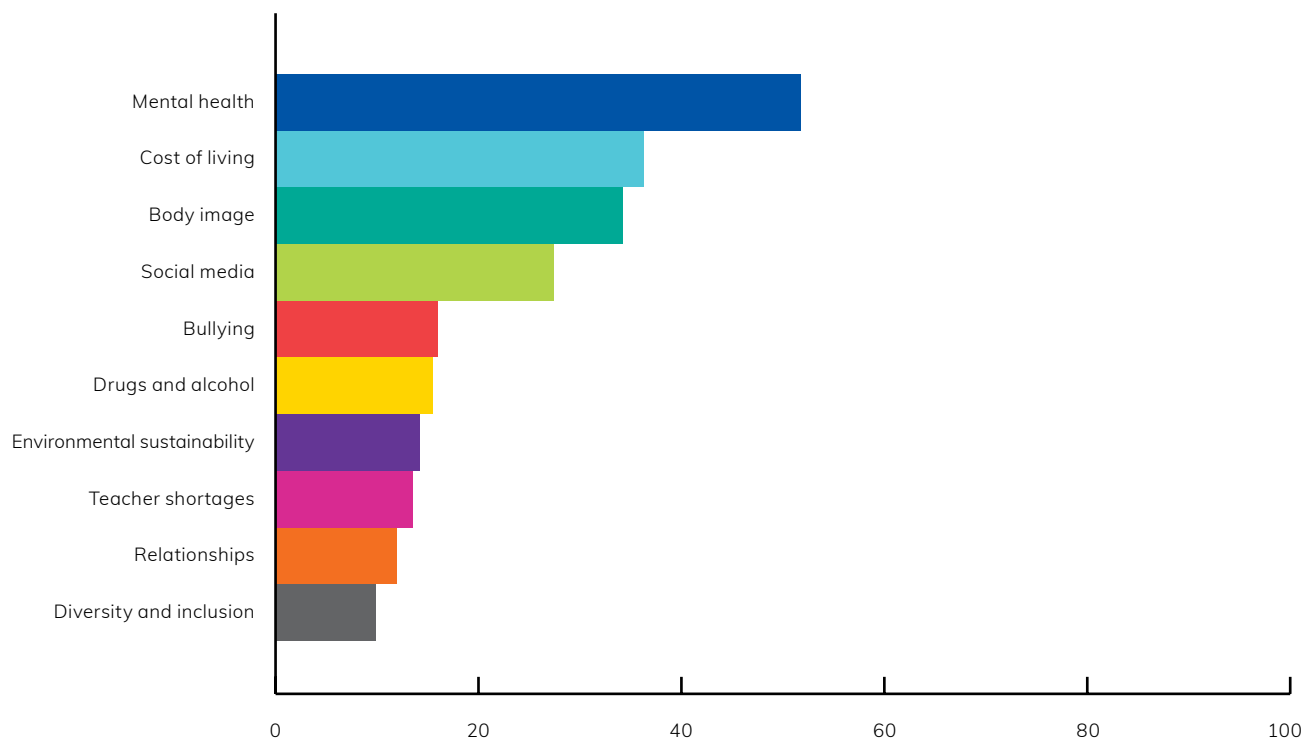
Education background



90.9% of respondents are currently enrolled in compulsory education (primary or high school) while 6.1% are undertaking study at a tertiary provider. Additionally, 21.6 are involved in some level of employment.

What matters to young people

The top 10 issues selected by respondents were:



Other issues that young people listed included:

- Public/private school disparity - 8.7%
- Decreasing youth involvement in extra-curricular recreational activities - 7.8%
- Driving safety - 6.3%
- Gender equality and empowerment - 6.1%
- Consent and sex education - 5.4%
- Personal safety - 5.1%
- Homelessness - 4.1%

What young people are saying

Young people were asked why these issues are important to them. Many comments highlight the fear that they will not be able to afford to live in the area, while others spoke of the pressure to achieve academically alongside the impacts of social media making it difficult to switch off.

Respondents noted that whilst many of these issues affect the whole population, young people are disproportionately affected by many of them.

Mental health, body image and social isolation

“We are constantly hearing about youth suicide in our area. It’s really devastating and more needs to be done to support vulnerable people.”

“High School can be a lot sometimes. To simultaneously manage school and social life can be really difficult.”

“Personally, for myself, mental health and body image is a big issue for me and often affects me on a day-to-day basis. Each worsen the other, and this can sometimes send me to spiral, affecting my school life.”

“Youth are experiencing a huge disconnect with the rest of the community. It began with a serious decline in youth spaces and has only worsened as a result of COVID. Young people have no opportunity to create the inter-generational connections that previous age groups may have had, and if severely impacts a young person’s ability to feel included and like a part of the community.”

Cost of living

“These are the most important issues for me as a young person as they affect me disproportionately. For example, cost of living is especially relevant to people on minimum wage and graduate jobs and not as relevant for people of established wealth who are mostly of older age.”

“Young people are not able to stay living on the beaches due to the housing market being impossible to enter or maintain with the ongoing cost of living - this makes an ageing population and limited teens and early 20s as they move out of the beaches once they leave their parents place.”

“The cost-of-living crisis, and young people’s fear for the future is also massive. Young people are worried that they might truly never gain financial independence, and the Northern Beaches in particular is becoming a more and more unattainable place for young people to live as they transition into adulthood.”

“Unless you are born into wealth, our generation is being rapidly priced out of not just our area, but our city.”

“The cost-of-living crisis terrifies me, and I often worry about when I will be able to move out and where, as well as how my family will be able to continue living on the Northern Beaches.”

“The lack of engaging, knowledgeable professional teachers at our school have caused many students to study for themselves without much guidance. Additionally, the lack of air conditioner at our school has made the recent heat unbearable to work in, and no one can study in such an environment, and the reason due to this is because our school has no money.”

“Going to a state ranked school with poor amenities. The school grounds do not supply air conditioning except for 1 single room, and it has reached up to 40° on some days where rooms are practically unbearable to sit in and learn. It is hard to pay attention to HSC content when you feel like you are being cooked alive.”

“I am currently a high school student and having a shortage of teachers has significantly affected my/others learning, especially because I go to a public school.”

“The school outranks almost all private schools in New South Wales, yet some textbooks are falling apart and we lack certain science equipment.”

“Private schools receive exponentially higher funding than public schools - our school is very well off, lucky and privileged but I’m aware of others that are not meeting the same standard.”

Social media

“Because people can take a screen shot without consent.”

“Because with the increase in a reliance on technology and constant accessibility and sociability, e.g. social media’s influence, issues such as body image are becoming more relevant.”

“On social media there are no limits to what people can say about you and this means they can say things that make you feel insecure about your body.”



“Drug and alcohol use is rampant in teens to the point where you are ridiculed if you’ve never tried it or disagree.”

“The number of accidents that have happened with people our age recently is so concerning, and we do go to car safety talks but teens are still not recognizing the power of driving unsafely.”

“There is a lack of good sex education and trained sex educators in Australia. The number of jokes and even semi-serious comment and questions that are said which deals with rape or even basic concepts of consent is disturbing to me on a personal level.”

“Consent and sex education seems to be lacking in our curriculum so far. I know it can be a sensitive topic for many students as there have been many sexual assault cases on the Northern Beaches, but this should make it even more important to educate us in how to help ourselves in those horrible situations.”

Inclusion

“I strongly believe that men and women are and should be treated as equals, even if it is more diverse with what we can do now there is still some injustice.”

“I believe that the Northern Beaches could be so much more inclusive for people with disabilities by improving accessibility in public places. Also, in terms of LGBTQIA+ inclusivity, by more Northern Beaches specific events celebrating LGBTQIA+ diversity etc.”

“I think that especially going to an all-girls school, these are all issues that I see way too much of and the detrimental effects they can have requires urgent solutions and improvement.”



Environmental sustainability

“The environment is such an important part of the Northern Beaches, and sustainability to preserve our beaches and green spaces is too often overlooked in favour of convenience and money. The natural spaces here are so unique and important and need to be preserved.”

“The environment is a major concern of mine and hopefully the people around me because there is so much that can and must be done, yet nothing is being done. I feel like I can’t make a change or don’t have any control over it.”

“Environmental issues, as I really care about our environment and want to preserve it and look after the flora and fauna that provide for us.”

General comments

“There is clear evidence for all of these issues in our community.”

“I believe that these are some of the most important issues because they are some of the newest things to young people, and some of these are not taken seriously or responsibly.”

“Like many places across Australia, these issues impact young people as they affect our education and mental well-being which link together.”

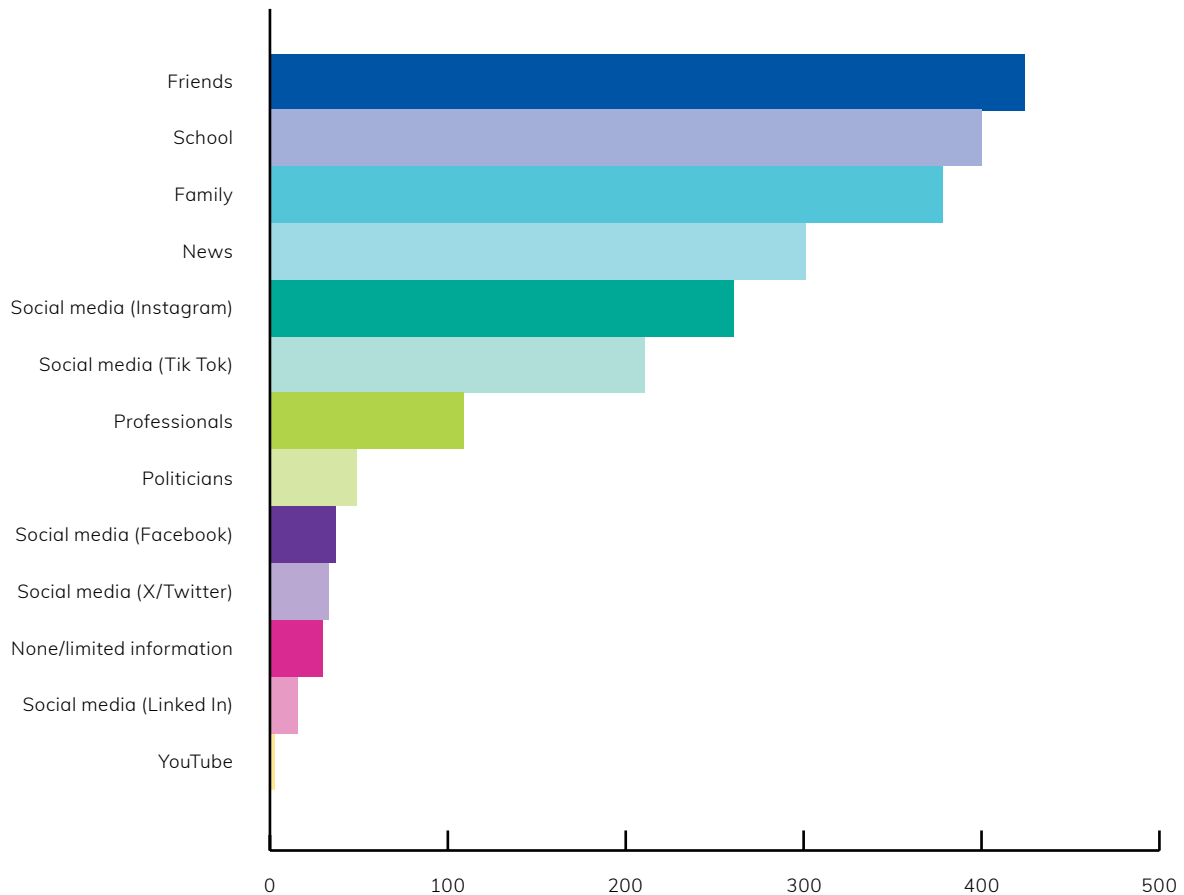
“Whenever I’m hearing a major headline about people my age on the Northern Beaches it often has something to do with one of these topics.”

“They effect the most people and do not have simple solutions.”

“These issues are dynamically shaping a generation of young people and are viewed extremely differently across generations.”

Where young people get information

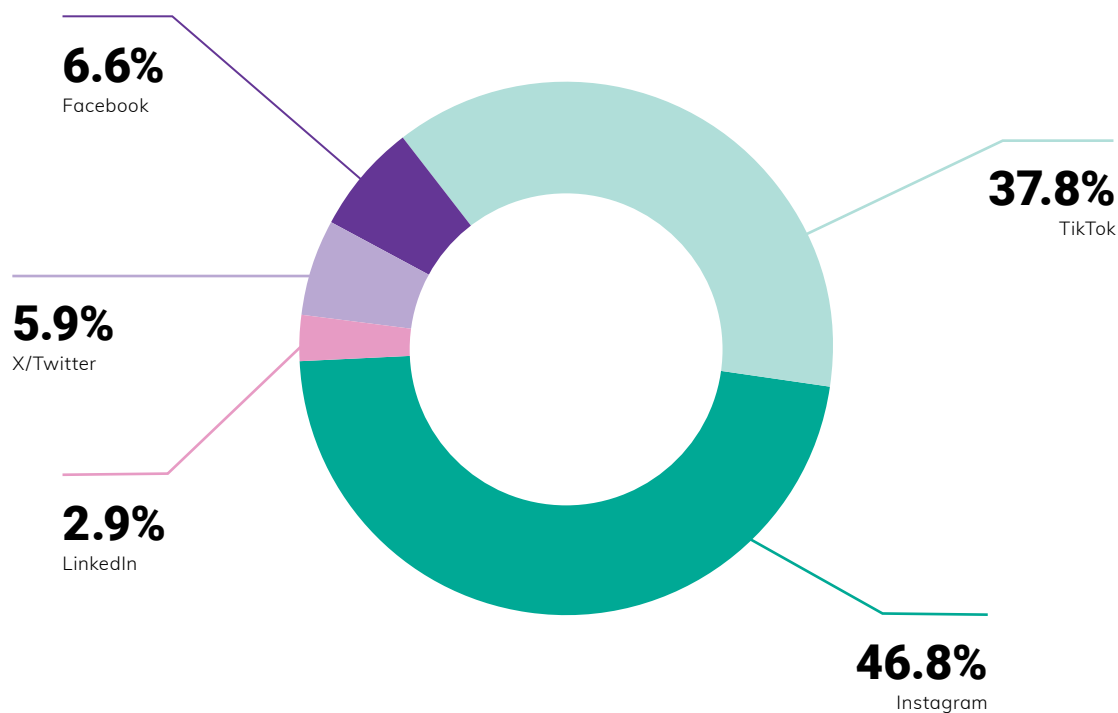
Where do you get your information on these topics?



Respondents were asked to select all of the information sources where they get their information.

The highest individual responses were 'friends', 'school', 'family' and traditional 'news media'. This shows that despite the popularity of social media, young people are still seeking out the people closest to them when looking for information on topics that matter to them.

Social media results



The combined results for social media was 558 representing the highest response, with the following breakdown of sources:

- Instagram - 261 responses
- TikTok - 211 responses
- Facebook - 37 responses
- X/Twitter - 33 responses
- LinkedIn - 16 responses

Popular sources for information on social media mentioned by respondents included traditional news channels such as ABC News, 9 News, 7 News, alongside smaller specialised accounts including Manly Observer, Cheek Media, Daily Aus and Dylan Page.

Presentation transcripts

Public and private school disparity

Summer and Noah - Barrenjoey High School

Evan and Daisy - Narrabeen Sports High School

December 3rd 1854, a date later labelled as the Eureka Stockade, had hundreds of Australians of all groups and creeds come together to righteously fight for fair representation in their own society. What we see today is that the Eureka Rebellion became one of the founding tenets of our modern egalitarian identity and the right to a better standard of life for all future Australians. In response to this social progression, the NSW Public Instruction Act of 1880 was created, defining and developing statewide, free, secular, and quality public education for all children within the colony.

While many governments have succeeded the colonial administration, we have begun to take for granted the immeasurable impact that quality public education has had on the foundations of Australia as an economic power, and the impact it will continue to have on Australia's future, should its decades long, institutionalised decline carry on.

What we see today is both an economic and social neglect of public education, and the stratification of communities across NSW and Australia arising from ever-growing private school enrolment as a result of this neglect. Therefore, we believe that not only will this divide disadvantage us today and tomorrow but will have a wider societal impact as it drives a wedge into our already divisive country, community, and population.

Resulting from the evident reduction in public school enrolments, the Minns government announced at the opening of last month that the budget for public education was to be cut by 148 million dollars, worsening the already dire situation where many students do not have access to textbooks, learning materials, adequate technology, and basic amenities... But tonight we don't aim to repeat the already known issues within the public education system, instead we want to simply highlight

our personal experiences, that how a lack of transparency, poor teacher retention, and an absence of impactful advocacy is feeding into the cultural fear surrounding public education. Because every child deserves a fighting chance during their most pivotal years of life.

While interest rates and cost of living pressures continue to rise, enrolments at private schools are growing at a faster rate than those public. Despite this growth, the government is still catering for 64% of students, that's approximately 2 million, 600 thousand young people. 2 million, 600 thousand young people, who can and will work, live, play and vote in Australia. Who will become your future doctors, lawyers, scientists, professors, policy makers and teachers.

The journey to these careers starts with the HSC. Currently 75% of schools within the top HSC results in NSW are private schools, however if we improve our resourcing, funding and standards, and if we begin to deconstruct the notion that public schools are simply a social welfare system for those "worse off" we can then reconstruct the stereotypes and normalise exceptional outcomes for students across the board. Easier said than done. Receiving funds isn't as simple as passing GO on monopoly.

Many of the issues rooted in our topic are a part of a bigger one pertaining to the retention of teaching as a career path, ensuring practical teachers get paid, and increasing their salary. And whilst we support the New South Wales Teachers federations recent proclamation, "don't be angry about schools funding. Be furious." We know the expenses of these issues and factors contributing to struggles to attain funding so we turned our attention to something that we as students can drive.

Public education since its inception has had a lack of transparency in regards to how funds are derived, spent, and more importantly, how they contribute to the betterment of a student's education. The lack of information given to students about school budgets and the supposed upgrades to our facilities creates a widespread impression that we are being left in the dark, and given empty promises. Many times, students have come up to me asking me the 'when's' and 'what's' regarding much needed school renovations, and as school captain, the bridge between students and teachers, I can do nothing but shrug back as I know as much as they do. If students and the wider community are to be informed extensively on the process, the anxieties surrounding enrolling at a public school held by both parents and students alike can be greatly reduced. Additionally, we need a way students can contribute to the decision-making process of how to spend a school budget, apart from the essentials. As it would give us a chance to influence upgrades or resources bought and speak up about what impacts our learning the most.

Furthermore, we propose advocacy. This evening, we seek your support in championing a more equitable distribution of funding across all schools. Specifically, we call for a reallocation of private school funds to public schools to address the stark inequalities prevalent throughout New South Wales. By advocating for this shift, we aim to rectify the disparities highlighted by reports such as the one revealing that Sydney private school Cranbrook invested more in a new pool and expanded fitness and drama facilities in 2021 than governments spent on 2,549 public schools combined. Similarly, data from 2023 indicates that Australian private schools received an excess of \$800 million in funding, while public schools faced a shortfall of \$4.5 billion.

Take a second to imagine a future where all schools are funded to a point where we are not just surviving but all staff and students thrive. We need you to help us ensure that once we leave the stage tonight, we will continue to get a say, that we're not stuck in jail while our other players get ahead. Help us roll the dice, get to Mayfair and pass GO, so that we can tap into our lost potential.

The dream gap

Sophia - Northern Beaches Secondary College, Cromer Campus

Today, I stand before you to advocate for a cause that is not only close to my heart but vital for the future of our society: promoting self-leadership among our youth through detailed programs that support youth for their future, going into the workforce.

As you know, our youth are the architects of tomorrow, the bearers of the torch of progress, and it is to equip them with the tools the youth need to navigate the challenges of an ever-evolving, unpredictable world. In a world that is constantly reinventing itself, with the landscape of the workforce shifting faster than ever before, it is imperative that we empower our young people to become leaders of their own lives.

Self-leadership is more than just a buzzword; it is the key to success in today's dynamic world. It is about taking ownership of one's actions, setting goals, and having the resilience to overcome obstacles. It is about having the confidence to chart your own course and the humility to seek guidance when needed without shame.

But self-leadership doesn't develop overnight. It requires thorough nurturing, developed mentorship, and deep-rooted support. This is where programs tailored to support students for their future in leadership and the workforce play a crucial role. These programs will provide young people with the skill set, knowledge, and opportunities they need to thrive in the competitive environment of the 21st century.

Now close your eyes again. Imagine a fully funded program that offers career counselling and guidance, that is always available to help students explore their interests, passions, and strengths. A program that connects

them with mentors who can provide valuable insights, connections and advice based on their own experiences. A program that offers hands-on training, possible internships, and apprenticeships, giving students a taste of the real world and helping them develop the practical skills they need to succeed that aren't given in that school syllabus.

But it's not just about preparing students for a job; it's about preparing them for life. It's about instilling and cementing the values of integrity, perseverance, and empathy. It's about teaching them how to adapt to change, communicate effectively, and how to work collaboratively with others.

By investing in programs that support students for their future in the workforce, we are not only investing in the future of our economy but instead planting a seed for many generations to come. We are empowering a generation of leaders who will innovate, who will inspire, and who will shape the world for the better.

There are 1.4 million young people in New South Wales, imagine the change that these future leaders could create if they had the right support and resources. Imagine a future where we have solved how to cure cancer, made education free, or found a solution for homelessness in Australia. What if these leaders were in this room right now? So let us come together, as educators, as parents, as community leaders, and as citizens, to advocate and support the cause of self-leadership among our youth. Let us create a world where every young person has the opportunity to fulfil their potential and to have the confidence to make their mark on society.

Academic burnout

Tash and Indie - Brigidine College

The average match box has 40 matches, now we want you to imagine lighting each of them to only see that 22 stay alight. Well, you might be wondering what happened to those other 18 matches that seemed to burn out? Did they have the right foundations to keep a flame? Did they lack the support that nurtured the fire? or did they burn too bright too fast? Now we want you to imagine that instead of matches they are students in a classroom.

In a survey that ReachOut Australia conducted in 2022 they determined that 46% of students in Australia suffer from severe academic stress and academic burnout meaning that within that classroom of 40, 18 students have affected well-beings caused by academic burnout. Academic burnout is a state of exhaustion, cynicism, and diminished effectiveness resulting from prolonged stress and overwhelming academic demands. Student's flame can be dimmed from the warped sense of success that is ingrained in the student psyche, the idea that success only stems from academic achievements, standardized tests results, ATARs, the acceptance into prestigious courses and universities causes students to live unbalanced lives, isolate themselves from their peers and even develop stress induced mental health issues, all things that contribute to the dimming and extinguishing of our flames.

The Mission Australia Youth Survey consistently reveals academic pressure as a leading cause of stress among young Australians, highlighting it for having significantly negative impacts on their mental health and well-being. Physical health is also compromised by academic burnout, it has been proven that stress significantly impacts sleep, a survey conducted by Reachout Australia found that 500 in 1000 students are either sleep deprived or struggle to sleep due to academic pressures and burnout. The inability to sleep caused academic burnout leads students to build harmful sleeping patterns that affect their behaviour, mental health, productivity, physical health conditions as well as creating a cycle of sleep deprivation further dimming the flame.

The Covid-19 pandemic has exacerbated the effects of academic burnout through online schooling. Due to the isolated nature of online schooling many students felt unmotivated, exhausted, overwhelmed and stressed. As the boundary between home and school was blurred many students formed unhealthy, screen time, study and sleeping habits that lead to academic burnout and have proven to be unattainable in a post-covid school environment. Though online school has been left in the past, academic burnout and its effects on student's wellbeing is becoming more prevalent in schools.

Rather than treating academic burnout as the problem it is, students will usually not reach out as it feels like taboo to accept that students are struggling, or that it feels like a rite of passage to experience the 'HSC grind.' By glorifying unhealthy study habits and not recognising the prominence and signs of academic burnout we are putting students' wellbeing, mental and physical health at risk. Education should light and nurture the flame while empowering, inspiring students not causing debilitating overwhelmingness and unnecessary stress that extinguish a flame's existence.

We need to stop normalizing academic burnout as a part of the Australian high school experience. Instead, we need the courage to talk about the issue itself and inform students that there is no shame in asking for help so they can live balanced lives.

The presence of resources such as study specialists and counsellors in schools is essential for maintaining pastoral care, so that schools can educate students on academic burnout, while offering support to help students keep their flame and overcome unhealthy study habits. We believe that mandatory self-care skills, meditation and study skill classes should be implemented in every school's pastoral program to support the wellbeing and health of students. These should be heavily used especially in junior years to help form a healthy relationship with sleep study and stress.

By working towards a holistic education and recognizing students as people rather than just a number, mark, or ATAR, we create positive change that actively brings awareness to academic burnout and recognise the signs to stop the effects of academic burnout from becoming more severe in young people. Together we can kindle the fire the students have; give them the support and resources they need to keep alight and make sure that no flame is left to go out.

Eating disorders

Aly and Amber - Northern Beaches Secondary College, Mackellar Girls Campus

Body image. You've heard those words before, I'm sure. You've probably heard the term tossed about, mentioned briefly but somewhat shunned as if it was taboo. You may not have heard the true meaning of body image. So, on behalf of the youth of the Northern Beaches we would like to explain what it is to you and why we feel it is such a deeply rooted issue in our community.

Body image is the combination of the thoughts and feelings that someone has about their body. It impacts both girls and boys alike, affecting their mental and physical health and can be both positive and negative but I can guarantee that your mind immediately went to a place of negativity; maybe stirring thoughts of criticism on your own body, disordered eating or maybe you even felt your heart sink a little.

As school captains of an all-girls school know all too well how true this is with body image being a huge inhibitor to young women's sense of self-worth. According to a study done by the National Eating Disorders Collaboration, nearly one third of adolescents struggle with disordered eating in any given year. This statistic has also been on the rise, having multiplied 5-fold since 1990.

The broken image of health we have on the Northern Beaches is fuel to this flame. One young girl asked on the survey, "Why is being tan and skinny the norm?". Because it is most definitely not worth sacrificing your mental and physical health for the perfect "bikini body". Or is it worth sacrificing your education? 50% of young people said that how they view their body has prevented them from raising their hand in class! Two-thirds of young people also said their body image stopped them from doing physical activities! Can you see how destructive low self-esteem is as a result of a poor body image?... Can you imagine how much potential 90% of young people could unlock without their body image issues?

As someone who has experienced the current hospital treatment plans for eating disorders firsthand, I can only label them as 'traumatic, degrading and all around ineffective' and it is clear that many of the survey participants felt similarly. One teen on the Northern Beaches stated that "the lack of proper treatment will leave scars I can never forget."

But improving adolescents' health in regards to eating disorders and body image isn't purely about improving treatment plans, it's about early prevention and education. I'm sure most of you would already know what the largest contributor to fractured body images is amongst young people and what is in the most dire need of reformation.

You don't need to be told, but it's social media. These types of large-scale platforms provide boundless opportunities for young people to make unrealistic comparisons about their own bodies. One of the survey participants has said that "people's mental health nowadays is ruined because of social media" "it leads to people thinking they have a rubbish life." Now does anyone want to guess how old the girl who gave this answer was? I'm sure most of you thought around 17 or 18; this girl was only in the 12-14 age bracket.

Social media does not only have a detrimental impact on body image but it's having this detrimental impact on people who are still children. This is why we are calling for a greater and more effective education system surrounding body image and eating disorders. It is important to recognise both of these things as mental health issues and not just "normalities." Whilst teens are still developing, there is no better time to educate on balance and how to stay flourishing without falling into unhealthy habits.

Achieving this starts with redefining healthy. No longer should it be the product of unhealthy, self-harming practices that make you "look the best". It should be what food, exercise and activities that make you happy, that keep you satisfied and fulfilled, not empty and afraid.

Teacher shortages

Annika and Nathan - Davidson High School

Good evening everyone. I would like you all to imagine that you showed up this evening; eager to learn about the challenges facing the youth today, and the youth never showed up. (sarcastically) That's a pretty crucial part to tonight's event, right? Well, across the state more than 9800 lessons are without a teacher every day. For young adults that's 28% of high school lessons left unsupervised meaning that about 50 of you tonight would be left staring at an empty stage. You'd be left pretty disappointed wouldn't you?

Teacher shortages have become a more prevalent issue in today's society and has been a significant factor in the educational decline of current students. So what is the challenge that we are facing? Teacher shortages are nationwide but in NSW alone there are more than 2000 full-time positions left empty. This includes everything from substitutes to some of our most fundamental subjects English and Math and even the school's executive team. There is a clear reason for this shortage: not enough young Australians want to become teachers.

School is a fundamental part of the development of the education and individuality of young adults. However, structured and trusting learning environments are essential in helping us encompass confidence that allows us to strive for our goals. By 2034 there is a predicted shortage of around 79 000 teachers. Our universities graduate around 16,000 new teachers each year, but Australia needs at least 4,000 extra to keep up with growth of school students. But due to these vacant positions, attendance rates have gone down. In high schools, only 36% of students have gone to school with a 90% or higher attendance rate. And as more teachers retire in the second half of the decade, this challenge we face together becomes larger.

The more teacher positions that have gone unfilled, the more students that don't show up for lessons. A student in the Have Your Say Day survey stated that teacher shortages "greatly impacted my year 12 learning experience with teachers that may not be capable of teaching higher syllabus levels for certain subjects taking on HSC classes." Another simply said "teacher shortages - they affect my school everyday." The attendance rates of schools are dropping due to decrease of specifically trained teachers in schools, ultimately leading to a remarkable disinterest in schooling. So, what if we could create a more stable learning environment for everyone?

Obviously, our first idea would just be to raise salaries, improve working conditions and provide benefits to those studying education but we believe it's not that simple. However, we could start by looking at how together we can support students impacted by shortages and respond to the stress that can build up from an unstable learning environment. Our idea to face this challenge would be to make educational resources more available for both students and teachers so that even with this shortage, there are easier ways for students to stay up to date with their work. This includes cooperating with organisations such as Headspace to provide resources on how to deal with stress, making online learning sites like Edrolo and Atomi free for all students and building a support system where students are able to cope with the stress of schooling in a more accessible way.

Year 12 is the home stretch for us up on the stage tonight. However, teacher shortages are making us work harder to finish something that already has had a significant toll on our wellbeing. So in the near future, we hope to have more teachers in our classrooms so that more of our lessons are covered. We want a better future for the education of young people because no one wants to be left staring at an empty stage.

Procrastination

Luca - St Ives High School

Before we get started, I would like to say a big thank you to everyone that has taken the time out of their day to attend this event this afternoon and concurrently I need to apologise. Last night it dawned on me that I had to stand on stage today and deliver a speech for the most important people of our country.

Yes of course we are very fortunate to be accompanied by members of parliament, distinguished achievers and beloved members of our community. However, I'm not standing up here for you today, and neither are my fellow advocates, today is a day to voice the issues and problems that the youth in our area face. So back to my apology.

The speech, I thought about it many times but something else always took priority, tomorrow always felt like a better day to start it, and there I was, at 8:00 last night regretting every choice I had ever made to put off writing this damn speech. I eventually gave up at 8:30. That's the problem, and as we all know it's no new one, it's withstood the test of time and it's not just hurting adolescents, it's hurting everyone.

We have all experienced the devil of procrastination at some point in our lives and as 'The Centre for Clinical Interventions' outlines "across the United States, United Kingdom and Australia, 20% of all adults experience chronic procrastination and, in the school and university setting chronic procrastination affects a staggering 75-95%. So what drives procrastination? Is it the assignments, is it the deadlines, is it the lack of support? Well, as MindBox Psychology puts it "Procrastination is driven by unhelpful rules and assumptions that individuals have about themselves and the world. Excuses like "I can't work when I'm feeling tired" typically produce discomfort like anger, boredom, anxiety, self-doubt, depression and so much more and when people can no longer tolerate this discomfort they procrastinate to avoid these feelings, favouring short term gratification over the desired long term outcome.

Adolescents have not been shown the correct way to complete tasks as soon as they are made aware of it, and continuously push hard things to another time. This is a responsibility that adults and educators have for adolescents and so far unfortunately they have been failing us, and themselves. Why aren't 12 year olds during their induction into high school taught about the perils of procrastination and how it can be effectively managed?

Solutions to procrastination will vary, as it is subjective and I cannot say in certainty that I have the answer, but the least we can do is bring awareness to the matter and slowly improve the systems in place to empower and strengthen adolescents so that we can tolerate this distress. As a student I have been guilty of completing schoolwork to an insufficient capacity and not meeting designated course outcomes. In recent years, my family has had some rather large obstacles to overcome and as a result a saying came to light that I have adopted to help me overcome hardships and allows me to continue to strive for my full potential. So, I apologise in advance to any Kevins, and I would like to warn you all, especially the teachers, that I am about to use an expletive. I promise it is not meant in any disrespectful way. Could all the teachers present please do me a favour and cover your ears and politicians I assume you're already pretty used to this.

The saying is three words long in all capitals, F**K KEVIN UP! with an exclamation mark. KEVIN is a metaphorical representation for anything that needs to get done, whether it is going on a run, cleaning your room, asking your boss for a raise, or even writing that speech 4 weeks before the deadline. In no way, shape or form am I suggesting this is going to prevent everyone from experiencing procrastination, all I can say is it has helped me and even some of my friends.

As you may already have gathered, Kevin actually came to my rescue long ago for this presentation. I have also prepared an additional solution that may be more appropriate for the target demographic. It would consist of an adjustment to the assessment structure for year 7 and 8 by creating a pathway in which assignments are completed. For example, an English assessment would be separated into manageable segments that allows students to submit smaller amounts of work at different times, the final deadline would include all the parts that have been previously submitted amounting to a normal assessment task. Hopefully by implementing a structure such as this, adolescents will be better equipped to complete tasks not just in school but throughout life.

In this one speech I have been able to identify two possible solutions that could benefit both young people and adults. What's stopping us from killing this virus and preventing it from harming future generations? There are answers to these problems, we just have to have enough courage to stand up to them. So, what do you say, can we F**K KEVIN UP! together?

Driving safety

Sami - Stella Maris College

Let's hit the road, Jack! I'm taking you for a drive down Road Safety Avenue. My name is Sami Winter, and I am representing Stella Maris College as their College Captain. Buckle up because we're about to hit a couple of tricky detours, but don't worry – I'll share some ideas to navigate them smoothly.

Our first detour, or risk factor, may surprise you. The use of older cars is a significant factor in road incidents for young drivers. A 2018 study revealed that over the past five years, 80% of drivers under 17 who tragically lost their lives on the roads were driving vehicles more than 10 years old. From personal experience, a couple of months ago, I was navigating a roundabout when the CV joint in my car snapped, causing me to lose control of the steering and crash into the curb. Thankfully, no one was injured, but this incident could have led to a much more drastic outcome. Guess how old my Nissan Pulsar was? It was a 2002 model, a vintage 22 years old.

Unfortunately, so many of our youth drive around in old cheap cars. A huge reason for this is the astronomical insurance and registration fees imposed on drivers aged under 25 years old. Young drivers cannot justify spending \$2,500 on car insurance. Also, once a kid gets their Ps, parents won't let them drive their newer cars either because they can't afford the added insurance premium. So of course, they'll opt for the cheapest option. Driving new cars with safety features may decrease this statistic. Plus, people make less risky decisions if they are driving a newer car. If we continue to allow our youth to drive around in old cars, this significantly compromises the community's safety.

So, what can we do to address this issue?

What if the government provided financial incentives and assistance for purchasing newer, safer vehicles?

The government could:

- Remove or reduce the stamp duty on cars that are under 10 years old.
- Establish affordable loan schemes for first-time car buyers under 25 years old to purchase a car under 10 years old.
- Subsidise insurance policies to reduce premiums for drivers under 25 years old to own newer, safer vehicles. And/or
- Provide a rebate to drivers under 25 years old who have not received an infringement notice in a set period of time.

New vehicles have advanced safety features like lane departure warnings and automatic emergency braking. By promoting the ownership of these safer vehicles, they have the potential to significantly improve youth road safety. Serious accidents result in long-term disabilities or fatalities, removing youth from the workforce. By decreasing the likelihood of accidents, this leads to less strain on our healthcare and emergency services, alleviating the financial burden on families and the government.

On our next detour, let's head to Fast and Furious. In the Northern Beaches, there have been 13 teenage deaths due to youth driving over the past ten years. Not to mention all the injuries. These accidents have predominantly occurred later at night, despite graduated restricted licenses.

The youth in the Northern Beaches like to go to parties and gatherings, where they hang out and drink with their mates. When the party is over, they all mindlessly jump into their mate's cars to get a lift home because our bus services are infrequent or non-existent later at night, especially in our remote suburbs. Therefore, there is constant peer pressure for the designated drivers to load up their car with their mates, pump up the music and drive them home. Studies indicate that teenage drivers are more likely to speed and engage in reckless driving behaviours when accompanied by peers, with the presence of just one teenage passenger increasing the likelihood of risky driving behaviours by 44%.

So, what can we do to discourage them from driving at night with a carload of mates? What if we extended the hours of our bus services making it more accessible for our youth to get home? In particular, what if we introduce an extension of the hop skip and jump bus. This service could pick up from our main B Line bus stops and drive youth directly home.

Furthermore, what if Australia revamped its driving test system by incorporating elements from England's stringent tests? For example, the emergency stop, where the instructor randomly calls out "stop", testing the driver's reaction time while maintaining full control of the car. This will prepare drivers to handle critical situations and maintain control under stress.

So, finally, let's make a turn in the right direction.

Consent and sexual violence

Yana and Liam - Northern Beaches Secondary College, Manly Selective Campus

Luna and Vishi - Northern Beaches Secondary College, Freshwater Senior Campus

Around 1 in 10 people between the ages of 15 and 24 have experienced sexual violence. Scarily, many young people feel a sense of inevitability of experiencing sexual violence. It's a largely avoided yet highly relevant topic, affecting us and future generations. Any behaviour, whether it be physical, psychological, verbal or cyber, of a sexual nature, from any gender, that causes distress is considered sexual violence.

It has dominated recent news, highlighting the ongoing and ever-present impacts of a broad and devastating social issue, affecting individuals, families and communities across Australia. These incidents aren't isolated but are the result of a deeply rooted societal problem; a silent culture, one of secrecy, undereducation, and social stigma.

87% of sexual violence cases go unreported. This current crisis is the result of a range of long-term generational factors, such as a lack of education and awareness, underfunded resources, minimal support and low conviction rates. There are services and programs currently in place that young people have found immediately effective, including culturally safe and trauma-informed support services such as 1800Respect and Reach Out who offer 24-hour hotlines as well as counselling and safety planning such as local domestic violence shelters.

The NSW Sexual Violence Plan, put in place from 2022, aims to tackle the root cause of sexual violence through improved education and increased access to hotlines and support groups. However, despite being in place for two years, the Plan has had a limited large-scale impact, especially for young people affected by sexual violence.

Personally, in my 13 years of education, never has the topic of sexual violence been addressed, let alone taught. No one felt they could ask because of the social stigma associated with even being a victim. The term sexual violence has confusion surrounding it, and without its proper definition, it makes the incidents difficult to recognise and speak out about. This vague understanding of these key terms limits the likelihood of identifying and reporting incidents, leaving us and many other students across Australia feeling in the dark about consent, healthy relationships and dual respect throughout our schooling.

But governments can and must help, through sizeable reforms, to the way that consent education is presented and discussed in schools. The youth of today and the future need access to open-ended conversations about safe, healthy relationships and consent through regular curriculum timetabling, not infrequent dialogue or ineffective scare campaigns in the media. The current and future generations of Australians deserve a future without a social culture of survivor blaming, free from the stigma surrounding sexual violence. Early intervention peer-to-peer programs that young people have found helpful such as Consent Labs and Tomorrow Man must be fully backed by the government, to help Australian youth recognise respectful relationships, understand consent and identify unsafe environments for themselves, their peers and their families.

Education must also extend beyond students to parents, families and community mentors to create long term generational change in the way victim-survivors are supported and challenge the stigma around sexual violence. Sexual education in general is considered a taboo topic that many only learn about at school so creating a strong, open community awareness around it is vital for the effectiveness of government legislation.

Of the 600 plus responders to this year's survey, it was clear that young people need governments and communities to improve education and support a key public issue. The NSW government released the Make No Doubt Campaign from 2018 to 2023 which raised awareness for affirmative consent through social media content directed towards young people. Ultimately, this campaign didn't decrease the number of sexual violence cases, making it clear that youth input is vital to the policy-making processes regarding sexual violence. This inclusion of voice must also be included in awareness, education and bystander campaigns.

Although we can see the government attempting to combat the issue of sexual violence, through strategies like the NSW Sexual Violence Plan 2022, we believe more action must be undertaken earlier, quicker and more effectively than current efforts, because for every year that we move ineffectively through education and stigma reduction, 80,000 NSW students proceed into life with insufficient knowledge to combat, recognise or prevent sexual violence and misconduct, creating further generational stigma and trauma.

But there's only so much we can do alone. An end to sexual violence starts with openness, connection and support. Together, we can minimise the impact of sexual violence in Australia and create a safer environment for future generations.



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