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YLab.



**Foundation for Young Australians + YLab**

# **Centring young people's in Victoria's future**

December 2020

## Executive Summary

The Foundation for Young Australians (FYA) and YLab welcome the opportunity to contribute to the development of a Victorian Youth Strategy which centres the voices, lived experience and expertise of young Victorians.

FYA and YLab commend the Victorian Government on their strong engagement with young people, the youth sector, and community members in developing this strategy. It is encouraging to see that the Victorian Government recognises the critical importance of a whole of government response to the challenges that Victorian young people are experiencing.

FYA also endorses the [Youth Affairs Council of Victoria's \(YACVic\) COVID-19 Response Plan](#) and recommendations for strong recovery for Victorian young people.

### Impact of COVID-19 on young Victorians (survey results)

Every aspect of how the 1.2 million young people (12-25) in Victoria live, learn and work has been transformed by COVID-19 and its economic and social impacts.<sup>1</sup> The effect of this will continue to be felt by young people in the decade to come.

Despite being disproportionately impacted by COVID-19, young people's voices, opinions and experiences are often missing from political and policy debates. Earlier this year, FYA commissioned a survey to understand how young people have been affected by COVID-19 and their opinions of government responses:

- **Highly engaged:** Almost 60% of young Victorians (18-24) were politically or civically engaged - having attended a town hall, signed a petition, attended a protest or engaged with an MP or politician on issues that they care about.<sup>2</sup>
- **Disempowered by traditional processes:** Around 60% of young Victorians believed politicians care more about businesses, corporations, and older people than they do about what people like me think. The social upheaval caused by COVID-19 risks exacerbating this further.<sup>3</sup>

### Summary of recommendations

FYA and YLab's recommendations focus on embedding active youth participation in Government and policy-making.<sup>4</sup>

1. Develop a paid **Youth Taskforce** to provide whole-of-government advice on youth issues, with working groups liaising with relevant Government Departments to provide youth insight across Government.
2. Embed **youth co-design and co-delivery processes** across Government through employing a workforce of young people with lived experience of a range of intersecting experiences that can be drawn upon for expert guidance across a range of issues.
3. Ensure all **policy processes hear directly from young people and include appropriate feedback loops** (e.g. inquiries and submissions for policy feedback hold a youth session or methods for inclusive engagement).
4. Trial **participatory democracy mechanisms** that include young people across all areas of policy-making, not just "youth issues" (e.g. online engagement, citizens juries, meetings with MPs).
5. **Support Youth Congress** to develop a yearly report summarising emerging issues and policy recommendations from young people that requires a public response from the Minister for Youth within six months.

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<sup>1</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), 2019.

<sup>2</sup> Essential Research Polling undertaken for FYA, June 2020. Available at: <https://www.fya.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Foundation-for-Young-Australians-Reserach-Report-2020-D2-1.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> Our recommendations address the Discussion Paper outcomes that: Victorian young people are connected to culture, community and civic life; and Government, community services and the youth sector are accessible, appropriate and coordinated, and respond to young people's evolving needs.

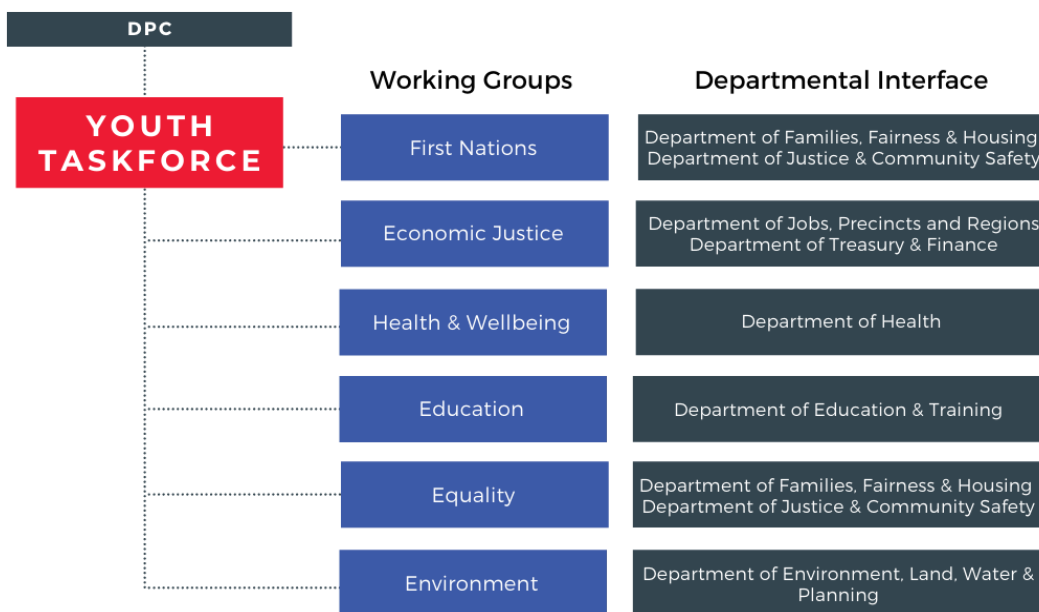
# 1. Whole-of-government Victorian Youth Taskforce

In addition to existing engagement mechanisms with young people such as Youth Congress, FYA proposes the formation of a paid Youth Advisory Taskforce that provides whole-of-government advice to the Department of Premier and Cabinet. It is important that this is a paid opportunity for young people to recognise and value their experiences, ideas and opinions and to remove barriers to their regular and sustained engagement.

This Taskforce should also be appropriately trained in Government processes in order to ensure their insights can be meaningfully operationalised. This Taskforce could operate in a similar manner to the Victorian Government’s LGBTQI+ Taskforce (see **case study 1**), with related working groups advising on a range of issues across other Government Departments.

Figure 1 outlines a proposed structure for the Youth Taskforce and the related working groups with the Government Departments they could interface with or advise. This would ensure a coordinated approach to young people across Departments while recognising that specific cohorts of young people should be consulted on specific issues.

Figure 1 - Proposed Youth Taskforce Structure



## Case study 1: Victorian Government’s LGBTQI+ Taskforce

The Victorian LGBTQI+ Taskforce advises the Victorian Government on LGBTQI+ issues to support equality through legislation reform, new policies and programs.

The LGBTQI+ Taskforce is made up of community members who are appointed for two-year terms. The LGBTQI+ Taskforce is supported in its work by two working groups, the Justice Working Group and the Health and Human Services Working Group, which also seeks input from the Trans and Gender Diverse Expert Advisory Group and Intersex Expert Advisory Group on specific projects.

For more information see: <https://www.vic.gov.au/lgbtiq-taskforce>

## RECOMMENDATION 1

Develop a paid Youth Taskforce to provide whole-of-government advice on youth issues, with working groups liaising with relevant Government Departments to provide youth insight across Government.

**Case Study: LGBTQI+ Taskforce**

## 2. Co-design and co-delivery with young people across government

In an increasingly complex world, there is no one mechanism or framework that will solve the unique and intersecting challenges that young people face today. In response to these challenges, FYA launched a social enterprise called YLab in 2016. YLab is a consulting, learning and digital storytelling enterprise that brings the fresh thinking of diverse young people to complex social challenges.

Youth unemployment recently hit a 23-year high in 2020 at 16.4% in June this year, adding to this challenge youth underemployment is also at record levels – with 1 in 3 young people unable to get enough work.<sup>5</sup> By providing young people with an employment opportunity where they can build their skills, and utilise their lived experience to tackle social change, the Victorian Government can actively contribute to reducing youth unemployment and underemployment.

### Benefits of youth-led co-design

Through the work undertaken at YLab (see **case study 2**), FYA and YLab have seen the value of hiring a diverse cohort of young people with lived experience to provide co-design services. This not only improves the efficacy of the policies and services by accurately reflecting young people's experiences, ideas and needs, but also provides meaningful employment pathways for young people.

### Case study 2: YLab

YLab flip power dynamics by putting young people in the driver's seat of this work. YLab has recruited, trained, and employed over 120 YLab Associates from across Australia who bring multidisciplinary skills, future-focused ideas and different lived experiences, to train and engage other young people - so far they have trained 5,000 learners and engaged 5000 other young people in decision making across Australia.

YLab has built a co-design and co-delivery framework from their deep learned experience enabling young people to work in multidisciplinary and intergenerational teams to lead the design of programs, services, infrastructure, and content for young people. This co-design framework

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<sup>5</sup> Brotherhood of St Laurence, 2020. "The Great Disruptor: COVID-led Recession Deals Another Blow to Youth". Available at: <https://www.bsl.org.au/news-events/media-releases/the-great-disruptor-covid-led-recession-deals-another-blow-to-youth/>

leverages facilitation tools and techniques that address power dynamics within groups to ensure individual young people, including those previously unheard from, feel a sense of agency and have courage to contribute. The design process is not linear or sequential, hence modes can occur simultaneously, overlap or be repeated in response to a design challenge.

Figure: YLab Codesign Framework



For more information about YLab please see: <https://www.ylab.global/>

### Investing in a lived experience workforce of young people

In response to COVID-19 and the challenges presented, YLab launched a co-design challenge with young people to design solutions. The Lived Experience League was one of the prototyped solutions that can be used as a framework to develop this policy (see **case study 3**).

FYA commends the Victorian Government on investing \$16 million in a lived experience workforce for the mental health system.<sup>6</sup> FYA proposes funding a similar workforce of young people with a range of lived experiences that can be deployed across Government to support in co-designing and co-delivering policies and services.

### Case study 3: YLab's Co-design Challenge & the Lived Experience League

YLab established the COVID-19 co-design challenge to understand the challenges young people were facing and design innovative solutions to these problems. Six key problem areas were identified as being the root causes of the most prominent issues faced by young Australians in the context of COVID-19:

1. Lack of access to support
2. Low confidence in government
3. Lack of economic power
4. Poor mental health outcomes
5. Discrimination and widening class divide
6. Lack of representation at a decision making level.

These problem areas have not been solely brought about by COVID-19, rather they have been exacerbated by the upheaval of many of our existing systems. As part of the co-design challenge, young people developed viable prototypes for each problem area. The below is an example of one of these prototypes - the **Lived Experience League**.

<sup>6</sup> Victorian Government Budget, 2020. Available at: <https://www.budget.vic.gov.au/mental-health-support-when-its-needed-most>

## PROTOTYPE 1: LIVED EXPERIENCE LEAGUE



### PROBLEM AREA

A lack of access to support and young people not represented at a decision making level

### THE PITCH

An embedded lived experience body that consults with young Australians to meaningfully represent their views within Government to facilitate better policy outcomes.

WHY	HOW	WHAT
<p>From testing, the concept of a formalised body to give young people a meaningful voice that is embedded in decision making processes was incredibly desirable to young people.</p> <p>They cited a significant need for young people to be considered when support systems are designed and implemented.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Creating a direct link between young people and decision makers to ensure support is developed with young people's input.</li> <li>• Co-design process will ensure that support meets the needs of all young Australians.</li> </ul>	<p>Keys to its success:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A meaningful seat at the table with decision makers</li> <li>• Effective strategy for co-designing with young Australians</li> <li>• Must be embedded in Government systems</li> </ul>

For more information on YLab's Codesign Challenge please see:

<https://www.ylab.global/codesign-challenge>

## RECOMMENDATION 2

Embed youth co-design and co-delivery processes across Government through employing a workforce of young people with lived experience of a range of intersecting experiences that can be drawn upon for expert guidance across a range of issues.

**Case studies: YLab and YLab's Co-Design Challenge and Lived Experience League**

## 3. Hearing young people's voices across all policy issues

Young people are actively engaged in civic life, but traditional policy-making processes are rarely accessible for young people to access and engage with. Young people seek "participatory experiences that afford them agency and where they can see tangible results of their efforts", rather than tokenistic involvement.<sup>7</sup>

Methods for engaging in policy-making, inquiries and Government reviews which aren't designed with young people in mind will not be effective at capturing young people's views. Traditional systems need to adapt to ensure they seek feedback from young people in ways young people want to engage with. FYA recommends that the Victorian Youth Strategy includes a process to ensure all inquiries and submissions for policy feedback have an opportunity for youth feedback.

<sup>7</sup> Collin, P. (2008). "Young People Imagining a New Democracy: Literature Review." Sydney: Whitlam Institute.

## Principles for engaging with young people

FYA also recommends that the Victorian Government develop principles for youth engagement in policy-making, this should include a range of preferred mechanisms for engagement.<sup>8</sup> As a Victorian Government research paper that reviewed engagement of culturally and linguistically diverse communities (CALD) in parliamentary inquiries highlighted - inquiries that engage with people from CALD communities were often done in an “ad hoc manner” and there were no formal strategies in place to foster engagement.<sup>9</sup> The paper also highlighted that engagement was often limited to specific “CALD issues” rather than seeking input from the community in policy-making more broadly.<sup>10</sup>

Similar challenges are experienced in engaging with young people. FYA supports the diverse range of engagement that the Victorian Youth Strategy team have employed to engage with young people in this process, through social media, focus groups, surveys and other methods. This should be the norm across policy-making processes rather than an ad-hoc approach only for “youth issues”.

## Tailored and responsive engagement tools

These principles should include a diverse range of methods for engagement that caters to different preferences, accessibility needs and language groups. This may include:

- Accepting submissions or promoting inquiries via social media;
- Accepting video submissions, journals or alternative forms of communication rather than formal written submissions;
- Training and resourcing young people to run consultations with their peers, in their contexts, using their preferred methods;
- Providing a youth specific forum (for under 25s) for all Government inquiries or Royal Commissions that is more accessible, less formal and removes power dynamics; and,
- Provide funding for community organisations to support young people with lived experience of issues to present at hearings, and to ensure that there is appropriate support in place to debrief them on sharing their experiences and provide access to mental health support where needed.

## Two-way dialogue between young people and government

As highlighted above young people want to ensure there is a tangible outcome from their involvement in policy-making processes. Therefore, we recommend that there are appropriate feedback loops in place for young people to be aware of the outcomes of their involvement. This might include:

- Communicate high level findings from inquiries and other relevant Parliamentary hearings (via short videos or other mediums);
- Seek a second round of input or feedback with an interim paper, or prototype solution; and,
- Summaries of research papers (ensuring they are accessible to people from diverse backgrounds including Culturally and Linguistically Diverse).

The above feedback loop recommendations have been formulated from YLab’s State of the Future project with the Victorian Parliament in which the team heard from over 500 young people across Victoria (see **case study 4: State of the Future** for more information).

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<sup>8</sup> Some examples of youth participation principles can be found here: [https://www.youthforum.org/sites/default/files/publication-pdfs/0017-20\\_FINAL\\_Policy%20Paper%20on%20Quality%20Youth%20Participation.pdf](https://www.youthforum.org/sites/default/files/publication-pdfs/0017-20_FINAL_Policy%20Paper%20on%20Quality%20Youth%20Participation.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> Victorian Parliament, 2018, “Engaging Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) Communities in Parliamentary Inquiries”. Available at: <https://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/component/jdownloads/download/36-research-papers/13885-engaging-culturally-and-linguistically-diverse-cald-communities-in-parliamentary-inquiries>

<sup>10</sup> *ibid.*

#### Case study 4: State of the Future

The 'State of the Future' project provides an exciting and pioneering opportunity to build on the insights and lessons learned to develop and pilot a statewide approach that enables deeper and more meaningful connection between young people and Parliament.

This project saw YLab hire, train and develop the capabilities of 10 young people to undertake a series of consultations with other young people in their Legislative Areas. Through workshops, phone interviews, online surveys and face-to-face meetings we spoke to 507 young people aged 18-30 across Victoria.

##### Objectives

- Develop an innovative approach that enables young people aged approximately 18 to 30 years old to directly present their perspectives to Parliament
- Establish a core group of eight young people to engage other young Victorians to provide different views and connections to Parliament
- Provide a dynamic and interactive mechanism for young people from a diverse range of backgrounds to learn about:
  - How Parliamentary committee processes work and can be utilised.
  - How to report on issues to Parliament

### RECOMMENDATION 3

Ensure all policy processes hear directly from young people and include appropriate feedback loops (e.g. inquiries and submissions for policy feedback hold a youth session or methods for inclusive engagement).

## 4. Participatory democracy mechanisms across all issues

Young people are not a homogenous group, and engage in a variety of ways with political and public life.<sup>11</sup> As technology develops and the ways that young people engage with politics and issues they care about changes over time, the Victorian Government will need to trial and test new forms to ensure young people are effectively included in democratic processes - e.g.:

1. **Direct engagement with Members of Parliament** (MPs) or key decision-makers (see **case study 5** of FYA's Local and Vocal campaign which sought to connect young people with Federal MPs to have their voices and experiences heard);
2. **Online engagement** (see **case study 6** of Taiwan's online democratic platform for engaging citizens in policy development);
3. **Engagement in non-traditional settings** to minimise power dynamics and encourage genuine two-way conversations between decision-makers and young people (see **case study 7** of YLab's Policy in the Pub project with the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning);
4. Randomly drawn **citizens juries** on key policy issues (see **case study 8** on Citizens Juries).

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<sup>11</sup> Victorian Government Youth Strategy Discussion Paper, 2020.



This above list provides a few examples that could be tested and trialled under a flagship youth project focussed on designing new ways to engage with the Victorian Government that are fit for purpose.

This should be appropriately funded, resourced and evaluated - to aid in sharing learnings about best practice youth engagement with other State/Territory Governments and the Federal Government.

#### **Case study 5: FYA's Local & Vocal Campaign**

The Local and Vocal campaign was launched to support young people aged 16-29 across the country to share the impact COVID-19 has had on their living, learning, and working with decision-makers ahead of the Federal Budget.

Culminating in two weeks of action from the 22 to 31 July, the program focussed on helping to build participants' capacity and confidence in meeting with their local Federal Member of Parliament (MP), sharing their experiences and putting forward their own ideas. FYA delivered weekly webinars, a two-hour government and media relations 101 training day, and created 151 electorate fact sheets to help participants put their experiences into context.

FYA supported more than 90 young people across over 30 Federal electorates to meet virtually with and share their experiences of COVID-19 with their local MP. 82% of participants had never met with their Federal Member of Parliament before Local and Vocal.

*"It was an excellent experience. My MP seemed to genuinely care about what we had to say and was very genuine in her responses." - Young person*

**For more information please refer to the FYA website:**

<https://www.fya.org.au/covid19-response/>

#### **Case study 6: YLab's Policy in the Pub**

YLab worked with the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP) to run a Policy in the Pub event to informally introduce departmental staff to young people, and engage them in meaningful policy discussions about renewable energy and climate change. The event also sought to demystify what happens behind the scenes in Government and showcase the policy-making processes.

*"It's quite informal, and people aren't as intimidated - they can come along without needing to know someone or know something already and learn about policy." - Young person*

**For more information please refer to the event storytelling video here:**

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1aPbqSnYJ280G2WydigFpB064fe0N8zrH/view>

#### **Case study 7: Taiwan's Online Democracy**

Taiwan has several online platforms to encourage discussion and consensus regarding policy and legislation. The two primary platforms of vTaiwan and Join encourage users to discuss

and find common ground on political topics, in online forums.

- One of the major impacts of vTaiwan is that it encourages discussion and brings together people from across the political spectrum regarding issues.
- Bringing together those in power and “regular citizens” can enlighten those in politics what the real world concerns of its citizens are and how they will be subjectively impacted on the ground by policies.

During 2020, Taiwan utilised this digital democracy to support its COVID-19 eradication efforts to great success, due to the platforms providing space for engaged online citizens, and policy-makers to connect.

**For more information on Taiwan’s online democracy please see:**

<https://theconversation.com/hacking-the-pandemic-how-taiwans-digital-democracy-holds-covid-19-at-bay-145023>

### **Case study 8: Citizens Juries**

Similar to traditional juries, citizen juries provide the opportunity for a randomly selected cross-section of the public to deliberate thoroughly over an issue, often over several days. The selected ‘jurors’ are given a key question or policy to consider with the aim of providing a recommendation.

This process is facilitated by an independent facilitator and in the course of their deliberations, the jury has access to expert advice and research. At the end of the process, the jury will issue findings and recommendations to the Government.

The use of citizens juries has been explored by a range of countries, state and local government’s worldwide. One local example is the City of Melbourne and their 10 year financial plan - in which they engaged a People’s Panel of 43 randomly selected Melburnians to make recommendations to Council on its spending and revenue strategy over the next decade. The evaluation of this project highlighted that the panel felt incredibly engaged, and the process provided good value of money - resulting in both increased goodwill in the City but also tangible community benefit.

**For more information on Citizens Juries including case studies please see:**

<https://www.vlga.org.au/sites/default/files/v4-Citizen-Juries-an-overview.pdf>

**For the City of Melbourne 10 year financial plan case study and evaluation please see:**

[https://s3.ap-southeast-2.amazonaws.com/hdp.au.prod.app.com-participate.files/3514/4477/8217/Evaluation\\_of\\_community\\_engagement\\_for\\_the\\_10\\_Year\\_Financial\\_Plan.pdf](https://s3.ap-southeast-2.amazonaws.com/hdp.au.prod.app.com-participate.files/3514/4477/8217/Evaluation_of_community_engagement_for_the_10_Year_Financial_Plan.pdf)

## **RECOMMENDATION 4**

Trial participatory democracy mechanisms that include young people across all areas of policy-making, not just “youth issues” (e.g. online engagement, citizens juries, meetings with MPs).

**Case studies: Taiwan's online democracy, Local & Vocal, YLab Policy in the Pub & Citizens Juries**

## **5. Dialogue between Youth Congress and Youth Minister**

Youth Congress is an important mechanism for engaging young people in policy making and ensuring young people's voices are heard in decision-making on issues of importance to all young Victorians.

In order to provide more power and accountability to Youth Congress, FYA recommends that young representatives should be funded to write a yearly report on the emerging issues and policy recommendations from young people for Government. This report should collate evidence and research produced during the year, and directly engage with other young people.

Appropriate and timely feedback loops are needed that recognise young representatives' time, experiences and ideas, and ensure that the Government is seriously considering the views of young people. Youth Congress' yearly report should receive a public response from the Minister for Youth within six months of receipt, outlining whether the Victorian Government will implement the recommendations in full, in part, or not at all.

### **RECOMMENDATION 5**

Support Youth Congress to develop a yearly report summarising emerging issues and policy recommendations from young people that requires a public response from the Minister for Youth within six months.

## About FYA

Today's generation of young people in Australia are facing unprecedented and intersecting crises. They also have the skills, insight and ambition to address them.

FYA's vision is that young people have the power to beat injustice and transform the future. In pursuit of this vision, our purpose is to back young people with the trust, resources, skills, and connections to make change.

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## About YLab

YLab employs young people with different lived experiences to bring fresh, impactful solutions to design the future. YLab flip power dynamics by putting young people in the driver's seat.

Since launching in 2016 YLab has recruited, trained, and developed over 100 YLab Associates, each with their own multidisciplinary skills, future-focused ideas, and different lived experiences.

YLab is imagined by the Foundation for Young Australians and certified by Social Traders as a social enterprise.

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