

28 July 2025

Dr Angela Jackson  
Commissioner (Social Policy)  
Australian Government Productivity  
Commission

Mr Selwyn Button  
Commissioner  
Australian Government Productivity  
Commission

Dear Commissioners,

I would like to commend the Productivity Commission (the Commission) on its Interim Report for the Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Agreement Review. It is encouraging to see that young people have been identified as a priority population who are disproportionately impacted. I welcome the opportunity to contribute to this important conversation to support the Commission in your work.

### The role of the Advocate for Children and Young People

Established under the *Advocate for Children and Young People Act 2014*, the Advocate for Children and Young People is an independent statutory appointment overseen by the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Children and Young People. The Advocate promotes the safety, welfare and wellbeing of children and young people aged 0-24 years and their participation in decisions that affect their lives. The Act requires the Advocate to 'give priority to the interests and needs of vulnerable and disadvantaged children and young people' and to 'focus on systemic issues affecting children and young people.' More information can be found at: [www.acyp.nsw.gov.au](http://www.acyp.nsw.gov.au).

### What do children and young people have to say about mental health?

Children and young people are the experts in their own lives and experiences. The Advocate recognises and supports the work being done across government to listen to children and young people with diverse lived experience when developing policies, programs and services. Throughout our work, the Advocate and team speak with many children and young people of all ages. This submission shares key messages and themes from these children and young people, reflecting what they have shared and our work in supporting them. These insights are sourced from the below.

- The [Strategic Plan for Children and Young People 2022-2024](#): Polling among children and young people in NSW to identify priority areas and baseline information.
- Unpublished 2025 Youth Week Polling: Each year we conduct a Youth Week Poll with 2,000 children and young people aged 10 to 24 across NSW.
- The Advocate's 2024 [submission](#) to the NSW Parliament's Inquiry on prevalence, causes and impacts of loneliness in NSW.
- The Advocate's 2023 [submission](#) to the NSW Parliament's Inquiry into equity, accessibility and appropriate delivery of outpatient and community mental health care in NSW.

Mental health is a key concern for children and young people. It disproportionately impacts young people identifying as LGBTQIA+, those living with disabilities and those with contact with the criminal justice system.

During polling to inform the *2022-2024 Strategic Plan for Children and Young People*, just 55% of children and young people rated their mental health as good. Those most likely to be positive about their mental health were 10 to 13 year olds (79%), those who viewed themselves as highly resilient (68%) and those who felt financially secure (56%). Those most likely to be negative about their mental health identify as LGBTQIA+ (50%), live with disability (40%), or have had contact with the justice system (39%).

The 2024 NSW Youth Advisory Council (YAC) advocacy project focused on reducing the stigma of mental health and enhancing mental health education in schools. The YAC heard from over 100 young people, who reported that stigma around mental health was a key reason why they do not feel comfortable speaking about or reaching out for mental health support.

*“As a neurodivergent young person who found living at home, high school and the COVID crisis immensely difficult and damaging, finding a mental health professional who understood my experiences was unnecessarily challenging.”* - Leila, 20 years old, from the Advocate’s submission to the NSW Parliament’s Inquiry into equity, accessibility and appropriate delivery of outpatient and community mental health care in NSW.

Equity of access to mental health services across the continuum of care is a key area of concern for children and young people across NSW. In particular, these challenges are experienced more acutely for those in regional and remote communities.

In comparison to other health services, the *2025 Youth Week Polling* highlighted that young people across NSW have the greatest need for counselling and psychologists (31%). This was more prominent for those in regional communities (40%) compared with those in metropolitan areas (27%). Despite this demand, those in regional areas find it significantly less easy to access these services (40% rating it easy compared with 48% in metro areas). Many young people who participated in polling highlighted cost of living challenges and the impacts associated with both accessing mental health support and barriers to seeking ongoing help across the continuum of care.

This reiterates findings from the Advocate’s 2023 submission to the ‘*NSW Parliament’s inquiry into equity, accessibility and appropriate delivery of outpatient and community mental health care in NSW*’, which is attached for consideration. The submission speaks to how young people find the mental health system to be difficult and confusing to navigate, and recommends a range of measures to address young people’s concerns. It emphasises the importance of empowering young people to access care, both in terms of first contact with services and in transitioning between different levels of support and mental health care. Throughout our research and engagement, the capacity of services to meet demand is a consistent issue raised. Young people continue to raise concerns about their ability to access professional support for their mental health.

This includes frustration with the wait times associated with seeing private psychologists, as well as wait times to access other mental health support services, such as Headspace.

*“In Regional NSW another challenge faced by young people as they navigate the mental health system concerns continuity of care. There is a high turnover of mental health support staff in regional NSW, robbing young people of the stability they need in their mental health journey.” - Sereena, 24 years old, from the Advocate’s submission to the NSW Parliament’s Inquiry into equity, accessibility and appropriate delivery of outpatient and community mental health care in NSW.*

**Governments can do more to improve access to mental health services for children and young people, and to strengthen protective factors and reduce risk factors to decrease the rate of youth suicide.**

In the *2025 Youth Week Polling*, we heard that there is strong support for potential initiatives to help young people struggling with their mental health, particularly improving access to bulk-billing and expanding the number of free sessions with a psychologist, and gap payments for private treatment. Young people also demonstrated a strong preference to access all services (including mental health) in person rather than online.

Research shows that more than 6 in 10 Australians have experienced adverse childhood experiences (Life in Mind Australia, 2024), with those experiencing child maltreatment being 4.6 times more likely to have attempted suicide (Life in Mind Australia, 2024). Our consultations reveal that many children and young people experiencing mental health challenges have histories of trauma, family dysfunction, or adverse experiences.

Young people's voices align with Australian suicide prevention evidence, calling for prevention focused approaches that address adverse childhood experiences and trauma-informed services that understand root causes. Our consultations show young people also want peer support as well as school based and community connection opportunities, which have been proven to significantly reduce suicide and self-harm among young people.

I encourage the Commission to continue to engage directly with children and young people with lived experience, and would be happy to provide assistance in any engagement. Thank you for the opportunity to provide a submission to this review. Should you wish to discuss these matters, please contact me via: [acyp@acyp.nsw.gov.au](mailto:acyp@acyp.nsw.gov.au) or ph: (02) 9248 0970.

Yours Sincerely,

**Zoë Robinson**

Advocate for Children and Young People