# headspace and yourtown submission on the Second Action Plan (National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022-2032)

**yourtown** and **headspace** welcome the opportunity to respond to the Department of Social Services' consultation on the Second Action Plan under the National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022-2032.

**yourtown** and **headspace** are national organisations that work with children and young people across prevention, early intervention and response systems, including mental health and wellbeing, family support, education, employment, housing and crisis services. Collectively, our services support hundreds of thousands of children, young people and families each year, including many who are impacted by family, domestic and sexual violence. **yourtown** also brings direct service experience supporting women and children escaping domestic and family violence through refuge, transitional housing, post-refuge support and therapeutic responses.

Drawing on these experiences, this submission focuses on the reforms that will make the greatest difference to children and young people. While progress has been made in recognising children and young people as victim survivors in their own right, significant gaps remain in prevention, early intervention, service integration, therapeutic recovery and access to youth-friendly support. The Second Action Plan presents an important opportunity to embed children and young people at the centre of Australia's response to violence.

**Our position**

**headspace** and **yourtown** submit that children and young people must be recognised in the Second Action Plan as victim-survivors in their own right, with distinct experiences, developmental needs, help-seeking pathways and recovery trajectories. This must include distinct responses for children and for young people, rather than as a single, uniform cohort.

Responses must be tailored to the experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people, multicultural children and young people, LGBTIQA+ children and young people, young people with disability, young parents, children and young people in out-of-home care, and young people experiencing homelessness or housing

insecurity. For women with children, safety and recovery must be understood as interconnected, with responses supporting the adult victim survivor and the child or young person as distinct but related victim survivors.

The Second Action Plan also needs to include dedicated actions, investment, performance measures and accountability mechanisms for children and young people across prevention, early intervention, crisis response, recovery and healing.

This needs to align with related national reform processes, including Safe and Supported, Our Ways – Strong Ways – Our Voices, the National Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Child Sexual Abuse 2021–2030, youth mental health reform and the development of more integrated child and family service systems.

Effective implementation of the Second Action Plan will also require strong alignment between Commonwealth, state and territory governments, not only in policy intent but also in funding, service design, performance measures and accountability arrangements. Children and young people affected by family, domestic and sexual violence frequently interact with multiple systems, including health, mental health, education, housing, child protection, justice and community services, and inconsistencies between jurisdictions can create gaps in support, duplication and fragmented experiences for families. A nationally aligned approach should establish shared outcomes, common principles and coordinated investment across governments, while allowing flexibility to respond to local community needs. This will help ensure children and young people can access consistent, connected and developmentally appropriate support regardless of where they live or which service system they enter through.

**Summary of recommended priorities for the Second Action Plan**

This submission identifies 11 priorities to strengthen prevention, early intervention, response, recovery and system reform for children and young people affected by family, domestic and sexual violence:

- Establish children and young people as a distinct priority populations within the Second Action Plan, with tailored actions for priority cohorts.
- Invest in age-appropriate prevention and early intervention from the prenatal period through early childhood, primary school, adolescence and young adulthood.
- Recognise 24/7, confidential and youth-friendly services as core national infrastructure for child and youth safety, not simply program delivery mechanisms.
- Fund trauma-informed, culturally safe, inclusive and coordinated support across the full continuum — from early help-seeking to crisis response and long-term recovery.

- Expand youth-friendly specialist family violence responses, including secondary consultations for mainstream youth, health, education and mental health services.
- Fund youth-specific crisis and transitional accommodation with therapeutic, developmental and practical supports.
- Increase access to safe housing, transitional housing, post-refuge support and long-term housing pathways for women, children and young people.
- Establish a genuine "no wrong door" approach across all services for children and young people, with confidential, anonymous and flexible access pathways, including digital, phone, webchat, outreach and face-to-face options.
- Expand developmentally appropriate responses for children and young people using violence or displaying harmful sexual behaviours.
- Strengthen workforce capability across youth-facing systems, including education, health, housing, child protection, family violence, community and mental health services.
- Embed children and young people, including those with lived experience, in policy design, service design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation.

The following section outlines the evidence supporting these priorities and the need for a stronger focus on children and young people within the Second Action Plan.

**Data and service user experiences from our services**

As some of the few services available to children and young people without the need for a referral, appointment or adult involvement, Kids Helpline and headspace provide important insights into both help-seeking behaviours and the risks facing children and young people across Australia.

**headspace**

headspace provides prevention and early intervention mental health services to 12- to 25-year-olds across Australia. Young people and family can access support via our online or phone services or our network of 175 centres nationally. In 2024-25, we provided 612,176 occasions of service to 101,300 young people via our centres, and 101,195 digital services to 24,392 young people and families.

Young people accessing headspace services have a wide range of presenting concerns, and these can change over an episode of care (or between occasions of service). Among young people accessing headspace services in 2025, 8 per cent (or 6,365 young people) had either 'family violence' and/or 'intimate family violence' as a primary or other issue on at least one occasion of service.

**Kids Helpline**

Kids Helpline provides a national, confidential and accessible entry point for children and young people experiencing violence, distress and safety concerns. In 2025, Kids Helpline responded to 123,266 contacts from children and young people across Australia, with 66 of responses involving professional counselling support. Approximately one in 13 counselling contacts related to child abuse, highlighting the significant role that violence, abuse and neglect continue to play in the lives of many children and young people.

Duty of care interventions, where a child or young person is assessed as being at risk of serious harm and emergency services or child protection authorities are required to be engaged, increased from 1,876 in 2019 to 5,806 during the 2025/2026 Financial Year. Across this period, between 27% and 37% of duty of care interventions were related to child abuse. In FY2025/2026 alone, Kids Helpline counsellors undertook 5,806 duty of care interventions, with more than one-third (35%) relating to child abuse, making up the largest proportion of Duty of Care actions completed by counsellors. These trends highlight the persistent and significant safety concerns facing many children and young people.

While annual contact volumes have remained consistently high, the number of children and young people presenting with serious safety concerns has increased substantially over time. Duty of care interventions more than tripled between 2019 and the end of FY2025/2026, highlighting the growing complexity and severity of issues experienced by children and young people seeking support.

For some children and young people, the greatest risks come from the people and environments around them. Child abuse remains a significant concern among children and young people accessing Kids Helpline. In 2025, approximately one in 13 children and young people identifying as female, one in 14 identifying as male, and one in 14 trans and gender diverse young people reported experiences of child abuse. Rates were even higher among younger age groups, with around one in eight children aged 5–9 years and one in 10 young people aged 10–14 years reporting experiences of child abuse. In addition, one in ten young people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and one in eleven First Nations young people reported experiences of child abuse.

**Experiences of women, children and families accessing yourtown domestic and family violence refuge and transitional housing services**

**yourtown's** domestic and family violence refuge and transitional housing services provide direct insight into the experiences of women, children and families recovering from violence. In 2025-26, 30 parents and 55 children accessed **yourtown's** domestic

and family violence refuge, while a further 23 parents and 36 children were supported through transitional housing services in Queensland and New South Wales.

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*Case study: Supporting recovery beyond crisis*

*Maisie entered **yourtown's** Parmenie refuge with her young daughter after experiencing escalating domestic and family violence. Like many women seeking refuge, she presented with a complex mix of challenges, including immediate safety concerns, the impacts of trauma, housing uncertainty, disrupted family stability, and concerns about her daughter's wellbeing and future. She was navigating the emotional consequences of violence while also confronting the practical realities of rebuilding her life and creating a safe environment for her child.*

*During her time at Parmenie, Maisie received integrated, trauma-informed support tailored to her family's needs. This included counselling to address the impacts of violence and support emotional recovery, parenting support and education to strengthen family wellbeing, safety planning, assistance to navigate legal pathways, and support to secure stable housing. Refuge staff also worked with Maisie to identify longer-term goals, including pathways into education and employment to support her independence and future stability. Throughout this process, support was provided not only to address immediate risks, but to help Maisie and her daughter rebuild safety, confidence and connection.*

*Maisie's experience demonstrates that recovery from family and domestic violence extends far beyond crisis accommodation. By the end of her stay, Maisie had strengthened her sense of safety, developed greater confidence in her parenting, established plans for stable housing, and begun pursuing education and employment opportunities. Reflecting on her experience, she described **yourtown** as "more than just support" and "a lifeline" during one of the most fragile periods of her life. Her story highlights the importance of integrated responses that combine safety, therapeutic support, parenting assistance, housing pathways and practical case management to help women, children and young people move from crisis towards long-term recovery and stability.*

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**What young people told us about violence, safety and support**

Findings from **yourtown's** Your Voice 2025 project reinforce the scale and urgency of this issue. Among more than 4,000 children and young people surveyed, domestic, family and sexual violence was identified as the most important issue facing children and young people, with 82% rating it as important and 67% rating it as very important. Young people consistently described feeling unsafe, unheard and unsupported, highlighting barriers to accessing help, limited understanding of abuse, housing insecurity, and a need for more accessible and compassionate responses. To assist with these barriers they called for greater investment in prevention, early intervention, community education and services that respond to their experiences without judgement. Young people also emphasised the importance of being listened to, believed and taken seriously when seeking help. They highlighted that harmful behaviours are not always recognised as family, domestic or sexual violence when they occur. This can make it difficult for children and young people to identify their experiences as abuse, understand that support is available, or recognise when a situation has become unsafe. These findings emphasise the need for services, schools and government systems to create environments where children and young people feel safe to disclose concerns and confident that action will be taken in response.

## 1. The case for a stronger focus on children and young people

Too many children and young people experience the immediate risks and long-term harm of family violence. Children and young people experience family, domestic and sexual violence in distinct ways, including as direct victim survivors, as witnesses to violence, through coercive control within families, through adolescent and peer relationships, and through online and technology-facilitated abuse. This can include physical, emotional, sexual, financial or social harm, both online and in person.

While understanding and acknowledgement of children and young people's distinct experiences of family violence is increasing, system change has been limited. Many children and young people do not receive the accessible, age and developmentally appropriate, and trauma informed care they need to be safe, recover and heal.

The First Action Plan 2023-2027 has helped establish children and young people as victim-survivors in their own right. The Second Action Plan should build on this foundation by embedding children and young people's distinct experiences and developmental needs across prevention, early intervention, crisis support, recovery and healing. This requires a more coherent and integrated approach, supported by dedicated actions, investment and accountability measures, while recognising the broader factors that shape experiences of violence and recovery, including housing

instability, unemployment, substance use, mental ill-health, disability, racism and discrimination and social disadvantage.

The Australian Government's work to identify gaps in supports for children and young people provides an important opportunity to strengthen prevention, early intervention, crisis response, recovery and healing. The following sections outline practical reforms that would improve safety, wellbeing and recovery outcomes for children and young people affected by family, domestic and sexual violence.

**The opportunity for the Section Action Plan**

The Second Action Plan should translate recognition of children and young people as victim-survivors into dedicated actions, investment and accountability mechanisms.

This approach should also recognise the broader factors that shape experiences of violence and recovery, including housing instability, unemployment, substance use, mental ill-health, disability, racism and discrimination and social disadvantage.

We also draw the Department's attention to the recent work of FVREE, a specialist family violence service in Victoria. Their recent blueprint, Seen, Safe, Supported, provides a youth-informed guide to shift how systems respond to children and young people experiencing family violence.

Similar themes emerged through **yourtown's** Your Voice 2025 project, where children and young people identified the need for earlier support, easier service navigation, greater understanding of violence and abuse, and more opportunities to be heard in decisions that affect them. Together, these initiatives reinforce the importance of designing the Second Action Plan with, not just for, children and young people.

**Encouraging early help seeking**

Encouraging and enabling children and young people to seek help as early as possible can help build safety, confidence and connection before more intensive intervention becomes necessary. Enabling earlier help-seeking should be a core objective of the Second Action Plan.

Providing accessible, child and youth-friendly trauma-informed support early can help reduce the need for more intensive interventions later. Many children and young people do not recognise their experiences as violence, are uncertain about where to seek help, or delay disclosure due to fear, shame or concerns about what may happen if they tell someone. Children and young people need access to information, advice and support when they first feel unsafe, confused or concerned about their circumstances, rather than only when risks have escalated to crisis point.

**Responses across prevention, early intervention, response and recovery are essential**

Data from Kids Helpline and headspace show that children and young people need support across the full continuum: early information and safe help-seeking before violence escalates; confidential and immediate support when they are unsafe or in crisis; and longer-term therapeutic, practical and relational support to recover and rebuild.

Rather than build competing priorities, the Second Action Plan should incorporate prevention, early intervention and crisis responses as necessary. Earlier support must be easier to access, while crisis responses must remain available when children and young people are at immediate risk.

Given the impact of violence across children and young people's development, mental health, education, housing, family relationships and future employment, the Second Action Plan must also include therapeutic recovery, safe housing, family support, and youth-friendly specialist and mainstream services.

**Providing child and youth-friendly support**

Children and young people need access to support that is confidential, accessible, trauma-informed and available through the channels they trust, including phone, webchat and other online environments. The option to seek help anonymously, without requiring the involvement of an adult family member, can be particularly important when a child or young person is experiencing violence, fears not being believed, is concerned about the consequences of disclosure, or is not yet ready to engage with face-to-face services.

Many children and young people do not seek help during standard business hours and may only reach out when they are in crisis, feeling unsafe, or ready to talk. Others face barriers to accessing traditional services due to family circumstances, including controlling relationships or a lack of adult support. These realities highlight the critical importance of flexible, child and youth-centred services that provide safe, confidential and responsive support 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

The Second Action Plan should recognise the essential role of 24/7 service models in ensuring children and young people can access support when and how they need it, through the channels they are most likely to use and trust.

**Recommendations:**

- The Second Action Plan must establish children and young people as a distinct priority population, with tailored actions for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people, multicultural children and young people, LGBTIQA+ children and young people, young people with disability, young parents, and children and young people experiencing homelessness or housing insecurity.
- The Second Action Plan should invest in prevention, early intervention, response and recovery services tailored to the needs of children and young people, including safety planning, trauma-informed therapeutic support, safe housing, practical case management, education and employment support, and longer-term recovery services.
- The Second Action Plan should recognise 24/7, confidential and youth-friendly services as core national infrastructure for child and youth safety, not simply program delivery mechanisms.

## 2. Key changes to improve outcomes for children and young people

*Consultation questions:*

- What would make the biggest difference to improving safety, recovery and wellbeing outcomes for children and young people affected by this violence?
- How can governments, services, education settings, families, communities and others better recognise and respond to children and young people experiencing violence or harm?

Children and young people affected by domestic and family violence need trauma-informed, inclusive and healing-focused responses across the service, education, health, housing, digital and community settings they access. Strengthening responses for children and young people should complement, not diminish, responses for adult victim-survivors. For women with children, safety and recovery are interconnected, but each person must also be recognised as having distinct experiences, rights and support needs.

Improving outcomes also requires greater investment in prevention and early intervention to reduce exposure to violence, strengthen protective factors and build children and young people's capacity to recognise unhealthy behaviours, seek support and develop healthy relationships.

This should include practical and developmentally appropriate interventions across childhood and adolescence, such as:

- family violence screening and support during pregnancy and early childhood
- parenting, caregiver and family supports, including peer support groups, home visiting programs and mental health promotion
- early childhood development and attachment-focused programs

- infant and child mental health supports
- respectful relationships education
- targeted responses for children and young people experiencing emerging risks.

These approaches should be supported by workforce training and development across mainstream services and increased access to youth-friendly specialist services.

**The need for trauma informed responses**

Young victim survivors need trauma informed responses (rather than risk-averse or punitive approaches) that prioritise safety, trust, engagement and choice. These responses must be inclusive, acknowledge the impacts of violence without judgement, and adopt relational ways of engaging with children and young people.

Service providers need to understand how trauma can shape a young person's mental health, behaviours, and help-seeking, and seek to avoid re-traumatisation in all interactions and service settings. To provide trauma-informed care, health-focused services providers need to:

- prioritise safety, trust and engagement for children and young people
- recognise the role of culture, identity, community and faith in supporting healing, recovery and wellbeing
- take into account intergenerational factors and impacts
- adopt a whole-of-service approach, where all aspects of the young person's service experience are considered from a trauma lens.

It is essential that children and young people can access services that are free from stigma and shame. For children and young people in particular, feelings of shame, embarrassment and the risk of disclosing abuse or violence, including risk of being blamed or of their disclosure being passed onto their abuser, can be key barriers. Additionally, they may not experience services and systems as safe, culturally responsive and trustworthy. Building trust with the service provider and strengthening the capacity of service providers to respond to disclosures of violence, is essential to providing a safe space and to support healing.

Trauma-informed responses are particularly important for young people who may be perpetrating violence in their families. Often, these young people are seen solely as perpetrators, without acknowledgement or understanding of their experiences as victim survivors. This can lead to exclusion from youth mental health services and a focus on punitive responses rather than safety and healing.

**Public-health level approach to trauma informed care**

The focus on providing trauma informed and relational responses to young people experiencing violence needs to extend beyond mental health or specialist family

violence services, to all professionals in contact with young people. Adopting a public health lens – and building capability and enhancing integration across the health, education and community settings where young people are – will help increase understanding and recognition of young people's risks and experiences, and lead to earlier and more appropriate responses.

Children and young people often seek support from trusted adults in their schools, communities and families before engaging with formal services. This reinforces the importance of building capability across the settings where children and young people already seek information, support and connection. School staff, youth workers and clinicians in mainstream services need the skills, knowledge and confidence to recognise the impact of family violence, identify indicators of harm, and connect young people with appropriate supports.

Young people with experience of family violence may access Kids Helpline or headspace services for their mental health, physical health, alcohol and other drugs or work and study needs. Often, these young people will present with general symptoms (such as anxiety or depression). Disclosing experiences of violence can take time, as the young person build trust with staff.

Some young people may delay seeking help because they fear family separation, child protection involvement, not being believed, or losing control over what happens next. While mandatory reporting remains essential to child safety, it must be accompanied by trauma-informed practice that explains processes clearly, involves the young person wherever possible, and links them to safe and appropriate support pathways. Staff can benefit from training and practical guidance on:

- asking directly about a young person's relationships and circumstances
- responding to the fears children and young people may have about disclosure.

Staff can find it difficult to know how to best respond to young people's experiences, particularly where referral pathways are limited, fragmented or poorly understood, or where there are few appropriate options available for children and young people seeking safety and support. This can leave them reluctant to ask about a young person's experiences of violence and, when the young person does disclose, uncertain about how to respond or more likely to suggest that the young person needs to transition to another provider or service. This in turn leaves the young person feeling unseen, unsupported, and less likely to feel included in decision making and planning. These pressures are particularly relevant for mandatory reporters.

Staff need a clear understanding of local referral options, including housing, family violence, mental health and child and family supports, so they can respond confidently when concerns are identified. This is particularly important for children and young

people who may not be able to safely remain at home and require access to timely, appropriate and youth-friendly support options.

While both **headspace** and **yourtown** are working to build the confidence, skills and capability of staff to respond to children and young people who have experienced violence, it is difficult to achieve this nationally without dedicated resourcing. Our services – and the youth mental health system more broadly – would benefit from government investment in sector-wide training and developing in trauma informed care for family, domestic and sexual violence.

**Recommendations:**

- Fund a national workforce capability initiative to improve recognition of family, domestic and sexual violence and strengthen trauma-informed, relational responses across education, health, child and family, housing, youth mental health and broader youth service sectors, including workforce training, professional development, practice guidance and secondary consultation.

**Additional support for recovery**

Recovery from family, domestic and sexual violence is often a long-term process rather than a single intervention. Children and young people may continue to experience impacts on their mental health, education, housing stability, relationships and social participation long after immediate safety has been established. The Second Action Plan should invest in longer-term therapeutic, educational and psychosocial supports that enable children and young people to recover, heal and thrive. Young people participating in Your Voice consistently emphasised the importance of opportunities to build independence, achieve their goals and create positive futures. Responses should therefore support not only recovery from violence but also participation in education, employment, community life and other pathways that contribute to long-term wellbeing.

Trauma-informed care must also be accompanied by access to evidence-informed, culturally safe interventions that address the impacts of violence and support recovery over time. Depending on their age, developmental stage and circumstances, children and young people may require counselling, therapeutic case management, expressive and creative therapies, family-based interventions, First Nations social and emotional wellbeing supports, mental health care, education support and practical assistance to address housing, safety and family stability. This is vital for younger children who may communicate experiences of trauma through play, behaviour and relationships rather than verbal disclosure. A one-size-fits-all approach is unlikely to meet the diverse needs of children and young people affected by violence.

Recovery approaches should recognise that mothers, children and young people often recover from violence together. Integrated responses should support each family member's distinct needs while also strengthening relationships, safety, stability and connection within the family where appropriate.

Recovery and healing are also shaped by culture, identity, spirituality and connection to community. For many children, young people and families, connection to culture, cultural practices, Country, language, community and faith can be important protective factors that support safety, belonging, trust, resilience and wellbeing. The Second Action Plan should recognise the role of culturally grounded and community-led approaches as part of healing and recovery from violence.

Children and young people often experience violence alongside other challenges, including mental ill-health, housing instability, family breakdown, disengagement from education, financial hardship and social isolation. Effective responses therefore require coordinated and wraparound support that addresses both immediate safety and longer-term recovery needs. This includes ensuring children and young people are connected to the specialist, community, cultural, housing, education and health services needed to support healing and resilience.

For families recovering from violence, parenting support can also be critical. Non-violent parents and carers may need practical and therapeutic support to rebuild safety, routines, confidence and connection with their children and young people after periods of coercive control, fear, instability or displacement.

**yourtown's** experience delivering refuge and transitional housing services reinforces the need for coordinated recovery responses. Women, children and young people often require support to navigate housing insecurity, legal and financial issues, trauma recovery, parenting challenges, disrupted education and social isolation. Recovery is strengthened when families can access integrated support that combines safety, therapeutic care, practical assistance and stable housing pathways.

In practice, recovery rarely follows a linear pathway. Families leaving violence may need to manage immediate safety risks while also navigating disrupted schooling, financial hardship, legal processes, trauma responses, parenting stress and housing uncertainty. In some cases, children and young people require their own therapeutic and educational supports while their non-violent parent is also rebuilding safety, confidence and stability. This reinforces the need for responses that support the adult victim-survivor and the child or young person as distinct but connected people recovering from violence.

**Recommendation:**

- Fund trauma-informed, inclusive and wraparound responses for children and young people affected by violence, including counselling, therapeutic case management, family-based interventions, expressive therapies, mental health care and longer-term recovery supports.

**Strengthening prevention and early intervention**

Prevention and early intervention must begin before violence escalates and before children and young people become disconnected from family, education, community and support. This includes practical, developmentally appropriate respectful relationships education; early support for families experiencing stress or conflict; accessible parenting support; youth mental health support; and clear pathways for children and young people to seek help when they feel unsafe.

Prevention should also address the settings where young people form relationships and identities, including schools, online environments, peer groups, workplaces and community spaces. Children and young people, as well as adults, need practical skills to recognise healthy and unhealthy relationships, understand consent and boundaries, identify coercive, controlling and abusive behaviours, respond to harmful attitudes and behaviours, and seek help without shame or fear of blame.

Children and young people also need clear, practical information about what family, domestic and sexual violence can look like in everyday life. Many young people may not identify controlling, coercive, abusive or unsafe behaviours as violence, particularly when these behaviours occur within families, intimate relationships, friendships or online environments. As a result, children and young people may minimise, normalise or fail to recognise their own experiences as abuse or violence, and delay seeking help or support. Prevention and early intervention efforts should help children and young people understand where the line between safe and unsafe behaviour sits, recognise the signs of violence and unhealthy relationships, understand their rights, and know when and how to seek support.

School and community-based interventions should move beyond awareness raising alone and focus on building practical skills. Effective respectful relationships education equips children and young people to recognise coercive and controlling behaviours, communicate respectfully, navigate conflict, understand consent and boundaries, respond safely to harmful attitudes and behaviours, and seek help when concerns arise. These skills should be reinforced throughout childhood and adolescence and tailored to different developmental stages.

School-based early education also provides an important opportunity to reach children and young people before they are in crisis and before they need to navigate specialist

service systems. Programs such as Kids Helpline @ School or headspace's Mental Health Education Program demonstrate how trusted, youth-friendly services can provide prevention and early intervention support in education settings. These programs can help children and young people build help-seeking skills, identify trusted adults, understand safety and wellbeing, and learn where to access support if they or someone they know experiences violence, abuse, bullying, online harm or other safety concerns.

Early intervention efforts should also recognise that children and young people can feel conflicted about seeking help. Many want the violence to stop, but do not want to be separated from their family, lose important relationships, or trigger outcomes they do not fully understand. Concerns about child protection involvement, mandatory reporting requirements and what may happen after a disclosure can discourage children and young people from seeking support. Prevention and early intervention approaches should therefore provide clear, age-appropriate information about help-seeking, build trust in support systems, and ensure children and young people are meaningfully involved in decisions that affect them wherever possible.

Existing prevention efforts should be strengthened by linking universal education with targeted early intervention. This means identifying children, young people and families experiencing early signs of distress, violence, coercive control, harmful sexual behaviours, adolescent family violence or unsafe relationships, and connecting them to support before harm escalates. Services such as Kids Helpline, Kids Helpline @ School, headspace's Mental Health Education program, Parentline, headspace, school-based programs, family support services and youth mental health services can provide low-barrier pathways into earlier support.

Young people regularly tell us about the importance of prevention and early intervention. For example, in **yourtown's** *Your Voice 2025* project, children and young people called for support before issues reach crisis point. Young people emphasised the need for trauma-informed services, peer and community-based supports, early intervention programs, easier navigation of services and a "no wrong door" approach. These findings reinforce the need for the Second Action Plan to invest in accessible early support that is available before violence, trauma and related harms escalate.

Prevention starts before a child is born and continues into early childhood and adolescence. Parents and carers need accessible support to develop appropriate parenting techniques, navigate family stress, relationship challenges, child development concerns and safety issues before problems escalate. Services such as Parentline provide an important early intervention pathway, offering timely advice, counselling and support that can strengthen family relationships, improve caregiver confidence and help connect families to additional supports when concerns arise. Supporting parents and carers, strengthening caregiver-child relationships, addressing developmental vulnerabilities, and providing early therapeutic support for children who

have experienced violence can help reduce the long-term impacts of trauma and improve lifelong wellbeing outcomes.

As children and young people grow, prevention efforts should continue through schools, community settings, youth services and digital environments, building the knowledge, skills, relationships and supports needed to recognise harm, seek help and maintain healthy relationships. The Second Action Plan should recognise prenatal and early childhood interventions as a critical component of prevention, recovery and healing.

Early intervention should also include targeted supports for children and young people who may already be experiencing the effects of violence, including counselling, therapeutic group programs, family support, school-based wellbeing interventions and programs that strengthen social and emotional skills, resilience and connectedness. Timely support can reduce the longer-term impacts of trauma and help prevent the escalation of violence and related harms.

**Recommendation:**

- Expand evidence-informed, age and developmentally appropriate prevention and early intervention initiatives, including prenatal and early childhood supports; family and parenting supports; primary school programs focused on safety, trusted adults, help-seeking and respectful relationships; and secondary school and young adult programs addressing consent, coercive control, online exploitation, sextortion, technology-facilitated abuse, harmful gender norms and healthy relationships.

**Responding to children and young people using violence**

The Second Action Plan also needs to include a stronger focus on children and young people using violence or displaying harmful sexual behaviours. These responses must be safety-focused, developmentally appropriate and trauma-informed. Young people using violence may also have histories of victimisation, family violence, neglect, mental health difficulties, disability, substance use, housing instability or exclusion from education.

Responses should not excuse harmful behaviour, but they must avoid relying only on exclusion, punishment or criminalisation. Effective responses combine accountability, behaviour change, family safety planning, therapeutic support, mental health care and specialist interventions matched to the young person's age, development, culture and circumstances.

The Second Action Plan should fund developmentally appropriate early intervention responses for children and young people using violence or displaying harmful sexual behaviours. Beyond recognising trauma, services should support healing, empowerment, connection and recovery, enabling children, young people and families to rebuild safety, confidence and control over their lives.

**Recommendations:**

- Fund developmentally appropriate early intervention and therapeutic responses for children and young people using violence or displaying harmful sexual behaviours, with a focus on accountability, behaviour change, family safety and victim survivor wellbeing.
- Establish dedicated service pathways that integrate mental health care, therapeutic intervention, family safety planning, education support and specialist family violence expertise for children and young people using violence.
- Expand specialist responses to adolescent family violence and harmful sexual behaviours, reducing reliance on punitive approaches and supporting earlier intervention, behaviour change and long-term safety outcomes.

**Marginalised groups of children and young people**

Research and data shows that experiences of domestic and family violence are shaped by intersecting social, cultural, economic, structural, and physical factors. Children and young people do not experience violence uniformly, and some groups face heightened risks of victimisation alongside additional barriers to accessing safety and support. Structural, social and historical inequities can increase exposure to violence and reduce access to services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people, multicultural children and young people, children and young people with disability, LGBTQIA+ children and young people, young parents, children and young people in out-of-home care, and young people experiencing homelessness or housing insecurity.[1]

To provide trauma-informed, safe and effective support, services must understand the diverse experiences, strengths, needs and help-seeking preferences of these groups, as well as the specific barriers they may face in disclosing violence and accessing support. This includes recognising the impacts of racism, discrimination, ableism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, exclusion, intergenerational trauma and geographic isolation, and ensuring responses are culturally safe, identity-affirming, accessible and inclusive.

For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people, responses should be designed and delivered in partnership with communities and Community Controlled Organisations wherever possible. Strengthening culturally grounded, community-led

[1] Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2021, Child Protection Australia 2019–2020 (Child Welfare Series, Number 74). Canberra; Fitz-Gibbon, K., Meyer, S., Maher, J., & Roberts, S., 2022, Adolescent family violence in Australia: A national study of prevalence, history of childhood victimisation and impacts (Research report, 15/2022). ANROWS; Tarpey-Brown, G., Kirwan, J., Wise, S., et al, 2024. Domestic and family violence affecting children and young people from culturally and racially marginalized migrant backgrounds in Australia: a scoping review of child experiences and service responses. Trauma, Violence, & Abuse, 25(5), 3872-3886.

supports can help improve safety, trust, engagement and healing outcomes for children and young people affected by violence.

For multicultural children and young people, responses should recognise the impacts of migration experiences, language barriers, social isolation, racism, and differing levels of familiarity with Australian service systems. Responses should also acknowledge that many children, young people and families may be affected by experiences of war, conflict, famine, persecution, natural disasters and humanitarian crises in their countries of origin, as well as ongoing concern for family and communities overseas. Information, support and referral pathways should be provided in ways that are culturally responsive, accessible and appropriate to the needs of children, young people and families from diverse communities.

LGBTIQA+ children and young people are at increased risk of experiencing family, domestic and sexual violence. Support services need to recognise the role that homophobia and transphobia play in driving violence and provide identity-affirming support for LGBTIQA+ children, young people and families.

Meaningful engagement with children and young people from these communities is essential to the design, delivery and evaluation of policies, programs and services. Embedding their perspectives helps ensure responses are tailored, culturally responsive and capable of meeting the needs of those most at risk of experiencing violence and harm.

Additionally, access to services must be based on risk, safety and support needs, rather than being limited by residency status, visa arrangements or other arbitrary considerations.

**Recommendation:**

- Invest in culturally safe, community-led and accessible services that are designed to meet the diverse needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people, multicultural children and young people, children and young people with disability, LGBTQIA+ young people, young parents and young people experiencing homelessness or housing instability.

**Increased access to specialist services**

Even with strong commitment across Commonwealth, state and territory governments to address family violence – including recognising the needs of children and young people – there are still gaps in the availability of youth-friendly, accessible specialist family violence services.

Many headspace services do not have dedicated staff skilled in responding to family violence, and many centres are in locations without local dedicated family violence

services that provide youth-friendly responses. Clinicians can be reluctant to invite a young person to disclose experiences of violence if there are limited options for specialist support for the young person, either via headspace or a specialist family violence service. This creates a barrier and means young people can feel unseen and unheard about their experience of violence.

The introduction of the headspace Plus model of care, as part of Government's youth mental health reforms, will help address this challenge. Centres delivering the headspace Plus model of care will offer more specialised services, have additional capacity to engage with young people via outreach in the community, and will employ a more diverse workforce. While the model of care is currently being drafted, it is likely that implementation will boost the capacity of the headspace network to respond to the needs of young people who have experienced family and domestic violence.

Even with the introduction of this new model of care (in 30 locations nationally), many headspace centres will continue to have limited access to specialist family violence expertise. More capacity for secondary consultation from specialists would enable headspace clinicians to provide earlier, safer responses when concerns are identified.

**Recommendations:**

- Expand and sustainably fund youth-friendly specialist family violence services and secondary consultation models to ensure children and young people experiencing violence can access timely specialist support, regardless of where they first seek help.

**Increase access to safe and stable housing, integrated with other supports**

Safe and stable housing is also critical to recovery from family, domestic and sexual violence. For many women, children and young people, ongoing housing insecurity can undermine safety, disrupt education, hinder recovery and increase vulnerability to further harm. Housing insecurity was also identified through Your Voice 2025 as a significant source of stress and instability for many young people; this notably included young people who were forced to leave home after experiencing abuse, reinforcing the importance of housing as a foundation for safety, wellbeing and recovery.

Some children and young people may require accommodation and support separately to their family, where they are unable to safety remain at home. This can include LGBTQIA+ young people; young people experiencing family rejection, adolescent family violence, coercive control or abuse within the home; and young people leaving unsafe family environments. However, appropriate youth-specific accommodation options are often limited, particularly outside metropolitan areas.

Responses under the Second Action Plan should recognise housing as a core component of prevention, crisis response and recovery, including through access to

crisis accommodation, transitional housing and longer-term housing pathways. This must include the need for developmentally appropriate housing responses that combine safe accommodation with therapeutic, educational, practical and social supports to help young people achieve safety, stability and recovery.

**yourtown's** experience delivering refuge and transitional housing services demonstrates that women escaping violence often need more than immediate crisis accommodation. Women, children and young people need integrated support that addresses safety, housing, legal and financial issues, trauma recovery, parenting, education and connection to community. For many women, the period after leaving a violent relationship remains a time of heightened risk, instability and system navigation. Transitional housing and post-refuge support provide an important bridge between crisis response and long-term safety, helping women, children and young people rebuild stability, maintain school and service connections, and recover from the impacts of violence.

Supporting women, children and young people after violence also requires a whole-of-family approach that recognises the distinct but interconnected recovery needs of mothers, children and young people. Women escaping violence may be navigating trauma, legal processes, financial insecurity, housing instability, parenting under stress, disrupted social connections and concerns about their children's safety and wellbeing. Children and young people may need their own therapeutic, educational and social supports, while also benefiting from stability in their relationship with their non-violent parent or carer. The Second Action Plan should support integrated models that provide safety, housing, therapeutic support, parenting support and practical assistance to women, children and young people together, while also recognising each person as a victim survivor with their own needs.

Women, children and young people often face heightened risks during key transition points, particularly when leaving a violent relationship, entering refuge accommodation, and moving from refuge or transitional housing into longer-term accommodation. Responses under the Second Action Plan should recognise these periods as times of increased vulnerability and provide coordinated support to maintain safety, stability and recovery.

**Recommendations:**

- Establish and expand youth-specific crisis accommodation, transitional housing and integrated support responses for children and young people who cannot safely remain at home due to family, domestic and sexual violence, including LGBTQIA+ young people and other priority cohorts.
- Fund integrated, whole-of-family support during high-risk transition points, including when women, children and young people leave violence, enter refuge accommodation, and move into transitional or long-term housing, with access to safety planning, case management, therapeutic support, parenting support and practical assistance.
- Increase investment in crisis accommodation, transitional housing, post-refuge support and long-term housing pathways to ensure women, children and young people can achieve safety, stability and recovery following violence.

**Improved system integration**

Young people and families often describe the system as 'disconnected' and 'hard to navigate'. This can be exacerbated when a young person discloses family violence experiences, only to be told by a clinician that this makes them 'too complex' or unsuitable to continue with that service. Young people often report to both **headspace** and **yourtown** that this leaves them feeling unseen and unsupported, damages their trust in services and leaves them less likely to seek help. For example, in **yourtown's** Your Voice 2025, young people identified difficulties understanding available supports, navigating service systems and knowing where to go for help. These experiences reinforce the need for integrated pathways and a genuine no wrong door approach.

Children, young people and families affected by violence often need support to navigate housing, education, health, legal, financial and family violence systems. Dedicated case management and advocacy support can improve continuity of care, reduce the need to repeatedly disclose traumatic experiences, and assist children, young people and families to access the services they need at the right time.

Building workforce capability across services settings, places and spaces where young people are will help address this. Improved service coordination, referral pathways and shared data are also needed to provide young people with a connected service response that meets their needs and builds their trust in seeking help.

The Second Action Plan should strengthen integration between specialist family violence services, youth mental health services, schools, child and family services, housing, child protection, online counselling and youth services through funded pathways, secondary consultation, shared protocols and multidisciplinary models.

Children, young people and families should be able to access support through a "no wrong door" approach, regardless of where they first seek help. This is particularly important for women, children and young people leaving violence, who may need to navigate housing, income support, legal, and health support. Many children and young people disclose experiences of violence to schools, youth mental health services, online counselling services, health professionals or community services rather than specialist family violence services. These services require the capability, resources and referral pathways to respond safely and effectively, rather than relying on young people to navigate complex systems on their own.

Service integration should also reflect how children and young people prefer to seek information and support. Young people regularly tell **yourtown** and **headspace** they want services to be youth-friendly, non-judgemental, confidential and welcoming, with flexible access outside school or work hours. Young people also emphasise that services should be designed with them, not just for them. A more integrated service system should therefore include multiple pathways to support, including phone, webchat, digital, outreach and face-to-face options, informal or 'third spaces' where children and young people can build trust, as well as confidential or anonymous pathways for children and young people who are not yet ready or able to engage with formal services.

The Second Action Plan should also address gaps at key transition points between child, youth and adult systems. Children and young people affected by violence often experience changes in eligibility, service models or funding arrangements as they move between systems or age cohorts. Better continuity of care, shared case planning and coordinated transitions are needed to prevent young people from disengaging from support during periods of heightened vulnerability.

Significant evidence gaps remain regarding children and young people's experiences of violence, particularly for younger children, children with disability, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people, multicultural children and young people, LGBTQIA+ children and young people, young parents, children in out-of-home care and young people experiencing homelessness. Continued investment in research, evaluation and lived experience-informed evidence generation is required to improve policy and service responses over time. Improved national data collection should include children and young people's direct experiences of violence, help-seeking pathways, service outcomes and recovery trajectories to better inform policy, investment and service design.

**Recommendations:**

- Establish a "no wrong door" service system for specialist services for children and young people affected by violence, supported by integrated referral pathways, multidisciplinary care, coordinated transitions between child, youth and adult services, and stronger collaboration across family violence, mental health, education, housing and child and family services.
- Invest in youth-friendly support pathways that provide children and young people with access to phone, webchat, digital, outreach and face-to-face support, including confidential and anonymous help-seeking options outside standard business hours.
- Improve national data collection, research and evaluation relating to children and young people's experiences of violence, help-seeking pathways, service outcomes and recovery trajectories.

### 3. Responding to online or technology-facilitated forms of harm

*Consultation questions:*

- How should the Second Action Plan respond to current or emerging forms of harm affecting children and young people, including technology-facilitated abuse, harmful online content, and violence within peer and dating relationships?

Technology-facilitated abuse should be understood as a modality through which violence occurs, not as a separate category of harm. For children and young people, online abuse can intersect with family violence, peer violence, dating violence, coercive control, sexual exploitation and social isolation.

Online harm and exploitation can cause profound harm to children and young people's emotional, social and psychological wellbeing. It is a violation of their safety, dignity and human rights. Harm can occur quickly (even after one conversation) and can involve anonymous or fake identities, making it difficult to spot warning signs. While abuse may occur online, the impacts on children and young people are very real and can deeply affect a young person's life, both in person and online.

Children and young people are growing up with digital and AI-driving ecosystems that shape how they connect, learn, create and manage their health and wellbeing. Rather than experiencing the world as divided between 'online' and 'real world' settings, young people move fluidly between digital and physical spaces. This makes it essential that responses to online abuse recognise the whole person and offer support that considers their emotional, social, cultural and developmental needs across all areas of their life.

The Section Action Plan provides an opportunity to progress government reforms that address the risks of online violence. As a modality through which violence occurs – and given how fluidly children and young people move between online and physical spaces

– any actions to address online risks need to align with other responses targeting the risks of violence.

Young people experiencing online harm or technology-facilitated abuse need similar responses to harm experienced offline, including:

- clear communication about the risks of harm, including in online spaces and new and emerging forms of harm
- non-judgemental conversations about how to manage their online lives
- accessible avenues to seek help for experiences of harm.

Children and young people also need practical skills to safely navigate digital environments, identify harmful behaviours, recognise online coercion and exploitation, manage privacy and consent, and seek support when concerns arise.

As noted above, it is essential that young people can access information and support that is free from stigma and shame. Any sense that they will be blamed, shamed or embarrassed becomes a barrier to disclosing and seeking help for experiences of violence, particularly online.

**Recommendation:**

- Treat technology-facilitated abuse and harmful online content as part of the broader continuum of violence affecting children and young people, rather than as separate or lesser forms of harm.
- Invest in youth-friendly, confidential and accessible support pathways for children and young people experiencing online or technology-facilitated abuse, including digital, phone, webchat and face-to-face options, supported by clear referral pathways into mental health, family violence, child safety and other specialist services.
- Invest in education, resources and capability-building for families, carers, schools and youth-facing services to support open, non-judgemental conversations with children and young people about online safety, privacy, consent, coercion and emerging digital harms.
- Establish integrated pathways between online safety, mental health, family violence and child safety services to ensure children and young people experiencing technology-facilitated abuse can access coordinated assessment, support, referral and safety planning.
- Expand digital literacy, online safety and respectful relationship education initiatives that help children and young people recognise, prevent and respond to technology-facilitated abuse and harmful online behaviour.

## 4. Involving children and young people in policies, programs and services that affect them

*Consultation questions:*

- How can children and young people be meaningfully involved in shaping the policies, programs and services that affect them?

Children and young people's engagement in the development of policies, services and other initiatives is critical to their responsiveness and success. Children and young people have unique insights into how violence affects their lives, the barriers they face when seeking help, and what makes services feel accessible, appropriate and safe. Their participation is essential across all aspects of government's response: from the development of national strategies and action plans through to the delivery and implementation of specific family safety initiatives.

Participation approaches should be tailored to a child or young person's age, developmental stage, communication needs and circumstances. While adolescents and young adults may engage directly through advisory groups, consultations and governance mechanisms, younger children can contribute through child-centred and developmentally appropriate approaches such as facilitated discussions, creative and play-based methods, storytelling and other forms of supported engagement. This recognises that children are experts in their own experiences and have a right to be heard on matters that affect them.

Youth mental health organisations like **headspace** and **yourtown** have a strong track record of engaging with children and young people and facilitating their participation in service governance, design, delivery, continuous improvement and evaluation. We facilitate young peoples' meaningful engagement by providing purposeful and inclusive opportunities, where there is reciprocal value for all involved. These approaches demonstrate that meaningful participation is possible across a range of age groups when engagement is appropriately designed, supported and resourced.

Recent youth participation opportunities include:

- **headspace** has engaged with over 70 young people from both national and local youth reference groups across each state and territory to develop the headspace Plus model of care for the Department of Health, Disability and Ageing. This includes safely engaging with school-aged young people aged 12 to 15.
- **yourtown** engages children and young people through service design, feedback, research and advocacy processes, including through Kids Helpline, Your Voice activities and direct engagement with young people accessing our services. This enables **yourtown** to identify emerging issues affecting children and young people, understand barriers to help-seeking, and design responses that are accessible, safe and relevant to young people's lives.

Our organisations enable meaningful participation by embedding engagement with children and young people across governance, service planning, program design, implementation, evaluation and continuous improvement. Promising examples are also emerging across Australia, including formal lived experience advisory structures and youth-focused reference groups established to inform family, domestic and sexual violence policy and reform. These initiatives demonstrate the value of embedding lived experience expertise into decision-making processes, rather than relying on one-off consultations.

Children and young people's participation has helped our organisations design and deliver services that are youth-friendly, aligned with young people's experiences and preferences, and recognise young people as experts in their own lives. Children and young people with lived experience of violence should be engaged throughout the design, implementation and evaluation of policies, programs and services that affect them. Participation must be safe, trauma-informed, appropriately supported, respectful of privacy and, where appropriate, remunerated to recognise the value of lived experience expertise. This should include a diversity of experiences and backgrounds, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people, children and young people with disability, multicultural children and young people, LGBTQIA+ children and young people, and those living in regional and remote communities. Participation processes should be designed in partnership with diverse communities to ensure they are culturally safe, accessible and representative of children and young people who are often underrepresented in policy development.

Meaningful participation requires more than one-off consultation processes. Children and young people should have ongoing opportunities to shape implementation, monitor progress and contribute to continuous improvement throughout the life of the Second Action Plan. There are opportunities for the Department of Social Services to work with **yourtown** and **headspace National** to design and implement safe and appropriate opportunities for children and young people to participate in the development of the Second Action Plan and relevant policies and initiatives. With national footprints, we have the reach and capacity to engage with young people across all stages of the process, including developing the Second Action Plan.

**Recommendation:**

- Establish and resource ongoing, safe, trauma-informed and developmentally appropriate participation mechanisms that enable children and young people, including those with lived experience of violence, to influence the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the Second Action Plan and related policies, programs and services.

**headspace** and **yourtown** welcome the opportunity to explore these ideas with you in further detail. Should you require further information about any issues raised in the submission, please do not hesitate to contact Tracy Adams, CEO of **yourtown** via email at advocacy@yourtown.com.au or Jason Trethowan, CEO of headspace National via email ceo@headspace.org.au.

## About headspace

**headspace** is the National Youth Mental Health Foundation, providing early intervention mental health services to 12 to 25 year olds. **headspace** has 175 services across Australia in metropolitan, regional and remote areas, and offers online and phone support services and digital resources through eheadspace. **headspace** provides multidisciplinary care for mental health, physical health, alcohol and other drug use, and work and study needs.

Our integrated services provide the holistic, multi-faceted support that is a necessary component of a responsive service system model. This includes:

- **headspace centres:** the **headspace** network of services are youth-friendly, integrated service hubs, where multidisciplinary teams provide holistic support across the four core streams.
- **community awareness:** guided by local youth reference groups and centre staff, Community Awareness Officers at each **headspace** centre work locally to build mental health literacy, reduce stigma, encourage help-seeking, identify local needs and ensure young people know they can access help at **headspace**.
- **digital mental health programs and resources: headspace** uses its digital platform to make a range of information and supports accessible to young people, parents and carers, professionals and educators.
- **eheadspace:** our virtual service provides safe, secure support to young people and their family and friends from experienced youth mental health professionals via email, webchat or phone. There are also online group sessions led by clinicians or peers, focused on the big issues facing young people and their family and friends.
- **headspace regional telephone counselling service: headspace** offers integrated holistic teleweb support for students in eligible schools in regional Victoria (locations more than 50km from a **headspace** centre).
- **headspace campaigns:** campaigns focus on stigma reduction, building mental health literacy and encouraging help seeking, while ensuring young people know **headspace** is a safe and trusted place they can turn to in order to support their mental health.
- **headspace in schools and universities:** Through evidence-based mental health promotion, prevention, early intervention and postvention services, **headspace** delivers key initiatives designed to support the mental health and wellbeing of school communities. This includes:
    - **Be You** – a mental health and wellbeing initiative for learning communities. In particular, **headspace** can support secondary schools to prepare for, respond to and recover together where there has been a death by suicide.
    - **Mental Health Education Program** – this program provides free mental health education workshops for schools

    - **University support program** – this provides training and education opportunities to Australian universities to build their capacity and confidence to engage in conversations about mental health and wellbeing

- a range of programs for First Nations young people, and projects to improve the culturally safety of **headspace's** services, including:
    - **Cultural supervision pilot** where Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander supervisors provide cultural supervision for non-Indigenous clinicians, to develop their knowledge, skills, insight and wisdom in how to support and care for both young people, and themselves, in the cultural context of working with community.
    - **First Nations Community connection project** providing support to centres to connect with local First Nations communities, enhance community engagement, outreach and collaborative activities and increase access by First Nations young people
    - **Our Way Our Say** culturally safe social and emotional wellbeing training resources for young people in Darwin schools, developed by an Aboriginal Cultural Advisory Council of key Aboriginal leaders from the Darwin community, in partnership with **headspace** National.
    - **Yulara and Mutitjulu service expansion** from **headspace** Alice Springs, established by the Central Australian Aboriginal Council in partnership with **headspace** National, and funded by the Northern Territory PHN. The expansion required innovation of the **headspace** Model to meet the needs of the young people and families in the remote communities of Yulara and Mutitjulu.
    - **Yarnspace** – a safe, anonymous online group for First Nations young people to yarn and connect, moderated by First Nations peer workers.
- **vocational supports: headspace** centres provide integrated mental health and vocational support to young people to help them remain engaged in work and study, including implementing Individual Placement and Support (IPS) in **headspace** centres. In addition, **headspace** provides vocational support via:
    - **headspace Work and Study Online** (hWS) is a national digital program that provides integrated mental health and vocational support via the phone, video conferencing, online messaging and email. hWS works closely with young people across their work/study journey from identifying work/study goals to maintaining a work/study placement, typically for a period of around three months.
    - **headspace Career Mentoring** connects young people aged 18 to 25 years living with mental health challenges with industry professionals to meet fortnightly over a period of six months via video conferencing and/or the phone to enhance a young person's employment and career opportunities.

## About yourtown

**yourtown** is a trusted provider of services for young people, with a focus on mental health and wellbeing, parenting and early childhood development, long-term unemployment, prevention of youth suicide, child protection, and support for those experiencing domestic and family violence. **yourtown** has evolved to helping hundreds of thousands of young people each year through a range of service offerings, supporting them through many difficult challenges.

Our services

- Kids Helpline, providing professional counselling and support to 5–25-year-olds across Australia since 1991
- Kids Helpline @ School and Kids Helpline @ High School, which delivers early intervention and prevention programs through primary and secondary schools
- My Circle, a confidential, private, online peer support network for 13–25-year-olds to share information and build coping skills
- Mental health service/s for children aged 0-11 years old and their families, with moderate mental health needs.
- Employment, education, and social enterprise programs to help long term unemployed young people re-engage with education and/or employment
- Domestic and family violence refuge, accommodation, and therapeutic supports for women and their children, including post-refuge support
- Accommodation and therapeutic supports for young parents and their children at high risk
- Parentline, a telephone and online counselling and support service for parents and carers in the Northern Territory and Queensland
- Young Parents Program providing parenting support to help with child development, life skills and health and wellbeing activities in safe, supportive environments.

**Kids Helpline**

**yourtown's** Kids Helpline is Australia's only free and confidential 24/7 phone and online counselling service for any young person aged 5 to 25. It offers children and young people a range of care options that are right for their needs and circumstances. Our commitment to being there anytime, and for any reason, has meant that we have responded to more than 8.9 million contacts from children and young people nationally in the 34 years since our service was first established, whilst also providing tens of millions of self-help interactions via our website and social channels.

In 2025, our Kids Helpline counsellors responded to 128,998 contacts from children and young people across Australia, including 5,190 crisis responses for children and young people at imminent risk of harm.

**Family and Domestic Violence Refuge and Transitional Housing**

**yourtown's** refuge offers supported accommodation for up to 12 weeks. A specialised team provides women and children with a safe and welcoming environment and creates opportunities for mothers to re-build self-concept and experience control and empowerment over their lives. The wrap-around care also includes linking with transitional housing and community outreach programs for women and children exiting refuges. Transitional housing is a vital steppingstone for women and children moving towards long term, safe and sustainable independent living in the community. **yourtown's** transitional housing offers a safe and supportive environment for 6 – 12 months, with support for legal and financial matters, accessing pre-employment support, and helping children into school.

**Parentline**

Parentline offers free confidential phone and webchat counselling and support for parents and carers of children in Queensland and the Northern Territory. It offers a safety net for families by providing support when it is most needed. This includes after hours and weekends, where families feel isolated and where local services are unavailable.

**Children and Families**

**yourtown** provides accommodation and intensive individualised support to vulnerable young parents and their children through our San Miguel service. For over 40 years, San Miguel has provided a place to call home for vulnerable and at-risk families.

**yourtown** also delivers a range of family and early intervention services designed to strengthen child and family wellbeing, support healthy child development and improve outcomes for children experiencing vulnerability and adversity. Services such as Starfish, Care Plus and Communities for Children provide family-centred support through parenting programs, early intervention, mental health and wellbeing supports, community connection activities and coordinated responses for children and families with additional needs. Together, these services help families build resilience, strengthen relationships and access the support needed to promote safety, wellbeing and positive developmental outcomes for children and young people.

**Employment Services**

For over 20 years **yourtown** has been delivering specialist youth employment services. Our employment services programs, including Transition to Work, Skilling Queenslander for Work, and Get Back in the Game provide young people with training to expand their options and help them find sustainable employment.

**Social Enterprises**

**yourtown** has worked with young people and employers to break down barriers to sustainable employment for more than 20 years. As a leader in work-based enterprises we provide young people at risk of long-term unemployment paid jobs in the following areas: construction, landscaping, and asset maintenance to help their transition to open employment.