



headspace strategy

2025–2028

foreword

We are excited to present the new headspace Strategy, which incorporates the *headspace Direction* and the *headspace National Youth Mental Health Foundation Strategic Plan (2025–2028)*.

Our strategy reflects the changing and diverse needs of young people in Australia and the dynamic context headspace works within across the country. The strategy was developed with the voices of young people and family and unites the work across the inspiring headspace network with our online supports, our work in schools and communities and our programs and services delivered by headspace National. headspace services across Australia have now seen a combined total of one million individual young people, a significant milestone to build on as we welcome the 2025 Australian Government's investment in new, upgraded and expanded headspace services. With these commitments, we will continue to evolve our services to increase our reach closer to where young people are, deepen our community partnerships and increasingly respond to more young people who present with severe and complex needs.

Our vision is for an *Australia where every young person's mental health and wellbeing are valued and supported*. Our strategic priorities balance this ambition with backing young people's hopes and aspirations and understanding challenges they can experience within their own communities. This strategy guides our focus, to continue to provide the care, support and treatment young people need, when and where they need it.

To meet the changing and evolving needs of young people, we will innovate; develop a deep understanding of generation alpha to inform future service delivery and explore ways to use technology such as artificial intelligence to complement existing services and improve efficiency. We will remain adaptable and responsive to change through continuous collaboration with our national lived and living experience reference groups, and through enduring partnerships with communities, service providers, Lead Agencies, Primary Health Networks and governments.



Jason Trethowan

Chief Executive Officer
headspace National Youth Mental
Health Foundation

We expect hurdles in our journey to deliver this strategy, but we are committed to adapting and responding to emerging needs and opportunities.

In 2024, we marked 18 years since the beginning of headspace. Over the years, we have made significant progress in growing our support for young people, including:

- expanding the headspace network to 173 headspace services across Australia with that number to grow further during the life of this strategy
- establishing the First Nations Wellbeing and Engagement division and launching our inaugural First Nations Strategy, demonstrating our commitment to the social and emotional wellbeing of First Nations young people
- growing our Work and Study programs to best support young people's holistic needs
- developing the headspace Early Career Program to build the mental health workforce of the future
- enhancing integration across headspace services by streamlining access and continuity of care.

Young people's mental health literacy has improved and the stigma associated with seeking help has reduced. However, the challenge to reduce help seeking barriers remains and our role in community engagement has never been more important. We are seeing more young people reaching out for help, and more families concerned for the mental health and wellbeing of their young people. Workforce shortages in the mental health sector make it difficult for young people to find the right support, particularly for those from diverse cultures and identities and those in regional, rural or remote communities.

Despite growing awareness and support, suicide remains the leading cause of death among young people. Our data show that those most at risk of suicidality include young people aged 15-17, as well as those who identify as female, gender diverse, LGBTIQ+ or First Nations. Higher suicidality rates are also observed among young people who are not studying or working and those without stable accommodation.

Since our last strategic direction was set, the world has changed significantly, particularly for young people. The impacts of COVID-19 have reshaped their experiences, compounding existing challenges such as bullying, social anxiety, school refusal and loneliness. Young people are increasingly concerned about climate change, global conflict, the rising cost of living, shifts in the labour market, and the rapid adoption of artificial intelligence and social media changes that impact their future.

Our services and programs must be as diverse as our young people, recognising the cultural contexts, pathways to help seeking, and unique needs within communities. Across headspace, our clinical services integrate essential holistic mental health care with work and study support, care in our schools and communities, and dedicated suicide prevention programs. This integrated approach allows us to lead the youth mental health sector in providing safe and effective care for young people—both in person and online.

While headspace is for all young people, we prioritise those that face greater barriers to care and experience poorer mental health outcomes. These priority groups include:

- First Nations young people
- sexuality and gender-diverse young people
- young people from multicultural backgrounds
- young men
- young people who use alcohol and other drugs
- young people experiencing, or at risk of, homelessness
- young people with disabilities
- young people from rural and remote communities.

Recognising the intersecting experiences of these groups ensures our services remain accessible, relevant and effective.

As we enter the next phase of our journey, we remain committed to standing beside young people, family, and communities—advocating for the issues that impact their mental health and wellbeing.

Jason Trethowan

Chief Executive Officer
headspace National Youth Mental Health Foundation



Looking Back: Celebrating a Journey of Progress and Participation

When we think about the journey headspace has been on over the past few years, we feel a sense of pride and connection.

As Youth Advisors to the Board, we've been honoured to bring young people's voices to leadership, ensuring that these perspectives are reflected in decision making at all levels. Over two national strategies, we've witnessed so much growth and change. Yet, the heart of what makes headspace special—championing the voices of young people and family—has remained constant.

At headspace, participation isn't just a buzzword; it is a powerful, meaningful, and diverse force.

It's looked like influence—young people and family shaping decisions in boardrooms and committees.

It's looked like courage—sharing lived and living experiences of navigating the mental health system or supporting a loved one, within the walls of headspace or on the floor of Parliament.

It's looked like creativity—co-creating workshops for schools or designing resources for healthcare professionals.

It's looked like agility—helping local centres respond to the unique and evolving needs of their communities.

It's looked like inclusion—driving milestones like the new headspace National Multicultural Practice Strategy and fostering culturally safe spaces where everyone feels welcome.

And, at times, it's looked messy, challenging and confronting—because real participation asks for vulnerability and trust. But that's what makes it so meaningful! At headspace, we embrace this, knowing that participation is a journey always worth striving for.

We are committed to it always growing and evolving, and our recently launched Model of Participation reflects this—a new framework for us to keep doing better! It brings more clarity, purpose, and practical support to how we engage young people and family. The Model ensures that participation isn't just a principle—it's a practice that is embedded in everything we do at headspace, and we're so excited for what it may achieve!

For us, this new national Strategy represents an opportunity to build on the legacy of headspace while setting a bold course for its future, shaped by all of us. Where could we go from here?



Emma Pryse Jones

Board Youth Advisor

hY NRG (2019 - 2021)



Sarthak Gandhi

Board Youth Advisor

hY NRG (2023 - 2024)



Looking Forward: Voices that Matter, Actions that Count

Our role is to ensure that this Strategy is more than just words on a page. Our role is to ensure that there is an actionable commitment to creating real change and progress for other young people, just like us, when they need it most.

As young people, we're all too familiar with a public narrative that often focuses on isolation, disconnection, and hopelessness. While these challenges are real, they don't tell the whole story. The new headspace Strategy is an opportunity to shift that focus – celebrating the strength and resilience of young people to tackle these challenges.



We see this strength every day in our friends, peers, and fellow advocates—young people who are innovating, problem-solving, and making a real difference in their communities. They bring invaluable knowledge, expertise, and passion that deserve to be championed. This Strategy is another step forward and commitment for headspace in ensuring young people's voices are heard and valued, keeping them at the centre of meaningful solutions. It's about empowering young people to shape a better future - for themselves, for their communities, and for generations to come.

The headspace Direction promises to meet us where we are and support us to progress to where we want to go. It builds not just on being reactive to our current challenges but also proactively building spaces, relationships and systems that actively support our wellbeing before troubles arise.

It is the greatest privilege in our role to amplify the voices of young people, promote the expertise of lived and living experience and be entrusted with the stories of incredible young people. We are excited to continue to contribute to the evolution of headspace and work collaboratively to ensure it remains a trusted, inclusive, and empowering space for young people.

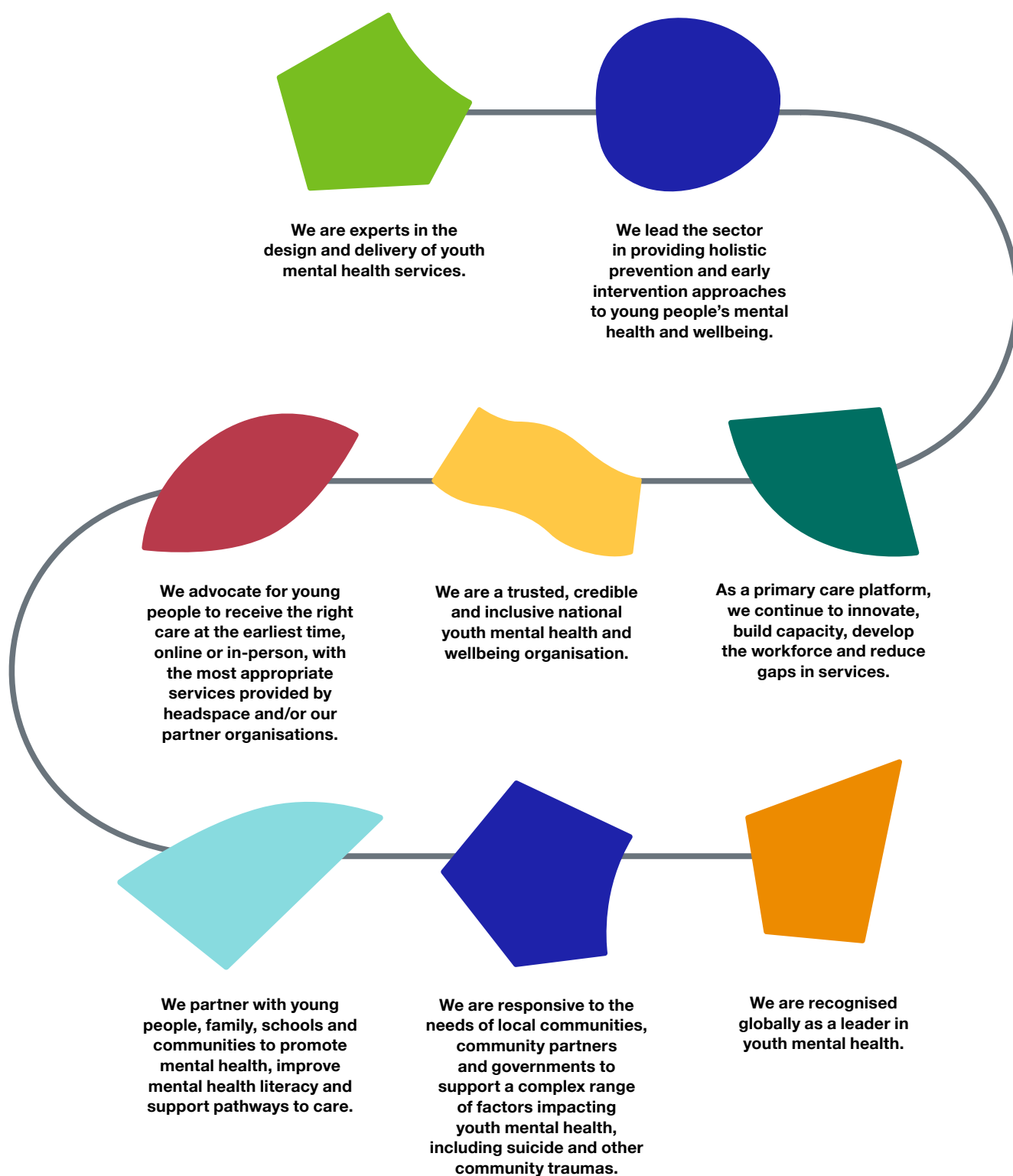


Emma Pryse Jones & Sarthak Gandhi

Board Youth Advisors
headspace National Youth Mental Health Foundation



headspace: who we are



how to read the headspace strategy

For the first time, we are introducing a **headspace Direction** which describes the overarching, strategic focus for headspace. This unites all headspace services across Australia, including headspace Centres, headspace Digital Mental Health Programs, headspace Schools and Communities, and headspace Work and Study.

The **headspace National Youth Mental Health Foundation Strategic Plan** articulates how headspace National will contribute to the headspace Direction from 2025-2028.

The **headspace Direction** is intended to be enduring and will inform future headspace National Strategic Plans.

The new headspace Vision is inspired by one of our valued partner organisations; Jigsaw, the National Centre for Youth Mental Health in Ireland.

headspace Direction

Describes the strategic direction for headspace

headspace National Strategic Plan (2025-2028)

Describes how hN will support headspace and deliver services

headspace services

headspace centres*

headspace digital mental health programs

headspace schools and communities

headspace work and study

headspace National support and enabling functions

*includes satellite, outpost or outreach

headspace direction

Vision

An Australia where every young person's mental health and wellbeing are valued and supported.

Purpose

headspace is expert in the design and delivery of youth mental health services.

Our purpose is to strengthen the mental health and wellbeing of all young people by delivering services and programs that respond to their changing, diverse needs.

Strategic Pillars

Strategic Pillar 1

Evolve headspace through continued youth and family participation, as well as leadership, advocacy, and engagement within the mental health sector.

Strategic Pillar 2

Build the capacity of young people, family, schools, and communities to use prevention and early intervention strategies to reduce harm associated with poor mental health, including suicide.

Strategic Pillar 3

Provide trusted, effective, holistic, evidence-based digital and in-person services and programs for young people's mental health and wellbeing.

Strategic Pillar 4

Grow and develop the workforce headspace needs now and into the future.

Strategic Pillar 5

Embed cultural safety and strengthen cultural capability to meet the social and emotional wellbeing needs of First Nations young people.

Principles

We believe

young people and family are experts in their own lives and their participation is fundamental to headspace and our evolution.

We deliver

best practice evidence-based services and programs, informed by lived and living experience and the practice wisdom from our network.

We contribute

to the mental health sector and shape our services and programs through the collection and use of high-quality data, robust evaluation, and research.

We acknowledge and embrace

the diverse cultures and evolving identities of young people.

We evolve, adapt and innovate

to meet the changing needs of young people and the sector.

We partner and harness

our national network to create a more connected youth mental health system.

headspace national youth mental health foundation strategic plan (2025–2028)

headspace National Role

headspace National connects, steers and grows headspace, delivers critical national services, and provides leadership within the youth mental health sector.

headspace National Values

Inclusion

Collaboration

Agility

Excellence

headspace National Enablers

Youth participation



Our world-leading approach to participation ensures better services for young people and family. We recognise that young people and family are experts in their own lives. Partnering with them builds trust, understanding and mutual respect, ensuring headspace remains relevant, accessible, safe and responsive to the community.

Trusted brand



headspace is a highly visible, trusted brand that encourages help seeking, engages more young people in mental health services, increases mental health literacy and reduces stigma among young people, family and the community. We are proud that headspace is the most-recalled youth mental health brand in Australia and is viewed overwhelmingly positively by young people and family.

National data systems



We are an evidence-informed organisation using research, evaluation and monitoring from our internationally leading youth mental health data sets to influence our work. We have developed innovative and effective approaches to capturing service and outcome data. We have a strong organisational culture of using data and evaluation to create insights that inform service and quality improvement.

National footprint; in-person and digital



headspace has a national footprint of 170+ centres, providing accessible, community-based mental health support, complemented by a variety of online programs to ensure that young people can access the right support, when they need it and how they want it.

Expertise in service delivery across metropolitan, regional, rural and remote communities



headspace is an expert in the implementation of national youth mental health services and programs, tailored to local needs and available resources. We focus on designing, adapting and delivering services and programs that allow young people across Australia to access the right support.

Integrated clinical, corporate and First Nations cultural governance



We have a holistic approach to governance, driven by the need to ensure high-quality, effective, culturally safe services and organisational sustainability.

headspace National Strategic Priorities

Strategic Pillar 1

Evolve headspace through continued youth and family participation, as well as leadership, advocacy, and engagement within the mental health sector.

headspace National Strategic Priorities for Pillar 1

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| <p>1.1 Listen to young people and family to improve our understanding of their experiences of mental health, wellbeing and support needs, now and into the future</p> <p>1.2 Use data, evaluation and research to inform headspace activities and identify advocacy priorities</p> | <p>1.3 Use our national platform to advocate with and for young people and family on matters that impact their mental health and wellbeing</p> <p>1.4 Develop our approach to strategic and research partnerships, to strengthen our influence and reach</p> <p>1.5 Maintain headspace as a keystone of the changing mental health sector</p> |
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Outcome

headspace is trusted as expert in the matters that impact the mental health and wellbeing of young people.

Strategic Pillar 2

Build the capacity of young people, family, schools and communities to use prevention and early intervention strategies to reduce harm associated with poor mental health, including suicide.

headspace National Strategic Priorities for Pillar 2

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| <p>2.1 Build headspace's capability in community awareness and engagement</p> <p>2.2 Strengthen the community's mental health literacy, including how young people can be supported to improve and maintain their mental health and wellbeing</p> | <p>2.3 Expand awareness and understanding that headspace's support is delivered through centres, schools and online</p> <p>2.4 Nurture relationships across headspace and community partners</p> <p>2.5 Communicate our impact in ways that are meaningful to young people, communities and the youth mental health sector</p> |
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Outcome

Increased community capacity to support youth mental health and wellbeing by improving understanding of the mental health needs of young people and the headspace support available.

Strategic Pillar 3

Provide trusted, effective, holistic, evidence-based digital and in-person services and programs for young people's mental health and wellbeing.

headspace National Strategic Priorities for Pillar 3

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| <p>3.1 Deliver best practice youth mental health and wellbeing care in all headspace services</p> <p>3.2 Ensure alignment with the headspace model</p> <p>3.3 Improve access and experience of headspace services, through expansion, integration and innovation</p> <p>3.4 Enhance service provision, access and appropriateness through partnerships</p> | <p>3.5 Improve headspace's capability to support all priority populations, with an increased focus on multicultural, LGBTIQ+, and rural and remote young people, family and communities</p> <p>3.6 Create and translate evidence into innovative and effective practice</p> |
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Outcome

Data demonstrate positive outcomes for young people and family.

Strategic Pillar 4

Grow and develop the workforce headspace needs now and into the future.

headspace National Strategic Priorities for Pillar 4

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| <p>4.1 Attract, retain and develop a contemporary and sustainable headspace workforce</p> <p>4.2 Identify and develop mechanisms that supply the mental health sector with the workforce it needs</p> | <p>4.3 Build an inclusive workplace that prioritises belonging, and the safety and wellbeing of our workforce</p> <p>4.4 Leverage the headspace workforce to bolster network capacity</p> |
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Outcome

A talented, capable, diverse and engaged workforce that is well positioned to support headspace's success and growth into the future.

Strategic Pillar 5

Embed cultural safety and strengthen cultural capability to meet the social and emotional wellbeing needs of First Nations young people.

headspace National Strategic Priorities for Pillar 5

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| <p>5.1 Build the cultural capability of headspace National staff and embed cultural safety in the way we do things</p> <p>5.2 Embed robust and appropriate cultural governance</p> <p>5.3 Value and grow cultural leadership and guidance</p> | <p>5.4 Partner with First Nations young people to shape care that reflects their needs, strengths, and First Nations approaches to social and emotional wellbeing</p> <p>5.5 Foster and maintain key stakeholder relationships</p> <p>5.6 Incorporate principles of First Nations data governance, collection and sharing</p> |
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Outcome

Increased cultural capability, trust and stronger connection to First Nations community, and better integration of social and emotional wellbeing support.

definitions

Community awareness and engagement refers to the community-based activities through which headspace services increase mental health literacy, reduce stigma around mental health issues, encourage early help seeking and promote access to headspace services, while building strong relationships with young people, family, other local services, and the broader community.

Family is defined uniquely by each young person. Family is considered an integral part of a young person's circle of care. Family and other caregivers—whether by birth, choice or circumstance—hold a significant role in supporting a young person by fostering a sense of belonging and connection through their shared experience. The term family may include parents, caregivers, siblings, partners, Elders, kin, mentors and other community members who are viewed by the young person as people who play a significant emotional, cultural, faith-based or other role in their life. At headspace we acknowledge and respect the diversity of family across Australia.

First Nations cultural governance at headspace means our organisation is stewarded by First Nations peoples and First Nations ways of knowing, being and doing, for all First Nations matters. Cultural governance provides a framework for headspace to implement quality, culturally safe and informed care to First Nations young people, family, communities and staff.

Social and emotional wellbeing is a holistic concept of health that includes mental health, but which also understands health and wellbeing as inseparable from connection to land/Country, spirituality, culture, ancestors, community, and family. Social and emotional wellbeing is impacted in various ways by social determinants, such as access to education, experiences of racism and ongoing processes of colonisation.

There are often barriers when trying to integrate Indigenous ways of knowing and doing within a biomedical mental health model. Situating mental health within an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander social and emotional wellbeing framework is more consistent with the view that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander concepts of health and wellbeing prioritise and emphasise wellness, harmony and balance rather than illness and symptom reduction.





headspace services operate across Australia, in metropolitan, regional, rural and remote areas, supporting young people and family to be mentally healthy and engaged in their communities.



headspace acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as Australia's First People and Traditional Custodians. We value their cultures, identities and continuing connection to Country, waters, kin and community.

We pay our respects to Elders past and present and are committed to making a positive contribution to the wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people, by providing services that are welcoming, safe, culturally appropriate and inclusive.



headspace celebrates, values and respects the diverse and intersectional living experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and gender diverse, intersex, queer and asexual (LGBTIQ+) young people, family and communities.

headspace is committed to engaging in continuous learning and eliminating all forms of discrimination in the provision of health services. headspace celebrates, values and respects all identities, experiences, cultures, abilities, faiths, bodies, sexualities, and gender identities.

Acknowledgement of Contribution

We are deeply grateful to all those who contributed their time, perspectives and expertise to the development of the headspace Strategy. Thank you to the headspace National Youth Reference Group (hY NRG), the headspace National Family Reference Group, the First Nations Youth Advisory Committee (FNYAC), the First Nations Cultural Governance Committee, the headspace Centre Managers Advisory Group, the headspace Clinical Leads Advisory Group, the headspace Community Awareness and Engagement Advisory Group, and all the headspace National staff involved.