



2022 CENTRAL GREAT SOUTHERN & GREAT SOUTHERN
Youth Sector Forums
KATANNING & ALBANY REPORT



Acknowledgment of Country

YACWA acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as the Traditional Custodians of this land, sea and waters. The YACWA office in Perth is situated on Whadjuk Nyoongar boodja. We wish to pay our respect to Elders past, present and future and extend this to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people seeing this message. We acknowledge their continuing care and custodianship for boodja, for Kepa (water) and Kaarl (fire).



This report was prepared by Kim Schroeder with support from Olivia Knowles and Stefaan Bruce-Truglio.

Photographer Acknowledgement

Owen Davies Photography

Sincere thanks to Owen for his photography at the Great Southern Youth Sector Forum.

The 2022 Central Great Southern and Great Southern Youth Sector Forums in Katanning and Albany were made possible by the generous support of Lotterywest funding for Regional YACWA.



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About YACWA

The Youth Affairs Council of Western Australia (YACWA) is the peak body for young people and the youth sector in Western Australia. We operate primarily as a human rights organisation that seeks to address the exclusion of young people in a rapidly changing society.

Our continued vision for Western Australia is one that celebrates and engages young people in all aspects of the community. Our role is to strengthen the trust, cooperation, collaboration, professionalism and voice of the non-government youth service sector to better serve the young people of Western Australia.

www.yacwa.org.au

In 2021, YACWA received funding to strengthen our regional engagement by employing local staff through a place-based model. We aim to build strong regional connections to better understand regional issues and amplify these in our policy and advocacy work, increase the capacity of young people to be changemakers in their communities, and support the youth sector where needed with training, networking, events and activities.

Our work is governed by four guiding principles of
– respect, equity, integrity and the celebration of diversity.

About the Central Great Southern Youth Sector Forum (Katanning) and the Great Southern Youth Sector Forum (Albany)

The aim of the Central Great Southern (in Katanning) and Great Southern Youth Sector Forum (in Albany) was to bring together members of the youth sector and create a space for networking to help strengthen connections amongst the many services and organisations that work across the Great Southern region.

A key element across both forums was for attendees to identify the strengths and challenges in the Great Southern youth sector and share their ideas about possible ways to move forward and map out approaches and solutions that could create better outcomes for young people. We recognise that regional communities have unique and diverse circumstances that impact on young people and the services that support them. These forums created a space to hear from the regional youth services and for YACWA to develop greater awareness of the context of our work.

Hosting a forum in the Central Great Southern was identified as a key approach to capture the voice of the satellite communities which may not have had the ability to travel and attend the Great Southern Forum in Albany.

Since the Covid-19 pandemic, opportunities for members of the youth sector to network were extremely limited. These forums provided a solid platform for sector staff to reconnect and learn about services and programs in the area. YACWA also wanted to host an event to shine a light on regional voices to key decision-makers and to elevate some of the great work that is happening in our local Great Southern communities.

The information gathered at both forums is just a starting point of the conversation for the youth sector. This report is a snapshot, capturing part of the conversation across the Great Southern youth sector and specifically the voices from those organisations and services which attended the Katanning and Albany forums. We acknowledge that not all key issues and challenges were heard at the forums and captured in this report.

YACWA has previously hosted an annual State of the Youth Sector Forum in Perth, and at the end of 2021 Regional YACWA hosted its inaugural Midwest Youth Sector Forum in Geraldton. The Central Great Southern and Great Southern Youth Sector Forums have enabled YACWA to engage with stakeholders and to better understand the needs and priorities of the region, assisting to identify advocacy priorities moving forward.



We trialled a new model of information collection at both these forums. Previously, people have been seated around a particular topic i.e., mental health, employment, child protection. However, for these forums people were not seated by particular topic and instead could discuss topics as they arose based on portfolio areas and backgrounds of people on each table. This helped to highlight the intersections between various issues and develop greater awareness of the challenges that exist across the areas, amongst the attendees on various tables. The discussions on the day highlighted that there are lots of overlapping themes identified from across the region. We have summarised a diverse array of conversations into the headings you see in this report.

We would like to acknowledge those sector members who were able to attend both forums, providing their valuable input and engaging in the networking benefits that come from these events. Throughout this report we have endeavoured (where possible) to highlight content specific to the relevant region and similarities between the regions.

For reader understanding, terminology around the regional locations may include reference to the “Central Great Southern” which indicates the information gathered at the forum in Katanning. This reference of the Central Great Southern denotes locations associated with the Upper Great Southern region (e.g. Katanning, Kojonup, Gnowangerup, Tambellup). Specific reference to the Great Southern suggests information gathered at the Albany forum and includes sector input from members from across the whole Great Southern region.



Aim of this Report

This report provides a snapshot of the current state of play for the youth sector across the Great Southern region. It is a point in time capture of the sector's current attitudes, feelings and perceptions, and creates an opportunity for this to be heard by a range of local and state-wide decision makers.

Having a regional presence in the Great Southern region has enabled YACWA to engage with the youth sector, to develop greater understanding of the services and supports and to hear about the unique needs that organisations and communities have in relation to supporting young people in their local communities. Regional communities have very different needs to metropolitan Perth and even other regions across WA and so being able to engage with these communities is essential for YACWA's advocacy and policy work.

We hope that this report will help foster greater awareness of the context of the current state of play for the youth sector across the Great Southern region and that it will also be a useful resource for the sector to help plan for future service and support models moving forward.

YACWA will share the findings of this report with key decision makers across all levels of government to help advocate and influence positive outcomes and facilitate conversations to help support advocacy and collaborative projects in the local region with youth sector service providers.

Key findings also helped inform the YACWA Pre Budget Submission (PBS) that helps provide guidance to the State Government to improve the lives of vulnerable young Western Australians, and to create a sustainable system of care.

Who Attended?

Regional YACWA purposefully engaged with a diverse range of youth sector members from across the Great Southern region, to invite them along to attend one of the events to be held in the region.

CENTRAL GREAT SOUTHERN KATANNING

36 individuals attended,
representing **22**
organisations

GREAT SOUTHERN ALBANY

60 individuals attended,
representing **34** sector
organisations

The Central Great Southern Youth Sector Forum in Katanning welcomed sector members from across regional communities including Broomehill, Gnowangerup, Katanning, Kojonup, Tambellup and Albany. Attendees included youth workers, service managers, executives and government workers and key people supporting young people in their local community.

There were 36 attendees at the forum in Katanning, representing 22 different organisations. This included representatives from across the Central Great Southern region from: Aboriginal Corporations, education (including secondary and tertiary), employment, local government, health, disability, community services, youth support organisations, Community Resource Centres, WA Police and the Department of Justice.

At the Great Southern Youth Sector Forum in Albany, there were 60 sector members in attendance, representing 34 organisations from across the Great Southern region, including Denmark, Mount Barker, Albany and even participants from Esperance.

Both events did not have a focus on engaging and including young people as the forum was focussed on creating an open space for the sector to come together.

A full list of the organisations in attendance is listed in Appendix A.

What Did We Talk About?

The two forums featured a Welcome to Country – in Katanning we had the pleasure of engaging Gabrielle Hansen to welcome us on Goreng and Kaniyang boodja and in Albany, Vernice Gillies welcomed us on to Minang boodja. Gabrielle and Vernice are both Aboriginal Elders and Leaders in the community.

The Katanning forum included an introduction from Olivia Knowles (YACWA Regional Project Manager) and in Albany we had an introduction from YACWA CEO Sandy McKiernan. For the Albany forum, we were very pleased to have an opening address from the WA Minister for Youth, the Hon. Dave Kelly MLA.

Both forums were structured across three workshops which are outlined below. Each table had a facilitator to guide the robust workshop discussions and to help capture key conversations, themes and priorities.



Workshop 1 – Strengths & Challenges

What things are working well for both services and young people in the region?
What are the issues/unmet community needs impacting on young people?
What are young people telling us they need?

Workshop 2 – Possible Solutions & Moving Forward

Identifying key challenges, highlighting three topics to move forward with and further explore solutions and opportunities.

Workshop 3 – Group Presentations of Key Summaries from each table

Each table had the opportunity to provide an overview of their three key challenges and a brief overview of what their proposed solution looked like.

Key decision makers were present for this workshop session, as YACWA recognises that it is important that these issues and solutions are heard by decision-makers, who can push forward a policy agenda that meets their needs and creates safer, healthier communities for young people.

What We Heard

This section of the report highlights the key themes and discussions that were shared by members of the youth sector. These themes highlight the priority challenges and proposed solutions identified at the forums.



Overview of What We Heard

These were the common themes and shared solutions from both forums in Katanning and Albany:

14 Services need additional funding to adequately cover actual costs and support outreach service delivery to satellite towns.

15 Regional areas need flexible, place-based and equitable long-term funding to be able to provide support to remote and isolated communities where vulnerable and disadvantaged young people live.

16 Regional communities are struggling to fill youth sector workforce positions.

17 Local level services directories are needed.

18 Additional supports are needed across the region to help foster and encourage youth sector interagency and networking groups.

19 Expand housing options for young people through investment in innovative local approaches.

20 Invest in more crisis and transitional housing and supports for young people.

21 Invest in wraparound services that support young people to enter housing.

22 Increase transport options to help support young people to access services in the Great Southern.

24 Greater support for young people with disabilities:
 – Increase access to employment opportunities and supported pathways for young people with disabilities.
 – Joined up and accessible activities and services/supports.
 – Paediatric and diagnostic supports are needed.

26 Young people need more opportunities to influence decisions on the issues that affect them.

29 Fund agencies to embed money and time into working in meaningful partnerships with Aboriginal communities.

30 Greater support and options for young people's education:
 – Alternative education options are needed to best support young people who may be disengaged from mainstream settings.
 – Provide greater pathways and supports for transition from education to employment.
 – Barriers to engagement and learning need to be addressed to support young people with diverse learning needs.

32 Centralise services and supports through a youth hub model.

34 Invest in a residential youth Alcohol and Other Drugs (AOD) service.

35 Invest in youth-friendly, safe places where young people can access the services and supports they need.

36 Greater investment in a range of mental health supports is needed.

38 Young people are unable to access primary and Allied Health Services they need in a timely and youth friendly manner.

38 Early intervention and prevention education and supports are needed.



Regional areas need flexible, place-based and equitable long-term funding to be able to provide support to remote and isolated communities where vulnerable and disadvantaged young people live

Community members at the forum told us that services are negatively impacted by ongoing short-term contracts and insecure funding. The process for applying for grants is tedious, complicated and not all organisations have skilled staff and time available to be able to write winning grants. Members of the sector voiced the challenges that short term funding rounds pose, including duration of projects, outcomes that may be achieved and provision of ongoing support to those engaged.

Seed funding could enable communities and services to engage innovative models of approach, to support the needs of vulnerable young people across regional WA.

Members of the youth sector across the Great Southern identified the need for:

- **Provision of long-term seed funding** that enables communities and services to engage innovative models of approach to support the needs of vulnerable young people across regional WA. This would enable services to deliver programs that can build capacity in their local communities and meet the needs of the young people and their service needs.
- **A cost benefit analysis of youth services** in the region would build upon existing work being carried out as part of current State Government re-commissioning processes. Information gathered from the analysis would help build the capacity of services to identify their own needs and advocate for funding. Coordination of state-based funding across the region could help complement existing federal contracts, rather than duplication of services. With the completion of a worthwhile analysis, relevant long-term approaches and goals could be identified to best support individual regional communities across the Great Southern including the satellite communities of Tambellup, Gnowangerup and Katanning. This would help to prevent disadvantage and could support and sustain better outcomes for vulnerable young people living in these regional towns. A comprehensive needs analysis could also build and support an evidence-based approach to illustrate the benefit of prioritising early intervention supports to reduce demand for crisis services.
- **Organisational flexibility to adapt services.** Each regional town and community has its own unique issues and challenges that exist as a result of its location, population and demographics. Funding for location specific services needs to reflect this and provide flexibility to adapt to unmet needs and identified challenges in satellite communities. Organisational flexibility to adapt services is needed to best meet the needs of clients, with a key focus on holistic outcomes rather than KPIs. Providing a flexible approach to funding grants would allow services to respond to program needs, the individuals they are supporting and focus on long term outcomes for the community.

Services need additional funding to adequately cover actual costs and support outreach service delivery to satellite towns

The sector stated that *transport costs are not adequately funded and planned for in contracts and service models*, to enable services concentrated in Albany to provide outreach to other towns. We heard that there are significant travel costs associated for services providing outreach to regional towns including time and travel expenses (e.g. vehicle, petrol, staffing allocation with time built in).

Across the region, the towns of Denmark, Tambellup, Gnowangerup, Kojonup and Katanning rely on many outreach services for youth engagement and to foster an early intervention approach. These services are not sustainable in the long-term and are not able to provide early intervention support to prevent and address crises. Due to limited funding options and the increase in costs of service delivery because of indexation, organisations have to look at alternative models of support to meet the cost of wage rises not reflected in service agreements, one of which is reducing the level of support provided to regional locations.



Regional communities are struggling to fill youth sector workforce positions

The Central Great Southern sector identified that *workforce shortages are impacting service provision for young people across regional towns*. The shortage of housing is also a critical part of this challenge. Limited access to housing for staff has meant that key positions in the community cannot be filled to help support new workers relocating to regional satellite communities such as Katanning. We heard anecdotes of staff relocating to work in the region and living in caravans while they waited for rentals to become available to live in.

We heard of a high rate of government workforce turnover due to lack of support for employees and the work they do. As a result, staff changes are frequent in regional and remote towns like Katanning. Feedback from the Katanning forum also highlighted that workforce shortages are impacting the service provision across the youth sector in regional towns in the outer region. Workforce recruitment and retention is also impacted by re-occurring short-term funding that is driven by short-term budgets, election cycles and changes in government. Services are also experiencing a lack of volunteers which is resulting in supports and activities not being delivered. This is an unmet community need which is being felt by young people and members of the youth sector.

Services commented that their workers are stretched providing core business to young people, with lots of pressure placed on critical workers in the sector. Many workers may face burn out because of this pressure and due to the stigma associated with seeking support, who may not access Employee Assistance Program (EAP) support.

We heard the need for:

- Employers and services to invest in retaining and supporting practitioners across the youth and community sector. A range of ideas on how to do this were put forward, including the development of working groups for staff to help mentor and support each other across different fields such as health, education and employment. This supported the discussions across the Central Great Southern communities, highlighting that regional towns need greater support to build capacity and retain staff who are new to the region – i.e., including new graduates. This also supports collaboration and partnerships between organisations.
- Incentives such as higher wages and subsidised housing could help to attract and retain a workforce in the satellite communities to provide place-based supports and long-term relationships with services and the young people.
- Access to funding to pay lived experience workers to help fill the gaps in staffing and greater engagement of peer lived experience in organisations at all levels.
- Regional homes allocated to staffing for services vital to the youth services industry, owned by agencies and government. Finding a way to secure housing for youth workers looking to move into the region is critical.

Local level services directories are needed

The sector identified that *access to a local level online youth services directory for regional communities would be beneficial*, to help develop awareness of what existing local services are available to link young people and their families in with. This could include contact information for staff as well as more detailed information on types of services, criteria and support available. Organisations and services may be working in silos, lacking capacity to engage with external providers who are able to provide outreach and other supports that can help address the needs of young people in the community. Local support is needed to improve access and engagement with services. Comments from the sector voiced that often young people and their families are not aware of the support services that do exist, until they are at crisis point.

Calls from the sector identified possible solutions to assist with information sharing, including:

- Dedicated interagency liaison within each service to help make connections and foster partnerships between agencies and develop community awareness of youth services and programs.
- Establishment of a committee who are dedicated to bringing this information altogether, sharing information and keeping it up to date and relevant.
- Coordinated response in regional communities to help promote services for young people (e.g. in schools, online platforms, sporting organisations, TAFE, universities, etc).



Additional supports are needed across the region to help foster and encourage youth sector interagency and networking groups

We heard of the need for well-connected, coordinated and collaborative youth sector. To support this, sector told us *youth sector interagency groups need to be established and/or better resourced, supported and coordinated in both the Central Great Southern and Great Southern region.*

Active, engaged and meaningful youth interagency networks support sector members to come together to foster open sharing of information, identifying gaps and unmet needs, to work collaboratively to explore solutions to challenges that exist for the young people living in their community.

These networks can be particularly beneficial for new staff in the region. There was a common call across both regional forums, for greater opportunities for sector collaboration to work towards better outcomes for young people.

We heard of challenges with duplication of services, competitive funding processes and organisations working at capacity to deliver services lacking the time to reach out and engage in collaborative partnerships. Changes in people's roles and turnover of staff can also significantly impact engagement in a network.

Key components outlined by participants, as important for interagency networks:

- Identified need for regular round table focussed discussions with youth sector members to improve access and support across the region. This could support better coordination between services, both government and non-government and foster collaborative partnerships with projects and events.

- A focus on sharing data and information to identify gaps and challenges could help to support outcomes for young people through enhanced service delivery and collaboration in response.
- Participants suggested that a staff member from each organisation or service could be the dedicated interagency liaison representative, ensuring good attendance and representation across services. Having a key spokesperson from each organisation could help strengthen connections and build greater awareness of people's roles and the services and supports they provide.
- Funding provision be allocated for a local facilitator to drive and coordinate local networks – i.e., carry out administration duties that are essential for local interagency groups and meetings to function effectively.
- Need for strong governance structures to help support and coordinate a functional network (e.g. terms of reference, administration structures and format, rotational roles). This would include having a clear focus for the group, to help maximise outcomes for the sector and young people.
- Identified role for an independent organisation to play in facilitating or supporting a youth specific interagency network.
- Importance of having the right people in the room and representing the key organisations, services and community stakeholders. This would require investment and commitment from members.
- Facilitation of a strong network in Albany to feed into and link into networks across the region – sharing information, resources and supporting a Great Southern youth network.

Expand housing options for young people through investment in innovative local approaches

We heard that young people are leaving the region due to not being able to find a rental property. There is a *lack of available and appropriate housing options in regional communities across regional and remote towns* in the Central Great Southern, with young people pushed to re-locate to Albany or Perth where they may face similar challenges. This can also impact young people's connection to family, friends and support networks, as well as impairing access to supports they may need to sustain independence.

Attendees highlighted the need to reduce the number of AirBnBs across the Great Southern region, as they have impacted significantly on the availability of rental properties available in the region, particularly in popular tourist towns such as Denmark and Esperance. Participants felt that the State Government could provide incentives for people to subsidise granny flats and make them available for vulnerable renters to live in.

As identified in other areas, there is also a lack of public housing in the Great Southern to meet local growth and to support young people leaving home. Sector told us there are long waitlists for young people wanting to obtain safe housing. We heard anecdotally of 2 – 3 year waitlists for permanent accommodation, with young people not having a safe place to be referred to in the interim, as the limited number of service support options are at capacity. Across the Great Southern there is said to be a social housing waitlist of 600+ places. Low-income households, people with disabilities, Aboriginal people and those impacted by family domestic violence are being significantly impacted by this.

Participants proposed that public housing options need to be built that are better suited to the needs of young people, such as one-bedroom housing. Further to this, they raised the need for a specific allocation of public housing stock be set aside for young people, given the challenges of entering the private market. Sector also identified opportunity to employ and upskill local young people to refurbish existing housing stock that needs maintenance.



Public housing options need to be built that are better suited to the needs of young people.

Invest in more crisis and transitional housing and supports for young people

Sector told us *there is a lack of emergency and transitional housing for young people in need.* There are currently no specialist youth homelessness services based in Katanning. The Katanning Regional Emergency Accommodation Centre is not able to provide services to young people under 17 years old. We heard that families are experiencing overcrowding, with young people and children wandering the streets in the evenings, impacting on their mental health, safety and wellbeing and engagement in school and everyday life.

At the Albany forum we heard calls for additional funding for support services to increase the number of refuge beds, as well as to increase availability of dwellings for transitional housing. Attendees highlighted the difficulties young people face because of having limited options for crisis accommodation. Sector told us there are just 8 refuge beds available in Albany and minimal transitional housing options. These services are regularly at full capacity, impacting availability to the community. Information shared by the group highlighted that because of limited service options, there are many young people who are couch surfing and sleeping rough.

Participants raised the need to increase funding and resources for family supports, enabling young people to stay and live at home, such as through the Reconnect program and working with families and young people in their homes.

It was stated that families need long term planning beyond times of crisis, easier access to resources and support in a timely manner to help combat young people becoming homeless or entering care. We heard there are not enough foster carers to meet community need, and that increased burden is placed on older carers and family supports, who may struggle to maintain the level of support needed.

Invest in wraparound services that support young people to enter housing

We heard of the need for investment in a Foyer Education First Model in the Great Southern, to support young people to access housing as well as education and training support. *Young people need support to navigate the housing system and explore their options (from public housing to rentals to home ownership), as well as build their skills to sustain independent living and maintain their tenancies.* Young people are facing challenges in accessing the rental market due to challenges in providing paperwork and a previous rental history.

Support and funding are needed from the State Government and cooperation from community agencies to help support the implementation of the Foyer program in Albany. This model would help work towards addressing the housing shortages for many young people across the region and could be utilised as a base to help address social challenges for young people and provide access to an integrated site for youth services.





Young people want appropriate options that link up with service access and appointments.

Increase transport options to help support young people to access services in the Great Southern

The current public transport system is limiting young people's access to services and activities. The timing, frequency and availability of services impacts their ability to access services in-person in Albany's centre, having to rely on engagement via virtual conference (if available) or rely on outreach (if available). This extends to those in satellite towns not having appropriate options that link up with service access and appointments in Albany. Members of the sector at the Albany forum voiced a common need for better consideration of access to services and transport options for people with disabilities in Albany and other regional towns.

We heard the need for:

- Existing regional school bus routes to be extended, to support more students and respond to population increases and community growth.
- Free access to public transport for all users to enable access services in major towns.
- The creation of a regional community bus system to encourage and aide greater access and connections to community services and support throughout the satellite communities. This vision for a bus service specific for young people and their families would provide invaluable access to sports and recreational activities and essential services, including participation in employment and education programs.
- An increase in safety mechanisms to support young people when travelling in town and across suburbs – i.e., walking paths for pedestrians and designated bike paths for cyclists and e-scooters.





Access to support and services for young people with disabilities transitioning from school, will help support them to be meaningfully engaged and active members of their community.

Greater support for young people with disabilities

Increase access to employment opportunities and supported pathways for young people with disabilities

We heard that young people with disabilities in the Central Great Southern who are transitioning from school are excluded from employment opportunities due to their limited job skills and work experience. Sector commented that they are facing difficulties in obtaining work placements suitable for school students with disabilities.

The benefits of employing young people with disabilities for inclusion in the workforce was highlighted. Young individuals with disabilities have many strengths that can be supported and celebrated. Limited job opportunities can lead to low self-esteem, mental health issues, isolation and segregation in the community. As a result of little to no income, individuals may also face homelessness/housing issues.

We heard calls from the sector for:

- Access to general education for the wider community to help support positive awareness and greater understanding around the strengths and benefits that come from supporting and engaging people with disabilities in the workforce.
- Greater access to qualified training programs to support the disability workforce and in particular help mentor National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) service providers to support individuals with workplace ready skills.
- *More dedicated support from service providers to help young people access and maintain meaningful employment that adopts an individualised, person-centred and strength-based approach.*
- Innovative approaches to support young people with disabilities to explore potential micro enterprise ideas and pathways should be explored and funded in regional areas.
- Whole community approach to foster partnerships with the Chamber of Commerce and local businesses to help create and foster sustainable employment options for people with disabilities.
- Support that helps individuals with disabilities to access information about traineeships and alternative pathways to employment.

Joined up and accessible activities and services/supports

We heard that there are limited options for services and activities available for young people with disabilities across regional areas of the Great Southern including towns such as Albany, Mount Barker, Denmark and Katanning. Attendees voiced that young people with disability may receive supports in school but have less opportunities once they leave. Stories of isolation and higher incidence of mental health needs were shared.

We heard the need for:

- Greater collaboration between disability service providers and local government to ensure that services, supports, community-based activities and attractions are inclusive for all.
- Greater incentives for organisations to partner with other community services to better plan and offer activities which cater for the needs of all young people, supporting inclusion across all levels of engagement.
- *Access to support and services for young people with disabilities transitioning from school, to support them to be meaningfully engaged and active members of their community.*
- Provision of a support program delivered in schools for young people with disabilities to build social skills and pathways to participate in community.

Paediatric and diagnostic supports are needed

Feedback from attendees acknowledged that the Great Southern has significant waitlists of approximately 12-24 months for paediatric support. This significantly impacts on those on wait lists and those seeking early intervention supports. Sector members voiced that many families are unable to travel to Perth and/or pay for private specialist assessments.

Without a formal diagnosis, many young people are not getting access to the NDIS and the vital support they need in their local community and across the region. As a result of the challenges that this process poses, many individuals and families disengage and give up on trying to access the NDIS.

Calls from the sector and across the region focussed on:

- *Greater access to Paediatric support across the region to help with timely support around diagnosis for individuals and families.*
- Better collaboration is needed between health services, NDIS providers and community partners, to help improve access, awareness and engagement in the scheme.



Young people need more opportunities to influence decisions on the issues that affect them

We heard key anecdotes and testimonials from members of the youth sector which highlighted *the need for young people to have a voice and to be meaningfully engaged in making decisions about the services that support them and the communities they live in.*

Discussions across both forums reflected that opportunities to do so are currently limited and may not necessarily be reflective of current good practice. Current attempts to engage young people in localised decision-making processes may be out of date, tokenistic and limited.

We heard from services that young people feel a lack of connection to their community, impacting engagement in other areas of their lives – i.e., school, employment, access to services, which feeds a lack of hope and outcomes for a better future. Members highlighted that narrative of self-worth is critical.

In the Central Great Southern, sector members acknowledged the challenges sector and services feel in trying to engage young people effectively – i.e., knowing how to do this, having scope to carry out consultation, supporting young people to develop confidence and leadership skills. Attendees noted that lack of funding exists to support the sector to engage young people and to amplify the voice and needs of our young people. Feedback was shared that young people who may be asked to be involved in consultations, miss out on effective support and at times may not be compensated for their engagement.

Effective youth leadership programs that have played a vital role to empower and engage regional Aboriginal young people (i.e., Aboriginal Health Council of Western Australia Youth Program) in the past, have had funding cut, severely impacting on those young people who were involved and the outcomes that they work towards. This has a significant effect on empowering regional emerging leaders from across the state, helping them to connect with others, advocate for their local community and to develop their confidence and capabilities.

Discussions on the day highlighted the need for:

- Organisations to *create and foster engagement with young people and support their meaningful participation in positions of power and influence that amplify their voices.* This includes opportunities to become members of Boards and/or develop Youth Advisory Committees or Youth Reference Groups. Ongoing funding and training are needed to facilitate and support these positions.
- Close engagement with Local Government to develop a Youth Engagement Strategy for regional communities, that highlights the way that young people want to be engaged and supported in their local community. A Youth Engagement Strategy would outline young people's aspirations and needs across a range of areas – i.e., health and wellbeing, recreation, community participation, education and employment.

- Adoption of processes, policies and governance that recognise the need for meaningful youth engagement practices to be developed and embedded in operational structures – i.e., designing, refining and implementing solutions that meet the needs of young people. This needs to be place-based and informed by young people.
- Meaningful support and recognition of the value that young people bring to the community and the activities they are engaged in, such as consultation, collaboration, planning and delivery of services.
- Support for regional young people to engage in mentoring activities that help to develop their confidence and skills with being a leader and to become positive role models for other young people in their community.
- Provision of funding for regional communities to deliver programs and workshops that support young people to develop their leadership and advocacy skills, such as the AHCWA Youth Committee & Cultural Camp.
- Availability of seed funding that encourages services to develop innovative solutions which fosters close collaboration with young people to work towards the challenges they face.
- Opportunities to mentor and support young people with lived experience, with the goal of them sharing their experience to empower and bring about positive awareness to young people who may have been in similar situations. This may also help to foster career pathways in the community sector for young people.

Young people want to be meaningfully engaged in making decisions about both the services that support them and the communities they live in.



Greater connection with Elders, community leaders and young Aboriginal people can help direct and influence the way the sector works and supports each community.

Fund agencies to embed money and time into working in meaningful partnerships with Aboriginal communities

Participants called for regional services and organisations to have access to funding to be able to purposefully and meaningfully engage with Aboriginal Elders, leaders and community members at all levels, to ensure that the services and supports they provide effectively support their community's needs. Greater connection with Elders, community leaders and young Aboriginal people can help direct and influence the way the sector works and supports each community. Funding and time need to be allocated to help services engage meaningfully with young Aboriginal people, their Elders and families to support positive changes to processes, practices and work towards building strong partnerships.

We heard this engagement could look like:

- Formation of genuine partnerships between Aboriginal people, Aboriginal Controlled Community Organisations (ACCOs), organisations and local government, to help foster leadership and opportunities for shared decision-making.
- Adoption of culturally secure strategies and policies which recognise and utilise the knowledge within Aboriginal communities.
- Regional communities invest in Aboriginal-led initiatives that meet the needs of their young people in the local community and provide gateways to help bring young people to the table.
- Provision of funding to support community mentoring with Elders playing a key role in sharing knowledge, leadership skills and ongoing connection to land, culture and community. This engagement could help identify structural barriers, challenges with access to services and identification of policies that are not supporting the needs of the community.
- Regular and ongoing meaningful consultation with Elders, ACCOs and community to ensure that local needs and context is at the forefront of planning and service provision.
- Invitations to local Elders, community members, Aboriginal representatives to engage in community groups, interagency meetings and advisory groups, that work towards supporting community outcomes.
- Increasing representation of Aboriginal people in the youth sector workforce, including youth counsellors and mentors.



Greater support and options for young people's education

Alternative education options are needed to best support young people who may be disengaged from mainstream settings

The attendees at the Central Great Southern forum voiced that *alternative education models within the Education Department are an unmet need for the Great Southern.*

Sector shared insight that young people who are struggling with mainstream settings have limited options prior to Year 9, and then become disengaged by the time they can access CARE school support. Attendees at both forums in the region provided feedback that there are limited spaces for young people to enrol in CARE schools and that there is an overall lack of alternatives to education. We heard at the time of the forum, that Alta-1's two sites in Katanning and Albany were at capacity.

Members from across the Central Great Southern voiced that families and individuals engaged in home schooling require more support to maximise their engagement in learning and long-term educational outcomes.

Sector voiced that these limited education options can lead to mental health challenges amongst our young people and may also contribute to unemployment rates across the region. Input from members at the Albany forum shared that young Aboriginal people need greater cultural support on Country and education models could benefit from a more "community-based" approach to develop real life skills and confidence in our young and emerging leaders.

Provide greater pathways and supports for transition from education to employment

We heard from members of the Great Southern youth sector that *young people need greater transitional support to help them exit high school and foster improved outcomes with education, employment and training and general life skills.* Specifically, sector highlighted there are limited options available for pathways to employment that can help to retain young people in Albany and across the regional locations.

Attendees at the Central Great Southern forum noted that limited education opportunities are impacting the mental health of young Aboriginal men. In particular, members of the youth sector identified that training providers are lacking staff and are not strongly aligned to the employment market, impacting unemployment. Young people across the Great Southern region need options to engage in meaningful and holistic learning opportunities that provide strong foundations for pathways into work and support them into independence.

We heard calls for:

- Adoption of the Foyer Education First Model in the Great Southern to support young people across the region to access a supportive pathway to education and employment.
- Solid and supported education pathways to be instigated at school and supported beyond school.
- Succession planning to help young people living in the Central Great Southern to develop their awareness of alternatives and options for enrolling in apprenticeships and traineeships through TAFE.
- Greater provision of preferred study/training courses offered on campus that help young people to develop skills in a chosen vocation, in roles that are sustainable and that support local initiatives and projects in local communities.

Barriers to engagement and learning need to be addressed to support young people with diverse learning needs

Members from the Albany forum shared their insights that the mental health of young people is at risk and contributing to lack of engagement in community and self-worth for many individuals. Young people are experiencing high levels of anxiety which if not addressed, may hinder access to learning opportunities. There are many students who identify as neurodivergent in our regional schools who may not be getting the support they need to maximise their potential.

We heard that young people are experiencing difficulties developing their literacy and numeracy skills for life. There is a *challenge for teachers to provide educational support for those students that may need significant support and adjustments in the curriculum.* Students may be placed in classes that are lower than their ability level, contributing to boredom and disengagement. We heard that school truancy is high across the regional communities, with contributing factors relating to family situations, domestic violence and alcohol and other drug issues. Support is needed for families to help place value on education. Individuals may not have any family support and limited networks to help them with the challenges that school and engaging in learning poses.

Young people across the Great Southern region need options to engage in meaningful and holistic learning opportunities.



Centralise services and supports through a youth hub model

We heard the need for a centralised venue/hub located in Albany's town centre, that houses a full range of allied health and other support services for young people. This could help provide youth-friendly, timely access to specialists as well as increase access to information and awareness of what supports are available. The need for a strong outreach service to surrounding towns on a regular and consistent basis was voiced as a crucial component to support access to services and pathways.

The hub can be facilitated by skilled support agencies, with *youth workers brokering engagement with external key stakeholders and services, helping young people navigate systems and receive the right supports in a timely and streamlined manner.*

Key components of the hub:

- Provision of a wide range of allied health and specialist services to support young people across various areas of wellbeing to foster a preventative approach. Examples include health educator, Sexual Health Clinicians, Mental Health Practitioners, Psychologists, Dieticians, Diabetes Educator, Occupational Therapist, Audiologist, Pharmacist, Podiatrist, Speech-Language Pathologists.
- Services engaging with the hub might include Centrelink, legal advice and employment services.
- Qualified staff housed in one location would foster close collaboration to case management support and facilitate a collaborative approach working in teams, sharing resources and consultation with all stakeholders to maximise benefits and health outcomes for young people.
- Young people with disabilities and access requirements should not be disadvantaged. A facility which is fully accessible and user friendly for individuals with mobility and sensory requirements could support all young people to be able to engage with services with greater ease.
- Culturally safe and appropriate. Adopt a holistic approach by ensuring staff are equipped to provide accessible and safe supports which caters to a diverse range of young people, including LGBTIQ+, Culturally and Linguistically Diverse, young people who are neurodivergent and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people.

A facility which is fully accessible and user friendly for individuals with mobility and sensory requirements could support all young people to be able to engage with services with greater ease.



Invest in a residential youth Alcohol and Other Drugs (AOD) service

We heard the need for a residential youth AOD service that provides preventative and rehabilitation support, offering individualised and holistic support to young people and their families who live in the Great Southern region.

Sector highlighted that the Great Southern does not have a residential rehabilitation service. This requires young people who need intervention support to travel to Perth to access the help they need. This can cause significant stress and upheaval for young people and their families, distancing them from their support networks.

There is currently no safe setting for young people who present to hospital for care when under the influence of alcohol and/or other drugs. Feedback from the group on the day highlighted also that residential mental health services cannot take young people if they are intoxicated and as a result, they are unable to get support at their time of need. There is a gap in services and supports for young people and families at this time of crisis.

Sector members acknowledged they are seeing an increase in young people presenting with early psychosis as a result of AOD use. Due to limitation in services and staffing, there are long waitlists in Albany for accessing AOD support and counselling. There is currently limited access to early intervention programs to help provide information about the harms that come with AOD use. Funding is concentrated in treatment/crisis management but lacking for prevention or holistic case management.

Key elements for a service that could help support young people impacted by AOD would include:

- Centralised hub located in Albany which can provide outreach services to satellite communities across the region. This would help support rehabilitation in their own community and with their support networks close at hand.
- Close collaboration with key stakeholders to support communication, wrap-around services, continuity of supports.
- Youth focussed, holistic approach/model.
- Access and appointment of qualified youth counsellors who are engaging, passionate and have a youth lens that young people can see and feel.
- Program which offers support beyond a 3-month period, empowering individuals and families collaboratively to make positive change. This includes the need for more leadership, mentoring and role models, particularly for young men.

Invest in youth-friendly, safe places where young people can access the services and supports they need.

We heard from the sector at both forums of the need for youth-friendly safe spaces that meet the needs of vulnerable and disadvantaged young people, where they can go to access support in their local communities.

Although Albany may have a youth specific location for young people to access, there is currently no youth friendly space in Katanning for young people to access and engage in activities. *Regional satellite communities need resourcing to be able to create and resource drop-in centres and programs* that can offer a range of options and activities that engage young people and help them build life skills, resilience and a sense of worth. There are limited options for young people to engage in youth-focused activities across the week outside of school, and no dedicated spaces for young people available over the weekends. Outreach services also need to be able to be delivered in a safe and motivating place for young people which is also accessible and close to local amenities. Participants felt that young people have a lack of connection to their community as a result of limited opportunities to engage in youth-friendly activities that help develop their confidence, social connections and life skills.

We heard that young people in towns across the Great Southern do not have access to a safe space after hours, with activities leading to contact with WAPOL, which can impact long term outcomes.

In addition, regional sector members highlighted the common need for:

- Provision and access to specialised services and qualified staff across fields of expertise including counsellors, youth mentors, youth development workers.
- Access to information and resources that support young people, families and the wider community to collectively work towards better outcomes.

Young individuals need early intervention programs to help provide information about the harms that come with AOD use.

Greater investment in a range of mental health supports is needed

Young people living in regional/remote towns are experiencing huge challenges with their mental health and wellbeing, impacting on their self-esteem and levels of resilience. Services told us that many young people are presenting with increased complexity and multiplicity of issues, that are influenced by the intersectionality of their experiences such as living with disability or neurodivergence.

Discussions from members of the sector highlighted their feeling that young people in the Great Southern feel a sense of worthlessness, and lack of recognition and support from services. The COVID-19 pandemic, along with impacts of global warming and other instances of global instability has heightened anxiety amongst young people, threatening their sense of security. As a result, young people are choosing to remain living at home longer, not engaging in community activities and are turning to social media and online platforms to seek help.

As a result of COVID-19, restrictions were placed on the delivery of in-person services. For young people who were reluctant or unable to access telehealth support, they missed out on medical services for up to five months, with issues worsening. Participants felt that young people are also engaging more on social platforms on their devices, decreasing opportunities to develop confidence and interpersonal skills, leading to potential challenges when connecting with others (including service providers) in real-life situations.

We heard the need for:

- **Specialised support for young people experiencing eating disorders.** *There is a significant need for supporting young people who are identified as having eating disorders.* At the time of the forum, we heard that an increasing number of young people were accessing services through headspace Albany for support with eating disorders; however, lack of funding is impacting the support they can provide. Referrals coming in highlight the increase in need for specialised support for young people experiencing eating disorders. We heard the call from services for greater flexibility and innovative approaches to help respond to emerging need.
- **Focus on resourcing for early psychosis.** Services in Albany are seeing an increase in the number of young people with early psychosis symptoms, however there is no program to support them. We heard the call for more qualified specialist youth mental health practitioners, who can focus on supporting adolescents with mental health needs across a range of areas such as early psychosis.
- **Case management.** There is an identified need for case management to help support vulnerable young people to access the specialised services they need. Holistic case management is missing in towns like Katanning and Tambellup, and there can be a mismatch between presenting needs and the staffing available to work with the young person – i.e., right person, right set of skills. More flexibility is needed to meet the needs of clients and work towards outcomes rather than numbers-based results.
- **Supports for parents and carers.** Parents are struggling to support their children who are going through trauma and grief. Parents need greater support from services to help guide their young people through the challenging times and to help build preventative strategies to build family solidarity and resilience from birth.

- **Greater partnerships between mental health professionals and ACCOs.** We heard of a lack of appropriate mental health services for Aboriginal young people in the Great Southern. There is a need for greater partnerships between mental health professionals and ACCOs to embed cultural services and supports to ensure young people can access the support they need. Investment is needed for Great Southern-based ACCOs to employ Aboriginal outreach staff who can provide place-based mental health support and facilitate access to community services.
- **Greater interventional assessments in schools.** Young people in regional schools are self-identifying with depression, anxiety, lack of resilience, suicidal ideation, trauma, drug misuse and self-harm. School staff are also identifying this in students, as well as parents. Long waitlists for existing services highlight that this is an urgent issue. Investment in partnerships between schools and youth services may enable better understanding of services available and pathways to access support before times of crisis.
- **Employing specialist youth staff.** There can be challenges for young people to access a youth friendly space and expert staff. Existing services could benefit from adopting a youth lens to their service delivery and expanding their workforce to be more youth friendly, including by employing more youth counsellors and youth engagement officers.
- **Increased accessibility and consistency of outreach support to regional areas.** This includes ensuring that Perth-based services and programs can visit Albany and other towns in across the Great Southern.
- **Greater investment in services supporting young people to access local nature-based activities.** These opportunities help young people engage with others in their community and build greater resilience and social skills for long term outcomes in life. We heard that young people want to engage in outdoor/nature-based activities like fishing, bush walking and surfing.
- Greater emphasis and provision for staff (and community) to engage in **Mental Health First Aid training.**
- Co-investment for all local government areas that promotes a **coordinated, complementary and comprehensive approach to service delivery** that meets the diverse mental health needs of young people in the Great Southern.

Parents need greater support from services to help guide their young people through the challenging times and to help build preventative strategies to build family solidarity and resilience from birth.

Young people are unable to access primary and Allied Health Services they need in a timely and youth friendly manner

We heard that young people disengaged from school in the Central Great Southern miss out on visiting health clinics and follow up support. Health concerns are not identified and access to support may not be provided. Feedback from members of the health and youth sector noted that young people living in regional communities across the Great Southern region have some of the most complex needs they have seen.

Intervention support is reliant on individual services and workers and requires intensive long-term relationship building and a tailored holistic approach, with the ability to do this limited by available resources and capacity.

There are long wait lists for specialist services across the Great Southern. Having a regular and consistent outreach service of allied health professionals supporting the regional communities would help to minimise waitlists for services in Albany and Perth. Many families and young people do not have the means to travel to Albany or Perth to access the specialist support they need.

Discussions also highlighted the extensive lack of appropriate and accessible health services and support for Aboriginal people, including in areas such as birthing on Country, accessing information about sexual health, support for young parents, access to information and supports for AOD harm minimisation and Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD).

Early intervention and prevention education and supports are needed

Early intervention education and prevention supports were highlighted as an area of need for young people across the region, to help to work towards better life outcomes. We heard the need to *prioritise long-term investment in early intervention approaches that prevent disadvantage and crisis for young people*, before it emerges.

Young people are not getting the access to the services they need at their time of crisis which then leads to crisis intervention and support being sought, which is not always available in Albany. Individuals may need to travel to Perth to get the crisis support they need and are taken away from their families and support networks which are crucial at this time of need.

Sector members acknowledged they are seeing an increase in vaping in schools and that communities are needing greater engagement from the sector to help support harm minimisation strategies and an early intervention approach.

We heard calls for:

- Programs that focus on an early intervention model and harm minimisation approach that have key focus on primary care to young people through qualified and specialised staff and services.
- Greater focus on supporting an early intervention approach and building upon the work that initiatives like the Early Years has founded. Greater investment in long term projects to foster more tangible early intervention outcomes is needed.

- Advocacy for a health education to be mandated in curriculum and delivered by qualified health promotion officers. Schools present a great opportunity to increase the wellbeing of young people through skill development. This could be done with a state-wide refurbishment of the health education curriculum to provide consistent content to support best outcomes for students and teachers.
- A consistent health approach to be mandated in the curriculum and delivered by qualified health promotion officers.
- Sexual health and healthy relationships education to combat online content that young people are exposed to, including support for families on how to engage with young people on these topics.
- Embedded systems and partnerships that strengthen the health promotion workforce through collaborative practices are needed, such as engagement between Mental Health Commission, Western Australian Association for Mental Health, Allied Health Professions Australia, International Union for Health Promotion and Education.

We heard the need to prioritise long-term investment in early intervention approaches that prevent disadvantage and crisis for young people



Where To From Here?

We hope that this report adds value by providing support to the Great Southern youth sector's planning, collaboration and advocacy work.



YACWA will meet with key decision makers to discuss the emerging themes identified at the forums in Katanning & Albany, to highlight and advocate for the key issues raised by the youth sector across the region. This report will also guide YACWA's advocacy efforts for the region and help identify where we can continue to support the Great Southern youth sector moving forward.



Agencies Represented

Central Great Southern Youth Sector Forum

in Katanning

- Albany Community Legal Centre
- Albany Youth Support Association (AYSA)
- All As One (Mentoring Support)
- Amity Health (Katanning)
- Anglicare
- APM (Katanning)
- Department of Communities
- Department of Education Western Australia
- Department of Local Government, Sport and Cultural Industries
- Jert Mia Aboriginal Corporation
- Katanning Community Resource Centre
- Palmerston (Albany & Katanning)
- Relationships Australia (Tambellup)
- Shelter WA
- Shire of Broomehill and Tambellup
- Skillhire (Katanning)
- Southern Aboriginal Corporation
- Southern Regional Tafe (Katanning)
- South West Aboriginal Medical Service (SWAMS)
- Tambellup Community Resource Centre
- WA Police (Katanning)
- Western Australia Country Health Service (WACHS)

- Albany Senior High School, North Albany Senior High School)
- Department of Justice Western Australia
- Department of Local Government, Sport and Cultural Industries (DLGSC)
- Escare
- Great Southern Aboriginal Health Service
- Great Southern Development Commission (GSDC)
- Headspace (Albany)
- Impact Services
- Kinjarling Basketball Team
- Neami National
- Palmerston (Albany)
- Pivot Services
- Police Community Youth Centre (PCYC)
- Read Write Now
- Shire of Denmark
- Skillhire (Albany & Katanning)
- Uniting WA
- Western Australia Association for Mental Health (WAAMH)
- Wanslea
- WA Police (Albany; Denmark)
- Western Australia Country Health Service (WACHS)
- Worklink Western Australia
- Youth Futures Community School

Great Southern Youth Sector Forum in Albany

- Albany Tutoring
- Albany Youth Support Association (AYSA)
- Alta-1
- Amity Health (Albany)
- APM (NDIS Services)
- City of Albany
- Community Living Association
- Department of Child Protection Western Australia
- Department of Communities Western Australia
- Department of Education Western Australia (including: Denmark Senior High School,

Invited Guests

Hon. Minister Dave Kelly – Minister for Youth, Water & Forestry

Jane Kelsbie MLA – Member for Warren-Blackwood

Cr Sandie Smith – Deputy Mayor, City of Albany

Gina McPharlin – Director of Corporate & Community Services, Shire of Denmark

David Johnson – Manager of Community and Recreation Services, Shire of Plantagenet

