

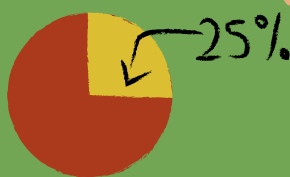
YOUNG PEOPLE LIVING IN REGIONAL, REMOTE AND RURAL WEST AUSTRALIA

EXPERIENCES OF COVID-19

The following paper represents the experiences of young people consulted by YACWA between June and September 2020. While by no means comprehensive, it aims to provide a snapshot of the experiences of young people living in regional, remote and rural Western Australia through the COVID-19 pandemic and recovery. This paper was co-authored by the YACWA staff and the YACWA COVID-19 Youth Steering Group. This paper should be read in conjunction with the "[Framework for Young People's Recovery from COVID-19](#)" in Western Australia produced by YACWA in August 2020.

THANK YOU TO THE YOUNG PEOPLE WHO GAVE THEIR TIME AND SHARED THEIR EXPERIENCES WITH US TO PRODUCE THIS PAPER.

KEY FACTS



25% of young people in Western Australia live in regional, remote or rural areas¹.



Young people from regional, remote and rural areas have higher incidences of depression, youth suicide and teenage pregnancy in comparison to their metropolitan based peers.²

This is exacerbated in regional areas where tourism is the main provider of jobs. 32% of regional jobs (84,160) have been indefinitely suspended or lost³.

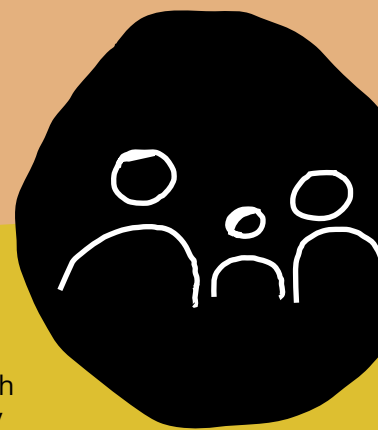
32%



ANNE'S STORY⁴

Anne is 22 years old and grew up in the South West, though she now lives in Perth. At the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, like many other young people she lost her job. Without employment, Anne was unable to pay her rent and was forced to move back in with her parents in the regional town she grew up in. Once Anne returned to her hometown she was fortunate enough to gain casual employment in a busy customer service role. However, Anne's mum works as a frontline health services provider and as the pandemic progressed Anne was no longer comfortable going into work as she felt that she could be putting her mum's vulnerable patients at risk. As Anne technically elected to leave her job by her own accord, she is not eligible for JobKeeper. Anne applied for JobSeeker months ago, but her application has not been responded to yet. She is unsure where to get more information about what to do and is burning through her savings quickly. Anne worries that if she isn't able to secure some form of income soon, she will not have enough money to move back to the city when the pandemic is over. This stresses her greatly as the degree she has been studying toward does not lead to regional employment opportunities. With all the chaos and uncertainty around her, Anne has been trying to focus on her studies online, but she is finding it near impossible to keep up and stay engaged as the internet in her town is extremely unreliable. Anne worries about her options moving forward but is hoping things will change for the better soon.

KEY THEMES FROM CONSULTATION



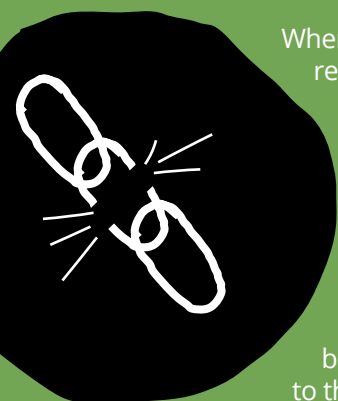
DISRUPTION OF SERVICES AND SUPPORTS

The lockdown period and the introduction of regional borders led to the closure or disruption of many services across regional WA. For some young people, where their health professionals or youth services were located across a regional border, it became incredibly difficult for them to access those services, and discouraged them from maintaining contact. For those in remote communities, many were deeply concerned about young pregnant women not attending regular check-up appointments. Additionally, many metro based services ceased their regional outreach services to schools and remote communities.

Since the restrictions have lifted, many youth services are still struggling to re-engage young people who previously attended their service. Young people have not returned to doctors at the same rate as before COVID-19, and some remote communities have still not had a visit from a nurse. For sporting and other community clubs that previously served as places of community connection, many have struggled to restart and recruit members for a new season of activity, something that is concerning for their long term viability.

FAMILY AND CONNECTION

Many young people living in regional areas reported increased tension with their families during the COVID-19 lockdown period. For those in school, some found it difficult to maintain friendships with their peers, and described feeling abandoned by their friends.



When lockdown began and regional borders came into effect, many young people who came from regional areas but had since moved, had to decide whether they would return to their regional home towns. For those who had experiences of rejection or violence in their home town or from family, particularly on the basis of their sexuality or gender, this was not an option. For those who did move back to their hometown some reported that there were positives of reconnecting with their family and community, while others reported increased tension with their family relationships. All young people said that it was an incredibly stressful and difficult decision. For those who were separated from their family by regional borders, many felt that they lost connection with that family. This was particularly stressful for those separated from family members who were chronically or terminally ill, or elderly. Many are still unable to move back to metro areas as they have lost their jobs and it is not financially feasible to relocate closer to their previous employment and education opportunities.

HEALTH

Many young people found it difficult to stay engaged with their health professionals during the lockdown period, particularly if the professional was located in another town or across regional borders. Young people who tried to adapt to telehealth reported mixed experiences. For some, telehealth was convenient, it allowed them to engage with their GP more regularly and some said the absence of a physical person made it easier to talk about personal issues. For some regionally located trans and gender diverse young people, it was the first time they were able to contact metro-based specialists to assist with medical transition. However, for other young people, not having a physical meeting made it harder to discuss personal issues, particularly if they were calling from a home environment that wasn't understanding. Some found that telehealth hotlines were difficult to navigate and they had to repeat their story several times. Since restrictions have lifted, many young people are still concerned about returning to the doctor and worry about GP practices possibly being high-risk spots for catching COVID-19.



EMPLOYMENT AND FINANCIAL INSECURITY

Many young people lost their jobs during the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly those in the arts sector. For regional young people who had recently moved to Perth, many found themselves ineligible for schemes like JobKeeper. This led to increased financial stress. It is well known that many regional young people take a 'gap year' in order to save money to pursue education or employment in a metropolitan centre the following year. This work year is necessary in order to be classed as "independent" by Centrelink. For these young people, it was unclear how the downturn in employment would impact their ability to pursue their education or employment goals. This added barriers to accessing Centrelink on top of existing barriers, such as the family assets test that disadvantages young people from farming families who have large physical assets but may not have the liquid assets to support their children. Looking to the future, many young people from regional WA were concerned about their financial security.



RECOMMENDATIONS TO START OUR RECOVERY



WHAT

WHO

Fund regional youth advocacy initiatives, such as the Regional Youth Leadership Development program, supporting regional young people's needs and desires to be heard by decision-makers and local services.	Department of Communities
Expand regional public transportation options, connecting smaller communities with regional hubs and training and education opportunities.	Public Transport Authority
Increase investment in regional arts and entertainment opportunities and development, focusing on growing local talent.	Department of Local Government, Sport and Cultural Industries
Provide additional funding for youth services to support outreach efforts that re-engage young people, with a priority for rural and remote communities.	Department of Communities
Provide one-off support to regional sports and community organisations to assist them with staying afloat over the recovery period, recognising their integral role in supporting young people to connect with their peers and community.	Department of Local Government, Sport and Cultural Industries
Provide schools and education programs with additional funding to assist with re-engaging young people in regional areas in education and to support young people to catch up on missed learning.	Department of Education
Commit to a statewide digital infrastructure upgrade to ensure schools, communities and young people have access to technology for digital/remote learning, as part of the Digital Inclusion in WA Blueprint	Office of Digital Government and Department of Education
Invest in regional telecommunications infrastructure (in partnership with the Federal Government) to ensure every young person in regional Western Australia has access to reliable and stable phone and internet services.	Department of Premier and Cabinet and Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development
Ensure that Western Australia's economic recovery responds to the needs of regional and remote young people, including their access to education and sustainable employment.	Department of Jobs, Tourism, Science and Innovation

1. Department of Communities - https://www.communities.wa.gov.au/media/1090/better_choices_youth_wa-1.pdf
2. WA Health Department Youth Policy companion document - <https://www2.health.wa.gov.au/-/media/Files/Corporate/general%20documents/Youth-Policy/PDF/Companion-Documents.pdf>
3. WA Government Covid-19 Impact Statement - [/government/publications/covid-19-coronavirus-impact-statement](#)
4. Anne is a fictional story made of composite experiences representative of stories from real young people.

