

Mr Jason Li, MP  
Chairperson  
Public Accounts Committee

Dear Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity for the NSW Advocate for Children and Young People (ACYP) to provide feedback to the Public Accounts Committee Inquiry on 'A framework for performance reporting and driving wellbeing outcomes in NSW'.

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

In 2021, we developed the [NSW Strategic Plan for Children and Young People 2022-2024](#) (Strategic Plan), which is made up of six core commitment areas. These were developed in response to what children and young people told us was important to them, and what they need to thrive and reach their fullest potential. Those six commitment areas are:

- Hope for the future
- Love, connection and safety
- Health and wellbeing
- A good standard of living
- Environments for joy and fun
- Respect and acceptance

The *Strategic Plan* asked children and young people about their sentiment about life, the quality of their relationships and their hope for the future. The health and wellbeing commitment area of the *Strategic Plan* focused on asking about their perceptions of their physical and mental health, how anxious they feel as a point-in-time measure, how resilient they think they are and their confidence to support friends with their mental and emotional wellbeing.

We have attached a copy of our *NSW Strategic Plan for Children and Young People: Tracking Report 02 (the Tracking Report)* for the Committee's review. Published in February 2024, this report tracks changes in sentiment among children and young people in NSW across the six key commitments areas. It compares 2023 trends with the 2021 benchmark data and 2022 results from *Tracking Report 01, published in February 2023*. The surveys are conducted with children and young people aged 10-24 years from across NSW who reflect the diversity of the State. We also undertake an annual Youth Week Poll which takes a deep dive into our Strategic Plan focus areas.

Wellbeing is an important aspect in the lives of children and young people, highlighted across both Tracking Reports. As presented in Figure 1 below, when asked about the top issues facing children and young people in NSW in 2023:

- Just over one in five (22%) rated mental health and emotional wellbeing as the second highest area of concern. This is down 10% from 2022.
- Just over one in ten (11%) rated social wellbeing and quality of life as one of the biggest issues faced by them. This is down 3% from 2022.

**Figure 1**

Top 10 issues facing young people - % mentions coded into themes		2023	2022	2021
1	High cost of living	35	26	8
2	Mental health / emotional well-being (anxiety, stress, depression)	22	32	27
3	Education / school	18	13	17
4	Affordable housing	16	13	10
5	Unemployment/access to jobs	13	10	16
6	Bullying	12	12	6
7	Social well-being/wellness/quality of life	11	14	9
8	Pressure to meet the societal expectations / trends	10	15	3
9	Social media	9	11	10
10	Fear/stress/uncertainty for future/stability	9	4	-

*Figure 1. In your opinion, what are the main issues young people in NSW are facing today?  
Base: All participants (2023: n=1,017, 2022: n=1,005, 2021: n=815)*

The 2024 Youth Week Poll found 77% of children and young people thought health and wellbeing skills are important, but only 46% report they are competent. When asked what wellbeing skills would be most helpful to build their abilities in, 55% said looking after their mental health and 57% said looking after their physical health. This strengthens the need to put children and young people at the center of a Wellbeing Framework designed to drive better outcomes.

The work of our Office is centered in the principle that children and young people best understand the issues they face. In the 2024 Youth Week Poll, when asked to rate how well the NSW Government understands their needs, 33% of participants rated poorly (0-4/10) and only 24% rating a positive (7+/10). This shows more can be done to ensure that the frameworks, programs and services affecting children and young people are co-designed with them to ensure they feel heard and have their needs met. There are many examples of agencies across the NSW Government providing this opportunity, most commonly through the establishment of Youth Advisory Groups.

The *Strategic Plan Tracking Reports* and *Youth Week Poll* reflect the diversity in views and experiences of children and young people across the State. While the majority rate questions around mental health positively, 18% of children and young people in *Tracking Report 2* rated their mental health negatively (0-4/10) (See *Figure 2: Overall perception of mental health*). This compares with 56% who rated it positively (7+/10). Of the 18% who rated their mental health negatively, 56% of those were not working or studying and 42% were struggling financially, highlighting the link between financial stress and poor mental health. This underlines the need for all government departments to consider how their policies impact young people's wellbeing.

**Figure 2**

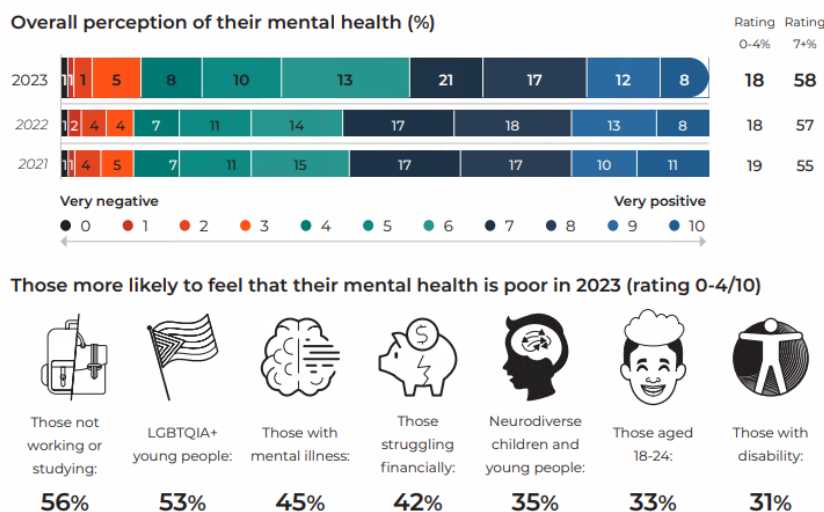


Figure 2. How would you rate your overall physical and mental health?  
Base: All participants (2023: n=1,017, 2022: n=1,005, 2021: n=815)

In the development of the *Strategic Plan*, we examined consultation data collected since 2015. Two key themes emerged alongside the issues raised by children and young people: the desire to be heard and the need to be able to access any supports that were offered to them. As a result, we developed three guiding principles that sit across the entire *Strategic Plan*. These three ideas are central to ACYP's work. As Figure 3 reflects, we also decided to measure children and young people's sentiment and experience towards government regarding these three guiding principles;

- Voice: Have we listened to children and young people, taken their point of view seriously and given them an opportunity to impact the outcome of decisions made about them?
- Rights: Are we upholding and promoting children and young people's rights?
- Access: Are children and young people able to access this initiative or program?

### Principles of the Strategic Plan

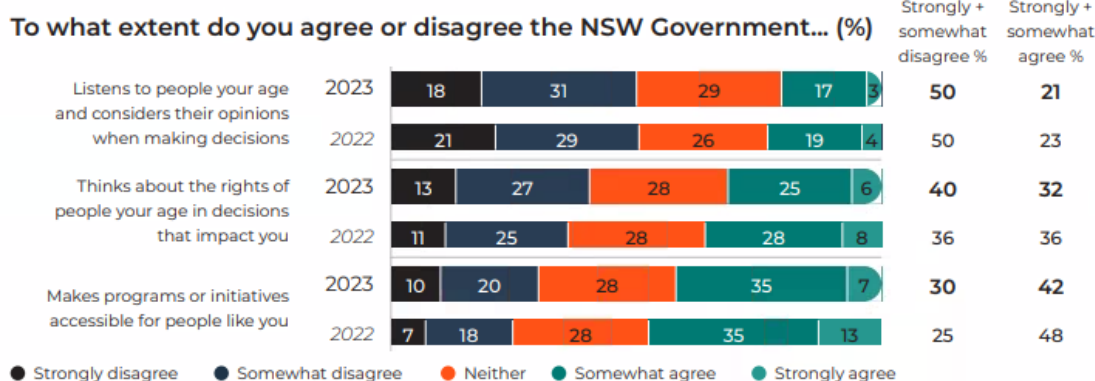


Figure 3. To what extent do you agree or disagree that the NSW Government...?

Source: ACYP Youth Week 2023, Survey Base, 2023 (n=1,007), 2022 (n=1,000) Children and Young People. Fieldwork period ran from 8 –17 April 2023.

I note that recent Federal Budget has included discussion about creating additional measurements in wellbeing. I recognise that the NSW Government holds a number of key data sets around this including the Department of Customer Service Customer Experience Survey, Department of Health HealthStats NSW and Department of Communities and Justice Humans Services Dataset among others. I would encourage the Government to enhance cooperation and accessibility to these datasets before expending additional funding in duplicate data sources.

ACYP also has an extensive range of data based on quantitative polling in our *Strategic Plan* and *Youth Week Polls*. Noting the five wellbeing themes that will be measured under the 'Measuring what matters' wellbeing framework<sup>1</sup>, ACYP's data in the following appendices could be used to measure the following themes:

- **Healthy : A society in which people feel well and are in good physical and mental health, can access services when they need, and have the information they require to take action to improve their health.**
  - **Appendix A** illustrates young people's ratings of overall mental health and their point in time for happiness, anxiety and resilience.
  - **Appendix B** illustrates ACYP's data about where young people seek mental health support and access times for mental health support.
- **Secure: A society where people live peacefully, feel safe, have financial security and access to housing.**
  - **Appendix B** illustrates young people's perceptions of feeling safe in different locations and experiences of hate speech.
  - **Appendix C** illustrates young people's access to basic needs and the impacts of the increase in the cost of living on them.
- **Cohesive: A society that supports connections with family, friends and the community, values diversity, and promotes belonging and culture.**
  - **Appendix B** illustrates young people's experiences of hate speech.
  - **Appendix D** illustrates young people's sense of belonging and cultural diversity.

I thank the Committee again for the opportunity to contribute to this important inquiry. I trust this information has been of use. Should you require anything further or wish to discuss this submission in detail, please do not hesitate to reach out to my Office.

Yours sincerely,



**Zoë Robinson**

Advocate for Children and Young People  
Office of the Advocate for Children and Young People

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<sup>1</sup>Australian Government (2023) '[Measuring What Matters: Australia's First Wellbeing Framework](#)' The Commonwealth of Australia, accessed 17 July 2024.

## Appendix A

### Healthy throughout life

Below is a snapshot of the trends captured under our *Strategic Plan* commitment area of ‘Health and Wellbeing’. As part of this, we track children and young people’s perception of their mental health, their sense of resilience and their point in time measures of happiness and anxiety. (Source: *The NSW Strategic Plan for Children and Young People Tracking Report 2*)

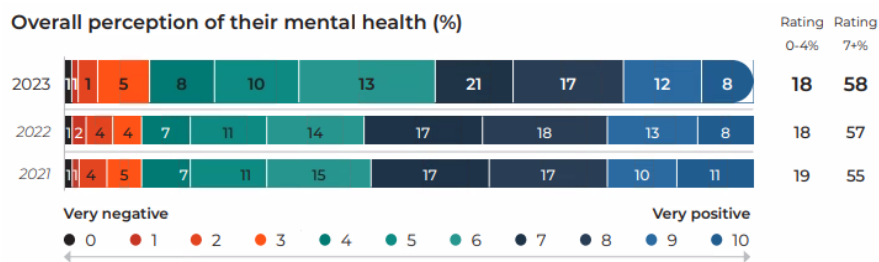


Figure 4. How would you rate your overall physical and mental health? Base: All participants (2023: n=1,017, 2022: n=1,005, 2021: n=815)

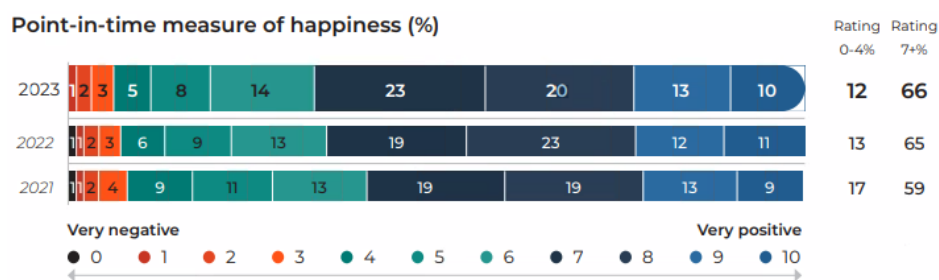


Figure 5. Overall, how happy do you feel today? Base: All participants (2023: n=1,017, 2022: n=1,005, 2021: n=815)

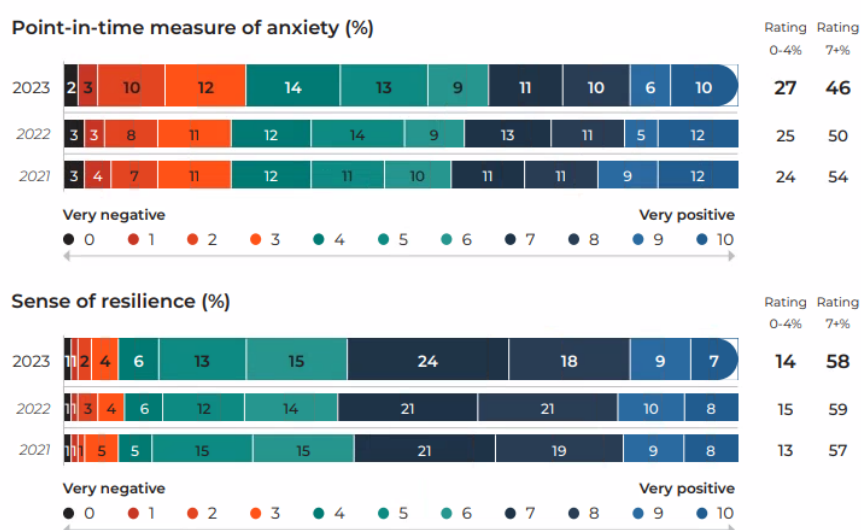


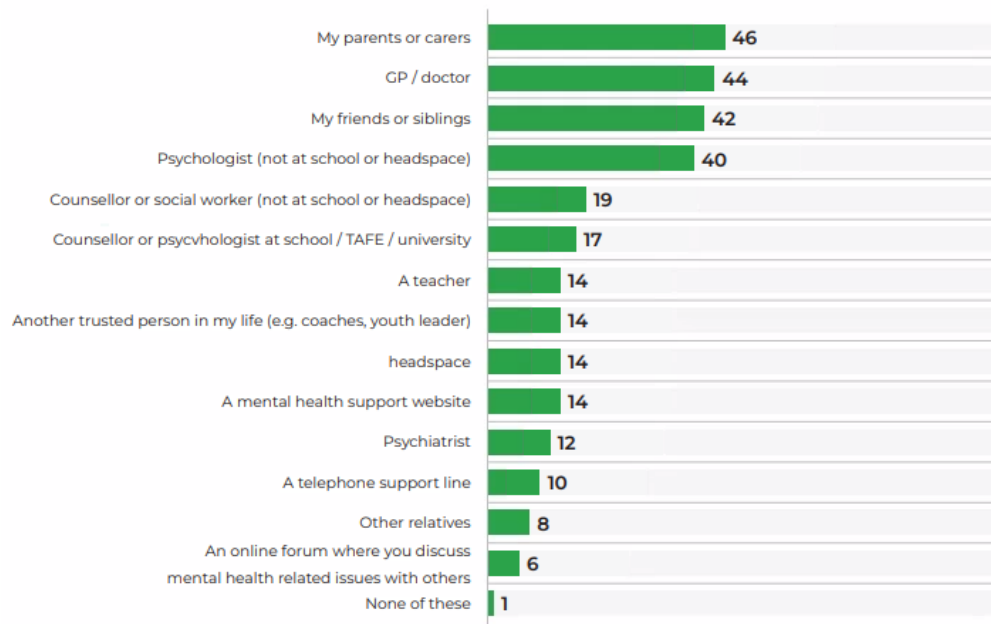
Figure 6. Overall, how anxious do you feel today? Base: All participants (2023: n=1,017, 2022: n=1,005, 2021: n=815)  
To what extent do you see yourself as a resilient person? Base: All participants (2023: n=1,017, 2022: n=1,005, 2021: n=815)

## Appendix B

### Equitable access to quality health and care services

In our *Strategic Plan Tracking Report 1* we took a deep dive into 'Health and Wellbeing' where we investigated trends in accessing mental health support through a range of sources and wait times to access professional support. This data was captured through our annual Youth Week Survey in 2022 and published in our *Strategic Plan Tracking Report 1*. (Source: *The NSW Strategic Plan for Children and Young People Tracking Report 1*).

#### Mental health support sources accessed – % of those who sought mental health support



#### ■ Wait times to access support

While around half of children and young people reported their access to a mental health professional within a school, TAFE or university took two weeks or less, those seeking support for a psychologist or psychiatrist would be more likely to experience a much longer waiting time. One in five children and young people report waiting four months or more to see a psychiatrist.

#### Overall perception of physical health in 2022 (%)

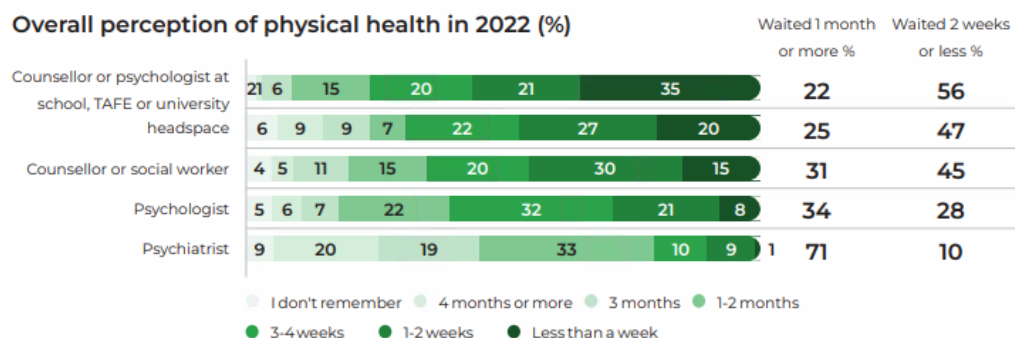


Figure 7. Which of the following sources have you used for support in relation to your mental health, in the past 12 months?

Base: those who have sought mental health support in the last 12 months - (n=342);

How long did you have to wait until you had your first appointment with a [mental health professional shown as relevant from previous answers], from when you or your parent first contacted them?

Base: Participants indicating they had sought support from each category of professional n=42-117.

## Appendix C

### Living peacefully and feeling safe

Below is a snapshot of the trends captured under our *Strategic Plan* commitment area of ‘Environments for Joy and Fun’. As part of this, we track children and young people’s feelings of safety in public areas, at school, university, TAFE or college, work and online. (Source: *The NSW Strategic Plan for Children and Young People Tracking Report 2*)

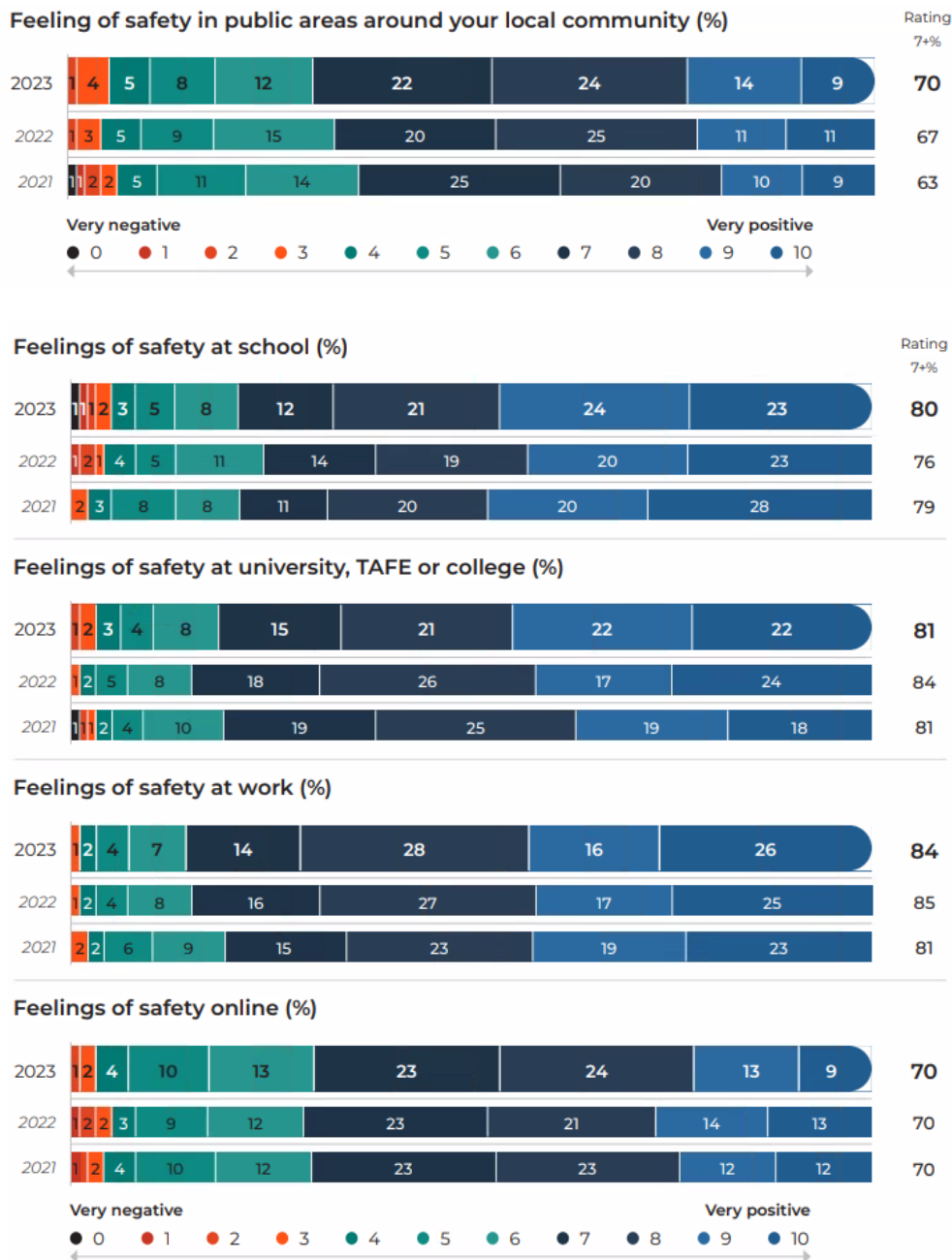


Figure 8. To what extent do you feel safe when you are in these different situations?  
Base: All participants 2023 (n=1,017) 2022 (n=1,005); 2021 (n=815).

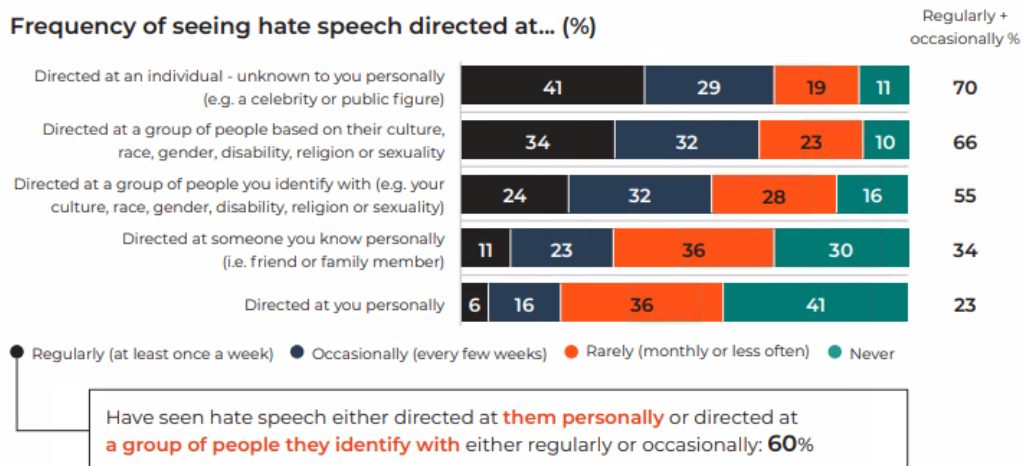


## Appendix C – Continued

Below is a snapshot of our deep dive into ‘Respect and Acceptance’ as part of the *2023 Strategic Plan Tracking Report 2*, focusing on exposure to hate speech online.

### ■ Exposure to hate speech online

Most young people reported seeing hate speech online on a regular basis. While it was mainly targeted at others, 3 in 5 regularly encountered hate speech online that was targeted at them directly, or a group of people they identify with.



**Those more likely to have seen hate speech directed at *them personally*, or had hate speech directed at *a group of people they identify with*:**



Figure 9. How often, if at all, have you seen hate speech online (i.e., On websites, social media, videos, images or comment threads) that was:  
Base: Participants who consented to answer questions on hate speech (n=652)



## Appendix D

### Having financial security and access to housing

In response to the increasing number of children and young people who raised cost of living as the most significant issue impacting their daily lives, ACYP undertook a consultation project to better understand these experiences. ACYP's report ['It should be easier to just exist: How children and young people are impacted by and responding to the rising cost of living in NSW'](#), demonstrates that children and young people are having to compromise on choices that relate to their housing, their health, their education and their physical wellbeing.

Below is a snapshot of the trends captured under our *Strategic Plan* commitment area 'A Good Standard of Living'. As part of this, we track children and young people's financial comfort and stability, their access to basic needs and the impacts of the cost of living crisis. (Source: *The NSW Strategic Plan for Children and Young People Tracking Report 2*)

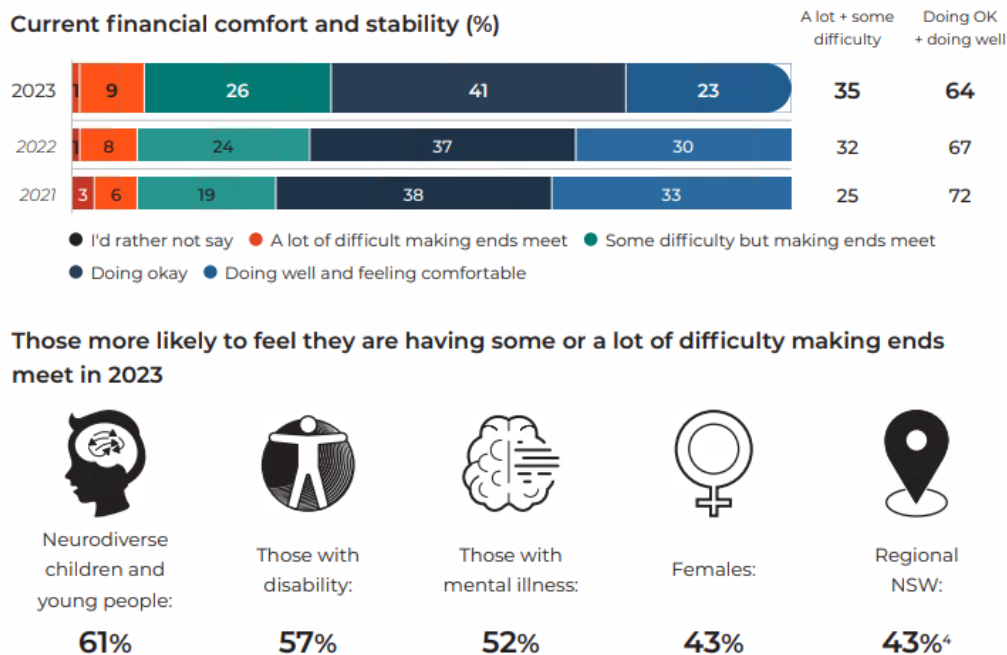
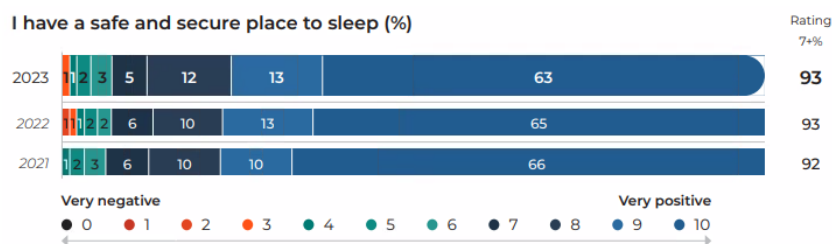
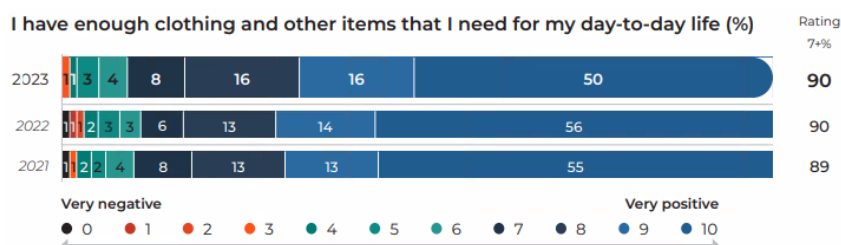
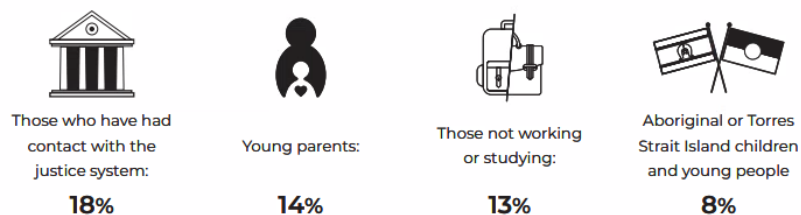


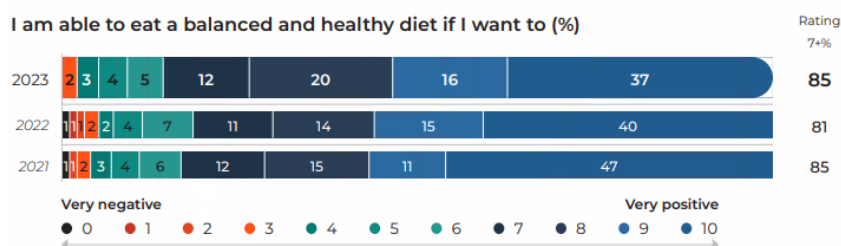
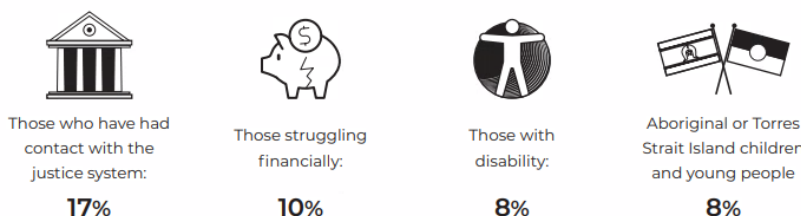
Figure 10. Which of the following best describes your financial situation?  
Base: Those aged 18+ or financially independent (2023: n=509, 2022: n=513, 2021: n=484)



Those more likely to disagree with this statement in 2023 (rating 0-4/10)



Those more likely to disagree with this statement in 2023 (rating 0-4/10)



Those more likely to disagree with this statement in 2023 (rating 0-4/10)

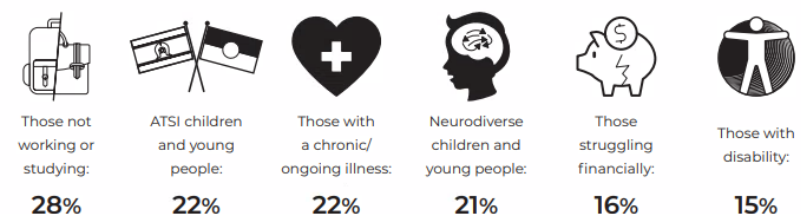


Figure 10. The next couple of questions are about your day-to-day living situation. To what extent do you agree or disagree with these statements? Base: All participants (2023: n=1,017, 2022: n=1,005, 2021: n=815)

## Appendix D - Continued

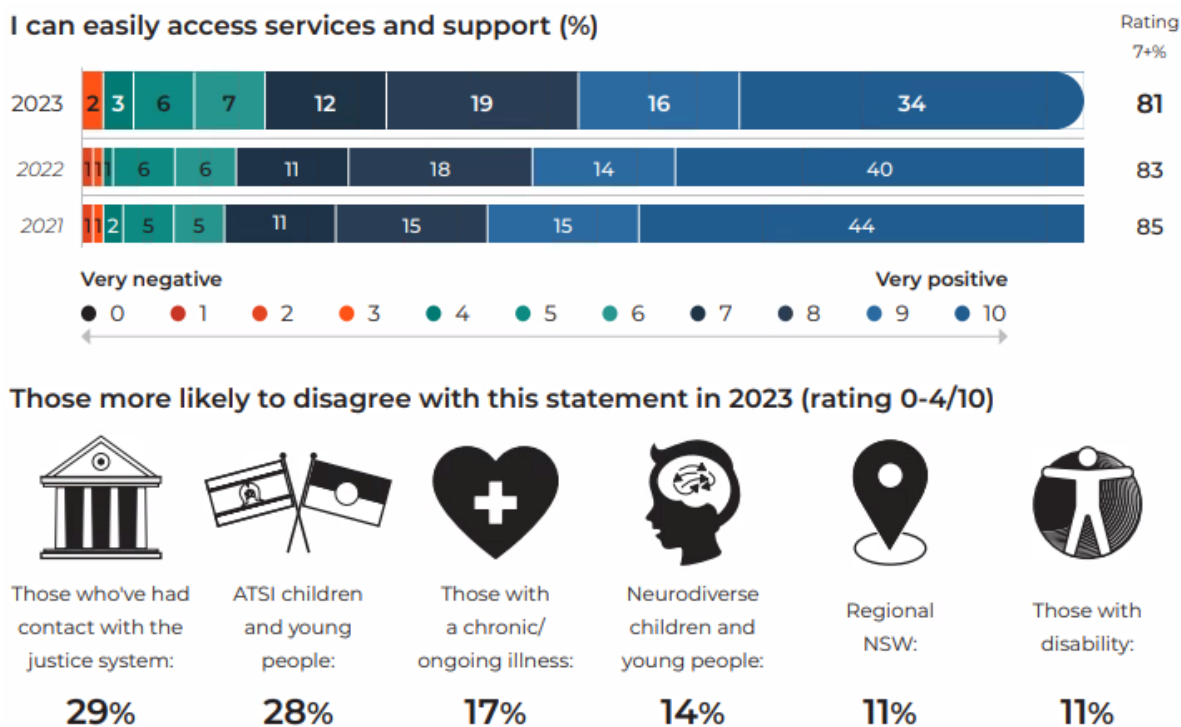


Figure 11. The next couple of questions are about your day-to-day living situation. To what extent do you agree or disagree with these statements?

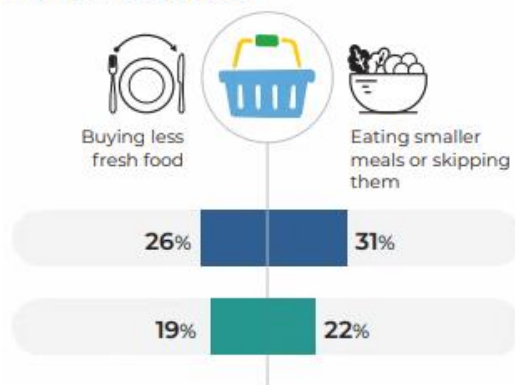
Base: All participants (2023: n=1,017, 2022: n=1,005, 2021: n=815)

## Appendix D - Continued

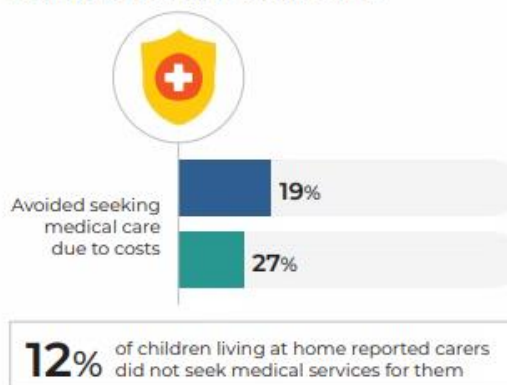
### ■ The impacts of the Cost of Living crisis on children and young people

● Young adults (those aged 18+ or living independently) ● Children and young people\*

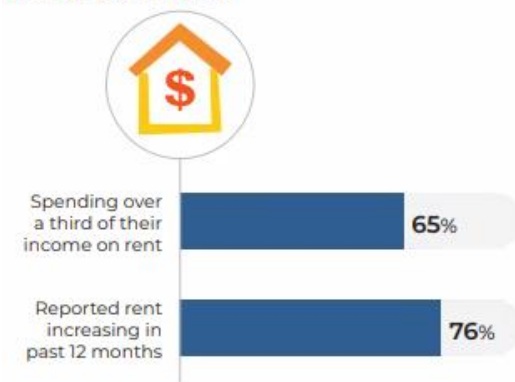
#### Groceries and food



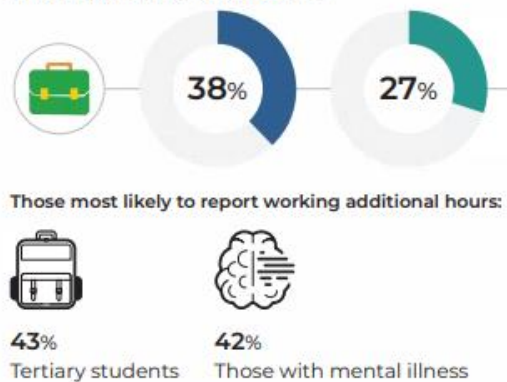
#### Healthcare and medical costs



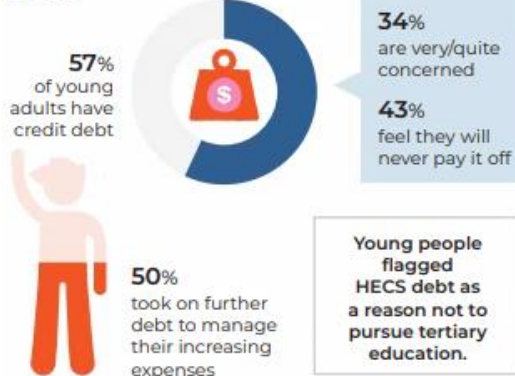
#### Housing and rent



#### Employment and income



#### Debt



#### Transport

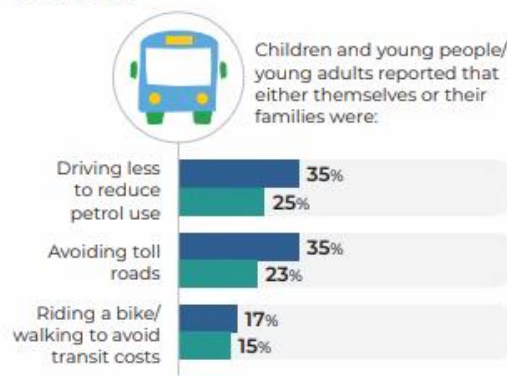


Figure 12. A Good Standard of Living in Focus (NSW Strategic Plan for Children and Young People 2022-2024 Tracking Report 2)

## Appendix D - Continued

### Valuing diversity, belonging and culture

Below is a snapshot of the trends captured under our *Strategic Plan* commitment area 'Respect and Acceptance', we track the level of respect, acceptance and discrimination children and young people have experienced in different settings. (Source: *The NSW Strategic Plan for Children and Young People Tracking Report 2*)

The following charts measure children and young people's satisfaction with the level of respect they are treated with in...

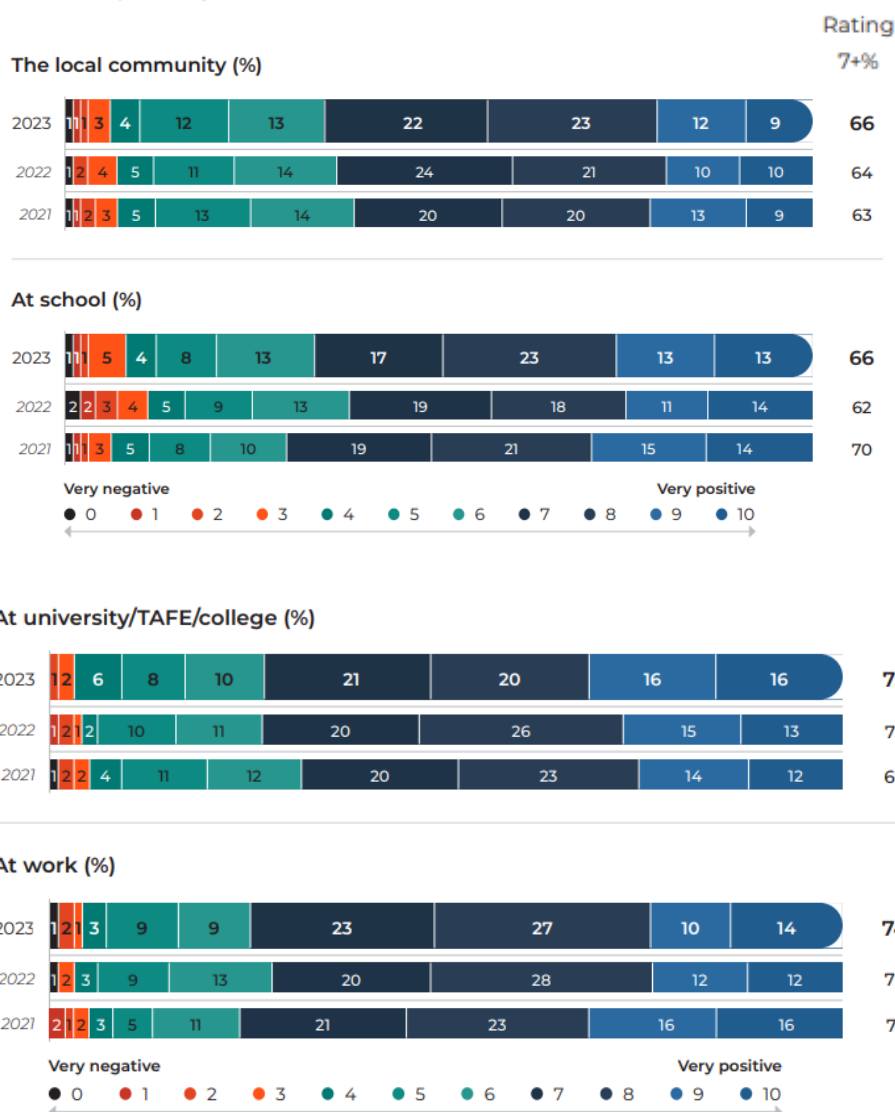
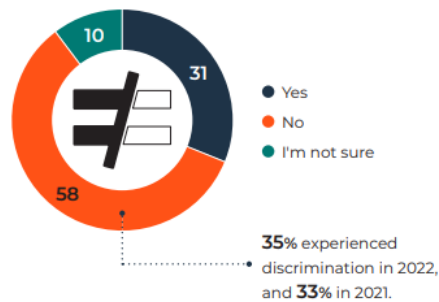


Figure 13. The next question asks about respect and acceptance. How satisfied are you with...?

Base: All participants (2023: n=1,017, 2022: 1,005, 2021: n=815), Tertiary students (2023: n=261, 2022: n=253, 2021: n=294), those who are working (2023: n=379, 2022: n=373, 2021: n=310), School students (2023: n=513, 2022: n=517, 2021: n=360)

One in three children and young people reported experiencing discrimination in the past year. Cohorts more likely to have experienced discrimination are young parents (59%), those with a disability (50%), young people who identify as LGBTQIA+ (49%) and Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander children and young people (48%).

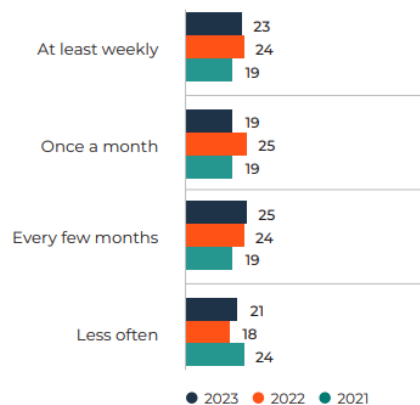
### Experienced discrimination in the last 12 months



### Frequency of discrimination

Concerningly, in 2023 a quarter of those who had been discriminated against in the past 12 months, experienced it on a weekly basis. This is consistent with last year's data and there has been no substantial improvement. Discrimination was higher amongst neurodiverse children and young people (71%), young parents (59%), those with a disability (50%), and those who identify as LGBTQIA+ (49%).

### Prevalence of discrimination amongst those who have experienced it in the last 12 months...



In 2023, the top reasons children and young people reported for discrimination were on the basis of ethnic/cultural background or skin colour; appearance or weight, and gender. Discrimination has increased in the community for those aged 10-17 from 31% (2022) to 43% in 2023 but this has decreased for those aged 18-24 from 52% (2022) to 47% in 2023. Experiences of discrimination in school have decreased among those aged 10-17 from 84% (2022) to 77% in 2023, however discrimination has increased at university/ TAFE/ college for those aged 18-24 from 11% (2022) to 15% in 2023.

### Where discrimination occurred – 2023 (%)

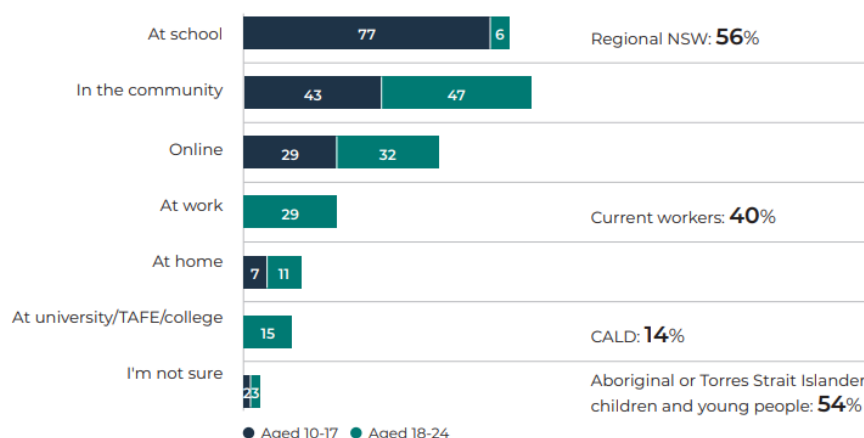


Figure 14. Discrimination is when a person is treated differently (not in a good way) because of some aspect of their identity. In the last 12 months, do you feel that you have experienced discrimination or have been treated unfairly by others? Base: All participants who consented to answer questions on discrimination (2023: n=793, 2022: n=816, 2021: n=673)