

---

The Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia

# Avoid the Harm - Stay Calm

**Report on the inquiry into the impact of violence on young  
Australians**

House of Representatives  
Standing Committee on Family, Community, Housing and Youth

July 2010  
Canberra

---

© Commonwealth of Australia 2010

ISBN 978-0-642-79363-8 (Printed version)

ISBN 978-0-642-79364-5 (HTML version)



# Contents

Foreword .....	vii
Membership of the Committee .....	x
Terms of Reference.....	xii
List of Recommendations .....	xiii

## THE REPORT

<b>1 Referral and Conduct of the Inquiry .....</b>	<b>1</b>
Context of the Inquiry .....	3
Structure of the Report .....	5
<b>2 Youth Violence – Terminology, Statistics and Perceptions .....</b>	<b>7</b>
Terminology and Definitions.....	7
Defining Violence .....	7
Links between Bullying and Violence .....	9
Defining Young Australians .....	10
Committee Comment .....	11
<b>Data and Statistics on Violence in Australia.....</b>	<b>12</b>
Difficulties with Measuring Violence .....	13
Committee Comment .....	16
<b>What is Known about Violence Involving Young People.....</b>	<b>18</b>
Increasing Levels of Violence.....	18
Young People are at Increased Risk.....	19
Risk by Gender .....	20

---

The Impacts and Costs of Violence and Bullying .....	23
Committee Comment .....	24
<b>Perceptions of Violence Involving Young People .....</b>	<b>25</b>
Young Peoples' Perceptions of Violence .....	25
Committee Comment .....	29
Community Perceptions of Young People.....	30
Committee Comment .....	33
<b>3 Understanding Youth Violence.....</b>	<b>35</b>
<b>Risk and Protective Factors Associated with Youth Violence .....</b>	<b>35</b>
Individual Factors.....	37
Relationship Factors .....	38
Family Factors.....	38
Peer Factors .....	40
Community Factors .....	41
<b>Societal Factors .....</b>	<b>44</b>
Committee Comment .....	45
<b>The Influence of Alcohol and Other Drugs .....</b>	<b>45</b>
Committee Comment .....	51
<b>Populations at Increased Risk .....</b>	<b>52</b>
Women.....	52
Culturally and Linguistically Diverse and Refugee Populations.....	54
Indigenous Australians.....	55
Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex.....	57
Other Vulnerable Populations .....	59
Committee Comment .....	59
<b>4 Targeted Interventions to Reduce Youth Violence.....</b>	<b>61</b>
<b>Approaches to Intervention.....</b>	<b>61</b>
<b>Individual .....</b>	<b>62</b>
Social Development Education .....	62
Early Education Facilities and Schools as the Hub of Social Development.....	66
Committee Comment .....	69

<b>Relational</b> .....	<b>75</b>
Family Relationships.....	75
Committee Comment.....	76
Peer Relationships.....	78
Committee Comment.....	79
<b>Community</b> .....	<b>80</b>
Linking to Communities.....	81
Connections with School.....	81
Committee Comment.....	83
<b>The Built Environment and Infrastructure</b> .....	<b>84</b>
Committee Comment.....	87
<b>Alcohol and Violence</b> .....	<b>88</b>
Committee Comment.....	93
Best Practice Policing.....	95
Committee Comment.....	99
<b>Tertiary Interventions and Rehabilitation</b> .....	<b>101</b>
Committee Comment.....	104
<b>5 A Strategic Response to Youth Violence</b> .....	<b>107</b>
<b>The Role of the Australian Government</b> .....	<b>107</b>
<b>Identifying the Priorities and Concerns of Young Australians</b> .....	<b>109</b>
Committee Comment.....	110
<b>The Need for a Robust Evidence-Base</b> .....	<b>113</b>
Committee Comment.....	115
<b>Multi-Level Interventions</b> .....	<b>117</b>
Committee Comment.....	119
<b>Prevention and Early Intervention</b> .....	<b>119</b>
Committee Comment.....	123
<b>A Collaborative and Coordinated Approach</b> .....	<b>123</b>
Committee Comment.....	126
<b>Acknowledging Social and Economic Factors</b> .....	<b>127</b>
Committee Comment.....	129
<b>Influencing Social Attitudes and Reflecting Cultural Norms</b> .....	<b>129</b>
<b>Exposure to Media Violence</b> .....	<b>130</b>

Committee Comment .....	132
<b>Social Marketing to Achieve Cultural Change .....</b>	<b>134</b>
Negative Community Perceptions of Young People.....	135
Committee Comment .....	137
Promoting Pro-Social Behaviour and Responsible Drinking.....	138
Committee Comment .....	140

## **LIST OF APPENDICES**

<b>Appendix A – List of Submissions .....</b>	<b>143</b>
<b>Appendix B – List of Exhibits.....</b>	<b>147</b>
<b>Appendix C – List of Public Hearings .....</b>	<b>149</b>
<b>Appendix D – Results from Online Survey on the Impact of Violence on Young Australians.....</b>	<b>153</b>



## Foreword

The current generation of young people is not a homogenous group, despite sharing the Gen Y 'tag'. Young people aged 12-24 years are socially and culturally diverse, and make up approximately one fifth of Australia's population. Individually, each has his or her own hopes, dreams and aspirations. Not only do young people make important contributions to our society now, but collectively they represent the future of our nation.

Nevertheless, it seems nearly every day we are confronted by yet another story in the papers or on the evening news. We are told about our out of control young people – fighting at school, getting drunk and fighting in the streets, carrying knives and joining gangs. Sometimes we hear how young people are using new technologies and social networking to bully their less fortunate peers. So, it is hardly surprising that many believe today's young people are more violent than ever.

But what is the reality? With so many violent incidents going unreported, assessing actual levels of violence is challenging to say the least. Based on the best available data however, it seems that youth violence in Australia is escalating. Importantly though, while often perceived primarily as perpetrators of violence, young people are in fact at greatest risk of being victims. Young people themselves are concerned about their own personal safety, with about one quarter of young people aged 18-24 years feeling unsafe or very unsafe when walking alone in their local area after dark, and around 1 in 10 feeling unsafe in their homes at night.

This leads to the fundamental question – what needs to be done to curb youth violence and address the concerns of young people and of the wider community? The starting point for the Committee was to examine what is known about the reasons that young people in particular are at increased risk of violence. Evidence to the inquiry shows that there are many factors and influences to be considered. While some pertain to characteristics of the individual, many relate to the

individual's immediate physical and social environment, including the nature of relationships with family and friends and levels of engagement with community. Added to these are the influences of alcohol and drugs for instance, as well as cultural influences which shape and reinforce attitudes towards young people and violence.

Given the many factors at play, it is clear that no single intervention or simplistic solution will be sufficient to address escalating levels of youth violence. Indeed, evidence to the inquiry includes reference to a large number of interventions and programs seeking to address youth violence by tackling a wide range of risk factors such as family violence, child abuse, bullying and the use and abuse of alcohol and other drugs. Not only is the sheer number of interventions overwhelming, but while all are well intentioned, it seems that not all have been evaluated with the same degree of rigour. The result is a potentially confusing array of interventions and programs at various stages of implementation and evaluation, supported by different portfolios within various levels of government, and delivered by a range of government and non-government agencies. Hence, a key recommendation of the Committee is to develop a national youth violence and rehabilitation strategy which brings together in a co-ordinated way, a comprehensive selection of evidence-based interventions.

The Committee recognises that developing an effective national strategy will require a collaborative exercise involving all levels of government and the non-government community sector, in consultation with the wider community. Young people must be included. Therefore, the Committee is encouraged to see the collaborative undertakings already being progressed through Council of Australian Governments. These include measures to reduce the harmful effects of alcohol, and to improve law enforcement through the implementation of best practice policing and increased access to restorative justice. In addition, the Australian Government has also demonstrated its commitment to consult with young people to identify priority issues of concern to them and suggest ways forward. The release in May 2010 of the *National Strategy for Young Australians* is a significant outcome of these consultations.

The Committee recognised the importance of engaging with young people as the priority of its own inquiry. Realising that young people were unlikely to make written submissions to a Parliamentary inquiry process, the Committee agreed to conduct an online youth violence survey. The survey was promoted through conventional means, including through websites of Members and Senators and through existing e-mail distribution lists. However, in thinking about how best to reach the target group – that is young people aged 12-24 years old – the Committee also felt that online advertising would be essential. Advertising through Facebook and Google was used for the first time by a Parliamentary



Committee. It proved to be a great success, with over 1300 young people responding to the survey. In addition, a Youth Forum held in Melbourne allowed around 40 more young people to share their experiences and ideas for solutions to youth violence with Members of the Committee directly. Formal and informal discussions were also held with young people living in the Northern Territory, Western Australia and Tasmania. The Committee found the input from all of the young people involved in the inquiry to be invaluable and many of their comments are interspersed throughout the report.

The Committee sought evidence from a wide range of contributors. I thank all of those who have participated in the inquiry, either by providing written evidence, by presenting evidence in person, by responding to the online survey or through informal discussions with the Committee. I also take this opportunity to thank my Committee colleagues for their efforts and contributions throughout the inquiry.

It is the Australian Government's vision for all young people to grow up safe, healthy, happy and resilient. It's a vision all Australians would share. Considering how experiences of violence impact on young people – damaging them physically, emotionally and socially – curbing escalating levels of youth violence will be essential to achieving this vision. As Chair of the Committee, it is my hope that the recommendations made in this report will provide a robust framework for a comprehensive, evidence-based approach to addressing the complex but crucial issue of youth violence.

Annette Ellis MP  
Chair



## Membership of the Committee

**Chair** Ms Annette Ellis MP

**Deputy Chair** The Hon Judi Moylan MP

**Members**

The Hon Tony Abbott MP <i>(until 3/02/10)</i>	Mrs Sophie Mirabella MP <i>(until 30/11/09)</i>
The Hon Kevin Andrews MP <i>(from 3/02/10)</i>	Mr Scott Morrison MP <i>(until 30/11/09)</i>
Ms Jodie Campbell MP	Mr Brett Raguse MP
Mr Steven Ciobo MP <i>(from 3/02/10)</i>	Mr Patrick Secker MP <i>(30/11/09 to 10/02/10)</i>
Ms Julie Collins MP	Mr Luke Simpkins MP <i>(from 30/11/09)</i>
Ms Kirsten Livermore MP	Mr Chris Trevor MP

## Committee Secretariat

Secretary	Mr James Catchpole <i>(until 23/04/10)</i>
	Ms Sharon Bryant <i>(from 27/04/10)</i>
Inquiry Secretary	Dr Alison Clegg
	Ms Susie Kelly <i>(until 26/02/10)</i>
Research Officer	Ms Belynda Zolotto
Administrative Officers	Ms Emily Costelloe <i>(from 10/02/10)</i>
	Mrs Jazmine Rakic <i>(from 15/02/10)</i>
	Mr Shaun Rowe



## Terms of Reference

The House of Representatives Standing Committee on Family, Community, Housing and Youth shall inquire and report on the impact of violence on young Australians with particular reference to:

- perceptions of violence and community safety among young Australians;
- links between illicit drug use, alcohol abuse and violence among young Australians;
- the relationship between bullying and violence and the wellbeing of young Australians;
- social and economic factors that contribute to violence by young Australians; and
- strategies to reduce violence and its impact among young Australians.



# List of Recommendations

## Recommendation 1

The Committee recommends that the Australian Government, either through the Australian Bureau of Statistics or the Australian Institute of Criminology, implement a regular (biennial or triennial) cross-sectional community-based survey to:

- measure the prevalence, nature and severity of youth violence; and
- monitor trends over time. (*para 2.36*)

## Recommendation 2

The Committee recommends that the Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs include social development education and training as an essential component in phase 3 developments for the national curriculum. (*para 4.28*)

## Recommendation 3

The Committee recommends that the Australian Government, in consultation with state and territory governments and non-government stakeholders, examine options for establishing partnerships between departments of education and community-based service providers to facilitate referral of students to external counselling and support services where required and appropriate. (*para 4.39*)

## Recommendation 4

The Committee recommends that the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, as part of its review of the *National School Chaplaincy Program*, enhance and extend access to professional counselling and support service for students by:

- introducing mandatory training for all school chaplains to assist them with early identification of students who may require professional assistance; and
- establishing partnerships and formal mechanisms for referral from the *National School Chaplaincy Program* to other student counselling or youth support services, including external counselling services where appropriate. (*para 4.43*)

#### Recommendation 5

The Committee recommends that the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government provide additional strategic funding for the development of community infrastructure to support communities to become more ‘youth friendly’. The funding should be awarded on a competitive basis to local government authorities that can demonstrate communities with the greatest need for social/cultural facilities and/or infrastructure to support youth. (*para 4.85*)

#### Recommendation 6

The Committee recommends that the Attorney-General’s Department introduce a new crime prevention grants scheme requiring partnerships to be established between the police and the local community to support collaborative approaches to enhancing community safety and reducing crime at a local level. (*para 4.121*)

#### Recommendation 7

The Committee recommends that the Australian Government, in consultation with state and territory governments and other key stakeholders, establish a national youth violence and rehabilitation strategy to guide the provision of a holistic and integrated policy and program delivery framework. The national youth violence and rehabilitation strategy should:

- be founded on a robust evidence-base;
- support multi-level interventions;
- be focused on prevention and early intervention;
- be collaborative, coordinated and inclusive of all levels of government, the non-government community sector and the wider community, including young people;
- link to existing strategies that target social and economic disadvantage; and

- include population level strategies to reinforce social norms and foster positive cultural and attitudinal changes. (*para 5.14*)

#### **Recommendation 8**

The Committee recommends that the Australian Government conduct an audit of existing initiatives and programs that aim to address youth violence. The audit should detail the outcomes of any assessments or evaluations, and provide commentary on the rigor of evaluation.

Further, the Committee recommends that the audit findings be made publicly available. (*para 5.25*)

#### **Recommendation 9**

The Committee recommends that the Australian Government, in consultation with state and territory governments and other key stakeholders, identify and establish an appropriate mechanism to support the development of a strong evidence-base through ongoing, systematic and rigorous evaluation of anti-violence interventions and programs.

A clearinghouse for the dissemination of information to policy makers and other interested parties should be an integral part of the considerations. (*para 5.27*)

#### **Recommendation 10**

The Committee recommends that the Attorney-General's Department examine the need for change to current classification categories of film and TV in relation to violent content. Consideration should be given to the potential impacts on children and young people of exposure to media violence with a view to better aligning classification categories with key developmental stages occurring in childhood and adolescence. (*para 5.77*)

#### **Recommendation 11**

The Committee recommends that the Australian Communications and Media Authority establish a 'Mediasmart' website aimed at providing children, young people and their parents with up-to-date, comprehensive and age-appropriate information to assist them to make informed, discerning and responsible choices in relation to media content, including exposure to media violence. (*para 5.80*)

#### **Recommendation 12**

The Committee recommends that the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations develop and implement a social

marketing campaign to promote positive images of young people and combat stereotypical and negative community perceptions. (*para 5.90*)

**Recommendation 13**

The Committee recommends that the Australian Government ensures that evaluations of social marketing campaigns undertaken in relation to youth violence or anti-social behaviour that can lead to youth violence, incorporate evaluation methodology to assess rates of behavioural change where this is an intended outcome. (*para 5.106*)