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ayf AUSTRALIAN  
YOUTH  
FORUM

**SUBMISSION TO THE HOUSE OF  
REPRESENTATIVES STANDING COMMITTEE  
ON EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT –  
INQUIRY INTO MENTAL HEALTH AND  
WORKFORCE PARTICIPATION**

December 2011

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## Executive Summary

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This submission to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and Employment Inquiry into Mental Health and Workforce Participation is made on behalf of young Australians who contributed their thoughts and opinions through the Australian Youth Forum (AYF).

The AYF is a formal framework and communication channel between the Australian Government, young people (aged 15-24) and the youth sector. For this inquiry, the AYF consultation process aimed to reach young people who have lived with or know of a person who lives with a mental health illness.

The Committee's inquiry focuses on:

- Barriers to participation in education, training and employment of people with mental ill health
- Ways to enhance access to, and participation in, education, training and employment of people with mental ill health through improved collaboration between government, health, community, education, training, employment and other services
- Strategies to improve the capacity of individuals, families, community members, co-workers and employers to respond to the needs of people with mental ill health.

The AYF consultation found that:

### **Barriers to Participation**

The main barriers to participation for young people include:

- the lack of available and/or appropriate support services
- young people with a mental health illness are treated differently (stigma/ discrimination)
- teachers and employers not being supportive
- young people need to have their basic needs met (accommodation, clothing, food) before they are able to participate in education, training or employment
- a perceived lack of funding and targeted mental health support for the 18 to 25 year old age bracket

Suggestions to overcome these barriers include:

- specialised and consistent support for young people with a mental health illness will assist to overcome barriers.

Young people identified themselves as having the biggest impact on their own ability to participate in education, training or work.

### **Enhancing Access**

Ways to enhance access for young people with a mental health illness include:

- better supervision and support
- increased awareness and understanding of mental health
- flexible hours (working hours and due dates)
- ongoing mental health support for young people needs to be affordable and not limited to a specific number of sessions.



## **Strategies to Improve Capacity**

Strategies to improve capacity include:

- information on mental health needs to be accessible and targeted at young people and their support network. Young people with a mental health illness seek help from those closest to them (e.g. family and friends) or through their own self directed search for information and support (internet).
- information about mental illness needs to be produced with four key areas for consideration - content and style (e.g. accessible to those with a low level of literacy), messaging (specifically around awareness raising), types of information (e.g. employers guide, national awareness campaign), resources should be targeted for the audience/topic (parents, teachers, employers).

While there is an extensive range of programs designed for young people with a mental health illness, those that make the most difference are the ones that provide one-on-one support, are ongoing or provide follow up support, and those that restore the confidence of the young person.

## Input from the Australian Youth Forum

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This submission to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and Employment Inquiry into Mental Health and Workforce Participation is made on behalf of young Australians who contributed their thoughts and opinions through the Australian Youth Forum (AYF). It is a summary of the views, ideas and experiences of young Australians. The original words and expressions of young people have been used where possible in highlighted quotes through the submission.

### AYF Background

The AYF is a formal framework and communication channel between the Australian Government (the Government), young people (aged 15-24), and the youth sector.

The AYF aim is to develop and implement targeted engagement strategies which provide young people and the youth sector with an opportunity to contribute their ideas and opinions on issues that affect them – and which in turn inform Government policy. Components of the AYF include events, sponsorships and support to the youth sector, communication strategies including a website, Facebook page and online survey tools.

### Mental Health and Workforce Participation

One in four young people, aged 16–24, experience mental health illness during adolescence, with depression and anxiety being the most common mental health disorders among young people.<sup>1</sup>

Having a mental health illness can make participating fully at work or school difficult. Some young people with mental health illness encounter difficulties in accessing education, training and employment opportunities, and face barriers in educational institutions and the workplace. People with mental health illness may find it harder than normal to stay focussed at school or to do well at work. They may also have trouble getting along with their family and friends.

Although there is no current research on the unemployment rates of young people who live with mental illness, studies in 2008<sup>2</sup> and in 2010<sup>3</sup> found that people with a mental health illness were less likely to be employed.

There is a lot of evidence, however, showing that being employed positively impacts on the lives of those people living with a mental illness. This is for many reasons, including having an income, a sense of self and improved connectedness with the broader community.

In February 2011, the Australian Government asked the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and Employment to investigate how to assist Australians with mental health illness participate in education, training and employment participation.

The Committee's inquiry will focus on:

- Barriers to participation in education, training and employment of people with mental ill health
- Ways to enhance access to, and participation in, education, training and employment of people with mental ill health through improved collaboration between government, health, community, education, training, employment and other services
- Strategies to improve the capacity of individuals, families, community members, co-workers and employers to respond to the needs of people with mental ill health.

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1 Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), 2008. National Survey of Mental Health and Wellbeing of Australians.

2 Waghorn and Harris, 2008 Mental Illness and Employment Outcomes. The Queensland Centre for Mental Health Research and the University of Queensland.

3 Killackey, 2010 The Most Important Part of my Recovery: Education, Training and Work in the Journey to Mental Health, presentation to HeadsUp 1<sup>st</sup> International Youth Mental Health Conference, Melbourne June 2010.

## Consultation Process

The AYF consultation process aimed to reach young people aged 15-24 who have lived with or know of a person who lives with a mental health illness. The AYF promoted the consultation through general channels (Facebook, distribution lists) and targeted communication to non-government organisations and youth service providers.

The AYF also encouraged people who work in the youth sector to participate in the consultation (these participants may be aged over 24 years). Feedback from approximately 150 respondents is included in this submission (including Facebook responses).

The AYF consultation on Mental Health and Workforce Participation was open from 27 October to 4 December 2011.

## Methodology

The AYF consultation process aimed to reach a wide range of young people through a range of formats that included:

### *1. AYF Online Discussion Topic*

An online discussion topic on Mental Health and Workforce Participation was hosted on the AYF website ([www.youth.gov.au/ayf](http://www.youth.gov.au/ayf)). The discussion topic asked young people to share their experiences and provide any suggestions to make it easier for young people who live with mental illness to participate in education, training and employment. Eight responses plus six votes (agrees) were received through the discussion topic. The online discussion topic starter is at [Attachment A](#).

From May to July 2011 the AYF hosted an online discussion topic on Mental Health and Young Australians seeking feedback on what young people think about mental health issues and their impact on young Australians. Sixteen ideas plus 30 votes (agrees) were received. Relevant feedback received through this consultation has been incorporated into the AYF response. The online discussion topic starter is at [Attachment B](#).

### *2. AYF Online Survey*

An online survey tool (Survey Monkey) was open for the duration of the consultation period. The survey comprising of 13 questions provided an opportunity for young people to respond anonymously. The survey was completed by 81 people (note 22 survey respondents indicated they were over the age of 24). The survey questions are at [Attachment C](#).

### *3. AYF Facebook Feedback*

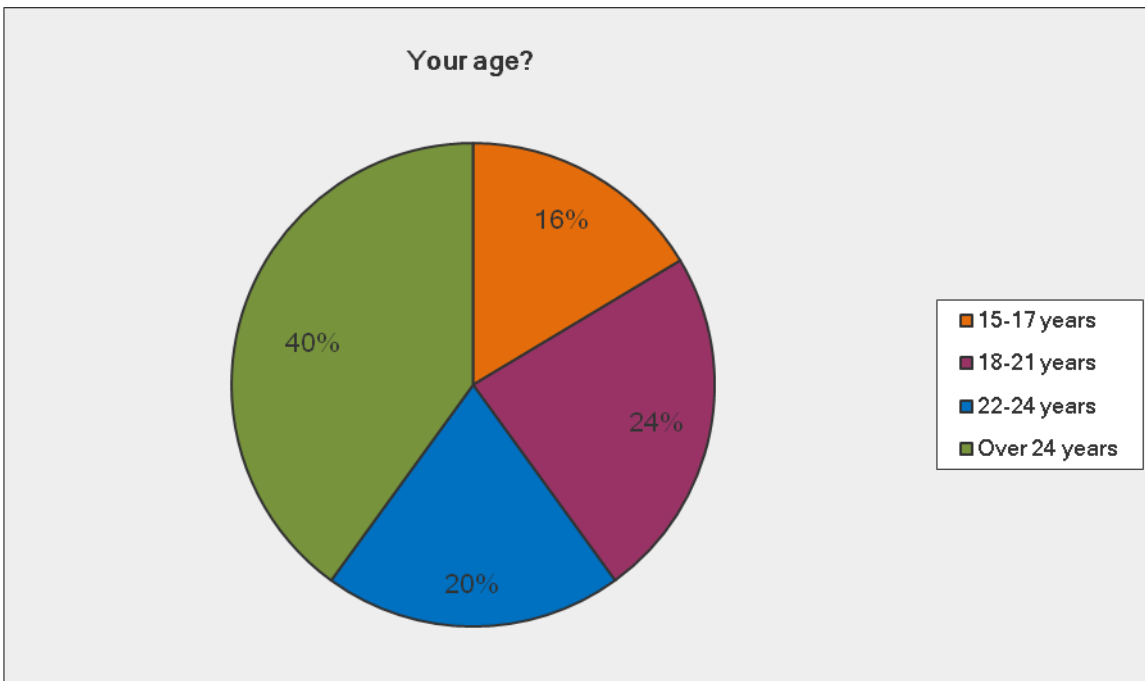
The AYF utilised Facebook to supplement feedback being provided through the online discussion topic and survey. An AYF Steering Committee member also sought feedback through Facebook wall and through private Facebook messages.

## Results

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**Note on tables and graphical information:** Not all of the AYF contributors provide information that could be represented numerically in this report. However, the tables and graphs should be considered as indicative of the preferences and trends across the consultation groups discussed within. The AYF does not collect any demographic information for submissions through the AYF Online Discussion Topic or Facebook.

## Participants



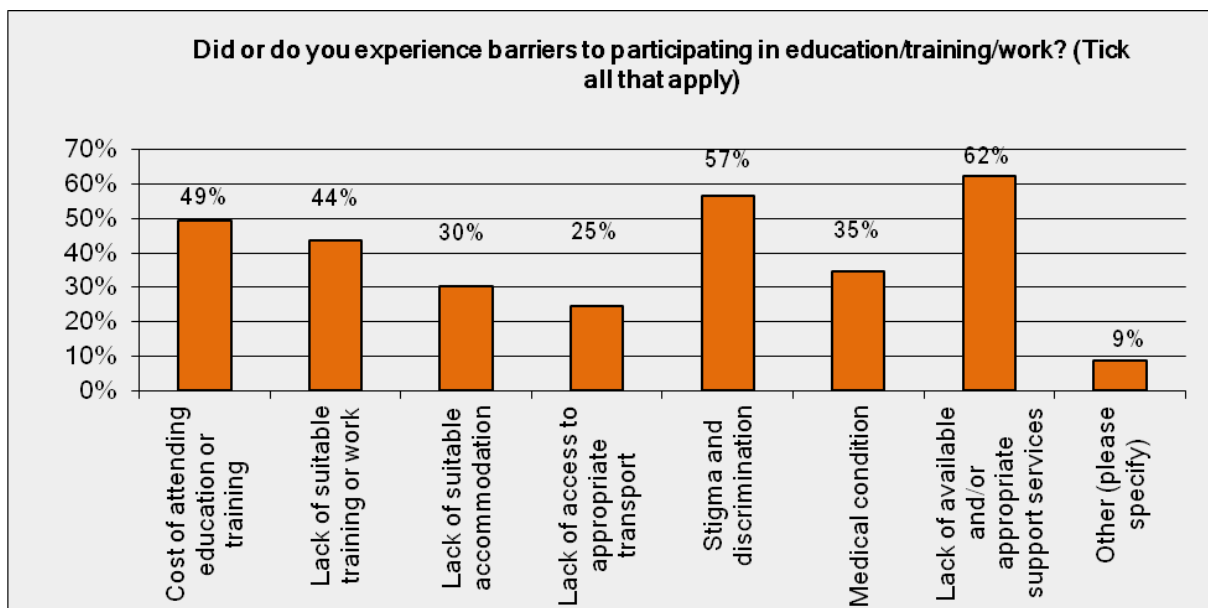
Approximately 60% of the 81 respondents to the AYF online survey were aged 24 years or younger. Eighty two percent of respondents were female and 18% were male.

Of the online survey participants 43% indicated they were a young person who has (or had) a mental health illness and 57% noted they knew a young person with a mental health illness.

## Barriers to Participation

*“There is a massive barrier when it comes to mental health in schools”.*

Online survey respondents identified a number of barriers that young people with a mental health illness face to participating in education, training and employment. Sixty two percent of respondents indicated that the lack of available and/or appropriate support services to be a main barrier for participation and 57% identified stigma and discrimination as a barrier (note respondents could provide more than one response).




Other barriers to participation included:

- teachers/employers not knowing how to treat/speak to or support a young person with mental illness
- not knowing where to go for support
- lack of support/belief from family and friends
- difficulty accessing basic needs (food, clothing, washing)
- lack of motivation
- high unemployment rate
- perceived lack of funding and targeted support for the 18 to 25 year old age bracket..

*“There is such a stigma surrounding mental health, that even if you are dealing/have dealt with it, many are reluctant to give you a chance or provide the necessary ongoing support that you may require in order to be a full participant (in education, work, whatever that may be).”*





*“My school struggled in the early stages of finding successful ways of dealing with my former determination of trying to end my life. However, in the end they in conjunction with other organisations and my family pulled me through time and time again. If it weren't for organisations such as Headspace, Kids Help Line and Beyond Blue, I would not have been able to finish my education and continue to live.”*

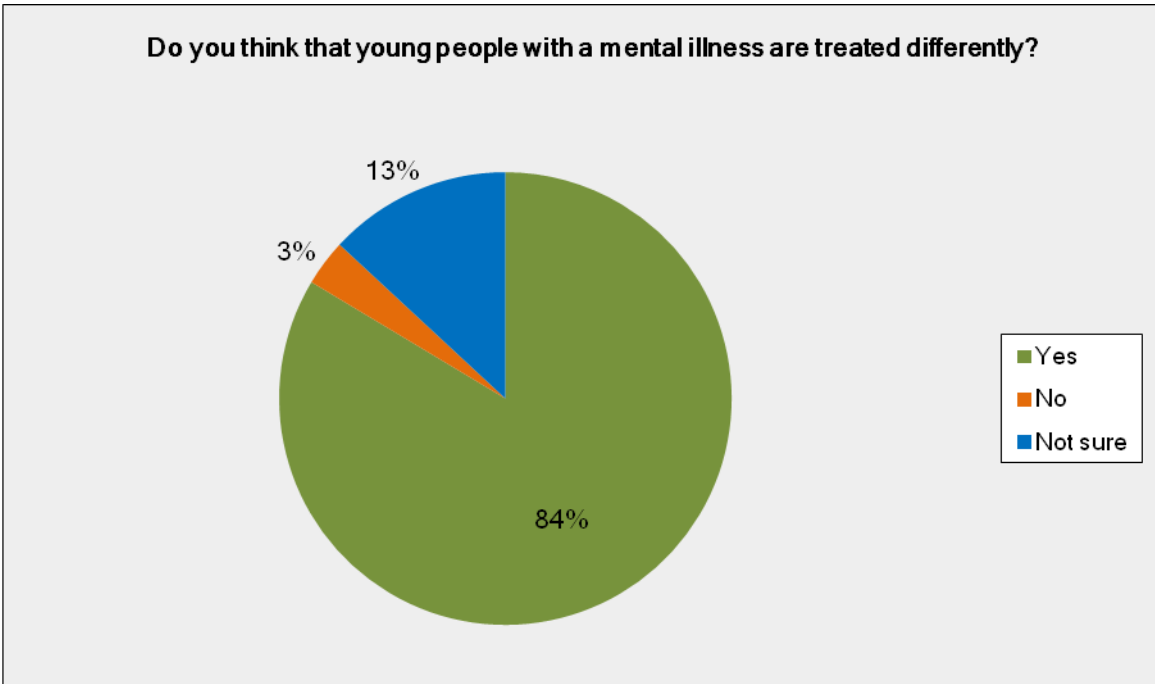
*“Some people need the structure of set hours to force them out of bed to work. Others need flexible hours so that they can perform during their peak hours. However flexibility to this extent is rare, unless other employees are not dependent on this person being available during normal business hours.”*

*“I believe mental health days should be mandatory for organisations to offer to staff and flexibility should be considered in relation to deadlines for young people attending schools and university.”*

*“...I am in a support class doing life skills and mainstream curriculum. the topic I wanted to mention is life skills, because I am doing life skills in my support class but I see people in my school with depression, low education and are having trouble in their lives but they aren't getting life skills or education help at school.”*

One of the key themes that emerged through the consultation is the need for specialised and consistent support for young people with a mental health issue to overcome barriers to education, training and employment. Teachers and employers were mentioned as not being supportive of the young person's needs, and that this lack of empathy had a negative impact on the young person. A number of respondents suggested a support worker could provide a conduit for the young person and the educational institute or employer in navigating their specific needs (flexible working hours, time for medical appointments).

It is also important to note that some young people identified that they need to ensure their basic needs are met (accommodation, clothing, food) before they are able to participate in education, training or employment.



Eighty four per cent of online survey respondents indicated that young people with a mental health illness are treated differently.

*"I have never disclosed my mental health issues to my employers because of a fear that I'd be treated differently or thought less capable."*

*"Stigma around mental illness, lack of education in the community."*

*"...I think it depends on the mental illness. I have depression and it feels as though I have to jump through hoops to get an extension on my assignments, whereas my friend with Bipolar seems to charm her way out of any assignment deadline she has."*

*"Less people that know, the better it is. Stigma just by saying you have a mental illness regardless of your actual abilities."*

*“They are usually judged unfairly, due to a lack of awareness and support in their environments.”*

*“There is so much stigma about mental health (STILL!!), its got better to some point but where I live in a rural town, there is so many community members who just don’t understand exactly what mental health even is!!”*

Young people feel there is stigma and discrimination towards people with a mental health illness. It was noted there is a catch-22 situation between making others aware of your illness and being treated differently or by not letting them know, there may be a misunderstanding on days when the person is not feeling well.

<b>How much do the expectations of the following people impact on you (or the young person living with the mental illness) in terms of participation in education, training or work?</b>					
	Not at all	A little	Not sure	Somewhat	A lot
Self	3	9	6	11	33
Family	7	7	6	19	23
Friends	5	12	11	21	13
Teachers	12	9	7	15	19
Employers	12	7	11	15	17

Sixty two respondents answered the online survey question regarding internal and external expectations, with over 50% of respondents indicating that they have the biggest impact on their ability to participate in education, training or work.

*“having a mental disorder is bad for the person and their family I had been suffering with depression since I was ten I skipped school and made my parents mad it isn't nice to feel like you're the only person in this world who can look after you...”*

*“... as much as I've struggled I never gave up & now I'm on my way to better health, starting education, achieving goals, becoming a survivor not a victim, making friends, being independent and working towards my career.”*

*“From talking to a few other young people with mental health issues, I think that we also hold ourselves back a lot out of fear that we won’t be able to do the work or study as well as other young people or that we’re not as good as other people.”*

*“A lot of times the only obstacle to success is ourselves. You after having a mental illness you need to overcome the fear and self pity and reject the stereotype of your illness yourself to move on and be all you can be!”*

*“As much as family and friends were just trying to help I often felt pressured and stressed by how much they pushed me into trying to get better their way.”*

## **Summary**

The main barriers to participation for young people include:

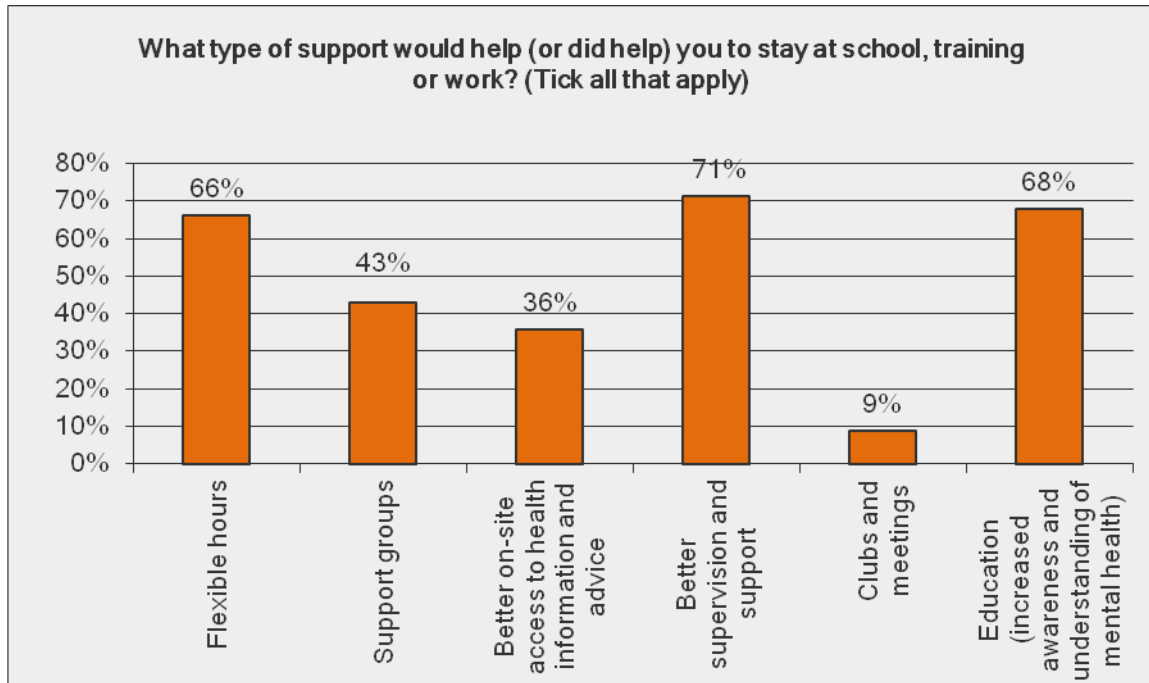
- the lack of available and/or appropriate support services
- young people with a mental health illness are treated differently (stigma/ discrimination)
- teachers and employers not being supportive
- young people need to have their basic needs met (accommodation, clothing, food) before they are able to participate in education, training or employment
- a perceived lack of funding and targeted mental health support for the 18 to 25 year old age bracket

Suggestions to overcome these barriers include:

- specialised and consistent support for young people with a mental health illness will assist to overcome barriers.

Young people identified themselves as having the biggest impact on their own ability to participate in education, training or work.

## Enhancing Access



Seventy one percent of online survey respondents indicated better supervision and support would assist with participating in education, training and/or work, followed by 68% indicating increased awareness and understanding of mental health and two thirds identifying flexible hours would support their ability to participate.


Note: While the survey indicated flexible hours, throughout the consultation flexibility regarding due dates (school, workplace) was also suggested.

It was also recommended that ongoing support needed to be affordable for a young person, and that sessions provided through the Medicare system should not be limited to a specific number of sessions, as ongoing mental health care is required.

A number of respondents identified the issue for young people living in rural and regional areas and the lack of adequate support, and the need for increased community awareness of mental health issues. This was highlighted as being very important for young people living in an area with a small population, and being signalled out as having a 'mental illness'.

*"Raising awareness of mental illness and finding the right support are two of the most important factors for fighting this very serious and very real disease. Many people, are still to learn that it is possible."*

*"..supportive teachers and goals that required a university entrance score."*



*"...flexible due-dates. You might have every intention to get your assignment done on time according to your schedule/calendar, but then something triggers your depression etc and suddenly you can't function properly for the next week - all of a sudden you're best intentions and time management have gone out the window."*

*"But being provided with an option that works for you, 'one size does not fit all'"*

*"The staff at headspace were amazing, and encouraged me to continue my studies at uni."*

*"When diagnosed at 15 with Bipolar, the school provided access to the school counsellor on a weekly and adhoc basis. This ongoing support and knowledge of the ease of access reduced stress levels significantly."*

*"It has taken me 9 months of support with one young woman just to coordinate and find an appropriate medical/health service that are assisting with both in a balanced way (counselling, health, childhood trauma and appropriate medication) - during this time we have provided outreach support most weeks to attend short training courses in this period that build further living/work skills - she is still not 'ready' for fulltime nor unsupported work."*

*"What is implemented by the government needs to be evidence-based - what the research tells us is that Individual Placement and Support is far superior to any other model of vocational support with respect to a range of vocational outcomes."*

*“Just to push for more groups, more awareness, mental health is not disease that you can catch, 1 in 3 people will suffer from a MI in their lifetime. More country programs for young people are needed!”*

*“I know that I've been so lucky to have such a supportive family who have been happy and have had the financial means to help me pay for weekly therapy for so long. This is pretty unusual. Access to therapy should be much cheaper for young people (and all people) who need it, but can't afford it. Young people should receive much more government assistance to receive ongoing therapeutic support - the reality is that problems don't just go away after 12 sessions. Therapy can be life-saving (I really think it was for me) and can increase your quality of life so much that a low SES background or lack of funds should not be the deciding factor about whether young people can access the help that they need or want.”*

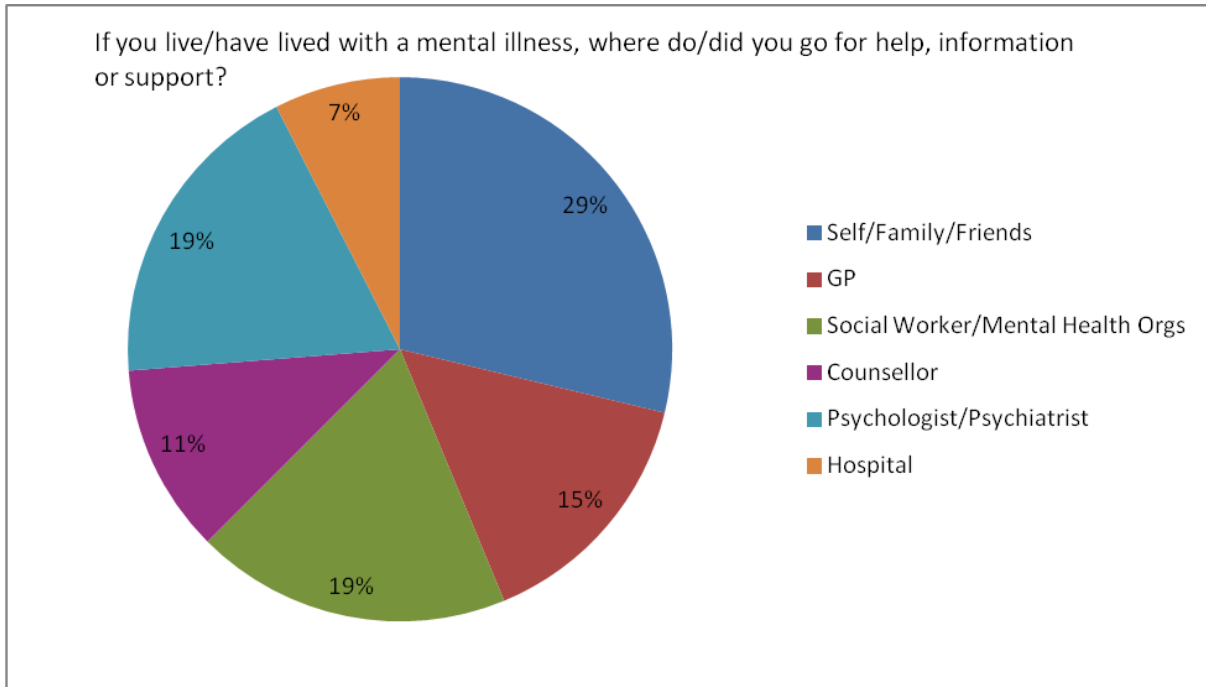
*“Volunteer work can be a great way of learning skills, gaining confidence, getting opportunities. It helps you & others. You can get education or employment through these channels, meet people, develop social skills, build relationships, gain support, meet mentors, build a resume, get references, figure out what your strengths are, what you're passionate about etc.”*

## **Summary**

Ways to enhance access for young people with a mental health illness include:

- better supervision and support
- increased awareness and understanding of mental health
- flexible hours (working hours and due dates)
- ongoing mental health support for young people needs to be affordable and not limited to a specific number of sessions.

## Strategies to Improve Capacity



Respondents to the online survey indicated that young people with a mental health illness tend to seek help from those closest to them, that is family and friends through their own self directed search for information and support (internet).

The second area where young people commonly seek support is quite diverse. Young people identified mental health organisations, social workers, school counsellors and seeing a psychologist and/or a psychiatrist.

The third highest area that young people seek support from is their GP.

Respondents indicated that they also sought support from hospitals and counsellors.

*"I think more awareness for the general public about mental health. I think there is still the attitude that such things aren't real health problems and that people who suffer from them just need to 'cheer up'. If there was more understanding from the general public I think it would be a lot easier for people to recover, or at least make everyday activities a bit more bearable."*

*"The biggest change for me was when I hooked up with the disability works who help people with disabilities – physical, mental or intellectual. they helped me immensely and supported me in finding work that has fundamentally changed my whole outlook on life."*



## Types of information about mental illness that young people think need to be produced

Young people identified four areas to target in regard to the types of information about mental illness that needs to be produced. These related to the style in which content is presented, the messaging that needs to be communicated through this information, the topics that information should be provided on and lastly the resource specific information for parents and family members, educators and employers.

### 1. Content/Style related

Respondents indicated that the style in which content is written is an important aspect. Information needs to be presented in a manner that is clear, written in plain English and accessible to people with low levels of literacy.

*“Content needs to be relevant and interesting.”*

Information should be open and honest and provide ‘descriptions of what it is like to experience a particular mental illness and how others can help when a person is struggling to cope.’

### 2. Messaging

Respondents indicated that messaging about mental illness is important. For example, information should increase awareness ‘that people like me aren’t so different to everyone else. That people with mental illness may struggle in certain areas can still do good things. That people with a diagnosis aren’t stupid, dumb or have a low IQ’.

Respondents indicated that an integral message for mental health lies in removing the stigma from mental illness.

*“Make everyone aware that it exists - remove the stigma”*

*“More information about it is ok to have a mental illness and still hold down a job and maybe information for employers saying that it is not in a persons head and might help them understand and be more flexible to the employees.”*

Respondents indicated that messaging should also focus on the universality of mental illness and that there is help available, and that a person with a mental illness does not have to live in despair.

*“That a mental illness is not the be in and end all. People can learn to live with mental illnesses and still achieve great things! Get rid of the negative stigma that you are a write off/ worthless just because you have a mental illness. People with mental illnesses can still give back to society in normal and different ways.”*

*“...that it's okay to feel sad! That mental illness is not a choice and sufferers haven't done anything wrong they are actually sick. They need support not pity.”*

*“That anyone can be affected by it. That it is not something to be ashamed of or shame people for. It is a serious disease that is more often than not difficult to control and can deeply affect the lives of the those living with it and the people around them. It should be taken seriously and the life of a person dealing with mental illness should be prioritised. Help is out there.” (sic)*

### 3. Types of information/topics/resources that should be made available

Suggestions on information sources and information on particular topics such as:

- long term impacts of childhood trauma
- post-traumatic stress disorder
- self injury
- suicide
- eating disorders
- how to help a suicidal friend/how to talk to a suicidal family member/what to do in a suicide related emergency
- messaging about not discriminating against people with a mental illness- videos or first person perspective
- signs/symptoms of mental illness and why having a mental illness does not make you 'crazy'
- employers guide to working with a person with mental illness
- national TV campaign
- talkback radio re mental illness
- simple day to day living tips for those with a mental illness
- resources for trauma related support networks, for example primary/vicarious and intergenerational trauma regarding 'Stolen Generations' and ATSI young people.

Many of these resources are already available but the fact that respondents weren't aware of them suggests more effective promotion is required.

#### 4. Targeted Resources should be available

Respondents indicated that targeted information should be provided to parents, friends, teachers and employers.

*“Parents- how to treat their children.”*

*“Families. Strategies for families to use during the bad times Talking through problems with someone (with appropriate training),not just being given reading matter.”*

*“Teachers- information on how to spot the warning signs and possibly prevent suicide”*

*“Employers need more information on how to manage young people with a mental illness, including ensuring workplaces have flexible arrangements and that young people aren’t discriminated against because of their mental illness.*

*For example “You wouldn’t have to worry about telling your supervisor you have generalised anxiety, depression, an eating disorder, or bipolar disorder, etc... because it would be as acceptable as having a broken leg and needing a few days off here and there if you’re feeling down or out of control or two hours off every Monday evening to go to a therapy appointment.”*

*“General information, there is already amazing amounts of information out there, it just needs to be promoted better. It needs to be in every classroom, and every work force and discussed or taught, one a year, or once a term, Yes it becomes repetitive, but for children to remember how to fluently say a word they need to see if 10-12 times, therefore we can’t just give the community this information once, it needs to be imbedded in the community, in schools, in workplaces and referred to on a regular basis so that it isn’t still seen as an uncommon or bad thing.”*

## Programs and projects that have made a real, practical difference for young people who live with mental illness

Young people identified an extensive range of programs and projects available to people with a mental illness:

- adolescent mental health services targeted specifically at young people with mental health illnesses
- access to a school counsellor/counsellor
- youth support coordinators
- family planning
- motivation conferences (e.g. Day of Hope by the Oxygen Factory)
- Mental Health First Aid workshops (increase understanding of symptoms and treatment)
- specific programs mentioned included -
  - Create Foundation
  - Twenty10
  - Headspace
  - Butterfly Foundation
  - Life Changing Experiences Foundation
  - Youth off the Streets
  - Mood gym
  - Youth Connections
  - BeyondBlue
  - Butterfly Foundation
  - Reach Out
  - Batyr
  - Reachout.com
  - Alive and kicking (Kimberley)
  - Youth Focus
  - Kids Help Line Counselling service
  - Ngatti Housing.

*“Batyr - a new organisation giving a voice to the elephant in the room. It's focus is on engaging, educating and empowering young people to seek help. They look at behavioural change not just awareness raising.”*

*“The mental health plan care from a GP has been beneficial in getting young people into cost-effective treatment.”*

*“Individual Placement and Support (IPS) is a much better model for helping young people gain competitive employment compared with the current disability employment services.”*

In addition to identifying a range of programs and projects that made real practical difference to young people with a mental illness, respondents identified a number of programs and the specific element of the program that made it successful.

Common core elements identified by the young people were:

- one-on-one support
- programs that help to restore confidence for the young person
- programs that provide ongoing/follow up support, not just initial crisis management style programs. This level of ongoing support is required as “You are never the same again after a mental illness and people have to learn how to challenge that by challenging themselves. It is easy to give up. So more support is needed to push people to strive off their best!”
- small group therapy
- the Federal Government's funding of mental health visits to psychologist (through Medicare).

*“No particular program but one-on-one outreach support by community services workers has been beneficial for some (long term/years of care plan coordination and support).”*

*“Can't name any but helping to restore confidence in people with a mental illness is a massive obstacle to overcome! You are never the same again after a mental illness and people have to learn how to challenge that by challenging themselves. It is easy to give up. So more support is needed to push people to strive off their best!”*

*“...school actually... but the programs and people with in that. having a place to go and hang out with a small group of people like a student services room. Also things like theatre and sport are amazing :D” (sic)*

*“Boystown Get Set For Work programs in Queensland have had a great impact in getting youth who have had negative experiences of the formal education system back into training and employment through helping them see the value in themselves and their capabilities as they are.”*

*“Youth Arts Project I've been involved with called PressureLands (<http://pressurelands.wordpress.com>) and other youth arts stuff with Riverland Youth Theatre.”*

*“... connecting with other young people like myself who had gone through similar experiences and come out the other side.”*

*“Hespace ran one or two free social group art workshops for clients, but they could not afford to run anymore and spaces were limited. There isn't a lot to be honest. There needs to be specialised programs/projects aimed at young people with mental illness. Once you turn 18 there are a limited amount of services and resources that those services have and most are aimed at adults although you are still a young person until 25?????” (sic)*

## **Summary**

Strategies to improve capacity include:

- information on mental health needs to be accessible and targeted at young people and their support network. Young people with a mental health illness seek help from those closest to them (e.g. family and friends) or through their own self directed search for information and support (internet).
- information about mental illness needs to be produced with four key areas for consideration - content and style (e.g. accessible to those with a low level of literacy), messaging (specifically around awareness raising), types of information (e.g. employers guide, national awareness campaign), resources should be targeted for the audience/topic (parents, teachers, employers).

While there is an extensive range of programs designed for young people with a mental health illness, those that make the most difference are the ones that provide one-on-one support, are ongoing or provide follow up support, and those that restore the confidence of the young person.

## Attachments

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### Attachment A - AYF Online Discussion Topic Starter

#### Mental Health and Workforce Participation

In July, we heard views from young people on the topic of mental health. The AYF now wants to hear more.

This time, we are focusing on participation in education, training and employment of young people who live with mental illness.

We want to hear your views on:

- barriers to participation in education, training or employment faced by young people who live with mental illness;
- approaches that have supported participation; and
- suggestions or new ideas to make it easier for young people who live with mental illness to participate in education, training and employment.

The AYF will use your ideas from this discussion topic, and the previous one on mental health, in a submission on behalf of young people to a House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and Employment – [Inquiry on mental health and workforce participation](#).

Join the discussion and/or share your thoughts on mental health and workforce participation by completing a short [online survey](#).

**If you, or someone you know is experiencing mental health difficulties, and need to speak to someone call:**

**[Lifeline on 13 11 14](#) or [Kids Helpline on 1800 55 1800](#).**

*Did you know that one in four young people, aged 16–24, will experience a mental health-related disorder, including substance abuse related issues, in any given year in Australia? And that depression and anxiety are the most common mental health disorders amongst young people? It is estimated that one in five young people will have experienced a diagnosable depressive episode by the age of 18.*

*Evidence is building that shows the link between unemployment and mental illness. Indeed, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation Development (OECD) found employment of people with a disability promotes social inclusion, lowers poverty risk and can contribute to the recovery of some conditions.*

*In 2009, the majority (81%) of young people aged 15-24 years (from a total of around three million) were fully engaged in either education or work. While most young people aged 15-24 years were fully engaged, some 561,000 (19%) were not. These were made up of 8% of young people who worked part-time (without being enrolled in study), 5% who were unemployed and another 6% who were not in the labour force. A very small proportion of young people (25,700 or around 1%) were enrolled in part-time study only .*

*Although there is no current research on the unemployment rates of young people who live with mental illness, studies in 2008 and in 2010 found that people with a mental illness were less likely to be employed.*

*The Australian Government is very concerned about all Australians and the issue of mental health, and on 11 May 2011 announced that additional funding of \$1.5 billion over five years would be provided for further National Mental Health Reform initiatives.*

*This funding is to ensure Australians with a mental illness get the care they need, when they need it, and makes a significant contribution to properly supporting young people who struggle with mental illness.*

## Attachment B - AYF Online Discussion Topic Starter

### Mental Health and Young Australians - Did you know?

Did you know that one in four young people, aged 16–24, will experience a mental health-related disorder, including substance abuse related issues, in any given year in Australia?

The Australian Government is very concerned about all Australians and the issue of mental health and on 11 May 2011 announced that additional funding of \$1.5 billion over five years would be provided for further National Mental Health Reform initiatives. This funding is to ensure Australians with a mental illness get the care they need, when they need it, and makes a significant contribution to properly supporting young people who struggle with mental illness.

**The Australian Youth Forum's Youth Engagement Steering Committee** wants to know what young people think about mental health issues and their impact on young Australians.

Your ideas will be collected to form a submission to the Minister for Youth, so that he knows what young Australians think about this issue.

- National Mental Health Reform ([PDF 249KB](#) | [RTF 7.57MB](#))

### Questions the AYF Youth Engagement Steering Committee and the Australian Government would like to hear your views on:

- How do you think Governments across Australia could best provide young people with positive mental health messages?
- What impact do you think mental health issues have on your community?
- What positive experiences have you had, or seen personally, in dealing with and managing mental health issues?
- Where do you go for help with mental health information or support?
- Do you think mental health education should include both professionals, using evidence-based treatments, and young people working together to manage the mental health issues of themselves, their friends and family?
- What sort of education programs about mental health would you like to see made available to young people? What existing programs about mental health do you think work and make a real, practical difference?

**If you, or someone you know is experiencing mental health difficulties, and need to speak to someone urgently call:**

[Lifeline on 13 11 14](#) or [Kids Helpline on 1800 55 1800](#).



## **Attachment C - AYF Online Survey Questions**

Please see attached PDF file for survey questions

# AYF Survey - Mental Health Barriers to Participation

Hi, Thank you for taking part in this Australian Youth Forum (AYF) survey. The AYF wants to hear about education, training and employment of young people living with a mental illness. Your feedback will be used to help provide the views of young Australians to the [Inquiry into mental health and workforce participation](#). The survey should take less than 10 minutes to complete, is confidential and closes on Monday 5 December 2011.

You can also contribute your ideas through the online discussion topic on the [Have a Say](#) page on the AYF website.

## \*1. I am: (Tick one only)

- a young person who has or has lived with a mental illness
- a person who knows a young person with a mental illness

## 2. If you live/have lived with a mental illness, where do/did you go for help, information or support?

## \*3. Are your answers about: (Tick one only)

- Education
- Training
- Work

## 4. Did or do you experience *barriers* to participating in education/training/work? (Tick all that apply)

- Cost of attending education or training
- Lack of suitable training or work
- Lack of suitable accommodation
- Lack of access to appropriate transport
- Stigma and discrimination
- Medical condition
- Lack of available and/or appropriate support services
- Other (please specify)

# AYF Survey - Mental Health Barriers to Participation

**\*5. How much did the *expectations* of the following people impact on you (or the young person living with the mental illness) in terms of participation in education, training or work?**

	Not at all	A little	Not sure	Somewhat	A lot
Self	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Family	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Friends	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Teachers	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Employers	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**\*6. How did these *expectations* impact on you (or the young person living with the mental illness)?**

	Always negative	Usually negatively	Neither positively or negatively	Usually positively	Always positively
Self	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Family	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Friends	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Teachers	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Employers	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Additional comments (optional)

**\*7. Do you think that young people with a mental illness are treated differently?**

- Yes
- No
- Not sure

Reason (optional)

## AYF Survey - Mental Health Barriers to Participation

**8. What type of *support* would help (or did help) you to stay at school, training or work?  
(Tick all that apply)**

- Flexible hours
- Support groups
- Better on-site access to health information and advice
- Better supervision and support
- Clubs and meetings
- Education (increased awareness and understanding of mental health)

Other (optional)

**9. What types of information about mental illness do you think needs to be produced?**

**10. List any programs/projects that have made a real, practical difference for young people who live with mental illness.**

**11. Share a story (optional)**

**Please use the space below to share your story about being or knowing a young person living with a mental illness and participation in education, training or work. We want to hear about some successes, as well as some difficulties.**

**\*12. Do you agree to the AYF publishing your story? This may include on the AYF website and/or in the inquiry submission.[Q11]**

- Yes
- No

## AYF Survey - Mental Health Barriers to Participation

### 13. Do you have anything else you would like to tell us or share?

#### AYF – About you

The questions below provide the AYF with an understanding of the people completing this survey. These details will only be used to provide context for the information being provided.

### \*14. Where did you hear about the AYF?

- Event/Presentation/Forum
- E-newsletter
- Facebook
- National Youth Week
- Friend
- Youth organisation
- Other (please specify)

### \*15. Your age?

- 15-17 years
- 18-21 years
- 22-24 years
- Over 24 years

### \*16. Your gender?

- Male
- Female

### \*17. Your post code?

Postal Code:

The [Australian Youth Forum](#) is managed through the [Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations](#).

The Department manages information collected from participants in accordance with the *Privacy Act 1988*. Your personal information will not be used for any other purpose, added to any mailing list or disclosed to any person or organisation without your consent unless such disclosure is permitted pursuant to the *Privacy Act 1988* or otherwise specified in the Conditions of Entry.

## AYF Survey - Mental Health Barriers to Participation

Thank you for taking the time to complete the AYF Survey. Your responses will be used to help provide the views of young Australians to the [Inquiry into mental health and workforce participation](#). They will also assist the AYF in improving the communication between the Australian Government, youth sector and young people.

Subscribe to the [AYF Newsletter](#) to keep up to date on AYF.



## Feedback Form – Australian Youth Forum

The Australian Youth Forum (AYF) is about enabling young Australians to communicate their ideas, thoughts and opinions to the Australian Government.

The AYF model of engagement is intended to be a socially inclusive one; about increasing participation, reducing disadvantage and importantly, providing a greater voice for young people.

By working directly with young people, and by linking-in with the different parts of government, the AYF is working towards ensuring that important Australian Government policies and programs take the views of young people into consideration.

### Your opinion

Your ideas and feedback are essential to helping AYF continue doing its job well for young people.

Do you have any great ideas or suggestions on how AYF can improve its service and presentation of young people's ideas? Please let us know, we'd love to hear from you.

### Your details

Contact person's name

Name of Department, Branch, Section

### The submission/report

What was the Consultation topic?

Was the submission useful?

What will be done with the information provided to you?

### Next steps

*The young people who contributed to the submission or report always like to know what effect the feedback they provided has had on policy or program designs*

How will young people find out what the outcomes of their feedback are?

**Thank you for completing this feedback form.**

Please return to sender or to [ayf@deewr.gov.au](mailto:ayf@deewr.gov.au)