

Government Response

to the House of Representatives Standing
Committee on Family, Community, Housing and
Youth Report:

Avoid the Harm – Stay Calm

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

Foreword

The Australian Government welcomes the opportunity to respond to the *Avoid the Harm – Stay Calm: Report on the inquiry into the impact of violence on young Australians* report from the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Family, Community, Housing and Youth.

Violence and its impact on young Australians is a significant concern for all levels of governments, the community and for young Australians themselves.

While young people are often seen as the perpetrators of public violence, they are overwhelmingly also the victims. For young people, being a victim of crime can negatively impact on health, wellbeing, confidence, perceptions of safety, educational achievement and socio-economic attainment.

The Australian Government has outlined a clear vision, through the *National Strategy for Young Australians*, (the Strategy) for all young people to grow up safe, healthy, happy and resilient and to have the opportunities and skills they need to learn, work, engage in community life and make and influence decisions that affect them. The Government is committed to ensuring this vision becomes a reality for young Australians.

As has been widely acknowledged the issue of violence is a complex, multi-faceted problem and one that demands the need for all levels of government, community organisations, parents, and young people themselves to work in partnership towards a range of solutions. There is no one simple answer to issues concerning young people and violence.

The Australian Government welcomes the Report and supports its key themes:

- the need for rigour and evaluation to make sure activities being undertaken are working;
- the importance of working with families, communities, police and young people; and
- the value of a coordinated framework and approach that draws effort together.

The Australian Government, through the Council of Australian Governments (COAG), is working with these other levels of government to reduce escalating rates of youth violence, improve community safety and provide rehabilitation services for both the victims and perpetrators of violence.

A number of measures are already in place to assist in this. In particular, Operation Unite is organised and run by State and Territory Police in conjunction with the Australia New Zealand Policing Advisory Agency. It is a mechanism for police agencies to influence the media, government and the community in an unprecedented way. Operation Unite aims to raise awareness of the impacts of alcohol related crime, violence and anti-social behaviour.

Additionally, on 2 July 2010, the Minister for Home Affairs, the Hon Brendan O'Connor MP, welcomed the agreement of all Australian police ministers to reduce, prevent and respond to youth violence and anti social behaviour through a National Youth Policing Model.

The Model supports and enhances effective programs already in place through six high-priority strategies for youth policing. Under the Model, jurisdictions will have the flexibility to adapt responses to youth policing issues to suit local environments. The six principles are:

- targeted policing;
- a strong response to alcohol and drug abuse;
- strong enforcement of road rules;
- early intervention and diversion strategies;
- collaboration and information sharing between justice, health, education and human services; and
- education and awareness for young people about safety, legal rights and responsibilities.

As part of a national approach to supporting schools to build safe school communities, the Australian Government and all state and territory Governments have revised the National Safe Schools Framework. The revised Framework was endorsed by all ministers for education in December 2010.

The Framework provides Australian schools with a vision and a set of guiding principles that will assist school communities to take a proactive whole-school approach to developing effective student safety and wellbeing policies. It highlights and responds to the emergence of technologies that have enabled new forms of bullying to develop.

The Framework and a supporting resource manual has been made available to all Australian schools, and was officially launched on 18 March 2011 to coincide with the Inaugural Day of Action Against Bullying and Violence.

CONCLUDING STATEMENT

The Australian Government agrees to act on a number of the Recommendations contained in the report *Avoid the Harm – Stay Calm - Report on the Inquiry into the Impact of Violence on Young Australians*.

The Australian Government agrees that violence against young people, and perpetrated by young people is unacceptable and that further attention needs to be focussed in this area.

The Australian Government response against each Recommendation is set out below.

Response to 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.

AGREE IN PRINCIPLE

The Australian Government will consider implementing a triennial survey on youth violence in consultation with States and Territories.

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.

NOTED

The Australian Government, in partnership with state and territory governments, is committed to the development and implementation of an Australian Curriculum from Foundation to Year 12. This work began with the release of the first four learning areas of English, mathematics, science and history from Foundation to Year 10, endorsed by all education ministers in December 2010 through the Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs (MCEECDYA). The first four learning areas will be substantively implemented by the states and territories by 2013.

The Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) is overseeing the development of the Australian Curriculum. Phase two of ACARA's work will involve the development of an Australian Curriculum in languages, geography and the arts. Phase three will include health and physical education, information and communication technology, design and technology, economics, business, and civics and citizenship.

ACARA's work in developing the Australian Curriculum is being guided by the Melbourne Declaration which was agreed to by MCEECDYA in December 2008. The Declaration sets the goal for all young Australians to become not only successful learners, but confident and creative individuals and active and informed citizens. The aim is to help students develop a number of personal values and attributes including social competence. The Melbourne Declaration is available at www.mceecdya.edu.au.

The Australian Curriculum also incorporates seven general capabilities, which are represented across all learning areas to different degrees. These capabilities include critical and creative thinking, ethical behaviour, personal and social competence, and inter cultural understanding. The inclusion of the general capabilities will assist young Australians as citizens of the twenty-first century. It will also help to prepare students for the challenges of adulthood as well as their potential life roles as family and community members.

The Australian Government agrees to raise with the Standing Council on School Education and Early Childhood (which replaced MCEECDYA on 1 July 2011) the place of social education development and training within the Australian Curriculum and to bring to its attention the Committee's recommendation. The Government expects

that aspects of social education development and training, identified by the Standing Committee on Family, Community, Housing and Youth, may be included in the Australian Curriculum for Health and Physical Education and or Civics and Citizenship and also through the general capability of personal and social competence.

ACARA has to date consulted extensively with the education community in developing the Australian Curriculum. ACARA will adopt a similar approach as it further develops the Australian Curriculum.

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.

NOTED

The Reconnect program, funded by the Department of Families, Housing and Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA) is an example of partnerships between services and schools. Reconnect is a community based early intervention program for young people aged 12 to 18 years (young people aged 12 to 21 for Reconnect-Newly Arrived Youth Specialist services), who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, and their families. In 2009-10, schools and other education institutions were the top referral source for Reconnect services (26 per cent, N=1,681). It is to be noted however that the Reconnect worker would be working more towards stabilising the young person's living situation and reconciling the family, in which violence may be part of the issue but not the sole reason for the referral. There may be opportunities for further engagement at the local level.

FaHCSIA also currently funds a number of service providers, under the Mental Health Community Based Initiative in the Targeted Community Care Program, which delivers mental health early intervention services in schools. These services are reducing the incidence of bullying in schools and promoting improved problem solving behaviour among young people.

In addition FaHCSIA administers the Family Support Program which emphasises the development of local links and coordinated strategies between Family Support Program funded service providers, other agencies and services, as well as state, territory and local governments to support vulnerable and at risk families and children. By working in partnership with state and territory governments and other services the Family Support Program supports children at risk through early intervention, prevention and post separation support focussing on family relationships and parenting to help families navigate life transitions.

Youth Connections is delivered through the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) under the National Partnership on Youth Attainment and Transitions. Youth Connections operates nationally, with providers contracted in 113 service regions. Youth Connections providers are funded to work with at risk young people aged 12-18 to assist them overcome barriers to their education and enable them to participate in further, education, training and active participation in their community. The barriers to education may include issues relating to violence.

Partnership Brokers are tasked with strengthening services in their region to raise retention in education and attainment of year 12 or equivalent. Partnership Brokers work with other providers, education authorities, local government, the police and community organisations, to establish formal referrals pathways and form partnerships to assist all young people to overcome regional based issues and improve linkages between services. Partnership Brokers are required to work closely with the Youth Connections provider in their region.

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 services 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.

NOTED

The National School Chaplaincy Program provides grants of up to \$20,000 per year for schools to establish or expand school chaplaincy services. It is a voluntary program that assists school communities to support the wellbeing of their students, including strengthening values, providing pastoral care and enhancing engagement with the broader community.

A national consultation process to review program arrangements has been undertaken recently. On 7 September, the Government announced that from January 2012 the program will be renamed the National School Chaplaincy and Student Welfare Program and that the Program will be strengthened with the introduction of minimum qualifications, increasing the maximum grants for schools in remote areas from \$20,000 to \$24,000, introducing benchmark standards for service providers, and improvements to the complaints management system. Another significant outcome of the review is the ability of school communities to choose to employ either a chaplain or a secular student welfare worker.

The minimum qualifications (Certificate IV in Youth Work, Pastoral Care or equivalent) have a strong focus on dealing with mental health issues and making appropriate referrals. School chaplains and student welfare workers are responsible for supporting the spiritual, social and emotional wellbeing of their students and are expected to work with the Principal and the school's well-being team to refer to appropriate services where required. They are also expected to develop a network of professional groups working with the community and to be aware of current student well-being, anti-bullying and cyber-safety strategies such as the National Safe Schools Framework.

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.

NOTED

On 3 March 2011 the Hon Simon Crean MP, Minister for Regional Australia, Regional Development and Local Government, announced the Regional Development Australia Fund (RDAF). To be eligible for funding under the RDAF, projects must be endorsed by the relevant Regional Development Australia (RDA) committee. RDAs will have a pivotal role in ensuring the long term sustainability of regional Australia. An amount of \$350 million of RDAF will be redirected for reconstruction efforts in flood affected areas. This funding will be prioritised to assist in the rebuilding of public infrastructure in those areas impacted by the disaster.

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.

NOTED

The Australian Government recognises the importance of enhancing partnerships between police and local communities to combat youth violence. The Government is supporting crime prevention through grant programs including the Safer Suburbs Program and with funding under the *Proceeds of Crime Act 2002*. During the 2010 election, the Government committed to dedicating a significant proportion of the funding from *Proceeds of Crime Act 2002* to support crime prevention activities by police and communities, with proceeds expected to be at least \$30 million over the next three years. The Government also extended the Safer Suburbs Program to 2012-13. These programs are significantly enhancing community safety and assisting in reducing instances of criminal and anti-social behaviour amongst youth in Australia at a local level.

The introduction of new programs is therefore unnecessary.

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.
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NOTED

The Australian Government understands that responses to violence and anti social behaviour need to be collaborative across all levels of government and facets of the community.

The Australian Government has already taken decisive action in this area with the release of the National Youth Policing Model. On 2 July 2010, all Australian police ministers endorsed a National Youth Policing Model which aims to help police address youth violence and anti-social behaviour. The Model identifies six national strategies for policing young people and provides best practice options for police to reduce, prevent and respond to youth violence and anti-social behaviour. The Model recognises and builds upon existing youth policing initiatives and programs and is an appropriate Framework for taking the essence of this recommendation forward.

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.

NOTED

The Australian Government would provide input for such a project based on current funded programs aimed at issues such as community crime prevention and Indigenous youth, including any evaluations of such programs.

As detailed in the response to Recommendation 7, the National Youth Policing Model, endorsed in July 2010, recognises and builds upon existing youth policing initiatives and programs. The Model includes a list of existing targeted initiatives that have been identified as being successful in addressing youth violence and anti-social behaviour.

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.

NOTED

As detailed in the response to Recommendation 7, the National Youth Policing Model promotes collaboration and information sharing between jurisdictions and with other sectors in order to address youth violence and anti-social behaviour. The Model also includes a guide to evaluating the quality of evidence and effectiveness of youth policing initiatives, to help jurisdictions determine the benefit of initiatives that have not yet been evaluated while recognising that jurisdictions will each have their own approach. The Model suggests jurisdictions liaise with the Australian Institute of Criminology if they wish to undertake a full evaluation of their youth policing initiatives.

The Indigenous Justice Clearinghouse, funded through the Standing Committee of Attorneys-General (SCAG), aims to promote discussion and disseminate relevant Indigenous justice information to government policy makers and those working in the field of Indigenous justice.

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.

NOTED

There is a review of classification taking place that will consider the possible impact of media upon children and young people and will also examine the classification categories for media content. This recommendation will be addressed primarily through the Australian Law Reform Commission review of classification, and the final report is due January 2012.

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.

AGREE IN PRINCIPLE

Key government, industry and non-government organisations currently provide a range of information and resources that enable a multi-media viewer to make responsible choices in relation to media content. These sources of information include the Cybersmart program (www.cybersmart.gov.au), Classification Board (www.classification.gov.au), Free TV Australia (www.freetv.com.au), and Young Media (www.youngmedia.org.au). For example, the Australian Communication and Media Authority's (ACMA's) Cybersmart website assists young people and parents make informed decisions about online content, including violent content, as part of its broader remit to promote safe and informed online use.

The television codes of practice registered by the ACMA under the *Broadcasting Services Act 1992* contain classification provisions and consumer advice, which inform viewers about the age-appropriateness of the content of television programs. These classification provisions are, in turn, based on the National Classification Scheme (NCS) which applies more broadly to film, computer games and publications.

The Government notes the NCS is currently under review by the Australian Law Reform Commission, with the review considering matters such as the provision of information about media content to the community. Education initiatives could be considered at the conclusion of that review and in light of its findings.

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.

NOTED

The Australian Government has in place a range of initiatives that seek to positively portray young people in society and combat negative community perceptions of young people.

National Youth Week

National Youth Week (NYW) is the largest single celebration of young people on the Australian calendar and has run annually since 2000 as a joint initiative between the Australian, state, territory and local Governments.

The overall aim of NYW is to "celebrate and recognise the value of all young Australians within their communities", encouraging young Australians aged 12-25 and their communities to celebrate and recognise the positive contributions young people make to their communities, and to voice concerns or issues relevant to them.

In 2011 NYW saw over 2,300 events take place approximately 250,000 young people and gave communities the opportunity to acknowledge the achievements and talents of young people across Australia.

Young Australian of the Year Award

The Australian of the Year Award includes a category for young Australians. This award recognises those aged 16 to 30 who are outstanding and exceptional young Australians. It is an opportunity to recognise and celebrate the outstanding achievements of young Australians who have made a substantial contribution to their communities. The Young Australian of the Year has been awarded since 1979.

Australian Youth Forum

The Australian Youth Forum (AYF) enables young Australians aged 15-24 years and the youth sector to directly engage with the Australian Government about issues that are important to them.

The AYF was launched on 2 October 2008 and since that time, over 11,000 young people have been involved in face-to-face AYF activities, including national youTHINK forums, outreach events and partnerships with youth sector organisations.

National Awards for Local Government – Youth Engagement Award

The Youth Engagement Award recognises councils that empower young people to take part and be active in their communities. Being involved and connected to a community is important for the wellbeing of individuals and of broader society. Young people who are engaged in their communities will find opportunities to

contribute, develop a sense of achievement and develop networks and skills to support them in other areas of life.

The Australian Government recognises the important role local governments play in connecting young people to their communities and helping them achieve their potential. The Youth Engagement Award celebrates successful local government initiatives that support the Australian Government's vision for young people and contribute to its stated priority of empowering young Australians to take part and be active in their communities.

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.

AGREE

The Australian Government agrees with this recommendation. Any potential social marketing campaign in relation to youth violence would include tracking research evaluating the campaign's effectiveness.

It is a mandatory requirement for all campaigns conducted by FMA Act agencies. The *Guidelines on Information and Advertising campaigns by Australian Government Departments and Agencies* (May 2010) state that all campaigns should be evaluated to determine effectiveness.