

Snapshot

Checking in with children and young people

Youth Survey

November 2020 to February 2021

Overview

The Commission for Children and Young People is an independent body that advocates for the rights, safety and wellbeing of all children and young people in Victoria.

This snapshot summarises what 123 children and young people told us between November 2020 and February 2021 about their experiences of life during the pandemic. This includes their reflections on mental health and wellbeing, education, safety and security at home, social issues and the future.

About this snapshot

Throughout 2020, we asked children, young people and the organisations that work with them about the impacts of COVID-19. We published what we heard in a series of snapshots about education, mental health and feelings of safety, and used the feedback to tell the government and the broader community about what children and young people needed to feel supported during this time.

Since then, restrictions have generally eased and parts of life have started to return to 'normal'. But we know the experiences of last year continue to have a big impact on children and young people. We want to continue to understand how they are feeling as we move through different stages of the pandemic towards recovery.

We created an online survey that children and young people can complete at any time, recognising that things will continue to change. At key stages, we are going to publish a snapshot of the main things that children and young people have told us in the survey. This includes what is going well, or not so well, and what they think could be done better.

The Commission shares this information with decision makers, including leaders in government departments, to improve services for children and young people.

We heard from

123

 children and young people

Age*

97

aged
under 18

22

aged between
18 and 25

**4 responses not provided*

Gender*

48

described their gender as
female

67

described their gender as
male

6

described their gender
another way

**2 responses not provided*

49 told us they have a **disability** or **long-term health condition**

3 identified as **Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander**

24 identified as **culturally diverse**

Located

across **Victoria** as shown in the heat map:



Just over
50%
lived in **rural** or
regional areas

Housing situation

- family home
- with kinship and foster carers
- in residential/ supported accommodation
- with friends
- a partner
- on their own

When we heard from them

12 November 2020 to 28 February 2021

What they told us about

- School and education
- Family, friends and community
- Safety and support
- Mental health
- Employment and income
- Sport and recreation
- Social issues and the future

Summary

Key themes

We heard that while children and young people were feeling more optimistic about things returning to 'normal', they still feel the impacts of last year and remain worried about the future.

While every participant's experience is different, key things we heard include:

- Many young people continue to struggle with poor mental health and find it hard to get the help they need (due to wait times, or services not being available in their area).
- Education is very important to children and young people but returning to in-person learning is an adjustment for many as they work to 'catch up' on what was missed and improve their grades.

- Children and young people are feeling the impacts of the pandemic on their parents or carers, including stress and loss of jobs or income. Some children and young people also told us they don't feel safe at home.
- Many young people felt worried about their future, particularly given the problems of racial injustice, the climate crisis and political instability around the world.

Children and young people told us the importance of investing in more mental health and support services for children and young people across the state, including at school. They wanted the impacts of the pandemic on their education and grades to be acknowledged and for this to not be a barrier to further study. They recognised the importance of supporting families through the recovery and wanted more action and the opportunity to have their say on the important issues affecting their future.

How are children and young people feeling overall?

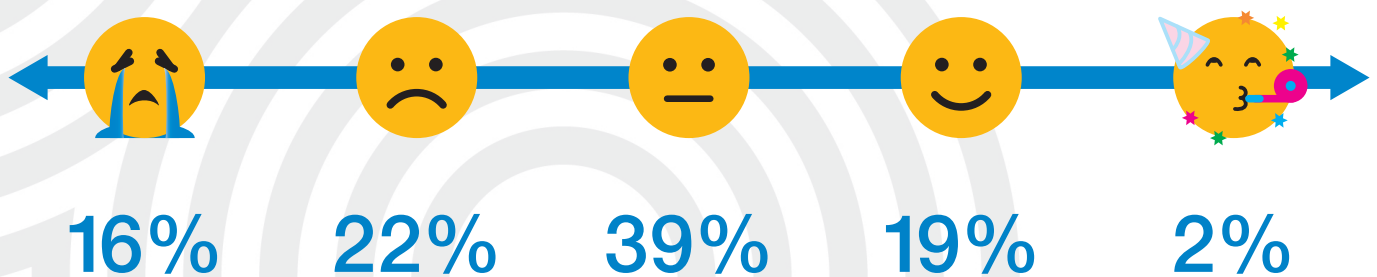
Most children and young people we heard from are not feeling their best, with most feeling either average (almost 40 per cent) or bad/terrible (almost 40 per cent). Just over 20 per cent said they were feeling good or great.

Children and young people were more likely to report feeling bad if they were aged around 14, or between 17 and 18 (noting their final years of school may have been disrupted). We also saw that children and young people were more likely to report feeling bad or terrible if they identify as gender

diverse, culturally diverse, have a disability or long-term health condition, live away from their parent/s or live in regional or rural areas.

The groups of children and young people who were more likely to tell us that they have been feeling great or good were those without any health problems, did not identify with a culture other than 'Australian', live with their parent/s, live in metro areas, and received support from family, school and sports/hobbies.

How they were feeling overall



Mental health and wellbeing

While some children and young people told us they were feeling more positive after restrictions eased, many children and young people said they continued to struggle with poor mental health and find it hard to get the help they need. They also talked about missing out on important parts of life that contributed to positive wellbeing, like sport.

Positives

A small number of children and young people told us about things that helped their mental health and wellbeing, which included hobbies, connecting with others online or spending more time with family. Some found it easier to talk about their feelings and mental health during the pandemic, as everyone was having a tough time.

I feel this year I have gotten closer to my family and I feel the extra time where I'm not travelling to and from school I got to do the things I love to do. This 100 per cent made me a happier person, I got that extra time to discover some hobbies that make me happy... COVID has really built my bonds and a support network. I now feel more comfortable talking to my friends, family and school. I feel this situation has made people understand the importance of positive mental health.

Young person, 16 years old, female

I've enjoyed the surge in online connectedness. It's much more accessible for me, and have enjoyed the solitude, and lack of people out and about.

Young person with long-term health condition or disability, 24 years old, gender diverse, culturally diverse background

A small number of young people were feeling more positive as they are beginning to see the light at the end of the tunnel.

Things are getting back to normal again so I am feeling more joyful.

Young person, 13 years old, male

...But now that it's over I have bounced back pretty well.

Young person, 15 years old, female

Challenges

Many children and young people told us that the pandemic had a significantly negative impact on their mental health. Words that they used to describe how they were feeling included: stressed, depressed, fatigued, disappointed, anxious, overwhelmed, sad, lost, alone, lonely, angry, isolated, dissociated, shithouse, confined, restricted.

My mental health has greatly suffered due to COVID-19.

Young person with long-term health condition or disability, 19 years old, male, Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander and culturally diverse background

I went to hospital during the pandemic due to mental health issues.

Young person with long-term health condition or disability, 20 years old

Bushfires were isolating, COVID was worse.

Young person with long-term health condition or disability, 17 years old, gender diverse, culturally diverse background

COVID has destroyed my routine and I was most of the time depressed. I didn't know, I was frustrated and had the feelings of hitting or shouting all the time. I spent most of my time sleeping. My mum got me some help but they were not that helpful. That was in the pit of COVID... I hate COVID, I hate what it has taken from me. I hate how it make me feel empty and in cage. I hate the person I become sometimes because of COVID... Sometimes I feel like I am a bad person but I can't help [it], when I get mad I can't control it.

Young person with long-term health condition or disability, 13 years old, male, culturally diverse background

Well since COVID struck and lockdowns and quarantine has happened my depression and mental health has taken a slight turn for the worst. I've also become a lot more anti-social of people in shops and generally around town.

Young person with long-term health condition or disability, 15 years old, male

Now I'm more anxious about the reintegration, and generally around people as more and more of society reopens.

Young person with long-term health condition or disability, 24 years old, gender diverse, culturally diverse background

We heard about long wait times to access mental health services, and it being particularly hard for young people to get support for their mental health in some regional and rural areas.

I have been waiting for months just to get my first meeting with a therapist.

Young person with long-term health condition or disability, 20 years old, female, culturally diverse background

The closest mental health service is 90km away: with no transportation to and from and the flexibility of times is insane. CAMHS is only available if [you're] hospitalised for mental health... I couldn't get mental health support and I relapsed on my mental illness hard.

Young person with long-term health condition or disability, 17 years old, gender diverse, culturally diverse background

Waiting lists are long and they are hard to find. Access to support workers during COVID was bad.

Young person with long-term health condition or disability, 17 years old, male

Some young people with disability told us that online counselling sessions didn't always work well for them and this made them less likely to want to participate. Sometimes, there was a lot of paperwork required to get help, which was stressful.

I have a support team for my complex and high needs but I have only done online meetings with them since lockdown.

Young person with long-term health condition or disability, 25 years old, male

Because I am on the spectrum I found it hard to do phone contact sessions with my counsellor at headspace and dropped out of the program... Having autism I don't like sudden change and find it hard to cope.

Young person with long-term health condition or disability, 16 years old, male

There are always a lot of forms to fill out, to the point where filling them out makes me anxious, so I don't do them, then I don't get the help I need. That makes things hard on my family.

Young person with long-term health condition or disability, 17 years old, male

Some respondents described deeply concerning impacts. Three young people wrote about suicide in the survey.

The amount of substance abuse out here is heartbreaking, I live in fear every day that someone I know will pass from suicide or an overdose. I nearly lost a friend to suicide.

Young person with long-term health condition or disability, 17 years old, gender diverse, culturally diverse background

It's horrible being told what to do and being made scared of a virus that is very unlikely to impact me. Why is my life being controlled and limited? My future is destroyed. I feel suicidal.

Young person with long-term health condition or disability, 24 years old, female, culturally diverse background

Many children and young people struggled with not being able to see friends and others face-to-face during lockdown.

COVID has cancelled all of my extracurricular activities as well as cut off all my connections with friends at school since remote learning and has impacted my mental health very negatively.

Young person with long-term health condition or disability, 16 years old, female, culturally diverse background

I am a very social person so without social connections I feel alone and almost lost.

Young person, 15 years old, female

We could have had the chance to talk to our mates more. I really missed them.

Child, 11 years old, male

Several children and young people told us that being able to participate in sports and other activities was important to them and many missed being able to play sport during lockdown.

I love my baseball and was selected to go [overseas to compete] and it was cancelled for 2020. With COVID there was no local baseball competition and borders closed. I could not travel to SA for their summer season.

Young person with long-term health condition or disability, 16 years old, male

In the future I hope we don't have lockdown again because I missed my friends and playing basketball.

Child, 10 years old, male

Exercise lost with AFL Juniors and Competition table tennis cancelled... Put on excess weight due to loss of physical activity.

Child, 11 years old, male

What children and young people said they need

Young people told us that they want the government to prioritise mental health, including going back to face-to-face counselling, better access to psychologists, and more funding.

I feel there needs to be more information put out on social media, in schools, at sporting clubs that getting help isn't a bad thing, and the people who get help aren't weird, they just need help at the moment and that's normal especially after this hard year.

Young person, 16 years old, female

I think service delivery needs to continue and not drop off because the "pandemic is over". Issues from this pandemic will affect people looooooong into the future and there needs to be services in place to deal with this.

Young person with long-term health condition or disability, 23 years old, female

Just make sure services are known and make sure no one involved with or associated with any of these services devalues a young person's situation or perspective.

Young person, 16 years old, female

Support the mental health industry for young people more!!! There has been a lack of people being able to support young people who need mental health support since COVID.

Young person with long-term health condition or disability, 16 years old, female, culturally diverse background

Support in rural areas! Stop making promises you can't and won't keep.

Young person with long-term health condition or disability, 17 years old, gender diverse, culturally diverse background

Education

Over 75 per cent of children and young people who completed the survey told us they were studying at school, and just over 10 per cent were studying at TAFE or university. Just over 5 per cent were working and not studying, and 5 per cent were neither working or studying.

Positives

Most children and young people told us that education was the most important thing for them and were relieved to be back face-to-face.

I prefer being at school than being locked inside.

Young person, 14 years old, female, Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander

School in my opinion has gotten much better at supporting kids that have struggled in this time. They have a better understanding of how hard things can get and got because they had to go [through] it too.

Young person, 16 years old, female

Challenges

Although most children and young people told us that school and study was important for them, some said it was hard to re-adjust and catch up. Some felt that teachers did not understand what they were going through and worried how online schooling would affect their grades.

Some also felt sad about having missed important things like going on school camp, going to the formal and having a proper graduation.

As COVID restrictions are lifting and coming back to school, I find it very hard to cope with the sudden changes to not only my curriculum but my environment of study. My school has also decided to not cancel exams which has put stress on myself from semi relaxed learning during remote learning... to having to remember and "learn" a lot of things for my exams.

Young person with long-term health condition or disability, 16 years old, female, culturally diverse background

School is good but they [teachers] don't know what I go through.

Young person, 13 years old, male, culturally diverse background

...and my school results have significantly dropped. Last year and the previous years I had been a straight A/A+ student, but this year my highest mark so far has been a B. I'm worried that this will affect my chances at doing well on my exams and then getting into university.

Young person with long-term health condition or disability, 19 years old, male, Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander and culturally diverse background

What children and young people said they need

Children and young people told us that they want the government to ensure that schools provide more support for students, including support with re-adjusting to on-site learning, as well as better mental health support. They want recognition of how the pandemic has affected their grades and help to ensure this does not unfairly stop them from further studies at TAFE or university.

Work even more closely with the Victorian educational system - work with schools to make them safer... stop bullying, make mental health a priority. That's a huge point...

Young person, 15 years old, male

Make allowances for next year's VCE cohort and their schooling due to the impacts in learning this year.

Young person with long-term health condition or disability, 17 years old, female, culturally diverse background

More support for students coming out of Year 12 and going to university, as our studies have been heavily impacted and interrupted.

Young person with long-term health condition or disability, 19 years old, male, Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander and culturally diverse background

Safety and security at home

Many children and young people told us they felt safe at home. However, for some children and young people, home did not feel safe, and the negative impacts of the pandemic on their parents or carers were making home a more stressful place to be.

Positives

Most children and young people ranked family and friends within the top three things they felt were important to them. For young people living in residential or supported accommodation, family was considered the most important thing to them. Across our survey, children and young people who got good support from their family and friends were less likely to tell us that they were feeling bad or terrible.

Several young people told us about how family helped them during the pandemic.

But I got through it all with the loving support of my siblings and parents!

Young person, 15 years old, male

I feel this year I have gotten closer to my family.

Young person, 16 years old, female

[My] foster parents who have done everything for me and for putting up with all the anxiety and anger I have shown on almost every day during COVID.

Young person with long-term health condition or disability, 16 years old, male

Today I feel better not because of the professionals but because of all the effort my mum has put in to help me.

Young person with long-term health condition or disability, 13 years old, male, culturally diverse background

My home is somewhere I love to go to rest and my family is always here for me.

Young person, 20 years old, male

Challenges

Not all children and young people we heard from described a supportive home environment. Some children and young people told us that they did not feel safe at home.

I feel safer being at school than at home because my family is very judgemental... and conservative.

Young person with long-term health condition or disability, 16 years old, female, culturally diverse background

I don't feel [safe] with my mum and I sometimes don't think I'm [safe] where I'm living at the moment.

Young person with long-term health condition or disability, 16 years old, gender diverse

I'm scared that my dad will find where my mum and I live.

Young person with long-term health condition or disability, 13 years old, male, culturally diverse background

Some children and young people told us about how the pandemic has placed extra stress on their families. In some situations this increased the tensions in the household.

We had less money and fought more. It was generally a fairly toxic environment.

Young person with long-term health condition or disability, 20 years old

It has been really hard on my mum... mum was very tired and stressed.

Child, 10 years old, male

She is a single mum but she still took time to help me till I think she got depressed too. I worried about her sometimes because there's no one to take care of her and she doesn't talk much about her stress. She just smile but I know she cry a lot too in her room but she hides it... My mum couldn't stay with me because she needed to work. She got sick and she still needed to look after me and work hard at work too... She was worried for me and I was worried for her. I don't have any other family, if she die, I may rather die too.

Young person with long-term health condition or disability, 13 years old, male, culturally diverse background

Some young people told us that their parents had lost their jobs due to the pandemic, and some have had to start supporting their parents financially.

I think it is important for me to share that I come from a CALD, first generation, recently arrived migrant background (been in Australia for a few years). I feel that everyone in my family has struggled to find good work because of all the barriers that are in place for people like us, which were only exacerbated by this pandemic happening. I know that govt initiatives like sidekicker/working for vic exist and we have done our best to use these to our advantage (with nothing to show for). I strongly feel that these initiatives were not designed specifically to include/be beneficial to people like us.

Young person with long-term health condition or disability, 20 years old, female, culturally diverse background

My dad has lost his job because of COVID-19, so I am worried financially as I just moved out. I may have to start supporting my parents earlier than I thought I would have to.

Young person with long-term health condition or disability, 24 years old, female, culturally diverse background

My only parent hasn't been able to find a job this entire pandemic. I've been financially supporting my entire household on my own for the past few months, relying on the 2 casual jobs I have and other one-off paid opportunities that pop up.

Young person with long-term health condition or disability, 20 years old, female, culturally diverse background

What children and young people said they need

Children and young people told us that they want the government to provide more support to families doing it tough due to the pandemic.

But like maybe look after others that need it more *cough cough* extend jobseeker.

Young person, 15 years old, female, culturally diverse background

More financial support for my Foster parents who have done everything for me.

Young person with long-term health condition or disability, 16 years old, male

The government should also support single mothers more, my mum works till she get sick. That is not fair and helps mothers to have a safe home to stay with their children.

Young person with long-term health condition or disability, 13 years old, male, culturally diverse background

Some children and young people said that any future restrictions should consider that they are less likely to get COVID-19 and so should be able to continue to see their friends.

Social issues and the future

Challenges

Many children and young people felt a sense of uncertainty and that important social issues were being ignored, including the climate crisis and racial injustice (particularly for First Nations people). This made them feel gloomy about what the future holds for them.

With the current political and social unrest in the world, and the environmental fuck-up our governments have caused, it's not unrealistic to think I'll be dead sooner than I want to be.

Young person, 18 years old, male

I'm worried that because of the economy and COVID-19 dominating our political and news sphere, issues around climate change and First Nations sovereignty are being ignored and conveniently left unaddressed.

Young person with long-term health condition or disability, 19 years old, male, Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander and culturally diverse background

We live in a very unstable world but the government has the ability to fix it but they keep letting us down. I'm not surprised; the bushfires and the mental health system... they keep letting young people, especially the mentally ill, disabled, and rural, down... Increasing uni fees, climate change, the forgetting of young people in all areas of policy, the political climate of the world. It doesn't feel like our government is taking care of us, we are slipping through the gaps. Please we need help.

Young person with long-term health condition or disability, 17 years old, gender diverse, culturally diverse background

I feel that the future is uncertain still, that I can't achieve my dreams and ambitions.

Young person, 23 years old, male

What children and young people said they need

Children and young people told us that they want to be consulted and taken seriously about important issues.

Listen and understand. Stop saying oh they are young they don't know anything.

Young person with long-term health condition or disability, 13 years old, male, culturally diverse background

Consult us when you're making a decision and make a greater effort to learn more about us, our concerns and the supports we need to thrive.

Young person with long-term health condition or disability, 20 years old, female, culturally diverse background

Young people also told us that they want the government to focus on the climate crisis, including more education and awareness on this issue in school.

Keep them [young people] alive longer than only a few decades by doing something about coal, oil, uranium and whatever else they keep mining.

Young person, 18 years old, male

Some young people told us that the government needs to focus more on providing support and safety for the children and young people who identify as LGBTIQ+.

Provide more support groups for the LGBTIQ+ community and help them to feel a part of the community [as] a whole... so that it is safe for people to be who they are.

Young person with long-term health condition or disability, 20 years old

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