



Most of the kids
I spoke to said that
it was very important
that the government
listens to what they
have to say.





I'm Anne Hollonds, the National Children's Commissioner.

My job is to protect the rights of all children and young people in Australia and to make sure they get the help they need to be safe and well.

I want all the kids in Australia to have the things they need to grow up safe and well. This means somewhere safe to live, someone who cares for them and looks after them, being connected to their culture, having enough to eat, health care, school, a safe neighbourhood, and time and space to play.

Not all kids and their families have the things they need to grow up well and healthy.

In 2021, the Australian Government asked me to talk to kids and families across Australia to find out what would help to keep them safe and well, especially kids and families having a tough time.

Between May and July 2021, I talked with 400 kids and parents across Australia. I talked with many of you in person and some of you online using video because COVID lockdowns meant we could not meet face-to-face.

426 of you answered some questions in a short survey.

You told me about what you need to be safe and well, and what makes it hard to get help when you need it. I've put lots of what you said into a report that I have given to the Australian Government.

The Australian Government wants to use the information you gave me to come up with an action plan to keep all kids safe and well. This plan will be part of *Safe and Supported: The National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2021-2031*.



WHAT YOU TOLD ME

Many of you told me that you feel safe with your parent or carer, your friends, your teachers and other people in your communities.

You told me that more needs to be done to make sure kids are safe.

The top three things you and parents said would help keep you safe were:



help with
housing



mental health
services



help with basic
needs

Many of you, and parents, said that it can be tricky to find the help you need and that sometimes the right help isn't there for you. You said it feels a bit like a maze.



You told me that you want help to be:



available



affordable



accessible



respectful



culturally safe
and inclusive



open to listening to the voices
of children and their families

I heard that the people and services that help to keep you safe and well are the ones who take the time to listen to you and to understand you. They do not discriminate against you, and they respect you. Being able to talk to the same trusted people at these services is very important to you.

It can be hard to find the help you need. I heard that you and parents want to be able to get different kinds of help for family members from one place, including what to do when there is violence at home and for mental health concerns. Many of you told me that you want to have more of a say in decisions about your life.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander kids and their families

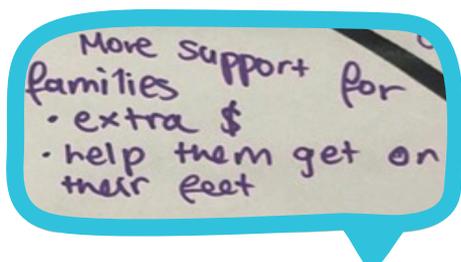


Many of you and parents told me that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families continue to experience trauma because of actions by governments, and discrimination by services and authorities.

Some parents are worried that asking for help might mean that child protection authorities will take their children away. They told me it was often hard to trust people in government who should be there to help them keep their kids safe and well.

You told me that sometimes schools are not welcoming of you and your families and you want this to change, so that you can feel comfortable going to school.

I heard that the services you can trust are run by the local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community members.



Kids and parents with disabilities



You told me that kids and parents with disabilities are the experts on what kinds of support they need.

Many of you told me that you face challenges finding and getting the right help for you.

Sometimes services don't treat you with respect, or you have to tell your story to someone new every time. You find services are often not flexible with the help they can give you.

I heard that the people and services that you trust are the ones who take the time to listen and to understand you.

Sadly, some of you and some parents said that school does not always feel safe for you.



Basic living conditions

Some of you and many parents told me that families need enough money to look after their kids and that payments from the government are not enough. This makes life very stressful every day.

You and parents said that the government needs to make sure that the payments cover the things you really need, like housing and food.

I heard that finding safe and secure homes was a big problem for families.

I met many young people, who are also parents of young children, who are couch-surfing or living in refuges, because they can't afford rent and it takes many years of waiting to get social housing.

It's really difficult to get into Housing Commission – I might have stayed with my old partner just to have a place to live. Lots of my friends stay with abusive partners just to have somewhere to live.

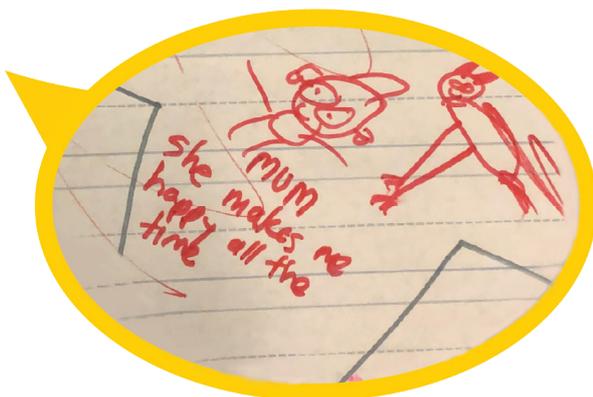
–Young parent, NSW

I was also told that public transport is often not available to get to the places that you need to go, like school and doctors' appointments.

Some of you told me that you don't have computers or internet at home to be able to do your schoolwork.

Family support

Lots of you told me that you feel safe with your families: with your mum, dad, grandparents, aunts, uncles, other family members, and carers and guardians.



Everyone's doing their best. How can we work together to provide the best care for kids.

–Parent, QLD

But many of you also told me that families need more help to keep kids safe and well at home and that it isn't always easy to get that help.

Some parents said that they don't feel like they can get help until they are in crisis. Other parents said that they were worried that if they asked for help, their children would be taken away.

Out-of-home care

Kids told me that they need more support to be safe and well in out-of-home care.

You told me that you didn't feel like your carers understand what you are going through. You said that you don't get enough help from your caseworkers, especially with your mental health.

Every kid should be looked after well – it should not be a matter of luck whether they get someone that cares for them. Most people who go through the care system have had nothing but negatives.

–Young person, TAS

Some kids are looked after by family members, such as their grandparents. Grandparent carers told me that they need more help, including to make sure their grandchildren who have disabilities have the help they need.

Kids who are leaving out-of-home care told me that they need ongoing support, for example with housing and money, and training and employment, to make sure they are okay.



Violence and safety

Many of you and parents told me you were all worried about violence at home and in your communities.

Sometimes the community itself is toxic, for example, if a lady is abused at home or experiencing some form of violence, community will tell her not to leave and bear with it and be strong. The community can come between families.

—Young person, SA

When you grow up with violence you don't know any better.

—Young person, NT

Parents can be really stubborn. They don't understand how to break the cycle or they don't want to. Growing up in that situation, I became a lot more numb to the situation because that was what my 'safe' was.

—Young person, NSW



You said that there were lots of reasons why it can be difficult to get help when there is violence in your home, including:



not feeling like
the police will
understand



worried about
children being
taken away

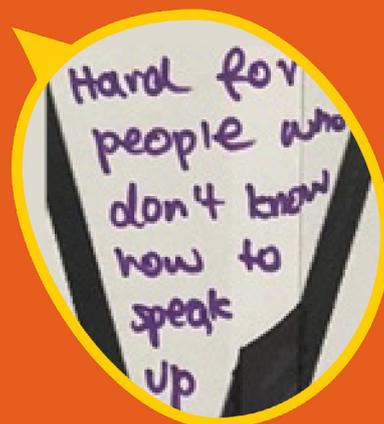


not having
another place
to live

Some kids and parents who have violence in their homes told me that the people who were supposed to help them, like police and child protection authorities, needed more training about how to help them.

Many of you have had to move far away from your family and friends so that you can be safe from violence.

Many of you told me that being safe from violence at home was a big problem for you.



Health and mental health

I heard that it's often hard to get the right kind of health care and mental health support when you need it.

You and parents said there are many barriers:



long wait
times to get
help



no services
nearby



too
expensive



too many
rules to
get in



staff who didn't
understand them



Schools and education

Some of you told me that you feel safe and looked after at school and said that your teacher was someone you could turn to for help with all kinds of problems.

But others said to me that school can be tough, with bullying and violence, and not being treated fairly. You said you don't feel safe at school.

Some of you also told me that you didn't feel your school was welcoming to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and their families.

You and parents told me that teachers need more support and training and that schools should be more welcoming of kids and their families.

Young people, including those of you in youth detention, told me that you need training so that you can get a job, but you also said that training is hard to get.

Parents talked about needing early childhood education and care so that they can get training and jobs, and also for the learning and development of their children.

I don't like school because I get teased every time I go there. The teachers don't really help. I have tried asking for help from a teacher. They sorted it out a little bit but then it started back up again. So, I just started fighting with the kids.

—Young person, VIC

We need somewhere for the people who want to hang out with their friends and not go back home.

—Young person, NT

Youth community activities

You told me that you like to have safe and local places that you can go to in your neighbourhood.

For example, you like drop-in youth centres where you can get help with lots of different things, like homework, mental health support, and free food. You also said that you like the kind and caring staff working at these places who help you with your worries, and you like hanging out with your friends there.

Lots of you told me that everyone should have somewhere to go after school where they can get any help they might need.

You also talked about the importance of sports clubs, homework centres and libraries in the local area.





What happens next

I have given my report to the Australian Government and asked them to use it in planning better services for the future. I will be looking at how your views are used and will let you know what happens.

What you need to know

If you feel unsafe or worried about anything, it is important to speak up and ask for help. You can talk to someone you trust – like a family member, friend, teacher or school counsellor.

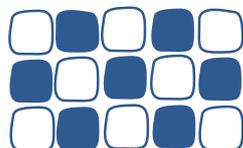
You can talk to **Kids Helpline:**

- on the phone on **1800 55 1800**
- online at **www.kidshelpline.com.au**.

You can also talk to **headspace:**

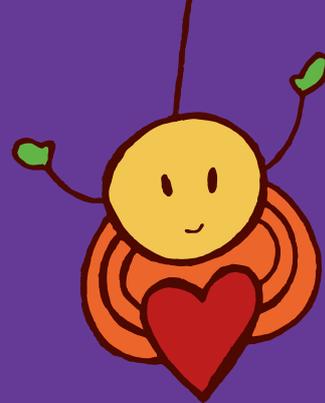
- face-to-face at a headspace centre
- online at **www.eheadspace.org.au**
- on the phone on **1800 650 890**

If you think you are in immediate danger, you can call the **police** by dialling **000**.



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