

Title: From consultation to influence: Promoting youth participation and advocacy through ARACY's Young and Wise program

Authors and affiliations:

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Co-presenter: Sarah Lake

Organisation: Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth (ARACY)

Presentation type: Program, policy or practice-based oral presentation (12 minutes + 3 minutes Q&A)

Conference theme: Health Education and Advocacy

Secondary theme (if applicable): Health Policy, Planning and Workforce

Background

Young people want a genuine say in the policies and programs that shape their wellbeing, yet their voices remain underrepresented in formal decision-making. The Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth (ARACY) established the Young and Wise program to change this by embedding youth participation, lived experience, and advocacy in national health reform. Supported by the Department of Health, Disability and Ageing, Young and Wise connects diverse young Australians directly with policymakers to promote intergenerational equity and youth-led advocacy.

Approach

Between March and June 2025, ARACY convened five national roundtables codesigned with the Department of Health, Disability and Ageing. Each session explored key youth priorities including social media and mental health, nutrition, alcohol and other drugs, sexual health and contraception, and cost-of-living pressures. More than sixty young people aged 14–24 contributed their lived

experience and co-authored recommendations for reform. The process combined participatory research, deliberative dialogue, and collaborative policy translation to strengthen both youth advocacy capability and government responsiveness.

Outcome

Young and Wise demonstrated that structured participation not only strengthens policy quality but also builds young people's confidence as advocates and civic contributors. Roundtable insights directly informed federal policy submissions, wellbeing frameworks, and government engagement approaches, while participants gained practical advocacy skills and a clearer understanding of how policy change occurs. The program continues to evolve, with lessons from Series 1 informing the design of Series 2, which expands youth leadership roles and deepens collaboration with government partners.

Innovation and significance

This program models how health advocacy can evolve from consultation to coleadership. Young and Wise provides a scalable framework for embedding youth participation and advocacy into systems design—showing that when young people are partners in shaping policy, health and wellbeing outcomes improve across generations. The presentation will also share how the model continues to adapt through Series 2, reflecting ARACY's commitment to ongoing learning and innovation.

Lead presenter biography (50 words)

Adam Valvasori is a seasoned advocacy and communications lead, driving innovative social and environmental justice campaigns. He's led major initiatives like Campaign for Australian Aid and Kids Off Nauru. A coalition builder, pasta enthusiast, and gnocchi master, Adam brings passion and creativity to every cause, while still dreaming of being Han Solo.

Co-presenter biography (50 words)

Sarah is a community engagement specialist and advocate with experience across youth justice, mental health, and digital governance. She's led initiatives centring lived experience, with roles at Beyond Blue and Amplify Australia. Based in

Melbourne, Sarah supports ARACY's Young and Wise program and believes real change starts with listening.