

# **Amplifying Youth Voices: Lessons Learned from Young Australians' Concerns and Recommendations During the COVID-19 Pandemic**

## **Authors:**

Orozco A<sup>1</sup>, Douglass C<sup>1,3</sup>, Pfeiffer L<sup>1,2</sup>, Eddy S<sup>1</sup>, Thomas A<sup>1</sup>, Wright C<sup>1,4,5</sup>, Lim MSC<sup>1,2,3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>The Burnet Institute, <sup>2</sup>University of Melbourne, <sup>3</sup>Monash University <sup>4</sup>Menzies School of Health Research, <sup>5</sup>Centre for Alcohol Policy Research, Melbourne Australia

## **Background:**

Young people's voices deserve to be heard and valued, especially during public health emergencies like COVID-19. This study aimed to explore young Australians' top concerns during the COVID-19 pandemic and identify their ideas for further support from government, educational institutions, and communities.

## **Methods:**

Between April and September 2020, we conducted an online cross-sectional survey of young people (aged 15–29 years) in Australia. Participants were recruited via a market research panel and social media advertising. We collected quantitative data on young people's top concerns and qualitative data on ideas for further support. A chi-squared test for independence was calculated to determine associations between the top three concerns and age, gender, state, and lockdown status. A deductive analysis was conducted on the open-text responses.

## **Results:**

Overall, 1978 participants completed the survey (49% identified as women, median age 24) and 1483 answered the open-ended question. Participants most reported concerns were mental health (35.3%), finances and money (34.9%), COVID-19 (34.8%), employment (28.2%), and climate change (21.9%). Younger women and participants in lockdown prioritised mental health, while older women expressed greater concern about COVID-19. Financial concerns were predominantly voiced by men, participants from Victoria and those not under lockdown. Open-ended responses revealed that young people wanted improved government public health messaging and communication, increased access to mental health support, opportunities for social connection, financial and job support, and opportunities for young people to be heard and acknowledged.

## **Conclusion:**

This study identified young people's concerns and recommendations for enhanced support, reflecting their desire for recognition and involvement in policymaking. These findings provide practical insights for addressing the ongoing challenges young people encounter in recovering from the pandemic. To further engage youth in policymaking and better prepare for future health emergencies, more qualitative and co-design research is necessary.

## **Disclosure of Interest Statement:**

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