

Regional NSW Youth Framework

Empowering youth in regional NSW



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Minister's foreword



Bronnie Taylor

Minister for Mental Health
Minister for Regional Youth
Minister for Women

A Regional NSW Youth Framework

Regional NSW is a spectacular place to live and one third of our state's youth are lucky to call it home. While there are countless benefits of growing up with the wide country horizons, there are also unique challenges.

The NSW Government has a strong track record of delivering for our country and coastal communities. Under the leadership of the Deputy Premier, the creation of the Regional Youth portfolio now places young people who live outside the big metropolitan centres of NSW at the centre of future decisions on regional service delivery.

I am very proud to be the first Minister for Regional Youth. I live in and raised my daughters in regional NSW and understand the need to provide quality services and resources so young people can stay in their home towns.

Currently, regional areas are dealing with serious challenges such as drought and bushfires, unemployment, mental health concerns and isolation. While there are innovative and effective approaches to service delivery in NSW, more needs to be done to ensure there is equitable coverage across the State.

Our mission is to make sure regional NSW has a strong future and remains a place that young people can live, learn, work and thrive.

Through this framework, the NSW Government recognises that the success of regional young people is central to the vitality and growth of regional communities and economies. The framework defines the priorities and actions to pave a pathway to success for young people.

The framework recognises the unique challenges and leverages the incredible opportunities young people in regional areas have so we can develop a stronger, fairer and more inclusive society.

The framework has been built on feedback from young people collected in late 2018, a broad range of agencies, and a review of services in regional NSW.

A cross-government steering committee of agencies that work with young people, or represent the voice of young people, has overseen the development of this work.

Together, we can build a sustainable and vibrant regional NSW that enables our young people to thrive at home.

Why focus on regional youth?

It is harder to be a young person in regional NSW. There are fewer training and employment opportunities, support and health services, transport options, and things to do.

Sadly, young people in our regions experience higher rates of suicide and greater battles with alcohol and illicit drugs. Youth unemployment rates in regional NSW remain high and many young people are forced to leave their communities in search of work or the chance to upskill.

The impact this is having on our regional communities is immense, with country and coastal towns losing the very people needed to sustain them.

In addition, our years as an adolescent and young adult are a very important time in a person's life where there is enormous physical, emotional, and mental change. We are heavily influenced by family and community support and the social, recreational and educational opportunities available.

The NSW Government recognises that a dedicated effort is required to ensure there is more support for young people outside of the city so they have the best chance to live, work and thrive in regional NSW.

To make sure regional young people reach their full potential, gaps and opportunities have been identified and strategies developed to create the Regional Youth Framework (the Framework) and Action Plan.

This is a first for the NSW Government. The framework outlines a whole of Government approach to addressing the needs of regional young people. It has been informed by the lessons of similar strategies that have been developed across Australia¹ as well as feedback from thousands of children and young people from regional NSW.

Investing in our regional towns and cities will create more employment, better education options, greater connectivity, and more social activities and recreation opportunities for young people. This will result in fewer young people feeling they have to move away to access opportunities offered to their metropolitan counterparts, instead staying in the communities they love.

1. These include: the NSW for Young People Report, Queensland Youth Strategy, South Australian Youth Strategy, VicHealth - Young people health and wellbeing strategy, NSW Refugee Youth Police, Mission Australia Youth Survey

Working towards the vision for regional youth

Localisation

A statewide approach will not create change for regional NSW. We will action this framework through local solutions informed by local communities and their priorities.

Coordination and collaboration

All levels of government and service providers need to work collaboratively within their local networks to deliver the effective services and programs.

Workforce for the future

The greatest asset in regional NSW is the people, especially young people. Investing in attracting and retaining a strong, capable and committed workforce is critical to this framework.

Our vision is for all regional young people to have opportunities for meaningful work, accessible health care and education; and to feel part of vibrant and inclusive communities.

Regional NSW is a dynamic mix of agricultural, energy and resources industries and strong manufacturing, tourism and service sectors; making it the largest and most diverse regional economy in Australia.

The NSW Government recognises the success of regional young people is central to the growth and vitality of regional communities and economies, which aligns with the goals of the 20-Year Economic Vision for Regional NSW. Until now, services for regional youth have been working in isolation.

The framework and action plan will work across sectors to define the priorities needed to pave the way to success for young people and ensure no one in regional NSW has to choose between access to basic services and where they live and work.

Each regional community has a different economy, geography and make up of people. This means that we need to work together, in partnership with other agencies and departments, local governments, regional organisations and local community groups and networks to deliver tailored solutions.

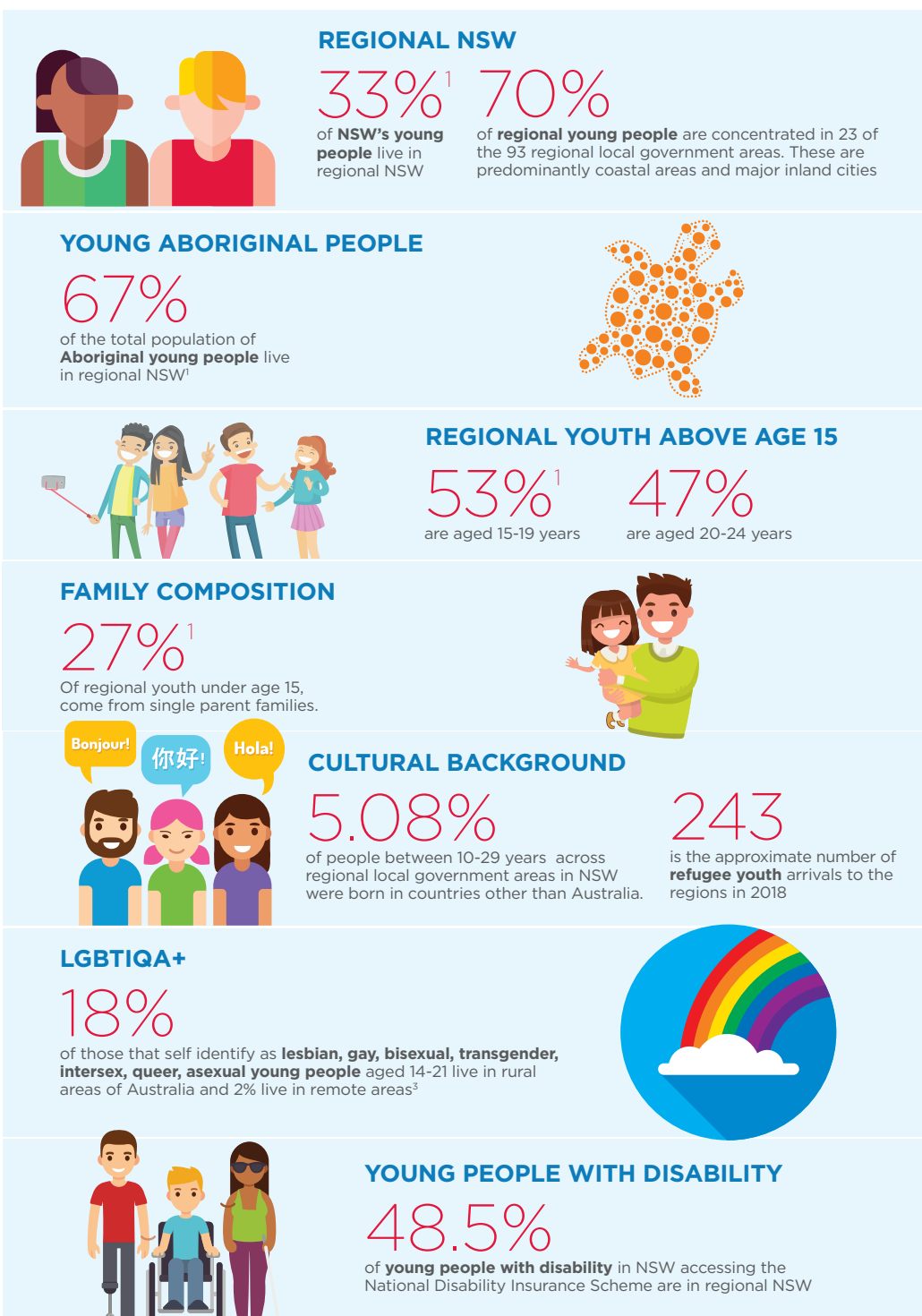
Young people must have a voice in this process. The inaugural Regional Youth Taskforce (the Taskforce) has given young people from regional NSW a direct line to government. The Taskforce has 18 young people aged 12 to 24 from across regional NSW who are advising the Minister for Regional Youth. They have contributed to the development of the framework.

This framework prioritises young people in regional NSW and makes sure they are involved in decision-making and have more opportunities to help shape their future.



Who are NSW regional youth?

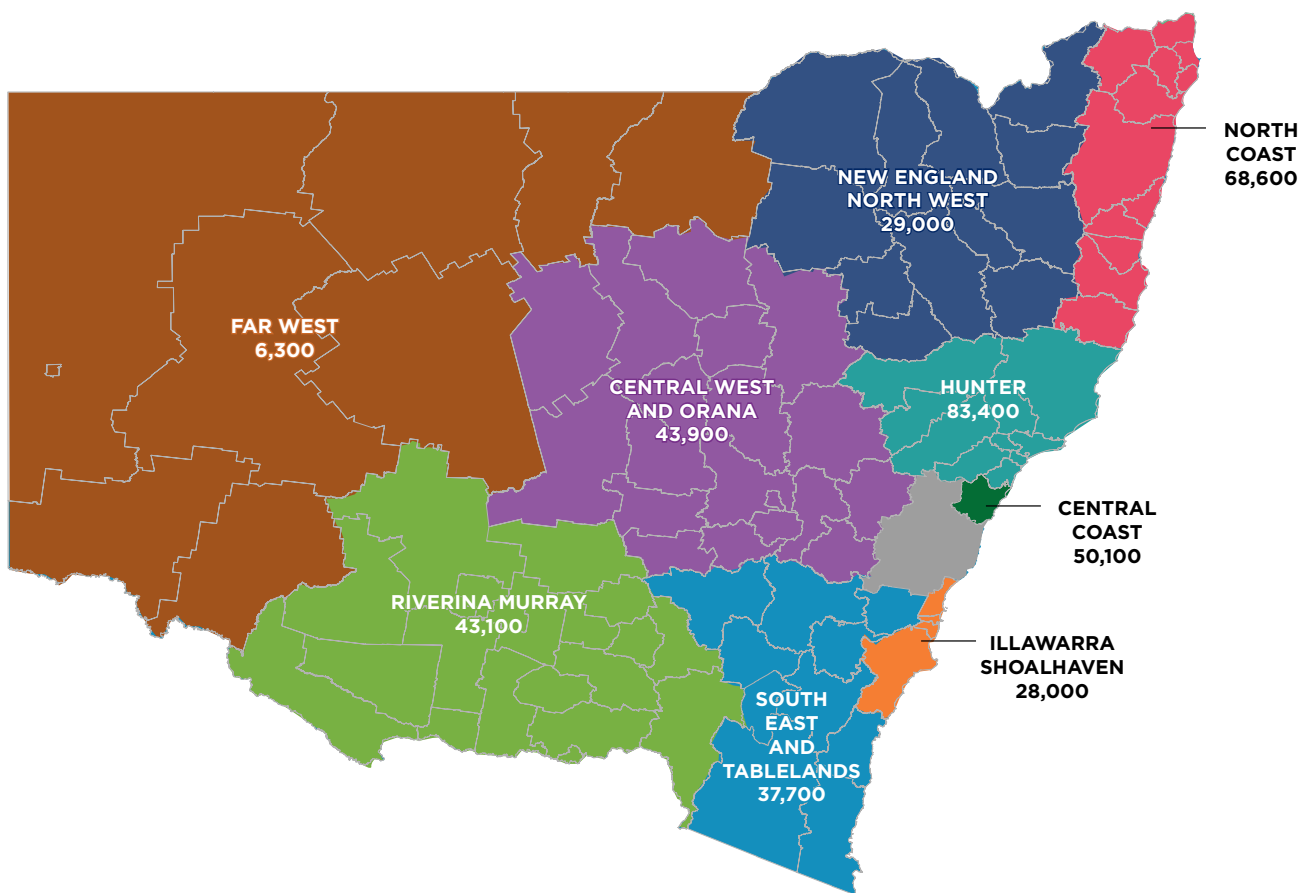
Under this framework, regional youth are aged between 12 and 24 years, living anywhere outside of the Greater Sydney metropolitan area, Newcastle and Wollongong.



1. 2016 Census – Australian Bureau of Statistics; 2. 2016 ABS Census data; 3. LGBTI (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex, Queer, Asexual) National Health Alliance

Where are NSW regional youth?

NSW has an estimated regional population of 2,024,195 (excluding the populations of Greater Sydney, Newcastle and Wollongong). Outside Greater Sydney, there are nine regions. The largest number of young people is in the Hunter with 83,400 young people, followed by the North Coast (68,600), Central Coast (50,100) and then Central West and Orana (43,900).



What young people told us

The NSW Advocate for Children and Young People (ACYP) is an independent statutory office that was established under the *Advocate for Children and Young People Act 2014*.

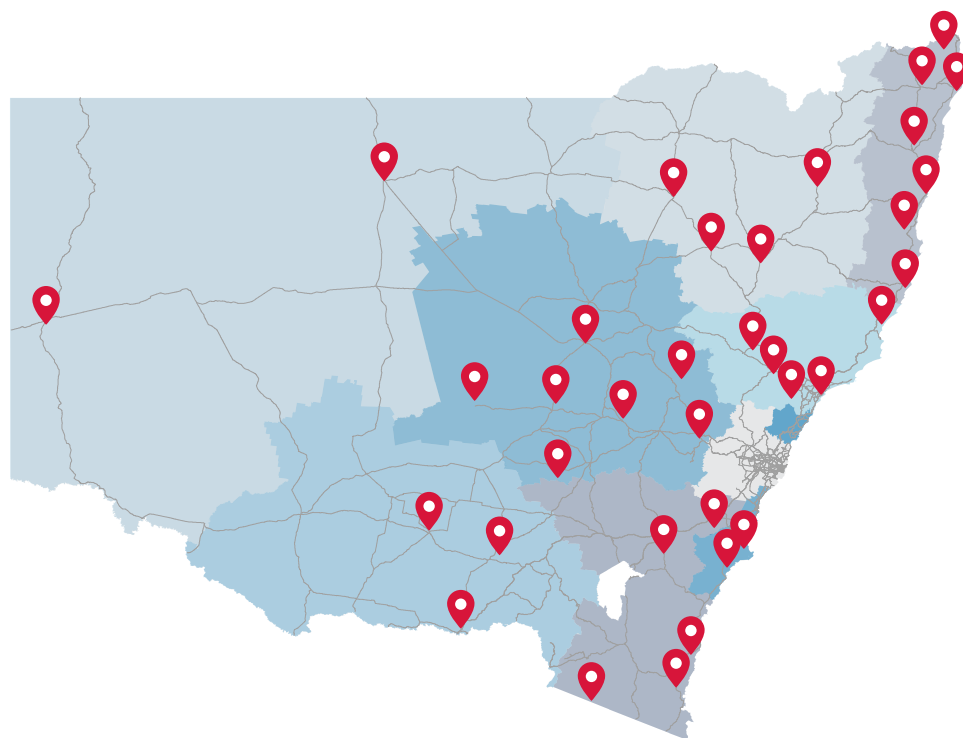
The ACYP has consulted and received feedback from more than 4,000 young people throughout regional NSW. These consultations informed more than 40 recommendations, encompassing jobs and training, education, services, mental health, drugs and alcohol, activities and programs, voice, violence against children, and transport.

To help inform the development of the framework, the ACYP consulted over 700 additional students across 26 regional locations. The NSW Government also commissioned Ipsos to conduct 48 focused interviews in nine locations, engaging over 180 parents, employers, youth workers and young people.

A female aged 12-14 from Dubbo told us,

“I care about the community that I live in and want to do anything I can to make a difference.

I think that one of the most impacting things I could do is to educate and inform others not from this region [as to the challenges and issues that affect youth in this area every day].”



Locations of research and consultations

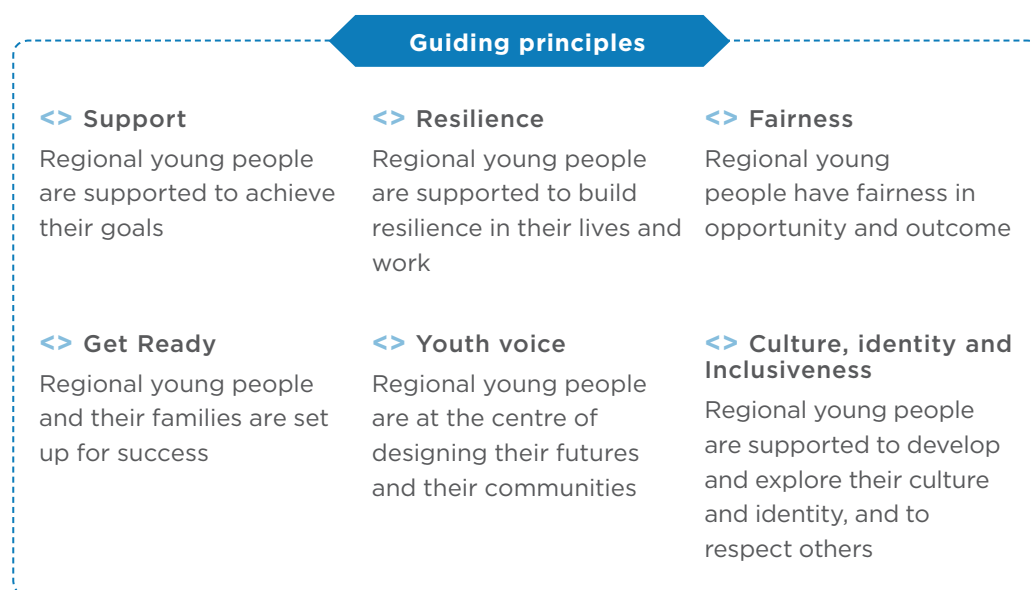
What young people told us (continued)

When young people in regional NSW told us their priorities, four common themes emerged as things they wanted. These themes related to jobs and pathways to employment, physical and mental health, digital and physical connection and, things to do and places to go. Those themes have become the following four pillars of this Framework:



Each pillar is vital to addressing the needs of young people in regional NSW and receives specific focus in this framework. In practice, the pillars are interconnected and work together to achieve our vision of young people learning, working and thriving in regional NSW.

By focusing on these four pillars, we aim to achieve the below principles for young people in regional areas:



Partnerships: working together for regional youth

To achieve the outcomes outlined in this framework, it is important to work with the community, and continually include the voices of young people throughout development and implementation. We recognise that support for young people needs to be tailored to the community in which they live, and that service providers should, in turn, work with young people to tailor their support to the individual and their family.

The framework acknowledges the organisations that currently support and help our young people in regional NSW and provides an opportunity to raise awareness of their important work. By drawing attention to existing support and building on the networks already in place we can also develop any opportunities we identify along the way.

The strength of using a partnership model means young people can attain the skills they need from specialist organisations and at the same time get the assistance they need to grow and build resilience.

The framework opens the doors for the NSW Government to work with local communities. This strengthens our support for young people, creates new pathways for them to build their work and life skills, and provides support for those who need it.

Current NSW programs and services

As at March 2020, the NSW Government has a range of initiatives underway to support young people in regional NSW including:

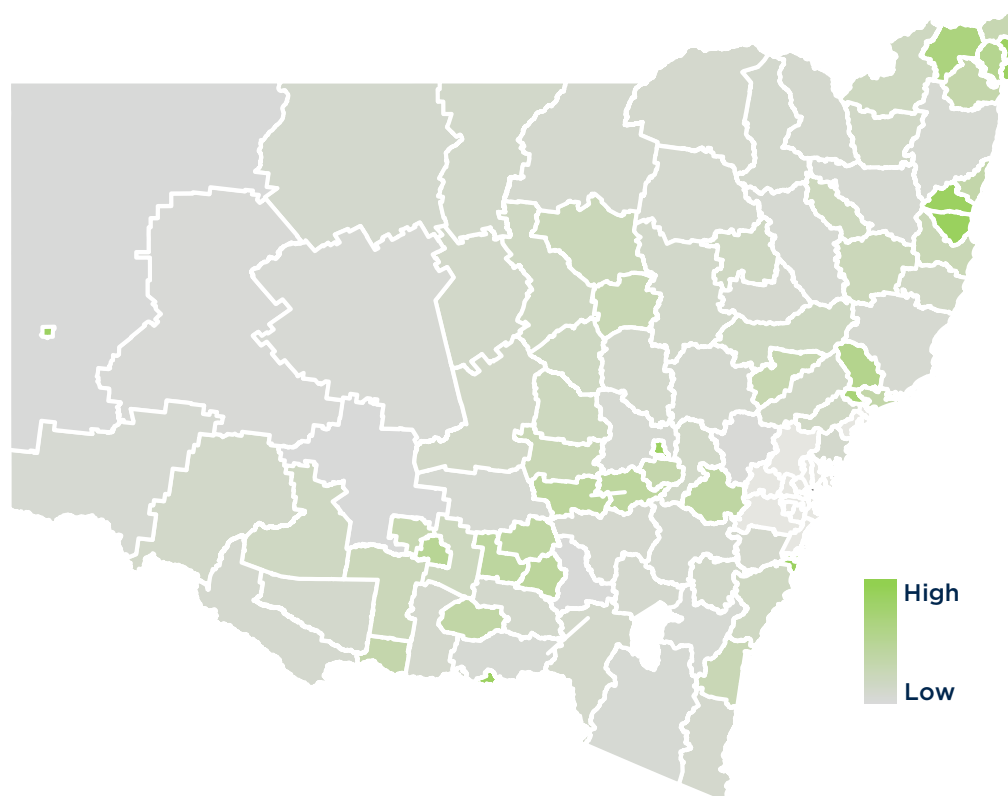
- \$50 million from the Stronger Country Communities Fund for youth programs and infrastructure
- \$61.7 million for eight additional Connected Learning Centres to help young people in regional areas attend TAFE
- \$8 million for five new Country Universities Centres, in locations to be determined, to reduce geographical barriers to attending university. This will supplement an existing \$8 million grant that funds Centres in Grafton, the Western Riverina (Griffith and Leeton), the North West (Narrabri and Moree), Goulburn and Broken Hill
- 100,000 fee-free apprenticeships to further training
- Additional funding for the Wellbeing Health In-Reach Nurse Coordinators to provide support and referral for young people in schools in three new regional locations of Deniliquin, Lithgow and Murwillumbah
- \$34 million in capital expenditure over two years to establish a pilot program for two senior secondary vocational schools, including one on the North Coast to support young people to build skills and get into a trade.
- Regional Industry Education Partnerships to coordinate employment opportunities between industry and schools
- \$88 million for additional school counsellors, psychologists and student support officers in high schools across NSW
- \$87 million for the *Suicide Prevention Framework*, where young people and regionally-based people are priority groups
- \$1.7 billion has been committed to grow local economies outside of Sydney, Newcastle and Wollongong through the Regional Growth Fund
- \$4.2 billion has been committed through the Snowy Hydro Legacy Fund for transformative infrastructure in projects in digital connectivity, water security, investment attraction, and rail and road transport
- \$31.96 million for programs such as the Homeless Youth Assistance Program, the Premier's Youth Initiative and Rent Choice Youth, to support regional youth at risk of experiencing homelessness.

Mapping of regional youth services

We have mapped regional youth services to provide a snapshot of youth programs and services for the framework. In regional NSW, there are more than 500 organisations providing youth-specific services. Young people and their families also have access to mainstream government services (not included in this map.)

However, the service intensity map highlights the scarcity of youth-related services in regional NSW.²

The service intensity accounts for geographic size and youth population within each local government area. Even with these factors, the map highlights the scarcity of services, which increases the more remote the local government area. Coastal areas with high youth populations show significant variation in youth-specific services. However, this may indicate a heavier reliance on and preference for mainstream services over youth-specific ones in areas with large regional hubs, rather than a greater need.



Service intensity by local government area

2. Nous Group 2019, *Mapping of Regional Youth Services Report*

1. Work ready

The pillars of the framework

Work ready: Prepared for regional jobs of the future

Objective

Young people have the opportunity to learn, work and achieve in regional NSW.

Reason for focus

We spoke to thousands of young people who raised getting the skills they need to secure a local job as a top priority.

Young people leave regional NSW to seek a wider variety of educational opportunities and career prospects. Poor availability and cost of public and private transport can be a barrier to gaining work experience that builds skills and secures meaningful work. Navigating the education and training options can be challenging when there is limited information on local opportunities. We need new approaches to address these barriers, particularly for those young people who are at risk of disengaging from education and employment.

Consultation has shown there is often a mismatch between the needs and opportunities of local industries with available training and career advice. Investing in the creation of local opportunities and localised, industry-relevant skills training will support and drive economic prosperity in regional NSW for young people. For young Aboriginal people, having local career options is particularly important to ensure that they remain connected to their community and land.

Although job market expectations are changing, more than half a million young people in NSW are already in the workforce. Regardless of how they are employed, or in which industry, young workers need extra support to ensure they can transition into the workforce and take advantage of the job opportunities in their area.

As regional industries such as agriculture or mining automate and digitise, opportunities for regional young people to upskill to take advantage of these regional opportunities should be prioritised.

“Young people who study at university in regions are more likely to stay, work and live in the regions.”

– Houghton K., 2019, *The Future of Regional Jobs*, The Regional Australia Institute, Canberra.

One young person, a male aged 21-24 years from Beelbangera, told us *“The job opportunities are not there compared to the urban areas, I feel we don’t have the medical or educational resources to keep the younger generations in regional NSW.”*

1. Work ready

TAFE NSW Connected Learning Centres provide students across regional NSW with access to world-class, learning opportunities. They utilise digitally enabled technologies to offer a wider range of choices, more accessible training, and flexible learning with better access to teachers and support services.

Key priorities

Priority	What we can do	Principle
1.1 Young people have better access to great education and training opportunities	Look for opportunities to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build on and increase the variety and range of school and post-school training opportunities • Increase training and education opportunities for young people through local delivery • Explore transport solutions to get young people to places they can train and work 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support • Fairness
1.2 Young people have improved skills and knowledge to navigate the pathways into careers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with local industries to increase the number of quality work experience opportunities for young people in regional areas • Work with young people to design and communicate relevant, future-focused career advice • Explore opportunities to better prepare young people to be work-ready and have life skills, including creative and critical thinking • Explore alternative pathways for creative skills development such as participating in digital screen, film and music making 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support • Fairness • Get ready
1.3 Young people have clearer options to take them from school to training, work and further education opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to explore partnerships between schools, businesses and local industries to create local career paths for young people • Continue to work with businesses to help them to train and invest in young people • Contact employers and educational institutions to help design and deliver training future employees will need 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support • Fairness
1.4 Disadvantaged, or at-risk young people are better supported to learn and achieve	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create ways to improve literacy, numeracy skills and language proficiency, and overcome other barriers to employment • Explore flexible pathways into careers through education and training • Encourage industry mentoring opportunities and programs to help young people plan for their futures and reach their goals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support • Resilience • Fairness • Get Ready

1. Work ready

Key priorities

Priority	What we can do	Principle
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Explore options for continued education for young people who have been disadvantaged by successive suspensions or the stigma of contact with the youth justice system Support organisations that offer creative skills development that engage at-risk young people and offer new pathways 	
1.5 Young people have increased understanding of the workforce	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Work with educational institutions to design and deliver training on rental rights, superannuation and banking systems; payment of bills; résumé writing and interviewing techniques; and maintaining respectful relationships Improve young people's access to information about the workplace to ensure they are not taken advantage of in their first years of professional employment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Get ready Resilience Fairness

Work ready example: Infrastructure Skills Legacy Program—Wagga Wagga Health Service Redevelopment Stage 3

The Infrastructure Skills Legacy Program (ISLP) capitalises on the NSW Government investment in government infrastructure by increasing the number of skilled construction workers. The program sets skill development and diversity targets for major government infrastructure projects. For young people under 25 years the participation target is eight per cent of the workforce.

To date, some 7,500 young people have been employed on 14 ISLP designated government infrastructure projects, representing 16 per cent of the total workforce. Identified ISLP projects include a pre-apprenticeship program to enable young people to gain the skills they need to access apprenticeship opportunities on infrastructure projects.

For the ISLP Wagga Wagga Health Service Redevelopment Stage 3 initiative, the contractor, training provider and Training Services NSW co-designed a pre-apprenticeship training program tailored to the specific needs of the project and to maximise employment outcomes for participants.

All 12 participants successfully completed this program, with three transitioning into construction apprenticeships, six continuing in construction jobs, and three participants actively seeking employment in other industries.

2. Wellbeing

The pillars of the framework

Wellbeing: Mentally and physically healthy

Objective

Young people are mentally and physically healthy, safe and thrive in their communities.

Reason a focus

We spoke to thousands of young people who raised having access to mental health services, particularly for mental illness and drug and alcohol abuse, as a top priority.

For our young people to thrive, we need to build the capacity of our communities to nurture them to be healthy, happy and safe. This means increasing our focus on physical and mental wellbeing to build resilient adults. Young people said they need better support for this.

Regional communities and their young people face unique challenges such as social and physical isolation. We know remoteness increases disadvantage. Drought has also had devastating effects on the wellbeing of communities, young people and their families.

For young people in regional NSW, getting help for mental and physical health or for alcohol and drug abuse can be hard. There may be high costs, long distances, inconsistent access to services and expertise, and in some cases, stigma around seeking help.

Young people need support at crucial transition points as they explore their independence, build relationships, and start making significant life decisions. They need to be able to access this support and advice independently, in a safe and confidential manner as they navigate personal challenges and build resilience to face adversity.

Aboriginal, LGBTIQ+, young people from a refugee background, culturally and linguistically diverse young people, young carers, young people with a disability, and vulnerable and disadvantaged young people have specific service and accessibility needs. Using a whole-of-community approach, we need to ensure that services are accessible, flexible, and appropriately tailored to cultural and personal needs. This includes compassionate and trauma-informed service responses for those who have experienced violence or abuse in any form.

The Forbes Wellness Hub brings together community and health services in one place at Forbes High School to support students and their families. The Hub provides free and confidential services for a wide range of concerns, and hosts the school counsellor, youth worker and Aboriginal Education Officers.

A female aged 21-24 from Warialda told us
“The types of support most needed are those surrounding tailored social and emotional wellbeing support networks as well as mentoring networks that allow young people to discover and build careers that can be implemented in the small hometowns that they love.”

2. Wellbeing

What you told us:
“Regional youth are greatly impacted by drug and alcohol abuse. This issue is important as drugs and alcohol can shape a person’s future and youth need to be educated more about how drugs and alcohol will have such a big impact on them and others.”

– Female, 12-14 years from Tamworth

Refugee Youth Voice: Postcards to the Premier states that mental health support needs to be more targeted. Mental health services need to be offered across multiple sites and offer complex trauma care. Young people from a refugee background sometimes hide their problems and take time to build trust.

Key priorities

Priority	What we can do	Principle
2.1 Young people and their families are supported to improve wellbeing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Look for ways to help young people to build resilience Provide services to families and communities to build their skills to support young people who need help Tailor support for young people from a refugee background, young people who identify as LGBTIQ+, Aboriginal youth, young people with a disability, young carers and vulnerable and disadvantaged groups Support services that provide nutritional advice and food preparation skills Support young people leaving out of home care who are at risk of experiencing homelessness with a combination of personal advice, education and employment mentoring, transitional support and accommodation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Resilience Fairness Get ready Culture, identity and inclusiveness
2.2 Increasing young people’s understanding of their health needs to help navigate the health system	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improve health education and awareness of health issues Look for opportunities to reduce stigma so young people feel comfortable asking for help Continue to raise awareness of youth services for mental health, sexual health, drug and alcohol abuse. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Resilience Fairness Get ready
2.3 Young people have access to culturally and youth-appropriate services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Look for opportunities to better support those youth at risk of suicide and their families Continue to improve culturally appropriate and inclusive practice for services working with Aboriginal, Culturally and Linguistically Diverse, and LGBTIQ+ young people Help mainstream services increase their capacity to deliver more flexible and youth-appropriate services Look for ways to better connect young people from a refugee background or have experienced other significant trauma to specialised care Identify opportunities for Aboriginal young people to have a say in government decision making Support organisations offering arts and screen projects that give young people a voice and support health outcomes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Resilience Fairness Get ready Culture, identity and inclusiveness

2. Wellbeing

Key priorities

Priority	What we can do	Principle
2.4 Increasing the number of young people who can get help, wherever and however they choose to seek it	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coordinate wraparound services with 'one-stop shops' that young people can access in person or online • Collaborate with service providers to improve the referral processes to achieve a 'no wrong door' approach for young people seeking help • Provide services that recognise young people who experience and/or use sexual, domestic and family violence • Increase referral pathways to local youth programs and services • Provide more safe and affordable accommodation for young people who are homeless and disadvantaged • Provide youth-specific treatment and support options for alcohol and other drug use and mental health conditions • Provide young people with time limited private rental assistance in the form of a rental subsidy for up to three years, with integrated support to find study and job opportunities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resilience • Fairness • Get ready

Wellbeing example: Wellbeing and Health In-reach Nurse Coordinators

The Wellbeing and Health In-reach Nurse (WHIN) Coordinator model is a collaborative initiative between the Ministry of Health and the NSW Department of Education that establishes a nurse position in Local Health Districts to work with primary and secondary schools in regional and rural NSW. The aim of the WHIN Coordinator is to identify and triage the health needs of vulnerable school students and their families and coordinate appropriate assessments and referral to services.

There have been three WHIN Coordinator sites in Young, Tumut and Cooma since 2018. These sites are participating in an independent evaluation to be completed by July 2020.

The NSW Government made an election commitment of \$4.2 million from 2019-20 to 2022-23 to maintain the WHIN Coordinator sites in Young, Tumut and Cooma and establish three new sites in Deniliquin, Murwillumbah and Lithgow.

3. Connectivity

The pillars of the framework

Connectivity: Able to access services and opportunities easily

Objective

Young people have transport and digital connectivity solutions to access training, work, services and recreational activities.

Reason for focus

We spoke to thousands of young people who raised access to public transport and the need for improved digital connectivity as their top issues.

The distances across regional NSW mean it can be hard for a young person to get around. With fewer public transport options and greater distances, young people without a driver's licence and a good internet connection can be isolated and miss out on opportunities easily accessible to young people in the cities.

Connectivity is empowering. Transport provides independence and access to services, while innovative digital solutions empower young people to connect and participate.

Transport

Driving is a milestone in a young person's life; it is a key point of transition from dependence to independence. Getting a licence in regional NSW not only means access to the road, it is also an important step towards adulthood, and for some people a requirement to get a job.

Where young people are unable to travel to access services and opportunities, innovative service delivery such as the Mobile Service NSW Centres and approaches such as the TAFE Connected Learning Centres can help bridge the distances for young people.

Digital connectivity

Improving digital connectivity will bring services, study and work opportunities to young people. Investing in the digital skills and capability of young people in regional NSW will future-proof their employability, education and networks.

Easy access to digital infrastructure and training will be important with the increasing automation of regional industries and the changing way young people interact with the world. Delivering digital connectivity infrastructure is a key priority of the Snowy Hydro Legacy Fund, including regional digital connectivity projects and removing mobile blackspots.

One young male aged 15-17 from Moruya said,

“For a young person without their licence or access to personal transport only one regular bus service is offered to travel between towns and it is both limited in availability (doesn't run on Sundays or public holidays) and time consuming (having to go via every stop as there is only one regular route). In instances such as sports training, attending community events and other everyday activities without efficient public transport offered by friends or family it is difficult to attend.”

The Driver Licensing Access Program helps to remove barriers through support such as access to a vehicle, licencing enrolment support, and learner driver mentoring and supervision.

3. Connectivity

The *NSW Digital Government Strategy* adopts a digital by default approach to increase the reach of services by improving access.

Key priorities

Priority	What we can do	Principles
3.1 Young people have increased access to safe private transport	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Find ways to help young people get their driver's licence and learner driver hours Work with young people to improve driver safety 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support Fairness
3.2 Young people have increased access to safe public transport to the places they need to go	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support and create innovative and flexible transport options to get young people to training, work and recreation at the right time and at more hours of the day 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support Fairness Youth voice
3.3 Young people are able to access services without travelling long distances	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Find ways to deliver co-located services to young people Increase options for the Service NSW mobile and digital services to reach young people Explore options for a service that helps young people navigate the service system and gives advice and information about services available for youth in their area 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support Fairness
3.4 Young people have the skills to navigate and use information and systems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improve the computer skills of young people Work with young people to communicate information and services so they make sense to young people Find ways to empower and train young people to design and create digital content in a meaningful way 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support Fairness Get ready Youth voice

Connectivity example: Second Life project – Nambucca youth engagement and leadership

In the Nambucca Valley, through the Second Life project, a bus service enables local young people who are disengaged or have no access to transport to attend TAFE programs. The bus picks young people up from their homes and takes them to TAFE.

The bus started operations on 1 April 2019. As of 13 June 2019, the 'Yilaami' bus had transported over 550 students, travelled over 3,000 km and completed over 57 trips that these students could not have made as a group without it. As a result, students were able to engage in the following leadership, education and mentoring programs:

- Three day SAFE Driver program
- Learn to Work in Manufacturing
- Various excursions to workplaces or community activities such as welding courses in Coffs Harbour, Taste of Trade excursions to work places, and Fire and Rescue training
- Regular attendance at the Coffs Harbour Education Campus twice a week
- Community project days.

4. Community

The pillars of the framework

Community: Connected to and valued by their community

Objective

Young people are given the opportunities to explore their creativity, collaborate with others in teams, develop a sense of achievement and feel socially and culturally connected to, and included in, their communities and environment.

Reason for focus

We spoke to thousands of young people who raised the lack of activity in their community, as well as weather impacts (such as the current drought) as major priorities.

Communities provide the safe, inclusive and connected fabric of a young person's life by providing vibrant arts, cultural and recreational opportunities that offer alternative pathways to develop skills.

Belonging to and participating in the community takes on greater significance in regional NSW, given smaller populations and close social and family networks. A key concern for many young people living in regional areas is the lack of things to do — whether it be recreational, arts or cultural activities for their age group.

Availability and frequency of creative arts, social and recreational activities are key access issues for regional young people, which is challenging in smaller towns.

Regional communities provide the perfect environment to develop collaborative relationships between, schools, relevant agencies and local government to enhance youth and community strengths.

Regional NSW should be a place where young people can explore their creativity and develop networks and skills to support them in other areas of life.

A young female aged
12-14 from Banora
Point told us,

“Lack of things to do. It is perceived in many areas that there is a lack of activities for youth. I, myself, have wondered: ‘Just WHAT could I have taken part in, in my community?’, for there isn’t truly a lot that comes to mind.”

4. Community

Funded under the Youth Opportunities grant program in 2018, Rhymes from the East involved young women from Byron Shire attending a creative retreat to create a dynamic hip-hop song and music video with an empowering message.

Create in NSW: The NSW Arts and Cultural Policy Framework recognises the positive impact of art making and culture for young people and the importance of arts and cultural experiences being accessible to all communities based in regional NSW.

Key priorities

Priority	What we will do	Principles
4.1 Young people are provided the opportunity to shape their communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Encourage and support established local organisations to include young people in an age-appropriate manner Create opportunities for youth to connect to communities by participating in creative arts activities, local youth forums and groups Support connections with organisations that foster youth engagement, leadership and confidence building Support the development of accessible, appropriate and rewarding volunteering opportunities for young people in regional and rural communities Support frontline workers in effective methods for encouraging young people's participation to ensure youth voices are heard in decision making that affects them 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support Fairness Youth voice Culture, identity and inclusiveness
4.2 Young people have increased access to a variety of youth-appropriate activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strengthen community partnerships for youth-oriented activities Engage communities to have a variety of youth-appropriate arts, screen, culture, recreation and sporting activities delivered in times and locations that match youth demand 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support Fairness Youth voice Culture, identity and inclusiveness
4.3 Young people feel safe in, connected to, and valued by their communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide support and information to young people experiencing discrimination Foster supportive communities that celebrate their diversity and culture and promote inclusion Create more opportunities for young people to have fun and socialise with their peers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support Resilience Fairness Youth voice Culture, identity and inclusiveness

4. Community

Community example: Active Kids program and Creative Kids program

The Active Kids program, launched in 2018, aims to increase participation of school-enrolled children in sport and physical activity by providing parents with vouchers to help cover the cost of registration and membership fees.

Under the Active Kids program, two \$100 Active Kids vouchers are available annually for each school-enrolled child (between 4 – 18 years). The program plays a crucial role in encouraging a physical and healthy lifestyle as well as social participation.

In Boggabilla township and Toomelah Aboriginal Community, neighbouring communities located in the Moree Plains Shire, there is limited access to physical activity options. Participation and travel costs also impact on the ability of children within these communities to get involved in sport and activities. Through a direct intervention strategy undertaken by the NSW Office of Sport, Active Kids team, and local schools, approximately 240 Active Kids vouchers were created for those towns. In partnership with NSW Rugby League, and the Goondiwindi PCYC, cricket and athletics clubs those kids now have the means to access their favourite sport and physical activities.

The Creative Kids program launched in 2019, supports a broad range of activities and practices and parents and guardians will be able to apply for new \$100 vouchers for 2020. The program acknowledges the importance of creative practice for kids. Creative kids develop curious, courageous minds that can confidently problem solve, and express themselves.

For example, at the Bank Art Museum (BAMM) Moree, the Director reported that the Creative Kids voucher has been great not only for BAMM but for the town. The children coming to BAMM regularly creates a real sense of community. This is especially needed at present with local families and businesses struggling with the drought. They have increased the outreach program “ART ON TRACK” where they visit Moree East Public School once a week and the local Moree Preschool several times a term. Creative Kids has been a great incentive and the children continue to come back once their voucher has been used.

Next steps: the action plan

With input from local and regional consultation, we have developed an action plan to implement the framework so that initiatives have specific and tangible outcomes.

A partnership approach will ensure local and regional ownership of initiatives. Partners will include young people, communities, community groups and organisations, local government, service providers, non-government organisations, other NSW agencies and the Australian Government.

The action plan includes both state-wide and local actions, with a strong emphasis on consultation with young people during development. Actions will address each priority, ensuring we are working with young people to design evidence-based and innovative solutions. The action plan will be monitored, and its outcomes reported on and fed back into the plan to ensure we are on track to success and able to adapt where needed.

Regional Youth Taskforce

The Regional Youth Taskforce will ensure that a youth voice is present in the action plan.

The taskforce is made up of 18 regional young people aged between 12 and 24, who are chosen to be representative of their region. There are two members from each of the nine regions of NSW (see NSW map page 6) and they advise the Minister for Regional Youth on challenges faced by young people in their region and give feedback on state-wide actions.

The application process for Taskforce members included identification of three issues within their region. The issues identified by taskforce applicants were consistent with the information gathered from young people in earlier consultations.

We recorded the responses from all taskforce applicants. Graphs at Appendix C show the issues raised under the headings of Work ready, Wellbeing, Connectivity and Community.

Local network

The Office for Regional Youth has regionally based staff working on the coordination of whole-of-government and whole-of-community approaches to regional youth issues. The local officers work across the private, non-government and government sectors to improve opportunities for local young people.

There are also existing Local Youth Networks in these regions. The Office for Regional Youth staff will continue to build relationships with these networks to ensure continual, effective consultation at the local level to support and complement the representative role of the Regional Youth Taskforce.

Stronger Country Communities Fund

In June 2019, the NSW Government launched the Stronger Country Communities Fund Round 3, with \$50 million committed to regional youth programs and infrastructure that fit within the four pillars outlined in the framework. Councils are working with local communities to identify projects for funding.

Appendix A: Current actions

Focus Area	Initiatives underway	Relevant Strategies
Work ready	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Illawarra Youth Employment Strategy (Illawarra YES) • Nambucca Valley Employability Skills Program • Nambucca Valley Leadership Mentoring Program • Opportunity Hubs in Dubbo, Tamworth and Upper Hunter • Regional Industry Education Partnerships • Smart Skilled & Hired • Links to Learning • Sticking Together • Rural Regional Enterprise Scholarships Program • Country University Centres • Connected Learning Centres • North Coast Vocational Senior School • Youth Employment Innovation Challenge 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 20-Year Economic Vision for Regional NSW • Regional Development Framework • <i>OCHRE Plan</i>: NSW Government Plan for Aboriginal Affairs
Wellbeing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wellbeing Health In-reach Nurse in Tumut, Cooma and Young • Wellbeing Hubs in Nowra and Young • Gatekeeper training • Youth Aware of Mental Health • LifeSpan • Youth Community Living Support Service • \$24 million Drug Package for young people • Youth Action Meetings • UNICEF Youth Drought Summit • Drought Stimulus Package • Youth Health Forum • NSW Young Carers project 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NSW Suicide Prevention Framework • NSW Youth Health Framework 2017-24 • NSW Department of Education Disability Strategy • Disability Inclusion Plan • NSW Rural Health Plan • NSW Health Alcohol and Other Drugs Strategy • NSW Mental Health Commission <i>Living Well</i> Report • A Strategic Plan for Mental Health 2014-24 • NSW Carers Strategy
Connectivity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Our Local • SecondLife • Safer Drivers Course • Community Transport Program 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 20-Year Economic Vision for Regional NSW • Future Transport 2056 • NSW Digital Government Strategy
Community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • \$50 million under Stronger Country Communities Fund • Creative Kids Vouchers • Active Kids Vouchers • Youth Opportunities Grants 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NSW Arts and Cultural Policy Framework • NSW Police Force Youth Strategy • NSW Strategic Plan for Children and Young People

***Note:** This is not an exhaustive list of all youth initiatives and strategies. There is significant work underway through regional specific and sector specific strategies and plans that are not represented on this list. For example, Local Council youth strategies, regional economic development plans and regional sport and active recreation plans.

Appendix B: Framework on a page

Vision: All regional young people have opportunities for meaningful work, accessible health care and education; and feel part of vibrant and inclusive communities

Guiding principles

Support <> Resilience <> Fairness <> Get ready <> Youth voice <> Culture, Identity and Inclusiveness

Key pillars

1. Work ready

Prepared for regional jobs of the future

Priorities

1.1 Young people have better access to great education and training opportunities

1.2 Young people have improved skills and knowledge to navigate the pathways into careers

1.3 Young people have clearer options to take them from school to training, work and further education opportunities

1.4 Disadvantaged or at-risk young people are better supported to learn and achieve

1.5 Young people have increased understanding of the workforce

2. Wellbeing

Mentally and physically healthy

Priorities

2.1 Young people and their families are supported to improve wellbeing

2.2 Increasing young people's understanding of their health needs and navigate the health system

2.3 Young people have access to culturally and youth-appropriate services

2.4 Increasing the number of young people who can get help, wherever and however they choose to seek it

3. Connectivity

Able to access services and opportunities easily

Priorities

3.1 Young people have increased access to safe private transport

3.2 Young people have increased access to safe public transport to the places they need to go

3.3 Young people are able to access services without traveling long distances

3.4 Young people have the skills to navigate and use information and systems

4. Community

Connected and valued by their community

Priorities

4.1 Young people are provided the opportunity to shape their communities

4.2 Young people have increased access to a variety of youth-appropriate activities

4.3 Young people feel safe in, connected to, and valued by their communities and connected to their culture.

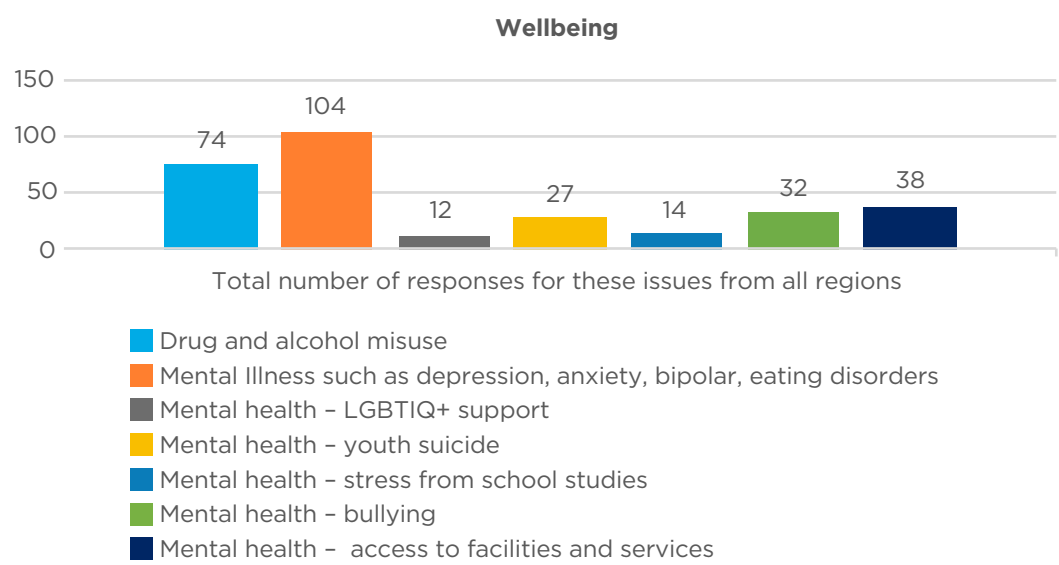
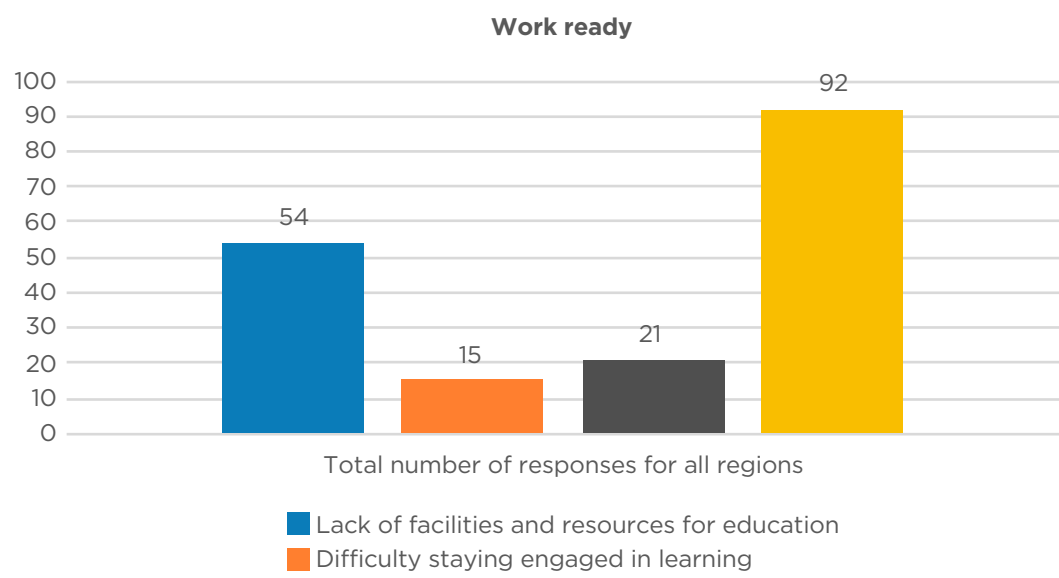
Strategic alignment

20-Year Economic Vision for Regional NSW <> Regional Development Framework
Department-specific youth strategies <> Local youth strategies

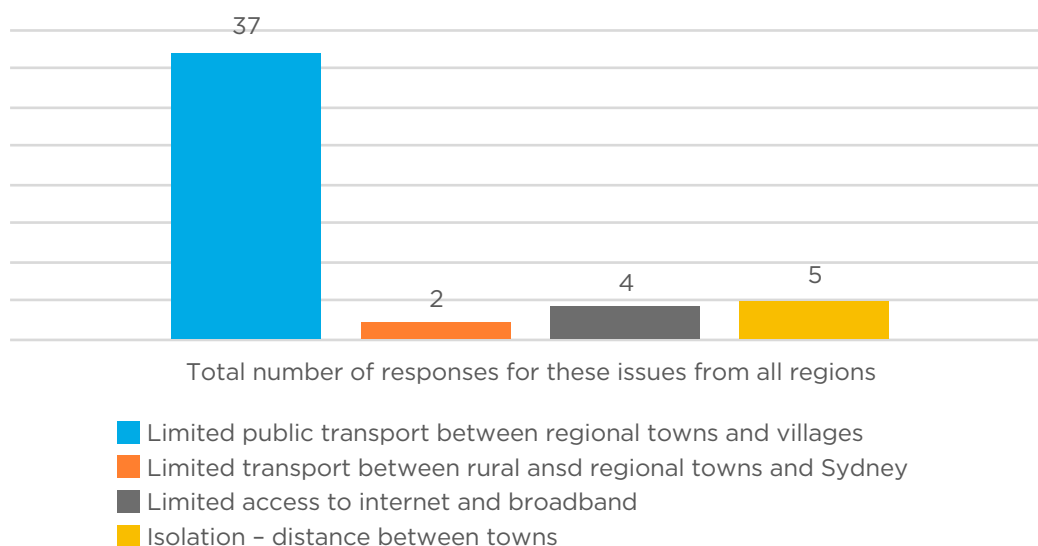
Diversity in regional NSW

Aboriginal young people <> Vulnerable and disadvantaged <> Young people with disability
LGBTIQA+ <> Young people from a refugee background
Culturally and linguistically diverse <> Young carers

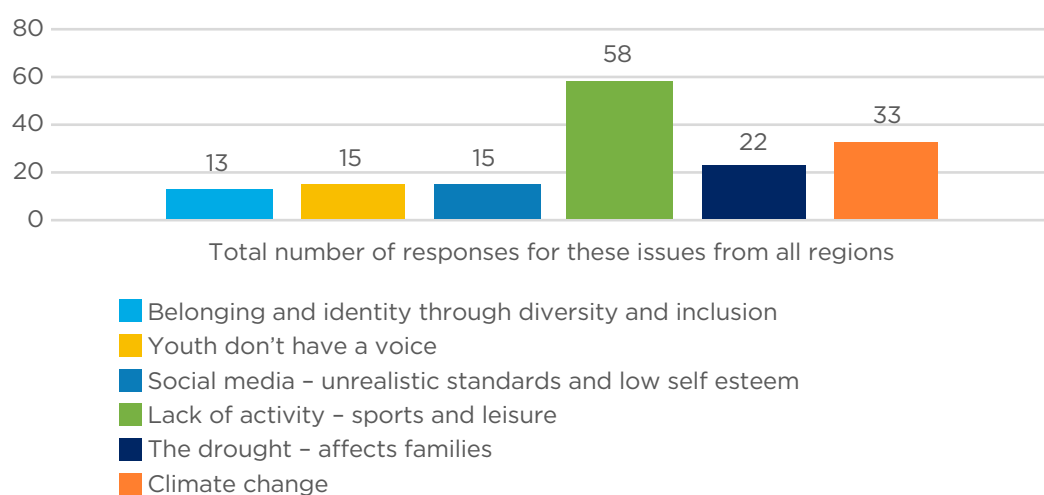
Appendix C: Applicant responses



Connectivity



Community



More information

nsw.gov.au

Contact us

Email: regionalyouth@dpc.nsw.gov.au

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