

# WALKING THE TALK: DESIGNING YOUTH ADVOCACY & ENGAGEMENT WITH YOUNG PEOPLE

## BACKGROUND

The Walking the Talk project is a collaboration between the Association for the Wellbeing of Children in Healthcare (AWCH), Health Consumers NSW (HCNSW), and young people. The goal of the project is to engage with young people, aged 14–25, from a diverse range of backgrounds to identify and target gaps in current resources and practices of youth engagement within the healthcare system. We aim to support young people to voice their thoughts, ideas, and opinions, and collaborate with them to make optimal youth engagement and health advocacy a reality.

A preliminary report has been created in order to gain insight into the current landscape of youth engagement and advocacy, as well as the needs and desires of young people in Australia.

## OUR VISION

The ultimate goal of the Walking the Talk project is to improve youth engagement and advocacy. We believe this can be achieved through collaboration with young people, building relationships and capabilities, and providing a platform, support, and resources for young people to voice their concerns, ideas, and opinions on how and why they want to be engaged with organisations, services, and the healthcare system.

## WHY?

There are both numerous resources available regarding youth engagement and advocacy, and extensive literature on the topic of youth engagement. However, through our preliminary report, we have found that many young people remain unheard and left out of critical conversations, particularly in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic.

To gain insight into the experiences of young Australians, we examined several sources including Mission Australia's Youth Survey 2021, AWCH's 2021 research report 'Too Young: An Exploration of Youth Ageism in the Healthcare System', the Australian Department of Health's 'National Action Plan for the Health of Children and Young People: 2020–2030' and the Youth Health Forum's 'Life Transitions and Youth Pathways to Health Services', and UNICEF Australia's report "'Living in Limbo": how COVID-19 is impacting young people in Australia'.

Through this, it was determined that many young people continue to face challenges regarding engaging both as consumers within organisations and the healthcare system, and on a service design and delivery level.



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Young people identified barriers to advocacy within healthcare settings, feeling left out of critical discussions regarding COVID-19, feeling unwelcome in healthcare settings, and dismissed as equal stakeholders within society.

The literature reviewed paralleled these findings, with several key themes emerging. These include the impact of adult power and tokenism, and a need for genuine co-design and an intersectional approach in order to ensure optimal youth engagement.

The report also examined current resources focused on youth engagement including The Department of Communities of Tasmania's 2019 'Youth Matter' guide, the Office of the Advocate for Children and Young People's 2019 'Engaging children and young people in your organisation', Health Consumers Queensland's 'Amplifying the Youth Voice: Health Consumers Queensland Youth Engagement Framework 2021', and WH&Y's 'Wellbeing Health & Youth Engagement Framework', among others.

We identified common themes and drew out any gaps or areas of opportunity. Common themes found throughout the resources include:

- Clarity and transparency
- Flexibility
- Mutual trust and respect
- Accessibility
- Inclusion/diversity
- Provision of support, resources, and feedback
- Reimbursement/Remuneration
- Avoiding tokenism

Gaps found were:

- The need for an intersectional lens with regard to young people's identities, experiences, and needs
- The need for improved follow up and sustainability of engagement
- The need for improved collaboration and sharing of power between adults and young people
- The need for improved acknowledgement of young people's work as co-designers/producers/authors

## **NEXT STEPS?**

So, what should the future of youth engagement and health advocacy look like? The goal of the Walking the Talk project is to support and empower young people to engage in health advocacy, to listen to young people's experiences of engaging with the healthcare system, and to identify and target gaps in current resources and support for young people engaging with the healthcare system. In order to achieve this, we must first engage with young people to discover what is important to them when it comes to engagement and participation, what works for them, and how they want to be involved.

Key findings from the preliminary report will inform the next steps of the Walking the Talk project.

### **Best Practice Engagement**

- Utilise all available knowledge of best practice youth engagement to bring together a diverse group of young people with the goal of co-designing a future for youth engagement and participation.
- Provide a platform, support and resources for young people to lead the way in designing future engagement and participation methods, models, and resources.

### **Co-design**

- Ensure all involved understand the meaning of co-design and commit to the process including sharing power and viewing young people as genuine co-designers and co-producers.
- Utilise available resources such as the work of McKercher (2020) to ensure, throughout the engagement process, that co-design is taking place.

### **Intersectionality**

- An intersectional lens will be utilised throughout the project. Consider aspects such as accessibility, remuneration, interpreters, cultural considerations, mental health, and disclosure when engaging with young people with intersectional needs.
- Consider the impact of intersectional needs on young people's lives - can lead to complex and challenging experiences, thus requiring sensitivity when engaging.

### **Follow Up & Sustainability**

- A commitment to providing effective feedback, follow up and sustainability of engagement.
- Discuss methods of follow up and sustainability with young people
- How can organisations better involve young people on an ongoing basis?
- How can organisations support young people to remain engaged, and utilise the skills and experience gained, as they age out of 'youth' focused engagement into adulthood?

We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the lands on which we work, the Gadigal people of the Eora Nation. We recognise their continuing connection to the lands and waters of this Country. We also pay our respects to Elders past and present.



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This project is made possible by the support of Consumers Health Forum of Australia, Multicultural NSW & the NSW Ministry of Health.

