

The Youth Coalition believes that the right to enjoy the highest attainable standard of health is a fundamental right to be enjoyed by all young people in the ACT as outlined in Article 24 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The Youth Coalition supports the World Health Organisation's definition of health as not simply the absence of disease or illness, but rather a state of 'complete physical, mental and social wellbeing.'<sup>1</sup> The Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion lists the fundamental prerequisites for good health as peace, shelter, education, food, income, a stable ecosystem, sustainable resources, social justice and equity.<sup>2</sup> The health of young people is influenced by a broad range of social factors, including; social exclusion, work, social support, access to food and transport, and stress.

The vast majority of young people enjoy relatively good health with only 7% reporting their health was fair or poor.<sup>3</sup> Some young people experience lower levels of health that correlate with their socio-economic status, housing arrangements and cultural backgrounds. Given that young people 15-19 make up 28% of Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) clients and that indigenous people make up 10% of the total SAAP clients, young and Indigenous people are more likely than the rest of the population to experience a range of risk factors affecting their wellbeing due to lack of safe and secure housing and ongoing stress.

The Youth Coalition also recognises that mainstream medical services do not meet the needs of the entire youth demographic and need to be tailored to meet the diversity of need and health behaviours of young people. The difference between males and females ages 10-24 in accessing GP's in the ACT is significant with just 14.3% of surveyed males accessing a GP in the past 2 weeks while over 24.4% of females accessed a GP over the same period of time.<sup>4</sup> Similarly, young people from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds and those experiencing homelessness all require services that meet their unique needs. Medical services must be delivered in ways that support and encourage young people to access medical services.

The Youth Coalition recognises the role that the youth sector plays in providing access to medical services through both partnerships and referrals. The Youth Coalition also believes that those who work in the youth sector are also well placed to recognise the needs of those young people who experience systemic disadvantage in their access to quality health care and should be involved in programs and initiatives that aim to rectify this.

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<sup>1</sup> World Health Organization [WHO] (1946) *Constitution of the World Health Organization*.

<sup>2</sup> WHO (1986) *Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion* Geneva: WHO

<sup>3</sup> Australian institute of Health and Welfare (2006) *Australia's Health 2006* p202

<sup>4</sup> ACT Government (2002) *Youth In The ACT: A Social and Demographic Profile* p96

Young people face a range of barriers to accessing health services that include; cost, discrimination, lack of transport options, a general unawareness that services exist, confidentiality concerns and possible stigma. Efforts need to be made to overcome these barriers, through schools and communities. The youth sector also has an important role to play. Health education programs need to be holistic and focus on life skills, including nutrition, as well as early intervention and prevention of high risk factors for injury and illness such as motor vehicle accidents, alcohol and other drugs, smoking and mental health.

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**The Youth Coalition is committed to:**

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- ◆ Advocating for the provision of coordinated, holistic and supportive health services for young people.
- ◆ Advocating for health services which are both accessible and affordable for young people
- ◆ Advocating for programs and services to urgently target those at high risk of having poor levels of health and wellbeing
- ◆ Promoting the role of consultation with young people regarding health needs and services
- ◆ Promoting health education and prevention programs, which promote a holistic health approach inclusive of balanced diets, positive body image, substance misuse, self-harm, depression and suicide
- ◆ Supporting co-ordination and co-operation between government and the community sector in order to promote health services that meet the diverse needs of young people