

The Youth Coalition believes that the variance in the age at which young people are deemed to be independent has to do with their ability to impede young people's participation in decision-making and community life. The disparity in young people's ability to access services can undermine young people's ability to fulfil basic health needs, such as being able to see a doctor independently from the age of 14 years and being unable to fill prescriptions for contraceptives until the age of 16 years.

The Youth Coalition believes that a model based on the circumstances of young people's individual lives are always better criteria for determining independence than broad generalisations based on an arbitrary age. Young people are a diverse group with a range of needs and life experiences. To suggest that all young people have the capacity to make a decision or will be faced with specific circumstances by a particular age fails to recognise that for many, this may have happened long before the defined age and that for others it will not happen until long after this age.

In accordance with Article 12 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CROC), the Youth Coalition believes that young people's ability to contribute to decision-making about their own lives should always be supported to ensure that young people's opinions are taken into account. This applies in cases where young people are involved in matters concerning parental responsibilities and the care and protection system, young people need to be supported in voicing their opinions and these should be given due weight in any decision made.

Young people are legally allowed to manage their own lives by living independently, working fulltime and consenting to medical procedures 16 years of age. This is at odds with Centrelink's measure of independence that was increased in 1997 to 25 years of age. As young people can be living out of home and receiving no assistance from their parents from the age of 16 years, the Youth Coalition believes that classifying young people as dependents until the age of 25 years is unrealistic and serves only to systemically disenfranchise young people from adequate income support.

The youth sector plays an important role for many young people in their transition to independence, particularly for young people who may face particular difficulty in developing independent living skills. They play a role in assisting young people to develop life skills such as managing finances, getting and maintaining employment, cooking and fulfilling their responsibilities as tenants.

Some of the ages of independence are detailed below:

- **10 Years Old:** *Be charged with a crime*
- **14 Years Old:** *Visit Family Planning and see a doctor alone*
- **15 Years Old:** *Leave school, work fulltime*
- **16 Years Old:** *Have consensual sex, get a prescription for contraceptives, apply to ACT Housing for a place to live, apply for Youth Allowance, get a Learner's driving licence, consent to a medical procedure.*
- **17 Years Old:** *Get a Provisional Licence*
- **18 years Old:** *Change name, get a tattoo, buy alcohol and tobacco products, get married, vote in elections and stand for Parliament, sign contracts, enter a casino or gamble, make a will, be sent to an adult prison.*
- **25 Years Old:** *Independent for Centrelink purposes.*

The Youth Coalition is committed to:

- ◆ Advocating for young people's circumstances to be taken into consideration above any arbitrary age which is used to classify young people.
- ◆ Advocating for the age of independence to be more standardised.
- ◆ Advocating for the age of independence for Centrelink to reflect the circumstances of young people and be lowered to at least 18 years.
- ◆ Advocating for young people to be supported to enable them to contribute the fullest in any matter concerning their own lives and for their opinions to be given due weight in decision making processes.
- ◆ Recognising the important role for the youth and community sectors in assisting young people to become independent.