



Tasmanian Council of Social Service Inc.

Tasmanian Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy

March 2021



INTEGRITY
COMPASSION
INFLUENCE

About TasCOSS

TasCOSS' vision is one Tasmania, free of poverty and inequality, where everyone has the same opportunity. Our mission is two-fold: to act as the peak body for the community services industry, and to change the systems, attitudes and behaviours that create poverty, inequality and exclusion. Our membership includes individuals and organisations active in the provision of community services to low-income Tasmanians living in vulnerable and disadvantaged circumstances. TasCOSS represents the interests of our members and their service users to government, regulators, the media and the public. Through our advocacy and policy development, we draw attention to the causes of poverty and disadvantage, and promote the adoption of effective solutions to address these issues.

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Introduction

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission to the Tasmanian Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy (the Strategy). This work comes at an important time in the lives of children and young people in the state, as the minds of policy makers and politicians turn to recovery from the COVID crisis. In this process, the wellbeing of children and young people must be front of mind.

Any efforts at recovery that fail to account for the experiences, hopes and needs of children and young people would risk entrenching, exacerbating, or even causing, poorer outcomes for our state and for our children and young people both now and into the future.

TasCOSS advocates on behalf of low income Tasmanians who often live in vulnerable and disadvantaged circumstances. We advocate for public policy that values and respects the diversity of Tasmanians and makes a real difference to the lives of people who are experiencing vulnerability. We work to ensure that the human rights of all Tasmanians, including children and young people, are integrated into the thoughts and actions of governments.

The children's version of Article 6 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child states that "children have the right to live a full life."¹ Extending on this, TasCOSS's vision is that all children and young people in Tasmania are able to live a *good* life. This submission aims to address how the Strategy can contribute to this end.

Our submission is in three parts:

1. The first reflects on the frame of reference for the wellbeing strategy.
2. The second contains a series of priority actions TasCOSS believes would have a high impact on the ability of children and young people to live a good life in Tasmania.
3. The final section provides comments and recommendations on some necessary structural underpinnings and opportunities which would assist the government to achieve the aims and goals that will be set out in the Strategy.

¹ <https://www.unicef.org.au/our-work/information-for-children/un-convention-on-the-rights-of-the-child>

Summary of key actions

Poverty and wellbeing

Priority action 1: The Tasmanian Government should actively advocate for:

- A permanent increase in JobSeeker and Youth Allowance to at least \$65/day.²
- A permanent 50% increase to Commonwealth Rent Assistance (at current rates, an increase of \$35/week).³

A healthy body and mind

Priority action 2: The Tasmanian Government adopts a Health in All Policies policy, framework and action plan.

Priority action 3: A coordinated, integrated, person-centred, lifespan-focused mental health service system that includes mental health and wellbeing initiatives for children in infancy, preschool and school age as well as young people.

A place to call home

Priority action 4: A social housing target of 10% of the state's total housing stock by 2036.

Priority action 5: Expanded youth accommodation facilities offering medium-to-long term housing and support to transition for young people, combined with expanded intensive case management, outreach support and family mediation for young people at the risk of homelessness.

Being able to afford the basics

Priority action 6: Universal school breakfast and lunch programs, coupled with expansion of community-based food security programs.

Priority action 7: Extend eligibility criteria for electricity concessions for families on low incomes who are currently ineligible, and increase concession amounts for large families on low incomes.

Feeling safe

Priority action 8: Expansion of collaborative, flexible, inclusive prevention and early intervention services for vulnerable families and their children .

Priority action 9: Raise the age of criminal responsibility.

² <https://www.acoss.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Strengthening-Income-Support-Bill-2021.pdf>

³ <https://www.servicesaustralia.gov.au/individuals/services/centrelink/rent-assistance/how-much-you-can-get>

Learning for life

Priority action 10: The Tasmanian Government extend universal access to early years education to all children aged three and upwards and provide wraparound support for all families in the first 1000 days.

Priority action 11: The Tasmanian government create a comprehensive guidance and referral service to help all Tasmanians – including young Tasmanians and their parents -- understand and plan for their learning in all areas of life and navigate the full range of learning opportunities.

Getting where you need to go

Priority action 12: Trial a Children's Bus.

Priority action 13: All existing Tasmanian public housing stock of three or more bedrooms be retrofitted to disability access standards to accommodate children and young people with disability.

Feeling valued, included and heard

Priority action 14: All Tasmanian government and government-funded programs working with children review and enact cultural safety recommendations for Aboriginal children and children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

Priority action 15: Application of good practice engagement with children and young people in all government and community sector policy development and planning and delivery.

Knowing you're not alone

Priority action 16: All Tasmanian government and community service providers of services for children and young people are trained in trauma and poverty awareness.

Priority action 17: The Tasmanian government discuss with the community sector possibilities for key service providers to employ youth peer workers to provide emotional and social support to others with whom they share a common experience.

Hope for the future

Priority action 18: Jobs Tasmania Local Networks be explicitly funded to address the needs of young jobseekers.

Priority action 19: The Tasmanian Government explicitly factors in current and future climate impacts of all policies and actions, including economic, social and environmental costs and benefits at the state and community level.

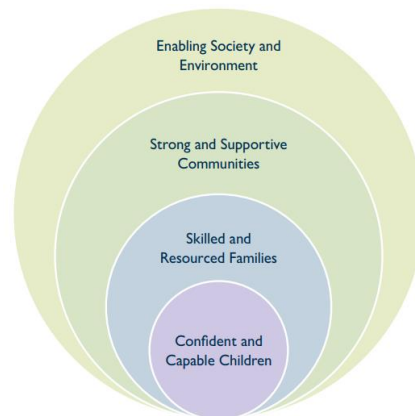
Whole-of-government structures for implementation

Priority action 20: The Tasmanian Government task the State Service to deliver on 'premier priorities.'

1. Background

What is our frame of reference for wellbeing?

In considering the wellbeing of children and young people, it is important to ask what frame of reference is being used for the range of factors which can impact children and young people? The Child and Youth Wellbeing Framework took an ecological model approach to this, acknowledging that “Children and young people’s wellbeing does not exist in isolation and is not determined by them



alone.” Instead each individual is influenced by “relationships within the settings of the family, the community and the wider society and environment.”⁴ This is a well-regarded model which helps in highlighting the broader and often invisible effects of structural and systemic issues. While the ecological model underpins the framework, there is no mention of it in the discussion paper. We believe it should remain central to the Strategy.

In recognition of the importance of this ecological model in highlighting often invisible drivers of poor wellbeing, TasCOSS’ approach for the remainder of the submission is to focus on the structural and systemic drivers of and barriers to the six ARACY Nest domains of child and youth wellbeing identified by the Child and Youth Wellbeing Framework and which form the basis for this Strategy:

- Being loved and safe
- Having material basics
- Being healthy
- Learning
- Participating
- Having a positive sense of culture and identity.

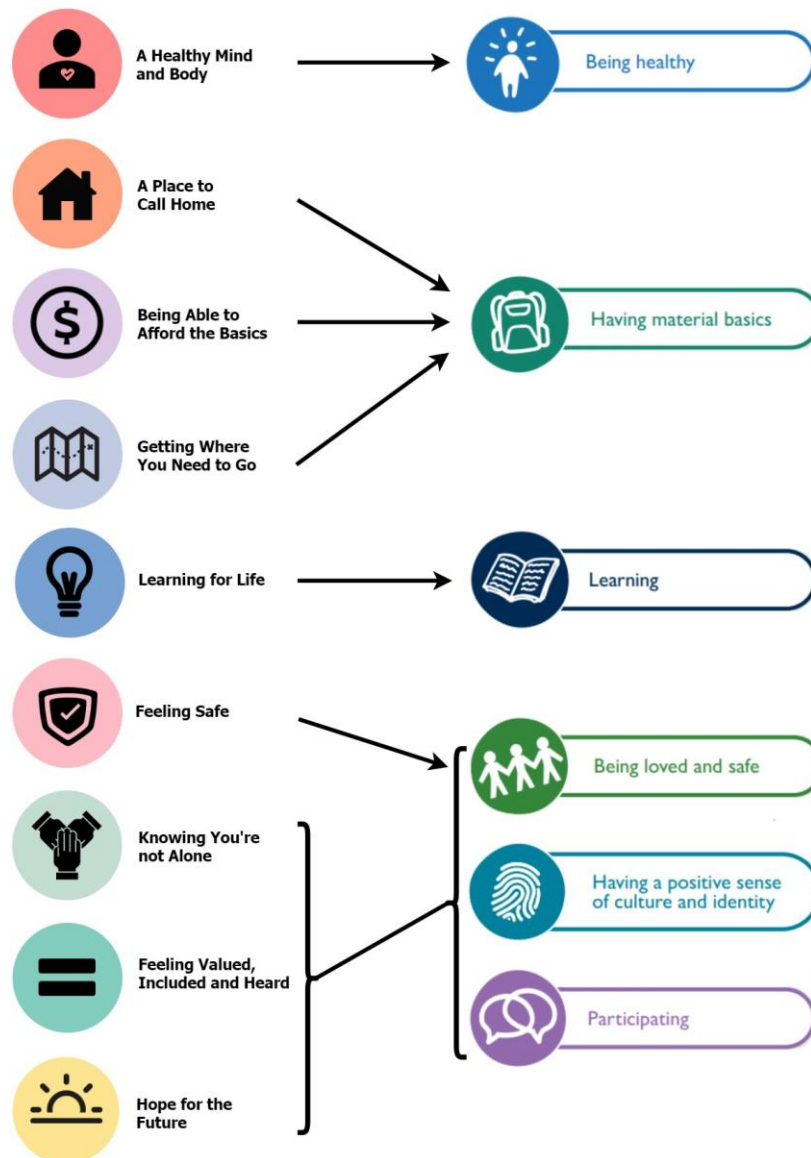
⁴ [Tasmanian Child and Youth Wellbeing Framework](#), p.4

A Good Life in Tasmania

Over the past few years, TasCOSS asked over 300 people across the state, as well as our members in the community sector, what they needed to live a good life. Nine key, interrelated elements of a good life in Tasmania emerged from those conversations:



This work has provided an aspirational vision in the words of Tasmanians of what life can and should be for everyone who lives here. The nine Good Life domains also map easily against the Strategy's six domains.



Below we provide priority wellbeing actions against each of the domains of the Good Life. Notably, the main thrust of our recommendations is Focus Area 2, Material Basics – without which, in fact, many of the Framework’s other domains (in particular Being Healthy) are hard to achieve.⁵ Material basics, we argue, cannot be approached in relation to children and young people alone, but must be also approached in relation to their families and communities, and from an explicit starting point of recognition of poverty in Tasmania.

Poverty and wellbeing

The ability of families to provide their children with material basics is inextricably linked to income levels, and particularly to poverty. Tasmania has the highest proportion of low income earners in the

⁵ See <https://tcal.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Social-determinants-of-health-action-sheets-TasCOSS-2012.pdf>

nation.⁶ In 2018, some 66,500 Tasmanians – 12.6% of the state’s population -- were living in poverty, as defined as less than 50% of median income – an increase in both number and proportion of 10.7% (around 6450 people) over 2017.⁷

This poverty disproportionately affects Tasmania’s children. In 2016, an estimated 14.7% of Tasmanian children aged 0-14 lived in poverty. This figure rose to:

- Over 25%: Port Sorell, East Devonport, Somerset, Burnie-Wivenhoe, Geeveston-Dover, Cygnet, Central Highlands, George Town, Waverly-St Leonards, Newnham-Mayfield, West Moonah
- Over 30%: West Ulverstone, Beauty Point-Beaconsfield, Mowbray, Hobart, Moonah, Montrose-Rosetta, Brighton-Pontville
- Over 35%: Mornington-Warrane, Risdon Vale, Claremont, Derwent Park-Lutana, New Norfolk, Ravenswood
- Over 40%: Rokeby, Berriedale-Chigwell, Dodges Ferry-Lewisham
- Over 50%: Bridgewater-Gagebrook (58.4%).⁸

Children’s and young people’s lived experience of wellbeing is clearly affected by the experience of poverty. For example, a 2018 NSW study found that compared to their peers experiencing neither deprivation⁹ nor poverty¹⁰, life satisfaction scores of young people aged 12-16 were:

- Experiencing deprivation only: 16.7% lower (6.4 out of a possible 10, compared to 7.68)
- Experiencing poverty only: 18.5% lower (6.26)
- Experiencing both poverty and deprivation: 27.5% lower (5.57).¹¹

The experience of poverty of Tasmania’s children and young people is directly linked to their experience of social benefits.

- In 2017, 28% of Tasmanian children aged under 16 – 27,865 children – were living in families with low incomes primarily sourced from government benefits, the family income category most likely to live in poverty in the country.¹² In the same year, the rate of poverty among Australian households with social security payments as their main source of income was 35.5%, compared to 13.6% of Australians overall.

⁶ <https://profile.id.com.au/australia/individual-income?WebID=150>

⁷ ACOSS-UNSW Poverty in Australia 2020 – unpublished, 2018. The number of Tasmanians living in poverty grew by around 6450 people (a 10.7% increase) between 2017 and 2018; the proportion of the Tasmanian population living in poverty grew 9.5% over this period (from 11.5% to 12.6%).

⁸ https://unitingcare.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Child_Social_Exclusion_Poverty_and_Disadvantage_in_Australia_Report-1.pdf

. Separate figures are not available for several key areas of disadvantage, including Clarendon Vale and Rocherlea.

⁹ The lack of 3 of 18 indicators of material basics and social inclusion deemed by survey participants as well as researchers to be essential to well-being; see Table 6.3, <https://www.thesmithfamily.com.au/~media/files/research/reports/material-deprivation-and-social-exclusion-among-young-australians-2018-full-report.ashx?la=en>

¹⁰ Calculated via indicators of inadequate income; see Table 6.14,

<https://www.thesmithfamily.com.au/~media/files/research/reports/material-deprivation-and-social-exclusion-among-young-australians-2018-full-report.ashx?la=en>

¹¹ <https://www.thesmithfamily.com.au/~media/files/research/reports/material-deprivation-and-social-exclusion-among-young-australians-2018-full-report.ashx?la=en>

¹² PHIDU 2017.

- This rose to 54.3% of households on Parenting Payment, and 56.9% of households on Newstart Allowance.¹³

This situation is particularly extreme for:

The nearly 20,000 Tasmanian children in sole-parent families. In 2017, 44.2% of Australian children in sole-parent households lived in poverty, compared with 17.7% of Australian children overall.¹⁴ In fact, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights has expressed concern that the structure of Australian welfare benefits for sole parents is injurious to the human rights of parents and children living in poverty.¹⁵

- In 2016, 26.8% of Tasmanian families with children under 15 – 12,906 families – were sole-parent families.¹⁶
- When dependent children over the age of 15 are added to the picture, this translated to around 19,677 dependent children in 16,125 sole-parent families.¹⁷

The nearly 4300 young Tasmanians on Youth Allowance. In 2017, the rate of poverty among Australian households on Youth Allowance was 42.8%.¹⁸ For the 4291 young Tasmanians receiving Youth Allowance as of January 2021,¹⁹ the rate of Youth Allowance (as of 1 April, \$256.25/week for a young person who has to live away from home²⁰) is at least \$60/week short of meeting their basic needs.²¹

Meanwhile, one of the most basic of material needs – housing – has seen relentless price rises in recent years, a situation particularly punishing for low-income renters. In December 2020 (the latest figures available), median weekly rents across Tasmania were:

- Inner Hobart houses (three bedroom): \$530
- Inner Hobart units (two bedroom): \$420
- Outer Hobart houses: \$430
- Outer Hobart units: \$380
- Launceston houses: \$370
- Launceston units: \$300
- North West houses: \$310
- North West units: \$250

¹³ http://povertyandinequality.acoss.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Poverty-in-Australia-2020-Part-2-%E2%80%93-Who-is-affected_Final.pdf

¹⁴ http://povertyandinequality.acoss.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Poverty-in-Australia-2020-Part-2-%E2%80%93-Who-is-affected_Final.pdf

¹⁵ <https://spcommreports.ohchr.org/TMResultsBase/DownloadPublicCommunicationFile?gId=23386>

¹⁶ PHIDU 2016

¹⁷ ABS Census 2016

¹⁸ http://povertyandinequality.acoss.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Poverty-in-Australia-2020-Part-2-%E2%80%93-Who-is-affected_Final.pdf

¹⁹ <https://data.gov.au/data/dataset/jobseeker-payment-and-youth-allowance-recipients-monthly-profile>

²⁰ <https://www.servicesaustralia.gov.au/individuals/services/centrelink/youth-allowance-job-seekers/how-much-you-can-get>

²¹ Calculated in 2017 at \$316/week. New Minimum Income for Healthy Living Budget Standards for Low-Paid and Unemployed Australians, UNSW SPRC 2017, pp. 83, 89)

Meanwhile, Commonwealth Rent Assistance stands at \$47/week for a young person sharing a house, \$83/week for a family with one or two children, and \$93.50 for a family with three or more children.²²

Tasmanian families on low incomes therefore will continue to struggle to meet their children's basic material needs without increases in Australia's welfare payments and housing assistance, particularly to sole parents and young people.

Priority action 1: The Tasmanian Government should actively advocate for:

- A permanent increase in JobSeeker and Youth Allowance to at least \$65/day.²³
- A permanent 50% increase to Commonwealth Rent Assistance.²⁴

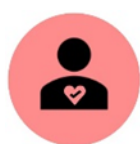
²² <https://www.servicesaustralia.gov.au/individuals/services/centrelink/rent-assistance/how-much-you-can-get>

²³ <https://www.acoss.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Strengthening-Income-Support-Bill-2021.pdf>

²⁴ <https://www.servicesaustralia.gov.au/individuals/services/centrelink/rent-assistance/how-much-you-can-get>

2. Priority actions by domain

This section outlines goals, targets and numbered actions under each Good Life domain. We believe these actions would have a high impact on the ability of children and young people in Tasmania to lead a good life; they should therefore be priorities for inclusion under the Tasmanian Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy. These proposed actions complement recommendations made by other organisations, for instance, the Youth Network of Tasmania (YNOT), which has noted the need to ensure that all areas of the Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy take the needs of young people aged 18-25 into account as well as those of children and younger people.



A healthy body and mind

All children and young people in Tasmania have the support they need to lead healthy lives.

Good health is the cornerstone of a good life, and a healthy childhood—a period in which both the biological and social foundations of health are laid down -- is the cornerstone of a healthy life. But many Tasmanian children and young people -- particularly in communities of socioeconomic disadvantage -- do not enter the world healthy or enjoy good childhood health.

- The proportion of Tasmanian children with low birthweight (7.3%) is 1.2 times higher than the national average -- and 1.9 times higher in Tasmania's most disadvantaged community.²⁵
- The proportion of Tasmanian children developmentally vulnerable in physical health and wellbeing is 10% --and 1.5 or more times that disadvantaged communities (in lowest quintile of socioeconomic disadvantage: 15.2%; in Tasmania's most disadvantaged community, 16.4%).²⁶
- Youth mortality (ages 15 to 24) in Tasmania's most disadvantaged community is over twice that of the state's overall youth mortality (92.4 per 100,000 compared to 45.8 per 100,000).²⁷

Childhood is also a period in which health patterns are laid down that can have an impact on preventable disease later in life.

- The estimated proportion of Tasmanian children aged 2-17 who are obese is 10.7%, going up to 11% in one of Tasmania's most disadvantaged communities.²⁸

²⁵ Low birth weight can be a risk factor for the healthy development of infants and children. PHIDU 2012-14

²⁶ PHIDU 2015

²⁷ PHIDU 2014-2018.

²⁸ PHIDU 2017-18.

- In 2017-18, 98% of Tasmanian 2-3 year olds did not eat enough vegetables to build and maintain good overall health (2.5 serves/day).²⁹

Meanwhile, in 2014-15 (the latest data available):

- 15.7% of Tasmanians aged 18-24 had high/very high levels of psychological distress.³⁰
- 16.8% of Tasmanians aged 0-24 had mental and behavioural problems, including 4.8% with mood (affective) problems and 11.9% with anxiety-related problems.³¹
- In 2019, 59% of Kids Helpline contacts from Tasmania were regarding mental health and emotional wellbeing, a category of concern including mental health concerns, emotional wellbeing, suicide-related concerns, self-injury and self-harm concerns as well as and loss and grief.³²

Priority action 2: A Health in All Policies framework and action plan.

Poor health behaviours at a young age risk setting the stage for poor health at an older age. While Tasmanian health outcomes in adulthood are poor overall (Tasmanians die younger than other Australians,³³ and are more likely to die of preventable causes³⁴), poor adult health outcomes are particularly noticeable among Tasmanians on low incomes: over twice (2.2 times) as many Tasmanians in the lowest quintile of socioeconomic disadvantage report fair to poor health as among those in the highest quintile,³⁵ and the median age of death in low-income Tasmanian communities is up to 14 years below the state average (18 years below that in the state's most advantaged community).³⁶ Poor health outcomes among Tasmanians on low incomes are particularly noticeable in relation to conditions that are considered to be preventable through lifestyle factors and early detection and intervention: compared to Tasmania's most advantaged suburb, Tasmania's least advantaged suburb has a rate of death from all avoidable causes 2.8 times higher.³⁷

Healthy habits laid down in childhood through young adulthood will stand every Tasmanian in good stead across the course of their life. A Health in All Policies framework and action plan will be crucial to forming the intersectoral relationships and developing intersectoral policies across government necessary to ensuring that all Tasmanian government activities address the social determinants of health and equity.

²⁹ ABS 4364.0, National Health Survey 2017-18, Tasmania, Table 17.3

³⁰ ABS 4364.0, National Health Survey, First Results 2014-15, Tasmania, Table 7.3

³¹ ABS 4364.0, National Health Survey, First Results 2014-15, Tasmania, Table 3.3

³² <https://publications.yourtown.com.au/2019-insights-tas-kt-v1/page/8-9>

³³ Median Tasmanian age of death: 80 (Australia: 82). PHIDU 2013-17.

³⁴ See TasCOSS 2020-21 BPS.

³⁵ PHIDU, 2017-18

³⁶ TasCOSS 2020-21 BPS.

³⁷ PHIDU

Priority action 3: A coordinated, integrated, person-centred, lifespan-focused mental health service system that includes mental health and wellbeing initiatives for infants, preschool and school-aged children, and young people.

TasCOSS members have consistently observed the struggle of vulnerable children and young people to access existing mental health supports and services in schools and in the community, a situation confirmed by survey data.³⁸ Between 2018 and 2019, Tasmanian contacts with Kids Helpline from children and young people under 26 rose 54%, from 2808 to 4332;³⁹ however, late last year media reports have alleged that one in three calls to Kids Helpline were going unanswered.⁴⁰ Meanwhile, the wait for a Headspace psychologist appointment in Tasmania – which requires a mental health plan referral from a GP – is currently a few weeks.⁴¹ As a consequence, as Anglicare’s submission to this consultation has noted, places in some community mental health programs are being filled by young people who require far more intensive responses. The Tasmanian Youth Mental Health Forum in November 2019 identified priority action areas for the development of an effective youth mental health service system, including around tools and resources, programs and initiatives, partnerships and collaboration along with and research and evaluation.⁴² Meanwhile, the Mental Health Council of Tasmania has noted the importance of addressing transportation barriers in accessing primary mental healthcare for young people.⁴³

³⁸ <http://mhct.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/Youth-MH-Forum-Briefing-Paper-031219.pdf>

³⁹ <https://www.yourtown.com.au/sites/default/files/document/2018%20statistical%20summary%20for%20states%20-%20TAS.pdf>; <https://publications.yourtown.com.au/2019-insights-tas-kt-v1/page/8-9>

⁴⁰ The Daily Telegraph, Friday 5th March, 2021

⁴¹ Personal contact, Headspace, 22 March.

⁴² <http://mhct.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/Youth-MH-Forum-Briefing-Paper-031219.pdf>

⁴³ <http://mhct.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/MHCT-reponse-to-Our-Healthcare-Future-Consultation-12022021.pdf>



A place to call home

All children and young people in Tasmania have affordable, stable, appropriate housing.

A stable, secure, affordable place to live is crucial to children's health and wellbeing and educational success.⁴⁴ But many Tasmanian children, particularly in families living on low incomes, lack this safe haven. Over 27% of Tasmanian families with children and nearly 48% of one-parent families, are renters (20,143 households)⁴⁵ which are the group most keenly affected by Tasmania's ongoing crisis in housing affordability. By November 2019, a single parent working part-time in greater Hobart would have to put 49% of their income towards a median rental.⁴⁶ As a consequence, many parents across the state have had to face difficult choices in relation to housing, including moving to dwellings that are smaller and/or farther from services. Meanwhile, family pressures resulting from instability and overcrowding contribute to young people feeling as though they cannot stay at home.

"Good family environments aren't a given – I've been in many of those sorts of situations. I was homeless at age 16 due to family issues, and again in Melbourne at one stage."

Priority action 4: A social housing target of 10% of the state's total housing stock by 2036.

Social housing is an investment that pays off for children and young people: to use just the example of education, in Australia and elsewhere, provision of stable, good quality public housing has been shown to provide measurable benefits in educational outcomes.⁴⁷ However, growing waitlists for social housing – 3594 applications as of September 2020, with an average wait time of 63.7 weeks for priority applicants⁴⁸ – are indicative of the inability of Tasmania's social housing stock to keep up with demand, as housing affordability drops and the state's population rises. The Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute has estimated that around 12% of Tasmanian households were eligible for or living in social housing in 2016.⁴⁹

⁴⁴ For an overview, see Taylor, M. and Edwards, B., 2012. 'Housing and children's wellbeing and development: Evidence from a national longitudinal study'. *Family Matters*, No. 91: 47-61. <https://aifs.gov.au/publications/family-matters/issue-91/housing-and-childrens-wellbeing-and-development>

⁴⁵ ABS Census 2016

⁴⁶ https://www.sgsep.com.au/assets/main/Projects/SGS-Economics-and-Planning_RAI-November-2019.pdf

⁴⁷ Phibbs, P., & Young, P., 2005. 'The health, employment and education benefits of public housing'. *Research and Policy Bulletin*: AHURI. Available:

https://www.ahuri.edu.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0011/3008/AHURI_RAP_Issue_54_The_health_employment_and_education_benefits_of_public_housing.pdf

⁴⁸ https://health.tas.gov.au/humanservicesstats/human_services_dashboard

⁴⁹ https://www.ahuri.edu.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0025/29059/AHURI-Final-Report-306-Social-housing-as-infrastructure-an-investment-pathway.pdf, p. 63

Priority action 5: Expanded youth accommodation facilities offering medium-to-long term housing and support to transition for young people, combined with:

- **Expanded intensive case management for young people experiencing homelessness**
- **Expanded case management, outreach support and family mediation for young people at the risk of homelessness.**

In 2016, an estimated 1,196 children and young people in Tasmania were homeless. Indeed, children and young people are disproportionately represented among homeless Tasmanians. In 2016, among homeless Tasmanians, an estimated:

- 13% (212 children) were under 12
- 23% (374 children and young people) were under 19
- 37.5% (610 children and young people) were under 25.⁵⁰

By the same token, children and young people aged 0-24 made up an estimated 46.4% of people in supported accommodation.⁵¹ This figure may not reflect the full extent of Tasmanian children and young people who experience homelessness alone, who are more likely to couch surf than to access Specialist Homeless Services (SHS).⁵² Meanwhile, the 2020 Anglicare Rental Affordability Snapshot found that there were no properties anywhere in Tasmania affordable for someone receiving Youth Allowance;⁵³ with young Tasmanians aged 16-25 currently making up one third of the waiting list for social housing.⁵⁴ Tasmania's shelters and supported accommodation services are not adequate to meet this demand, and more attention is needed to keep children and young people from entering the homelessness system in the first place. SARC's submission to this consultation calls for the development and trial of an explicit model of medium-term (six months plus) residential care within a state-wide program of Youth at Risk Response Centres targeting unaccompanied homeless children 12-15 years, and offers examples of successful programs to keep families together and divert children from the homelessness system.

⁵⁰ ABS Census 2016, Estimating Homelessness 2016, Table 2.7

⁵¹ ABS Census 2016, Estimating Homelessness 2016, Table 2.7

⁵² Robinson 2017; 2018

⁵³ Anglicare 2020 Rental Affordability Snapshot.

⁵⁴ <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2021-03-17/housing-crisis-forcing-young-tas-people-into-homelessness/100013412>.



Being able to afford the basics

All children and young people in Tasmania live in families who can afford the basics of life.

In recent years, Tasmanians have faced sweeping increases in the cost of living. Beyond housing – the largest expenditure for most households – over the past five years Tasmanians have also experienced rises in the cost of electricity (10.8%), water and sewerage (16.8%), health (40.8%) and petrol (20%).⁵⁵ Rising prices have significantly outstripped increases in benefits and allowances, particularly Youth Allowance and Newstart, whose recipients have often fallen below the Australian poverty line. TasCOSS analysis show that in recent years, Tasmanian individuals and families living on Youth Allowance and Newstart have fallen short of the minimum income necessary for healthy living by anywhere between \$12 and \$159 a week.⁵⁶ But they have also outstripped increases in incomes: between 2013-14 and 2017-18, Tasmanian equivalised disposable household income rose only 1.15% for the lowest income quintile and 2.9% for the second-lowest (although 7.6% for the highest).⁵⁷

As noted above, an increase in federal benefits would be the single greatest step that could occur to ensure that all Tasmanian children and young people live in families that can afford the basics. At the state level however, the Tasmanian Government can also take steps to ensure that Tasmanian children and young people are well-fed and warm.

Priority action 6: Universal school breakfast and lunch programs, coupled with expansion of community-based food security programs.

Good nutrition in childhood builds healthy bodies, counters health risk factors, and supports effective learning.⁵⁸ However, too many Tasmanian children are not getting the nutrition they need for good health and learning now and into the future: 30% of students across Tasmanian government schools reported that they were not always eating a healthy breakfast before school, including 14% of Year 4 students; 18% of Year 5 students; 22% of Year 6 students; 33% of Year 7 students; 38% of Year 8 students; 44% of Year 9 students; 45% of Year 10 students; and 40% each of students in Years 11 and 12.⁵⁹ In 2017-18, 7.3% of Tasmanians and 12.3% of Tasmanians in the lowest income quintile, lived in a household that ran out of food and could not afford to buy more in the previous year.⁶⁰ Tasmanian

⁵⁵ ABS 6401, Consumer Price Index Australia, March quarter 2020, Table 9.

⁵⁶ <https://www.mja.com.au/journal/2013/199/7/cant-escape-it-out-pocket-cost-health-care-australia>. For instance, in 2015-16, Tasmanian households in the lowest disposable income quintile spent, on average, \$32.14 on health, more than 1.5 times the top modelled figure for health expenditure; this is probably due to the fact that Tasmania has an older-than-national-average population (Tasmanian median age 42.2 years, Australia is 38.0) with higher-than-national-average levels of disability (6.4% of the population, compared to Australia's 5.1%). ABS 6530.0, Household Expenditure Survey Australia 2015-16, Table 19.1.; ABS Region Summary, Tasmania.

⁵⁷ ABS 6523.0, Household Income and Wealth, 2017-18

⁵⁸ <https://www.thesmithfamily.com.au/-/media/files/research/reports/health-literacy-full-2011.pdf?la=en&hash=4120DEA4714A6CC7290905737964BBB6>, p. 6; <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED508614.pdf>; <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3902051/>; <https://publicdocumentcentre.education.tas.gov.au/library/Shared%20Documents/2020-SWS-All-Tasmanian-Government-School-Students-Statewide-Report.pdf>

⁵⁹

⁶⁰ https://www.dhhs.tas.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0004/375025/The_State_of_Public_Health_Tasmania_2018_v10.pdf p. 18.

families may not be in the position to give their children the nutritious food that they need to thrive due to issues of affordability, availability and nutrition literacy.

- *Affordability*: When times are tight, many people on low incomes will pay for housing, utilities and transport first.⁶¹ As these costs, particularly housing costs, have risen in recent years, food insecurity has grown around the state: the south of the state, which has Tasmania's highest housing costs, also has the highest levels of food insecurity.⁶²
- *Availability*: As a general rule, Tasmanian neighbourhoods with low household incomes have fewer shops selling healthy foods and shops there are also more likely to have a limited range and be more expensive than shops in higher-income areas.⁶³
- *Nutrition literacy*: Families with lower health literacy levels are less likely to be aware of how best to promote good nutrition: for example, children from disadvantaged families are less likely to have had a good quality breakfast.⁶⁴

Universal school breakfast and lunch programs, programs that help parents and children understand principles of good nutrition and how to shop/grow for and prepare nutritious meals as well as local initiatives such as food co-ops can all help families access healthy food for their children.

Priority action 7: Extend eligibility criteria for electricity concessions for families on low incomes who are currently ineligible, and increase concession amounts for large families on low incomes.

Due to winter heating costs, energy makes up a more substantial proportion of Tasmanian household spending than it does in other states (3.8%, Australia 2.9%) – particularly in households in the lowest income quintile, where it makes up 6.3% of gross household expenditure, compared to 3.8% for Tasmanian households overall.⁶⁵ The number of Aurora Energy on an electricity concession grew by 6.1% between 2016-17 and 2019-20, to 96,177.⁶⁶ Although the prices of energy and water are frozen for the 2020-21 financial year, the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic have seen the number of households experiencing financial hardship rise; indeed, the number of Tasmanians who have accumulated a residential energy debt increased by 61% between the first quarter of 2019-20 and the first quarter of 2020-21, from 3867 to 6241, with an average amount owed now standing at \$1040 for Aurora Energy and \$694 for 1st Energy.⁶⁷

Tasmania's electricity concession scheme is currently set at a fixed rebate of roughly \$514/year, regardless of household size or consumption. This approach does not help larger families who may have higher child-related consumption, however: as of 2016, there were somewhere between 2818 and 3938 such families in the state.⁶⁸ Meanwhile, the Tasmanian concession scheme does not extend to families

⁶¹ <https://www.healthyfoodaccesstasmania.org.au/>

⁶² https://www.dhhs.tas.gov.au/publichealth/epidemiology/tasmanian_population_health_survey_2016

⁶³ <https://www.healthyfoodaccesstasmania.org.au/>

⁶⁴ <https://www.thesmithfamily.com.au/-/media/files/research/reports/health-literacy-full-2011.pdf?la=en&hash=4120DEA4714A6CC7290905737964BBB6>, p. 6

⁶⁵ ABS 6530.0, Household Expenditure Survey, Tables 13.7, 19.3)

⁶⁶ <https://www.economicregulator.tas.gov.au/Documents/Energy%20in%20Tasmania%20Report%202019-20.pdf>

⁶⁷ OTTER, Projects on the Go December 2020, pp. 11-15.

⁶⁸ Larger families (3+ children) in Tasmania with incomes up to \$1249/week, plotted against Low Income Healthcare Card eligibility limits. ABS Census 2016, <https://www.servicesaustralia.gov.au/individuals/services/centrelink/low-income-health-care-card/who-can-get-card/income-test>; TasCOSS calculations available on request.

on low incomes who are not eligible for Australian benefits (in particular recent migrants) or to families who are in embedded networks (i.e. part of a private network that serves multiple premises).



Feeling safe

All children and young people in Tasmania live in safety.

Safety is basic to wellbeing. Yet many Tasmanian children and young people face violence, abuse and bullying outside and inside the home, with 1317 Tasmanian children and young people in out-of-home care in September 2020.⁶⁹

“You can’t live a good life if you feel in danger – that’s just surviving.”

In fact, despite Tasmania’s overall safety, Tasmanian levels of violence are higher than the national average, and are rising. In 2018-19, Tasmania saw increases in assaults, armed robberies, domestic and family violence, and children removed to out-of-home care.⁷⁰ The COVID-19 pandemic is likely to exacerbate this situation, particularly in relation to domestic and family violence.

Between 2017 and 2019, the proportion of callers to Kids Helpline expressing concerns about both family and non-family violence and abuse rose between 2017 and 2019, in the case of family violence by 23% and in the case of non-family violence by 52%.⁷¹

Priority action 8: Expansion of collaborative, flexible, inclusive prevention and early intervention services for vulnerable families and their children.

The May 2020 evaluation of SFSK found that more needed to be done to support a wider cohort of Tasmanian families, including better linkages between family support services and other key services such as Child Health and Parenting Services, Child Adolescent and Mental Health Services, and Perinatal and Infant Mental Health Services. The evaluation specifically recommended reviewing contractual and funding arrangements to ensure they support collaborative and flexible service provision and enable service integration in order to meet the needs of families and children/young people. This recommendation dovetails with Action 17 of the Strong Families, Safe Kids Implementation Plan 2021-23, which promises further development of prevention and early intervention capability for vulnerable families and their children—including older children and adolescents, a cohort identified by the 2020 evaluation as facing challenges in accessing appropriate services.

⁶⁹ https://health.tas.gov.au/humanservicesstats/human_services_dashboard

⁷⁰ ABS 4530.0, Crime Victimisation Australia 2018-19,

⁷¹ <https://publications.yourtown.com.au/2019-insights-tas-kt-v1/page/6-7>

Priority action 9: Raise the age of criminal responsibility.

A wide range of voices have called for Tasmania's age of criminal responsibility to be raised from 10 to 14,⁷² on the grounds that:

- The current age of criminal responsibility is inconsistent with research on brain development: children lack the necessary components of criminal responsibility, both in terms of behaviour control and moral awareness.
- Children's exposure to the criminal justice system damages health and wellbeing.
- Australia is out of step with international human rights standards and the minimum age of criminal responsibilities in other countries.⁷³

⁷² <https://www.childcomm.tas.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/Age-of-Innocence-Children-and-criminal-responsibility-Background-Paper-FINAL.pdf>

⁷³ https://www.acoss.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/SUB_Joint-COSS_Age-of-Criminal-Responsibility-FINAL.pdf



Leaning for life

All children and young people in Tasmania can learn what they need to thrive across their lives.

A good life means being equipped with the knowledge, skills and confidence you need to navigate the world. Unfortunately many Tasmanians haven't had a chance to gain these.

Tasmania consistently trails the rest of the country in measures of learners' outcomes. AEDC data shows that around 21% of Tasmanian children are starting school developmentally vulnerable, and in some communities this is as high as 67%.⁷⁴ Once they enter high school, 1 in 5 Tasmanians remain at or below the National Minimum Standard for reading.⁷⁵ Only 3 in 5 Tasmanians who undertake year 12 successfully complete it, and 1 in 2 Tasmanians of working age haven't got the literacy skills they need to navigate everyday life and work.⁷⁶

There are also other skills and knowledges people need to set them up for a good life. People told us that this includes things which are often forgotten in a narrow 'education' focus, things such as basic life skills, relationship skills and cultural knowledge – including the knowledges of aboriginal peoples.

"We should be learning how to live – how to do basic things like paying rent, doing tax. I don't know how to do those properly."

Education and learning opportunities for children and young people in Tasmania can and should be setting them up to thrive across their lives.

Priority action 10: The Tasmanian Government extend universal access to early years education to all children aged three and upwards, and provide wraparound support for all families in the first 1000 days.

TasCOSS supports the focus on the first 1000 days as identified in the discussion paper. A 2017 National Review highlighted that expanding universal early learning access to three year olds would be "the single most impactful reform Australia could undertake" in improving educational outcomes.⁷⁷ Participation in quality early learning has been shown to provide significant positive and protective impacts on both short and long-term outcomes for children.

While the federal government has been resistant to extending Universal Access funding, Tasmania has an opportunity through this strategy to put the interests of children first and ensure every child is provided with quality early learning at no cost to families. The Working Together initiative has shown that cost is a significant barrier to access, but by no means the only one. It has also shown that

⁷⁴ See [AEDC, 2018](#). Clarence, Clarendon Vale: 66.7% vulnerable on one or more domains

⁷⁵ See ACARA, [NAPLAN, 2019](#): Year 7, Reading, Tasmania – 21.6% at or below NMS

⁷⁶ #100percentliteracy Alliance, 2021. [A Road Map to a Literate Tasmania](#), p.4

⁷⁷ Pascoe, S. M., & Brennan, D. 2017. [Lifting our game: Report of the review to achieve educational excellence in Australian schools through early childhood interventions](#). Victorian Government

the provision of holistic, wraparound supports for families can help children and families experiencing multiple or complex barriers to accessing early learning to engage and thrive.

Priority action 11: The Tasmanian government create a comprehensive guidance and referral service to help all Tasmanians – including young Tasmanians and their parents -- understand and plan for their learning in all areas of life and navigate the full range of learning opportunities.

TasCOSS has heard time and again from people of all ages that learning opportunities and systems are fragmented, tangled and confusing. All people of all ages, people said, deserve an equal chance at an education, and Tasmanians who've embarked on different learning journeys all need to have the chance to double back, change paths, or make up for lost time.

Many want to engage in learning but don't know what's available, who it's available to, what's involved, or where to go for help. A comprehensive, holistic service which covers the full range of learning opportunities, including early learning, schools, VET, University, and adult and community education would assist children, young people and their families to start their learning journeys with a map to a destination, while also providing the chance to reassess and reorient when circumstances change or new opportunities arise.



Getting where you need to go

All children and young people in Tasmania can get where they need and want to go, when they need and want to go there.

Behind many of the challenges facing Tasmanian children and young people and their families lies the issue of transport disadvantage: an inability to own or drive a private vehicle coupled with lack of easy access to public transport.

In terms of access to a car, people may be:

- Unable to obtain a licence—a particular problem for young people who do not have support in learning to drive from the family.
- Unable to afford to purchase or run a car—again, particularly a problem for young people without family backing, since vehicles, fuel, registration and maintenance all cost more in Tasmania than in many parts of Australia.³

Children in female-led sole-parent families may be particularly vulnerable to these issues: TasCOSS consultations suggest that young women in socioeconomically disadvantaged areas of Tasmania may be more likely to never have held a driver's licence, possibly reflecting lower aspirations and/or higher social barriers, and this may be even more the case among single mothers. Indeed, in 2016, some 2000 sole-parent families – 9% of such households – had no vehicle, including:

- 15% in the Brighton and George Town LGAs
- 13% in the Glenorchy LGA
- 11% in the Devonport, Launceston, Waratah-Wynyard and West Coast LGAs
- 10% in the Derwent Valley LGA.⁷⁸

In terms of public transport, outside a few main corridors in Hobart and Launceston,⁷⁹ even Metro bus services are still largely characterised by limited hours and frequency of operations. For example, buses from Newnham to central Launceston run once an hour on weekdays, twice a day on Saturday, and not at all on Sunday.⁸⁰ And rural services often run only a few times a day at most, if they are available at all: for example, there is no public transport west of New Norfolk. Meanwhile, only a small percentage of city-dwellers live or need transport to destinations within the recommended 400-600 metres of a bus stop.

Getting where you need to go extends beyond transport, however. The built environment can act as a significant barrier to the wellbeing of Tasmanian children and young people with limited mobility or disability. For example, TasCOSS members have reported that families with one or more children living with disability face significant challenges in accessing social housing due to a lack of disability-accessible larger properties.

⁷⁸ ABS Census 2016

⁷⁹ Hobart-Glenorchy, Hobart-Shoreline, Hobart-Kingston, Launceston-University and Launceston-Kings Meadows.

⁸⁰ <https://www.metrotas.com.au/timetables/launceston-network-2020/mayfield-newnham-alanvale/>

Priority action 12: Trial a Children’s Bus.

While transport disadvantage affects everything from ability to secure affordable housing to access to health services to food security, previous TasCOSS research has found that the impact of transport disadvantage can be particularly severe on children’s learning opportunities in the early years. While young mothers who do not live close to bus routes are often dependent on others to get to birth-to-four programs or to childcare, any child under the age of around four is required to be in a fixed car seat;⁸¹ this means that a friend or family member who does not have such a seat installed cannot offer a ride. Child seat attachment points only became mandatory in vehicles sold in Australia in 2005, meaning added expense to modify older vehicles.⁸² Taxis are legally able to transport infants without car seats—a situation that leads to the complaint that “your child can be unsafe, as long as you’re paying for the privilege”—but are unaffordable for people on low incomes or in outlying areas. Meanwhile, even where bus services exist, birth-to-four programs are not always well scheduled to link to bus timetables.

Taken together, these factors mean that in the absence of transport run by an early learning provider, children often simply do not have the opportunity to attend early learning programs. Local maxi-taxis or small buses could be fitted with child safety equipment (car seats, harnesses) and funded to carry children and parents to early learning programs, playgrounds, appointments and childcare. This idea is not without precedent: some Child and Family Centres in Tasmania and commercial childcare providers elsewhere in Australia,⁸³ already provide transport for clients, and in some North American jurisdictions, specialist transport services exist for preschool children.⁸⁴

Priority action 13: All existing Tasmanian public housing stock of three or more bedrooms be retrofitted to disability access standards to accommodate children and young people with disability.

Around a third of the people on the public housing waitlist are living with disability, with waiting times for a disability-suitable property in February 2021 standing at least 15 months.⁸⁵ Where the applicant with a disability is a child or young person, Housing Tasmania’s newer disability-accessible two-bedroom properties will not be large enough to accommodate them if their family has more than one child. Given the shortage of disability-friendly private rental housing stock, the Tasmanian Government’s investment in disability-suitable housing must include expedited retrofitting of existing larger properties to ensure that families with children with disabilities can be housed, or re-housed, within social housing stock promptly.

⁸¹ The formula for determining whether a child requires a fixed backward-facing seat, a fixed forward-facing seat, or a booster seat is complicated and can depend on the make of car seat; see <http://www.transport.tas.gov.au/roadsafety/people/carseats>

⁸² <https://www.legislation.gov.au/Details/F2012C00358/Html/Text#primary-content>. We appreciate the RACT’s assistance with this issue.

⁸³ <https://www.goodstart.org.au/news-and-advice/october-2017/new-goodstart-bus-fleet>

⁸⁴ <http://www.firststudentinc.com/services/early-childhood> ;

⁸⁵ Hansard, Tasmanian House of Assembly, 3 March 2021.



Feeling valued, included and heard

All children and young people in Tasmania are treated equally, inclusively, and with respect, and have a voice in decisions that affect them.

A good life means feeling you have value and voice, regardless of your background. But sadly, many children and young people in Tasmania feel looked down on, left out or overlooked and unheard. Age discrimination can lead to children and young people's needs being overlooked or denigrated, and their voices going unheard. At the same time, children and young people from marginalised groups can face a second layer or multiple layers of discrimination; these can include Aboriginal children and young people, girls and young women, children and young people with disability, children and young people with mental health issues, LGBTQIA+ children and young people, children and young people in public housing, and children and young people whose families are recent arrivals from other countries and cultures. Indeed, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child has so far identified 53 grounds of discrimination against children based either on their identity or the identity of their parents.⁸⁶ Meanwhile, apart from the Departments of Communities and Education, consultations with children and young people are not standard practice for Tasmanian government departments.

Priority action 14: All Tasmanian government and government-funded programs working with children and young people create cultural safety policies and review and enact cultural safety recommendations for Aboriginal children and young people and children and young people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

Aboriginal Tasmanians and Tasmanians from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds face some of the highest levels of discrimination in the state. In 2014, for instance, the proportion of Tasmanians who felt that they had experienced discrimination because of ethnic or cultural background in the last 12 months was 1.4%;⁸⁷ among Aboriginal Tasmanians, it was 12.5%.⁸⁸ In the same year, survey respondents nominated people who don't speak English and Indigenous Australians as the top two groups discriminated against by Australians.⁸⁹

Cultural safety – environments in which people who have experienced racism, discrimination, stigma and dispossession can see themselves and their communities as achievers and contributors, equal to anyone in the room⁹⁰ – has been shown to be crucial to children and young people's mental health and wellbeing.⁹¹ Without assurances of cultural safety in place, Aboriginal parents may choose not to participate in child-related programs, especially given that the involvement of child safety services with Aboriginal families has sometimes reflected lack of understanding of cultural differences in child-rearing practices.⁹² Such concerns and fears may contribute to lower-than-proportional levels of participation

⁸⁶ <https://archive.crin.org/en/guides/introduction/discrimination-and-crc.html>

⁸⁷ ABS General Social Survey 2014

⁸⁸ ABS National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey 2014-15.

⁸⁹ <https://www.beyondblue.org.au/docs/default-source/research-project-files/bl1337-report---tns-discrimination-against-indigenous-australians.pdf?sfvrsn=2>

⁹⁰ <https://www.humanrights.gov.au/our-work/chapter-4-cultural-safety-and-security-tools-address-lateral-violence-social-justice>

⁹¹ <https://www.humanrights.gov.au/our-work/childrens-rights/child-safe-organisations-and-cultural-safety> ;

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5496226/>

⁹² <https://aifs.gov.au/cfca/publications/child-protection-and-aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-children>

by Tasmanian Aboriginal children in child care and preschool programs.⁹³ Meanwhile, newly arrived Tasmanians, particularly from non-English speaking backgrounds, also have experiences of racism and discrimination, as well as simple lack of cultural understanding – which may lie behind their lower-than-proportional levels of participation in child care and preschool programs as well.⁹⁴ All Tasmanian-government-funded organisations working with children should be working to, for example, the cultural safety recommendations for Aboriginal children and children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds in relation to child-safe organisations put forward by the Victorian Commissioner for Children and Young People.⁹⁵

Priority action 15: Application of good practice engagement with children and young people in all government and community sector policy and program development, planning and delivery.

Across Australia, all levels of government as well as non-government sectors are increasingly acknowledging the involvement of children and young people in decision-making as not only a responsibility of genuinely inclusive governance, but also a significant aid to policy and program formulation and delivery.⁹⁶ More mechanisms and opportunities are needed for Tasmanian children and young people to participate in decisions that affect them. Engagement of children and young people should extend beyond issues traditionally considered to be ‘children’s issues’ (education, youth programs) to include areas such as spatial planning⁹⁷ and healthcare, and should extend beyond consultation to collaboration and co-design.⁹⁸ Particular attention is necessary to ensure inclusion of diverse cohorts of vulnerable children and young people in consultative and decision-making activities.⁹⁹

⁹³ ROGS 2020, Table 3A.12

⁹⁴ ROGS 2020, Table 3A.12

⁹⁵ <https://www.cpsltd.org.au/media/1632/43-catholic-archdiocese-of-melbourne-promoting-the-safety-of-aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-children-and-young-people.pdf>

⁹⁶ <https://www.communityservices.act.gov.au/ocyfs/children/a-picture-of-children-and-young-people-in-the-act/domain-3-communities-environments-and-services/outcome-9-families-live-in-supportive-and-connected-communities/indicator-48-government-consultation-with-children-and-young-people>

⁹⁷ <https://emergingminds.com.au/resources/childrens-participation-in-decision-making-processes-in-the-child-protection-system-key-considerations-for-organisations-and-practitioners/>

⁹⁸

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/225279282_Consulting_children_and_young_people_on_what_makes_a_good_nurse

⁹⁹ <https://emergingminds.com.au/resources/childrens-participation-in-decision-making-processes-in-the-child-protection-system-key-considerations-for-organisations-and-practitioners/>



Knowing you're not alone

All children and young people in Tasmania can connect with and receive support from their community in ways that work for them.

A good life means recognising that you have the support of others when you need it. We know that the single most common factor in the future wellbeing of children and young people and their ability to developing the capacity to overcome hardship is the presence of secure, supportive relationships with a significant adult.¹⁰⁰ But too often, children and young people in Tasmania don't have the supportive relationships they need: according to the Department of Education's 2020 wellbeing survey, 31% of students reported medium to low wellbeing in relation to adults at home, and 42% in relation to adults at school, and almost two thirds (63%) of students reported a medium to low sense of belonging at their school.¹⁰¹

Being connected in a way which ensures you know you're not alone requires three things: people who persevere; a strong, caring community; and help from the professionals when more support is required than friends and family or the general community can give.

*"You can go to mum with depression and all she can give you is soup and a Panadol.
That's where professional supports come in."*

A successful wellbeing strategy will recognise the importance of stable, supportive relationships and connections for children and young people. It should also acknowledge that community services are key driver of wellbeing through the support they provide to families, children and young people on the ground in communities right across the state.

Priority action 16: All Tasmanian government and community service providers of services for children and young people are trained in trauma and poverty awareness.

Trauma is a crucial – some believe the most important -- mediator between structural disadvantage and negative life outcomes for children and young people, both before adulthood and as adults: for example, studies in the United States have found that unaddressed childhood trauma is a more accurate predictor of educational outcomes than race or income.¹ At the most basic level, childhood trauma has lasting impacts on both physical and mental health, as well as on cognitive functioning and social interactions; these underlie a range of broader impacts, including on education, contact with the criminal justice system, and ability to engage with services. Trauma also can set up a cycle of traumatic experience.¹⁰²

Training in trauma awareness for all government and non-government staff who have contact with children and young people will make service providers better able to refer on to appropriate mental health support any child/young person exhibiting behaviours of concern and to develop trauma- and poverty-informed approaches to service delivery. In the educational context, for example, SARC has particularly recommended professional development for all teaching and non-teaching school staff;

¹⁰⁰ Harvard Centre on the Developing Child, [Three Principles to Improve Outcomes for Children and Families](#)

¹⁰¹ DoE 2020, [Student Wellbeing Survey, All Tasmanian Government School Students](#)

¹⁰² <https://aifs.gov.au/cfca/publications/long-term-effects-child-sexual-abuse/interpersonal-outcomes>

teacher's aide resourcing to support the implementation of responses to the specific learning needs of children impacted by trauma; trauma-informed and poverty-informed revision of approaches to student behaviour and discipline (in particular suspensions); and development of a partnership between the Department of Education and the University of Tasmania to make trauma awareness an integral part of teacher training programs in Tasmania.

Priority action 17: The Tasmanian government begin discussions with the community sector in relation to employment by key service providers of youth peer workers to provide emotional and social support to others with whom they share a common experience.

The recent PESRAC final report recommended funding a Youth Peer Worker model for mental health services to provide additional, early intervention, awareness raising and support to young people experiencing situational distress.¹⁰³ Peer workers have proven to be incredibly effective in providing support services, particularly for recovery focused services such in the areas of mental health and drug and alcohol recovery.^{104, 105, 106} Peer workers share lived experiences, can overcome power and other imbalances or dynamics which impede connection and trust, and have been shown to reduce the sense of being alone in people who access services.¹⁰⁷ The state government should engage with key service providers to explore the possibility of youth peer worker positions across a range of services so that young Tasmanians are able to get person-centred support delivered in ways which work best for them.

¹⁰³ PESRAC, 2021. Recommendation 30.

¹⁰⁴ Peer Work Hub 2016. [Employers guide to implementing a peer workforce](#)

¹⁰⁵ Orygen 2017, [Youth Peer Work Toolkit](#)

¹⁰⁶ Lennox, Lemark, O'Shea, 2021. [Peer support workers as a bridge](#)

¹⁰⁷ Health Workforce Australia, [Mental Health Peer Workforce Literature Scan](#)



Hope for the future

All children and young people in Tasmania can face the challenges of the future with confidence.

A good life means being able to lift your eyes from the day-to-day and see a future for yourself.

Having a longer-term vision and the support to enact this for oneself is particularly important for those living through periods of dramatic life changes. Children and young people fall squarely in this camp, as they transition through the crucial developmental stages from birth through to independence. Also, as the evidence for the acceleration of global climate change and of its emerging impacts builds, environmental concerns are increasingly strongly felt by younger Tasmanians: in 2020, 44% of young Tasmanians, the highest proportion in the country, identified the environment as the most important issue in Australia today.¹⁰⁸

For many children, the transitions between developmental stages and levels of education are a time of great tumult. Roughly 1 in every 4 children who starts year 7 in Tasmania doesn't complete year 12.¹⁰⁹

"Primary school to high school was pretty crappy. I went to a different school and didn't fit in at all. I had no friends so I was going into it with nothing."

Many young people also worry about their future at work. Only just over 1 in 2 young people who finished year 12 in 2019 were engaged in either study or work the following year.¹¹⁰

"The economy is screwed. Lots of people are feeling hopeless and worried."

A successful wellbeing strategy will be one which sees more and more children being able to imagine a bright future and being supported to step into it.

Priority action 18: Wraparound transport support for young jobseekers and workers.

Many young people want to make a successful transition to training and work, but need help getting there. Young people can need to access transport support for training, jobseeking or employment on:

- A permanent basis, for example where no public transport options are available and the chances of a young person securing other means of transport are unlikely.
- A short-term basis, for example where a young person is waiting for their license or saving up to buy a car.
- An ad hoc basis, for example where a young person's car breaks down, their usual lift is unavailable, or they are offered a shift that cannot be accommodated by public transport.

Transport support services can act as more than simply ways of getting from A to B; they can also act as a wraparound services for young people needing connection to other services, individualised motivational support or a sympathetic ear. For example, Area Connect estimates that between 10% and

¹⁰⁸ <https://www.missionaustralia.com.au/publications/youth-survey>

¹⁰⁹ ROGS 2021, retention of full time students

¹¹⁰ ROGS 2021, school leaver destinations

20% of young people accessing their Regional Employment Transport Trial require such additional support to make it to work.¹¹¹ All Jobs Hubs in the state should have provisions for transport support built into their operations.

Priority action 19: The Tasmanian Government explicitly factors in current and future climate impacts of all policies and actions, including economic, social and environmental costs and benefits at the state and community level.

Young people across Tasmania consistently nominate action on climate change as a priority.¹¹² Children and young people are keenly aware that the greatest impacts of climate change will fall squarely on them, and note also that impacts on their wellbeing due to climate change have already begun.¹¹³ If the government is serious about the wellbeing of children and young people they must not only take steps to reduce and mitigate our state's climate impacts, but also to clearly account for these impacts. Doing so would allow actions to be viewed and scrutinised in their proper context, and may help assuage some climate anxiety by providing clarity and increasingly, one would hope, explanation of the future climate benefits of many actions. This would allow children and young people in the state to look forward to a future not with dread of impending climate chaos, but hope at the possibilities for mitigation and adaptation.

¹¹¹ Area Connect, personal communication, 31 March 2021

¹¹² YNOT, 2020. [Youth Policy Perspectives](#)

¹¹³ CCYP, 2020. [Investing in the wellbeing of Tasmania's children and young people.](#)

3. Whole-of-government structures to implement a Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy

TasCOSS agrees that ensuring wellbeing sits at the heart of policy requires ‘building wellbeing into the machinery of government and the tools used to make decisions.’^[1] We note and broadly agree with the benefits and limitations of the various approaches in the Discussion Paper.^[2] In particular, TasCOSS agrees that creating new structures within government to drive wellbeing outcomes is not always effective because there is less pressure on the rest of government to consider wellbeing.^[3] We therefore support measures that facilitate genuine whole-of-government approaches. We believe that one in particular would help shift the policy focus in Tasmania to one of wellbeing.

Priority action 20: The Tasmanian Government task the State Service to deliver on ‘Premier priorities.’

A wellbeing budget with priorities should be supported by a public service also geared to produce those outcomes. Ian Watt’s recent *Review of the State Service Interim Report* notes that, even though the Premier’s State of the State address typically identifies a range of priorities for the year ahead, ‘there is no process for Government to designate key whole-of-government priorities that it considers essential for the future *and* for which the TSS [Tasmanian State Service] (through Heads of Agency) must be actively involved and collectively accountable for progressing.’¹¹⁴ These priorities reflect the fact that many policy challenges are just that, partly because they require a multi-agency response, and often also collaboration outside government. The second recommendation of his report is:

The Government should task the Tasmanian State Service leadership collectively with addressing a small number of ‘Premier priorities’, built around complex problems that cut right across government, requiring a collaborative approach to facilitate successful delivery of required outcomes.¹¹⁵

As Watt points out, Premier priorities have been established in other jurisdictions, including NSW, Victoria, the Northern Territory, and New Zealand.¹¹⁶ Watt recommends such priorities be ‘identified, defined and agreed to based on the best available data and evidence, and be measured with targets and Key Performance Indicators.’¹¹⁷ Heads of Agencies should be accountable for arranging their resources in a way that contributes to meeting those indicators and targets. TasCOSS endorses this approach and recommends the Tasmanian Government identify three to five key cross-agency policy challenges as priorities, and could consider using the Good Life framework domains as a starting point.

¹¹⁴ Ian Watt, *Review of the State Service Interim Report*, 2020, p 24.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p 27.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.* pp 24-25.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.* p 25.

We also believe that more could and should be done to ensure a truly *whole-of-government* approach to ensuring policy is directed at wellbeing outcomes by building wellbeing priorities into the work of the Tasmanian state service, as recommended in the *Review of the Tasmanian State Service Interim Report*.¹¹⁸

Ultimately, any number of structures can be put in place to guide or require wellbeing approaches to policy, but these will not produce the desired outcomes without the political will, commitment and drive to achieve those outcomes. As noted by Watt in relation to the proposed ‘Premier priorities,’ “Government commitment at the outset will be critical, especially from the highest levels of leadership.”¹¹⁹ The success of the Australian and Tasmanian Governments’ initial responses to COVID-19 can be partly attributed to collaboration between agencies and outside of government, to ensure people had enough income and/or support to access essentials including food, electricity, healthcare, employment and education. We urge the Tasmanian Government and State Service leaders to retain and build upon this collaborative and wellbeing-driven approach to address the long-standing and complex challenges that children and young people still face in Tasmania.

¹¹⁸ Ibid. pp 24-27.

¹¹⁹ Ibid. p 25.

'A GOOD LIFE' IN TASMANIA

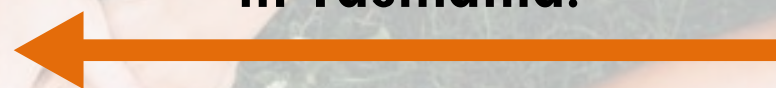
EVERY TASMANIAN DESERVES A GOOD LIFE —
THE OPPORTUNITY TO DO MORE THAN SPEND
EACH DAY JUST GETTING BY.



But what does a good life look like for Tasmanians on low incomes? What are the basics of a good life, and what makes a good life hard to achieve?

To find out, TasCOSS engaged 338 people across the state, combining these with results from similar processes undertaken by other organisations.

Taken together, our community highlighted nine key elements of 'a good life' in Tasmania.





A HEALTHY MIND AND BODY

One phrase emerged again and again: “Health is everything.” Respondents emphasised the value of good health and health care that treats the whole person.

“If you have good mental health, anything is possible.”

But Tasmanian health outcomes are poor overall and Tasmanians on low incomes struggle to get primary medical, dental and mental health care.



A PLACE TO CALL HOME

Participants spoke of the pleasure that they take in their homes and the security that a stable home brings. But they also spoke of the anxiety associated with watching rents and house prices go up, the stress of trying to find an appropriate place in a tight housing market, and the stresses on families as people are crowded together.

“I feel a level of fear now, in my mid-forties, that I have never felt before - I feel like I’m priced out of the market.”

Tasmanians on low incomes face exceptional difficulties in finding either a home to buy or a secure, affordable rental. The supply of social housing has not kept up with demand and the number of homeless Tasmanians has grown.



KNOWING YOU’RE NOT ALONE

Most participants in the Good Life consultations felt that relationships, both intimate and social, were crucial to their wellbeing and to their ability to thrive. Being connected, participants suggested, requires three things: people who persevere; a strong, caring community; and help from the pros when more support is required than friends and family or the general community can give.

“Knowing someone who believes in you [is necessary] to flourish.”

“With so many people in the world, no one should have to be alone.”

Combining strengthened social connection with other support initiatives can lead to a virtuous spiral that addresses multiple issues simultaneously.



LEARNING FOR LIFE

Tasmanians told us a good, broad-ranging education leads to a better life across the board: literacy, numeracy, digital competence, and life skills ranging from cooking to budgeting to effective communication. All people of all ages deserve an equal chance at an education that takes their needs into account.

“Hard as it was to improve our education in our 30s, we are now seeing the benefit of having done so and wish young people could only understand how important education is to quality of life.”

Tasmanians need to be supported to understand what education is right for them across the broad range of options on offer in the Tasmanian educational system.



FEELING VALUED, INCLUDED, AND HEARD

Good Life consultations were filled with pain at being considered to be worth less than other Tasmanians. Respondents described feeling looked down on, left out, invisible, and unheard.

“I wish...that others would understand disability a little bit more, rather than just discriminating against us and not including me and my family in the community.”

“If we want to be more innovative and inclusive, we need to open [decision-making] to people from all backgrounds.”

Behind these experiences lie attitudes of individuals and structural inequalities like racism, ableism, and sexism.



BEING ABLE TO AFFORD THE BASICS

Financial stress was the one of the biggest barriers to a good life, making it harder to cope with other stressors.

“Financial stress leads to major anxiety. It’s mentally draining. There’s no need for luxuries, but just no stress.”

Tasmanians face sweeping increases in the cost of living with rising prices significantly outstripping increases in benefits and allowances. Thousands of Tasmanians struggle to get into employment that would lift their incomes above subsistence levels.



FEELING SAFE

Fear has no place in a good life. While women, children, older Tasmanians, and Tasmanians with disability are particularly vulnerable to feeling unsafe, everyone deserves to feel safe – even people caught up in the justice system, which is short on therapeutic and culturally appropriate approaches to rehabilitation.

“Safety underpins everything else. If you’re not safe, you don’t have a healthy mind – you’re always worried, always stressed. If you don’t feel safe at home because of violence, your home is worthless. If you don’t feel safe at school, you can’t get an education.”



GETTING WHERE YOU NEED TO GO

Having your own transport equates to freedom. Tasmanians pointed out it can be deeply frustrating to struggle to get to employment, education, health and support services, shops, socialising, and Tasmania’s natural beauty.

“[I need] reliable, affordable access to supermarkets, playgrounds.”

Getting where you need to go extends beyond transport: the built environment can act as a significant barrier to Tasmanians with limited mobility or disability.



HOPE FOR THE FUTURE

Tasmanians want support which is future-oriented, taking whole-of-life approaches. Three key areas emerged around **looking ahead**:

Across life stages. A longer-term vision in relation to two main groups living through periods of dramatic life changes: young people and older people.

A changing economy. Even prior to COVID-19, participants, particularly those from regions of industrial downturn, are worried about the future of work.

“What worries me most: lack of employment opportunities for my daughter. It’s bad enough now; I hate to think what it will be like in 15-20 years.”

Response to climate change. Climate change is now a significant concern for older and younger Tasmanians alike

