

Position Statement



Children and Young People

Anglicare Australia believes all children and young people need to be provided with care and love, as well as the opportunity to fully participate in their communities. The best way to give children and young people the best possible start in life is to support parents and families to provide loving and secure homes.

Our Experience

The Anglicare Australia Network supports 14,900 children and their families through child-specific services, 14,800 young people through youth-specific services and more than 5,500 children and young people in out-of-home care. In addition, 60,000 people access the Network's family and relationships support services including domestic violence support.

Our Network engages in research and advocacy for children and young people, including through the [Home Stretch Campaign](#). The campaign calls on all state and territory governments to extend out-of-home care to the age of 21. Many members support [Family Matters](#), the national campaign to ensure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people grow up safe and cared for in family, community and culture.

Key Issues

Poverty is a major factor in family breakdown, a source of trauma, and a barrier to children and young people living in stable and loving homes. Governments have failed to provide families who rely on government payments with enough support, and many families simply can't find affordable housing. The effects on children and young people are profound. For example, evictions force families to move and children to abruptly change schools, losing stability, friends and social connection. Families in poverty struggle to feed themselves and heat and cool their homes, which causes distress and suffering. Children and young people miss out on extra-curricular and recreational activities which is so important in formative years.

The number of children and young people in out-of-home care has been rising for decades. Studies indicate that children enter care for increasingly complex family situations associated with a range of factors including poverty, parental substance abuse, mental health issues and family violence. The consequences of entering state care are often dire. Young people who have left care are more likely to be homeless,¹ leave school early, and make contact with the criminal justice system. They are also more likely to have children at an early age and have their own children taken into care.² At a time when more and more parents are supporting their children well into their twenties, it is clear that young people in care should not have their support cut off at the age of 18. Extending care to the age of 21 would improve life outcomes and reduce reliance on future services for many young people.

Young people are particularly at risk of becoming homeless. This is driven by domestic and family violence, family breakdown, and lack of mental health support.³ Each of these factors are major issues for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people who are even more likely to experience homelessness, poverty, and removal from their families.

Work is another key factor in the wellbeing of families. Parents who can't find work are forced to rely on government payments that are well below the poverty line. Those in insecure work face precarious and unstable lives. These situations make it hard for parents to provide the best possible life for their children.

Work is also a major issue for young people. Young people are also more educated than ever before, but still more than twice as likely to be unemployed compared with other workers. Unemployment, especially youth unemployment, is particularly high in regional and remote areas.⁴ Young people are facing the challenges of casual and insecure work, with only half of young Australians gaining full time work by the age of 25.⁵

Unemployment and underemployment has serious implications for young people's self-esteem and mental health as they transition to adulthood. 40 percent of young people report low levels of social and emotional wellbeing.⁶ The number of young people with a probable mental illness is growing, rising to almost 1 in 4.⁷

To tackle the issues, we must ensure that children and young people are valued and supported emotionally and socially, and given agency over their own lives. It is also critical that we support children and young people by supporting their parents and families. That means abandoning punitive welfare measures and supporting people with trauma-informed care.

Recommended Actions

Anglicare Australia calls for:

- An investment in housing that is affordable, safe and secure for children, young people and their families, including social and public housing, so that all children and young people enjoy the benefits of home.
- An increase in government income payments and minimum wage to allow children, young people and their families to live dignified, healthy and happy lives.
- More localised programs throughout states and territories to address family violence including perpetrator intervention programs and support for victims and witnesses of family violence and abuse.
- All state governments and territories to extend the care for young people to the age of 21.

- Education and employment programs, including mentoring, that build on the capacity of people rather than being punitive.
- Collaboration from governments, businesses and the community sector to create entry level jobs. This would create dignity and security for families, and help young people gain skills and build independence.
- Evidence based early intervention and prevention programs that work therapeutically and holistically with children, young people and their families in a culturally safe manner.
- Mental health services with the capacity to respond to the needs of children, young people and their families affected by trauma.
- Co-design to ensure that the lived experiences of children, young people and their families are reflected in the services they use.

1 McDowall, J. J. (2010) Experiences of homelessness by care leavers in Australia. Commissioned by the CREATE Foundation.

2 Bauchamp, T. (2014) strong future for young people leaving out-of-home care. Uniting Care Children Young People and Families position paper on leaving care and aftercare.

3 AIHW (2015) Specialist Homelessness Services 2014-15.

4 Brotherhood of St Lawrence (2018) An unfair Australia? Mapping youth unemployment hotspots.

5 Foundation for Young Australians (2018) The New Work Reality. New Work Order report series.

6 Australian Council for Educational Research (2007) ASG Student Social and Emotional Health Report.

7 Mission Australia (2017) Five Year Mental Health Report.