



Canberra Foundations Collaborative

Hands Across Canberra
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THE SNOW FOUNDATION

John James Foundation

CANBERRA YOUTH ISOLATED FROM HEALTH SERVICES POST COVID-19

Young people in Canberra are finding themselves increasingly isolated from health services as the impact of COVID-19 continues to leave them vulnerable and uncertain about the future.

One of the Capital's leading youth advocates has sighted [new data](#) showing one in 20 young people in the ACT, aged 15 to 19, were homeless for the first time during the pandemic. These young Canberrans are experiencing high levels of psychological distress, negative impacts on wellbeing, family conflict, discrimination and other pressures.

Yet youth in the ACT are not accessing mainstream services for help.

Justin Barker, from the ACT Youth Coalition, is calling for greater access to services that are tailored to young people to help them cope with the ongoing uncertainties connected to the significant changes in the way we live, post COVID.

“Young people are motivated to seek help, but they are getting lost in a system that does not work for them. Our health systems are not set up for young people; it's too expensive, services are hard to find and wait times are prohibitive. The result is that they are simply not getting the help they need,” Mr Barker said.

“We need more programs like the Teen Clinic in Lanyon and the Youth Space in Belconnen. These programs are doing youth work in a way that works for young people in the ACT. They are free, accessible and youth friendly. They provide health pathways to services that are available and appropriate, and they work in spaces where and when young people need them.”

These two programs are part of a suite of organisations and services supported by the Canberra Foundations Collaboration, who are focussed on funding people who find innovative ways to reach Canberrans in need and who help reconnect the local community after COVID-19.

“If you do youth work well, it becomes self-perpetuating. Young people let other young people know and the services are used more and more frequently, by the people who need it, in a way that works for them,” Mr Barker added.

Teen Clinic Nurse Sandy Lendrum said, often, young people wanted a sense of autonomy and control over their health care needs in a comfortable and youth focussed setting.

“Many young people do not have a regular GP,” Nurse Lendrum said. “Young people need to be able to access services without parental involvement, when needed, to promote autonomy over their health and wellbeing.”

“There needs to be locally available health networks that are set up for young people to recommend free and accessible GP’s and other health services, and who can provide inclusive and non-judgemental care, without a waitlist.”

The Teen Clinic is a first of its kind in Canberra, with clients seeking help with supportive listening, sexual identity and gender issues, mental health, as well as advice and education around contraception and alcohol and other drug use (including vaping).

“Many of these issues are something that young people don’t feel comfortable discussing with the family GP or with their parents in the room. This is especially important when the young person may be experiencing violence and abuse at home.”

Violence and abuse at home is one reason that many young people end up homeless.

“The statistic from Mission Australia regarding the level of youth homelessness is especially concerning. It certainly aligns to the data we have seen in the Canberra Vital Signs 2022 report released earlier this year,” Mr Barker said.

“In reality, for every homeless young person, there are more on the brink of leaving home, or being thrown out. This is a real problem for our city and the region.”

In addition to the two programs, the Canberra Foundations Collaborative is also supporting a review of the ACT’s youth practice workers, who themselves have been impacted by COVID-19. The review is being undertaken by the ACT Youth Coalition.

Collaborative member and Snow Foundation CEO, Georgina Byron, said the focus on youth services was vital at this time of uncertainty and change.

“It’s so important that we have a true understanding of how the sector is doing, we need to know what worker burnout, and other factors, are having on the availability of youth services in the region. This is in addition to the development of new services, created with young people in mind, as we recover from COVID and begin to understand it’s true impact,” Ms Byron said

“We know that the physical and mental health of young people has taken a serious knock thanks to three years of pandemic. The uncertainty for young people associated with changes to just about every aspect of our lives must be taken seriously. We must find ways to provide young Canberrans with safe, caring, low or no cost, available health-based environments, where they feel it’s OK to share their physical and mental health worries and needs.”

“That’s why the services supported by the Collaborative are so important.”

For more information about the Collaborative go to <https://www.snowfoundation.org.au/canberra-foundations-collaborative-1m-grant-round/>

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