

Youth Participation and Empowerment

Youth Network of Tasmania
Budget Priorities Statement 2025-26



Introduction

In recent years, the Tasmanian Government has embarked on an ambitious reform agenda to improve outcomes for Tasmania's children and young people. This includes the introduction of legislation to protect and promote the safety of children in our communities, and whole-of-government strategic policies aimed at improving health and wellbeing, and economic outcomes for children and young people.

Current State Government policy initiatives clearly demonstrate a strong commitment to seeking the views of children and young people to inform decision-making and policy development. It is evident that prioritising the rights of children and young people, as well as creating child-centred systems, is a key focus for the government.

However, a shared strategic vision for Tasmania's children and young people is essential, not just to support governments ongoing reform efforts, but also to plan for the future. By creating systems to proactively seek the views of children and young people, we can shift from a system that reacts to issues to one that identifies emerging issues and trends early, allowing for timely interventions, improved outcomes and budget efficiencies. A two-way exchange between the government and young people, where the views of young people inform government's strategic objectives as well as provide a platform for them to communicate new issues affecting their lives, will lead to better outcomes.

Many young people aged 12-25 years, and the Tasmanian youth sector, are looking to YNOT to do more to ensure an independent voice to government informs thinking and action on a range of important public policy areas. YNOT is well placed, as the State's Youth Affairs Peak Body, to bring young people's views to government to inform planning and decision-making, particularly from a population-based perspective.

In addition, YNOT believes that the delivery of safe, ethical, and meaningful youth participatory activity across government and community sectors could be delivered in a more fiscally responsible, efficient, and effective way.

This submission offers three key ways the government can better support young people: first by adequately funding YNOT's capacity to bring young people's views to policy deliberations and effective solutions; secondly, by investing in a whole of government youth participation and empowerment framework and learning program and finally, by ensuring the ongoing delivery of the Youth Week Tasmania small grants program.

Summary of Recommendations

1. **Strengthen YNOT capacity to bring the views of young people to government and decision makers**, including the delivery of youth consultations for government agencies, through an increased investment in recurrent Peak Body Funding.
2. Invest in the development of a shared **Child and Youth Participation and Empowerment Framework and Toolkit** that offers a unified structure for genuine and safe engagement of all children and young people in Tasmania.
 - a) Invest the delivery of a **youth participation professional learning program** to build the skills and capability of state service employees and the community sector workforce in youth participation and engagement.
3. Invest in the ongoing delivery of the **Youth Week Tasmania** small grants program.

1. Sustainable Funding for YNOT

Significant government reforms, an increased demand from young people to amplify their views on matters important to them, and ongoing cross sectoral requests for the delivery of youth participation activity and training, have led to a significant increase in demand for our expertise.

A demand we cannot meet.

YNOT's recurrent Peak Body funding is just \$157,634 per annum and despite being indexed since 2019, has steadily eroded in value since 2010. The recent sharp increase in inflation and inadequate indexation has further exacerbated this.

YNOT's ability to deliver its core peak body functions has only been possible through deficit funding and separate project funding. YNOT's total staffing compliment comprises 2.0 FTE including the CEO, Project Manager and Finance Officer. Underinvestment in the State's Youth Affairs Peak Body, does not achieve the outcomes that young people, government and our sector want or need.

"...The work you do is fantastic, however, you have very little resources so are spread thinly..."
YNOT Member 2022

YNOT is seeking a sustained increase in our recurrent Peak Body Funding through investment in two key roles: a full-time Policy Officer and a part-time Communications Officer. This investment will support government to achieve its strategic policy objectives through strengthening YNOT's capability to respond to requests for our expertise, particularly the delivery of youth consultations for government agencies. It will also increase our ability to bring the views of young people to the government on emerging issues, allowing for earlier input into planning and decision-making on youth affairs. Most importantly, it will empower young people by providing more opportunities for them to actively shape their future.

Young Tasmanians face many challenges and concerns including the environment, the economy, housing insecurity, transitioning to adulthood, education, employment and inequality to name a few. Sustained investment in YNOT will ensure young people's view, lived experience and solutions are reflected in public policy leading to better outcomes and budget efficiencies across government.

"YNOT do a fantastic job. I rely on their expertise for a large part of my work especially in policy and governance." YNOT member 2023

Proposed investment: \$830,000 over 4 years*

*This investment is for increased resources only (policy and communications officer) bolstering our total Peak Body funding to \$1,460,536 over 4 years. Costs inclusive of salary and entitlements for 1.0 x FTE SCHADS Level 7 and 1 x 0.6 FTE SCHADS Level 6. A full breakdown is available on request.

2. Child and Youth Participation and Empowerment Framework

Investing in a whole-of-government Child and Youth Participation and Empowerment Framework will deliver a coordinated, effective, and evidence-informed approach to child and youth participation activity across the government, community, and private sectors in Tasmania.

A unified framework, co-designed with children and young people, will support a shared understanding and approach to child and youth participation and empowerment across sectors, improve mechanisms to support young people's individual and collective participation in decision-making and provide guidance and tools to organisations to improve their practice in the delivery of safe, ethical and meaningful youth participation activity¹.

"... the responsibility to lead whole of government actions, work to develop, implement and evaluate a whole of government engagement and participation strategy, in co-production with children and young people." Interim Commissioner for Children and Young People (2024)

At present, there is considerable duplication in effort and budget expenditure across government agencies in implementing child and youth participation initiatives. Government agencies appear to work in silos, often seeking to engage with the same established youth participatory groups and entities. This contributes to consultation fatigue, tokenism, a lack of diversity in views and the inefficient use of resources. On occasion, well-intentioned youth participation activity has resulted in unintended consequences such as power imbalances, safety issues and ethical dilemmas.

"In a few gigs that I've done with youth participation, it feels quite tokenistic. Sometimes it feels like they want a young person for the sake of having a young person."
Young Tasmanian aged 15, North (2023)

Meaningful and sustained participation by children and young people in decision-making and policy design requires commitment, coordination and collaboration to create genuine change². It requires a shift in policy settings and cultural transformation within workplaces, and the wider community, to challenge negative attitudes and beliefs towards children and young people's right to express their views and participate in decision making.

"I found that some government representatives were not highly engaged with the youth and were not open to new ideas presented by young people" Young Tasmanian aged 16, North West (2023)

A Child and Youth Participation and Empowerment Framework will support cross sectoral compliance with international, national and state obligations relating to children and young people. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)³ serves as the foundation of these obligations, particularly in Article 4, which states that "Governments should make these rights available to children," Article 12, which affirms that "Children have the right to express their views on decisions that affect them and to have their opinions considered," and Article 42, which emphasises that "Governments should ensure the Convention is made known to all parents and children."

The Tasmanian Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy: It takes a Tasmanian Village⁴, Commission of Inquiry (CoI) Report into the Tasmanian Government's Responses to Child Sexual Abuse in Institutional Settings 2023⁵, Youth Justice Blueprint 2024-2034⁶ and the Youth Jobs Strategy 2024-

2030⁷ have all either recommended or committed to seeking the views of young people in order to meet their strategic objectives and develop child and youth focused service systems.

Crucially, the government's response to implementing all 191 CoI recommendations emphasises youth empowerment and participation, as outlined in CoI recommendation 15.7, which focuses on empowering children, families, and carers. Youth participation and empowerment is one of six key themes that will steer the government's approach to carrying out the CoI recommendations.⁸

Investment in a Youth Participation and Empowerment Framework will also support the coordination and alignment of effort across government agencies to achieve shared goals, contribute to budget efficiencies through a more coordinated, effective and efficient use of resources, and improve workforce capability through increased knowledge and improved youth participation practice.

YNOT is well placed to deliver statewide youth participation and engagement activity with young Tasmanians aged 12-25 years to co-design a Youth Participation and Empowerment Framework with key stakeholders.

Proposed investment \$35,000 over 12 months. *

*Costs inclusive of projects costs, including travel, accommodations consultation activity. A full breakdown is available on request.

a) Youth Participation Professional Learning Program

Building workforce capability to uphold the rights of children and young people and improve participation and empowerment practices will be essential in supporting government to achieve its reform agenda. Investing in the ongoing delivery of YNOT's pilot youth participation professional learning program will help achieve this.

"Investing in a youth participation professional learning program is crucial to addressing the gaps in local government experience, confidence and capability in engaging with young people. Many local government employees lack the foundational skills and knowledge necessary to effectively involve young people in decision-making processes, leading to missed opportunities for meaningful participation." Local Government Association of Tasmania (2024)

YNOT has seen a significant increase in demand for our expertise in youth participatory work, across government and community sectors, following significant legislative and policy reform.

There is a distinct lack of knowledge and understanding of child rights and youth participation and empowerment approaches across sectors. Many organisations are looking to YNOT for support and guidance on how to meaningfully engage with young people and meet child safe standards—specifically, Standard Two: *"Children and young people are informed about their rights, involved in decisions that affect them, and treated with respect."*⁹

YNOT is recognised for our expertise in youth participation nationally and statewide, and importantly we are trusted by young Tasmanians. Our pilot youth participation professional learning program, developed in partnership with the Youth Affairs Council of South Australia (YACSA), Youth Affairs Council of Western Australia (YACWA) and young people, provides evidence-informed information on youth participation models and mechanisms, through the provision of online webinars, workshops, toolkits and practical resources. Designed to build individual knowledge, confidence and capability in

the delivery of youth participation initiatives our initial workshops were oversubscribed within 48 hours, resulting in a waitlist of 60 individuals.

“I thought this was an excellent workshop... Having a toolkit to take back with me will actually mean we can start putting words into practice more quickly.”

Workshop participant (2024)

Currently, YNOT is working collaboratively with TasTAFE to explore the possibility of aligning the content from our learning package to specialised youth work skills sets that have been designed using units from a selection of community services qualifications. These specialised skill sets have been selected by TasTAFE in collaboration with YNOT relating to youth work and professional youth work practice. These nationally accredited units of competency are industry-recognised, with the potential for participants of YNOT’s learning package to gain recognition of prior learning.

Investing in a program of professional learning will support sustained cultural and systemic change through building the capacity and capability of the state service, local government and community sector workforce to deliver evidence informed, youth participation and engagement activity.

It will result in a more interconnected and integrated child-centred service system and help strengthen cross-sectoral partnerships, through building a shared understanding of child rights, youth participation theories, models, methods and outcomes of effective participation¹⁰.

Importantly, it will enhance cultural safety and inclusive practice and empower young people to actively participate in their community and make meaningful contributions on issues that impact their lives.

“[YNOT’s] advice was pivotal in helping me design a survey that was as accessible and engaging as possible, and much appreciated. The responses we’ve received so far are very moving, affirming, and – perhaps not surprisingly for yourselves to hear, given your expertise in engaging with children and young people – very consistent.” *Tasmanian Government stakeholder (2023)*

Proposed Investment: \$217,300 over 2 years*.

*Costs inclusive of a part-time SCHADS Level 5 Project Officer, Casual SCHADS Level 4 Facilitator (young person), project running costs, including travel, accommodation, and workshop delivery. A full breakdown is available on request.

3. Youth Week Tasmania

Since 2018, the Tasmanian Government has invested \$50,000 per annum in Youth Week Tasmania to celebrate the invaluable contributions young people make in their communities, showcase their talents and skills and to the build capacity of young people to develop practical skills and knowledge in event planning and delivery.

The Youth Week Tasmania Small Grants Program, coordinated by the Department of Premier and Cabinet, with support from YNOT, has not received an ongoing funding commitment beyond 2025.

Tasmania's largest celebration of young people attracts significant support and interest from young people, the Tasmanian youth sector and the broader community, with each annual event eagerly anticipated by existing and new participants.

Young people actively participate in the planning and delivery of Youth Week Tasmania activities, providing them the opportunity to take ownership, develop skills and connect with other young people and the broader community. Importantly it provides young people with a platform to share their views on matters important to them.

“Youth Week Tasmania 2024 is an essential platform for young people to share their voices, ideas, and aspirations, ultimately contributing to a more connected, vibrant, and representative community.” 2024 Youth Week Tasmania Participant, aged 14 (South)

YNOT urges the Tasmanian Government to commit to ongoing investment in Youth Week Tasmania to ensure this annual, statewide event can continue into the future.

Proposed Investment: \$200,000 over 4 years.

References

¹ Government of Ireland (2021). Participation Framework. National Framework for Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-making. https://hubnanog.ie/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/5587-Child-Participation-Framework_report_LR_FINAL_Rev.pdf

² *Ibid.* Government of Ireland (2021).

³ United Nations (1990). Convention on the Rights of the Child. <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-rights-child>

⁴ Tasmanian Government (2021). Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy: *It takes a Tasmanian village* https://hdp-au-prod-app-tas-shapewellbeing-files.s3.ap-southeast-2.amazonaws.com/2116/3159/8898/Child_and_Youth_Wellbeing_Strategy_Sept_2021_wcag_FINAL.pdf

⁵ Commission of Inquiry into the Tasmanian Government's Responses to Child Sexual Abuse (Report, August 2023) https://www.commissionofinquiry.tas.gov.au/_data/assets/file/0011/724439/COI_Full-Report.pdf

⁶ Tasmanian Government (2023). Youth Justice Blueprint 2024-2034. <https://publicdocumentcentre.education.tas.gov.au/library/Shared%20Documents/Youth-Justice-Blueprint.pdf>

⁷ Tasmanian Government (2024). Youth Jobs Strategy 2024-2030. https://www.youthjobsstrategy.tas.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0004/536521/Youth-Jobs-Strategy24.pdf

⁸ Tasmanian Government (2023). Keeping Children Safe and Rebuilding Trust: *Government Response to the Report of the Commission of Inquiry into the Tasmanian Government's Responses to Child Sexual Abuse in Institutional Settings*. https://assets.keepingchildrensafe.tas.gov.au/media/documents/Keeping-children-safe-and-rebuilding-trust_final-WEB.pdf

⁹ Office of the Independent Regulator. Child and Youth Safe Standards. Tasmanian Government. December 2024. <https://www.oir.tas.gov.au/about/child-and-youth-safe-standards>

¹⁰ *Ibid.* Government of Ireland (2021).