



Mental Health  
Australia

# YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH, EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT



Education and employment can be cornerstones for feeling part of a community and contributing to that community. From the young starting out in their careers, to those at the end of their careers still wanting to contribute, employment and fulfilling work can provide purpose and belonging to many.

We know that people with disability are disproportionately excluded from opportunities to work, and we know that older adults can be too. We also know that youth is a critical time for educational achievement, learning vocational skills, and early employment experience and training. And that the majority of mental health problems develop during adolescence and young adulthood, coinciding with this critical phase in life.

In 2018, the Foundation for Young Australians reported that 31.5% of young people, aged 15-24 years, were unemployed or underemployed, and that the average time taken for a young person to transition from education to full-time work is now 4.7 years, compared to just one year in 1986.

The same report highlighted that some populations of young people are more likely to face barriers, experience disadvantage, and disengage from both education and employment settings, particularly those experiencing mental ill-health.

Disengagement from study and work at this crucial transition period has major, ongoing, negative consequences for economic and social participation throughout adult life. Prolonged periods of unemployment and underemployment also have serious implications for a young person's self-esteem and general mental health and wellbeing.

The National Centre for Excellence in Youth Mental Health found that the unemployment rates for young people experiencing mental ill-health can be up to three times higher than the standard youth unemployment rate.

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# THE FACTS

## According to the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare

- In May 2020, 88% (2.8 million) of young people aged 15-24 were engaged in education and/or employment—4 percentage points less than in 2019 (92%).
- In May 2020, the proportion of young people who were considered not in employment, education or training (NEET) was more than twice as high for those living in the lowest socioeconomic areas as for those in the highest (18% or 96,000 compared with 8.7% or 66,000).
- The unemployment rate of young people aged 15-24 in June 2020 was 16%, an increase from 12% in 2019, and the highest rate since 1997.
- Monthly analysis since the COVID-19 pandemic began in March 2020 showed the rate peaked at 16.4% in July 2020 and was 11% in April 2021.

## The National Centre for Excellence in Youth Mental Health found that:

Around 37.6% of all people experiencing mental ill-health (or 67.3% with severe mental illness) are unemployed or not in the labour force, compared to 22.3% of people without mental health conditions. Evidence shows that young people with mental ill-health can have large gaps in their employment history; interrupted learning resulting in lower literacy and numeracy levels; lack employment references; and lack confidence to apply for jobs or enrol in further study.

Australian research supports the importance of early intervention in supporting young people into education, employment, and vocational training, including findings that a person unemployed for one year has more than a 50% chance of becoming long term unemployed (two years or greater) and, after a second year of unemployment, there is a six out of 10 chance of remaining unemployed for an additional year.

Research also suggests that a return to work and/or education is likely to improve, rather than harm, a young person's clinical mental health outcomes. Vocational services can act as a powerful engagement tool for young people experiencing mental ill-health, as most want to return to work or study.

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# WHAT CAN THE GOVERNMENT DO?

The 2022-2027 National Workforce Strategy released in March lists 'supporting resilience and mental health assistance in workplaces' as one of its 16 considerations for the medium and long-term future of workforce policy development.

The Strategy also highlights that "continued education and skills development through tertiary and vocational pathways will be critical as the structural shift towards higher skilled jobs continues at an increased pace."

With this in mind and looking at the research and evidence from Orygen and other mental health organisations working with youth, the importance of vocational training is paramount.

One model that has been successfully adopted for delivery within youth mental health settings, is Individual Placement Support (IPS) an evidence-based vocational intervention integrated with mental health supports. IPS has been demonstrated to be more effective than traditional vocational interventions in supporting people with severe mental illness into competitive employment. The IPS model have also been successfully adapted to support young people experiencing mental ill-health to re-engage with education. A trial of a Youth Online Training and Employment System is also currently underway in Australia.

People with lived experience of mental ill-health and recovery are also an important part of the workforce providing vocational peer work support. An Australian IPS program for young people including vocational peer workers was found to achieve strong outcomes, and should be further expanded.

Further, work with employers to break down mental health-related stigma and discrimination is fundamental to increasing equity in workplace opportunities for young people with experience of mental ill-health.

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## LOOKING FOR MORE DETAIL OR RESOURCES?

**March 2022 - \$206.5 Million to support the mental health of young Australians**  
<https://www.pm.gov.au/media/2065-million-support-mental-health-young-australians>

**March 2022 - The National Workforce Strategy**  
The National Workforce Strategy provides a framework for Government to work with to ensure sector-specific workforce plans are data-driven, enable and equip Australians to take up available work, remove barriers to participation, activate industry to drive change, and use migration to complement the domestic workforce.  
<https://www.dese.gov.au/workforce/national-workforce-strategy>

**June 2021 - Australian Institute of Health and Welfare - Engagement in education or employment**  
<https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/children-youth/engagement-in-education-or-employment>

**January 2021 - Mental Health Australia 2021 - New Disability Employment Support Model**  
[https://mhaustralia.org/sites/default/files/docs/mha\\_submission\\_-\\_new\\_disabiliton\\_paper\\_-\\_31\\_jan\\_2022\\_-\\_final.pdf](https://mhaustralia.org/sites/default/files/docs/mha_submission_-_new_disabiliton_paper_-_31_jan_2022_-_final.pdf)

**Orygen - Employment and Education Partnerships**  
<https://www.orygen.org.au/About/Employment-and-education-partnerships>

**Orygen - Policy Briefing - Individual Placement and Support**  
[https://www.orygen.org.au/getmedia/488cb584-e970-4140-ab48-304e582f41ea/Individual\\_placement\\_and\\_support\\_policy\\_briefing\\_22.aspx?ext=.pdf](https://www.orygen.org.au/getmedia/488cb584-e970-4140-ab48-304e582f41ea/Individual_placement_and_support_policy_briefing_22.aspx?ext=.pdf)

**WayAhead 2016 - The impacts of unemployment on youth mental health**  
<https://wayahead.org.au/the-impacts-of-unemployment-on-youth-mental-health/>

**Orygen 2014 - Tell them they're dreaming - Work, Education and Young People with Mental Illness in Australia**  
<https://www.orygen.org.au/Orygen-Institute/Policy-Reports/Work-Education-Young-People/tell-them-theyre-dreaming-view?ext=>

Mental Health Australia would like to thank its member organisations and key stakeholders for contributing to this extensive body of work. If you are a member of Mental Health Australia and would like to add to these resources, please contact [info@mhaustralia.org](mailto:info@mhaustralia.org)

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