

# Policy brief: Involvement of young people in messaging and decision-making

The need for young people's voices in public health messaging and response measures to COVID-19. Recommendations from the Coping with COVID-19 Study.

## Background

While young people are less likely to be hospitalised or die from COVID-19, since July 2020 a large percentage of transmission in Victoria has occurred amongst people under 30.<sup>1</sup> While partly attributed to the fact that young people are more likely to work in insecure and customer-facing roles, young people are less likely to believe that they will be negatively impacted by the virus and are more likely to believe in conspiracy theories.<sup>2</sup> Young people are also used to spending a higher proportion of their time socialising out of the home.

*"Actively involving young people in the development of strategies and initiatives. Transparency and clear communication about decision-making."*

## Key issues

### Public health messaging

To date, most of the public health messaging about COVID-19 and the restrictions has been communicated via press conferences and mass media campaigns using broad public health messaging. This has been recognised as insufficient to meet the diverse needs of the broader community such as people who are culturally and linguistically diverse.

Young people in our study also reported that such campaigns do not consider their unique needs and would be more effective if tailored to address the way young people consume information. The lack of youth-focussed campaigns is a significant barrier to supporting young people to adhere to the restrictions. To address this, young people want to be actively involved in developing public health messaging and initiatives to ensure that they appropriately meet the needs of young people.

### Involvement in decision-making

Young people also expressed their disappointment that their voices had not been considered in decision-making about issues that affected them. Young people also believe that communication should be two-ways with the needs of young people being incorporated alongside the

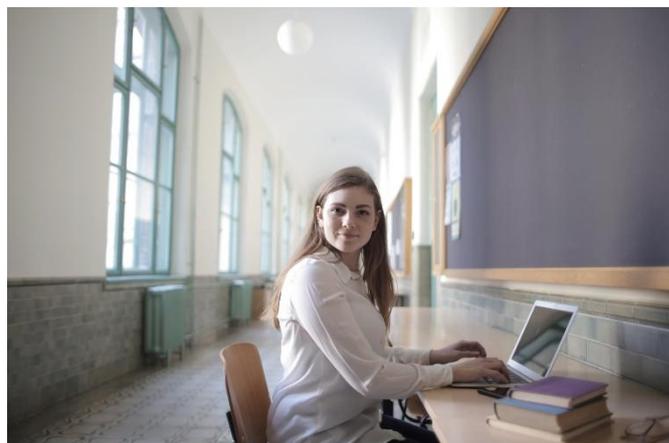


Photo by Andrea Piacquadio from Pexels

needs of the broader community.

Students are facing a range of challenges moving to an entirely online environment for their studies. Young people wanted education providers to recognise these substantial shifts in their learning and genuinely engage with students to increase flexibility and recognise the added stresses they face during this time.

## Recommendations

The Burnet Institute recommends that the Australian Government and State Governments develop age-specific campaigns in partnership with young people to ensure that their informational needs are reflected, incorporated into public health messaging and campaigns and delivered via mediums used by young people. Young people should be actively involved in all stages of messaging regarding COVID-19 – from problem framing, research, design, implementation, and evaluation.

The Burnet Institute also recommends that young people are consulted in decision-making regarding COVID-19 response strategies. Young people's experiences, perspectives, ideas, skills, and strengths must be valued and integrated throughout these stages.

1. Department of Health and Human Services. 2020. Surveillance of notifiable conditions: Coronavirus COVID-19 in Victoria, online.
2. Pickles et al. 2020. COVID-19: Beliefs in misinformation in the Australian community, medRxiv, online.

## About the Coping with COVID-19 Study

Coping with COVID-19 is a national study of young people aged 15-29 years old. Funded by VicHealth, this study aims to assess the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and related restrictions on social connection, loneliness, health behaviours, and the mental health and wellbeing of young Australians. This study commenced in March 2020, with 2000 young people participating in a longitudinal mixed methods study.