

IMPACT OF EXTREME WEATHER EVENTS ON YOUNG PEOPLE

FINDINGS FROM THE 2023
MISSION AUSTRALIA YOUTH SURVEY

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS



We acknowledge the traditional custodians of lands throughout Australia and we pay our respects to the Elders past, present and future for they hold the memories, culture and dreams of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. We recognise and respect their cultural heritage, beliefs and continual relationship with the land and we recognise the importance of the young people who are our future leaders.

This report was developed by Orygen in partnership with Mission Australia. The work was led by Caroline Gao, Myriam Ziou, Daniel Gan, Shu Mei Teo, Nicholas Fava, Jana Menssink, and Kate Filia from Orygen, and Naheen Brennan and Bronwyn Boon from Mission Australia. The expert input of other contributors from Orygen and Mission Australia who provided helpful insights, feedback, design and support were instrumental in shaping the work.

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A special thank you to the young people who shared with us, via the 2023 Mission Australia Youth Survey, their responses on current issues – especially with regard to concerns around extreme weather events and their impact on mental health and wellbeing.

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Each year, the *Mission Australia Youth Survey* seeks to understand the perspectives of young people aged 15-19 years regarding current issues, concerns and experiences. The findings allow us to develop informed initiatives to address issues and advocate for the needs of young people and their families. Orygen and Mission Australia partner on reports that delve into mental health and wellbeing findings from the *Youth Survey*. The focus of this report is on extreme weather events and the impact they have on young people.

In 2023, young people expressed their continued concern for the environment, consistent with previous years. More than two in five *Youth Survey* participants indicated that matters relating to the environment were among the most important issues facing Australia today, and a quarter of young people expressed being personally 'very concerned' or 'extremely concerned' about climate change¹.

The 2023 *Youth Survey* included additional questions to better understand young people's experiences and concerns regarding adverse climate-related events in response to a surge in the frequency and severity of these events nationwide². We asked young people whether extreme weather events, such as floods, bushfires, landslides, destructive storms, and

droughts directly impacted their households and/or communities. We also sought to understand the nature of these impacts, the resources or assistance that young people found beneficial, and their perceptions regarding the preparedness of their households and/or communities for future events.

Thirteen percent of *Youth Survey* participants (2,478 out of 19,501) indicated that they had been directly impacted by extreme weather events over the past year. Among them, approximately 40% reported an impact on their households (this could have been household only, or household and community), while 60% reported an impact solely on their communities (no impact to their household).

Impact of extreme weather events



13%
of young
people
affected

Disruptions to:

- Housing
- Schooling
- Livelihood
- Access to essentials



**Psychological
distress**



**Social
exclusion**

Overall, these events disrupted housing, education, wellbeing, and access to essential services for young people. Different groups of young people were impacted differently. Vulnerable groups such as those in lower socioeconomic areas, Indigenous young people, young people with disabilities, and gender-diverse individuals, were more likely to be confronted with the impacts of these events on their households and/or communities. While most young people believed their households were prepared for extreme weather events, there were concerns about community readiness, especially for homelessness services.

Young people who were impacted by these events, whether through their households and/or communities, reported higher levels of psychological distress than those who were not impacted. These findings are further supported by a considerable body of research affirming the link between climate disasters and mental health difficulties³⁻⁵. Importantly, young people who were affected by extreme weather events were also more likely than their peers to experience various forms of social exclusion (a lack of available resources in the domains of housing, finances, relationships, and education/employment). Among the domains, difficulties relating to finances and housing stability were particularly significant. While some disparities may stem from issues predating the events, which the data cannot clarify, addressing these concerns remains essential.

These psychosocial effects were particularly severe among young people who experienced impacts within their household, with instances of housing challenges and financial hardships more than twice as high compared to unaffected peers. They also experienced higher levels of psychological distress and heightened worries about climate change, alongside more pessimistic views on their future. Moreover, they expressed concerns about the readiness of their households and communities to cope with subsequent extreme weather events.

Despite the challenges survey participants faced, they were able to identify a variety of resources and supports that helped them cope with the aftermath of extreme weather events. Cooperation at the community level was cited by many young people as providing vital supports, which also resulted in feelings of encouragement and optimism during an otherwise difficult period. Receiving various forms of assistance from family, friends, community groups and non-profit organisations was acknowledged. Personal coping strategies, like maintaining a hopeful mindset or preparing for future weather events, were seen as beneficial. In addition, the ability to remain connected to people through technology-supported platforms and stay informed helped to alleviate the distress caused by extreme weather events.

Recommendations

Extreme weather events can have a wide range of impacts on young people's lives. This highlights the importance of developing a broad and multi-faceted strategy to support young people through these challenging times. In considering the implications of the survey findings for policy and practice, our recommendations include:

- Engaging young people for future disaster recovery strategies, planning and implementation;
- Ensuring access to housing and financial supports;
- Increasing mental health support for impacted communities;
- Enhancing capacity building for trauma-informed responses in local mental health workforce;
- Extending local workforce supporting young people; and
- Enhancement of disaster resilience and climate change education.

We believe these will help drive action to better support young people and, in doing so, reduce the psychosocial impacts of extreme weather events. This is increasingly pertinent in light of the increasing frequency and severity of extreme weather events in Australia over the past decade.



What do we need to do?



Engage young people for future disaster recovery strategies, planning and implementation:

- considerations for their needs; and
- involving them in local recovery planning and delivery.



Expand housing services and other financial supports to assist young people and their families during and after disasters with:

- sufficient immediate post-disaster housing;
- easily accessible financial aid;
- improved access to rental subsidy schemes; and
- additional youth-specific housing options.



Increase mental health support for impacted communities with:

- dedicated medium to long term funding and services;
- targeted strategies to expand and maintain the mental health workforce; and
- additional support from telehealth or other digital health services.

Capacity building for trauma informed and specific care through:

- strengthening local capacity in delivering trauma informed and specific care;
- establishing additional specialist support for local health professionals; and
- training focused on youth-specific and trauma-informed support.



Extend local workforce supporting young people, who can:

- promote social connection;
- support service access; and
- deliver peer support.



Enhance disaster resilience and climate change education by:

- crafting a national strategy for developing and disseminating educational content;
- establishing targeted funding to update and ensure the effectiveness of educational resources; and
- boosting funding for innovative community programmes, such as climate cafés and innovation labs.

2.

EXTREME WEATHER EVENTS IN AUSTRALIA

In recent years, Australia has endured large-scale bushfires, frequent floods and storms, droughts and extreme temperatures. These extreme weather events (also frequently referred to as climate-related disasters or climate disasters) have resulted in loss of life, destruction of property and infrastructure, displacement of communities, and long-term negative impacts on productivity and economic growth^{6,7}. Additionally, there is a considerable body of research affirming the link between climate disasters and mental health difficulties, with exposure to such events known to lead to conditions including post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety and depression – the effects of which may persist for years thereafter^{5,8-10}. A recent survey conducted by the Climate Council found that four in five Australians have experienced at least one climate-related event within the last four years⁸. Of these, more than half reported feeling anxious about the possibility of facing a future event. Climate disasters also impact community wellbeing through consequences such as disrupting social support networks, reducing access to services, and resulting in housing instability and poverty⁶.

Extreme weather events have a diverse impact on the population, with young people particularly susceptible^{12,13}. During adolescence and early adulthood, young people navigate critical periods of growth, with their identities, beliefs, and social networks in a state of flux and development¹⁴. This transitional phase, marked by significant physical, emotional, social, and cognitive changes, renders them more vulnerable to the direct impact of climate-related disasters such as housing and financial instability, physical ill-health, increasing stress, and interruptions to education. This vulnerability is further compounded by the heightened sensitivity of young people to social and environmental cues. As they are still forming their understanding of the world and their place within it, the chaos and destruction brought about by such events can profoundly disrupt their sense of security, which may lead to long-term

psychological consequences. Moreover, the impact of these events extends beyond immediate psychological effects, influencing young people's outlook on life and their future.

Acknowledging the unique vulnerabilities of young people to extreme weather events demands a comprehensive understanding of how these events uniquely affect youth. These understandings are critical for developing tailored support mechanisms that address the multifaceted needs of young people in Australia.



3. KEY FINDINGS

Impact of extreme weather events on young people

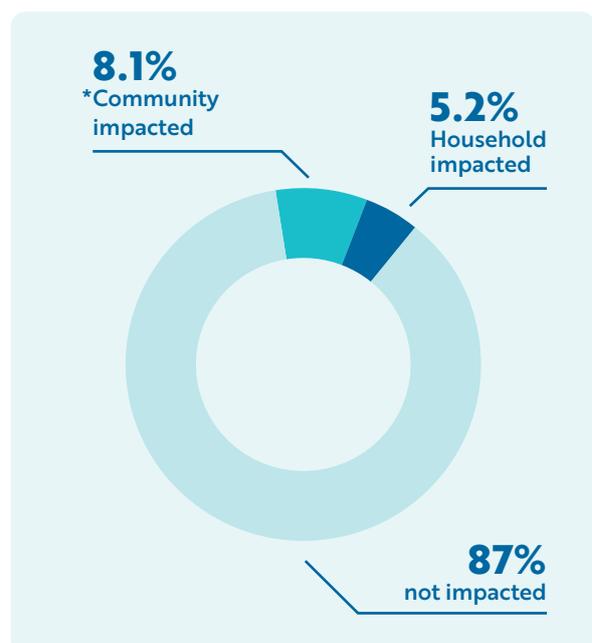


IN THE WORDS OF A YOUNG PERSON:

“Extreme flood events and bushfires have tormented my area for years, slowly getting worse and worse. Though I was not directly affected, my education as well as everyday life was disrupted every time.” – Female, 15, NSW

Of the 19,501 young people who participated in the *Mission Australia Youth Survey* in 2023, 13% had been impacted by extreme weather events in the past 12 months (2,478 participants). Among them, about 40% (967 participants, or 5.2% of all young people who participated in the survey) reported a direct impact on their household, with around 30% (290 participants) of those who experienced household impacts also identifying impacts in their community. Since the results for those exclusively affected at the household level and those experiencing both household and community impacts were largely similar, the report does not distinguish further between these two groups. Meanwhile, 60% (1,511 participants, or 8.1% of all young people who participated) reported impacts on their community, but not their household. ‘Household impacted’ and ‘community impacted’ are key measures by which participants are grouped in this report (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Impacts of extreme weather events in the past year on young people. *Community impacted but not household, see Table A1, Appendix for detailed characteristics.



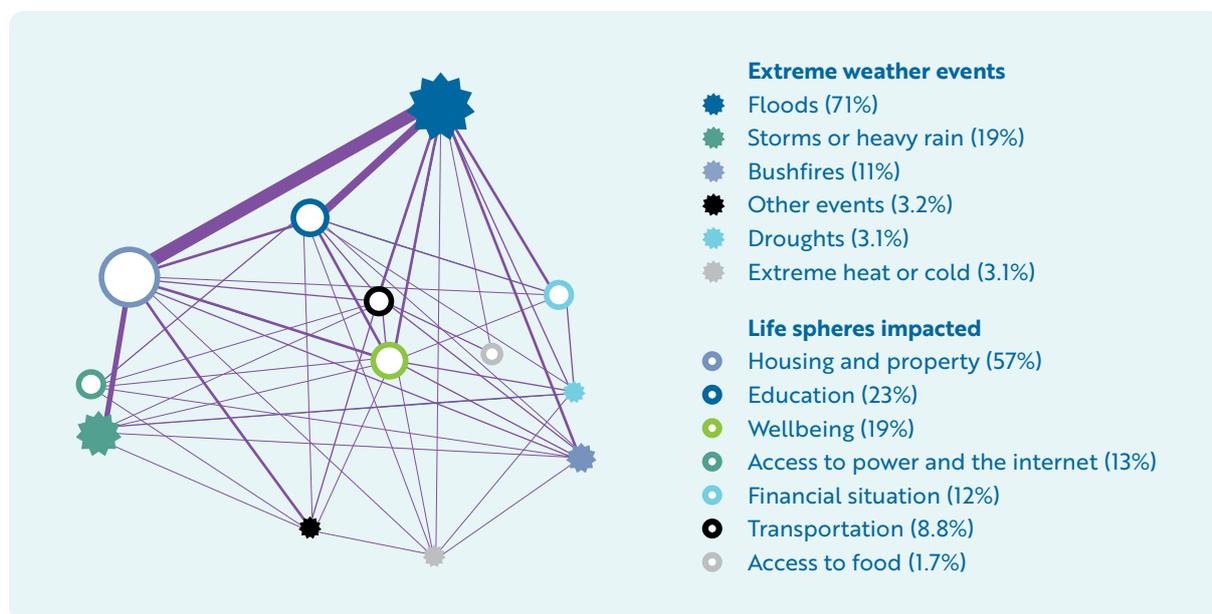
How were young people impacted by extreme weather events?

We asked participants how extreme weather events impacted them, and 93% of impacted young people (2,296 participants) provided qualitative responses. Amongst them, 65% of young people (1,493 participants) gave information about the types of weather events they experienced over the past year. Of these, the most common extreme weather event was flood (71%). This was followed by storms or heavy rain

(19%), bushfires (11%), droughts (3.1%), and extreme heat or cold weather (3.1%). Close to half (47%) of young people (1,088 participants) also provided information about which aspect of their life was impacted. These included housing and property (57%), education (23%), wellbeing (19%), access to power and the internet (13%), financial situation (12%), transportation (8.8%), and access to food (1.7%) - see Figure 2.

Figure 2. Connections between the type of climate disaster experienced and life spheres impacted.

The thickness of the line represents the frequency of events and impacts reported simultaneously and sizes of the node are proportional to the frequency of each event and impact.



Young people told us that the destruction of homes and property can significantly disrupt their lives, often necessitating relocation and imposing

considerable financial strain and enduring stress and trauma on both the young people and their families.



IN THE WORDS OF A YOUNG PERSON:

“Impacted housing due to flooding impacted my family’s financial situation affecting mental and emotional wellbeing.” – Female, 17, VIC

“My house flooded around early July of last year, with the area around us also being affected. It was pretty hard to move to our emergency accommodation, see many belongings get trashed, as well as the entire bottom floor have to get renovated. It was so stressful.” – Female, 17, NSW

Disruptions to education occur frequently during such events, with schools often closed or access to them blocked, leading to stress, loneliness, and social isolation among students. This break in the educational routine of young people not only

hampers academic progress, but also affects social interactions and mental wellbeing, contributing to a sense of disconnection from their peers and normal life activities.



IN THE WORDS OF A YOUNG PERSON:

“...Online school reminded me of lockdown which isn't a time I look too fondly back on so I was affected mentally by that, didn't get to see friends and family, no access to our packages-have medication that comes via mail, were isolated from the rest of the world, trapped.” – Female, 16, NSW

Prolonged power outages and limited access to the internet have been significant stressors for some young people. These disruptions often result in difficulties

with schoolwork, hamper the smooth running of household activities, and further exacerbate stress in their lives.



IN THE WORDS OF A YOUNG PERSON:

“We experience a lot of destructive storms where I live, and often have long blackouts, and internet outages. We once lost internet for nearly three weeks. This impacted my ability to do school work which made me stressed, and also the ability to run the household.” – Gender identity unknown, 16, NSW

Financial strains were frequently cited as a consequence of income loss, property repair expenses, and unemployment. While some of these financial

challenges are short-term, others, particularly those related to droughts, have long-lasting effects on young people in affected communities.



IN THE WORDS OF A YOUNG PERSON:

“We were impacted by the drought and bushfires. The drought affected a lot for my family and community, it affected livelihoods, water access, mental health and morale. During the drought, many things could not grow which led to a lack of livelihood through cropping as well as a lack of feed to look after livestock which led to having to sell a lot of livestock as well. We also did not have a lot of water for household things. For example, we had to shower in buckets and drink bottled water. This overall just dampened morale and had effects on mental health throughout the community.” – Female, 15, NSW

These events also have a significant impact on the physical and mental health of young people, both directly and indirectly.

These young people frequently report feelings of fear or stress stemming from their own experiences or those of their family, friends, or community.

Additionally, there were also decreases in physical activity and involvement in events, such as sports clubs, challenges in accessing services, exposure to smoke from bushfires, increasing stress, and experiences of social isolation and loneliness.



IN THE WORDS OF A YOUNG PERSON:

“...my social health and physical health [was impacted] as I was not able to see my friends and participate in sport.” – Male, 16, QLD



IN THE WORDS OF A YOUNG PERSON:

“...Smoke from the fires bogged the school and the entirety of my community was covered in it. I found it hard to breathe and despite terrible conditions, we still did activities like sports, etc, because we were still in school.” – Male, 17, WA

“One of my friends had his house flooded, and I was quite scared that something worse might happen to him. Luckily nothing did.” – Male, 16, NSW

Demographic vulnerability differences

There were significant geographical differences in the impacts of extreme weather events on young people (see Figure 3). Young people from Queensland (17%), New South Wales (17%), and South Australia (14%) were more likely to report having been impacted by extreme weather events. These results were likely due to significant floods in these states across the year

prior to the 2023 *Youth Survey* having been conducted (e.g., southeast Queensland and Northern NSW floods, Feb to Mar 2022, and the Murray River floods in South Australia, Nov 2022 to Jan 2023). These results may differ each year, depending on the extreme weather events experienced in each State and Territory.

Figure 3. Proportion of young people impacted in each State and Territory.



Young people with varying demographic and residential profiles were also impacted differently.

Those living in areas of lower socioeconomic conditions reported higher rates of impact, with 11% of young people from lower socioeconomic areas reporting their community had been impacted and 6.6% reporting that their household was directly impacted. In areas of higher socioeconomic conditions, only 6.4% of young people reported an impact on their community, and 4.4% on their household.

Community impact was reported in the highest proportions by young people living in inner regional areas (13% vs 5.6% in major cities, and 11% in outer regional/remote areas). Similar patterns occurred for household impact (7.0% in inner regional areas vs 4.2% in major cities and 6.1% in outer regional/remote areas).

Indigenous young people were more likely to report higher rates of both community and household impacts (13% community impact vs 7.8% for non-Indigenous, and 13% household impact vs 4.8% for non-Indigenous).

Culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) young people reported lower levels of community impact (6.5% vs 8.7% for those who were not CALD) but higher levels of household impact (5.6% vs 4.9% for not CALD).

Young people who reported living with disabilities also described significantly higher community impact (12% vs 7.7% among those without disability), and household impact (10% vs 4.5%).

Young people identifying as gender diverse reported 10% community impact and 11% household impact, compared with 8.0% and 5.3% for young people identifying as male, and 7.9% and 4.7% for those identifying as female. These findings should be interpreted with care, due to the relatively low number of gender diverse young people participating in the survey 3.7% (690) of all participants (see Table A1, Appendix).

The differences observed in this study align closely with existing literature. Social and economic factors, as well as characteristics that relate to existing adversities (such as living with a disability or belonging to marginalised and/or minority groups) are commonly

found to be associated with increasing vulnerability to disasters^{15,16}. These factors may in part relate to the likelihood of people living in disaster-prone areas, such as high-risk flood zones where housing can be more affordable, and may limit their ability to protect themselves against, and recover from, the direct and

indirect impacts of these disasters. Additionally, these areas tend to see a demographic shift post-disaster, as wealthier families tend to relocate, leaving behind a population that may lack the resources to move or rebuild effectively¹⁷.

Figure 4. Different subgroups of young people significantly impacted by extreme weather events.

Young people are more likely to be impacted if they:

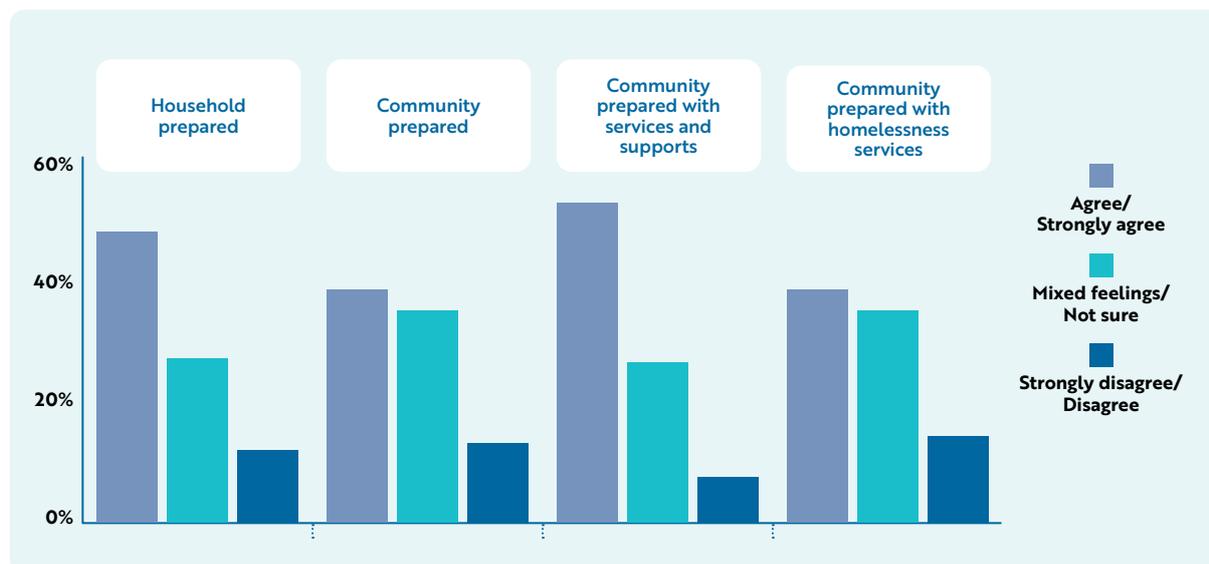
- Have a disability
- Are Indigenous
- Are culturally/linguistically diverse
- Live in low socioeconomic areas
- Live in non-metro areas
- Identify as gender diverse

Community and household preparedness

We asked the young people who reported being impacted by extreme weather events whether they felt that their households or communities were prepared for the future:

- 55% of those young people *agreed or strongly agreed* that their households were prepared for extreme weather events.
- 45% *agreed or strongly agreed* that their communities were prepared for extreme weather events.
- Most young people reported that they felt their communities could provide access to services and supports in the event of an extreme weather event (60% *agreed or strongly agreed*), but fewer felt that communities would be equipped to provide homelessness services to those affected by extreme weather events (45% *agreed or strongly agreed*).

Figure 5. Reported feelings regarding personal and community preparedness towards extreme weather events by young people affected by those events in the past year, see Table A2, Appendix for details.



However, young people’s positivity about their household and community’s preparedness depended on many factors. For example, across all household and community preparedness indicators, young people from areas of lower socioeconomic conditions were less confident with preparedness, particularly with respect to housing services (see Figure A1, Appendix). Young people who reported direct household impact were also likely to have a more negative outlook on the preparedness of both their households and communities than those who only experienced community impact (see Table A2, Appendix).



Concerns about climate change



IN THE WORDS OF A YOUNG PERSON:

“Knowing that the weather and natural disasters occur more often can get me scared.” – Female, 17, VIC

Three-fifths of young people who completed the *Youth Survey* reported some level of concern about climate change, with 21% feeling *very* or *extremely* concerned (see Figure 6). Those who experienced

extreme weather events impacting their community or household had substantially higher levels of concern regarding climate change than those who were not impacted by extreme weather events (see Figure 7).

Figure 6. Levels of concern regarding climate change in the past year.

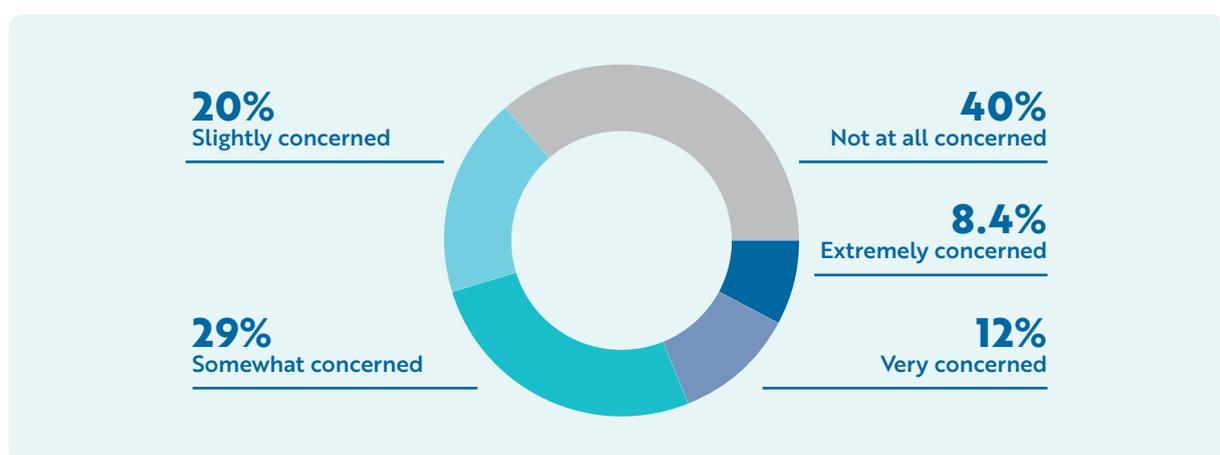
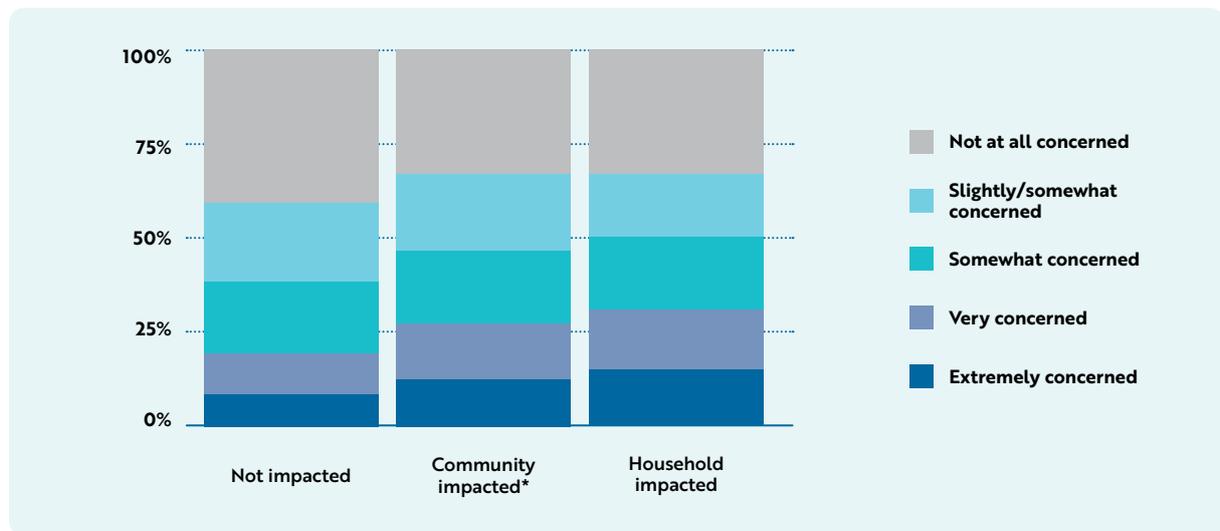


Figure 7. Levels of concern regarding climate change in the past year, by extreme weather event exposure.

*Community impacted but not household.



The observed correlation between personal experiences of extreme weather events and heightened concern over climate change highlights the profound impact that direct exposure to environmental disasters can have on individuals' perceptions and anxieties related to climate change

and its effects. This heightened concern is not merely a reflection of the immediate impact of such events but also an acknowledgment of the broader implications of climate change on personal and community wellbeing currently and in the future.

Psychological distress and social exclusion



IN THE WORDS OF A YOUNG PERSON:

“The floods were very stressful as it got really close to my house. There were financial worries which impacted my mental health. School was closed for a while.” – Female, 17, QLD

Further analysis of the survey data illustrates how the psychological impact of experiencing or even witnessing environmental disasters can extend beyond increased concern for climate change. Young people exposed to such events reported higher levels of psychological distress than their peers, with high psychological distress observed in greater proportions among young people who reported household impact (32%) and community impact (28%), compared with those who reported no impact (24%, see Figure 8 and Table A3, Appendix). The elevated psychological distress observed among participants who experienced extreme weather events could be

a compounded effect of anxiety, helplessness, and a heightened sense of urgency regarding climate action, alongside various other psychosocial factors.

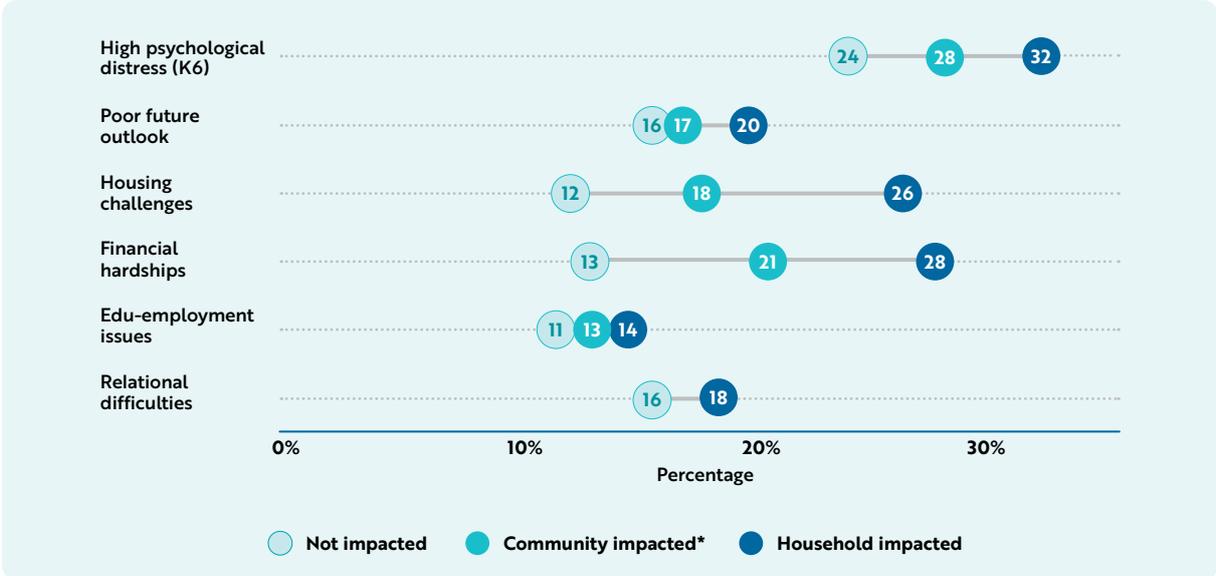
Poor outlook regarding the future was more noticeable in young people with a lived experience of extreme weather events. One in five (20%) young people, who reported extreme weather events had impacted their household also expressed *negative* or *very negative* feelings about the future, which was slightly higher than the 17% of young people who experienced community impact only, and 16% of those not directly impacted by extreme weather events.

Social inclusion is a relatively novel concept that refers to the available resources a person has to participate in society in a meaningful way. People who experience *social exclusion* (or a lack of available resources in the domains of housing, finances, relationships and education/employment), are more vulnerable to the impact of negative circumstances, and the experience of negative circumstances (such as extreme weather events) can contribute to and further compound the experience of social exclusion. This was certainly observed here.

We saw that young people who reported impacts of extreme weather events (household and/or community) were more likely to report social exclusion in each domain:

- **Housing challenges:** 26% of young people who reported household impact also cited experiencing housing challenges in the year prior to the survey, compared to 18% of those who reported only that their communities had been impacted, and 12% of those who reported no impact.
- **Financial hardships:** 28% of young people who reported household impact also reported financial hardships, in contrast to 21% of young people who reported only community impact, and a smaller 13% who reported no impact.
- **Education and employment issues:** 14% of young people who reported household impact also reported educational and/or employment issues, slightly higher than those who reported community (13%) or no impact (11%).
- **Relational difficulties:** 18% of young people who reported household and/or community impact also reported relational difficulties, compared to 16% of those who reported no impact.

Figure 8. Mental health, future outlook and social exclusion in young people, by impact of extreme weather events. * Community impacted but not household, see Table A3, Appendix for details.



Additional statistical analyses were performed to explore how extreme weather events affect young people's psychological distress and social exclusion, accounting for demographic differences. After removing the effect of differences in gender, socioeconomic status, remoteness and other relevant characteristics, young people who saw their household and/or community impacted by climate disasters still reported higher concern regarding climate change, higher psychological distress and increased financial hardships and housing challenges than those who did not experience climate disasters. Notably, direct household impact led to worse outcomes compared to community-only impacts.

It is important to note that the survey looked at these associations at one distinct time point. It is not possible to determine whether the negative impacts were solely the consequence of extreme weather events or compounded effects of these events with other pre-existing adversity. It is also possible that for some young people who reported impact from extreme weather events, experiences of psychological distress and social exclusion prior to the events rendered them more vulnerable to the impacts of extreme weather events, which potentially exacerbated existing issues.

Supports during extreme climate events



IN THE WORDS OF A YOUNG PERSON:

"...It was amazing to see the community come together and help everyone who was affected." – Female, 15, NSW

Learning from young people who were impacted by extreme weather events has been useful in identifying and understanding how to facilitate

supports to young people and their families in the event of future extreme weather events.

What helped young people cope with extreme weather events?

Material and emotional support

- Family and friends
- Local community
- Non-profit organisations
- Governments

Emergency preparedness plans

- Equipment for specific adverse weather conditions
- Having a store of necessities
- Personal / home insurance

Technology

- Remain connected with loved ones
- Keep up with schoolwork
- Stay updated with developments
- Source of recreational activities

Personal coping strategies

- Self-management strategies (e.g. yoga, meditation, deep breathing)
- Maintaining an optimistic outlook
- Helping others in need

We asked young people what was helpful to them during or after the extreme weather events, and 1,299 responses were received. Of these, 32% (418 participants) identified that the supports provided by the wider community following or during these extreme weather events were vital. Neighbours, charities, religious groups and other non-profit organisations supplied affected parties with

necessities (e.g., food, blankets, towels, and sandbags). The State Emergency Service (SES) was noted as helping with more complex forms of assistance, such as roof repairs, and financial support from the government was also acknowledged. Many young people reported feeling encouraged by community group cooperation to provide relief to those affected by extreme weather events.



IN THE WORDS OF A YOUNG PERSON:

"Staying optimistic about the outcomes after the extreme weather and the friendliness of the community who offer helping hands to assist each other."

– Male, 16, QLD

Support from family and friends was mentioned by a quarter of young people (320 participants). They were a key source of material support, particularly among young people who were more severely impacted by extreme weather events. Some young

people expressed particular gratitude towards family or friends who provided a temporary place to stay, and for some, they were critical sources of emotional support and reassurance while waiting for adverse impacts of extreme weather events to subside.



IN THE WORDS OF A YOUNG PERSON:

“Constant communication with loved ones was always the best help...”

– Gender identity unknown, 19, WA

Almost one in five (18%, 238 participants) young people mentioned that having access to functional appliances or equipment helped to alleviate the direct impacts of extreme weather events. During power disruptions, home backup power generators were a valuable source of electricity, and candles/lanterns provided essential lighting for safe navigation around the home. Having personal insurance helped to alleviate financial stress associated with home repairs and damage to belongings. During floods, availability of towels and sandbags helped to minimise water damage, while boats and kayaks served as an alternate mode of transport to obtain supplies.

More than one in ten (12%, 160 participants) young people mentioned that their personal coping strategies were beneficial to their mental wellbeing during extreme weather events. Specific strategies such as yoga, meditation, and breathing exercises helped some young people to manage their own feelings of distress and anxiety. Maintaining an optimistic and hopeful mindset also helped some young people to remain calm. Some young people also reported that knowledge of disaster responses helped them cope. Others focused their attention and efforts on constructive activities such as repairing damaged property and cleaning debris, either for their own families or others who needed help.



IN THE WORDS OF A YOUNG PERSON:

“...I always keep a bunch of blankets in my car for any emergencies and had a to-go bag ready. Teaching myself what is calm vs dangerous amounts of rain helped with the anxiety and also knowing when it's better to sit it out (even if the water cleared and I missed a shopping trip/class/shift).” – Gender diverse, 19, QLD

“Everyone coming together to clean each other's houses after floods”

– Female, 17, QLD

Finally, young people also acknowledged the role of technology in helping them through extreme weather events. Technological devices were critical in helping

young people remain connected with their loved ones and keep up with their academic progress.



IN THE WORDS OF A YOUNG PERSON:

“During the floods, access to the internet was important so that I could continue to socialize with friends and family.” – Male, 15, QLD

Technology also allowed young people to stay updated with new developments on the status of extreme weather events. Devices supported by technology also served as platforms enabling young people to foster social connections and access recreational opportunities, aiding in coping with stress. It is noteworthy that the number of responses discussing technology appeared to be lower than expected (87 responses, 6.7%) in the context of the high technology use among youth. It is possible that the inherent integration of technology in everyday life has made its role in extreme weather events seem less remarkable, despite its undeniable utility. Alternatively, disruptions to power and internet connectivity during such events may limit young people's access to technology.

A variety of resources and supports helped to mitigate the adverse consequences of extreme weather events experienced by young people. However, it must be noted that these resources and supports were available only to some and may not be easily accessible by others. This highlights the critical role that formal and coordinated sources of support have in filling the gaps in informal resources for the young people who lack them.



Summary

This survey revealed that young people experienced different levels of impact from extreme weather events, with geographical and demographic variations in these impacts underscoring the importance of focusing on vulnerabilities in disaster response. These impacts span multiple aspects of young people's lives, including disruptions to education and daily routines, heightened psychological distress, poorer future outlook, decreased social engagement, and the onset of housing and financial instability. Thus, it is important that a holistic approach to post-disaster support is adopted.

Despite a general optimism among impacted young people regarding the readiness of their households and communities, approximately half of the participants expressed uncertainty or disagreed about this preparedness, especially for homelessness services. It is also important to recognise that the survey findings may not fully capture the extent of the impacts on young people, as those more severely affected may have been less likely to participate in the survey.

4.

IMPLICATIONS AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

As Australia faces escalating challenges posed by extreme weather events, a comprehensive strategy is essential to mitigate the impacts and build resilience among our communities. Recognising the urgent need for action, a range of policy recommendations have been put forward focusing on accelerating emissions reductions as well as enhancing national resilience and recovery capabilities from climate disasters^{11,18}. Such broad-scope recommendations are crucial steps towards safeguarding the wellbeing of all Australians in the face of climate change.

Within this context, it is important to acknowledge that young people are especially vulnerable, bearing a disproportionate burden of the psychosocial consequences stemming from extreme weather events^{5,19}. This report aims to build on existing

evidence and policy frameworks to specifically address the unique challenges and needs of young people impacted by extreme weather events to ensure that they are not only supported during and after extreme weather events, but are also empowered as resilient leaders of the future.

As highlighted in the report, young people identified a wide range of impacts related to extreme weather events, including impacts that are particularly pertinent to their stage of life. To address specific challenges that young people may face, a broad and multi-faceted strategy is essential. It is also crucial that we work with young people to respond to their distinct and unmet needs during and after an extreme weather event, and in preparing for future events.

Engage young people for future disaster recovery strategies, planning and implementation

Young people frequently face increased levels of psychological distress, disruptions in social interactions, possible educational setbacks, and other impacts following extreme weather events²⁰⁻²³. While policies and strategies often recognise young people as a population that requires additional support after an extreme weather event, few plans and strategies focus on addressing their specific needs. National, state/territory and local disaster recovery strategies should include dedicated measures to address the unique needs of young people, such as access to youth-friendly mental health care and ensuring education continuity and support. Importantly, local recovery committees should include young people in both recovery planning and delivery.

In 2023, the Australian Government's Disaster Ready Fund provided funding to establish a National Centre of Excellence in Young People and Disasters. This Centre "will be a collaborative hub for research, expertise, and programs for young people to be actively involved in decision-making and management of disasters such as bushfires or floods"¹⁷. It is recommended that this Centre continues to be supported by governments to ensure the needs of young people in disasters are planned for and responded to.

Ensure access to housing and financial supports

Housing and financial challenges can be significant for young people and their families facing disaster impact, particularly those with pre-existing vulnerabilities. Extreme weather events will affect everyone, but acute challenges accompany these events for young people. Accessing housing and financial aid can be more difficult for young people than for adults. Young people are likely to have fewer resources than adults due to lower incomes, and generally have less experience navigating fragmented and complicated service systems.

Young people who are trying to navigate the impact of extreme weather events alone – those who are living independently, experiencing homelessness, or living in out-of-home care – are likely to face more challenges. In particular, unaccompanied young people who have not been assessed as independent by Services Australia may struggle to establish eligibility for payments, especially where their identification has been lost or destroyed.

To assist young people and their families with stability during and after disasters, a support system is needed to provide:

- Sufficient immediate post-disaster housing, which:
 - is age-appropriate, noting that adult shelter arrangements may not be suitable for young people and that young people under 18 may need supervision to access Temporary Accommodation;
 - has clear pathways to longer-term accommodation;
 - is delivered in conjunction with other supports as needed.
- Easier access to financial aid to assist young people and their families in their recovery from disaster impacts. Access to emergency support payments must be tailored with young people in mind, especially unaccompanied young people.
- In the longer-term, improved access to rental subsidy schemes, including Commonwealth Rent Assistance (CRA), for young people. The Australian Government should initiate an immediate comprehensive review of all rental subsidy programs, including the CRA and State and Territory schemes, with a view to better support people on low incomes – especially young people – to gain and maintain adequate and affordable housing.
- In the longer-term, access to more youth specific housing options, including Youth Foyers and youth-specific social housing, for young people who cannot safely live at home, or are experiencing or at risk of homelessness.

Increase mental health support for impacted communities

In 2020, the Australian Government funded ten additional Medicare-rebated mental health services for people whose mental health was adversely impacted by the bushfires²⁴. A similar initiative was implemented after the southeast Queensland and Northern NSW 2022 floods, funding dedicated mental health services²⁵. Recognising the increased psychological distress and limited availability of post-disaster services, underscored by our participants not specifically noting mental health professional support, we strongly advocate for enhanced access to mental health support for communities affected by extreme weather, particularly for vulnerable young people facing barriers like financial hardships. As the mental health impact of disasters commonly peaks

about one year after the event and may take years to recover^{3,26}, these additional mental health services should be available to communities over the medium to long term to support people throughout the recovery process. It is also critical to bolster workforce capacity in local regions impacted by these events via attraction, relocation, and retention of a local support and clinical workforce rather than relying on fly-in mental health support. As extreme weather events have a larger impact on regional and remote communities²⁷, it is also important to ensure telehealth or other online mental health support services can be easily accessible after these events, including digital services designed specifically for young people.

Capacity building for trauma-informed and specific care

Extreme weather events may introduce severe psychological trauma that requires skilled mental health professionals to provide assessment, treatment and ongoing support. To meet this demand, it is imperative to strengthen local capacity by increasing the number of mental health professionals – both community support workers and clinicians – trained to deliver trauma informed and trauma specific care within affected communities. Additionally, the establishment of additional specialist support (e.g., secondary consultation services), particularly for dealing with trauma responses, would provide local

mental health professionals the opportunity to tap into expert assistance as required and enhance capabilities in managing intricate cases with greater efficacy. Specialised training programs should be implemented for mental health professionals working with young people, ensuring that they are equipped to provide youth-specific support tailored to their unique needs during and after such events. Other social, peer and youth workers should also be provided with capacity building opportunities to provide trauma-informed social and emotional support after an extreme weather event.

Enhance extended local workforce supporting young people

Young people have previously recommended that local youth workers should be supported to run activities and events in communities that have experienced an extreme weather event²⁸. Unlike outreach from regional centres or fly-in recovery support, local youth workers can build ongoing trust with young people and long-term relationships with schools, local councils and sporting clubs. Through regular events and activities, youth workers can facilitate social engagement among young people, guide them in accessing various support services, and tactfully evaluate and refer them to assistance as needed.

This type of support can also be facilitated by other members of the community who understand the challenges facing young people in their area. They might include schoolteachers or counsellors, leaders and chaplains from diverse faith groups, sports coaches, environmental organisations, and representatives from various local groups.

As evidenced in the *Youth Survey*, young people often turn to their friends and peers for advice and support. Having a group of young people who can provide confident, evidence-based support across multiple domains can be a source of easily accessible assistance after a weather event. Consideration should be given to developing a peer workforce of young people who would like to be skilled-up to work with and provide mental health support to other young people following severe weather events.



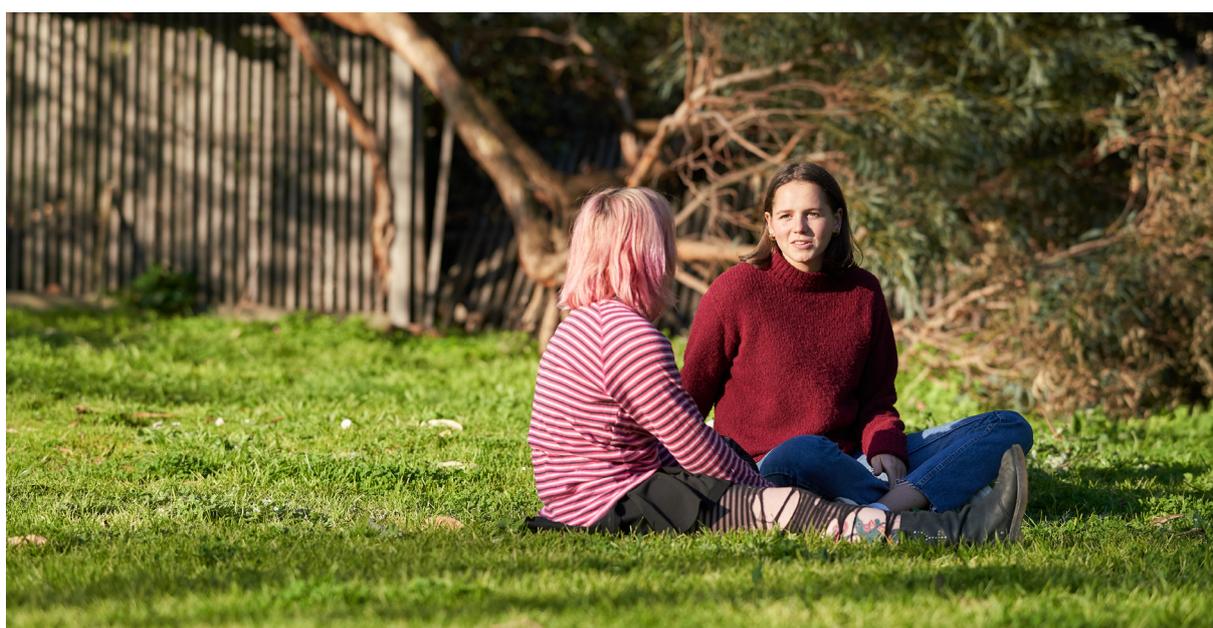
Enhance disaster resilience and climate change education

Empowering young people with the knowledge and skills to prepare for and respond to extreme weather events and climate change is crucial for fostering a generation that is resilient, knowledgeable, responsive, and proactive in the face of environmental challenges. Education in these areas not only prepares them for extreme weather events, but also empowers them to be part of the solution. Recognising the importance of this educational focus, many government strategies and action plans have called for its integration into academic curricula²⁷⁻²⁹. A national strategy is needed to underpin the creation and distribution of comprehensive educational content. This strategy should support the development of educational materials and programs that:

- Build resilience by enhancing young people's actionable knowledge and practical skills on how to prepare for, respond to, and cope with extreme weather events.
- Inspire proactive environmental actions by embedding optimistic, solution-focused learning on climate adaptation into the education system.
- Integrate flexibility to allow resources to be customised to local needs and contexts and can be easily implemented in different school settings.

Moreover, it is crucial to establish targeted research funding in partnership with educational sectors to continually assess and tailor these resources, ensuring their safety, ongoing relevance and effectiveness in supporting and empowering young people.

Education programmes can be delivered outside of education settings through increasing funding to support platforms for young people to identify and actively participate in collective effort and problem-solving activities, such as climate cafés and innovation labs. Participation in such activities can foster a sense of community, promote solution-focused thinking and development, and inspire hope and motivation as a consequence of proactive environmental action.



5. APPENDIX

Variable definitions

Item	Explanation
Gender	Self-identified gender options included female, male, non-gendered, non-binary gender, transgender, not listed and prefer not to say. <i>Non-gendered, non-binary gender, transgender, and not listed</i> were grouped as “gender diverse”.
Socioeconomic conditions	The Index of Relative Socio-economic Advantage and Disadvantage (IRSAD), a geographical measure of socio-economic status (SES) incorporating various indicators, was obtained from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) and matched to participants' residential postcodes. Deciles 1 to 4 were grouped as “low”, deciles 5 to 7 as “medium” and deciles 8 to 10 as “high”. Deciles divide the Australian population in 10 groups of relatively equal size.
Remoteness	Remoteness information was obtained from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) by matching participants' residential postcodes to one of five categories: <i>Major Cities of Australia, Inner Regional Australia, Outer Regional Australia, Remote Australia, and Very Remote Australia</i> . The latter three were combined in our analyses as “Outer regional, remote or very remote”.
Indigenous status	Young people were grouped as Indigenous if they replied identifying as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander.
Disability	Participants were asked <i>Do you identify as a person with disability?</i> to which they could answer <i>Yes, No or Prefer not to say</i> .
Cultural and linguistic diversity	Young people were grouped as culturally and linguistically diverse if they replied <i>Yes</i> to <i>Is there a particular cultural or ethnic group that you strongly identify with?</i> and/or <i>Do you speak a language other than English at home?</i>

Table continues

Item	Explanation
Financial hardship	Young people were noted as having experienced financial difficulties if they answered the question: <i>In the past year, have you and/or your family received support or assistance from a charity or foundation?</i> With <i>Yes, Mission Australia, Yes, a different charity or foundation, or No, but I needed support or assistance;</i> or indicated an affirmative response to the question <i>In the past year, have you and/or your family experienced any of the following because of money concerns?</i> With responses: <i>Could not pay bills or car expenses, Could not pay rent/mortgage, Gone without a meal, Could not afford school supplies or go on school excursions, and/or Sought financial help from family, friends or a charity.</i>
Housing challenges	Young people were noted as experiencing housing instability if they answered Yes to any of the following: <i>Have you experienced a time when you had no fixed address or lived in a refuge or transitional accommodation within the last year? Within the last year, have you spent time away from home because you felt you couldn't go back? And/or In the past year, have you ever worried about having a safe place to stay?</i>
Edu-employment issues	Young people were noted as having edu-employment issues if if they answered <i>both No to both Are you currently studying? and Do you currently have paid work?</i> or if they answered <i>Yes, full-time or Yes, part-time to Are you currently studying</i> while answering <i>Very dissatisfied or Dissatisfied to If you are currently studying, how satisfied are you with your studies?</i>
Relational difficulties	Young people were noted as having relational difficulties if they answered Yes to <i>both Do you find it hard to fit in and socialise with everyone else (at school, work or socially)? and Do you find it hard to turn to friends and family if you need help?</i>
Concern about climate change	This was part of a grid question including 17 common concerns that young people have <i>In the past year, how personally concerned have you been about...?</i> Answers were presented on a five-point scale from <i>not at all concerned to extremely concerned.</i> High levels of concern in this report refers to <i>very concerned or extremely concerned</i> responses.
Psychological distress	Psychological distress was assessed using the Kessler Psychological Distress Scale – 6 item version (K6) ³⁰ . A score of >18 is classified as high psychological distress.
Outlook on the future	Answers to <i>How would you describe your feelings when you think about the future?</i> were presented on a five-point scale from <i>Very negative to Very positive.</i> <i>Very positive</i> and <i>Positive</i> , and <i>Very negative</i> and <i>Negative</i> were combined in this report.
Exposure to extreme weather events	Participants were asked <i>Over the past year, have you or your community been directly impacted by extreme weather events?</i> As more than one answer could be selected, participants were classified as “Household impacted by extreme weather events” if they selected <i>Yes, my household only</i> or <i>Yes, my household and Yes, my community.</i> Participants were classified as “Community impacted by extreme weather events” if they selected <i>Yes, my community,</i> but not <i>Yes, my household</i> and as “Not impacted by extreme weather events” if they selected <i>No, my household/ community were not directly impact by extreme weather.</i>

Table A1. Demographical characteristics of the cohort and level of impact from extreme weather events among young people.

	Overall (N=19501)	Not impacted (n=16245)	Community impacted* (n=1511)	Household impacted (n=967)	p-value
	n (column %)	n (row %)	n (row %)	n (row %)	
Gender					< 0.001
Male	7546 (40.7%)	6242 (86.7%)	578 (8.0%)	382 (5.3%)	
Female	10319 (55.6%)	8733 (87.4%)	789 (7.9%)	472 (4.7%)	
Gender diverse	690 (3.7%)	516 (79.4%)	65 (10.0%)	69 (10.6%)	
Age					0.637
15-16	12699 (65.1%)	10605 (86.9%)	982 (8.0%)	617 (5.1%)	
17-19	6802 (34.9%)	5640 (86.5%)	529 (8.1%)	350 (5.4%)	
Socioeconomic areas					< 0.001
Low	3657 (19.4%)	2859 (82.4%)	382 (11.0%)	229 (6.6%)	
Medium	4460 (23.7%)	3607 (84.5%)	418 (9.8%)	243 (5.7%)	
High	10740 (57.0%)	9288 (89.2%)	663 (6.4%)	457 (4.4%)	
Remoteness					< 0.001
Major cities	11916 (63.2%)	10334 (90.2%)	644 (5.6%)	483 (4.2%)	
Inner regional	4565 (24.2%)	3525 (79.9%)	578 (13.1%)	307 (7.0%)	
Outer regional/ remote	2376 (12.6%)	1895 (83.3%)	241 (10.6%)	139 (6.1%)	
Indigenous status					< 0.001
No	18004 (95.6%)	15559 (87.4%)	1386 (7.8%)	854 (4.8%)	
Yes	820 (4.4%)	590 (74.0%)	106 (13.3%)	101 (12.7%)	
Cultural and linguistic diversity					< 0.001
No	12908 (69.0%)	11039 (86.4%)	1108 (8.7%)	632 (4.9%)	
Yes	5811 (31.0%)	5041 (87.9%)	374 (6.5%)	319 (5.6%)	
Disability					< 0.001
No	16434 (88.6%)	14284 (87.8%)	1252 (7.7%)	740 (4.5%)	
Yes	1352 (7.3%)	1034 (77.5%)	162 (12.1%)	138 (10.3%)	
Prefer not to say	759 (4.1%)	621 (84.0%)	62 (8.4%)	56 (7.6%)	

* Community impacted but not household.

Note: Statistics reported were numbers and column/row percentages. A p-value < 0.05 indicates that the proportion of impacted adolescents was different between the categories of each demographical group.

Missing data includes: 778 records for disaster impact, 946 records for gender, 644 records for socio-economic status and remoteness, 677 records for Indigenous status, 782 records for cultural and linguistic diversity and 956 records for disability.

Figure A1. Reported feelings regarding personal and community preparedness towards extreme weather events by participants affected by those events in the past year. Results are broken down by socio-economic status.



Table A2. Household and community preparedness.

	All impacted (n=2478)	Community impacted* (n=1511)	Household impacted (n=967)	p-value
	n (column %)	n (column %)	n (column %)	
My community is prepared for extreme weather events				< 0.001
Agree/Strongly agree	1034 (44.7%)	683 (48.2%)	351 (39.1%)	
Mixed feelings/Not sure	933 (40.3%)	550 (38.8%)	383 (42.7%)	
Strongly disagree/Disagree	346 (15.0%)	183 (12.9%)	163 (18.2%)	
My household is prepared for extreme weather events				< 0.001
Agree/Strongly agree	1276 (54.8%)	826 (57.9%)	450 (49.9%)	
Mixed feelings/Not sure	725 (31.1%)	424 (29.7%)	301 (33.4%)	
Strongly disagree/Disagree	328 (14.1%)	177 (12.4%)	151 (16.7%)	
My community has access to services and supports that people affected by extreme weather events can reach out to for help				< 0.001
Agree/Strongly agree	1395 (60.1%)	930 (65.4%)	465 (51.7%)	
Mixed feelings/Not sure	718 (30.9%)	392 (27.5%)	326 (36.3%)	
Strongly disagree/Disagree	209 (9.0%)	101 (7.1%)	108 (12.0%)	
My community is able to provide help to people who are homeless or have lost their homes due to an extreme weather event				< 0.001
Agree/Strongly agree	1035 (44.5%)	671 (47.1%)	364 (40.4%)	
Mixed feelings/Not sure	916 (39.4%)	554 (38.8%)	362 (40.2%)	
Strongly disagree/Disagree	375 (16.1%)	201 (14.1%)	174 (19.3%)	

* Community impacted but not household.

Note: Statistics reported were numbers and column percentages. A p-value < 0.05 indicates that the perceptions regarding community preparedness differed between adolescents who saw their household impacted and those who saw their community, but not their household impacted.

Missing data includes: 165 records for community prepared, 149 records for household prepared, 156 records for access to services, 152 records for access to housing.

Table A3. Associations between extreme weather events' impact and potential outcomes.

	Overall (N=19501)	Not impacted (n=16245)	Community impacted* (n=1511)	Household impacted (n=967)	
	n (column %)	n (column %)	n (column %)	n (column %)	p-value
Concern about climate change					< 0.001
Not at all concerned	7669 (40.1%)	6555 (40.7%)	507 (33.8%)	316 (33.1%)	
Slightly/ somewhat concerned	7483 (39.1%)	6354 (39.5%)	588 (39.2%)	349 (36.6%)	
Very/extremely concerned	3987 (20.8%)	3177 (19.8%)	404 (27.0%)	289 (30.3%)	
Psychological distress (K6)					< 0.001
Low	13936 (75.1%)	11986 (76.0%)	1054 (72.1%)	626 (67.7%)	
High	4618 (24.9%)	3793 (24.0%)	408 (27.9%)	298 (32.3%)	
Outlook on the future					0.024
Very negative/ negative	3125 (16.5%)	2595 (16.2%)	255 (17.1%)	188 (19.8%)	
Neither	6346 (33.5%)	5368 (33.4%)	480 (32.1%)	321 (33.8%)	
Positive/very positive	9482 (50.0%)	8087 (50.4%)	759 (50.8%)	441 (46.4%)	
Financial hardships					< 0.001
No financial hardships	15750 (85.4%)	13749 (87.0%)	1164 (79.3%)	671 (72.2%)	
Financial hardships	2689 (14.6%)	2063 (13.0%)	304 (20.7%)	259 (27.8%)	
Housing challenges					< 0.001
No housing challenges	16217 (86.4%)	14065 (87.9%)	1212 (82.1%)	694 (73.7%)	
Housing challenges	2557 (13.6%)	1940 (12.1%)	264 (17.9%)	248 (26.3%)	

Table continues

	Overall (N=19501)	Not impacted (n=16245)	Community impacted* (n=1511)	Household impacted (n=967)	p-value
	n (column %)	n (column %)	n (column %)	n (column %)	
Edu-employment issues					0.007
Engaged with education or employment and satisfied with studies (if studying)	16718 (88.0%)	14043 (88.5%)	1280 (86.8%)	796 (85.7%)	
NEET or dissatisfied with studies	2278 (12.0%)	1824 (11.5%)	195 (13.2%)	133 (14.3%)	
Relational difficulties					0.002
No relational difficulties	15496 (84.0%)	13370 (84.4%)	1203 (81.5%)	771 (81.5%)	
Relational difficulties	2956 (16.0%)	2478 (15.6%)	273 (18.5%)	175 (18.5%)	

* Community impacted but not household.

Note: Statistics reported were numbers and column percentages. A p-value < 0.05 indicates that there were differences in the potential outcomes experienced between adolescents of each extreme weather events impact category.

Missing data includes: 778 records for disaster impact, 362 records for concerns about climate change, 947 for psychological distress (K6), 548 for feelings about the future, 1062 for financial hardships, 727 for housing challenges, 505 for edu-employment issues and 1049 for relational difficulties.

Statistical methods

Pearson's chi-squared test was used to test for differences in proportion of impacted young people (not impacted, community impacted, or household impacted) by demographic characteristics

(Table A1), household and community preparedness (Table A2), and mental health or social exclusion factors (Table A3).

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Who is Mission Australia?

Mission Australia is a national Christian charity motivated by a shared vision of an Australia where everyone has a safe home and can thrive.

Since 1859, we've been standing alongside people and communities in need across Australia, offering real hope that has lasting impact. Backed by our supporters, churches, partners and funders, we work together for the long-term wellbeing of anyone who needs us by collaborating with them to tackle the root causes of their challenges.

Every day we deliver homelessness crisis and prevention services, provide social and affordable housing, assist struggling families and children, address mental health issues, fight substance dependencies, support people with disability and much more.

We measure our impact, collecting evidence of what works to inform our service design and delivery, and to advocate for change.

Mission Australia believes a person's circumstances shouldn't define their future and that given the right support, everyone can reach their full potential.

That's why we stand together with Australians in need, for as long as they need us.

Who is Orygen?

Leading the revolution in youth mental health

At Orygen, we believe that every young person deserves to grow into adulthood with optimal mental health. Everything we do is focused on delivering this outcome.

Orygen is Australia's centre of excellence in youth mental health and the world's leading research and knowledge translation organisation focused on mental ill-health in young people.

We believe in treating early and focusing on recovery. Pioneering reform to deliver real-world practical solutions.

Our research is world-leading, impactful and creates change. Working directly with young people, their families and friends, we pioneer new, positive approaches to the prevention and treatment of mental disorders.

We advocate to make sure that policy makers understand the need and cost of mental ill-health in young people.

And educate to ensure our research and evidence-based practice is used to develop innovative training programs and resources.

Our goal is to see all young people with mental ill-health get well and stay well.

Contact Mission Australia

Email: youthsurvey@missionaustralia.com.au

Web: www.missionaustralia.com.au

Follow Mission Australia

Twitter: @MissionAust

Facebook: www.facebook.com/MissionAust

Instagram: @mission_aust

LinkedIn: @mission-australia

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Follow Orygen

Twitter: @orygen_aus

Facebook: www.facebook.com/OrygenAus

Instagram: @_orygen_

LinkedIn: @orygen-revolution

If you are a young person and need someone to talk with, you can contact

Kids Helpline: 1800 55 1800 (24/7)

Kidshelpline.com.au

