


THE CITY OF  
GREATER GEELONG

# COVID-19 YOUTH IMPACT REPORT

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**Council acknowledges Wadawurrung Traditional Owners of this Land and all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People who are part of the Greater Geelong community today.**

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Top four areas young people in Geelong said would be most helpful for them in recovering from Covid-19 pandemic:

1

Increase availability of youth friendly mental health service in the Geelong region.



2

Opportunities for young people to connect/engage with their community.



3

More awareness in the community about issues impacting young people in Geelong.



4

Increase health and wellbeing programs in schools.



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The COVID-19 Youth Impact study is a research project undertaken by The City of Greater Geelong's Youth Development Unit with the aim of better understanding the diverse impacts that the COVID-19 pandemic has had on young people in the Greater Geelong region.

It is encouraged that the findings within this report be considered by the broader youth sector and organisations working with young people in the Greater Geelong region. A collaborative effort will be needed to holistically mitigate the impacts that the COVID-19 pandemic continues to have on young people in our community.

The COVID-19 Youth Impact survey was developed by the Youth Development Unit in consultation with the 2022 Geelong Youth Council who helped to develop the survey questions and continued to contribute throughout the duration of the project.

Nine broad areas of life were included in the COVID-19 Youth Impact survey which were based on the 'domains' of life explored in the Orygen and Mission Australia Clusters of COVID-19 Impact Report, 2022. This enables the findings of the report to be compared to the relevant and available Victorian and Australian data.

In the first quarter of 2023 the Youth Development Unit engaged with young people in the Greater Geelong region, through an online survey hosted on The City's Have Your Say Platform, with the aim of better understanding the regional impacts the COVID-19 pandemic had on key areas of their life. A total of 379 young people completed the survey providing The City with a substantive amount of local data. Seventy percent of respondents were 18–25-years-old, indicating this survey topic resonated with this demographic, and findings should be read with this age group in mind.

It is important to note that this is not a population survey and therefore results should be interpreted accordingly. The survey found that the COVID-19 pandemic has had and is continuing to have significant negative impacts on many areas of most young people's lives, with 70% of young respondents in the Greater Geelong region indicating they were negatively or very negatively impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Mental wellbeing, education, employment, physical health, and friendships were the areas of life most negatively impacted for young respondents in the municipality.

The Covid-19 Youth Impact Survey found mental wellbeing and education are the areas substantially more impacted for survey respondents, therefore this report explores these areas in more depth. Young people in the Greater Geelong region who responded to the survey think that the negative impacts of the pandemic will be long lasting, with around 58% of those surveyed believing their future had been negatively or very negatively impacted.

Young people were asked to indicate what would be most helpful in the recovering post-pandemic, the top responses are shown in the infographic below.

This report seeks to investigate the impacts of the pandemic on a local level to help shape a response that enables the youth in our region to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic and foster a future where young people are engaged, happy and satisfied within our community.

The City of Greater Geelong's Youth Development Unit have produced this COVID-19 Youth Impact report to sit alongside broader state and nationwide reports from other youth organisations.

# BACKGROUND

COVID-19 virus first gained collective attention at the end of 2019, it was declared a pandemic early the following year, and has since had an unprecedented impact on the world. In addition to the substantial deaths and long-term physical effects caused by the COVID-19 virus, the measures taken to slow the spread of the virus have also created upheaval to people's lives. Young people have experienced the challenges of the pandemic at a unique life stage with the social, emotional, and educational development during this life stage being key to their life trajectory.

**“While COVID-19 affects people in different ways, the social and economic impacts on young people have been substantial. Compared with older age groups, young people have experienced high rates of psychological distress, loneliness, educational disruption, unemployment, housing stress and domestic violence.”**

**Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2021**

In response to these unique challenges, several reports have been produced by key youth and health organisations looking into the impacts of the pandemic on young people in Australia. These studies have found that young people's lives have been substantially impacted by the pandemic and that young people in Victoria have been disproportionately affected compared to their interstate peers [1] [2]. Additionally, those who identified as gender diverse and Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander young people, as well as those who reported living with a disability, poor mental health and wellbeing or living in out-of-home care were groups found to be more negatively impacted by the pandemic.

Youth Development Unit Service Plan is guided by two principles: 'Youth and evidence informed' and 'We design and provide programs with a focus on health and social equity'. To ensure the programs delivered by the Youth Development Unit remain responsive to young people's current experiences, this comprehensive survey and report was conducted to explore the ongoing impacts that the COVID-19 pandemic is having on young people in the Greater Geelong region.



## CITY OF GREATER GEELONG PLANS AND STRATEGIES THAT INFLUENCED THE REPORT

<p>Youth Development Unit Service Plan</p>	<p><b>PRINCIPLES:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Youth and evidenced informed</li> <li>• We design and provide programs with a focus on health and social equity'</li> </ul>
<p>The Connected Communities Business Plan 2022-23</p>	<p><b>DIRECTORATE PRIORITY 4.2:</b> Communicate and engage effectively with our community to understand their needs and advocate on their behalf.</p>
<p>Our Community Plan 2021-25</p>	<p><b>STRATEGIC DIRECTION 1: Healthy, caring, and inclusive community</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Our community has equitable access to health and social services, information, and infrastructure</li> <li>• Healthy behaviours and environments are promoted, supported and accessible</li> </ul> <p><b>STRATEGIC DIRECTION 4: High-performing council and organisation</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Our services are accessible and meet the diverse needs of our community</li> </ul>
<p>Greater Geelong- A Clever and Creative Future</p>	<p><b>MEASURES OF SUCCESS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• An increase in the proportion of adults that are a member of an organised group (sports, religious, school, professional, community or action group)</li> <li>• An increase in the percentage of residents reporting their health and wellbeing as very good or excellent</li> <li>• A decrease in the proportion of adults experiencing high or very high psychological distress</li> </ul>

Youth Development Unit produced this COVID-19 Youth Impact report to sit alongside broader state and nationwide reports from other youth organisations.

Key national and state reports investigating the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on young people referred to within this report were:

- Clusters of COVID-19 Impact: Identifying the Impact of Covid-19 on Young Australians in 2021
- COVID-19 Recovery Plan for Young People.



# SECTION 1: THE COVID-19 YOUTH IMPACT REPORT SURVEY

## 1.1: SURVEY DEVELOPMENT

The COVID-19 Youth Impact survey questions examined if young people's lives have been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, how they have been impacted and what would be helpful additions to the Greater Geelong community in helping them recover.

The COVID-19 Youth Impact survey was developed in consultation with the Geelong Youth Council who contributed to the survey questions and provided advice on the usability and length of the survey.

Nine broad areas of life were included in the COVID-19 Youth Impact survey which were based on the 'domains' of life explored in the Clusters of COVID-19 Impact Report [1]. This decision was made to be able to compare findings from young people in the Greater Geelong region with findings from young people in Victoria and Australia more broadly. The areas of life explored in the survey were:

1. Participation in activities
2. Education
3. Mental Wellbeing
4. Physical Health
5. Family
6. Friendships
7. Employment
8. Financial Security
9. Housing-Accommodation

## 1.2: HOW WE REACHED YOUNG PEOPLE

The COVID-19 Youth Impact survey was created on Have Your Say page, the online platform where the Council collects residents' feedback on a variety of issues and collected young people's feedback for 44 days from the 12th of January 2023. The majority of young people, 62%, who responded to the COVID-19 Youth Impact survey heard about the survey through a social media campaign, focused on Instagram, asking for young people to share their experience. Twenty-two percent of young respondents heard about the survey from family, friends, and neighbours, with the remaining participants hearing about the survey from a variety of sources including the Geelong Australia website, posters and the Have Your Say platform.

Posters were shared with young people who participated in the City's youth drop in spaces across Corio, Armstrong Creek and Whittington with iPads made available at The fOrT youth space in Corio to complete the survey on the spot. Additionally, posters and survey links were sent to school contacts in the Greater Geelong region to share with students.

## 1.3: LIMITATIONS

This is not a population survey and therefore results should be interpreted accordingly. There is an over representation of 18–25-year-olds in the survey results, they make up 70% of respondents, which should be considered when utilising or actioning the recommendations.

When comparing the data of this report to findings from similar state or national reports it is important to note when each of the studies were conducted, particularly when discussing issues following the COVID-19 pandemic. As our survey was conducted in 2023 and the other studies referenced in this report were conducted in 2021 and 2022 there are limitations when comparing consequences between the COVID-19 pandemic reports.

Respondents from the national survey were able to select all areas of life they thought were impacted by the pandemic, whereas in the COVID-19 Youth Impact survey young respondents from the Greater Geelong region were asked to select the top three areas of life most negatively impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Although this has no bearing on the order of results, it does mean the national survey results are likely to have higher percentages, given there were no limits on their selections.





## SECTION 2: RESULTS/FINDINGS

Initially, 457 total survey contributions were collected via the Have Your Say Platform. Responses from young people outside of the municipality and duplicate responses were removed, resulting in 379 unique, local responses being collated for this report.

### 2.1 DEMOGRAPHICS

70% of respondents were aged between 18–25 years old and 30% of respondents were aged between 12–17 years old. 58 out of the 60 suburbs in Geelong were represented in the response to the COVID-19 Youth Impact Survey.

### 2.2: IMPACTS OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON GREATER GEELONG'S YOUTH

#### **Question asked: How has the COVID-19 pandemic impacted you?**

Of the 379 young people who responded to the survey, 70% indicated that the COVID-19 pandemic had negatively (47%) or very negatively (23%) impacted them. Eighteen per cent of respondents selected that neutral or no-impact was felt following the COVID-19 pandemic and 12% selected that they were positively or very positively impacted.

#### **Question asked: How do you think the COVID-19 pandemic has had a long-term impact on your future goals (study, work etc)?**

When the young people were asked how they thought their long-term future goals had been impacted by the broad effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, 58% of respondents thought that their future had been very negatively or negatively impacted. A sizable number of participants, 31%, indicated they felt the pandemic had neutral or no impact on their future goals and 11% indicated that they thought their future goals had been positively or very positively impacted.

#### **Question asked: From the following list select the three areas of your life that have been most negatively impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic**

Areas of Life Impacted ranked by prevalence:

1. Mental wellbeing
2. Education
3. Employment
4. Physical health
5. Friendships
6. Participation in activities
7. Financial security
8. Family
9. Housing/accommodation
10. No areas negatively impacted

- The top five most selected categories that were impacted; 'Mental wellbeing', 'Education', 'Employment', 'Physical health', and 'Friendships', will be discussed in detail below. These top 5 categories had over 30% of young respondents indicate that it was an area most impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.
- For brevity, 'Participation in activities', 'Financial security', 'Family', 'Housing/accommodation', and 'No areas negatively impacted' all had under 30% of participants indicating that they were a 'most impacted' area and so they will not be broken down further in this report. However, it is worth noting through comments submitted in these areas, even though they were not the most broadly impacted, the impacts felt by individuals were substantial.

Once survey participants selected the three areas most impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic they were asked to elaborate on each of those areas by selecting from four pre-written options on how that area was impacted or write their own answers via selecting the other box. Results and discussion points from the five areas most impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic from young respondents from the City of Greater Geelong follow.

## DEMOGRAPHICS



**70%** 18 - 25 years

**30%** 12 - 17 years

### HOW HAS THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC IMPACTED YOU?

  
**70%**  
Negatively

  
**47%**  
Very Negatively

  
**47%**  
No impact

### HOW HAS THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC IMPACTED YOUR FUTURE GOALS?

  
**58%**  
Negatively /  
Very Negatively

  
**31%**  
Neutral /  
No Impact

  
**11%**  
Positively /  
Very Positively

## AREAS OF LIFE IMPACTED BY THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC



**54%**  
Mental wellbeing



**47%**  
Education



**32%**  
Employment



**32%**  
Physical health



**32%**  
Friendships



**26%**  
Participation  
in activities



**21%**  
Financial  
security



**14%**  
Family



**9%**  
Housing  
accommodation



**4%**  
No areas negatively  
impacted





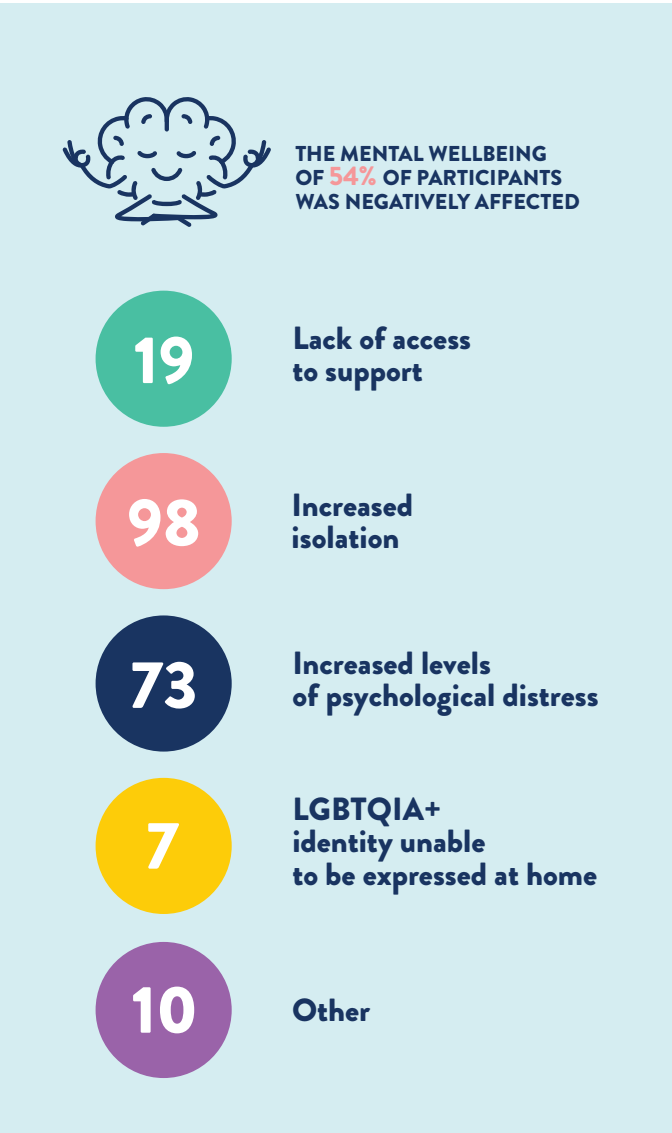


## 2.3: 5 MOST IMPACTED AREAS OF LIFE

### 1) MENTAL WELLBEING

‘Mental wellbeing’ was the area of life most selected by young people in the Greater Geelong region as being negatively affected by the pandemic, with 54% of young respondents (207) indicating that their mental wellbeing had been impacted.

When asked to describe how their mental wellbeing had been impacted, 47% selected ‘Increased isolation’ and 35% selected ‘Increased levels of psychological distress’. ‘Lack of access to support’ (9%) and ‘LGBTQIA+ identity unable to be expressed at home’ (3%) were also selected in smaller numbers. Five percent of young people used the ‘Other’ box to express that most of the options were relevant to them.



### Discussion

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on the mental health of young people. As highlighted above, 54% of young respondents from the Greater Geelong region expressed that their mental wellbeing had been negatively impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. This is similar to the findings from the 2022 Mission Australia Youth Survey, where 53.7% of young Australians said their mental health had been negatively impacted due to the COVID-19 pandemic, up from 50.3% in 2021 [4]. Young Victorians expressed the most significant negative impacts to their mental health, with 67.8% of all Victorian respondents indicating that the COVID-19 pandemic had negatively affected their mental health [5]. The strict lockdown measures that were in place for Victoria throughout much of the pandemic could be a contributing factor to this statistic.

The mental wellbeing of young people was impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic in a multitude of ways. The disruptions to every area of young people’s lives, including education, employment and participation in activities contributed significantly to feelings of anxiety, uncertainty, and isolation [3]. Despite the public health emergency status of the COVID-19 pandemic and lockdowns lifting, demand for mental health services and support for young people across Australia has surged [6]. Of particular concern there has been an alarming increase in youth suicides in Victoria in the first quarter of 2023 [7]. The long term and accumulative impacts that this may cause to young people’s health, wellbeing, and life trajectory, and therefore that of our society, are yet to be seen. To mitigate these challenges, significant measures need to be taken to help support and service the mental wellbeing of young people across Australia, particularly throughout Victoria.



## COMMENTS FROM YOUNG PEOPLE:

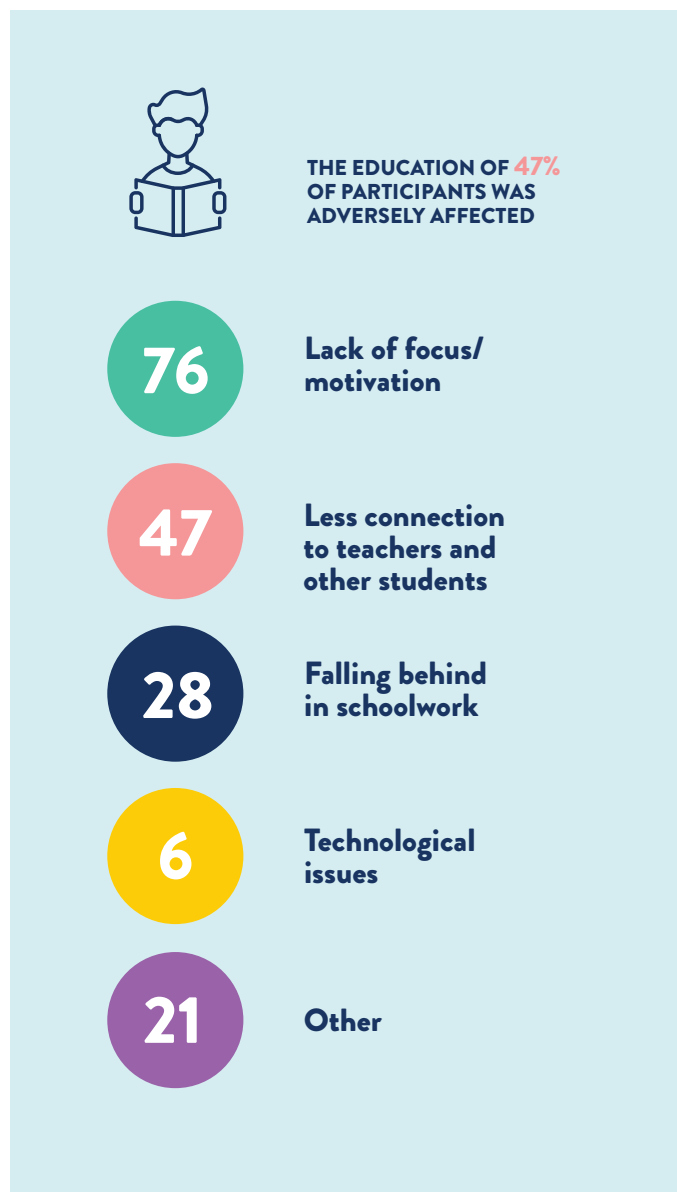
“My mental health plummeted, and I’ve been in and out of hospital for various reasons including an eating disorder and suicide attempts. Access to support services during covid was almost impossible, and still is. Wait lists have even reached 12months (sic) for some support services!”

“It very negatively impacted my mental health, it took away all my coping skills and distractions and it isolated me. I had many significant relapses in mental health including suicide attempts because I wasn’t able to stay busy and suppress my struggles like I normally would. It impacted my ability to work, participate in society and connect with people. It made relationships with family fade and just the general fear in the community added it’s toll on top of everything else.”

“Through the loss of many friends due to suicide as a result of the lack of mental health support throughout the pandemic and the pure isolation felt by many if not all is still affecting people today, and it is clear as friends and family speak to one another that this is still an ongoing crisis that needs to be more seriously addressed and spoken about”

## 2) EDUCATION

'Education' was selected by 47% of young respondents (179), making it the second most negatively impacted area of life by the COVID-19 pandemic for young people in the Greater Geelong region.



When asked how their education was impacted, many respondents (44%) expressed that they experienced a 'Lack of focus or motivation', 26% selected that they had 'Less connection to teachers and other students', 15% selected 'Falling behind in schoolwork' and 6 % selected 'Technological issues'.

Education was the area of life that had the most 'Other' responses, with 12% of young people who responded to this question choosing to tell us more about how their education was affected. Of these responses two key themes were identified, with 42% of the respondents stating that all areas of their education were impacted, and 19% stating that they struggled with not being able to complete the hands-on aspect of learning. The remaining 39% of these responses included varied remarks about how education was impacted.

### Discussion

The COVID-19 pandemic brought unprecedented challenges to the education system, and the impact on young people has been significant. As highlighted above, 47% of young respondents from the Greater Geelong region expressed that their education had been negatively impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, making it the second most negatively impacted area of life. On a state and national scale, education was the top reported area of life negatively impacted for young people with 73.2% of young Australians reporting that the pandemic had negatively impacted their education, compared to 62.3% in 2021 [4]. Once again, young Victorians felt the impacts of the pandemic on their education at a greater rate than their interstate peers. [5].

The disruptions to the education system caused by the COVID-19 pandemic have been experienced by young people more than any other age group. Subsequently, this is having significant consequences on other facets of young people's lives including their social development, mental well-being, and employment [3] [1].

Young people from cohorts in Australia who were already at risk of educational disadvantage, such as low-income families, and young people with family dysfunction, are likely to be further disadvantaged by the COVID-19 pandemic [8]. Additionally, older young people from those cohorts, who were already at risk of disengagement, may not return to school [7].

Currently government responses to the disruption to education from the COVID-19 pandemic are mostly short term [7]. Given how crucial education institutions are for social connectedness, mental health referrals and support, and pathways to employment for young people, it is important that young people are supported in their educational recovery and educational engagement.





## COMMENTS FROM YOUNG PEOPLE:

“I cannot study online anymore. I’m so emotionally worn out. I’ve been living in Geelong for almost a year and haven’t made any friends as I’ve been having to do online learning. I’ve had no chance to meet people from uni.”

“I felt trapped, I had no one I was alone all the time. I graduated year 12 in covid so we didn’t get a graduation. I couldn’t celebrate my 18th birthday. I just felt so missed out. I struggled going to university because I was used to zoom calls. I was so scared of the world and all I wanted to do was go home.”

“I was locked in my house for weeks on end, couldn’t go to school and it effected my parents’ mental health significantly. I had no social life and had too much time in my own head. I also had no motivation for my online schoolwork and my grades suffered”



THE FOLLOWING THREE AREAS OF LIFE, EMPLOYMENT, PHYSICAL HEALTH AND FRIENDSHIPS WERE SELECTED EQUALLY, BY 32% OF PARTICIPANTS, AS BEING NEGATIVELY IMPACTED BY THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC.

### 3) EMPLOYMENT

'Employment' was selected by 32% (124) of young respondents as an area of life that had been negatively impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

In the follow up question enquiring how employment had been impacted 39% participants selected 'Work hours reduced', 25% selected 'Job loss', 18% selected 'Unable to find a job' and 8% selected 'Missing out on work experience'. An additional 7% of young people selected 'Other' with a common theme of those responses centring around lack of on-the-job experience leading to lack of career development.

For young respondents in the Greater Geelong region 'Employment' was the third most negatively impacted area of life as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, along with 'Physical health' and 'Friendships' which were also selected by 32% of young respondents. On a state and

national level, 'Employment' was the seventh area of life most negatively impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. The 2022 Mission Australia Report found that 24.1% of young Australians reported that the pandemic had negatively impacted their employment, which was down from 30.1% in 2021 [4]. For young Victorians 'Employment' has been more negatively impacted with 25.9% of young Victorians expressing that the COVID-19 pandemic had negatively impacted their employment [5].



**32% OF PARTICIPANTS  
REPORTED EMPLOYMENT  
OPPORTUNITIES WERE  
ADVERSELY AFFECTED**

**11**

**Missing out on  
work experience**

**23**

**Unable  
to find a job**

**32**

**Job loss**

**49**

**Work  
hours reduced**

**9**

**Other**



## COMMENTS FROM YOUNG PEOPLE:

“I finished my nursing studies end of 2019 and started my job in early 2020 when covid first hit Australia. This was also at the same time I moved out of home for the first time. I was thrown into a stressful work environment due to covid and isolated from family and friends. This led to very quick burn out in my job. I was faced with confronting situations for a young 21-year-old nurse with no debriefs or the ability to catch up with friends and family.”

“Lost my job and so did not work for 8 months. Took a negative toll on me mentally and psychically. Having covid 19 was very difficult and took a long time to get over and back to functioning normally.”

## 4) PHYSICAL HEALTH

Physical health was selected by 32% of young respondents (123) as an area of their life that was negatively impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

When asked how their physical health was impacted, 36% selected 'Decreased activity', 34% selected 'Lack of motivation', 22% selected 'Sporting activities cancelled' and 11% selected 'Long Covid symptoms'. The remaining 3% of young respondents selected 'Other'.



THE PHYSICAL HEALTH OF  
**32% PARTIPANTS WAS**  
NEGATIVELY AFFECTED

45

Decreased  
Activity

22

Sporting  
activities  
cancelled

42

Lack of  
motivation

11

Long Covid  
symptoms

4

Other

As previously mentioned, 'Physical Health' is the equal third most negatively impacted area of life following the COVID-19 pandemic along with 'Employment' and 'Friendships', all of which were selected by 32% of young respondents from the Greater Geelong region. On a state and national level, 'Physical Health' was the fourth area of life most negatively impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. The 2022 Mission Australia Report found that 46.8% of young Australians reported that the pandemic had negatively impacted their physical health, which was up from 46.1% in 2021 [4]. For young Victorians, 'Physical Health' has been more negatively impacted, with 56.6% of young Victorians expressing that the COVID-19 pandemic has had a negative impact on their physical health [5].

### COMMENTS FROM YOUNG PEOPLE:

"I've had extreme covid symptoms, I was crying every night, isolated and alone with a week-long migraine. I was only sleep 2-3 hours a night. I've lost school events and relationships to covid."

"It adversely affected my mental health, depriving me of face-to-face relationships etc, and my physical health, as my immune system has worsened since getting the virus"

"It took away years of core memories that should be formed during teenage years. The ongoing isolation was a key factor in me undergoing anorexia nervosa, and a difficult recovery i.e. not being able to access mental health services until my condition had worsened thus making recovery more arduous. Though I am physically recovered, I am still healing from the dark head space I was in, resulting from quality time with people, a basic human necessity, being taken, especially over harsh lockdowns"

## 5) FRIENDSHIPS

'Friendships' was selected by 32% young respondents (121) as an area of life that had been negatively impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

When asked to indicate how their friendships had been most impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, the top two responses were 'Decreased social skills' (36%) and 'Difficulty maintaining friendships over digital technology' (32%). These were followed by 'Restricted activities' (16%) and 'Loss of Friends' (15%). The remaining 2% of young respondents selected 'Other'

For young respondents in the Greater Geelong region 'Friendships' is the equal third most negatively impacted area of life as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, along with 'Employment' and 'Physical Health, which were all selected by 32% of young respondents. On a national level, 'Friendships' was the sixth most affected area of life negatively impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic with 37.3% of young Australians reporting that the pandemic had negatively impacted their friendships, which was up from 33.8% in 2021 [4]. For young Victorians, 'Friendships' was the fifth area of life most negatively impacted by the pandemic, with 48.8% of young Victorians expressing their friendships had been negatively affected by the COVID-19 pandemic [5].

### COMMENTS FROM YOUNG PEOPLE:

**"It socially isolated me to the point I lost numerous of my friendships, particularly during lockdowns where I struggled mentally to maintain relationships with others online and not seeing my friends daily at school. School online have a horrible impact of my grades, they dropped massively, and I was struggling to find motivation to even do the work, majority of the time I did not do school and I had a decline in my mental health. I also was unable to work during lockdowns."**

**"I started a new school in 2020 and struggled to make friends due to the constant lockdowns"**



**"Mainly just cancelled events that are somewhat of a coming-of-age ritual for people going through high school and university. I feel like my friendship group has also not grown due to how hard it was to see people and make connections."**

**"It impacted me as we move here right at the start of the pandemic and obviously with all the isolation I never really for to meet anyone. Feels just as isolating as when we moved"**



TOP 5 AREAS OF LIFE MOST IMPACTED BY THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC FOR YOUNG PEOPLE IN GEELONG COMPARED TO STATE AND NATIONAL DATA:

As highlighted in the results above, the areas of life most negatively impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic for young people in Greater Geelong differs to those for young people on a state and national level. This further highlights the importance of understanding the diverse impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic for young people in different localities. The table below highlights the different findings from this report and the 2022 Mission Australia report.

Geelong:	Victoria	Australia
Mental Wellbeing	Education	Education
Education	Participation in activities	Participation in activities
Employment	Mental Health	Mental Health
Physical Health	Physical Health	Physical Health
Friendships	Friendships	Family

\*Data source: M. Australia, "Youth Survey 2022," 2022 [4], M. Australia, "Youth Survey 2022 Victoria Sub Report," 2022 [5]



## 2.4: WHAT WOULD BE HELPFUL FOR YOUNG PEOPLE IN THE GREATER GEELONG REGION

### Question asked: What do you think would be most helpful to young people in Geelong in recovering from the COVID-19 pandemic?

*For this question, respondents were asked what they thought would be most helpful to young people in the Greater Geelong region in recovering from the COVID-19 pandemic. There was no limit to the responses they could select.*

The recommendation young respondents thought would be most helpful was 'Increase availability of Youth friendly mental health services in the Geelong region' with 53% of all respondents selecting this option. This was followed

closely by 'Opportunities for young people to connect/engage with their community (youth dedicated live music, art events, workshops etc)' and 'More awareness in the community about issues impacting young people in Greater Geelong (mental health, etc)'. The next most selected option was 'Increase health and wellbeing programs in schools', followed by 'More accessible and safe youth dedicated spaces throughout Geelong', 'Greater support for youth housing' and 'More leadership opportunities for young people'. Just 1% of young people who selected 'Other' to tell us more about their ideas which included suggestions surrounding education support and tutoring, support for youth businesses and skills workshops.



The next most selected option was 'Increase health and wellbeing programs in schools'



More accessible and safe youth dedicated spaces throughout Geelong



More awareness in the community about issues impacting young people in Greater Geelong



Opportunities for young people to connect/engage with their community



More leadership opportunities for young people



Greater support for youth housing



## SECTION 3: RECOMMENDATIONS

In addition to highlighting the experiences of young people in the Greater Geelong region following the COVID-19 pandemic and the impacts it has had, this report also outlines 11 recommendations for how the City of Greater Geelong can best support young people in recovering from the pandemic and mitigate the ongoing negative impacts that it is continuing to have on our youth.

The recommendations focus on addressing the key areas of impact from the COVID-19 pandemic identified by young people in Greater Geelong and the key areas that would be most helpful for them in recovering to reach their full potential.

The recommendations have also been informed by the broader findings of the COVID-19 Youth Impact Report Survey, consultation with the City of Greater Geelong's Youth Council, and research from leading organisations in the youth sector.

### **THEME ONE: INCREASE AVAILABILITY AND AWARENESS OF YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES TO YOUNG PEOPLE IN THE GEELONG REGION**

Research suggests that inclusive, customised, and safe access to mental health services "... enables young people to thrive and take full part in education, work and their communities" [9]. To address the accumulative and ongoing impacts that the COVID-19 pandemic has had on young people's mental wellbeing in the Geelong region, it is imperative that the increased availability of youth mental health services in our community continues to be a priority as well as increasing young people's knowledge of those services and how to access them. The 2022 Mission Australia report found that feeling stigma and shame, concerns about confidentiality and not knowing where to go for help were the top barriers for young people accessing professional mental health support for help. The City run youth hubs are ideal places to co-locate with, or promote, youth mental health services [4]. This includes the promotion of safe and reputable online mental health services as they are often more accessible and timelier than in person services [10].

1. Partner with local youth mental health services to deliver services, on a visiting or permanent basis, in council run youth hubs.

2. Promote safe and reputable online mental health services in Council run youth spaces and digital platforms.

### **THEME TWO: PROVIDE MORE OPPORTUNITIES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE TO CONNECT AND ENGAGE WITH THEIR COMMUNITY**

The COVID-19 pandemic and the strict lockdown measures that were implemented in Victoria significantly impacted on young people's ability to connect and engage with each other and their broader community. This has had a range of impacts on the social connections and mental wellbeing of young people in the Geelong region. Evidence suggests that group-based interventions that target social relationships can have real benefits on young people's mental health. Young people can do this by joining hobby groups or extra-curricular activities, which is associated with mental health benefits [11]. The Youth Development Unit's Youth Engagements and Connections programs delivered across the region provide young people with opportunities to connect and engage with their peers and broader community.

3. Continue to provide and promote opportunities for young people to connect and engage with their peers and community.

4. Continue to engage and involve young people in the planning of relevant Council events to ensure those events meet the needs of Geelong's youth and encourage youth participation and attendance.



### **THEME THREE: DELIVER PREVENTION AND EARLY INTERVENTION PROGRAMS TO YOUNG PEOPLE AND THEIR ALLIES ACROSS THE MUNICIPALITY**

Preventative and early-intervention programs encourage and increase protective factors and healthy behaviours that can help prevent the onset of a diagnosable mental disorder and reduce risk factors that can lead to the development of a mental disorder [12]. The City's Youth Development Unit deliver a range of prevention and early intervention health and wellbeing programs for young people in the Geelong region. The delivery of such programs will play a significant role in supporting the health and wellbeing of young people in our community whilst also increasing their awareness of existing local services.

5. Conduct an environmental scan of secondary schools in the region to guide a more structured and evidence informed understanding of where the greatest needs are in the community.

6. Develop and/or implement health and wellbeing programs where gaps are identified in partnership with likeminded organisations where possible.

### **THEME FOUR: SUPPORT YOUTH EMPLOYMENT AND EMPLOYMENT READINESS OPPORTUNITIES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE ACROSS THE MUNICIPALITY**

Victoria's Youth Strategy 2022-2027 highlights the need to provide young people in Victoria with "... more ways to develop the skills and capabilities they need to build a sustainable and fulfilling career" [9]. Increasing youth employment and youth employment readiness opportunities is vital for empowering and equipping young people to achieve their career goals and obtain financial security, and for ensuring our youth don't need to leave Geelong for work and study opportunities elsewhere.

7. Support existing external youth employment and employment readiness opportunities in the Geelong region.

### **THEME FIVE: CONTINUE TO COLLECT INFORMATION FROM YOUNG PEOPLE, AND THEIR ALLIES, ON ISSUES IMPACTING THEM AND AMPLIFY THEIR VOICE TO THE COMMUNITY**

The importance of listening to, and championing, the voice of young people in the community is highlighted by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of a Child, Article 12, which outlines that children and young people have the right to have their opinion considered in any matter that affects them [13]. Furthermore, including the voice of young people in community discourse improves social inclusion, civic participation, and economic prosperity [14]. The Youth Development Unit's Youth Voice programs offer young people in Geelong with opportunities to have their voices heard. Ensuring the community is aware of the issues impacting young people following the COVID-19 pandemic will play an important role in ensuring Geelong is a supportive and safe place for young people to thrive.

8. Gain insight into broad youth perspectives and experiences to strengthen the representative voice of Youth Voice programs, to increase understanding of issues impacting young people locally.

9. Gather insight of professionals working with youth to explore the challenges facing young people in the Geelong region. Provide a mechanism to feed back to professional's insight into the experiences of young people in the region.

## THEME SIX: CREATE OPPORTUNITIES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE TO BE INVOLVED IN CO-DESIGNING YOUTH PROGRAMS AND INITIATIVES

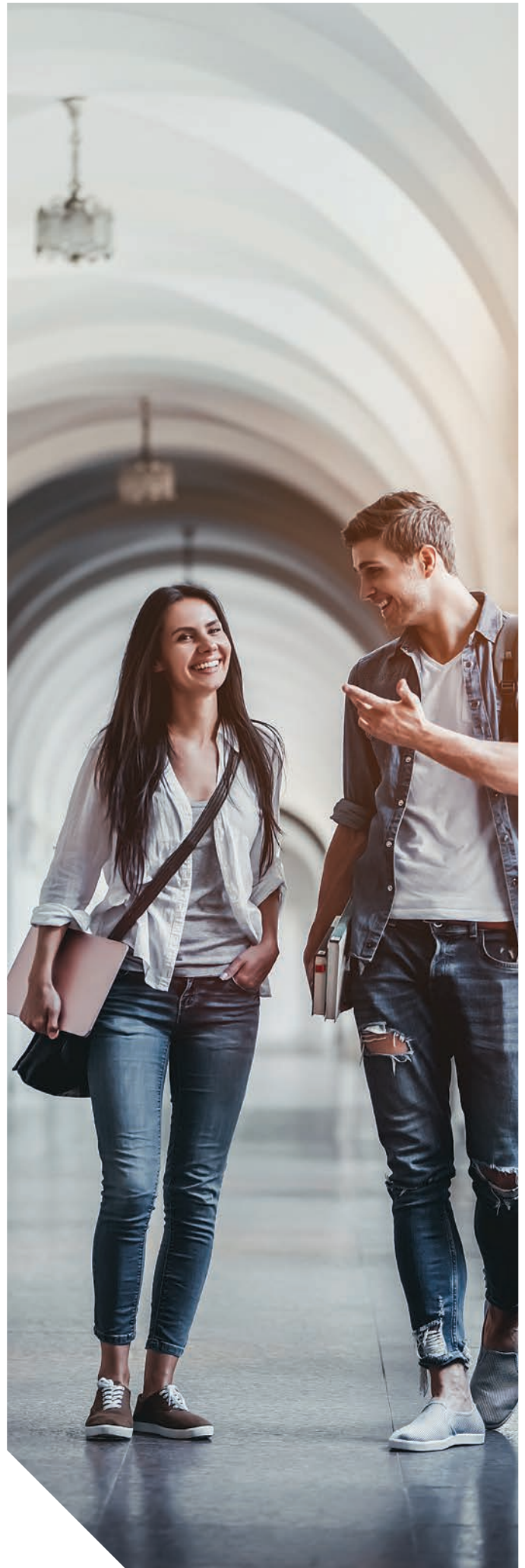
It is imperative that all youth programs and initiatives are guided by the insights and perspectives of young people in our community. This theme and respective recommendations therefore relate and coexists alongside all of the recommendations provided above.

“To adequately address the needs of young people moving forward and ensure approaches are relevant, helpful, accessible by young people, and appropriately nuanced to their developmental stage and any additional needs, the continued input of young people is essential.” (Orygen and Mission Australia, 2022)

By creating structures that ensure young people are included in decision making processes will help us foster intergenerational equity within our community which will benefit both current and future generations [9].

10. Implement a standardised co-design framework to ensure best practice measures are adopted by the Youth Development Unit.

11. Develop Youth Voice Activation Framework to guide all departments at The City of Greater Geelong to effectively capture the voices of young people.



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