

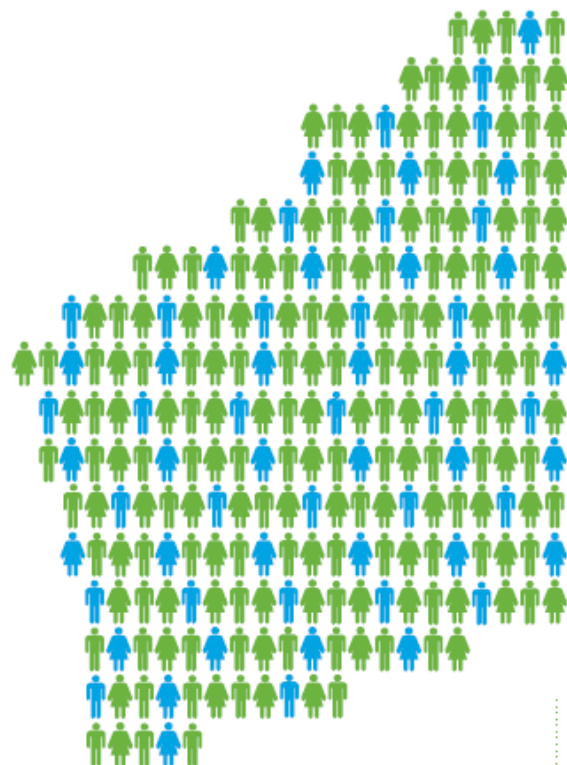
Balancing the system:

Heeding the calls for better mental health support for WA children and young people

February 2021



Commissioner for Children and Young People
Western Australia



Poverty line

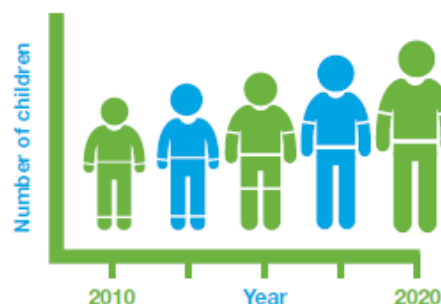
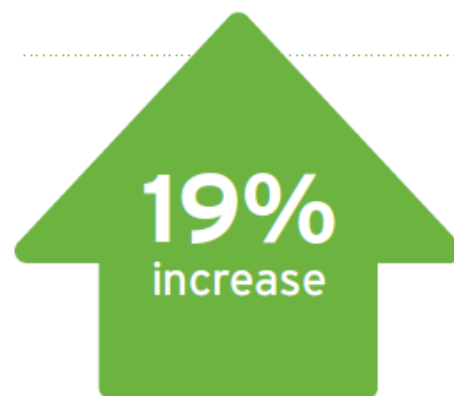
Up to

17%

of children and young people are living below the poverty line in WA

Approximately
610,000

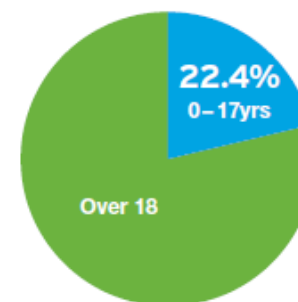
children and young people live in WA and make up **23 per cent** of the state's population



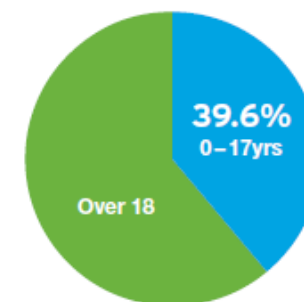
In the last 10 years there has been a **19 per cent** increase in the number of children aged 6 to 11 years living in WA

Aboriginal children and young people

There are about **40,000** Aboriginal children and young people aged under 18 years living in WA. Children and young people aged under 18 years make up **39.6 per cent** of the total WA Aboriginal population



WA non-Aboriginal population



WA Aboriginal population



33,754

births were registered in WA during 2019

Around

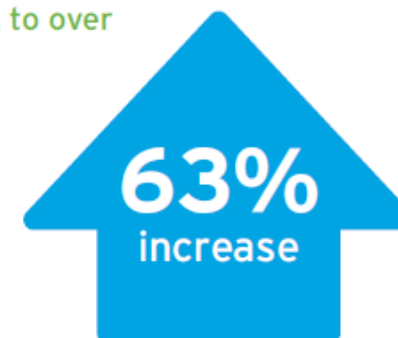
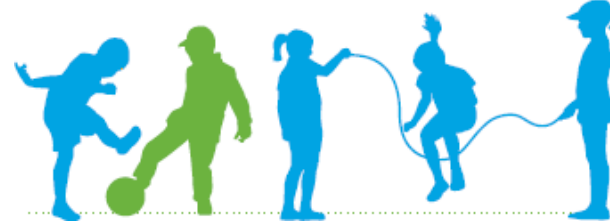
152,000

or **25 per cent**, of children and young people in WA live in regional and remote areas



The number of WA children and young people is projected to increase by **63 per cent**, to over

1 million by 2066



Key statistics

- 4,912 Year 4 to 12 students
- 125 schools
- 16 weeks of fieldwork
- 957 Aboriginal students
- Results: representative of Year 4 to 12 students in government, independent and independent Catholic schools across WA



**Speaking
Out
Survey
2019**



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Western Australia

Children and young people report generally positive outcomes

- Most students report they are physically and mentally healthy, their basic material needs are met and they like school.
- Many children and young people also say their relationships with family, friends and teachers are positive, that they feel loved and supported by the people around them and feel connected to their community.
- In many cases, students' self-reported views on their wellbeing are broadly consistent for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students, male and female students and for students living in regional and remote areas.

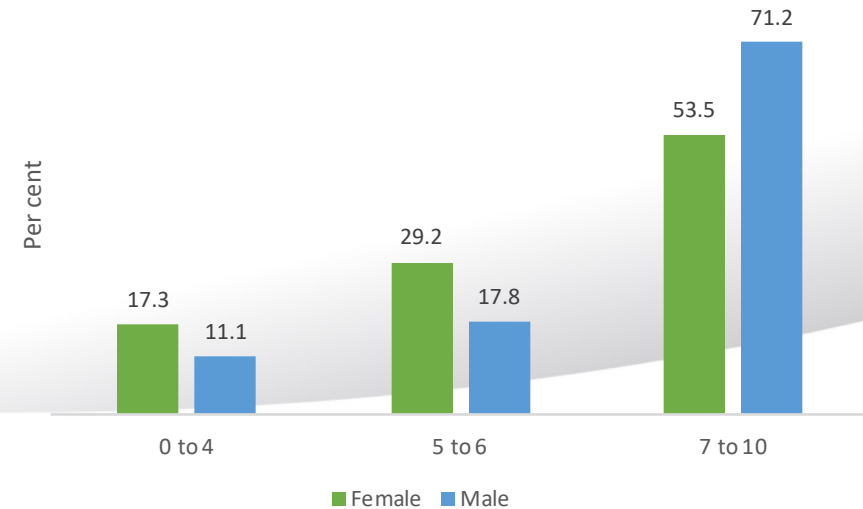


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Mental health is a critical issue for many children and young people

- A substantial number of Year 7 to 12 students reported poor life satisfaction, low self-esteem, high levels of stress and the feeling they can't cope with life's challenges.

Proportion of Year 7 to Year 12 students rating their life satisfaction on a scale of '0' to '10' where '0' is the worst possible life and '10' the best possible life, grouped responses by gender





Mental health is a critical issue for many children and young people

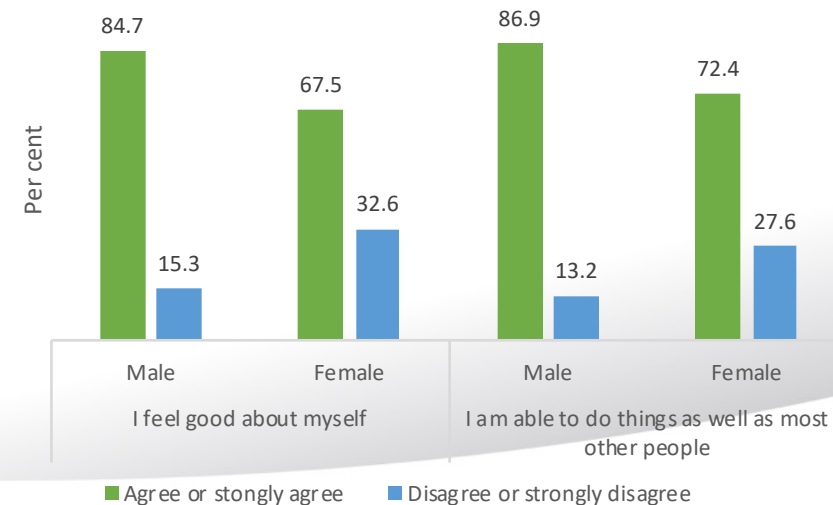
- The mean life satisfaction score for all students in Years 4 to 12 was 7.2.
- Younger students scored their life satisfaction higher than older students.
- **17.4%** of female Year 7 to 12 students rated their life satisfaction 0 to 4 (worst possible).
- **One-in-ten** Year 7 to 12 students said they feel as if they cannot achieve their goals or cope with life's challenges.
- **60.0%** of Year 9 to 12 students reported they had felt sad, blue or depressed for two or more weeks in a row in the last 12 months.
- School or study problems were the most frequently reported source of stress for students in Years 9 to 12 with **84.5%** of students affected.



Female students rate their wellbeing less favourably than male students

- This is particularly in areas relating to mental health, self-perception, conflict, relationships, personal safety and independence.

Proportion of Year 4 to Year 12 students agreeing or disagreeing with statements about their identity, by gender





Female students rate their wellbeing less favourably than male students

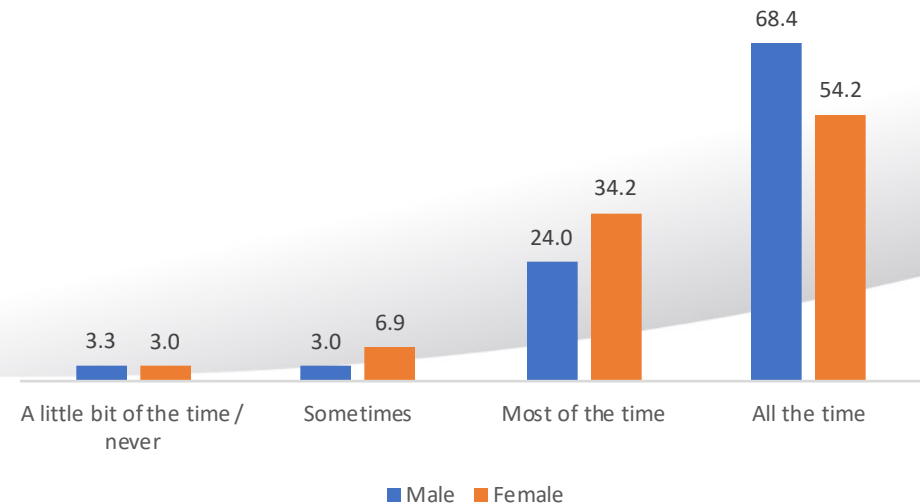
- Female students less likely than male students to rate their health as 'excellent' or 'very good' (43.1% female vs. 57.0% male).
- Lower proportion of female than male students reported eating regular meals every day (61.9% of female students do not eat breakfast and 47.5% do not eat lunch every day).
- Lower proportion of female than male students said their parents listen to them or that they can talk to parents about problems.
- Lower proportion of female than male students reported feeling safe at home all the time (68.4% male vs. 54.2% female).
- 54% of female Year 9 to 12 students have been sent unwanted sexual material.



Perceptions of safety

- 3% of students feel safe at home only a little bit of the time or never.
- More than one-half of Year 7-12 students worry that someone in their family will be fighting with 1-in-10 worrying a lot about this.
- For female students, 1-in-3 reported feeling safe in their local area and on public transport only sometimes or less.

Proportion of Year 7 to Year 12 students saying they feel safe at home all the time, most of the time, sometimes or a little bit of the time / never, by gender

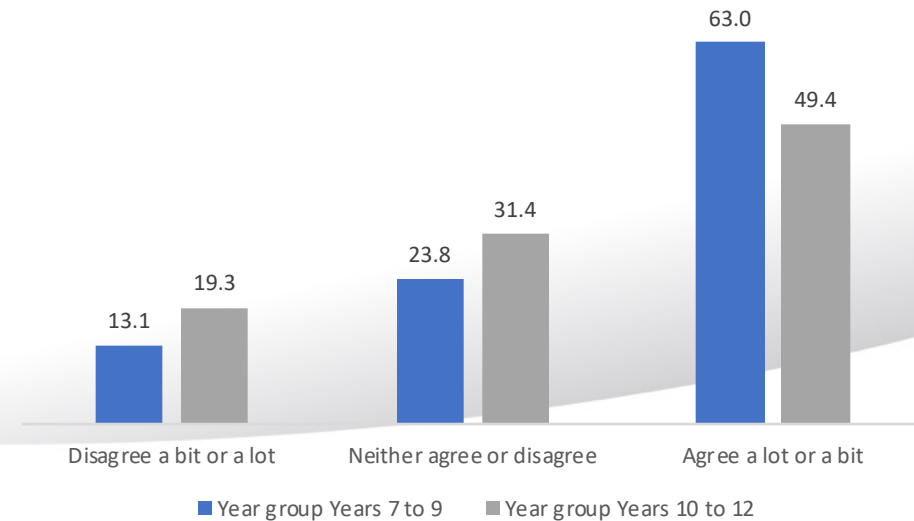




Some students feel they do not belong in their community

- Three-quarters of Year 4 to 12 students agreed they have friends who live nearby and more than 80 per cent agreed they like where they live.
- Only one-half of Year 10 to 12 students feel they belong in their community.
- One-third of Year 10 to 12 students said there was 'nothing to do' in their local area.

Proportion of Year 7 to Year 12 students agreeing or disagreeing with the statement 'I feel like I belong in my community', by year group

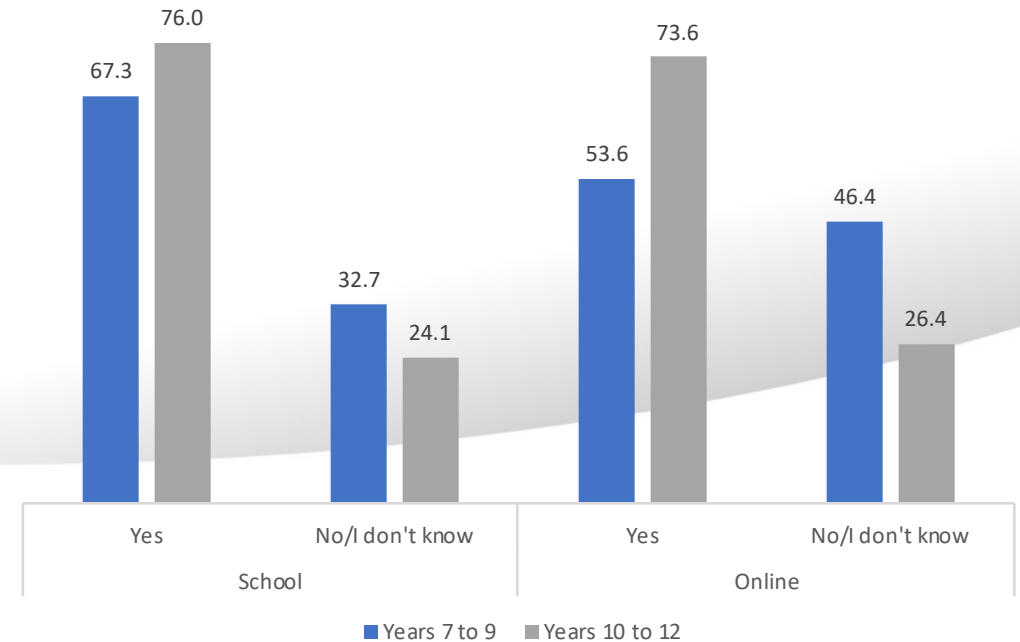




Help and support

- Almost 30% of Year 7 to 12 students said they did not know where to get mental health support in their school and 50% did not know where to get such help in their local area.
- 41% of female and 29% of male students reported they had sought help for mental health worries in the last 12 months.
- A doctor was the most commonly reported source of information for health worries, however, for mental health concerns most students seek help from a friend.

Proportion of Year 7 to Year 12 students knowing where to get mental health support at school and online, by year group





Help and support

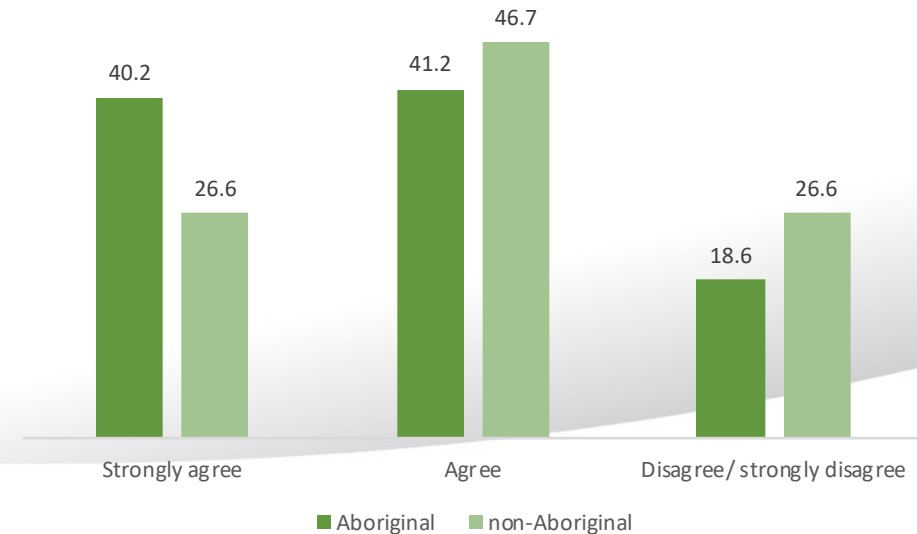
- One-third of female Year 7 to 12 students reported they wanted or needed to see someone for their health but weren't able to (in the last 12 months).
- Almost 30% of Year 7 to 12 students reported not having a parent they can talk to about their problems (Year 7 to 9 more likely to say this than Year 10 to 12).
- One-quarter of Year 10 to 12 students reported not knowing where to go for help about smoking, drinking or drug related issues.



Many Aboriginal students report high self-esteem and strong sense of belonging

- Aboriginal students fared less well than non-Aboriginal students in terms of their dental health, material basics, family stability, or expectations for further education.
- In other respects, Aboriginal students were more positive than non-Aboriginal students in terms of their self-perception, connection to community and feeling safe in the community.

Proportion of female Year 7 to Year 12 students agreeing or disagreeing with the statement 'I am happy with myself', by Aboriginal status



Progress on *Our Children Can't Wait* recommendations

- 2011 Inquiry into the mental health and wellbeing of children and young people in Western Australia
 - 2015 follow up *Our Children Can't Wait* Report: Review of the implementation of the Inquiry into the mental health and wellbeing of children and young people in Western Australia
 - 2019 review of progress against the 12 recommendations from *Our Children Can't Wait* Report
- 

Progress on *Our Children Can't Wait* recommendations

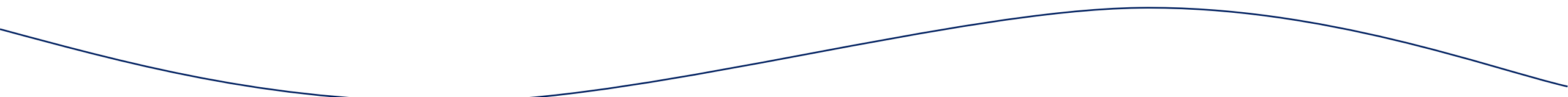
12 recommendations

4 recommendations: Some progress evident

5 recommendations: Limited progress evident

2 recommendations: Progressed through my office

1 recommendation: No progress evident





School responses on student wellbeing

177 responses across three sectors

Key issues identified:

Health and wellbeing

mental health, emotional and behavioural disorders
disability
physical health.

Parents and family

family structures and dynamics
parenting styles and capacity
child protection concerns.

Social exclusion and isolation.

Barriers to supporting student wellbeing

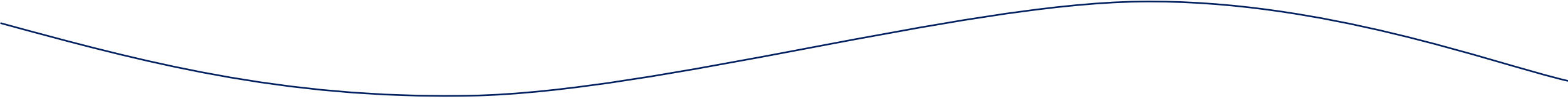
“The sheer volume of numbers of students who require a level of intervention and support beyond the capacity of the current resourcing of the school.”

“There are at times unrealistic expectations placed on schools as to what we are able to do.”

“Allocation/calculation of FTE for school psychologists needs to be revised as it's not meeting the minimum requirement for our school. Then as a school you are expected to allocate resourcing to top up the FTE. Waitlists are too long through the public sector for parents and children to access specialist agencies.”

“Allocation/calculation of FTE for school psychologists needs to be revised as its not meeting the minimum requirement for our school.

“Increasing number of children presenting at enrolment for Kindy already suffering from anxiety, some already having professional intervention and support.”



How the education sectors resource and react to student health and wellbeing issues in Western Australia

Discussion paper – Supporting student wellbeing in schools

School survey findings on student wellbeing

Speaking Out Survey 2019

Student wellbeing in schools resources

Indicators of Wellbeing

The Commissioner for Children and Young People has developed the Indicators of Wellbeing, an evidence-based model to monitor and report on the wellbeing of WA children and young people.



The Indicators of Wellbeing is a component of the **Wellbeing Monitoring Framework**. It is designed to be a practical resource that provides a single, collated overview of the wellbeing of WA's children and young people and helps to identify what is working and where changes in policies and practices are required.

The Indicators of Wellbeing data is structured across the life course of children and young people and organised into three domains: Learning and participating (now available), Healthy and connected (now available), and Safe and supported (to be released late 2019).

Select an age group below to view the data from the Learning and participating and Healthy and connected domains.



Age group 0 to 5 years



Age group 6 to 11 years



Age group 12 to 17 years

Indicators of Wellbeing

[Age group 6 to 11 years](#) >[Age group 12 to 17 years](#) v[Learning and participating](#) +[Healthy and connected](#) -[Physical health](#)[Mental health](#)[Healthy behaviours](#)[Connection to community and support](#)[Safe and supported](#) +

Outcome

Young people are physically and mentally well

Good mental health is an essential component of wellbeing and means that young people are more likely to have fulfilling relationships, cope with adverse circumstances and adapt to change.

Poor mental health is associated with behavioural issues, a diminished sense of self-worth and a decreased ability to cope. This has adverse effects on a young person's quality of life, emotional wellbeing and relationships as well as their capacity to engage in school and other activities.¹

Overview and areas of concern

[Measure: Positive outlook on life and resilience](#)[Measure: Experience of mental health issues](#)[Measure: Receiving services for mental health issues](#)[Measure: Intentional self-harm](#)[Measure: Suicide rate](#)[Young people in care](#)[Young people with disability](#)[Policy implications](#)[Further resources](#)



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