# Gathering voices: a review of the literature supporting the refreshed Youth Plan

## Purpose

This literature review provides a high-level overview of evidence on the current threats to wellbeing most often reported by young people in Aotearoa New Zealand. Sources were drawn from the period 2013 to 2023 and are primarily from New Zealand. Priority was given to research directly seeking the views of young people. Where possible, specific experiences, needs, and challenges of identified cohorts of young people are also explored.

This review sits under the refresh of the Youth Plan, which defined 'young people' as those aged 12-24 years. In the first iteration of the Youth Plan 2020-2022, rangatahi Māori, Pacific young people, rainbow[1] young people, and disabled[2] young people, all aged 17-24 years were prioritised based on marginalisation prior to COVID-19 and anticipated impacts during the pandemic. Further feedback from young people has indicated the priority cohorts should be expanded to include a specific focus on young women, young people in the regions, and young people from ethnic communities (in particular former refugees and recent migrants). This is also supported in the literature, particularly in the Youth19 research and the What About Me? survey.

It is important to note our priority cohorts for the Youth Plan do not exist as distinct categories, and many young people belong to multiple groups. Intersectional identities result in unique experiences and challenges. Additionally, identity is diverse and complex. Labels such as 'ethnic' or 'rainbow' are necessary generalisations that capture broad trends, but all people within these groups do not share one common experience. For example, ethnic young people include those born in Aotearoa New Zealand, those who migrated, and refugees who underwent forced migration, following different paths and belonging to different population sub-groups. These young people have varied lived experiences and perspectives, which should be addressed in appropriate ways.

Due to the nature of a literature review, which gathers evidence from many sources, there are occasions where the definitions of priority cohorts may vary. For example, some sources explore a smaller age range than 12-24 years. In other cases, research may define terms such as 'disabled' in varied ways, perhaps by asking survey respondents to self-identify, or by asking a broad range of questions to gauge respondents' restrictions over different areas of functioning.

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[1] The term 'rainbow' is used in line with the *Identify Survey,* intended as a collective term including takatāpui, MVPFAFF+ and LGBTQIA+ people, or people whose genders, sexualities, variations in sex characteristics differ from cisgender and heterosexual norms. This report acknowledges some may find the term limiting and it is used to provide a broad overview (Fenaughty et al., 2022).

[2] The term 'disabled' is used in line with the *New Zealand Disability Strategy 2016-2026*, informed by the voices of disabled people. This report explains disabled people are diverse, with different preferred terms, identities, and experiences. It uses identity-first language of "disabled people" rather than "people with disability" to acknowledge disabling barriers are imposed by society. If the disabled community reaches a consensus on ways to be described, official language will shift to reflect this (ODI, 2016).

Throughout the review, investigations on certain priority cohorts are conducted. Cohorts were directly addressed if they reported frequent threats to wellbeing in the relevant area, or if there was expansive literature on their particular experiences. Some groups may not be sufficiently addressed due to lack of evidence and could indicate areas requiring further external study. For example, research acknowledged regional and rural young people were underrepresented compared to those from urban areas (Fenaughty, 2022).

This literature review will help inform the development of a refreshed Youth Plan, aiming to increase youth voice and youth representation across government to support decision-making. It also aims to identify areas of focus and concern for young people in Aotearoa New Zealand to help inform future actions of a refreshed Youth Plan. Finally, the review examines specific voices and experiences of different cohorts of young people (where research was available) to help identify which priority cohorts should be included in a refreshed Youth Plan.

# Findings from the literature review

## Young people identified mental health as the biggest threat to wellbeing

Mental health is an expansive topic that cannot be comprehensively covered in a literature review of this size. However, we note young people are reporting mental health as a primary concern today. The key sources addressing this topic are the What About Me? (2022) survey and Youth19 research. The last ten years have seen a marked increase in rates of psychological distress and suicide for young people, with the enduring impacts of COVID-19 compounding this issue (Menzies et al., 2020). A recent survey found, while the majority (58 percent) of young people reported good to excellent wellbeing, more than one quarter reported scores indicating serious distress (Ministry of Social Development – Te Manatū Whakahiato Ora, 2022). In the last 12 months, 49 percent reported feeling so overwhelmed they could not cope, and 41 percent reported feeling life was not worth living; while 26 percent of respondents had seriously thought about suicide and 12 percent had attempted it.

The Youth 2019 survey concluded concerns about emotional and mental health were the most common problem for young people in Aotearoa New Zealand today (Fleming et al., 2020a). This research provides strong evidence of a social gradient in youth mental health, with youth from high deprivation areas having higher rates (30 percent) of self-reported depression symptoms than those from medium (23 percent) and low (17 percent) deprivation areas. Likewise, a social gradient is apparent with regards to attempted suicide, with rates doubling between each deprivation classification: low (2.7 percent), medium (6 percent) and high (11 percent).

What About Me? (MSD, 2022) mental health results were significantly worse for many of the priority cohorts: women, disabled young people, rainbow young people, and for many questions, rangatahi Māori. Discrimination, feelings of not belonging, and isolation from community were all key contributors to negative mental health outcomes (Williams, 2018; GIMH, 2018; Fleming, 2020a). Mental health concerns increase for those who belong to multiple groups at risk of social exclusion, such as young people who are rainbow and disabled (NZ HRC, 2020; Fleming et al., 2020a; Filia et al., 2022). Other evidence connects mental health concerns across generations and suggests even prenatal mental health concerns for young mothers affect their children, in addition to contributing environmental factors (Lowe et al., 2021). These factors indicate threats to wellbeing can be experienced by whole communities and groups over lifetimes.

*Young women*

Across multiple cohorts in Youth19 research, the intersection of female identity was a key indicator of increased challenges (Roy et al., 2021). Young women reported depression and suicidal ideation at double the rates reported by their male peers (Menzies, 2020; MSD, 2022). They struggled particularly with achievement and body image, especially for certain smaller demographics, such as Asian women (YWCA, 2020).

*Young men*

Despite poor mental health, young women were likely to have strong social support networks, more so than males experiencing similar levels of distress (Youthline, 2019). In research from Youthline (2019), Māori young men were particularly isolated from support.

Male mental health challenges, though reported at lower levels, seem compounded by gender expectations where cultural definitions of masculinity limit emotional expression (Chandra, 2019). Rates of attempted suicide for young men are increasing, doubling from 2.2 percent to 5 per cent between 2012 and 2019, and have been linked to the lack of support and discouragement from speaking out about struggles (Menzies et al., 2020).

*Rainbow young people*

High levels of mental distress are reported by the rainbow cohort, linked to exposure to discrimination and structural disadvantage (Fenaughty, 2022; NZ HRC, 2020). The Identify Survey suggests rainbow young people face barriers to mental health care and gender-affirming care that enforces resilient wellbeing (Fenaughty, 2022). Cultural expectations of masculinity and femininity can also contribute to poor mental health (Chandra, 2019; NZ HRC, 2020). In the Youth19 research, rainbow young people reported less positive family, school, and community relationships alongside mental health disparities (Roy et al., 2021). In What About Me? (2022), the rainbow cohort had the worst results in mental health measures over multiple categories, with 57 percent experiencing serious distress compared with the 28 percent average, and more than double having attempted suicide.

Many rainbow young people do receive support from friends and whānau. For example, among transgender and non-binary participants in Counting Ourselves (2019) whose family/whānau knew about their identity, more than half (57 percent) reported that most or all of their family supported them. Participants who were supported by at least half of their family/whānau were almost half as likely (9 percent compared with 17 percent) to have attempted suicide in the last 12 months. Other forms of support and acceptance impact young people positively, such as those who accessed gender-affirming care reporting positive self-image and improved mental wellbeing (Fenaughty, 2022).

*Disabled Young people*

Disabled young people tend to report worse health outcomes in general, including inequities in mental health (Clark et al., 2021). They show indicators of stress and trauma due to ableist discrimination, with cognitive impairment and associated characteristics a particular risk factor for abuse (Moore et al., 2020; OCC 2021b). Disabled youth may feel they cannot participate in society to their preferred extent, or they must dispense more energy than their non-disabled peers to live the same lives (Roy et al., 2021).

Disabled young people may have their mental health overlooked due to diagnostic overshadowing, where symptoms are automatically attributed to their disability (MoH, 2013). The health system itself can be siloed, making it difficult to get coordinated help for mental and physical health, including disability, even though the two factors feed into each other (MoH, 2015; GIMHA, 2018).

Some disabled young people may not be aware they have a disability or may face barriers to getting diagnoses and the associated support (Wynd, 2015). They may find symptoms of disability are interpreted to their disadvantage by the justice system. For example, they may be unable to defend or express themselves according to social expectations (Boughey, 2022). Their experiences in custody may also include isolation and distress that worsens mental health conditions (Day et al., 2020).

*Young people from ethnic communities (in particular former refugees and recent migrants)*

Young people from ethnic communities (in particular former refugees and recent migrants) report low measures of mental health (MSD, 2022; Spencer et al., 2022). Causes vary due to diverse lived experiences, but some trends are evident in research. Racism increases stress and ethnic young people may report they do not feel they belong in their communities (MSD, 2022; Nakhid et al., 2022). Traumatic experiences preceding migration or continued news of struggle in countries of origin can also harm mental health (Spencer et al., 2022). Lastly, some internal cultural expectations and external societal pressures create a heightened sense of obligation for ethnic young people. They report being required to display responsibility and success to a greater extent than average, which can contribute to mental fatigue (Jacolyn et al., 2021).

Isolation poses a particular threat to the refugee group, as forced migration can separate young people from parental and familial figures who usually provide support through life transitions (Choummanivong, 2014). In addition, surviving traumatic events can cause guilt and disenfranchisement with protective systems, both of which are associated with poor mental health outcomes.

However, research also indicates ethnic young people show strong resilience and wellbeing when offered certain supports. Acceptance of cultural difference contributes to greater sense of belonging and stability in mental health (Spencer et al., 2022). Participation in community is a particular protective factor for former refugees and recent migrants settling into new homes (Gatt et al., 2020).

*Current action by young people*

Young people want to mitigate factors that negatively impact mental health (MSD, 2022; Fleming et al., 2020a). They lead campaigns for better mental health support, signing petitions coordinated by youth-founded groups such as the Mental Health Awareness Matters Initiative (Willis, 2022). Projects like Te Rourou seek to elevate young voices and encourage communities to follow young people's leadership (Jacobs, 2023). The Access and Choice programme by Te Whatu Ora directly seeks input from people aged 12-24 years when establishing a continuum of support, treatment, and therapy for holistic care, understanding their participation in their own care leads to positive results (Te Hiringa Mahara, 2022).

## Young people consistently report climate change and the state of the environment as key concerns

The climate crisis is a multi-faceted discussion involving the state of the environment entwined with decolonisation and economic justice, connected to every other issue addressed in this review. Clear evidence shows the worldwide climate is changing (IPCC, 2021). Young people are worried they will live with the consequences of a multitude of overlapping decisions made today, which may affect their lives more significantly than the lives of older decision-makers (SS4C NZ, 2019; Gluckman et al., 2022). They want to be agents of conservation rather than victims in crisis (Etchart, 2017).

Young people in Aotearoa New Zealand connect to the climate and their natural environment through kaitiakitanga (guardianship) and suggest environmental wellbeing affects all other aspects of life. After mental health, they have reported climate change as one of their biggest issues of concern (UN Youth NZ, 2019). They continue to mark it as a priority

following the COVID-19 pandemic (UN Youth NZ, 2021; The Hive, 2021). Young people also report the climate crisis is an intersectional phenomenon part of a larger framework of disadvantage, and it affects social vulnerability differentiated by age, gender, ethnicity, health status, and access to resources (Otto et al., 2017).

*Rangatahi Māori and Pacific young people*

Indigenous peoples regularly combat climate change by participating in activism, political engagement, and international environmental conferences (Etchart, 2017). Through their cultural heritage and sovereignty, rangatahi Māori express particular concern for the land of Aotearoa New Zealand. They explain kaitiakitanga (guardianship) of our world is passed through whakapapa (genealogy) and responsibility for natural taonga should be shared (Ministry for the Enivornment, 2020). Young climate activists attended the COP26 in October 2021, and Māori representative India Logan-Riley emphasised the legacy of indigenous peoples' knowledge of the land and their role in defending it (Myers, 2022).

Pacific young people express similar cultural connection with nature. They are vocal in favour of action as their ancestral homes fall under increasing threat from rising sea levels (Weir et al., 2017; SS4C NZ, 2019; Myers, 2022). Though Pacific people have traditional methods to combat natural hazards, unprecedented climate change threatens resilience and contributes to forced migration, including to New Zealand (Weir et al., 2017).

*Young people living in the regions*

Young people living in the regions are also impacted in unique ways by climate change, as weather impacts agriculture and resources central to their communities (MfE, 2020). Climate change increases the risk of extreme weather events such as floods and droughts, affecting both physical health and material wellbeing. Examples include bush fires contributing to air pollution, and high temperatures increasing pollen counts, contributing to allergies in younger generations (MfE, 2020). Regional and rural young people are often isolated from healthcare, and climate change risks further disrupting their access to central support services (RSTA, 2017).

This cohort experienced particular threats to their wellbeing during Cyclone Gabrielle. Isolation from central support services and breakdown of modern communication systems, including power and cellular connections in some regions, resulted in increased disadvantage in recovery (Speidel, 2023). Farmers, growers, and tangata whenua Māori are listed by the Ministry for Primary Industries (2023) as the groups most financially affected. As the Cyclone passed by so recently, research addressing it is scarce, but evidence following the Christchurch earthquakes in 2011 gives insight to the effects of natural disasters on young people in rural settings. Freeman et al. (2015) explain that rural and regional young people want to contribute to recovery, particularly sharing their voice in the reestablishment of small communities. Early advice following Cyclone Gabrielle suggests young people should be centred in the response, participating in decisions which impact their lives (UNICEF, 2023).

*Current action by young people*

Young people implore the government to make climate justice a priority (OCC, 2017; Bright and Eames, 2020). They emphasise social cohesion and support; uplifting those most strongly effected contributes to collective success (Bright & Eames, 2020). They express the need for a more sustainable approach to managing natural resource use to preserve what we have for the future (OCC, 2017). A global movement of young people continues to push decision-makers to recognise climate change is an urgent and existential problem and young people in Aotearoa New Zealand are an active, engaged, and leading part of this movement (Gluckman et al., 2022).

## Many groups of young people are affected negatively by racism and other forms of discrimination

Young people in Aotearoa New Zealand express increasing concern about racism and other forms of discrimination (Koi tū, 2022). In 2021, 37 percent of young people aged 16-24 years said racism was one of the biggest issues for their generation, compared with only 23 percent in 2014 (Youthline, 2021). In particular, racism impacts ethnic minorities navigating societies where they are positioned as the cultural "other" (Alansari et al., 2020). Aotearoa New Zealand has a European majority, and often Māori, Pacific, and other ethnic communities face systemic disadvantage and discrimination. Their negative wellbeing has been directly tied to isolation, whereas strong cultural connection, sense of identity, and belonging create the opposite effect (Williams et al., 2018; Nakhid et al., 2020; Roy et al., 2021; MSD, 2021). Racism contributes to many negative wellbeing outcomes in this review, such as socioeconomic disadvantage and poor mental health (Koi tū, 2022).

An intersectional lens is important when discussing discrimination against young people with multiple identities. In certain contexts, they may face discrimination for one aspect of their identity; in other cases, they may find the combination of multiple forms of prejudice results in unique disadvantage (Roy et al., 2021). For example, rainbow rangatahi Māori must navigate public perception of their identities in a westernised landscape, where traditional frameworks for takatāpui have been overshadowed by colonial ideas of normative gender and sexuality (Fenaughty et al., 2022).

*Rangatahi Māori*

Rangatahi Māori assign importance to whakapapa (genealogy/heritage) yet are more likely than the majority to feel they don't belong in wider communities (MSD, 2021). The power structures of colonialism have embedded disadvantages for indigenous groups, shaping lasting socioeconomic inequality and fostering racist stereotypes (Haukamau et al., 2017). In an individualistic society, rangatahi Māori can also be separated from traditional cultural values emphasising kinship and mutual support, which would ordinarily reinforce their resilience and wellbeing (Williams et al., 2018).

Young people are known to thrive in contexts where they feel supported, capable, and socially connected (Fleming et al., 2020a). Schools are key environments for many young people, yet rangatahi Māori (as well as Pacific and other ethnic young people) report their cultural learning styles are not respected by schooling organised around a hegemonic European model (Alansari et al., 2020). Some rangatahi Māori report daily racism impacts their education, including from teachers and authority figures (OCC, 2021a).

*Pacific young people*

Pacific young people face similar racism to Māori, reporting discrimination impacting their material wellbeing (Roy et al., 2021; Funaki, 2017). A consideration that should be made when examining Pacific research, is that the group placed under this umbrella is very diverse, and different people will experience different forms of discrimination and disadvantage. Some Pacific people in Aotearoa New Zealand are recent immigrants, while some are born into established generations; they may connect to heritage from any number of islands with their own histories, languages, and cultural perspectives (Flavell and Cunningham, 2022). Yet one positive shared by most Pacific young people is that, through strong connections to family and migrant communities, they report pride in their identities – more so than other ethnic groups in Aotearoa New Zealand (MSD, 2022).

*Young people from ethnic communities (in particular former refugees and recent migrants)*

Young people from ethnic communities (in particular former refugees and recent migrants) report frequently encountering racism (MSD, 2022). Former refugees and migrants are often grouped together in research despite distinct lived experiences depending on factors such as where they immigrated from, their financial status, their education, and other intersectional identities (MBIE, 2020). An increasing portion of young people in Aotearoa New Zealand were born overseas (from 17 percent in 2001 to 23 percent in 2013) and of resettled refugees approved for residence, 27 percent were between 12-24 years old, making them a significant demographic group (MBIE, 2017). Long-term growth indicates they will continue to form a significant portion of Aotearoa New Zealand's population in the years to come.

People from Middle Eastern, Latin American, and African groups make up a small portion of the population in Aotearoa New Zealand but are often treated as a single demographic group in research, despite the diversity of their cultures (MSD, 2022; DPMC, 2021). This makes it difficult to gather comprehensive evidence about their distinct experiences. However, young people in this combined group report ethnic discrimination at three times the rate of their European peers in the Youth19 research (DPMC, 2021) and indicate low feelings of belonging and safety in the What About Me? research (MSD, 2020).

Asian ethnicities make up the third largest portion of the youth population in Aotearoa New Zealand. They also face racism compounding in material disadvantage – by teachers, police, health professionals, and others (DPMC, 2021; Peiris-John et al., 2021). According to research by Juang et al. (2022), Asian New Zealanders experienced a particular increase in racism during the COVID-19 pandemic, reported most often by the youth cohort.

*Rainbow young people*

Rainbow young people also report discrimination, including homophobia, transphobia, and biphobia (Fenaughty et al., 2021a; Fenaughty et al., 2021b). Once again, this can come from teachers, police, and health professionals who are ordinarily expected to be supportive figures (Veale et al., 2019; Roy et al., 2021; Fenaughty et al., 2021a; Fenaughty et al., 2021b; Fenaughty et al., 2022). In a formal setting, this discrimination can be 'invisible' when young people are assumed to be cisgender or heterosexual. For example, discrimination is evident in the absence of rainbow-specific content for health professionals, patient

management systems that don't acknowledge gender identity or sexuality, and in everyday assumptions reported following healthcare interactions (Ker et al., 2022).

Research which applies an intersectional lens finds ethnic rainbow young people are at particular risk of familial rejection. Nakhid et al. (2022) suggest rainbow identities place individuals in conflict with families influenced by misinformation, religious beliefs, and cultural practices encouraging prejudice. Asian and Pacific participants are the most likely to experience discrimination by their families, severing them from their ordinarily high feelings of cultural connection which nurture positive wellbeing (Veale et al., 2019; Roy et al., 2021).

Many rainbow young people report that peers and other rainbow people provide support removed from societal discrimination (Fenaughty et al., 2022). These individual bonds and small communities are important, though they aren't a substitute for systemic change and resources.

*Disabled young people*

Discrimination against disabled young people comes in the form of ableism – both in person and online (MSD, 2022). Many in this cohort report being infantilised or seen as less capable compared to their non-disabled peers (Moore et al., 2020; Office of the Children's Commissioner, 2021). Others, especially neurodivergent young people, report being treated as adults and placed under high expectations compared with others their age (Boughey, 2022).

Schools are a cornerstone of life experience for many young people in Aotearoa New Zealand; yet disabled young people, especially those with behavioural challenges, are at risk of being excluded from mainstream school environments (Alesech, 2020). While some find it helpful being in alternative learning environments, others prefer being included in school. When included, they report low feelings of safety, at 77 percent compared with 88 percent for non-disabled young people (Clark et al., 2021) They are at increased risk of bullying, which can follow them home in the form of cyberbullying (MSD, 2022). Their discrimination has been directly linked to negative perceptions of disability in society and reinforces a greater sense of not belonging (MSD, 2022). As with ethnic rainbow youth, ethnic disabled youth can experience the additional struggle of disconnection from culture (Roy et al., 2021).

*Young women*

Young people report sexism as a key concern and a consistently present form of discrimination. In interviews by Calder-Dawe and Gavey (2016), most young people defined sexism as the enforcement of gender expectations, imposing disadvantage for people according to their gender identity or perceived gender. For the purposes of this review, this section focuses on disadvantage faced by young women and some corresponding disadvantage faced by young men. Though we acknowledge sexism also affects gender diverse groups (included in the rainbow cohort) and does not impact young people over simple binary lines.

Young people are concerned gender inequality may hinder both employment and education for women (UN Youth NZ, 2021). In the What About Me? survey, males felt safer than females across all settings (MSD, 2022). They also reported feeling more accepted in every setting (other than with friends, who provided an equally accepting environment for young women). Sexism affects many aspects of life for those of marginalised genders, especially

mental health, and is a key lens for intersectionality, as women are represented in every other cohort in this review.

*Current action by young people*

Young people are advocates for eliminating racism and discrimination and want to be empowered to create solutions rather than relying solely on existing authorities (Rankine, 2014). For example, the Youth19 respondents said eliminating sexism would consequently create a brighter future (Fleming et al., 2020a). Some cohorts facing discrimination, such as rainbow young people, choose to engage with volunteering and activism to a greater extent than average; challenges they faced motivated them to participate in social change (Fenaughty et al., 2021a). In general, young people report racism and discrimination as collective problems that should be resolved through communal transformation, where voices, including young voices, join together to unlearn discriminatory behaviours (Simon-Kumar et al., 2022).

## Many young people report economic insecurity and poverty are key concerns

Even before 2020, economic insecurity was a key concern for young people in Aotearoa New Zealand (Utter et al., 2018). Young people draw attention to the cycle of generational poverty and inequitable distribution of wealth (Koi tū, 2022). They also report economic insecurity worsened in direct relation to the COVID-19 pandemic (Youthline, 2021).

*Rangatahi Māori, Pacific young people, and young people from ethnic communities*

Ethnic background does not inevitably assign economic status, but socioeconomic deprivation can be entrenched in generational racism; and related stressors can augment disadvantages such as poor mental health (Williams et al., 2018; Simon-Kumar et al., 2022).

Rangatahi Māori and Pacific young people face economic disadvantage at a higher rate than average (MSD, 2022; Roy et al., 2021). In What About Me? (2022) research, these cohorts reported they regularly worried about the provision of necessities like food, power, housing, and transport. Rangatahi Māori felt constrained by a European model of home ownership and, in the current day, were more likely than others to be renting property (Paul, 2022). Pacific young people were more likely to live in damp housing than any other demographic in Aotearoa New Zealand (DPMC, 2021). Both Māori and Pacific groups report economic disadvantage affects whole communities rather than single family units, and the overlapping effect of poverty creates challenges in multiple other areas (Gluckman et al., 2022)

Other ethnic communities report low measures of economic security when compared with European young people (MSD, 2022). South Asian groups were most likely to report household poverty, even if both parents were working (Pieris-John, 2021). Ethnic young people were also the most likely to be living outside the support system of their family home due to high rates of international students (MBIE, 2017).

*Young women*

Young people also list gender inequality as a financial concern (MSD, 2022; Fleming, 2020a; UN Youth NZ, 2019). In What About Me? (2022) research, women in all groups were more likely than men to worry about their economic security. Young sole parents, who are primarily women, are at significant risk of poverty as they support their children, as well as themselves (Krassoi Peach and Cording, 2018; Gibb et al., 2014). Māori and Pacific sole

mothers are particularly at risk of housing disadvantage (Krassoi Peach and Cording, 2018). Additionally, people who menstruate can face unique poverty risks. Period pain and hormonal side effects can be a disadvantage in education and employment settings; costs of necessary products can be prohibitive; and the stigma of both periods and poverty can result in risks to physical and mental health (Fleming et al., 2020b).

*Rainbow young people*

As indicated earlier, some rainbow young people are disconnected from their families, creating a unique case of housing insecurity for this group (Nakhid et al, 2022; Roy et al., 2021). Rainbow young people who are also Māori, Pacific, or disabled see increased risks, while transgender individuals are the most at-risk (Roy et al., 2021, Fraser et al., 2022b). When isolated from family or wider society, rainbow people tend to rely strongly on informal networks. These are often unlikely to result in finding long-term housing, because individuals within these networks are experiencing similar disadvantages (GMA, 2020).

*Disabled young people*

Disabled young people are overrepresented in households in poverty and are 1.4 to 1.6 times more likely to be below all three poverty thresholds than houses with non-disabled children (Murray, 2019). For example, care responsibilities can be a barrier to parents engaging in employment. Growing up in poverty is linked to a wide range of negative outcomes for young people and can aggravate disability symptoms, such as pain, or create further isolation for a group often excluded from wider communities.

*Current action by young people*

Across multiple demographics, young people agree all members of society should be able to achieve a good standard of living (OCC, 2017). They call for more quality and affordable housing, asking the government to take action to reduce cold and damp accommodation (OCC, 2017; O'Sullivan et al., 2017; Ara Taiohi et al., 2018). There is a dearth of research documenting youth-led activism directly targeting economic insecurity in Aotearoa New Zealand, but young people often address poverty while campaigning for disadvantaged groups. For example, Protect Ihumātao is a social movement with high participation of young people. They seek to protect Indigenous land from housing development, asking that the rights of Māori people are not overridden to financially benefit others (Nairn et al., 2022).

## Young people want their voices heard and to be involved in decision-making about their future

Young people care about a range of issues pertinent to their wellbeing and want to actively participate in mitigating actions. They report wanting adults to listen to them, to understand their perspectives, and involve them in the decisions affecting their future (Fleming et al., 2020a). They are the next generation, already taking leadership opportunities, developing expertise, and forming community connections.

Young people have strongly expressed their desire for their views to be sought, valued, and acted upon within the context of home, school, government, and across the country. Some note their voices have been dismissed or ignored by those older than them or those in positions of power (Ara Taiohi et al., 2018). Additionally, some cohorts have been historically underrepresented in Aotearoa New Zealand, and their voices should be highlighted.

Research suggests youth participation can positively impact health outcomes, for example, by developing novel intervention strategies, alternate interpretations of community dynamics and values, and culturally appropriate approaches to data collection and analysis (Wallerstein, Yen, & Syme, 2011). Distinct young voices can enrich the way we measure leadership, wellbeing, and other successes by providing intersectional understandings that discourage us from applying a normative lens. For example, young Māori activists describe tino rangatiratanga (self-determination) as a complex way to address their agency in society, historically defined by acts of resistance against oppression (Watson, 2022). Young Pacific people explain their idea of leadership comes from an overlapping interaction of Pacific and Western perspectives developed in Aotearoa New Zealand (Faletutulu, 2021).

Young people are also leaders in their communities. The coordination group, Volunteer Auckland, reports that they have more young volunteers signing up than they have places to put them. Some priority cohorts are particularly highly represented in Volunteer Auckland, as in 2018 young women were three times more likely to apply and Asian young people made up 43 percent of applications despite being only a quarter of the wider population (Wardlaw, 2018). Facing threats to wellbeing can motivate young people to advocate for social change (Fenaughty et al., 2021a).

*Current action by young people*

In each of the sections above, this review describes how young people are currently expressing voice and leadership. Though many sources address the topic of in Aotearoa New Zealand, literature directly sharing a young perspective is less common (Watson, 2022). Yet young people should be able to share their perspectives. Young people who feel their voices are valued are more likely to engage in and contribute to social change with the chance to shape their own lives in the present and the future (Hodson, 2014; Watson, 2022). Participating in decision-making promotes general resilience and wellness, which can positively transform the long-term trajectory of young lives (Ballard & Syme, 2016; Ozer & Douglas, 2013; Sprague Martinez et al., 2016).

# Recommendations

The literature surrounding young people in Aotearoa New Zealand is complex and there are many nuanced topics being raised; however, some clear trends emerge. Young people express the most concern for mental health, climate change, racism and discrimination, and economic insecurity and poverty. Some of these factors feed into each other, for example, those experiencing increased stress from economic insecurity may find their mental health impacted. Young people also express strong interest in being involved in mitigating negative outcomes and creating transformative change.

The emerging theme of this literature review was voice and leadership. These are both known as protective factors for wellbeing (Koi Tū, 2022). As young people engage with action, they gain a sense of agency and involvement. In the case of the environment, for example, young activists report increasing pride in Aotearoa New Zealand and a cultural fulfilment in being guardians of the natural landscape (Koi Tū, 2022). We recommend focusing the Youth Plan's outcome areas to voice and leadership, understanding that empowered young people are supported to mitigate threats to wellbeing and to create transformative change.

The literature also supports a focus on priority cohorts. Rangatahi Māori, Pacific young people, rainbow young people, disabled young people, young women, young people in the regions, and young people from ethnic communities (in particular former refugees and recent migrants) all show evidence of being more often negatively affected by certain threats to wellbeing when compared with the average. Some of their specific needs are outlined in this review. When addressing priority cohorts and forming actions, we must remember that not all cohorts are affected by the same threats to wellbeing and, even within each cohort, individual experiences are diverse. Many young people also occupy multiple, overlapping identities. We recommend the Youth Plan is designed to acknowledge diversity and incorporate intersectionality.

Finally, the Youth Plan must embed diverse ideas and definitions of wellbeing, voice, and leadership. We must treat our priority cohorts as a part of the whole young population with important needs. They cannot be separated; young people cannot succeed as a group while those facing disproportionate threats to wellbeing are left behind.

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