

Legislative Assembly Committee on
Law and Safety



LEGISLATIVE
ASSEMBLY

Community safety in regional and rural communities

Interim report: Addressing the drivers of
youth crime through early intervention



Report 2/58 – May 2025

New South Wales Parliamentary Library cataloguing-in-publication data:



A catalogue record for this
book is available from the
National Library of Australia

ISBN: 978-1-925214-69-7

Cover image: Bourke, NSW, on the Darling River.

The motto of the coat of arms for the state of New South Wales is "Orta recens quam pura nites". It is written in Latin and means "newly risen, how brightly you shine".

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Chair's foreword

Crime is a serious concern for many regional and rural communities in New South Wales. In 2023, violent crime was 57 per cent higher in regional New South Wales than in Greater Sydney. Since the COVID-19 pandemic, we've also seen that young people are increasingly involved in certain forms of crime, like motor vehicle theft. Statistics tell us only part of the story. Over the past year, we've heard powerful first-hand accounts from victims of crime. For many, their lives have been profoundly affected by trauma.

Since the Committee on Law and Safety began its inquiry into community safety in regional and rural New South Wales on 20 March 2024, there has been strong and widespread interest. We received almost 200 submissions, held regional hearings in Bourke, Broken Hill, and Kempsey, as well as one public hearing at Parliament House in Sydney, and met informally with community stakeholders in Wagga Wagga. The Committee also held a roundtable discussion with community members on the Mid North Coast, who have been victims of crime. The communities we have visited and the stories shared with us in submissions make one thing very clear: people feel unsafe.

Inquiry participants also emphasised that youth offending is a deeply complex social issue, and one that cannot be solved through increased policing alone. Overwhelmingly, the evidence tells us that early intervention is the most effective way to prevent young people from engaging in criminal behaviour. We must be guided by what the evidence tells us works. Tough-on-crime approaches may seem appealing, but they won't deliver lasting change for communities – smart, evidence-based strategies will.

This is the first of two reports that the Committee intends to publish as part of its inquiry. Primarily, this first report focuses on evidence we received about what drives youth crime – that is, the underlying social and economic factors that contribute to a young person's involvement with the criminal justice system. There is a clear need for a robust, well-designed ecosystem of programs that provide early intervention and support. Throughout the inquiry, we have heard about outstanding programs for young people being delivered in the regions. The Committee acknowledges the efforts of service providers across NSW, who work tirelessly, and with great passion and dedication, to provide opportunities and support for vulnerable young people in their communities. However, service 'gaps', inefficiencies in referral processes, and limitations around government funding and how it's used undermine the effectiveness of early intervention efforts. Stakeholders identified several opportunities for improvement in this regard. Their insights inform many of the recommendations in this report.

While this first report briefly discusses issues around policing and recent legislative reform, these matters will be examined more closely in the Committee's final report. This doesn't mean that these issues are less important. We recognise the critical role police play in keeping our communities safe. NSW Police have provided evidence regarding police resourcing, particularly prisoner transfers, mental health, and replacement of officers on extended leave and its impact on policing. The Committee intends to explore this further in its final report for this inquiry. I'm grateful to the officers who met with us informally during our regional visits, as well as those who appeared at our public hearings. Police need to be properly resourced and supported by laws that are fit for purpose.

Last year, the NSW Government introduced a 'bail test' (section 22C of the *Bail Act 2013*) that restricts the release of 14 to 18-year-olds on bail, unless the bail authority holds a high level of confidence that the individual will not commit a serious indictable offence while on bail. Section 22C will sunset on 4 April 2028. In May 2025, the Attorney General announced a review into the operation of the common law principle of *doli incapax* and its operation in New South Wales. We will be monitoring the progress of this review, as well as the impacts of recent legislative amendments, with interest over the coming months.

On behalf of the Committee, I would like to thank everyone who has participated in our inquiry to date. We've heard from hundreds of stakeholders, including private citizens, police officers, community service providers, advocacy organisations, academics, representatives from local government, First Nations community leaders, and young people. We have heard your voices and been deeply moved by your resilience and your enduring commitment to your communities. In this report, the Committee has tried to present your testimony faithfully and authentically – where possible, in your own words.

I acknowledge the many regional members of Parliament who have engaged with this inquiry constructively and in good faith to ensure their communities' concerns are heard. I also thank the staff of the Legislative Assembly and Department of Parliamentary Services for their support.

Although we still have a lot of work to do as part of this inquiry, we're hopeful that the recommendations in this report are given serious consideration so they can translate into positive action and improved outcomes for communities across regional and rural New South Wales.

Edmond Atalla MP
Chair

Findings and recommendations

Finding 1

While property crime in regional NSW has fallen over the two decades to 2023, it remains significantly higher compared to Greater Sydney. In 2023, motor vehicle theft in regional NSW exceeded pre-pandemic levels by around 20 per cent. This trend was largely driven by increased youth offending.

Finding 2

Sensationalist media coverage of youth crime in rural and regional NSW heightens public anxiety and encourages negative perceptions of young people.

Finding 3

Youth crime is significantly impacting regional and rural communities, undermining community cohesion and adversely affecting the mental health of victims of crime and their families.

Finding 4

Victims of property-related crime are often elderly, frail, or otherwise vulnerable individuals.

Recommendation 1

That the NSW Government considers further investment in targeted mental health programs proven to support people who have been victims of crime.

Recommendation 2

That NSW Police actively promote awareness of available supports for victims of property crime. This could include providing resources with practical guidance and a directory of support services.

Recommendation 3

That, following a report of crime, NSW Police maintain meaningful and trauma-informed communication with victims regarding the progress of their investigation.

Finding 5

Use of violence is increasing in some cohorts of young people and is linked to offending behaviour.

Finding 6

Youth service providers need targeted training so they can work safely and constructively with young people who use violence.

Recommendation 4

That the NSW Government invest in upskilling youth service providers so they are able to work safely and constructively with young people who use violence.

Finding 7

The number of young women (aged 10-17) being charged with violence-related offences has increased significantly.

Recommendation 5

That the NSW Government prioritise sustained investment in targeted, place-based early intervention programs that effectively engage young people at risk of offending behaviour, including young women.

Finding 8

Effective early interventions for First Nations young people need to be co-designed with Elders and community and must focus on strengthening connections to culture and Country.

Finding 9

Connecting young people with their passions and helping them develop a sense of purpose is an effective way to prevent offending behaviour.

Recommendation 6

That the NSW Government consider increasing investment in youth hubs to provide holistic support, enhance social cohesion, and divert young people from crime.

Recommendation 7

That the NSW Government increase funding and support for community organisations in areas with high rates of youth crime to deliver nighttime services and activities for young people.

Recommendation 8

That the NSW Department of Education collaborate with schools in disadvantaged regional and rural communities to identify and implement programs that holistically support the school community, including wellbeing hubs.

Recommendation 9

That the NSW Government consider expanding alternative education options to help at-risk children and young people stay engaged in learning and receive ongoing support for future success.

Recommendation 10

That TAFE NSW explore opportunities to expand face-to-face learning in regional and remote areas to support sustained engagement.

Recommendation 11

That the NSW Government consult with communities on the feasibility of local on Country diversionary centres for young people, offering accommodation, alternative education pathways, and cultural enrichment.

Recommendation 12

That the NSW Government invest in alcohol and other drug treatment in regional and rural communities, and consider the need for residential rehabilitation and withdrawal management services for young people in these areas.

Finding 10

Although there are excellent examples of programs underway in regional and rural communities for at-risk young people, the lack of coordination between organisations can result in critical gaps in support.

Recommendation 13

That the NSW Government create incentives for community services to collaborate and foster partnerships that enhance referral processes and improve service efficiency.

Recommendation 14

That the NSW Government actively support 'mapping' of services in regional and rural communities to promote collaboration, and expand services where gaps are identified.

Finding 11

Short-term funding cycles create uncertainty and disruption for community organisations and the people they serve.

Recommendation 15

That the NSW Government expedite its consideration and approval of the draft Secure Jobs and Funding Certainty Roadmap and communicate the approach and timeframes to the sector. The Roadmap should consider the needs of youth service providers and the impact on program delivery.

Recommendation 16

That the NSW Government provide community services funding contracts that allow greater flexibility and longer terms, enabling organisations to better meet community needs.

Recommendation 17

That the NSW Government reduce the administrative burden on community service organisations by streamlining grant funding reporting requirements, while recognising the need to collect accurate data that reflects performance against defined KPIs.

Recommendation 18

That the NSW Government create incentives for community projects and programs to be co-designed with young people, where appropriate.

Recommendation 19

That the NSW Government prioritise funding to Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs) to deliver targeted early interventions to First Nations young people and families. It is important that program delivery and effectiveness is measured using appropriate metrics.

Chapter One – Crime in regional and rural NSW

Trends and patterns in regional and rural crime

Summary

There are higher rates of crime in regional NSW than in Greater Sydney. Property crime in regional NSW has fallen in the two decades to 2023, but the overall rate remains higher than in Greater Sydney.

In 2023, violent crime was 57 per cent higher in regional NSW than in Greater Sydney. Youth involvement in crimes like motor vehicle theft has also increased since the COVID-19 pandemic.

Finding 1

While property crime in regional NSW has fallen over the two decades to 2023, it remains significantly higher compared to Greater Sydney. In 2023, motor vehicle theft in regional NSW exceeded pre-pandemic levels by around 20 per cent. This trend was largely driven by increased youth offending.

- 1.1 In March 2024, the NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research (BOCSAR) published a report titled *Crime in Regional and Rural NSW in 2023: Trends and Patterns*.¹ Part of the report considers recorded crime in regional NSW to December 2023, and how these trends compare with Greater Sydney. The insights in the BOCSAR report are helpful to consider in the context of this inquiry.
- 1.2 For the purpose of its analysis, BOCSAR defines 'regional NSW' as parts of NSW outside Greater Sydney (Sydney metropolitan area and the Central Coast). This includes small and large regional towns, remote communities, and the centre and surrounds of the cities of Wollongong and Newcastle. In 2021, 35 per cent of the NSW population lived in regional NSW.²
- 1.3 The NSW Government noted that there are ongoing economic and social disparities between regional NSW and metropolitan centres. Regional areas face high youth unemployment, lower incomes, and higher poverty rates. These gaps have been worsened by recent events like the COVID-19 pandemic, bushfires, floods, and drought.³
- 1.4 Rates of violent and property crime are significantly higher in regional and rural NSW than in Greater Sydney.⁴ According to BOCSAR, this is a 'longstanding

¹ A Cook & J Fitzgerald, [Crime in Regional and Rural NSW 2023: Trends and Patterns](#), Bureau Brief No. 169, NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research (BOCSAR), Sydney, March 2024.

² A Cook & J Fitzgerald, [Crime in Regional and Rural NSW 2023: Trends and Patterns](#), BOCSAR, March 2024, p 3.

³ [Submission 195](#), NSW Government, p 3.

⁴ A Cook & J Fitzgerald, [Crime in Regional and Rural NSW 2023: Trends and Patterns](#), BOCSAR, March 2024, pp 2, 18.

feature of crime in NSW'. This trend has continued, although there has been a long-term decrease in property crime over the past two decades, and shifts in patterns of violent crime.⁵

1.5 During the COVID-19 pandemic, crime rates fell across most offence categories in regional NSW. By 2023, the rates of many major offence categories remained lower than in 2019.⁶

1.6 However, four offence categories saw significant increases in regional NSW over the period from 2019 to 2023:

- motor vehicle theft (20 per cent increase)
- non-domestic violence-related assault (14 per cent increase)
- sexual assault (47 per cent increase)
- domestic violence (DV)-related assault (24 per cent increase).⁷

1.7 Additionally, BOCSAR noted that, for some of these offence categories, increases are linked to increased offending by young people (aged 10-17) in regional NSW:

- There was a 188 per cent increase in legal actions against young people for motor vehicle theft between 2019 and 2023.
- Thirteen per cent of the increase in legal actions for DV-related assault between 2019 and 2023 were legal actions against young women.
- Thirty-one per cent of the increase in legal actions for non-DV-related assaults was due to incidents occurring on school premises.
- Legal actions against young people made up 62 per cent of the increase in legal actions for non-DV-related assault in regional NSW between 2019 and 2023.⁸

1.8 The statistical data indicates that while Aboriginal young people make up approximately 8 per cent of NSW's population aged 10-17, they make up 57 per cent of young people proceeded against by police, and 57 per cent of young people in custody.⁹

1.9 The following sections look more closely at trends in property crime, motor vehicle theft and violent crime in regional NSW.

⁵ A Cook & J Fitzgerald, [Crime in Regional and Rural NSW 2023: Trends and Patterns](#), BOCSAR, March 2024, p 1.

⁶ This is true of: break and enter dwelling, break and enter non-dwelling, steal from motor vehicle, steal from dwelling, steal from person, other theft, sexual touching, and robbery. For more information, see: A Cook & J Fitzgerald, [Crime in Regional and Rural NSW 2023: Trends and Patterns](#), BOCSAR, March 2024, p 1.

⁷ A Cook & J Fitzgerald, [Crime in Regional and Rural NSW 2023: Trends and Patterns](#), BOCSAR, March 2024, p 1.

⁸ A Cook & J Fitzgerald, [Crime in Regional and Rural NSW 2023: Trends and Patterns](#), BOCSAR, March 2024, p 2.

⁹ NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research, [Infographic: Aboriginal young people – Aboriginal youth over-representation in the justice system](#), 2024, viewed 26 May 2025.

Property crime in regional NSW

Property crime¹⁰

BOCSAR defines 'property crime' to include the offences of break and enter dwelling, break and enter non-dwelling, motor vehicle theft, steal from motor vehicle, steal from retail store, steal from dwelling, steal from person, stock theft and other theft.

- 1.10 Property crime in regional NSW has decreased over the past two decades, with the rate of property crime falling by 48 per cent between 2004 and 2023. However, this decline was smaller than in Greater Sydney. The rate of property crime in Greater Sydney dropped by 67 per cent over the same period.¹¹
- 1.11 The property crime rate in 2023 was 59 per cent higher in regional NSW than in Greater Sydney.¹² Figure 1 shows property crime rates across New South Wales in 2023 by Statistical Area.

Statistical Area Level 4¹³

Statistical Areas Level 4 (SA4s) are geographical areas defined by the Australian Bureau of Statistics. They are used to collect and publish data. They represent labour markets. NSW is divided into 14 SA4s.

BOCSAR collates and publishes statistics on the number of criminal incidents recorded in each NSW SA4.

- 1.12 In 2023, 11 of the 14 NSW SA4s recorded rates of property crime above the state average. These were all areas in regional NSW. In the Far West and Orana region, rates of property crime were nearly three times the NSW average. Only Greater Sydney, Capital Region, Southern Highlands, and Shoalhaven SA4s reported rates of property crime below the state average.¹⁴

¹⁰ A Cook & J Fitzgerald, [Crime in Regional and Rural NSW 2023: Trends and Patterns](#), BOCSAR, March 2024, p 3.

¹¹ A Cook & J Fitzgerald, [Crime in Regional and Rural NSW 2023: Trends and Patterns](#), BOCSAR, March 2024, p 4.

¹² A Cook & J Fitzgerald, [Crime in Regional and Rural NSW 2023: Trends and Patterns](#), BOCSAR, March 2024, p 1.

¹³ Australian Bureau of Statistics, Statistical Geography Standard, [Statistical Area Level 4](#), Edition 3, 20 July 2021, viewed 2 May 2025; NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research, [Definitions and explanations - Crime and policing statistics](#), viewed 29 April 2025.

¹⁴ A Cook & J Fitzgerald, [Crime in Regional and Rural NSW 2023: Trends and Patterns](#), BOCSAR, March 2024, p 4.

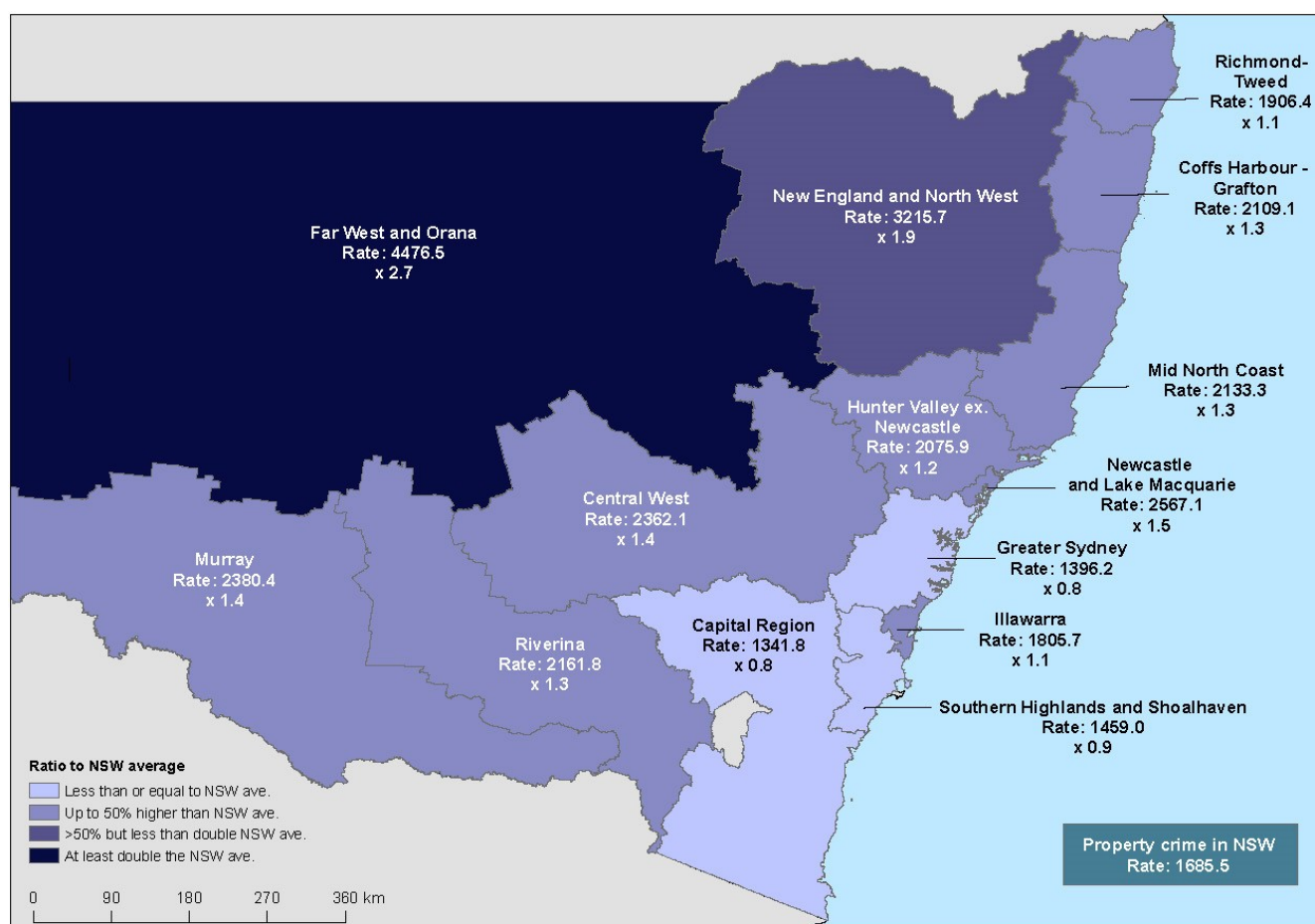
Figure 1 Rate of property crime by SA4 and ratio to state average, 2023

Figure sourced from A Cook & J Fitzgerald, [Crime in Regional and Rural NSW 2023: Trends and Patterns](#), Bureau Brief No. 169, NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research, March 2024, p 7, figure 4.

- 1.13 In 2023, young people (aged 10-17) in regional NSW made up 28 per cent of legal actions for property crime, compared to 20 per cent in Greater Sydney. Additionally, 22 per cent of these legal actions were taken against young men, compared to 15 per cent of legal actions in Greater Sydney.¹⁵
- 1.14 Figure 2 shows the percentage of legal actions taken against young and adult offenders in regional NSW and Greater Sydney by recorded age, gender, and Aboriginal status.

¹⁵ A Cook & J Fitzgerald, [Crime in Regional and Rural NSW 2023: Trends and Patterns](#), BOC SAR, March 2024, p 7.

Figure 2 Age, gender, and Aboriginal status of persons of interest proceeded against for violent crime by region, 2023

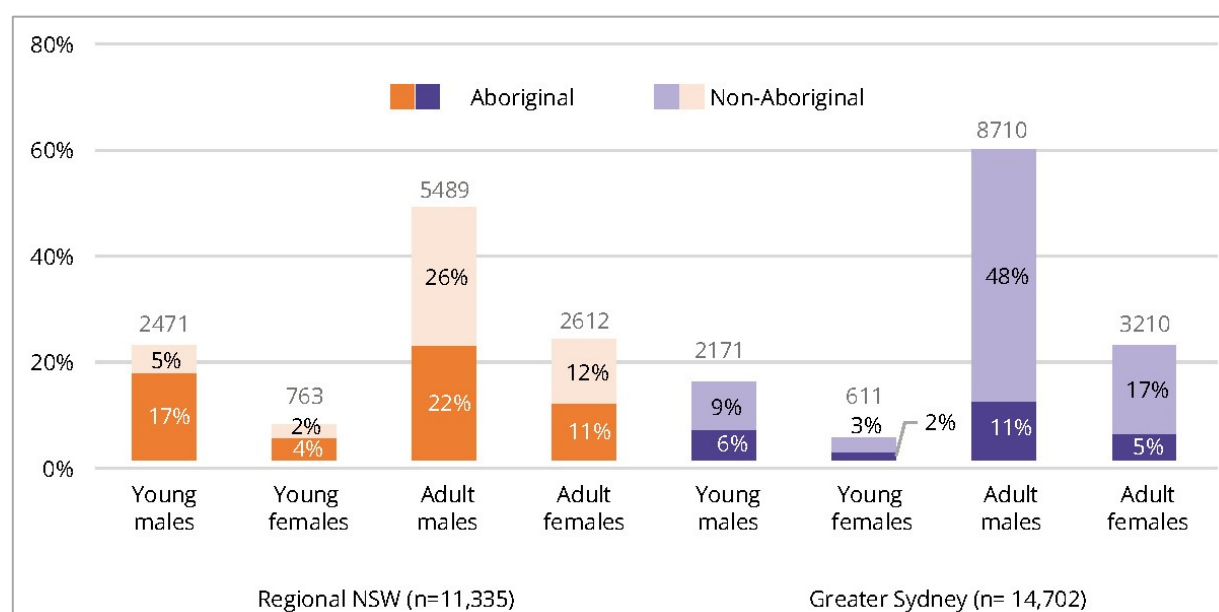


Chart taken from A Cook & J Fitzgerald, [Crime in Regional and Rural NSW 2023: Trends and Patterns](#), Bureau Brief No. 169, NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research, March 2024, p 7, figure 5.

- 1.15 Fifty-three per cent of all persons of interest proceeded against for property offences in regional NSW in 2023 were Aboriginal. In Greater Sydney, 23 per cent of people proceeded against were Aboriginal.¹⁶
- 1.16 Fifty-nine per cent of young men and 50 per cent of young women proceeded against for property crime in regional NSW in 2023 were Aboriginal, compared to approximately two-thirds of young offenders in Greater Sydney.¹⁷

Motor vehicle theft in regional NSW

- 1.17 Although rates of motor vehicle theft in regional NSW declined significantly from 2004 to 2019, they began to increase again in 2022 in both regional NSW and Greater Sydney. In Greater Sydney, the rate of motor vehicle theft increased to meet pre-pandemic levels by 2023. However, in regional NSW, the rate of motor vehicle theft exceeded pre-pandemic rates by approximately 20 per cent in 2023.¹⁸
- 1.18 Figure 3 shows the age and gender of persons of interest proceeded against by NSW Police for vehicle theft between 2019 and 2023. March 2023 saw the highest number of motor vehicle thefts in regional NSW since January 2010, with 699 incidents.¹⁹

¹⁶ A Cook & J Fitzgerald, [Crime in Regional and Rural NSW 2023: Trends and Patterns](#), BOCSAR, March 2024, p 7.

¹⁷ A Cook & J Fitzgerald, [Crime in Regional and Rural NSW 2023: Trends and Patterns](#), BOCSAR, March 2024, p 7.

¹⁸ A Cook & J Fitzgerald, [Crime in Regional and Rural NSW 2023: Trends and Patterns](#), BOCSAR, March 2024, p 10.

¹⁹ A Cook & J Fitzgerald, [Crime in Regional and Rural NSW 2023: Trends and Patterns](#), BOCSAR, March 2024, p 10.

Figure 3 Age and gender of persons of interest proceeded against for motor vehicle theft in regional NSW, 2019 to 2023

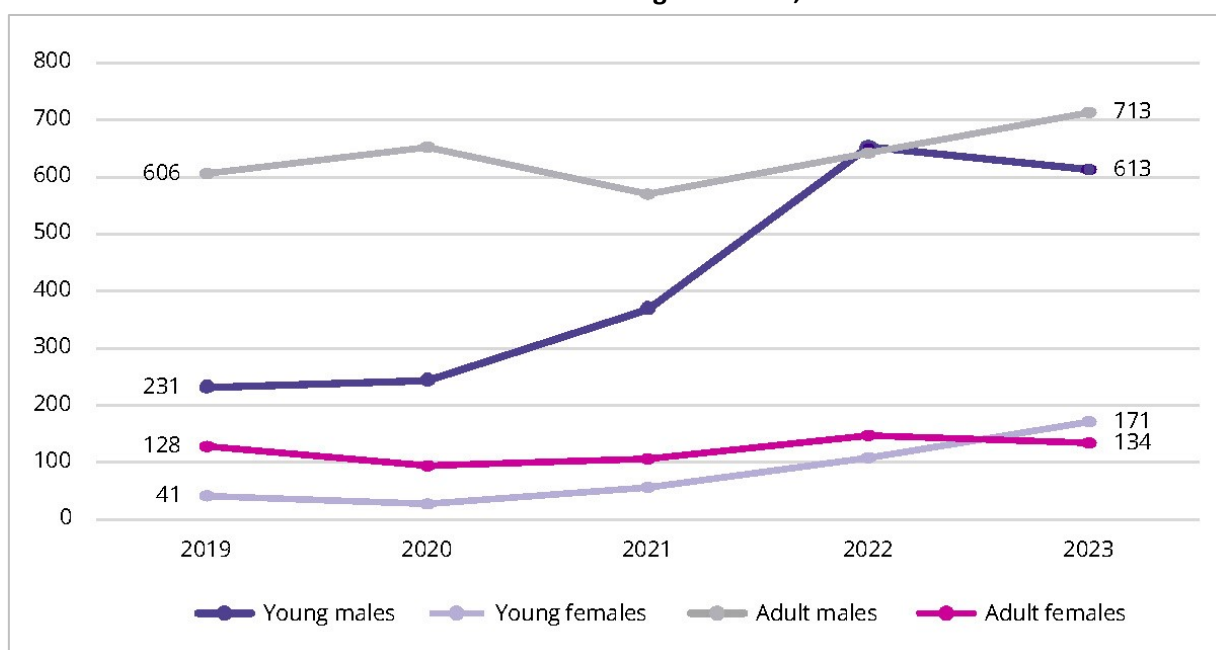


Chart taken from A Cook & J Fitzgerald, [Crime in Regional and Rural NSW 2023: Trends and Patterns](#), Bureau Brief No. 169, NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research, March 2024, p 13, figure 16.

- 1.19 BOCSAR notes that the increase in motor vehicle theft is linked to increased offending by young people. Legal actions taken against young people for motor vehicle theft increased by 188 per cent from 2019 to 2023, and represent 82 per cent of the total increase in motor vehicle theft across NSW.²⁰ Police data also shows a rise in vehicle thefts occurring alongside break-ins and an increase in the stealing of vehicle keys during break-ins.²¹
- 1.20 In regional NSW, the rate of legal actions taken against young men for motor vehicle theft increased by 162 per cent (382 additional actions). For young women, it increased by 317 per cent (130 additional actions).²²

²⁰ A Cook & J Fitzgerald, [Crime in Regional and Rural NSW 2023: Trends and Patterns](#), BOCSAR, March 2024, p 12.

²¹ A Cook & J Fitzgerald, [Crime in Regional and Rural NSW 2023: Trends and Patterns](#), BOCSAR, March 2024, p 2.

²² A Cook & J Fitzgerald, [Crime in Regional and Rural NSW 2023: Trends and Patterns](#), BOCSAR, March 2024, p 12.

Violent crime in regional NSW

Violent crime²³

BOCSAR defines 'violent crime' to include the offences of murder, attempted murder, manslaughter, assault (domestic-violence related and non-domestic violence-related), assault police, robbery without a weapon, robbery with a firearm, robbery with a weapon other than a firearm, sexual assault and sexual touching, sexual act, and other sexual offences.

- 1.21 In 2023, rates of violent crime in regional NSW were similar to rates recorded in 2004. Over the same period, Greater Sydney recorded a 20 per cent decline. The decline in violence in Greater Sydney, compared with stable rates in regional NSW, has increased the disparity between the two areas. In 2023, violent crime was 57 per cent higher in regional NSW than in Greater Sydney.²⁴
- 1.22 Figure 3 shows the age, gender, and Aboriginal status of individuals proceeded against for violent offences in 2023. The largest percentage of actions taken were against adult men in both regional NSW and Greater Sydney.²⁵

Figure 4 Age, gender, and Aboriginal status of persons of interest proceeded against for violent crime by region, 2023

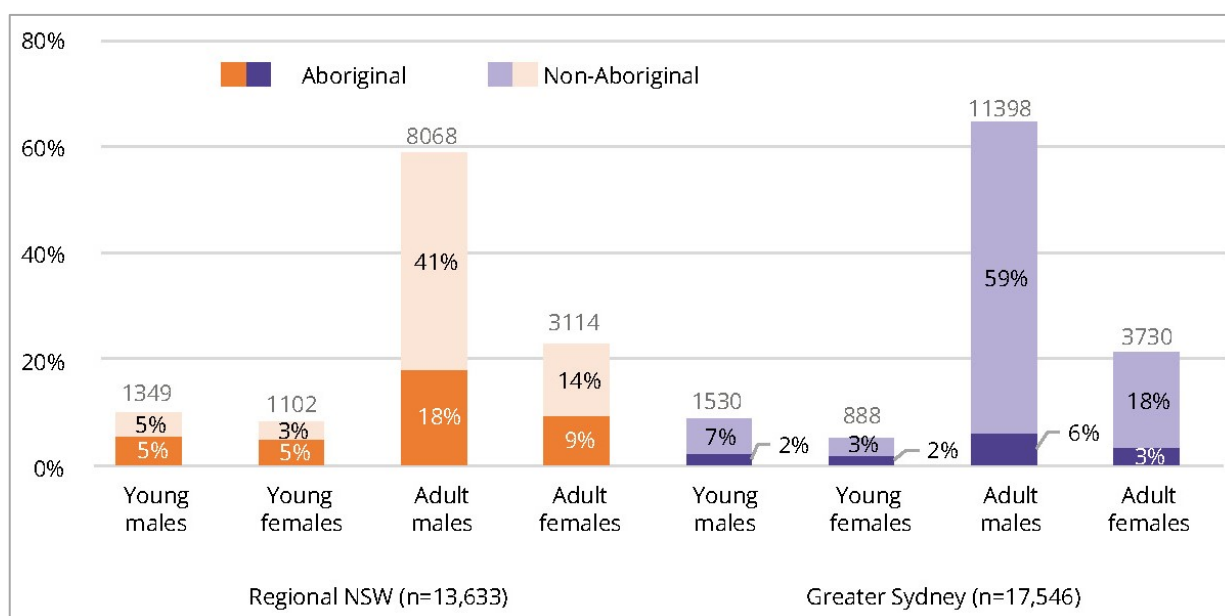


Chart taken from A Cook & J Fitzgerald, [Crime in Regional and Rural NSW 2023: Trends and Patterns](#), Bureau Brief No. 169, NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research, March 2024, p 7, figure 6.

²³ A Cook & J Fitzgerald, [Crime in Regional and Rural NSW 2023: Trends and Patterns](#), BOCSAR, March 2024, p 3.

²⁴ A Cook & J Fitzgerald, [Crime in Regional and Rural NSW 2023: Trends and Patterns](#), BOCSAR, March 2024, p 1.

²⁵ A Cook & J Fitzgerald, [Crime in Regional and Rural NSW 2023: Trends and Patterns](#), BOCSAR, March 2024, p 7.

- 1.23 Thirty-seven per cent of all persons proceeded against for violent offences in regional NSW in 2023 were Aboriginal, compared to 13 per cent of people proceeded against in Greater Sydney.²⁶
- 1.24 Half of young men and 71 per cent of young women proceeded against for violent offences in regional NSW were Aboriginal young people, compared to 22 per cent of young men and 66 per cent of young women proceeded against in Greater Sydney.²⁷

Drivers of youth crime

Summary

There are a range of factors that can elevate a young person's risk of engaging in criminal behaviour. These factors operate at a personal level, family level, and community level.

- 1.25 The underlying factors driving offending behaviour in young people are complex and numerous. They contribute to a young person's overall 'criminogenic risk', which refers to the likelihood that someone will engage in offending behaviour, including re-offending. Each young person is different, and has a unique mix of risk factors.
- 1.26 The Committee has received extensive evidence on this topic, which is briefly summarised in the following section.

Personal risk factors

- 1.27 The Committee heard that there are criminogenic risks that impact people at an individual level, as well as within family environments. These include:

Individual risk factors

- mental illness, cognitive impairment, and disability²⁸
- use of alcohol and other drugs²⁹ (discussed in more detail in chapter 4)

²⁶ A Cook & J Fitzgerald, [Crime in Regional and Rural NSW 2023: Trends and Patterns](#), BOCSAR, March 2024, p 7.

²⁷ A Cook & J Fitzgerald, [Crime in Regional and Rural NSW 2023: Trends and Patterns](#), BOCSAR, March 2024, p 7.

²⁸ [Submission 96](#), One Vision Productions, p 9; [Submission 112](#), Save the Children and 54 reasons, p 2; [Submission 116](#), Justice Reform Initiative, p 7; [Submission 118](#), The Law Society of New South Wales, p 4; [Submission 135](#), Raise the Age NSW, p 16; [Submission 136](#), Legal Aid NSW, pp 23-26; [Submission 137](#), The Salvation Army, p 17; [Submission 143](#), Redfern Legal Centre, p 5; [Submission 147](#), New South Wales Council for Civil Liberties, p 10; [Submission 151](#), Youth Off The Streets, p 5; [Submission 161](#), Greens NSW, p 9; [Submission 162](#), Marangula Ltd, p 10; [Submission 174](#), Just Reinvest NSW, p 4; [Submission 175](#), New South Wales Bar Association, p 4; [Submission 180](#), NSW Council of Social Service, p 8; [Submission 184](#), Office of the Advocate for Children and Young People, p 3; [Submission 194](#), Aboriginal Legal Service (NSW/ACT) Limited, p 3; [Submission 195](#), NSW Government, p 3; Deb Tougher, Outreach Manager, YP SPACE MNC, [Transcript of evidence](#), 29 October 2024, p 26.

²⁹ [Submission 109](#), SHINE for Kids, p 1; [Submission 116](#), Justice Reform Initiative, p 7; [Submission 136](#), Legal Aid NSW, p 37; [Submission 143](#), Redfern Legal Centre, p 6; [Submission 147](#), New South Wales Council for Civil Liberties, pp 9-10; [Submission 151](#), Youth Off The Streets, p 5; [Submission 174](#), Just Reinvest NSW, p 4; [Submission 180](#), NSW Council of Social Service, p 8; [Submission 183](#), Name.Narrate.Navigate, p 2; [Submission 184](#), Office of the Advocate

- social isolation³⁰
- disconnection from culture³¹
- prior contact with the criminal justice system³²
- socio-economic disadvantage and poverty

Family-based risk factors

- intergenerational trauma³³
- exposure to domestic and family violence and abuse³⁴
- family breakdown³⁵
- contact with the out-of-home care system³⁶
- neglect³⁷
- use of alcohol and other drugs in the home³⁸

for Children and Young People, p 9; [Submission 194](#), Aboriginal Legal Service (NSW/ACT) Limited, p 3; [Submission 195](#), NSW Government, p 3; Rozaria Suckling, Club Manager, PCYC Bourke, [Transcript of evidence](#), 1 October 2024, p 10.

³⁰ [Submission 143](#), Redfern Legal Centre, p 5; [Submission 179](#), Community Industry Group, p 7.

³¹ [Submission 109](#), SHINE for Kids, p 1; [Submission 183](#), Name.Narrate.Navigate, p 2; Phillip Sullivan, Chair, Bourke Tribal Council, [Transcript of evidence](#), 1 October 2024, p 16; Michael Kennedy, Chairman, Wilcannia Local Aboriginal Land Council, [Transcript of evidence](#), 2 October 2025, p 26.

³² [Submission 96](#), One Vision Productions, p 5; [Submission 112](#), Save the Children and 54 reasons, p 3; [Submission 118](#), The Law Society of New South Wales, p 8; [Submission 135](#), Raise the Age NSW, p 4; [Submission 147](#), New South Wales Council for Civil Liberties, p 3; [Submission 161](#), Greens NSW, p 3; [Submission 174](#), Just Reinvest NSW, p 4; [Submission 180](#), NSW Council of Social Service, p 8; [Submission 193](#), Dharriwaa Elders Group, p 5; [Submission 194](#), Aboriginal Legal Service (NSW/ACT) Limited, pp 5-6; [Submission 195](#), NSW Government, p 3; Dr Mindy Sotiri, Executive Director, Justice Reform Initiative, [Transcript of evidence](#), 24 February 2025, pp 11-12.

³³ [Submission 118](#), The Law Society of New South Wales, p 4; [Submission 151](#), Youth Off The Streets, p 5; [Submission 162](#), Maranguka Ltd, p 10; [Submission 183](#), Name.Narrate.Navigate, p 2; Pania Tahu, Chairperson, Bourke Community Working Party, [Transcript of evidence](#), 1 October 2024, p 19; Michael Kennedy, Wilcannia Local Aboriginal Land Council, [Transcript of evidence](#), 2 October 2025, p 24.

³⁴ [Submission 49](#), ANTAR, pp 15-16; [Submission 109](#), SHINE for Kids, p 1; [Submission 112](#), Save the Children and 54 reasons, p 6; [Submission 118](#), The Law Society of New South Wales, p 4; [Submission 136](#), Legal Aid NSW, p 22; [Submission 137](#), The Salvation Army, p 12; [Submission 175](#), New South Wales Bar Association, p 4; [Submission 177](#), Public Interest Advocacy Centre, p 8; [Submission 179](#), Community Industry Group, p 7; [Submission 183](#), Name.Narrate.Navigate, p 2; [Submission 184](#), Office of the Advocate for Children and Young People, p 9.

³⁵ [Submission 49](#), ANTAR, p 16; [Submission 118](#), The Law Society of New South Wales, p 4; [Submission 137](#), The Salvation Army, p 16; [Submission 183](#), Name.Narrate.Navigate, p 2.

³⁶ [Submission 49](#), ANTAR, p 15; [Submission 96](#), One Vision Productions, p 11; [Submission 112](#), Save the Children and 54 reasons, p 6; [Submission 116](#), Justice Reform Initiative, pp 8, 11; [Submission 118](#), The Law Society of New South Wales, pp 5-6; [Submission 136](#), Legal Aid NSW, pp 26-32; [Submission 180](#), NSW Council of Social Service, p 8; [Submission 184](#), Office of the Advocate for Children and Young People, p 9; [Submission 194](#), Aboriginal Legal Service (NSW/ACT) Limited, p 3.

³⁷ [Submission 96](#), One Vision Productions, p 8; [Submission 137](#), The Salvation Army, p 16; [Submission 147](#), New South Wales Council for Civil Liberties, p 9; [Submission 162](#), Maranguka Ltd, p 10; [Submission 195](#), NSW Government, p 3.

³⁸ [Submission 118](#), The Law Society of New South Wales, p 4; [Submission 137](#), The Salvation Army, p 14; Mayor Tom Kennedy, Broken Hill City Council, [Transcript of evidence](#), 2 October 2025, p 6.

- parental incarceration³⁹
- offending by family members and contact with the justice system⁴⁰
- socio-economic disadvantage and poverty

Community-level risk factors

1.28 We also heard about a range of broader factors operating at a community level that can elevate criminogenic risk. These include:

Economic

- socio-economic disadvantage and poverty⁴¹
- unstable or inadequate housing and overcrowding⁴²
- rising cost of living⁴³
- limited employment opportunities⁴⁴

Community and peer group

- limited service availability or lack of suitable programs and positive activities for young people, which leads to boredom⁴⁵
- poor access to health and welfare supports⁴⁶

³⁹ [Submission 109](#), SHINE for Kids, p 1; [Submission 116](#), Justice Reform Initiative, p 7; [Submission 136](#), Legal Aid NSW, p 21; [Submission 147](#), New South Wales Council for Civil Liberties, p 8.

⁴⁰ Superintendent Shane Cribb, Commander, Mid North Coast Police District, NSW Police Force, [Transcript of evidence](#), 29 October 2024, p 4.

⁴¹ [Submission 49](#), ANTAR, p 15; [Submission 50](#), Uniting NSW.ACT, p 1; [Submission 109](#), SHINE for Kids, p 1; [Submission 111](#), Port Macquarie Hastings Council, p 4; [Submission 116](#), Justice Reform Initiative, p 11; [Submission 118](#), The Law Society of New South Wales, p 3; [Submission 136](#), Legal Aid NSW, p 19; [Submission 137](#), The Salvation Army, p 10; [Submission 143](#), Redfern Legal Centre, p 6; [Submission 151](#), Youth Off The Streets, p 5; [Submission 174](#), Just Reinvest NSW, p 4; [Submission 179](#), Community Industry Group, p 7; [Submission 183](#), Name.Narrate.Navigate, p 2; [Submission 189](#), Youth Action NSW, p 33; [Submission 194](#), Aboriginal Legal Service (NSW/ACT) Limited, p 3; [Submission 195](#), NSW Government, p 3; Deb Tougher, YP SPACE MNC, [Transcript of evidence](#), 29 October 2024, p 26.

⁴² [Submission 49](#), ANTAR, p 15; [Submission 116](#), Justice Reform Initiative, p 7; [Submission 118](#), The Law Society of New South Wales, p 4; [Submission 136](#), Legal Aid NSW, p 20; [Submission 137](#), The Salvation Army, p 15; [Submission 139](#), Tweed Shire Council, p 2; [Submission 151](#), Youth Off The Streets, p 5; [Submission 174](#), Just Reinvest NSW, p 4; [Submission 175](#), New South Wales Bar Association, p 4; [Submission 177](#), Public Interest Advocacy Centre, p 8; [Submission 180](#), NSW Council of Social Service, p 8; [Submission 184](#), Office of the Advocate for Children and Young People, p 9; [Submission 189](#), Youth Action NSW, pp 35-36; [Submission 194](#), Aboriginal Legal Service (NSW/ACT) Limited, p 3; [Submission 195](#), NSW Government, p 3; Gregory Hill, General Manager, Central Darling Shire Council, [Transcript of evidence](#), 2 October 2025, p 6.

⁴³ [Submission 162](#), Maranguka Ltd, p 9; [Submission 184](#), Office of the Advocate for Children and Young People, p 11.

⁴⁴ [Submission 49](#), ANTAR, p 15; [Submission 175](#), New South Wales Bar Association, p 4.

⁴⁵ [Submission 50](#), Uniting NSW.ACT, p 1; [Submission 109](#), SHINE for Kids, p 1; [Submission 112](#), Save the Children and 54 reasons, p 8; [Submission 118](#), The Law Society of New South Wales, p 4; [Submission 136](#), Legal Aid NSW, p 37; [Submission 145](#), Border Regional Organisation of Councils, p 4; [Submission 189](#), Youth Action NSW, p 32; Deb Tougher, YP SPACE MNC, [Transcript of evidence](#), 29 October 2024, p 26.

⁴⁶ [Submission 118](#), The Law Society of New South Wales, p 4; [Submission 162](#), Maranguka Ltd, p 11; [Submission 183](#), Name.Narrate.Navigate, p 2; [Submission 189](#), Youth Action NSW, p 24; [Submission 195](#), NSW Government, p 3.

- inadequate access to public transport, which can be a barrier to accessing education and employment⁴⁷
- over-policing, especially of First Nations people⁴⁸
- unmet legal need, such as access to local representation and legal advice⁴⁹
- peer influence⁵⁰
- discrimination and systemic racism⁵¹

Education

- disengagement from education⁵²
- school exclusion (suspensions or expulsions).⁵³

1.29 The Committee heard that addressing criminogenic needs in a holistic, place-based way through early intervention programs is an effective way of reducing crime, compared to a justice system response.⁵⁴ As one witness said, 'early intervention is always the answer'.⁵⁵ Chapter 3 of this report considers the need for early intervention in more detail.

⁴⁷ [Submission 49](#), ANTAR, p 18.

⁴⁸ [Submission 49](#), ANTAR, pp 16-17; [Submission 118](#), The Law Society of New South Wales, pp 6-7; [Submission 189](#), Youth Action NSW, pp 38-39; [Submission 193](#), Dharriwaa Elders Group, p 4; [Submission 194](#), Aboriginal Legal Service (NSW/ACT) Limited, pp 4-5.

⁴⁹ [Submission 118](#), The Law Society of New South Wales, p 8; [Submission 194](#), Aboriginal Legal Service (NSW/ACT) Limited, p 8.

⁵⁰ [Submission 49](#), ANTAR, p 16; [Submission 111](#), Port Macquarie Hastings Council, p 4; [Submission 112](#), Save the Children and 54 reasons, p 8; [Submission 115](#), Lake Macquarie City Council, p 8; [Submission 145](#), Border Regional Organisation of Councils, p 4; [Submission 151](#), Youth Off The Streets, p 6.

⁵¹ [Submission 49](#), ANTAR, pp 22-23; [Submission 112](#), Save the Children and 54 reasons, p 2; [Submission 116](#), Justice Reform Initiative, pp 7-8; [Submission 118](#), The Law Society of New South Wales, p 4; [Submission 162](#), Maranguka Ltd, p 11; [Submission 183](#), Name.Narrate.Navigate, p 2; [Submission 194](#), Aboriginal Legal Service (NSW/ACT) Limited, pp 3-4.

⁵² [Submission 96](#), One Vision Productions, pp 7, 10; [Submission 116](#), Justice Reform Initiative, p 7; [Submission 136](#), Legal Aid NSW, p 32; [Submission 137](#), The Salvation Army, p 12; [Submission 162](#), Maranguka Ltd, pp 9-10; [Submission 174](#), Just Reinvest NSW, p 4; [Submission 175](#), New South Wales Bar Association, p 4; [Submission 184](#), Office of the Advocate for Children and Young People, p 9; [Submission 189](#), Youth Action NSW, pp 28-29; [Submission 195](#), NSW Government, p 3; Jillian Ashley, Chief Executive Officer, ShoreTrack, [Transcript of evidence](#), 29 October 2024, p 17.

⁵³ [Submission 118](#), The Law Society of New South Wales, p 5; [Submission 136](#), Legal Aid NSW, p 32.

⁵⁴ E.g. Jonathan Hall Spence, Principal Solicitor, Justice and Equity Centre, [Transcript of evidence](#), 24 February 2025, p 22.

⁵⁵ Maxime Nina, Acting Chief Executive Officer, Maranguka Ltd, [Transcript of evidence](#), 1 October 2024, p 36.

Media reporting of youth offending

Summary

Media coverage of youth crime in rural and regional NSW may create undue anxiety and distort public perception. This impacts the treatment of young people, reinforces stigma and leads to harsh and ineffective public policy responses. Accurate and balanced reporting promotes measured responses and enhances community cohesion.

Finding 2

Sensationalist media coverage of youth crime in rural and regional NSW heightens public anxiety and encourages negative perceptions of young people.

- 1.30 Media coverage of youth offending in rural and regional NSW plays a significant role in shaping public perceptions and discourse around youth crime.⁵⁶ Some inquiry participants expressed concerns that sensationalist media reporting can exaggerate or distort the true extent of the problem.
- 1.31 The Committee heard that 'youth crime isn't a new issue...It's been around as long as young people have'.⁵⁷ However, sensationalised media coverage that 'dehumanises' can intensify public fear and fuel a 'moral panic' around youth crime.⁵⁸ This reactionary response tends to overlook the underlying causes of anti-social behaviour and youth offending.⁵⁹
- 1.32 Stakeholders commented that media narratives of a youth crime 'crisis' are somewhat at odds with publicly available data.⁶⁰
- 1.33 Media coverage of youth crime also influences how young people are treated. The NSW Advocate for Children and Young People told us that sensationalist reporting increases stigma around, and 'vilifies', young people. For young people involved with the criminal justice system, this can impede their reintegration into the community.⁶¹
- 1.34 The Justice Reform Initiative noted that media coverage reinforces racist stereotypes about 'First Nations and other racialised children and young people' that harm both individuals and communities.⁶² The Committee also heard that the perception of rising youth crime fuels public support for the 'degrading

⁵⁶ [Answers to supplementary questions](#), Advocate for Children and Young People, 18 March 2025, p 2; [Answers to supplementary questions](#), Justice Reform Initiative, 14 March 2025, p 2; [Answers to supplementary questions](#), NSW Council for Civil Liberties, 13 March 2025, p 1.

⁵⁷ [Answers to supplementary questions](#), YOUth Speak, 15 November 2024, p 1.

⁵⁸ [Answers to supplementary questions](#), Justice Reform Initiative, 14 March 2025, p 2; [Answers to supplementary questions](#), Advocate for Children and Young People, 18 March 2025, p 2.

⁵⁹ [Answers to supplementary questions](#), Advocate for Children and Young People, 18 March 2025, p 2.

⁶⁰ [Answers to supplementary questions](#), NSW Council for Civil Liberties, 13 March 2025, p 1; [Answers to supplementary questions](#), Justice Reform Initiative, 14 March 2025, p 2; [Submission 184](#), Office of the Advocate for Children and Young People, p 8.

⁶¹ [Answers to supplementary questions](#), Advocate for Children and Young People, 18 March 2025, p 2.

⁶² [Answers to supplementary questions](#), Justice Reform Initiative, 14 March 2025, p 2.

treatment of youth offenders'. This also hinders positive reintegration into the community after contact with the justice system.⁶³

- 1.35 We also heard that media reporting on youth crime drives political pressure for 'tough-on-crime' measures.⁶⁴ The NSW Council for Civil Liberties and the Justice Reform Initiative told us that such responses, like harsher bail laws and sentencing, do not address the causes of offending and are ineffective at reducing crime.⁶⁵
- 1.36 Stakeholders noted that reactive policies are not only ineffective, but can also worsen outcomes for young people and communities. They stressed the importance of moving away from media-driven narratives and instead pursuing evidence-based solutions focused on prevention, reducing re-offending, and improving community safety.⁶⁶ We discuss these more in chapter 3 of this report.
- 1.37 Balanced media reporting is needed to ensure that the community is not misled about youth crime.⁶⁷ The Advocate for Children and Young People emphasised the need for responsible journalism that ensures information is factual and considers its impact on the community, and on children and young people.⁶⁸
- 1.38 The Justice Reform Initiative called for media guidelines around crime reporting.⁶⁹ They told us that public education, media guidelines, and political leadership committed to evidence-based policies would change how the public perceives crime and community safety.⁷⁰

⁶³ [Answers to supplementary questions](#), NSW Council for Civil Liberties, 13 March 2025, p 1.

⁶⁴ [Submission 147](#), NSW Council for Civil Liberties, p 5; [Answers to supplementary questions](#), Justice and Equity Centre, 17 March 2025, p 2; [Answers to supplementary questions](#), Justice Reform Initiative, 14 March 2025, p 2.

⁶⁵ [Submission 147](#), NSW Council for Civil Liberties, p 5; [Answers to supplementary questions](#), Justice Reform Initiative, 14 March 2025, p 2.

⁶⁶ [Answers to supplementary questions](#), Justice Reform Initiative, 14 March 2025, p 2; [Submission 147](#), NSW Council for Civil Liberties, p 5.

⁶⁷ [Answers to supplementary questions](#), NSW Council for Civil Liberties, 13 March 2025, p 1.

⁶⁸ [Answers to supplementary questions](#), Advocate for Children and Young People, 18 March 2025, p 2.

⁶⁹ [Answers to supplementary questions](#), Justice Reform Initiative, 14 March 2025, p 2.

⁷⁰ [Answers to supplementary questions](#), Justice Reform Initiative, 14 March 2025, p 2.

Recent NSW Government initiatives to address youth crime

Summary

In March 2024, the NSW Government announced a \$26.2 million package of reforms and initiatives to support community safety in regional NSW, which included \$13.4 million for a place-based response in Moree. It has also progressed legislative changes to strengthen bail laws and introduced a new performance crime offence under the *Crimes Act*.

NSW Police recently commenced a targeted police response called 'Operation Soteria' to address escalating violence among young offenders in regional crime 'hotspots'.

- 1.39 This section outlines some initiatives recently announced by the NSW Government in response to community concerns about crime in regional and rural communities.

Place-based response in Moree

- 1.40 In March 2024, the NSW Government announced it would invest \$13.4 million for a targeted, place-based response in Moree to support young people and improve community safety. The funding is delivering:

- additional resources for the Local (and Children's) Court jurisdictions for six months and additional funding for the Aboriginal Legal Service
- a bail accommodation and support service in Moree for young people, to be co-designed with community stakeholders
- an Action Plan within six months to deliver more coordinated, effective and accountable services to the Moree community and to improve availability of nighttime and out-of-hours services
- out-of-hours activities for young people
- ongoing NSW Police Force operations in the Moree area, including surge operational resources.⁷¹

- 1.41 In February 2025, the NSW Government committed a further \$2 million to help address community safety issues in Moree. It also announced that a group of three local Aboriginal organisations – Miyay Birray Youth Service, Pius X Aboriginal Medical Service and SHAE Academy – will deliver the bail accommodation centre, which is expected to open later in 2025.⁷²

⁷¹ NSW Government, [NSW Government takes action to make communities safer and support young people in regions](#), media release, 12 March 2024, viewed 17 April 2025.

⁷² NSW Government, [More than \\$2 million in additional funding for Moree as Youth Justice NSW marks milestones](#), media release, 7 February 2025, viewed 17 April 2025.

Broader regional crime prevention initiatives

- 1.42 The NSW Government is also investing \$12.9 million to fund a new range of state-wide regional crime prevention initiatives including:
- expansion of Youth Action Meetings in nine police districts
 - expansion of the Safe Aboriginal Youth Patrol Program to an additional five priority Closing the Gap locations
 - Justice Reinvestment grants.⁷³

Amendments to the *Bail Act 2013* and *Crimes Act 1900*

- 1.43 The NSW Government introduced the Bail and Crimes Amendment Bill 2024 in March 2024, which sought to make amendments to the both the *Bail Act 2013* (Bail Act) and *Crimes Act 1900* (Crimes Act).
- 1.44 In his second reading speech, the Attorney General, the Hon Michael Daley MP, said that the Bill would introduce two targeted measures. The first of these measures was a time-limited 'bail test' (section 22C of the Bail Act), which would restrict the release of 14 to 18-year-olds on bail unless the bail authority holds a high level of confidence that the individual will not commit a serious indictable offence while on bail.⁷⁴
- 1.45 In February 2025, the NSW Government introduced the Bail Amendment (Extension of Limitation on Bail in Certain Circumstances) Bill 2025. The Bill extended the sunset provision on section 22C so that the temporary additional bail test will be repealed automatically four years after it commenced, on 4 April 2028. Section 22C was originally intended to stop operating on 4 April 2025.⁷⁵
- 1.46 A media release issued by the Attorney General reported that 'the bail refusal rate for young people dealt with under 22C is more than double the rate for youth offences generally'.⁷⁶
- 1.47 The second measure that the Bill introduced was an amendment to the Crimes Act to introduce a new 'performance crime' offence.⁷⁷ These are also referred to as 'post and boast' offences.

⁷³ NSW Government, [NSW Government takes action to make communities safer and support young people in regions](#), media release, 12 March 2024, viewed 17 April 2025.

⁷⁴ New South Wales, Legislative Assembly, [Parliamentary Debates](#), 12 March 2024 (Michael Daley, Attorney General); [Submission 195](#), NSW Government, p 8.

⁷⁵ New South Wales, Legislative Assembly, [Parliamentary Debates](#), 19 February 2025 (Michael Daley, Attorney General).

⁷⁶ NSW Government, [Extension of strict bail laws for young people will strengthen community safety](#), media release, 25 March 2025, viewed 17 April 2025.

⁷⁷ New South Wales, Legislative Assembly, [Parliamentary Debates](#), 12 March 2024 (Michael Daley, Attorney General).

1.48 The Attorney General said:

Disseminating recordings of offending behaviour online may encourage others to engage in similar dangerous criminal behaviour. It might send the message to impressionable young people, or other people in our community, that criminal acts are socially acceptable. It may also provide people with information or ideas about how to commit criminal offences.

Posting videos of crimes that involve breaking and entering into the homes of other people can... re-traumatise the victims of these offences...⁷⁸

1.49 The Bill passed Parliament on 21 March 2024 and was assented on 3 April 2024. The Act adds two years to the maximum penalty and will undergo a statutory review two years after commencement, with a report due six months later.⁷⁹1.50 As at 19 March 2025, 53 individuals had been charged with performance crime offences. Of these, 27 were under the age of 16.⁸⁰**Support for place-based initiatives in Bourke and Kempsey**1.51 In February 2025, the Premier announced that the NSW Government would invest \$4 million to match the Australian Government's contribution to the *Stronger Places, Stronger People* program in Bourke and Kempsey. The funding will support existing local teams in these communities to design and implement projects to address identified issues.⁸¹***Stronger Places, Stronger People* program⁸²**

The *Stronger Places, Stronger People* program is overseen by the Australian Government, and delivered jointly with state and territory governments and communities. The program is being delivered in ten local communities across Australia, including Bourke and the Macleay Valley in NSW. It aims to disrupt disadvantage through community-led, place-based responses.

Operation Soteria1.52 In March 2025, the NSW Police Force announced Operation Soteria to address escalating violence among young offenders aged 11-16 in 'hotspot' areas, including Moree, Tamworth, Dubbo, Orange, Tweed Heads, Coffs Harbour, Kempsey, Taree, and Newcastle. Operation Soteria will target aggravated break, enter and steal offences, motor vehicle theft, and performance crime offences.⁸³

⁷⁸ New South Wales, Legislative Assembly, [Parliamentary Debates](#), 12 March 2024 (Michael Daley, Attorney General).

⁷⁹ [Submission 195](#), NSW Government, pp 7-8.

⁸⁰ New South Wales, Legislative Assembly, [Parliamentary Debates](#), 19 March 2025 (Yasmin Catley, Minister for Police and Counter-terrorism).

⁸¹ NSW Government, [Local knowledge vital to addressing regional crime](#), media release, 12 February 2025, viewed 22 April 2025.

⁸² Australian Government, [Stronger Places, Stronger People](#), viewed 22 April 2025.

⁸³ New South Wales, Legislative Assembly, [Parliamentary Debates](#), 19 March 2025 (Yasmin Catley, Minister for Police and Counter-terrorism); NSW Police Force, [New rapid response units launched to tackle youth crime in NSW](#), media release, 19 March 2025, viewed 17 April 2025.

- 1.53 The new unit includes up to 80 dedicated police officers. As part of the operation, police will aim to identify and refer young offenders into programs such as Youth Action Meetings and other intervention and support programs through the NSW Police Crime Prevention and Youth Command.⁸⁴
- 1.54 The initial phase of the operation will run for three months.⁸⁵
- 1.55 NSW Police have provided evidence in regards to police resourcing, particularly prisoner transfers, mental health, and replacement of officers on extended leave and its impact on policing.⁸⁶ The Committee intends to explore this further in its final report for this inquiry.

Review of doli incapax

- 1.56 On 8 May 2025 the Attorney General announced a NSW Government review into the operation of doli incapax in New South Wales.⁸⁷ The announcement followed a report of the Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research published in May 2025 considering the impact of a 2016 decision of the High Court on court outcomes for children aged 10-13 in NSW between 2016 and 2023.⁸⁸

Doli incapax⁸⁹

Doli incapax is a legal presumption that children aged 10-14 can't be held criminally responsible because they don't sufficiently understand the difference between right and wrong. This means that, in cases involving a child aged between 10 and 14, the prosecution has to prove beyond reasonable doubt that the child did the act, and that the child knew the act was wrong (not just naughty or mischievous).

Under section 5 of the *Children (Criminal Proceedings) Act 1987*, children younger than 10 can't be charged with a criminal offence.

- 1.57 The review is led by the Hon Geoffrey Bellew SC, Chair of the State Parole Authority and former Supreme Court Justice, and Mr Jeff Loy, former Deputy Commissioner of the NSW Police Force. It will consider how doli incapax operates in criminal proceedings, its impact, and options for intervention and improvement. The Government has indicated that the review will consult with stakeholders, including victims of crime, First Nations stakeholders, and

⁸⁴ NSW Police Force, [New rapid response units launched to tackle youth crime in NSW](#), media release, 19 March 2025, viewed 17 April 2025.

⁸⁵ NSW Police Force, [New rapid response units launched to tackle youth crime in NSW](#), media release, 19 March 2025, viewed 17 April 2025.

⁸⁶ Assistant Commissioner Andrew Holland APM, Western Region Commander, NSW Police Force, [Transcript of evidence](#), 2 October 2024, pp 13-14; Superintendent Shane Cribb, Commander, Mid North Coast Police District, NSW Police Force, [Transcript of evidence](#), 29 October 2024, p 7.

⁸⁷ New South Wales, Legislative Assembly, [Parliamentary Debates](#), 8 May 2025 (Michael Daley, Attorney General).

⁸⁸ J Gu, [Did a High Court decision on doli incapax shift court outcomes for 10-13 year olds?](#), Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research, Crime and Justice Bulletin no 268, May 2025.

⁸⁹ Judicial Commission of New South Wales, Local Court Bench Book – Children's Court, section [38-020], [Criminal procedure generally, Doli incapax](#), viewed 15 May 2025; Attorney General, [Review of doli incapax for young offenders under 14](#), media release, 8 May 2025, viewed 15 May 2025.

communities across regional and rural NSW. It is due to report back to the Attorney General in 'the second half of 2025'.⁹⁰

⁹⁰ Attorney General, [Review of doli incapax for young offenders under 14](#), media release, 8 May 2025, viewed 15 May 2025; New South Wales, Legislative Assembly, [Parliamentary Debates](#), 8 May 2025 (Michael Daley, Attorney General).

Chapter Two – Impacts of crime on communities and the need to support victims

Property crime is causing fear and anger in regional and rural communities

Summary

Youth crime is significantly impacting regional communities. It is causing fear, especially among vulnerable groups like the elderly. Victims report repeated home invasions, emotional trauma, and financial loss. A perceived lack of justice is fuelling community frustration, and undermining trust in the criminal justice system.

Finding 3

Youth crime is significantly impacting regional and rural communities, undermining community cohesion and adversely affecting the mental health of victims of crime and their families.

Finding 4

Victims of property-related crime are often elderly, frail, or otherwise vulnerable individuals.

- 2.1 Stakeholders told us that youth crime is a significant concern in regional and rural communities across NSW, causing fear, insecurity, and disruption.
- 2.2 We heard that crimes are leaving people feeling afraid and unsafe in their communities and within their own homes. These impacts are especially pronounced for vulnerable residents, such as the elderly, young women, and children, and undermines their sense of safety and well-being.⁹¹
- 2.3 Throughout the inquiry, the Committee heard extensive evidence about the physical, mental, social, and economic consequences of crime on residents in regional NSW. In this chapter, we present victims' stories in their own words, to make sure their experiences and perspectives are represented authentically.

Property crime is becoming increasingly violent

- 2.4 The Committee heard that many households have been repeat targets of break and enters. Vulnerable residents have faced 'terrifying experiences', including being woken by intruders, threatened with weapons, and forced to hand over their personal belongings.⁹²

⁹¹ [Submission 186](#), Local Government NSW, pp 7-8.

⁹² [Submission 192](#), Cr Debra McGillan, p 1.

- 2.5 Michael Kemp MP, Member for Oxley, said in his submission that, for many residents in regional NSW, 'home' has become a cage of fear and sleepless nights'.⁹³
- 2.6 Inverell Shire Council reported that their community has been 'badly shaken by the brazen, intimidating, at times violent and repeated nature of crime'.⁹⁴ Gunnedah Shire Council described aggravated break-ins and thefts by groups of offenders, often armed, that have caused both physical and psychological harm to victims.⁹⁵
- 2.7 A survey conducted by the Country Women's Association of NSW (CWA) that involved over 300 residents across regional NSW recorded widespread experiences of property crime, vandalism, public disorder, drug offences, trespassing, and violence.⁹⁶
- 2.8 The CWA told the Committee that these crimes impact both individual victims and the community:
- These incidents have significantly affected individuals' feelings of safety and security, contributing to a pervasive sense of vulnerability and unease within their communities. The impact of these crimes extends beyond the immediate victims, influencing the overall well-being and cohesion of the community.⁹⁷
- 2.9 Representatives from regional communities told us they are witnessing an increase in young people carrying weapons, such as machetes and blades, which are used in home invasions.⁹⁸
- 2.10 Councillor Lachlan Ford, Bourke Shire Council, expressed concern over the increasingly violent nature of these crimes and the younger age of offenders. He said that, while Bourke has experienced motor vehicle theft in the past, incidents now include targeted home invasions, motel break-ins, and threats at knifepoint.⁹⁹
- 2.11 Inquiry participants expressed frustration at the perceived lack of accountability for young offenders. They said it can be traumatic for victims of crime and the community when young offenders 'revolve in and out of the courts and there is virtually no consequence for their actions'.¹⁰⁰ This repeat offending witnessed by communities can also lead to a breakdown in trust in the judicial system.¹⁰¹

⁹³ [Submission 133](#), Michel Kemp MP, p 4.

⁹⁴ [Submission 55a](#), Inverell Shire Council, p 3.

⁹⁵ [Submission 57](#), Gunnedah Shire Council, p 9.

⁹⁶ [Submission 132](#), Country Women's Association of NSW, p 3.

⁹⁷ [Submission 132](#), Country Women's Association of NSW, p 3.

⁹⁸ [Answers to supplementary questions](#), Benevolent Society, 26 November 2024, p 1.

⁹⁹ Councillor Lachlan Ford, Bourke Shire Council, [Transcript of evidence](#), 1 October 2024, p 5.

¹⁰⁰ [Submission 97](#), Eric Reading, p 1.

¹⁰¹ [Submission 186](#), Local Government NSW, p 8.

Performance crime is a concern for regional communities

- 2.12 Performance crime is a concerning issue in regional NSW. As discussed in chapter 1, this involves young offenders recording and sharing crimes on social media for peer approval and attention (also referred to as 'posting and boasting'). Local Government NSW called these crimes 'particularly violent and damaging'.¹⁰²
- 2.13 Some stakeholders linked the rise in youth crime in regional areas to performance crime driven by social media, where young offenders film and share high-risk activities like car theft and police pursuits.¹⁰³ Data from the NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research shows a spike in motor vehicle theft since 2021. BOCSAR noted that this offending is often opportunistic and tied to trends on social media platforms like TikTok.¹⁰⁴ Dubbo Regional Council also commented on the link between the negative influence of social media and youth offending'.¹⁰⁵
- 2.14 The Country Mayors Association of NSW told us they support the introduction of a 'posting and boasting' offence. They called for tougher penalties for social media platforms, like TikTok, that permit publishing of 'post and boast' content.¹⁰⁶
- 2.15 While some stakeholders support a legislative response to performance crime,¹⁰⁷ ANTAR said they believe deterrent sentencing is ineffective. They told us that deterrent sentencing serves to placate public outrage and reassure regional communities, rather than addressing the root causes of offending behaviour.¹⁰⁸

First-hand accounts from victims of property crime

- 2.16 The Committee heard multiple first-hand accounts of elderly individuals repeatedly targeted in home invasions. Stakeholders said:

I've been harassed in my home to the point where at one stage I was diagnosed with PTSD... I had more than 20 cars stolen, and I've had 17 home invasions.
Marilyn Figgett, resident in regional NSW (Mid North Coast)¹⁰⁹

My 79 year old mother has been broken into 4 times in the last 12 months... This has been very traumatic for my mother and our family. She doesn't feel safe in her own home.
Karen Smith, resident in regional NSW¹¹⁰

¹⁰² [Submission 186](#), Local Government NSW, p 8.

¹⁰³ [Submission 145](#), Border Regional Organisation of Councils, p 4; [Submission 55a](#), Inverell Shire Council, p 3; [Submission 57](#), Gunnedah Shire Council, p 10.

¹⁰⁴ A Cook, [The increase in motor vehicle thefts in NSW up to March 2023](#), Bureau Brief No. 166, NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research (BOCSAR), Sydney, June 2023, p 10.

¹⁰⁵ [Submission 148](#), Dubbo Regional Council, p 1.

¹⁰⁶ [Submission 52](#), Country Mayors Association of NSW, p 29.

¹⁰⁷ [Submission 52](#), Country Mayors Association of NSW, p 29; [Submission 55a](#), Inverell Shire Council, p 3.

¹⁰⁸ [Submission 49](#), ANTAR, pp 10 & 26.

¹⁰⁹ Marilyn Figgett, Community member, [Transcript of evidence](#), 29 October 2024, pp 11 & 14.

¹¹⁰ [Submission 98](#), Karen Smith, p 1.

Another 78-year-old widow had her car keys stolen, phone, and money. She was belted with a baseball bat very close to her head, on her shoulder. She was black from the neck to her hips. She was a widow living by herself.

...

We were broken into three times. It's four times for another 84-year-old lady who is a friend of mine. Her car was taken; her money was taken. She has now had to build a safe room to lock herself in. It's just awful. She lives in total fear. She hears a noise and she has to go and lock herself in.... If somebody sets fire to that house and she's in there, there's no way that she'll escape.

The list goes on and on, of elderly people who have worked and lived in the valley all their lives, terrorised, terrified, and living in fear in their own homes.

Gail Cheers, resident in regional NSW (Mid North Coast)¹¹¹

- 2.17 The Committee also heard stories of other vulnerable individuals who have been impacted by youth crime:

In the early hours, young persons forced entry into the residence of a single mother in... Bourke before stealing the victim's vehicle. The vehicle was later located burnt out in Bourke.

Bourke Shire Council¹¹²

My home was broken into by a group of young offenders. I live with a medical condition known as Marfan Syndrome and this condition greatly impacts my heart, eyes, skeleton and lungs. To have my home broken into and be held at knife-point was a horrific experience....Not only was my heart put under unnecessary stress, but it was later discovered that the offenders were carrying the COVID-19 virus at the time.

Jaxon Swift, resident in regional NSW¹¹³

We awoke to find our home had been broken into while we slept and all our keys stolen, our house ransacked ... At the time when this happened, we were caring for our elderly mother with dementia and our disabled 64-year-old brother. Both of whom were deeply distressed by the whole situation.

Heather Fogarty, resident in regional NSW¹¹⁴

- 2.18 We heard powerful stories about the emotional and psychological impact of crime on victims and their families. The trauma caused by these experiences is

¹¹¹ Gail Cheers, Community member, [Transcript of evidence](#), 29 October 2024, p 11.

¹¹² [Submission 187](#), Bourke Shire Council, p 6.

¹¹³ [Submission 93](#), Jaxon Swift, p 1

¹¹⁴ [Submission 171](#), Heather Fogarty, p 1.

often enduring, undermines a person's sense of safety, and can diminish their overall quality of life.

Once a person has been robbed or, worse still, been confronted with a home invasion, they never recover. The fear perpetuates and their quality of life greatly diminishes.

Eric Reading, resident in regional NSW¹¹⁵

What concerns me the most is the emotional damage the crime spree is having on my wife, her colleagues and the elderly in our community. Single women where she works are afraid to the point of tears.

Simon Waller, resident in regional NSW¹¹⁶

Every day and every evening I reflect back on that vision of someone with a machete threatening me ... When you have to barricade your home every evening to feel safe, and you go around at dusk and lock everything up ... you're immediately reminded of that vision. It doesn't leave you.

John Roydhouse, resident in regional NSW (Mid North Coast)¹¹⁷

Our usually quiet home was broken into, and unfortunately, both money and valuables were stolen. We came home after a Christmas party, and our house was turned upside down. I can't begin to describe the sheer feelings of violation, panic, disgust, anxiety, and anger we experienced.

Hannah Jackson, resident in regional NSW (Riverina)¹¹⁸

2.19 We also heard that the financial and economic burden of crime on victims and communities in regional areas is substantial.

That whole trauma of that home invasion was incredibly stressful. Apart from the theft of my things, our things, the cost for insurance—you've got property, you've got two cars and then you've got contents. The cost of that was about \$2,500 to me, to us. There was no recompense for that.

Pam Tucker, resident in regional NSW (Far West)¹¹⁹

¹¹⁵ [Submission 97](#), Eric Reading, p 1.

¹¹⁶ [Submission 8](#), Simon Waller, p 1.

¹¹⁷ John Roydhouse, Community member, [Transcript of evidence](#), 29 October 2024, p 10.

¹¹⁸ [Submission 1](#), Hannah Jackson, p 1.

¹¹⁹ Pam Tucker, Treasurer of Broken Hill Branch, Country Women's Association, [Transcript of evidence](#), 2 October 2024, p 40.

At 4.00 am... we were woken by an intruder standing in our bedroom door. He fled when I got out of bed. That is when I noticed our car had been stolen and my house keys were in the front door. My car was trashed. It cost us \$40,000.

Simon Waller, resident in regional NSW¹²⁰

We have lived in Gunnedah for 11 years but have never seen the stolen car crime as bad as this. We often drive past a recently burnt out vehicle and think nothing of it anymore because it happens so often. It is a blight on our town, a burden on our insurance premiums and is leaving this community in real fear.

Sam Woods, resident in regional NSW (New England and North West)¹²¹

- 2.20 Crime in regional and rural NSW also affects local businesses, and has broader social and economic consequences. One stakeholder told us that, in her small town in the Richmond Valley, there has been an assault on a pharmacist causing serious facial injuries. We also heard about a supermarket altercation where a staff member sustained a concussion, as well as break ins and thefts from local businesses.¹²² Others said:

We have owned a small business in Kempsey for approximately 15 years and the current level of crime is the worst we have experienced to date...We have reduced our opening hours to protect our staff so they are not leaving work in the dark, resulting in loss of potential sales. The overall impression of our town has declined considerably resulting in fewer opportunities for new businesses to open or for visitors to stop and spend in town.

Ellerslie Flowers, business owner in regional NSW (Mid North Coast)¹²³

As a business owner I have had to press my duress alarm twice in the last month...we have an extremely high crime rate.

Hangry, business in regional NSW (New England and North West)¹²⁴

...businesses in our area are finding it increasingly difficult to obtain insurance coverage due to the high frequency of claims related to criminal activities.

Cr Debra McGillan, resident in regional NSW (Northern Rivers)¹²⁵

- 2.21 For farmers in rural communities, crime impacts personal and economic security through stock, fuel and machinery theft which cause distress and financial loss. NSW Farmers said a 'high proportion' of farmers are concerned about the

¹²⁰ [Submission 8](#), Simon Waller, p 1.

¹²¹ [Submission 117](#), Sam Woods, p 1.

¹²² [Submission 192](#), Cr Debra McGillan, p 1.

¹²³ [Submission 105](#), Ellerslie Flowers, p 1.

¹²⁴ [Submission 23](#), Hangry, p 1.

¹²⁵ [Submission 192](#), Cr Debra McGillan, p 1.

'serious level' of crime, which is affecting the well-being and cohesion of communities.¹²⁶

- 2.22 Local Government NSW told us that, as a result of crime rates, councils have to allocate more resources to community safety. This reduces funding for other essential services and infrastructure.¹²⁷ Communities dealing with higher rates of crime suffer reputational damage, which impacts tourism and the visitor economy.¹²⁸

Mental health and support services for victims of crime must be enhanced

Summary

Victims of crime require targeted mental health support. NSW Police should enhance access to support services for victims of crime and ensure clear, trauma-informed communication is maintained throughout an investigation.

Victims of crime need targeted mental health support

Recommendation 1

That the NSW Government considers further investment in targeted mental health programs proven to support people who have been victims of crime.

- 2.23 In light of the extensive evidence the Committee heard about the impacts of crime on mental health, we recommend supporting victims of crime through investment in specialised mental health programs.
- 2.24 Stakeholders stressed that trauma from experiencing crime is enduring and needs ongoing support to help victims recover. John Roydhouse, a resident of South West Rocks, told us that in his experience as a victim of a home invasion, current mental health support available to victims of crime is inadequate.¹²⁹
- 2.25 Gail Cheers, a Kempsey resident, described the mental toll of crime on victims and the absence of effective support. She commented that 'we cannot go on the same way and doing the same things and expect a different result'.¹³⁰ Pam Tucker, a member of the Country Women's Association in Broken Hill, shared her experience of lasting trauma following a break-in at her residence. Two years after the break-in, she still wakes at the same time each night. She told us that effective coping strategies are vital for managing the ongoing effects of trauma.¹³¹

¹²⁶ [Submission 170](#), NSW Farmers, p 2.

¹²⁷ [Submission 186](#), Local Government NSW, p 8.

¹²⁸ [Submission 186](#), Local Government NSW, p 8; [Submission 139](#), Tweed Shire Council, p 1.

¹²⁹ John Roydhouse, [Transcript of evidence](#), 29 October 2024, p 10.

¹³⁰ Gail Cheers, [Transcript of evidence](#), 29 October 2024, p 11.

¹³¹ [Answers to questions on notice](#), Country Women's Association, 10 October 2024, p 2; Pam Tucker, [Transcript of evidence](#), 2 October 2024, p 40.

- 2.26 Some communities have taken the initiative to establish volunteer-led community groups to provide help and support to victims of crime.¹³² Although such groups are helpful, facilitators may lack formal mental health expertise, making them limited in scope, sustainability, and therapeutic benefit.
- 2.27 We heard that there is a gap in accessible, government-supported services, leaving victims without reliable and clear avenues for recovery. There is need for targeted mental health programs that go beyond what community volunteer groups can provide.

Police engagement with victims

Recommendation 2

That NSW Police actively promote awareness of available supports for victims of property crime. This could include providing resources with practical guidance and a directory of support services.

Recommendation 3

That, following a report of crime, NSW Police maintain meaningful and trauma-informed communication with victims regarding the progress of their investigation.

- 2.28 Stakeholders told the Committee that better referral systems are needed to ensure that victims are linked to appropriate support services. Access to trained mental health professionals or victim support specialists could be beneficial in providing this help and support to victims of crime, particularly victims of violent crime.
- 2.29 As a result, we are recommending that the NSW Police work to promote greater awareness of victims' services. NSW Police should ensure that the resources provided to victims after a property crime incident contain appropriate links to support services and guidance.
- 2.30 NSW Police currently provides victims of crime with a Victim Card to keep for future reference. This card contains the contact details of the officer handling the victim's matter, and details for the Victims Access Line.¹³³
- 2.31 The Victims Access Line is managed by Victims Services. The Line can provide information, support, and referrals to a range of services for victims of crime.¹³⁴

¹³² John Roydhouse, [Transcript of evidence](#), 29 October 2024, pp 10-11.

¹³³ NSW Police Force, [Victims of Crime Initial Police Response](#), viewed 1 April 2025, p 1; NSW Police Force, [Victims of Crime Initial Police Response Fact Sheet 4](#), viewed 1 April 2025, p 1.

¹³⁴ NSW Police Force, [Victims of Crime Initial Police Response Fact Sheet 4](#), viewed 1 April 2025, p 1; NSW Police Force, [Victim Support and Referral](#), viewed 2 April 2025.

Victims Services¹³⁵ and the Victims Support Scheme¹³⁶

Victims Services is part of the Department of Communities and Justice. It administers functions under the *Victims Rights and Support Act 2013*.

This includes administering the Victims Support Scheme. This Scheme assists victims of violent crime, modern slavery, and road crime. It can provide counselling, financial assistance (including immediate needs, economic loss, and funeral expenses), and recognition payments.

- 2.32 The victims of crime we spoke to were generally positive about their interactions with police attending reported crimes. They did say, however, that they would have benefited from receiving clearer information about where they could seek help. Most of these victims would not be eligible for the Victims Support Scheme or other Victims Services functions.
- 2.33 We heard that victims of crime, particularly in regional areas, can face significant challenges in restoring services and replacing official documents, particularly if their mobile phone has also been stolen. This process is often stressful and difficult. One stakeholder told us it would have been helpful if police provided him with 'a card of where you can go to get help as a victim'.¹³⁷
- 2.34 The Committee heard that in addition to the information provided on the Victim Card, victims of crime would benefit from receiving information from NSW Police about other places they could seek help. It was suggested to us that this could be in the form of a checklist, or a guide to help a person navigate steps for:
- replacing stolen documents, including drivers licences and IDs, credit cards, Medicare and concession cards, and Opal cards or other transport cards
 - managing insurance claims
 - accessing local support services.¹³⁸
- 2.35 Based on the evidence we heard from victims of crime, we are also recommending that NSW Police maintain meaningful and trauma-informed communication with victims regarding the progress of their investigation.
- 2.36 We heard that a lack of consistency in the way officers follow up with victims can cause unnecessary stress and confusion. This can leave victims of crime without the necessary assistance during a distressing time in their life.
- 2.37 Support for victims should be trauma-informed, where officers are trained to actively listen to victims and consider their feedback. In particular, victims of

¹³⁵ Victims Services, Department of Communities and Justice, [About us](#), last updated 3 February 2025, viewed 2 April 2025.

¹³⁶ Victims Services, Department of Communities and Justice, [Victims Support Scheme](#), last updated 3 February 2025, viewed 2 April 2025.

¹³⁷ John Roydhouse, [Transcript of evidence](#), 29 October 2024, p 10-11.

¹³⁸ John Roydhouse, [Transcript of evidence](#), 29 October 2024, p 11.

crime would benefit from updates delivered in a way that acknowledges their emotional needs and respects their preferences for communication.¹³⁹

- 2.38 Stakeholders suggested that there could be a victim support role, similar to a caseworker, who is independent from NSW Police. This role could be managed by Victims Services. Mrs Tucker told us that post-crime support for victims is lacking. She said that, as a victim of crime, she had to find mental health support on her own, and advocated for dedicated victim mental health support.¹⁴⁰
- 2.39 Fran Greville, a member of the Country Women's Association in Darling River, emphasised that victims of crime need better support and guidance following a crime. She emphasised that victims unfamiliar with legal, court, police, and insurance processes would benefit from the support of a dedicated individual who can clearly explain the procedures and guide them through the necessary steps.¹⁴¹
- 2.40 Mrs Tucker also told us about her experience with NSW Police during the investigation, and said that it felt like a formality or a 'box-ticking' exercise. She told the Committee:
- They rang on a regular basis, and it really did feel a little bit like ticking the box, to tell me that it was proceeding but they didn't have any update for me. I think they did that about six times, to the point where I ended up asking them to not ring me. "Please don't ring me anymore because every time you ring me, you've got no idea of the amount of stress that it actually creates within me."¹⁴²
- 2.41 We note that NSW Police already has different teams of specialised officers who act in a liaison role in various contexts.
- 2.42 Family Liaison officers act as points of contact for the families of victims of 'serious crime, high-risk situations, or mass casualty incidents.'¹⁴³ These include terror events, homicides, missing persons, and road trauma events. This program was introduced in 2022, following a recommendation of the NSW State Coroner in 2017.¹⁴⁴
- 2.43 Aboriginal Community Liaison Officers (ACLOs) are employed in police stations across NSW. They are responsible for providing advice and support to police about issues impacting community in the local area, and promote open and strong partnerships between local police and Aboriginal communities. ACLOs are also responsible for linking community with police in line with the NSW Police

¹³⁹ [Answers to questions on notice](#), Country Women's Association, 10 October 2024, p 2.

¹⁴⁰ Pam Tucker, Country Women's Association, [Transcript of evidence](#), 2 October 2024, p 46.

¹⁴¹ Fran Greville, Treasurer of Darling River Group, Country Women's Association, [Transcript of evidence](#), 2 October 2024, p 46.

¹⁴² Pam Tucker, Country Women's Association, [Transcript of evidence](#), 2 October 2024, p 39.

¹⁴³ NSW Police Force, [Annual Report 2022-23](#), 31 October 2023, p 11.

¹⁴⁴ NSW Police Force, [Annual Report 2022-23](#), 31 October 2023, p 11; State Coroner of New South Wales, Inquest into the deaths arising from the Lindt Café siege, [Findings and recommendations](#), May 2017, pp 34-35 (recommendation 34).

Force Aboriginal Strategic Direction. They work with community and local Aboriginal organisations in their role.¹⁴⁵

- 2.44 We acknowledge that NSW Police officers provide crucial initial support to victims of crime, but they are not appropriately placed to meet victims' longer term support needs.

¹⁴⁵ NSW Police Force, [Aboriginal Community Liaison Officers](#), viewed 2 April 2025.

Chapter Three – Early intervention for young people at risk of offending

The importance of early intervention

Summary

Early intervention programs work in a cost-effective way to address the drivers of offending behaviour, which prevents crime and reduces rates of re-offending.

Young people are not inherently 'bad' or criminal. They may engage in offending behaviour for a range of reasons. Every young person needs to be able to access age and culturally appropriate support, in their community, and when they need it. It is important to prevent young people from having contact with the justice system in order to reduce criminalisation and prevent re-offending.

- 3.1 Young people are not inherently criminal. Offending behaviour is driven by broader factors and issues that impact young people, their families, and their communities.
- 3.2 All children and young people in NSW should be able and empowered to access the support they need, within their communities, when they need it.
- 3.3 The NSW Government must work with communities to develop and strengthen community-led, place-based, and culturally appropriate early intervention for young people and their families in regional and rural communities.
- 3.4 Stakeholders consistently told us that early intervention programs are effective at addressing the underlying drivers of youth crime. As a result, they reduce the risk of young people engaging in offending behaviour, and divert them from contact with the justice system.
- 3.5 We also heard that these programs are particularly important for children and young people experiencing disadvantage. This includes poverty, hunger, trauma, domestic and family violence and abuse, homelessness, and exposure to or use of alcohol and other drugs.

Early intervention addresses the drivers of youth crime

- 3.6 Early intervention approaches address a range of factors driving criminogenic behaviour in young people. They are particularly important for children and young people experiencing socioeconomic disadvantage. A stakeholder in Bourke

commented that 'early intervention is always the answer',¹⁴⁶ an opinion shared by many other people we spoke to during this inquiry.¹⁴⁷

- 3.7 Stakeholders emphasised that early intervention approaches are proven to prevent crime and reduce rates of re-offending.¹⁴⁸ This was also acknowledged in the NSW Government's submission to the inquiry.¹⁴⁹ Community service providers told us that it is important to begin working with young people before they are engaged in offending behaviour or 'in crisis'.¹⁵⁰
- 3.8 The most effective early intervention programs address a range of factors driving offending behaviour. As discussed in chapter 1, these factors include poverty and hunger, disengagement from education, abuse and neglect, domestic and family violence, homelessness, and alcohol and other drug use.¹⁵¹
- 3.9 Programs can be delivered to young people at different contact points during their lives:
- Primary prevention programs aim to address factors impacting young people before they start showing offending behaviour.
 - Early intervention programs aim to address offending behaviour at early stages or before serious offences are committed.
 - Diversionary programs focus on diverting young people from custodial settings after an offence has been committed.¹⁵²
- 3.10 In this report, we are using 'early intervention' to refer to programs that address the drivers of offending behaviour in young people in order to prevent contact with, or divert them from, the justice system. They may have features of primary prevention and early intervention type programs.

¹⁴⁶ Maxime Nina, Acting Chief Executive Officer, Maranguka Ltd, [Transcript of evidence](#), 1 October 2024, p 37.

¹⁴⁷ [Submission 50](#), Uniting NSW.ACT, p 3; [Submission 83](#), Byron Youth Service, p 2; [Submission 96](#), One Vision Productions Pty Ltd, p 7; [Submission 109](#), SHINE for Kids, p 3; [Submission 175](#), New South Wales Bar Association, pp 7-8; [Submission 177](#), Public Interest Advocacy Centre, p 4; [Submission 184](#), Office of the Advocate for Children and Young People, p 21; [Submission 189](#), Youth Action NSW, p 50; [Submission 194](#), Aboriginal Legal Service (NSW/ACT) Limited, p 14.

¹⁴⁸ [Submission 83](#), Byron Youth Service Inc., p 2; [Submission 96](#), One Vision Productions Pty Ltd, pp 4, 7; [Submission 116](#), Justice Reform Initiative, pp 11-12; [Submission 194](#), Aboriginal Legal Service (NSW/ACT) Limited, p 14; [Submission 147](#), NSW Council for Civil Liberties, p 12; Dr Mindy Sotiri, Executive Director, Justice Reform Initiative, [Transcript of evidence](#), 24 February 2025, p 14; Robyn Bust, Regional Manager (Northern NSW) Youth and Education, The Salvation Army, [Transcript of evidence](#), 24 February 2025, p 47.

¹⁴⁹ [Submission 195](#), NSW Government, p 9.

¹⁵⁰ Judy Barraclough, Chief Executive Officer, Youth Off The Streets, [Transcript of evidence](#), 24 February 2025, p 34; Jasmine Smith, Team Leader, Youth on Track, Mission Australia, [Transcript of evidence](#), 29 October 2024, p 43.

¹⁵¹ [Submission 151](#), Youth Off The Streets, pp 5-6; [Submission 116](#), Justice Reform Initiative, p 12; [Submission 162](#), Maranguka Ltd, pp 16-17; [Submission 175](#), New South Wales Bar Association, p 8; [Submission 177](#), Public Interest Advocacy Centre, pp 9-10; [Submission 179](#), Community Industry Group, pp 9, 24.

¹⁵² D Higgins and K Davis, [Law and justice: prevention and early intervention programs for Indigenous youth](#), Resource sheet 34, Australian Government Closing the Gap Clearinghouse, July 2014, pp 5-6; [Submission 172](#), Professor Ross Homel, pp 1-2.

Early intervention should link to mental health and disability services

- 3.11 Early intervention programs also work to identify issues earlier in young people's lives, and help them to access support earlier. As discussed in chapter 1, disability and mental illness are known to be risk factors for offending behaviour, and access to appropriate diagnostic and professional support reduces this risk.
- 3.12 Children and young people with disability are overrepresented in the youth justice system.¹⁵³ A high proportion of young people in contact with the youth justice system experience mental illness.¹⁵⁴ A service provider in Kempsey said they see high rates of undiagnosed disabilities and mental health issues, and 'many of them are untreated', including fetal alcohol spectrum disorder.¹⁵⁵
- 3.13 Stakeholders drew our attention to a survey conducted by Youth Justice in 2015 which found that, of the young people in custody surveyed:
- 83 per cent had at least one psychological disorder, with 63 per cent having two or more
 - 17 per cent had an intellectual disability
 - 39 per cent had a borderline intellectual disability.¹⁵⁶
- 3.14 These conditions can impact many of a young person's behavioural and functional domains, including impulse control, emotional regulation, and communication. This may place affected young people at higher risk of contact with the criminal justice system.¹⁵⁷
- 3.15 Many young people living with disability and mental illness who come into contact with the criminal justice system in regional NSW are undiagnosed and unsupported.¹⁵⁸ This is partially due to a lack of access to professional support and diagnostic services and long wait lists.¹⁵⁹ Legal Aid NSW commented that they see 'a high prevalence of children with undiagnosed disabilities being criminalised', and pointed out this is 'borne out by research' across Australian jurisdictions.¹⁶⁰
- 3.16 Linking between different services is an important part of effective early intervention. This is best delivered by a hub model of service delivery, such as a

¹⁵³ [Submission 147](#), NSW Council for Civil Liberties, p 10.

¹⁵⁴ [Submission 149](#), Shoalhaven City Council, p 6; [Submission 161](#), Greens NSW, p 5.

¹⁵⁵ Deb Tougher, Outreach Manager, YP SPACE MNC, [Transcript of evidence](#), 29 October 2024, p 26.

¹⁵⁶ Justice Health & Forensic Mental Health Network and Juvenile Justice NSW, [2015 Young People in Custody Health Survey: Full report](#), November 2017, pp 95-96; [Submission 136](#), Legal Aid NSW, p 23.

¹⁵⁷ [Submission 136](#), Legal Aid NSW, p 23; [Submission 161](#), Greens NSW, p 9.

¹⁵⁸ [Submission 184](#), Office of the Advocate for Children and Young People, p 9.

¹⁵⁹ [Submission 136](#), Legal Aid NSW, p 24; [Answers to supplementary questions](#), Bourke Shire Council, p 1; [Answers to supplementary questions](#), Benevolent Society, pp 10-11; Anika Malcolm, Community Development Worker, Benevolent Society, [Transcript of evidence](#), 29 October 2024, p 30; Neha Shah, Policy Lead, NSW Council of Social Service, [Transcript of evidence](#), 24 February 2025, p 46.

¹⁶⁰ [Submission 136](#), Legal Aid NSW, p 23.

youth hub or wellbeing hub, and we discuss this model in more detail later in this chapter.

Issues related to the youth justice system in NSW

3.17 We heard evidence that justice system processes do not generate the same prosocial outcomes as early intervention. Justice system-based responses to offending behaviour in young people:

- perpetuate intergenerational cycles of incarceration¹⁶¹
- significantly increase the risk of re-offending¹⁶²
- adversely impact young people's health and wellbeing¹⁶³
- entrench disadvantage¹⁶⁴
- increase disengagement from education, work, and other important prosocial structures.¹⁶⁵

Cost

3.18 Stakeholders said that early intervention is significantly cheaper than responding through the justice system.¹⁶⁶ A service provider told us that early intervention programs are expected to cost one-tenth of the cost of a justice response.¹⁶⁷

3.19 Early intervention programs generate additional benefits that are not captured in financial analysis. The Law Society of New South Wales noted that analysis of the economic benefits of a program does not include wellbeing and prosocial outcomes that are 'difficult to monetise'.¹⁶⁸ These outcomes can be just as important and impactful for young people participating in programs, and for their wider community.

¹⁶¹ [Submission 174](#), Just Reinvest NSW, p 4; [Submission 135](#), Raise the Age NSW, pp 14, 21; [Submission 180](#), NSW Council of Social Service, p 9; [Submission 116](#), Justice Reform Initiative, p 19; [Submission 112](#), Save the Children and 54 reasons, p 4.

¹⁶² [Submission 147](#), NSW Council For Civil Liberties, p 11; [Submission 154](#), Shellharbour City Council, p 11; [Submission 175](#), New South Wales Bar Association, p 7.

¹⁶³ [Submission 135](#), Raise the Age NSW, p 25; [Submission 189](#), Youth Action NSW, pp 25-26; [Submission 161](#), Greens NSW, p 5.

¹⁶⁴ [Submission 49](#), ANTAR, p 9; [Submission 194](#), Aboriginal Legal Service (NSW/ACT), pp 3-4.

¹⁶⁵ [Submission 109](#), SHINE for Kids, pp 1-2.

¹⁶⁶ [Submission 49](#), ANTAR, pp 13-14, [Submission 174](#), Just Reinvest NSW, p 5; Blake Cansdale, National Director, ANTAR, [Transcript of evidence](#), 24 February 2025, p 18; Penny Lamaro, Chairperson, Youth Action, [Transcript of evidence](#), 24 February 2025, p 32; [Answers to supplementary questions](#), ANTAR, 17 March 2025, p 6; [Submission 136](#), Legal Aid, p 5.

¹⁶⁷ Mark Robertson, Founder and Chief Executive Officer, One Vision Productions, [Transcript of evidence](#), 29 October 2024, p 19; One Vision Productions, [Answers to supplementary questions](#), 19 November 2024, p 14.

¹⁶⁸ [Submission 118](#), Law Society of New South Wales, p 10.

Wellbeing¹⁶⁹ and prosocial¹⁷⁰ outcomes

Wellbeing refers to a generally positive state experienced by a person. It is sometimes called 'quality of life'. Wellbeing is linked to physical health, but also includes environmental, mental, emotional, and social factors. It's also impacted by a person's life experiences and circumstances.

Prosocial refers to behaviours that benefit other people or society, like acts of kindness and helping others. Volunteering is an example of prosocial behaviour.

Prosocial outcomes are the effects of prosocial behaviour within a family and community. They include stronger relationships and sense of identity and culture (belonging), and increased resilience.

- 3.20 In September 2024 there were 401 children (236 incarcerated and 165 on remand) being held in NSW Youth Justice centres,¹⁷¹ at an approximate cost of \$2,700 per child each day. This is approximately \$1 million per child each year.¹⁷² We heard this does not include the cost of policing, courts, or the costs of the crime itself.¹⁷³
- 3.21 The Committee also heard that the cost of incarceration is 'escalating exponentially'.¹⁷⁴ Figures given by the Department of Communities and Justice (set out in Table 1 below) show that each year it costs more to hold a child in a Youth Justice facility.

¹⁶⁹ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, [Understanding welfare and wellbeing](#), viewed 6 May 2025; Australian Government Treasury, [Measuring what matters](#), viewed 6 May 2025.

¹⁷⁰ Australian Institute of Family Studies, Growing up in Australia: [Prosocial behaviours and the positive impact on mental health](#), research snapshot, May 2023, viewed 6 May 2025.

¹⁷¹ Paul O'Reilly, Deputy Secretary, System Reform, NSW Department of Communities and Justice, [Transcript of evidence](#), Legislative Council Budget Estimates, Monday 9 September 2024, pp 37-38.

¹⁷² Blake Cansdale, [Transcript of evidence](#), 24 February 2025, p 18

¹⁷³ Dr Mindy Sotiri, [Transcript of evidence](#), 24 February 2025, p 8.

¹⁷⁴ Geoff Scott, Chief Executive Officer, Just Reinvest NSW, [Transcript of evidence](#), 24 February 2025, p 10.

Table 1 Average daily cost for a young person held in a NSW Youth Justice facility

	Financial year					
	2018-19	2019-20 ¹⁷⁵	2020-21 ¹⁷⁶	2021-22 ¹⁷⁷	2022-23 ¹⁷⁸	2023-24 ¹⁷⁹
Daily cost per young person	\$1,306	\$1,598	\$1,956	\$2,749	\$2,759	\$2,800
Yearly cost per young person	\$476,690	\$583,270	\$713,940	\$1,003,385	\$1,007,035	\$1,022,000

- 3.22 A 2021 Productivity Commission report found that the cost of corrective services, policing, and the courts had each increased by about five per cent every year in Australian jurisdictions between 2012-13 and 2019-20.¹⁸⁰ In the same period, between 87 and 88 per cent of corrective services spending was incurred by prisons, with the remaining amount spent by community corrections services.¹⁸¹

Aboriginal young people are over-represented in Youth Justice statistics

- 3.23 Aboriginal young people are over-represented in Youth Justice figures. About 60 per cent of young people in Youth Justice custody are Aboriginal.¹⁸² Geoff Scott, CEO of Just Reinvest NSW, commented that:

[The number of Aboriginal young people in custody are not] figures that we can be proud of. What worries me today is that it's become normalised and people that are outraged by it, they're not out there speaking about it. We think it's normal. That's a real failure of, not just society, but our community, and our system ... those kids are on remand. They haven't even been sentenced.¹⁸³

¹⁷⁵ Figures for 2018-19 and 2019-20: Paul O'Reilly, Executive Director, Youth Justice, NSW Department of Communities and Justice, [Transcript of evidence](#), Legislative Council Budget Estimates, 30 August 2022, p 44.

¹⁷⁶ Paul O'Reilly, Executive Director, Youth Justice, NSW Department of Communities and Justice, [Transcript of evidence](#), Legislative Council Budget Estimates, 30 August 2022, p 43.

¹⁷⁷ New South Wales, Legislative Council, Questions & Answers Paper no 71, 16 August 2023 (the Hon Aileen MacDonald MLC to the Special Minister for State, representing the Minister for Youth Justice), question [965](#).

¹⁷⁸ New South Wales, Legislative Assembly, Questions & Answers Paper no 84, 30 October 2024 (Roy Butler MP to the Hon Jihad Dib MP, Minister for Youth Justice), question [3757](#).

¹⁷⁹ Paul O'Reilly, Acting Deputy Secretary, System Reform, Department of Communities and Justice, [Uncorrected transcript of evidence](#), Legislative Council Budget Estimates, 11 April 2025, p 43.

¹⁸⁰ Productivity Commission, [Australia's prison dilemma](#), research paper, 29 October 2021, p 55.

¹⁸¹ Productivity Commission, [Australia's prison dilemma](#), research paper, 29 October 2021, p 56.

¹⁸² Geoff Scott, [Transcript of evidence](#), 24 February 2025, p 10.

¹⁸³ Geoff Scott, [Transcript of evidence](#), 24 February 2025, p 10.

- 3.24 Other stakeholders, including the NSW Government,¹⁸⁴ also noted the overrepresentation of Aboriginal young people in the youth justice system.¹⁸⁵ This over-representation is not due to inherent criminality.¹⁸⁶
- 3.25 Figures from the Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research show that Aboriginal young people are more likely to be refused bail by police.¹⁸⁷ They are also less likely to receive diversionary cautions or warnings from police, which results in a higher chance that Aboriginal young people are prosecuted and remanded in custody.¹⁸⁸

Location of Youth Justice facilities

- 3.26 Of the six Youth Justice facilities in NSW, three are regionally based – Orana Youth Justice Centre, in Dubbo; Riverina Youth Justice Centre, in Wagga Wagga; and Acmena Youth Justice Centre, in Grafton. These centres only accommodate young men. Young women on remand are transferred to and held in the Reiby Youth Justice Centre, in Sydney.¹⁸⁹ The location of Youth Justice centres is shown in Figure 5.

¹⁸⁴ [Submission 195](#), NSW Government, p 3.

¹⁸⁵ [Submission 147](#), New South Wales Council for Civil Liberties, pp 3, 6; [Submission 151](#), Youth Off The Streets, p 3; [Submission 175](#), New South Wales Bar Association, p 9; [Submission 116](#), Justice Reform Initiative, p 6, 16-17.

¹⁸⁶ [Submission 147](#), New South Wales Council for Civil Liberties, p 7.

¹⁸⁷ I Klauzner & S Yeong, [What factors influence police and court bail decisions?](#) NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research, Crime and Justice Bulletin no 236, March 2021, p 21.

¹⁸⁸ [Submission 194](#), Aboriginal Legal Service (NSW/ACT), pp 6-7; [Submission 49](#), ANTAR, pp 17-18; [Submission 175](#), New South Wales Bar Association, pp 13-14; [Submission 100](#), Law Society of New South Wales, p 7.

¹⁸⁹ Rebecca Antoniou, Manager, Bourke Community Corrections Office, [Transcript of evidence](#), 1 October 2024, p 27; Youth Justice NSW, [Youth Justice NSW Centres](#), viewed 23 April 2025.

Figure 5 Location of Youth Justice centres in NSW



- 3.27 This means that young people on remand who have been refused bail are held in centres that can be several hours away from their community, family, and Country, without having been convicted of an offence. For young women in regional areas placed in Reiby Youth Justice Centre in Sydney, this is a particular concern.

Youth on Track program

- 3.28 The NSW Government currently delivers early intervention through the Youth on Track program.

Youth on Track¹⁹⁰

Youth on Track is an early intervention service delivered by community-based non-government organisations in partnership with Youth Justice.

It provides flexible and culturally appropriate supports to young people (aged 10-17) who have had at least one formal contact with police and are assessed as medium or high risk of re-offending. It aims to reduce future contact with the justice system and prevent serious offending.

¹⁹⁰ Youth Justice NSW, [How Youth on Track works](#), viewed 31 March 2025; [Submission 195](#), NSW Government, p 9.

Young people must be referred to the program and participation is voluntary. A young person cannot participate in Youth on Track if they have previously been supervised by Youth Justice NSW.

There are currently nine Youth on Track sites: Blacktown, Dubbo, Orange, Hunter, Coffs Harbour, Mid North Coast, Taree, New England, and Riverina.¹⁹¹ Each site covers several communities.

The NSW Government has focused on partnering with Aboriginal Community-Controlled Organisations (ACCOs) to deliver Youth on Track. Six of the nine current service providers are ACCOs.¹⁹²

- 3.29 During the inquiry, we heard from providers involved in delivering Youth on Track, as well as the broader community. Stakeholders were supportive of the program, and noted the positive impact it has had on participants.¹⁹³ However, they said that the program needs to be offered in more remote and regional locations,¹⁹⁴ and noted that existing sites are operating at capacity with long waitlists.¹⁹⁵
- 3.30 Jasmine Smith, a Team Leader for Youth on Track in Kempsey (Mid North Coast site, delivered by Mission Australia), told the Committee that funding limits the team's capacity to meet demand in the area. Ms Smith said that current funding means the Youth on Track team can only work with 30 young people in Kempsey each year.¹⁹⁶ Caseworkers have to prioritise the allocation of resources to referrals of young people with the highest risk.¹⁹⁷
- 3.31 A 2021 Youth Justice review of the Youth on Track program found that participants exponentially reduced their risk of re-offending as they worked through the program. All participants had a reduction in the risk of re-offending after completion. Between 2017 and 2021, participants had 'substantially' decreased contact with police in the 12 months after they were referred to the program.¹⁹⁸
- 3.32 A program evaluation completed in 2022 by BOCSAR found that 50.6 per cent of Youth on Track participants reoffended within 12 months of completing the program. This rose to 59.2 per cent at 24 months post completion. However, it found that only 18.8 per cent of Youth on Track participants had entered custody

¹⁹¹ Youth Justice NSW, [Youth on Track locations](#), viewed 26 March 2025.

¹⁹² [Submission 195](#), NSW Government, p 9.

¹⁹³ [Submission 118](#), Law Society of New South Wales, p 13; [Submission 116](#), Justice Reform Initiative, p 16; [Submission 189](#), Youth Action NSW, pp 50-51; [Submission 146](#), Social Futures, p 2; [Submission 161](#), Greens NSW, p 11; Willa Herron, YOUTH Speak participant, YOUTH Speak, [Transcript of evidence](#), 29 October 2024, p 45.

¹⁹⁴ [Submission 189](#), Youth Action, p 55.

¹⁹⁵ [Answers to supplementary questions](#), Benevolent Society, 26 November 2024, p 2; Jasmine Smith, [Transcript of evidence](#), 29 October 2024, p 43.

¹⁹⁶ Jasmine Smith, [Transcript of evidence](#), 29 October 2024, pp 43-44.

¹⁹⁷ Jasmine Smith, [Transcript of evidence](#), 29 October 2024, p 43.

¹⁹⁸ Youth Justice, Department of Communities & Justice, [Youth on Track Snapshot Report: 2021 Calendar Year](#), July 2022, pp 5-6.

within 12 months of completing the program. This rose to 26.7 per cent at 24 months post completion.¹⁹⁹

3.33 The 2022 BOCSAR evaluation also noted that the delivery of Youth on Track, including referrals to services and family interventions, had 'substantial variability' across different delivery sites.²⁰⁰ Variability in delivery across sites was associated with differing rates of program completion and completion rates for referred programs.²⁰¹

3.34 While Youth on Track is a well-established program and delivers positive outcomes for some young people, there remains a need for additional early intervention programs across NSW. In particular, we heard that programs need to be available for:

- young people with difficult, violent, or challenging behaviours who are deemed too high-risk for existing programs²⁰²
- young people with complex needs that can not be met by the scope of existing programs or services²⁰³
- young people with prior offending who are deemed ineligible for existing programs²⁰⁴
- young people who are in out-of-home care²⁰⁵
- children under the age of ten²⁰⁶
- young women²⁰⁷

¹⁹⁹ I Klauzner, S Poynton, D Weatherburn & H Thorburn, [Evaluating Youth on Track: A randomised controlled trial of an early intervention program for young people who offend](#), NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research, *Crime and Justice Bulletin* no 249, July 2022, viewed 31 March 2025.

²⁰⁰ I Klauzner et al., [Evaluating Youth on Track](#), July 2022, viewed 31 March 2025, p 24.

²⁰¹ I Klauzner et al., [Evaluating Youth on Track](#), July 2022, viewed 31 March 2025, pp 23-24.

²⁰² , Youth Action, pp 27-28; Jamieson Williams, Assistant Manager, Kempsey Youth Justice NSW, Department of Communities and Justice NSW, [Transcript of evidence](#), 29 October 2024, p 36; [Submission 148](#), Dubbo Regional Council, p 2; [Answers to supplementary questions](#), Advocate for Children and Young People, 18 March 2025, p 2; [Submission 183](#), Name.Narrate.Navigate, p 12.

²⁰³ [Submission 196](#), Greg Edwards, p 1; [Submission 193](#), Dharriwaa Elders Group, p 6; [Submission 189](#), Youth Action, p 26; [Submission 139](#), Tweed Shire Council, p 5.

²⁰⁴ [Submission 49](#), ANTAR, pp 20-21.

²⁰⁵ [Submission 118](#), Law Society of New South Wales, p 2; [Submission 160](#), Gunnedah Community Roundtable, p 1; [Submission 184](#), Office of the Advocate for Children and Young People, p 4; Geoff Scott, [Transcript of evidence](#), 24 February 2025, p 10; Charlie Chubb, Head of Northern & Western NSW, Uniting NSW/ACT, [Transcript of evidence](#), 24 February 2025, p 49.

²⁰⁶ Superintendent Shane Cribb, Commander, Mid North Coast Police District, NSW Police Force, [Transcript of evidence](#), 29 October 2024, p 5; [Submission 112](#), Save the Children and 54 reasons, p 6.

²⁰⁷ Maxime Nina, [Transcript of evidence](#), 1 October 2024, p 38.

- young people who are at risk of offending but have not yet had contact with the justice system.²⁰⁸

There is a need for more programs to work with young people who use violence

Summary

Early intervention programs are not accessible for all the young people who need them. There need to be more programs delivered to more young people, not just those considered the highest risk. There is also a need for programs targeting primary-school aged children.

Finding 5

Use of violence is increasing in some cohorts of young people and is linked to offending behaviour.

Finding 6

Youth service providers need targeted training so they can work safely and constructively with young people who use violence.

Recommendation 4

That the NSW Government invest in upskilling youth service providers so they are able to work safely and constructively with young people who use violence.

- 3.35 The evidence to this inquiry indicates that there is a real need for more early intervention programs that work with young people who use violence. Use of violence impacts young people committing offences, the victims of crime, service providers, and the broader community.
- 3.36 Some youth service providers feel ill-equipped to work with young people who use violence. Service providers (including caseworkers) have said they do not have appropriate skills and training:
- Practitioners in our region [said], "We can't get training. We can't get support. We don't feel confident to work with youth violence in a way that is trauma informed and culturally responsive."²⁰⁹
- 3.37 The Committee also heard that it is difficult for organisations to access funding in order to work with young people who use violence. There is a particular gap in funding for training and upskilling service providers.²¹⁰

²⁰⁸ [Submission 193](#), Dharriwaa Elders Group, pp 10-11; [Submission 194](#), Aboriginal Legal Service (NSW/ACT) Limited, p 15; James Clifford, Managing Solicitor, Statewide Children's Criminal Law Practice, Aboriginal Legal Service, [Transcript of evidence](#), 2 October 2024, p 31.

²⁰⁹ Associate Professor Tamara Blakemore, Project Lead, Name.Narrate.Navigate, [Transcript of evidence](#), 24 February 2025, pp 27-28.

²¹⁰ [Answers to supplementary questions](#), Name.Narrate.Navigate, 17 March 2025, p 4; Associate Professor Tamara Blakemore, [Transcript of evidence](#), 24 February 2025, p 29.

- 3.38 We recommend that the NSW Government invest in programs and in upskilling youth service providers so they are able to work safely and constructively with young people who use violence.
- 3.39 The largest number of offences committed by young people in regional NSW that were proceeded against by NSW Police involved use of violence. The most common offence was non-domestic violence-related assault, with 1,321 young people proceeded against (including diversions under the *Young Offenders Act 1997*) between January and December 2024. Of these offences, 34 per cent proceeded to court, and 66 per cent were diverted.²¹¹
- 3.40 We were concerned to hear that violence is increasingly being experienced and used by primary school aged children (aged 10-13 years).²¹² Children from regional and rural NSW are charged with violent offences more frequently, and from a younger age.²¹³ The most common principal offence committed by children aged 10-14 across Australia in 2017-2018 was acts intended to cause injury.²¹⁴ Aboriginal children are disproportionately represented in these statistics.²¹⁵

Young people who use violence need to be able to access appropriate support

- 3.41 Young people who use violence are often unable to access programs because they are assessed as posing a risk to service providers and other participants. As a result, these young people 'fall through the cracks' and do not receive the help they need.²¹⁶
- 3.42 It is important to recognise that young people who use violence are commonly victims of violence themselves, and need support.²¹⁷ Exposure to violence often overlaps with other risk factors, such as poverty and exposure to alcohol and other drug use, and out-of-home care placements.²¹⁸
- 3.43 The Western Region Commander for the NSW Police Force, Assistant Commissioner Andrew Holland, commented that many young people who commit offences 'live in a life of violence. They're used to [violence], and that might be coming through [in their behaviour]'.²¹⁹

²¹¹ NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research, [Youth Offending](#), viewed 22 April 2025.

²¹² [Answers to supplementary questions](#), Name.Narrate.Navigate, 17 March 2025, p 1; [Submission 183](#), Name.Narrate.Navigate, p 12.

²¹³ [Answers to supplementary questions](#), Name.Narrate.Navigate, 17 March 2025, p 1; [Submission 183](#), Name.Narrate.Navigate, p 12.

²¹⁴ This offence category includes assault but excludes sexual assault and other sexual offences; Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, Australia's children: [Children and crime](#), web report, last updated 25 February 2022, viewed 22 April 2025.

²¹⁵ , ANTAR, p 7; [Submission 147](#), NSW Council for Civil Liberties, p 7.

²¹⁶ Jamieson Williams, [Transcript of evidence](#), 29 October 2024, p 36.

²¹⁷ Associate Professor Tamara Blakemore, [Transcript of evidence](#), 24 February 2025, p 27.

²¹⁸ K Freeman and N Donnelly, [The involvement of young people aged 10 to 13 years in the NSW criminal justice system](#), NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research, August 2024, p 19; [Submission 147](#), NSW Council for Civil Liberties, p 9; pp 20, 22; [Submission 118](#), Law Society of New South Wales, p 2.

²¹⁹ Assistant Commissioner Andrew Holland, APM, Western Region Commander, NSW Police Force, [Transcript of evidence](#), 2 October 2024, p 12.

The number of young women being charged with violence-related offences is growing

Finding 7

The number of young women (aged 10-17) being charged with violence-related offences has increased significantly.

- 3.44 The Committee heard that the rate of young women being charged with violence-related offences is growing, with a 50 per cent increase over the past five years.²²⁰
- 3.45 There are a lack of early intervention programs targeted at young women who use violence. We heard that programs work with women and young women as they would work with adult men.²²¹
- 3.46 This means services may not effectively engage young women who are at risk of offending, or of escalating their offending behaviour. As more young women are being charged with violent offending behaviour, it is important that the NSW Government invests in early intervention programs developed to address this need.
- 3.47 Young women account for about a quarter of all young offenders aged 10-17 in NSW. However, a higher percentage of young women that have offended have committed violent offences.²²²
- 3.48 A Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research report on trends in female offending between 2014-2023 shows that violent offences (not including sexual assaults) have had a greater average annual increase for young women than for young men.²²³ Although there was overall a smaller number of young women who committed offences (compared to young men), the percentage of these young women who were proceeded against for violent offences increased on average between five and ten percentage points each year.²²⁴
- 3.49 The Committee heard that it is unclear whether the increase relates to 'an increase in charges, versus an increase in actual use of violence.'²²⁵ However, it is clear that this is a growing cohort of regional young people who have contact with the justice system, and would benefit from targeted early intervention programs.

²²⁰ Associate Professor Tamara Blakemore, [Transcript of evidence](#), 24 February 2025, p 30.

²²¹ Associate Professor Tamara Blakemore, [Transcript of evidence](#), 24 February 2025, p 30.

²²² N Donnelly, [Trends in female offending in New South Wales: 2014-2023](#), NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research, December 2024, pp 9-10.

²²³ N Donnelly, [Trends in female offending in New South Wales: 2014-2023](#), December 2024, pp 10, 12.

²²⁴ N Donnelly, [Trends in female offending in New South Wales: 2014-2023](#), December 2024, pp 11-12.

²²⁵ Associate Professor Tamara Blakemore, [Transcript of evidence](#), 24 February 2025, p 30.

Community-led, place-based early intervention addresses local needs more effectively

Summary

Early intervention programs work best when they are designed and led by local communities. This is because every community understands its unique needs and challenges. Programs that are developed and delivered in this way are more likely to engage young people.

Recommendation 5

That the NSW Government prioritise sustained investment in targeted, place-based early intervention programs that effectively engage young people at risk of offending behaviour, including young women.

- 3.50 We heard that early intervention programs work best when they are place-based and community-led. Stakeholders emphasised that a 'one size fits all' approach will not work.²²⁶

Local solutions to local problems

- 3.51 During this inquiry The Committee has heard from communities and stakeholders across regional and rural NSW. We are grateful to the people who shared their experiences, opinions, and suggestions with us. Every community has unique strengths, challenges, and needs. We also heard very clearly that communities hold the answers to the issues they face.
- 3.52 Communities need long-term support from government and service providers to deliver place-based, community-led initiatives. The Committee recommends that the NSW Government provides ongoing investment for the design and delivery of place-based early intervention programs in consultation with communities and young people.
- 3.53 The need for this type of approach was emphasised by many who gave evidence to the inquiry, including individuals,²²⁷ community groups,²²⁸ representatives from Aboriginal communities and Local Aboriginal Land Councils,²²⁹ local service

²²⁶ Nicholas Cowdery, Committee Member, NSW Council for Civil Liberties, [Transcript of evidence](#), 24 February 2025, p 24; [Answers to supplementary questions](#), Maranguka, 21 October 2024, p 4; [Submission 96](#), One Vision Productions, p 7; [Submission 172](#), Professor Ross Homel, p 5; [Submission 174](#), Just Reinvest NSW, p 5; [Submission 57](#), Gunnedah Shire Council, p 14.

²²⁷ [Submission 21](#), Sophie Berghout, pp 1-2; [Submission 123](#), Lynne Hosking, p 1; [Submission 94](#), Glen Crump, p 2; [Submission 197](#), Kylie Selig, pp 1-2;

²²⁸ Submission 107, [Safer Coonamble Group](#), p 5; [Submission 160](#), Gunnedah Community Roundtable, p 3.

²²⁹ Michael Kennedy, Chairman, Wilcannia Local Aboriginal Land Council, [Transcript of evidence](#), 2 October 2024, p 26; Pania Tahu, Chairperson, Bourke Community Working Party, [Transcript of evidence](#), 1 October 2024, pp 19-20; Maxime Nina, [Transcript of evidence](#), 1 October 2024, p 36; Clarrie Hoskins, Board Member, Dunghutti Elders Council, [Transcript of evidence](#), 29 October 2024, p 32.

providers,²³⁰ local governments,²³¹ education and training providers,²³² representatives from NSW Police and Youth Justice,²³³ and academics.²³⁴ It was also noted by the NSW Government in its submission to the inquiry.²³⁵

3.54 Stakeholders said:

Community does know the solutions to its issues, and community does have the capacity and capabilities to deliver as well.

Maxime Nina, Maranguka, Bourke²³⁶

People in the communities know what they want in their communities.

Phillip Sullivan, Chair, Bourke Tribal Council²³⁷

Resources have to go in at the local level, via local people.

Geoff Scott, Just Reinvest NSW²³⁸

The role for government is supporting those people—the families, communities, community organisations—to better support [their young people].

Jonathon Hall Spence, Justice and Equity Centre²³⁹

The solutions must begin with the community.

Deb Tougher, YP SPACE MNC, Kempsey²⁴⁰

Local solutions. Local problems.

Elaine Yallop, The Salvation Army (Eastern NSW)²⁴¹

²³⁰ [Submission 83](#), Byron Youth Service, p 2.

²³¹ [Submission 57](#), Gunnedah Shire Council, p 12; [Submission 100](#), Ballina Shire Council, pp 1-2; [Submission 111](#), Port Macquarie Hastings Council, p 5; [Submission 115](#), Lake Macquarie City Council, p 2; [Submission 139](#), Tweed Shire Council, p 5; [Submission 149](#), Shoalhaven City Council, p 4; [Submission 154](#), Shellharbour City Council, p 9.

²³² Deborah Summerhayes, Deputy Secretary for Public Schools, NSW Department of Education, [Transcript of evidence](#), 24 February 2025, p 57; Mark Morrison, Community leader and educator, [Transcript of evidence](#), 29 October 2024, p 18; Jillian Ashley, Chief Executive Officer, ShoreTrack, [Transcript of evidence](#), 29 October 2024, p 16; [Submission 176](#), BackTrack, p 3.

²³³ Assistant Commissioner Dave Waddell, [Transcript of evidence](#), 29 October 2024, p 5; [Submission 196](#), Greg Edwards, p 1.

²³⁴ [Submission 178](#), Dr Chris Krogh, Associate Professor Penny Buykx and Ms April Dimmock, p 9; [Submission 183](#), Name.Narrate.Navigate, p 2.

²³⁵ [Submission 195](#), NSW Government, pp 3-4.

²³⁶ Maxime Nina, [Transcript of evidence](#), 1 October 2024, p 33.

²³⁷ Phillip Sullivan, Chair, Bourke Tribal Council, [Transcript of evidence](#), 1 October 2024, p 14.

²³⁸ Geoff Scott, [Transcript of evidence](#), 24 February 2025, p 13.

²³⁹ Jonathon Hall Spence, Principal Solicitor, Justice and Equity Centre, [Transcript of evidence](#), 24 February 2025, p 22.

²⁴⁰ Deb Tougher, Outreach Manager, YP SPACE MNC, [Transcript of evidence](#), 29 October 2024, p 26.

²⁴¹ Elaine Yallop, Regional Manager (Eastern NSW) Youth and Education, The Salvation Army, [Transcript of evidence](#), 24 February 2025, p 49.

The community has to very much be part of the decision-making process because, if you don't get that feedback and input, [initiatives are] probably destined to fail from the starting point, to be honest.

Dominic Holles, Aboriginal Legal Service (Western NSW)²⁴²

There's a whole lot of local solutions that we have, we just need to get a seat at the table.

Youth workers in Wilcannia²⁴³

Local people want to help local young people. If there's an opportunity... the local people will step forward and provide that assistance. People are very generous with their time, and wanting to support young people locally to be successful. That does need scaffolding. It doesn't just happen.

Charlie Chubb, Uniting NSW.ACT (northern & western NSW)²⁴⁴

The people with the most intimate expertise of [a community's] needs, strengths, and opportunities are the communities themselves.

Just Reinvest NSW²⁴⁵

A whole-of-community approach provides scope for communities to see themselves as that — sharing a common unity that enables their members to operate and function in a purposeful manner.

Law Society of New South Wales²⁴⁶

Co-design with communities is a key feature of place-based responses

- 3.55 Place-based responses need to be designed and implemented in consultation with communities. One stakeholder commented that there's a 'need to respond with what people on the ground see as the solutions'.²⁴⁷
- 3.56 When services and programs are co-designed with communities, they are appropriately tailored to the needs and context of that community. Services and programs designed in this way are more responsive to issues, more sustainable, and better serve the people they are designed to help. In turn, this means

²⁴² Dominic Holles, Deputy Principal Solicitor (Western NSW), Aboriginal Legal Service, [Transcript of evidence](#), 2 October 2024, p 35.

²⁴³ Quoted in [Submission 189](#), Youth Action, p 48.

²⁴⁴ Charlie Chubb, [Transcript of evidence](#), 24 February 2025, p 49.

²⁴⁵ [Submission 174](#), Just Reinvest NSW, p 5.

²⁴⁶ [Submission 118](#), Law Society of NSW, p 19.

²⁴⁷ Geoff Scott, [Transcript of evidence](#), 24 February 2025, p 10.

programs are more likely to engage participants and generate long-term positive outcomes.²⁴⁸

- 3.57 Maranguka, a place-based justice reinvestment program in Bourke, told the Committee:

For programs to be truly effective, it would be more beneficial for communities to have ownership over their design and implementation. This would allow them to tailor initiatives to meet local needs and align with specific cultural contexts.²⁴⁹

- 3.58 More information about Maranguka and the impact it has had in Bourke is provided in the case study below.

Case study: Maranguka Justice Reinvestment Project, Bourke²⁵⁰

Maranguka is a place-based, Indigenous-led justice reinvestment project in Bourke aiming to improve social, economic, and criminal justice outcomes for the local community. It is a collaboration between the Bourke Tribal Council, Just Reinvest NSW, and the Bourke community.

Maranguka provides culturally appropriate, coordinated support for local young people and their families through community-led approaches that focus on addressing the root causes of crime.

The project began in 2013. A 2018 KPMG impact assessment of Maranguka in 2016-2017 estimated that the gross impact of the project in 2017 was worth \$3.1 million; two-thirds (about \$2.06 million) of this was associated with the justice system.

They found that the project's outcomes in Bourke from 2016 to 2017 included:

- 38 per cent reduction in charges across the top five offence categories for young people
- 23 per cent reduction in reported domestic and family violence incidents
- 31 per cent increase in retention rate for year 12 students.

- 3.59 Becoming U in the Nambucca Valley is another example of an effective, place-based response delivered through a process of community co-design. Becoming U is discussed in the following case study.

²⁴⁸ [Answers to supplementary questions](#), Maranguka Ltd, 21 October 2024, pp 4-5; [Submission 179](#), Community Industry Group, p 13.

²⁴⁹ [Answers to supplementary questions](#), Maranguka Ltd, 21 October 2024, p 4.

²⁵⁰ [Submission 162](#), Maranguka Ltd, p 6.

Case study: Becoming U, Nambucca Valley²⁵¹

Becoming U is a program of place-based initiatives designed by Uniting in collaboration with community stakeholders. It is delivered to communities in the Nambucca Valley (Bowraville, Nambucca Heads, and Macksville) and Toormina.

The program funds a 'backbone' team that works with communities, local organisations, and young people to facilitate collaboration and co-design of initiatives. The backbone team also supports youth advisory and community advisory groups, who provide feedback and advice on the direction, focus and activities of the programs being delivered.

YOUth Speak²⁵²

In 2024, Becoming U Nambucca Valley partnered with Ellie Tree, the creator of YOUth Speak.

YOUth Speak is a youth engagement model that works with young people to identify needs in their communities, design projects in response, and engage with local council and businesses to drive change. As at November 2024, there were 12 YOUth Speak projects at different stages of delivery in communities across the Bellingen Shire and Nambucca Valley.

Programs for Aboriginal young people must draw on the strength of culture and Country

Finding 8

Effective early interventions for First Nations young people need to be co-designed with Elders and community and must focus on strengthening connections to culture and Country.

- 3.60 Inquiry participants reflected on the strength and resilience of Aboriginal cultures. They commented that early intervention programs need to draw on the strengths of culture and Country. Programs that connect Aboriginal young people with culture and Country have a strong protective effect and help to prevent recidivism.²⁵³
- 3.61 Programs for First Nations young people must be designed and delivered with input from Elders and from community. This position is acknowledged by the NSW Government, as set out in its submission to this inquiry:

Effective Aboriginal family and community support and development programs are community-led, that build partnerships with Aboriginal communities and

²⁵¹ [Answers to supplementary questions](#), Uniting NSW.ACT, 17 March 2025, p 1; Becoming U, [Nambucca Valley](#), viewed 1 May 2025.

²⁵² [Answers to supplementary questions](#), YOUth Speak, 15 November 2024, pp 2-4; Becoming U, [YOUth Speak Nambucca Valley 2024](#), viewed 1 May 2025; Cr Ellie Tree, Project Coordinator, YOUth Speak, [Transcript of evidence](#), 29 October 2024, p 41.

²⁵³ Associate Professor Tamara Blakemore, [Transcript of evidence](#), 24 February 2025, p 31; Judy Barraclough, [Transcript of evidence](#), 24 February 2025, p 33.

organisations. They are centred on Aboriginal cultural values, seek to strengthen connections, and meet the needs of community.²⁵⁴

- 3.62 The Committee acknowledges the generous contributions of Aboriginal men, women, and young people to this inquiry. We are grateful for the courage and candour with which they shared their insights. Below are examples of evidence we heard from Aboriginal people, highlighting the importance of connection to culture.

[Local services understand] the unique challenges and story of the community—the unique needs. And equally, the aspirations. We need to be really careful to tap into the strength of our culture. It's really, really beautiful. Our kids are stronger in culture, which is one of the key reasons that they need to stay connected to our families and our communities, because that's where they will grow strong, and they'll develop the resilience that's deep in each one of us, to be able to work through some of those intergenerational disadvantages which are there.

Blake Cansdale, National Director, ANTAR²⁵⁵

Culture is such a huge part of who we are as Aboriginal people ... We're not just a number; we're more than that. We're 40,000-plus years of culture and knowledge.

Anthony Hayward, Transition Worker, Community Restorative Centre, Far Western NSW²⁵⁶

... as Aboriginal people, we're such a spiritual culture. Everything about the river and the land and our culture, we're connected to that. We feel connected to the river. We feel connected to the land. We feel so connected to our culture. When you take that stuff away from us, I feel like that is the main thing that is affecting the young ones and the old ones today.

Michael Kennedy, Chairman, Wilcannia Local Aboriginal Land Council²⁵⁷

Our law is now governed by roads and fence lines, with no access to our camp-world. That is because of the law. Where does that law come from? It comes from that side of the river. We have our law on this side of the river. Now that law is coming across this side of the river and having an impact on our people, which are also your people.

...

Our survival tells us that we've survived for so long—a long time, since the beginning of time, if I could say that. There were also rules and laws that were

²⁵⁴ [Submission 195](#), NSW Government, p 15.

²⁵⁵ Blake Cansdale, [Transcript of evidence](#), 24 February 2025, p 18.

²⁵⁶ Anthony Hayward, Transition Worker, Far Western New South Wales, Community Restorative Centre, [Transcript of evidence](#), 2 October 2024, p 21.

²⁵⁷ Michael Kennedy, [Transcript of evidence](#), 2 October 2024, p 26.

in place for that to happen, particularly our children. Those laws have been taken away from us. That's the main part [of the issue] right there.

Phillip Sullivan, Chair, Bourke Tribal Council²⁵⁸

Even when we go into the detention centres here in Sydney, and we see our young mob from all across New South Wales, when an Elder walks in, they represent home, they represent safety, and they are also the medicine bottle. They have all the wisdom and knowledge to apply to that particular circumstance.

Nicole Laupepa, Youth off the Streets²⁵⁹

- 3.63 Co-design and culturally appropriate delivery through Aboriginal Community-Controlled Organisations (ACCOs) is the best way to recognise self-determination, and provide support in a way that is accessible and culturally appropriate.
- 3.64 Government and service providers need to work to understand Aboriginal communities and respect their ways of doing, instead of imposing standardised models of service delivery.²⁶⁰ Support from government is best delivered through ACCOs. This is discussed further in chapter 5.

Programs need to leverage existing resources in communities

- 3.65 To effectively support young people and their families, government should leverage and fund existing local networks and services. Jonathan Hall Spence, Principal Solicitor with the Justice and Equity Centre, told us:
- The role for government is supporting those people—the families, communities, community organisations—to better support those young people.²⁶¹
- 3.66 The Committee recognises that some communities distrust agencies and government services, mainly due to intergenerational trauma and prior experience with government systems.²⁶² Established local service providers are better placed to deliver early intervention programs because they already have existing relationships within communities.²⁶³ The Justice and Equity Centre commented that young people 'need to be supported by people they know.'²⁶⁴

²⁵⁸ Phillip Sullivan, [Transcript of evidence](#), 1 October 2024, pp 13, 14.

²⁵⁹ Nicole Laupepa, Head of First Nations Services, Youth off the Streets, [Transcript of evidence](#), 24 February 2025, p 35.

²⁶⁰ Dominic Holles, [Transcript of evidence](#), 2 October 2024, p 35; Emma Whitnall, Economic Policy Analyst, Just Reinvest NSW, [Transcript of evidence](#), 24 February 2025, p 9

²⁶¹ Jonathan Hall Spence, [Transcript of evidence](#), 24 February 2025, p 22.

²⁶² [Answers to supplementary questions](#), Name.Narrate.Navigate, 17 March 2025, p 2; [Answers to supplementary questions](#), The Salvation Army, 17 March 2025, p 4; [Submission 195](#), NSW Government, p 14

²⁶³ James Clifford, [Transcript of evidence](#), 2 October 2024, p 31; [Answers to supplementary questions](#), The Salvation Army, 17 March 2025, p 4.

²⁶⁴ Jonathan Hall Spence, [Transcript of evidence](#), 24 February 2025, p 22.

- 3.67 Programs should involve mentors and authority figures from different parts of young people's lives, including parents, mentors, coaches, and Elders.²⁶⁵

'Hub and spoke' service delivery

- 3.68 We heard about the 'hub and spoke' model of service provision.²⁶⁶ It may not be feasible for services to have a permanent presence in some isolated, small, or remote communities ('spoke' communities). In these instances, it may be possible for young people to access locally based services in larger towns ('hub' communities) nearby.
- 3.69 However, the hub and spoke model does not work if there are barriers to accessing services. These include:
- limited or unavailable public transport²⁶⁷
 - lack of awareness and access to services²⁶⁸
 - cost.²⁶⁹

Positive early intervention programs build skills, connections, and resilience

Summary

Strengths-based early intervention programs engage young people by building on their existing skills while addressing their needs, leading to more positive outcomes.

Finding 9

Connecting young people with their passions and helping them develop a sense of purpose is an effective way to prevent offending behaviour.

- 3.70 Effective early intervention programs have a 'strengths-based' approach. They focus on identifying and developing existing strengths and skills that young people have. This builds young people's confidence and resilience, and creates connections across peer and community groups. If programs fail to recognise young peoples' individual strengths, needs, and skills, there is a high chance that young people will disengage.²⁷⁰

²⁶⁵ Associate Professor Tamara Blakemore, [Transcript of evidence](#), 24 February 2025, p 30.

²⁶⁶ Cr Ellie Tree, [Transcript of evidence](#), 29 October 2024, p 43.

²⁶⁷ Nicky Sloan, Chief Executive Officer, Community Industry Group, [Transcript of evidence](#), 24 February 2025, p 40; Paul Ireland, [Transcript of evidence](#), 29 October 2024, p 21; Cr Ellie Tree, [Transcript of evidence](#), 29 October 2024, p 43; Anika Malcolm, Community Development Worker, Benevolent Society, [Transcript of evidence](#), 29 October 2024, p 30; [Submission 154](#), Shellharbour City Council, p 8.

²⁶⁸ [Submission 160](#), Gunnedah Community Roundtable, p 3; Cr Ellie Tree, [Transcript of evidence](#), 29 October 2024, p 43.

²⁶⁹ [Submission 194](#), Aboriginal Legal Service (NSW/ACT), p 16; [Answers to supplementary questions](#), Youth Action, 24 March 2025, p 1; Dominic Holles, [Transcript of evidence](#), 2 October 2024, p 36; Erin Reberger, Team Leader, Far West New South Wales, Mission Australia, [Transcript of evidence](#), 2 October 2024, p 40.

²⁷⁰ [Answers to supplementary questions](#), One Vision Productions, 19 November 2024, p 12.

- 3.71 Nicholas Cowdery, a member of the NSW Council for Civil Liberties, commented that:

We know that kids don't wander off the track if they are occupied, doing something that they engage with. It might be education, it might be playing sport, it might be a hobby. Whatever it is that appeals to them and keeps them engaged. And if they stay engaged, they will avoid crime.²⁷¹

- 3.72 We heard that early intervention programs should use a variety of approaches and pursuits, including sport, creative pursuits, and trade skills. There also needs to be a range of activities that are age-appropriate for different cohorts of children and young people.²⁷²

- 3.73 One Vision Productions (OVP), based in Byron Bay, said that existing government programs 'focus on legal, custodial, or case management approaches'. Such approaches miss opportunities to engage young people by using creative hobbies and skills.²⁷³ OVP uses culture and community as the basis for positive change, connecting young people with inspiring mentors to drive engagement.

Case study: One Vision Productions, Byron Bay²⁷⁴

One Vision Productions provides music and creative arts programs and mentoring for young people at risk of offending. These programs use culture, community, and connection as the basis for change and growth. Young people at risk of offending are matched with qualified youth mentors who support them to deal with issues affecting them.

Participants are matched to mentors that share their interests and passions (such as music, film production, motor mechanics). This helps develop a respectful and trusting relationship and provides community connection.

Mentors work with young people to overcome barriers, with a strengths-based focus on the future and life aspirations of the young person.

Programs should aim to build life skills, as well as literacy and numeracy

- 3.74 Early intervention programs for young people at risk, particularly high school aged young people, should also focus on building life skills and employment skills. These foundational skills are important for participation in the broader community.
- 3.75 Preventative and early intervention type programs run in schools focusing on interpersonal relationships and life skills have 'promising outcomes'.²⁷⁵ However,

²⁷¹ Nicholas Cowdery, [Transcript of evidence](#), 24 February 2025, pp 23-24.

²⁷² Penny Lamaro, [Transcript of evidence](#), 24 February 2025, p 32; Judy Barraclough, [Transcript of evidence](#), 24 February 2025, p 34

²⁷³ [Answers to supplementary questions](#), One Vision Productions, 17 December 2024, p 2.

²⁷⁴ [Submission 96](#), One Vision Productions, pp 3-4.

²⁷⁵ [Answers to supplementary questions](#), Name.Narrate.Navigate, 17 March 2025, p 1.

we heard that many at-risk young people have disengaged from education.²⁷⁶ This means they are not in attendance to participate in these programs.

- 3.76 Several stakeholders commented that young people at risk of offending behaviour often lack basic literacy and numeracy skills. These are critical skills; they impact options for employment and engagement with other services and programs into adult life.²⁷⁷ Where appropriate, early intervention programs should incorporate development of these critical skills.
- 3.77 The Country Mayors Association recommended prioritising programs that build literacy and communication skills. They also emphasised the importance of 'pathways-based' initiatives that develop independence, confidence, and practical work skills.²⁷⁸
- 3.78 We also heard that early intervention programs are particularly important for young people exiting out of home care, especially skills-based programs. This cohort of young people have been identified as being at significant risk of offending behaviour.²⁷⁹ Positive early intervention programs targeting young people leaving out of home care have been shown to reduce known factors of offending behaviour. They also improve a range of other outcomes, including housing stability and engagement with work and study.²⁸⁰

The youth hub model of service delivery has a range of benefits for young people

Recommendation 6

That the NSW Government consider increasing investment in youth hubs to provide holistic support, enhance social cohesion, and divert young people from crime.

- 3.79 A youth hub is a model of service delivery that provides:
- a welcoming, non-clinical space where young people can access a diverse range of support services at the same location ... [they are] a relaxed space for young people to hang out while simultaneously having the option to speak with a youth worker.²⁸¹
- 3.80 Hubs involve a range of organisations that deliver services and may also run programs for individuals or groups.²⁸²
- 3.81 The Committee recommends that the NSW Government consider increasing investment in youth hubs because they provide a range of social benefits and work to divert young people from crime.

²⁷⁶ For example, Jillian Ashley, [Transcript of evidence](#), 29 October 2024, p 17

²⁷⁷ Martin Graham, Deputy Secretary Teaching Learning and Student Wellbeing, NSW Department of Education, [Transcript of evidence](#), 24 February 2025, p 60.

²⁷⁸ [Answers to supplementary questions](#), Country Mayors Association, 24 March 2025, p 1.

²⁷⁹ [Submission 147](#), NSW Council for Civil Liberties, p 8; [Submission 112](#), Save the Children and 54 reasons, p 6; [Submission 195](#), NSW Government, p 3; Charlie Chubb, [Transcript of evidence](#), 24 February 2025, p 49.

²⁸⁰ [Answers to supplementary questions](#), Uniting NSW.ACT, 17 March 2025, pp 2-3

²⁸¹ [Submission 178](#), Dr Chris Krogh, Associate Professor Penny Buykx and Ms April Dimmock, p 4.

²⁸² [Submission 178](#), Dr Chris Krogh, Associate Professor Penny Buykx and Ms April Dimmock, p 4.

- 3.82 Stakeholders told us that youth hubs are a good way to provide early intervention in communities. They also address a range of the drivers of offending behaviour we outlined in chapter 1 of this report.²⁸³ Service providers recognise the value of hub delivery models.²⁸⁴
- 3.83 We heard that youth hubs:
- improve service visibility and availability
 - are adaptable to the unique needs of communities
 - reduce service duplication
 - centralise and coordinate resources
 - provide opportunities for skills development and employment
 - function as a single point of entry for access to services.²⁸⁵
- 3.84 A research team from the School of Creative Industries, Humanities and Social Sciences at the University of Newcastle told the Committee that their research demonstrates that youth hubs 'can play an important part in responding to the needs of local young people and their community.'²⁸⁶ In particular, they noted that service delivery should not operate independently. Better outcomes are associated with connection and collaboration between service providers, which is a key feature of the colocation youth hub model.²⁸⁷
- 3.85 There are currently ten youth hubs in NSW, with four in regional areas.²⁸⁸ We note that this includes the Wollundry Dreaming First Nation Youth Hub in Wagga Wagga, which is targeted at First Nations young people in the area.²⁸⁹
- 3.86 The Committee was privileged to visit the Wollundry Dreaming Hub during this inquiry. We saw first-hand the excellent work that Elders and Hub staff are doing to support and empower the young people attending the Hub. The Hub has a strengths-based focus to develop participants' skills and capabilities. It is a positive and welcoming environment.²⁹⁰ We recognise the Hub's work to connect young people with their culture, particularly the work of Elders involved with the Hub.

²⁸³ Andrew Johnson, Interim Chief Executive Officer, Youth Action, [Transcript of evidence](#), 24 February 2025, p 32; Penny Lamaro, [Transcript of evidence](#), 24 February 2025, p 32.

²⁸⁴ [Submission 179](#), Community Industry Group, p 21.

²⁸⁵ [Submission 178](#), Dr Chris Krogh, Associate Professor Penny Buykx and Ms April Dimmock, p 3; Penny Lamaro, [Transcript of evidence](#), 24 February 2025, pp 32, 34, 39; [Submission 189](#), Youth Action, p 43; [Answers to supplementary questions](#), Youth Action, 24 March 2025, p 1.

²⁸⁶ [Submission 178](#), Dr Chris Krogh, Associate Professor Penny Buykx and Ms April Dimmock, p 3.

²⁸⁷ [Submission 178](#), Dr Chris Krogh, Associate Professor Penny Buykx and Ms April Dimmock, p 8.

²⁸⁸ [Submission 189](#), Youth Action, p 10

²⁸⁹ [Submission 195](#), NSW Government, p 12.

²⁹⁰ Visual Dreaming, [Wollundry Dreaming](#), viewed 6 May 2025.

- 3.87 It was clear to us that the Hub is a valuable resource for local Aboriginal young people, and has strong prosocial impact. We consider that this model would be beneficial for other communities across regional NSW.

The need for support and prosocial activities outside of school hours

Summary

Stakeholders emphasised a lack of funded programs and services operating 'after hours' (outside 9am–5pm). This is a major driver of offending behaviour in their communities. Young people may feel unsafe at home, and need to be able to access support or activities at night.

There are examples of evening community patrol programs operating in regional communities. These are normally run by local non-government organisations, particularly ACCOs, and may involve volunteers. Community patrol programs can provide safe transport, proactive intervention to prevent harm and disputes, and supervised activities.

Recommendation 7

That the NSW Government increase funding and support for community organisations in areas with high rates of youth crime to deliver nighttime services and activities for young people.

- 3.88 As previously stated, many young people who engage in offending behaviour are impacted by issues in their home environment, including domestic and family violence, overcrowding and housing insecurity, poverty, hunger, and exposure to alcohol and other drug use.
- 3.89 We heard that some young people who are found to be outside at night consider it safer than being at home, and do not have an alternative place to go.²⁹¹ Many regional and rural towns do not have opportunities for young people to meet and socialise outside of school hours or in school holidays.²⁹²
- 3.90 Stakeholders stressed that there are not enough funded programs and services operating 'after hours' (outside 9am–5pm) and that this is a major driver of offending behaviour in their communities.²⁹³ This is a longstanding and widely recognised issue.²⁹⁴ The Committee recommends that the NSW Government provide additional funding and support to community organisations to offer evening programs and activities for young people.

²⁹¹ [Answers to supplementary questions](#), Benevolent Society, 26 November 2024, pp 1-2; Leonie Brown, General Manager, Bourke Shire Council, [Transcript of evidence](#), 1 October 2024, pp 5-6; Cr Ellie Tree, [Transcript of evidence](#), 29 October 2024, p 45; Cr Russell Webb, Executive Board Member, Country Mayors Association, [Transcript of evidence](#), 24 February 2025, p 5.

²⁹² [Submission 189](#), Youth Action, pp 3-4, 32-33.

²⁹³ [Submission 118](#), Law Society of New South Wales, p 9; [Answers to supplementary questions](#), SHINE for Kids, 15 November 2024, p 1.

²⁹⁴ Eg. Willa Herron, [Transcript of evidence](#), 29 October 2024, p 41; Kevin Thorne, Aboriginal Family Support Worker, SHINE for Kids, [Transcript of evidence](#), 29 October 2024, p 42; Pania Tahu, [Transcript of evidence](#), 1 October 2024, p 19.

- 3.91 YP SPACE, a specialist youth homelessness service provider for young people, commented that, for local at-risk young people, 'a lack of accessible after-hours activities only deepens their sense of boredom and disconnection'.²⁹⁵
- 3.92 Young people have reported that they want to be able to access support at night, including social events, hobbies, and social services.²⁹⁶ The increased availability of services would also benefit young people who are disengaged from education by connecting them with their community.
- 3.93 ANTAR noted that funding is currently 'funnelled' into policing and Youth Justice. The organisation suggested at least part of this funding could be better used to fund First Nations-led community patrols and after dark programs for young people.²⁹⁷ Community patrols are discussed below.

Community patrols and the Safe Aboriginal Youth program

- 3.94 Community patrol programs are independent from policing. Patrols are normally run by local non-government organisations, particularly ACCOs, and may involve volunteers. They operate at night. Functions of patrols include providing safe transport, proactive intervention to prevent harm and disputes, and supervised activities.²⁹⁸
- 3.95 The primary aim of community patrols is to divert people from contact with the justice system, especially young people. They are particularly important for Aboriginal communities because they promote culturally safe first responses to social issues.²⁹⁹
- 3.96 The NSW Government, through Youth Justice NSW, funds the Safe Aboriginal Youth (SAY) program in nine regional communities across NSW. This includes four Closing the Gap priority locations, added in 2024.³⁰⁰

Safe Aboriginal Youth (SAY) program³⁰¹

Safe Aboriginal Youth (SAY) is a community-based service providing supervised activities and safe transport for Aboriginal young people aged 12 to 18 years.

It is designed to divert young people away from harmful activities and reduce the likelihood of criminal involvement, while also reducing the risk of them becoming victims of crime.

²⁹⁵ [Answers to supplementary questions](#), YP SPACE MNC, 19 November 2024, p 1.

²⁹⁶ [Submission 189](#), Youth Action, pp 32-33.

²⁹⁷ Jessica Johnston, Research and Policy Officer, ANTAR, [Transcript of evidence](#), 24 February 2025, p 19.

²⁹⁸ Australian Government Closing the Gap Clearinghouse, [The role of community patrols in improving safety in Indigenous communities](#), Resource sheet no. 20, July 2013, pp 6, 8.

²⁹⁹ [Submission 49](#), ANTAR, p 30

³⁰⁰ NSW Government, [Safe Aboriginal Youth \(SAY\) program expanded in NSW to strengthen community safety](#), media release, Minister for Aboriginal Affairs and Treaty and the Minister for Youth Justice, 1 November 2024, viewed 29 April 2025.

³⁰¹ Australian Government Closing the Gap Clearinghouse, [The role of community patrols in improving safety in Indigenous communities](#), Resource sheet no. 20, July 2013, p 7 (Table 3); NSW Government, [Safe Aboriginal Youth \(SAY\) program expanded in NSW to strengthen community safety](#), media release, Minister for Aboriginal Affairs and Treaty and the Minister for Youth Justice, 1 November 2024, viewed 29 April 2025; [Answers to supplementary questions](#), ANTAR, 17 March 2025, pp 2-3.

SAY has been operating in NSW since 2010, when it replaced the prior Aboriginal community patrol program.

SAY is run in Kempsey, Taree, Newcastle, Dubbo, Bourke, and Wilcannia. Under the expansion of the program, additional services will be added to Dubbo, and new services will be run in Moree, Orange, Coffs Harbour, and Tamworth.

- 3.97 ANTAR noted that SAY (and community patrol programs generally) are a cost effective and culturally safe way to promote early intervention and prevent offending behaviour.³⁰² ANTAR also said that funding must be ongoing (longer than two or three-year funding cycles) in order to see long-term change.³⁰³
- 3.98 The NSW Government has acknowledged the importance of place-based design in the SAY program, and is working to engage ACCOs for program delivery. This includes recommissioning delivery of existing programs to ACCOs.³⁰⁴ We also note that funding contract for the service in Dubbo is for a period of five years, in line with calls for longer term cycles of funding.³⁰⁵

Engagement in education and training addresses risk factors for offending

Summary

Disengagement from education is a key risk factor for future contact with the criminal justice system. School-based wellbeing hubs offer a platform for early intervention, helping schools to connect with and support students, as well as their families and carers.

Not all students will thrive in a traditional classroom environment, or pursue an academic pathway. Alternative education options, such as trade-based learning, can play a role in keeping at-risk students engaged. In-person, hands-on delivery methods support sustained engagement in training and education.

- 3.99 As outlined in chapter 1, disengagement from education is a major risk factor for future involvement with the criminal justice system. This section examines key drivers of educational disengagement and explores opportunities to strengthen engagement with education and training.

Drivers of disengagement

- 3.100 Connecting children and young people with their passions supports their development and overall wellbeing. The Committee heard that at-risk young people, particularly those from First Nations and marginalised communities, often struggle to see themselves or their experiences reflected in mainstream

³⁰² Jessica Johnston, [Transcript of evidence](#), 24 February 2025, p 19; [Submission 49](#), ANTAR, pp 29-30.

³⁰³ [Answers to supplementary questions](#), ANTAR, 17 March 2025, p 3.

³⁰⁴ [Answers to supplementary questions](#), Kempsey Youth Justice, 19 November 2024, p 1.

³⁰⁵ Department of Communities and Justice, [Safe Aboriginal Youth program expanding in Dubbo](#), media release, 24 March 2025, viewed 29 April 2025.

school curricula. Without creative and culturally relevant content, schools risk alienating these students.³⁰⁶

- 3.101 Some young people disengage from the education system at the transition from primary school to high school.³⁰⁷ This is a period when children are going through puberty, forming new friendship groups, and adjusting to a new school environment, all of which may increase their vulnerability to influence from antisocial peer groups.³⁰⁸
- 3.102 Parental incarceration is also a risk factor for disengagement from school. Research undertaken by SHINE for Kids with Monash University and Griffith University shows that if a child has a parent in prison, they are 50 per cent more likely to be suspended from school. One third of those children are likely to have been expelled.³⁰⁹
- 3.103 Young people with mental illness³¹⁰ or neurodevelopmental conditions, such as attention deficit hyperactivity disorder and autism spectrum disorder,³¹¹ are at increased risk of disengaging from school. This is especially the case when adequate support is lacking, or when suspension or expulsion is used as a response to challenging behaviours.
- 3.104 The Committee heard that some of the underlying issues that contribute to offending behaviours stem from, or are exacerbated by, school suspensions.³¹²
- 3.105 Dominic Holles, Deputy Principal Solicitor at the Aboriginal Legal Service, told the Committee that some regional and rural communities may have very few alternative options for children and young people who have been excluded from school. For young people who are already at risk and not engaged in school or prosocial activities, their likelihood of involvement in criminal behaviour increases significantly.³¹³
- 3.106 We heard that in-school suspensions are preferable to out-of-school suspensions. Gail Cheers, a former school principal, said that the school where she worked had a policy of implementing in-school suspensions. Mrs Cheers said:
- They were set up with work, and I could talk to them, help them with their work, and so on. They didn't get sent home to go out in the streets to run and create havoc. They were supervised within school... until they worked their way through, and were ready to go back into the playground or into the mainstream class.³¹⁴
- 3.107 Suspensions are issued when a student's presence on site poses a risk to the school community. The suspension period provides an opportunity for the school

³⁰⁶ [Answers to supplementary questions](#), One Vision Productions, 17 December 2024, p 13.

³⁰⁷ Associate Professor Tamara Blakemore, [Transcript of evidence](#), 24 February 2025, p 29.

³⁰⁸ [Submission 172](#), Professor Ross Homel, p 5.

³⁰⁹ Julie Hourigan, Chief Executive Officer, SHINE for Kids, [Transcript of evidence](#), 29 October 2024, p 42.

³¹⁰ Zoë Robinson, Advocate for Children and Young People, [Transcript of evidence](#), 24 February 2025, p 54.

³¹¹ Dominic Holles, [Transcript of evidence](#), 2 October 2024, p 31.

³¹² Andrew Johnson, Interim Chief Executive Officer, Youth Action, [Transcript of evidence](#), 24 February 2025, p 36.

³¹³ Dominic Holles, [Transcript of evidence](#), 2 October 2024, p 31.

³¹⁴ Gail Cheers, Community member, [Transcript of evidence](#), 29 October 2024, p 13.

to develop and implement appropriate supports to address the student's challenging behaviours. This help ensure a successful reintegration into the school environment.³¹⁵ Martin Graham, Deputy Secretary Teaching, Learning and Student Wellbeing at the NSW Department of Education told the Committee that schools 'will always try an in-school [suspension] option first'.³¹⁶

- 3.108 Mr Graham also noted that the Department has 22 'suspension centres'. If it is unsafe for a child to be onsite, they can be temporarily placed in a centre that helps them to reintegrate. Fifteen of the centres are in regional areas.³¹⁷

Wellbeing hubs in schools

Recommendation 8

That the NSW Department of Education collaborate with schools in disadvantaged regional and rural communities to identify and implement programs that holistically support the school community, including wellbeing hubs.

- 3.109 Schools play a pivotal role as a 'hub' within a community. It is important for schools to be able to connect with, and support, the families and carers of students, because their health and wellbeing has an impact on a young person's learning and development.
- 3.110 Wellbeing hubs in schools provide a valuable site for early intervention in this respect. The Committee recommends that the NSW Department of Education work with schools in disadvantaged regional and rural areas, with a view to establishing wellbeing hubs for the benefit of those communities.
- 3.111 These hubs should provide opportunities for parents and carers to speak with their child's teachers, seek assistance with navigating social services, and connect with other families.
- 3.112 Importantly, wellbeing hubs build trust between families and schools. Deborah Summerhayes, Deputy Secretary for Public Schools at the NSW Department of Education, highlighted the need to 'make sure that school is a place where our families feel safe to come, and there are historical reasons why that has been difficult for many families in many communities'. Ms Summerhayes said she would like to see wellbeing hubs created in all schools and offering periodic access to a mental health nurse and a paediatrician.³¹⁸
- 3.113 Similarly, Mrs Cheers emphasised the need for schools to be more involved in providing holistic support, given their early contact with young people and their families. She said that parents may also require support and called for greater

³¹⁵ NSW Department of Education, [Policy library: Suspension and expulsion procedures](#), viewed 29 April 2025.

³¹⁶ Martin Graham, [Transcript of evidence](#), 24 February 2025, p 62.

³¹⁷ Martin Graham, [Transcript of evidence](#), 24 February 2025, p 62.

³¹⁸ Deborah Summerhayes, [Transcript of evidence](#), 24 February 2025, p 61.

collaboration between schools, families, and external services, such as the Department of Communities and Justice, to address complex issues and risks.³¹⁹

3.114 Cara Varian, Chief Executive Officer at NCOSS, discussed the philanthropically funded community hub that has been established at Ashcroft Public School (known as Mirrung). The individual leading the hub operates independently and is able to act as a 'powerful navigator' between the education, health, justice, and social services systems. By establishing trust with families, staff at the hub are able to engage with parents and identify the kinds of support they need, such as assistance with visa applications or translating medical documents. The hub has fostered a collaborative approach between teachers, allied health professionals, and social services, leading to improved responses to developmental delays. Ms Varian described the model as 'very powerful, but it requires us to change the way we think about service delivery'.³²⁰

3.115 The case study below discusses the design and impact of Mirrung.

Case study: Mirrung, Ashcroft Public School³²¹

In 2021, Ashcroft Public School partnered with NCOSS to establish a wellbeing hub on campus. Named Mirrung – a Dharug word meaning 'belonging' – the hub was founded on the principle that supporting children's education requires addressing the broader structural disadvantages faced by their families.

Ashcroft is among the one per cent most disadvantaged communities in NSW, recording the state's highest overall poverty rate, and the third highest rate of children living in poverty. Local support services are scarce, forcing many children and families to travel to nearby suburbs to access the help they need.

Mirrung is described as 'a place where parents feel welcome to drop in for a cup of coffee, use the internet and printer, connect with teachers about their children's learning, seek assistance with filling out government forms, or pick up supplies of food and uniforms'. Students are able to access a variety of after-school programs through the hub.

Fostering trust between families and the school enables timely delivery of early intervention services. This helps to address issues before they escalate.

Since Mirrung's inception, Ashcroft Public School has recorded noteworthy improvements in attendance, student performance and wellbeing.

³¹⁹ Gail Cheers, [Transcript of evidence](#), 29 October 2024, p 13.

³²⁰ Cara Varian, Chief Executive Officer, NSW Council of Social Service, [Transcript of evidence](#), 24 February 2025, pp 41-42.

³²¹ NSW Council of Social Service, [Mirrung Impact Report](#), 2024, pp 14-18; NSW Council of Social Service, [NCOSS School Gateway Project](#), viewed 29 April 2024.

The need for alternative education options

Recommendation 9

That the NSW Government consider expanding alternative education options to help at-risk children and young people stay engaged in learning and receive ongoing support for future success.

- 3.116 Keeping children and young people engaged in learning – whether at school, or through alternative pathways – is of utmost importance. We recognise that not all young people will flourish in a traditional classroom environment.
- 3.117 We heard that rates of truancy and school refusal (reluctance to go to school, or non-attendance) escalated during the COVID-19 pandemic and remain high. Alternative education providers report increased demand, and note that young people who disengaged from school during the pandemic are now influencing younger siblings and peers to follow the same path.³²²
- 3.118 The Committee recommends that the NSW Government consider expanding alternative education options to help at-risk children and young people stay engaged in learning. Examples of alternative education include on Country learning, trade-based skills, or on-the-job training opportunities.
- 3.119 Jillian Ashley, Chief Executive Officer, ShoreTrack said that, in her opinion, the education system does not have the capacity to support young people who are not pursuing an academic pathway:
- They like to learn by being shown and then doing. From our experience with the certificate II, once they realise why they need to do the writing and why there needs to be evidence collected, then that's okay. They understand, "If I want to get the certificate II, and I want to go and work, then I've got to follow through this process." Before that, it's not really meaningful learning for them.³²³
- 3.120 ShoreTrack's 'Track Back' program is offered to high school students. Participants may attend between one and five days per week depending on their level of need and school requirements. Through the program, young people learn trade-based skills and workplace expectations in an authentic work environment.³²⁴ Ms Ashley told the Committee that even one day per week of trade-based learning can help students re-engage with education by offering a learning style that suits them. It also equips them with skills that enhance future employability.³²⁵
- 3.121 Youth Off The Streets (YOTS) operates a 'specialist assistance school' model, which provides years 9 to 12 under the regular curriculum, meeting all the relevant education standards. The distinguishing feature of this model is its provision of comprehensive, wraparound support. YOTS also facilitates access to

³²² Nicky Sloan, [Transcript of evidence](#), 24 February 2025, p 40.

³²³ Jillian Ashley, [Transcript of evidence](#), 29 October 2024, p 17.

³²⁴ [Answers to supplementary questions](#), ShoreTrack, 14 November 2024, p 1.

³²⁵ Jillian Ashley, [Transcript of evidence](#), 29 October 2024, p 17.

homelessness services for students enrolled in the specialist assistance school who are facing an accommodation crisis.³²⁶

- 3.122 Additionally, we note that the NSW Department of Education operates a number of programs and initiatives designed to support student transitions into work or training. Examples of these programs are provided below.

Regional Industry Education Partnerships

- 3.123 The Regional Industry Education Partnerships (RIEP) program links employers with schools to create tailored opportunities for students to explore training and career pathways. It also allows them to gain practical experience in local industries.
- 3.124 In February 2024, the Minister for Skills, TAFE and Tertiary Education established RIEP as a permanent NSW Government service for schools and industry. The program has supported more than 250,000 students to explore different career options by connecting them with almost 4,000 employers across NSW.³²⁷

Educational Pathways Program

- 3.125 The Educational Pathways Program (EPP) provides support to identified schools, including 77 in regional, rural, and remote NSW. A key aim of the program is to address skills shortages with targeted courses, career immersion activities, and access to School Based Apprenticeships and Traineeships in priority industries.
- 3.126 Through the EPP, First Nations students have participated in cultural exchange programs. This involves travelling to the New England region for a week-long experience, combining industry immersion activities with opportunities for cultural connection.³²⁸

Get Back in the Game

- 3.127 The Get Back in the Game program supports two groups of young people under different streams:
- Back in the Game helps students stay engaged at school or transition into employment or training.
 - Get in the Game helps young people who are completely disengaged from education, training, and work.

The program funds local service providers to case-manage these transitions and connect young people with essential support services, such as housing and healthcare.³²⁹

- 3.128 Service providers are strong advocates for the young people they support and have strong working relationships with their local TAFE NSW. This allows them to

³²⁶ Judy Barraclough, [Transcript of evidence](#), 24 February 2025, pp 38-39.

³²⁷ [Answers to supplementary questions](#), NSW Department of Education, 31 March 2025, p 7.

³²⁸ [Answers to supplementary questions](#), NSW Department of Education, 31 March 2025, p 7.

³²⁹ NSW Government, [Low cost and free training options: Get Back in the Game](#), viewed 29 April 2025.

provide feedback to TAFE NSW on the need for specific courses – particularly in rural and regional areas where course availability may be limited.³³⁰

TAFE NSW

Recommendation 10

That TAFE NSW explore opportunities to expand face-to-face learning in regional and remote areas to support sustained engagement.

- 3.129 During the Committee's regional visits, we heard that face-to-face learning opportunities are essential for sustained engagement in TAFE NSW programs. We recommend that TAFE NSW look at ways to expand face-to-face learning in regional and remote areas.
- 3.130 Bourke, for example, has what is called a 'Connected Learning Centre'. Connected Learning Centres are essentially 'a different version of a TAFE campus that's digitally enabled'. They offer opportunities for training to be delivered in a blended way, with some hands-on/face-to-face learning, and some course content delivered online.³³¹
- 3.131 One benefit of TAFE NSW's Connected Learning Centres is that they allow people who live in small regional and remote locations, like Bourke, to access a wide variety of courses, without the need to travel or to relocate for further education.³³²
- 3.132 At the same time, we acknowledge community concern that inadequate or limited face-to-face course delivery increases the risk of student disengagement.
- 3.133 Adam Bennett, Executive Director Learning and Teaching, Health, Wellbeing and Human Services Faculty at TAFE NSW noted the importance of students building strong and supportive relationships with educators and peers:
- Often, we hear that the TAFE teacher is the responsible role model and adult that takes an interest in them and helps them believe that they can do something more. That relationship with them, and with their peers in the group, makes a significant difference to them continuing to be engaged.³³³
- 3.134 ShoreTrack suggested that TAFE NSW should prioritise the following initiatives to meet diverse learning needs and engage at-risk cohorts:
- smaller classes to support positive relationship building
 - hands-on learning, on Country, and in community
 - meaningful learning that supports future employment

³³⁰ [Answers to supplementary questions](#), NSW Department of Education, 31 March 2025, p 8.

³³¹ Alison McGaffin, Chief Student and Community Officer, Student Support and Community Group, TAFE NSW, [Transcript of evidence](#), 24 February 2025, p 64.

³³² Alison McGaffin, [Transcript of evidence](#), 24 February 2025, p 59.

³³³ Adam Bennett, Executive Director Learning and Teaching, Health, Wellbeing and Human Services Faculty, [Transcript of evidence](#), 24 February 2025, p 64.

- wraparound supports, including transport.³³⁴

- 3.135 The Committee acknowledges important work undertaken by TAFE NSW to meet the needs of disadvantaged cohorts and communities. For example, the TAFE Connects community engagement program was designed to better understand and respond to local community needs. Feedback from communities is used to inform planning around service delivery, including course offerings.³³⁵
- 3.136 We also note that place-based Aboriginal engagement and student support teams are 'in community all the time'. Alison McGaffin, Chief Student and Community Officer, Student Support and Community Group at TAFE NSW stated that these officers serve as a vital link between TAFE NSW and First Nations communities, helping to address community needs and identify pathways into skills development and, ultimately, employment.³³⁶

A 'diversionary centre' model to support young people at risk of offending

Summary

Many young people are held in custody because they do not have suitable accommodation to be bailed to. There is need for alternative accommodation for at-risk youth. Some stakeholders suggested this could be delivered in the form of a 'diversionary centre'.

Recommendation 11

That the NSW Government consult with communities on the feasibility of local on Country diversionary centres for young people, offering accommodation, alternative education pathways, and cultural enrichment.

- 3.137 The Committee heard that many young people are held in custody because they do not have appropriate accommodation to be bailed to. Approximately 90 per cent of young people held in Youth Justice facilities are on remand (they have not yet been sentenced by a court).³³⁷
- 3.138 As such, we consider that there is a need for alternative accommodation for at-risk youth, and that this could be delivered in the form of a 'diversionary centre' model. This model could provide accommodation, education or assistance to link young people with education pathways, as well as social and cultural programs. The Committee recommends that the NSW Government consult with communities about their needs in this regard.

³³⁴ [Answers to supplementary questions](#), ShoreTrack, 14 November 2024, p 2.

³³⁵ [Answers to supplementary questions](#), TAFE NSW, 17 March 2025, pp 2-3.

³³⁶ Alison McGaffin, [Transcript of evidence](#), 24 February 2025, p 63.

³³⁷ Dr Mindy Sotiri, [Transcript of evidence](#), 24 February 2025, p 8; [Submission 147](#), NSW Council of Civil Liberties, p 12.

- 3.139 In addition to providing a bail alternative for young people, centres could (depending on local needs) incorporate:
- features of specialist homelessness services
 - drug and alcohol treatment and other health services
 - education and training services, including alternative education services
 - support for young parents
 - cultural programs.
- 3.140 It is important that services are available to all young people who need to access them.
- 3.141 Stakeholders were very clear that programs or services that remove young people from their communities, particularly young First Nations people, cause harm and increase risk of offending behaviour.³³⁸
- 3.142 Jonathan Hall Spence, Justice and Equity Centre, emphasised the need to be careful of solutions that isolate children. If a diversionary centre were to take young people away from their support networks, it likely would not be effective. Such a model would need to be 'deeply rooted in community knowledge and community networks' to succeed.³³⁹
- 3.143 Young people who are at risk of offending have commonly experienced significant trauma. Many have been involved with child protection services, including being placed into care or otherwise removed from their families.³⁴⁰ Government responses designed to help these young people must not perpetuate trauma.³⁴¹
- 3.144 According to Maranguka, by supporting young people on Country, we can use local strengths, cultural connections, and a sense of belonging to create more positive outcomes for young people. The success of an on Country diversionary centre would require substantial investment in upskilling community members and attracting qualified professionals, to meet the needs of the young people it serves.³⁴²
- 3.145 Existing or proposed accommodation programs, such as the proposed Kunpu-Gunya program in Bourke, could meet this need.³⁴³

³³⁸ Dominic Holles, [Transcript of evidence](#), 2 October 2024, p 35; [Submission 161](#), Greens NSW, p 7.

³³⁹ Jonathan Hall Spence, [Transcript of evidence](#), 24 February 2025, p 24.

³⁴⁰ [Submission 112](#), Save the Children and 54 reasons, p 6; [Submission 135](#), Raise the Age NSW, p 21; [Submission 116](#), Justice Reform Initiative, p 10; [Submission 149](#), Shoalhaven City Council, p 3; [Submission 189](#), Youth Action, p 36; [Submission 190](#), Domestic Violence NSW, p 2; [Submission 194](#), Aboriginal Legal Service (NSW/ACT), p 4; [Submission 195](#), NSW Government, p 3.

³⁴¹ Deborah Summerhayes, [Transcript of evidence](#), 24 February 2025, p 59.

³⁴² [Answers to supplementary questions](#), Maranguka Ltd, 21 October 2024, p 1.

³⁴³ [Answers to supplementary questions](#), Maranguka Ltd, 21 October 2024, pp 1-2.

Chapter Four – Access to alcohol and other drug treatment

Summary

Use of alcohol and other drugs is a significant social issue in regional and rural NSW, and a major driver of crime. Communities are concerned about a lack of withdrawal management or drug rehabilitation facilities. In addition, access to drug and alcohol counselling is limited, especially for young people.

Recommendation 12

That the NSW Government invest in alcohol and other drug treatment in regional and rural communities, and consider the need for residential rehabilitation and withdrawal management services for young people in these areas.

- 4.1 Use of alcohol and other drugs (AOD) is a driver of offending behaviour. AOD use is also linked to other drivers of offending behaviour, including boredom and financial need.
- 4.2 The Committee recommends that the NSW Government invests in AOD treatment in regional and rural communities. We also recommend that the NSW Government considers the need for residential rehabilitation and withdrawal management services for young people in these communities.
- 4.3 People we spoke to in Bourke,³⁴⁴ Broken Hill,³⁴⁵ and Kempsey³⁴⁶ emphasised the need for drug withdrawal management and rehabilitation facilities in their communities. There were similar calls for AOD facilities in submissions received from people across the state.³⁴⁷ The Country Mayors Association, which

³⁴⁴ Rozaria Suckling, Club Manager, PCYC Bourke, [Transcript of evidence](#), 1 October 2024, pp 10-11; [Answers to supplementary questions](#), Bourke Shire Council, 21 November 2024, p 2; [Submission 162](#), Maranguka Ltd, p 13.

³⁴⁵ Mayor Tom Kennedy, Broken Hill City Council, [Transcript of evidence](#), 2 October 2024, pp 2, 4; Erin Reberger, Team Leader, Far West New South Wales, Mission Australia, [Transcript of evidence](#), 2 October 2024, pp 40-41; Megan Boshell, Area Manager, Central and Far West New South Wales, Mission Australia, [Transcript of evidence](#), 2 October 2024, p 41; Pam Tucker, Treasurer, Broken Hill Branch, Country Women's Association, [Transcript of evidence](#), 2 October 2024, p 42; Answers to questions of notice, [Country Women's Association](#), 10 October 2024, p 1.

³⁴⁶ Greg Brown, Aboriginal Community Liaison Officer, Police District Commander's Aboriginal Leadership Group, [Transcript of evidence](#), 29 October 2024, p 6; [Answers to supplementary questions](#), NSW Police Force Northern Region Command, 19 November 2024, p 3.

³⁴⁷ [Submission 119](#), St Vincent de Paul Ballina, p 1; [Submission 174](#), Just Reinvest NSW, pp 3, 9; [Submission 175](#), New South Wales Bar Association, p 23; [Submission 180](#), NSW Council of Social Service, pp 6, 12-13 (recommendation 8); [Submission 189](#), Youth Action, p 11 (recommendation 6); [Submission 193](#), Dharriwaa Elders Group, p 11; [Submission 186](#), Local Government NSW, pp 10-11, 14 (recommendation 12); [Submission 194](#), Aboriginal Legal Service (NSW/ACT), p 10 (recommendation 5.i.iii); [Submission 165](#), Fair Treatment for Tamworth Region, pp 2-3; [Submission 136](#), Legal Aid NSW, pp 37-38.

represents local governments across most of regional and rural NSW, strongly recommended investment in AOD facilities across non-metropolitan NSW.³⁴⁸

- 4.4 Key terminology related to AOD treatment is defined in the section 'Access to alcohol and other drug treatment services for young people' below.

Children in regional and rural communities are engaging in alcohol and other drug use

- 4.5 Increasingly younger children are engaging in AOD use across regional and rural communities. Stakeholders told the Committee:

One thing that we're seeing at the moment is that the age of children engaging in drug and alcohol consumption locally, in Broken Hill, is about nine or ten.

Erin Reberger, Mission Australia, Broken Hill³⁴⁹

A lot of these kids are unfortunately on the heavy stuff [ice]... We've had a fair amount of youth that have been drinking alcohol as well. And that's from the age of 13.

Rosaria Suckling, PCYC, Bourke³⁵⁰

I've got kids here—eight years old, smoking marijuana, sitting on our corner, stoned out of their brains, just wanting to munch out on the corner ... Drugs are a very big thing here in Bourke at the moment, when it comes right down to our little babies who you are talking about.

Pania Tahu, Bourke Community Working Party³⁵¹

We do have a drug problem... We're talking about speed and ice and a bit of marijuana as well.

Gregory Hill, Central Darling Shire Council³⁵²

The other thing that's really big is a lot of young people [are] getting addicted to drugs really early on.

Tom Kennedy, Mayor, Broken Hill City Council³⁵³

³⁴⁸ [Submission 52](#), Country Mayors Association of NSW, p 31 (recommendation 15); Cr Russell Webb, Executive Board Member, Country Mayors Association, [Transcript of evidence](#), 24 February 2025, p 6.

³⁴⁹ Erin Reberger, [Transcript of evidence](#), 2 October 2024, pp 42, 44.

³⁵⁰ Rosaria Suckling, [Transcript of evidence](#), 1 October 2024, pp 10-11.

³⁵¹ Pania Tahu, Chairperson, Bourke Community Working Party, [Transcript of evidence](#), 1 October 2024, p 20.

³⁵² Gregory Hill, Manager, Central Darling Shire Council, [Transcript of evidence](#), 2 October 2024, p 5.

³⁵³ Tom Kennedy, Mayor, Broken Hill City Council, [Transcript of evidence](#), 2 October 2024, p 4.

Because we know a lot of these things [issues causing offending behaviour in young people] in particular are drug and alcohol related.

Clarrie Hoskins, Dunghutti Elders Council, Kempsey³⁵⁴

In our local area ... young people are facing issues with alcohol and drug use.

Jamieson Williams, Kempsey Youth Justice³⁵⁵

We have a massive problem here [in Kempsey] at the moment with ice. This is not just my own personal thinking. This is what I've seen over the last 20 years. Ice is so massive. We have such a big percentage and, especially in the Indigenous community, ice is a major problem.

Marilyn Figgett, Kempsey community member³⁵⁶

These kids [committing offences], they're affected by drugs.

Greg Brown, Aboriginal Community Liaison Officer, Kempsey³⁵⁷

There are huge drug problems.

Gail Cheers, Kempsey community member³⁵⁸

In terms of the drugs that are circulating, it's actually quite scary if I'm being honest. A lot of the young people are experimenting with substances like cocaine and ketamine. That's really big in our area. They're both really heavy-duty substances that, combined together, can be quite fatal.

Erin Reberger, Team Leader, Mission Australia, Far West NSW³⁵⁹

- 4.6 Residents in regional and rural communities are aware of children and young people using alcohol, marijuana, speed and ice (two forms of methamphetamine), cocaine, heroin, and ketamine. These drugs are schedule 8 and 9 substances that are highly addictive and generally pose risks to health. These risks are increased for young people, who are still growing.³⁶⁰

³⁵⁴ Clarrie Hoskins, Board Member, Dunghutti Elders Council, [Transcript of evidence](#), 29 October 2024, p 32.

³⁵⁵ Jamieson Williams, Assistant Manager, Kempsey Youth Justice, Department of Communities and Justice, [Transcript of evidence](#), 29 October 2024, p 36.

³⁵⁶ Marilyn Figgett, Kempsey community member, [Transcript of evidence](#), 29 October 2024, p 12.

³⁵⁷ Greg Brown, [Transcript of evidence](#), 29 October 2024, p 6.

³⁵⁸ Gail Cheers, Kempsey community member, [Transcript of evidence](#), 29 October 2024, p 14.

³⁵⁹ Erin Reberger, [Transcript of evidence](#), 2 October 2024, p 40.

³⁶⁰ National Health and Medical Research Council, [Australian guidelines to reduce health risks from drinking alcohol](#), 2020, pp 41 (Guideline 2), 43-45; Alcohol and Drug Foundation, [Understanding drug and alcohol addiction \(dependence\)](#), 26 October 2021, viewed 23 April 2025.

Schedule 8 and 9 drugs³⁶¹ and alcohol³⁶²

Schedule 8 drugs are controlled by the *Poisons and Therapeutic Goods Act 1966* (NSW). Schedule 8 drugs have a high risk of dependence (addiction), but have legitimate therapeutic uses. They can be prescribed by a doctor. Types of schedule 8 drugs include cannabis, cocaine, prescription amphetamines, and prescription opiates.

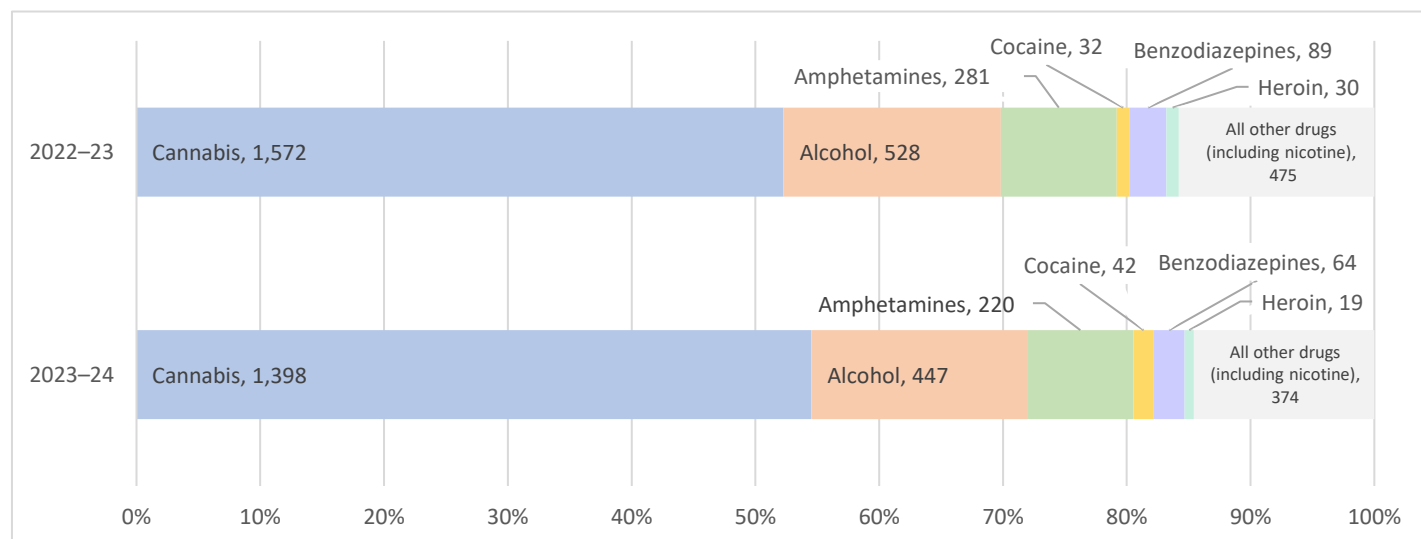
Schedule 9 drugs are illegal. They have a high risk of dependence. They are not recognised as a therapeutic good (medicine) and cannot be prescribed by a doctor. Types of schedule 9 drugs include non-prescription opiates (like heroin) and non-prescription amphetamines (like ice and speed).

Alcohol is regulated by the *Liquor Act 2007* (NSW). People over 18 years old can legally buy alcohol if they are not intoxicated (drunk). Alcohol is a drug. It has a risk of dependence, and alcohol withdrawal syndrome can have serious health impacts.

'Drug of concern' is used to refer to the drug that someone is dependent on (addicted to).

4.7 Stakeholders' observations about AOD use in their communities are supported by data collected by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare for AOD treatment episodes in the years 2022-24 (shown in Figure 4 below). Cannabis, alcohol, and amphetamines were the top three drugs of concern for young people (10-19 years old) who sought AOD treatment in both years.

Figure 6 Treatment episodes by principal drug of concern, 10-19 year olds, all NSW



Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, [Alcohol and other drug treatment services in Australia: early insights](#), web report, last updated 15 April 2025. Data sourced from [data cube: Closed treatment episodes for clients own drug use by principal drug of](#)

³⁶¹ Poisons and Therapeutic Goods Act 1966 (NSW), [part 3](#); NSW Health, [Schedule 8 medicines](#), last updated 5 September 2024, viewed 22 April 2025; Therapeutic Goods Administration, [The Poisons Standard \(the SUSMP\)](#), last updated February 2025, viewed 22 April 2025.

³⁶² [Liquor Act 2007](#) (NSW); Liquor and Gaming NSW, [Liquor Law](#), 1 July 2019, viewed 23 April 2025; Alcohol and Drug Foundation, [Alcohol](#), 7 March 2025, viewed 23 April 2025.

[concern and client characteristics](#), 2023-2024 (AODTS_PDOC_2324_demographics dataset). Data last updated 20 March 2025, viewed 24 April 2025.

Withdrawal can be dangerous and should be medically supervised

- 4.8 The drugs young people are using may need medically supported withdrawal. As a result, it is important that young people in regional areas can access appropriately supervised withdrawal management.
- 4.9 Withdrawal syndromes (symptoms experienced when a user reduces their dose or stops taking the drug) associated with alcohol and schedule 8 and 9 drugs can pose serious health risks.³⁶³ We heard that public hospitals do not offer withdrawal management for young people.³⁶⁴
- 4.10 Representatives from Mission Australia in Broken Hill spoke about the need for specialised, medically supervised withdrawal management for young people:

The process to support a young person to detox is so complex and so difficult, and it absolutely needs to be medically supervised. So it's not as easy as saying, "Come to Mac River [a residential facility in Dubbo that operates as a Youth Justice service]. You can detox here." That's not safe. That's not appropriate.³⁶⁵

Access to alcohol and other drug treatment services for young people

Key terminology - Alcohol and other drug withdrawal management and rehabilitation³⁶⁶

Withdrawal management is also referred to as 'detoxing' or 'getting clean'. It refers to care and supervision of a person who is experiencing withdrawal symptoms after stopping or reducing taking their drug of dependence.

The withdrawal period varies depending on the drug, but is short-term (normally one to two weeks). Symptoms of withdrawal vary from mild to severe and may need medical supervision.

Withdrawal management can be supervised by a GP, or through a specialist service provided in an outpatient, inpatient, or residential facility, depending on the risk level.

Rehabilitation is also referred to as 'rehab'. It is longer-term care and support as part of treatment for AOD dependence. Generally, people must complete withdrawal management before they can attend rehabilitation programs.

Rehabilitation may be delivered in a residential facility, where programs range from four weeks – 12 months (depending on the person and their needs), or in a 'day rehabilitation' program, where people attend for set times each day over a set period (normally three or six weeks) but remain living in their home.

³⁶³ healthdirect, Addiction withdrawal, [What are the symptoms of addiction withdrawal?](#), last reviewed August 2024, viewed 1 May 2025.

³⁶⁴ Megan Boshell, [Transcript of evidence](#), 2 October 2024, p 41.

³⁶⁵ Megan Boshell, [Transcript of evidence](#), 2 October 2024, p 41.

³⁶⁶ Centre for Alcohol and Other Drugs, NSW Health, [About alcohol and other drug treatment](#), viewed 23 April 2025; Your Room, [What is treatment?](#), viewed 23 April 2025.

Counselling, or psychosocial therapy, is 'talk-based' treatment. It aims to support people to understand the impact of their AOD use, and encourage changes to improve health and wellbeing.

There are many options for how AOD counselling is delivered. It is ideally in person (face-to-face) but can be delivered online or over the phone. AOD counselling is also part of withdrawal management and rehabilitation treatment plans.

'AOD treatment' refers to some or all of these services used in combination as part of long-term management of AOD dependence.

- 4.11 Stakeholders drew the Committee's attention to the lack of AOD treatment services for young people in NSW.
- 4.12 There are currently no supervised residential withdrawal management ('detox') facilities for young people under 16 in NSW.³⁶⁷ There are also limited options for residential rehabilitation facilities ('rehab') for young people. Stakeholders pointed out that young people who can access rehabilitation facilities must complete withdrawal from substance use before they can be admitted, but there are no withdrawal management services to help them to do this safely.³⁶⁸
- 4.13 Issues accessing AOD services are compounded by distance, cost, wait times, and limited service availability.³⁶⁹ Cr Russell Webb, of the Country Mayors Association, commented that:
- There is a lack of [AOD treatment] services, and then there's a lack of opportunity and motivation for those people that need to go and access the services that might be, as you say, some 100 kilometres away.³⁷⁰
- 4.14 Dr Mindy Sotiri, Executive Director of the Justice Reform Initiative, said that the lack of AOD services in regional and remote areas is a 'critical issue' that has been raised 'for the last 20 years'. She told us that it is 'absolutely not just a matter of better coordination ... it is actually a resourcing issue'.³⁷¹

Facilities for 13-18 year olds operate for Youth Justice

- 4.15 There are two residential AOD rehabilitation facilities for 13-18 year olds in NSW: Mac River in Dubbo,³⁷² and Miinggi Gilinggal in Coffs Harbour³⁷³ (formerly Junaa Buwa!³⁷⁴).

³⁶⁷ Megan Boshell, [Transcript of evidence](#), 2 October 2024, p 41.

³⁶⁸ Cara Varian, Chief Executive Officer, NSW Council of Social Service, [Transcript of evidence](#), 24 February 2025, p 44.

³⁶⁹ [Submission 174](#), Just Reinvest NSW, p 4; [Submission 165](#), Fair Treatment for Tamworth Regional Campaign, p 1; [Submission 136](#), Legal Aid NSW, p 38.

³⁷⁰ Cr Russell Webb, [Transcript of evidence](#), 24 February 2025, p 6.

³⁷¹ Dr Mindy Sotiri, Executive Director, Justice Reform Initiative, [Transcript of evidence](#), 24 February 2025, p 14.

³⁷² Mission Australia, [Mac River Centre Residential Rehabilitation Program](#), viewed 1 May 2025; Erin Reberger, [Transcript of evidence](#), 2 October 2024, p 41.

³⁷³ Lives Lived Well, [Miinggi Gilinggal](#), viewed 24 April 2025.

³⁷⁴ Alcohol and Other Drugs Knowledge Centre, [Junaa Buwa! Centre for Youth Wellbeing](#), viewed 1 May 2025.

4.16 However, these facilities operate as part of the Youth Justice Rural Residential Rehabilitation Adolescent Alcohol and Other Drugs Services program (RRRAAOD). This means they are only available to young people under Youth Justice supervision, and young people can only be referred to these facilities by Youth Justice caseworkers.³⁷⁵ Inherently, they cannot provide early intervention to at-risk young people.

4.17 The Committee also notes that the RRRAAOD service specifications state that young people must undergo withdrawal before entering these facilities:

The Referral Committee will assess for each young person referred, whether clinically supervised detoxification is required prior to entering the service.

While it is recognised that there are limited detox facilities throughout the state, the Agency is required to explore all possible options to facilitate clinically supervised detox when required (e.g. General Practitioners, local AOD services and hospitals).³⁷⁶

4.18 Concerningly, Mission Australia told us that they are aware of young people who have committed offences in order to access AOD treatment through Youth Justice facilities, because they do not have another way to get support.³⁷⁷

Existing services in NSW

4.19 In addition to the two Youth Justice facilities discussed above, there are only three other residential AOD services for young people outside of Greater Sydney, and two non-residential AOD services. Current AOD treatment services available for young people in NSW are summarised in Table 2 and shown on the map in Figure 7.

Table 2 Alcohol and other drug services for young people in regional NSW

Location	Service name	Service type	Ages	Type of service	Cost
Southern Highlands	Triple Care Farm ³⁷⁸ (Mission Australia)	Residential	16-24	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Withdrawal management Rehabilitation 	\$150/week ³⁷⁹
Shoalhaven	Triple Care Farm Walawaani (Mission Australia) ³⁸⁰	Residential	16-24	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Withdrawal management Rehabilitation 	\$150/week ³⁸¹

³⁷⁵ Youth Justice, [Rural Residential Rehabilitation Adolescent Alcohol and Other Drugs Services](#), viewed 23 April 2025; [Submission 118](#), Law Society of New South Wales, p 14; [Submission 136](#), Legal Aid, pp 38-39.

³⁷⁶ Youth Justice, [Service Specifications for Rural Residential Adolescent Alcohol and Other Drug Rehabilitation Services](#), 31 December 2018, last updated 24 May 2022, viewed 1 May 2025, p 12.

³⁷⁷ Megan Boshell, [Transcript of evidence](#), 2 October 2024, p 41.

³⁷⁸ Mission Australia, [Triple Care Farm Residential Rehabilitation](#), viewed 29 April 2025; [Submission 116](#), Justice Reform Initiative, pp 15-16.

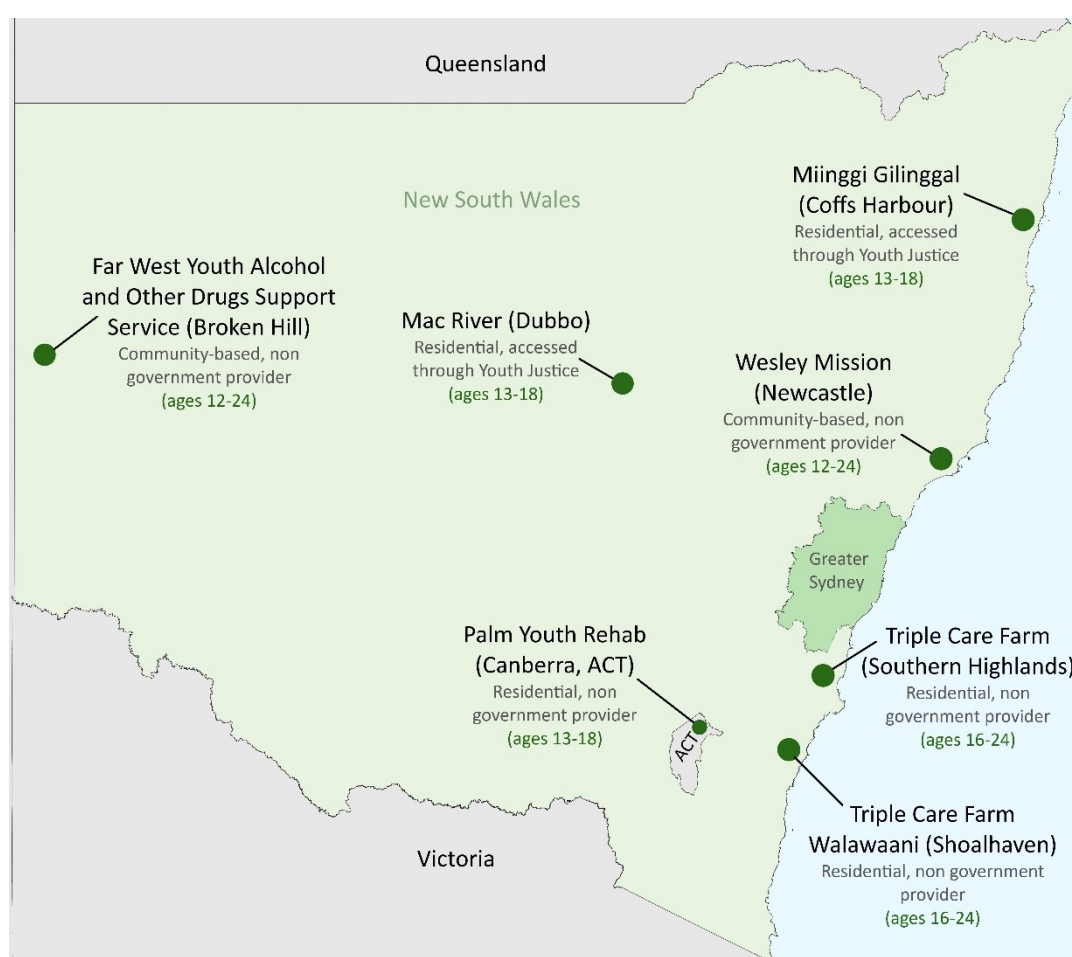
³⁷⁹ Sir David Martin Foundation, [Triple Care Farm Rehabilitation Program](#), viewed 23 April 2025.

³⁸⁰ Mission Australia, [Triple Care Farm Walawaani \(East Lynne\) Residential Rehabilitation](#), viewed 1 May 2025; Mission Australia, [Opening of Mission Australia's new youth rehabilitation facility Walawaani](#), media release, 24 February 2023, viewed 1 May 2025.

³⁸¹ Sir David Martin Foundation, [Triple Care Farm Withdrawal Program](#), viewed 23 April 2025.

Location	Service name	Service type	Ages	Type of service	Cost
Canberra (ACT)	Palm Youth Rehab ³⁸²	Residential	13-18	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rehabilitation 	\$160/week ³⁸³
Newcastle	Wesley Mission ³⁸⁴	Community-based	12-24	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Counselling Crisis management 	N/A
Broken Hill	Far West Youth Alcohol and Other Drugs Support Service (Mission Australia) ³⁸⁵	Community-based	12-24	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Counselling 	N/A

Figure 7 Location of alcohol and other drug treatment services in NSW (excluding Greater Sydney)



³⁸² Ted Noffs Foundation, [Palm Youth Rehab](#), viewed 29 April 2025.

³⁸³ Ted Noffs Foundation, Palm Youth Rehab, [FAQs](#), viewed 29 April 2025.

³⁸⁴ Wesley Mission, [Alcohol and Other Drug Programs](#), viewed 1 May 2025; Hunter Community Hub, [Wesley Mission Youth Service](#), viewed 1 May 2025.

³⁸⁵ Mission Australia, [Far West Youth Alcohol and Other Drugs Support Service](#), viewed 1 May 2025.

- 4.20 Other AOD treatment services for young people aged 12-24 are based in Greater Sydney.³⁸⁶ It is clear that there need to be more withdrawal management and rehabilitation facilities for young people in NSW, especially in regional NSW.
- 4.21 Paid non-government residential rehabilitation centres cost between \$1,800-\$2,000 for a 12 week program.³⁸⁷ We note that this cost, while relatively inexpensive, is likely to be unaffordable for young people in many regional and rural areas, although centres have payment options and cost waivers available.³⁸⁸
- 4.22 Legal Aid NSW said they have observed many of their young clients referred to residential AOD services in Sydney and Canberra 'do not graduate from the programs, and some are exited from the service within 24 to 48 hours'. However, they also noted there are 'many success stories'.³⁸⁹
- 4.23 We heard that, as of February 2024, Mission Australia is operating the Far West Youth Alcohol and Other Drugs Service (YADSS) in Broken Hill. Mission Australia commented that they 'are the only AOD service' for young people in the Far West. YADSS offers psychosocial support and AOD counselling.³⁹⁰
- 4.24 Caseworkers involved in the YADSS service said their community still needs multidisciplinary AOD treatment resources, including psychologists and psychiatrists. The YADSS program cannot currently support young people who need intensive residential withdrawal management and rehabilitation.³⁹¹

Virtual resources and counselling are insufficient to meet demand and complexity

- 4.25 In many regional and rural areas, there are no local service providers delivering AOD treatment for young people. This means that the only form of AOD treatment available is counselling delivered virtually (online or by telephone) through state and national helplines and web chat.³⁹² We heard that there is limited access to reliable internet and cellular data in regional areas, and some young people cannot afford internet access.³⁹³ These connectivity issues mean that many young people in regional areas cannot effectively utilise these services.
- 4.26 Maranguka, in Bourke, said that 'this digital divide exacerbates their isolation and reduces their engagement with crucial support services'.³⁹⁴

³⁸⁶ [Submission 136](#), Legal Aid NSW, p 38; Network of Alcohol and Other Drugs Agencies, [Supporting young people with alcohol and other drug issues: A profile of non government alcohol and other drug services for young people in NSW](#), version 2, 2021, pp 4-5.

³⁸⁷ Triple Care Farm programs: \$150/week, total cost of 12 week program \$1,800. Palm Youth Rehab: \$160/week, total cost of 12 week program \$1,920. Sir David Martin Foundation, [Triple Care Farm Rehabilitation Program](#), viewed 23 April 2025; Noffs Foundation, [Palm Youth Rehab](#), viewed 23 April 2025.

³⁸⁸ For example, [Information Pack: for Parents & Supports](#), Palm Youth Rehab, Ted Noffs Foundation, 2024, p 17.

³⁸⁹ [Submission 136](#), Legal Aid NSW, p 39.

³⁹⁰ Erin Reberger, [Transcript of evidence](#), 2 October 2024, pp 40-41; Mission Australia, , viewed 1 May 2025. [Far West Youth Alcohol and Other Drugs Support Service](#), viewed 1 May 2025.

³⁹¹ Erin Reberger, [Transcript of evidence](#), 2 October 2024, p 40-41.

³⁹² For example, those listed on Your Room; Your Room, [Support Services](#), viewed 1 May 2025.

³⁹³ [Submission 162](#), Maranguka Ltd, p 16; [Submission 180](#), NSW Council of Social Service, p 15.

³⁹⁴ [Submission 162](#), Maranguka Ltd, p 16.

- 4.27 We also note that these resources do not provide adequate support or care for young people experiencing dependence, especially dependence on alcohol and other drugs with withdrawal risks.³⁹⁵
- 4.28 Limited health services in many regional and remote areas also make it difficult for young people to access AOD treatment through GPs or other medical services.³⁹⁶

Service providers face difficulty accessing support for young clients

- 4.29 Young people in regional and rural areas who have access to service providers still face significant barriers in accessing AOD treatment. We also heard about the difficulty that service providers face in accessing AOD treatment for clients under 18 years old.
- 4.30 Other service providers told us that they have had to cover the cost of flying young people to Sydney for withdrawal management, and then to another location for rehabilitation. They noted the impact of displacement from home and community on these young people:

We've flown kids before from Dareton, down on the border with Mildura. ... We will fly them, if we can, to Sydney to detox, then we have to fly them to Dubbo to be able to attend the rehab. Imagine what that's like ... [this] 16-year-old [had] never left Dareton before.³⁹⁷

- 4.31 In particular, as we discussed in chapter 3, Country is an important part of wellbeing for First Nations young people, who are disproportionately impacted by a lack of locally accessible services. Being away from Country directly affects the wellbeing of First Nations young people.³⁹⁸

Few young people currently access AOD treatment in NSW

- 4.32 In 2022-23, there were approximately 1.017 million young people aged 10-19 in NSW.³⁹⁹ Of these young people, 184,000 were living in regional and rural NSW (outside of Greater Sydney).⁴⁰⁰

³⁹⁵ [Submission 165](#), Fair Treatment for Tamworth Region Campaign, p 2; Erin Reberger, [Transcript of evidence](#), 2 October 2024, p 41.

³⁹⁶ Maxime Nina, Acting Chief Executive Officer, Maranguka, [Transcript of evidence](#), 1 October 2024, p 37.

³⁹⁷ Megan Boshell, [Transcript of evidence](#), 2 October 2024, p 41.

³⁹⁸ Nicole Laupepa, Head of First Nations Services, Youth Off The Streets, [Transcript of evidence](#), 24 February 2025, p 34; [Submission 136](#), Legal Aid NSW, p 38.

³⁹⁹ Australian Bureau of Statistics, [Region summary: New South Wales](#), Estimated resident population – Persons – year ended 30 June (10-14 and 15-19 years), viewed 24 April 2025.

⁴⁰⁰ Australian Bureau of Statistics, [Region summary: Rest of NSW](#), Estimated resident population – Persons – year ended 30 June (10-14 and 15-19 years), viewed 24 April 2025.

- 4.33 The 2022-23 National Drug Strategy Household Survey estimated that:
- approximately 13 per cent of 14-17 year olds in NSW⁴⁰¹ had used an illicit drug⁴⁰² in the previous 12 months (about 132,000 young people)
 - approximately 8 per cent of 14-17 year olds in NSW⁴⁰³ were estimated to be at risk of alcohol-related harm⁴⁰⁴ (about 81,000 young people).
- 4.34 This data does not distinguish between regional and metropolitan (Greater Sydney) NSW. However, we note that research has shown rates of AOD use per capita are higher in regional and rural Australia.⁴⁰⁵
- 4.35 In comparison, the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare reported that, in 2022-23, 1,841 young people aged 10-19 across NSW accessed AOD treatment (including community-based, residential, and counselling services) for their own drug use. This made up about eight per cent of the total number of people accessing AOD treatment services in NSW in 2023.⁴⁰⁶
- 4.36 This is less than one per cent of the estimated number of 14-17 year olds who used illicit drugs in 2022-23, and less than two per cent of young people who were estimated at risk of alcohol-related harm.

⁴⁰¹ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, [National Drug Strategy Household Survey 2022-23](#), web report, last updated 29 February 2024, [Data table](#) 9b.31, Recent illicit use of any drug, by age and state/territory, 2007 to 2022-23, viewed 24 April 2025.

⁴⁰² Includes amphetamine and methamphetamine, cocaine, ecstasy, emerging psychoactive substances, GHB, hallucinogens, inhalants, ketamine, marijuana/cannabis and synthetic cannabinoids, opioids (including heroin, methadone, and buprenorphine), prescription stimulants, steroids, tranquilisers, and any injected drug.

⁴⁰³ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, [National Drug Strategy Household Survey 2022-23](#), web report, last updated 29 February 2024, [Data table](#) 9b.22, People at risk of alcohol-related harm, by age and state/territory, 2007 to 2022-2023, viewed 24 April 2025.

⁴⁰⁴ Using guideline 1 from the [2020 NHMRC Australian guidelines to reduce health risks from drinking alcohol](#): the person consumed more than 10 standard drinks a week, or consumed more than four standard drinks on a single day at least once per month.

⁴⁰⁵ [Submission 147](#), NSW Council for Civil Liberties, p 10.

⁴⁰⁶ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, [Alcohol and other drug treatment services in Australia: early insights](#), Figure 1: Client demographics by state and territory, 2013-14 to 2023-24, last updated 15 April 2025, viewed 24 April 2025.

Chapter Five – Grant funding and strategic support for the community services sector

Better coordination between service providers can help to meet young people's needs

Summary

The community services system is often 'siloed'. Inadequate coordination between services results in support that is fragmented and difficult for young people and families to navigate. Mapping service availability in local communities and creating incentives for collaboration can help address gaps and ensure support is cost-effective and responsive to community needs.

Finding 10

Although there are excellent examples of programs underway in regional and rural communities for at-risk young people, the lack of coordination between organisations can result in critical gaps in support.

Recommendation 13

That the NSW Government create incentives for community services to collaborate and foster partnerships that enhance referral processes and improve service efficiency.

Recommendation 14

That the NSW Government actively support 'mapping' of services in regional and rural communities to promote collaboration, and expand services where gaps are identified.

- 5.1 The Committee heard that services operate in silos, which can be a byproduct of the competitive nature of grant funding. This fragmentation results in a loss of efficiency and responsiveness to community needs, as well as gaps in services.
- 5.2 The Committee recommends that the NSW Government create incentives for greater collaboration and coordination among existing services, which would ensure a more efficient allocation of public funds, and help to achieve a more holistic service response.
- 5.3 Mapping services in a specific area is a valuable first step in identifying gaps and potential duplication. The NSW Government should actively encourage and support this practice in regional areas to enable more efficient allocation of resources. Service mapping could also form part of the grant funding application process.

- 5.4 Legal Aid submitted that strong collaboration enables service providers and organisations in regional areas to deliver wraparound support and referrals more effectively. To allow this, Legal Aid suggested holding monthly roundtables where service providers can connect, share information about their services, and identify opportunities for collaboration.⁴⁰⁷
- 5.5 Similarly, the Border Region Organisation of Councils (BROC) emphasised the importance of service mapping in the BROC region to identify inefficiencies and duplication and ensure government services and interventions are 'fit for purpose'.⁴⁰⁸
- 5.6 Bourke Shire Council noted that the high level of crime in the community is a clear indication that current programs are not working effectively. A service mapping project, the Council suggested, would help to define the services provided in Bourke. They also suggested that this would identify areas of duplication and allow resources to be redirected more effectively.⁴⁰⁹
- 5.7 The NSW Police Northern Region Command informed the Committee that although many youth workers are employed by services in the Kempsey area, they often operate in isolation. Greater collaboration among youth services could help make programs and activities more accessible. For example, the PCYC Unites program, which runs on Friday evenings, is limited to around 35 children due to staff constraints. In January 2023, the PCYC hosted a community touch football competition over four weeks, supported by youth agencies, sports groups, and parents, with 80–100 children attending each night. However, the Northern Region Command noted that similar large-scale events have not been replicated due to a lack of cooperation between service providers.⁴¹⁰
- 5.8 Justice Reinvest and Legal Aid NSW recently conducted a survey of frontline service delivery programs in Moree. Participants reported that families in Moree do not always understand what supports are available to them as the service system is fragmented. As a result, people in need must actively identify and seek out services themselves, rather than being referred or proactively offered assistance.⁴¹¹
- 5.9 Cr Russell Webb, Executive Board Member, Country Mayors Association, told the Committee:
- If you go to Moree, for example, there's well over 50 organisations that are mostly government funded. It's a tender for service. They tender, they get the money from the government, then they try and deliver a service. You've got so many organisations trying to deliver little programs that might help those in need. Is it working? No, it's not.⁴¹²

⁴⁰⁷ [Submission 136](#), Legal Aid NSW, p 15.

⁴⁰⁸ [Submission 145](#), Border Region Organisation of Councils, p 2.

⁴⁰⁹ [Submission 187](#), Bourke Shire Council, p 8.

⁴¹⁰ [Answers to supplementary questions](#), NSW Police Northern Region Command, 19 November 2024, pp 2-3.

⁴¹¹ [Submission 136](#), Legal Aid NSW, p 15.

⁴¹² Councillor Russell Webb, Executive Board Member, Country Mayors Association, [Transcript of evidence](#), 24 February 2025, p 3.

- 5.10 Cr Webb observed that this funding system creates a situation where organisations are focused on securing the next tender, rather than on long-term service delivery.⁴¹³
- 5.11 The Benevolent Society likewise noted that current funding structures 'create a sense of competition between organisations'. This discourages collaboration and resource-sharing practices that could enhance service provision for regional and rural communities.⁴¹⁴
- 5.12 This position was shared by members of the NSW Council of Social Service, who claim that competitive funding leads to instability and unfairness and reduces collaboration between services. Smaller services must compete for the same funding as larger organisations, which puts them at a disadvantage.⁴¹⁵
- 5.13 The Advocate for Children and Young People (ACYP) told the Committee that children and young people often speak of the need for a single place where they can go to share their story and to access the supports they need. Disconnected services create gaps in wraparound care. This is especially damaging to children and young people facing multiple issues, such as out-of-home care, disengagement from education, or homelessness.⁴¹⁶
- 5.14 The ACYP further emphasised that building networks between government agencies, service providers, and the community will foster a more holistic and effective service response. These connections also facilitate improved data sharing, leading to a better overall client experience.⁴¹⁷
- 5.15 In March 2025, Committee members visited Wagga Wagga to explore community-driven initiatives designed to strengthen collaboration between services and improve outcomes for local young people. These initiatives are discussed in the two case studies below.

Case study: Short-term remand pilot program, Wagga Wagga⁴¹⁸

The Wagga Wagga Short-Term Remand Pilot Program aims to reduce the number of children and young people (aged 10-17) experiencing avoidable short-term remand.

The program takes a holistic approach to a young person's involvement in the criminal justice system, beginning with their initial contact with police. A series of targeted projects provide advocacy, support, and access to essential services at every stage of this process, ensuring a more coordinated and effective response.

⁴¹³ Councillor Webb, [Transcript of evidence](#), 24 February 2025, p 3.

⁴¹⁴ [Answers to supplementary questions](#), Benevolent Society, 26 November 2024, p 8.

⁴¹⁵ [Answers to supplementary questions](#), NSW Council of Social Service, 25 March 2025, pp 1-2.

⁴¹⁶ [Answers to supplementary questions](#), Advocate for Children and Young People (ACYP), 18 March 2025, p 1.

⁴¹⁷ [Answers to supplementary questions](#), ACYP, 18 March 2025, p 1.

⁴¹⁸ Save the Children/54 Reasons, [Program profile: Mobile Youth Outreach Short Term Remand Pilot](#), viewed 6 May 2025.

The program design is led by the NSW Police Force and the Children's Court of NSW, and is facilitated by Youth Justice NSW. To ensure culturally safe support, Youth Justice NSW has worked closely with local Aboriginal Elders, community groups, young people, families, and local organisations to understand community needs and ensure services are tailored to meet the needs of this cohort of young people and their families.

A key element of the place-based approach in Wagga Wagga is the Wollundry Dreaming First Nations Youth Hub, which was co-designed with Elders and the community. The hub works in partnership with schools, community groups, sporting organisations, government agencies, and service providers to deliver early intervention support and build a strong, supportive network for First Nations young people.

Case study: Showcasing, Learning About Youth Supports (SLAYS), Wagga Wagga⁴¹⁹

Showcasing, Learning About Youth Supports (SLAYS) is a service mapping initiative led by the Riverina Police District and Youth Justice, Wagga Wagga. The program recognises that individual services cannot meet a young person's needs alone; referrals and cross-sector collaboration are essential.

As part of the SLAYS initiative, youth services and community providers were invited to an event where they could showcase their services to young people and connect with other organisations. This event facilitated networking and gave police and service providers a clearer understanding of local service availability.

SLAYS helped to identify key service gaps in Wagga Wagga and surrounding areas, particularly in mental health support, drug and alcohol services for young people, and youth outreach programs beyond central Wagga Wagga. Notably, nearly all of the services that attended discovered programs or organisations they were previously unaware of, and all identified gaps in local service provision.

Participants expressed support for holding SLAYS more frequently to ensure they stay informed about available services.

⁴¹⁹ Riverina Police District, [Showcasing, Learning about Youth Supports: Presentation](#), 3 March 2025.

Longer-term funding contracts give service providers and communities certainty

Summary

Short-term funding cycles compromise the effectiveness and sustainability of programs, leading to poorer outcomes for communities. Without long-term certainty around funding, services have difficulty recruiting and retaining qualified staff. Frequent turnover of programs and staff damages the trust built with young people and their communities.

Funding agreements lasting five or ten years would help ensure services are more consistent and reliable. Stakeholders also called for greater flexibility in how they use funding to respond to evolving community needs.

Finding 11

Short-term funding cycles create uncertainty and disruption for community organisations and the people they serve.

- 5.16 The Committee heard considerable evidence that short-term funding cycles compromise the effectiveness and sustainability of programs and result in sub-optimal outcomes for communities.
- 5.17 The ACYP said that short-term funding cycles are a significant barrier to the provision of holistic and sustained support to children and young people. Short-term funding creates unnecessary competition among service providers. It also tends to prioritise temporary pilot programs over long-term solutions that need time to deliver meaningful outcomes.⁴²⁰
- 5.18 As the Community Industry Group observed, 'you can't treat long-term trauma using a short-term time frame'.⁴²¹
- 5.19 Several stakeholders told the Committee that short-term funding for community services impedes organisations' ability to recruit and retain staff.⁴²²
- 5.20 For instance, Justine Russell, General Manager of Youth Programs and Social Impact at PCYC Kempsey, told the Committee:
- We have short-term funding options that are available to us at the moment, so everything seems to go in a 12-monthly cycle up here, or slightly longer, which means it's hard to get long-term employment options for really highly qualified staff to operate in those services.⁴²³

⁴²⁰ [Answers to supplementary questions](#), Advocate for Children and Young People, 18 March 2025, p 1.

⁴²¹ [Answers to supplementary questions](#), Community Industry Group, 25 March 2025, p 3.

⁴²² E.g. [Submission 116](#), Justice Reform Initiative, p 19; [Submission 189](#), Youth Action NSW, p 56; Cara Varian, Chief Executive Officer, NSW Council of Social Services, [Transcript of evidence](#), 24 February 2025, p 43; [Answers to supplementary questions](#), Benevolent Society, 26 November 2024, p 10.

⁴²³ Justine Russell, General Manager Youth Programs and Social Impact, PCYC Kempsey, [Transcript of evidence](#), 29 October 2024, p 4.

- 5.21 When staff with established community relationships are lost due to contract uncertainty, it becomes challenging for new providers to build trust with young people who have experienced frequent turnover of programs and staff. Long-term stability is essential for building connections with both young people and their communities.⁴²⁴
- 5.22 Judy Barraclough, Chief Executive Officer of Youth Off The Streets (YOTS), told the Committee that for a vulnerable young person, suddenly losing the trusted individual they have opened up to is 'one of the most destructive things that can happen'. For this reason, YOTS has taken the risky decision of giving their specialist workers' permanent employment. Longer contract terms, Ms Barraclough said, would 'help the system'.⁴²⁵
- 5.23 Name.Narrate.Navigate also remarked on the impact 'perpetual grant-seeking' has on relationships and intervention efficacy. Frequent pauses or adjustments to interventions due to funding cycles can halt progress, disrupt relationships, and hinder consistent learning and improvement. There is a need for a funding model that allows for greater focus on high-quality implementation and meaningful evaluation, which ultimately improves outcomes for communities.⁴²⁶
- 5.24 Local Government NSW (LGNSW) submitted that funding for wraparound services including mental health support, drug and alcohol services, and justice diversionary programs 'can often be revoked unexpectedly'. LGNSW emphasised the need for stable, longer-term funding. The impact of funding cuts may not be immediately apparent, and it can take years to restore trust within a community even after funding is reinstated.⁴²⁷
- 5.25 The Community Industry Group called for a funding model that ensures continuity of service delivery and can adapt to a community's changing needs. Although longer-term contracts 'often strike fear in bureaucrats', service delivery and efficacy can still be rigorously assessed, and improvement plans put in place where needed.⁴²⁸
- 5.26 Some inquiry participants recommended a contract duration of five years.⁴²⁹ Others suggested that a ten-year term would be more effective.⁴³⁰

⁴²⁴ [Answers to supplementary questions](#), Community Industry Group, 25 March 2025, p 3.

⁴²⁵ Judy Barraclough, Chief Executive Officer, Youth Off The Streets, [Transcript of evidence](#), 24 February 2025, p 37.

⁴²⁶ [Answers to supplementary questions](#), Name.Narrate.Navigate, 17 March 2025, p 4.

⁴²⁷ [Submission 186](#), Local Government NSW, pp 8-9.

⁴²⁸ [Answers to supplementary questions](#), Community Industry Group, 25 March 2025, p 2.

⁴²⁹ E.g. [Submission 154](#), Shellharbour City Council, p 9; Penny Lamaro, Chairperson, Youth Action, [Transcript of evidence](#), 24 February 2025, p 37; Judy Barraclough, [Transcript of evidence](#), 24 February 2025, p 37; Cara Varian, [Transcript of evidence](#), 24 February 2025, p 43.

⁴³⁰ E.g. [Answers to supplementary questions](#), ANTAR, 17 March 2025, p 3; [Answers to supplementary questions](#), Community Industry Group, 25 March 2025, p 1.

The Secure Jobs and Funding Certainty Roadmap aims to deliver greater job security

Recommendation 15

That the NSW Government expedite its consideration and approval of the draft Secure Jobs and Funding Certainty Roadmap and communicate the approach and timeframes to the sector. The Roadmap should consider the needs of youth service providers and the impact on program delivery.

- 5.27 The NSW Government should expedite its consideration and approval of the draft Secure Jobs and Funding Certainty (SJFC) Roadmap, to deliver greater job security for the NSW community services sector.
- 5.28 SJFC was a 2023 election commitment of the current NSW Government. The commitment aims to:
- improve job security for the community services workforce
 - increase funding certainty for key community services providers
 - reduce administrative burden for community services providers.⁴³¹
- 5.29 The SJFC Leadership Group has endorsed the draft SJFC Roadmap, which sets out priority work areas and timeframes to achieve the NSW Government's commitment. The draft Roadmap is awaiting approval from the NSW Government.⁴³²
- 5.30 Cara Varian, Chief Executive Officer, NSW Council of Social Services expressed disappointment that there has not been more progress made on the SJFC commitment, two years into the electoral cycle.⁴³³
- 5.31 Ms Varian said she hoped the SJFC would eventually deliver competitive pay to workers and funding levels that reflect the true operating costs of delivering services. Ms Varian also highlighted issues around flexibility in how organisations can spend their funding:
- We're hearing all the time at the moment that... rent and insurance are just skyrocketing for our community service organisations. Because there's no flexibility to adjust that, in a contractual way, with the government, all that means is either less services are being delivered, or the staff that are working for the organisations are getting paid less...⁴³⁴
- 5.32 This concern was shared by other inquiry participants and is discussed further in the following section.

⁴³¹ Communities and Justice, [Secure Jobs and Funding Certainty for Community Services – A NSW Government focused commitment](#), viewed 3 April 2025.

⁴³² Communities and Justice, [Secure Jobs and Funding Certainty Roadmap](#), viewed 3 April 2025.

⁴³³ Cara Varian, [Transcript of evidence](#), 24 February 2025, p 43.

⁴³⁴ Cara Varian, [Transcript of evidence](#), 24 February 2025, p 43.

The need for greater flexibility in how organisations use their funding

Recommendation 16

That the NSW Government provide community services funding contracts that allow greater flexibility and longer terms, enabling organisations to better meet community needs.

- 5.33 The Committee recommends that the NSW Government implement longer-term, more flexible funding contracts for early intervention and other community services, which will better enable organisations to address the needs of local communities.
- 5.34 Stakeholders told the Committee that many non-government organisations, in addition to being underfunded, are contracted in a way that limits their ability to address community needs effectively.⁴³⁵
- 5.35 Anika Malcolm, Community Development Worker at the Benevolent Society, identified restrictions around funding as a key reason for gaps in wraparound services. As a result, organisations may be forced to divert resources from other areas to meet the needs of the people they support.⁴³⁶ Funding is often limited, or not approved to be spent on things such as food for program participants or transportation to and from services. This creates a barrier for some people in regional and rural communities.⁴³⁷
- 5.36 Maranguka noted that the strict activity requirements attached to government grants often restrict the organisation's ability to respond flexibly to evolving community challenges. It limits their ability to respond to sudden spikes in homelessness or increased demand for mental health services. Allowing greater flexibility in how funds are allocated would enable community organisations like Maranguka to better respond to local priorities, rather than simply delivering rigidly defined activities. This approach could support agility and innovation in service provision and ensure resources are used where they are most needed.⁴³⁸
- 5.37 YOUTH Speak recommended that outcome measures tied to grant funding be flexible and adaptable to changing needs. Regional providers can deliver better services when funding supports local priorities instead of applying a one-size-fits-all approach. Adaptable outcome measures would allow providers to direct resources where they are needed most, rather than adjusting programs to fit inflexible funding criteria.⁴³⁹
- 5.38 YOUTH Speak also highlighted the importance of including emergency or discretionary funds within certain grant allocations. This would enable regional

⁴³⁵ [Answers to supplementary questions](#), NSW Council of Social Service, 25 March 2025, p 1.

⁴³⁶ Anika Malcolm, Community Development Worker, Benevolent Society, [Transcript of evidence](#), 29 October 2024, p 30.

⁴³⁷ [Answers to supplementary questions](#), Benevolent Society, 26 November 2024, p 9.

⁴³⁸ [Answers to supplementary questions](#), Maranguka Ltd, 21 October 2024, pp 3-4.

⁴³⁹ [Answers to supplementary questions](#), YOUTH Speak, 15 November 2024, p 6.

service providers to respond swiftly to urgent situations, such as youth mental health crises, or community displacement caused by natural disasters.⁴⁴⁰

- 5.39 The Committee heard that many parents and carers work during standard business hours, making it difficult for them to access essential services. The Salvation Army advocated for funding that supports flexible service delivery to ensure all families can access critical supports. Moreover, increased operational funding is needed to run programs outside of standard business hours. This would allow services to offer information, education, and support through diverse formats, including online, in-person, and by phone.⁴⁴¹
- 5.40 Justice Reform Initiative submitted that services and programs are often 'not supported or resourced to provide the long-term, intensive, holistic, wraparound support that the research makes clear is highly effective at reducing justice system involvement'. Access to services is often limited by both explicit and implicit exclusion criteria. For example, individuals on remand frequently cannot access prison-based services. Also, many people are excluded from services because they have multiple concurrent support needs, such as alcohol and other drug dependence and mental health conditions.⁴⁴²
- 5.41 Justice Reform Initiative also emphasised the need for services in NSW that cross geographic boundaries.⁴⁴³
- 5.42 Cr Ellie Tree, Project Coordinator at YOUTh Speak, shared this view, noting that contracts with rigid local government area (LGA) boundaries can hinder service delivery. She explained that a young person may live in one LGA and attend school in another, yet their ability to access support often depends on which LGA the service contract specifies, rather than the young person's actual needs.⁴⁴⁴

⁴⁴⁰ [Answers to supplementary questions](#), YOUTh Speak, 15 November 2024, p 6.

⁴⁴¹ [Answers to supplementary questions](#), Salvation Army, 17 March 2025, p 4.

⁴⁴² [Submission 116](#), Justice Reform Initiative, p 19.

⁴⁴³ [Submission 116](#), Justice Reform Initiative, p 19.

⁴⁴⁴ Ellie Tree, Project Coordinator, YOUTh Speak, [Transcript of evidence](#), 29 October 2024, p 45.

Stakeholders told the inquiry reporting requirements are burdensome

Summary

Reporting requirements that are difficult to manage divert scarce resources from core service delivery activities. Community organisations often rely on multiple funding streams, which can have inconsistent or overlapping reporting requirements. Having flexibility around reporting may help organisations to provide a more fulsome picture of the impact of their programs.

Recommendation 17

That the NSW Government reduce the administrative burden on community service organisations by streamlining grant funding reporting requirements, while recognising the need to collect accurate data that reflects performance against defined KPIs.

- 5.43 Onerous reporting requirements can divert scarce resources from core service delivery activities. The Committee recommends the NSW Government streamline grant funding reporting requirements to reduce this administrative burden.
- 5.44 ANTAR told the Committee that, particularly where it concerns services provided by Aboriginal Community-Controlled Organisations, poorly designed funding models and inefficient reporting requirements 'significantly undermine the ability of First Nations communities to exercise self-determination'.⁴⁴⁵
- 5.45 The Committee heard that community-led organisations are often reliant on multiple funding sources, each with separate compliance and reporting requirements.⁴⁴⁶
- 5.46 People impacted by the justice system often have complex, intersecting needs and there is no single, 'core' funding stream designed to meet every one of those needs. As such, organisations may need to apply for funding from state government departments (for example, NSW Health, Family and Community Services, and Communities and Justice) as well as Australian Government departments. This funding is usually supplemented by small grants, including from local councils, and philanthropic contributions.⁴⁴⁷
- 5.47 The Justice Reform Initiative noted that different government departments may fund similar projects within the same organisation, yet require inconsistent forms of reporting. For example, outcomes and other data may be measured differently across funding streams, including basic discrepancies in how clients and services are counted. It suggests that a more productive approach would involve government departments 'genuinely working together' to review the various funding streams and agree on what data they require.⁴⁴⁸

⁴⁴⁵ [Answers to supplementary questions](#), ANTAR, 17 March 2025, p 3.

⁴⁴⁶ [Submission 180](#), NSW Council of Social Services, p 18.

⁴⁴⁷ [Answers to supplementary questions](#), Justice Reform Initiative, 14 March 2025, p 1.

⁴⁴⁸ [Answers to supplementary questions](#), Justice Reform Initiative, 14 March 2025, p 1.

- 5.48 The Benevolent Society called for flexibility around reporting styles, particularly in communicating cultural impacts. The organisation observed that data systems are typically designed to capture quantitative rather than qualitative information. Quantitative data alone may not provide a complete or accurate picture of a program's actual impact within a community. Cultural impacts, in particular, are often best conveyed through storytelling.⁴⁴⁹
- 5.49 Similarly, Ms Megan Boshell, Area Manager, Central and Far West NSW, Mission Australia, told the Committee:
- Sometimes reporting that is set from funding bodies—I absolutely understand the need to have those, but reporting on statistics, demographics and numbers doesn't tell you a story. It doesn't tell you a story about how a person has experienced a time in a service, what things were like before they came into that program, or things that might have happened in the middle.⁴⁵⁰
- 5.50 Standardised templates, fewer requirements, or permitting smaller providers to report outcomes in ways that are workable for them could all help to streamline reporting and minimise administrative burden.⁴⁵¹ This would allow community organisations to focus their resources on service delivery, rather than navigating complex and time-consuming paperwork.⁴⁵²

Co-designing programs with young people fosters a sense of ownership and responsibility

Summary

Involving young people in the co-design and planning of community projects ensures their needs are met, builds their leadership skills, and fosters a sense of ownership and responsibility. Meaningful co-design can also improve the effectiveness and long-term sustainability of projects and programs designed to support young people.

Recommendation 18

That the NSW Government create incentives for community projects and programs to be co-designed with young people, where appropriate.

- 5.51 Engaging young people in the co-design and planning of community projects and programs ensures their needs and ideas are reflected in community development.⁴⁵³ The NSW Government should create incentives for community projects and programs to be co-designed with young people to ensure they are impactful and relevant.

⁴⁴⁹ [Answers to supplementary questions](#), Benevolent Society, 26 November 2024, p 10.

⁴⁵⁰ Megan Boshell, Area Manager, Central and Far West New South Wales, Mission Australia, [Transcript of evidence](#), 2 October 2024, p 45.

⁴⁵¹ [Answers to supplementary questions](#), YOUTh Speak, 15 November 2024, p 6.

⁴⁵² [Answers to supplementary questions](#), Maranguka Ltd, 21 October 2024, p 4.

⁴⁵³ [Submission 146](#), Social Futures, p 5.

- 5.52 Ms Barraclough noted the importance of actively engaging children and young people in program design, 'bringing them into the picture, drawing on their expertise'.⁴⁵⁴
- 5.53 The Advocate for Children and Young People recommended a 'public health approach' to youth justice – one that focuses on early intervention and prevention strategies, rather than punitive measures. Listening to children and young people who have had contact with the criminal justice system, and incorporating their stories and experiences into decision making processes, is key to this approach.⁴⁵⁵
- 5.54 Social Futures submitted that young people need platforms to express their concerns, ideas, and aspirations for their communities. This can be provided through co-design initiatives, which involve young people directly in decision-making processes, and youth councils and forums. When young people are actively involved in shaping their communities, they develop a stronger sense of ownership and responsibility. This engagement also helps build their leadership skills.⁴⁵⁶
- 5.55 Engaging young people in decision-making fosters a sense of ownership, increasing the likelihood that they will support and promote initiatives. YOUth Speak noted that this involvement enhances the effectiveness and long-term sustainability of programs. Building meaningful relationships, creating tangible opportunities for involvement and making programs fun and rewarding ensures sustained engagement and leads to better outcomes for young people and the community.⁴⁵⁷
- 5.56 The Committee heard from Willa Herron, a 17-year-old YOUth Speak participant and student at Belling High School. She spoke about 'Project Pawn' – a youth-led initiative to revitalise local chess tables that had become a frequent target of vandalism. Through initiatives such as this, Miss Herron said, 'we are not just participating, we are leading the way to meaningful change'.⁴⁵⁸ 'Project Pawn' is discussed further in the case study below.

Case study: 'Project Pawn', Belling Shire⁴⁵⁹

The aim of Project Pawn is to transform an area that has been prone to vandalism into a community space that young people can be proud of and treat with respect. The revitalisation project hopes to reduce anti-social behaviour and build a sense of shared responsibility for public spaces. Project Pawn has provided a platform for young people to drive meaningful change in their communities.

⁴⁵⁴ Judy Barraclough, [Transcript of evidence](#), 24 February 2025, p 33.

⁴⁵⁵ [Submission 184](#), Office of the Advocate for Children and Young People, pp 4, 12.

⁴⁵⁶ [Submission 146](#), Social Futures, p 5.

⁴⁵⁷ [Answers to supplementary questions](#), YOUth Speak, 15 November 2024, p 7.

⁴⁵⁸ Willa Herron, Participant, YOUth Speak, [Transcript of evidence](#), 29 October 2024, p 41.

⁴⁵⁹ [Answers to supplementary questions](#), YOUth Speak, 15 November 2024, pp 4-5.

The project started with a group of five young people from Bellingen High School and the Bellingen Youth Hub. While it has not received funding yet, the group has worked closely with the Bellingen Shire Council, the local Business Chamber, and the Rotary Club to find solutions and progress the project.

A noteworthy by-product of Project Pawn is the increased involvement by young people in local government processes. The Bellingen Shire Council received more than 100 survey responses from young people aged 12-17 in its community strategic planning survey. When young people are given opportunities to contribute to decisions that affect their lives, they are eager to engage.

Young people involved in Project Pawn have gained recognition for their leadership and advocacy. This has led to work and training opportunities, as well as awards from local government. These accomplishments build young people's self-esteem and encourage ongoing community engagement and leadership.

Aboriginal Community-Controlled Organisations are well placed to deliver culturally appropriate support to young First Nations people

Summary

Aboriginal Community-Controlled Organisations (ACCOs) provide culturally safe, person-centred early intervention programs for First Nations people. Building the ACCO sector is Priority Reform Two in the National Agreement on Closing the Gap.

Aboriginal-owned and -led approaches should be the foundational principle when working with First Nations young people.

Recommendation 19

That the NSW Government prioritise funding to Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs) to deliver targeted early interventions to First Nations young people and families. It is important that program delivery and effectiveness is measured using appropriate metrics.

- 5.57 The Committee recommends that the NSW Government prioritise funding to Aboriginal Community-Controlled Organisations (ACCOs) to support effective early interventions for First Nations young people and families. The Committee notes that building the ACCO sector is Priority Reform Two in the National Agreement on Closing the Gap.⁴⁶⁰
- 5.58 The Aboriginal Legal Service (ALS) submitted that 'ACCOs deliver better results for Aboriginal people'.⁴⁶¹

⁴⁶⁰ [National Agreement on Closing the Gap](#), July 2020, p 8.

⁴⁶¹ [Submission 194](#), Aboriginal Legal Service (NSW/ACT) Ltd, p 15.

- 5.59 ACCOs provide culturally safe, person-centred early intervention programs for First Nations people. LGNSW argued that 'the issue of adequate, consistent funding remains' and recommended investment in early intervention initiatives and diversionary approaches via ACCOs.⁴⁶²
- 5.60 Youth Action emphasised that Aboriginal-owned and led approaches should be the foundational principle when working with First Nations young people. They also said that any increase in funding must prioritise First Nations young people and ACCOs. In particular, ACCOs working in youth justice have the expertise to respond with culturally appropriate interventions that strengthen cultural identity and connection to community.⁴⁶³
- 5.61 According to Just Reinvest NSW, lack of cultural understanding can increase the likelihood that a First Nations child is drawn into the child protection system. As was noted in chapter 1 of this report, contact with the child protection system is a significant risk factor for later offending and incarceration. For that reason, collaboration with, and support of, ACCOs is essential, as is adequate cultural training.⁴⁶⁴
- 5.62 When adequately resourced, ACCOs can provide appropriate services and support diversion from the criminal justice system. The Dharriwaa Elders Group reported that, in Walgett, police are currently 'used as the response to all issues of public safety'. Implementing the Closing the Gap Priority Reforms would empower and support ACCOs to deliver critical community-based responses that police are not equipped to provide.⁴⁶⁵
- 5.63 Under the *National Agreement on Closing the Gap*, Australian governments have committed to building formal Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled sectors to deliver services to support Closing the Gap. The Agreement acknowledges that 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled services are better for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, achieve better results, employ more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and are often preferred over mainstream services'.⁴⁶⁶ The Committee's recommendation is consistent with this objective.
- 5.64 The Committee notes concerns raised by Uniting NSW/ACT regarding ACCO-only procurement for key programs such as Youth on Track and the Casework Support program. Uniting cautions that this approach may unintentionally exclude non-Aboriginal children and young people from accessing these essential services.. While Uniting strongly supports investing in ACCOs to deliver youth justice programs, they advise that it is important to ensure that services remain accessible to all young people who need them.⁴⁶⁷

⁴⁶² [Submission 186](#), LGNSW, pp 11-12.

⁴⁶³ [Submission 189](#), Youth Action NSW, pp 10, 49.

⁴⁶⁴ [Submission 174](#), Just Reinvest NSW, p 9.

⁴⁶⁵ [Submission 193](#), Dharriwaa Elders Group, p 8.

⁴⁶⁶ [National Agreement on Closing the Gap](#), July 2020, p 8.

⁴⁶⁷ Charlie Chubb, Head of Northern and Western NSW, Uniting NSW/ACT, [Transcript of evidence](#), 24 February 2025, p 47.

Appendix One – Terms of reference

That the Committee on Law and Safety inquire into and report on:

- a) the drivers of youth crime across regional and rural NSW, particularly since the COVID pandemic;
- b) how a whole of government approach can reduce the drivers and root causes of youth crime in regional and rural NSW;
- c) the wraparound and diversionary services available for youth and families in the regions and rural areas and how they can be better matched to individuals, measured, improved and integrated into a coordinated approach to divert youth from crime, having regard to the NSW Government's commitment to working in partnership with Aboriginal people;
- d) staffing levels and workforce issues, including police staffing, in regional and rural areas and how services can be improved to reduce youth crime in these areas;
- e) recidivism rates in regional and rural areas, and related impacts on the community, services and law enforcement;
- f) the range of functions being performed by NSW police officers, including mental health assistance and youth welfare, on behalf of other agencies in regional and rural areas, and the supports required to assist police; and
- g) any other related matter.

Appendix Two – Conduct of inquiry

The inquiry into community safety in regional and rural communities was self-referred on 20 March 2024. The Chair announced the adoption of the inquiry in the House and a media release was issued the same day. The terms of reference for the inquiry are at Appendix One.

The Committee invited key stakeholders to make a submission to the inquiry. Submissions closed on 31 May 2024. The Committee received 197 submissions from a wide range of stakeholders, including local and state government, community organisations, service providers, academics, community members, and victims of crime. A list of submissions is at Appendix Four, and they are also available on the inquiry's [webpage](#).

Four hearings have been held as part of the inquiry, in:

- Bourke, on 1 October 2024
- Broken Hill, on 2 October 2024
- Kempsey, on 29 October 2024
- Parliament House, Sydney, on 24 February 2025.

At these hearings, the Committee heard from a range of stakeholders, including service providers and non-government organisations, community members, Aboriginal Elders and community representatives, local government, Youth Justice caseworkers, advocacy and policy groups, young people, and government departments. A list of witnesses who appeared at these hearings is at Appendix Four, and the transcripts of evidence taken at the hearings are available on the inquiry's [webpage](#).

The Committee also conducted a number of site visits across NSW, including in Bourke, Broken Hill, Coffs Harbour, Kempsey, and Wagga Wagga, as well as two roundtables with community members and other representatives. Information about these visits is detailed in Appendix Three.

Appendix Three – Site visit reports

We undertook a number of site visits and roundtable discussions as part of this inquiry with communities across NSW. The Committee visited:

- Maranguka Community Hub, Bourke
- Bourke Police Station
- Broken Hill Police Station
- Abcare, Coffs Harbour
- Community members in Kempsey
- Wollundry Dreaming Youth Hub, Wagga Wagga
- Wagga Wagga Police Station

Maranguka Community Hub, Bourke

30 September 2024

At the Maranguka Community Hub, we met with Acting CEO Maxime Nina and Maranguka staff. We learnt about Maranguka's programs for young people, which are delivered in partnership with local service providers. Maranguka is guided by the Bourke Tribal Council in partnership with Just Reinvest NSW, and also receives support from government.

Staff from Maranguka noted that young people in the Bourke community and surrounding area are impacted by a range of issues, including family stress and dysfunction, mental health, intergenerational trauma, low school attendance, and limited availability and accessibility of services.

We discussed:

- the need to reduce Aboriginal young people's contact with the justice system
- diversionary and community development initiatives for young people in the Bourke area
- issues with resourcing and staffing, including burnout
- the drivers of youth offending in Bourke.

We would like to thank Maxime and the staff of Maranguka for their time and valuable contributions, and acknowledge the valuable work they do in the Bourke community.

Bourke Police Station

1 October 2024

At Bourke Police Station, we met with Acting Superintendent Andrew Mensforth, Detective Inspector Andrew Barnes, and Inspector Peter Walton.

We discussed:

- policing issues in the region
- working with community organisations, including resourcing and building connections
- the drivers of youth offending in the region
- the Young Offenders Act and diversionary provisions, including youth justice conferences
- the impacts of programs and initiatives delivered by or in partnership with police.

We extend our thanks to Superintendent Mensforth, Detective Inspector Barnes, Inspector Walton, and the staff at Bourke Police Station for their time and informative contributions.

Broken Hill Police Station

2 October 2024

At Broken Hill Police Station, we met with Assistant Commissioner Andy Holland APM, Western Region Commander, Superintendent David Cooper, District Commander, and staff members.

We discussed:

- trends in crime in Broken Hill
- policing issues, including resourcing
- bail conditions
- the impact of service availability
- the drivers of youth offending in the region.

We extend our thanks to Assistant Commissioner Holland, Superintendent Cooper, and the staff at Broken Hill Police Station for their time and contributions.

Abcare, Coffs Harbour

28 October 2024

In Coffs Harbour, we met with Greg Bennett, Chief Executive Officer, Adam Close, Cultural Programs Manager and Kevin Wilson, Team Leader, Youth on Track, from Abcare.

Abcare is an Aboriginal Community-Controlled Organisation that has delivered Youth on Track in the Coffs Harbour area since February 2024.

Abcare is also an accredited out-of-home care provider and delivers emergency, respite, short- and long-term care placements, as well as recruiting, training, and supporting Aboriginal foster and kinship carers.

We discussed:

- the Youth on Track program, including funding and operation of the program, and its impact on participants
- opportunities and ways to engage with young people when running programs and initiatives
- the drivers of youth offending in the region
- ways to support young people in the community
- out-of-home care
- bail accommodation
- engagement and collaboration with government departments, including Health and Education.

We would like to thank Greg, Adam, and Kevin for their time, insight, and contribution. We would also like to acknowledge the important work that Abcare does for young people in the Coffs Harbour community.

Roundtable discussion with victims of crime, Kempsey 29 October 2024

In Kempsey, we met with residents and victims of crime from the Mid North Coast region to discuss issues related to the inquiry. In the meeting, community members shared their lived experiences with us, highlighted concerns, and offered their perspectives on responses to youth offending in their communities.

We are grateful for the openness and honesty of participants, and would like to thank them for sharing their personal stories with us. We would also like to thank the Member for Oxley, Michael Kemp MP, for his assistance in coordinating the meeting.

Roundtable discussion – Riverina short-term remand pilot program, Wagga Wagga 3 March 2025

In Wagga Wagga, we met with stakeholders involved in the Riverina short-term remand pilot program. The program aims to reduce the number of children and young people (aged 10-17) experiencing avoidable short-term remand in the Riverina region. 'Avoidable short-term

remand' refers to cases where a child is refused bail by police and held in custody, but is later granted bail by a magistrate.

Design of the program is led by the NSW Police Force and the Children's Court of NSW in collaboration with local communities, non-government agencies, and the NSW Government. It is particularly focused on addressing the overrepresentation of First Nations young people in custody. It has been running since 2023.

We discussed:

- the program's design, goals, and outcomes
- funding structures and staffing
- the importance of community-led solutions
- the strength of partnership between government and local organisations in the Riverina region
- associated early intervention programs
- out-of-home care
- service gaps in the Riverina region and their impacts on young people.

We would like to thank all the stakeholders who spoke with us and appreciate their insights and contributions. We recognise the important work of the program and acknowledge the many people involved in providing crucial support to young people in the Riverina.

Wollundry Dreaming Youth Hub, Wagga Wagga 4 March 2025

We met with staff of the Wollundry Dreaming Youth Hub and young people involved in the Hub's programs. The Hub is a Wiradjuri-run space for First Nations young people aged 7-18 in Wagga Wagga. It connects young people with local Elders, First Nations mentors, and youth workers, and works to build young people's awareness of and competence in traditional values, knowledge, skills and customs.

The Hub operates an after-school program that offers meals, homework support, and cultural activities, including dance, storytelling, and art. We heard that the Hub accommodates up to 40 young people and receives about 10 new referrals every week.

During our visit, we had the privilege of attending a youth-led talent show, which featured cultural performances, artworks, and speeches from young people involved in the Hub. We extend our heartfelt thanks to all the young people who generously shared their stories and talents with us.

We would like to thank all the staff and volunteers of the Hub for their time and the valuable and impactful work they do to support young First Nations people in their community. We

would also like to thank Janet Kilgallon, from Youth Justice, and Leanne Sanders, CEO of Visual Dreaming at the Wollundry Hub, for their assistance in coordinating the visit.

Wagga Wagga Police Station

4 March 2025

At Wagga Wagga Police Station, we met with Superintendent Andrew Spliet and Inspector Jillian Gibson.

We discussed

- policing issues in the Riverina region
- police-community relationships
- youth crime
- the importance of preventative approaches.

We extend our thanks to Superintendent Spliet and Inspector Gibson and the staff at Wagga Wagga Police Station for their time and informative contributions.

Appendix Four – Submissions

No.	Author
1	Miss Hannah Jackson
2	Mr Jamie Skeet
3	Mr Stewart MacDonald
4	Mrs Nicola Littlewood
5	Mr Daniel Norris
6	Mrs Kerry Chick
7	Confidential
8	Mr Simon Waller
9	Mr Roger Neader
10	Mr Jason Bush
11	Confidential
12	Ms Wendi Hobbs
13	Mr Logan Smith
14	Mr Andrew Johns
15	Mr Greg McDonald
16	Confidential
17	Mr Stephen Carpenter
18	Confidential
19	Mrs Marion Kenny
20	Mrs Susanne Donoghue
21	Miss Sophie Berghout
22	Name suppressed
23	Hangry
24	Confidential
25	Name suppressed
26	Miss Erika-Lee O'Reilly
27	Ms Angela Martin
28	Mr Ronald Lundstrom
29	Mr Timothy Brooks
30	Mr John Hamparsum
31	Albury Netball Association
32	Confidential

No.	Author
33	Ms Amanda Chalmers
34	Mrs Janell Wheelock
35	Confidential
36	Confidential
37	Ms Amber Martin
38	Mrs Bev Kleinschafer
39	Mr Barry Baldwin
40	Confidential
41	Mr Garry Irwin
42	Confidential
43	Confidential
44	Cr Mark Rodda
45	Confidential
46	Dr Angela Pattison
47	Ms Elly Jurd
48	Ms Fiona Lovelock
49	ANTAR
50	Uniting NSW.ACT
51	Coolamon Shire Council
52	Country Mayors Association of NSW
53	Mr Brian Jeffrey
54	Confidential
55	Inverell Shire Council
55a	Inverell Shire Council
56	Confidential
57	Gunnedah Shire Council
58	Confidential
59	Confidential
60	Confidential
61	Confidential
62	Confidential
63	Mr Shannon Radcliffe
64	Confidential
65	Mr John Philpott
66	Confidential

No.	Author
67	Mrs Gabrielle Geyer
68	Mr Trevor Giblin
69	Ms Bronwyn Elliott
70	Confidential
71	Confidential
72	Mr James Ewan
73	Mr Kenneth Gentle
74	Mrs Sarah Martin
75	Confidential
76	Mr Bryan Keough
77	Ms Joanne Merley
78	Confidential
79	Ms Eleanor Leleu
80	Confidential
81	Confidential
82	Ms Mary Louise White
83	Byron Youth Service Inc.
84	Mrs Julie Coburn
85	Ms Marie Woolnough
86	Narrandera Shire Council
87	Mr Gordon Popple
88	Confidential
89	Ms Jane Mari
90	Ms Barbara Finch
91	Ms Patsy Asch
92	Miss Philippa Morris
93	Mr Jaxon Swift
94	Mr Glen Crump
95	Ms Robin Ritchie
96	One Vision Productions
96a	One Vision Productions
97	Mr Eric Reading
98	Ms Karen Smith
99	Institute of Public Affairs
100	Ballina Shire Council

No.	Author
101	Bega Valley Shire Council
102	Confidential
103	The Hon. Kevin Anderson
104	Name suppressed
105	Ellerslie Flowers
106	Confidential
107	Safer Coonamble Group
108	ANTAR-Armidale
109	SHINE for Kids
110	Mr Peter Bignell
111	Port Macquarie Hastings Council
112	Save the Children and 54 reasons
113	Confidential
114	Country Women's Association Far North Coast Group
115	Lake Macquarie City Council
116	Justice Reform Initiative
117	Mr Sam Woods
118	The Law Society of New South Wales
119	St Vincent de Paul Ballina
120	Texas and District Crime Watch
121	Mrs Stephanie Matthews
122	Mrs Michelle Scott
123	Ms Lynne Hosking
124	Confidential
125	Ms Marian Formosa
126	Dr Diana Eades
127	Mr Peter Brunskill
128	Mrs Colleen Fuller
129	Dr Kerry Dunne
130	Mr Mike Blake
131	Australasian College of Road Safety
132	Country Women's Association of NSW
133	Mr Michael Kemp MP
134	Narrabri Shire Council
135	Raise the Age NSW

No.	Author
136	Legal Aid NSW
137	The Salvation Army
138	Police Association of NSW
139	Tweed Shire Council
140	Confidential
141	Confidential
142	Mr Dave Layzell
143	Redfern Legal Centre
144	HealthWISE
145	Border Regional Organisation of Councils
146	Social Futures
147	New South Wales Council for Civil Liberties
148	Dubbo Regional Council
149	Shoalhaven City Council
150	Ms Marjorie Henzell
151	Youth Off The Streets
152	Mr Adam Fuller
153	Women's Shelter Armidale
154	Shellharbour City Council
155	Ms Elizabeth O'Hara
156	Confidential
157	Mr Matthew Sykes
158	Confidential
159	Mr John Kearns
160	Gunnedah Community Roundtable
161	Greens NSW
162	Maranguka Ltd
163	Ms Miriam Purkiss
164	Mr Peter Gill
165	Fair Treatment for Tamworth Region Campaign
166	Ms Barbara Beatson
167	Mrs Susan C. Dunn
168	Mr Tadeusz (Tad) Kiemski
169	Cr Joshua Black
170	NSW Farmers' Association

No.	Author
171	Mrs Heather Fogarty
172	Professor Ross Homel
173	Confidential
174	Just Reinvest NSW
175	New South Wales Bar Association
176	BackTrack
177	Public Interest Advocacy Centre
178	Dr Chris Krogh, Associate Professor Penny Buykx and Ms April Dimmock
179	Community Industry Group
180	NSW Council of Social Service
181	Confidential
182	Australian Language and Culture Classes at Gunnedah Anglican Church
183	Name.Narrate.Navigate
184	Office of the Advocate for Children and Young People
185	Lachlan Shire Council
186	Local Government NSW
187	Bourke Shire Council
188	Name suppressed
189	Youth Action NSW
190	Domestic Violence NSW
191	Mr Andre Els
192	Cr Debra McGillan
193	Dharriwaa Elders Group
194	Aboriginal Legal Service (NSW/ACT) Limited
195	NSW Government
196	Mr Greg Edwards
197	Kylie Selig

Appendix Five – Witnesses

1 October 2024

Back o' Bourke Information and Exhibition Centre, Bourke, NSW

Witness	Position and Organisation
Leonie Brown	General Manager, Bourke Shire Council, Bourke Shire Council
Cr Lachlan Ford	Councillor, Bourke Shire Council
Rozaria Suckling	Club Manager, PCYC Bourke
Phillip Sullivan	Chair, Bourke Tribal Council
Pania Tahu	Chairperson, Bourke Community Working Party
Rebecca Antoniou	Manager, Bourke Community Corrections Office
Samara Milgate	Case Worker, Bourke Youth Justice Community Office
Vivianne Prince	Case Worker, Bourke Youth Justice Community Office
Maxime Nina	Acting Chief Executive Officer, Maranguka Ltd

2 October 2024

Broken Hill Civic Centre, Broken Hill, NSW

Witness	Position and Organisation
Mayor Tom Kennedy	Mayor, Broken Hill City Council
Gregory Hill	General Manager, Central Darling Shire Council
Assistant Commissioner Andy Holland APM	Western Region Commander, NSW Police Force
Superintendent David Cooper	District Commander, Barrier Police District, NSW Police Force
Anthony Hayward	Transition Worker, Far Western NSW, Community Restorative Centre
Terina King	Manager, Transition Programs - Far West, Community Restorative Centre
Michael Kennedy	Chairperson, Wilcannia Local Aboriginal Land Council
Dominic Holles	Deputy Principal Solicitor (Western NSW), Aboriginal Legal Service

James Clifford	Managing Solicitor (Statewide Children's Criminal Law Practice), Aboriginal Legal Service
Pam Tucker	Treasurer of Broken Hill Branch, Country Women's Association
Fran Greville	Treasurer of Darling River Group, Country Women's Association
Megan Boshell	Area Manager, Central and Far West NSW, Mission Australia
Erin Reberger	Team Leader, Far West NSW, Mission Australia

29 October 2024**Kempsey Shire Council, Council Chambers, West Kempsey, NSW**

Witness	Position and Organisation
Assistant Commissioner Dave Waddell APM	Northern Region Commander, NSW Police
Superintendent Shane Cribb	Commander, Mid North Coast Police District, NSW Police Force
Greg Brown	Aboriginal Community Liaison Officer, Police District Commander's Aboriginal Leadership Group
Justine Russell	General Manager Youth Programs and Social Impact, PCYC - Kempsey
John Roydhouse	Community member
Marilyn Figgett	Community member
Gail Cheers	Community member
Mark Morrison OAM	Community leader and educator
Jillian Ashley	Chief Executive Officer, ShoreTrack
Paul Ireland	Operations Manager, ShoreTrack
Mark Robertson	Founder and Chief Executive Officer, One Vision Productions
Anika Malcolm	Community Development Worker, Benevolent Society
Leish Morrison	Policy Manager, YP SPACE MNC
Deb Tougher	Outreach Manager, YP SPACE MNC
Meagan Probert	Acting Director Operations Child Youth and Family, Regional, Rural and Outer Sydney, Benevolent Society
Clarrie Hoskins	Board member, Dunghutti Elders Council

Jamieson Williams	Assistant Manager, Kempsey, Youth Justice NSW, Department of Communities and Justice NSW
Cr Ellie Tree	Project Coordinator, YOUth Speak
Willa Herron	YOUth Speak participant, YOUth Speak
Julie Hourigan	Chief Executive Officer, SHINE for Kids
Kevin Thorne	Aboriginal Family Support Worker, SHINE for Kids
Jasmine Smith	Team Leader, Youth on Track, Mission Australia

24 February 2025

Macquarie Room, Parliament House, Sydney, NSW

Witness	Position and Organisation
Cr Russell Webb	Executive Board Member, Country Mayors Association
Dr Mindy Sotiri	Executive Director, Justice Reform Initiative
Robert Tickner	Chair, Justice Reform Initiative
Emma Whitnall	Economic Policy Analyst, Just Reinvest NSW
Geoff Scott	CEO, Just Reinvest NSW
Blake Cansdale	National Director, ANTAR
Jessica Johnston	Research and Policy Officer, ANTAR
Nicholas Cowdery	Committee Member, NSW Council for Civil Liberties
Jonathon Hall Spence	Principal Solicitor, Justice and Equity Centre
Alannah Daly	Policy Officer, Justice and Equity Centre
Associate Professor Tamara Blakemore	Associate Professor - Social Work and Program Lead, Name.Narrate.Navigate
Nicole Laupepa	Head of First Nations Services, Youth Off The Streets
Judy Barraclough	CEO, Youth Off The Streets
Penny Lamaro	Chairperson, Youth Action
Andrew Johnson	Interim CEO, Youth Action
Nicky Sloan	CEO, Community Industry Group
Cara Varian	CEO, NSW Council of Social Service
Neha Shah	Policy Lead, NSW Council of Social Service
Dr Tom McClean	Head of Research and Social Policy, Uniting NSW.ACT

Charlie Chubb	Head of Northern & Western NSW, Uniting NSW.ACT
Robyn Bust	Regional Manager (Northern NSW) Youth and Education, The Salvation Army
Elaine Yallop	Regional Manager (Eastern NSW) Youth and Education, The Salvation Army
Zoë Robinson	NSW Advocate for Children and Young People, NSW Advocate for Children and Young People
Deborah Summerhayes	Deputy Secretary for Public Schools, NSW Department of Education
Martin Graham	Deputy Secretary Teaching Learning and Student Wellbeing, NSW Department of Education
Alison McGaffin	Chief Student and Community Officer and Student Support and Community Group, TAFE NSW
Adam Bennett	Executive Director and Learning and Teaching Health Wellbeing and Human Services Faculty, TAFE NSW

Appendix Six – Extracts from minutes

MINUTES OF MEETING NO. 5

2.00pm, 20 March 2024

Meeting room 1043

Members present

Mr Edmond Atalla (Chair), Dr Hugh McDermott (Deputy Chair), Mr Phil Donato, Mr Tri Vo, and Mr Paul Toole.

Officers present

Kieran Lewis, Patrick Glynn, and Janelle Taouk.

Agenda item

1. Inquiry into community safety in regional and rural communities

The Committee considered adopting an inquiry into community safety in regional and rural communities.

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Donato, seconded by Dr McDermott:

- That the Committee on Law and Safety inquire into and report on:
 - a) the drivers of youth crime across regional and rural NSW, particularly since the COVID pandemic;
 - b) how a whole of government approach can reduce the drivers and root causes of youth crime in regional and rural NSW;
 - c) the wraparound and diversionary services available for youth and families in the regions and rural areas and how they can be better matched to individuals, measured, improved and integrated into a coordinated approach to divert youth from crime, having regard to the NSW Government's commitment to working in partnership with Aboriginal people;
 - d) staffing levels and workforce issues, including police staffing, in regional and rural areas and how services can be improved to reduce youth crime in these areas;
 - e) recidivism rates in regional and rural areas, and related impacts on the community, services and law enforcement;
 - f) the range of functions being performed by NSW police officers, including mental health assistance and youth welfare, on behalf of other agencies in regional and rural areas, and the supports required to assist police; and
 - g) any other related matter.
- The inquiry will report back in February 2025.
- That the Committee call for submissions and advertise the inquiry on the Committee's webpage.

- That the Committee secretariat prepare a list of stakeholders for members to consider and that those stakeholders be invited to make a submission.
- That the closing date for submissions be Friday 31 May 2024.
- That the Chair issue a media release announcing the inquiry.
- That the Committee invite relevant NSW Government agencies to provide a private briefing about the inquiry topic, if/as needed.
- That the Committee engage directly with communities, community leaders, victims of crime and other stakeholders.

Resolved, on the motion of Dr McDermott, seconded by Mr Toole: That the Committee write to the Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research (BOCSAR) and the Australian Institute of Criminology to seek information about youth crime in NSW and relevant research publications.

2. Next meeting

The meeting adjourned at 2.21pm until 5 April 2024.

MINUTES OF MEETING NO. 6

9.16am, 5 April 2024

Macquarie Room and videoconference

Members present

Mr Atalla (Chair), Dr McDermott (Deputy Chair), Mr Donato (videoconference), and Mr Vo.

Apologies

Mr Toole.

Officers present

Leon Last, Rohan Tyler, Patrick Glynn, Janelle Taouk, Isabella Ciampa, and Charlie King.

Agenda item

1. Confirmation of minutes

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Donato, seconded by Dr McDermott: That the minutes of the meetings of 7 February 2024 and 20 March 2024 be confirmed.

2. Inquiry into community safety in regional and rural communities

Correspondence

The committee noted the following correspondence:

Sent

- Letter from Chair to BOCSAR dated 22 March 2024
- Letter from Chair to Australian Institute of Criminology dated 22 March 2024

Received

- Letter from Mr Kevin Anderson MP, Member for Tamworth, dated 21 March 2024, requesting that the Committee visit the Tamworth electorate as part of its inquiry into community safety in regional and rural communities

- Letter from Mr Richie Williamson MP, Member for Clarence, dated 21 March 2024, requesting that the Committee hold a hearing in the Clarence electorate as part of its inquiry into community safety in regional and rural communities
- Letter from Ms Steph Cooke MP, Member for Cootamundra, dated 27 March 2024, requesting that the Committee hold a hearing in Cowra, Narrandera or Leeton as part of its inquiry into community safety in regional and rural communities
- Resolved, on the motion of Dr McDermott, seconded by Mr Vo: That the Chair write to Mr Anderson, Mr Williamson and Ms Cooke thanking them for their correspondence and advising that the Committee will consider regional visits and hearings as part of its inquiry in due course.

2.1. Proposed stakeholder list

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Donato, seconded by Mr Vo:

- That the Committee write to the following stakeholders inviting them to make a written submission by 31 May 2024:

Ministers

- Attorney General
- Minister for Police and Counter-terrorism
- Minister for Youth Justice
- Minister for Regional NSW
- Minister for Aboriginal Affairs and Treaty
- Minister for Family and Community Services
- Minister for Corrections

NSW Government agencies and stakeholders

- NSW Department of Communities and Justice
- NSW Police
- NSW Health
- Justice Health NSW
- Aboriginal Affairs NSW
- Department of Education
- Department of Family and Community Services
- Youth Justice NSW
- Juvenile Justice NSW
- Corrective Services NSW
- Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (Youth Justice)
- NSW Ombudsman
- Deputy Ombudsman Aboriginal Programs
- Homes NSW

Local councils

- Local Government NSW
- All regional councils

Legal/judicial bodies

- Law Society of NSW
- NSW Bar Association
- Australian Lawyers Alliance

- Legal Aid New South Wales
- Children's Court of NSW
- NSW Local Court
- NSW District Court
- NSW Supreme Court
- Office of the DPP (NSW)
- Justice Dina Yehia SC
- Youth Koori Court
- Far West Community Legal Centre

Advocacy and diversionary groups

- NSW Council for Civil Liberties
- Youth Advisory Council
- Youth Solutions
- Public Interest Advocacy Centre
- Country Mayors Association
- Police Association of NSW
- Country Women's Association of NSW
- NSW Farmers
- NSW Council of Social Service (NCOSS)
- Justice Reform Initiative
- Jesuit Social Services
- Mission Australia, which runs Youth on Track
- Federation of Parents and Citizens Associations of New South Wales
- Youth Action NSW
- Youth Off The Streets
- PCYC NSW
- Social futures
- Regional Youth Support Services
- BackTrack
- Boys to the Bush / Girls to the Country
- Community Restorative Centre (CRC)
- Taldumande Youth Services
- The Salvation Army, Youth Services
- The Rainbow Lodge Program
- Justice Reform Initiative
- Clontarf Academy
- Broncos Girls Academy
- Jim Moriarty Foundation
- Netball NSW
- AFL/NRL/Cricket NSW
- Just Reinvest
- Weave Youth & Community Services
- Change the Record

Youth health groups

- Headspace
- Orygen
- The Benevolent Society, Rural Youth Mental Health Service

- Samaritans, Rural Young Minds
- ACON
- Beyond Blue
- Blue Knot Foundation
- YFoundations (peak for youth homelessness)

Indigenous advocacy groups

- CAPO:
- NSW Aboriginal Land Council (NSWALC)
- NSW Child, Family and Community Peak Aboriginal Corporation (AbSec)
- Link-Up NSW
- NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Group (AECG)
- Aboriginal Health and Medical Research Council (AH&MRC)
- First Peoples Disability Network (FPDN)
- Aboriginal Legal Service (ALS NSW/ACT)
- BlaQ Aboriginal Corporation
- Miyay Birray Youth Services (Darrel Smith, Chief Executive)
- The NSW Coalition of Aboriginal Regional Alliances (NCARA)
- Deadly Connections Community and Justice Services
- Redfern Legal Centre
- Indigenous Justice Clearinghouse
- National Centre for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Wellbeing Research
- First Nations Education Youth Advisory Group
- 13YARN
- Wellmob
- KARI (Aboriginal child protection)
- National Aboriginal Sporting Chance Academy (NASCA)
- Multicultural Youth Network
- Shine for Kids
- Justice Advocacy Service
- Young Mob, World Vision
- Aboriginal Health & Medical Research Council of NSW
- The Aboriginal Culture, Heritage & Arts Association Inc (ACHAA)
- The Shopfront Youth Legal Centre
- Nelly's Healing Centre Aboriginal Corporation
- Matana Foundation for Young People
- South Coast Medical Service Aboriginal Corporation, Ngudjoong Billa program/Aboriginal Justice Reintegration Program
- Yuwaya Ngarra-Li Team
- Dharriwaa Elders Group
- National Justice Project
- NCARA
- Maranguka Justice Reinvestment
- Baabbayn Aboriginal Corporation
- Redfern Youth Connect
- Wahroonga Aboriginal Corporation
- Torres Strait Regional Authority

Research bodies and academics

- Australian Institute of Criminology
- Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research (BOCSAR)
- Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research (CAEPR)
- Centre for Law and Social Justice, University of Newcastle
- Youth Law Australia
- Charles Stuart University, Centre for Law and Justice
- Professor Murray Lee, Professor in Criminology, University of Sydney Law School
- Dr Garner Clancey, Associate Professor in Criminology & Associate Professor, Lead of the Youth Justice Collaboration, University of Sydney
- Ms Peta MacGillivray, Senior Research Fellow, Yuwaya Ngarra-li Partnership
- Associate Professor Vicki Sentas, School of Law, Society & Criminology, University of NSW
- Centre for Criminology Law and Justice UNSW
- Professor Thalia Anthony, Faculty of Law, University of Technology, Sydney
- Jumbunna Institute for Indigenous Education & Research, University of Technology, Sydney
- Emeritus Professor Ross Homel, AO, Foundation Professor of Criminology and Criminal Justice, Griffith University
- Paul Ramsey Foundation
- Professor Donald Weatherburn, UNSW

Victims of crime support groups

- Victims of Crime Assistance League
- Enough is Enough
- Advocacy Australia, Victims of Serious Crimes

Other jurisdictions

- Aboriginal Justice Unit NT
- Groote Eyelandt Law and Justice Group
- Vic Police for their Embedded Youth Outreach Program

3. ***

4. Next meeting

The meeting adjourned at 3:43pm until 9.20am on 12 April 2024.

MINUTES OF MEETING NO. 7

9.20am, 12 April 2024

Macquarie Room and videoconference

Members present

Mr Atalla (Chair), Dr McDermott (Deputy Chair), Mr Donato (videoconference), and Mr Vo.

Apologies

Mr Toole

Officers present

Leon Last, Patrick Glynn, Ilana Chaffey, and Isabella Ciampa.

Agenda item

1. Confirmation of minutes

Resolved, on the motion of Dr McDermott, seconded by Mr Vo: That the minutes of the meeting of 5 April 2024 be confirmed.

2. Inquiry into community safety in regional and rural communities

2.1. Correspondence

The committee noted the following correspondence:

Received

- Letter from Mr Adam Marshall MP, Member for Northern Tablelands, dated 4 April 2024, requesting that the Committee hold a hearing in the Northern Tablelands electorate as part of its inquiry into community safety in regional and rural communities.
- Letter from Ms Ros Moriarty, Co-Founder, Moriarty Foundation, to Mr Toole, dated 3 April 2024, regarding youth crime and the John Moriarty Football program in Dubbo.
- Letter from Mr Paul Gallagher, General Manager, Coonamble Shire Council, to Mr Toole, dated 26 March 2024, requesting that the Committee visit Coonamble.
- Email, from Kirri Piper, Associate Director Social Policy, Cabinet Office, dated 10 April 2024, requesting that the Committee provides the Cabinet Office with a list of the NSW Government stakeholders invited to make a submission.

Resolved, on the motion of Dr McDermott, seconded by Mr Donato:

- That the Chair write to Mr Marshall and Mr Gallagher thanking them for their correspondence, and advising that the Committee will consider regional visits and hearings as part of its inquiry in due course.
- That the Chair write to Ms Moriarty thanking her for her correspondence and encouraging her to make a written submission to the inquiry.
- That the Committee authorises the provision of the list of government agencies invited to make a submission to the inquiry to the Cabinet Office.

3. ***

4. Next meeting

The meeting adjourned at 2.57pm until a date and time to be determined.

MINUTES OF MEETING NO. 8

1.33pm, 20 June 2024

Room 1254

Members present

Mr Atalla (Chair), Dr McDermott, Mr Donato, Mr Toole, Adjunct Professor Smith, and Ms Stuart.

Apologies

Mr Vo.

Officers present

Kieran Lewis, Patrick Glynn, Karena Li, Caitlin Bailey and Isabella Ciampa.

Agenda item

1. Confirmation of minutes

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Donato, seconded by Dr McDermott: That the minutes of the meeting of 12 April 2024 be confirmed.

2. ***

3. ***

4. Inquiry into community safety in regional and rural communities

4.1. Correspondence

The Committee noted the following correspondence:

- Letter from the Hon Adam Marshall MP, dated 6 May 2024, requesting the Committee visit Inverell as part of its inquiry.
- Letter from Mr Michael Kemp MP, dated 7 May 2024, regarding the Macleay Valley Regional Crime Community Forums, circulated to members on 9 May 2024.
- Chair's response to Mr Kemp, dated 9 May 2024.
- Email from Mr Andrew Johnson, Managing Director, thrive international, dated 8 May 2024, regarding the Understanding young people doing it tough conference in Armidale, circulated to members on 10 May 2024.
- Chair's response to Mr Johnson, dated 10 May 2024.

4.2. Publication of submissions

The Committee considered submissions 1-188 (previously circulated) for publication.

Resolved, on the motion of Adjunct Professor Smith, seconded by Dr McDermott:

- That the Committee accept and publish submissions 1-6, 8-10, 12-15, 17, 19-21, 23, 26-31, 33, 34, 37, 38, 41, 44, 46-53, 55, 55a, 57, 63, 65, 67-69, 72-74, 76, 77, 79, 82-87, 89-91, 93-101, 103, 105, 107-112, 114-123, 126-129, 131, 133-138, 142-155, 157, 159-163, 165-172, 174-180, 183-187 in full with standard redactions, as set out in the publication table.
- That the Committee accept and publish submissions 22, 25, 39, 92, 104, 125, 130, 132, 139, 164, 182 and 188 as partially confidential.
- That submissions 7, 11, 16, 18, 24, 32, 35, 36, 40, 42, 43, 45, 54, 56, 58-62, 64, 66, 70, 71, 75, 78, 80, 81, 88, 102, 106, 113, 124, 140, 141, 156, 158, 173 and 181 remain confidential to the Committee and not be published.

4.3. Briefing notes

The Committee noted the following briefing notes prepared by the secretariat:

- Submissions 'heat map'
- Trends in major criminal offence categories in Regional NSW
- Issues raised in submissions.

4.4. Options for regional hearings and/or site inspections

The Committee discussed options for regional hearings and/or site inspections, including preferred timing ***.

5. General business

The Chair noted the resolution of the House of 15 May 2024 and welcomed Adjunct Professor Smith and Ms Stuart to the Committee.

Mr Ron Hoenig moved, That the resolution of the House of 22 June 2023 establishing the Committee on Law and Safety be amended by:

(1) Omitting paragraph (11) and inserting instead:

'(11) The Committee consist of seven members, comprising:

(a) four Government members (one of whom shall be the Chair);

(b) one Opposition member; and

(c) two Crossbench members.'

(2) In paragraph (12), inserting 'Ms Maryanne Stuart' and 'Adjunct Professor Tamara Smith'.

Question put and passed.

6. Next meeting

The meeting adjourned at 2.02pm until 3 July 2024.

MINUTES OF MEETING NO. 9

11.01am, 5 July 2024

Room 1254 and videoconference

Members present

Mr Atalla (Chair), Dr McDermott, Mr Donato, Mr Toole, Mr Vo (all via videoconference).

Apologies

Adjunct Professor Smith, Ms Stuart.

Officers present

Kieran Lewis, Patrick Glynn, Caitlin Bailey, Isabella Ciampa, Karena Li.

Agenda

1. Confirmation of minutes

Resolved, on the motion of Dr McDermott, seconded by Mr Toole: That the minutes of the meeting of 20 June 2024 be confirmed.

2. ***

3. Inquiry into community safety in regional and rural communities

3.1. Late submissions

The Committee considered late submissions 189-195.

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Toole, seconded by Mr Vo: That the Committee accept and publish submissions 189-195 in full with standard redactions, as set out in the publication table.

3.2. Progress of inquiry

The Committee discussed the inquiry timeline, including regional travel and reporting.

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Vo, seconded by Mr Donato:

- That the Committee amend the terms of reference for the inquiry into community safety in regional and rural communities by deleting the words "report back by February 2025" and replacing them with "table a first report by 30 May 2025, with a final report due by 30 November 2025".
- That the Committee agrees to post the following wording on the inquiry webpage: "Due to the volume of submissions received and the Committee's intention to undertake broad stakeholder engagement across NSW, the Committee has extended its reporting deadline."

3.3. Regional travel

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Donato, seconded by Mr Vo: That the Committee hold its first regional hearings and/or site inspections in the Far West and North Coast regions, and authorises the Chair and the secretariat to:

- make arrangements for regional hearings and/or site inspections
- develop a memo for funding approval.

4. Next meeting

The meeting adjourned at 11.29pm until 2.00pm on 5 August 2024.

MINUTES OF MEETING NO. 10

2.01pm, 5 August 2024

Room 1254 and videoconference

Members present

Mr Atalla (Chair), Dr McDermott (Deputy Chair), Mr Vo, Adjunct Professor Smith, Ms Stuart (all by videoconference), Mr Donato.

Apologies

Mr Toole.

Officers present

Kieran Lewis, Patrick Glynn, Ilana Chaffey, Caitlin Bailey, Isabella Ciampa, Karena Li.

Agenda item

1. ***

2. **Confirmation of minutes**

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Donato, seconded by Dr McDermott: That the minutes of the meeting of 5 July 2024 be confirmed.

3. ***

4. ***

5. **Inquiry into community safety in regional and rural communities**

5.1. **Regional visits – Far West and Mid North Coast regions**

The Chair updated the Committee on arrangements for regional hearings and site inspections in the Far West and North Coast regions in 2024.

Resolved, on the motion of Ms Stuart, seconded by Mr Donato: That, as part of the Committee's planned travel to the Far West region, the Committee:

- charter a flight from Sydney to Bourke, Bourke to Broken Hill, and Broken Hill to Sydney
- ***
- ***

5.2. **Regional visits – Wagga Wagga**

The Committee considered possible site visits to Wagga Wagga in 2025.

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Vo, seconded by Mr Donato: That the Committee conduct site visits in Wagga Wagga in 2025, and authorises the Chair and secretariat to make arrangements and develop a memo for funding approval.

6. ***

7. **Next meeting**

The meeting adjourned at 2.28pm until a date and time to be determined.

MINUTES OF MEETING NO. 11

10.55am, 1 October 2024

Back O' Bourke Information and Exhibition Centre

Members present

Mr Atalla (Chair), Dr McDermott (Deputy Chair), Ms Stuart, Mr Toole, and Mr Vo.

Apologies

Mr Donato and Adjunct Professor Smith.

Officers present

Kieran Lewis, Patrick Glynn, Janelle Taouk, Karena Li, Shanshan Guo and Joe Stewart.

Agenda item

1. Confirmation of minutes

Resolved, on the motion of Dr McDermott, seconded by Ms Stuart: That the minutes of the meeting of 5 August 2024 be confirmed.

2. Inquiry into community safety in regional and rural communities

Pre-hearing deliberative meeting

2.1. Witnesses

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Toole, seconded by Ms Stuart: That the Committee invites the witnesses listed in the notice of the public hearing for Tuesday 1 October 2024, to give evidence to the inquiry into community safety in regional and rural communities.

2.2. Media orders for public hearing

Resolved, on the motion of Dr McDermott, seconded by Mr Toole: That the Committee authorise the audio-visual recording, photography and broadcasting of the public hearing on 1 October 2024, in accordance with the Legislative Assembly's resolution of 9 May 2023, and the Assembly's guidelines for coverage of proceedings for parliamentary committees administered by the Legislative Assembly.

2.3. Questions on notice and supplementary questions

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Toole, seconded by Dr McDermott:

- That the Committee adopt the following process in relation to supplementary questions and answers to questions taken on notice:
 - Members to email any proposed supplementary questions for witnesses to the secretariat by 4pm, Tuesday 8 October;
 - Secretariat to then circulate all proposed supplementary questions to Committee, with members to lodge any objections to the questions by 4pm, Thursday 10 October.
- That witnesses be requested to return answers to questions taken on notice and any supplementary questions within 7 days of the date on which questions are forwarded to witnesses.

The deliberative meeting was adjourned at 10.57am.

3. Public hearing: inquiry into community safety in regional and rural communities

Witnesses and the public were admitted. The Chair opened the public hearing at 11am and made a short opening statement.

The following witnesses were admitted:

Ms Leonie Brown, General Manager, Bourke Shire Council, Bourke Shire Council, affirmed and examined.

Cr Lachlan Ford, Councillor, Bourke Shire Council, affirmed and examined. Evidence concluded and the witnesses withdrew.

The following witness was admitted:

Ms Rozaria Suckling, Club Manager, PCYC Bourke, affirmed and examined. Evidence concluded and the witness withdrew.

The following witness was admitted:

Mr Phillip Sullivan, Chair, Bourke Tribal Council, affirmed and examined. Evidence concluded and the witness withdrew.

The following witness was admitted:

Ms Pania Tahu, Chairperson, Bourke Community Working Party, sworn and examined. Evidence concluded and the witness withdrew.

The following witnesses were admitted:

Ms Rebecca Antoniou, Manager, Bourke Community Corrections Office, sworn and examined.

Ms Samara Milgate, Case Worker, Bourke Youth Justice Community Office, sworn and examined.

Ms Vivianne Prince, Case Worker, Bourke Youth Justice Community Office, sworn and examined.

Evidence concluded and the witnesses withdrew.

The following witness was admitted:

Mr Maxime Nina, Acting Chief Executive Officer, Maranguka Ltd, affirmed and examined. Evidence concluded and the witness withdrew.

The hearing adjourned at 3.31pm.

4. Post-hearing deliberative meeting

4.1. Publication orders

Resolved on the motion of Ms Stuart, seconded by Dr McDermott: That the corrected transcript of public evidence given today be authorised for publication and uploaded to the Committee's webpage.

5. Next meeting

The meeting adjourned at 3.33pm until Wednesday 2 October at 9.50 am.

MINUTES OF MEETING NO. 12

9.58am, 2 October 2024

Broken Hill Civic Centre

Members present

Mr Atalla (Chair), Dr McDermott (Deputy Chair), Ms Stuart, Mr Toole, and Mr Vo.

Apologies

Mr Donato and Adjunct Professor Smith.

Officers present

Kieran Lewis, Patrick Glynn, Janelle Taouk, Karena Li, Shanshan Guo, and Joe Stewart.

Agenda item

1. Inquiry into community safety in regional and rural communities

Pre-hearing deliberative meeting

1.1. Witnesses

Resolved, on the motion of Ms Stuart, seconded by Dr McDermott: That the Committee invites the witnesses listed in the notice of the public hearing for Wednesday 2 October 2024 to give evidence to the inquiry into community safety in regional and rural communities.

1.2. Media orders for public hearing

Resolved, on the motion of Dr McDermott, seconded by Mr Toole: That the Committee authorise the audio-visual recording, photography and broadcasting of the public hearing on 2 October 2024, in accordance with the Legislative Assembly's resolution of 9 May 2023, and the Assembly's guidelines for coverage of proceedings for parliamentary committees administered by the Legislative Assembly.

1.3. Questions on notice and supplementary questions

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Vo, seconded by Dr McDermott:

- That the Committee adopt the following process in relation to supplementary questions and answers to questions taken on notice:
 - Members to email any proposed supplementary questions for witnesses to the secretariat by 4pm, Tuesday 8 October;
 - Secretariat to then circulate all proposed supplementary questions to Committee, with members to lodge any objections to the questions by 4 pm, Thursday 10 October.
- That witnesses be requested to return answers to questions taken on notice and any supplementary questions within 7 days of the date on which questions are forwarded to witnesses.

The deliberative meeting was adjourned at 10am.

2. Public hearing: inquiry into community safety in regional and rural communities

Witnesses and the public were admitted. The Chair opened the public hearing at 10.02am and made a short opening statement.

The following witnesses were admitted:

Mayor Tom Kennedy, Broken Hill City Council, sworn and examined.

Mr Gregory Hill, General Manager, Central Darling Shire Council, sworn and examined.
Evidence concluded and the witnesses withdrew.

The following witnesses were admitted:

Assistant Commissioner Andy Holland APM, Western Region Commander, NSW Police Force, sworn and examined.

Superintendent David Cooper, District Commander, Barrier Police District, NSW Police Force, sworn and examined.

Evidence concluded and the witnesses withdrew.

The following witnesses were admitted:

Mr Anthony Hayward, Transition Worker, Far Western NSW, Community Restorative Centre, affirmed and examined.

Ms Terena King, Manager, Transition Programs - Far West, Community Restorative Centre, affirmed and examined.

Evidence concluded and the witnesses withdrew.

The following witness was admitted:

Mr Michael Kennedy, Chairman, Wilcannia Local Aboriginal Land Council, affirmed and examined by videoconference

Evidence concluded and the witness withdrew.

The following witnesses were admitted:

Mr Dominic Holles, Deputy Principal Solicitor (Western NSW), Aboriginal Legal Service, sworn and examined.

Mr James Clifford, Managing Solicitor (Statewide Children's Criminal Law Practice), Aboriginal Legal Service, affirmed and examined.

Evidence concluded and the witness withdrew.

The following witnesses were admitted:

Mrs Pam Tucker, Treasurer of Broken Hill Branch, Country Women's Association, sworn and examined.

Mrs Fran Greville, Treasurer of Darling River Group, Country Women's Association, sworn and examined.

Ms Megan Boshell, Area Manager, Central and Far West NSW, Mission Australia, affirmed and examined.

Ms Erin Reberger, Team Leader, Far West NSW, Mission Australia, sworn and examined.
Evidence concluded and the witness withdrew.

The hearing adjourned at 3.36pm.

3. Post-hearing deliberative meeting

3.1. Publication orders

Resolved on the motion of Mr Toole, seconded by Dr McDermott: That the corrected transcript of public evidence given today be authorised for publication and uploaded to the Committee's webpage.

4. Next meeting

The meeting adjourned at 3.37pm until a date and time to be determined.

MINUTES OF MEETING NO. 13

8:21am, 29 October 2024

Kempsey Shire Council Chambers, 22 Tozer Street

Members present

Mr Atalla (Chair), Dr McDermott (Deputy Chair), Mr Donato, Adjunct Professor Smith, Ms Stuart, and Mr Toole.

Apologies

Mr Vo.

Officers present

Rohan Tyler, Patrick Glynn, Ilana Chaffey, Karena Li, Chris Herbert, and Nicolle Gill.

Agenda item

1. Confirmation of minutes

Resolved, on the motion of Dr McDermott, seconded by Mr Toole: That the minutes of the meetings of 1 October 2024 and 2 October 2024 be confirmed.

2. Inquiry into community safety in regional and rural communities

Pre hearing deliberative meeting

2.1. Publication of answers to questions on notice and supplementary questions

The Committee noted the following responses received to supplementary questions and questions taken on notice at the public hearings held on 1 and 2 October 2024:

Questions taken on notice

- Country Women's Association, received 10 October 2024

Supplementary questions

- Bourke Youth Justice Community Office, received 18 October 2024
- Maranguka Ltd, received 21 October 2024

Resolved, on the motion of Adjunct Professor Smith, seconded by Ms Stuart: That the Committee accepts the responses to the questions taken on notice at the public hearings on 1 and 2 October 2024, and the responses to supplementary questions, as listed above, and publishes them on its website.

2.2. Publication of late submission

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Donato, seconded by Ms Stuart: That the Committee accepts and publishes the submission from Mr Greg Edwards, Area Manager Far West, Department of Communities and Justice, received on 11 October 2024, in full.

2.3. Forward work program

The Committee discussed its forward work plan for 2025.

2.4. Text on the Committee's website - forward work program

Resolved, on the motion of Ms Stuart, seconded by Mr Toole: That the following text be added to the webpage for the inquiry into community safety in regional and rural communities:

"The Committee intends to undertake further hearings and community consultation throughout 2025 as part of its inquiry into community safety in regional and rural communities. Information will be published on this webpage as soon as it is available."

2.5. Witnesses

Resolved, on the motion of Adjunct Professor Smith, seconded by Mr Donato: That the Committee invites the witnesses listed in the notice of public hearing for Tuesday 29 October 2024 to give evidence to the inquiry into community safety in regional and rural communities.

2.6. Media orders for public hearing

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Donato, seconded by Ms Stuart: That the Committee authorises the audio-visual recording, photography and broadcasting of the public hearing on 29 October 2024, in accordance with the Legislative Assembly's resolution of 9 May 2023, and the Assembly's guidelines for coverage of proceedings for parliamentary committees administered by the Legislative Assembly.

2.7. Questions on notice and supplementary questions

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Donato, seconded by Dr McDermott:

- That the Committee adopts the following process in relation to supplementary questions and answers to questions taken on notice:
 - Members to email any proposed supplementary questions for witnesses to the secretariat by 4pm, Monday 4 November;
 - Secretariat to then circulated all proposed supplementary questions to the Committee, with members to lodge any objections to the questions by 4pm, Wednesday 6 November.
- That witnesses be requested to return answers to questions taken on notice and any supplementary questions within 7 days of the date on which questions are forwarded to witnesses.

2.8. ***

The Chair adjourned the deliberative meeting at 8.31am.

2.9. Public hearing

Uncle Graham Quinlan gave a Welcome to Country.

Witnesses were admitted. The Chair opened the public hearing at 8.39am and made a short opening statement.

The following witnesses were admitted:

Assistant Commissioner Dave Waddell, Northern Region Commander, NSW Police Force, sworn and examined.

Superintendent Shane Cribb, Commander, Mid north Coast Police District, NSW Police Force, sworn and examined.

Greg Brown, Aboriginal Community Liaison Officer, Police District Commander's Aboriginal Leadership Group, NSW Police Force, sworn and examined.

Justine Russell, General Manager Youth Programs and Social Impact, PCYC Kempsey, sworn and examined.

Evidence concluded and the witnesses withdrew.

The following witnesses were admitted:

John Roydhouse, sworn and examined.

Marilyn Figgett, sworn and examined.

Gail Cheers, sworn and examined.

Evidence concluded and the witnesses withdrew.

The following witnesses were admitted:

Mark Morrison OAM, community leader and educator, sworn and examined. Jillian Ashley, Chief Executive Officer, ShoreTrack, sworn and examined.

Paul Ireland, Operations Manager, ShoreTrack, sworn and examined.

Mark Robertson, Founder and Chief Executive Officer, One Vision Productions, affirmed and examined.

Evidence concluded and the witnesses withdrew.

The following witnesses were admitted:

Anika Malcolm, Community Development Worker, Benevolent Society, sworn and examined.

Megan Probert, Director Learning and Capability, Benevolent Society, affirmed and examined.

Leish Morrison, Policy Manager, YP SPACE MNC, affirmed and examined. Deb Tougher, Outreach Manager, YP SPACE MNC, affirmed and examined.

Evidence concluded and the witnesses withdrew.

The following witness was admitted:

Clarrie Hoskins, Board member, Dunghutti Elders Council, sworn and examined.

Evidence concluded and the witness withdrew.

The following witness was admitted:

Jamieson Williams, Assistant Manager, Kempsey Youth Justice NSW, Department of Communities and Justice NSW, affirmed and examined.

Evidence concluded and the witness withdrew.

The following witnesses were admitted:

Ellie Tree, Project Coordinator, YOUth Speak, affirmed and examined. Willa Herron, YOUth Speak participant, affirmed and examined.

Julie Hourigan, Chief Executive Officer, SHINE for Kids, sworn and examined.

Kevin Thorne, Aboriginal Family Support Worker, SHINE for Kids, affirmed and examined.

Jasmine Smith, Team Leader, Youth on Track, Mid North Coast (Mission Australia), affirmed and examined.

Evidence concluded and the witnesses withdrew.

The public hearing concluded at 1.45pm.

Post hearing deliberative meeting

The Chair resumed the deliberative meeting at 1.49pm.

2.10. Publication orders

Resolved, on the motion of Dr McDermott, seconded by Adjunct Professor Smith:

That the corrected transcript of public evidence given today be authorised for publication and uploaded to the Committee's webpage.

3. ***

4. Next meeting

The meeting adjourned at 1.52pm until a date and time to be confirmed.

MINUTES OF MEETING NO. 14

8.50am, 24 February 2025

Macquarie Room and videoconference

Members present

Mr Atalla (Chair), Dr McDermott (Deputy Chair), Ms Stuart (via videoconference), Mr Toole, and Mr Vo.

Apologies

Mr Donato and Adjunct Professor Smith.

Officers present

Kieran Lewis, Patrick Glynn, Janelle Taouk, Ilana Chaffey, and Karena Li.

Agenda item

1. Confirmation of minutes

Resolved, on the motion of Dr McDermott, seconded by Ms Stuart: That the minutes of the meeting of 29 October 2024 be confirmed.

2. ***

3. ***

4. Inquiry into community safety in regional and rural communities

Pre-hearing deliberative meeting

4.1. Witnesses

Resolved, on the motion of Ms Stuart, seconded by Dr McDermott: That the Committee invites the witnesses listed in the notice of the public hearing for 24 February 2025 to give evidence to the inquiry into community safety in regional and rural communities.

4.2. Media orders for public hearing

Resolved, on the motion of Dr McDermott, seconded by Ms Stuart: That the Committee authorises the audio-visual recording, photography and broadcasting of the public hearing on 24 February 2025, in accordance with the Legislative Assembly's resolution of 9 May 2023, and the Assembly's guidelines for coverage of proceedings for parliamentary committees administered by the Legislative Assembly.

4.3. Questions on notice and supplementary questions

Resolved, on the motion of Dr McDermott, seconded by Ms Stuart:

- That the Committee adopt the following process in relation to supplementary questions and answers to questions taken on notice:
 - Members to email any proposed supplementary questions for witnesses to the secretariat by 4pm Wednesday 5 March;
 - Secretariat to then circulate all proposed supplementary questions to the Committee, with members to lodge any objections to the questions by 4pm Friday 7 March.
- That witnesses be requested to return answers to questions taken on notice and any supplementary questions within 7 days of the date on which questions are forwarded to witnesses.

4.4. Inquiry correspondence

Sent

- Email to Broken Hill stakeholders, 5 November 2024, conveying the Committee's best wishes to residents.
- Letter to Maxime Nina, 9 December 2024, thanking Maranguka for meeting with the Committee in Bourke.
- Letter to Adam Close, 9 December 2024, thanking Abcare for meeting with the Committee in Coffs Harbour.
- Letter to Brendan Moylan MP, 9 December 2024, responding to his request for the Committee visit to Inverell.
- Letter to Michael Kemp MP, 9 December 2024, thanking Mr Kemp for his assistance during the Committee's visit to Kempsey.
- Letter to Cr Susannah Pearse, 31 January 2025, responding to her request for the Committee to hold a regional hearing in Moree.

- Letter to Aileen MacDonald MLC, 31 January 2025, responding to her representations on behalf of Cr Susannah Pearse.

Received

- Email from Mr Rob Hamilton, 29 October 2024, providing notes containing comments and feedback from Wauchope community members.
- Letter with attachment, from Mr Brendan Moylan MP, 29 October 2024, requesting that the Committee visits Inverell as part of its inquiry into community safety, and attaching a letter of support from Cr Kate Dight, Mayor of Inverell Shire Council.
- Email from Ms Tracie Kemp, 29 October 2024, providing further comments following the afternoon tea held on 29 October, forwarded to the Committee's mailbox by Mr Michael Kemp MP and the Oxley electorate office.
- Email from Mr Jason Househam, 29 October 2024 (forwarded from the Prospect electorate office) with screenshots of security footage.
- Email with attachment from Mr Brad Alfred, Magpie Centre Indigenous Corporation Limited, 1 November 2024, with information about the Corporation.
- Letter from the Hon Steve Whan MP, Minister for Skills, TAFE and Tertiary Education, 3 December 2024, responding to concerns raised by the Committee on behalf of Maranguka Ltd about TAFE NSW Bourke.
- Email from Cr Susannah Pearse, 2 January 2025, requesting that the Committee hold a regional hearing in Moree.
- Letter from Aileen MacDonald MLC, 8 January 2025, supporting Cr Pearse's request for a hearing to be held in Moree.
- Email with attachment from Dr Chris Krogh, University of Newcastle, 18 February 2025, providing the Committee with the report on the Regional Youth Support Services 131 Youth Hub in Gosford.
- Email from Andrew Connolly, 20 November 2024, asking whether the Committee plans to invite the Country Women's Association of NSW to a future public hearing.

Resolved, on the motion of Dr McDermott, seconded by Mr Toole: That the Chair reply to Mr Connolly acknowledging the CWA's interest in the inquiry and noting that the Committee will keep CWA in consideration for future hearings.
- Letter from Mr Roy Butler MP, 29 January 2025, requesting that the Committee reopen public submissions to its inquiry into community safety in regional and rural communities.

Resolved, on the motion of Dr McDermott, seconded by Mr Toole: That the Chair reply to Mr Butler advising that the Committee does not intend to reopen the submissions portal on the inquiry webpage, but may be willing to accept late submissions from organisations and members of the community.

Mr Toole joined the meeting at 8.58am. Mr Vo joined the meeting at 9.00am.

The Chair adjourned the deliberative meeting at 9.01am.

4.5. Public hearing

Witnesses were admitted. The Chair opened the public hearing at 9.03am and made a short opening statement.

The following witness was admitted:

Cr Russell Webb, Executive Board Member, Country Mayors Association, sworn and examined.

Evidence concluded and the witness withdrew.

The following witnesses were admitted:

Dr Mindy Sotiri, Executive Director, Justice Reform Initiative, affirmed and examined.

Robert Tickner, Chair, Justice Reform Initiative, sworn and examined.

Emma Whitnall, Economic Policy Analyst, Just Reinvest NSW, affirmed and examined.

Geoff Scott, CEO, Just Reinvest NSW, affirmed and examined.

Evidence concluded and the witnesses withdrew.

The following witnesses were admitted:

Blake Cansdale, National Director, ANTAR, affirmed and examined.

Jessica Johnston, Research and Policy Officer, ANTAR, affirmed and examined.

Evidence concluded and the witnesses withdrew.

The following witnesses were admitted:

Nicholas Cowdery, Committee Member, NSW Council for Civil Liberties, affirmed and examined by videoconference.

Jonathon Hall Spence, Principal Solicitor, Justice and Equity Centre, affirmed and examined.

Alannah Daly, Policy Officer, Justice and Equity Centre, affirmed and examined.

Evidence concluded and the witnesses withdrew.

The following witness was admitted:

Associate Professor Tamara Blakemore, Program Lead, Name.Narrate.Navigate, sworn and examined.

Evidence concluded and the witness withdrew.

The following witnesses were admitted:

Judy Barraclough, CEO, Youth Off The Streets, sworn and examined.

Nicole Laupepa, Head of First Nations Services, Youth Off The Streets, sworn and examined.

Penny Lamaro, Chairperson - Youth & Policy Association, Youth Action, affirmed and examined.

Andrew Johnson, Interim CEO, Youth Action, affirmed and examined.

Evidence concluded and the witnesses withdrew.

The following witnesses were admitted:

Nicky Sloan, CEO, Community Industry Group, affirmed and examined by videoconference.

Cara Varian, CEO, NSW Council of Social Service, affirmed and examined.

Neha Shah, Policy Lead, NSW Council of Social Service, affirmed and examined.

Evidence concluded and the witnesses withdrew.

The following witnesses were admitted:

Dr Tom McClean, Head of Research and Social Policy, Uniting NSW.ACT, affirmed and examined.

Charlie Chubb, Head of Northern & Western NSW, Uniting NSW.ACT, affirmed and examined.

Robyn Bust, Regional Manager (Northern NSW) Youth and Education, The Salvation Army, sworn and examined.

Elaine Yallop, Regional Manager (Eastern NSW) Youth and Education, The Salvation Army, sworn and examined.

Evidence concluded and the witnesses withdrew.

Mr Toole left the meeting at 2.57pm.

The following witness was admitted:

Zoë Robinson, Advocate for Children and Young People, affirmed and examined.

Evidence concluded and the witness withdrew.

The following witnesses were admitted:

Deborah Summerhayes, Deputy Secretary for Public Schools, NSW Department of Education, affirmed and examined.

Martin Graham, Deputy Secretary, Teaching, Learning and Student Wellbeing, NSW Department of Education, affirmed and examined.

Alison McGaffin, Chief Student and Community Officer and Student Support and Community Group, TAFE NSW, sworn and examined.

Adam Bennett, Executive Director and Learning and Teaching, Health Wellbeing and Human Services Faculty, TAFE NSW, sworn and examined.

Evidence concluded and the witnesses withdrew.

Dr McDermott left the meeting at 4.15pm.

The public hearing concluded at 4.46pm.

Post-hearing deliberative meeting

The Chair resumed the deliberative meeting at 4.48pm.

4.6. Publication orders

Resolved, on the motion of Ms Stuart, seconded by Mr Vo: That the corrected transcript of public evidence given today be authorised for publication and uploaded to the Committee's webpage.

4.7. Publication of answers to questions on notice and supplementary questions

The Committee noted the following responses received to questions taken on notice and supplementary questions from the public hearings held on 1 and 29 October:

Answers to questions taken on notice

- Kempsey Youth Justice (Department of Communities and Justice), received 8 November 2024

Answers to supplementary questions

- ShoreTrack, received 14 November 2024
- YOUth Speak, received 15 November 2024
- YP SPACE MNC, received 19 November 2024
- SHINE for Kids, received 19 November 2024
- NSW Police, Northern Region Command, received 19 November 2024
- PCYC Kempsey, received 20 November 2024
- Youth Justice Kempsey, received 20 November 2024
- Bourke Shire Council, received 21 November 2024
- Benevolent Society, received 26 November 2024
- One Vision Productions, received 17 December 2024

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Vo, seconded by Ms Stuart: That the Committee

- accept and publish the responses to questions taken on notice by the Department of Communities and Justice at the public hearing on 29 October 2024;
- accept and publish the responses to supplementary questions from ShoreTrack, YOUth Speak, SHINE for Kids, PCYC Kempsey, Youth Justice Kempsey, Bourke Shire Council and One Vision Productions in full with standard redactions;
- accept and publish the responses to supplementary questions from the Benevolent Society ***
- accept and publish the responses to supplementary questions from YP SPACE MNC ***.

4.8. Request for correction of fact

The Committee noted correspondence received from Cr Ellie Tree, requesting a correction to part of her evidence given on 29 October 2024.

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Vo, seconded by Ms Stuart: That the Committee:

- publishes Cr Tree's correspondence requesting a correction to part of her evidence given on 29 October 2024 under 'Other Documents' on the inquiry webpage; and
- inserts a footnote providing a link to the published correspondence at the relevant section of the transcript.

4.9. Publication of late submissions

Resolved, on the motion of Ms Stuart, seconded by Mr Vo: That the Committee:

- publishes Ms Selig's submission in full with standard redactions;

- publishes One Vision Productions' supplementary submission as 'Submission 96A' in full with standard redactions.

5. Future inquiry activity

5.1. ***

5.2. Proposed inquiry timeline

The Committee discussed the inquiry timeline, including the timing of a first report and future locations for site visits and hearings.

6. ***

7. Next meeting

The meeting adjourned at 4.57pm until a date and time to be confirmed.

Unconfirmed minutes of meeting no. 15

10.02am, 26 May 2025

Room 1136 and videoconference

Members present

Mr Atalla (Chair), Dr McDermott (Deputy Chair), Adjunct Professor Smith, Mr Toole (via videoconference), and Mr Vo (via videoconference).

Apologies

Ms Stuart and Mr Donato

Officers present

Kieran Lewis, Patrick Glynn, Janelle Taouk, Ilana Chaffey, and Nicolle Gill.

Agenda item

1. Confirmation of minutes

Resolved, on the motion of Dr McDermott, seconded by Adjunct Professor Smith: That the minutes of the meeting of 25 February 2025 be confirmed.

2. Resolution permitting recording of meeting

Resolved, on the motion of Adjunct Professor Smith, seconded by Dr McDermott: That the Committee agrees to record the meeting for the purposes of committee staff preparing the minutes and report amendments, and that the recording be deleted when the report is tabled.

3. ***

4. Inquiry into community safety in regional and rural communities

4.1. Correspondence

The Committee noted the following correspondence:

Sent

- Letter from Chair to Andrew Connolly, dated 6 March 2025, regarding the CWA's interest in attending a future public hearing.

- Letter from Chair to Roy Butler MP, dated 6 March 2025, regarding late submissions to the community safety inquiry.
- Letter from Chair to Joe McGirr MP, dated 17 March 2025, regarding the Committee's site visit to Wagga Wagga.
- Letters from Chair to roundtable stakeholders, dated 17 March 2025, regarding the Committee's site visit to Wagga Wagga.
- Letter from Chair to Brendan Moylan MP, dated 17 March 2025, regarding ANTAR's request that the Committee visit Moree and Armidale.
- Letter from Chair to Aileen MacDonald MLC, dated 17 March 2025, regarding ANTAR's request that the Committee visit Moree and Armidale.

Received

- Email from Aileen MacDonald MLC on behalf of ANTAR, dated 26 February 2025, regarding ANTAR's request that the Committee visit Moree and Armidale. Chair's reply to this correspondence noted above.
- Letter from Brendan Moylan MP on behalf of ANTAR, dated 5 March 2025, requesting that the Committee visit Moree and Armidale as part of its inquiry. Chair's reply to this correspondence noted above.
- Email from the Advocate for Children and Young People, dated 20 March 2025, providing a copy of 2020 report on children and young people's experiences in Youth Justice Centres.
- Email from Natalie Riley, Burrun Dalai, dated 25 March 2025, declining to provide answers to the Committee's written questions.

4.2. Submission – Change of publication status

Resolved, on the motion of Adjunct Professor Smith, seconded by Dr McDermott: That the publication status of submission 125 be changed from 'public' to 'confidential', as requested by the individual who made the submission.

4.3. Publication of answers to questions on notice and supplementary questions

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Vo, seconded by Dr McDermott: That the Committee accept and publish on its website the following responses to the questions taken on notice at the public hearing on 24 February 2025 and responses to the supplementary questions.

Questions taken on notice

- ANTAR – received 17 March 2025
- TAFE NSW – received 17 March 2025
- Advocate for Children and Young People – received 18 March 2025
- Youth Action – received 24 March 2025

Supplementary questions

- NSW Council for Civil Liberties – received 13 March 2025
- Justice Reform Initiative – received 14 March 2025

- ANTAR – received 17 March 2025
- Justice and Equity Centre – received 17 March 2025
- The Salvation Army – received 17 March 2025
- Uniting NSW.ACT – received 17 March 2025
- Youth Off The Streets – received 17 March 2025
- TAFE NSW – received 17 March 2025
- Name.Narrate.Navigate – received 17 March 2025
- Advocate for Children and Young People – 18 March 2025
- Country Mayors Association – received 24 March 2025
- Just Reinvest NSW – received 24 March 2025
- Youth Action – received 24 March 2025
- NSW Council of Social Service – received 25 March 2025
- Community Industry Group – 25 March 2025
- Department of Education – 31 March 2025

4.4. Clarification of evidence

The Committee considered Alison McGaffin's correspondence of 7 March 2025, clarifying evidence given at the public hearing on 24 February 2025.

Resolved, on the motion of Adjunct Professor Smith, seconded by Mr Vo: That the Committee:

- accept and publish Ms McGaffin's correspondence clarifying evidence given at the public hearing on 24 February 2025 under 'Other Documents' on the inquiry webpage
- inserts a footnote providing a link to the published correspondence at the relevant section of the transcript.

4.5. Publication of document provided by Wagga Wagga police

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Toole, seconded by Dr McDermott: That the Committee accept and publish the document about Showcasing, Learning About Youth Supports (SLAYS), provided by NSW Police during the Committee's visit to Wagga Wagga, under 'Other Documents' on the inquiry webpage.

4.6. Consideration of Chair's draft report

Resolved, on the motion of Adjunct Professor Smith: That the Committee consider the Chair's draft report chapter by chapter starting with recommendations and findings.

Findings and recommendations

- Dr McDermott proposed that, in Recommendation 1:
 - the words 'considers further investment' be inserted following 'NSW Government'.
 - the word 'proven' be inserted following 'mental health programs'.

- Adjunct Professor Smith proposed that, in Recommendation 5: the words 'including young women' be inserted following 'at risk of offending behaviour'.
- Adjunct Professor Smith proposed that, in Recommendation 9, the words 'on track' be omitted and replaced by the words 'receive ongoing support'.

Discussion ensued.

Resolved, on the motion of Dr McDermott, seconded by Adjunct Professor Smith: That the findings and recommendations as amended stand as part of the report.

Chapter 1

- Adjunct Professor Smith proposed that the following be inserted following paragraph 1.7: The statistical data indicates that while Aboriginal young people make up approximately 8 per cent of NSW's population aged 10-17, they make up 57 per cent of young people proceeded against by police, and 57 per cent of young people in custody.
- Adjunct Professor Smith proposed that, under the subheadings 'Individual risk factors' and 'Family-based risk factors', a bullet point be added reading 'socio-economic disadvantage and poverty'.
- Mr Toole proposed that, the following paragraph be inserted after paragraph 1.54: 'NSW Police have provided evidence in regards to police resourcing, particularly prisoner transfers, mental health, and replacement of officers on extended leave and its impact on policing. The Committee intends to explore this further in its final report for this inquiry.'
- Adjunct Professor Smith proposed that the information box under paragraph 1.55 be moved to follow paragraph 1.54.

Discussion ensued.

Resolved, on the motion of Dr McDermott, seconded by Mr Vo: That chapter 1 as amended stand as part of the report.

Chapter 2

- Adjunct Professor Smith proposed that, in paragraph 2.26:
 - The word 'they' be omitted and replaced by the word 'facilitators' following 'Although such groups are helpful'.
 - The words 'and government support' be omitted.
 - The words 'and therapeutic benefit.' be inserted, following 'sustainability'.

Discussion ensued.

Resolved, on the motion of Adjunct Professor Smith, seconded by Mr Toole: That chapter 2 as amended stand as part of the report.

Mr Vo left the meeting at 10.58am.

Chapter 3

- Adjunct Professor Smith proposed that, in paragraph 3.14, the words 'of a young person's' be inserted following 'can impact many'.
- Adjunct Professor Smith proposed that, in paragraph 3.27:

- The words 'and Country' are added following 'from their community and family'.
- That the words 'For young women in regional areas placed in Reiby Youth Justice Centre in Sydney, this is a particular concern.' be added following 'without having been convicted of an offence.'
- Adjunct Professor Smith proposed that, in paragraph 3.36:
 - The word 'some' is inserted before 'youth service providers'.
 - The word 'struggle' is omitted and replaced with 'feel ill-equipped'.

Discussion ensued.

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Toole, seconded by Dr McDermott: That chapter 3 as amended stand as part of the report.

Chapter 4

Resolved, on the motion of Dr McDermott, seconded by Adjunct Professor Smith: That chapter 4 stand as part of the report.

Chapter 5

- Adjunct Professor Smith proposed that, in paragraph 5.1, the words 'as well as gaps in services.' are inserted, following 'responsiveness to community needs'.

Discussion ensued.

Resolved, on the motion of Dr McDermott, seconded by Adjunct Professor Smith: That chapter 5 as amended stand as part of the report.

Resolved, on the motion on of Adjunct Professor Smith, seconded by Dr McDermott:

1. That the draft report as amended be the report of the Committee and that it be signed by the Chair and presented to the House.
2. That the Chair and Committee staff be permitted to correct stylistic, typographical and grammatical errors.
3. That, once tabled, the report be published on the Committee's webpage.

4.7. Report cover

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Toole, seconded by Dr McDermott: That the proposed image circulated in the meeting papers be used on the cover of the Committee's tabled report and that the report be subtitled 'Interim report: Addressing the drivers of youth crime through early intervention'.

4.8. Future inquiry activity

Resolved, on the motion of Adjunct Professor Smith, seconded by Dr McDermott: That, as part of its inquiry into community safety in regional and rural communities, the Committee conduct regional public hearings and site visits in the New England and Central West and Orana regions, and a public hearing at Parliament House, and authorises the Chair and Committee staff to make arrangements.

4.9. Terms of reference

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Toole, seconded by Dr McDermott: That the terms of reference for the Committee's inquiry into community safety in regional and rural

communities be amended by omitting the words '30 November 2025' and replacing them with 'early 2026.'

5. Next meeting

The meeting adjourned at 11.25am until a date and time to be determined.