



Homeless 16 and 17-year-olds

Yfoundations position paper

The issue

In an average year, more than 3,000 unaccompanied 16 and 17-year-olds present to Specialist Homelessness Services (SHS) in NSW. They can stay in youth refuges, which are funded to provide housing and support for up to three months. But when it comes time to move on, these homeless children and young people face a dire lack of options.

In the past decade, the NSW Government has paid considerable attention to unaccompanied children aged 12 to 15 years accessing SHS. This cohort is covered by an age-specific service (the Homeless Youth Assistance Program) and a [policy](#) that mandates that if homeless children can't return to their families, Child Protection must step in.

Unfortunately, homeless 16 and 17-year-olds – who are classified as 'young people' under the NSW Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998 – have not received the same response. Like under-16-year-olds, their [most common reason](#) for leaving home is relationship and family breakdown. But unlike children, SHS providers aren't mandated to report young people to Child Protection for living away from home, and there is no policy limiting the time they spend living in an age-appropriate SHS.

There are some factors that make it is easier for SHS to care for 16 and 17-year-olds – for example, they can receive Youth Allowance and consent to medical treatment. But this age group are still not legally adults and are [extremely vulnerable](#) and [at risk of chronic homelessness](#). And while they are eligible for mainstream youth housing programs, such as transitional accommodation or Rent Choice Youth, most have not had the time or support to build the independent living skills that these programs demand.



[See our position paper on homeless 12 to 15-year-olds](#)



[See our Rent Choice Youth factsheet](#)

Medium-term accommodation services are an important lifeline for this age group. Through providing 24/7 supported accommodation in a home-like environment for one to two years, these services offer the stability that homeless children and young people need to reconnect with family, finish their education and avoid negative longer-term outcomes. Unfortunately, there are only five medium-term facilities left across NSW. This appalling service gap means the majority of vulnerable children and young people are forced to 'refuge-hop' between crisis services, couch surf or even sleep rough.

Our asks

The NSW Government should fund seven new medium-term accommodation services in regional and country areas and top up funding for the five existing services.

The 2014 Going Home Staying Home reform [resulted in a critical loss](#) of medium-term accommodation services. There are now only five services left across NSW, all of which are in metropolitan areas. To adequately support homeless 16 and 17-year-olds, Yfoundations is calling on the NSW Government to provide \$5,740,000 ongoing annual funding to operate at least seven new medium-term services. Given that regional NSW does not have a model of this kind, we recommend that these new services are established in regional and country areas.



[See our fact sheet on medium term accommodation factsheet](#)

The five medium-term services which do currently exist are underfunded, having to source supplementary funding through philanthropy or even run at a loss. Yfoundations recommends these services are provided \$1,291,028 p.a ongoing top-up funding to match the funding level of proposed new services. This will give existing medium-term accommodation providers funding certainty and enable them to adequately support the homeless young people they are designed to help.

The NSW Government must fund additional Foyers for vulnerable youth including capital costs where necessary.

While medium-term accommodation will provide the necessary level of support for many homeless 16 and 17-year-olds, a small number in this age group do have the readiness and maturity to access broader programs such as Foyers. There are currently [13 accredited Youth Foyers in Australia](#), but only two of these are in NSW.



[See our Foyer factsheet](#)

The NSW Government must increase housing options for young people with complex needs.

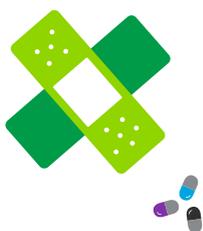
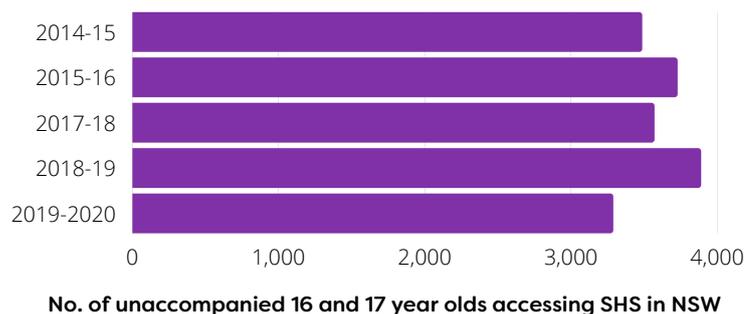
Some homeless 16 and 17-year-olds will require [more intensive support](#) than that which medium-term accommodation or Foyer can provide. Sadly, the NSW youth homelessness system does not have sufficient specialised services to support these young people. To address this, Yfoundations is calling on the NSW Government to increase the number of placements for young people with complex needs, including therapeutic residential and foster care placements and drug and alcohol rehabilitation programs and expanding the 'A Place To Go Program.'



[See our housing for young people with complex needs position paper](#)

The evidence

Around 3,000 16 and 17-year-olds access SHS services alone in NSW each year.



Homeless young people experience [high rates of mental](#) and [physical health issues](#) and [drug use problems](#). They are also more likely to engage in [risk-taking behaviour](#) and become involved in the [criminal justice system](#).



The [Cost of Youth Homelessness](#) report estimated that every homeless young person costs the Australian health and justice system \$17,868 in 2014/15. These costs climb higher if we consider the lifelong impacts of youth homelessness – including disengagement from schooling, long-term unemployment, and chronic homelessness.

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Experiences of early homelessness are currently putting young people in NSW [at risk of lifelong marginalisation](#).

Homeless young people in regional, country and rural NSW face additional challenges which are compounded by the [lack of support services](#). Non-metropolitan areas tend to face [higher rates of poverty](#) and [youth unemployment](#).



Young people in rural and remote areas also have [poorer health outcomes](#) than those living in metropolitan areas and are more likely to [drop out of school early](#). More recently, those living in regional, country and rural NSW have faced unprecedented challenges related to increasing [rental unaffordability and decreasing availability](#).