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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

## **Yfoundations 2022-23 NSW Budget Response**

### **The 2022-23 NSW Budget neglects homeless children and young people**

Once again, the 2022-23 NSW Budget does not include a single new funding measure for children and young people experiencing homelessness.

**There is no new investment in crisis services, no new funding for medium-term or transitional accommodation, no new investment to end the incarceration of homeless children and young people, and no investment in youth-specific social housing.**

Yfoundations acknowledges that funding for improved access to affordable preschool options is an important approach to ensure children have a positive start to life. However, the absence of any funding for children and young people beyond this age cohort who are at risk of or experiencing homelessness remains a glaring omission. The evidence is compelling: children and young people represent significant numbers who are cycling through the crisis systems, leaving home because of domestic and family violence, couch-surfing, and living in severely overcrowded accommodation. The outcome of this budget gives these children and young people no choice but to continue living within these vulnerable and insecure circumstances. The most recent AIHW Specialist Homelessness Services (SHS) Report indicated nearly 14,000 young people aged 15-24 years old presented on their own during 2020-21.

The budget neglects any affordable housing options for young people even though they face considerable barriers to accessing a home independently. Young people often experience age discrimination and are unable to afford properties in the private rental market. The average income for young people has fallen over the past decade, while rental prices have become increasingly unaffordable. Young people also face an average wait time of five to ten years to access social housing.

“Yet again, the NSW Government has missed a vital opportunity to support homeless children and young people. Without new funding for affordable, youth-specific housing, young people have nowhere to go. This will only perpetuate their cycle in and out of homelessness,” said Pam Barker, CEO of Yfoundations.

The budget also failed to address the alarming rates of incarceration of homeless children and young people. The Bail Assistance Line has been critical in providing accommodation support to children and young people who are denied bail because they couldn't provide an appropriate bail address. The NSW Government has missed a critical opportunity to expand the currently limited reach of the program by funding new contracts, particularly in regional areas of NSW. In 2019/20 alone, 236 highly vulnerable adolescents were held in detention in NSW simply because they were homeless.

““We are disappointed by the lack of increased funding for the Bail Assistance Line and its team to provide urgent care and accommodation to our state’s highly vulnerable youth exiting the juvenile justice system,” said Barker.

Yfoundations’ call for medium term housing to provide supported accommodation to 16 to 18 year olds who have complex needs and are unable to live independently was also ignored. We are frustrated that the government has missed this crucial opportunity to invest in providing a stable environment for this vulnerable cohort. It cannot be ignored that more than 3,000 unaccompanied 16 to 18-year-olds – classified as ‘young people’ under the NSW Care and Protection Act (1998) – present to SHS in NSW on an average year.

New funding for the Together Home program is welcomed, however, will not impact significantly on homeless youth. Young people’s homelessness is predominantly hidden with only 3% of young homeless people sleeping rough. Much more needs to be done to support the other forms of homelessness that young people experiencing such as couch surfing, overcrowding and living in refuges because home is not a safe place.

“Everyone has a right to live in safety and in a home they can afford. More medium-term accommodation, as well as public housing, is needed urgently to stop young people constantly moving in and out of homelessness,” notes Barker.

It was encouraging to see the NSW Government recognise the successful Foyer Central initiative. The Foyer Model is an important support accommodation model for 18 to 22-year-olds to access stable accommodation and tailored support to achieve independence over time. Unfortunately, the success of the Foyer Central initiative was not taken seriously and it is disappointing the budget failed to replicate this approach.

“We will continue to fail our most vulnerable children and young people if we don’t support them in their critical times of need. This budget lacks vision – and heart,” said Barker.

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### **About Yfoundations**

Yfoundations is the peak body for youth homelessness in NSW. It represents young people at risk of and experiencing homelessness, and also represents the services that provide direct support to children and young people. Since it was founded as the Youth Refuge Action Group in 1979, Yfoundations has been supporting young people who are at risk of and experiencing homelessness and works collaboratively with members, NGOs, government departments and community members, to provide policy and structural advocacy, services for young people, health projects, and research and sector development. Yfoundations believes that with access to mechanisms that support the development and attainment of each foundation, a young person is more likely to enter adulthood with the skills, interests, competencies and healthy behaviours necessary to build a productive and bright future. Find out more: [yfoundations.org.au](http://yfoundations.org.au)

### **About Pam Barker, Chief Executive Officer, Yfoundations**

Pam Barker brings extensive experience across the not-for-profit sector. She sits on the board of: National Youth Coalition for Housing (NYCH), My Foundations Youth Housing, WayAhead Mental Health Association, and Australian Youth Affairs Coalition (AYAC). Her experience includes youth services, homelessness prevention, mental health programs, and reform.

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