MORE THAN DISTRESS: HOW CLIMATE CHANGE IS SHAPING YOUNG PEOPLE'S LIVES

FINDINGS FROM THE 2025 MISSION AUSTRALIA YOUTH SURVEY

MISSION AUSTRALIA

ORYGEN

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We acknowledge the traditional custodians of lands throughout Australia, and we pay our respects to the Elders past, present and future for they hold the memories, culture and dreams of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. We recognise and respect their cultural heritage, beliefs and continual relationship with the land and we recognise the importance of the young people who are our future leaders.

This report was developed by Orygen in partnership with Mission Australia. The work was led by Caroline Gao, Jana Menssink, Myriam Ziou, Shu Mei Teo, Mengmeng Wang, Hasini Gunasiri, David Baker, Samantha Eala, Sunny Nguyen, Neerja Singh, and Kate Filia from Orygen, and Naheen Brennan and Tamara Freeburn from Mission Australia. The expert input of other contributors from Orygen and Mission Australia who provided helpful insights, feedback, design and support were instrumental in shaping the work.

ISBN: 978-1-875357-44-4

The report may be cited as: Gao, C.X., Menssink, J., Ziou, M., Teo, S.M., Wang, M. Gunasiri, H., Baker, D.G., Eala, S.J.L., Nguyen, S.N., Singh, N., Freeburn, T, Brennan, N., and Filia, K. (2026) More than distress: How climate change is shaping young people's lives - Findings from the 2025 Mission Australia *Youth Survey*. Orygen: Melbourne, VIC and Mission Australia: Sydney, NSW.

A special thank you to the young people who shared with us, via the 2025 Mission Australia Youth Survey, their responses on current issues, especially with regard to climate change factors and their impact on mental health and wellbeing.

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Mission Australia *Youth Survey* has been capturing the aspirations, experiences and concerns of young people each year since 2002. As the largest survey of its kind in Australia, it provides a national platform for young people to share what matters to them and their perspectives on key issues. The findings inform the development of targeted initiatives and support advocacy for the needs of young people and their families. Orygen and Mission Australia partner on a series of reports that draw on the *Youth Survey* to examine mental health and wellbeing trends among young people in Australia.

In this report, we examined climate-related impacts spanning emotional distress, functional disruption (e.g., impacting school/work, sleeping, having fun, and relationship), concerns about safety during severe weather events, and belief that collective efforts can make a difference in addressing climate change (collective efficacy). We identified four distinct groups with different types and severity of impacts:

- **Low** impact group: low climate distress, functional disruption or safety concerns;
- **Emotional** impact group: high climate distress but low functional disruption;
- **Functional** impact group: high climate distress and functional disruption; and
- **Safety** impact group: moderate climate distress and functional disruption, but low sense of safety and collective efficacy.

Combined, the **Safety**, **Emotional**, and **Functional** impact groups comprised more than three in four young people, indicating that climate-related impacts were widespread. Young people in the **Safety** impact and **Functional** impact groups reported the poorest overall wellbeing, with higher levels of psychological distress, loneliness, low happiness, reduced control and negative future outlook. These two groups were concentrated among young people already facing social, economic and health-related vulnerabilities, as well as existing impacts of severe weather events in their household and community.

Our findings on the diverse, widespread and uneven climate change impact on young people point to the urgent need for policy action with escalating climate-related challenges in Australia. Consistent with our previous reports, these recommendations include:

- embedding young people's climate-related mental health needs within policy and service planning;
- co-developing responses with young people; strengthening workforce and community capacity to recognise and respond to climate-related impacts;
- increasing access to mental health and social supports; investing in prevention, resilience and recovery approaches that are tailored to young people;
- enhancing climate change and disaster resilience education; and
- supporting targeted research.

The current findings suggest these recommendations remain highly relevant, but also point to the need for three additional priorities:

- developing new joint community and clinical programs for young people experiencing emotional and functional impacts;
- increasing opportunities for environmental action in community and education settings, including as a form of social prescribing; and
- strengthening safety-focused supports for young people exposed to, or at risk of, extreme weather events.

We believe this will help drive actions to better support young people and, in doing so, reduce the impact of climate change on mental health and wellbeing, foster hope and avoid despair, as well as motivate climate actions.

2. BACKGROUND

Climate change represents one of the most significant threats to young people's mental health and wellbeing in the 21st century[1,2]. In Australia, climate change and environment are consistently rated as one of the top three concerns by young people[3]. For many young people, climate change is not an abstract environmental issue but a reality that influences their worldview, educational choices, career aspirations, and long-term life planning[4,5].

The mental health impacts of climate change occur in multiple, connected ways. Some of these are direct impacts, such as the experience of severe weather events (also referred to as climate disasters) that cause immediate stress, trauma, and disruption to daily life. Others are indirect, including ongoing worry about climate change, anxiety about the future, and feelings of hopelessness[6]. These impacts do not happen in isolation, they often overlap and build on each other over time.

There is strong evidence that young people are particularly affected by severe weather events. These events can disrupt daily routines, limit access to essential supports, affect housing stability, increase climate-related distress, and worsen mental health[7]. Young people who are already feeling high levels of climate distress, or who are living with pre-existing mental health conditions, may be especially vulnerable to these impacts[8,9].

Overall, this means that climate change does not affect all young people in the same way. Some may mainly experience emotional distress, others may face direct risks to their safety and daily life, and some may experience both. At present, we still lack a clear understanding of the complex and overlapping patterns of climate-related impacts and needs among young people, which limits the development of targeted policy and support responses.

The 2025 Mission Australia *Youth Survey*

This report draws on the 2025 *Youth Survey* (young people aged 14-19 years), to explore climate change-related mental health, safety, and functional impacts using five specific statements adapted from existing measures:

- Climate worry: "I'm worried that climate change threatens people and the planet";
- Climate grief: "I feel sad about species going extinct and animals suffering because of climate change";
- Safety: "I feel safe and comfortable at home during really bad weather" *(e.g. heatwaves, storms, extreme cold)*;
- Functional impact: "My feelings about climate change negatively affect my daily life" *(at least one of the following: concentrating, school/work, sleeping, having fun, relationships)*; and
- Collective efficacy: "When people come together to fight climate change, I feel we can make a difference."

Of the 17,155 young people who completed the survey, 16,230 responded to all five above items and were included in this report. We have used cluster analysis to identify distinct groups of young people in Australia to help inform more targeted health and policy responses to growing climate impacts.

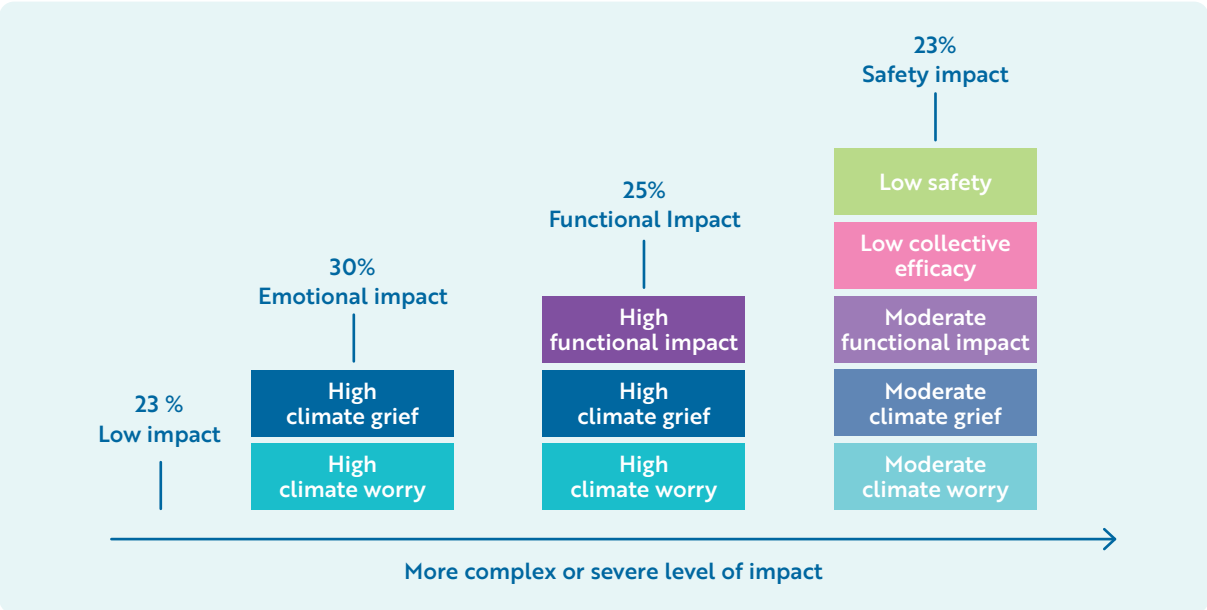
3. KEY FINDINGS

Among survey participants included in this report, climate change and the environment was among the top three 'most important issues in Australia' reported by young people (28%), following cost of living (64%), and alongside mental health (29%).

Climate impact subgroups

We identified four distinct groups of young people impacted by climate distress in different ways, highlighting the different experiences of climate distress for young people from different backgrounds and lived experiences. Young people differed with respect to the impact on their mental health and day-to-day functioning, their sense of safety, and their belief in a shared ability to influence climate outcomes (Figure 1 and Table A1 for detailed statistics).

Figure 1. Four climate impact groups identified across climate worry, grief, functional impact, safety concerns and collective efficacy statements.



Low impact group (23%) showed low levels of concern about climate issues across all areas. Only a small proportion reported worrying about impacts on people and the planet (7%), or feeling sad about species extinction (9%). Most (90%) reported that their feelings about climate change do not negatively affect their daily life. Safety during severe weather events was also not a concern for this group, with 99% reporting they feel safe and comfortable at home during these events.

Emotional impact group (30%) showed high levels of climate concern, particularly at an emotional level. Most reported worrying about the impacts of climate change on people and the planet (74%), and feeling sad about species extinction (88%). Despite this, these feelings did not appear to impact their daily functioning (5%). Further, most (96%) reported feeling safe and comfortable at home during severe weather events, and over half (54%) reportedly believe that collective action can make a difference, suggesting that climate concern is accompanied by a sense of hope and agency.

Functional impact group (25%) reported the highest level of climate distress across multiple dimensions. Levels of worry (81%) and grief (84%) were high, and around half reported that their feelings about climate change negatively affected their day-to-day functioning (49%). Most still reported feeling physically safe at home during severe weather events (97%). This group also showed the strongest belief in collective action, with 67% agreeing that people can make a difference suggesting that even high levels of concern can coexist with a sense of agency.

Safety impact group (23%) was primarily concerned about their physical safety during severe weather events. None of the young people in this group reported feeling safe and comfortable during severe weather. However, their emotional responses to climate issues were more mixed, with many reporting moderate levels of climate-related worry (57%) and grief (55%) and functional impact (62%). Notably, only 16% believe that people can make a difference through collective action, suggesting a sense of immediate risk without confidence in broader solutions.

Collectively, more than three in four young people were impacted by climate change, environmental issues and severe weather events.

Factors associated with climate impact groups

Climate impact groups were not distributed evenly across young people, instead, they were shaped by a different combination of age, gender, geography, socioeconomic position and lived experience of exposure to severe weather events (see Table A2).

Young people are more likely to be in the Low impact group if they:

Are younger

Are males

Live in more regional/ remote areas

Are more socially and economically advantaged

Have less direct exposure to severe weather events

Young people in the **Low** impact group appeared less affected by climate concerns and broader life challenges than others. They were also the youngest group overall, with most (72%) aged 14–16. A higher proportion of young people in this group identified as male (67%), and more lived in outer regional or remote areas (29%) than in the other groups. Young people in this group reported fewer financial hardships than the other groups (20%), and less likely to have been affected by severe weather events in the past year (29%, similar to the **Emotional** impact group but lower than the other groups). Young people in this group were less interested in engaging with climate issues. For example, 66% disagreed that they would like more climate change or environment-related opportunities at school or in their community.

Young people are more likely to be in the Emotional impact group if they:

Are females

More urban - Living in major cities

Are more socially and economically advantaged

Have less direct exposure to severe weather events

The **Emotional** impact group included the highest proportion of young people identifying as female (59%). Most young people in this group reported living in major cities (56%), with fewer living in outer regional or remote areas (19%). Overall, this group is more socially and economically advantaged than the other groups, with 39% coming from higher income neighbourhoods, and most (77%) reporting no financial hardship. Their concern about climate issues appeared to translate into greater interest in taking action, with 35% of young people in this group reporting that they would like more opportunities to engage with climate and environmental issues at school or in their community.

Young people are more likely to be in the Functional impact group if they:

Are identified as gender diverse

Are identified as Aboriginal and/ or Torres Strait Islander

Living in major cities

Have some social and economical disadvantage

Have a disability or mental health condition

Have more direct exposure to severe weather events

The **Functional** impact group was in some ways similar to the Emotional impact group, but more socially and economically vulnerable overall. It included a higher proportion of young people who identified as male (45%), and nearly twice as many young people than in the Emotional impact group who identified as gender diverse (3.1%). Young people in this group were more likely to identify as coming from culturally diverse backgrounds (45%), as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander (5.7%), and live in outer regional or remote areas (22%), as well as experiencing disadvantage, including living in low socioeconomic areas (38%), and living with a disability (11%). A third of young people in this group reported having experienced severe weather impacts on their household or community (33%). Despite these challenges, this group showed the highest level of climate engagement among all four groups, with 62% of young people reported wanting more climate change or environmental opportunities at school or community.

Young people are more likely to be in the Safety impact group if they:

Are identified as gender diverse

Are Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islanders

Are culturally and linguistically diverse

Live in more regional/ remote areas

Have a disability or mental health condition

Are more socially and economically disadvantaged

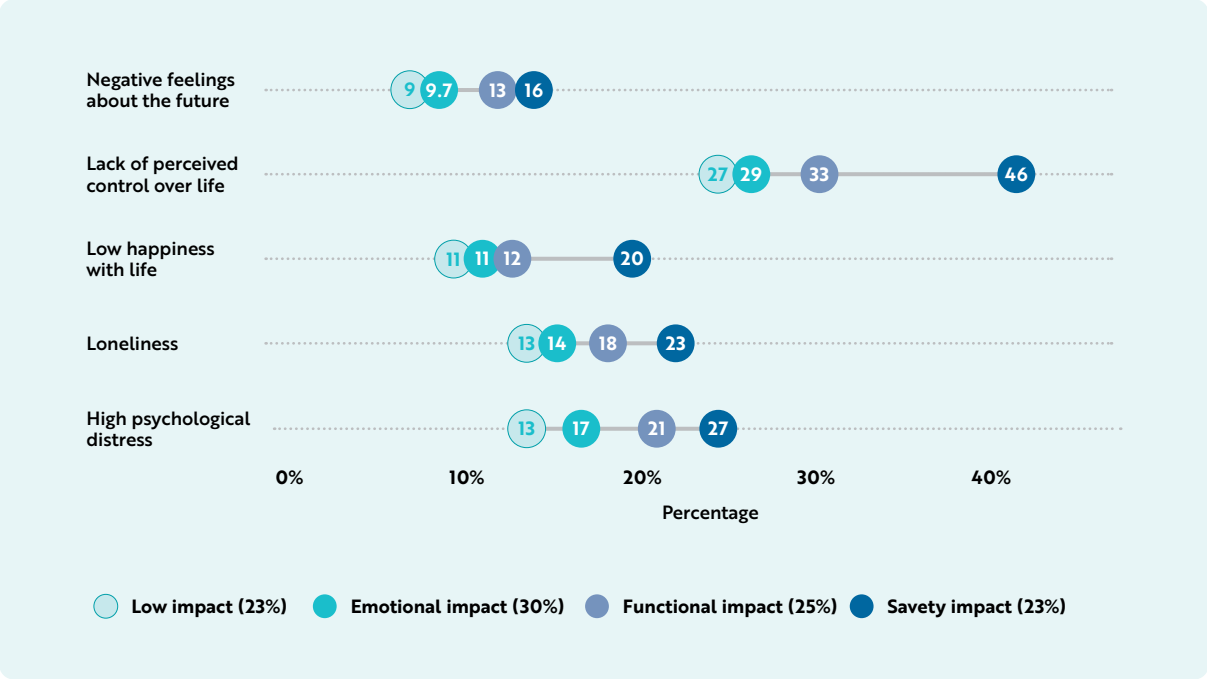
Have more direct exposure to severe weather events

A different pattern was observed in the **Safety** impact group, with many young people facing multiple forms of marginalisation and social exclusion. This group had the highest proportions of young people who identified as gender diverse (3.2%), Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander (6.9%), culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD, 48%), and who were not currently engaged in education, employment or training activities (NEET, 1.5%), as well as those experiencing poor living conditions (25%) and homelessness (5.9%). This group also had the highest rate of young people who identified as living with a disability (13%), and experiencing difficulties with relationships and social support (40%). Importantly, more young people in this group than any other reported having been affected by severe weather events over the past year (37%), with 17% reporting direct impacts on their household and 20% on their community.

Wellbeing differences across climate impact groups

Climate distress and sense of safety during severe weather events does not occur in isolation; it is closely linked to broader aspects of young people's wellbeing. For adolescents, this period of development is already marked by changes in identity, independence, and vulnerability to mental ill-health. During this time, feelings such as hope about the future, sense of safety and control, life satisfaction, and psychological distress can strongly shape young people's decisions, behaviours, and engagement in key developmental activities including education, relationships, and future planning. Climate change is known to affect many of these same domains[6]. A clear pattern emerged in our data; young people most affected are also those experiencing the poorest overall wellbeing.

Figure 2. Prevalence of mental health and wellbeing outcomes across climate-impact groups.



The **Safety** impact group stood out as particularly vulnerable, with young people in this group reporting the highest levels across all indicators, including almost half perceiving a low sense of control over their lives (46%), more than a quarter reporting high psychological distress (27%), and almost a quarter feeling lonely all or most of the time (23%). A further one in five reported low levels of happiness with life (20%), and 16% reported feeling quite negatively about their future. This points to a group facing both immediate concerns about safety, and broader challenges to their mental health and sense of stability.

Young people in the **Functional** impact group also showed substantial wellbeing difficulties, particularly with respect to a low perception of control over their lives (33%) and high psychological distress (21%). These findings describe a group with both impacts on day-to-day functioning and broader challenges related to mental health and wellbeing.

By comparison, outcomes were more favourable in the **Emotional** impact group, where levels of high psychological distress and poor wellbeing were lower, despite high levels of concern about climate issues. This suggests that worry alone does not necessarily translate into poorer wellbeing; that perhaps poorer wellbeing is more likely when concerns are accompanied by perceived threats to safety or disruption to daily life.

Young people in the **Low** impact group reported the most positive wellbeing overall, with the lowest levels of high psychological distress and disruption across all wellbeing markers, suggesting relative insulation from both climate-related concerns and their broader impacts.

Importantly, these differences are not explained by other factors alone. Even after accounting for potential confounders (such as age, gender, sociodemographic status and residential location), poorer wellbeing outcomes remain concentrated among the **Safety** and **Functional** impact groups. In contrast, differences between the **Emotional** and **Low** impact groups no longer persist after controlling for confounders across most of outcomes.

What this means?

The survey found that more than three in four young people in Australia experienced some form of climate-related emotional, functional or safety impact. These impacts were associated with poorer mental health, future outlook and wellbeing overall, particularly among young people who experienced functional and safety impact, who together comprised around half of the total sample. These findings point to three clear priorities: preventing progression to functional impairment among young people who are emotionally engaged with climate change and environmental issues; developing care and recovery pathways for those already experiencing functional impacts; and providing targeted, safety-focused support for young people at risk of severe weather events.

Our results also highlight that climate change's impacts on young people are deeply intertwined with the social determinants that shape cycles of disadvantage. Poverty, housing instability, marginalisation, disability, pre-existing mental health vulnerability, and unequal exposure to environmental risks all influence how climate change is experienced and who is most affected[10]. As a result, climate change does not simply add a new burden; it can intensify existing inequalities, reinforcing cycles of vulnerability and undermine the mental health and wellbeing of young people, particularly those already facing social and structural disadvantage.

Our measure of sense of safety during severe weather events was relatively simple, and the survey may not have fully captured the experiences of young people in remote and very remote communities. Further research is needed to strengthen understanding of the lived experience of young people in these communities and to inform more targeted policy and support responses. As the survey examined associations at a single point in time, the relationship between climate-related experiences and broader wellbeing outcomes should be interpreted with caution and may reflect the influence of multiple interacting factors.

4. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POLICY AND PRACTICE

Across climate, health, and disaster policy, most recommendations and reforms have focused on accelerating emissions reductions, reducing health impacts, and strengthening national resilience and recovery from climate-related disasters[11-13]. These are important steps in addressing the impacts of climate change, but there remains a critical lack of targeted strategies for supporting young people in Australia experiencing the highest levels of climate distress and vulnerability, particularly during severe weather events. Addressing these challenges requires a more tailored and multi-faceted approach that recognises the diverse ways climate concerns are experienced and the uneven distribution of risk. Drawing on our previous reports on climate concerns and the impacts of severe weather events on young people[14,15], we have broadly recommended following priority policy strategies:

- **Embed young people's climate-related mental health needs within policy and service planning.** Climate-related distress and disruptions are now significant features of young people's lives, yet these experiences are not consistently recognised in youth, mental health, climate or disaster policy. Embedding these needs in policy is essential to ensure responses are developmentally appropriate, coordinated and sustained.

- **Co-develop policies and programmes with young people.** Young people are directly affected by climate change but are often excluded from decisions about how systems respond. Co-development helps ensure that responses are relevant to young people's lived experience, more acceptable to those they are intended to support, and better able to address emerging needs.

- **Strengthen workforce and community capacity to recognise and respond to climate-related impacts.** Many young people present to schools, community services, primary care or youth services. Building climate-informed, trauma-informed and youth-friendly capability across the workforce is therefore critical for early recognition, appropriate support and timely referral.

- **Increase mental health and social support.** Young people need access to support that addresses both the emotional impacts of climate distress and the practical consequences of climate-related disruptions. This includes accessible and integrated health and community care. Targeted support is needed for those most affected, such as those who face overlapping risks related to repeated severe weather impacts, social disadvantage, housing instability, marginalisation or pre-existing mental health vulnerabilities.

- **Invest in prevention, resilience and recovery approaches that are tailored to young people.** Effective responses should not be limited to crisis management after disasters occur. Young people need supports that strengthen resilience before, during and after climate-related events including approaches that foster safety, stability, connection, coping and opportunities for meaningful action.

- **Enhance disaster resilience and climate change education.** Develop national education strategy and programmes focusing on joint climate change, disaster resilience and emotional impact education. This will equip young people with the knowledge, practical skills and opportunities needed to prepare for current and future climate change impact and to participate in collective environmental action.

- **Targeted research funding.** Invest in targeted research to build robust assessments of the mental health impacts of climate change and develop effective prevention, early intervention and treatment approaches for young people.

These recommendations remain highly relevant in light of the current findings. Indeed, this analysis identified a higher level and broader patterning of climate-related impacts, further developing our understanding from previous reports. This highlights a more urgent need for action across these domains. In addition to the broad policy strategies outlined above, the distinct profiles identified in this report suggest the need for the following further policy directions.

- **Develop new joint community and clinical programs for young people experiencing climate-related emotional and functional impacts.** Although climate distress is not a diagnostic category, a substantial subgroup of young people may experience significant functional impacts, including difficulties with sleep, concentration, daily activities, motivation, study, relationships and future planning[16]. At present, there is a lack of evidence-based interventions specifically designed to respond to climate distress and related functional impairment, as traditional therapeutic approaches may not fully address the existential, moral, social and collective dimensions of climate-related distress[17]. This highlights the need for new models of care that bring together community and clinical responses. Peer-supported, nature-based, place-based, arts-based and culturally informed programs may offer promising approaches for reducing distress, strengthening coping, building hope and fostering collective efficacy[18-20]. Advancing this area will require close collaboration across research, community organisations and clinical services.

- **Increase opportunities for environmental action in community and education settings.** Over 60% of young people in the Functional impact group reported wanting more opportunities to engage in climate and environmental activities at school or in their community, indicating strong demand for accessible, action-oriented pathways. These programs can provide young people with meaningful opportunities for connection, agency, problem-solving and collective action, helping to reduce feelings of helplessness and build hope. For young people experiencing or recovering from mental health challenges, environmental action may also act as a form of social prescribing, whereby participation in activities such as nature restoration, community resilience initiatives, conservation, climate advocacy or other place-based activities can promote both wellbeing and engagement, in turn supporting functional recovery. Although such programs exist in Australia[21], they are rarely implemented at scale and have largely focused on passive nature exposure rather than environmental action. Targeted funding is needed to adapt, implement and evaluate environmental action-based social prescribing models, which may offer a substantially more cost-effective approach to addressing both rising mental ill-health and the impacts of climate change on young people.

- **Strengthen safety-focused supports for young people at risk of severe weather events.** For young people exposed to or at risk of severe weather events, policy responses should include educational and support programs that strengthen preparedness, safety and practical coping. Currently, there is a lack of comprehensive, age-appropriate education packages and programs that help young people prepare for and cope with events such as extreme heat, bushfires and floods. This includes support for physical safety, emotional coping, social connection, housing disruption or instability, and help-seeking. These programmes should be co-designed with young people to ensure they are relevant and acceptable. It is also critical to invest in longer-term infrastructure that can support housing stability, community connection and therapeutic care for at-risk young people, not only in the immediate aftermath of disasters, but as part of a sustained approach to building community resilience. Particular attention is needed for young people with pre-existing mental-ill health, disability, housing instability or other factors that may heighten vulnerability during disasters. These safety-focused responses should be embedded across youth, health, education and community systems, rather than delivered as stand-alone disaster materials.

Given the interaction between climate change and the social determinants of wellbeing, these recommendations should be implemented with particular attention to young people experiencing disadvantage, including through meaningful inclusion of their perspectives in policy design and delivery.

5. REFERENCES

1. McGorry PD, Mei C, Dalal N, et al. The Lancet Psychiatry Commission on youth mental health. *Lancet Psychiatry 2024;* 11(9): 731–74. https://doi.org/10.1016/s2215-0366(24)00163-9.

2. Berry HL, Bowen K, Kjellstrom T. Climate change and mental health: a causal pathways framework. *International Journal of Public Health* 2010; 55(2): 123–32. https://doi.org/10.1007/s00038-009-0112-0.

3. Australia M. *Youth Survey* 2025: National Report. Australia: Mission Australia, 2025. https://www.missionaustralia.com.au/what-we-do/evidence-impact-and-advocacy/research/youth-survey/youth-survey-reports/youth-survey-2025/.

4. Eala S, Gao C, Zhang Y, et al. Over 3,000 voices: Understanding how climate change shapes the minds and lives of young people in Australia. *PsyArXiv* 2025. https://doi.org/10.31234/osf.io/e4sfb_v1.

5. Pihkala P. Anxiety and the ecological crisis: An analysis of eco-anxiety and climate anxiety. *Sustainability* 2020; 12(19): 7836. https://doi.org/10.3390/su12197836.

6. Lawrance EL, Thompson R, Newberry Le Vay J, Page L, Jennings N. The impact of climate change on mental health and emotional wellbeing: A narrative review of current evidence, and its Implications. *International Review of Psychiatry* 2022; 34(5): 443–98. https://doi.org/10.1080/09540261.2022.2128725.

7. Ziou M, Gan DZQ, Boon B, et al. Vulnerability and psychosocial impacts of extreme weather events among young people in Australia. *Environmental Research* 2025; 275: 121385. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.envres.2025.121385.

8. Boyd CP, Jamieson J, Gibson K, Duffy M, Williamson M, Parr H. Eco-anxiety among regional Australian youth with mental health problems: A qualitative study. *Early Intervention in Psychiatry* 2024; 18(12): 1022–31. https://doi.org/10.1111/eip.13549.

9. Woodland L, Ratwatte P, Phalkey R, Gillingham EL. Investigating the health impacts of climate change among people with pre-existing mental health problems: A scoping review. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* 2023; 20(8). https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph20085563.

10. Clayton S, Crandon T. Climate Change and Mental Health. *Annual Review of Clinical Psychology* 2025; 21: 61–83. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-clinpsy-081423-025932.

11. Climate Council. Climate Trauma: The Growing Toll of Climate Change on the Mental Health of Australians: Climate Council, 2023. https://www.climatecouncil.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/ReportClimate-Change-and-Mental-Health.pdf.

12. Department of H, Aged C. National Health and Climate Strategy, 2023. https://www.cdc.gov.au/resources/publications/national-health-and-climate-strategy.

13. National Emergency Management A. Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements Report, 2020. https://www.royalcommission.gov.au/natural-disasters/report.

14. Gao CX, Boon B, Ziou M, et al. Impact of extreme weather events on young people: Findings from the 2023 Mission Australia *Youth Survey*.: Orygen and Mission Australia, 2024. https://www.orygen.org.au/Orygen-Institute/Policy-Areas/Social-and-environmental-factors/Impact-of-extreme-weather-events-on-young-people.

15. Gao CX, Teo SM, Brennan N, Fava N, Freeburn T, Filia K. Climate Concerns and Young People's Mental Health: Findings from the 2022 Mission Australia *Youth Survey*. Orygen and Mission Australia, 2023. https://www.orygen.org.au/Orygen-Institute/Policy-Areas/Social-and-environmental-factors/climateconcerns.

16. Clayton S. Climate anxiety: Psychological responses to climate change. *Journal of Anxiety Disorders* 2020; 74: 102263. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.janxdis.2020.102263.

17. Boehme BAE, Kinsman LM, Norrie HJ, Tessier ED, Fleming SW, Asmundson GJG. Climate Anxiety: Current Evidence and Future Directions. *Current Psychiatry Reports* 2024; 26(11): 670–7. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11920-024-01538-9.

18. Xue S, Massazza A, Akhter-Khan SC, Wray B, Husain MI, Lawrance EL. Mental health and psychosocial interventions in the context of climate change: a scoping review. npj *Mental Health Research* 2024; 3(1): 10. https://doi.org/10.1038/s44184-024-00054-1.

19. Gallay E, Furlan Brighente M, Flanagan C, Lowenstein E. Place-based civic science—collective environmental action and solidarity for eco-resilience. *Child and Adolescent Mental Health* 2022; 27(1): 39–46. https://doi.org/10.1111/camh.12537.

20. Stewart E, Sabina M, Brown M. The Climate Crisis and Indigenous Youths' Mental Health: The Pilot Project. *Mental Health: Global Challenges Journal* 2025; 8(1): 36 – 47. https://doi.org/10.56508/mhgcj.v8i1.254.

21. Stanley JK, Stanley JR, Vella-Brodrick D. Nature scripts to promote social sustainability: monetizing wellbeing benefits of group-based nature exposure for young adults with mild to moderate mental illness. *Sustainability* 2025; 17(22): 9988. https://doi.org/10.3390/su17229988.

22. Kessler RC, Andrews G, Colpe LJ, et al. Short screening scales to monitor population prevalences and trends in non-specific psychological distress. *Psychol Med* 2002; 32(6): 959–76. https://doi.org/10.1017/s0033291702006074.

6. APPENDIX

Variable definitions

Variable	Definition
Demographics	
Age	Categorised as 14–16 years and 17–19 years.
Gender identity	Categorised as male, female, or gender diverse (combining a gender/non-gendered, transgender, non-binary, intersex, and other).
Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander	Self-identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander.
Culturally and linguistically diverse status (CALD)	Defined as speaking a language other than English at home or identifying with a non-European, non-Indigenous ethnic background, including East Asian, Southeast Asian, South Asian, African, Central/South American, West/Central Asian, Middle Eastern, or Polynesian backgrounds.
Remoteness area	Classified using the Australian Statistical Geography Standard (ASGS) remoteness structure based on postcode: major cities, inner regional, and outer regional/remote (combining outer regional, remote, and very remote).
Socioeconomic status	SEIFA socio-economic indexes (Index of Relative Socio-economic Advantage and Disadvantage, IRSAD) for areas based on postcode categorised as low (deciles 0–4), medium (deciles 5–7), and high (deciles 8–10).
Paid work	Currently engaged in any paid employment: Yes or No (combining "*No, looking for work*" and "*No, not looking for work*").
Not currently in education, employment, or training (NEET)	Coded as NEET if not currently studying, nor in paid work.

Table continues

Variable	Definition
Socioeconomic and living circumstances	
Financial distress and hardship	Derived from self-reported financial hardship and family financial concerns. Categorised as: none, concerns or hardship only (combining concerns only and hardship only), or hardship and concerns. Financial hardship was defined as affirmative responses to at least one of the following experiences because the participant or their family couldn't afford it: "*Couldn't access mental health support*", "*Couldn't pay rent/mortgage*", "*Couldn't buy clothes/other essential items*", "*Missed at least one meal in the day*", "*Couldn't get medical treatment/medicine*", "*Couldn't participate in activities, hobbies or groups*", "*Couldn't pay for school uniform, supplies, excursions or fees*", or "*Other*". Family financial concerns were defined as strongly agreeing or agreeing with the statement: "*My family are often stressed about money*".
Disability status	Self-reported disability using question: "*Do you have a disability? Our definition of disability is if you have a limitation, restriction or impairment, which has lasted, or is likely to last for at least six months and restricts everyday activity*". Responses include "*Yes*", "*No*", or "*Prefer not to say*".
Mental health condition	Self-reported mental health condition using question: "*Do you have a mental health condition? Our definition of mental health condition is a type of condition that can affect your thoughts, mood and/or behaviour*". Responses include "*Yes*", "*No*", or "*Prefer not to say*".
Poor living conditions	Coded as poor if the young person reported lacking any of the following: access to important things (e.g. food, clothes), public transport, essential services (electricity, water, internet), comfort, adequate sleeping space, facilities in good working condition, or space to study.
Homelessness experience	Self-reported experience of homelessness in the past year, including rough sleeping, couch surfing, or temporary/crisis accommodation. Coded as Yes (combining "*Yes, only me*" and "*Yes, with my family/someone else*") vs No ("*No*").
Relational difficulties	Coded as Yes if the respondent reported "*No*" to "*Do you find it easy to fit in and socialise with everyone?*", or "*Do you find it easy to turn to friends and family if you need help?*"
Direct impact of severe weather on household or community	Self-reported experience of severe weather events using the question: "*In the last year, have you and/or your community been directly impacted by severe weather events? Such as cyclones, bushfires, floods, landslides, destructive storms, droughts, extreme heat or cold weather.*" Responses include "*No*", "*My community*", "*My household*".

Variable	Definition
Statements used in defining climate impact groups	
Climate worry	"*I'm worried that climate change threatens people and the planet*". Five-point response scale from "*Strongly disagree*" to "*Strongly agree*".
Climate grief	"*I feel sad about species going extinct and animals suffering because of climate change*". Five-point response scale from "*Strongly disagree*" to "*Strongly agree*".
Functional impact	"*My feelings about climate change negatively affect my daily life (at least one of the following: concentrating, school/work, sleeping, having fun, relationships)*". Five-point response scale from "*Strongly disagree*" to "*Strongly agree*".
Safety	"*I feel safe and comfortable at home during really bad weather (e.g. heatwaves, storms, extreme cold)*". Five-point response scale from "*Strongly disagree*" to "*Strongly agree*".
Collective efficacy	"*When people come together to fight climate change, I feel we can make a difference*". Five-point response scale from "*Strongly disagree*" to "*Strongly agree*".

Variable	Definition
Wellbeing indicators	
Negative feelings about the future	Self-reported feelings about the future ("*How would you describe your feelings when you think about the future?*") coded as Yes if respondent reported "*Negative*" or "*Very negative*", No if respondent reported: "*Neither positive or negative*", "*Positive*" or "*Very positive*".
Lack of perceived control over life	Self-reported sense of control over life ("*How much control do you feel you have over your life?*") coded as Yes if respondent reported "*Some control*", "*Almost no control*", or "*No control*", coded as No if respondent reported "*Mostly in control*" or "*Complete control*".
Low happiness with life	Self-reported happiness with life ("*How happy are you with your life as a whole?*") rated on a 0–10 scale: coded as Yes if score was 0–4.
Loneliness	Self-reported experience of loneliness ("*In the last four weeks, how much of the time did you feel lonely?*") coded as Yes if respondent reported feeling lonely most or all of the time.
High psychological distress	Measured using the Kessler Psychological Distress Scale – 6 item version (K6)[22]. Six items rated on a five-point scale (none of the time to all of the time), summed to a total score ranging from 6–30. Coded as high psychological distress if score ≥19 (mental disorder very likely).
Other	
Want more climate change/ environment opportunities at school or community	"*I want more opportunities at school/community to join projects that tackle climate change or protect the environment.*" Five-point response scale from "*Strongly disagree*" to "*Strongly agree*".

Statistical methods

This report excluded participants with missing data across all five climate-related questions (climate worry, climate grief, safety, and collective efficacy). Data was weighted to make the sample representative of 14-19-year-olds by gender, location (state/territory based on postcodes), and the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) developed Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas for 2021 (SEIFA) (ABS, 2023). Gender and location correspond to the ABS's Estimated Residential Population (ERP) statistics for December 2024 (ABS, 2025), as it provides year on year figures. The *Youth Survey* uses Random iterative method (RIM) weighting, which balances the marginal distributions of each weighting element one after the other, repeating until all factors are within a reasonable margin of the target. All proportion reported in Figure 1-2 and Table A1-A2 were weighted using this population weight.

Ensemble clustering was used to identify groups of participants based on five climate-related questions. Missing data was addressed using multiple imputation, with 10 imputed datasets. Within each dataset, repeated subsampling was used to generate base clusters by applying k-means clustering to principal component scores across solutions ranging from two to five clusters. The optimal number of clusters was selected using cumulative distribution function (CDF) plots, delta area plots, heatmaps, and proportion of ambiguous clustering (PAC) scores. Final cluster assignments were then derived by combining the base clusters for the selected solution using k-means clustering. Logistic regression models were used to examine wellbeing outcomes and cluster membership. Models were run using multiply imputed data and adjusted first for demographic factors (i.e., age group, gender, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander status, culturally and linguistically diverse background, remoteness, and area-level socioeconomic disadvantage), then in a sensitivity model additionally adjusted for social and structural factors (i.e., not being in education, employment or training, relational difficulties, homelessness experience, and financial stress).

Table A1. Climate worry, grief, functional impact, safety and collective efficacy by climate impact groups.

	Low impact (n= 3658)	Emotional impact (n= 4883)	Functional impact (n= 3982)	Safety impact (n= 3707)	Total (N=16230)
Climate worry: I'm worried that climate change threatens people and the planet					
Strongly disagree	28%	0.6%	0%	9.8%	8.9%
Disagree	34%	3.8%	1.1%	10%	11%
Mixed feelings	31%	21%	18%	57%	31%
Agree	6.1%	51%	41%	15%	30%
Strongly agree	0.8%	24%	40%	7.6%	19%
Climate grief: I feel sad about species going extinct and animals suffering because of climate change					
Strongly disagree	22%	0%	0.3%	9.9%	7.2%
Disagree	31%	0.4%	1.0%	9.3%	9.4%
Mixed feelings	39%	11%	15%	55%	28%
Agree	8.3%	56%	42%	16%	33%
Strongly agree	0.6%	32%	42%	9.4%	22%

Table continues

	Low impact (n= 3658)	Emotional impact (n= 4883)	Functional impact (n= 3982)	Safety impact (n= 3707)	Total (N=16230)
Functional impact: My feelings about climate change negatively affect my daily life					
Strongly disagree	51%	40%	0%	14%	27%
Disagree	39%	60%	0%	19%	31%
Mixed feelings	9.6%	0%	51%	62%	29%
Agree	0.4%	0%	34%	4.0%	9.4%
Strongly agree	0.3%	0%	15%	1.3%	4.1%
Safety: I feel safe and comfortable at home during really bad weather					
Strongly disagree	0%	0%	0%	12%	2.8%
Disagree	0%	0.1%	0%	15%	3.5%
Mixed feelings	1.3%	4.3%	3.1%	72%	19%
Agree	47%	55%	62%	0%	42%
Strongly agree	52%	41%	35%	0%	33%
Collective efficacy: When people come together to fight climate change, I feel we can make a difference					
Strongly disagree	24%	2.4%	1.6%	11%	9.1%
Disagree	25%	12%	5.9%	12%	13%
Mixed feelings	36%	32%	25%	60%	38%
Agree	14%	39%	41%	12%	27%
Strongly agree	2.1%	15%	27%	4.5%	13%

Table A2. Demographic characteristics by climate impact groups.

	Low impact (n= 3658)	Emotional impact (n= 4883)	Functional impact (n= 3982)	Safety impact (n= 3707)	Total (N=16230)
Age group					
Age 14-16	72%	65%	65%	66%	67%
Age 17-19	28%	35%	35%	34%	33%
Gender identity					
Male	66%	39%	45%	53%	50%
Female	33%	59%	52%	44%	48%
Gender diverse	1.0%	1.6%	3.1%	3.2%	2.2%
Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander					
Yes	6.5%	3.3%	5.7%	6.9%	5.4%
CALD					
Yes	37%	40%	45%	48%	42%
Remoteness area					
Major cities	44%	56%	52%	46%	50%
Inner regional	27%	25%	26%	28%	27%
Outer regional/remote	29%	19%	22%	26%	24%
Socioeconomic status					
Low (deciles 0-4)	45%	36%	38%	45%	40%
Medium (deciles 5-7)	27%	25%	28%	27%	27%
High (deciles 8-10)	29%	39%	34%	28%	33%
Paid work					
Yes	45%	48%	48%	49%	48%
NEET					
Yes	0.5%	0.5%	0.7%	1.5%	0.8%

Table continues

	Low impact (n= 3658)	Emotional impact (n= 4883)	Functional impact (n= 3982)	Safety impact (n= 3707)	Total (N=16230)
Financial distress and hardship					
None	80%	77%	74%	68%	75%
Concerns or hardship only	15%	15%	18%	20%	17%
Hardship and concerns	5.4%	7.4%	8.2%	12%	8.2%
Disability status					
No	88%	89%	85%	81%	86%
Yes	8.3%	9.5%	11%	13%	10%
Prefer not to say	3.4%	1.8%	4.2%	6.4%	3.8%
Mental health condition					
No	80%	75%	71%	69%	74%
Yes	12%	16%	17%	16%	15%
Prefer not to say	8.6%	8.6%	12%	14%	11%
Poor living conditions					
Yes	19%	16%	17%	25%	19%
Homelessness experience					
Yes	2.4%	2.2%	3.3%	5.9%	3.3%
Relational difficulties					
Yes	32%	33%	32%	40%	34%
Direct impact of severe weather events on household or community					
No	71%	72%	68%	63%	69%
Community	19%	19%	21%	20%	20%
Household	10%	8.6%	12%	17%	12%

	Low impact (n= 3658)	Emotional impact (n= 4883)	Functional impact (n= 3982)	Safety impact (n= 3707)	Total (N=16230)
Want more climate change/ environment opportunities at school/community					
Strongly disagree	30%	4.8%	1.6%	11%	11%
Disagree	36%	21%	6.3%	13%	19%
Mixed feelings	26%	39%	30%	62%	39%
Agree	5.5%	27%	39%	9.7%	21%
Strongly agree	1.6%	7.4%	23%	4.2%	9.3%

MISSION AUSTRALIA

Who is Mission Australia?

At Mission Australia, we believe in hope and possibility for all.

As a national non-denominational Christian charity with more than 165 years of experience, we are one of Australia's largest and most trusted for-purpose community service and housing providers.

Every day, we deliver homelessness services, provide social and affordable housing, help families, children and young people thrive, improve mental health and wellbeing, support people with disability, provide pathways to employment and financial stability, strengthen communities, offer alcohol and other drug support, and more.

Backed by our supporters, partners, funders and collaborators, we welcome people and communities of all backgrounds, ages and beliefs who seek our support, providing excellent services and safe, secure homes that offer hope and lasting impact.

Together, we're building hope and possibility for all.

orygen

Who is Orygen?

Leading the revolution in youth mental health

At Orygen, we believe that every young person deserves to grow into adulthood with optimal mental health. Everything we do is focused on delivering this outcome.

Orygen is Australia's Centre of Excellence in Youth Mental Health and the world's leading research and knowledge translation organisation focused on mental ill-health in young people.

We believe in treating early and focusing on recovery. Pioneering reform to deliver real-world practical solutions. Our research is world-leading, impactful and creates change. Working directly with young people, their families and friends, we pioneer new, positive approaches to the prevention and treatment of mental disorders.

We advocate to make sure that policy makers understand the need and cost of mental ill-health in young people.

And we educate to ensure our research and evidence-based practice is used to develop innovative training programs and resources.

Our goal is to see all young people with mental ill-health get well and stay well.

MISSION AUSTRALIA

orygen

Contact Mission Australia
Email: youthsurvey@missionaustralia.com.au
Web: www.missionaustralia.com.au

Follow Mission Australia
LinkedIn: @mission-australia
Instagram: @mission_aust
Facebook: www.facebook.com/MissionAust
X: @MissionAust

Contact Orygen
Phone: 03 9966 9100
Email: info@orygen.org.au
Web: www.orygen.org.au

Follow Orygen
Linkedin: @orygen-revolution
Instagram: @_orygen_
Facebook: www.facebook.com/OrygenAus
X: @orygen_aus

If you are a young person and need someone to talk with, you can contact Kids Helpline: 1800 55 1800 (24/7)
Kidshelpline.com.au

CSV0000560_Orygen_2026