Youth mental health and climate distress

Results from a national Orygen and YouGov poll

An Orygen Institute survey
Conducted by YouGov
This survey was commissioned by the Orygen Institute and conducted by YouGov.

**Methodology**

Fieldwork conducted online between 17 April and 1 May, 2023.

A sample of 1000 Australian citizens aged 16-25.

Weighted on age, gender, location, and education.

Weighting efficiency of 89%, effective sample size of 891.

Margin of error of ±3.1% on a 50% figure with 95% confidence level.
Key findings

More than three in four young people (76%) are concerned about climate change.

Two-thirds of young Australians (67%) say climate concerns are having a negative impact on youth mental health.

**DISTRESS** is escalating, and they’re talking about it.

- Most young Australians with climate concerns (56%) say they have become more concerned about climate change in the past 12 months. Only 12% say they have become less concerned.
- Nearly nine in ten (88%) have discussed their concerns with others.

Nearly one-third (30%) say they are “very concerned”. Only 6% of young people surveyed said they were not concerned at all.

Young females are particularly aware of the impacts of climate concern on mental health, with 74% reporting a negative impact.

Young Australians want to see **ACTION**

- Government inaction was the most frequently identified factor impacting young people’s mental health.
- 77% of young Australians believe seeing the government take strong action on climate change would be helpful to the mental health of those experiencing climate distress, and more than half (56%) say it would be ‘very helpful’
Do you believe the following currently have a positive or negative impact on the mental health of young Australians?

- **Lack of action by government on climate change**: 75% (very negative) 25% (somewhat negative)
- **Hearing about extreme weather events**: 70% (very negative) 30% (somewhat negative)
- **Worrying about the future of the planet**: 71% (very negative) 29% (somewhat negative)
- **Feeling guilty about not taking enough climate action**: 70% (very negative) 30% (somewhat negative)
- **Lack of action by industry and business on climate change**: 71% (very negative) 29% (somewhat negative)
- **Concern about environment policies harming Australia’s economy**: 60% (very negative) 40% (somewhat negative)

Note: answered by young people reporting concern about climate change (n=765).
Summary of survey results

How concerned are you about climate change?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Very concerned</th>
<th>Somewhat concerned</th>
<th>Not particularly concerned</th>
<th>Not at all concerned</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender diverse and/or intersex young people¹</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Which of the following is closest to your point of view?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Concerns about climate change have a negative impact on the mental health of young Australians</th>
<th>Concerns about climate change have no impact on the mental health of young Australians</th>
<th>Concerns about climate change have a positive impact on the mental health of young Australians</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender diverse and/or intersex young people¹</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>16</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Have you ever discussed your concerns about climate change with others?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Yes, regularly</th>
<th>Yes, but rarely</th>
<th>Yes, sometimes</th>
<th>No, never</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16–18</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19–21</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22–25</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: answered by young people reporting concern about climate change (n=765).

¹ Gender diverse and/or intersex data is based on a limited sample size (n=20) and should therefore be interpreted with care.
Summary of survey results

If you had concerns about climate change that were impacting your wellbeing, who are the first 3 people or organisations you would go to for support?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>First person or organisation</th>
<th>First 3 people or organisations</th>
<th>Not in the first 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A parents or guardian</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Website or online resources</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A mental health professional (e.g., psychologist)</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A partner</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A sibling</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A helpline (e.g., Kids Helpline Lifeline)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A doctor</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School counsellor</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An app</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: young people who indicated that they would talk to someone or that they were worried about climate change (n=873).

How helpful do you believe the following would be for young people who were experiencing anxiety about climate change?

- Seeing the government take strong climate action (e.g., invest in renewables and reduce pollution)
  - Very helpful: 56
  - Neither helpful nor unhelpful: 21
  - Somewhat helpful: 15
  - Somewhat unhelpful: 9
  - Very unhelpful: 6
  - Don’t know: 5

- Hearing positive climate change stories in the media and online
  - Very helpful: 38
  - Neither helpful nor unhelpful: 34
  - Somewhat helpful: 16
  - Somewhat unhelpful: 6
  - Very unhelpful: 5
  - Don’t know: 3

- Training mental health professionals to support young Australians with climate-related concerns
  - Very helpful: 33
  - Neither helpful nor unhelpful: 37
  - Somewhat helpful: 16
  - Somewhat unhelpful: 6
  - Very unhelpful: 4
  - Don’t know: 4

- Helping schools support young Australians with climate-related concerns
  - Very helpful: 33
  - Neither helpful nor unhelpful: 39
  - Somewhat helpful: 12
  - Somewhat unhelpful: 7
  - Very unhelpful: 5
  - Don’t know: 3

- Helping families support young people with concerns about climate change
  - Very helpful: 30
  - Neither helpful nor unhelpful: 41
  - Somewhat helpful: 15
  - Somewhat unhelpful: 6
  - Very unhelpful: 4
  - Don’t know: 4

- More online resources about reducing climate anxiety
  - Very helpful: 29
  - Neither helpful nor unhelpful: 38
  - Somewhat helpful: 18
  - Somewhat unhelpful: 8
  - Very unhelpful: 4
  - Don’t know: 3
Summary of survey results

If a young person approached a health care professional with anxiety about climate change, which of the following responses do you believe would be most helpful?

- Give them resources on how to help the environment (e.g., recycling and environmentally friendly choices)
- Acknowledge their concerns about climate change are valid
- Provide ideas about different ways to take climate action (e.g., petitions and protests)
- Teach ways to discuss climate change with others (e.g., their family)
- Provide self-help resources and activities
- Provide ideas about different ways to connect with nature
- Tell them that climate change will not impact on their life
- Tell them climate change is nothing to worry about
- Tell them climate change is not real

Which of these has the community you currently live in experienced in the past 5 years? Select all that apply.

- Floods
- Smoke from bushfires
- Bushfires
- Heatwaves
- Severe storms
- Air pollution
- Drought
- Property fires
- Cyclones
- Toxic waste and chemical spills
- Landslides
- Tsunamis
- None of these

Note: young people who thought that at least one of these was the most helpful response (n=960).
Orygen acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the lands we are on and pays respect to their Elders past and present. Orygen recognises and respects their cultural heritage, beliefs and relationships to their Country, which continue to be important to First Nations people living today.

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