our world our say

National survey of children and young people on climate change and disaster risk

Australian Institute for Disaster Resilience

World Vision

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Australian Red Cross

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

The authors of this report acknowledge and pay respect to past, present and future Traditional Custodians and Elders of this nation and the continuation of cultural, spiritual and educational practices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. We recognise that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people are part of the oldest continuing culture in the world. We also recognise that climate change is disproportionately affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and that climate action needs to acknowledge, respect and listen to their perspectives, experience and expertise.

Today in 2020, as a society we are being called upon to unite in order to overcome great challenges that threaten us. Statements such as "We are all in this together", ring through with a frightening truth, that we can no longer do it alone, and we can no longer wait and hope for someone else to do it.

It must be understood that being "all in this together", means identifying the common purpose between our different communities, even when we might think none exist. This report identifies the importance of a sustainable future to young peoples, which directly aligns with the aspirations of First Nations groups across Australia who in accordance with their laws and customs have taken care of these lands for thousands of generations. Our First Nations groups connection to country has never been extinguished, and so the responsibility to protect and ensure the sustainability of our lands lives on.

While First Nations groups represent the oldest of generations, and our youth the youngest, this does not mean that we cannot work together on areas that are important to us. In fact, it is the differences that make us greater allies. As the survey suggests, while young people feel protecting the environment is important, they feel unprepared and ill-equipped to do so. Our First Nations communities have generational collective knowledge on sustainable land practices that could empower young people in their ability to become a force for change.

Most importantly for me, a proud Boonwurrung man, this survey reveals for the first time in 200 years, we are not alone.

Gheran Yarraman Steel (Briggs)
Yaluk-ut Weelam of the Boon Wurrung

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Foreword

As young Australians, we are united in the opinion that our nation needs to do more to reduce its carbon emissions and become a greener, more sustainable nation. This will help reduce global emissions, improve our collective health and wellbeing, and reinforce Australia's standing as a responsible regional power committed to the human and economic security of our region.

We are aware of climate change, and we are worried about climate change. We are concerned about the repercussions of climate change globally, regionally and here at home. We are concerned about experiencing climate-related disasters due to a lack of action by those in power, and we are worried about what that means for us, our families, and our friends, in the present, and in the future.

Young people feel unprepared, under-educated, concerned and increasingly scared by the prospect of a disaster. We anticipate that we will experience personal impacts from natural hazards in the future, whether we are living in capital cities, regional centres, or rural areas. The 2020 bushfires demonstrated that you need not live in the bush to be affected by a bushfire. We are experiencing these persistent worries while having to contend with life, school, growing up and everything else that comes with being a young person in Australia.

We want to be ready for when disasters strike through greater preparedness, and we want to reduce the intensity and frequency of disasters through climate action. We know that on our current trajectory disasters will come thicker and faster. We want to know how to plan, prepare and protect ourselves and our communities in an increasingly unsafe world.

Young people are calling for better dialogue between leaders and scientists on climate change and disaster risk, as well as an avenue for young people to join the conversation and give voice to their hopes and concerns for the future. There is currently very little opportunity for young people to participate in national discussions around disaster resilience and climate change, and young people are feeling more concerned about these issues as they are left in the dark. With this report we aim to amplify the voices of young Australians and invite decision-makers to engage with us in developing solutions for a resilient and sustainable nation.

Alexander Matters, 18

Ashley Wild, 23

Clare Myers, 21

Chelsea Caffery, 19

Grace Lewis, 16

Halima A. Bhatti, 23

Jeffrey Zhao, 23

Jialu Meng, 21

Laura Guy, 13

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Executive Summary

The release of this youth survey report on climate change and disaster risk takes place in the context of a global pandemic and in the wake of national and state inquiries into the devastating Australian 'Black Summer' bushfire season of 2019/2020.

From February to April 2020, approximately 1500 children and young people aged between 10 and 24 years participated in an online survey on climate change, natural hazards and disaster risk in Australia. The survey was co-designed by young people and organisations working with young people in Australia and the Asia-Pacific region. It included 27 questions on climate change, natural hazards and disaster risk, with questions designed to identify children and young people's priorities for action by decision makers.

There has not been a national consultation with young people on climate change and disaster risk of this scope before. A representative panel of young people assisted in the data analysis, and you can find their commentary throughout the report.

The survey data presented in this report indicates that young people are deeply concerned about climate change. They are concerned about how climate change will impact their own lives and even more concerned about impacts that are far-reaching and universal. Young people are aware that there are many factors that affect climate change and that it is important to tackle these issues collectively.

The data indicates that not only are young people in Australia experiencing natural hazards, but that they are experiencing them more often. Young people are telling Australia that although their education has had a strong focus on causes and impacts of natural hazards, it has not equipped them with the skills and knowledge needed to help mitigate the impact of disasters on themselves and their communities. School curricula are focusing exclusively on what is, rather than what could be, missing an opportunity to empower and invest in young people as creators of a new and better world.

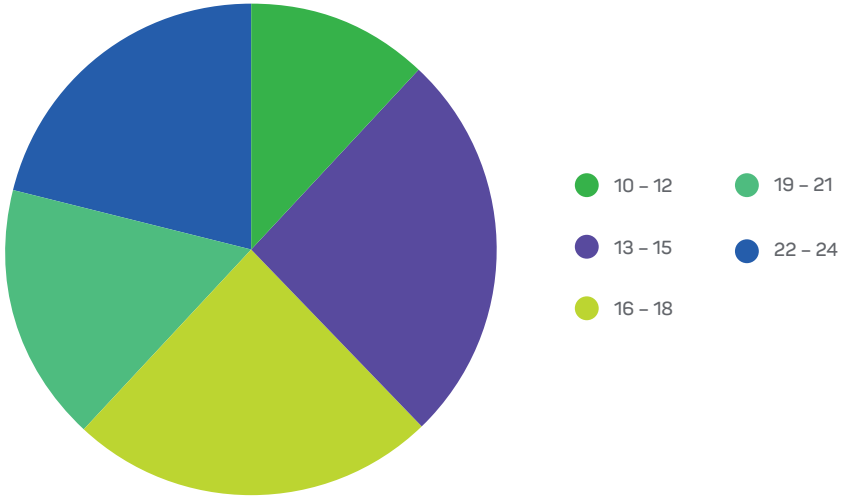
Young people are calling on decision makers to:

- transition away from fossil fuels to cleaner and renewable energy sources
- listen to scientists' advice on climate change
- support disaster-affected communities by providing them with familiar and accessible evacuation centres
- make sure essential services continue to operate in a disaster
- ensure young people are provided with the knowledge and skills to:
  - plan and prepare for natural hazards,
  - care for themselves and others in a crisis
  - access emergency alerts and warnings
  - prevent or reduce the risk of a disaster

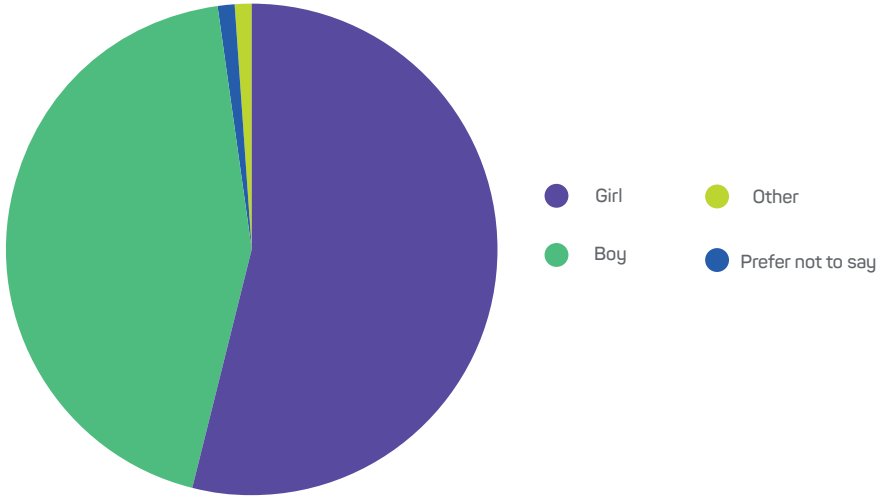
Only 13% of the young people surveyed indicated that they felt their views were listened to by leaders in government.

The survey was completed by 1,477 young Australians between the ages of 10 and 24

How old are you?

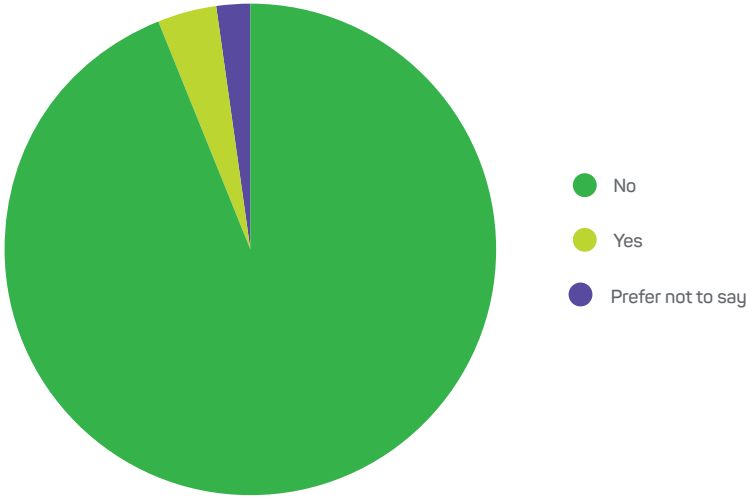


Are you...?

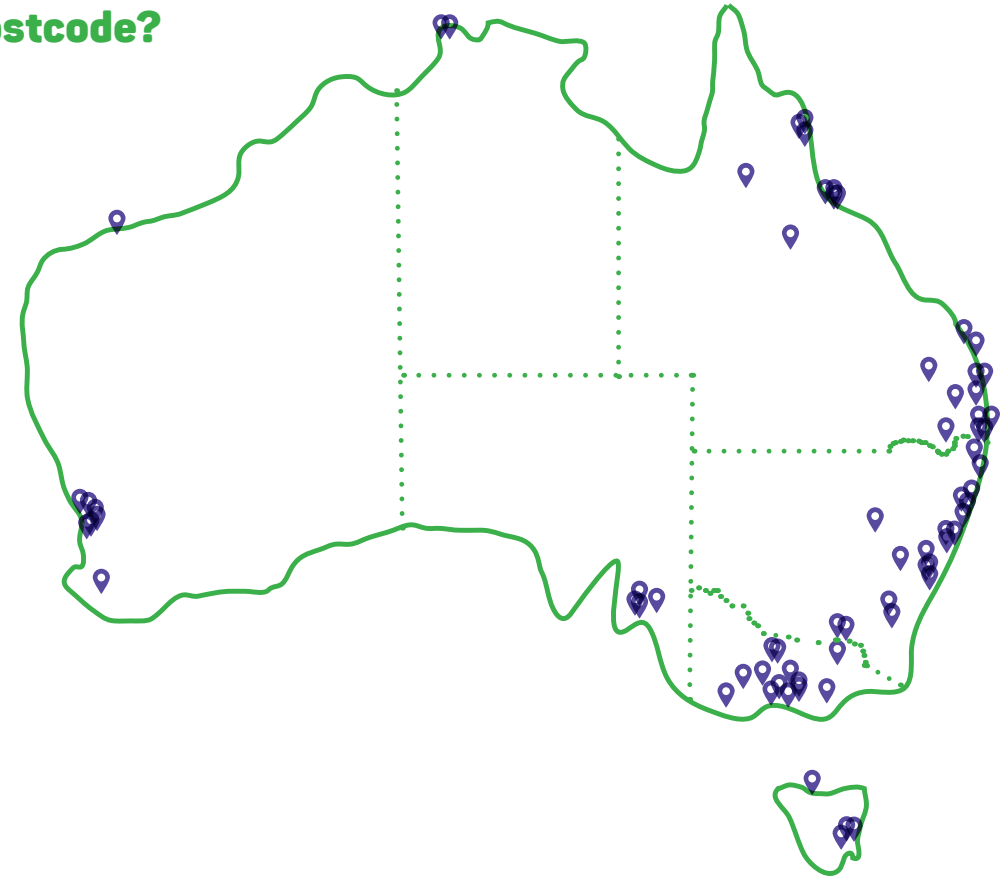


Participants in the survey came from every state and territory in Australia

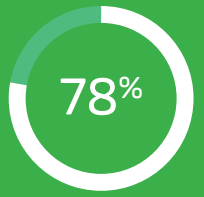
Do you identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander?



What is your postcode?



Young people are concerned about climate change



Young people are concerned or extremely concerned about climate change

Young Australians are deeply concerned about climate change and feel very strongly that Australia is not doing enough to reduce carbon emissions. Across all age groups, genders and locations, the majority of participants were either concerned or extremely concerned about climate change.

Reviewed by age group, more than 80% of participants aged over 16 indicated that they were concerned or extremely concerned about climate change, compared to less than 60% of those aged under 12.

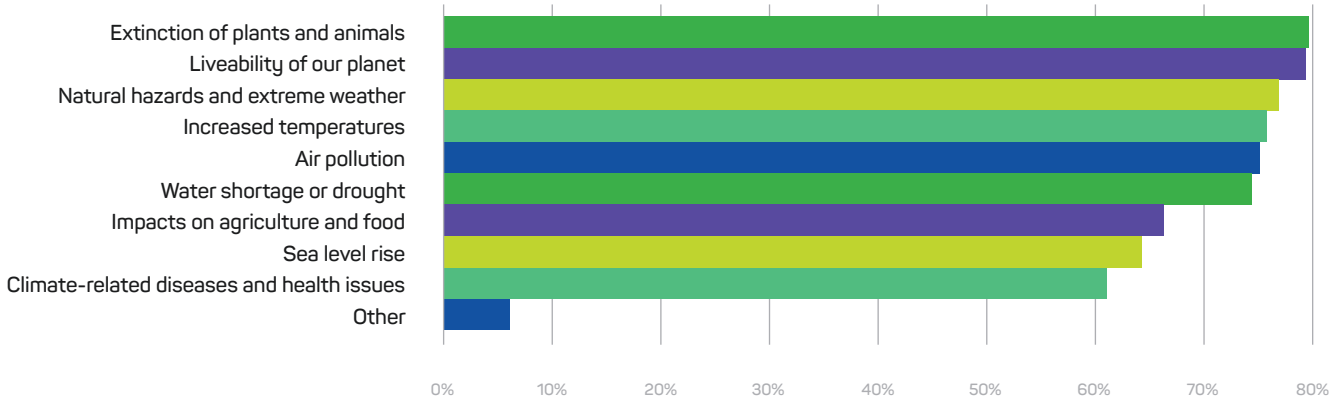
37% of women and girls indicated that they were extremely concerned about climate change. Less than 1% were not concerned at all.

76% of respondents identified air pollution as a climate change concern. This was highest for states affected by the Black Summer bushfires.

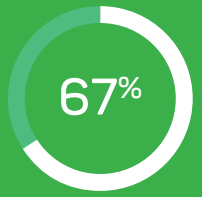
Young Australians feel that climate change is putting every living thing and the quality of all life at risk.

This data includes the different aspects of climate change that are concerning young people from all over Australia.

Young Australians' concerns about Climate Change



Young people feel that Australia is not doing enough



Young people believe Australia is not doing enough to reduce carbon emissions

Young people are aware that there are many factors that affect climate change and that it is important to tackle these issues collectively. An overwhelming percentage of young people think that Australia is not doing enough to reduce the carbon emissions identified by scientists as contributing to climate change.

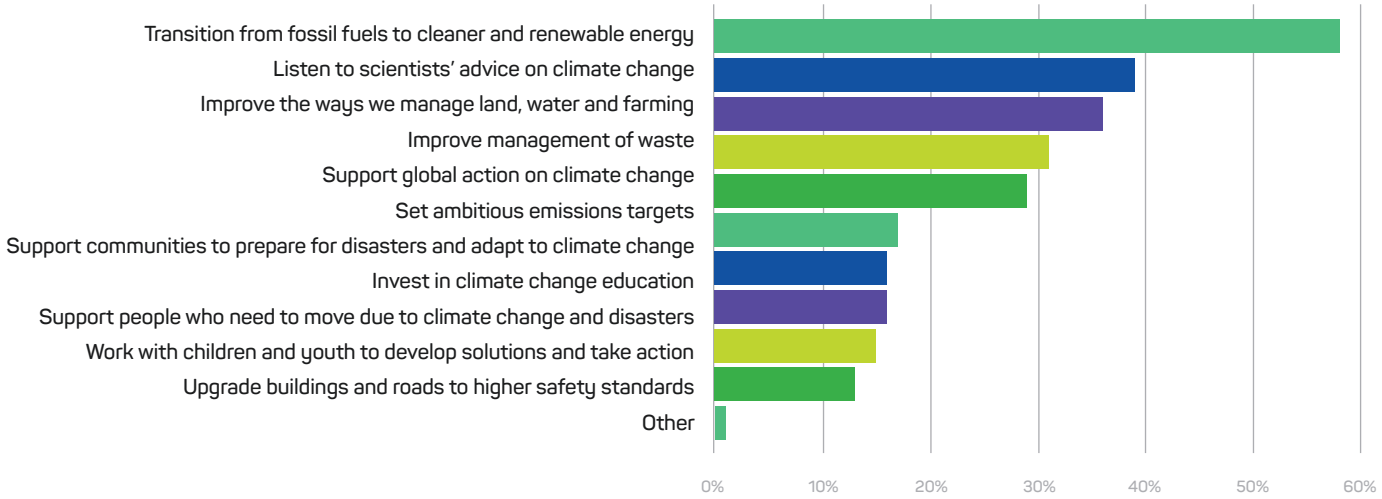
Young people are calling specifically on decision makers to:

1. Transition away from fossil fuels to cleaner and renewable energy sources
2. Listen to scientists' advice on climate change

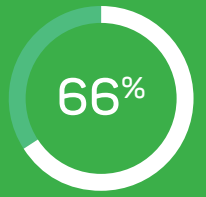
Moving away from fossil fuels is clearly the top desire for young people.

The young people surveyed would like the Australian Government to transition from fossil fuels to cleaner and renewable energy sources and listen to scientists' advice on climate change.

What would you like the Australian Government to do to address the impact of climate change in your community? (top three selections by participant)



Young people are taking action on climate at home



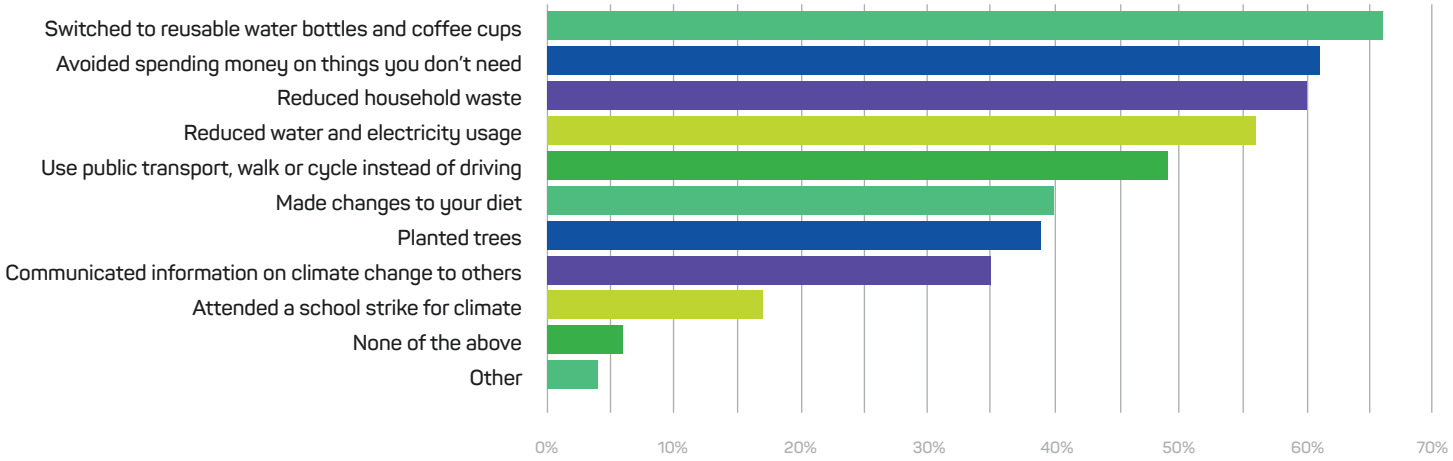
Young people have switched to reusable water bottles and coffee cups

The young people surveyed are making changes in their everyday lives to live more sustainably. Over half of survey participants have switched to reusable water bottles and coffee cups, avoided spending money on unnecessary items, reduced household waste, water and electricity usage. Young people would like to see more sustainable options offered as standard for consumers, to magnify the positive impacts of action already taken by climate conscious youths.

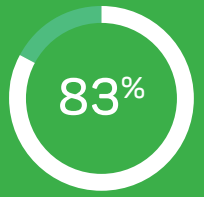
Reviewed by age group, older participants were more likely to identify multiple actions that they have taken to address climate change. In each age category, more than half of participants identified switching to reusable water bottles and coffee cups, avoiding unnecessary purchases and reducing household waste. More than half of participants aged 16 and over indicated that they had reduced water and electricity usage and opted for greener transport options instead of car travel. Girls, women and those identifying as 'other' were most likely to have taken personal actions to address climate change.

Young people are prioritising individual actions to address climate change, but real reductions in emissions need to stem from systemic action.

Have you done any of these things, either by yourself or with your family, to address climate change?



Young people understand the link between climate change and natural hazards



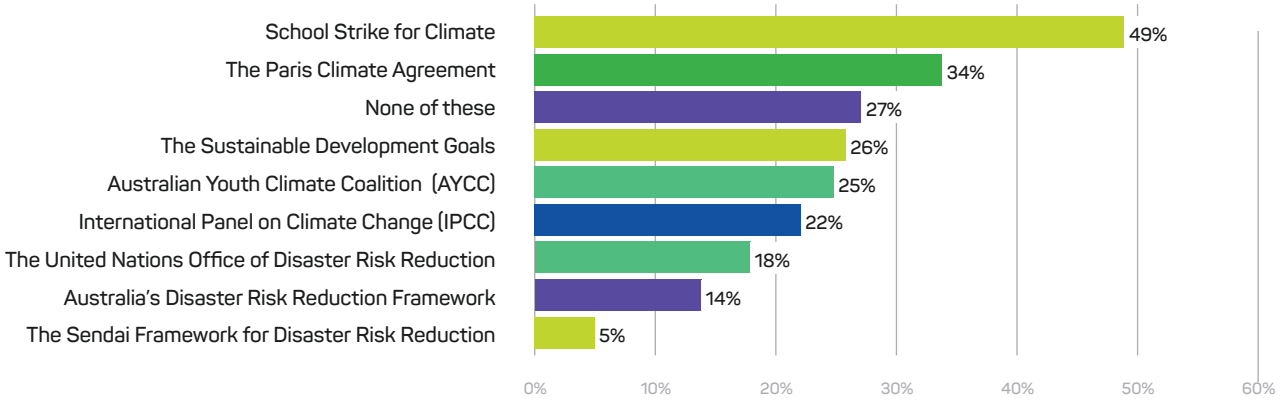
Young people think there is a connection between climate change and natural hazards

Young Australians understand the link between climate change and natural hazards. As global temperatures rise, natural hazards such as extreme heat, drought, tropical cyclones, floods and bushfires are increasing in frequency and intensity. The majority of young Australians surveyed believe that natural hazards are occurring more often.

Young people are not aware of key climate change and disaster risk frameworks and initiatives

Young people have limited awareness of actions, frameworks, goals and organisations that exist or are in place to address climate change and disasters.

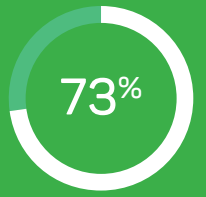
Before completing this survey, had you heard of any of the following?



Young people overwhelmingly recognise that climate change and natural hazards are linked. They understand that failure to act on climate change is equal to a delay in disaster risk reduction, which may have devastating impacts.

The data demonstrates that many climate and disaster related organisations have limited penetration amongst young people. Particularly, the disaster risk reduction-orientated agreements and organisations are known by very few young people.

Young people feel that natural hazards present a real and personal threat



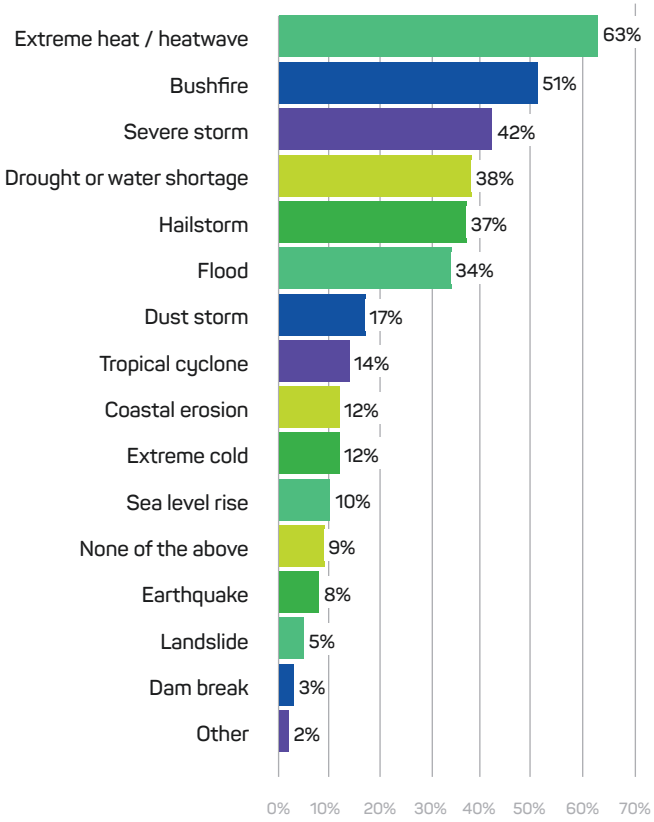
Young people are either concerned or extremely concerned about experiencing a disaster

Over 90% of young people surveyed reported experiencing at least one natural hazard event in the last three years and well over half (63%) felt that disasters were occurring more often. This is consistent with the scientific consensus that climate change is increasing the frequency of natural hazards.

In the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) and the Northern Territory, every participant reported that they had experienced a natural hazard in the last three years. At least 40% of participants from every state and territory reported experiencing the impacts of bushfires in the past three years.

At least half of the participants from regional and rural locations indicated that they had helped to prepare property for dangerous weather. These participants were the least likely to have taken no action to reduce the impact of natural hazards.

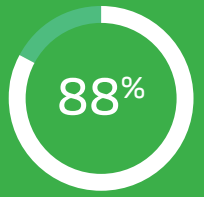
Natural hazards experienced in the last 3 years



Have you done any of these, either by yourself or with your family, to reduce the impact of natural hazards and disasters where you live?

61%	Kept up to date with emergency warnings and alerts
40%	Learned more about natural hazards where you live
37%	Prepared your property for dangerous weather
31%	Prepared an emergency plan with your family
27%	Prepared an emergency kit of important items
26%	Communicated information on natural hazards and preparedness to others
20%	Participated in community to reduce the harmful effects of natural hazards
15%	None of the above
9%	Contacted community leaders asking them to protect the local area
1%	Other

Young people want to learn more about natural hazards and disaster risk reduction



Young people think they should be learning more about natural hazards and how to reduce the risk of a disaster

Young people are telling Australia that they feel unprepared, under-educated, concerned and increasingly scared by the prospect of a disaster. Young people are identifying their own priorities for learning about natural hazards. They are calling on decision makers to ensure young people are provided with the knowledge and skills to:

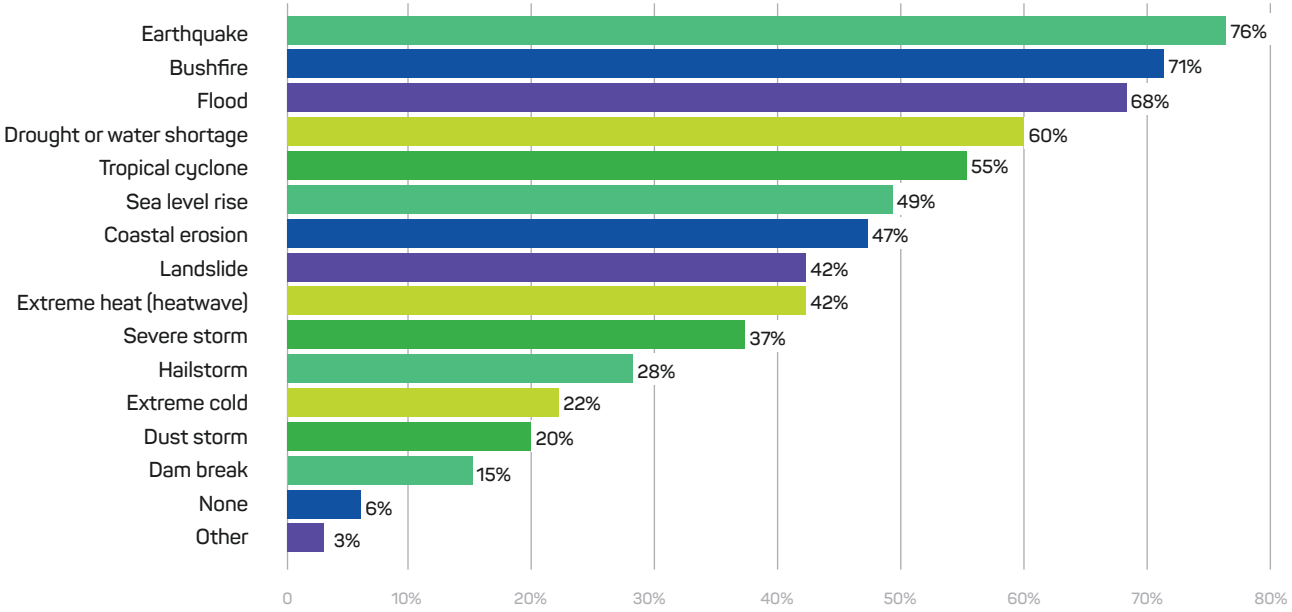
- plan and prepare for natural hazards,
- care for themselves and others in a crisis
- access emergency alerts and warnings
- prevent or reduce the risk of a disaster

What do you think are the most important things young people need to learn about natural hazards and the risk of disasters? (Top 5)	
73%	How to plan and prepare for natural hazards and disasters
70%	How to care for themselves and others if their community experiences a natural hazard or disaster
69%	Where to access emergency warnings and alerts
66%	The actions children and young people can take to prevent or reduce the impact of natural hazards and disasters
64%	The causes of natural hazards and disasters

When you studied natural hazards, did you learn about...? (Top 5)	
72%	The causes of natural hazards and disasters
54%	The potential impacts of natural hazards and disasters on your community
48%	The influence of climate change on natural hazards and disasters
45%	The types of natural hazards that could affect your community in the future
45%	How to plan and prepare for natural hazards and disasters

Most students were taught about how a natural hazard occurs but not what to do if one happens. Less than half of students were informed about how to care for their themselves and others in a disaster.

What natural hazards have you learned about at school?

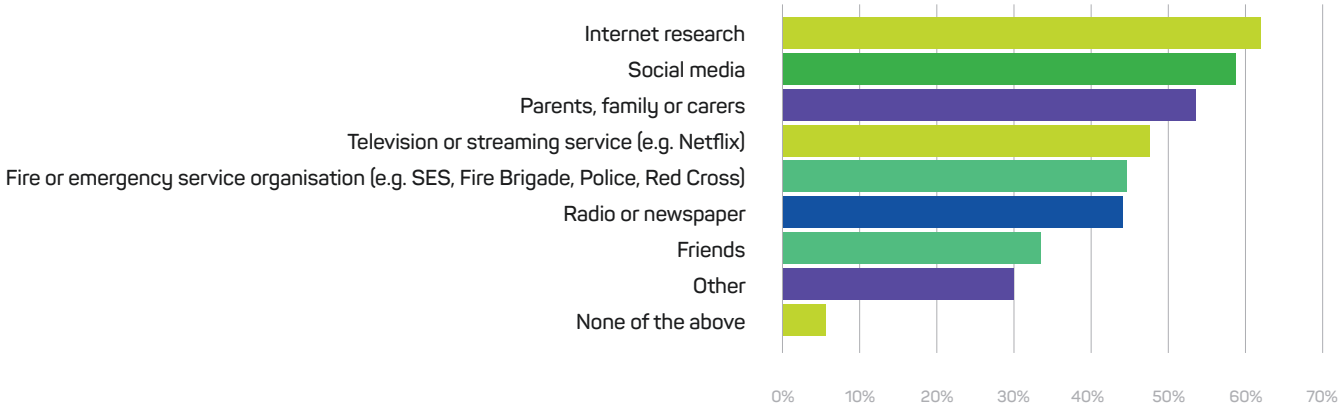


Young people find themselves being taught more about earthquakes than the hazards that present the most risk to them as Australians, like floods or bushfires.

Young people are turning to the internet and social media for information

Beyond the classroom, young people are learning about natural hazards and how to protect their communities from disaster from a range of sources. Participants aged between 10 to 12 reported accessing most of this information from parents, family and carers, with little input from social media and internet sources. For the older age brackets, social media and the internet become a far more prominent source, overtaking family as the most common source from age 16. Members of the youth panel reviewing the survey data noted that the internet and social media may not be reliable sources for critical information on natural hazards and disaster risk.

Where else (apart from school) have you learned about natural hazards and how to protect your community from a disaster?



Young people are turning to sources like social media for information on how to prepare for, cope with, or recover from natural hazards.

Outside of school, young people have learned about natural hazards through researching on the internet, on social media or from talking to people close to them.

Young people are calling for action to limit the harmful impacts of disasters

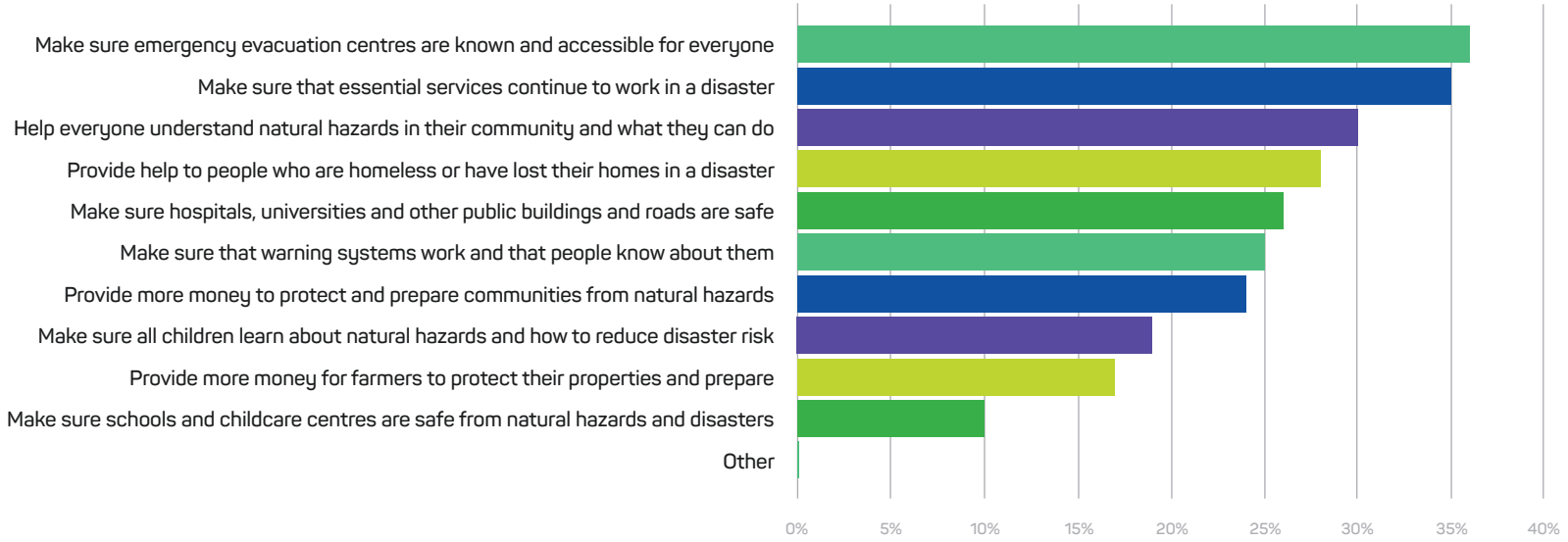
Young people do not view themselves as particularly vulnerable to the impacts of disaster. In the context of natural hazards and disasters, the young people surveyed were most concerned for the homeless, elderly and people with a disability. The data reflects a selfless desire by young people to ensure that the most vulnerable are not left behind when natural hazards occur.

Young people are calling for the Australian government to:

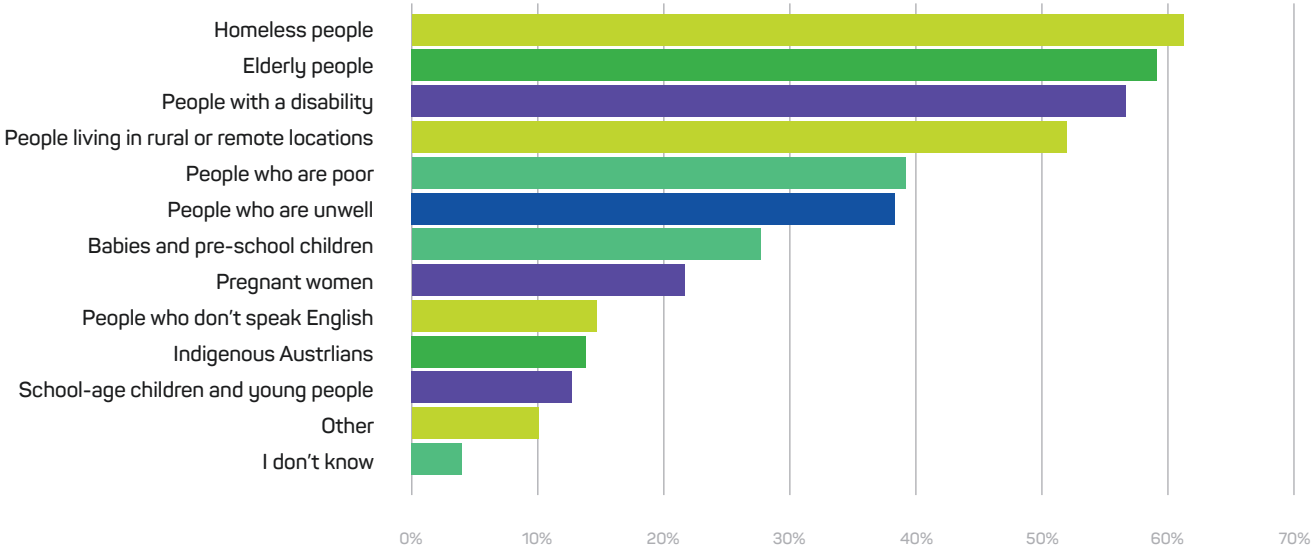
- support disaster-affected communities by providing them with familiar and accessible evacuation centres
- make sure essential services continue to operate in a disaster

Access to essential services and evacuation centres were the top two priority issues for young people in terms of limiting the impacts of natural hazards. Survey participants seem to be more focused on government action in response to an event rather than long-term prevention or preparedness.

What do you think the Australian government should do to limit the impacts of natural hazards and disasters in Australia? (top three selections by participant)

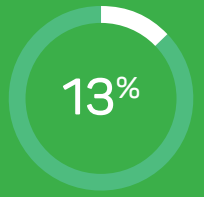


In the event of a disaster, who do you think would be most in danger?



Young people recognise that those most at risk of harm in a disaster are the people who are already vulnerable members of our society.

Young people do not feel listened to by leaders in government

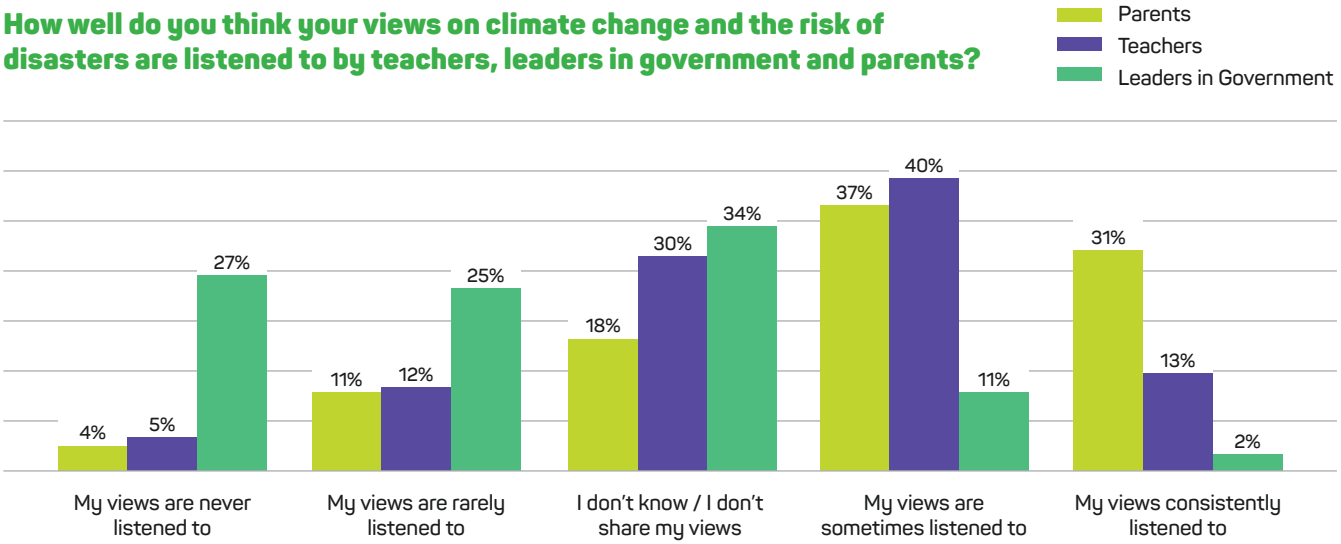


Only 13% of young Australians felt they were listened to by leaders in government

Very few young Australians felt listened to by leaders in Government.

Young Australians felt much more listened to by their parents and teachers, with 67% feeling sometimes or consistently listened to by their parents and 54% by their teachers. Across all participant categories, there was a high proportion of participants who said they didn't share their views or didn't know if parents, teachers or leaders listened to them. This result demonstrates the need for more opportunities for young people to engage on national conversations on climate change and disasters.

How well do you think your views on climate change and the risk of disasters are listened to by teachers, leaders in government and parents?



Many respondents indicated that they either did not know if their views were listened to, or don't share their views.

The majority of respondents felt listened to by parents and teachers, however overwhelmingly young people feel leaders in government do not listen to their views.

Messages from young people to leaders in government

850 survey participants chose to include a message to leaders in government related to climate change and disaster risk. Their sentiments are reflected here:

"The bushfires this summer in Australia were horrific. These catastrophic disasters aren't going to stop. In fact, they are only going to get worse as time progresses without action being taken. It is the responsibility of every single person to do everything they can to reduce the impact of climate change. Everyday people are trying their hardest to do their best, but until huge corporations and governments all around the world take action, this crisis will only get worse. Responsibility to fix this global crisis is falling on youth, because we are the ones growing up with this as our reality. It makes me angry. It makes me anxious. I am tired of being angry and anxious about this huge problem, especially when I feel so small and powerless. Please, do something."

– 14, East Toowoomba

"The Australian government plays a pivotal role in supporting each and every resident of this country and to make sure that everyone's protected from whatever danger that is approaching, therefore, we put a lot of hopes for the government to initiate any action necessary for the sake of climate change and the future."

– 21, Melbourne

"Governments don't have the answers. The scientists do, [and] young people want the government to hear what is being said."

– 13, Adelaide

"Listen to the Indigenous Australian communities. Listen to the scientists. Take on their advice. Be determined and driven to make each Australian live eco-friendly lives. Work towards introducing new legislation and use renewable energy to reduce the effects of climate change. Consult with children regularly and ensure they are doing well mentally with the natural hazards occurring."

– 19, Perth

Glossary of terms

Disaster	A harmful event causing serious loss or damage to people, places and the environment.
Natural hazard	A natural event or process with the potential to cause harm to people, places and the environment.
Climate change	A change to the average weather conditions in a region, such as temperature and rainfall, over a long period of time.
Risk	The chance or possibility of loss or damage taking place.
A note about 'natural' disasters	It is the view of the organisations supporting the publication of this report that disasters are not natural events and only result from the interaction of a natural hazard with an exposed and vulnerable community. It is within our power to ensure that communities are resilient to natural hazards through collective action for disaster risk reduction. As a result, we have avoided using the term 'natural disasters' throughout the survey report and encourage our readers to do the same.

Supporting organisations

The Australian Institute for Disaster Resilience

The Australian Institute for Disaster Resilience (AIDR) develops, maintains and shares knowledge and learning to support a disaster resilient Australia. AIDR is supported by its partners: the Australian Government Department of Home Affairs, AFAC and the Australian Red Cross.

World Vision Australia

World Vision is Australia's largest humanitarian organisation, assisting more than 100 million people in over 90 countries. We go where children's needs are greatest and make a positive impact through development, relief and advocacy work.

Oaktree

With over 250,000 supporters, Oaktree are Australia's largest youth-run international development organisation. We are volunteers, alumni, campaigners, student ambassadors, donors, and everyday Australians who believe in a world where all people have the opportunity to thrive.

UNICEF Australia

Children's charity, UNICEF Australia, has been a champion of children since 1966. We fund lifechanging programs for children and work with governments and civil society partners to protect and provide a fair chance for children.

Plan International Australia

Put simply, we're the charity for girls' equality. We tackle the root causes of poverty, support communities through crisis, campaign for gender equality, and help governments do what's right for children and particularly for girls. We believe a better world is possible. An equal world; a world where all children can live happy and healthy lives, and where girls can take their rightful place as equals.

Save the Children Australia

Here in Australia and around the world, Save the Children gives a powerful voice to children and champions their rights. As a global organisation, in 2018 Save the Children directly reached more than 40 million children in 116 countries.

Australian Red Cross

Australian Red Cross works to reduce suffering across Australia and internationally through mobilising the power of humanity. We are part of the International Red Cross Red Crescent Movement, the largest humanitarian movement in the world.

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