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Deloitte
Access Economics

Introduction to the Youth Agenda series

In August 2025, Deloitte Access Economics released *Australia's Youth Agenda: Economic and policy imperatives*. This report outlined the key challenges faced by young Australians today, the implications for Australia's economy, and policy imperatives to lift young people and the nation.

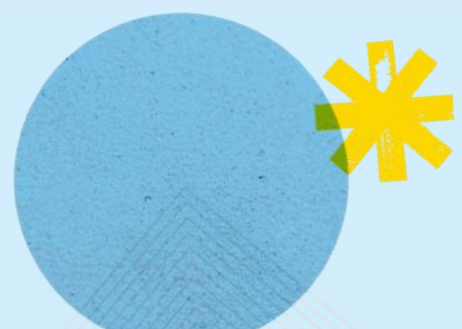
The report highlighted how young Australians are navigating a version of adulthood that feels less like a rite of passage and more like a locked door. With under 40s making up 40% of the labour force but holding just under 8% of seats in Federal Parliament, it is no wonder young people feel sidelined.¹ Despite being the most digitally connected generation, young Australians are lonelier than ever,² and 41% of 18 to 24-year-olds worry they won't be able to live a healthy and happy life as they grow older.³ Understanding the distinct challenges that young people face and embedding their perspectives into decision-making is a national economic imperative.

Critically, the report highlighted how Australia's young people are not merely young versions of ourselves. Instead, they are products of their own formative experiences and our world today. The greatest mistake is to assume young people today are simply behind because they are young and that, with time, they will catch up.

Australia's Youth Agenda sets the foundation for an ongoing series, designed to provide deeper, data-driven perspectives on the big issues faced by young Australians.

Connection without belonging is the third in that series. It focuses on community and social connection, one of the most underrated assets for our economic prosperity and wellbeing. The report outlines why we face a different set of challenges in building community than previous generations, putting forward opportunities to build social capital for young Australians of today and tomorrow. If anything, recent terror attacks such as those at Bondi Beach have highlighted the importance of social cohesion in Australia.

For statistical purposes, young Australians are defined as those aged 15 to 34. In 2026, that is a cohort spanning both Millennials (born 1981 to 1996, aged 30 to 45 in 2026) and Gen Zs (born 1997 to 2012, aged 14 to 29 in 2026). Where data captures a smaller age group or generational cohort, it is called out in the report.



Connection without belonging

TL;DR summary of this report

- For young people in Australia today, community is increasingly fragmented and fragile. Only a third (35%) of young Australians feel connected to community.⁴ Since 2010, the share of young people agreeing they have a sense of belonging in Australia has dropped 30% for Millennials, compared to only 5% for Baby Boomers.⁵
- The ideal is not the place-based community of 50 years ago – but it's also not where we are now. Cultural, technological and economic shifts have limited opportunities for young people to meaningfully connect across differences, and social division is more prominent. In fact, 2 in 5 Gen Zs (41%) need to embrace someone's worldview to be able to accept them as a person – in other words, acknowledging the individual while disagreeing with their beliefs is a challenge.⁶
- The impacts of fragmented community on young people are profound and reinforcing. Previously the least lonely age group, a quarter (25%) of 15–24-year-olds now experience loneliness, compared to only 18% of those 65 and older.⁷ Research shows loneliness leads to poorer health, wellbeing and workplace productivity.⁸
- Even so, there are signs of resilience. Natural disasters and other crises have shown the impact when Australians come together to support one another, and online communities are providing spaces to build connection. But we need to fundamentally rethink our approach to community. It's an economic asset that is critical to our prosperity. Without it, the legacy we leave our young people is a world that prioritises performance without purpose.
- For young people, building community requires four things: giving young people agency, rebuilding places and developing skills that bring people together, making community visible in decision-making, and restoring the intergenerational bargain.

Community for young people is increasingly fragmented and fragile

"Australians all let us rejoice, for we are one and free" – words from our national anthem that speak to our unity and shared purpose. But for many young Australians, these ideals feel increasingly hollow. Recent events are prompting difficult questions about how united we truly are: whether young people can genuinely believe that Australia has their backs, and what sense of connection they feel to this country they call home.

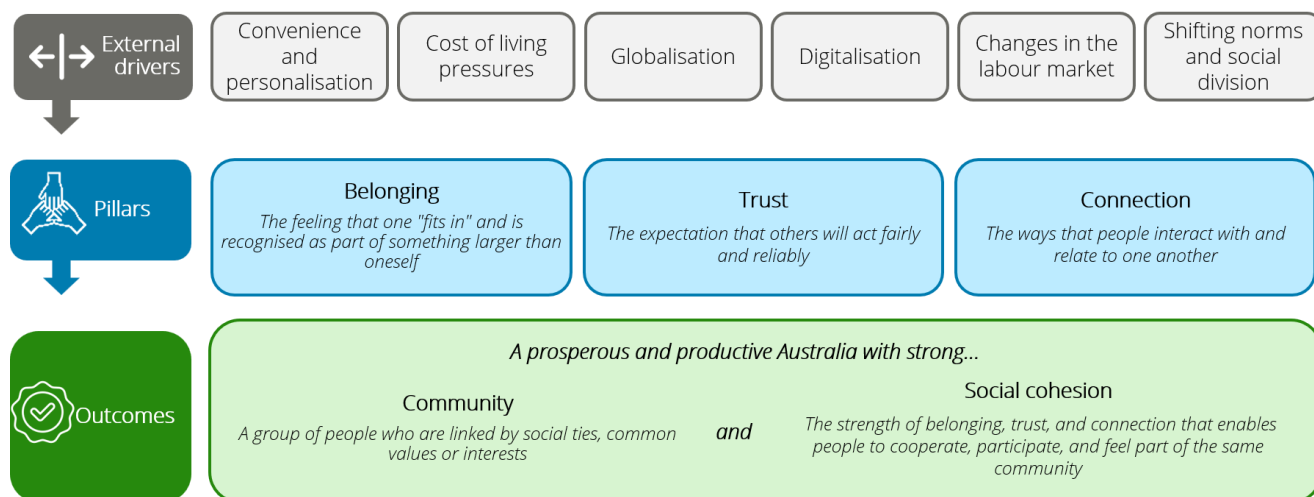
Australians' experience of community has never been uniform. For some, significant isolation and low belonging have long been a reality, and for others, community that once felt strong is now eroding.

Young people represent a highly diverse and rich mix of cultures, backgrounds, and identities. Each of these play a critical role in shaping young people's sense of belonging and fundamentally influence how they relate to and experience community across different contexts.

When thinking about how young Australians experience community, it is therefore critical to adopt an intersectional lens, recognising how these different aspects of identity can expose young people to overlapping forms of discrimination and marginalisation that disrupt opportunities to build community.⁹ For example, recent research from the Scanlon Foundation Research Institute demonstrates that loneliness, limited trust and experiences of exclusion are more pronounced among recently arrived migrants, shaping their feelings of belonging.¹⁰

Community can be found in all sorts of contexts, including family and friends, workplaces, schools, social and sports groups, religion and even culture itself. At its heart, community is a network of relationships where social interaction has become belonging. Community is the kind of belonging that builds trust and togetherness; the kind where you're known and seen; and the kind that supports our prosperity and productivity (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Pillars of community and how they support prosperity today



Source: Deloitte Access Economics and additional sources.^{11,12,13,14,15}

For generations, neighbourhoods, workplaces and educational institutions have actively fostered lifelong connections. Baby Boomer and Gen X communities were characterised by local neighbourhoods and strong face-to-face ties in workplaces, clubs and religious groups. These formal spaces created routine, shared identity and reliable opportunities for social interactions.

But the foundation of community has evolved from what it once was (Box 1). Today, young people are faced with a casualised and less durable form of community – one that is no longer place-based, nor one that guarantees quality connection. Community for young people is fluid and interest-based. Millennials and Gen Zs leverage digital spaces and flexibility to form shared identity and purpose. Online communities facilitate free clothes swaps, fundraising efforts, and connection to people in another part of the world rallying around an issue. But in-person friendships are less central and 'third places' that once anchored social life, including

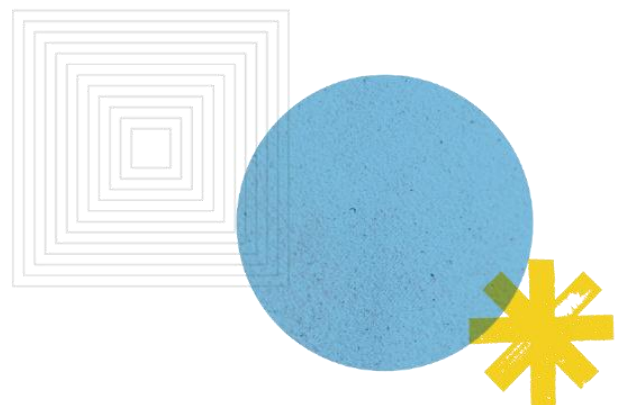
libraries, community centres, local cafes and parks, are smaller and infrequently used.¹⁶ Now, social connection is something you plan, not something you encounter or bump into, offering young people fewer opportunities to build community.

Box 1: Why does community look so different today?

Community looks different today. Where connection was once largely shaped by neighbourhoods, workplaces, religious institutions and civic organisations, it is now far more fluid, diverse and often centred around shared interests rather than shared places.

Some of the social and economic shifts driving this transformation include:

- Previously, mobility was more constrained; migration was at lower levels than it is today, and interstate mobility was lower. In contrast, today, over 39% of Australians change their address every five years.¹⁷
- Religion was also a key way that people built community. However, 40% of Australians today do not identify with any religion.¹⁸
- Social media and hyper-personalised algorithms are redefining how people connect beyond geography. This accelerated during COVID-19, with TikTok adding more than 2.5 million Australian users in the first half of 2020 alone and now reaching more than 8.5 million.^{19,20}
- The traditional link between community and place is weakening for younger generations. Housing unaffordability has put the “Great Australian Dream” of homeownership out of reach for many, while urban sprawl, residential mobility and car-dependent suburbs make it harder to form and sustain local connections.^{21,22}

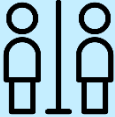


Drivers of how young people experience community

A few big shifts in how we live, work and spend time are making it harder for young people to build and maintain strong community ties. The table below summarises what's changing and why it matters.

Table 1: Drivers of how young people experience community and why it matters

Driver	What's changing	Why it matters for community	Considerations
Convenience and personalisation 	The way we consume goods and services is increasingly built around the individual. The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated this drift. Working arrangements are flexible,²³ content is personalised and on-demand,²⁴ and shopping is self-served.²⁵ Even dating has algorithm-driven personal recommendations and 24% of young Australians now meet their partner on a dating app.²⁶	We have fewer shared routines and incidental encounters with each other. When connection has to be planned, it is easier for community ties to weaken.	Personalised consumption patterns are not inherently negative. Flexibility can support other important things such as participation in the workforce and opportunities to work and study.
Digitalisation 	Work and study are now enabled by digital spaces, including recorded learning, online meetings and hybrid work. The share of Australians working from home has increased steadily since 1970 to 36% in 2025,²⁷ while higher education delivered by a combination of remote and in-person methods has increased by over 32% since 2020.²⁸	Digital spaces reduce informal 'in-between' moments that build belonging and trust. This reduces community over time. For example, remotely enrolled higher education students report 13% lower belonging and 64% lower satisfaction with peer engagement than those on campus.²⁹	Digital spaces help us connect when physical spaces decline. This is especially true for gender diverse, Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) and First Nations young people.³⁰ However, the COVID-19 pandemic revealed the importance of some IRL (<i>'in real life'</i>) connection for wellbeing.³¹ Social media age restrictions are in place for under 16s. It is too early to know how these will impact community for young people.
Changes in the labour market 	Work is more fragmented and less secure. The share of young workers (15-24) working part time has increased from 41% to 58% since 2000,³² and the share of those who hold multiple jobs has increased 31%.³³ Young people are less likely to stay in one career for life and work itself requires more adaptability and flexibility.	Fragmented work limits the degree to which long-term trust and relationships are built. When work is casual, short-term or spread across multiple jobs, opportunities to form deep connections or shared identity are less common.	Flexible careers can create opportunity, autonomy and exposure to a wider range of people and experiences. But where flexibility is driven by insecurity rather than choice, it can make community hard to sustain. Young people are the most likely age group to want to work more with the highest rates of underemployment.³⁴

Driver	What's changing	Why it matters for community	Considerations
Cost of living pressures 	Young Australians are under disproportionate financial stress. Over 85% of young Australians experienced financial difficulties to some extent in the last 12 months.³⁵ They also spend less on discretionary items than other age cohorts.³⁶ This creates pressure to work and study more. The average time spent on employment and education each day has increased most significantly for 15-24 year olds.³⁷	Financial stress and busyness can isolate us. We experience social connection differently or opt for disengagement entirely.³⁸ This undermines the interactions needed for community and social cohesion.	Increased work and study can provide opportunities for community. But financial stress can act as a barrier to connection in these settings.³⁹ Associated time pressures affect civic engagement too. Over one third (34%) of young people (12-25) do not engage with the Australian government because they do not have enough time.⁴⁰
Shifting cultural norms and social division 	Individualism has replaced collectivism and gender norms are diverging. While younger women show less belief in traditional gender norms, Gen Z men are the opposite, reporting, on average, more traditional beliefs in gender norms.⁴¹ Social media, online platforms and political discourse are narrowing our experiences; only 33% of Australians receive information from a different political leaning to theirs at least weekly.⁴²	Our realities are becoming more disparate. We share fewer common perspectives and understanding, increasing social division. This makes it harder to connect across differences, undermining trust, unity and belonging. Attitudes reflect this: 2 in 5 (41%) Gen Zs now need to embrace someone's worldview or practice to be able to accept them as a person.⁴³	Online sources and social media allow us to find credible information. But the fast-paced and personalised environment poses a risk of fragmentation by amplifying our divisions and differences. This erodes our shared fact base and polarises opinions. The information environment may also be contributing to this fragmentation.⁴⁴
Globalisation 	The distinction between local and global is far less clear than it used to be. Digital platforms, migration and geographic mobility bring global events, identities and cultural norms into real time.	When identity is shaped by a global reference point, boundaries of community become broader and less anchored. This can cause us to feel less connected to those around us, weakening trust in local communities and their collective identity.⁴⁵	Globalisation enriches our perspectives and strengthens connection across borders. It can create new forms of belonging that were previously inaccessible. The challenge is to ensure wider connection is additive.

Source: Deloitte Access Economics, additional sources referenced in table.⁴⁶

The pillars of community

For young Australians, quantity over quality puts belonging at risk

Young people are at an age where independence and identity are established, social skills are put into practice, and significant personal, social and economic transitions occur.

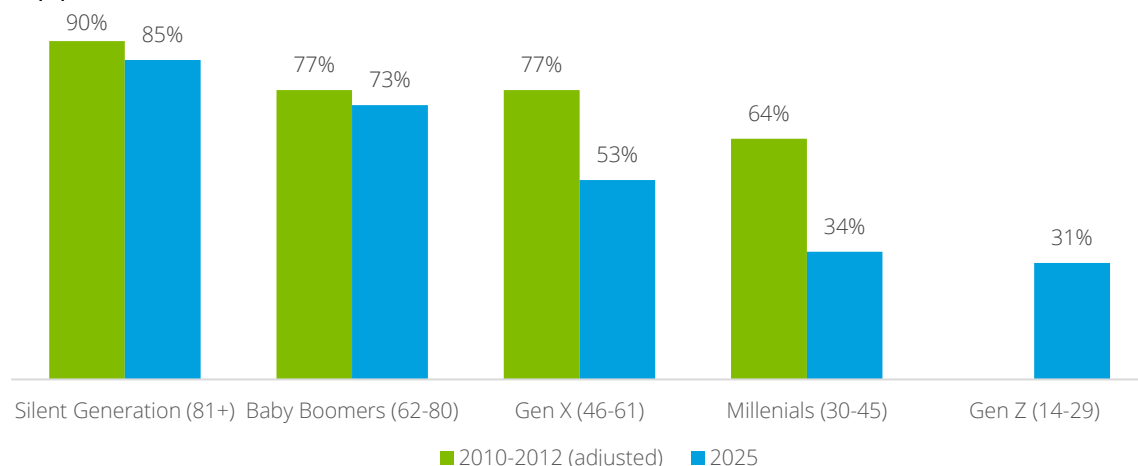
From this age onwards, the quantity of social interactions matters less than the quality. Without quality, there can be long-lasting effects on participation, the ability to trust others and other life outcomes.⁴⁷ In a social media era, opportunities for social interaction are, on paper, at an all-time high. But today's high-volume interactions ask for shallow engagement, not deep belonging. Young people realise this – over 42% agree that it is easier to connect with others online than in-person,⁴⁸ and over 70% use social media to only passively view or scroll other people's content.⁴⁹

Young Australians today do not experience genuine and meaningful community by simply doing the things expected or available to them. Our policies, norms and economy are no longer built in a way that naturally cultivates quality connection. Constant interaction online, or even a planned face-to-face catch-up, does not reliably translate to tangible belonging or trusted support.

We might be surrounded by more people than ever, but we're not necessarily meaningfully connected to them. In other words, social interaction has failed to establish a long-term sense of belonging. This puts the very premise of community at risk.

Australia's sense of belonging is now well below its long-term average, representing a steady 23% decline since 2007. Concerningly, generational differences in the sense of belonging are widening and are lowest among young people (Chart 1). The sense of belonging of Australian-born Millennials dropped from 64% in 2010 to only 34% in 2025.ⁱ This is equivalent to a 30% drop in young people's sense of belonging over 15 years, while over the same period, Baby Boomers only dropped 5%. While temporal data on Gen Zs on this index is yet to be established, only 31% of Gen Zs felt a sense of belonging to Australia in 2025 – this is even lower than Millennials.⁵⁰

Chart 1: Proportion of people who have a sense of belonging in Australia 'to a great extent,' by age group across time (%)ⁱⁱ



Source: Deloitte Access Economics, using data from the Scanlon Index of Social Cohesion.⁵¹

Note: No data is available for Gen Z individuals between 2010 and 2012 as they were not interviewed due to the minimum survey age.

ⁱ Respondents were asked 'to what extent do you have a sense of belonging in Australia?' Data points reflect Australian born individuals and a percentage change over time.

ⁱⁱ Ages of each generation are accurate to 2026.

Young people's trust in institutions is eroding

Trust is an expectation that someone or something can be relied on. It makes plans and everyday transactions possible and provides social stability. But without a shared understanding, we're less inclined to rely on those who don't also share our view. We see this in young people's trust in each other and institutions. Currently, young people (15-24) are the least likely to agree that others can be trusted (54%), followed by those aged 25-39 (60%).⁵² At an institutional level, only 1 in 3 (32%) young Australians believe the federal government can be trusted to do the right thing most or all the time.⁵³

Consequently, political engagement is lower and 33% of young people (12-25) don't engage with the Australian government because they feel they will not be listened to.⁵⁴ While some young people have taken to digital advocacy and issue-based activism to voice their opinions, the lack of trust in legitimate decision-making powers reflects a growing disillusionment towards Australia as a nation. For young Australians, eroding trust is both a symptom and a cause of changing community standards. Without shared values or experiences in community, they are less likely to trust others. But equally, lower trust means they are less likely to attempt to connect with others.⁵⁵

Young people have become Australia's loneliest generation

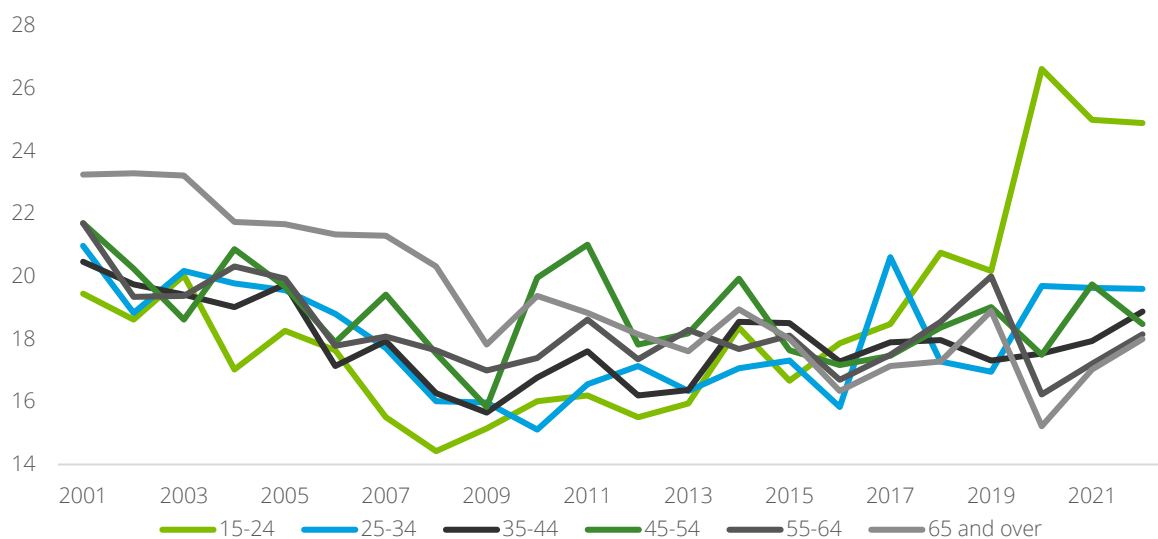
Young Australians are incredibly vulnerable to loneliness. Social transitions are often significant at this age, with major life changes such as leaving school, moving out of home, starting work or tertiary studies or having children. Each transition for young people increases the risk of loneliness. Worse, the transitions can directly cause loneliness, especially when support networks are weak.⁵⁶

Low belonging and community are strongly tied to loneliness. Young people with lower community participation and trust are two times more likely to experience episodic or persistent loneliness.⁵⁷ In fact, low community engagement is one of the strongest risk factors for loneliness in young Australians.⁵⁸

As communities have become more fluid, young Australians have become the loneliest generation. Previously, 15-24 year old Australians were once the least lonely generation. But in the past two decades and accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic, loneliness in young people has increased 16% (Chart 2). Now, a quarter (25%) of 15-24 year olds are lonely, compared to only 18% of those 65 and older.⁵⁹

The perceived number of friends has also dropped most markedly for those aged under 25 in the past two decades, and 25-34 year olds have closely followed.⁶⁰ Further, only a third (35%) of young Australians felt connected to their local community.⁶¹ While the long-term impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic remain uncertain, we continue to see a sustained trend towards the digitalisation of communication and social interaction. These perceptions of connection may signal that young people are struggling to re-establish meaningful social connections, despite connectivity being at an all-time high.

Chart 2: Loneliness prevalence by age group over time (%)



Source: Deloitte Access Economics, using the Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) Survey.⁶²

The outcome: social cohesion under pressure

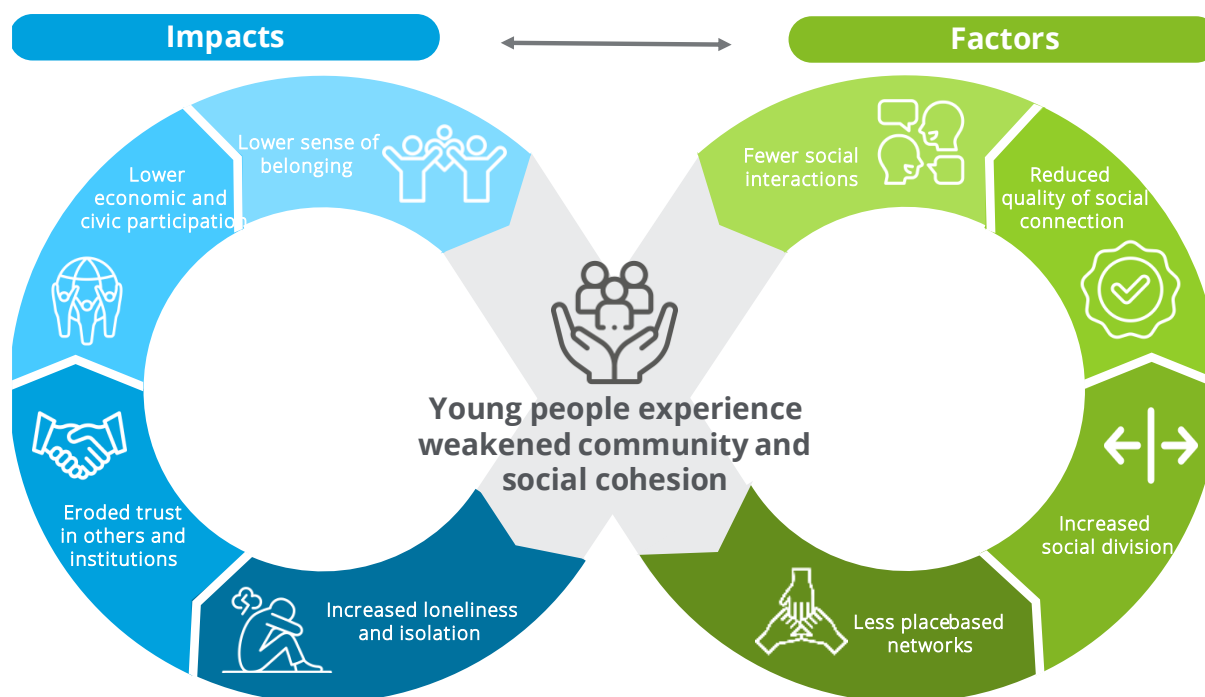
In Australia at large, social cohesion is strained – the glue that binds us together is under pressure. In the past 10 years, social cohesion in Australia has dropped 16%, from a score of 93 in 2015 to just 78 in 2025.^{iii, 63} It is now well below its long-term average and at its lowest level since the first survey in 2007. The symptoms of division and dissatisfaction in Australian society are evident in political activism, incidents and protests.

If this continues, these changes leave a legacy for young people that is divided, exclusive and marginalised. No longer will society be effectively working towards everyone's best interests; no longer will Australia be offering young people the opportunity of moving up in life; and no longer will Australia be as resilient to conflict, geopolitical tensions and natural disasters.⁶⁴ Social outcomes will decline and experiences of prejudice and discrimination will become more prevalent. This will reduce the economic and civic participation of young people who would otherwise provide significant productivity and diversity benefits to Australia's economy. Worse, some research suggests that low social cohesion impacts wellbeing and can stagnate economic growth, even sending it backwards.⁶⁵

Young Australians are experiencing the effects already, citing concerns about unfairness in education, employment and housing.⁶⁶ In the country of 'a fair go', these concerns risk simmering tensions. For some, becoming an adult is now a downward social trend, giving rise to a sense of status frustration. In fact, many young people are unsure whether Australia even cultivates the conditions for a shared sense of identity.⁶⁷ For young people, building a cohesive and inclusive Australia is incomplete.

Lesser connection and a lack of shared identity are likely to further feed the reinforcing cycle of social division, weakening community and social cohesion among young people (Figure 2). However, the relationship between the factors and impacts of community is deeply complex and can feed in a self-fulfilling cycle.

Figure 2: Reinforcing cycle of low community and its impacts



Source: Deloitte Access Economics.⁶⁸

ⁱⁱⁱ The Scanlon Index of Social Cohesion measures social cohesion across five areas: sense of belonging, sense of worth, social inclusion and justice, political participation, and acceptance and rejection. In 2007 when the index was introduced, the measure was benchmarked at 100.

The economic risk of weakening community

Community and social cohesion are critical to our economic prosperity – networks, support and shared purpose are embedded in our willingness to contribute. In community, we don't just do things for our own perks, but because we belong and feel a sense of responsibility.⁶⁹ In community, work and effort are no longer simply transactional.⁷⁰ While research on the direct link between community and economic growth is mixed,^{71, 72} the economic benefits are still clear. Community generates benefits, including:

- improved wellbeing and reduced loneliness, which lower health system costs, strengthen productive capacity and increase participation⁷³
- stable social dynamics and higher trust in institutions, which increase cooperation and efficiency in economic transactions⁷⁴
- strengthened social cohesion and civic resilience, which support economic participation, diversity and economic productivity.⁷⁵

But the evidence above shows that the foundations of community are weakening for young Australians: belonging is falling, loneliness is rising, trust is eroding and social cohesion is under pressure. If these trends continue, Australia risks leaving young people a society that is less connected, less resilient and less able to draw on the full contribution of its people.

Loneliness shows how quickly weakened community can become an economic problem. Lonely people have higher rates of mental illness, emotional distress, suicide, poor health behaviours such as physical inactivity or excessive alcohol consumption, and premature death (Figure 3).⁷⁶ They are also more absent from work or study and less productive even when they're there.

These impacts cost the Australian economy. In 2021, it was estimated that loneliness among young people cost Australia \$801 million, contributing almost a third (29%) of the total economic cost of loneliness in Australia.⁷⁷ This means less investment in more productive avenues for government and businesses.

Figure 3: Health and wellbeing impacts of loneliness

Lonely people are...



Source: Deloitte Access Economics, using data from *State of the Nation: Social connection in Australia 2023*.⁷⁸

Health and workplace costs are only the start. Lonely young people are also less likely to participate in the workforce, and this can impact economic output.⁷⁹ Other socially motivated work and civic contributions, such as volunteering and voting, are likely to be lower too.⁸⁰ In turn, lower participation can reinforce experiences of loneliness and weak community.⁸¹ However, the relationship between community and productivity is complex and interconnected: neither solely drives the other, but each can strongly influence changes in the other.

Strengthening community would support reduced loneliness in young people, increasing their levels of participation and productivity, while avoiding costs to the health system and improving their quality of life. In turn, saved costs could be reinvested elsewhere and young people would be supported to contribute more to the economy.

Trust shows another way weakened community becomes an economic risk. Young people's eroding trust can have consequences that can affect their ability to cooperate and effectively undertake economic transactions. People with lower trust are less likely to work for the good of others and instead act in their own interests.⁸² Low trust necessitates additional costs to enforce contracts, monitor behaviour and implement security protocols, reducing the pool of funds available for investment.⁸³ The quantity and quality of investments are also affected by trust and less trusting people have lower confidence in others to take on risk.⁸⁴ This will skew investment towards less ambitious and less valuable projects, limiting long-term productivity and prosperity.⁸⁵

Furthermore, many of the systems Australia relies on also depend on informal cooperation: neighbours checking in on older people, families and communities sharing care responsibilities, volunteers responding in emergencies, and people stepping forward before formal services are required. As young people's sense of community becomes more fragmented, this informal social infrastructure becomes less reliable. The result is likely to be greater pressure on existing systems, from aged care and healthcare to childcare and emergency services. Without strong community ties, more of the effort falls to formal services, placing greater pressure on already stretched systems and further weakening trust when they cannot respond effectively.

Together, these effects show that weakening community is not just a social concern; it is an economic risk.

Opportunities: How to advance the Youth Agenda

Community is an economic asset that is critical to the prosperity of young Australians. But we need to fundamentally rethink how we approach policy, norms and our economy.

To harness the economic benefits of community, young people need to be able to connect across differences. They need the time, honesty and vulnerability in relationships to build genuine community.

Community can't be insular or exclusive, nor can it erase diversity and difference, but it should articulate what connects us as Australians despite it.

Building community in Australia will not happen by accident. The onus can't only be on young people's plans. Structures and policies need to support young people so that they have choice and flexibility in how to engage with their communities.

Recent crises have demonstrated what's possible when Australians come together to support one another. Whether it is the support provided in the aftermath of natural disasters, the paddle-out in honour of Bondi victims, or the way communities rally around local causes, these examples show that connection is not absent. The challenge is that it is often episodic, emerging in moments of crisis rather than being embedded in everyday life. Australia's task is to make that sense of connection more durable, so young people inherit a society where community is not only something we rediscover in hardship.

For young people, building the social capital and quality support networks in today's world requires four things: giving young people agency, rebuilding places and developing skills that bring people together, making community visible in decision-making, and restoring the intergenerational bargain.

1. Give young people genuine agency in shaping society

For young Australians, building community and belonging starts with meaningful participation in public life and intentional investment in their connections with broader institutions, including government. The Office for Youth and Youth Advisory Councils have begun this work already. Youth representation in decision-making spaces such as parliament ensures that trust is built through participation, not just consultation. Over 78% of young people want to be included in government decision-making,⁸⁶ and 98% of young people think it's important that the Australian Government considers their views when making decisions.⁸⁷ When young people feel heard and see themselves reflected in leadership, relationships with institutions become more credible and meaningful.

2. Rebuild places and develop skills that bring people together

Integrating flexible, low-cost and accessible opportunities for genuine connection in settings young people are already a part of, including homes, schools, education, workplaces, social groups and sport, would provide building blocks for community. Thoughtfully designed physical spaces and transport routes in urban planning initiatives can not only be functional but also foster unplanned and everyday encounters to complement community in an increasingly digital world. The Nightingale Village in Melbourne brings this to life as Australia's first privately delivered residential precinct to integrate social housing, without direct government partnership.⁸⁸ This housing model demonstrates what a community lens over decision-making can look like – embedding belonging into the built environment through intentional social mix that fosters everyday connection.

Structured programs could provide intentional spaces for young people to develop communication and collaboration skills. For example, early investment in education settings in a way that, while not the primary focus of the investment, equips young people to communicate, collaborate and build trust effectively, would limit barriers to social connection later in life. Investment could also include community or intergenerational programs, education and civic participation initiatives, as well as public narratives that emphasise mutual respect and fairness. The Victorian Government's Amplify grant⁸⁹ put this into practice by funding organisations to support young people to design and deliver youth-led music, arts and cultural events across Victoria.

3. Make community visible in decision-making

What gets measured gets managed. If we're to value community for what it's worth, we need to make community tangible.

Some measures of community already exist, including the Scanlon-Monash Index of Social Cohesion and Australia's Measuring what Matters Wellbeing Framework.^{90, 91} These measures could be expanded to capture the meaning of community for young people today, as well as the relationship between community and economic growth. UNICEF Australia and ARACY's Australian Children's Wellbeing Index⁹² shows how broad, multidimensional concepts about children and young people's wellbeing can be translated into a practical national measurement framework. A similar approach could help governments track whether young Australians have the conditions needed to build community, trust and belonging over time.

Communicating progress with community and social connection-related measures could emphasise their value for governments. We need to apply a community lens over decision making and investment in adjacent areas to ensure it's easier for young people to build community, not harder.

Recent budget statements, such as the *Women's Budget Statement*, have highlighted Government decisions and investment related to historically overlooked policy areas that do not have an explicit budget area associated with them.⁹³ The value of environmental considerations is also now prominently highlighted through Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) reporting requirements for businesses.

For each decision, the question needs to be asked: how will this affect community? Applying an intersectional community lens – and keeping it front of mind through persistent tracking and measurement – would support continuity for deeper relationships, established trust and long-lasting belonging.⁹⁴

4. Restore the intergenerational bargain

Young Australians are more likely to feel part of their communities and shared national story when they can see a place for themselves in Australia's future.

This requires trust in their institutions to deliver on the core promises of adulthood – secure housing, stable work, fair returns to education and confidence that living standards will improve over time. As these aspirations feel increasingly out of reach for young people, belonging becomes harder to sustain.

There has been a growing recognition of the challenges facing young Australians today, particularly with respect to housing and wealth accumulation. The recently announced FY27 Federal Budget includes a series of sweeping tax reform changes designed to make the tax system fairer, particularly for younger generations. This includes limiting negative gearing for residential property and replacing the 50% capital gains tax (CGT) discount with inflation-adjusted indexation and with a minimum rate of 30%. These changes matter because they influence whether young people feel the systems around them are responsive to their lives, values and aspirations for the future.

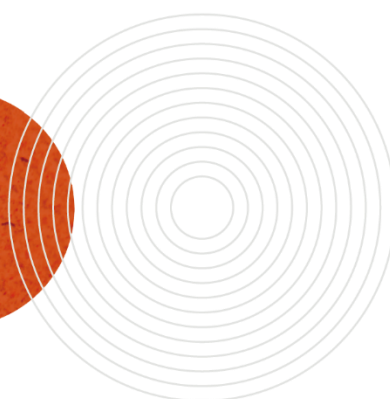
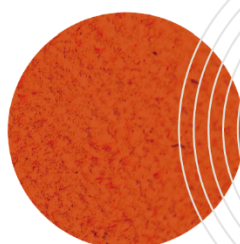
While the reforms are a step in the right direction, further work is needed to ensure younger generations feel that the promise of a fair go has not been broken. Beyond housing, nearly two in three Gen Z Australians report living pay check-to-pay check with cost of living a major concern, and 75% of younger Australians believe that governments should play a bigger role in pushing businesses to address climate change.⁹⁵ The question is whether young Australians inherit systems that reflect modern realities and values, or systems that leave them carrying risks they had little role in creating.

Looking ahead

The story of community for young Australians is not only one of decline. Across Australia, there are already examples of governments, service providers, communities and young people themselves taking serious steps to rebuild connection, trust and belonging. The opportunity is to make this work more deliberate, more visible and more enduring.

This report has outlined where we stand. Young Australians are navigating a world in which community is more fragmented, belonging is weaker, loneliness is higher and trust is under pressure. But the direction is not fixed. Building community for young people is possible if we treat it as an economic and social priority. The task ahead is not to recreate the communities of the past. It is to build the conditions for community in the world young people actually inhabit.

The Youth Agenda is therefore not just about recognising the pressures facing young Australians. It is about choosing to build a future where they can participate, contribute and genuinely belong.



Endnotes

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