Regional Youth Insights Report

Office for Regional Youth

October 2022

NSW GOVERNMENT

Contents

The Department of Regional NSW acknowledges that it stands on Country which always was and always will be Aboriginal land. We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the land and waters, and we show our respect for Elders past, present and emerging. We are committed to providing places in which Aboriginal people are included socially, culturally and economically through thoughtful and collaborative approaches to our work.

Executive Summary

This report presents priority areas for investment for each region to improve economic and social outcomes for young people living in regional NSW

NSW's regions are home to more than two million people, spread across its spectacular coastline, rugged mountains, and outback landscapes. As part of a population dispersed across a relatively large geographical area, regional youth face different, and in many cases greater, challenges than youth in urban areas.
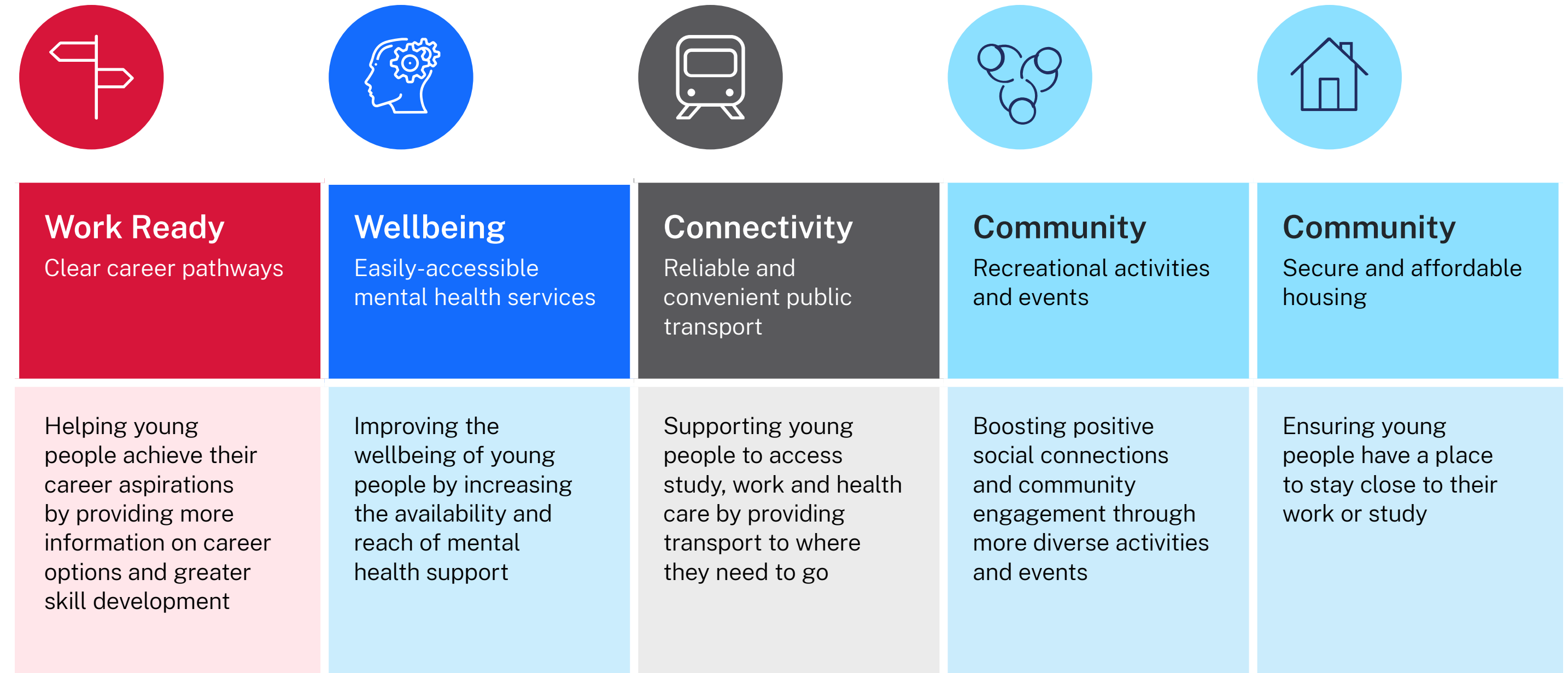
Office for Regional Youth's (ORY) vision is for all regional young people to have opportunities for meaningful work, accessible health care, and education; and to feel part of vibrant and inclusive communities.

The Department's Regional Youth Framework guides ORY's work. This Framework, which reflects the views of young people in regions, has four pillars - Work Ready, Wellbeing, Connectivity, and Community. Nine investment themes across these pillars have been identified for further government investment.

ORY undertook a project to understand the most important areas for investment to improve outcomes for young people in each region.

ORY developed evidence-based priority areas for each region through triangulating the input from in-person engagements with over 650 young people, survey responses from over 1300 young people, and data on key economic and social indicators for each region. The priority areas for each region are displayed on the following page.

State-wide priority areas that presented across multiple regions are outlined below. While in many cases, youth in metropolitan areas may face the same or similar issues, outcomes for regional young people trail behind metropolitan peers. As well, how young people experienced these challenges tended to differ depending on whether they were based in Metro Satellite and Growth Centres, Coastal and Inland areas or Remote areas in each of the regions.

Work Ready	Wellbeing	Connectivity	Community	Community
Clear career pathways	Easily-accessible mental health services	Reliable and convenient public transport	Recreational activities and events	Secure and affordable housing
Helping young people achieve their career aspirations by providing more information on career options and greater skill development	Improving the wellbeing of young people by increasing the availability and reach of mental health support	Supporting young people to access study, work and health care by providing transport to where they need to go	Boosting positive social connections and community engagement through more diverse activities and events	Ensuring young people have a place to stay close to their work or study

Any decision on funding programs under these priorities should be informed by:

- **Desirability.** The extent to which an initiative is needed by young people in a region.

- **Impact**. The benefits an initiative will deliver, the extent to which it addresses a service delivery or policy gap, and the number of people that will be affected.

- **Feasibility.** The ease of implementation, including risks, cost, and alignment with ORY's government partners.

Proposed priority areas for investment vary across the regions

● Top priorities　　○ Secondary priorities

KEY

WORK READY	
	Career Pathways
	Happy and healthy schools
	Life skills
	Start-up business training

WELLBEING	
	Cultural activities
	Healthcare access
	Mental health support
	Public facilities
	Sexual health education

CONNECTIVITY	
	Driving training support
	Internet access
	Public transport

COMMUNITY	
	Affordable housing
	Community safety
	Cost of living
	LGBTQIA+ & multicultural inclusivity
	Recreational activities
	Social services support
	Voice of youth

		State Level Themes	Far West	Hunter	Illawarra Shoalhaven	Central Coast	Central West & Orana	North Coast	Riverina Murray	South East & Tablelands	New England North West
WORK READY	Skills	●	●○	●	○○	●○	●○	○○	○○	○○	○○
	Education			○○	○	○○	○○	○	○○		○
WELLBEING	Health	●	●	●○	●	●○	●○	●	●○	●	●
	Inclusivity		○							○	
CONNECTIVITY	Transport	●	○○	○	●○	●	●	○	○	●	○
	Digital		○			○	○		○		○
COMMUNITY	Belonging	●	●	●	●	○○	●	●	○○○	●○○	○
	Agency					○			○		
	Housing	●						●	●		●

Definitions

WORK READY

	Career Pathways	Boost skill development and information on career pathway options
	Happy and healthy schools	Reduce anti-social behaviour (including bullying) and the impact of drug use on other students
	Life skills	Provide more life skills education for school aged young people, such as managing finances, taxes and finding a rental property
	Start-up business training	Offer more training and support to start a business for apprentices, other TAFE students and young entrepreneurs

WELLBEING

	Cultural activities	Expand opportunities for Aboriginal young people to be involved in cultural activities
	Healthcare access	Boost the accessibility of health services for young people
	Mental health support	Expand the availability and awareness of mental health services for young people
	Public facilities	Improve the maintenance of public facilities, including bathrooms and provision of period products
	Sexual health education	Provide more education on sexual health to young people, including on different sexual preferences

CONNECTIVITY

	Driving training support	Offer more support for young people to obtain their driver's licence
	Internet access	Increase the reliability and speed of internet access
	Public transport	Improve the availability, frequency, and reliability of public transport.

COMMUNITY

	Affordable housing	Expand affordable housing options for young people close to their work or study
	Community safety	Improve young people's feeling of safety in public areas and on public transport
	Cost of living	Ease the cost of living pressure on young people
	LGBTQIA+ & multicultural inclusivity	Build community inclusivity and safety for young people identifying as LGBTIQ+ or from a multicultural background
	Recreational activities	Boost the number and variety of recreational activities and events for young people
	Social services support	Improve access to youth and support workers for young people
	Voice of youth	Offer young people greater influence on decision-making in their community

Background and Methodology

Targeted place-based investments will improve economic and social outcomes for young people in regional NSW

Regional youth can face greater challenges in work, wellbeing, connectivity, and community than youth in urban areas as evidenced by indicators highlighting disparities in outcomes for regional youth.

ORY's vision and investment themes guide its work to improve the lives of young people in NSW's regions. ORY engaged young people across the regions in consultations to understand the priority areas for investment in each region under each investment theme.

Please refer to the Regional NSW Youth Framework for further information (link)

ORY's vision

For all regional young people to have opportunities for meaningful work, accessible health care and education; and to feel part of vibrant and inclusive communities

Four pillars

WORK READY	WELLBEING	CONNECTIVITY	COMMUNITY

Investment themes

Skills	Education	Health	Inclusivity	Transport	Digital	Belonging	Agency	Housing

Priorities for young people

WORK READY
- Better access to great education and training opportunities
- Improved skills and knowledge to navigate the pathways into careers
- Clearer options to take them from school to training, work and further education opportunities
- Increased understanding of the workforce
- Disadvantaged, or at-risk young people better supported to learn and achieve

WELLBEING
- Young people and their families supported to improve wellbeing
- Increased understanding of their health needs to help navigate the health system
- Access to culturally and youth-appropriate services
- Increased number of young people who can get help, when they seek it

CONNECTIVITY
- Increased access to safe private transport
- Increased access to safe public transport to the places they need to go
- Access to services without travelling long distances
- Skills to navigate and use digital systems

COMMUNITY
- Opportunities to shape their communities
- Increased access to a variety of youth-appropriate activities
- Feeling of safety in, connection to, and value to their communities
- Opportunities for Aboriginal young people to connect with Country and Culture
- Social connections and activities for LGBTQIA+ young people
- Improved messaging about upcoming events and activities

The priority areas were based on the input of nearly 2,000 young people across NSW, as well as data on key indicators for each region

Data sources were triangulated to develop priority areas, and then tested and refined with government partners.

In-Person Regional Engagements

Developed a richer and more nuanced understanding about what would improve work readiness, wellbeing, connection, and community for young people in regional NSW.

REGIONAL DATA

Examined the available data on key outcomes for regional areas and metro Sydney to better understand the disparities in outcomes between young people living in regional areas and metro Sydney.

Data on key indicators

Priority Investment Areas For Each Region

Survey

Understood the relative importance of challenges faced by young people across regional NSW, and the types of initiatives that would improve key aspects of their lives.

Government Partner Engagement

Tested and refined the proposed priority areas for investment with government stakeholders from the Regional Youth Steering Committee (representing NSW Departments including Education and Training, NSW Transport, and Justice NSW) and the Regional Directors group.

Regional engagement outputs

Survey responses from each region

Around 2000 young people across NSW were consulted on the key challenges that need to be addressed

Market Research

In-Person Regional Engagements

651 young people provided input across **9** regions through workshops, interviews and pop-up engagements, including with Regional Youth Taskforce members.

Young people engaged included: 259 males under 18; 79 males over 18; 241 females under 18; 70 females over 18; 2 non-binary/transgender[3]

ORY contacted more than **95** community organisations across the 9 regions to arrange engagement sessions and better understand the local community context.

Survey

1,316 youth completed the survey: 62% 12 to 17 years old, 38% 18-24 years old, 63%[1] female, 34%[1] male.

The survey engaged **diverse cohorts**: 16% of respondents were living with a disability or were a carer for someone living with a disability; 16% identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander; 19% identified as LGBTIQ+[2].

The survey was distributed through **multiple channels**:

- social media campaign, market research firm
- government partners, community organisations.

Map

North Coast **156** | **66**

New England North West **120** | **128**

Unincorporated NSW

Far West **23** | **53**

Central West and Orana **164** | **77**

Central Coast **162** | **63**

South East Tablelands **107** | **75**

Hunter **264** | **77**

Riverina Murray **198** | **54**

ACT

Illawarra Shoalhaven **122** | **58**
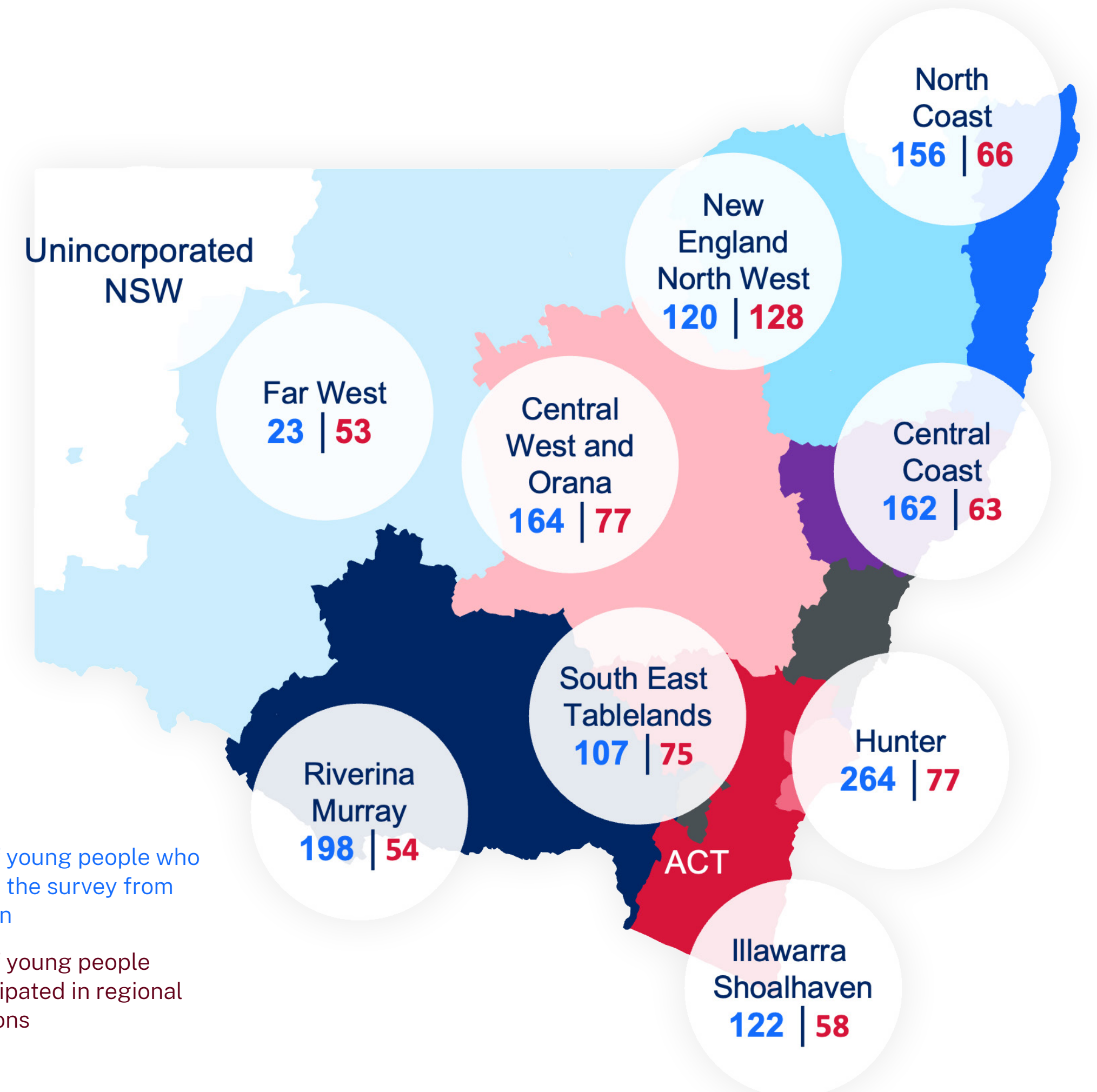
Number of young people who completed the survey from each region

Number of young people who participated in regional consultations

1. Young people identifying as male and female represented 96% of total survey respondents, 3% identified as non-binary or transgendered, and 1% did not disclose their gender identity
2. Some demographics are more likely to answer a survey compared to others. This creates response bias, which can result in higher than expected percentages for certain cohorts. To account for these variations, the results of the survey were standardised using a benchmark (ABS data).
3. Numbers for gender identity are estimates as participants were not asked to disclose their gender identity. Two participants self-identified as non-binary or transgender.
4. Stakeholders from the Regional Youth Steering Committee included: Department of Customer Service; Ministry of Health; Family and Community Services; Police NSW; Sport NSW; Justice NSW; Aboriginal Affairs NSW

Young people throughout regional NSW were engaged across a wide range of locations using a strengths-based approach

Regional engagements were arranged in close consultation with local community organisations

More than 95 community organisations were contacted across the nine regions to arrange workshops, explore potential venues for 'pop-up' engagements, and to understand local community dynamics.

The design of engagements encouraged participation and supported young people to share their views

The design of the facilitation enabled youth to explore and talk about the issues that were most important to them. The facilitation style was adapted depending on the context – from more formal workshops to informal conversations in 'pop up' engagements.

We spoke to young people in their own locations

Young people were engaged in the environments in which they felt comfortable to help us reach harder-to-access cohorts. We visited diverse locations – schools, TAFEs, universities, youth centres, community events, sporting facilities, and shopping centres.

males under 18	259
males over 18	79
females under 18	241
females over 18	70
non-binary/transgender	2
TOTAL	**651**

Numbers for gender identity are estimates as participants were not asked to disclose their gender identity. Two participants self-identified as non-binary or transgender.

1,300 young people from diverse cohorts completed the survey

The survey generated state-wide and region-specific insights on the relative importance of the nine investment themes to regional youth, as well as the actions that could improve outcomes for regional young people

Market research firm: Distributed survey to their proprietary database (900 completed responses).

Community organisations and youth workers: Shared the survey with their networks

3 **Data analysis techniques ensured robustness of the findings**

Data was weighted by region and per cohort to mitigate bias for lower or higher responses from particular cohorts and regions. For example, the proportion of young people responding to the survey who identified as LGBTIQ+ was higher than in the general population.

Cohorts were analysed using regression analysis. Differences between cohorts were considered statistically significant if p =<.05.[1&2]

Survey distributed

1

... through four primary channels over four weeks

2 **Representation of key cohorts**

1,316 COMPLETIONS

63%[3] female

34%[3] male

62% 12 to 17 years

38% 18-24 years old

16% were living with a disability or were a carer for someone living with a disability

Diverse cohorts were reached

16% identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander

19% identified as LGBTIQ+

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Social media campaign: Targeted lower response rate regions to increase the completion rate (Central Coast, Far West, and New England North West.

Government partners: ORY and other NSW government agencies distributed the survey.

1. Aligned with statistical best practice, as described in Smithson, M. (2010) *Statistics with Confidence*. SAGE Publications Ltd.
2. The gender sample size when split across the four genders- non-binary, female, male, transgender- yielded too small a sample size to analyse without inaccurate extrapolation. Cohort analysis compared a male baseline with all other genders.
3. Young people identifying as male and female represented 96% of total survey respondents, 3% identified as non-binary or transgendered, and 1% did not disclose their gender identity.

Key indicators were determined for each region based on a range of data sources

13 data sources were examined to select **6 main sources** for data analysis[1].

- 2020 Health Stats NSW data
- 2020 ABS LGA data
- 2019 ABS LGA data
- 2016 ABS Census data
- 2018 ABS Census data
- HealthStats NSW - NSW Combined Admitted Patient Epidemiology Data
- ABS population estimates (SAPHaRI)
- 2016 Remoteness Area. 2016 ABS Data
- HealthStats NSW - NSW Perinatal Data Collection (SAPHaRI). Centre for Epidemiology and Evidence, NSW Ministry of Health.

- Regional labour force trends and NSW electorates (December 2021) –Parliament of NSW
- Unpublished tables from Australian Burden of Disease Study, 2015. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare.
- BOSCAR offence by month data. YTD 2020
- BOSCAR offence by month data. YTD 2021

Data selection criteria

1 **Relevancy**

2 **Recency**

3 **Coverage**

WORK READY
Skills & Education

2016 Census data
2019 ABS LGA data
2020 ABS LGA data

WELLBEING
Health & Inclusivity

2018 Census data
2020 Health Stats NSW data
2020 ABS LGA data

CONNECTIVITY
Transport & Digital

2016 Census data
2020 ABS LGA data

COMMUNITY
Belonging, Agency & Housing

2020 BOSCAR offence data
2016 Census data
2019 ABS LGA data

LEGEND

● Work Ready   ● Wellbeing   ● Connectivity   ● Community   ● Cross-cutting

1. 2021 ABS census data was not included as it had not been released in its entirety at the time of writing.

A robust method was used to determine priority areas for each region

Qualitative and quantitative evidence sources were triangulated to prioritise areas for investment.

A four step process was used to triangulate the data and develop priority areas for each region:

1. **Analyse survey responses:** to identify the key issues for each investment theme for each region. This included identifying gaps in the survey data, such as where issues raised in the consultations had not been included as a question in the survey.

2. **Analyse engagement outputs:** by synthesising the key ssues for each region and counting how often each issue was raised by participants in each region during engagements.

   Through this analysis, the top three to five issues from the consultations were identified for each region, based on the number of people who raised the issue.

3. **Compare the two sets of issues:** for each investment theme for each region (survey and engagement analysis). An issue was selected as a priority area where it was raised as a key issue in both the survey and engagement analysis.

4. **Examine proposed priority areas for each region against data on key indicators:** to ensure the proposed priority areas were aligned with the key needs for young people. Key issues from the consultations, which had not been included in the survey, were selected as a priority issue where this was supported by the available data on key indicators. See page 10 for more detail on the analysis of data on regional indicators.

Data on key indicators

Priority Investment Areas For Each Region

Regional engagement outputs

Survey responses from each region
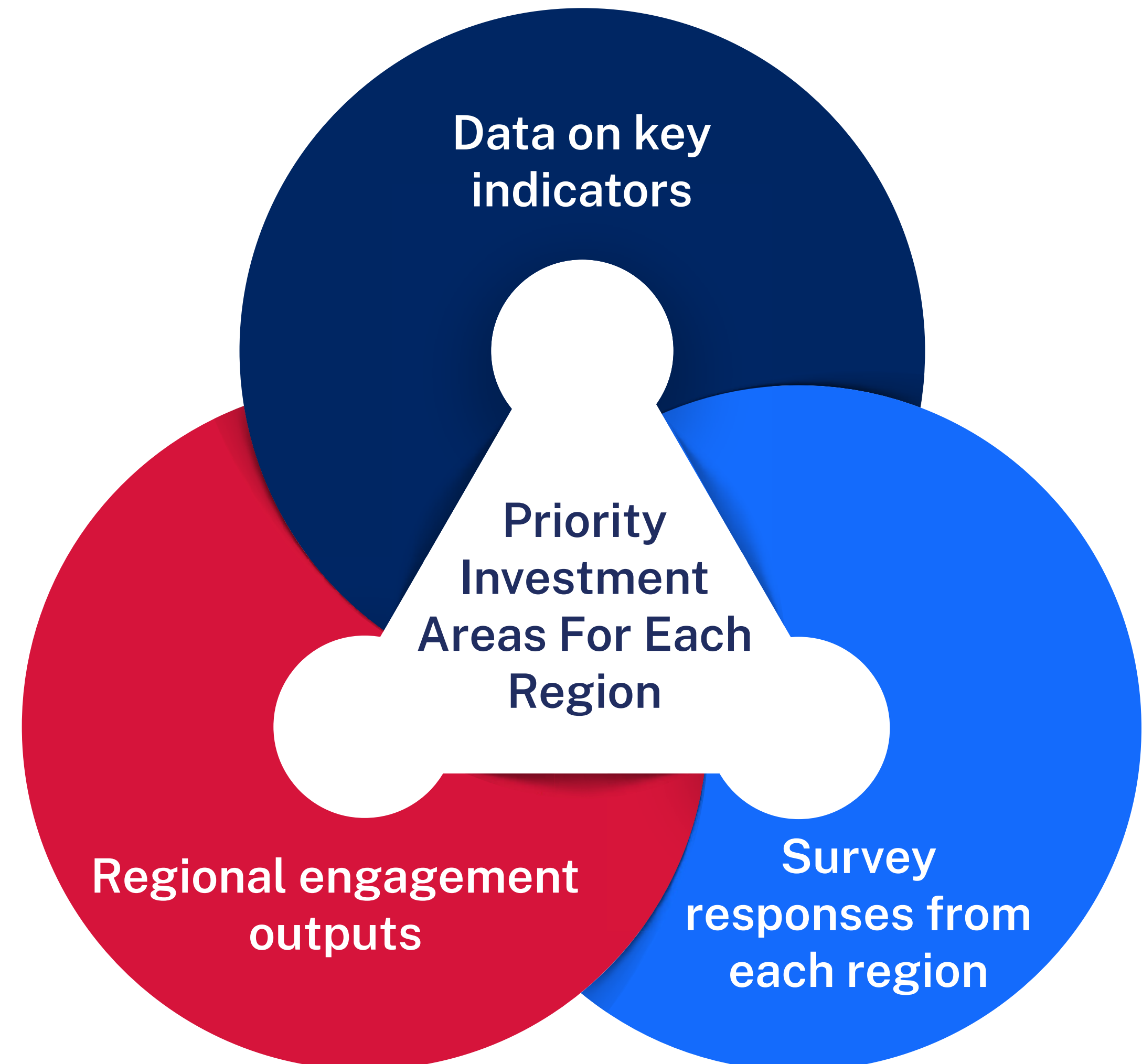
State-wide priority areas for investment

Young people shared many positive aspects of living in regional NSW

Young people highlighted what they valued about their local areas during the consultations

"The PCYC [in Walgett] is a great place to hang out."

"I loved growing up in a small town, you get to know everyone and when needed everyone pulls together."

"We're close to nature out here which can be fun on the weekends"

"It's beautiful out here. I love going for walks to just clear the mind."

"We have [a school wellbeing nurse] here in Cooma and she's great, every town should have one"

"I come to the Youth Centre most nights because all my friends go here"

"Having transport to school events is great so we can catch up with our friends from surrounding towns."

"Organisations like this [Aboriginal community hub] are what helps this town get through challenges. They know you, they care and they're just as invested in this community"

"Events like this [close the gap community fair] is what makes this community great. We get to do this, play some footy and catch up with those all around the North Coast"

"If you get out there and ask for work [from a farmer], most times they'll give you a go"

"[youth worker] is really good. Wish there were more people like him around. He really gets it."

"The [police liaison officer] is really nice to talk to and he just gets what it's like to be a young boy growing up remote"

"There's no way I'd move to the city…too much traffic and too many buildings…I like being able to exercise outside and explore"

"The basketball court is cool…I come here after school..gotta win some one on ones but haha"

"We're lucky to live near the beach, if there's nothing happening, you can always go to the beach"

"When you do get a car it's easy to get around, not too much traffic"

"The skatepark is so good… everyone comes here after school…I like that I can get food here"

"The Youth Centre here in Singleton is great! Good to see other people playing Dungeons and Dragons"

Five priority issues emerged across the State

Across the regions, youth advocated most strongly for clearer career pathways, more easily-accessible mental health services, additional recreational activities, and events, a greater focus on reliable and convenient public transport, and an increased supply of secure and affordable housing. For state-wide issues, analysis was undertaken into how each priority presented across the different geographic classifications used by the Department of Regional NSW: Metro Satellites and Growth Centres; Coastal and Inland; and Remote.

Work Ready
Clear career pathways

Young people indicated that they needed more knowledge of potential career options and the steps required to realise their ambitions. Our research suggested that Remote areas should focus on developing the core educational skills of youth and helping them to explore career possibilities. Metro Satellites and Growth Centres, as well as Coastal and Inland areas, should help young people to better understand potential career options and achieve their aspirations.

Wellbeing
### Easily-accessible mental health services

Young people in regional areas told us it can be difficult to find available mental health support and reach those services due to geographical distance. Some young people in Metro Satellites and Growth Centres had to wait up to six months for an appointment. Mental health fly-in-fly-out service providers greatly assist people in Remote areas, but are not available frequently enough to cater for the youth's ongoing care needs. Service providers for Coastal and Inland areas tend to be concentrated in larger towns. Young people who live outside these towns told us it was difficult to access these services if they did not have access to a car, due to the lack of reliable public transport in most of these areas.

Connectivity
Reliable and convenient public transport

Easy access to transport options was a persistent issue for young people across regional NSW. It presented a barrier to study, work and health care, as well as recreation and socialising. Typically, private organisations operate public bus networks in Remote areas but these services are not accessible to all people, and can be infrequent and expensive. Many small and medium-sized Coastal and Inland towns are in close proximity to each other, but young people told us there were little to no public transport links between them. Metro Satellites and Growth Centres tend to have buses and some train networks but youth identified a need for more reliable and safer public transport.
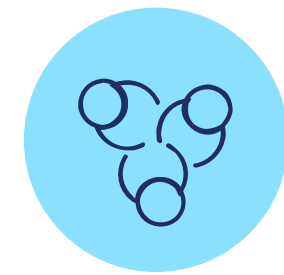
Community
Recreational activities and events

Young people in all regions expressed a strong desire for a greater variety of recreational activities and events. Metro Satellites and Growth Centres tend to have a variety of activities and events for young people, but youth in these areas advocated for more diverse and accessible activities, as well as larger scale events similar to those available to young people in metro areas. Young people in Coastal and Inland areas have access to more basic activities, including sport and some organised recreational events, but would like a greater variety of activities, such as performing arts and cultural activities. In Remote areas, the limited range of available activities for youth are mostly sports-related. Young people wanted more varied recreational facilities, and Aboriginal young people expressed a strong desire for more cultural events.

Community
Secure and affordable housing

Many young people told us they experienced difficulties securing rental properties, and finding accommodation when they cannot afford private or shared housing. In some areas, rental prices have increased in the past few years due to a variety of factors. Metro Satellites and Growth Centres appear most affected by rental price increases. When they cannot find accommodation, some young people said they resort to sleeping rough.

Young people can experience challenges differently depending on their location in a region

The following slides explore how state-wide priority areas present across Metro Satellite and Growth Centres; Coastal and Inland areas; and Remote areas[1]

METRO SATELLITE & GROWTH CENTRES[2,3]	COASTAL & INLAND[4,5]	REMOTE[6]

Demographic:

Tends to be higher SES, with populations more than 20,000.

Work ready:

Tertiary education available in most major towns.

Wellbeing:

Health services are available, but are often unable to meet demand.

Connectivity:

Transport is available and fairly frequent in town but unreliable at night. Transport can be infrequent on the outskirts of town.

Community:

Some activities, but young people would like larger scale / more events similar to those available in metro areas.

Demographic:

Often lower SES, with populations between 5,000 and 20,000.

Work ready:

Few tertiary education opportunities. Some medium-sized towns have large regional TAFEs, but many are without specialist courses (e.g. graphic design).

Wellbeing:

Limited array of health services available locally, but more services than in remote regions.

Connectivity:

Lack of public transport is often a barrier to accessing services outside the local area, particularly for smaller towns.

Community:

Some activities available, but young people would like more variety and more activities tailored to youth.

Demographic:

Often lower SES, with populations less than 5,000.

Work ready:

Additional challenges to school attendance and engagement.

Wellbeing:

Some health facilities (dental, GP) are available but there is insufficient staff to support the community. Awareness of what mental health means can be limited. Access to services can be more challenging for those without birth certificates.

Connectivity:

Very infrequent public transport (e.g. once every other day).

Community:

Public safety is a concern, with a relatively high crime rate. Available activities are very limited and mostly sport-related.

Examples:

Tamworth, New England North West

Examples:

Young, South East & Tablelands

Examples:

Walgett, Far West

Clear career pathways

Clear career pathways is a top priority for five regions and a secondary priority for another four regions[3]. Young people told us they would like more information about potential options for work, including careers outside their local area, and the steps they could take to follow their chosen line of work. Reliable transport and affordable housing in the work/study location are enablers for young people to pursue their career ambitions.

Consultations

Metro Satellite & Growth Centres
Knowledge of how to achieve career aspirations

How the issue presents:

- Regional towns tended to have more educational training opportunities, such as TAFEs or universities in neighbouring areas.

- Young people had a fair appreciation of the general types of career options available, but experienced difficulty in identifying which work opportunity was best for them.

- Young people identified a need to understand their career options earlier (i.e. from Year 7) to allow them more time to deliberate on a chosen career path.

- Once students identified a work type, they wanted to understand the resources, including scholarships, available to assist them to follow this pathway. Some regional students who wished to travel to metro areas for further study were concerned about accommodation while studying.

"We should get a cheat sheet showing us what we can do if we leave school in year 9 or 12 and what sort of things we can do...we should get it before people start to leave school"

-young person from Hunter

Coastal & Inland
Better understanding of career options

How the issue presents:

- Youth expressed a desire for a greater variety of courses, including creative and arts-based subjects. Most rural towns had TAFEs but many only offered a limited set of subjects.

- Travelling to study is fairly common. Young people identified this as a potential barrier for further learning due to difficulties with transport and finding housing. Intermittent internet can also make remote study challenging.

- Confident and proactive students were perceived as more likely to gain work experience and exposure to different types of work, than less extraverted students.

- Young women in rural settings said they would like more female role models in mostly male-dominated industries, such as agriculture, especially when the work in their region is centred around these industries.

"I want to do more on-the-job experiences to "try out" different jobs in a practical way but I don't know how to go about it"

-young person from New England North West

Remote
Greater skill development in school

How the issue presents:

- Young people told us that school attendance in Remote areas tended to be low, impacting on the literacy and numeracy levels of young people, and constraining their potential career options.

- Young people highlighted the limitation of subjects they were able to study in school, as well as their limited access to career advice.

- Young people mentioned that gaining work experience in regions, such as the Far West, was challenging.

- The need to relocate or travel to pursue further education or work was seen as a barrier to finding work, as career opportunities in the local area tended to be very limited,

- Helping youth to explore career possibilities might inspire them to engage more in learning.

"Didn't really know what was out there...at uni now and I have no idea how to do these things. I can't imagine how others get through it who have had even less education than me"

-young person from Riverina Murray

Survey

NSW regional snapshot
Our market research highlighted that young people would feel more confident about their work future if they:

- Had a greater understanding of their options earlier in high school (39%1) and knew what they wanted to do (38%1).

- Could access role models, mentors, and learning support in a variety of fields to assist youth in imagining what is possible (34%1).

- Could more easily find and secure work experience opportunities that assist them in determining whether a career type is one they wish to pursue (43%2 of 12-17 year olds and 36%1 of 18-24 year olds).

Easily-accessible mental health services

Mental health support is a top priority for eight regions, and a secondary priority in an additional region. Young people living in regional NSW face challenges spanning availability, awareness, and geographical distance to reach services.

Consultations

Metro Satellite & Growth Centres
Service providers are not able to meet demand

How the issue presents:

- Young people told us that mental health services in regional towns were not able to meet demand.

- Young people noted that services had limited availability and many young people were required to wait three to six months for an appointment, with limited to no support during this period. In some cases, services were unable to admit new patients.

- Where a town had multiple service providers, some youth told us they would switch between providers to access earlier appointments.

- When professional support is unavailable, youth typically turned to adult friends, youth workers, teachers, and family. The latter two tended to be last resort options.

"Just booked an appointment and the first availability they had was in three months, I just hope it doesn't get worse before then"

-young person from North Coast

Coastal & Inland
Service providers tend to be concentrated in larger towns

How the issue presents:

- Mental health services were reported as sparse in rural towns. Larger towns were often seen as having more service providers, acting as a service hub for nearby, smaller towns.

- Due to the need to travel to larger towns with service hubs, young people said that transport could be a barrier to accessing services for those living in smaller rural towns.

- Young people told us that in-person mental health services were limited. Telehealth was their primary means for accessing support.

- In towns with limited service providers, young people were concerned about the confidentiality of their discussions because the same health professionals often treated other family members.

"We have to travel for a few hours to the main town to see a psychologist cause there isn't one here, it's not worth the trouble"

-young person from Southeast & Tablelands

Remote
Mental health support relies on fly-in-fly-out providers

How the issue presents:

- Mental health services are seldom based in remote towns. Young people told us that telehealth, drive-in-drive-out and fly-in-fly-out were the most common support models.

- Many young people had limited awareness and understanding of mental health issues and associated challenges. Some young people said that this can contribute to stigma around mental health and prevent young people from seeking help.

- Anonymity was a concern for young people where they were not able to access services without disclosing the need and likely reason for seeking the service.

"They have big facilities here but they just sit empty until the doctors and counsellors come into town"

-young person from Far West

Survey

NSW regional snapshot
Young people in NSW believe that better mental health support is the most important initiative to make their lives healthier (54%[1]).

- Young people told us that longer opening hours (49%[3]) and better transport options to health services (29%[3]) would help them access the care they need.

- Key regional indicators suggest a lack of adequate support for severe and acute mental health issues. The rate of self-harm in regional NSW is more than twice[2] that of metro areas.

- Cohort analysis of survey responses indicated that some cohorts may need further consideration. Young people who identified as LGBTIQ+ were more likely to prioritise support when experiencing a crisis than those who identified as heterosexual/straight. Young people who identified as female or non-binary were also more likely to prioritise crisis support than those who identified as male.

Reliable and convenient public transport

Easy access to transport options was a persistent issue for young people across regional NSW. It was a top priority in four regions, and a secondary priority in another four regions. Difficulties with transport were frequently raised as a barrier to accessing services and work opportunities, and building community connections.

Consultations

Metro Satellite & Growth Centres
Greater reliability and safety of public transport

How the issue presents:

- Young people told us there were a large number of bus services, but that most buses travelled in and out of the main town centre, making it difficult to travel between residential areas on the outskirts of town. Stops on the outskirts of town also tended to be infrequent.

- Young people noted that buses were often late or did not show up, making it difficult for young people to rely on the bus network to get to work or appointments.

- Safety on buses was a key concern. Young people told us they were worried about catching buses at night time, especially near perceived 'bad parts' of town.

Coastal & Inland
More public transport between towns

How the issue presents:

- While many small and medium-sized towns are in close proximity to each other, young people told us there were little to no public transport links between them.

- Larger towns tended to act as a service hub for rural areas. Young people told us they generally needed to use private transport to access services in larger towns due to the lack of public transport.

- Young people told us that school buses were often used by members of the public during the school-year as it was the only transport option.

- Younger youth told us that lack of transport was a barrier to community cohesion as it was difficult to socialise with people from nearby communities outside school.

Remote
More frequent and affordable public transport

How the issue presents:

- Young people told us that remote areas were generally serviced by private companies that operate between the major regional centre and the surrounding remote towns.

- Young people told us that bus services were often infrequent and finished early in the afternoon, making it difficult for people to reach appointments and make it back home in one day.

- The transport options were further restricted for young people living with family members who did not have a driver's licence and/or access to a car.

- Younger youth told us that there is often only one school bus for a town, resulting in long commutes for youth living on the outskirts of a town.

Survey

NSW regional snapshot

Young people in regional NSW ranked improving transport options as the third most important initiative for improving life in their community (26%[1])
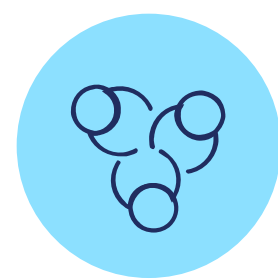
Young people suggested two ideas to help them get to where they needed to go:

1. Improved public transport. Young people strongly desired a public transport system that was more convenient (33.9%[2]), and affordable (12.3%[2]).

2. Improved access to driver training. Young people in regional NSW also prioritised support to get their driver's licence (30.9%[2]) , with affordability of driving lessons noted as a major concern (17.8%[2]).

"It's scary getting buses at night with adults you don't know on there"

-young person from the Hunter

"The community needs more transport to get to the places they need like a doctor or specialist that are far away"

-young person from Southeast & Tablelands

"There's only one bus around town so those that live out of town have to wait a long time to get home"

-young person from Central West & Orana

1. NSW total responses to the survey question, "Life in my town and surrounding areas would be better with".
2. NSW total responses to the survey question, "In my community I would like to see".
3. Four regions have reliable and convenient public transport as their top priority: Illawarra Shoalhaven; Central Coast; Central West & Orana; South East & Tablelands; four regions had this issue as a secondary priority: Far West; Hunter; North Coast; New England North West.

Recreational activities and events

Young people expressed a strong desire for more and a greater variety of recreational activities and events; it was a top priority for seven regions, and a secondary priority in an additional region. While sporting activities were valued, young people told us they would like activities and events that catered to a wider range of interests.

Consultations

Metro Satellite & Growth Centres
Larger scale events and more accessible and diverse activities

How the issue presents:

- Regional towns were identified as having a greater variety of activities and events available for young people than smaller towns.

- Young people expressed a desire for larger scale and more varied events, similar to what is available to young people in metro areas (e.g. Canberra), such as festivals, youth events at night, performing arts, cultural activities and food fairs.

- Some young people asked for activities and events that are tailored to cohorts and communities such as young people who identify as Aboriginal or LGBTQI+, and for more affordable/free youth events for people from disadvantaged backgrounds.

- Youth from regional towns tended to have a particular need for more activities catering to older young people (18-24), as well as improved messaging about upcoming events and activities.

"We need a bit more diversity of things to do for older youth, the main priority for the council seems to be building playgrounds"

-young person from Central West & Orana

Coastal & Inland
Better variety and affordability of activities

How the issue presents:

- Young people told us that most rural towns had some basic activities and events for young people, and that young people in smaller towns could travel to nearby larger towns for greater variety

- Many mentioned that the majority of activities tended to relate to sport.

- Young people expressed a desire for more varied activities and events, such as performing arts, music, and festivals.

- Some young people expressed concern regarding the quality and maintenance of public facilities, such as sporting grounds or public toilets.

- Young people also identified a need for greater access to public sporting facilities. For example, increasing access to indoor sporting facilities during winter and bad weather.

"Sport is one of the main things to do here, but we haven't been able to play for the last few weeks because of the weather"

-young person from North Coast

Remote
More access to basic activities and events

How the issue presents:

- Young people told us that sport was generally the primary social activity in remote areas. The options, however, were seen as limited due to the lack of teams for all age groups and genders. Young people with a disability also found they had limited opportunities to participate.

- Young people in remote towns tended to lack access to basic recreational activities such as gyms, movie theatres, and shops. Some young people told us that some illegal activity by young people was due to boredom and a lack of options for positive recreational activity.

- Remote areas tended to have larger Aboriginal communities. Many young people who identified as Aboriginal expressed a desire for more cultural activities and events, especially those that would help them to learn more about their culture.

"There's nothing for us to do, that's why we get up to no good"

-young person from Far West

Survey

NSW regional snapshot
The majority of young people living in regional NSW ranked more fun and interesting things to do as the most important initiative in making life better in their communities (53%[1]).

Young people expressed a desire for more of the following in their community:

- Free or cheap social and recreational activities (63%)[2]

- A variety of activities, such as sports, outdoor adventure and creative activities (49%)[2]

- Young people having a say in the activities available to them (49%)[2]

- More information about the activities available to them (31%)[2].

Secure and affordable housing

Many young people experienced difficulties securing rental properties, and finding accommodation when they could not afford private or shared housing. This has been exacerbated by the increased rental prices in some areas. When they could not find accommodation, some young people resorted to sleeping rough.

Consultations

Metro Satellite & Growth Centres
Rental price increases are impacting young people

How the issue presents:

- Young people told us that some regional areas, particularly those near the coast, had experienced increased demand for rental properties and higher rental prices, following COVID and greater interest in moving from metro to regional areas.

- Young people told us that they have experienced challenges securing a property due to competition from other renters, with some unsuccessfully applying for more than 20 properties.

- Young people noted that their decision-making about post-school education tended to be strongly influenced by the availability and cost of housing in towns with educational institutions.

- Some youth told us they couch surfed and slept in parks or under bridges when they could not find accommodation.

"People are choosing their 2nd preference because of housing issue (at uni). It shouldn't affect where you get a tertiary education. Already stressing about Y12 and HSC, and don't want to think about uni."

-young person from Illawarra Shoalhaven

Coastal & Inland
Accommodation options are limited

How the issue presents:

- Young people in rural towns appeared to face many of the same challenges as those in regional areas. Young people told us that rental prices in many rural areas had also increased over the past few years.

- Young people in agricultural regions told us that it was usually possible to find work nearby to pay rent. Young people in smaller towns, however, said they faced financial pressure due to the lack of employment opportunities.

- Some young people told us that they or their friends slept in their cars when they travelled to a major city for work or study because they could not afford other accommodation.

"People often have to travel to WAGGA for 4 days [for study and work] at least and just end up sleeping in their cars so they can still go to their course or placement"

-young person from Riverina Murray

Remote
Further research is required

How the issue presents:

The issue of affordable housing was not specifically raised by young people in remote regions during our consultations.

Young people from the Far West ranked affordable housing as an important initiative in the survey. The sample size from the Far West, however, was small.

Survey

NSW regional snapshot

Young people ranked help to access affordable housing as the second most important initiative that would improve life in their community. 36%[1] responded that addressing this issue was a priority.

Young people were not confident in knowing where to find help with housing. The proportion of young people who indicated they knew where to access help finding accommodation ranged from 16.6%[2] in New England North West to 31%[2] in South East & Tablelands.

Housing was also an important enabler for studying and employment:

- 24%[3] of youth selected "inadequate supply of accommodation" as a barrier to young people gaining a job.

- 19%[4] of 18-24 year old's said they would feel more confident about their work future if their university or TAFE campus was closer to them.

The survey indicated some differences in the perspectives of key cohorts state-wide

We analysed the responses of different cohorts of young people to understand the differences in what they ranked as the most important initiatives to improve their local area. The analysis considered: age (over 18 years and under 18 years); gender; sexual identity; whether the respondent identified as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander; and if they had a disability or cared for someone with a disability. Appendix C contains further details on the analysis.

Statistically significant differences in how cohorts ranked priority areas for improvement include:

Young people 18 years and older	Young people with disability	Young people who idenfified as female	Young people who identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual or other
(compared to those under 18 years)	(compared to those without disability)	(compared to young those who identified as male)	(compared to those who identified as heterosexual/straight)

More likely to prioritise:

- secure work
- help accessing affordable housing
- the opportunity to be involved in community decisions

This may be because they were more likely to have entered the workforce and less likely to be living with their parents.

More likely to prioritise:

- healthcare that better met their needs
- more support for people experiencing a crisis

This may be due to the health care needs arising from their disability.

More likely to prioritise:

- healthcare that better met their needs
- more support for people experiencing a crisis

This may be due to a lack of health professionals who understood their health needs.

- Young people who identified as female were also more likely to prioritise help accessing affordable housing.

More likely to prioritise:

- more connections with other young people like them
- more support for people experiencing a crisis

This may be due to a lack of support networks who understood and were able to support their identity.

Less likely to prioritise:

- reliable internet access
- better public transport / support to get a driver's licence

This may be because they were able to access the internet at their place of work or study, and were already independent drivers.

Less likely to prioritise:

- having more fun activities.

This does not mean young people with a disability do not value fun activities, rather that they ranked other improvements as more important.

Regional priority areas

Priority areas for
Central West and Orana

COMMUNITY	WORK READY	WELLBEING	CONNECTIVITY

1 Belonging

Provide additional recreational activities and events

Consultations

Access to a variety of activities and entertainment for young people was raised in the region as a key need. Youth revealed that the Remote areas of Central West and Orana lacked basic activities such as movie theatres, shops or gyms. Growth Centres were also mentioned as lacking access to affordable activities for older youth and indoor activities during winter, especially in low SES communities.

Surveys

57% of youth noted that a 'more fun and interesting things' initiatives would make life in their town and surrounding areas better (most common answer).

54% cited 'free or cheap social and recreational activities' as something they would like to see in their community.

2 Skills

Increase opportunities to develop skills and clear career pathway options

Consultations

High school students expressed a desire for more opportunities for skill development and career pathway options through school. Students felt that the options available to them were not advertised early enough and that work experience opportunities and other alternative pathways were not clearly communicated.

Surveys

46% stated 'more training and work experience opportunities' would improve school (most common answer on how to improve school).

42% answered that 'access to more training and work experience' would improve their work future (most common answer regarding work future).

3 Health

Improve access to health services

Consultations

Young people expressed a need for improved accessibility to health services, particularly mental health support and specialist services. They also reported that remote towns tended to have few GPs, forcing people to travel to major towns for care, where services often had significant waitlists.

Surveys

54% of young people advocated for 'better mental health support' (most common answer) and 31% listed 'more specialist health services' (fourth most common answer) as initiatives that would help them live healthier lives.

4 Transport

Improve access to public transport

Consultations

Young people raised public transport as a significant barrier to living their lives. Young people said that they faced infrequent and unreliable public transport that impeded their access to services and their engagement with the community. Youth also communicated that public transport is not always accessible for those with disabilities.

Surveys

26% of young people noted that initiatives relating to 'better public transport/support for driver's licences' would improve life in their area (second most common answer).

28% selected 'more convenient public transport' (2nd in transport) and 14% chose "more affordable public transport" as initiatives that would help them get to where they need to go (4th in transport).

Secondary Priorities

Improved education around life skills in schools (Skills); reduced bullying and racism in schools (Education); improved public access to the internet (Digital); reduced substance misuse and abuse, such as alcohol, drugs and particularly vaping, in schools (Health); improved access to sexual health amenities and education (Education); improved access to feminine hygiene products (Health).

Other Priorities

Agency and Housing were raised by young people but not to the same extent as the top and secondary priorities.

Central West & Orana

(1) # Belonging

Provide additional recreational activities and events

Many young people consulted agreed that access to more and varied activities and entertainment would improve their wellbeing. More remote areas of the region highlighted that there are few facilities and basic (and inexpensive) activities within their communities, especially for people aged between 12 to 24 years old.
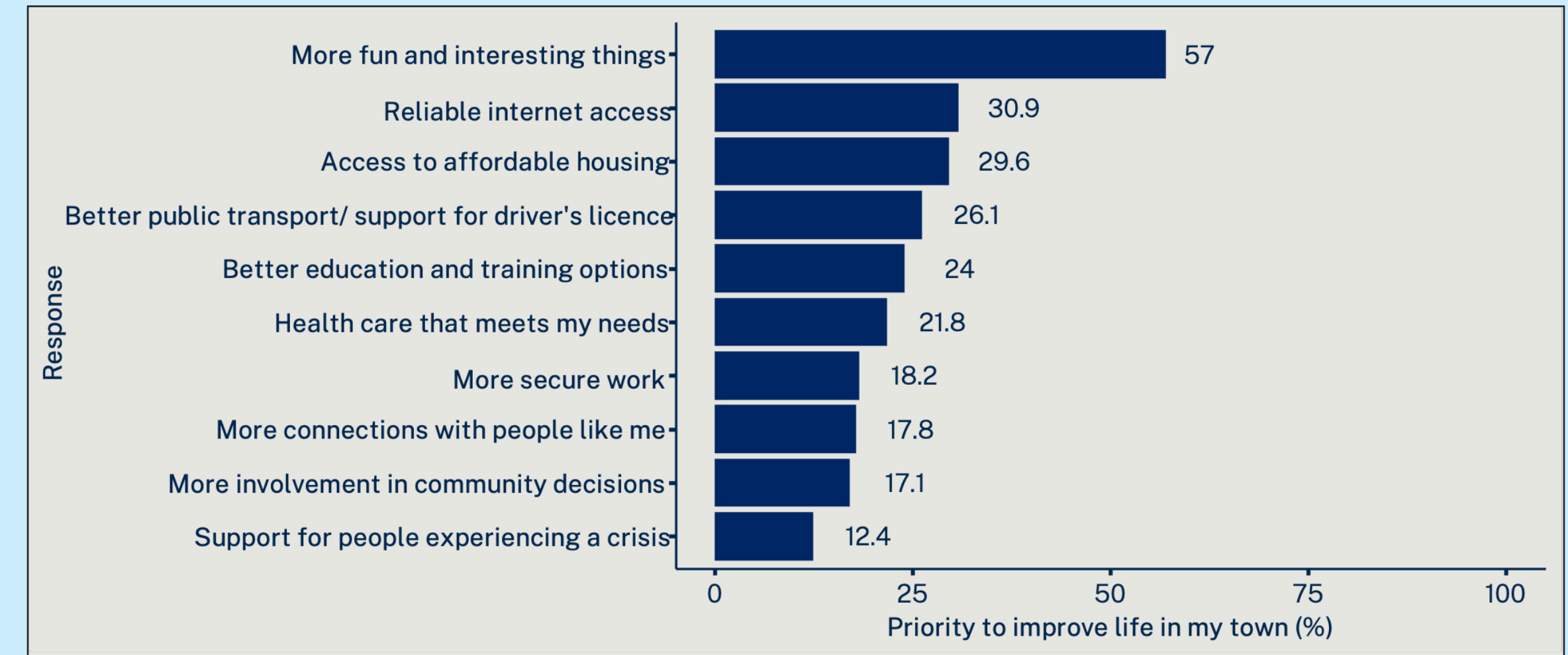
How the problem presents[1]

- In Remote towns, young people indicated a need for more basic activities and services. Examples include gyms, general shops, sports teams for all ages and genders and movie theatres.

- Indigenous youth specifically referenced Yarning Circles as one of their needs in the community, particularly in more Remote areas.

- In Growth Centres, especially lower SES areas, young people expressed a desire for a greater variety of affordable activities, chiefly during winter and for older age groups.

"I'd just keep it to myself, don't need anyone knowing my business."

"I might go to the counsellor, but I don't think any of these other boys would [referring to people in the room]."

Life in my town and surrounding areas would be better

Response	Priority to improve life in my town (%)
More fun and interesting things	57
Reliable internet access	30.9
Access to affordable housing	29.6
Better public transport/ support for driver's licence	26.1
Better education and training options	24
Health care that meets my needs	21.8
More secure work	18.2
More connections with people like me	17.8
More involvement in community decisions	17.1
Support for people experiencing a crisis	12.4

57%[2] of young people noted that more fun and interesting things would make life better

54%[4] of respondents would like to see free or cheap social recreational activities

50%[5] of respondents want more sports, outdoor adventure, and creative activities

48%[3] of respondents don't believe there are fun and interesting things to do

Central West & Orana

(2) Skills

Increase opportunities to develop skills and clear career pathway options

High school students expressed a desire for more opportunities for skill development and career pathway options through school. Students felt that the options available to them were not advertised early enough and that work experience opportunities and other alternative pathways were not clearly communicated.

How the problem presents[1]

- Remote towns tended to have fewer career options available, more difficulties regarding transport to TAFE, and less opportunity for apprenticeships. Additionally, youth mentioned that there are fewer options for casual work due to the small number of businesses. Study options in school were limited, which restricted their options for alternative paths outside of school.

- Growth Centres tended to have greater opportunities for tertiary study and work; however, poor connections between businesses and schools/students was raised as a barrier to finding work.

"We need more career options for students in year 8-11 so they can start thinking about their futures."

"We need more ways to get work experience, more engagement from business."

School would be better with

42%[3] of young people indicated that access to more training and work experience would increase their confidence about future work

46%[2] of young people noted that more training and work experience opportunities would make school better

75%[4] of youth from the region aged 15 to 19 are fully engaged with work or study

8% less jobs per 1,000 persons in Central West and Orana compared to Metro Sydney[5]

1. Remarks were sourced from consultations in Central West & Orana
2. Responses to survey question 15: "School would be better with."
3. Responses to survey question 17: "I would feel more confident about my work future if."
4. Refer to section Youth Engagement in the R code. Based on 2016 ABS Census data
5. Refer to the section Number of Jobs in the regions. Based on 2019 ABS LGA data

Central West & Orana

③ Health

Improve access to health services

Young people expressed a need for improved accessibility to health services, specially mental health support and specialist services. Remote towns tended to have few GPs, forcing people to travel to major towns for care, where services often had significant waitlists.
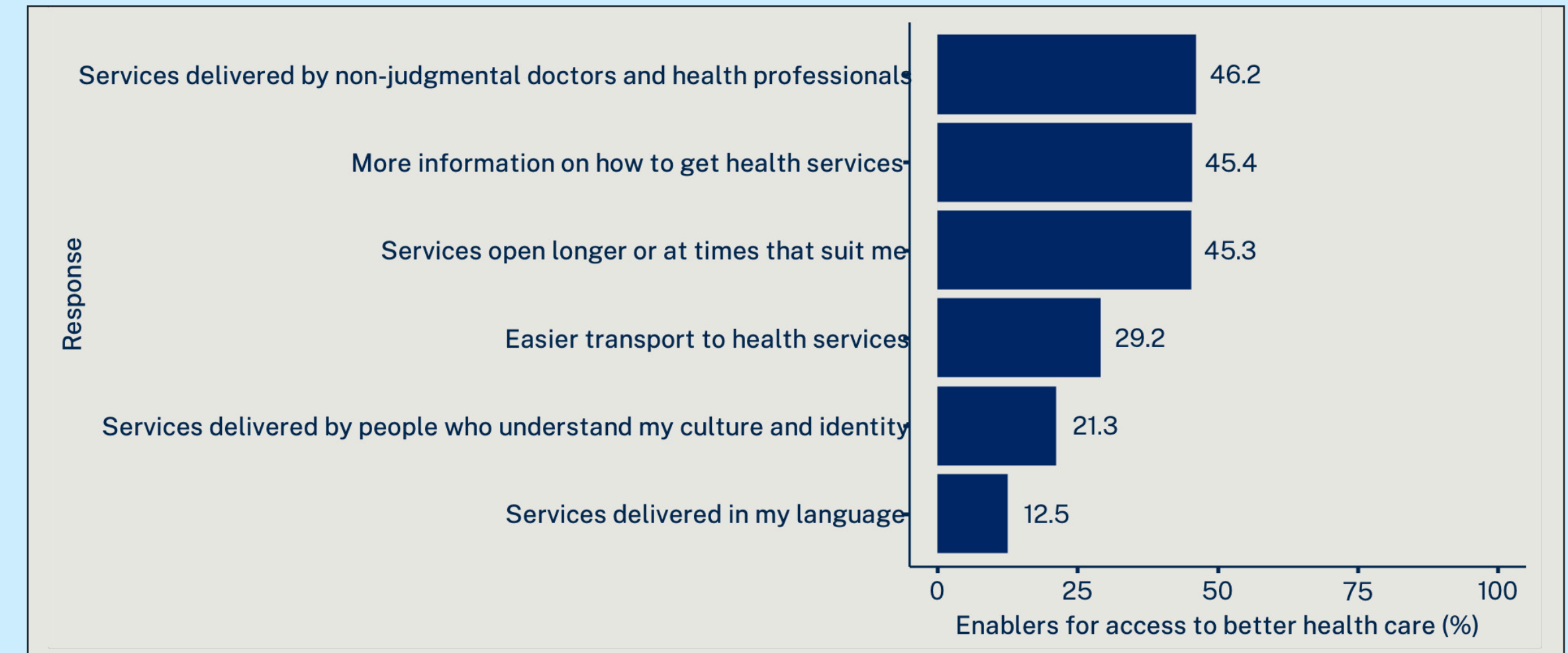
How the problem presents[1]

- In remote towns, availability of basic services, and transport to services was raised in youth consultations as the primary barrier to access.

- In Growth Centres, variety and appropriateness of services were revealed as the primary barrier, in addition to considerable waitlists.

- Young people consistently mentioned privacy concerns around the need to attend appointments with their parents.

- Young women often expressed a desire for more female doctors.

"There's only one doctor in town, we need to travel to Dubbo for any other medical care."

"There's high demand for mental health services but there's high demand for everything."

Enablers to young people being better able to get the care they need

Response	Enablers for access to better health care (%)
Services delivered by non-judgmental doctors and health professionals	46.2
More information on how to get health services	45.4
Services open longer or at times that suit me	45.3
Easier transport to health services	29.2
Services delivered by people who understand my culture and identity	21.3
Services delivered in my language	12.5

54%[2] of young people indicated that better mental health support would help them live healthier lives.

31%[3] of young people see 'more specialist health services' as an initiative that would help them live healthier lives.

1.6x[4] less health and social assistance businesses per 10,000 people in the region when compared to Metro Sydney

Central West & Orana

(4) Transport

Improve access to public transport

Young people raised public transport as a significant barrier to living their lives. Young people said that they faced infrequent and unreliable public transport that impeded their access to services and their engagement with the community. Youth also communicated that public transport is not always accessible for those with disabilities.

How the problem presents[1]

- In remote towns, public transport to major population centres tended to be infrequent and time consuming. Youth living on the outskirts of town also noted that they faced long journeys home from school.

- Growth Centres tended to have privatised bus networks that are unreliable and not always accessible for people with disabilities. The buses also tended to operate in and out of the town centre, making it difficult to navigate between areas of the town.

- The long travel times to Growth Centres was frequently raised as a barrier to accessing activities and essential services.

"There's only one bus around town so those that live out of town have to wait a long time to get home."

"People end up driving without a licence because they can't get public transport."

Most difference in helping young people get where they need to go

Most difference in helping young people get where they need to go (%)
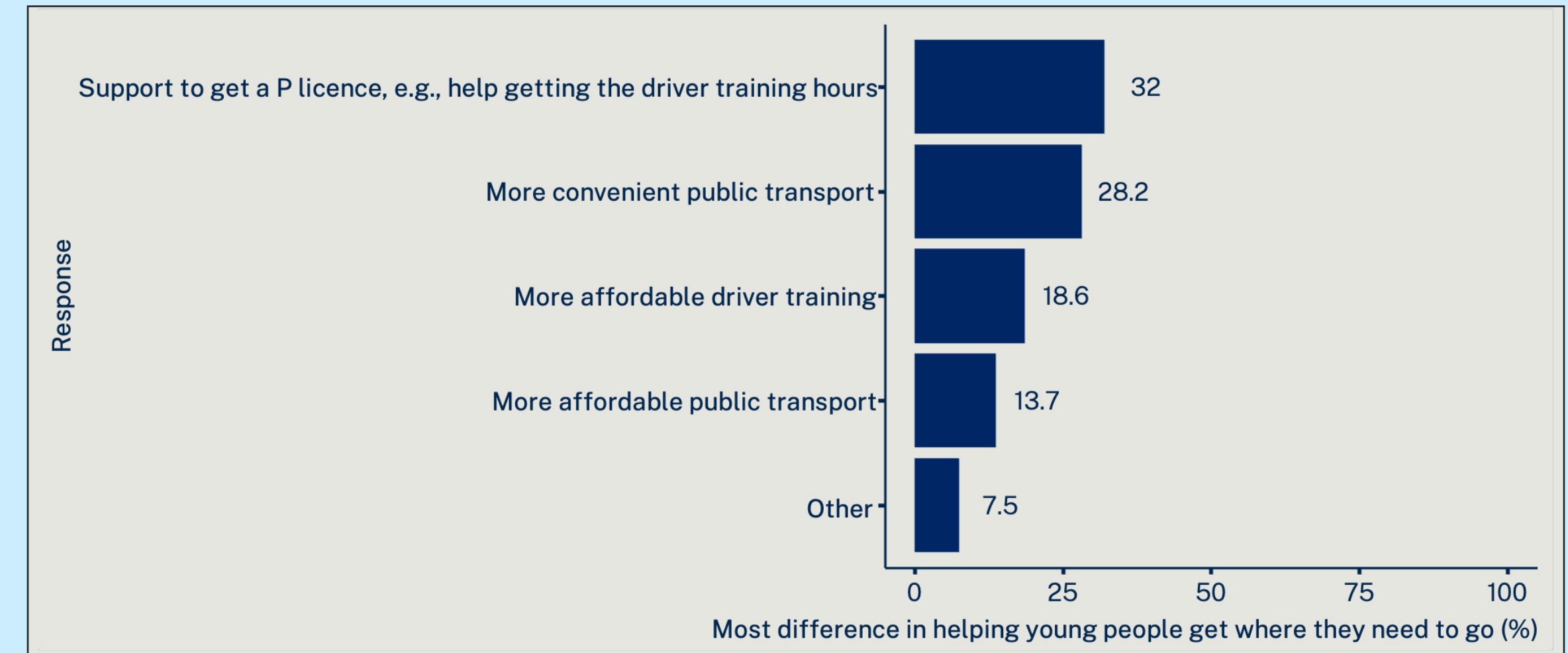
28%[3] of young people indicated that more convenient public transport would help get them where they needed to go

26%[2] of people believe that better transport and support for driver's licences will make life better in their community

26%[4] of young people listed the lack of public transport as a barrier to getting a good job

29%[5] of young people chose public transport as an enabler to get the healthcare they need

Priority areas for
Far West

WELLBEING	WORK READY	COMMUNITY

1 Health

Improve access to mental health services

Consultations

In remote communities, young people reported stigma around mental health affecting their comprehension of mental illness and thus their willingness to seek help when required. In Growth Centres long wait times for acute and chronic mental health challenges are a barrier to seeking help, where youth regard help as pointless because of the wait time, especially in acute cases.

Surveys

12/23 young people in the Far West noted that better mental health support initiatives would support them to live healthier lives (2nd most common answer overall).

2 Skills

Increase opportunities to develop skills and clear career pathway options

Consultations

Many young people noted that low school attendance rate among youth has reduced youth's opportunity to develop skills. Underdeveloped skills, for example relatively low literacy, create further challenges, such difficulty obtaining a driver's licence and uncertainty about what opportunities these young people can access post-school.

Surveys

9/23 young people in the Far West noted that 'better education and training options' would improve life in their town and surrounding areas (3rd most common answer overall).

Of education and training options 7/10 young people raised 'more career advice' as initiatives that would improve their school (1st most common answer) with their 2nd most common answer as 'more training and work experience opportunities'.

3 Belonging

Provide additional recreational activities and events

Consultations

Activities for young people tended to centre around sport, particularly rugby league and netball. Those who are not interested or able to engage in these sports said they did not have alternative opportunities. Young people emphasised that boredom can lead to substance use and crime.

Surveys

14/23 young people in the Far West noted that 'more fun and interesting things' to do would improve life in their town and surrounding areas (1st overall).

17/23 voiced that they would like to see more free or cheap social and recreational activities in their communities (1st most common answer).

Secondary Priorities

Young people have the resources and the skills to access resources to engage in the community (Education); improve frequency and reliability of public transport (Transport); more young people can obtain a driver's licence without undue barriers (Transport); improve public access to internet (Digital); improve opportunities for Aboriginal young people to be involved in cultural experiences (Belonging).

Other Priorities

Agency, Inclusivity and Housing were also referenced as important to young people in the Far West.

Far West

① Health

Improve access to mental health services

Some youth experienced difficulty understanding mental health concepts. When youth self-identified mental health challenges, they were unable to seek support when they needed it. Young people communicated that limited availability of mental health professionals contributes to long and unpredictable wait times. Stigma around mental health also fuels reluctancy to seek help.
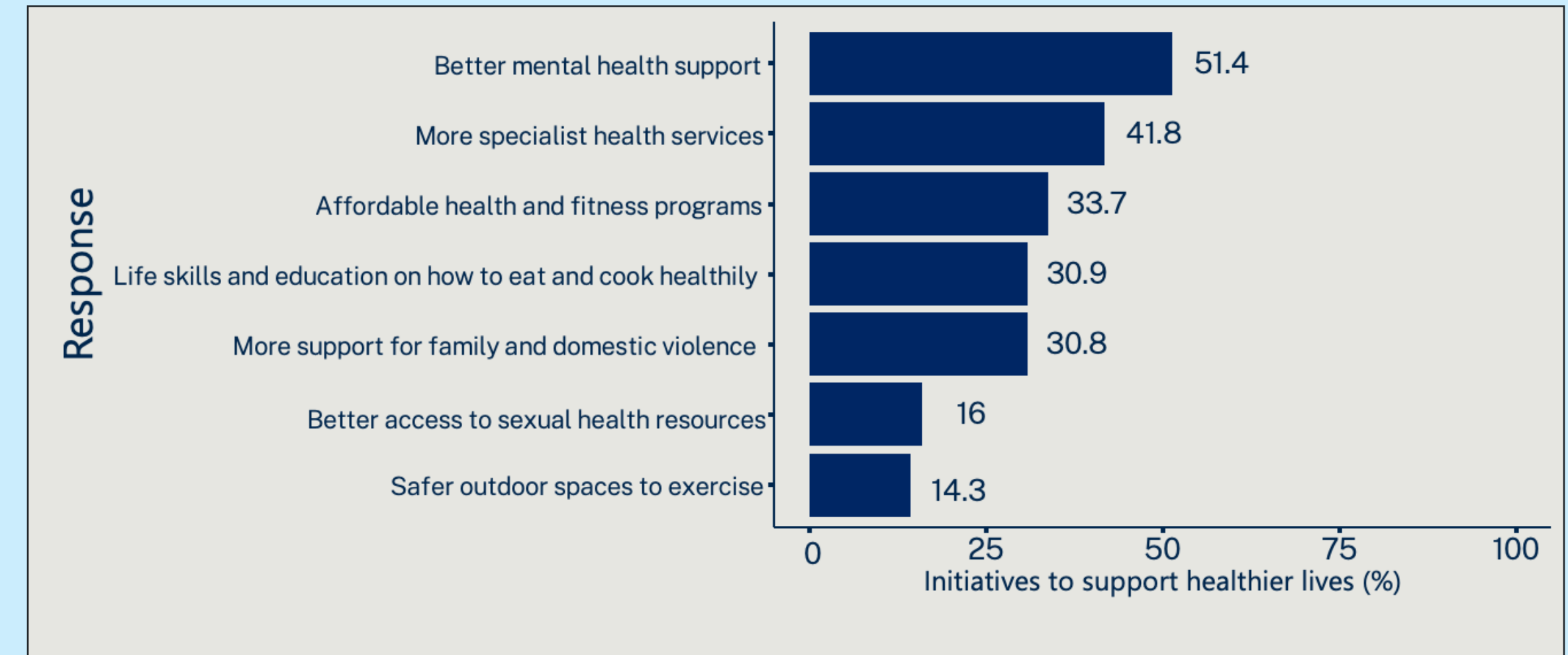
How the problem presents[1]

- Overall young people identified health care, especially around mental health, as something that needs to be improved in their community. They indicated that challenges with health services relate to the accessibility of opening hours, awareness of services to which young people have access, and the need for non-judgemental treatment.

- Young people want the quality of their mental health support to improve, including greater availability of specialists, and more affordable proactive programs.

- Some young people only became aware of their mental health through experiences with drug, alcohol, and trauma.

"I'd just keep it to myself, don't need anyone knowing my business."

"I might go to the counsellor, but I don't think any of these other boys would [referring to people in the room]."

Initiatives to support young people living healthier lives

Initiatives to support young people living healthier lives (bar chart)

Response	Initiatives to support healthier lives (%)
Better mental health support	51.4
More specialist health services	41.8
Affordable health and fitness programs	33.7
Life skills and education on how to eat and cook healthily	30.9
More support for family and domestic violence	30.8
Better access to sexual health resources	16
Safer outdoor spaces to exercise	14.3

12/23[2] young people listed better mental health support as an initiative that would help them live healthier lives

11/23[3] young people indicated that life would be better with health care that meets their needs

20/23[4] people wanted services to open longer or more suitable times

0.1[5] health and social assistance businesses per 100 square kilometre

Far West

2 # Skills

Increase opportunities for skill development and clear career pathway options

Young people indicated that school was not their main focus; instead youth wanted to engage in training and work experience earlier. However, they told us that finding work or training was difficult because they did not know about possible career options or what they needed to do to follow a career path.
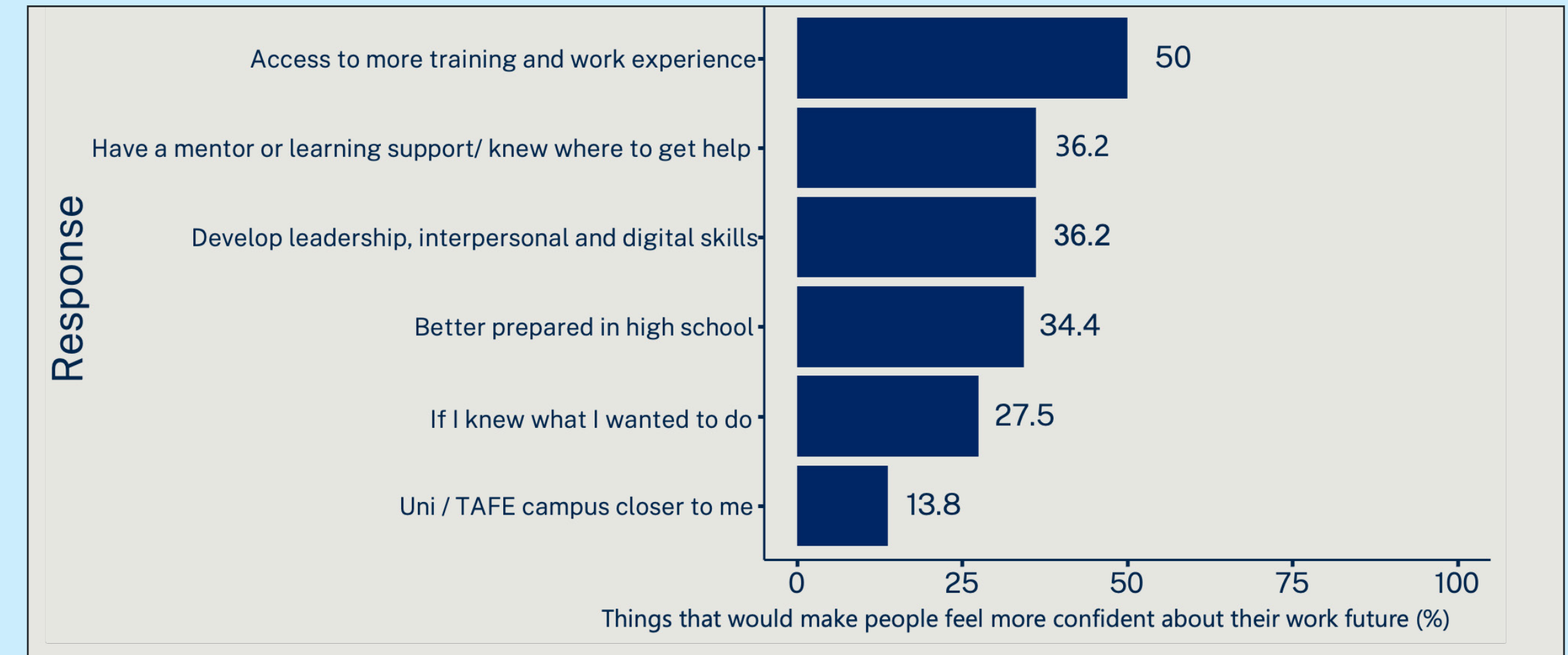
How the problem presents[1]

- According to youth, limited awareness of the training and career opportunities decreased their motivation to work and reduced their career pathway aspirations.

- Young people indicated that career opportunities were very limited in local areas, requiring them to travel for work. Obtaining a driver's licence were also mentioned as a barrier for young people who want to work.

- Filling out life administration tasks (e.g., paperwork for obtaining licences and appropriate identity documentation) were a further challenge experienced by some people; difficulties exacerbated by low literacy levels.

- Violence and bullying was highlighted as a significant problem at some remote schools and could create a difficult learning environment.

"We don't really go to school just hang at home. We visit the PCYC and learn things there."

"I can't do this [onboarding] paperwork...I don't know what it's asking me to do."

I would feel more confident about my work future if:

Access to more training and work experience — 50
Have a mentor or learning support/ knew where to get help — 36.2
Develop leadership, interpersonal and digital skills — 36.2
Better prepared in high school — 34.4
If I knew what I wanted to do — 27.5
Uni / TAFE campus closer to me — 13.8

Things that would make people feel more confident about their work future (%)

9/23[3] people think that better education will improve their life

7/10[4] people indicated that more career advice would improve their school experience

6/10[2] young people don't feel confident that school prepares them for life

11/23[5] young people think that it is too difficult to get training or qualifications

Far West

③ Belonging

Provide additional recreational activities and events

Activities for young people tended to centre around sport, particularly rugby league and netball. Those who are not interested or able to engage in these sports said they did not have alternative opportunities. Young people emphasised that boredom can lead to substance use and crime.

How the problem presents[1]

- Young people highly valued youth centres. For instance, youth felt the Walgett PCYC was a very positive investment in the community because it provided youth with a place to hang out and to participate in fun activities.

- Youth in the Far West would like to have a say in the activities they do.

- Transport to activities is limited and largely dependent on a few private companies.

"There's nothing for us to do, that's why we get up to no good aye."

"We just don't wanna be at home you know, there's just too much (expletive) going on."

Life in my town and surrounding areas would be better
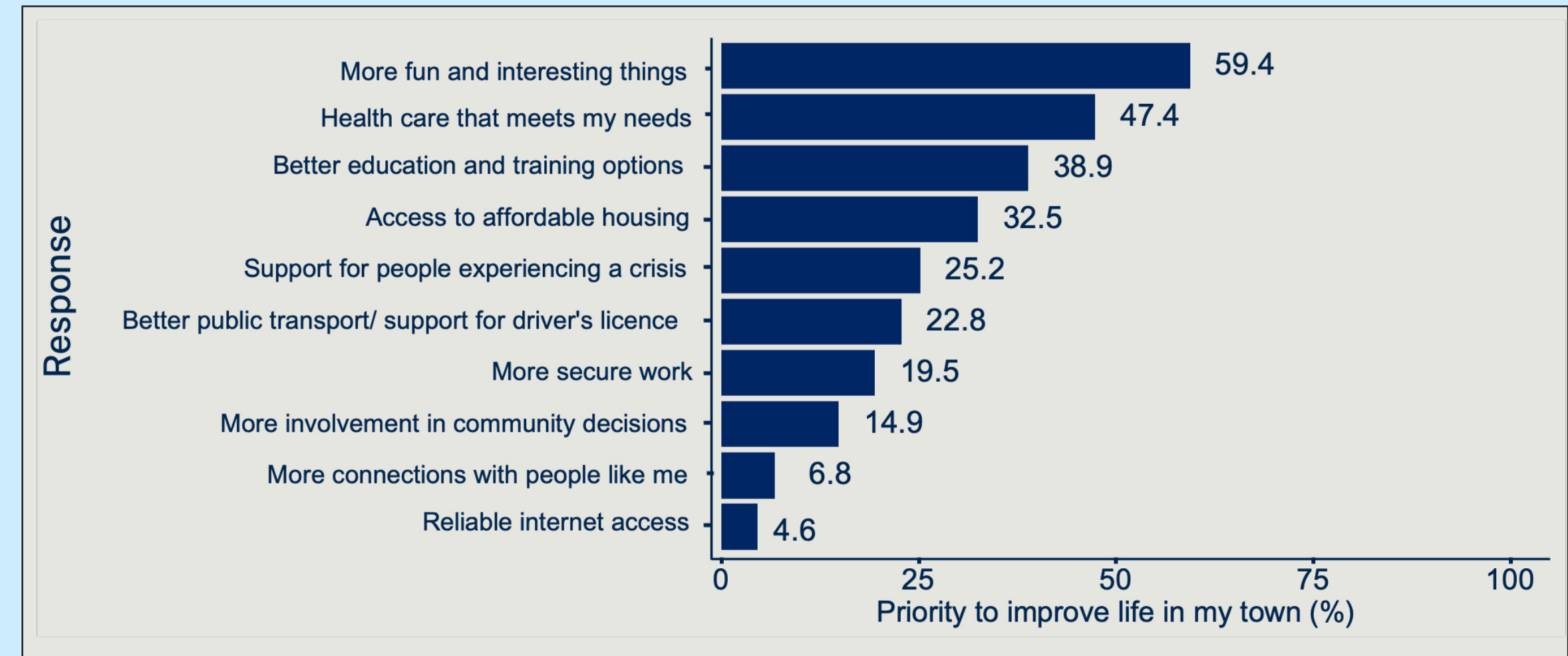
17/23[3] people want more free or cheap social and recreational activities

12/23[3] people wants more sports, outdoor adventure, and creative activities

15/23[2] young people don't believe there are fun and interesting things to do

14/23[4] young people don't think they have a say in making a difference in the community

Priority areas for
Riverina Murray

WELLBEING	COMMUNITY	COMMUNITY

1 Health

Improve access to mental health services

Consultations

Young people described the need for more mental health care as critical. Young people informed us that mental health services had little to no availability; those requiring urgent care reported a wait time of two to three months. Non-urgent appointments elongated the wait time out to three to four months.

Surveys

53% of young people in the Riverina Murray region listed better mental health support as the initiative that would most support young people living healthier lives (most common initiative to improve health for young people).

2 Housing

Reduce youth homelessness

Consultations

Access to affordable housing was ranked as young people's second highest need. Youth noticed that the demand for affordable housing for lower income earners had increased over recent years.

Homelessness, represented as "couch surfing" and rough sleeping, was prevalent in conversations with young people. Those in this position are affected greatly.

Surveys

34% of young people in the Riverina Murray region listed access to affordable housing as an initiative that would improve their town and surrounding areas (2nd most common initiative to improve their town).

3 Belonging

Provide additional recreational activities and events

Consultations

Young people articulated a desire for a greater variety of organised youth focused activities. Examples of these activities included culturally-specific activities, creative arts, and intellectually stimulating activities.

At present, young people participate in sport for recreation. But, they often cannot utilise these sporting facilities outside organised times or without being part of a club.

Surveys

60% of young people in the Riverina Murray region noted that 'more fun and interesting things' would improve life in their town and surrounding areas (1st most common initiative to improve their town).

Secondary Priorities

More young people are able to obtain a licence without undue barriers (Transport); improve public access to internet (Digital); improve access to doctors (Health); improve access to sexual health amenities and education (Health); improve imminent support for young people who suffered sexual abuse (Health); young people are supported to manage cost of living (Agency); young people have had the opportunity to learn 'life admin' type skills (Skills); reduce drug use among youth in schools (Health); increase opportunity for young people to be involved in decision making (Agency).

Other Priorities

Inclusivity was also raised by young people but not to the same extent as the top and secondary priorities.

Riverina Murray

(1) # Health

Improve availability of mental health services

Young people described the need for more mental health care as critical because services in their area had low to no availability. Young people requiring urgent care were reportedly given appointments in two to three months time. Non-urgent appointments indicated that wait times were approximately three to four months.
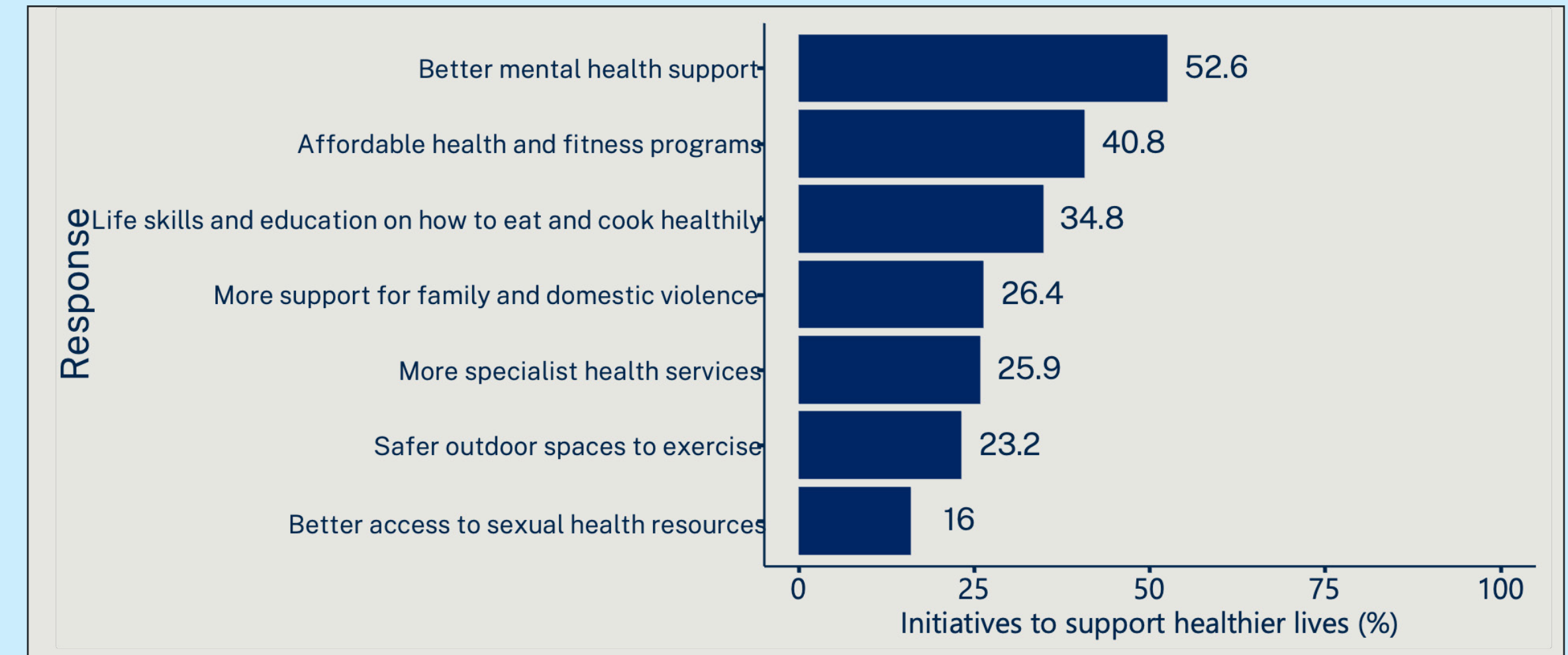
How the problem presents[1]

- Mental health concerns were prevalence across people consulted; many referenced high individual and cluster suicide rates.

- Young people noted that mental health challenges can occur due to the absence of social activities, effects of isolation, substance misuse, and youth crime.

- Young people mentioned that difficult family relationships and bullying can worsen mental health.

"Out of a class of 30, you would expect to know at least 5 people who had attempted, and an additional of maybe 2 that had died by suicide, that's just who I know, there is probably more."

"Don't want to open up to them because they don't stay in the community [reference to fly-in-fly-out services]."

"People can have appointments about mental health for urgent support and they get cancelled because there is no one to do it."

Initiatives to support young people living healthier lives

12/23[2] young people listed better mental health support as an initiative that would help them live healthier lives

11/23[3] young people indicated that life would be better with health care that meets their needs

20/23[4] people wanted services to open longer or more suitable times

0.1[5] health and social assistance businesses per 100 square kilometre

Riverina Murray

② Housing

Reduce youth homelessness

Access to affordable housing was selected as young people's second highest need. Youth noticed that the demand for affordable housing for lower income earners had increased over recent years. Homelessness, represented as "couch surfing" and rough sleeping, was common in conversations with young people. Those in this position are affected greatly.
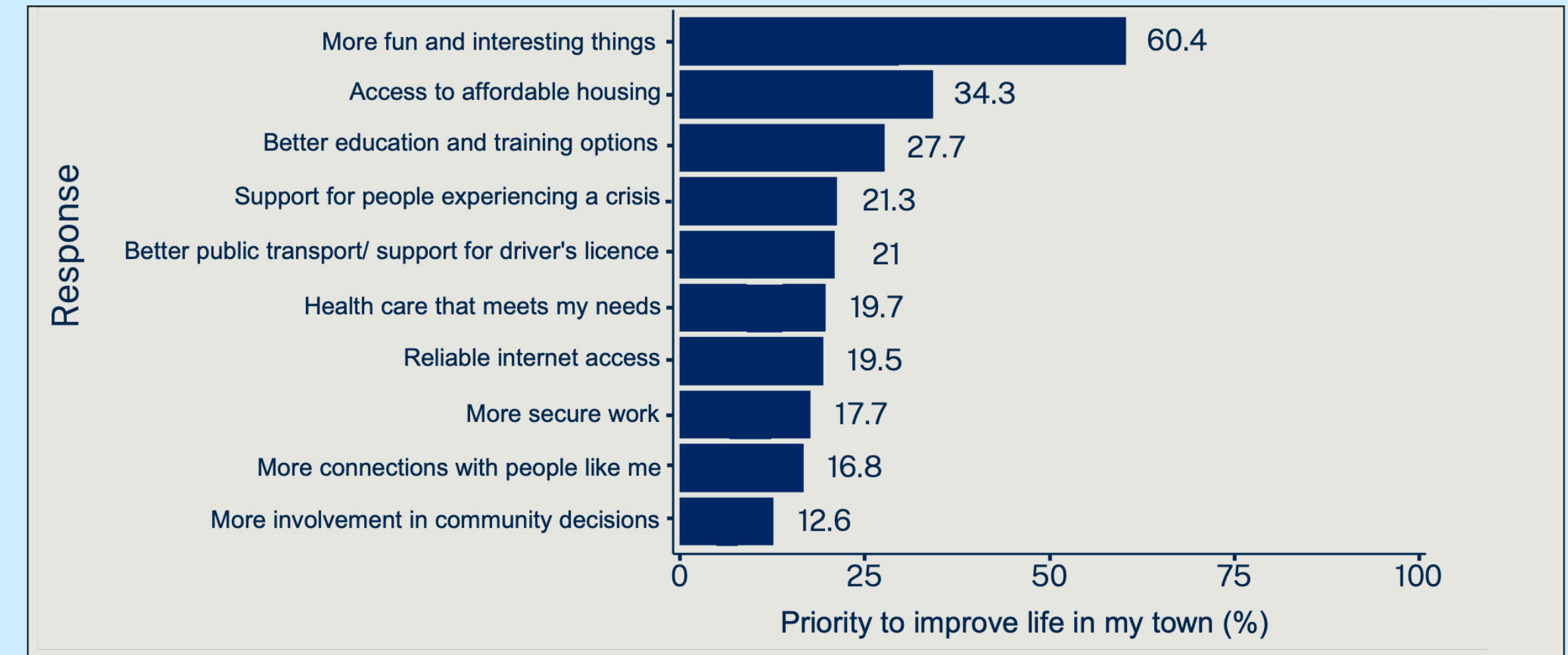
How the problem presents[1]

- Young people said that there were very limited social housing options for young people facing social-cultural difficulties, including lower social-economic status.

- Many young people engaged mentioned that youth often "couch surf" at their friend's homes, resorting to sleeping in the park and under bridges if they cannot seek refuge with people they know.

"Housing is not affordable in our region."

"I know families that live in a tent in the camping grounds because they can't afford to find a house. These young people then don't want to come to school because they are embarrassed and have other priorities."

Help looking for a place to live

Response / Priority to improve life in my town (%)

Response	%
More fun and interesting things	60.4
Access to affordable housing	34.3
Better education and training options	27.7
Support for people experiencing a crisis	21.3
Better public transport/ support for driver's licence	21
Health care that meets my needs	19.7
Reliable internet access	19.5
More secure work	17.7
More connections with people like me	16.8
More involvement in community decisions	12.6

34%[2] of people believe that access to affordable housing would improve their life

24%[3] of young people believe that 'not having enough places to live' is a barrier to 'getting good jobs'

Riverina Murray

(3) Belonging

Provide additional recreational activities and events

Young people selected 'fun and interesting things to do' as the initiative that would most improve their town and surrounding areas. Currently, activities are limited to sports, and sporting facilities are typically only open to registered players.
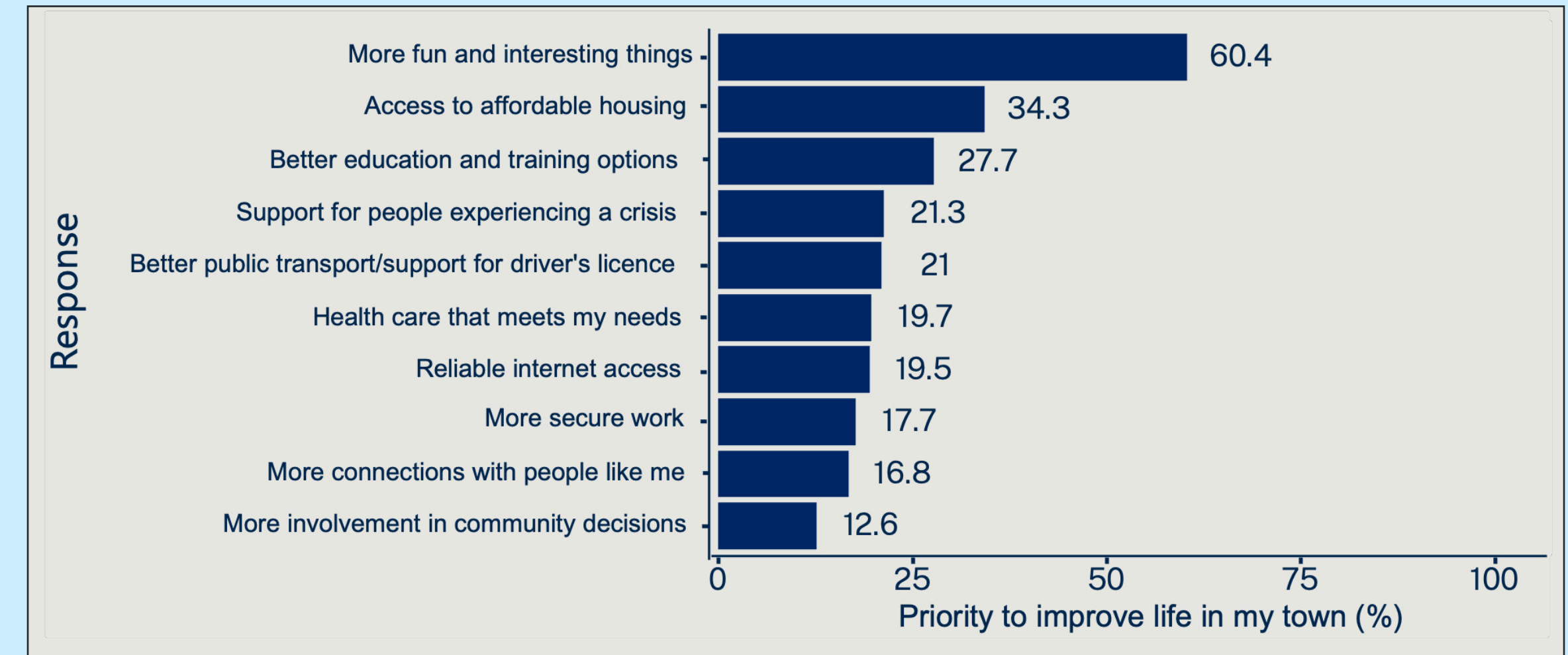
How the problem presents[1]

- Young people highlighted that sporting activities are the predominant hobby.

- Young people advocated for more low cost non-sport activities, including more outdoors and cultural activities.

- The number of young people interested in culture and arts activities may be small but the young people we spoke to wanted to see more of these opportunities.

"For people who don't like sport, you basically just end up staying home because there is nothing for you."

"We could have laser tag…bouldering, bowling, culture activities…free music programmes…build a fun park or trampoline park."

Life in my town and surrounding areas would be better

Response / Priority to improve life in my town (%)

Response	Priority (%)
More fun and interesting things	60.4
Access to affordable housing	34.3
Better education and training options	27.7
Support for people experiencing a crisis	21.3
Better public transport/support for driver's licence	21
Health care that meets my needs	19.7
Reliable internet access	19.5
More secure work	17.7
More connections with people like me	16.8
More involvement in community decisions	12.6

49%[2] of people don't believe there are fun and interesting things to do in their community

58%[3] of young people want free or cheap social and recreational activities

53%[3] of young people want more sports, outdoor adventure, and creative activities

48%[3] of young people want to have a say in the types of activities in the community

Priority areas for
New England North West Region

WELLBEING	COMMUNITY	WORK READY

1 Health

Improve access to mental health services

Consultations

Young people indicated that demand is outpacing the available and known mental health services. Many noted that they are unable to access the health care they need, citing that mental health is a barrier to living healthy lives and to attaining a job.

Surveys

36% of young people cited 'Health care that meets my needs' as a priority (ranked 2nd overall).

65% of young people listed "Better mental health support" as an initiative that would help them live healthier lives (most common answer).

2 Housing

Improve access to affordable housing

Consultations

The need for more affordable housing was the third priority for young people in New England North West. Young people noted issues, including the cost of renting, prevalence of couch surfing and homelessness.

Although only a few instances of homelessness were reported during engagements, this issue greatly affected people when they found themselves in this situation.

Surveys

32% of young people listed 'Access to affordable housing' as an initiative that would improve their town and surrounding areas (ranked 3rd overall).

3 Skills

Provide more guidance on career pathway options

Consultations

High school students seek greater awareness of potential career options earlier in high school. These young people noted challenges in navigating further study and career options.

Those post school reflected that they would feel more confident about their work now, if they were better prepared in high school.

Surveys

48% of youth think that having access to more training and work experience will make them feel more confident about their future work (most common answer).

39% of young people listed 'More training and work experience opportunities' (3rd of available options) and 32% answered "More career advice" (4th of available options) as initiatives that would improve their school life.

Secondary Priorities

Improved safety for young people in the community (Belonging); improved availability of transport to major services, including schools and the main town (Transport); increase youth's understanding of sexual health, catering for different sexual preferences (Education); increase the start-up business skills of tradespeople and other TAFE students where this is applicable (Education); improve the internet service outside of Tamworth to increase the number of people who can study and work remotely (Digital).

Other Priorities

Inclusivity and Agency were raised by young people but not to the same extent as the top and secondary priorities.

New England North West Region

1 # Health

Improve availability of mental health services

Young people indicated that demand is outpacing the available and known mental health services. Many noted that they are unable to access the health care they need, citing that mental health is a barrier to living healthy lives and to attaining a job.
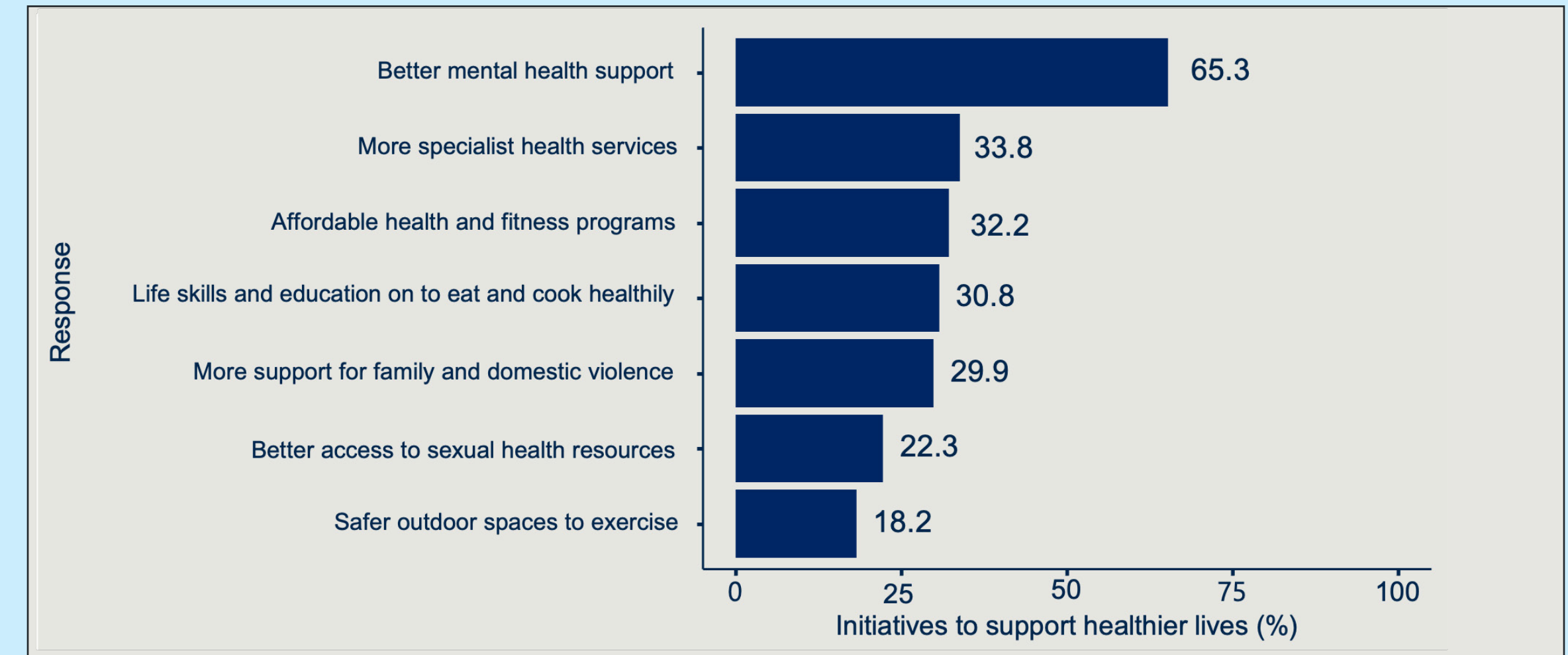
How the problem presents[1]

- According to youth, demand for mental health services is high and the population does not have access to sufficient services to handle support needs.

- In the survey, youth expressed that mental health services could be improved through longer opening times and more information about how to access mental health services in the area.

- Youth indicated that bullying was a precursor to mental health challenges, in some instances.

"I've been on the waiting list (for mental health) for 8 months. But mental health isn't the first thing we think about because there are so many other things to worry about (drought, farm, physical health etc.)."

"I handed my teacher a knife…I felt unstable. He took me to the hospital but I couldn't get help because I said I wasn't going to do it that night."

Initiatives to support young people living healthier lives:

Response	Initiatives to support healthier lives (%)
Better mental health support	65.3
More specialist health services	33.8
Affordable health and fitness programs	32.2
Life skills and education on to eat and cook healthily	30.8
More support for family and domestic violence	29.9
Better access to sexual health resources	22.3
Safer outdoor spaces to exercise	18.2

2nd most common response with 36% of young people indicating that healthcare is a priority that will make life better[2]

150[3] intentional self-harm hospitalisations per 100,000 persons

76%[4] of people don't think that they have access to healthcare when they need it

35%[5] of young people listed 'mental issues' as a barrier to getting good jobs

New England North West Region

② Housing

Improve access to affordable housing

The need for more affordable housing was the third priority for young people in New England North West. Young people noted issues, including cost of renting, prevalence of couch surfing and homelessness. Although only a few instances of homelessness were reported during consultations, this issue greatly affected people when they found themselves in this situation.

How the problem presents[1]

- According to youth, the income of some people who are studying (at TAFE) or working only just covers or does not cover their cost of living. Rising petrol prices pose a challenge for people in the region because they often travel long distances to study and work. Youth also feel that the cost of rent is high.

- Students can live up to four hours from study or work. In some cases, students attend TAFE for four consecutive days per month, which does not warrant them moving to town. Unable to pay for accommodation, some students "couch surf" or sleep in their cars when visiting Tamworth.

"A couple of students in this class sleep in their cars when they come to TAFE... there's no student accommodation... and it's pretty cold out there."

"We only make enough money to make ends meet... fuel is so expensive...The costs keep going up and up."

Life in my town would be better with:
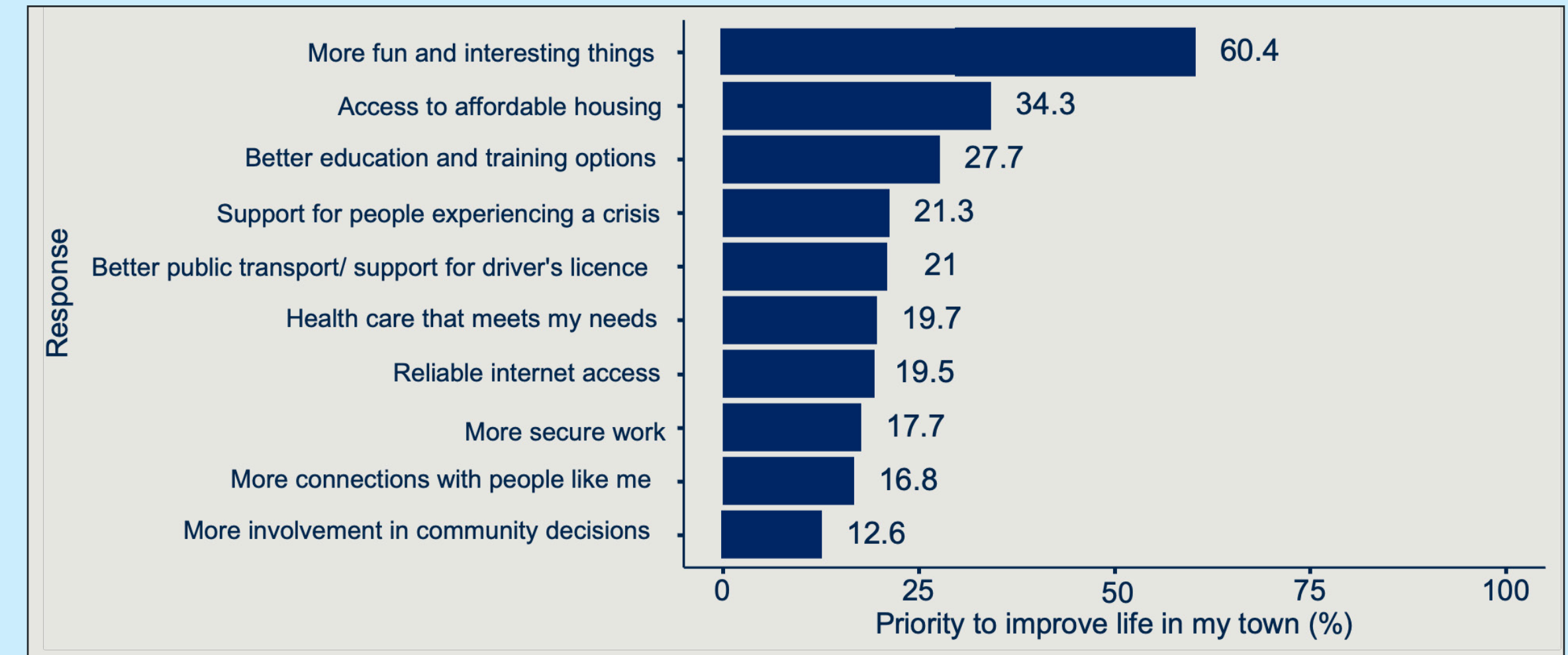
32%[2] of young people listed 'access to affordable housing' as an initiative that would improve their town and surrounding areas (3rd ranked issue for the region)

50%[3] of households experiencing socio-economic disadvantage

62%[4] are unlikely know where to go for help if they were looking for a place to live

17%[5] of young people listed 'not having enough places to live' as a barrier to getting good jobs

New England North West Region

(3) # Skills

Greater career pathway options

High school students seek greater awareness of potential career options earlier in high school. These young people noted challenges in navigating further study and career options. Those post school reflected that they would feel more confident about their work now, if they were better prepared in high school.
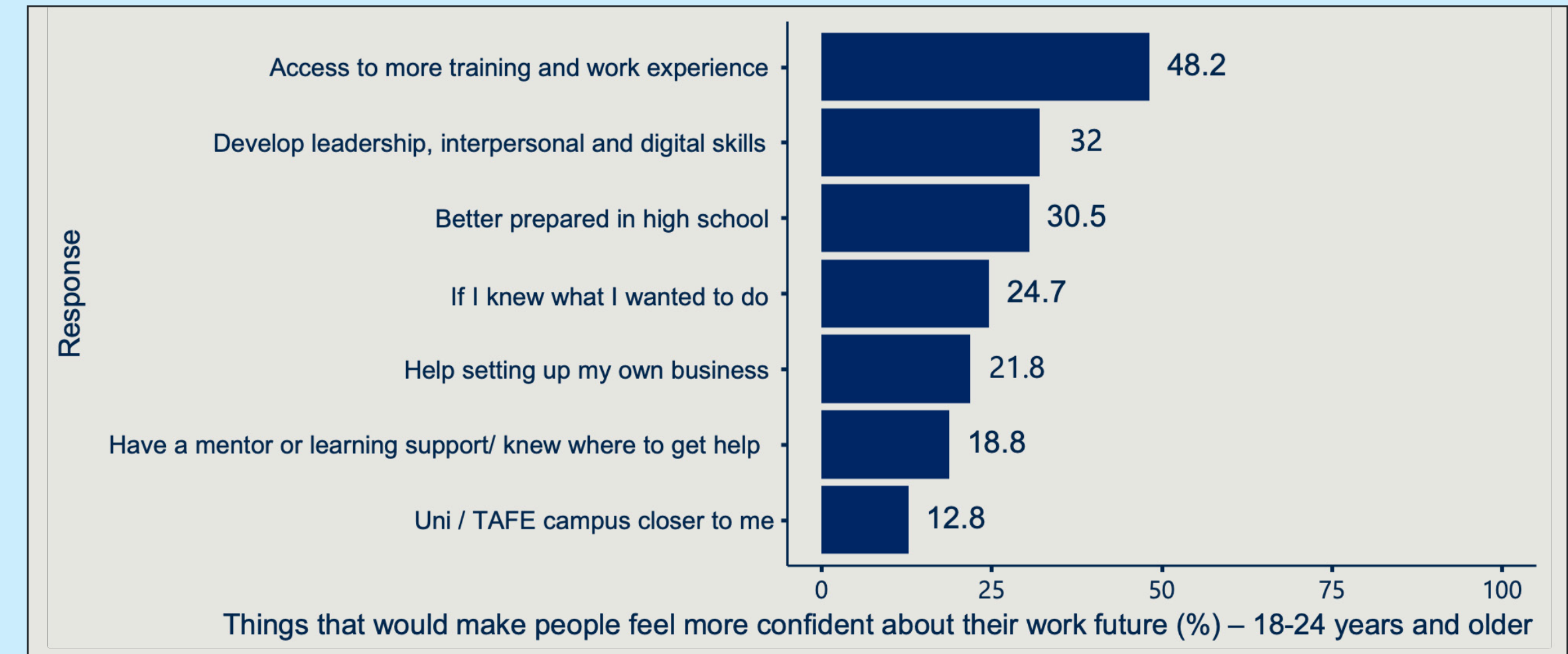
How the problem presents[1]

- Students reported that they struggle to find sufficient information on further study and scholarship information.

- Students, particularly introverted and female students, we consulted were less likely to proactively seek opportunities, especially in male dominated industries such as agriculture.

- Some young women commented that it is challenging to find role models in male dominated industries, such as agriculture.

"You can't be what you cannot see or believe you can achieve…and we don't really know what's out there."

"It's difficult to know what university options and scholarships we can apply for. It's not easy to make sense of it all…the school could have a list of all scholarships in one place. This could be online too."

I would feel more confident about my work if:

Access to more training and work experience — 48.2
Develop leadership, interpersonal and digital skills — 32
Better prepared in high school — 30.5
If I knew what I wanted to do — 24.7
Help setting up my own business — 21.8
Have a mentor or learning support/ knew where to get help — 18.8
Uni / TAFE campus closer to me — 12.8

Response

0   25   50   75   100

Things that would make people feel more confident about their work future (%) – 18-24 years and older

74%[4] of youth aged 15 to 19 are fully engaged with work or study

32%[3] answered 'More career advice' as initiatives that would improve their school life

48%[5] of youth think that having access to more training and work experience will make them feel more confident about future work (most common answer)

39%[2] of young people listed "More training and work experience opportunities" in schools as a priority

Priority areas for
North Coast

WELLBEING	COMMUNITY	COMMUNITY	WORK READY

1 Health

Improve access to mental health services

Consultations

Young people in more Coastal towns often relied on teleconferencing (via phone and internet) to seek mental health support. Cost and wait times were mentioned as a barrier for youth across all functional economic regions who are trying to access these services.

Surveys

65% of young people listed better mental health support as an initiative that would support young people living healthier lives (1st most common answer).

15% of young people said that health care that appropriately meets a young person's needs would improve life in their town.

2 Belonging

Provide additional recreational activities and events

Consultations

Sport was often mentioned as one of the few recreational activities available. Youth who are unable to participate in sport or were not interested in it, highlighted a need for additional activities.

Youth also noted that the cost of these activities and limited transport options to activities can prevent their involvement.

Surveys

54% of young people in the North Coast region noted that an increase in fun and interesting things to do would make life in their town and surrounding areas better (1st most common answer).

3 Housing

Improve access to affordable housing

Consultations

Young people living out of home noted challenges regarding securing a rental property. Youth noticed a rise in competition and in rental prices.

More generally, young people are struggling to afford a variety of living expenses, including housing, food, service providers (private healthcare), insurances, etc.

Surveys

47% of young people chose access to affordable housing as their second highest priority to improve their community.

Separately, 2016 Census data revealed that 52% of households experience socio-economic disadvantage, significantly more than the Metro Sydney benchmark of 37%.

4 Education

Maintain school personal care amenities

Consultations

Young people suggested that an upgrade of school personal care amenities, including bathroom facilities, would support safe and sanitary environments for them.

Young women especially raised concern over bathroom conditions, citing them as unclean, inoperable, and sometimes without doors and sanitary bins for the safe disposable of period products.

Surveys

No available data in survey or from regional indicators.

Secondary Priorities

Improve frequency and reliability of public transport (Transport); decrease substance misuse and abuse such as alcohol and drugs (Education); engagement and opportunities for skill development (Skills) and career pathway options (Skills)

Other Priorities

Inclusivity, Digital, and Agency investment themes were discussed by youth in the North Coast but to a lesser extent than the top and secondary priorities.

North Coast

1 # Health

Improve access to mental health services

Young people's observations were that there are limited health services in Growth Centres, and limited to no services in Inland and Coastal towns with small populations. People from Coastal areas with small populations often relied on teleconferencing for mental health appointments. Cost and wait times were also mentioned as an increasing barrier for youth accessing these services; people in Growth Centres reported facing similar challenges.

How the problem presents[1]

- Young people noted that there were generally limited social things to do in some areas and that this could increase mental health challenges.

- Growth Centres reportedly have a very small number of services that often do not have the capacity to meet the towns needs. Youth referenced long wait times as evidence of the issue.

- People in Coastal towns with small populations, such as Maclean, indicated the need to travel several hours to see doctors with availability.

"For mental health support, we don't know a place outside of school to go to."

"I have to cancel my psychologist appointments sometimes because I can't afford to go."

Initiatives to support young people living healthier lives

Figure: Horizontal bar chart titled "Initiatives to support healthier lives (%)", y-axis labelled "Response"

- Better mental health support — 61.4
- Affordable health and fitness programs — 39.9
- Life skills and education on how to eat and cook healthily — 35.5
- More support for family and domestic violence — 30
- More specialist health services — 24.4
- Better access to sexual health resources — 19.7
- Safer outdoor spaces to exercise — 18.9

49%[3] of people want healthcare services to open longer or at times that better suit them

30%[4] of young people believe that better internet access will make the most difference

37%[2] of respondents listed health issues as a barrier to getting a good job

2.2x more people per 100,00 are likely to be hospitalised with intentional self-harm than in Metro Sydney[5]

North Coast

(2) Belonging

Provide additional recreational activities and events

Sport was often mentioned as one of the few recreational activities available. However, youth who are unable to participate in sport or are not interested in it, highlighted a need for additional activities. Activities suggested included varied outdoor pursuits, creative arts, culture, and cultural activities to make them feel more part of the community. Youth also noted that the cost of these activities and limited transport options to activities can prevent their involvement.

How the problem presents[1]

- Weather was mentioned as a factor that could affect sporting facilities and prevent youth from participating in sport. When this occurs, youth reported having limited options for alternative activities.

- There is interest in more youth orientated centres, such as youth hubs, which host activities. Youth commented that facilities in the region that offer these services currently face funding and staff challenges.

- Young people highlighted that transport to sporting activities is largely dependent upon a few private companies.

"There's nothing to do here, and the small activities there are so expensive that no one can afford to do them."

"The sport here is great except when it rains, then you can't play for weeks and then there is nothing to do."

Initiatives to support young people living healthier lives
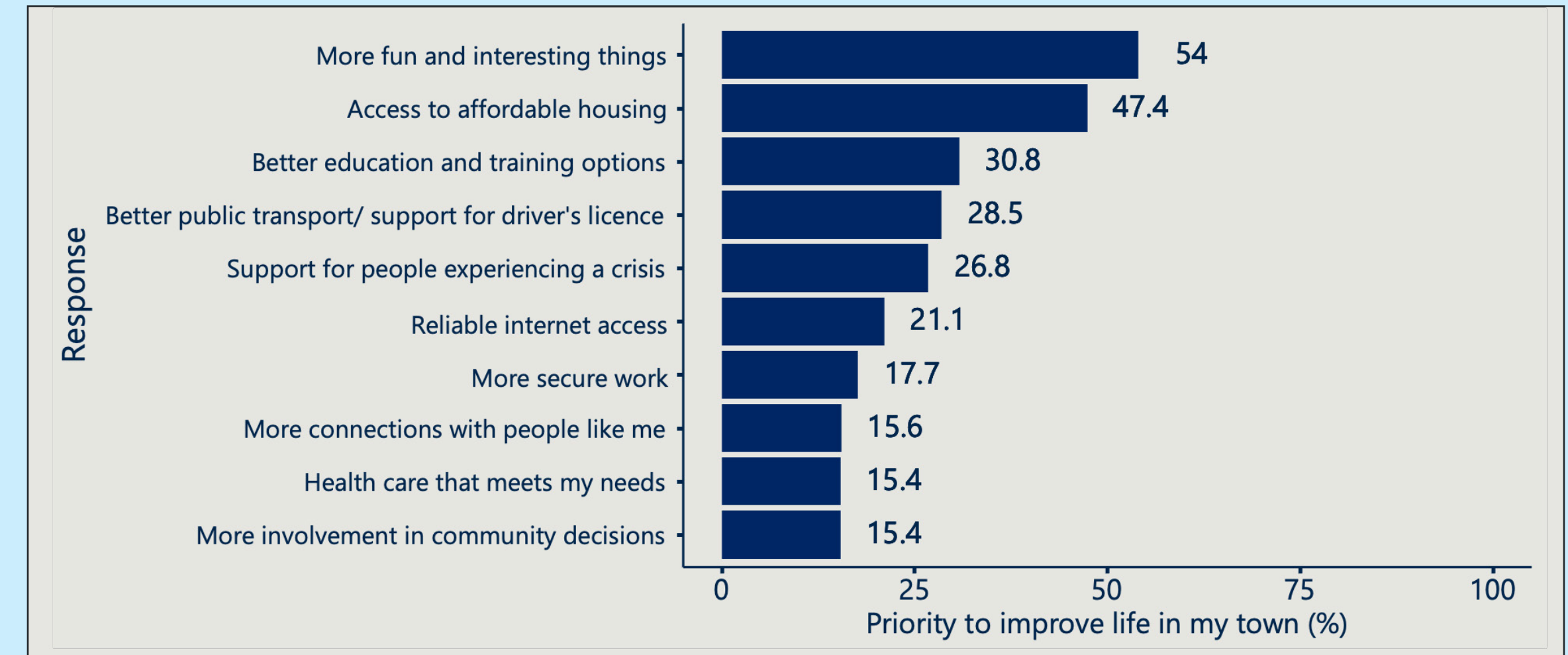
39%[2] of people don't believe there are many fun and interesting things to do in their community

69%[3] of young people would like free or cheap social and recreational activities

50%[3] of people would like to see more young people having a say in the choice of activities

45%[3] of young people would like more sports, outdoor adventure, and creative activities

North Coast

(3) # Housing

Improve access to affordable housing

Young people are finding it increasingly challenging to find an affordable place to rent, attributing this to rising rental prices.[1] Although securing a rental property is of greatest concern, young people are also experiencing difficulty affording general living expenses.
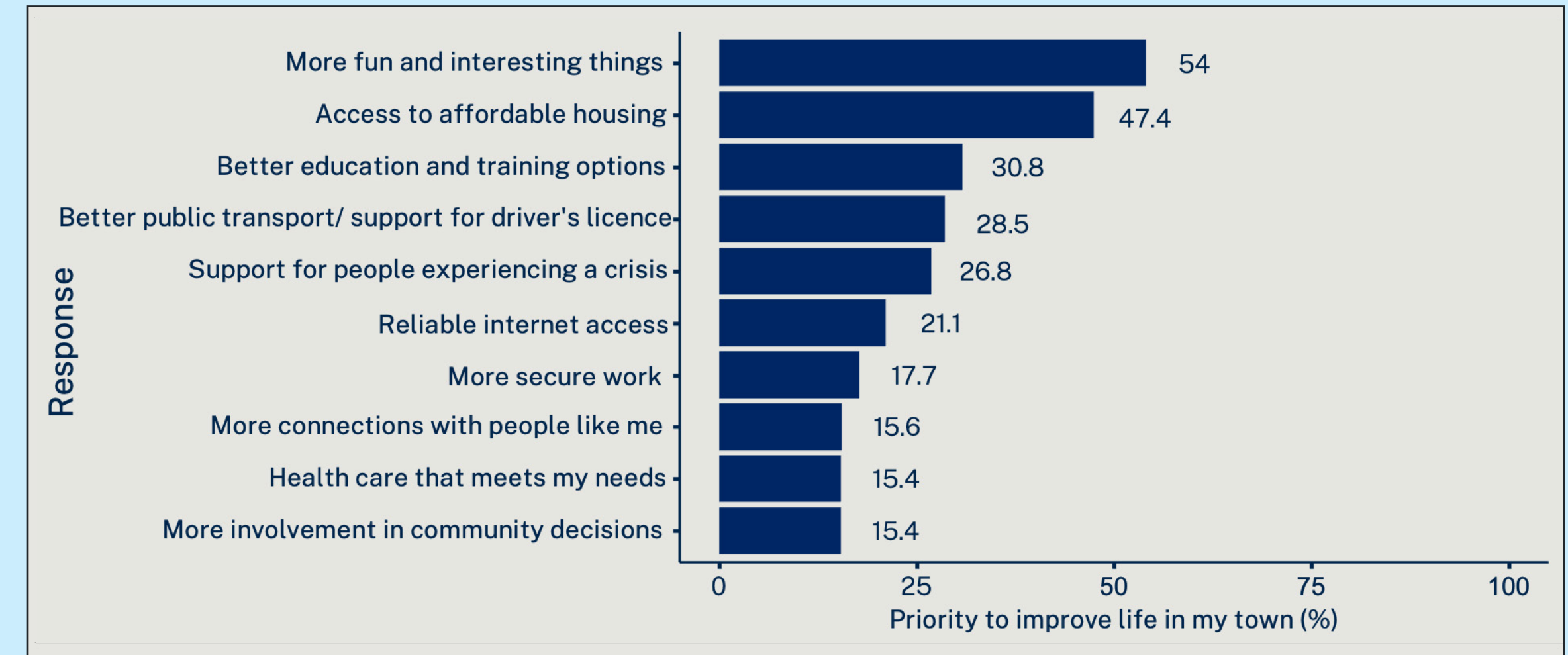
How the problem presents[2]

- Youth intimated that greater rental applicants per property were as sign of increased competition for rental properties.

- Some mentioned that properties were being rented for a higher price than advertised.

- Youth noticed that COVID lockdowns coincided with the rise in demand for North Coast properties.

"So many people apply for houses that it's impossible to be successful. I reckon most young people will move away to wherever they can get a place, otherwise they'll be homeless."

"How are we supposed to be independent if we can't afford to move out of home even with a full-time job... that's provided you can actually find a place."

Initiatives to support young people living healthier lives

Response	Priority to improve life in my town (%)
More fun and interesting things	54
Access to affordable housing	47.4
Better education and training options	30.8
Better public transport/ support for driver's licence	28.5
Support for people experiencing a crisis	26.8
Reliable internet access	21.1
More secure work	17.7
More connections with people like me	15.6
Health care that meets my needs	15.4
More involvement in community decisions	15.4

47%[3] of people reported that life in town would be better with access to affordable housing

31% of people believe that not having a place to live is a barrier to finding a good job[4]

1.4x more households were experiencing socioeconomic disadvantage compared to Metro Sydney[5]

North Coast

4 Education

Maintain school personal care amenities

Strikingly young people, and young women in particular, expressed concern about the personal care amenities in the North Coast. Young people noted that (mostly women's) bathrooms were in poor condition and often did not have sanitary bins or adequate servicing of sanitary bins.

How the problem presents[1]

- Young people, mostly young women, reported that toilets were generally in poor condition with some bathrooms not having doors or bins for period products.

- Young women indicated that bathrooms that did have sanitary bins were often not serviced or emptied frequently enough, leading to them becoming overfilled and unhygienic.

- Some young women mentioned that they could not afford feminine hygiene products. This issue appeared heightened for young families with multiple young people.

"Three out of five of the girls bathrooms don't have doors at school."

"The dispensers and baskets in the school bathrooms are helpful for those who can afford them."

"There are no sanitary bins sometimes and you just have to carry around a dirty pad."

"The bathrooms are pretty gross, we try to avoid using them where we can and wait till we are home."

26 out of 32 young women mentioned that personal care amenities are an issue during consultations

7 different towns had toilet care issues, according to reports from young people within the respective towns.

1. Note: there were no relevant survey or external data to substantiate this issue. However, given that young people across many locations emphasized the extent of the issue and impact on their lives, this issue was included as a priority.

Priority areas for
Hunter

COMMUNITY	WORK READY	WELLBEING

1 Belonging

Improve access to safe activities and events

Consultations

Young people felt that they have limited access to activities and entertainment that they can take part in whilst feeling safe. Many young people expressed concerns that activities in public spaces exposed them to anti-social behaviour, such as harassment, bullying and violence.

Surveys

46% of young people noted that 'more fun and interesting things' would improve life in their town and surrounding areas (most common answer).

33% of young people in the Hunter referenced 'safer outdoor spaces to exercise' as an initiative that would support young people to live healthier lives (fourth most common answer).

2 Skills

Increase opportunities to develop skills

Consultations

Young people noted that they had difficulty finding work after leaving school, particularly in areas with lower population densities. It was raised that young people wanted to understand their career options earlier, especially for people that intend to leave school before year 12.

Surveys

49% answered that school would be better with 'more training and work experience opportunities' (second most common answer), while 33% noted that 'more career advice' would improve school for them (4th most common answer).

41% of young people aged between 18 to 24 years old indicated that gaining work experience is too difficult and is a 'barrier to getting good jobs'.

3 Health

Improve access to mental health services

Consultations

Young people that we visited in the Hunter region expressed that struggle to find and access mental health services when they need them.

They recounted that school counsellors face too much demand and that young people lack awareness of their own mental ill health. Some young people stated that they and their peers turn to drugs when they cannot find help.

Surveys

53% of young people listed 'better mental health support' as an initiative that would help them to live healthier lives; this was the top answer by young people.

27% of young people also listed 'health issues including mental health' as a barrier to attaining good jobs.

Secondary Priorities

Improved safety for young people in the community (Belonging); improved availability of transport to major services, including schools and the main town (Transport); increase youth's understanding of sexual health, catering for different sexual preferences (Education); increase the start-up business skills of tradespeople and other TAFE students where this is applicable (Education); improve the internet service outside of Tamworth to increase the number of people who can study and work remotely (Digital).

Improved education around contraception and reduced teen pregnancy (Education); improved affordability of and access to feminine hygiene products (Health); improved road quality (Transport); greater reliability and safety of public transport for young people (Transport); Reduce illicit drug use, especially vaping, in schools (Education).

Other Priorities

Inclusivity, Digital, Agency, and Housing were raised by young people but not to the same extent as the top and secondary priorities.

Hunter

1 Belonging

Improve access to safe activities and events

Young people have limited access to activities and entertainment that they can take part in whilst feeling safe. Many young people expressed concerns that activities in public spaces exposed them to anti-social behaviour such as harassment, bullying and violence.
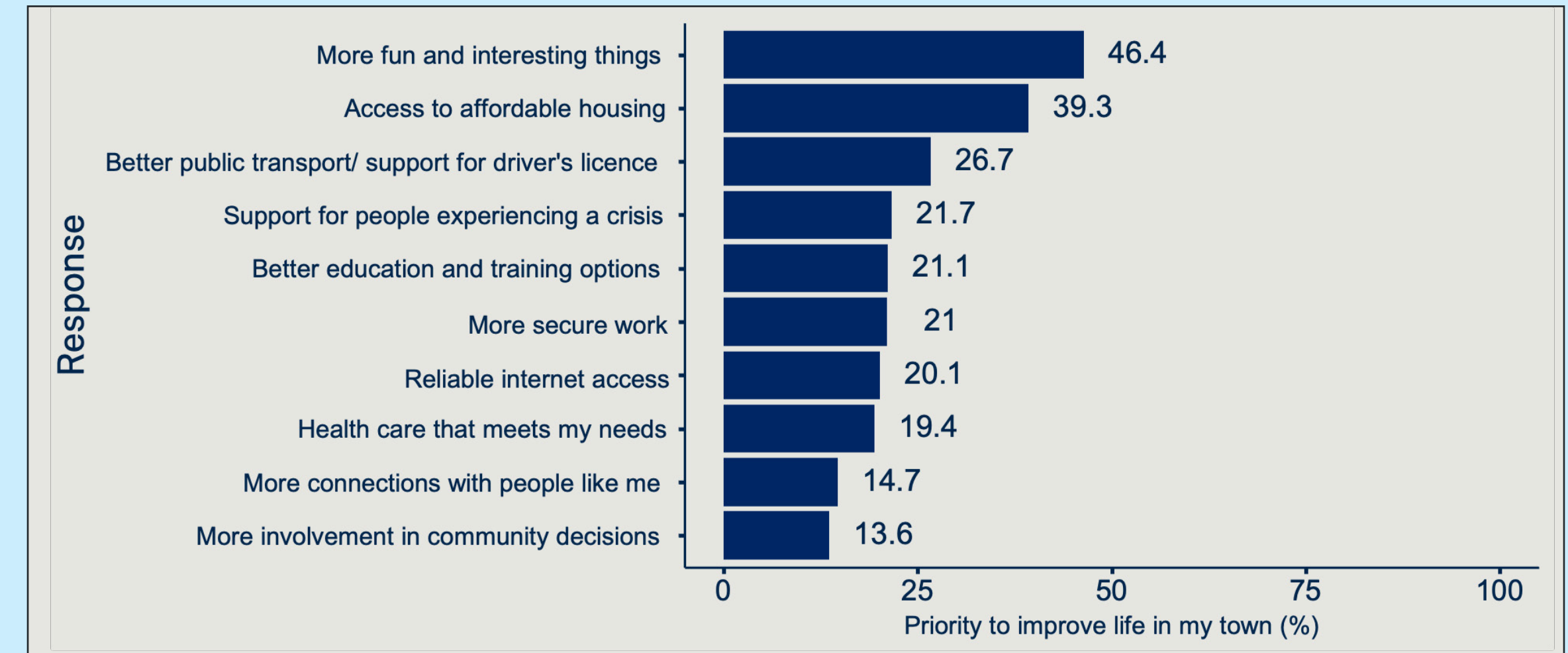
How the problem presents[1]

- Youth-focused places, such as youth centres, are open irregularly, leaving young people without access to activities and events for most of the week.

- Public facilities often have unsavoury characters nearby that make youth afraid to use them, especially in lower SES areas.

- Many of the available public facilities are outdoors and not considered suitable by young people for use at night or during winter.

"There are [unsavoury characters] everywhere here, you can't go to parks or anything because they try and fight you."

"We want more youth centres like the Deck."

Life in town and surrounding areas would be better

Response	Priority to improve life in my town (%)
More fun and interesting things	46.4
Access to affordable housing	39.3
Better public transport/ support for driver's licence	26.7
Support for people experiencing a crisis	21.7
Better education and training options	21.1
More secure work	21
Reliable internet access	20.1
Health care that meets my needs	19.4
More connections with people like me	14.7
More involvement in community decisions	13.6

31%[2] of youth believe that they feel a sense of belonging

1.2x more offences per 10,000 people compared to Metro Sydney[3]

33%[4] of youth listed that safer outdoor exercise spaces would help them live healthier lives

71%[5] of people would like to see more free and cheap social recreational activities

48%[5] of people would like to see more sports, outdoor adventure, and creative activities

1. Remarks were sourced from consultations in Hunter
2. Responses to survey question 23 "I feel a sense of belonging in my community"
3. Refer to the section Crime Data in the regions. Based on 2021 BOSCAR data
4. Responses to survey question 20: "Young people in my town and surrounding areas would live healthier lives with"
5. Responses to survey question 26 "In my community, I would like to see more"

Hunter

② Skills

Increase opportunities to develop skills and clear career pathway options

Young people noted that they had difficulty finding work after leaving school, particularly in areas with a lower population density. It was raised that young people wanted to understand their career options earlier, especially for people that leave school before Year 12. With the regional Hunter economy expected to undergo a transition away from mining[1], it is important to offer young people pathways to secure opportunities in growth industries.

How the problem presents[2]

- Young people highlighted that many people leave school before year 12 unprepared and unaware of the potential pathways into the workforce.

- Many young people communicated their struggle to find work and training opportunities through formal channels, relying on family and social connections instead.

"They need to focus careers education more on high school because that's where you start to lose kids."

"They should push apprenticeships more in school for people that don't finish high school."

I would feel more confident about my work if:

Response	%
If I knew what I wanted to do	44.3
Better prepared in high school	39.9
Have a mentor or learning support/ knew where to get help	34.7
Access to more training and work experience	31.1
Develop leadership, interpersonal and digital skills	24.9
Uni / TAFE campus closer to me	22.4
Help setting up my own business	16.7

Things that would make people feel more confident about their work future (%)

41%[3] of people think that difficulty getting work experience is a barrier to getting good jobs

39%[3] of people think that the lack of preparation from high school is a barrier to getting good jobs

21%[4] of people believe that life would be better with more education and training

49%[5] of youth believe more training and work experience would make school better

Hunter

③ Health

Improve access to mental health services

Young people in Hunter struggle to find and access mental health services when they are needed, with school counsellors facing too much demand and young people lacking awareness of mental health. Some young people stated that they and their peers turn to drugs when they cannot find help.
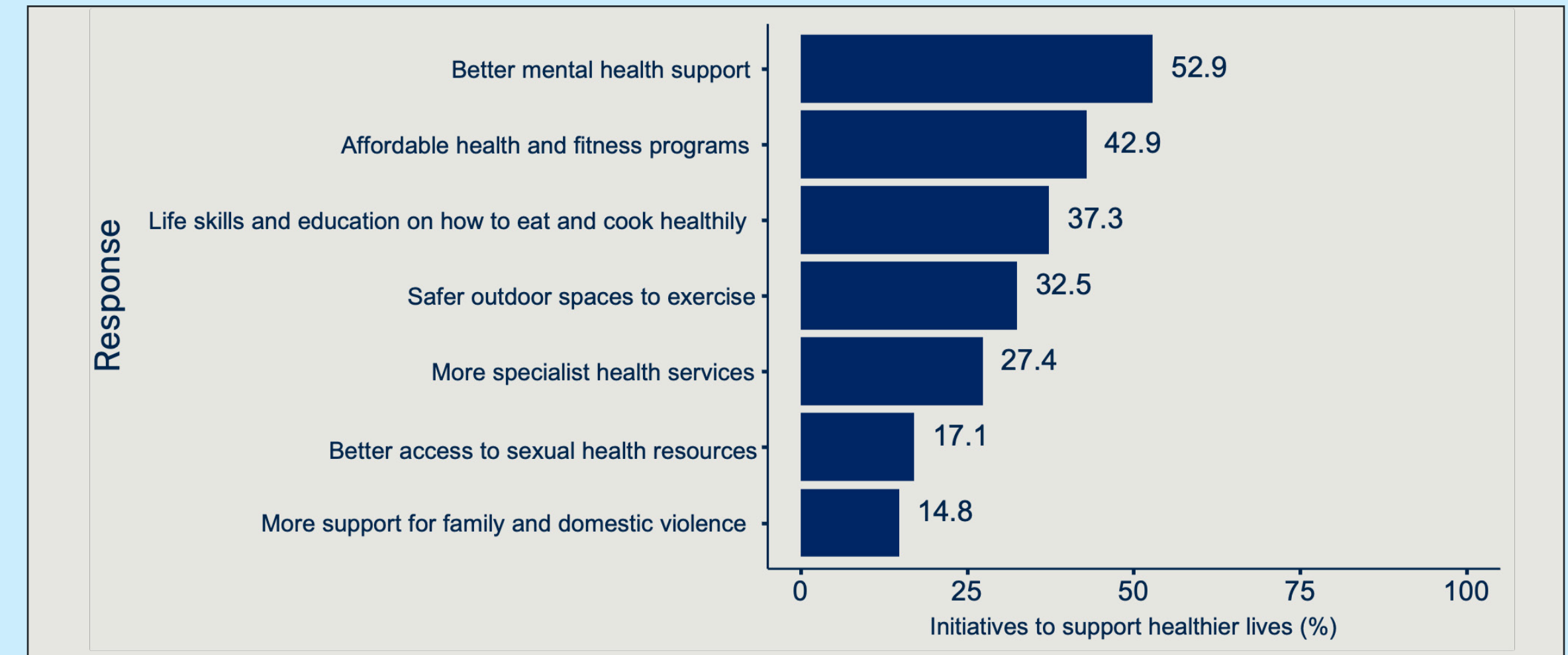
How the problem presents[1]

- Young people identified a lack of awareness around mental health matters, especially in regards to lesser known mental health conditions.

- Many young people referenced cost and ease of accessing services as barriers to seeking mental health treatment, with young people often not aware of where and when services are available.

- Many young people struggled with the disruptions of the COVID-19 pandemic and school counsellors faced increased demand as a result.

"The school can't advertise the school counselling services because it'll get overwhelmed."

"Mental health isn't taken as seriously as it should be, especially by the old folk."

Initiatives to support young people living healthier lives

Better mental health support — 52.9
Affordable health and fitness programs — 42.9
Life skills and education on how to eat and cook healthily — 37.3
Safer outdoor spaces to exercise — 32.5
More specialist health services — 27.4
Better access to sexual health resources — 17.1
More support for family and domestic violence — 14.8

Response
Initiatives to support healthier lives (%)

19%[3] of people think that life would be better if they could get healthcare that meets their needs

14%[4] of people don't think they can get the healthcare they need

2.3x more people per 100,000 are likely to be hospitalised for intentional self-harm in Hunter than in Metro Sydney[5]

27%[2] of young people listed 'health issues including mental health' as a barrier to getting good jobs

Priority areas for
Central Coast

WELLBEING	WORK READY	CONNECTIVITY

1　Health

Improve access to mental health support

Consultations

Young people in the Central Coast struggle to access mental health resources due to long wait times for appointments. Anonymity was also raised as a major concern, with students needing parental or guardian permission to access mental health services.

Surveys

27% of young people in the Central Coast listed 'health care that meets my needs' (3rd overall) as something that would improve life in their town and surrounding area.

Moreover, 57% of young people cited 'better mental health support' as an initiative that would help them live healthier lives (most common answer).

2　Skills

Improve career pathways and skill development for young people

Consultations

High school students expressed a desire for a greater focus on career-readiness in schools. Many high school students were not aware of potential career options. Students with a reasonable understanding of a range of careers felt they needed more information and guidance on whether potential career pathways aligned with their preferences, skills and strengths.

Surveys

54% of 18-24 year olds in Central Coast noted 'high school not preparing me for work' as a barrier to getting a good job (1st of available options).

38% of 12-17 year-olds felt that 'more training and work experience opportunities' would make school better (2nd overall).

3　Transport

Improve availability of public transport

Consultations

Transport is a priority for young people in the Central Coast, particularly for youth without a drivers licence. The distance from home to public transport stops was cited as a challenge by young people. As well, youth during consultation sessions revealed that they do not feel very safe travelling home at night on buses, often relying on friends or relatives for transport.

Surveys

35% of young people listed 'better public transport' as an initiative that would help them get to where they want to go (most common answer).

Secondary Priorities

Improved access to high quality sexual education and resources (Education); reduced bullying in schools (Education); free access to sanitary products (Health); improved public internet access (Digital); greater variety of activities and events (Community); education around life skills in schools (Skills); greater outreach to young people and enable them to influence aspects of their community (Agency); easing of cost of living pressures (across all themes)

Other Priorities

Inclusivity, Digital, and Housing were raised by young people but not to the same extent as the top and secondary priorities.

Central Coast

① Health

Improve access to mental health services

Young people in the Central Coast struggle to access mental health resources due to long wait times for appointments. Anonymity was also raised as a major concern, with students needing parental or guardian permission to access mental health services.
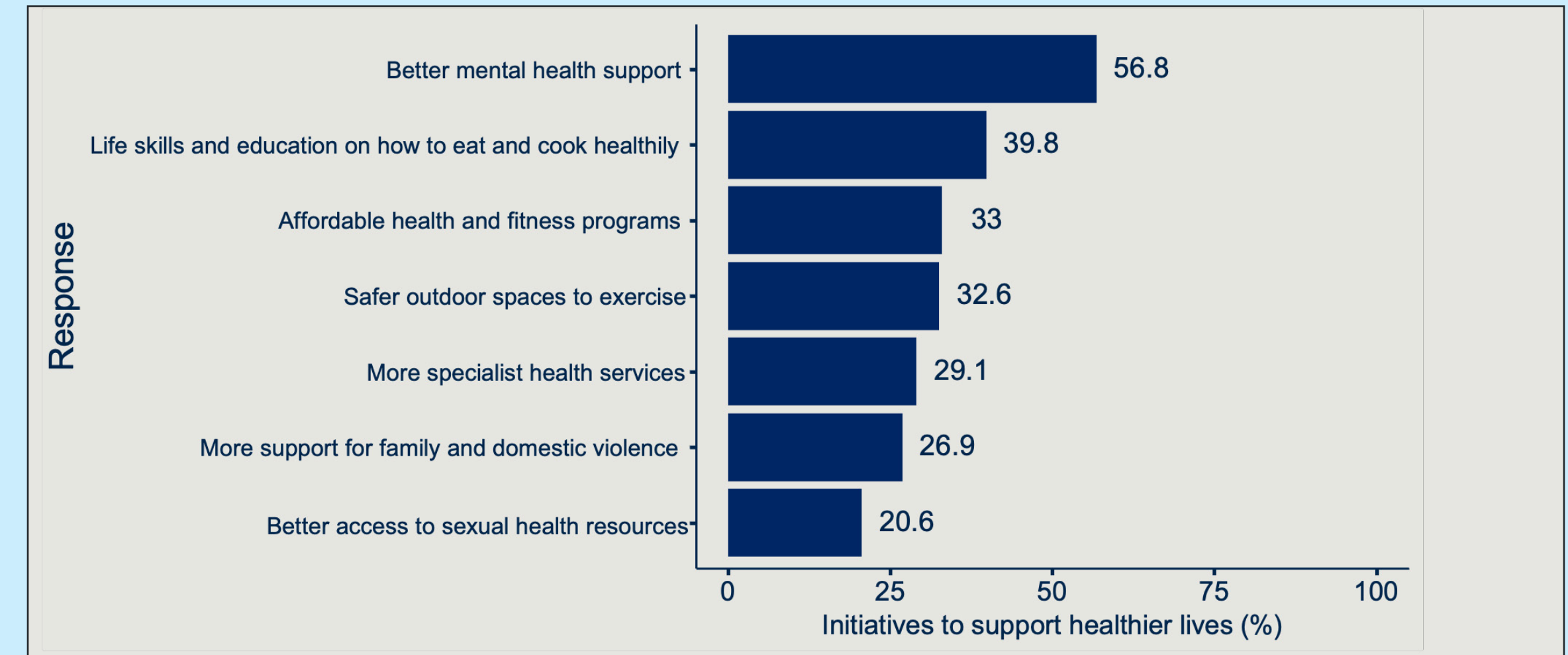
How the problem presents[1]

- Youth selected mental health as the top enabler for them to live healthier lives.

- Students feel teachers are unable to identify mental health challenges. But, they felt comfortable speaking with youth workers and mental health professionals.

- Young people tried to access mental health services via their phones and via the internet (on applications such as TikTok) to overcome the need for guardian approval.

"Kind of don't want my parents to know about things going on for me mentally. Other kids parents have said no...want it to be private."

"3 month wait for a phone call with Headspace."

Initiatives to support young people living healthier lives

Better mental health support — 56.8
Life skills and education on how to eat and cook healthily — 39.8
Affordable health and fitness programs — 33
Safer outdoor spaces to exercise — 32.6
More specialist health services — 29.1
More support for family and domestic violence — 26.9
Better access to sexual health resources — 20.6

Response (y-axis)
Initiatives to support healthier lives (%) (x-axis: 0, 25, 50, 75, 100)

1.9x[3] more likely to have self-harm hospitalisations than Metro Sydney

27%[2] of people think that "health care that meets their needs" would improve life in the region

61%[4] of people listed more suitable times as an initiative that would improve healthcare

27%[5] of people selected mental health issues as a barrier to getting a job

2 Skills

Improve career pathways and skill development for young people

High school youth expressed a desire for a greater focus on career-readiness in schools. Many of these young people did not understand the spectrum of careers available to them, the steps they would need to take to pursue potential career pathways, or the support available to help them navigate the options. Young people who had a reasonable understanding of potential career options felt they needed more guidance on which most options aligned with their preferences, skills and strengths.

How the problem presents[1]

- Young people often sought advice from youth workers (in schools or at youth centres) on potential career options. While this was helpful, youth workers were not always able to provide insights on specific fields.

- Young people want greater access to work experience and career advisors through schools to help them to better understand: the options available to them; what different jobs entail; and which are best suited to their goals.

- Young people also want more guidance on the subjects and further study options required to follow their chosen career.

"I don't know what to do in the future… where to get support…(and) how to get educated for other jobs"

"I'm in Year 12…I talk to [youth worker at school] about what I want to do after school. He's great but I'm still not sure…I'm thinking psychology or nursing…"

School would be better with

38%[3] of young people noted that 'more training and work experience opportunities' would make school better

54%[2] of young people believed that high school does not prepare them for work, when selecting barriers to getting good jobs

49%[4] listed that being 'better prepared in high school' would make them more confident about their work future

47%[2] of young people believed that it's too difficult to get work experience, when selecting barriers to getting good jobs

Central Coast

③ Transport

Improve availability of public transport

Transport is a priority for young people in the Central Coast, particularly for youth without a drivers licence. The distance from home to public transport stops was cited as a challenge. As well, youth during consultation sessions revealed that they do not feel very safe travelling home at night on buses, often relying on friends or relatives for transport.
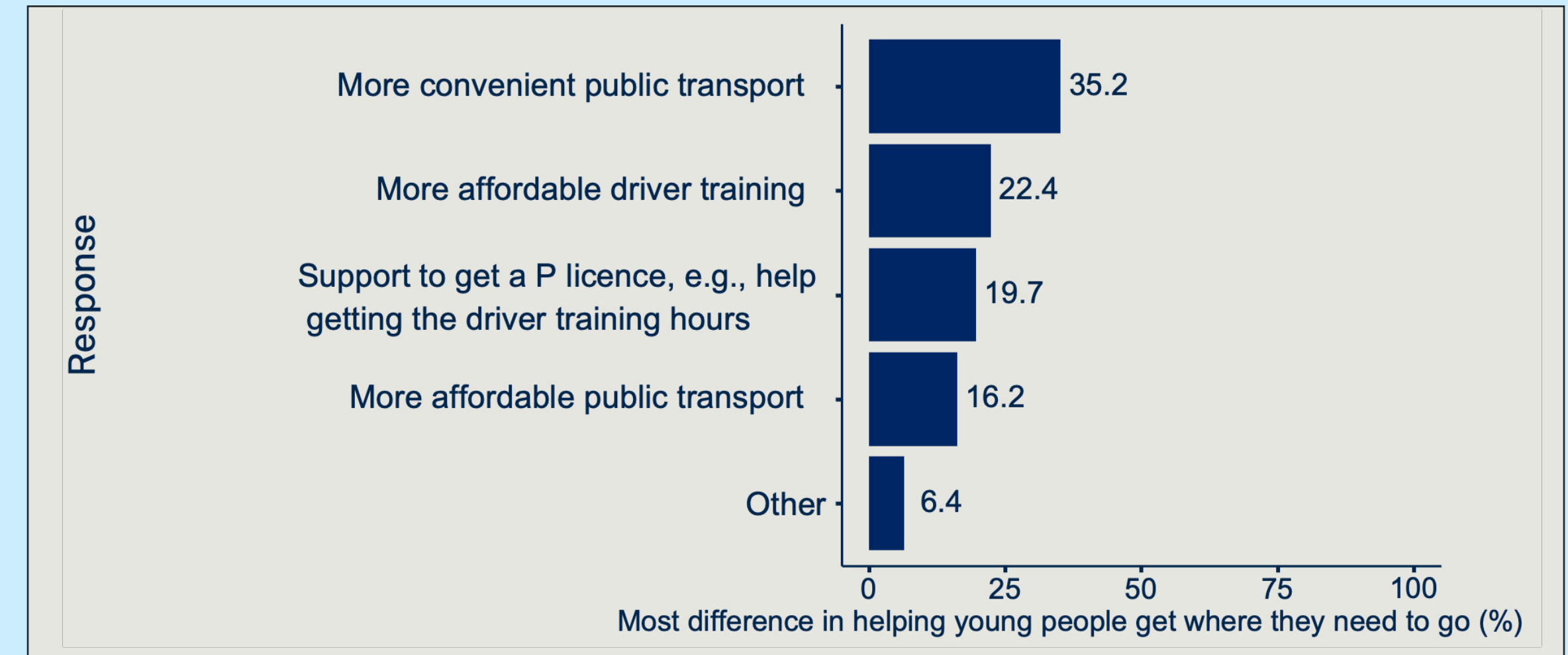
How the problem presents[1]

- More people want improvements in public transport (35%[1]) than they want support obtaining their Ps (22%[1]).

- Public transport was selected as the fourth top barrier to young people getting a job.

- Youth who completed the survey believe that better public transport is an enabler for them to access the health care they need.

"Infrequent buses create a safety issue for young people when trying to return home at night…there are no buses near some community areas…I rely on older siblings to pick me up."

"Can't afford L's test or driving lessons, so I used public transport."

Most difference in helping young people get where they need to go

Most difference in helping young people get where they need to go (%)

Response	
More convenient public transport	35.2
More affordable driver training	22.4
Support to get a P licence, e.g., help getting the driver training hours	19.7
More affordable public transport	16.2
Other	6.4

12%[2] of young people stated that school would be better with "improved public transport"

29%[3] of people listed 'lack of public transport' as the biggest barrier to getting a desirable job

23%[4] of people believe that better transport and support for driver's licences will make life better

22%[5] of people chose public transport as an enabler to get the health care they need

Priority areas for
South East and Tablelands

CONNECTIVITY	WORK READY	COMMUNITY	WELLBEING

1 Transport

Improve access to public transport

2 Skills

Provide more guidance on career pathway options

3 Belonging

Provide additional recreational activities and events

4 Health

Improve access to mental health services

Secondary Priorities

Improved access to health services (Health); improved safety for young people in the community (Belonging); improved teaching of life-skills in schools (Skills); improved awareness and increasing LGBTIQ+ and multicultural youth inclusivity (Inclusivity), improved targeting of services towards people over 16 (across all themes)

Other Priorities

Education, Inclusivity, Agency, and Housing were raised by young people but not to the same extent as the top and secondary priorities.

Consultations

Young people in smaller towns rely on larger towns to access services. Yet there is poor or non-existent public transport connections between towns, presenting a barrier to young people's community engagement and access to services.

Consultations

High school aged youth expressed a desire for more education around career-readiness in schools. As well, students identified that existing programs did not reach students early enough. Youth also highlighted a need for greater integration between TAFE, apprenticeships and schools.

Consultations

Young people described a need for a greater variety of activities for young people to participate in. In particular, there was a need for activities outside of sport as well as those targeted at older youth.

Young people living in smaller towns also lacked access to facilities such as gyms, movie theatres and youth centres. Youth identifying as LGBTIQ+ noted a desire for more safe spaces and activities for this cohort.

Consultations

Young people expressed a need for improved accessibility to and awareness of mental health support services in their communities. In particular, young people noted the need for in-person support provided in a private, accessible format.

Mental health services were often overburdened in larger towns where they were available, whereas smaller towns had limited or no access to such services.

Surveys

32% of people believe that better transport and support for driver's license will make life better in their community.

43% of young people wanted more convenient public transport to help them get where they needed to go.

Surveys

29% of young people noted that better education and training options would improve life in their area (third most common answer).

In relation to this 48% of young people answered that more training and work experience opportunities (second most common answer) would improve school with 34% also noting "More career advice" (third most common answer)

Surveys

58% of young people in the Southeast & Tablelands region noted that "more fun and interesting things" would improve life in their town and surrounding areas (most common answer).

Surveys

45% of young people noted that "better mental health support" would help them live healthier lives (most common answer).

30% listed health issues (incl. mental health) as a barrier to work while only 34% of young people agreed that they have access to healthcare when they need it.

South East and Tablelands

(1) # Transport

Improve availability of public transport

Young people in smaller towns mentioned their reliance on larger towns to access services. Yet there are infrequent or, in many areas, non-existent public transport connections between towns, presenting a barrier to young people's community engagement and access to services.

How the problem presents[1]

- Young people living in smaller towns reportedly rely on private transport to get to larger towns, presenting a barrier to work, education, and health services

- Young people from smaller towns attending TAFE during high school mentioned they face disruption to their schooling due to the extended travel time to study.

"The community needs more accessible transport to get to the places they need, like doctors or specialists that are far away."

"Yass is seen as part of Canberra because it's only an hour away. It's only an hour away if you have a car, if you don't you may as well be in Bourke."

Most difference in helping young people get where they need to go
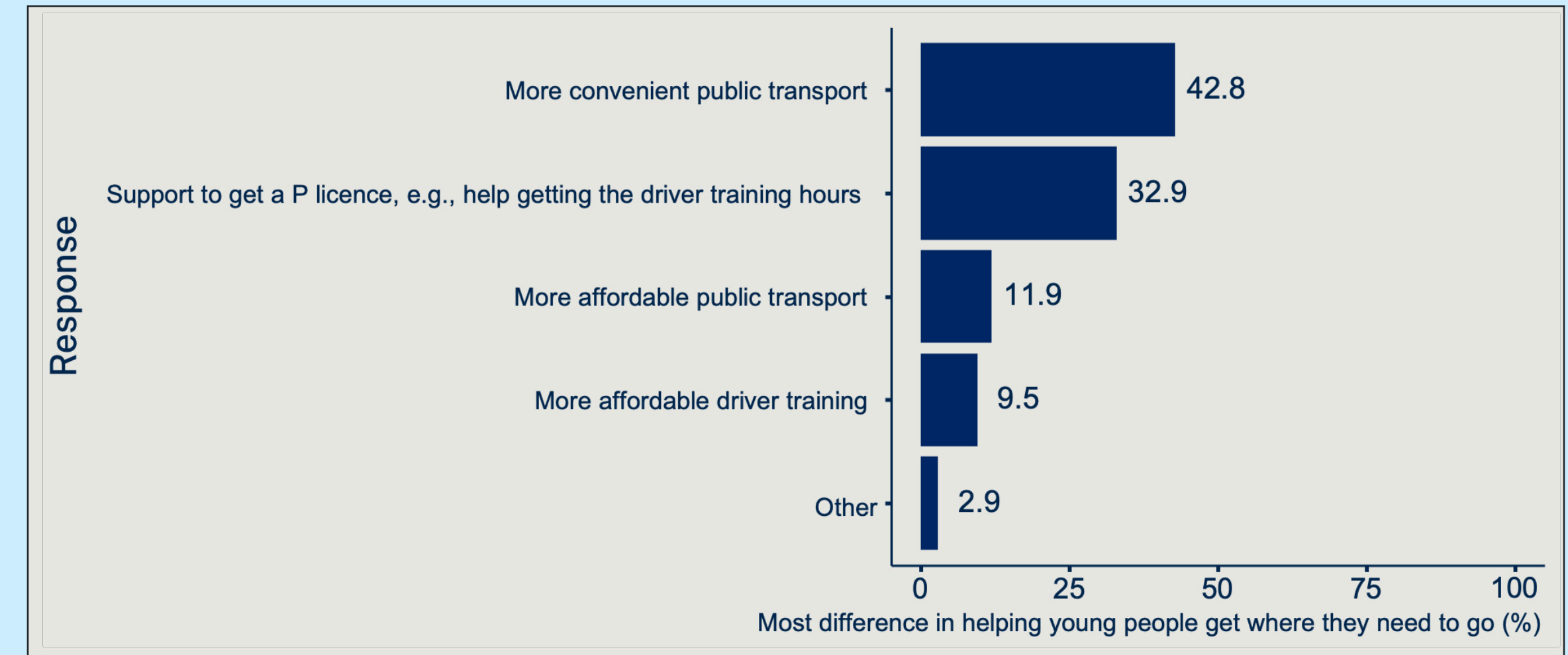
43%[3] of young people want more convenient public transport to help get them where they need to go

43%[4] of young people indicated that a lack of public transport prevents them from getting a good job

35%[5] of young people chose public transport as an enabler to obtaining the healthcare they need

32%[2] of people believe that better transport and support for driver's licences will make life better in their community

South East and Tablelands

② Skills

Provide more guidance on career pathway options

High school students expressed a desire for more education around career-readiness in schools. Students raised that their schools either did not have a career advisor or that their advisor(s) were overwhelmed. As well, students identified that existing programs did not reach students early enough.

How the problem presents[1]

- Larger towns tended to have larger TAFEs and schools that provided more options to young people. Young people also noted that larger towns have greater employment opportunities specifically in fast food and retail.

- In smaller towns, young people looking at alternative pathways (i.e. TAFE or TAFE subjects during HSC) face greater barriers due to travel requirements. Young people need to travel to larger towns for employment as there are minimal businesses in their local area.

"When we miss a day of school for TAFE, we have to make up the day."

"There's lots of employment options in the region but there's poor connections between them and the schools."

School would be better with

48%[3] of young people noted that 'more training and work experience opportunities' would make school better

34%[4] listed that being 'better prepared in high school' would make them more confident about their work future

29%[2] of young people listed 'better education and training options' as an initiative that would improve life in their town

41%[5] of young people believed that high school does not prepare them for work, when selecting barriers to getting good jobs

South East and Tablelands

③ Belonging

Provide additional recreational activities and events

Young people described a need for a greater variety of activities for young people to participate in, specifically indoor spaces and events during winter and when the weather is bad. Older youth (aged 16-24) desired more activities other than sport.

How the problem presents[1]

- Young people living in smaller towns said they lack access to facilities such as gyms, movie theatres and youth centres, requiring them to travel into larger towns. Young people in these smaller towns noted that the lack of activities lead to people turning to risky or illegal activities.

- Youth identifying as LGBTIQ+ noted a desire for more safe spaces and activities for this cohort.

"We don't have a lot of positive things to put our mind to and people have too much time on their hands."

"Sometimes we get kicked out of the shopping centre for just hanging around and having poor behaviour, but we just have nothing to do."

Life in town and surrounding areas would be better
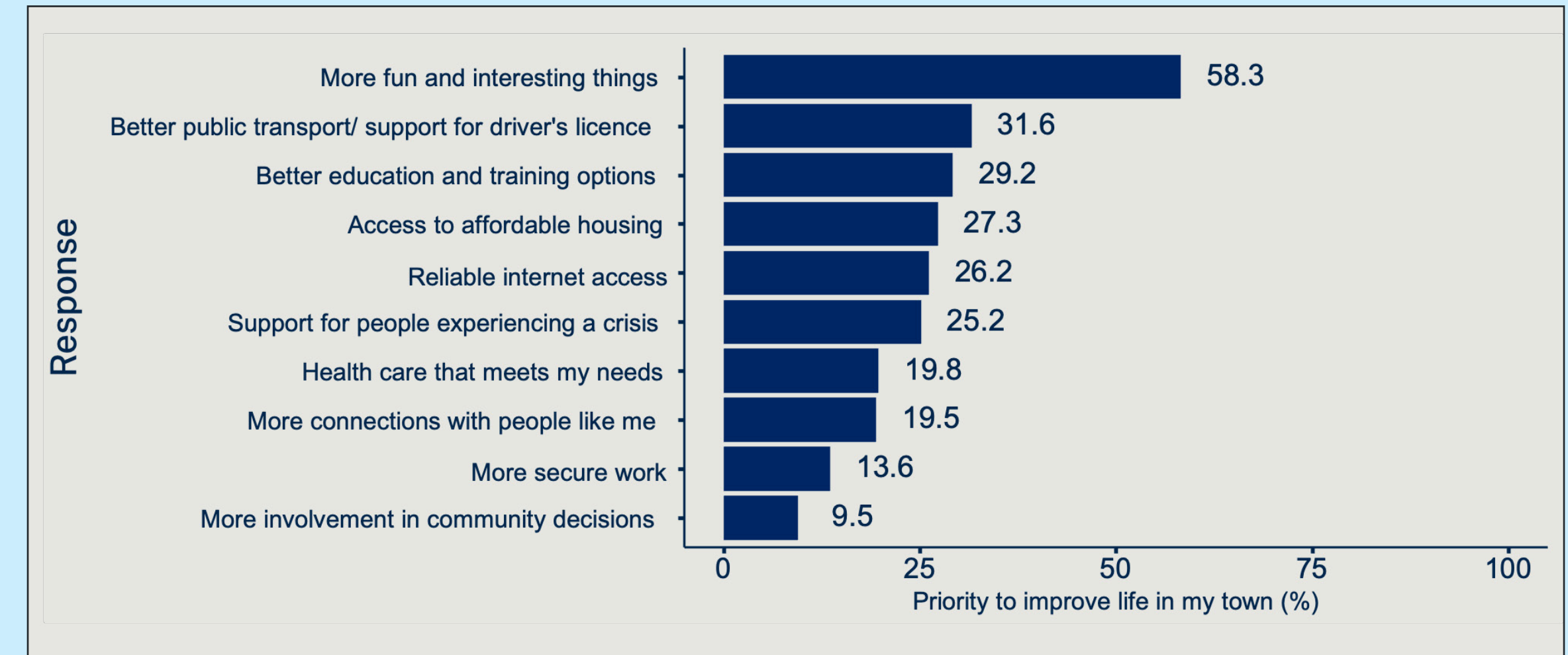
58%[2] of young people noted that access to more fun and interesting activities would make life in their town and surrounding areas better

53%[3] of respondents don't believe there are currently fun and interesting things to do

63%[4] of respondents would like to see free or cheap social recreational activities

55%[5] of respondents would like to see more sports, outdoor adventure, and creative activities

South East and Tablelands

(4) # Health

Improve awareness of and access to mental health services

Young people expressed a need for improved accessibility to and awareness of mental health support services in their communities. Many young people noted the current services were not adequately tailored to their needs. The need for much greater awareness of mental health issues was also a common theme in engagements.
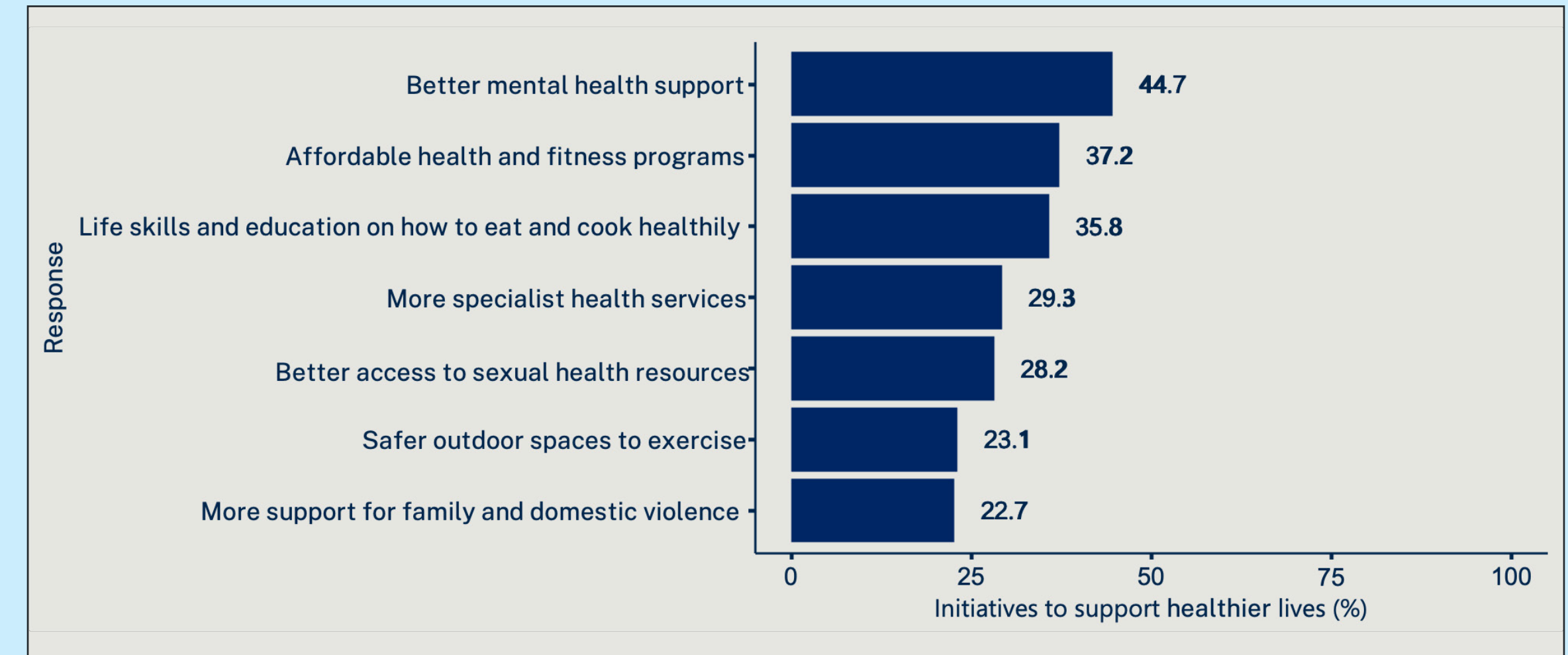
How the problem presents[1]

- In-person support services, such as Headspace, tend to be based in larger towns. This can be a barrier for those living in smaller towns, due to the lack of easily-accessible public transport.

- Young people said available services often experienced significant wait times due to excessive demand.

- There was a clear preference for in-person support services to telehealth programs, including outreach through schools and community groups.

- Young people expressed concern about privacy when accessing mental health services because clinics required consent from their families to access support.

"There's therapists in town but no psychologists, the closest one's in Bega."

"A lot of the support services in place will just tell your parents after you've told them everything."

Initiatives to support young people living healthier lives

30%[3] of young people listed health issues (incl. mental health) as a barrier to work

34%[4] of people did not agree that they have access to healthcare when they need it

45%[2] of young people indicated better mental health support would help them live healthier lives.

2x[5] more likely to have intentional self-harm hospitalisations than metro Sydney

Priority areas for
Illawarra Shoalhaven

COMMUNITY	CONNECTIVITY	WELLBEING

1 Belonging

Provide additional recreational activities and events

Consultations

Young people yearned for a greater sense of belonging to their community and mentioned that the absence of spaces for young people to socialise makes them feel less connected to each other. Connected to this idea, youth raised their interest to participate in theatre and performance activities.

Surveys

53% of young people in the Illawarra Shoalhaven area don't believe that there are fun and interesting things to do in the community.

49% of young people chose more fun and interesting things to do as a way for their community to improve (most common answer).

2 Transport

Improve frequency and quality of public transport services

Consultations

Youth in Illawarra highly value existing transport options but still chose better transport as their second highest regional priority.

Young people indicated that insufficient transport options could act as a barrier to obtaining a job. Better transport is also seen as an enabler to better healthcare access.

Surveys

40% of young people think that a key enabler of better health care is easier transport to healthcare services.

Additionally, of all young people 27% in the Illawarra Shoalhaven region noted that better public transport/ support for a driver's licence was a priority (second most common answer).

3 Health

Improve access to mental health services

Consultations

Young people in Illawarra chose better mental health support as their top priority to help them to live healthier lives. Consultations found that limited services and availability of these services, mean that some young people can wait months to see a mental health professional.

Survey data supported consultation insights, highlighting that there is a need for greater information on how to find healthcare services.

Surveys

49% of young people listed 'Better mental health support' as an initiative that would help them live healthier lives (most common answer to live healthier).

Noting that of all young people 60% indicated they were not confident that they could get healthcare where they live.

Secondary Priorities

Reduced drug use (vaping) at school (Education), increased number of people attaining their P's licence at 18 years old (Transport); greater career guidance at schools and broader range of courses at further education (e.g., TAFE) (Education); improve accessibility of social services to help young people to navigate life challenges (Skills).

Other Priorities

Inclusivity, Digital, Agency, and Housing were raised as issues in the Illawarra Shoalhaven region, but not to the same extent as the top and secondary priorities.

Illawarra Shoalhaven

1 # Belonging

Provide additional recreational activities and events

Young people yearned for a greater sense of belonging to their community and mentioned that the absence of spaces for young people to socialise makes them feel less connected to each other. Connected to this idea, youth raised their interest to participate in theatre and performance activities.
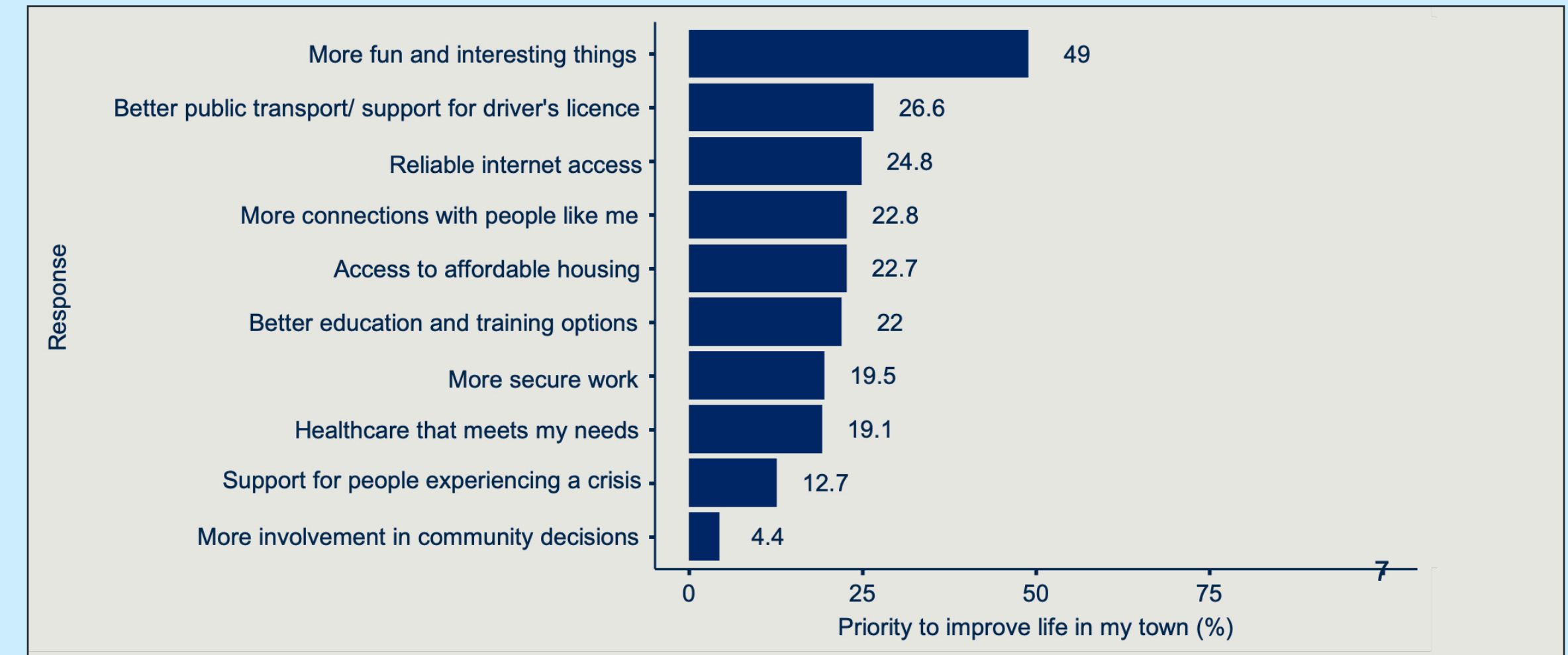
How the problem presents[1]

- Young people noted that there are limited social options for young people to participate in apart from sporting activities.

- Young people referenced activities in Canberra or Sydney as exemplars when thinking about activities they would like in Illawarra. It appears that these cities have created expectations for young people in the region.

"Nowra's own version of Vivid would be nice."

"We need more opportunities to perform."

"They should revamp the main street at Nowra (and) make it feel more safe. More lighting."

Fun and interesting things to do

Response	Priority to improve life in my town (%)
More fun and interesting things	49
Better public transport/ support for driver's licence	26.6
Reliable internet access	24.8
More connections with people like me	22.8
Access to affordable housing	22.7
Better education and training options	22
More secure work	19.5
Healthcare that meets my needs	19.1
Support for people experiencing a crisis	12.7
More involvement in community decisions	4.4

33%[2] of respondents don't feel a sense of belonging to their community

51%[3] of young people want to have a say in the types of activities that occur within their community

58%[4] of young people don't believe that they have a say in making a difference

Illawarra Shoalhaven

(2) # Transport

Improve frequency and quality of public transport services

Youth in Illawarra highly value existing transport options but still chose better transport as their second highest regional priority. Survey respondents indicated that insufficient transport options are a barrier to obtaining a job. Better transport is also seen as an enabler to better healthcare access.

How the problem presents[1]

- According to youth, transport challenges are exacerbated for young people living with disabilities, particularly those who have difficulty obtaining a driving licence.

- The free bus service in Wollongong is highly valued by young people in the area and the train line is seen as useful. However, bus services in the rest of the region were seen as infrequent and often running late, making it challenging to use public transport to/from work, services, and recreational venues/activities.

- Public transport is not seen as a viable mode of transport for young people, rather it is a last resort. For example, buses are typically late and have long routes. This means that a 5-minute drive to town via car can take 30-minute by bus.

"There are limited transport options between towns (apart form the train) and outside Wollongong."

"I would avoid catching the train or public transport after dark, particularly some parts of town. It's scary and doesn't feel safe."

Most difference in helping young people get where they need to go
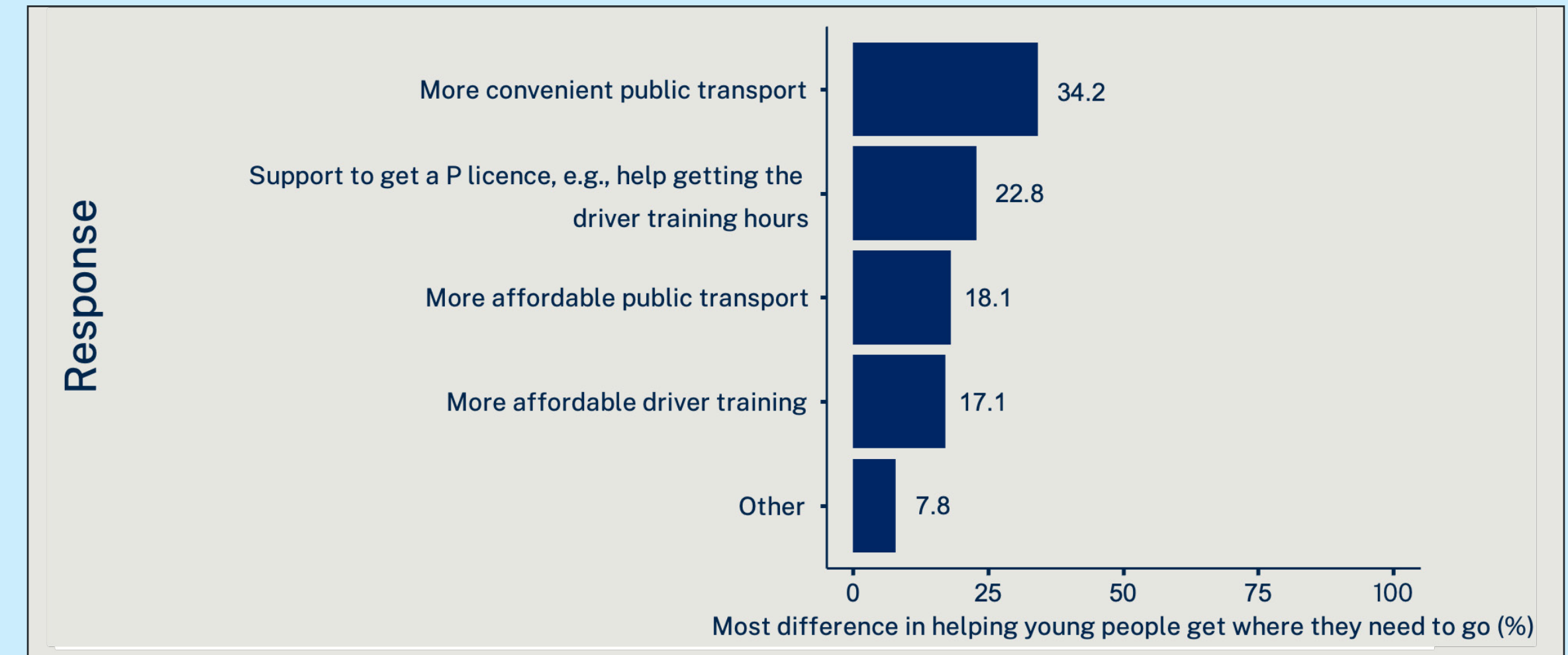
35%[2] of young people believe that lack of transport options are a barrier to getting good jobs

27%[3] of people think better public transport and support for a driver's licence will make life better

40%[4] of people think that a key enabler of better health care is easier transport to healthcare services

Illawarra Shoalhaven

(3) Health

Improve access to mental health services

Young people in Illawarra chose better mental health support as their top priority to help them to live healthier lives. Consultations found that limited services and availability of these services, mean that some young people can wait months to see a mental health professional. Survey data supported consultation insights, highlighting that there is a need for greater information on how to find healthcare services.
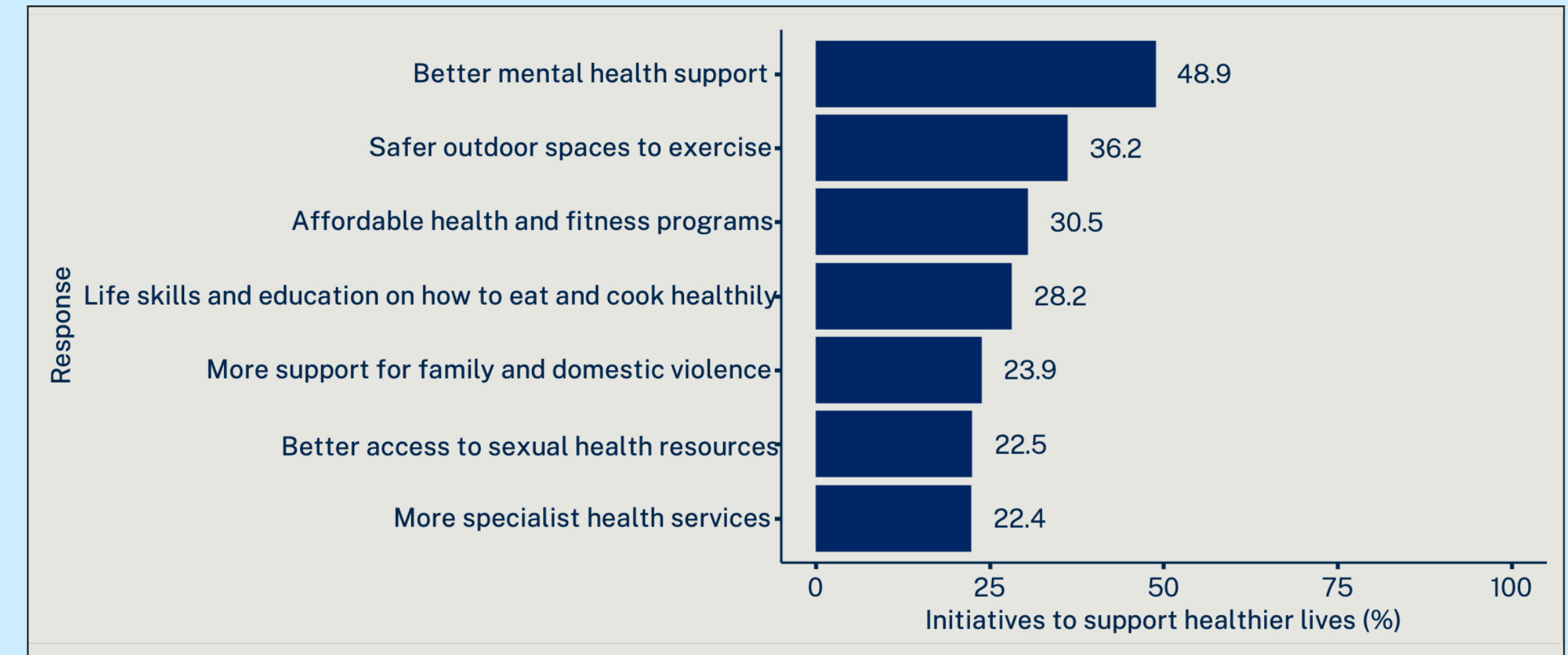
How the problem presents[1]

- Young people noted that support services and staff do not always have expertise in supporting young people. Youth think their issues are unique.

- Youth reported that they resort to switching between service providers shopping for shorter waiting times, burdening young people with the need to retell their story. This could indicate the need for greater information on how to find healthcare services.

"Mental health workers keep moving...I need to keep retelling and reliving (traumatic) 'stories."

"It's hard to know who to trust to talk to."

Initiatives to support young people living healthier lives

Chart — Initiatives to support healthier lives (%):
- Better mental health support — 48.9
- Safer outdoor spaces to exercise — 36.2
- Affordable health and fitness programs — 30.5
- Life skills and education on how to eat and cook healthily — 28.2
- More support for family and domestic violence — 23.9
- Better access to sexual health resources — 22.5
- More specialist health services — 22.4

1.2x[3] more people per 100,000 are likely to be hospitalised over intentional self-harm compared to Metro Sydney

41%[4] of people think that services by non-judgmental health professionals will enable better healthcare

60%[2] of people are not confident that they can get health care where they live

19%[5] of people think that having health care that meets their needs is a priority to improve their life

Investment framework for guiding funding decisions

An investment framework will be used to assess potential projects according to desirability, impact and feasibility

Decision making on funding allocations will be supported by an investment framework. Scoring criteria used to assess potential initiatives will consider the extent to which it is desired by young people; the benefits and potential scale of the initiative; and the risk, sustainability, and cost of implementation.

Criteria 1 - DESIRABILITY

Outcome

1.1. All regional youth - The common needs and wants of regional youth from across regional NSW

1.2. Youth from each region - The needs and wants of regional youth specific to each region

Scoring considerations

1.1. For region-specific initiatives, does the program address one of the top 3-5 priority areas for the region?

1.2. For state-wide initiatives, does the program address one of the state-wide priorities?

Will the initiative cater for the differences across regions?

Criteria 2 - IMPACT

Outcome

2.1. Benefits – the benefits an initiative will deliver

2.2. Additionality – the extent an initiative addresses a service delivery or policy gap

2.3. Scale – the number of people that will be affected

Scoring considerations

2.1. What quantitative or qualitative benefits will the initiative deliver per person?

2.2. How much of an improvement can the supplier deliver (depth vs breadth)?

2.3. How many people can this help? To what extent can this project be scaled and applied in other communities?

Criteria 3 - FEASIBILITY

Outcome

3.1. Delivery risk – The difficulties or sensitivities in implementation

3.2. Sustainability – Organisations can financially sustain the program past the initial 2 years of funding

3.3. Cost – The financial cost of the initiative, including adequate resourcing

3.4. Government partner alignment – Alignment with broader government policies

Scoring considerations

3.1. To what extent does the supplier have a robust plan to effectively deliver the project and outcomes?

To what extent has the supplier considered the risks and issues, including cultural sensitivities, and ways to overcome them?

3.2. To what extent can the program be, or prepare to be, financially sustainable following completion of the grant period?

3.3. Does the project represent an efficient use of resources?

3.4. Will this project have the support of partner agencies?

ORY's role in developing and delivering each initiative will depend on the complexity of the initiative and context

ORY will work closely with its government partners to consider how to best address priority areas for young people in each region

Complexity →

Policy and program advocate

Program design and pilot

Program design and delivery

Program design and delivery	Program design and pilot	Policy and program advocate
Description: Design and deliver the full program in regional communities	**Description:** Lead the design of the program and validation of the benefits through a pilot; hand over delivery of the program to long-term partners (incl. agencies and other SMEs)	**Description:** Lead policy development for young people; identify program requirements; support and advocate for change on behalf of young people
Requirements: High resourcing and funding requirements during the duration of the program; high control over program design and timeframes	**Requirements:** Medium resourcing and funding requirements over the short to medium term; medium control over program design and timeframes	**Requirements:** Relatively low resourcing requirements; low control over program design and timeframes
Example(s): Holiday Break; Children and Young People Wellbeing Recovery Initiative Grants	**Example(s):** Mayyumi-Li Gem, YAMs, 500 Nights pilot programs	**Example(s):** Regional Youth Steering Committee, Regional Youth Action Plan