

## Referral and Conduct of the Inquiry

- 1.1 While often seen as the perpetrators of public violence, the reality is that young people are also overwhelmingly the victims. Young Australians have clearly identified violence as one of the top issues impacting on their daily lives. Not only do they worry about their own personal safety, but also about the impact that violence is having on their friends, families and on their communities.
- 1.2 Underlying these concerns, there is a general perception that the incidence and severity of violence among Australia's young people is increasing. But what evidence exists to support this and what role should the Australian Government play to help minimise the problem?
- 1.3 The *Inquiry into the Impact of Violence on Young Australians* (the inquiry) was referred to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Family, Community, Housing and Youth on 16 June 2009. An advertisement calling for written submissions was placed in *The Australian* on 19 August 2009. Information on the inquiry, including its terms of reference and on how to make a submission, was available on the Parliament of Australia website.<sup>1</sup> The inquiry was also advertised through an extensive mail out to interested parties, including peak bodies and organisations, and state and territory governments.
- 1.4 The inquiry received 79 submissions and four supplementary submissions. The list of submissions is at Appendix A. Fifteen exhibits for the inquiry were also received and a detailed list is provided at Appendix B. The Committee held nine public hearings and four community roundtables across Australia between February and May 2010. Details of the public hearings for the inquiry are listed at Appendix C.

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1 Parliament of Australia website, viewed on 30 May 2010 at <http://www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/fchy/youthviolence/index.htm>.

Informal discussions were also held with police officers, representatives from community based organisations and with young people in Queensland, Tasmania and Western Australia. Committee inspections included site visits to the Gold Coast Closed Circuit TV Monitoring Centre and to the Ashley Youth Detention Centre in Tasmania.

- 1.5 At the outset of the inquiry, the Committee Chair, Ms Annette Ellis MP (Member for Canberra) indicated that it was essential that as many young people were consulted as possible. As the Committee recognised that young people were unlikely to provide formal written submissions to the inquiry, the Committee agreed to develop an online survey to help measure young people's perceptions and experiences of violence.
- 1.6 While this is not the first time an online survey has been conducted by a parliamentary committee, its method of promotion was novel. Facebook and Google advertising were used, as well as existing email distribution lists. Members of Parliament and Senators were also contacted to request they place a link to the survey on their own websites. The Liaison and Projects Office within the Department of the House of Representatives developed a short video using interviews conducted with young people. This was placed on the Committee website, and promoted through the *About the House* TV program on Sky News and Australia's Public Affairs Channel on 22 November 2009. The survey was open from 22 October 2009 to 16 February 2010. During that time there were 1379 respondents. A summary of the outcomes of the survey is at Appendix D. Comments made by survey respondents are interspersed throughout the body of the report.
- 1.7 Also, preceding the formal public hearings on 15 February 2010, the Committee held a Youth Forum in Melbourne that allowed around 40 young people to have informal group discussions with Committee members about their perceptions and experiences of violence and its impact on their lives. Following informal discussions, participants of the Youth Forum were invited to give formal feedback on the *Hansard* record. Some young participants of the Youth Forum were interviewed for a segment on the *About the House* TV program aired on Sky News and on Australia's Public Affairs Channel on 14 May 2010.

## **Context of the Inquiry**

- 1.8 Media reports highlight and perhaps sensationalise the involvement of young people as both victims and perpetrators of violence. But what is the

actual extent of this problem, and how does the Australian Government need to act on it? It was in this context that the Committee undertook to investigate the impact of violence on young Australians.

- 1.9 The inquiry was conducted at a time when there was no national youth violence prevention framework. While there are national policies and strategies which aim to address various aspects of social and economic disadvantage, and which are therefore likely to impact on youth violence to varying degrees, these target broader issues.<sup>2</sup> In addition, there are a large number of strategies and programs operating in Australia which directly target youth violence. However, being administered by various portfolios in federal, state and territory governments, and delivered by a range of government and non-government agencies, these strategies and programs cannot be said to constitute a nationally cohesive youth violence prevention framework.
- 1.10 Also at the time of the inquiry, the Australian Government was in the process of conducting a series of broad ranging consultations with young people to consider the strategic direction for youth policy. These consultations were initiated with the establishment in 2008 of the Australian Youth Forum (AYF). On 20 February 2009, the Minister for Youth, The Hon Kate Ellis MP, hosted the inaugural AYF youTHINK forum. The forum allowed hundreds of young Australians from various locations in Australia to speak out on issues of importance to them and to share their views about practical solutions. As concern about personal safety had been a recurrent issue raised in earlier discussion, violence and safety was a theme for discussion at the youTHINK forum. As summarised by the AYF:

In the discussion about 'Violence and Safety', participants spoke about the need for better understanding between young people and authority figures, like the police, through training. They also talked about the need for awareness raising campaigns about violence, and the links with alcohol abuse. Participants also said that because young people are more exposed to the media than

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2 See for example: Australian Government's Social Inclusion Agenda, and strategies to tackle issues associated with domestic violence and child safety (e.g. *National Council's Plan for Australia to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children*; *National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children*), the use and impact of alcohol and other drugs (*National Drug Strategy* including *National Alcohol Strategy* and the *National Binge Drinking Strategy*) and Indigenous disadvantage (e.g. *Closing the Gap*).

ever before, they are also more exposed to violence and its impact.<sup>3</sup>

- 1.11 Consultations with young people through the AYF and through youTHINK resulted in referral of the *Inquiry into the Impact of Violence on Young Australians* to the Committee in June 2009. The inquiry's terms of reference were formally adopted by the Committee on 24 June 2009.
- 1.12 Following referral of the inquiry, on 3 September 2009, the Prime Minister, The Hon Kevin Rudd MP, announced the Australian Government's intention to develop a *National Strategy for Young Australians* (the National Strategy). The purpose of the National Strategy was to provide an overarching framework identifying issues of concern for young people, and priorities for action. To support the development of the National Strategy, additional consultations with young people and the broader community, the so called National Conversation, ran from 22 October to 19 November 2009.
- 1.13 On 14 April 2010, the *National Strategy for Young Australians* was launched. It identifies the following eight priorities for action, all of which are directly relevant to addressing the issue of youth violence, and therefore to the inquiry. The eight priorities are:
- improving the health wellbeing of all young people;
  - equipping young Australians to shape their own futures through education;
  - supporting young Australians within their families;
  - empowering young Australians to take part and be active in their communities;
  - equipping young Australians with the skills and personal networks they need to gain, and be successful in, employment;
  - enabling young Australians to participate confidentially and safely online;
  - strengthening early intervention with young Australians to help prevent any problems getting worse and to help young people get their lives back on track; and
  - establishing clear cut legal consequences for behaviours that endanger the safety of others.<sup>4</sup>
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3 Australian Government – Australian Youth Forum (AYF) website, viewed on 9 June 2010 at [http://www.youth.gov.au/ayf/pages/youTHINK\\_home.htm#2](http://www.youth.gov.au/ayf/pages/youTHINK_home.htm#2).

## Structure of the Report

- 1.14 Chapter 2 establishes the scope of the inquiry. The Chapters considers definitions of the terms 'violence', 'bullying' and 'young Australian'. It also presents an overview of the data and statistics on youth violence in Australia, and considers issues associated with perceptions of youth violence and the influence of perceptions on feelings of personal safety.
- 1.15 Chapter 3 presents an overview of risk and protective factors occurring at individual, family, community or societal levels that are associated with youth violence. The Chapter also examines the association of alcohol and other drugs with violence. The Chapter concludes by considering specific populations of young people that are at increased risk of experiencing violence.
- 1.16 Chapter 4 examines options for targeted interventions to address youth violence principally by decreasing risk factors and increasing protective factors that occur at individual, family and community levels. The Chapter includes consideration of strategies to reduce alcohol-related violence and to improve personal safety through the implementation of best practice policing. While the focus is on prevention and early intervention, consideration is also given to interventions to support young victims of violence and to reduce recidivism among young offenders.
- 1.17 Chapter 5 examines the need for a strategic and coordinated response to youth violence and considers the role of the Australian Government in supporting this approach. The Chapter also examines societal level influences on behaviour. The role of the Australian Government in supporting national policies to address broader issues of social and economic disadvantage is considered. The Chapter concludes by considering options for population based initiatives to reinforce social norms and foster widespread positive cultural and attitudinal change.

