

## 7.2.4 MONASH YOUTH COMMITTEE- LETTERS TO POLITICIANS

<b>Responsible Manager:</b>	Sharon Bahn, Manager Children, Youth and Family Services
<b>Responsible Director:</b>	Russell Hopkins, Director Community Services

### RECOMMENDATION

**That Council:**

- 1. Notes the importance of the issues raised by the Monash Youth Committee (MYC) on behalf of their peers in the City of Monash.**
- 2. Supports MYC in seeking clarification from Adam Bandt MP surrounding the proposed amendments of the Commonwealth Electoral Amendment (Lowering Voting Age and Increasing Voter Participation) Bill 2019.**
- 3. Supports MYC in its efforts to seek amendments to the Australian Government's reduction in the number of Medicare funded psychologist sessions for the Australian community.**

### INTRODUCTION

The Monash Youth Committee (MYC) is seeking clarification on a proposed amendment to the Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918 to lower the legal voting age to 16 years for all Australian citizens.

MYC wants to increase debate around lowering the voting age in Australia. Young people are more informed and connected than ever before, engaged with social issues, aware of current events, and capable of making informed decisions. Currently, the legal voting age in Nicaragua, Scotland, the Isle of Man, Guernsey, Ethiopia, Ecuador, Cuba, Brazil, and Austria is 16 years.

In exploring how to best advocate for a reduction in the legal voting age, the Monash Youth Committee became aware that Adam Bandt MP put forward a private member's bill in October 2019 with amendments that align with the terms that the Monash Youth Committee wanted implemented.

In October 2019, a proposal for amendments to the Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918 was made to lower the minimum (non-compulsory) voting age in Australian federal elections and referenda from 18 to 16 years; allow 14 and 15-year-olds to be added to the electoral roll in preparation for their eligibility to vote at 16 years of age; provide for 16 and 17-year-olds to be included in the certified list of voters (but not to be given a penalty notice if they do not vote); and provide that an eligible voter, who is not yet on the electoral roll or enrolled at their correct address, is able to cast a provisional vote on election day.

This motion was moved by Adam Bandt MP from the Greens Party and seconded by Andrew Wilkie MP, Independent, in the House of Representatives in October 2019, but the bill never proceeded beyond this point. The MYC wishes to seek clarification from Adam Bandt MP on the proposed bill before considering how to approach future advocacy in relation to amending the current legal voting age in Australia.

The MYC is also seeking that the Federal Government reinstate 20 Medicare-funded psychological sessions. In December 2022, the current Federal Government reduced sessions back to 10 funded sessions a year, being the number of funded sessions funded pre-pandemic. MYC supports the Coalition and the Greens, who are calling for the immediate return to 20 funded sessions a year, both parties identifying the need to effectively support the mental health and wellbeing of low-income earners during a period where more Australians (particularly young people) than ever are feeling the impact of increased cost of living pressures.

The MYC intends to send the attached letter to Adam Bandt MP seeking clarification on the proposal for amendments to the Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918. MYC also intends to send the attached letter in response to the Federal Government's reduction of Medicare-funded psychologist sessions to the Prime Minister and federal members of Parliament with relevant portfolios related to health, youth affairs, and mental health.

## **COUNCIL PLAN STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES**

### **Inclusive Services**

Community development and advocacy to support the Monash community.

## **BACKGROUND**

The MYC is a group of young people who come together to share ideas, opinions and discuss needs of all young people. The aim of the group is to be the voice of young people in Monash. As such, the group strives to represent the views of young people in Monash to all levels of Government. It is important to note that the matters raised in the attached correspondence reflect the views of MYC are not formal positions of Monash City Council.

## **DISCUSSION**

The MYC letter to Adam Bandt MP raises similar concerns that are shared in his speech to the House of Representatives in October 2019 for the proposed amendments to the Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918 to lower the minimum (non-compulsory) voting age in Australia:

- Supporting all the key reasons why the bill is important for Australians aged 16 and 17 years, such as - young people have a strong social voice that should be supported by voting rights; we can drive, pay taxes, enlist in the Australian Defence Force, and get married. If young Australians have the responsibility to contribute to Australia in such meaningful ways, including fighting for our nation and paying taxes, we need to have a say in how the country and its government are run.
- Allowing 16-year-olds to vote as it empowers them to take an active role in their community from an early age.
- It instils a sense of responsibility and civic duty, encouraging engagement with local issues and participation in the democratic process.
- This early involvement can lead to a lifetime of active citizenship, fostering a more engaged and informed electorate in the long term.

In October 2024 Adam Bandt MP took the opportunity to further increase debate around lowering the voting age in Australia through Raise Our Voice Campaign. Mr. Bandt delivered a speech written by a young constituent that addressed the need to reduce the voting age to 16 years. The Raise Our Voice Campaign is a program where politicians amplify a young person's voices by reading their speeches in parliament.

The second MYC letter attached to this report raises issues related to the reduction of Medicare-funded sessions and how it impacts Monash young people, which they want to share with Federal Members of Parliament, including:

- As representatives of young people, we see directly the growing mental health difficulties that our peers confront and believe that this reform will have a detrimental impact on Monash young people.
- Over the last 15 years, Monash Council has conducted a biennial youth survey for young people aged 10-25 years. Since the survey's inception, mental health has remained a top concern for Monash young people. The 2023 Monash Youth Survey, which consulted 2,488 young people, identified that 34% of Monash young people are feeling stress most or all the time.
- Monash young people want to ensure barriers to mental health support are minimized allowing young people access to appropriate support immediately rather than when they can afford it.

As typically low-income earners, young people are the demographic that has been hardest hit with cost-of-living pressures, and this policy provided an opportunity for the Federal Government to effectively support the mental health and wellbeing of young Australians. Instead, many low-income Australians will be forced to stop psychological sessions once they reach 10 sessions annually or to space out their 10 psychologist sessions over a 12-month period as they are unable to afford the additional cost.

## **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

There are no financial implications to this report.

## **POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

There are no policy implications to this report.

## **CONSULTATION**

Community consultation was not required.

## **SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

MYC is passionate about ensuring young people's voices are represented at each tier of government and that the most effective way to ensure representation is through politicians being held accountable during election time.

MYC is concerned that young people's ability to seek appropriate mental health support is directly impacted by the reduction of Medicare-funded sessions. The Black Dog Institute and Beyond Blue identify that approximately three-quarters of common mental health problems emerge before the age of 25 years old. With cost-of-living pressures impacting young people significantly, many young people with complex mental health concerns will not have the resources to engage in ongoing psychological support.

## **HUMAN RIGHTS CONSIDERATIONS**

The Monash Health & Wellbeing Plan 2021-2025 is committed to creating a city that is safe and respectful and where young people in Monash will be provided with opportunities to be engaged and connected. Reducing the voting age and ensuring young people have adequate mental health care are two important issues that will support this goal.

MYC wants to ensure that opportunities for young people to actively contribute to their community remains a key priority for Australian Governments. This supports Monash Council's goal of achieving tangible changes in attitudes and practices that discriminate against people for their race, age, gender, sex, sexuality, disability, or religion.

With mental health being a priority in the City of Monash Health and Wellbeing Plan, MYC wants to ensure that there are affordable and accessible services available for their peers and to reduce any unnecessary barriers to participation in psychological support for Monash young people in the community.

## **GENDER IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

A GIA was not completed because this agenda item is not a 'policy', 'program' or 'service'.

## **CONCLUSION**

The MYC acknowledges that it is important that there is ongoing dialogue between young people and policymakers so that young people's views are adequately considered and represented at each level of government. The MYC wants each level of government to be more proactive in creating policies that promote more effective outcomes for young people.

MYC requests that Council note both letters to be sent as attached.

## **ATTACHMENT LIST**

1. Letter to Adam Bandt Monash Youth Committee 26 November 20 (2) [7.2.4.1 - 2 pages]
2. Letter to Anthony Albanese Medicare Monash Youth Committee (1) [7.2.4.2 - 2 pages]

26 November 2024

Mr Adam Bandt MP  
Member for Melbourne  
PO Box 1063  
COLLINGWOOD VIC 3066

Dear Mr Bandt

**THE COMMONWEALTH ELECTORAL PROPOSED AMENDMENT (LOWERING VOTING AGE AND INCREASING VOTER PARTICIPATION) BILL 2019**

The Monash Youth Committee (MYC) supports your proposed amendments of the Commonwealth Electoral Amendment (Lowering Voting Age and Increasing Voter Participation) Bill 2019. MYC are keen advocates for the lowering of the voting age. It's a democratic right that all young people aged 16 and 17 years be entitled to vote at Australian elections.

Monash Youth Committee is a youth advisory group from Monash City Council aged 15-25 years, who are passionate about youth issues and social change.

We are aware from the Parliament Australia website for bills and legislation, that you put forward amendments and delivered a second reading in the House of Representatives on 21 October 2019, which was supported by the member Andrew Wilkie, but it appears the matter may not have been resolved.

We are aware that you still share our passion about this issue, as you recently chose a young constituent's speech to amplify in parliament through the Raise Our Voice Campaign.

We support all the key reasons for why the Bill is important for Australians aged 16 and 17 years such as young people having a strong social voice that should be supported by voting rights, we can drive, pay taxes, enlist in the Australian Defence Force and get married. If young Australians have the responsibility to contribute to Australia in such meaningful ways, including fighting for our nation and paying taxes, we need to have a say in how the country, and its government, is run.

By allowing 16-year-olds to vote empowers us to take an active role in their community from an early age. It instils a sense of responsibility and civic duty, encouraging us to engage with local issues and participate in the democratic process. This early involvement can lead to a lifetime of active citizenship, fostering a more engaged and informed electorate in the long term.

Your amendments are well considered and provide young people (16-17 years) with the right to vote whilst also ensuring that young people under 18 years who do not vote are not penalised.

We encourage you to put forward the proposed amendments of the Commonwealth Electoral Amendment (lowering voting age and increasing voter participation) Bill 2019 again for consideration in the House of Representatives so that young people aged 16-17 years can participate in future democratic elections and referendums.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter. We look forward to your positive response and are available to discuss this proposal further at your convenience. The best method to contact me is via email at [thomasmaguirenguyen@gmail.com](mailto:thomasmaguirenguyen@gmail.com)

Yours sincerely,

**THOMAS MAGUIRE-NGUYEN**  
Chair Monash Youth Committee

26 November 2024

The Hon. Anthony Albanese MP  
Prime Minister of Australia  
PO Box 5100  
MARRICKVILLE NSW 2204

Dear Prime Minister

### **REINSTATING 20 MEDICARE FUNDED PSYCHOLOGIST SESSIONS ANNUALLY**

The Monash Youth Committee (MYC) is writing in response to the Federal Government's reduction of Medicare funded psychologist sessions, from 20 sessions to 10 sessions. We support the Coalition and the Greens who are calling for the immediate return to 20 funded sessions a year, with both parties identifying the need to effectively support the mental health and wellbeing of low-income earners during a period where more Australians than ever are feeling the impact of the increase cost of living pressures.

As representatives of young people, we see directly the growing mental health difficulties that our peers are confronted with and believe that this reform has and will continue to have a detrimental impact on Monash young people. Over the last 15 years Monash City Council has conducted a biennial youth survey for young people aged 10 - 25 years, since the survey's inception mental health has remained a top concern for Monash young people. The 2023 Monash Youth Survey which consulted with 2488 young people identified that 34% of Monash young people are feeling stress most or all the time. MYC want to ensure barriers to mental health support are minimised so young people can access appropriate support immediately rather than when they can afford it.

We understand that Mark Butler, the Honourable Minister of Health and Aged Care, identified that the previous model of offering an additional 10 psychologist sessions was not reaching its intended target of low-income earners and regional communities. MYC believe that it would have been more effective to have adopted a targeted promotion and awareness campaign rather than cutting psychologist sessions to community members most in need.

As low-income earners, young people are the demographic that have been hit the hardest with cost-of-living pressures and this was an opportunity for the Federal Government to effectively support the mental health and wellbeing of young Australians. Instead, many low-income Australians will be forced to stop psychological sessions once they reach 10 sessions annually or to space out their 10 psychologist sessions over a 12-month period as they are unable to afford the additional cost.

The Black Dog Institute and Beyond Blue identify that approximately three-quarters of common mental health problems emerge before the age of 25 years old highlighting the importance of ensuring young people can effectively access the appropriate support during their formative years. Increasing the session limit to 20 will help to meet these needs, especially for individuals who are financially constrained.

Encouraging psychologists to manage extra session requests guarantees that individuals in most need of treatment receive it. This rise is about more than simply statistics; it's also about providing our generation with better, more easily accessible mental health care. Medicare's present benefits are a good place to start, but they need to adapt to effectively meet the needs of today's young people.

A crucial first step in guaranteeing improved mental health outcomes for young Australians is raising the session limit to 20. We appreciate your consideration of this significant issue. We eagerly await your response and would love to discuss compromises. The best method to contact me is via email at [thomasmaguirenguyen@gmail.com](mailto:thomasmaguirenguyen@gmail.com)

Yours sincerely,

**THOMAS MAGUIRE-NGUYEN**  
Chair Monash Youth Committee