

Towong Shire Youth Strategy

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2025 - 2029



Front Cover Image:

Towong Shire youth resident Chaise Heinjus demonstrates his skateboard skills at the Official Opening of the Corryong Skatepark in March, 2025.

Council successfully secured \$882,000 in funding from the National Recovery and Resilience Agency's Black Summer Bushfire Recovery Grants Program in 2022 for this project.

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1 Executive Summary

This strategy sets the direction for Towong Shire Council's Youth portfolio from 2025-2029, acknowledging that even with a relatively small youth population, young people are vital to the health, strength, and future of our communities. This strategy focuses on the age range between 12–25-years old.¹

Young people in Towong Shire deserve equitable access to opportunities, supports, and spaces regardless of where they live. While Council does not deliver youth services directly, it plays a critical role in advocating for better access to health, wellbeing, transport, and engagement programs, particularly across our geographically dispersed communities where services reach is often inconsistent.

The strategy highlights the importance of place-based, youth-informed initiatives and focuses on areas where Council can have the greatest impact: building partnerships, influencing system change, supporting local activation, and strengthening youth voice in local decision-making.

The development of this strategy involved a review of relevant literature and data at local, state, and national levels, alongside consultation with over 70 young people, families, and stakeholders across Towong. Young people identified key challenges including mental health access, cost-of-living stress, school and peer pressures, limited program options, body image concerns and making decisions about their future. Key protective factors in Towong communities for young people are place based sporting clubs and community groups who contribute to safeguarding youth health and wellbeing. Young people also spoke of the importance of feeling safe, seen, and connected to their towns.

In response, this strategy presents six key priority areas that guide Council's focus:

- Youth Voice and Participation
- Youth-Friendly Spaces and Facilities
- Stronger Partnerships and Local Solutions
- Advocacy for Accessible Health and Wellbeing Supports
- Leadership, Advocacy and Celebration
- Future Prepared Youth

¹ Not all census and other demographic data is available in the 12-25 age range; some additional age groups are included in some data categories.

Together, these priorities support the strategy's long-term vision:

Young people in Towong Shire are valued, connected and empowered. They thrive in communities where their voices are heard, their needs are understood, and they have equitable access to opportunities, supports, and spaces regardless of where they live.

The action plan contains detailed deliverables across 6 strategic priorities to address some of the issues raised by young people including:

Strategic Priority 1: Youth Voice and Participation

Towong Shire Council will embed meaningful youth engagement in its planning and decision-making processes. By intentionally including young people in service reviews, facility design, and community planning, Council will amplify their voices and ensure their perspectives shape the future of their towns.

Strategic Priority 2: Youth-Friendly Spaces and Facilities

Council will work with young people to improve access to inclusive, safe, and engaging community spaces. Through youth led consultation and advocacy for funding, Council will help create facilities that reflect young people's needs and support stronger social connection across the Shire.

Strategic Priority 3: Stronger Partnerships and Local Solutions

Towong Shire Council will strengthen partnerships with youth-focused services, schools, and local organisations to deliver more coordinated and locally relevant supports. By bringing partners together and advocating for investment in Towong, Council will help ensure services are better connected, better targeted, and more accessible to young people in remote and rural areas.

Strategic Priority 4: Advocacy for Accessible Health and Wellbeing Supports

Council will advocate for equitable and consistent access to health and wellbeing services for all young people in Towong. Many state and regional services do not regularly reach smaller communities in the Shire. Council will advocate for outreach models and local delivery of mental health, sexual health, and wellbeing supports to ensure young people aren't left behind due to geography.

Strategic Priority 5: Leadership, Advocacy and Celebration

Towong Shire Council will take a visible leadership role in speaking up on youth issues, including inclusion, transport, mental health, and access to opportunity. Council will also support young people to be their own advocates and celebrate their achievements through campaigns, events and recognition platforms that foster pride and belonging.

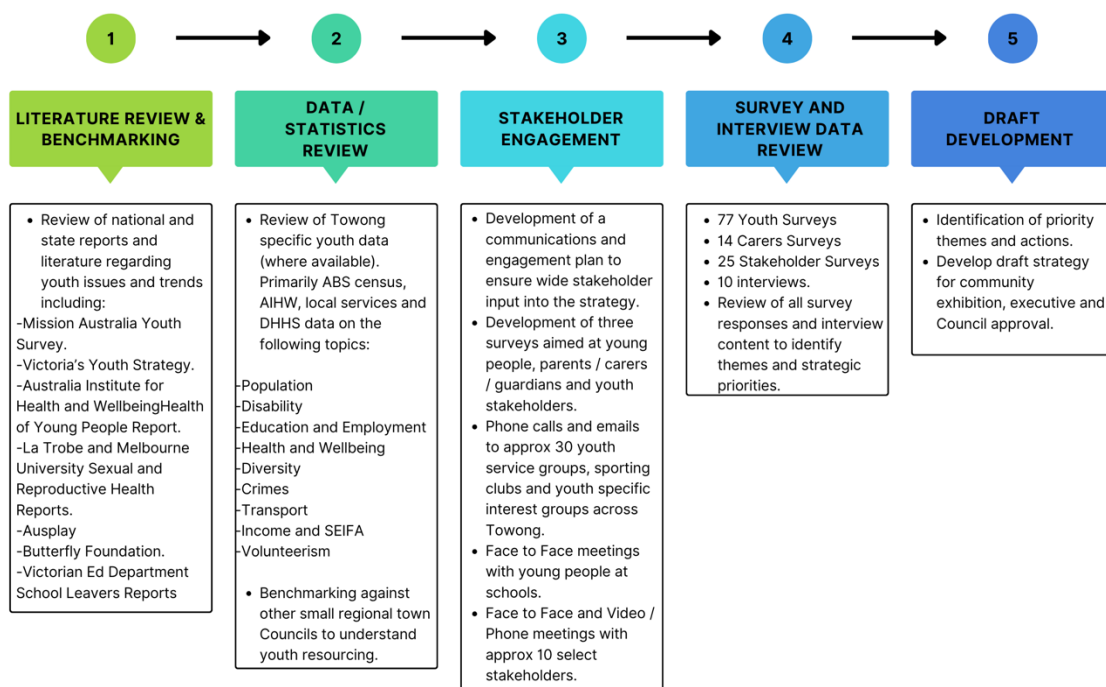
Strategic Priority 6: Future Prepared Youth

Council will partner with schools, employers, and community organisations to support young people as they prepare for life after school. Initiatives will focus on practical skills such as employment readiness, budgeting, communication, and understanding diverse workplaces, ensuring young people are confident and future-ready, regardless of where they live in Towong.

2 Strategy Development Process

The strategy was developed with the direct input from young people, their parents / carers / guardians and from stakeholders who work with young people or deliver programs and services for young people. The following diagram outlines how the strategy was developed:

Towong Youth Strategy Development Process



3 Towong young people

The below data provides a snapshot of Towong's young people. A full data report can be found at Appendix 11.6 to this strategy and includes references to sources.

Population and Age Distribution	● 860 10–24-year old's live in Towong (2021) ● 51% Males ● 49% Females
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The youth population in Towong is comparable to Buloke Shire Council, Hindmarsh and Yarriambiack.

There has been a 5.6 % decrease in the youth population of Towong since the 2017 census, compared with a 2.2% overall population increase during this time. The population increase in Towong is primarily in the 55 years and over age cohort.

Young people 15-24 make up 7.9% of the population in Towong, compared to the Victorian rate of 11.9%.

The future population projections for Towong indicate a reduction in population for the 10-24 age group in Towong to 800 in both 2026 and 2031. This is then projected to slightly increase to 860 by 2036. Overall population growth is anticipated at 2.4% from 2021 to 2036 across Towong, compared to the state population growth future projected growth of 28% for this period.

Looking Australia wide, young people aged 15-24 proportion relative to the Australian population has been steadily declining (from 17% in 1971 to 12% in 2021) due to sustained low fertility and increased life expectancy or 'population ageing'.

Disability	● 44 people aged 5-24 needed assistance in their day to day lives in one or more of the three core activity areas of self-care mobility and communication.
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The overall rates of disability are .4% higher in Towong than the rest of Victoria and the rates of unpaid assistance to a person with a disability were 4% higher in Towong than the Victorian average. Young people in Towong with a disability are likely to experiences additional service access issues because of living with mobility constraints in small regional towns.

Education and Employment	• 17% of Towong's 15–24-year old's engaged in either part time or full time tertiary or higher education (2021) • 9.6% youth disengagement rate 20–24-year-old (% those not in paid employment / formal education) (2021) • 15.6% of 20–24-year old's had not completed year 12.
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There has been a 5% increase in tertiary / higher education engagement for 20–24-year old's in Towong over 5 years. Towong still has a higher than state average year 12 non-completion rate.

Health and Wellbeing	• Headspace data indicates a slight increase in the number of 12–18-year old's accessing services from Towong Shire postcodes between 22/23 and 23/24. • The Infant Child Youth Mental Health Service (ICYMHS) also indicated an increase in episodes of care for Towong young people under 25 from 22/23 to 23/24.
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Population wide, 10.1% of Towong residents in 2021 reported a mental health condition including depression or anxiety compared to the state average of 8.8%.

The Australian Early Development Census indicates that in 2021, 14.3% of school age children surveyed in Towong were developmentally vulnerable in two or more domains (i.e., physical health and wellbeing, social competence, emotional maturity, language and cognitive skills (school-based), communication skills and general knowledge). This indicates a 6% increase in developmental vulnerability in school aged children since 2015 in Towong. Falling behind early in education has significant implications for young people's high school performance and year 12 completion rates in Towong.

Population wide, both smoking rates and alcohol related harm were higher in Towong than state averages. Obesity rates across Towong were higher than the state average with 24.2% of the population in 2020 obese compared to the state average of 20.9%. 61.3% of Towong's population in 2021 had a long-term health condition compared to 48.4% of the Victorian population.

Diversity	• 3.3% of Towong residents aged 5-24 years of age identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander (compared to 1.7% of the overall population).
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Higher First Nations youth rates have implications for the way services and programs should be tailored to be culturally safe and engaging for this cohort.

Towong has very low rates of overseas born residents compared to the state average however residents rated more positive responses regarding how much multiculturalism makes life in their area better than the state average.

Crimes	• 0–24-year-old victims have increased from 29 to 35 since 2020. • 10–24-year-old offenders remain steady since 2020 at 20. • 171% increase from 21/22 to 22/23 in police recorded family violence incidents; A child was either the victim or witness in 37.9% of these incidents. • A young person was the victim in nearly 10% of family violence incidents in 2022/23 and was the perpetrator in 7% of these incidents
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Population wide, there has been a 52% increase in criminal incidents from December 2022 to December 2023. Although for general crimes, youth involvement rates have remained low, youth involvement rates for family violence are concerningly high.

Transport	• Driving mentor program delivered by Corryong Neighbourhood Centre for young people 16 years and over. • Albury-Corryong via Walwa Bus: 3-hour trip with 9 stops. Once a day per direction. • Albury-Tallangatta via Bonegilla: Fridays only 45-minute trip. Once a week Fridays per direction. • The mail bus is used frequently by residents as a form of public transport. • 80% of 2021 census respondents travelled to work by car with only 10% walking or riding a bike.
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A primary factor in youth service and program access is transportation for Towong young people. The Shire is geographically very dispersed with some towns very isolated from services. There are limited public transport options available per above and for those over the age 18 with a licence the distance from Corryong to Albury is far and the roads can be dangerous in winter and the evenings. Transport options are often provided by community groups, services and local government to encourage youth attendance to events and programs.

Income	• 34% of Towong residents have income under \$500 per week in 2021, less than the national average. • Median total income per person in Towong in 2021 was \$42 687, \$9651 less than the national average.
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	Walwa, Corryong and Tallangatta all score below the regional Victorian average on the SEIDA index of relative disadvantage.
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Youth income is limited to part time employment and youth participation in paid activities is likely limited where families are financial constrained.

4 Policy context and social trends impacting young people

The following youth trends and issues have been summarised from a range of national and state literature. Full reference to these sources can be found at Appendix 11.6.

Mental Health	Young people are experiencing all time higher levels of mental distress. Social media use, the impacts of Covid, cost of living pressures, housing difficulties and the increase in worries about social issues are contributing to young peoples decreased mental wellbeing. School challenges including workload, academic pressure, difficulties with teachers and learning difficulties also contributed to young people's stress. A 2023 study of nearly 20,000 15–19-year old's indicated that 32% were either personally extremely or very concerned about mental health. Young people have a personal wellbeing index of 65.7, which is 12 points lower than the adult range. 24% of young people indicated stress, anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, diagnosed disorders or self-harm were themes of concern to them in their lives currently. 38% were extremely or very concerned about coping with stress, 38% reported their mental health as fair or poor, 25% had high psychological distress and 21% felt lonely all or most of the time. A 2020-22 National Study of Mental Health and Wellbeing indicated that 26% of 16-24 experienced high or very high psychological distress, with young women reporting higher rates than young men.
Equity and Discrimination	31% of young people in 2023 identified this as one of the most important issues, with 27% indicating they were treated unfairly or discriminated against in the last year due to physical appearance, race / cultural background or gender. The gender diverse cohort raised this as the highest concern.
The Environment	44% of young people in 2023 indicated that the environment was the most important issue for them. Young people are particularly engaged with the impacts of climate change and the need to take action to reduce the rates of climate related disaster in their

	communities. This is particularly apparent in regional towns where the impacts of flood and fire are felt in distinct ways by young people.
Self-harm	In 2021/22, Australians aged 13 to 18 were 3.4 times more likely than adults to be hospitalised for injuries caused by intentional self-harm, AIHW data shows. Girls accounted for more than four in five of these hospitalisations. From 2008 to 2022, rates of self-harm nearly doubled for girls aged 15 to 19 and tripled for girls aged 14 and under. For LGBTQIA+ young people, a recent study indicated 78.1% of respondents aged between 14-17 had experienced suicidal thoughts in their lifetime compared to 79% of 18–21-year olds. 62.3% of 14–17-year olds and 61.8% of 18-21 had self-harmed in their lifetime. The impacts of youth suicide are magnified in small regional communities and this strategy acknowledges the recent loss of life as a result of youth suicide across Towong communities.
Substance use	Traditional tobacco smoking and alcohol consumption has fallen nationally in recent years with fewer young people than ever before reporting daily smoking. Conversely, the rates of e-cigarette and vape usage increased from 1.8% to 9.7% between 2019-2023 in the 14–17-year-old age group nationally and from 5.3% to 21% in the 18–24-year-old cohort. Vaping is a national issue; Commonwealth government recently passed legislation to prohibit the sale in any other venue but pharmacies to only those with a prescription from July 1, 2024. From 1 October 2024, pharmacies will then be permitted to sell vapes to anyone over 18 because of a downgrading in poisons standards for vapes.
Sexual and Reproductive Health	Data reviewed from both the National Survey of Australian Secondary Students and Sexual Health and the Centre for Excellence in Rural Sexual Health has indicated that there are barriers to contraceptive information, sexually transmitted infection information and testing in regional Victoria. Despite sexual activity levels for young people remaining high, condom usage remains at 49% of young people aged 14-18. The most recent survey of young people indicated the relationship and sexuality education received in a school setting was not relevant to them.

	Information seeking behaviour indicates young people discuss sex and sexual health with friends in the first instance, but that GP sources remained the most trusted.
Education and Employment	Year 12 completion remains high across Victoria with only 7.8% of 20–24-year old's not completing Year 12. The majority of recent year 12 students indicated they wanted to go to university after high school as their first preference with the second preference being to get a job or travel. Significantly higher numbers of young males indicated they wanted to start their own business after school. With an increase in costs for tertiary education and the additional housing costs for young regional students, higher education may be less attainable for this generation of young people. The annual HECS student contributions for an arts degree in 2023 is \$15,142 compared to \$5868 in 2013. This is increasingly prohibitive for lower income regional young people even with the educational and housing subsidies and scholarships available to select students.
Physical Activity	Young adults aged 15-19 participated less in sport and physical activity in 2022/23 compared to 2021/22; 78% participated in sport or physical activity 1+ per week in 22/23 representing a 3% decline in participation. The frequency of participation for young people in sport or physical activity has also seen a steady decline; Since 2021-22, 5+ per week participation has declined among 15–19-year-old Australians. There is also a trend away from group-based activities and formal regular membership-based participation in sport to individualised and infrequent physical activity, particularly for young people. Regionally, there remains the prevalence of traditional sports participation such as football and netball which can be exclusionary for non-mainstream young people.
Social media	A recent report indicated that teens in Australia experience the second highest level of online bullying among developing countries. 17 % of students reported that "other students made fun of me". The study found teen girls were reporting anxiety, fear and panic at twice the rate of boys as a result of the online bullying and that boys appeared more resilient to stress than girls. A 2024 report indicated the concerning connection between body dissatisfaction and social media use. Almost two thirds (61.7%) of

	young Australians aged 12-18 said social media made them feel dissatisfied with their body – up by 12% since 2022. 8 in 10 young Australians aged 12-18 thought that social media platforms need to do more to help young people have a more positive body image. 6 in 10 (59%) Australians say diet and fitness content on social media impacts their body image – yet two thirds (68%) aren't adjusting their social media behaviour in response to this. Unhealthy social media has recently become a concerning issue in schools with the increase in deepfake images; images of female school students from social media being inappropriately manipulated and distributed online. This is predicted to become another method of abuse and violence towards young women and many school settings are responding with improved policies.
Housing	Both home ownership and rental accommodation are reaching critical levels of unaffordability in Australia. Vacancy rates in the rental market are now at 1%. Property prices have risen every month since January 2023 to now, even with an increase in interest rates. This has been combined with population growth and a downturn in construction resulting in higher demand and less available houses for purchase. The median house price in Tallangatta is \$480,000 in May 2024, which represents a 14.3% increase in the past 12 months. The median rental price (all bedrooms) is \$400 per week as at December 2023, indicating a \$50 per week increase in 12 months. The median house price in Corryong is \$325,000 representing a 5% decrease in the last 12 months however the median rental price of \$360 per week represents a 20% increase in the last 12 months. The housing affordability issue has repercussions for young people with increased family financial pressures to repay rising mortgages combined with the increased below cost of living pressures.
Cost of living	In March 2023, 46% of Australians have reported feeling increased pressure as the cost of living continues to rise – an increase of 5% from the previous quarter. With the cost of groceries, energy bills and fuel increasing dramatically over the past year, more than 40 per cent of Aussie households have struggled to afford household basics in the last three months, and over half of Australians say they will struggle to pay an essential bill over the next three months. In the last 12 months, dairy and related products have increased by 15%, bread and cereal by 11.8% and fruit and vegetables by 4.9%.

	These financial pressures result in families experiencing stress particularly in regional towns where access to bulk purchasing from larger supermarkets is limited and distances to supermarkets is further.
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The following Council documents have been reviewed for reference to Towong young people:

Council Plan 2021-2025	● 2.8 Renew the Youth Plan to embed the youth voice in all aspects of service delivery.
Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan 2021-2025	● Acknowledgement of the increase rates of youth suicide. ● References the need to increase recreation opportunities for young people (Dartmouth in particular)
Economic Development Strategy 2022-2026	● Recognition that the retention of youth has been a key challenge for the Upper Murray, particularly due to a combination of remoteness, training pathways as well as a lack of diverse recreation products. This impacts on population growth and reduces workforce supply to support industry growth. ● Identifies the need to increase public transport options through action 1.1.11 Transport Infrastructure Audit.
Recreation Strategy 2022-2023	● References the 60-minute minimum physical activity recommendation for 5–17-year old's. ● Cites participation trends for 12–17-year old's in particular the halving of physical activity during adolescence. ● Cites the reduction in anxiety and depression for physically active children and the increase in school performance for these young people engaged in physical activity.

In 2022, thousands of young Victorians help develop a 5-year youth strategy for state government. The Victorian Government Youth Strategy is important for Towong's youth services as it sets the framework for program support and funding from Victoria.

Strategic Priority 1: *Young people are healthy and well.* This priority focuses on maintaining and improving youth wellbeing. It recognises the youth mental health trends, the need for relationship and sexuality education, and the importance of active living for young people. Service access is a focus of this priority.

Strategic Priority 2: *Young people are safe and secure.* This priority recognises the youth impacts of family violence, the current housing crisis impacts for young people and the need to protect young people from discrimination, neglect and abuse.

Strategic Priority 3: *Young people achieve their goals through education, training and employment.* This priority recognises the need to support young people to complete education, to build life skills, access job opportunities and prepare them for financial independence. There is a focus on successful transitions to meaningful post school futures, whether this is employment or additional education.

Strategic Priority 4: *Young people are respected and involved in decisions in their communities.* Inviting young people to contribute their lived experiences, increasing positive youth representation in the media and supporting place-based engagement with young people to genuinely influence decisions that matter for them.

Strategic Priority 5: *Young people are confident and strong in their identity and culture and are supported in their communities.* This priority focuses on young people celebrating their diverse identities and feeling accepted and valued. This includes increased support for disabled, multicultural and LGBTIQ+ young people/

Strategy Priority 6: *Services are coordinated, responsive and accessible.* Improving service collaboration, prevention and early intervention to respond to young people's service access needs.

5 Towong Shire Council's Role in Youth Services

Historically, Towong Shire Council allocated a part-time youth officer (2–3 days per week) to support youth-focused initiatives. This role previously included coordinating youth events, delivering activities, supporting community-based programs, and assisting young people and local groups to connect with services and access funding opportunities.

Recently, youth responsibilities have been brought together with arts, culture and inclusion within the Senior Community Development Officer – Culture and Inclusion (0.8 FTE) position. Strategic oversight is now provided by the Manager – Community Wellbeing, whose portfolio includes Health and Wellbeing, Inclusion and Diversity, and Youth.

Council does not take on a primary service delivery role for youth in the Shire, however, contributes to local delivery through partnerships, facilitation, and occasional direct programming—particularly in areas like events, arts, and community-led initiatives. Where appropriate, Council may contract external providers or support community groups to lead delivery, ensuring programs are responsive to local needs and contexts.

Council continues to advocate for improved service access in areas that are currently under-resourced or not consistently reaching Towong communities—such as **mental health, transport, recreation, and arts and culture**.

To support this, Council will actively pursue external funding through programs such as VicHealth, Creative Victoria, and the Department of Transport and Planning. Council will also continue to support local community groups and partners to access these and other relevant funding streams. In addition, Council may explore partnership-based applications for programs such as Engage! and Freeza to help deliver more targeted youth initiatives.

The Youth Action Plan reflects this collaborative and strategic approach. The coordinator role is intended to work alongside partners to deliver the plan’s initiatives by:

- Facilitating local partnerships
- Supporting funding access and program development
- Advocating on youth issues
- Enhancing place-based initiatives through Council resources

A benchmarking review (Appendix 11.2) indicates that most comparable rural councils support their youth portfolio with either part-time roles or by embedding youth responsibilities within broader community development functions. Some councils also partner with external agencies—such as Neighbourhood Houses or Local Learning and Employment Networks (LLENs)—to deliver services on the ground.

Securing additional funding and forming strong partnerships will be key to Council’s ability to deliver on the actions outlined in this strategy and to remain responsive to the evolving needs of young people across Towong Shire.

6 Youth services provided in Towong – Service Mapping

The below mapping has been undertaken to identify the availability of each service in each town. Overall, there are limited specialist youth health and wellbeing services available in the larger towns of Tallangatta and Corryong almost no outreach availability in the remaining smaller towns.

SERVICE DESCRIPTION	TOWN AVAILABILITY		DETAIL
Mental Health Services	Corryong	Yes	General Practice: No local referral sources available and no free mental health service, most referrals are to telehealth psychological services but fee paying. Corryong College have a Clinical Counsellor, Youth Worker, Wellbeing and Engagement Leading Teacher and a Department of Education Mental Health and Wellbeing Lead.
	Tallangatta	Yes	Available via the General Practice. Tallangatta Secondary College, School Mental Health Practitioner.
	Bethanga	Limited	Limited to online services and telehealth.
	Bellbridge		
	Cudgewa		
	Eskdale		
Sexual Health Services	Walwa		
	Corryong	Yes	Limited to General Practice.
	Tallangatta	Yes	Limited to General Practice.
	Bethanga	Limited	Online / Telehealth.
	Bellbridge		
	Cudgewa		
	Eskdale		
General Practice Services (Pharmacist and GP)	Walwa		
	Corryong	Yes	Drs at Corryong Health and Pharmacist.
	Tallangatta	Yes	Drs at Tallangatta Health Service Medical Centre and Pharmacist.
	Bethanga	No	Limited to locum drs / online
	Bellbridge	No	
	Cudgewa	No	
	Eskdale	No	
Financial and material aid	Walwa	No	
	Corryong	Yes	Food share delivered via local religious groups.
	Tallangatta	Yes	Food share delivered via local religious groups.
	Bethanga	No	No local service.
	Bellbridge	No	
	Cudgewa	No	
	Eskdale	No	
	Walwa	No	
	Corryong	Yes	Support offered via local religious groups.

Accommodation and Homelessness Services	Tallangatta	No	No local service.
	Bethanga	No	
	Bellbridge	No	
	Cudgewa	No	
	Eskdale	No	
	Walwa	No	
Employment, Training and Centrelink	Corryong	Yes	Corryong Neighbourhood Centre
	Tallangatta	Yes	Tallangatta Neighbourhood Centre
	Bethanga	No	No local service.
	Bellbridge	No	
	Cudgewa	No	
	Eskdale	No	
	Walwa	No	
Legal Services	Corryong	Yes	Visiting service from Hume Riverina Community Legal Service via the hospital, service is at capacity.
	Tallangatta	Yes	Visiting service from Hume Riverina Community Legal Service via the hospital, service is at capacity.
	Bethanga	No	No local service.
	Bellbridge	No	
	Cudgewa	No	
	Eskdale	No	
	Walwa	No	
LGBTQIA+ Support Services	Corryong	No	There are no direct LGBTQIA+ services in Corryong. Gateway Health have secured funding to deliver specific outreach support services to LGBTQIA+ young people in the Northeast, with a focus on smaller shires such as Towong Shire Council. This program will be facilitated during the 2025-2028 Engage! Funding period. CAMP exists in Towong - Corryong Allied Movement for Pride – which is an incorporated social community group which supports this community.
	Tallangatta	No	Gateway Health have secured Engage! Funding for outreach support for young people and Upper Murray Family Care have Towong Shire Council in the catchment to provide outreach and services, but they don't currently facilitate any youth specific programs.
	Bethanga	No	
	Bellbridge	No	
	Cudgewa	No	
	Eskdale	No	
	Walwa	No	
Drug and Alcohol Services	Corryong	No	No local community-based services. Gateway Health provide an outreach service.
	Tallangatta	No	
	Bethanga	No	
	Bellbridge	No	
	Cudgewa	No	
	Eskdale	No	

	Walwa	No	
General Counselling Services	Corryong	Yes	Corryong Health have an adult/all ages counselling service at Corryong health which is currently at capacity.
	Tallangatta	Limited	Outreach services are provided to Towong via Gateway Health community initiatives funding which doesn't cover clinicians but group programs.
	Bethanga		
	Bellbridge		
	Cudgewa		
	Eskdale		
	Walwa		

7 Strategic Vision

The following vision has been developed as an aspirational statement for Council to work towards and captures the sentiments expressed by Towong's young people:

Young people in Towong Shire are valued, connected and empowered. They thrive in communities where their voices are heard, their needs are understood, and they have equitable access to opportunities, supports, and spaces regardless of where they live.

8 Strategic Priorities

Following the above review of the youth trends, local statistics and survey feedback the following themes emerged as priorities for Towong Shire Council to address in the youth strategy.

Towong is a geographically dispersed shire which presents challenges for youth access to programs. Money to access programs is also a barrier. The engagement demonstrated that many stakeholders believe there are good youth programs happening locally by community groups which should be supported, enhanced and promoted by Council.

The 6 strategic priorities have been identified directly in response to the survey data and literature review.

1. Youth Voice and Participation	Towong Shire Council will embed meaningful youth engagement in its planning and decision-making processes. By intentionally including young people in service reviews, facility design, and community planning, Council will amplify their voices and ensure their perspectives shape the future of their towns.
2. Youth-Friendly Spaces and Facilities	Council will work with young people to improve access to inclusive, safe, and engaging community spaces. Through youth led consultation and advocacy for funding, Council will help create facilities that reflect young people's needs and support stronger social connection across the Shire.
3. Stronger Partnerships and Local Solutions	Towong Shire Council will strengthen partnerships with youth-focused services, schools, and local organisations to deliver more coordinated and locally relevant supports. By bringing partners together and advocating for investment in Towong, Council will help ensure services are better connected, better targeted, and more accessible to young people in remote and rural areas.

4. Advocacy for Accessible Health and Wellbeing Supports	Council will advocate for equitable and consistent access to health and wellbeing services for all young people in Towong. Many state and regional services do not regularly reach smaller communities in the Shire. Council will advocate for outreach models and local delivery of mental health, sexual health, and wellbeing supports to ensure young people aren't left behind due to geography.
5. Leadership, Advocacy and Celebration	Towong Shire Council will take a visible leadership role in speaking up on youth issues, including inclusion, transport, mental health, and access to opportunity. Council will also support young people to be their own advocates and celebrate their achievements through campaigns, events and recognition platforms that foster pride and belonging.
6. Future Prepared Youth	Council will partner with schools, employers, and community organisations to support young people as they prepare for life after school. Initiatives will focus on practical skills such as employment readiness, budgeting, communication, and understanding diverse workplaces, ensuring young people are confident and future-ready, regardless of where they live in Towong.

9 Towong Shire Youth Action Plan

The below action plan identifies specific youth initiatives directly in response to the above stakeholder and youth input, the data which identified particular issues or gaps in services and the current policy and social trends identified in the literature review.

It is envisaged that the Senior Community Development Officer - Culture and Inclusion with support from the Manager - Community Wellbeing with Health and Wellbeing, Youth and Inclusion responsibilities will oversee the implementation of the below action plan. The actions are intended to be delivered over a 5-year period.

Council does not have primarily responsibility for all actions in consideration of the limited staffing resources available and the improved effectiveness resulting from collaboration. The action plan and associated timelines may be updated in the event of additional funding allocated to the youth portfolio.

Council's role associated with each action varies and includes the following:

Advocate – provide written or verbal public support for an initiative.

Facilitate – be involved in or recommend a particular course of action, make the connections for an initiative to be delivered.

Lead – take full responsibility for the implementation of action.

Partner – work directly with other organisations or Council areas to deliver a specific initiative collaboratively.

High priority actions indicate a 1–2-year timeframe for completion, medium is 2-3 years, low is 3-5 years.

Strategic Priority 1: Youth Voice and Participation

Strategic Objective: To ensure young people contribute meaningfully to local decision making and awareness raising on issues of importance to them.				
Action	Partners	Council Role	Funding / Resources	Priority
1.1 Prioritise youth engagement in all Council engagement plans where the topic is relevant to young people.	Council Communications Team	Lead	Existing resources	High
1.2 Promote State and Federal Government opportunities for youth engagement.	State / Federal Government Council Communications Team	Lead	Existing resources	High
1.3 Identify and promote leadership programs for young people regionally to enhance youth confidence in local decision making.	Local leadership programs i.e., Mandala Program, Alpine Valleys Leadership.	Lead	Existing resources to promote, may need external funding to subsidise program attendance.	High
1.4 Promote or conduct youth leadership, sense of belonging and inclusion by encouraging youth participation in awareness raising campaigns such as IDAHOBIT, NAIDOC, 16 Days of Activism, This Girl Can etc.	Council Community Development and Communications Teams	Lead	Existing resources and external funding to subsidise program attendance.	High
1.5 Ensure young people and parents /carers are involved in any Transport Infrastructure Audit conducted	Council Economic Development Team	Partner	Existing resources	Medium

identified in the Economic Development activities.				
1.6 Ensure a youth voice is included in all Council services during service review and service design processes.	Towong Shire Council	Lead	Existing resources	Medium
1.7 The potential establishment of a Towong Shire Youth Council to be detailed and reported to Council for their consideration.	Towong Shire Council	Lead	Existing resources	Medium

Strategic Priority 2: Youth-Friendly Spaces and Facilities

Strategic Objective: To provide safe, inclusive open parks, recreation and community facilities with young people's design needs prioritised.				
Action	Partners	Council Role	Funding / Resources	Priority
2.1 Ensure youth involvement in Council's next play space strategy to ensure 12–25-year-old needs and all ability needs are met.	Council's, Early Years, Community Development and Assets Teams	Lead	Existing resources	High
2.2 Ensure youth involvement in the development of new programs at sports facilities per Council's Recreation Strategy.	Community Development Team	Partner	Existing resources and external funding.	Medium
2.3 Celebrate new Corryong Skate Park by engaging young people to coordinate park activity program.	Council's Community Development Team and CNC Youth Program.	Partner	Existing resources may need external funding to deliver programs and opening event.	Medium
2.4 Investigate how to improve spaces for young people to hang out locally i.e. Library and Corryong Youth Hub.	Corryong Neighbourhood Centre Community Development Team	Partner	External funding may be required for facilities improvements	Medium
2.5 In partnership with the Infrastructure and Capital Works team identify upcoming facility improvements where young people can provide input into designs.	Towong Shire Council	Partner	Existing resources	Medium

Strategic Priority 3: Stronger Partnerships and Local Solutions

Strategic Objective: To combine resources and ideas to deliver tailored initiatives locally for young people.				
Action	Partners	Council Role	Funding / Resources	Priority
3.1 Investigate the establishment of a Towong Youth Mental Health and Wellbeing Network.	Corryong and Tallangatta Secondary College Gateway Health Junction Support Services Corryong and Tallangatta Neighbourhood Centres Police	Lead	Existing resources	High
3.2 Maintain an up-to-date Towong youth stakeholder list with services and community organisations prioritised for regular check-ins to better understand services offered.	N/A	Lead	Existing resources	High
3.3 Investigate the establishment of a Towong Shire Community & Cultural grants program which would incorporate funding for local placed based youth programs (with and initiatives suggested by young	Towong Shire	Lead	Allocation TBD as part of future Budget considerations	High

people, alongside community culture and arts programs and initiatives. Ensure youth voice in the proposed establishment and decision making.				
3.4 Continue to deliver any Freeza funding in collaboration with local service providers and contractors to ensure youth access to fun, place-based music events.	State Government Victoria Event delivery contractors Gateway Health Local musicians	Facilitate	Existing resources (apply for subsequent 3-year funding when grant round opens in 2027)	High
3.5 Collaborate with the library to offer youth-only after school and / or after-hours programming. (with a focus on games, creative workshops and youth literary genres)	Community Development Team	Facilitate	Existing resources, some external funding may be required to fund workshop facilitation.	Medium
3.6 Ensure L2P program funding is secured and delivered across the shire in both Corryong and Tallangatta. Council to confirm partnerships are sustainable via Junction Support Services, or another appropriate provider.	Youth program delivery agencies.	Partner	Existing resources, ensure quick grant budgets include transport provision.	High
3.7 Continue to support local clubs and sporting groups in their work with young people through promoting grant opportunities, removing Council red tape, improving access to council facilities	Community Development and Recreation Teams	Facilitate	Existing resources	Medium

and providing training to members / volunteers.				
3.8 Investigate a partnership approach to Engage funding for the next funding round (2027).	Corryong Neighbourhood Centre Other interested youth partners	Partner	Existing resources may be a contribution required for grant funding.	Medium
3.9 Support Gateway Health and Headspace in the delivery of their Engage!-funded LGBTQIA+ youth support program, ensuring outreach programming occurs in both Corryong and Tallangatta, and that the program is accessible, inclusive, and reaches young people across the shire.	Youth program delivery agencies	Partner	Existing resources may be a contribution required for grant funding.	High

Strategic Priority 4: Advocacy for Accessible Health and Wellbeing Supports

Strategic Objective: To ensure young people have local access to consistent, confidential and time critical mental health and wellbeing services.				
Action	Partners	Council Role	Funding / Resources	Priority
4.1 In partnership with the Corryong and Tallangatta Health Services and Schools, and local schools, develop a comprehensive youth mental health support model and Youth Mental Health Action Plan tailored to Towong's needs.	Tallangatta Secondary College Corryong College Headspace / Gateway Health Junction Support Services Tallangatta Health Service Corryong Health Service ICYMHS Sacred Heart Primary School St Michael's Primary School Tallangatta Primary School	Partner	Existing resources	High
4.2 Deliver youth mental health first aid (or similar) in partnership with local community organisations / clubs / sporting groups to ensure friends, parents and other community members are appropriately skilled in referring and supporting young people.	Interested community organisations / clubs / sporting groups working with young people.	Facilitate	Existing resources may need external funding for workshop facilitation.	High

4.3 In partnership with schools, Centre for Excellence in Rural Sexual Health (CERSH) and local health services, investigate improved sexual health information to be provided to young people.	CERSH Tallangatta Health Service Corryong Health Service Tallangatta Secondary College Corryong College	Partner	Existing resources	Medium
4.4 Explore the provision of regular, consistent outreach services by Headspace, ICYMHS and Junction Support Services from Council and community settings (depending on the model developed in 4.1).	Headspace / Gateway Health ICYMHS and Junction Support Services	Partner	Existing resources	High
4.5 In partnership with local services, develop place based mental health referral information in a range of mediums and promote effectively to young people to improve services awareness.	Council Community Development and Communications Teams	Partner	Existing resources, may need external funding depending on the information medium.	Medium
4.6 Promote youth service agencies and community organisations programs and activities to young people via Council communication channels regularly.	Council Community Development Council Communications Teams	Lead	Existing resources	High

4.7 Collaborate with specialist facilitators to develop an engaging school-based program addressing key issues affecting young people, including body image, social media use, and healthy peer relationships.	Specialist subject matter facilitators	Partner	Existing resources may need external funding depending on facilitation fees.	Medium

Strategic Priority 5: Leadership, Advocacy and Celebration

Strategic Objective: To use Council's leadership position to raise awareness on youth issues and celebrate youth achievements across Towong.				
Action	Partners	Council Role	Funding / Resources	Priority
5.1 Advocate to State Government / Public Transport Victoria to improve public transport connections from Towong towns Albury / Wodonga including the frequency and duration of the trip.	Public Transport Victoria	Advocate	Existing resources	Medium
5.2 In partnership with schools, develop a communication campaign showcasing the achievements of local young people in monthly Council communications.	Tallangatta Secondary College Corryong College Council Community Development and Communications Teams	Lead	Existing resources	High
5.3 Support inclusion and diversity campaigns by messaging public support at Council meetings, Council social media and by Councillors and Executive.	Council Community Development and Communications Teams	Advocate	Existing resources	High

5.4 Advocate for increased mental health support for young people in Towong.	Local mental health service providers	Advocate	Existing resources	High
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Strategic Priority 6: Future Prepared Youth

Strategic Objective: To ensure young people have a head start on life after school and are prepared for future challenges and opportunities.				
Action	Partners	Council Role	Funding / Resources	Priority
		Lead	Existing resources	High
6.1 Partner with financial counselling services to deliver budgeting and money management workshops in schools and libraries.	Local financial counselling services Tallangatta Secondary College Corryong College	Partner	Existing resources	High
6.2 Partner with local employers and employment agencies to deliver communication in the workplace sessions and other work ready programs for young people.	Local employers i.e., Acres for Acres. Employment agencies Corryong and Tallangatta Neighbourhood Centres Tallangatta Secondary College Corryong College NELLEN	Partner	Existing resources	Medium
6.3 Investigate and support partnership opportunities for further education and training.	Universities Centre Ovens Murray Local TAFE providers Local Apprenticeship providers	Partner	Existing resources	Medium

10 Acknowledgements

We would like to thank all the young people across Towong who have completed the survey or spoke to us in person to provide input into this strategy.

Significant parent input has also been provided via the completion of the surveys; we are grateful for the time spent in completing this amongst busy family lives.

Finally, to schools, service providers and community groups / organisations who spoke to us during the engagement process, your expertise and insight has been invaluable. A full list of stakeholders engaged is provided as Appendix 11.6 to this strategy.

Council staff have also provided communication support for the promotion of the engagement and input into the strategy; thank you.

11 Attachments

1. Towong Youth Strategy Engagement Findings