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South Australian students call for comprehensive mental health support on World Mental Health Day

This World Mental Health Day, members of the South Australian Student Representative Council (SA SRC) are **calling on the South Australian Government to remove barriers for high school students to access pools, gyms, leisure centres and fitness classes to support their mental wellbeing.**

The call comes as part of the SA SRC's Fitness for Free campaign, which aims for a proactive, rather than reactive, approach to dealing with stress and promoting healthy school-life balance.

There is strong research to demonstrate the link between physical activity, social interaction and good mental health. For many young people, the cost of regularly attending facilities such as pools, gyms and fitness classes is prohibitive.

This year's theme for [World Mental Health Day](#) (Tuesday 10 October 2023) is 'Our Minds, Our Rights'. The World Health Organisation (WHO) states that, "Everyone, whoever and wherever they are, has a right to the highest attainable standard of mental health". Every young person deserves access to spaces to be physically and socially active, regardless of their financial situation or location.

SA SRC Member Jazmin Bingham, 15yo from Mount Gambier, says, "I have had tough times with my mental health. Recreational services are not accessible for all young people. I know from personal experience recreational activities haven't 'solved my problems' but they have certainly helped me along my way; in a way they have 'healed' me. Being able to have the comfort and reliability of these services after a long day has helped me feel reassured and gives me peace of mind. Not only do recreational services give you comfort in yourself, they allow you to build relationships with people in the community and help you to feel more connected."

"Personally, after dealing with my own battles, I use recreational services to help me. They allow me to have a connection within myself to distract my mind and relax my thoughts."

South Australia's Commissioner for Children and Young People, Helen Connolly, agrees the benefits of providing young people with financially accessible fitness spaces and places will have a positive impact on many young people.

"The connection between regular exercise and building and maintaining positive mental health is well documented. The benefits will outweigh the costs. If more young people can maintain their own mental health through access to fitness centres by Government putting in place a mechanism that could minimise their

financial burden in this regard, there will be a positive flow on effect across the mental health system. Sports Vouchers have proven to work well and perhaps there is potential to extend this to include gym and fitness centre membership for those in most need.”

SA SRC Program Coordinator, Maddie Diamond, says, “There are many existing mental health campaigns, many of which focus on reducing the stigma of mental illness and seeking support, or push for more treatment services. Whilst these are all essential in achieving better support for our communities, Fitness for Free focuses on a unique gap in the conversation; ways for young people to maintain their mental health before hitting crisis point.”

All South Australians, no matter their age, are encouraged to [sign the petition](#) and take action to make fitness and leisure facilities financially accessible for high school students.

About the SA SRC

The [South Australian Student Representative Council](#) (SA SRC) is a body of 160+ high school students from across South Australia who are coming together to create real change in their schools and communities through student-led projects and campaigns.

About CCYP

[Commissioner for Children and Young People SA](#) promotes and advocates for the rights, development and wellbeing of all children and young people in South Australia and seeks to change laws, policies, systems and practices to uphold children’s rights. The work of the Commissioner is guided by the [UNCRC](#), the core international treaty which sets out the civic, political, economic, social and cultural rights of children around the world.

About FYA

The [Foundation for Young Australians](#) (FYA), is the pre-eminent national organisation dedicated to backing young people. Our vision is that young people have the power to beat injustice and transform the future. In pursuit of this vision, our purpose is to back young people with the trust, resources, skills, and connections to make change.

Fitness for Free Petition: bit.ly/fitnessforfreesa

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