

2024 Keeping Our Promises

South Australia's progress on promises made by government to ensure that children in this State are healthy, safe and thriving.



Education



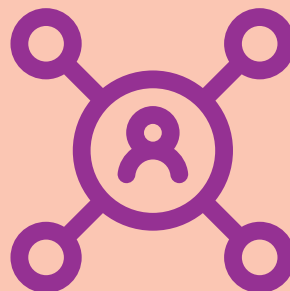
Health



Safety



Wellbeing



Citizenship



Strong evidence



Some evidence



Little evidence

About the CCYP

The South Australian Commissioner for Children and Young People is an independent position, established under the [Children and Young People \(Oversight and Advocacy Bodies\) Act 2016](#) (OAB Act). This legislation was introduced to the South Australian Parliament in response to the [Child Protection Systems Royal Commission 2014](#).

The Commissioner 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 practice to uphold children's rights.

The work of the Commissioner for Children and Young People is guided by the [United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child](#) (UNCRC); the core international treaty established in 1989 to which Australia is a signatory. This important agreement sets out the civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights of children around the world.

The Commissioner aims to ensure that as a part of the Australian Commonwealth, South Australia enacts its international obligations under this Convention.

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Introduction

As Commissioner my role is to ensure that all levels of government fulfil international obligations under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) to respect and protect the rights of South Australian children and young people. I advocate for systemic change to legislation, policy, and processes that deliver quality and best practice services and outcomes to South Australian children and young people.

An essential part of my role as South Australia's Commissioner for Children and Young People is to hear directly from children and young people themselves. I regularly engage with children and young people about their lives and the changes they would like to see. They have repeatedly told me that they want to be trusted, listened to, and respected by adults as valued members of our community. Children and young people want government, institutions, leaders, and decision makers, to take action and prioritise their wellbeing and interests. This includes taking immediate steps to address climate change, remove inequality and create future job opportunities.

In the language of children and young people, the 'promises' governments make through laws, policies, strategies and plans are considered to be commitments that adults will fulfil. This report focuses on the promises the SA government has made to children and young people across five domains of their lives: Education, Health, Safety, Wellbeing, and Citizenship.

These five dimensions are consistent with the legislated Outcomes Framework for Children and Young People in South Australia.¹ They also align with the focus areas of my *Advocacy Agenda 2022+2*, which builds on work completed in my first term as Commissioner and focuses specifically on the many issues raised by children and young people. These issues include sexual health and safety, youth suicide, mental health, harassment and bullying prevention, road and transport safety, and school exclusions, to name a few.

This annual report monitors, maps and grades the 'promises' the South Australian government has made to ensure children and young people across the State are healthy, safe and thriving.

The report also makes suggestions for where improvements can be made in each of the five dimensions as applicable to the relevant government departments. The report uses publicly available information as well as information provided by relevant departments responsible for particular 'promises'.

By monitoring and reporting on activities of government on an annual basis, I am fulfilling my role of ensuring the South Australian government is accountable for how government departments are giving effect to protecting, upholding and progressing the rights of South Australia's children and young people. While accountability is crucial, tracking and recording the achievements across government are also highlighted in the report.

I am grateful to all government departments who provided specialist data requested. I am pleased to report that some progress has been made in specific areas over the last twelve months and though incremental, is encouraging. There is, however, much work still to be done to ensure the rights, and wellbeing of South Australia's children and young people are aligned with international standards protecting their rights.

It is my hope that this work will complement existing reports and provide a more complete picture of South Australian children and young people's lives. Although this is not a child voice report, many of the suggested areas for improvement come from children and young people and reflect the actions they have identified would improve their lives.³

Context

This report is designed to be read alongside other child monitoring reports produced on an annual basis by the bodies created under the *Children and Young People (Oversight and Advocacy Bodies) Act 2016* (OAB). These bodies include the Commissioner for Aboriginal Children and Young People, the Guardian for Children and Young People, the Child Development Council and the Child Death and Serious Injury Review Committee.

Relevant reports include:

- Commissioner for Children and Young People's *Child Rights Progress Reports*,⁴
- The Guardian for Children and Young People's *Reports on Government Services*,⁵
- The Child Development Council's report on the outcome framework, *How are they faring? South Australia's 2022 Report Card for children and young people*.⁶

Most data sets utilised in this report are taken from Australian and State government sources for children up to 18 years of age for the whole of South Australia on an annual basis. Data sets must meet this reliability and accessibility criteria to be included.

Whilst most of the data used in this report is available publicly, some data has been requested of and provided by relevant State government departments specifically for this report. This includes data on suspensions and exclusions in schools, sexually transmitted infections, and South Australian Certificate of Education completion rates for children with disability and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

A rating system similar to that used in the annual CCYP Child Rights Progress Reports has been applied to each 'promise' being assessed:



Strong evidence the promise has been kept



Some evidence the promise has been kept; and



Little evidence the promise has been kept.

Commentary provided by individual agencies on actions they have taken has also been included in the report. This input has been taken at face value and has been used in good faith in determining ratings. At times although the data may show no signs of improvement, we are aware of considerable efforts being undertaken. Where these activities appear to have a likelihood of success they have been incorporated into the rating in recognition of the lag between actions taken and improvements in outcomes as measured by data.



Education Promises

As a signatory to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, South Australia has promised the United Nations that it will ensure every child:

- Can access their right to an education. Primary education should be free. Secondary and higher education should be available to every child. Children will be encouraged to go to school to the highest level possible. Discipline in schools will respect children's rights and never use violence (Article 28).
- Can access an education that fully develops their personalities, talents and abilities. It will teach them to understand their own rights, and to respect other people's rights, cultures and differences. It will help them to live peacefully and protect the environment (Article 29).

The Law

The *Education and Children Services Act 2019* gives children and young people the right to an education. One of the principles that must be taken in the operation, administration and enforcement of this Act, is that the best interests of children and young people is given paramount consideration.

Promise #1: Reduce Exclusionary Discipline

The South Australian government promises to only use exclusionary responses as a last resort to support safe and positive behaviour in school. This includes 'consideration regarding how to best support priority groups including Aboriginal students, students in care, and students with disability, as well as other vulnerable students (for example, students with refugee experiences) at higher risk of exclusionary responses.⁷ This commitment includes support to not use exclusionary discipline for young children or for minor incidents.⁸

This report focuses on the use of suspensions, exclusions and expulsions on primary school students. It is the Commissioner's view that no primary school child should ever be excluded from education.

This position was reiterated in the Commissioner's 2020 *Blame Game* report⁹ and remains equally relevant today. The Commissioner continues to hear from parents and guardians who have very young children who have been excluded. Although this section only reports on data relating to government schools, it is hoped that in the future this office will also receive data from independent and Catholic schools. Use of exclusions in early learning centres will also be incorporated for review in the future.

Government Plan

Recommendations in relation to exclusions and behaviour management made in the Commissioner's *Blame Game* report and the Inquiry into Suspensions, Exclusions and Expulsions in South Australian Government Schools resulted in the Department for Education undertaking a number of reforms. These include:

- aiming to reduce exclusionary responses in Reception to Year 2 by investing in services to support younger children with behaviours of concern to stay at school
- reviewing the Suspension, Exclusion and Expulsion of Students procedure, supported by for staff and advice to families
- reviewing the suite of programs that support student attendance; and
- improving social-emotional learning classroom practices that are trauma aware.

The reforms include making changes to improve student engagement. These reforms not only aim to increase levels of engagement and wellbeing overall, but also to reduce use of exclusionary discipline.¹⁰ The Department for Education has been rolling out these reforms to support greater engagement of students and drive a reduction of exclusionary responses.

Promise kept?

Little evidence



Why this Assessment?

It is too early to see any improvements in data related to reducing exclusionary discipline.

Data provided to this office by the Department for Education¹¹ shows there was an increase in take homes, suspensions, exclusions and expulsions in government primary schools between 2022 and 2023, compared to the decrease that occurred between 2021 to 2022. In 2023, a total of 5,908 students were affected in relation to 20,383 incidents (making up 6.1% of total enrolments), compared to 5,270 students in relation to 18,105 incidents in 2022 (5.4% of total enrolments).

Certain priority groups are overrepresented when compared to total enrolments. Of the total number of students enrolled in government schools impacted by take homes, suspensions, exclusions and/or expulsions in 2023:

- 20.6% were Aboriginal students, although they only make up 7.4% of total enrolments
- 27.8% were students with a disability (funded by the Inclusion Education Support Program (IESP)), making up 7.5% of total enrolments
- 72.3% were students living with a disability (according to the nationally consistent collection of data on students with a disability (NCCD), which includes IESP students), making up 33.1% of total enrolments; and
- 6.1% were children in care, making up 1.4% of total enrolments.

Children enrolled from reception to Year 2 make up 31.2% of South Australian take homes, suspensions, and/or exclusions from Government schools, making up 38.3% of total enrolments.

Exclusions

Definition: Exclusions are when children cannot attend school for a period of 4–10 weeks, or for the rest of a term, not less than 4 consecutive weeks and not more than 10 consecutive weeks.¹²

There was an increase in the number of exclusions in primary schools in 2023, compared to the decrease that occurred from 2021 to 2022. In 2023, there were 299 incidents involving 261 students, compared to 2022 when there were 238 exclusion incidents involving 219 students, and 263 incidents involving 240 students in 2021.

Exclusions included particularly young children, with 82 students in Reception to Year 2 excluded for 94 incidents in 2023, compared to 61 students in the same age range excluded for 67 incidents in 2022.

There is an overrepresentation of boys and students with a disability in this group. In 2023, 82.0% of excluded students were boys (86.3% in 2022), 52.5% were IESP students (60.7% in 2022) and 92.7% were NCCD students (90.4% in 2022). Other groups who were overrepresented when compared to total enrolments include Aboriginal students, who made up 23.4% of all exclusions in 2023, and students in care at 9.6% of all exclusions.

Suspensions

Definition: Suspensions are when children cannot attend school for a period not exceeding 5 days at a time, up to 15 school days in a calendar year and no more than on 4 separate occasions.¹³

There were 8,494 incidents involving 3,980 students in 2023, up from the previous two years, with 7,756 incidents involving 3,554 students in 2022, and 8,135 suspension incidents involving 3,770 students in 2021. Although suspensions increase in higher grades there were still 1,000 children in Reception and Year 2 who were suspended in 2023.

Again, the majority of students suspended were boys and/or were identified as living with a disability. In 2023, 81.3% suspended students were boys, compared to 81.7% in 2022, and 82.3% in 2021. In 2023, 28.4% were IESP funded (32.3% in 2022 and 34.7% in 2021) and 72.2% were NCCD students (73.7% in 2022 and 73.0% in 2021). Aboriginal students were also overrepresented, making up 20.6% of students suspended in 2023 (20.6% in 2022 and 21.1% in 2021), as well as children in care who represented 6.2% of suspensions in 2023 (6.8% in 2022 and 7.3% in 2021).

Take Homes

Definition: A take home is when a student is removed from the school for the rest of the day as a result of a breach in the school's behaviour code. It is not set by any Act or Regulations.¹⁴

In 2023, there was a rise in the number of students receiving take home instructions with 11,590 incidents involving 4,031 students, compared to 10,111 incidents and 3,566 students in 2022, and 11,317 incidents and 3,820 students in 2021. Again, the percentage of take homes for boys is greater, with boys making up 80.6% of all take homes in 2023 (79.3% in 2022 and 80.4% in 2021).

Children living with a disability are also overrepresented in take home figures, with 31.4% students being IESP funded (36.4% in 2022 and 39.2% in 2021), jumping to 77.7% NCCD students in 2023 (79.2% in 2022 and 78.7% in 2021).

As with exclusions and suspensions, the priority groups were also overrepresented, with 22.0% of students given take homes in 2023 being Aboriginal students (21.1% in 2022 and 22.2% in 2021) and students in care making up 6.8% of take homes in 2023 (7.1% in 2022 and 8.0% in 2021).

Evidence of activity to improve outcomes

On 29 January 2024, a revised suspension, exclusion and expulsion of students procedure was launched. It had been developed with stakeholder consultation throughout 2023 and is supported by training materials offered to all public schools.

According to the Department of Education, the revised procedure:

- improves clarity and guidance for principals
- strengthens consistency of good practice
- improves accessibility of information
- maintains students' connectedness to school

- provides additional guidance about seeking the voice and perspective of the student involved
- uses restorative approaches to restore relationships; and
- embeds child rights in its principles.

To support the adoption of this new procedure, a Behaviour Support Toolkit along with other support resources for students and educators are being updated and developed, with these resources expected to be released to all government schools early in 2025.

Future Improvements

The goal of the Department for Education reforms on behavioural policy and practice in relation to expulsions, suspensions and take homes should be to reduce all exclusionary practices. It is hoped that data will soon reflect these reforms, including no child in primary school being excluded or suspended for any reason.

Proposed actions include:

- focusing on introducing measures into schools that provide targeted support for students from over-represented groups (i.e. students with a disability, Aboriginal students, and students in care).
- reviewing practices that underpin bias in the use of exclusionary discipline; and
- establishing an independent body to monitor, review and overturn education exclusions.

Promise #2: Reduce School Disengagement

The Department for Education's student engagement reforms contain a commitment to reducing student disengagement.¹⁵

Promise kept?

Strong evidence



Government Plan

Key objectives include:

- improving the Department's service model for behaviour support
- improving the learning support options available for students at risk of disengagement
- improving the alignment of attendance supports available to school
- increasing the availability, accuracy and usefulness of data, to inform site and system level decision making and support engagement and positive behaviour
- increasing services for mental health
- providing schools with access to the tools, resources, training and services needed to support increased engagement and positive behaviour; and
- providing schools with access to the resources, training and services needed to support educators in relation to applying best practice techniques for improving student engagement.

Why this Assessment?

Definition: As detailed by ACARA, the student attendance rate is 'the number of actual full-time equivalent student-days attended by full-time students in Years 1–10 as a percentage of the total number of possible student-days over the period'.¹⁶

For Years 1–10 in South Australia, attendance rates of students in all schools has been steadily falling since 2018, with a larger fall in 2022 after the COVID-19 pandemic.

However, in 2023, there has been a slight rise in attendance rates in all schools.¹⁷ Average attendance rates have fallen to 88.0% in 2023, from 91.6% in 2018. Attendance rates for all sectors were lower in government schools in 2023, at 86.6%, compared to Catholic schools at 90.1% and independent schools at 90.8%.¹⁸

Definition: The attendance level is 'the proportion of full-time students in Years 1–10 whose attendance rate in Semester 1 is equal to or greater than 90 per cent'.¹⁹

In South Australia, there was a decrease in the number of students in all schools reaching 90% attendance levels over the past 5 years. In 2023, 59.7% of students enrolled attended school more than 90% of the time, compared to 46.5% in 2022, but not reaching 2018 levels of 74.1%. In 2023, attendance levels for all sectors were lower in government schools at 56.3%, compared to 63.4% in Catholic schools and 67.9% in independent schools.

The attendance rates are lower for Years 1–10 students who identify as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander in South Australia, down to 75.0% in 2023 from 80.5% attendance in 2018. The overall attendance level has also reduced from 31.7% in 2023 from 43.4% in 2018. This means 68.3% of this group missed more than 4 weeks of school each year.

Evidence of activity to improve outcomes

The Department for Education is working to improve attendance in government schools. This not only includes policy reform but also a commitment to addressing some of the drivers of non-attendance and increasing student's agency through hearing their perspectives and addressing reasons for student disengagement that leads to non-attendance.

Other actions designed to increase attendance include:

- expanding existing breakfast programs to address cost of living pressures
- increasing supports for the wellbeing of LGBTIQ+ students including provision of resources for teachers/leaders to provide better support; and
- the development of the Young People Empowered to Re-engage Towards Achievement (YERTA) project, being delivered in partnership with Department for Human Services and an Aboriginal community-controlled organisation. This program supports Aboriginal students with complex family circumstances to help improve their school attendance.

Future Improvements

The cycles of disengagement, disadvantage and exclusion need to be broken. The current reforms must ensure policy change that addresses the various reasons for school disengagement that prevail and instead provide support for students and families who struggle with their children's school attendance.

Proposed actions include:

- the Department for Education undertaking a public review into disengagement, disadvantage, and exclusion in South Australia with recommendations on services and programs that could be implemented to address issues for particular groups; and
- exploring links between systemic discrimination faced by particular groups of young people, and their disengagement from education, employment and training pathways.

Promise #3: Increase SACE Completion

The South Australian government through endorsement of the Alice Springs Mparntwe Education Declaration ‘aims to ensure all young people are on a pathway towards continued success in further education, training or employment’.²⁰

Promise kept?

Some evidence



The South Australian Certificate of Education (SACE) is a ‘modern internationally-recognised secondary school qualification that is designed to equip students with the skills, knowledge and personal capabilities they need to successfully participate in our fast-paced global society’.²¹ The SACE Board is responsible for the accreditation of subjects and the assessment of student learning that contribute to meeting the completion requirements of SACE. It also develops and updates this curriculum with feedback from stakeholders.

The SACE Board Strategic Plan 2020–2023 is currently being updated. This office has been informed that the new strategic plan will be an evolution of the SACE Board’s vision for a thriving learner and will build on the learnings garnered from SACE’s engagement with students, teachers, and key stakeholders through the previous strategic plan.²²

The latest Department for Education Strategy aims to ensure public education is for every child and young person in South Australia. Part of its purpose is to enable students ‘to enter the world beyond the classroom ready to learn and create opportunities to live a satisfying and fulfilling life of their choosing’.²³

Government Plan

There are several plans with outcomes to improve SACE completion. These include:

- Department for Education’s School Improvement Model to make every school ‘world class’. It supports teachers and leaders by providing evidence-based tools and resources to help embed literacy and numeracy skills in the curriculum with part of the criteria of success being high levels of SACE achievement in schools²⁴
- the Aboriginal Education Strategy, with a 10year goal for ‘all Aboriginal students to achieve their SACE or attain vocational education qualifications at the same rate as non-Aboriginal students’²⁵
- the Joint Plan of Action between the Department for Child Protection and the Department for Education which includes steps to increase the number of young people in care who complete their SACE²⁶; and
- the Department for Education’s Disability Access and Inclusion Plan, containing actions to develop and provide programs which support learning by children and young people living with disability, with an overall target to increase the percentage who achieve their SACE.²⁷

Why this Assessment?

There has been a steady decrease in SACE completion rates partly due to COVID-19 and the disruption in learning the pandemic caused during the 2020–2021 period.

SACE data provided to this office shows an increase in South Australian students completing SACE rose to 15,566 in 2023 from 14,571 in 2022. There was also an increase in the number of South Australian Aboriginal students who completed their SACE, to 421 in 2023 up from 347 in 2022.

The SACE Board does not collect data on the number of students living with disability who completed SACE, but does collect data on the number of students completing the SACE by studying at least one modified subject, with this figure increasing to 456 in 2023 from 396 in 2022.²⁸

The Productivity Commission's Closing the Gap Data Dashboard shows that progress is being made in South Australia against the education outcome of 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students achieving their full learning potential'.²⁹ The goal set to be achieved by 2031 is for the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (aged 20–24 years) to attain year 12 be equivalent to 96%. In 2021, 64.6% of South Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students attained Year 12 or an equivalent qualification up from 31.4% in 2001.

Evidence of activity to improve outcomes

Actions taken by the Department for Education to increase SACE completion rates include:

- progressing the SA curriculum to ensure it aligns with the purpose of public education with a focus on positive dispositions toward learning and life capabilities that are transferable between subjects and year levels. This new focus is aimed to support student wellbeing and sense of belonging in school; and
- increasing SACE completion success rates for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students by developing a statewide service model for Indigenous secondary learners, co-designed with community and stakeholders, to inform programs to support the engagement and retention of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students enrolled in South Australian government secondary schools.
- The implementation and progress of this program will be monitored in subsequent reports.

Future Improvements

All children in this state should have the opportunity to achieve their SACE, and the State government should be increasing efforts to ensure this occurs.

Proposed actions include:

- creating a student-co-designed SACE support plan to be implemented in Year 10 as part of the Personal Learning Plan (PLP) supporting young people in the key transitions periods between Year 10 and Year 11, and Year 11 to Year 12; and
- collecting and publicly reporting disaggregated data in relation to vulnerable groups so that resources and practices can be developed to improve these outcomes.

Promise #4: Increase Student Wellbeing

The Government of South Australia through endorsement of the Mparntwe Declaration promises that all young Australians will be supported to become confident and creative individuals, successful lifelong learners, and active and informed members of the community. This commitment includes addressing well-being in schools.

Promise kept?

Some evidence



Government Plan

Department for Education's strategy for public education in South Australia is to 'build a world-leading public education system' with all children and young people capable of learning and thriving. The strategy states that it will do this by prioritising and resourcing key areas of impact on students' wellbeing: belonging and safety, resilience and persistence, and cognitive engagement.

Why this Assessment?

The Wellbeing and Engagement Census (WEC) is used by all schools to measure student sense of belonging and wellbeing amongst Year 4–12 students.

Some of the measures used in the survey include:

- feeling like they belong at school
- having at least one person at school who the student can go to for support
- having a school culture where people care about each other; and
- feeling they have a group of friends around them or that they fit in.

These measures are grouped into high, medium, and low wellbeing.

In relation to students' views of their sense of belonging in school there has not been much change from 59% in 2023 down from 61% who reported high wellbeing in 2019.³⁰ At the same time, there appears to be a deterioration in students' sense of school belonging, with 40% reporting that they feel they belong in 2023, down from 47% in 2019.³¹

Peer belonging has also decreased with 49% feeling they belong in 2023 down from 56% of students in 2019.³² Students who feel as though they have friendship intimacy has also decreased, albeit less than peer belonging, with 67% in 2023 feeling supported by their peers, down from 70% in 2019.³³

Evidence of activity to improve outcomes

Department for Education reported that it is addressing wellbeing for all South Australian students who are attending government schools, while prioritising certain vulnerable groups applying a range of measures.

These include:

- establishing a School Mental Health Service to help support the increasing number of students who experience mental health concerns impacting on their wellbeing and learning. (This service has now been made available to 65 high schools and area schools for Reception to Year 12 students, with a focus on prioritising schools with the highest need.
- Implementing the recommendations from the review of the Disability Standards for Education (DSE) with e-training on the DSE is available to all Department for Education staff.
- introducing Autism Inclusion Teachers to provide expertise in their assigned primary school to benefit students with autism and ensure classroom teachers and school approaches are evidence informed

- developing practice guides have been released which provide educators with evidence-based classroom strategies including a guide about understanding disability legislation for school leaders.
- the Department for Education’s Trauma-Informed Practice in Education approach provides preschools and schools with opportunities to deepen their understanding and build capacity to be places of safety, connection and learning for children and young people impacted by trauma. The approach helps schools to:
 - understand trauma, its impact on the developing brain, and how this impacts students’ capacity to engage in learning
 - understand and respond appropriately to the behaviours we see in students, and recognise the needs of students who have experienced trauma
 - develop universal trauma informed practices and teachings that create inclusive and engaging educational settings; and
 - include trauma informed practices in school documentation and processes.

In 2023, the Department’s approach identified and prioritised support for sites with higher numbers of students in priority groups (children in care, students with disability and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students) to engage in whole-site trauma-informed practice. The Department has commenced support to approximately 100 sites in 2023.

The Department also supports children in care through critical transitions, providing funding to assist with they start preschool, a move to a new school, or when they first come into care. This funding can support staffing and release times, to support building a positive relationship with the young person or to support personalised planning, equipment and resources, or social and emotional learning programs.

The Department’s Children in Care Service, staffed by specialist education social workers works collaboratively with staff from Department for Child Protection (DCP) education leaders, schools and preschools, to guide a range of trauma informed practices that are focused on meeting the needs of children in care, including transitions information sharing and funding decisions.

Future Improvements

More needs to be done to increase the feeling of connectedness children in care have with school and with their peers, particularly as these needs are inherently connected to supporting student wellbeing and engagement with their learning.

All children and young people should feel safe and supported at school. Student wellbeing is integral to learning outcomes and schools must ensure measures are in place to address student wellbeing.

Proposed actions include:

- developing targeted responses with input from students and with a focus on meeting the needs of groups of students who consistently report challenges with their feelings of wellbeing at school; and
- looking at innovative solutions to address bullying and recognise signs of bullying earlier to avoid any spiralling negative impacts on student wellbeing.

Promise #5: Support Young Carers in their Role

The South Australian *Carers Recognition Act 2005* (Carers Act) promises to recognise and support young carers and their role in the community.

Promise kept?

Some evidence



Government Plan

The Carers Act requires government departments and organisations who receive government funding to demonstrate an awareness of the Act and to reflect the principles of the Act in the Carer's Charter.

Why this Assessment?

The Department for Education does not actively ask students (or their families) if they are carers. This means the State does not know the numbers of young people who fulfilling the role of carer and who therefore may need extra support. It is not known whether this data is collected in Independent or Catholic schools. Not knowing means the onus is on students and families to disclose if they wish to.

However, there are many barriers to and reasons for students and families choosing not to disclose. Reasons can include a fear of concern for children's safety being raised, the shame and embarrassment of being a carer, or simply not knowing extra support is available if asked for. More should be done to enable educators to understand the signs that a student is fulfilling a role as a carer at home with a commitment to seeking out children who are carers so they are able to be better supported in-line with the Carers Act.

Evidence of activity to improve outcomes

The Commonwealth funded Carer Gateway is the primary funding platform to support carers nation-wide. However, DHS stated that after facilitating a pilot program following the Commissioner's report *Take Care: What can be done at school to support children and young people with caring responsibilities at home*, a number of service provision gaps were identified.

To fill these gaps, DHS funded the Young Carer Support Service (YCSS) which commenced on 1 July 2023. The service is designed to provide a range of social, connection, participation and wellbeing services aimed at improving the wellbeing of young carers, increase their education or employment participation and opportunities, and/or strengthen connection with communities, support networks and services.

DHS funding for the newly established YCSS model is allocated between four organisations who make up the Carer Support Network (CSNSA). They are Carer and Community Support, Carers and Disability Link, Centacare Catholic Family Services, and Carers SA. YCSS is provided across 12 South Australian government regions, with young carers able to access support services that include:

- case management and advocacy
- information, education, and connection to support; and
- social support groups.

This service also helps young carers to work with the school to ensure they understand and support the young child or young person in their caring role.

Carers SA is also resourced to deliver the Carer Break Service³⁴ which gives reprieve to carers through group activities to connect with others or overnight retreats.

Future Improvements

All young carers at school should be given the support needed to ensure they can complete their education and have opportunities to participate in extra-curricular activities, such as sports, camps, and other excursions.

Proposed actions include Department for Education:

- collecting data on young carers at enrolment and informally throughout the school year.
- developing and implementing school-based supports for students with significant caring roles to improve their educational, social, and community inclusion and learning outcomes including taking a proactive approach to identifying these students; and
- instructing school sites to identify a young carer champion who agrees to act as a single point of contact to review students' needs on a regular basis and act as an advocate on their behalf.



Health Promises

As a signatory to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, the South Australian government has promised the United Nations that it will:

- ensure all children have access to the best health care possible, clean water to drink, healthy food and a clean and safe environment in which to live; and
- provide children and young people with age-appropriate information about how to stay safe and healthy (Article 24).

The Law

The South Australian *Public Health Act 2011* (Public Health Act) commits to ‘promote and provide for the protection of the health of the public of South Australia and to reduce the incidence of preventable illness, injury and disability through a public health approach’. This aims to ensure all South Australians, including children and young people, have a right to the highest attainable physical, emotional and mental health.

Promise #1: Decrease Communicable Disease in Young People

The Public Health Act commits to decreasing the incidence of communicable diseases amongst South Australians.

Promise kept?

Little evidence



Government Plan

The government’s State Public Health Plan 2019–2024 promises to reduce and prevent communicable disease.³⁵ The plan does not include an action to provide sexual health education for young people.

There are several strategies that drive SA Health’s approach to the prevention of Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs). These include national and state strategies, including, but not limited to:

- Fourth National Sexually Transmissible Infections Strategy 2018–2022
- Fifth National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Bloodborne Viruses and Sexually Transmissible Infections Strategy 2018–2022
- South Australian Sexually Transmissible Infections Implementation Plan 2019–2023
- South Australian Aboriginal Sexually Transmissible Infections and Blood Borne Viruses Action Plan 2020–2024; and
- South Australian Syphilis Outbreak Response Plan 2021: update and review.

The South Australian Sexually Transmissible Infections Implementation Plan 2019–2023 (Implementation Plan) makes young people a “priority population” with the following targets:

- achieve and maintain HPV adolescent vaccination coverage of 80%
- increase STI testing coverage in priority populations
- reduce the prevalence of gonorrhoea, chlamydia and infectious syphilis.
- eliminate congenital syphilis; and.
- minimise the reported experience and expression of stigma in relation to STIs.

It is noted that some of these strategies ended in 2022 and 2023.

Why this Assessment?

The Commissioner commenced monitoring in 2022, using numbers available at this time as a baseline. However SA Health reports that there has been an overall increase in the incidence of gonorrhoea and syphilis among young people since 2017, while rates of chlamydia remain high.³⁶ The case numbers reported below were provided to the Commissioner by the Communicable Disease Control Branch of SA Health.³⁷

Chlamydia cases

Data provided for young people aged 18 years and younger, shows an overall increase in the number of chlamydia notifications with 656 cases recorded in 2023 up from 596 cases in 2022.

Notifications of chlamydia are lower in regional areas compared to the Adelaide region, though rising in both areas. Notifications have increased in the Adelaide region to 461 in 2023 up from 432 in 2022, and in regional areas to 194 in 2023 up from 164 in 2022.

The rates are similar when breaking data down into age ranges: for 13–15 year olds notifications increased to 56 in 2023 from 37 in 2022 and for 16–18 years olds notifications increased to 600 in 2023, up from 559 in 2022. There are no notifications of chlamydia recorded for 0–12 year olds in either year.

Gonorrhoea cases

There is an overall increase for gonorrhoea notifications, although smaller numbers for young people 18 years and under. The overall increase is lower than chlamydia notifications but rising to 227 in 2023 from 142 in 2022.

Notifications have increased in both regions, however, notifications have increased more steeply in regional areas, almost doubling to 86 in 2023 from 45 in 2022.

This compares to 141 in 2023 from 95 in 2022 for the Adelaide region. In relation to age ranges, there were 3 notifications of young people aged 12 years and under, which has remained steady over the two years. There were 46 in 2023 up from 16 notifications in 2022 for children between 13 and 15 years of age. Notifications also increased for 16 to 18 year olds at 178 in 2023 up from 123 in 2022.

Syphilis cases

Notifications are low in relation to syphilis cases although these rose in 2023 when there were 5 cases of syphilis reported, all in the 16 to 18 year old age range with no cases in 2022.

There were no notifications of HIV diagnoses in children and young people over both years.³⁸

Evidence of activity to improve outcomes

According to SA Health, factors thought to be contributing to the increase in STIs amongst all age groups (including young people) include:

- the impact of dating apps on sexual behaviour (e.g. increased mixing between different networks)
- declining condom use in the context of improvements in HIV prevention
- resurgence in social activities and travel following the COVID-19 pandemic; and
- lack of access to sexual healthcare, including STI testing.³⁹

While escalation of STI epidemics is multi-factorial, research suggests that improving access to sexual health care, and reducing time from STI acquisition to effective treatment is key to improving outcomes, including preventing disease progression and onward transmission.

SA Health commissioned an independent review providing a suite of practical recommendations to strengthen the sexual health system in South Australia. Work to progress these recommendations is underway.⁴⁰

Sexual health education targeting young people

The South Australian government's approach to sexual health education encompasses broader whole of population awareness raising initiatives, and more targeted approaches for priority populations (including young people) through distribution of SA Health funding through non-government organisations (NGOs). SA Health reports that opportunities to further increase the reach and impact of sexual health promotion activities in South Australia are currently being explored.⁴¹

Current initiatives include the Focus Schools Program, delivered by SHINE SA in partnership with SA Health and the Department for Education since 2003. Approximately 80% of SA public secondary schools are enrolled in the program.⁴² There are Independent and Catholic schools who have signed up to the program, but there is no publicly available data on which schools have signed up.

The Focus Schools Program builds capacity for participating schools to deliver best practice comprehensive relationships and sexual health education to young people, and supports the primary prevention of:

- unintended pregnancy
- STIs, HIV and other blood-borne viruses
- gendered and intimate partner violence
- bullying/child abuse; and
- poor mental health outcomes among young LGBTIQ+ people.

In 2023 and 2024, SHINE SA partnered with the Aboriginal Health Council of SA (AHCSA) to provide the Mooditj Leadership Training Course (designed by Sexual Health Quarters, Western Australia). This is a resilience, relationships and sexual health program designed specifically for young Aboriginal people aged 10–15 years. It trains both Aboriginal community members and people who work with Aboriginal young people, including educators, nurses, midwives, youth workers and other adults.⁴³

Campaigns targeting young people

In January 2024, the Commonwealth Government launched 'Beforeplay' a national education campaign aimed at young people in their 20s and 30s to raise their awareness of STI prevention strategies, and emphasise the importance of testing and safer sex.

Future Improvements

Young people need more information about sexual health and safety. More needs to be done to address the rise in numbers of sexually transmitted infections, given young people begin to engage in sexual activity from a young age.

Proposed actions include:

- addressing gaps in the curriculum relating to social issues of gender inequality and domestic and family violence
- implementing a cohesive, coordinated, and contemporary relationship and sexual health education that is age appropriate and meets the needs of children and young people delivered consistently in all schools, commencing in primary school and extending to year 12; and
- reviewing the current sexual health curriculum to determine how it can be amended to reduce the number of STI infections occurring.

Promise #2: Positive Mental Health Outcomes

Under the *Health Care Act 2008* the government promises to provide services that enable the provision of optimal health outcomes and facilitate the provision of safe, high quality services focused on prevention and proper management of conditions contracted.⁴⁴

Promise kept?

Little evidence



Government Plan

The government has several strategies and plans in place in relation to mental health. These include the SA Mental Health Strategic Plan (that ended in 2022) and the Mental Health Services Plan 2020–2025.

The Mental Health Services Plan 2020–2025 made services for children and young people a priority and set the following outcomes:

- perinatal, infants, children (0–12) and families have improved access to and engagement with mental health services and support; and
- young people (12–24) have positive mental health and early intervention services access for any emerging mental health issues.

Why this Assessment?

According to the annual South Australian Population Health Survey, in 2022 18.8% of South Australian children aged 5 to 15 years reported a mental health condition. This is higher than 2018 when 16.1% reported a mental health condition, but lower than the 5 year peak of 19.4% in 2020.⁴⁵

In 2022, 24.6% of 10–15 year olds reported a mental health condition and 10.5% of 5–9 year olds. Overall, 14.2% of all children reported having anxiety, followed by 6.6% with ADHD and 3.1% with depression.⁴⁶ Of those aged 16–17 years in 2022, 31.7% reported having a mental health condition. This was lower than the level reported in 2021 (35.3%) and 2020 (35.8%).⁴⁷

In 2022, mental health services were accessed by a total of 15.7% of South Australian children aged 5 to 17 years. This proportion is similar to levels reported in 2018 when 14.3% accessed services. In the 5-year period, access peaked at 17.9% in 2019. In 2022, mental health services were reported to be used more often by children and young people aged 10–17 years compared to those aged 5 to 9 years. Children living in the higher socioeconomic areas were more likely to report accessing a mental health service, compared to those in mid-level socioeconomic areas.⁴⁸

Evidence of activity to improve outcomes

In 2022, the Office of the Chief Psychiatrist reviewed the assessment, treatment, management and follow up plans of children and young people presenting to the Women's and Children's Hospital Emergency Department for mental health conditions.⁴⁹ The subsequent report to government is currently being reviewed with a public announcement in response to the recommendations made by the Chief Psychiatrist to become available in due course.⁵⁰

Despite the considerable work undertaken by the Department for Health, Preventive Health SA and the Office of the Chief Psychiatrist (following the 2022 findings by the Auditor-General) there are still significant gaps in mental health services⁵¹ and resourcing and planning services to fill these gaps is slow.

In 2023, the Department for Health reported that additional funding had been allocated to the Women and Children's Health Network (WCHN) for child and adolescent mental health services.⁵² In 2022–2023 this included appointment of additional child psychologists and child psychiatrists as well as a number of 6.0 FTE mental health nurses.⁵³ This additional funding included a commitment to providing 10 additional mental health beds in the new Women and Children's Hospital (WCH).⁵⁴ It is unclear whether these beds will be reserved for children with acute conditions, subacute conditions, or both.

Currently WCH only accepts children presenting with acute conditions. There is also a commitment to employing five additional paediatric psychiatrists and 10 additional child psychologists to the WCHN over the next four years with the appointment of one additional psychiatrist and two additional psychologists completed in 2022-2023.⁵⁵

The Bilateral Agreement with the Commonwealth government and allocates funding for a Head to Health Kids Hub in Adelaide, a new headspace centre and integration work in the youth mental health space, as well as supporting implementation of perinatal mental health screening.⁵⁶

In 2023, the Office of the Chief Psychiatrist undertook a follow up review of an independent review of the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) on the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjajara (APY) Lands to consider progress in re-establishing services.

The DHS, in its 2023 consultations with young people for the next SA Youth Action Plan, found that mental health was a key concern. In response, DHS provided \$180,000 in funding for the new SA Youth Action Plan Mental Wellbeing Grant. This funding allows eligible organisations to apply for a grant up to \$15,000⁵⁷ to deliver community-based peer-to-peer mental health support initiatives. The first round of recipients were expected to be announced during the 2024 SA Youth Week.⁵⁸ At the time of writing there was no update on when this announcement will be made.

Future Improvements

South Australia needs to focus resources and services to ensure all children and young people in the State have access to adequate mental health services when they need them.

Proposed actions include:

- resourcing services that support children and young people at earlier ages so that mental health conditions are less likely to escalate
- working with young people to create mental health peer-to-peer self-help resources on issues related to what they need to know to help a mate, including what to do and where to turn when they're ready to seek adult help; and
- providing funding to enable young people to undertake Mental Health First Aid training.

Promise #3: Reduce Deaths by Suicide and Suicide Attempts

The *Suicide Prevention Act 2021* promises to reduce the incidence of suicide.

Promise kept?

Some evidence



Government Plan

The *Suicide Prevention Act* created a Suicide Prevention Council (“the Council”) that:

- requires there be a State Suicide Prevention Plan; and
- makes recommendations on policies and programs intended to reduce deaths by suicide, and attempted suicides, and enhance postvention reports.

The SA Suicide Registry (SASR) was established in 2021 to ensure the effective and sensitive collection of all suspected suicide deaths in South Australia. The data collected is used as an evidence base for public health action, and to prevent further suicides by reducing risk or harm on a population-health basis.

Why this Assessment?

The Suicide Prevention Plan 2023–2026 was launched in 2023 with three goals:

- to reduce suicide related distress and death by suicide in South Australia
- to reduce distress that may contribute to suicide; and
- to improve community understanding and responsiveness to prevent suicide.

The Suicide Prevention Council is required to report every year. In its most recent annual report it notes the lowest rate of death by suicide is for young people aged 25 years and under.

Wellbeing SA provided the following information about deaths by suicide:

‘Deaths by suicide of young people are routinely monitored within the SASR and are a rare occurrence and the interpretation of rare events and/or small populations are prone to bias. Whilst the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted the South Australian and broader Australian population’s mental, social and emotional wellbeing, deaths by suicide in persons aged less than 18 years and those aged 18 to 24 years have remained stable.

SASR data are analysed to help identify issues requiring a timely response or potential clusters. The Registry will evolve over time and enriched SASR data from a range of additional sources will help inform the implementation of intervention strategies, service planning, and evaluation of interventions that are already in place.’

Evidence of activity to improve outcomes

Wellbeing SA reports that it provides support to community-based Suicide Prevention Networks (SPN) across the state, many of whom have a particular focus on and work with young people to develop resources, supports and help-seeking pathways. Talk Out Loud is a youth focused SPN that provides support for young people at risk, including those bereaved by suicide, those who have struggled, or are currently struggling with a mental health condition, or those who are disengaged from mainstream education.⁵⁹

Wellbeing SA administers an annual Suicide Prevention Community Grants program which provides funding to local community groups and non-government organisations to support state suicide prevention projects and activities. In the 2022–2023 grant round, \$180,000 was granted to 21 local organisations.⁶⁰ This included funding initiatives that featured Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) training for teens and young people.⁶¹

A range of other initiatives supporting social connection, mental health literacy, stigma reduction and cultural approaches to suicide prevention for children and young people were also successful in their applications for funding.

Future Improvements

To reduce the numbers of deaths by suicide amongst children and young people in South Australia, there needs to be comprehensive co-designed prevention and early intervention mental health and wellbeing strategy with policies and actions that will address the drivers of youth suicide.

Proposed actions include:

- ensuring young people are a priority population in the development of a State Suicide Prevention Plan
- ensuring mental health resources across the lifespan are accessible in all communities to support development of protective factors that will decrease the risk of suicide; and
- delivering Mental Health First Aid Training to all year 11 and 12 school students.



Safety Promises

As a signatory to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, South Australia has promised the United Nations that children should be protected:

- “Irrespective of the child’s or his or her parent’s or legal guardian’s race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national, ethnic or social origin, property, disability, birth or other status” (Article 2).

The Law

The *Children and Young People (Safety) Act 2017* commits the government to promoting the following outcomes for children and young people:

- to be safe from harm
- to do well at all levels of learning and to have skills for life
- to enjoy a healthy lifestyle; and
- to be active citizens who have a voice and influence.

Promise #1: Prevent Youth Homelessness

The Housing and Homelessness Agreement between the state and Commonwealth governments commits to improving housing outcomes across the housing spectrum, including working together to improve outcomes for Australians who are homeless, or at risk of homelessness.⁶² One of the priority groups is young people.

Promise kept?

Some evidence



Government Plan

‘Our Housing Future Strategy 2020–2030’ is a 10-year plan that aims to provide better housing outcomes across the State. The Strategy is a commitment by the government to provide better services to prevent South Australians of all ages from falling into homelessness, ensuring people get the right support they need when they need it, and rapidly re-housing people into safe, stable and long-term housing so that they don’t cycle in and out of homelessness for long periods.⁶³ As part of these reforms the ‘Future Directions for Homelessness in SA’ Strategy was released in 2020. It aims to transform the homelessness service system through SA’s Homelessness Alliances.

Why this Assessment?

According to the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, in 2022–2023, there were 3,036 individual young people between the ages of 15–24 years who presented to homeless services for support in South Australia. Of these 65.3% were female and 34.7% were male.⁶⁴ The data indicates a decrease in the number of homeless young people since 2018–2019 when 3,538 young people presented to homelessness services, 63.3% of whom were female and 36.7% male.⁶⁵ However, due to data collection changes introduced in 2021, it is difficult to determine whether this decreasing trend has continued. Anecdotally the Commissioner hears from stakeholders that more young people are homeless. Measures that go beyond analysis of service data are required to obtain a more complete picture of the homelessness situation for young people.

Within the group of homeless young people presenting to agencies in South Australia in 2022–2023, there were 135 who had care and protection orders in place. This number has declined since its five-year peak of 163 in 2019–20.⁶⁶ The numbers of young people leaving care and moving into homelessness has also decreased to 378 in 2022–2023 from 496 in 2018–19.⁶⁷

Evidence of activity to improve outcomes

Homeless young people are an especially vulnerable population and are likely to have experienced family and domestic violence, problematic drug and alcohol use, and/or be managing mental challenges of their own or their family members. Once homeless, young people have increased vulnerability to violence, abuse, school exclusion and criminal justice involvement. Food insecurity is also frequently reported by young people who are experiencing homelessness, putting them at increased risk of adverse health outcomes.⁶⁸

Homelessness is also disruptive to education due to the difficulties homeless young people face attending school and can result in increased disengagement in class and poor academic achievement over the long-term. Continuity of schooling provides stability for young people who are experiencing homelessness and can contribute to their wellbeing later in life.⁶⁹

Youth homelessness, and its prevention, is the responsibility of both the Department of Human Services (DHS) and the South Australian Housing Authority (SAHA).⁷⁰ A cultural and linguistically diverse (CALD) specific service and an Aboriginal specific service is located in Adelaide to provide Statewide capacity building support to Youth Support Development programs. Regional services are based at Port Lincoln, Whyalla, Port Augusta, Port Pirie, and Kapunda in the Barossa Valley.

DHS is responsible for supporting families and children, preventing them from experiencing homelessness through provision of:

- Safer Family Services (SFS) Child Wellbeing Program (CWP) which provides direct services to children and young people enrolled in a South Australian government school, who are experiencing complex issues. SFS and CWP work with other support services – government and non-government – to deliver the support students and their families need; and
- the Youth Support and Development program, which seeks to establish positive trajectories for at risk and vulnerable people aged 10–25 years by improving their participation in education, employment and training.

SAHA funds a number of youth services that aim to prevent youth homelessness as well as help young people who are homeless, including:

- The Youth Support and Development (YSD) program aimed at young people aged 10–25 years with the key target group being young people aged 15–19 years of age. DHS reported⁷¹ that in 2022–2023, over 500 young people were assisted by through the YSD program. Services include finding stable accommodation for a young person who has become homeless and supporting young people to return home and return to their education. YSD is delivered in five rural areas and five metropolitan areas.
- Kids Under Cover is a studio program that provides a stable space for a young person to study while keeping them connected to their family. This is achieved by building 1 and 2 bedroom studios in their family's backyard. As at 3 November 2023, 12 of these studios had been constructed, with a total of 42 expected to be constructed assisting 64 young people.⁷²

- St John’s Youth Services include:
 - UNO and Youth 110, which provides 30 self-contained apartments for young people in crisis who are aged 16 to 21 years. The service offers 24-hour care and case management support. In 2022–2023 Youth 110 provided 12,500 nights of accommodation to more than 150 young people and 14 small children.⁷³
 - Foyer Port Adelaide (part of the Adelaide Northwest Homelessness Alliance) provides independent accommodation for 23 young people who want to re-engage with their education or seek training or employment.
 - Keeping my Place is an early intervention response, providing support for young people living in private rental, but at risk of losing their tenancy due to personal or financial crisis.
 - Next Step is a service that provides intensive, individualised and long-term solutions to homelessness by equipping young people with the skills needed to live independently.

All these services combined accommodated 218 young people, assisted 152 others through outreach services, connected 22% of young people with employment and 42% with their education.⁷⁴

In addition to these programs there are:

- Ruby’s Reunification Program supports young people aged 12–17 years who are homeless or at risk of homelessness and who need support resolving conflict with their family either to remain at or return to their home. There are 4 Ruby’s houses that provide 24-hour support and supervision. They are located at Enfield (4 beds), Thebarton (6 beds), Edwardstown (5 beds) and Mount Gambier (5 beds).⁷⁵
- Centacare’s Young Family Support Program assists pregnant or parenting young women at risk of homelessness with support and accommodation. There are 4 places in Adelaide that provide support and accommodation, including Coolock House, Louise Place, Malvern Place and Findon Family Housing.⁷⁶
- The Integrated Housing Exits Youth Justice Program provides accommodation and support to young people with a history of offending, when they have completed a custodial sentence, period on remand, or community-based justice order. The program aims to reduce their risk of exiting custody and becoming homeless and reoffending.⁷⁷

Future Improvements

Protective factors must be developed to support the prevention of youth homelessness as well as provide interventions that will reduce the time young people are homeless and, preventing reoccurrence across the lifespan.

Proposed actions include:

- developing school-based early intervention approaches for young people at risk of family breakdown and conflict, and disengagement from their education, keeping them connected to school, family and the community to prevent leaving home early and experiencing homelessness; and
- increasing capacity of family formed reconnection supports to promote favourable pathways back home for more young people, and youth-focused housing where returning home is not possible or appropriate.

Promise #2: Improve Road Safety for Children

South Australia's Road Safety Strategy to 2031 has made a commitment to achieving at least a 50% reduction in lives lost and at least a 30% reduction in serious injuries on South Australian roads by 2031.⁷⁸

Promise kept?

Some evidence



Government Plan

The new South Australia's Road Safety Action Plan (2023–2025) focuses on:

- providing better safety in and around schools and communities so that children can safely walk, cycle or take public transport to school
- promoting safer vehicles and road safety education programs for young drivers and riders, especially in regional and remote areas; and
- providing better public transport through mass transit corridors to and from the city and key regional areas.

The above plan is supported by SAPOL's Road Safety Action Plan 2023–2026.

Priority areas include focusing on:

- road safety education for people aged 16–24 years' and
- improving safety for people who walk, cycle, and use other forms of personal transport.

Why this Assessment?

South Australia recorded 117 road fatalities in 2023, which was a 64.8% increase from 71 in 2022. However, the number of children aged 16 years and under who die on South Australian roads is low with only 1 child in this age group who died in 2023, compared to 2 who died in 2022.⁷⁹

Sixteen young people between the ages of 17–25 years died on South Australian roads in 2023, making up 13.6% of total deaths, an improvement from a high of 23 deaths in 2020, making up 24.7% of total deaths.⁸⁰

Evidence of activity to improve outcomes

In response to the rise in numbers of road deaths in 2023, the South Australian government announced a \$98 million road safety package, including upgrading infrastructure.

Elements of this package include:

- funding for additional road safety campaigns of \$6.2 million over the forward estimates;
- funding for a Rider Safe program reform of \$3.8 million over the forward estimates to address motor bike accidents; and
- half a million over the forward estimates for the ultra high-powered vehicle licensing scheme.⁸¹

The Department for Infrastructure and Transport (DIT) funds several projects and grants annually to improve road safety.⁸² They include:

- the State Bicycle Grants Program, which awarded \$2 million to 20 councils for 27 projects⁸³; and
- the Way2Go program promoting safer, greener and more active travel for primary school students and their communities using a whole school approach built on a partnership between local councils, school communities and DIT. (There is however no reporting on how many schools and communities this program reached.)

SAPOL's Road Safety Centre offers road safety education sessions to schools, businesses and community groups. In the 2023–2024 year the Centre was almost back to pre-COVID-19 levels with 5,311 children and 307 young adults completing sessions. The last comparable year was 2019–2020 where education sessions reached 5,718 children and 174 young adults.⁸⁴

Future Improvements

Children and young people want to be involved in making their communities safer when walking, cycling and skating to school, parks and sporting grounds. They also want to drive in safe vehicles and feel safe on the roads.

Improvements proposed include:

- working with children and young people, local councils and communities to develop safer transport routes to schools, parks and recreational spaces known to be used by children and young people
- implementing a scheme that can help young drivers purchase safety compliant cars; and
- addressing children and young people's safety concerns through better street lighting at shelters and near bus stops, and by offering more frequent bus, tram and train services. These need to come with synchronised connections so that children and young people are not left waiting for long periods or forced to walk extended distances in the dark because timetabled services are not meeting their travel needs.

Promise #3: Reduce Bullying Behaviour at School

The government promises to reduce the incidence of bullying behaviour at school by requiring all government schools to have a local bullying prevention policy.⁸⁵

Promise kept?

Some evidence



Government Plan

A State-wide Bullying Strategy was implemented in 2019 and includes addressing bullying in all schools throughout the State. This plan has now lapsed. The Department for Education has stated that the initiatives concerned with schools that were outlined in the strategy have now been embedded and incorporated into department policy and practices.⁸⁶

Why this Assessment?

According to the 2023 Wellbeing and Engagement Collection (WEC) Survey there has been a slight jump in all forms of bullying from previous years in all schools:

In 2023, WEC recorded that:

- 32% of students experienced physical bullying on a monthly or weekly basis, up from 30% in 2019, but lower than the high of 36% in 2020
- 49% of students experienced verbal bullying on a monthly or weekly basis, compared to 45% in 2019, but lower than the high of 55% in 2020
- 43% of students experienced social bullying on a monthly or weekly basis (which was the same in 2019), but lower than the high of 50% in 2020; and
- 23% of students experienced cyberbullying on a monthly or weekly basis, up from 21% in 2019, but down from the high of 26% in 2020.⁸⁷

Evidence of activity to improve outcomes

There is no information in respect to policies in place to address the reduction of bullying in Independent and Catholic schools, but it is hoped that this will be provided in the future.

To address bullying and violence in public schools the Department for Education reported that it is undertaking the following:

- launching a new wellbeing programs directory, providing schools with a list of evidence-informed mental health and wellbeing programs available from external providers
- providing new funding for restorative practices training programs and support for schools. Restorative practices focus on repairing and rebuilding relationships after conflict has occurred to foster a supportive and safe school community, with the view that supporting schools to do this effectively will have a positive impact on student wellbeing; and
- co-designing an action plan for prevention of violence in all schools including a guide to best responses following consultations undertaken throughout 2023 with students from government, Independent and Catholic schools.⁸⁸

The Department for Education has also implemented a support and intervention strategy that takes a system approach to addressing patterns of disruptive incidents, particularly in large complex secondary schools.⁸⁹ The strategy is designed to proactively support schools at risk of repeat incidents of violence to return to a focus on teaching and learning by:

- giving at risk schools the tools to better respond to violent incidents
- establishing proactive processes and routines to better prevent incidents; and
- providing additional leadership support.

Examples of tailored supports and interventions a school might provide through the strategy include:

- leadership and teacher capacity building and coaching
- additional security and safety measures
- additional resourcing to support staff and student wellbeing (eg policy reviews/ updates and student support officers; and
- parent and community engagement.

Feedback from schools who have received supports so far under this strategy has indicated that these approaches have:

- strengthened school community relationships
- improved leadership confidence; and
- ensured teachers are better equipped to manage disruptive student behaviour.

The Commissioner will be monitoring whether these actions result in reports of increased safety and a reduction in the levels of violence and bullying occurring in South Australian schools.

Future Improvements

The State government must include children and young people in any policy changes, especially at a school level, thereby empowering this group to address bullying.

Proposed actions include:

- involving children and young people in the development of self-help resources to better reflect the multiple forms of bullying being experienced by them in the school environment; and
- developing strategies that improve the wellbeing of children and young people, particularly those who are the most vulnerable.

Promise #4: Reduce Sexual Harassment of Young People

The *Equal Opportunity Act 1984* outlaws sexual harassment in workplaces, educational institutions and other public places in South Australia.

Promise kept?
Little evidence



Government Plan

Committed to Safety: A framework for addressing domestic, family and sexual violence in South Australia was the State's policy framework up to 2022 which aimed to address harassment in workplaces. A new state-wide framework is currently being developed that will address domestic, family and sexual violence in workplaces, homes and community settings.

Why this Assessment?

Currently, the Commonwealth government does not release annual statistics on the prevalence of sexual harassment recorded for young people under 18 years.⁹⁰

It does, however, collect data from young people who are over 18 years about any experiences of sexual harassment since the age of 15. In South Australia, 54.4% of women aged 18 years and over have experienced sexual harassment since the age of 15.⁹¹

Data is also collected about women's experiences before the age of 18 in relation to physical and sexual abuse. In South Australia 16.1% of women aged 18 years and over reported physical and/or sexual abuse before the age of 15. Sexual abuse was reported by 11.1% of women, physical abuse by 8.9% and both sexual and physical abuse by 3.9%.⁹²

The Equal Opportunity Commission (EOC) released new tools to 'empower those who experience discrimination and sexual harassment to exercise their rights and complain directly to service providers, employers and others as an alternative to making a formal complaint, or as a precursor to doing so. This includes a new online form to report unlawful discrimination'.⁹³ In 2022–2023 the resources page on the EOCs website was accessed over 1,000 times with the sexual harassment complaint letter accessed 22 times.⁹⁴ In 2022–2023 there were 30 accepted complaints in relation to sexual harassment making up 24% of all accepted complaints.⁹⁵ Of these 27 complaints were related to the workplace.⁹⁶ It is not known whether any of these complaints related to young people.

Evidence of activity to improve outcomes

The Department for Human Services will be addressing Sexual Harassment in its Youth Action Plan.⁹⁷

The Department for Education addresses harassment and sexual discrimination through the Australian Curriculum where there are opportunities to explore sexism, sexual harassment and gender-based violence as follows:

- the Partnership Schools and Pre-Schools (PSP) Division works with site leaders to ensure they are aware of the ‘Sexual Behaviour in Children and Young People Procedure and Guidelines’ and other resources available to them; and
- the Keeping Safe: Child Protection Curriculum (KS:CPC) – a child safety and respectful relationships curriculum in which discrimination, bullying and harassment are explored in the context of rights and responsibilities, power in relationships, recognising and reporting abuse (including domestic and family violence), online safety, strategies for keeping safe, and seeking support.⁹⁸

Future Improvements

The State government should be collecting annual data on young people under 15 years who experience sexual harassment while also reviewing how policies and practices can support young people better.

Proposed actions include:

- reviewing the extent to which school-based relationship and sexual health education and bullying materials specifically address sexism, sexual harassment and gender-based bullying; and
- collecting and publicising data on the prevalence of sexual harassment of young people under 15 years.

Promise #5: Combat Online Sexual Extortion ('Sextortion')

Online sextortion is a crime that involves child victims being coerced into sending sexualised images of themselves or others to online offenders, often by the offender pretending to be another young person. The offender then threatens to share these images to others unless their demands are met. The demands usually include blackmailing victims to send more images, performing sexual favours, and/or payment of money.

Promise kept?

Some evidence



The *South Australian Criminal Law Consolidation Act (1935)* outlaws blackmail and extortion. The eSafety Commissioner has the power to order online service providers to take down intimate images through the Image-Based Abuse Scheme. There are heavy penalties for service providers that do not comply.⁹⁹

Government Plan

There is a multi-agency response to child exploitation that is led by the Australian Centre to Counter Child Exploitation (ACCCE) and includes SAPOL, the eSafety Commissioner and other state or national authorities tasked with protecting children from sexual exploitation.¹⁰⁰

Why this Assessment?

The data indicates a rise in online sexual extortion, particularly by overseas offenders who are targeting teenage boys in Australia.¹⁰¹ However, there is no publicly available data on online sexual extortion for young people 18 years and under. The most recent nation-wide data available shows approximately 300 incidents of sextortion targeting children is being reported each month.¹⁰²

The protection and legal responses in relation to sexual exploitation, including sexual extortion ("sextortion") significantly increased in 2018 when the Commonwealth Government provided funding of \$68.6 million to the Australian Federal Police to establish the Australian Centre to Counter Child Exploitation (ACCCE) including the formation of Operation Huntsman in June 2022.¹⁰³ Operation Huntsman was formed between the Australian Federal Police and the Australian Transaction Reports and Analysis Centre (AUSTRAC) to target organised crime syndicates blackmailing children using sexual images provided and threatening to share them unless they pay.

Evidence of activity to improve outcomes

In the 2022–23 year the ACCCE:

- reported that Operation Huntsman had successfully disrupted hundreds of people and thousands of Australian bank accounts
- released 'Jack Changes the Game' - a children's picture book about staying safe online for 5–8 year olds of which 8,500 copies have been sent to Australian primary schools; and
- initiated an awareness raising and education response campaign across media, social media, schools, community groups, financial institutions, and police stations resulting in 5,086 online blackmail and sexual extortion response kit downloads; distribution of 10,405 sextortion posters to police stations and 3,545 letters to high schools.¹⁰⁴

The Department for Education promotes resources developed by the eSafety Commissioner to assist educators and parents support their children and young people to stay safe online. It also regularly reviews the bullying and violence prevention programs SAPOL delivers in SA schools.¹⁰⁵

The Department is also collaborating with Youth Law Australia to review the content of teaching resources about student rights and responsibilities in relation to:

- bullying and cyberbullying
- abusive photos and videos; and
- sex and sexting.¹⁰⁶

The Australian Curriculum and Keeping Safe: Child Protection Curriculum contains opportunities for students to explore sextortion and online safety and learn ways to stay safe while online and minimise the risk of being targeted. KS:CPC is currently being revised, with a significant focus on ensuring content and additional resources (including professional development) remain contemporary and evidence-based, including within topics of online safety, sextortion, risk-taking, and coercion. The Office of the eSafety Commissioner has provided advice as part of this consultation.

Future Improvements

More needs to be done to protect and support children and young people from sextortion.

Proposed actions include:

- undertaking awareness raising campaigns in schools within the health and physical education curriculum about how children and young people can stay safe while online
- undertaking an awareness raising campaign targeting children and young people to ensure they see the signs of sextortion and know who to report this to and how to get support; and
- adopting a joined up approach between state and federal organisations to ensure children who are victims of crime are better supported on the ground.



Wellbeing Promises

As a signatory to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, South Australia has promised the United Nations that:

- all decisions that affect children are made in their best interests (Article 3)
- every child has the right to life and to ensure that children survive and develop in the best possible way (Article 6); and
- every child has rights to food, clothing and a safe place to live so they can develop in the best possible way. The government should help families and children who cannot afford this (Article 27).

The Law

The South Australian *Family and Community Services Act (1972)* objectives are to promote the welfare of the community generally and of individuals and families, as well as to promote the dignity of the individual and the welfare of the family as the basis of the welfare of the community.

Promise #1: Improve Food Security Outcomes

The South Australian Food Relief Charter¹⁰⁷ is a commitment to working collaboratively towards an optimal food relief system that leads to improved client and community outcomes. It has been co-designed in a partnership between the SA government and the food relief sector as a way to improve community wellbeing in response to the State government's promise to improve individual and household food security outcomes.

Promise kept?

Some evidence



Government Plan

One of the goals set in South Australia's Wellbeing Strategic Plan 2020–2025¹⁰⁸ is to increase long term health and wellbeing for South Australians and to reduce chronic disease, including obesity, through better access to nutritional food.

Implementation of this plan has now been completed by Wellbeing SA (transitioning to Preventive Health SA). Although Preventive Health SA has not yet released a new strategy, one of its pillars is preventing obesity through provision of support for more South Australians to access and make healthier food choices.¹⁰⁹

This goal aligns with the National Preventive Health Strategy (2021–2030),¹¹⁰ which states that people living in food insecure households are more likely to develop chronic conditions such as diabetes, hypertension and mental health issues due to the consumption of food and drinks high in energy and fat and sugar, which provide low or no nutritional value.¹¹¹

Why this Assessment?

Foodbank reports that food insecurity has increased over the past year with respondents saying the main driver has been cost of living, followed by healthcare and housing costs.¹¹²

In 2023, Foodbank reported upwards of 255,000 South Australian households struggled to put food on the table – up from 213,000 in 2022 (an increase of 42,000 households). Of these, 150,000 SA households experienced severe food insecurity (multiple days without food each week) up from 130,00 last year (an increase of 20,000 households in twelve months).¹¹³

According to Foodbank, over 60% of SA households with children experienced food insecurity in 2023, up from 50% in 2022.¹¹⁴ This is supported by a South Australian school survey which found that nearly two thirds of families with primary school-aged children reported food insecurity.¹¹⁵

The overall level of household food security has trended down in South Australia over the last twelve months to 65% in 2023, from 71% in 2022.¹¹⁶ The proportion of households

experiencing food insecurity who had at least one person working increased to 60% in 2023 from 46% in 2022. A third of SA households with mortgages, experienced food insecurity over the last year, up from 29% in 2022.¹¹⁷

According to the 2022 South Australian Population Health Survey, 4.5% of South Australian children were reported as having 'run out of food'.¹¹⁸ This proportion is similar to recent years (4.4% in 2022, 5% in 2020, and 5% in 2016), but is an improvement on 2019 at 7.3%. Children living in lower socioeconomic areas were more likely to experience food insecurity, with this percentage increasing to 11.2% of children in the lowest Socio-Economic Index For Areas (SEIFA).¹¹⁹

The Wellbeing and Engagement Collection (WEC) Survey of non-academic factors relevant to learning and participation, conducted annually by South Australia's Department for Education, shows that many children and young people are missing out on breakfast. Students are asked 'How often do you eat breakfast?' with responses grouped into high, medium, or low wellbeing.

In 2023, approximately two thirds (63%) of students were considered to have high wellbeing in relation to breakfast, steady in both 2021 and 2022. However, it is down from 69% in 2019 and 67% in 2020.¹²⁰ This also decreases steadily as school year levels rise. In 2023, 80% of students in Year 4 were considered to have high wellbeing in relation to breakfast, with just 48% of students in Year 12.¹²¹

Evidence of activity to improve outcomes

The government needs to do more to address rising food insecurity in households to ensure all children are eating nutritious food and not going hungry. Although the Food Relief Charter is a step in the right direction, signing up to the charter is optional for organisations working in this sector.

Preventive Health SA is prioritising obesity prevention by focusing on supporting healthier eating and food preparation choices, including providing guidance on recipes for preparing nutritious meals on a budget.¹²² More needs to be done to address food insecurity in vulnerable households.

In Term 1 of 2023, with funding support provided by Department for Education, the charities Foodbank SA and Kickstart for Kids offered breakfast programs at 494 South Australian schools and other education services.

In June 2023, the State government announced a further \$6.5 million¹²³ in funding to expand existing breakfast programs as part of other policy measures to address cost of living pressures. It is anticipated that 1.4 million meals will be provided, free of charge, to South Australian children over the next four years.¹²⁴

In 2023, Department for Human Services (DHS) opened its Addressing Food Security Grant¹²⁵ seeking applications of up to \$50,000 for projects to support South Australian communities move out of food insecurity. A total of \$1.5 million in grant funding has been made available for projects that align with the intent of the South Australian Food Relief Charter and Nutrition Guidelines for the Food Relief Sector. These projects can include, but are not limited to:

- sustainable food security infrastructure
- development and/or delivery of community food education programs; and/or
- partnerships between community organisations and/or local government to achieve common food security goals.

DHS reports that recommendations for funding are currently being finalised and approved with notification to applicants likely to occur in April 2024. Projects directly aimed at supporting young people make up 8% of applications submitted, with almost all of these likely to be recommended for funding.¹²⁶

Future Improvements

Proposed actions include:

- extending current breakfast programs and introduce lunch programs to ensure children attending schools in disadvantaged areas eat well every day
- ensuring the government makes an explicit commitment to addressing food insecurity in households where there are children and young people; and
- collecting statewide data to determine the prevalence of food insecurity in SA households.

Promise #2: Support Children to Move and Play More

The State government, through the Office for Recreation, Sport and Racing (ORSR) Strategic Plan 2021–2025, commits to improving the health and wellbeing of South Australian children and young people by providing support for more movement and play. This includes development of an action plan that will explore youth inactivity and provide ideas for pathways to influence young people to increase their levels of ‘movement, play and performance’.

Promise kept?

Little evidence



Government Plan

The ORSR Strategic Plan includes the following goals:

- Children (0–12 yrs) achieve a 30% increase in activity by 2025. (Target = 60 minutes of activity per day). (Baseline = 26% of children);
- Youth (13–17 yrs) achieve an 18% increase in activity by 2025. (Target = 60 minutes of activity). (Baseline = 14% of youth).¹²⁷

Shortly, the ORSR will announce a new state-wide Physical Activity Framework, which will align with the World Health Organization’s Global Action Plan for Physical Activity 2018–2030.¹²⁸ This will supersede ‘Game On SA’ introduced by the previous government. It will build on the key elements of the earlier strategy, which included a goal of 55% of young people participating in sports or recreation at least one day per week.

One of Preventive Health SA’s priorities is obesity prevention. This includes encouraging children and young people to participate in more physical activity, as well as providing more information and resources about healthy food and nutrition.¹²⁹

Why this Assessment?

At this point in time there are no updated indicators in relation to the activity goals outlined in the OSRS Strategic Plan. In its Annual Report 2022–2023 the OSRS set a target to make a positive difference in participation in sport or recreation of at least once a week for the average South Australian aged 0–14 years. Currently there is a negative difference with 1.9% less young people aged 0–14 years participating in sport or active recreation at least once a week.¹³⁰

According to Ausplay, children’s participation in sports or recreation remains steady at one or more times a week. In South Australia, as in other parts of Australia, children’s participation in sport and recreation at least once a week, rising back to 49.1% in 2022–2023. However it has not returned to pre-COVID levels of 51.4% in 2018–2019.¹³¹

Evidence of activity to improve outcomes

One of the actions undertaken by the State government to get more children into sport is its Sport Voucher Program. Administered by the OSRS, the program aims to increase the number of children participating in physical activity by helping to reduce ‘cost’ as a barrier.¹³² The vouchers provide children from Reception to Year 9 with up to a \$100 discount on sport, dance, swimming, and Scouts/Guides fees. This was extended to include Year 8 and 9 students from 1 January 2022, and Scouts and Guides from 1 January 2024.¹³³ There has been a continual increase in the uptake of this program since its inception in 2015.

The OSRS 2021–2022 Annual Report set a target of 87,000 sports vouchers to be redeemed in that financial year, with an actual figure of 82,057 vouchers redeemed (94% of the target).¹³⁴ For the OSRS 2022–23 Annual Report, a total of 89,234 vouchers were redeemed against the target of 92,000 vouchers set.¹³⁵

In 2023, 88,840 vouchers totalling \$8,846,052 were redeemed. The Sports Voucher program saw the number of children from Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander backgrounds who accessed vouchers increase to 3% in 2023 from 2.2% in 2022, whilst 12.6% of children from a Culturally and/or Linguistically Diverse background accessed the voucher scheme in 2023, up from 9.3% in 2022. There were 4.1% in 2023 up from 3% of vouchers used by families who have a child living with a disability in 2022.¹³⁶

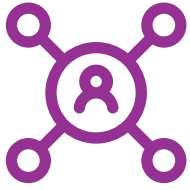
Other projects by OSRS aimed at increasing youth activity include:

- investing \$1.5 million over three years to support four regional locations to build more connected and active communities – Limestone Coast, Port Lincoln, Whyalla and the Riverland
- partnering with the Department for Child Protection (DCP) to establish a 2024–2025 Action Plan, funding two regional pilots to connect children in care with positive sporting environments: West Coast Youth and Community Support through City of Port Lincoln and Limestone Coast through City of Mount Gambier; and
- co-funding for the Welcome to SA Shores Program supporting Ukrainian refugees to learn about beach/water safety and providing young people within the program with an opportunity to pursue employment in the aquatics industry.¹³⁷

Future Improvements

To provide real opportunities for children and young people to access sport and recreation activities, future actions could include:

- ensuring better targeting, increased value, and overall expansion of the scope of the Sports Voucher Scheme to benefit children and young people from low-income families who wish to participate in extra-curricular activities that go beyond club sport
- addressing the high costs of organised sport for children and young people, so more children and their families can afford to participate
- reducing formal and transport barriers to accessing sports for children and young people from low-income families; and
- creating opportunities for more children with disability to participate in sport.



Citizenship Promises

As a signatory to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, South Australia has promised the United Nations that it will promote, protect and provide for every child so that they are able to become an active and engaged citizen in their community and society.

This is achieved through upholding each child's right to:

- develop in the best possible way (Article 6)
- have a say in the decisions that affect their lives (Article 12)
- be free to think and associate with others (Articles 13 and 14)
- be safe from attacks and abuse (Article 19)
- receive an education (Articles 28 and 29); and
- be provided with adequate food, clothing and a safe home (Article 27).

The Law

The South Australian *State Electoral Act 1985* entitles people to vote from 18 years of age. It also entitles young people to enrol to vote from 16 years of age.

Promise #1: Increase the Number of Young People Enrolling to Vote

Section 29 of the *Electoral Act 1985* entitles people who are Australian citizens whose principal place of residence is in Australia, to enrol to vote at 18 years of age. It also entitles people from 16 years to be provisionally enrolled.

Promise kept?

Little evidence



Government Plan

Although one of the priorities of the Electoral Commission of South Australia's 2021–24 Strategic Plan is to 'engage the community and stakeholders to promote electoral awareness, participation and compliance', there is nothing in the plan that specifically addresses young people.¹³⁸ The plan does, however, include delivering on ongoing education program to improve understanding of the electoral process, particularly amongst people in groups who have traditionally had low voter turnout rates.

Why this Assessment?

Enrolment by age group and population shows that 18–24-year-olds are less likely to be enrolled than people who are 25 years and over.¹³⁹ Data, as at 30 September 2023, shows that the total enrolment rate for all age groups is 97.3%, but only 90.2% for 18–24 year olds.

Likely due to state and federal elections, and the referendum that was held in 2023, there was a large increase in the number of 18 and 19 year olds who enrolled to vote with this figure increasing to 76.4% (14,885) at 30 September 2023 from 39.9% (7,524) of 18 year olds at 30 September 2021.¹⁴⁰ For 19 year olds this percentage rose to 89.1% (17,102) as at 30 September 2023 from 55.5% (10,441) being enrolled to vote in September 2021.¹⁴¹

Evidence of activity to improve outcomes

A non-formal memorandum of administrative arrangement (MoAA) between the Department for Education and Parliament SA (2020–2024) is in place to support a range of programs aimed at teachers and students to promote active citizenship and a better understanding of civics and citizenship overall.

However, most actions have been undertaken by Parliament SA in 2023.

These include:

- a Civics in the City grant program delivered in partnership with CCYP¹⁴² with 26 schools approved for grant funding in 2023¹⁴³
- video linked incursions offered for regional trips¹⁴⁴
- quarterly regional trips offered once per term for students in Years 3 to 12 with 4,100 students participating throughout 2022 and 2023
- Civics and Citizenship professional development for Teachers held in Term 2, 2023 with support from the Commissioner for Children and Young People
- regular professional development courses through Parliament SA.¹⁴⁵
- general school tour programs
- Step Outside the Classroom – Teacher Professional Learning¹⁴⁶; and
- South Australian Constitutional Convention for Year 11 students (included 65 students and 23 teachers) with 12 students selected to attend the National Schools Convention in Canberra.¹⁴⁷

Future Improvements

Young people describe a lack of education as one of many barriers they face to enrolment and voting.¹⁴⁸

To break down this and other barriers to civics knowledge and participation, proposed actions include:

- amending the Act to make it easier to enrol to vote, including allowing people to enrol on election day
- developing a comprehensive civics and citizenship curriculum, including developing a centralised hub dedicated to South Australian civics and citizenship learning and engagement opportunities to inform students, teachers, and parents
- implementing comprehensive social media campaigning that reaches young people
- schools reviewing any policies or practices that preclude them from assisting young people to provisionally enrol at 16 years; and
- reducing the voting age from 18 to 16 years for local government council elections.

Promise #2: Engage and Empower Digital Learning Experiences

The Department for Education's Digital Strategy promises that all children and students have engaging and empowering digital learning experiences, which will help to improve overall education achievement and better prepare them to live, learn and work in the future.¹⁴⁹

Promise kept?

Strong evidence



Government Plan

The Department for Education's Digital Strategy aims to support students to have age-appropriate access to devices and internet connectivity for learning when they need it.

The Digital Strategy aims to:

- establish a primary school device program to deliver an average digital device access ratio of 1 device per every 3 students in all primary schools. The program will provide a cost per capita amount to primary schools to help purchase devices for use at school
- establish a secondary school device program to help ensure secondary students have access to personal digital devices for their learning, at school and at home. The program will provide guidance on 1:1 device models at the school level, and a costed per capita amount made available to each school to support purchase of devices for School Card students who need them
- provide cost savings to schools and families who purchase devices by leveraging the Department's bulk-purchasing power; and
- deliver ongoing access to the Internet for School Card students who do not currently have this access to enable them to study and learn from home.¹⁵⁰

Why this Assessment?

The Department for Education in implementing the strategy and during the year achieved the following outcomes as detailed below. It is not known what Independent and Catholic schools are doing in this area.

Evidence of activity to improve outcomes

School Device Program

In August 2023, the Department for Education approved both the Primary¹⁵¹ and Secondary Student Digital Device Policies¹⁵² and all schools have until 2026 to comply.¹⁵³ To help schools, the Department offers a funding allocation of 50% of the cost per digital device, with schools who participate in the program required to fund the remaining 50%. All families with students on a School Card are not required to pay for their child's digital device. To date, a total of 226 schools have been accepted into the first year of the program, with a total of 15,262 devices distributed to eligible students so far.¹⁵⁴

Increasing accessibility to the Internet

The Department for Education launched the Student Home Internet Program at the end of 2022 to provide a wireless internet connection (through a SIM card and Wi-Fi dongle) to any South Australian government school student who does not have adequate access to the Internet from home. The installation of free internet and Wi-Fi at regional SA public schools has been completed and the installation process for all metropolitan public schools is underway.¹⁵⁵

In addition, the Department is participating in the Australian Government’s School Student Broadband Initiative to provide up to 30,000 families across Australia who are currently without NBN access at home, with free access through to 31 December 2025.¹⁵⁶ Families are identified and nominated by participating schools, education authorities, charities, and community organisations. The Department has nominated approximately 14,000 eligible South Australian families for this national initiative. Families have until 31 December 2024 to activate their free NBN service.¹⁵⁷

Future Improvements

To ensure equity amongst all students when it comes to engaging and empowering digital learning:

- SA schools in low socio-economic areas adopting proactive measures to ensure all their students have access to appropriate digital devices and reliable access to the Internet in all households.

Promise #3: Increase Digital Access and Inclusion

The government promises better access to the Internet for all households by designing a Digital Inclusion Strategy.

Promise kept?
Little evidence



Government Plan

The Department for Premier and Cabinet’s states it is ‘working to close the digital divide by co-designing a Digital Inclusion Strategy for South Australia. We are working with national advocacy groups, government agencies and the community’.¹⁵⁸

In 2021, the government asked the public, especially those with a lack of digital access, to provide feedback on the concept of developing a Digital Inclusion Strategy. Submissions closed in December 2021 and to date there has been no public strategy released.

Why this Assessment?

Digital Inclusion consists of (1) Access to the Internet, (2) affordability of the Internet, and (3) ability to use the Internet safely, sometimes referred to as digital literacy.¹⁵⁹

The Australian Digital Inclusion Index measures digital inclusion in these three dimensions: access, affordability, and digital ability.¹⁶⁰ Although inclusion is slowly increasing over time, South Australia is below the national average overall, and is the third least digitally inclusive state. In 2022, South Australia’s index score was 72 compared to the national average of 73.2.¹⁶¹ Regional centres are especially affected with digital exclusion index scores for Anangu Pitjantjatara at 53.9, Maralinga Tjarutja at 54.4 and Coober Pedy and Peterborough both at 61.4. The highest digital access was recorded in the metropolitan areas with all suburbs sitting above 70.0. The highest regional areas include Mount Barker at 74.7 and Roxby Downs at 74.4.¹⁶²

In respect to affordability, 100% of Australians in the lowest income quintile, and 48.3% of those in the second lowest quintile, would have to pay more than 5% of their household income for ‘quality, uninterrupted connectivity’. For the second lowest quintile, this is an improvement since 2021 when 84.1% would have to pay more than 5% of their household income for quality internet access, although the report states that this is also a reflection of the lower price for internet access overall.¹⁶³

Evidence of activity to improve outcomes

In 2023, the government sought to understand the elements of inclusion related to access to the internet via engagement with Telecommunications Providers, First Nations peoples and other interest groups, such as the SA Council of Social Services (SACOSS), Regional Development Authorities (RDA), and Local Government Association (LGA).¹⁶⁴

As part of this, in August 2023, a public consultation about 'Access and connectivity to the Internet'¹⁶⁵ was held on the Government's Engagement Platform YourSay, resulting in nearly 200 responses from across the state. Having this information means the state is well placed to improve connectivity where it is most needed when opportunities to apply for Commonwealth funding or strategic partnerships with providers become available.¹⁶⁶

Free Wi-Fi is available in a range of public places and spaces, including across the City of Adelaide and many other councils, at most libraries and public schools, in hospitals, at train stations, and on Adelaide trams. In November 2023, the Federal Minister for Communications announced an upgraded free Wi-Fi network for metropolitan Adelaide. Existing infrastructure was replaced with high-speed fibre networks and 25% more access points throughout the city were installed.¹⁶⁷

Most libraries in South Australia provide free Wi-Fi access. There are over 130 libraries funded by both the state and local government, with the state government responsible for funding of Wi-Fi services. However, the free Wi-Fi on offer is limited to 5GB per day.¹⁶⁸ In addition to free Wi-Fi many libraries offer their members computer access. Tourism SA provides free Wi-Fi spots in 60 locations throughout the state.¹⁶⁹

Note: The Index threshold scores for the four groups are: Highly excluded (45 or below); Excluded (above 45 and below 61); Included (61 and below 80); Highly included (80 and above).

Future Improvements

All South Australians should have access to Wi-Fi, including in public spaces and without jeopardising their right to privacy.

Proposed actions include:

- providing clear information on where free Wi-Fi funded by state and local government can be accessed
- expanding access to free public Wi-Fi to include all public buildings, public transport, and community infrastructure such as libraries and school grounds, especially in regional and remote areas
- upgrading public transport infrastructure and facilities, including bus, train and tram stops, stations and shelters. (These upgrades should include a modernised and environmentally sustainable transport system with USB charging ports); and
- upgrading internet access in regional and remote areas.

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