

NURTURE SELF, NURTURE OTHERS

Summary of Mental Health Consultation Findings

Prepared by Youth and Family Services
November 2022

OVERVIEW

'Nurture Self, Nurture Others' was an event delivered by the City of Greater Dandenong Youth and Family Services during Mental Health Week in October 2022. The event brought together Year 7-8 students from eight local secondary schools to participate in a day of interactive workshops and activities, to build their mental health literacy and equip young people with positive coping and selfcare strategies.

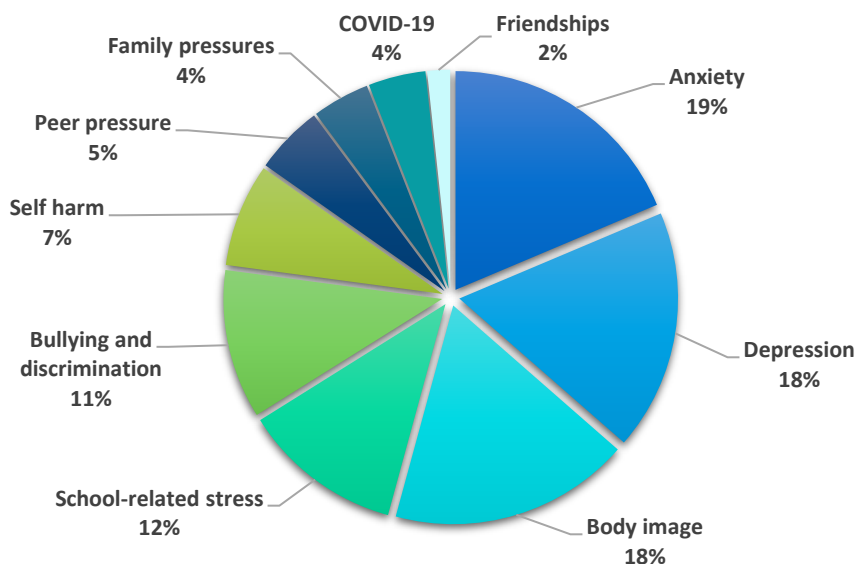
A consultation was embedded within the event to capture feedback regarding young people's greatest concerns regarding mental health, and identify priority areas for action to support youth mental health. A survey was conducted via Mentimeter, comprising of three key questions:

- **What do you think is the biggest issue relating to mental health, for young people in Greater Dandenong?** (Multiple choice)
- **What are your biggest concerns relating to mental health?** (Open ended response)
- **What solutions does the community need to invest in to support young people's mental health?** (Multiple choice)

A total of 120 young people completed the survey. A summary of their responses is outlined below.

BIGGEST ISSUES

Students were asked to identify what they believe to be the biggest mental health issue impacting young people in our community. Anxiety (19%), closely followed by depression and body image (18%) emerged as the three greatest issues, reported by almost one fifth of participants. School-related stress (12%), bullying and discrimination (11%), and self-harm (7%) were also key concerns. To a lesser extent, students also prioritised peer pressure (5%), family pressures, COVID-19 (4%) and friendships (2%).



KEY CONCERNS

Young people were prompted to elaborate on their biggest issues of concern regarding mental health. The most commonly cited concerns were those relating to social pressures, such as bullying and peer influence (referenced by 18%). Young people mentioned both actual and perceived pressures, including fears of judgement and exclusion, as well as body image concerns. Another issue identified by young people was related to family pressures (referenced by 11%). Students described having a lack of voice and autonomy, and a shared concern that parents and carers do not understand mental health and *“do not take issues seriously”*.

“Young people are scared about what others think of them. We cannot express ourselves at school without feeling judged.”

“During tests I overthink that I won’t get good grades and worry about how my parents would see me, like I’m a disgrace in our family.”

Another key theme to emerge was concerns regarding help-seeking and access to support (cited by 16%). There was a general consensus that *“young people aren’t getting enough help”* – which participants believe to be exacerbated by stigma and poor understanding of support pathways. Students shared worries that young people are delaying help-seeking, which allows time for mental health concerns to intensify. Participants urged that more needs to be done to normalise conversations about mental health, so that young people feel more comfortable voicing their concerns.

“My biggest concerns are the amount of people who have to cope with mental illness alone and don’t know how to find the resources to help them.”

“Not speaking up because you feel something that no one else could relate to.”

“Mental health services should be more accessible and less stigmatised. There should be more avenues for personal and family counselling.”

Echoing findings from the first question, young people also reported concerns relating to stress, anxiety, and depression. In particular, students described how these issues impact social connections, by contributing to isolation and withdrawal. Alarming, a significant number of young people cited issues relating to self-harm and suicidal ideation (reported by 16%). Students raised concerns about not having a trusted person who they can disclose these behaviours to, and commented that *“not enough is being done to prevent suicide”*.

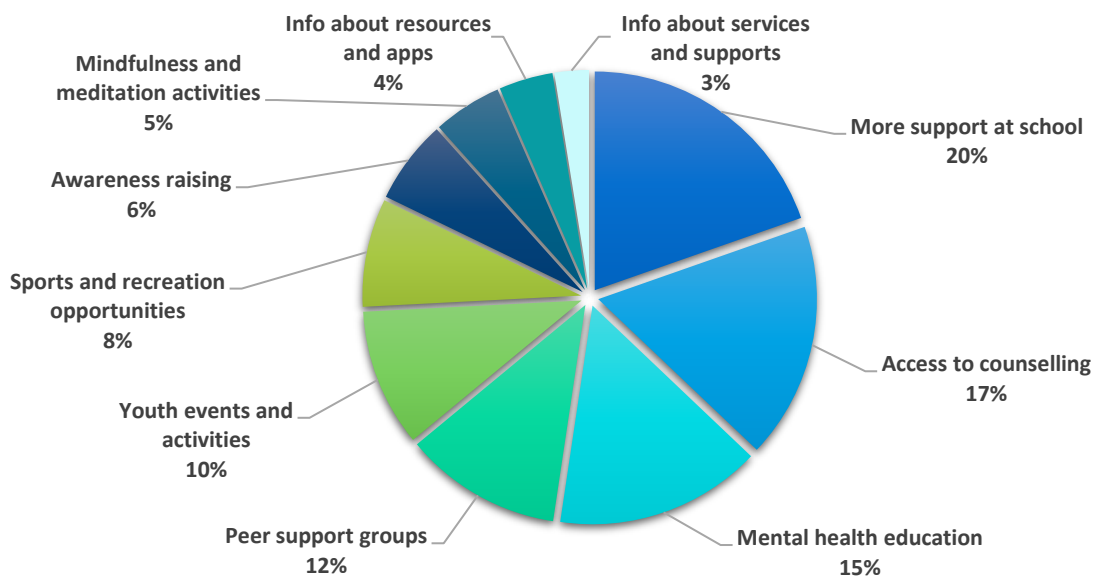
“Suicidal thoughts and being able to talk to people confidentially.”

“My worries are that the bullying I am experiencing will lead me to self-harm and suicide.”

SOLUTIONS

Lastly, young people were asked to identify their top three priorities, where greater investment is required to support youth mental health. The top three solutions to emerge were greater investment in school-based supports (20%), access to counselling (17%), and mental health education (15%) – closely followed by peer support groups (12%), youth events and activities (10%), and sports and recreation opportunities (8%). This highlights the need for a variety of psychosocial supports, to assist young people in managing their mental health concerns, while building resilience.

Findings also demonstrate a need for greater investment in awareness raising initiatives, such as social media campaigns, to build mental health literacy. To a lesser extent, students also reported wanting improved access to mindfulness and meditation activities, information about mental health resources and apps, as well as information to help them navigate local services and supports.



CONCLUSION

This report provides a snapshot of the thoughts and experiences of early secondary students regarding mental health. While the sample may be small, the data is consistent with findings from Youth and Family Services' [COVID-19 Research Project \(2020\)](#) and [Youth Summit Report \(2022\)](#) which identify stress and mental health to be key concerns for young people in Greater Dandenong.

This report highlights the critical role of schools in supporting young people's mental health, through the provision of information and support, while also mitigating stressors relating to academic performance, bullying and peer pressure. Findings demonstrate a need for community services to enhance information sharing and referral pathways, to build young people's knowledge and confidence to seek help early, whilst bolstering the delivery of social activities to provide an accessible 'entry point' for young people.

Findings will assist to inform the development of the City of Greater Dandenong Youth and Family Strategy Year 3 Action Plan.