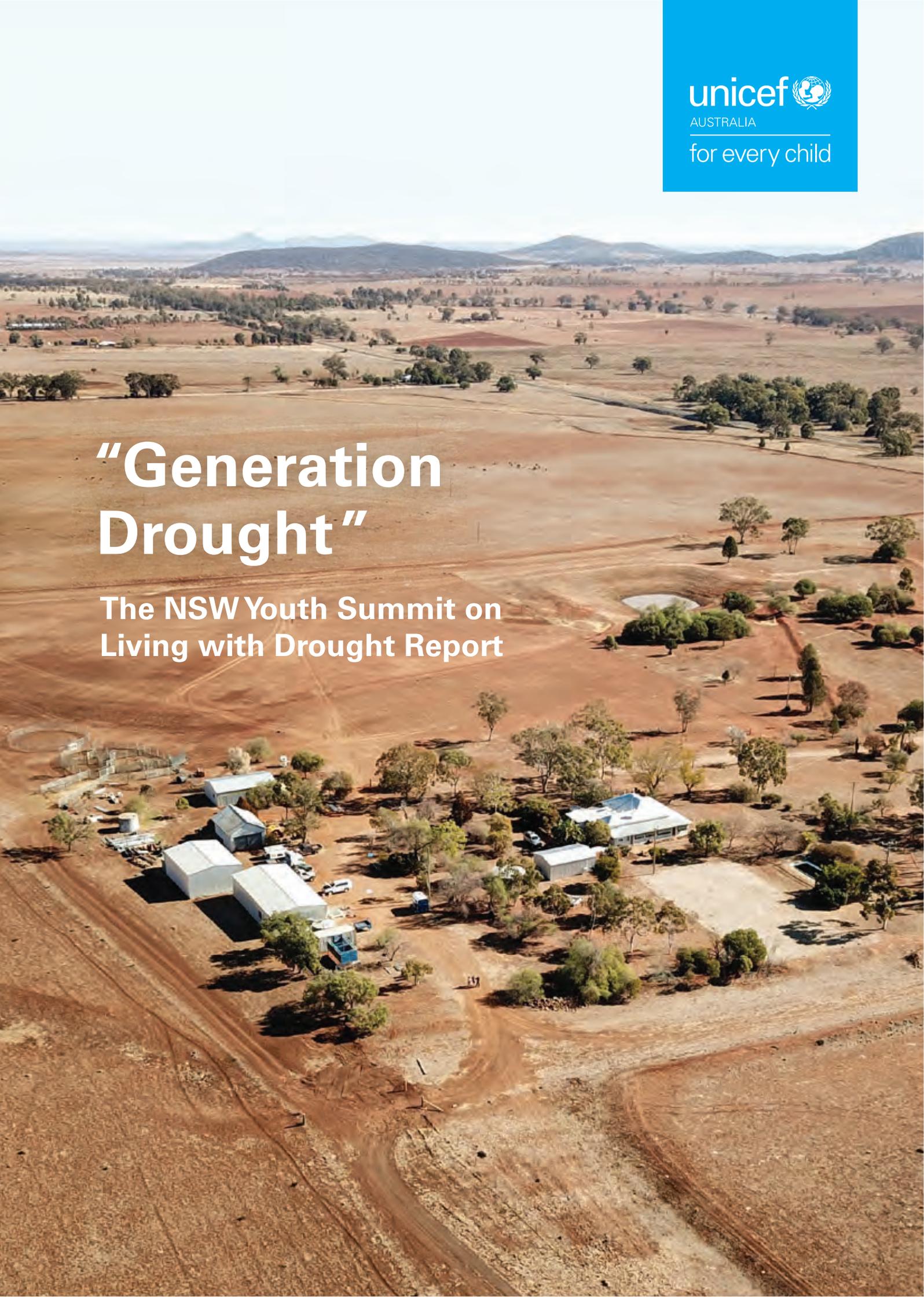


“Generation Drought”

The NSW Youth Summit on Living with Drought Report



Acknowledgements

The authors of this report would like to acknowledge the generous contributions of the young people who planned and participated in the *NSW Youth Summit on Living with Drought* (the summit) and contributed to UNICEF Australia's work throughout 2019. Thank you for speaking your minds bravely and with such clarity. We would also like to thank the many parents and community leaders who have generously given their time to build our understanding of the complex challenges of living, working and parenting through periods of prolonged drought.

We also warmly recognise and appreciate the rich professional knowledge and lived experiences generously shared by the members of our summit Advisory Group. These insights helped us to understand the complex picture of drought, remoteness and mental health and wellbeing. Thank you for being supportive partners in a process of real discovery.

Finally, we would like to thank UNICEF Australia staff who supported this project, in particular Sue-Ellen Simic and Brinsley Marlay.

The summit was a second phase of work for UNICEF Australia following the report, *In their own words: the hidden impact of prolonged drought on children and young people*, which was released in February 2019.

Authors

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Thank You to Our Supporters



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Executive summary

In late 2018, UNICEF Australia embarked on a trip to northern rural NSW to talk to children and young people about their experiences of living with drought. What we saw and heard from young people began to paint a picture that was both impressive and worrying. Impressive in the compassion, insights, maturity, and resilience we witnessed. Worrying for the toll this drought was taking on their wellbeing. We asked young people to assess their current wellbeing and imagine what they might be like in a year's time. Almost all of them imagined themselves to be worse, many substantially so.

Now it is a year later. The drought has not only continued, but worsened, and as we write this report, vast swathes of NSW is engulfed in fire. Bushfires are now substantially impacting many regional communities struggling with this same drought that has made these fires so dangerous and has already resulted in the tragic loss of lives, homes, wildlife and ecosystems.

Following the publication of our report, *In their own words: the hidden impact of prolonged drought on children and young people*¹ (the Drought Report), UNICEF Australia began to explore ways to develop a deeper understanding of, not only how drought was impacting on young people in NSW, but also what insights and solutions they would like to bring to the discussion on drought response – now and for future droughts. The decision to organise a summit, in consultation with NSW Health, was taken in order to achieve these goals. It was also intended to provide a platform for young people to share their stories, needs, and hopes with the wider public. Lastly, we wanted, through careful programming, to design an experience that could support and enhance the wellbeing of the young people in attendance. These aims were underpinned by our intention to provide the conditions for building new support networks for young people from all over the state, and to give young people a brief respite from the daily realities of living with drought.

The model for this summit was designed carefully around young people who, for the most part, had not previously been involved in public discussions about the impact of drought on their peers or communities. Aware of the sense of urgency that young people are feeling, we designed a summit that:

- quickly established the state of play;
- had a high level of youth participation;
- was focused on solutions and good practices that are potentially scalable; and
- connected young people to decision-makers and to media.

Over the course of 2019, UNICEF Australia has consulted and collaborated widely with young people, their parents and communities, and service-providers and stakeholders living and working on the frontlines of what they describe as the worst drought in living memory. The *NSW Youth Summit on Living with Drought* was designed in collaboration not only with young people but also many individuals and organisations doing great work within these communities. This report is a culmination of this collaboration and the issues, insights, and ideas that have been shared and grown out of this work.

Through the manner of the design and delivery of the summit, UNICEF Australia in essence adopted an action research approach – engaged in a continual process of listening, analysing, re-evaluating and listening some more. As a result, in addition to providing an overview of the summit itself, this report provides analysis and guidance on a number of key aspects of drought response and young people. Specifically, the report highlights:

- the human impact of prolonged drought with a focus on the situation of young people in regional and remote New South Wales;
- a need for improved drought preparedness, and coordination at a local, state/territory and national level;
- coordination of drought response and leadership;
- mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) models and services mapping;
- nexus of MPHSS, remoteness and a changing climate; and
- being ready for the future.

As with our previous Drought Report, it is UNICEF Australia's hope that in sharing a thorough analysis of the NSW Youth Living with Drought summit, that we will further influence good practice into the future for all stakeholders seeking to better support children and young people living with drought. It is also our hope that these stakeholders will seek new ways to reach out to young people, listen to what they have to say, and work with them as partners in drought response and the future of regional NSW.



1

Introduction: Reconceptualising drought in Australia

1.1 A need for clear strategic direction

In commentary about life on the land and the challenges facing our country and its people, it is frequently said that at any given moment, some part of Australia will be in drought.

Given that Australia is such a dry country, with a long history of periodic severe drought, it seems reasonable to ask – where is the comprehensive national policy framework and how is it being practically implemented at a state and territory level?

In terms of responses to the immediate and long-term picture of drought in Australia, the last two decades and successive governments have largely delivered ‘policy on the run’, rather than the substantive policy work that is required.

It would seem that, while our leaders unquestionably have goodwill towards our farmers, this has not necessarily translated into well-targeted and effective policy that identifies and provides adequate strategic guidance - that is, policies that connect agriculture with the impacts of climate change and the wellbeing of regional and remote Australia, the management of natural resources, and in particular, water management.

The federal government is currently working to develop its first national drought policy since 1992. And while genuine direction setting is a welcome development, questions have also been raised by various stakeholders about its core strategic intent and reach, its coherence, scope and the breadth of consultation being conducted.

Developing a comprehensive, practical, predictable, and equitable national drought policy and strategy, based on

the broadest possible consultation, is hard work, involving multiple and frequently competing stakeholder views and interests. At the same time, farmers, small and large business owners, young people and communities across regional and remote Australia, who are at the frontline of extreme weather, consider themselves to be facing the consequences of inaction.

In fact, participants at the summit openly wondered if governments had undertaken any long-term thinking since the Millennium Drought. They specifically queried whether any preparedness measures and infrastructure had been put in place for better management of droughts in the future.

Additionally, the Australian public has become more acutely aware of this picture - as we watch our farmers and communities across regional and remote Australia face the worst drought in living memory, and now battle fierce and unprecedented bushfire seasons.

The impact of drought in Australia, which is often devastating, can include:

- reduced water and food security;
- the loss of livelihoods - and a sharp rise in unemployment and poverty;
- education disruption;
- family separation;
- post-disaster distress and a reduced ability to cope over time;
- the loss of livestock and crops;
- significant (skilled) migration from regional and remote areas; and
- land degradation including vegetation loss, soil erosion and water contamination.

In developing a national drought policy and strategy, the federal government has the opportunity to be guided by existing reviews, including the Productivity Commission report on drought support (2009)² and, most recently, the

Auditor-General's report (2019).³ Over the last decade, sector and stakeholder advice on ways governments could strengthen their approach has emphasised a need for:

- a substantive and predictable national drought policy that is properly framed with regard to climate change and variability;
- an overarching policy framework for slow onset hazards in Australia;
- coherence between policy direction and programmatic responses;
- high level decision making in the national interest (control over water rights belongs almost exclusively to states and territories, with limited Commonwealth powers.)⁴
- a holistic approach to drought that connects agriculture, wellbeing in regional and remote Australia, and natural resources management;
- a focus on preparedness and risk migration rather than short-term crisis management;
- long term thinking and significant investment in water systems and water security (e.g. comprehensive national review of water infrastructure);
- a clear plan for each stage of drought, including planning and support for recovery periods;
- recognition that the primary responsibility for managing drought rests with farmers – and corresponding resourcing of adaptation practices;
- drought preparedness and measures (e.g. tax measures that assist farmers to build reserves in good times and manage income across the drought cycle); and
- improved climate data and models that can be used to better predict tipping points and triggers for drought.

The 2018 National Drought Agreement, the Future Drought Fund, and the rolling suite of financial measures announced by the federal government this year will add some value to existing arrangements. Arguably, as the name of the Future Drought Fund implies, investments will assist farmers of the future; but perhaps may be too little too late for the farmers and farming families of today.

This drought has raised critical questions about the role a federal government in a high- income country should play in protecting and supporting farmers and drought-affected communities, particularly in terms of policy. In particular, it highlights the need for a flexible policy environment that can adapt to changes in new information, research, and farming methods and technologies. At present, the Australian Government appears to have largely taken a market-based approach to drought, focussing on keeping money in the pockets of farmers, small regional businesses and local councils. For some, this financial relief has been seen a welcome development. Others criticise it as insufficient – a short-term measure without any comprehensive consultation, collaboration or planning for the future.

The Farm Household Allowance (FHA) is the Australian Government's current income support payment for farmers

experiencing financial hardship, irrespective of its cause. It is an important safety net for farmers and has a dual purpose of providing support and assisting structural change. The independent review into the FHA in early 2019 found that there was no system of data collection taking place to assess its performance. Based on our consultations throughout the process of designing and implementing the summit, the majority of stakeholders tend to believe that, while short-term financial measures do provide much-needed relief for farmers and communities, it doesn't solve the greater problem. That is, the need for long-term planning (including climate change adaptation) government coordination (e.g. around water management, including the Murray Darling Basin) and sustainable community resilience. Given that the severe impact of drought and climate change on agriculture and regional communities is national in scope, it follows that there should be leadership at the national level to consider and address these issues in an ongoing and flexible way.

1.2 A need for leadership and cooperation

"How do we manage 'drought' rather than just manage in times of drought?" This is a profoundly important policy question. It requires a shift in mindset, a steady hand from Australian governments and a common vision for the future of one of the driest continents on earth.

At the summit, young people demonstrated a relatively high level of literacy in relation to the drought policy environment. During one Call to Action (see page 32) drafting session, one young person remarked, "we want politicians to leave politics at the door". When describing the politics of drought and regional and remote communities, another participant stated, "I have this recurring feeling like we are puppets on a string". On this same subject, another participant described the last decade of drought policy as a "no new ideas, just a revolving door of reviews, funding announcements and (political) appointments".

In early December 2019, the Australian Government announced Machinery of Government changes and Mr Shane Stone was announced as the Coordinator-General of Drought and North Queensland Floods Agency. One year earlier, in August 2018 the Prime Minister had announced:

- the appointment of Major General Stephen Day as the Coordinator-General of Drought;
- the establishment of a Joint Agency Drought Taskforce (to be led by Major-General Stephen Day);
- the creation of a Northern Basin Commissioner (replaced in August 2019 by the Basin water resources overseer, an Inspector General for the Murray–Darling Basin);
- the appointment of the Honourable Barnaby Joyce as the Special Envoy for Drought Assistance and Recovery.

In his role as Special Envoy, Mr Barnaby Joyce was tasked with “listening to affected communities so that he could feed back a deeper picture of the human and economic impact of drought, including positive examples of resilience”⁵. The driving idea for appointment was to get boots on the ground. And while he visited a number of drought-affected communities, no final report was produced for the consideration of the Prime Minister or for Cabinet, as would be standard practice for this role. This appointment officially ceased in May 2019.

At a state level, the NSW Government announced a dedicated Office of Drought Response in late 2019, which is a positive step. It will operate from within the Department of Planning, Industry and Environment. The announcement of a dedicated office followed on from the news that Mr Jock Laurie had been terminated from his role as the NSW Drought Coordinator less than one year after he was appointed. Mr Jock Laurie served previously as the President of the National Farmers Federation and the NSW Land and Water Commissioner. The Deputy Premier of NSW, Mr John Barilaro, indicated that the dedicated Office of Drought response was established in response to the “the crippling effects of drought that have reached beyond the farm gate and are impacting families, businesses and local economies right across regional NSW”⁶

The issue of water management is central to the question of federalism, government cooperation and drought response. The management of the Murray Darling Basin

has been deemed the largest ecological disaster the modern history of Australia’s river systems. It is an important example, though not the only instance, of how politics can get in the way of good policy and decision-making in relation to Australia’s water management. This purpose of this report is not to explore the Murray Darling Basin operations or effectiveness in close detail. However, there were some headline observations from the Royal Commission that are relevant to the concerns raised by summit participants. These include:

- the Murray-Darling Basin Plan has a distinct lack of consideration for the catastrophic risk of climate change (and this should be central in any re-write/ renegotiation);
- Commonwealth officials committed “gross maladministration, negligence and unlawful actions” (and the original architects of the plan were driven by politics, not science and evidence);
- evidence of widespread water theft;
- the Murray Darling Basin Authority (MDBA) failed to comply with the *Water Act 2007* and there is a need for wholesale reform;
- there is a crisis of confidence in the governance arrangements of the Murray-Darling Basin;
- a simplification of existing agreements is required (water is a national asset however under existing arrangements each state has specific licencing arrangements);
- better engagement with Aboriginal people is required (a call for cultural flows to improve the spiritual, cultural, environmental and social conditions across the 40 Aboriginal nations that fall within the Basin⁷).





In discussions about the Murray-Darling Basin, summit participants asked – “how did we get here?” They, like many Australian young people, asked “how the scale of the problem could go on for so long?” And, “how could a multibillion-dollar program with involvement from federal, state, and local governments and the Murray-Darling Basin authority run off the rails so badly? Water and land management and governance was a strong focus for summit participants. In part, because the Murray-Darling Basin runs past some of their properties and they have witnessed the governance nightmares and community pressures firsthand. And, fundamentally, because young people understand that unless leaders can set politics aside and focus on new policy settings for climate related challenges in the 21st century, they will inherit a country in decline.

At the summit, young people made a clear demand that decision-makers declare the drought a national disaster or an emergency.

This idea has, in fact, been debated by national decision-makers. Drought was formerly a part of Australia’s natural disaster framework, though there was a leaning away from this approach. Similarly, in the political environment, any reference to the term ‘crisis’ is considered to be charged language. Successive governments and both major parties have previously stressed that drought is neither a crisis nor a natural disaster because it is gradual and creeping in its manifestation, is part of our usual climate cycle and has no clear termination point. In October 2019, the Leader of the Opposition, Mr Anthony Albanese, stated that, “...if the drought continues much longer, it could also become a threat to our food security. It is fast becoming a national emergency”.⁸

No matter how leaders may choose to classify or describe drought, it is worth noting that in March 2019 the UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction called for countries to step up their efforts to reduce the impacts of drought. In addition, the Sendai Framework on Disaster Risk Reduction⁹ and the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change¹⁰ both included slow onset disasters in their scope.

While drought may not always lead to disaster (as we traditionally understand it), its effects can intensify and result in chronic consequences where it interacts with existing and entrenched community vulnerability and a lack of preparedness.

Mainstreaming drought risk reduction requires long-term political commitment. For this reason, there is value in establishing clear bipartisan support and cooperation for an overarching policy framework, response mechanism and ongoing resourcing. This will not be easy achieved, given the inherent tensions between the Liberal and National parties; accusations of pork barrelling; the vested interests of irrigators and mining companies; and strong criticism from environmental groups.

Additionally, one of the most profoundly important and least recognised stakeholders’ groups are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and traditional owners whose right to water is not properly protected in law or policy.

In a global context of large-scale patterns of climate variability and uncertainty, bipartisan support is essential to developing a culture of disaster prevention and resilience.

1.3

Key lessons from international drought responses

In *Unchartered Waters: The New Economics of Water Scarcity and Variability* (2017) the World Bank describes drought as “misery in slow motion”.¹¹ It is this slow movement of drought that frequently makes it subject to political inaction, indecision or procrastination. Examples of slow onset hazards or disasters include famine, soil and water salination, water-logging, coral bleaching.

Internationally, there is recognition that drought and water insecurity have far-reaching, catastrophic and growing consequences. In aggregate, slow onset disasters affect more people globally. Since the 1970’s, the global land mass affected by drought has doubled.¹² Additionally, in coming decades, the world will be defined by water insecurity and associated issues - such as food insecurity, mass displacement, disease, stunting and resource-related violence and conflict. Globally, it appears that our level of political and public response to hazards and disasters is based on how rapidly or gradually they manifest. In this regard, Australia is not alone in the pressing need to reconceptualise drought and its unique challenges – there is a global need for a fundamental re-examination and re-boot so that we can adopt a more proactive and robust position.

In a paper titled *Overcoming barriers to proactive response to slow-onset disasters* (2019) UiT The Arctic University of Norway points to key insights that can usefully prompt us to rethink drought response. These include that:

- nearly all disaster research and theory is based on *rapid* onset disasters;
- slow onset disasters tend to evoke political inaction, even when we have early warning data;



- the geographically dispersed nature of drought impacts dilutes its perceived severity – there is a need to educate the public on drought;
- drought should be included in national disaster risk reduction coordination and decision-making architecture - for example, a multi-sectoral national platform that includes oversight (coordination, implementation and monitoring) for drought response within its scope;
- generalised (all hazards) disaster management strategies are good practice in rapid-onset disasters, but are inappropriate in the context of slow-moving hazards/ disasters;
- there is a need to broaden the mandate of specialized disaster agencies to include drought.¹³

1.4

What does this mean for Australia?

Ensuring that we have effective frameworks and tools to practically operationalise drought risk reduction, response and recovery, is critical. While improved coordination may appear to be an immense task, it is both crucial and achievable to protect people (and their wellbeing), their livelihoods, communities and regional and remote economies. Furthermore, it is essential that we better understand the realities and risks for drought affected communities, including the most vulnerable members of those communities. If we don’t understand the picture of vulnerability at a community level, we cannot be prepared for future droughts.

With increased and enduring climate variability and extreme weather events, political inaction is most likely to become less tolerable by members of the general public. On this basis, it would be neither viable, nor politically wise to attempt to simply wait out the drought. Meanwhile, convenient catch phrases such as “we can’t make it rain”, suggest that responsibility for drought response rests with ‘Mother Nature’ or good fortune, rather than squarely with decision-makers. While governments cannot make it rain, they can better position and prepare us for drought and dryness and a changing climate.

Australia remains one of the most vulnerable nations in relation to natural disasters, despite being highly developed. The *Building Resilience to Natural Disasters in our States and Territories* report forecasts that the total cost of natural disasters will more than double – costing \$39 billion per year by 2050. A relatively low investment now in preparedness, community education and resilience, would significantly reduce the (human) impact and financial burden of disasters in our communities.¹⁴ Governments, in collaboration with businesses, communities and the Not for Profit sector all have an important role in developing and delivering concrete solutions.



2

Summit background

2.1

Why did we do this?

In 2018 UNICEF Australia reviewed public discussion of widespread drought in NSW. We saw that, as with previous droughts, the impacts of drought on children and young people were largely absent from discourse. Not only was there a lack of information available, but it also seemed that few were talking with children and young people about what it was like for them to be living with drought. As a result, we determined to conduct a number of consultations with primary and high school students and their communities in northern rural NSW. This decision, informed by our global mandate to listen to children and involve them in problem solving, aimed to help us paint an initial picture of how some children were experiencing drought.

The report, *In their own words: the hidden impact of prolonged drought on children and young people*¹⁵ (the Drought Report) presented a worrying picture of the impact of living in prolonged drought on the overall wellbeing of children and young people. The report also reflected on the high levels of awareness young people had of drought and its impact on farming and rural/regional communities, and the capabilities and insights they could bring to discussions about drought responses at all levels (local, state, and federal).

UNICEF Australia recognised the lack of opportunities these children and young people had to contribute to those discussions. This became one impetus for the idea to organise a youth summit. The other factor that inspired our approach was the recognition that young people living with drought were struggling to maintain their wellbeing and many were not seeking, or able to access, additional support.

This year marked the 30th anniversary of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (the Children's Convention) and a year of action for children. The NSW Youth Summit on Living with Drought, organized with support from the NSW Government, was appropriately held during Mental Health Week and was one way we contributed to this international year of action for children.

2.2

Goals of the summit?

The three-day residential summit brought 88 young people (aged 14-25 years) from across NSW together to discuss the challenges they face living with drought and how responses can be improved. It sought to explore the ways young people can be best supported to strengthen resilience, be part of solutions, and become better prepared to reduce the negative impacts of ongoing and future drought. On the final day, service providers and decision-makers attended to enter into the discussions.

In addition, the summit provided an opportunity for young people living with drought to have a break from the land, to work with their peers going through similar struggles, and have an opportunity to connect, engage and reflect, surrounded by Lake Macquarie. The choice of venue was inspired by discussions with the Youth Steering Committee (steering committee), who cited the known psychosocial and emotional benefits of being on, in or near water.

The concrete goals, objectives and outcomes for the summit were also developed largely in partnership with our steering committee and in consultation with a wide range of stakeholders. They were to:

- connect young people from across NSW with their peers to create a support network based on shared experiences of the challenges of living with drought;
- develop a shared understanding of the impact of drought on young people, the current support available (what works, what hasn't worked), and the key gaps that need to be addressed;
- provide a forum for meaningful, action-oriented discussion between young people, policymakers and service providers about how to more effectively support young people and children experiencing drought;
- strengthen confidence in advocacy, analysis, collaboration and leadership among young people attending the summit;
- strengthen awareness of mental health and wellbeing needs, avenues for support, and tools for self-care.



3

Methodology: Summit design & implementation

The summit was organised by UNICEF Australia with a core team. Head of Policy and Advocacy, Amy Lamoin, provided overall management and supervision. Summit Director, Samantha Newman was responsible for day-to-day planning and organisation. Project Support Officer, Sue-Ellen Simic, provided administrative support. Brinsley Marlay, External Communications Manager, coordinated media and communications.

3.1 Financial and in-kind support

A large grant from the NSW Government provided the foundation funding that enabled the summit to be held. The Primary Health Network (PHN) for Murrumbidgee and Dolly's Dream provided additional financial support. Travel costs for those participants living in particularly remote locations throughout NSW were met through flights donated by Qantas.

A number of other organisations also generously supported the summit by providing their expertise through staff and volunteers who supported participants, as well as by providing advice and support on the summit's design. These included representatives from:

- NSW Health, School Link and Got It! Programs
- NSW Health, Western Local Health District
- Headspace
- Rural Adversity Mental Health Program (RAMHP)
- Relationships Australia
- Emerging Minds
- Aboriginal Health and Medical Research Council
- Benevolent Society
- Charles Sturt University

NSW Health worked closely with UNICEF Australia through the design and development process.

3.2 Summit co-design with drought affected young people

As part of its global practice, UNICEF aims to develop programs in consultation with affected children and young people. It was therefore vitally important to UNICEF Australia that this summit be designed through a process of wide consultation and collaboration with all relevant stakeholders, particularly young people living with drought.

By advertising widely through our networks, we were able to select eleven young people aged 14-24 years, with diverse lived experiences, from across drought-affected NSW to form our steering committee. This committee worked with the UNICEF Australia summit team to provide advice, feedback and guidance throughout the planning process. Specifically, they advised on the goals of the summit, the design of the program and the participant application process. They met initially for an in-person planning workshop in Sydney and subsequently met online every three to four weeks over the course of four months. Through a voting process, the youth steering committee selected three Chairs (one under and two over 18 years) who ran meetings and attended Advisory Group meetings (see below) when they were available.

The establishment of the steering committee provided clear value to the summit programming process, particularly in testing assumptions. In a debriefing process, steering committee members said they were able to develop practical skills and gain confidence in their ability to advocate about drought-related issues.

When asked how they would improve the co-design aspect of summit planning, they said benefits would flow from having:

- greater clarity in relation to the roles of steering committee members during the delivery of the summit (noting that a number of steering committee members were involved in panel sessions on day one); and
- an additional face-to-face committee meeting one month prior to the delivery of the summit (unfortunately it was not possible to prioritise this with the available human and financial resources).

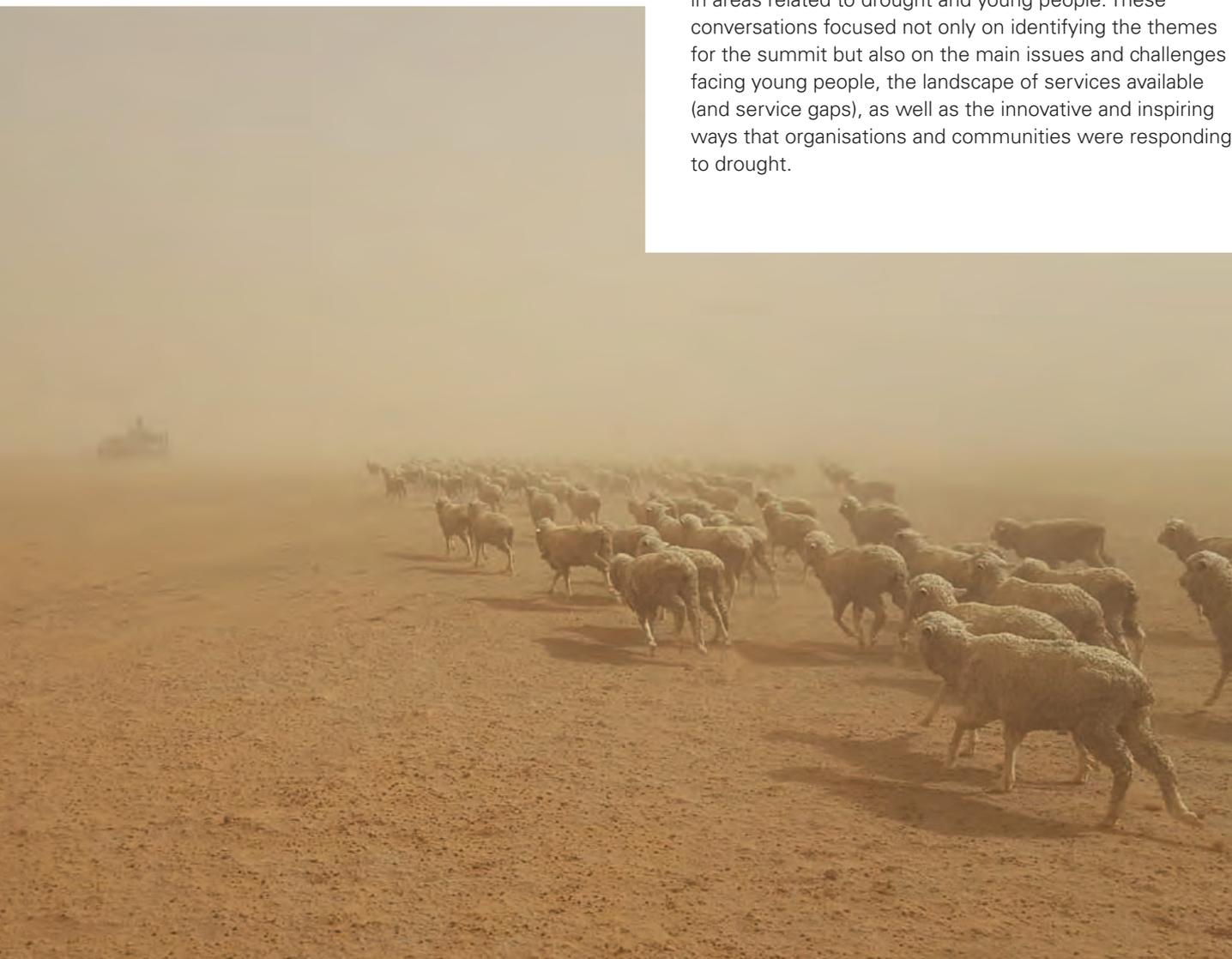
As the design phase unfolded, UNICEF Australia discovered a number of limitations in the engagement of steering committee members in this process:

1. video conferencing was an ineffective, if impossible, medium for conducting a genuine co-design process;
2. data is expensive and internet access is often unreliable in regional and remote NSW; and
3. significant study, work, and family responsibilities meant committee members had limited available time.

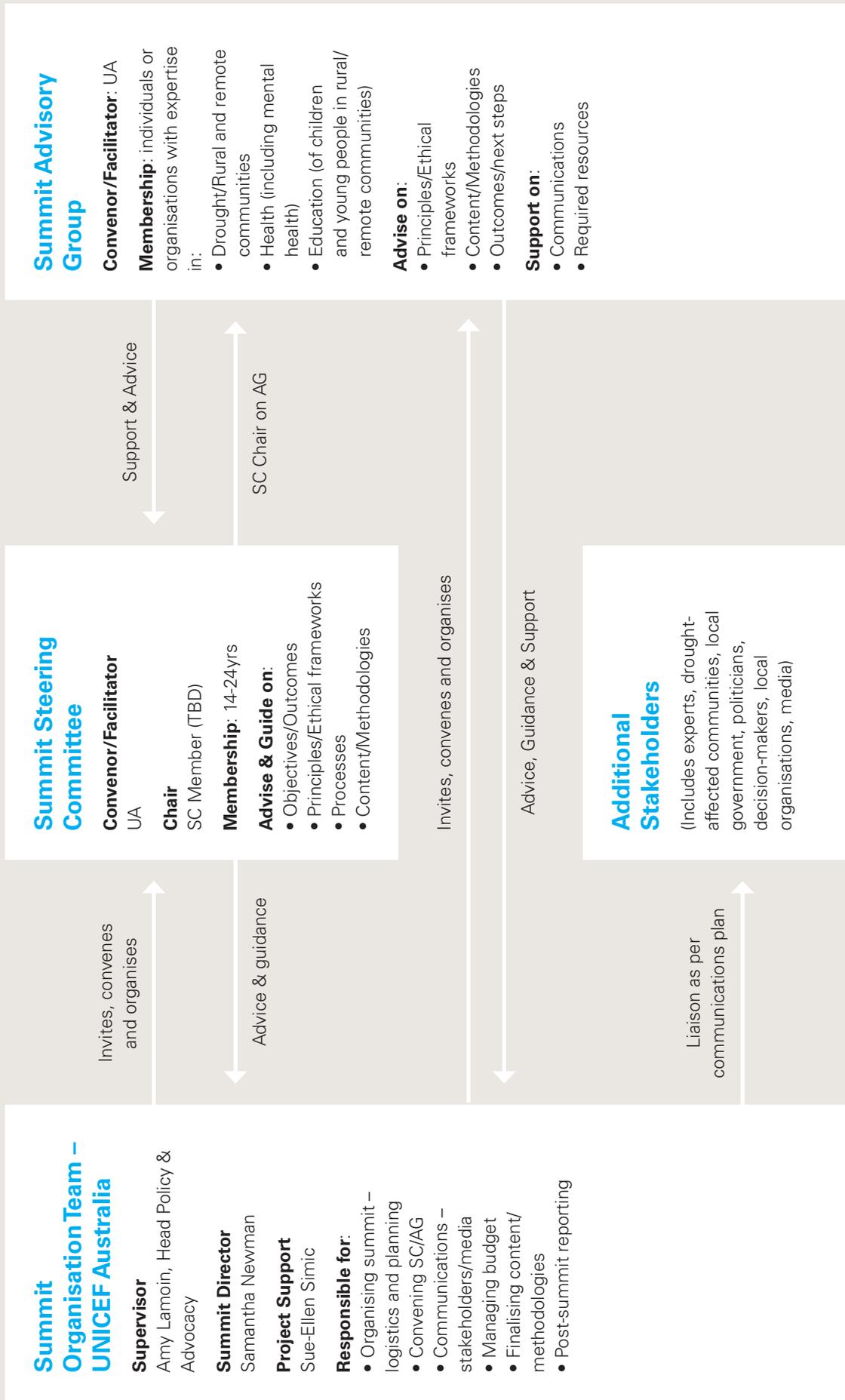
3.3 Stakeholder consultation

In addition to the Youth Steering Committee, UNICEF Australia recognised the importance of ensuring the wide representation of interested stakeholders in the summit process. These included government and non-government organisations, agencies and ministries, which helped ensure that the design and delivery of the summit focussed on relevant themes and adopted suitable methodologies and approaches. To achieve this, UNICEF Australia established the Summit Advisory Group consisting of individuals and organisations with expertise in areas relevant to the summit's themes, namely: drought/rural and remote communities; health in rural and remote communities; children and young people's mental health and well-being; and education.¹⁶ The advisory group met regularly to advise and support summit planning and to discuss policy issues related to children and young people living with drought.

In addition to the advisory group, UNICEF Australia reached out to, and spoke with, over 70 organisations working in areas related to drought and young people. These conversations focused not only on identifying the themes for the summit but also on the main issues and challenges facing young people, the landscape of services available (and service gaps), as well as the innovative and inspiring ways that organisations and communities were responding to drought.



This diagram illustrates the governance structure created to support and guide the summit's design and implementation.





linking rural people to the help they need
ramhip

POLO

4

Summit overview

To meet the objectives established for the summit, UNICEF Australia created a program built around four pillars.

1. **Policy issues:** Examining the policy landscape relevant to drought and young people – What are the key themes, priorities, and issues? What is working? What isn't working?
2. **Solutions and action:** Providing opportunities for participants to identify ways they participate in drought responses in their communities; listening to young people's solutions to the challenges of drought.
3. **Promoting psychosocial support and wellbeing:** Through facilitating conversations and building support networks between young people sharing their stories; providing tools, strategies and advice on self-care and supporting others; providing activities aimed at supporting wellbeing.
4. **Advocating for change:** Working with young people to identify key messages they wish to share with decision and policy-makers.

4.1

Policy issues: Day one panel discussions

The policy context was established through three panel discussions on day one of the summit, focussing on three core themes:

- youth participation and leadership in decision-making;
- community-based initiatives to drought; and
- approaches to mental health and well-being.

The panel discussions included youth representatives and practitioners working to support young people living with drought. (For further details of panel speakers, see ANNEX C). The aims of panel discussions were to:

- share experiences, stories and innovations that inspire and inform responses to drought, involving young people, and
- address underlying challenges for young people living in regional NSW.

The following is a brief summary of the main points raised in each panel.

Panel 1

Youth participation and leadership in decision-making

Sally Downie

Forbes Council Drought Coordinator

The first panel discussion for the summit began with a presentation from Sally Downie, talking about her experiences as the first local government Drought Coordinator at the age of 19, a position funded through the federal government's Drought Communities Program. Sally spoke of some of the challenges she faced as a young woman embarking on a job that had no description, trying to work out what the council could do to help the community. She described a local council employment scheme she oversaw which was developed to address rising local unemployment caused by the drought. The project provided short-term, casual employment on council projects – the first was repairing the local cricket pitch. In her own words:

“ What this did was create a good sense of community because people saw things getting done. ”

Though the project only had enough funding to go for 6 months, Sally explained:

“ At the end of the project they said that it essentially saved their lives because it gave them a reason to get out of bed in the morning and it also gave them the finances to get going. ”

Sally explained that one of the biggest challenges she faced in her role was coming to realise the lack of coordination going on between various service-providers, organisations and agencies working in her local area:

“ One thing I really found was that these organisations were doing great work, but they weren't talking to each other. They were kind of stepping on each other's toes or not sure what the other was doing...and it meant that events were running where there were people that should be there that weren't there or that they could invite another agency to collaborate but they weren't doing that so there were gaps in the system. ”

Work was done to improve coordination and information sharing and encourage greater collaboration between services and organisations, including creating a services network to meet regularly. This improved coordination:

“ ...[It] really created a whole city with an open-door policy – there were no closed doors. So, if a community member or a farmer came to an organisation to ask them about a certain thing, they wouldn't say 'Oh, we don't do that, I don't know' and essentially close the door on them. They'd say, 'We don't do that, but we know who does.' ”

Sally emphasised the importance of local drought coordinators and noted that other councils had begun to create similar roles, although, like her position, many of them are only funded for a short period of time. She also highlighted the importance of ensuring that drought coordinators be recruited from local community members with existing relationships and a strong understanding of farming and community drought-related issues. Sally noted the importance of educating the community on the varied roles local council perform beyond rates and roads:- in her role, she provided advice and support to farmers and members of the community on financial support available and how to access it, accessing services to address specific needs, who to ask for help, or in many cases, “just to have a chat with them about how they're going.”

Rachel Nicholl

Chair of NSW Young Farmers Association (NSWYFA)

The second presentation in this panel was by Rachel Nicholl, the Chair of the NSWYFA, on how young people can enact and move on change. She spoke first of the work NSWYFA has done over several years in advocating for a shift in policy in relation to climate change within the broader NSW Farmers Association. This shift began in 2015 when NSWYFA were successful in inserting two new motions allowing NSW Farmers to support members' work to address climate change and the need to move away from fossil fuels and closer to renewable sources.¹⁷ This work has continued and recently, NSWYFA:

“ ...achieved the motion that the government support the research and development of alternative power sources for tractors and other farm machinery that can effectively make the range and recharge of current technologies. ”

Rachel's involvement in this work had a huge impact on her:

“ My passion for change came from what I saw. My love of advocacy came when I realised it was the key to changing the things that I saw. ”



Big changes are also coming in the areas of technology and automation. Rachel spoke about the impact this was having on jobs and that are emerging out of this new industry. Seventy five percent of the fastest growing occupations will call for STEM-based skills. She spoke of the work she's been involved in in Lithgow, where youth unemployment is 14.2 per cent, to address skills gaps, increase knowledge and access career paths – both traditional and entrepreneurial – for young people in the community, noting:

“ As a generation, we have to be enterprising – not only career-wise, but with our advocacy as well. We are a generation unlike any other with our uptake of technology, digitally, virtually. We're connected on multiple platforms, talking and sharing the things we care about. ”

And because of this, Rachel said, “we've got to plan for where the world is going”

Rachel ended her presentation by sharing her thoughts on the ways that advocacy presents a vehicle for young people to participate in the change they want to see and the importance of collaborating with others to advance their issues. She spoke of the need to recognise the strong emotions and differing viewpoints within communities concerning drought.

She advised young people advocating for change to engage others by

“ joining the dots for people [to] ensure they see an element of themselves and the capability of being involved in a way that resonates for them. ”

She encouraged people to seek out difference and to try to listen to others with an open mind, adding:

“ Some of you may be a little frustrated, some a little worried, perhaps, many of you optimistic. A lot of you want to break new ground when it comes to action and collaboration. And to challenge the same old dialogue we've been hearing. We know there's no silver bullet and there's a lot of firm positions held right now across the landscape. But ultimately, we know that we have no hope of tackling the challenges before us if we can't find ways to collaborate and take action. ”

Jason Yelverton

Dubbo Council, Social Justice Coordinator

The presentations were followed by a panel discussion, beginning with Jason Yelverton, the Social Justice Coordinator for Dubbo Council. Jason explained that, for him, community development was something that young people could easily make a contribution to in their everyday lives, whether it be through involvement in co-coordinating sport and community BBQs or simply helping someone wash up after a public event. He encouraged young people to engage

in finding solutions and have the courage to “put your hand up and have a go” at implementing these solutions.

Lastly, the panel engaged in a discussion about the barriers that hinder greater youth participation and how these could be overcome. Jason spoke of the need for local government to do more for young people living with drought, particularly in smaller communities:

“ I think it's really important that local government take young people seriously. Too often I've seen people say 'oh, we consulted young people', but then go away and do what they were going to do anyway...Too often young people don't want to be involved because they feel it's fake. And often it is. ”

He spoke of the important role the Youth Council has in his community, noting that they are empowered to provide recommendations and to veto issues that involve them.

Sally and Rachel noted how difficult it can be for young people to find the courage to stand up and be heard, particularly in contexts where they're surrounded by older adults. Sally highlighted the importance of empowering young people to build their confidence through skills development. Rachel added that mentoring relationships can help to support this as well.

Panel 2

Community-led initiatives, drought and young people

The second panel of the summit consisted of the following speakers: Matt March, Drought Support Peer Worker (Child & Adolescent Support) Drought Support Team, Western NSW Local Health District; Courtney Kovac, Batyr; and Michelle Miller, The Australian Centre for Social Innovation.

What makes communities resilient during tough times?

The first question to the panel explored ways to strengthen community resilience. Courtney encouraged young people to be open and share their experiences of drought and its impact on them, and to listen to others. Building on this point, Matt highlighted the importance of resisting the urge to “go into our shells” during difficult times, but instead to look for ways the community can connect with each other. He encouraged young people to recognise that stoicism can sometimes lead us to deny how we're travelling. In this manner, it can hinder, and not help, resilience.

Michelle explained that resourcefulness within communities can sometimes seem lacking when communities are struggling. She encouraged young people to pay attention to the stories we tell ourselves about our community and what they emphasise and reflect – Do they focus on suffering, struggles and issues? Or do they incorporate strengths and capabilities. She asked participants: “can we re-tell our narratives?”

What are the strengths of peer-support models?

(Matt March)

The panel then moved to a discussion of peer-support models, their rationale and approaches.

Matt explained the importance of having people in drought support roles with lived experiences that relate to the role and the community. To this end he provided the rationale for creating a peer-support team within the Western Local Health District to specifically focus on drought. His insights into supporting young people living with drought have come from experiences growing up on a farm, struggling with family and mental health issues, and working with young people within his community.

Developing the capability of local members of the community to work in mental health support has an additional benefit of ensuring those skills and capabilities remain within the community. This lived experience enables Matt to build rapport with farming families because *“there’s real power to talking with someone who’s been there... they tend to listen more.”* As a local, Matt’s experiences help him to understand his community in ways a non-local could not. He described how people living in regional areas have their own language and subtext that can be difficult for a non-local to understand and interpret – things like body language, silence, and understanding the technical aspects of agricultural work. His experiences also help him to work with young people on and off the land to identify solutions and support available for them.

Matt described the proactive nature of his work – of the need to reach out to young people and their families, rather than wait for them to reach out to him or other service-providers – whether through visiting schools (particularly isolated ones) or farms. By getting to know people’s stories and *“having a yarn and a real conversation about what’s happening on the ground,”* Matt is able to assess their needs and provide tailored information to assist. He is also able to provide a critical bridge between those impacted by drought and available mental health services. By encouraging young people to talk about their experiences, he can support those who need further assistance in getting the help they need. He said that people are often unaware that there are more services available to them than they think. Matt concluded:

“ *This is why I took on this role. I didn’t walk into it because I had a particular certificate that suited it. I was passionate about trying to engage my community with my experiences. And that’s the peer model. It’s basically what it boils down to.* ”

What are the strengths of collaboration-based models?

(Michelle Miller)

The session also explored the rationale, approach and strengths of a collaboration-based model. Michelle explained the harmful impact of the ‘helicopter effect’

(bringing outsiders into a community to ‘solve’ their problem) on building and retaining community capability to solve their own problems. A collaboration-based model seeks to work with communities and to build capability through a collaborative process. Firstly, such models develop skills in how to get collaboration going. Secondly, they develop skills in bringing people with lived experiences together (such as community members and young people) with those with decision-making roles and responsibilities. Thirdly, they develop skills in implement design-led interventions – finding creative approaches to problem solving. This work is done largely through coaching:

“ *So that people who are in projects in communities learn how to do what we do so when we go away, the skills remain.* ”

Michelle provided a number of examples of her experience in utilising a collaboration-based model, including setting up the Children and Prison Working Group in Dubbo, an initiative that brought together police, local council, community services, education and training professionals and young people to creatively explore ways to reduce juvenile incarceration. She also spoke of the role of “community connectors” in Condoblin, Bourke, Lake Cargelligo, and Dubbo. Because these community connectors are not aligned with any particular organisation, they are more able to bring people together to collaborate on addressing community issues that have been identified by the community. The Australian Centre for Social Innovation work with community connectors to provide support and develop skills in advocating for change, bringing people together, raising uncomfortable issues, and gathering and organising the data to support arguments.¹⁸ She encouraged participants to consider how *“...you find people who have that interest in working with you? ...[and] design things together?”* Michelle also said it was important for young people to insist that they be involved in services and support activities being designed to help them:

“ *For services to work in the community, they have to be designed from the community out, not from headquarters in.* ”

Young people’s leadership in mental health and wellbeing

Courtney said it was important that young people actively help to reduce the negative stigma associated with mental health issues, as well as empower other young people to connect with the services they need when they need them. She explained the way Batyr – “a for purpose preventative mental health organisation, created and driven by young people, for young people” - employs this approach with their “Being Herd Workshops.”¹⁹ This initiative mentors young people with lived experiences of mental ill-health, or who struggle with issues related to mental health, to speak about their experiences in schools and in communities. Encouraging participants to consider getting involved in their programs, Courtney explained:

“We think that is an exceptional way of being a leader – using your voice and your experiences to create change... It’s not being the best public speaker; it’s not being the person who puts their hand up for everything. It’s being the person who’s willing to voice what they care about and actively try to make a difference.”

Panel 3 Approaches to mental health and wellbeing

Jessica McWilliam – Hearing from young people with lived experience

To explain her individual journey to becoming a mental health advocate, Jess generously and courageously shared her experiences of personal and familial mental ill-health. She described her own challenges with depression and anxiety during adolescence, losing her brother to suicide a year later, and losing her father to suicide two years after that. In spite of these tragic and heavy losses such a young age, Jess described being *“grateful to have been given useful tools to cope with this type of significant grief”* early in her adolescence through the mental health support she received for depression and anxiety.

By sharing her story, Jess hopes other young people will feel encouraged to reach out and talk to someone they trust when they are struggling. Jess received a grant from Heywire which she used, with the assistance of Headspace and other regional young people’s mental health organisations, to advocate for schools to better support young people and their mental health needs. Her point was that, for young people to be able to start talking more about their experiences, it is essential that they not only feel safe and supported to do so, but that they hear from other young people who are going through similar experiences:

“ We have physical health – we know what to do if we break a leg, or what to do if we have a cold, but sometimes we don’t always know what to do if we’re affected by stress. So just knowing who to go to and understanding that it’s normal and ok to reach out for help, is possible through the power of storytelling. ”

In terms of careers in this field, she urged young people to consider developing skills that can help their community in ways they know the community needs:

“ It feels great to go off, have your independence and do your training and then to come back to offer that service that wasn’t there when you were a young person...It’s a great thing to do and you have that power to take on that role and not wait around for someone else to do it. ”



Jinnara Tyson – Aboriginal young people, drought and mental health

Jinnara is a member of the Benevolent Society’s Rural Youth Mental Health Service (RYMH) team, based in Dubbo, which covers the areas of Nyngan, Narromine, Coonamble and Cobar.²⁰ Jinnara spoke about the impact’s drought was having on Aboriginal young people in regional NSW. She said common impressions that droughts only significantly impact farmers fails to recognise that other communities are feeling the effects in similar and different ways.

She pointed out that many Aboriginal communities are employed on farms and, due to the drought, many have lost their jobs. This has required some to relocate in search of employment opportunities, which *“impacts on their connections to their communities as they’ve had to relocate.”*

For Aboriginal communities living in regional NSW, water is a crucial part of culture and cultural practices: *“water is very significant in Aboriginal culture as it is a part of healing and very significant to women’s business.”* She pointed out that rivers were also crucial in recreation for Aboriginal children and young people – for fishing, swimming – and to nourish animals, plants and trees. This loss creates a loss of connection for young people to their communities:

“ From my personal experience, coming from a rural and remote community and then moving to Dubbo, I also feel a lack of connection with my community. When we go home to Weilmoringle or Goodooga, there’s no water in the river and we’re used to going down and doing activities as it is a healing place for us – our home towns and water play a big part in healing for the Aboriginal community. ”



In many remote and regional towns, there isn't much for young people to do. As rivers can no longer support the many activities young people might otherwise engage in, there are risks that some Aboriginal young people are taking up risky behaviour instead.

Jinnara also described the work the Benevolent Society and the approaches they take to strengthening mental health and wellbeing for Aboriginal young people in drought-affected NSW. She said building partnerships with Aboriginal organisations with close ties to the community was the first step to building a relationship with the community and the young people in them. She also noted the value of bringing her own lived experiences as an Aboriginal young woman who grew up in remote NSW to the table. The RYMH program works closely with schools, and school programs for Aboriginal young people, to provide additional support for students.

Jinnara, and her colleague Imogen Morrissey (facilitating the panel discussion), highlighted the approach, of de-emphasising the clinical and emphasising the social, taken by RYMH to avoid intimidating Aboriginal young people. Jinnara noted:

“ ...because it can be intimidating, and I find that working with Aboriginal people as well. It can be a barrier. As a youth support worker, I can be intimidating for them as well, even working as an Aboriginal person...Some Aboriginal young people don't want to see psychologists. They don't want to see counsellors. At some schools, kids have only come over to talk to me when they hear that I'm not a counsellor. ”

Imogen added that many Aboriginal young people do not trust the role of counsellors and psychologists. Therefore, RYMH take the approach of recasting their work from providing counselling to supporting young people to strengthen their coping and self-management skills and helping them to set and work towards goals to do so. The language they use is equally important in this regard – they use terms like 'stress' rather than 'anxiety', and 'being low' rather than 'depression'. They employ support groups, as well as one-on-one support, in recognition that many Aboriginal young people prefer meeting with their peers and friends.

Perhaps most significantly, Jinnara highlighted the importance of taking the time to encourage consistent trust and acceptance from communities and their young people:

“ We know that a lot of youth in these communities have trouble building relationships with services... so we offer face-to-face support, one-on-one, online, and group support. We give the youth time in these communities to get to be able to build that connection with us and we visit on a weekly basis to show that we are a consistent service and that we are there to provide support to them ... Showing consistency is really important in these communities. Showing we are there to support them and their mental health. Also working with other Aboriginal programs and spending time with these organisations in their work builds trust that can encourage Aboriginal young people to access mental health support. ”

John Dean – Creativity, mental health and wellbeing

John Dean was the third speaker and is the District Clinical Leader/Registered Psychologist for School Link and Got it! Programs in the Murrumbidgee Local Health District. He provided a case study on the Dramatic Minds Festival, an annual short play festival now in its 10th year.²¹

The rationale for the Festival is that drama and the arts are an important and useful way to encourage young people to explore mental health issues and shift negative attitudes towards mental illness in communities. Particularly in regional areas, it provides an alternative opportunity for young people less interested in sport. The Festival is open to high school students from Wagga Wagga, Griffith, Albury and Temora areas. Students research, write and perform an original short performance about a mental health issue. Live-streamed from Temora, this year there were thirteen presentations from ten different schools.

Initially, students are supported in workshopping their ideas. Then teachers work with them to research issues and develop a creative way of presenting their ideas, feelings, and beliefs about their topic or issue. These topics are typically issues young people are personally struggling with, for example:

“ One particular school one year did a play around alcohol use and it was after there'd been a tragic farming accident with a young person after drinking during school holidays. And they used that process of looking at those issues, and developing a play that told that story, to process a lot of the issues that were left behind. ”

A tool has been developed to measure the impact and consistency of the Festival. It has shown that there has been an increase in knowledge and a positive change in attitudes towards mental health amongst those involved in it. The Festival also provides a unique opportunity for young people from different schools to get to know each other and build a wider network of friends.

Vicki Melitas – Support through schools

Vicki Melitas, from the NSW Department of Education's Psychology and Wellbeing team, was the final speaker. She provided an overview of the Department's work to ensure that schools can provide support to students, families and communities going through challenging times. This includes working closely with principals to ensure wellbeing programs are available in schools and that teachers are able to access training in mental health. This work is also supported by School Link (NSW Health) teams who provide mental health first aid training to teachers. Recently, additional funding has meant a school psychologist/ counsellor and youth worker can be provided in every high school in NSW.

Given that, in remote areas, mental health services are “not easy to come by,” Vicki outlined a priority the Department has set to improve support for rural and remote schools impacted by drought. It includes establishing dedicated tele-psychology and fly-in/fly-out services for rural and remote students. It also includes collaborating with local primary health, community health agencies, family support services, Carers NSW, and others. Lastly, Vicki spoke of the importance of the Department's state-wide collaboration with close to a dozen agencies including Headspace, the Black Dog Institute, Smiling Mind, NSW Health, the University of Wollongong, and others, to develop professional learning and resources to support schools in the work they do.

Lastly, Vicki noted the critical importance of ensuring against reducing teachers, a move that would cause drought to further harm students. She said that no teachers should be moved during drought, regardless of the reduction in student numbers. The Department is also working, ideally, to hire counsellors and youth workers from local communities, as well as to examine the sorts of incentives that could be provided to encourage people to work in rural and remote schools and live in the area.

4.2 Ideas to action mini-workshops

In the afternoon of Day 1, summit participants were given the option of attending one of four mini-workshops being run simultaneously. Each workshop, run by different organisations working in this area, focussed on a different aspect of developing an idea from concept to action. The organisations and topics were:

- **Batyr:** Learning how to talk about mental health and wellbeing issues in your community to reduce stigma and increase help-seeking behaviour
- **Youth Action NSW:** Learning about what it means to engage in advocacy and how to persuade decision-makers
- **The Australian Centre for Social Innovation:** Learning about how to work with others in your community to identify and solve local problems
- **ReachOut:** Learning about how to identify solutions and develop an idea into a project plan capable of being implemented.

Each mini-workshop utilised their own methodologies, tailored to the specific needs of the participants and the topics on which they were focussing. This included: steps involved in problem solving and project planning; activities involved in logistics, marketing and budgeting; how to present your ideas to potential donors; advancing your issue or solution to government; and strategies to build allies and partners in solving community issues.

These small groups, facilitated by representatives from organisations doing expert work with young people in these areas, allowed participants to work together to develop interesting ideas to support drought-affected young people, such as:

- create a social-media-based community awareness-raising campaign using strategies and tips to reduce water usage (see below Section 6.4);
- build an accessible model for young people to create youth councils in all communities, particularly small towns that sit within larger local council areas;
- explore possible ways young people can receive further tertiary training and employment opportunities within their communities so they don't need to leave their farms during drought;
- paint murals in schools with positive messages, written by each student, to remind everyone about, and increase, wellbeing of students and the school overall;
- to increase community awareness of mental health and reduce stigma, create locally relevant calendars with stories and information where, each month, there is a day dedicated to a specific action around mental health;
- hold community events, with mental health service providers attending, so people can get to know them and feel less nervous about/normalise using their services;
- design bridging courses for rural students attending university for the first time to help them adjust and decrease the drop-out rate; and
- implement a "community chest" idea, whereby members of the community contribute to a pool of emergency money that community members can dip into, for small amounts, to provide short-term bridges for people with financial shortfalls (see Section 7.7 below for further details).

4.3 Promoting psychosocial support and wellbeing

While each day of the summit was programmed with an element of psychosocial support, the second day had an exclusive focus on psychosocial and physical wellbeing, using a variety of methodologies. This programming was done in consultation with members of the Summit Advisory Group.

4.3.1 Plenary discussion: Anatomy of our emotions

As part of the first day two plenary session, all participants received a short training session on the 'anatomy of our emotions', which set out the basic neuroscience of profound and prolonged stress and its impact on our bodies and our emotional state. The Centre on the Developing Child at Harvard University defines 'toxic stress' (as distinct from tolerable stress) as:



“...strong, frequent, and/or prolonged adversity—such as physical or emotional abuse, chronic neglect, caregiver substance abuse or mental illness, exposure to violence, and/or the accumulated burdens of family economic hardship—without adequate adult support. This kind of prolonged activation of the stress response systems can disrupt the development of brain architecture and other organ systems and increase the risk for stress-related disease and cognitive impairment, well into the adult.”²²”

It should be noted that UNICEF Australia does not use the language of 'toxic' stress because, from a child rights perspective, this risks labelling children themselves as 'toxic'. Instead, we use the language of 'profound stress' where strong, frequent and prolonged adversity can threaten a child or young person's identity or existential wholeness.

The session was experiential (drawing directly on the experiences of participants), informing group discussions delivered in the round. During the session, UNICEF Australia outlined the function of our limbic system, established a picture of the ways our bodies and minds respond to long-term stress and explained the flight, fight and freeze responses. The purpose of setting out this thinking was to:

- remind participants that our minds, bodies and emotions are in a continuous conversation;
- initiate a conversation about if, and how, participants measure and monitor their own levels of stress; and
- provide tools and ideas to support positive self-regulation.

Also, on day two of the program, summit circle facilitators led two sessions focused on (I) practical strategies for self-care and (II) strategies to care for others, including practical approaches to have difficult conversations. Summit facilitators came from a range of therapeutic backgrounds and relied on different therapeutic frameworks. Diverse skilling and practice was a key characteristic of the strength of our approach.

4.3.2 Summit circles

Summit circles were a core building block of the program and facilitated all small group discussions across the duration of the summit. Participants were assigned to summit circles, each consisting of approximately twelve young people, to create a diverse representation of age, sex and geographic location. At the programming phase UNICEF Australia was cognisant of the ten-year age gap between the eldest and youngest members of summit circle groups. Given the overall maturity level of participants and the skill level of facilitators, we assessed this as being manageable.

Summit circles were designed on a peer to peer model²³ based on their efficacy, particularly in relation to health promotion. We know that peers have a strong role in healthy psychosocial development of adolescents. Peer models provide opportunities for friendship and connection, and knowledge and skills development. They can establish norms and challenge behaviours, model pro-social behaviour, and foster leadership.

UNICEF Australia assigned a skilled facilitator to guide each summit circle. We prepared them for summit circle sessions through:

- providing a comprehensive information note that set out UNICEF's approach to MPHSS, as well as guidelines and ground rules for each session;
- providing detailed session plans which identified session goals, prompting questions and links to relevant resources; and
- a pre-summit group teleconference briefing and onsite briefing/debriefing.

Summit circles were not designed to provide therapy or to provide a therapeutic intervention, but instead to:

- create a predictable point of peer to peer contact for participants throughout the duration of the summit;
- share stories safety and build supportive relationships;
- share good coping strategies (Aboriginal wellness models and individual and whole of community level coping strategies);
- find potentially scalable community-based solutions to key drought related issues - including loneliness, isolation and grief;
- capitalize on community knowledge and capacities; and
- gather important, but non-identifiable data to develop a better picture on the experiences and needs of drought affected young people.

There were five summit circles over the three-day program, beginning with a getting to know you session. The purpose of this session was to establish an initial rapport between the facilitators and participants and to establish a safe way of working together. The summit

circles were convened shortly after arrival the day before the formal program began. Among the 88 participants, there were young people who had left their remote communities for the first time to attend the summit. Summit circles provided a point of entry and connection for those young people in particular.

Throughout the summit circle process, observation and data collection was undertaken by UNICEF Australia staff and volunteers and social work students from Charles Sturt University. Summit participants were advised that de-identified data would be collected during summit circle discussions. UNICEF Australia prioritised the relational and bonding aspects of the summit circles and adopted a non-intrusive approach to collecting data. In practical terms this meant that observers were physically positioned outside the group discussions.

The single summit circles session on the first day of the summit was aimed at setting the policy scene from a youth perspective. This 'Mental health and remoteness in practice' session aimed to establish:

- a picture of remoteness and mental health in NSW; and
- thinking on approaches/services that work, those that don't – and why.

Facilitators introduced a number of guiding questions for discussion, including:

- Based on your experience/experiences of your friends and peers – what is working well in the mental health space?
- What would you like to see dialled up, and dialled down to ensure that young people have the right kind of support?
- What one piece of advice would give to (I) schools (II) service providers and (III) governments about youth mental health as the drought continues.
- What ideas or sessions really resonated with you? Why?

As part of their standard approach, facilitators presented these questions for discussion, but followed the curiosity of the participants.

On day two of the summit, there were two summit circle sessions which focused on practical skills related to self-care and caring for others during periods of prolonged adversity. The 'Strategies for self-care' session was designed to build understanding of the ways participants understand and practice self-care. The goals for this session were to:

- explore whether there was a common or shared experience of drought;
- normalise identified emotions – and stress that many emotions are common for people experiencing adversity; and
- discuss and share existing and new strategies to positively manage stress, loneliness/isolation, guilt and anger.

During this session, UNICEF Australia observed the benefits of working across the 14-25-year age cohort. Young adults in the group were able to reflect upon and share coping strategies, which they had tested and developed, with younger people in the group. The guiding questions for this session included:

- From 0 to 5 (0 = no self-care & 5 = excellent self-care) how would you rate your self-care?
- Why did you choose to rate yourself there?
- What practical things do you find helpful when are feeling stressed or anxious?
- What practical things are helpful when you feel a little lonely or isolated? Angry?
- What strategies are working for you and are useful? What hasn't worked at all?
- If nothing changes, and the drought continues into the foreseeable future, what does this mean for affected young people?

The goals of the 'Having supportive conversations' session, held later that day, included that:

- young people understand the value/importance of being able to have supportive conversations during difficult times.
- young people have some additional skills/tips on how to communicate with peers and family members during difficult times.

During consultations conducted for the Drought Report, UNICEF Australia first became aware of the intergenerational tensions that sometimes exist within families in relation to drought. We were eager to provide some strategies and tools that could help to bridge the experiences between young people and their parents/grandparents who have lived through previous droughts. As one participant explained:

“ *The community mourns our lost youth, our lost childhood, but at the same time, they tell us to toughen up and get to work because that's all they know to do. The same person wishing she could afford to buy you a formal dress is handing you the keys to the ute and telling you to feed up.* ”

Through community-based consultations and the coordination of the Drought Summit, UNICEF Australia has had contact with many parents who are coping with drought. Their efforts to consistently prioritise their children and to care for their families and communities are, without doubt, commendable. We also acknowledge the notion of stormy weather parenting, which refers to parenting during major life events and periods of heightened stress (e.g. divorce, a death in the family, or other life shocks). We understand that during difficult times, some parents may need some additional support either within their family units, their broader community or from local services. All parents navigate through choppy waters.

These challenges are not specific to parents living through drought or in regional and remote Australia. Similarly, all families face intergenerational tensions, with both parents and children having legitimate perspectives on their family circumstances. In providing summit participants with some additional skills to have difficult conversations, it was our hope that:

- young people could share these skills with their parents, based on the idea of kitchen table learning (conversations around the kitchen table)
- young people could have supportive conversations that benefit both them and their parents or other family members.

As previously referenced in this report, one of the most consistent themes within this body of work has been the high levels of concern that young people feel about their parents' distress. As one participant signalled, "When our parents aren't happy, we aren't happy."

The final summit circle session, held on day three of the summit, focused on a general debrief with regard to the program. Participants were asked to identify their highlights (and low lights), and the potential future actions they would take post-summit. Participants also discussed the draft Call to Action (see page 32) and provided critical feedback before entering into a Q and A session with a high-level panel.

Many of the issues that emerged through summit circle discussions are further explored in Section 8.1 of this report.

4.3.3 Physical activities

As part of our approach to programming for psychosocial support and wellbeing, physical activities were scheduled for the second day of the summit. Summit participants were able to choose between a number of physical activities including kayaking, fishing, and high ropes or, alternatively, to rest. UNICEF Australia prioritised physical exercise as part of an otherwise busy program for the following reasons:

- the well-known mental health benefits of physical activities, including stress reduction;
- the psychosocial benefit of being in flourishing nature as raised in the Drought Report 2019 – "I just wish it was green" (Year 9 Girl);
- to build confidence and teamwork bonds through a group activity – high ropes and kayaking;
- the wellbeing dividends associated with being on, in or near water – kayaking and fishing;
- for varied stimulation in a summit that was otherwise highly focused on dialogue – mindfulness and guided relaxation;



- to create an opportunity for rest and recreation for young people who tend to be highly overscheduled due to school, work and family commitments during drought; and
- to keep participants energized on the middle day of an intensive three-day summit.

Feedback from the summit survey showed over 80 per cent of respondents felt that the physical activities added significant value to the program. From an observer perspective, the physical activities also contributed to the fast-growing social connection between participants, which was evident throughout and beyond the summit's conclusion.

4.3.4 Wayapa Wuurrk

For many decades Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, like First Nations peoples across the world, have been endeavouring to heal themselves from the historical and present-day trauma, grief and distress associated with genocide and colonisation. Wayapa Wuurrk is an Aboriginal-led healing organisation that combines mindfulness, narrative meditation and traditional movement as part of its practice. UNICEF Australia selected Wayapa Wuurrk to run a narrative mediation and movement session because it is relevant for Aboriginal Australians but can also be shared with non-Aboriginal people of any age. They share a practice that can be used daily to connect to the environment and quieten the mind. Wayapa Wuurrk's programming strongly complemented the intent of the summit as both place emphasis on the need to care for and be good custodians of the land.

4.3.5 "A storied life"

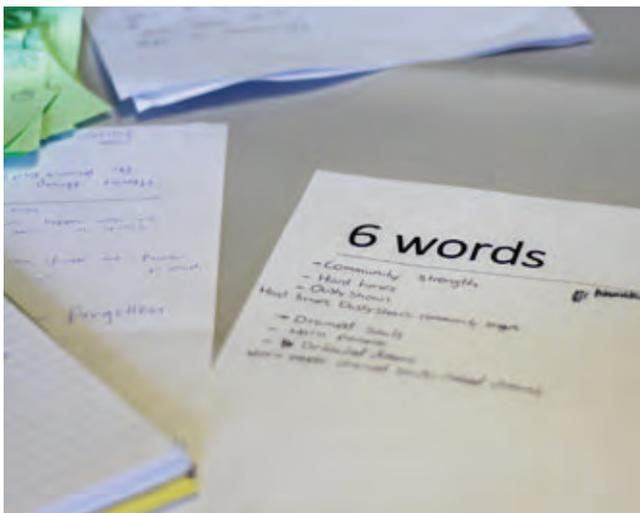
Amy Lamoin and Samantha Newman designed and ran an optional two-hour workshop for participants, called "A Storied Life." The workshop was run for two groups consecutively. The purpose of the session was for participants to:

- understand story as a tool to reflect, comfort, cope, express, and resist dominant social stories that are told about us and our communities;
- make and share meaning through story; and
- reconnection to emotional language.

Though the workshop was not designed with therapeutic intent, we understood that it might have some therapeutic benefit for participants. It consisted of three core activities supported by individual reflection and rich group discussion.

One of these activities employed principles of narrative therapy practice, used, in this case, to initiate open conversation among a cohort of young people who are known to be notoriously stoic. It involved having participants write – literally - six-word stories, to encapsulate individual experiences of drought. Very valuably, we found that the exercise of writing and explaining their six-word stories led participants to open up and share their experiences in much more depth, including sharing the coping strategies they had developed.

The process of writing, sharing and discussing these stories was a powerful way of encouraging young people to reflect on some of the challenges and emotions they have been living with every day as a result of drought and remoteness. Many of the issues raised by participants echoed themes UNICEF Australia explored in our report



earlier in the year. Themes such as *“missing out on the opportunity to just be a kid”*, worrying that resilience among farmers was almost gone, talking about the emotional toll of constant work with no gain, being surrounded by death and dying, living with the severe pressure on families, including descriptions of drought being *“like a nightmare you can’t wake up from”* or wondering *“when will it end?”* were discussed in depth.

Two additional major themes emerged and were discussed in the storytelling workshops. The first concerned ‘hope’ and the double-edged sword that it has become in drought. On the one hand, *“hope is driven by love”* – for what young people do, for the people they do it for, for the land they live on, and for wanting to pass this on to their kids: *“I just want my kids to see the land I grew up on.”*

But as the drought has worsened, hope is fading:

“ *The motto we’ve lived by is ‘We’re one day closer to rain’ and now it feels like every day ‘we’re one day further from rain.’* ”

“ *We’re all super passionate about our local towns and our farms and communities but I know a lot of people my age who’ve seen their parents get smashed by [drought] and seen the heartbreaking effects it has and...you love it but you can hate it as well.* ”

Now, with enduring drought, hope can even feel dangerous for some young people. It can make them feel vulnerable – building up belief and expectation about something they worry won’t improve for a long time. Some also see vulnerability as inherently dangerous: *“Everyone thinks they need to be ok.”* They know that identifying and seeking help puts additional strains on their families. In some cases, it may even require their family to relocate to be nearer services. This puts a tremendous amount of pressure on young people to *“be okay.”*

The second theme that was discussed in both workshops was the impact of remoteness - the sense of alienation drought exacerbates and the value of connecting with other young people going through the same thing. ‘Remoteness’ doesn’t just mean living in a remote town. It also describes a way of life for many regional young people who, for study or work, find themselves necessarily remote from

their family and loved ones. Young people feel alienated from a land that doesn't resemble their home anymore: "Home hasn't felt like home in a long time." This is a highly significant quote because it references the strong *place bond* that is evident in young people from rural and remote Australia. That is, a deep sense of connection and attachment to their land and communities.

Participants shared reflections about the impact the summit was having in relation to help them feel more connected with others who understand their pain and struggle. This helped them recognise the strengths they have, individually and collectively, and helped to build their confidence in their capacity to get through this terribly difficult time:

““ *The thing I've learned over the past 2 days is that we're stronger together and we're the generation that's not going to give up easily. We're the generation that's going to fight with everything we've got left... There's some strong people in this group and we need to keep these new friendships alive because we're the people that are gonna support each other when it comes to it.* ””

““ *I've had to pinch myself that you guys actually know what I'm talking about. Because at boarding school in the city, they don't know. So, it's been great that you guys actually know.* ””

““ *It's like a weight's just been lifted – everyone understands!* ””

For some, the experience of attending the summit helped them feel more confident about being able to manage, not only this drought and the recovery period, but the next drought that comes along:

““ *It's going to be sad when it's over tomorrow. But we're taking away strategies to cope better and I think the main thing is strategies to just prepare ourselves for the next one. Because this is definitely not the last drought that us kids are going to be living through. So just taking away strategies to better enhance future droughts and just get us prepared really helps.* ””

The second activity had participants completing matrices asking them to reflect on these questions: How do I see myself in drought?; How does my family see me in drought?; How do my friends see me in drought?; How does my community see me in drought? The activity allowed participants to reflect upon and share the different ways they and the people in their lives saw themselves living with drought. It also allowed them to unpack what this means and whether there are alternative ways they could see themselves, which both recognise the strengths they have and acknowledge the harm they continue to experience.

This is a snapshot of some of the key reflections shared:

How do I see myself in drought?

- Growing up too fast; Gaining resilience
- Emotional; Useless/hopeless; unable to do anything to help make it better; wanting to have stock but knowing it's practically impossible; burdened
- Strong willed; hard working; capable; strong (mentally & physically); motivated; gotta do attitude; has hope; don't act the same
- Helping parents and other farmers; praying for rain endlessly
- Being strong; having teamwork skills; talking to people about their problems; being positive (trying)
- Broken; heartbreak for everyone else; resilient
- Need to be educated; need to hold responsibility; need to contribute; glue
- Strong; able to overcome pain and negative emotions; hopeful
- Challenging; stressful; resilient; guilty
- Building and developing resilience; developing a view and sense of the land; desire to contribute to change, for the future
- Challenging; caught in the middle – being at university I'm not at home on the farm all the time – guilt
- Strength (emotional, mental, physical); working for solutions; when life gives you lemons...

How does my family see me in drought?

- Understanding; Realising they can't hide me from it
- Emotional; connecting; wanting the best opportunities for me but also wanting to continue the farming;
- Strong one; reliable (go-to); hard working; coping; nurturing; understanding; social
- Closer relationships; struggling together; gratitude
- Teamwork; having a good relationship to talk to each other; resilience; problem-solving; new ideas and accepting the problems
- Disappointment in this is how my childhood is; support network; independent
- Farm hand; appreciation; self-sufficient; proud; stronger; camaraderie/team; future
- My family believes that I am strong and supportive. Even though my mental ability drops I am able to rise above those emotions to adjust to the situation and be there for my family in a very tough time
- Working together; checking up on one another; wanting days off school to help but parents won't allow me
- Teamwork; passion; understanding; love for community; determination

- Challenging/tough; I'm away at university i so I am there to listen – an ear for them to vent their troubles; they don't really see it as me living in drought; I fully support myself independently with full-time university
- Teamwork; new ideas; problem-solving; challenging.

How do my friends see me in drought?

- Understanding; Being able to talk about it because they see and live it too
- Unable to relate; supporting but also hurting
- Don't know what I know; strong one; go-to person for anything; hard-ass; hard worker; mum!
- At school; story-telling; gratitude
- They don't understand. They see me as quiet and always tired
- Don't really talk about it
- Misunderstood; opportunity to walk away/ distance myself
- Most of my friends are struggling significantly with the drought and listening to them and having them open up about their lives and helping them relieve their stress helps me and they know that I will be able to talk to them about the difficult time I'm going through as well
- They don't realise the impact it has on my family – my parents can't just go find another job; have to miss things on weekends – reduces friendships
- Determination; love for community; struggle to understand; tough topic to talk about
- I'm at university – they don't realise there is a drought, any time I mention it they are surprised; friends from farm/home are highly supportive and I am supportive of them too
- On Instagram; additional responsibilities; lots and lots of driving.

How does my community see me in drought?

- Sympathy; Seeing us grow up faster than we should need to in order to try and deal with it
- Attempting to support but often backfiring (school); providing spaces away from the dust and the dirt
- Passionate one; loud; future generation; future of town; takes no shit girl; social; get shit done type
- Sympathy; trying to be optimistic; not kids anymore
- Pity
- Representation of youth; advocate; future; fresh/ youthful
- Becomes a normality; school system – behaves like drought doesn't really affect youth but it does; voice for youth; challenging; sympathy
- Challenging; community pulls together
- The future; hope; support

Examples of participants' 6-word stories:

- We are the ones you forgot.
- 400km away. We have been forgotten
- 700kms lies blood that's not bleeding.
- It's not over until it's over.
- Eyes: The only thing not dry.
- We are puppets on a string.
- Water is a luxury few can afford.
- Our sea of white has dried.
- Sixteen: Utter devastation, all I know.
- 5:30, Feeding, Lost time, gotta hope.
- Sleepless nights without enough to share.
- Hopeless, broken; but we carry on.
- Back to work; back to school; back to hell
- Worn people. Drained souls. Defeated dreams
- Wanted: Cheap feed for hungry sheep.
- She's like a thirst – never satisfied.
- Home's changed, not the same, foreign.
- Dry land, dry dam, wet tears.
- Families struggling. Fighting so long: break.
- Barren plains: Nothing is left anymore.
- Helping others – hope can be exhausting.
- Chains, tractor engine, decay, feeding calves.
- Hard work. Lost stock. Never stops.
- No Rain, Paddock's Plain, Gotta Maintain.
- Thick dieback, dead stock; Sold up.
- Worried, Fearful, Disheartened, Strength, Resilience, Hope.
- Just another day ending in "Y".
- Even the cicadas die around here.
- It's all dead. We are exhausted.
- It will rain again, one day.

4.4

A Call to Action: Advocating for change

The summit was designed with reference to UNICEF's global advocacy model and was based on:

- evidence and expert advice;
- partnerships and cooperation (the NSW Government and key NGO's from the mental health and psychosocial support (MPHSS) sector; and
- youth participation across the three-day program, including a youth-led call to action process.

The Call to Action process was designed to ensure that the summit's three days of important dialogue and pathfinding with young people could be captured and shared in a document that could be part of a public conversation going forward (see Annex A). It would also be a tool for direct advocacy with influencers who were part of a panel discussion on the final day, and with other key state and federal decision-makers over following months.

To initiate the process, UNICEF Australia selected and briefed six summit participants to frame and initially scope the Call to Action. As interest and participation in these sessions grew, we opened the planning sessions to all participants. At the time of delivery, approximately 70 per cent of participants had direct involvement in the drafting, and over 90 per cent of participants provided critical feedback on the final draft.

The Call to Action process was developed through facilitated and semi-structured discussion. UNICEF Australia framed the discussion around three broad areas:

- **identity statements:** to explain the important characteristics, common ground and diversity among the group;
- **key issues:** including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander social and emotional wellbeing, drought decision-making, community-based mental health, families and financial stress, and quality education; and
- **solutions:** including young people's formal participation in decision-making in policy, deferred school fee payments when families experience financial stress, a review of national water infrastructure and new technologies in farming.

With a full program, there was limited time for Call to Action planning, discussions and drafting. Notwithstanding these limitations, participants presented rich content and diverse, sometimes competing perspectives on issues and related solutions. Capturing the breadth of issues relating to regional and remote disadvantage, drought and isolation in a short period was challenging. Documenting this thinking in sufficient depth and detail with such strict deadlines was similarly difficult.

One of the overarching objectives of the summit was to support the social and emotional wellness of young people experiencing drought. With this in mind, it is pertinent that, on the first day, one participant asked panellists a sharp question: *"Why has it taken you so long to talk to us?"* It is therefore pivotal to recognise that the process of deeply listening to, and acknowledging, the stories of survival, coping, community pride, grief, exhaustion, and distress was as important as producing the statement itself.

Informed by our global institutional knowledge of working with children and our experience drafting the Drought Report, this process relied on us using the *actual* and *exact* language from participants to describe their experiences (parrot phrasing) to call for change, rather than paraphrasing. We applied this technique so that the final document holds significant value and meaning for individual participants and contributors. In other words, they can see themselves in the statement.

Summit participants provided feedback that the parrot phrasing technique rapidly built their trust and confidence and fast-tracked their buy-in to the summit and its objectives. This was particularly important, given that the two public-

facing focal points for the summit, Samantha Newman and Amy Lamoin, while both practitioners, are relative outsiders to rural and regional communities in Australia.

While we tried to ensure the best possible balance of views as part of the Call to Action process, as noted above, there were serious time limitations. This resulted in some gaps in the process such as:

- dedicated time to ensure that the views of Aboriginal participants were properly understood and comprehensively represented in the final statement;
- capturing and fairly representing perspectives of the youngest participants 14-16 years;
- listening for and understanding dissonance during the discussion and drafting process (e.g. the history of farming and agriculture and Aboriginal dispossession from their lands); and
- ongoing testing for an overall balance in the perspectives of diverse stakeholders (a number of participants indicated that there was a disproportionate focus on young people living on farms rather than those in regional and remote towns)

The final step was a verification process where participants were able to provide critical feedback on the draft content. Wherever possible, UNICEF Australia universally accepted identified content changes. Three summit participants presented the Call to Action to a panel of decision-makers, followed by a Q and A style discussion. Panellists included Mr Clayton Barr, NSW Shadow Minister for Water, Mr Joel FitzGibbon MP, Shadow Minister for Agriculture and Resources, and representatives from the National Mental Health Commission, the NSW Department of Health, and the National Farmers Federation.

The summit attracted substantial media interest, and many participants were interviewed by media throughout, supported by UNICEF Australia communications staff. The ABC NSW Country Hour and ABC NSW Statewide Drive broadcast live from the summit on the 11 October 2019, exclusively reporting about the content outlined in the Call to Action document. Nine/Fairfax newspapers reported extensively, running four stories that culminated in a front-page story in the Sun-Herald. Other ABC news outlets, Sky News, The Daily Telegraph, SBS, AAP, ACN Community Newspapers, 9NBN News, 7Prime News, Mamma Mia and a host of other regional newspapers and community radio stations also conducted interviews with participants, filing from location and in studio. Participants provided feedback to UNICEF Australia that they benefitted from having multiple opportunities to speak to the media. They said they were able to build their confidence as they conveyed their messages to the Australian public.

In December 2019, a delegation of summit participants visited Canberra where they presented the Call to Action to ten key government leaders, including the Deputy Prime Minister and the respective Ministers for Drought and Water Services, Agriculture, and Regional Services.



5

The participation and place of Aboriginal young people

5.1 Voice and cultural safety

UNICEF Australia is committed to culturally safe programming but does not possess deep knowledge that has been drawn from an operational presence in regional and remote Australia. We define cultural safety as interactions where the cultural identity and ways of being of an individual are respected, and never harmed. We understand cultural safety as both a process, and an outcome, based on respectful relationships and the genuine opportunity for all parties to influence the terms and tone of engagement.

In our approach to cultural safety, we are guided by the principles of the Children’s Convention – non-discrimination, the best interests of the child, participation and development. UNICEF Australia is further guided by the principles of:

- do no harm;
- talk less, listen more;²⁴
- collaborative decision making and problem solving; and
- curiosity about cultural identity and experiences.

UNICEF Australia was cognisant that in our initial consultations to inform the Drought Report we were unable to establish a clear and reliable picture of the impacts of drought on Aboriginal young people living in regional NSW²⁵. We therefore took a number of steps to ensure this was not the case for the summit.

From the early days of summit preparation, we had highly skilled representatives on our Youth Steering Committee who had experience in the area of Aboriginal youth mental health. Their insights and contributions, enhanced by our engagement with a number of Aboriginal organisations

and actors working with Aboriginal young people, provided tremendous value in attempting to build this picture for us. We were also very fortunate to work with Tara Harriden from the Aboriginal Health and Medical Research Council, and Orry Berry from the Rural Adversity Mental Health Program, who provided expert support as summit circle facilitators. Having both a male and female Aboriginal facilitator was seen as a strength of the summit.

UNICEF Australia was committed to striking a responsible balance between creating cultural safety and sharing the important knowledge, and diverse lived experiences of Aboriginal participants with the broader group. We did not want to create an additional burden for Aboriginal young people to have to educate their non-Aboriginal peers. In the end, the combination of having a dedicated summit circle for Aboriginal young people and having two other groups with Aboriginal young people represented in them, allowed us to receive feedback on both approaches.

After the summit, we reflected on our level of engagement with Aboriginal young people before and during the summit, and the extent to which we sought to ensure their experiences, perspectives and voices were heard alongside those from more traditional farming backgrounds.

In this regard, a number of non-Aboriginal young people specifically highlighted how beneficial it was for them to hear an Aboriginal young person describing what the drought meant for them and the ways it enhanced their understanding of cultural loss from a personal perspective. However, there were crucial moments in the summit where Aboriginal young people benefitted from collectively discussing their experiences and proposed solutions going forward.

5.2 Understanding Aboriginal perspectives on drought

As UNICEF Australia has noted previously, there is a lack of research on how young people experience drought. There is even less understanding of Aboriginal young people and the similar and distinct ways they experience drought. This lack of awareness exists within regional and remote communities as well. It was therefore important that the summit provide opportunities for Aboriginal young people to reflect upon, discuss and share these experiences.

Most clearly, we heard about the deep connection Aboriginal young people have with their land, the importance of sustaining that connection and the deep sorrow they feel at the death of their rivers:

“ *The River is the blood that flows through us. Death of the River is the death of us.* ”

Rivers are not only a source of recreation; they are a crucial part of connection to country and culture. Their absence has many effects: the death of sacred trees, animals too undernourished to hunt, the death of fish and birdlife sustained by the rivers. It prevents women’s business and other cultural practices. When describing the impact of drought, one member of a group of Aboriginal participants explained that,

“ *Multiple algae blooms and mass fish kills equals death of the river. Death of the river equals the death of sacred trees. The death of trees equals the death of rights and rituals and cultures. It is impossible to practice our culture.* ”

Sustaining a relationship with the land in the face of drought is difficult. As the climate continues to change, Indigenous communities will likely have a harder time maintaining traditional practices. This can lead to cultural erosion by forcing people to change their traditional ways of living. Over time, this can decrease wellbeing among Aboriginal young people and increase their vulnerability to mental health issues.²⁶

While the drought has also had many economic and social impacts on Aboriginal young people, in ways similar to non-Aboriginal young people, these impacts are worsened by existing disadvantage, discussed below. For example, unemployment was emphasised as a significant impact which, for some, has resulted in having to move away from their communities or leaving school to seek work. Mental health and wellbeing impacts were also discussed. Other health impacts were noted as being of particular significance for Aboriginal young people - such as a lack of clean water needed for life-saving dialysis, and the rise in water-borne and vector borne diseases and infections.

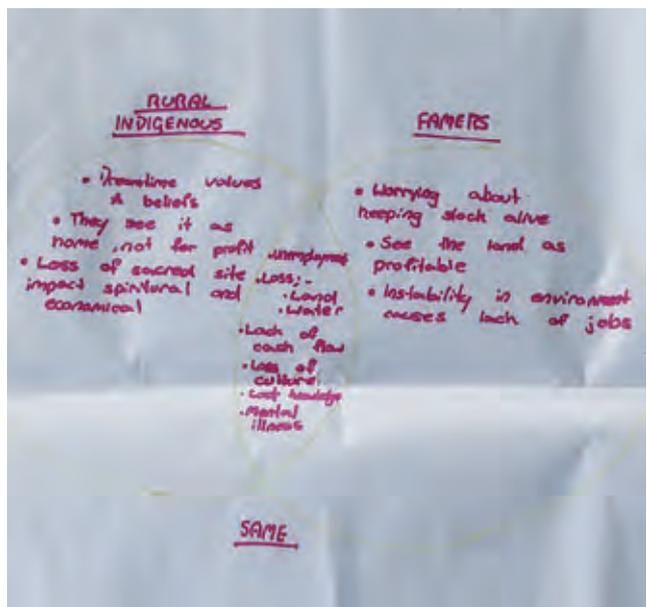
5.3 Aboriginal young people, drought and disadvantage

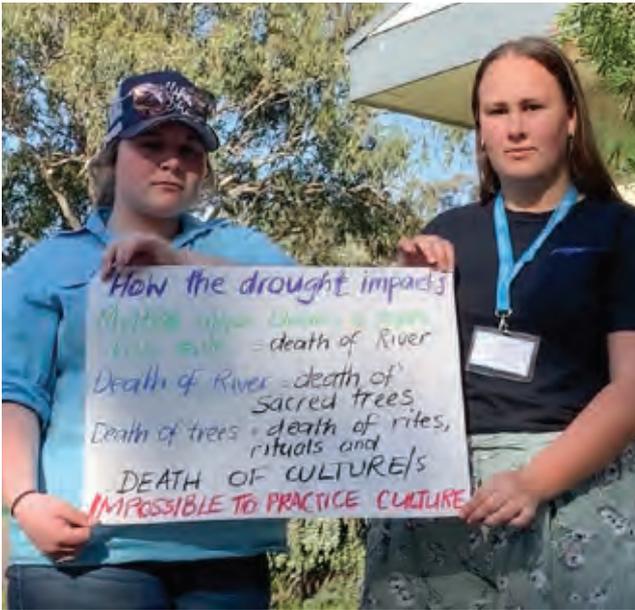
Disadvantage experienced by young people living in rural and remote NSW was an issue that came up throughout the summit. There is a general shared awareness among young people living in regional areas – by virtue of not living in metropolitan areas, the disadvantage they all experience in terms of quality of education, services and employment opportunities, for example, has been well documented.

These discussions revealed existing tensions and misunderstandings among young people from diverse backgrounds. They also revealed possibilities for future work in this area. This work could encourage a more nuanced understanding of the layered ways in which disadvantage works with young people living in regional areas, and the associated implications and remedies.

Indeed, drought presents an interesting vehicle through which to explore this disadvantage and the various ways it impacts upon different groups of young people. The image below shows how Aboriginal young people saw the differences and overlapping similarities that unite their communities with farming communities.

There is scope for deeper exploration with regional young people of the way disadvantage impacts upon young people differently depending on who they are, their histories, their lived experiences– Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people, members of ethnic or religious minorities, members of the LGBTQI community, young people living with a disability, and many others.





5.4 Embedding cultural safety and competence in services

Summit participants, facilitators and panellists all noted that Aboriginal young people had been largely overlooked in relation to drought response. The summit explored ways that support services for Aboriginal young people could work more effectively, particularly pointing to:

- the efficacy and importance of Aboriginal-led and delivered services in regional and remote Australia;
- approaches that seek to strengthen cultural connection and work with young people, their communities and Elders, including arts-based activities;
- programs informed by the inter-generational and profound impacts of colonisation and driven by local leadership;
- programs that use group based or collective support activities – and recognise the social, emotional, cultural, spiritual and physical wellbeing of the whole community;
- regular, ongoing services with professionals who understand Aboriginal regional young people and are able to build rapport and trust with them and their communities;
- establishment of relationships with a particular community through organisations with existing close ties;
- recognition that each community is unique, with its own stories, strengths and needs;
- avoidance of an overly clinical approach in how services are designed and staffed; and
- the participation of Aboriginal young people, using a strengths-based approach, in seeking solutions to the drought and other issues impacting upon them.



5.5 Solutions and ways forward

Aboriginal young people in the summit provided a number of key actions they would like to see in relation to the drought.

- Aboriginal young people were clear on the importance of conversations about drought between all different groups of people impacted by it, recognising cultural differences in regional NSW, the need for open minds and to hear different perspectives that result from diversity among participants.
- Aboriginal young people want improved protection of their water rights and to be a part of water management policy-making – in their local community and beyond – and to explore ways to improve water storage, recycling and capture throughout Australia.
- Access to quality water is a life or death issue for people who rely on renal treatment in regional and remote Australia, many of them from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds.
- There is an over-reliance on medicating young people, rather than addressing the social causes of mental ill- health.
- Barriers to accessing support include stigma, services that aren't tailored to the needs of Aboriginal young people, services that aren't culturally relevant/ appropriate and lack of access to quality mental health services.
- There should be a Youth Financial Liaison Officer to better support young people and advocate for change.
- Greater effort should be made to provide more jobs for young people in government, to build their leadership skills and also advocate for changes from within.
- There should be incentives for farmers to produce and store hay and stock feed (even purchased and stored by local council) in the good seasons so that they can prepare for the bad seasons.



6

Key themes emerging from the summit - Analysis

6.1 Building on The Drought Report

A number of the key themes identified in the Drought Report consistently emerged during summit discussions.

For many of the participants, the drought has been a life shock. They shared three key observations drawn from living through the Millennium Drought from the 1996 to 2010 period.

First, some participants have spent the majority of their lives living through a drought. Second, for some communities, there has been little recovery time since the end of the Millennium Drought. And third, inadequate progress was made between 2010 and the onset of the current state-wide drought.

Without clear commitments for action, participants were concerned that they would remain trapped in a cycle of drought. One participant reflected, “I don’t want this life for my kids”.

In relation to mental health and wellbeing, participants reflected on the traditional barriers to services, growing suicidality among Aboriginal children and the growing impact climate change is having on poor mental health.

6.2 Approaches to mental health, wellbeing and youth development

As policy makers and practitioners are aware, for those needing mental health support, distance is a significant impediment to accessing services. This is further complicated by other factors including a perceived or actual lack of privacy for people accessing services.

One participant stated that, “the school counsellor is also my football coach and my father’s good mate.” Another

particularly important point is that many young people feel compelled to ignore their mental health to avoid placing additional burdens on their families:

“It’s really difficult to be struggling and need that support, but that’s also putting extra pressure on your parents, which is part of the reason you’re struggling. So, it’s a bit like a vicious cycle.”

One of the clearest messages we heard from drought-affected young people through the planning and delivery of the summit was the importance of understanding who they are and how their unique lived experience informs their identity and their needs. In the words of one young person:

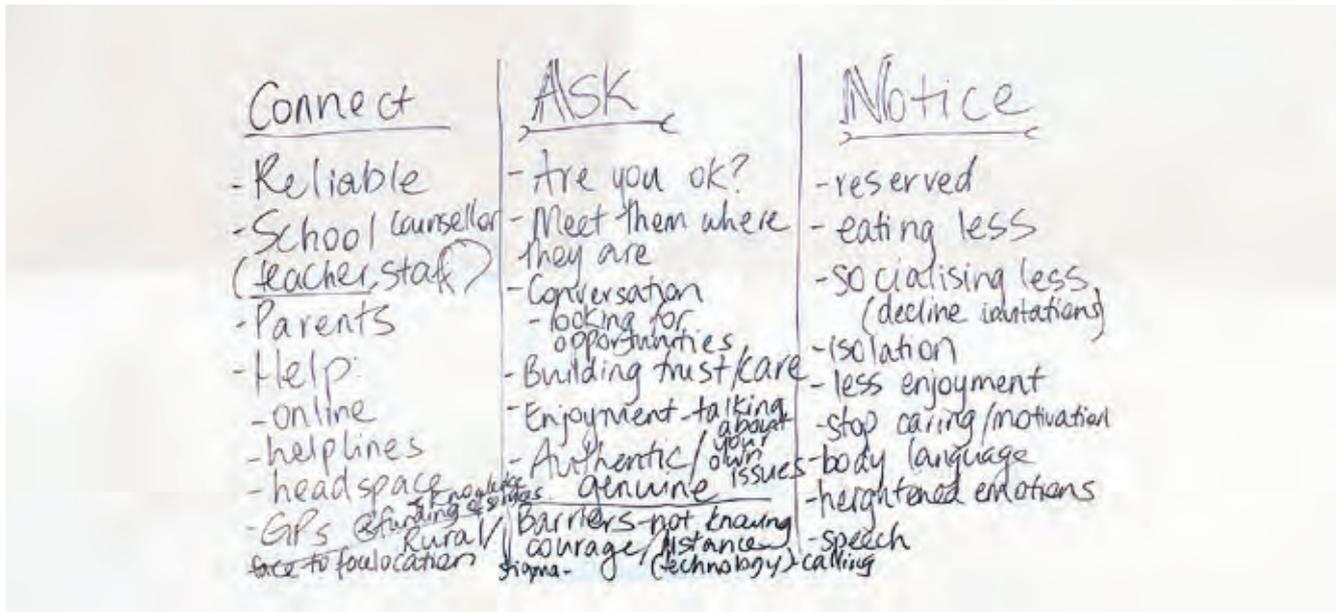
“To treat the person, you must understand the person.”

This not only requires recognition of their differences in relation to young people living in metropolitan areas, it also requires recognition of the diversity among young people throughout rural and regional NSW. The simple reality is that approaches which are effective for one group, or one community, will not necessarily work for others. However, we need to invest in understanding what works, where, how and why.

Rural and remote young people are extremely resilient and very proud of their resilience. Indeed, strength and resilience are highly prized virtues in their communities:

“We feel broken, but we also feel pride because we’re carrying on – for each other and with each other.”

They feel that frequent references to mental health or mental ill-health is not always helpful. They view strength based approaches as more helpful and something they therefore respond well to. These approaches focus more on wellbeing and building upon young people’s existing capabilities to cope, and less on what they perceive as ‘problems’ or even ‘problem kids’. For example, a number of young people suggested a greater focus on life-skills to build resilience, communication skills, decision-making and problem solving, assertiveness and self-control, among other things.²⁷



Perhaps most importantly, young people highlighted the importance of local area services. They said they needed to be consistent, that service-providers of all kinds needed to be known to young people and to take the time to get to know those they were working with. It requires making efforts to work with them face-to-face and on a regular basis - something that is particularly important for those living in more remote areas. They emphasized services that provide regular/weekly visits to remote towns are more able to achieve this, and are seen as more trustworthy by young people, than those to which they have to travel over 100km.

Having the same person visit regularly allows young people to get to know them. "Drop run solutions", "helicoptering", and "fly in/fly out" approaches are seen as deterrents for young people who need consistency and approachability-particularly where staffing changes can often mean young people need to start all over again with a new counsellor.

Participants stressed the importance of services that are responsive to young people from regional and remote areas. By this they meant using 'everyday language' or being 'plain spoken', rather than using therapeutic jargon. As one group of young people stated, "Put down the paper and pen or computer and see us".

It seems that this group was referencing the 'expert frame' of therapists who name, ascribe and colonise experience. Being responsive to young people means seeking to understand what language, and the words that they use to describe their experience, has meaning in that person's world. It is critical that young people define their own experiences and problems in their own words - it demonstrates the ways they develop meaning.

We want young people to know that we care about their experience and will work with them to find a solution. This means a therapeutic journey that is led by the young

person (the client) and supported by therapists who are willing to join that journey. Some models of therapy operate like a mechanical metaphor. That is, a series of steps where we are focused on naming and fixing the problem (here comes the broken vehicle; name the problem, repair it, send it away) rather than on seeing the whole picture for the young person.

During the summit, participants had multiple opportunities to reflect and feed back about their perceptions of the youth-related services available in regional NSW. The break-out box on the facing page provides a list of things highlighted by participants - things that work, things they need more of and things that don't work or that they don't need. Many aspects of their feedback are discussed below. Here it is important to highlight a few recurring themes.

Through UNICEF Australia's interactions with young people affected by drought, we observed a high awareness of mental health issues but big gaps in awareness of effective services. Young people explained that they want services that focus more on prevention and that look toward the future, rather than just focussing on crises and emergencies or providing short-term, 'band-aid' solutions.

They also highlighted that projects needed to be community-based and sustainable in order to be seen as reliable and trustworthy. Moreover, many participants commented on the lack of available services where they live, particularly those further away from regional hubs. A recurrent observation was made throughout the summit about the irony that those most in need of support are least likely to get it due to their remoteness..

Many young people highlighted the importance of providing more peer-to-peer activities. Social events and youth activities are seen as an opportunity to improve social connection, reduce isolation and provide young people with

a chance to spend time with their peers and away from work and stress. It was noted that recreational opportunities are limited, particularly in smaller and more remote areas. For young people, this lack of recreational opportunity presents additional risks of contributing to mental ill-health and/ or engaging in risky behaviour.

Spaces where young people can gather such as community, youth and wellness hubs or centres were highly valued, particularly those run and co-designed by young people. Young people would like more of them in drought-affected areas. Lastly, peer-to-peer/ group-based/ collective support models and activities (including online support forums) were seen as an important and underutilised approach for drought-affected young people, particularly when working with Aboriginal young people.

To ensure those most affected by drought are willing and able to participate in these events or activities, participants observed that service-providers needed to consult with young people on their design, possibly including their families. This would help ensure that those living on farms (for example) are able to take some time off to attend.

Lastly, there was recognition that there is a significant lack of awareness among young people (and beyond) of the services that are available in their communities, and a need to improve local understanding. More than that, there was a strong recognition that a lack of consultation with young people in designing services had a significant impact on perceptions of their appropriateness. The belief that services lack relevance for young people constitutes an obvious barrier to accessing them.

When considering support and services for young people, that would enhance their wellbeing and resilience during drought, summit participants identified initiatives that work, are needed and those that don't or are not needed:

Works/ not needed

- support networks that are youth-centred
- social events/activities to reduce isolation and provide opportunities for farming young people to meet each other
- opportunities for youth leadership and youth voices in decision-making
- opportunities that provide regular contact with peers
- telephone services
- community/Youth Hubs/Centres: run by young people and working with young people in their design
- sustainable approaches by providing more support to community-based organisations

- activities that focus on prevention more so than cure
- transparency about what's being done and why
- Being consulted, being heard, being able to participate in solutions
- transportation support (school/community bus)
- being able to see school counsellors/youth workers on a regular basis
- more mental health support and guidance for parents and families
- encouragement – particularly towards farmers and men
- services that check up on farmers
- cultural and gendered safe spaces for self-care
- mental health services located where people are – for e.g., in schools, clubs, agriculture services. Make them more youth-friendly rather than in offices or hospital-based
- having more services provided through schools; seeing schools in drought-affected areas more as community centres
- having teachers trained and able to connect with young people around issues
- providing training for students/student representatives so they feel more confident when young people talk to them as a first point of contact
- talking about wellbeing and resilience rather than mental health – “talk to people like they're people”
- mental health workers who understand drought
- peer support to help guide young people to the right services
- teachers talking about mental health more, in smaller groups, with real stories (some schools already do this a lot which is good)
- collaboration between different organisations and services to regularly check in on farmers and their families
- mentoring opportunities
- summits, workshops and training opportunities for young people
- life skills courses
- interagency networks specific to youth
- more supported pathways for tertiary education (especially during drought)
- more support for people living with a disability including training and job opportunities
- attempts to educate people (including kids) living in metro/city areas about rural living, agriculture, drought and water conservation measures
- discrete methods to secure appointments with school counsellors.

Doesn't work/ not needed

- isolation
- drop-run solutions (band aid)
- online resources (without services available)
- being told to use online services (where the cost of data is too high, where there are serious issues with connectivity)
- time/financial costs involved in coming into town to see someone
- generational differences – more young people working in these areas would help
- asking a rural man what he's feeling instead of asking him what he's thinking
- being too "professional" and acting like psychologists – "put away the pen/paper/ computer" and use "normal language"
- being treated like you're sick
- having counsellors who aren't there often enough, don't understand our context/can't build rapport, and often change so you have to start from scratch with a new person
- lengthy waiting times
- hotlines are only helpful if you're in a crisis – not if you're just not coping too well
- being unaware of what services are available in our area.

6.3 Education and roles for schools and universities

With the majority of summit participants currently attending either high school or university, education emerged as a key theme in discussions. There was a general recognition that although there is a regional/ remote education gap compared with city students, schools in drought-affected areas had an incredibly important role to play in coping with drought, not only for their students but also for families and the wider community.

The summit heard about schools like Trundle Central West which built new shower blocks and washing machines to allow families to use school water after hours, rather than their own. They created a movie night when the local cinema shut down. They built a garden where members of the community can enjoy looking at things growing, rather than dying. These kinds of initiatives were promoted by students as something all schools should consider.

Wellness hubs were also discussed - they were considered an important approach that all drought-affected schools could implement, even on a small budget.

However, in order to implement these initiatives, schools in severely drought-affected areas need much more support – not only in the form of resources, but also in the form of support from service-providers. For example, some schools are reaching out to peer-support workers because they are unable to get service-providers to reliably come to their school to work with the students. For more remote and smaller schools, it is often impossible for a staff member to leave to attend mental health training. Having service providers come to them would enable them to build their skills without burdening the school and could perhaps also provide support for teachers and staff who are also experiencing the challenges of living with drought.

School counsellors were recognised as important. But many participants identified barriers to seeing their counsellor, particularly in small communities where the school counsellor may be related to a student or senior staff member. Moreover, young people attending schools in more remote areas spoke of the challenges of building rapport with counsellors they saw as over-stretched, supporting several schools or visiting infrequently.

Some participants were attending boarding school in regional towns or cities. Their experiences and needs were different as a result. They spoke of the general isolation they felt – not only being far from home, but feeling misunderstood by their peers, their teachers and school support personnel in relation to their issues related to the drought. All boarding students expressed stress and guilt about the costs of their education. Some spoke of the difficulties they found in encouraging schools to adopt a more flexible approach to school fees for families experiencing significant drought-related financial strain. One student reported being removed from school until fees were paid in full and that no extensions were granted.

Participants studying at university, particularly those studying away from home, also expressed challenges about transitioning to and from their studies. They pointed out the generally high dropout rates, particularly in the first year, and called for much greater transitional support. In their view, this support needed to include:

- **Financial:** most students have to take on additional part-time work to support themselves;
- **Practical:** support for the things like navigating public transport;
- **Educational:** regional young people reported feeling the effects of what they see as an inferior education compared to their city-educated peers (less subjects, less experienced teachers) which results in poor academic performance in first year
- **Emotional:** living far away from their families, many participants attending university reported feeling extremely isolated and lonely, as well as experiencing anxiety about how they were coping with drought

Transitioning back to their communities also presented challenges for young people. Some highlighted the lack of available jobs, a situation significantly worsened by the drought. Others highlighted the generational divide that has emerged for young people returning home:

“ Young people in regional areas may go off to uni in the city and then we return with all these new ideas and education – we get stuck in this generational gap... We have all this new information and ways that new technology can be integrated into farming practices and that sort of thing. But a lot of the time people on council and others we try to work with, they're generations above us, much older, they can't really understand these new practices we can be implementing... [They often have] a defeatist attitude that shuts down our enthusiasm. ”

Young people wanted universities to be more flexible in relation to regional students, particularly during drought time. They wanted them to provide additional opportunities to study remotely or to restructure their programs to allow students to spend as much time at home as possible.

6.4 Water and natural resource management

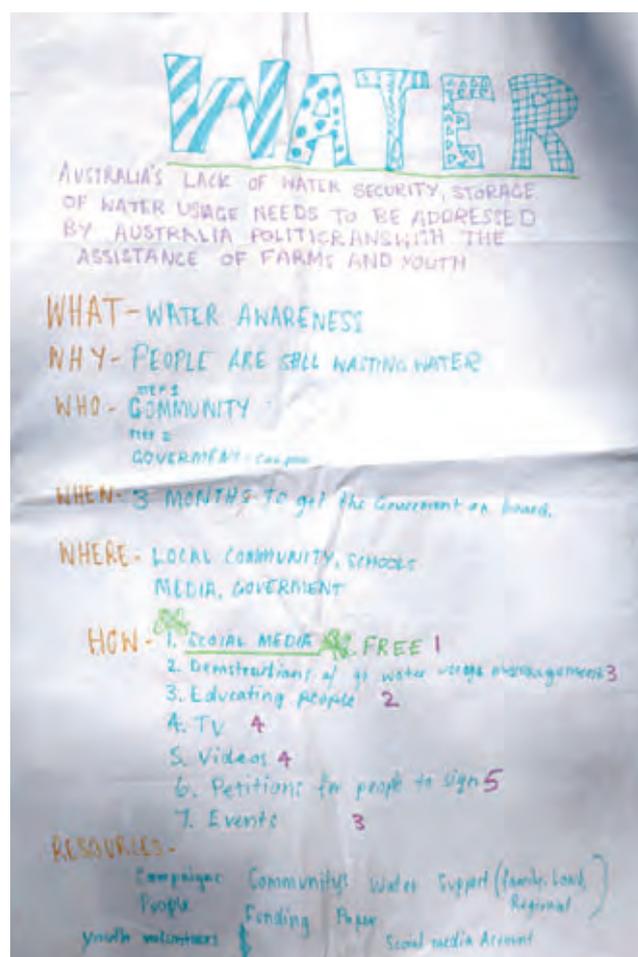
Water was an enormous theme that both literally and figuratively surrounded the summit. With water levels reaching critical lows in their homes, many participants expressed genuine anxiety and concern about what would be done to address this emergency situation. There was also significant frustration at the perceived lack of action and lack of information available to them. Many of the questions they raised focussed on these issues (see Annex B) – they wanted to know why the meaning of water restrictions was left to local councils to interpret (with some local councils seeming to act in their own interests without regard to their neighbours'). They wanted all of NSW to be “in this together” by implementing water restrictions based on the whole state, rather than just their immediate needs.

Many participants expressed a strong desire to see government at all levels planning for long-term solutions and responses to drought and resource management, particularly in the context of a changing climate.

Witnessing systems that are failing, coupled with band-aid responses, they wonder why there isn't a national inquiry into what's not working and ideas for future planning:– how river systems are managed; water recycling options, infrastructure and pipelines; managing dams and water storage; mining and its natural resources, as well as economic impacts.

Participants felt there was a strong need for governments to be more transparent about the actions they are undertaking and the reasons for decisions being made. They considered that this could be addressed by holding more public events where decision-makers make themselves available for questions. As with other issues raised, participants strongly advocated for greater opportunities for young people to provide input into such decisions. There was a perception among many that being ineligible to vote meant that elected officials neglected them.

As has been noted earlier in this report, Aboriginal communities have a strong cultural connection to water. Aboriginal participants emphasised the impact that dried riverbeds were having on their lives. They also advocated strongly that this aspect of the drought needed to be better recognised and that their voices needed to be part of discussions on water and resource management. Young people reported having health-related concerns about water-borne diseases and the provision of safe drinking water for people and animals. They also reiterated the urgent need for safe water to use for life-saving medical support such as dialysis.





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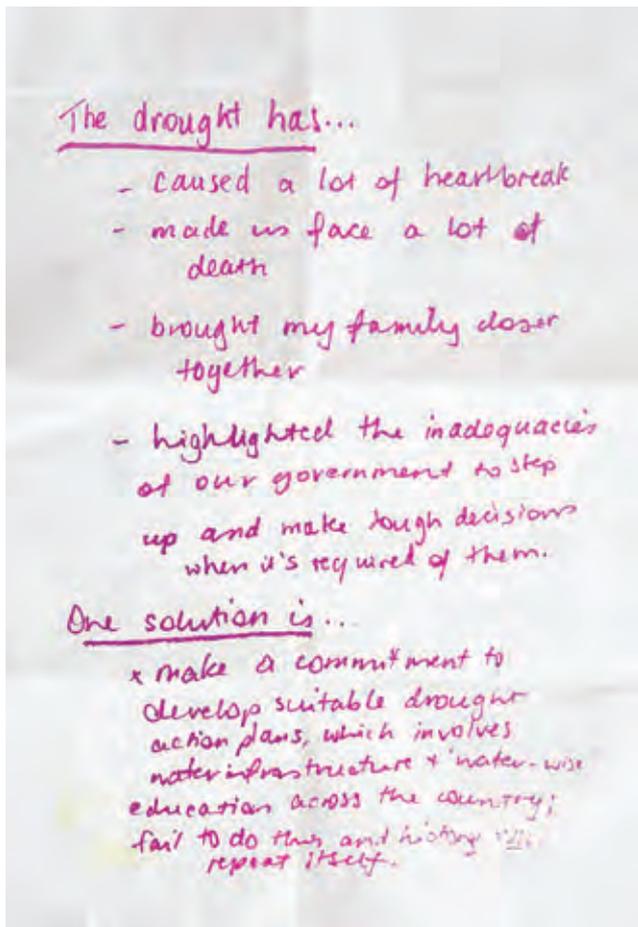
Summit outcomes and ways forward

As noted earlier in this report, the process of designing and implementing the summit was a collaborative one. UNICEF Australia worked closely with affected young people, dozens of service providers, mental health and youth organisations, and government departments and ministries. Following the summit, UNICEF Australia conducted a series of debrief/feedback sessions with all stakeholders involved in the summit and developed an online survey for participants. The following observations, conclusions, and suggestions reflect these discussions and the analysis formed throughout 2019.

7.1 Policy lessons

The summit has raised a series of important policy issues in relation to identity, remoteness, place-based disadvantage and developing community resilience. The headline policy lessons for consideration include that:

1. There is no overarching national agenda or framework for young people in Australia, or to address chronic regional and remote disadvantage for young people.
2. To ensure that our policy settings are right for young people, we need whole of government models/standards for youth participation in decision making, including in relation to drought response, quality education²⁸ and the future of farming.
3. Investing in the education, wellbeing and protection of young people in regional and remote Australia creates the best prospect for a demographic dividend and prosperity in those communities long term.
4. Multiple reviews have identified the need for investment in community leadership and resilience building. There would be significant value in establishing holistic programs for young people in drought affected communities that focus on life skills, leadership and wellbeing.
5. Getting the models for mental health right is paramount – a medical model versus community-based approaches. What is the right balance during periods of adversity such as drought? Though Australia has a history of being ravaged by drought, there is little evidence on good practice models.
6. There could be value in considering a social geography or localised approach to MPHSS services delivery. That is, mapping communities by key characteristics²⁹ and establishing what MPHSS could be most effective (a social geography approach).³⁰
7. There is a clear need to improve MPHSS literacy levels (core skilling) in regional and remote Australia, including with adolescent boys at a community level. We need to approach this in a way that doesn't pathologize young people or common/healthy transitory stress (peer to peer models).
8. There is a need for improved coordination of mental health services (type and location of services) and this requires resources for rolling mapping of those services.³¹
9. There is a growing level of generalized anxiety in many young Australians³² which may be compounded by concerns about major public policy issues such as climate change, and lack of trust in decision-makers. Inclusion creates more robust policy but could also improve the wellbeing of young people through strengthening their social contract with decision-makers.
10. If we are serious about closing the gap on health outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, we will need to quickly increase efforts to address the impacts of drought and climate change on their health and mental health.
11. Drought and climate variability provide both risk and opportunities for communities. State governments could consider wrapping a youth employment strategy around drought response (youth drought coordinators; youth financial counsellors; peer to peer roles). Australia will also need to continue to develop and grow the local Disaster Risk Reduction industry, including building a sustainable workforce that has presence in regional and remote Australia.
12. Focal points such as the newly established NSW Office of Drought Response, the Coordinator-General of Drought and North Queensland Floods and others should consider how to communicate effectively with young people as a key stakeholder in their communications strategies.



to others, and to make new friends. Several participants noted that these connections have continued since the summit. Participants also highlighted the importance of having an opportunity to share their ideas and be heard – by service providers, policy and decision makers, and the media. The following quotes capture these sentiments:

“ The highlights were not at all what I expected them to be. I think the biggest one was the sense of camaraderie that I found with the people beside me; the fact that for the first time I felt like we had a chance to be heard, that the media cared. I said to a lot of people that I did not come to the summit to talk about mental health, that I come to talk about policy and government assistance. I didn't realise how poignant my own personal experience was until I was talking and there were so many people who came and asked me to talk more about the experiences my family had, and as me if my sister was okay in the end. ”

“ I would REALLY like to thank the organisers of the event because the biggest highlight is that I met so many good people and on the large part they all had the same experiences as me. This astounded me and I felt less alone at the conclusion of the summit. The friends I have made turns out I have been in the same places as them and not even know they existed until the summit. We now have a close-knit group, and all keep in contact. Thank you so much for providing the platform. ”

7.2 Outcomes of the summit: Feedback from participants

The response rate to the UNICEF Australia's post summit online survey was 94 per cent (although 75 per cent answered most questions) and covered a number of aspects about the summit, many of them relevant for internal purposes only. Regarding overall feedback on how the summit could be improved, participants commented on ways future summits could restructure the program to allow for more time to reflect and discuss, particularly between panels. Some participants would have preferred a greater emphasis on solutions related to drought and less on the mental health impacts of drought. Many commented on wishing there were more opportunities for decision-makers to talk with young people and provide answers to their questions. Others provided suggestions of how to structure these aspects of the summit in the future.

In terms of highlights, overwhelmingly participants listed the ability to “meet new people and being able to talk to people that are going through the same situation” as the biggest strength of the summit. This allowed young people to feel understood and supported, provided multiple avenues and opportunities to share their stories and listen

7.3 Meaningful youth participation and opportunities for leadership

Perhaps the most consistent theme that has emerged is a strong expectation that all stakeholders working in drought response should create opportunities for young people to meaningfully participate in issues affecting their lives and to play leadership roles in these areas. Meaningful participation requires that young people be treated as stakeholders, not as mascots. It requires not only provision of opportunities for input into solutions, but also to be a genuine voice and to have the ability to shape decisions before they're made. It requires ensuring that engagement with young people has a real purpose. Most of all, young people must be considered not only as recipients of the decisions made today, but as equal partners in discovering solutions for the future.

There are many critical reasons why young people's participation in drought-related issues is essential. As the questions and comments provided by participants in the summit (see Annex A) clearly demonstrate, young people are experts not only of their own lives, but also of farming, drought, regional living, resource management and many other issues. As those who attended the summit will

attest, young people recognise the urgency of the situation they are in and are willing to communicate this truthfully to anyone who will listen, including those in power. And as the solutions provided in this report so clearly illustrate – young people are innovative thinkers, capable of finding new creative and practical solutions to everyday challenges.

There are also tremendous benefits for young people. Participation and leadership opportunities build experience and skill and enhance young people’s engagement with their communities and governance. This, in turn, strengthens civic engagement, builds community resilience and provides additional encouragement for young people to remain in their communities in the future.

Recommendations to government highlight the importance of strengthening local leadership in relation to expanding opportunities for young people to have a role to play in the future of their communities. Decision makers in particular need to provide time, resources and mechanisms to effectively achieve and benefit from such an approach.

For local government, there are many things that could be done to strengthen engagement with younger members of the community. First, there is a need for higher levels of transparency and information-sharing with young people and children about issues related to water and drought response. Young people not only want to know how drought response funds are being spent; they want to be part of the decision-making process. As one young person asked: “How can we ensure councils can be more accountable and bridge the gap between youth and government?”

Providing children and young people with information on the ways that urgent community issues (such as depleted water sources) are being managed is also a crucial way of reducing stress and building confidence in young people’s ability to cope with adversity.³³ Times of crisis also present an opportunity to demonstrate that representative democracy is not only available for those of voting age.

Additionally, local governments should be reaching out to young people from all walks of life to better understand the available services that can help them, and to understand how to design and deliver them in partnership with those they seek to support. Mechanisms, such as youth councils, need to have clear decision-making authority, as opposed to merely playing an advisory role. Local councils should see young people for what they are – drought-responders - and should explore ways to provide employment in these roles. Lastly, local councils and communities should be nurturing young talent by identifying young leaders in their communities – particularly in sectors crucial to the community’s future, such as health, education, and community development. they should also provide pathways for ongoing development of this leadership through education, training, mentoring and employment opportunities.

At the state and federal levels, more work could be done to provide meaningful opportunities for young people to be part of drought response discussions and planning. Again, this would mean ensuring there are concrete mechanisms for young people to provide input and to have their perspectives considered adequately. Initiatives, such as the creation of the Regional Youth Taskforce to support the development of a regional youth strategy, are welcome steps in the right direction.³⁴ It is important though that youth representative or advisory groups have some clear decision-making authority as part of their terms of reference. It is equally important that there is a path for their thinking to be mainstreamed into relevant policy.

Currently, there are significant discussions taking place on drought strategy, water management, farming approaches, new technologies and mental health. However, there are currently too few mechanisms or pathways for young people to influence participants in these discussions.

7.4 The critical importance of effective coordination at all levels

One of the most crucial and yet overlooked aspects of drought response has been coordination at all levels. Throughout the course of our work, we heard countless stories from service-providers, government personnel, educators, and young people about the lack of information-sharing between responders, the gaps and duplication resulting from this, the lack of knowledge about what’s available due to an absence of service mapping, and the frustration at inefficiencies and confusion. Ideas are quickly picked up and dropped and no one is sure that what they are doing is working.

Coordination arrangements for drought vary across NSW, dependant on the ability, willingness, and resources available within various regional areas and communities. We heard examples of coordinators coming from local council, NSW Health, Primary Health Networks and RAMHP. In one small town, we heard about a coordination forum organised by a local person and funded by the Red Cross, with deep connections to the services and people in her community. She is working full time for a part-time salary with no guarantee of work beyond June 2020. Coordination in regional areas has therefore been described by some as “hit and miss”, with little to no consensus on what it even means in practice, beyond service mapping. Young people are rarely consulted or involved in any capacity.

There are few coordination forums connecting smaller communities within a wider area. Local coordination bodies that do exist have no state or federal coordination bodies to feed up or into. In NSW, the post of Drought Coordinator has been replaced with a dedicated Office of Drought Responsibility. At this early stage, it is unclear what, if any, role they might play in leading coordination efforts.

Federally, the Joint Agency Drought Taskforce concluded its operations earlier this year. The report by the Coordinator-General, Major General Stephen Day, recommended the Department of Agriculture, Water and Resources be responsible for coordinating various government agencies involved in drought, however it is unclear if this is occurring and in what manner.³⁵

This picture reveals, from the local community or shire up to the federal government, not only how little coordination is considered, let alone prioritised, but also the fundamental misconceptions about the role coordination needs to play and its vital importance in drought response.

Effective coordination in an area as complex as drought response is essential. It greatly enhances the impact of responses for communities and the young people in them. Establishment of concrete coordination mechanisms and forums would allow for more consistent and up-to-date service mapping. This is particularly crucial in the area of youth, mental health and drought, which is highly specialised and uniquely different from other sectors. It would allow service-providers, funding bodies and organisations, and young people to share information on what they are seeing and how they are addressing challenges. In doing so, it would be possible to identify gaps and duplication in the response. It would also provide direction for prioritising efforts and funding needs. Regular meetings between stakeholders, where relationships are developed, can encourage collaboration and partnership, and generate ideas and solutions.

It is critical, if we are to resolve coordination issues, that all actors involved on the ground in drought-affected communities are brought together with state and federal governments. Such meetings present the greatest opportunity to ensure that overall approaches leave flexibility for local coordination arrangements, and for embedding recognition that each area has its own unique and specific needs and demands, as well as strengths. It also requires:

- state and federal governments to recognise this issue as a priority and provide dedicated resources to this aspect of drought response.;
- clear identification of overall responsibility for coordination at state and federal levels;
- provision of guidance and necessary support (including financial) to local towns and shires to develop a coordination structure that works for them - guidance should also include avenues to involve young people in

those coordination bodies, including in leadership roles;

- service-providers to be encouraged and supported to play a more active role in coordination forums and to collaborate/ partner with other organisations;
- coordination structures to be both horizontal and vertical (horizontally, they need to be able to share ideas and lessons learned between drought-affected communities: vertically, they need to be able to feed up and into state and federal coordination structures) – so that crucial information can be shared, and collaboration can take place.

Lastly, it should be emphasised that coordination is an activity requiring competency, dedicated resources, time and skills. It is not something that can be tacked on to an overfull workload for any one person. For coordination to work at the local level, it must be clear who is taking responsibility for this role. The mechanisms they intend to develop and employ to support this work must also be clear. Creation of forums, information-management systems, and mapping of services, as well as having the requisite interpersonal skills (consensus building, advocacy, facilitation) are just a few elements required to do this successfully.

7.5 Reliable and relevant service provision

UNICEF Australia recognises the importance of providing direct financial support to farmers and their families through allowances and loan schemes. However, as noted in our previous report, it is also important to recognise the impacts of drought on non-farmers as well. Moreover, it is equally important to invest in social support structures, mechanisms, and services for all drought-affected communities, particularly young people who are currently significantly overlooked.

Young people living with drought require reliable services. By far the greatest challenge to providing reliably consistent services is funding instability. Many, if not most, programs or projects have a one-year funding cycle. Indeed, many federally funding projects through Primary Health Networks will lose their funding in June 2020. There are no indications thus far that they will be able to continue. Funding uncertainty prevents organisations from being able to plan beyond a year. Crucially for young people, this uncertainty prevents them from being able to build relationships with communities and to engage in longer-term initiatives.

Funding uncertainty, staff shortages and staff turnover, resulting in projects that are briefly initiated and then ended, is not an uncommon event. As one peer support worker explained:



“ It’s a frustration that gets voiced quite a lot in small towns like Trangie and Narromine where they finally get a bit of a presence in that particular area and want to start accessing it and then it’s suddenly not available anymore. [As a result] clients get disheartened and feel like they’ve just been left.” (Matt March) ”

We heard of cases where remote communities reached out to service-providers to arrange weekly two-hour visits for young people, only to find after a few weeks that the organisation was no longer able to visit. Instead these organisations recommended that the young people come to the regional hub where they were based. This unreliability has a very harmful impact on the very people these programs aim to support. It creates mistrust and acts as a further barrier to seeking support.

The relevance of services and activities aimed at supporting young people living with drought is similarly hampered by a lack of opportunities for young people to participate in the design and delivery of these services. As noted in section 7.1, service-providers need to ensure they are taking the time to get to know young people living with drought, what they need and what the most effective ways are to support them.

The following points are based on what we heard from young people and stakeholders before, during and after the summit, regarding the picture of service-delivery and approaches that resonate for young people living with drought:

- **Strengths-based approaches:** As noted in section 7.1, this is extremely important for young people. Projects or activities that seek to build on young people’s strengths, talents and lived experiences (as well as their community’s) are much more meaningful for them.
- **Tools/ guidance that works for them:** There was a general view that the tools and guidance developed by larger mental health organisations are being written with a city audience in mind – suggestions of ‘seeing a movie’ for a young person living far away from a cinema could be made more relevant if replaced with suggestions of ‘going for a ride’, or ‘going to the back paddock and having a good scream’.
- **In-person, regular support:** Service-providers need to give serious consideration to the inherent limitations of infrequent or distance support for young people living in remote communities. They need to find ways to provide more regular and in-person support. There is intermittent contact at best within most remote areas. Many service-providers are not reaching those most in need, those most isolated. At the same time, community-based organisations (such as the Benevolent Society) doing valuable and important work supporting the mental health and wellbeing of young people in these more remote areas should receive greater support. They play a particularly valuable role reaching the very communities that are most in need and least supported. This is particularly the case with schools that may have an over-stretched counsellor supporting four or five other schools as well. These organisations, which utilise youth mental health workers, present a complementary model to clinical support. Their more regular presence in these remote towns allows them to build a necessary rapport with young people. The bottom line is that the only way to truly provide support to young people most affected by drought is for service providers to have the resources to allow them to go to where the young people are – not ask them to come to you.



- **Peer Support Models:** Peer support models work for young people because they feel like they are talking to someone who understands their lived experiences. They feel their peers can give them support that speaks to those experiences and the needs arising from them. Moreover, informal peer support exists in all drought-affected communities. Whether it's a coach or a volunteer from a youth group, these trusted individuals are a crucial aspect of young people's support networks. There should be opportunities for these community members to be trained - on how to have supportive conversations and encourage help-seeking behaviour, and how to refer young people to services if they're struggling and need further support from mental health professionals.
- **Peer-to-peer group-based activities (including online support forums):** Opportunities to share their experiences are particularly valued by young people living with drought, and rarely offered. They also present opportunities for service-providers to consider the ways they can develop collective support models and create small group forums to discuss, share, and problem-solve.

- **Conceptualise mental health and wellbeing more broadly:** In regional and remote communities there are many barriers to accessing MHPSS support, including strong stigma, lack of privacy and an absence of relevant and relatable youth targeted services. There is value in testing models that have a strength-based and holistic approach to wellbeing. These are models that emphasise social connectedness, life skills and personal development. Activities - such as building community gardens to create a green space, increasing informal social events and opportunities, designing hubs or spaces for young people to meet, providing greater transportation options - can enhance wellbeing over time. Indeed, providing young people with information about drought, water shortages and other urgent community concerns is another important way to enhance their ability to cope with adversity. Similarly, having opportunities to participate in community activities to support problem solving and decision-making.
- **Arts/ storytelling/ narrative approaches:** The links between arts-based/ storytelling activities and improved health and wellbeing for young people are well established. Given the nature of drought and the scarcity of activities for young people, particularly in more remote communities, this aspect of youth drought response presents untapped potential. Examples like the Dramatic Minds Festival in Murrumbidgee (discussed above), Desert Pea's work with young people in Wilcannia³⁶ and Indigenous Hip Hop Project's work in Coonamble³⁷, Cowra High School's drought dance performance³⁸, all provide vivid and inspiring examples that could be replicated elsewhere. Photography, music, dance, short stories, and theatre are measures that could be more utilised to give young people living with drought an opportunity to share their experiences and views.

In the end, if mental health and youth services are not accessible, if young people are not aware of them, or they provide services that are not context-sensitive, it doesn't matter what level of investment you make in them.

Communities need to understand what is working and why

Through the process of collaboratively designing and implementing the summit, it became abundantly clear that there are great things happening in communities and shires across drought-affected NSW. These initiatives and activities are having genuinely positive impacts for children, young people and their communities. However, without any mechanisms, avenues or opportunities to share these ideas and experiences, and the lessons learned from them, with other drought-affected areas, much of this incredibly valuable learning is lost. So too, are opportunities to replicate and build on these ideas and approaches. There is therefore a need to answer the question: What is working and why?

Some specific examples of approaches that show signs of success and would benefit from greater analysis and wider sharing are:

- **Wellness hubs:** A number of schools have created Wellness Hubs in various ways, depending on available resources, with varying success. Forbes High School is (unofficially) considered the ‘gold standard’ of this approach – providing a physical and virtual space where students and their families can receive tailored support to meet their needs, and access a variety of services and activities run by service-providers working with the school. Other schools have visited Forbes High School on open days to better understand how they could provide a similar space. Smaller and more isolated schools have tried to implement this idea using volunteers and almost no budget and discovered services were unable to reliably be available. A thorough analysis and evaluation of Wellness Hubs - as they currently exist, including the number and qualifications of dedicated staff needed to provide guidance to others seeking to implement similar initiatives - would have tremendous value.
- **Youth councils:** Government could similarly analyse models and derive lessons learned from various youth councils across the state (and the local councils they sit within) to provide guidance and model options to other local councils. This would be particularly useful to encourage greater youth participation within smaller communities that sit within larger regional councils - which often feel that they don’t have a voice due to their size/ remoteness. Youth councils need to represent the diversity of their communities and have real power to influence decisions, rather than just have an advisory function. Guidance in this regard would be extremely valuable.
- **Mental health and wellbeing youth leadership:** There are a number of organisations implementing programs that seek to de-stigmatise mental health and encourage help-seeking behaviour among young people in regional NSW. This approach should be amplified so that young people feel safe seeking help.
- **Peer-support models:** Several NSW Local Health Districts and non-government service providers are increasingly creating teams, comprised of local community members with relevant lived experience, and providing them with training opportunities to build specific expertise. This is a promising approach that would significantly benefit from a greater understanding of its impacts (even in these early stages) and a commitment to providing advice to other organisations seeking to adopt a similar approach. At the moment, there are three Local Health Districts with drought support programs that adopt different models of care. One has mostly peer-support workers with clinical oversight. One has a 50/50 split of clinical and peer support workers, and one has only clinical staff. These different approaches present an opportunity, when

working with those affected by drought, to explore the mutually supporting relationship between clinical and social work models. Publicly available initial evaluations of these approaches, coupled with forums for sharing the lessons learned, would be very helpful for others to learn from.

- **Peer-to-peer activities:** Young people have consistently been clear that opportunities to talk and connect with others who understand what they’re going through has real benefits. It not only increases their wellbeing by providing additional and necessary avenues for support, it allows them to discuss and share ideas and solutions. Feedback from the summit further confirmed this. Organisations working through schools to provide group-based activities (including talking and arts-based) should be strengthened with additional and longer-term resources as they provide a valuable addition to schools supporting student wellbeing. This is critically important for remote schools. Moreover, service-providers would benefit from ensuring their work considers ways to allow young people to support each other.
- **Community capability building:** When seeking to support communities to solve problems, particularly with regard to capability-building, there needs to be a greater understanding, and utilisation of best practices. Organisations adopting a collaborative approach to ensure skills and knowledge remain with communities are generating knowledge and experience in this area. We need to understand their approaches and explore ways to benefit from the lessons they’ve learned.
- **Community resilience:** We do not have sufficient understanding of the factors that make communities resilient during tough times. There is much we don’t know about community resilience during tough times and the factors that erode this resilience. This knowledge is critical if we are to improve preparedness measures for the next drought. Even less is known about how young people can contribute to this resilience. In order to better understand and strengthen communities now, and into the future, resources could be allocated to universities to collaborate with local communities, service providers and government.

7.6 Need for strategic guidance

There is no doubt of the complexity of responding to drought. Actors from multiple sectors are working across three levels of government in relation to resources that impact across neighbouring communities and across neighbouring states. In this regard,, state and federal governments could have a significant impact on improving the cohesiveness and efficacy of drought response by providing greater strategic guidance to drought responders at all levels.

For example, federal grants to local councils provide a welcome avenue of support. However, as young people have told us, councils are often at a loss as to how to spend funding in ways to discernibly benefit their communities. State and federal government could provide a suite of ideas and options for other communities by identifying successful approaches in various communities, .

Young people living with drought are aware and concerned about the lack of a state or federal drought strategy for the present and future. They believe this has resulted in band-aid and ad-hoc solutions that lack coherence, as well as decision-making that lacks transparency and accountability. Not only do they want to see clearer leadership from their government, they also want to be a part of strategic policymaking concerning drought.

This could be addressed by developing and resourcing an integrated national drought management strategy based on scientific evidence, extensive stakeholder consultation and the principles of the Sendai Framework, including:

- (a) developing accompanying state/territory-based preparedness plans;
- (b) investing in capacity development on the national drought management strategy;
- (c) publicising and building awareness of the national drought management strategy and preparedness plans; and
- (d) integrating drought into the formal mandate of key national emergency management agencies.

7.7

Small ideas and big wins

Perpetual problems, such as remoteness and drought, present a complex picture that can distract from solutions. Yet, much of the thinking about solvable problems tends to emerge from community members with lived experience in regional and remote areas.

The following provides a snapshot of three ideas emerging from the summit that could deliver a high impact during times of drought and potentially be scalable.

Community chest model:

This is the equivalent of a community-based banking or pooled funding model and can be designed and adapted based on the needs of the individual local area. It is a community-based social protection mechanism where trusted leaders have oversight of, and operate a fund which is headquartered locally. Community members can draw on small sum financing when they urgently require cash-funds, and then repay the loan over a short period. This enables access to flexible, small and short-term loans which are generally not available through standard banking institutions.

In practical terms the 'community chest model' is an informal safety net for individuals and families. It could be rolled out with guidelines and tips. It could also create community cooperation during times of high financial stress for families and businesses. It is an accessible



model that could 'help to make ends meet' on a short-term basis when many families in drought-affected farming and regional communities are facing crippling levels of debt through formal banking loans.

Government schools as a hub:

Education can be a lifeline for students particularly during periods of high stress and adversity. When communities are experiencing drought, schools can be more than just a platform to learn. Schools can:

- provide a highly protective environment with strong referral pathways to existing local and technology-based services (identifying service gaps and advocating on behalf of students);
- assist in normalising the lives of students when their circumstances are highly unpredictable;
- develop and co-design new programs to support students and their families;
- leverage school infrastructure to provide assistance to parents and families.

School administrators could develop action plans in collaboration with student populations and community leaders to set out clear priorities for assistance during periods of drought, and to address the social emotional and geographic isolation of local students. Suggested activities that schools may choose to initiate or scale up could include:

- group peer mentoring programs that are co-designed with local youth to improve student wellbeing and educational achievement;
- informal social activities or support programs for drought affected parents;
- student exchange programs to build understanding between metropolitan and regional/remote Australia;
- informal and community-based childcare linked to schools to provide parents with scheduled rest;
- community infrastructure program (installing washing machines and additional showers in schools for community use)
- community transport programs for the most remote and drought affected schools (schools purchase a bus to address impacts of transport disadvantage; and develop a community schedule to link young people to regional hubs, casual employment and sport and recreation activities);
- partnerships with business and communities that create entrepreneurship, and support student skills development and school to work transition;
- drought noticeboard in the schoolyard to share information with parents and community members;
- green playground, community gardens and schoolyard aquaculture projects;
- collect, gather, organize and share data regarding the impact of drought on student education (including drop-out rates) and
- collect, gather, organize and share data regarding measures that support the wellbeing and educational achievement of students during periods of drought.

Constitutionally, state and territory governments are primarily responsible for policy, funding and delivery of school education. The Australian Government is a minority public funder of public schools. In November 2019, the Australian Government announced an additional ten million dollars in Special Circumstances for drought affected independent schools. While governments have a clear mandate to independent schools under the *Australian Education Act 2013*, it is hard to overlook the data picture. According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics data, over 70 per cent³⁹ of all regional and remote students attend government-funded schools, which were locked out of this funding pool. While Australian governments argue that government schools can respond to drought through the annual global allocation, it is unclear that this is the case. Additionally, this places pressure on school principals and administrators who, when facing the reality of education disadvantage, routinely have to justify drought-related spends against other long-standing community demands.

Youth-led water awareness campaign:

Access to quality drinking water is an internationally recognized human right - derived from the right to an adequate standard of living. Under international law, states are required to work towards achieving universal access to water for all, without any discrimination and while prioritizing those most in need.⁴⁰ Globally, there has been a marked shift towards understanding water as a multidimensional resource that is essential for survival and wellbeing, social and economic function, energy and food production and the maintenance of global ecosystems. This understanding, however, has not been sufficiently promoted to raise public awareness of water scarcity.

Water scarcity and management were themes discussed in some detail throughout the summit. Participants were concerned that water security is essentially non-existent for so many remote communities.

As previously mentioned in Chapter 6, summit participants discussed the urgent need for a more integrated approach to the managing water, land and other resources. Participants suggested the development of a national youth-developed-and-led water awareness campaign.

The purpose of this campaign would be to:

- promote understanding of the situation of drought affected Australians;
- promote the idea that water is everyone's responsibility;
- promote a water conservation/efficiency mindset;
- promote understanding of water security threats in Australia;
- positively influence the behaviour and habits of Australians in relation to their daily water usage (developing improved water behaviours); and
- motivate strategic commitments and financing (innovation, partnerships and investment in water for the long run).



8

Afterword

Despite the rains that have followed the horrific 2019-2020 bushfires in our country, the drought continues. In fact, for many, including children and young people, the rain was little more than a news report. With the continuation of the drying of our landscape, the need to understand, improve and innovate the ways we can support people and communities through drought, now and into the future, remains critical in the development of public policy and the initiatives that go with it.

Children and young people are citizens of our country and stakeholders in our democracy. As an organisation looking at drought, our focus is on the children and young people involved – a too often overlooked stakeholder group in national challenges, such as drought – on their needs, their experience with this natural disaster, their capacity to contribute, and their insights and problem-solving approaches that can powerfully contribute, alongside others, to future disaster responses.

With this in mind, for over 12 months, UNICEF Australia has been on a journey to better understand the way young people are experiencing drought and how they could be better supported. We also sought to help improve public awareness of the ways young people in drought are being impacted, as well as the initiatives and policies they need and require to increase their ability to navigate, manage and cope through this incredibly difficult time.

During the period of this research, we had deep conversations and discussions with around 150 young people from across NSW, working in close partnership with 20 of them. We also consulted with over 70 different stakeholders who work in the areas of drought and young people, closely collaborating with around 30 organisations, government agencies and departments. We have listened to children, young people, parents, farmers and professionals living in drought-affected NSW in an effort to not only paint a picture of what drought looks like for young people and children, but to ascertain and understand what they want and need for the future.

The NSW Youth Summit on Living with Drought was a culmination of this work and learning. It was designed with recognition of the deep emotional impact this long and severe drought is having on young people, its implications for their wellbeing, and the desire to identify innovative and varied ways of supporting them. It was also designed

with full appreciation of the passion and deep commitment young people have for finding solutions to the drought and its negative impacts – solutions not only for themselves, but for their entire communities.

This is a protracted environmental, social, economic and political event, of which these children and young people are on the frontlines every day. Their consequent demand to be on the frontlines of solutions and decision-making was heard by everyone involved with the summit. This demand is not only understandable and justifiable, it is necessary and pivotal to the development of successful and effective outcomes and solutions.

From inception, UNICEF Australia was committed to ensuring all aspects of the summit project be collaborative, from the beginning to the end – and not just to ensure children and young people were at its core. Collaboration with stakeholders from all aspects of drought response is necessary because the area of drought and young people is highly complex, involving actors from all levels of government, from multiple agencies and departments, educational institutions, service-providers, interest groups and from business. Collaboration is the only way to ensure young people are supported in a coherent, relevant and holistic way. Collaboration continues to be critical in the delivery of effective solutions: because approaches that ‘deliver’ require everyone to do better.

Finally, one of the key points of emphasis in this report is the need for young people to have meaningful opportunities to participate and lead in responses to drought. Concurrently, it highlights the dangers of treating young people like mascots or photo opportunities, rather than as the important stakeholders and survivors they are, with critical expertise developed through lived experience.

As with our initial drought report, *In their own words*, we have sought to share the data we’ve obtained through this action-based research in order to provide the most comprehensive bank of information, ideas and analysis possible. It is our hope that it will inspire new and innovate approaches.

We view this summit and report as the first steps to, not only better supporting young people living with drought, but actively involving them in seeking solutions. Young people need to believe it won’t be the last.

Annexes

Annex A Glossary of acronyms and terms

Advisory group – the Summit Advisory Group
Batyr – founded in 2011, a purpose preventative mental health organisation, created and driven by young people, for young people, named after batyr ('hero'), The Talking Elephant From Kazakhstan
DRR – Disaster risk reduction
FHA – The Farm Household Analysis
MPHSS – Mental health and psychological support
NSWYFA – New South Wales Young Farmers Association
PHN – Primary Health Network
RAMHP – Rural Adversity Mental health Program
RYMH – The Benevolent Society's Rural Youth Mental Health Service
Sendai framework – The Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030 outlines seven clear targets and four priorities for action to prevent new and reduce existing disaster risks: it was adopted at the Third UN World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction in Sendai, Japan, on March 18, 2015.
Steering committee – the Summit Youth Steering Committee
STEM – Science, technology, engineering and mathematics
The Drought Report – UNICEF Australia's *In their own words: the hidden impact of prolonged drought on children and young people* report, 2018
The summit – UNICEF Australia's *NSW Youth Summit on Living with Drought*, 2019

Annex B Specific questions raised by participants

The following section is questions and comments raised by participants throughout the summit and on the final day's Open Forum with decision and policy-makers.

Water-related

- Do you believe that either state or federal governments should be more involved in how local councils manage their water restrictions? Where I'm from in the central west, there are several different levels of restrictions in place across the area. Should there be a universal guide for water restrictions so that elected local officials, often with a conflict of interest, aren't implementing restrictions when it's already too late?

- Does the government have a plan to regulate regional growth and upgrade water infrastructure? As regional centres grow in population, the existing water supplies are drying up quicker as more people use it.
- The creation of a Cooperative Research Centre to research and investigate ways to manage our water better, both for agriculture, manufacturing and industry, as well as everyday personal consumption was one idea discussed during the summit talks. Although a "water sensitive cities" CRC currently exists, it doesn't seem to cover the issues of broader Australia in smart water management. A CRC could have a research arm and a large education arm focusing on educating people (both rurally and in the cities) about sustainable water usage. We shouldn't just save water during a drought; it should become the normal behaviour to conserve water even in the good years. For example, Israel re-use water many times over and manage their water carefully because of their climate's conditions. I would like to know if the panel thinks this idea has merit? What else can be done to research new technologies, conduct large-scale education programs, and educate people about sustainable water usage? Does the government have any ideas to propose and put in place in addition to this?
- How do you get collaboration between councils so that we can stop talking about it and actually put solutions in place and actually make stuff happen? (Eg, water infrastructure)
- What pressure does state government bring to bear on local governments in terms of water restrictions?
- What is the relationship between local and state government on deciding what water restrictions should be in place and what they mean?
- What's the plan for communities running out of water right now in terms of transporting water? Some areas we're from are going to run out of water by the end of the month. It's devastating because there are some kids that are dropping out of school just to help with their properties and water is so tight it's not funny. People are buying it from the supermarket.
- What exactly are you doing to transport water to areas like Guyra? Water has become a luxury not a necessity. Water is a human right. Why is Sydney only on Level 2 when we're on Level 5?
- Do you believe the state government should have more of a hand on how local governments handle their water restrictions? This is clearly an issue. If it weren't – we wouldn't have run out of water.
- Our family farm has irrigation water. We decided with a limited remaining allocation to irrigate our pastures, instead of selling the water at a higher financial gain.

We made some hay and we hope to keep the last of our cattle alive to save the genetics of our herd, that my grandfather started over 50 years ago. This water also provides an environmental benefit to our area. It has also given employment locally. Water was attached to the land previously to help farmers prepare for droughts. The Government policy of separating land and water has taken away the very asset that has helped communities survive. Can the Government reverse the unintended consequences of the water trading rules to provide a positive social, economic and environmental outcome so that my generation has a future in farming?

- Many communities across NSW and Queensland are in a severe situation regarding their urban water supply and are facing running out of water completely in the near future without rain. It is evident that there has been mismanagement of water across the Murray-Darling Basin which is an element of the problem currently being faced. Would you consider conducting a Royal Commission into the Murray-Darling Basin Plan to gauge its effectiveness and ensure better water management in the future for the benefit of towns, agriculture and the environment?
- Within NSW, we have towns that are already out of water and others on level 5 and 6 restrictions. Would you consider pushing a Royal Commission of all water decisions, (including the Murray Darling Basin Plan) that have been made so that there is transparency between farmers and government?
- Why don't city people get the same drought restrictions? Drought restrictions wouldn't affect a lot of them. No use of outside water for most—all rain tanks, rainfall, etc

Youth participation/ contributions/ collaboration

- Young people in regional areas may go off to uni in the city and then we return with all these new ideas and education – we get stuck in this generational gap...We have all this new information and ways that new technology can be integrated into farming practices and that sort of thing. But a lot of the time people on council and others we try to work with, they're generations above us, much older, they can't really understand these new practices we can be implementing. So how can we as youth communicate better with people much older than us and who have a completely different mental attitude than we have. A defeatist attitude that shuts down our enthusiasm.

Government planning and response

- The federal government is providing \$1 million drought grants to local councils – how does it work? Cowra

has spent their money on local footpaths. How can we ensure councils (and ourselves as youths of regional NSW) can be more accountable and bridge that gap between youth and government?

- Due to the drastic circumstances surrounding regional and remote Australia, which are our livelihoods, there's been a strong call for this drought to be declared a natural disaster. This would adequately enable much needed support and Australian resources to be distributed to farmers and their struggling communities. Before they are forced to shut their doors and can no longer continue and provide the necessities that they give to our fellow counterparts in metro areas. We provide those things and I'd ask each of you to speak on this. This is a major national issue and calling this a natural disaster will give it the attention it needs.
- Obviously, this is not the first time we've been in drought and it is not the last one. So, my question is, what long-term drought proofing strategies are currently being implemented? And are they compulsory or subsidised?
- I have a question on the existing FLO (Farm Liaison Officer). I wish to ask the panel whether they think it would be pertinent to fund a youth farm liaison officer with the explicit purpose of working alongside rural youth to assist them to access information, facilities and assistances much the same as the existing FLO. The Youth FLO could accompany the DPI (Department of Primary Industry) and RAA (Rural Assistance Authority) drought buses which travel the region and hold events, this YFLO could target a demographic that is overlooked by the current assistance model.
- There are positions in Centrelink called a Farm Household Case Officer (FHCO) that assist farmers in getting onto payment, remaining on payment, accessing training and setting active and achievable goals for improving their positions. Would it be viable to include a similar position for children in rural or remote areas that are attempting to claim Youth Allowance? There is a requirement for most universities for rural students to travel immense distances, they have to relocate far away from their homes, their families and the life that they know, in most cases they are doing this completely alone, yet facing the Centrelink forms in most cases is a sheer impossibility, if there was a Youth allowance officer or team that could be reached by rural kids, they could work on keeping them linked in to mental health facilities, helping them access the relocation scheme.
- What plans do the government have that they are ready to implement TODAY to help with feed and financial assistance because as well as needing long-term help,

we also need immediate help, rain or no rain. Grass does not grow overnight and the rain that we may just have received for most of us won't allow us to stop feeding.

- A major concern for many farmers, including my family, is their ability to retain their core breeding stock during the drought. Other than the freight subsidy, have you considered putting other measures in place (such as a fodder or interest rate subsidy) to assist farmers with this? If so, what are they, and when will they commence?
- Given that Australia's agricultural exports significantly contribute to the wealth of our nation, why is more not being done to aid agricultural businesses and communities to survive this drought?
- My parents are rural contractors and farmers and they rely on a good season to receive good income. In the past, we have had good seasons, but the drought has made our entire income suffer. When applying for loans through the Rural Assistance Authority, we are seen to have more off-farm income than in-farm, and we are not eligible for these loans even though our off-farm income is agriculture base. These loans are used to drought-proof our property. My question to you is, why aren't the loan applications considering where the off-farm income comes from?
- What percentage of the \$2 billion in Drought Appeal Aid will be loans for the farmer which will be needed to be paid back to the government? How are the farmers going to pay back loans with no income?
- What plans are in place for recovery stage support?
- Can / will the government support implementation of future drought proofing?
- What long-term solutions are in place?

Health, mental health and wellbeing approaches

- A big problem with rural and regional areas is the stigma that's around young males and talking out. On a personal note, in the last six months I've lost four close friends to suicide. I'd like to know whether it be through the schools, whether it be through Indigenous and Torres Strait Islander or your personal experiences, what is the best way to go about breaking down that stigma?
- The government has consistently highlighted and set about providing mental health care for rural and remote adolescents. Whilst I admit that the crisis care has increased dramatically there is a complete and utter lack of acute, continued mental health facility and care. Personally, my sister was diagnosed with Borderline personality disorder, manic depression and OCD. These are issues that require ongoing support from mental health specialists that were simply not available. How is it that Dubbo as a regional centre does not have an adolescent's mental health unit? How is it that Orange mental health unit in Bloomfield only operates at half capacity due to staffing issues despite the fact that it services such a large part of the central west? Why is

it that programs like DBT, (dialectic behaviour therapy) available in regional NSW? And most importantly how is it that people in rural areas cannot have a teleconference with psychologists and psychiatrists in the city and have it billed through Medicare as part of their mental health plan?

- Lots of us have spoken about our parents' level of stress and the difficulties of accessing health services which require specialist assistance without having to leave the farm. How can NSW Health help farmers access services without putting livelihoods at risk?
- Mental health support is available but only if you know it's available and have the motivation to seek it out. What do you do when you're just too tired?
- Why are teleconferencing costs with psych professional unable to be charged through Medicare as part of a Mental Health plan?
- Regarding peer support models, smaller communities face unique challenges – family names have deep roots and reputations which could affect the way peer support works. What are some solutions to this?
- How do you try to talk to farmers who don't like to talk and don't want to drive 100kms to find a service that isn't full or booked out?
- What I've noticed is that personally, as a daughter, with a lot of these medications and psychologists and going to see GPs, it costs a lot of money. Is there any funding available? Because it's really difficult to be struggling and need that support but that's also putting extra pressure on your parents, which is part of the reason you're struggling. So it's a bit like a vicious cycle.
- [Describing her Dad as a proud and stoic farmer who's obviously struggling] We can't get him to open up and talk about anything involving his mental state...which isn't great. How do we get people to open up at home without having to take them to a clinic or a doctor? Because he will not talk to anyone about these kinds of things.
- For six years of my life I've had no friends in my life who understood [dealing with mental ill-health] and there has not been a single day where someone has gone to a school and given information to other students on how to help your friends on mental illness. Would there be a service to give information to student who are kind of clueless, to be honest, because people don't know how to help when you're going through something.
- [As a boarding student in a city school] How can we get support from people who understand our context and not just the urban context?
- Do all teachers have a mandatory basic training to deal with mental health? Because most students prefer to talk to one particular teacher rather than go to the counsellor.

- What has been done to direct health professionals to rural areas that do not have medical coverage?
- Many rural and regional families have pushed aside their mental and physical health and faith. Is NSW Health or the National Mental Health Commission discussing or planning a support group consisting of local land service officers, and medical and religious professionals, to visit rural properties as a team and offer their support?

Education and jobs

- The university drop-out rates for rural students in their first year is extremely high. How can we address this?
- There's recognition that remoteness/living in a rural area is a factor for special consideration but can the Department of Education consider drought as an additional factor for special consideration in the HSC?
- How can we educate kids living in cities to better understand what we're going through and why what we do matters so much to our country?
- Can the government support the creation of "domestic student exchanges" between kids in rural areas and kids in cities to help learn more about other young people's lives?
- I think agriculture should be a compulsory subject in schools. There's an enormous "disconnect" with rural life in the cities. Do you think making agriculture compulsory could be a way for preserving agriculture for the future?
- There is much support to innovate how the Government delivers drought support, with one such idea being income contingent loans. The best-known example of an income contingent loan is HECS. With a HECS loan, the Government underwrites the tertiary education of Australian students. During the drought is there an opportunity for the Government to offer a similar type of loan, that underwrites Australian farmers and would allow farming families to utilise their income from future years to meet their expenses, including education during the drought?
- Given that the average age of farmers in Australia is 54 years and only 13 per cent of farmers are under the age of 35, what are you doing to encourage young people to pursue careers in Agriculture and ensure the future of the industry?
- Many non-rural children/young people do not understand the struggle that we deal with in our daily lives. Is it possible to create a program aimed at non-rural students to help them understand the struggle we deal with and how they can be more efficient with water?
- How will you help support young people with education?
- People have to stop their education to work on the farm
- ANU has reported 70 per cent drop out of rural students
- School dropouts have increased in general-Clear HECS debts?
- Boarding schools is best option for most, but long travel is required
- Guilt of taking family resources for school
- Plan for tertiary education needed
- Way needed for young people to leave school to help for drought emergencies. A number of young people missed exams to attend the Drought Summit

Annex C

Summit Call to Action

In October 2019, UNICEF Australia hosted the first Youth Summit for young people living with drought. The summit presented an opportunity for young people living with drought in New South Wales to have a break from the land, work with their peers who are going through similar struggles, and have an opportunity to connect, engage and reflect, surrounded by beautiful Lake Macquarie. Over three days, participants explored the ways decision-makers can best support children and young people to build resilience and become better prepared to reduce the negative impacts of ongoing and future drought. Most importantly, the summit saw children and young people come together with decision-makers and one another to discuss the challenges they face living with drought in NSW and how responses can be improved. The culmination of three days' work, the young participants discussed and presented this 'Call to Action' to a panel of influential decision-makers who accepted the invitation to attend. This is what they had to say.

PART A

Introduction

1. We are 88 young people from 57 properties and 26 towns across New South Wales. Between us, we cover around 700,000 acres of land across the state.
2. We are a diverse group of young people from Aboriginal backgrounds, 7th and 8th generation Australian farming families, new entrants to agriculture, and migrant families who have settled in communities across regional NSW.
3. For Aboriginal young people from NSW, we are concerned about the impact the drought has on our culture. For us, the river is more than just a water source. It is a source of spirituality and connection to country. The river is the blood of our people. Our ancestors have been the custodians of the environment for thousands of years. If we fail to continue nurturing our lands, we not only make it impossible for future generations to practice their cultures, but we also disrespect our ancestors' legacy. We need you to know that the drought is affecting the wellbeing and mental health of Aboriginal people.
4. As a group, we are young farmers, community leaders, apprentices, students, mental health practitioners, remote financial counsellors, educators, and health professionals. Collectively, we know that, when farmers struggle, everyone struggles.
5. We are proud ambassadors for regional and remote Australia and its long-term sustainability. We have a strong love of the land, and a love of our way of life. We would never choose to grow up anywhere else—even though, for the youngest members of our group, we've seen more drought than good years.

6. We have all of the same challenges as other young Australians. But, we also face the difficulties and risks of remoteness. And we are now in the third year of state-wide drought, which exacerbates the inequalities that already exist. We want our grandchildren to live on the same land as our grandparents.
7. Australia needs a plan to future proof our communities. We need infrastructure, community education, and technology. Without this, we will never be prepared for drought, and this will be a conversation that never ends.
8. This drought came on fast and strong. We were only just beginning to recover from the Millennium Drought. We have to ask, what, in concrete terms, was done in the meantime? What policy, what strategies, what water infrastructure? Unless we commit to long term action, we will be having this conversation over and over and over again.
9. We urgently need an honest national conversation about water security. Without this, our primary industries and our economies face a certain failure. Drought will eventually affect our food security, ecosystems, and eventually our cities. We understand that the government can't make it rain. But when it does rain, we want to be ready.
10. We are three years into the state-wide drought – and young people are only convening now for a state-wide conversation. Why has it taken so long to include us in a conversation? Why weren't we here in the first year?
11. It is hard to survive around so much death. It is hard to survive when the dust never settles. It is hard to survive without some of the most basic services.
12. We need you, and our fellow Australians, to look past the Great Dividing Range at what is happening for young people who live with drought every day. We want to bridge the divide between regional and remote Australia and the cities. We want people to understand us better; to understand where the food on the kitchen table comes from; and to respect water saving behaviours as a new norm.

PART B

Issues and Solutions

13. Today, we will make some brief comments on five key areas for action:
 - Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander social and emotional wellbeing;
 - Youth participation and decision making;
 - Mental health;
 - Families; and
 - Education.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander social and emotional wellbeing

14. First, we need Australia to understand the profound impact of drought on Aboriginal people. We want people to understand the importance of Aboriginal culture and our connection to country.

15. We need a review into water rights and an agreement established between the NSW government and Aboriginal communities, elders and young people on joint water management and planning.
16. We need the protection and conservation of sacred sites and cultural practices to be a priority, not only for the future of Aboriginal peoples, but our country.

Drought decision-making

17. Second, we are working hard alongside our parents, and our towns and communities to cope with drought. It is critical that we have formal channels to be involved in drought decision making.
18. We need regular access to relevant state and federal ministers. We need accountability, transparency and communication with stakeholder groups, and money spent where it's needed most.
19. We need to employ young people strategically as Youth Liaison Officers in the drought response – beyond just year to year contracts.
20. Ultimately, we have the right to be involved in decision making because we are the future of regional and remote Australia, and the farming industry.

Mental health in the community

21. Third, the drought is putting stress on our mental health. We emphasise that:
 - Loneliness and isolation are a big part of our lives;
 - It is unrealistic to expect that rural kids can rely heavily on the Internet for mental health support, when we face poor bandwidth and data access;
 - We need tailored regional specific mental health strategies and specialized services;
 - We need mental health nurses and access to psychiatrists in every regional hospital - billed through Medicare.

Families and financial stress

22. Fourth, we constantly worry about our families.
23. Many of us hide our own struggles because we don't want to add to the serious worry of our parents.
24. Many of us feel anxious about going to school during the day, or boarding for the term, and leaving our parents alone to deal with struggling stock and failing farms.
25. Many of our families and communities are under extreme financial stress. We ask that Australian governments consider a drought employment scheme – employing people across local communities to alleviate some of the worst aspects of drought.

Education

26. Finally, we have seen some wonderful leadership from certain schools to support drought affected communities. Schools and their infrastructure can and should play a central role during time of adversity – like prolonged drought.
27. The high costs of a quality education for children and young people in regional and remote areas is prohibitive, particularly during periods of drought.
28. We need a HECS style payment for high school students – with a pay after school scheme so that we can continue our education, even in times of adversity.
29. We need research into good practice for transitional support arrangements for regional and remote students in city-based universities. Too many country kids are dropping out because of the multiple pressures they face.
30. And we need local programs to foster understanding between regional, remote and urban children – like the paddock to plate program. We need a united mindset going forward as we face the challenges of a changing climate, and food and water security. We are all in this together.

PART C Conclusion

31. We are a generation that won't give up easily. But we shouldn't have to fight for everything.
32. Australia is a global leader in farming and agriculture. And our generation want to be global leaders in drought response and planning.
33. We want remote and regional Australia to thrive, but for that to happen, we need to act now.
34. We appreciate sympathy - but what we really need is long term thinking, a national drought plan and concrete solutions.
35. This work is urgent. Our communities are depending on us, and on you. We won't stop fighting for the people and places we love.

Annex D

Summit program



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9 OCTOBER (DAY 1): POLICY

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START	SESSION NAME	SPEAKERS
7.30am	Fishing, mindfulness (Optional)	
8.00am	BREAKFAST	
9.00am	Summit opening	Ann Sherry , Chair, UNICEF Australia Uncle Bill Smith, Aboriginal Elder Bronwyn Taylor , Minister for Mental Health, Regional Youth and Women Elly Byriell & Pat Blomfield , Summit Youth Steering Committee members
10.00am	Youth participation & leadership in decision making	Sally Downie , Drought Coordinator, Forbes Shire Council Rachel Nicholl , Chair, NSW Young Farmers Association Jason Yelverton , Social Justice Coordinator, Dubbo Regional Council
11.00am	MORNING TEA	
11.15am	Community-led initiatives, drought and young people	Matt March , Drought Support Peer Worker (Child & Adolescent Support), Western NSW Local Health District Courtney Kovac , NSW Program and Booking Coordinator, Batyr Michelle Miller , Senior Social Innovator, The Australian Centre for Social Innovation (TACSI)
12.30pm	LUNCH	
1.30pm	Approaches to mental health & well-being	Jinnara Tyson , Aboriginal Mental Health Support Worker, Rural Youth Mental Health - Benevolent Society Jessica McWilliam , Summit Youth Steering Committee member John Dean , District Clinical Leader & Registered Psychologist, School Link and Got It! Programs - Murrumbidgee Local Health District Elizabeth Crossman , Wellbeing and Counselling Service Advisor, Department of Education
2.45pm	AFTERNOON TEA	
3.00pm	Summit circle: Mental health & remoteness in practice	Summit circle facilitators
3.45pm	Close day	Amy Lamoin, Samantha Newman
4.15pm	From ideas to action mini-workshops (Optional)	Youth Action; ReachOut; TACSI; Batyr
4.00pm	Free time	
6.00pm	DINNER	

10 OCTOBER (DAY 2): PSYCHO-SOCIAL SUPPORT

START	PROGRAM ACTIVITY	SPEAKERS
7.00am	Fishing, mindfulness (Optional)	
7.30am	BREAKFAST	
8.30am	Overview of the day ahead	Samantha Newman , Youth Drought Summit Director, UNICEF Australia
8.45am	Identifying emotions through our bodies	Amy Lamoin , Head of Policy and Advocacy, UNICEF Australia
9.15am	Summit circle: Strategies for self-care	Summit circle facilitators
10.30am	Activities	Point Wolstoncroft Instructors – Kayaking/High Ropes Amy Lamoin, Samantha Newman – A Storied Life Lizzy Keys – Wayapa Wuurrk
12.30pm	LUNCH	
1.30pm	Activities	As above
3.45pm	Summit circle: Having supportive conversations	Summit circle facilitators
4.45pm	Close day	Amy Lamoin, Samantha Newman
5.15pm	Free time	
6.00pm	DINNER	

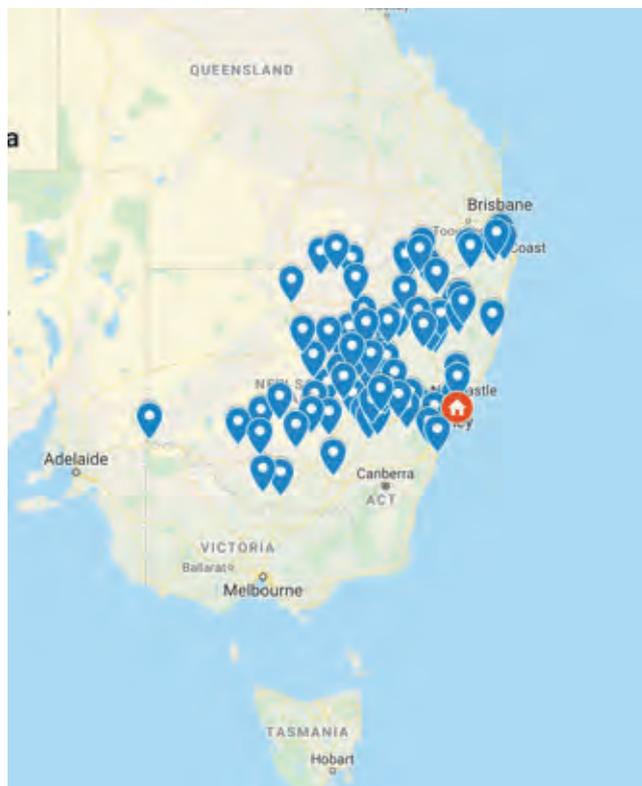


11 OCTOBER (DAY 3): ADVOCACY

START	PROGRAM ACTIVITY	SPEAKERS
7.30am	BREAKFAST	
8.15am	Overview of the day ahead	Amy Lamoin, Samantha Newman
8.30am	Summit circles: Where to from here?	Summit circle facilitators
9.30am	Call to action work	In plenary, Lakeview Hall
10.30am	MORNING TEA	
10.45am	Call to action work	As above
11.45am	Welcome MP's and officials	Tony Stuart , CEO, UNICEF Australia
12.00pm	LUNCH	
12.30pm	Call to action: In conversation with decision makers	Participants with decision-makers
1.45pm	SUMMIT CLOSE	Tony Stuart , CEO, UNICEF Australia & invited guests

Annex E

Map of summit participants



Annex G

Summit Advisory Group members

- Andrew Johnston, Advocate for Children and Young People
- Anita McRae, PHN Murrumbidgee
- Annie Wylie, Reach Out
- Carlton Quartly, NSW Ministry of Health
- Claire Butler, Isolated Children and Parents' Association
- Dayle Lummis, Moorambilla Voice
- David Bone, NSW Department of Primary Industries
- Heather Blackley, Western Plains Regional Development (WPRD)
- Jackie Hallan, Reach Out
- Jacqui McKenzie, Youth Action
- James Cleaver, NSW Department of Primary Industries
- John Southon, Trundle Central West School (K-12)
- Katie Acheson, Youth Action
- Margaret Nixon, National Workforce Centre for Child Mental Health (Emerging Minds)
- Matthew March, Western NSW Local Health District
- Michelle Leonard, Moorambilla Voice
- Michael Shaw, Advocate for Children and Young People
- Nicky Sloss, Association of Independent Schools
- Pip Job, NSW Department of Primary Industries
- Rhoni Stokes, NSW Department of Education
- Tessa Caton, Centre for Rural and Remote Mental Health (RAMHP)

Annex F

Summit Youth Steering Committee members

- Elly Byriell, Gunnedah NSW
- Emily Newton, Wagga Wagga/Walgett NSW
- Hamish Sanderson, Trundle NSW
- Jessica McWilliam, Coonabarabran/Dubbo/Wollongong NSW
- Jinnara Tyson, Dubbo/Goodooga/Weilmoringle NSW
- Joanna Treasure, Cowra NSW
- Kate Currans, Nyngan NSW
- Leo Fitzpatrick, Hay/Wagga Wagga NSW
- Mali Dillon, Picton NSW
- Patrick Blomfield, Carroona NSW
- Sally Downie, Trundle NSW

References

- ¹ To read UNICEF Australia's report, see: <https://www.unicef.org.au/our-work/unicef-in-australia/the-drought-report>
- ² Productivity Commission. 2009. *Government Drought Support: Productivity Commission Inquiry Report*. View at: <https://www.pc.gov.au/inquiries/completed/drought/report/drought-support.pdf>
- ³ Australian Government. 2019. *Drought in Australia: Coordinator-General for Drought's advice on a Strategy for Drought Preparedness and Resilience*. View at: https://www.agriculture.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/advice-long-term-strategy-drought-preparedness-resilience_0.pdf
- ⁴ Under s 51 (xxxvii) of the Australian Constitution the states may refer their powers to permit the Commonwealth to pass legislation on water usage and management. This requires the cooperation of its states for its implementation and cannot be used coercively by the Commonwealth.
- ⁵ Information regarding Mr Barnaby's role as the Special Envoy for Drought Assistance in 2018 can be viewed on the Joint Agency Drought Taskforce: <https://www.pmc.gov.au/domestic-policy/joint-agency-drought-taskforce>
- ⁶ 'Office of drought response delivering better support for regional NSW'. 14 November 2019. View at: <https://www.nsw.gov.au/your-government/ministers/deputy-premier-minister-for-regional-new-south-wales-industry-and-trade/media-releases-from-the-premier/office-of-drought-response-delivering-better-support-for-regional-nsw/>
- ⁷ Productivity Commission. 2019. Murray-Darling Basin Plan. View at: <https://www.pc.gov.au/inquiries/completed/basin-plan/report/basin-plan-overview.pdf>
- ⁸ 'National Emergency': Albanese writes to PM with drought cabinet plan: <https://www.smh.com.au/politics/federal/national-emergency-albanese-writes-to-pm-with-drought-cabinet-plan-20191018-p531xu.html>
- ⁹ UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction. *Sendai Framework for Action 2015-2030*. View at: <https://www.unisdr.org/we/coordinate/sendai-framework>
- ¹⁰ United Nations. 1992. The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). View at: https://unfccc.int/files/essential_background/background_publications_htmlpdf/application/pdf/conveng.pdf
- ¹¹ World Bank Group. 2017. *In Unchartered Waters: The New Economics and of Water Scarcity and Variability*. View at: <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/bitstream/handle/10986/28096/9781464811791.pdf?sequence=21&isAllowed=y>
- ¹² UN urges reboot of drought response to focus more on preparedness. 2017. View at: <https://news.un.org/en/story/2017/06/559812-un-urges-reboot-drought-responses-focus-more-preparedness>
- ¹³ Staube-Delgado, R. 2019. *Overcoming barriers to proactive response in slow onset disasters*. View at: https://www.unisdr.org/files/66508_f49finalreidarstaupedelgadoovercomi.pdf
- ¹⁴ Deloitte Access Economics. 2017. *Building Resilience to Natural Disasters in our States and Territories* report. View at: http://australianbusinessroundtable.com.au/assets/documents/ABR_building-resilience-in-our-states-and-territories.pdf
- ¹⁵ UNICEF Australia. 2019. In their own words: the hidden impact of , see: <https://www.unicef.org.au/our-work/unicef-in-australia/the-drought-report>
- ¹⁶ We were very grateful to have support from the following organisations represented in the Advisory Group: Association of Independent Schools, Advocate for Children and Young People, Isolated Children and Parents' Association National Workforce Centre for Child Mental Health (Emerging Minds), NSW Department of Primary Industries, Youth Action, Centre for Rural and Remote Mental Health, RAMHP, Reach Out, Trundle Central West School (K-12), NSW Department of Education - Student Engagement and Interagency Partnerships, PHN Murrumbidgee, NSW Ministry of Health, Western Plains Regional Development (WPRD), Western NSW Local Health District (Drought Support Team - WNSWLHD).
- ¹⁷ Young farmers rewrite NSW farmers climate change policy. 16 July 2015. View at: <https://www.abc.net.au/news/rural/2015-07-16/nsw-young-farmers-put-climate-change-on-agenda/6624996>
- ¹⁸ For more information on TACSI's work in this area, see: <https://www.tacsi.org.au/work/building-regional-innovation-capability/>
- ¹⁹ For more information on Batyr's workshops, see: <https://www.batyr.com.au/being-herd/>
- ²⁰ For more information about the Benevolent Society's work with drought-affected young people, see: <https://www.benevolent.org.au/services-and-programs/list-of-programs/rural-youth-mental-health>; and <https://newsandviews.benevolent.org.au/family-focus/a-win-for-our-mental-health-programs-in-western-nsw>
- ²¹ For more information about the Dramatic Minds Festival, see: <https://www.facebook.com/Dramatic-Minds-629769720437919/>
- ²² Shern, D. et al 2014. Impact of Toxic Stress on Individuals and Communities. P1. View at: https://www.mhanational.org/sites/default/files/Impact%20of%20Toxic%20Stress%20on%20Individuals%20and%20Communities-A%20Review%20of%20the%20Literature_0.pdf

²³ UNICEF defines a peer as someone with similar standing with another, for example with regard to age, background, social status, and interests. For additional information, please see: https://www.unicef.org/lifeskills/index_12078.html

²⁴ Williams, G. 2009. Listening not talking. Griffith Review Edition 24: Participation Society. View at: <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/30685322.pdf>

²⁵ While this report has referenced the national picture in relation to drought policy, it focuses on the lived experiences of young people in NSW. For this reason, UNICEF Australia has not included reference to Torres Strait Islander young people.

²⁶ Solastalgia: “distress or loss of solace, caused by degradation of the environment, home and sense of belonging” (p.5)

²⁷ UNICEF defines “life skills” as: psychosocial abilities for adaptive and positive behaviour that enable individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life. They are loosely grouped into three broad categories of skills: cognitive skills for analyzing and using information, personal skills for developing personal agency and managing oneself, and inter-personal skills for communicating and interacting effectively with others. See: https://www.unicef.org/lifeskills/index_7308.html

²⁸ For example, minimum standards for quality education in regional and remote Australia.

²⁹ This could include levels of remoteness, population size, age demographics, and vulnerability rankings.

³⁰ A similar social geography approach was adopted in the Challenging Racism Project coordinated by Western Sydney University: <https://www.westernsydney.edu.au/challengingracism>

³¹ We note that a number of primary health networks already map services but this is not consistent.

³² Mission Australia. 2019. *Mission Australia Youth Survey Report*. View at: <https://www.missionaustralia.com.au/what-we-do/research-impact-policy-advocacy/youth-survey>

³³ see for example emerging minds research on responding to disasters and sharing info with children enhances their confidence in their ability to cope.

³⁴ For more information on the Regional Youth Taskforce, see: <https://www.nsw.gov.au/improving-nsw/regional-nsw/regional-youth-taskforce/>

³⁵ See Recommendation 6.3 in *Drought in Australia: Coordinator-General for Drought’s advice on a Strategy for Drought Preparedness and Resilience* (2019), at: <https://www.agriculture.gov.au/ag-farm-food/drought/drought-policy/govt-actions-coordinator-generals-report>

³⁶ For an example of their collaboration with the Barkindji community on their “Heartbeat” video, see: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pW6Pt3ln780>

³⁷ For an example of their collaboration with the Coonamble community on their “Make It Rain – Are you ready Coonamble?” video, see: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CMH-F05-MiU&app=desktop>

³⁸ Cowra High School students worked with choreographer Angela French and performed this expression of living with drought as a part of the Western Dance Festival in June 2019: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IKP1dPWY48I&feature=youtu.be>

³⁹ Australian Bureau of Statistics. *Schools, Australia, 2018*. View at: <https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Latestproducts/4221.0Main%20Features202018?opendocument&tabname=Summary&prodno=4221.0&issue=2018&num=&view=>

⁴⁰ Article 11.1, International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

Images

The images of drought that feature in this report were taken by our young participants and sent to us before the summit commenced. Photographers are listed below:

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