

## Under 16s policy update summary

The Department of Communities and Justice (DCJ) has recently updated *the Unaccompanied Children 12–15 Years Accessing Specialist Homelessness Services policy* (the Under 16s policy). The revised policy seeks to ensure that young people accessing homelessness services get the response they need and are supported in transitioning to stable accommodation.

You can find the updated the [Unaccompanied Children 12–15 Years Accessing Specialist Homelessness Services policy](#) here.

### Who did we speak to?

To ensure the updated policy effectively meets the needs of children accessing homelessness services, DCJ has consulted with a range of stakeholder's including Yfoundations<sup>1</sup>, the Homelessness Youth Assistance Program (HYAP) providers, Specialist Homelessness Service Providers (SHS), DCJ Program, Policy and operational areas, DCJ District staff and the NSW Ombudsman.

### Why the policy was updated

The Under 16s policy was updated in response to sector feedback, the 2020 HYAP evaluation<sup>2</sup> and reports by the NSW Ombudsman<sup>3</sup>. The Under 16s policy has not been updated since it was endorsed in October 2015. Since then, there have been new initiatives introduced. The key changes to the policy reflect these new initiatives and changed landscape.

One of the key concerns identified through consultation and the NSW Ombudsman reports was that unaccompanied children aged 12-15 years fall through the gaps in the homelessness and child and family service systems.

The updated Under 16s policy provides guidance on actions to prevent children from staying too long in homelessness services without a realistic plan for long term living arrangements.

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<sup>1</sup> Yfoundations is the peak body for youth homelessness services in NSW

<sup>2</sup> [https://www.facs.nsw.gov.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0008/792476/Evaluation-of-Homeless-Youth-Assistance-Programs.pdf](https://www.facs.nsw.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0008/792476/Evaluation-of-Homeless-Youth-Assistance-Programs.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> [2018 More than Shelter report](#) and the [2020 More than Shelter Progress report](#)

## Key changes in the policy

- guidance around Helpline reports, re-reporting when children's parents are not engaging and escalation pathways
- the clarification of DCJ roles and responsibilities for children in SHS/HYAP
- inclusion of 48-hour time limit on length of stay for children under the parental responsibility of the Minister (PRM)
- increased reference to the Permanency Support Program and use of OOHC as both a temporary and permanent pathway to prevent/reduce children's drift in the homelessness system
- deletion of District Protocols, and inclusion of principles and methods of local collaboration in replacement

## Updated Under 16s policy's intended outcomes

- to ensure children aged 12-15 years do not fall through gaps in policy in youth homelessness services or child and family service system
- to ensure children who are under PRM do not stay in homelessness services
- prevent children staying too long in homelessness services without foreseeable plans for appropriate long term living arrangements

## Next steps including the HYAP reconfiguration

This Under 16s review is separate to the HYAP reconfiguration. The HYAP reconfiguration is a consultative process to look at the HYAP program, which aims to ensure that the program is meeting the needs of children aged 12-15 years who are experiencing homelessness.

The Under 16s policy will be reviewed again once the HYAP reconfiguration has been finalised to incorporate any relevant changes coming out of the reconfiguration.

## Do you have any question or comments about the updated policy?

If you have any questions about the updated U16s policy which aren't answered here, please feel free to contact the youth homelessness team at [youth.homelessness@dcj.nsw.gov.au](mailto:youth.homelessness@dcj.nsw.gov.au)