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# THE YEAR 7 HEALTH CHECK

Consultation with Gold Creek Senior School Year 8 Students



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A REPORT BY THE ACT CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE COMMISSIONER

MARCH 2020



**Public Advocate and Children  
and Young People Commissioner**



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**ACT HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION**

With thanks to the participating young people and Gold Creek Senior School, and the support of ACT Health and ACT Education Directorates.

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ACT Human Rights Commission 2019

On 1 April 2016, the offices of the Public Advocate (PA) and the Children and Young People Commissioner (CYPC) were brought together as part of the restructured ACT Human Rights Commission. Broadly these two independent statutory roles involve legislative responsibility for protecting and promoting the rights and interests of people in the ACT who are experiencing vulnerability, and for consulting with children and young people in ways that promote their participation in decision-making.

While the role of Children and Young People Commissioner is obviously a targeted one with a focus on ensuring that relevant stakeholders listen to and seriously consider the views of children and young people, the role of Public Advocate extends to all persons within the ACT whose situation or condition gives rise to a need for protection from abuse, exploitation or neglect, or a combination of those things.

The responsibilities of the PACYPC are underpinned by a range of functions including advocacy (individual and systemic), representation, investigation, and monitoring. Some of these functions are specific to children and young people, and others encompass people with complex disability needs, including those with mental health conditions and/or forensic patients.

Overarching these functions is a strong focus on ensuring that the PACYPC's monitoring and oversight functions (and the recommendations that we make to government and non-government agencies on legislation, policies, and practices) contribute to improvements in the accessibility, responsiveness and quality of supports and services that are available for persons experiencing vulnerability.

In the role of Children and Young People Commissioner, I have a number of responsibilities including, but not limited to, promoting children and young people's rights, and encouraging and supporting people who provide services for children and young people to continue to improve those services.

Notably, I also have the responsibility to consult with children and young people themselves, to hear what they have to say, and to make sure their views help improve services. The ACT considers the views of children and young people to be so important they have included the need to engage them directly in legislation. Amongst other things, the ACT *Human Rights Commission Act 2005* states that:

*In exercising the children and young people commissioner's functions, the commissioner must endeavour to —*

- (a) consult with children and young people in ways that promote their participation in decision-making; and*
- (b) listen to and seriously consider the views of children and young people...*

This report is a direct product of exercising these functions.

## INTRODUCTION

The Year 7 Health Check is proposed as a new school-based program that will monitor risk factors for chronic diseases such as overweight and obesity and assess the emotional wellbeing of children in the ACT.

CYPC staff spoke with ACT Health about the value of having young people assist in designing the roll-out of the planned compulsory Year 7 Health check, and also in evaluating the initial roll out after it occurs. CYPC, ACT Health and ACT Education all collaborated to enable consultations to occur. Education approached schools, with Gold Creek Principal, Ms Angela Spence, indicating interest and a positive view about including student voice before rolling out the program.

## AIMS

The CYPC undertook to consult directly with young people to gain their knowledge and expertise so this can be incorporated into the development and roll out of the Year 7 Health Check. Services and programs for young people stand to be more effective and more efficient when they seek the views of young people themselves in design and development.

The CYPC was aware that young people may have a broad range of ideas to raise in relation to the Health Check and that the consultation needed to be open enough to be led by the young people's own priorities. At the same, CYPC was conscious not to falsely raise expectations or consult in areas that were not open to input, such as the content of the Health Check Survey. As such the CYPC structured the consultation around four broad questions:

- Topic 1: What would it be like?
- Topic 2: What would you want to know?
- Topic 3: Who should be involved?
- Topic 4: What ACT Health needs to know?

## KEY FINDINGS

The Year 7 Health Check needs to:

1. Be safe and feel safe for young people
2. Be flexible enough to respond to individual needs
3. Ensure informed consent is an active process
4. Provide information and results to both students and parents.

## THE CONSULTATION

Five (5) Year 8 ACT high school students from Gold Creek Senior School participated in one session for approximately 1 hour and 15 minutes during their scheduled P.E class. Consent forms had been signed by their parents/guardians.

Three CYPC staff facilitated the consultation session including the CYPC and two advisors.

The session began with an overview of what the CYPC is and does with examples of the CYPC's work shown. An explanation of the Year 7 Health Check and the consultation was provided. It was explained that participation was entirely voluntary and that the young people could leave or choose not to participate at any time.

A break-out space was provided with craft activities and the young people were encouraged to use that space if they wanted to leave the discussion, noting they could re-join at any time. It was explained that the CYPC would write up a report and provide their responses to ACT Health but that none of the participants would be identified in the report.

A 'getting to know each other' ice breaker activity was completed. A giant jenga game was played with each participant introducing themselves and removing a jenga block before answering a random question about themselves, which they picked out of a container.



The questions were deliberately designed to:

- cover a range of topics - showing that the consultation was a safe space to talk about views and experiences,
- position the young people as experts – showing that the CYPC and advisors were genuinely interested in the participants views and experiences
- demonstrate that there were no 'right' or 'wrong' answers – that each participant could have different thoughts and views and that was okay.

The participants were then split into two groups to complete the first activity. Each group was provided with Topic 1 or Topic 2 and asked to write answers on butcher's paper. They provided feedback about their answers to the larger group and each group was provided an opportunity to add to the answers of the other. The final two topics were discussed as a whole group.

After the group discussions, the young people were invited to complete an evaluation form. The facilitators thanked the young people for their participation. They were also provided with a postcard with the prompt words 'Dear Jodie' and were invited to write the Commissioner a message about any topic at any time. At the conclusion of the session, each young person was given a Children and Young People Commissioner Frisbee and key ring light. They were also provided with a \$20 movie voucher as a thank you for contributing their time and expertise.

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## RISK MANAGEMENT

The CYPC is very mindful about identifying and addressing any risks to children's and young people's wellbeing presented by our consultations.

An identified risk in relation to this consultation was that the process of talking about the physical health check and the survey content may raise difficult or traumatic experiences for individual children. A process for managing this risk was developed and articulated in the project plan. The risk management strategy included informed consent from parents, optional participation and the availability of a breakout space. The consultation discussions focused on process not content and was conducted with Year 8s rather than Year 7s to ensure that the discussion was hypothetical. Facilitators observed participants behaviour, and body language throughout the session to monitor for disengagement or discomfort

No issues were identified and no follow up was required.

## WHAT DID WE LEARN?

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### WHAT WOULD IT BE LIKE?

The young people were able to identify that Year 7 students may experience a range of thoughts and feelings in relation to the Year 7 Health Check. They felt that students may feel 'nervous', 'curious', 'excited' or 'willing', and noted that some may also feel 'scared' and 'super anxious' and that students could cry.

They identified that some of the things that might make it okay would be having friends and familiar people around, food and music, and a comfortable and relaxed atmosphere. The things that the young people identified that they did not want the check to be was formal, uptight, or uncomfortable.

*'nice and chillaxed people'*

*'a nice, comfy, chill vibe'*

When asked what comfortable would look like. The young people felt that comfortable meant having 'friends and people you know there'. They did not feel that strangers should be involved. However, they felt that whether a student would always want their friends there would depend on the individual student. One young person responded:

*"Depends on the person and who's doing the check – some people might want them there".*

*'It would not be ok for it to be in a room with only strangers'*

Other comments were made about previous experiences of health initiatives at school:

*'Don't make us line up for two hours'*

The young people stated that they had been made to line up for two hours in relation to their Year 7 immunisation and they had found this an uncomfortable and anxiety-provoking experience. They felt that this should not be repeated during the health check.

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## WHAT WOULD YOU WANT TO KNOW?

The young people identified that before the health check they would want to know how it works, for example, that the physical check was to measure height and weight and how these measurements would be taken like where and by whom. They emphasised that it was important that year 7 students know that it is voluntary and that they could opt out at any time and of any part of the check. This included having the ability to only answer the questions they wanted to and to skip or not answer any other questions.

*'You don't have to answer everything'*

The young people would also want to know that they were safe and that their information was safe with the school.

*'They would want to know that they are safe that their info is safe with the school and no one will have info'*

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## WHO SHOULD BE INVOLVED?

The young people felt that parents should sign permission notes and get the results. They felt that teachers should only receive results if it was relevant to learning. One young person gave the example that if a student had a problem with their hearing identified through the check then it would be important for teachers to know that.

They felt that the only adults who should be there were the people completing the health check. All students identified their school nurse as the most appropriate person to conduct the health check and who they would feel most comfortable with. They believed that

teachers would play an important role in supporting and comforting students undertaking the health check both before and after.

*'The nurse will be more comfortable because they have experience'*

*'Teachers should be there to give support to students'*

The young people again emphasised that some students would prefer to have their friends nearby and that this would help them to feel comfortable.

When completing the survey, the young people had a range of opinions about where, how and with whom they would want to complete the survey. Some of the young people preferred to have friends around while they completed the survey and this was particularly due to the nature of the questions thought to be part of the survey.

*'I would prefer to have my friends around for the emotional stuff'*

Another thought that it would be good to have a parent present in case they had information about their health that they didn't know.

*'If it's about health, maybe a parent should be there in case you don't know the answer'*

They also believed that the survey should be completed electronically as most of the surveys they do are online and completed on their Chromebooks or phones. They felt this gave flexibility about who was present when the young person completed the survey. The young people felt that there should be choice about where the survey was completed whether at home or school and that this would allow them to determine who was present depending on who they thought would be helpful.

The young people believed that both parents and young people should need to give permission. They felt that a Year 7 student could give consent by writing their name and ticking a box. They were asked about the possibility of parents consenting when the young people didn't and vice versa, that is young people consenting when their parents didn't. They considered that there may be a number of reasons why this may occur including that:

*'parents may say no because they don't want their kids checked out or think they might be the only one' and 'if kids say no, maybe their friends aren't doing it and it would feel weird'.*

They felt that if a Year 7 student says no then they shouldn't have to do the check or a compromise should be reached with the student about which part of the check they would consent to completing. If there was a part that they didn't like then there should be a process to explore other ways for that student to do the check or do parts of the check or to not do the check at all.

The young people felt this ability to consent to some parts of the health check but not others should be built into the consent forms, for example by being able to tick a box for each part.

*'Should be ok to just do survey but not the other parts'*

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## WHAT ACT HEALTH NEEDS TO KNOW?

The young people were asked what else the department needs to know, or think about, in running the Year 7 Health Check. Some of their ideas included:

- The young people felt that their school gym may be an appropriate place for the physical check due to the space available.
- All the young people identified that they would want their results of both the physical check and the survey and that they would like to receive this via email or in a report.

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### THE YEAR 7 HEALTH CHECK NEEDS TO BE SAFE AND FEEL SAFE FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

Participants identified the potential for varied responses to the health check by students and possessed a nuanced understanding about maintaining their physical, emotional and online safety. For example, medical professionals especially those known to the students such as the school nurse, were trusted to conduct the health check. The participants knew the risks of being alone with strangers in contexts where they might feel vulnerable, and responses suggested awareness of 'my body, my choice'. Participants also recognised the importance of having adults around for support including teachers or family members as well as their friends and peer group to feel safe through both the physical check and survey.

Participants demonstrated an awareness about keeping personal information secure online and an understanding that the information should only be shared on a need-to-know basis, for example if teachers need to know in order to meet a student's learning needs. Information provided about the health check and the conduct of the health check needs to recognise and be consistent with students' understanding about information sharing and security and consistent with existing messaging to young people about online safety and protection of personal information.

A part of feeling safe for the participants was about the check being conducted in a way that was comfortable. The participants identified that this included having peers and support around them however, also included considering the environment that the check would be conducted in and included suggestions about the right space, atmosphere, and a relaxed vibe with food and music. There also is a need for the physical check to be conducted in a way that is non-intrusive and child-centred, an example given by one participant that they should not be made to line up for hours.

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### THE YEAR 7 HEALTH CHECK NEEDS TO BE FLEXIBLE ENOUGH TO RESPOND TO INDIVIDUAL NEEDS

The young people consulted were highly attuned to different young people needing different things to feel okay about completing the health check and being able to respond to the health check meaningfully and usefully. In relation to both the physical check and the survey some participants wanted friends present for support, others wanted parents or siblings, and others wanted to be able to do it on their own.

The design and implementation of the health check needs to consider how best to accommodate these individual needs. This may mean that the survey could be available online for a set period such as a week and not just completed at one point in time. This would allow students to complete the survey in different settings and allow them to decide when, where and with whom the survey is filled out. This may also allow students to complete the survey in one sitting or at a different points over the week.

The physical check requires the same flexibility and will need to have ways for students to choose whether they would like peers, teachers or others present for support.

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### **THE YEAR 7 HEALTH CHECK NEEDS TO ENSURE INFORMED CONSENT IS AN ACTIVE PROCESS**

The participants were aware of consent issues in relation to the health check for both parents and young people. The participants assumed that the health check would be voluntary for the students and their consent was considered necessary for each stage and step of the check, not as a one-off overall agreement. This suggests that the health check needs to be designed to allow for students to consent to neither, one or both the physical check and survey, as well as having the ability and knowledge to withdraw their consent at any stage of the check and the ability to skip or not answer questions within the survey. The students felt that this should be built in to the consent forms and it needs to be considered how it would be built in to the processes for the physical check on the day and the design of the survey.

There was contemplation of disagreements about consent between parents and students and the health check design would require the ability to resolve any disagreements over a student's participation. This may include capacity for follow up phone calls to parents or conferences with students and parents if issues arise. It was clearly considered by the participants that a compromise should be sought with the student if they refused to a part of the health check that had been earlier agreed to, however, they clearly envisaged that the student's consent would be respected and that they would not be forced to complete any part of the check if they said no.

These statements about consent reflect a clear understanding about the messaging that has been conveyed to children and young people about being able to assert themselves when it comes to controlling what is done with their body. The 'my body, my choice' message was clearly articulated throughout the consultation, and needs to be respected in the design of the Year 7 Health Check.

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### **YEAR 7 HEALTH CHECK INFORMATION AND RESULTS NEED TO BE PROVIDED TO STUDENTS AND PARENTS**

The information provided to students and their parents prior to the health check needs to consider the concerns raised above by the participants in relation to consent, support, safety and flexibility.

The participants were unanimous in requiring a copy of their results to be provided to them, not just their parents. They felt that this should be in the form of a report or email, as would be provided to their parents. It will need to be considered how individual student results will be shared with them. The participants also envisaged that information relevant to students' learning may be shared with teachers. How the health information gained during the health check is used and shared needs to be carefully considered and individual students' best interests, needs and wishes should be central to that decision-making.

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## ANECDOTAL INFORMATION LEARNED ABOUT CONSENT

Unfortunately there was a limited number of participants in this consultation. Information shared with the CYPC by school staff suggested that parents had not consented to students participating, because they thought it was the actual health check rather than a consultation.

This has implications for ACT Health to consider when preparing for the roll out of the health check and how parents will respond. ACT Health will need to be proactive about getting information about the health check out well in advance and in a broader context, for example at transition to high school days, so that parents are aware of it being a part of Year 7 rather than encountering it for the first time when their consent is sought.

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## FUTURE STEPS

Given the limited participation numbers during this consultation, it would be beneficial to conduct further consultations with other Year 8 students to gain additional ideas and broader agreement of the views gained so far.

EVALUATION

Choose an emoji sticker that represents how you felt about today's session (place your sticker in the box below)



**What did you like MOST about the session, or thought worked well?**

It was a fun and chill lesson

Jenga because we got to know things about other people

Jenga because it was a good way to meet each other

I think writing stuff in groups on the butchers paper worked best

I liked doing the Jenga and getting to know everyone

**What did you like LEAST about the session, or thought could be done better?**

Not sure

Nothing it was perfect

Maybe during the butcher paper we could look at all the questions

No not really it went well

**Any other comments?**

No

Nope

Nope