

FUTURE HEALTHY COUNTDOWN 2030

'Learning and Employment Pathways' - 2025 Supplement to the Medical Journal of Australia

Open Call for Papers

The Future Healthy Countdown 2030 is seeking expressions of interest for research papers for its 2025 Supplement. We are interested in cutting-edge research that demonstrates how learning and employment pathways can shape policy and practice to improve the health and wellbeing of children and young people in Australia.

Accepted EOIs will be invited to submit a full paper as part of our 2025 Supplement to the Medical Journal of Australia (MJA).

Submissions open: 12:00am AEST, Friday 16 August 2024

Submission deadline: 11:59pm AEST, Sunday 22 September 2024

Overview

What is the Future Healthy Countdown 2030?

The Future Healthy Countdown 2030 (the Countdown) is a collaboration between VicHealth, MCRI, and ARACY. It is a high-level advocacy campaign that spotlights and tracks the health and wellbeing of children and young people in the lead-up to 2030; a time after which notionally we should see improvements. The centrepiece of the Countdown is the annual Supplement to the Medical Journal of Australia (MJA). This brings together evidence across seven key domains essential for children and young people's health and wellbeing in order to: (1) identify the most pressing policy actions, and (2) track progress on these domains for Australia's children and young people.

The [inaugural Supplement](#), published in 2023, introduced the Countdown framework and its seven domains. Subsequent Supplements will present the best evidence for improving health and wellbeing in children and young people within one of the seven domains. The focus of the 2025 Supplement is on the 'Learning and Employment Pathways' domain. The MJA is Australia's leading general medical journal, reaching 24,500 individual subscribers and receiving over 170,000 online views each month. The Supplement presents a unique opportunity to showcase cutting edge research that can shape policy and/or practice in Australia for children and young people taking into account the broad influences on their lives across the seven domains.

Why Learning and Employment Pathways?

In 2025, the Future Healthy Countdown 2030 aims to spotlight the role of learning and employment pathways on the health and wellbeing of children and young people (0-24 years) in Australia. Children and young people learn through a variety of formal and informal experiences within the classroom, peer groups, the home, and the community in which they live. Quality and equity of formal education (e.g., preschools, schools and universities) have strong associations with individuals' life expectancy, morbidity and health behaviour, and educational attainment is important to children and young people's health as it shapes their



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further education, employment, and wellbeing.^{1,2} At the same time, informal learning experiences (e.g. play, music and art, volunteering) can have a range of cognitive benefits for children and young people and build resilience, instil confidence and foster development.³

Employment pathways through engagement with the world of work or further learning are also critical for young people's health and wellbeing. For example, young people who are not in employment, education, or training are more likely to experience persistent, common mental disorders.⁴ Educational policies and interventions can support employment pathways and mitigate the chances of young people being unemployed or not engaged in learning and training.⁵

Children and young people are seeking better learning and employment pathways that meet their individual interests and needs. A soon-to-be-published review by ARACY examined the literature for consultations with children and young people in Australia over the past five years about the issues most important to their health and wellbeing. The review found that children and young people are concerned about mental health and wellbeing in schools. They are experiencing school-related stress, are seeking better bullying programs and peer support systems, and want more support when navigating major transitions (e.g., from primary to secondary school and into early adulthood).

Additionally, many children and young people have a low sense of belonging in their schools due to feeling unsafe or excluded due to their gender, sexuality or disability, others struggle to fit into mainstream models of education. They are asking for opportunities to build healthier relationships at school and for more inclusive educational environments (e.g., improved sexual education) that foster a sense of belonging, promote wellbeing, are more equitable, and empower transitions to independence. Additionally, young people are concerned about underemployment (particularly in rural areas) and the challenges of competing in an increasingly casualised job market – especially for young people with disability and/or mental health challenges.

Amplifying the voices of children and young people is a cornerstone of the Future Healthy Countdown 2030. As such, the issues of importance to children and young people highlighted in ARACY's review have been summarised into broad themes for the 2025 Supplement. As it was not always possible to capture the voices of young children in these consultations, an additional theme focused on the early years has been added, as quality early childhood education, care and play, along with supportive roles from parents,

¹ Sahlberg P, Goldfeld SR. New foundations for learning in Australia. *The Medical Journal of Australia*. 2023 Nov 20;219(10):S25-9.

² Welsh J, Bishop K, Booth H, et al. Inequalities in life expectancy in Australia according to education level: a whole-of-population record linkage study. *Int J Equity Health* 2021; 20: 178.

³ Lai NK, Ang TF, Por LY and Liew CS. The impact of play on child development - a literature review. *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal* 2018; 26: 625-643.

⁴ Rodwell L, Romaniuk H, Nilsen W, et al. Adolescent mental health and behavioural predictors of being NEET: a prospective study of young adults not in employment, education, or training. *Psychological Medicine* 2018; 48: 861–871.

⁵ OECD. *Adolescent Education and Pre-Employment Interventions in Australia: Keeping Young People in Education, Employment and Training*. 2023. https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/2023/04/adolescent-education-and-pre-employment-interventions-in-australia_349375af.html (accessed Aug 2024).

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community, and institutions, are critical for laying the foundation for lifelong learning and wellbeing.

Through an open submission process, we are seeking 4-6 papers that examine how learning and employment issues, like the ones outlined above, impact the health and wellbeing of children and young people in Australia. The papers must present cutting-edge evidence that can influence policy and/or practice to improve health and wellbeing outcomes. A youth-led paper and an Indigenous-led paper will be commissioned separately to this process.

Submission information

Learning and Employment Pathway Themes

Authors are invited to submit a proposal for a paper that examines one of five broad themes:

- **Early childhood development, learning and wellbeing**
- **Mental health and wellbeing in schools**
- **Inclusive learning and employment environments**
- **Transforming learning systems**
- **Meaningful employment pathways**

Paper guidelines

Papers must strictly adhere to the Countdown Supplement guidelines. Papers must:

- be original, theoretically grounded, and empirically rigorous;
- focus on part of or all of the 0-24 years developmental age span (i.e., early childhood, middle childhood, adolescence, and/or young adulthood);
- address the nexus between learning and employment pathways and their impact on health and wellbeing;
- have a strong focus on policy and/or practice implications;
- be of relevance to a general medical audience;
- include at least 2 authors aged under 30 years (young authors in leadership roles are strongly encouraged);
- be applicable to an Australian context (using national and/or international data);
- be a [type of article](#) published by the MJA (e.g., research paper (quantitative and/or qualitative); systematic review);
- conform to the journal's [editorial policies](#) and [requirements](#) where relevant (e.g. ethics approvals, registration, patient consent, authorship criteria);
- include a [disclosure of interests statement](#) (note that there will be instances when the MJA will decide not to publish a paper if there is a high risk that competing interests may be too substantial);
- not have been published elsewhere or not be currently under review elsewhere.



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Additionally, papers are strongly encouraged to consider:

- including at least 1 Indigenous Australian author to ensure Indigenous perspectives are embedded in the paper;
- putting forward research that has resulted from meaningful engagement with people with lived experience and/or children and young people (e.g., use a co-design approach);

How to submit

Proposals should be submitted online at <https://redcap.link/fhc-eoi-2025> by 11:59pm AEST, 15 September 2024. Submissions will need to include the following:

- Relevant 2025 Supplement topic
- Type of article
- Tentative title
- Structured abstract (maximum 300 words) with the following headings:
 - Objectives
 - Design
 - Methods
 - Setting
 - Participants (if applicable)
 - Intervention (if applicable)
 - Main outcome measures
 - Results
 - Conclusions
- Corresponding author's name and contact details (this will not be shared with the selection panel)
- Short explanation of the policy implications of the paper's findings
- Short statement detailing the level of involvement of people with lived experience and/or children and young people in the paper's design (if applicable)
- Disclosure of interest statement ([see MJA website](#))

Selection criteria

All proposals will be double-blind reviewed by a panel of young people and academics with expertise in the domain of learning and employment pathways. Please note that proposals will not be reviewed by the MJA at this time. However, full papers from accepted proposals will need to be submitted to the MJA and are subject to the journal's usual editorial and peer review processes and standards ([see more](#)). The decision to accept papers for publication rests with the MJA editorial team and not all manuscripts submitted to the MJA for consideration in the supplement will necessarily be published.



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Proposals will be selected in line with the following criteria:

1. *Quality of evidence*
 - The Supplement will present high-quality, cutting-edge evidence that will inform policy. Proposals will be evaluated based on their academic rigour and policy relevance.
 - Original research papers or review papers will receive higher weighting than perspective papers.
2. *Fit within the Supplement aims*
 - The Supplement will present evidence covering the full developmental age span (0-24 years), including early childhood, middle childhood, adolescence and young adulthood. Papers will be selected to ensure a balance is achieved across the full age span.
 - The Supplement will focus on a variety of informal and formal learning and employment pathways. Papers will be selected to spotlight a range of pathways.
3. *Meaningful engagement of children and young people and priority groups*
 - Paper topics will be evaluated based on how important they are to children and young people today.
 - Papers that meaningfully engage with people with lived experience and/or children and young people in the paper's development will receive higher weighting.
 - Papers that reflect voices of priority groups that we do not often hear from (e.g., LGBTQI+ children and young people; children in out-of-home care) will receive higher weighting.

Anticipated Timeline

1. Submit your proposal by **22 September 2024**
2. Authors will be notified of acceptance into the Supplement by **late October 2024**
3. Full papers from accepted proposals will be due to the Countdown editorial team **15 March 2025**
4. Papers will be submitted to the MJA by **15 April 2025**
5. Peer review process finalised by **15 September 2025**
6. Anticipated publication date: **Mid-November 2025**

For any questions, please email Dr Kate Lycett at kate.lycett@mcri.edu.au

