

ILLAWARRA MERCURY

DECEMBER 23 2021 - 3:40PM

Survey reveals Illawarra youth want more mental health services and COVID vaccines



Agron Latifi

Local News



Illawarra Centre for Enablement (ICfE)'s inaugural Youth Council member Alvin Chung. Picture: Adam McLean

University of Wollongong student Alvin Chung has witnessed how difficult life can get during a pandemic.

But it was only after participating in the Illawarra Centre for Enablement's (ICfE) inaugural Youth Council that the 22-year-old's eyes were opened to "some of the real issues confronting youth in the region".

Mr Chung led the council, which featured fellow UOW students Amar Sultan, Ben Healey, Ishan Datar and Tristan James, as well as Ben Johns from the Flagstaff Group.

[The group](#) recently completed their analysis of the Illawarra Youth Survey they conducted in August and September this year.



Council: Ben Johns, Amar Sultan, Ben Healey, Ishan Datar, Trsitan James and Alvin Chung.

[Their report](#) had seven main recommendations to benefit youth in the Illawarra by urging the government to fund more mental health services and improve accessibility for and information about vaccination.

"We kind of dived into it not knowing what to expect. It was only near the end that we realised what the issues were and we could make the necessary recommendations," Mr Chung said.

Read more: [Masks, QR check-ins mandatory as NSW backflips](#)

The report was released earlier this week by Kiama MP Gareth Ward.

The Federal Gilmore MP Fiona Phillips and Cunningham's Sharon Bird, as well as RDA Illawarra CEO Debra Murphy, endorsed the report.

"The endorsements mean a lot to us. We hope their support can have a meaningful impact in addressing the important needs of Illawarra youth," Mr Chung said.

Read more: [COVID cases explode to 123 in the Illawarra Shoalhaven](#)

Mr Ward said he welcomed the Youth Council's seven key recommendations, particularly those around giving youth greater access to the vaccine and also the call for better and more accessible access to mental health clinics.

"This is also something I have called on the Commonwealth Government to do to establish a Headspace service in Kiama to improve access for local young people," he said.

ICfE director Dr Diann Rodgers-Healey commended the Youth Council for their leadership in launching the survey and analysing the responses from 134 Illawarra youth.

"They resoundingly heard Illawarra youth ask for more mental health services, more COVID vaccines and information to assist them," she said.

"Their recommendations are significant given the ongoing challenges Illawarra youth are now facing with the rise of Omicron."

Some of the suggestions:

- Communication of the current COVID-19 pandemic needs to be centralised and easily made available to youth.
- Funding is needed by local, regional and state governments to fund mental health services.