

MEDIA RELEASE
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Beyond Bans: Why Young Australians Need Resilience, Not Just Restrictions

Scott Watters of LifeChanger says prevention must begin in childhood, arming kids with resilience to face life's challenges

As more than 200,000 Year 12 students across Australia prepare for their ATAR exams, the stress they face highlights a bigger national issue: too many young Australians are entering adulthood without the coping skills to manage life's challenges. Without those tools, pressures can accumulate and contribute to serious mental health consequences - with suicide now the leading cause of death among 15-24 year olds.¹

At the same time, the Federal Government is preparing to tighten restrictions on young people's access to social media, acknowledging growing concerns about its role in anxiety, loneliness, cyberbullying and harmful self-comparison. While reducing harmful online influences may provide some relief, bans alone will not solve the problem. Children also need to be equipped with the skills to manage stress, build resilience, and seek support early in life.

The ABS reports that almost 39% of people aged 16–24 experienced a mental disorder in the past year, compared with 22% of all adults.² Despite this, many do not seek professional help, with stigma, cost and accessibility still significant barriers.

These figures clearly demonstrate that prevention cannot wait until kids are in crisis. It needs to start in their formative years - teaching them how to handle setbacks, regulate emotions and know when to reach out for help.

"Exams are stressful, but the truth is life is full of challenges," said Scott Watters, CEO and Founder of LifeChanger Foundation, a youth mental health and wellbeing non-profit focused on prevention. "If we wait until kids hit Year 12 to start talking about resilience, we've left it too late. We need to give children the tools much earlier - to cope with stress, to know who to talk to when they're struggling, and to not carry those mental burdens into their adult lives."

Scott has also welcomed the Government's proposed restrictions on under-16s using social media, but stresses that policy is only part of the answer.

"Social media can amplify all the pressures young people are already feeling. Bans might take away some risk, but they don't replace the skills kids need to get through tough times," Watters said. "Prevention is about teaching them to handle stress, to put problems in perspective, and to feel strong enough to reach out for help. That's what will protect them in the long run."

Independent evaluations of school-based wellbeing programs have confirmed the impact of early intervention. Students who participate report stronger self-belief and practical coping strategies, while teachers observe greater peer connection and confidence. These outcomes reflect what

¹ <https://www.aihw.gov.au/suicide-self-harm-monitoring/population-groups/young-people/suicide-self-harm-young-people>

² <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/health/mental-health/national-study-mental-health-and-wellbeing/latest-release>

prevention looks like in practice, not waiting until crisis hits, but embedding resilience as a life skill from the start.

“Every time a young person feels connected and supported, we take weight off their shoulders,” Watters added. “That’s what prevention is really about. It’s not one program or one policy, it’s a community effort to make sure every child grows up knowing they are valued, connected and capable of facing life’s challenges with confidence.”

LifeChanger Foundation is a preventative youth mental health and wellbeing non-profit that empowers young people to thrive. Through evidence-based school and community programs, it builds the social, emotional and resilience skills young people need to navigate life’s challenges.

As this year’s Year 12 cohort sits down to their exams, and the government debates how to tackle the impact of social media, the reminder is clear: prevention is not a short-term fix. It is about giving every child the foundations to face life with confidence, connection, and hope.

For more information about LifeChanger, visit: www.lifechanger.org.au

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About Lifechanger

LifeChanger Foundation is a preventative youth mental health and wellbeing non-profit that empowers young people to thrive by developing their social, emotional and resilience skills for life. LifeChanger is at the forefront of mental health prevention, supporting young people with critical foundation skills and tools they need to successfully navigate life, overcome challenges and pursue their unlimited potential. In 2024 alone, LifeChanger positively impacted more than 140,000 young people across 600+ schools in Australia and New Zealand. This was achieved through practical, evidence-based workshops, digital resources for educators, and a scalable delivery model that trains and engages community mentors to support the program. Visit <https://www.lifechanger.org.au/>