
Parliamentary Secretary for Children and Youth Affairs

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The Howard Government has recently announced that the Ministry for Children and Youth Affairs will be removed, segregated and streamed into various other portfolios, replacing the Ministry with a Parliamentary Secretary for Children and Youth Affairs in the portfolio of Family and Community Services (FaCS).

From the previous Ministry, the majority of Centrelink has moved to the new Department of Human Services while apprentice, student and youth payments are now managed by the Department of Science, Education and Training and the majority of other responsibilities will be absorbed into FaCS.

Mrs Sussan Ley (member for Farrer) was sworn in as the Parliamentary Secretary for Children and Youth Affairs and Senator Kay Patterson as the Minister for FaCS on the 26th of October 2004. According to Mrs Ley's office, these changes "allow Senator Patterson and Mrs Ley to focus more on policy development in Children and Youth Affairs" by reducing the "wide range of other policy issues" that the previous Ministry was responsible for.

Mrs Ley believes that "the Australian Government is committed to engaging young people in decision-making process that affect them" and says that "as Parliamentary Secretary, I am dedicated to working hard for the interests of children and young people, in developing strong policies to ensure the best possible outcomes for Australian Youth." However, not everyone agrees that the Australian Government is acting in the best interests of children and young people to represent them in decision making. In fact, these changes mean "young people have no-one to represent their interests" in Federal Government decision making, according to Labor's Shadow Minister for Youth and Early Childhood Education, Mrs. Tanya Plibersek (member for Sydney).

"The government should have kept a minister for youth, but more importantly it should beef up the (national) youth roundtable" according to Mrs. Plibersek. She argues that the Government's lack of commitment contrasts with labor who have 'elevated the youth portfolio to a Shadow Cabinet position and the government have downgraded it'.

Joining Mrs. Plibersek's condemnation of the Government's actions is Jacinta Allan – the Victorian Minister for Children

and Youth Affairs who questions "In its last term, the Howard Government eroded the rights of young people, by increasing the age at which they are eligible for their own Medicare Card... (now) with no youth minister, no peak body, and a question mark over the youth affairs branch of the Department, what does the Howard Government have in store next for young people?"

For many, this change simply represents another example of how the Howard Government has "turned its back on young people" said the young spokesperson for the Australian Youth Affairs Coalition – the peak organisation for young Australians, Reynato Reodica.

Mr. Reodica believe that that the Howard Government has a "bad track record" of considering the views of young people, citing the Electoral Reform Bill the government tried to introduce earlier this year, a failure to fund a Federal Peak Organisation to represent youth issues and the lack of action taken by the Government to review its consultative mechanisms with young people.

While voices of opposition to the changes in the ministry are already being heard, many will be waiting to see what new policies for children and young people will come from the increased focus on policy development by Mrs. Ley and Sen. Patterson.

Voice for young people

The Department of Health and Ageing have contracted AICAFMHA to develop a strategy for the voice and perspective young people to be incorporated into the development and implementation of national programs funded under the National Mental Health Strategy (NMHS) and the National Suicide Prevention Strategy (NSPS).

SO if you can answer YES to the following 2 questions we want to hear from you and your experiences of youth participation!

1. Are you a young person or do you work with young people around 12-17 years of age?
2. Do you or young people in your organization have ways their voice can be heard?

Please go the following link and fill out the online questionnaire. http://www.aicafmha.net.au/youth_participation/index.html or you can access it directly from the AICAFMHA home page by clicking on Youth.

The website also provides further information about the project or if you have any further questions please feel free to contact:

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