

# Bright Futures:

## Megatrends impacting the wellbeing of young Victorians over the coming 20 years

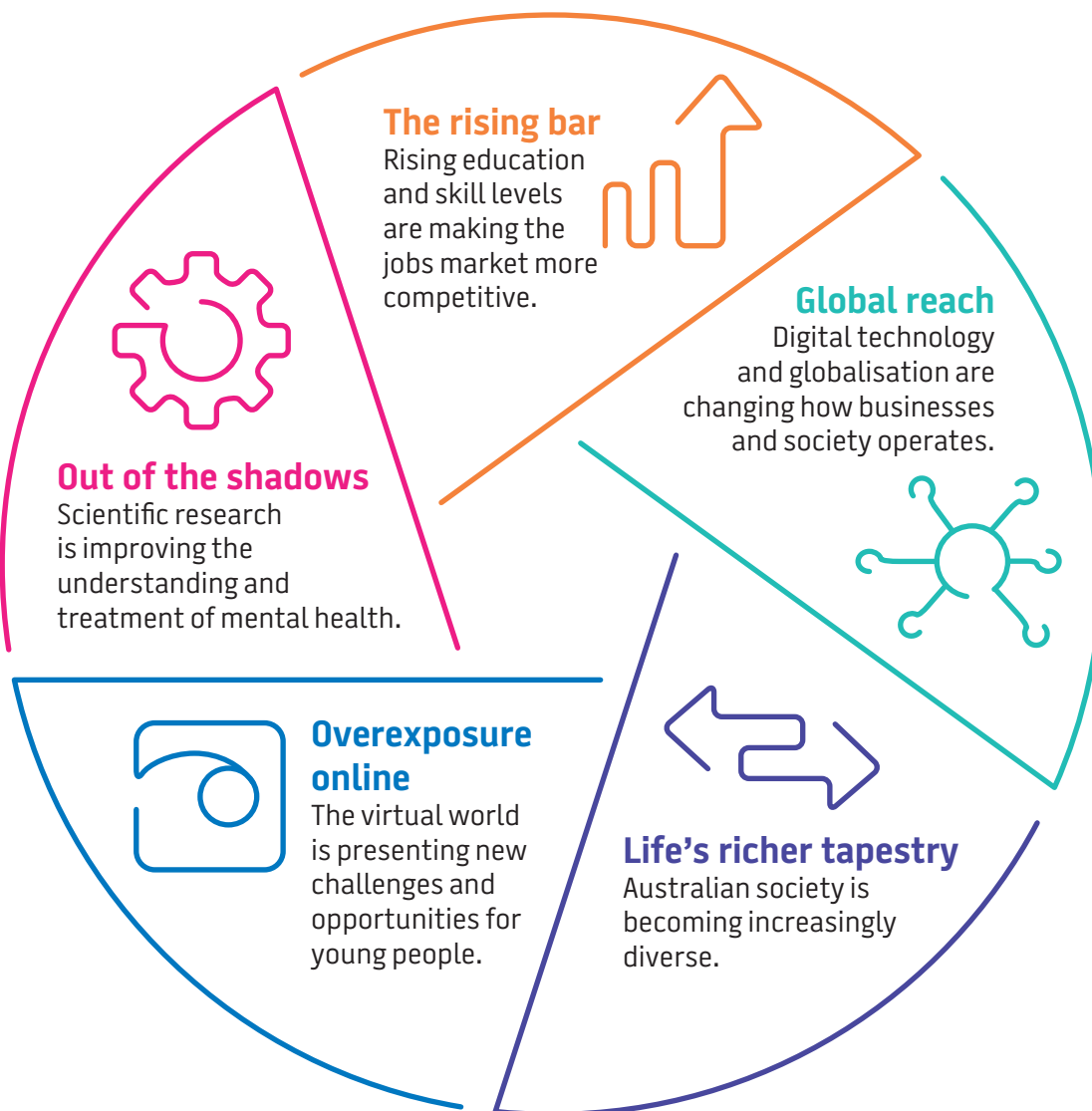
2018 UPDATE

### 2018 megatrends update

In 2018, as an extension of VicHealth's 2015 megatrends work, VicHealth partnered with CSIRO's Data61, the Youth Affairs Council Victoria and the National Centre for Farmer Health to update the original *Bright Futures* megatrends. This update looks at new and emerging trends impacting young people in Victoria.

VicHealth commissioned CSIRO to carry out foresight research and build a comprehensive picture of the factors set to influence the mental health and wellbeing of young people over the next 20 years.

The resulting report, *Bright Futures*, was published in 2015 and attracted strong interest. It predicted a future where young people need resilience and flexibility to succeed in a world characterised by decreasing job security, the fluidity of globalisation and technology, increasingly diverse societies, over-exposure to the internet, and positive progress for mental health. The original report can be found here: <https://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/megatrends>





## The rising bar

Rising education and skill levels are making the jobs market more competitive. Advances in digital technologies are changing the nature of work for young people, with anywhere from 9% to 47% of the workforce in Australia expected to be automated in the future (Frey & Osborne, 2013). The growing demand for high skills and education levels is making it harder for young people to enter the workforce and gain full-time employment.

**Getting a foot in the door.** The skills bar for gaining employment continues to rise, with the number of online vacancies for jobs in Victoria requiring a Bachelor degree or higher (Skill Level 1) growing faster than lower skill levels (see Figure 1). A similar trend is seen in employment projections in Australia: Skill Level 1 positions will show greater growth (almost 11% from 2017 to 2022) than those in Skill Level 4 or 5 positions (over 8% and 4%, respectively) (Dept. of Employment, 2017). As a result, fewer entry level or lower skill jobs are available. Young people who typically rely on these types of jobs when they enter the job market may instead have to complete further study, or opt for part-time or casual roles to gain experience and skills.

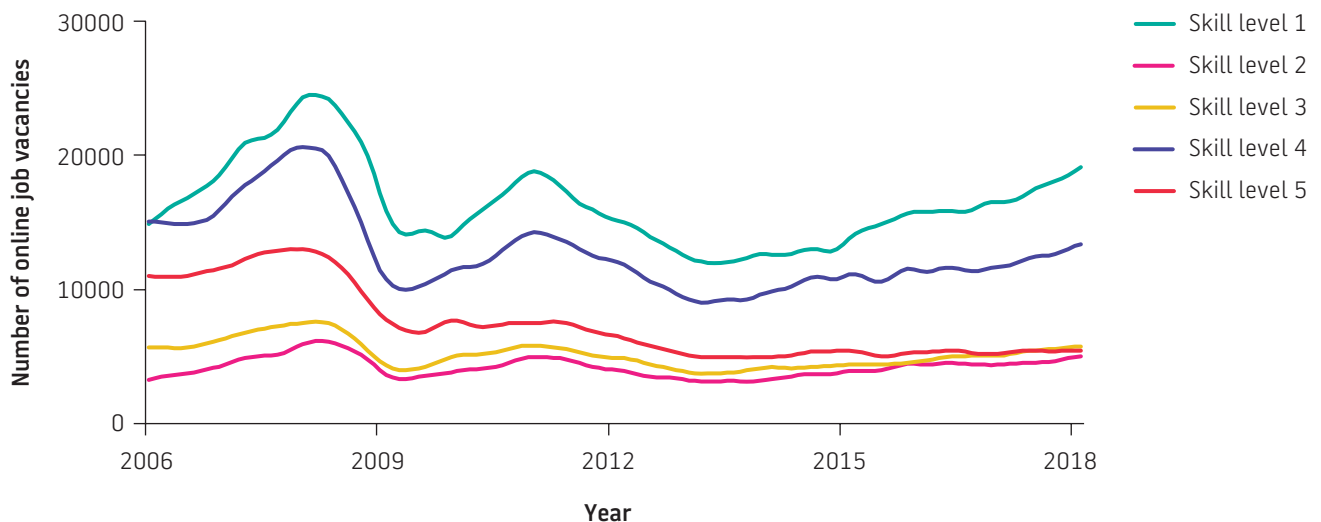
**Higher cost of living.** The proportion of household income attributable to rent in Melbourne has risen from almost 23% in 2004 to 26% in 2016, with similar increases in regional Victoria (around 22% to 27%) (CoreLogic, 2016). People aged 25–34

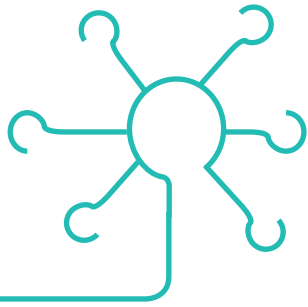
years in Australia are more likely to rent (than own) the home they live in, and less likely to have an investment property, relative to older age groups who were more like to buy a property during their young adulthood (CEDA, 2017). This points to a growing generational gap in access to housing ownership and property investment opportunities (CEDA, 2017). This can impact a young person's transition into adulthood and their ability to reach milestones of independence (e.g. purchasing their first home or moving out of their family home).

**Happy to lend a hand.** Work is more than just paid employment for young people, with those aged 12–24 years increasingly likely to engage in formal volunteering, up from just over 12% in 2011 to 15% in 2016 (ABS, 2011; ABS, 2016). These figures are likely to underestimate youth volunteering though, as they do not include informal forms of volunteering. Other estimates suggest up to 54% of 15–19 year olds in Victoria engaged in some form of volunteer work in 2017 (Bullot, Cave, Fildes et al, 2017). Young people volunteer for a range of reasons, with most motivated by a desire to help others or their community, to gain a sense of personal satisfaction and to do something worthwhile (Muir, Mullan, Powell et al, 2009). Volunteering can provide young people with benefits, such as feeling like they have made a difference, social engagement and personal development (Ferrier, Roos, Long, 2004).

**Figure 1. Number of online job vacancies across skill levels as measured by the Internet Vacancy Index**

Source: Department of Jobs and Small Business 2018





## Global reach

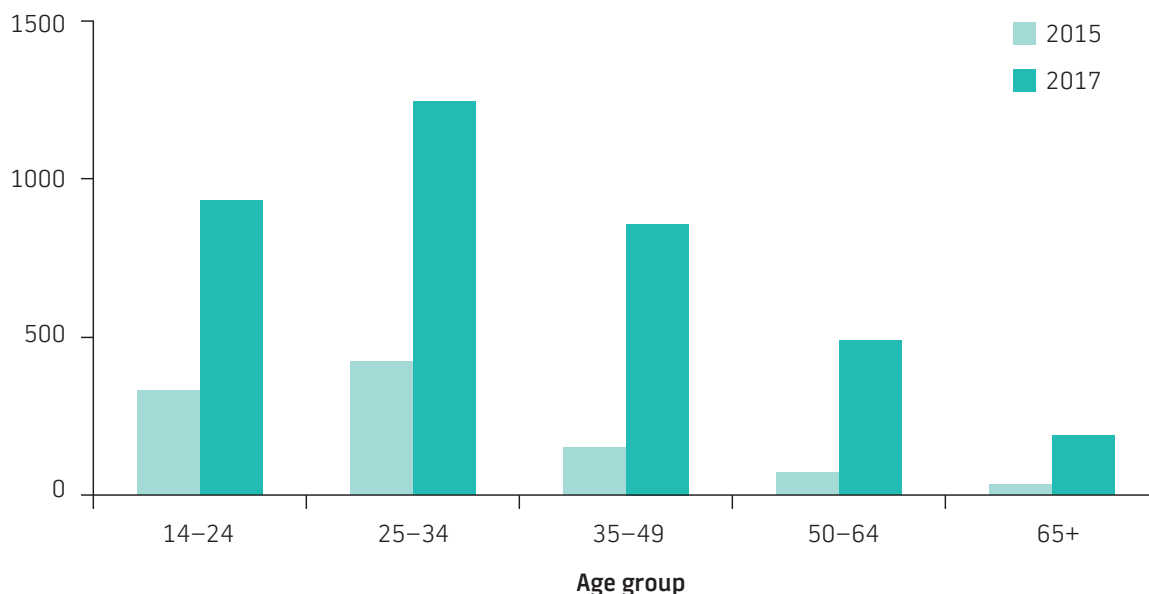
Digital technology and globalisation are changing how businesses and society operates. Global connectivity and digital technologies are bringing new opportunities in education and freelance employment. While this gives flexibility, autonomy and variety to workers, it can also create financial and employment insecurity (Edelman Berland, 2014).

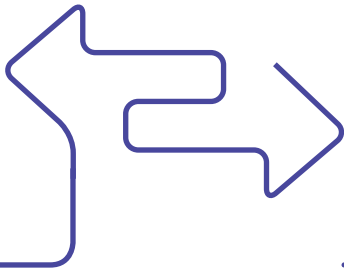
**Being connected has real benefits.** The internet can present risks, along with benefits, such as providing opportunities for young people to connect to online learning tools and social support. Using social media can also improve their sense of identity, community and self-esteem (Collin, Rahilly, Richardson et al, 2011). Being connected online enables young people who may be socially excluded to join new online networks too (Notley, 2009). Young Australians who are frequent users of social media are more engaged in social and political activities and issues (Xenos, Vromen, Loader, 2014). Being connected to social media alone does not negatively impact wellbeing; it is influenced by additional factors, such as engaging in online comparisons (Walker, Thornton, Choudhury et al, 2015). Educating young people on how to use the internet and social media may help promote the positive benefits young people can gain from being online.

**Getting around.** Compared to older generations, young people are more likely to use public transport and are less likely to drive a car to work or education (ABS, 2013). In Victoria, the proportion of young people aged 18–23 years who hold a driver's licence has declined from 75% in 2001 to 65% in 2012 (Delbosc, Currie, 2013). This trend mirrors a global generational shift towards young people delaying getting their driver's license (Bullot et al, 2017; Delbosc & Currie, 2013). Rises in digital connectivity and innovative business models have enabled new alternative transport options, such as ride-sharing platforms Uber, Lyft and GoCatch. Young people aged 14–24 years are among the greatest users of these new transport services, second only to 25–34 year olds as the most frequent users of Uber in 2015 (see Figure 2). These new transport options may contribute to fewer young people (particularly those in metropolitan areas) owning a private vehicle or holding a driver's licence.

**Figure 2. Number of Uber users in Australia by age group**

Source: Roy Morgan Research 2017





## Life's richer tapestry

Australian society is becoming increasingly diverse. Almost a third of Australian residents were born overseas (ABS, 2016); non-traditional family structures are on the rise (AIHW, 2011); and both parents are now more likely to be working full-time, bringing additional family pressures (Hayes, 2011). There is also a rise in the frequency and severity of extreme weather events (Timbal, Ekstrom, Fiddes et al, 2016).

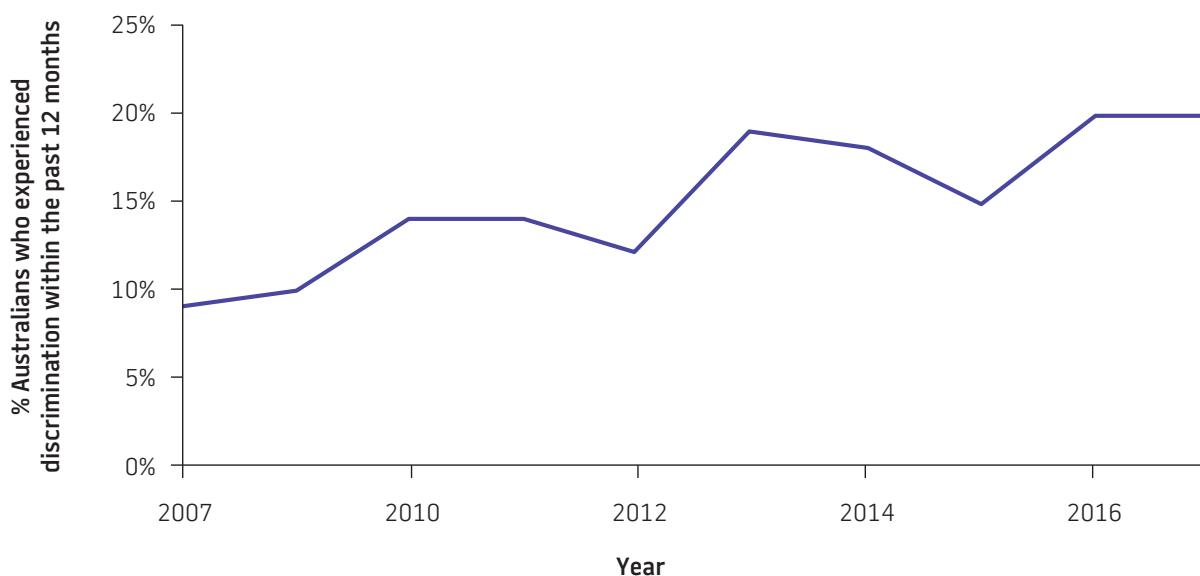
### More discrimination, but youth more open to diversity.

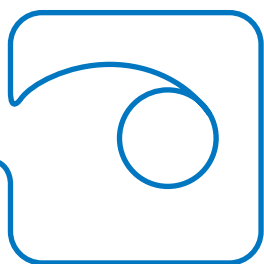
Incidences of ethnic, cultural or religious discrimination have continued to rise, up from around 1 in 10 in 2007 to 1 in 5 in 2017 – the highest rate in 10 years (see Figure 3). However, young people aged 18–24 years are less likely to report experiences of discrimination than people aged 25–34 years or 35–44 years (around 22% versus 31% and 24%, respectively) (Markus, 2017). Having said this, some groups of young people are more vulnerable to acts of discrimination than others, such as those born in non-English speaking countries (Markus, 2017). Young people are also more accepting of a range of family structures and hold more favourable attitudes towards unmarried couples, single parent households, and marriage equality for same-sex couples than older age groups (Melbourne Institute, 2017).

**Climate change concerns.** Young people are increasingly engaged in conversations about the impacts of climate change and their effects on future public health and wellbeing (Ojala, Lakew, 2017). In the lead up to the 2016 Australian federal election, young people identified climate change as the third most important issue they wanted addressed (Sealey, McKenzie, 2016). Young people are generally more aware of the issues relating to the environment compared to older generations (Estevez, Frutos, Ruth et al, 2014). Common concerns of young people include the degradation of the Great Barrier Reef, global warming, sustainable energy, pollution, land degradation and food security (Sealey, McKenzie, 2016). Young people have expressed a strong desire for the government to introduce policies and initiatives to address climate change (Sealey, McKenzie, 2016), and report greater willingness to pay extra taxes and higher prices towards this end (Tranter, Skrbis, 2014).

**Figure 3. Percentage of Australians who experienced discrimination within the past 12 months**

Source. Markus 2017





## Overexposure online

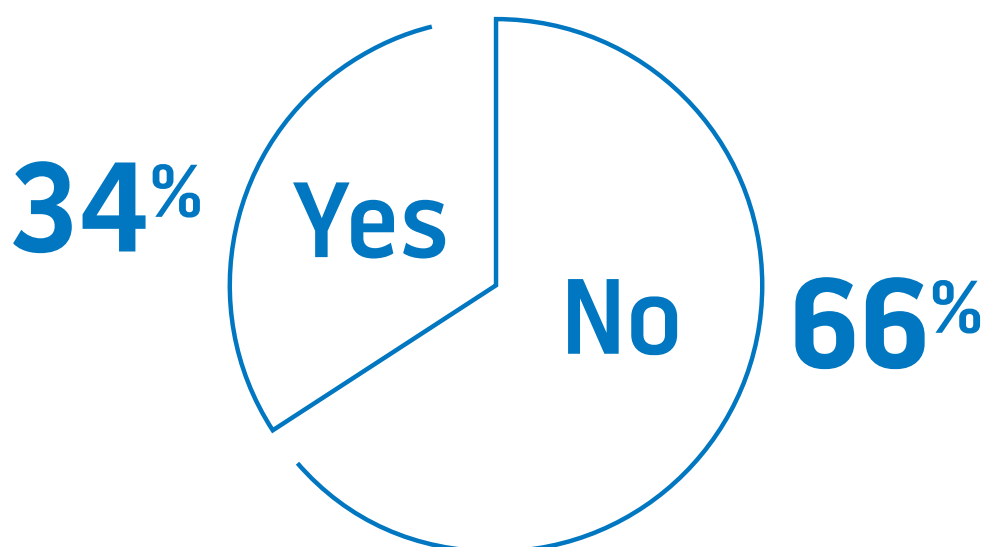
Young people are spending more time online and increasingly turning to social media as their main source of news and current affairs (Pew Research Centre, 2015). The internet is creating diverse learning and employment opportunities, but spending time online increases exposure to potential risks such as cyber-bullying and exposure to violent, racist or hateful comments (Mason, Czapski, 2017) (ACMA, 2013).

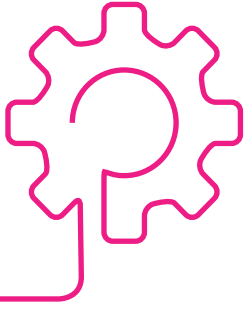
**Real and fake lives online.** The rise of fake or misrepresented information online creates the risk that young people will misinterpret the news, or feel confused and/or distressed by fake news online (Notley, Dezuanni, Zhong et al, 2017). A survey of young Australians aged 8–16 years found most of them did not feel confident in identifying fake news online (see Figure 4). Internet users can also edit the images they post on social media to enhance their appearance. Exposure to these types of images can negatively impact a young person's self-image and mental wellbeing (Fardouly, Vartanian, 2015).

**Poorer youth physical health.** In 2015, around 24% of young Victorians aged 18–24 years were overweight and a further 13% were obese. In the future, this trend could pose potential health risks for young people, with chronic health problems like diabetes and heart disease becoming increasingly common (ABS, 2007). Declining physical health outcomes could be due to the increased amount of time young people are spending indoors, their reduced physical activity, and eating poor diets high in processed foods and/or poor quality food (Harris, Bargh, 2009). Programs for increasing physical activity among young people can not only improve their physical health, but also their mental health (Rosenbaum, Tiedemann, Ward, 2014). Opportunities for physical activity must be created within the arts, community and sports settings.

**Figure 4. Percentage of young people aged 8–16 years who felt confident identifying fake news online**

Source. Notley, Dezuanni, Zhong & Howden, 2017





## Out of the shadows

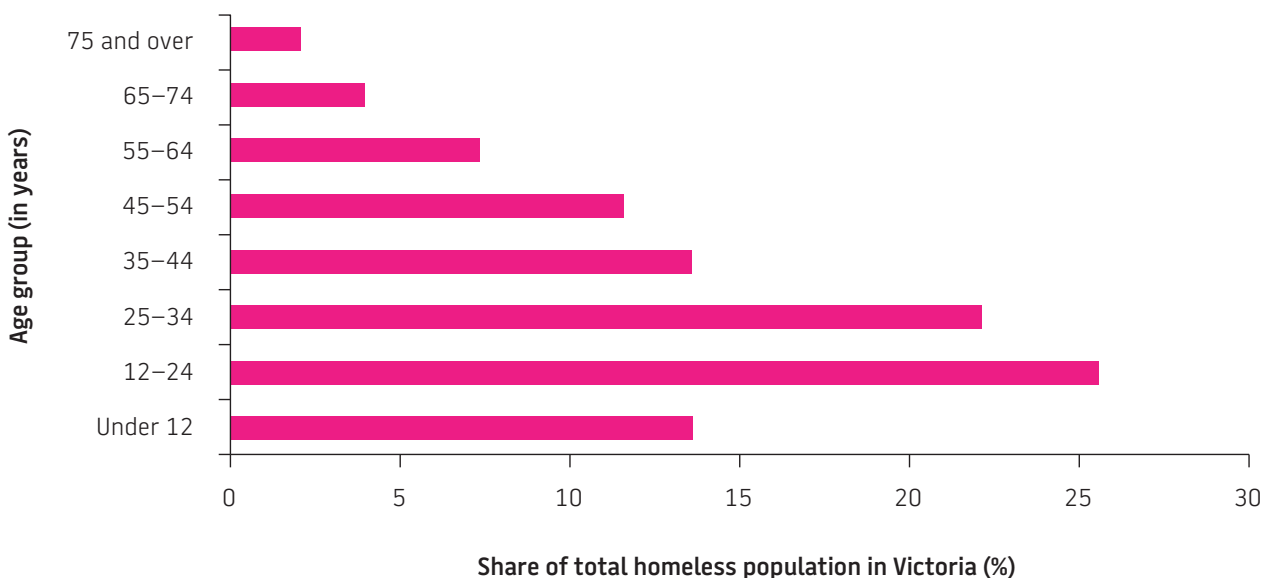
Scientific research and advances in technology are improving the understanding and treatment of mental health. However, in 2015, approximately 23% of young people in Australia aged 15–19 years were at risk of serious mental illness (Mission Australia and Black Dog Institute, 2016) and youth suicide rates are still on the rise (ABS, 2017; Bailey, Baker, Cave et al, 2016).

**Camaderie helps when things get tough.** Peer-to-peer support services are increasingly being used to provide alternative sources of mental health support for young people. These types of programs have been shown to be effective in helping individuals build stronger relationships with others, take better care of themselves and feel more empowered to take control of their recovery (Chinman, George, Dougherty et al, 2014). Peer-to-peer support programs for school students aged 11–14 years can help young people make new friends, develop self-confidence, improve responses to bullying, cope with stress and make difficult decisions (Ellis, Marsh, Craven, 2009). Through these programs, young people can improve their own mental wellbeing, as well as that of others (Collumb, Gillespie, Grant, 2012).

**Living without a roof over your head.** The rate of youth homelessness in Victoria has increased by just over 4% in the past five years, mainly driven by increases in the number of 19–24 year olds who are homeless (ABS, 2018). Young people aged 12–24 years contributed the largest share of the homeless population in Victoria in 2016 (this includes insecure and temporary accommodation), followed by young people aged 25–34 years old and those less than 12 years old (see Figure 5). Youth homelessness is associated with poorer mental and physical health outcomes, unemployment, and less engagement in formal schooling (Mission Australia, 2016; Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, 2008). There are many reasons for youth homelessness, including interpersonal relationship issues, accommodation problems (e.g. being evicted) and financial pressures (McNamara, 2015).

**Figure 5. Share of total homeless population in Victoria by age group**

Source. Australian Bureau of Statistics 2018



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