

Submission Response
from

Youth Affairs Network of Queensland (YANQ)

***Discussion Paper – Regulation of Tattooing and Body
Piercing of Children and Young***

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Contents

1. About the Youth Affairs Network of Queensland (YANQ).....	2
2. Issues to consider – seeking views to inform Government in its review of these issues.	
Process	3
3. Issues to consider -	
Content.....	4
4. Conclusion	6

1. About the Youth Affairs Network of Queensland

The Youth Affairs Network of Queensland Inc. (YANQ) is the peak community youth affairs organisation in Queensland. YANQ's members total over 400 individuals and organisations from Queensland's youth sector, seeking to represent and promote the interests and well being of young people across the state. YANQ advocates for and with young people, especially marginalised and disadvantaged young people, to government and the community.

Further, YANQ encourages and participates in the development of policies, programs, projects and research that are responsive to the needs of young people and we promote and support cultural development.

2. Issues to Consider – seeking views to inform Government in its review of these issues. (Process)

In responding to the Discussion Paper, YANQ staff consulted with young people and workers who work with young people. Unfortunately, given the time-frame for responses, we have only sought to gather a list of issues to be considered by policy makers. Certainly one of those issues would be the **time frame** for responding to the Discussion Paper, particularly given that this is an issue that directly impacts on many young people, their bodies and their decision making.

Given the current Government's commitment to youth participation it is critical that information (such as this Discussion Paper) is widely distributed and the process clearly articulated.

Young people consulted include the *Dark Wave Reference Group (Brisbane)*. Workers consulted include YANQ members from the Non English Speaking Background Youth Issues Network (NYIN).

Certainly a number of young people who were consulted were keen to provide **direct feedback** regarding some of the questions raised in the Discussion Paper. Unfortunately, when they tried to ring the contact number advertised in the paper, they were informed that they were only able to respond by email or in writing. For many young people, particularly disadvantaged and marginalised young people this is not an option, nor their preferred method of communication. If young people are to have a say regarding issues that directly impact on their lives and life choices, then feedback mechanisms must take this into consideration.

YANQ sought to distribute the Discussion Paper widely, given that many workers, particularly those working with marginalised and disadvantaged young people, were not aware of it. Perhaps, there will be further opportunities for feedback and consultation however, the process is not clearly articulated in the report. YANQ is keen to participate in further opportunities to comment on the issues raised in the Discussion Paper and wishes to consult widely on this issue with a diverse range of stakeholders.

4. The Issues – Content

- Tattooing and Body Piercing are seen as two distinctive types of body adornment by many young people and must be considered separately.
- Young people are aware of the laws regarding tattooing and know that it is illegal to get a tattoo before the age of 18 years. There seems to be a certain amount of acceptance around this.
- With regard to both tattooing and piercing, any recommendations need to have explored cultural diversity, given the greater than 160 different ethnic groups living in Queensland. Tattoos are a part of many cultures – there will no doubt be concerns that must be explored. Similarly, with piercings, significant information and data needs to be collected before any comprehensive review of the issues, and subsequent changes to legislation occur.

The following information was *provided by young people involved in the Dark Wave Reference Group (Brisbane)* and other members of the Youth Affairs Network of Queensland. All were very keen to be involved in further opportunities to discuss the issues raised.

Certainly most responses that follow relate particularly to body piercing:

- Is it a fad? – No. Many adults who had piercings as young people in the 70's and 80's still have them.
- Young people want an open door opportunity to be able to complain regarding back yard and shonky operators.
- Young people have attended some Piercing Studios and have had negative experiences including extreme pain caused by procedure. Upon being referred to another studio, they have had positive experiences, including no pain. This points to a range of different methods and experience from operators and particularly relates to the issue of standards and benchmarks for operators.
- Issues of **Information dissemination, education and community awareness** rated high on concerns of those consulted by YANQ.
- Relevant information must be available at the time of piercing.

- Information must be piercing specific, related to the piercing of different body parts – there are a range of different issues to be considered e.g. *don't go surfing after a belly piercing*.
- Many of the 'experts' on body piercings, on the do's and don'ts, are young people – they must be widely consulted, particularly certain subcultures.
- Further reason for this includes the fact that many young people will obtain their information from their peers and if peers are well informed they can educate their friends, e.g. “ *hey did you know if you getpierced, you need to know.....* ”
- Regarding subcultures, quality information must be subculture specific and therefore appeal to young people from the variety of subcultures – examples of how this information needs to be presented includes the different types of imagery/language that relates to the different subcultures e.g. Goths, industrials, surfies, skates, etc.
- Levels of literacy need to be considered with regard development of any materials. Information must be available that will be relevant to young people in school, homeless young people, etc.
- Young people were concerned about hygiene issues. Workers concerns mirrored this with concern regarding hygiene and Hepatitis C infection.
- Young people were particularly concerned that there were different levels of piercings. They talked about ear and nose piercings being fairly standard and low risk, whereas tongue, cheek, eyebrow and similar piercings posed significantly more risk. Certainly, intimate piercings were looked upon in a completely different light.
- One piece of feedback from young people who had experiences of multiple piercings was that piercing guns should only be used on ears and needles used on other body parts.
- All young people consulted had stories of “piercings gone wrong”.
- Generally, young people felt (apart from nose and ear piercings) that once 16 years of age young people could make their own decisions about piercings, however they were also concerned that where there was to be any issue of parental consent that equal weight be given to the consent of the young person.
- A further issue raised was that some young people don't have 'active' guardians.
- Young people consulted were generally between the ages of 17 and 25, however one 10 year old was also consulted in this group and there was a

resounding awareness about the issue of piercings of some parts of the body on developing bodies.

- Irrespective of regulation, young people consulted felt that there will always be those who will pierce themselves or their friends and for this reason there must be relevant, accessible information.
- Responses regarding the AMA pamphlet on piercing were generally positive, however, not particularly young people friendly to the range of subcultures that exists. Ultimately by the time a young person attends a doctor's surgery they have already been pierced and most likely have an infection. Not particularly preventative in nature.
- The high cost of piercings was also an issue raised by young people.

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, all young people and workers consulted regarding this issue were keen to have further opportunities to discuss the issues. Certainly different groups and individuals will have different positions on issue of consent, and regulatory mechanisms.

However, the underlying principles of all discussions with those consulted included:

- Access to relevant information
- Tattooing and piercing considered very separate issues
- Participation and consultation of young people in decisions which impact on their lives and life choices
- Standards/Benchmarks
- Hygiene/Sterilisation
- Awareness of young people's subcultures
- Awareness of cultural diversity