

MISSION AUSTRALIA

YOUTH SURVEY

2023

SUMMARY REPORT



2023 Youth Survey Overview

The *Youth Survey 2023* paints a picture of a diverse, resilient and capable group of young people who often experience significant pressures in multiple facets of life, but who can usually identify solutions or ways of coping. This study gives us insight into the current and future concerns of the next generation of Australian adults.

For the past 22 years, the Mission Australia *Youth Survey* has provided a platform for young people to share their goals, experiences and concerns during an important transitional point in their lives. The 19,501 young people aged 15-19 who completed the *Youth Survey 2023* each bring their own perspective, collectively painting a picture of how young people across Australia are faring and the issues that matter to them.

There are many results to celebrate from the *Youth Survey 2023*. There were high levels of involvement in study, with the majority of students satisfied with their progress. Many young people were employed, and two-thirds of those working were pleased with their job. Close to nine in ten were involved in activities or groups, and most young people were proud of their community.

The majority of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people were involved in study or employment, and the vast majority had plans for the future including going to university, employment or travel. However, similarly to past years, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people rated their wellbeing lower than their non-indigenous peers on a range of measures, and a greater proportion reported they were subject to unfair treatment or discrimination.

As in past years, young people showed awareness and thoughtfulness about issues facing the nation. Their unprompted responses when asked about the **most important issues** facing Australia today demonstrate their continuing concern for *the environment, equity and discrimination, the economy and financial matters* and *mental health*. Over the past year, we have seen greater levels of concern about issues relating to *the economy and financial matters, housing and homelessness* and *crime, safety and violence*.

Some national issues were more notable in certain states. For example, *housing and homelessness* was prominent among young Tasmanians, pointing to effects of the housing crisis in this state. *Crime, safety and violence* was the second highest issue in the Northern Territory, and over a third of young people in New South Wales mentioned *mental health* as an important national issue.

In the context of these national concerns, only half of young people felt positively about the future. In relation to various aspects of subjective wellbeing, young people were most unhappy about *what may happen to them later in life*. Similarly, when asked whether they felt they had control over their life, one in 10 felt they had *no control* or *almost no control* over their life.

In addition to their societal awareness, young people demonstrated great insight into the challenges they have personally faced this year as well as possible solutions to those challenges. The top **personal challenges** faced by young people were consistent with 2022, with the most common responses themed around *school, mental health* and *relationships*. While ranking highly in 2022, the *COVID-19* pandemic was not a top-of-mind challenge. Only 5% of 2023 respondents indicated they were *very or extremely concerned* about *COVID-19*, down from 19% in 2022 and 29% in 2021.

School challenges were mentioned unprompted by almost half of all respondents. These young people shared difficulties around their high workload, academic pressure, challenges with teachers and learning difficulties. This aligns with responses to a separate question asking about **personal concerns**, to which *coping with stress* and *school or study problems* were the most common answers. Young people suggested solutions to these challenges, including taking responsibility for more efficient study and better time management, greater understanding from teachers and parents about stress levels, and being more comfortable asking for support or advice when they need it.

Mental health continues to affect the lives of many young people. Close to one quarter of respondents mentioned issues including stress, anxiety, depression and low self-esteem as one of their greatest personal challenges in the last year. In addition, *mental health* was seen as the top barrier to achieving work and study goals. The levels of psychological distress, loneliness and general wellbeing, as measured in the *Youth Survey*, give further insight into young people's mental state. Males self-reported higher scores than females across the range of wellbeing questions, but self-assessment of wellbeing among females and especially gender diverse young people was worryingly low. Young people described helpful solutions to their mental health challenges, including better access to mental healthcare services, proper diagnosis and treatment and support from their family and friends.

Around one in five respondents cited relationship challenges, with the most common being issues with family and friends. Additionally, three in 10 young people said they find it hard to turn to friends or family if they need help and one quarter said their family's ability to get along was only *fair* or *poor*. Young people's solutions to their relationship challenges included asking others close to them for more support, understanding or advice, with the desire for a more diverse support network and professional help also featuring.

The *Youth Survey 2023* findings reveal that young people are diverse, resilient and capable - often experiencing significant pressures in multiple facets of life, but usually able to identify solutions or ways of coping. Many are concerned about the future, but also have more immediate challenges in their lives. Young people took the opportunity of this platform to openly share their perspectives and the findings remind us of the importance of listening to this next generation of Australian adults.



National summary

PROFILE OF RESPONDENTS

State and territory distribution

The Mission Australia 2023 Youth Survey was completed by 19,501 young people aged 15-19 years from across the country. Figure 1.1 shows the number and proportion of responses from each state and territory.

Locality

Over three in five (62.7%) respondents lived in postcodes that were part of a major city as defined by the *Australian Statistical Geography Standard* (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2021). One quarter (24.7%) resided in regional areas and the remaining 12.7% lived in postcodes classified as both a major city and a regional area.

Gender

Over half (54.9%) of respondents were female, two in five (40.2%) were male, 3.7% were gender diverse and 1.3% preferred not to say.

Identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander

A total of 820 (4.4%) young people identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander. Among this group, 661 (3.5%) respondents identified as Aboriginal, 71 (0.4%) identified as Torres Strait Islander and the remaining 88 (0.5%) identified as both.

Cultural and ethnic identity

One in five (21.6%) respondents said that they strongly identify with a cultural or ethnic group. The most common (in order of frequency) were Indian, Chinese, Italian, Greek and Filipino. A similar proportion (22.1%) said they spoke a language other than English at home. The most common (in order of frequency) were Chinese/Mandarin, Arabic, Chinese/Cantonese, Vietnamese, Tagalog, Hindi and Greek.

Disability

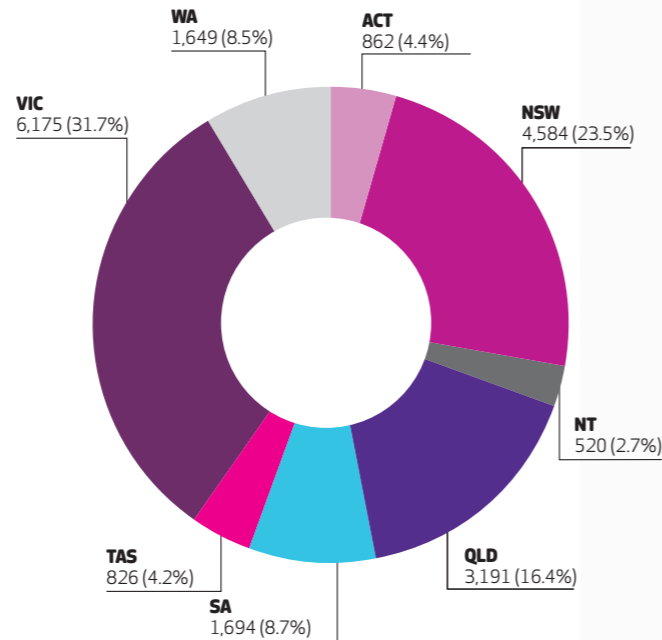
A total of 1,352 (7.3%) young people identified as a person with disability, with another 759 (4.1%) preferring not to say. Over one third (34.2%) of gender diverse respondents identified as living with disability compared with 5.8% of females and 6.9% of males. The most frequently cited disabilities (in order of frequency) were attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and dyslexia.

Mental health

There were 3,232 (17.4%) respondents who identified as a person with a mental health condition and 2,174 (11.7%) who preferred not to say. The proportions varied by gender; almost half (48.6%) of gender diverse young people identified as living with a mental health condition compared with 21.4% of females and 8.9% of males. The most frequently cited mental health conditions (in order of frequency) were anxiety disorders, depressive disorders and neurodevelopmental disorders which include ASD and ADHD.



Figure 1.1: Proportion of respondents by state/territory



MOST IMPORTANT ISSUES IN AUSTRALIA TODAY

 **19,501** YOUNG PEOPLE AGED 15-19 YEARS PARTICIPATED IN THE YOUTH SURVEY

1 

The environment

44% identified it as one of the most important issues in Australia compared with 51% in 2022 and 38% in 2021.

21% of young people were personally extremely or very concerned about climate change.

In the past year I have struggled with anxiety regarding my future, and climate change.

Female, 17, TAS

2 

Equity and discrimination

31% identified it as one of the most important issues in Australia compared with 36% in 2022 and 35% in 2021.

27% of young people were treated unfairly or discriminated against in the last year, most commonly due to: Physical appearance, Race/cultural background, Gender.

I have experienced a lot of prejudice and discrimination based on my gender, especially around school interactive environments.

Female, 16, NSW

3 

The economy and financial matters

31% identified it as one of the most important issues in Australia compared with 22% in 2022 and 11% in 2021.

15% of young people were personally extremely or very concerned about financial security.

Financial difficulties - the cost of food and petrol has meant that I have to work more and focus less on school.

Female, 18, NSW

4 

Mental health

30% identified it as one of the most important issues in Australia compared with 34% in 2022 and 35% in 2021.

32% of young people were personally extremely or very concerned about mental health.

My mental health has probably been the biggest challenge for me in the last year. I have been struggling with feeling down, stressed and overwhelmed.

Male, 17, NSW

Homelessness and housing was the 5th most important issue in Australia for 2023 at 19%, up from 12% in 2022 and 7% in 2021.

Crime, safety and violence was the 6th most important issue in Australia for 2023 at 18%, up from 10% in 2022 and 11% in 2021.



CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS

In young peoples' own words

Young people told us in their own words and unprompted, what their **biggest personal challenge** has been in the past year, what they found helpful in dealing with that challenge and what more could be done to help them address their challenge. The key themes of young people's responses are shown below.

1 in 3 young people said nothing more could help, or they were unsure what could help with their challenges, indicating there is an opportunity to improve awareness of supports available to them.

THE BIGGEST PERSONAL CHALLENGES

WHAT MORE WOULD HELP? Solutions suggested by young people

49%



SCHOOL CHALLENGES

High workload, academic pressure, challenges with teachers or learning difficulties.



- Be comfortable asking for support or advice
- Study harder and more effectively
- Greater understanding from teachers and parents about stress levels
- Be more organised and manage time effectively

24%



MENTAL HEALTH CHALLENGES

Stress, anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, diagnosed disorders or self-harm



- Asking healthcare professionals for help
- Be comfortable asking for support or advice
- Better access to mental healthcare services
- Proper diagnosis and treatment

21%



RELATIONSHIP CHALLENGES

Challenging relationships with family, friends or significant others like lack of support, abuse or death



- Be comfortable asking for support or advice
- Asking healthcare professionals for help
- Asking those closest to me for advice and understanding
- Better access to mental healthcare services





86%
studying full-time

63%
of students were **satisfied** or **very satisfied** with their studies

47%
of students were **very or extremely confident** in their ability to achieve study or work goals

37%
of students said there are **barriers to achieving study or work goals**

TOP 3 BARRIERS:

-  **Mental Health**
-  **Academic ability**
-  **Financial difficulty**

WHAT MORE WOULD HELP YOUNG PEOPLE ADDRESS SCHOOL RELATED CHALLENGES?

Being comfortable asking for support or advice

I could ask friends or family for support and to help ensure I stay focused on my tasks instead of getting distracted.

Female, 15, NT

I need to study harder and more effectively

I need to concentrate harder on my studies, I want to do the fun things but knowing me it'll just divert my attention away from what's actually important and the reason why I am in school in the first place and that is to get good grades and a good life in the future.

Male 17, QLD

More understanding from my teachers about stress levels

Perhaps speaking in confidence to the teachers who are constantly putting pressure on me even when I'm experiencing mental health issues would help address my specific challenge because it would give them an understanding of what I'm going through and, hopefully, stop them from making my schooling much more difficult.

Female 17, SA

Helping my parents understand the challenges I face at school

Communicating my hardships with my parents so they know if I am struggling in school and need their understanding that I need to vent to them without them trying to find solutions for me or completely dismiss my hardships and perceive me struggling as me outright failing [sic].

Female, 16, SA

Be more organised and get help managing my time

More help in school - assisting me in managing the tasks I need to complete to reduce last minute stress etc.

Female, 17, NSW



MENTAL HEALTH



38%

Were extremely or very concerned about **cop**ing with stress

38%

reported their mental health and wellbeing as **fair** or **poor**

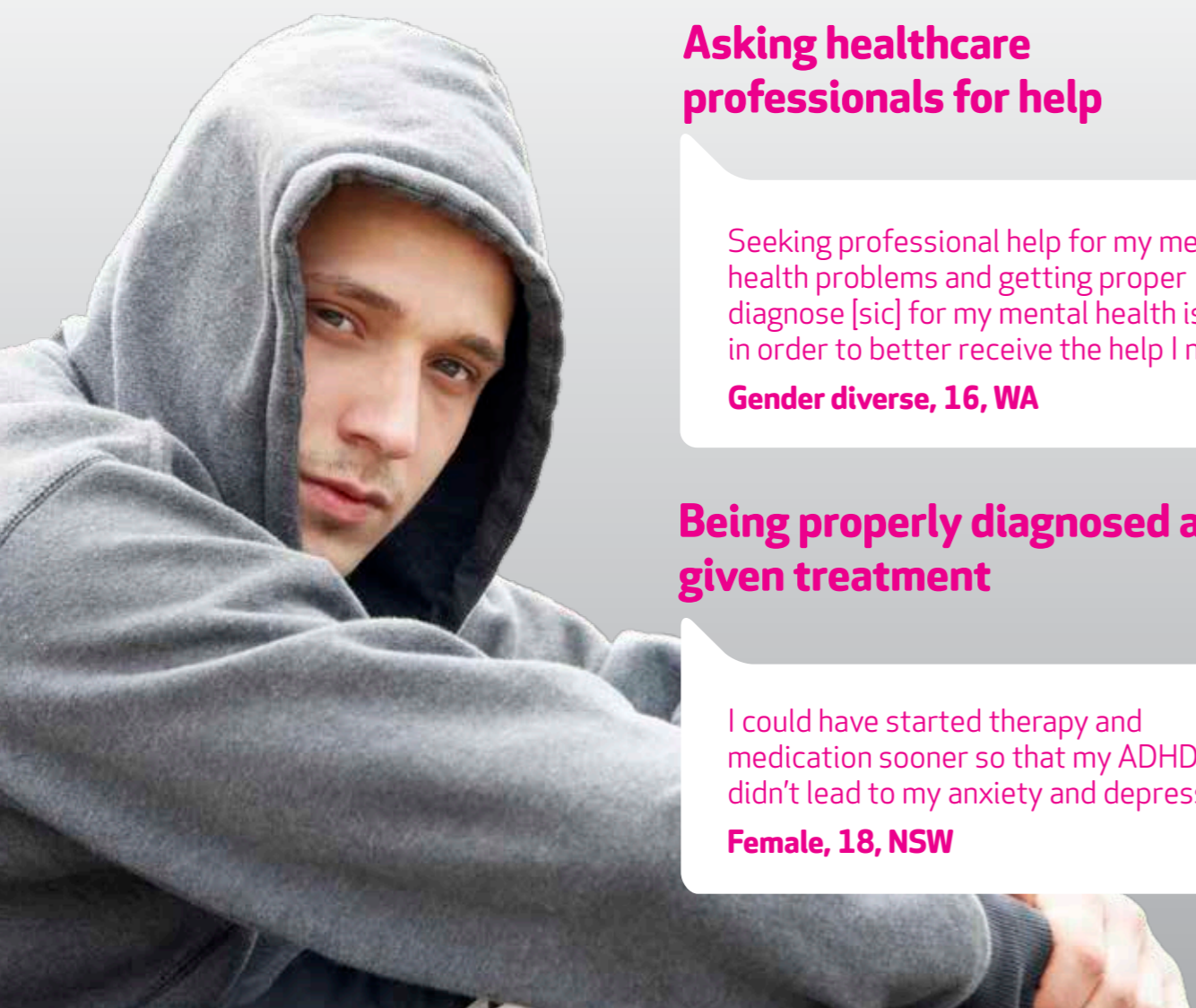
25%

had **high psychological distress**

21%

felt **lonely** all or most of the time

WHAT MORE WOULD HELP YOUNG PEOPLE ADDRESS MENTAL HEALTH CHALLENGES?



Asking healthcare professionals for help

Seeking professional help for my mental health problems and getting proper diagnose [sic] for my mental health issues in order to better receive the help I need.

Gender diverse, 16, WA

Being properly diagnosed and given treatment

I could have started therapy and medication sooner so that my ADHD didn't lead to my anxiety and depression.

Female, 18, NSW

Being comfortable asking for support or advice

I believe that if I felt more comfortable opening up to my support team about my struggles then I could get better help. I worry that they will not validate my emotions or brush over something that may be a bigger deal to me than they thought.

Female, 16, QLD

Talking through my concerns with family and friends

Ongoing conversation with family and friends, making sure to stay on top of my personal experiences and feelings surrounding motivation and depression.

Female, 16, VIC

Better access to and availability of mental health services

I need to be in therapy. Mental health resources like therapy are not easily assessable [sic] in Australia. Since January of this year, my mum has been trying to book me in to see a therapist/psychologist. But due to the fact that there are no open spots anywhere that fit my needs, and I am not in danger (not suicidal) we have been unsuccessful. I believe I would really benefit from seeing a therapist, so I could have some professional help dealing with my mental health.

Female, 16, QLD

RELATIONSHIPS

Family's ability to get along:

29% found it hard to turn to friends and family when they needed help

25% said their family's ability to get along was fair or poor

Community:

60% agree or strongly agree that I am proud to be a part of my community

63% agree or strongly agree that my community has the things I need to have a positive and thriving future

88% are involved in activities or groups in their communities

TOP 3 SOURCES OF SUPPORT:



Friends



Parent/s or guardians



Relative/family friend

WHAT MORE WOULD HELP YOUNG PEOPLE ADDRESS RELATIONSHIP CHALLENGES?

Being comfortable asking for support or advice

Being more open about my personal issues, asking for help and support when I need it, accepting support when it is offered.

Gender diverse, 15, NSW

Talking through my concerns with family and friends

Friends being able to talk it out and not bottle stuff up. Instead of joking all the time, we're able to talk.

Male, 15, QLD

Better access to and availability of mental health services

I think more mental health support for teenagers that is easily accessible and guarantees confidentiality as well as guidance and tips for how to support friends with their mental health.

Female, 16, NSW

Asking healthcare professionals for help

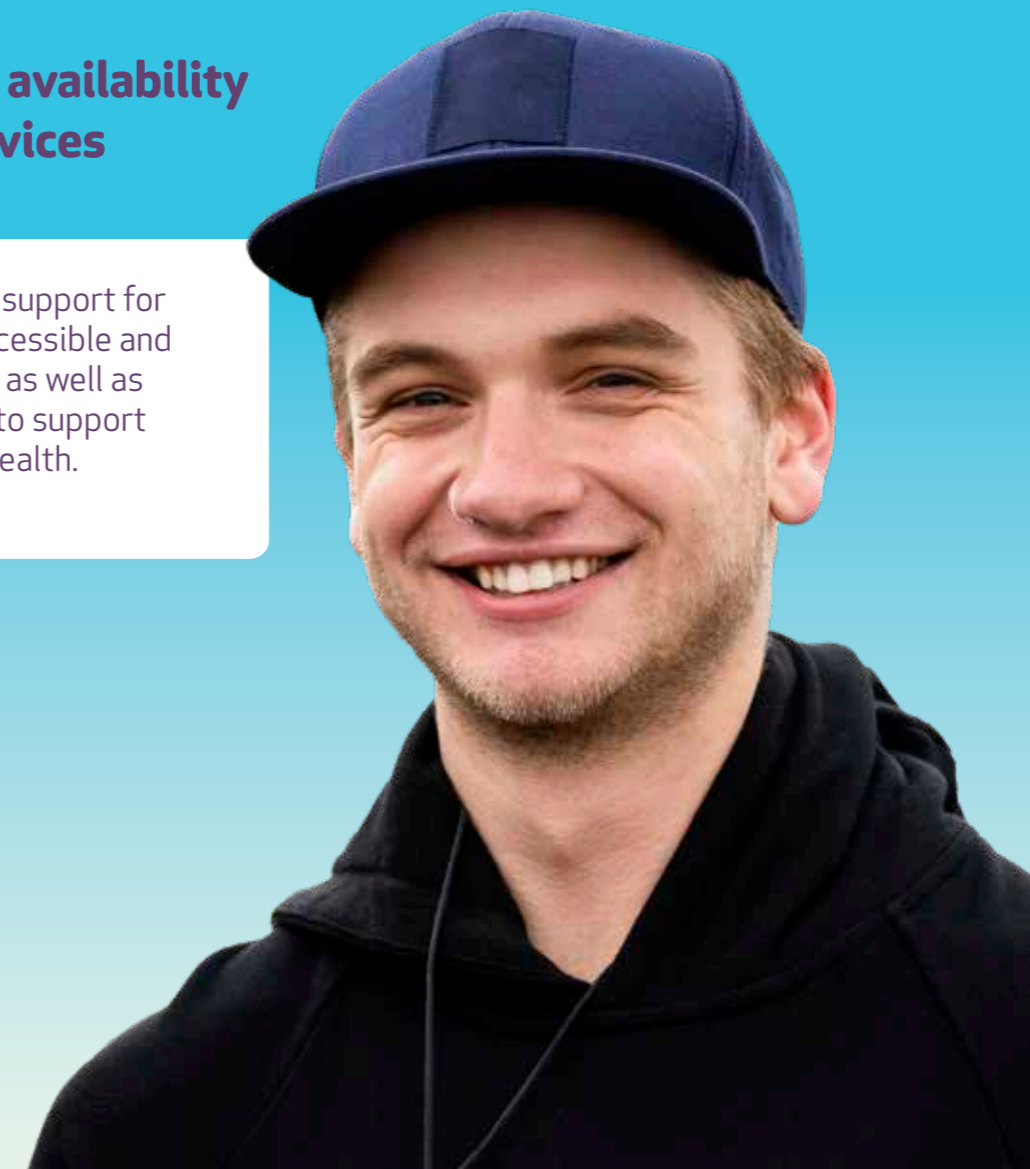
I could get professional help but a part of me doesn't want to ask for help as it feels a bit too much work and I don't want too much attention on my personal problems.

Female, 15, NT

More understanding from those closest to me

More support. I felt like none of my friends understood my situation. I feel like no one talks about the anxiety and stuff that comes with a breakup.

Female, 18, SA



Who is Mission Australia?

Mission Australia is a national Christian charity motivated by a shared vision of an Australia where everyone has a safe home and can thrive.

Since 1859, we've been standing alongside people and communities in need across Australia, offering real hope that has lasting impact. Backed by our supporters, churches, partners and funders, we work together for the long-term wellbeing of anyone who needs us by collaborating with them to tackle the root causes of their challenges.

Every day we deliver homelessness crisis and prevention services, provide social and affordable housing, assist struggling families and children, address mental health issues, fight substance dependencies, support people with disability and much more.

We measure our impact, collecting evidence of what works to inform our service design and delivery, and to advocate for change.

Mission Australia believes a person's circumstances shouldn't define their future and that given the right support, everyone can reach their full potential.

That's why we stand together with Australians in need, for as long as they need us.

Thank you

This publication would not have been possible without the 19,501 young people who completed Mission Australia's Youth Survey 2023. We extend special thanks to them, the staff of Mission Australia, and the many schools and organisations who supported their involvement.

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If you are a young person and need someone to talk with, you can contact Kids Helpline: 1800 55 1800 (24/7) kidshelpline.com.au

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