

Youthline ASB State of the Generation

April 2026

te ara taiohi whakatapua kia ora ai
youthline

ASB
Principal Partner

Research partner:

TRA

From Youthline's CEO: Youth Voice Matters

We are proud to present the voices of young people in this latest State of the Generation report produced with the support of our Principal Partner ASB.

We conduct this research regularly to gauge what young people are most concerned about and why, what issues they are dealing with on a daily basis; and what they believe can be done to help.

This latest Youthline ASB State of the Generation report reveals a generation of young New Zealanders grappling with increasing mental health distress and limited access to mental health support, constant societal pressure and rising living costs and job concerns. With some of these issues being amplified in our always on digital world and for underserved communities of young people.

It's my hope that everyone in health, in policy settings or involved in educating or supporting young people reads this report. We want the voice of young people to be heard across Aotearoa New Zealand, so what they say helps create solutions that are meaningful to them and their lives.

Why are these voices important? Quite simply because young people are our future. Whether we're raising them, employing them, working or studying with them, what affects them affects us all - our lives, our businesses, our children's children, our future and our own wellbeing.

How can we develop programmes, set policy, deliver results, or truly make a difference to their lives if we don't listen to what they have to tell us?

In short, we can't. That's why this report is so important because it gives a voice to young people to collectively tell us what's wrong and what we can all do together to change the things that need changing to help them; to help the future of Aotearoa.

If we listen to young people's views, we can all work together to make a difference in the lives of young New Zealanders. A difference that strengthens youth mental health in Aotearoa New Zealand and helps set young people up for a promising future.

Shae Ronald, ONZM

CEO Youthline



Understanding what matters to our youth is key to supporting them.



Youthline, with the support of ASB and TRA, has surveyed a sample of young New Zealanders to understand the issues facing them and to inform how to best support them.

Through a deep understanding, Youthline and others will be able to provide the right support, at the right time, to the right people; all while understanding the context they are speaking to young people within.

Youthline wants to be a leading voice for our youngest and most vulnerable New Zealanders, enabling them to improve how they serve and support them.

There are three main insight objectives of this research:

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1. Identify the issues top of mind, and most likely to be worrisome to young New Zealanders.
 2. Prioritise the issues that young people need the most support with.
 3. Determine the sources of support; i.e., Where young people go for advice related to different topics, their expectations of different sources to provide support, and where they want to be able to go / in what form they would like support.
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The methodology

What

We ran a 10-minute quantitative survey with 12-24s across Aotearoa New Zealand.

We invited participants from a research panel and they were not told the subject of the survey prior to starting, to avoid any self-selection bias.

Fieldwork ran from the 28th January to the 16th February 2026.

Who

A nationally representative sample of n=1,041 12-24s, representative across gender, region and ethnicity.

We also ensured a robust sample size across the different subgroups that we wanted to be able to look at results with, including age groups and underserved communities.

For our youngest audience (12-17s), participants were recruited via parents in line with RANZ and ESOMAR guidelines.

Age groups

We made sure to have a robust sample size for each age group, including:

- 12-17s: n=584
- 18-24s: n=457

Underserved communities

We also ensured a robust sample size from underserved communities, including:

- People from the rainbow community n=96
- People from the disabled community n=254
- People from the neurodiverse community n=288

Weighted sample profile

Age

How old are you?

12 to 17 years	50%
18 to 24 years	50%

Gender

Which gender do you most closely identify as?

Male	51%
Female	48%
Gender diverse	1%

Region

Which part of the country do you live in?

Upper North Island	20%
Auckland	35%
Lower North Island	11%
Wellington	11%
Canterbury	13%
Other South Island	11%

Ethnicity

Which ethnic group(s) do you identify with?

NZ European or Pākehā	64%
Māori	22%
Asian	18%
Pacific Peoples	12%

Sexuality

Which of the following best describe how you think of yourself?

Heterosexual or straight	77%
Gay	2%
Lesbian	3%
Bisexual	11%
Pansexual	3%
Asexual	2%
Demisexual	1%
Queer	1%
Total: Rainbow community	20%
I'm unsure/Rather not say	4%

Disability

Do you have a lot of difficulty doing the following, or cannot do the following at all?

Seeing	6%
Hearing	4%
Walking or climbing stairs	3%
Remembering or concentrating	15%
Bathing or dressing	2%
Communicating	10%
Total: Disabled community	25%
None of the above	71%
Rather not say	4%

Neurodiverse

Do you consider yourself to have any of the following?

ADHD	19%
Autism	10%
Dyslexia	5%
Dyspraxia	2%
Dyscalculia	1%
Tourette's Syndrome	1%
Other neurodiversity	3%
Total: Neurodiverse community	29%
No – I do not have any of these conditions	67%
Rather not say	4%

● Agenda

The issues young people are facing

1

Where they're turning for support

2

Youthline's role in their world

3

Learnings to take forward

4

The issues young people are facing



1

Just over half of young people are feeling positive most days



Q. FEEL_TODAY_PROMPTED: Which of these words would you use to describe how you feel most days? (Positive = Good, Happy, Alright, Relaxed, Motivated, Peaceful, Negative = Stressed, Anxious, Lonely, Sad, Depressed) Base: Total n=1041.
Note: These percentages have been recalculated to exclude the 1% that chose "Rather not say". These figures now reflect the distribution of answers among those who provided a response.

How do you feel most days

52%

Only use positive words to describe how they feel

38%

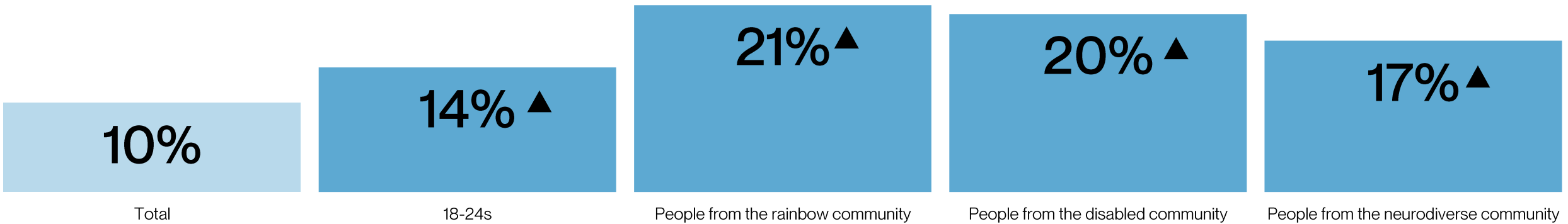
Use both positive and negative words to describe how they feel

10%

Only use negative words to describe how they feel

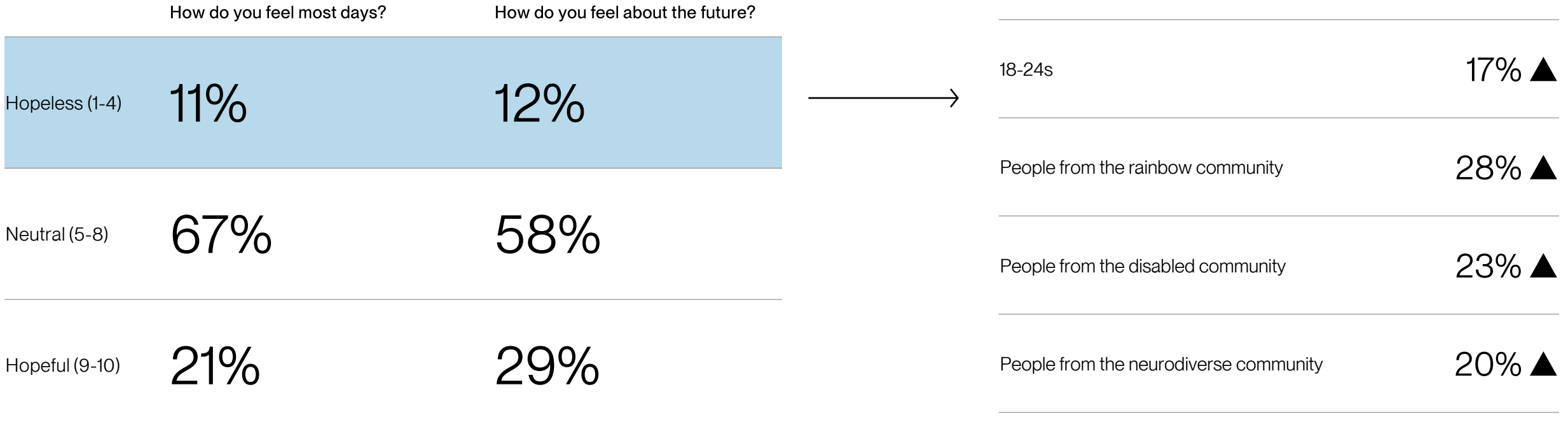
Some groups are feeling down more than others, including 18-24s and young people in rainbow, disabled, and neurodiverse communities

Only use negative words to describe how they feel most days



These groups are also experiencing feelings of hopelessness, both now and when thinking about the future

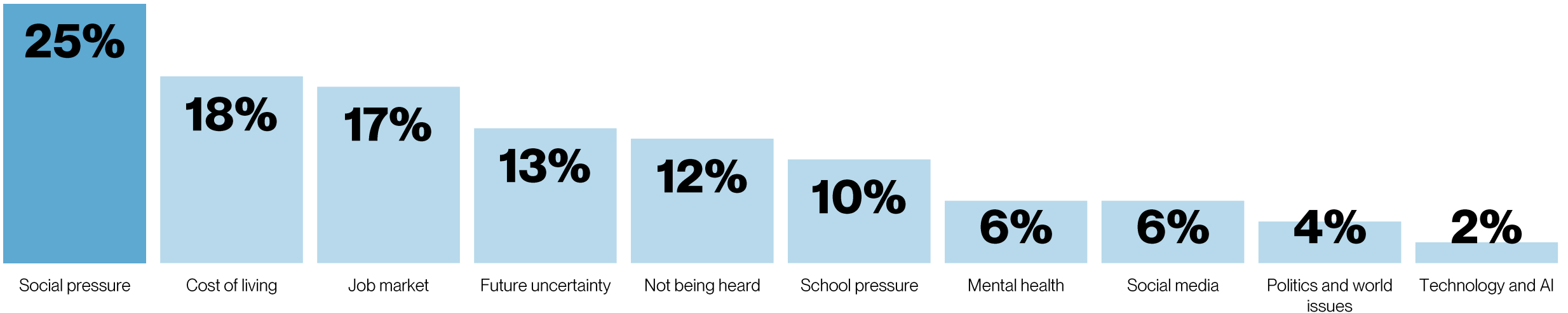
How hopeless or hopeful do you feel most days



Unprompted, young people say social pressure is the most challenging thing about being young

The most challenging thing about being a young person

For 12-17s, social pressure and school pressure are larger issues, lifting to 32% and 16% respectively.
For 18-24s, the cost of living and the job market are larger issues, lifting to 29% and 23% respectively.



When we asked about the most challenging part of being a young person, they said:

It feels like we're under constant pressure - from adults, from social media - to have everything figured out

Comments under 'Social pressure'

“For a young person, hope and ambition for their future should be at their peak, and opportunities for that should be available. Someone that's only 1/5 through their life shouldn't feel like the rest will be a struggle, that they're stuck with nothing to do and nowhere to go.”

“Social media and constantly comparing yourself, your lifestyle, your looks to other people”

“The societal pressure to have everything together”

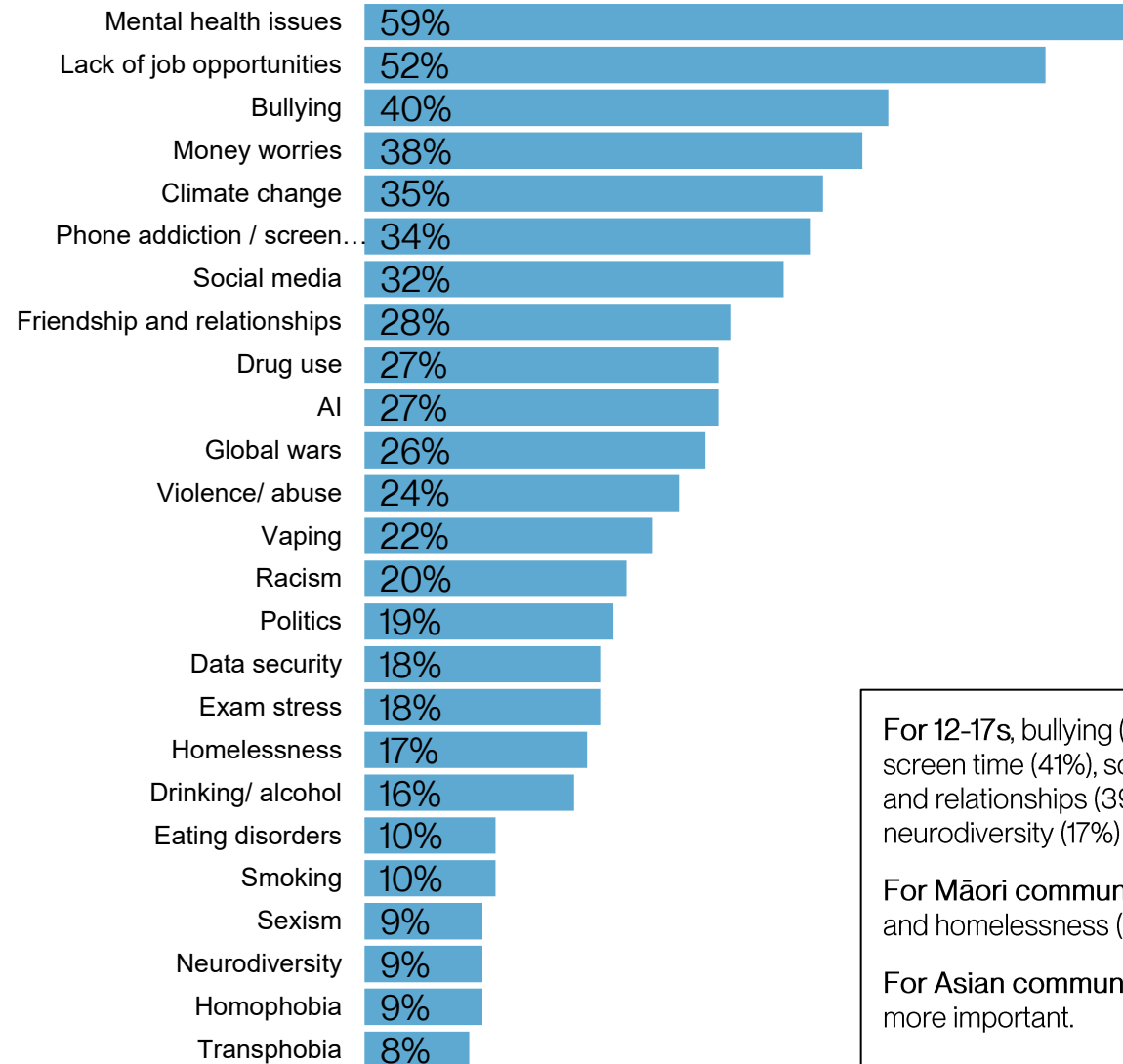
“The weight of expectations, stress to find a job and earn money, family issues all contribute to poor mental health and are prevalent in youth”



Mental health is seen as the most important issue when prompted

Close behind this are job opportunities, bullying, and money worries.

Most important issues young people are facing



For 12-17s, bullying (55%), phone addiction / screen time (41%), social media (42%), friendships and relationships (39%), exam stress (27%) and neurodiversity (17%) are more important.

For Māori communities, violence / abuse (39%) and homelessness (31%) are more important.

For Asian communities, exam stress (27%) is more important.

Q. MOST_IMPORTANT_ISSUE: And which three issues do you think are the most important issues?

Base: Selected an issue in IMPORTANT_ISSUE Total n=1018, 12-17s n=584, Māori communities n=224, Asian communities n=183.

Implication

Young New Zealanders are carrying a lot, with mental health standing out as the issue affecting them most

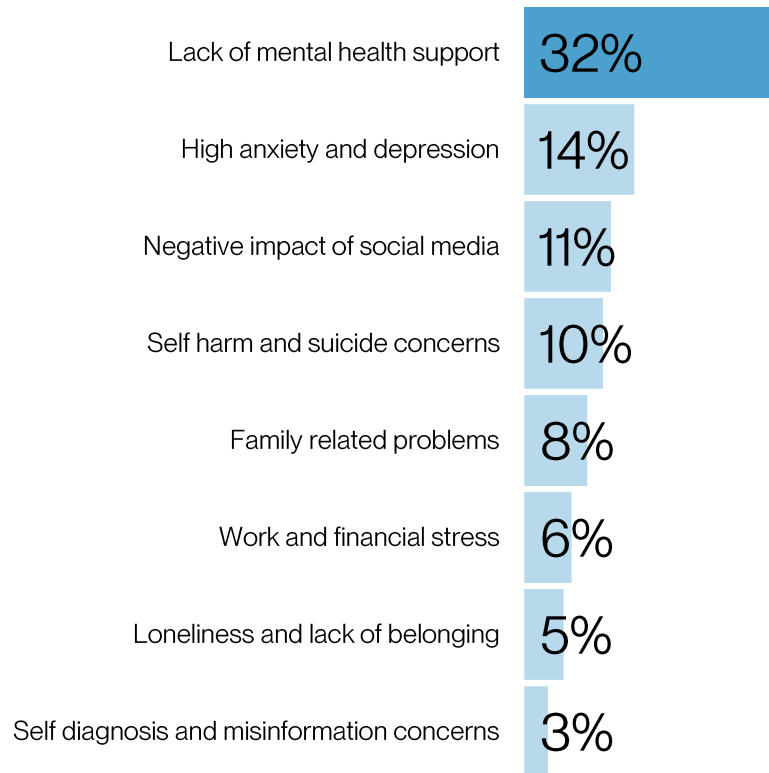
Many feel under constant pressure, from both adults and social media, to have their lives figured out. Alongside this, concerns around job opportunities, bullying, and money are front of mind, all contributing to their mental health.

To understand these concerns more, let's hear what young people have to say about them...



When it comes to mental health issues, the biggest concern is that there isn't enough support available

Why do you think mental health is an important issue facing young people



“Because I've been waiting 12 months for an urgent appointment with child mental health services and I still don't have one, apparently, cutting yourself isn't enough to get help. New Zealand is the worst country for youth mental health.”

“Too many people suffer from mental health issues but don't have real expert help to go to. For example, you get exactly the same advice and tools no matter where you go. It's like it's just been googled and shared among health professionals but with no real help. The wait times to see someone is ridiculous.”

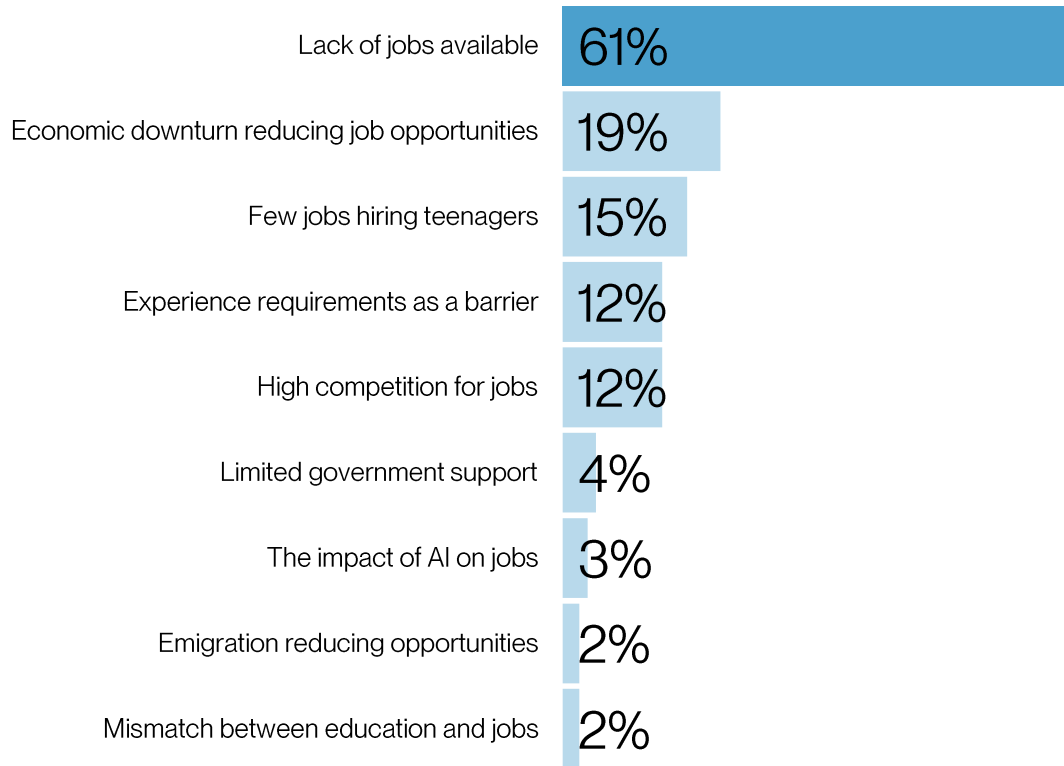
“It seems that the more it's talked about, the more people realise they have mental health issues, putting strain on the system”

“Because we are losing so many young people to mental health, and the mental health in New Zealand is hopeless”

“With all the issues going around us, I'm worried people's mental health is getting worse and they aren't getting enough support”

When it comes to lack of job opportunities, the biggest concern is that there aren't enough jobs for young people

Why do you think lack of job opportunities is an important issue facing young people



“Young people apply to millions of jobs and barely get a response. How are we supposed to move forward in life?”

“It doesn't give you anything to do after school. Some of us can't afford further education so our prospects are often limited.”

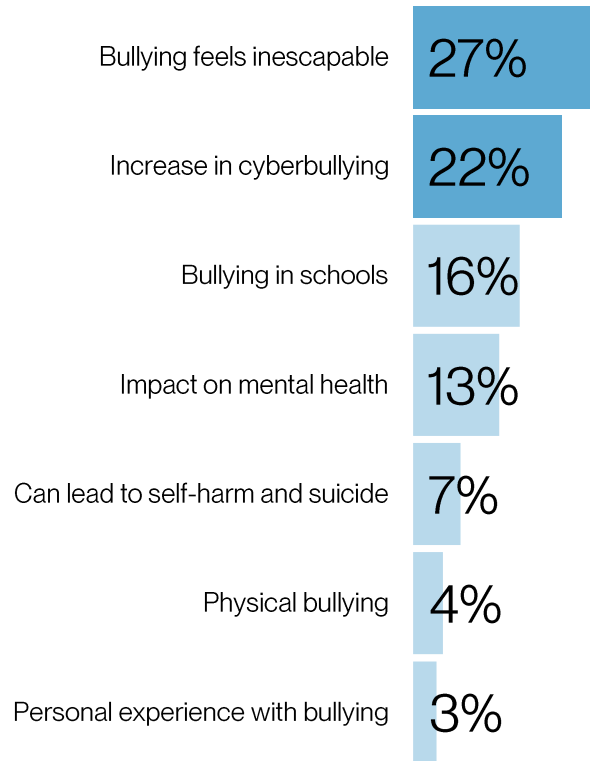
“The lack of opportunities and the development of AI”

“Because without job opportunities, young people struggle to gain independence, build experience, and feel secure about their future”

“Because people will give up and go downhill because they can't pay for anything”

When it comes to bullying, it has always been an issue for young people but it's worse now, because it doesn't just stop at the end of the school day

Why do you think bullying is an important issue facing young people



“Bullying has always been an issue for young people, but it's worse now because it doesn't just stop at the end of the school day; the bullies can bully you online when you're at home”

“Can affect you for your whole life even if you were bullied years earlier. A lot is done online, so it is more hidden.”

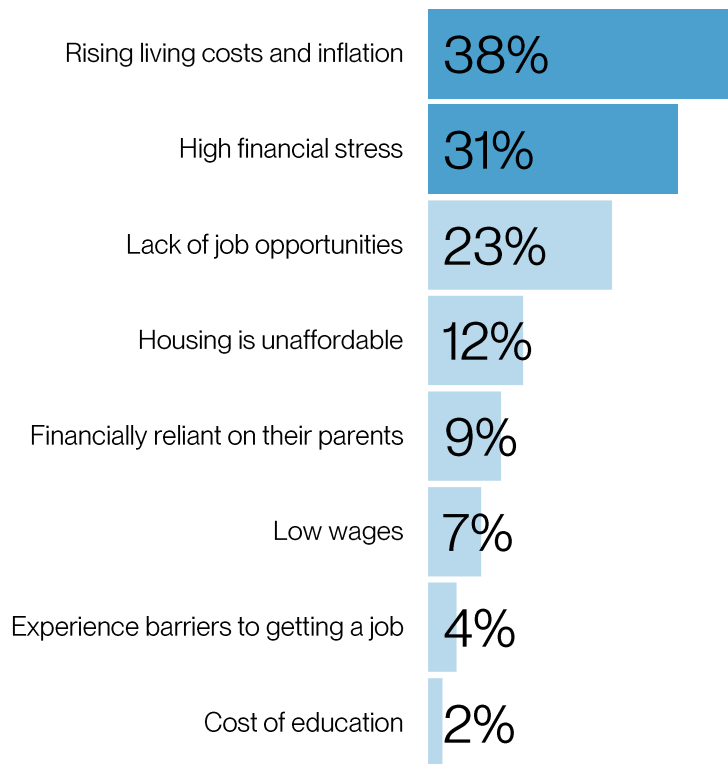
“It happens so much, in so many ways”

“Bullying is very disturbing, as victims are pushed and pushed to the brink of their lives, which causes mental health issues, low self-esteem, and most of all self-harm, which is a concerning issue with youth my age these days”

“I think people of all ages get bullied, and there is nothing in place when it happens”

When it comes to money worries, rising living costs and the financial stress it's causing, is top of mind for many

Why do you think money worries is an important issue facing young people



“It’s hard to live with how expensive everything is”

“Every day living is getting so much more expensive and it can get stressful trying to stretch the budget to survive”

“Because a lot of young people are having to help their families pay for bills, a lot of households don’t make enough for essential things for young people like food and school equipment. A lot of us young people who are living out in the world are having troubles with the high cost of living (rent, grocery shopping, water, rates, gas, tax, power, and that’s just all the needs, not the wants).”

“Everything is so expensive and it feels impossible to do anything. You can’t move into a house of your own because it’s too expensive, so your only option is to flat with other people. Groceries, bills, and expenses just pile up on low-paying jobs. It makes us feel like we won’t ever get anywhere in life.”

“Because we can see some families struggling, and it affects us as kids.”

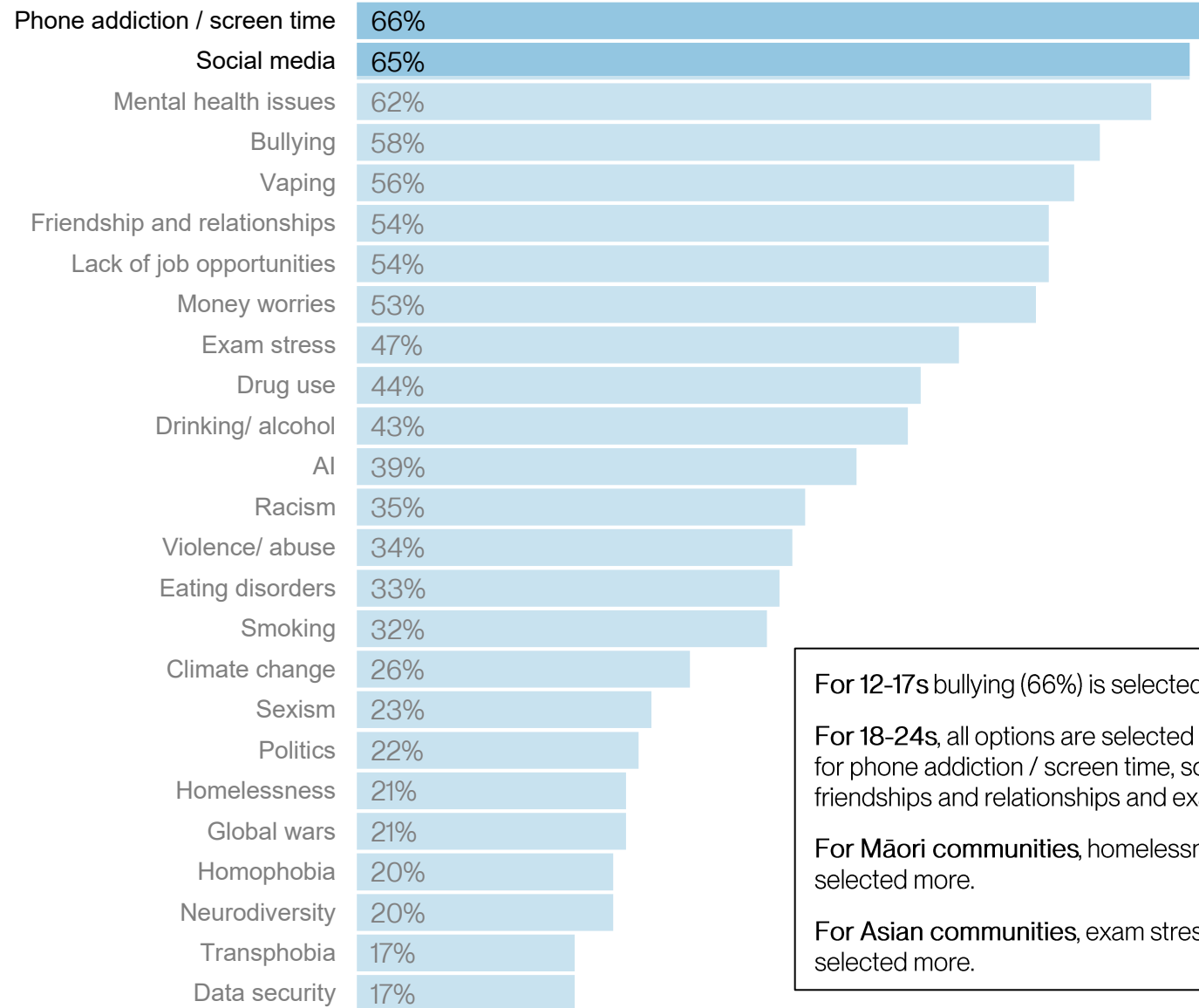
While being able to afford a house is a large concern, for 18-24s, paying bills and having enough food are also major worries

Money issues young people are worried about

	Total	12-17s	18-24s
Worrying about being able to afford a house in the future	46%	31% ▼	54% ▲
Worrying because parents/whānau are stressed about money	35%	47% ▲	28% ▼
Missing out on activities because they cost too much	34%	39%	31%
My household not being able to pay bills like power, water, or internet	30%	21% ▼	35% ▲
Not having enough food at home	29%	20% ▼	33% ▲

While mental health is considered the most important issue, phone addiction / screen time and social media are the most common issues young people face

Issues young people are facing



For 12-17s bullying (66%) is selected more.

For 18-24s, all options are selected more, except for phone addiction / screen time, social media, friendships and relationships and exam stress.

For Māori communities, homelessness (31%) is selected more.

For Asian communities, exam stress (58%) is selected more.

Q. IMPORTANT_ISSUE: Which of these things do you think are issues facing young people today?
Base: Total n=1041, 12-17s n=584, 18-24s n=457, Māori communities n=224, Asian communities n=183.

Young people see the impact phones and screens are having

Comments under 'Phone addiction / screen time'

“It prevents us from actually living, it also makes anxiety worse because the screen time is so addictive that we cannot function properly without it”

“So addicted that they don't do anything else, and lack other skills”

“Because we're not living life, we're just living through our phones”

“Because everyone spends too much time online and not enjoying the real world”

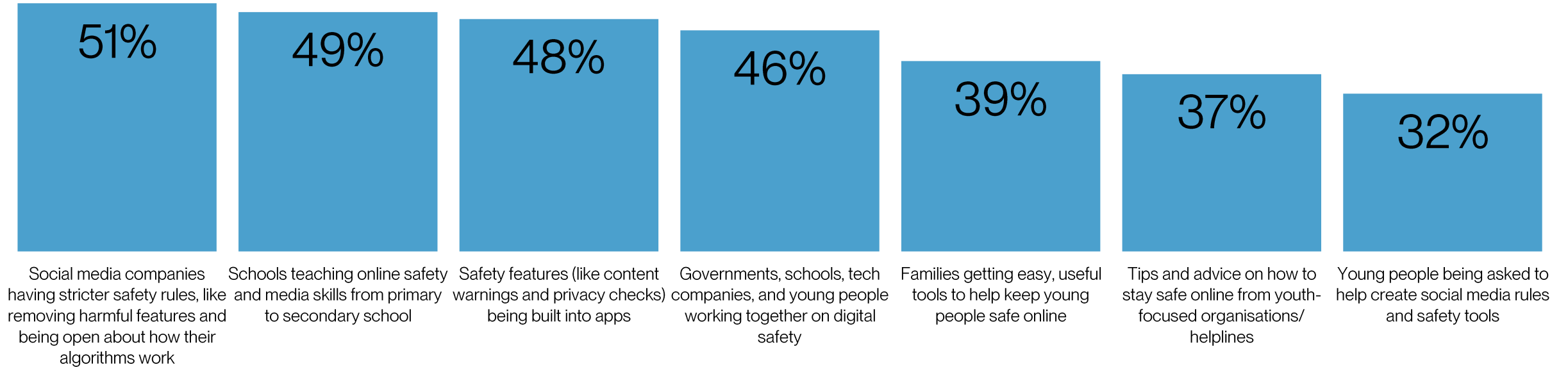
“Everything is so accessible, so caught up in a fake life instead of living ours”

“Always on our phones and don't care about what's happening around us”

Q. ISSUE_WHY: Can you tell us why you think phone addiction / screen time is an important issue facing young people today?

They have a range of ideas for making online spaces safer, with stricter safety rules from social media companies the top suggestion

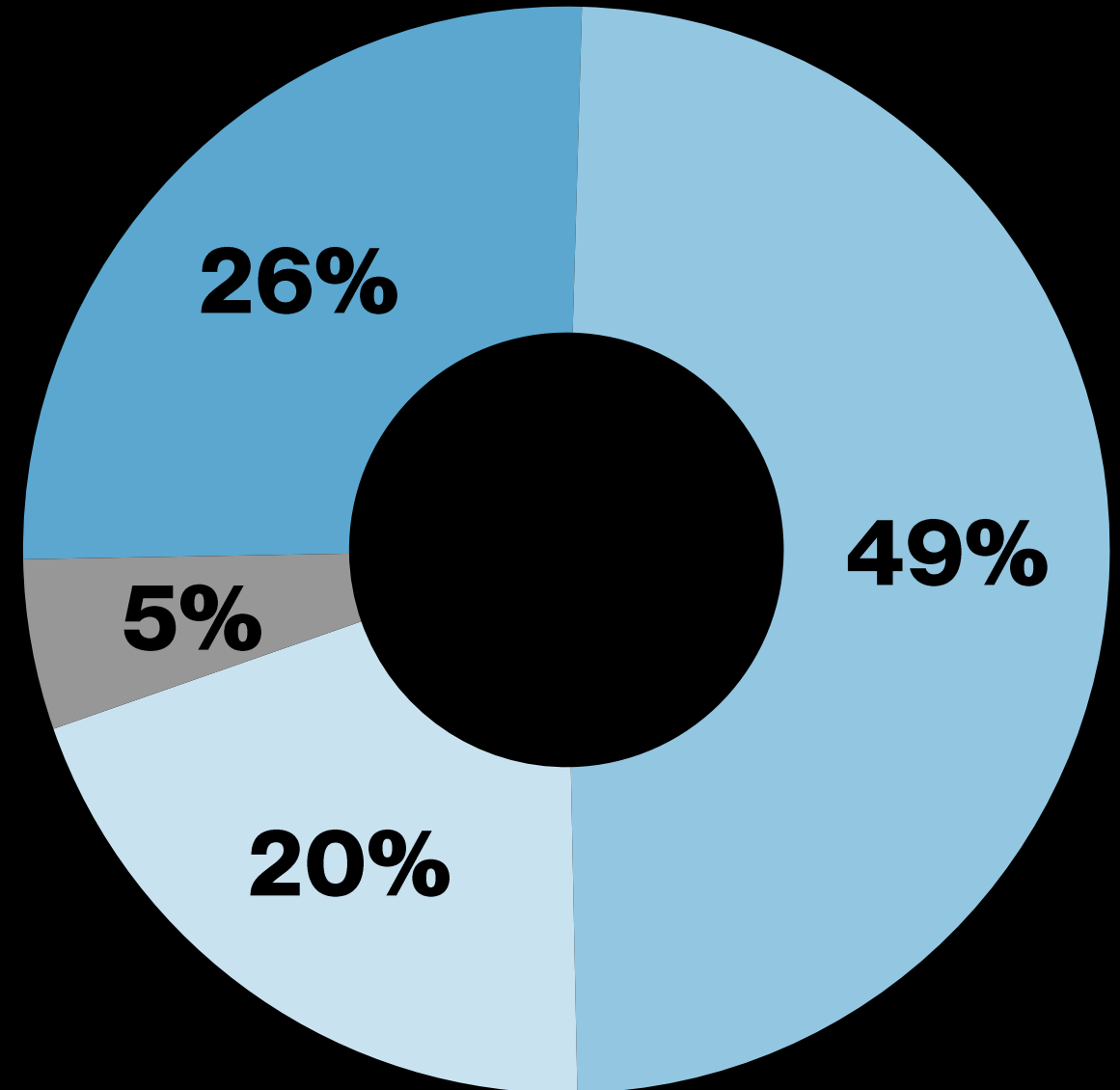
Ideas to help young people be safer online



While AI isn't a top concern, most young people are still worried about it

18-24s are more worried about AI, with the percentage of those who are very worried lifting to 26% (+6%).

- I am not worried about AI
- I am a little worried about AI
- I am very worried about AI
- None of these

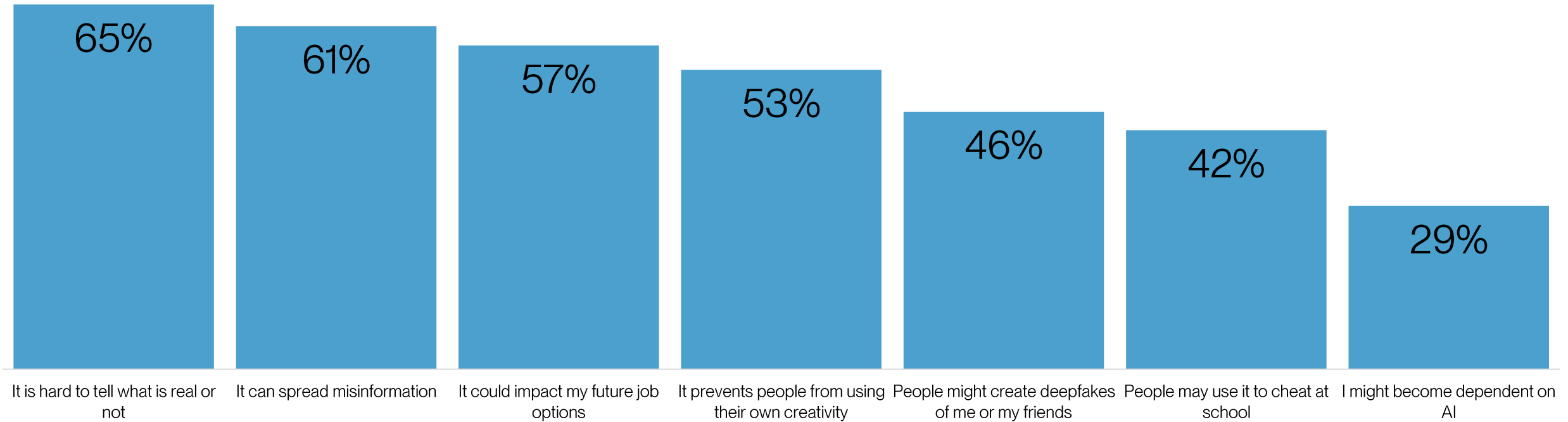


Q. AI_WORRY: Which of the following best represents how you feel about AI (Artificial Intelligence – including ChatGPT, fake image creation, etc.)?

Base: Total n=1041, 18-24s n=457.

Concerns around AI are wide-ranging, from uncertainty about what's real and what isn't, to fears around misinformation

What young people are worried about when it comes to AI



These concerns are reflected in how young people talk about AI, particularly fears that it could replace human skills and reduce their own abilities over time

Comments under 'AI'

“Because AI is moving at a very fast pace, sooner or later it will take over many jobs and aspects of life. Also, people these days cannot tell what is real or AI.”

“As someone who uses it, I'm starting to lack the ability to write really good essays or write-ups without it”

“It’s making people dumb and lazy”

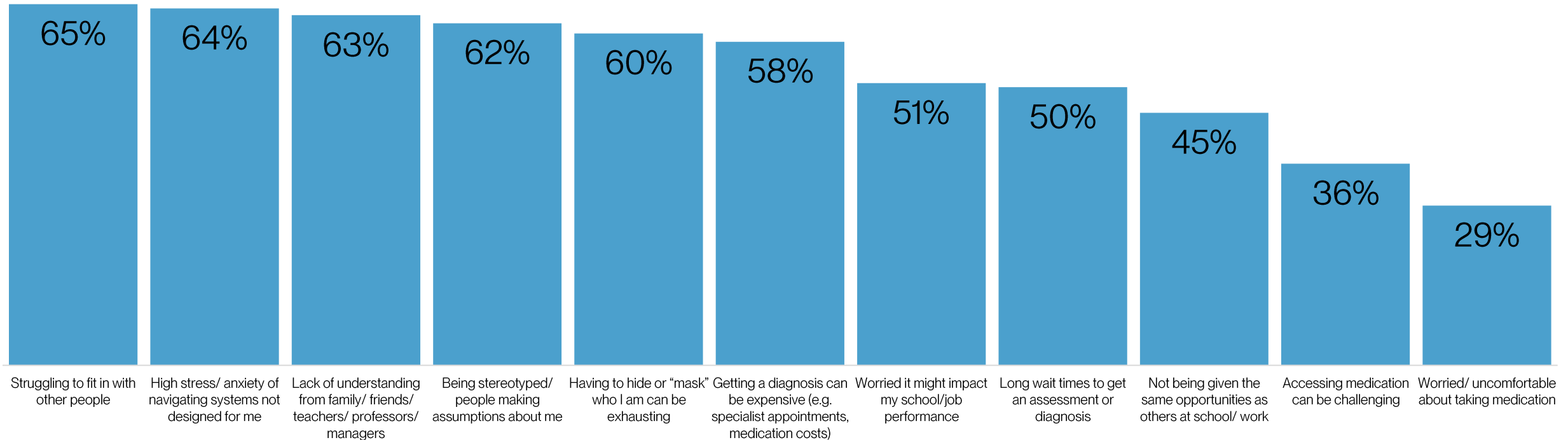
“It is hard to tell what is real and true, and what isn't”

“I'm worried about deep fakes; it’s so easy to create these, and they could really affect your life”

Q. ISSUE_WHY: Can you tell us why you think AI is an important issue facing young people today?

Neurodiverse young people face additional challenges, with a range of factors making it difficult for them to navigate daily life

What young people are worried about when it comes to neurodiversity



They speak to feeling different and misunderstood, often judged by others and finding everyday life difficult to navigate

Comments under 'Neurodiversity'

"I'm neurodiverse, as are a few people at my school. It's a hidden condition, so other kids can't see it. They just think I'm weird and will readily make fun of me as I communicate and act differently to them."

"If you tell someone you're neurodivergent, they will bully you and look at you differently"

"People don't understand and don't bother to try understand"

"It is becoming more and more diagnosed and recognised, yet it isn't in the work industry or general society. I am very happy that I have a diagnosis, but it still feels like a burden if you are asked to be accommodated for it."

"For me as a neurodivergent person, I feel that I struggle with doing basic things, especially as an adult, and feel sometimes that I have the maturity of a child"

Q. ISSUE_WHY: Can you tell us why you think neurodiversity is an important issue facing young people today?

Implication

Young people are facing a broad and interconnected set of pressures

From limited mental health support and lack of job opportunities to rising living costs and bullying.

These challenges are widespread and some of them feel constant and difficult to escape or control, amplified by an always-on digital environment and the growing influence of AI.

There's a clear need for support here, so let's look at where they're turning for support.

TRA



Where they're turning for support



2

Young people are turning to informal rather than formal channels for support

12-17s, are more likely to have spoken to their parents/carers (65%).

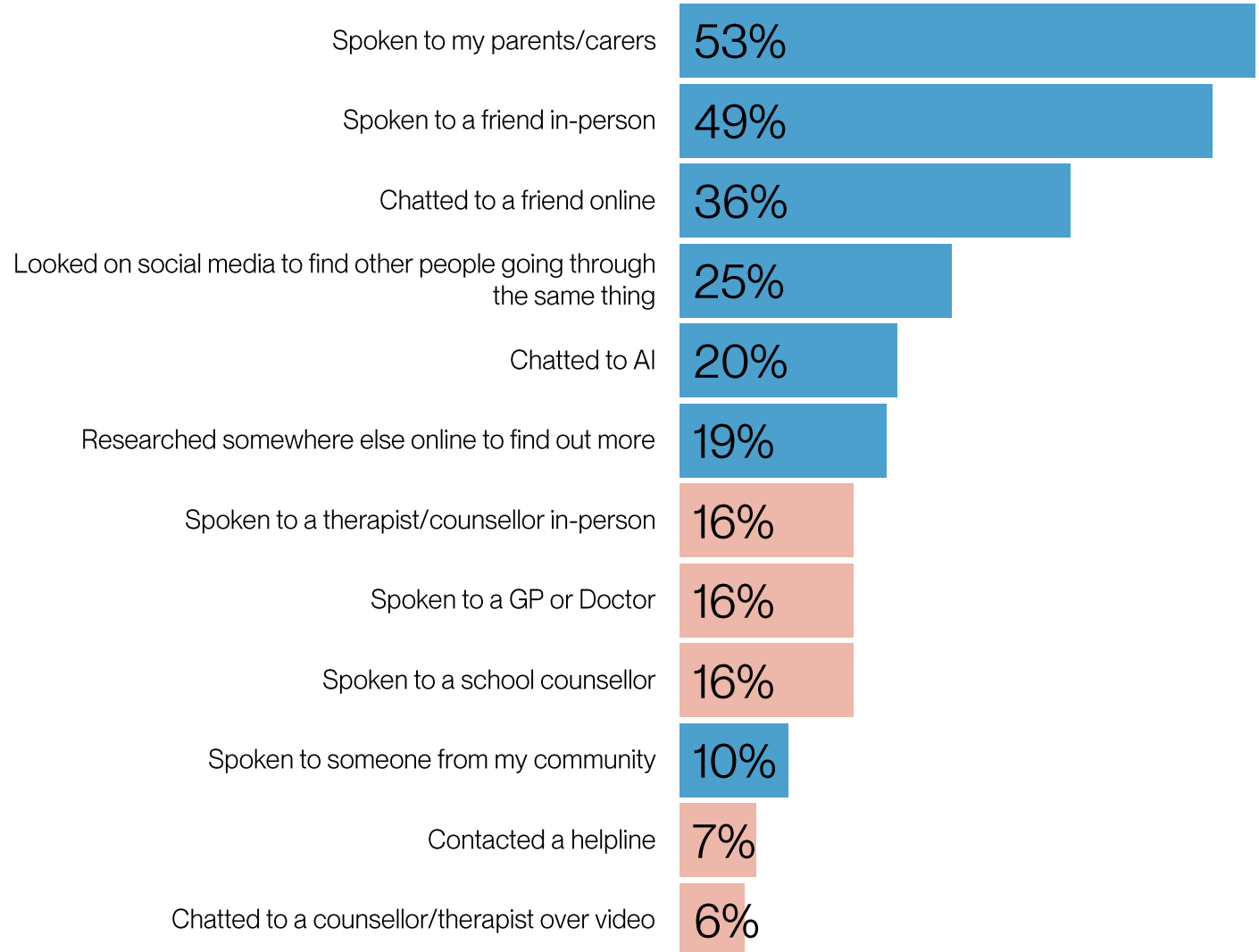
18-24s, are more likely to have used formal channels for support, including spoken to a therapist/counsellor in-person (20%), spoken to a GP or doctor (20%) or contacted a helpline (10%).

Māori communities, are more likely to have spoken to a friend in-person (56%) or spoken to someone from their community (15%).

● Informal support ● Formal support

Q. SUPPORT_SOURCES: For the next question, we want you to think about times when you might feel like you need support – it could be a big problem or something small. Which of the following have you done? Base: Total n=1041, 12-17s n=584, 18-24s n=457, Māori communities n=224.

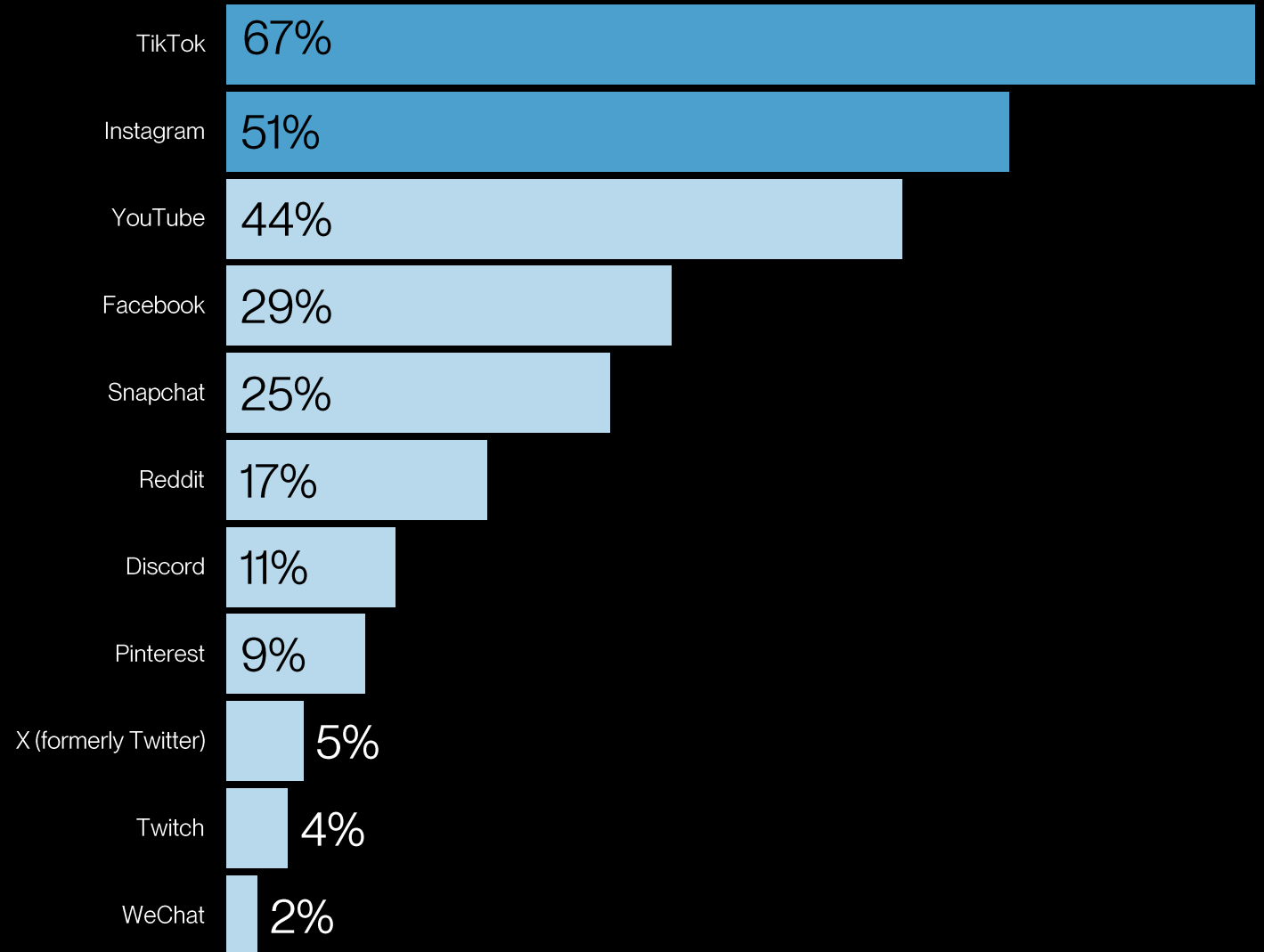
Sources of support used



Those turning to social media for support are mostly going to TikTok or Instagram

There are no significant differences across age groups, except for Reddit, where 18-24s are more likely to use it for support (24%).

Social media platforms used for support



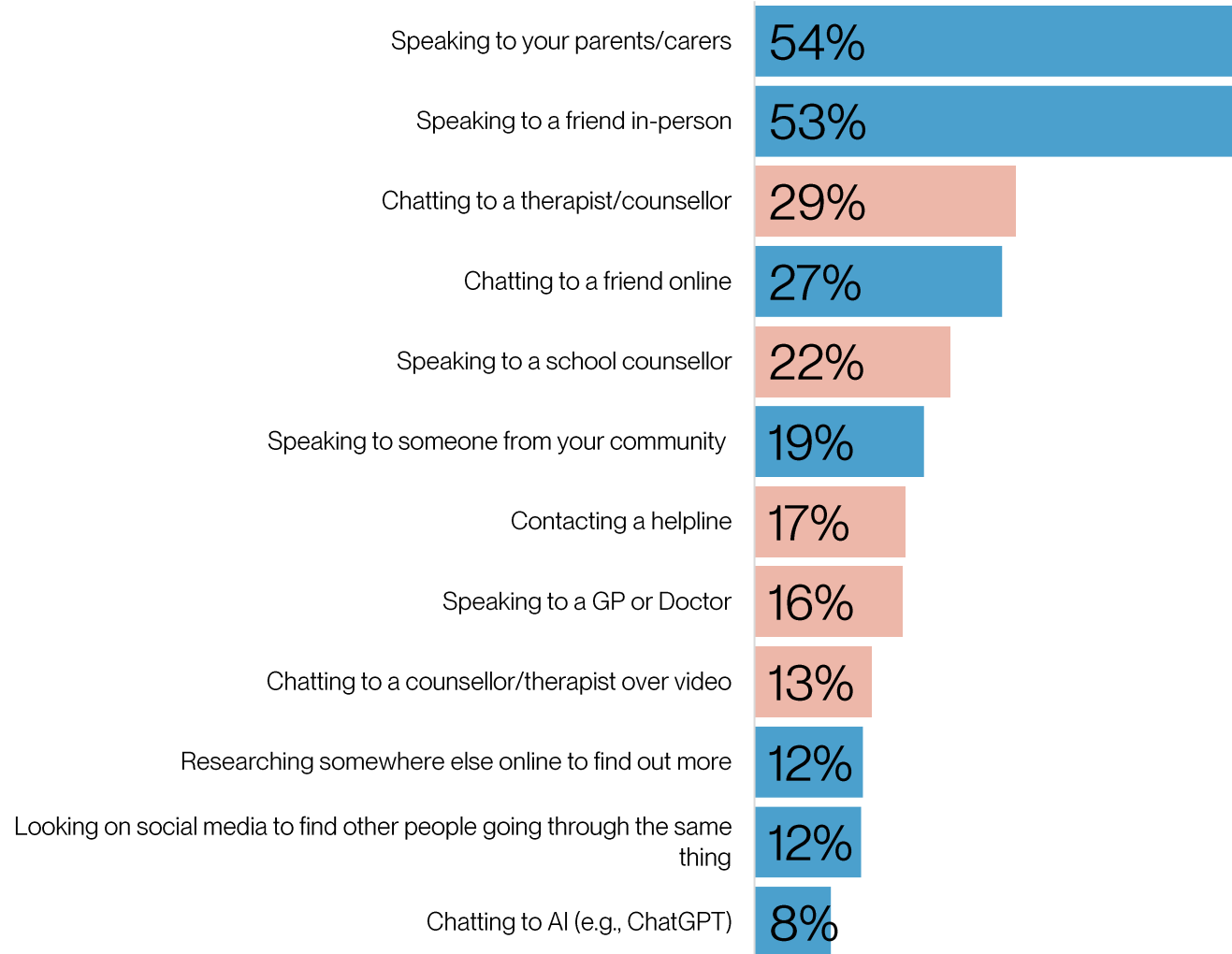
Q. SOCIAL_MEDIA_SUPPORT: You said you look at social media for support with your problems. Which of the following platforms do you use for support? Base: Selected 'Social media' in SUPPORT_SOURCES Total n=255, 18-24s n=148.

When it comes to what's seen as providing the best support, counselling and helplines are recognised as the most effective formal channels of support

● Informal support ● Formal support

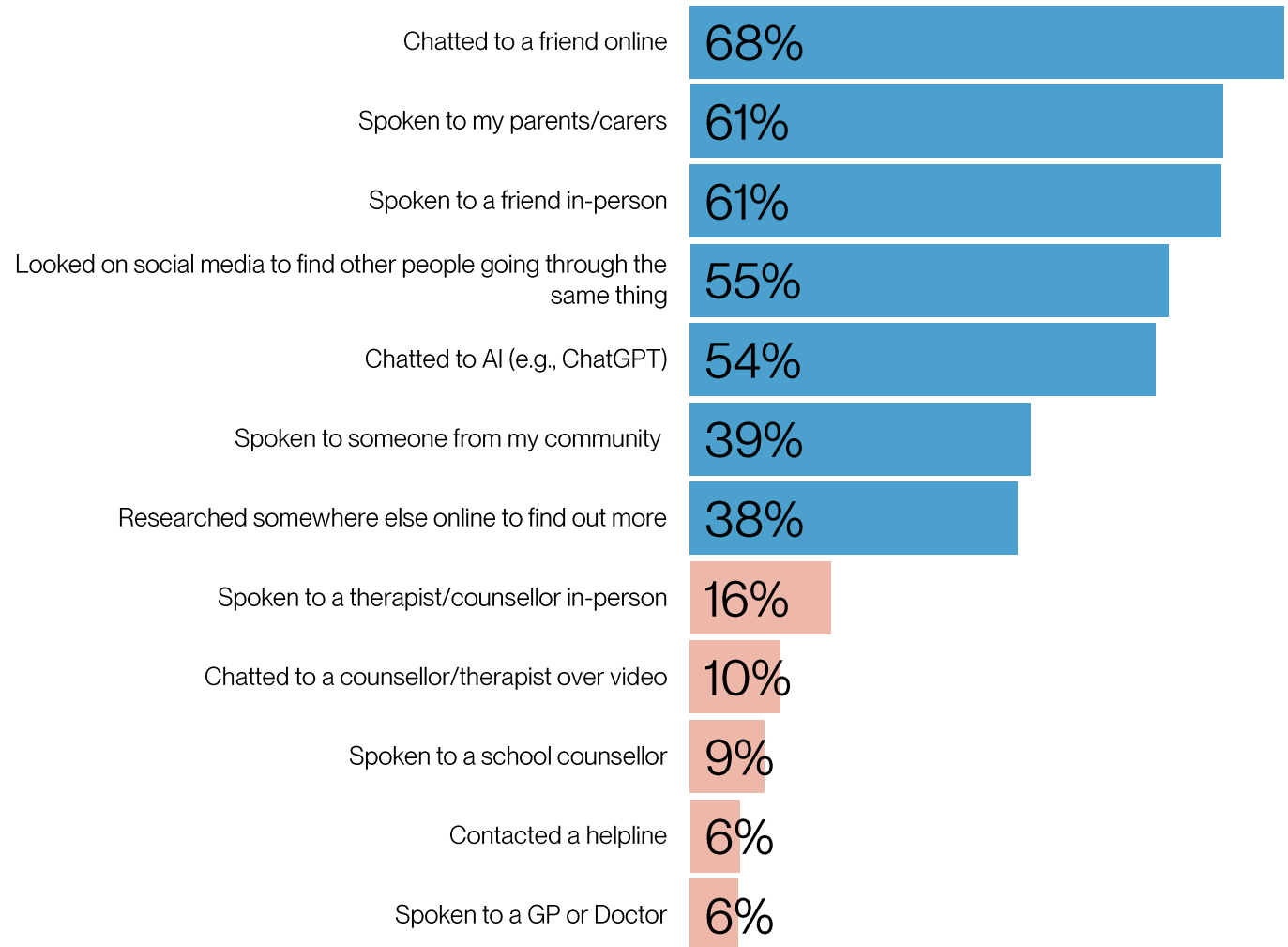
Q. SUPPORT_MOST_USEFUL: And which of these things do you think give the best support for young people?
Base: Total n=1041.

What young people see as providing the best support



Of those young people using these forms of support, many are accessing these weekly

Young people using these forms of support weekly



● Informal support ● Formal support

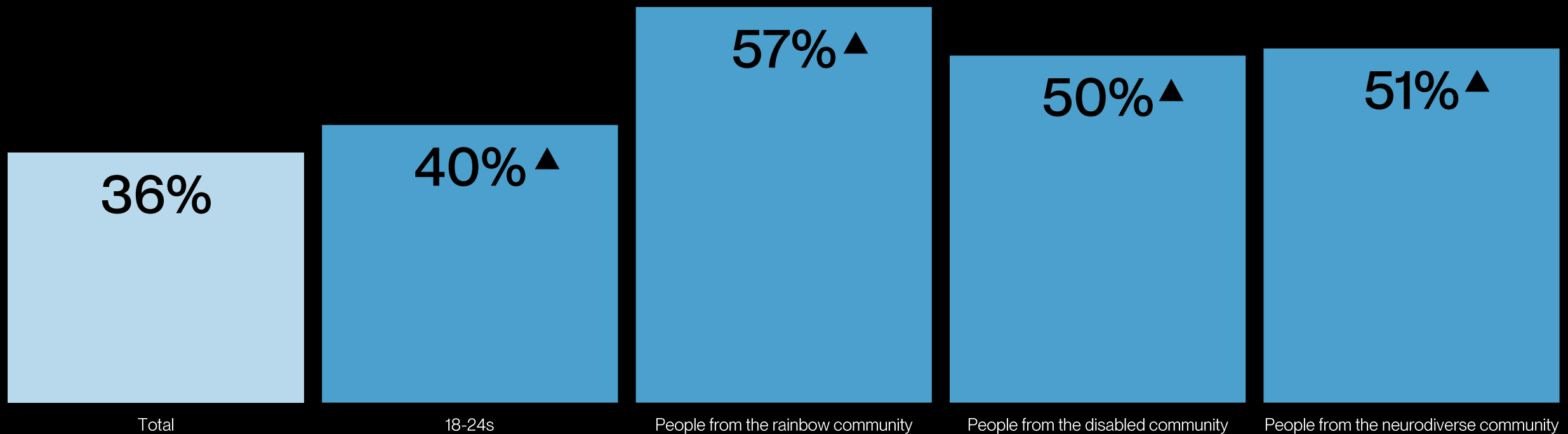
Q. SOURCE_OFTEN: How often have you used each of these forms of support? (At least once a week).

Base: Selected the form of support in SUPPORT_SOURCES n=67-568.

It's encouraging that those who need help the most are more connected to formal channels

These are the audiences that are most likely to experience negative feelings, including 18-24s and young people in rainbow, disabled, and neurodiverse communities.

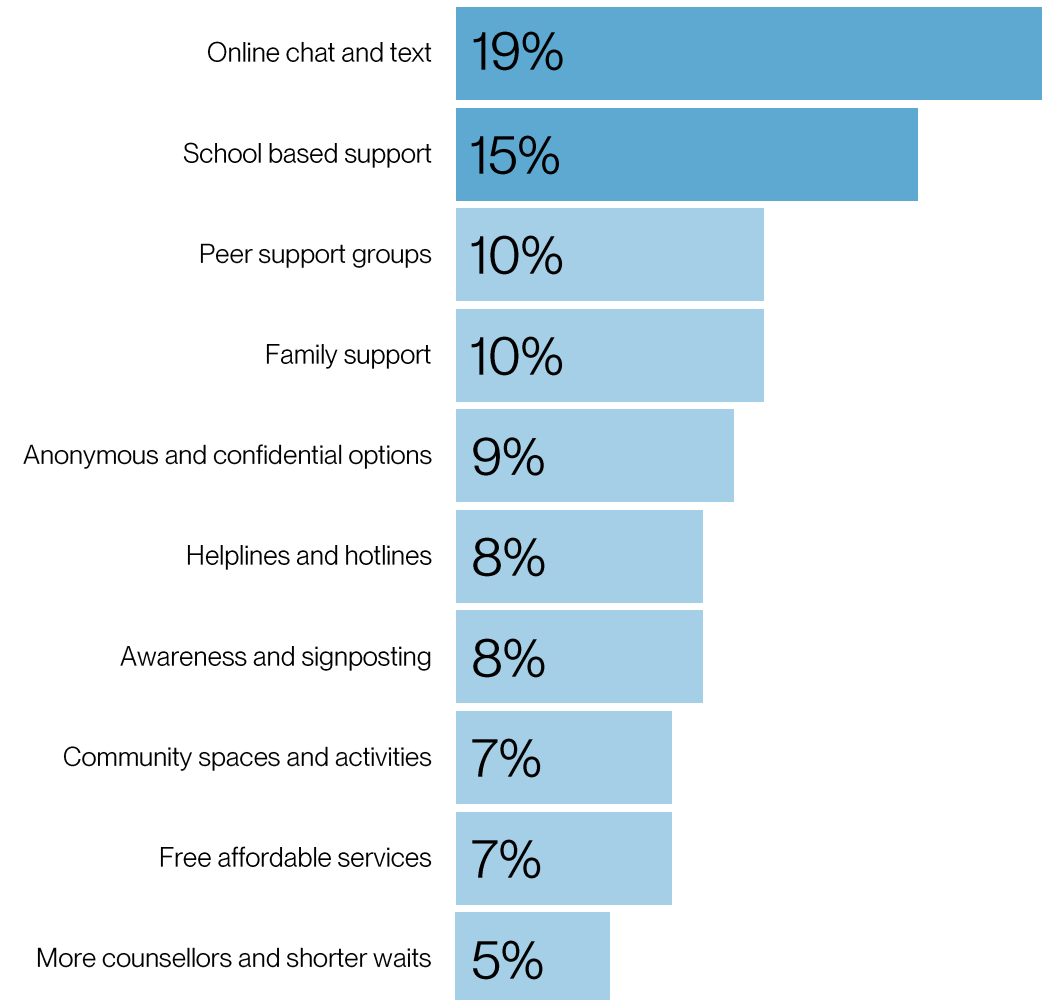
Formal sources of support used



Young people want support through more informal channels, where they already are

Young people want to be able to access more support through online chat and text, and schools.

Other ways young people want to access support



Q. NEW_SUPPORT: Do you have any other ideas about how young people would like to be able to access support?
Base: Total n=1041.
Note: Rebased to exclude those that said 'I don't know' and 'Nothing'.

Implication

There is a clear opportunity for formal sources of support to show up in the places where young people already are

The opportunity lies in making formal support feel more informal and part of young people's worlds, by showing up through channels like online chat and text, and within schools, where they are already engaged and feel most comfortable.

Let's take a closer look at the role of Youthline in their world.



Youthline's role in their world



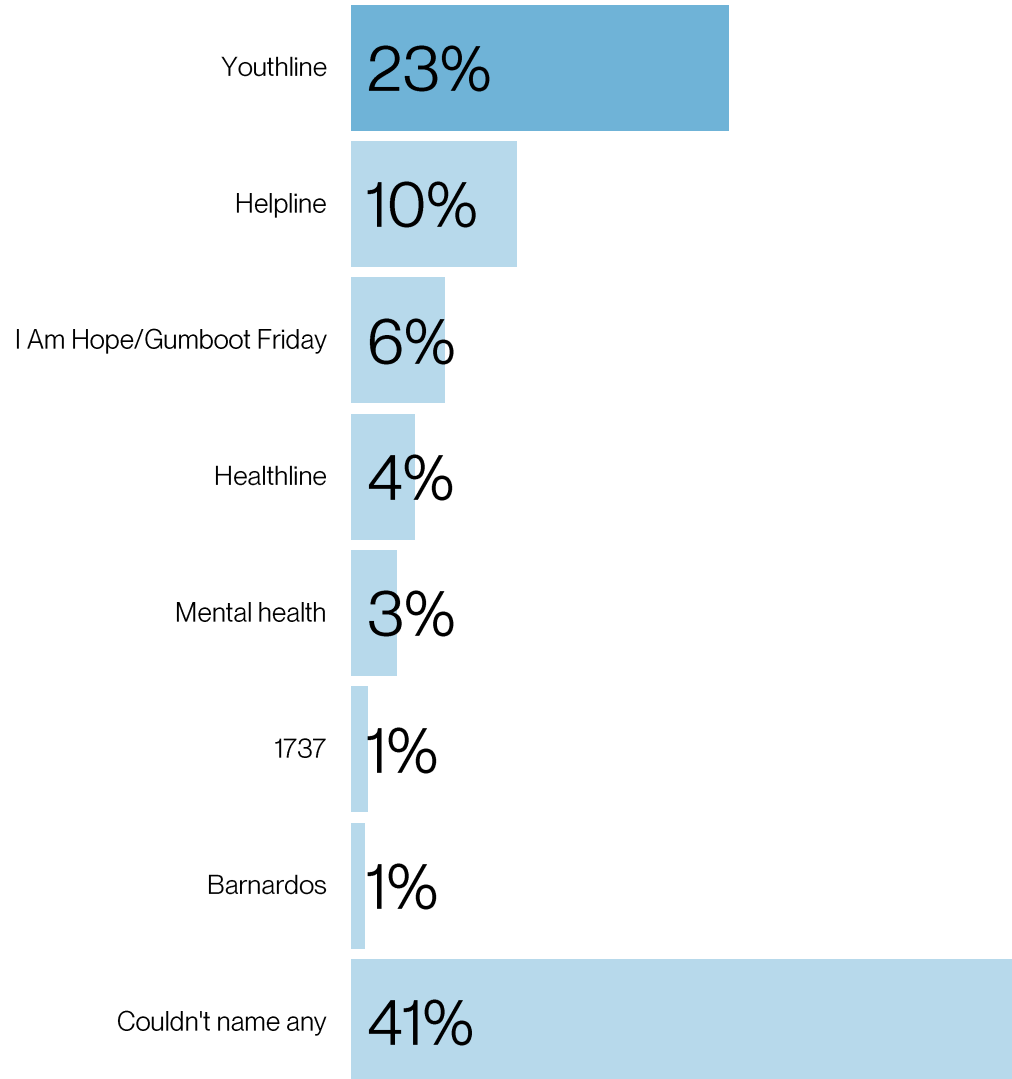
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Youthline is the most top of mind mental health organisation for young people

However, 41% of young people are unable to name a single mental health organisation when asked.

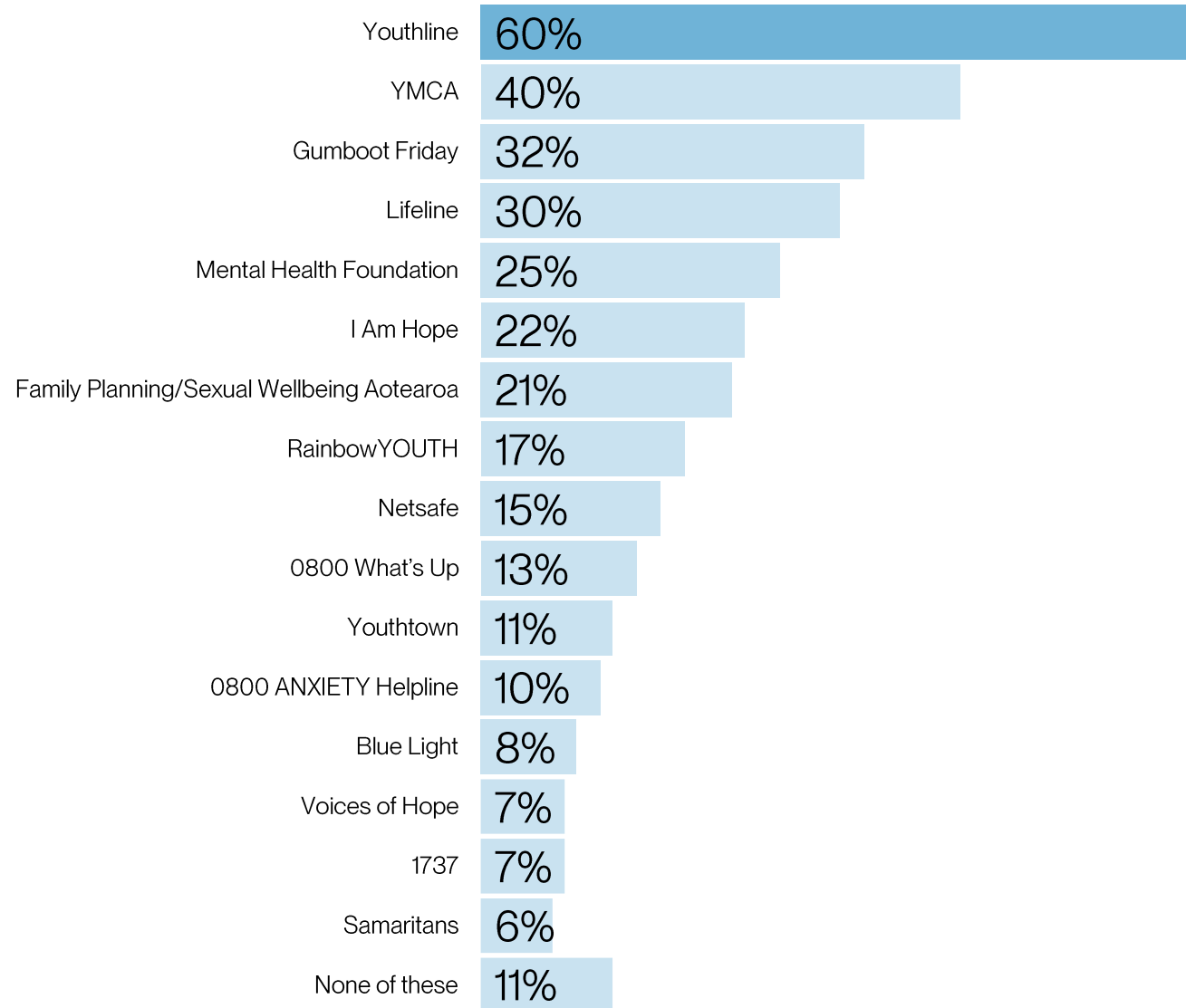
Q. YOUTHLINE_UNPROMPTED_AWARE: How many children and young people's mental health organisations can you think of? (Open-ended question that has been coded).
Base: Total n=1041.

Mental health organisations young people can name
Unprompted



When prompted, Youthline is also the most recognised, with 6 in 10 having heard of it

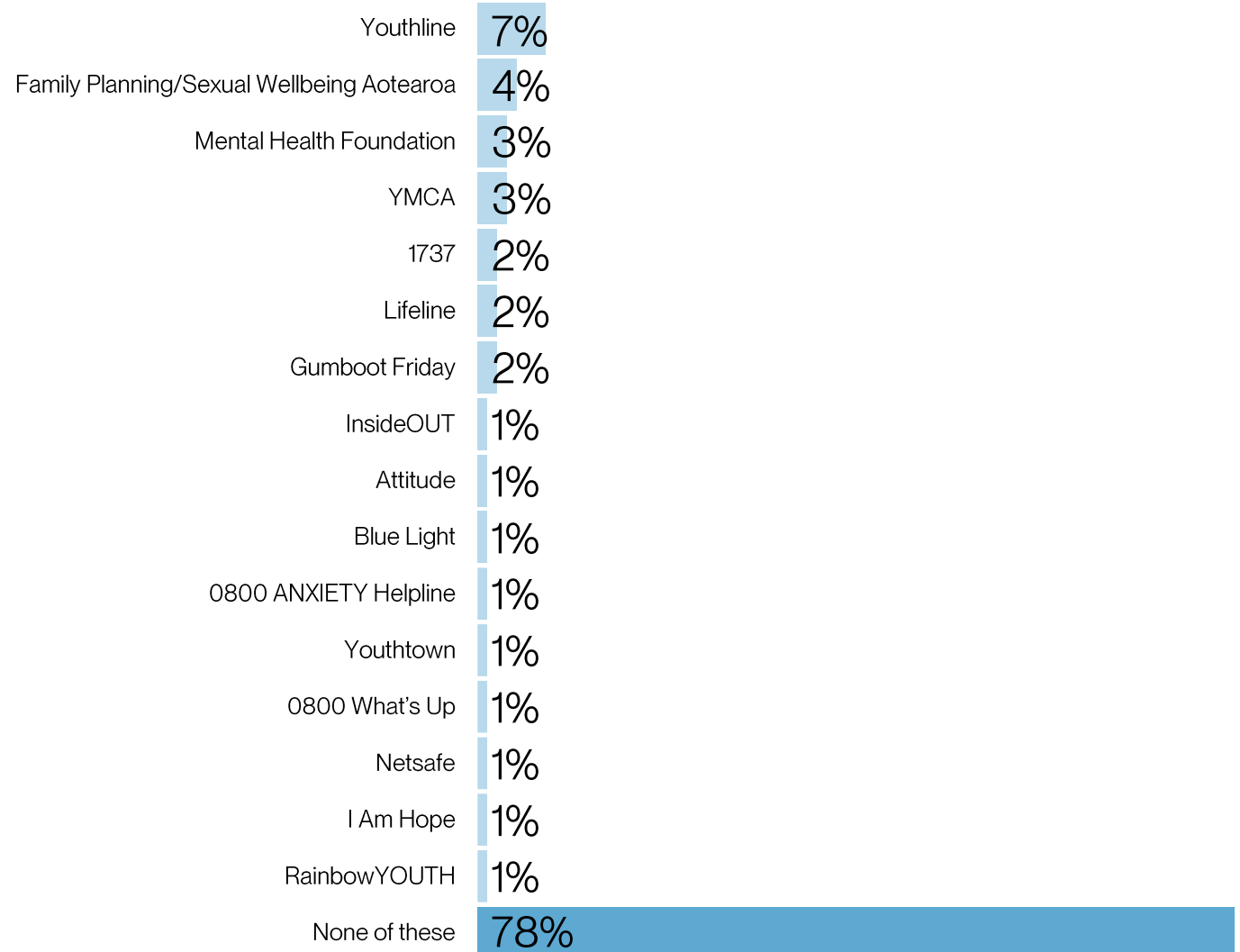
Mental health organisations young people have heard of before Prompted



Q. YOUTHLINE_PROMPTED_AWARE: Which, if any, of the following have you heard of?
Base: Total n=1041.
Note: Percentages less than 5% have been hidden.

Youthline is the number one mental health organisation young people have reached out to for support

Mental health organisations contacted for support



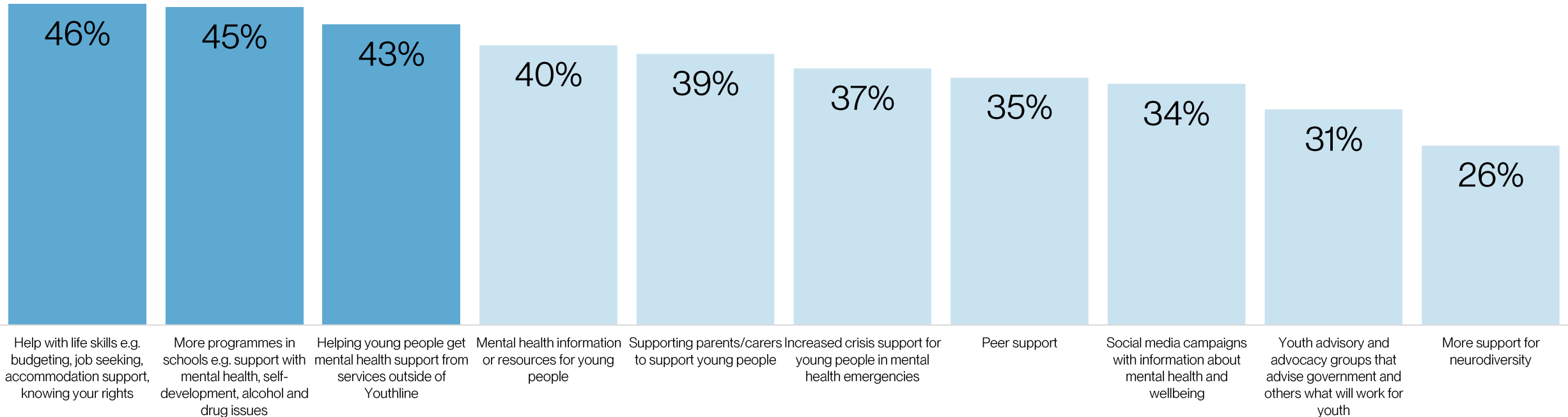
Q. SERVICES_USED: Which of these organisations, if any, have you contacted for support?

Base: Aware of at least one organisation in YOUTHLINE_PROMPTED_AWARE n=930.

Note: Percentages less than 1% have been hidden.

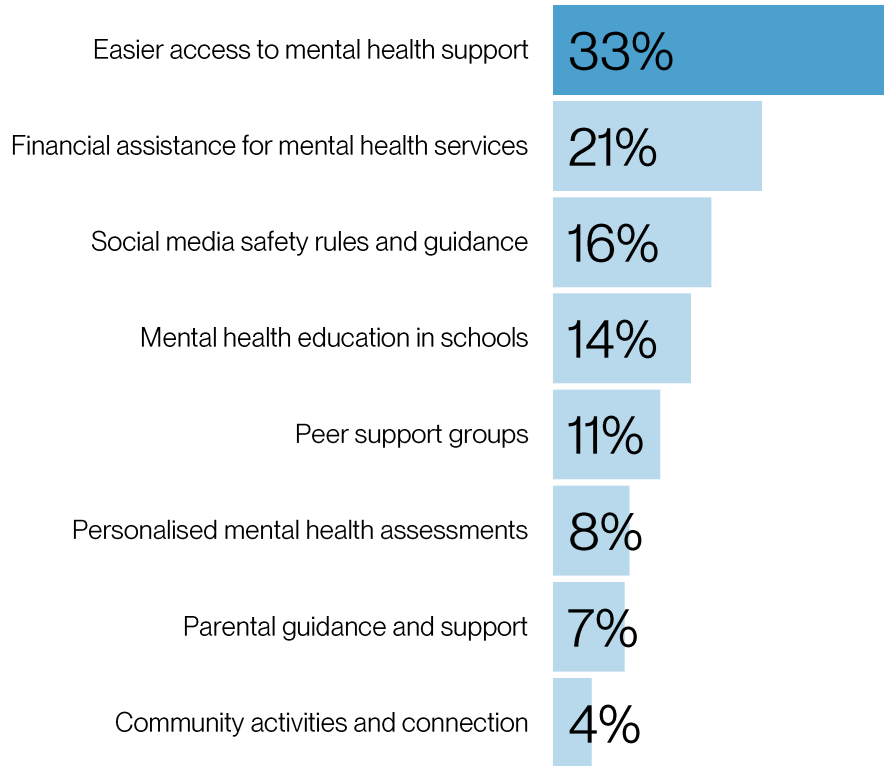
Young people want Youthline to play a broader role: supporting them with life skills, delivering programmes in schools, and helping connect them to other mental health support

Support that young people think Youthline should offer



Underpinning this is a clear need for support that's easier and faster to access

What would help young people with mental health issues



“Make accessing mental health support in the public system easier”

“Make support feel normal, and provide faster help when someone is actually struggling. A lot of young people aren't mentally ill, they're isolated.”

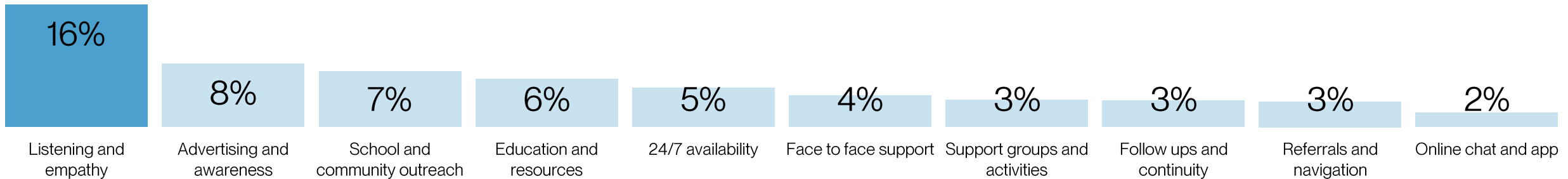
“We need to normalise having mental health issues talked about in school more, because that's when kids will be more open and vulnerable to teachers or the people in care with them”

“Having parents be more open to hearing when young people are struggling”

“Stricter rules on social media, and more education around the positives and negatives”

Above all, young people want to feel heard. Listening and showing empathy is the most important thing Youthline can do to help young people.

What Youthline could do to help young people with mental health struggles



This comes through clearly when they describe what meaningful support looks like to them

Comments under 'Listening and empathy'

"Listening to them without judgement, and not cutting in when they are trying to talk"

"Honestly just being there. Being able to listen means a lot."

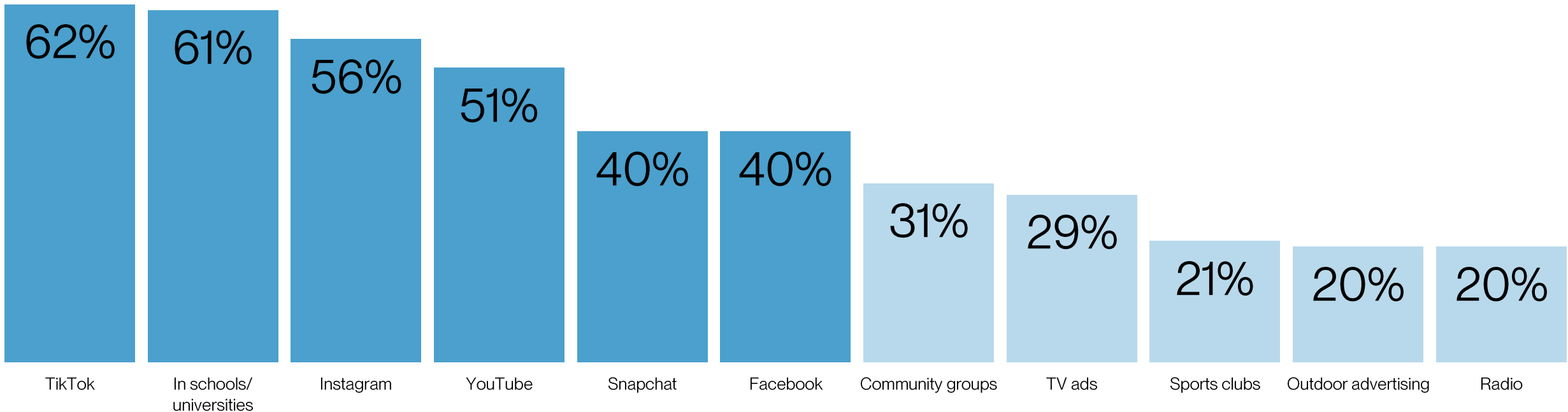
"Understand and listen to the victims or sufferers. While this might appear simple, it is one of the most inspiring and confidence building tools for young people."

"Be an attentive and patient listener"



Social media is key to connecting with young people, but building a presence in schools and universities is just as important

Where young people want Youthline to advertise
Among those aware of Youthline



Implication

Support must reflect what young people need and be advertised in the places they are

This includes support with practical life skills through programmes in schools and providing them with clearer pathways to other mental health support. Ultimately, it's about making support faster, more empathetic and easier to access.

Just as importantly, Youthline needs to advertise where young people already are - this is on social media, especially TikTok and Instagram, as well as in schools and universities.



Learnings to take forward



4

Learnings to take forward

- 1** Mental health is the most pressing issue young New Zealanders are facing
- 2** Accessing mental health support is a significant issue
- 3** We must listen to young people, and provide empathetic mental health support when, where and how they want it
- 4** Youthline is the number one mental health support organisation for young people to reach out to for support

Mental health is the most pressing issue young New Zealanders are facing

Young people are navigating a broad and interconnected set of challenges that feel constant and increasingly hard to escape, amplified by an always-on digital environment and the growing influence of AI.

This creates a sense of ongoing pressure, where issues are not only widespread but harder to switch off from.

The need for mental health support, in particular for young people from rainbow, disability and neurodiverse communities experiencing disproportionate levels of mental health distress, has never been greater.

TRA

1



Accessing mental health support is a significant issue

Over 4 in 10 young people can't name a single mental health support organisation. Long-wait times and limited access to services are also key barriers. Young people are increasingly seeking support through informal channels like text and online chat and support based in schools.

To remain relevant, mental health support must continue to meet them in these spaces. While Youthline already offers these services, there is an opportunity to further evolve how support is delivered to better align with how young people naturally reach out and the type of support they want to receive.

TRA

2



To provide effective support we must listen to young people, and provide empathetic mental health support when, where, and how they want it

They are looking for support with practical life skills, such as budgeting and applying for jobs, alongside more mental health programmes in schools and clearer pathways into other mental health services.

At the same time, it's critical to be present in the environments young people are spending their time – this is on social media, particularly TikTok and Instagram, as well as in schools and universities.

TRA

3



Youthline is the number one mental health support organisation for young people to reach out to for support

Additionally, 60% of young people have heard of Youthline, the highest awareness of all mental health support organisations we asked about. This highlights Youthline's crucial role in the mental health ecosystem.

It's important that we continue to increase awareness of Youthline as a mental health support service for young people, so every young person in Aotearoa New Zealand knows where to turn for support when they need it.

TRA

4



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