

28 March 2025

A statement from Milly Bannister,

I was directly invited to attend the budget lockup by the Minister for Finance & Women, likely because of my work with ALLKND, (the youth mental health charity I founded), and my ability to engage meaningfully with a large Gen Z audience. I saw the invitation not as a token gesture, but as a signal of meaningful change: that young people deserve to be part of the rooms where decisions about their future are being made.

There were no content requirements or expectations placed on us, which I think is important. We were there to listen, learn, and interpret - just like the press. For me, that meant filtering what I heard through a youth mental health lens, and finding ways to communicate complex information in an accessible, human way. Because for my audience, political decisions aren't abstract - they're *deeply* personal. The budget affects whether they can afford to study, rent, access mental health care, or plan a future with stability.

Inside the lockup, the rules were the same for everyone. No phones, no internet, no contact with the outside world for hours. We went through full security and vetting procedures, and the environment was structured and formal. And yet, there was something electric about being in that room with other creators. We knew we were witnessing something historic - not just for us, but for the communities we represent. There was a shared sense of curiosity, responsibility, and quiet determination to do it justice.

What surprised me most was how seriously our presence was taken. Ministers didn't brush us off - they engaged, answered questions, and acknowledged our platforms as legitimate spaces of influence. That mattered. It showed an awareness that traditional media doesn't reach everyone, and that trust now lives in new places.

Since the lockup, the content I've created around the budget has reached over 250,000 impressions in three days. That kind of reach isn't just numbers - it's proof that young Aussies want to understand what's going on. Mainstream media has even picked up some of the insights we shared, including a segment on The Project.

Of course, there's been criticism. Some of it's been dismissive (calling us 'influencers in activewear', for example), which completely misses the point. But I understand the discomfort. When new voices enter old institutions, there's always friction. What I hope is that we can evolve towards valuing impact, reach, and trust as much as we value

traditional titles. Because we're not here to replace journalists. We're here to bridge the gap.

In the lead-up to the next election, I won't be telling anyone how to vote - but I will be encouraging young people to ask sharper questions. About how mental health is being funded, how education is being supported, how the cost of living is being managed. The budget has reinforced for me just how important it is that young Australians feel equipped to navigate this landscape with confidence. Information is power - and connection is the vehicle.

Looking ahead, I believe creators will continue to shape Australia's political future. Not as 'influencers' in the narrow sense, but as educators, community leaders, and trusted advocates. We're often the first point of contact when someone's struggling, or unsure, or trying to make sense of the world. That's a responsibility I don't take lightly. And it's exactly why I do what I do through ALLKND every day, to create connection, build resilience, and show young people that they're not just affected by policy... they're a powerful part of it.