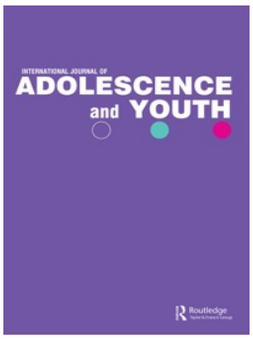

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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Youth advisory boards: a scoping review of characteristics, youth engagement activities and role in inclusive research

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ABSTRACT

Youth Advisory Boards (YABs) are increasingly used to engage young people in youth-related research internationally, yet it is unclear as to whether they constitute inclusive research by engaging youth with disabilities. A scoping review of studies employing YABs was conducted, guided by a rights-based conceptual framework identifying four activities that meaningfully engage youth in research: decision-making, training/education, participatory methods, and authoring/dissemination of outcomes. Analysis of 61 articles revealed the disciplinary fields, composition and engagement activities of 48 unique YABs, and how commonly they facilitated inclusive research. The majority of studies were located in health research, and to some extent, social work and the social sciences. A small number recommended YABs include youth with disabilities, yet only three articles reported YABs that included them in exclusively disability-focused research. This finding represents an opportunity to expand YAB membership to include youth with disabilities in research about issues that matter to all youth.

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KEYWORDS
Youth advisory board; youth voice; meaningful youth engagement activities; youth-related research studies; inclusive research; youth with disabilities

Introduction

Youth participation in decision-making structures and mechanisms, such as Youth Advisory Boards (YABs), has significantly increased since the adoption of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations, 1990). YABs have been used in a multitude of institutional settings internationally, such as museums (Silva, 2022), social services and policy contexts (Augsberger et al., 2020; Forenza & Havlicek, 2022; Petersen et al., 2025), social justice domains (Benninger et al., 2024; Creaney et al., 2025), and health research (Jacobs & George, 2022). In North America, YABs have been used to generate youth-focused priorities and recommendations to decision-makers in organisations and government agencies, and to guide the development of policies, programmes and services (Augsberger et al., 2020; Moreno et al., 2021; Laestadius et al., 2025). While nomenclature varies, such as Youth Advisory Councils, Committees, Panels and Groups, YABs seek to meaningfully engage young people in youth-related programmes, services, policies and research (Tsang et al., 2020; Sellars et al., 2021; Flodgren et al., 2025), that provide them opportunities to take action towards meaningful social change (Haddad et al., 2022; Craig et al., 2025; Storer et al., 2025). Meaningful youth engagement is defined as 'active and effective involvement in processes impacting young people's lives, characterised by information sharing, dialogue, mutual respect, and shared decision-making' (United Nations, 2023, p. 8).

Meaningful youth engagement facilitates the identification of youth-centric issues, perspectives and concerns that enhance research quality, relevance and ethics, and build participants' leadership and skills through mentorship, exposure to academic research, and professional development activities (Laestadius et al., 2025). YABs have predominantly been involved in medical and health research (Orellana et al., 2021; Prior et al., 2022; Mandoh et al., 2023; Partridge et al., 2025), and increasingly, research in social work (Mance et al., 2020; Forenza & Havlicek, 2022; Petersen et al., 2025) and the social sciences (Call-Cummings et al., 2025; Clary et al., 2025; Dvorsky & Becker, 2025). Meaningful engagement requires that youth understand and are empowered to assert their rights as equal partners in decision-making processes; that institutions

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mandate structured processes to ensure youth involvement; and that the operations of such processes are transparent, accessible and shared by all youth groups (Flodgren et al., 2025). Until recently, however, few studies have documented the practices through which YABs facilitate meaningful youth engagement to meet these objectives (Haddad et al., 2022).

While YABs seek the representation of diverse youth, it is unclear, however, how commonly YABs facilitate inclusive research, which refers to studies that extend participatory methods to include people with disabilities (Walmsley & Johnson, 2003; Nind, 2017; Njelesani et al., 2022; Young & Clerke, 2024a). Here, we refer to YABs that include youth with disabilities among their members in research relevant to all youth. We define disability as

> [R]esult[ing] from the interaction between individuals with a health condition, such as cerebral palsy, Down syndrome and depression, with personal and environmental factors including negative attitudes, inaccessible transportation and public buildings, and limited social support (World Health Organisation, 2025).

Here, disability is a social rather than a medical construct that includes people with socially defined limitations, irrespective of whether they consider themselves to be disabled (Charlton, 1998). Around 16% of the global population currently experience significant disability (World Health Organisation, 2025), which includes one in 10 children worldwide (United Nations, 2021), with the country prevalence ranging between 1% and 7.6% of people aged 15 to 24 (United Nations, 2023). Youth with disabilities mature into adults with disabilities, who are similarly excluded from studies that investigate issues affecting everyone. Improved social participation by people with disabilities, including engagement in research, can be achieved by addressing barriers and facilitating their day to day lives (World Health Organisation, 2025) and in the context of research, through inclusive research.

Inclusive research contests the oppression experienced by people with disabilities, the depoliticisation of that experience, and their central role in determining their rights through empowerment, independence and self-determination facilitated by resources based on equality and respect (Charlton, 1998, pp. 8–9). An inclusive research framework for involving people with disabilities (Walmsley & Johnson, 2003) has been instrumental in generating research outcomes that reflect their lived experience and different ways of knowing (Nind, 2017). Inclusive research, however, moves beyond involving people with disabilities in research about them, to all research projects. While YABs often seek to attract diverse representation, it is unclear as to whether the inclusion of youth with disabilities extends to YABs themselves. Our focus on inclusive research arose from one author's establishment of the UTS Child, Youth and Parent Inclusive Disability Research Panel at the University of Technology Sydney (UTS) in 2023. Its purpose was to engage youth with disabilities and their parents in a cross-disciplinary advisory role to facilitate inclusive research studies at the university.

We undertook a scoping review of literature published since 2020 that reported the involvement of YABs in research. Scoping reviews seek to investigate meanings and understandings of phenomena in a particular domain (Aromataris & Munn, 2020). The purpose is to identify and map concepts and conceptual boundaries underpinning and broadly documenting what is known (Hallinger, 2013), that describe 'the nature of a research field' (Newman & Gough, 2020, p. 1). Such reviews do not commonly report search strategies or assess the quality of studies reviewed (Evans & Benefield, 2001). They do, however, present results in diagrammatic or tabular form (Peters et al., 2015), and identify areas for further research (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005). Similarly to our previous work (Young & Clerke, 2024a, 2024b), we aimed to generate a methodological map of research in which YABs were involved, to understand how they operate in these studies, how YAB recruitment and research activities facilitated the meaningful engagement of youth with disabilities in youth-focused research, and how commonly YABs could be considered inclusive research.

Theoretical framework

Our review was initially underpinned by an inclusive research framework informed by contemporary theories in childhood studies that recognises children's status and rights, and research that acknowledges what it means to be a child (Mason & Watson, 2014). Central to this framework is a move away from research *on* children, where adults are researchers and children are objects of enquiry, towards research *with* and *by* children as subjects of enquiry (Njelesani et al., 2022). Research *with* involves qualitative and

participatory methods, such as arts- and play-based activities, and research *by* engages children as co-researchers who actively shape the study agenda and processes. We discovered, however, that while YABs are widely known to comprise youth who are interested in and/or have lived experience of the topic being investigated, not all YABs are involved in all stages of the research process. This ruled out the concept of research *with* youth with disabilities being applied to the studies in our review, because of the advisory role and the range of activities in which YABs engaged. It also became clear that irrespective of disciplinary location, few articles described YABs that specifically engaged youth with disabilities, such as the UTS Youth Advisory Panel (YAP).

By definition and goal, the role of YABs in research aligns with the four levels—informing, consulting, collaborating, and empowering—of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's (2017) youth involvement in policy processes. The levels are based on 'the ladder of children's participation' (Hart, 1992), which has been widely used as a model for engaging children in matters, research and decisions relevant to them. A scoping review of YAB involvement in health research (Sellars et al., 2021) proposed five levels of youth involvement based on this model: affirmation, where youth approve researchers' decisions; light consultation, where youth provide input into materials proposed by researchers; interactive advice, where researchers engage in discussion with youth to guide the research; co-production, where youth work collaboratively with researchers throughout the research process; and youth-led, where young people are responsible for all research stages. The study applied the levels to four research stages: research design, involving the development of study aims, methods and materials; conducting research, including piloting, recruitment and data collection; data analysis; and output and dissemination, including recommendations. The framework, however, was difficult to apply to our review because of the diversity of purpose and disciplinary location beyond health research in which YABs engaged.

A more flexible framework, informed by three child and youth involvement perspectives used in the public health, education and social work sectors, was proposed by a study exploring adolescent involvement in health and wellbeing policy development (Flodgren et al., 2025). The rights-based perspective, founded on the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, requires that youth be listened to, have their views taken into account, be involved, and share decision-making power and responsibility. The pragmatic perspective explores processes and methods that facilitate youth involvement, including recruitment and engagement, and duration of involvement. The social perspective considers how involvement promotes the needs of youth involved, such as social processes and contexts, ownership, benefits and skills development. All three perspectives are relevant here because YABs elicit and amplify the youth voice, and albeit to various degrees, involve members in the research process and facilitate youth development and social engagement.

While the three frameworks help to determine the degree of youth engagement in policy development and research, some reticence has been expressed about the implied 'stepwise climbing' that is linked to sequential child development theories (Hart, 2008), and the paucity of fine-grained descriptions of how meaningful engagement is facilitated in practice, such as in Sellars et al. (2021) review. This led us to a framework that identified five kinds of youth engagement activities in the context of policy development processes (Duea et al., 2022). First, engagement and capacity building activities, use methods that draw stakeholders into research at the initial planning stages, at key points in the process, and on an ongoing basis via collaborative working formations and infrastructure support (p. 6). Second, exploring and visioning methods, which support research development through community dialogue, stakeholder priority setting, and problem exploration via group discussions, community fora, concept mapping and action research strategies. Third, visual and narrative activities include participatory, arts-based, and narrative approaches to data collection, analysis and interpretation (p. 14). Fourth, mobilisation methods that initiate action by providing participatory tools for decision-making, action planning, translation, policy change, and dissemination (p. 6). Finally, evaluation involves participatory methods for determining project processes or outcomes.

While these activities were sufficiently described for us to identify how YABs facilitated meaningful youth across research processes, not all activities aligned with what had been reported in the review articles, particularly in relation to longer-term benefits, such as skills development to equip youth to take action towards meaningful change (Haddad et al., 2022; Storer et al., 2025). So we adapted Duea et al.'s (2022) policy development activities into four research engagement activities, to encapsulate the diverse

engagement of YABs reported in the review articles as occurring across the entire research process, beyond Sellars et al. (2021) health research stages and levels. This enabled us to describe, in more fine-grained detail, an integrated engagement activities framework comprising four activities, often occurring in a non-sequential process, in which youth were meaningfully engaged: agenda-setting, decision-making and contributing topics/directions for research; skills training/education; collaborative/participatory methods for idea generation/data collection; and co-authoring/disseminating research outcomes, advocacy, evaluation and recommendations for further research (Table 1).

The new framework informed a more productive analysis of YABs in our review, and guided our adaptation of the research questions used in Flodgren et al. (2025, p. 3) to:

1. What are the characteristics of research studies that involve YABs?
2. What are the characteristics of YAB membership?
3. How are YABs engaged in the research process and in what kinds of engagement mechanisms and activities?
4. How commonly do YABs include youth with disabilities?

Methods

We conducted a search of Proquest and Ebscohost databases and Google Scholar, and a manual search of scholarly journals, using the terms 'youth advisory board' and 'youth advisory' because of the variation in nomenclature that became clear during the search (see Characteristics of YABs in the Findings section).

We limited the search to articles published between 2020 and 2025 because of the significant increase in YAB involvement in youth-related research studies during this time, which coincided with the establishment of the UTS YAP. Inclusion/exclusion criteria were established during the search and conflicts resolved through discussion, which was exclusively centred on articles reporting YAB involvement in service design and delivery, or policy development, unless it was part of a research study (see Table 2).

After scanning reference lists for additional articles, we extracted data from 61 articles into an Excel spreadsheet under the following categories: year of publication, journal name, country, YAB nomenclature, agency facilitating the study, disciplinary location, youth age, YAB size, demographics, origins, operations and engagement activities, study research methods and participants, findings, conclusions, limitations, and further information about YABs.

Table 1. Theoretical framework.

Four levels of youth participation in policy processes (Hart, 1992; United Nations, 2023)	Five levels of youth involvement in health research (Sellars et al., 2021)	Three perspectives of youth involvement in health and wellbeing policy development (Flodgren et al., 2025)	Five engagement activities in policy development (Duea et al., 2022)	Integrated engagement activities framework (Young & Clerke)
Informing	Affirmation	Rights-based	Capacity building	Decision-making, agenda-setting, contributing to research directions
Consulting	Light consultation	Pragmatic	Exploring and visioning	Training/education, skills development
Collaborating	Interactive advice	Social	Visual and narrative	Collaborative/participatory methods for idea generation/data collection
Empowering	Co-production		Mobilisation	Authoring/dissemination/ advocacy/ recommendations
	Youth-led		Evaluation	

Table 2. Inclusion/exclusion criteria.

Inclusion criteria	Exclusion criteria
Published in English	YAB not mentioned in the abstract
Published in refereed journals or conferences between January 2020 and August 2025	YAB role not described in the research process
YABs were inclusive of people aged between 15 and 25	YAB was involved exclusively in service design and delivery, or policy development, unless part of a research study
Described a YAB's origins, role, operations and the activities through which it facilitated youth engagement in research	

Descriptive analyses were performed on quantitative data to characterise studies and YABs, and qualitative data were analysed using an inductive approach, which involved a process of iterative close reading and categorisation of extracted data informed by our integrated engagement activities framework.

Findings

The findings of our review are presented in the form of graphs and a narrative synthesis that describes how they address the research questions.

Search results

The searches yielded 651 articles. After screening titles and abstracts, 121 articles were assessed through full text reading. The outcome was 61 articles published between 2020 and 2025, which reported 48 unique YABs.

Characteristics of included studies

Publication year

Articles were published at a consistent rate in each of the six years under review, with a mean of 10.2 per year (Figure 1). The anomalies were six articles published in 2023, and 17 studies published in the first half of 2025.

Publication sites

The 61 articles were published in 46 unique peer-reviewed journals and two refereed conference proceedings (Figure 2). Of these, 26 articles were published in 23 journals reporting medical/health sciences, psychology and mental health research that involved adults. Seven articles were published in six journals reporting child, adolescent and youth research in the domains of medical/health, social work and social sciences. The remaining five journals reported non-child-focused and non-medical/health research, including two research methodologies journals in which five articles were published, a social work and a social sciences journal that each published one article, a journal reporting non-child-focused and disability-

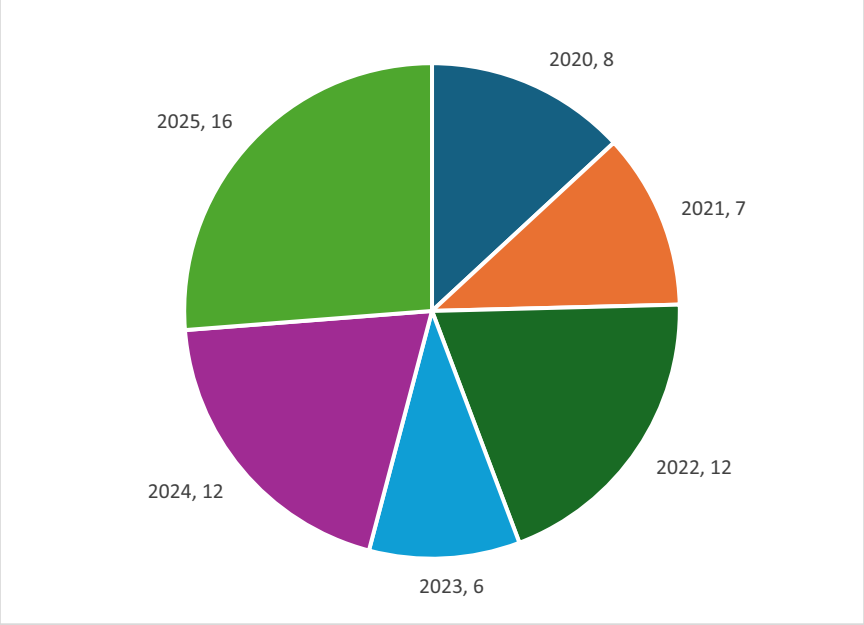

Figure 1. Year of publication.

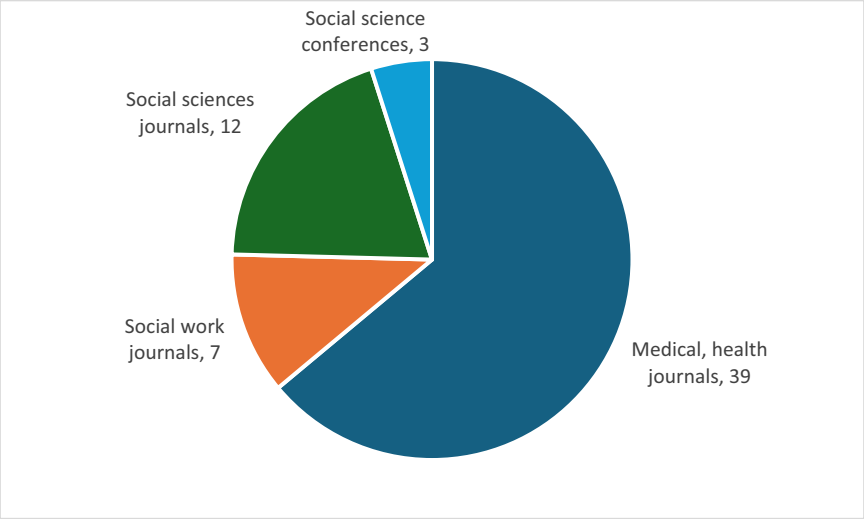

Figure 2. Publication site.

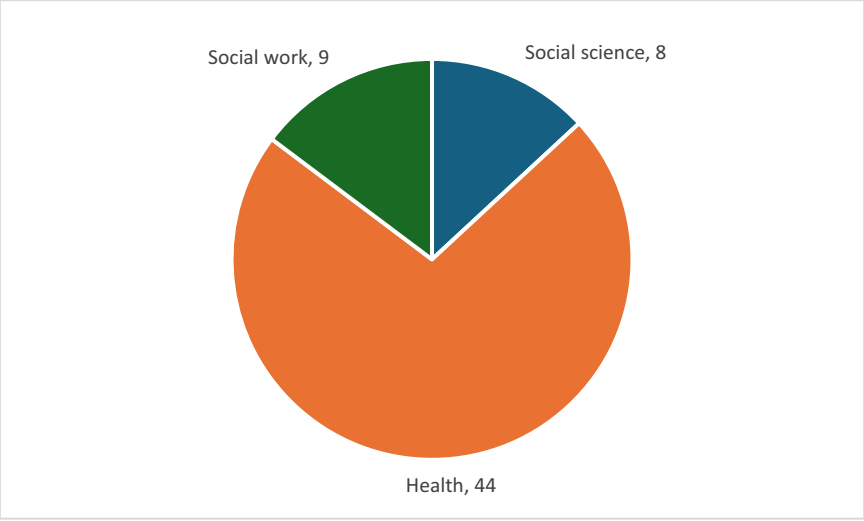

Figure 3. Disciplinary location.

specific research, in which one article was published. Three articles were published in the refereed proceedings of two social sciences conferences. Of the 17 articles published in 2025, 10 were published in health journals and seven in social science and social work journals.

Disciplinary location

Just over three quarters (77%) of studies were located in health research, followed by social work (9.8%) and the social sciences (9.8%), and 3.3% in disability-related education and employment domains (Figure 3). Health studies included health sciences and medical research, youth mental health and wellbeing, patient participant involvement (PPI) in research, and specific foci, such as HIV and substance use prevention, sexual health, health equity, and chronic and non-communicable disease. Social work studies included child welfare and protection, youth development, and social inequities, such as for refugee communities. Social sciences studies included those focused on youth leadership, civic engagement, participation in museums, school decision-making and qualitative research methods. Indeed, of the 17 articles published in 2025, 10 were located in health disciplines and publication sites, while seven were located in the social sciences and social work.

Country income classification (The World Bank, 2025)

Most studies (90.2%) were conducted in countries with high-income economies (Europe, U.K., North America and Australia); 4.9% in countries with upper-middle income economies (South Africa); 4.9% in countries with lower-middle income economies (Egypt and India); and none in countries with low-income economies (Figure 4).

Regional classification

Regional categorisation broadly correlates with that of income (The World Bank, 2025). More than half of the studies (57.4%) were located in North America (Canada and U.S.); 19.7% in East Asia and the Pacific (Australia); and 13.1% in Europe and Central Asia (U.K., Portugal, Belgium, The Netherlands). The remaining studies were located in other regions: 4.9% in Sub-Saharan Africa (South Africa, Uganda and Ghana); 3.3% in South Asia (India); and 1.6% in the Middle East, North Africa, Afghanistan and Pakistan (Egypt) (Figure 5).

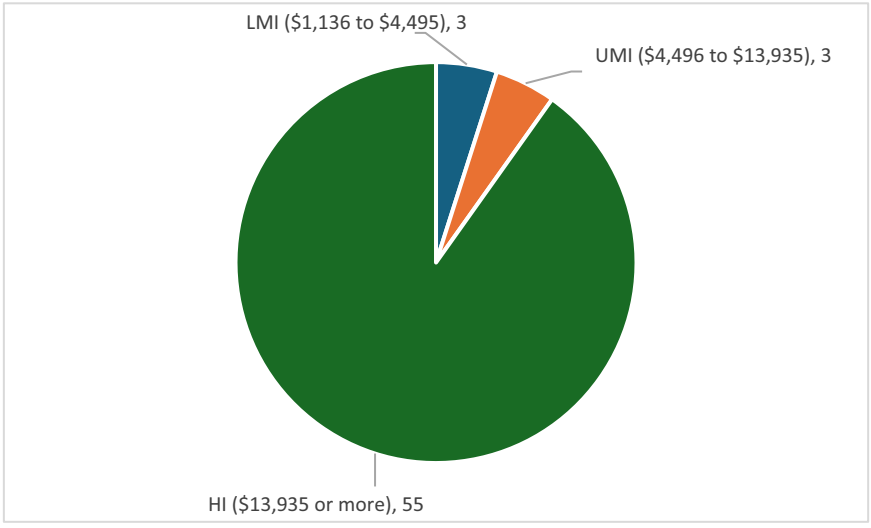

Figure 4. Study location by country income levels.

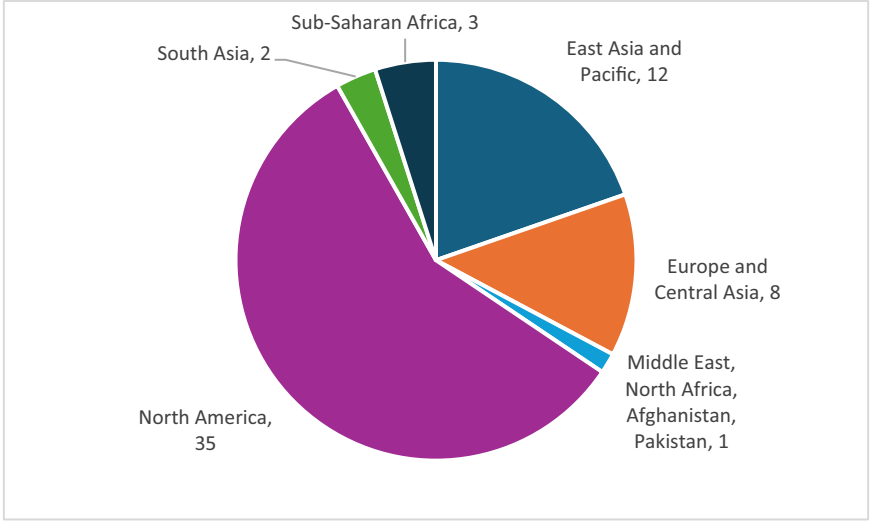

Figure 5. Study location by region.

Study design

Just under a third of the articles adopted a mixed methods research design (27.9%), a participatory action research (PAR) design (26.2%), or a reflective commentary or descriptive approach (27.6%). Of the remaining articles, 14.8% used a qualitative design, 1.6% used a quantitative design (Prior et al., 2022) and 1.6% engaged in user testing (Figure 6).

Study data collection methods

Of the 54.1% of articles that reported mixed methods and PAR designs, 23% used surveys, focus group discussions and interviews; 14.8% used collaborative discussion forums, meetings and workshops; and 19.7% of studies combined group discussion with collaborative arts-based or creative methods (concept mapping, photovoice and story-circle techniques). Narrative methods were used in 24.6% of articles, and 18% exclusively used qualitative methods (Figure 7).

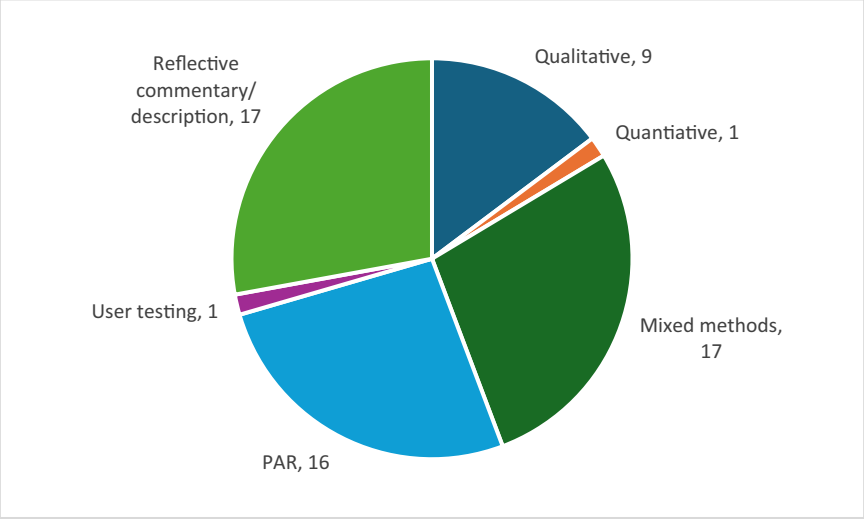

Figure 6. Research design.

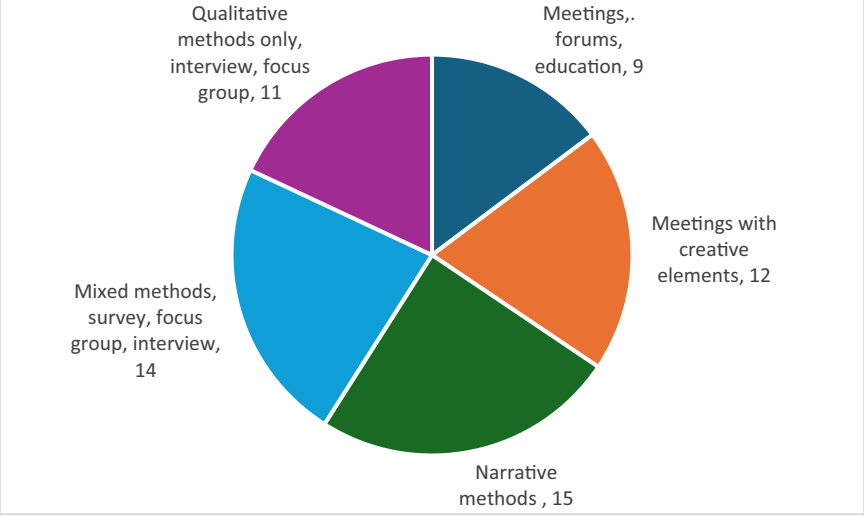

Figure 7. Data collection methods.

Reported study outcomes

Youth involvement in PPI health research studies (41%) was the most frequently reported study outcome, followed by youth development (16.4%), intervention development (13.1%), programme or service design (11.5%), social justice or community development (6.6%), and policy development (4.9%). Two articles reported outcomes that informed research protocols (3.3%), and two reported youth involvement in organisational development (3.3%) (Figure 8).

Characteristics of YABs

Nomenclature

Just over a third of articles (37.7%) referred to a YAB (Youth Advisory Board). Other acronyms included the words Group (YAG, 8.2%), Council or Committee (YAC, 11.5%), Teen (TAG), Paediatric (PAB, 4.9%), or Young Person (YPAG, 3.3%). Descriptive terms were also used, for example, CYAB (Community YAB) or TYAB (Transgender YAB). One Australian YAB coined the acronym, HAPYUS (8.2%), to capture its positive focus and location at the University of Sydney (Table 3).

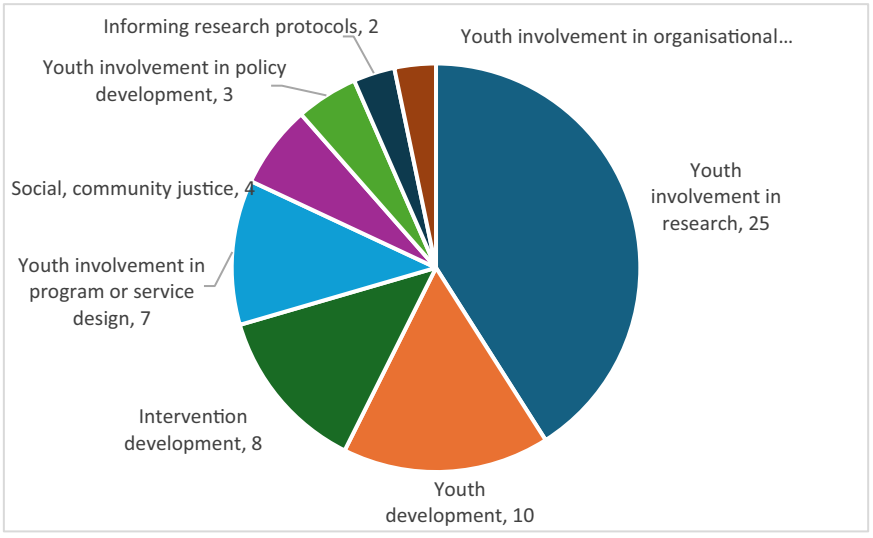

Figure 8. Study outcomes.

Table 3. Nomenclature.

YAB	24
HAPYUS YAG	5
YAG (Youth Advisory Group)	5
YAC (Youth Advisory Council)	5
CYAC (Child and Youth Advisory Committees)	2
PAB (Paediatric Advisory Board)	2
TAG (Teen Advisory Group)	2
YPAG Young Persons Advisory Group	2
AYAP (Adolescent and Youth Advisory Panel)	1
CYAB (Community Youth advisory board)	1
HEALYAC (Human Environments Analysis Laboratory Youth Advisory Council)	1
IYAB (International Youth Advisory Board)	1
SAB (Student Advisory Board)	1
TYAB (Transgender Youth Advisory Board)	1
YA (Youth Advisory)	1
YAT (Youth Advisory Team)	1
YCAB (Youth Community Advisory Board)	1
YMHAT (Youth Mental Health Advisory Team)	1
Youth Mental Health Advisory Board	1
YPAG (Youth Patient Advisory Group)	1
YRC (Youth Research Council)	1
Various names (Young partners in research)	1
	61

Lead agencies

Of the 45 articles that reported the lead organisation, we identified 35 unique agencies. The most common was the University of Sydney, which accounted for almost a quarter of these articles (22%) through its Matilda Centre for Research in Mental Health and Substance Use and HAPYUS YABs. Research involving YABs was conducted at all governance levels, including local and district (coalition or community groups), and state, national and international organisations. Agencies leading the research included universities (26.2%), medical research networks, such as hospitals and patient groups (18%), Non-Government Organisations (NGOs) (14.8%), government agencies (4.9%), private company or foundation (4.9%), cultural institutions (3.3%), and one university-private company partnership (1.6%). In all cases, academic researchers alone, or together with community stakeholders, were the initiative takers, while only one article reported a youth-initiated YAB, which was established following a forum involving youth in foster care (Augsberger et al., 2020). Lead agencies were not reported in 26.2% of articles.

Size

YAB membership size varied in the 22 YABs reported in 48 articles; 13 articles did not state group size. Groups ranged between 3 and 45 members, with the most common being five (10.4%) and 16 (10.4%) members, and the least common being less than five and more than 25 members, and those with fluctuating membership. Membership comprised between 3 and 10 members in 43.8% of articles reporting group size, between 11 and 20 members in 35.4% of articles, and more than 20 members in 10.4% of articles.

Age

The age of YAB members ranged from between eight and 38 in the 43 articles where age reported, and the most commonly reported was between 15 and 25 (52%). The mean age was 23, and the median was 16. Around 30% of articles did not report members' ages.

Demographics

YAB demographics were reported in 38 articles. Of these, the most commonly reported characteristics were gender/sexuality, and race/ethnicity (10 articles), gender/sexuality alone (six articles), lived experience relevant to the research (four articles), geographic location (three articles), and youth participation experience (one article). Twelve articles reported a combination of demographic characteristics. Only three articles reported YABs that included youth with disabilities, of which two exclusively comprised such youth.

Recruitment

Of the 25 YABs where their origins were reported, 48% were established in the 16 years between 2006 and 2021, and 52% were established in the three years between 2021 and 2023. Of the 43 YABs where recruitment strategies were reported, 60.5% used existing networks, 18.6% recruited from local organisations, 2.3% via social media posts, and 18.6% used all three strategies. Member selection was reported as having been based on lived experience of the issue being researched (42%), interest and availability (42%), research participation experience (5%), and open criteria (5%). Of these, a small number of articles reported an intention to seek diverse representation (7%), yet in the majority of articles, diversity referred to race/ethnicity, age, sexual identity, or geography. Only six articles (10%), reported having sought the inclusion of youth with disabilities.

Duration

Almost half the YABs (48%) operated on an ongoing basis, and 52% were established for a single research project. Of the 12 ongoing YABs whose duration was reported, 33% operated for up to one-year, 17% operated for two-years, 8% extended beyond two-years, and 25% had no limit other than members ageing out at 25. Of these, the operations of 17% of YABs were reported during a particular project. Of the 25 YABs established for a single research project, duration ranged from one-off consultations to a series of meetings held over a weekend or the summer, or on a monthly, bi-monthly or as-needed basis.

Compensation

Of the 23 YABs where member compensation was reported, 87% were compensated monetarily (gift cards, salary), 8.7% received non-monetary compensation (certificates, volunteer hours), and 4.3% were reimbursed expenses (travel). Of the 44 YABs where engagement activities were reported, 70.5% involved formal meetings, 27.3% involved activities that extended beyond meetings, and 2.3% involved activities that extended beyond the project duration.

Engagement activities

All 48 YABs provided input into research and feedback to researchers through engagement in discussions of some kind. While all YABs were adult-initiated, many of the activities in which YABs engaged were youth-determined or led. The results of the inductive analysis of the engagement activities facilitated by the 48 unique YABs are presented in Table 4.

Engagement activities: of the 12 YABs (25%) that facilitated all four engagement activities, all but two were ongoing. Of the 15 YABs (31%) that facilitated three engagement activities, six were ongoing and nine were involved in a single project. Of these, 13 YABs engaged in activities involving collaborative methods, 11 in training/education, 11 in co-authoring and disseminating research outcomes and eight in decision-making/agenda setting. Of the nine YABs (19%) that facilitated two engagement activities, five were ongoing and four involved a single project, all of which engaged in activities involving collaborative methods, seven in training/education, and one each in decision-making/agenda setting, and co-authoring and disseminating outcomes. Of the 12 YABs (25%) that facilitated one activity, all but two involved a single project. Of these, 11 YABs engaged in activities involving collaborative methods, and one engaged in training/education.

We next provide details about the ways in which YABs were involved in each of the four engagement activities.

Decision-making, agenda-setting, contributing to research directions: reported by 44% of YABs, of which 17 were ongoing and four were involved in a single project. Activities were referred to as operational (recruitment and dissemination strategies, research methods, intervention or programme content development), and/or strategic—decision-making, such as research priority-setting, research question development (Cluver et al., 2021). Articles were not always clear as to what degree youth input impacted strategic decisions, although studies were described as having an adult team leader (Tsang et al., 2020), led by adult-youth partnerships (Nguyen et al., 2022), being overseen by the YAB (Goffnett & Paceley, 2020), or youth-led (Call-Cummings et al., 2025).

Training/education, skills development: reported by 65% of YABs, of which 17 were ongoing and 14 were involved in a single project. All studies used adult facilitators to engage and guide YAB members via training in youth development, study topics, research methods, or study-specific methods, such as user testing.

Collaborative/participatory methods for idea generation/data collection: reported by all but one YAB. The most common methods were participatory brainstorming, concept mapping, on-line or face-to-face discussion fora for team/cohesion-building (Mance et al., 2020), and arts-based or creative data collection in which youth provided input and feedback (Patchen et al., 2020), idea generation and dissemination methods, such as photovoice, filmmaking, and storytelling. In some articles, YABs engaged in participatory methods for both idea generation and data collection, and in some studies, YAB members were identified as co-researchers (Tsang et al., 2020), or were also research participants. Bilingual communication was used in one international study (Craig et al., 2025).

Co-authoring/disseminating research outcomes and advocacy: 50% of YABs engaged members in co-authoring, presenting, or creating advocacy materials for local, national or international dissemination. Of these, 13 YABs were ongoing and 11 were involved in a single project.

Inclusion of youth with disabilities

Youth with disabilities were not mentioned in 83.6% of articles ($n = 51$) and were referred to but not included in YABs in 11.5% of articles ($n = 7$). Of the remaining three articles, two reported discrete research

Table 4. Engagementactivities facilitated by YABs (N = 48).

YAB	Article	EA			
		D	T	M	A
HAPYUS YAG (Health Advisory Panel for Youth at the University of Sydney). 2021 – Australia. University of Sydney – Chronic disease prevention research – [13–18] 16 members [incl. 3 co-chairs]	Valanju et al. (2022), Mandoh et al. (2023), Wardak et al. (2023), Mautner et al. (2024), Partridge et al. (2024), Partridge et al. (2025)	✓	✓	✓	✓
YAB. 2019 – Australia. Matilda Centre and PREMISE NHMRC Centre of Research Excellence, University of Sydney – Mental health, wellbeing, substance use – [18–24] 9 members	Prior et al. (2022), Debenham et al. (2024), Ross et al. (2025)	✓	✓	✓	✓
YPAG (Young Persons Advisory Group). 2015 – Canada. International Children's Advisory Network (iCAN) – PPI and Participatory Health Research – [13–23] 16 members	Tsang et al. (2020), Tsang et al. (2020)	✓	✓	✓	✓
PAB (Paediatric Advisory Board). 2019 – USA. Mayo Clinic – Paediatric health – [11–17] 18 members	Orellana et al. (2021), Dsouza et al. (2021)		✓	✓	
YAB. 2020 – India. Adolescent Health Champions (AHC) – [13–19] 21 members	Shankar et al. (2022), Sharma et al. (2023)	✓		✓	✓
YAB. 2008 – USA. New England Youth Coalition – Child foster care welfare programmes – [14–25]	Augsberger et al. (2020)	✓	✓	✓	✓
Youth mental health advisory board (YMHAB). 2018 – Nepal. Transcultural Psychosocial Organisation – Depression therapies – [13–20] 5 members	Rose-Clarke et al. (2020)				
TAG (Teen Advisory Group) Team. 2008 – South Africa – HIV research – [10–18] 20–35 members	Cluver et al. (2021)	✓	✓	✓	✓
M-YAB (Multi-ethnic YAB). 2016 – USA. Refugee Trauma and Resilience Centre (RTRC) – Refugee health – [16–24] 12 members	Miller et al. (2021)		✓	✓	
YAB. 2021 – USA. University of Wisconsin-Madison Technology and Adolescent Mental Wellness (TAM) – [12–18] 15–20 members	Moreno et al. (2021), Ali et al. (2024a), Ali et al. (2024b)		✓	✓	
YAB. 2021 – USA. Collaborative Research on MEdication use & family health (CRoME Lab) – Social, administrative pharmacy research – [12–18] 15 members	Abraham et al. (2023)	✓	✓	✓	
YAG (Your Rheum). 2016 – UK. Barbara Ansell National Network for Adolescent Rheumatology (BANNAR) – Adolescent health research – [10–24] 45 members	Esen et al. (2022)	✓	✓	✓	✓
AYAP (Adolescent and Youth Advisory Panel). 2017 – South Africa. National Department of Health – Health policy – [10–24]	Jacobs & George (2022)			✓	
YAP (Youth Advisory Panel). 2021 – USA. The Lancet Child & Adolescent Health – 8 members	Janušonytė et al. (2022)	✓		✓	✓
YAB – Egypt. Saint Andrew's Refugee Services (StARS) – Unaccompanied children, youth – [18–21] 8 members	Mhretu & Akok (2022)	✓	✓	✓	✓
Young partners in disability research – The Netherlands, Canada, UK. Utrecht Brain Centre, University Medical Centre – [12–38] 6 projects	Nguyen et al. (2022)	✓	✓	✓	✓
– USA. Cleveland YPAR movement – School psychology – [10–24] YAB. 2020	Benninger et al. (2024)	✓	✓	✓	
Generation R YPAG (Young Persons Advisory Group). 2006 – UK. National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR)	Preston et al. (2024)	✓		✓	✓

Table 4. (*Continued*)

YAB	Article	EA D	EA T	EA M	EA A
– Paediatric health research – [8–23] 15–20 members					
YAC (Youth Advisory Council). 2023 – Canada. MHA family navigation service – Mental health, addiction – 10 members	Anwarzi et al. (2025)	✓	✓	✓	
YRC (Youth Research Council). 2021 – USA. Civic engagement – Social science and sociological research	Call-Cummings et al. (2025)	✓	✓	✓	✓
IYAB (International YAB). 2022 – Canada, USA, Mexico. International Partnership for Queer Youth Resilience (INQYR) – Decolonising and internationalising research – [15–21] 12 members	Craig et al. (2025)		✓	✓	
HEALYAC (Human Environments Analysis Laboratory Youth Advisory Council). 2018 – Canada. Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR) – Health research – [median 17.3] 7 members	Nelson Ferguson et al. (2025)	✓	✓	✓	✓
YAG. 2021 – Australia. Curtin University – Wellbeing, health for youth with chronic conditions	Parkinson et al. (2025)	✓		✓	
CYAC (Child and Youth Advisory Committee). 2017 – Canada. International and Canadian Child Rights Partnership (ICCRP)	Collins et al. (2020), Collins et al. (2021)			✓	
TYAB (Transgender YAB). 2017 – USA – Social work, welfare – [16–22] 9 members	Goffnett & Paceley (2020)			✓	
YAB – USA. Network Project – partnership between a Historically Black College, University, community – Adolescent mental health – [13–17] 7 students	Mance et al. (2020)			✓	
YAB – USA – Sexual health education – [15–21] 6 members	Patchen et al. (2020)			✓	
YAB. 2019 – USA. School of Public Health and Human Longevity Science – Physical activity – [13–18] 4 members	Larsen et al. (2021)			✓	
YAB. 2021 – USA. Boston University School of Social Work, Boston Medical Centre Family Medicine Department – [16–25], 8 members	Augsberger et al. (2023)		✓	✓	✓
YMHAT (Youth Mental Health Advisory Team). 2022 – Australia. Matilda Centre, University of Sydney – Youth Participation Project (YPP) – [15–24] 8 members	Guo et al. (2024)	✓		✓	✓
YA (Youth Advisory). 2021 – Scotland. DanceConnect – Arts and mental health – [18–25] 5 members	Wright et al. (2024)		✓	✓	✓
YAB. 2018 – Belgium. Ghent University – Adolescent mental health – [16–22] 12 members	Hovasapian et al. (2022)			✓	
YAB (Listening Lab – Youth, Culture, Participation). 2021 – Portugal. Cross-institutional Youth in Museums project – [15–25] 52 members	Silva (2022)			✓	
CYAB (Community YAB) – USA – Youth trauma-informed care – [19–20] 4 members	Sinko et al. (2022)		✓	✓	
WH&Y Commission. 2018 – Australia. (WH&Y CRE), Western Sydney University – Health research and translation – [13–26] 3 cohorts of 18, 7, 21 members	Swist et al. (2022)		✓	✓	✓
YCAB (Youth Community Advisory Board) – USA – Tailored HIV intervention – [15–21] 28 members	Geffen et al. (2023)		✓	✓	

(*Continued*)

Table 4. (*Continued*)

YAB	Article	EA			
		D	T	M	A
YAC (Youth Advisory Council). 2023 – Canada – Health research – [15–24] 11 members	Bailey et al. (2024)		✓	✓	✓
YAG. 2022 – Africa. Young Africa Works: Disability Inclusive Research Partnership project – [18–35] 2 YAGs, 24 members	Bannink Mbazzi et al. (2024)		✓	✓	✓
YAB. 2022 – England. York University – Adolescent mental health – [18–25 yrs] 4 members	Bell et al. (2024)			✓	
SAB (Student Advisory Board). 2020–2021 – USA. – Youth leadership, participation in school decision-making	Bertrand et al. (2025)			✓	✓
TAG (Teen Advisory Group). 2020 – USA. Comprehensive Healthcare for Adolescents Initiative (CHAI) Project, Texas A&M University – [14–18] 19 members	Esquivel et al. (2025)	✓	✓	✓	✓
YAB. Midwest Youth Wellness Initiative on Technology (MYWIT). 2022 – USA. University of Wisconsin-Madison, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee – Health equity, wellness and technology research – [16–17] 4 members	Laestadius et al. (2025)	✓	✓	✓	
YAG. 2023 – Canada, England, France, Scotland, Spain – PPI paediatric health research reporting – [13–19] 6 members	Baba et al. (2025)		✓	✓	
YAT (Youth Advisory Team). 2023 – Canada. Transgender, two-spirit, nonbinary youth (TTNB) – Health and wellbeing – [14–25] 23 members	Clark et al. (2025)		✓	✓	✓
YAC (Youth Advisory Council). 2022 – USA. – Health literacy – [15–19] 8 members	Iqbal et al. (2025)		✓		
YAC (Youth Advisory Council). 2021 – USA. Southern California Tribal Tobacco Coalition (SCTTC) – Tobacco use prevention	Kornacki et al. (2025)	✓	✓	✓	✓
YAC (Youth Advisory Council). 2020 – USA. Rapidly Advancing Discovery to Arrest the Outbreak of Youth Vaping (VapeRace) Centre; VapeRace Community Engagement and Research Translation (CERT) – [mean 15.6] 2 cohorts of 17, 22 members	McLeish et al. (2025)		✓	✓	✓
YAB. 2022 – USA. Hope Coalition Corporation – Substance use, vaping – [12–17] 2 cohorts of 4, 11 members	Sleath et al. (2025)			✓	

Abbreviations: **D**, Decision-making, agenda-setting, contributing to research directions; **T**, Training/education, skills development; **M**, Collaborative/participatory methods for idea generation/data collection; **A**, Authoring/dissemination/advocacy/recommendations.

Notes: Date YAB established inserted after name; Continuing YABs (white) (n = 23); Single study YABs (pink) (n = 25); YABs engaged in inclusive research (green) (n = 3).

projects that exclusively included siblings of (Nguyen et al., 2022) or youth with disabilities (Bannink Mbazzi et al., 2024), and one reported a YAB that included a single youth with disability (Bertrand et al., 2025) (Figure 9).

Discussion

Our scoping review reported the engagement of 48 unique YABs in research processes in 61 artiles reporting studies predominantly aimed at improving youth health and well-being. The findings are next discussed in dialogue with the literature to address each of the research questions guiding our review.

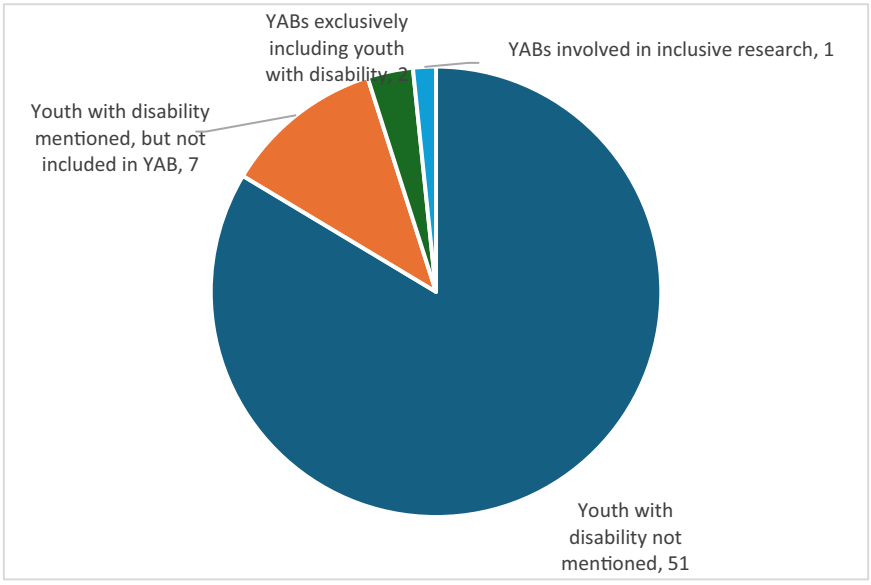

Figure 9. Inclusion of youth with disabilities in YABs.

Studies involving YABs

Two notable variations to the mean annual publication rate were found. First, six articles were published in 2023, which may be attributed to the COVID-19-related disruption to academic publishing. Second, 16 articles were published in the first half of 2025, an increase of almost three times the mean rate. The rise reflects the increased incidence of YABs established between 2021 and 2023 (52%), including eight ongoing, and 14 involved in a single study, compared with 48% established between 2006 and 2021. The finding affirms that YABs are increasingly being used to meaningfully engage youth in research about issues that matter to them (Moreno et al., 2021; Sellars et al., 2021; Haddad et al., 2022; Prior et al., 2022; Esquivel et al., 2025; Laestadius et al., 2025).

Publication sites align, for the most part, with studies' disciplinary locations. The majority were located in medical or health research, reflecting increasingly mandated patient and participant involvement (PPI) (Tsang et al., 2020; Cluver et al., 2021; Preston et al., 2024; Baba et al., 2025; Laestadius et al., 2025). The inclusion of YABs in social work and social sciences research reflects international calls for meaningful youth engagement in the development of youth-related policies, services and programmes (Moreno et al., 2021; Haddad et al., 2022; Guo et al., 2024), and their continued involvement in cultural institutions (Silva, 2022). The increase in articles reporting YABs located in non-health domains in 2025 (seven versus ten in health) affirms that YAB-facilitated youth research engagement has recently extended beyond mandated domains.

The location of most studies in high-income economies, perhaps unsurprisingly, reflects these countries' GDP-based capacity for basic, applied and experimental development research (World Bank Group, 2025). The anomalies are studies located in Egypt (Mhretu & Akok, 2022) and India (Shankar et al., 2022; Sharma et al., 2023), and South Africa, Uganda and Ghana (Cluver et al., 2021; Jacobs & George, 2022; Bannink Mbazzi et al., 2024). The existence of YABs in less affluent countries, and particularly rural locations, is heartening in relation to reportage that disability is often linked to differences in socio-economic outcomes, where almost two-thirds of young people with disabilities are illiterate, and as five times as many have never attended school compared to those without disabilities, which is exacerbated in rural locations (United Nations, 2023). The existence of YABs in such regions does not mean, however, that young people with disabilities are involved, other than those that specifically recruited members with disabilities (Bannink Mbazzi et al., 2024).

The remit of YABs to facilitate youth engagement most often through discussion, again unsurprisingly, aligns with our finding that most studies adopted qualitative research and PAR designs, and used

collaborative idea generation and data collection methods and mixed methodologies, the latter in which surveys primarily collected demographic data. The predominance of study outcomes related to youth development and involvement in research, intervention and programme design aligns with the similarly high incidence of training/education facilitated by YABs.

YAB characteristics

Almost all YABs included the words 'youth', 'young persons' or 'teen' in their titles, with the exception of the Mayo Clinic's Paediatric Advisory Board (Dsouza et al., 2021; Orellana et al., 2021), reflecting its medical location. Youth-related nomenclature is to be expected for advisory boards comprising young people, yet all YABs were reported in the review articles as being adult-initiated and led. Membership age of YABs mirrors the UN definition of youth by age (United Nations, 1990), and most YABs reflected workable group sizes and duration (Moreno et al., 2021).

Many studies reported seeking diverse youth representation, although diversity was defined in terms of geography, sexual orientation/gender identity, race/ethnicity, and lived experience of the phenomenon under study. Most surprisingly for this review, however, was that all but one the studies that reported having sought diversity in YAB membership omitted youth with disability. The omission affirms the disability rights movement's call for researchers to consider their inclusion in youth-related research 'to overcome economic, institutional, and structural barriers to participation … of youth from minoritized and marginalised communities' (Laestadius et al., 2025, p. 7).

The underrepresentation of youth with disabilities in leadership positions was discussed in the sole article we determined to be inclusive research. The article questioned the intersecting axes of power in school leadership positions in relation to race, disability, and language (Bertrand et al., 2025). The article suggested that despite 14% of the school population including students with learning, intellectual and physical disabilities, the separation structures that enabled them to attend the school seemed to influence their willingness to join the YAB. For this reason, the school intentionally recruited a single student with a disability to the YAB during the study years. We posit that there is a direct correlation between the elision of youth with disabilities from meaningful engagement in research on issues that affect all youth and the very structures that are designed to include youth with disabilities in social institutions, such as schools.

The omission of youth with disabilities from YABs may be attributed to recruitment strategies, which were predominantly via personal, organisational and professional networks (Rose-Clarke et al., 2020; Esen et al., 2022; Mhretu & Akok, 2022; Sharma et al., 2023), or the requirement for members to have leadership or participation experience (Guo et al., 2024; Craig et al., 2025). This suggests YAB recruitment strategies are limited to an already engaged youth population in known local organisations (see for example, Miller et al., 2021; Benninger et al., 2024; Anwarzi et al., 2025) via existing organisational or research relationships (see for example, Mance et al., 2020; Tsang et al., 2020; Orellana et al., 2021; Esen et al., 2022; Abraham et al., 2023; Sharma et al., 2023; Preston et al., 2024) or in one case, intergenerational membership (Cluver et al., 2021). The exceptions were YABs recruited through outreach campaigns or open calls via social media (see for example, Prior et al., 2022; Bailey et al., 2024; Wright et al., 2024; Craig et al., 2025; Esquivel et al., 2025; Partridge et al., 2025). Our point is that organisations seeking YAB members often limit their recruitment strategies to those involving existing relationships or known youth organisations, perhaps because of convenience and/or previous success. This means that youth with disabilities who do not attend such organisations and/or are unconnected to existing youth research networks are unintentionally elided from opportunities to meaningfully engage in research about issues that affect all youth.

YAB facilitation of engagement activities

This section is organised by our integrated engagement activities framework.

> YABs are closely related to youth participatory action research (YPAR), but generally stop short of allowing youth to cocreate and participate in all aspects of the research process and may lack the intention of 'shifting power structures' inherent to the YPAR orientation (Laestadius et al., 2025, p. 2).

All YABs facilitated collaborative and participatory engagement activities, mostly to identify youth concerns or perspectives and generate research data, and less often in agenda-setting, decision-making, and dissemination activities. Our finding that only 25% of YABs facilitated all four engagement activities is concerning, given that their purpose is to meaningfully engage youth in dialogue and shared decision-making (United Nations, 2023) about youth-related programmes, services, policies and research (Sellars et al., 2021; Flodgren et al., 2025). It is particularly surprising that while two thirds of the YABs facilitated training/education in research methods and/or the issue being researched, only half involved skills development to equip members for strategic or operational decision-making activities, and co-authoring and/or outcome dissemination and advocacy activities that enabled them to take action towards meaningful change (Haddad et al., 2022; Storer et al., 2025).

Of particular interest is our finding that overall, descriptions of meaningful youth engagement in research activities were often limited in the articles, with little detail on how engagement was enacted in practice. This lack of reporting represents an important field-level issue. Furthermore, engagement activities were typically located in the middle—participant recruitment and participatory and multi-modal data collection (Njelesani et al., 2022)—or end phase—dissemination of findings, co-authorship—of the research process, rather than the data analysis stage. This is despite data interpretation being central to meaningful participation and shared decision-making, and in contrast to the review of health research YABs by Sellars et al. (2021), which reported that 'activities typically clustered at the beginning (research design) and data analysis and dissemination phase, with little involvement in conducting research' (p. 702). The conflicting findings point to areas for further research.

On a positive note, the various mechanisms through which engagement activities were facilitated offered YAB members logistical flexibility, in terms of meeting attendance and methodological modes, opportunities for skills development and access to social support, and also contributed to 'study feasibility and the usefulness of findings for practice' in the case of health research (Laestadius et al., 2025, p. 2). Development and implementation of a YAB requires, as studies have argued, 'substantive funding or other forms of institutional support' (p. 3), which is often out of alignment with research grant funders and institutional expectations (Goffnett & Paceley, 2020; Geffen et al., 2023; Benninger et al., 2024).

Inclusion of youth with disabilities

Our key finding that the vast majority of the articles ($n = 51$) neither referred to nor included youth with disabilities in YABs evidences the omission of this significant, yet disparate group of young people whose voices are, therefore, largely elided from research conversations about issues that matter to all youth. This is despite recent moves to 'prioritise the voices of youth from minoritized and marginalised communities as a step toward centreing equity in technology and wellness research' (Laestadius et al., 2025, p. 7). The exceptions were three articles, one of which reported the engagement of siblings of youth with disabilities in discrete research projects (Nguyen et al., 2022), YABs exclusively comprising youth with disabilities in a disability-specific research project (Bannink Mbazzi et al., 2024), and one that included a single youth with disability in a school-based YAB, which we categorise as inclusive research (Bertrand et al., 2025).

Strengths and limitations

Strengths of our review include adherence to scoping review processes, iterative searching, data extraction and synthesis frameworks, and collaborative decision-making. The feedback provided by the UTS YAP on the findings increased our insights into how YABs might constitute inclusive research, the potential impact on youth with disabilities, and informed our recommendations for future research. The disparate nomenclature describing youth advisory structures, their location in a range of disciplinary and cultural research programmes, and the paucity description about their roles may have resulted in eligible studies being omitted. Finally, the limited reportage of YAB origins, demographics, duration, and engagement activities may have resulted in mis-classification of these activities.

Implications for research and practice

To ensure the views of youth with disabilities are meaningfully engaged in research about issues that affect youth broadly, organisations should move beyond aspirational intention toward systemic inclusion. This

requires intentional diversification of recruitment strategies beyond existing institutional or youth networks to reach young people who are typically underrepresented. The key finding that YAB engagement in research processes was frequently in the form of a consultative or advisory role but rarely extended into deeper forms of participation. This is a significant reporting gap that has implications for future research, given that, as previously stated, around 16% of the global population currently experience significant disability (World Health Organisation, 2025), including one in ten children worldwide (United Nations, 2021). In practice, methodological adaption, including accessible technologies and universal design principles, is critical to facilitate participation of youth with disability in YABs in service delivery and design and policy development, and particularly for those involved in research about issues that concern all youth. Consideration must also be given to the social structures that constitute 'economic, institutional, and structural barriers to participation' that are crucial to research projects that strive for diversity and equity. Organisations supporting youth-focused research should consider instigating institution-wide YABs, such as the UTS YAP, that may meaningfully engage youth with disability in research beyond the specific condition that constitutes their categorisation as having a disability.

Implications for youth with disabilities

The continued exclusion of youth with disability from YABs perpetuates epistemic and participatory injustice in youth research. Structured and ethical inclusion of youth with disability is a necessary evolution of participatory practice, comparable to the Patient and Public Involvement (PPI) movement in health research. The mandatory inclusion of youth with disability would ameliorate researchers' unconscious or tacit acquiescence to the oppression of youth with disabilities and harness the efforts of those who actively organise to change them by engaging in inclusive research. Such engagement enables youth to exercise agency, develop leadership, and contribute to the reshaping of research cultures that have historically marginalised them. Inclusive YABs can thus become spaces of empowerment, fostering critical reflexivity among researchers and driving innovation through diverse lived experiences and knowledge systems.

Conclusion

This scoping review mapped 61 articles describing 48 YABs that facilitated youth engagement in research across health, social work, and social sciences. While YABs increasingly serve as mechanisms for participatory engagement, only three YABs included youth with disabilities, all of which were disability-related studies. The finding suggests that YABs need to extend their diversity parameters beyond race/ethnicity, gender/sexual orientation and geography to include youth with disabilities in research that matters to all youth. The review also found that while YABs seek to meaningfully engage youth in all stages of the research process, they are more likely to engage in training/education and collaborative methods of idea generation and data collection methods than in research direction-setting and decision-making, and co-authoring and dissemination of research findings. Future research and funding frameworks should normalise inclusive YABs as a core feature of participatory design across disciplines. Embedding inclusive research principles will ensure that YABs reflect the full spectrum of youth experience, contributing more equitable, relevant and impactful research outcomes.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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