

MEDIA RELEASE

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Closing The Gap Efforts Undermined by Funding Cuts

“The release of the Closing The Gap report into Indigenous disadvantage today highlights that policies and programs in critical areas including education, employment, child protection and community safety are clearly missing the mark,” said Irina Cattalini, CEO of WACOSS.

The Council is calling on the Federal Government to reverse recent cuts to funding for critical social services and to engage with communities on how to achieve meaningful and sustainable outcomes.

“Cuts of \$271m in social services and \$534m in Aboriginal service programs over the coming four years are going to have a significant impact on social wellbeing. The Federal Government’s new tendering approach is causing great uncertainty and it is still very unclear which services and communities will be hardest hit,” said Ms Cattalini.

“We need to invest in families and communities and support them with the programs and services they know make a difference.”

Governments must listen to the evidence on what works, particularly in the critical areas of community safety, juvenile justice and child protection. These are all areas where we are going backwards and the gaps are widening not closing,” said Ms Cattalini.

“The Council has recommended a series of budget measures which invest in strengthening the capacity of families and communities, particularly in early childhood. We know that Aboriginal children have much higher rates of developmental disadvantage before school age, so we must do more to help children and families earlier, to get positive life outcomes.”

WACOSS also supports the call from the Closing The Gap committee to set justice targets. Western Australia has the highest rates of Indigenous juvenile detention of any state, (77% in 2014) and more than half of the children removed from their families in WA (51% in 2014) are Aboriginal, despite representing only 6.7% of the total population under 17 years.

“The path to a reconciled Australia requires transparent partnerships and dialogue between Government and community to ensure that Closing The Gap targets are met,” added Mr James Back from Reconciliation WA.

WACOSS will give evidence to the Senate Inquiry into Out of Home Care in Perth on Monday

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