

Budget Area 3: Children, Young People & Families

About this Issue

Services for children, young people and their families remain disjointed and compartmentalised within different government departments. Research, theory and best practice in childhood development indicate that the totality of the child’s experience (both within the immediate family and the broader community) matters; that gaps in health and support can have a profound and lifelong impact; that successful interventions are predicated on the degree to which the client participated in decision making; and that the most effective approach is a universal, coordinated and holistic one.

The Council continues to support the establishment of an Office of Early Childhood. As a starting point, the Council is calling for an overarching client-centred framework that supports and informs the provision of services that engages children, young people and families with the government agencies and community organisations that support them in a common approach. There is an important link to be made between the provision of universal, secondary and crisis services as part of an integrated approach.

The Council’s 2013-14 Pre-Budget Submission

Outcome sought: Coordinated client-centred services and supports that meet the needs of children, young people and families, with client participation a central component of service delivery **\$78m**

Proposed strategies	
A single comprehensive outcomes framework for children and young people	
Co-ordination of data collection and analysis	
A state-wide strategy for coordinating early childhood programs on or near school sites	
Universal services for engaging young people	
Employment of youth workers in schools	
Increased funding to expand universal parenting services	
R4R funding for occasional child care (21 centres- provided in 2011 & 2012)	
Integrated approach to secondary services- including expansion of secondary service hubs with additional resources for secondary services.	
Adequate resourcing for family and domestic violence services, incl. for children of parents escaping DV.	

Relevant Budget Portfolio(s)

Lead government agencies:	Department of Education, Department for Local Government and Communities, Department for Child Protection and Family Support , Department of Health and Commissioner for Children and Young People
Other government agencies:	Mental Health Commission, Department of Corrective Services, Disability Services Commission, Department of Housing and Department of Sport and Recreation

Children, Young People & Families: The 2013-14 Budget in Summary

Western Australia has the fastest growing population of families with children under 15 years of age, while still lagging behind other States on key measures of child development - but these demographic pressures are not reflected across the Budget. It is a Budget that sees the continuation and roll-out of some existing programs and commitments for children, young people and families. The major new funding in 2013-14 reflects previous announcements, such as the \$19m for six new Child and Parent Centres and \$38m over 4 years for 155 FTE School Health staff.

The change of name of the *Department of Child Protection and Family Support* has not resulted in greater investment being directed to family support services. There have not been any new family support programs or initiatives announced or in any substantive increase to existing family support measures. We anticipate seeing a call for greater investment in secondary services following the evaluation of the innovations site at the Armadale Family Support Network, and hope to see an expansion of these networks in coming years.

The proposed program rationalisation and reprioritisation of existing programs remains a particular concern, but there is no information available on how these cost savings will be achieved.

Initiatives at a Glance

Notable funding announcements in the 2013-14 State Budget (most reflect previous announcements):

- ✦ \$19 million (capital of \$11.1 million¹; \$8 million recurrent²) for the six new Child & Parent Centres.
- ✦ \$38 million over 4 years for 155 FTE School Health staff, primarily for school health nurses but including 10 FTE speech pathologists.³
- ✦ \$2 million will be invested by the Department for Child Protection & Family Support in a new six unit family refuge in the metropolitan area, providing refuge for women and children fleeing domestic violence. A total of \$3.5 million has been allocated between 2013-14 and 2016-17 to provide support and outreach services for the new refuge.⁴ However, during the State Election campaign, the Liberal Party had promised *\$4 million to build 2 new cluster-style refuges* in the metropolitan area (one NOR, one SOR).⁵
- ✦ Election commitment of increased funding for pastoral care (school) chaplains — will occur from 2014-15 (note \$2.36 million over 4 years promised; \$1.475 allocated).⁶

Other Numbers

- ✦ The number of children in out of home care was not published in the budget papers, but it is noted that the increase in numbers has slowed significantly — to less than 6%.⁷

Key Observations/Implications

1. No mention of Child Health Nurses

The commitment to funding an additional 100 CHN was a focus of last year's budget and an additional \$59million over the next four years was allocated.⁸

A key element of this announcement was a commitment to partnering with the community sector.

A number of information forums and consultation sessions with interested parties were held and the Request for tender document was advertised on the WA Tenders Board on 21 November 2012 and was originally scheduled to close at 11.00 am on Monday 7 January 2013. This was subsequently extended until Friday 8 February 2013.

WACOSS was advised in early June, 2013, that the evaluation of tenders had been completed and an announcement was expected to be made in mid-July. Our latest information is that this is still a month or more away.

We know that 16 of the 100 have already been employed by the Government.⁹

It will be important to track the money and specifically:

- ✦ How much of the \$9.11 million allocated for this year has been spent?
- ✦ What has happened to the remainder of this year's allocation?
- ✦ Has the time line has been pushed out, or is the proposed \$59 million still within the original 4 year period, i.e. until 30/6/16?

Child and community health services come under the line item in the Budget titled- Prevention, promotion and protection, which is showing a slight decrease in this year's Budget Estimates.¹⁰

2. Program rationalisation and reprioritisation of existing programs

Decisions about re-focusing investment and restructuring service areas need to be evidence-based and need to be based on consultation.

Where there are changes to or cuts in service delivery our first question is – where is the evidence? What evidence do we have that services are ineffective or that changes will lead to better outcomes? Then we ask – what is the transition strategy? Where is the consultation with services and experts to ensure a smooth transition and make sure that vulnerable people are not falling through the cracks? How are we meeting the need for services and support? What is the level of unmet need? Then we want to know – what is the longer term plan for service user engagement, monitoring and evaluation to ensure new services or programs are delivering real community outcomes.

In the Department of Local Government and Communities for example; program rationalisation accounts for \$5.9 million over the 3 years beginning 2014-15; and reprioritisation of existing programs is \$332,000 in this financial year with similar amounts over the following three (total of \$1.37 million)¹¹. In the Department of Child Protection, on the other hand, program rationalisation is \$645,000 each year (a total of \$2.584 million) with the total reprioritisation of programs (\$1 million) occurring in this financial year.¹²

3. Demographic changes and the impact on services

The Budget papers recognise the significant demographic changes occurring in WA and the resultant social changes. For example:

- *the number of Western Australians aged 60 years and over will increase by more than 150% by 2050*¹³
- *Western Australia has the fastest growing population of families with children under 15 years of age.*¹⁴

However, while this is reflected to some extent in, for example, the Seniors Cost of Living Rebate (which was underspent this year but anticipated to increase by almost \$10 million in 2016-17¹⁵), there is a significant reduction in the allocation for the provision of information, services and programs to support children, parents, families and communities over the Forward Estimates.¹⁶ For example, while the Budget acknowledges the growth in families in WA (since 2006, the number of families with children under 18 years has grown by 21%), there are significant cuts in services evident in the forward estimates (\$50 million budgeted in 2013-14; but only \$41.6 million in 2014-15).¹⁷

¹ Department of Education, Budget Paper 2 (Vol 1), p. 272.

² Department of Education, Budget Paper 2 (Vol 1), p. 277.

³ Department of Health, Budget Paper 2 (Vol 1), p. 136

⁴ Budget Paper 3, p. 152.

⁵ Liberal Party of WA (2013) *The Liberals' Protecting Families Policy*, <http://goo.gl/rtG64X>.

⁶ Department of Education, Budget Paper 2 (Vol 1), p. 272.

⁷ Department for Child Protection and Child Support, Budget Paper 2 (Vol 2) p. 563.

⁸ Department of Health, 2012-13 State Budget Paper 2 (Vol 1), p. 130.

⁹ Government of Western Australia (16 July 2012) *Media Release: WA children benefit from more child health nurses* <http://goo.gl/5fMqIH>.

¹⁰ Department of Health, Budget Paper 2 (Vol 1), p. 131.

¹¹ Department of Local Government and Communities, Budget Paper 2 (Vol 2), p.776

¹² Department for Child Protection and Child Support, Budget Paper 2 (Vol 2), p.562.

¹³ Department of Local Government and Communities, Budget Paper 2 (Vol 2), p.778.

¹⁴ Department of Local Government and Communities, Budget Paper 2 (Vol 2), p.778.

¹⁵ Department of Local Government and Communities, Budget Paper 2 (Vol 2), p.776.

¹⁶ Department of Local Government and Communities, Budget Paper 2 (Vol 2), p.777.

¹⁷ Department of Local Government and Communities, Budget Paper 2 (Vol 2), p.777