



WACOSS

Western Australian
Council of Social Service Inc

*Ways to make
a difference*

Budget Area 5: Regional Services

About this Issue

One of the largest emerging issues in The Council’s regional consultations last year was the scope and rate of social, demographic and economic change in regional communities affected by rapid development, rapid population growth, and a transient workforce. Regional centres affected by the rapid development and the resources boom (both those in the northwest now hosting a fly-in fly-out workforce, and those in the southwest that have become the home base for the FIFO workforce) are facing a host of issues including housing affordability, infrastructure stress, cost of living pressures, and social cohesion.

The need for sustainable community services surfaced as a common theme across the whole state. Two priorities were clearly apparent – the need for the planning and resourcing of community services to respond to changing population size, demographics and need (including the cost of delivering services especially outreach in regional areas); and the opportunity for better service delivery coordination, planning and cross-referral through increasing the capacity of regional community service networks.

The Council’s 2013-14 Pre-Budget Submission

Outcome sought:	Community services can adequately cope with surging demand for support and the needs of growing and changing populations and strong regional community networks are established to play an active role in regional development and service planning and delivery	\$15m
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Proposed strategies
A model that ensures community services can respond to population need
Well-resourced regional community services networks
Addressing the social impact of mining on regional towns
A greater allocation of Royalties for Regions funding towards community services
Support for farmers

Relevant Budget Portfolio(s)

Lead government agencies:	Department for Child Protection, Department of Housing, and Department of Regional Development & Lands, Royalties for Regions
Other government agencies:	Regional Development Council, Regional Development Commissions, Local Government Authorities, Department for Communities & Local Government, Mental Health Commission, Disability Services Commission, Department for Workforce Development

Regional Services: The 2013-14 Budget in Summary

The capacity to meet the growing service needs in regional areas remains a major challenge, in the context of population increases, and much higher costs for goods and services in regional areas.

The focus of regional spending continues to be through Royalties for Regions, which has had a policy shift to take on areas of traditional government spending, including the Department for Regional Development, the Regional Development Commissions and remote area essential services provision.

Initiatives at a Glance

Notable announcements in the 2013-14 State Budget:

- ✦ This year's Royalties for Regions initiatives are in the key areas of agriculture, regional health, education, tourism, community support services, business development and transport.¹
- ✦ With the completion of a detailed feasibility and option report on a residential aged care facility in Carnarvon and planning for the preferred option complete, the focus will turn to securing funding and a service provider. In addition, independent living units for seniors and retirees in all regional communities are a priority and the Commission will work with local governments to find ways to improve the quality and quantity of appropriate accommodation.²

Key Observations/Implications

1. Lack of investment in affordable housing

The Council supports measures to identify needs and coordinate infrastructure development that will generate employment, investment and sustainable economic and social growth in regional areas. However, the Council is concerned about the lack of investment in the 2013-14 Budget for increased development of affordable housing to cope with housing shortages and population growth. Economic and social growth needs to correlate with increased and affordable housing stock otherwise, increased growth will continue to displace people living on the margins.

There is some suggestion that eligibility for keyworker housing may be expanded beyond public sector workers to other industries, which may create an opportunity to access more housing for NGO workers. WACOSS will investigate this and advise the sector in due course.

2. Little funding for regional community services

Despite the shift of RfR funding from infrastructure funding towards supporting economic and social growth, there appears to be little funding to support community services. It further appears from the budget papers that the community services sector is not included or specifically named as participants in regional development planning initiatives as called for in previous WACOSS Pre-Budget Submissions.

¹ 2013-14 Budget Paper 3, Ch. 7 Royalties for Regions (p.217)

² 2013-14 Budget Paper 2, V1, Royalties for Regions (p.184)