

# Turning the Tide: The “Trickle-Up” Effect

## WACOSS Pre-Budget Submission to the State Government 2005 / 06



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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Western Australian Council of Social Service (WACOSS) 2005/2006 Pre-Budget Submission "Turning the Tide: The Trickle-Up Effect" outlines the Western Australian Non-Government Human Services Sector (NGHSS) assessment of where social resources and support are most urgently needed by the people of our State.

The NGHSS is experiencing a crisis in terms of their endeavors to address increasing client need both in the number of clients and the complexity of their problems. While the NGHSS wishes to improve the effectiveness of its services and the efficiency with which they are offered the current crisis, described by one agency as "*bleeding at the seams*", can only be addressed sustainably through demand reduction in the medium-to-long term. Investment in the short-term is required to achieve an overall reduction in the demand for services.

The recommendations throughout this document carry two themes in this area:

- Firstly, remove current inefficiencies through "catch-up" or "top-up" funding to existing NGHSS' to improve capacity thus reducing "social fall-out" in other areas.
- Secondly, invest in better coordination and linkages within the NGHSS and between the NGHSS and Government service providers.

A Government prepared to invest now in resolving this crisis will prevent "blow-out" in social expenditure both in their term and beyond. WACOSS calls for a "trickle-up" effect through sufficient social expenditure to "bounce" people out of disadvantage into maximum participation within the Western Australian community, resulting in decreased demand for social services.

Our priority areas of Children, Poverty and Non-Government Human Services Sector Viability require leadership at the highest level and therefore call on the Premier to provide coordination with the support from across Government.

We put forward the following recommendations for Government commitment in 2005/06 with a view to ongoing commitment in following years:

## Priority Areas:

- **Children's Issues:**

### **Establishment of a Children's Commissioner**

That the State Government funds the establishment of an independent Office of the Children's Commissioner who reports to Parliament and has broad ranging powers including responsibility for:

- Promoting children's interests and rights across government departments and the community;
- Instigating and undertaking investigations in regard to specific issues or incidents, including the capacity to compel witnesses; and
- Researching issues relating to the interests and rights of children.

### **Systemic Information Collection on the Status of Children**

That the State Government commission an independent non-government organization to gather and analyse information across the WA Government on children's issues and that a report (such as the Women's Report Card) is published annually on the state of children in WA.

### **Child Protection Strategy**

That the State Government develop a whole-of-government strategy for the protection of children in Western Australia.

### **Child Protection Community Forum**

That the State Government convene a *Community Forum on Child Protection* in which a broad range of perspectives are represented including representatives from the community as well as a variety of government and non-government organisations and groups.

### **Capacity Building in relation to Child Protection**

That the State Government:

- Undertake a review of existing training in child protection and well-being and that training be made available to government and non-government agencies who have direct and/or indirect contact with children
- Undertake an assessment of existing capacity building strategies aimed at increasing: children's ability to understand and respond to child protection issues; and parents/caregivers ability to respond to and protect children. Further, that funds are committed to appropriate capacity building initiatives in areas of need.

### **Children in Care**

- That the State Government commit funds to clear the backlog of children in care waiting for counselling and therapeutic services.
- That the State Government undertake an investigation of the real cost of providing out of home care and that appropriate levels of funding are provided (cost: \$60,000 one off payment).
- That the State Government investigate good practice models for providing intensive support to children with complex care needs.

### **Grandparent and other Relative Foster Carers**

Where Grandparents and other relatives become the primary care-givers (either by Departmental arrangement, order or agreement due to care and protection issues identified by the Department, community and/or family) that they are provided with financial support commensurate with that provided to non-familial foster care placements.

### **Maintenance of Family Centres and Community Based Child Care Centres**

That the State Government provides adequate resources to undertake much needed infrastructure maintenance of state owned premises operated as Family Centres and Community Based Child Care Centres.

### **Parenting Services**

That a strategic planned approach is developed in relation to parenting services, and in particular:

- That the State Government funds ten local services for men in parenting and other family roles.
- That the State Government funds four multidisciplinary early childhood and parenting demonstration services in the metropolitan area for children from birth to school entry age.
- That the State Government commits funds to ensure better linkages between parenting services and other key agencies.

### **Support for Children of Refugees and Asylum Seekers**

That the State Government commit funds to provide additional services and support to children of refugees and asylum seekers in schools.

- **Poverty Issues:**

**State Anti-Poverty Strategy**

WACOSS recommends that the Government adopt a State Anti-poverty strategy that has the capacity to increase the knowledgebase of the extent and experience of poverty in Western Australia and to make committed steps towards its eradication.

**Poverty Proofing Government Policies and Programs**

As a priority, the State Government, through extensive consultation with relevant stakeholders, should commit to establishing and implementing a Poverty Proofing program. The aim of this program should be to ensure that all Government Policies and Programs are assessed at the design stage to determine the likely impact that they will have on poverty and inequality in the community. If a policy or program is recognised as potentially socially detrimental to society in this way, it should be modified prior to approval.

**Micro Enterprise and Micro Financing**

The State Government, as part of the State Anti-Poverty Strategy, establishes and implements micro finance and micro enterprise opportunities for low income and disadvantaged individuals.

**State Taxes and Charges**

That all State taxes and charges be frozen at their current levels. This should include all household fees and charges such as: Transperth fares; electricity tariffs; Water Corporation charges for water; sewerage and drainage; motor vehicle registrations; compulsory third party insurance; and drivers licence fees.

**State Concessions**

That a full review of State concessions is undertaken immediately to examine the accessibility, equity and adequacy of concessions both within Western Australia and their consistency with other States.

- **Non-Government Human Services Sector Viability Issues:**

**Wage Increase to achieve Wage Parity and address the Workforce Crisis**

The State Government, in partnership with the NGHSS immediately review the adequacy of base funding and develop a plan to address wage inadequacy and the current workforce crisis in the NGHSS.

**Adjustment to Base Funding Levels**

That the State Government provide a “catch-up” factor to all State funding for the NGHSS at between 3% and 25% depending on evidenced need.

**Sector Development**

The State Government commit to adequate funding of a sector development model for the NGHSS to be determined by the NGHSS Industry Plan Working Group.

**Peak Membership Fees**

The Department for Community Development continue to provide the “Membership Allowance” to all funded agencies for the purposes of membership fees or service purchasing from their peak representative body.

**Sector Engagement**

The State Government, in partnership with the NGHSS develop an agreed and consistent approach to facilitate the engagement of sector organisations in consultative and participative processes.

## Summary of Other Recommendations:

- **Sustainability:** the establishment of an independent and well resourced Sustainability Commission.
- **Citizenship and Multicultural Interests:** including; the development of racial and religious vilification legislation; dedicated efforts to reduce racial and religious vilification; and the establishment of a State based interpreting service.
- **Essential Services:** including; the establishment of a utility advocacy scheme and a utility assistance scheme; review of Community Service Obligation payments; amendment of legislation to allow waiver of late payment fees for water accounts for low income earners; and the introduction of Retrofit programs.
- **Transport:** including; an increase in the numbers of fully accessible buses; freezing of transport concessions; free CAT bus services in other urban centers such as Joondalup and Midland; and the development of public transport services along growth corridors.
- **Regional Development:** including; an increase and development of mental health services in regional areas; addressing homelessness in regional communities; and the development of regional workforces.
- **Consumer and Employment Protection:** including; the establishment of a consumer research and advocacy centre; regulation of tenant databases; action on the review of the Residential Tenancies Act 1987; abolition of private rental letting fees; development of legislative protection for boarders and lodgers; and establishment of local tenancy advice services
- **Indigenous Affairs:** including the establishment and development of services capable of delivering appropriate service to Indigenous peoples.
- **Attorney General:** including an increase in resources to Community Legal Services; and repealing of mandatory sentencing legislation
- **Health:** including; increased funding for mental health services; implementation of Community Options 100 project; development of a funding formula for the Independent Living Program; Increased resources to the Home and Community Care program; improvement of oral health services; additional funding and resources for alcohol and drug services; resource allocation to initiatives to address gaps in alcohol and drug services for Indigenous people; commitment to the reduction of Hepatitis C and Blood Borne Virus transmission rates; expansion of services that are able to assist co-occurring mental health and alcohol or other drug issues, and improvement of integration of services that respond to clients with complex and multiple problems
- **Justice and Community Safety:** including; addressing senior's fear of crime through assisting them to feel safer; and providing adequate accommodation for people exiting the justice system in an effort to reduce recidivism.
- **Planning and Infrastructure:** including; social and affordable housing provisions in redevelopments; and the establishment of a comprehensive definition of 'affordable' to be applied in housing planning mechanisms and processes.
- **Education and Training:** including; better training for the Community Housing Sector, training alternatives in the Aged and Community Care Sector, and additional allocation of resources to education and training providers for young people

- **Employment:** including; commitment to address financial disadvantage amongst employed people; and greater support for mature age unemployed people.
- **Community Development:**
  - **Homelessness:** including; increase in the funding for existing Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) services; application of the State Indexation Policy to SAAP agencies; continuation of funding for SAAP services funded under the State Homelessness Strategy; and an increase in funding available through SAAP.
  - **Domestic and Family Violence:** including; the establishment and implementation of a rural and remote intensive support program; the provision of a state-wide voice on domestic and family violence in WA; the provision of access and equity entitlements for workers in regional areas; provision of intensive counselling support for children who are witnesses of domestic and family violence; the funding of a coordinator for the Domestic Violence Advocacy Service; the establishment of community education programs in primary and high schools; and the development of public awareness campaigns on link between animal cruelty and domestic and family violence.
  - **Financial and Material Assistance:** a review of the policies of the Family Crisis Program and commitment to increased funding allocations to this program.
  - **Emergency Relief:** including; the establishment of a state-wide network of Emergency Relief providers; and greater training opportunities for Emergency Relief workers.
  - **Financial Counselling:** including; increased funding to financial counselling services; and increased resources to services.
- **Women's Interests:** including; the development of indicators and benchmarks to measure and address the problem of poverty amongst women; amendment of employment legislation to cater for the needs of women; education and training assistance for pregnant girls and teenage mothers; and increased funding for appropriate housing options for women.
- **Youth:** including; the development and implementation of programs to address the needs of regional, rural and remote youth; the development of appropriate options for education and training; reform of public housing policies relating to young people; and greater allocation of resources to facilitate interests of young people being heard in decision making processes.
- **Disability Services:** including; additional resource allocation to residential accommodation support; increase availability of respite, family and in-home support; provide appropriate alternatives for young people in nursing homes, establishment of a day support program; increase resources allocated to therapy and equipment; and capacity building in the Disability Services Sector.
- **Housing and Works:** including; increased funding to social housing; commitment to securing additional funding for social housing from the Commonwealth; commitment to supporting the Community Housing Strategic Plan 2003-2008; the development of affordable housing options through community housing; establishment of a plan of action to address socially excluded community housing tenants; the development of regional housing strategies; and the development of culturally appropriate housing for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders.
- **Racing and Gaming:** including; the commitment to not allowing poker machines into WA; and the allocation of resources to undertake research into problem gambling in Australia.

WACOSS prepares this annual submission to give voice to the issues faced by Western Australians living in poverty or suffering disadvantage. To this end, WACOSS seeks to



ensure that the State Government is aware of the diverse range of the social needs of the community. Most importantly, this Pre-Budget Submission ensures that all political parties are well apprised of the views of the community services sector.

As with previous pre-budget submissions, in framing this document WACOSS seeks from the State Government the following crucial elements:

**Vision** that is focused on enhancing social equity and quality of life through the simultaneous pursuit of sustainable economic development, full employment, a fair distribution of the wealth of this State, and justice for disadvantaged people;

**Values** that enhance the dignity and worth of all Western Australians, promote community participation and development, and place the common good above individual or sectoral interests;

**Strategies** that based on the equitable interdependence of economic, social and environmental factors; and

**Policies** that reject unacceptably high levels of poverty and inequality, and give highest priority to raising the living standards of low income and disadvantaged people.

These are the basics, the building blocks that are fundamental to a policy package that seeks to create an inclusive, sustainable future that promotes equity between all West Australians.

# Children

The often quoted line from the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CROC) that *all children, no matter where they live deserve to live in dignity and to be treated according to their best interests*, is a call to all members of the community to share responsibility for ensuring that the needs and rights of children are met. In particular, the CROC calls on families, caregivers and governments to uphold three fundamental rights:

- *The right to play and have an adequate standard of living, health care, education and access to early years services;*
- *The right to protection from abuse, neglect, exploitation and discrimination;*
- *The right to express their view about things that affect them and to participate in communities, programs and services for children.*<sup>1</sup>

It is widely documented and acknowledged that:

*The more we reduce the negative impacts in children's lives, the more the opportunities for healthy development increase.*<sup>2</sup>

Despite this, a significant number of children in Western Australia continue to experience poor social and economic outcomes. For example:

- It is estimated that the percentage of children living in poverty is between 13% and 17%.<sup>3</sup>
- Children of asylum seekers continue to be held in detention centres.
- In relation to child protection issues:
  - The number of children entering care is increasing every year - the number of children in out of home care in WA rose by 36% during the period 1998-2001.<sup>4</sup>
  - Services for families in need of assistance are fragmented and uncoordinated and inter-agency collaboration is often absent and/or ineffective.<sup>5</sup>
  - Aboriginal children are grossly over represented in the child protection system - in 2001-02 their rates of substantiation in WA were 8 times higher than for other children.<sup>6</sup>
  - Families who are unable to care for their children are suffering from a myriad of problems including low socio-economic status; unemployment; residential instability; crowded dwellings; domestic violence; alcohol and substance abuse; and psychiatric disability.<sup>7</sup> Child protection must therefore be embedded in a comprehensive system of societal and government support for families, children and young people.<sup>8</sup>
- In relation to children's services (long day care, family day care and out of school hours care), agencies continue to work under increasing pressure. In the period between 2001-02 and 2002-03 financial years, there was a 69% increase in the number of people seeking but not receiving services. To cope with this demand, agencies are responding in a number of ways including: the extension of waiting lists; increased numbers of referrals; and closer targeting of services.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>1</sup> United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child (1989)

<sup>2</sup> NIFTeY (2004) *A Vision for Children in Western Australia*, Perth

<sup>3</sup> Harries, M., Harris, T., Diamond, S. and Mackenzie, G. (2004) *Caring Well-Protecting Well: Investing in systemic responses to protect children in WA*, The Ministerial Advisory Council on Child Protection Western Australia, Perth, p 11

<sup>4</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2003), *Australia's Welfare 2003*, Canberra, p 258

<sup>5</sup> Harries, M., Harris, T., Diamond, S. and Mackenzie, G. (2004), *Ibid*, p 17

<sup>6</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2003), *ibid*, p 260

<sup>7</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2003), *ibid*, p 270

<sup>8</sup> Harries, M., Harris, T., Diamond, S. and Mackenzie, G. (2004), *Ibid*, p 17

<sup>9</sup> Australian Council of Social Service and WA Council of Social Service (2004) *Australians Living on the Edge 6: Community Sector Confidence Survey, Western Australian survey results*, Perth

Children's issues cut across the full range of government services with every major policy decision impacting on children. WACOSS has therefore consistently argued for a coordinated whole-of-government approach to children's issues and we are pleased at the Government's commitment to this in its Children's First Strategy:

*Children First is a comprehensive whole of government approach to supporting children, families and communities.<sup>10</sup>*

Recommendations in this Pre-Budget Submission regarding children's issues have been separated out as one of WACOSS' three whole-of-government priorities. This gives children's issues the status they deserve and emphasises the importance of the Premier taking leadership in this crucial area. Having said this, it is acknowledged that a number of recommendations fall directly within the responsibility of the Minister for Community Development.

The Labor State Government has shown a commitment to improving the status and well-being of children through strategies such as the Children's First Strategy and the Early Years Strategy. However, a number of issues require further attention; details of these are outlined below. WACOSS calls on the government to demonstrate its commitment and leadership in relation to children through the appropriate allocation of funds to address the following issues.

## **Establishment of a Children's Commissioner**

**Portfolio area:** The Premier

### **Recommendation:**

That the State Government funds the establishment of an independent Office of the Children's Commissioner who reports to Parliament and has broad ranging powers including responsibility for:

- Promoting children's interests and rights across government departments and the community;
- Instigating and undertaking investigations in regard to specific issues or incidents, including the capacity to compel witnesses; and
- Researching issues relating to the interests and rights of children.

### **Rationale:**

*Children are not the people of tomorrow, but people today. They are entitled to be taken seriously. They have a right to be treated by adults with courtesy and respect, as equals (Janusz Korczak 1879–1942).<sup>11</sup>*

*When the Australian government ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CROC), it formally recognised and made a commitment to the protection and promotion of children's rights in Australia. However, as indicated by the Youth Affairs Council of Victoria, the protection of children's rights is not the sole domain of the Commonwealth and State governments have a vital role to play in ensuring these rights are upheld and given effect at a State level.<sup>12</sup> This has been recognised by a number of State governments with Children's Commissions existing in Queensland, New South Wales and Tasmania. The establishment of a Children's Commission is important for a number of reasons, not least of which is that it*

<sup>10</sup> The Government of Western Australia, *Western Australia's Children First Strategy*, Department of the Premier and Cabinet, Perth

<sup>11</sup> Janusz Korczak was a paediatrician, writer and educator who wrote in Polish; died anonymously in 1942 along with millions of others. Had it not been for him the UN would not have produced the only UN human rights treaty to be signed by every world government (except the United States and Somalia), the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

<sup>12</sup> Youth Affairs Council of Victoria (2001) *Are you listening to us? The case for a Victorian Children and Young People's Commission*, Victoria

*provides a mechanism for the promotion and protection of children's rights, interests and well-being at a systemic level.*

Unfortunately, the community often responds to children from a position of fear and mistrust rather than seeing their potential and recognising that we all share responsibility for their wellbeing. The establishment of a Children's Commissioner will play a vital role in reshaping the community's attitudes to children.

## **Systemic Information Collection on the Status of Children**

**Portfolio area:** The Premier

### **Recommendation:**

That the State Government commission an independent non-government organization to gather and analyse information across the WA Government on children's issues and that a report (such as the Women's Report Card) is published annually on the state of children in WA.

### **Rationale:**

There is a critical need to bring together information from across the WA government on children's issues to assist the community to assess how children are faring in WA. Such information will assist in building an accurate picture of children's needs and the extent to which such needs are being met. Information that is accurately and systematically collected will assist in the creation of targets to be met and benchmarks for determining progress. Information collected by a non-government organisation will be seen both as independent and credible.

**Cost:** \$200,000

## **Child Protection Strategy**

**Portfolio area:** The Premier in partnership with the Minister for Community Development

### **Recommendation:**

That the State Government develop a whole-of-government strategy for the protection of children in Western Australia.

### **Rationale:**

As indicated in a recent report commissioned by the Ministerial Advisory Council on child protection, *fundamental structural and organisational reforms*<sup>13</sup> in the child protection system are required. Further, the report states that there is a:

*need for a comprehensive strategy of child protection [that] would need to be located in the promotion of good conditions for all children's health, wellbeing and development with specific abuse prevention strategies and intervention for those who are abused.*<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Harries, M., Harris, T., Diamond, S. and Mackenzie, G. (2004), Ibid, p 17

<sup>14</sup> Harries, M., Harris, T., Diamond, S. and Mackenzie, G. (2004), Ibid, p 14

The development of such a strategy would need to be informed by relevant statutory bodies, the proposed Children's Commissioner and the Community Forum referred to in other recommendations. In addition, the importance of a joined-up approach is recognised as being important as it:

*... identifies the responsibility of government, alongside the corporate sector, non-government organizations and communities, in developing the necessary environment (values, policy, engagement with families and children) ...*<sup>15</sup>

**Cost:** \$250,000

## **Child Protection Community Forum**

**Portfolio area:** The Premier in partnership with the Minister for Community Development

### **Recommendation:**

That the State Government convene a *Community Forum on Child Protection* in which a broad range of perspectives are represented including representatives from the community as well as a variety of government and non-government organisations and groups.

### **Rationale:**

Given the ongoing debate in the community on such things as mandatory reporting and concerns, by some, regarding the effectiveness of the current system of child protection in WA, it is essential that the community have an opportunity for a broad ranging discussion on this topic, with a view to building consensus. The aim of the Forum would be to have an open discussion on the issue of child protection and would result in recommendations to Government on how child protection issues ought to be progressed in WA. There is no doubt that child protection is most effectively dealt with when the community feels involved and meaningfully participates in it. Recommendations arising from such an event would help to engender trust in how children are assisted and protected. Unless the community can have confidence in the State's approach to child protection, an unhelpful, divisive debate will continue.

## **Capacity Building in relation to Child Protection**

**Portfolio area:** The Premier in partnership with the Minister for Community Development

### **Recommendation:**

That the State Government:

- Undertake a review of existing training in child protection and well-being and that training be made available to government and non-government agencies who have direct and/or indirect contact with children
- Undertake an assessment of existing capacity building strategies aimed at increasing: children's ability to understand and respond to child protection issues; and parents/caregivers ability to respond to and protect children. Further, that funds are committed to appropriate capacity building initiatives in areas of need.

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<sup>15</sup> Harries, M., Harris, T., Diamond, S. and Mackenzie, G. (2004), *Ibid*, p 14

**Rationale:**

There is currently a lack of consistency in the **training available to agencies**, particularly in the education system and the child care sector. It is critically important that all agencies delivering services for the direct and/or indirect benefit of children, parents/caregivers and/or supporters, have access to high quality training regarding child protection and well-being issues.

**Cost:** \$200,000

Child protection issues are the subject of significant community debate and discussion and it is critical that **children have the necessary knowledge and resources to respond to child protection issues**, particularly in a cyberspace context. Alongside this, parents/caregivers and supporters need to be provided with support to enhance their capacity to respond to and protect children.

**Cost:** \$200,000

## Children in Care

**Portfolio area:** The Minister for Community Development

**Recommendation:**

That the State Government commit funds to clear the backlog of children in care waiting for counselling and therapeutic services.

**Rationale:**

Approximately one third of children in care are in need of specialist intervention. However, at least half of these children are currently not receiving vital **counselling and therapeutic services**. It is critical that these children are provided with these services and that the backlog is addressed.

**Cost:** \$200,000

**Recommendation:**

That the State Government undertake an investigation of the real cost of providing out of home care and that appropriate levels of funding are provided (cost: \$60,000 one off payment).

That the State Government investigate good practice models for providing intensive support to children with complex care needs.

## Grandparent and other Relative Foster Carers

**Portfolio area:** Minister for Community Development

**Recommendation:**

Where Grandparents and other relatives become the primary care-givers (either by Departmental arrangement, order or agreement due to care and protection issues identified by the Department, community and/or family) that they are provided with

financial support commensurate with that provided to non-familial foster care placements.

**Rationale:**

Grandparents and other relatives are increasingly playing a vital role in caring for children as a result of care and protection issues, particularly in Indigenous families. While the State has discretion to pay grandparents the foster-carer allowance, this does not always occur. In addition, grandparents providing care are particularly disadvantaged due to reduced earning capacity in the medium to long term as well as having poorer health. This is of particular concern in Indigenous communities who continue to have significantly poorer social and economic outcomes.

**Cost:** \$3,130,920

## **Maintenance of Family Centres and Community Based Child Care Centres**

**Portfolio area:** Minister for Community Development

**Recommendation:**

That the State Government provides adequate resources to undertake much needed infrastructure maintenance of state owned premises operated as Family Centres and Community Based Child Care Centres.

**Rationale:**

In 2002 the Auditor General undertook an evaluation of the asset effectiveness of Family Centres.<sup>16</sup> As part of this study, the suitability of Family Centres was rated by centre management, staff and regular users based on a number of criteria including: their internal and external liveability; their safety and security; their physical condition; and the need for maintenance to keep the asset in a reasonable condition. The assessment for these criteria varied with an average rating of criteria only being met to a *moderate extent*. Further, WACOSS has received consistent feedback from the sector about the critical need for maintenance upgrades for Family Centres and Child Care Centres.

**Cost:** \$1,000,000 one off payment

## **Parenting Services**

**Portfolio area:** Minister for Community Development

**Recommendation:**

That a strategic planned approach is developed in relation to parenting services, and in particular:

- That the State Government funds ten local services for men in parenting and other family roles.
- That the State Government funds four multidisciplinary early childhood and parenting demonstration services in the metropolitan area for children from birth to school entry age.
- That the State Government commits funds to ensure better linkages between parenting services and other key agencies.

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<sup>16</sup> Auditor General (2002) *Second Public Sector Performance Report 2002: Report No. 8*, Perth

**Rationale:**

In 2002, the Department for Community Development awarded Meerilinga and Relationships Australia the contract for Mensplace, a Statewide men's resource centre to assist groups, agencies and individuals to develop and deliver **services for men in fathering and other family roles**. This is the first Statewide resource for men in their role as fathers in Western Australia. The need for local services in this area has been identified through a range of mechanisms including a needs analysis undertaken by Mensplace and through the Men's Forum held in May 2004, which was attended by over 200 government and non-government participants with strong representation from Indigenous and remote participants.

**Cost:** \$750,000

As indicated in NIFTeY's Vision for Children there is a large body of evidence about the benefits of high quality early childhood health, care and education services. Benefits include: significantly improved later school performance; reduced numbers of children in special educational programs; increased employment opportunities, reduced criminal offending; and improved health outcomes in adulthood.<sup>17</sup> It is therefore critical that our community has access to high quality **multidisciplinary early years services** that are accessible, affordable and responsive to the needs of families with young children, regardless of their location or the child's individual requirements. Such services could be located in existing facilities (for example, kindergartens) that could be modified.

**Cost:** \$880,000

The complex task of parenting is impacted on by a number of factors including post-natal depression and substance abuse. Issues such as these can have a detrimental effect on the health and wellbeing of children in our State. It is therefore critical that parents are supported and linked into appropriate services in mental health, community health, health, and drug and alcohol services.

**Cost:** \$300,000 one off payment

## **Support for Children of Refugees and Asylum Seekers**

**Portfolio area:** The Premier

**Recommendation:**

That the State Government commit funds to provide additional services and support to children of refugees and asylum seekers in schools.

**Rationale:**

Children who have arrived in Australia either as asylum seekers or as refugees have a unique set of social and emotional needs. This needs to be recognised through funding of appropriate support services.

**Cost:** \$150,000

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<sup>17</sup> National Investment for the Early Years (2004) *A Vision for Children in Western Australia*, Perth



# Poverty

*Although Australia by world standards is a wealthy country the level of poverty in our community is increasing and becoming increasingly entrenched. The [Senate Community Affairs Reference] committee is compelled to this view after hearing the daily experiences of Australians living in poverty – from pensioners who go to bed early because they cannot afford heating and students slipping into prostitution to support their studies.<sup>18</sup>*

Increasing levels of poverty and financial hardship in Western Australia cannot be ignored. To illustrate, the number of people seeking assistance from social services has increased from 500,310 in 2000-01 to 531,299 in 2001-2002<sup>19</sup>. This is an increase of over 30,000 people in one year and represents an increase of 6%. This level of growth is both socially and economically unsustainable and intolerable.

In May 1996, as part of the International Year for the Eradication of Poverty, the Government of Western Australia established a Poverty Taskforce, consisting of 20 government and non-government agencies. A primary aim of the Taskforce was to develop strategies to strengthen responses to poverty in Western Australia, focussing on long term strategies<sup>20</sup>. Eight years on, the extent of poverty in Western Australia has increased substantially and is becoming more entrenched and more complex for those who experience it. Since the completion of the report resulting from the Taskforce *Community Choices – Individual Lives* the State Government has neglected its responsibility and its promise to commit the necessary resources to long term strategies to fight poverty in Western Australia.

Poverty does not just affect those who directly experience it but rather it affects the whole community. Inequality between rich and poor affects the social cohesion of society and the ability for Western Australia to progress as a state. Poverty and financial hardship necessarily means that there is a substantial need for Government to fund services and programs to provide crisis and short term assistance to those affected as well as increasing allocations to other areas of social spending such as health and crime. If there were fewer people experiencing poverty, fewer resources would need to be allocated to reduce the burden placed on social services and other government and non-government agencies and thus funding could be directed elsewhere.

It is not appropriate for the Western Australian Government to pass the buck to the Commonwealth to deal with the issues of poverty and related symptoms. The eradication and amelioration of the effects of poverty will take commitment from government across all levels and so regardless of whether the Commonwealth accepts its responsibility in this area the State cannot afford to be apathetic.

WACOSS recommends that Government take on the commitment to make dedicated efforts toward eradicating poverty in our community as well as address the effects that poverty has on individuals and families through amelioration.

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<sup>18</sup> Community Affairs References Committee (2004) *A Hand Up Not a Hand Out: Renewing the Fight Against Poverty*, Senate Printing Unit Parliament House, Canberra p xxv.

<sup>19</sup> WA Council of Social Service (2003) *WACOSS Submission to the Senate Community Affairs Inquiry into Poverty and Financial Hardship in Australia*, Perth, p 8

<sup>20</sup> International Year for the Eradication of Poverty (1996) Taskforce (1998) *Community Choices: Individual Lives*. Department of Family and Children's Services; Perth. Available at: <http://www.fcs.wa.gov.au/content/miscellaneous/edit2.pdf>

# State Anti-Poverty Strategy

**Portfolio area:** The Premier

## **Recommendation:**

WACOSS recommends that the Government adopt a State Anti-poverty strategy that has the capacity to increase the knowledgebase of the extent and experience of poverty in Western Australia and to make committed steps towards its eradication.

The objectives of the strategy should incorporate:

- Facilitating the participation of individuals in the community through ensuring access to employment, resources, rights, goods and services;
- Preventing the risks of exclusion associated with poverty and financial hardship;
- Providing dedicated assistance to vulnerable members of the community; and
- Mobilising the assistance of all stakeholders.

Key features should include:

- An agreed definition of poverty that reflects the position of Western Australia recognising its geographical vastness and the complexity and uniqueness of issues in relation to poverty;
- Further research into the current extent and experience of poverty in Western Australia;
- An analysis of the causes of poverty in Western Australia and identification of the most vulnerable groups in the community at risk of poverty;
- The setting of targets, objectives, and actions for key areas including: education, employment, health and housing;
- The development of key principles to engage other levels of Government including the Commonwealth. The strategy should also be developed to facilitate the participation of the non-government sector, business sector and the wider community;
- The establishment of structures by which the strategy would be implemented; and
- Ongoing evaluation of the effectiveness and achievements of the Strategy.

## **Rationale:**

A State Anti-Poverty Strategy necessarily adopts a long-term, cross-sectoral outlook in addressing social problems in our community - something that has been sorely missed in the range of strategies aimed at relieving poverty in Western Australia to date. The Anti-Poverty Strategy adopted in Ireland has resulted in marked reductions in the level of poverty in the country and has been widely recognised as a precedent in whole-of-government approaches to disadvantage.<sup>21</sup> Following the success of this strategy, a number of European countries have adopted similar programs.

Recently, following the release of the Community Affairs Reference Committee report into poverty and financial hardship in Australia, Mark Latham wrote to all States and Territories asking for their support in addressing poverty through a national strategy. In response to this, the current premier replied by offering his government's complete support and commitment to this strategy.

WACOSS believes that regardless of the outcome of the Federal Election, the Western Australian Government should commit to establishing an Anti-Poverty Strategy at a State Level. While the Commonwealth is responsible for a number of key issues in addressing poverty, there remain many issues of relevance for the State to address. Through Western Australia leading the way in adopting such a strategy, it will also send

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<sup>21</sup> See for example, Johnston, H. (2003) The Irish Approach to Combating Poverty. Speech available at: <http://www.vinnies.org.au/index.cfm?state=wa&section=socialj> 2003

a strong message to the Commonwealth regarding the imperative for the establishment of a National commitment to addressing poverty.

WACOSS believes that while this recommendation requires significant financial commitment by Government, long-term social and economic benefits will greatly outweigh the initial expenditure. In awareness of the ageing population and growing numbers of individuals and families experiencing poverty, this strategy would facilitate capacity building within the community and allow more individuals to contribute economically to the State and to the country in the future.

## **Poverty Proofing Government Policies and Programs**

**Portfolio area:** The Premier

### **Recommendation:**

As a priority, the State Government, through extensive consultation with relevant stakeholders, should commit to establishing and implementing a Poverty Proofing program. The aim of this program should be to ensure that all Government Policies and Programs are assessed at the design stage to determine the likely impact that they will have on poverty and inequality in the community. If a policy or program is recognised as potentially socially detrimental to society in this way, it should be modified prior to approval.

### **Rationale:**

'Poverty Proofing' has been implemented in a number of countries in the European Union. In Ireland, the 'Poverty Proofing' program has been hailed as one of the most significant developments under the Anti Poverty strategy to date. Such programs make it essential for government departments, local authorities and state organisations to assess all policies and programmes. The implementation of such a program in Western Australia will have marked benefits in reducing negative social impacts from State policies and programs.

## **Micro Enterprise and Micro Financing**

**Portfolio area:** The Premier

### **Recommendation:**

The State Government, as part of the State Anti-Poverty Strategy, establishes and implements micro finance and micro enterprise opportunities for low income and disadvantaged individuals.

The strategies should include:

- Financial intermediation including no or low interest loans that can be used for: personal debt management, income generation, education and/or micro enterprise or small business development
- Enterprise development services including basic training for people wishing to establish a micro enterprise, advocacy for individuals establishing and/or operating a micro-enterprise.
- Financial advisory services and assistance including education in: living skills, financial literacy such as financial management and business budgeting, insurance products
- Community education and awareness campaigns
- Assistance to social services responsible for delivering micro finance and micro enterprise to clients

- Ongoing evaluation of and target setting for programs

Such strategies and programs must be developed through extensive consultation with social services as well as client groups that may access the programs.

**Rationale:**

Micro enterprise and micro finance aim to achieve income generation and social inclusion goals of people with multi dimensional barriers to participation in the social and economic life of the community.

In Western Australia, very few opportunities currently exist for people who experience marginalisation to escape poverty, injustice and social exclusion through micro enterprise and micro finance. Micro enterprise and micro finance opportunities are commonly adopted overseas and increasingly in other States in Australia and have shown positive results in assisting disadvantaged and vulnerable people.

Further implementation of these programs in Western Australia is likely to result in multiple benefits through capacity building of disadvantaged and vulnerable people in the community.

## State Taxes and Charges

**Portfolio area:** The Treasurer

**Recommendation:**

That all State taxes and charges be frozen at their current levels. This should include all household fees and charges such as: Transperth fares; electricity tariffs; Water Corporation charges for water; sewerage and drainage; motor vehicle registrations; compulsory third party insurance; and drivers licence fees.

If this is not possible, at a minimum the State should subject all state revenue proposals to a social impact assessment to ascertain whether separately or cumulatively they impact unfairly on low income families and individuals. As a guide, rises in taxes and charges should be kept at or below the Consumer Price Index. Proposals that don't meet this criteria should be modified if it is shown that they adversely affect disadvantaged groups in the community.

**Rationale:**

Over the last few years, the State Government has consecutively increased many State taxes and charges<sup>22</sup>. These tax slugs have had severely detrimental effects on many Western Australian families and provide further barriers for many to break out of episodes of financial hardship and poverty. Given the record State Government Budget surplus of \$793 million and the currently low inflation rates, a further rise in taxes cannot be justified.

## State Concessions

**Portfolio area:** The Treasurer

**Recommendation:**

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<sup>22</sup> With the exception of a freeze on fees and charges in 2004 and a freeze on concession Public Transport fares over the term of the Labour Government.

That a full review of State concessions is undertaken immediately to examine the accessibility, equity and adequacy of concessions both within Western Australia and their consistency with other States.

**Rationale:**

Concessions are an integral part of the range of support needed by disadvantaged individuals and families. At present, the existing system of concessions is in urgent need of review – the variations existing between States and Territories and also the variations in the subsidies available to holders of different types of concession cards are unacceptable.

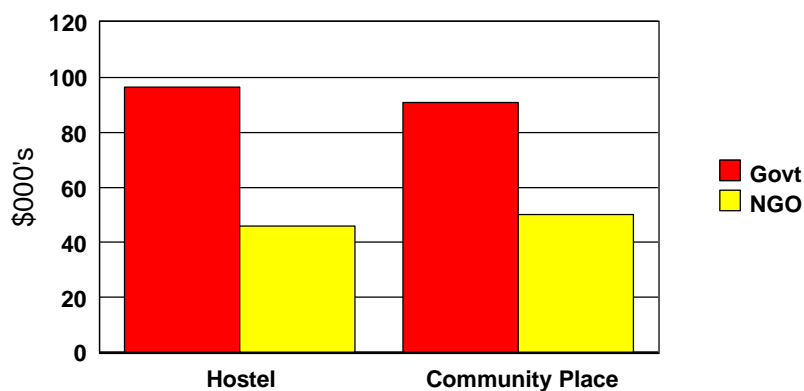
The extent of the variations between different types of concessions can be illustrated through the example of telephone allowances. This allowance subsidizes the cost of renting a home or mobile phone to holders of a Pension Concession Card or a Seniors Card. WACOSS asserts that through limiting this subsidy only to holders of these forms of concession cards, as opposed to holders of a Health Care Card as well, individuals of working age on low incomes face an increased barrier to accessing a telephone. This is likely to have serious implications on the abilities of low-income individuals and families to partake in social and economic activities in the community.

# Viability of the Non-Government Human Services Sector

There are significant financial benefits accruing to the State through purchasing services from the non-government sector and it is in the interests of Government to maintain this capability.

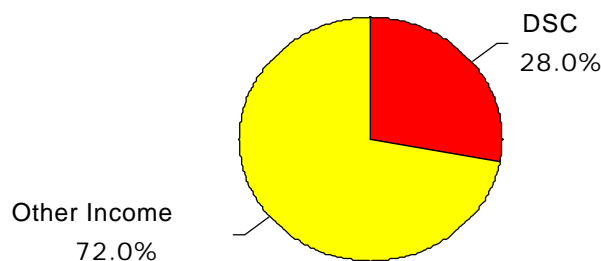
For many years the non-government sector has provided services at a lower output cost than that of Government provided services. For example, in the disability sector, fifty percent of all Government expenditure is directed towards the provision of residential services to people with disabilities in institutional and community settings. This has proved to be substantially more economical through the non-government sector.<sup>23</sup>

**Cost Per Place 2001-2002**



Income generation is a value-adding activity of the sector. Fundraising contributes nearly eleven percent of recurrent income raised by community based organisations and additional funds are also raised from commercial sales and fees for service.<sup>24</sup> The sector contributes significantly to services through income generation. For example, an analysis of non-government agencies in the disability sector, shows that 72% of their income is raised from sources other than the Disability Services Commission (DSC). This is a substantial contribution that if not made, would require serious service cuts or require substantial and additional Government expenditure.

**NGO Income 2001-2002**



<sup>23</sup> Productivity Commission (2002) *Report on Government Services 2002*, Canberra, Table 13A.22

<sup>24</sup> Report Of The Inquiry Into The Definition Of Charities And Related Organisations, June 2001

There are at least 250,000 volunteers in Western Australia, nearly one in every five adults contribute more than 46 million hours of unpaid work for the benefit of our community.<sup>25</sup> This is a significant economic contribution to the State and volunteers are the cornerstone of many services provided by the sector in Western Australia.

The immense capacity and efficiency of the Non-Government Human Services Sector requires urgent assistance and support from the State Government to ensure its viability.

## Wage Increase to achieve Wage Parity and address the Workforce Crisis

**Portfolio area:** The Premier

### Recommendation:

The State Government, in partnership with the NGHSS immediately review the adequacy of base funding and develop a plan to address wage inadequacy and the current workforce crisis in the NGHSS.

### Rationale:

The Non-Government Human Services Sector (NGHSS) is currently experiencing a crisis in relation to recruiting and retaining staff. This crisis relates to the relatively low wages available to workers in this field due to inadequate base level funding from Government. When agencies are able to secure workers they risk losing them to better paid Government positions, thus creating inefficiencies with the NGHSS. This is of particular concern in regard to regional, rural and remote employment.

The inadequacy of wages is most clearly illustrated through examination of wage parity between the Government and the Non-Government Human Services Sector.

Job	Non-Government	Government	Government Worker earns % greater than NGO Worker
Residential Care Worker <sup>26</sup>	\$31,447 to \$37,976 <sup>27</sup>	\$35,952 to \$44,972 <sup>28</sup>	12% - 15%
Executive Director <sup>29</sup>	\$55,032 <sup>30</sup>	\$91,299 <sup>31</sup>	40%
Team Leader <sup>32</sup>	\$46,376 <sup>33</sup>	\$60,378 <sup>34</sup>	23%
Nurse <sup>35</sup>	\$46,538 <sup>36</sup>	\$49,297 <sup>37</sup>	6%

**Table: Comparison of Government and Non-Government sector wages for comparative positions.**

<sup>25</sup> WA Volunteering Compact 2002: [www.premier.wa.gov.au/policies/volunteers.pdf](http://www.premier.wa.gov.au/policies/volunteers.pdf)

<sup>26</sup> The typical worker in the typical Supported Accommodation Assistance Program service would be paid under the Crisis Assistance Supported Housing Industry – Western Australian Award 2002 (CASH Award). When compared to a worker undertaking similar work in the Department of Community Development (DCD), (who by the way provide the funding to the 'typical' women's refuge), considerable inequities are revealed.

<sup>27</sup> Crisis Assistance, Supported Housing Industry – Western Australian Award 2002 (CASH Award) *Annual Rates including 2003 safety net*

<sup>28</sup> Public Service General Agreement (2002) *Schedule 5 General Agreement Salaries*

<sup>29</sup> An Executive Director of a medium to large Non-Government Human Services Organisation compared with a Director of the Department for Community Development.

<sup>30</sup> Social and Community Services Award (2002) as at 20 June 2004 paid at Level 9 (top of the SACS Award)

<sup>31</sup> Public Service General Agreement (2002) *Schedule 5 General Agreement Salaries* at Level 9

<sup>32</sup> A Team Leader of an Education and Training Unit within a NGO and a team Leader within the Department for Community Development.

<sup>33</sup> Social and Community Services Award (2002) as at 20 June 2004 paid at Level 7.1

<sup>34</sup> Public Service General Agreement (2002) *Schedule 5 General Agreement Salaries* at Level 6

<sup>35</sup> A Registered Nurse employed in an Aged Care Non-Government Service and a Registered Nurse employed in the Public Hospital System.

<sup>36</sup> NGHSS Aged Care Level 1 Nurse, Australian Nursing Federation, January 2004

<sup>37</sup> Public Sector Level 1 Nurse, Australian Nursing Federation, January 2004

The lack of wage parity is leading to significant difficulties in employing and retaining staff. Alarming, a recent survey conducted by WACOSS shows that this difficulty, resulting from failures in wage parity is the number one threat to the viability of the NGHSS.<sup>38</sup>

Feedback included:

*We have just employed an Administration worker and she took a pay cut from waitressing to work for us (Community Legal Centre)*

Exacerbating the wage parity issue are significant variations in conditions. Whilst some NGHSS organizations are able to offer salary packaging in an endeavour to address this disparity, the extent of this practice is limited and its administration complex. In the example of a Residential Care Worker given above, a DCD worker would be covered by the Public Service General Agreement (2002) (PSGA 2002) giving them better conditions than their non-government colleague. They typically would work 37.5 hours per week compared to the women's refuge worker on 38 hours per week. The DCD worker would, apart from receiving job security, (not a feature of working in the community sector where the women's refuge relies heavily on government funding), also be entitled to long service leave after 7 years. The women's refuge worker would need to wait 15 years.

There is no doubt that the NGHSS can achieve greater efficiency than the Government sector in providing community and social service. However, the issue of poor wages and conditions places the viability of the sector at risk. The sector cannot enter into Enterprise Bargaining for better wages and conditions until there is a commitment from the State Government to work on these issues.

## Adjustment to Base Funding Levels

**Portfolio area:** The Premier

**Recommendation:**

That the State Government provide a "catch-up" factor to all State funding for the NGHSS at between 3% and 25% depending on evidenced need.

**Rationale:**

The NGHSS welcomed the commitment by the Labor State Government in 2004 to a State Indexation Policy. Whilst the formula for indexation is supported by the sector it is crucial to note that significant concerns remain regarding the inadequacy of base funding provided to the NGHSS. Indexation paid on inadequate base funding will never achieve viability in the NGHSS.

Inadequate base funding results in:

- Wage inadequacy (as outlined in the recommendation above)
- Compliance failure (e.g. payment of increased insurance costs, risk management and occupational health and safety and compulsory superannuation)
- Unmet Demand

All of these issues place significant strain on the NGHSS and pose risks to its viability. A relatively small investment now will prevent collapse of NGHSS agencies in the medium to long term. Loss of efficiency can be prevented through this investment, creating both better and more service provision now and significant savings to Government.

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<sup>38</sup> Sector Viability Telephone Survey conducted September 2004.



The 3% figure is based on research undertaken by the Social Policy Research Centre (UNSW) into the disability services sector<sup>39</sup> and is the best estimate currently available for this area. The 25% figure is based on the States need within the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) III & IV National Evaluation (see recommendation under Department for Community Development – Homelessness) and consultation with the mental health sector (see recommendation under Health section) and the drug and alcohol services sector (see recommendation under Health section.<sup>40</sup>

This is a critical strategy to ensure any future growth is not watered down by service reduction strategies aimed at meeting budgetary shortfall arising from inadequate indexation.

## Sector Development

### Recommendation:

The State Government commit to adequate funding of a sector development model for the NGHSS to be determined by the NGHSS Industry Plan Working Group.

### Rationale:

The second stage of the NGHSS Industry Plan has recently commenced and is focussed on “Building the Capacity of Non-Government Organisations: Sector Reform and Development”.<sup>41</sup> The primary focus of this stage relates to sector development, specifically a) mapping existing resources, b) developing strategies to connect the sector with these resources and c) exploring and negotiating other points of access or new points.

Significant disparity exists between the level of State Government commitment to the small business community<sup>42</sup> and the NGHSS, although arguably the NGHSS contributes more both economically and socially to the State. The Small Business Development Corporation (SBDC) will receive more than \$8.5m in 2005/06<sup>43</sup>, whilst the NGHSS currently has no specific funding allocated for this purpose.<sup>44</sup>

Previously, WACOSS has recommended investigation of a “Trust” model, whereby, the State Government provides a one-off significant investment, which can be added to (both in recurrent and capital contribution) by parties that currently invest in capacity building of the sector.

Sector Development is a key priority to ensure the viability and continued efficiency of the NGHSS and as such, should be adequately resourced by Government. It should be noted that efficiencies could be achieved within the sector, not through funding cuts (the sector is already “cut to the bone”) but through innovative new initiatives. High-level, strategic participation is required to ensure these opportunities are progressed.

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<sup>39</sup> Social Policy Research centre, University of New South Wales (2002) *Methods to address requirements for changes in funding disability services brought about by external change*, NSW

<sup>40</sup> Mental Health, Supported Accommodation Assistance Program and Drug and Alcohol services currently show the highest level of need for top-up funding.

<sup>41</sup> Industry Plan for the Non-Government Human Services Sector Working Party (2004) *Industry Plan for the Non-Government Human Services Sector*, Department of Premier and Cabinet; Perth, Section 4

<sup>42</sup> Via multi-million dollar annual funding allocation to the Small Business Development Corporation (SBDC)

<sup>43</sup> *2004-05 Budget Statements, Paper No. 2, Volume 3*, p 1020 (May 2004), WA Department of Treasury and Finance

<sup>44</sup> A small number of Peaks (particularly resource bodies) will receive less than \$500,000 (estimated) collectively for ad hoc work in this area.

## Case Example

The establishment of a Not-for-Profit Workplace Relations Service to ensure the Not-for-Profit sector has access to legal and practice advice regarding Human Resources and Industrial Relations could save potentially several thousands of dollars each year. Currently organisations in the Non-Government Human Services Sector spend on average around \$700 - \$1000 per agency per year retaining the services of private providers of industrial relations and human resource services even if they do not require the service throughout the year.

This situation is often ineffective, usually because the provider is “for profit” and does not have adequate understanding or familiarity with the community sector. Payment of these monies to private providers is also massively inefficient as it takes much needed Government funding away from service provision where it could be more efficiently utilised.

A relatively small investment by Government could provide a service in this area, saving a significant amount of money and allowing for value-adding programs.<sup>45</sup> This small investment, when added with the pro-bono Lawyer services currently being offered (but wasted due to being under-utilised), potential corporate sponsorship and a small amount of fee-for-service, could see a self-sustaining entity within four years.

## Peak Membership Fees

**Portfolio area:** The Premier with the Minister for Community Development.

### **Recommendation:**

The Department for Community Development continue to provide the “Membership Allowance” to all funded agencies for the purposes of membership fees or service purchasing from their peak representative body.

### **Rationale:**

“Peaks” provide an integral representative role within the NGHSS whilst providing a range of services to their constituency. Peaks include a blend of a) Policy Advocacy Bodies (e.g. WACOSS), b) Consumer Representative Groups (e.g. Health Consumers Council) c) Service Providers Representative Groups (e.g. Council of DSC Funded Agencies) d) Target Group Representative Bodies (e.g. Ethnic Communities Councils) and e) Resourcing / Training Provider Bodies (e.g. Volunteering WA).

Peak bodies and non-government community service agencies are extremely concerned by the Department’s proposal to remove around \$315,000 provided to funded agencies to allow them to purchase membership or other services from a member representative body.

Individual funded agencies stand to lose between \$270.00 and \$15,850.00, whilst peak bodies such as WACOSS, the Women’s Council for Domestic and Family Violence Services (WA) (formerly Women’s Refuge Group of WA) and the Youth Affairs Council of WA stand to lose up to 20% of annual revenue as a consequence of this decision.

The removal of membership allowance in effect reduces the amount of money received by agencies each year. The impact will be a net decrease in capacity of NGO’s to be

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<sup>45</sup> Such as “Safety Screening” preventative education projects that reduce the risk of sex offenders or other criminals being employed in NGHSS.

members of peak bodies or to purchase training and other services. As a result, peak bodies will be weaker, less able to represent the interests of their members and less able to provide support services such as training and consultancy.

There will be a weakening of the sector, a direct loss of capacity for agencies and thus a reduction in both quality and efficiency of service delivery.

## **Sector Engagement**

**Portfolio area:** The Premier

### **Recommendation:**

The State Government, in partnership with the NGHSS develop an agreed and consistent approach to facilitate the engagement of sector organisations in consultative and participative processes.

Key features should include:

- The payment of sitting fees to enable meaningful engagement in consultation processes
- Building the capacity of the sector to effectively and meaningfully contribute to consultative and participative processes
- Placing a stronger emphasis on negotiation between stakeholders in consultation processes
- Increasing the transparency around decision making by clearly communicating HOW outcomes of consultation processes influence the final decisions and HOW and WHY the final decisions were made
- Committing to evaluation and monitoring of consultation processes
- Establishment of mechanisms to ensure adequate communication regarding the context of the decision making process
- Ensuring that one process is not negated by activity elsewhere in government

### **Rationale:**

The State Government has a stated commitment to engagement with the community and thus the community sector (NGHSS). This commitment has been illustrated in a variety of more open and transparent consultation processes. However, there remains considerable work to be done by government to ensure effective sector engagement in consultation processes.

In the words of one NGHSS Worker:

*we are at risk of being consulted to death...*

Without adequate provisions the NGHSS faces an increasing choice between their clients and their Government. With limited time, staff shortages and under- resourced representative bodies, the NGHSS is increasingly forced to decline opportunities to participate in State Government consultation.

This issue should be of significant concern to a Government with a stated commitment of ensuring better participation in democracy for its citizens.

# Sustainability

## Institutional Reform to Support Sustainability

**Portfolio Area:** The Premier

**Recommendation:**

To ensure that the social, environmental and economic dimensions of sustainability are given equivalent consideration, the State Government should establish an independent and well resourced Sustainability Commission with responsibility for:

- Developing robust Sustainability Assessment processes;
- Undertaking a comprehensive legislative review for sustainability; and
- Integrating Headline Sustainability Indicators and Sustainability Reporting into Government budget planning and auditing of agency performance.

**Rationale:**

The significant challenge that sustainability represents for all sectors of society will require a strong institution, such as a Sustainability Commission, to drive the implementation of sustainability. In other national and State Government jurisdictions, similar bodies have played an important role in driving sustainability, one particularly good example is the UK Sustainable Development Commission.

The Sustainability Commission should:

- Oversee sustainability assessment processes which would allow decision-makers and policy-makers in all sectors to assess different dimensions of sustainability, and to choose the most sustainable option in an open and transparent manner;
- Oversee an ongoing process of review and reform of Western Australian legislation to ensure its compatibility with achieving sustainability. A precedent for such a comprehensive legislative review has been provided in Australia by the National Competition Policy legislative review process; and
- Ensure that any Headline Sustainability Indicators developed for Western Australia are embedded in the policy-making, decision-making and budgetary processes of Government – rather than sitting outside the central business of government.

# Citizenship and Multicultural Interests

## Racial and Religious Vilification Legislation

**Portfolio Area:** The Premier

**Recommendation:**

That the State Government, in consultation with the wider community, commit to the development of legislation to address racial and religious vilification in Western Australia as part of an anti-racism strategy

**Rationale:**

Racial and religiously motivated behaviour including violence, intimidation and ridicule is unacceptable in Western Australia and should not be tolerated. The consultation paper on Racial and Religious Vilification released in August 2004 by the Office of Multicultural Interests and the Equal Opportunity Commission highlights some key issues concerning these issues in Western Australia and appropriate methods of dealing with them.<sup>46</sup> It is vital that State government ensure that legislation is enacted to provide more effective protection to individuals and groups from religious and racial minorities. In the development of appropriate civil and criminal provisions, the government should facilitate and encourage input from the public, especially from community-based organisations dealing with groups that would benefit from the legislation.

## Reducing Racial and Religious Vilification

**Portfolio area:** The Premier

**Recommendation:**

That the State Government commit to the development of a range of other programs to be used in conjunction with the proposed racial and religious vilification provisions.

These should include:

- Developing Community Education Programs
- Establishing a permanent team within the Police Service to deal with racially and religiously motivated attacks and related issues
- Establishing a Victim Support Unit to be funded by Government but managed by a community organisation
- Implementing changes to the current Equal Opportunity Act in order to improve access, empower the Commissioner to receive complaints, initiate action, and increase penalties
- Developing protocols for recording incidences of hate crimes
- Initiating a public awareness campaign with meaningful community participation

**Rationale:**

Criminal and/or civil penalties alone will not solve the problem of racism in our society. Creating awareness and getting the community and government at all levels involved is

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<sup>46</sup> Equal Opportunity Commission and Office of Multicultural Interests (2004) *Racial and Religious Vilification Consultation Paper August 2004*, Perth

the key to achieving positive outcomes in the fight against racism. Institutionalised racism as we all know is fully embedded in all the systems and cannot be easily identified or punished. Educating the public and using other measures proposed above have the potential to change people's attitudes about respecting and accepting others who are different.

## **State Based Interpreting Service**

**Portfolio area:** Minister for Citizenship and Multicultural Interests

### **Recommendation:**

That the State Government should establish an independent State Interpreting and Translation Unit, which will:

- Provide cost free interpreting and translation services to all clients seeking to access State services and State funded services operated by community agencies.
- Undertake Translating and Interpreting in migrant languages as well as Indigenous community languages<sup>47</sup>.
- Gather data on what training is needed by practitioners and users of practitioners, and liaise with trainers to deliver the same.
- Develop a bank of translated material, in particular of standard government and agency forms, but of information relating to health, legal, welfare and industrial matters as well.

### **Rationale:**

The establishment of the State Interpreting and Translation Unit will enable government to identify savings in the current Language Services and possibly redirect these funds to enable more cost-effective whole-of-government service delivery.

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<sup>47</sup> Should also include Interpreting Services for the Deaf.

# Essential Services: Energy & Water

For low income and disadvantaged Australians the costs associated with accessing essential services consume a disproportionately high proportion of their income. As reported by the ABS in 1998-1999, those in the highest income quintile allocated less than half as much of their household expenditure to utility bills as did those on the lowest income quintile (1.2 percent compared to 8.2 percent).<sup>48</sup> Many of these people subsequently find paying utility bills very difficult and often end up in arrears to service providers. This may result in restriction of supply or disconnection. The consequences of these outcomes have been shown to include: deterioration in health, poor diet and exclusion from society amongst others.

The pressure being placed on Emergency Relief agencies to assist clients with utility bills is growing rapidly and many agencies are reporting that they are having to turn clients away due to lack of resources to assist. To illustrate this demand for assistance a 2003 WACOSS report into the cost of essential services to Emergency Relief Agencies and their clients found that in the 12 months to July 2003, Emergency Relief Agencies paid approximately \$1.34 million to utility service providers to prevent disconnection or restriction of supply to low-income and disadvantaged communities.<sup>49</sup>

In recognition of the increasing burden of essential services on low-income earners and ultimately Emergency Relief providers, the State Government should implement a whole of government approach to essential services that takes into account a range of social and environmental strategies. These should include the following:

## Utility Advocacy Scheme

**Portfolio area:** The Premier

### **Recommendation:**

That resources be provided to:

- Establish a Utility Advocacy Scheme to enable the development of policy information and advice, education and support to relevant stakeholders.
- Ensure that utility consumers can access information and advocacy assistance on an individual basis where they encounter difficulty or dispute with a provider of an essential service.
- Ensure that provisions be made available for adequate consumer representation, (including adequate sitting fees and funding of at least one policy worker) in the Non-Government sector

### **Rationale:**

This measure would facilitate meaningful consumer participation and representation in the reform of the utilities market and ensure positive outcomes for low-income and disadvantaged consumers. It would also ensure transparency to the actions taken as part of the reforms through the dispersal of research, education and policy development and consumer advocacy.

As part of the energy reforms the Economic Regulatory Authority is required to establish a consultative committee under the terms set out in Section 81 of the *Electricity Industry Act 2004*. However, for effective stakeholder engagement to occur, resources must be allocated for independent representation of consumer interests. Examples can be drawn

<sup>48</sup> WA Council of Social Service (2003) *Would You Like a Bit of Heat With that Trickle of Water?*, Perth

<sup>49</sup> WA Council of Social Service (2003) *Would You Like a Bit of Heat With that Trickle of Water?*, Perth

from several eastern state government models that contribute to achieving better outcomes for all as a result of strengthened stakeholder participation.<sup>50</sup>

## Utilities Assistance Scheme

**Portfolio area:** The Premier

**Recommendation:**

That a Utilities Assistance Scheme be implemented to provide one-off financial assistance to Concession Card Holders and low-income families with the cost of utility bills due to temporary financial crisis. Assistance should include: electricity, mains gas, water and domestic LPG gas. The scheme should operate in addition to existing concessions and rebates and provide assistance for those most vulnerable to disconnection and restriction of services.

**Rationale:**

A number of states in Australia have established similar schemes and such programs are commonplace throughout the United Kingdom and United States of America.<sup>51</sup> Western Australia should follow this lead in view of the observed need for greater assistance in regard to utility bills for disadvantaged and vulnerable people through recognition of the fact that sustained access to essential services is a requisite for an acceptable standard of living.

## Community Service Obligation Payments

**Portfolio area:** The Premier

**Recommendation:**

That the State Government undertake a review of Community Service Obligation (CSO) payments with a view to increasing the existing amount of funds available for CSO payments and making payments available to private enterprises providing essential services to the community.

**Rationale:**

Community Service Obligation Payments are an integral component of the support required by financially disadvantaged members of the community. The payments are intended to benefit all disadvantaged members of the community, not just customers of the Government enterprises providing essential services and therefore provide assistance to wider range of people in need.

## Late Payment Fees for Water Accounts

**Portfolio area:** The Premier

**Recommendation:**

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<sup>50</sup> The Utility Consumer Advocacy Program is funded by the New South Wales Government and is conducted by the Public Interest Advocacy Centre (PIAC) in Sydney. The Consumer Utilities Advocacy Centre (CUAC) is a Victorian Government funded, independent consumer advocacy organisation, established to enhance the input of electricity, gas and water consumers, and particularly low-income, disadvantaged and rural consumers, into the regulatory debate. See [www.consumer.vic.gov.au/cuav](http://www.consumer.vic.gov.au/cuav) for further information

<sup>51</sup> For example the Utilities Relief Grant Scheme operating in Victoria



That the relevant legislation be amended to provide for waiver of late payment fees for low income earners. If this is not possible, the State Government should ensure that the Water Corporation does not continue its practice of charging high penalty interest on overdue accounts held by low-income earners.

**Rationale:**

Late payment fees and high interest rates charged on accounts are likely to disproportionately effect low-income families. This has the potential to cause periods of significant hardship for low-income families and people that are already struggling.

## Introduction of Retrofit Programs

**Portfolio area:** The Premier

**Recommendation:**

The State government in conjunction with relevant consumer bodies, Government Departments and water, energy and gas utility providers undertake retrofitting programs which includes:

- Implementation of an energy-efficient retrofitting program and efficient heating system for existing Department of Housing and Works properties.
- Funding of a community education and awareness program to improve the capacity of low income households to manage utility costs.<sup>52</sup>
- The funding of a program to encourage household energy conservation measures as a means to reducing energy utility bills in low income households including

**Rationale:**

Research undertaken in South Australia suggests that energy conservation is vital to the reduction of unmanageable electricity bills for many low-income households. Household conservation measures should be given much greater government and retail support through an integrated approach covering a broad range of educational measures.<sup>53</sup>

Efficiency and weatherisation programs have also been proven to have substantial effects on the number of uncollectible and bad debt write-offs. These programs install energy efficient appliances and/or other energy conserving measures to lower the consumption costs of customers.

In NSW, the REFIT Program was developed by representatives of a number of organisations including: Council of Social Service of NSW, the Department of Fair Trading, Sustainable Energy Development Authority, the Smith Family, Sydney Water and the Department of Community Services. Under this program a number of energy and water efficient devices were distributed to low income households and recipients of Energy Accounts Payment Assistance vouchers. The package distributed included (among other products): one AAA rated showerhead and two fluorescent light bulbs. Results from the program indicated that the REFIT recipients' savings were well in excess of the costs associated with installing the products. While the cost of the packages totalled \$112 (GST inclusive) each, savings to recipients were estimated at \$1000 in energy and water bills from using the single AAA showerhead and \$50 from smart lighting. The other devices also facilitated considerable additional savings. Benefits to the companies were also significant in the decrease observed in costs

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<sup>52</sup>Lawrence, J (2002) *Electricity its just essential, low income electricity consumer project, Final Report*. South Australian Council of Social Service, Adelaide

associated for debt recovery, the growth in the perception of community goodwill and a competitive edge.<sup>54</sup>

The above programs are only two examples selected from many others. Further information can be obtained from reports such as: *Power, Markets and Exclusion* by the Financial and Consumer Rights Council of Victoria<sup>55</sup> as well as the *Electricity: It's Just Essential* report, published by the South Australian Council of Social Service in 2002.

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<sup>54</sup> Benson, T. (2003) *REFIT: A Social Justice and Environmental Pilot Project*. Public Interest Advocacy Centre: Sydney. Available at: <http://www.sprc.unsw.edu.au/ASPC2003/papers/Paper37.pdf>

<sup>55</sup> Financial and Consumer Rights Council Victoria Inc. (2004) *Power, Markets and Exclusion: Assessing the effectiveness of social protections in deregulated markets: An Electricity Case Study from Victoria*. Melbourne

# Transport

Appropriate, accessible and affordable public transport is essential for many low income and disadvantaged individuals and families in Western Australia. Figures from Transperth clearly show that utilising public transport can save over \$1800 per year compared to driving a car. This is a substantial amount and money that could be utilised for other necessities. In addition, many low income individuals do not have access to alternate forms of transport and therefore rely on public transport to get them to places of education and employment amongst others.

While the current State Government has endeavoured to improve public transport, there is considerably more that needs to be done.

## Fully Accessible Buses

**Portfolio Area:** Minister for Planning and Infrastructure

**Recommendation:**

That the State Government should increase the number of fully accessible buses in the Transperth fleet.

**Rationale:**

Transperth currently has approximately 300 fully accessible buses. For disabled people to be able to more fully engage in community life it is vital they are able to access appropriate transport. Many disabled people are on low incomes and cannot afford modified motor vehicles or taxi fares. Public transport is often the only available transport to them and for this reason it is important that Government ensure that appropriate resources be allocated to enhance the ability for them to access appropriate public transport.

## Transport Concessions

**Portfolio area:** Minister for Planning and Infrastructure

**Recommendation:**

That State concessions for public transport be frozen at their current rate.

**Rationale:**

Concessions are vital to ensure that low income individuals can afford necessary services. Given increasing levels of poverty in Western Australia, it is important that Governments recognise the financial strain being placed on low income earners and endeavour to lessen the burden on them for such an essential service.

## **CAT Buses**

**Portfolio area:** Minister for Planning and Infrastructure

**Recommendation:**

That the State Government expand the operation of the free CAT buses by establishing routes in other main urban areas including Joondalup and Midland.

**Rationale:**

Joondalup and Midland are increasingly becoming central urban areas where people go to carry out daily shopping and run errands. Many people, especially low income earners, do not have access to a car to assist them to get from one place to the next when it is only a relatively short distance away. In addition, many older and disabled people are unable to walk long distances. CAT buses would be greatly beneficial in these areas as it would allow greater mobility for people around central areas of Joondalup and Midland.

## **Public Transport Services along growth corridors**

**Portfolio area:** Minister for Planning and Infrastructure

**Recommendation:**

That the State Government direct resources to improve public transport services along growth corridors.

**Rationale:**

Suburbs in the outer areas of Perth often have higher proportions of low income and disadvantaged people. It is imperative that these areas are well serviced by public transport so as to relieve pressure on individuals having to rely on cars to compensate for the lack of public transport. Increasing public transport to these areas will improve access to employment and education opportunities as well as essential services such as health care for disadvantaged members of the community.

# Regional Development

While agencies in regional Western Australia are dealing with similar challenges to their metropolitan counterparts, the issues are exacerbated and often more complicated in the regions. For example, in a recent phone-in undertaken by WACOSS regarding sector viability issues, an agency in the South-West reported that staff are unable to undertake training that is crucial to maintaining their skills in a number of areas including skills that enable them to: deliver services to their clients; maintain the viability of the service; and meet reporting and compliance requirements. Specifically, the agency reported that they are unable to attend 80% of training opportunities due to lack of funds and that even if funding was available, training is not being delivered in the region and is therefore not accessible. While many metropolitan agencies also face these challenges, issues of accessibility and affordability are exacerbated in the regions.

There are two overarching issues that need to be addressed in the regions: Firstly, it is critical that people in the regions are able to access face-to-face services; and secondly, that these services are supported by appropriate information technology.

Regional Western Australia is facing a crisis in a number of areas including:

- Mental health
- Homelessness (see Youth Homelessness and Homelessness recommendations)
- The overall viability of the regions

## Mental Health

**Portfolio area:** Minister for Local Government and Regional Development with the Minister for Health

### Recommendation:

That the State Government commits funds:

- To increase the level of mental health services in regional Western Australia;
- To community agencies to enable an integrated model of service delivery including supporting better linkages between mental health services and other key agencies.

### Rationale:

**Mental health services** in the regions are extremely under-resourced. For example, people in the Mid West and Gascoyne are experiencing a four-week delay in accessing emergency services provided by visiting psychiatrists. This issue is even more pronounced in rural and remote areas. While the Burdekin report identified a range of issues to be addressed in this area, there has been little real progress to date with mental health services continuing to struggle to provide much needed services.

There is widespread evidence of the poor outcomes associated with the lack of an **integrated community model of delivery**. For example, support for carers and family members in initial management of mental health issues is virtually non-existent, and police are often sought as a last resort to manage psychotic behaviour. Further, the over representation of people with a mental illness in the legal system can be addressed if a more proactive model of delivery is developed. There is also an increasing level of mental health and drug dependency issues surfacing in an array of community services. Due to the separation of mental health and drug services, non-government organizations are often unable to access required services due to lack of acknowledgement of the

inter-relatedness of service delivery. It is critical that **better linkages** between mental health services and other key agencies are developed and maintained.

## **Workforce Development**

**Portfolio area:** Minister for Local Government and Regional Development

### **Recommendation:**

That the State Government commit funds to develop models to enhance collaboration between government and non-government agencies including government departments sharing infrastructure with the non-government sector whilst respecting the importance of agencies' maintaining their independence.

### **Rationale:**

The regions continue to be effected by workforce issues both in the government and non-government sector. In the government sector, a significant number of government positions remain unfilled in all communities, which in turn results in a lack of services to people in the area. One of the contributing factors is that formal qualifications are a pre-requisite for many positions. In addition, there is extreme concern with regard to recruitment, retention and support/supervision of professionally qualified staff in regional, rural, and remote non-government services. Contributing factors include the lack of suitable award conditions and a lack of industry infrastructure in small agencies.

While the Government has implemented a number of important initiatives including the State Sustainability Strategy and a number of capacity building initiatives, this can create an additional burden for non-government agencies in terms of being fully appraised of the implications for their services. It is therefore important that non-government agencies are adequately resourced to ensure they are well informed of broader government initiatives and the implications for their service.

# Consumer and Employment Protection

## Establish a Consumer Research and Advocacy Centre

**Portfolio area:** Minister for Consumer and Employment Protection

**Recommendation:**

That the State Government provides resources for the establishment of a Consumer Research and Advocacy Centre, akin to that proposed by the Consumer Advisory Council.

**Rationale:**

Western Australian consumers are significantly disadvantaged related to their interstate counterparts due to the absence of a Consumer Research and Advocacy Centre. A Consumer Research and Advocacy Centre is required in WA to:

- Build capacity, facilitate consumer participation and citizenship
- Ensure Consumer research, advocacy and policy development
- Provide “Joined-Up” solutions
- Link consumer issues across Government and Non-Government
- Assist the marketplace

The absence of adequate consumer representation has led to unequal and unfair decision-making in many areas under the current Government, in particular with regard to the essential services (Utilities) reform agendas.

**Cost:** \$500,000

## Regulate Tenant Databases

**Portfolio area:** Minister for Consumer and Employment Protection

**Recommendation:**

That, in view of the potential consequences for homeless people or people at risk of homelessness, the State Government support the establishment of a nationally consistent legislative and regulatory framework for Residential Tenancy Databases, or, in the alternative, that their use be prohibited.

Social housing’s share of the Australian housing market has declined steadily in the last decade. Therefore any factor that denies access to the private rental market to people who are marginal in housing or homeless may result in increasing rates of homelessness. It is therefore likely that the emergence of Residential Tenancy Databases (RTDs) has increased the pressure on social housing and crisis accommodation services.

This assertion is supported by research conducted by the Tenant Database Action Group (Queensland, January 2002). Over a one-week period, of the 162 clients surveyed, 76 (47%) respondents said they were listed on a RTD, 59 (78%) said the listing was the primary cause of their homelessness.

What is clear is that the current legislative framework is inadequate to protect consumer rights and, as the Larvarch Committee concluded:

*If however, the databases can not meet the tests of fairness and accuracy and openness then the risk of unconscionable harm to tenants outweighs their value to lessors and their use should be curtailed if not prohibited.<sup>56</sup>*

## **Action the Review of the Residential Tenancies Act 1987**

**Portfolio area:** Minister for Consumer and Employment Protection

### **Recommendation:**

That the Statutory review of the Residential Tenancies Act be progressed as a matter of priority in order to address the consumer vulnerability of the 25% of West Australians who rely on the rental market to meet their housing needs. In particular the following areas require urgent reform:

- Improvement to the security of tenure provisions particularly important in the current environment of shrinking housing affordability;
- Introduction of rent control provisions to prevent exploitation particularly in industry and seasonal linked regional markets;
- Abolition of contracting out clauses, which allow landlords to opt out of minimum legislative obligations (such as to carry out maintenance and repairs);
- Improvement to the dispute resolution mechanism which does not currently provide access to justice for most tenants and is currently unable to review administrative decisions of the Department of Housing and Works.<sup>57</sup>

In addition, adequate funding should be committed to implement education strategies associated with legislative change.

### **Rationale:**

The *Residential Tenancies Act 1987* requires that this legislation be reviewed at least every 5 years. The Labor Government undertook this review over two years ago and there is yet to be any legislative reform on this matter.

## **Abolition of Private Rental Lease Fees**

**Portfolio area:** Minister for Consumer and Employment Protection

### **Recommendation:**

That legislation pertaining to the abolition of letting fees for private rental be proclaimed and enacted immediately as part of the State Action Plan on Homelessness.

### **Rationale:**

Despite legislation being passed by both Houses of Parliament in the mid-1990's to abolish these unfair and inappropriate fees and a subsequent Government

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<sup>56</sup> Queensland Government Backbench Committee Report 'the Lavarch Committee' August 2002 – as cited in the Residential Tenancy Databases Issues Paper

<sup>57</sup> see Auditor General's criticisms in relation to fairness, transparency and accountability "A Roof Over Our Heads" October 2003



commissioned Economic Impact Assessment finding that these fees should be abolished there has been no action by Government on this issue.

## **Legislative Protection for Boarders and Lodgers**

**Portfolio area:** Minister for Consumer and Employment Protection

**Recommendation:**

That legislation be introduced to protect Boarders and Lodgers in WA.

**Rationale:**

Boarders and Lodgers are most often low-income and disadvantaged people suffering mental health and/or alcohol and drug issues. Currently the *Residential Tenancies Act 1987* exempts Boarders and Lodgers from coverage under that Act (under section 5 sub-section 2(d)). The failure to afford these people protection under the law means that they are significantly at risk of being further disadvantaged by actions such as being evicted from their homes without any notice or due process.

Conditions for Boarders and Lodgers should be in accordance with the minimum legislative standards set out by the Commonwealth Department of Housing and Regional Development in 1995.<sup>58</sup>

## **Advice Services to Tenants**

**Portfolio area:** Minister for Consumer and Employment Protection

**Recommendation:**

That local tenancy advice services (Local Service Units), with links to the existing Tenants Advice Service (Inc) as the specialist resourcing body, be established in locations identified by the State Housing Strategy as comprising a relatively high proportion of renters and with the greatest affordability issues.

**Rationale:**

Currently identified areas include Broome, the Great Southern region, the area between the Mid West and the Pilbara, and the expanding suburbs around Wanneroo and Joondalup.

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<sup>58</sup> in Minimum Legislative Standards for Residential Tenancies in Australia (except for no cause evictions) report commissioned by Commonwealth Department of Housing and Regional Development 1995.

# Indigenous Affairs

As community and social service sector organisations, we do not support the mainstreaming of Indigenous controlled services. Programs designed to support and promote the wellbeing of any groups in society are most effective when those groups have a voice in how those programs are developed and delivered. This needs to occur for both Indigenous controlled and non-Indigenous services. Mainstreaming Indigenous controlled services has inherent dangers and has been found to have failed to protect and promote the health and wellbeing of Indigenous peoples by both the Productivity Commission<sup>59</sup> and the Commonwealth Grants Commission.

The gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in health, education, employment and housing is not changing and in some areas is worse – these are areas for which services are already mainstreamed. The statistics below tell the hard truth of the failure of mainstream services for Indigenous Australians.

- Life expectancy for Indigenous males is 56 years – 21 years lower than for non-Indigenous males, and for Indigenous females, 63 years – 20 years lower than for non-Indigenous females.
- Indigenous infants are around 4 times more likely to die before their first birthday and 5 times more likely to succumb to Sudden Infant Death Syndrome.
- Indigenous students are half as likely as non-Indigenous students to continue to year 12.
- Unemployment is 2.8 times higher among Indigenous people compared with non-Indigenous people.
- Suicide rates for Indigenous people are nearly three times that of other Australians.
- Hospital separation rates for assault are more than 13 times greater for Indigenous Australians compared with non-Indigenous people.
- Indigenous people are 15 times more likely than non-Indigenous people to be in prison.<sup>60</sup>

For too long, Australian Federal, State and Territory Governments have not done enough to overcome these gaps. They have merely worked to ‘manage’ them. Improved accountability for the services provided to Indigenous peoples and communities by both mainstream and Indigenous controlled organisations is required.

## Appropriate and Adequate Services

**Portfolio area:** Minister for Indigenous Affairs

### **Recommendation:**

That the State Government commits to encourage the establishment and development of services with appropriate and adequate capacity to effectively assist Indigenous peoples. A key factor involved in this is the establishment of appropriate mechanisms to establish and implement best practice models in the delivery of services to Indigenous peoples.

### **Rationale:**

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<sup>59</sup> Productivity Commission (2003) *Report on Government Services 2003 – Indigenous Compendium*, Melbourne.  
Available at: <http://www.pc.gov.au/gsp>

<sup>60</sup> ACROSS Media Release (2004), *Indigenous People The Most Marginalised in Election*, says Community Organisation Monday 4<sup>th</sup> October 2004

For social services to be effective in assisting indigenous clients, it is imperative that Indigenous peoples, communities, and organisations be involved in the development and delivery of the services that are there to assist them.

Whether the services are specifically targeted to Indigenous peoples or if they operate to assist all client groups in Western Australia, it is essential that these individuals and groups be consulted. Indigenous Australians have equal rights to have their needs met as any other group in the community and therefore all services must be facilitated to be able to deliver appropriate and effective services to these clients.

# Attorney General

## Increased Resources to Community Legal Services

**Portfolio Area:** The Attorney General

### **Recommendation:**

That the State Government increase funding to Community Legal Centres to the base level over a two-year period. In the first year 2004 – 2005 the State Government should provide \$3.086 million, with a further increase of \$3.273 million (including indexation) in the second year 2005 – 2006.

Community Legal Centres require an overall increase to the combined Commonwealth and State CLC Funding Programme of at least \$15,426,000. Based on the funding situations in other States (see graph below), it is appropriate for the State Government to contribute 40% of this amount, totalling \$6.171 million.

### **Rationale:**

Community Legal Centres (CLCs) provide free and/or low cost services to people who are social security recipients, those on low incomes, or those who have difficulty in accessing legal services, including people with disabilities, women, young people, indigenous people and people from non-English speaking backgrounds<sup>61</sup>. CLCs provide a safety net for those who cannot afford the services of a private lawyer, or who are ineligible for legal aid.<sup>62</sup> CLCs are positioned at the prevention and early intervention end of the legal system, working to reduce the likelihood of litigation and the negative social consequences related to lack of access to justice.

The Joint Commonwealth and State Review of WA Community Legal Centres (2003) recommended that funds be directed towards the following priority areas of legal need:

- Non-metropolitan regions - Gascoyne; Peel, Wheatbelt and West Kimberley; and
- Metropolitan outer corridors - north, north east and south east
- Services for Aboriginal people, mental health consumers, persons affected by domestic and family violence, culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) people, prisoners and young people.

Funds granted by the new State Community Legal Services Program addressed legal needs in only four of these areas. Pressing legal needs still exist in the Wheatbelt (where a community legal centre has been forced to close due to lack of funds); West Kimberley; throughout the metropolitan area; and among Aboriginal people, CALD people, prisoners and young people.

The Review also prioritised sustainable levels of funding for existing CLCs, which currently face significant problems with attracting and retaining staff<sup>63</sup> and are failing to meet community demands as a result of inadequate funding.<sup>64</sup>

<sup>61</sup> There are over 207 CLCs in Australia which provide services to approximately 350,000 clients per year.

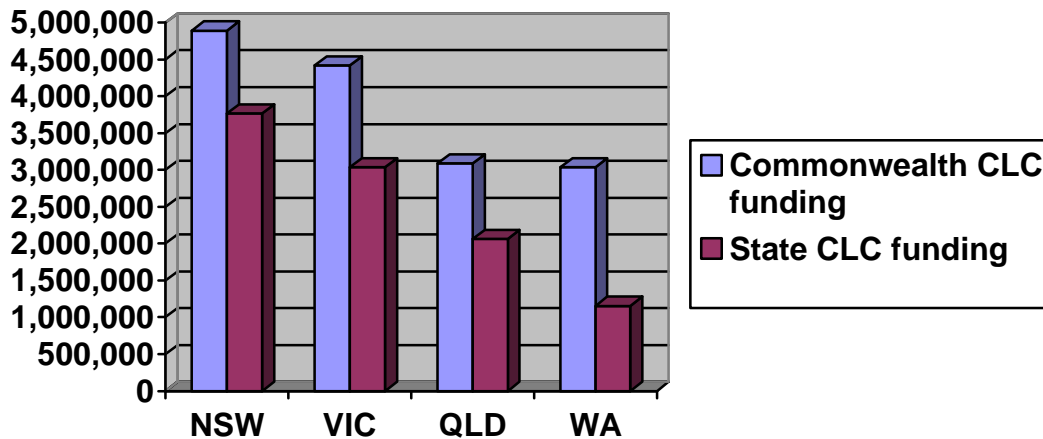
<sup>62</sup> (I)ncreasingly it appears that CLCs are expected to pick up the shortcomings in the legal aid system where, for example, people have reached their legal aid "cap", where they have a legal matter for which legal aid is not available, or where they do not meet the means test despite being unable to afford a private solicitor. The demand appears to be overwhelming many CLCs. Commonwealth Senate Legal and Constitutional References Committee (2004) *Legal Aid and Access to Justice*, p 209. See also: *Joint Review of Western Australian Community Legal Centres*, 2003.

<sup>63</sup> A key problem is the rates of pay offered in the community sector. *Rates of pay for comparable positions in CLCs are 25%-35% lower than for positions in Legal Aid WA. As the SACS award has failed to keep up with increases in other industries, the remuneration gap between working in a CLC, the public service and the private sector has increased. Joint Review, of Western Australian Community Legal Centres*, 2003, p 57.

<sup>64</sup> It is imperative that the Commonwealth and state/territory governments acknowledge existing shortfalls in funding and accept that a continuing deterioration in circumstances will inevitably lead to a severe crisis for CLCs. , Commonwealth Senate Legal and Constitutional References Committee (June 2004) *Legal Aid and Access to Justice*, p 217.

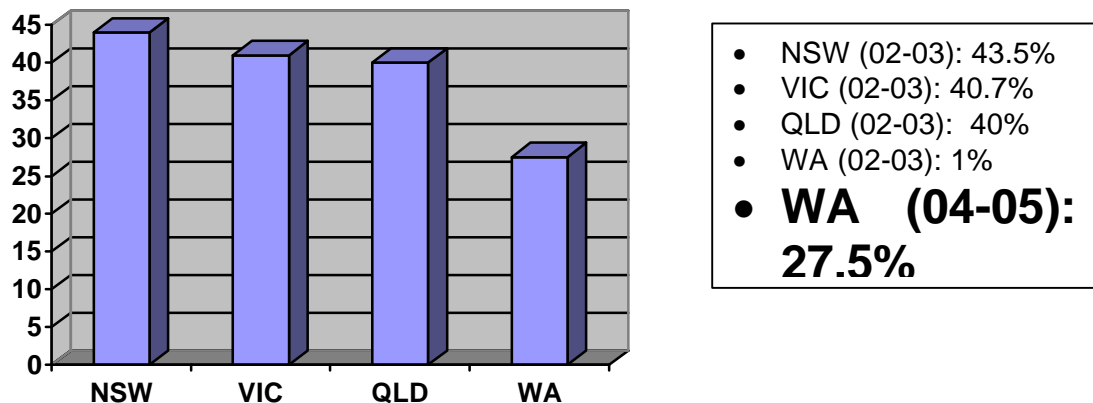
To adequately address these recommendations, funding for community legal centres must be significantly increased at both Commonwealth and State levels.

**State CLC funding relative to Commonwealth CLC funding.**



NB: based on 2002-03 figures for all states other than Western Australia (2004-05, to incorporate the new State CLC funding program).

**State CLC funding as a percentage of total CLC funding.**



Reference for 2002-03 figures: Joint Review of WA Community Legal Centres, 2003.

**Cost:** \$3.086 million

## Repeal of Mandatory Sentencing Laws

**Portfolio area:** Minister for Justice

**Recommendation:**

That the State government immediately repeal the 1996 amendments to the *Criminal Code (WA)* and *Young Offenders Act 1994* which impose mandatory sentencing for

adults and juveniles convicted of their third burglary offence.

**Rationale:**

The “Three Strikes and You’re In” amendment (November 1996) to the *Young Offenders Act 1994* makes it compulsory for a judge to sentence a repeat offender to 12 months detention upon his or her third appearance for home burglary offences. This legislation applies to anyone over 10 years of age (the age of criminal responsibility).

The removal of judicial discretion means that more children/juveniles are catapulted into the criminal justice system. Research indicates a strong link between imprisonment and recidivism.

These provision are particularly shameful in relation to juveniles and are a breach of our international obligations under the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

# Health

The emerging crisis in mental health dominates as the priority need area within the health portfolio, in particular the need for increased resources in community-based mental health services and alcohol and drug services.

It should be noted that we recognize the effort on the part of the State Government to begin to address mental health issues via the funding announcements made recently. However, a significant proportion of this money would be classed as replacement for funding lost in recent years.

## Increased funding for Mental Health Services

**Portfolio area:** Minister for Health

### **Recommendation:**

That the State Government commit to increasing, over the next 3 years 2004 - 2007, in real terms, the level of funding for Mental Health Services to 10% of the Health Budget, and that they plan to increase this level of funding over 2007 to 2010 to 12% of the Health Budget.

### **Rationale:**

According to the National Survey of Mental Health and Wellbeing (1997), almost one in five Western Australians aged 18 years or over met a criteria for a mental disorder at some time during the 12 months prior to the survey.<sup>65</sup> However, the real incidence is likely to be higher than reported as the survey sample did not include homeless people, residents of nursing homes, hostels, hospitals or prisons. These groups are known to have higher rates of mental disorders than the general population.

Consumers, service providers and even the Office of Mental Health, the division responsible for Mental Health Services within the WA Department of Health, acknowledge that there is a grossly unmet need for basic mental health services in Western Australia. However, these statistics are not readily available to organisations such as WACOSS. Yet we understand that what is happening in Western Australia is also occurring in Australia at large, and refer to the 2003 *Out of Hospital: Out of Mind* report produced by the Mental Health Council of Australia where a number of key issues were identified. Some of these were:

Grossly unmet need for basic mental health services:

- Currently, 62% of persons with mental disorders do not utilise mental health services. Reported reasons include: stigma associated with mental disorders; fearfulness of medical treatments; poor distribution and costs associated with specialist services; and, inappropriate mix of medical and psychosocial services provided by government-financed systems.<sup>66</sup>
- As a direct consequence of our (sic) lack of community understanding of current treatments available for mental disorders and our (sic) poorly resourced and poorly distributed service systems, the majority of people with mental disorders receive either no treatment or treatment that fails to meet current international standards for

<sup>65</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics (1999) *Mental Health and Wellbeing: Profile of Adults, Western Australia*

<sup>66</sup> Groom G, Hickie I, Davenport t. (2003) *Out of Hospital: Out of Mind! A report detailing mental health services in Australia in 2002 and community priorities for national mental health policy for 2003-2008*. Mental Health Council of Australia, Canberra p 3-4

optimal care. For example, less than one in six persons with depression or anxiety are currently receiving evidence-based treatments.<sup>67</sup>

- Restricted access to existing services:

*The experience of current consumers of mental health care is that they have severely limited access to primary care (exacerbated by current declines in bulk-billing rates), emergency care, specialist care and rehabilitation services.<sup>68</sup>*

*Current care systems are perceived to be chaotic, under-resourced and overly focussed on providing brief periods of medicalised care, largely within acute care settings.<sup>69</sup>*

*The demands on the carers and families of people with mental illness are increasing.<sup>70</sup>*

A significant investment via “catch up” (base funding increase) as discussed in the sector viability section of this submission will significantly alleviate the current crisis and address the targets outlined in this recommendation.

## Implement the Community Options 100 Project

**Portfolio area:** Minister for Health

### **Recommendation:**

That the Community Options 100 project, aimed at providing supported housing in the community for consumers in Murchison Ward, Graylands Hospital be progressed, and that detail of the actual level of funding available to provide support to these people be made known.

### **Rationale:**

In 2002, as part of the Government’s response to the WA State Homelessness Taskforce it was confirmed that \$1 million per annum had been allocated over the following four years to *assist people with mental illness to relocate from the institutional care environment of the Murchison Ward of Graylands Hospital into supported housing accommodation in the community.*<sup>71</sup> In September 2003, in response to a letter from the Community Housing Coalition of WA (CHCWA) seeking clarification on the level of funding to be made available, the Office of Mental Health responded that *the funding for the project is still being determined*, the letter also confirmed that the Department of Health would undertake an open tender process to select the new accommodation service provider. The decision to use competitive tendering was made despite the fact that the DSC Accommodation Blueprint Steering Committee Report identified that this approach had led to outcomes *which had not been in the best interest of people with disabilities.*<sup>72</sup>

At the end of 2004 there remains no clear progress on this commitment and no information on where the \$1m p/a has been spent. It is morally wrong and economically inefficient to continue to “house” people with mental illness for no other reason than a failure on the part of the State Government to implement their stated commitment to this program.

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<sup>67</sup> Groom G et al (2003) *ibid*

<sup>68</sup> Groom G et al (2003) *ibid*

<sup>69</sup> Groom G et al (2003) *ibid*

<sup>70</sup> Groom G et al (2003) *ibid*

<sup>71</sup> Progress Report on the Implementation of the Government’s Response to the WA State Homelessness Taskforce As at October 2002 – downloaded from [http://www.homeless.dhw.wa.gov.au/shif\\_progress.pdf](http://www.homeless.dhw.wa.gov.au/shif_progress.pdf)

<sup>72</sup> Accommodation Blueprint Steering Committee (March 2003) *Final Report and Recommendations: Disability Services Commission*



## **Develop a Funding Formula for the Independent Living Program**

**Portfolio area:** Minister for Health

### **Recommendation:**

That the Department of Health, in consultation with Independent Living Program (ILP) housing providers develops a funding formula for ILP funding. Such a model should offer a transparent and consistent approach based on the amount of funding required to deliver an appropriate level of service.

### **Rationale:**

The current trend in de-institutionalisation has significantly impacted on the community housing sector. People with mental health problems are evident both in Supported Accommodation Assistance Program services and in longer-term disability housing. The Independent Living Program is part of a comprehensive community mental health system, which has been built up in WA since the early 1990's to address the problems associated with de-institutionalisation.

Through this program, the Department of Health provides approximately \$450,000 to a number of community housing organisations to assist people with an enduring, chronic mental health diagnosis to live independently in the community. The organisations in receipt of ILP funds fulfil the role of 'benevolent landlord', providing ongoing tenancy support, and developing and maintaining intersectoral linkages to facilitate housing stability.

The housing stock is leased to community organisations by the DHW under the Community Disability Program (CDHP), a program developed as a major response to the pressures of de-institutionalization. Currently the number of accommodation units is insufficient to meet the demand, which is indicated by long wait lists. At November 2003 there were 68 families, 349 singles and 24 couples in the metro area and 9 families, 52 singles, and 9 couples in rural areas waiting for ILP accommodation.

By and large, the community sector supports de-institutionalisation as a Government policy initiative. There are already far too many people homeless or "living" in hospitals or inappropriate accommodation because of the lack of availability of ILP places and community housing options indicate greater efficiency through a 1.25 multiplier affect. It is unacceptable for de-institutionalisation to "dump" people with mental health issues into the community sector. Government must move to address this need through better planned and implemented ILP funding.

## **Increased funding for the Home & Community Care Program**

**Portfolio area:** Minister for Health

### **Recommendation:**

That the State Government(s) increase the state contribution to the HACC program to bring the real increase to 20% (\$146m Federal Government and \$98m from the State Governments (collectively)) and at least 6% growth per annum (plus indexation) thereafter.

That the State Government commit to the reform of Community Care as a priority and work with the Commonwealth to achieve the goals of a seamless and streamlined community care service.

**Rationale:**

The Home & Community Care (HACC) Program represents the major Government effort in community care and provides services to approximately 700,000 Australians each year. The demand for aged care is increasing as the population ages. The majority of older people want to be supported to live in their own home.

Consumers and providers are critical of existing service programs – they speak of services overlapping; of duplication, of fragmentation; of being assessed numerous times; of artificial barriers to entry.

The new paradigms (as indicated in the Vision for Community Care, Aged and Community Services Australia with other peaks) call for a continuum of care with lifestyle choices to enable people to live at home in their community. The vision is one of a seamless flexible service where the mechanics of the services are invisible to the clients – the people with care/support needs and the carers – with the resources directed to individual and family needs rather than to particular service models.

This includes the need for better integration across the acute, primary health and community sectors and for these services to be more carer aware. Acute hospital services in particular need to be backed by adequate information for carers at point of admission and diagnosis as well as discharge procedures which include carers. This is particularly important given the fact that the majority of carers are of workforce age.

The 20% increase will restore funding levels which were reduced when a fees policy was introduced nationally in the mid 1990s. This policy has not raised the anticipated revenue. Consumers have suffered as a result of this as services have been rationed. This shortfall has been compounded by the inadequate Commonwealth Own Purpose Outlays (COPO) indexation method which fails to keep pace with unavoidable rising costs.

## **Improve Oral Health Services**

**Portfolio area:** Minister for Health

**Recommendation:**

That the State government increase dental care services to curtail delays in receiving treatment and meet the needs of low-income people in WA.

**Rationale:**

Dental care is the greatest deficiencies in our health system. Early intervention for dental problems is important in preventing further deterioration in oral health as well as averting wider adverse health consequences. Poor oral health has been attributed to broader social outcomes such as difficulties in accessing employment and housing (due to stigma). Many Western Australians continue to miss out on basic dental care and are subject to very long delays in receiving treatment. At June 30<sup>th</sup>, 2004 some 18 700 patients were waiting for "non-urgent" dental care in WA, with an average waiting time of 12.5 months. Delays of up to 18 months for fitting dentures are not uncommon.

## Increased funding for Alcohol and Drug Services

**Portfolio area:** Minister for Health

### **Recommendation:**

That the State Government, as a priority, adequately resource existing services to a level that meets the expansion in the demand. An immediate injection of 25% increase to recurrent core funding for existing services has been identified as needed to ensure the sustainability of the sector

### **Rationale\*:**

Addressing the increasing social cost of drug and alcohol use through community-based alcohol and drug services makes good economic sense. The cost effectiveness of treatment is deemed to be 23 times more effective in reducing drug use than supply reduction strategies.<sup>73</sup>

The increase in demand for assistance has meant service provision on current resources is not sustainable. Statistics provided by the State's own Drug and Alcohol Office indicate that demand on existing services has more than doubled in the past 4 years. This demand is not met by current resource support and is exacerbated by the increasing costs faced by agencies that are not met through indexation.<sup>74</sup> Consultation with sector services indicates a 25% increase in core funding is needed to prevent a further reduction in services. Failure to apply a funding increase in this area creates irrevocable damage to individuals, families and to the State Government budget in other areas (e.g. public health, justice).

**Cost:** \$2.25 million

## Address gaps in Alcohol and Drug Services for Indigenous people

**Portfolio area:** Minister for Health

### **Recommendation:**

That the State Government resource new initiatives identified as serious gaps for the sector including a feasibility study to identify the most efficient and effective methods of addressing issues for Aboriginal people with resources set aside in following financial years to meet identified service gaps, including the potential development of an Aboriginal specific residential facility.

### **Rationale:**

There is a higher than average prevalence of drug use amongst Aboriginal people with Cannabis use 3 times higher among Indigenous than non-Indigenous populations<sup>75</sup> and 22% of Aboriginal people drinking at levels harmful to their health.<sup>76</sup>

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\* WA Network of Alcohol and Drug Agencies (WANADA) will be submitting a pre-budget submission with an extended rationale and references.

<sup>73</sup> ANCD Forum, Perth 16 September 2004

<sup>74</sup> Costs exceeding CPI offered including insurance, administration, communication, computer and IT development (feedback from services on comparison costs over the past 4 years)

<sup>75</sup> Stearne, (2002) National Drug Research Institute, p.8

<sup>76</sup> ANCD Forum Perth 16 September 2004

Aboriginal people face significant barriers in accessing services, due, in part to, lack of culturally appropriate residential treatment facilities and services, preventing Aboriginal people accessing services.<sup>77</sup>

There is a higher than average prevalence of hepatitis C and other blood borne viruses (BBVs) amongst Aboriginal people with the notification rate in WA, SA, and NT nine times the rate for Indigenous than non-Indigenous Australians per population.<sup>78</sup>

Alcohol and drug use contribute significantly to the economic and social disadvantages experienced by Indigenous communities.<sup>79</sup> Failure to respond appropriately to these issues is morally shameful and economically shortsighted.

**Cost** \$70,000

## **Reduce Hepatitis C and Blood Borne Virus (BBV) Transmission Rates**

**Portfolio area:** Minister for Health

### **Recommendation:**

That the State Government aims to reduce Hepatitis C transmission and its impact through:

- A second fixed site needle and syringe exchange program (NSEP) to cater for the Fremantle, Rockingham and Kwinana catchment area, possibly co-located at an existing health or community service to reduce costs  
**Cost:** \$150,000.
- Needles and syringes vending machines in the metropolitan regions could be provided at minimal cost and improved after hour's access. (WANADA has been informed that the HDWA has a number of such machines not in current use, and the cost of these would be maintenance only.)
- Regional health services being given the opportunity of providing an exchange service, should they wish to. Several regional needle and syringe providers have expressed their unease that they cannot offer this incentive for safe disposal of used needles and syringes. This strategy would incur minimal costs.
- An expansion of peer-based hepatitis C education services, ensuring incorporation into all alcohol and other drug (AOD) services  
**Cost:** \$300,000

### **Rationale:**

There is an estimated cost of \$14.32 million for every 1000 injecting drug users newly infected with hepatitis C.<sup>80</sup>

There are significant advantages in reducing unsafe injecting by 10% in terms of economic savings and social costs. The benefits of an expansion of NSEP services in metropolitan and non-metropolitan regions include:

- An estimated 25,000 cases of HIV avoided
- An estimated 21,000 cases of hepatitis C avoided
- An estimated saving of over 5,000 livers by 2000

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<sup>77</sup> Stearne, National Drug Research Institute 2002, p.33, and anecdotal feedback

<sup>78</sup> National Notifiable Diseases Surveillance System 2001, cited in Indigenous Australian Indigenous HealthInfoNet [www.healthinfonet.ecu.edu.au](http://www.healthinfonet.ecu.edu.au)

<sup>79</sup> Drug and Alcohol Council (2001), cited in Indigenous Australian Indigenous HealthInfoNet [www.healthinfonet.ecu.edu.au](http://www.healthinfonet.ecu.edu.au)

<sup>80</sup> Brown and Croft (1998)

- Or the equivalent of a saving of between \$2.4 and \$7.7 billion from an outlay of \$150 million.<sup>81</sup>

Significant efficiencies can be achieved by incorporating peer education into all AOD service provision to enable a significant increase in awareness of BBV risks.<sup>82</sup> Currently there is only one funded position to provide hepatitis C peer education.

## Co-occurring Mental Health and Alcohol or other Drug issues

**Portfolio area:** Minister for Health

### Recommendation:

An expansion of the Joint Services Development Unit to ensure all alcohol and other drug and mental health services are adequately supported

### Rationale:

Both mental health and alcohol/drug service providers have faced increasing challenges over recent years in providing “joined-up” services to clients with co-occurring mental health and alcohol/drug issues. The prevalence of co-occurring disorders in AOD services is estimated at 50%<sup>83</sup>, though many service providers argue that this figure is closer to 100%.

Failure to address co-occurring issues adequately has significant economic costs (wastage / duplication) and social costs. Alarming, anecdotal evidence suggests that “system failure” (where a client has not been able to secure an AOD service because they are deemed psychotic and not been able to access a mental health service because they are deemed to have an alcohol / drug issue) has even in some cases resulted in the death of clients who would otherwise have survived.

**Cost:** \$400,000

## Joined-Up Solutions to Complex Problems

**Portfolio area:** Minister for Health

### Recommendation:

Explore improved efficiencies and effectiveness through integrated systems development to respond to clients with complex and multiple problems who are in contact with multiple agencies.<sup>84</sup>

### Rationale:

Clients with complex and multiple issues are often in contact with numerous Government and Non-Government agencies whose interventions are minimally if at all coordinated. Significant efficiencies and improvements in effectiveness can be achieved through a

<sup>81</sup> As indicated in the National Centre for HIV Epidemiology and Clinical Research’s (2002) *Return on Investment in Needle and Syringe Programs in Australia Report* Funded through the National Tough on Drugs Strategy, previous Commonwealth funding

<sup>82</sup> Douthwaite (1997)

<sup>83</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics (1998)

<sup>84</sup> An example of an integrated systems approach is the “Strong Families” program conducted by the Department for Community Development.

“joined-up” approach, including the possibility of issue resolution, thus removing the client from the demand-side of the equation.

An example of a case study, provided by an Alcohol / Drug agency in 2004 typifies the level of complexity in the sector:

**Case Example:**

A male person, 31 years old, has been engaging in AOD counselling off and on over the last two years. He has linked up with a Prison to Parole Program offered by a community AOD service. He has been in detention or in prison for about 70% of the time since his teens, all related to drugs. The participant prefers heroin but in the last two years has used a range of drugs, including amphetamines. He has been off and on methadone, Naltrexone, and Subutex, and uses benzodiazepines prolifically. He has had countless attempted suicides and overdoses, and has hepatitis C. When released from prison, a major area of need for him was to secure accommodation. He has burned most bridges of support in this area. He has a girl friend, who is also a drug user and who works in the sex industry.

The participant has been in detoxification several times and has been to a residential service for one long stint. He has no family support, was sexually abused as a child, and has had minimal contact with family. Typically he always returns to a drug and crime spree. He variously takes prescribed anti-depressants, anti-anxiety, anti-psychotic medication, and has been diagnosed with depression, anxiety, attention deficit disorder (ADD) and post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

He attends AOD services when on parole but by this stage he is usually in crisis, needing accommodation or medical attention due to overdoses. The AOD agency providing this case example works closely with his parole officer and provides AOD support, treatment and harm reduction guidance when appropriate. They also, where possible and appropriate, have worked collaboratively with mental health, general health, accommodation and other community services, however the mechanisms to do so are often dependent on personalities rather than structural systems. Also the service provision is not adequately integrated, resulting in parallel and/or sequential care that does not maximise the support provided by the collective involvement across sectors.

**Cost:** \$300,000

## **Concession on Continence Products**

**Portfolio area:** Minister for Seniors Interests and Disability in partnership with Ministers for Health and Treasury

**Recommendation:**

That the State Government immediately introduce a subsidy to assist lower income seniors to purchase continence products.

**Rationale:**

Western Australia is the only State/Territory that fails to provide financial assistance to assist with the purchase of continence products. This omission causes severe financial hardship to Age Pensioners and other seniors on low incomes as well as their carers. We call on the WA government to immediately provide funding to people in receipt of a Pensions Concession Card who are assessed as requiring continence products by a Continence Advisor.

**Cost:** \$1,000,000 annually

# Justice & Community Safety

## Supporting Seniors to Feel Safer

**Portfolio area:** Minister for Justice

### **Recommendation:**

Seniors' vulnerability to and fear of crime must be addressed by:

1. Providing an adequate and visible police presence in public places and local communities;
2. Subsidising alarms for lower income seniors to discourage residential burglary; and
3. Funding a peer support crime prevention initiative.

### **Rationale:**

Seniors fear victimisation as they are amongst the most vulnerable of all citizens and have the least capacity to recover from the consequences of crime. An adequate and visible police presence in public places will discourage criminal behaviour.

Visible alarm systems are an effective preventative measure combating opportunistic burglary, but not all seniors can afford to install an alarm system in their homes.

Our experience suggests that peer education is an effective means of providing seniors with the knowledge they require to overcome a range of problems. Establishment of a seniors crime prevention service utilising trained volunteer seniors would be a valuable addition to existing services such as those of the Office of Crime Prevention and SAFERWA.

## Housing and Support to Reduce Recidivism

**Portfolio area:** Minister for Justice

### **Recommendation:**

That the State Government commit to increasing the number of accommodation units available to people exiting the prison system, and;

That adequate funding be made available to specialist support organisations thereby increasing their capacity to assist their clients to re-establish themselves in the community and hence reduce the rate of recidivism.

### **Rationale:**

Currently, agencies are only able to assist 10% of people seeking accommodation assistance on exiting the prison system. For many prisoners, this means that their stay in prison is extended, as they are unable to satisfy parole conditions. It is estimated that these 'extended stays' cost the Department of Justice between \$40 - \$60K per prisoner per year, money that would be far better spent on expanding the range of housing options available to people leaving prison.

People who have served long prison sentences often have chaotic lifestyles and multiple issues to address. Some have mental health and/or drug and alcohol issues and need intensive, prolonged support to make the transition to community living. Without this support, many return to prison within a very short period of time.



# Planning and Infrastructure

## Social and Affordable Housing Developments

**Portfolio area:** Minister for Planning and Infrastructure in partnership with Minister for Housing and Works

**Recommendation:**

That the State Government extends the Department of Planning and Infrastructure initiative requiring that all redevelopment has a minimum of 15% of dwellings allocated to social and affordable housing. It is recommended that this requirement be extended to all future development on Government owned and Crown land.

## Definition of Affordable Housing

**Portfolio area:** Minister for Planning and Infrastructure in partnership with Minister for Housing and Works

**Recommendation:**

That where existing and new planning mechanisms and processes are used to increase the availability of affordable housing (for rent and for purchase), a comprehensive definition of 'affordable' be developed in consultation with a broad range of stakeholders, to ensure consistency of application.

# Education and Training

## Better training for the Community Housing Sector

**Portfolio area:** Minister for Education and Training

**Recommendation:**

- That the State Government commit to ensuring that Nationally Accredited Training in Social Housing is adequately funded and made accessible and available to staff and volunteers in community housing organisations throughout Western Australia.
- That the Department of Education and Training commit to the National Skills Development Strategy for Indigenous Community Housing Management.

**Rationale:**

A problem shared by all community housing providers is the lack of accredited training available for staff and volunteers. The DHW Community Housing Strategic Plan (2003-2008) places increasing obligations and expectations on providers. To ensure that organisations are equipped to meet these performance requirements it is essential that staff and Board members of community housing organisations have access to nationally accredited training in social housing and governance. In addition to this, the State Minister for Education and Training must commit to the National Skills Development Strategy for Indigenous Community Housing Management which was signed off by the Housing Ministers at the Building Better Futures Conference in 2001.

## Training alternatives in the Aged and Community Care Sector

**Portfolio area:** Minister for Education and Training

**Recommendation:**

That additional funding be allocated for the exploration of alternative clinical training models in the TAFE sector for the preparation of Certificate III (Care Workers) and Certificate IV (Enrolled Nurses).

**Rationale:**

The aged and community care industry is confronted with serious challenges in recruiting and retaining both nursing and personal care staff. Additionally the sector is supportive of trends to expand the role of Enrolled Nurses and Care Workers to provide greater job satisfaction and diversity of skills/competence.

There is a limited number of student places available (driven by limited access to clinical placement) for those wishing to enter the nursing profession or related occupations. Given the widely acknowledged shortage of nurses and the expansion of role boundaries between the levels of nursing this limited number of places/clinical placement must be addressed as a priority.

# Education and Training for Young People

**Portfolio area:** Minister for Education and Training

**Recommendation:**

That the State Government allocates additional resources to education and training providers to assist in the delivery of services

**Rationale:**

Western Australia has the lowest levels of both males and females from low socio-economic deciles completing year 12 of high school out of all states except the Northern Territory. While the national average for males of low socio-economic deciles completing year 12 is 56 per cent, the WA average is 45 per cent. For females the figures are 79 per cent average for the nation compared to 54 per cent in WA. For all students, the figures are 63 per cent national average compared to 49 per cent in WA. While WACOSS commends measures being taken to ensure that all young people under 17 are in education or training, we are critically aware of the need to ensure that appropriate funds are allocated to the schools and training providers to support this initiative. This is particularly pertinent to state schools in low socio-economic areas as these are the schools that are likely to face the biggest burden as a result of this initiative.

If the State Government commits to the initiative of keeping young people in education or training until they are 17, it is vital that appropriate additional resources are allocated to providers. Without these resources, it is likely that the positive effect of keeping young people in school and training will be compromised by the reduced quality of service provided. Maintaining the current level of funding will put an unsustainable strain on education providers and make it virtually impossible for many providers, especially public institutions, to deliver a quality service.

# Employment

Throughout Australia, the labour force has come to be characterised by casual and part-time work. According to the ABS, casual employment increased by 68 per cent during the 1990's. During this time, permanent jobs have only increased by 5.3% and full-time permanent jobs have actually decreased by 1%. As at August of 2002, 27.3% of all wage and salary earning jobs were casual. Sixty six per cent of these were part-time.

As implied through these figures, the employment rate that government boasts does not reveal the full story. Hidden unemployment refers to those with minimal engagement with the labour market or those that are not captured by unemployment figures due to them not accessing government financial assistance or accessing financial support under other Commonwealth payments. In September 2002, while there were only 628,500 people officially unemployed, a further 672,100 people would have preferred to work a greater number of hours each week. There were a total of 808,100 workers who were only 'marginally attached to the workforce'.

While many recommendations regarding employment are discussed under other sections in this submission, the below recommendations refer to those issues not covered in alternative sections.

## Addressing Financial Disadvantage Amongst Employed People

**Portfolio area:** Minister for Consumer and Employment Protection

### **Recommendation:**

That the State Government undertakes a comprehensive review of the extent and experience of financial disadvantage amongst employed people in Western Australia to facilitate the establishment of strategies aimed at combating this occurrence.

### **Rationale:**

Many studies have commented on the growing incidence of poverty and financial hardship affecting employed people in Western Australia. Poverty amongst employed people is often as a result of them working insufficient hours to maintain a reasonable quality of life. Recent research by ACOSS shows that 'the working poor' now represent 15% of all Australians living in poverty<sup>85</sup>. It is important that all levels of government implement strategies to improve the conditions of casual and part-time workers and implement appropriate programs to facilitate them to move into more appropriate employment or to be able to acquire adequate hours and conditions to protect them from poverty and financial disadvantage. Through the initiative of undertaking a comprehensive review of the problem of growing numbers of 'working poor', the State government will be better equipped to establish a partnership with the Commonwealth to address this problem.

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<sup>85</sup> ACOSS (2004) Media Release *Wage Case Review Needed for Working Poor* 5<sup>th</sup> May 2004

# Mature Age Employment Assistance

**Portfolio area:** Minister for Consumer and Employment Protection

## **Recommendation:**

That the State Government establishes policies and programs to offer mature age unemployed people greater support in accessing and maintaining appropriate employment

## **Rationale:**

Mature age people make up a large number of the long term unemployed in Western Australia. These people face complex barriers in being able to access employment such as workplace discrimination and insufficient recognised training and education qualifications.

While current programs are assisting mature age workers to access appropriate employment related training, there remains a significant need to improve linkages to assist the transition into employment. Discrimination against mature age people is a key area that the State Government should take leadership in addressing. Given the ageing of the population and the increasing need to retain older workers in the labour force, discrimination against these workers is unacceptable. Older people must be consulted about their experience in the labour market as this is likely to provide key insights into possible explanations for discrimination and ultimately clues in being able to effectively address this growing problem.

# Community Development

The Community Development portfolio is broad and is charged with primary responsibility for areas of social concern (just behind the Department of Premier and Cabinet and Department partnerships).

## Homelessness Strategies

Whilst the Department of Housing and Works has responsibility for the “bricks and mortar” of housing in WA, the Department for Community Development has held primary responsibility for tackling the issue of homelessness in this State through a range of mechanisms including the State Homelessness Taskforce. The following recommendations relate to further work required in this area.

### Increase funding for existing Supported Accommodation Assistance Program Services

**Portfolio area:** Minister for Community Development

**Recommendation:**

That the State Government commit to a 25% increase in their contribution to funding under SAAP V, and that this funding be directed into increasing the funding levels for existing agencies.

**Rationale:**

The Supported Accommodation Assistance (SAAP) Sector in Western Australia is made up of 124 different community agencies spread throughout the state.<sup>86</sup> These community agencies provide assistance to homeless young people, single men, single women, families and women escaping domestic violence among others.

However, around Australia every day hundreds of women, children and men desperately seeking temporary shelter are turned away from services as there are insufficient services to support the number of homeless. According to the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) on any night the *chances of getting immediate accommodation are ... less than 50%*.<sup>87</sup>

Over a number of years the SAAP Agencies in WA have struggled to continue to maintain services resulting in pressures on workers due to staff levels, difficulty in filling positions and continual restructuring. It is widely acknowledged that there is an urgent need to improve accommodation services to homeless people.

<sup>86</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2002). *Homeless people in SAAP – SAAP NDCA Report Series 7 – Western Australia supplementary tables*. Table 2.1

<sup>87</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2003) *Demand for SAAP Assistance 2001-02, Media Release* [www.aihw.gov.au](http://www.aihw.gov.au) downloaded 30<sup>th</sup> of October 2003.

## **Apply the State Indexation Policy to Supported Accommodation Assistance Program Agencies**

**Portfolio area:** Minister for Community Development

### **Recommendation:**

That the State Government commit to the application of the State Indexation Policy in relation to its contribution to the SAAP Agreement regardless of the outcome of the agreed bilateral indexation formula.

### **Rationale:**

When the State Indexation Policy was announced in May 2004 agencies which received any State funding, believed they would receive much-needed additional funds. The realisation that the State Government would not be providing this level of indexation to its contribution to the SAAP Agreement came as a rude shock to many of these services.

Adoption of this recommendation will demonstrate the State Government's commitment to the spirit of the indexation policy and to the importance of these services.

**Cost:** \$126,000

## **Continue Funding for Supported Accommodation Services Funded under the State Homelessness Strategy**

**Portfolio area:** Minister for Community Development

### **Recommendation:**

That the State Government continue to provide funding to support the SAAP services which were either implemented or enhanced in response to the State Homelessness Strategy, and that this funding be additional to the State's component of funding for the SAAP V Agreement.

### **Rationale:**

In May 2002 the State Government responded to the Homelessness Taskforce with a \$32 million package of services and support to reduce homelessness in Western Australia. From the \$32 million allocation, the Department for Community Development received \$2.2 million in 2002/03 rising to \$3.4 million per annum thereafter to implement new services to reduce homelessness.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> Department for Community Development (2004) *Submission to the Review of the Crisis Accommodation Program*

## Domestic and Family Violence

Within a four-month period in WA during 2004, eight women and one infant tragically lost their lives as a result of domestic homicide. This tragic statistic represents one of the worse spates of domestic homicides ever seen in this State.

*The number of murders of women and children by their partners and fathers is a reflection of their unacceptable powerlessness in our community, and our community's failure to protect them from the ultimate consequences of domestic and family violence.<sup>89</sup>*

### Rural and Remote Intensive Support Program

**Portfolio area:** Minister for Community Development

**Recommendation:**

That the State Government work in partnership with the Women's Council for Domestic and Family Violence Services and WACOSS to progress the urgent need for an intensive support model to be provided to services providers within rural and remote regions of WA. The model would provide face-to-face needs based support with Managers/Coordinators and Management Committees in rural and remote areas.

**Cost:** \$200,000pa for 3 years

### Provide a State-Wide Voice on Domestic and Family Violence in WA

**Portfolio area:** Minister for Community Development

**Recommendation**

(a) WACOSS support the Women's Council for Domestic and Family Violence Services (WA) submission to the Department for Community Development for a one-off grant for \$40,000 for the implementation of the new model for Women's Council for Domestic and Family Violence Service (WA).

(b) An increase in recurrent funding of \$98,000 pa is required to sustain the WCDFVS and ensure its role as the non-government peak body representing of a diverse range of Women's Refuge and Domestic Violence Related Services throughout WA.

**Rationale:**

The Women's Council for Domestic and Family Violence Services, formerly the Women's Refuge Group of WA Inc is the peak community-based organisation committed to improving the status of women and children in society.

The expanded role of the WCDFVS is to provide a voice on domestic and family violence that facilitates and promotes policy, legislative and programmatic responses relevant to women and children who have experienced domestic and family violence.

**Cost:** \$40,000 plus an additional \$98,000 in recurrent funding

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<sup>89</sup> Carolyn Johnson, MA Research: DV Round Table: 27.4.04



## Access and Equity for Workers in Rural and Remote Regions

**Portfolio area:** Minister for Community Development

### **Recommendation:**

That the State Government to provide GEHA or equivalent subsidy as benefits available for non-government organisations to offer as incentive packages for workers within rural and remote regions of Western Australia.

### **Rationale:**

Recruiting and sustaining staff with a high level of knowledge and expertise in Women's Refuges Services in rural and remote regions of WA has proved to become increasingly difficult to high costs associated with housing and living costs.

Incentive packages incorporating housing, air-conditioning and related subsidies must become a major consideration to ensure that access and equity for staff with the non-government sector living in rural and remote areas. Government Employee Housing Association (GEHA) or equivalent subsidies must be provided as incentive employment packages to maximise the opportunity to attract and sustain good quality staff.<sup>90</sup>

## Children as witnesses of domestic and family violence

**Portfolio area:** Minister for Community Development

### **Recommendation:**

The State Government allocate brokerage funds for Women's Refuge Services to purchase intensive counselling support from specialist services to work with children who are dealing with the impact and effects of violence in the home.

### **Rationale:**

The impact of domestic and family violence on the lives of children often has far reaching long term implications on their health and well-being as teenagers and adulthood. It is imperative that a range of early intervention strategies are implemented to avoid the long term consequences of domestic and family violence on children's lives. All Refuge Services require access to DV Children's Counselling Services. Currently, the Peel region sees 1,000 children per year and can not offer counselling services to children within that region.

Children's Counselling Services that provide intensive support for traumatised children are urgently required. There are a number of models that the WCDFVS would like to recommend funds could be made available to metropolitan, rural and remote services:

- DV Children's Counselling Services in regions where there is currently no access to these services;
- Brokerage funds to purchase specialist services

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<sup>90</sup> It should be noted that WACOSS supports the application of this recommendation across the board for all NGHSS Workers, however, the crisis in regional employment is particularly acute in the Domestic Violence Service are.

# Domestic Violence Advocacy Service Model

**Portfolio area:** Minister for Community Development

**Recommendation:**

To ensure the success of a multi-agency response to domestic and family violence, that all DVAS are funded for a Co-ordinator.

**Rationale:**

A multi-agency response to domestic and family violence in a one stop shop location is a relatively new model within WA that provides people in crisis with a range of relevant legal, advocacy and support services. The comprehensive and effective model of domestic violence crisis support is based on research and evidence that identifies the importance of accessible joined up services.

**Cost:** \$59, 402 (Level 6, SACS Award, plus on-costs)

# Community Education Programme in Schools

**Portfolio area:** Minister for Community Development

**Recommendation:**

That the State Government fund a mandatory programme for all Primary and High School students which focuses on healthy/unhealthy relationships and the impact of domestic and family violence.

# Links Between Animal Cruelty and Family and Domestic Violence

**Portfolio area:** Minister for Community Development

**Recommendation:**

- That the State Government commits funds to raise public awareness in relation to research focused on links between animal cruelty as an issue indicating family and domestic violence and the potential for other criminal acts and violent behaviour.
- That the State Government commit funds for a project to promote collaboration between Government agencies and the non-government sector to ensure both the essential recording of acts of animal cruelty and the provision of adequate management of offenders as well as prevention mechanisms in the community. This would include the development of interagency memoranda of understanding with protocols for training, cross reporting, cross referral for investigation and safety responses for both human and animal victims.

**Rationale:**

There are well-established links between animal cruelty/abuse and forms of child abuse and violence in the community. It is particularly relevant to family and domestic violence and a significant factor in the developmental profile of a range of violent offenders.

**Cost:** \$100,000

## Financial and Material Assistance

### Family Crisis Program

**Portfolio area:** Minister for Community Development

**Recommendation:**

That the State Government undertake a review of the policies guiding the Family Crisis Program and commit to substantially increasing the funding allocated to the program

**Rationale:**

Government expenditure on the Family Crisis Program has been decreasing substantially in real terms in recent years. Given that numbers of Western Australians experiencing poverty have been rapidly increasing in the last five years, decisions to allocate reduced funding have clearly not been based on client demand.

Concerns have been raised to WACOSS for a number of years now regarding the current policies, guidelines and procedures of the Family Crisis Program. These concerns have been repeatedly raised at the Emergency Relief Agencies Forum and from our other constituents.

Key concerns include:

- Narrow scope of eligibility criteria and no apparent mechanisms to allow for discretionary assistance to be provided
- Lack of funds to assist clients – even when clients meet eligibility criteria
- Lack of information dispersal from the department regarding eligibility criteria guidelines and policy and procedures to agencies
- Inadequate financial assistance to clients to cover costs associated with the particular crisis (for example costs associated with moving house)

At present, the Family Crisis Program appears to be operating ineffectively in addressing the issues that it has been set up to address. It is vital that increased funding is provided and an extensive review of the program is undertaken to ensure that it becomes an effective mechanism in addressing financial crisis in the community.

## Emergency Relief

There are currently over 300 Emergency Relief providers operating in Western Australia. These services provide essential material assistance to low income and disadvantaged members of the community in times of financial crisis.

### State Wide Network of Emergency Relief Providers

**Portfolio area:** Minister for Community Development

**Recommendation:**

That funding is provided to establish a State Wide network of Emergency Relief providers to link up agencies across the State. Particular emphasis should be placed on the inclusion of rural, remote and regional organisations in such a program. This could be achieved by setting up video conferencing to a variety of regional centres to allow participation in Emergency Relief forums.

**Rationale:**

Agencies have often reported to WACOSS that they find the ability to communicate and network with other providers of Emergency Relief essential in their ability to provide quality service to their clients. Information regarding the establishment of new services, relevant policies affecting service delivery, trends in problems being experienced by clients, staff training opportunities and other relevant information would greatly enhance the capabilities of the sector as a whole. The more effective individual services can be in delivering assistance to those in crisis the greater their ability will be in appropriately directing and utilising their limited funding.

## **Training for Emergency Relief Agency Workers**

**Portfolio area:** Minister for Community Development

**Recommendation:**

That additional training opportunities be provided under the Community Skills Training Centre (CSTC) program specifically focussed on the training needs of Emergency Relief agency workers.

**Rationale:**

Given that many Emergency Relief agencies are relatively small and often rely heavily on assistance provided by volunteers, agency based training is often limited. It is vital that access to appropriate training is available for all workers in these agencies. Training is also vital as many of these agencies deal with clients who have complex support and assistance requirements and are frequently in a state of crisis. Training in topics such as communication, occupational health and safety, privacy, dealing with clients from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, among many others are vital to the education required for these employees and volunteers.

While WACOSS and the Department for Family and Community Services also offer training, there appears to remain considerable need for greater training opportunities for the workers in Emergency Relief. WACOSS calls on the State Government to allocate increased resources to CSTC to facilitate these opportunities.

## **Financial Counselling**

Financial Counselling Services aim to “assist individuals and families to maximise income and rationalise expenditure, to make informed decisions about their financially related problems and to act on these decisions, through providing information, identifying and clarifying options, improving skills and supporting clients through the negotiation process”.

Customers who access financial counselling services generally fall into the following categories:

1. People who usually manage well but encounter financial difficulty because of significant changes in their circumstances, eg. Relationship break down, loss of employment, sudden illness.
2. People on low income struggle to ‘make ends meet’.
3. People who experience financial difficulty that is complicated by social exclusion factors. It is not uncommon for this group of customers to be accessing services from multiple agencies.

## **Maintain Funding to Financial Counselling Agencies**

**Portfolio area:** Department for Community Development

### **Recommendation:**

That the State Government provides the Department for Community Development with adequate funds to ensure that they are able to maintain the 15% funding increase provided to Financial Counselling agencies under the State Homelessness Strategy.

### **Rationale:**

Financial Counsellors provide invaluable services to low-income people facing financial difficulties. Under the State Homelessness Strategy all Financial Counselling agencies were provided with a 15% increase in base funding. The 15% was quickly absorbed into the operating budgets of these agencies and to remove this funding would place this sector in crisis.

It is our understanding that the funds provided for this increase are derived from the Rental Accommodation Fund<sup>91</sup> and that this source of funding will not be available after the end of 2004/05. We believe that it is essential that additional funds are provided from consolidated revenue to ensure that there is no reduction in financial counseling funding.

## **Increased Resources for Financial Counselling Services**

**Portfolio area:** Department for Community Development

### **Recommendation:**

That the State Government increase resources allocated to financial counselling services.

### **Rationale:**

According to the Financial Counsellors Association of WA, there currently exists a waiting period of approximately three weeks before individuals can access the services of a financial counsellor. This has been reported to be a result of: the inability of services to offer adequate financial counselling services to meet client demand due to lack of resources as well as the lack of the number of social services that offer financial counselling, especially in regional areas.

Given the fact that the majority of individuals that access financial counselling do so in a time of crisis, it is inappropriate that the majority of them are forced to wait three weeks. This three weeks can make a huge difference to people being able to address financial problems they are experiencing and can lead to outcomes such as: eviction from their place of residence, legal action being taken against them, as well as further entrenchment into poverty and financial hardship.

Financial Counsellors offer long-term solutions to people in crisis and financial hardship by building on individual capacity to manage their financial affairs.

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<sup>91</sup> Interest derived from Private Tenants Bond monies.

# Women's Interests

Women continue to face unique and complex barriers fitting into and participating in public life in Western Australia. Research undertaken by the ABS and findings from the West Australian Community Report on Women from the Women's Rights Action Network Australia highlight some of the key issues facing Women in Western Australia.

Women continue to be over-represented in the numbers of Australians living in poverty. This statement is supported by a number of findings:

- Women are more likely to be the head of a lone parent family with dependents. 13% of all families in 1999 were lone parent families headed by a woman compared to only 2% headed by a male sole parent. Furthermore, 7% of all women aged over 15 live as lone parents with dependants. This is compared to 1% of men.
- Sole parents are more likely to be living in income poverty. It has been reported that just over one in five (22%) of female sole parents live in income poverty.
- Almost 60% of all casual workers are women. This means that they are working in unstable employment, with no benefits such as holiday and sick pay and maternity leave, and they often work a minimum amount of hours
- 44% of women worked part time in 1999 compared to 12% of men.
- Women continue to earn substantially less than men. In 1998, female wage and salary earners working full time received, on average, only 84 per cent of what their male counterparts received.
- Women (particularly lone mothers) lag far behind other family types in levels of home ownership. 61% of lone mothers rent or board.

In view of the above findings, it is important that the Government provide assistance to those organisations that seek to assist women in the community as well as improving the opportunities available to disadvantaged women in Western Australia.

Domestic violence is a key issue of concern for WACOSS. This is dealt with separately under the section on Domestic and Family Violence.

## Women and Poverty

**Portfolio area:** The Premier in partnership with the Minister for Women's Interests

### **Recommendation:**

That the State Government commit to the development of indicators and benchmarks to measure and address poverty amongst women. This should be incorporated into the Women's Report Card developed by the Office of Women's Policy.

### **Rationale:**

In recent years, there has been resurgence in research into the experience of women in poverty, particularly at an international level.<sup>92</sup> Such research provides valuable insight into the fluctuations in the extent and experience of poverty over a number of years amongst different groups of women and highlights the effect that various social policies have had on women.

<sup>92</sup> See for example: Townson, M. (2000) *A Report Card on Women and Poverty*. Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives; Canada; Whitehead, A. (2003) *Failing Women, Sustaining Poverty: Gender in Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers*. UK Gender and Development Network; Sussex; Casper, L., McLanahan, S. and Garfinkel, I. (1994) *The Gender – Poverty Gap: What Can we Learn from Other Countries*. *American Sociological Review*; Aug 1994; 59, 4.

Given the over-representation of women in the numbers of Australians living in poverty highlighted by the figures above, Western Australia has much to gain by looking at research conducted inter state and overseas on the experience of women in poverty. These studies could provide useful frameworks to understand and measure poverty amongst women.

The Women's Report Card, developed by the Office of Women's Policy is a critical resource in informing the community, business sector and government of the experience and progress of women in Western Australia. The seven key areas that have been focused on in the report card provide an insight into how women fit into areas of public life and participation and will be able to show the changes to these levels over time. WACOSS believes that these broad indicators provide the framework for a deeper analysis of the position of women in our community, of how they experience our society and of the demographics that describe this experience. Poverty has not been incorporated into the Women's Report Card and is something that would be an invaluable contribution to the resource.

## Women and Employment

**Portfolio area:** Minister for Consumer and Employment Protection and Minister for Women's Interests

### Recommendation:

- The *Minimum Conditions of Employment Act 1993* should be amended to enhance and protect the entitlement of casual workers. Such amendments could include entitlements for long term casual workers to convert to permanent employment, increase the casual loading which is currently 20% to 25% and provide parental leave to long term casual employees. Providing entitlements for women to return from parental leave on a part time basis should also be incorporated into the parental leave entitlements in the Act. Further amendments could include extending unpaid parental leave to 24 months and including a scheme of paid parental leave.
- The *Industrial Relations Act 1979* be amended to ensure there is a mechanism for women to take pay equity matters to the Industrial Relations Commission.

### Rationale:

The decentralisation of the labour market has led to an increased casualisation of the workforce, with women making up the majority of casual workers. In 2000, 21.5% of women in WA were working casually (ie had no paid leave entitlements). Almost 58% of all casual employees are women.<sup>93</sup> Casual workers experience job and income insecurity and many casual workers remain in casual work for the majority of their working life. An increasing number of casual workers work regular hours for the same employer and yet have no paid leave entitlements or security of tenure.

Western Australia continues to have the biggest gender pay gap between male and female employees in Australia. Women currently earn around 24% less than men in Western Australia. The national average of the gender pay gap is 16 per cent. Furthermore, the situation in Western Australia is worsening. Explanations for the current situation in WA may include the increase in individual workplace agreements and the increasing casualisation of the workforce.

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<sup>93</sup> Office of Women's Policy, Department of Community Development (2002) *Women's Report Card: Measuring Women's Progress*.

These findings show that the State Government must take measures to improve the employment situation for women in Western Australia.

## **Women and Education**

**Portfolio area:** Minister for Education and Training and Minister for Women's Interests

**Recommendation:**

That the Government provide pregnant girls and teenage mothers with specific programs to prepare and encourage them to return to study

**Rationale:**

Given the current Governments commitment to retaining teenagers in education or training until they are 17, provisions must be implemented to assist pregnant girls and teenage mothers being able to complete a satisfactory level of study.

It is well established that young people face significant barriers to obtaining employment if they have not completed year 12 or alternatively undertaken employment specific training. Young mothers face multiple barriers in returning to study after having a child. It is therefore imperative that they are provided with further assistance to encourage the transition to employment through education, training and support programs.

## **Women and Housing**

**Portfolio area:** Minister for Housing and Works and Minister for Women's Interests

**Recommendation:**

That the State Government increase the stock of public housing appropriate for single women and mothers.

**Rationale:**

Public housing for women must take into account safety factors in the surrounding community as women are more likely to be subject to assaults and attacks in there local community. Women are also more likely to state that they have a fear of crime in there community.

Many low income single mothers do not have access to a car due to the costs associated with running one and therefore often rely on public transport. Especially with very young children to care for, it can often be difficult to access public transport and subsequently be able to reach essential services and to run errands.

The Government must therefore ensure that public housing is available that is situated in safe areas and provides easy access to services in the community.



# Youth

## Regional, Rural and Remote Young People

**Portfolio area:** Minister for Community Development (and Youth)

**Recommendation:**

That the State Government, in consultation with relevant stakeholders develop and implement programs to encourage opportunities for regional, rural and remote young people to access education, employment, and support services within their local community

**Rationale:**

Young people living in regional, rural and remote communities have the same right to share in resources and have their needs met as any other person in our society. Currently, very few resources go into addressing issues for young people living in these communities. As stated by the Youth Affairs Council of Western Australia *Equitable distribution of resources has a direct link with the quality of life for young people and their families. To enable young people to access services they must be flexible and offer a range of responses and programs that overcome barriers such as the tyranny of distance, especially in the north-west and east of the state*

Without appropriate, available and accessible resources, negative community outcomes are likely to result. These are likely to include: high levels of migration away from rural areas, an increase in the incidence of crime and juvenile delinquency in rural areas, and the exclusion of young people from the communities they live in.

## Education and Training for Young People

**Portfolio area:** Minister for Education and Training

**Recommendation:**

That the State Government engage young people as active participants in the development and delivery of education and training programs.

**Rationale:**

Given the recent push by the State Government to ensure that young people remain in education or training until they are 17, it is imperative that appropriate alternative education and training programs be developed to cater for the needs of all young people. To ensure that these programs are appropriate, young people should be encouraged and facilitated to have input into the development of a wider range of education and training alternatives.

## Housing for Young People

**Portfolio area:** Minister for Youth in partnership with the Minister for Housing and Works

### **Recommendation:**

That the State Government removes age based criteria that prevent young people accessing public housing and increases the public housing expenditure for youth.

### **Rationale:**

Young people under the age of 18 make up 39 per cent of all homeless people in Western Australia. Homeless young people are particularly susceptible to substance abuse, prostitution and crime. Providing access to housing for these individuals, who are often homeless as a result of family violence, would greatly improve their chances at maintaining a reasonable standard of living. It would also facilitate them to engage in education, training or employment.

## Youth Homelessness

**Portfolio area:** Minister for Community Development in partnership with Minister for Consumer and Employment Protection and Minister for Housing and Works.

### **Recommendation:**

That the State Government:

- Implement reforms to enable young people to take out leases and/or family members to take out leases on behalf of youth
- Investigate ways to build a fund to assist in accessing housing

### **Rationale:**

There is a real need for continued efforts regarding homelessness of youth, drug addicted and mental health target groups.

Feedback from service providers indicates that **youth homelessness** is on the increase with the age group demanding services decreasing. In particular, there is a critical need for services for youth aged between 10-16 years.

There is a **lack of accommodation** for those leaving short-term community accommodation services (SAAP), which leads to a cyclical demand for service due to homelessness. Released prisoners also face financial barriers to accessing housing. The release payment of \$180 is inadequate and results in people becoming homeless, particularly finite sentence recipients.

## Representation of the Interests of Young People in Consultative and Participatory Processes

**Portfolio area:** Minister for Community Development

### **Recommendation:**

That the State Government allocate greater resources to the Youth Affairs Council of Western Australia to facilitate greater input from young people in consultative and participatory processes.

**Rationale:**

The Youth Affairs Council of Western Australia is the Peak body representing youth affairs in Western Australia. The council aims to promote the rights and social justice issues facing young people in the community with a specific focus on disadvantaged young people. Through developing and co-ordinating policy, facilitating program responses and distributing information about the needs of young people, they aim to increase community awareness of youth issues and the contributions young people make to society.

It is important that Government recognize the vital role that the Youth Affairs Council plays in advocating for the needs of young people in the community. Without appropriate funding of this organization, it is likely that the voice of the youth of Western Australia will be lost in government and non-government debates. The outcome that this is likely to have is the denigration of the appropriateness of policies and services in the community that impact young people both directly and indirectly.

# Disability Services

The table below provides an overview of indicative additional recurrent expenditure required (each recommendation is discussed separately within this section):

Indicative additional recurrent expenditure required is:

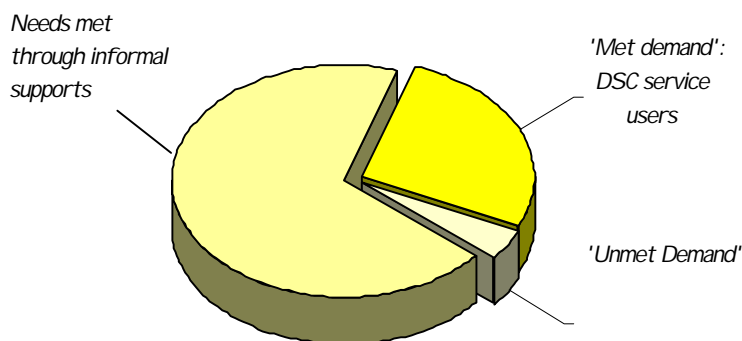
Resources required (\$m)	05/06	06/07	07/08	08/09
1. Residential Accommodation Services	<b>\$29.7</b>	\$34.0	\$38.4	\$43.0
2. Respite, Family and In-Home Support	<b>\$6.7</b>	\$9.8	\$13.0	\$16.3
3. Young People in Nursing Homes & De-institutionalisation	<b>\$6.1</b>	\$9.2	\$10.0	\$10.8
4. Day Activities	<b>\$7.8</b>	\$9.0	\$10.1	\$11.3
5. Therapy/Equipment	<b>\$3.7</b>	\$5.7	\$7.8	\$9.9
6. Capacity Building	<b>\$2.6</b>	\$3.7	\$4.7	\$5.8
7. Indexation	<b>\$6.2</b>	\$7.2	\$8.4	\$9.6
Existing Growth funding committed 2003-2009 <sup>94</sup>	<b>(\$20.3)</b>	(\$33.6)	(\$47.9)	(\$47.9)
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$42.5</b>	\$45.0	\$44.5	\$58.8

## Rationale:

Based on the Time to Care<sup>95</sup> budget submission of 2004-2005 and the commitment of the State Government in that budget, it is estimated that by 2008-2009 the additional recurrent funding required will be \$58.8m.

Sadly for the people who wait for assistance, much of this is a long accumulated backlog of need that requires immediate support. There is clear and evidenced 'unmet demand' for accommodation, respite and alternatives to employment for people with disabilities in Western Australia. This group includes elderly carers often in their seventies and eighties, families that have literally worn out, carers with significant health problems and those who need assistance to continue coping. Their situations are an indictment on our society; their need for assistance is a basic, compassionate response that should be further expanded the Western Australian Government's already positive action in this area.

The demand for services in Western Australia is best depicted in the pie diagram below.<sup>96</sup>



<sup>94</sup> Includes "third business plan funds" and additional indexation provided in 2004-2005 forward estimates.

<sup>95</sup> The Time to Care Campaign has been organised by the families of people with disabilities to articulate their desperate need for support in caring for their children. Funded by service providers in the disability sector and auspiced by the Developmental Disability Council, the Time To Care Campaign has a vision that people with disabilities and their families will have the access to the same opportunities enjoyed by all other members of our community.

<sup>96</sup> Informed by the latest data from the Australia Bureau of Statistics, people with severe or profound disabilities who need assistance with core activities (mobility, self-care or communication) and who are aged 5-64 and the recently completed study by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (which estimates some 20,000 people nationally have unmet needs for accommodation, respite or community access).

The State Government through the Disability Services Commission (DSC) forecasts its expenditure will be \$295m in 2005-06 and rise to \$335m by 2007-08. Of this, just over \$44m is the DSC's unpublished third Business Plan. This contribution is widely acknowledged as a positive first step by the State Government towards resolving the crises faced by individuals and families, but is yet to be subject to proper public scrutiny.

The strategies proposed seek to provide sustainable services to thousands of Western Australians who are without support:

<b>People Assisted<sup>97</sup></b>	<b>05/06</b>	<b>06/07</b>	<b>07/08</b>	<b>08/09</b>
Residential Accommodation Services	444	539	638	740
Respite, Family and In-Home Support	1,209	1,610	2,026	2,457
Young People in Nursing Homes & De-institutionalisation	238	359	391	423
Day Activities	601	718	840	966
Therapy/Equipment	805	1,231	1,674	2,134

## **Residential Accommodation Support**

**Portfolio area:** Minister for Disability Services

### **Recommendation:**

The State Government provide new resources of \$43m for an additional 740 places for people who need residential accommodation will be required by 2008-2009. With \$29.7m of these additional funds being provided in 2005/06.

### **Rationale:**

Despite a significant investment in residential accommodation support over many years, the amount of places available has remained quite constant. The reasons for this are complex, e.g. closure of places when vacancies arise for budgetary reasons. The Minister for Disability Services has undertaken that in future, when vacancies arise, they will be maintained and used for people in need for a residential accommodation support option. This means that this important part of the service system can continue to grow and provide much needed support.

It is envisaged that new resources of \$43m for an additional 740 places for people who need residential accommodation will be required by 2008-2009. The Minister's decision that all vacancies that arise from exits in residences are to be retained means 125 people will be assisted at no additional cost to the State. This means 740 people will be assisted by 2008-2009 if this strategy is adopted.

It is acknowledged that the Accommodation Blueprint will possibly contribute up to 200 new residential places and is implicit in the third business plan. As the business plan remains unpublished and the Accommodation Blueprint was subject to significant errors<sup>98</sup> in its calculations for future need the Time to Care Campaign stands by its previous estimates until these issues of transparency and miscalculation are resolved<sup>99</sup>:

<sup>97</sup> The 2004-2005 forward estimates offset these numbers but remain unpublished and therefore unavailable for public scrutiny.

<sup>98</sup> The use of the Social Policy Research Centre's predicted growth figure of 3.73% was applied to the 1,551 residential places available in the service system in 2001/02 to derive the estimated 2003/04 growth figure of 58. When the projected "backlog" figure of 45 is added to this, an increased capacity figure of 103 is derived (announced in the 2003/04 budgetary process). However, the Accommodation Blueprint allocates these places to the broader notion of

<b>Cumulative Places</b>	<b>05/06</b>	<b>06/07</b>	<b>07/08</b>	<b>08/09</b>
Population Growth	124	199	278	360
Backlog	300	300	300	300
Improved Capacity	20	40	60	80
<i>Total</i>	<i>444</i>	<i>539</i>	<i>638</i>	<i>740</i>
Less exits from residences	43	69	96	125
<i>Net Growth</i>	<i>401</i>	<i>470</i>	<i>542</i>	<i>615</i>

## Total Respite, Family and In-Home Support

**Portfolio area:** Minister for Disability Services

### Recommendation:

The State Government provide an additional 2,457 supported community living packages, respite and family and in-home support services by 2008/09 at an additional recurrent expenditure of \$16.3m with \$6.7m of this being provided in 2005/05.

### Rationale:

There is a need for 2,457 supported community living packages, respite and family and in-home support services by 2008-2009 at an additional recurrent expenditure of \$16.3m. As the business plan remains unpublished and the Accommodation Blueprint was subject to significant errors in its calculations for future need the Time to Care Campaign stands by its previous estimates until these issues of transparency and miscalculation are resolved<sup>100</sup>:

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"accommodation support" and are not reserved for only expanding the residential service system. In that case, the base figure used to calculate future growth should have been the number of accommodation support places not residential service places. In 2001/02 the number of people receiving accommodation support was 3,179 yielding a growth factor 119 additional accommodation support options. Clearly the published growth numbers represent an under-estimation of the growth in accommodation support required. This needs to be addressed, as the current published projected figures are most likely to perpetuate unmet need and the many individual and family crises that currently occur.

<sup>99</sup> Assumptions:

- Figures above are cumulative;
- Population growth is estimated to be 3.73% per annum (Social Policy Research centre, University of New South Wales 2002, Methods to address requirements for changes in funding disability services brought about by external change suggests the application of a "demand adjustment" of 3.73% (adjusted for WA's population), which provides a method of adjusting funds "so that the relationship between the supply of services and the demand for those services remains constant");
- Backlog of unmet demand is 300 critical and urgent priority is placed on this matter being resolved in a 24month period (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2002 Effectiveness of Existing Funding to reduce Unmet Needs and any Remaining Shortfalls estimated 300 people in need. The "Identifying The Need" report commissioned by the Minister for Disability Services of Western Australia, the Hon. Sheila McHale, in June 2001 and subsequently tabled in the West Australian Parliament estimated backlog demand to be 263.);
- New places are estimated to be at an average cost of \$76,591 (DSC Annual Report 2002-2003). It is understood that DSC may have a more current calculation and that this may be higher than that used in this paper;
- Improved capacity is derived from an estimated 400 residential places being redeveloped to accommodate an additional 80 people over four years at a marginal cost of \$25,530 per person. These places are kept separate from demands arising from population growth and backlog so as to improve service reach and ensure the system has more flexibility and available capacity; and
- Vacancies will be retained and that the vacancy rate is 1.3% per annum (death rate for specific age rates in WA). It is estimated that there will be 125 vacancies by 2008-2009

<sup>100</sup> Assumptions:

- Figures above are cumulative;
- Supported community living are strategies to support people to live in their local communities rather than in residential facilities,
- Respite includes out of home, in-home and alternative respite strategies,
- Family Support includes a range of community supports such as counseling, behavioural intervention and case management
- A backlog for respite is included based on the AIHW unmet need study<sup>100</sup> estimate of 950 people who have an unmet need, of which half are assumed to be a priority. The estimate is spread out over two years.
- Population growth is estimated to be 3.73% per annum (Social Policy Research Centre, University of New South Wales 2002, Methods to address requirements for changes in funding disability services brought about by external change suggests the application of a "demand adjustment" of 3.73% (adjusted for WA's population), which provides

<b>Cumulative People Assisted</b>	<b>05/06</b>	<b>06/07</b>	<b>07/08</b>	<b>08/09</b>
Supported Community Living	206	315	428	545
Respite	732	881	1,036	1,196
Family Support	271	414	562	716
<i>Total</i>	<i>1,209</i>	<i>1,610</i>	<i>2,026</i>	<i>2,457</i>
Less exits	269	361	456	555
<i>Net Growth</i>	<i>940</i>	<i>1,249</i>	<i>1,570</i>	<i>1,902</i>

## Young People in Nursing Homes and De-Institutionalisation

**Portfolio area:** Minister for Disability Services

### **Recommendation:**

By the end of 2008/09 and at a cost of an additional \$10.8m alternative accommodation be found for an 160 people with disabilities languishing in institutional facilities, with an additional \$6.1m to be provided in 2005/06.

### **Rationale:**

Two hundred and sixty three people have been identified<sup>101</sup> as being inappropriately accommodated in the mental health services system, aged care services and in public hospitals. An urgent response to this is required as it is a complex Commonwealth-State jurisdictional issue. This paper assumes that these people will be provided community accommodation support over the next three years and that their existing supports will be transferred with them to community options.

Whilst there exists a critical need for accommodation, there also remains a considerable agenda of de-institutionalisation that is required to provide more contemporary accommodation for people with disabilities.

It is proposed that alternative community accommodation be found for an additional 160 people with disabilities languishing in institutional facilities by 2008-2009. This may also present an opportunity for building further places in the service system. Wherever possible services will be provided by the non-government sector or by direct consumer funding, to allow families to purchase services of their choice. Services will be planned around the needs of individuals. Potential exists for significant asset holdings to be sold and expensive maintenance and upgrading costs avoided.

Estimated recurrent costs required at the end of 2008-2009 are \$10.8m.

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a method of adjusting funds "so that the relationship between the supply of services and the demand for those services remains constant".;

- Vacancies will be retained and that the vacancy rate is 1.3% per annum (death rate for specific age rates in WA). It is estimated that there will be 125 vacancies by 2008-2009;

<sup>101</sup> Department of Disability Services (2001) *Identifying The Need* report commissioned by the Minister for Disability Services of Western Australia, the Hon. Sheila McHale, in June 2001 and subsequently tabled in the West Australian Parliament

## Alternatives to Employment (ATE)

**Portfolio area:** Minister for Disability Services

### Recommendation:

The State provide day support options for 966 additional people by 2008/09 at an additional cost of \$11.3m (includes Post School Options), with \$7.8m of this to be provided in 2005/06.

### Rationale:

Day support options will be required for 966 additional people by 2008-2009 who because of their level of disability are unable to access Commonwealth employment services. The estimated cost for this level of service is projected to be \$11.3m includes Post School Options. As the business plan remains unpublished the Time to Care Campaign stands by its previous estimates until this issue of transparency is resolved. The estimate is made up of a backlog in services of 400 places.<sup>102</sup>

Places (cumulative)	05/06	06/07	07/08	08/09
Growth	201	318	440	566
Backlog	400	400	400	400
Total	601	718	840	966
Less Exits	78	120	164	210
Net Cumulative	523	598	676	756

Until 2008-2009, all eligible school leavers with high support needs seeking a community access option on leaving school will be placed with an individually designed and appropriately funded service. Adults will have an increased chance of gaining employment or alternatives to employment that will help them maintain and develop their skills. Places are assumed to be an average cost of \$15,000 per place.

## Therapy / Equipment

**Portfolio area:** Minister for Disability Services

### Recommendation:

The State provide an additional \$9.9m for access to therapy, aids and equipment for an additional 2,134 people by 2008/09, with \$3.7m of this to be provided in 2005/06.

### Rationale:

Escalating pre-school and adult consumer/staff ratios limit the potential impact of therapy and professional support on the capacity for people with disabilities to achieve their full potential and to live as independently as possible.

Aids and equipment (assistive technology) are items used to assist people to maintain a level of independence and/or health. Access to aids and equipment benefit the consumer/client and community by promoting independence and health and reducing reliance on external assistance and the concomitant improvement in quality of life and wellbeing.

<sup>102</sup> Disability Services (2001) Ibid. of which 950 people are estimated as needing respite WA. 50% have been assumed to be a critical priority



It is estimated that up to an additional 2,134 people with disabilities and their families require access to therapy as well as aids and equipment to enhance their opportunities for greater independence and access to the community. The resource requirement is estimated to be \$9.9m recurrent.<sup>103</sup>

## Capacity Building in Disability Services Sector

**Portfolio area:** Minister for Disability Services

### **Recommendation:**

That the State Government invest in a recurrent allocation of \$5.8m recurrent by 2008-2009 (with \$2.6m in 2005/06) to enable capacity building in the following areas:

- Maintenance of a capable Local Area Coordination (LAC) service system (\$3.14m);
- Development of a network of Local Government initiatives to bolster community capacity (\$1.95m);
- Improving access to generic and mainstream services (\$0.25m)
- Policy research and development (\$0.20m)
- Advocacy (\$0.25m)
- Improving knowledge and understanding of existing capacity to build practical strategies to improve community capacity.

### **Rationale:**

Maintenance of a **locally coordinated service managing** direct consumer funding is essential. The recent review into LAC shows very high consumer satisfaction with the service. It is proposed to maintain and strengthen the system by allowing continued growth based on the projected population growth of 3.73%. This will allow for over an additional 1,130 people to access the service at a cost of \$3.14m by 2008-2009.

Families and carers can be provided with greater opportunities to be funded directly and to establish a wide range of “lifestyle” services through **Local Government**. Examples are recreational, self-help or community development services. One dollar for every person living in a Local Government boundary will be provided by the State Government contingent on a matching commitment from Local Government. At a recurrent cost of nearly \$2m at the end of 2008-2009, this scheme will build a significant array of locally based lifestyle services. These will have significant benefits in creating community capacity to deal with emerging demand for more formal services.

A close linkage with this model and the LAC service system is pivotal. DSC will manage funding under contract with Local Government.

**Access** is a critical component of ensuring capacity exists in mainstream services. \$250,000 recurrent is earmarked to boost access, especially through promotion, to all sectors of the community, and to discharge the new access directions emerging from the review of the Disability Services Act.

**Policy Research and Development** was identified as being critical to building capacity in 1994.<sup>104</sup> Prior to this and subsequently there have been many calls for the further development of this area, especially within the Disability Services Commission. Most recently, the Ministers Accommodation Blueprint Committee has also called for

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<sup>103</sup> The calculations assume that an average cost of \$7,000 for children aged 0-6, \$2,500 for children aged 6-18, \$1,500 for adults and \$2,500 per person per annum for equipment. A mixture of service delivery modes for therapy and professional services will be utilised to ensure the most effective and efficient service delivery.

<sup>104</sup> Industry Commission (1994) *Inquiry Into Community Social Welfare Organisations*, Ch 3

additional investment in this area. A notional amount of \$200,000 is provided for, spread over two years.

**Advocacy Services**, with the exception of advocacy through the Local Area Coordination system this area has received little additional support of the last several years. There is little doubt that the overwhelming majority of people have a vision of our community where people with disabilities exercise self-determination and choice and have equality of opportunity and full participation. A key ingredient to realising this vision is through individual and systemic advocacy and through the enactment and vigorous enforcement of laws protecting civil and human rights. Small individual advocacy agencies report significant workloads and there is little investment in the area of self-advocacy services. A notional amount of \$250,000 is provided for, spread over two years.

Many examples of **community capacity** exist but need to be more widely promulgated.

# Housing and Works

The experience of WACOSS and other housing-related non-government organisations over a number of years highlight the critical role of housing in people's lives, and the interconnectedness of housing with employment, health, education and other social, economic and environmental factors.<sup>105</sup> This experience is further supported by a growing body of research evidence at both state and national levels<sup>106</sup>. However, these recognitions have rarely been addressed at the policy level, with responses to housing need tending to be ad hoc and uncoordinated.<sup>107</sup>

In response to this lack of appropriate policies and financial commitment to the housing of financially disadvantaged people, WACOSS recommends that the State Government increase its annual commitment to social and community housing by \$52.1 million. This commitment will allow for increases to the provision of both social and community housing. As shown in the recommendations below, out of the \$52.1 million designated to increasing affordable housing stock, \$10 million should be allocated to community housing. As part of this \$10 million, 25% should be directed towards the development of affordable housing options through community housing.

## Increase the Investment in Social Housing

**Portfolio area:** Minister for Housing

### **Recommendation:**

The State Government lobby the Commonwealth Government to increase their annual commitment to social housing in Western Australia by \$74.2 million to \$173.4 million per year.

The State Government increases its annual commitment to social housing by \$52.1 million to \$86.6 million per year.

### **Rationale:**

This recommendation aims to arrest the decline in social housing funding over the last decade, to respond to increasing unmet housing need and to redress the alarming rate of housing related poverty.

The total number of social housing dwellings owned by the Department of Housing and Works increased slightly in 2003/04 (from 39,181 to 39,215). However, this level of growth was insufficient to increase social housing as a proportion of total housing stock and as a result has fallen from 5.4% to 5.2% over the year.

<sup>105</sup> See for example WACOSS (2000) *Housing for a Sustainable Community: the State of Housing in WA*, Perth; National Shelter (1999) *The Links between Housing, Employment and Income Support: Implications for Housing Policy*, Discussion Paper, National Shelter, Canberra; People With Disabilities (1997) *Planning to meet the growing demand for accommodation services: A Discussion Paper for the Industry Commission*, People With Disabilities, Perth; Shelter SA and SACOSS (1998) *Redefining the Contribution of Housing to Stronger Communities: A South Australian Policy Perspective*, Shelter SA and SACOSS, Adelaide.

<sup>106</sup> See for example Burke, T. (1998) "Housing and Poverty" in Finch, R. and Nieuwenhuysen, J. (eds) *Australian Poverty: Then and Now*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne; Farrar, A. (1999) *Housing and sustainable communities*, Paper presented at There's No Place Like Home, 2<sup>nd</sup> National Conference on Homelessness, Melbourne, 19-21 May 1999; Finch, R and Wulff, M (1998) "The Locations of Poverty and Disadvantage" in Finch, R. and Nieuwenhuysen, J (eds) *ibid*; National Housing Strategy (1992) *Australian Housing: The Demographic, Economic and Social Environment*, Issues Paper 1, AGPS, Canberra ; Newman, P., Kenworthy, J. and Vintila, P. (1991) *Housing, transport and urban form*, National Housing Strategy Background Paper 15, AGPS, Canberra

<sup>107</sup> Barron, L. and Gauntlett, E. (2001a) *Housing and Sustainable Communities Indicators Project Working Paper*, unpublished, WACOSS, Perth

Figure 1 demonstrates that since 1997 social housing has declined from 6.1% of all occupied dwellings to 5.25% in 2004. This decline has been caused by the combined effect of funding for WA under the Commonwealth State Housing Agreement (CSHA) falling by 26.5% in real terms since 1996/97 and resulting the Department of Housing Works being unable to build sufficient new stock to maintain its presence. At the same time social housing has increasingly been targeted to people with high needs and low incomes, reducing the Department of Housing and Works rental revenue.

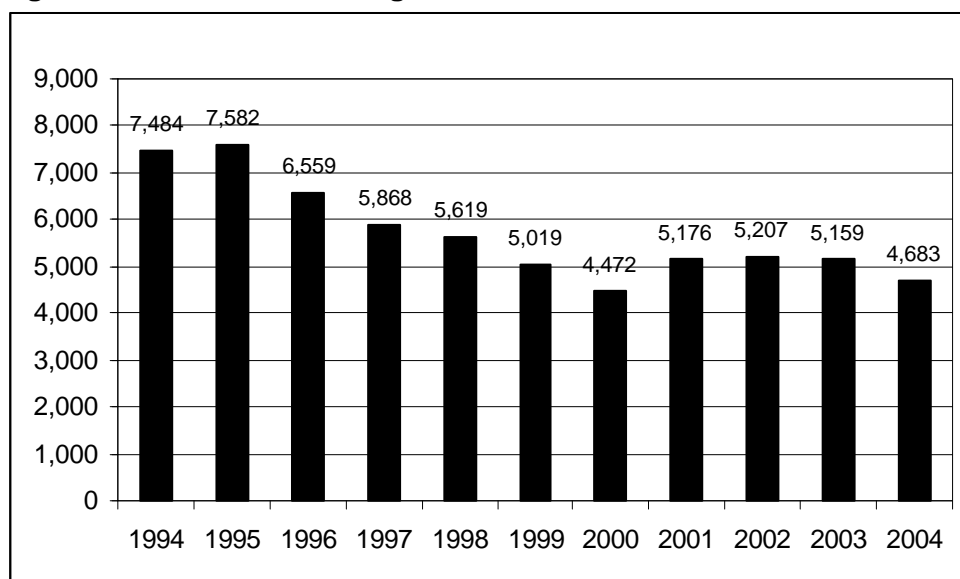
**Figure 1: Social housing stock as a proportion of occupied dwellings 1997 to 2004.**

*(Refer paper version – graph unable to be displayed)*

Data Source: DHW Annual Reports 1997-2004

This decline in market presence has corresponded with a downward trend in the number of new tenancies over the past decade. Figure 2 demonstrates that the number of new tenancies have fallen by a third since 1995 (7,582) down to 4,683 in 2004.

**Figure 2: New social housing tenancies 1994 to 2004**



Data source: DHW Annual Reports 1994 to 2004.

Research prepared for the National Summit on Housing Affordability shows that In 1998 an estimated 78,000 Western Australians were in housing stress, in 2004 this number has grown to 83,000 and represents 8.6% of income earners<sup>108</sup>.

Commonwealth Rent Assistance is often pointed to as reducing the extent of housing poverty but the Productivity Commission Report on Government Spending 2003 shows that of the 86,244 CRA recipients in WA, 28.7 remained in housing stress after receipt of the payment.

In order to have a real impact on the level of housing stress experienced by Western Australians, social housing must be increased to at least 6% of total housing stock. This would provide access to Homeswest housing for the 13,000 or so households on the waiting list.

In order to achieve this by 2025, social housing stock must increase by around 1,500 dwellings per year. Even maintaining social housing stock at its current level of 5.2% of total housing stock would require funding an additional 800 dwellings per year. Shelter

<sup>108</sup> Anne Harding, Ben Philips and Simon Kelly, (2004) *Trends in Housing Stress* NATSEM.

WA estimates that this would require a total CSHA funding of around \$260 million per year nearly double the current amount of \$133 million.<sup>109</sup>

**Cost:** \$52.1m

## A Commitment to Community Housing

**Portfolio area:** Minister for Housing

### **Recommendation:**

That the State Government commit to supporting the Community Housing Strategic Plan 2003 – 2008 to encourage a more viable and financially independent community housing sector through honouring its previous pre-election commitment to provide an additional \$10 million to community housing<sup>110</sup>. (\$10m to be allocated from the total of \$52m requested under recommendation above) each year for four years from July 2005.

### **Rationale:**

Community housing is recognised as an efficient method of housing provision, with a multiplier affect of 1.25 and as an effective method of housing, particularly for those who can benefit from other support (e.g. employment, training, treatment) due to the capacity of non-government services to cross-fertilise housing provision with support services. Despite proven efficiency and effectiveness, allocation of funding from the Department of Housing and Works has remained relatively static since 1997.

Viability of the community housing sector, and hence the capacity of organisations to deliver a range of services is dependent upon stock growth. In September 2003, the Department of Housing and Works released the Community Housing Strategic Plan 2003 – 2008 which introduces a series of reforms designed to “shape the future of Community Housing in this state over the next 5 years and beyond”<sup>111</sup>. The draft Plan targeted an increase of 75% in stock numbers over the period 2004 – 2008. However, when the final Plan was released in September 2004 this was reduced to a 40% increase in stock. For the Plan to achieve a strong and vibrant sector, we believe additional funding is required. Currently, growth is around 300 units per annum and the additional \$10 million per year would add a further 80 units per year to the growth rate.

## Affordable Housing through Community Housing

**Portfolio area:** Minister for Housing

### **Recommendation:**

That 25% of the \$10 million to Community Housing (referred to in the previous section) be directed towards the development of affordable housing options.

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<sup>109</sup> Shelter WA (2004) *Occasional Paper 2004-2, The State of Affordable Housing in WA*

<sup>110</sup> The Labor Party committed up to an additional \$10m to Community Housing from the funding provided to the Department of Housing and Works in its pre-election commitments (see [www.wa.alp.org.au/dl/camp2001/housing.pdf](http://www.wa.alp.org.au/dl/camp2001/housing.pdf), p2.) ac. In addition, The Premier in correspondence to WACOSS (2 February 2001) states “Labor supports the continued development of Community Housing and believes it has not received the priority under the Court Government it deserves. In government, we would be looking to restoring community housing.” According to statistics provided by the Department of Housing and Works there has been no increase in funding to Community Housing as yet under the Gallop Government.

<sup>111</sup> Department of Housing and Works. (2003). *Community Housing Strategic Plan 2003 – 2008*.

**Rationale:**

There is also a recognised and increasing need for the development of affordable housing options for those 7% of Western Australians households (who renting privately and in receipt of Commonwealth Rent Assistance) spend more than 50% of their income on rent<sup>112</sup>.

Increasing income eligibility limits to include the second quintile has a two-fold effect on housing outcomes. Firstly, it can provide opportunities for those living in housing related poverty, most often “the working poor” to access housing for the medium term as a savings gateway to home ownership. Secondly, this strategy has the potential to return a higher level of rental income to community housing providers, thus improving viability and efficiency.

## **A Plan to Address Socially Excluded Community Housing Tenants**

**Portfolio area:** Minister for Housing

**Recommendation:**

That the Premier and Cabinet commit to the examination and resolution of national and state government policy issues impacting on the delivery of services to community housing tenants. A high priority to be placed on identifying strategies to support service providers to work in a more integrated way to address the complex needs of their mutual clients. An essential component of a coordinated initiative would be the development of an integrated emergency crisis response to assist people with both mental health and drug and alcohol issues.

**Rationale:**

Community housing tenants access a range of support programs that are funded by other government departments such as the Health Department, Disability Services Commission, Department of Community Development and the Department of Justice.

The design and delivery of programs funded through these various government Departments needs to be complementary, and opportunities for service providers to work in a more integrated way enhanced and encouraged. Currently there is a lack of coordination between the main national housing and other policy frameworks. Programs are largely evaluated in isolation, and as a result opportunities to develop a web of mutually reinforcing responses are lost.

The important role that the non-government organisations play in providing vital services, including accommodation is widely acknowledged. However, continued expansion of partnerships between government agencies and the non-government sector, whilst being essential to the achievement of ‘seamless’ service provision, is dependent upon adequate funding and well-coordinated, coherent policy.

A problem identified across all sectors, which demands immediate government action is the lack of an emergency crisis response with the capacity to assist people with serious mental health and/or drug related problems. If an appropriate response could be developed collaboratively with services providers including hospitals, police and community agencies, it would contribute to a safer working environment for those working with people who are potentially dangerous to themselves or others, and would ensure that clients received immediate and appropriate assistance.

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<sup>112</sup> Productivity Commission (2003) *Report of Government Services 2003* Table 16A.49 AGPS, Canberra

# Developing Regional Housing Strategies

**Portfolio area:** Minister for Housing

## **Recommendation:**

- That Regional Housing Associations be established progressively in all regional areas of WA.
- That funding be provided for a housing policy position to assist in the development of Regional Housing Strategies.
- That Regional Development Commissions and Metropolitan Regional Councils be adequately resourced by the State government to ensure extensive consultation across a broad range of stakeholders in the preparation of regional housing strategies.

## **Rationale:**

In recent years, deepening regional inequalities have become evident across the country and some regions are emerging as pockets of high, and increasingly entrenched disadvantage.<sup>113</sup> These problems are exacerbated by the withdrawal of services by both private and public sector agencies.

A high percentage of community housing dwellings located in regional WA are joint venture projects managed by community housing providers including local government authorities. However, it is evident that the lack of a coordinated approach to housing development in regional areas contributes to a competitive, rather than a cooperative approach between providers. Local government tend to focus their efforts on housing seniors, whilst people with complex needs may have limited access to crisis or supported accommodation. Expansion of the role of local government in community housing would be greatly facilitated by the appointment of 'housing workers'.

# Culturally Appropriate Housing for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Families and Singles

**Portfolio area:** Minister for Housing

## **Recommendation:**

That priority is given to developing a culturally appropriate housing response to the needs of young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and singles.

## **Rationale:**

A number of current and emerging housing needs are evident for Indigenous people living in both rural and urban areas. Some of these needs relate to population pressures, for example, almost 40% of the Western Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population is under the age of 15<sup>114</sup>. Clearly there is a need for collaborative effort to develop culturally appropriate housing options for these young families and singles, including transitional housing.

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<sup>113</sup> Gleeson & Carmichael (2001). *Thinking regionally, acting locally: lessons for Australia from overseas housing and regional assistance policies*. AHURI

<sup>114</sup> Department of Housing and Works (2003). *Western Australian Aboriginal Housing and Infrastructure Council Strategic Plan 2003/04 – 2006/07* page 18.





# Racing and Gaming

## Poker Machines

**Portfolio area:** Minister for Racing and Gaming

### Recommendation

- That the State Government oppose the introduction of Poker Machines into pubs, clubs and hotels in Western Australia
- That the State Government allocates resources to allow an examination of the current extent and experience of problem gambling in Western Australia compared to other states in Australia

### Rationale:

Evidence from the rest of Australia show that problem gambling, often associated with the use of poker machines contributes to a wide range of social problems including, alcoholism, domestic violence, poverty and suicide. The below statistics, correct in 1999, illustrate some key facts behind the opposition of the introduction of pokies to Western Australia

- About 290,000 people in Australia (that is approximately 2% of all adult Australians) are considered to be experiencing significant problems associated with gambling.
- It is estimated that in Western Australia, problem gamblers represent 0.70 per cent of the adult population.
- Western Australia has the lowest rates of problem gambling and this can be attributed to the relative availability of gaming machines in comparison to the other states and territories.
- The average duration of gambling problems is nine years.
- Problem gambling is most prevalent with regular players of gaming machines, racing and casino table games.
- Between five and ten "other" people are affected by the behaviour of a person who has a gambling problem.<sup>115</sup>

Given the renewed pressure on State Governments to introduce poker machines into pubs and clubs, it is important that extensive and up to date research is undertaken to show the prospective damage that poker machine introduction could have on the WA community. This research will be of great benefit in providing substance to government current opposition to the introduction of pokies.

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<sup>115</sup> Statistics obtained from the *Report of the Productivity Commissions Inquiry into Australia's Gambling Industries (26 November 1999)*. Cited on the Department for Racing, Gaming and Liquor website: [www.orql.wa.gov.au/gaming/pgstats.php](http://www.orql.wa.gov.au/gaming/pgstats.php)

# Appendix 1 – List of Bodies Consulted

ACROD

Aged & Community Services WA (ACSWA)

Carers WA

Children, Youth and Family Agencies (CYFA)

Community Housing Coalition of WA

Community Legal Centres Association WA (CLCWA)

Council of DSC Funded Agencies (COFA)

Council on the Ageing WA (COTA)

Developmental Disability Council (DDC)

Ethnic Communities Council (ECC)

Financial Counsellors Association of WA

Meerilinga Young Children's Foundation

National Association of Community Based Child Care Services

People With Disabilities WA Inc

Shelter WA

Volunteering WA

WISH (Western Australian Institute of Self Help)

Women's Health Centres WA

Women's Council of Domestic and Family Violence Services

Youth Affairs Council of WA

Youth Accommodation Coalition

"More Than a Bed" Campaign Collaboration

NiFTEY

Early Childhood Australia

WACOSS Emergency Relief Agencies Forum

Tenants Advice Service WA

WA Council of State School Organisations (WACSSO)

Centrecare (WA) (WACOSS Board Representative)

Mission Australia (WA) (WACOSS Board Representative)

Ruah Community Services (WACOSS Board Representative)

Ngala Family Resource Centre (WACOSS Board Representative)

Sussex Street Community Law Service (WACOSS Board Representative)

Cerebral Palsy Association (WA) (WACOSS Board Representative)

WA Aids Council (WACOSS Board Representative)

Geraldton Resource Centre (WACOSS Board Representative)

The Gowrie WA (WACOSS Board Representative)