



WACOSS and the Community Services Sector

The Western Australian Council of Social Service (WACOSS), the leading peak organisation for the community, represents three hundred member organisations and affiliates, and 810 organisations involved in the provision of services to the community.

WACOSS is part of a national network consisting of the Australian Council of Social Service (ACOSS) and state and territory COSS's. Our national coverage strengthens our capacity to represent state interests.

We speak with and for, the 400,000 West Australians who used community services in the past year, whose voice and interests need to be brought to the attention of government, decision makers, media and the wider community.

About this Submission

This Pre-Budget Submission outlines our key priority recommendations for how the State Government should allocate funding in the 2009-2010 Budget to meet the immediate and pressing needs of the community.

Built upon the expertise and experience of our sector, this submission is derived from broad consultation with representative peak bodies and developed in collaboration with them. A detailed exploration of the priority issues, together with a complete list of recommendations can be found in the WACOSS 2009-2010 Pre-Budget Consultation Report, available online at www.wacoss.org.au

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Contents

PART ONE	
Priority Budget Recommendations	2-3
Housing	
Community Services	
Community Data	
Mental Health	
Drug & Alcohol	
Essential Services	
PART TWO	
Overview of Consultation Report	
Social Infrastructure	4
Housing	
Transport	
Community Services	5-6
Community Service Providers	
Accommodation Support Services	
Health Services	
Services for Children	
Reconciliation & Language Support Services	
Specialist Utilities, Community Legal & Education Services	
Services for Seniors, People with Disabilities, Carers	
Community Research & Development	7
Community Data	
Community Research & Development Fund	
Conclusion	8
Organisations Consulted	9



Priority Budget Recommendations

This submission highlights the top six priorities of the community for the 2009-2010 State Budget; housing, community services, community data, mental health, drug & alcohol, and essential services. For a detailed rationale for each of these recommendations, please read the Pre-Budget Consultation Report.

Housing

Increasing the supply of social housing, crisis accommodation and homelessness services.

Without doubt, the most critical need of the community and community service providers is to increase the availability of safe, appropriate and affordable housing. There can be no meaningful attempt to address social disadvantage without addressing the housing shortage. The ACOSS Community Sector Survey 2008 identified long term accommodation as the service most needed by recipients of community services. Crisis and supported accommodation was the second most needed service. The crisis is even more acute for vulnerable groups and in regional, rural and remote areas. There is a scarcity of social housing in WA, with rapidly growing waiting lists, and insufficient funding for crisis and supported accommodation to meet the demand for services. Lower income renters in housing stress report depriving themselves of basic goods and services in order to meet rental repayments. The current shortfall relative to the 6% social housing target is 15 900 dwellings. At a steady increase of 2,380 dwellings per year, the cost would start at \$576million, increasing by 4% each year.

Recommendation			Cost \$590m
Restore public and community housing stock to 6% of the total housing stock in WA by 2020 and increase the number of crisis accommodation beds by 50%, or approximately 350 beds.			
Year	2009	Annual increase	2020
All Housing	840,000	22,000	1.148m
Public Housing	34,500	2,380	67,820
Cost per dwelling	\$239,990	+4%	\$415,585
Total cost to increase public housing stock	\$576m	+4%	\$960m
Crisis Accommodation	\$14m	350 beds	

Community Services

Providing funding for community services across metropolitan, rural, regional and remote WA.

The community services sector is committed to delivering quality services in response to the needs of the community. The community needs the State Government to support this commitment by enabling us to “catch-up” with the increased costs of service delivery, and to shift from a mode of merely surviving to thriving. This “catch-up” is required due to the cumulative effect of cost drivers including; the increase in wage pressures; diminishing workforce capacity associated with staff shortages and high turnover; increased transport, accommodation and operational costs; and a decline in volunteerism. Failure to adequately fund the sector will threaten the viability of community services available to the public and the social wellbeing of the state.

Recommendation						Cost \$182m
Increase current funding to contracted not-for-profit service providers in the community by 30% to meet increased operating costs and provide an urgent increase in wages for staff. This should include an additional index for service providers operating in rural, regional and remote WA, as well as maintain the existing policy of indexation into the future.						
Disabilities Services Commission	Communities	Indigenous Affairs	Consumer & Employment Protection	Attorney General	Education & Training	Health
74,385,000	1,068,000	725,000	78,000	43,000	3,223,000	36,900,000
Child Protection	Corrective Services	Total Departments	3.55% indexation	7% regional price index		
19,264,000	1,756,000	137,442,000	12,905,000	32,070,000		

Community Data

Evaluating social wellbeing in WA through a community Research & Development program.

There is an increased need for services throughout the community, as more and more people fall behind in the boom. At the same time, the National Reform Agenda at COAG, and the national Social Inclusion Strategy are attempting to improve social outcomes across the board. WA decision makers and policy developers, within Government, the public and private sector and the community, need to have access to good quality data. Access to data, across a collective group of social wellbeing indicators, is a critical starting point for improving outcomes for WA.

Recommendation	Cost \$11.4m
Create an accessible, integrated data set of social performance indicators in WA. This will enable community, government and business analysts to determine and measure baselines and targets for social wellbeing. It should be coupled with an investment fund for not-for-profits for research and development of innovative policy, program and service delivery models which will assist in meeting WA targets.	

Mental Health

Supporting people with complex needs through expanded mental health service funding.

Western Australia had a well developed Mental Health Strategy for 2004-2007, which aimed to increase the capacity of mental health services. While the laudable mission seeks to "ensure safe, reliable and timely mental health services," we have struggled to deal adequately with the complexity of mental health issues due to a lack of funding to support the strategy. Together with drug and alcohol support, this issue ranked as the third highest need of clients accessing community services, after housing and income support, according to the ACOSS Community Sector Survey 2008. The quality of care available to people living with a mental illness needs to be improved, through improved community service delivery. It is particularly important that services are expanded to fill the current gaps in delivery to Aboriginal people and seniors.

Recommendation	Cost \$9.35m
Increase funding for mental health services across the community and particularly for Aboriginal people. Build upon the objectives of the State Mental Health Strategy, by developing a specific strategy for seniors.	

Drug and Alcohol

Supporting people with complex needs through expanded drug & alcohol services.

The rapidly escalating numbers of clients affected by issues associated with their drug and alcohol use and or mental health has led to much greater complexity in service delivery. This complexity comes at a cost, in terms of resources, management and operations. We need to improve the accessibility of drug and alcohol services for substance users, particularly by providing funding for services supporting people in the corrective services system, where up to 35% of offences are suggested to be related to drug use. Currently, services are inadequately resourced to support people within the corrective services system. The growing demand and lack of funding for this population group, is effecting the access for people who voluntarily wish to access treatment and support.

Recommendation	Cost \$10m
Increase funding for alcohol and other drug services across the community and particularly for people in the corrective services system, so that non-government organisations are funded to provide services to this critical client group.	

Essential Services

Connecting people to the essential services they need, at an affordable cost of living.

As the cost of living rises rapidly, low income households often find paying for utility bills difficult. Electricity, gas, water and transport are fundamental to maintaining basic living and working conditions for families and individuals. Thousands of consumers living on low incomes currently forgo other essential goods and services in order to pay for energy and water, as well as under-consuming as a way of making the service more affordable. These strategies, together with service disconnections, have negative health, social and financial outcomes, including reduced employment and educational opportunities as well as social isolation and depression. Rebates, concessions and improved efficiency are critical to alleviating financial hardship. Consumer representatives have an important role to ensure effective participation of consumers in essential service markets.

Recommendation	Cost \$1.13m
Provide ongoing funding for the Consumer Utilities Project; increase the current level of funding for energy and water efficiency for people living on lower incomes; and target concessions and rebates efficiently, to those who need them most.	

Total Value

The total value of these six priority recommendations is \$804m



Overview of Consultation Report

The WACOSS Pre-Budget Consultation Report identifies 43 budget recommendations, based on the input received through our consultation with members and peaks. This submission, 'Putting the Pieces Together,' provides an overview of all those recommendations, together with the top six recommendations. They are grouped into three themes; social infrastructure, community services, and community research and development. We recommend reading this submission in companion with the Consultation Report.

SOCIAL INFRASTRUCTURE

The total value of recommendations for social infrastructure is \$1.05billion.

Without doubt, the most critical need for investment in major infrastructure for the community is housing. The State must provide public housing that is safe, appropriate and affordable for people who can not rent or buy in private markets. The ACOSS Community Sector Survey 2008 identified long term accommodation as the service most needed by recipients of community services. Crisis and supported accommodation was the second most needed service. This need is even more acute for many vulnerable groups and people living regional, rural and remote areas.

WACOSS is keen to see that the Government invests the *Royalties for Regions Community Services Fund*, in social infrastructure that supports regional communities to be more sustainable. The affordability of housing will be critical to the viability of regional services.

Mobility is also essential to social wellbeing, and therefore WA must maintain an affordable transport system. Recent announcements by the new Government will support people with fuel costs in rural, regional and remote areas of WA. Appropriate, affordable and accessible alternatives to private motor vehicle transport are still required. The inefficiency and inaccessibility of the current public transport system leaves many people physically excluded with a range of negative health, social and financial outcomes, including reduced employment and educational opportunities as well as social isolation and depression. WA needs to focus new attention on investment in public transport in outer suburban areas to improve people's connections to major transport routes.

Housing & Homelessness

The most critical infrastructure recommendation is to increase the supply of affordable housing. This includes building enough public housing each year to restore housing stock to 6% of the total housing stock in Western Australia by 2020 (\$576m), and to increase the number of crisis housing beds by 50%, or approximately 350 beds (\$14m).

Cost: \$590m

Transport

Budget recommendations focus on the need to expand the public transport system in the metropolitan region, focusing on travel within and between suburbs (inter-nodal transport), through new light rail and bus services (\$450m) and to invest in dedicated walking and cycling routes to support alternative transport users (\$10m).

Cost: \$460m

COMMUNITY SERVICES

The total value of recommendations made for Community Services is \$305 million.

There is an increased need for social services across the Western Australian community, as more and more people fall behind in the boom. Many of these services are delivered by non-profit providers. The social, cultural and economic value of the contribution that the community services sector makes to civil society, by providing services to the community, is immense. Nationally, almost a quarter of a million not-for-profit organisations contribute 3.3% to the GDP, representing \$32.9 billion annually. A 3.3% contribution to Gross State Product in WA equates to \$4.2 billion per year.

The viability of community service providers is no longer certain, as organisations are beginning to cut back on their level of operations in order to survive. Now more than ever, our sector is exposed to a range of social, political and economic pressures that are challenging the way we provide services. Increasing cost drivers range from a decline in volunteerism; increase in wage pressures; diminishing workforce capacity; and increased transport and accommodation costs, to increased demand for services. The highest priority of the community sector is to address the growing workforce crisis, which is threatening its capacity to continue to deliver the current level of services being provided, and preventing an increase in service levels to meet the community's need.

There are over 36,000 people employed in the not-for-profit non-government human services industry in WA. The average staff turnover in the sector is significantly higher than the average for all Australian industries, at 23% per annum. 68% of agencies have reported difficulties finding and keeping staff and 66% of agencies have reported an increasing reliance on unpaid labour. A shortage of staff is resulting in longer periods of staff vacancies and subsequently, increased numbers of people being turned away from services to due a lack of capacity to deliver.

The commitment of the community services sector to deliver quality services in response to the needs of the community remains. The community needs the State Government to support this commitment by enabling us to "catch-up" with the increased costs of service delivery, and to shift from a mode of merely surviving to thriving.

Community Service Providers

In order to deliver services to the community, a 30% increase on current funding to contracted service providers in the community sector is required to; catch-up on the escalated costs of operation and provide an immediate increase in wages for staff (\$137.4m), cover the additional costs of operating outside the metropolitan region (\$32.07m), and maintain an ongoing annual indexation (\$12.9m).

Cost: \$182m

Accommodation Support Services

A range of accommodation and affordability measures are required including; implementing new financial support, regulatory and planning arrangements and tenants' rights (\$2m), support for vulnerable groups including mental health, disability, culturally and linguistically diverse communities and humanitarian entrants (\$2.3m) safe houses for victims of domestic and family violence (\$4.2m), a new SAAP service in the Kimberley (\$0.43m) and an expansion of the low-income household efficiency program to reduce running costs (\$0.8m).

Cost: \$9.73m



Health Services

Reform is required for the delivery of health services to Aboriginal people through targeted budget allocations for health services (\$36.4m). Recommendations from the Aboriginal Health Council of WA are provided in detail in the Consultation Report. Funding for additional mental health services, particularly units in each Aboriginal Medical Service is also a priority (\$8.85m). The priority needs in funding for alcohol and other drug services are for people in the corrective services system. Program details are included in the Consultation Report (\$5m). An Active Ageing program is required to improve the health of seniors (\$0.15m). Finally, we recommend resources for improving dental health services (\$12.5m).

Cost: \$62.9m

Services for Children

Develop community hubs to provide a range of integrated early childhood, community and education services (\$0.44m); ensure that the new Early Childhood Agenda arising from COAG is informed by a review of the Early Years Strategy and assess the balance between funding for early intervention and prevention strategies (\$0.06m), compared to crisis intervention and protection programs; double the number of Child Health Nurses (\$30m); increase funding for children in and leaving State care (\$2m) and support early childhood education for more Aboriginal children (\$7.47m).

Cost: \$39.97m

Reconciliation & Language Support Services

Post the Federal and State Apology, we call for the development of state-wide Healing Centres, based on the models being developed by the Western Australian Aboriginal community, with the establishment of the first Healing Centre within this budget cycle (\$1.35m) and a Reconciliation Secretariat (\$0.15m). Increasing English language courses, and access to interpreting and translation services to assist culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) and Aboriginal people is a high priority (\$5.5m).

Cost: \$7m

Specialist Utilities, Community Legal & Education Services

Provide funding for independent consumer representation in the area of essential services such as energy, water, climate and transport (\$0.34m). Expand the CLC State Funding Program to include regional services in the Wheatbelt, Gascoyne, Peel and West Kimberley; and in North, North East and South East Perth. (\$1.5m) Better access to social services in schools is recommended, including youth workers, services for young mothers, and services that support same-sex attracted young people in their school environments and practices. (\$1.07m) A range of support services in the gay and lesbian community and broader education about gay and lesbian issues is also recommended (\$0.5m).

Cost: \$3.41m

Services for Seniors, People with Disabilities and Carers

We need to commit to the planning and funding required to ensure that the needs of all people with a disability are met, particularly in the areas of accommodation support and Intensive Family Support. We recommend ongoing, re-current funding, rather than the current system of one-off grants in order to provide consistency for a high number of young carers in need of support services (\$0.5m) and to recognise, engage and support carers in systemic and operational levels of service delivery across the sector. For seniors, we recommend an independent one-stop-shop for housing information and accommodation advice, research into the mobility needs of seniors who lose their drivers' licences (\$0.075m) and an expansion of the State's Mental Health Strategy to include the specific needs of seniors. Costs for these services are not all available to date.

COMMUNITY RESEARCH & DEVELOPMENT

The total value of recommendations for Research & Development is \$11.4 million.

WA decision makers and policy developers within the Government, public sector and the community need to have access to good quality data that tracks the wellbeing of Western Australians across a collective group of social indicators, so that we can effectively influence outcomes for WA. This is particularly important in the context of the COAG National Reform Agenda and the national Social Inclusion Strategy, where targets are being decided for WA.

In recent years the lack of access to such information has compromised the quality and integrity of social policy development and resource allocation. For example, the most recent and reliable estimate of the number of organisations working in social service delivery in WA is ABS data which has not been updated since 1999-2000.

The community sector in Western Australia has a well established reputation of research and innovation leading to the development of new approaches to service delivery, projects and programs that have adapted over time to meet the changing needs of people using their services. This innovative capacity for research and development is declining as a result of an increasingly time consuming and expensive burden of accountability, reporting, and operational constraints, coupled with increased financial pressures.

A new approach is needed to ensure that we create and maintain a focus on continuous improvement, on re-evaluation and re-thinking new creative, efficient and cost-effective service models. Access to quality data and a research and development investment fund will be of immense value to the State.

Community Data

Create an accessible, integrated data set of social performance indicators in WA. This would serve as a collective baseline understanding of the social wellbeing of Western Australians.

Cost: \$1.2m

Community Research & Development Fund

Develop an investment fund for research and development of innovative policy, program and service delivery models which meet WA targets.

Cost: \$10.2m

TOTAL VALUE OF ALL RECOMMENDATIONS

The total value of all recommendations in the Pre-Budget Consultation Report, for social infrastructure, community services and research and development is \$1.37billion.



Conclusion

“Social policy is the whole cloth. It is naïve at best and deceitful at worst to maintain that piecemeal programmes, no matter how good in themselves, are any substitute for an over-arching strategy for genuine inclusion and empowerment.” (Dr John Falzon, St Vincent de Paul Society, Victoria)

It should be clearly apparent to decision makers that the overarching need of the Western Australian community is an immediate and long term commitment to increase the supply of housing. For a growing number of people, their only option to achieve safe, affordable and appropriate accommodation is through public housing, which needs greater capital investment from Government.

For community service providers, a significant injection of Government funding is urgently required to secure our capacity to deliver vital human services to people in need.

The recommendations included in this submission have been prioritised because they address the specific concerns of people we know are more likely to miss out on opportunities to live fulfilling lives. There are many vulnerable groups, such as Aboriginal people, children and youth, culturally and linguistically diverse people and seniors who all face a unique set of challenges that impact on their ability to survive and thrive in our community. For all of these groups, it is critical that we address the priority issues of access to services, above all for housing, but also for mental health, drug and alcohol, and essential services.

The well-being of our children and youth is shaped by the environments in which they live and interact: families, communities, schools, child care centres and workplaces. Families who struggle to look after their children often suffer from many different problems including poverty; unemployment; lack of housing; domestic violence; alcohol and substance abuse and mental illness. To help protect and improve the wellbeing of our children we must “build the capacity of adult-focussed services such as mental health, alcohol and drug treatment services, disability, family violence, corrections, homelessness and resettlement services so that they can see, hear and respond to the needs of vulnerable children in the families they serve.”

Aboriginal children are more likely to experience poorer health and developmental outcomes than other Australian children, and the Aboriginal community more generally continues to suffer from prolonged neglect of their basic needs. We need to pursue the reconciliation agenda through healing and cultural services by working with Aboriginal people.

We must also provide reliable, quality services that people with disabilities and carers can depend on for support. People with disabilities, their families and carers need the supports and services that will enable them to live as valued and included members of our society. In WA, critical unmet need for support services has been acknowledged by the WA Government and responded to with increases in funding. However, despite this effort there continues to be a significant number of people with a disability whose needs are not being met, particularly in the areas of accommodation support.

For WA to be a truly inclusive community, we must support our multicultural communities by enhancing inclusion through English language, translation, interpretation and settlement services. We need to ensure that women and child victims of domestic and family violence are protected and supported. Finally, we need to support the inclusion of diverse sexualities in our community through services, education and strategies to remove discrimination. All these and other recommendations are explored further in the Consultation Report.

WACOSS supports a vision for a fairer WA and commends the recommendations in this submission to the State.

Professor Dorothy Scott Director, 2008, “Think Child, Think Family, Think Community: Building the Capacity of Adult Services to Respond to the Needs of Vulnerable Children” Professor Dorothy Scott Director, Australian Centre for Child Protection, University of South Australia. Australian Centre for Child Protection, University of South Australia.

Organisations consulted on the 2009/10 Pre-Budget Submission

WACOSS gratefully acknowledges the contributions, ideas, thoughts and recommendations submitted by each of the following contributing organisations.

Aboriginal Health Council of WA
Aboriginal Legal Service
Anglicare WA
Carers WA
Centrecare
Children, Youth and Family Agencies Association
Communicare
Community Housing Coalition of WA
Community Legal Centres Association WA
Coolabaroo
Council on the Ageing WA Inc
CREATE Foundation
Djooraminda
Health Consumers' Council WA Inc
Men's Advisory Network
National Disability Services WA
Noongar Patrol
Playgroup WA
Ruah Community Services
Resource Unit for Children with Special Needs
Salvation Army Western Australia
Shelter WA
UnitingCare West
Volunteering Western Australia
WA Association for Mental Health
WA Collaboration
WA Network of Alcohol & Other Drug Agencies
WA No Interest Loans Network
Women's Council for Domestic and Family Violence
Yorgum Aboriginal Family Counselling Service
Youth Affairs Council of WA
WA Association of Youth Workers



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