



STRONG TOGETHER

*Working collaboratively for a
socially sustainable WA*

WACOSS Pre Budget Submission
For the WA State Budget 2013–14

Prepared for the WA State Government
October 2012



wacoss

Western Australian
Council of Social Service Inc

*Ways to make
a difference*

WACOSS Pre Budget Submission
2013–14

*Stronger Together:
Working Collaboratively for
a Socially Sustainable WA*

Western Australian Council of Social Services
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October 2012

Foreword

The Western Australian Council of Social Service presents this Pre-Budget Submission *Stronger Together: Working Collaboratively for a Socially Sustainable WA* to the Western Australian Government, calling for investment in the top five priorities of the community services sector in the 2013-14 State Budget.

The past year has seen a continued emphasis on driving cultural change across the public and community sectors to forge a more collaborative relationship to achieve better outcomes for Western Australians in need of care and support.

The Premier's Partnership Forum is responsible for leading this change and is proving to be a valuable mechanism for working together to improve the sustainability of services and deliver better outcomes for the community.

The 2012-13 State Budget responded to some of the critical needs of Western Australian children, through investment in child health nurses and school based centres for children and parents. The Council continues to hold the strong view that investing more effort in the wellbeing of children is one of the most important roles for the State Government, capable of having a profound effect on the wellbeing of the State over time.

We are still a long way from having closed the social divide in WA. While we have achieved a lot through working together, we cannot diminish our efforts to achieve our vision of a just, inclusive and equitable society. We must maintain a focus on our goals of securing the sustainability of services that improve outcomes for the most disadvantaged and excluded in our community, realising that we are 'Stronger Together.'

The Council welcomes the commitment by the State Government to greater collaboration in the co-design of client-centred services and programs. For the identification of real-world outcomes and the co-design of services to be truly effective it must involve real collaboration across government agencies in partnership with community service providers *and* with informed and empowered service users.

The Council presents this submission that embraces the theme of collaboration, and calls for holistic responses to the greatest areas of need, from early intervention and prevention services, to secondary services for those at risk, through to services for those with complex needs or in crisis. There is much to be done. We maintain our commitment to working in partnership with our members and stakeholders across all sectors, and we hope that the implementation of these recommendations will be pursued by Government through a collaborative approach with the community sector, as we work together to care for and support the Western Australian community.



Francis Lynch
President



Irina Cattalini
Chief Executive Officer

About WACOSS

The Western Australian Council of Social Service (WACOSS) is the leading peak organisation for the community services sector, and represents its 300 members and the over 800 organisations involved in the provision of services to individuals, families and children in our community.

WACOSS is part of a national network consisting of the State and Territory Councils of Social Service and the Australian Council of Social Service (ACOSS). Our national coverage strengthens our capacity to represent the interests of people in Western Australia across the breadth of state and national issues.

Each year WACOSS member organisations deliver services to hundreds of thousands of Western Australians. The services we provide include health, community services and development, disability support, employment and training, aged and community care, family support, children and youth services, mental health and drug and alcohol treatment, Aboriginal services, support for culturally and linguistically diverse people, victims of violence and abuse, housing and advocacy.

We speak with and for Western Australians who use community services, to bring their voices and interests to the attention of government, decision makers, media and the wider community. We invite you to join with us in creating a just, inclusive and equitable society.

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Introduction

The Western Australian Council of Social Service produces an annual pre-budget submission on behalf of disadvantaged and vulnerable Western Australians and the community services that work with them in the interests of the Western Australian community. This submission is the culmination of many months of consultation and research and reflects the contributions of many community service providers.

In recent years The Council has sought to provide a strategic analysis of the state of community services, the needs of disadvantaged citizens, critical gaps in the support provided, and emerging trends and issues. We have sought to move away from simply presenting a shopping list of requests for new service funding and to provide a forward-looking analysis of wider social issues to inform the policy priorities of community service providers, Ministers and senior public servants alike. This year we also hope to influence the policy development and funding commitments of all political parties ahead of the State election in March, leading into next May's budget.

Our approach also seeks to highlight and strengthen the role of civil society in the governance and the life of our community, by presenting to decision makers the insights of front-line community services that are in a unique position to observe and engage with the lived experience of our most disadvantaged citizens. One of the key emerging issues for community service provision, in the quest to understand and improve real world outcomes for disadvantaged and vulnerable Western Australians, is the opportunity for collaboration in the design, delivery and evaluation of programs and services. It is a significant challenge to do this properly, and despite the best efforts of service providers and funding agencies (and the isolated success of many programs and initiatives) there persist areas of disadvantage that remain intractable, groups and individuals who fall through the cracks, and areas of complex need that are not amenable to an isolated or piecemeal approach.

In the face of growing levels of unmet service need, the increasing cost of and demand for crisis services, and the failure of overlapping services to make headway with relatively small numbers of individuals or families with complex needs or entrenched disadvantage, it seems apparent that simply putting more resources into business as usual is not enough. At the same time we must not abandon existing successful programs or expect to find a silver bullet solution. One challenge is to be able to put in place the resources and frameworks that enable collaborative approaches to be planned in a coordinated-manner state-wide and implemented at the local level. This kind of innovation needs to be supported in a way that isn't easily captured by any particular vested interest, can grow, adapt and persist beyond individual pilot programs and "pet" projects.

Another challenge is how to define and measure meaningful and relevant outcomes to underpin and drive improvements and innovations in service delivery. We need to ensure our outcome data are independent, relevant, and at the right level to support effective evaluation across services and programs – without increasing the reporting burden for the community services sector. These are the big challenges for the Partnership Forum and the public and community sectors in successfully realising their agenda.

The community and public sectors have been working together to both implement policy reform and to drive cultural change that fosters the partnership approach as common practice. It is important to stress that cultural change is a process that requires a dedicated commitment over time and that we are still early on the journey of realising the benefits that will flow from a more collaborative approach. Many community service organisations, especially small organisations distributed across the State need more time and resources to engage meaningfully in these reforms, and to accrue the benefits of them.

The State Budget is an important mechanism to pursue greater collaboration and to that end, our submission focuses only on high level outcome areas that cut across multiple government agencies, policies and programs. This allows the opportunity for new programs to be implemented through innovative and collaborative models, potentially crossing over traditional single agency models where that may lead to improved outcomes.

This year's submission identifies five key priorities:

- *Housing and homelessness,*
- *The cost of living,*
- *Children, young people and families,*
- *People with complex needs, and*
- *Sustainable community services state-wide.*

Underlying these key priorities is a range of concerns including sustaining service outcomes through greater reliability and continuity of funding; addressing Commonwealth-State issues to better align overlapping and conflicting program and service outcomes; and building recognition of the role of the civil society and citizen participation in improving community outcomes.

This year, the Council has used its Model of Social Sustainability as a tool to assist in identifying priority recommendations for the Pre-Budget Submission. The Model was developed as a set of five principles in 2002 then adapted to develop a Social Sustainability Assessment Framework in 2008. The Council suggests that these principles can serve as an important lens for the Government in considering its commitment to social sustainability in the State Budget. Further information about the WACOSS Model of Social Sustainability is included below.

WACOSS Model of Social Sustainability

The Social Sustainability Assessment Framework was developed as a tool specifically for organisations in the community services sector by WACOSS in September 2008. It is intended to be an educative tool that enables organisations to understand how services and programs contribute to social sustainability by encouraging reflective process, facilitating discussion and dialogue, and enhancing the understanding and awareness of a project. The Assessment Framework was based on the WACOSS Model of Social Sustainability (2002).

The WACOSS Social Sustainability Assessment Framework has informed the development of our Budget recommendations and is based on five principles:

- ***Equity***
- ***Diversity***
- ***Quality of Life***
- ***Inter-connectedness***
- ***Democracy & Governance***

The Council suggests that these principles can serve as an important framework for the Government in considering its commitment to social sustainability in the State Budget. The Framework also provides a foundation on which the community sector can continue to engage with both Federal and State Governments across the broad range of reforms currently underway.

Equity

All Western Australians want to be part of a community that is both experienced and perceived as being equitable, but the reality is that we fall short of this shared aspiration. Our shared aspiration of being part of an equitable society should be a lens through which we assess our approach to all the other elements of social sustainability.

Diversity

We all benefit from being part of a vibrant, innovative community, that comes from having a wide diversity of people, ideas and expression. Diversity is also a key component of resilient systems that allows them to survive and adapt to change. Diversity needs to be embraced, valued, fostered and protected in all its forms, for the social, cultural, artistic, intellectual and economic advancement of WA.

Quality of Life

Access to our basic needs is something we would all like to take for granted, but increasingly people are failing to be able to meet such basic needs as shelter, food, and essential services like electricity and water. Responding to the cost of living requires a suite of policies, services and support, targeted at providing affordable housing and reducing utility hardship and nutritional poverty. It also requires us to ensure that people have access and control of the services they need to live with dignity.

Inter-connectedness

Everyone benefits from being part of a community that provides both formal and informal means of connecting people with the systems of support around them. Promoting participation, accessibility and social inclusion are critical to the wellbeing of WA. Collaborative communities and processes lead to improved outcomes for a wider range of stakeholders and help to prevent the exclusion of particular groups or issues of concern. Service user participation in the design of services leads to better programs and more relevant and sustainable outcomes.

Democracy & Governance

Providing democratic processes and open and accountable governance structures are important at all levels of community and Government, particularly in a way that is simple for people to engage in, and doesn't result in overly complex bureaucratic processes. It's vital that Western Australians have access to information, and are able to participate in decision making processes about issues that affect their lives and the liveability of their communities. Good governance is also essential to deliver on the promise of justice and legal rights.

2013 – 14 Budget Recommendations

<i>Budget Priority</i>	<i>Outcome</i>	<i>Allocation</i>
Housing and Homelessness	<i>All Western Australians have access to affordable, appropriate, and sustainable housing, particularly those vulnerable to housing stress and homelessness</i>	\$525m
Cost of Living	<i>More integrated financial management support services for all Western Australians, particularly those on low, fixed or insecure incomes vulnerable to utility hardship and financial stress</i>	\$275m
Children, Young People & Families	<i>Coordinated client-centred services and supports that meet the needs of children, young people and families, with client participation a central component of service delivery</i>	\$78m
Complex Need	<i>Innovative, integrated and flexible service responses reflecting collaboration across government and community services that provide assistance and address gaps in services for people with complex needs</i>	\$57m
Sustainable Community Services State-wide	<i>Community services are adequate to cope with changing population need and strong regional community networks play an active role in regional development</i>	\$15m

Budget Priority – Housing and Homelessness

Outcome:

All Western Australians have access to affordable, appropriate, and sustainable housing, particularly those vulnerable to homelessness and housing stress.

Budget Investment: \$525m

Rationale:

Issues concerning access to safe and affordable housing in Western Australia emerged as a strong priority across our consultations with service providers. The biggest concerns are: rates of homelessness, the lack of crisis and transitional accommodation, access to social housing, and the availability and affordability of private rentals in regional centres and the metropolitan area. At the same time the cost of housing has risen to a point where owning your own home is increasingly beyond the reach of the average working family.¹ The cost and availability of affordable rental accommodation emerged as the number one contributor to financial stress in low-income households in our recent *Cost of Living 2012 Report*, accounting for 30-40% of weekly expenditure (compared to 22-27% for food and 3-5% for utilities).² This suggests that much of the recent increases in levels of financial stress and default, utilities hardship and demand for emergency relief services, can be understood as a product of transferred housing stress.

Most services, wherever they sit in the housing and service continuum, recognise the 'housing first' principle and agree that the provision of housing is fundamental. Investment in more housing should be the first priority, while the range of services at the support, transitional and crisis end is critical, they should not be seen as an alternative to investing in more houses. The Council also recognises that significant structural reform to the Australian tax system is required to address the drivers of rising housing costs, and continues to advocate for reform at the Federal level.

Service Targets:

The people in need of additional housing support that this investment should be targeted at include those living on low, fixed and insecure incomes experiencing housing stress, unable to secure appropriate affordable housing, or at risk of homelessness. Population sub-groups that are particularly vulnerable to housing stress and homelessness include: seniors with low incomes and few assets, particularly older single women; people with disabilities; people with complex needs, mental illness or drug and alcohol issues; single parent families and families living on low incomes; Aboriginal people, recent humanitarian migrants and others from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds; and young people from disadvantaged backgrounds.

¹ Median purchase price is 120% median household income. Department of Housing presentation on *State Affordable Housing Strategy: Opening Doors 2010-2020*.

² *The Cost of Living 2012*, WACOSS. www.wacoss.org.au

Strategies:

Significant investment in more social housing, including new public and community housing

The Department of Housing's Affordable Housing Strategy 2010-2020 contains a good mix of measures addressing different needs across the housing affordability spectrum. The Council has welcomed a range of initiatives that takes creative approaches to partnering with the private and community sectors to increase the availability of affordable housing stock. We believe the strategy is sound and the mix is appropriate, but that the scale of investment is inadequate to address growing need or to reduce the growing affordability gap. To meet the level of need a construction target of an additional 1000-1500 social housing dwellings each year is needed, with this new housing located as close to services, education and employment opportunities as possible.

The Council is particularly concerned by the lack of appropriate and affordable housing for low income households. A recent study of rental affordability found that only 0.5% of private rentals across the state, were affordable for low-income households.³ At June 2012, there were 22, 871 applications for public housing, while social housing has accounted for only 4% of all housing stock in WA since 1996. Waiting times for social housing continue to grow, and public housing is increasingly limited to the most disadvantaged in our community.

The Council is calling for increased investment in the community housing sector. Community housing has a number of key advantages including: the ability to provide a better social mix of housing that reduces both concentration of disadvantage and the stigma of public housing; provision to households sitting in the affordability gap between social housing and private rental (enabling cross-subsidisation of more disadvantaged tenants); the ability to leverage housing assets to invest in new construction; the ability to access Commonwealth rent assistance; and integrated tenancy support and referral to other community services.

Increase provision of housing for community workers and other essential services in regional areas

Regional community services report a growing problem with attracting and retaining staff due to the shortage of affordable accommodation in many regional centres. A similar problem also applies to the affordability of service premises in many regional centres. To address the problem the Council calls on the government to provide adequate and affordable housing dedicated to accommodating regional community workers.

Strategies to address housing provision in rapidly growing regional communities

The impact of mining development, infrastructure stress, fly-in fly-out work practices and rapid population growth on regional communities have resulted in widespread cost of living increases and a chronic shortage of affordable housing. Research reports,⁴ the Regional Price Index 2011 and the Council's consultations provide ample evidence of the mounting numbers of people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness due to rising costs and a lack of affordable housing. The Council calls for an increase in the supply of affordable housing to ameliorate housing stress in regional areas.

³ *Anglicare Australia Rental Affordability Snapshot*, www.anglicare.asn.au/site/housing_issue.php, (2012)

⁴ *Impact of Fly-In Fly Out/Drive-In Drive-Out Work Practices on Local Government*, ACELG, (2012)

Support vulnerable groups and those with complex needs to secure and sustain housing

The Council calls for ongoing and sustainable funding for programs that provide housing assistance to homeless families and vulnerable people with multiple and complex needs (including disability, mental ill-health or co-morbidity). The lack of appropriate accommodation undermines the capacity of service providers to assist vulnerable people to secure stable and sustainable outcomes. Better resourcing is needed to enable accommodation support providers to provide a more comprehensive level of support, so they can better respond to the range of support needs to prevent people from falling through the cracks during transitional points (such as new refugee arrivals, young people leaving home, patients being discharged from hospitals, and victims of domestic violence).

Community services for people experiencing, or at risk of homelessness

Homelessness has become an increasingly significant problem in Western Australia, with the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare finding that in 2010–11, an estimated 19,500 people received support from a specialist homelessness service. Of these, 41% were children accompanying clients, while 59% were clients seeking ongoing accommodation. While the growing lack of affordable housing in WA is a significant factor, the correlation between homelessness, poverty and complex need is increasingly apparent. The research indicates that the majority of homelessness service users in WA were women (58%); that escaping family and domestic violence was the primary reasons for homelessness; that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people were over-represented relative to their population size; that many who experience homelessness also experience concurrent challenges such as mental health concerns and/or drug and alcohol addiction; and, that homelessness among seniors goes beyond a lack of available housing.⁵ At the same time WA services are providing shorter periods of support than those in other states and reporting high levels of unmet need.

Homelessness is clearly not a stand-alone issue, and an integrated and collaborative approach that combines homelessness and tenancy support with other community services for vulnerable and at risk groups is required to prevent people and families from becoming homeless or to sustain longer term outcomes. These complementary services include those addressing family violence, unemployment and insecure work, addiction and mental health, and financial management.⁶

Increased crisis and transitional accommodation

Women's refuges report increased numbers of women and children seeking refuge and ongoing support, including women on Temporary Visas who have no income. Crisis accommodation is increasingly being used as transitional or longer term housing due to a lack of affordable alternative housing options. Similar conditions apply across a range of groups in need of emergency accommodation, with large numbers being turned away because accommodation services are running at over capacity. The availability of supported accommodation is very limited in regional and remote towns where crisis or transitional housing is non-existent or in dire shortage, and youth at risk of homelessness are of particular concern.

⁵ *People Turned Away from Government-Funded Specialist Homelessness Accommodation 2010-11*, The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) (2011).

⁶ These issues are also addressed in section 2 *Cost of Living* and section 4 *Complex Need*

On an average day in Western Australia a total of 1,232 people (including accompanying children) either request new or continued accommodation.⁷ The majority of these are turned away and have to find alternative accommodation or sleep rough. The majority of unmet requests for emergency accommodation occurred because there was no accommodation available, while others were a result of gaps in crisis accommodation that do not meet the special needs of specific client groups, such as families, youth, seniors, single men, and women from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse backgrounds. To this end, The Council is calling on the State Government to increase investment in crisis and transitional accommodation as part of a wider strategy to ensure that those accessing these services are then supported into appropriate longer-term housing options.

Subsidise access to private rental

Subsidising private rental is a vital strategy for avoiding bottlenecks in the housing continuum. Targeted at people exiting transitional accommodation, this would free up transitional accommodation and provide exit points from crisis accommodation – which remains a real challenge for the current system. It would also assist other specific vulnerable groups, such as older single women who have not been in the private rental market before and have the capacity to manage their tenancy well, but simply cannot afford market prices. This is an appropriate and cost-effective strategy to provide immediate access to housing and prevent further disadvantage and exclusion.

Introduce inclusionary zoning policies

The Council calls for the introduction of inclusionary zoning policies requiring new developments over ten units to include 15% affordable housing.⁸ 'Affordable' in this context meaning that households in the bottom two quintiles can afford to live in that housing (taking into account locational costs). The Council considers that Local Governments also have the capacity to influence the range and type of housing provided to ensure a more appropriate mix of housing types, and believes there should be a statutory requirement for local government housing policies that underpin their planning regimes. The City of Swan provides a good example where it has encouraged greater housing diversity to cater for older and younger people, including measures to allow 'granny flats' to accommodate unrelated people.

Implementation:

A coordinated approach across multiple government agencies is required to achieve better outcomes. Lead government agencies, those primarily responsible for these areas, include the Department of Housing and the Department for Child Protection. Other relevant agencies who should be engaged in a coordinated approach include Department of Planning, FaHCSIA (Commonwealth), Department of Human Services (Commonwealth), Department for Communities, Department of Corrective Services, Department of Education, Mental Health Commission, Disability Services Commission, Local Government, community housing providers, Homelessness and tenancy support services, community legal services.

⁷ AIHW (2011), *op cit*.

⁸ South Australian policies provide a good model. See *New directions in planning for affordable housing*, AHURI, (2008) or *Housing Strategy for South Australia Green Paper*, Government of SA, (2009).

Budget Priority – Cost of Living

Outcome:

To provide a comprehensive and integrated approach to financial management support services for all Western Australians, particularly those vulnerable to financial stress and utility hardship.

Budget Investment: \$275m

Rationale:

Many disadvantaged and vulnerable Western Australians are increasingly placed at risk by the high cost of essential goods and services, particularly housing. As a relatively wealthy society with a robust economy, we should be able to improve the prospects of this comparatively small, but growing proportion of citizens. A more integrated and coordinated approach to the delivery of financial management services is needed to actively assist low income households build-resilience in the face of financial stress so that unexpected costs or large bills don't push them into financial crisis or homelessness. Frontline and emergency relief services with greater capacity to direct clients in financial hardship or with complex need to complementary services can better support and encourage disadvantaged households to make the most of opportunities to improve their circumstances.

Service Targets:

The households most in need of services and support with the cost of living are those living on low, fixed and insecure incomes experiencing financial stress. Population sub-groups who are particularly vulnerable, include: single parent families, the long-term unemployed and those experiencing intergenerational disadvantage or dependence; low income families in poor rental or public housing stock; seniors with low incomes and assets, particularly older single women; Aboriginal people, recent humanitarian migrants and people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds; People with disabilities, mental illness or co-morbidity; and people in insecure work.

Strategies:

A comprehensive approach to financial management services and support

The Council believes there is a need for a comprehensive and joined-up approach to financial management services across the community sector to better coordinate and integrate outcomes across emergency relief, financial counselling, consumer credit, no-interest and low-interest loan schemes, and other programs such as the Hardship Utility Grants Scheme (HUGS). We are calling on the State Government to resource a cross-sectoral coordination mechanism (building on the model of the Emergency Relief forum) and provide funding for more integrated financial management services.⁹ Building referral capacity and improving the inter-connectedness of front line services (such as emergency relief) with complementary programs and supports can enable frontline staff to identify families and individuals who are vulnerable to a crisis, and can then assist them to take preventative action.

⁹ *Emergency Relief Scoping Project: Mapping ER delivery across Western Australia*, WACOSS, (2012).

A whole of government approach to improve the adequacy and targeting of State concessions

There are three key principles that apply to concessions – access, appropriateness (or targeting) and adequacy. The recent introduction of the Concessions WA web portal has improved access to State concessions and provides a strong basis for reviewing appropriateness and adequacy across the range of State concessions. The review should examine how the current mix of concessions responds to the needs of disadvantaged and at-risk groups and whether there is a need to re-size or re-target some concessions to fill existing or emerging gaps. The review might also consider concessional rates for fines for minor offences (such as traffic infringements), so that they do not cause undue hardship for those without the capacity to pay.

The Council would like to see the Concessions WA portal complemented by a physical one-stop-shop, so that those groups who may have trouble with online access can visit a single location, and receive support to identify and apply for the concessions to which they are entitled. The next step in improving the accessibility of State concessions is to further streamline and automate the application process, so that citizens only need to fill in the one application form for multiple concessions (or have the relevant details imported across to another application where additional information is required). Improved data matching between State Government Departments and the Commonwealth Department of Human Services (Centrelink) could enable greater proactive identification of entitlements.

The introduction of a concessional electricity tariff

The cost of energy represents a larger proportion of weekly expenditure for most low-income households than it does for most of those on median and higher incomes, meaning that increases in the cost of electricity impact disproportionately on disadvantaged households. There is considerable variation in power usage across different kinds of low-income households, depending on household composition and the quality and efficiency of their housing and appliances. Larger low-income households, particularly those with children, consume more electricity, especially when in old housing stock of poor quality and design.

Strategies to address utility hardship need to focus on the most effective manner of ensuring that low-income households remain connected, are able to meet their utility costs and resolve outstanding debts. The current concessions available to disadvantaged households (the Cost of Living Allowance and the Dependant Child Rebate) are inadequate for some households in the face of rising levels of hardship. In addition to the available assistance the Council proposes a two-pronged approach: the introduction of a Concessional Tariff for low income households experiencing utility hardship set at 15% below the current domestic tariff; complemented by a new energy efficiency program targeted to low-income households in hardship with excessive energy consumption.

A targeted energy efficiency program

While programs like the Hardship Utility Grants Scheme continue to play a crucial role in ensuring that households experiencing financial hardship can avoid disconnection, the increasing demand for grants both appears unsustainable and only tackles one side of the problem. Utility stress is connected both to the price of energy, and the consumption patterns of households. While providing financial assistance is important, improving efficiency and consumption behaviours can do more to support the resilience of households, and offers a more sustainable complementary solution. It is apparent that a stop-gap program alone is insufficient to tackle the underlying causes

of utility hardship, and complementary measures are needed to achieve long-term reductions in power consumption for low income households living in old and inefficient housing stock. Access to financial counselling and the opportunity to put in place arrangements to budget for utility bills can play a key role in stabilising household finances, but where income is simply insufficient to keep up with inefficient consumption for essential purposes, more is needed to reduce long-term use.

The Council proposes a new energy management program targeted at low income households with high consumption (top 2 quintiles) in social housing or private rental. Entry to the program would require an agreement to data sharing, and the program would be delivered by local community service providers that have an established relationship with the household.¹⁰ The home efficiency assessment will identify least cost measures, with the cost of interventions tracked against bill reductions. Participants may gain access to further assistance by meeting targets and engaging in peer to peer education.

The Government has seen positive results from dedicated efficiency programs, such as the Water Smart initiative of the Water Corporation. The Council believes that there is a real opportunity to reduce energy consumption for households in hardship across the metropolitan region as well as addressing the high cost of regional and remote power delivery. Focusing a significant proportion of this investment on regional and remote communities where the cost of delivering electricity is high will provide both a saving for households in regional and remote locations and reduce the cross-subsidy that is provided by the Tariff Equalisation Contribution (TEC).

Sourcing the tariff equalisation contribution TEC from consolidated revenue

The Council believes that the Tariff Equalisation Contribution should be provided via a Community Service Obligation payment from consolidated revenue rather than a direct levy on consumers. Customers in the Southwest Interconnected System (SWIS) are currently being asked to pay an extra 7.3%¹¹ per kilowatt-hour to fund the uniform tariff policy. This is placing an unnecessary burden on customers in the SWIS, and a disproportionate burden on low income households that are spending a greater proportion of their disposable income on electricity.

Including the TEC as a levy on SWIS consumers confuses the argument about cost reflectivity by artificially inflating the cost of service provision within the SWIS. The Council remains a strong advocate for the uniform tariff policy as a means of providing equitable access to electricity as an essential service for all residential households throughout the state. However, the Council believes that the funding for the uniform tariff policy should be borne fairly and equitably by all citizens of the State according to their means and ability to contribute (that is, out of consolidated revenue) rather than disproportionately by disadvantaged electricity consumers in the SWIS.

An independent consumer advocacy body

The Council notes the lack of specialist consumer advocacy for utility services in Western Australia. Effective consumer advocacy in this area requires skilled technical and legal advice to create informed submissions and effective advocacy for the diverse consumer interest. There is considerable asymmetry in the effective participation in public reviews and pricing inquiries where the interests of networks, energy producers, water service providers and major energy and water

¹⁰ See *Community Sector Energy Hardship Services Delivery: Gaps & Needs Analysis* WACOSS 2012.

¹¹ *Inquiry into the Efficiency of Synergy's Costs and Electricity Tariffs Draft Report* (pxi), Economic Regulation Authority (ERA) (2012).

users are extremely well resourced but small consumers are not. At present, diverse advocates for residential and small business energy consumers contest issues on an *ad hoc* basis alongside well-resourced representatives from the electricity generation and network businesses, water service providers and the utility retail sector. Utility decision-making processes are, for the most part complex, highly technical and time intensive. The establishment of an independent consumer advocacy body that specialises in local issues would allow representatives of small use utility customers to engage with these processes more effectively. In the medium to long term this body could influence a number of decision making processes that should provide Western Australians better utility services at reduced prices. Except for the initial establishment costs, such a body will not impact on the State budget as the Council proposes that it be funded via a modest industry levy.

A State Food Stress strategy, based on a regular food access and pricing survey

Food security is the ability of individuals, households and communities to acquire appropriate and nutritious food on a regular and reliable basis. Food stress is when a household needs to spend a disproportionate amount of its disposable income to eat healthy and nutritious food, or when financial difficulties mean they cannot effectively afford to do so. Nutritional poverty is experienced when households cannot afford nutritious food and are persistently forced to make unhealthy food choices and subsist on a diet of cheaper, energy-dense foods. Food stress and nutritional poverty are emerging issues for our community, and, therefore need to be part of any state food security planning. There is a pressing need to develop a reliable measure of food stress that is relevant to the Western Australian community. The Council is calling for a *regular* state-wide survey of food access and pricing¹² together with the development of an appropriate measure of food stress by the community sector.

The Council also identified a range of practical measures as part of its recent Cost of Living 2012 Report that could provide the basis for the development of a State plan. For example, addressing the relative cost of nutritious versus convenience foods in remote communities by supporting local production, or providing a targeted transport subsidy are options. Any sustainable solution to the impacts of poor nutrition on rates of chronic disease and life expectancy will require a combination of regulatory and service responses, industry consultation, community engagement and education. Time and resources are required to research regulatory and policy responses and complementary measures to ensure the strategy is appropriately targeted to be effective whilst avoiding unintended consequences.

Implementation:

A coordinated approach across multiple government agencies is required to achieve better outcomes. Lead government agencies include the Department of Finance Public Utilities Office, the Department for Child Protection and the Department for Communities. Other relevant agencies that should be engaged in a coordinated approach include FaHCSIA, Department of Human Services, Department of Commerce, Department of Health, Mental Health Commission, Disability Services Commission and the Department of Climate Change and Energy Efficiency (Commonwealth).

¹² *Food Access and Pricing Survey*, WA Department of Health, (2010).

Budget Priority – Children, Young People and Families

Outcome:

Coordinated client-centred services and supports that meet the needs of children, young people and families, with client participation a central component of service development.

Budget Investment: \$78m

Rationale:

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

The Council continues to support the establishment of an Office of Early Childhood. As a starting point, The Council is calling for an overarching client-centred framework that supports and informs the provision of services that engages children, young people and families with the government agencies and community organisations that support them in a common approach. There is an important link to be made between the provision of universal, secondary and crisis services as part of an integrated approach. The community sector's advocacy for the provision of more child health nurses provides a good example. Their role in universally monitoring child development during the crucial first three years creates an opportunity for the early identification of problems and prompt referral to secondary or support services that may prevent or reduce the severity of these problems in the longer term, producing better outcomes for the child and reducing the longer-term cost to the community.

Service targets:

The services in this section are envisaged as universal, scalable and responsive, in line with the principle of proportionate universality.¹³ Different services seek to address at a broad level the social and developmental needs of children in the early years; children in the middle years; adolescents; - young people aged 18-25 years; parents and families.

¹³ Kershaw, Anderson, Warburton & Hertzman. *15 by 15: A comprehensive policy framework for early human capital investment in B.C.*, Business Council of British Columbia, (2009).

Strategies:

A single comprehensive outcomes framework for children and young people

The provision of a comprehensive outcomes framework derived from robust data is a necessary first step to being able to meaningfully assess the well-being of Western Australian children and provide the basis for investment in effective programs to improve developmental and life outcomes. As the Commissioner for Children and Young People noted in her 2012 Report: *“Although many agencies collect data with relevance to the wellbeing of children and young people, in most cases these relate only to individual agency performance and targets or specific subject areas. A single, collated overview of children and young people’s wellbeing is a vital starting point to improving the wellbeing of children and young people.”*¹⁴

There is a need for a single mechanism to oversee assessment protocols and coordinate data collection and analysis – under the domains of health and safety, education, material wellbeing, family and peer relationships, participation, subjective wellbeing, behaviours and risks and environment.¹⁵ The area of early childhood development is one where there are well-researched outcomes frameworks that can provide a robust foundation for developing and implementing the commitment to outcomes-based contracting in line with the aspirations of the *Partnership Forum* and the commitments of the *Delivering Community Services in Partnership Policy*.

A state-wide strategy for coordinating early childhood programs on or near school sites

The Council welcomed the State Government’s announcement earlier this year that ten Child and Parent Centres will be established on school sites and has been actively involved in facilitating the contribution of the community sector to the implementation of this initiative. The Council believes that resources are now required to enhance the capacity of the Office of Early Childhood Development and Learning to provide a strategic overview to work in this area.

There are particular advantages to locating early childhood services on or near school sites. For example, given that there is a school in nearly every town and community in Western Australia, such services are likely to be more readily accessible for families and children. However as Stuart Shanker, the Commissioner for Children and Young People’s 2012 Thinker in Residence noted, “this is such an important initiative and one that needs to become universal rather than targeted.”¹⁶ It is imperative that these ten centres be linked to the other initiatives such as the five Indigenous Child and Family Centres, the three Early Learning and Care Centres, the two existing Integrated Service Centres and the proposed Early Years Services Grants for an additional seventy-five schools as well as the range of existing programs for pre-school aged children in schools (including those provided directly by the schools, and other activities run by community organisations such as playgroups).

¹⁴ *The State of Western Australia’s Children and Young People*, CCYP, February, 2012.

¹⁵ These are the categories used in *Report Card: The Wellbeing of Young Australians*, Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth, (2008).

¹⁶ *Thinker in Residence report*, Dr Stuart Shanker, Commissioner for Children and Young People, p16, (2012)

Together these programs provide a clear basis for a state-wide program. What is lacking is an overall policy framework that underpins all these activities, links them together and identifies where additional expenditure should be directed. It is important that such a framework not only takes account of other initiatives within schools (such as the potential freeing up of space in primary schools with the move of year seven students to high school) but also what else is occurring in the broader community, such as where other community services are located or planned.

Universal services for engaging young people

The Council believes there is a need for universal youth services providing a community development approach to services and events that cater for all young people, with the capacity to then engage with and provide additional support and referral for youth who are at risk. The provision of open, attractive events and services for youth can create an opportunity to identify young people who are disengaging with education, have undiagnosed or emerging mental health or drug and alcohol issues, come from particularly disadvantaged or traumatic backgrounds, and are otherwise at risk of poor life outcomes or contact with the justice system.

The Foundation for Young Australians recently released its latest version of the *How Young People are Faring* report,¹⁷ noting that educational attainment improves the labour market prospects of young people and that poor educational outcomes lead to marginalisation to either part-time work or unemployment or participation in illegal activities. Policies to raise educational attainment need to be directed at those groups of young people among whom rates of school completion are currently low. This includes young adults who live outside metropolitan areas; are disabled; come from homes in which English is not the first language; have parents who have not completed Year 12; have parents who are unemployed, and children in single income households.

The combination of a changing youth labour market, long-term unemployment and persistent marginalisation experienced by certain groups reinforces the need to ask: how well are young people prepared for the increasingly fluid worlds of work? The Gonski Report found that a concerning proportion of Australia's lowest performing students are not meeting minimum standards of achievement.¹⁸ There is a strong link between low levels of achievement and educational disadvantage, particularly among students from low socioeconomic and Indigenous backgrounds. While policies and strategies to address disadvantage are clearly needed, a pro-active approach to school attendance is a critical underpinning. Alternative education programs are often under-funded and display significant shortfalls when used as a full substitute for schools. To this end, The Council is also calling for an expansion of the initiative employing youth workers as part of educational institutions' key staff groups.

Provision of universal parenting services

Consistent and quality parenting is of critical importance to raising "healthy, competent and independent children" and plays a central role in the development of a child's thinking and language as well as the social and emotional well-being.¹⁹ Therefore, positive parenting programs have a crucial role to play in breaking intergenerational cycles of disadvantage. Many WACOSS members are involved in delivering such programs either as part of their broader family assistance work or

¹⁷ *How Young People are Faring*, Foundation for Young Australians, (2011).

¹⁸ *Gonski Report: Review of Funding for Schooling*, (2011).

¹⁹ *Report of the Inquiry into the mental health and wellbeing of children and young people in Western Australia*, Commissioner for Children and Young People, (2011).

specifically targeted around particular age groups, locations or areas of interest (such as parents in prison). The Council recognises that there has been increased collaboration between State Government agencies delivering parenting programs (such as the Departments of Health, Education and Communities) but argues that significant increases in funding are needed to increase the coordinated delivery of evidence-based parenting programs across the state.

Targeted childcare program where current funding is inadequate

Unlike some of the other state Governments, Western Australia has, to date, put limited funding into the direct provision of child-care. A notable exception has been the funding of occasional child-care, which was initially a joint Commonwealth /State program and then funded directly by Royalties for Regions following the withdrawal of Commonwealth funding. However, Royalties for Regions funding for twenty-one services was only provided for two years during 2011 and 2012. Additional funding is required to ensure these services remain open from 2013 onwards.²⁰

Integrated approach to secondary services

The interface between universal and more targeted services is critical to ensure that children and families receive appropriate assistance and support. More intensive family support services are aimed at assisting individuals and families who are at risk and prevent them slipping through the cracks or falling into crisis. These children and families have needs that are beyond the capacity of universal services and therefore require a more targeted response to prevent their situation worsening. Family support services aim to strengthen families, improve family functioning, and to overcome parents problems while responding to children's needs. Such support is most effective when it is provided early in the life of a child, early in the development of a problem and early in the formation of a family and when linked into the more universal health, education and early childhood services. Links to other secondary services such as drug and alcohol, mental health, housing support and community based justice services are also integral to the success of such initiatives. The WA Government has a well-supported State Plan for Secondary Services, developed collaboratively by the Department for Child Protection and the community services sector. Early indications from the innovative secondary service hub site in Armadale suggest that an expansion of this approach, coupled with additional resources for secondary services, will have great benefit for the WA community.

Family and domestic violence services

Adequate resourcing of services for families in crisis, and living with or escaping from family and domestic violence is essential. The Council is particularly concerned by the lack of appropriate support services for children of parents escaping domestic violence. To this end, we are calling on the State Government to consider a dedicated program to ensure the provision of child case workers in women's refuges and safe houses.

²⁰ Identified as estimated actual of \$636,000 in 2011-12 in 2012-13 WA State Budget papers, p712 (2012).

Implementation:

WACOSS continues to advocate for an Office for Early Childhood as an effective means of coordinating the current activity occurring across the government and community sectors and explore the need for similar mechanisms across other age groups. There is a lead role to be played by the Department of Education; Department for Communities; Department for Child Protection; and Department of Health as well as the Commissioner for Children and Young People.

Services and supports for children, young people and their families require coordinated approaches across a range of different government agencies, including: FaHCSIA ; Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) (Commonwealth); Mental Health Commission; Department of Corrective Services; Disability Services Commission; Department of Housing; Department of Local Government; Department of Sport and Recreation; and Department of Educational Services together with a range of community organisations providing services in this area.

Budget Priority – People with Complex Needs

Outcome:

Innovative, integrated and flexible service responses reflecting collaboration across government and community services that provide assistance and address gaps in services for people with complex needs.

Budget Investment: \$57m

Rationale:

The Council is concerned by the prevalence of mental health and drug and alcohol issues in clients across community service areas, as clients with complex needs complicate the provision of other support services and place demands on service staff not trained or resourced to address all the issues. A person may present to an issue-specific service in one part of the community sector, only to be found to have highly complex and interrelated needs that must all be addressed to achieve a positive and sustainable outcome. These clients often face multiple barriers to achieving sustainable outcomes that can result in a lack of progress despite their contact with multiple services, programs and supports. Community service providers are often frustrated by their inability to turn around the lives of disadvantaged clients as a result of narrow service parameters, a lack of coordination or referral capacity, or simply a lack of places in critical support programs.

We need to encourage and resource cross-sectoral collaboration to develop innovative service responses that assist people with complex needs. Areas of concentrated and intergenerational disadvantage are best addressed through local strengths-based wrap-around programs. Successful service provision will emphasise social inclusion, local community responses and cultural appropriateness. Recognition of the need for flexibility will be central to the success of such service responses, as will improvements in integration and collaboration between the government and community sectors, as well as between government agencies. There are potentially many different ways to respond to these challenges, and the Council supports efforts to bring together stakeholders to co-design innovative responses. The strategies outlined in this submission have the potential to help support people in profound ways.

Service Targets:

There are several vulnerable groups of people who would benefit from integrated services which are able to address complex needs, including: prisoners on release and people in contact with the justice system; children and families with intergenerational disadvantage and complex needs; people with mental illnesses and/or people with alcohol/drug problems; people with complex needs from Aboriginal and culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds (including recent humanitarian migrants escaping trauma).

Strategies:

Capacity Building for Integrated Care-Coordination Services

We know there is not a 'one size fits all' model to support people with complex needs. However it is clear that greater coordination of services and supports is required to improve outcomes for people. Integrated and client-centred models for coordinating the care of individuals across both government and community organisations can help to reduce some of the complexity from people's lives and support better engagement and responses for individuals. Greater service-user participation in identifying outcomes and designing services also leads to more responsive services and more sustainable outcomes.

Housing tends to underpin the needs of people with complex needs who often have difficulty finding stable and secure accommodation. While some people may find accommodation, the insecure nature of their housing can exacerbate mental illness and can make it difficult to achieve ongoing employment. Increased funding is also needed to ensure people with complex needs are able to access the appropriate crisis, transitional or supported accommodation.²¹

Regional outreach services for people with complex mental health and co-morbidity needs

Current funding models do not adequately reflect the cost of providing outreach services to small towns and regional areas (particularly to towns where provision of a full-time service is not cost effective due to scale). This can mean there are limited opportunities for cross-referral and limited access to specialist knowledge or services, such that people with complex needs miss out on the more comprehensive services they need to overcome the barriers they face to achieving stable outcomes.²²

Mental health & wrap-around services for young people

There is a need for increased funding for programs that are able to respond in a holistic and flexible way to the needs of young people at risk. Services need to be able to provide wrap around support to young people struggling with any combination of mental illness, drugs and alcohol, health, education, employment, family problems and contact with the justice system.

Mental illness and drug & alcohol problems linked to criminal behaviour

The Council is calling for an ongoing audit of rates of mental illness and drug and alcohol problems among prisoners. Improved data are needed to accurately evaluate the need for services within prisons; to plan and manage/support prisoners once they are released back into the community; and to develop effective crime-prevention strategies. Prisoners are often people with extremely complex needs who need integrated multi-department/service responses to get the best outcomes for both individuals and their communities. This research should be used to support the development of pilot preventative programs. It is important to note that investment in high-risk communities to deliver prevention and early intervention programs seeks to ensure supports and services reach families and at risk young people prior to their involvement in the criminal justice system and should not be confused with diversionary or non-custodial programs for offenders.

The period of time when an ex-prisoner leaves jail and is trying to reintegrate into the wider community, secure a job and a place to live and rebuild social networks is crucial. Investment in 'through-care' programs that provide support prior to, and during this transition can make a

²¹ This issue is addressed in more detail in the *Housing and Homelessness* section.

²² This issue is also addressed in more detail in the *Housing and Homelessness* section.

significant difference to rates of re-offending and the reoccurrence of mental health or drug and alcohol problems, and hence significantly reduce the longer term costs to both the individual and the community.

Alcohol and other Drug Programs

There is a need to improve funding for community programs designed to support people leaving formal treatment programs within the alcohol and drug sector and prisons, particularly in the high risk period of 3 to 6 months following completion of a formal treatment program. Increased funding, while providing additional short term costs, would ensure best return on the public's investment in such treatment. High levels of substance use also contribute to the over-representation of Aboriginal people in contact with justice and child protection systems. The majority of Aboriginal people in WA are located in metropolitan Perth and the South West region and there is demand for residential drug and alcohol rehabilitation amongst this population group.

Expansion of the existing Drug Court to incorporate an alcohol-related diversion program

A successful illicit drugs diversion program (the Drug Court) currently operates in Western Australia. However, the majority of offenders have alcohol and not illicit drug related problems. People with alcohol only problems who come into contact with police or courts are consequently excluded from access to the Drug Court.

Strengths-based diversion programs for juvenile offenders (particularly Aboriginal offenders)

The Council believes that increased investment for the provision of diversionary programs and services for at risk youth in Western Australia should be accompanied by an independent assessment of the effectiveness of new and existing programs, with a particular focus on the pathways through the system for at risk youth, their changing resilience and life outcomes. There are a number of existing strengths and culture-based diversionary programs for Aboriginal youth that have proven particularly promising and should be supported and expanded. Examples include the Yiriman bail intervention program in Fitzroy Crossing;²³ the Halo youth leadership program;²⁴ the Cultural Corridors program;²⁵ and the Nowanup farm youth diversion program near Albany.²⁶

Implementation:

A coordinated approach across multiple government agencies is required to achieve better outcomes. Lead government agencies primarily responsible for these areas include the Department for Child Protection, Mental Health Commission, Department of Corrective Services and the Drug & Alcohol Office. Other key players who should be engaged in a coordinated approach include WA Police, Disability Services Commission, Department for Communities, Department of Education, Department of Health, Office of the Public Advocate, Department of Housing, DoHA (Commonwealth), FaHCSIA, WANADA, WAAMH, YACWA and community services in the youth, mental health, alcohol and other drug and family services areas.

²³ KALACC, Kimberley Aboriginal Law and Culture Centre.

²⁴ Hopes, Aspirations and Leadership Opportunities, <http://haloleadership.com/>

²⁵ A diversionary program for Nyoongar juvenile offenders run by Dr Noel Nannup

²⁶ Run by Eugene Eades on a property supported by Greening Australia and Gondwanalink.

Budget Priority – Sustainable Community Services State-wide

Outcome:

Community services are adequate to sustainably cope with growth and changing population needs; and that social planning becomes a core component of regional development, with regional community networks resourced to play an active role.

Budget Investment: \$15m

Rationale:

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

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

Service Targets:

Sustaining community services state-wide is important to over four hundred thousand Western Australians who rely on support from the community sector each year. The strategies outlined in this priority area are also particularly important for people who rely on community services in regional areas, key workers and the regional communities they support. All community service organisations need to be engaged and supported through this current period of reform for service users state-wide who rely on the continuity and sustainability of services and the outcomes they produce.

Strategies:

Support to build the capacity and sustainability of community services

The community services sector is going through a time of profound change, with numerous convergent reforms adding pressure to a sector already stretched to capacity. Improving the viability and sustainability of community services continues to be a critical priority for The Council. The Partnership Forum has a particular focus on improving the sustainability of services through current funding and contracting reforms. These efforts are welcome and have the potential to make a real difference. There is much more work to do (particularly in regional WA) to ensure that community service organisations are supported through this period of change so we can secure the viability of services and community outcomes.

The Council's consultations reveal inadequate levels of engagement by regional community services and smaller service providers in both State and Federal reforms. Regional services have particular needs that impact upon their sustainability – for instance, the need to deliver services over vast distances, or the ability to recruit and retain qualified staff. Directing more resources to support the community services sector in areas of governance, workforce, financial management, strategic planning and service design (particularly more innovative, client-focused and outcome-based service design) will help to improve the sustainability of community services state-wide.

A model that ensures community services can respond to population need

One of the most pressing concerns of regional community services is their capacity to respond to changing need in rapidly growing and changing regional populations. A number of regional centres in Western Australia have some of the highest rates of growth in the country, but there is currently no strategy or formula that links population demographics or levels of need to the resourcing of community services (as we see in health funding). Western Australia faces an emerging issue with young people growing up in these centres with a paucity of support services and life opportunities. Young families have moved to these centres seeking affordable housing or using them as a base for fly-in fly-out work, only to find there are insufficient family and relationship services to cope with demand. Growing regional centres provide an opportunity for better service delivery coordination, planning and cross-referral through increasing the capacity of regional community service networks.

Well-resourced regional community services networks

The Council's regional consultations highlighted the challenges posed by gaps in service coverage and capacity together with the limited resources available to deliver services effectively to dispersed populations in regional areas. Experienced regional service providers have a good understanding of the major barriers to effective regional service delivery and the kind of collaborative initiatives which make the delivery of regional services (including outreach to smaller towns and remote areas) more effective. Many regional service providers report coordinating their efforts and collaborating on remote visits and cross-referrals on an informal and *ad hoc* basis. These informal networks rely on existing relationships and the knowledge and capacity of existing staff, and as a result are patchy and prone to break down when staff move on, funding programs cease, or things just get too complicated. Where there has been some dedicated capacity for regional networking and capacity building, or for the engagement of regional service providers in planning (for instance in the Peel and Midwest regions) we have seen significant benefits.

The most effective means for engagement with the community sector in service co-ordination planning, funding and allocation of resources is through Regional Community Services Networks that are sufficiently resourced to support network coordination, activities and events and with sufficient policy capacity to participate in regional planning. The need for regional community service hubs and networks was identified as a priority in the Economic Audit Committee report,²⁷ but despite the willingness of regional community services to participate in greater collaboration, we have not seen any progress on this front. Another significant barrier is the misalignment of regional and program boundaries across different State and Federal funding agencies, such that places like Roebourne or Waroona might find themselves on one side or another of a dozen different jurisdictional boundaries for health, education, housing and social services. There is a need for much greater coordination

²⁷ *Putting the Public First Report*, Economic Audit Committee, Department of Premier and Cabinet, (2009).

both between State Government Departments and with their Federal counterparts to align jurisdictional boundaries and program funding criteria, to allow more flexible and more effective service provision.

The capacity of community services to meet the needs of a growing population is continually overlooked in regional and local planning initiatives. More opportunities for formal engagement of the community sector in planning for the social impacts of regional development (for instance, in “Super Towns”) is necessary to ensure that services have the capacity and range to meet community needs and service demand, and that consideration is given to the long-term social consequences of population growth and infrastructure development. While there has been some recognition of the infrastructure pressures created by rapid growth within the *Royalties for Regions* program, its focus has been primarily on physical infrastructure, its assessment criteria are not a good fit for emerging social issues, and it only provides short-term funding for community services on a once-off or pilot project basis.

Addressing the social impact of mining on regional towns

A pressing concern emerging from The Council’s consultations is the social impact on regional communities from rapid resource development, rapid population growth, and fly-in fly out work practices. The impact of population growth and FIFO workforce practices on communities have resulted in a range of complex impacts, including high living costs and a dire shortage of affordable housing, diminished social capital and volunteerism, higher rates of drug and alcohol use, difficulty attracting and retaining staff outside the resources sector, and increasing pressures on social service capacity. The Regional Price Index 2011 (RPI) provides clear evidence of rising costs in regional and remote areas. In the mining towns of the Pilbara and Kimberley regions especially, the price index differences from the Perth benchmark (100) arise from high rents driven by increasing demand and an acute shortage of affordable housing: Pilbara private rents are +434.9% (Port Hedland +400%); and Kimberley private rents are +195.7% (Derby +359.5%).

There has been little research to date into the social impact of rapid regional development, particularly in relation to the approach to rapid expansion of resource industries using FIFO workers.²⁸ Growth projections of FIFO workers in the Pilbara region alone indicate that by 2015 the transient FIFO population will exceed residents by three to one.²⁹ The Council calls for the State Government to commission a Social Impact Study into the consequences of mining activity and associated regional development, population growth and FIFO workforce practice on the needs of communities and the sustainability of community services.

²⁸ One example is *Social Impact of Mining Survey: Aggregate Results Queensland Communities*, QUT, (2011).

²⁹ That is, by 2015 the FIFO population is estimated to be 27, 524 versus 7,198 residents.

Planning for resources growth in the Pilbara: revised employment & population projections to 2020, Pilbara Industry Community Council, (April 2010).

Implementation:

A coordinated approach across multiple government agencies is required to achieve better outcomes. Lead government agencies primarily responsible for these areas include Department for Child Protection, Department of Housing, Department of Regional Development. Other key players who should be engaged in a coordinated approach include the Regional Development Council, Regional Development Commissions, Local Government Authorities, Department for Communities, Mental Health Commission, Disability Services Commission, Department for Workforce Development, regional service providers, existing regional community networks and the resources industry.

Acknowledgements

Each year, WACOSS consults widely with the not-for-profit community services sector on the preparation of our Pre-Budget Submission. Peaks organisations and other key stakeholder representatives in the non-government community services sector play a critical role in this process by providing data and information about the key service pressures in the community and assisting to establish priorities. We also greatly appreciate the input from government agencies and other engaged stakeholders. WACOSS gratefully acknowledges the contributions, ideas, thoughts and recommendations submitted by each of the following contributing community service organisations.

A Smart Start	Fremantle Multicultural Centre Inc	Regional Counselling Service Albany
Australian Association of Social Workers WA Branch	Fremantle Women's Health Centre	Rocky Bay
Aboriginal Health Council of Western Australia	Geraldton Regional Community Education Centre	Ruah Community Services
Accordwest	Geraldton Resource Centre	Salvation Army Crossroads West TSS
ACTIV Foundation	GP Down South	Sarjan's Legacy
Aged and Community Services WA	Great Southern Employment Development Committee Inc	Shelter WA
Albany Youth Support Association	Green Skills	Shire of Mundaring Children's Services
Allambee Counselling	GYN Forward	Short Term Accommodation for Youth Inc
Alliance Housing WA	Hosanna Australasian Community	SMYL Community Services
Amity Health	Individual Disability Advocacy Service	South Coastal Women's Health Services
Anglicare WA	Industry and Training Council	South West Development Commission
Arafmi	Intown Centre	South West Institute of Technology
Australian Crime Prevention Council	Investing In Our Youth	South West Refuge
Broome Community Development Group	Ishar Multicultural Women's Health Centre	South West Seniors Expo
Brunswick Junction Community Resource Centre	Jacaranda Community Centre	Southern Aboriginal Corporation
Burdekin Youth in Action	Kimberley Development Commission	Southern Agcare Inc
CALVARY Youth Services Mandurah Inc.	Kimberley Individual & Family Support Association Inc.	St John of God Bunbury Hospital
Cancer Council	Kimberley Interpreting Service	St Vincent de Paul Society (WA) Inc
Carers WA	Kooramining Committee of Narrogin Inc.	Starick Services
Carnarvon Family Support Service Inc	Magabala Books	The Bethanie Group
Centacare Family	Margaret River Community Resource Centre	The City of Greater Geraldton
Chamber of Commerce and Industry	MidWest Employment and Economic Development Inc	The Family Inclusion Network of WA
City of Mandurah	Mission Australia	The Salvation Army
City of Swan	Mission Australia Employment Solutions	UnitingCare West
Combined Universities Centre for Rural Health	Morrissey Homestead Inc	Volunteer South West
Community Housing Coalition of Western Australia	Multicultural Services Centre of WA	Wanslea
Conservation Council	Ngala	Waratah Support Centre
Coodanup Community College	North Lake Senior Campus	Westaus Crisis
Council of The Ageing WA	Outcare	Western Australian Association of Mental Health
Country Women's Association	Palmerston	Western Australian Network of Alcohol and Drug Agencies
Development Disability Council of WA	Peel Development Commission	Women's Network
Disability Services Commission	Peel Mental Health	Women's Council for Domestic and Family Violence Services (WA)
Dwellingup Community Village	Peel Youth Medical Service	Women's Health & Family Services - Rural in Reach program
Edmund Rice Centre	People with Disabilities WA	Women's Health Networks
Ethnic Communities Council	Regional Development Australia Peel	Women's Health Place
Fairbridge Western Australia Incorporated	Reach Out Drop In Centre Inc	Women's Health Resource Centre
Financial Counsellors' Association	Regional Cleantech Solutions	Women's Law Centre
		YMCA Perth
		Youth Affairs Council of WA

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