

Shaping Our Future



wacoss

Western Australian
Council of Social Service Inc

*Ways to make
a difference*

WACOSS
**Pre-Budget Submission to the
State Government 2006 / 07**

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Western Australian Council of Social Service (WACOSS) 2006/2007 Pre-Budget Submission *Shaping Our Future* outlines the Non-Government Human Services Sector (NGHSS) recommendations of where social resources and support are most urgently needed in WA. Given the strong economy, the State Government is in a better position than ever before to address critical issues of concern and make a positive contribution to shaping our future.

Despite continued pressure on the State Government to reduce revenue for services through providing tax cuts, the vast majority of Western Australian citizens do not support this proposal. WACOSS polling during early 2005 indicated that 73.3% of people surveyed preferred further investment in social services before tax cuts. Before considering further tax cuts we implore the State Government to prioritise social needs that the NGHSS is struggling to address.

The NGHSS is in crisis - trying to address increasing client need both in the number of clients and the complexity of their problems – whilst being unable to meet the costs of service delivery. Existing services receive insufficient base funding to cover costs, particularly the increased cost of recruiting and retaining staff in an increasingly competitive environment. This crisis is resulting in shrinking capacity, reducing service delivery and has dire consequences for those in need.

The most recent research conducted by the Australian Council of Social Service (ACOSS)¹ indicates that whilst more people are seeking a service, fewer are receiving necessary assistance. The decline in service provision appears to be the result of two key factors – inadequate funding and the growing complexity of client matters. The same survey indicates that around 12,000 Western Australians are being turned away from services each year due to a lack of service capacity. These key issues of viability have not been addressed by the State Indexation Policy and are yet to receive meaningful attention from the Industry Plan process. The issue of viability of the NGHSS is the number one priority area in this year's submission.

Further priorities for action concern issues associated with Children, Poverty and Housing. These issues require leadership, coordination, planning and adequate financial investment if we are to improve the futures of all West Australians. The submission outlines these key priority areas and a broad range of other concerns identified by WACOSS and key community stakeholders and representatives².

Housing has joined the list of priority areas this year because of the urgent problems so many people are experiencing with housing, from homelessness to affordable low cost housing. The problem of lack of housing is perhaps one of the simplest challenges to tackle- increase investment in a range of low cost housing options. Housing is a basic requirement for a decent standard of living, something which all Western Australians deserve and which this State is capable of delivering.

It should be noted that there are many recommendations throughout the document that require little or no additional financial investment but rather a change in policy or legislation.

We put forward the following recommendations for Government commitment in 2006/07 with a view to ongoing commitment in following years:

¹ Australian Council of Social Services, Paper 138, *Community Sector Survey 2005*

² See Appendix 1 for list of stakeholders consulted.

Priority Number 1 - Viability of the Non-Government Human Services Sector

State Indexation Policy

- The calculation of the 2005/06 payment be reassessed to deliver a once-off retrospective payment and the remainder of the payments made for the financial year be paid at the correct indexation rate.
- Review the efficacy of the Indexation Policy in meeting annual cost increases.

Provide Capacity to Address the Workforce Crisis

- An analysis of the current workforce crisis in the non-government human services sector be undertaken by the State Government and representatives of the sector and strategies, including base-funding adjustments, be implemented to address these issues.

Review the Adequacy of Base-Funding Levels

- A review schedule be developed to examine each government funded program with regard to base-funding level efficacy.

Help Regional, Rural and Remote Service Providers Address Service Delivery Challenges

- That the State Government investigates the added costs of non-government human service delivery in regional, rural and remote areas and provides an appropriate loading on all service agreements to cover relatively higher costs.
- That the State Government support the NGHSS' attempts to improve workforce recruitment and retention through providing access to the Government Employees Housing Authority (GEHA) housing in areas of high need.

Support for Volunteers in the Non-Government Human Services Sector

The State Government explore the following volunteering issues:

- The impact of the cost of Volunteer Personal Accident Premiums on service delivery;
- The cost / benefit of increasing the standard reimbursements for volunteers; and
- The cost / benefit of reducing the cost of police checks for volunteers.

Building the Organisational Capacity of Non-Government Organisations

- The State Government provide adequate resources to implement the recommendations of the NGHSS Industry Plan Sector Reform and Development Working Group.

Priority Number 2 - Children

Ensure the Effectiveness of the Office of Commissioner for Children and Young People

- That the State Government adequately resource the recently established Office of Commissioner for Children and Young People to the sum of \$5 million per year.
- That the Office of Commissioner for Children and Young People be independent of Government.
- That the Safety Screening Unit function be quarantined from the rest of the Office of Commissioner for Children and Young People.

Whole-of-Government Child Protection Strategy

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

- Commit resources to a community forum on child protection
- Increase funds for quality counselling and therapeutic services for children, adolescents and their families dealing with abuse issues both in and out of care.
- Progress the review of the real cost of providing out of home care and provide appropriate funding.

Enhance Child Protection Training

That the State Government:

- Make child protection training available to government and non-government agencies who have direct and/or indirect contact with children as well as parents/caregivers.

Increase Parenting Services

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

- That the State Government provide more local services for men in parenting and other family roles and continue funding of Mensplace beyond June 2006.
- That the State Government fund more multidisciplinary early childhood and parenting services in the metropolitan area for children from birth to school entry age.
- That the State Government commits funds to ensure better linkages between parenting services and other key agencies.

Working with Children Processes

That the State Government:

- Implement consistent recording of animal cruelty convictions
- Improve the selection and recruitment processes of employers by expanding the Employright program
- Ensure that there is a streamlined process so employers/employees can obtain a 'working with children check' and a general police clearance at a one stop shop and at no extra cost
- Compensate all NGO agencies who may need to recruit, screen and induct new staff or retrain existing staff where a loss has been experienced as a result of compliance with the Working with Children legislation
- Apply the working with children check to parents who volunteer for activities with their children
- Ensure the Working with Children Screening Unit employ an expert in the assessment of future probability of offending before dispensing a Negative Notice.

Programs to Promote Physical Activity

That the State Government commit to initiatives to promote physical activity among children and young people by:

- Ensuring that any new urban developments have large public parks and reserves suitable for team sports
- Conducting a research project into the costs of sporting activities for school aged children from low- income families.

Maintenance of Family Centres and Community Based Child Care Centres

- That the State Government continues allocation of funding for minor works and capital upgrade of state owned premises operated as Family Centres and Community Based Child Care Centres.

Priority Number 3- Poverty

State Anti-Poverty Strategy

- That the Government establishes a Taskforce to guide the development of a State Anti-Poverty Strategy. The Taskforce should be established in a similar way to the State Homelessness Taskforce and include individuals who have expertise and commitment to addressing poverty in Western Australia. Participants should include representatives from a variety of government departments and agencies as well as non-government agency representatives and other stakeholders such as academics.

Priority Number 4- Housing

State Homelessness Strategy

- Continue to fund and expand effective homeless services, introduced as part of the State Homelessness Strategy.

Increase funding for existing Supported Accommodation Assistance Program Services

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

Increase the Investment in Public Housing

- The State Government commit to meeting the demand for public housing, as indicated by the waiting list, by 2025.

Increase Housing Appropriate for Priority Groups

- Increase the amount of appropriate social, community and crisis housing available to the following high priority groups: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, young people, women, prisoners exiting the justice system and people with mental illnesses.

A Commitment to Community Housing

- That the State Government commit to supporting the Community Housing Strategic Plan 2003-2008 to encourage a more viable and financially independent community housing sector.
- That the State Government provide an additional \$2.5 million each year to community housing for four years from July 2005 and that this funding be targeted to emerging community housing Key Providers including allowing a portion of this funding to be set aside for the development of affordable housing projects.

Regional Housing Initiatives

That the State Government develop strategies to increase the supply of affordable and appropriate accommodation in regional areas, including options for home purchasing, private rental and social housing, specifically through:

- Expanding the subsidised home loan scheme currently offered by the Country Housing Authority
- Allocating appropriate funding from the Central Revenue Fund to the Government Employees Housing Authority to allow it to build rather than lease its housing stock
- Allocate funding of \$70,000 per annum to establish a small grants scheme aimed at allowing local groups to conduct housing research in regional areas.

Summary of Other Recommendations:

Consumer Protection

Including: exclusion of hostels from the *Retirement Villages Act*; funding of an Indigenous consumer representative position; completion of the Review of the Residential Tenancies Act; provision of legislative protection to long-stay residents of caravan parks; development of consumer protection measures to protect boarders and lodgers; abolishment of private rental lease fees; expansion of tenancy advice services; regulation of tenant databases.

State Taxes, Fees, Charges & Concessions

Including; freezing of all State taxes and charges; an immediate full review of State concessions; extension of the range of concessions currently granted to seniors and family carers under the age of 60 who are in receipt of carer allowance; undertaking of a review of Community Service Obligation (CSO) payments; instruction of State Government Departments and Government Business Enterprises to provide for waiver of late payment fees; introduction of a subsidy to assist lower income people to purchase continence products; addressing the financial impact on parents of children with disabilities who are subject to land tax if they purchase a property for their children; maintenance of the exemption to the church and charitable sector from local government rates

Essential Services- Energy & Water

Including: implementation of a Utilities Assistance Scheme; continuation of funding for the WACOSS Consumer Utilities Project; funding for comprehensive state-wide retrofitting programs; price monitoring of gas bottles.

Transport

Including; continuation of improvements to the use of public transport in Western Australia; investment in walking and cycling routes; release of a Transport Energy Strategy.

Health

Including; improving oral health services; evaluating the patient assisted travel scheme; implementation of an informed consent campaign; development of specialist mental health services for seniors, Aboriginal, CaLD and regional people; extension of carer participation across all clinical health networks and the public health system; funding of core alcohol and other drug services currently provided from resources using Commonwealth funding; adequate resource allocations to existing non-government drug and alcohol services; implementation of the Dementia Action Plan; implementation of family involvement frameworks, carer friendly systems and workplaces.

Indigenous Issues

Including; adequate resource allocations to new initiatives to meet identified service gaps in the alcohol and drug sector; establishment of an independent national

representative Indigenous body; establishment of a number of mobile health units; expansion of recreational options.

Multicultural Issues

Establishment of an independent State Interpreting and Translation Unit.

Young People

Including; undertaking a mapping exercise of youth service agencies across the State; undertaking a cross-Government review of processes for ensuring appropriate youth consultation strategies for all Government decision making; development of a specific training program for all Government workers in effective and appropriate ways of dealing with young people; implementation of a recurrent young carer support program.

Criminal Justice & Crime Prevention

Including; greater recognition of the role of NGO's in diverting young people from crime; contributing funds to the Aboriginal Legal Service WA; increasing funding for community legal centers; abolishment of the "move on" laws; allocation of resources for alcohol and other drug services for Prison and Community Justice clients; increasing transitional support for people exiting detention.

Education & Employment

Including; increasing casual workers entitlements; implementation of paid parental leave; increasing support for school students in raising the school leaving age; providing increased educational and training support for CaLD and Indigenous youth.; provision of training and professional development for emergency relief workers.

Domestic & Family Violence

Including; funding for early intervention and prevention of accompanying children in SAAP services; developing a public awareness campaign about the link between animal cruelty and family violence; provision of adequate management of offenders as well as prevention mechanisms in the community; provision of an intensive support model for Women's Refuge and Domestic/Family Violence Services in rural and remote regions; further development of a state-wide network of domestic and family violence outreach services.

Disability

Including; funding to assist with the accommodation support needs for Aged Carers; establishment of transitional accommodation support to assist families who share the care of their disabled children; securing alternative accommodation for the 160 people with disabilities languishing in institutional facilities.

Sustainability

Establishment of an independent and well resourced Sustainability Commission.

Non-Government Human Services Sector Viability

Independent research undertaken by ACIL Tasman Consulting regarding the current viability of the Non-Government Human Services Sector in Western Australia concludes the sector is experiencing the following issues:

- Increasing demand for services
- Inadequate resources available for service delivery
- Issues associated with funding levels and continuity of funding
- Relatively low salary levels and high staff turnover rates

A full copy of this research report, including recommendations is provided as an attachment to this submission.

The recommendations provided within this section relate to the need to review the adequacy of base-funding levels to non-government human services providers. This is closely tied to the need to provide capacity to address the workforce crisis, the need to address existing anomalies in the calculation of the indexation formula and the need to review the policy to improve its efficacy in meeting cost increases. Connected to these issues is the importance of ensuring equity for regional communities by addressing the additional costs of service delivery and the challenges of these agencies in worker retention. Further, recommendations also relate to the need to ensure the invaluable social and economic contribution of volunteering is sustained and maximized. These issues underpin the basic operation of the non-government human services sector.

Whilst not addressing the issues of financial viability directly, the Non-Government Human Services Industry Plan Sector Reform and Development Working Group proposal of a developmental pathway forward for addressing organisational capacity building and the provision of resources for implementation of initiatives will assist many agencies in the sector.

State Indexation Policy

Address the Under-Payment of the 2005/06 Indexation Rate

Recommendation:

The error in calculation of the 2005/06 payment be addressed through a once-off retrospective payment and that the remainder of the payments made for the financial year be paid at the correct indexation rate;

Rationale:

The announced figure of indexation for 2005/06 is 2.9%, however using Treasury's formula, calculations undertaken by WACOSS indicate that the actual figure should have been 3.5%.

The WA Government Indexation Policy for the Non-Government Human Services Sector (May 2004) reads:

“4.1 The Policy establishes an appropriate level of indexation through a formula (the Composite Wage and Cost Index) which recognises the effect of both wage cost and operating cost increases on Non-Government organisations delivering human services.

4.2 The components of the Composite Wage and Cost Index are:

(i) an indexation factor based on increases in the salary component of service budgets (ie. 80% of the funding allocation). The amount of indexation will be based on wage growth projections by the Department of Treasury and Finance at the time when the State Budget is framed; and

(ii) an indexation factor based on other operating costs (ie. 20% of the funding allocation). The amount of indexation will be linked to the projected CPI for Western Australia at the time when the Budget is framed.

5.2 The indexation rate applicable to Non-Government organisations will be clearly published in budget papers and will not vary from that paid to Departments for that purpose.”

The rate for 2005/06 has not been published as promised under section 5.2 of the policy. In the absence of the published figure, we are only able to rely on the projections for each of the composite components as cited in the Budget Economic & Fiscal Outlook (May 2005) to assess if the published rate has been calculated correctly.

Using the figures as published in the Budget Economic & Fiscal Outlook, there is a clear indication that the 2005/06 indexation rate should be higher than the announced 2.9%. The figure calculated by WACOSS is based on the Treasury wage growth projection for 2005/06 being 3.75% and CPI being 2.5%. This yields a composite of 3.5% (Economic and Fiscal Outlook May 2005, p 132) as opposed to the announced figure of 2.9%.

We believe an adjustment should be made in December of every year to ensure the accurate amount is paid on all agreements and that a retrospective payment be made to compensate for the difference during the period July to December 2005.

Review the Efficacy of the Indexation Policy in Meeting Annual Cost Increases

Recommendation:

That the Indexation Policy be reviewed to address the point of time that indexation is calculated and that the transparency of the calculation and the formula itself be reviewed to ascertain if it is appropriate. If it is found not to be appropriate, a better formula should be developed.

Rationale:

The Indexation Policy as it is currently applied does not effectively meet annual cost increases. In part, this is due to the formula being based on forward estimates that, in the current economic conditions, have proven to be underestimates. In future years, however, the formula may alternatively result in overestimates. For example,

the forward estimates for 2004/05 published by Treasury in May 2004, estimated CPI of 2.0% and wages growth of 2.5%. The Indexation figure for that year, based on the published figure in the Indexation Policy (May 2004) was 3.10%. However, the revised estimates for 2004/05, published in May 2005 show wage growth for the year at 4.25% and CPI at 2.75% yielding a composite of 3.95% (Economic and Fiscal Outlook, p132).

Timing of the calculation is also one of a number of considerations that should be taken into account during a review of the efficacy of the indexation policy in meeting annual cost increases.

Provide Capacity to Address the Workforce Crisis

Recommendation:

An analysis of the current workforce crisis in the non-government human services sector be undertaken by the State Government, along with representatives of the sector, and strategies, including base-funding adjustments, be implemented to address these issues.

Rationale:

The most recent ACOSS survey investigating non-government human services sector issues provides evidence of the difficulties the non-government sector is experiencing in attracting and retaining expert and experienced staff.

The staff turnover rate in the sector currently exceeds 16% per annum compared with the average of 11%. Staff working in these agencies face rapidly increasing “work intensity” and the often resulting work stress is responsible for alarming increases in workers compensation claims.

The ACIL Tasman research attached provides further evidence of the impact of these issues.

Whilst it is certainly true that wages and conditions are determined by employers, based on Awards, the State Government has a considerable role to play as the funding provider of these services and a significant interest at stake in seeing these issues addressed.

Review the Adequacy of Base-Funding Levels

Recommendation:

A review schedule be developed to examine each government funded program with regard to base-funding level efficacy.

Rationale:

The State Government 2005 pre-election commitment to addressing base-funding adequacy states:

“The Government will examine sectoral or program specific approaches relating to cost pressures on Non-Government organisations based on evidenced needs. This is viewed as a more realistic approach than a blanket 3-25% across the Non-Government sector.”

Whilst the State Indexation Policy aims to address annual cost increases, there has been no starting point analysis of the adequacy of base funding levels. The payment of annual indexation fails to achieve adequacy due to the fact that it builds on an unrealistic foundation.

The ACIL Tasman independent research report regarding the viability of the sector indicates that whilst there has been some growth, funding in real terms has not risen to meet demand nor has it kept pace with increases provided by other Australian Governments. Further evidence is provided in the full version of the report attached to this submission.

We seek to work with Government to develop a plan and schedule to review the adequacy of base funding levels for all program areas. This review process should have regard to efficiency and effectiveness of existing funding levels and specific consideration of locational cost variations.

Help Regional, Rural and Remote Service Providers Address Service Delivery Challenges.

A Regional, Rural and Remote Loading

Recommendation:

That the State Government investigates the added costs of non-government human service delivery in regional, rural and remote areas and provide an appropriate loading on all service agreements to cover the relatively higher costs.

Rationale:

Regional, rural and remote Non-Government Human Service organisations consistently report viability issues caused by the additional costs of service delivery in these geographical areas.

These service providers face additional challenges in relation to recruitment and retention of workers. This issue requires measures such as those outlined above in relation to base-funding as well as those outlined below such as resource-sharing initiatives in relation to housing.

Operational costs are often significantly higher in regional, rural and remote areas. For example, petrol is regularly between 5c and 25c higher in country areas. Neither base-funding formula, nor the State Indexation Policy address this issue. As a result, regional, rural and remote service providers are forced to reduce service delivery to their local communities through measures such as case number restrictions, outreach cancellation or closure of service. This situation results in inequitable delivery of services to communities that already suffer barriers associated with locational disadvantage.

We believe a thorough investigation of the additional costs of service delivery in regional, rural and remote areas is required and a subsequent loading be provided, in addition to the annual indexation payment.

Access to GEHA for Non-Government Human Service Workers

Recommendation:

That the State Government support the Non-Government Human Services Sectors attempts to improve workforce recruitment and retention through providing access to GEHA housing in areas of high need.

Pre-Election Commitment:

"This recommendation is not supported. Conditions in the Non-Government sector are determined through industrial awards which is fundamentally an issue between employers and employees and their representative bodies."

Rationale:

WACOSS believes that current policy and practice needs to change so that services delivered by NGO's can be maintained and clients of these services can be provided with appropriate assistance. By working together with Government, we believe this can be achieved. As the Premier said last year:

"This [Industry] Plan responds to calls within both sectors for an improved working relationship, and for specific policies and strategies to assist non-government organisations in the important work they do. It also gives clear recognition to the vital role that non-government organisations play in delivering human services and in strengthening communities."³

The availability of appropriate and affordable accommodation is consistently cited as a key viability issue for regional, rural and remote service providers. To ensure that non-government human services can continue to play this key role and be able to strengthen these communities, we need a commitment from the State Government to explore these types of resource-sharing arrangements.

Support for Volunteers in the Non-Government Human Services Sector

Recommendations:

That the State Government explore the following volunteering issues:

- The impact of the cost of Volunteer Personal Accident Premiums on service delivery;
- The cost / benefit of increasing the standard reimbursements for volunteers; and
- The cost / benefit of reducing the cost of police checks for volunteers.

Rationale:

In 2000, almost 429,000 people in Western Australia or one-third of our population were volunteers. Current estimates value volunteer contribution at \$17 per hour. ABS statistics indicate that individual volunteers contribute between 4-6 hours per week, an average of 240 hours per year. This equals \$4,080 worth of contribution per year. Based on the formula above, plus adding standard economic multipliers, the annual contribution by all volunteers in Western Australia is worth at the very minimum \$5,250,960.00 to the economy. By resourcing initiatives and programs which enhance and enable volunteering in WA, the Government would be increasing the contribution made by volunteers to our community and our economy.

³ Premier Geoff Gallop, Speech at WACOSS Conference June 2004.

The above recommendations address issues which discourage people from becoming volunteers and discourage organisations from using volunteers. It is important to remove disincentives to volunteering as these activities clearly make an invaluable contribution to the community and especially to the work of the non-government human services sector.

Building the Organisational Capacity of Non-Government Organisations

Recommendation:

The State Government provide adequate resources to implement the recommendations of the NGHSS Industry Plan Sector Reform and Development Working Group.

Rationale:

In September 2004, the Social Policy Unit, Department of the Premier and Cabinet, established the Sector Reform and Development Working Party, to address Objective 4 of the Industry Plan for the Non-Government Human Services Sector. This was to:

“Identify strategies to build the capacity of the Non-Government sector that will result in more effective and efficient practices, including practical reforms that ensure appropriate allocation of resources and contribute to good corporate governance.”

Whilst this phase of the Industry Plan does not address the range of sector reform and development issues outlined above, the issues of organisational capacity outlined below constitute important components of overall organisational capacity.

The specific areas of organisational capacity identified as needing support and enhancement are:

- Governance
- Financial management and accountability
- Human resource management and development
- Leadership and policy development
- Service delivery and evaluation
- Information technology
- Responding to industry change

Consultations undertaken by WACOSS also identified the need to take account of, and respond to, the particular needs of small, Indigenous and rural, regional and remote NGOs in relation to these 7 areas.

We support the outcome of the Sector Reform and Development Working Group and urge the State Government to invest in implementing the recommendations of the Group.

Children

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

- “*The right to play and have an adequate standard of living, health care, education and access to early years services;*
- *The right to protection from abuse, neglect, exploitation and discrimination;*
- *The right to express their view about things that affect them and to participate in communities, programs and services for children.*”⁴

Evidence shows that there are many indicators suggesting adverse trends in the developmental health of children and young people in Australia.

- Mental health issues for young people has risen: 15% of children 4-17 years scored in the clinical range for somatic complaints, delinquent behaviour, attention problems and aggressive behaviour
- Reports of child sexual assault have more than doubled in the last decade
- There is an increase in the number and percentage of children in the child welfare system⁵
- Despite Indigenous people representing only 3.5% of the WA population- 44% of children in care are Indigenous⁶
- In relation to children’s services (long day care, family day care and out of school hours care), agencies continue to work under increasing pressure. In the period between 2001-02 and 2002-03 financial years, for example there was a 69% increase in the number of people seeking but not receiving services. To cope with this demand, agencies are responding in a number of ways including: the extension of waiting lists; increased numbers of referrals; and closer targeting of services.⁷
- It is estimated that the percentage of children living in poverty is between 13% and 17%.⁸
- There are rising rates of youth suicide, self-harm and drug abuse
- An increase in health problems such as diabetes and obesity⁹

“Striking disparities in what children know and can do are evident well before they enter kindergarten. These differences are strongly associated with social and economic circumstances, and they are predictive of subsequent academic performance. Redressing these disparities is critical, both for the children whose life opportunities are at stake and for a society whose goals demand

4 United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child (1989)

5 Stanley, F. (2001) *Developmental health and wellbeing: Australia’s future*. Child developmental health and wellbeing in the 21st century. Paper presented at the Prime Minister’s Science, Engineering and Innovation Council Seventh Meeting.

6 Harries, M., Harris, T., Diamond, S. and Mackenzie, G. (2004) *Caring Well-Protecting Well: Investing in systemic responses to protect children in WA*, The Ministerial Advisory Council on Child Protection Western Australia, Perth, p 18

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

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

9 Harries, M., Harris, T., Diamond, S. and Mackenzie, G. (2004) *ibid*.

*that children be prepared to begin school, achieve academic success, and ultimately sustain economic independence and engage constructively with others as adult citizens*¹⁰

Early intervention and prevention as well as protection, are important elements of promoting the health and wellbeing of children. Expenditure on children's services in WA during the period 2003-2004 was the third lowest among all the other States- approximately \$180 per child compared against the Northern Territory that spent \$525 per child. During the same period, WA again spent the third lowest amount, this time on child protection and out-of-home care services- approximately \$180 per child whilst the ACT spent nearly \$300 per child.

Below, WACOSS has detailed a number of issues that have not been addressed by Government initiatives such as the Children's First Strategy and the Early Years Strategy. WACOSS urges the Government to take the opportunity in the next Budget to demonstrate a committed vision of wellbeing for all WA children by allocating an appropriate amount of funds to these important issues.

Ensure the Effectiveness of the Office of Commissioner for Children and Young People

Recommendations:

- That the State Government adequately resource the recently established Office of Commissioner for Children and Young People to the sum of \$5 million per year.
- That the Office of Commissioner for Children and Young People be independent of Government.
- That the Safety Screening Unit function be quarantined from the rest of the Office of Commissioner for Children and Young People.

Rationale:

WACOSS welcomed the State Government's decision to establish a Children's Commissioner. It will provide an important mechanism for the promotion and protection of children's rights, interests and well-being at a systemic level. To this end, it is vitally important that the Office of the Children's Commissioner is adequately resourced in order to undertake the important tasks it was established to perform such as:

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

The present funding levels of \$1.5 million recurrent funding per year will not be a sufficient amount with which to perform all the responsibilities of the Office. The minimum amount required to enable to the Commissioner to undertake all potential activities is \$5 million, in line with similar Office's in other States. This costing is based on \$10 per child in WA. The resources already committed to the establishment of the Office will be wasted if it is unable to perform the functions it was designed to perform. WACOSS strongly urges the Government to ensure that the Office of the Children's Commissioner has the resources to undertake its important work.

¹⁰ Shonkoff & Phillips (2000) *From Neurons to Neighbourhoods: The Science of Early Childhood Development*, National Academy Press, Washington DC, p.5

In order to carry out its work effectively, it is imperative that the Office is independent of the Government. This independence is necessary because the intended nature of its work will mean that it will undertake investigations, most probably relating to Government departments. Incorporated in this, in concerted effort to ensure the integrity of the work of the Office, it is also important, that the Office reports outside of departmental structures. To achieve independence, WACOSS recommends that the Office not be located within a Government department, that the Commissioner has powers to act on any matter they deem appropriate without the Minister's permission and that the Office have control over of its budget. In addition, the Commissioner should report to a select committee of Parliament through the Attorney-General.

WACOSS' also holds the position that the screening function should be separate from the Office. The Minister has stated that there is a need for "*heed to be taken of the cautionary comments in the Select Committee Report that the function must not overwhelm the Commission's other responsibilities*". It is WACOSS' position that the screening function be completely quarantined from the Commission in terms of funding and staffing so that it does not become the main activity of the Office thereby detracting from its intended functions.

Working with Children Processes

Recommendations:

That the State Government:

- Implement consistent recording of animal cruelty convictions
- Improve the selection and recruitment processes of employers by expanding the Employright program
- Ensure that there is a streamlined process so employers/employees can obtain a 'working with children check' and a general police clearance at a one stop shop and at no extra cost
- Compensate all NGO agencies who may need to recruit, screen and induct new staff or retrain existing staff where a loss has been experienced as a result of compliance with the Working with Children legislation
- Apply the Working with Children Check to parents who volunteer for activities with their children
- Ensure the Working with Children Screening Unit employ an expert in the assessment of future probability of offending before dispensing a Negative Notice.

Rationale:

A great deal of research has supported the link between animal cruelty and domestic violence, child abuse and other violent crimes¹¹. Collectively, it suggests that incidents of animal abuse could be an effective predictive tool for early intervention to prevent further violence towards humans and animals. Presently, if a person is convicted of animal cruelty offences and prosecuted by the RSPCA, the conviction does not appear on a criminal record check even when it results in a jail term. This is not the case for animal cruelty convictions that are prosecuted by the police. It is of significant concern that employers cannot obtain this information about potential employees, considering the acknowledged link between animal cruelty and abuse of humans, including children.

¹¹ RSPCA (2005) *The Cruelty Connection: Evidence based research and potential strategies and applications for WA on the links between animal abuse and human violence*, RSPCA, Perth.

The Employright project is delivered by WACOSS, in partnership with the Department for Community Development. It has established a range of invaluable management tools to assist community organisations with essential best practice knowledge in recruitment, screening, selection, staff management and creating child safe organisations. Employright should be delivered across the State to all organisations that work directly or indirectly with children. One element of this strategy would be to provide copies of the Choose with Care resource and video to all organisations. WACOSS recommends that this program be expanded in order to enhance recruitment processes and therefore, child protection in WA.

The Working with Children Check will cost \$10 for volunteers and \$50 for paid workers and self-employed persons for a three year period. General criminal record checks are an additional cost and involve a separate application. It is WACOSS' recommendation that the process be streamlined so that applicants can apply for both a general police clearance and a Working with Children Check at the same time and that the cost be no more than the current cost of a police clearance.

The costs to non-government agencies for recruitment, screening and induction of new staff or retraining existing staff are considerable. It is anticipated that the Working with Children legislation will result in a number of agencies having to replace staff as a result of compliance. The costs will be considerably higher for regional agencies which already have great difficulties in recruiting and retaining staff.

The Working with Children Check must apply to parents who volunteer for activities with their children. Leaving out this group would be to ignore the overwhelming evidence that indicates that the majority of child sex offences are enacted by a person trusted by the victim¹².

It is WACOSS' recommendation that an expert in the assessment of future probability of offending be employed by the board of assessors within the Working with Children Screening Unit. This expert should be used when undertaking an assessment of suitability to engage in child related work. Obviously, a Negative Notice would result in loss of income and/or loss of reputation to the person in question. Therefore, it is vitally important that extreme scrutiny and consideration is given before issuing a Negative Notice.

Whole- of- Government Child Protection Strategy

Recommendation:

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

- Commit resources to a community forum on child protection
- Increase funds for quality counselling and therapeutic services for children, adolescents and their families dealing with abuse issues both in and out of care.
- Progress the review of the real cost of providing out of home care and provide appropriate funding

¹² Finkelhore (1986) *A source book on child sexual abuse*, Sage, Beverly Hills.

Rationale:

Whole of Government Strategy

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

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

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

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

The Healthy Child Manitoba program in Canada is an example of a new way of working together across government departments and with the community to develop policies, programs and policies that promote the best possible outcomes for children¹⁶. It recognises that no single department or agency can meet all the needs of children. Program planning and service delivery are coordinated across sectors to provide the best possible integration of supports for the specific needs of each child and family and as much as possible, programs are harmonised with Federal, Indigenous and local initiatives.

Child Protection Forum

WACOSS, in conjunction with other agencies will be convening a community forum on child protection in 2006. It has become apparent through WACOSS’ consultation with other organisations, that there is not a shared understanding of how the current child protection system works. The purpose of the forum is to build a complex and sophisticated understanding about how the current system (from prevention through to intervention) actually operates in practice and how it is experienced by different groups and across different locations.

This would strengthen our responses and ultimately assist in improving outcomes for the protection of children in Western Australia. This seminar would include a broad range of stakeholders including but not limited to police, various health professionals, education, disability, and those working directly with children and families. WACOSS asks the Government, as a stakeholder, to commit funds to enable this forum to be convened and thus, strategies to be identified for the protection of children in WA.

Cost: \$30 000

Therapeutic Services

WACOSS has received extensive feedback from the sector about the lack of quality ongoing services for children, adolescents and their families that provide specialist short and longer-term interventions (including counselling) for dealing with abuse issues. This applies to both children in care and out of care. Providing adequate support services is an integral part of a quality child protection system.

Review of Out of Home Care

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

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

¹⁵ Harries, M., Harris, T., Diamond, S. and Mackenzie, G. (2004), Ibid, p 14

¹⁶ www.gov.mb.ca/healthychild

In the last Budget, the State Government committed to undertake a Review of the real cost of providing out of home care. WACOSS urges the Government to progress this Review and make available appropriate funding.

Enhance Child Protection Training

Recommendation:

That the State Government make child protection training available to government and non-government agencies who have direct and/or indirect contact with children as well as parents/caregivers.

Rationale:

There is currently a lack of consistency in the training available to agencies, particularly in the education system and the child care sector. It is critically important that all agencies delivering services for the direct and/or indirect benefit of children, parents/caregivers and/or supporters, have access to high quality training regarding child protection and well-being issues. Investing now in child protection, will greatly reduce the significant financial costs of child abuse and neglect, both for the individual and Australian society more generally. These costs include:

- Future alcohol abuse
- Mental illness
- Poor health
- Homelessness
- Juvenile delinquency
- Juvenile or adult criminal behaviour
- Possible incarceration¹⁷

Increase Parenting Services

Recommendation:

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

- That the State Government provide more local services for men in parenting and other family roles and continue to fund Mensplace beyond June 2006.
- That the State Government fund more multidisciplinary early childhood and parenting services in the metropolitan area for children from birth to school entry age.
- That the State Government commits funds to ensure better linkages between parenting services and other key agencies.

Rationale:

Men in Parenting

The need for local services for men in parenting roles has been identified through a range of mechanisms including a needs analysis undertaken by Mensplace as well as through the Men's Forum held in May 2004, attended by over 200 government and non-government participants with strong representation from Indigenous and remote participants. The expansion of parenting services for men is an important strategy in promoting the well being of children and families.

Mensplace, established in 2002, is the first State-wide resource for men in their role as fathers in Western Australia and assists groups, agencies and individuals to

¹⁷ Kovacs, K. & Richardson, N. (2004) *The economic costs of child abuse*. Downloaded www.aifs.gov.au/nch/sheets/rs2.html 1 September 2005

develop and deliver services for men in fathering and other family roles. Continuing funding beyond 2006 will ensure that it continues its important work in promoting positive fathering.

Early Childhood and Parenting Services

As indicated in NIFTeY's Vision for Children there is a large body of evidence about the benefits of high quality early childhood health, care and education services. Benefits include: significantly improved later school performance; reduced numbers of children in special educational programs; increased employment opportunities, reduced criminal offending; and improved health outcomes in adulthood¹⁸. It is therefore critical that our community has access to high quality multidisciplinary early years services that are accessible, affordable and responsive to the needs of families with young children, regardless of their location or the child's individual requirements.

The Early Years Study¹⁹ recommends that communities and governments develop an integrated system of community-based early childhood development and parenting centres that are linked to the school system. An example of this model that is currently operating in WA is the successful Midvale Multi Service School. It is important that these centres are universally available to all. Centres could have a variety of programs including: play based learning, health appraisal, parenting enrichment/support, relationship enrichment, adult skills development, specific needs and training and research. Centres could be added on to existing infrastructure such as Family Centres or Community Based Child Care Centres.

The evidence suggests that good quality early childhood development programs can be cost-effective, with returns being greater than the original investments. One example is the Elmira Project (USA), a nurse home visitation program for high-risk mothers, which cost \$6 000 per mother-child pair and demonstrated over \$24, 000 in benefits to public expenditure through savings in criminal justice, welfare and health services costs and increased tax revenue in the first 15 years after the birth of the child²⁰.

Better Linkages

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

Programs to Promote Physical Activity

Recommendations:

That the State Government commit to initiatives to promote physical activity among children and young people by:

- Ensuring that any new urban developments have large public parks and reserves suitable for team sports
- Conducting a research project into the costs of sporting activities for school aged children from low income families

Rationale:

¹⁸ National Investment for the Early Years (2004) *A Vision for Children in Western Australia*, Perth

¹⁹ McCain, M.N. & Mustard, J.F. (Eds) (1999) *Reversing the Real Brain Drain: Final Report of the Early Years Study*, Government of Ontario, Canada.

²⁰ NSW & QLD Commission for Children and Young People, (2004) *A Head Start for Australia: An Early Years Framework*, NSW Commission, Sydney.

Childhood obesity is now a serious public health problem in Australia. A recent study found that about one quarter of all children aged 7-18 years were overweight and practicing sedentary lifestyles²¹. Childhood obesity can lead to lifelong illnesses for people including adult obesity, diabetes, high blood pressure and heart conditions.

Urban design is considered to be an important element in the prevention and treatment of childhood obesity²². A whole of government strategy is needed to evaluate new urban developments and its suitability for catering to the physical needs of children and young people. An across government approach is needed to assess if new developments have an adequate amount of parks and facilities appropriate for a range of team sports. Children living in suburbs without large open spaces face greater difficulties in maintaining regular physical activity.

WACOSS recommends that a joint initiative by the Department of Health and the Department of Sport and Recreation is undertaken, to investigate the difficulties faced by low income families in accessing sporting activities and equipment for their children. The impact of this on health problems such as obesity and other diseases should be included in the research. Low income families face many disadvantages including being unable to afford sporting classes for their children and this issue must be addressed in order to combat childhood obesity effectively.

Maintenance of Family Centres and Community Based Child Care Centres

Recommendation:

That the State Government continues allocation of funding for minor works and capital upgrade of state owned premises operated as Family Centres and Community Based Child Care Centres.

Rationale:

In 2002 the Auditor General undertook an evaluation of the asset effectiveness of Family Centres.²³ As part of this study, the suitability of Family Centres was rated by centre management, staff and regular users based on a number of criteria including: their internal and external liveability; their safety and security; their physical condition; and the need for maintenance to keep the asset in a reasonable condition. The assessment for these criteria varied with an average rating of criteria only being met to a *moderate extent*. Further, WACOSS has received consistent feedback from the sector about the critical need for maintenance upgrades for Family Centres and Child Care Centres.

²¹ Booth, M.L., Wake, M., Armstrong, T., Chey, T., Hesketh, K. & Mathur, S. (2001) "The epidemiology of overweight and obesity among Australian children and adolescents 1995-1997", *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health*, vol.25, pp.162-169.

²² Wigg, N. (2003) "Cilento Oration 2003: Public Health Issues in Paediatrics", *The Quarterly*, Vol.36, No. 2, pp. 5-7.

²³ Auditor General (2002) *Second Public Sector Performance Report 2002: Report No. 8*, Perth

Poverty

There is ongoing debate among researchers, social welfare lobbyists and governments concerning the extent and experience of poverty in Australia. It is not the purpose of this section to rehash this information as WACOSS recognises that the Government is aware of the alarming levels of poverty in Western Australia. Instead, it is timely to provide a reminder of the costs to society of not addressing poverty.

Poverty and social exclusion are closely linked to a variety of adverse outcomes, both to the individuals and families experiencing it as well as to the wider community and the economy. Domestic violence, crime, poor health outcomes, engagement in health risk behaviours, child abuse, homelessness, mental health problems, educational exclusion or under achievement, and barriers to employment are among these outcomes.

For society, poverty therefore results in the need for increased expenditure on measures to address these problems or, as they may be called, 'symptoms' of poverty. While there is limited research concerning the costs of these problems to society, there is clear evidence that highlights this correlation. For example:

- Research has found that an increase of 1000 families living in poverty would result in an additional 141 young people becoming involved in crime should all other factors remain the same. Following from this, the increase in juvenile court appearances because of this increase would be 257 for each additional 1000 families. An increase of 1000 neglected children, also closely linked with poverty would result in an additional 256 young people involved in crime and 466 additional juvenile court appearances²⁴
- The number of Australian families with no parent in work increased by 30% between 1986 and 2003. In 2003, almost 17% of families did not have a parent in work. By the time children from these families reach 20 they are three times as likely to be on income support as young people from middle-income families²⁵. Needless to say, people on income support cost the economy, not just in terms of the direct money they receive from government, but also in other ways including the revenue lost through them not contributing economically to society.
- In 2002-2003, approximately 408,100 women were the victims of domestic violence. Poverty is the main determinant of domestic violence. The total annual cost of domestic violence in 2002-2003 was estimated to be \$8.1 billion for Australia²⁶.

While many of the recommendations throughout this submission link closely to addressing the causes and symptoms of poverty, there is a need to consider the issue of poverty from a broad view. The following recommendations reflect the view of WACOSS in terms of what is required by government in this agenda.

24 Weatherburn, D. and Lind, B. (1997) 'Household Income, Neglect and Juvenile Crime'. *NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research*, vol.17, pp 95-95

25 Australian Clearinghouse for Youth Studies (n.d) *Australian Youth Facts and Stats: Family and Relationships*. Downloaded 13 September 2005 from:

www.youthfacts.com.au/index.php?option=displaypage&Itemid=214&op=page

26 Access Economics (2004) *The Cost of Domestic Violence to the Australian Economy: Part 1*. Australian Government's Office of the Status of Women; Canberra

State Anti-Poverty Strategy

Recommendation:

WACOSS recommends that the Government establish a Taskforce to guide the development of a State Anti-Poverty Strategy. The Taskforce should be established in a similar way to the State Homelessness Taskforce and include individuals who have expertise and commitment to addressing poverty in Western Australia. Participants should include representatives from a variety of government departments and agencies as well as non-government agency representatives and other stakeholders such as academics. A special focus should be on facilitating involvement of regional and indigenous representatives. Funding needs to be allocated to the taskforce to employ three FTE's to undertake dedicated work on a report for Government. Additional funding should be allocated for other costs.

Responsibilities of the Anti-Poverty Taskforce:

- Similar to the State Homelessness Taskforce, the key mandate of the Anti-Poverty Taskforce should be to develop a plan of action for the establishment of the Anti-poverty Strategy.
- The Taskforce should build on the work of the International Year for the Eradication of Poverty (1996) Taskforce by undertaking a thorough review of the current status of the recommendations made in the *Community Choices, Individual Lives Report*.
- Undertake (or have significant involvement in) a review of the policies guiding the Family Crisis Program

The Anti-Poverty Strategy itself, informed by the work of the taskforce, should have the capacity to increase the knowledgebase of the extent and experience of poverty in Western Australia and to make committed steps towards its eradication.

Objectives of the Anti-Poverty Strategy should incorporate:

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

Key features should include:

- An agreed definition of poverty that reflects the position of Western Australia recognising its geographical vastness and the complexity and uniqueness of issues in relation to poverty;
- A commitment to ongoing research into the extent and experience of Poverty in Western Australia
- The setting of targets, objectives, and actions for key areas including: education, employment, health and housing;
- A particular focus on groups in the population more likely to experience poverty including Indigenous peoples, young people, women, the unemployed, culturally and linguistically diverse, seniors and single parents
- The development of key principles to engage other levels of Government including the Commonwealth as well as all State Government departments and agencies dealing with individuals and families who could be at risk of experiencing poverty. The strategy should also be developed to facilitate the participation of the non-government sector, business sector and the wider community;

- The development of a State-wide Emergency Relief Network
- The adoption of a 'poverty proofing' policy for all government policies and programs
- Facilitating the development of innovative methods of addressing poverty such as social enterprise and micro finance
- The establishment of structures by which the strategy would be implemented; and
- Ongoing evaluation of the effectiveness and achievements of the Strategy.

Pre-Election Commitment:

In response to last years Pre-Budget Submission presented to the Government by WACOSS, the government indicated that they would commit to the development of a State Anti-Poverty Strategy. This commitment was reiterated at two of the Anti-Poverty Week events in October last year. On the 19th October 2004, the Social Policy Unit of the Department of the Premier and Cabinet hosted an Anti-Poverty forum as part of *Anti-Poverty Week*. The forum was convened as the first phase of the development of an Anti-Poverty Strategy for Western Australia. Further, on the 22nd October at the *Anti-Poverty Week* 'Setting the Agenda' forum, Mr Mark McGowan MLA representing the Premier, reiterated the government's commitment to the development of an Anti-Poverty Strategy.

Concerning a review of the Family Crisis Program, the pre-election commitment was:

"The Family Crisis Program has been operating for approximately 11 years on the same policy basis, a review is timely. An important part of the review would be to consider the funding requirements of the reviewed program"

Almost one year down the track, there appears to have been no further action by the government in the development of the Anti-Poverty Strategy or a review of the Family Crisis Program.

Rationale:

The Anti-Poverty Taskforce is viewed as an essential step towards the development of an appropriate and effective Anti-Poverty Strategy. The structure and function of the State Homelessness Taskforce has provided a useful model that can be now applied to the Anti-Poverty Taskforce.

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

Many of the objectives and key features advocated in the recommendation above are based firmly on the Irish example. In particular, the poverty proofing program implemented in Ireland has been hailed as one of the most significant developments under the Anti-Poverty strategy to date. Such programs make it essential for government departments, local authorities and state organisations to assess all policies and programs

In regard to the review of the Family Crisis Program, at present it appears the program is operating ineffectively in addressing the issues that it has been set up to address. WACOSS supports the State Government's pre election commitment to an

extensive review of the program to ensure that it becomes an effective mechanism in addressing financial crisis in the community. The review should take into account the following key concerns repeatedly raised from the Emergency Relief sector and other services providing crisis assistance to individuals and families in the community.

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

Through the government's previous stated commitment to furthering the development of the Anti-Poverty Strategy, it is clear that the value of furthering this agenda is recognised. It is now time to further this commitment.

Housing

Housing is a basic human need. It plays a crucial role in determining whether or not people live in poverty and in a society's ability to realise broader social outcomes. It affects people's ability to participate in employment, education and training, as well as the social life of the community and to maintain good health and well-being.

In Western Australia, there is a growing housing affordability problem. The amount of well located, affordable housing available for people on low incomes, including the working poor, is decreasing rapidly. Perth is currently experiencing a housing crisis, with affordability a major issue for both home purchasers and private renters²⁷. The consequences of this are far reaching. In most countries, housing is a key indicator of social exclusion. Housing access and affordability is acutely linked to employment opportunities²⁸.

Since this Government came to power in 2001, it has demonstrated an active commitment to housing through such initiatives as the State Homelessness Strategy and the recently released, *Housing Strategy WA Discussion Draft*. However, there remain areas of need which have not been adequately addressed and the recommendations below, detail these issues. While the State Government has developed a number of welcomed initiatives aimed at addressing the housing problem in WA, further action is urgently needed. The Government has a responsibility to act now to address the lack of affordable housing, thereby stemming the growth of problems associated with lack of housing, particularly homelessness and social exclusion.

The economic consequences of these recent trends are worth noting. As affordable housing retreats further from centers of employment growth, commuting time and costs rise for those whose housing opportunities are constrained by low incomes. Low wage job vacancies in employment centers become harder to fill, wage premiums must be paid and labour markets function less efficiently²⁹. It is very important that affordable housing be located close to service and transport hubs. This is discussed further in the Transport section.

WACOSS recommends that the State Government allocates an additional \$122 million per year to public housing in order to meet the current demand. In addition, it is recommended that an extra \$2.5 million per year be allocated to community housing with a portion of this directed towards the development of affordable housing options through community housing.

The Housing section is divided into three parts:

- Homelessness Strategies
- Social Housing
- Regional Housing

There are also important tenancy issues which are addressed in the Consumer Protection section.

27 Shelter WA, (2004) *The State of Affordable Housing in WA*, 2004, Shelter WA, Perth.

28 ACOSS, (2003) *The Bare Necessities: Poverty and Deprivation in Australia Today* Submission to the Senate Enquiry into Poverty and Financial Hardship, ACOSS, Sydney.

29 Gavin Woods (2004) 11th Annual F. Oswald Barnett Oration: 9 November 2004, *What Is Happening in Australian Housing Markets? Why Policy Makers Should be Concerned*. Downloaded:

<http://www.sisr.net/events/docs/obo11.pdf>

Homelessness Strategies

State Homelessness Strategy

Recommendation:

Continue to fund and expand effective homeless services, introduced as part of the State Homeless Strategy.

Rationale:

The Government's State Homelessness Strategy (SHS) was a welcome initiative aimed at addressing homelessness and its causes. Funding for the SHS initiatives was provided for four years from 1 July 2002 to 30 June 2006 - a total of \$32 million. While the SHS achieved some important outcomes, the problem of homelessness in WA persists. As the Government acknowledges, homelessness is a complex problem that cannot be solved in a short time frame. WACOSS urges the Government to consolidate its significant work in this area by continuing to fund and expand SHS initiatives.

The social and economic costs of homelessness are significant. Correspondingly, the cost benefit of providing housing for homeless people is also considerable. Research by the RMIT-NATSEM Research Centre, indicates that providing stable housing for homeless people generated cost savings in a range of support services areas³⁰. In some cases the savings paid for most if not all of the housing expenditure, while in others, the gains exceeded the cost. Particular findings included:

- The total cost of youth homelessness in Australia (in net present value terms) to be \$574 million and the net benefit of successfully intervening to be \$474 million- a benefit/cost ratio in excess of 5.
- Housing the homeless significantly increases the likelihood of employment and, hence, increased income. Individual and society benefit through increased income (productive output) and reduced government expenditure on unemployment benefits.
- Positive savings on mental health, substance use, criminal justice and other services when housing is provided to the homeless.

Increase Funding for Existing Supported Accommodation Assistance Program Services

Recommendation:

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

Pre-Election Commitment:

"An increase in funding for existing Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) Services will be considered in the negotiation of the SAAP V Agreement between the Australian and State/Territory Governments."

³⁰ RMIT-NATSEM Research Centre, (2003) *Counting the Cost of Homelessness: A Systematic Review of Cost Effectiveness and Cost Benefit Studies of Homelessness*, AHURI, Canberra.

Rationale:

The SAAP Sector in Western Australia is made up of 125 different community agencies spread throughout the State.³¹ These community agencies provide assistance to homeless young people, single men, single women, families and women escaping domestic violence among others.

Recent research found that one in every 130 Australians used a SAAP service in 2003-2004 and the largest single reason for clients seeking assistance was to escape domestic violence³². Worryingly, it is estimated that up to 2,300 requests for SAAP services in WA could not be met during 2002-2003³³.

The State Government has a responsibility to do something about the high rates of homelessness in WA. It is not acceptable that we have a booming economy but that we have over 11,000 homeless people in our community³⁴. Homelessness is one of the most visible indicators of shortcomings in social and economic policy. Homeless people are exposed to the most extreme risks of ill health, violence, and barriers to social participation. Only 1 in 7 homeless Australians will find a bed in the homeless services system. This is grossly inadequate and the Government must act now.

Recently, the Queensland State Government allocated \$235.52 million over four years to addressing homelessness. With just under half the number of homeless people in Queensland, WACOSS urges the State Government to direct a commensurate amount towards responding to homelessness in WA.

Social Housing

Increase the Investment in Public Housing

Recommendation:

The State Government commit to meeting the demand for public housing, as indicated by the waiting list, by 2025.

Rationale:

Increasing the public housing stock is key to addressing the high rate of homelessness, housing stress and housing related poverty currently experienced in WA.

Research by RMIT-NATSEM³⁵, has found that housing people in public housing generates an economic gain equivalent to between 7.7 and 12.1 per cent of tenant income. This gain offsets about three-quarters of the cost of providing the public housing stock. Other unmeasured benefits of secure, affordable housing are likely to offset the residual (25 per cent) cost of public housing provision.

The total number of public housing dwellings owned by the Department of Housing and Works has been declining slowly over the last ten years, in 1995 it was 36,492 dwellings and by 2005 it had fallen to 34,955. Public housing as a proportion of total housing stock is 4.16% while nationally it is around 5% of housing stock.

³¹ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2005). *Homeless people in SAAP – SAAP NDCA Report Series 9 – Western Australia supplementary tables.*

³² Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2005). *Homeless people in SAAP – SAAP NDCA Report Series 9 – Western Australia supplementary tables.*

³³ www.afho.org.au/7_facts/stats/2002_2003_wa.htm

³⁴ *ibid*

³⁵ RMIT-NATSEM Research Centre, (2003) *Counting the Cost of Homelessness: A Systematic Review of Cost Effectiveness and Cost Benefit Studies of Homelessness*, AHURI, Canberra.

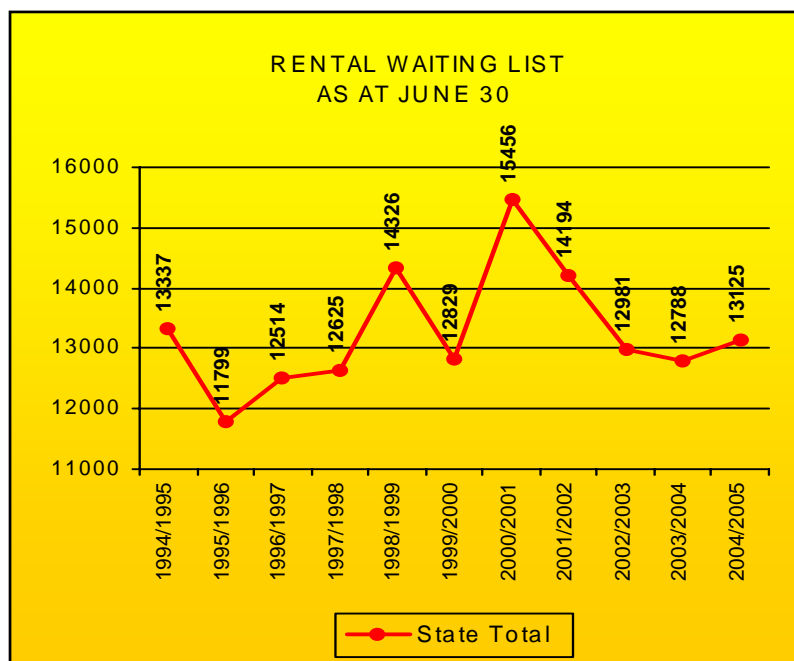
Figure 1 demonstrates that the waiting list has remained relatively static for the past ten years. In 1995 the number of households waiting for public housing was 13 337 and in 2005 it is 13 198 households. No significant inroads have been made into reducing the waiting list.

In order to meet the current demand for public housing by 2025, 660 additional dwellings per year must be constructed. This is in addition to the current public housing construction program which is not producing net stock increases. Shelter WA estimates that building 660 extra dwellings per year would require an additional \$122 million per year.

This strategy would eliminate housing need as indicated by the waiting list and increase the public housing stock from 34 955 to 48 153 units by 2025.

Cost: \$122 million per year

Figure 1: Rental Waiting List



Source: DHW Annual Reports 1995-2005

Increase Housing Appropriate for Priority Groups

Recommendation:

Increase the amount of appropriate social, community and crisis housing available to the following high priority groups: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, young people, women, prisoners exiting the justice system and people with mental illnesses.

Rationale:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people comprise around half of all homeless people in WA³⁶. Just below 20% of Indigenous households live in overcrowded

³⁶ Williams, S. & Eringa, K. (2005) *Final Report- Pre Election Housing Forum* Tuesday 18 January 2005, Shelter WA, Perth.

situations, compared to 2% of non-Indigenous households³⁷. Many Aboriginal households include extended families and so housing therefore needs to accommodate this in order to prevent overcrowding. Overcrowding has been shown to exacerbate a number of social and economic problems such as domestic and family violence, sexual abuse and property damage - all factors that often lead to eviction³⁸. Recent research found that housing stock is inadequate in both number and condition. There is also a lack of appropriate crisis and temporary housing, and long-term affordable housing³⁹. Culturally appropriate housing is urgently needed for Aboriginal singles, couples and families both in rural and urban areas.

- Children and young people make up more than half the homeless population in WA⁴⁰. Feedback from service providers indicates that youth homelessness is on the increase. This group urgently requires appropriate public housing to stop the problems associated with youth homelessness such as substance use, prostitution and crime. In addition, the State Government should remove age based criteria that prevent young people accessing public housing. Currently, applicants will not receive housing until they turn 18 years of age, unless they have supporting parents who request special consideration. By virtue of their homelessness, often young people do not have supporting parents- many of them homeless because of family violence.
- Household composition has a major impact on housing affordability with single income households the most likely to experience affordability problems. In WA, 88% of all single parent households are headed by women⁴¹. Many low income single mothers do not have access to a car due to the costs associated with running one and therefore often rely on public transport. Especially, with very young children to care for, it can be difficult to access public transport and subsequently be able to reach essential services and to run errands. The Government must therefore ensure that available public housing is situated in safe areas and provides easy access to services in the community.
- Currently, agencies are only able to assist 10% of people seeking accommodation assistance on exiting the prison system. For many prisoners, this means that their stay in prison is extended, as they are unable to satisfy parole conditions. It is estimated that these 'extended stays' cost the Department of Justice between \$40 000 - \$60 000 per prisoner per year, money that would be far better spent on expanding the range of housing options available to people leaving prison. Released prisoners face financial barriers to accessing housing. The release payment of \$180 is inadequate and results in people becoming homeless, particularly finite sentence recipients. Lack of access to housing also increases the risk of re-offending.
- Feedback from the SAAP sector indicates the existence of a large number of people who are unable to access SAAP services because they have a mental illness. This is reported as particularly the case with many young people. There are no specific community based supported housing options for homeless young people with a mental illness. A number of supported housing models for people with a mental illness, especially young people, should be funded. These models

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute (AHURI) (2005) *Sustainable tenancy for Indigenous families: what services and policy supports are needed?* AIHW, Canberra.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Williams, S. & Eringa, K. (2005) *Final Report- Pre Election Housing Forum* Tuesday 18 January 2005, Shelter WA, Perth.

⁴¹ Tenants Advice Service & Shelter WA, (2004) *Women and Adequate Housing*, TAS & Shelter WA, Perth.

need to range from 24 hour long term support through to semi and independent housing options.

Recent research by AHURI⁴² found that reduced housing costs, increased residential stability, reduced crowding and more socially diverse neighbourhoods provided to new public housing tenants; benefit educational outcomes for children, the health and well being of tenants and reduce health costs for Government. The study found the net cost outcome was a saving of \$30.71 of average Medicare benefits per person per month. It also found that nearly half the children involved in the study had improved educational performance after moving into public housing while only 10% of children had poorer educational results. This demonstrates the importance of adequate and stable housing and its impact on health, employment and education outcomes.

The Government must make sure that there is an adequate supply of public housing, both long term and transitional, for groups in the community that face particular disadvantage. In particular, there is a lack of accommodation for those leaving SAAP services, leading to a cyclical demand for services due to homelessness. Access to appropriate and stable housing is a key element to addressing the many other problems facing these groups.

A Commitment to Community Housing

Recommendations:

- That the State Government commit to supporting the WA Community Housing Strategic Plan 2003-2008 to encourage a more viable and financially independent community housing sector.
- That the State Government provide an additional \$2.5 million each year to community housing for four years from July 2005 and that this funding be targeted to emerging community housing key providers including allowing a portion to be set aside for the development of affordable housing projects.

Rationale:

Community housing is recognised as an efficient method of providing housing, with a multiplier affect of 1.25. It is also recognised as highly effective, particularly for those people in need of other support services and assistance (e.g. employment, training, treatment). Those individuals who can benefit from other support are able to access this due to the capacity of many non-government services to cross-fertilise housing provision with support services.

The viability of the community housing sector and hence the capacity of the sector organisations in delivering a range of services is dependent upon stock growth and adequate funding. Despite the proven efficiency and effectiveness, however, allocation of funding from the Department of Housing and Works has remained relatively static since 1997. Additional funding is vital in order to achieve a strong and vibrant sector.

There is also a recognised and increasing need for the development of affordable housing options for the 7% of Western Australians households who spend more than 50% of their income on rent⁴³. The development of more affordable housing has the potential to return a higher level of rental income to community housing providers,

⁴² Australian Housing and Urban Institute (AHURI) (2005) *The health, employment and education benefits of public housing* AHURI Research & Policy Bulletin Downloaded: www.ahuri.edu.au 7 September 2005

⁴³ Productivity Commission (2003) *Report of Government Services 2003* Table 16A.49 AGPS, Canberra

thus improving viability and efficiency of the sector. The eligibility for affordable housing should extend to households in the middle income bracket but not exclude those who are eligible for social housing.

Regional Housing

Regional Housing Initiatives

Recommendations:

That the State Government develop strategies to increase the supply of affordable and appropriate accommodation in regional areas, including options for home purchasing, private rental and social housing. This should be achieved specifically through:

- Expanding the subsidised home loan scheme currently offered by the Country Housing Authority
- Allocating appropriate funding from the Central Revenue Fund to the Government Employees Housing Authority to allow it to build rather than lease its housing stock
- Allocate funding of \$70,000 per annum to establish a small grants scheme aimed at allowing local groups to conduct housing research in regional areas.

Rationale:

The housing market in many regional centres of WA has problems with 'key worker housing'. This occurs when 'key worker's' whether they be cleaners, child care workers or teachers earn too much to qualify for public housing but too little to afford to buy a home themselves⁴⁴. A lack of key workers contributes to a number of social problems through facilitating high levels of unemployment and contributing to economic problems for local industries. Local authorities in Britain, supported by the Blair government's £690m 'Key Worker Living' program, have introduced rental subsidy and no-interest loan programs for certain groups of employees. Such subsidies and programs have been designed to head off potential shortages of essential service workers caused by increasing cost of housing in inner city areas. These programs attempt to address a paradox of housing markets in large urban areas. That is, certain parts of the city come to be seen as desirable and become more expensive because they are close to services such as transport, health and education. However, this very process results in the housing becoming unaffordable to the workers who provide such services seen as desirable⁴⁵.

WACOSS is concerned that the proposed amalgamation of the Country Housing Authority, Government Employees Housing Authority and the State Housing Authority into a single authority may reduce or eliminate the availability of the subsidised home loans currently available through the Country Housing Authority. This is particularly disturbing given that we are at a time when, in the interests of economic development of regional areas, such schemes are in need of expansion.

In a number of regional centres, the Government Employees Housing Authority leases rather than builds or purchases its housing stock. In view of the pronounced economic cycles experienced by a number of regional centres, WACOSS is concerned that leasing stock creates additional pressure on the private rental market at the top of the cycle. As a more appropriate alternative, a GEHA building program could be used to stimulate the economy in these centres at the bottom of the

⁴⁴ Weaver, The Guardian 25/5/04

⁴⁵ Michael Darcy, Judith Stubbs, Julia Perry and Hazel Blunden, *Moving to Work, Moving from Work: housing, travel, cost and key workers in Sydney*, Australian Social Policy Conference, UNSW July 2005

economic cycle. This could occur particularly in regional centres such as Hedland, where rents rise to extraordinarily high levels at the top of the economic cycle. In such cases, building rather than leasing GEHA housing stock could be achieved at relatively low cost. To enable this, funds from the Central Revenue Fund would need to be transferred to GEHA.

It has been envisaged that the soon to be established Regional Standing Committee of the Housing Advisory Committee to the Minister for Housing will operate at a relatively high level with minimal representation from housing consumers in regional areas. In order to facilitate representation of housing consumers, WACOSS proposes that the State Government, through the Regional Standing Committee, establish a small grants scheme allowing local groups to conduct locally based housing research. A similar scheme has operated in Queensland for some years and has successfully drawn the active involvement of local communities in housing issues at minimal cost.

Consumer Protection

All WA residents undertake activities associated with being a consumer. Due to the often complex interrelationships between consumers and service or product providers, and the varying quality levels of such service and products, consumers require a level of protection to ensure the maintenance of appropriate standards.

Adequate consumer protection ensures that consumer's rights are not compromised. Consumers have eight basic rights as recognised by the United Nations; these are the:

- Right to satisfaction of Basic Needs
- Right to Safety
- Right to be Informed
- Right to Choose
- Right to be Heard
- Right to Redress
- Right to Consumer Education
- Right to Healthy & Sustainable Environment

This section falls into two distinct parts- firstly, recommendations concerning general consumer protection and secondly, recommendations relating to tenancy issues.

Consumer Protection Legislation

Recommendation:

Progress the *Consumer and Protection Legislation Amendment and Repeal Bill 2004* and ensure that it excludes hostels from the *Retirement Villages Act*.

Rationale:

The State Government has previously committed to amend the *Local Government Act* to remove its application to 'hostels' regulated under the *Aged Care Act 1997*. A Bill was put before Parliament to this end, however it lapsed (23/1/05) in light of Parliament being prorogued for the election. This means that, hostels are still covered by the *Retirement Village Act*. This is unnecessary regulation of the hostels sector given the existing Federal legislation in this area.

Indigenous Consumer Protection

Recommendation:

The State Government commit to fund an Indigenous consumer representative position within an organisation currently undertaking advocacy on behalf of consumers.

Rationale:

The recent launch of the National Indigenous Consumer Strategy: *'Taking Action, Gaining Trust Action Plan'* highlighted the need for increased consumer protection for Indigenous people. In Western Australia, the remoteness of many Indigenous communities leads to increased vulnerability, further exacerbated by a lack of representation regarding consumer protection related issues.

Independent from Government, Indigenous consumer representation will ensure Government has access to a wider range of views on consumer related issues. An Indigenous consumer representative could participate in a number of current and ongoing processes related to Indigenous consumers. Such processes could include the ACCC Disadvantaged and Vulnerable Consumers Project, the current discussion regarding pre-payment meters for electricity supply in Western Australian Aboriginal communities, and issues related to housing, water and other consumer related issues identified in the recently released State Government report, *Environmental Health Needs of Indigenous Communities in Western Australia: The 2004 Survey and its findings*.

Complete the Review of the Residential Tenancies Act 1987

Recommendation:

That the statutory review of the *Residential Tenancies Act* be progressed as a matter of urgency in order to address the vulnerability of the 25% of West Australian consumers who rely on the rental market to meet their housing needs.

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

Pre-Election Commitment:

“A final position paper on the general provisions of the Residential Tenancy Act is due with the Minister by the end of 2004 so as to allow for legislation to be introduced in 2005. Consumer Protection supports the finalisation and implementation of the review of the Residential Tenancies Act and is working within resources to facilitate implementation in 2005.”

Rationale:

While the Labor Government undertook this review three years ago, and it is understood that the Bill may be in the process of preparation, there has not yet been any legislative reform on this matter.

When legislative changes are made, an extensive education process will be required to ensure that both tenants and landlords are aware of changes to their rights and/or responsibilities.

Introduce Legislation to Provide Protection to Long-stay Caravan Park Residents.

Recommendation:

That legislation to provide protection to consumers who are long-stay residents of caravan parks be passed and implemented.

Rationale:

Protection for long-stay caravan park tenants is becoming an increasingly important issue as the range of low cost housing options diminishes, the demand for accommodation of this nature by many groups, especially the elderly, grows, and increasing land prices tempt park owners to redevelop. The *Residential Parks (Long stay Tenants) Bill* was introduced into parliament in November 2004. At the last election, the current Minister gave an undertaking that the Bill would be passed as a matter of priority.

Consumer protection measures for Boarders and Lodgers

Recommendation:

That consumer protection measures be introduced to protect boarders and lodgers in WA.

Pre-Election Commitment:

“The issue of legislating to protect boarders and lodgers is being examined as part of the review of the Residential Tenancies Act, however it is a complex area that may require further targeted consultation. As a result, it is possible that Consumer Protection will advise the Minister to support a project to examine separate legislation for boarders and lodgers rather than delay the overall review of the Residential Tenancies Act. Consumer Protection has not yet determined a firm position on this matter. In general Consumer Protection supports the need for some protection for boarders and lodgers but this matter will be addressed in the position paper on the review of the Residential Tenancies Act, which is due to be with the Minister by the end of 2004”.

Rationale:

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

A complicating issue regarding the current exemption of boarders and lodgers from the RTA and the potential to provide additional consumer protection to this group is the lack of a clear definition of boarders and lodgers. This lack of clarity has proved problematic to others, such as overseas students who are being preyed upon by unscrupulous operators, as evidenced by a recent case where a landlord was found guilty of 14 counts under the *Fair Trading Act* and 4 counts under the RTA.

Abolish Private Rental Lease Fees

Recommendation:

That the abolition of letting fees for private rental tenants be treated as a high priority in the review of the *Residential Tenancies Act 1987*, or in the case of the review of the RTA not being completed in the near future, legislation pertaining to the abolition of these fees be passed and enacted immediately.

Pre-Election Commitment:

“This issue is being dealt with as part of the Review of the Residential Tenancies Act. Abolition of letting fees would only require the proclamation of previously passed legislation – no new legislation is required. Consumer Protection is likely to recommend the abolition of private letting fees but this matter will be included in the position paper on the review of the RTA which is due to be with the Minister by the end of 2004”.

Rationale:

Letting fees are effectively a form of commission payable to the real estate agent for securing a tenant. However unlike other circumstances where commission is paid, these fees are paid by the “buyer” (in this case the tenant) rather than the “seller” (the landlord). Both Houses of Parliament passed legislation in the mid-1990s to abolish

these unfair fees and a subsequent Government commissioned economic impact assessment found that these fees should be abolished. However no action has been taken by Government on this issue.

Tenants Advice Services

Recommendation:

That the Tenancy Advice and Education Program be expanded to provide services through the establishment of Local Service Units in locations identified by the State Housing Strategy, and/or by subsequent research focusing on the needs of the high proportions of renters that have the greatest affordability issues.

Pre-Election Commitment:

“On current predictions the Rental Accommodation Fund is expected to close the financial year 2004/05 at \$614,000 and is predicted to be \$1M in 2005/06. At this time it will be possible to examine an expansion of the tenancy advice network.”

Rationale:

Currently identified areas include: Broome, the Great Southern, the area between the Mid-West and the Pilbara and the expanding suburbs surrounding Wanneroo and Joondalup. The Tenants Advice Service is currently undertaking further comprehensive research into the *Unmet Tenancy Advice and Education Need in WA*. This report is expected to be completed by December 2005 and will provide additional guidelines as to the implementation of this recommendation.

Regulate Tenant Databases

Recommendation:

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

Pre-Election Commitment:

“The Department of Consumer Protection is represented on a Standing Committee of Consumer Affairs Working Party developing a proposal for the uniform national regulation of residential tenancy databases. A final report is to be developed for consideration by the Standing Committee/Ministerial Council of Consumer Affairs, and it is likely that some form of regulation of tenancy databases will be recommended.”

Rationale:

Social housing's share of the Australian housing market has declined steadily in the last decade. In consideration of this, any factors that deny or limit access to the private rental market may result in increased rates of homelessness.

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

There is significant evidence that RTDs commonly contain incorrect entries for tenants and it can be both difficult and costly to: determine whether a listing exists for

an individual; obtain the detail of that listing; and to have an incorrect listing corrected or removed.

A number of findings by the Commonwealth Privacy Commissioner against the largest RTD in Australia on 21 December 2002 support this assertion. These findings related to issues surrounding the accuracy of listings and access to listings by consumers.

It is clear that the legislative framework is inadequate in regard to consumer protection and RTDs.

State Taxes, Fees, Charges & Concessions

State Taxes and Charges

Recommendations:

- That all State taxes and charges be frozen at their current levels. This should include all household fees and charges such as Transperth fares, electricity tariffs, Water Corporation charges, sewerage and drainage; motor vehicle registrations; compulsory third party insurance; and drivers licence fees.
- The State should subject all state revenue proposals to a social impact assessment to ascertain whether separately or cumulatively they impact unfairly on low income families and individuals. As a guide, rises in taxes and charges should be kept at or below the Consumer Price Index. Proposals that don't meet this criteria should be modified if it is shown that they would disadvantage groups in the community.

Pre-election commitment:

"Increases in taxes and charges are required to fund the demand for services in the community. Where Government tax increases have occurred, they have been in progressive taxation measures such as stamp duties. Regressive taxes such as utility charges are kept at or below the rate of inflation."

Rationale:

While most charges were not increased in last year's budget, there were increases in water tariffs and some Transperth fares. WACOSS views that the government should continue its freeze on fees and charges in line with the commitment for 2004.

WACOSS is pleased that the government is currently undertaking a review of State Taxes and we will be putting forward a submission as part of this process. At this stage however, it is important to recognize that low income earners often bear the highest cost of any across the board increases to state taxes and charges in terms of the representation that these costs have in comparison to the income of these individuals and families

Review of State Government Concessions

Recommendation:

That a full review of State concessions is undertaken immediately to examine the accessibility, equity and adequacy of state concessions.

Pre-election commitment:

"The Government has given an undertaking to examine social concessions as part of a second term agenda. Over \$380 million is provided in state concessions and these will be continued in the second term"

Rationale:

Concessions are an integral part of the range of support needed by disadvantaged individuals and families. At present, the existing system of concessions is in urgent need of review – the variations existing between States and Territories and also the

variations in the subsidies available to holders of different types of concession cards are unacceptable.

Current Concession Criteria - Carers

Recommendation:

That the State Government immediately extend the range of concessions currently granted to seniors, to the approximately 18,400 family carers under the age of 60 who are in receipt of carer allowance.

Rationale:

Caring responsibilities can not only restrict a carer's income earning capacity, but also incur extra costs for the household such as extra electricity, phone or transport costs, medications, continence products and special equipment. Rebates/concessions given to seniors in our community should be extended to carers to assist them in meeting the demands and pressures of their role.

One example of where the extension of concessions would assist carers is in the purchase of accommodation for their adult children to assist them to live an independent lifestyle. They are currently not eligible for concessions on council land rates and water rates.

Community Service Obligations

Recommendation:

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

Pre-election commitment:

"The issues of Community Service Obligations will be considered as part of the review of State Government concessions."

Rationale:

Community service obligation payments are intended to benefit all disadvantaged members of the community, not just customers of the Government enterprises providing essential services.

Late Payment Fees

Recommendation:

That the relevant legislation be amended and all State Government Departments and Government Business Enterprises be instructed to provide for waiver of late payment fees for low income earners.

Rationale:

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

Contenance Product Subsidy

Recommendation:

The State Government immediately introduces a subsidy to assist lower income people purchase continence products.

Pre-election commitment:

“Options for developing a subsidy scheme to assist with the purchase of continence products have been developed by a working group comprising the Department of Health, Disability Services Commission and Department for Community Development, Office for Seniors Interests and Volunteering. The recommendations of this working group are currently with the Minister for Community Development, Disabilities and Seniors”.

Rationale:

Incontinence is a condition that affects an individual’s ability to control their bladder and/or bowel. It affects many people of all ages with disabilities, many of whom cannot afford the necessary aids they require to enjoy a reasonable quality of life.

Western Australia is alone amongst Australian States and Territories in failing to provide financial assistance to assist with the purchase of continence products. This omission causes severe financial hardship to seniors and people with disabilities on low incomes as well as their carers.

While there is a limited level of funding currently available at a State level for children aged between three and fifteen years, this is insufficient to meet the annual cost of continence aids for young people with disabilities.

Land Tax

Recommendation:

Address the financial impact on parents of adult sons and daughters with disabilities who are subject to land tax if they purchase a property for their children.

Rationale:

A number of Western Australian families who purchased homes to house their disabled sons and daughters are being adversely impacted on by land tax and their ineligibility for rebates/concessions for council and water rates. Making an exemption from land tax for families who are trying to support their adult children to maintain an independent lifestyle would be a positive step in the State Government supporting carers, who undertake a valuable role in the community.

Exemptions from Local Government Rates

Recommendation:

Ensure any revision to the Local Government Act maintain the exemption from local government rates to the church and charitable sector.

Rationale:

This issue has significance to the operation of affordable housing for seniors. It is important that not for profit aged care providers do not have to pay local government rates as this will impact on affordability of housing for priority groups such as the aged. The State Government conducted the Local Government Advisory Inquiry in 2000 and WACOSS recommends that any amendments to the Act do not result in

not for profit providers being compelled to pay local government rates for land used for residential, community and retirement villages.

Essential Services: Energy & Water

WACOSS calls for the State Government, in recognition of the increasing burden of essential services on low-income earners and ultimately Emergency Relief providers, to implement a whole of government approach to essential services that takes into account a range of social and environmental strategies.

For low income and disadvantaged Australians the costs associated with accessing essential services consume a disproportionately high percentage of their income. As reported by the ABS in 1998-1999, those in the highest income quintile allocated less than half as much of their household expenditure to utility bills as did those on the lowest income quintile (1.2 percent compared to 8.2 percent)⁴⁶. Many of these people subsequently find paying utility bills very difficult and often end up in arrears to service providers. This may result in restriction of supply or disconnection. The consequences of these outcomes have been shown to include: deterioration in health, poor diet and exclusion from society amongst others.

The pressure being placed on Emergency Relief agencies to assist clients with utility bills continues to grow unsustainably. Many agencies are increasingly reporting that they are having to turn clients away due to lack of resources to assist. To illustrate this demand for assistance a 2003 WACOSS report into the cost of essential services to Emergency Relief Agencies and their clients found that in the 12 months to July 2003, Emergency Relief Agencies paid approximately \$1.34 million to utility service providers to prevent disconnection or restriction of supply to low-income and disadvantaged communities.⁴⁷

Utilities Assistance Scheme

Recommendation:

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

Pre-election commitment:

“Assistance for low-income consumers to be considered as part of the review of State Government concessions. The Government has expanded the energy rebate to eligible pensioners in caravan parks and other lease for life arrangements such as retirement homes.”

Rationale:

There is an urgent need to establish a Scheme that can provide emergency funds to cover basic essential service costs for people experiencing temporary financial crisis. Many Concession Card Holders and low-income families in Western Australia face supply disconnection due to an incapacity to pay. The negative impacts of disconnection put families under extreme hardship and contribute an enormous social cost to the State.

⁴⁶ WACOSS (2003b)

⁴⁷ WACOSS (2003) *Would you like a bit of Heat with that trickle of Water?*.

All efforts should be made to avoid disconnection due to an incapacity to pay, resulting from temporary financial crisis.

There is a strong national and international precedent for establishing such a Scheme in WA. A number of states in Australia have established similar schemes.⁴⁸ States of the United Kingdom and United States of America also offer such programs as common practice.⁴⁹ Two examples include:

- The State Government funded Connecticut Energy Assistance Program (CEAP) assists low-income earners by paying a fixed amount directly to their nominated utility provider, and
- The Contingency Heating Assistance Program (CHAP) available to consumers requiring assistance with utility bills whose income level is above the CEAP guidelines.⁵⁰

The Western Australian Government, recognising the fact that sustained access to essential services is a requisite for an acceptable standard of living, should follow this lead by other states.

Thousands of people are assisted each year by the WACOSS & Emergency Relief Forum's modest financial assistance schemes, which are sponsored by the utility providers, *Western Power Assist* and *Alinta Care*. But many applicants are turned away each round due to inadequate funding.

There is an observed need for greater assistance in regard to utility bills for disadvantaged and vulnerable Western Australians, who would be greatly relieved by such a scheme.

Consumer Utilities Project - Advocacy

Recommendation:

That the State Government continue to fund WACOSS to deliver the Consumer Utilities Project, to undertake research, education, policy development and advocacy, to secure better outcomes for Western Australian utility consumers.

Pre-election commitment:

"The Government has funded WACOSS to the amount of \$200 000 to establish a utility consumer's policy project".

Rationale:

The interests of consumers need to be represented in policy and decision-making regarding the provision of essential services such as water, gas and electricity. Consumer representation provides government and industry bodies access to a wide range of views and input, thereby improving the quality of their deliberations and decisions. Not only is there a natural justice imperative for consumers to have input into decisions which impact on them, but it also makes for sensible business practice.⁵¹

⁴⁸ The Energy Accounts Payment Assistance (EAPA) is a financial assistance scheme for emergency energy bill payments from the New South Wales Department of Energy, Utilities and Sustainability. They offer a similar scheme for water. The Utility Relief Grant Scheme (mains & non-mains) is a financial assistance scheme for one off crisis payment from the Victorian Department of Human Services.

⁴⁹ Howat and Oppenheim, *"Low Income Consumer Utility Issues: A National Perspective"*; National Consumer Law Centre, Boston, 2000. Copies available from WACOSS.

⁵⁰ Howat and Oppenheim, *"Low Income Consumer Utility Issues: A National Perspective"*; National Consumer Law Centre, Boston, 2000. Copies available from WACOSS.

⁵¹ Commonwealth Consumer Affairs Advisory Council. *Principles for the Appointment of Consumer Representatives: A process for Governments and Industry*. Consultation Draft. May 2002

Across Australia, national competition policy initiatives have seen governments change the structural arrangements for utilities. Western Australia is undergoing significant reform in the way the utilities sector is structured, including changes to markets, regulation and service provision. Changes to water utilities are ongoing, reform in the electricity market is currently underway, and many of the recent gas reform outcomes are currently under or soon to be reviewed. The outcomes of the reform processes have significant implications for consumers in areas such as pricing and subsidies, service standards, sustainability, and complaints resolution.

Ongoing government funding of a consumer utilities project will facilitate meaningful consumer participation and representation in the reform of the utilities market and ensure positive outcomes for consumers. It would also make the reform process, policies and outcomes more transparent, by providing a mechanism through which research, education, policy development and consumer advocacy materials can be dispersed to consumers and consumer representatives throughout the state.

Over the past 6-months, the Western Australian Council of Social Service has been undertaking an 18-month long Consumer Utilities Project. Examples of other similar projects can be drawn from several eastern state government models that contribute to achieving better outcomes for all as a result of strengthened stakeholder participation.⁵²

The Consumer Utilities Project is a major step forward for consumer protection in WA. Ongoing reports to Government illustrate the activities undertaken by the project; which have resulted in numerous positive outcomes for consumers, which attest to its value, including:

- Greater awareness of electricity consumers rights under *Code of Conduct for Small Use Customers*,
- Greater flexibility for customers experiencing financial hardship or payment difficulties under the *Western Power Hardship Policy*,
- Stronger emphasis on consumer protection compliance in electricity licensing,
- A 50% funding increase for the *Western Power Assist Scheme*, and
- Improved access for customers and customer representatives to information about consumer rights and obligations; through training, information, a telephone advice hotline and website.

The Consumer Utilities Project has established strong working relationships with government agencies and authorities, private utility companies, intra-state, inter-state and federal consumer representative bodies, and other non-government organisations involved in consumer utility issues.

The utilities telephone hotline is well publicised and well used by consumers and consumer representatives. A website has been developed by WACOSS which includes comprehensive information and advice.

Over the next 12 months, the Project will build upon the successes achieved to date. It is vital that longer term and stable funding be provided to WACOSS to continue to undertake such important consumer representation and advocacy for improving consumer protection and providing a safety net for all consumers.

⁵² The Utility Consumer Advocacy Program is funded by the New South Wales Government and is conducted by the Public Interest Advocacy Centre (PIAC) in Sydney. The Consumer Utilities Advocacy Centre (CUAC) is a Victorian Government funded, independent consumer advocacy organisation, established to enhance the input of electricity, gas and water consumers, and particularly low-income, disadvantaged and rural consumers, into the regulatory debate. (www.cuac.org.au)

Retrofit Programs

Recommendation:

That the State government fund comprehensive state-wide retrofitting programs, which include:

- Consultation and partnership across government, community and business,
- Implementation of an energy-efficient retrofitting program and efficient heating system for all Department of Housing and Works properties,
- Targeting of Sustainable Energy Development Office grants to low-income housing,
- A community education and awareness program to encourage household energy conservation measures as a means of reducing energy utility bills in low income households and improving the capacity of low income households to manage utility costs.⁵³

Pre-election commitment:

“Committed support to the concept of retrofit programs and promised to commence discussion with community groups in regards to these programs in 2005.”

Rationale:

Improving the efficiency of water, gas and electricity consumption can deliver cross-sectoral benefits, by reducing consumption costs to consumers, improving home comfort and delivering on other government social, economic and environmental priorities.

WACOSS has a role in demonstrating the social benefit of well-targeted retrofitting and assistance packages.

Research undertaken in South Australia suggests that energy conservation is vital to the reduction of unmanageable electricity bills for many low-income households. Household conservation measures should be given much greater government and retail support through an integrated approach covering a broad range of educational measures.⁵⁴

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

There are other indicators that improving demand management, through retrofitting and creative strategies for improving efficiency, can reduce the peak load demand, which is the most expensive electricity to produce. Hence, improving energy and water efficiency, can place downward pressure on the cost of energy generation for all consumers.

In NSW, the REFIT Program was developed by representatives of a number of organisations including: Council of Social Service of NSW, the Department of Fair Trading, Sustainable Energy Development Authority, the Smith Family, Sydney Water and the Department of Community Services. Under this program a number of

⁵³Lawrence, J (2002) *Electricity its just essential*, low income electricity consumer project, Final Report. South Australian Council of Social Service, Adelaide

energy and water efficient devices were distributed to low income households and recipients of Energy Accounts Payment Assistance vouchers. The package distributed included (among other products): one AAA rated showerhead and two fluorescent light bulbs. Results from the program indicated that the REFIT recipients' savings were well in excess of the costs associated with installing the products. While the cost of the packages totalled \$112 (GST inclusive) each, savings to recipients were estimated at \$1000 in energy and water bills from using the single AAA showerhead and \$50 from smart lighting. The other devices also facilitated considerable additional savings. Benefits to the companies were also significant in the decrease observed in costs associated for debt recovery, the growth in the perception of community goodwill and a competitive edge.⁵⁵

The above programs are only two examples selected from many others. Further information can be obtained from reports such as: *Power, Markets and Exclusion* by the Financial and Consumer Rights Council of Victoria⁵⁶ as well as the *Electricity: It's Just Essential* report, published by the South Australian Council of Social Service in 2002.

Fuel Watch: Gas Bottles

Recommendation:

That Fuel Watch undertake price monitoring and publicise on the Fuel Watch website the cost of Gas bottles.

Rationale:

The fluctuation in the cost of gas bottles and the different prices charged in different locations for gas bottles causes concern within communities, particularly in regional areas due to a lack of transparency about how prices are set, and how these compare with other towns and suppliers.

Price monitoring of gas bottles and providing that information to the public would increase the transparency in price setting for gas bottles, similar to the information currently provided to consumers regarding petrol pricing.

⁵⁵ Benson, T. (2003) *REFIT: A Social Justice and Environmental Pilot Project*. Public Interest Advocacy Centre: Sydney. Available at: <http://www.sprc.unsw.edu.au/ASPC2003/papers/Paper37.pdf>

⁵⁶ Financial and Consumer Rights Council Victoria Inc. (2004) *Power, Markets and Exclusion: Assessing the effectiveness of social protections in deregulated markets: An Electricity Case Study from Victoria*. Melbourne

Transport

Appropriate, accessible and affordable public transport is essential for many low income and disadvantaged individuals and families in Western Australia. Figures from Transperth clearly show that it is possible to save over \$1800 per year by using public transport, compared to driving a car. This is a substantial amount of money that could be used for other necessities. In addition, many low income individuals do not have access to alternate forms of transport and therefore rely on public transport, walking and cycling to meet their transport needs, including to get to places of education and employment. While the current State Government has endeavoured to improve public transport, there is still more that needs to be done.

It is important to note that accessibility and affordability of transport and housing are closely and generally inversely related. The more affordable housing is most often associated with higher transport costs, greater travel distances, less frequent and reliable public transport, and less dedicated walking and cycling routes. It is important that transport initiatives take into account the implications for housing affordability. Please see the WACOSS PBS recommendations regarding Housing Affordability in the Housing section.

Public Transport – Trains & Buses

Recommendation:

That the State Government continue to improve the accessibility, affordability of use of public transport in Western Australia.

Rationale:

Public Transport, including trains and buses, are of immense value to community. The benefits of an efficient and well utilised public transport system, include:

- Health,
- Enjoyment,
- Convenience,
- Saving money,
- Better air quality,
- Better local living environment,
- Less traffic congestion⁵⁷.

In order for all Western Australians to share the benefits of Public Transport, it is important that the services are provided efficiently and equitably, and in that respect, several improvements are required. These improvements should specifically include:

- increasing the number of fully accessible buses in the transport fleet,
- introducing free CAT bus services in other urban nodes, including Midland & Joondalup, and
- freezing concessions fees for public transport.

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

⁵⁷ Benefits of TravelSmart: <http://www.dpi.wa.gov.au/travelsmart/benefits.html>

that appropriate resources be allocated to enhance the ability for them to access appropriate public transport.

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

Concessions are vital to ensure that low income individuals can afford necessary services. Given the increasing levels of poverty in Western Australia, and the increasing financial strain being placed on low income earners, the State Government must respond by ensuring affordable access to public transport, as an essential service.

Alternative Transport – Walking & Cycling

Recommendation:

That the government invest in safe, secure and accessible, dedicated walking and cycling routes for suburbs of Perth most dependent on alternatives to private cars for transport.

Rationale:

Personal, physical transport modes are an important part of all journeys that we make, and require greater priority in urban planning and transport.

Walking and cycling have many individual and community benefits including:

- Social Equity – Walking is the only free transport mode available at all times to almost all people at no cost. Many West Australians do not own or have access to a private vehicle and many groups including children, older people and those with disabilities depend on a combination of public transport and walking.
- Community – Good community design creates environments that are safe and encouraging for walking and cycling. The Sustainable Transport Coalition has suggested that “community design that incorporates safety, shelter and shade increases activity and interaction between community members and creates natural surveillance of local areas.”⁵⁸
- Health - West Australian’s currently do insufficient physical activity to achieve health benefits and 39% of adults are overweight or obese.⁵⁹ As little as 30 minutes of moderate activity including walking, on most days can provide health benefits, and reduce the risk of heart disease, disabilities and other conditions.

In order for all Western Australians to make the most of walking and cycling opportunities, it is important that the walking and cycling services are provided

⁵⁸ Sustainable Transport Coalition WA, *Walking Policy* http://www.stcwa.org.au/papers/STC_walking_policy.doc 2003.

⁵⁹ Premiers Physical Activity Taskforce: *Facts about Physical Activity*. WA Government: 2003

efficiently and equitably, and in that respect, several improvements are required. These improvements should specifically include:

- Prioritise pedestrians and cyclists in planning and transport infrastructure,
- Create safe walking and cycling environments, including dedicated paths and access ways,
- Encourage walking and cycling as travel modes, by providing quality information and promotion,
- Focus the Travel Smart household program on areas most dependent on walking, cycling and public transport, and
- Create a policy priority to increase the percentage share of trips made by walking or cycling.

Transport Energy – A State Strategy

Recommendation:

That the State Government release a Transport Energy Strategy with a clear management plan for dealing with the WA impacts of peaking global oil supplies and escalating petrol costs, that includes particularly attention to the most vulnerable peoples transport needs.

Rationale:

Western Australia's transport system relies predominantly on private car usage and is therefore highly oil dependent.⁶⁰ There is an urgent need to reform transport and energy policies to provide leadership, direction and funding to reduce the WA transport system's vulnerability to global oil supplies and prices.

The escalating costs of transport energy disproportionately affect low-income consumers, particularly those that live further away from the city and central urban nodes. Trends indicate that this impact will continue to worsen in Perth, due to its high level of car dependence and urban sprawl.

The State Government appointed Transport Energy Strategy Committee released an Interim Report in 2003, but since then the Government has not followed through with developing a final strategy.

WACOSS calls on the Government to develop a strategy that addresses the vulnerability of WA to the availability and price of oil. The issues that ought to be addresses include:

- strategy to contain urban sprawl,
- strategy to improve transit oriented development so that it improves housing affordability,
- development and utilisation of alternative fuels,
- development and utilisation of efficient vehicles, and
- policies to protect the transport needs of low income and disadvantaged individuals.

⁶⁰ Transport Energy Strategy Committee, *Interim Report 2003*, Department of Planning & Infrastructure, WA Government: 2003, p6.

Health

Improved Oral Health Services

Recommendations:

That the State Government commit additional resources to assist low income families and elderly people to access high quality dental care including early intervention and on-going monitoring of oral health.

Specifically, the State Government needs to:

- Develop a dental workforce plan for next 10 – 15 years
- Provide additional resources for the orthodontic treatment of young people
- Review the Country Patients' Dental Subsidy Scheme (CPDSS) with a view to improve its effectiveness for patients and increase the private dentist participation in the scheme
- Increase the eligibility criteria for PATS funding to include all dental treatments for rural and regional patients who are unable to access public dental services in their region.
- Commit additional funding to reduce the dental waiting list

Pre-election commitment:

"The State Government has committed funding of \$1 million over the next four financial years to continue to reduce dental waiting lists."

Rationale:

Thousands of West Australian cannot afford private dental care, and are obliged to queue for the limited public dental services available. It is vital to people's overall health that they access adequate oral health services.

In Western Australia, a number of deficiencies in the dental health services are limiting the access low income and elderly people have to oral health services. These deficiencies include:

- Not enough dentists working in the public dental health service
- Three year waiting periods for orthodontic services for school aged children and strict exclusions for orthodontic treatment eligibility
- In areas where no public dental service exists, and private dentists do not participate in the CPDSS residents must pay full fees for dental treatment or travel to the nearest public clinic.
- Admission of public patients for dental procedures in public hospitals is severely restricted in many country locations, forcing patients to wait for lengthy periods or to travel to Perth to access treatment.
- The Patient Assisted Travel Scheme (PATS), which aims to provide assistance to country residents who are required to travel more than 100km to see a specialist, is very costly and largely unavailable for dental treatments.

Patient Assisted Travel Scheme (PATS)

Recommendation:

That the State Government initiates a comprehensive patient evaluation of the PATS and agree to consider the recommendations with a view to improving the

patient/family focus of the Scheme. This should be done as part of WA Country Health Services: Patient Transport Review.

Rationale:

Many formal and informal complaints have been raised by consumers regarding the PATS over the past two years. A review of the scheme will enable a comprehensive assessment to be made of the deficiencies in the scheme, and progress a strategy to rectify these issues.

Informed Consent

Recommendation:

That Department of Health, through the Council of Safety and Quality in Health Care, develop and implement a wide ranging campaign promoting informed consent, including appropriate media and distribution throughout the State, of Consumer Informed Consent resource materials.

Rationale:

The Informed Consent Process in healthcare is a fundamental human right. Many people have no understanding of the consent process including information giving, shared decision-making and effective communication. This applies to consumers and community members as well as health service providers

Mental Health

Recommendation:

The Government develop and implement strategies to target specialist mental health services for seniors and people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds (CaLD) and for regional and remote areas.

Pre-election commitment:

“The State Government has allocated \$173.4 million in additional funding over the next three years to enable the implementation of the comprehensive mental health reform initiatives identified in the Mental Health Strategy 2004-2007.

These key strategies form part of the first phase of the innovative longer term plans for public health system reform outlined in the Health Reform Committee's final report. Further initiatives will be delivered in accord with the Health Reform Implementation Team's recommendations”.

Rationale:

Despite the development of the Mental Health Strategy 2004-2007, key sections of our community have unmet mental health needs that the State Government needs to address. The State Government should commit to improve mental health services for seniors and people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds by:

- Developing and implementing a State Mental Health Strategy for Seniors
- Introducing programs to redress the growing problem of depression in seniors
- Making grief counselling services widely available to seniors through increased funding to agencies providing appropriate mental health services to seniors.

- Developing partnership between the government mental health service providers and CaLD community organisations in order to facilitate the delivery of culturally appropriate health services
- Ensuring Practitioners and Mental Health staff undertake cross cultural awareness training.
- Recruiting bilingual workers should also be promoted in order to improve mental health services to people from CaLD backgrounds.
- Approving and implementing the Draft Mental Health Action Plan as a matter of urgency.
- Establishing a culturally appropriate mental health service for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as a matter of urgency.

Very often mental health conditions are undiagnosed in seniors or incorrectly attributed to age or dementia. Hence, seniors are incorrectly recorded as having the lowest levels of mental illness⁶¹ in the community. Depression and suicide are also problems for seniors which are largely unrecognised. Loss of a partner, relative or friend can be devastating for seniors, but grief counselling is neither widely available nor accessible at low cost. There is little recognition of the special needs of seniors for counselling.

The current mental health services are not adequately responding to the needs of seniors and people from CaLD backgrounds. There is lack of equitable access to comprehensive range of mental health services and relevant information about those services. Appropriate programs and policies should be developed for seniors and people from CaLD backgrounds.

There is an increasing need for a culturally appropriate mental health service for Aboriginal people in WA, for rural and urban areas. Since the closure of the Derbal Yerrigan Health Service in 2003, one study found that there was a 110% increase in hospitalisations of former clients in the year following cessation of Aboriginal focussed mental health services when compared to the previous year⁶².

In addition, mental health services in the regions are extremely under-resourced. There has been little real progress to date with mental health services in rural and remote areas continuing to struggle to provide much needed services.

Participation of Carers in Mental Health System

Recommendation:

Extend carer participation; representation and advocacy within a capacity building framework across all clinical health networks and the public health system.

- Implement a carer representation framework for all clinical health networks, including mental health at a cost of \$200,000 pa
- Initiate paid Carer consultants within public mental health services at a cost of approximately \$600,000 in 2006-2007.

Rationale:

A key objective 11 of the *Mental Health Strategy 2004-2007* is "Increasing Consumer and Carer Participation". This commitment requires resourcing. Increased consumer participation leads to improved outcomes in the health sector. This enhanced

⁶¹ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2000) *Australia's Health*, Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, Canberra., p 77

⁶² Office of Mental Health, (2005) *WA Aboriginal Social and Emotional Well Being and Mental Health Strategy*, Department of Health, Perth.

participation and the introduction of more family involvement practice must be extended to all State Government health service providers.

Funding for Drug and Alcohol Services

Recommendation:

That the State Government, as a priority, develop strategies to fund core alcohol and other drug services currently provided from resources using Commonwealth funding.

Rationale:

Since 2000, the Commonwealth Government's National Illicit Drug Strategy (NIDS) Treatment Grants and the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) Diversion Initiatives funding enabled those agencies funded to have the capacity to meet the needs of the Commonwealth initiatives and additional demand for core services. In some cases agencies are receiving more Commonwealth funding than State funding to deliver what has become core services. This situation is not acceptable given the State's responsibility for alcohol and other drug service provision and the risk associated with potential variance in Commonwealth strategic policy directions or change of Commonwealth Government that could lead to the cessation of service provision. WANADA estimates the State Government responsibility's core business currently supported by Commonwealth funding is in the order of \$4.5 million.

Four residential services throughout the State, Rosella House in Geraldton, Cyrenian House, Palmerston Farm and the Salvation Army Bridge Program in the metropolitan area successfully accessed external funding from the Alcohol Education and Rehabilitation Foundation for expansion in infrastructure and service development. This funding was allocated on the evidence of demand for additional services and verbal State Government support for these developments and a commitment to recurrent resources to maximise the investment in capital works. The State Government has to date not committed funds necessary to utilise the additional residential capacity.

Non-Government Drug and Alcohol Services

Recommendation:

That the State Government, as a priority, adequately resource existing non-government drug and alcohol services to a level that meets the expansion of demand. An immediate additional 25% increase to recurrent core funding for existing non government treatment and support services has been identified as required to ensure the sustainability of the sector

Pre-election commitment:

In response to a set of questions about the future of alcohol and other drug treatment in WA for the Drug Wise magazine, Mr McGinty stated that:

"In 2004/05 Gallop Labor Government allocated \$29.66 million for the Drug and Alcohol Office. In 2005/06 if re-elected we would allocate \$33.6 million plus relevant indexation. The additional funding would see the Drug and Alcohol Office progress a range of initiatives to prevent and effectively respond to problems related to alcohol use, amphetamine use, co-existing mental health and drug problems and expand the range of responses for Aboriginal people."

Rationale:

The provision of services by the non-government sector can be delivered in a more cost effective way than those provided by Government largely due to the difference in salaries and terms and conditions of employment. In addition to this, the Australian National Council on Drugs (ANCD) 2004, stated that drug treatment was 23 times more effective in reducing drug use than supply reduction strategies in terms of costs and outcomes, effecting social, health and justice benefits.

Current demands on alcohol and other drug services are stretching the capacity of the non-government service providers. Strengthening the capacity of existing services is well overdue as non-government services are currently limited by existing resources and capacity, with many services reporting increased client complexity and need.

Improving recurrent core funding of existing services particularly the non-government sector continues to be overlooked, with new initiatives supported instead. The alcohol and other drug sector has reached a crisis point and is not able to meet current demand. This is evidenced by waiting lists, staff shortages, access issues due to services having to reduce operating hours to manage within existing budget constraints not met by CPI increases eg. insurance premiums, communication costs.

The government's commitment and inclusion of annual CPI indexation to the non government sector is commended, however, the previous years when minimal or no CPI was funded has eroded the core funding of agencies. This is due to a number of factors, such as, the escalation in professional indemnity and workers compensation insurance premiums. Where excessive premiums have been incurred for activities, such as camps for young people at risk of drug problems these services are no longer being provided.

The non government sector has had to absorb the additional costs placed on agencies to support reporting and accountability standards, telecommunication, IT infrastructure maintenance and enhancement, travel and facilities management costs, however, there is has resulted in reduced access to services. The non government sector does not have the capacity to continue to invest the limited resources available to support infrastructure without further diminishing the level of services available to the community, which are already operating in a non sustainable manner.

Dementia Care

Recommendation:

That the State Government provide funding for the progressive implementation of the Dementia Action Plan⁶³ within the State Aged Care Plan.

Rationale:

The incidence of dementia is increasing. According to Alzheimers Australia:

(In Australia)...[*1000 people a week will be diagnosed with dementia in 2005*](#)⁶⁴

The State government has developed a Dementia Action Plan. However, little has been done to implement this plan.

⁶³ Dementia Action Plan accessed at <http://www.health.wa.gov.au/waacac/publications/docs/Dementia.pdf>

⁶⁴ <http://www.alzheimers.org.au/content.cfm?infopageid=1926>

Aged Care- Residential Care Services

Recommendation:

The State Government needs to establish recurrent funding streams for the aged care sector to encourage and support residential care in trialling new initiatives that facilitate transition care from both the public and private acute care

Rationale:

The need to support the sector in this regard should be fostered through a range of State Government initiatives. The sector is strategically placed to provide responsive and appropriate care to seniors requiring supported transition following acute admissions or acute health episodes however to provide such services

Carer Recognition Act

Recommendation:

That the Government initiate a non recurrent grants programme of \$250,000 p.a. over the years 2006-2007 and 2007-2008 to encourage the implementation of family involvement frameworks; carer friendly systems and workplaces

Rationale:

Western Australia's Carer Recognition Act is the first legislation of its kind in Australia. "The purpose of the Bill is to formally recognise carers as partners in the provision of care for the frail, the chronically ill and persons with a disability, and to reflect this formal recognition by requiring key organisations to comply with a Carers Charter.

The charter provides clear direction on how carers are to be treated and how carers are to be involved in the delivery of services. The Carers Charter will ensure that applicable organisations involve carers in decisions about the provision of care and services, and consult with them on issues that will have an impact on the carer and the caring role." ¹ The Carer Recognition Act applies to Health, Public Hospitals, Disability and all their funded organisations. A grants program will assist with education about the legislation and with the development and implementation of models to comply with the spirit of the legislation prior to its review after 3 years in 2007-2008.

Australian Bureau of Statistics (1998) *National Survey of Mental Health and Wellbeing of Adults*. Canberra: Australian Bureau of Statistics

Australian Indigenous Health Info Net www.healthinfolnet.ecu.edu.au Accessed on 27/09/2004

Government of Western Australia, (2003) *Indicators of Drug Use: Regional and State Profiles Western Australia*, Drug & Alcohol Office, Department of Health, Perth.

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Saunders, B. (2002) *Co-occurring mental health and drug dependency disorders: Challenges and dilemmas*. Paper presented at the Drug & Alcohol Office Inaugural Conference. Fremantle, August 2002

Sheill A & Law, M (2001) *The cost of hepatitis C and the cost-effectiveness of its prevention*. Health Policy 58, 12-131.

Tesson, M. and Burns, L. (2001) *National Comorbidity Project*. National Drug Strategy and National Mental Health Strategy. Canberra: Commonwealth Department of Health and Aged Care

Indigenous Issues

The gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in health, education, employment and housing is still at an unacceptable level.

- Life expectancy for Indigenous males is 59 years – 18 years lower than for non-Indigenous males, and for Indigenous females, 65 years – 17 years lower than for non-Indigenous females.
- Indigenous infants are around 4 times more likely to die before their first birthday and 5 times more likely to succumb to Sudden Infant Death Syndrome.
- Indigenous students are half as likely as non-Indigenous students to continue to year 12.
- Unemployment rate is 2.8 times higher among Indigenous people compared with non-Indigenous people.
- Suicide rates for Indigenous people are nearly three times that of other Australians.
- Indigenous people are 11 times more likely than non-Indigenous people to be in prison.⁶⁵

Despite vast differences in health status, per capita health care expenditure is not much different between Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations⁶⁶. To make significant changes in the health, education, employment and housing status of Aboriginal people there needs to be a level of resources that is proportionate to need.

The State Government has an opportunity in the next Budget to ensure that Aboriginal people in Western Australia do not continue to have poor quality of life outcomes. We urge the Government to invest in much needed services for Indigenous people. There needs to be in depth consultation on a grassroots level to ensure that any new initiative takes into account the needs of Indigenous people. Also, deeply entrenched problems cannot be solved quickly- the Government must take a long term view of the implementation of new programs.

Investing now in infrastructure and services for Indigenous people will reduce the social and financial costs associated with poor health, crime, lack of education and family breakdown, immediately and in the future.

The pressing issue of lack of affordable and appropriate housing for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is discussed in the Housing section. The need for a State Based Interpreting Service that caters for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages is discussed in the Multicultural section.

Address Gaps in Alcohol and Drug Services for Indigenous People

⁶⁵ Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision, (2005) *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage: Key Indicators 2005 Report* Productivity Commission, Canberra.

⁶⁶ Australian Council of Social Services (ACOSS) (2003) *The Bare Necessities: Poverty and Deprivation in Australia Today*. Submission to the Senate Inquiry into Poverty and Financial Hardship, ACOSS, Sydney.

Recommendation:

That the State Government resource new initiatives to meet identified service gaps in the alcohol and drug sector, including the potential development of an Aboriginal specific residential facility.

Pre- Election Commitment:

“In WA, a partnership of key Indigenous and Government agencies has been formed to draft a WA Aboriginal Alcohol and Drug Strategy. A draft framework of the document has been completed and has been circulated to the stakeholder agencies for their input on current and planned activities relevant to the Strategy.”

Rationale:

There is a higher than average prevalence of drug use amongst Aboriginal people with cannabis use 3 times higher among Indigenous than non-Indigenous populations⁶⁷ and 22% of Aboriginal people drinking at levels harmful to their health.⁶⁸ The number of Indigenous clients accessing residential services between July 2000 and June 2004 has nearly trebled⁶⁹.

Aboriginal people face significant barriers in accessing services, due, in part to, lack of culturally appropriate residential treatment facilities and services, preventing Aboriginal people accessing services.⁷⁰ Alcohol and drug use contribute significantly to the economic and social disadvantages experienced by Indigenous communities.⁷¹

Cost \$70,000

Establish a National Representative Indigenous Body

Recommendation:

The Government commit to establishing a sustainable, independent national representative Indigenous body. This body should be responsible for representing the interests of Indigenous people, giving policy advice to Government and setting policy directions and priorities for Indigenous controlled services.

Rationale:

Indigenous Australians must determine future structures and processes for the administration of their own affairs. Australia is a signatory to international human rights treaties and conventions that demand this. We have a responsibility under the United Nations' *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights* (ICESCR) and *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights* (ICCPR) to promote and support the social, economic and cultural development of all Indigenous peoples and communities. Both *ICESCR* and *ICCPR*, affirm the fundamental importance of the right of self-determination of all peoples. Any revised Indigenous representative structure must support Indigenous peoples' self determination.

Mobile Health Units for Aboriginal People

Recommendation:

⁶⁷ Stearne, (2002) National Drug Research Institute, p.8.

⁶⁸ ANCD Forum Perth 16 September 2004

⁶⁹ WACOSS, (2005) *The Social Issues Scorecard 2005- WA State Political Party Responses to WACOSS Pre Election Document: Turning the tide: The trickle up effect*, WACOSS, Perth.

⁷⁰ Stearne, National Drug Research Institute 2002, p.33, and anecdotal feedback

⁷¹ Drug and Alcohol Council (2001), cited in Indigenous Australian Indigenous HealthInfoNet www.healthinonet.ecu.edu.au

Establish a number of mobile health units for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples throughout metropolitan and regional areas, staffed by culturally aware community health workers.

Rationale:

The health of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in WA is extremely poor. Indigenous people suffer from markedly higher rates of potentially preventable chronic health conditions than the rest of the population⁷². A consequence of lack of access to health services is the high prevalence of diseases such as diabetes and pulmonary diseases⁷³. Aboriginal children in WA have significantly lower rates of contact with health professionals, 49% when compared to the general population-59%⁷⁴.

Establishing mobile health units with workers, who can visit patients in their homes and in their communities, would decrease the incidence of preventable diseases and help patients to manage their conditions. This would be particularly useful for the many people who do not have access to reliable or affordable transport. Currently, Indigenous people are not accessing mainstream health services at the rate of the general population and this is having a serious impact on their health. Outreach health workers would be able to build rapport with communities and assist in the early intervention of diseases, saving significant resources by reducing hospital admissions and other costs involved with poor health. The mobile units could be based on the successful mobile medical services targeted at homeless people in particular, currently operating in Fremantle and Swan.

Recreational Options for Aboriginal Youth

Recommendation:

Expand recreational options for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people, potentially with a number of community youth drop in centres.

Rationale:

Currently young Indigenous juveniles are 20 times more likely to be detained than other juveniles⁷⁵. For Aboriginal young people in WA, 21% are at high risk of clinically significant emotional or behavioural difficulties, compared with 13% of young people in the non-Aboriginal population and social exclusion has been identified as a risk factor⁷⁶. Taking part in organised sport, arts or community group activities can foster self-esteem, social interaction, and the development of skills and teamwork. Some of the benefits include better health, improved academic performance and reduced rates of crime, self-harm and substance misuse⁷⁷. Recent WA research found that current services targeting the social and emotional wellbeing of Aboriginal children and young people are inadequately provided at all levels⁷⁸.

The State Government has an obligation to provide this disadvantaged group with specific opportunities to engage with others in a positive environment, expand their

⁷² Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision, (2005) *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage: Key Indicators 2005 Report* Productivity Commission, Canberra.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Telethon Institute for Child Health Research, (2005) *The Health of Aboriginal Children and Young People* Telethon Institute, Perth.

⁷⁵ Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision, (2005) *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage: Key Indicators 2005 Report* Productivity Commission, Canberra.

⁷⁶ Telethon Institute for Child Health Research, (2005) *The Health of Aboriginal Children and Young People* Telethon Institute, Perth.

⁷⁷ Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision, (2005) *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage: Key Indicators 2005 Report* Productivity Commission, Canberra.

⁷⁸ Telethon Institute for Child Health Research, (2005) *The Health of Aboriginal Children and Young People* Telethon Institute, Perth.

skills and increase their self-esteem. New services should be based on in- depth consultation with young people and should be staffed by Indigenous co-ordinators, able to provide a culturally appropriate service. The drop-in centres could have links with community based training programs, enhancing opportunities for employment. Indigenous people face social exclusion through racism and poverty as part of their daily life and recreational services offer young people the opportunity to strengthen their ties to the community whilst engaging in enjoyable activities. Investing now in recreational services will result in a reduction of crime, better educational outcomes and a more inclusive community.

Multicultural Interests

Western Australia's population is drawn from a variety of rich cultural, linguistic and historical traditions. People born in more than 200 different countries live, work and study in Western Australia. Collectively, Western Australians speak 170 different languages and practise more than 100 religious faiths. Western Australia continues to have the highest proportion of people born overseas of all States and Territories. Almost half a million Western Australians, or more than a quarter of the State's population, were born overseas⁷⁹. People from culturally and linguistically diverse (CaLD) communities have a unique set of needs and it is important that the Government provides services accordingly.

Below, the pressing need for a state based interpreting service for non-English speakers, including Indigenous Australians, is discussed. Further recommendations relating to CaLD communities are addressed in other sections such as Health and Education.

State Based Interpreting Service

Recommendation:

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

- Provide cost free interpreting and translation services to all clients seeking to access State services and State funded services operated by community agencies.
- Undertake Translating and Interpreting in migrant languages as well as Indigenous community languages⁸⁰ particularly in health and legal contexts.
- Gather data on what training is needed by practitioners and users of practitioners, and liaise with trainers to deliver the same.
- Develop a bank of translated material, in particular of standard government and agency forms, but of information relating to health, legal, welfare and industrial matters as well.

Pre-Election Commitment:

The Office of Multicultural Interests (OMI) commissioned a *Needs Analysis of Interpreting and Translating Services in Western Australia* to investigate demand and supply issues for interpreting and translating services. The report recommends that, following a review of the Language Services Policy, the requirements for a state based interpreting service be reassessed. This review is currently being progressed.

Rationale:

Almost a quarter of a million people or 11 per cent of Western Australians speak a language other than English at home. In our State as many as 170 different languages are spoken⁸¹. The *Needs Analysis* conducted by the OMI found that there is evidence of growing demand for interpreting services to support the needs of CALD clients accessing Government services. Another significant issue identified was the lack of Indigenous interpreting services in WA and the high level of unmet

⁷⁹ <http://www.omi.wa.gov.au/WAPeople/>

⁸⁰ Should also include Interpreting Services for the Deaf.

⁸¹ <http://www.omi.wa.gov.au/WAPeople/>

need in this area⁸² despite the high numbers of Aboriginal people who use the legal and health system.

In the legal and health arenas particularly, it is very important that people using the system can communicate effectively orally, and/or using written material. Failures in communication in the legal arena can cause a person to be convicted for something they did not do or to which they have a legal defence, or to be deprived of contact with their children, or other life changing outcomes. The use of interpreters and translators by the WA Police Service is remarkably low⁸³ and this is just one example of a setting where non-English speakers are failing to have their needs met. Failures in communication in the health arena can cause misdiagnosis, people to mismanage their health, and at worst illness or death. The State Government has a responsibility to ensure that all Government and community agencies are able to meet their access and equity obligations to non-English speaking Australians by providing a state based interpreting service.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples living in Western Australian speak a wide variety of languages. English is often a second, third or fourth language, and even then it is often Kriol or Aboriginal English, which linguists recognise as being different languages from Standard Australian English. Differences also go beyond mere language to include communication conventions (eg appropriateness of asking a question or of disagreeing with the questioner, turn taking, specificity in numbers or times etc). Another issue is that many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are not literate, or not very literate, in written Standard Australian English. Alternatively they are literate but cannot see well enough to read due to health conditions that affect their sight (eg diabetes, glaucoma).

In the *Needs Analysis*, OMI made the following recommendations:

- that a State-wide Indigenous Interpreter Service be developed
- that the Department of Indigenous Affairs commission a study into the most appropriate model in consultation with the Aboriginal community
- that the proposed model for a State-wide Indigenous Interpreter Service be developed within 12 months of acceptance of the recommendations by the Ministers for Citizenship, Multicultural Interests and Indigenous Affairs

WACOSS urges the Government to progress this study into the most appropriate model for a State-wide Indigenous Interpreter Service.

⁸² Office of Multicultural Interests (OMI), (2004) *Analysis of the Need for Interpreter and Translation Services within the Western Australian Government Sector*, OMI, Perth.

⁸³ Office of Multicultural Interests (OMI), (2004) *ibid*

Young People

Many recommendations relating to young people have been inserted in other sections of this submission (for example: housing and education). The recommendations below are those that are specific to young people and / or stretch across different portfolios.

Youth Services Mapping Exercise

Recommendations:

That the State Government undertake a mapping exercise of youth service agencies across the State. The mapping exercise should build on the 2004 Service Group Review undertaken by Department for Community Development and incorporate the following components:

- Identification of all youth service agencies across the state. This exercise should include agencies funded by State, Federal or Local Government as well as philanthropic trusts, private fundraising, fee-for-service or volunteer labour. It should also incorporate services that assist young people as non-core business;
- Provide a break down of funding sources and their distribution across the State. Including program based funding allocated to individual agencies.
- For agencies that are funded by the State Government, an assessment is needed of both historically funded agencies and newly emerging communities and their requirements for funding and services;
- Clear identification and recognition of the gaps in the service provision and the areas of most need with the aim of responding to these identified needs; and
- Funding be made available for new services in identified areas, particularly for new and emerging suburbs in the metropolitan area as well as addressing the need in rural, regional and remote areas. Funding should also be made available to extend the capacities of existing services where required.

Rationale:

Services assisting young people obtain funding from a variety of different sources such as local, state and federal governments, and/or philanthropic trusts and private fundraising. Many agencies are unable to survive on the money received from the core funding body (if they receive core funding at all) and therefore receive small amounts of funding from many sources simultaneously, with much funding often tied to specific programs.

The clear lack of co-ordination of funding to the youth sector ultimately leads to a considerable lack of knowledge regarding what programs are operating and acts as a significant barrier in being able to recognise gaps, as well as duplication, in the services available. The effectiveness and efficiency of the youth sector is therefore compromised. A thorough mapping of services available to young people is considered by WACOSS to be essential in efforts to strengthen the capacity of the youth sector to meet the needs of Western Australian young people.

Whole of Government Review of Youth Consultation Processes

Recommendation:

The government needs to undertake a cross-Government review of their processes for ensuring appropriate youth consultation strategies are undertaken to ensure youth input into all Government decision making and not just those issues deemed to be 'youth issues'.

Rationale:

Young people continue to largely be excluded in government decision-making processes. This involvement is not only essential in the development of policies that are appropriate and accepted by young people, but is also important in facilitating young people to feel part of the community and develop their own capabilities. A cross-government review of consultation processes should incorporate a particular aim of facilitating the involvement of marginalised and disadvantaged young people.

Training for Government Workers on Dealing with Young People

Recommendation:

That a specific training program be developed for all government workers, especially the police, in effective and appropriate ways of dealing with young people.

Rationale:

Many young people access a variety of government and non-government services. As is increasingly being recognized, the experience of young people in these contacts has an important bearing on their well-being. Recent research undertaken by White, highlights this fact in relation to the impact of these services on young people's decisions to become involved, or continue to be involved in criminal behaviour⁸⁴. Further, research undertaken by WACOSS this year on the role of NGOs in Diverting Young People from Crime has also found that negative experiences by young people with the police and other government agencies appears to, in many cases, escalate the problems experienced by young people⁸⁵. In regard to the police, many youth agencies report that young people's contact with police is often seen as detrimental and unhelpful by the young people. Young people reportedly often feel that they are being unfairly targeted by police and dealt with in a way that is disrespectful. There appears a considerable need for essential training for government workers in how to interact appropriately with young people. Such training could easily be provided to government workers and the police through the existing training program operating through the Department for Community Development.

Young Carer Support Program

Recommendation:

Implement a recurrent young carer support program.

Rationale:

⁸⁴ White, R. (2003) *Youth Offending in Relation to Young People as Multiple Service Users*: Scoping Paper. Available at: <http://www.aic.gov.au/crc/reports/2003-03-white.html> downloaded 19 September 2005

⁸⁵ WACOSS (2005) *The Role of Non-Government Organisations in Diverting Young People from Crime*. Available at: www.wacoss.org.au

Young carers are a largely under identified group of children and young people who face social disadvantage, early cessation of education and lower educational achievement, higher levels of unemployment, poor health and isolation. There are over 30,000 young carers in Western Australia. A program that provides on going support to young carers is urgently needed.

Cost: \$65,000 pa.

Criminal Justice & Crime Prevention

WACOSS welcomes recent commitments by the Government to addressing a number of issues relevant to the criminal justice system and crime prevention. The current independent inquiry into the *Performance of the Department of Justice With Regard to the Management of Offenders in Custody and in the Community* will undoubtedly highlight some of the urgent needs of people who have contact with the Criminal Justice System. Further, the recently adopted *State Community Safety and Crime Prevention Strategy* enhances the community's and the government's ability to appropriately respond to the recognised systemic causes of offending and make concerted efforts to address these in ways that can prevent crime from occurring.

Below, WACOSS has not explored the issue of repealing mandatory sentencing laws due to the strong opposition expressed by the State Government. However, it is still considered by many in the social service sector to be an issue that needs to be addressed. The three strikes/mandatory sentencing laws remove from magistrates their usual ability to exercise discretion in sentencing based on all relevant factors including the principles of sentencing. This affords to people convicted of home burglary a constricted form of justice, in contrast to people convicted of other offences. In addition, the 3 strikes/mandatory sentencing laws disproportionately affects Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people by targeting people convicted of home burglary (an offence very prevalent amongst Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander juveniles⁸⁶). It is not appropriate to remove magistrates' discretionary powers, which contribute to higher levels of incarceration. There is no evidence to suggest that this has reduced home burglary rates- only that Western Australia is institutionalising its offenders, particularly Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Further, housing for people leaving incarceration is an ongoing urgent issue that requires action by government. This recommendation however, has only minimally been addressed in this section, further information is found in the Housing section of this submission.

Greater Recognition of the Role of NGOs in Diverting Young People from Crime through Funding and Support

Recommendation:

That further recognition, funding and support be given to the many NGOs that offer services to young people who could be considered 'at risk' of initial or further involvement with the Criminal Justice System to enhance their ability to play a role in crime prevention. This should be funded through both the Department of Justice Community Funding Program as well as the Office of Crime Prevention.

As Outlined in the Department of Justice Review and Evaluation of Youth Crime Prevention Programs, a number of metropolitan geographical areas are in urgent need of increased funding. These areas are:

- Armadale and Gosnells
- Peel – Particularly in the Mandurah area
- Bibra Lake, Coobellup and Hamilton Hill

⁸⁶ Crime and Justice Statistics for Western Australia: 2003. Published Dec. 2004
http://www.crc.law.uwa.edu.au/facts_and_figures/statistical_report_2003 at page 57

- Calista, Kwinana and Leda
- Balga and Mirrabooka
- Midland
- Girrawheen

Regional areas identified as requiring urgent funding are:

- Great Southern - Katanning
- Goldfields - Leonora / Laverton
- Pilbara - Port Hedland
- Kimberley – Derby, Halls Creek, Kununurra

A further \$750,000 pa is required to meet the demand in these areas.

Rationale:

Young people who are involved with the Criminal Justice system, or who are particularly at risk of offending, often have histories of involvement with a multitude of government and non-government agencies⁸⁷. This involvement may or may not be in response to the engagement of the young person with the criminal justice system. Many of these young people have experienced poverty, family breakdown's, housing insecurity, abuse and possibly other social problems. They therefore have a multitude of complex needs.

Given this background, it is vital that, to be effective, services to these young people are able to work holistically and be able to build up a high level of trust and rapport with the client. These characteristics of effective services are well recognised in the literature on crime prevention⁸⁸. Funding is an essential element of services ability to do this.

WACOSS has recently completed a research project investigating the role of NGOs in diverting young people from crime. The focus has been on those organisations not funded to play a crime prevention role. Findings of the research highlight that crime prevention is highly relevant to NGOs assisting young people however many do not receive any funding for this. Many of these services provide assistance to young people in ways that have been recognised as integral best practice components of diverting young people from crime. Given that these agencies are already established and are engaging with young people who are at risk of offending, providing funding and support to them is likely to substantially enhance their crime prevention function.

87 White, R (2003) *Youth Offending in Relation to Young People as Multiple Service Users: Scoping Paper*, Criminology Research Council, Tasmania.

88 See for Example, Homel (1999) *Pathways to Prevention: Developmental and Early Intervention Approaches to Crime in Australia*. National Crime Prevention Attorney General's Department, Canberra and Sallybanks J. (2002) *What Works in Reducing Young People's Involvement in Crime?*, Australian Institute of Criminology, Canberra

Resource Aboriginal Legal Representation and Crime Prevention Services

Recommendation:

That the Western Australian government contributes funds to the criminal law representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples by Aboriginal Legal Service WA (ALSWA), their predominant and preferred criminal law service provider especially in regional and remote areas.

Rationale:

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples living in Western Australia are generally poorer than other Western Australians. This makes them heavily reliant on public legal aid service providers. Further, as now well recognised, Indigenous people are grossly overrepresented in the Criminal Justice System.

ALSWA's legal practice is approximately 60% criminal law. Virtually all of that work is in relation to State offences. All funding is from the Commonwealth government and has been fixed until 30 June 2008. In the meantime the Western Australian government continues to expand police services and magistrate services (for example, the cross border project), pass laws that target Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and the numbers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people involved in the criminal justice system continues to increase⁸⁹. On its current funding ALSWA cannot keep pace with ever increasing demand caused by the actions of the State. Throughout Australia, the number of criminal cases dealt with by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services rose by approximately 67 per cent over the five years to 2002-2003⁹⁰. Despite this, as found by the Australian National Audit Office, funding for the Legal Aid element of the Law and Justice Program has not increased substantially over this period⁹¹.

This exposes Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to the risk of appearing in court without legal representation in matters for which they could go to prison. As stated by the Legal Aid Commission of WA:

If we were able to provide proper representation for a lot of [Indigenous] people currently being found guilty and being sent to prison, I am sure that we would either reduce the numbers or contribute to a lowering of the sentences that people are being saddled with⁹².

Large numbers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples live in remote areas in Western Australia, eg the Ngaanyatjarra Aboriginal Lands (near the WA/NT/SA border), Roebourne, Halls Creek and Meekatharra. ALSWA has one metropolitan office and 16 country offices, and is in the process of establishing a further country office at Warburton. For many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, ALSWA is not only the preferred legal service provider, it is the only legal service available.

Increase Funding for Community Legal Centres

90 Joint Committee of Public Accounts and Audits (2005) *Access of Indigenous Australians to Law and Justice Services*

91 Ibid

92 Cited in Joint Committee of Public Accounts and Audits (2005) *Access of Indigenous Australians to Law and Justice Services*. P 12

Recommendations:

- Funding of centres in the following unfunded priority areas identified by *The Joint Commonwealth and State Review of WA Community Legal Centres*:
 - Non – metropolitan areas of the Wheatbelt and West Kimberley
 - Metropolitan outer corridors of north, north east and south east
- Funding of improved services to the priority client areas of young people, indigenous people, prisoners and people from non English speaking backgrounds. Information on the deficits in this area will be informed by a project on the needs of priority groups currently being undertaken by the Association
- Increase funding for CLCs in Western Australia to sustainable levels

Rationale:

Community Legal Centres (CLCs) provide free and/or low cost services to people who are social security recipients, those on low incomes, or those who have difficulty in accessing legal services, including people with disabilities, women, young people, indigenous people and people from non English speaking backgrounds.

The *Joint Commonwealth and State Review of WA Community Legal Centres* views CLCs as a valuable resource and essential community service. The State has further recognised that value through the introduction of the Community Legal Services Program. The Association appreciates that recognition.

Currently, CLC staff and volunteers are required to expend far too much energy in acquiring and managing the funds required to keep their services functional, let alone viable. It should also be noted that the costs of employing and retaining staff in regional, rural and remote areas requires additional funding. Anticipated additional funding required to gain a reasonable level of sustainability over two years are:

2006/07	\$3.355 million including indexation
2007/08, an additional	\$3.450 million including indexation

Abolish “Move On” Laws**Recommendation:**

Abolish the “move on” laws which disproportionately affect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and young people and have the potential to lead to their incarceration.

Rationale:

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as a group experience an imprisonment rate of more than 20 times that of non-Indigenous people.⁹³ The “move on” laws aggravate this by targeting people in public places (for cultural reasons, as well as reasons of poverty, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples often meet and conduct business in public places).

The ‘move on’ laws also disproportionately affect young people in that it is young people that commonly congregate in public space areas and socialise in groups. The ‘move on’ laws in these cases are a direct attack on young people’s rights to use areas of public space and attack a central element of the youth ‘culture’.

⁹³ Office of the Inspector of Custodial Services (2005) *Aboriginality in Western Australian Prisons*, p 2

The “move on” laws are unnecessary as they address no “mischief”. Western Australia already has laws that address public space issues eg disorderly behaviour, street drinking, urinating in public, littering, rioting, riotous behaviour, assault, threatening behaviour and conspiracy to commit an offence. The “move on” laws are able to operate before a person has done anything wrong, based on a police prediction as to the person’s future behaviour. This can be capricious, particularly when operating across a cultural divide. As there is no requirement for the decisions of police officers to be reviewed by a justice of the peace, magistrate or even a supervising police officer there is no way to ensure that police exercise their discretion appropriately.

The following examples are all from 2005:

- A Martu man doing nothing but waiting in a public Noongar meeting place to obtain permission to stay in Noongar country (a cultural requirement) has been “moved on”.
- A Noongar woman has been “moved on” out of the entire Perth city area for 24 hours. Consider the effect of this on being able to use public transport going via Perth, and also on employment, education or appointments in the city for the next day.
- A young person has been ‘moved on’ from the Perth city area while waiting for a youth social support centre to open. The young person subsequently had to leave the area and was unable to obtain necessary assistance.

Department of Justice Drug and Alcohol Funding

Recommendation:

The Department of Justice allocate funding and resources for the provision of alcohol and other drug services for Prison and Community Justice clients that is based on actual and projected levels of demand.

Rationale:

The alcohol and other drug sector have historically provided services to prison and community justice clients funded predominately from the Health budget in an ad hoc manner. This is inadequate and does not reflect a strategic approach to address the ever increasing needs of the prison population with alcohol and drug issues. Information from the alcohol and other drug sector indicates between 40% to 70% of their client load comprises of justice clients. Justice clients and their families generally present with more complex social and health issues requiring additional support services.

In the metropolitan area limited funding is allocated to alcohol and other drug treatment and support programs to provide prisoners and their families with pre and post release services. These services address alcohol and other drug issues and associated problems including co-occurring mental health issues, housing, education, employment and other welfare concerns, either through their agencies or in partnership with other service providers. The general aim of the programs is to address criminogenic needs to reduce re-offending and enhance the functioning level of the individuals and their families.

It is estimated that approximately 80% of adults in prison have alcohol and other drug and related issues that would benefit from counselling and support. Increase in

demand for services will continue given the rising prison populations. It has been determined there has been on average a 25% increase in the demand for counselling/support from prison transition alcohol and other drug services over the past 2 – 3 years. There are no funds allocated specifically for the provision of services to prisoners in the regional areas. There is a need for adequate funding to support existing level of service provision to prisoners and their families impacted by drug use.

Increase Transitional Support for People Exiting Detention

Recommendation:

Allocate increased resources to agencies capable of offering services to people on the transition back to the community from detention. This should be funded through both the Department of Justice as well as the Office of Crime Prevention. Key support services are:

- Housing assistance (in many cases this may need to be supported)
- Employment and/or training assistance
- Counselling and/or mentoring
- Financial assistance and counselling
- Life skills development
- Substance misuse assistance
- Transport (especially in cases of ex-prisoners living in remote communities)
- Culturally specific services (especially for Indigenous peoples)

Rationale:

Currently, about 45% of prisoners released into the community without supervision will be reimprisoned within two years⁹⁴. Many people leaving detention are socially excluded and financially disadvantaged and often require an array of support to address a number of complex social and economic problems.

Currently, services able to provide this transitional support are unable to meet demand in terms of the number of clients they are able to assist as well as the degree to which they are able to assist individual clients⁹⁵. Re-entry services are vital to facilitating individual's successful transition back to the community and are central in efforts to reduce recidivism.

94 Department of Justice (2005) *Re-Entry Program Performance Monitoring Report*.

95 Department of Justice (2005) *Re-Entry Program Performance Monitoring Report*

Education & Employment

Increase Casual Workers Entitlements

Recommendation:

The *Minimum Conditions of Employment Act 1993* should be amended to enhance and protect the entitlement of casual workers. Such amendments could include entitlements for long term casual workers to convert to permanent employment, increase the casual loading which is currently 20% to 25% and provide parental leave to long term casual employees.

Pre-Election Commitment:

“The proposals to increase casual loading, provide long term casual employees with an entitlement to convert to permanent employment and to unpaid parental leave are canvassed in the Casual Employment Reform paper being prepared by the Labour Relations division of DOCEP for the Minister. The paper goes further to propose annual and sick leave entitlements for long term casual employees. Office of Women’s Policy is working with DOCEP to ensure a gendered analysis.”

Rationale:

The decentralisation of the labour market has led to an increased casualisation of the workforce. In 2002, 27 per cent of the full-time workforce in Australia was employed on a casual basis.⁹⁶ Almost 58% of all casual employees are women in WA.⁹⁷ Casual workers experience job and income insecurity and many casual workers remain in casual work for the majority of their working life. An increasing number of casual workers work regular hours for the same employer and yet have no paid leave entitlements or security of tenure. The average job tenure for a casual adult employee is almost 4 years in comparison to a so-called permanent full-time employee who enjoys a tenure between 6 and 7.5 years⁹⁸. Precarious employment combined with a fluctuating income combine to severely restrict the ability of casual employees to take out housing and personal loans, often causing further financial and personal hardship.

The State Government has indicated support for the above recommendations in the *Casual Employment Reform Paper* yet no action has been taken since the Government was re-elected. WACOSS urges the Government to draft and progress amendments to the legislation to increase the entitlements for casual workers.

Paid Parental Leave

Recommendation:

That a government funded scheme of paid parental leave be available for women and men in paid work in the public, private and non-government sectors.

Rationale:

⁹⁶ Philip Lewis (2004) *The Australian Labour Market and Unemployment in 2004*, The Centre for Labour Market Research, UWA.

⁹⁷ Office of Women’s Policy, Department of Community Development (2002) *Women’s Report Card: Measuring Women’s Progress*.

⁹⁸ M Wooden *Job Insecurity and Job Stability: Getting the Facts Straight* Business Council of Australia pp 14-18.

Australia and the US stand alone amongst industrialised nations in failing to provide paid maternity leave⁹⁹. For as long as women are expected to bear the major responsibility for unpaid caring, they are unlikely to participate equally with men in paid work¹⁰⁰. Paid parental leave helps to cover the costs of children by enhancing parents' ability to remain attached to the labour force during child rearing years.

In 2004, DOCEP commissioned an independent *Review of the Gender Pay Gap*. One of the recommendations made in the Report was: that the *Minimum Conditions of Employment Act 1993* be amended to include paid parental leave within both the public and private sectors in WA in accordance with the International Labour Organisation standard of 14 weeks. WACOSS urges the Government to implement this recommendation as a matter of priority.

Support for School Students in Raising the School Leaving Age

Recommendations:

That the funding and resources allocated for the raising of the school leaving age be reviewed with the prospect of increasing support services for children and young people experiencing barriers to effective engagement and participation in education.

In addition to what the government has already committed to, this should include:

- Increasing the number of alternative education programs available to students that for whatever reason are not engaging with mainstream education. These programs should be implemented at an early age however should be designed to allow students to change back into mainstream education easily if desired.
- Increasing the numbers of homework centres in non-government organisations assisting young people particularly in indigenous specific services
- Training mentors from year 8 onward for young people at increased risk of disengaging from the education system
- A scheme to facilitate young people from financially disadvantaged families to participate in school excursions, camps and extra-curricular activities throughout their school life
- An ongoing commitment to make schools relevant and appropriate to young people
- A renewed emphasis on improving literacy and numeracy of young people
- Further research into the reasons why young people leave school prior to year 12 and tailor response programs to address these issues
- Provide pregnant girls and teenage mothers with specific programs to prepare and encourage them to return to study
- Provide programs out of school, which are recognised by the Department of Education, for young people not wanting to attend school institutions.

Rationale:

While WACOSS recognises the value in increasing the school leaving age, for this to be of any real benefit to Western Australia's young people, it is clear that a wide range of changes must be made to the entire education system. For young people coming from life experiences of poverty and the associated social problems,

⁹⁹ www.actu.org.au

¹⁰⁰ Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC) (2005) *Striking the Balance: women, men, work and family- Discussion Paper 2005*, HREOC, Sydney.

increasing the school leaving age is insufficient to result in better educational and subsequent employment outcomes. This statement is backed up by numerous Australian reports resulting from the Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth (LSAY) by the Australian Council of Educational Research (ACER). Key findings of some of these reports are:

- Earlier school achievement and socioeconomic background are the main contributors for early school leaving¹⁰¹
- There is a strong link between socio-economic status and student achievement in both literacy and numeracy¹⁰²
- Socioeconomic status is a persistent influence on participation both at an individual and a school level¹⁰³
- Students from higher socioeconomic backgrounds and those with professional parents have been found to have the highest levels of engagement with school¹⁰⁴
- Social background is strongly related to the ability of young people to make a smooth transition from school to full-time work. 10% more low SES school leavers compared to high SES leavers participate in pathways involving long-term unemployment or extended periods not in the labour force¹⁰⁵
- The most significant difference in achievement is between Indigenous Australian students and all other students in Australia. Indigenous young people are less likely to complete Year 12, enter higher education or make a successful transition to employment¹⁰⁶
- High engagement at the school level was found to moderate the negative effects of socioeconomic status and indigenous status. The school environment is very important to facilitating student engagement¹⁰⁷
- There is evidence to suggest that further years of schooling is actually detrimental to some young people¹⁰⁸

Studies have shown that differences in educational competency by socio-economic status are apparent from the very early years of schooling. The National School English Literacy Survey from 1996 highlighted that at year 3, there is considerable difference in children meeting literacy standards by socio-economic background, indigenous status, and language background. The report highlighted that low socio-economic background, a language background other than English and being Indigenous greatly increased the chances of children not meeting the standard¹⁰⁹. Those young people that do not meet the standards are at higher risk of leaving school prior to year 12.

¹⁰¹ Fullarton, S., Walker, M., Ainley, J. and Hillman, K. (2003) *Patterns of Participation in Year 12*. LSAY Research Report Number 33, ACER. Available at: <http://www.acer.edu.au/research/LSAY/research.html>

¹⁰² Rothman, S. and McMillan, J. (2003) *Influences on Achievement in Literacy and Numeracy*. LSAY Research Report Number 36, ACER. Available at: <http://www.acer.edu.au/research/LSAY/research.html>

¹⁰³ Fullarton, S. (2002) *Student Engagement with School: Individual and School-level Influences*. LSAY Research Report Number 27, ACER. Available at: <http://www.acer.edu.au/research/LSAY/research.html> Downloaded on 5 September 2005.

¹⁰⁴ Fullarton, S. (2002) *Student Engagement with School: Individual and School-level Influences*. LSAY Research Report Number 27, ACER. Available at: <http://www.acer.edu.au/research/LSAY/research.html> Downloaded on 5 September 2005.

¹⁰⁵ Lamb, S. and McKenzie, P. (2001) *Patterns of Success and Failure on the Transition from School to Work in Australia*, LSAY Research Report Number 18, ACER. Available at: <http://www.acer.edu.au/research/LSAY/research.html> Downloaded on 5 September 2005.

¹⁰⁶ Rothman, S. (2002) *Achievement in Literacy and Numeracy by Australian 14 year olds – 1975 – 1998*, LSAY Research Report Number 29, ACER. Available at: <http://www.acer.edu.au/research/LSAY/research.html> Downloaded on 5 September 2005.

¹⁰⁷ Fullarton, S. (2002) *Student Engagement with School: Individual and School-level Influences*. LSAY Research Report Number 27, ACER. Available at: <http://www.acer.edu.au/research/LSAY/research.html> Downloaded on 5 September 2005.

¹⁰⁸ Dockery, A. (2005) *Assessing the Value of Additional Years of Schooling for the Non-Academically Inclined*. LSAY Research Report Number 38, ACER. Available at: <http://www.acer.edu.au/research/LSAY/research.html> Downloaded on 5 September 2005.

¹⁰⁹ DETYA (1997) *Literary Standards in Australia*. Available at: <http://www.dest.gov.au/lsia/index.htm> Downloaded on 5 September 2005.

Exclusion at school also increases young people's risk of not completing year 12. It has been found that in many cases, this can be a result of parents not being able to afford school fees and charges, uniforms, books, school excursions and camps¹¹⁰. Being able to engage in extra-curricular activities has also been shown as vital in building a sense of 'belonging' to the school community. If young people or their parents are unable to afford such expenses, negative educational outcomes are likely to result.

Provisions must be implemented to assist pregnant girls and teenage mothers being able to complete a satisfactory level of study. Young mothers face multiple barriers in returning to study after having a child. It is therefore imperative that they are provided with further assistance to encourage the transition to employment through education, training and support programs.

Many young people who disengage from the education system often are led to this decision from experiences throughout their school life. For this reason, attempts to raise the school leaving age should consider the issue in a much broader light and efforts to increase retention should be focused from the first year of schooling. If the school leaving age is increased, it is vital that more emphasis be put on the development of literacy and numeracy prior to them entering Year 11, attractive and relevant learning environments throughout young people's school life, and a commitment by government to make available alternative pathways and institutional arrangements to accommodate the different needs, abilities and preferences of all young people.

Educational and Training Support for CaLD and Indigenous Youth

Recommendations:

That the State Government develop strategies to encourage young people from CaLD and Indigenous backgrounds to stay at school longer including:

- Adapt early intervention approaches to identify the risk factors for students from Indigenous and CaLD backgrounds and develop carefully targeted need-based support structures, such as additional bi-lingual workers, counsellors with knowledge of Indigenous and CaLD issues and increased ESL support in schools
- Provide specially designed services and support to children of refugees and asylum seekers in primary and high schools
- Establish pre-traineeship courses for Indigenous and CaLD young people requiring additional support to assist in application process, training expectations, and post-training options
- Establish a well-resourced flexible learning program to meet the specific needs of the Indigenous and CaLD young people identified as having limited schooling with inadequate literacy and numeracy skills
- Provide resources to encourage schools and the local communities to initiate programs that focus on adaptive and vocational education, through a variety of activities including job search training, work placements, outdoor and personal development activities and counselling
- Provide funding for staff development programs, especially cross-cultural awareness, in order to support teachers in their effort to understand and help young people from Indigenous and CaLD backgrounds.

¹¹⁰ Brotherhood of St Laurence (2005) Education and Social Inclusion: Submission to the Victorian Government's Review of Education and Training Legislation. Available at: http://www.bsl.org.au/pdfs/BSL_subm_education_review_2005.pdf Downloaded on 5 September 2005.

Rationale:

Education has a significant role in enabling access to employment and income. Higher education is associated with better parenting skills and better academic and mental health outcomes. The factors that contribute to young people leaving school are many and complex, and include social, economic, and emotional factors.

Retention of students and relevant training programs is a current issue facing both Indigenous and CaLD groups¹¹¹. Nationally in 2004, Indigenous students were half as likely to continue to year 12 as non-Indigenous students¹¹². WA has the lowest total retention rate of Indigenous students from year 10 to 12 of all the states in Australia¹¹³.

One in five students are newly arrived in Australia and from a language background other than English or was born in Australia but entered school with little or no English¹¹⁴. People from CaLD backgrounds have relatively low participation rates in apprenticeships and traineeships locally and nationally, which may lead to restricted access to employment in certain fields¹¹⁵.

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

The Government must increase funding for services to meet the needs of Indigenous and CaLD young people to help them attain a level of education that is equitable with the mainstream community.

Training and Professional Development of Emergency Relief Workers

Recommendation:

A separate grant program be established to ensure services are able to provide quality professional development and training of both staff and volunteers providing Emergency Relief.

Rationale:

Emergency Relief services continually raise concerns over the lack of support and funds to employ adequate staff to supervise and co-ordinate volunteers and the lack of funds to provide ongoing training to staff and volunteers. This is concern is particularly relevant as there is an increasing expectation from community and funding bodies that all organisations (ER inclusive) provide quality services to clients as well as complying with good management and governance practices, including adhering to relevant regulations for the protection of paid and unpaid staff. For Emergency Relief agencies to meet these requirements and to maintain a high standard and consistent approach to service delivery across the state it requires a commitment from both state and federal government to ensure adequate support and resourcing of all services.

¹¹¹ <http://www.fecca.org.au/POLICY/Education.html#context>

¹¹² Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision, (2005) *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage: Key Indicators 2005 Report* Productivity Commission, Canberra.

¹¹³ Productivity Commission (2005) *Report on Government Services 2005*, Productivity Commission, Canberra.

¹¹⁴ <http://www.eddept.wa.edu.au/gifftal/inclusivity/diverse.htm>

¹¹⁵ Jupp, J (ed) (2001), *The Australian people: An encyclopedia of the nation, its people and their origins*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

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

While the Department for Family and Community Services has an Emergency Relief training program, there appears to remain considerable need for greater training opportunities for the workers in Emergency Relief across the state. WACOSS strongly advocates for the state government to recognise that this program is not solely a Commonwealth responsibility and calls for a contribution to be made towards training and professional development opportunities through the establishment of a grant scheme for Emergency Relief providers for attendance to training and or network meetings.

Domestic and Family Violence

From January 2004 to April 2005, there were 21 domestic violence related homicides in WA, of which 95% of the perpetrators were male¹¹⁶. Police statistics show there have been almost 10,000 reports of domestic and family-related offences in Western Australia this year, up from 6,640 at the same time last year¹¹⁷.

It is WACOSS' position that the Government should commit to the programs outlined below, in order to make a difference to the lives of thousands of women and children who seek safety and support from refuge and domestic violence services in WA each year.

Early Intervention and Prevention for Accompanying Children in SAAP Services

Recommendation:

Core funding levels be increased so that Women's Refuge and DV Services can work with children as clients in their own right.

Pre-Election Commitment:

"The Family and Domestic Violence Unit agree that there is a need in the community for services for children and young people affected by family and domestic violence. It is also agreed that Peel region is likely to be a high need area for such services due to the growth and demographic profile of the area, with distance precluding Perth based services from providing to Peel.

An expansion of service provision in some regional centres and Peel would be considered in future budget planning."

Rationale:

In 2002-2003 there were around 263,800 children living with domestic and family violence in Australia.¹¹⁸

There is currently inadequate funding to provide resources to support children and young people who are affected by domestic and family violence.

The National Data Collection Agency statistics clearly indicate that children, particularly those between 0-5 years old are the largest group of SAAP Service users; two thirds of them were there as result of domestic and family violence; and an alarming 48% of all women with accompanying children assessing a SAAP Service in 2003-04 were experiencing domestic and family violence.¹¹⁹

Costing:

Additional core funding sufficient to employ at least two full-time Children's DV Specialists based on a Level 5/6 CASH Award or equivalent, plus operating costs. Minimum of \$75,000 per year.

¹¹⁶ Police Child Protection and Family Violence Unit (2005)

¹¹⁷ The West Australian: 29 August 2005

¹¹⁸ Access Economics (2004)

¹¹⁹ NDCA (2004)

Links Between Animal Cruelty and Family and Domestic Violence

Recommendations:

- That the State Government commits funds to raise public awareness in relation to links between animal cruelty as an issue indicating family and domestic violence and the potential for other criminal acts and violent behaviour.
- That the State Government ensures the provision of adequate management of offenders as well as prevention mechanisms in the community. This would include the development of interagency memoranda of understanding with protocols for training, cross reporting, cross referral for investigation and safety responses for both human and animal victims.

Rationale:

There are well-established links between animal cruelty/abuse and forms of child abuse and violence in the community. It is particularly relevant to family and domestic violence and a significant factor in the developmental profile of a range of violent offenders. For example in Nashville, Tennessee, a city with one of the highest domestic violence homicide rates in the USA, a policy was instituted on domestic violence calls to obtain information on possible lethality indicators, including the abuse of pets in the family. Perpetrators meeting any of these criteria were remanded to special programmes. Domestic violence fatalities decreased by 80% within one year of instituting this policy¹²⁰. There is a demonstrated need for cooperation between a range of professionals including child protection workers, law enforcement officers, teachers, social workers, doctors, nurses, veterinarians, family violence workers as well as animal welfare agencies.

Ensuring Access and Equity in Rural and Remote Regions

Recommendation:

That the State Government work in partnership with the Women's Council for Domestic and Family Violence Services (WCDFVS) to progress the urgent need for an intensive level of support model to be provided for Women's Refuge and Domestic/Family Violence Services in rural and remote regions of WA.

Pre-Election Commitment:

"The Department has had previous discussions with the WCDFVS of Western Australia and WACOSS regarding the provision of support, consultation and assistance for refuges and relevant services in rural and remote locations. The Department will continue these discussions and consider possible options"

Rationale:

This need for an intensive support program was first identified by the WCDFVS on behalf of its members in 2002. The project would respond to common issues that arise as well as the uniquely local based issues identified by Refuge Services and Safe Houses.

The project will provide an extensively skilled worker/s to be based at each Refuge for a four week period. This support period will be provided once a year over three years to allow for planned skilled development.

¹²⁰ Boat, B.W. (1999) "Abuse of children and abuse of animals: using the links to inform child assessment and protection" in Ascione, F.R. and Arkow, P. (eds) (1999) *Child Abuse, Domestic Violence and Animal Abuse: linking the circles of compassion for prevention and intervention*, Purdue University Press, Indiana, pp.83-100.

By strengthening the capacity of Refuge Services and Safe Houses in rural and remote regions, women and children will have an increased opportunity to improve the quality of their lives.

Cost: \$200,000pa for 3 years

Domestic Violence Outreach Services for Women and Children

Recommendation:

The further development and sustainability of a state-wide network of domestic and family violence outreach services that provide support to women and children living in violent relationship.

Rationale:

Domestic and Family Violence Outreach Services are a vital component to the overall success the intervention and prevention of escalating violence within relationships.

A small number of Domestic Violence Advocacy & Referral Services (DVARs) have been funded in WA, which provide a range of specialist services such as court support with VRO and Family Court matters; counselling; advocacy and safety planning to women and children.

The demand for a range of professional and readily available DVARs models has increased dramatically and the need to establish DV Outreach Services in all locations where the Refuge Service and Safe Houses Model currently operate within WA is critical component to providing the necessary support for women in the community and exiting the Refuge.

There are some priority groups, such as CaLD communities, which require specific programs to address the issue of family and domestic violence.

Cost: \$60,000 each

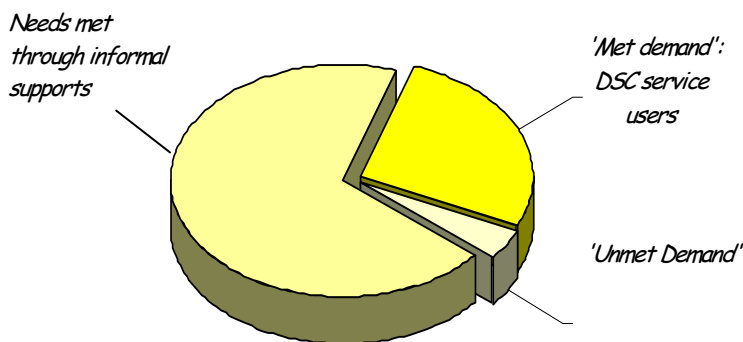
Disability Services

The following is a snapshot of disability in WA:

- There were 405,500 people with a disability in Western Australia representing 21% of the state population.
- Between 1998 and 2003 the number of people with a disability in Western Australia increased by 50,000 (14%).
- The number of carers who had provided informal assistance to people with disabilities or the frail aged rose by 32%, from 187,400 to 246,800 over the same period. Meanwhile the number of primary carers rose by 11%.
- While most people with a disability received some form of assistance, just over one quarter (26%) felt they needed more help than they already received.
- The proportion of those with an unmet need rose with the severity of disability. Almost a half (45%) of those with a profound or severe core-activity restriction felt their need for assistance was not fully met¹²¹.

The "Time to Act" Campaign 2005 identified a significant number of areas of unmet need that remain unanswered. The recommendations below relate to these priority areas.

The demand for services in Western Australia is best depicted in the pie diagram below.¹²²



The State Government has a responsibility to meet this demand for support in order to enable people with disabilities and their carers to participate actively in the community and increase their quality of life.

Support for Aged Carers

Recommendation:

Funding to assist with the accommodation support needs for Aged Carers of their disabled adult children

¹²¹ www.abs.gov.au/Ausstats/abs@.nsf/Lookup/A6D8D7EEC1F1A5BECA25703C007C7B35

¹²² Informed by the latest data from the Australia Bureau of Statistics, people with severe or profound disabilities who need assistance with core activities (mobility, self-care or communication) and who are aged 5-64 and the recently completed study by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (which estimates some 20,000 people nationally have unmet needs for accommodation, respite or community access).

Rationale:

Early in 2005 the State Government identified that “there are a small number of carers aged 70 and over who are known to be seeking accommodation support on behalf of a family member with a disability. In order to address this need an additional allocation ... will be made available from 2005 to accommodate the 25 people with disabilities known to rely on a carer aged 70 and over.”¹²³ These stories are well known as they continue to receive publicity.

Case Study:
A seventy nine year old lady is the sole carer of her 52 year old daughter who has a progressive neurological condition which has affected her both physically and intellectually. Her daughter needs twenty

Recent accommodation funding rounds reveal increasing numbers of people in crisis, seeking support and it is important that the emphasis on aged carers continue past that promised for 2005. This will enable those who have provided care to their children, in some cases for more than fifty years, with hope that their situation will be resolved. The funding request and people assisted is outlined below:

Cumulative Details	06/07	07/08	08/09	09/10
People assisted	25	50	75	100
\$000's	\$1,449	\$2,999	\$4,657	\$6,426

Establish Transitional Accommodation

Recommendation:

Establish transitional accommodation support to assist families share the care of their disabled children.

Rationale:

For many families, planned regular respite, for periods of time that are long enough to give the family a decent break, will improve the capacity of the family to continue to care for their son or daughter with a disability.

It is envisaged that four respite houses be commissioned over a four year period, each operating as a six person duplex, offering planned regular respite in one, two, three and four week blocks, several times per year, with the capacity to provide longer periods of respite. For example, a family may receive one week’s respite per month over a twelve-month period. The proposal will provide support to twenty-four to forty-four families as it is implemented, supporting each family in caring for their loved one.

As this model is implemented, twelve families will be provided with permanent accommodation in two of the transition houses with two remaining as respite houses for thirty families at which time the transition model can be evaluated to ensure that it is achieving its stated outcomes and ongoing funding for the continued expansion of the model considered. The funding request and people assisted is outlined below:

Cumulative Details	06/07	07/08	08/09	09/10
People assisted	24	32	38	44
\$000's	\$540	\$1,118	\$1,735	\$2,395

¹²³ Labor’s Plan for Disability Services 2005

Young People in Nursing Homes and De-Institutionalisation

Recommendation:

By the end of 2008/09, alternative accommodation be found for 160 people with disabilities languishing in institutional facilities.

Rationale:

Two hundred and sixty three people have been identified¹²⁴ as being inappropriately accommodated in the mental health services system, aged care services and in public hospitals. Putting young people in aged care facilities is inappropriate as they do not receive the necessary support services to meet their needs whether it be physiotherapy or speech therapy. It makes many people depressed and isolated from people their own age. An urgent response to this is required as it is a complex Commonwealth-State jurisdictional issue. This paper assumes that these people will be provided community accommodation support over the next three years and that their existing supports will be transferred with them to community options.

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

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

Cost:

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

¹²⁴ Department of Disability Services (2001) *Identifying The Need* report commissioned by the Minister for Disability Services of Western Australia, the Hon. Sheila McHale, in June 2001 and subsequently tabled in the West Australian Parliament

Sustainability

Institutional Reform to Support Sustainability

Recommendation:

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

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

Rationale:

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

The Sustainability Commission should:

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

Appendix 1 – List of Bodies Consulted

ACROD

Aged & Community Services WA (ACSWA)

Carers WA

Children, Youth and Family Agencies Association (CYFAA)

Community Housing Coalition of WA

Community Legal Centres Association WA (CLCWA)

Council of DSC Funded Agencies (COFA)

Council on the Ageing WA (COTA)

Derbal Yerrigan Health Service

Developmental Disability Council (DDC)

Ethnic Communities Council (ECC)

Financial Counsellors Association of WA

Maamba Aboriginal Corporation

Meerilinga Young Children's Foundation

Moorditch Koolak Housing Project

People With Disabilities WA Inc

Shelter WA

Volunteering WA

Women's Council of Domestic and Family Violence Services

Women's Law Centre

Youth Affairs Council of WA

Youth Accommodation Coalition

"More Than a Bed" Campaign Collaboration

WACOSS Emergency Relief Agencies Forum

Tenants Advice Service WA

Anglicare WA (WACOSS Board Representative)

FPWA (WACOSS Board Representative)

Multicultural Services Centre of WA (WACOSS Board Representative)

Ngala Family Resource Centre (WACOSS Board Representative)

Sussex Street Community Law Service (WACOSS Board Representative)

Cerebral Palsy Association (WA) (WACOSS Board Representative)

WA AIDS Council (WACOSS Board Representative)

Geraldton Resource Centre (WACOSS Board Representative)

The Gowrie WA (WACOSS Board Representative)

**Appendix 2 – ACIL Tasman
Independent Research on Non-
Government Human Services
Sector Viability**