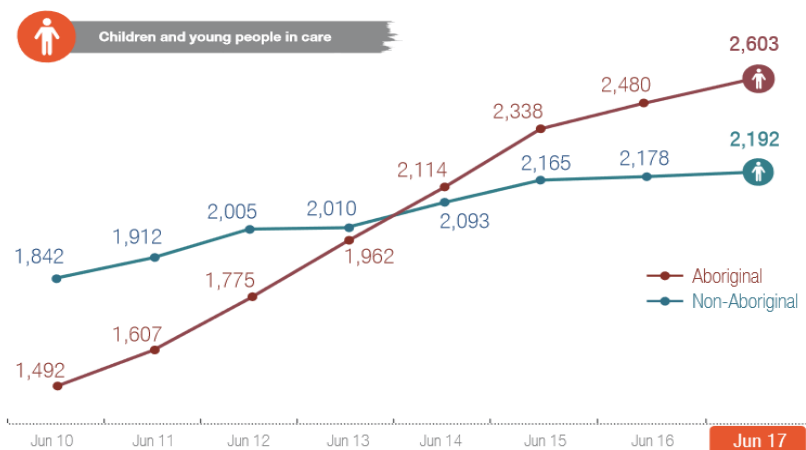


SERVICES FOR CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE, AND FAMILIES

Following on from the Service Priority Review there is a stated imperative in the budget about the need for supports to children and families be delivered in collaboration. This is reinforced by the new strategic direction of the Department of Communities, 'People, Place, and Home', and the key focus agency level areas 'Strong communities, safe communities, and supported families'.

Child Protection and Family Support

- WA has the lowest rates of investment in prevention and early intervention together with the highest rate of over-representation of Aboriginal children in state care in the world
- The ongoing investment of \$13 million per annum into the Early Intervention Family Support Scheme is welcome, but all of the growth in funding is for support and assessment services for children in care of the Department, reactive, and aimed at the crisis end. This grows by \$22 million over forward estimates from \$395 million up to \$417 million by 2021-22



- The number and proportion of Aboriginal children in care continues to increase at a higher rate than the number of available placement options with Aboriginal carers or relatives, though no funding available to establish specialised services to address this
- Only 65% of Aboriginal children in care are placed in accordance with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle (the target is 80%).

Outcome: Children and young people in the CEO's care receive a high quality of care and have much improved life outcomes:

Proportion of Aboriginal children in the CEO's care placed in accordance with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle	64%	80%	65%	80%
Proportion of children in the CEO's care who felt safe in their care arrangement	96%	95%	96%	95%
Proportion of children in the CEO's care with comprehensive care planning undertaken within set timeframes	80%	90%	82%	90%

- Greater commitment and investment is needed to refocus our efforts and turn around the continuing growth in numbers in state care otherwise these costs will continue to skyrocket
- No funding for expanded transition to adulthood services, like the Home Stretch Campaign

- This budget is at odds with the Department's new strategic direction and Machinery of Government, which the new Department says 'provides an opportunity to remove the red tape and focus on enabling individuals, families and communities to achieve outcomes...the Department can be more responsive to the needs of those we serve'.

Early Years

- The recently announced **10 year Early Years Partnership Initiative**, led by the Department of Communities, to establish collective impact projects in pilot sites aimed at improving outcomes for children living in socio-economically disadvantaged areas, was mentioned but not costed, with funding from Minderoo and repurposed existing government funding.
- **Child and Parent Centres (CPC)** co-located with schools provide an early intervention and integrated response for families with young children at risk. The 2017-18 pledge to establish CPC in Ellenbrook is not going ahead, however another is still planned for these repurposed funds. There are still considerable gaps in some areas where CPCs are needed
- No new initiatives targeting the critical early years supports for children with Foetal Alcohol Syndrome Disorder (FASD)

Redress and Victims of Child Sexual Abuse

- A contingent liability has been acknowledged for the *Removal of Statutory Limitation Periods for Civil Litigation by Victims of Child Sexual Abuse* Bill, which is due to come into force in 2017-18
- The potential participation of Western Australian in the *National Redress Scheme for Institutional Child Sexual Abuse*, in response to recommendations made by the Royal Commission, was also recognised as a contingent liability.

Education and Training

- Five new specialist programs to help students with autism and learning difficulties are being set up in public schools in 2018, and a further 11 will be set up by 2020. The budget, however, makes no mention of equivalent services for students with learning difficulties as a result of FASD and this omission is very disappointing
- Continuation of 2017-18 budget commitments, including additional regional education assistants, Aboriginal and Islander Education Officers, and more teachers to deliver specialist mental health programs in regional schools. However, these are in the context of concurrent and significant cuts to Departmental leadership positions, notably Aboriginal designated ones
- Additional \$11.2 million to cover the freeze on Vocational Education and Training fees from 2018-21 does not go far enough to counter the disincentive to study community services courses
- Decrease in recurrent expenditure of \$24.9 million for non-government schools and \$128.4 million increase for government schools reflects changes in forecasted enrolments
- Shortfall in Commonwealth funding for VET courses in regional areas not being covered by the state is a concern, especially in the context of VET courses being an important pathway to working in the community service sector
- WACOSS supports the commitment to revamp the State Training Board and Industry Training Councils, including development of an industry engagement and planning framework