

A THRIVING COMMUNITY: Hope, Inclusion & Trust

STATE BUDGET SUBMISSION 2020-21



About WACOSS

The Western Australian Council of Social Service (WACOSS) is the peak body for the community services sector and works to create an inclusive, just and equitable society. WACOSS represents more than 300 member organisations and individuals, and more than 500 organisations involved in the provision of community services to the people of Western Australia.

Our mission is to advocate for social and economic change to improve the wellbeing of Western Australians and to strengthen the community services sector that supports them. WACOSS is one of nine peak councils of social service, collaborating across Australia to bolster the united strength and weight of the work of each peak body, working collectively on campaigns of national significance.

Tackling difficult issues, systems, behaviours, and attitudes that contribute to inequality and exclusion, WACOSS develops evidence-based social policy and research to inform and influence government policy to change the lives of those facing adversity. Non-partisan and free from private interests, we play a unique and objective role within the sector.

Acknowledgment of Country

WACOSS respectfully acknowledges the Traditional Owners of Country throughout Western Australia and recognises their continuing connection to land, waters and community. We pay our respects to them and their cultures, and to Elders both past and present. We acknowledge that the land on which we live and work is and always will be Aboriginal land.

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Foreword

This year we decided to do something a bit different.

We started our community conversations with the question *'what does a thriving community look like in WA?'*

We focused on outcomes and explored where we want to get to as a community, and discussed the practical changes needed to make the visions a reality.

WACOSS held these conversations in Broome, Geraldton, Kalgoorlie, Midland, Mandurah, Cockburn, Bunbury, Busselton, Kwinana, Karratha, Newman, Port Hedland, Perth and more. We talked with people who use community services, who shared with us their lived experience. Insights from our conversations with the sector and people with lived experience are interwoven throughout, shaping the focus on our collective aspirations.

Their vision is for Western Australia to be the best place in the world to be a child. It is an approach to public investment that prioritises community wellbeing, that builds up our care economy and grows the care workforce to meet growing demand. A place where housing, energy and food are affordable and accessible for all. An inclusive community that takes serious action on climate change. A place where people can meaningfully engage in shaping the community in which they live.

The *WA Outcomes Framework* underpins this entire submission. The outcome areas of *stable, safe, healthy, equipped, connected, empowered* and *sustainable*, speak in different ways to each section. For instance, the discussion of public participation and trust cuts across the domains of *empowered, connected* and *equipped*, while the sections on wellbeing features every domain.

While this submission is written to help shape policy priorities and investments for the 2020/21 State Budget, it has a clear eye to the future beyond. The themes throughout this document will be carried through to the 2020 WACOSS conference *Finding Ground: Building a better way together* and, ultimately, to the March 2021 State election.

It is our hope that organisations, consumers and community members find this submission of use in their work to create a thriving community.



Debra Zanella
President



Louise Giolitto
Chief Executive Officer

Vision

Kids playing sport. This seemingly simple concept was how community services in the Cockburn corridor described their vision for a thriving community. By this, however, they did not mean simply investing in local sports programs for children. For them, kids being able to play sport signifies something much more. It means strong social connections. It means parents having the capacity and time to be able to take their children to training and matches. It means public spaces, transport, health and education. Local services recognise that unless we address the underlying challenges and inequalities in our society that prevent children being able to participate, a thriving community will remain out of reach.

Western Australians care about the places they live and the future of their communities. This was immediately obvious in the many conversations we started around the state about how local communities could thrive. Their vision for a thriving community is both personal and connected—it is about family and friends, community and country, care and cooperation, environment and equality. What strikes you most when you talk to the frontline workers, community connectors and volunteers is how much meaning and inspiration they get out of working hard for and with our community. When given the opportunity Western Australians jump at the chance to contribute.

At the same time, there is a strong sense that our society has become more divided and unequal, that the gap between haves and have nots has widened, and our systems have become harsher and more unfair. More families are feeling that their livelihoods and the wellbeing of those they care about is more uncertain and more at risk. Jobs and incomes are less secure and there is less of a safety net. Our social security system has become increasingly mean-fisted, judgmental and much less fair. Managing money is more complex and risky, and there is a looming fear of being wiped out by forces beyond our control. Frontline services feel overwhelmed and under-valued, as they are forced to turn away more people than they can help. Frontline staff are run down by the incessant demands, while their jobs have become more insecure, funding more competitive and increasingly reliant on last minute contract roll-overs. This is particularly true for regional, outreach and after-hours services—but these pressures are being felt across the board. Everywhere we went, community services were talking about an emerging crisis.

There is clear frustration that the promises of more collaborative and joined-up service design and delivery have not materialised, particularly place-based reforms in regional

areas. Meanwhile, the focus on complex machinery of government changes and a lack of communication have led to a loss of clarity in roles and responsibilities and contact points, particularly in the Department of Communities.

The sector is struggling with 'reform fatigue', with organisations and consumers participating in multiple consultations and strategies without seeing it translate into new services, investments or ways of doing things. Having enthusiastically embraced opportunities to discuss doing things differently, sector leaders are now reluctant to participate in consultative processes where there are not dedicated resources backed up by a political commitment to act.

Claims to be engaging in 'co-design' are met with some cynicism, with participants now demanding commitments up-front to make clear the process, level of engagement and path to implementation. They want to know the effort will be acted on and have a real-world impact. With an ongoing austerity budget and in the absence of meaningful additional investment, it is not possible to deliver on aspirational commitments to more holistic service systems when we are struggling to provide the basics.

We have the opportunity to chart a different course. By focusing on practical community-based actions we can profoundly improve health and wellbeing. So much more can be achieved where local communities are given the opportunity and space to act collectively. Government has a crucial role to play as an enabler and facilitator for ground-up, grassroots change, rather than having to assume all of the responsibility for leading or directing it. It is about backing communities and earning their trust.

An open and transparent public sector, connected with empowered communities that have a sense of ownership over political and economic processes, supported by robust services, will shape a positive future for our society.

Public participation is the cornerstone of a thriving community. A community where everyone is able to access housing, the wellbeing of children is prioritised, the self-determination of Aboriginal communities is respected, and social connection is supported.

A community that is inclusive, just and equitable for all.

The Best Place to be a Child

Western Australia can be an incredible place to grow up—for some. Access to quality public education and health care, a breathtaking natural environment, outstanding cultural institutions and a prosperous economy. A place where, despite our rapid growth, everyone still seems to know everyone.

But this is not a reality shared universally in our state. Of the 593,000 children in WA, over 44,000 (7 per cent) are growing up in poverty, and one in five (20 per cent) are developmentally vulnerable when they first start school—needing more than just their teacher to be able to catch up. One in five children are becoming disengaged from school and at high risk of poor life outcomes.¹

Children growing up in poverty face the lifelong impacts that it has on their development, educational success and wellbeing. Poverty in the first five years of life can cause lasting harm to physical and mental health through impoverished relationships and experiences, but effective early intervention providing consistent and responsive care can break the cycle of disadvantage.² Children in single parent families are three times more likely to live in poverty in WA.³ Aboriginal children are also three times more likely to live in poverty and ten times more likely to die by suicide.⁴

The New Zealand Government, led by Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern, has set a clear goal to make their country the best place in the world to be a child.⁵ To achieve this aspiration, they have passed the *Child Poverty Reduction Act* and the *Children's Amendment Act*, backed by every single Member of Parliament bar one. These Acts require successive governments to develop and publish strategies to improve the wellbeing of all children and young people, with a particular focus on child poverty; to set and review targets for child poverty; report annually on child poverty measures; and

¹ Commissioner for Children and Young People WA (2019) *Improving the odds for WA's vulnerable children and young people*; Bankwest Curtin Economics Centre (2017) *Educate Australia Fair? Education inequality in Australia*

² H Monks (2017) 'The impact of poverty on the developing child', *CoLab Evidence Report*, Telethon Kids Institute, colab.telethonkids.org.au/resources/

³ P Davidson, P Saunders, B Bradbury, M Wong (2018) *Poverty in Australia, 2018*, ACOSS/UNSW Poverty and Inequality Partnership Report No. 2

⁴ F Markham and N Biddle (2018) 'Income, poverty and inequality,' *2016 Census Paper No. 2*, Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research, Australian National University

⁵ Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern (2019) 'Making NZ the best place in the world to be a child', Magic NZ

report each Budget day on how the Budget will reduce child poverty and progress has been made towards these targets.⁶

Last year, WACOSS called for a whole-of-government *Child Poverty and Wellbeing Strategy* to focus our state's investment on the early years and direct resources to those children most likely to benefit from early support. Since then, the Commissioner for Children and Young People has also recommended a *Child Wellbeing Strategy for WA*, CoLab at Telethon Kids Institute have released an evidence report on *The impact of poverty on the developing child*, and the return on early investment has been clearly documented.⁷

Child development experts, children's advocates and services are all in agreement about the need to target early developmental vulnerability in those cohorts most likely to miss out on existing support. These groups welcomed the focus on early childhood development in the Premier's *Our Priorities - Brighter Futures* initiative. However, all have expressed concern that a narrow focus on achieving poorly set targets could see resources focused on middle-class children (who are more likely to catch up anyway), while overlooking those children who are vulnerable on three or more developmental domains and likely to be left behind.⁸

It is crucial that we work to ensure that children and young people are safe and secure within our community, and given the encouragement and support they need to thrive. We need to take a strong rights-based approach to support children in care. This must include having access to an independent advocate, as recommended by the *Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse*. Our child protection system needs to be monitored by a single independent oversight body that ensures the safety of children and young people, gives them a voice, hears their grievances, and advocates on their behalf by providing a child and youth focused complaints handling process.

More investment also needs to be directed towards prevention and early intervention. Western Australia spends less per capita on child protection services and much less on secondary family support services than any other state.⁹ The Premier's *Our Priorities* sets a target to reduce over-representation of Aboriginal adults in custody, but does not yet address over-representation of Aboriginal children and young people in out-of-

⁶ Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet (2019) '[Child Poverty reduction and wellbeing legislation](#)', New Zealand Government

⁷ The Front Project (2019) [A Smart Investment for a Smarter Australia: Economic analysis of universal early childhood education in the year before school in Australia](#)

⁸ CCYP (2019) *Improving the Odds for WA's Vulnerable Children and Young People*

⁹ Productivity Commission (2019) *Report on Government Services*

home care and juvenile justice, despite the strong causative link.¹⁰ Spending on prevention and early intervention has reduced as the cost of tertiary services has risen, inevitably meaning numbers of children in care will continue to rise.

We should pursue an approach that prioritises the self-determination of Aboriginal families and communities through systemic reform that builds on the existing capacity of Aboriginal Community-Controlled Organisations (ACCOs) to deliver family support and out-of-home care services. This is crucial to improving the lives of Aboriginal children and their families by recognising the impacts of intergenerational trauma from previous child removal policies and by ensuring close connection to culture and community.

What the New Zealand example has demonstrated is that a positive vision of a brighter future for children and families provides the kind of inspirational political leadership that people world-wide are looking for. We believe that a focus on child and family wellbeing can excite community support and unite the public to deliver better outcomes for all Western Australians in the lead-up to, and beyond, the March 2021 State Election.

Actions:

- Develop a Whole of Government Child Wellbeing Strategy
- Deliver integrated parenting support and early child development for families at-risk
- Develop wellbeing measures and assess the impact of proposed legislation, policy or strategy on children and young people
- Implement the independent oversight recommendations of the *Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse*
- Ensure services for Aboriginal children and families are ACCO-led
- Improve outcomes for young people in the justice system



¹⁰ Government of Western Australia (2019) *Our Priorities: Sharing Prosperity*, Whole-of-government targets to deliver better outcomes for all Western Australians

COMMUNITY PROFILE

**CITY OF ARMADALE**

The City of Armadale is an east metropolitan regional centre spanning 545 square kilometres. The city centre of Armadale is a hub for residents, providing services, supermarkets, retail outlets, and court and child protection services.

Armadale is one of Western Australia's fastest growing areas with around 82,280 people. It is anticipated that the population will increase by 3.58 per cent annually to 116,880 people by 2026.

At the WACOSS community conversation, people spoke of being unable to meet their most basic needs. Needs around regularly eating healthy food; being able to go to the hospital without risking your housing; buying bags of ice daily while waiting for a donated fridge; and having an income that forces you to compromise between food, shelter, or hygiene.

Many expressed a frustration around feeling as though they are being pitted against one another to establish 'who is most in need,' instead of everyone's most basic rights being prioritised.

"[A thriving community looks like] a place where a person would not have to go months without eating meat and living with an inadequate diet." – Community member

A common component of the stories we heard was that many systems worked on the assumption that those accessing hardship support were already accessing whole-of-life services. This false assumption ultimately prevents further assessment and referral to ensure effective support.

Some described a thriving community as one where parents who carry trauma are provided with early intervention services, and where new and expecting parents are supported to resolve their existing trauma. Our conversations reflected a clear vision that parents should be supported to be in a better position to parent.

As one of the state's fastest growing areas, Armadale's capacity to anticipate growing need is crucial to ensuring infrastructure and services are in a position to adapt to the changing environment and respond effectively to the needs of the community.

Budgeting for Wellbeing

Recent economic cycles in WA have increasingly benefited only a small few, while many of us struggle to get ahead. Efforts to re-balance the State Budget over the last few years have impacted disproportionately on low income households, which have seen sizeable increases in government fees and charges. At the same time, Western Australians have faced stagnant wage growth and a rise in precarious work, meaning more people are struggling to secure enough income to get by.

The McGowan Government has invested in generating local jobs, through initiatives such as returning railcar manufacturing to Midland. It is crucial we continue to ensure initiatives to create economic growth provide these employment opportunities in local communities and not simply dividends for company shareholders.

Creating economic growth is important, but growth alone does not guarantee improvements to our standard of living, nor do anything for those who are missing out. We need to think differently about how we measure success. What WA needs is inclusive growth with a clear purpose in mind. We need to focus on what Western Australians care about and need, then measure how well our public services and public investment are delivering it.

Western Australians care about their children, their neighbours, their ageing parents. They care about fairness and want to know that no-one is being left behind. They care about the future. They want action to protect our natural environment and farmlands. They want to do the right thing and see the right thing done.

That is what a wellbeing budget is all about.

New Zealand introduced their first wellbeing budget in May 2019, taking the position that wellbeing should be at the heart of all government investment.¹¹

This budget sets out five priority areas:

- Improving mental health
- Reducing child poverty
- Addressing the inequalities faced by Māori and Pasifika peoples
- Supporting a thriving nation in a digital age
- Transitioning to a low emission, sustainable economy

A Western Australian wellbeing budget would build upon the *'Our Priorities: Sharing Prosperity'* goals.¹² The New Zealand Wellbeing Budget approach has been implemented to achieve results very similar to those being pursued by the WA Government. The

¹¹ Te Tai Ōhanga, The Treasury (2019) *The Wellbeing Budget*, New Zealand Government

¹² *Our Priorities: Sharing Prosperity*

approach is intended to break down agency silos and work across government; focus on outcomes that meet the needs of both present and future generations; and track progress with broader measures of success – including the health of the finances, natural resources, people and communities. Machinery of government changes in WA have struggled to date to deliver cross-government outcomes and cultural change. Explicitly linking these outcomes to the budget accountability process may enhance their implementation.

Traditional budget approaches have created the entrenched structures, gaps and challenges that we are all struggling to address. The positive economic impacts generated by well thought through investment increase equity in economic engagement and drive future economic activity. It is time to try something different and focus on creating community wellbeing.

Actions:

- Deliver a WA Wellbeing Budget for 2022
- Develop a wellbeing framework that measures the things that matter to WA communities
- Engage with WA communities to capture and understand what they care about through a biennial *Our Communities* report
- Evaluate and transparently report how policies and investments improve the quality of life of all Western Australians



COMMUNITY PROFILE

**CITY OF BUSSELTON**

The City of Busselton has the largest population (21.3 per cent) in the South West Region with around 36,688 people and sits on Wardandi Noongar land. Busselton acts as a gateway for visitors to explore the Margaret River Region. The area combines a sea-change retiree population, with young working families employed in local industries or working FIFO, and has one of the highest rates of population growth in the state.

In our conversations with services, many local providers commented on funding for local services and programs shifting to Bunbury in favour of fewer, large regional providers. This change in funding has consequently made it more difficult for community members to access critical services locally.

A particular concern for services in Busselton was young people entering homelessness. Many spoke of young people leaving the family home because of family violence (increasingly linked to drug use), discrimination from family members toward LGBTIQ+ youth, and those exiting the youth justice system. Currently, there is only one service in Busselton providing shared accommodation to young people 17-25 years old and accommodation support for people as young as 15 years old. Despite this, many critical support services are based in Bunbury, over 50 kilometres away.

There are increasing concerns that people as young as 12 are sleeping rough due to crisis accommodation not accepting people under 15 years old. Meanwhile, child protection support is only accessible to those already with a case file or considered a suicide risk. Youth services can only send young people to ER at the local hospital, or need to get the police involved multiple times to secure support. This means young people have to reach crisis point before they can access shelter and support, and risk ending up in juvenile justice or out-of-home care.

A clear vision for the community that emerged from our conversations centred on the need for local services and resources to support community members, particularly young people and seniors. A vision where community members experiencing hardship are supported to access services before reaching breaking point, where distance is not a barrier for people, and opening hours for services are not reduced due to insufficient funding.

The Care Economy

“Sharing prosperity” is the vision at the heart of the State Government’s *Our Priorities* targets. In many ways, the care economy is uniquely positioned to deliver this outcome.

It is important to recognise the societal value of investing in care work. It is not only a significant source of employment, it enables people receiving support to participate in the social and economic life of our community. It can make all the difference in grasping opportunities and achieving greater life outcomes. A well-funded, resourced and accessible care sector also enables those who otherwise engage in informal care within their families, to access paid employment.

A sustained commitment to the care sector is fundamental to guaranteeing universal access to essential community services for all, regardless of our income or where we live. Universal access to services provides a strong basis for effective primary prevention and early intervention strategies that assist people before problems escalate and direct them to more intensive support when needed.

Health care and social assistance is already the largest employing industry in Western Australia, and is projected to grow faster than any other area of the economy over the next five years.¹³ Meeting the State Government’s ambitious target to create an additional 150,000 jobs in Western Australia will require this projected growth to be realised and surpassed.¹⁴

This growth is being driven in part by rapid growth in disability services as the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) is implemented across WA, by services developing to meet the needs of an aging population, and by a shift in community attitudes away from institutionalisation towards person-centred care.

Research commissioned by the International Trade Union Confederation found that, if Australia invested 2 per cent of its GDP in the care industry, it would directly create 356,812 new jobs and raise the employment rate by 2.3 per cent.¹⁵ When the indirect effects through the supply chain and the induced effects from increased demand within the economy are added, this sees the creation of 613,597 new jobs and a rise in the employment rate of 4 per cent.

¹³ State Training Board (2019) *Social Assistance and Allied Health Workforce Strategy*

¹⁴ *Our Priorities: Sharing Prosperity*

¹⁵ Jerome De Hanau, Susan Himmelweit, Zofia Tapniewska and Diane Perrons (2016) *Investing in the Care Economy: A gender analysis of employment stimulus in seven OECD countries*, UK Women’s Budget Group, International Trade Union Confederation

In comparison, the same level of investment in construction would only directly increase employment by 0.5 per cent, and by 2.5 per cent when indirect and induced effects are taken into account.

“Sustained investment in care is not only vital to societies, it also provides an indispensable motor for economic growth and an antidote to the destructive impact of failed austerity policies.” – Sharan Burrow, ITUC General Secretary

Investing in the care economy also has a profound impact on closing the gender employment gap, with the modelling showing that 79 per cent of the new jobs created by this level of investment would be taken by women, increasing the employment rate for women by 3.7 per cent and decreasing the gender employment gap by 2.6 per cent.¹⁶

The care economy can create job opportunities for those who have required assistance in the past, to share the benefits and insight gained from their experience as peer support workers. Models like that utilised by the Financial Counselling Network’s *Hardship Utility Grant Service Centres*, which prioritise the recruitment of local people who had experienced financial hardship and barriers to gaining employment. There are already many workers in the sector with lived experience relevant to their work, and peer work is commonplace in disability, mental health, and alcohol and other drug services. Deliberately fostering these roles across the industry by providing clear training and employment pathways for current service users can engender hope and have a transformative impact.

The peer workforce could be expanded to include positions in areas such as social housing, tenancy support, financial assistance and emergency relief. Replicating existing examples of education pathways, such as the *Certificate IV in Mental Health Peer Work*, could assist peer workers into other roles across the community services sector.

The development of local ACCOs delivering social services within their communities is a great example of an initiative that can provide better outcomes, deliver culturally safe and responsive services, and strengthen local economies. While the Department of Communities has had an *ACCO Strategy*¹⁷ and the State Government has an *Aboriginal Procurement Policy*¹⁸ in place, more work is needed to link the two and implement local

¹⁶ By comparison, construction industry investment would see only 11 per cent of jobs taken by women and their employment rate would rise by only 0.1 per cent.

¹⁷ Department of Communities, *ACCO Strategy to 2022*

¹⁸ Department of Finance, *Aboriginal Procurement Policy*

transition strategies. Encouraging existing services to commit to exit strategies and directly support local ACCOs to take over local service delivery needs to be prioritised.¹⁹

Workforce growth is a whole-of-sector issue. We must invest in stability across the care services sector and positively support it in order to realise the very real prospects for growth in employment. It will not happen of its own accord. The experience of the NDIS demonstrates that where investment in planning and process is lacking, this growth will not happen of its own accord.

The care economy can strongly contribute to building prosperous and resilient regional communities, by providing employment opportunities in those areas. This in turn supports and encourages people to stay in regional communities, as well as diversifying the local economy.²⁰

In addition to the clear economic and social benefits, caring jobs are climate-friendly jobs, contributing to the liveable environment target set out in *Our Priorities*. Care work is people-intensive low-emission work that creates the kind of social connection and community cohesion necessary to encourage people to care for and conserve their local areas and landscapes.

Actions:

- Invest to grow the care economy to create jobs and meet community need
- Ensure universal access to essential community services
- Plan and fund services based on population and need, using a public health model
- Set targets and dedicate resources to deliver *ACCO Strategy* commitments



¹⁹ WACOSS and the Noongar Family Safety and Wellbeing Council (2019) *Partnering with Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations to deliver trusted services with stronger outcomes for Aboriginal people*

²⁰ 'Regional Prosperity', *Our Priorities: Sharing Prosperity*

COMMUNITY PROFILE

**COCKBURN CORRIDOR**

The Cities of Fremantle, Cockburn, Kwinana and Rockingham, the 'Cockburn corridor,' represents an estimated 373,995 people and includes the southern Perth metropolitan coastal areas. There is a strong sense of civic and social responsibility and commitment to equality and fairness among these communities. In the WACOSS community conversations, a key vision emerged around ensuring an environment where everyone can live their best life and where people do not give up on others.

Service workers described the stark difference between the areas that contain service-hubs and 'pockets' around the South West Metro, with the lack of community infrastructure and services elsewhere. Baldivis was presented as a clear example, where community members must travel to Rockingham or Kwinana to access emergency accommodation, food relief or financial counselling services.

In 2016, children and young people made up nearly 20 per cent of the corridor's population compared to 12 per cent of the population in WA overall. Our conversations revealed a need for greater focus on children and young people, particularly in ensuring young people remain connected to their families, schools and communities. This was especially evident in the Cockburn and Rockingham areas, where the overwhelming majority of the corridor's children and young people reside.

Many also reflected on the ability that children's sporting programs had to enable families experiencing hardship to connect with their local communities. They suggested that sport and recreation programs provided pathways for families experiencing hardship to build parenting support networks, and helped young people build trust and support to find respite from the issues at home.

Services and consumers alike agreed that having a range of different community-based options that provide pathways for meaningful engagement with activities and interests was best. Resources such as community centres, parenting programs, early-years services, public sporting and recreational facilities, and programs that are open for all ages to engage. Not only do they provide people with the dignity of engaging in activities that are interesting to them, they facilitate the development of supportive local networks.

Jobs of the Future

Investment in the care economy is also crucial to improving the wages and working conditions within the industry, which is in turn required to support the recruitment and retention of skilled workers to meet the growing demand for services.

The issue of recruitment and retention has been identified by the State Training Board's *Social Assistance and Allied Health Workforce Strategy* as a significant challenge facing a sector already experiencing skills shortages in regional areas, lower than average wages and increasing casualisation.²¹

It is crucial that jobs in this sector are quality jobs. Not only for the wellbeing of the workers themselves, but also for the people that they support. The care workforce is predominantly female (71 per cent of full-time workers)²² and continues to be low-paid and undervalued—despite the efforts of sector advocates, peak bodies and unions to secure better pay through the industrial relations system. In spite of recent improvements to indexation policy²³ and supplementation to assist 24/7 National Housing and Homelessness Agreement services,²⁴ State Government funding has fallen increasingly behind award wage increases.

Workers should not be disadvantaged because they have chosen to pursue a career in assisting those experiencing hardship in their community. That, however, can be the end result of a service procurement approach that forces organisations in the sector to cut costs wherever possible, restructure, reduce services or even stop providing them where they are no longer financially viable, regardless of whether those services are still in demand.

Organisations are being forced into the position where they are restricting service provision to deliver lower service standards as part of a downward reclassification of their workforce, while attempting to provide essentially the same service under an extension of the same contract. A significant proportion of employers have been shown to be on the verge of collapse.²⁵

²¹ State Training Board (2018) *Social Assistance and Allied Health Workforce Strategy*, Government of Western Australia

²² Alan Duncan and Rebecca Cassells (2019) *Gender Equity Insights 2019: Breaking through the Glass Ceiling*, Bankwest Curtin Economics Centre and the Workplace Gender Equality Agency

²³ WACOSS (2019) '[WACOSS welcomes McGowan Government decision to support fairer funding for sector](#),' Media Release

²⁴ Department of Communities (2019) [2019-20 ERO 24/7 NHHA Supplementation Fact Sheet](#)

²⁵ David Gilchrist and Penny Knight (2017) [The 2012 Equal Remuneration Order: Sustainability Impacts on Human Services Delivery in Western Australia](#)

Ultimately, this reflects a hollowing out of service provision, a reduction in clinical services and an increase in clinical risk. At some point soon, a failure in critical care in areas like disability, child protection or aged care services will lead to serious questions about responsibility and clinical governance. This comes at a time where high-profile public inquiries have led governments to commit to higher standards of care and better outcomes.

Government contracting practices are short-changing WA communities on the essential services they have a right to expect will continue to be delivered, and short-changing the predominately female workers who deliver them.

For young people, the changing nature of work has seen higher levels of underemployment, more precarious employment and a greater number of transitions in and out of work. Nearly one in three young people are unemployed or underemployed, with only half of 25 year-olds in full-time work.²⁶

WA needs to create the necessary conditions to guarantee that the jobs of the future are fairer and ensure better opportunities for young people in this state. A taskforce should be established, as recommended by the *Ministerial Review of the State Industrial Relations System*, to monitor work conditions of people in the gig economy and make recommendations on how to regulate that industry.

For the community services sector to prove to be a desirable career path, it is essential that it can provide an alternative to this trend towards precarious and casualised work.

The care economy can also be positioned to offer employment opportunities and supportive workplaces for older Western Australians, who are increasingly finding it harder to get back into the workforce following redundancy or periods of unemployment. Recognition of knowledge, lived experience and broader skills, together with more flexible work arrangements, can enable those needlessly excluded to contribute through and benefit from meaningful work.

The State Training Board has set out a series of clear recommendations to support the development and growth of social assistance and allied health workforce:

- Take a coordinated and integrated approach to maximise the development and growth of the social assistance and allied health workforce
- Simplify and streamline employment and training pathways
- Ensure there are appropriately skilled workers in regional and remote communities

²⁶ The Foundation for Young Australians (2018) *The New Work Reality*

- Grow and develop the workforce through innovative attraction and retention strategies
- Decrease the cost of training for employers and students/trainees so that it is more affordable
- Undertake further research to determine future workforce requirements and improve portability of skills

In that spirit of collaboration and in recognition of the barriers to attracting and retaining a skilled workforce, Victoria has established *the Future Social Service Institute*. The institute is a collaboration between the Victorian Government, the Victorian Council of Social Service and RMIT University, with a focus on co-producing training, education, information and research to support a highly-skilled social sector workforce.²⁷

Ensuring Western Australia is able to meet the growing demand for qualified workers in this sector requires an accessible, affordable TAFE sector that is able to equip students with the right skills and then to have appropriate, quality employment opportunities available to them on graduation. This could include abolishing fees which currently limit access to priority community sector courses. The McGowan Government's 50 per cent reduction of TAFE fees for high priority qualifications— including those in community services, aged care, disability care and mental health—is a welcome first step in making these courses more affordable.²⁸

The challenge of meeting this growing demand is global. Connecting the training needs of the care economy to the State's plans to attract international students could see Western Australia position itself as the premier destination to gain the skills necessary for a career in care work.

On all projections, the size and importance of the care sector will continue to grow. Western Australia needs to be ready for this.

Actions:

- Deliver gender pay equity outcomes to social service workers
- Develop a care workforce institute with the education and social services to become regional leaders in workforce development
- Ensure appropriately skilled local workers in regional and remote communities
- Locally train and source our future care workforce through quality fee-free VET courses in priority areas
- Create a taskforce to protect the rights of workers in the gig economy

²⁷ Future Social Service Institute (2019) www.futuresocial.org/

²⁸ Hon Mark McGowan and Hon Sue Ellery (2019) 'McGowan Government reduces TAFE fees by 50 per cent,' *Media Statements*

COMMUNITY PROFILE



EAST PILBARA

The Shire of East Pilbara is vast, spanning 372,571 square kilometres, with the surrounding Martu lands part of the most intact arid ecosystem anywhere in the world.

The mining industry largely dominates its economy, representing 89 per cent of the total output of the Shire, as well as around 61 per cent of the working population's employment. There is a drive within the community towards reimagining its relationship with the resource industry in anticipation of the impacts of new and emerging technologies and automation.

The Shire has three main town sites Marble Bar, Nullagine and Newman, and several remote Aboriginal communities, Jigalong, Parnngurr, Punmu and Kunawarritji. The Town of Newman sits on the Nyiyarparli people's land and the Martu people are the custodians. Newman is the largest town in the East Pilbara and acts as one of its main regional centres catering to around 10,591 people.

In 2016, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples represented nearly 20 per cent of the East Pilbara region. They continue to advocate for more Aboriginal-led place-based services to meet the needs of the local population.

In the WACOSS conversations, there was a clear desire among local services and community members to take the time to develop true partnerships with governments and other organisations so they could work together to develop co-designed solutions to community-defined problems in the area.

This has already begun in some areas, evident in the development of the *Wama Wangka* pilot, a Martu-led, place-based and culturally driven strategy focused on addressing alcohol related harm. The co-designed project was built on a partnership between the Martu people and the WA Police, yet will require further systemic change through policy and funding models for remote community services.

Building an Equitable Society

Growing up in an impoverished neighbourhood, or a so-called 'poverty postcode' means being systemically isolated from a range of social and economic prospects. Children grow up with an increased risk of developmental vulnerability, school-leaving happens earlier, unemployment and imprisonment rates are higher, and the incidence of mental illness and chronic disease are elevated.²⁹ The McGowan Government has recently added its voice to the calls from the community sector, unions, economists and business for a raise in the rate of unemployment payments.³⁰

With housing the single largest living cost for WA households, one of the most effective mechanisms that state governments have to help people out of poverty, or to prevent them experiencing it in the first place, is the supply of affordable housing.

Western Australia's investment in this space over recent years has principally been focused on 'affordable' home ownership, through mechanisms like Keystart, shared equity schemes and first home owner grants. We have yet to see evidence this kind of investment assists those who most need public support. Home ownership is out of reach for those on the lowest incomes, who struggle to find affordable rental properties near to jobs, schools and services, so the prolonged lack of investment in social housing by the State Government means that genuinely affordable housing options have not been built at the necessary rate.

The risk of poverty is more than twice as high for households renting privately than home-owners with or without a mortgage. Poverty is the highest amongst public renters, though this is in part due to the fact that tightening eligibility requirements for public housing means that this group has some of the lowest incomes.³¹ Nearly 20 per cent of families interviewed for *100 Families WA* indicated that they cannot afford a decent and secure home, while one in three males and one in ten females were homeless at the time of the survey.³²

The Department of Communities' *Demand Model* estimates that there is an unmet social and affordable housing need in Western Australia for approximately 61,000 very low to

²⁹ H Monks (2017) 'The impact of poverty on the developing child', *CoLab Evidence Report*, Telethon Kids Institute

³⁰ Peter de Kruijf and Nick Butterly (2019) '[WA Premier Mark McGowan calls for Newstart welfare payment increase](#)', *The West Australian*; Tim Skelton (2019) '[KPMG joins the growing chorus for a boost to Newstart](#)', ABC RN Drive

³¹ ACOSS (2018) *Poverty in Australia*

³² Ami Seivwright and Paul Flatau (2019) *Insights into hardship and disadvantage in Perth, Western Australia: The 100 Families WA Baseline Report*, The 100 Families WA project, 100familieswa.org.au

moderate income households—including over 28,000 households on very low incomes.³³ Lack of secure and affordable housing is also one of the key factors contributing to rising homelessness in WA.³⁴

The proposed METRONET precincts remain prime opportunities for building diverse, inclusive communities, featuring social housing dwellings that are integrated with accessible public transport.³⁵ The new METRONET East redevelopment area around Bayswater, Forrestfield and Midland will act as a demonstration of how these precincts can be delivered as it will need to meet the Metropolitan Redevelopment Authority's affordable housing requirements, though even these are not ambitious enough.

This kind of piecemeal approach will not be sufficient to deliver the scale of social housing required and at the necessary speed. Inclusionary zoning that requires the provision of social and affordable dwellings in all new developments is essential for building inclusive communities throughout the state. Inclusionary zoning is standard practice in South Australia, the United Kingdom, the United States and many cities around the world with similar housing systems.

Sustained investment by the State to grow the social housing stock is also required. Research has demonstrated that direct public investment is the most cost-effective way to scale up the number of social housing dwellings.³⁶ It is crucial that the new *State Affordable Housing Strategy 2020-30* establishes clear and ambitious *net* targets for increasing the stock of social housing in WA, accompanied by the necessary public investment. Evaluation and reporting requirements must be part of the strategy to ensure the community see action is being taken to secure housing for those on the lowest incomes.

Discriminatory provisions in the *Residential Tenancies Act* need to be removed to ensure that public housing tenants are entitled to the same protections as renters in the private market. At the same time, renters' rights and protections in the Act need to be

³³ Julie Considine and Sarah Mewett (2017) *Estimating unmet housing demand and priority areas for public and affordable housing at the Local Government Area level – a housing practitioner's approach*, WA Department of Communities. Note 'affordable' is defined as up to 30 per cent of income for the bottom 40 per cent of incomes.

³⁴ Lisette Kaleveld, Ami Seivwright, Emily Box, Zoe Callis and Paul Flatau (2018) *Homelessness in Western Australia: a review of the research and statistical evidence*, Department of Communities

³⁵ *Our Priorities: Sharing Prosperity*

³⁶ Julie Lawson, Hal Pawson, Laurence Troy, Ryan van den Nouweland, Carrie Hamilton (2018) *Social housing as infrastructure: an investment pathway*, AUHRI Final Report No 306, Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute

strengthened to end 'without grounds' evictions, allow reasonable modifications, establish minimum standards, and cap unfair rent increases.³⁷

Those on low incomes and experiencing hardship also spend disproportionately more of their incomes on essential services. ACOSS and the Brotherhood of St Laurence found people on low incomes spend on average 6.4 per cent of their income on energy, compared to households in the highest income quintile, who spend only 1.5 per cent. Further, one in four low income households were found to be paying over 8.8 per cent of their income on energy.³⁸

This has a profound impact on people's health. Households living in poor quality housing with inefficient appliances have limited capacity to reduce their exposure to extreme heat, and older households often underestimate their vulnerability to adverse health outcomes.

Providing these households with the resources to be more energy efficient, through home audits and appliance upgrades can have a significant impact. There are many programs in the Eastern States that improve household energy efficiency for those on low incomes. These include the Tasmanian Energy Efficiency Loan Scheme, the Victorian Energy Upgrades program and the Healthy Homes program, and the NSW Climate Change Fund. Western Australia has not had a similar scheme in place since the axing of the Hardship Efficiency Program (HEP) in 2012. A revamped HEP should be introduced to support low income households to access energy efficiency measures based on the evidence of best practice.

WA also needs to shift to *percentage-based* concessions for energy and water, as used in Victoria, to substantially improve their adequacy and equity.

Percentage-based concessions are calculated in proportion to usage so they ensure eligible households with higher energy needs receive more assistance. Such an approach is more effective in meeting the principle of vertical equity than flat concessions.³⁹ This approach better supports individual households to cope with fluctuations in their energy consumption over time due to changing health needs and seasonal variation.

Many households struggling to keep a roof over their heads or the power on, also experience food insecurity. Research by Foodbank Australia found 49 per cent of people experiencing food insecurity said they were unable to buy food due to an

³⁷ Make Renting Fair (2019) 'The Tenancy Ten,' www.makerentingfairwa.org.au

³⁸ ACOSS and BSL (2018) *Energy Stressed in Australia*

³⁹ Queensland Council of Social Service (2014) *Energising concessions policy in Australia*

unexpected expense or large bill, and 35 per cent as a result of paying the rent or mortgage.⁴⁰ Only 19.3 per cent of people in the *100 Families WA* study were food secure.⁴¹

In our community, the need for food relief is no longer being experienced as a short term emergency, but has become a day-to-day reality for many, sometimes lasting for decades. Food insecurity is not a personal choice. A well-coordinated and resourced cross-government response is required to address it effectively. Poor nutrition due to food poverty has significant impacts on child development and rates of chronic disease.

WACOSS and key stakeholders recently developed the *WA Food Relief Framework*, with support from Lotterywest. It sets out necessary actions to reform the food relief landscape in WA, including the need for proactive government leadership. Its recommendations provide a clear roadmap for the State to ensure access to safe, nutritious and dignified charitable food for all.⁴² Together we can ensure the basic right of every person in our state to be food secure.

Actions:

- Significantly increase the stock of social housing to meet demand
- Mandate 30 per cent affordable housing, including 10 per cent social housing, in every new development
- Reform the *Residential Tenancies Act* to improve security and quality of tenure.
- Ensure no exits into homelessness from government institutions, including public housing
- Establish a vacant residential property tax and gradually replace stamp duty with a broad-based progressive land tax⁴³
- Shift to percentage-based energy and water concessions, and introduce a revamped Hardship Efficiency Program
- Implement the recommendations of the *WA Food Relief Framework*

⁴⁰ Foodbank Australia (2018) *Foodbank Hunger Report 2018*

⁴¹ Ami Seivwright and Paul Flatau (2019) *The 100 Families WA Baseline Report*

⁴² WACOSS (2019) *Food Relief Framework Report*, Lotterywest

⁴³ WACOSS (2018) *Vision 2020*, WACOSS State Budget Submission

COMMUNITY PROFILE

**GREATER GERALDTON**

The City of Greater Geraldton is considered one of Australia's regional capitals with around 39,567 people. Geraldton is located in the Mid-West Region of WA where there are multiple local Aboriginal language groups, collectively known as the Yamatji peoples. Aboriginal people represent nearly 10 per cent of the population in the area, compared to 3 per cent in the state.

It is estimated that 16,653 people are employed in Greater Geraldton, representing the overwhelming majority of people working in the Mid-West Region. Despite this, Greater Geraldton in March 2019 reported a high unemployment rate of 8.9 per cent (in comparison to 6.8 per cent overall in WA), having grown from 5.4 per cent in March 2017.

The WACOSS community conversations revealed the real effort service providers have put into resourcing and networking to develop formal and informal collaborations across governments, the community service sector and Aboriginal Community-Controlled Organisations. Many discussed the increasing focus on community services developing more partnerships, without recognition of the time and work needed to do this effectively, while some expressed frustration that the promised place-based planning and co-design had yet to occur.

Participants outlined several challenges facing the community sector, particularly around the increasing incidence of young people caring for their younger siblings, the link between family and domestic violence and methamphetamine use, and the increasing use of meth by young people.

One community response targeting the prevalence of family violence among Mid-West communities is the *Community Respect and Equality* agreement. The agreement was developed for organisations and businesses in Geraldton to stand up to the violence in the community and recognise the need for a community-wide response to prevent family violence.

A clear vision for the community that emerged from our discussion was centred on having well-resourced opportunities to develop effective partnerships in order to develop local solutions to address the complex issues faced by these communities.

Making Place Inclusive

More than a quarter of Australians feel lonely for at least three days a week.⁴⁴

Social isolation and loneliness have significant impacts on our health, and their consequences and costs are well documented. Chronic loneliness is akin to smoking 15 cigarettes a day, and impacts our health system as much as obesity.⁴⁵ The poor mental and physical health outcomes associated with feelings of not belonging are linked to chronic illness, including high blood pressure, high cholesterol, diabetes, dementia and Alzheimer's disease, depression, alcoholism, injury and violence.⁴⁶

We continue to rely on medical interventions to tackle these growing problems, despite the evidence that social integration and support are cheaper and more effective. Despite this knowledge, social factors are generally not considered in traditional responses to health issues.⁴⁷ Unaddressed, loneliness can be self-perpetuating, leading to lower levels of self-worth, resentment and anxiety.⁴⁸

The impacts of social isolation are particularly acute for some groups in our society.

People who are unemployed, for example, have been shown to use withdrawal from social networks as a strategy to manage feelings of social shame.⁴⁹ Despite recent advances, the social stigma faced by LGBTIQ+ people remains a driver of marginalisation and isolation. People living in rural and remote areas, people living with a disability, and sole parents all live with a greater risk of marginalisation and loneliness.

People who are incarcerated also face an increased loneliness due to physical isolation. Western Australia's prison population has grown by over 85 per cent since 2008, despite population growth under 20 per cent. The last three years alone have seen an increase in the prison population of over 11 per cent. The female prison population has

⁴⁴ Relationships Australia (2018) *Is Australia experiencing an epidemic of loneliness?*; Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2019) 'Social isolation and loneliness', *Australia's welfare*

⁴⁵ Dennis Campbell (2017) 'Loneliness as bad for health as long-term illness, says GPs' chief,' *The Guardian*

⁴⁶ Aged and Community Services Australia (2015) *Social Isolation and Loneliness Among Older Australians*

⁴⁷ SA Haslam, C McMahon, T Cruwys, C Haslam, J Jetten, NK Steffens (2018) 'Social cure, what social cure? The propensity to underestimate the importance of social factors for health,' *Social Science & Medicine*, 198:14-21.

⁴⁸ Australian Psychological Society (2018) *Australian Loneliness Report*

⁴⁹ Michelle Peterie, Gaby Ramia, Greg Marston (2019) 'Social Isolation as Stigma-Management: Explaining Long-Term Unemployed People's 'Failure' to Network,' *Sociology*

exploded by 182 per cent over the past ten years in WA.⁵⁰ Isolation in prison impacts disproportionately on Aboriginal people in custody and is linked directly to suicide and self-harm.⁵¹

Social isolation and loneliness is an increasing issue for older people, and as Australians live longer our population is ageing. The rate at which older people are taking up home care packages has almost doubled in the last ten years, while the number of people entering residential aged care has risen by close to 20 per cent in the same period.⁵² Older people are more likely to live on their own and less likely to go out, particularly with declining mobility or inadequate income. Loneliness in aged care is reinforced where services do not include opportunities to develop meaningful relationships through organised activities.⁵³ Forced isolation, or the threat of isolation, is among the most common forms of elder abuse, alongside psychological and financial abuse.⁵⁴

Isolation from friends, extended family and social networks is a common mode of controlling behaviour used by an abusive partner in family violence. Limiting who a victim can talk to also gives the perpetrator greater opportunity to inflict other forms of abuse.⁵⁵ Separation from social supports can also be a consequence of the stress, shame, physical exhaustion, fear and injury experienced by victims. Loneliness driven by family violence is exacerbated for migrant women, particularly those born overseas without permanent status with limited networks of family and friends.⁵⁶

The experience of social isolation is intertwined with the experience of *place*,⁵⁷ which is why community-based programs and initiatives need to be created and sustained locally. There is strong evidence that well-integrated place-based models lead to better outcomes.

The need to reduce social isolation was highlighted by the State Government's *Sustainable Health Review*. The review recommended introducing a community development approach that links people accessing primary care into their local

⁵⁰ Australian Bureau of Statistics (2019) 4512.0 – *Corrective Services, Australia, June Quarter 2019*

⁵¹ 'Aboriginal wellbeing', *Our Priorities: Sharing Prosperity*; RCIADIC (1991) *Final report of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody 1987-1991*

⁵² AIHW (2019) *Australia's welfare*

⁵³ ACSA (2015) *Social Isolation and Loneliness Among Older Australians*

⁵⁴ WA Alliance for the Prevention of Elder Abuse (2018) *Elder Abuse Protocol: Guidelines for Action*

⁵⁵ Break the Silence (2019) 'Isolation and Domestic Violence,'

www.breakthesilencedv.org/isolation-and-domestic-violence/

⁵⁶ Heather Douglas, Bridget Harris, Molly Dragiewicz (2019) 'Migrant women are particularly vulnerable to technology-facilitated domestic abuse,' *The Conversation*

⁵⁷ AIHW (2019) *Australia's welfare*

community, based on the *Compassionate Frome Project* in the UK. The model also ensures that the services and engagement opportunities are available to be connected with. Referral pathways from primary care that are not backed by funding to meet increased demand will fail and further discourage those seeking help. Unfortunately, health policy makers often assume social services are funded on a population demand model (like health services) and able to respond to growing need. Employing local *link workers* to help connect people with local services and networks, and engaging local government in planning for community development are practical solutions to address social isolation.

Griffith University research into intergenerational learning in residential aged care has found marked improvement in the wellbeing of people with cognitive decline.⁵⁸ These enhancements in physical and mental health are also evident for the people participating in a similar project recently broadcast on the ABC, *Old People's Home for 4 Year Olds*.⁵⁹

Research has also linked pet ownership to higher levels of social connection, as it facilitates contact with neighbours and triggers conversations.⁶⁰ Many people on low incomes in private rental accommodation are prevented from taking up this enabler of social connection by their lease.⁶¹

Good urban planning is critical to supporting social relationships and community connections. The Grattan Institute has written extensively about the ways we can design our towns and cities to encourage social connections, advocating that cities need to take into account people's psychological and material needs.⁶² Our cities and towns need to be designed to promote social interaction and participation, and ensure equal access to services and resources.

Inclusive, connected and safe communities are essential to address social isolation. Elevating a sense of belonging across people, families and community has far-reaching benefits for our entire state. A connected community can help make WA the best place to live.

⁵⁸ Troy Miller (2019) '[Intergenerational Care – Successful Trials Deliver Wellbeing Between The Generations](#)', Griffith University

⁵⁹ ABC (2019) '[Cameras Roll on the Most-Heart Warming Show of 2019](#),' TV Press

⁶⁰ AIHW (2019) *Australia's welfare*

⁶¹ Make Renting Fair WA (2019) 'Allow Pets'

⁶² Grattan Institute (2012) *Social Cities Report*.

Actions:

- Create a social inclusion taskforce that links social services, local government and health to deliver whole-of-government community development outcomes
- Resource local link workers to connect primary care and community services
- Embed social interaction and access to services in State and local government planning
- Invest in regional community networks to support place-based responses
- Develop innovative approaches to ageing in place
- Ensure independent systemic advocacy for LGBTIQ+ people
- Guarantee continuity of suicide prevention services
- Implement and resource the *10-year Family and Domestic Violence Plan*
- Support community-designed Justice Reinvestment initiatives
- Increase preventive and community support investment to reach the targets in the *Mental Health, Alcohol and Other Drugs Services Plan*



COMMUNITY PROFILES

KALGOORLIE-BOULDER

The City of Kalgoorlie-Boulder is home to an estimated 29,998 people, with nearly 27 per cent of the working population employed in the mining industry. Kalgoorlie-Boulder spans 95,575 square kilometres with Kalgoorlie acting as one of the main regional centres in the Goldfields-Esperance region.

Despite Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples making up over 7 per cent of the local population, there is still little acknowledgment of their history, culture and continued connection to country. At the WACOSS community conversation, services highlighted the lack of progress in addressing the persistent and entrenched racism in the area.

The conversation revealed a clear vision for healing in the community, where services would be better positioned to respond to the adverse circumstances being experienced by people in hardship.

One area in need of greater focus is ensuring people experiencing or entering homelessness have access to culturally appropriate crisis and transitional housing. In particular, more housing and accommodation developed in partnership with government and community is required, with a focus on bridging the gap in understanding of diverse cultural and familial obligations.

Steps towards achieving this vision have been instigated by community service organisations through interagency collaboration and by building strong connections with local residents. More still needs to be done to support community members and services, in partnership with all levels of government, to create positive, lasting and sustainable change.

MANDURAH

Mandurah acts as the regional hub for the Peel region providing services to 83,322 people and the Bindjareb people of the Noongar Nation are acknowledged as the original custodians.

Within the city centre of Mandurah and surrounding suburbs, low SEIFA scores reveal an area clearly experiencing hardship, in contrast to the wealthy oceanfront suburbs nearby. The economic divide in the area is readily apparent, with large oceanfront infrastructure on one side, growing disadvantage inland and more homeless people now on the streets.

A key challenge raised in conversations with WACOSS was the inconsistent recognition of Mandurah as a part of regional WA across government departments. This causes inconsistencies in funding for organisations considered to be providing metro versus regional services.

Climate Justice

People living in poverty have the fewest protections from climate change impacts and live in the most affected places. With less access to resources, such as money, choice, power and social connections, their ability to cope, adapt and recover is reduced.⁶³

Research has shown those living in poverty are more susceptible to the diseases that climate hazards can spread, and suffer more adverse effects from heatwaves as they cannot afford air conditioning. This in turn undermines their employment and income, as it leads to lost school days, general health and growth impacts, and increased risk of chronic conditions.⁶⁴

Increases in the severity of extreme climate events in Western Australia will lead to increased pressure for support. Local community-based services are often called upon to play a critical role in disaster response, particularly during the recovery phase. To be effective, it is crucial they have the necessary knowledge, capacity and networks, and are connected with key authorities and formal disaster response plans. The changing nature of volunteering, with an ageing population and fewer people able to contribute time, also presents a threat to the resilience of local communities and civil society.

Research from RMIT highlights the significant dangers faced by vulnerable households due to the increasing prevalence of extreme heat. 88 per cent of services surveyed were aware of at-risk clients who do not use air conditioners during a heatwave, with half also not using fans because of electricity costs. The majority of services reported households experiencing adverse health impacts or declining mental health as a result.⁶⁵

As the only state with rising carbon emissions, Western Australia clearly needs to do more to combat climate change. Australia is a signatory to the Paris Agreement to limit global warming to below two degrees Celsius and pursue a limit of 1.5 degrees above pre-industrial levels.⁶⁶ In order for Australia to meet its contribution to these targets, serious action must be taken to decarbonise our economy. This is a significant challenge

⁶³ IPCC (2007) *Climate Change 2007: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability*, Working Group II Contribution to the Fourth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change

⁶⁴ S Nazrul Islam and Jogn Winkel (2017) *Climate Change and Social Inequality*, DESA Working Paper No. 152, United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs

⁶⁵ Larissa Nicholls, Halley McCann, Yollande Strengers, Karyn Bosomworth (2017) *Heatwaves, homes and health: Why household vulnerability to extreme heat is an electricity policy issue*, Centre for Urban Research, RMIT University

⁶⁶ Australia is also a signatory to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, which include taking urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts.

for Western Australia, where emissions have *increased* by 23 per cent above the State's 2004 baseline.⁶⁷

A poorly managed transition to a clean economy can hit those on low incomes the hardest. It is critical that regulators and policy-makers work together to ensure an affordable, inclusive and equitable transition that supports the workers and communities most affected.

The uptake of residential rooftop solar photovoltaics (PV) in Western Australia has been significant, with around one in four households installing PV. The ability for households to access this technology is not equal, and those on lower incomes or in rental housing have few opportunities to benefit from reduced consumption costs.

Energy is recognised as an essential public service, yet those on lower incomes who cannot access solar continue to pay *more* for their energy, while those on higher incomes who own their homes are paying much less. While this inequity of access is an issue across Australia, Western Australia has one of the lowest levels in the nation of solar PV on the dwellings of those on lower incomes.⁶⁸ Focused investment is needed in models that share the benefits of renewable energy with low-income households and renters – such as solar gardens and virtual power plant models.

A shift away from a reliance on coal power will have significant consequences for the Collie region in particular. It is crucial that the region is supported through this transition to protect the livelihoods of local workers and the wellbeing of the community. Beyond Zero Emissions has created a clear roadmap for what a just transition in Collie could look like, reindustrialising the town as a hub for sustainable manufacturing.⁶⁹

With transport a significant driver of rising emissions, WA must shift away from our current reliance on polluting vehicles. Part of this shift needs to involve more people being able to access public transport. The McGowan Government's historic investment in public transport should be rightly celebrated, but more can be done to encourage its use.

New initiatives are needed to improve accessibility of public transport. Seniors card-holders are currently able to travel for free on public transport during off-peak times. This arrangement should be expanded to other cohorts, such as those experiencing

⁶⁷ Department of the Environment and Energy (2019) *State and Territory Greenhouse Gas Inventories 2017*, Australian Government

⁶⁸ Bankwest Curtin Economics Centre (2017) *Power to the People*

⁶⁹ Beyond Zero Emissions (2019) *Collie at the Crossroads: Planning a future without coal*

unemployment and those eligible for the recently established Asylum Seeker Hub concession. These groups have the least income to cover the costs of public transport and so have an even greater need to travel for free. A lack of affordable, accessible transport was reported as a barrier to gaining employment by 17 per cent of the *100 Families WA* family members.⁷⁰

Western Australia also needs to start transitioning its public bus fleet to be fully electric. Electric buses have lower emissions than diesel and natural gas buses, even where charged on grids that rely on coal or natural gas.⁷¹ Electric buses have already been deployed in China and the United States, with California committed to an emission-free fleet by 2040.

We need to be bold in our thinking. Western Australia has a responsibility to be proactive in addressing the causes of climate change and building a cleaner, more sustainable future.

Actions:

- Legislate for a 100 per cent Renewable Energy Target in WA by 2030
- Support a just transition for Collie to create low-carbon manufacturing jobs and protect workplace conditions
- Ensure access to the benefits of renewable energy for low-income households
- Transition the Transperth bus fleet to full electric
- Free public transport for all concession-card holders, including those experiencing unemployment or with refugee status



⁷⁰ Ami Seiwright and Paul Flatau (2019) *The 100 Families WA Baseline Report*

⁷¹ Union of Concerned Scientists (2018) '[Study Finds Electric Buses are Cleaner in All Parts of Country](#),' Press Release

COMMUNITY PROFILES

CITY OF SWAN

The City of Swan is home to 133,851 people and covers almost half of the Eastern Metropolitan Region of Perth. Currently Midland is the city's main hub for services and employment.

At the WACOSS community conversations, services highlighted challenges for residents living on the edges of the area. Ellenbrook epitomises the sprawl suburbs of Perth's fast-growing fringe, where urban development is often not supported by the necessary social infrastructure or services, and young families are at risk of social isolation.

The issues arising from the recent Midland hospital developments are unique to this area, with a spike in admissions since its opening. Conversations revealed a concern over the number of crisis, long-term housing and accommodation services available for people discharged from the hospitals. Many expressed concerns that those admitted to mental health wards often lose their housing, are discharged into short-stay accommodation and ultimately end up homeless.

It was clear from our conversations that a more coordinated approach is needed to ensure services are able to support people entering and exiting hospital, as well as those living on the fringes of the City of Swan to prevent further hardship.

SHIRE OF HALLS CREEK

The Shire of Halls Creek sits on the Jaru, Kija, Kukatja, Walmajarri, and Gooniyandi peoples' lands, located in the Kimberly region. According to the 2016 Census, the Shire is home to approximately 3,267 people, over 70 per cent of whom are Aboriginal, and has one of the largest youth population per capita in WA.

The Shire enjoys a rich cultural diversity, comprising multiple distinct cultural groups, each with their own Elders and practices, and thousands of years of history and tradition. As such, it has been important that community, social and civic development approaches are inclusive and responsive to the diversity this region offers.

Young people ending up in the justice system has particularly affected the communities of Halls Creek, driving locals to advocate for a Justice Reinvestment approach to ensure prevention, early intervention, diversion, and rehabilitation are available. A key community response is the grassroots *Olabud Doogethu: Smart Justice in the Heart of the Kimberley*, a shire-wide framework and individual community plans to build better futures with young people in Halls Creek and prevent young Aboriginal people from experiencing further hardship and disadvantage.

Restoring Trust in Democracy

There is a worldwide trend of declining trust in the key institutions of democracy, particularly politics and the media, described as a 'global democratic recession'.⁷²

Trust within Australia is declining at a very fast rate. Australians were once proud of the fairness of our institutions, but our media are now only trusted by 40 per cent of Australians, with 65 per cent feeling unable to distinguish real from fake news. Only 42 per cent trust government (this is higher among the 'informed' public at 54 per cent, but much lower than trust in business at 62 per cent and NGOs at 67 per cent).⁷³

Governments need to be concerned by the impact this trend has on citizen engagement, their capacity to deliver public services and their social license to operate. Equally, where a government engages effectively with their citizens, they are more likely to secure ongoing popular support to implement a shared community vision.

Western Australia was once a leader in public participation. At the turn of the millennium, the Gallop Government established a citizenship policy unit, the *Office of Citizenship and Civics*, and developed a *State Citizenship Strategy* to "facilitate greater community involvement in policy development and implementation."⁷⁴

More recently, the 2016 WA Labor *Supporting Communities* election policy platform promised to co-design community services with citizens and trial more collaborative funding models. This was followed by the *Service Priority Review* recommendations to build a public sector focused on community needs and prioritise the issues that matter to the community. Highlighting best practice citizen engagement in other jurisdictions (including South Australia, ACT, Victoria, Tasmania and New Zealand), the Service Priority Review recommended WA:

- Prioritise community engagement as a core function for the public sector
- Empower citizens to actively participate in decision making
- Build capacity within both the public sector and community to engage effectively
- Articulate, promote and facilitate good engagement practice to ultimately embed this as an integral way of operating

It called for a whole-of-government approach to community consultation and recommended building the capacity of the public sector for genuine co-design and

⁷² Pew Research Centre (2017) *Globally, Broad Support for Representative and Direct Democracy*; Diamond (2015) 'Facing up to the Democratic recession,' *Journal of Democracy*, 26,1, 141-155.

⁷³ Edelman Trust Barometer 2019

⁷⁴ Former Premier Geoff Gallop (2004) '[Premier launches the State's Citizenship Strategy](#)', *Media Statements*

place-based solutions, particularly in regional and remote areas and on complex issues. It also recommended a digital transformation agenda including a whole-of-government online platform that complements (but does not replace) face-to-face engagement with citizens.

True co-design should be recognised not only as a mechanism for designing high quality services to meet community need, but as a powerful democratic process directly engaging those who rely on public and community services to shape the institutions they most care about. Having the chance to work on issues that really matter in your community is truly empowering and leads to high levels of ownership and commitment.

Enhancing public participation in our democracy needs to extend to economic democracy as well, to ensure that the benefits and prosperity stemming from business ownership are shared widely. This involves promoting and supporting the growth of alternative models of economic governance to provide citizens with greater investment in and control over their economic future, through mechanisms such as worker-owned cooperatives. Worker-owned cooperatives create quality, empowering jobs for community members, keeping profits remaining and circulating within the community, allow employees to accumulate wealth through an ownership stake, and develop democratic, grassroots decision-making skills.⁷⁵ The community wealth building approach, successfully implemented in places such as Cleveland and the Preston City Council area provide a clear model for how community-shared ownership can create inclusive and sustainable economies.⁷⁶

The establishment of the Office of Digital Government within the Department of the Premier and Cabinet also provides an opportunity to support productive use of public data for the common good. Public policy needs to shape the production, distribution and control of data to create democratic online spaces and reduce the social damage being done by monopolistic data enclosure and exploitation by private platforms (like Facebook and Google) for profit. Our online worlds have become increasingly inequitable, despite their potential to transcend the barriers of age, class and race. Digital democracy and eGovernance offer another means to restore trust through public participation. One-off initiatives like GovHack have only scratched the surface of the opportunities for socially generated data and analysis to promote the creativity and prosperity of our whole society.

⁷⁵ Democracy Collaborative, 'Worker Cooperatives', community-wealth.org/content/worker-cooperatives

⁷⁶ Marjorie Kelly and Sarah McKinley, 'Cities Building Community Wealth' democracycollaborative.org/content/cities-building-community-wealth-executive-summary

We need to bring government and civil society together to promote innovation and excellence in democratic governance. Our goal should be to create active, informed and engaged citizens in WA.

Actions:

- Re-establish citizenship and civics policy leadership within the Department of Premier and Cabinet
- Build community engagement and co-design capacity within the public sector
- Create *Citizens WA* - a single community engagement web portal to support and promote best practice digital democracy and eGovernance initiatives
- Develop local digital strategies to encourage and support community-based local initiatives
- Incentivise and promote the creation of worker-owned cooperatives in WA



Completing the Circle

We started out in the *Vision* section of this submission discussing the passion and commitment shown by Western Australians when they spoke about supporting their local community. We also reflected on the dedication of those who choose to work in the caring professions, and their level of frustration at the hollowing out of local services and lack of delivery on promises to co-design collaborative local service systems. This submission provides direction and solutions—from focusing on wellbeing and measuring what really matters to our community, to growing the care economy and supporting the jobs of the future, tackling climate change and giving people more say in public policy, investing in our children and making WA the best place in the world to be. It is all about nurturing and sharing a commitment to make our community thrive—building hope, inclusion and trust.



Acknowledgements

Consultations for this submission commenced in June and ended in September 2019. These were predominantly place-based, face-to-face sessions. WACOSS convened community conversations in the east, north and south metropolitan areas, and across the state, including in Broome, Kalgoorlie, Geraldton, Bunbury, Busselton, Newman, Port Hedland and Karratha. An online survey was created for those unable to attend a session in person and a number of one-on-one discussions with key stakeholders and experts also occurred around specific initiatives.

WACOSS also held specific consultations with people who are currently accessing community services in Western Australia.

We thank and acknowledge everyone who provided us with feedback, data and research for this submission.

Organisations Consulted:

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| Aarnja Aboriginal Corporation | City of Busselton |
| Aboriginal Health Council of WA | City of Greater Geraldton |
| Aboriginal Males Healing Centre | City of Karratha |
| Allambee Counselling | City of Swan |
| Alliance for Children at Risk | Communicare |
| Anglicare WA | Community Legal Centres Association WA |
| APM | Coolabaroo |
| Australian Childhood Foundation | Connecting Community for Kids |
| Australian Red Cross | Consumers of Mental Health WA |
| Bankwest Curtin Economic Centre | CREATE Foundation |
| Bindu Farm | Children's Youth and Families Agencies Association |
| Calvary Youth | Curtin University |
| Cancer Council WA | Department Human Services |
| Centacare | Department of Communities |
| Centrecare | Developmental Disability WA |
| Children's Youth and Family Agencies Association | ECHO Community Services |
| City Mandurah | |

Ethnic Disability Advocacy Centre
Empowering People in Communities Inc
Family Inclusion Network WA
Financial Counsellors' Association of WA
Financial Counselling Network
FinUCAre
Foundation Housing
Goodstart
Hearing Australia
Hedland Women's Refuge
Hope Community Services
Indigo Junction
Investing In Our Youth
Juniper
Just Home Inc
Kanyirninpa Jukurrpa
Karratha Women's Place
Key Assets
Keys WA
Kimberley Medical Service
Koolkuna
Karratha Rotary Club
Lamp Inc
Life Without Barriers
Lifestyle Solutions
Local Drug Actions Group Inc
Mackillop Family Services
Mawarnkarra Health Service
Men's Outreach
Midland Women's Health Care Place
Milligan
Mission Australia
National Disability Services (WA)
Newman Neighbourhood Centre
Ngala
NOFASD Australia
Noongar Family Safety and Wellbeing Council
One Tree
Outcare
Parkerville
Pat Thomas House
Pathways Southwest
Red Cross
Peel Community Legal Services
Peel Development Commission
Peel Youth Services
Phoenix Support and Advocacy Service
Playgroup WA
Pilbara Health Workforce Working Group
Puntukurnu Aboriginal Medical Service
Reconciliation WA
Regional Alliance West
Relationships WA
Rise Network
Ruah
Rural Health West
Salvation Army
Save the Children

Shelter WA

Short Term Accommodation for Youth

Social Reinvestment WA

South West Community Legal Centre

South West Refuge

St John of God Health Care

St Patrick's Community Support Centre

Telethon Kids Institute

Telethon Speech and Hearing Centre

The People Place

UnitingCare West

University of WA

Valuing Children Initiative

Volunteering WA

WA Association for Mental Health

WA Mums Cottage

Wanslea Community Services

WA Peaks Forum

WA Primary Health Alliance

WA Network of Alcohol and
Other Drug Agencies

WA Stolen Generations Aboriginal
Corporation

Women's Community Health
Network of WA

Women's Council for Domestic and
Family Violence Services WA

Yorganop

Youth Affairs Council of WA

YMCA



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WACOSS stands for an inclusive, just and equitable society.

We advocate for social change to improve the wellbeing of Western Australians and to strengthen the community services sector that supports them.

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