

Community Recovery WA

Five Key Ideas

To put us on the Path to Recovery

*Putting in place the systems and supports for an inclusive
and effective recovery that leaves no-one behind.*



wa council of
social service

The Road to Recovery

The COVID-19 crisis forced us to put aside business as usual and focus on what counts to respond quickly and effectively. As our community recovers from the pandemic, we have a unique opportunity to reflect on how well previous policies and systems have served us, and be ambitious about what we want for our future. We have the opportunity to reset our practices and assumptions, and the relationships that underpin them.

For many, ‘business as usual’ was not working and we do not want a return to it. Instead, we need to chart a course forward to a more inclusive and caring economy that leaves no-one behind. For others, returning to business as usual is not an option, as they face unemployment and financial hardship for the first time in their lives. What we do now matters intensely for them, and for the future we all share.

Learning from the Past

In shifting from disaster response to recovery, we must move from the command and control model needed in the immediate crisis, to a local grassroots community development approach consistent with national and international recovery principles.¹ This has been a crisis like no other, with economic activity shut down for a protracted period and ongoing measures to reduce the risk of a second outbreak. We put at risk the effectiveness of our recovery if too narrow an understanding of ‘the economy’ means we miss the lessons learnt about the role of the social in community resilience.

We also need to learn from our responses to the Global Financial Crisis and where our stimulus was effective. Young workers in particular experienced long-term career scarring and diminished lifetime earnings. The jobs lost during that crisis were eventually replaced by ones that were more precarious and less rewarding. Then, as now, young and female workers were more likely to be the first let go.

Why Families are at the Heart of Economic Recovery

One of the first things the pandemic highlighted was that children and families are at the heart of a functioning and resilient workforce and economy. Shutting schools effectively shut down the economy, as many working families had to reorganise around their core priorities. When it came time to kick-start economic recovery, public debate focused on if and when it was safe to restart schools, to enable parents to return to work. The early failure of our childcare funding model highlighted how broken that system was, as it quickly became apparent that without access to safe and affordable childcare we would lose around a quarter of the frontline workforce we needed in this crisis.

Children and families have been missing from the crisis response in WA. The lack of coordination and responsibility has meant that families in crisis have not received clear advice about where to go for help.

¹ See [Koliou et.al. \(2018\)](#) for a recent review of the international community resilience and recovery literature

Reports from frontline services indicate high levels of family stress that will translate into much greater demand on crisis services if we do not address them in recovery.

If WA truly wants to build a strong sense of cohesion and commitment, as we work together through hard times to create a better future, then we should put children and families at the centre of recovery and commit to leave no child or family behind.

Five ideas to put us on the path to recovery

1. Connecting the New Jobless

- **An outreach campaign to all WA households on how to manage recovery that engages the newly jobless with local community connectors to provide advice and quickly connect them to the help they need**

Our single greatest challenge in ensuring an effective economic recovery is to reach out and engage with the newly jobless to provide advice and support **quickly**. The more people we can get back into work quickly, the greater our capacity and resources to provide assistance to others in industries facing a protracted downturn or who may need to retrain for careers in other areas. The sooner we can provide advice on careers and skills, or support to avoid financial stress, deteriorating mental health or relationship breakdown, the fewer households will face long-term joblessness and poverty. The problem is that many of these households have not engaged with services before, put off reaching out for help because of stigma, and may be living in areas with less disadvantage and fewer social services.

Putting children and family at the centre of outreach and recovery is the most effective way to engage newly at-risk households. We can learn from the success of the New Zealand child poverty strategy that shows focusing on children's wellbeing delivers the best community engagement.

2. Working with WA

- **Create *Working with WA* – a job search and creation scheme connecting employers & skilled workers with a one-stop shop for recruitment and training**

WA has been fortunate and managed the impacts of the pandemic well – meaning fewer deaths, less disruption and cost. We have also been buffered from greater economic impacts by our resource economy. Together, this means that we are better placed to mitigate the impacts on our workforce and to invest in job creation. We have a competitive advantage during this global economic recession that we can take advantage of to diversify our economy, develop new future-focused industries that target our natural advantages in knowledge, skills, resources and regional positioning. Rather than losing skills and hope during the recession, we could build them to be on the front foot for the global economic recovery.

Inspired by the *Working for Victoria* scheme,² **Working with WA** would help jobseekers find work and provide employers with access to a labour pool for new jobs; recruitment services including job and skills matching; assistance to create new jobs in priority areas that respond to COVID and support recovery; and free or subsidized vocational training in priority areas. The program builds on existing TAFE Jobs and Skills Centres to ensure participating employers are only referred the best people to choose from for the job. It prioritises skills, training and job creation in future focused industries and services, like those identified by the *Diversify WA Strategy* and *BCEC's Future-proofing the WA Economy* report. Public investment in traineeships and transitional job creation should focus in areas that deliver a return to the community – by building future industries, addressing COVID-related needs, and adding social value.

The **WA Youth Jobs Plan** is a key component to ensuring younger workers and particularly younger women do not continue to be those worst affected by this crisis³. Learning from the GFC and Nineties Recession we should encourage and support young workforce entrants and recent graduates to build their skills or extend their education, rather than face protracted unemployment, career scarring, reduced lifetime earnings and a loss of hope.

3. The Care Economy

- **Create transitional jobs in areas of COVID-related need and open up future career opportunities through targeted investment in The Care Economy**

The pandemic exposed the critical role of frontline health and social services in caring for our community in their hour of need. This industry is **the largest employer in WA, particularly for women**, and is projected to grow faster than any other sector over the next five years.⁴ Care work now has a crucial role to play in our social and economic recovery, and OECD modelling shows that investment in care is the most effective form of economic stimulus.⁵

Working women have been worst hit by the crisis and cuts to childcare, and overlooked in Federal stimulus programs. While Governments often see human services as a cost rather than an economic multiplier, we know there is growing need for skilled workers in aged care, disability services and early childhood education. If we don't train these workers locally now, we will be importing them from the developed world in a decade's time.

The more that we can do quickly to provide advice and support to those who have lost their jobs and livelihoods the fewer households will fall into poverty and long-term disadvantage. In the short term,

² Victorian Government (2020) [Working for Victoria](#)

³ Prof. Alison Preston (2020) [The WA Labour Market in 2019/2020](#)

⁴ State Training Board (2019) *Social Assistance and Allied Health Workforce Strategy*

⁵ Jerome De Henau & Susan Himmelweit (2020) *Stimulating OECD economies post-Covid by investing in care*, IKD Working Paper No. 85 and De Henau & Himmelweit (2020) *The gendered employment gains of investing in social vs. physical infrastructure: evidence from simulations across seven OECD countries*. IKD Working Paper 84, The Open University, UK. www.open.ac.uk/ikd/publications/working-papers

there is a pressing need for job search and career advice, financial counselling, family and relationship services, mental health and AOD support to minimize the impacts of the crisis and prevent the need for longer term reliance on tertiary services. Short-term job creation in these areas will deliver the greatest long-term benefits.

Workers with excellent people skills in our tourism and hospitality industries now face an extended slowdown and recovery, where there is unlikely to be enough work for between 6 to 18 months. Traineeships in areas of unmet and growing need could keep them connected to the workforce in the interim while giving back to improve the wellbeing and productivity of others. Exposure to these caring roles may expose aptitudes and passions that open up new career opportunities in higher skilled occupations, giving them a pathway to further learning and development.

A transitional care economy jobs and training program also gives us an opportunity to develop longer term analytics to assess community need, service coverage and outcomes so we can respond more effectively to the next crisis, and demonstrate the return on investment of stimulus through the care economy.

4. A generational Aboriginal human services strategy

- **Commit to a generational Aboriginal human services employment strategy with long term service commissioning and local employment targets**

The McGowan Government came to power with a strong commitment to build economic opportunities for Aboriginal people and close the gaps on social, economic and health outcomes. The Aboriginal Procurement Policy has quickly and significantly surpassed its mandated targets for Aboriginal businesses but has yet to be successfully applied to the human services industry. Areas of disproportionate Aboriginal disadvantage or restricted service access should be priorities for industry development to enable local Aboriginal community controlled services to secure government service contracts.

There is untapped potential for delivering employment outcomes, improved service quality, trust and impact to be delivered by focusing on the Aboriginal human services workforce. Aboriginal community-controlled services already deliver a larger and increasing proportion of community services in other States, particularly in priority areas like child safety and intensive family support; out of home care and family reunification; justice diversion and youth at risk services; mental health, alcohol and other drug services; health, education, aged and disability care. Partnerships with local Aboriginal health services who have the local knowledge and expertise in developing and supporting a local workforce could play a critical role, together with support from mainstream service providers. Longer-term service contracts are needed that support these partnerships and enable the transfer over time to local control.

5. Regional Employment and Community Wealth Building

- **Take a community-wealth building approach to build regional economies**

The need for local, sustainable employment opportunities in regional towns and communities has been exacerbated by the economic impacts of the COVID-19 crisis. The care economy can contribute strongly to building prosperous and resilient regional communities by providing long-term employment opportunities that are less susceptible to seasonal variations and tourist numbers. This in turn supports and encourages people to stay in regional communities, as well as diversifying the local economy.

To support and sustain the prosperity of our regions, we should look to adapting approaches like community wealth building, which have been successfully implemented in Cleveland, USA and the Preston City Council in the United Kingdom. Their success has seen several other communities and local governments adapting these models to suit their local circumstances.

“Community wealth building is a systems approach to economic development that creates an inclusive, sustainable economy built on locally rooted and broadly held ownership.”⁶ By placing community-shared ownership at its core, community wealth building seeks to provide low- and moderate-income communities with the tools necessary to build their own wealth.⁷

The approach places a large emphasis on the procurement activities of ‘anchor institutions’ – organisations which employ a significant number of local people, spend a lot of money on local procurement, and are unlikely to leave as they are rooted in the local area.⁸ These anchor institutions include local government authorities, hospitals, schools and universities. Wherever possible, anchor institutions are encouraged to shift external spending towards local procurement.

The impact of this community wealth building in Preston has been clear. By 2016, three years after the project began, spending by six anchor institutions had risen from 5 per cent in Preston and 39 per cent in Lancashire more generally, to 19 per cent in Preston and 81 per cent in Lancashire. The benefits have not only been economic, with a sense of community and belonging being created.⁹

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⁶ Marjorie Kelly and Sarah McKinley, ‘Cities Building Community Wealth’

<https://democracycollaborative.org/content/cities-building-community-wealth-executive-summary>

⁷ Ted Howard ‘Owning Your Own Job is a Beautiful Thing: Community Wealth Building in Cleveland, Ohio’

<https://community-wealth.org/sites/clone.community-wealth.org/files/downloads/article-howard12.pdf>

⁸ Centre for Local Economic Strategies (2017) ‘Community Wealth Building through Anchor Institutions’

https://cles.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/Community-Wealth-Building-through-Anchor-Institutions_01_02_17.pdf

⁹ Lisa Schaefer (2018), The Next System Project (2018) thenextsystem.org/learn/stories/infographic-preston-model