

WACOSS Response

State Commissioning Strategy for Community Services

3 September 2021

WACOSS welcomes the opportunity to respond to the State Commissioning Strategy discussion paper. A more strategic, rigorous and transparent approach to commissioning of social services delivered by the public and community sectors in WA has the potential to significantly improve outcomes for our community. If it is done well – with coordination and consistency across government agencies and underpinned by the development of robust and consistent data on service need, coverage and outcomes – it should give citizens and Cabinet confidence that public resources intended to support our community are being efficiently and effectively directed to make a real difference, particularly for our most vulnerable. As we are better able to measure service and population outcomes across programs, agencies and portfolios, we will collectively develop the capability and insight to shift the dial on early intervention and prevention, and reduce the growing cost of crisis services.

It is critical that we get the systems and processes right to ensure that strategic commissioning delivers on its potential to be a game changer in WA. This includes ensuring transparency and good governance, with clarity of roles and responsibilities for key players (including central government agencies, peak bodies, commissioning agencies, service users and service providers, researchers and evaluators, local and regional networks and communities). We need a collaborative approach to building our shared capability over time to co-design services and measure, analyse and report on outcomes over time that is underpinned by trust and mutual respect and enabled by social and data infrastructure.

To get to this point we need a realistic and sustainable pathway, that balances the desire to do things properly with the need to get things happening. We need to ensure some easy wins that build on what is already being done well, measuring the outcomes and return on investment of existing collective impact initiatives and putting in place integrated ongoing contracting and reporting arrangements. We need to prioritise existing programs and services overdue for renewal, and identify the best places to co-develop and evaluate new outcome-based service models; and to build the evidence over time on prevention and early intervention and effectively track reducing demand and cost of crisis services.

We are concerned that a business as usual approach relying on existing contracting processes and engagement mechanisms in individual Government agencies will not get us where we need to go. We are currently lacking the confidence, capability and culture to implement strategic commissioning effectively, and we need a shared path to build the practices and expertise we need in co-design, outcome measurement and evaluation. However, we are also excited by the opportunity that strategic commissioning can provide dedicated staff across the public and community sectors to work to a common purpose to the benefit of our community in a way that makes our work more meaningful, exciting and rewarding.

Executive Summary

The six issues outlined within the Discussion Paper represent a comprehensive cross-section of the challenges which the State Commissioning Strategy (SCS) will need to address. WACOSS has responded to all eleven Consultation Questions within this paper. However, we highlight three cross-cutting points which we believe are critical to the success of the development and implementation of the SCS.

1. Longer-term, systematic approach to social research and outcomes measurement. As outlined in our response to Consultation Question 8 in particular, it is critical to develop a longer-term, well-resourced, system-focussed strategy for social research and outcomes measurement. We also need to invest in analytical capacity, models and trials that allow for longer-term tracking of meaningful outcomes. An outcomes-based approach simply must be resourced appropriately, and build upon genuine collaboration between the sector and government, and this has to be reflected in the commissioning process. This approach must include:

- An acknowledgement that ***we currently don't know what we don't know***. There is an unsupported assumption throughout the Discussion Paper that the sector needs to improve. However – do we really know which services or programs are better or worse? What is good, where the gaps or points of failure are? What makes up efficient, appropriate services and how they should be resourced in operating and investment terms?
- A ***systemic approach to social research***, understanding and, relatedly;
- An ***ability to leverage the work undertaken by universities***, and to harness their skills and capacity, in order to develop effective and efficient, systemically focused, research models, that are implemented as research programs over a longer term horizon. It will also be important to institutionalise the learnings so that the fullest possible value is garnered of the investment made.
- Appropriate, proactive and iterative implementation of the ***Community Services WA Outcomes Measurement Framework (OMF)***, as outlined in the Guide to Implementation developed by WACOSS in the first phase of development;
- Removing barriers to ***data linkage*** in WA;
- Developing a ***system that engages and provides a framework for effectively managing the multi-faceted, multi-stakeholder complexity***, including stakeholders such as the Commonwealth, other state governments, research institutions and the community sector.

2. The role of Peak bodies.

Peak bodies are uniquely positioned with a particular expertise, connectivity and technical experience to help government understand what is 'good' and what represents value for money. Additionally, these organisations are repositories of institutional knowledge and experience. Involvement and investment in these organisations helps in a very large way to ensure the intellectual property and experience developed over time is retained and leveraged rather than lost through demographic change. As such, peaks are a part of the system and so any genuine, effective systemic response will include them as they provide a valuable link to the sector, an objective yet insightful perspective in terms of community services, and can support the government in co-design and in co-evaluation and measurement. Peaks can also represent a sector perspective and facilitate insights from frontline practice that is independent of the commercial interests of any particular provider. Finally, the development of a genuine systemic response that is longer-term focused will

ensure alignment of all system components (including peak bodies) as, in the end, all interests are focused on achieving the whole of system outcomes we know are critical for WA.

3. Capability building.

It will be critical to develop a multi-faceted approach to building capability across government and the sector. The traditional forms of training, workshops and one-to-one support will continue to be an important element here. However, it will be important to facilitate secondments, mentoring and cross-departmental, organisational and institutional learning opportunities as our recent experience has highlighted the incredible value here for increasing cross-sectoral understanding and creating opportunities for genuine collaboration and ideas development. It also needs to include the development and fostering of specific roles and units across Treasury, DPC, Department of Finance and line agencies in order to build genuine collaboration within and outside of government while also ensuring effective translation of rhetorical intention to practice.

Consultation Question 1: Are there other issues associated with commissioning that should be covered in the Strategy?

The six issues as outlined within the Discussion Paper represent a comprehensive cross-section of the challenges which the Strategy will need to address.

Given the importance of capacity and capability within and across the public and community services sectors, this should likely be addressed as a separate issue (noting it is included in the Discussion Paper as Consultation Question 11).

The only other key issues that we felt were not adequately addressed in the Discussion Paper were:

- 1. Tension between federal/state government.** Even if the State becomes more strategic at commissioning for outcomes, Federal funding remains disconnected, and less outcomes focussed. This results in a still complex commissioning situation for community service organisations, and a less than ideal situation for members of the community and people receiving services. What might integration with federal initiatives look like? How might the State endeavour to work with the federal government and/or with other states to improve national practice. Have NSW aligned their NPAs with their commissioning strategy? If so, how? Additionally, the WA government needs to consider the impending re-negotiation of bilateral agreements (such as that related to the NDIS) as very real opportunities for resetting the federal/state relationship in the context of collaboration and systemic response building. Indeed, this opportunity should figure in the state government's strategies regarding the State Commissioning Strategy.
- 2. Resourcing implementation.** The Discussion Paper represents the start of what could be an excellent State Commissioning Strategy - if we appropriately and comprehensively resource and build capacity with regard to each issue and element (i.e. Place-based, co-design, costing and pricing, outcomes and data collection, etc). However, the challenge is always in the implementation, and, almost always, the prospects for success come down to a question of appropriately resourcing the implementation. If a genuine systemic, longer-term strategy is to be developed, adequate investment up front will support success and ensure value for money in the medium- and longer-terms. Insufficient funding in the short term will result in significantly increased risk of failure and a loss of return on investment.

3. **Learning from other jurisdictions.** Other jurisdictions, and particularly other Australian states – e.g. [NSW](#) - have implemented state commissioning strategies. It is not clear from the Discussion Paper if this work has been canvassed and what lessons we have learnt from their experiences, so as to ensure we are not reinventing the wheel. Additionally, other national jurisdictions—most notably Canada and the UK—have also successfully navigated these problems. However, these countries have also made well-documented mistakes which represent an opportunity to learn.

Consultation Question 2: How can commissioning approaches drive more integrated service delivery?

1. Definitional challenges: ‘Integrated’ service delivery can mean different things to different sectors based on their context. Integration in some sectors has involved a push towards ‘one stop shops’ or hub type service delivery models; for others better integration means a better understanding of other local services, better networking and cross-referral, better sharing of data about client need and service outcomes. We recommend that any work in this space needs to start with an understanding of the different types of integration and clear agreement among stakeholders about what type of integration is being sought or discussed in any design process. It should be grounded in evidence and based in a clear rationale and theory of change. Additionally, any integration process needs to be implemented within a highly transparent governance and accountability system so that learnings, examples and mistakes can be identified and quickly disseminated to the entire system. This aspect helps to ensure much greater value for money and a significantly higher opportunity for success across the whole system rather than in pockets.

It is important to note first and foremost that integration is a means to an end – it is not a starting point. Bigger is not always better – either in geographic coverage or service complexity. Additionally, effective integration does not always mean larger entities; focus, local decision making, and the application of experience should also be balanced here. Though sometimes there can be benefits to scale and critical mass, often small, local and responsive works best, especially in regional and remote WA. The starting point must be the identification of the needs of the people of the WA community and those needs manifest at the local level, and understanding that comprehensively through research and co-design. Integrated service models may then be a part of the answer – but it is important that commissioning has the flexibility to allow for the best solutions, rather than encouraging integration for the sake of it, or for some perceived cost saving.

2. Revisit the starting point: Integrating service delivery, then, means having a proper appreciation of Western Australians – not simply as individual service users, but as embedded in families, in places and local communities, communities of interest and historical contexts. It requires a re-thinking of West Australians as partners in procurement decisions and strategies. Genuine citizen-centred planning resulting in integrated service delivery can often mean identifying that those best able to assist and support someone facing personal challenges and vulnerabilities may be those closest to them and that local decision making is often the most effective way to achieve outcomes efficiently and effectively.

To do this, we need to recognise that a focus on citizens is more than a focus on individuals and commit to community development processes that facilitate and support local initiatives, active

participation, volunteering and peer support. This starts with providing simple mechanisms for meaningful service user feedback and evaluation of how effective services are in meeting their aspirations and agreed outcomes. It needs to graduate to co-design and evaluation processes that engage service users and those with lived experience of overcoming disadvantage to play a critical role in making our services more integrated and effective. All of these activities need to be undertaken in a highly transparent environment to drive accountability and to ensure data assets can inform change.

3. In implementation, there should be some consideration for service integration during the first stage of service design – ensuring both a) the possibility to examine, when re-designing a service model or program, what other existing services maybe be integrated or considered to be complementary; and b) the capacity for providers to bring forward examples of existing service integration linked to that service across multiple contracts within that Department. It is worth noting the distinction between the integration of services and integration of contracts. In many places, the experience of service users can include receiving an integrated wrap-around service from a provider, where the funders may not be aware of the level of integrated delivery across contracts. The first step to better service integration or wrap-around at a local level may involve understanding existing strategies, programs and plans in place, identifying and agreeing outcomes and measures and creating necessary data assets which can be deployed to inform opportunities for consideration of future integration into the program review process. Again, transparency is critical in informing and transmitting experience across the entire system.

4. Some additional key points as related to this Consultation Question

- Proper and appropriate implementation of the Outcomes Measurement Framework, taking the accounted-for whole of government approach, would enable more integrated service delivery. More on this point is provided under Consultation Question 8.
- Integrated service delivery depends heavily on a deep knowledge of communities by the organisations supporting them. The commissioning process needs to acknowledge and value the informal protocols developed by services over time, which may include how organisations work together to support shared clients, manage cases and cross-refer, and the kinds of relationships that are in place to enable this to occur effectively. These play a critical role in the efficacy of the service delivery system and should be valued as such.
- Transparency of approach, targets, timeframes and results is critical to informing next steps and leveraging the results to inform the entire system, thus creating significant value for money.

Consultation Question 3: How can service users be most effectively engaged to design services that meet their needs in the context of place and community?

1. Definitional challenges: It is important to note at the outset that there are three separate issues within this consultation question – a) responding to user needs (both those current service users who may be in crisis and less willing or able to engage in design; as well as those with lived experience of the problem and the system who have learnt from their journey and may share insights but are not always current service users), b) co-design (which does include a.) and c) the question of place-based. These will be addressed in turn below.

2. Co-design: Co-design is about designing and delivering community services in a partnership – an equal and reciprocal relationship – between funders, service providers and the people using services (and often their carers, families and others in their community). It is a process that recognises the different perspectives and insights that all stakeholders bring to the process – including citizens, service providers and public servants. Co-design is a key mechanism for driving human service system reform where existing services and service systems are failing. It can improve most services, programs and service systems, but co-design processes take time and resources to be done properly and effectively.

Further, it must be noted that the onus should not sit on service users to be involved and participate in a co-design process, especially for people who might be experiencing crisis or ongoing trauma as a result of crisis. Resourcing must exist to enable this engagement to happen – through participant payments, through supporting peaks or organisations to support their clients, through building internal client capability, providing crèches – whatever it is that removes barriers to engagement.

100 Families participants have identified some specific challenges in terms of barriers to their participation. A key barrier identified is to bridge the people-practice-policy gap which occurs due to the lack of shared language. People, services, and government talk about similar issues in very different ways. Opening dialogue between the three parties, through co-design processes, could create better alignment with the needs of all parties.

Being clear about the parameters and bounds of co-design: Not every service or program needs to be co-designed and if the language of co-design is applied too widely, quickly and shallowly, this will undermine the opportunity to use co-design effectively when and where it is most needed. There may, therefore, be different design processes and stages between the program level co-design, and the local or regional level co-design or co-implementation. It is important that all stakeholders engaged in co-design processes start with clear shared expectations of what co-design means in this context, including what is in and out of scope, the process, timeline, and opportunities for input and review.

There is a clear need for a consistent approach to service co-design and commissioning processes across government, and to build the capacity of the public and community sectors to lead and participate in effective co-design processes. The WACOSS Co-Design Toolkit, developed under the guidance of the Partnership Forum Co-Design working group, covers the essential elements of effective co-design and provides a sound basis for such a consistent approach. The Council recommends that the Co-Design Toolkit be promoted across Government through the SCS, as a guide to co-design in WA. WACOSS worked closely with the COSS network and with people with lived experience to develop the *Lived Experience Framework – Principles and Practices for Lived Experience Partnerships*. This Framework provides an important element as to how to engage with community and service users to ensure they are appropriately involved in designing services that meet their needs.

The role of Peaks: Peak bodies are uniquely positioned with a particular expertise, connectivity and technical experience to help government understand what is ‘good’ and what represents value for money. Additionally, these organisations are repositories of institutional knowledge and experience. Involvement and investment in these organisations helps in a very large way to ensure the intellectual property and experience developed over time is retained and leveraged rather than lost

through demographic change. As such, peaks are a part of the system and so any genuine, effective systemic response will include them as they provide a valuable link to the sector, an objective yet insightful perspective in terms of community services, and can support the government in co-design and in co-evaluation and measurement. Peaks can also represent a sector perspective and facilitate insights from frontline practice that is independent of the commercial interests of any particular provider. Finally, the development of a genuine systemic response that is longer-term focused will ensure alignment of all system components (including peak bodies) as, in the end, all interests are focused on achieving the whole of system outcomes we know are critical for WA.

Peaks are key partners working alongside those with lived experience to support their participation in identifying meaningful outcomes as part of co-design, and are also key research partners in the development and evaluation of outcomes measurement framework, engaging with researchers to evaluate service and program level outcomes. Peaks already play an important, and often comprehensive, role in supporting co-design and research processes, but are rarely if ever adequately resourced for this role. Government currently pays large consulting firms lacking crucial contextual knowledge and expertise significant amounts of money to facilitate co-design processes; however, a better mechanism creating more value for the WA community exists in using Peaks for this work.

Consumer peak bodies, in particular, have individuals with lived experience as their members. They exist to provide training and capacity building for those with lived experience to be at the decision-making table, and they also provide support for organisations to engage meaningfully with people with lived experience at all levels of an organisation, at all stages of procurement.

3. The question of place: There are further definitional challenges associated with the question of place. What do we mean by place? Generally speaking, it refers to a specific social and cultural context where a sensible and reasonable ‘community’ exists for doing something within.

Place-based solutions, particularly in regional and remote areas, are better able to develop effective and comprehensive responses to complex issues at community level. However, there is concern that we don’t have good models and practices for place-based service design yet, and there is some confusion about how it is done at a program, agency and inter-agency/community level.

In implementation, a staged approach to running place-based co-design trials in a couple of locations where we have the right capacity, engagement and commitment to getting plans and services in place first may be most successful.

Place-based collective impact approaches: It is pleasing to see reference to collective impact-style approaches in the Discussion Paper. However, it also has to be acknowledged that the key struggle for collective impact (CI) type initiatives – e.g. Olabud Doogethu, Youth Partnership Project, Imagined Futures, Connecting Communities for Kids, to name just a few – is the fact that they cobble together funding from various programs and agencies for relatively short periods of time. This means that the whole initiative is vulnerable to the ending or loss of a single funding source, as very few CI initiatives have been successful in tendering for ongoing service delivery. CI-type initiatives require long-term funding tied to outcomes agreed across government and the community. Critically – competitive tendering of any funding element can destroy the social capital and collaborative relationships required to make CI work.

We suggest that proposed Government central evaluation unit should visit these initiatives, document the lessons learned from their development, measure their collective impact, and recommend a model for ongoing funding as appropriate.

4. The role of District Leadership Groups. Around the state, many DLGs are developing a more collaborative approach to regional service delivery. Where they are made up of representatives from State, Federal and local government, community services sector, Aboriginal community-controlled organisations and industry, they have been responsible for developing and leading effective on-the-ground responses to achieve local outcomes. Participation of local community services and leaders should be mandated in all DLGs.

When inclusive, these groups create the possibility for a more responsive and joined-up approach to regional social planning, together with greater coordination of service system design to create more integrated and appropriate regional services that deliver stronger, more sustainable outcomes. When backed by clear direction and endorsement at high levels within the State Government and public service, inclusive DLGs can create an effective and informed mechanism for place-based decision making. They can also drive local engagement and planning processes to oversee the implementation of place-based joint commissioning trials.

We suggest that there is consideration of how DLGs report on their partnership activities, how the effectiveness of their partnership is measured with stakeholders across sectors, and how they are centrally supported to develop and implement local trials.

We further suggest starting with those DLGs with a track record of effective partnership (e.g. the South West Metropolitan Partnership Forum, the South East DLG engaged through the YPP mentioned above, and possibly the Mid-West DLG.

We recommend guidelines and reporting requirements are developed for the appropriate participation and engagement of local community leaders and service providers over time.

Consultation Question 4: How can the Strategy strengthen the involvement of Aboriginal people, organisations and leadership in the planning, design and delivery of services?

1. The role of the Peak body: The report [Partnering with Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations to deliver trusted services with stronger outcomes for Aboriginal people](#) by WACOSS and NFSWC reflected shared experiences of a system which fails to positively leverage and draw from these strengths; **a system that urgently needs to incorporate a new direction, based on self-determination** for Aboriginal people. The State Government will need to work in partnership with the Aboriginal peak body that is currently being established, existing peaks and representative bodies to strengthen the involvement of Aboriginal people, organisations and leadership at all levels of service delivery. Services for Aboriginal people must be designed with and by Aboriginal people¹ and there should be an increased proportion of services for Aboriginal people delivered by Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs) and other Aboriginal organisations.

2. SCS as a catalyst like the APP: The Aboriginal Procurement Policy has quickly and significantly surpassed its mandated targets for Aboriginal businesses but has yet to be successfully applied to

¹ See for example Kimberley Aboriginal Law & Cultural Centre (KALACC) 2020. [Nothing About Us Without Us: Co-designing Youth Justice in the Kimberley.](#)

the human services industry. The SCS could be the mechanism needed to bridge the capability gap for ACCOs to ensure they are able to secure State Government service contracts. Areas of disproportionate Aboriginal disadvantage or restricted service access should be priorities for industry development to enable local Aboriginal community controlled services to develop and deliver services. If linked to a fair and staged approach in building the capability of ACCOs to secure and deliver social service contracts, the SCS can be a strong driver for Aboriginal employment growth *and* better outcomes through more effective and appropriate services.

3. Development of the Aboriginal human services workforce through partnerships: 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. The starting point should be to grow the role of existing ACCOs to better meet community needs. Commissioning strategies need to include local workforce development targets, strategies and resources as a component of longer-term service contracting. In places where there are no local ACCO services, 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 ACCOs from other regions and mainstream local service providers. Longer-term service contracts are needed that support these partnerships and enable the transfer over time to local control.

Insufficient genuine engagement with the National Agreement on Closing the Gap: We would echo the comments of the Aboriginal Health Council of WA (AHCWA) that there is insufficient engagement with the National Agreement on Closing the Gap in the SCS Discussion Paper. The National Agreement on Closing the Gap (the National Agreement is explicit about the responsibilities of each party to the agreement, and details key actions that must be undertaken to close the gap in life outcomes for Aboriginal people. While the Discussion Paper references the four Priority Reforms of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap, and clearly shows an intent to prioritise genuine partnerships and the leadership of Aboriginal people and organisations in the planning, design and delivery of services, there is little detail on *how* the WA Government's commitments under the National Agreement will be implemented through the Strategy.

Consultation Question 5: How can government work with the sector to ensure services remain contemporary and are agile enough to change to meet the needs of services users?

1. Clarity on what is best practice: In order for government and the sector to ensure which services are contemporary and meeting the needs of service users, we need to understand what is best practice. In order to understand what is best practice, we need **funded** capacity and capability in social research, and full and comprehensive, yet flexible, mechanisms for measuring outcomes (link with Consultation Question 8 below). This needs to include sufficient resourcing for independent evaluation(s) as required, secondments and embedding expertise in social research and outcomes measurement in departments and with community organisations.

2. Feedback loops within commissioning: We caution against the assumption that old contracts necessarily mean services have become out of date and recommend that service reviews need to ground-truth actual service delivery. Service practices and models may well have been updated and adapted to meet changing needs, priorities and learnings, but in some cases it may be the program models, contracts and reporting requirements which have not kept pace. Unless contract managers are actively involved with service delivery there is a real risk that they are unaware of what is happening on the ground, and there may be a perception that services are out of date when they have evolved. A good example is the CSATS services, where the contracts are very old and out of date. However, the services themselves have taken on emerging issues and learnings around complex trauma, harmful sexual behaviours, changing online and social media environments and porn culture.

3. Role of Peaks: As described above under Consultation Question 3, peak bodies are uniquely positioned with a particular expertise to help government understand what is 'good' and (perhaps) what represents value for money. Peaks provide a valuable link to the sector, an objective yet insightful perspective in terms of community services, and are generally well-connected with the social research related to their specific areas of practice – which is critical for supporting both government and services to remain contemporary.

4. Flexibility and innovation in contracting: Agility needs to exist throughout the commissioning and contracting processes, not just in the contracted organisations. Flexibility and innovation in contracting is required to enable this agility and capacity for organisations to move as needs change. Agencies need to better understand how to commission and contract for co-design and service development – ensuring that service providers remain accountable while also enabling the ongoing development and improvement of service models and measures over time – rather than locking things in for the duration of the contract.

5. Culture: Structure alone is not enough – there has to be a commissioning relationship that enables a culture of sharing and does not foster a fear of failure. Frank and fearless conversations and good relationships between government and sector are required (link with Consultation Question 10 below), including trust and authority for service providers to change practices as required to meet needs. Ensuring feedback loops in the commissioning cycle also ensures that individual service practices and models don't diverge too far from what is considered good or best practice, and government and the sector together can foster shared learning and a community of practice.

Consultation Question 6: How can the sector ensure services are priced appropriately encompassing all costs for the service to support sustainability?

1. A shared responsibility: This consultation question specifically places the onus on 'the sector' to ensure that services are 'priced appropriately' for 'sustainability'. Presuming that the sector referred to is the community services sector (but noting that this could refer to the public sector), we would challenge the premise of this question. This assumes full implementation of the DCSP policy, which is still yet to be the case. More often than not government provide fixed amounts within which to procure, alongside certain expectations of service delivery, which necessitates adaptive pricing. As such, there is a need for government to appreciate that the pricing structure is often derivative of the funding available which does not relate to the cost of service delivery but, rather, often to

historical budget provisions. It would not necessarily be a problem to provide a fixed amount where other limitations did not exist.

Organisations will often cross-subsidise services because what is on offer in a tender process is rarely sufficient or the cost of service delivery has risen while funding has remained fixed. Contract roll-overs rarely allow for organisations to re-negotiate what they are providing. Therefore, it is not the community sector that needs to take responsibility for ensuring services are priced appropriately. Indeed, the community sector's responsibility is to ensure that services are delivered efficiently and effectively. Pricing is a shared responsibility in that the community sector has a role in providing appropriate data to build the necessary data assets, and government has a responsibility in setting the pricing/quantum of service delivery calculus in a balanced way that accepts the true comprehensive cost of service delivery. This process requires a high level of transparency relating to collaboration in prioritisation where financial resources are insufficient to meet all needs together with a strategic plan focused on closing the financial resources gap.

The State Commissioning Strategy gives us an opportunity to develop an evidence-based and collaborative process for resolving these difficult issues that reduces the risk of issues of sustainable funding becoming contested and political.

WACOSS also cautions community service providers that they need to better cost their operating overheads (including infrastructure, IT and office maintenance costs) as we are aware that changes in Lotterywest policy mean providers cannot expect to rely on grants to cover these items in the future.

2. Shared costing and pricing model(s): There was a significant amount of work conducted in the early days of the NDIS in terms of developing shared costing and pricing tools between the disability sector and government. There are also examples in both NAHA-funded Homeless services (2019) and Out of Home Care services (2020) where community providers and government agencies commissioned costing studies using data shared by existing services. There is an opportunity in revising the State Commissioning Strategy, to undertake similar work in other service areas, and create some shared tools which contain assumptions and modelling which is agreed to across both the community sector and government. This would enable us as a partnership to move beyond a discussion simply about price, as there would be a real justifiable price for a level of community outcomes – and we could instead be talking about community value and quality. Such tools would also allow for learnings to be transmitted across the community sector to drive efficiency and effectiveness while learning from errors.

Consultation Question 7: How can commissioning support a focus on the longer term needs of the service user, as well as the immediate needs of those in crisis?

1. Longer-term, systematic approach to social research and outcomes measurement

Existing service models are generally better suited to responding to those in immediate crisis, although there is still a way to go to better measure and compare service user and community outcomes across different crisis services and programs. The challenge for our efforts to shift to earlier and more effective interventions is *both* to close the targeting and evidence gap between interventions delivered and outcomes avoided *and* to ensure that those who are in crisis still receive

the support they need. In some cases, like juvenile justice, diversionary models (where a young person goes into a community program rather than detention) clearly show avoided costs, while in other areas it is apparent we will need to be investing in additional services and measuring their impact as the need for crisis services reduces over time.

We need a longer term, well-resourced, system-focussed strategy for social research and outcomes measurement, and we need to invest in the analytical capacity, models and trials that allow for longer-term tracking of meaningful outcomes. This point links with our response under Consultation Question 8, below. Understanding and working to better deliver on the longer term needs (or aspirations) of service users is something more than (and outside of) individual service design and evaluation. We need projects like 100 Families sitting outside and across individual programs and providers to build a better understanding of people's lives and trajectories and measure longer term outcomes. However, commissioning, no matter how strategic in nature, can sometimes only be about individual services and programs, which does not support us to build this wider understanding. In this case, in addition to individual services measuring short-term service outcomes, we also need to be judiciously commissioning research independent of the service system to be able to get a better understanding of longer term and whole-of-system outcomes.

Specifically, as related to this question, there is an evidence gap for prevention and earlier intervention, and there is a lack of willingness to invest in prevention and earlier intervention where the evidence does exist. There is also an ongoing challenge as to how to attribute outcomes of prevention, which requires a strong understanding of pathways (i.e. the evidence provided through studies such as 100 Families).

For example, a main finding from 100 Families has been that the system we have put in place to support people who are experiencing disadvantage is inadvertently keeping them trapped in the situations they seek to escape. We have constructed a 'survival' system rather than a model that promotes thriving. The survival system created is typically only able to meet people's immediate needs, sometimes fully, sometimes in part, and sometimes not at all. Where families are having significant successes, this is often due to their own assets and capacities, not the system. Due to its construction, our current system is rarely able to go further than supporting an immediate need and often holds no or limited options to help families 'climb the ladder' out of poverty. In short, it keeps people perpetually in a cycle of poverty with no support options available to overcome the substantive hurdles and barriers they face.

This system is in direct contradiction to what families want, which is to thrive; and really what we are looking for as the public and community sectors.

"I think there is room for change across all those areas because they are all connected. The big picture is really important. We get the messages all the time and it ripples through everywhere. Government sets the policy and it affects how their staff and the agencies contracted think about things. At the other end lots of people are affected by this and they change the way they are as a result. But, it doesn't have to be this way. People can change, governments can change. Contractors can change. If we all changed a little bit, the whole show might work a lot better? Why don't we meet in the middle? On neutral ground."

100 Families Participant

Definitional challenge: There is also a definitional challenge in how early is ‘earlier intervention’. For example, the Earlier Intervention Family Support program within Communities is not what we would consider an ‘early intervention’ program, but rather diverts children and families at the point of entering the formal child protection system. There is some confusion about diversion versus earlier intervention in terms of child protection and justice. It is important to be clear about how early we are talking in terms of earlier intervention, which is highly dependent on sector, context and the social research we have available.

2. Political priorities. One of the major challenges faced by both sectors is the political priority given to urgent crisis services. Political intervention in terms of support for specific causes can undermine efforts to prioritise longer-term investments. It is also challenging to secure additional funding for longer term prevention, when the cost of crisis services continues to rise.

3. Institutional knowledge and commitment to early intervention: The earliest intervention possible, which research tells translates into long-term cost savings is into the early years. However, the expertise and capacity of the public service to meaningfully engage in this arena has significantly decreased in recent years because of the lack of institutional priority and commitment. Recent public sector reforms and machinery of government changes appear to have reduced the priority given to early years programs, with amalgamation of existing units and a reduction of seniority of specific roles.:

- The Executive Director of Child Health no longer exists,
- The Office of Early Learning and Development in the Department of Education no longer exists,
- Staffing levels for the Connecting Early Years Network program have been reduced, and it has been relocated into a unit responsible for staff development within Communities, despite the success of the previous community based network.

Due to these and other changes, there has been a significant amount of institutional knowledge and networks lost in early years policy and service delivery, which cannot be made up for through well-trained procurement managers.

Consultation Question 8. How can data collection be comprehensive enough to evaluate services without being overly burdensome for service users, providers and government?

1. We currently don’t know what we don’t know: There is an assumption throughout the Discussion Paper (and which often arises in relations between Government and the sector) that the sector needs to improve. However – do we really know which services or programs are better or worse? What is good, where the gaps or points of failure are? There are statements in the discussion paper that appear to assume inefficiency in terms of getting better outcomes from investment and promoting efficient delivery of services – but what do they/we actually know and how do we know it?

At the opening of our submission we mentioned the need for a longer term systematic approach to outcomes measurement. This includes the need to building collaborative processes and forums across the public, research and community sectors; agreement on what efficient and appropriate services look like and how they are best resourced; an ongoing iterative program to extend the WA Outcomes Measurement Framework; leveraging the work undertaken by universities and other

research institutions. It also includes recognising the unique position and current capability of peak bodies as repositories of institutional knowledge and facilitators of collaborative engagement; as well as the need for a joined up approach to building capability across public, community and research sectors with leadership from DPC, Treasury and Finance (as discussed in relation to question 11 below).

What we need to do is take stock first. As a system, we need to understand and evaluate what is already out there in terms of both need and services, and encourage providers and networks to come forward with better evidence of how things actually work on the ground.

2. Longer-term, systematic approach to social research and outcomes measurement

We need a longer term, well-resourced, system-focussed strategy for social research and outcomes measurement, and we need to invest in the analytical capacity, models and trials that allow for longer term tracking of meaningful outcomes. An outcomes-based approach must be resourced appropriately, and this has to be reflected in the commissioning process. The rest of the response to this Consultation Question fleshes out the critical elements of the longer-term, systematic approach required to social research and outcomes measurement.

3. Systemic approach to social research

There is an opportunity to better understand and engage with the drivers of research institutions to establish a longer-term program of social impact measurement that will encourage and support ongoing independent research into social outcomes – rather than government having to independently commission and fund studies into individual programs. Establishing some shared infrastructure (such as a curated hub for social impact data) and partnering in a few key processes and roles then creates opportunities for institutions to build their own ongoing programs of research that serve a shared purpose, with postgraduate students and early career researchers then looking pursue their own industry linked research using that infrastructure.

4. Appropriate and proactive implementation of the Community Services WA Outcomes Measurement Framework

The WA Outcomes Measurement Framework (OMF) was a key priority for the Supporting Communities Forum in 2018-19. The first phase of development of the Framework was completed in 2019 by WACOSS in partnership with DPC, with oversight from a SCF Working Group; and the Department of Finance has had carriage of the continued development of the OMF.

In the absence of a common outcome framework across government agencies, much of our existing service and program level data is fragmented and incommensurate – simply not suitable for the task of measuring how effectively we are tackling the key problems at a local, cohort or population level. Many community service providers have implemented their own data systems and evaluation frameworks to improve the quality of their services. The end result is an undesirable level of fragmentation. Without central leadership and a process for agreeing on common frameworks, standards and models, community services may be reluctant to invest time and energy in developing systems and building evaluative capacity, or will continue to act individually and focus on the outcomes and metrics most relevant to their mission and operating environment.

The WA OMF must be appropriately implemented from the very beginning of the commissioning cycle. The Framework fills the gap of a common outcomes framework – it is a hierarchy of population level outcomes and a bank of indicators, providing a common language for service delivery across government agencies and community services organisations. Drawing extensively on work in other jurisdictions, it provides the architecture for a whole-of-government and a whole-of-sector approach. The intent of the Framework is to orient our attention to the outcome, rather than the output; and to the person, rather than to the program.

The Framework provides the scaffolding to support the move to an outcomes focus in community service delivery. The Framework was also developed with the intent that it could be rolled out as a whole-of-government framework over time, and the extensive consultation and engagement process that WACOSS and the Department of Premier and Cabinet engaged in to develop the framework unearthed a desire across both sectors to see this occur ([see OMF resources here](#)).

A lean, iterative process to implement the Framework is critical to ensuring strategic commissioning can have timely and measurable impact across programs, disciplines and agencies that demonstrates its worth. WACOSS developed an Implementation Guide which accompanied the final deliverables of the OMF, which provides guidance as to how to implement the Framework, depending on whether the person is in a community service organisation, or in a government line agency; and whether they are looking to use the Framework for a commissioning process, or for the development of a Policy. The next stage of its' development is to apply it at the agency and program level, adding to and refining the indicator bank and list of service level sub-outcomes.

To implement this, we need the relevant capability and capacity across sectors – see point 6 for further information.

5. Data and data linkage: Fundamental barriers to data linkage in WA are the lack of explicit data standards and protocols across government departments and agencies, and the lack of central leadership driving the interpretation and promotion of data. A central data linkage and analysis unit is needed, to bring together expertise across the public (and research and community) sectors to drive innovation in priority areas to increase social impact and deliver better returns on public resources. Protocols have been used in other jurisdictions to protect privacy and other sensitive elements while still bridging the data assets gap that we face today.

Data needs to be at the centre of policy development and evaluation in this state, but in order for that to occur, there needs to be clear leadership in setting priorities for social and 'public good' outcomes, and a mechanism for commissioning and pooling the research and analysis. There is no central database of social research in WA that agencies, services and researchers can draw upon to facilitate policy development and service design, to align measurement and ensure prospective research adds to the knowledge base. Other jurisdictions in Australia have developed central data repositories, removed charges and bureaucratic barriers to data sharing and invested in proactively seeking opportunities to use data access and linkage to drive innovation, economic activity and better community outcomes.

A collaborative model is suggested below.

6. A multi-faceted, multi-stakeholder system: To enable a State Commissioning Strategy with all the promise outlined in the Discussion Paper, we must partner across the Commonwealth, other state governments, research institutions and the community sector to develop shared projects that align with major research and development priorities and can attract matching funding. Our system-based approach needs to involve a variety of stakeholders in ways that are appropriate to their size and capabilities.

Government central agencies: An independent unit within Treasury (with secondments from Finance, Communities, MHC, health, sector, etc) should provide the leadership for cross-departmental, system-level measurement and evaluation. Strong engagement with community service peak bodies would ensure that a common understanding of what is 'good' and value for money in the sector would be developed over time.

Government line agencies: Line agencies would carry responsibility for some primary outcomes, and for aggregating the data from reports of community service organisations on their outcomes-based contracts.

Universities or Research Institutions: In partnership with government central agencies and peak bodies, a cross-institutional partnership would provide independent expertise and capacity on outcome measurement, a clear plan to build capability together across the public and community sectors, together with some independent oversight and evaluation – that can ultimately inform decisions about where to drive investment to produces better outcomes across programs and agencies. This may include an independent process where service providers come together with experts across research institutions to put forward schemes for evaluation and pilot funding outside of a procurement process.

Individual community services: In an environment of outcomes orientation, and endeavouring to measure outcomes, it is important to have a frank conversation about what it is possible for individual organisations to achieve. There needs to be a question as to what is appropriate for individual organisations to measure. Ultimately – the overhead cost and the skills and experience required means that it really isn't appropriate for individual organisations to measure long term outcomes. Ideally we should rely on evidence that tells us that if we achieve these short-term outcomes, then it will lead to these medium and long term outcomes over x time horizon. Individual organisations should demonstrate fidelity to short-term outcomes, or perhaps medium term outcomes. Governments and perhaps tertiary institutions should then take carriage of the broader systemic measurement and analysis as outlined above.

7. Building a learning system and culture: It is critical that not only are the systems, structures and processes as outlined above developed, but that a culture of learning and development is fostered across the community and public sectors.

Further, **the use of technology** can be leveraged to great success. For example, planning is underway to develop a shared social service data asset across universities, underpinned by shared data and measurement protocols to ensure comparability and quality of outcome data. A technical solution would also be desirable to support government line agencies in aggregating the reporting of individual organisations on their outcomes-based contracts.

Consultation Question 9. What enablers are the most important for implementing new commissioning approaches in WA and are there any other key enablers not listed here?

The most important enablers for implementing strategic commissioning approaches in WA are:

- Building capacity and capability across government and the sector over time in all areas listed in the Discussion Paper (note this is covered further under 11)
- Flexibility in contracting to allow for agility and innovation, and to support co-design, co-development and co-evaluation activities so that service programs evolve together over time
- The system for understanding and measuring what works (covered under 8, above) – the evidence, the understanding of outcomes, the measuring of outcomes, the management of data, the analytical capability and the various stakeholders playing the different roles required across sectors – government, universities/tertiary institutions, service providers, service users, etc.
- Relationships and collaboration – we need to focus on the nature and quality of the relationship between the public and community services sector to ensure that the elements within the Discussion Paper can be put into practice.
- Governance and oversight that supports transparency and trust, encourages partners to contribute to collaborative efforts, driving more effective early intervention over time, and reassuring Parliament that public services are efficiently delivering outcomes that citizens value.

Consultation Question 10. How can government and providers have brave conversations when things are not working?

1. Talent management. It will be critical that, within government, the right people are recruited to the right roles, and then empowered with the expertise and authority to do those roles in terms of contract management.

2. Whole-of-government oversight. As important as talent management and culture is, we also need mechanisms and structures in place, as we won't always have all the right people in the right places at all times. There appears to be strong agreement across community sector stakeholders of the need for some form of whole-of-government procurement oversight, compliance and appeals mechanism. This applies equally to the initial procurement process and service agreement as well as to ongoing contract management processes. There is a recognition that the Funding and Contracting Services Unit (FACS) in Department of Finance has responded on occasions to approaches from the sector (often mediated by the peaks) to provide support and advice or to intercede where there have been significant problems and concerns identified with procurement processes and contracts. While this has been greatly appreciated, there remains a concern these processes remain ad hoc and there are many circumstances where service providers have had unsatisfactory engagement with contracting agencies with no recourse to appeal or seek independent intervention or advice. The sector believes policy compliance questions need to have somewhere they can be independently tested and reviewed so that a constructive course of action can be determined and directed. It is preferable if this can be done in a simple and non-confrontational manner that facilitates a fair and speedy resolution.

3. Hard conversations cannot jeopardise funding. Individual service providers often feel challenged in having difficult and brave conversations when things aren't working because oftentimes it is perceived, or actually the case, that those conversations have the potential to jeopardise funding. We do not have an easy answer to this question – even where policies are put into place for protection, it does not solve the perceived challenge.

Consultation Question 11. What capabilities do government, providers and service users require to implement this strategy?

1. Workforce diversity. Each sector has very different workforces, and very different requirements for their workforces – perhaps accreditation, skills development, quality controls – and some sectors don't have any. It will be important to understand this and consider the variety of workforce and human capital planning approaches in the commissioning process. This has further complexity in the community services sector given the number of volunteers that the sector engages with – in some sectors, volunteers make up quite a significant part of the workforce.

2. Structured capability across Departments. It will be critical in implementing the SCS to drive a shared service culture across the public service. This requires leadership and a common approach, with clearly defined roles that leverage the expertise of the central agencies (DPC, Treasury and Finance), clear governance and reporting processes, and structured opportunities to bring together the best and brightest working on strategic commissioning across the public and community sectors. Getting the processes and authorising environment right is likely to be crucial to building impact, capacity and momentum over time to ensure strategic commissioning delivers the maximum benefits.

At this stage we believe that more work is needed to discuss and develop the structures, processes and oversight needed to ensure the success of strategic commissioning, and recommend there should be a process with relevant stakeholders to discuss and develop these system level design considerations.

3. Central agency capacity, capability and responsibility. The investment of time, effort and resources into place-based reform, service integration and outcomes will only see success if we are 'completing the loop' to ensure that the evaluation of service outcomes is driving investment decisions. As outlined above under Consultation Question 8, in structural terms, this capacity should be located within Treasury.

It is clear that **Finance** have a crucial oversight and advisory role in relation to procurement processes, including expertise in how to build co-design, co-production and co-evaluation into tendering and contracting. This is critical to ensure that commissioning agencies have the confidence about issues of probity and oversight to ensure that meaningful and effective collaboration can occur between service providers within the current risk-averse environment.

Treasury clearly have expertise in evaluation and impact across agencies and programs that provides the crucial link between consistent application of outcome measurement across programs, sectors and disciplines on the one hand, and informed analysis of the return on investment of different initiatives on the other. Having Treasury being a source of truth on value and outcomes in strategic commissioning should in the longer term ensure there is a clear path for progressing cross-agency bids to align and integrate services, and for making a compelling case for genuine opportunities to

progress investment in prevention, early intervention and diversion (where benefits and cost savings often accrue across portfolios).

Department of Premier and Cabinet have a critical leadership role in whole-of-system governance, design and policy development. They might be expected to lead in identifying strategic opportunities to develop or prioritise trials or initiatives that test and demonstrate key aspects and steps of the evolution of strategic commissioning. DPC have to date played a critical role in the development alongside WACOSS of the WA Outcomes Measurement Framework that should continue, including some oversight of the development of outcomes at an individual agency and program level. Together with Treasury they might also evaluate bids or proposals for pilot programs – from considering contract integration proposals for already integrated service delivery, to helping convene place-based multi-agency trials to tackle complex community challenges.

We suggest that this tripartite approach to strategic commissioning governance needs to actively and appropriately include **key stakeholders** from commissioning agencies, sector peaks, and relevant experts on service design and evaluation (which includes service users and those with lived experience as well as researchers). This should involve both ongoing structured processes for information sharing (such as workshops and conferences) as well as networks of practitioners and communities of practice.

4. In implementation, we should ensure we have a deliberate strategy to build capability over time, starting by identifying existing best practice outcome measurement and service integration across programs and agencies. We should have a process for providers and networks or alliances to come forward with existing integrated service models to be evaluated and combined into a single outcome based contract where appropriate.

Further, all sectors need capacity building across all areas as outlined in the Discussion Paper – outcomes measurement, place-based service design, pricing and costing (or creating shared pricing and costing frameworks and assumptions), co-design; and there need to be ongoing opportunities to create strong and collaborative relationships across sectors at all levels. We believe that it makes sense to develop and extend this capacity over time, starting with some easy wins and providing evidence as we go to justify further effort and investment.

Yours sincerely,



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