



# Beyond Recovery

STATE BUDGET  
SUBMISSION **2022-2023**

 **wacoss** wa council of  
social service

## About WACOSS

The Western Australian Council of Social Service is the peak body for the community services sector and works to create an inclusive, just and equitable society. We are committed to genuine engagement, authentic collaboration, and building trusted relationships with members, communities and governments.

WACOSS represents over 280 community service organisations and 500 organisations involved in the provision of community services to the people of Western Australia. 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.

We drive social change with communities, through collective action and policy formulation, strengthening community services and influencing decision makers to ensure justice and equity. With WACOSS members and the broader sector, we advocate with and on behalf of those who are the furthest from levers of power and influence, to amplify their concerns and seek justice, to create a society that genuinely works for the benefit of all and not just the few.

## 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

There are times in the struggle for social justice that it seems as though nothing will shake the status quo. And then there are times when everything is turned on its head overnight.

This is the first WACOSS State Budget Submission since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Last year we stepped away from our usual analysis as we were all forced to grapple with the new reality of the crisis. So we released our [Community Recovery Plan](#) instead, setting out recommendations to put in place the systems and supports necessary for an effective recovery that leaves no-one behind.

Now is the time for us to shift our thinking beyond a focus on recovery. While maintaining our diligence in combating the pandemic, WA can make reforms to ensure our state is fair, safe and strong into the future. To determine what those reforms are, WACOSS engaged in conversations with community members, workers and leaders, right across the state – from down in Albany to up in Broome, and so many places in between.

Our 2022-23 State Budget Submission, *Beyond Recovery*, is the result of all of those conversations. It sets out recommendations that address gaps in services, identify supports that need to be bolstered, and chart the systemic changes required for WA to be stronger and fairer into the future.

Together we can take action to create a society that genuinely works for the benefit of all and not just the few. It is our hope that the recommendations in this submission prove useful for the State Government, sector organisations and the communities we all live in, to collectively achieve that goal.



Debra Zanella  
President



Louise Giolitto  
Chief Executive Officer

## Introduction

Western Australians share a vision for our communities. We want to live in places that foster healthy, creative, culturally-rich and socially connected communities. We want our loved ones to be safe from illness and harm. And we want strong networks of support that provide access to opportunities to pursue purpose and connection – giving us all the freedom to live well.

This vision addresses the challenges and crises we now collectively face. The public health and economic impacts of COVID-19 continue to take centre stage, yet do so against a backdrop of more frequent and severe natural disasters. The back-to-back catastrophic Black Summer bushfires, severe winter flooding on the east coast, and the more recent Wooroloo bushfire and Cyclone Seroja, all paint a sobering picture of a ‘new normal’ of escalating and compounding crises.

As a sector we know that compounding crises expose the vulnerability of those already struggling in our communities, as well as tipping others into hardship and ongoing disadvantage. Many Western Australians are experiencing financial hardship for the first time, having lost work and income while the cost of living continues to rise and government coronavirus support measures have ceased. This is reflected in increasing demand for support and services across the state, including housing, homelessness, food relief, mental health, child protection and family violence services.

Both Federal and State Governments responded swiftly with economic policy measures to aid individuals, households, and businesses facing the immediate impacts of lockdowns and job losses, but many of these supports have now come to an end. We now have a unique opportunity to reflect on how well these policies have served us, and be ambitious about what we plan for our future.

**We need to develop long-term sustainable strategies and measures that go beyond recovery and even resilience, towards building fair and strong communities.**

The 2021-2022 State Budget delivered record investments in social housing, climate action, health and mental health, while ensuring household fees and charges remain low. It marks an important shift in State Government planning and investment into longer term outcomes. The combination of Western Australia’s strong economic position and the Premier’s unprecedented political majority has created an opportunity to think bigger and create a legacy that will benefit our whole community into the future.

Where and how we build upon our foundational social services, ranging from secure and affordable housing, to health and care services, to community supports, public spaces and cultural institutions, will shape the lives of current and subsequent generations of Western Australians. As will the

pathways we choose by building digital and green infrastructure for the future. The quality, integrated and people-centred services we need to build stronger communities must be outcome-focused and strengths-based, while also improving inclusiveness and reducing inequality.

We can strategically work together towards this vision from two angles: by strengthening the capability of the community services sector, and by developing frameworks for long-term systemic and transformational change. Success requires collaboration across sectors, including the different levels of government, industry, unions, social services, and the community. It also requires the adoption of an intersectional framework to promote systems and ways of working that better meet the needs of people experiencing disadvantage and marginalisation in our society - to ensure no-one is left behind by our policies and strategies.

The WACOSS State Budget Submission 2022-2023 provides analysis and key recommendations for both immediate action and longer-term strategic planning across eight key focus areas: secure and affordable housing, health and wellbeing, income security and financial resilience, climate justice and disaster resilience, closing the gap, gender equity, the care industry and human rights and community wealth. Our aim is to move the pandemic recovery conversation beyond the economy towards a person-centred recovery that focuses on outcomes and wellbeing. Taking us from:

**Economic Recovery:** overcoming challenges and regaining productivity

to

**Building Resilience:** responding well to unique and disruptive challenges

to

**Stronger Communities:** working together and emerging fairer

Together, we can achieve our shared vision for a Western Australia that is fair, safe and strong.

## Recommendations

### The Care Industry

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- Build a shared data asset to enable outcome-based commissioning based on the WA Outcomes Measurement Framework
- Ensure short-term contract extensions are sustainably funded while reforms occur
- Establish success criteria and an evaluation framework for integrated services and place-based initiatives
- Partner in a WA Care Industry Plan to develop effective care systems and address future workforce gaps and capability needs

### Climate Justice and Disaster Resilience

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- Legislate ambitious carbon emissions reduction targets to reach net zero
- Create climate proof civic infrastructure and community spaces with local governments
- Free public transport for all concession-card holders, including those experiencing unemployment or with refugee status
- Develop and implement a WA Community Disaster Resilience Strategy
- Broaden the membership in emergency management committees to include representatives from the community service sector

### Closing the Gap

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- Progress the Implementation Plan to expand the role of Aboriginal community-controlled organisations
- Establish a WA Reparations for Stolen Generations Scheme
- Raise the age of criminal responsibility to 14 years' old
- Partner with local communities to co-design new justice reinvestment sites

### Gender Equity

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- Create workforce development and retention strategies for female-dominated industries
- Establish a gender-responsive budgeting unit within Treasury
- Adequately resource culturally-aware and community-led family healing approaches
- Fund evidence-based men's behaviour change programs
- Invest in community-wide sexual violence prevention that encourage respect for gender, sexuality and cultural diversity across the age spectrum

**Health and Wellbeing**

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- Adopt a WA Child and Family Wellbeing Framework and implementation plan
- Support community-based initiatives that reduce loneliness and social isolation
- Address service gaps for young people from diverse backgrounds
- Fund dedicated school-based youth workers to improve wellbeing

**Human Rights and Community Wealth**

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- Introduce a WA Human Rights Act
- Ban all LGBTQA+ conversion practices
- Develop community and worker owned models of regional economic development
- Create a windfall gains charge and increase the gold royalty rate

**Income Security and Financial Resilience**

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- Develop and resource a nutrition-focused food relief policy
- Initiate a Secure Work Pilot Scheme
- Increase flexibility of disaster relief funds to respond to widespread financial hardship
- Shift to percentage-based energy concessions

**Secure and Affordable Housing**

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- Implement inclusionary zoning with social and affordable housing targets for new developments
- Fast track reform of the Residential Tenancies Act to improve renters' rights
- Introduce a vacant residential property charge
- Partner with local councils and community housing organisations to provide affordable rentals for low-income workers

## The Care Industry

The healthcare and social assistance industry is one of the largest and fastest-growing employers in WA, and a major contributor to the WA economy.<sup>1</sup> It provides services that assist those made vulnerable and who are excluded by societal systems and structures to overcome barriers and improve wellbeing, and creates careers that give people the opportunity to meaningfully contribute to our community. Community-based organisations mobilise a mass of local volunteers, bringing people together to create a sense of community and belonging that builds inclusion and resilience.

At the same time, community services in WA are facing rapid and substantial changes in order to respond to an ageing population, the roll-out of the NDIS, greater demands for early education and care, and emerging challenges to the mental health and wellbeing of many within our community. These challenges are exacerbated in a time of crisis, particularly for our youth.

### Developing Strategic Commissioning Models

A more strategic, rigorous and transparent approach to the commissioning of social services<sup>2</sup> delivered by the public and community sectors in WA has the potential to better improve outcomes for our community and respond to the challenges we face together. If it is done well, with coordination and consistency across government agencies, and underpinned by robust data on service need, coverage and outcomes, it will give community members and Cabinet confidence that public resources are being directed where they can make the greatest difference.

To ensure that the State Government's strategic commissioning reforms deliver on their potential, it is critical that we get the systems and processes right. This requires good governance and transparency, with the roles and responsibilities of the key players made clear, including central government and commissioning agencies, peak bodies, service users and providers, researchers and evaluators, networks and communities. We need a collaborative approach to building our shared capability over time that is underpinned by mutual trust and respect.

To get to this point we need to balance proper process with the desire to act quickly. Some easy wins can be achieved if we evaluate the outcomes and return on investment of existing best-practice collective impact initiatives, followed by integrating contracting and reporting arrangements. The recent WA Budget has done this with two collaborative projects – [Olabud Doogethu](#) in Halls Creek and the [Home Stretch](#) trial with Anglicare and Yorganop in Perth. Other successful initiatives, such as

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<sup>1</sup> D Gilchrist and T Emery (2020) [Western Australia's Not-for-profit Landscape](#)

<sup>2</sup> Department of Finance (2021) [State Commissioning Strategy discussion paper](#)

the [Youth Partnership Project](#) in Armadale and Gosnells, [Imagined Futures](#) in Fremantle, Melville and Cockburn, and [Connecting Communities for Kids](#) in Cockburn and Kwinana could be next in line for evaluation of impact and consolidation of funding, but remain at risk of discontinuation if a single funder or partner is lost.

A business-as-usual approach that relies on existing contracting processes and engagement mechanisms is unlikely to succeed without the capability, confidence and culture to implement strategic commissioning effectively. This is why we need a shared path to build expertise in co-design, outcome measurement and evaluation.

We need to establish a mechanism where existing collaborative projects that are working well are brought to a central authority (possibly a social impact evaluation unit within Treasury) to evaluate their effectiveness, develop or ratify outcome measures, then develop future funding models.

Secondly, while the focus of the first round of Agency Commissioning Plans may be on ensuring expiring contracts are renewed in a timely fashion, it is also desirable that we are collectively identifying the most promising areas for outcome-based programs to be co-designed. Funding agencies are often unaware of existing integrated service models that combine multiple contracts across programs and funders. Collaboration is needed with the community sector so we can build capability and success over time. Both Departments of Finance (with their role in procurement and oversight of the State Commissioning Strategy) and Premier and Cabinet (with their role in policy development and governance) have the relevant expertise to play a key role in identifying those strategic pilot projects most likely to succeed and to deliver important lessons for future strategic commissioning.

Thirdly, we need to develop robust and reliable outcome measures across programs, agencies and disciplines, together with a shared capability to implement, measure and evaluate them. This requires central oversight and advice within government, the relevant knowledge and practice within commissioning agencies and service networks, and we encourage engagement with the independent expertise in our research institutions.

Supporting a shared data asset across research institutions that is backed by common data and measurement protocols will reduce the reliance of government on expensive one-off reports from consultants. Over time, better measurement of service and population outcomes across programs, agencies and portfolios will give us the insight needed to shift the dial on early intervention and prevention, reducing the growing cost of crisis services.

We note that the recent [Digital Strategy for the Western Australian Government 2021-2025](#) and the [Digital Capability Fund](#) announced in the 2021-22 State Budget provide a mechanism to develop a whole-of-government and whole-of-sector social outcomes data asset to provide a focal point for driving these reforms. This potentially aligns with the existing cross-university collaboration to develop an independent social impact data asset to drive collaborative research excellence in this field. Under the terms of the Fund there would need to be a lead government agency driving this initiative – such as Department of Communities (key role in social outcomes), Treasury (central role in evaluation), or be linked to the current work in Department of Health in implementing the WA Outcome Measurement Framework as part of the Sustainable Health Review.

Finally, we need to develop cross-portfolio systems to support local stakeholders to address local priorities. This requires an alignment of central and local leadership to enable the sharing of priorities, resources and outcomes across portfolios. Efforts to date to achieve this through District Leadership Groups have largely depended on the capability of local managers, the discretion given to them by their agencies, and their willingness to engage with local services and communities.

Service users and those with lived experience need to be meaningful partners in co-design and co-evaluation to ensure success.<sup>3</sup> Ideally, what we need is key success criteria and a project development framework for identifying and progressing the most promising opportunities to establish place-based initiatives, led by a central government agency capable of funding and evaluating these initiatives.

Unfortunately, there are a number of services whose contracts will need to be rolled-over yet again while the State Government's strategic commissioning reforms progress. Many have had multiple extensions over the years, with no opportunity to renegotiate funding and so now face significant sustainability challenges. Funding agencies need to consider interim arrangements in future budget bids to ensure that services remain viable and ready to engage in these important reforms. All extended contracts should be entitled to a minimum uplift of 10 per cent in their funding and the indexation policy reviewed to determine if it remains fit for purpose.

### **Industry Planning**

To further extend the opportunity the strategic reform of commissioning provides, a Care Industry Plan should be developed that positions the community sector to be able to appropriately respond to future gaps in capability and workforce needs, as demand for services grows and evolves. Better

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<sup>3</sup> See the WACOSS [Lived Experience Framework](#) and [Partnering with ACCOs](#) report.

data on service outcomes and clear evidence of community need will also support the development of an industry plan that ensures our response is coordinated and effective.

A ten-year care industry plan would provide a unified vision that enables funders, service providers and communities to align their needs and priorities to plan and invest for the future. We need to better capture the voice and aspirations of people in our community, particularly those most excluded and with lived experience of hardship. We need to make an impact in peoples' lives in the places they live and come together. We need to strengthen the capability of community services to meet emerging challenges, adopt evidence-based best practice and make a real difference. We need to build effective community service system architecture to enable outcome-based commissioning and shift the dial over time on prevention, early intervention and diversion. We need engaged and effective local networks that support place-based solutions to local needs. We need strong and effective governance and transparent reporting on priorities, investments and outcomes.

The plan is something that the industry should lead, in close collaboration with the WA Government, and with the support of experts in community need, outcome measurement and system design. It should be a plan by the industry, for the industry, with the WA community at its heart. Our challenge is to build shared capability and understanding across the public and community sectors, and across disciplines and portfolios. By leveraging the opportunities of strong data sharing systems and effective evaluation we can better understand community need, identify gaps in service coverage, develop flexible and responsive service systems, and transform service practice.

### **Recommendations**

- Build a shared data asset to enable outcome-based commissioning based on the WA Outcomes Measurement Framework
- Ensure short-term contract extensions are sustainably funded while reforms occur
- Establish success criteria and an evaluation framework for integrated services and place-based initiatives
- Partner in a WA Care Industry Plan to develop effective care systems and address future workforce gaps and capability needs

## COMMUNITY PROFILE

**ALBANY / KINJARLING**

Albany is a port city in the great southern region of Western Australia, on the lands of the Menang Noongar people, home to more than 34,000 people. The median age for residents in the Albany region is 43 years-old, higher than the Western Australian median age of 36.

At the WACOSS community conversations, services highlighted how social isolation and loneliness among older people in the region has been made more salient by the COVID-19 pandemic. Instances of older people living by themselves in homes or caravan parks on the edges of town were commonplace. Programs and recovery opportunities, especially in regional areas such as Albany, have been increasingly technological in focus. Older citizens, people with disabilities, those with transient housing, and people with low literacy – particularly low digital literacy - have been unable to access online resources and core Government services and programs.

In addition, a growing number of middle class families are seeking access to emergency relief and charity food, both through their own networks and via local providers. The stigmatisation of accessing services and the complexities of navigating a fragmented emergency relief system are barriers for many seeking necessary first-time support, with fear from the sector that debt and hardship will only deepen. As reflected across the state, services have reported increases in the number of women experiencing family and domestic violence in the region. An absence of affordable housing and a lack of refuge and transitional accommodation options are forcing women to return to their perpetrators and unsafe home environments.

The community identified several solutions that with state government policy and commitment can address the growing complexity of need in their region. These include: in-person support for accessing Government services and programs that can be facilitated through existing programs such as community resource centres, neighbourhood centres and community legal centres; investing in the community sector workforce so that they can be supported to build and maintain relationships with community and local population; and resourcing perpetrator intervention systems to augment existing family and domestic violence efforts and allow women and children to stay in their homes.

## Climate Justice and Disaster Resilience

The results from the latest Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change report are in and they make for sober reading. There is, unequivocally, no more time to delay. We need immediate and ambitious action to reduce carbon emissions if we are going to keep our planet liveable.

It is overwhelmingly clear that those experiencing poverty are more vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. Poverty significantly increases peoples' susceptibility to poor health and wellbeing outcomes resulting from climate hazards such as heatwaves, droughts, floods, cyclones, and wildfires. With limited access to resources, disposable income, choice, power and social connections, people in poverty are less able to cope, adapt and recover from these hazards.<sup>4</sup> The physical and mental health impacts in turn make it harder for people to find or engage in work or study, further entrenching hardship and poverty.<sup>5</sup> Those who have contributed the least to causing climate change are the ones who will be, and already are, hit by it the hardest. That is true both on a global scale, but also within Australia and our state.

By acting early, and anticipating and addressing the changes we now face, more just outcomes can be achieved for all communities and workers across WA. The establishment of the \$750 million Climate Action Fund in the McGowan Government's 2021-22 State Budget is an important step to improve the climate-resilience of our state and move towards a low-carbon future.

It is critical that government, unions and civil society work together to ensure an inclusive and equitable climate transition. To drive this action further and to ensure it remains a focus for future parliaments, we must legislate ambitious carbon emission reduction targets to decarbonise our economy and reach net zero as quickly as possible.

### Escaping the Heat

In recent decades, heatwave events have increased in intensity, frequency and duration across Australia, and are considered Australia's deadliest natural disaster, accounting for almost five times more fatalities than bushfires.<sup>6</sup>

People experiencing homelessness, whether it be street-present, sleeping in cars or in overcrowded accommodation, have a high level of exposure to extreme weather events and the significant risks

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<sup>4</sup> Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. (2007) [Climate change 2007: Impacts, adaptation and vulnerability](#).

<sup>5</sup> SN Islam & J Winkel (2017) [Climate change and social inequality](#) (United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs DESA Working Paper No. 152).

<sup>6</sup> Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements (2020) [Report of the Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements](#).

associated with heat stress. When people attempt to escape the heat by seeking shade by the entrance to a building, or access places with air-conditioning like libraries, cinemas and shops, they are liable to be moved on, making such strategies difficult to sustain.

Heat stress can also be a significant factor for those in housing with poor ventilation and insulation, and no or inadequate air-conditioning. Research conducted by RMIT highlighted the danger posed to at-risk households by the increasing prevalence of extreme heat. Service providers reported that many people accessing their services avoided using air conditioners and fans due to energy costs.<sup>7</sup>

Later in this submission we discuss the need to introduce minimum standards for rental properties, which is part of addressing this issue, but we must also ensure that there are publicly accessible places for people to seek refuge from the heat. Blacktown City Council in Western Sydney has established a heat refuge network of council and community-run air-conditioned venues, with access to toilets, comfortable seating and cold water. These heat refuges provide a space for the community to gather during high temperature days to shelter from extreme heat.<sup>8</sup>

### **Transport**

Transportation is a major driver of carbon emissions across the world and WA is no exception. It is imperative that people shift away from heavy polluting vehicles towards cleaner alternatives, including public transportation. In order to encourage people to increase their use of public transport for commuting, we must ensure that it is affordable and accessible for everyone in our community. The State Government's cap on all bus, train, and ferry fares at two-zones is a very welcome step in this direction, particularly for those living in the outer suburbs.

For those on lower incomes, fare-free options should be investigated. A lack of affordable, accessible transport was reported as a barrier to gaining employment by 17 per cent of the participants in the *100 Families WA* study.<sup>9</sup> Currently, seniors card-holders are able to travel for free on public transport during off-peak times. This arrangement should be expanded to other people in our community with the greatest need for free travel, such as those experiencing unemployment and those eligible for the recently established Asylum Seeker Hub concession. While these people have access to concessions, they often have the least income to be able to cover the cost of transport and have a greater need for it to be free.

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<sup>7</sup> L Nicholls, H McCann, Y Strengers, & K Bosomworth (2017) [Heatwaves, homes and health: Why household vulnerability to extreme heat is an electricity policy issue](#).

<sup>8</sup> M Amin (2021) ['Heat refuges' may be one solution to Western Sydney's climate emergency](#), ABC News

<sup>9</sup> [100 Families WA Baseline Report](#) (2019)

## Disaster Resilience

Australia's disaster outlook is distressing. Climate-driven natural hazards are becoming more frequent, intense and compounding. Direct and indirect disaster costs in Australia are projected to increase from an average of \$18.2 billion per year to \$39 billion per year by 2050, even without accounting for climate change.<sup>10</sup> Natural disasters can incur significant and often long-term costs, including death, physical and psychological injury, damage to property, infrastructure, heritage and cultural sites, and adverse impacts on employment, education, community networks and public health. The capacity of communities and systems to be resilient diminishes as disaster risk increases.

Consecutive and compounding natural disasters will also place increasing stress on existing emergency management arrangements. Emergency and recovery planning and coordination require a collective and collaborative approach to be effective and better respond to the inherent fatigue, confusion, and trauma within communities when navigating these processes. Key stakeholders with important roles and capabilities in response and recovery efforts, such as primary health providers, emergency relief and charity food providers, and other critical place-based community groups who support vulnerable groups like people with disabilities, people seeking asylum, multicultural groups and young people, are not routinely included in state preparedness and resilience plans.

In order to ensure all Western Australians are best prepared and supported to face the growing impacts of climate change and frequency of natural disasters, our communities and the services that support them need to be included in the planning and processes that lead to emergency and disaster preparedness, response and recovery.

## Recommendations

- Legislate ambitious carbon emissions reduction targets to reach net zero
- Climate proof civic infrastructure and community spaces with local governments to establish a formalised network of local heat refuges
- Free public transport for all concession-card holders, including those experiencing unemployment or with refugee status
- Develop and implement a WA Community Disaster Resilience Strategy
- Broaden the membership in emergency management committees to include representatives from the community service sector

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<sup>10</sup> Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements (2020)

## COMMUNITY PROFILE

**BROOME / RUBIBI**

The Shire of Broome is located in the south-west Kimberley region of Western Australia, with a population of approximately 14,000 people. Broome is situated on the lands of the Yawuru Native Title holders, with a total of 84 Aboriginal communities located within the expansive Shire.

The current housing crisis in Western Australia is acutely felt by local people in the Shire of Broome. A shortage of rental properties and safe and secure housing options is adding undue stress to residents and leading to poorer outcomes for the community. A lack of safe and secure housing has contributed to further overcrowding in remote communities and in regional centres where private tenants have been pushed out of the rental market.

This stressed rental market is putting more people in need of public and emergency housing, forcing people in need of these services into or at risk of homelessness. The community service sector believes that interim solutions to address housing needs should be fit for purpose, including options for families with children who also have cultural and familial obligations.

As experienced across other regional centres, Broome's care sector workforce is reliant on recruiting the partners of those relocating to work in local industries. Attracting and maintaining a skilled workforce in both the public and not-for-profit sectors is a perennial issue in Broome, further complicated by the social and economic impacts of COVID-19. Increasing the flexibility of position criteria to accommodate applicants with equivalent skills and experience may assist with workforce attainment, particularly given the limited tertiary courses offered locally. Culturally safe alternative pathways to employment for young Aboriginal people can provide opportunities for purposeful employment as well as connections to culture, country and community.

Across all regional issue areas, the community advocates strongly for place-based solutions with community leaders at the forefront of decision making and implementation.

## Closing the Gap

Through its time in leadership to date, the McGowan Government has demonstrated a strong commitment to building economic opportunities for Aboriginal people and for closing the gaps in social, economic and health outcomes and life opportunities. This has included implementing targeted procurement policies, building strong partnerships with Aboriginal organisations, investing in a range of services, and crucial legislative reform, such as ending imprisonment for unpaid fines, which disproportionately impacted Aboriginal people.

Even with these important steps, it is recognised within government and across the community, that significant progress is still needed to improve the wellbeing of Aboriginal people in WA, and to end their overrepresentation in both the justice and out-of-home care systems. Systemic reform is required that prioritises the self-determination of Aboriginal people, and addresses the continued impacts of colonisation and intergenerational trauma.

In September 2021, the McGowan Government released its first Implementation Plan for Closing the Gap and the Aboriginal Empowerment Strategy. These documents provide the groundwork for a significant shift in the way that government has typically related to Aboriginal people in WA, with a new focus on empowerment, truth-telling, culture and country permeating the direction they set.<sup>11</sup>

It is incumbent now upon the State Government to ensure that these plans are acted upon and the outcomes they seek are achieved. The community services sector has a critical role in the delivery of these priorities, partnering with government to create systems and services that are culturally secure and safe, and significantly increasing the proportion of those services that are delivered by Aboriginal community-controlled organisations.

### Reparations for the Stolen Generations

The 1997 *Bringing them Home* report recommended that all Australian parliaments make appropriate reparation to respond to the effects of forcible removals and in recognition of the history of gross violations of human rights against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.<sup>12</sup> Since that report, NSW, South Australia, Victoria and Tasmania have introduced Stolen Generations redress schemes, with the Federal Government announcing its own scheme in August 2021 for the Northern Territory, ACT and Jervis Bay.

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<sup>11</sup> Hon Stephen Dawson MLC (2021) '[State Government releases Aboriginal Empowerment Strategy and Closing the Gap Implementation Plan](#)', *Media Statements*

<sup>12</sup> Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (1997) [Bringing them Home: Report of the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families](#)

It is pressing that Western Australia, with our own shameful local history of forcible removals of Aboriginal children from their families, introduce a reparations scheme for people who were part of the Stolen Generations and their communities. While Western Australia has previously established the Redress WA scheme, this was specifically targeted at addressing ‘abuse suffered’ and so did not provide reparations that reached all those identified in the *Bringing them Home* report.<sup>13</sup>

A dedicated Stolen Generations reparations scheme will be necessary both as part of the much-needed truth-telling identified in the Implementation Plan for Closing the Gap and as an acknowledgment for the significant and ongoing harm that these practices have caused.

### **Raising the Age of Criminal Responsibility**

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people in the WA justice system are incarcerated at the most disproportionate rate in the entire country, and one of the highest rates in the world.<sup>14</sup> A study by the Telethon Kids Institute at the Banksia Hill Detention Centre identified that 90 per cent of young people in detention have at least one severe neuro-developmental impairment, with one in three young people in custody having Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder.<sup>15</sup>

Not only is our current approach to incarcerating children unjust, it is also profoundly damaging to their long-term wellbeing. Many studies have shown that detention is detrimental to a child’s psychological health and mental wellbeing both in the short and long term. Detention also disrupts children’s education and social development, as well as exposing them to other children and young people who may encourage anti-social and offending behaviour.<sup>16</sup>

Further, this approach fails to effectively rehabilitate and reintegrate young people, as is demonstrated by its high recidivism rates, with 55 per cent of children in Banksia Hill in 2019/2020 having been imprisoned previously.<sup>17</sup> Even through a cold economic lens keeping children in detention cannot be justified, with it costing nearly nine times as much to incarcerate a child than to support them in the community with other interventions.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Western Australian Stolen Generations Aboriginal Corporations (2020) [Submission and Response: WA Government’s Aboriginal Empowerment Strategy](#)

<sup>14</sup> Social Reinvestment WA (2021) [Raising the Minimum Age of Criminal Responsibility](#)

<sup>15</sup> Telethon Kids Institute (2017) *Implications and recommendations from the Telethon Kids Banksia Hill Project*

<sup>16</sup> E Baldry and C Cunneen (2019) [‘Locking up kids damages their mental health and leads to more disadvantage. Is this what we want?’](#) University of New South Wales

<sup>17</sup> Department of Justice (2020) [Annual Report, 2019/20](#), WA Government

<sup>18</sup> WA Government (2020) [Western Australia State Budget 2020-21, Budget Paper, No. 2, Budget Statements Volume 2](#)

There is a reason that globally the median age of criminal responsibility is 14 years old and not 10, as it is in Western Australia. It is time for us to catch up to the rest of the world and raise the minimum age of criminal responsibility to at least 14 years old, finally ending the practice of WA children aged 10 to 13 years old being charged, tried and sentenced.

### **The Social Reinvestment Approach**

By addressing the causes of crime and intervening early to prevent offending from occurring in the first place, better outcomes can be achieved for community safety than through a narrow focus on punishment and incarceration.

Instead, we need to take a Social Reinvestment Approach to justice. This kind of approach is evidence based, and responds to the underlying causes of offending, reducing both crime and costs, and supporting the social and economic development of disadvantaged communities. The social causes of crime are complex, and a one-size-fits-all approach does not work. Creating healthier families, safer communities, and implementing smart justice approaches requires both cross-government and cross-sector collaboration and reform; and empowered communities leading local solutions.

The Olabud Doogethu Project in Halls Creek is Social Reinvestment WA's first Justice Reinvestment trial site. Driven by the local community, the project has already seen considerable success, with initial results showing a significant reduction in burglaries, stolen motor vehicles and stealing offences. These results demonstrate the validity of the justice reinvestment philosophy behind Olabud Doogethu and Social Reinvestment WA. To replicate this success across WA, the State Government should work with local communities to co-design new justice reinvestment projects.

### **Recommendations**

- Progress the Implementation Plan for Closing the Gap to expand the role of Aboriginal community-controlled organisations
- Establish a WA Reparations for Stolen Generations Scheme
- Raise the age of criminal responsibility to 14 years' old
- Partner with local communities to co-design new justice reinvestment sites

## COMMUNITY PROFILE

**BUNBURY / GOOMBURRUP**

The City of Bunbury is located 180 kilometres south of Perth, Western Australia and is regarded as a hub for the Bunbury-Geographe region. Bunbury is located on the lands of the Wardandi Noongar people.

Echoing similar concerns around the state, services in Bunbury have recognised an increase in family and domestic violence in their region, but acknowledge that there are not sufficient systems in place to effectively measure and monitor this change. They highlighted a need for a shared framework or model with standardised reporting requirements that applies to all sectors, services and workforces that intersect with family violence. Such a framework could provide a common language for key concepts and practices, supporting a better understanding of family violence across sectors, and enhance the sharing of information and collaboration across agencies and services.

The triggers of family and domestic violence, such as financial stress and debt, are increasing. Financial counsellors are seeing rising numbers of middle-income earners experiencing financial hardship, believing this to be a result of a combination of loss of income and low financial literacy. Additionally, gambling has become an increasingly normalised aspect of sports fandom for men, fuelled by heavy advertising and mobile app technologies, and is leading to serious levels of undisclosed debt. Services have pointed to the need for male-targeted interventions and supports to better address growing financial hardship and rising incidents of family and domestic violence.

To strengthen community resilience in the long-term, services identified a clear need for investment in prevention and early-intervention strategies. School-based education streams targeted at tackling gender inequality, financial resilience and mental health literacy, were suggested as more cost-effective ways to address some of the emerging issues, but require adequate funding in order to make their delivery sustainable.

## Gender Equity

COVID-19 brought into sharp focus the persistent gendered asymmetries in our society, and in many cases these were compounded, particularly in the areas of paid and unpaid labour. Women are over-represented in sectors that were both hardest hit by lockdown measures and heavily reliant on casual workers, such as retail, hospitality, accommodation and the arts, meaning they not only faced higher job losses, but they were also largely ineligible for JobKeeper.<sup>19</sup> Women also account for the majority of those working on the frontline in the healthcare sector, or what are considered to be high-risk environments in the community services sector such as aged care, not only exposing them to greater health risks but also longer hours and increased responsibilities, despite their low pay.<sup>20</sup>

Research shows that gender segregation is one of the most important contributing factors in Australia's gender pay gap, with female-dominated industries and jobs attracting lower wages. At an industry level, gender segregation has intensified over the last two decades, particularly in health care and social assistance, and in education and training.<sup>21</sup> In addition to the gender pay gap, research demonstrates that Australian women face inequality in the workplace in the following areas: lower-paid and more precarious forms of employment, lower superannuation balances, and gender power inequalities that place them at greater risk of workplace and sexual harassment.<sup>22</sup> These factors are partly responsible for women being more likely to live in, and spend more years living in, poverty than men.

Despite the clear gendered impacts of the pandemic, government policies and investment continues to categorically disadvantage women by favouring male-dominated industries like manufacturing and construction. In a move that is widely considered a nation-leading approach to advancing gender equality, the Victorian Government has recently established a gender-responsive budgeting unit, ensuring outcomes for women are specifically measured as part of all budget decisions.<sup>23</sup> Following Victoria's example, there is scope for pragmatic policy responses in Western Australia to address women's workforce participation, working conditions and economic security.

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<sup>19</sup> Dwyer (2020) COVID19 – Impact on Women: The need for effective and equitable recovery policies and interventions.

<sup>20</sup> G Matthewson & N Kalms (2020). [The Essential Gendered Lens](#). THE SITE MAGAZINE.

<sup>21</sup> S Charlesworth & M Smith (2018) 'Gender Pay Equity,' *The Wages Crisis in Australia: What it is and what to do about it*. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.20851/wages-crisis>

<sup>22</sup> Australian Human Rights Commission (2017). [Unleashing the power of gender equality: Priorities of Kate Jenkins Australian Sex Discrimination Commissioner](#).

<sup>23</sup> Victorian Budget 2021/2022. [Gender Equality Budget Statement](#). Government of Victoria.

### **Family and Domestic Violence**

Family and domestic violence is considered preventable based on the enabling and modifiable social, cultural and economic structural conditions. With an increasing research base evidencing the requirement for a whole-of-government, whole-of-community cross-sector response, it is pertinent investment is funnelled into the prevention of violence, collective healing, place-based interventions and challenging societal norms.

The factors associated with gender inequality are the most reliable predictors of family and domestic violence, and that alcohol, other drug use and mental health issues interact to increase the probability, frequency, or severity of family and domestic violence.<sup>24</sup> It is imperative services are equipped to work in an integrated way to improve the safety, health and wellbeing outcomes for victim-survivors as well as respond holistically and appropriately to those who disclose or identify as perpetrators of violence and/or abuse. Rigorous policy and a strategic and resourced commitment to building the workforce is critical in providing a systemic response while equally acknowledging the importance of localised contexts and responses.

Recent research into interventions for perpetrators of family and domestic violence proposes that human services work in an integrated way with the legal system and specialist men's family violence interventions to create a 'web of accountability'.<sup>25</sup> This 'web of accountability' includes the 'surveillance (formally through the legal system or informally through the community) effective engagement and appropriate referrals and integrated service systems that monitor and respond to risk'.<sup>26</sup> For this to be effective, adequate resourcing for men's behaviour change programs is paramount to allow men's longer-term participation with a focus on prioritising women's safety.

### **Community-Led and Culturally Appropriate Services**

Colonisation and other associated factors have been identified as a precursor to family violence for many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women. Systemic disadvantage, forced removal of children, cultural dislocation, gender and racial discrimination, oppression and intergenerational impacts of trauma shape the experiences of family violence in communities.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Evans, et. al., (2020) Towards an integrated response to the complex interplay of domestic and family violence, alcohol and other drug use and mental health in Western Australia.

<sup>25</sup> Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety. (2021). *Interventions for perpetrators of domestic, family and sexual violence in Australia* (ANROWS Insights, 02/2021). ANROWS.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Blagg, et al. (2020) *What works? Exploring the literature on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander healing programs that respond to family violence* (Research report, 01/2021). ANROWS.

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Healing Foundation Development Team strongly advises investment in four primary principles to support the healing of Aboriginal peoples:

1. A focus on addressing the causes of community dysfunction, not its symptoms
2. Aboriginal ownership, definition, design and evaluation of healing initiatives
3. Initiatives based on Aboriginal worldviews
4. Strengthen and support initiatives that use strength-based approaches to healing<sup>28</sup>

Solutions that focus on the restoration of family cohesion and community healing are preferred, particularly those that allow the ‘victim-survivor and perpetrator deal with their pain and suffering’.<sup>29</sup> Collective healing is about encompassing a culturally based approach viewing the individual in the context of their family, community, culture and country.<sup>30</sup>

Members of culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities have differing identifications and power structures that interact to shape their experience.<sup>31</sup> Investment in time and resources to build trusting relationships to support CALD communities from an individualised, strengths-based and gender-equitable approach<sup>32</sup> is equally important to providing appropriate services.

### Recommendations

- Resource and develop workforce development and retention strategies to address worker shortages in female-dominated industries
- Establish a gender-responsive budgeting unit within Department of Treasury
- Adequately resource culturally aware and community-led family healing programs
- Invest in community-wide sexual violence prevention activities that encourage respect for gender, sexuality and cultural diversity across the age spectrum
- Fund evidence-based men’s behavior change programs

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<sup>28</sup> ATSIHFDT (2009) [Voices from the Campfires](#)

<sup>29</sup> A Olsen & R Lovett (2016). *Existing knowledge, practice and responses to violence against women in Australian Indigenous communities: Key findings and future directions* ANROWS Compass, 01/2016

<sup>30</sup> Healing Foundation. (2016). *Restoring our spirits – Reshaping our futures*. Healing Foundation.

<sup>31</sup> ANRWOS (2021). *Best practice for working with culturally and linguistically diverse communities in addressing violence against women* (ANROWS Insights, 03/2021)

<sup>32</sup> M Koleth, N Serova & BK Trojanowska (2020). *Prevention and safer pathways to services for migrant and refugee communities*. ANROWS Insights, 01/2020)

## COMMUNITY PROFILE

**GERALDTON / JAMBINU & THE MID WEST**

The town of Geraldton acts as a key service hub for the Mid West region, with outreach services delivered to surrounding towns. Its traditional owners are the Amangu people of the Yamatji nation. Distance can be a significant challenge here and funding has not kept pace with the cost of service delivery, leaving many services stretched and outlying towns increasingly at risk of missing out. Community service networks remain strong in the region, as they have to work together to get by.

Cyclone Seroja had a devastating impact on the region in April, with 70% of buildings in Kalbarri and Northhampton destroyed. Mid West communities were quick to aid their neighbours, and emergency relief efforts have been commendable, but recovery and rebuilding is proving slow and difficult.

Insurance and compensation issues have become major challenges for families and local legal services, and many are still in temporary accommodation, such as tents and caravans. Damage was much more extensive than expected, with inquiries finding that debris rather than wind speed alone was the main cause of damage. Changes to building codes and standards will be required, as we look to build back better and be prepared for more extreme weather events in a changing climate.

While the Mid West was spared the health challenges of the pandemic, the economic impacts have been felt acutely, particularly when it comes to housing and homelessness. The existing shortage in affordable rentals was exacerbated by population growth, as many families returned home from elsewhere to avoid COVID-19, or lost work and income. Much of the old public housing stock has been poorly maintained and has become uninhabitable. Minister John Carey recently committed \$9 million for refurbishment and redevelopment in Spalding (and \$5 million in Bunbury and \$4 million in Albany), but with the current construction boom it will take some time before the housing pressures ease.

Youth homeless services have faced their toughest time in many decades, as already scarce affordable and appropriate accommodation in town has dried up and been taken off the market. Local services have seen young people forced to exit into homelessness. During the COVID lockdowns, local services had to find new ways to reach out and show how much they care.

## Health and Wellbeing

### Child and Family Wellbeing

Many families with young children continue to be affected by the ongoing uncertainty and unpredictability of life during a pandemic. While all families have experienced unique challenges in responding to COVID-19 lockdowns and restrictions, children, families and carers who were already experiencing disadvantage continue to face increased and differential impacts that threaten to widen the socioeconomic inequalities in child wellbeing and development.

To ensure every child realises their potential for a healthy and fulfilling life, a Child and Family Wellbeing Framework should be developed for WA, designed in partnership with children, young people and their families, and owned and endorsed by the public and community services sectors. Building on similar examples in Tasmania, Queensland and New Zealand, as well as the WA Commissioner for Children and Young People's Wellbeing Monitoring Framework, the framework would identify shared measures and agreed data protocols across disciplines, which can be further refined and built on in time.

An effective framework will further align and coordinate efforts, recognising existing expertise and leadership, gaps and overlaps, and how we can provide joined-up support to children and families with the greatest need in a timely fashion – helping us to shift towards early intervention and reduce the growing cost of crisis services. Importantly, it creates an opportunity to better connect WA's world-leading research expertise in early childhood development with the support provided to WA families, leading to safer, stronger and supportive families and communities.

### Loneliness and Social Isolation

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, one in four Australians were experiencing loneliness, a feeling of distress driven by social isolation or dissatisfaction with relationships that leaves people feeling unsupported and disconnected.<sup>33</sup> Western Australians are experiencing major economic and social disruption, may be separated from loved ones interstate or overseas, and are subject to essential quarantine and social distancing interventions as a result of COVID-19. In this context, it is possible to more deeply appreciate the acute mental and physical health consequences of social isolation and loneliness, and how these may be heightened for different people and groups.

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<sup>33</sup> Australian Psychological Society (2018). [Australian Loneliness Report: A survey exploring the loneliness levels of Australians and the impact on their health and wellbeing](#). Swinburne University of Technology.

Research has demonstrated that social isolation and loneliness increases the likelihood of premature death by 29 and 26 per cent, respectively, comparable to that of obesity and cigarette smoking.<sup>34</sup> They are also linked to poorer physical and mental health such as depression, cardiovascular disease, cognitive decline, and sustained decreases in quality of life.<sup>35</sup> Social isolation and loneliness brought about by COVID-induced physical distancing measures, job loss, and the cancellation of community events may be disproportionately amplified for those already experiencing social exclusion in our society. Social exclusion is more prevalent among recipients of income support, people who are unemployed, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, people with a long-term mental or physical health condition or disability, single parents, public housing tenants and migrants from a non-English speaking background.<sup>36</sup>

While community service organisations have always been aware of this issue, it has come into much sharper focus during the pandemic. WACOSS has received anecdotal reports of newly jobless older Australians and those experiencing housing stress resorting to living in their cars or caravan parks, separating them from community life. In addition, older Western Australians living alone are retreating from public interactions for fear of potential risks to their health. Lack of transport options and/or digital connectivity are preventing people who have low digital literacy or are financially disadvantaged from accessing existing community services and resources that have moved online. These barriers are compounded by an internalised stigma and shame about growing hardship that stops people from reaching out and into the community for support.

We must recognise the reality of loneliness and social isolation in our communities as not just transient conditions, but enduring experiences that may last long beyond the pandemic.<sup>37</sup> This necessitates a strengthening of community services to be able to rebuild and sustain the social and emotional needs of the population – a task that will be critical to building stronger communities beyond recovery efforts.

### **Mental Health & Young People**

The potential for COVID-19 to impact mental health and wellbeing was recognised early in the pandemic. School-aged children and young people are particularly vulnerable to mental health

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<sup>34</sup> J Holt-Lunstad, T Smith, M Baker, T Harris & D Stephenson (2015) Loneliness and Social Isolation as Risk Factors for Mortality: A Meta-Analytic Review. *Perspectives on Psychological Science* 10:227–37.

<sup>35</sup> A Shankar, S Rafnsson & A Steptoe (2015) Longitudinal associations between social connections and subjective wellbeing in the English Longitudinal Study of Ageing. *Psychology & Health* 30:686–98.

<sup>36</sup> R McLachlan, G Gilfillan, and J Gordon (2013). Deep and Persistent Disadvantage in Australia. *Productivity Commission Staff Working Paper*.

<sup>37</sup> BJ Smith, MH Lim. How the COVID-19 pandemic is focusing attention on loneliness and social isolation. *Public Health Res Pract.* 2020;30(2):e3022008.

impacts, with the immense social and economic disruption, stress, and uncertainty occurring during a vital time in their lives. Compared with older age groups, young people have experienced high rates of psychological distress, loneliness, educational disruption, unemployment, housing stress and domestic violence.<sup>38</sup>

International and Australian data paint a concerning picture of the state of the mental health and emotional wellbeing of young people. There has been a decline in adolescent emotional wellbeing in WA over the past decade, with a clear gender gap.<sup>39</sup> Female young people are significantly more likely than their male peers to experience anxiety and depression, to have lower self-esteem and to be hospitalised as a result of intentional self-harm.<sup>40</sup> The Youth Affairs Council of WA's COVID-19 Youth Survey found an overwhelming 91 per cent of respondents have experienced impacts on their mental health and stress levels.<sup>41</sup> Even before the pandemic hit, WA's *School-aged Health Service Review* identified mental health issues of school-aged children and young people as the greatest health and wellbeing concern of community health nurses (CHNs). CHNs expressed concerns about their capacity to support young people experiencing mental health issues, particularly where families cannot access specialist or acute services in a reasonable time frame.<sup>42</sup>

This is particularly pertinent as the Western Australian public health system is experiencing an unprecedented, yet not entirely unpredictable, level of demand, together with workforce shortages that are exacerbated by high levels of staff stress, burnout and illness.<sup>43</sup> According to Health Director General Dr David Russell-Weisz, an increasing number of long stay patients in WA hospitals are awaiting discharge to supported community services, especially in mental health.<sup>44</sup> Through community consultation, mental health services have reported that they are at capacity, with a gross asymmetry between the number of young people needing access to affordable, timely services and the number of clients that services and specialists can accommodate. For young people from diverse backgrounds, lack of cultural understanding and sensitivity by mainstream services and the wider

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<sup>38</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2021). [COVID-19 and the impact on young people](#). Web Article.

<sup>39</sup> Commissioner for Children and Young People (2021). [Exploring the decline in wellbeing for Australian girls](#). Commissioner for Children and Young People WA.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Youth Affairs Council of Western Australia (2020) [Impacts of COVID-19 on young people in Western Australia: Feedback from the YACWA COVID-19 Youth Survey](#).

<sup>42</sup> WA Child and Adolescent Health Service (2019) [School-aged Health Service Review: key findings](#).

<sup>43</sup> M Pascual Juanola (2021) [Fiona Stanley staff 'having panic attacks' before work as pressure mounts](#). *WA Today*.

<sup>44</sup> Department of Health (2021) [Elective surgery rescheduled to reduce demand](#). WA Government.

community present additional barriers to accessing mental health services and preventative supports appropriate for their needs.<sup>45</sup>

Intervention early in life and early in mental illness can reduce its duration and impact on children and young people. To address the over-reliance and reduce the strain on hospital-based services, and ensure better mental health outcomes for young people and our community, the sector is calling for immediate, increased investment in preventative and community-based mental health services now and beyond the pandemic.<sup>46</sup>

**Recommendations:**

- Adopt a WA Child and Family Wellbeing Framework and implementation plan
- Fund community-based and local government initiatives to support social activities that reduce loneliness and social isolation
- Increase preventative and community support investment to reach the targets in the Mental Health, Alcohol and Other Drugs Services Plan.
- Address service gaps for LGBTIQ+ young people, young people from refugee and/or migrant backgrounds, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people, and young people living with a disability
- Fund dedicated school-based youth workers to improve gender equality outcomes in wellbeing

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<sup>45</sup> National Mental Health Consumer & Carer Forum (2014). [Culturally and Linguistically Diverse \(CALD\) Mental Health](#). Advocacy Brief.

<sup>46</sup> WAAMH (2020) [Crucial role of WA's mental health community support in spotlight as part of new campaign](#)

## COMMUNITY PROFILE

**KALGOORLIE-BOULDER / KARLKURLA**

Kalgoorlie-Boulder, on the lands of the Wongatha people, acts as the main regional centre for the Goldfields-Esperance region and is home to an estimated 29,055 people.

The COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in a number of unique challenges for First Nations people living in the region. Hundreds of artists based in remote communities have suffered devastating losses in revenue due to the diminished number of events and opportunities to sell their artworks. This is adversely affecting entire families who are reliant on these sales to meet their basic living provisions. Services have reported that visitors from remote communities are experiencing extreme levels of food insecurity and an inability to access safe and culturally appropriate accommodation.

As primary health services transitioned to online and tele based medical appointments during lockdown periods, these services became inaccessible for those in remote communities without access to digital technologies, adequate internet or sufficient digital literacy skills. Language barriers also play a major role in preventing Aboriginal people and communities from receiving quality healthcare information, an issue particularly pertinent in regards to COVID-19 facts and misinformation.

Services highlighted the importance of government quarantine facilities being culturally safe spaces for those undergoing mandatory isolation, whilst factual information in local languages could minimise the potential health impacts of the pandemic on Aboriginal families.

First Nations leaders have drawn specific attention to the need to decolonise Euro-centric policies, legislation and social service approaches that deny the knowledge, values, strategies, participation and leadership of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Enabling mainstream services to be more inclusive, accessible and responsive to diverse needs will help improve outcomes in the community. The availability of free and subsidised training, for example, has opened up affordable training options for more people to upskill and build pathways into employment.

## **Human Rights and Community Wealth**

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, Western Australians have demonstrated their solidarity and commitment to the collective good, as they continue to work together and make difficult sacrifices to keep our community safe.

With future crises increasingly likely, whether they be due to disease, bushfires and extreme weather events, or economic recessions, those values have never been more important. There are too many examples, however, within both Australia and other nations, that demonstrate how quickly they can be lost in the face of hyper-individualism and bigotry.

The task has always fallen to Labor when in government to create the legislative space for those values to be realised and protected. On the back of two historic WA Labor victories, the groundwork is in place for the legacy of this government to be the renewal and revitalisation of social democratic norms and institutions within our state.

### **A Human Rights Act**

From Doc Evatt at the United Nations, to Acts in Queensland (2019), Victoria (2006) and the ACT (2004), Labor has played a leading role in protecting human rights. In 2007, the Western Australian Government undertook a community consultation process, headed by Fred Chaney AO, which found that there was significant support for a WA Human Rights Act and recommended the introduction of legislation to protect civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights.

By adopting legislation similar to those in other states, we can, while maintaining parliamentary sovereignty, encourage a human rights culture throughout public institutions and provide protection for human rights, including freedom of association and the right to organise. It should also provide a mechanism for parliament to scrutinise whether legislation is compliant with the Human Rights Act, as well as access to meaningful remedies for individuals where their rights are determined to have been breached.

### **Harmful 'Conversion' Practices**

So-called 'conversion therapy' is a dangerous and morally repugnant practice that places LGBTIQ+ Western Australians at great risk. People who have survived these practices have been left with physical injuries and mental health issues, with the availability of the practices itself linked to lowered senses of self-worth and internalised homophobia. Research has identified that these

practices remain a very real and pervasive problem within Australian religious communities, and that legislative action is needed to bring these practices to an end.<sup>47</sup>

“Legislation that categorically outlaws conversion practices sends a clear message that this conduct is ineffective, not based in evidence, unethical and generally harmful.”

– *Preventing Harm, Promoting Justice Report*

Over the past two years, Victoria, Queensland and the ACT have all introduced legislation prohibiting conversion practices, with the Victorian legislation providing the greatest level of protections.

Western Australia should follow the recommendations of the Sexual Orientation & Gender Identity Change Efforts Survivor Statement.<sup>48</sup> The Victorian legislative model should be adopted that makes illegal practices that seek to change or suppress a person’s sexual orientation or gender identity, including those undertaken in religious settings. This is critical, as the *Preventing Harm, Promoting Justice* report makes clear that religious-based conversion practices are the most common.

### **Economic Democracy**

As part of ensuring that Western Australia’s representative democracy is trusted, healthy and functioning, the State Government has embarked on historic reforms so that electoral equality can be achieved for all citizens entitled to vote for the Legislative Council, as well as address how preferences are distributed in the Council’s proportional representation system.<sup>49</sup>

To further enable local communities to meaningfully participate in decision-making about their lives, we must explore opportunities that expand and enrich economic democracy. This can be achieved by implementing models like community wealth building – a systems approach to economic development that creates an inclusive, sustainable local economy built on locally rooted and broadly-held ownership. Community wealth building promotes models of ownership that enable the wealth created by workers and consumers to be held within those communities, rather than disappearing as profits for shareholders. In practice, this looks like establishing and supporting models like worker-owned co-operatives and community ownership structures throughout the supply chains of institutions that are significant fixtures within their local areas and are unlikely to shift, like local government authorities, hospitals, schools and universities.

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<sup>47</sup> T Jones et al (2018) [Preventing Harm, Promoting Justice: Responding to LGBT Conversion Therapy in Australia](#), La Trobe University, GLHV, Human Rights Law Centre

<sup>48</sup> [SOGICE Survivor Statement](#)

<sup>49</sup> The WACOSS submission to the Ministerial Expert Committee on Electoral Reform can be read here: [www.wacoss.org.au/library/submission-on-electoral-reform](http://www.wacoss.org.au/library/submission-on-electoral-reform)

Drawing upon the successful implementation of this approach in places such as Cleveland, USA and the Preston City Council in the United Kingdom,<sup>50</sup> a WA community wealth building strategy should be developed to facilitate local economic development that is owned by the community.

### **Progressive Revenue Measures**

Western Australia's state economy is in a globally enviable position, performing more strongly now on many metrics than it even had prior to the onset of the pandemic. As ever, however, we remain highly exposed to a boom and bust cycle strongly dictated by international events. With that consideration, we must not let WA's current economic success deter us from taking further measures to strengthen the state's revenue base in a fair and equitable manner. Not taking that action now could leave households bearing the burden of Budgetary constraints in the future. In addition to the vacant property tax proposed elsewhere in this submission, WACOSS recommends the introduction of a 'windfall gains' charge and an increase to the gold royalty rate.

Simply by virtue of owning significant swathes of land, rezoning decisions by government can generate unearned gains for already wealthy landowners and developers. As part of the 2021/22 Victorian Budget, the Andrews Labor Government has announced that it will introduce a levy of up to 50 per cent for windfalls above \$500,000.<sup>51</sup> A charge on changes in allowable land use resulting in unearned windfall gains is an efficient and equitable revenue measure.

Another fair and equitable means of strengthening state revenue would be to increase the gold royalty rate from 2.5 per cent to 3.75 per cent as recommended by the State Government's 2015 *Mineral Royalty Rate Analysis* in order "to make a return to the community comparable with the contributions from other mineral sectors."<sup>52</sup> While the Legislative Council blocked this sensible measure when it was introduced in 2017, we contend that an increase in the rate remains justified and the present term of government provides the opportunity to make this change.

### **Recommendations**

- Introduce a WA Human Rights Act
- Ban LGBTQA+ conversion practices and protect against conversion ideology
- Develop community and worker owned models of regional economic development
- Create a windfall gains charge and increase the gold royalty rate

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<sup>50</sup> M Kelly and S McKinley, '[Cities Building Community Wealth](#)'

<sup>51</sup> <https://www.premier.vic.gov.au/contributing-fair-share-stronger-victoria>

<sup>52</sup> Department of Mines and Petroleum (2015) *Mineral Royalty Rate Analysis – Final Report*

## COMMUNITY PROFILE

**MANDURAH / MANDJOOGOORDAP**

Mandurah is Western Australia's largest regional city and acts as a regional hub for Peel and surrounds. It is located on the lands of Bindjareb people and home to more than 88, 000 residents, with an expected growth in population to 119,877 people by 2036.

At the WACOSS community conversation, residents spoke of the potential to better support regional areas, such as Mandurah, through strategies which recognise their unique regional attributes and opportunities. They called for strong, place-based workforce development strategies for regional areas which recognise and reinforce equity of services across metropolitan, regional and rural areas. This includes setting concrete, regional level targets for balanced housing and job development to both improve the region's ability to attract people with skills in demand and increase employment and training opportunities for local people who are under-represented in the workforce. Services called for sustained investment and funding that allows community organisations to extend face-to-face services to surrounding areas such as Boddington, Waroona and Pinjarra, as well as respond to emerging regional needs.

An area of concern in the region is the inability for residents to access mental health care in an appropriate timeframe. At the time of the conversation, it was reported that the Saturday night prior, the emergency department at Peel Health Campus had experienced its busiest night since opening in 1997. Mental health services in the region have reported that they are at capacity, with long waitlists, and bulk billing GPs changing to fee-for-service models, creating additional barriers to access. Community members recognised the crucial need for immediate investment into adequate and affordable community-based and preventative mental health services so that all residents can access essential support prior to the point of crisis.

Local government, service providers and community members identified that a proactive and coordinated approach is essential for building resilience across the region and state, that sees local councils and State Government working collaboratively with services to deliver better results for the community.

## Income Security and Financial Resilience

Employment across Australia has become less secure, leading to increased underemployment,<sup>53</sup> unpredictable incomes and a rising number of people working more than one job to cover basic living expenses.<sup>54</sup> At the same time, Australia's social safety net has provided less protection for a significant portion of our community, including older Australians, single parents and their kids, and people with a disability. These changes in job and income security have weakened people's financial resilience and protection against increasing economic shocks and environmental disasters. Research shows that the COVID-19 crisis has left many with a weakened capacity to absorb future shocks, especially for those already experiencing hardship.<sup>55</sup>

### Shift from full-time to part-time employment and its impact on ER services

A number of our member organisations, including emergency relief, charitable food, financial counselling and family and domestic violence services, have reported month-on-month increases in people accessing their services due to the ongoing financial and social impacts of COVID-19. Many have indicated that this growth in demand is due to new cohorts experiencing hardship, who lost full-time or well-paid jobs during lockdowns and have re-entered the workforce in newly-created casual or part-time jobs, typically with lesser hours, security and pay. People who have lost employment as a result of COVID-19 that have struggled to regain full-time employment in similar occupations with similar pay, or have struggled to re-enter the workforce at all, include:

- Older people who are too young to claim superannuation but face difficulty regaining employment due to their age
- Migrant families, who as well as losing jobs and hours have been locked out of the Federal Government's economic support measures
- Families who have had children return to home requiring financial support
- Single mothers who have to balance care responsibilities with income-earning opportunities
- Working families and households on low wages struggling with rising living costs
- Newly jobless from industries such as tourism and hospitality experiencing an ongoing downturn

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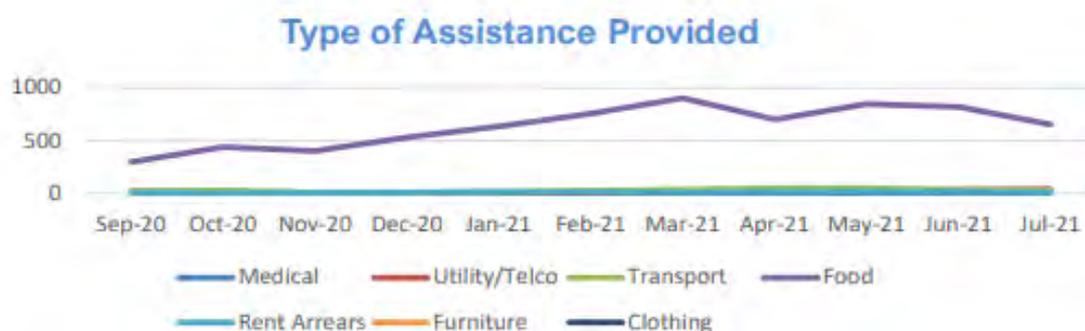
<sup>53</sup>ABS 2021, [Labour force, Australia, detailed](#) (reference period February 2021), Cat. No. 6291.0.55.001, Canberra.

<sup>54</sup>ABS 2020, [Labour account Australia](#), December 2020 release, ABS, Canberra.

<sup>55</sup>E Porter & D Banks (2021) [Shocks and safety nets Financial wellbeing during the COVID-19 crisis](#). Brotherhood of St Lawrence, Research and Policy Centre.

As a result, emergency relief services are seeing increasing numbers of people from these cohorts accessing their services for support, many for the first time in their lives. In addition, relatively large numbers of clients are returning to emergency relief services who have not requested assistance for more than 5+ years. Food charities, in particular, have witnessed a significant increase in the demand for food relief. This is likely a result of households lowering their food budget, or skipping meals, to compensate for lower incomes and rising living expenses.<sup>56</sup>

### Emergency Relief and Food Access Service Dashboard



Source: Financial Counselling Network

With an increasing number of people turning to food relief services, the safety and nutritional quality of charity food being distributed must be taken into consideration. Due to the ad hoc nature of donations and the food supply, the lack of infrastructure and resources to support reliable and appropriate food services, and reliance on volunteers, models of charitable food service delivery generally do not meet consumer's nutritional needs and preferences. Organisations need fit-for-purpose food relief nutrition policies, and to be supported to re-orientate them toward the procurement of appropriate and nutritious food for recipients.

### Income Insecurity and Frontline Workers

The pandemic reignited important debates concerning the future and security of work, and the value we place on essential workers and frontline service providers. These debates centred on the uncomfortable acknowledgement that some of the lowest-paid and most precarious workers in this state provide the essential goods and services that our community depend upon to be healthy, safe and functioning during a crisis. Whether essential or front-line roles in retail, early childcare and education, aged care, delivery driving, or (as *case 903* in Perth illustrates) security services,

<sup>56</sup> S Booth, A Smith (2001) Food security and poverty in Australia -- challenges for dietitians. *Australian Journal of Nutrition & Dietetics*. 2001;58(3):150–6.

widespread underemployment and low pay across a range of essential sectors have increased the number of Western Australians who rely on multiple jobs to cover basic living expenses.

Many of our essential and frontline workers are employed on casual contracts, with no entitlement to sick leave, and thus cannot afford to stay home when they are unwell. Such conditions contributed to the spread of COVID-19 through residential aged care and hotel quarantine. Victorian Premier Daniel Andrews labelled insecure work as 'toxic' and largely responsible for Victoria's second wave. The Victorian Government has since initiated a Secure Work Pilot Scheme<sup>57</sup> to provide up to five days of sick and carer's pay at minimum wage for casual or insecure workers in priority industries.

To produce a fair, safe and resilient society we need to strengthen the weak links in Western Australia's workplace policies that place the health and safety of casual and low-paid workers, their families and the broader community at risk. In consultation with unions, WA should develop a secure work pilot of its own with pay set at the State Minimum Wage, as the beginnings of an overall shift for casual workers to more easily convert to permanent in the state system, with all the entitlements that entails.

### **Financial Stress and Resilience**

The impact of COVID-19 on employment and job security exposed how deeply and broadly financial precarity can affect not only low-income workers, but a large portion of the population. People have been, and may continue to be, exposed to sudden disruptions to financial stability, employment, secure and affordable housing, relationships and social connections, that threaten to impart deep economic and social scars.

Cumulatively, these impacts are diminishing people's capacity to cope, and the community services sector is observing a substantial impact on the physical, mental, social, and financial well-being of individuals and families experiencing both emerging and persistent hardship. COVID-19 impacts and recovery efforts to date, however, have largely been two-tiered in nature, hitting low-income earners, informal and non-standard contract workers, women, migrants, children and youth, and those with disabilities particularly hard.<sup>58</sup> These groups were already experiencing hardship and/or disadvantage across a range of spheres prior to the crisis, while being largely overlooked or excluded from early wage protection or economic stimulus policy responses to COVID-19.

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<sup>57</sup> Victorian Government, [Secure Work Pilot Scheme](#).

<sup>58</sup> OECD (2021). [Going for Growth 2021: Shaping a Vibrant Economy](#). Chapter 1, pp. 14-59

With the surge in the cost of living in Western Australia, financial stress is on the rise as people navigate multiple socio-economic shocks combined with less government support than was available in 2020. Financial stress has a range of significant short and long-term impacts on households, ranging from households needing to forgo essential expenses such as groceries, medicine, education or heating, to family breakdowns and subsequent impacts on child development and safety, to increased risk of violence and substance abuse.

The safety net for those enduring financial stress must be strengthened so that this stress does not convert into severe financial hardship. Severe financial hardship limits the prospects of those struggling to enter or re-enter the labour market, may widen education gaps of children and young people, and aggravate physical and mental health conditions in the longer term, in addition to the impacts listed above. When faced with severe financial hardship and increasing levels of debt people may turn to high-cost payday loans. Borrowers of payday loans have been identified as “the most vulnerable in terms of becoming dependent on loans, entering into cycles of debt and lacking the financial education or means to improve their circumstances.”<sup>59</sup>

We must invest in strategies that work to increase the financial resilience of economically vulnerable households, while community services need a flexible pool of funding to support people experiencing ongoing hardship in multiple and complex ways.

**Recommendations:**

- Develop and resource a nutrition-focused food relief policy
- Initiate a Secure Work Pilot Scheme to provide up to five days’ sick and carer’s pay for casual workers
- Increase flexibility of disaster relief funds to respond to widespread financial hardship
- Shift to percentage-based energy concessions that better targets assistance to match household’s energy needs

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<sup>59</sup> M Banks, G Marston, H Karger and R Russell (2012) [\*Caught Short: Exploring the Role of Small, Short Term Loans in the Lives of Australians\*](#). Final Report, Social Policy Unit, University of Queensland.

## COMMUNITY PROFILE

**JOONDALUP / DOONDALUP**

The City of Joondalup is located on the lands of the Mooro Noongar people and covers a significant part of Perth's North Metropolitan region. It is home to more than 160,718 residents.

Services in the North-Metro region highlighted the mental health and other impacts of the digital divide. The digital divide was made apparent when students were expected to learn from home and as government services moved online. Unfortunately, members of the community who have been pushed further into poverty due to COVID-19, including those from culturally and linguistically diverse and migrant backgrounds, and those most likely to rely on government services and supports, are also those at greatest risk of digital exclusion, through lack of digital literacy, access and affordability.

For sole parents navigating the challenges of home schooling children during periods of lockdown, stress and anxiety have been amplified where educational institutions were unable to provide families with the appropriate technology to facilitate home-based learning. Even with physical access to technology, not all families have the financial or attentional capacity, or appropriate skills and knowledge, to support young people with their remote education. For children and young people with disabilities, loss of accommodations and supports provided in mainstream education created additional barriers to learning from home.

To address the growing inequalities of the digital divide, services highlighted the need for arrangements that ensure affordable and equitable access to digitally-based technologies. Local governments in the region are looking to coordinate their digital accessibility plans but require adequate funding to expand public access to digital infrastructure, including free Wi-Fi and terminals at public libraries, community resource and neighbourhood centres, as well as provide adequate staffing to support access to public services online.

## Secure and Affordable Housing

Access to safe, secure and affordable shelter is a necessity for people to be able to thrive. Stable tenancies are crucial to support positive outcomes in areas like health, education and employment. Tragically, the lack of stable housing can lead to preventable deaths. In 2020, the UWA Home2Health team were notified of the death of fifty-six people experiencing homelessness in Perth.<sup>60</sup>

Housing costs have a disproportionate impact on those living on the lowest incomes.<sup>61</sup> With median rents in Perth on the increase since 2018 and drastically rising during 2020, the pressure this places on households has never been more apparent. As of June 2021, median house rents in Perth had increased over the past 12 months by around 22 per cent and for median units by 19 per cent.<sup>62</sup>

In a survey of tenancy and housing service providers conducted by Shelter WA and WACOSS in April 2021, one service stated that,

*“A single mother of five children has had a rent increase from \$350 per week to \$550 per week. The likelihood is that the mother and her five children are expecting to be homeless.”<sup>63</sup>*

The inability of the market to ensure the supply of affordable housing for low income and at-risk households is why State Government investment in social housing is so essential. Direct public investment is the single most cost-effective way to scale up social housing stock, boosting jobs and income.<sup>64</sup> Every dollar invested into social housing boosts GDP by an estimated \$1.30.<sup>65</sup>

As part of the 2021-22 State Budget, the McGowan Government announced the largest one-off investment into social housing in Western Australia’s history.<sup>66</sup> This investment acts as a circuit-breaker that halts the decline of social housing stock in our state. With access to trades and materials under considerable constraints as a result of the current construction boom, this package sensibly includes a focus on refurbishing existing properties to a livable standard, spot purchasing and innovative methods for the delivery of housing stock.

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<sup>60</sup> L Wood and S Vallesi (2021) [‘Deaths Among People Experiencing Homelessness: Each One, a Life’](#), *Parity*, 34 (07)

<sup>61</sup> ACOSS/UNSW Poverty and Inequality Partnership (2020) [Poverty, Property and Place: A geographic analysis of poverty after housing costs in Australia](#), City Futures Research Centre & the Social Policy Research Centre

<sup>62</sup> REIWA (2021) [Perth property market](#)

<sup>63</sup> Shelter WA (2021) [Data shows impact on people and services in the lead up to rental moratorium lifting](#)

<sup>64</sup> J Lawson, H Pawson, L Troy, R van den Nouweland, C Hamilton (2018) Social housing as infrastructure: an investment pathway, AUHRI Final Report No 306, AHURI

<sup>65</sup> KPMG (2012) [Social Housing Investment Review](#)

<sup>66</sup> Hon Mark McGowan MLA and Hon John Carey MLA (2021) [‘\\$875 million to significantly boost social housing in WA,’ Media Statements](#)

There is also a need to address the failure of the market to provide housing that is affordable for low-income workers who are unable to qualify for public housing. By partnering with local governments and community housing providers, State Government can support models that secure long-term affordability so that workers can live in and near the communities in which they work.

### **Inclusionary Zoning**

The most effective way to integrate and normalise the delivery of social housing in our planning and development systems, is to implement inclusionary zoning requirements. Mandating the inclusion of affordable dwellings in any new residential development of an appropriate size is a powerful and effective tool routinely used in other cities around the world with similar housing systems to deliver more social and affordable rental housing. In Western Australia, Development WA has required developers to provide a minimum of 12 to 15 per cent of the dwellings as social or affordable housing in their projects. When given the flexibility under that policy, however, developers have tended to deliver that percentage through schemes like shared equity, rather than as social housing.<sup>67</sup> This demonstrates the need to not only strengthen the targets in that policy, but embed these requirements across the planning system.

Since 2005, the South Australian Government has had a target of 15 per cent affordable housing for significant development sites. Though there have been some issues around the consistency of its enforcement, it has seen 17 per cent of total dwelling approvals in major new residential development areas from 2005 to 2015 being dedicated affordable homes, including social and affordable rental housing. In England and Scotland, the general expectation is for 20–40 per cent of new housing developments to be affordable housing, and in the United States, more than 500 cities have inclusionary planning schemes. These requirements are simply treated like any other planning obligations that need to be factored into development costs prior to land acquisition.<sup>68</sup>

### **Residential Tenancies Act**

In response to the COVID crisis, the McGowan Government acted quickly to shield renters from evictions and rent hikes. The legislation that was introduced was of paramount importance to protect the health and wellbeing of both renters and the community at large.

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<sup>67</sup> National Shelter (2019) [Inclusionary Zoning Report](#)

<sup>68</sup> N Gurrán, C Gilbert, K Gibb, R van den Nouwelant, A James and P Phibbs (2018) 'Supporting affordable housing supply: inclusionary planning in new and renewing communities', *AHURI Final Report No. 297*, Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute

With the moratorium on evictions and rent increases now over and rental vacancies at an all-time low, we need to accelerate the review and reform of the *Residential Tenancies Act* that began in 2019, to produce a fair and equitable rental system. With the numbers of renters growing, as well as the length of time people are likely to be in rental properties, it is essential that this relationship is reformed to be in keeping with community standards and expectations about our right to be safe and secure at home.

Abolishing ‘no-grounds’ terminations is fundamental to creating a more equitable rental framework. The ability of tenants to exercise their rights is significantly diminished when they can be evicted without a justifiable reason. The legislation must recognise that a tenant’s basic right to shelter and security takes precedence over a landlord’s discretion to terminate a lease.

The more of their income that households must dedicate to covering housing costs, the less they will be able to spend on other essentials like food, energy and health. Regulating the frequency and size of rental increases is also a necessity.

Discriminatory provisions in the *Residential Tenancies Act* also need to be removed to ensure that public housing tenants are entitled to the same rights and protections as renters in the private market. As identified by the WA Equal Opportunity Commission, public housing tenants in many cases are “subject to a harsher regime than tenants in the private market.”<sup>69</sup> Public housing tenants deserve the same level of basic rights and protections as any other renter, if not more as they may be navigating the system while dealing with the impacts of poverty, illness, trauma and other challenges.

### **Minimum Standards**

Western Australia has agreed in principle to the *Trajectory for Low Energy Buildings – Existing Buildings*, which includes the implementation of national minimum energy efficiency standards for rental properties. Mandatory minimum standards that ensure tenants are able to access liveable, quality housing options, are being progressively introduced in Victoria, Queensland and the ACT.

Home energy inefficiency is a key driver of utility stress and energy poverty for low income households. Common causes of energy inefficiency are little or no insulation; inefficient or faulty built-in heating, cooling and hot water devices; significant draughts caused by structural problems; and a lack of window coverings.

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<sup>69</sup> Equal Opportunity Commission (2013) [A Better Way](#)

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. Many aged pensioners put their health and life at risk in an effort to keep energy bills down, leading to poorer wellbeing outcomes and rising health care costs. Inadequate housing costs us all more as a community, through the associated burden of chronic disease.

### **Vacant Residential Property Charge**

With rental vacancy rates at historic lows and many WA households struggling to find affordable places to rent, we cannot afford to have residential properties sitting empty. A vacant residential property charge can ensure the most efficient use of housing stock by discouraging investors and developers from leaving dwellings empty. This is particularly important during the current period, where supply is struggling to keep up with the demand for rental housing, leading to exorbitant rent increases.

In 2017, the Victorian State Government introduced a vacant residential property tax in the inner and middle ring of Melbourne to reduce the high number of houses and apartments being left vacant. The tax is levied at a rate of one per cent of the property's capital improved value on land that is able to be used solely or primarily for residential purposes.

The proposed Vacant Residential Property Charge would be levied on dwellings that are vacant for more than a total of 6 months in a calendar year, with exemptions for deceased estates, properties under renovation and those temporarily overseas.

### **Recommendations**

- Implement inclusionary zoning, with all major new development to include 30 per cent affordable housing, one third of which is social housing
- Fast track reform of the Residential Tenancies Act to abolish 'no-grounds' terminations, cap rental increases and establish minimum standards for rental premises
- Introduce a vacant residential property charge levied at a rate of 1 per cent of the property's capital improved value
- Partner with local government and community housing organisations to provide affordable rental housing for low-income workers

## Acknowledgements

Consultations for this submission commenced in June and ended in September 2021. These were predominantly place-based, face-to-face sessions. WACOSS convened community conversations in the east, north and south metropolitan areas of Perth, and across the state, including in Albany, Broome, Bunbury, Geraldton, Kalgoorlie-Boulder, Karratha, Mandurah, Newman and Port Hedland. 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.

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

### Organisations Consulted:

Albany Volunteer Resource Centre	City of Mandurah
Allambee Counselling Mandurah	Communicare
Anglicare WA	Community Legal WA
Australian Red Cross	Department of Communities
Broome Circle	Department of Education
Broome Youth and Families Hub	Department of Health
Busselton Hospice	Department of Justice
Calvary Youth Services	Department of Social Services
Centacare Kimberley	East Pilbara Independence Support
Central Regional TAFE - Jobs & Skills Centre	Ethnic Communities Council of WA
Centre for Asylum Seekers, Refugees and Detainees	Financial Counselling Network
Centrecare	Financial Counsellor's Association of WA
City of Joondalup	Finucare

Foodbank WA	Regional Development Australia – Pilbara
GIVIT	Riverview Community Services
Gosnells Community Legal Centre	Salvation Army
Headspace	Services Australia
Hope Community Services	Social Reinvestment WA
Jacaranda Community Centre	Shelter WA
Julyardi Aboriginal Corporation	South West Community Legal Centre
Lamp Inc.	St Basil’s Care Services
Lotterywest	St John of God Horizon House
Men's Outreach Service	St Patrick's Community Support Centre
Metropolitan Migrant Resource Centre	St Vincent de Paul Society
Midlas	Street Friends WA
Mission Australia	Town of Port Hedland
Newman Women’s Shelter	Unions WA
Ngala	Uniting WA
Not-for-profits UWA Research Team	WA Multicultural Association Inc
OVIS Community Services	WA Primary Health Alliance
Peel Connect	Wangka: Goldfields Aboriginal Language Centre
Peel Youth Service	Wanslea
Pilbara Aboriginal Voices	Youth Affairs Council of WA
Pilbara Connections Consultancy	Youth Involvement Council
Pivot Support Services	





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