

# Creating a Stronger Future for WA

**STATE BUDGET SUBMISSION 2023-2024**  
on behalf of the Community Services Sector of WA and the people we support.

**wacoss** wa council of social service

## About WACOSS

The Western Australian Council of Social Service is the peak body for the community services sector in Western Australia and works to create an inclusive, just and equitable society. We advocate for social and economic change to improve the wellbeing of Western Australians, and to strengthen the community services sector that supports them. WACOSS is part of a network consisting of National, State and Territory Councils of Social Service, who advance the interests of people on low incomes and those made vulnerable by the systems that have been put in place.

## 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, their cultures, and to elders both past and present. We acknowledge the land on which we live and work is, and always will be, Aboriginal land. Sovereignty was never ceded.

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## Foreword

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Western Australians are facing difficult and turbulent times.

Our community has weathered significant challenges over the last few years. As a state, we came through the COVID-19 health crisis and economic slowdown surprisingly well, with cautious leadership and a strong sense of community commitment helped by our geographic isolation and natural resources.

The challenges we now face are different, and we will need new strategies and measures to adapt and thrive. We are confronted by the prospect of a global recession causing escalating inflation and living costs, despite living in a period of record low unemployment and high workforce participation. Rising interest rates threaten a new group of households who have recently bought into new mortgage belt suburbs and may soon owe more than their homes are worth and their incomes can cover. Those already doing it tough risk falling further behind, with rents skyrocketing and rental vacancies hard to find.

Western Australia's success in recent years has highlighted the qualities and advantages we can build on with an eye to the future. For many of us, this is the best place in the world to be living, and we would not want to be anywhere else. Our rapid expansion in recent years has led to some serious growing pains and there is a struggle to ensure our public infrastructure, both physical and social, keeps up with changing demand. Our resource-based economy has enabled the state to prosper, but it is also inherently unequal, creating obstacles to ensuring that those on low and fixed incomes are not left behind.

The 2023-24 *WA State Budget* provides the opportunity to make the public investment necessary to assist those struggling to get by and to ensure we can collectively make it through the coming storms. We came together to face the pandemic, we now need to find a way forward that builds on our strengths and creates a sense of common purpose.

Western Australians are facing challenging times. The important thing is how we face them together.



Mark Glasson  
President



Louise Giolitto  
Chief Executive Officer

## Recommendations

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### Ensuring a Growing State Can Thrive

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- Develop workforce participation programs for under-represented groups in partnership with the community services that support them.
- Plan and budget for the outcomes of Fair Work Australia deliberations on gender wage equity across the care industry.
- Implement WGEA reporting standards across all WA public agencies and build into commissioned programs in the future.
- Develop in-place training with blended delivery models that cater for both new and existing workers in community services.
- Build housing subsidies into service contracts for regional centres where worker housing is unaffordable and create more GROH housing when possible.
- Resource the implementation of the State Commissioning Strategy and report on achieving agreed priorities.
- Build a shared data asset within Treasury to report outcomes for newly commissioned services.
- Address the care workforce retention crisis through sustainable long-term service contracts, with top-up funding until services are recommissioned.
- Treasury and Finance work with experts and peak bodies to develop robust, accountable systems and a new indexation policy that ensures agency contracts meet sustainability commitments.

### Community Resilience and Wellbeing

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- Undertake a State-wide review of regional social service gaps, demand and unmet need to design a regional service network model.
- Upgrade existing underutilised infrastructure to build service hubs in outer-metro areas and regional centres.
- Treasury head a research project with leading WA child development experts to create a child and family wellbeing framework that contributes to national processes.
- Provide per-capita grants and targeted subsidies to community-based long day-care and after-school care.
- Increase investment in emergency and transitional accommodation services for women and children escaping family and domestic violence.

- Increase investment in services for men to increase perpetrator accountability, including men’s behaviour change programs and accommodation services.
- Partner with regional ACCOs to develop early intervention and family support services in key regional centres to create a state-wide EIFS program.
- Establish a WA Stolen Generations Reparations Scheme.
- Create a gender-responsive budget unit in WA Treasury to deliver a Women’s Budget Statement, aligned with emerging national frameworks.
- Increase the availability of place-based funds to build community resilience and disaster risk reduction capacity, with a focus on low-income communities.

### **Keeping the Essentials Affordable for All**

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- Replace the Energy Assistance Payment with a percentage-based primary energy concession.
- Expand eligibility for water concessions to include people who hold a Health Care Card.
- Make the HUGS 90-day payment arrangement requirement permanent, increase the maximum grant limits and expand the eligibility.
- Expand eligibility for the free travel periods on public transport to all concession card holders.
- Expand car registration concessions to cover all Health Care Card holders.
- Develop a household gas transition roadmap and institute a moratorium on all new household connections to the existing gas network.
- Establish a \$1 billion Affordable Housing Future Fund.
- Introduce a vacant residential property charge levied at a rate of 1 per cent of the property’s capital improved value.
- Re-introduce a residential rent relief grant scheme.

### **Safe Communities**

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- Implement the *Blueprint for a Better Future: Paving the Way for Youth Justice Reform in WA*.
- Develop a whole of government vision and strategy to improve youth justice outcomes across the life-course, in partnership with the community and sector.
- Identify the 10 communities in most need of action on youth justice and resource place-based initiatives to co-create asset-based solutions in partnership with local communities and services.

## Ensuring a Growing State Can Thrive

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Western Australia faces both skills and worker shortages,<sup>1</sup> with businesses and essential services struggling to find staff in the face of growing demand. Despite this, wages have stayed flat, falling behind living costs in real terms. Our labour force shortages are structural in nature and are likely to persist for some time.<sup>2</sup> Training and migration take time and face additional barriers, so the critical question for policy makers is what can be done to immediately address participation barriers for those who already have skills and experience yet are locked out of opportunity.

Western Australia can respond to these challenges by supporting people currently underrepresented in our workforce, such as women, particularly mothers with young children, people with a disability, migrants with unrecognised qualifications and skills, seniors wanting to work, and Aboriginal people. Despite our high job vacancy rate, we have done little to support these groups to access employment,<sup>3</sup> and we can learn from successful initiatives in other states and overseas. Efforts to increase skilled migration will take time. Current intake processes are slow to reform, it is easy for migrants to go elsewhere at a time of strong international demand, and our housing shortage make it difficult for them to find somewhere to live. Uplifting our local workforce will stimulate our local economy and improve community wellbeing.

Initiatives to improve inclusion within our labour force have seen great success, but there remain substantial gaps. Promising steps are underway that should in time see more Aboriginal workers delivering services to their communities with the implementation of the *WA Aboriginal Procurement Policy* and *ACCO Strategy*, once local services are given the support to get established.<sup>4</sup> Despite workplaces discovering during COVID-19 that many of the accessibility barriers for people with a disability, such as requiring them to work from the office, could easily be overcome, employment rates for people with a disability did not change.<sup>5</sup> Participation rates for women are lower and we remain further behind on pay equity than other states, with WA having not yet adopted the initiatives and subsidies we have seen increase access to affordable early education and care in those jurisdictions.<sup>6</sup>

**RECOMMENDATION:** Develop workforce participation programs for underrepresented groups in partnership with the community services that support them.

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<sup>1</sup> BCEC (2022) [Bridging the Gap: Population, skills and labour market adjustment in Western Australia](#).

WACOSS (2022) [Delivering a Skilled Workforce for Western Australia](#).

<sup>2</sup> Treasury (2022) [Jobs and Skills Summit Issues Paper](#).

<sup>3</sup> BCEC (2022) [Bridging the Gap](#). Table 2 p61, Fig 13, p60, Fig 31 p 62. There were 132,000 skilled workers of working age in WA with a Cert III or higher not in the labour force in May 2022. Almost half (57,900) held a university degree or higher, versus 65,000 vacancies at that time.

<sup>4</sup> WA Government (2021) [Aboriginal Procurement Policy](#) and (2022) [ACCO Strategy](#)

<sup>5</sup> AIHW (2022) [People with disability in Australia](#). As of July 2022, only 53% of working age people with a disability are in the labour force, compared with 84% of those without disability. OECD (2025) [Sickness and disability](#). Australia ranked 21 out of 29 OECD countries on disability employment rates.

<sup>6</sup> BCEC (2022) [Bridging the Gap](#). Figure 20, page 73, Figure 26, page 79. WACOSS (2022) [Work and Care in WA](#) We also have half the rate of older people undertaking part-time or seasonal work as New Zealand.

## The Wellbeing Workforce

The wellbeing workforce provides multiple benefits to our economy, not only as an employer but also as an enabler of workforce participation. As our focus now shifts to supporting greater workforce participation of under-represented groups to address skill shortages, the social services sector can be both an employer of choice for them to consider, and the provider of services that assist their transition into work, support ongoing participation, health and wellbeing. Those with lived experience of these challenges can bring insight to support roles, building trusted relationships based on common experiences and aspirations.

Health and social services are now the largest and fastest growing workforce in the state and the nation, mirroring similar international trends.<sup>7</sup> This growth reflects increasing demand for services with an ageing global population, and the growing realisation that wellbeing services have wider impacts on population health and happiness, translating into more active, engaged and resilient communities. The commitment by the new Federal Treasurer Jim Chalmers to release a wellbeing budget statement in the October Budget, create a gender budget unit in Treasury, and work with the States and Territories to develop budget wellbeing measures opens up opportunities to better *measure what matters*. With an industry level gender pay equity case being taken to the Fair Work Commission to address systemic underpayment of female-dominated industries, the focus has also shifted to how to better measure the productivity of care work beyond simple gross-value added metrics to truly value its contribution to our nation.<sup>8</sup> Western Australia can build on the leadership shown through its gender equity plan, procurement and public sector reporting trials.<sup>9</sup>

**RECOMMENDATION:** Plan and budget for the outcomes of Fair Work Australia deliberations on gender wage equity across the care industry.

**RECOMMENDATION:** Implement WGEA reporting standards across all WA public agencies and build into commissioned programs in the future.

## Overcoming Workforce Challenges

The wellbeing workforce faces both a recruitment challenge and a retention crisis, simultaneously holding some of the highest rates of under-employment and the most unfilled job vacancies of any sector.<sup>10</sup> Retention is the biggest challenge for community organisations in the current economic cycle, as significant numbers of skilled staff leave the sector for better pay and conditions in other occupations. Capped funding for social programs and ongoing short-term contract roll-overs while we transition to sustainable longer-term funding under the State Commissioning Strategy<sup>11</sup> and

<sup>7</sup> WACOSS (2022) [Delivering a Skilled Workforce for Western Australia Submission](#)

<sup>8</sup> BCEC (2022) [Bridging the Gap](#).

<sup>9</sup> Department of Communities (2021) [Stronger Together: WA's Plan for Gender Equality. Second Action Plan 2021-25](#). Department of Communities (2022) [WA Women's Report Card. Gender equality in procurement pilot](#).

<sup>10</sup> BCEC 2022. Bridging the Gap. Table 3, page 64. See also ABS (2022) [Job vacancies by sector](#).

<sup>11</sup> Government of Western Australia (2021) [State Commissioning Strategy](#).

agency commissioning plans, have led to a mass exodus of experienced staff from the wellbeing workforce. When governments do not match increases to award wages with increases in program funding, they create more part-time insecure work, reduced opening hours and service coverage, or see more places going bust and closing. Federal commitments to improve wages and conditions for aged care and childcare workers will also increase the pressure on state-funded services to improve pay and conditions or face a greater exodus.

More subsidised VET traineeships are part of the solution, but they can only help so much if there is not also enough experienced staff to supervise, train or mentor them. There is also a particular challenge for students and workers in regional and remote areas to access locally delivered training opportunities. An increase in on-the-job training is needed to address high drop-out rates during the stressful first few months of graduate work placements. Doing so can offer professional development opportunities and career progression for skilled and capable staff. Such pathways also offer a unique opportunity to people with lived experience of hardship, who can develop the skills to help others turn their lives around by sharing their own insights and experience.

**RECOMMENDATION:** Develop in-place training with blended delivery models that cater for both new and existing workers in community services.

Regional community services face an added recruitment challenge as new staff on care service wages simply cannot find anywhere they can afford to live in most of our regional centres. The WA Government has tackled this challenge for public sector workers in the past by building Government Regional Officer Housing. 5,500 GROH properties across the state are currently managed by the Department of Communities. These houses are available to public sector employees delivering essential public services, such as teachers, health workers and police. In theory, these houses should be accessible to care workers delivering public services, but in practice there are few places available and existing service contracts do not cover the cost of the lease. We need to build more GROH housing in key centres when it is practical. Service contracts in regional centres lacking accessible housing also need to build in the cost of housing subsidies, and tender processes should confirm workers can be housed to ensure critical social services can be delivered to areas of need.

**RECOMMENDATION:** Build housing subsidies into service contracts for regional centres where worker housing is unaffordable and create more GROH housing when possible.

### **Commissioning Sustainable Service Systems for Impact**

Fortunately, a longer-term solution to the retention challenge is already underway. The State Commissioning Strategy gives us the opportunity to collectively design services that are better targeted, more efficient and effective, and put in place longer-term sustainable service contracts that provide job certainty. The strategy commits us to jointly create a well-led, transparent and

sustainable system that takes a person-centred and outcome-based approach to deliver more inclusive and effective services.

These changes have the potential to be transformative. They will require us to work closely together to build the capability needed and to be able to take the time and commit the resources required across central agencies, line agencies and the community sector. Targets should be set for the agreed priorities and reported to Parliament. Over time, with effective monitoring and evaluation of programs and well-supported implementation of outcome measurement, this approach will enable us to determine which measures make the biggest difference. Then we will be able to better join up programs and systems across portfolios and departments, and better support place-based service networks that respond to the needs of local and regional communities. As our measurement of outcomes improves, we can prove the value of effective early intervention initiatives, such as the Target 120 trials and Early Intervention and Family Support Services,<sup>12</sup> that reduce the rising cost of crisis services and negative life outcomes. The result will be better outcomes, and reduced per capita costs and demand on our healthcare and crisis care systems.

Adequately resourcing the implementation of the State Commissioning Strategy means funding education and training where it is needed across both sectors, resourcing evaluation of programs and initiatives, and building a shared data asset within Treasury where all newly commissioned services can share the data they are trained and supported to report to measure what matters.

**RECOMMENDATION:** Resource the implementation of the State Commissioning Strategy and report on achieving agreed priorities.

**RECOMMENDATION:** Build a shared data asset within Treasury to report outcomes for newly commissioned services.

## A Viable Transition

These commissioning reforms will take time to deliver outcomes and so will not address the current workforce retention crisis. As such, we need a transition strategy to ensure we can retain the skilled and capable staff we need to design and deliver new services, and to supervise and up-skill the next wave of graduates. Analysis of indexation and award rate increases since 2014 shows that existing contracts need to be topped up by 12.75 per cent to enable a sustainable level of service delivery until sustainable service contracts are commissioned to replace them. This is a one-off commitment that will only need to last until the WA Government is able to recommission existing services.<sup>13</sup>

There will need to be an oversight mechanism to ensure public authorities contract with not-for-profit services in a manner that supports sustainable service delivery and recognises the importance of ongoing organisational viability to meet the commitments made by the State Commissioning Strategy. A standard price review mechanism should be developed by the Department of Finance

<sup>12</sup> [Target 120 Evaluation](#), [Social Investment Data Resource](#), [Earlier Intervention Family Support evaluation](#)

<sup>13</sup> CEWA and WACOSS (2022) [Western Australian Government Community Services Indexation](#).

that enables contract funding levels to be adjusted to meet legally binding cost increases, such as award increases, that are outside of the control of both parties. To ensure long-term service viability, Treasury should work with local experts and the sector to develop an ongoing program indexation model based on real-world changes to the goods and services deployed in human services. Population and demand metrics need to be built into human service programs so they can better match need at a state, regional and local level, comparable to our health and education systems.

**RECOMMENDATION:** Address the care workforce retention crisis through sustainable long-term service contracts, with top-up funding until services are recommissioned.

**RECOMMENDATION:** Treasury and Finance work with experts and peak bodies to develop robust, accountable systems and a new indexation policy that ensures agency contracts meet sustainability commitments.



## Case Study – Kinjarling (Albany and Great Southern)

Albany is a port city in the great southern region of Western Australia on the lands of the Menang Noongar people, acting as a service centre for the Southern Wheatbelt and South Coast.

Key issues raised in the community conversations reflected many concerns raised in other regions, with their own local opportunities and challenges. COVID-19-induced relocations resulted in population growth in the area, which increased pressure on housing and other services. There is limited housing available and it is either low quality, expensive, or both. The rise in rental prices following the end of the State moratorium meant some people had to move out. Community members report visible homelessness has increased.

Community members recognised the need for investment into creating more and maintaining existing GROH and public housing. They reported that over 100 houses in the Great Southern and South West remain vacant due to maintenance issues. Lack of housing is also a factor in recruitment difficulties and services seeking new staff are unable to fill vacancies. One service provider reported renting an apartment to help recruit staff.

Increasing living costs are a growing issue. Services are anticipating a bad year ahead. They are already stretched thin due to inadequate funding and indexation, increased demand and staffing difficulties. Many report operating at capacity with long waitlists.

More funding for mental health, youth and culturally diverse services is urgently needed.

Like other regional towns that service a wide catchment, transport is a major barrier to accessing services. The lack of public transport means the cost to drive to appointments can be prohibitive and will get even higher when full fuel excise returns. Poor connectivity in the region means that using online services is not an option available to many.

Access to childcare in Albany and the Great Southern is a major problem. Two childcare centres were reported to have recently closed, while those that remain have long waiting lists. Lack of childcare is impacting on staff recruitment and closure of those two centres resulted in the loss of critical service staff, as parents were forced to either leave jobs or cut their hours.

The region has also seen a significant drop in volunteering in local services and community organisations.

Other priorities included:

- Social and emotional wellbeing programs in schools
- More investment in mental health services, particularly moderate to severe care
- Better access to clinicians
- More school and community based social workers
- Improving food security and crisis support
- Improved care wages to help with recruitment and unmet need
- Access to training
- More funding for early intervention and prevention

## Community Resilience and Wellbeing

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Western Australians want to live in places that foster healthy, engaged, 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 care in our homes and local communities, bolstering our resilience against disruptive challenges and disasters. Community cohesion and wellbeing is weakened by the presence of structural inequalities and environmental risks, just as it is strengthened by strong policies and effective services that focus on equity and connectedness to intervene early and reduce or prevent harm. Throughout our community conversations across the state, community members identified solutions that fill critical service gaps, support children and their families, serve First Nations communities, increase gender equity and improve our preparedness for environmental disasters.

### A Growing and Sustainable Service System

Western Australia is a vast state with a growing population. It is important that there is sufficient social infrastructure to support the creation of healthy, safe and connected communities as outer suburbs and regional centres expand.<sup>14</sup> WACOSS members raised serious concerns about the lack of community services available in these areas, including childcare, specialist health, alcohol and drug, child and youth services. Existing services report long waiting lists, particularly for mental health, paediatric, counselling and specialist services as a result of being severely under-resourced and understaffed. The WA community has grown rapidly over the last two decades, but rather than matching population growth, most service funding had been capped for many years, shrinking in real terms as the cost of delivery has risen. Service locations are uneven across suburbs and communities, making them hard to find or to reach by public transport. There is little time and resourcing for service networking, so navigating the system is difficult and cross-referrals become less effective. The system is particularly hard to navigate for those from diverse backgrounds facing access and inclusion barriers.

Our members called for more co-located services and funded local community networks to create a more comprehensive safety net. Co-located services benefit from reduced costs from shared space and equipment and more streamlined referral processes, while community members benefit from increased access to care and reduced wait times and costs. Community outreach workers can play a critical role in engaging community members who experience additional access and inclusion barriers and connecting them to services.

**RECOMMENDATION:** Undertake a State-wide review of regional social service gaps, demand and unmet need to design a regional service network model.

**RECOMMENDATION:** Upgrade existing underutilised infrastructure to build service hubs in outer-metro areas and regional centres.

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<sup>14</sup> WA Government (2022) [Foundations for a stronger tomorrow: State infrastructure strategy](#). Recommendation 21: *Develop regional social services and infrastructure models that are more responsive to the changing needs of communities across regional WA.*

## Measuring What Matters

Care work is complex and relational. Done well, it can play a critical role in enhancing the life outcomes of those facing the greatest barriers, but it depends on understanding and trust. Recent evaluations, inquiries and royal commissions into different aspects of our care system have highlighted the risks for some of our most vulnerable when corners are cut, continuity and quality are lost, and profits are put ahead of wellbeing. The development of national wellbeing budgeting frameworks arising from the October budget commitments creates an opportunity to measure what matters in service outcomes, shifting the focus from transactional activities to meaningful quality care outcomes. We anticipate that WA Treasury will be asked to participate in a national project to develop these measures.<sup>15</sup>

Western Australia has a history of national leadership in research into child development and disadvantage. We are well-placed to lead an interjurisdictional push to develop a national child, youth and family wellbeing budget framework, and to trial its application in WA. Our starting point is to build on the existing work and focus on measuring what really matters for children, young people and families in WA. This includes our leading AEDC measures, the framework developed by the WA Commissioner for Children and Young People and our unmet OECD reporting requirements. WA Treasury could play a critical role in ensuring the systems and measures meet the reporting needs and standards required for a budget framework. As we expect that all states and territories will be asked to participate in these national processes, we think it makes sense to be proactive and play to WA's strength and leadership in this area.

**RECOMMENDATION:** Treasury head a research project with leading WA child development experts to create a child and family wellbeing framework that contributes to national processes.

## The Critical Role of Early Education and Care

The early education and care workforce play a crucial role in both workforce productivity and community wellbeing. They provide childcare services that enable parents, particularly mothers, to participate in the workforce, while delivering early development and education to children during the critical early years that set the foundations for life-long productivity and wellbeing. Childcare services are projected to increase by over 10 per cent nationally between 2020 and 2025, requiring an additional 154,000 workers nationally and at least 16,000 in WA. Higher rates of recruitment and training will be needed if we are to increase the workforce participation rate of women within the WA labour market (now up to 64.5 per cent vs 74.8 per cent for men) and lift the proportion of women working fulltime (51.5 per cent, vs 82.6 per cent for men).<sup>16</sup> Meanwhile skilled early educators are leaving the sector in droves, while new graduates have alarming drop-out rates.

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<sup>15</sup> Australian Treasury (2022) [Jobs and Skills Summit Outcomes](#). Treasurer Jim Chalmers (2022) [Press Conference](#) 1 June, [Ministerial statement](#) July 28. See also The Conversation: [Wellbeing and budget rigor](#)

<sup>16</sup> BCEC (2022) [Bridging the Gap](#).

Lack of childcare was one of the top issues raised across our community consultations. While WA provides 11 hours of free kindy in the year before school within our education system, parents face a significant challenge in closing the gap in care to meet their work commitments. Despite our chronic skills shortages and professed desire to support more women to return to work, WA has done little to support community-based early education and care services compared to the per-capita grant and targeted subsidies for vulnerable groups provided in other states.

**RECOMMENDATION:** Provide per-capita grants and targeted subsidies to community-based long day-care and after-school care.

### Keeping Women and Children Safe

Serious, widespread incidents of family and domestic violence within Western Australia are placing significant pressure on specialist FDV services. The economic and social impacts of COVID-19 produced a rapid rise in demand for services, which outstripped capacity, placing the sector under significant strain. Services are not currently equipped to meet this high level of demand, which undermines the safety of those experiencing family and domestic violence and their potential for recovery. Consultation with our members confirmed media reports of services forced to turn away hundreds of women and children they simply cannot support.<sup>17</sup> Members spoke of the pressing need for more emergency and transitional accommodation services for women escaping violence. They also stressed how efforts to keep victim-survivors safe must be strengthened through a consistent approach to perpetrator accountability backed by investment in men's behaviour change programs. Accommodation services are needed for men, so women and children can stay safely within the home when families separate. Importantly, these services must be culturally appropriate and secure and tailored to the particular contexts and needs of diverse women and men.

**RECOMMENDATION:** Increase investment in emergency and transitional accommodation services for women and children escaping family and domestic violence.

**RECOMMENDATION:** Increase investment in services for men to increase perpetrator accountability, including men's behaviour change programs and accommodation services.

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<sup>17</sup> WACOSS (2022) [Submission on Work and Care](#).

## Supporting Families and Addressing Intergenerational Trauma

In September 2016, the Department of Communities launched the *Building Safe and Strong Families: Earlier Intervention and Family Support Strategy*,<sup>18</sup> acknowledging that effective earlier intervention reduces the risk of child protection intervention and presents the best opportunity to support children and families. EIFS has three key programs delivered in partnership with an Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation that aim to provide culturally appropriate services that meet the specific needs of Aboriginal families. Currently, the Intensive Family Support Service program is run state-wide, with 17 locations across the state, whereas the Family Support Network program and Aboriginal In-Home Support Service program is only delivered across four metro corridors. Additional funding was allocated in the 2022-23 State Budget to enable EIFS services to reach more children and families and meet growing demand, while also trialling the programs in Halls Creek and the South-West. Throughout our community conversations, WACOSS members welcomed the recent progress, suggesting that it should be scaled up and rolled out more widely, building on the strategies that have been effective in meeting the needs of vulnerable families.

**RECOMMENDATION:** Partner with regional ACCOs to develop early intervention and family support services in key regional centres to create a state-wide EIFS program.

The 1997 *Bringing them Home* report recommended that all Australian parliaments make appropriate reparation to respond to the effects of forcible removals and recognise the history of gross violations of First Nations human rights.<sup>19</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. Western Australia had the highest proportion of children removed of any state and now has the highest rate for the children of Stolen Generations parents and grandparents within our out-of-home care system.<sup>20</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. The McGowan Government has already made strong progress on Aboriginal procurement policy, committed to build the role of Aboriginal community-controlled organisations delivering community services and progress the Southwest native title settlement. As a State we must right these past wrongs and show we are a caring and unified community by introducing a WA Stolen Generations reparations scheme.

**RECOMMENDATION:** Establish a WA Stolen Generations Reparations Scheme.

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<sup>18</sup> Department of Communities (2016) [Earlier Intervention and Family Support](#).

<sup>19</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](#).

<sup>20</sup> [AIHW](#) (2017), [SNAICC](#) (2017), ABS [NATSISS](#) (2002, 2008, 2014). [AIHW](#) (2018). WAACHS (2004).

## Towards Gender Equity

Gender equity issues are now at the forefront of our national conversation. Gender responsive budgeting has emerged as a tool to analyse the impact of the budget on gender equality and ensure the collection and allocation of public resources addresses gender gaps. Currently, Queensland,<sup>21</sup> Victoria,<sup>22</sup> New South Wales<sup>23</sup> and the Australian Capital Territory<sup>24</sup> produce gender budget statements detailing spending measures and initiatives that may benefit women, having laid the groundwork by incorporating gender analysis across their policies, programs and services.

With the commitment by the Federal Government to introduce gender responsive budgeting, deliver an annual women's budget statement and apply gender impact analysis on decision making processes,<sup>25</sup> gender budgeting is likely to be a key focus for National Cabinet in 2023. The Western Australian Government should build on the WA Women's Report Card and engage with the national agenda by progressively introducing gender impact analysis in policy, budgets and service delivery.<sup>26</sup>

**RECOMMENDATION:** Create a gender-responsive budget unit in WA Treasury to deliver a WA Women's Budget Statement, aligned with emerging national frameworks.

## Resilient Communities

Extreme weather-induced disasters have devastating financial, social and environmental impacts on individuals, families, local communities, businesses, governments and our landscape. Today, extreme weather-induced disasters cost the Australian economy \$38 billion per year on average. This cost is estimated to rise to at least \$73 billion annually by 2060 under a low emissions scenario, if not more. These costs include asset losses and financial costs associated with residential and public asset damage, emergency response and clean-up costs, together with social costs ranging from higher rates of chronic illness and mental health conditions to increased family and domestic violence. Research suggests that the total economic costs of weather-induced disasters between 2020-2060 for Western Australia under a low-emissions scenario may be \$120 billion.<sup>27</sup>

The capacity of communities to be resilient diminishes as disaster risk increases. It is overwhelmingly clear that those experiencing poverty are more vulnerable to the impacts of disasters and climate change. Poverty significantly increases people's susceptibility to poor health and wellbeing outcomes resulting from climate hazards such as heatwaves, droughts, floods, cyclones, and wildfires. People in poverty have limited access to resources, disposable income, choice, power and social connections and are thus less able to cope, adapt and recover from these hazards.<sup>28</sup> In order to

<sup>21</sup> Government of Queensland (2021) [Queensland Budget 2021-22 Investing for Women](#)

<sup>22</sup> Government of Victoria (2022) [Victorian Budget 22/23 Gender Equality Budget Statement](#)

<sup>23</sup> Government of New South Wales (2022) [NSW Budget 2022-23 Women's Opportunity Statement](#)

<sup>24</sup> ACT Government (2020) [ACT Women's Budget Statement 2020-21](#)

<sup>25</sup> Australian Government (2022) [Jobs and Skills Summit Outcomes](#), p9.

<sup>26</sup> Department of Communities (2022) [WA Women's Report Card](#).

<sup>27</sup> Deloitte Access Economics (2021) [Special report: Update to the economic costs of natural disasters in Australia](#). Sydney. Australian Business Roundtable for Disaster Resilience & Safer Communities.

<sup>28</sup> Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (2007) [Climate change 2007: Impacts, adaptation and vulnerability](#).

ensure all Western Australians are best prepared to face the growing impacts of climate change and frequency of weather-induced disasters, increased investments targeting both physical resilience (such as infrastructure) and community resilience measures (such as preparedness programs) aligned with the framework of the WA Community Disaster Resilience Strategy are needed.

**RECOMMENDATION:** Increase the availability of place-based funds to build community resilience and disaster risk reduction capacity, with a focus on low-income communities.



## Case Study – The Pilbara

The Pilbara is an expansive region 1,200 kilometers north from Perth that covers four shires made up of more than 31 language groups. Aboriginal people account for 14.8 per cent of the region's population, which has a large migrant community and fly-in, fly-out workforce.

The Pilbara community faces unique challenges due to the influence of mining and the boom/bust cycle. The cycle often exacerbates the challenges faced by regional areas. People living in the Pilbara see the massive wealth generated, but do not see the level of investment back into the region, despite extreme poverty and high levels of unmet need.

The housing crisis is acutely felt by those in this region. Housing is very expensive to rent or buy, there are chronic shortages, and what is available often does not meet community needs. Public housing waitlists are extensive, maintenance is poorly delivered, and overcrowding is a common issue. Addressing this shortfall is happening slowly and expensively. Community members frequently raise the need for culturally appropriate housing, both in location and structure. There is also a critical lack of crisis and transitional accommodation to support those in need.

The housing crisis in Pilbara towns impacts directly on the recruitment and retention of care staff. Care workers simply cannot afford local rental prices on their wages. If employees are able to secure housing, they still struggle with extremely high living costs, the lack of essential and recreational services, and a chronic lack of childcare. There is deep concern that services are not sustainable, with many local social services facing staff burn out. The services most affected include childcare, mental health, alcohol and drug services, and family and domestic violence services. Without these services, Pilbara communities suffer and hollow out.

While many of the issues across the Pilbara are of a similar nature, there is strong community concern the Government fail to understand the different needs between the remote and regional areas and appreciate that different strategies are needed to meet local needs. The town of Newman is a clear example. The remote isolation, harsh environment and the influx of people coming in from the Western Desert due to poor living conditions, who need to access essential services, puts extra strain on the community and amplifies social issues.

Across the whole Pilbara there is a strong and united call for investment in locally-led, placed based, culturally responsive, strategic initiatives.

Priorities include primary investment in remote communities to increase livability and help culture thrive, and increased funding for all contracts north of the 26<sup>th</sup> parallel to support higher living and service delivery costs.

## Keeping the Essentials Affordable for All

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Western Australia's economic position is strong, and our job market is tight, but households reliant on low and fixed incomes are struggling. The combination of minimal or stagnant wage growth, and persistently insufficient Commonwealth income support, means that families and workers are unable to cover the cost of basic necessities. The McGowan Government has made critical commitments to keep the household fees and charges set by government at or below CPI. With consumer prices at such high levels further action is needed at this time to support Western Australian households to meet their living costs.

### Energy and Water Concessions

A critical reform to improve energy concessions in Western Australia would be to introduce a *percentage-based* concession, as used in Victoria. This would substantially improve their adequacy and equity, particularly for larger households and those in poor quality, energy-hungry public and rental housing. Percentage-based concessions are calculated in proportion to usage, ensuring eligible households with higher energy needs receive more assistance. Such an approach is more effective in meeting the principle of vertical equity than flat concessions, as support is better matched to the different circumstances and needs of households.<sup>29</sup> It also enables households to cope with fluctuations in energy consumption over time due to changing health needs and seasonal variation.

Alviss Consulting recently modelled changes to the electricity concessions in each Australian jurisdiction. Their analysis found that in Western Australia, health care card holders would be better off under a percentage-based concession set at 19 per cent and pensioners would be better off if it was set at 22 per cent. They determined that shifting to a percentage-based model, rather than a flat or a hybrid model, was more equitable and responsive to changes in both energy price and consumption. This model is also better equipped to 'self-correct' to maintain relativity to need when there are changes to energy prices or demand.<sup>30</sup>

The clear issue for water concessions is one of equal access. The State Government rebates for consumption and service charges are only readily available to people who hold a Pensioner Concession Card or Seniors Card. This means that many people who require additional financial support to access enough water to sustain reasonable living standards, such as those who may be unemployed and rely on Commonwealth income support, are not eligible. Expanding the eligibility for water concessions to include people who hold a Health Care Card is essential to reducing water hardship.

**RECOMMENDATION:** Replace the Energy Assistance Payment with a percentage-based primary energy concession.

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<sup>29</sup> Queensland Council of Social Service (2014) [Energising concessions policy in Australia](#).

<sup>30</sup> May Mauseth Johnston, Alviss Consulting, and Rebecca Law, SACOSS (2022) *Assessing impacts of changes to Australian Electricity Concessions* (yet to be published).

**RECOMMENDATION:** Expand eligibility for water concessions to include people who hold a Health Care Card.

### Household Utility Grant Scheme

As part of its response to COVID-19, the WA Government reduced the requirement for a customer to be on a minimum 180-day payment arrangement before submitting a Hardship Utility Grant Scheme application, down to a minimum of 90-days. This measure meant that customers experiencing financial hardship could access the grants earlier, providing them the support they needed to avoid increasing debts and the risk of disconnection. This measure is set to expire on 1 February 2023.

The reduced wait time meant that customers could engage with HUGS Service Centre earlier. Evidence shows that early help makes a big difference in assisting households get on top of financial issues, leading to better outcomes. The Centre provides an assessment and triage service for customers eligible for a HUGS grant, working with HUGS applicants to address their budgetary challenges and providing referrals to other services as necessary.

HUGS payment limits have remained the same since 2017, while the cost of energy and water services have risen. Grants should be raised to keep pace with rising utility costs and indexed to CPI. Eligibility for these grants should be expanded to include other consumers in hardship who are currently unable to access them, including pre-payment meter customers and water customers in public housing

**RECOMMENDATION:** Make the HUGS 90-day payment arrangement requirement permanent, increase the maximum grant limits and expand the eligibility.

### Transport

Making public transport more affordable and accessible for everyone in our community will encourage greater use, reducing the load on our roads and our emissions. The McGowan Government made significant strides in improving the affordability of public transport by capping fares at the cost of a two-zone journey. Building on this, we recommend that free travel options for those on lower incomes are investigated. Currently, Seniors Card holders can 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 Asylum Seeker Hub concession.

A lack of affordable, accessible transport can also lock people out of the labour force. For example, 17 per cent of the participants in the *100 Families WA* study reported it was a barrier to gaining employment.<sup>31</sup> Car registration costs also contribute to the unaffordability of transport, creating additional hurdles for those who are unemployed to secure work in roles that require a car. Households in outer suburban and regional areas, where public transport options are limited, are

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<sup>31</sup> 100 Families WA (2019) [Baseline Report](#).

dependent on cars as their primary form of transport. The introduction of a monthly payment option from 27 September 2022 is a welcome step to assisting households to manage their finances but will not reduce the burden that car registration payments place on limited incomes.

In 2021, the Salvation Army reported a 90 per cent increase in requests for assistance to pay car registrations.<sup>32</sup> Uniting WA and Anglicare’s Emergency Relief and Food Access Service have also seen a rise in demand for car registration payments. With only a select number of emergency relief providers able to pay for car registration payments, those few that do are overwhelmed with demand.

**RECOMMENDATION:** Expand eligibility for the free travel periods on public transport to all concession card holders.

**RECOMMENDATION:** Expand car registration concessions to cover all Health Care Card holders.

### Transitioning Away from Gas

The electrification of households is a critical step in improving energy affordability in Western Australia and reducing emissions. By removing the gas connection, households will no longer be required to pay the unavoidable fixed costs of two networks, while collectively reducing emissions.

Analysis conducted by Renew has found that the retail fixed daily charges that households must pay to stay connected to both the electricity and gas networks are nearing \$500 a year. This research determined that in every instance, no matter the location or tariff type, it is more economic for new homes to avoid a gas connection altogether. Further, in most circumstances where a gas appliance needs to be replaced, it is also more economical to replace it with an electric appliance.<sup>33</sup>

Horizon Power’s Esperance Energy Transition Plan is currently seeing the electrification of 379 homes and businesses in the lead up to the March 2023 closure of the privately-owned local gas network. This transition is supporting households to replace existing gas appliances with energy efficient energy appliances.<sup>34</sup> The lessons from the Esperance transition can be used to develop a whole-of-state gas substitution roadmap, similar to that launched by the Victorian Government.<sup>35</sup>

This roadmap should include measures developed with local communities that support the electrification of their homes, with additional support for people on low incomes. Subsidies and rebates can be provided for low-income households to support the replacement of their existing gas appliances with efficient electric appliances. Otherwise, as the usage of the gas network declines and

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<sup>32</sup> Josh Zimmerman, ‘The Salvation Army pays car registrations for homeless West Australians’, *The West Australian* (2021) [thewest.com.au/news/social/the-salvation-army-pays-car-registrations-for-homeless-west-australians-ng-b881889193z](https://thewest.com.au/news/social/the-salvation-army-pays-car-registrations-for-homeless-west-australians-ng-b881889193z).

<sup>33</sup> Renew (2021) [Affordable energy choices for WA households](#).

<sup>34</sup> Horizon Power (2022) [Esperance Energy Transition Plan](#).

<sup>35</sup> Victorian Government (2022) [Victoria’s Gas Substitution Roadmap](#).

wealthier households make the shift to new, more cost-effective electric appliances, the cost of maintaining the gas network will be carried by low-income households.

In the interim, the WA Government should institute a moratorium on all new household connections to the existing gas network. This prevents households being forced to take on the costs of two networks, reduces emissions and provides an easier path to the complete electrification of Western Australian households.

**RECOMMENDATION:** Develop a household gas transition roadmap and institute a moratorium on all new household connections to existing gas networks.

### **Affordable and Social Housing**

Access to safe, secure and affordable shelter is essential for people to fully engage in our community. Stable tenancies are crucial to support positive outcomes in health, education and employment. Conversely, insecurity and instability in housing create the circumstances for increased hardship and entrenches disadvantage. Rents in Perth have grown drastically over 2020, 2021 and into 2022, placing significant pressure on many households. At the same time, the rental vacancy rate has been in freefall since 2017, making it difficult to secure a tenancy.

The McGowan Government announced the largest one-off investment into social housing in Western Australia's history as part of the 2021-22 State Budget.<sup>36</sup> This investment acts as a circuit-breaker that halts the decline of social housing stock in our state. A further \$408 million was also invested in the 2022-23 State Budget towards housing and homelessness measures. With access to trades and materials constrained as a result of the current construction boom, public investment has sensibly focused on refurbishing existing properties to a liveable standard, spot purchasing properties and innovative methods for delivering housing stock.

A WA Future Housing Fund would build on and extend this work by unlocking additional construction activity for social and affordable housing over the long term. It could provide an ongoing source of funding for key projects, give certainty to the construction industry and community housing providers, and enable counter-cyclical investment during construction downturns.

The proposed WA model sets aside \$1 billion of the state's surplus in perpetuity, with annual returns on the fund forming a long-term funding pipeline for new social and affordable housing supply. Annual returns on a \$1 billion WA fund can be allocated as an up-front equity co-investment to housing providers. Modelling undertaken for Shelter WA and Anglicare WA found the establishment of this fund would create up to 5,330 social and affordable dwellings over the next 10 years.<sup>37</sup>

**RECOMMENDATION:** Establish a \$1 billion Affordable Housing Future Fund.

<sup>36</sup> Hon Mark McGowan MLA and Hon John Carey MLA (2021) ['\\$875 million to significantly boost social housing in WA,' Media Statements.](#)

<sup>37</sup> Shelter WA, Anglicare WA (2022) WA Future Housing Fund proposal.

## Supporting Private Renters

With rental vacancy rates at historic lows and many WA households struggling to find affordable places to live, we cannot afford to have houses sitting empty. A vacant residential property charge ensures the most efficient use of housing stock by discouraging investors and developers from leaving houses empty. This measure would make a huge difference during the current crisis, where construction and supply cannot keep up with the demand for rental housing, leading to huge 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 vacant houses and apartments. 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 residents temporarily overseas.

The WA Government acted swiftly in response to the COVID-19 pandemic by introducing the Residential Rent Relief Grant Scheme to assist tenants experiencing financial hardship. With rents continuing to skyrocket in our overheated rental market, there is clear need for the scheme to be reintroduced to provide support for tenants until the market cools.

**RECOMMENDATION:** Introduce a vacant residential property charge levied at a rate of 1 per cent of the property's capital improved value.

**RECOMMENDATION:** Re-introduce a residential rent relief grant scheme.



### Case Study – Goomburrup (Bunbury and South West)

The City of Bunbury is located 180 kilometres south of Perth on the lands of the Wardandi Noongar people. It is a service centre for the south west of WA.

‘No one on Centrelink can find a rental in town’ sums up the housing problems in Bunbury. There is a lack of affordable housing and no emergency response for people with nowhere to live and an increase in visible homelessness. The punitive three strikes policy operating in public housing is causing a great deal of anxiety in the community and adds to growing homelessness.

The rising cost of fuel is already putting pressure on household budgets. This is before the reduced fuel excise was removed in September, increasing the price. With limited regional public transport, affordable housing in more distant towns can quickly become a poverty trap when older cars break down or cost too much to run.

Health services are also a regional priority. There is a lack of access to mental health services and support and to affordable bulk billing GPs. People are required to travel to metropolitan hospitals and specialists for vital services not available closer to home, which is a major barrier and cause of financial hardship. The Patient Assisted Travel Scheme PATS was mentioned several times. PATS reimburses regional community members for travel, 16c/L and only one way. The community would like to see an increase in PATS support that reflects the rising cost of living.

Services report that family violence is a major concern and local services are unable to meet the need. There are growing financial stress and debt issues, which are often triggers for family conflict. The women’s shelters in the region report that they are full and there is a triage process to be waitlisted.

Legal services for domestic violence are also at capacity. LegalAid is not able to take on more clients and community legal services are also at capacity. Affordable support is difficult to find.

Services highlighted how COVID-19 increased the feelings of loneliness and isolation being felt by all generations in the community. Many want to see a focus of rebuilding community connection in the region they love.

## Safe Communities

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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. The current approach to justice and community safety is leading to high rates of imprisonment and recidivism, resulting in the overrepresentation of Aboriginal people in our justice system. In fact, the overrepresentation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the WA justice system is the most disproportionate rate of incarceration in the entire country, and one of the highest disproportionate rates of incarceration the world.<sup>38</sup>

A study by the Telethon Kids Institute at Banksia Hill identified that 90 per cent of young people in detention have at least one severe neuro-developmental impairments, with one in three young people in custody having Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder.<sup>39</sup> 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>40</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>41</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>42</sup>

The *Young Offenders Act 1994* is a critical piece of legislation for guiding how police, the courts and corrective services interact with young people and the approaches they may choose to take in relation to diverting them from the justice system, or when they may consider detention as an option. In October 2022, the WA Government announced that it would commence public consultation on this legislation, marking the first substantially review since its initial statutory review in 1998.<sup>43</sup>

This legislation needs to be updated to ensure that it is effective and reflects a modern understandings of youth offending, with a focus on prevention and diversion, as well as prioritising pathways that promote the wellbeing of children, young people and communities.

Building on this, Western Australia needs to take a Social Reinvestment approach across the justice system. 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.

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<sup>38</sup> Social Reinvestment WA (2021) [Raising the Minimum Age of Criminal Responsibility](#).

<sup>39</sup> Telethon Kids Institute (2017) *Implications and recommendations from the Telethon Kids Banksia Hill Project*.

<sup>40</sup> Eileen Baldry and Chris 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>41</sup> Department of Justice, 'Annual Report, 2019/20', *The Department of Justice*, WA, The Government of Western Australia, 2020, [https://www.wa.gov.au/sites/default/files/2020-09/Department-of-Justice-Annual-Report-2019-2020\\_0.pdf](https://www.wa.gov.au/sites/default/files/2020-09/Department-of-Justice-Annual-Report-2019-2020_0.pdf);

<sup>42</sup> The Government of Western Australia, 'Western Australia State Budget 2020-21, Budget Paper, No. 2, Budget Statements Volume 2', Perth, WA, The Government of Western Australia, <https://www.ourstatebudget.wa.gov.au/2020-21/budget-papers/bp2/2020-21-wa-state-budget-bp2-vol2.pdf>.

<sup>43</sup> Hon Bill Johnston MLA, ['WA Government to review young offender laws'](#), *Media Statements*, WA Government.

The Social Reinvestment WA *Blueprint for a Better Future: Paving the Way for Youth Justice Reform in WA* outlines a vision for a more effective and connected youth justice system in Western Australia, setting out seventeen key recommendations to redesign the system.<sup>44</sup> It also sets out three actions that the WA Government can take immediately to improve youth justice outcomes:

- Develop a whole-of-government vision and strategy to improve youth justice outcomes
- Fund 10 place-based initiatives co-designed with communities in urgent need
- Review and modernise the *Young Offenders Act 1994*

**RECOMMENDATION:** Implement the *Blueprint for a Better Future: Paving the Way for Youth Justice Reform in WA*.

### Whole-of-Government Vision and Strategy

The Australian Law Reform Commission has recommended a justice reinvestment approach to address the overrepresentation of Aboriginal people in the justice system.<sup>45</sup>

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.<sup>46</sup> To increase community safety, we must utilise diversion, rehabilitation, and community sentencing options that contribute to reductions in offending behaviour and are ultimately more cost effective.

Our state's continually expanding police force adds to these challenges. These investments often take place in the absence of any evidence that they are needed or will be effective in ensuring community safety, and instead see a significant increase in pressure on both the courts and LegalAid, and the prison and corrections population.

With responsibility for delivering youth justice outcomes sitting across multiple portfolios and agencies, there can be a lack of interagency coordination and accountability across the entire service system.

**RECOMMENDATION:** Develop a whole of government vision and strategy to improve youth justice outcomes across the life-course, in partnership with the community and sector.

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<sup>44</sup> M Rothwell et al. (2022) [Blueprint for a Better Future: Paving the Way for Youth Justice Reform in Western Australia](#), Social Reinvestment WA.

<sup>45</sup> Australian Law Reform Commission (2018) Pathways to Justice – Inquiry into the Incarceration Rate of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People, ALCR Report 133.

<sup>46</sup> Social Reinvestment WA (2021) [Raising the Minimum Age of Criminal Responsibility](#).

## Place-Based Initiatives

The WA Government's Target 120 projects demonstrate the evidence-based early intervention and prevention approach that can be taken to support young people who come into contact with the justice system. By working with young people, their families and their community, these projects seek to address the complex issues that can be the causes of youth crime.

Likewise, the Olabud Doogethu Project is an example of how place-based initiatives can be delivered and developed to improve youth justice outcomes.<sup>47</sup> Located in Halls Creek, it is Social Reinvestment WA's first Justice Reinvestment trial site. Designed by and employing Aboriginal people, this initiative seeks to build community capacity and leadership by reducing juvenile offences and supporting families, achieving a brighter future for the next generation in Halls Creek.

As part of this need to reduce juvenile offences, Olabud Doogethu introduced the Youth Engagement Night Officers to help to get young people off the streets and discourage them going out during the night or the early hours of the morning. Taking down the names of these children, they follow up during the day to support the parents. This approach aims to support and encourage these children to go home, but not to take a punitive approach. The YENO strategy saw a substantial reduction in offences, as well as an overall decrease in children out at night.

To ensure the ongoing success of these programs, it is integral that backbone support, developed with local communities, is provided to enable these place-based programs to identify service gaps and seek solutions tailored for their local circumstances.

**RECOMMENDATION:** Identify the 10 communities in most need of action on youth justice and resource place-based initiatives to co-create asset-based solutions in partnership with local communities and services.



<sup>47</sup> Olabud Doogethu – Smart Justice in the Heart of Kimberley <https://olabuddoogethu.org.au/>.

### Case Study - Jambinu (Geraldton and Mid West)

The town of Geraldton is a key service hub for the Mid-West region, with outreach services delivered to surrounding towns. Geraldton is on the lands of the Amagu people of the Yamatji nation.

Affordable housing is a major issue in Geraldton particularly impacting young people and placing them at risk. The lack of affordable housing is also impacting the care workforce with organisations being unable to recruit staff. Local care staff continue to raise concern about the large number of vacant public houses that have been neglected for decades, calling for support to create a local social enterprise to train young people in renovating old homes.

Many in the region who had homes lost or badly damaged by Cyclone Seroja are still struggling fifteen months later to negotiate with insurance companies and meet the cost of rebuilding, while some with inadequate insurance cover are facing significant financial hardship.

The rising costs of service delivery, inadequate funding, short term contracts and staff shortages are leaving many services stretched. Services keen to recruit more staff now focus on those already in their community and want to help develop career pathways for young people and those excluded from the workforce. This requires additional resources and better access to training.

Finding affordable health care in Geraldton is increasingly difficult, with local GPs moving away from bulkbilling and switching to fee-for-service models. The community commented that it is impossible to attract more affordable GPs to the area when there is nowhere for them to live.

Care staff are concerned that it is practically impossible to access mental health care in an appropriate timeframe. Mental health services in the region are at capacity and many have waitlists over a month long. The region is particularly concerned for the mental health of their young people. Many people in the region feel their young adults are slipping through the gaps due to limited access to early intervention and prevention programs. Telling young people that they are not yet distressed or desperate enough when they reach out for help is sending the wrong message, and services report that once local young people become homeless it is then so much harder to secure better outcomes.

Homelessness services continue to have a tough time due to the lack of places, with the shortage of affordable rentals meaning many have nowhere to move on to. This year the State Government opened six refurbished social housing dwellings and progressed the \$9 million Spalding renewal project. However, it will be some time before these homes are completed and housing pressures ease due to the construction boom and rising cost of building materials.

## Acknowledgements

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WACOSS held community conversations from July to September 2022 in Albany, Broome, Bunbury, Geraldton, Kalgoorlie and Esperance (online), Karratha, Mandurah, Metropolitan Perth (north, south and east), Newman, Port Hedland and Roebourne. A statewide online forum was also held for those unable to participate in person. In addition, discussions or priority-setting workshops were held with a number of the community service networks WACOSS convenes, including the WA Peaks Forum, the Children’s Policy Advisory Council, the State Emergency Relief Council and Fair Food WA.

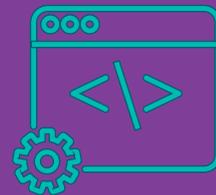
We acknowledge and thank everyone who participated in the community conversations, provided data, research and advice, including:

Aarnja	Consumer Credit Legal Service
Aboriginal Health Council WA	Create
Access Care Network	Cyrenian House
Access to Leisure and Sport Inc	Denmark CRC
Albany CLC	Department of Communities
Albany Youth Support Association	Department of Health
Allambee Counselling	Disabilities WA
Amity Health	East Pilbara Independence Support
Anglicare WA	Edith Cowan University
Australian Red Cross	Escare
Broome Circle	Esperance Care Services
CARAD	Esperance Crisis Accommodation Service
Centrecare	Everability Group
Centacare Kimberley	Fair Food WA
Child and Family Alliance WA	Financial Counselling Network
Child Australia	Financial Counsellors Association of WA
Children’s Policy Advisory Council	Geraldton Regional Aboriginal Medical Service
Choyces	Goldfields Anglicare
City of Armadale	Goldfields Women’s Healthcare Centre
City of Greater Geraldton	Good360
City of Joondalup	Goodstart Early Learning
City of Mandurah	Headspace
City of Wanneroo	Indigo Junction Karnany Resource Centre
Community Employers WA	Job SouthWest
Community Legal WA	Just Home Margaret River Inc
Communicare	Kanyirninpa Jukurrpa
Connect Groups	Keys Youth Services

Kimberley Aboriginal Medical Service	Ruah
Linkwest	Salvation Army
Lived Experience Advisory Group	Save the Children
Local Drugs Action Groups	SecondBite
Lotteries House Geraldton	Shine
LotteryWest	Shire of Serpentine Jarrahdale
Mark Folkard MLA	Silver Chain
Meerilinga Children and Community Foundation	Social Reinvestment WA
Men's Outreach	Spires Centre
Mercycare	State Emergency Relief Council
Metropolitan Migrant Resource Centre	St Patrick's Community Support Centre
Midland to Health, SJOG Outreach Services	St Vincent de Paul Society
Metropolitan Migrant Resource Centre	Stopping Domestic Violence
Mission Australia	Town of Port Hedland
Money Mentors	Umbrella Multicultural Community Care
Ngala	Uniting WA
No Limits Perth	United Way WA
North Metropolitan TAFE	Vision Australia
Northern Suburbs Legal Centre	Volunteering WA
OVIS Community Services	WA Local Government Association
Palmerston	WA Network of Alcohol & other Drugs Agencies
Parkerville	WA Peaks Forum
Patricia Giles Centre for Non-Violence	WA Social Research Network
Peel Development Commission	Wanslea
People with Disabilities WA Inc	Waratah Support Centre
Pilbara Aboriginal Legal Service	WestAus Crisis & Welfare
Pilbara Aboriginal Health Alliance	Women's Health and Family Services
Pilbara Family and Domestic	Women's Legal Centre WA
Phoenix	Yaandina Community Services
Violence Network	YMCA
Pilbara Regional Development Authority	Yorganop
Playgroup WA	Yorgum
Puntukurnu Aboriginal Medical Service	Youth Affairs Council of WA
Regional Alliance West	Youth Involvement Council
Rise	

WACOSS  
MEMBERS GET  
**10%**  
DISCOUNT

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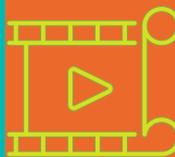


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# WACOSS strives for an inclusive, just and equitable society.

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

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