

## Early Years

*The 2023-24 Budget works to support children's early years by investing in infrastructure, supports for students with disability and infant, child and youth mental health. An additional \$123.8 million is provided for Child Protection Services and out of home care services (see WACOSS 'Youth' fact sheet for further detail). There appears to be very limited investment in targeted early years programs. The absence of such funding mirrors the government's broader lack of investment in preventative service provision and puts children at increased risk of adverse experiences.*

<b>Initiative</b>	Consultation, Research and Promotion of the Wellbeing of Children and Young People (BP2, V1, P107)
<b>Investment</b>	\$3.5 million for 2023-24
<b>Description</b>	Consultation, research and the promotion of the wellbeing of children and young people are a responsibility of the Commissioner and the scope and goals for this are prescribed in the Commissioner for Children and Young People Act 2006.
<b>Implications</b>	This important funding works to ensure the voices of children and young people are heard, and their needs and wellbeing are prioritised.

<b>Initiative</b>	Access to regional childcare (BP2, V2, P521)
<b>Investment</b>	\$1.4 million over 2023-24
<b>Description</b>	As part of election commitments, the Government committed to boost funding to support access to regional childcare, including through initiatives to help attract and retain regional childcare staff. The 2023-24 budget continues to support this commitment.
<b>Implications</b>	Increased childcare, particularly in regional areas, allows parents and carers to return to work. This initiative supports women's economic empowerment and helps to create safe environments where children are supported to flourish in their early years.

<b>Initiative</b>	Infants, Children and Adolescents (ICA) Taskforce – improved mental health outcomes for children and adolescents (BP2, V1, P322)
<b>Investment</b>	\$35.5 million for the forward estimates

<b>Description</b>	<p>The investment includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• establishment of a 2.5 year pilot of a Community ICA Mental Health Service Hub in Bunbury</li> <li>• continuation of a 9.5 FTE uplift at the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS)</li> <li>• establishment of a 2.5 year pilot of an East Metropolitan Acute Care Response Team</li> <li>• funding for 10 additional Aboriginal Mental Health Workers</li> <li>• an expansion to the Touchstone Service which provides specialised intensive treatment for children aged 12-17 years with complex personality disorders.</li> </ul>
<b>Implications</b>	<p>Investment in infant and child mental health is a proactive approach to ensuring community wellbeing both now, and in the future. While the identified investment is a positive start to addressing the significant gap in infant and child mental health services, it is unclear how the funding will specifically target improving mental health in the early years. Ongoing, and targeted, investment is required to drive significant and sustained change in this area.</p> <p><i>See 'WACOSS Youth' fact sheet for further comment.</i></p>

<b>Initiative</b>	Supporting students with disability and complex behaviour (BP2, V1, P350)
<b>Investment</b>	\$533.8 million over the forward estimates, which represents \$74.6 million more than last year's allocation
<b>Description</b>	This package works to support students with disability and complex behaviour. This package includes the expansion of specialist learning programs for students with autism spectrum disorder and an increase to the educational adjustment allocation to support more students with undiagnosed disabilities and learning difficulties.
<b>Implications</b>	<p>This important investment will ensure young students have access to services that both identify and meet their complex learning needs. Early intervention improves immediate and long-term outcomes for students with disability and complex behaviour.</p> <p><i>See WACOSS 'Disability' and 'Youth' fact sheets for further comment.</i></p>