

Youth

This State Budget provides a few positive investments to young people, primarily in cost-of-living relief for families and investments in services in child protection and out-of-home care. Initiatives such as the provision of free public transport for school students is positive, and will provide welcome relief to families doing it tough. Dedicated investment in programs such as the expansion of the Home Stretch WA initiative, allowing young people leaving out-of-home-care to continue to receive support, and in therapeutic diversion programs inside the WA Children's Court are highly welcomed and will have long-term positive impacts on breaking cycles of vulnerability.

However, with the State's enviable economic position, this Budget was a missed opportunity to make generational investments in ending vulnerability and safeguarding young people's futures. The Budget's focus on delivering for every Western Australian has meant targeted investment on priority issues for young people are out-of-focus.

Initiative	Extending Home Stretch WA funding for young people leaving out-of-home care (BP2, V2, P504)
Investment	\$46.3 million over four years
Description	Additional funding builds on the \$32.7 million invested in 2019 in the Home Stretch pilot, making the program permanent. It supports young people from 18 to 21 as they leave care. This is part of a larger package of investment into child protection.
Implications	Aboriginal children and young people are overrepresented in out-of-home care. A total of nine ACCOs and three mainstream services will now deliver the program across the state – adding in the Goldfields-Esperance and Wheatbelt regions. (<i>Anglicare and Yorganup played a critical role developing the service model</i>). (see media release)

Initiative	Expansion of Child Development Services (BP2, V1, P306, P310)
Investment	\$39 million in total (\$15.7 million in 2024-25, \$23 million in 2025-26)
Description	Additional funding for both the Child and Adolescent Health Service metropolitan service (CAHS-CDS) and WA Country Health Service regional service (WACHS-CDS). Enables a significant increase in clinical staff, including paediatricians, clinical nurse specialists, speech pathologists, occupational therapists, psychologists and audiologists, in both the metro and regional areas.
Implications	Referrals to child development paediatricians have risen 132% over last decade leading to significant delays in diagnosis and treatment of children with developmental delays. This solution still only focuses on the health system response and it is unclear if this will also address the problem of needing a formal diagnosis before receiving critical early

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	development advice and support. <i>See Children and Families Fact Sheet.</i>
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Initiative	Extension and Expansion of Respectful Relationships Program (BP2, V2, P504, P506)
Investment	\$1.53 million over the next two years
Description	This is part of a larger investment in family and domestic violence (FDV) in this Budget. Respectful Relationships is prevention program focusing on respectful relationships and gender equality in WA State schools.
Implications	This is a positive investment in addressing FDV early and changing behaviour in schools. However we note funding is currently provided only for two years, and would welcome a longer-term commitment.

Initiative	Ride To School Free Program (BP3, P6 & P329)
Investment	\$21 million over an unknown time period
Description	School students with a SmartRider card will travel on public transport for free on weekdays. This complements free public transport provided every Sunday with a SmartRider.
Implications	This is a welcome investment that will ease cost-of-living pressures. However, it is unclear how long this initiative will continue for, and we would welcome a decision to make this permanent. While positive, it is important to note the requirement to hold a valid SmartRider imposes a barrier on some young people, particularly vulnerable young people who may need external support to afford the cost of a Smart Rider and ensuring it is valid.

Initiative	Early Years Partnership (BP2, V2, P116, P503)
Investment	\$15.6 million over four years
Description	The Early Years Partnership focuses on child wellbeing and school readiness, where community plans are codesigned with local communities in four locations - Armadale West, Central Great Southern, Derby and Bidyadanga. EYP is a whole-of-government 10-year partnership (2018-2028) between Minderoo Foundation, Telethon Kids Institute and Dept Communities.
Implications	EYP aims to increase child well-being and school readiness by improving access to early learning opportunities, early identification and intervention services to address developmental delay and family support services.

Initiative	Therapeutic Approaches in the Children's Court (BP2, V2, P421 & BP3, P131)
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Investment	\$13.3 million over two years
Description	<p>This includes funding for two programs in the WA Children’s Court:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • \$8.8 million for In-Roads, a diversionary program of intensive support and clinical interventions for young people who would otherwise be sentenced to youth detention. \$1.8 million has been provided for the Health Navigator Pilot. • \$5.1 million has been allocated to continue the Dandjoo Bidi-Ak Court, which provides culturally-safe court services, legal assistance and family support services for Aboriginal young people and their families involved in protection and care proceedings. <p><i>See Justice fact sheet.</i></p>
Implications	Funding for diversionary programs is highly needed in WA, and this investment provides some security for pilot programs inside the Children’s Court. With a crisis in youth detention, initiatives to provide therapeutic care and services to children and families can prevent children from entering detention.

Initiative	Health Navigator Program (BP2, V1, P306 and P310)
Investment	\$6.6 million over two years
Description	<p>A further \$6.6 million in funding will continue the successful Health Navigator pilot program by helping vulnerable, out-of-home-care children and young people to get the best start in life. Skilled health system navigators partner with carers, case workers and young adults to access comprehensive health assessments through collaborative cross-agency service delivery that maximises health and wellbeing benefits within a culturally safe environment.</p> <p><i>See Children and Families and Health fact sheets</i></p>
Implications	This contributes to an overarching aim to improve access to medical care and health support for young people in out-of-home-care.

Initiative	Infants, Children and Adolescents (ICA) Taskforce (BP2, V1, P331 – P333)
Investment	<p>\$46,600,000 over four years, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • \$22.4 million over four years to establish new Acute Care Response Teams in the North and South Metropolitan areas and the Great Southern, and to extend the existing Acute Care Response Team pilot in the East Metropolitan area. • \$19.5 million to extend the expansion of the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services’ Crisis Connect service workforce

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> \$4.7 million for a two-year extension of the WA Country Health Service's Brief Crisis Intervention Service to continue a vital post-emergency department follow-up service for children and their families and allow for a full evaluation of the service to be undertaken.
Description	<p>The Government is continuing its commitment to implement all 32 recommendations of the Ministerial Taskforce into Public Mental Health Services for Infants, Children and Adolescents aged 0-18 years in Western Australia (ICA Taskforce). Investment in the 2024/25 Budget brings the Government's total investment in ICA Taskforce initiatives to \$143.6 million.</p> <p><i>See Mental Health and Children and Families fact sheets</i></p>
Implications	<p>This initiative will improve access to vital services for young people needing an acute response.</p> <p>Ongoing investment in WACHS Brief Crisis Intervention allows for the continuation of a vital post-emergency department follow-up service for children and their families and allows for a full evaluation of the service to be undertaken. Yet, a two-year extension represents an overall shortfall for mental health funding in the regions.</p>

Initiative	Reconfiguration and refurbishment of the PCH Mental Health inpatient ward (BP2, V1, P312 & P332).
Investment	\$14.2 million over an unknown period
Description	Additional funding for the reconfiguration and refurbishment of the Perth Children's Hospital Mental Health Inpatient Unit on Ward 5A. The Government is continuing its commitment to implement all 32 recommendations of the Ministerial Taskforce into Public Mental Health Services for Infants, Children and Adolescents aged 0-18 years in Western Australia (ICA Taskforce). Investment in the 2024/25 Budget brings the Government's total investment in ICA Taskforce initiatives to \$143.6 million.
Implications	Important infrastructure upgrades to improve services for children receiving inpatient mental health support.

Initiative	Investing in Aboriginal Social and Emotional Wellbeing (BP2, V1, P332 & BP3, P121)
Investment	\$12.3 million over two years

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Description	To continue delivery of vital Aboriginal Social and Emotional Wellbeing services across regional Western Australia, an additional \$12.3 million will be spent over 2024-25 and 2025-26. This provides for the continuation of culturally safe and secure services in five regional areas and a youth specific program in the Kimberley. The program contributes to the aim to improve Aboriginal people's levels of social and emotional wellbeing under the National Agreement on Closing The Gap.
Implications	Additional funding is Aboriginal youth suicide prevention is welcome, given the unacceptably high rates of suicide, particularly in the Kimberley. More detail is needed on the youth specific program in the Kimberley.

Initiative	Provision of Menstrual Products in Primary Schools (BP2, V1, P354)
Investment	\$865,000 over four years
Description	This is in addition to free products in high schools and TAFEs which were provided from mid-2023. Note: Existing Department Spending has been reprioritised to meet these costs.
Implications	Access to free menstrual items helps to reduce stigma around menstruation and ensures that no child goes without such basic healthcare items.

Initiative	Safe Place – Youth Mental Health and Alcohol and Other Drug Homelessness Program (BP2, V2, P520)
Investment	\$4.829 million over two years
Description	This is an ongoing commitment to develop a facility for young people struggling with mental health, alcohol and other drug (AOD) usage and homelessness to access with safe and stable accommodation.
Implications	This funding was committed to in previous budgets, and was anticipated to be completed in 2023. Details on the status of this commitment are needed, however significant expenditure is committed in the next financial year.