

# If not now, WHEN?!

## WACOSS Pre-Budget Submission State Budget 2008/09



WACOSS

Western Australian  
Council of Social Services Inc

Ways to make  
a difference

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# Executive Summary

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The Western Australian Council of Social Service is pleased to present the 2007/2008 Pre-Budget Submission ***If not now, when?!*** to the State Government of Western Australia. This annual submission provides detail to the State Government on the budget priorities of the Western Australian community services sector.

This year, our primary recommendation has been to commit to a social vision for Western Australia by developing a Western Australian Social Inclusion Strategy. Our sector is calling on the State Government to develop an overall vision for social wellbeing in Western Australia, supported by well resourced social performance reporting which measures our progress towards achieving that vision. Such a strategy would form a plan for how social wellbeing will be pursued in WA.

Western Australia lacks a social vision to address longstanding disadvantage in our society. The current strong economy provides a timely opportunity to implement a plan to address these inequities and create a fairer society. Effective participation in society is described as “social inclusion.” To be effective, a social vision should be pursued through the development of a WA Social Inclusion Strategy.

Recommendations for the development of the Social Inclusion Strategy are provided in Part One of the submission, *Planning for Communities*.

Our secondary recommendations argue for investment in the community services sector and a comprehensive scope of human service priorities. These priorities fall under ten broad headings: Investing in our Strengths; Aboriginal; Housing; Care and Support; Essential Services; Health; Financial Support; Safety and Justice; Education; and Social participation.

Recommendations for investment in the social wellbeing of our state are detailed in Part Two of the submission, *Budgeting for Communities*.

It is time for the State Government to invest in the Western Australian community by delivering a State Budget that provides for our social wellbeing. The rationale for developing a social vision for Western Australia is now well established. In order to achieve the objectives of a social vision for our state, we will need to budget for communities.

This submission provides an overview of the broad range of budget priorities across the social spectrum. It has been developed in consultation with the peak bodies and the members of the WACOSS Policy Advisory Councils, and is reflective of the community perspective. We focus on recommendations for advancing the social wellbeing of WA, under our suggested framework for a WA Social Inclusion Strategy.

## **Investing in our Strengths**

Suggests how the Government should invest now in the strength of the community services sector, in recognition of its value to the state, and to enhance its ongoing viability.

## **Aboriginal**

Highlights a number of recommendations to improve the social wellbeing of Aboriginal Western Australians.

**Housing**

Calls for funding priorities to address the housing affordability and homelessness crisis in across the state.

**Care and Support**

Provides a range of strategies to improve the care and support given to children, youth and families, including grandparents; as well as support for seniors, carers and people with disabilities.

**Essential services**

Recommends improvements to the accessibility and affordability of essential services such as electricity, gas, water, transport and emergency relief for utilities.

**Health**

Overviews the range of primary health service and preventative health initiatives that require funding attention.

**Safety and Justice**

Provides information of the current needs of the community in relation to the priority areas of addressing domestic and family violence and legal support services.

**Education**

Highlights recommendations for providing holistic education support, and social support services through the education system.

**Financial Support**

Calls for the state to implement strategies for ensuring that people in financial hardship get proper financial support and attention.

**Social Participation**

Suggests budget priorities for improving the social connectedness and participation of all members of the community, including marginalised and disadvantaged groups.

A separate overview document is also available from WACOSS, which provides a snapshot of some of the recommendations of this submission. The recommendations presented in the overview document do not necessarily represent the agreed top priorities of our sector, but instead provide a snapshot of the complete document and highlight some of the areas of great need. A complete list of recommendations is also included at the conclusion of the overview document.

# **PART ONE**

## **Planning for Communities**

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# Planning for Communities

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Economic indicators put WA at the forefront of the nation for jobs, business investment and resources. But the benefits of the boom are not enjoyed by all - pressure is increasing on average families to find and maintain affordable housing and to adjust the family budget as the cost of living rises. Others, who are already in disadvantage, like the homeless, under employed and unemployed, people living with mental illness and non-English speakers, face even greater difficulties in spite of the boom as the income support system toughens and industrial relations laws weaken.

WACOSS advocates for immediate action on developing and implementing a Social Inclusion Strategy for two key reasons. Firstly, it is inequitable and unnecessary to tolerate the continuation of poverty and social exclusion in a society whose leaders profess that is founded on opportunity and the concept of giving everyone a 'fair go'. Secondly, given the current and predicted strength of the State economy, the opportunity is now available to make a lasting difference to the wellbeing of the whole community. Currently, this opportunity is not only affordable but also necessary if this favourable economic position is to be maintained.

It is a measure of poor social inclusion when some are systematically excluded from full participation in economic and social life, in areas such as employment, community services, housing and social participation. Many other governments have implemented whole-of-government social inclusion strategies with notable success, including other Australian states.

The startling evidence that many Western Australians continue to be disadvantaged despite the economic boom includes:

- In WA, while wages in the mining sector have increased significantly, wages in other sectors have not. For example, hospitality wages only rose by an average of 2.4% in the 12 months to September 2006 (half the rate of inflation).<sup>1</sup>
- House purchase prices have been rising substantially in WA in recent years. Between 2002 and 2007 in Perth, the median house price increased 153% and the median land price has risen 189%.
- Perth's 'affordability gap' (the difference between incomes required to affordably purchase a median priced house and household median income) has also risen considerably. By March 2007 the gap had risen more than 86%, the median income was \$60,000 and the median house price had risen to \$460,000 bringing the income required to purchase this house to more than \$110 000.<sup>2</sup>
- Western Australia has the least amount of students from low socio-economic backgrounds completing Year 12 out of all states except the Northern Territory.
- Thirty percent of all 15–19 year olds were not enrolled in a course of study in Western Australia in 2005. Of those, 70% were employed and 30% (12,900) were unemployed or not in the labour force.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Dennis, R (2007) The Boom for Whom? Who benefits from WA's resources boom?, Produced by the Australian Greens available at [www.rachelsiewert.org.au](http://www.rachelsiewert.org.au)

<sup>2</sup> Shelter WA. The State Budget 2007: A missed opportunity to set affordable housing targets.

<sup>3</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics annual Survey of Education and Work May 2005 cited in Pathways in Education and related outcomes in Western Australia ([www.abs.gov.au/ausstats](http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats))

## PLANNING FOR COMMUNITIES

- Aboriginal people, who represent 3% of WA's population, account for more than 1 in 3 homeless persons (41%) and nearly a third of homeless households (29%).
- While overall the State enjoys the lowest rate of unemployment in history, the unemployment rate in some areas of Western Australia are as high as 8% (Kwinana)<sup>4</sup> and 6.3% in the East Kimberley.<sup>5</sup>
- In September 2006 there were 56,000 'discouraged jobseekers' not included in unemployment figures.<sup>6</sup>

Western Australia lacks a social vision to address longstanding disadvantage in our society. The current strong economy provides a unique opportunity to implement a plan to address these inequities and create a fairer society. Effective participation in society is described as "social inclusion." To be effective, a social vision should be supported by social inclusion strategies which are proven to be effective in similar societies overseas and have been introduced recently in other Australian states.

Central to a social inclusion plan is an anti-poverty strategy. Recent national research points to "postcodes of disadvantage", a framework that can help to concentrate efforts to improve social wellbeing. While we acknowledge the commitment by this ALP Government to anti-poverty and recognise that some work has been begun, it is clear that a comprehensive strategy is long overdue and much more needs to be done urgently.

Anti-poverty strategies are working in many countries around the world. In the European Union for example, every member state has a National Action Plan on Social Inclusion. The results of such strategies have been significant decreases in the extent and severity of poverty in these countries. For example, Ireland, the first EU Member State to adopt an Anti-Poverty Strategy has made significant progress in addressing poverty, including:

- A significant reduction in the numbers of people experiencing consistent poverty. Dropping from 15% in 1997 to 6.8% in 2004.
- A drop in unemployment from 11.3% to just 4%. (long term unemployment has dropped to 1.4%.)
- A fall in the numbers of children living in poverty - from 24% to 6%
- A reduction in the proportion of early school leaving, a well known link to poor employment prospects, from 31% of students to 15%<sup>7</sup>

Other Australian states are leading the way in whole-of-government social inclusion strategies (e.g., *A New Direction for NSW State Plan*, *A Fairer Victoria - The Victorian Government's social policy action plan*, *Tasmania Together 2020*). Can the WA Government catch up before more Western Australians fall behind?

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<sup>4</sup> Source: DEWR; Small Area Labour Markets Australia, June quarter 2006 included <http://www.perthacc.com.au> Perth Area Consultative Committee 17 September 2007

<sup>5</sup> Labour Market Information Portal June 2007, [workplace.gov.au](http://workplace.gov.au). Accessed 20 September 2007.

<sup>6</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics (2007) Persons not in the Labour Force Cat 6220.0

<sup>7</sup> Bennett, Johanna, *Poverty: Ireland is winning the war*, The Catholic Weekly, 17 August 2003.

# Developing a WA Social Inclusion Strategy

There are many examples of processes to develop a social plan. Other Australian States have succeeded in developing social plans and have even completed reporting and evaluation cycles – a review of these processes would be a good starting point. Meanwhile, momentum is building for a national plan for social inclusion. Linking with this process would also prove useful and help to identify state and federal responsibilities.

In W.A. much work has already been done or is currently underway to develop strategies for children's wellbeing. These strategies, along with other work towards social wellbeing, should be identified and inform the Social Plan. Existing independent strategies include:

- The [Early Years Strategy](#)
- The [Children First Strategy](#)
- [Active Ageing Strategy](#)
- [Responding to the Gordon Inquiry](#)
- Drug Summit
- [Industry Plan for the Non-Government Human Services Sector](#)
- [State Homelessness Strategy](#)
- State Sustainability Strategy
- Mental Health Action Plan 2005–2010

If WA were to allow other successful processes to guide the development of a social plan, a visionary commitment to improving quality of life for Western Australians should be articulated at the highest level of Government. Community sector leaders have called upon the Premier to make such a commitment to a Social Vision. For example, the idea of a strategic approach to social inclusion in Britain began to take hold in March 1999 when Tony Blair made a commitment to end poverty among children within a generation. This galvanised policy development and inspired community leaders and private enterprise.

## Recommendation

WACOSS proposes the Premier commit his social vision for the State to the public record. A Social Inclusion Strategy Taskforce should be established, modeled from the successful *State Homelessness Strategy Taskforce*. It would involve Government alongside industry and the community sector.

Such a model would strengthen the ability of the resulting plan to achieve sustainable, positive results of great benefit to our community and to alleviate poverty and disadvantage throughout the state. To this end, it is vital that the strategy is informed by the WA community's collective knowledge, experience and skill, and is representative of the needs of all West Australians living in poverty.

Existing information should be used as a basis to develop comprehensive, specific, sustainable and partnership-focussed responses to social inclusion in Western Australia. Particular attention should be given to the 2004 Senate Committee Report: *A hand up not a hand out* and the WA specific research from the 1998 *Report for the International Decade for the Eradication of Poverty*. The taskforce should identify key state-level strategies and partnerships that have the capacity to effectively address the causes and symptoms of poverty in Western Australia both in the short and long term.

## PLANNING FOR COMMUNITIES

One possible approach is to develop objectives, targets and strategies to reduce poverty and social exclusion across life's course: children and young people, the workforce age population, seniors. (This is the approach Britain has taken with their social inclusion plan, *Opportunity for All*.) This approach has the advantage of taking a whole-of-government perspective. At a Government department level, objectives would be adopted as key performance indicators.

### Proposed Activities of a Social Inclusion Strategy Taskforce

- An agreed definition of poverty that reflects the unique and complex experience of those living in poverty;
- An emphasis on research into the extent and experience of poverty and effectiveness of measures that aim to address it
- An analysis of the causes of poverty and further identification of the most vulnerable groups in the community at risk of poverty;
- On going consultation on the development of the strategy with key stakeholders
- The setting of targets, objectives, and actions for key areas including: education, employment, health and housing;
- The development of key principles to engage all sections of Government and community. In particular, the implementation of a poverty proofing to ensure that all Government Policies and Programs are assessed to determine the likely impact that they will have on poverty and inequality in the community.
- The establishment of structures by which the strategy would be implemented; and
- Ongoing evaluation of the effectiveness and achievements of the Strategy.

#### Recommendation

That the State Government support a Social Inclusion Strategy Taskforce by resourcing two senior policy officers (one from within Government and one from the non-government sector) and a part time administration support officer.

A Government agency should be identified to host the taskforce secretariat. WACOSS propose that the new Department for Communities is in a good position to act as sponsor agency.

#### Membership

Members of the taskforce should be selected for their individual expertise and commitment to social inclusion. An initial group of about five members drawn from the organisations below would finalise the terms of reference.

- WACOSS and other relevant peak bodies
- Major service providers
- Academic experts
- The Department of Premier and Cabinet Social Policy Unit
- Other representatives from key target service groups not represented by the above

WACOSS propose that a partnership of non-government and government organisations identify these initial members.

After initial work by these members, a number of government and business representatives will be invited to join the taskforce. The full taskforce would be appointed following an

informal expression of interest process. The size of the full taskforce should be about 12 people who are most likely to be drawn from:

- All relevant government departments and agencies including: Community; Child Protection; Education and Training; Consumer and Employment, Protection; Housing and Works; Justice; Planning and Infrastructure; Health; Treasury and Finance; and Indigenous Affairs
- Economic Regulation Authority
- Chamber of Commerce and Industry
- Unions WA

### **Goals**

It is intended that the taskforce would release a final public report detailing Government, business sector and community action. This report would also be presented to the Premier. Through the course of its work, the taskforce should keep government and the wider community informed by regular information releases.

# Evaluating WA's Social Wellbeing

Social wellbeing is measurable across many different areas. Like the NSW State Plan, WACOSS believe a WA Social Inclusion Strategy would cover areas such as:

- Housing
- Essential services
- Care and support, including child protection, community care, and support services for older people and people with disability
- Economic security and financial hardship
- Health, both physical and mental
- Education, including access to early childhood, school and vocational training
- Transport and connectivity
- Safety and Justice, both in the home and in community
- Social participation

A key outcome of the Taskforce's work would be to define measurable outcomes and establish mechanisms to measure them. These should be independently monitored. The Taskforce, in close consultation with the community, non-government organisations and Government Departments, would develop indicators across the areas listed above.

**Recommendation:**

Government departments adopt Social Inclusion Strategy indicators as developed by the Taskforce as key performance indicators.

WACOSS believes the sole reliance on objective indicators is inadequate to provide insight into the social system. In order for social sustainability outcomes to be relevant and useful, there needs to be subjective assessments including attitudes, beliefs and feelings.

Social indicators are dynamic, not static, and are linked to

- Quality of life
- Well-being
- Community sustainability
- Equity and human rights

Social performance reporting is useful in both evaluating results and ensuring that indicators are linked to resources and actions within and across government agencies. Results measured need to be embedded in all parts of government if the framework is to promote whole-of-government approaches to achieving better social outcomes. International and interstate experience shows that social performance reporting can be implemented at relatively low cost if currently collected information is used as the primary source of data against which reporting takes place.<sup>8</sup>

The Taskforce would establish the foundation for evaluation of the strategy. It would:

- Develop an analysis of causes of poverty and those at risk, including developing a model for collecting and analysing qualitative and quantitative data on aspects of poverty in Western Australia that can then be used to inform policy. Such a model should

<sup>8</sup> Measuring Up: A Framework for Government Social Performance Reporting in NSW, NCOSS 2005.

incorporate a method to facilitate those with direct experience of poverty to be able to meaningfully contribute to policy and program decisions relating to poverty.

- Set a target for poverty reduction
- Develop an objective-based evaluation model for the Social Inclusion Strategy. For each objective, a number of indicators should be identified; some designed to capture the current aspects of poverty and others to capture the risk that people will experience poverty in the short and/or long term.

### Recommendation

A State Social Inclusion Monitoring Committee be established including representatives from: the Departments of Communities, Child Protection, Justice, Housing and Works, Health; two representatives from the non-government sector; and an observer from the Auditor General's office to assist.

The terms of reference for this committee would include:

- Monitor the implementation of the Government response to the Report of the Social Inclusion Taskforce
- Develop performance indicators to measure Government performance in responding to the Taskforce recommendations.
- Prepare an annual report to the Cabinet against these performance indicators
- Prepare an evaluation report on the implementation of the recommendations for submission to Cabinet.

### Recommendation

That the Premier tables in Parliament an annual report on social performance in the state, in the form of a progress report on the WA Social Inclusion Strategy.

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# **PART TWO**

## **Budgeting for Communities**

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# Budgeting for Communities

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It is time for the State Government to invest in the Western Australian community by delivering a State Budget that provides for our social wellbeing. The rationale for developing a social plan for Western Australia is now well established. In order to achieve the objectives of a social vision for our state, we will need to budget for communities.

The WACOSS Pre-Budget Submission provides an overview of the broad range of budget priorities across the social spectrum. It has been developed in consultation with the peak bodies and the members of the WACOSS Policy Advisory Councils, and is reflective of the community perspective.

The 2008/2009 Submission focuses on recommendations for advancing the social wellbeing of WA, in accordance with our suggested framework for a WA Social Inclusion Strategy.

The Social Inclusion Strategy that we have called for would address ten basic social needs, which would collectively reflect the social wellbeing of our state.

In suggesting how the Government ought to budget for communities, our priorities can be summarised as:

1. **Investing in our Strengths**; suggests how the Government should invest now in the strength of the community services sector, in recognition of its value to the state, and to enhance its ongoing viability.
2. **Aboriginal**; highlights a number of recommendations to improve the social wellbeing of Aboriginal Western Australians.
3. **Housing**; calls for funding priorities to address the housing affordability and homelessness crisis in across the state.
4. **Care and Support**; provides a range of strategies to improve the care and support given to children, youth and families, including grandparents; as well as support for seniors, carers and people with disabilities.
5. **Essential services**; recommends improvements to the accessibility and affordability of essential services such as electricity, gas, water, transport and emergency relief for utilities.
6. **Health**; overviews the range of primary health service and preventative health initiatives that require funding attention.
7. **Safety and Justice**; provides information of the current needs of the community in relation to the priority areas of addressing domestic and family violence and legal support services.
8. **Education**; highlights recommendations for providing holistic education support, and social support services through the education system.
9. **Financial Support**; calls for the state to implement strategies for ensuring that people in financial hardship get proper financial support and attention.
10. **Social Participation**; suggests budget priorities for improving the social connectedness and participation of all members of the community, including marginalised and disadvantaged groups.

# Investing in Our Strengths

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The Western Australian non-government human services sector is rich in diversity, commitment and talent. Our sector is an enormous contributor to civil society as well as providing a breadth of high quality social services across the state. This 'third sector' of our economy is an excellent indicator of the overall health and well being of our communities.

WACOSS, as the peak representative organisation for the third sector in WA is calling for recognition of our value and worth to the WA community. We know that our sector is large and growing, as both employers and service providers. Our role goes far beyond service delivery, as does our contribution to the economic wellbeing of the state and regional economies of WA.

We undertake an increasingly diverse mix of activities. We are responsive to changing public and government expectations. We are proactive, and drive innovation and efficiency in quality human services and civil engagement.

While Governments rely on our sector to provide vital human services, they have consistently undervalued our strengths and community contribution. It is now time to claim our ground in civic participation and as service deliverers.

Our sector has partnered with Government to establish the Human Services Industry Roundtable. The purpose of the roundtable is to identify and overcome challenges facing the industry and advance the strengths and wellbeing of our sector and government service providers.

We need to develop new funding frameworks that will recognise and reward the real and full costs of our operations. This will require increases to the core funding of service providers. Our sector is not strengthening our capacity to support civil society, by continuing to cross-subsidise government service delivery contracts. It is time for new thinking in the overall funding rationale for our sector.

Our highest priority is to secure our strength as employers. We need to undertake a comprehensive workforce planning strategy, and improve our ability to attract and retain staff. This will require benchmarking of salaries and conditions across the industry, and funding that is reflective of real staff costs.

The following section outlines a range of strategies to invest in our strengths and relieve the current pressures on the sector. The recommendations focus on workforce planning, indexation and a uniform chart of accounts.

# The Future of our Workforce

## Recommendation:

Provide funding for the implementation of workforce development strategies for the non-government sector, arising from the Human Services Industry Roundtable research into workforce planning.

## Rationale:

The highest priority of our sector is to secure our strength as employers. A workforce planning research project is currently being pursued by the Human Services Industry Roundtable. Our sector will need funding support to implement the development strategies arising from the research.

## Detail:

The current rate of growth in the WA economic climate is seeing workforce shortage issues challenging a number of employment industries. In this context, the Human Services Industry Roundtable has recognised the critical need of the industry to improve its ability to attract and retain staff. So far government has committed \$40,000 to undertake workforce planning research, though we understand that this will require a greater contribution from other members of the Roundtable.

The workforce planning model being progressed focuses on five strategic imperatives at a systems level, organisational level and individual/teams level. The five strategic imperatives are:

1. Organisational Development
2. Retention and Recruitment
3. Strengthened Industrial Framework
4. Training and Development
5. Research and Evaluation

We anticipate that the workforce plan will result in a number of workforce development strategies that will require government funding for implementation.

The resulting workforce development strategies may include:

- Benchmarking of salaries and conditions across the industry,
- Contract funding that is reflective of real staff costs,
- Improved pay parity within the industry,
- An establishment fund for portable superannuation,
- Promotion strategies for career opportunities, and
- Career path development.

The competitiveness of the human services industry as an employer will be enhanced into the future by the implementation of workforce development strategies. It is important that our sector is supported to ensure the strength of the industry as a whole.

# Indexation

**Recommendation:**

That the Government provide the sector 2.7% in “back-pay” for the past three years to address the funding shortfall due to the erroneous application of indexation policy. The indexation policy should specify where and when the CPI and WPI are sourced from to consistently calculate the indexation rate. An adjustment payment at the end of the financial year should be paid to match *actual* figures.

**Rationale:**

According to the State’s indexation policy, the sector has continually been underpaid compared to the actual indexation rates each year since the policy of indexing non-government services was introduced, and this needs to be urgently remedied.

**Detail:**

Indexation to the non-government sector is calculated by a combination of the Wage Price Index (WPI) and the Consumer Price Index (CPI) according to the following formula:

$$\text{Indexation rate} = 80\% (\text{WPI}) + 20\% (\text{CPI}).$$

A problem of inconsistency has arisen in the calculation of indexation to the sector because the source and timing of the WPI and CPI figures is undefined in the policy, which refers to those used at the time that the government formulates the budget.

The tables overleaf demonstrate that the government has used different figures in calculating the indexation rate each year for the past three years. Each of the three years has used a completely different approach to calculating the indexation rate.

- In 2004/05 the figures were drawn from the Budget Forward Estimate.
- In 2005/06 the figures were drawn from no known source originally, and then corrected the following year to reflect the Mid-Year Revision Forecast.
- In 2006/07 the figures were drawn from the Forward Estimates.

The source of figures that typically represent the closest resemblance to the Actual inflation rates have been the Mid Year Revision. This source has never been used by Government and the sector has never been paid an indexation rate, or adjusted rate that actually meets the increased WPI and CPI.

In effect, the government has failed in its application of the indexation policy, to actually deliver it. The table below shows the cumulative shortfall of indexation payments based on known Actual inflation rates and current budget forecasts.

<u>Years</u>	<u>05/06</u>	<u>06/07</u>	<b><u>07/08</u></b>	<u>08/09</u>	<u>09/10</u>	<u>10/11</u>
Wages	4.50%	4.50%	<b>4.25%</b>	4.00%	3.50%	3.50%
CPI	4.30%	4.25%	<b>3.00%</b>	2.75%	2.50%	2.50%
Calculated (Indexation Formula)	4.46%	4.45%	<b>4.00%</b>	3.75%	3.30%	3.30%
State Budget Forward Estimates	3.50%	3.40%	<b>3.30%</b>	2.90%	2.90%	2.90%
Shortfall	0.96%	1.05%	0.70%	0.85%	0.40%	0.40%
Cumulative Shortfall	0.96%	2.01%	2.71%	3.56%	3.96%	4.36%

# Budgeting for Rural, Regional and Remote Areas

**Recommendation:**

That the Government reintroduces monitoring of a regional price index and that agencies in non-metropolitan areas are adequately remunerated for the costs of service provision in their region.

**Rationale:**

The cost of providing services in regional WA is significantly higher than in the metropolitan area. Funding for agencies providing regional services should be reflective of the real operating costs in those regions.

**Detail:**

The Department of Local Government and Regional Development, together with the nine Regional Development Commissions published a Regional Prices Index in 2000. It showed how prices of a range of goods and services varied amongst each of the regions and compared the costs with Perth.

The results show that while costs differ greatly from region to region, in many cases they are significantly higher than Perth. For example, housing was shown to be 38.7% more expensive in Broome, 33.5% more in Port Hedland, 30.9% more in Derby and 30.5% more in Kununurra.<sup>9</sup> Similarly, recreation and education costs were 15.6% more in the Gascoyne, 19.3% more in Kununurra and 16.2 % more in Carnarvon.<sup>10</sup>

Transportation costs were also higher in the regions. The costs in Exmouth were 23.7% more than Perth, 12.0% more in Karratha and 11.8% more in Laverton.<sup>11</sup>

Our sector is a key employer and service provider in regional WA, as shown in the table across. Given the range of pressures already facing regional Western Australians, we need to ensure that services are adequately funded to meet the costs of operating in those regions to prevent any further closure or reduction of services.

<b>Regional Employment by Industry</b>			
Number of people employed in:	Regiona l WA	Perth	WA
Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing	13.7%	1.1%	4.4%
Mining	7.2%	2.2%	3.5%
Retail Trade	13.5%	15.4%	14.9%
Government Admin and Defence	4.8%	4.3%	4.4%
Education	6.8%	7.4%	7.3%
<b>Health and Community Services</b>	<b>7.4%</b>	<b>10.3 %</b>	<b>9.6%</b>
Cultural and Recreational Services	1.3%	2.5%	2.2%

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics - Census (Usual Residence) in Statistical Snapshot 4.4, DLGRD

<sup>9</sup> Regional Prices Index Third Data Collection 2000. Executive Summary p 7

<sup>10</sup> ibid

<sup>11</sup> ibid

# A Uniform Chart of Accounts

## Recommendation:

That Government and NGOs work together to adopt a uniform Chart of Accounts for Western Australia and that training is funded to introduce this throughout the sector.

## Rationale:

Many voluntary organisations are hampered by the fact that there is no standard financial terminology to form a consistent guide for organisations and treasurers. The lack of consistency in accounting reporting terms required by government department funding contracts causes significant compliance costs for nonprofit agencies, especially if they have multiple government funding sources. This could be remedied by a uniform Chart of Accounts.

## Detail:

Over the past four years, the Centre of Philanthropy and the School of Accountancy at the Queensland University of Technology have developed a standard Chart of Accounts and data dictionary for nonprofit organisations that receive Queensland government funding. Unlike other OECD countries, Australia does not provide specific national accounting standards for nonprofit organisations.

The lack of consistency in accounting categories and terms required by government departments in their funding relationships with nonprofit organisations causes:

- **An inability to aggregate or compare financial data for policy development purposes.** Evaluations of performance rely to some extent on comparisons between the activities being evaluated, so government departments are unable to use this financial information to develop comparable data on financial performance or to build efficiency benchmarks of similar activities by different nonprofit organisations. Collecting comparable data would greatly facilitate feedback to the sector to increase their capacity to evaluate performance, and hence their ability to be more accountable.
- **Significant administration costs for government and non-government agencies.** The lack of consistency in accounting categories makes it difficult for NGOs to comply with funding requirements and Government Departments to assess compliance and value for money.

The overall aim of developing a Western Australian Uniform Chart of Accounts would be to improve the reliability and comparability of the financial data across the non-government organisations (NGOs), and reduce the administrative costs of financial management for both funded human service organisations and government agencies. The uniform Chart of Accounts has been adopted in Queensland and NSW with an aim to eventually implement the system nationally.

# Investing in our Strengths Case Study

## Workforce Development for the Non-Government Sector

The Western Australian Network of Alcohol and other Drug Agencies (WANADA), the Western Australian Association for Mental Health (WAAMH), the Women's Council for Domestic & Family Violence Services (WA) and the WA Women's Health Peak have undertaken a workforce survey of their member agencies, which is intended to be reported in October 2007.

Collectively these peak bodies represent over 250 non-government organisations, responding to crisis needs of 50,000 community members each year.

The majority of these organisations report significant difficulties in recruiting and retaining staff as a result of: increased employment choices, scarcity of accommodation, staff stress, burnout, and the inability for the non-government sector to offer improved remuneration within existing funding. These barriers to recruiting and retaining staff are of particular concern to the community services in the regions of WA.

Many of services are not currently able to work at full capacity, due to reduced staff numbers. This situation risks negatively impacting on a range of sectors services, including hospitals/ public health services, police, corrective services/prisons, and other community services.

Non-government not-for-profit services in these sectors report:

- A significant number of vacant positions that they have had difficulty filling,
- The consumers of these services increasingly present with more complex issues,
- Increased staff workloads as a result of lower staff numbers,
- Where the information is available the usage of Employee Assistance Program services for workers in these sectors has more than doubled over the past year.
- At least 80% of resources/funding received by services is dedicated to staffing costs. As a result there is little or no leeway for increasing remuneration without reducing the services delivered.

The peak bodies involved feel that the situation is at crisis point and an appropriate and adequate increase in funding must be considered for the 2008/09 financial year.

Preliminary comparisons of wages suggest a general 20% increase in the funding for non-government services within the alcohol and other drug, mental health, women's health, and women's refuge sectors will support agencies to offer adequate remuneration and conditions for the recruitment and retention of staff, which in turn will ensure existing service provision is maintained.

The cost of a 20% increase is estimated to be \$9.6 million.

# Aboriginal

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The life expectancy of Aboriginal Australians is nearly 20 years below that of non-Aboriginal Australians – 59 years for males and 65 for females. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people experience lower levels of access to health services than the general population, in some part due to residing further from health services, and also as a result of poorer socio-economic status, lack of availability of transport and inability to speak English.<sup>12</sup>

“The statistics of infant and perinatal mortality are our babies and children who die in our arms...The statistics of shortened life expectancy are our mothers and fathers, uncles, aunties and elders who live diminished lives and die before their gifts of knowledge and experience are passed on. We die silently under these statistics...” (Mick Dodson, quoted in the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commissions Social Justice Report, 2005).

We believe that to make significant changes in the health, education, employment and housing status of Aboriginal people there needs to be a level of resources that is proportionate to need. The gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in health, education, employment and housing is still at an unacceptable level.

- Aboriginal infants are around 4 times more likely to die before their first birthday and 5 times more likely to succumb to Sudden Infant Death Syndrome.
- Unemployment rate is 2.8 times higher among Aboriginal people compared with non-Aboriginal people.
- Suicide rates for Aboriginal people are nearly three times that of other Australians.
- Aboriginal people are 11 times more likely than non-Aboriginal people to be in prison.
- In 2006, 49.9 per cent of non-Aboriginal Australians had no non-school qualification compared with 71 per cent of Aboriginal Australians
- As at 2002, the apparent retention rate for Aboriginal year 12 students was 38 per cent compared to 76.3 per cent for their non-Aboriginal counter-parts.
- In 2006, 21% of 15 year old Aboriginal people were not participating in school education.
- In 2006, Aboriginal students were half as likely as non-Aboriginal students to complete year 12.<sup>13</sup>

For the 2008/09 budget, WACOSS received submissions from peak bodies and non-government organisations mainly regarding Aboriginal health and housing. We believe that investing now in infrastructure and services for Aboriginal people will reduce the social and financial costs associated with poor health, crime, lack of education and family breakdown, immediately and in the future.

Our concerns are reflective of the concerns of many non-government organisations, such as Oxfam, whose Close the Gap report argues that the poor health experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders is preventable, given that these poor outcomes are related to socio-economic indicators such as poverty; overcrowded housing; poor sanitation; lack of access to education; poor access to medical care for accurate diagnosis and treatment; and poor nutrition.

See also:

**Safety and Justice** Crisis Care for Aboriginal Men.

**Housing** Culturally Appropriate Housing for Aboriginal Families and Singles.

**Health** Services for the Health Needs of Aboriginal Children.

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<sup>12</sup> See <http://www.oxfam.org.au>

<sup>13</sup> See <http://www.pc.gov.au/gsp/reports/indigenous/keyindicators2007/keyindicators2007.pdf>

# Aboriginal Healing Centres

**Recommendation:**

To establish state-wide Healing Centres, based on the Canadian Aboriginal Friendship Centre Model.

**Rationale:**

Healing Centres have been shown overseas to be very effective at providing Aboriginal people with access to holistic services and support, to address a range of short and long-term disadvantages, improve the wellbeing and interconnectedness of Aboriginal people, and advance the purposes of reconciliation. Local Aboriginal people have visited Canada to investigate their model, and WACOSS understands that there is significant community support for introducing it in Western Australia.

**Detail:**

Healing Centres should be established in each major region across Western Australia, and work holistically to address the following needs:

- Education and training
- Employment
- Counselling
- Health programs
- Children and youth programs
- Recreation programs
- Economic development programs
- Healing circles
- Alcohol and drug counselling
- Day care
- Nutrition programs
- Rental programs

Healing Centre staff should work closely with the local service providers in addressing Aboriginal client needs as required.

The Healing Centres should also operate as a family centre, which could provide short term accommodation to those placed in the care of Department of Child Protection until an alternative placement is found within the extended family network.

Healing Centres should be sensitively located to ensure Aboriginal people's needs were met in a way that respected their privacy.

# Reparation for Stolen Wages

**Recommendation:**

That the State Government commit substantial funding for allocation to reparation payments for Aboriginal people who have been effected by past stolen wages, and correspondingly, that the inquiry into stolen wages in WA delete the reference to 'no reparations' as a policy option.

**Rationale:**

Aboriginal people have made an enormous contribution to the state of Western Australia through their hard and low paid or unpaid labour. The injustices done to Aboriginal people by withholding the money that was due to them must be repaired.

**Detail:**

An enormous amount of information and research into the issues of stolen wages is already available to the Government, including the most recent report "Hard Labour, Stolen Wages."<sup>14</sup> While the State Government deserves commendation for establishing an inquiry on this issue, we suggest that the inquiry terms of reference should be amended to ensure that it proceeds as efficiently as possible. There is no doubt that Aboriginal people deserve reparation for past injustices of withheld wages, savings and Commonwealth benefits. The question that needs to be answered now is more a matter of process; how will the Government calculate how much is owed to individuals and families affected by stolen wages, and the way this money will be re-paid? There is urgency for the Government to move ahead on this issue as quickly as possible, as sadly, many of the Aboriginal people affected are now in the later years of their lives.

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<sup>14</sup> Dr Rosalind Kidd, 2007, *Hard Labour, Stolen Wages*, Australians for Native Title and Reconciliation

# Seniors Care for Aboriginal People

**Recommendation:**

To investigate culturally appropriate and relevant services that will provide for Aboriginal senior over the age of 55.

**Rationale:**

Aboriginal people have a much lower life expectancy than non-Aboriginal people, and it important to ensure that their needs are met appropriately in their later years of life.

**Detail:**

The Home and Community Care (HACC) Program is a cost-shared program between the Commonwealth and State and Territory governments. The program provides funding for a range of services, which support people who are at risk of inappropriate admission to long-term residential care. HACC can provide basic support services so that elders can continue to live in the community, by providing eligible people with help at home, support in getting out into the community, and a break for carers. The services are offered in people's homes or local community and may be provided by a HACC agency, community health centre or local council.

In previous years, there has been discussion in the South East metropolitan community to try and establish an HACC program for Aboriginal people over the age of 55.

As at December 2003 there were approximately 3,000 HACC-funded organisations. These organisations provide services to approximately 700,000 people per year. HACC-funded organisations include:

- State government services,
- Local government services, church organizations,
- Charitable bodies (eg. St John Ambulance), and
- Community organisations (eg. community aid centres).<sup>15</sup>

To be successful, an appropriate community centre would be required that could facilitate the community based services of the program (such as respite and transport).

In addition to the provision of targeted HACC services for older Aboriginal people, it may be necessary to establish a dedicated senior citizens centre for Aboriginal people.

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<sup>15</sup> See <http://www.health.gov.au/internet/wcms/Publishing.nsf/Content/hacc-faq.htm>

# Accommodation for Accessing Metropolitan Health Services

**Recommendation:**

Undertake a review to determine Aboriginal patient accommodation needs and increase the availability of accommodation for that purpose.

**Rationale:**

A review is necessary to determine the scope of needs and solutions to critical shortage of appropriate accommodation for Aboriginal people temporarily in Perth for medical services. In 2006/07, approximately 2000 Aboriginal people from rural, regional and remote Western Australia travelled to Perth for emergency, elective and ongoing medical treatment. Currently there is inadequate accommodation to meet their needs.

**Detail:**

Some patients can stay with family members, but this often leads to overcrowding and an unreasonable burden on the host family. As has been demonstrated time after time, life expectancy for Aboriginal men, for example, is 17 years less than non-Aboriginal men. Primary care, health promotion and hospital care can all contribute to improving health (along with education, training, employment and housing) and a modest investment in patient accommodation for Aboriginal people would garner major benefits to Aboriginal health, as this could be a health promotion facility also.

A review of Aboriginal patient accommodation needs should be undertaken jointly by the Office of Aboriginal Health, the WA Country Health Services and the Aboriginal Health Council of WA. A review report should be completed within twelve months and additional accommodation be provided as a matter of urgency.

# Patients Assistance Transport Scheme (PATS)

**Recommendation:**

To expand the services of PATS to provide greater support for escorts of patients from rural, regional and remote areas.

**Rationale:**

Current subsidies and arrangements for country patients need to be increased and improved.

**Detail:**

In regards to Aboriginal patients, provision needs to be made for escorts to be able to travel with their patients, as currently this arrangement does not exist.

These needs must be met in a culturally appropriate and sensitive manner.

The estimated cost of expanding PATS, according to the Health Consumers Council would be approximately \$560,000, based on a 4% index of the current \$14 million.

# Aboriginal Health Liaison Officers

## Recommendation:

To employ Aboriginal Health Liaison Officers in all major hospitals in Western Australia.

## Rationale:

Peak bodies along with non-government organisations have strongly noted the need for Aboriginal Health Liaison Officers and Health Workers in public hospitals.

## Detail:

It is believed that such positions would ensure better liaison between community and hospital, resulting in more effective discharge and better quality care for Aboriginal patients in the Acute Care system. Currently, the hospitals in Western Australia which do not have Aboriginal Liaison Officers or Health Workers include:

- Sir Charles Gairdner
- Fremantle
- Rockingham-Kwinana
- Bunbury

Regional hospitals in Western Australia are in a unique position to link and improve the health of Aboriginal people. It is with this in mind that Aboriginal Health Liaison Officers are a major priority.

The estimated cost of providing these positions in all major WA hospitals would be \$70 000 per position based on Health Consumer Council estimates.

# Outreach Counselling Services

## Recommendation:

Increase funding to outreach counselling in order to provide distributed services to Aboriginal people beyond the central metropolitan area.

## Rationale:

It has been noted by non-government organisations that there are many Aboriginal people who cannot readily access services relating to substance abuse, mental health and accommodation.

## Detail:

## ABORIGINAL

Aboriginal people have a need for expanding services in order to assist them in these areas. To expand outreach services, and also to have a centralised point of referral to other services such as housing, counselling and youth programs and legal and health services, WACOSS supports the estimation of approximately \$250 000 - \$300 000, which would be spent on three full-time staff, fuel, vehicle and administration resources. WACOSS also acknowledges the work of the Nyoongar Patrol Outreach service operating in the Town of Vincent, but would recommend these services extend across the metropolitan area.

In Victoria, a similar program is run by the Ngwala Willumbong Outreach service, with funding from the Commonwealth (Office of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health), Aboriginal Hostels Ltd and the State Government (Department of Human Services). They deliver rehabilitation and a range of outreach support and referral services through Aboriginal communities throughout Victoria. This outreach service could be used as a model when looking to extend services in regional, rural and remote Western Australia.

# Expansion of Patrol Services in the Metropolitan Area

Recommendation:

Increase funding in order to expand patrols in the Perth Metropolitan area.

### Rationale:

Since the loss of CDEP, many services have lost staff that would ordinarily serve to patrol the metropolitan area.

### Detail:

The Nyoongar Patrol, for example, has lost eight workers since July. WACOSS supports the recommendations of non-government organisations that are calling for patrols to be expanded to:

- Mirrabooka
- Koondoola
- Midland
- Armadale
- Victoria Park
- Fremantle
- Belmont
- Northbridge

The estimated cost of expanding patrol services is approximately \$500 000 per annum, based on current costs of six staff and three vehicles.

# Statewide Interpreter Services

## Recommendation:

To establish a state wide interpreter service for Aboriginal peoples in Western Australia, especially for the areas of health, law and justice.

## Rationale:

Currently, there is no adequate State-wide interpreter service available for Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander language speakers in Western Australia.

## Detail:

The need for interpreter services is highlighted by the fact that 17% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people speak an Aboriginal language at home. This figure rises to 51% in some remote areas, and only  $\frac{3}{4}$  claim to speak English well.<sup>16</sup> When coming into contact with service providers, approximately one in five Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have difficulty understanding or being understood.<sup>17</sup>

In light of this situation, the West Australian Aboriginal Advisory Committee (WAAAC) considers it a matter of urgency that these services are provisioned. The WAAAC was established by the Aboriginal Legal Service of Western Australia (ALSWA) in order to advise governments and peak bodies about law and justice issues affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living in Western Australia.

ALSWA has identified four existing models of interpreter services in Australia – The Aboriginal Interpretive Service (AIS) in the Northern Territory; the Kimberley Interpreter Service (KIS) in Western Australia; a private contractor, based only in Perth; and the Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS), which does not provide any interpreters for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

The AIS receives \$5 million under the Northern Territory Agreement, which is in place until 2008. They have 136 qualified interpreters who cover 104 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages. The KIS provides interpreters in the Kimberley only, and has no plans to expand. They have 60 registered interpreters offering 13 different languages. Funding is delivered by the Department of Indigenous Affairs, at \$120 000 per year.

An independent contractor contracted by ALSWA has proposed a service in Perth only, that contracts out private interpreters on an on-call basis. It is believed that funding could be obtained through the TIS (Translating and Interpreter Services), which is Australia's only national interpreter service.

ALSAW proposes that the services that currently exist should be linked together, and proposes that creating a short-lived organisation with the specific task of achieving this is a cost effective way of developing and establishing an appropriate service. They emphasise that the service should be open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, and that the service should offer training to service providers. In addition to this, they also propose scholarships and financial assistance be offered to attract the appropriate recruits (who may often be from a low socio-economic background).

<sup>16</sup> See <http://www.abs.gov.au> (1996).

<sup>17</sup> See <http://www.abs.gov.au> (2001).

# Aboriginal Case Study

## Aboriginal Friendship Centres

In Canada, Aboriginal Friendship Centres provide programs in relation to education, employment, health, alcohol and drug counselling, day care and nutrition programs, among others.

The National Association of Friendship Centres (NAFC) is the peak body for Aboriginal Friends Centres throughout Canada. The association's aims are to promote and advocate the concerns of Aboriginal peoples; and to present the needs of the local Friendship Centres across the country to the Federal Government and the general public. They also monitor activities of the government and programs of various departments who have a mandate to provide funding or services to urban Aboriginal people.

The funding received by the NAFC is used to support more than 100 community based projects designed to help Aboriginal people develop leadership skills and strengthen their cultural identity.<sup>18</sup>

A well funded Aboriginal Healing Foundation was one the initiatives to come from the Government in its response to a report submitted by the Royal Commission on Aboriginal People in 1996. *Gathering Strength* was the Action Plan which both acknowledged the past and looked to the future, designed to renew the relationship with the Aboriginal people of Canada.

This plan builds on the principles of mutual respect, mutual recognition, mutual responsibility and sharing which were identified in the report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples. That report served as a catalyst and an inspiration for the federal government's decision to set a new course in its policies for Aboriginal people.

It is time that the Aboriginal People of Western Australia were shown a genuine commitment from Government to support them in their recovery from past injustices, recognise and develop their strengths and participate fully in the community.

The establishment of Healing Centres in Western Australia would be a positive step in a reconciliatory direction. It would acknowledge past injustices, and offer positive, practical solutions that would enable Aboriginal people to access the resources they need to empower their lives.

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<sup>18</sup> See <http://www.nafc-aboriginal.com/ayc.htm>

# Housing

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Housing stands out as a shining example of the stark contrast between those who are doing well and those who are missing out in our State economic boom. Those who are doing well are establishing new “McMansions” in the lofty suburbs. However, for many Western Australians the cost of housing is a major financial stress as interest rates rise faster than their average wages and house prices climb to new heights. For others, who are already marginalised by being unemployed, disadvantaged by illness or disability, or facing a crisis like the drought or family violence, the lack of crisis accommodation, financial assistance or affordable housing creates dire circumstances and poverty traps.

The Housing recommendations in this year’s PBS are numerous, as organisations rise to the challenge to suggest solutions to the housing crisis. Complex solutions are urgently needed for these complex problems. Thankfully, some of the necessary steps are already well known, such as increasing public housing and community housing. There are also recommendations for a new public housing funding model and strategies for increasing the stock of affordable housing.

Programs established under the Homelessness Strategy should continue to be supported and expanded. Some recommendations refine and enhance existing programs. We call for improvements in the diversity of housing stock, which would help address the ongoing shortage of boarding and lodging houses, and small homes.

The number of people living alone is projected to increase from 1.8 million (nationally) in 2001 to between 2.8 and 3.7 million in 2026; an increase of between 57 and 105%<sup>8</sup>.

Accommodation of all kinds remains beyond the reach of many young people, in particular young people with mental health problems and/or alcohol and other drug misuse concerns.

The ongoing crisis in housing affordability has thrown a spotlight on the significance of integrated planning, development and housing policies. The lack of forward-thinking across these areas, based on sustainability for the whole of community, not just those who can easily afford it, is now impacting heavily on people who are in disadvantage. And for the first time, these impacts are felt by people who are average earners.

See also

## ***Safety and Justice***

- Crisis accommodation and support for Aboriginal men in the southeast corridor
- Safe House for young women (age 14 to 18) and children escaping domestic/family violence

## ***Aboriginal***

- A joint agency review to address the shortage of accommodation for rural/remote Aboriginal people accessing health services in Perth metropolitan area.

## ***Care and Support: Aged Care***

- Development of a seniors’ housing advisory service and laws to protect seniors from unfair contracts relating to accommodation.

# Public Housing

**Recommendation:**

That the State Government increase funding to restore public housing stock to 6% of the total housing stock in Western Australia.

**Rationale:**

Public housing is critical to addressing the high rate of housing stress and housing-related poverty. It is also the only viable housing option for the many vulnerable groups in our community with high needs and extremely low incomes. The current lack of public housing places many of these people in imminent danger of homelessness.

**Details:**

Western Australia is experiencing an unprecedented economic boom, which has in turn resulted in the State's median housing price surpassing that of most other Australian states and territories. Private rental availability is at an historical low and rents continue to rise. Public housing has become the only viable option for many Western Australians not directly benefiting from the 'boom'.

Low cost private rental accommodation becomes even scarcer when people who are eligible for public housing compete with other low-cost rental consumers, like students, transient labourers, or newly arrived migrants.

There is a current shortfall of 15,900 public housing dwellings to reach 6% of all housing. At a steady increase of 2,380 dwellings per year, it would cost an average of \$758M per year for the next 15 years to reach 6% of all stock.<sup>19</sup>

Year	2007	annual increase	2021
All Housing	840,000	22,000	1.148M
Public Housing	34,500	2,380	67,820
Cost per dwelling	\$239,990	+4%	\$415,585
Total cost to increase public housing stock	\$576M	+4%	\$960M

These calculations were based on costs increasing by the CPI (currently 4%) and a housing industry capacity of 22,000 new dwellings a year. These variables may change.

<sup>19</sup> Calculated from figures provided by Shelter WA.

# Funding Model for Public Housing

## Recommendation:

That the State Government recognise the State Housing Authority for Community Service Obligation (CSO) funding to maintain and expand public housing supply.

## Rationale:

People eligible for public housing greatly exceed the numbers of public dwellings available. Currently, the State Housing Authority subsidises public housing for low-income households by about \$85.4 million (\$2,455 per dwelling in 2006)<sup>20</sup>. A CSO amount of \$85M per year would cancel the deficit, returning public housing to financial viability.

## Detail:

The current funding model does not provide enough resources to meet the costs of maintaining current public housing stock, let alone to increase stock. A new model is needed to provide housing for low-income and disadvantaged Western Australians now and into the future.

The State Government already uses a system of CSO funding for other essential services. For agencies that meet the criteria (the Public Transport Authority, the Water Corporation and Synergy) the difference between the cost of service and an amount paid by the recipient of a concession is considered a *Community Service Obligation*.

Community Service Obligation Contributions	
Water Corporation (2005)	\$288,235,000 <sup>21</sup>
Synergy (2006)	\$9.2million <sup>22</sup>
Public Transport Authority (2005)	\$243,341,000 <sup>23</sup>

Shelter WA has estimated that the State Housing Authority rental operations are currently running at a loss of \$2,570 per public housing dwelling (Figure 1).<sup>24</sup> If Treasury covered the cost of the rental subsidy (\$2,455 per dwelling) then the deficit would be reduced significantly to just \$115 per dwelling per year or \$2 per dwelling per week.

For an outlay of approx \$85 million per annum the State Government would be showing a significant commitment and funding contribution to the long term financial viability of the State's public housing system.

<sup>20</sup> Shelter WA Housing Information Sheet, Issue No. 29, July 2007.

<sup>21</sup> Water Corporation: Annual Report 2005, Financial Report, p. 4

<sup>22</sup> Synergy 2006 Annual Report, Financial Statements, p. 35

<sup>23</sup> All grants and subsidies, The Public Transport Authority 05/06 Annual Report, p.91

<sup>24</sup> Department of Housing and Works, 2006 State Housing Commission Annual Report 2005-06

# State Homelessness Strategy Programs

**Recommendation:**

That the State Government continues to provide funding to support the SAAP services that were implemented or enhanced in response to the State Homelessness Strategy, and that this funding be additional to any Federal funding agreements.

**Rationale:**

Homelessness remains to be a difficult issue throughout Australia. A well considered Western Australian strategy was developed, trialled and evaluated. Almost comprehensively the recommendations of the evaluation were to continue and expand the initiatives. Government should commit funds to achieve the aims of the Homelessness Strategy

**Detail:**

In May 2002 the State Government responded to the Homelessness Taskforce with a \$32m package of services and support to reduce homelessness in Western Australia. From the \$32m allocation, the Department for Child Protection received \$2.2m in 2002/03 rising to \$3.4m per annum thereafter to implement new services to reduce homelessness<sup>25</sup>.

Various community housing providers raised the issue of insufficient time periods funded for individuals in crisis accommodation; the current system allows for only 28 days of funded crisis accommodation which is insufficient as many clients need up to 18 months of ongoing support to prevent a revolving door syndrome. Providers identified that clients transferred to exit houses at the end of their 28 day crisis support period were often not ready for this stage and were therefore being set up to fail. Alternatively these clients were staying in exit houses for extended periods when they should still be in crisis accommodation. The community housing sector stressed a need for more links in the chain of supported accommodation options including crisis, transitional, supported, and exit accommodation options.

## Abolition of Option Fee

**Recommendation:**

That the State Government regulates to abolish the collection of option fees.

**Rationale:**

The payment of option fees seriously impedes the ability of low income tenants to establish new tenancies and limits their access to appropriate properties when available.

**Detail:**

An **option fee** is where the agent requires "a deposit" to be lodged with the application (one week's rent). This fee is normally paid in cash by the applicant. The option fee is refunded if the application is unsuccessful. The problem is the speed of refund, particularly as the

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<sup>25</sup> Department for Community Development. (2004). Submission to the Review of the Crisis Accommodation Program.

refund is normally paid by cheque and the delay caused by waiting for cheques to clear can prevent applicants with limited resources putting in further applications.

Tenants face a significant financial commitment when establishing a new tenancy at Perth's current median rent of \$290 per week<sup>26</sup>:

<i>Option fee (refundable)</i>	\$290
Bond: 4 weeks rent	\$1,160
Rent in advance: 2 weeks	\$580
<b>Total:</b>	<b>\$2,030</b>

Agents are now prohibited to charge the equivalent of one week's rent to the tenant for a **letting fee** that becomes the agent's commission (this commission is also paid by the landlord). Advocates successfully argued that the tenant's contribution to the commission should cease as it is a service to the landlord, to be paid for by the landlord.

# Affordable Rental Incentive Scheme

## Recommendation:

That the State Government commit to a rental incentive scheme similar to the National Affordable Rental Incentive (NARI) scheme developed by the National Affordable Housing Summit as a matter of urgency in order to improve stocks of affordable housing for rental in the WA market.

## Rationale:

Subsidising private and community housing investors in order to provide affordable rentals is one solution to assist in addressing Western Australia's rental affordability crisis that does not require a bricks-and-mortar solution and that can be implemented quickly as part of an overall strategy to meet current need.

## Detail:

A State Government administered NARI style scheme would provide benefits to both community housing and private investors who are guaranteed a rate of return on their investment that offsets the limited returns available in renting to low-income households at an affordable level. In supporting the implementation of this scheme the sector does however believe that participation in NARI by landlords must be subject to the landlord's housing stock being within reasonable distance to public transportation so as not to create poverty traps.

We believe that the Government should also investigate factoring in land tax cuts or stamp duty relief into this scheme to promote the construction of new affordable housing by private investors willing to be locked into the scheme for an extended period of time and Community Housing organisations that are willing to use their existing equity to increase their stocks of housing. The Federal Labor party announced on the 13<sup>th</sup> of August that they would support this scheme under the title of the National Rental Affordability Scheme. While Federal Labor's policy seems to focus on large institutional investors, we believe that it should be opened up to allow, at the very least, Community Housing providers to access the scheme. Federal Labor estimates the scheme will cost \$603 million over its first 5 years.

<sup>26</sup> REIWA, June quarter 2007 Market indicators

## HOUSING

The cost of the State Government implementing this policy is estimated by the Community Housing Coalition of WA at around \$80 million over the first five years, assuming \$8000 of payments per home with a target of creating 10,000 low cost rentals from the scheme.

# State Funding for SAAP Services

### Recommendation:

Increase the State Government contribution to funding for Supported Accommodation Assistance, raising funding levels for existing agencies.

### Rationale:

There is an urgent need to improve accommodation services to homeless people while over a number of years SAAP agencies in WA have struggled to continue to maintain services resulting in pressure on workers due to staff levels, difficulty in filling positions and continual restructuring.

### Detail:

Even though we acknowledge a significant gain was made in the 2007 Budget, the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) sector in Western Australia is still struggling. The SAAP sector is made up of 137 different community agencies spread throughout the state.<sup>27</sup> These community agencies provide assistance to homeless young people, single men, single women, families and women escaping domestic violence among others.

However, it continues to be the case that around Australia every day hundreds of women, children and men desperately seeking temporary shelter are turned away from services as there are insufficient services to support the number of homeless. According to the Australian Institute of health and Welfare (AIHW) on any night the 'chances of getting immediate accommodation are...less than 50%.'<sup>28</sup>

Due to the severe shortage of accommodation for the medium or long term, exiting from crisis accommodation is extremely difficult. After a crisis has passed, clients would leave crisis accommodation only to find they are homeless. The result is that crisis accommodation has few, if any, places available.

<sup>27</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2002). Homeless people in SAAP – SAAP NDCA Report Series 7 – Western Australia supplementary tables. Table 2.1

<sup>28</sup> Australian Institute of health and Welfare (28<sup>th</sup> October 2003) *Demand for SAAP Assistance 2001-02*, Media Release [www.aihw.gov.au](http://www.aihw.gov.au) downloaded 30<sup>th</sup> of October 2003.

# Supported Accommodation for Young People

## Recommendation:

That the State Government increase youth accommodation and expand funding available to youth accommodation support services, including rural and regional areas where direct consultation is required to determine greatest need.

## Rationale:

Young people dealing with multiple issues can not begin to address their wellbeing, take care of the day-to-day, find employment or plan for the future while they are homeless. The result of this is that young people are not coping, their 'street presence' is increasing (See Housing) and 'generations of young people are being lost to a preventable circumstance'.

## Detail:

Nationally, Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) figures report servicing 157,200 homeless people between 2004-05; a figure representative of 14-20% of the total homeless. For WA, the latest census data used to compile the *Counting the Homeless Report: Western Australia* presents a stark picture.

In order to meet the housing needs of young Western Australians we need:

- An immediate increase of youth specific accommodation including crisis and transitional/supported accommodation.
- An injection of funds allocated to existing services who are serving the needs of young people who have multiple issues. That the Government provide fully funded training to workers in the youth industry with fully-funded professional development opportunities with a focus on the issue of co-morbidity.
- To consult directly with rural and regional youth service providers in relation to accommodation needs and provide short, medium and long-term training in the areas of greatest need – YACWA draws attention specifically to the areas of the Kimberley and the South West.

# Young People in the Private Market

## Recommendation:

That the allowable loan amount for the Keystart program is increased to improve its accessibility for young people and that a community education program is undertaken to encourage the provision of affordable housing to young people in the private rental market.

## HOUSING

### Rationale:

Young people continue to face difficulties in establishing private market accommodation. Strategies to improve housing for young people include community education programs involving real estate professionals in encouraging private owners to accept young tenants and an increase in the KeyStart loan amount.

### Detail:

In 2001, of the 11,697 homeless West Australians 15% utilised boarding homes 58% were lucky enough to source temporary shelter with friends and family and only 8% were served by SAAP accommodation. This left 2,242 people -19% of the total homeless, 'living on the streets, sleeping in parks, squatting in derelict buildings, or using cars or railway carriages for temporary shelter' – a group categorised in the census as 'improvised dwellings or sleeping rough.'<sup>29</sup> (See, Legal and justice: Creative responses to public space).

Of great concern is that in Western Australia 39% of the total homeless population are aged between 12-24 years.<sup>30</sup>

WACOSS suggests that the Department of Housing and Works commence a community education program involving Real Estate stakeholders to encourage private housing markets to assist and encourage the provision of affordable housing to young people, as part of a whole community approach the lack of housing for homeless young people.

In addition, considering the historically high costs of property, Government needs to increase the allowable loan amount for the Keystart program to ensure that young people have the ability to enter the property market with a low cost loan from the Government.

# Regional Housing Development Coordinator

### Recommendation:

That a dedicated support position with funding is developed within the Department of Housing and Works to support regional housing providers.

### Rationale:

A regional housing support officer will address the lack of a co-ordinated approach to housing development in regional areas which is hampering providers' efforts to deliver housing outcomes.

### Detail:

In recent years, deepening regional inequalities have become evident across the country and some regions are emerging as pockets of high and increasingly entrenched disadvantage.<sup>31</sup> These problems are exacerbated by the withdrawal of services by both private and public sector agencies. In a recent Community Housing Coalition of WA survey 25% of member

<sup>29</sup> Chris Chamberlain, *Counting the Homeless 2001: Western Australia*.

<sup>30</sup> *Counting the Homeless 2001, ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> Gleeson & Carmichael (2001). Thinking regionally, acting locally: lessons for Australia from overseas housing and regional assistance policies. AHURI

responses consider regional area participation by their peak body an area of importance and 50% are concerned about the shortage of appropriate Aboriginal community housing.

A high percentage of community housing dwellings located in regional WA are joint venture projects managed by community housing providers, including local government authorities. However, it is evident that the lack of a coordinated approach to housing development in regional areas contributes to a competitive, rather than a cooperative approach between providers. Local government tends to focus its efforts on housing seniors, whilst people with complex needs may have limited access to crisis or supported accommodation. Expansion of the role of local government in community housing would be greatly facilitated by the appointment of a regional housing development coordinator.

# Culturally Appropriate Housing for Aboriginal Families and Singles

**Recommendation:**

That priority is given to developing a culturally appropriate housing response to the needs of young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and singles.

**Rationale:**

There is a need for collaborative effort to develop culturally appropriate housing options for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young families and singles, including transitional housing.

**Detail:**

A number of historic, current and emerging housing needs are evident for Aboriginal people living in both rural and urban areas. Some of these needs relate to population pressures, for example, almost 40% of the Western Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population is under the age of 15<sup>32</sup>.

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<sup>32</sup> Department of Housing and Works (2003). Western Australian Aboriginal Housing and Infrastructure Council Strategic Plan 2003/04 – 2006/07 page 18.

# Coordination for Clients with Complex Needs

**Recommendation:**

That Premier and Cabinet commit to the examination and resolution of national and state government policy issues impacting on the holistic delivery of services to community housing tenants to assist clients with complex needs.

**Rationale:**

Community housing tenants access a range of support programs that are funded by other government departments such as the Health Department, Disability Services Commission, the Department for Child Protection and the Department of Corrective Services.

The design and delivery of programs funded through these various government departments needs to be complementary, and opportunities for service providers to work in a more integrated way enhanced and encouraged. Programs are largely evaluated in isolation, and as a result opportunities to develop a web of mutually reinforcing responses are lost.

**Detail:**

In examining the needs of housing clients with complex needs, priority should be given to identifying strategies to support service providers to work in a more integrated way to address the complex needs of their mutual clients.

An essential component of a coordinated initiative would be the development of an integrated emergency crisis response to assist people with both mental health and drug and alcohol issues and assist in pre-emptive measures to avoid increasing the number of homeless people.

The important role that non-government organisations play in providing vital services, including accommodation, is widely acknowledged. However, continued expansion of partnerships between government agencies and the non-government sector, whilst being essential to the achievement of coordinated service provision, is dependent upon adequate funding and well-coordinated, coherent policy.

A problem identified across all sectors, which demands immediate government action, is the lack of an emergency crisis response with the capacity to assist people with serious mental health and/or drug-related problems. If an appropriate response could be developed collaboratively with service providers including hospitals, police and community agencies, it would contribute to a safer working environment and would ensure that clients receive immediate and appropriate assistance.

The cost-effectiveness of homelessness prevention and support programs operating in WA is the subject of current AHURI research under Paul Flatau at Murdoch University. The issue of support takes into account the fact that homelessness prevention and support programs actually save the community money elsewhere, such as in the health, justice and income support fields.

Other research<sup>33</sup> notes that a distinct group of highly vulnerable homeless people are high users of government assistance, and if not addressed they remain as 'expensive' clients. A study in Sydney examined a similar theme to Murdoch University's analysis into 'outcomes achieved by clients relative to the costs of providing support'. Over a two-year time-frame it

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<sup>33</sup> Rosanne Haggerty, 'A proven strategy for ending homelessness', *Parity*, 19 (5), July 2006, pp. 6-7.

followed 20 high-needs homeless people who used 68 different government or community services on 2,491 occasions at an average cost of \$34,000 per person per year. Focusing on this chronically homeless group and providing appropriate housing and support so that they remain housed has been the key here.

In South Australia the Social Inclusion Board has acted with many initiatives on the evidence that people with complex needs must be recognised, prioritised for assistance, and given appropriate housing. For example, in Adelaide, a 'Street to Home' program has placed 58 long-term homeless with complex needs into housing, etc.

These points emphasise the importance of the relationship between housing and support functions in the provision of social housing. The sector has indicated that there is insufficient recognition given to the need for housing and support to be regarded as a dual function. This is evidenced by the commonly occurring situation where houses are remaining vacant as there is insufficient support funding to enable organisations to successfully tenant them. CHCWA believes that this lack of program and funding coordination between the DHW, the Department for Child Protection, the Health Department, and the Disability Services Commission, needs urgent attention as a strategy priority to help these most needy of clients.

# Properties in the Community Options and Independent Living Programs

## Recommendation:

That the State Government increases the number of properties provided to the Community Options and Independent Living Programs (ILP).

## Rationale:

Access to housing for people with a long term mental health condition remains a major concern. Currently the number of accommodation units is insufficient to meet demand, as indicated by long waiting lists. The Government should increase funding to the Community Options and Independent Living Program with the specific intent of building more housing stock.

## Detail:

The first of the Community Options residences was due to open in July 2007 and will be one of four residences to be built. These new properties and beds will still not come close to meeting demand. Some housing stock is leased to community organisations by the DHW under the Community Disability Housing Program (CDHP), a program developed as a major response to the pressures of de-institutionalisation. The forward estimates state that Residential Mental Health Care will cost the Government \$5.164 million in 2007-08. This funding should be increased by at least 15% as estimated by the Community Housing Coalition of WA.

# Housing Support for People Released From Prison

**Recommendation:**

Reduce the rate of recidivism by assisting people who are released from prison to re-establish themselves in the community. This requires more accommodation units and increased funding for specialist support organisations.

**Rationale:**

Currently, agencies are only able to assist 10% of people seeking accommodation assistance on exiting the prison system. Without this support, many return to prison within a very short period of time.

**Detail:**

People who have served long prison sentences often have chaotic lifestyles and multiple issues to address. Some have mental health and/or drug and alcohol issues and need intensive, prolonged support to make the transition to community living.

Approximately 1,650 ex-offenders are unable to receive accommodation with support, thereby potentially contributing to the recidivism rate. For many prisoners, this means that their stay in prison is extended as they are unable to satisfy parole conditions. It is estimated that these 'extended stays' cost the Department of Justice between \$40-\$60K per prisoner per year – money, it could be argued, could potentially be better spent on expanding the range of housing options available to people leaving prison.

# Requirements for Social and Affordable Housing in Developments

**Recommendation:**

To address the shortage of affordable housing, all new developments and redevelopments should include a percentage of affordable housing. Any development on Government or Crown lands should include at least 15% social housing (public or community housing). Developments on private land should be required to include at least 15% affordable housing. These requirements should remain in force until public housing reaches 6% of total housing stock and the demand for affordable housing is met.

**Rationale:**

Affordable housing should be developed wherever possible both for low-income families and first home-buyers but also for Community Housing providers and investors seeking to provide low cost rental properties.

**Detail:**

Developers should be required by law to set aside 15% of new estates for affordable housing.

Development on land owned by the Crown or State Government should, as a matter of course, be required to set aside at least 15% of land. In addition, the Government should develop laws, which require all new developments on private land include 15% of dwellings, which are “affordable”. It is also recommended that the definition of affordable is to be arrived at through genuine consultation of stakeholders.

# An Appeals Process for Social Housing

**Recommendation:**

That the State Government create and fund an external and independent appeal mechanism for public and community housing.

**Rationale:**

An external and fully independent appeals mechanism for both public and community housing will provide appellants and advocates with a stronger sense of justice in the appeals process. In addition it will encourage Department of Housing and Works staff to ensure their original decisions are made using appropriate criteria and that the system is not used, as is currently believed to be the case, to restrict the heavy demand on public housing waiting lists. Community housing providers will also be required to meet an independent standard of operation for their tenants.

**Details:**

Western Australia’s current review mechanism for public housing does not offer a truly independent process for appealing decisions made by the Department of Housing and Works. Similarly there is no single independent body capable of reviewing the decisions of community housing providers. Due to the lack of an independent and transparent review process there exists a deep sense of distrust of the process by applicants and no sense that natural justice is being served.

One way to ensure all parties to a decision perceive their application has received a fair and independent review is to ensure that the review mechanism exists outside the agency making the original decision. The mechanism must include powers to change decisions, not simply make recommendations.

# Valuer General Calculation of Market Rent

**Recommendation:**

That the Valuer General's Office is resourced to calculate realistic market rent figures every six months.

**Rationale:**

An increase in resources to shorten the current timeframes for recalculation of market rent by the Valuer General and market rent values (given the volatile and rapid rise of private rental market rent) will improve the ability of Community Housing providers to charge rents that allow tenants to fully utilise Commonwealth Rent Assistance (which is calculated using rent costs) and in turn improve the viability of community housing.

**Detail:**

There is a general consensus amongst the Community Housing sector that the figures currently being provided by the Valuer General's Office (VGO) are adversely affecting the sector's financial viability. Raising VGO market rent levels does not significantly negatively impact tenants due to DHW's rent-to-income ratio policy which caps rents at 25% of income. The current pricing regime forced upon the sector by the significant undervaluing of stock using VGO figures is leading to some tenants, especially those with children, paying significantly less than 25% of their income in rent. This leads to viability and growth stunting issues for providers.

# Training and Skills Development for Community Housing

**Recommendation:**

That significant investment is made into the provision of accredited training in community housing organisations.

**Rationale:**

Community housing staff and volunteers deliver a service in providing housing for people. Training in social housing should be provided to ensure a high standard of service delivery.

**Detail:**

WACOSS calls on the State Government to implement this recommendation by committing to fund and make accessible Nationally Accredited Training in Social Housing. This should be made available to staff and volunteers in community housing organisations throughout Western Australia.

In addition, the Department of Education and Training should commit to the National Skills Development Strategy for Indigenous Community Housing Management.

Despite recent developments in the *Certificate IV in Social Housing*, there are concerns that this has not been acknowledged as a priority training area in the recent allocation of TAFE training hours. We would urge the Government to continue to prioritise the availability of nationally recognised training for all community housing providers in WA. The DHW Community Housing Strategic Plan (2003-2008) places increasing obligations and expectations on providers. To ensure that organisations are equipped to meet these performance requirements it is essential that staff and board members of community housing organisations have access to nationally accredited training in social housing and governance.

# Disability Support Packages

**Recommendation:**

Fund a minimum of 150 additional disability support packages in the year 2007/2008.

**Rationale:**

Currently there is a huge backlog of demand for Accommodation Support Funding. More disability support packages are needed to help people with disabilities.

**Detail:**

Australian Bureau of Statistic figures indicate that 15% of Western Australians (272,900 individuals) have a disability, and that by 2021 this figure is expected to rise by more than 200,000 due mainly to our ageing population. Currently 93% of people with disabilities live in the community, either independently or with family or friends.

To be housed under the Community Disability Housing Program (CDHP), people with disabilities must be in receipt of funding for accommodation support. In 2001, a review of the Accommodation Support Funding (ASF) process found that the available funding for accommodation support was approximately 6% of that requested and fewer than 10% of those requesting ASF were successful.<sup>34</sup> This has resulted in a huge backlog of demand which means there is a current focus on crisis rather than a more balanced proactive response to meeting family needs.

<sup>34</sup> DSCWA (2001). Review of the Accommodation Support Funding Process.

# Legal and Consumer Advice Services for Housing

**Recommendation:**

That the State Government provides funding to fill gaps in specific legal or consumer services. In particular: a Homeless Persons Legal Clinic in the metro area; a centralized Residential Park Homes advice service; and tenant advocacy services in the West Kimberley/Broome area (see also Care and Support: Seniors).

**Rationale:**

The current legal advice centres operating within Western Australia are not meeting the needs of many social groups, including homeless people, people who live in residential home parks, residents of the West Kimberly/Broome region and seniors.

**Detail:**

People living in residential parks are subject to specialised tenancy legislation, unlike other tenants. Residential Park Home owners may spend up to \$350,000 purchasing a home which they are then required to place on a piece of land within a residential park that they can only rent from the park owner. As a tenant of the land they can be asked to move out and gain no benefit in the increase of value of the land whilst their home is a depreciating asset. The legislation governing their living situation and status as a resident is highly complex necessitating specially trained advocates to ensure residential park home owners are advised correctly of their rights and obligations. The cost of a *central advice service for residential park home owners* is estimated to be \$88,000 annually by the Tenants Advice Service.

Homeless people have limited opportunities to access appropriate legal services and as a result they may suffer undue harassment from authorities and an inability to access benefits and services to which they are legally entitled. This imbalance needs to be redressed as a matter of some urgency, particularly as the number of homeless people within Perth and its surrounds continues to grow as a result in some part of our unaffordable housing. In order to ensure their rights are protected and they have easy access to legal services in a form that meets their special needs, a *homeless persons' legal clinic* is vital. This has already been documented in a scoping study funded by the Law Society. The cost is estimated to be \$160,000 annually by the Tenants Advice Service.

Community sector agencies in the West Kimberley/Broome region have advised that the needs of all people living in this region are not met by existing services. For this reason there is a need for a *specific tenancy focused legal service for this region*. The cost is estimated to be \$103,000 annually by the Tenants Advice Service.

# Housing Case Study

## Experiences of Housing Assistance Providers

“Clearly there is urgent need for increase in affordable housing stock – public, community and private housing. While abolition of letting fee is great, the continuation of the ubiquitous 'options fee' is a major obstacle faced by many people. This should be abolished immediately and so bring WA into line with the eastern states. There is a real need to increase amount paid in rent assistance to offset increasing rent rises. We regularly encounter difficulties when dealing with private landlords where some ride roughshod over tenant's rights. While the real estate industry does have some level of oversight to prevent and/or deal with shonky practices, the same cannot be said of the private rental sector.”

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“A significant proportion of Gosnells Community Legal Centre's ongoing tenancy casework involves public housing applications and appeals. The private rental market issues which are referred through duty intake to the tenancy service often involve clients who experience multiple disadvantages (such as poverty, mental health issues and literacy/language issues etc).

They also frequently involve landlords who are unaware of their legal obligations to tenants, for example, serving incorrect notices, breaching the right to privacy, or failing to carry out essential repairs.

Finally, in relation to all tenancy cases, we find it is difficult for tenants to reach a successful outcome through the dispute resolution process provided under legislation. Going to Court is daunting for many tenants, particularly when they must argue points of law against property managers with extensive experience in utilising the process.”

# Care and Support

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Western Australia is in the midst of a resources boom. But while the state is undeniably more prosperous, the gap between rich and poor is widening and the increasing inequity is impacting on our most valuable and vulnerable community members, our children, youth and families; carers, seniors and people with disabilities.

It is the care and support that is offered to these groups in our communities that reflects highly on the quality of the social fabric of our state. Communities that are strengths based and resilient are able to build strong capacity and provide real solutions to the challenges facing these groups in a preventative, holistic way.

It is our hope that these recommendations encourage the state government to invest in strong, basic infrastructure that will benefit the community across the board. Inherent in this strong infrastructure are community workers and professionals who are trained in ways that seek to solve problems holistically when responding to crisis or trauma situations.

While most children living in Australia are faring well, there are a significant number that are being failed by our society. It is estimated that the percentage of children living in poverty in Australia is between 13% and 17% - a significant proportion of the population. This is concerning when we know that children born into poverty have an increased chance of low birth weight, poor physical growth and inadequate coping skills in the early years of school. With such a poor start they are more likely to drop out of school, develop mental health problems and experience difficulty in finding and keeping a job<sup>35</sup>.

There are serious short and long-term consequences for a society that does not adequately support all of its children in their early years. Nobel Prize winning Economist James Heckman, along with many others, has widely documented the economic and social benefits of investing in children early. "Early advantages cumulate; so do early disadvantages. Later remediation of early deficits is costly... redirecting additional funds toward the early years, before the start of traditional schooling, is a sound investment in the productivity and safety of our society."<sup>36</sup>

"It was once said that the moral test of government is how that government treats those who are in the dawn of life, the children; those who are in the twilight of life, the elderly; and those who are in the shadows of life, the sick, the needy and the handicapped".

(Hubert Humphrey)



<sup>35</sup> Brotherhood of St Laurence. (2003). *What does the future hold*. See <http://www.bsl.org.au/main.asp?PagelD=3937>

<sup>36</sup> Heckman, J. (2006). *Investing in Disadvantaged Young Children is an Economically Efficient Policy: Building the Economic Case for Investing in Preschool*. Committee for Economic Development: New York.

# Children, Youth and Families

The wellbeing of children, youth and families should be an issue high on everyone's agenda, for they not only represent our future, but also shape how we get there. It is the responsibility of families, caregivers and governments to uphold the following fundamental rights as identified in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCROC):

- The right to play and have an adequate standard of living, health care, education and access to early years services;
- The right to protection from abuse, neglect, exploitation and discrimination;
- The right to express their view about things that affect them and to participate in communities, programs and services for children<sup>37</sup>.

While 'youth' issues are often viewed as only those things that directly impacting on young people, in fact every major policy decision affects children and young people either directly or indirectly. To this end, the interests of children and youth should be considered by all sectors of the community.

We are often told that Western Australia has a wealth of valuable resources and that investing in those resources creates prosperity and opportunity for all. It is time that we acknowledge our children, youth and families as our most valuable resources and realise that prioritising in their wellbeing is a priority economic and social investment.

## Children in Care

Recommendation:

That the State Government increase funding for children in the State care system by \$1.25million dollars in the 2008/2009 year.

### Rationale:

Under current funding arrangements, children in care are not being adequately provided for, to ensure that they have at a minimum, an equivalent standard of living with average Western Australian children. This increase would provide, approximately, an additional \$500 per child for around 2,500 children in care.

### Detail:

When the government takes guardianship over Western Australian children, it is usually under extreme circumstances. These children have often faced a number of traumas and need comprehensive and therapeutic support. It is of vital importance that children in care are provided with services to assist them with any immediate needs, as well as adequate ongoing resources to provide them with the equivalent standard of living as average Western Australian children. This includes ensuring that their basic needs, such as food, clothing and education are met, but it also relates to ensuring that children in care are encouraged to actively and willingly participate in society.

Research has shown that the Western Australian Government spends significantly less of children in the care of the state in WA, than what other Australian State Governments allocate for this incredibly important role.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>37</sup> The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

<sup>38</sup> Australian Productivity Commission. Report on Government Services 2007. Protection and support services. Chapter 15

# Therapeutic Counselling for Children

**Recommendation:**

That State Government increase funding for both government and non-government therapeutic counseling services for children, including children in care as a major priority.

**Rationale:**

Early access to counseling services plays a vital part in preventing the spiraling of problems and is essential to preventing self-destructive behaviours from developing in children who are victims of abuse.

**Detail:**

It is essential that children and young people who are victims of abuse have timely access to therapeutic counseling services help them to heal, recover their childhoods and regain their self esteem and the confidence to pursue happy and productive futures.

Research suggests that abused and neglected children are vulnerable to becoming society's most disabled and dysfunctional members and that immediate access to therapeutic counseling services can help to minimise the negative consequences of abuse<sup>39</sup>.

There are a range of factors which predispose a child to poor behavioural, educational and health outcomes, and also to increased rates of child abuse and neglect.<sup>40</sup> Poor socio-economic status, single parenthood, a violent home and lack of social support are just some of the factors that may increase the incidence of abuse and neglect.

Children and their parents need access to counselling and support services. This can assist in breaking of repeating the cycle of violence and becoming trapped in a position of isolation and disempowerment.

## Keeping Children Safe

**Recommendation:**

That the State Government provides funding for a dedicated policy and research project to investigate early intervention and protection responses for the needs of children who are victims or witnesses of domestic and family violence, and/or who accompany their mothers/female guardian into Women's Refuge Services.

**Rationale:**

A Children's Policy Officer will represent the needs of children and young people by providing input to policy development relevant to the needs of children who have been exposed to domestic and family violence (DVF) and child abuse.

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<sup>39</sup> Massachusetts Citizens for Children – Kids Count. A STATE CALL TO ACTION: Working to End Child Abuse and Neglect in Massachusetts. April 2001

<sup>40</sup> See <http://www.community.wa.gov.au> – Research Base for the Early Years.

**Detail:**

The need to ensure that early intervention and prevention responses are in place is essential in terms of addressing the immediate and longer terms effects of DFV on the lives of at-risk women and children. Children represent the majority of clients in Women's Refuge Services (up to 20 at any one time) and must be seen as clients in their own right. Children and young people who have witnessed and/or experienced forms of domestic violence and child abuse within the home require timely responses and often this window of opportunity is when children accompany their mother or female guardian into a Women's Refuge.

WACOSS considers it appropriate to locate the Children's Policy Officer at the Women's Council for Family and Domestic Violence. The Policy Officer will represent the needs of mothers/caregivers and their children who have experienced abuse in the home and seek safety, protection and support from Women's Refuge and DFV Services in WA and the Department of Child Protection. It will also represent the needs of children who are still in the home suffering the consequences of domestic violence.

The estimated total cost of funding a Children's Policy Officer for three years is \$195,000, based on the equivalent of Level 6, SACS Award plus on costs.

# Services for the Health Needs of Aboriginal Children

**Recommendation:**

To improve health services for Aboriginal children in Western Australian hospitals, specifically to reduce time on waiting lists; access to paediatricians; access to physiotherapists; and access to speech pathologists.

**Rationale:**

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and children from lower socio-economic backgrounds are more likely to experience poorer health, developmental outcomes and reduced wellbeing than other Australian children. In 2004-05, Aboriginal children under four were twice as likely to be hospitalised for preventable diseases than non-Aboriginal children. To improve these statistics it is vital that health services for Aboriginal children in Western Australia are improved.

**Detail:**

It is well known that providing a child with a good start can have a profound effect on the rest of their life and that stress and neglect in these early years can have significant effects on later health and educational outcomes.

The survival of infants in their first year of life is generally viewed as an indicator of the general health and wellbeing of a population. While there has been a dramatic decline in the infant mortality rates in the past century for all Australians, the mortality rate for Aboriginal infants is still significantly higher than for infants in the rest of the population.<sup>41</sup> For Aboriginal infants, the average mortality rate in 2002/03 was three times the corresponding rate for

<sup>41</sup> See <http://www.pc.gov.au/gsp/reports/indigenous/keyindicators2007/keyindicators2007.pdf>

other Australian infants. Infants from a disadvantaged socio-economic background are twice as likely as those from a high socio-economic background to die before they reach their first birthday<sup>42</sup>.

Improving access to health services for Aboriginal children in hospitals and preventative health services such as physiotherapists and speech pathologists has the potential to significantly impact on the health and developmental outcomes of Aboriginal children in Western Australia.

# Children in Women's Refuge Services

**Recommendation:**

That the State Government increases core funding levels to ensure that women's refuges, DV services and homeless services employ a minimum of two full-time Child Support Workers.

**Rationale:**

Due to funding constraints, the majority of women's refuges are only able to provide a part-time Child Support Worker. This is resulting in an inability to provide this support for many women and children in crisis, which can have a devastating impact on the community, now and into the future.

**Detail:**

Children's lives are often severely disrupted by domestic and family violence. Escaping the violence means leaving their home, their friends and their community. Pets, toys, books, clothes and precious possessions may all be left behind, disrupting a child's sense of place. They may have to change schools several times and may have difficulty gaining a place in a new school.

A critical window of opportunity exists to provide specialist DV support to children when accompanying their mother/caregiver to the refuge. Child DV specialists work primarily with children and young people at the point of crisis to deliver counselling and program support. This support can come in a variety of ways, including children's counselling, group programs, and support with educational and recreational needs. Not providing this support can have devastating long term effects on children and young people in the community. Witnessing their mother being trapped in a cycle of abuse and controlling behaviour also has a huge impact on a child's emotional and psychological well-being and performance at school.

Refuge workers are now seeing women and children of three generations using their services. We urge the State government to contribute to 'breaking the intergenerational cycle of violence' by addressing this issue as a matter of urgency. It is in the best interest of children to ensure they receive the necessary support when accompanying their mother to a refuge service or homeless shelter.

The estimated cost of providing Child Support Workers is a minimum of \$75,000 per annum per worker, based on Level 5/6 of CASH Award plus on-costs.

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<sup>42</sup> Australian Institute of Health & Welfare (2005) *A Picture of Australia's Children*, AIHW, Canberra

# A Holistic, Child Focused Approach to Child Protection

**Recommendation:**

That the State Government fund the creation of a Child Advocacy Centre as a model for service delivery which offers a holistic, child focused approach to child protection.

**Rationale:**

The Child Advocacy Centre model of service delivery expands and enhances the responsibility for holistic child focused responses from Police and DCP at the assessment and investigation end of service provision, to comprehensive multi-agency response focused on assessment, investigation, therapeutic intervention, medical evaluation, prosecution and family support.

**Detail:**

The Joint Approach to Child Abuse has to date focused on the interviewing of children who have been harmed and service provision by Police and DCP only. It is recommended that the Western Australian Government, through the Departments of the Attorney General, Health, Indigenous Affairs, Police and Child Protection, implement the Child Advocacy Centre model of service provision for child protection, support and prosecution of cases. Instead of each individual government agency focusing on core business within their own frameworks the Child Advocacy Centre is a considered and deliberate move by government to build services around the requirements of children and families. Each agency supplies resources, changes internal systems, moves out of service provision silos and provides commitment and energy to work differently and improve the system.



It is recommended that the recently established Directors of Child Safety in each identified department provide leadership in the establishment of Child Advocacy Centres in the metropolitan & country areas in collaboration with communities and service providers. The Directors will be responsible for ensuring change within their own agencies, identifying resources, working with key stakeholders and providing the commitment required to consolidate a whole of government response at the service delivery level.

The re-location and expansion of the Child Interview Unit is an opportunity for the WA Government to establish the first Child Advocacy Centre in Australia – a comprehensive child and family focused service meeting the needs of children who have been harmed and who require a range of services. Services are provided in a planned, seamless way with case review and tracking mechanism to ensure child safety and support. Expanded well planned accommodation will enable growth from an interview unit to comprehensive centre for vulnerable children.

Approximate size and estimated cost within Subiaco or central city (proximity to PMH, Child Protection Squad Detectives) 3000 square metres, 70 car bays \$1.3 million per year lease.

# Family Centres and Community Based Child Care Centres

**Recommendation:**

Maintain current funding for minor works and capital upgrade of state owned premises operated as Family Centres and Community Based Child Care Centres.

**Rationale:**

WACOSS has received consistent feedback from the sector about the critical need for maintenance upgrades for Family Centres and Child Care Centres, which play an important role in service provision and community cohesion.

**Detail:**

Every day thousands of Western Australian families and children utilise Family Centres and Community Based Child Care Centres. These centres fulfil an important role in the provision of services. For example: they often provide services in locations that for profit centres do not see as viable; and studies are beginning demonstrate that the quality of service is lower in for profit centres, particularly the large corporate chains, than in community based centres.<sup>43</sup> These centres also play a valuable role in promoting community cohesion as those using the centres are often involved in how the centre is run. It is vital in this climate of the corporatisation of child care that the value of community based centres is recognised

Expenditure on children's services in WA during the period 2003-2004 was the third lowest among all the other States – approximately \$180 per child compared against the Northern Territory that spent \$525 per child.<sup>44</sup>

In 2002 the Auditor General undertook an evaluation of the asset effectiveness of Family Centres. As part of this study, the suitability of Family Centres was rated by centre management, staff and regular users based on a number of criteria including: their internal and external liveability; their safety and security; their physical condition; and the need for maintenance to keep the asset in reasonable condition. The assessment for these criteria varied with an average rating of criteria only being met to a *moderate extent*.

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<sup>43</sup> Press, F. (2006) *What about the kids?: Improving the experiences of infants and young children in a changing world*, NSW Commission for Children and Young People, QLD Commission for Children and Young People and Child Guardian, National Institute for the Early Years, p. 3.

<sup>44</sup> Productivity Commission (2005) *Report on Government Services: Children Services Section* Australian Government, Canberra. Part 14.33

# Young People Leaving Care

**Recommendation:**

That the State Government provides adequate funds to resource and support all young people up to the age 25 leaving care, including but not limited to those with a Comprehensive Care Plan.

**Rationale:**

Many young people who leave care at the age of 18 do not have access to the adequate resources and support to successfully make the transition into adulthood. It is vital that young people leaving care have access to, for example, periodic access to counselors, or rental assistance. This supports should be offered to all young people so that those with a Comprehensive Care Plan received the necessary resources, but that also those without a plan can access support services.

**Detail:**

Children and young people in care are vulnerable and at risk of being unable to access services which would support them to embark upon successful adult lives.

Without having access to comprehensive support, either through a care plan or not, young people leaving care are more likely than other young to be homeless, unemployed, accessing mental health care services, unable to access general health services and to be forever trapped in the poverty and welfare cycle.

The State Government must ensure that there are adequate resources to enable young people leaving care to be able to access independent housing, tertiary training and education if desired, employment opportunities and most importantly mental and general health care services including dental health services until they are 25 years of age.

# Young People Abused in Care

**Recommendation:**

That the State Government provide funds for the provision of information, access and support to young people who have experienced abuse while in care or who have been victims of crime.

**Rationale:**

Children and young people in care are vulnerable and it is essential that they have access to legal information and support should they need it to seek compensation.

**Detail:**

## CARE AND SUPPORT: CHILDREN, YOUTH AND FAMILIES

Children and young people in care currently have access to the Advocate for Children in Care whose role it is to provide advocacy and complaints management services for all children and young people in care.

Although the Advocate for Children in Care will provide age appropriate information on the complaints handling processes and refer children and young people to other complaints services (such as the State Ombudsman or the State Administrative Tribunal) WACOSS considers it important that funds should be provided to ensure that the complaints process is accessible and that children and young people who have made a complaint are properly supported during the process.

# Early Childhood Years

Recommendation:

That the State Government funds a review of the Early Years Strategy.

### Rationale:

The Early Years Strategy provides a framework for improving the social wellbeing of Western Australian children, but the programs being funded under the strategy are ad hoc and require evaluation through a major review of the strategy. The learnings from the implementation of the strategy need to be applied and integrated across the child protection system.

### Detail:

While WACOSS commends the State Governments commitment to the Early Years Strategy and acknowledges the good work that is being done we are concerned with reports that agencies are dissatisfied with the implementation of the Strategy and the removal of funding from successful programs.

Children's wellbeing is a joint responsibility for government, business and community organisations. It important to ensure that we are not just trauma sensitive and responsive to incidents, but that we have a holistic, preventative and supportive view of children's wellbeing. We need to foster child friendly, child safe families and communities, where children are nurtured and enriched.

A lack of resources for evaluating Early Years programs is eventuating in a loss of valuable learning that should be transferred and applied on a more permanent basis. An emphasis on community capacity building and evaluation would highlight a commitment to providing ongoing social infrastructure to support families in our communities and ensure that successful programs could continue to run in the community.

Current State Government policy does not sufficiently acknowledge the changing and transient nature of families. Emphasis on capacity building and evaluation would mean that successful programs could continue to run in the community.

# Children Youth & Family Case Study

## Child Advocacy Centres

The Child Advocacy Centre (CAC) model has a 20 year history of development in the United States of America with over 640 centres in that country. Centres are now established in Canada, Eastern Europe, Sweden, Iceland and the Philippines.

The CAC model is a comprehensive service which includes more than the interviewing of children, it allows:

- child focused and culturally appropriate services
- timely responses
- less stress for children and families requiring services
- improved coordination, information sharing, planning and decision making
- improved protection of children
- improved assessment and collection of evidence
- improved prosecution of offenders
- increased expertise in multi-sectoral responses
- increased satisfaction for children and families in the response to their needs
- increased community awareness about accessible services and
- improved quality assurance, case tracking and accountability of service providers.

The Child Advocacy Model of service delivery is a model that was developed at a grass roots level to provide holistic responses to children who have been harmed.

# Disabilities

In 2003 there were 405,500 people with a disability in Western Australia representing 21% of the state population. Between 1998 and 2003 the number of people with a disability in Western Australia increased by 50,000 (14%). While most people with a disability received some form of assistance, just over one quarter (26%) need more help. The proportion of those with an unmet need rose with the severity of disability. Almost a half (45%) of those with a profound or severe core-activity restriction have their needs for assistance only partially met.<sup>45</sup>

For the 2008/09 budget, the Disability Coalition is preparing a pre-budget submission focusing on issues faced by people with disabilities and their carers. WACOSS supports the recommendations of the Disability Coalition and highlights the following two recommendations from their submission.

## Support Services for People with Disabilities

Recommendation:

- That the State Government commit to the funding and planning required to ensure that all people with a disability in need of accommodation and respite support services have access to these.
- That the State Government commit to the funding and planning required to ensure that all people with disabilities in need of assistance are able to access the support and services they need.

**Rationale:**

The community supports the right of people with disabilities to have a decent quality of life of a standard enjoyed by other community members.<sup>46</sup>

**Detail:**

Through the Disability Services Commission's Combined Application Process (CAP), people with a disability apply for individual funding for the essential supports they require that are unavailable elsewhere.

The range of support services required by people with a disability, such as: accommodation support; individual and family support, therapy and a properly resourced and effective early intervention program will need to be developed through a plan, informed by sound data, and include a commitment to the funding required.

## Supporting Advocacy for People with Disabilities

<sup>45</sup> See <http://www.abs.gov.au/Ausstats/abs@.nsf/Lookup/A6D8D7EEC1F1A5BECA25703C007C7B35>

<sup>46</sup> Chamber of Commerce and Industry (2006) *Workforce Planning in the Disability Services Sector*, A report commissioned by ACROD WA

**Recommendation:**

That the State Government allocates additional recurrent funding to organisations funded to provide advocacy, individual and systemic, for people with disabilities.

**Rationale:**

Existing advocacy services are under-funded and over-stretched. Greater investment is required to support the many people with a disability who need assistance to effectively exercise their rights.

**Detail:**

Advocacy services provide essential support to people with disabilities in defending and promoting their human rights, citizenship rights, and rights as service users. Some of the rights promoted and protected by advocacy services include access to employment, education, health care, housing, and due legal process.

There are two types of advocacy that help to enhance the quality of life for people with disability. Individual advocacy provides a service to safeguard and enhance the rights, interests and wellbeing of individuals with a disability. Individual advocacy involves assisting, supporting and empowering people with a disability to bring about positive changes in the quality of their everyday life.

Systemic advocacy focuses on influencing changes in society in order to positively affect the quality of life of people with a disability and their families. Systemic advocacy involves the development and changing of policy, awareness raising within the community, lobbying and education and training.

# Supporting People with Disabilities to Secure and Maintain Work

**Recommendation:**

That the State government provides funding for programs that support people with disabilities to secure and maintain work.

**Rationale:**

People with disabilities are at risk of poverty and social exclusion and often experience significant access barriers to securing and maintaining work.

**Detail:**

There are many training providers, support organisations and employment agencies in WA that specialise in providing employment support and assisting people with disabilities to secure and maintain employment. Funding programs that assist people with disabilities to secure work and provide ongoing support that enable them to maintain that work, has significant social and economic benefits to the state.

# Disabilities Case Study

## Workability – Life Works Model

*Workability* is an innovative, non-profitable organisation that has successfully delivered services to people with disabilities who experience significant access barriers since 1988. Their approach involves a highly improved personal support model for producing skilled workers who can self manage and better sustain mental health resilience across WA.

Peter, a young man with a mild intellectual disability, had previously lived on the streets and presented as quite introverted and shy. His participation in *Workability*'s Communications course boosted his confidence in his ability to converse with others and motivated him to present himself better. As a result of this participation and these positive changes, he secured himself his first ever job doing presentation work at Coles.

*Workability* has estimated that the total cost benefit of each successful client participating in the Life Works Program currently averages between \$85,000 and \$125,000 annually to the WA economy.

To increase the placement of skilled workers over the next three years by supporting the roll out of this service model in the Peel region *Workability* need to attract funding of 1.2m per annum.

# Aged Care

Seniors are uniquely valuable members of our community. Although accounting for just 20% of the adult population, Western Australian seniors provide nearly 40% of unpaid caring, nearly 25% of unpaid volunteering and 68% of unpaid child minding, at a value of over \$1.1billion<sup>47</sup>. While their contribution to society is immense, the assurance of their wellbeing has some way to go.

Most senior Australians rely on allowances or pensions as income support or their sole source of income, many have a high incidence of ill health and age related disabilities such as hearing and vision loss, reduced mobility and dementia. Mental health, whilst statistically lower, is known to be under diagnosed and poorly understood amongst seniors. Increasingly, individuals are required to meet or at least contribute to the cost of their medical care, including prescription medication, home support services and residential care.

Increasingly, our older population is facing financial hardship, social exclusion, housing stress and a lack of access to affordable services. This pressure is likely to increase as the aging population places higher demands on public health services.

See also **Health: Mental Health Strategy for Seniors**

## Housing Information, Advice and Security for Senior Citizens

**Recommendation:**

That the State Government develops laws to protect seniors from unfair contracts related to their accommodation and establish a Seniors' Housing Advisory Service to provide information and advice to older Western Australians regarding their housing options.

**Rationale:**

In current times there is an ever-increasing availability of retirement and lifestyle villages to add to seniors housing options. Whilst the majority of Western Australian seniors own their own home, many seniors face the problem of choosing between rental properties (public or private), retirement and lifestyle villages. Contracts for the latter two options are often complex and lengthy and many seniors enter into these contracts blindly. The establishment of laws to protect seniors from unfair contracts related to their accommodation is essential.

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<sup>47</sup> *The State of Aging in WA*. (2007). Report by Access Economics Pty Limited for the Office for Seniors Interests and Volunteering, Government of Western Australia.

**Detail:**

Some retirement villages are located alongside a hostel and/or nursing home, leading seniors to believe that this care option will be available to them if/when they need it. This assumption is not necessarily correct as residential care beds often have waiting lists and are often allocated on a needs basis. Seniors need to be made aware of this, so they are not lead into a false sense of security. A Seniors Housing Advisory Service must be established to provide face-to-face advice and information to the growing number of seniors facing this dilemma.

# Protecting Vulnerable Seniors

**Recommendation:**

That the State Government funds crime prevention strategies aimed at seniors.

**Rationale:**

Crime prevention strategies are an effective way of reducing crime. A reduction in crime will give seniors a greater sense of security and wellbeing. Peer education is an effective means of providing seniors with the knowledge they require to overcome a range of problems. Establishment of a seniors' crime prevention service utilising trained volunteer seniors would be a valuable addition to existing services such as those provided by the Office of Crime Prevention.

**Detail:**

Seniors fear victimisation as they are amongst the most vulnerable of all citizens and have the least capacity to recover from the consequences of crime. An adequate and visible police presence in public places discourages criminal behaviour and gives seniors a sense of security and the confidence to participate fully in society.

Visible alarm systems have been shown to be an effective preventative measure in combating opportunistic burglary. However, not all seniors can afford to install an alarm system in their homes. These people are the most vulnerable and government should act to assist them to protect themselves from both the threat and fear of burglary.

Although seniors are amongst those least likely to be the victims of crime, they are also less able to recover from the effects of crime than younger people. Irrecoverable physical and psychological harm may result from a crime committed against a senior and, for people on low and fixed incomes, a financial loss is difficult or impossible to recover from. Seniors need enhanced victim support services to assist them to recover from the effects of crime, including assistance in seeking adequate compensation from perpetrators.

# Increase Mobility Equipment Assistance for Seniors

**Recommendation:**

For the State Government to provide financial assistance to low-income seniors for purchasing mobility equipment, enabling them to live and participate in the community for longer.

**Rationale:**

Many seniors on a low income cannot purchase expensive mobility aids, and if unaided they are more likely to have falls resulting in incapacitation. This means that they cannot participate fully in the community.

**Detail:**

Although age and disability are not necessarily linked, and people are ageing in better health than ever before, there is a tendency for the rate of disability to increase with age. In Western Australia, the rates of disability for seniors are:

Age group	Male disability rate (%)	Female disability rate (%)
60-64	43	39
65-74	45	47
75+	68	70

The existing CAEP scheme provides for assistance with only a single item of mobility equipment. Realistically, many people require more than one piece of equipment. Equipment for Living grants increase access to equipment such as electric beds, but these items are not a luxury, they are a necessity and should be available as a matter of course to people who need them. Patients discharged from private hospitals are not eligible for assistance with mobility aids, while those discharged from public hospitals do receive help (with the loan of crutches and other aids). This causes hardship as many seniors retain their private health insurance despite having a low income, but they are unable to afford to hire or purchase mobility equipment.



# Aged Care Case Study

## Aged Care

In 2003-04, Westpac commissioned the Association of Superannuation Funds of Australia (ASFA) to determine how much money was needed in retirement to fund a modest lifestyle, and a comfortable lifestyle<sup>48</sup>.

According to the ASFA, a modest lifestyle enables only basic living, and precludes such things as eating out, travel, private health insurance, running a motor vehicle or entertaining at home. Whereas a comfortable lifestyle enables a healthy retiree to be involved in a broad range of social and leisure activities; to purchase some household goods such as electrical equipment; to own and run a good car; and to partake of some national and occasionally, international travel. In all these estimates, it is assumed that the retired individual or couple owns their own home.

Breaking down budgets into areas such as on-going household costs, utilities, clothing, personal care, transport, leisure, and others, the ASFA suggests that a single person living a modest lifestyle, needs approximately 353.05 per week, while a couple would need approximately \$496.57. To live a comfortable lifestyle, the ASFA suggests that a single person requires \$685.26 per week, while a couple requires \$917.16 per week. These costs are based upon the national average costs as at December 2006<sup>49</sup>.

The maximum Aged Pension for a single person is \$262.55 or \$438.50 for a couple.

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<sup>48</sup> Westpac/ASFA, 2006 *Retirement Living Standard: Detailed Budget Breakdowns*, December Quarter  
[www.superannuation.asn.au](http://www.superannuation.asn.au)  
Accessed March 2007

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

# Carers

Carers are people who provide help and support to a child, partner, relative, friend or neighbour, who due to age, physical or mental illness, disability or addiction could not manage without their help. They play a very valuable, and frequently under acknowledged role in our community.

Many carers do not consider themselves to be a carer, they are just doing what they, or anyone else in their situation would do – looking after a friend or relative who cannot look after themselves.

While taking on a caring role can be rewarding it can also have significant impacts on the carer's life, it can mean juggling work and caring responsibilities or giving up a career and an income. It can leave the carer frustrated, depressed, isolated and in need of emotional and financial support. This is especially true of young carers and grandparents, who are often forced into a carer's role.

While carers may not ask to be rewarded, they do need to be supported.

## Carer Representation Framework

### Recommendations:

For the State Government to provide funding for Carer Representation in order to recognise, engage and support carers in systemic and operational levels of service delivery across the sector.

### Rationale:

Carers have real experiences to contribute and real issues which need to be addressed and recognised in existing service standards across the sector. Carers need to be appropriately trained and supported in order to be contributing effectively as representatives.

### Detail:

Carer and family involvement is already acknowledged and embedded in the WA Carers Recognition Act 2004, Disability Services Standards, Mental Health and HACC Standards. In order to include carers in consultations, planning and implementation processes of service delivery, carers need to be appropriately trained and supported. Carers are 'experts' in their own rights in caring for a family member and therefore have a lot to offer as consumers and partners in community care.

Many carers have had to reduce or leave highly skilled and well-paid employment in order to care for a family member in the community. As is commonly known and proven, the inclusion of consumers and carers in service planning enhances the effectiveness of service delivery as part of good practice models. Training and support is key for carers to understand standards and processes in order to make valued contributions to discussions at a systemic level. This program must be statewide in order to be inclusive and ensure quality assurance.

Allocation of funding to this important initiative would provide meaningful support to carers being engaged at a systemic level. Anecdotal evidence shows that carers continue to be

excluded in important processes in service models across the sector, regardless of Standards and Legislation.

# Mental Health Carer Representation and Advocacy

**Recommendation:**

That the State Government increases the funding of Mental Health Carer Representation and Advocacy.

**Rationale:**

WA Carers Recognition Act 2004 and the Mental Health Standards require meaningful carer involvement at a systemic level. Funding of Mental Health Carer Representation and Advocacy would achieve the objectives of both legislation and Standards as well as support carers.

**Detail:**

A State wide consultation took place in 2006 with key stakeholders; including carers, service providers, government and others. This consultation significantly informed the resultant framework as stakeholders described the best means of supporting a more effective Mental Health carer representation program. As the Mental Health Division (MHD) require mental health carer representatives on each ratified MHD committee, reference group and others it is important that an expanded and more inclusive Framework be duly considered in order for the most effective service to be provided. This would significantly reduce carer stress and burnout from being over-utilised and expand the network to become self-regulatory and much more consultative in its approach.

As mentioned in the Framework submission, it was estimated in 2006 that an increase in funding of this area of approximately 350% p/a (an additional \$222,000) was required. This was based on costing out for appropriate staffing and other support in the market at the time.

The cost of not providing this support will result in Mental Health Carer representation being unable to grow and expand in the manner that is required. Representation is a very particular skill that requires training, support and guidance, as well as the capacity to meaningfully engage with and advocate on behalf of other carers.

# Mental Health and Carer Information-Sharing

**Recommendation:**

That the State Government approve Phase Two of a research project addressing the use of forms and checklists by mental health clinicians to provide a consistent process of gaining consent to release information to family carers.

**Rationale:**

This research project would very appropriately explore the processes involved in meaningful information-sharing between clinicians, consumers and carers and look at effective processes that will foster inclusive information-sharing and prompt all stakeholders to become more involved.

**Detail:**

Two guides have been developed collaboratively by Carers WA, UWA, Mental Health Division and Office of the Chief Psychiatrist, along with input from carers and consumers. The Guides have been overwhelmingly taken up, with very positive feedback received. Allocating funding to Phase Two would see the rollout of the guides into a practical form across 3 AMHS sites in WA. One of the most reported issues that family carers has is the issue of adequate and appropriate information sharing between themselves, the clinician/s and the mental health consumer<sup>50</sup>.

# Support Services for Young Carers

**Recommendation:**

That the State Government, as a matter of urgency, provides ongoing, re-current funding in order to provide consistency for a high number of young carers in need of support services.

**Rationale:**

Young carers are a vulnerable and at-risk cohort. Without ongoing funding young carers will continue to fall through the gaps of services.

**Detail:**

40,000 young carers currently live across WA, according to research conducted by Curtin University in 2004. Young carers as a target population have one of the highest school drop-out rates. Only 4% of young primary carers between the age of 15-25 yrs are still at school, compared to 23% of the general population.

The National Young Carer Summit in 2006 identified 4 key areas for young carers which were discussed with key stakeholders again at the WA Young Carers Forum in August 2007. The areas identified are; Identification, Education, Respite and Whole of Government.

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<sup>50</sup> McKeague, B. (2003). *Worried, Tired and Alone: A Report of Mental Health Carers Issues in WA*: Carers WA.

Disability Service Commission (DSC) has provided one-off grants for young carers programs since 2004, however, \$500,000 annually across a variety of agencies in WA is needed.

Ongoing and re-current funding across WA will support the efforts to develop and implement appropriate services for young carers as well as provide opportunities for young carers to meet with and develop peer support networks, like many other young people of their age enjoy.

# Support for Grandparents as Carers

## Recommendation:

For the State Government to fund a range of appropriate services for grandparents who are caring for their grandchildren, including financial support (whether in the foster care system or not), and additional Grandparent Playgroups.

## Rationale:

The ongoing costs of raising a grandchild can seriously affect the financial security and sustainability of a grandparent's retirement. And while financial support is extremely important, WACOSS also acknowledges that a full range of services are required to look after the emotional needs of grandparents in a caring role.

## Detail:

Grandparents often take on the care of their grandchildren in sudden and unforeseen circumstances, which can place them under immense pressure and strain. The costs of caring for children are high, particularly as approximately 63% of grandparent families rely on a government pension, benefit or allowance as their main source of income.

In recognition of the important role that these grandparents play in the community, the State Government is encouraged to continue to look after their social and financial wellbeing.

In particular, the services required for Grandparents caring for children are:

- The re-establishment of an Emergency Relief Fund for Grandparents as carers, which would also include a relief fund for assisting with legal costs.
- Provision of Independent Advocates for children being raised by grandparents.
- Accessible legal services for grandparents as carers.
- A range of respite options to grandparents both by expanding existing respite programs and funding new options through grandparent support groups and community service providers.
- Parenting education programs to meet the specific needs of grandparents raising grandchildren.
- The establishment of additional grandparent playgroups, which provide the opportunity to reduce social isolation by providing a connection with other grandparents in the same circumstances (either as carers or child care providers), as well as providing an avenue to deliver information on contemporary parenting styles.

# Carers Case Study

## A Young Carer's Story

Liam is a young carer aged 13 yrs old. He lives with his mum and has one young brother aged 8 and sister 7 yrs. His mother has a disability and does not work regularly. There is little money for after-school and holiday activities. Liam is often pulled from school to attend medical appointments with his mother. The doctor does not consider any of the young carer issues Liam might be facing.

He attends a local school which takes him 20 minutes to walk to each day. Because his mum is constantly taking him out of school, he sometimes gets bullied and harassed by his classmates. He struggles with schoolwork, but gets along quite well with his teacher. He does not mix regularly with his peer group and is seen by his teachers as being isolated. He reports to the sick bay regularly with complaints of tiredness, feeling unwell and lacking energy.

Liam and his family live in an outer metro suburb in state housing, and receive some in-home support from a local HACC agency. Liam does the majority of meal preparation and is responsible for preparing his siblings for school each morning. He also occasionally does the family shopping and deals with paying the bills.

Liam's situation highlights the needs of many young carers throughout the state that need our support.

# Essential Services

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Access to essential services such as public transport and utilities is integral to the wellbeing of individuals, families and communities.

Public transport provides communities with not only environmental, economic and social benefits; it is also an essential service because it provides mobility and access for people who have no other transport options.

Electricity, gas and water are essential services because they are fundamental to the quality of our lives. We are dependent on an affordable and uninterrupted supply of water and energy for living and working.

The cost of living is rising rapidly. This has been due, in part, to increased petrol costs, a locally high inflation rate and the increased costs of housing in Western Australia. In the context of rapidly rising living costs, low income households can often find paying utility bills difficult.

Many low income consumers forgo other essential goods and services in order to pay for energy as well as under consuming as a way of making the service more affordable. Unpaid utility bills ultimately lead to disconnection which results in poor health outcomes, reduced employment and educational opportunities as well as social isolation and depression<sup>51</sup>.

Affordability and access for consumers must always be a prime consideration of policy makers because being without energy and water, even for a short period of time, can have severe social and economic ramifications on individuals, families and communities.

WACOSS has provided a series of recommendations which focus on improving the accessibility and affordability of essential services, and better regulatory protections and financial assistance for consumers.

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<sup>51</sup> Public Interest Advocacy Centre, 'Cut Off: The Impact of Utility Disconnections', Utility Consumers' Advocacy Program, February 2005, p. 19

# Energy & Water

Access to essential services, such as utilities, has long been recognised as a primary indicator of disadvantage in other countries. For example, in the United Kingdom, fuel poverty has long been understood as a key determinant of poor health and social exclusion.<sup>52</sup> However, there is still relatively little detailed data available in Western Australia regarding trends in this area. The small quantity of available data suggests, however, that the level of disconnections from electricity services in Western Australia remains up to five times higher than elsewhere in the country.

## Comparative disconnections across jurisdictions (per 100 residential and non-residential<sup>34</sup> customers) for 2005/06.<sup>53</sup>

	New South Wales	South Australia	Victoria	Tasmania	Western Australia
Disconnections per 100 residential and non-residential customers	0.86	1.13	0.22	0.51	1.16

Despite the relative absence of data regarding the rates of disconnection and restriction of essential services in Western Australia, we do know that for disadvantaged Western Australians and people living on lower incomes, the cost of accessing essential services consumes a disproportionately high percentage of their income.<sup>54</sup>

Emergency Relief agencies are under increased pressure to assist clients with utility bills, and many agencies report that they are turning away an increasing number of clients due to lack of resources.

To illustrate this demand for assistance a 2003 WACOSS report into the cost of essential services to Emergency Relief Agencies and their clients found that in the 12 months to July 2003, Emergency Relief Agencies paid approximately \$1.34 million to utility service providers to prevent disconnection or restriction of supply to low-income and disadvantaged communities.<sup>55</sup> During the 2003-04 period, the St. Vincent de Paul Society in Victoria reported an 80% increase in demand for emergency relief associated with utility bills.<sup>56</sup>

Emergency relief agencies and financial counsellors require additional resources to meet the increasing demand for services. The Australian Council of Social Service's *2007 Community Sector Survey*<sup>57</sup> indicated that non-government agencies providing individual advocacy services during 2005-06 turned away 23% of eligible clients because of an incapacity to meet demand. The survey also indicates that over the same period, the rate of clients being turned-away because of insufficient resources increased by 54%.

<sup>52</sup> NCOSS. (2005). *Measuring Up: A Framework for Government Social Performance Reporting in NSW*, NCOSS Discussion Paper

<sup>53</sup> Economic Regulation Authority, '2005/06 Annual Report – Code of Conduct (for the Supply of Electricity to Small Users)', April 2007, p. 15

<sup>54</sup> Committee for Melbourne, 'Utility Debt Spiral Project', August 2004, p. 6

<sup>55</sup> WACOSS. (2003). *Would You Like a Bit of Heat with that Trickle of Water?*

<sup>56</sup> Consumer Utilities Advocacy Centre, 'Submission to the Committee of Inquiry into the Financial Hardship of Energy Consumers', May 2005, p. 9

<sup>57</sup> Australian Council of Social Service, 'Australian Community Sector Survey: Report 2007', 2007, pp. 68-69

# State-wide Energy and Water Efficiency Retrofit Programs

## Recommendation:

Develop and fund a comprehensive state-wide energy and water efficiency retrofitting program targeted at lower income households, including through the use of no-interest loan schemes for the purchase of efficient appliances.

## Rationale:

While the State Government has offered some level of commitment to energy efficiency in new buildings through the 5-Star Plus efficiency ratings, this will only affect a relatively small proportion of homes in Western Australia. Research has indicated that households living on lower incomes are particularly vulnerable to rising energy prices<sup>58</sup>, therefore programs aimed at increasing energy efficiency in homes should be targeted at those most vulnerable to energy costs, as well as larger users.

## Detail:

Programs should be initially targeted at households living on lower incomes and facing financial vulnerability, including all Department of Housing and Works properties. They should also be accompanied by a widespread community education and awareness program on energy and water efficiency, including promotion of the availability of no-interest loan schemes specifically to assist people living on lower incomes in the purchase of energy-efficient appliances.

Retrofitting and increasing the energy efficiency of low-income households both reduces the consumption costs for consumers, in addition to delivering on other environmental and economic priorities of State Government. This has been demonstrated in the United Kingdom, through the 'Warm Front' program<sup>59</sup>.

Research undertaken in South Australia suggests that energy conservation is vital to the reduction of unmanageable electricity bills for many low-income households.<sup>60</sup> Efficiency programs have also been proven to have substantial effects on the number of uncollectible and bad debt write-offs.<sup>61</sup>

Retrofitting programs should also be accompanied by a community education and awareness program to encourage household energy conservation measures as a means of reducing energy utility bills in low income households and improving the capacity of low income households to manage utility costs.<sup>62</sup> Utilities should also play a role in the promotion and referral to these services.

<sup>58</sup> Consumer Law Centre Victoria, 'Do the Poor Pay More – A Research Report', January 2005

<sup>59</sup> Consumer Utilities Advocacy Centre, op. Cit., p. 16

<sup>7</sup> Ibid

<sup>61</sup> Committee for Melbourne. (2004). *Utility Debt Spiral Project Report*.

<sup>62</sup> Lawrence, J. (2002). *Electricity its just essential*. Low Income Electricity Consumer Project Final Report. South Australian Council of Social Service. Adelaide.

## ESSENTIAL SERVICES: ENERGY AND WATER

The Community Association, Environment House, ran a program jointly funded by Lotterywest and the Sustainable Energy Development Office, called Saving Water and Power (\$WAP)<sup>63</sup>, which focused on providing information and minor trade services to reduce household water and energy consumption. The Lotterywest and SEDO funding, which had enabled these services to be provided free of charge to healthcare cardholders and pensioners anywhere in metropolitan Perth, concluded in September 2007. The grant included a translation/interpretation budget which is being used for newly arrived refugee families. Additional, ongoing funding is required for programs such as \$WAP, to meet demand across the Perth metropolitan area.

In May 2007, the Government committed \$1.5 million to a Household Energy Audit and Education Program<sup>64</sup>. This program will aim to cover over 10,000 households within a geographically targeted area. The local government area(s) to be targeted by the program have yet to be selected and will be chosen based on a set of criteria including the potential for reduced energy use and waste.

While WACOSS strongly supports this funding commitment, additional criteria should be used to select areas to be targeted, including social and financial vulnerability.

Further to the recent report to the Minister for Energy regarding the Inquiry into LPG Affordability, WACOSS recommends the formation of a no-interest loan scheme specifically targeted at assisting people living on low incomes to purchase energy-efficient appliances.

# Utility Connection Grant Scheme

### Recommendation:

Implement a Utility Connection Grant Scheme to provide financial assistance to Concession Card Holders and low-income families to cover the cost of utility bills when facing temporary financial difficulties. The scheme should operate within a framework of regulated financial hardship policies for utility providers.

### Rationale:

Low income households can easily face temporary financial difficulties which prevent them from paying utility bills on time. Circumstances which can cause low income households to struggle paying utility bills include high energy consumption due to inefficient household

<sup>63</sup> See <http://www.environmenthouse.org.au/pages/news/news-two.html>

<sup>64</sup> See <http://www.5starplus.wa.gov.au/premier/>

### NSW REFIT PROGRAM

Through a partnership of utilities, community sector organisations and Government, packages of energy & water efficient devices were distributed to low income households. The cost of the packages was \$112, while savings to recipients estimated at \$1000 from the showerhead and \$50 from the smart lighting. Utility companies benefited from decreasing costs of debt recovery as well as increased community goodwill.

Benson, T. (2003) *REFIT: A Social Justice and Environmental Pilot Project*. Public Interest Advocacy Centre: Sydney

appliances, unexpected expenses on other essential items, and loss or decrease in income, which could be a result of unemployment.

**Detail:**

Continued access to essential services is a requisite for an acceptable standard of living and being disconnected from utilities can worsen financial hardship as well as pose serious safety risks for those disconnected. Based on the *2005/2006 Annual Report: Code of Conduct (For the Supply of Electricity to Small Use Customers)*, WACOSS estimates that more than 10, 000 households went without power during the year to 2006. In fact, electricity disconnections in WA are five times higher than they are interstate: 1.16 % of customers are disconnected in WA compared to only 0.22% of customers in Victoria.<sup>65</sup>

A Utility Connection Grant Scheme that can provide emergency funds to cover basic essential service costs for people experiencing temporary financial difficulties can help prevent disconnection from essential services for Western Australia's most disadvantaged households. To optimise the effectiveness of a Utility Connection Grant Scheme in Western Australia, the State Government should also regulate hardship policy guidelines for energy retailers and make compliance with these guidelines a condition of their operating licence.

Thousands of people are assisted each year by the WACOSS & Emergency Relief Forum's modest financial assistance scheme *Power Assist*, which is sponsored by the utility providers; Synergy, Horizon Power, and Alinta Care. Due to inadequate funding however, many applicants are turned away each round.

WACOSS recommends the WA State Government implement a Utility Connection Grant Scheme modelled on Victoria's Utility Relief Grant Scheme. The Utility Relief Grant Scheme is funded by the Victorian Government and administered by the Concessions Unit within the Victorian Department of Human Services. Importantly, Victoria's utility companies also play a role in the administration of the scheme. The grant is available to low income households who either hold a concession card or who are experiencing financial hardship and are registered with their utility company's hardship program.<sup>66</sup> Applicants may apply for assistance every two years and the scheme provides payment for up to six months worth of energy expenses per household.

As in Victoria, a Western Australian Utility Connection Grant Scheme should cover: electricity, mains gas, water and domestic LPG gas. The scheme should operate in addition to existing concessions and rebates and provide assistance for those most vulnerable to disconnection.

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<sup>65</sup> Economic Regulation Authority Western Australia *2005/2006 Annual Report: Code of Conduct (For the Supply of Electricity to Small Use Customers)*

<sup>66</sup> State of Victoria Department of Human Services (2006) *Utility Relief Grant Scheme Guidelines*.

# Essential Services Policy Unit

**Recommendation:**

Establish a central policy unit to monitor the affordability and accessibility of essential services in Western Australia.

**Rationale:**

The Western Australian Government has an obligation to ensure universal access to essential services. There is a need to improve policy coordination around guaranteeing an essential service in a user pays market. Currently there is an ambiguous line between the responsibilities of Government for the social welfare of essential service consumers and utility providers, in relation to their corporate responsibilities. As Western Australia moves towards cost-reflective pricing of electricity, gas and water, as well as full retail contestability, a central policy unit would provide coordination and clarification around the consumer protection framework in WA.

**Detail:**

Electricity, water and gas are essential services for all Western Australian households, and these services must be accessible and affordable for consumers. Unfortunately, there are a number of indicators<sup>67</sup> that show a significant proportion of households can not always afford to access these services, and often do so at the expense of other vital needs, such as food and rent. Others miss out altogether and are disconnected from supply, resulting in further social detriment.

A policy unit dedicated to essential services could be situated either in the Department of Premier and Cabinet, the Department of Consumer and Employment Protection or within the new Department for Communities. The unit would play a critical role in clarifying rights and responsibilities between government, utilities and consumers.

The unit would assess the impact on consumer hardship of the policies and practices of utility providers, Government departments and agencies, and where appropriate recommend changes to ensure a greater level of utility consumer protection. In consultation with the utility providers, consumer representatives and other stakeholders, the unit's primary objective would be to protect the long-term interests of Western Australian consumers with regard to the price, quality and reliability of essential services.

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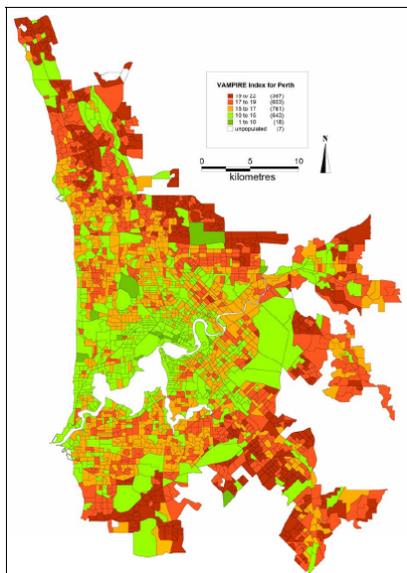
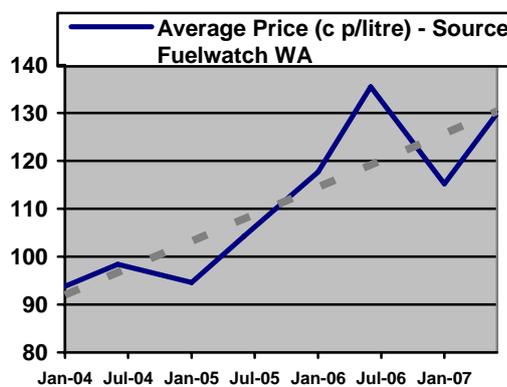
<sup>67</sup> WACOSS. (2005). Submission to the Standing Committee on Environment and Public Affairs Regarding Petition No 22 – Utility Consumer Hardship Inquiry.

# Transport

Access to transport is a key determinant of disadvantage: a socially sustainable society is one where all people can access employment, education, services and recreational opportunities. The gap between those who can easily travel to opportunities and those who cannot reinforces patterns of wealth and poverty in the community.

Low income households in Western Australia face a number of challenges in accessing affordable transport. Low income households generally have the greatest dependence on private car transport due to their need to reside in less expensive outer suburban areas, which are generally not serviced by effective public transport<sup>68</sup>. In addition, a significant proportion of household income is dedicated to transport, particularly care related expenses, which in some cases amount to 25% of average household income<sup>69</sup>.

Petrol prices continue to display significant volatility, and will continue to rise as global oil production reaches its peak. These factors combined make the provision of alternatives to private car transport more important than ever. Researchers at Griffith University have studied Australian cities in terms of their vulnerability to the combined impact of rising mortgage expenses, historically high petrol prices and inflationary pressures.



Mortgage and Oil Vulnerability in Perth (Dodsen & Sipe)

As we might expect, the outer and fringe areas of the Perth metropolitan area are the most vulnerable to rising fuel prices, compounded by inflation and rising housing costs (see the *Mortgage and Oil Vulnerability in Perth* figure to the left). In a comparison of major Australian cities, Perth was found to have a significant number of people who are 'mortgage and oil vulnerable'.

The Department of Planning and Infrastructure have also begun mapping data on social disadvantage in the Perth metropolitan area, which confirms that the areas of greatest social disadvantage are located in the outer suburbs of the metropolitan area which are poorly served by public transport.

Ensuring greater access to appropriate forms of transport has the capacity to both mitigate greenhouse gas emissions as well as reduce Western Australia's vulnerability to peak oil and gas production.

<sup>68</sup> Charter, Keck, Cramer. (2001). *Cars – Where Are They Taking Us?* Research insight

<sup>69</sup> Ibid

# Expand Public Transport

**Recommendation:**

Expand the public transport system in Western Australia, focusing on travel within and between suburbs, and increasing the accessibility and accessibility of train and bus services.

**Rationale:**

Public transport is essential for many people in Western Australia, such as households without vehicles, those under 18 or over 80, or people unable to drive due to disability.

**Detail:**

With the cost of petrol going up, demand for alternatives to transport other than the private car is increasing. Train patronage increased significantly in 2005-06, rising 4.5 percent and trains are filled to capacity during peak periods<sup>70</sup>. Anecdotal evidence suggests that the usage of Perth's public transport system is continuing to rise, and at times when fuel prices peak, public transport patronage also increases (See table below).

Transperth patronage and average fuel price					
	Patronage (million) *		Fuel price (cents)		
	2005	2006	2005	2006	2007
January	4.730	4.950	94.6	117.7	115.2
February	5.799	5.986	98.7	117.9	114.9
March	<b>6.158</b>	<b>6.882</b>	<b>104.7</b>	<b>120.6</b>	122.5
April	5.720	5.457	107.9	128.6	124.8
May	6.275	<b>6.773</b>	103.2	<b>135.6</b>	<b>130.2</b>
June	5.576	6.062	104.3	135.5	<b>129.9</b>
July	5.552	5.725	110.9	135.0	126.7
August	<b>6.322</b>		<b>117.1</b>	133.3	122.7
September	5.950		130.2	122.3	
October	6.088		124.4	116.3	
November	6.031		115.6	112.7	
December	5.142		112.7	115.7	
* System-wide fare-paying boardings and free travel on CAT and FTZ.					
# Average price of unleaded petrol in Metropolitan Perth (from Fuel Watch)					

Access to public transport is patchy throughout the Perth metropolitan area, and many suburbs are particularly disadvantaged. Suburbs with poor access to public transport also tend to be those suburbs that are socio-economically disadvantaged. While the Southern suburbs railway is obviously a positive initiative, there are still a large number of established suburbs which are suffering from a lack of transport options, and investment is required to ensure that the public transport services in these suburbs are adequate.

Some of the initiatives that should be funded to address transport disadvantage in Western Australia include:

<sup>70</sup> Carpenter/MacTiernan Media Statement 25/09/06  
<http://www.mediastatements.wa.gov.au/media/media.nsf/news/9834F3E5763E51454>

- More local bus routes are required to run services within and between suburbs;
- Introducing free CAT bus services in other urban nodes, including Midland, Armadale and expansion of the Joondalup service, which would allow greater mobility for people living in these areas, as well as increase the use of other forms of public transport (such as the train and buses) if the CAT services links into transport interchanges;
- Continuing to increase the number of fully accessible buses in the transport fleet to allow easier access by disabled people, elderly people and people with prams;
- Freeze concessions fees for public transport to ensure affordable access to public transport for those under the most financial strain; and
- Additional coordination of public transport and social services in rural and regional areas to facilitate community access to Courts and other public services.

Roads are expensive and carry a high opportunity cost in diverting scarce transport funds from other more effective policy responses especially in a time where official and anecdotal reports suggest demand for motor vehicle travel is declining.

Dodson and Sipe.(2006). *Shocking the Suburbs*.

# Walking and Cycling

### Recommendation:

That Government increase investment in safe, secure and accessible, dedicated walking and cycling routes in the suburbs of Perth, and in the public promotion of alternatives to car use.

### Rationale:

There was no increase in the real level of funding to the bicycle network in the 2007-08 State Budget. In a car-dependent city such as Perth, where three-quarters of all trips are made by car,<sup>71</sup> it is easy to forget the need to provide infrastructure for trips by walking and cycling. Yet walking and cycling has a range of individual and community benefits, such as health and fitness, saving money, better air quality, less traffic congestion and better urban design.

### Detail:

Encouraging people to make use of alternative transport requires specific initiatives, such as:

- Prioritising pedestrians and cyclists in planning and transport infrastructure;
- Creating safe walking and cycling environments, including dedicated paths and access ways;
- Encouraging walking and cycling as travel modes, by providing quality information and promotion;
- Focusing the Travel Smart Household Program on areas most dependent on walking, cycling and public transport; and
- Creating a policy priority to increase the percentage share of trips made by walking or cycling.

<sup>71</sup> Department of Planning and Infrastructure (2000) Travelsmart, [http://www.dpi.wa.gov.au/mediaFiles/tsmart\\_highlights.pdf](http://www.dpi.wa.gov.au/mediaFiles/tsmart_highlights.pdf), accessed on 30 August 2006

## ESSENTIAL SERVICES: TRANSPORT

The review of the Perth Bicycle Network is currently underway. In addition to the review of the network, more funding needs to be allocated for permanent, qualified staff to provide advice to the Main Roads and other Government bodies regarding the needs of cyclists in Western Australia. This advice will promote the incorporation of the needs of cyclists into planning and transport decisions on all levels.

The TravelSmart program, being delivered across Australia, has shown that promoting existing public transport services is a cost-effective way of encouraging public transport use. Results in the six Perth metropolitan areas where the program operated showed a 4-15% decrease in motor vehicle use following the program<sup>72</sup>.

WACOSS recommends that further funding be allocated to promote the use of public transport, targeting areas experiencing social and economic disadvantage.



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<sup>72</sup> Australian Government, 'Evaluation of Australian TravelSmart Projects in the ACT, South Australia, Queensland, Victoria and Western Australia 2001-2005', Department of Environment and Heritage, Australian Greenhouse Office, 2005, p. 9

# Essential Services Case Study

## Victorian Utility Relief Grant Scheme

In Victoria, the existence of significant levels of energy related hardship among disadvantaged consumers led to incremental additions to energy-specific legislation until a comprehensive consumer protection 'safety net' was in place. This included the regulation of hardship policies for energy retailers, the introduction of legislation regarding compensation for wrongful disconnections, the enshrinement in the Energy Retail Code that customers should not be disconnected solely because of incapacity to pay and the expansion of concessions including the Utility Relief Grant Scheme. An inquiry into financial hardship among energy consumers in 2005 recorded the positive outcomes resulting from these consumer protection initiatives. In 2006, Victoria had the lowest electricity disconnection rate in the country at 0.22%.

(VCOSS. (2007). Submission to the Productivity Commission Inquiry - Consumer Policy Framework).

# Health

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The community sector across Western Australia has a strong commitment to working with Government to achieve improved outcomes in relation to the Health and wellbeing of Western Australians.

The increasing complexities of health policy, the growing cost of the health system and the existence of disturbing inequalities in health according to socio-economic status have made health a priority social policy issue across the state.

WACOSS would like to see greater Government commitment to a number of priority health issues for our sector.

Unfortunately, Aboriginal people continue to be over-represented in our health and justice systems. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people make up 40% of the Australian prison population, which demonstrates an imprisonment rate 23 times higher than the national rate.<sup>73</sup> In addition to this, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people also experience poorer health outcomes, and are therefore in more contact with health service providers than other Australians. In fact, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are 12 times more likely to need care involving dialysis, and twice as likely to need care for respiratory disease and injury.<sup>74</sup>

Improving the quality, breadth and accessibility of Mental Health services in WA continues to be a major priority for the community. The Mental Health Key Initiatives 2004-2007 have been largely implemented and the sector is calling on the Government to articulate its future strategy for addressing mental health issues in both the community and forensic sectors.

The care for people with a mental illness is a constant theme for peak bodies and non-government organisations. Unfortunately, it is the disadvantaged members of society, such as Aboriginal, homeless and low-income Australians and seniors, that are most affected by inadequacies in our mental health system. In addition to this, our young people also face a series of serious mental health issues that must become a priority of the State government.

The dental and oral health of Western Australians continues to be of concern, with thousands of people on dental service waiting lists for up to a year to receive treatment. Oral health is an important part of general health and poor oral health affects nutrition, use of medication, medical and nursing care needs, and quality of life.

WACOSS is also calling for better policy and coordination of primary health care through the development of a Primary Health Care Council; an expansion of the Patient Assisted Travel Scheme (PATs), and improved Drug and Alcohol Services.

See also

***Aboriginal: Aboriginal Health Liaison Officers.***

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<sup>73</sup> The Mahoney Report, (2005).

<sup>74</sup> See <http://www.abs.gov.au> (2001).

# Primary Health Care Council

## Recommendation:

To establish an integrated, cross-government council to address health promotion, prevention and intervention in Western Australia.

## Rationale:

Primary Health Care in Western Australia is plagued by a lack of integration, co-ordination and leadership. Currently there is no way of evaluating the effectiveness of programs, or of ensuring their sustainability.

## Detail:

WACOSS, in support of the Health Consumers' Council of WA, recommends that a Primary Health Care Council is established to perform an evaluative role in policy making and funding allocation. The body of the council should represent both cross- government departments and primary health providers.

If priority was given to the establishment of this Council, the State government would be showing its commitment to a sound investment in our Health system. This collaborative 'think-tank' would play a vital role in providing long-term and sustainable solutions to health promotion, prevention and intervention.

# Patients Assisted Transport Scheme

## Recommendation:

For the current Patients Assisted Transport Scheme (PATS) to be expanded and made more effective by improving the accessibility of the scheme.

## Rationale:

The provision of adequate support for people in rural, regional and remote areas of WA to access high quality health services continues to be of concern.

## Detail:

In order to improve the effectiveness of PATS, the Government needs to undertake a review of the services provided to country patients, and assess their transport needs in relation to access to services.

Increased funding to for the expansion of PATS should prioritise the transport needs of patients in rural, regional and remote areas of WA.

The funding for this scheme should be recurrent, reflective of real costs and indexed annually.

## HEALTH

Under the current PATS, any trip over 15 hours road travel is eligible to be transported by air, while trips under 15 hours must be taken by road. This is obviously a long way for a sick person to travel by road, and often results in less than optimal treatment outcomes for many patients with a severe illness. A review of these services may possibly reduce this eligibility time and therefore increase the quality of care provided to country patients.

The Health Consumer Council also recommends that from a new policy approach to PATS should come an increase on the \$14 million provided by an indexation of 3-5%. They note that currently there is no budget for PATS WA, and at the moment, Country Health makes a budget allocation to all regions. The regions are then allocated to the Health Care Units' budget and PATS is paid for within that.

# Mental Health Unit in Broome

### Recommendation:

To allocate funding for a mental health unit at the Broome Hospital, as a part of the current hospital re-development.

### Rationale:

The Health Consumers' Council (HCC) is currently working with Aboriginal people in Broome on a range of health projects that impact on patients and their families, and the issue of care for people with a mental illness is a recurrent theme. There is clearly a need to include a mental health unit at Broome Hospital to care for people from the Kimberley.

### Detail:

The HCC has been informed of cases from family members of acutely mentally ill people being transferred to Perth, and following a recent incident on an aircraft, all patients being transferred to a metropolitan psychiatric facility now need to be escorted by a police officer and a nurse. This represents a waste of both time and resources.

We suggest that beds should be provided at the Broome Hospital to provide services for people where they are needed.

The estimated cost of providing a 14 bed facility at the Broome Hospital would be approximately \$10 million based on Health Consumer Council estimates.

# Mobile Mental Health Clinics

## Recommendation:

An allocation of funds to establish mobile mental health clinics, to operate in the areas of highest priority.

## Rationale:

Establishing mobile mental health units is one way of addressing the current lack of access to mental health services faced by many people from low socio-economic backgrounds

## Detail:

There are currently mobile health clinics that operate for Aboriginal people in the Fremantle and Midland areas, but there are significant gaps in other areas of the Perth metropolitan area, such as the northern suburbs (Clarkson, Joondalup and Quinns Rock) as well as the Peel region (Mandurah and Pinjarra). WACOSS recommends that the mobile units expand their services to address mental health needs, and to also open these services to all disadvantaged people, not just Aboriginal people. Patients can be visited at their homes or communities, or they can gather in areas that are easily accessible, such as CBDs or other densely populated centres. This addresses the problem many people have relating to reliable and affordable transport.

The mobile mental health units could be modelled on a similar model that successfully operates in Victoria. Homeless Outreach Psychiatric Services (HOPS) provide a specialist clinical and treatment response for people who do not engage readily with mental health services. HOPS work in partnership with homelessness services and use assertive outreach to locate and engage with their clients to create a pathway out of homelessness by providing early and appropriate treatment. HOPS link clients into the mental health service system, including access to long-term housing augmented with outreach support, and improve the coordination and working relationships between mental health and homelessness services. HOPS also provide assessment and secondary consultation to homelessness services and other mental health workers.

An example of HOPS being provisioned can be seen at the Sacred Heart Mission in St Kilda. Mental health professionals from the Alfred Hospital's Homeless Outreach Psychiatric Service (HOPS) are based at the Mission in a program to help link homeless peoples with support services. The Bracks Government provided \$81 000 for Sacred Heart's program, which came as part of a \$500 000 commitment to provide extra staff across Melbourne, plus extra sessions with psychiatrists to assist homeless people. The Alfred's HOPS program also received a funding boost of \$123 000 under the Government's Fairer Victoria Strategy. The Sacred Heart Mission is an ideal location for HOPS team to be based, as more than 400 people a day visit the building for meals. A similarly located service in Perth would provide homeless people with much needed mental health care.<sup>75</sup>

<sup>75</sup> See

[http://www.dpc.vic.gov.au/domino/Web\\_Notes/newmedia.nsf/955cbeae7df9460dca256c8c00152d2b/05886c3285b76a1fca25706d0007a953!OpenDocument](http://www.dpc.vic.gov.au/domino/Web_Notes/newmedia.nsf/955cbeae7df9460dca256c8c00152d2b/05886c3285b76a1fca25706d0007a953!OpenDocument)

# Youth Mental Health Strategy and Centres

**Recommendation:**

For Government and service providers to work together to develop a sustainable Youth Mental Health Strategy, ensuring young people's mental health becomes a government priority. This should include the establishment of youth focused multi-disciplinary centres for mental health and wellbeing services.

**Rationale:**

The issue of co-morbidity and the changing nature of drug use and misuse means that a strategy must be developed to address multiple issues (such as housing, education, health, etc) affecting young people. This strategic approach should be a co-ordinated workforce development and capacity building process (including training) across all sectors, focussing on:

- Enhancing assessment of co-morbidity
- Service matching and referral
- Case management and evaluation
- Development of regional support networks that link the different sectors together.

**Detail:**

Dual diagnosis, or co-morbidity<sup>76</sup> in young people has been identified by peak bodies, as an issue that needs to be addressed in order to stop young people becoming lost in the mental health system, without their needs being met.

Of all diseases affecting young people aged 15-24, 55% of these are related to mental health. For the 10-15% of young people who experience a mental health disorder in one year, the majority will find their illness has fully presented itself before they turn 25. In addition to this, young people aged 18-25 who are living with a mental illness are at an increased risk of developing problematic attitudes towards alcohol and drug use. Unfortunately, 63% of young people with a mental illness do not access appropriate services because of the stigma attached to their condition. If they do, their complex needs are often overlooked, with an increasing amount of dual-diagnosis patients being referred to so many different service providers they eventually end up homeless, detained or worse.

In addition to a mental health strategy for youth, youth focused multi-disciplinary centres should be established (such as that currently being built in Fremantle). These would provide young people easier access to health and wellbeing facilities, case workers and support staff in one location.

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<sup>76</sup> Co-morbidity refers to the presence of one or more disorders (or diseases) in addition to primary disorder, and the effect of such additional disorders.

# Mental Health of Seniors

## Recommendation:

Develop a Mental Health Strategy for seniors to focus energy and resources on the mental health of older Western Australians. This should include the development of community awareness campaigns to promote education and support mental health issues.

## Rationale:

The number of seniors is ever increasing and depression is now a problem of chronic proportions. We need the community to recognise that depression is not a normal part of ageing.

## Detail:

The Transitions in Ageing research project reported that 8% of seniors had indicated that they had felt depressed almost every day in the previous two weeks. Another 13% occupied the middle ground between this group and those who had not felt depressed, which would indicate that they also had feelings of depression, but less frequently<sup>77</sup>. Very often mental health conditions are undiagnosed in seniors or incorrectly attributed to age or dementia. Hence, seniors are incorrectly recorded as having the lowest levels of mental illness in the community.<sup>78</sup> Depression and suicide are also problems for seniors which are largely unrecognised.

This area of growing concern and media coverage must be acted on immediately. The recent initiatives being planned to fight depression in seniors must be adequately resourced and put into practice without delay.

Lack of services in rural and remote areas for people involved with or suffering from mental health or depression are causing them to feel more and more alienated from the community. Lack of community education and support is lacking across the State, which exacerbates the problem.

# Improved Dental Services

## Recommendation:

That the Government invest resources in improving the coordination of dental health services, the access for low-income families, and providing dental health services for homeless people.

## Rationale:

Oral health is fundamental to overall health, wellbeing and quality of life. A lack of access to public dental services and long delays for treatment is still a feature of Dental Services in Western Australia in 2007. As at 31 August 2007, there were 13 215 people on the WA Dental Health Service's waiting list. The average waiting period is 11.1 months.

<sup>77</sup> Department of Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, Annual Report 2005-06, Outcome 3.1 Support for the Aged. See [www.facsia.gov.au/annualreport/2006/2\\_3\\_1.html](http://www.facsia.gov.au/annualreport/2006/2_3_1.html)

<sup>78</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2006, *Analytical Living Cost Indexes for Selected Australian Household Types*, June 2006. Cat. No. 6463.0

## HEALTH

### Details:

The three priority actions that the Government needs to undertake to improve the quality of dental health in WA are:

- Commit additional resources to assist low income families to access high quality dental care including early intervention and on-going monitoring of oral health.
- A comprehensive review of dental services in WA, to be undertaken by the Department of Health. The review should produce a report about, amongst other things, waiting times; cost; dental care in nursing homes; and the roles of the new Dental Hygienist under the Dental Practitioners Act.
- Commit funds for the establishment of a dental clinic for homeless people, possibly to be modelled on the North Yarra Community Health Dental Clinic for Homeless People.<sup>79</sup>



Some of the particular challenges for low income families in accessing dental care include:

- In areas where no public dental service exists, and private dentists do not participate in the CPDSS residents must pay full fees for dental treatment or travel to the nearest public clinic;
- Three year waiting periods for orthodontic services for school aged children and strict exclusions for orthodontic treatment eligibility;
- Admission of public patients for dental procedures in public hospitals is severely restricted in many country locations, forcing patients to wait for lengthy periods or to travel to Perth to access treatment; and
- The Patient Assisted Travel Scheme (PATS), which aims to provide assistance to country residents who are required to travel more than 100km to see a specialist, is very costly and largely unavailable for dental treatments.

Specifically, the State Government needs to:

- Provide additional resources for the orthodontic treatment of young people;
- Review the Country Patients' Dental Subsidy Scheme (CPDSS) with a view to improve it's effectiveness for patients and increase the private dentist participation in the scheme;
- Increase the eligibility criteria for PATS funding to include all dental treatments for rural and regional patients who are unable to access public dental services in their region; and
- Commit additional funding to reduce the dental waiting list.

It has been estimated that an additional \$12.5 million a year of funding would provide optimal investment and improve primary oral care for people in Western Australia. It would reduce waiting lists for public dental care to between 4-6 months.

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<sup>79</sup> North Yarra Community Health (NYCH) Dental Clinic for Homeless People, provides a four-hour weekly dental service for homeless people. The clinic is located at NYCH in Brunswick Street, Fitzroy and takes referrals from the health service and other local agencies assisting the homeless. Annual funding of \$25,000 to run the program. See: <http://hnb.dhs.vic.gov.au/web/pubaff/medrel.nsf/0/bb7a74b8c057a11f4a256ae600007920?OpenDocument>

# Accessible, Appropriate and Effective Oral Health Care for Seniors

## Recommendation:

That the State Government provide accessible, appropriate and effective oral health care for seniors and commit funds to oral health education programs for carers and staff.

## Rationale:

There is a growing need for the Government to assess the current model of oral health care delivery amongst the older population. High levels of unmet need indicate problems in availability, appropriateness and effectiveness of the current system.

## Detail:

With an increasing ageing population and higher retention levels of natural dentitions, this will result in higher levels of oral disease and need for prevention and care. Oral health is an important part of general health and poor oral health affects nutrition, use of medication, medical and nursing care needs, and quality of life.

Daily oral hygiene practice and receipt of regular dental care are cost-effective means for not only minimising morbidity of oral infections but even more importantly, their non-oral sequelae.

It must be kept in mind, however, that improved availability of services and care alone would not necessarily increase the use of services- this should be clear from the observed discrepancy between objective and subjective dental needs in this and other studies. Improved awareness and oral health behaviour should also be considered, as well as oral health education of carers and staff.<sup>80</sup>

# Men's Health Strategy

## Recommendation:

For the State government to apply resources to address men's health issues, specifically to develop of a state policy on men's health and establish a men's health reference group. The strategy should include men's health related outputs in the Public Health Outcome Funding Agreement.

## Rationale:

Currently there is no planned, co-ordinated approach designed to deal with men's health issues.

<sup>80</sup> Kruger, E., Tennant, M., Badrian, B., Gorgy, S., & Bruce, D. (2004). *Oral health of aged inpatients*. Australasian Journal on Ageing, 23(4), pp.172-76.

### Details:

Even though many men's and boys' health problems are preventable, they typically resist accessing medical, allied health or welfare services when their health is at risk. In light of this, what is required is an effective government policy, and a new approach to health interventions and health promotion which delivers the message that men's health is important and that they should actively seek access to health services. Health services need to be mindful of men's attitudes to health and how these impact on their health status, health risk behaviour and utilisation of services.

The need for a formal policy and strategic plan relating to men's health has been highlighted by non-government organisations, based on data obtained from the ABS. This data shows that for many different causes of death, the death rate for males is proportionately higher. It is believed that the men's health policy should be based on a holistic view of men's health, including all Australian men and boys and incorporating physical, mental, emotional, social and spiritual outcomes.

# Drug Treatment Services for Community Corrections and Prison Clients

### Recommendation:

To expand the prison to parole services in order to meet existing demand for community corrections clients and commit to the recommendations made at the WA Illicit Drug Summit (2007).

### Rationale

The Department of Corrective Services (DCS) provides little direct funding to the non government sector for alcohol and other drug services. Recent feedback from the alcohol and other drug sector indicates anecdotally that the workload for services to corrective services clients continues to grow, significantly displacing non-mandatory community clients.

### Detail:

Following the *"Inquiry into Management of Offenders in Custody and in the Community"* by Hon Dennis Mahoney AO QC, November 2005, the WA Network of Alcohol and Other Drug Agencies prepared a joint submission with the non-government sector, seeking funding to meet the demand for their services from the prisons client group. The Mahoney Inquiry noted the high prevalence of Alcohol and Other Drugs (AOD) and mental health issues among Department of Corrective Services' clients, and the significant implications and costs to the individuals and the community.

The Inquiry recommended an increase in the resources provided by the Department of Corrective Services for the management of drug abuse, in particular the need to fund non government agencies for this work.

Alcohol and drug misuse is widespread among DCS clients and self reports by offenders suggest that up to 35% of offences may be directly related to drug use.

More specifically:

- Of all women prisoners surveyed in 2003, 78% of respondents reported they had frequently used drugs and alcohol in the six months prior to their arrest;
- The DUCO 2005 study indicates 67% of juveniles in detention use a substance regularly which equates to 630 juveniles in 2005/06 requiring a service;
- DUCO identifies that approximately 62% of prisoners have AOD problems which equates to 4,874 prisoners needing a service in 2005/06. However 4,440 did not receive a service; and
- A survey of the data captured by the Department's needs and risk assessment tool for adults identified that 53% (6500) of all adults on community order had a AOD problem yet services provided by the non-government sector indicates that only approximately 3500 people received a service in 2005/06.

With consumer focused principles, the Alcohol and Other Drug Service sector has maintained its commitment to their clients to date. Despite repeated efforts from the treatment services to establish protocols with corrective services officers, clients referred from corrective services are often inappropriately referred and require more time and staff resources than non-mandated clients. Without demonstrated support from government, the Alcohol and Other Drug Service Sector will no longer be able to meet existing referral demands, let alone the growing unmet need for treatment of offenders as identified in the Joint Submission (an alarming shortfall of approximately 7,500 offenders in 2005/06).

WACOSS, in support of WANADA as the peak drug and alcohol body, urges the government to commit to meeting the recommendations from the WA Illicit Drug Summit – WA Government Action Plan (2007) which included;

- Consideration for comprehensive alcohol and other drug treatment services in WA prisons through the 2008/09 budget process; and
- Consideration for resourcing non government organisation treatment services to meet the needs of offenders sentences to community orders through the 2008/09 budget process

The Joint Submission clearly identifies the cost efficiency and additional benefits of investing in alcohol and other drug treatment including reducing criminal activity.

Estimated Cost:	2008/09	an additional \$ 3,056,000
	2009/10	an additional \$ 3,523,000
	2010/11	an additional \$ 4,006,000

# Health Case Study

## Prisoner Oral Health

Health services are provided to prisoners in Western Australia by professionals employed by the Department of Corrective Services or working under contract.

Health services delivered to prisoners are ostensibly of a standard comparable with that available to the general community.<sup>81</sup> However, the provision of dental services in Western Australian prisons is well below the dental care available to the general population.

The Western Australian Dental Health Services Unit has not received specific funding for the provision of dental care in prisons since 1990. Currently in Western Australia, there are 4053 prisoners<sup>82</sup> (3911 adult and 142 juvenile offenders); while in 1990 there were 1720.<sup>83</sup>

The Department of Corrective Services and the Dental Health Services Unit are struggling to provide primary dental care for the growing number of prisoners in Western Australia. Compounding this problem is the increased incidence of prisoners suffering from 'meth mouth', a term coined by dental professionals to describe the extensive oral damage caused by methamphetamine abuse.

An extra \$1million per annum in funding is needed to provide for a dental team to service Western Australia's regional prisons and ensure full-time dental services in metropolitan prisons.

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<sup>81</sup> See <http://www.correctiveservices.wa.gov.au/O/offenderhealthcare.aspx?uid=0607-4348-1507-2568>

<sup>82</sup> Department of Corrective Services WA Prisoner Numbers as at 07/09/07

<sup>83</sup> ABS (2000) *Prisoners in Australia* Cat. No. 4517.0

# Safety & Justice

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For people escaping violence, a roof over one's head and a quiet safe space are just the beginning of feeling safe. Community services work toward creating systems which stem the tide of violence, provide immediate crisis support and also administer appropriate penalties so that justice is served.

To put our Safety and Justice recommendations into perspective, the State Government approach to creating safer communities has been to place a great emphasis on protecting children, introduce tougher penalties, and implement what they call "smarter" policing. New tougher laws include parental responsibility legislation, child protection laws, anti-hoon legislation, the Northbridge curfew, and powers to confiscate proceeds of crime. The State Government also set out to build 23 new police stations including a new \$93M state-of-the-art police complex in Northbridge.

From the perspective of delivering programs for people in need, we approach the development of safer communities from a different angle. We ask for greater support to break the cycle of violence by providing more child support workers in refuges, for example. We have called for the establishment of a short term crisis support centre in the southeast corridor for Aboriginal men. We've also called for a metropolitan area safe house for young women with children escaping violence. In addition, for women exiting a refuge or those who cannot find room in a refuge, outreach support services to assist them with safety planning, coping with court procedures, counseling and advocacy.

To assist people in disadvantage, we've recommended an increase in core funding for community legal centres (CLCs). The impact of continuing the current short term project funding rather than converting it to core funding is dire with predictions that a number of important CLC services will be unable to continue. The discontinuation of services will result in increased difficulty for many disadvantaged people in accessing justice in a range of areas, which will have consequent social and economic costs.

## See also

### ***Care and Support: Children***

- Child support workers within women's refuges and DV services.
- A Children's Policy Officer to provide social policy advice in relation to responding to needs of children who experience or witness domestic violence.

### **Statistical snapshot**

The estimated total number of victims of domestic and family violence in Australia was 408,100 in 2002-03 of which 87% were women

98% of perpetrators of domestic and family violence are male

Approximately 263,000 children were exposed to violence in the home

181,200 children witnessed domestic and family violence

- Access Economics 2004

# Safe house for young women and children escaping violence

**Recommendation:**

That the State Government supports the establishment of a Safe House for young women aged 14-18 and their children who experience a range of issues including domestic/family violence and homelessness by providing core operational funding.

**Rationale:**

There is an existing gap for a specific refuge/safe house for young women and their children in the metropolitan area. In addition to the benefit of safe refuge for young women and/or their children, research clearly shows there are significant short and long term financial gains in assisting young women to leave violent relationships.

**Detail:**

It is imperative that young women with children in particular are provided with crisis accommodation and support relevant to the range of issues such as domestic/family violence and homelessness. The cost of this service is estimated to be \$400,000 per annum.

Strong evidence is currently emerging that indicates that 'removing a pregnant women from an environment of abuse may be as critical for the future well being of her infant as any other possible intervention in modern obstetrics' (Quinlivan: 2000)

In Australia the incidence of domestic and family violence amongst pregnant teenagers aged 12-17 years is higher than the rates of violence reported for the general community (Quinlivan, 2000)

A study of 537 pregnant teenagers in Western Australia found:

- 157 (29.9%) were victims of domestic and family violence;
- 89.7% of these young women reported major psychological problems
- 46.8% of victims reported social isolation and
- 29% of victims were homeless

A recent national study on dating violence involved 5,000 young people (12–20 years) from all States and Territories and found that:

- 22% of young women experienced dating violence;
- 26% of young women reported being pushed, grabbed or shoved by their boyfriend
- 25% of young women experienced an attempt to be physically controlled

# Expansion of refuge-based domestic violence outreach services

## Recommendation:

That the State Government continues to support the establishment of additional refuge-based domestic violence outreach services throughout WA to support women and children living in violent relationships.

## Rationale:

Domestic violence (DV) outreach services are a vital component to the overall success of intervention and prevention of escalating violence within relationships. They can be particularly effective when based at a women's refuge.

## Detail:

A number of Domestic Violence Advocacy and Referral Services have been operating as successful models in various regions of WA. DV Outreach Services assist women and children who are exiting a refuge and/or living in community with court support with a range of specialist services court support with Violence Restraining Orders and Family Court matters; counselling; advocacy and safety planning to women and children.

The Women's Council for Domestic and Family Violence Services (WA) has identified refuge-based outreach as a best practice model and recommends the establishment of additional DV Outreach Services in locations where the Refuge Service and Safe Houses Model currently operate within WA as this is a critical component to providing continuity of service provision for both exiting clients and/or women and children in the community who are living in a violent relationship. DV Outreach Support is essential to ensuring the safety and protection of women and children for women and children living and/escaping domestic and family violence who may not be able to be accommodated at the Refuge due to a lack of beds; or may not require crisis accommodation

The cost of this service is estimated to be \$60,000 per annum by the Women's Council for Family and Domestic Violence.

# Crisis Care for Aboriginal Men

## Recommendation:

To establish a Short Term Crisis Centre (accommodation and counselling) for Aboriginal men in metropolitan region.

## Rationale:

Domestic violence and restraining order violations continue to disrupt family and community life even though a woman who has suffered may have gained support or refuge. Current support services for Aboriginal men do not have capacity to assist men who find themselves

## SAFETY & JUSTICE

in a crisis situation the only alternatives are ending up either with extended family in overcrowded situations or in a police lock-up.

### **Detail:**

The need for a short term crisis centre in this region was identified by Aboriginal Police Liaison Officers (APLOs) who, as police personnel, come into contact with families who are experiencing domestic violence or restraining order violations. A common sentiment among Aboriginal men is that women have somewhere to turn for support and accommodation, but no such centres exist for men.

To this end, APLOs, along with other members of the Aboriginal community, would like to see a centre established where men could reside for a cooling down period, followed by the appropriate counselling. It is the general feeling in the Aboriginal community that while some situations call for an individual to be locked up, this measure should be applied only as a last resort. A crisis centre would provide an alternative to incarceration in some circumstances.

# Restorative Programs for Perpetrators of Family and Domestic Violence

### **Recommendation:**

That funds are dedicated on a recurrent basis for the development and delivery of restorative programs for perpetrators of family and domestic violence.

### **Rationale:**

Services addressing those living with and experiencing family and domestic violence are an essential service in our community, however, as the violence is the issue and not the outcome, dedicated programs for perpetrators must be developed. There has been a demonstrated need for perpetrator programs as there has been an increase of reports of family and domestic violence.

### **Detail:**

Restorative programs for perpetrators should be delivered in prisons and through non-government organisations.

The delivery points would be distributed across eight locations; two prison based regionally, two community based regionally, two prison-based in the Perth metropolitan region and two community-based in the Perth metropolitan region.

All programs would need to be culturally appropriate and specific to different Aboriginal, CALD and other groups.

The cost of this service is estimated to be \$2m per year at \$250,000 per program by the Edmund Rice Centre.

# New support services for other forms of partner abuse

## Recommendation:

That the State Government examine the issue of mutual intimate partner abuse and violence, with a view to providing support services for less prevalent forms of abuse such as same sex partner abuse, male victims, and women who use violence and abuse.

## Rationale:

Without question most family and domestic violence is against women and is undertaken by men, however there is also a need to assist people who experience other forms of domestic violence. Currently all services that support victims are for women and all services for perpetrators are aimed at men. The State Government does not provide specialist support services for women who use violence and for men who are victims of violence. And there is little emphasis on the causes of violence generally.

## Detail:

The ABS Personal Safety survey in 2005 revealed that men were more likely to be physically assaulted by a stranger in the most recent incident since the age of 15, whereas women were more often assaulted by a current and/or previous partner.<sup>1</sup>

- Of those men who were physically assaulted, 65% (1,507,400) were assaulted by a stranger.
- Of those women who were physically assaulted, 46% (780,500) were assaulted by a current and/or previous partner.

The location of assaults varied between women and men during the 12 months prior to the survey:

- Of the 195,300 women who experienced physical assault by a male perpetrator, 64% (125,100) of incidents occurred in a home
- Of the 79,500 men who experienced physical assault by a female perpetrator, 77% (60,900) of incidents occurred in a home
- Of those women who experienced physical assault by a female perpetrator, 38% (25,300) were assaulted in a home and 22.7% (15,100) at licensed premises
- 35% (148,900) of men experienced physical assault by a male perpetrator in the open, and 34% (145,300) at licensed premises

While they only represent a small portion of people who suffer domestic violence, there is inadequate recognition and a lack of support for men and women who have been affected by several other forms of domestic violence including:

- Mutual intimate partner abuse and violence
- Women who use abuse and violence against men

<sup>1</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics (4906.0 - Personal Safety, Australia (Re-issue), 2005

## SAFETY & JUSTICE

- Abuse and violence by women against women in a same-sex relationship
- Abuse and violence by men against men in a same-sex relationship

# Domestic Violence Legal Workers Network

### Recommendation

That the State Government provide funding for a minimum of two further domestic violence legal workers in the metropolitan region, with consideration for further expansion of services in regional areas, particularly to provide services in the growing communities in the northern corridor, and to provide targeted outreach services to women and children in crisis accommodation at refuges.

### Rationale:

The provision of additional domestic violence legal workers would compliment the current roll-out of Family Violence Courts, and increase the ability of the regional domestic violence response groups to operate effectively across agencies. In doing so, the additional domestic violence legal worker positions would increase the effectiveness of some of the key programs aimed at addressing violence against women and children in the community.

### Detail:

Established in 2004 the Domestic Violence Legal Workers Network (DVLWN) links legal workers providing services to people who have experienced domestic violence. The Network operates to provide opportunities for professional development and support for those workers, as well as forums for community education. Through this work the DVLWN has identified the need for an expansion of these legal services.

# New support services for other forms of partner abuse

### Recommendation:

That the State Government addresses the issue of mutual intimate partner abuse and violence, plus provide support services for men who are victims of abuse and violence and women who use abuse and violence.

### Rationale:

While the majority of family and domestic violence is against women and is undertaken by men, other forms of domestic violence also need to be addressed. Currently all services that

support victims are for women and all services for perpetrators are aimed at men. The State Government does not provide specialist support services for women who use violence and for men who are victims of violence.

**Detail:**

Of those women and men who experienced current partner violence since the age of 15, 70% (160,100) were women and 30% (68,100) were men.<sup>1</sup> There is inadequate recognition and a lack of support for men and women who have been affected by several other forms of domestic violence including:

- Mutual intimate partner abuse and violence
- Women who use abuse and violence against men
- Abuse and violence by women against women in a same-sex relationship
- Abuse and violence by men against men in a same-sex relationship

# Increase Core Funding to Community Legal Centres

**Recommendation**

Ensure the stability and effectiveness of community legal service provision by committing the \$872,339 granted to Community Legal Centres (CLCs) in a range of 1 to 3 year non-recurrent project grants through the Legal Contributions Trust in 2007/08 to recurrent core funding for CLCs as part of the CLC State Funding Program.

**Rationale:**

Community Legal Centres provide free and/or low cost services to people who are social security recipients, those on low incomes, or those who have difficulty in accessing legal services, including people with disabilities, women, young people, Aboriginal people and people from non-English speaking backgrounds<sup>84</sup>. CLCs provide a safety net for those who cannot afford the services of a private lawyer, or who are ineligible for legal aid. CLCs are positioned at the prevention and early intervention end of the legal system, working to reduce the likelihood of litigation and the negative social consequences related to lack of access to justice.

**Detail:**

The Joint Commonwealth and State Review of WA Community Legal Centres (2003) recommended that funds be directed towards a number of priority areas of legal need, both in terms of client groups and geographic areas. The ongoing funds provided through the State Funding Program addressed a number of these priority areas. Further priority areas, such as the northern suburbs (newly funded Joondalup CLC) and the Wheatbelt (Rural Community Legal Service), have since been addressed through the Legal Contributions Trust. However, the non-recurrent nature of this funding leaves the stability of service provision in jeopardy.

<sup>1</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics (4906.0 - Personal Safety, Australia (Re-issue), 2005

<sup>84</sup> There are over 207 CLCs in Australia which provide services to approximately 350,000 clients per year.

## SAFETY & JUSTICE

It should be noted that the Review also prioritised sustainable levels of funding for existing CLCs, which currently face significant problems with attracting and retaining staff and are failing to meet community demands as a result of inadequate funding.<sup>85</sup> Ensuring the sustainability and viability of WA community legal centres requires a significant increase in funding by both Commonwealth and State governments.

*'Increasingly it appears that CLCs are expected to pick up the shortcomings in the legal aid system where, for example, people have reached their legal aid "cap", where they have a legal matter for which legal aid is not available, or where they do not meet the means test despite being unable to afford a private solicitor. The demand appears to be overwhelming many CLCs.'*<sup>86</sup>

A key problem is the rates of pay offered in the community sector:

*'Rates of pay for comparable positions in CLCs are 25%-35% lower than for positions in Legal Aid WA. As the SACS award has failed to keep up with increases in other industries, the remuneration gap between working in a CLC, the public service and the private sector has increased.'*<sup>87</sup>

# Programs for Women in Prison

### Recommendation:

That funding is allocated to providing family and domestic violence programs, and educational programs to women in prison.

### Rationale:

Volunteers are currently delivering an essential, non-therapeutic family and domestic violence workshop in Bandyup women's prison, without any Government funding support. This program is providing an important community service to women in need and deserves funding support to ensure its continuation.

### Detail:

While individual volunteers have demonstrated a personal commitment to the advancement and healing of women in prison, the Government should also put its support behind this program. Support for this program will provide an opportunity to assist women in their development while incarcerated and before returning to the community.

Programs to support women in prison and to reduce the number of women who are imprisoned are under-funded in spite of the fact that Western Australia has the highest incarceration rate in Australia for Aboriginal women. In Western Australia, Indigenous women

<sup>85</sup> 'It is imperative that the Commonwealth and state/territory governments acknowledge existing shortfalls in funding and accept that a continuing deterioration in circumstances will inevitably lead to a severe crisis for CLCs.' Legal Aid and Access to Justice, Commonwealth Senate Legal and Constitutional References Committee, June 2004, p 217.

<sup>86</sup> Legal Aid and Access to Justice, Commonwealth Senate Legal and Constitutional References Committee, June 2004, p 209. See also the Joint Review of Western Australian Community Legal Centres, 2003.

<sup>87</sup> Joint Review, of Western Australian Community Legal Centres, 2003, p 57.

constituted approximately 42%<sup>88</sup> of the female prison population in 2004 although only constituting 3.2% of the female population of Western Australia.<sup>89</sup>

Notably, women's programs receive far less funding than men's programs.

Allowance must also be made for the delivery of therapeutic programs being delivered at least once per month in each of the women's prisons including Boronia at an approximate cost of \$1m per year.

# Partnerships to Support Re-entry Services

## Recommendation:

Support non-government organisations to develop effective partnerships between the Departments of Justice, Health, Housing, and Education and Training, and other government agencies to work towards the common goal of reducing the cycle of re-offending.

## Rationale:

Reoffending is a major economic and social cost to the community. Support services, including accommodation and training, provided on release, can reduce the rate of recidivism.

## Detail:

A recent report from the Attorney General states: "If the causes of repeat crime are poor basic skills, lack of qualifications, drugs misuse, lack of suitable housing or mental health problems – these must be addressed and improved whilst the prisoner is in prison and actively supported in the community on re-entry."

Non-government service providers can play a key role in supporting prisoners and should be adequately funded to deliver services to these people who are greatly in need of assistance to reintegrate into both the workforce and their community. In fact, in the absence of government services, these disadvantaged people are often left with no-one else to turn to for help but non-government services.

Whether it is a loan for white goods or a food parcel, prisoners on release are assisted by non-government community services along side other people in disadvantage. Most agencies are ill-equipped to address their special circumstances and provide the support they need to successfully manage the transition from prison to community.

The few non-government agencies that are funded to assist in the coordination of re-entry services, rely on the rest of the community sector to access services. Those agencies are not resourced to provide that service, and coupled with other pressures they are facing, are decreasingly able to meet the need. This situation could undermine the effectiveness of the current re-entry program if greater investment is not made in the service providers.

<sup>88</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Corrective Services, Australia*, March Quarter 2004, *op cit*, pp13,20-22

<sup>89</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Indigenous Profile - Western Australia 2001, Community Profile Series 2001 Census*, Australian Bureau of Statistics, Canberra 2002, Table 1 02.

# Safety & Justice Case Study

## Rural Community Legal Service Inc (RCLS)

The Rural Community Legal Service Inc, after a significant period with no paid staff, has recently re-opened its doors to provide legal support to Wheatbelt communities. However the service only has one year of funding, which covers only the employment of a part-time solicitor and paralegal. There is no guaranteed funding from 1 July 2008.

The Wheatbelt community is spread across 4 regional centres (Avon, Central East, Central Midlands, Central South), encompassing 44 Shires. The total land area is 154,992 with a population of 73,000. It is estimated that the region will have significant growth by the year 2021 with some centre's population increasing greater than 20%.

The community of this region has some specific issues indicating a need for low cost legal services. It has a lower average wage than both the metropolitan Perth and the rest of rural Western Australia. It also scores lower than the rest of the State on all socio-economic indicators in areas of disadvantage, including economic, education and occupation.

The Joint Review of Community Legal Services (September 2003), identified the Wheatbelt as having a high priority of need for legal services. The following legal needs were identified in 2006, in order of significance<sup>90</sup>:

- Family law
- Domestic violence
- Consumer credit, debt and bankruptcy
- Drug and alcohol issues
- Criminal law, particularly petty crime
- Custody and child protection issues including advocacy for Department of Community Development clients -
- Neighbourhood and other civil disputes
- Welfare rights and Centrelink issues
- Tenancy
- Youth issues

It is vital that Rural Community Legal Service Inc secure adequate ongoing funding to ensure services can be provided to address these community needs.

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<sup>90</sup> *Toward a Wheatbelt-wide Community Legal Service*, Joint Review of Community Legal Services consultant report, Nov. 2006.

# Education

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Education is recognised as a key human development indicator and a fundamental economic, social and cultural human right. Education is not only a basic human right, but vital to individuals' social wellbeing. Having a well resourced and socially responsible education system is core to achieving a socially just and sustainable Western Australia.

In general, the youth sector reports that funding and resource spending favours private schools to the detriment of public schools located in lower socio economic areas. WACOSS urges government to consider issues of parity and equity with regards to the funding of education.

We would like to see the school learning environment enhanced by providing students with greater access to social supports that can assist them in their learning. We recommend the establishment of a program to deploy school-based Youth Workers throughout the state based education system.

Young people within the school environment are at risk of falling behind and leaving formal education in order to deal with (or not to deal with) more pressing issues and social problems; a situation exacerbated by the raising of the school leaving age. Improved provision of support services through the schools would assist to prevent this decline.

We also suggest a pilot to use a state primary school as a community resource hub to provide linkages between child care, aged care, kindergarten, community nurses, medical staff, employment services and financial counselling, and other services.

This would assist the community to build networks and support local services, whilst at the same time enhance the learning and connectedness of children.

Support for the education needs of young mothers in schools is another priority for our sector. Without proper support, teenage mothers are at risk of becoming socially isolated, developing mental health problems, or of being caught in the poverty trap that is the result of a lack of education and training.

The quality of our rural, regional and remote education system also requires new investment. Greater incentives are necessary to encourage qualified teachers to work remotely, and to remain teaching there after their two year permanency has been reached. Funding is also required to enable students to access tutors, either in their community or via Distance Education, to support individual education needs.

Finally, in order to promote the development, of a human rights culture in Western Australia, human rights education should be fostered through our schools.

# Youth Workers in Western Australian High Schools

**Recommendation:**

That the Government employs a youth worker in every Western Australian State High School.

**Rationale:**

In 2005, a WACOSS study investigating the role of NGOs in diverting young people from crime confirmed that youth workers who have built positive and trusting relationships with young people play a major role in preventing criminal behaviour.<sup>91</sup>

**Detail:**

A pilot program should be developed to deploy school-based Youth Workers to work in collaboration with existing student services such as school counsellors, psychologists and chaplains. The program should be subject to a general review and evaluation process.

Current research, similar programs in other state jurisdictions and youth worker case studies confirm that the same is true for reducing suicide and drug abuse, promoting healthy living practices and acting as an early intervention mechanism in detecting mental health problems and referring services.

Youth Worker testimonies indicate that young people 'perceive the youth worker differently'. Because of this the youth worker is able to access, build relationships with and serve young people in ways that many school counsellors, psychologists and chaplains cannot; pointing young people to services like counselling, health and employment services, other NGOs, accommodation and financial services and much more.

WACOSS supports peak bodies and other non-government organisations in their recommendations that an independent youth worker working in collaboration with existing student service teams will have a considerable impact on reducing harm in a young person's life.

Furthermore, without this form of independent assistance, young people within the school environment are at risk of falling behind and leaving formal education in order to deal with (or not to deal with) more pressing issues and social problems; a situation exacerbated by the raising of the school leaving age.



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<sup>91</sup> Western Australian Council of Social Service. *The Role of Non-Government Organisations in Diverting Young People from Crime*, [www.wacoss.org.au](http://www.wacoss.org.au).

# Primary Schools as a 'Hub' for Community Development Services

## Recommendation:

Allocation of funds for a pilot program in the metropolitan area for a 'Community Development Hub'.

## Rationale:

If primary schools became a kind of community resource, whereby school students and their parents were linked with child-care centres and other community services, learning and care could begin to take place simultaneously. In addition to this, community capacity would increase as members of the community build networks and support local services.

## Detail:

WACOSS supports the recommendation of Carewest to fund a pilot for a state primary school to provide linkages between child care, aged care, kindergarten, community nurses, medical staff, employment services and financial counselling, amongst other services.

A similar program operates in Julatten/Mt Molloy, regional Queensland. Funding of \$171 000 non-recurrent was provided for construction and establishment costs, with recurrent funding of \$26 000 provided to employ a part-time co-ordinator. A second round of non-recurrent funding secured \$65 000 to aid with additional construction.

# Alternative Education Programs for Young Mothers in High Schools

## Recommendation:

Ensure the State government allocates resources and funding to provide services for young mothers in all Western Australian High Schools where required.

## Rationale:

Currently, the only program running where parents have full time care for their children and are able to remain in the education system is the Balga Senior High School Child Care Centre. There is a two year waiting list for the program, which is entirely funded by the Federal government (\$90 000 over two years).

## Detail:

The needs of young mothers in schools include:

## EDUCATION

- Alternative transport to provide for young mothers who cannot easily access vehicles or public transport networks; and
- Expansion of childcare facilities in existing programs.

Enhancing the capacity to care for more children will mean that more young mothers are able to remain in the education system, thus improving their long term wellbeing.

WACOSS welcomes initiatives such as the Balga Senior High School Child Care Centre, but stresses that the State government has the responsibility to fund more high schools so similar services can be provided.

There is a pressing need for Balga's childcare centre to be expanded, and enough space for this to happen, but securing State funds has been a long and difficult process. The program provides the young women with valuable resources, and they benefit from the strong support that is provided. Without this support, teenage mothers are at risk of becoming socially isolated, developing mental health problems, or of being caught in the poverty trap that is the result of a lack of education and training. WACOSS is of the belief that State government funding should be allocated to all high schools as required so young mothers are provided with an alternative to dropping out of the educational system.

# Human Rights Education

### Recommendation:

That every Western Australian high school is provided with the funding and resources to ensure Human Rights education becomes part of the curriculum.

### Rationale:

Human rights play a core role in community sector activities, education being one of these. The promotion of a human rights culture in Western Australia should be fostered through our schools.

### Detail:

Human rights are based upon a recognition of the inherent worth and dignity of every human life.

Many organisations undertake work, which encompasses particular human rights principles, for example the right to adequate food and shelter. As the peak body for the community services sector in WA, WACOSS has been closely monitoring the State Government's intention to introduce Human Rights legislation for WA.

The Hon. Jim McGinty MLA Attorney General believes that by introducing a WA Human Rights Act, a culture of human rights will be fostered, in which there will be a greater awareness of, respect for, and observance of, human rights at all levels of government and throughout the community.

What better way to instil in our young people a sense of what it means to have a Human Rights Act, and how this translates in real life terms, than through our education system? This would mean that young people would leave school with a sense of what Human Rights are and how governments are accountable to uphold these rights.

# Regional Education Needs

## Recommendation:

That the Government invest resources into regional education needs to improve access to teaching and tutoring support services and by providing greater financial incentives for teachers to work in rural, regional and remote schools.

## Rationale:

In rural, regional and remote areas, particularly the Kalgoorlie-Boulder region, there is a vast shortage of tutors and funds to employ tutors for the young people who live there

## Detail:

Financial investment is needed in rural, regional and remote areas that will enable young people to gain access to tutors, either in their community or via Distance Education.

In addition, greater incentives are necessary to encourage qualified teachers to work at a rural, regional or remote school, and to remain teaching there after their two year permanency has been reached.

An increase in the school leaving age now means that many young people, often with learning difficulties or a poor academic record, are remaining in the school system and are in need of extra tuition in order to meet academic expectations.

Without basic tutoring services, young people who have learning difficulties cannot be expected to cope with their current workload as well as catch up on prior learning that has not taken place.

It is believed that without the provision of additional services, many young people will continue to fail in the current system.



# Education Case Study

## Julatten State School Community Hub

The Julatten/Mt Molloy region had a population of approximately 1400 people at the 1996 census. The population has increased by around 32% since this time. The nearest formal childcare facility is located in Mossman or Mareeba (approximately 30 minutes each way). A playgroup has been established at the local park hall with around 25 children under five attending on a weekly basis. The region clearly has a need for an integrated, community based facility which can cater for the parents and children who live there.

The Community Hub project would be run from the school, and would provide Julatten and Mt Molloy with an integrated kindergarten, limited-hours service, after school care/vacation care and permanent venue for playgroup. The service proposes a flexible and integrated program for children and families in the area. In addition to the services already outlined, it is proposed that room be made available for child health-care services for new mothers, parenting and relationship education evenings, weekend community workshops, and visits from early intervention specialists, speech therapists, nursing mothers and the Noah's Ark Toy Library. An information and referral service would also be established from this room.

This proposal has been discussed over a number of years and has strong community support from the Commonwealth Department of Family and Community Services, Education Queensland, the Creche and Kindergarten Association, Community Health, and other groups such as the Nursing Mothers' Association and Playgroup.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> See <http://www.communities.qld.gov.au/childcare/hub/hubs/julatten.html>

# Financial Support

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Financial crisis can be described as a situation in which an individual or family does not have the material, social or emotional resources to cover essential items such as food, shelter, essential services, medication, clothing and transportation.

For many people, the cost of living in Western Australia has increased at a rate that has not been met either by wage rises, or increases to vital government income support. As basic needs become increasingly costly (like private rental, food, petrol and utilities), people can become extremely vulnerable to unforeseen circumstances which usually don't affect people who are more financially secure. For instance an accident or illness can keep someone out of work and reduce their pay packet when they can least afford it. The cost of visiting the doctor, collecting medicine or attending clinics for treatment takes a bite out of the household budget and may mean that paying other bills is delayed. In some cases, under the new welfare to work reforms, people may find they have to fend for themselves without income support for up to 8 weeks.

Some assistance is available for people who are in dire need, struggling to make ends meet. The non-government sector provides vital support to people facing financial hardship through providing emergency relief services and financial counselling.

Emergency relief is the provision of practical assistance to those people who find themselves in financial crisis. This assistance takes two forms - the provision of financial and/or material aid to meet immediate needs, (ie: food parcels, food vouchers, vouchers for clothing or household goods); the provision of information, advice, referral and advocacy to help address the underlying cause of financial crisis.<sup>93</sup> The objective of the federally-funded Emergency Relief Program is to assist people to deal with the immediate crisis situation in a way that maintains dignity and encourages self reliance. Other important principles of access, respect and culturally appropriate service provision should be maintained at all times in the provision of emergency relief.

In their recent submission to the Department for Communities, the Financial Counselling Association of Western Australia identified poor levels of funding for wages and significant increases to demand for services as being major problems for the sector. Changes to the funding of emergency relief and other community service organisations providing assistance to the public should also be informed by a comprehensive study of the real cost of living in Western Australia.



Many people living on lower incomes also rely on social concessions provided by the state government in order to meet basic, every day costs. A review of the efficacy and structure of these concessions is required to ensure that they meet the needs of people in Western Australia living on lower incomes or facing hardship.

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<sup>93</sup> Australian Council of Social Service: Emergency Relief Handbook – A Guide for Emergency Relief Workers (3<sup>rd</sup> Edition)

# A Cost of Living Index

**Recommendation:**

Establish a Cost of Living Index that takes into consideration factors beyond just those which determine the Consumer Price Index (CPI) and use this index to inform monetary and social policy.

**Rationale:**

The State Government's reliance on the Consumer Price Index (CPI) as an indicator of the cost of living is flawed. The Australian Bureau of Statistics explicitly states that the CPI should not be confused with a cost of living index.<sup>94</sup>

**Detail:**

In recent years, Western Australia has been experiencing an economic boom. This has resulted in increased business investment in WA, increased revenue gains for the State Government and substantial increases in the wages paid to workers in sectors such as finance, mining and construction. However, this 'boom' is not producing benefits for all Western Australians, and in fact, it is producing adverse conditions for many people who live on a middle and/or low income. The main reason for this is that the boom has caused the cost of living in WA to soar.

In August 2007 WACOSS released a paper that translated the percentage increases in the price of essentials such as housing, food and petrol into dollar terms to show the effect on lower-income families. The paper included a Cost of Living Scenario which shows that from 2006 to 2007 a low-income family in rental accommodation could be worse off by almost \$70 per week, just on basic living costs.<sup>95</sup>

Both the Federal and State Governments factor the CPI into their economic decisions. However, as the WACOSS *Cost of Living* paper shows, the national CPI rate of between 2 – 3% does not accurately reflect the increases in the cost of basic household necessities. For example, average wages in WA increased by 4.8% from 2006 to 2007; but during the same period the median rent in Perth increased by 17% and basic food items by 11%.<sup>96</sup> Price increases in essentials like housing, food and petrol are placing lower-income families in Western Australia under significant financial pressure.

Community service agencies report that the number of people struggling to make ends meet is growing. From 2005 to 2006 there has been a 54% increase in the number of people in need that agencies had to turn away.<sup>97</sup>

The State Government needs to recognise the financial hardship being experienced by many Western Australians and develop a government monitored Cost of Living Index which can better inform financial and social policy than the CPI.

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<sup>94</sup> ABS (2005) A Guide to the Consumer Price Index: 15th Series, ABS cat 6440.0, [http://www.ausstats.abs.gov.au/ausstats/subscriber.nsf/0/A0C0F582E0909660CA2570A60000A4C1/\\$File/64400\\_2005.pdf](http://www.ausstats.abs.gov.au/ausstats/subscriber.nsf/0/A0C0F582E0909660CA2570A60000A4C1/$File/64400_2005.pdf) pp3-4

<sup>95</sup> WACOSS (2007) *The Rising Cost of Living in Western Australia*

<sup>96</sup> Ibid page 6.

<sup>97</sup> ACOSS. (2007). Community Sector Survey.

# Financial Counsellors

## Recommendation:

Increase funding to the Financial Counselling service providers to ensure the maintenance of metropolitan and regional counselling servicing and to enable the staff to collect information regarding increases to demand for services, recruitment, retention and training issues.

## Rationale:

The Financial Counselling sector is under-funded in comparison to other sectors. The peak association for financial counselling, the Financial Counsellors Association of WA (FCAWA), has identified that there are a number of ongoing issues affecting the provision of financial counselling services in WA.

## Detail:

Financial Counsellors empower or enable people who are in financial crisis to regain control of their own financial situation. They do this by offering short-term crisis management and long-term prevention strategies. Long-term, holistic solutions assist people in crisis and financial hardship by building on individual capacity in managing financial affairs. Financial Counsellors assist people by providing services including negotiating with creditors and government departments, mediation, advocacy, money management, resources, legal options report helping people with housing, utility bills, creditors, bankruptcy, Centrelink and budgeting skills. A more detailed discussion of current issues affecting the FCAWA's provision of services follows:

- **Insufficient Funding for Rural Services**  
FCAWA reports that locum staff are difficult to find for rural areas. Rural services also receive the same level of funding as urban or metropolitan services, which does not account for increased travel costs.
- **Insufficient Funding Increases**  
The Personal Support Program funding for 2007-08 was increased by the nominal national CPI of 3.3%. This increase is insufficient to meet the training needs of staff and increases in demand for services.
- **Insufficient Wage Levels**  
More now than ever, financial counselling services are finding it difficult to retain staff as wages in this area have not increased in proportion to other industries. Additional funding for wages is required in order to improve recruitment and retention rates for Financial Counselling services. A recent survey conducted by FCAWA showed a large variation in the wages paid to staff by individual services.
- **Increased Demand for Services**  
FCAWA reports marked increases in demand for services including assistance with rental arrears and utility bills. There has also been an increase in the quantity of referrals from government departments, utility companies, mental health services and financial service and credit providers. A recent survey conducted by FCAWA showed that many services have had to reduce the amount of financial counselling provided due to funding constraints. Increased demand has also meant that individuals can now wait for several weeks before being able to access a Financial Counsellor.

# Co-ordination Unit for Emergency Relief Providers

**Recommendation:**

That the Government provide funding for the long-term continuation of a Co-ordination Unit for Emergency Relief Providers in WA to facilitate the provision of emergency relief and support the development of providers and continuous improvement of their operations.

**Rationale:**

Emergency Relief Agencies provide material and financial assistance to those in need across Western Australia. There are over 250 Emergency Relief outlets currently operating across the State. These services report to WACOSS that they are turning people away on a daily basis because they do not have the resources or capacity to meet the crisis needs of the large numbers of people requesting assistance. This includes increasing number of clients seeking financial assistance to help pay utility bills, who, if not assisted, risk being disconnected from essential services.

**Detail:**

Currently WACOSS receives ad hoc funding through the Lotteries Commission to fund a part time Emergency Relief Support position. The position has a limited role in providing advice and support to individual services and in the organisation of training, forums and conferences for the ER sector.

If ongoing funding was provided for a Co-ordination Unit, the Co-ordinator position would enable WACOSS to monitor trends within the areas of emergency relief and to be in a position to advise Government and the funding bodies on priority policy issues and the best use of resources. It would also help to identify the gaps in services and take a leading role in developing strategies in response to these identified needs.

WACOSS can then play a much more prominent role in encouraging and promoting a collaborative response to the issues and concerns raised by the ER sector and would be able to build capacity and promote relationships to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of the whole sector.

Agencies are reporting that their staff, many of whom are volunteers, have to deal with stressed and sometimes violent people in crisis, who may well be suffering trauma, depression or from a mental illness. With limited resources, these agencies may not always be able to help to the extent that they would like, which then leads to even further stress for those seeking assistance.

Most Emergency Relief (ER) agencies receive very limited funding to distribute emergency relief assistance, but there is an expectation by Government, funding bodies and the community that they also provide ancillary services for which they are not funded, including the provision of information, individual support, advocacy etc.

This is in addition to complying with good management and governance practices, including adhering to relevant regulations for the protection of paid and unpaid staff. Because of the

limited funding many services use volunteer labour to do these extra tasks, however there is no funding for the supervision and training of these volunteers.

For the Emergency Relief sector to meet these requirements and to maintain a high standard of service delivery and a consistent approach across the state, it requires support and resourcing of all services and a well-targeted and equitable training program.

# Review of State Government Concessions

## Recommendation:

As recommended in the State Taxation Review, the state should continue to undertake a comprehensive review of State concessions to examine the accessibility, equity and adequacy of state concessions.

## Rationale:

Concessions are an integral part of the range of support needed by disadvantaged individuals, families and carers. Significant variations in concession policy exist between the States and Territories. Additionally, some concessions are available to particular groups of vulnerable people but not others. For example: caring responsibilities can not only restrict a carer's income earning capacity, but also incur extra costs for the household such as extra electricity, phone or transport costs, medications, continence products and special equipment.

## Detail:

A review of State Government concessions should examine:

- Community Service Obligation (CSO) payments with a view to increasing the existing amount of funds available for CSO payments and making payments available to private enterprises providing essential services to the community.
- Potential for incorporating environmental concessions as an integral component of a concession system, such as those targeted at increasing household energy efficiency.

At present, the existing system of concessions is in urgent need of review. The State Government is due to commence the formal review process in early 2008.

The Economic Regulatory Authority undertook an Inquiry on Country Water and Wastewater Pricing in Western Australia, which recommended that further consideration be given to making CSO funds available to all water service providers in Western Australia.<sup>98</sup> Community service obligation payments are intended to benefit all disadvantaged members of the community, not just customers of the Government enterprises providing essential services. Carers of the aging and people with disabilities are often not eligible for the full range of social concessions, despite the significant need.

The process of reviewing state concessions should be open, transparent and include relevant stakeholders within both government and the community.

<sup>98</sup> Economic Regulatory Authority (2006) *Inquiry on Country Water and Wastewater Pricing in Western Australia*, Final Report, Government of Western Australia

# Financial Support Case Study

## A Common Story

Mandy and her partner, Justin, are in arrears of over \$1000 rent. They have been renting with their current real estate agent for about 6 months and are on a 12-month lease.

Due to rental arrears they have been issued with a 7 day notice and are required to either pay the amount in full or vacate. The couple get the contact number for a tenants' advice service during a visit to a Centrelink office.

Mandy tells the advisor that her partner's mental health and a run of bad luck have contributed to their arrears. Justin has disclosed that he suffers from mental health illness and has no support. Mandy and Justin are fairly new to area and do not have available family assistance.

Mandy and Justin feel unable to liaise with the Property Manager and request assistance with this.

Mandy and Justin have two girls who are less than two years of age. Mandy seeks assistance for some food, furniture for one of the girls and a loan to purchase a washing machine. There are a number of overdue utility accounts and no identified payment methods. Mandy states that they struggle with budgeting.

This case study illustrates the complex needs of people who are struggling to cope. Clearly, they are in a precarious situation and need some assistance. They could go on a waiting list for public housing, but could wait several months for secure accommodation. This couple can be assisted by emergency relief providers in the short term – with a loan for whitegoods, some donated furniture and a food parcel. Given appropriate financial counselling and assistance to negotiate payment terms with their private landlord, there is a chance they can get back on track, save their tenancy, and manage their debts.

# Social Participation

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Social participation has been defined as “socially oriented sharing of individual resources.” It is important in regard to a sense of well-being.

Many factors can inhibit social participation. Not speaking the same language, living with a disability, having a low income, lacking access to transport, or having low literacy skills can make it difficult to be involved in various activities. The level of participation can fall so low as to be considered in social isolation. Social isolation can contribute to ill-health and a reduced quality of life.

“Social participation is vital to people with low socioeconomic status as it can develop skills that help with confidence-building, enabling inclusion into further education or gaining paid employment. It can’t fix issues that are directly related to poverty and disadvantage but can be significant when combined with other approaches.”<sup>99</sup>

Social participation builds social capital. “It has been observed that those with limited or low levels of social capital are: most likely to report having poor health outcomes; least likely to have high levels of educational attainment; significantly less likely to own a home; more likely to perceive their neighbourhoods as being unsafe; more likely to have experienced some form of family disruption such as separation or divorce; and more likely to live in economically disadvantaged areas.”<sup>100</sup>

Strategies which improve social participation, particularly for those people who are in disadvantage, can deliver both direct and indirect benefits. For instance, providing English classes directly assists non English speakers to acquire one of the skills they may need in the workforce, to communicate effectively. But these classes also provide an opportunity to develop networks among others who are experiencing the same challenges of adjusting to living in a new place and adapting to a new culture. The indirect benefits of attending English classes include building confidence, possibly making friends, and reducing anxiety levels. This can in turn contribute to happier, safer home environments.

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<sup>99</sup> South Australian Council of Social Service, Media Release, 12 March 2006 *SACOSS calls for action on social participation.*

<sup>100</sup> *South Australian Council of Social Service fact sheet prepared with the Australian Institute for Social Research, the University of Adelaide. Published November 2005.*

# English Classes for Migrants and Refugees

**Recommendation:**

Increase the opportunities for migrants and refugees to learn English by working with the Department of Immigration and Citizenship (as a funding body) to provide appropriate courses [at the level of the Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP)], facilities to meet childcare requirements, and additional educational support for people who are pre-literate.

**Rationale:**

Learning English is essential to participating in Australian society. The Department of Immigration and Citizenship provides funding and childcare for 510 hours of free English classes for migrants and refugees at least 18 years old with a permanent visa. For many migrants and refugees this support is insufficient to allow them to develop the skills they need to participate in Australian society.

**Detail:**

The Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP), one of the federally funded programs, teaches migrants and refugees how to read, write, speak and understand English. The Program also provides an education in Australian society, culture and customs. Other federally funded programs are available through TAFE and other non-government organisations.

Migrant and refugee support services believe the existing 510 hours are sufficient only for those migrants and refugees who have a good educational background. Those who have a limited educational background are assisted by the hours provided, but do not reach higher standards of competency. For those who are illiterate, the program simply does not provide enough support to ensure that they can read safety signs or understand what the boss is saying in regard to safety. For this group, a more comprehensive program, some say up to 3 years, is required.



To further complicate the settling in process, migrants and refugees who are on income support are subject to the same stringent participation requirements as other job-seekers with a few weeks of arrival. Obtaining employment may take precedence over taking the time necessary to learn basic English. This could trap migrants and refugees in low-paid jobs and limit future job prospects due to poor English skills. A related concern is that if these non-English speakers later decide to return to English classes and voluntarily leaves the job to do so, they will not be eligible for income support due to a mandatory 8 week non-payment period.

# Childcare for Migrants in English Classes

## Recommendation:

Provide more free childcare places for large families to allow a parent to attend English class.

## Rationale:

Childcare is provided for refugees, migrants, and some visa holders so that they can attend English classes. However, large families who need more childcare places are seldom accommodated. More childcare places should be made available for large families.

## Detail:

While in most cases, migrants and refugees can start the English classes soon after arrival, women with children under 5 are currently on a waiting list. The program includes funding for childcare during classes. However, childcare facilities are scarce, not only due to the general lack of childcare facilities available, but also due to a recent influx of large migrant and refugee families. Because classes must be held in close proximity to the crèche, these large families cannot be accommodated by many of the existing facilities which typically cater for smaller numbers of children.

Developing basic English skills is a critical step toward full participation in Western Australian society. The benefits include opening up new possibilities in the workforce, establishing friendships, participating in community life and greater access to services, to name a few.

# Independent Translating & Interpreting Service

## Recommendation:

Establish an independent State interpreting and translation service, as recommended by the Office of Multicultural Interests needs analysis<sup>101</sup>.

## Rationale:

Non English speakers can be excluded from full participation in our society when interpreting and translating services are not provided to assist them to access basic services. Western Australia has a rich and diverse population including more than 11% who speak a language other than English at home<sup>102</sup>, with as many as 170 different languages spoken. Non English speakers can struggle to communicate effectively and need assistance at times. This need is

<sup>101</sup> Office of Multicultural Interests (2004) *Analysis of the Need for Interpreter and Translation Services within the Western Australian Government Sector*, Perth

<sup>102</sup> ABS Census 2006 Community Profiles, Western Australia.

## SOCIAL PARTICIPATION

critical when non English speakers are accessing the legal system or receiving health care. The State Government should provide this assistance.

### Detail:

The State government should ensure that trained interpreters are available in all public service institutions, especially health and legal services such as courts and public hospitals. Policies, procedures and protocols should be developed to ensure that public hospital staff are aware of the potential difficulties in using family members as interpreters for multi-cultural seniors.

The national Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS) is helpful, but only available by telephone. Over the phone, this process can be very tedious for all parties and ineffective. It can also greatly complicate seeking assistance, for instance, when visiting a local GP. Interpreting and translation services should also be available in-person.

Language issues increase as people age – many seniors policies recognise the special needs of multi-cultural seniors need to be put in place.

Currently, the lack of interpreters and language services in public hospitals is a matter of concern. Hospitals often rely upon family members to provide interpreter services. This is inappropriate for a number of reasons:

- Firstly, seniors may not wish their health issues to be disclosed to family members. All of us have a right to privacy and steps must be taken to ensure that the rights of seniors in hospitals are protected.
- Secondly, many health issues are sensitive and not readily disclosed in the presence of relatives. Embarrassment may prevent disclosure of important information to health professionals when sensitive health issues are involved. It is unrealistic, for example, to expect that a senior will be willing to discuss matters of sexual health via their children. Inadequate care may result.
- Thirdly, the use of close family members as interpreters in a health context may open the possibility of elder abuse – enabling unscrupulous family members to exploit a senior's vulnerability.

Accredited interpreter/translator services are needed not only for people from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities but also for Aboriginal people (See the **Aboriginal** section). To meet obligations for access and equity, these services should:

- Provide cost free interpreting and translation services to all clients seeking to access Government services and State-funded services operated by community agencies.
- Cater for migrants as well as Aboriginal community languages particularly for health and legal services.
- Develop a library of translated material, in particular of standard government forms, and including information relating to health, legal, welfare and industrial matters.

# Supporting Volunteers

## Recommendation

That the State Government takes a leadership role, working with federal and local government and with Volunteering WA as the Peak Body for volunteer-involving organisations, to establish a variety of strategies to address the reimbursement of out-of-pocket expenses for volunteers.

### Rationale:

Appropriately reimbursing volunteers for out-of-pocket expenses is an important strategy to attract and maintain the volunteers necessary to deliver core services and programs.

### Detail:

These expenses include fuel, vehicle and public transport costs, as well as telephone calls, uniform and safety equipment costs. Research conducted by Volunteering Australia found that 10% of volunteers changed their volunteering involvement in the past year due to the cost. This represents a potentially loss of almost 60,000 volunteers in Western Australia alone. Rising costs also affect community organisations, with approximately 50% of organisations unable to reimburse expenses due to being unable to afford such a commitment.

Analysis of the recent ABS Voluntary Work survey reveals that in 2006, 564,000 or 36% of Western Australian adults volunteered. This was better than the national rate of 34% and marks a steady increase from similar surveys undertaken in 1995 (24% volunteering rate in WA) and 2000 (32%). Increases occurred for both sexes and most age groups.

Although the number of people volunteering has increased since the last national survey, the number of hours volunteered on a national basis appears to have decreased, with the median number of hours volunteered just 1.1hrs per week or 56 hrs per year. And despite total hours spent in voluntary work increasing nationally by 26 million between 2000 and 2006, median hours were lower in all states and territories.

In other words, more people are volunteering but individually have less time to commit to it.

This means that community organisations must adjust their recruitment and retention methods accordingly in order to attract and maintain the volunteers necessary to deliver core services and programs. Research conducted by Volunteering Australia has found that on average, volunteers with net expenses were out-of-pocket by \$693 annually. 88% of volunteers have out-of-pocket expenses that are not reimbursed, and 10% of volunteers have changed their volunteering involvement in the past year due to the cost.

The research also found that 44% of organisations with less than 50 volunteers did not provide any expense reimbursement for volunteers, while 67% were unable to reimburse expenses due to being unable to afford such a commitment. While more than 50% of large organisations (50+ volunteers) were able to provide reimbursements, the ability to reimburse declined for organisations with extremely large numbers of volunteers.

The State Government has demonstrated its support of the value of volunteering through initiatives such as the Community Service Program (CSP), where all Year 10 students in Western Australia are expected to participate in 20 hours of community service before graduating from high school. While a fun and positive CSP experience can lead to a lifetime

## SOCIAL PARTICIPATION

of volunteering, motivation can quickly wane if barriers such as cost get in the way. State Government support for reducing out-of-pocket expenses for volunteers creates and fosters a positive culture for volunteering in Western Australia, and prevents the loss of such a valuable resource to our community.

A loss of 10% of volunteers in Western Australia (approximately 60,000 individuals) would represent a decline of 3.36 million hours of work per year donated to the community. At an approximate value of \$20 per hour, this would equal an annual loss of \$67 million to the Western Australian community.

# A Fair Go and a Fair Wage for Young People

### Recommendation:

That the State Government advocate for the abolition of any current awards or agreements that retain the concept of youth wages, ensuring that young people are paid fairly for their commitment to the workforce, and promotes awareness of young peoples working rights through the Office of Fair Employment Advocate.

### Rationale:

Young people are overwhelmingly represented in sales, retail, low level clerical and service occupations.<sup>103</sup> In Western Australia, YACWA compared the award minimum for this sector with the ages of those surveyed and discovered;

- 40% of those surveyed aged between 15-17 years were receiving less than the minimum award; and
- Over half (66%) of employees 21-25yrs were also receiving less than the award minimum.

In order to bring Western Australia in line with other state jurisdictions there is an urgent need to provide advice, services and resources to adequately protect young West Australian workers.

### Detail:

Young people remain one of the most exploited and, in Western Australia, least protected demographics of the labour force. The Youth Legal Service is the only young person's legal service in WA and this organisation defers most industrial relations questions to the Employment Law Service. In turn, the Employment Law Service, despite heroic efforts, appears to be under considerable financial and resource stress such that it is unable to effectively deal with the needs of young people in the labour market; especially when one considers the added dimension of new industrial relations laws.

A NSW 2005 survey of young people revealed that in the workforce;

- 48% of young people aged between 12-16 experienced verbal harassment; 23% experience physical harassment;
- Young people are less likely to negotiate on matters of substance (leave arrangements, pay and conditions); and, more likely 'to put up with poor pay and conditions (77.2%) than to simply quit and look for another job (22%)'.<sup>104</sup>

<sup>103</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Australian Social Trends, 2004, Catalogued Number, 4102.0.*

# Social Participation Case Study

## Community Grants Program

Through offering a Community Grants Program (CGP), the Office of Multicultural Interests aims to assist and encourage the involvement of all Western Australians in projects and events that bring together people from diverse backgrounds.

The objectives of the Community Grants Program are to:

Support the involvement of Western Australians in inclusive activities reflecting cultural diversity.

Inform the community of the shared benefits of living in an inclusive, multicultural society.

Enhance community harmony by bringing together Western Australians of different religious, cultural and ethnic backgrounds.

Examples of applications that have received funding include: cross-cultural festivals, community events and celebrations, concerts and plays, seminars, workshops, forums, exhibitions and conferences, community education projects such as cultural exchanges, publications with a multicultural focus, including books, manuals, information kits and projects targeting racism and discrimination in all its forms.

Priority is given to projects that:

- have the potential for "flow-on" benefits;
- can demonstrate community support.

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<sup>104</sup> Ferguson. J., *Not a young person's choice: young people, industrial relations & workplace negotiations*, YAPRap Vol 16 No 6 June 2006, Youth Action and Policy Association NSW Inc.

# Appendix 1

## List of Recommendations

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### Planning for Communities

#### Developing a WA Social Inclusion Strategy

1. WACOSS proposes the Premier commit his social vision for the State to the public record. A Social Inclusion Strategy Taskforce should be established, modeled from the successful *State Homelessness Strategy Taskforce*. It would involve Government alongside industry and the community sector.
2. That the State Government support a Social Inclusion Strategy Taskforce by resourcing two senior policy officers (one from within Government and one from the non-government sector) and a part time administration support officer.

#### Evaluating WA's Social Wellbeing

3. Government departments adopt Social Inclusion Strategy indicators as developed by the Taskforce as key performance indicators.
4. A State Social Inclusion Monitoring Committee be established including representatives from: the Departments of Communities, Child Protection, Justice, Housing and Works, Health; two representatives from the non-government sector; and an observer from the Auditor General's office to assist.
5. That the Premier tables in Parliament an annual report on social performance in the state, in the form of a progress report on the WA Social Inclusion Strategy.

### Budgeting for Communities

#### Investing in Our Strengths

6. Provide funding for the implementation of workforce development strategies for the non-government sector, arising from the Human Services Industry Roundtable research into workforce planning.
7. WACOSS calls on the Government to pick a consistent figure for calculating the indexation rate paid to the sector each year, and to commit to a policy of an additional adjustment payment each year, to match the Actual figures at the end of each financial year.
8. That the Government reintroduces monitoring of a regional price index and that agencies in non-metropolitan areas are adequately remunerated for the costs of service provision in their region.

9. That Government and NGOs work together to adopt a uniform Chart of Accounts for Western Australia and that training is funded to introduce this throughout the sector.

## **Aboriginal**

10. To establish state-wide Healing Centres, based on the Canadian Aboriginal Friendship Centre Model.
11. That the State Government commit substantial funding for allocation to reparation payments for Aboriginal people who have been effected by past stolen wages, and correspondingly, that the inquiry into stolen wages in WA delete the reference to 'no reparations' as a policy option.
12. To investigate culturally appropriate and relevant services that will provide for Aboriginal senior over the age of 55.
13. Undertake a review to determine Aboriginal patient accommodation needs and increase the availability of accommodation for that purpose.
14. To expand the services of PATS to provide greater support for escorts of patients from rural, regional and remote areas.
15. To employ Aboriginal Health Liaison Officers in all major hospitals in Western Australia.
16. Increase funding to outreach counselling in order to provide distributed services to Aboriginal people beyond the central metropolitan area.
17. Increase funding in order to expand patrols in the Perth Metropolitan area.

## **Housing**

18. That the State Government increase funding to restore public housing stock to 6% of the total housing stock in Western Australia.
19. That the State Government recognise the State Housing Authority for Community Service Obligation (CSO) funding to maintain and expand public housing supply.
20. That the State Government continues to provide funding to support the SAAP services that were implemented or enhanced in response to the State Homelessness Strategy, and that this funding be additional to any Federal funding agreements.
21. That the State Government regulates to abolish the collection of option fees.
22. That the State Government commit to a rental incentive scheme similar to the National Affordable Rental Incentive (NARI) scheme developed by the National Affordable Housing Summit as a matter of urgency in order to improve stocks of affordable housing for rental in the WA market.
23. Increase the State Government contribution to funding for Supported Accommodation Assistance, raising funding levels for existing agencies.

## APPENDIX 1

24. That the State Government increase youth accommodation and expand funding available to youth accommodation support services, including rural and regional areas where direct consultation is required to determine greatest need.
25. That the allowable loan amount for the Keystart program is increased to improve its accessibility for young people and that a community education program is undertaken to encourage the provision of affordable housing to young people in the private rental market.
26. That a dedicated support position with funding is developed within the Department of Housing and Works to support regional housing providers.
27. That priority is given to developing a culturally appropriate housing response to the needs of young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and singles.
28. That Premier and Cabinet commit to the examination and resolution of national and state government policy issues impacting on the holistic delivery of services to community housing tenants to assist clients with complex needs.
29. That the State Government increases the number of properties provided to the Community Options and Independent Living Programs (ILP).
30. Reduce the rate of recidivism by assisting people who are released from prison to re-establish themselves in the community. This requires more accommodation units and increased funding for specialist support organisations.
31. To address the shortage of affordable housing, all new developments and redevelopments should include a percentage of affordable housing. Any development on Government or Crown lands should include at least 15% social housing (public or community housing). Developments on private land should be required to include at least 15% affordable housing. These requirements should remain in force until public housing reaches 6% of total housing stock and the demand for affordable housing is met.
32. That the State Government create and fund an external and independent appeal mechanism for public and community housing.
33. That the Valuer General's Office is resourced to calculate realistic market rent figures every six months.
34. That significant investment is made into the provision of accredited training in community housing organisations.
35. Fund a minimum of 150 additional disability support packages in the year 2007/2008.
36. That the State Government provides funding to fill gaps in specific legal or consumer services. In particular: a Homeless Persons Legal Clinic in the metro area; a centralized Residential Park Homes advice service; and tenant advocacy services in the West Kimberley/Broome area (see also Care and Support: Seniors).

## Care and Support

### *Children, Youth & Families*

37. To increase funding for children in the State care system.
38. That State Government increase funding for both government and non-government therapeutic counseling services for children, including children in care as a major priority.
39. To improve health services for Aboriginal children in Western Australian hospitals, specifically to reduce time on waiting lists; access to paediatricians; access to physiotherapists; and access to speech pathologists.
40. That the State Government provides funding for a dedicated policy and research project to investigate early intervention and protection responses for the needs of children who are victims or witnesses of domestic and family violence, and/or who accompany their mothers/female guardian into Women's Refuge Services.
41. That the State Government increases core funding levels to ensure that women's refuges, DV services and homeless services employ a minimum of two full-time Child Support Workers.
42. That the State Government fund the creation of a Child Advocacy Centre as a model for service delivery which offers a holistic, child focused approach to child protection.
43. Maintain current funding for minor works and capital upgrade of state owned premises operated as Family Centres and Community Based Child Care Centres.
44. That the State Government provides adequate funds to resource and support all young people up to the age 25 leaving care, including but not limited to those with a Comprehensive Care Plan.
45. That the State Government provide funds for the provision of information, access and support to young people who have experienced abuse while in care or who have been victims of crime.
46. That the State Government funds a review of the Early Years Strategy.

### *Disabilities*

47. That the State Government commit to the funding and planning required to ensure that all people with a disability in need of accommodation and respite support services have access to these.
48. That the State Government allocates additional recurrent funding to organisations funded to provide advocacy, individual and systemic, for people with disabilities.
49. That the State government provides funding for programs that support people with disabilities to secure and maintain work.

## **APPENDIX 1**

### **Seniors**

50. That the State Government develops laws to protect seniors from unfair contracts related to their accommodation and establish a Seniors' Housing Advisory Service to provide information and advice to older Western Australians regarding their housing options.
51. That the State Government funds crime prevention strategies aimed at seniors.
52. For the State Government to provide financial assistance to low-income seniors for purchasing mobility equipment, enabling them to live and participate in the community for longer.

### **Carers**

53. For the State Government to provide funding for Carer Representation in order to recognise, engage and support carers in systemic and operational levels of service delivery across the sector.
54. That the State Government increases the funding of Mental Health Carer Representation and Advocacy.
55. That the State Government approve Phase Two of a research project addressing the use of forms and checklists by mental health clinicians to provide a consistent process of gaining consent to release information to family carers.
56. That the State Government, as a matter of urgency, provides ongoing, re-current funding in order to provide consistency for a high number of young carers in need of support services.
57. For the State Government to fund a range of appropriate services for grandparents who are caring for their grandchildren, including financial support (whether in the foster care system or not), and additional Grandparent Playgroups.

### **Essential Services**

58. Develop and fund a comprehensive state-wide energy and water efficiency retrofitting program targeted at lower income households, including through the use of no-interest loan schemes for the purchase of efficient appliances.
59. Implement a Utility Connection Grant Scheme to provide financial assistance to Concession Card Holders and low-income families to cover the cost of utility bills when facing temporary financial difficulties. The scheme should operate within a framework of regulated financial hardship policies for utility providers.
60. Establish a central policy unit to monitor the affordability and accessibility of essential services in Western Australia.
61. Expand the public transport system in Western Australia, focusing on travel within and between suburbs, and increasing the accessibility and accessibility of train and bus services.
62. That Government increase investment in safe, secure and accessible, dedicated walking and cycling routes in the suburbs of Perth, and in the public promotion of alternatives to car use.

## Health

63. To establish an integrated, cross-government council to address health promotion, prevention and intervention in Western Australia.
64. For the current Patients Assisted Transport Scheme (PATS) to be expanded and made more effective by improving the accessibility of the scheme.
65. To allocate funding for a mental health unit at the Broome Hospital, as a part of the current hospital re-development.
66. An allocation of funds to establish mobile mental health clinics, to operate in the areas of highest priority.
67. For Government and service providers to work together to develop a sustainable Youth Mental Health Strategy, ensuring young people's mental health becomes a government priority. This should include the establishment of youth focused multi-disciplinary centres for mental health and wellbeing services.
68. Develop a Mental Health Strategy for seniors to focus energy and resources on the mental health of older Western Australians. This should include the development of community awareness campaigns to promote education and support mental health issues.
69. That the Government invest resources in improving the coordination of dental health services, the access for low-income families, and providing dental health services for homeless people.
70. That the State Government provide accessible, appropriate and effective oral health care for seniors and commit funds to oral health education programs for carers and staff.
71. For the State government to apply resources to address men's health issues, specifically to develop of a state policy on men's health and establish a men's health reference group. The strategy should include men's health related outputs in the Public Health Outcome Funding Agreement.
72. To expand the prison to parole services in order to meet existing demand for community corrections clients and commit to the recommendations made at the WA Illicit Drug Summit (2007).

## Safety and Justice

73. That the State Government supports the establishment of a Safe House for young women aged 14-18 and their children who experience a range of issues including domestic/family violence and homelessness by providing core operational funding.
74. That the State Government continues to support the establishment of additional refuge-based domestic violence outreach services throughout WA to support women and children living in violent relationships.
75. To establish a Short Term Crisis Centre (accommodation and counselling) for Aboriginal men in metropolitan region.

## APPENDIX 1

76. That funds are dedicated on a recurrent basis for the development and delivery of restorative programs for perpetrators of family and domestic violence.
77. That the State Government examine the issue of mutual intimate partner abuse and violence, with a view to providing support services for less prevalent forms of abuse such as same sex partner abuse, male victims, and women who use violence and abuse.
78. That the State Government provide funding for a minimum of two further domestic violence legal workers in the metropolitan region, with consideration for further expansion of services in regional areas, particularly to provide services in the growing communities in the northern corridor, and to provide targeted outreach services to women and children in crisis accommodation at refuges.
79. That the State Government addresses the issue of mutual intimate partner abuse and violence, plus provide support services for men who are victims of abuse and violence and women who use abuse and violence.
80. Ensure the stability and effectiveness of community legal service provision by committing the \$872,339 granted to Community Legal Centres (CLCs) in a range of 1 to 3 year non-recurrent project grants through the Legal Contributions Trust in 2007/08 to recurrent core funding for CLCs as part of the CLC State Funding Program.
81. That funding is allocated to providing family and domestic violence programs, and educational programs to women in prison.
82. Support non-government organisations to develop effective partnerships between the Departments of Justice, Health, Housing, and Education and Training, and other government agencies to work towards the common goal of reducing the cycle of re-offending.

## Education

83. That the Government employs a youth worker in every Western Australian State High School.
84. Allocation of funds for a pilot program in the metropolitan area for a 'Community Development Hub'.
85. Ensure the State government allocates resources and funding to provide services for young mothers in all Western Australian High Schools where required.
86. That every Western Australian high school is provided with the funding and resources to ensure Human Rights education becomes part of the curriculum.
87. That the Government invest resources into regional education needs to improve access to teaching and tutoring support services and by providing greater financial incentives for teachers to work in rural, regional and remote schools.

## Financial Support

88. Establish a Cost of Living Index that takes into consideration factors beyond just those which determine the Consumer Price Index (CPI) and use this index to inform monetary and social policy.
89. Increase funding to the Financial Counselling service providers to ensure the maintenance of metropolitan and regional counselling servicing and to enable the staff to collect information regarding increases to demand for services, recruitment, retention and training issues.
90. That the Government provide funding for the long-term continuation of a Co-ordination Unit for Emergency Relief Providers in WA to facilitate the provision of emergency relief and support the development of providers and continuous improvement of their operations.
91. As recommended in the State Taxation Review, the state should continue to undertake a comprehensive review of State concessions to examine the accessibility, equity and adequacy of state concessions.

## Social Participation

92. Increase the opportunities for migrants and refugees to learn English by working with the Department of Immigration and Citizenship (as a funding body) to provide appropriate courses [at the level of the Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP)], facilities to meet childcare requirements, and additional educational support for people who are pre-literate.
93. Provide more free childcare places for large families to allow a parent to attend English class.
94. Establish an independent State interpreting and translation service, as recommended by the Office of Multicultural Interests needs analysis.
95. That the State Government takes a leadership role, working with federal and local government and with Volunteering WA as the Peak Body for volunteer-involving organisations, to establish a variety of strategies to address the reimbursement of out-of-pocket expenses for volunteers.
96. That the State Government advocate for the abolition of any current awards or agreements that retain the concept of youth wages, ensuring that young people are paid fairly for their commitment to the workforce, and promotes awareness of young peoples working rights through the Office of Fair Employment Advocate.

# Appendix 2

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## List of organisations consulted in the preparation of the 2008/09 Pre-Budget Submission

Aboriginal Health Council  
Aboriginal Legal Service  
Anglicare WA  
Carers WA  
Carewest  
Centrecare  
Children, Youth and Family Agencies Association  
Communicare  
Community Housing Coalition of WA  
Community Legal Centres Association WA  
Coolabaroo  
COTA Council on the Ageing WA Inc  
CREATE Foundation  
Development Disability Council of WA Inc  
Djooraminda  
Edmund Rice Centre for Social Justice  
Ethnic Communities Council  
Financial Counsellors Association  
Health Consumers' Council WA Inc  
Learning Centre Link  
Men's Advisory Network  
Mercy Community Services  
National Disability Services WA  
Noongar Patrol  
Playgroup WA  
Ruah  
RUCSN  
Salvation Army Western Australia  
Shelter WA  
Volunteering Western Australia  
WA Association for Mental Health  
WA Collaboration  
WA Network of Alcohol & Other Drug Agencies  
WA No Interest Loans Network  
Western Institute of Self Help  
Women's Council for Domestic and Family Violence  
Women's Law Centre  
Yorgum Aboriginal Family Counselling Service  
Youth Affairs Council of WA