

WACOSS submission to SDG Inquiry

Executive Summary

The SDGs provide an opportunity to leverage international expertise and best practice to create meaningful and achievable long-term plans, goals and targets addressing the biggest shared social, economic and environmental challenges of our time.

Irrespective of the SDGs, Australia still faces a critical challenge in developing a blueprint for our future sustainable and inclusive development that balances people, prosperity and planet and leaves no-one behind. The SDGs provide a context in which nations and peoples can collaborate to develop common approaches, tools and metrics to address this shared challenge – bringing together the best and brightest on the planet to re-imagine the future.

Australia should be taking the opportunity to identify and align its goals and aspirations with the SDGs and seeking out collaborative opportunities with other advanced nations to significantly improve our capacity and impact.

As a wealthy and well-educated nation with good technical and scientific capacity, Australia also has the opportunity to provide international and regional leadership in areas of specialization and expertise. Focusing our international diplomacy and aid through the lens of where we can make the greatest or most useful contribution to these global priorities, provides an effective means for ensuring we maximize our international impact, enhance our global standing, and build strong and meaningful relationships with our neighbours linked directly to our shared prosperity and security.

At the same time, there are key areas of our social development where Australia is falling behind and has the opportunity to learn from best practice programs and initiatives in other jurisdictions. One of the most critical and internationally embarrassing of these is the gap on Indigenous disadvantage and the lack of opportunity and self-determination provided to our first peoples – recognised as the oldest continuing culture on the planet.

We have also seen in recent years the growth of inequality within our prosperous nation – such that we have gone backwards on Goals 10 and 1 since committing to increase the incomes of the bottom 40% of our community faster than the national average.

There is significant concern that Australia's engagement with the SDGs has primarily been seen through the filter of our International development aid agenda. We have failed to adequately implement and resource our domestic targets and commitments, failed to align Federal and State plans, priorities and reporting mechanisms with the goals, and failed to build the capacity of civil society organisations to participate in and contribute to the goals.

Civil society organisations within Australia have knowledge and expertise, together with access to frontline services and the lived experience of people experiencing vulnerability and disadvantage. They potentially have a lot to contribute and as mission-driven organisations they are inherently inclined to support the SDG agenda. However, their knowledge of and engagement with the implementation of the SDGs is patchy and, given the competing demands for their services and levels of unmet need, they lack the capacity to proactively engage. There is an opportunity to engage them as active partners in domestic measurement, program design and implementation in a cost-effective manner, but more so than the public and private sectors, they need to be resourced to enable their effective engagement.

Recommendations

- Take to heart the core SDG messages and values – That we should prioritise sustainable and inclusive development that balances people, prosperity and planet to deliver a better future for all peoples and leaves no-one behind.
- Develop a national implementation plan for the SDGs, outlining how Australia will achieve the goals.
- Develop an resource a strategy through COAG to identify how existing State and Territory reporting mechanisms can be aligned consistently to report against the goals – this may require some central expertise, outreach and support to prove effective.
- Assess how relevant existing national, State and Territory strategies and programs can be more effectively aligned with the goals and each-other.
- Identify any gaps in Territory, State and National capability that need to be addressed to deliver against agreed SDG priorities.
- Strategically develop or engage with key international and regional partnerships to address critical capability gaps.
- Reach out to regional partners to offer assistance with their domestic efforts to implement the SDGs and offer support where Australian expertise can assist them to address their critical capability gaps.
- Identify shared regional sustainable and inclusive development targets to enhance regional sustainability, prosperity and stability.
- Recognise the critical role of civil society organisations in community engagement and SDG implementation.
- Resource the participation of civil society organisations in strategy development and implementation and build capacity for measurement and implementation.
- Support and enhance the Closing the Gap Targets to address Indigenous disadvantage, including justice, child protection and self-determination targets.
- Develop and implement national poverty and inequality measures, targets and strategies.
- Increase the single rate of unemployment and student payments to lift recipients above the poverty line.
- Develop a simple, more flexible and responsive 21st Century social safety net that better supports those experiencing insecure and precarious work, underemployment and uncertain hours to enhance their financial resilience and job readiness and boost their contribution to our economy and community.
- Reduce the alarming rise of children living in poverty in single parent households by reversing Welfare to Work changes that have seen single parents transferred to Newstart Allowance once their youngest child is over 8 years old.

International context of the SDGs

The Sustainable Development Goals create universal targets for inclusive development that equally apply to developing and developed nations, and to both domestic and overseas aid commitments. They aim to make the world a better place by 2030, setting out a shared agenda to end poverty, promote peace and fairness, and ensure our way of life becomes sustainable. They were unanimously adopted by all 193 member states (including Australia) in 2014. By setting long-term targets they provide an opportunity for nations to plan for and commit to action to deliver long-term benefits that are shared by all, rather than short-term benefits for a few.

The concept of sustainable development ultimately embodies what is arguably the biggest global challenge of our lifetime: How do we strike a fair and lasting balance between our way of life (the economic, social and industrial systems on which our communities depend) and the resilience, carrying capacity and ecological limits of our shared ecosystem? (Sen and Anand 1994, Sen 2000, Sengupta 2016) It is truly a wicked problem, and it lies at the heart of our greatest efforts yet to develop a shared international framework and targets for at once achieving equality and sustainability – the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) were the first concerted global effort to create an international framework and momentum to progress ‘human development’ in under-developed and developing nations (Loewe and Rippin 2015). They focused primarily on addressing third world poverty and boosting international development aid, while also strengthening a discourse around economic justice and the role that developed countries play in creating and maintaining poverty through unfair trade and economic measures (Gupta and Vegelin 2016). Evaluation of the MDGs highlighted some remarkable achievements in coordinating international development, while noting some significant barriers – including third-world nation states with intractable domestic conflicts, and the growth of inequality in the developed and developing worlds (ICSU 2015). A key criticism was their lack of relevance to the plight of disadvantaged communities in the developed world, particularly Indigenous communities and marginalized ethnic minorities (Sengupta 2016, ICSU 2015).

Australia stands out among nations on Indigenous disadvantage, given the gap in life expectancy, economic participation, and opportunity afforded to our First Australians. Aboriginal Australians are over-representation in our justice and child protection systems, at greater risk of poverty, unemployment, homelessness, chronic health and mental health problems – despite representing a comparatively small minority within a very wealthy nation. WACOSS supports the recommendations of the ACOSS submission including prioritizing Indigenous disadvantage and responding to the Uluru Statement from the Heart on voice, treaties and truth telling and the Redfern statement.

The Sustainable Development Goals set out to build on the successes and address the gaps in the MDGs, widening the agenda to include both ‘*inclusive development*’ (Sen 2000) in developing and developed nations (that is, to address growing inequality) and to address critical concerns about ecological sustainability, including resource depletion, ecosystem health and climate change (Loewe and Rippin 2015). They face a significant challenge in seeking to set goals and measure progress across disparate economic and social circumstances and systems, creating a greater role for domestic institutions in setting targets and measuring progress (Sengupta 2016).

While the concept of ‘sustainable development’ is both clear and instructive, its implementation and achievement represents a difficult balancing act, particularly when our development agenda is largely driven by a market-based economy with regulation dominated by short-term political horizons. Can we actually achieve inclusive and sustained economic growth within the limits of our planetary boundaries and resources? How do we ensure a focus on longer-term impacts and outcomes?

Relevance of the SDGs to Australia

When it comes to the challenge of how Australia achieves inclusive and sustainable development the SDGs outline the major challenges that ALL modern societies must come to term with to ensure our future continuity, prosperity and harmony. Reducing poverty and inequality, improving health and education, achieving inclusive growth, gender equality and decent work for all, ensuring sustainable energy and water production and consumption, reducing biodiversity loss, mitigating and adapting to climate change... These are significant long-term challenges that are likely to take time and resources to understand and effectively tackle, but we cannot afford not to take them seriously or we put at risk our way of life and the opportunities and standard of living of our children. At the same time, identifying them as shared international challenges gives us the opportunity to pool and leverage our knowledge and experience, to link up our best and brightest around the globe to develop and implement effective solutions - in line with SDG 17: *Global partnerships for sustainable development*. As a relatively small nation, albeit a wealthy one, our most effective strategy for tackling what are arguably some of our biggest challenges is to collaborate. While we will ultimately get much more out of major international collaborations than we put in, we do need to put time and resources into identifying, facilitating and contributing to collaboration to be a partner and share the benefits.

One key aspect of these partnerships is how we seek out and identify global best practice in those future challenges that represent the greatest priority for our nation, how we engage with, partner, and compliment their efforts to adapt and adopt them to meet our local needs. Australia has the opportunity to use our scientific research capacity and our resources to take a leadership role in priority areas of our choosing, assisting those with relevant knowledge and expertise to enhance the global impact of their work. While DFAT can play a critical role in supporting and facilitating this collaboration, it does not have the capacity, expertise and international networks to effectively lead it or make it happen – this requires reaching into our research, policy development and implementation organisations and providing them with the mechanisms, capacity and resources to pursue national priorities through international collaborations.

Another key aspect of our international engagement is the manner in which we can choose to take a leadership role with our regional neighbours in the Asia-Pacific in our areas of expertise. This will involve taking the opportunity to better leverage our domestic capacity in environmental, technological and social policy areas to enhance the capacity of our near neighbours. It may also require increasing and redirecting some of our overseas aid budget to prioritise critical areas of community development and technology transfer that are likely to make the most critical difference to our neighbours. Doing so is likely to do more for peace and security in our region and strengthening the bonds between nations than any other area of investment or aid. We can also play a critical role in transferring the learnings of the kind of international collaborative projects discussed further above to our regional neighbours and

guiding and supporting their engagement – a relatively low-cost, high-impact strategy for regional development.

The role of civil society

‘Civil society’ or ‘third sector’ organisations are recognized as playing a critical role in international development and social justice, with the UN supporting and reporting their contributions to global outcomes (United Nations 2009, UNDoESA 2016). Australian peak advocacy organisations argue that civil society will need to play a critical role if we are to successfully develop meaningful and effective domestic goals (ACFID et.al. 2016).

There is significant concern across civil society organisations and forums in Australia that our response to the SDGs has been framed within and dominated by an overseas aid and foreign policy agenda. Responsibility for governance and oversight of our UN SDG commitments has been assigned to Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, and the coordination and implementation of our response has largely been dominated by their priorities and policy agenda. While it makes sense that they are best placed to maintain and support our engagement with UN processes, however their lack of capacity for domestic engagement combined with the overall lack of capacity or commitment for cross-government collaboration and coordination at a Federal level continue to significantly undermine the development of a domestic reform agenda to implement our SDG commitments. Australia has committed through the United Nations to implement the SDG goals, which includes a commitment to develop measures and targets to address the goals within Australia. This has significant implications for addressing poverty and growing wealth inequality within Australia, gender equity, Indigenous disadvantage in health, participation and life outcomes, the sustainability of our cities and the protection of our lands and seas.

Poverty and Inequality Targets (SDGs 1 & 10)

WACOSS supports the recommendations of the submission made by ACOSS, particularly in relation to priority actions including developing an agreed definition of poverty, increasing unemployment and student payments, rent assistance and family payments, and closing the gap on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander disadvantage.

Looking forward and being deliberative and proactive about the kind of community we want to create means taking a different approach to our understanding and efforts to manage and direct the economy. Progressive economics suggest we should view the economy not as an end in and of itself, nor as something we are determined and beholden by, or need to react to ... but as something we manage as a means to producing the kind of community in which we want to live.

There are a few key components to a more proactive approach. Firstly, understanding, managing and sustainably growing the Care Economy. Secondly, looking at the future of work to consider whether current trends like underemployment, insecure work hours and income are desirable ... are workers actually seeing the benefits of flexibility – or do we want to better regulate work to prevent the development of a growing underclass? (Discussed in more detail in our recent [WACOSS Submission to The Future of Work Inquiry](#)).

Thirdly, considering whether our social security system is still fit for purpose and giving thought to what a 21st Century social safety net should look like – given the changing nature of

work and what we've learned about the longer term impacts of poverty and income insecurity on people's well-being and productivity.

Findings of recent research in 7 OECD nations including Australia demonstrated that there is a much greater 'stimulus' boost to the economy as a whole, to employment (and particularly the employment of women) by investing in social rather than physical infrastructure (De Henau et.al. 2016). This analysis revealed the dramatic positive benefits to the economy and employment of investment in social infrastructure, (such as education, care and health services, and social care) in comparison to investment in construction of physical infrastructure.

They found that if 2 per cent of our GDP was invested in the care industry it would directly create 356,812 (nearly 400,000) new jobs and raise the employment rate by 2.3 per cent. If we add in the indirect effects through the supply chain and the induced effects from increased demand within the economy, the impact increases to 613,597 new jobs in Australia and a rise in the employment rate by 4.0 per cent.

The same level of investment into the construction industry creates 74,791 (under 75,000) jobs directly and 387,452 (less than 400,000) jobs when induced and indirect effects are included, raising the total employment rate by just 2.5 per cent.

This is not factoring in the additional productivity and well-being boost from the outcomes of that employment into the future from those who are educated, cared for, and better enabled to reach their full potential to contribute to our community and economy.

We saw this in practice in Australia during the GFC, with the Jobs Package and associated investment into services to support those most at risk of financial hardship evaluated as being the most productive aspect of the Rudd/Swan stimulus package.

International trends suggest that the wider service economy and the care economy in particular will continue to grow. The future of human work is to become *more* human – to better amplify and enable what it is we do best for and with each-other. One part of this may be helping our machines and technologies become more human, but the real effect is amplification, not displacement.

In WA our projections for the demands for the WA care workforce - particularly in health, ageing and disability services - suggests the workforce will need to double or even triple by 2030. However, we do not yet have a clear strategy, training and investment pathway in place to meet this future demand.

The key question for policy makers is the extent to which we have planned growth and a smooth transition – do we have the workforce development strategy and training programs to deliver the quality workforce we will need? Are we growing service organisations and social infrastructure in a sustainable manner?

When we consider the evidence about the economic stimulus derived from such growth and its role in the wider transition to a service economy, it creates new options for managing our economy with an eye on future prosperity and quality of life. It suggests that Governments would be wise to use counter-cyclical social investment as a tool for smoothing economic downturns and stimulating growth when the economy is sluggish.

This is the exact opposite of current trends, whereby we see significant cuts to social service spending during economic downturns (to reduce deficits) and increased investment in social services during good times, delivering 'a social dividend'.

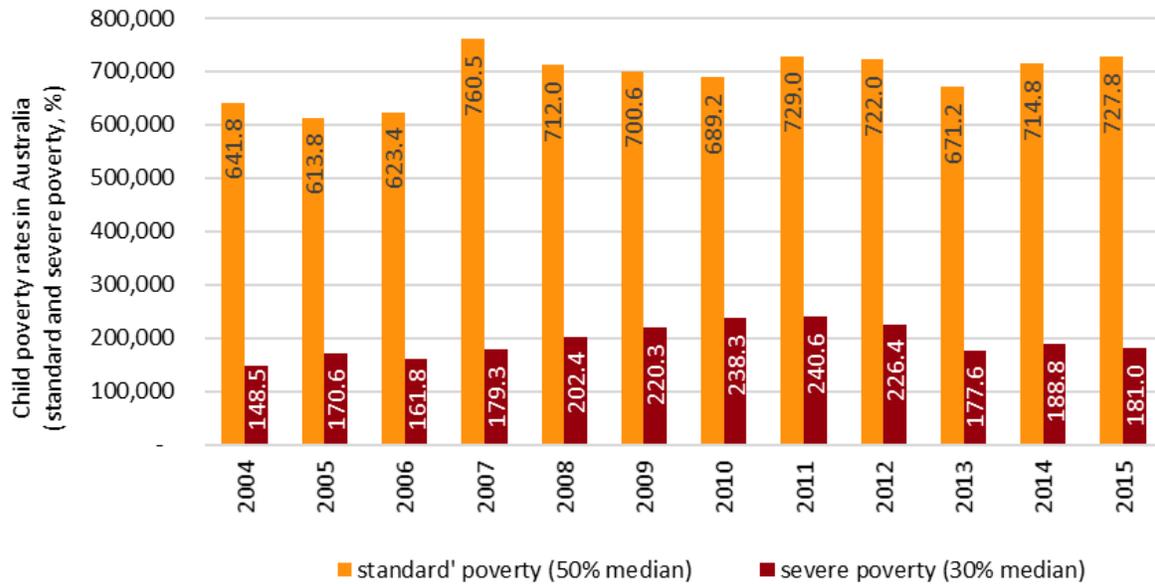
To put it another way, if we know that the care economy needs to grow in coming decades to meet demand, shouldn't we be considering the most productive and effective way to get there? Rather than be reactive and pursuing a 'just in time' strategy that is likely to result in us importing future carers from overseas. We should seek to get ahead of the curve and build a competitive advantage with our trading partners, and plan and time our investment in services and social infrastructure to best balance and stimulate our domestic economy at key points in its cycle.

One of the greatest boosts that the care economy can provide to productivity across our economy is to empower those who are currently excluded and enable them to reach their full potential. We know those on the lowest incomes who are underemployed and in low skilled work will immediately spend the majority of any new income on basic goods and services – straight back into the economy. To do so we need to overturn the narrative of punitive welfare that sees the unemployed as a drag on our economy, who need to be punished and starved into work, and view them instead as a resource that needs to be developed to release its economic potential.

This leads us to the question of the current effectiveness of our social security safety-net. Two decades of this punitive welfare policies have undermined the resilience of those caught in long-term underemployment – the inadequacy of payments acts as a barrier to the mobility and work-readiness of those on benefits. At the same time the rate of structural employment is such that there are simply not the jobs there for those seeking work, if we are not actively and deliberately seeking to create them.

Recent analysis by Bankwest Curtin Economic Centre shows the impact of the Welfare to Work measures moving single parents onto Newstart on the dramatic rise of children living in poverty. Firstly, considering national child poverty rates over time we can see in Figure 1 a rise in child poverty and severe poverty rates post 2006, with some stabilization over time albeit at a higher rate.

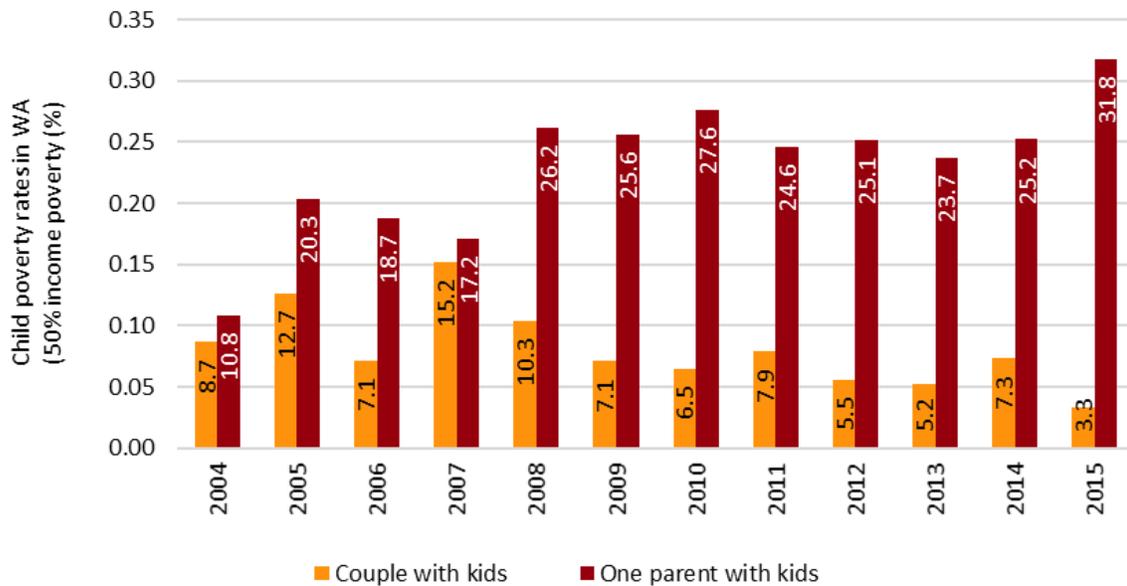
Figure 1. National Child Poverty Rates



Source: Bankwest Curtin Economic Centre presentation, WACOSS Emerging Issues Forum 2018

However, when we look at rates of child poverty in single parent households the increases are much more dramatic post the 2006 *Welfare to Work* changes by the Howard Government, and post the 2013 removal of grandfathering provisions by Jenny Macklin and the Gillard Government.

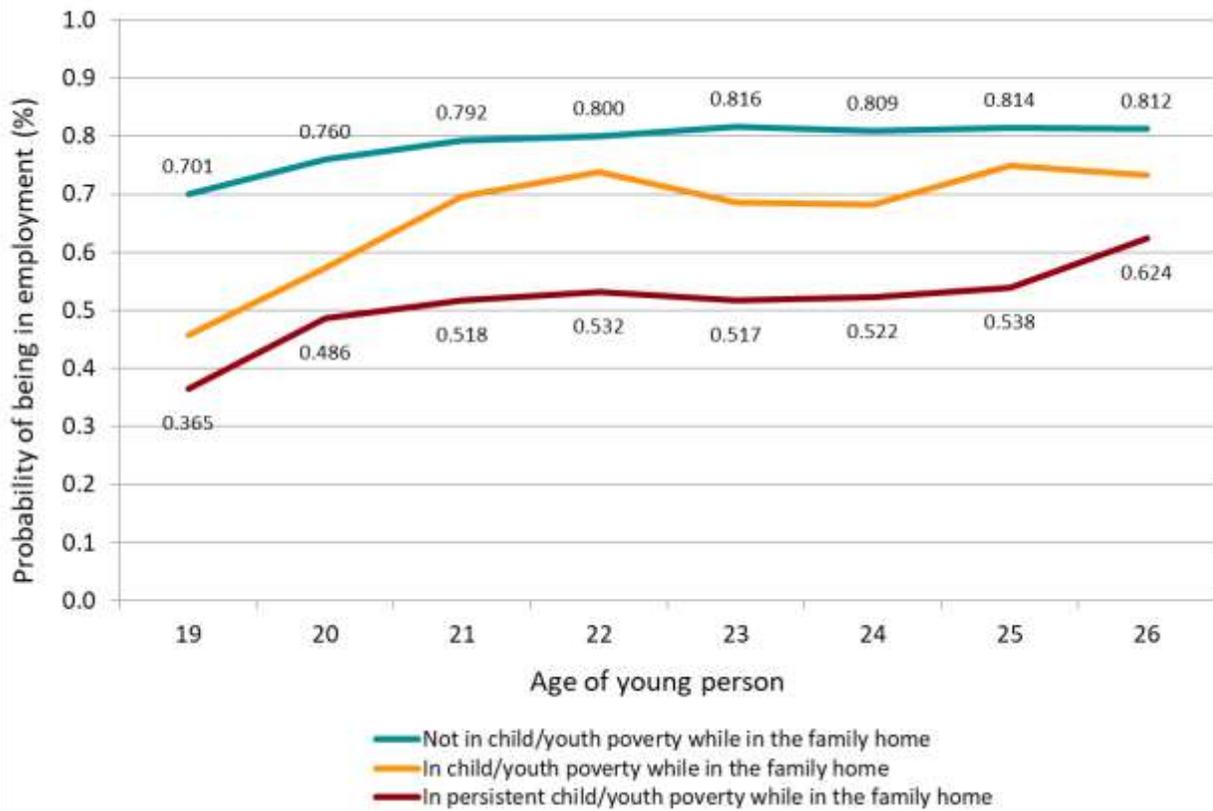
Figure 2. WA Child Poverty Rates Prevalence by Family Type



Source: Bankwest Curtin Economic Centre presentation, WACOSS Emerging Issues Forum 2018

Furthermore, recent analysis of HILDA data by Bankwest Curtin Economic Centre shows the significant poorer workforce outcomes experienced by young people who have grown up in persistent poverty. Selecting young people for whom there was at least three years data before and after leaving the family home, the analysis compares outcomes dependent on their level of financial vulnerability between those who faced no poverty in the family home, those who had experienced some degree of poverty, and those experiencing persistent poverty for three years or more in the family home.

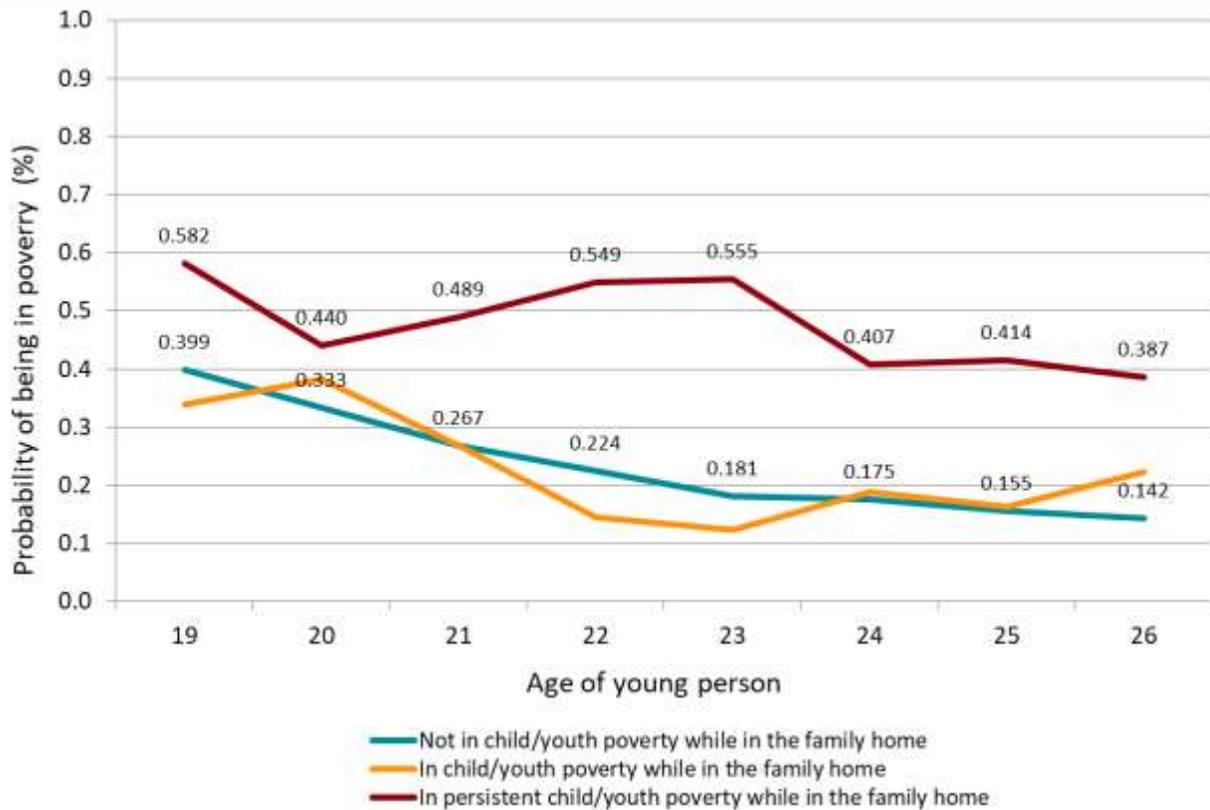
Figure 3. Workforce Outcomes for Young People Leaving Home



Source: Bankwest Curtin Economic Centre presentation, WACOSS Emerging Issues Forum 2018

The data clearly shows the longer term impacts for young people raised in persistent poverty – with nearly half the rate of employment during their first year of independence (36% vs 70%) and they are still struggling to catch up seven years later, with an employment rate of 62% vs 81%. Furthermore, as figure 4 shows below, they are much more likely to experience poverty themselves on leaving home and for that poverty to persist.

Figure 4. Poverty Risk for Young People Leaving Home



Source: Bankwest Curtin Economic Centre presentation, WACOSS Emerging Issues Forum 2018

This highlights both that reducing child poverty needs to be a national priority, and that significantly more employment assistance should be provided to young people from disadvantaged backgrounds.

We are arguing that the focus of welfare policy should be on the resilience and work-readiness of those on income support. That a *21st Century social safety net* should be more flexible and responsive – to help those transitioning in and out of short-term precarious work maintain their financial resilience and to assist those with uncertain and unpredictable income to smooth out their budgets and stabilize their lives. This is the exact opposite of the series of changes we have seen under the punitive welfare experiment of the last two decades.

A fit-for-purpose social security safety net would allow greater simplicity and flexibility in reporting periods, knowing we will ultimately have access to all income data. Such data and analysis will increasingly move from being retrospective to real-time, and clients will increasingly expect to have access to their records to enable them to track their entitlements and obligations so they can make more informed budgeting and work activity decisions. Simplifying the system and empowering those on income support will substantially reduce administrative overheads and compliance costs, while providing greater income security and resilience.

An evidence-based approach to workforce preparedness, resilience and flexibility that takes its lead from best practice in other jurisdictions with more developed and diversified knowledge and service economies will result in a modern social safety net that makes us forwardly

competitive in a rapidly changing world and better able to respond to innovation and opportunity. We need a system that is better able to support those moving in and out of precarious employment to enhance their financial resilience - so they are able to respond in a timely manner to employment opportunities and to make a productive contribution to our community.

A simpler system might be based on a guaranteed adequate income, proportional to need and pegged to a basic living standard relative to the cost of living and community expectations.

The key question for policy makers is the extent to which we have planned growth and a smooth transition – do we have the workforce development strategy and training programs to deliver the quality workforce we will need? Are we growing service organisations and social infrastructure in a sustainable manner?

When we consider the evidence about the economic stimulus derived from such growth and its role in the wider transition to a service economy, it creates new options for managing our economy with an eye on future prosperity and quality of life. It suggests that Governments would be wise to use counter-cyclical social investment as a tool for smoothing economic downturns and stimulating growth when the economy is sluggish. This is the exact opposite of current trends, whereby we see significant cuts to social service spending during economic downturns (to reduce deficits) ... and increased investment in social services during good times delivering ‘a social dividend’.

To put it another way, if we know that the care economy needs to grow in coming decades to meet demand ... should we be considering the most productive and effective way to get there? Rather than be reactive and pursuing a ‘just in time’ strategy that is likely to result in us importing future carers from overseas, we should seek to get ahead of the curve and build a competitive advantage with our trading partners, and plan and time our investment in services and social infrastructure to best balance and stimulate our domestic economy at key points in its cycle (while at the same time increasing the capacity of our current and future workforce).

One of the greatest boosts that the care economy can provide to productivity across our economy is to empower those who are currently excluded and enable them to reach their full potential. We know those on the lowest incomes who are underemployed and in low skilled work will immediately spend the majority of any new income on basic goods and services – straight back into the economy. Such an approach makes a shift from viewing the unemployed simply as a drag on our economy, who need to be ‘incentivised’ into work, to view them instead as a resource that needs to be developed to release its economic potential.

This leads us to the question of our social security safety-net. Two decades of punitive welfare policies have undermined the resilience of those caught in long-term underemployment – the inadequacy of payments acts as a barrier to the mobility and work-readiness of those on benefits... At the same time the rate of structural employment is such that there are not the jobs there for those seeking work ... if we are not actively and deliberately seeking to create them.

We are arguing that the focus of welfare policy should be on the resilience and work-readiness of those on income support. That a 21st Century social safety net should be more flexible and responsive, to help those transitioning in and out of short-term precarious work to maintain their financial resilience and to assist those with uncertain and unpredictable income to smooth out their budgets and stabilize their lives to support and enable a greater contribution to

our economy. This is the exact opposite of the series of changes we have seen over the last two decades.

A fit-for-purpose social security safety net would allow greater simplicity and flexibility in reporting periods, knowing we will ultimately have access to all income data. Such data and analysis will increasingly move from being retrospective to real-time, and clients will increasingly expect to have access to their records to enable them to track their entitlements and obligations so they can make more informed budgeting and work activity decisions. Simplifying the system and empowering those on income support will substantially reduce administrative overheads and compliance costs, while providing greater income security and resilience.

An evidence-based approach to workforce preparedness, resilience and flexibility that takes its lead from best practice in other jurisdictions with more developed and diversified knowledge and service economies will result in a modern social safety net that makes us forwardly competitive in a rapidly changing world and better able to respond to innovation and opportunity. WACOSS recommends a review of the social security system to ensure that it is fit for purpose given the changing nature of work. One that is better able to support those moving in and out of precarious employment to enhance their financial resilience - so they are able to respond in a timely manner to employment opportunities and to make a productive contribution to our community. A simpler system might be based on a guaranteed adequate income – proportional to need and pegged to a basic living standard relative to the cost of living and community expectations.

Closing the Gap on Indigenous Disadvantage

The gap in economic participation and life outcomes for Aboriginal Australians remains significant. This is in part a legacy of the impacts of past policies and practices, part a consequence of health, education and support service systems that are inappropriate or inadequate to meet levels of need, and part simply a consequence of poverty and lack of opportunity. Fear and lack of trust also play a critical role in lower rates of access to universal and secondary support services, particularly when it comes to justice and child protection services that many families associate with former stolen generation practices.

The recent Closing the Gap report illustrates the vast gulf between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. Despite progress on child mortality, early childhood education and Year 12 attainment, Australia is not on track to meet targets for school attendance, reading and numeracy, life expectancy and employment. Improved transparency of measuring and reporting progress is translating into only modest progress.

There is a strong argument for a greater focus on Aboriginal employment in health, education and community services. Given the projected growth of the service and caring economy, and disproportionately high levels of need for services and support by Aboriginal families and communities, the development of a human services workforce also offers an excellent opportunity for increasing economic participation, helping develop more sustainable and resilient local economies.

A planned and sustained strategy is needed to develop a skilled Aboriginal workforce and build sustainable Aboriginal organisations and businesses by setting clear employment and training targets.

A combination of contracting requirements, additional incentives, and training support is likely to deliver the most effective outcomes. Contracts over a certain size should include minimum employment and training requirements, additional resources made available to leverage increased employment outcomes, and access to targeted support to ensure Aboriginal workers are work-ready, have access to additional training where necessary and their supervisors and co-workers have access to appropriate information and assistance.

There is a significant risk that a strategy that does not address these gaps and challenges would be setting up Aboriginal people, communities and community services to fail. Mission-driven organisations may be willing and motivated to employ and train local Aboriginal workers, but many smaller, regional and specialist providers may lack the capacity and resources to do so effectively. There is a clear role for government to commission appropriate employment support services at a local or regional level to provide appropriate support. Existing Aboriginal organisations may be best placed to deliver this support, and the Aboriginal community-controlled health sector has a strong record of outcomes in this area.

While increasing Aboriginal employment in mainstream services is necessary to ensure they are more accessible and appropriate for Aboriginal clients, much stronger gains are likely to be made in delivering responsive services that achieve transformative and sustainable outcomes in service areas with a high proportion of Aboriginal clients by increasing the role of the Aboriginal community-controlled organisations (ACCOS).

Aboriginal community-controlled services already deliver a larger and increasing proportion of community services in other jurisdictions, particularly in service areas where there are a significant proportion of Aboriginal service users. This includes child safety and intensive family support; out of home care and family reunification; justice diversion and youth at risk services; mental health, alcohol and other drug services; health, education and aged care. NSW and Victoria have strong ACCO sectors responsible for ensuring the application of the Aboriginal Placement Principles, facilitating Aboriginal Family Led Decision Making processes, and providing case management for children within the child protection system. Queensland has recently adopted a similar approach. WA has the lowest level of investment in family support and intensive family support services, with the majority of investment going into out of home care and protective intervention.

There is a strong and well-established Aboriginal community-controlled health services sector (ACCHSs) in WA that has the capacity, the community reputation and trust, and the local governance structures to play a critical role in establishing or supporting community services. While partnerships with mainstream community service providers based on the national partnership principles¹ (x) provide one mechanism for establishing and building the capacity, ACCHSs may be better able to establish local Aboriginal community services more quickly and sustainably, as they have established local infrastructure, and experience in training and supporting an Aboriginal workforce. There may also be emergent opportunities for service co-location and cross-referral as well as the sharing of back of office and governance structures.

In addition to supporting and encouraging the development of Aboriginal workers, larger community service programs and initiatives should also include provisions and resources to

¹WACOSS promotes the [APONT Partnership Principles](#) to its members and has recommend that the WA Government develop matching commissioning principles to ensure service contracts recognize and support fair and appropriate partnerships that transfer responsibility and control to ACCOs.

enable the development of local community-controlled services as part of a whole of government ACCO strategy. We note that there has been a trend in human services towards fewer contracts with larger organisations, which is assumed to reduce the administrative burden of contract management within government, reduce duplication between service providers, and improve service efficiency. This trend, however, works against the interests of smaller local services and place-based strategies, potentially making it difficult to develop a local workforce, or increase service user engagement and trust. An alternative model is to have ACCHSs or mainstream services auspice local services, providing transitional backbone support or oversight in finance, governance, service reporting and HR. Service contracts need to be able to support the transfer of responsibility and control over time and tendering and commissioning processes need to both allow sufficient time for the development of such arrangements, be sensitive to and include provisions that support partnerships and transfer of control, and use local knowledge to ground-truth claims of local engagement.

Links

[WACOSS Submission on the Future of Work and Workers](#)

[WACOSS Cost of Living Report 2017](#)

[WACOSS 2018-2019 Pre-Budget Submission](#)

[WACOSS Submission to the State Wage Case, May 2017](#)

[WACOSS Emerging Issues Forum 2018](#)

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