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Executive Summary

The Western Australian Council of Social Service is pleased to present the 2007/2008 Pre-Budget Submission ***A Vision Beyond the Boom*** to the State Government of Western Australia.

There are two sections in this document. In the first section we concentrate on the 'Big Picture' – we call on State Government to develop an overall vision for social wellbeing in Western Australia, supported by a well resourced Social Plan and ways to measure how we are going in achieving this Plan (social indicators).

Achieving an ambitious social vision will only be possible with an ongoing and successful partnership with the Community Services Sector. This was confirmed in all of our consultations with Western Australian peak organisations in the Community Services Sector, where a remarkably consistent theme emerged. This theme was the importance of supporting a strong and thriving community services sector, to ensure that the best quality services are delivered to people in need.

The recommendations in the first section focus on creating a partnership between State Government and the community services sector to determine quality, value and improvement in the sector. WACOSS calls on the Government to work with the sector in developing a workforce plan for the community services sector, to establish a new Ministerial portfolio for the Community Sector, and to specifically examine the full cost of service delivery in rural, regional and remote areas.

In the second section of the document we concentrate on the range of concerns raised by the peak organisations of the Community Services Sector and other key stakeholders, under eight broad headings: Housing; Care and Support; Essential Services; Health; Financial Wellbeing; Safety; Education; and Social participation.

In addition to the importance of planning a social vision for the future and supporting the value of the community services sector there are two areas that are of particular concern for the 2007/08 budget; Housing and Children.

Since the release of the 2006/07 Pre-Budget Submission, access to affordable housing has dramatically worsened in Western Australia. The need to continue and increase funding for initiatives under the Homelessness Strategy and Supported Accommodation Assistance services remains. WACOSS once again calls for Government support for a range of strategies to address housing affordability including increasing public housing stock, expanding community housing and assisting to halt the decline of boarding and lodging houses.

In the area of children's protection and support there is an urgent need for government to lead the development of a more integrated approach to the many areas of work in both the community and government. WACOSS is calling for a commitment to implementing the strategic approach recommended by the *Caring Well Protecting Well* report, for maintaining funding for family and community based child care centres, and for providing better support to grandparents, who play a crucial role in children's wellbeing.

Summary of Recommendations

A Social Vision for Western Australia

1. Immediately begin the development of a plan to improve the wellbeing of all Western Australians and address disadvantage. The plan should be supported with adequate resources to ensure it is fully implemented.
2. Develop a system of regular social reporting against established benchmarks and indicators, which are closely linked to the targets of the proposed Plan for Social Wellbeing.

Strengthening Community Services

1. State Government commit to working with the sector to determine:
 - The total value of the programs currently delivered (beyond service delivery);
 - The value of quality improvement initiatives currently being undertaken by the sector;
 - The total cost of delivering services including an accurate costing of current and future overheads; and
 - Appropriate pricing principles for government funding to enable Full Cost Recovery for the sector.

This should be conducted by a Taskforce (possibly under the umbrella of the Industry Council) made up of Government and Sector representatives.

2. A comprehensive workforce plan for the Community Services sector should be completed. This workforce plan would be overseen by a Human Services Industry Taskforce made up of Government and Sector representatives.
3. Create a new Ministerial portfolio dedicated to the Community Services Sector, supported by an Office for the Community Services Sector.
4. As part of the investigations into full cost recovery, provision should be made for regional differences in costs, and service agreements increased accordingly.

Housing

1. Continue to fund and expand homelessness initiatives under the State Homeless Strategy. Continue the State Homelessness Strategy initiatives and expand these programs.
2. Increase funding for existing agencies already funded through the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program Five (SAAP 5) to meet the identified shortfall.
3. Funding to public housing should be increased by an extra \$122 million per year in order to meet the current demand as indicated by the waiting list to 2025.

4. Increase the amount of appropriate social, community and crisis housing available to particularly disadvantaged groups: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, children and young people, people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds (CaLDB) large families, women, people with disabilities (under the Independent Living Program), , people with mental illnesses and people released from prison.
5. That the State Government provide appropriate housing (i.e. group units) for young people under 18 years old with mental health problems. Funding should be provided to support residents with experienced staff and independent living skills programs.
6. Allocate an additional \$10 million to community housing for four years from July 2007 with 25% of this directed towards the development of affordable housing options and fund training for staff and volunteers in community housing organisations.
7. Release the \$25 million in funding promised under the Key Provider Strategy.
8. Increase the supply of and support existing boarding and lodging houses in WA as outlined in the Response to the Department of Housing and Works Housing Strategy WA Draft Discussion Paper from the 'Where Will They Live' Campaign stakeholders
9. Increase the supply of affordable and appropriate accommodation in regional areas, including options for home purchasing, private rental and social housing.
10. Increase the amount of social and affordable housing using a range of initiatives across State and Local Governments.
11. The Premier and Cabinet examine and resolve national and state government policy issues to support service providers to work in a more integrated way to address the complex needs of their clients. An essential component of a coordinated initiative is an integrated crisis response to assist people with both mental health and drug and alcohol issues with measures to prevent homelessness.

Care and Support

1. Fund a strategic "whole of community" approach to children's and young people's wellbeing, which is based on the 2004 Caring Well Protecting Well Report¹. An implementation framework, based on this important work, should be developed in partnership with industry and the community sector.
2. Maintain current funding for minor works and capital upgrade of state owned premises as Family Centres and Community Based Child Care Centres.
3. Fund a range of appropriate support services for grandparents who are caring for their grandchildren.
4. Take urgent, immediate steps to ensure that all people with disabilities, who are in critical need of assistance, are able to access the following services:
 - accommodation support;

¹ Harries, M., Harris, T., Diamond, S. and Mackenzie, G. (2004) *Caring Well – Protecting Well: Investing in systemic responses to protect children in WA*, The Ministerial Advisory Council on Child Protection Western Australia, Perth

- individual and family support;
 - an alternative to employment option (some may not want this);
 - full access to therapy required to develop skills, maximise independence and maintain health; and
 - that all eligible young children with a disability have access to a properly resourced and effective early intervention programme.
5. Allocate additional recurrent funding to organisations currently funded to provide individual advocacy for people with disabilities. Allocate additional funding to organisations providing systemic advocacy for people with disabilities.
 6. Fund the non-government sector to deliver transition care programs for elderly people
 7. Ensure that eligibility for the Community Aids and Equipment scheme is again made available to people in receipt of Commonwealth Aged Care funding.

Essential Services

1. Implement a Utilities Assistance Scheme to provide one-off financial assistance to Concession Card Holders and low-income families to cover the cost of utility bills when facing temporary financial difficulties.
2. Develop and fund a comprehensive state-wide energy and water efficiency retrofitting programs, particularly for all Department of Housing and Works properties. This should be accompanied by a widespread community education and awareness program on energy and water efficiency.
3. Expand the public transport system in Western Australia, focusing on travel within and between suburbs, and increasing accessibility of trains and buses.
4. Increase investment in safe, secure and accessible, dedicated walking and cycling routes in the suburbs of Perth.

Health

1. Commit additional resources to assist low income families and elderly people to access high quality dental care including early intervention and on-going monitoring of oral health.
2. Fund the Country Health Service to expand the Patients Assistance Transport Scheme and to develop a Strategic Plan for the scheme.
3. Fund the implementation of the Community/ Consumer Engagement Framework in the Department of Health.
4. Fund the Department of Health to develop strategic plan for improving Men's Health.
5. Develop a strategic approach to addressing complex health needs (or co-morbidity) in young people. Fund workforce development and capacity building in alcohol and other drug sector, mental health sector and youth sector to address these issues.

6. Fund mobile health units to work specifically with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people throughout metropolitan and regional areas, staffed by culturally aware community health workers.
7. Fund specific alcohol and other drug services in regional areas, focused on the needs of Aboriginal people to develop prevention and early intervention resources specific to individual communities and provide continued care in the local communities.
8. Fund specialist mental health services for seniors, people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds (CaLD), Aboriginal people and for regional and remote areas.
9. Fund an education program in response to increased incidence of hepatitis C, with a particular focus on expansion and diversification of services to enhance prevention of people at risk from contracting hepatitis C; and to support those living with hepatitis C, including in regional and rural areas.
10. Expand the range of services provided to people suffering from a neurological condition by providing additional funds for services in the home and community, such as community based social workers to provide for people with neurological conditions, or a funded centralised information/education resource centre for people with neurological conditions

Financial Wellbeing

1. As recommended in the State Taxation Review, undertake a comprehensive review of State concessions to examine the accessibility, equity and adequacy of state concessions. In addition, the review 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.
2. Establish a Cost of Living Index that takes into consideration, factors beyond just those which determine the Consumer Price Index, and ensure that all future taxes and charges be kept at or below the Cost of Living Index.
3. Subject all State Revenue Proposals to a Social Impact Assessment to ensure that they do not unfairly impact on low-income families and individuals.
4. Extend the range of concessions currently granted to Seniors to the approximately 18,400 family carers under the age of 60 who are in receipt of carer allowance and the 115,800 people who are severely or profoundly disabled.

Safety

1. Enable the employment of Children's Domestic Violence Specialist Workers (or equivalent) in Women's Refuge and Domestic Violence Services to reduce the impact of domestic and family violence on the lives of children.
2. Expand the Refuge based Outreach Model to locations where Women's Refuge and Safe Houses exist to ensure a state-wide network of domestic and family violence outreach services are available to support women and children exiting the Refuge and/or living in violent relationship.

3. Fund the establishment of specialist domestic violence services in a range of areas, in particular, a refuge for young women, a specialist counselling service for men who are victims of violence, and a specialist service for CaLD communities who are experiencing domestic and family violence.
4. Fund an alcohol diversion program in conjunction with police and the justice system.

Education

1. Develop a range of strategies to encourage young people from CaLD and Aboriginal backgrounds to stay at school longer including:
 - Early intervention approaches to work with Aboriginal and CaLD students at risk;
 - Specially designed services and support to children of refugees and asylum seekers in primary and high schools;
 - Pre-traineeship courses for Aboriginal and CaLD young people requiring additional support;
 - Flexible learning program to meet the specific needs of the Aboriginal and CaLD young people identified as having limited schooling with inadequate literacy and numeracy skills;
 - Provide funding for staff development programs, especially cross-cultural awareness
2. Fund programs targeted at young mothers to keep them in the formal education system.

Social Participation

1. Establish an independent State Interpreting and Translation Unit, as recommended by the Office of Multicultural Interests *Needs Analysis*.
2. Explore potential barriers to volunteering such as the impact of the cost of Volunteer Personal Accident Premiums on service delivery; the cost/benefit of increasing the standard reimbursements for volunteers; and cost/benefit of reducing the cost (financially and time-wise) of police and Working With Children checks for volunteers.
3. Commit funding in the long term to increase funding for the provision of services for young people.

SECTION ONE: Building the Vision

A Social Vision for Western Australia

The Western Australian economy is moving so fast that not everyone in our community can keep pace. More and more people are finding themselves being left behind and suffering the negative affects of being excluded from the 'boom times'.

Western Australia's economic strength affords us a unique opportunity to invest in improving the well being of all Western Australians from a social perspective. The State Government must take advantage of the current climate by creating a positive 'social vision' for the state, and then, by investing in the overall well being of our communities.

Levels of poverty and disadvantage are significant and becoming more entrenched. The gap is widening between high income earners and the disadvantaged. Poverty and social exclusion are closely linked to a variety of adverse outcomes, both to the individuals and families experiencing it as well as to the wider community and the economy. Domestic violence, crime, poor health outcomes, engagement in health risk behaviours, child abuse, homelessness, mental health problems, educational exclusion or under achievement, and barriers to employment are among these outcomes.

Social commentators like Hugh MacKay often point to broad support for reaching beyond economic growth in the pursuit of social wellbeing. "In a 1999 survey, 75 per cent of respondents agreed that, 'too much emphasis is put on improving the economy and too little on creating a better society'. In a 2002 poll, 83 per cent agreed that 'Australian society is too materialistic, with too much emphasis on money and not enough on the things that really matter.'²

The quest for Governments to achieve healthy economic outcomes has been a key driving force behind the adoption of plans to address poverty, disadvantage and inequity in many countries around the world. For example, Ireland's National Anti-Poverty Strategy, first introduced in 1997, has been particularly effective. Following this success, the entire EU now has a commitment to make a decisive impact on poverty and social exclusion by 2010. Each member state was required to submit a two-year National Action Plan against Poverty and Social Exclusion to the EU Commission by July 2006.

Closer to home, in 2005 the State Government of Victoria released its plan: *A Fairer Victoria: Creating opportunity and addressing disadvantage*.³ The Victorian Government invested \$788 million in *A Fairer Victoria*, a social policy action plan with 14 strategic areas aimed at reducing disadvantage and creating opportunities. On 1 June 2006 the Premier of Victoria released a progress report and allocated an additional investment of \$848 million.

It is imperative that within this booming economy driven by the strong demand for our mineral wealth, the WA State Government define a whole-of-government plan for 'social wellbeing'.

The Social Policy Research Centre has estimated that to eradicate poverty from Australia it would only cost a small fraction of Australia's Gross Domestic Product – a mere 2.4%.

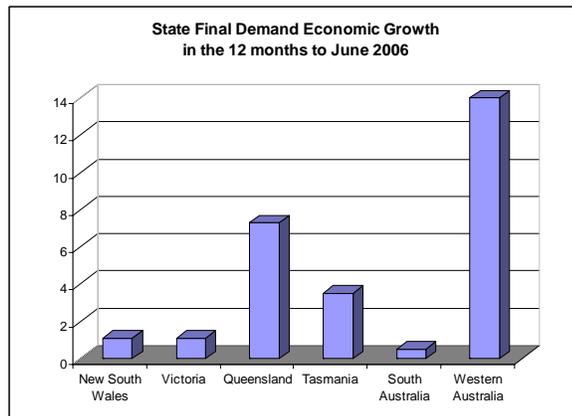
² Clive Hamilton, *Growth Fetish*, Sydney, Allen & Unwin, 2003.

³ Department of Premier and Cabinet, Melbourne Victoria 2005.

The facts are:

- Every day, 35 people, many with children, are turned away from services for homeless people in Western Australia.
- Specific groups have experienced harsher changes in the cost of living: Aged and Disability Support pensioners who are reliant on the rental market and public transport, for example, have experienced cost increases that were 30% greater than that underlying inflation rate.⁴
- Housing affordability is in crisis: both houses for purchase and rental accommodation at the low end of the price scale are scarce with increasing numbers of Western Australians in housing stress (paying more than 30% of their income on housing costs).
- It is estimated that the percentage of children living in poverty is between 13% and 17%.

The State economic boom, which has created a generous budget surplus, presents a unique opportunity to break the cycle of poverty for all Western Australians and to secure a 'fair go' for all. In its May 2006 Budget the State Government "*committed to ensuring that no Western Australians are left behind in the plan to build on our economic boom.*" The Treasurer announced increased funding to support people with disabilities, vulnerable children, seniors and volunteers, and women and children who are victims of domestic violence.⁵



Without diminishing the significance of this support for these vulnerable groups, an integrated whole-of-government vision for creating a fairer society is needed in order to achieve sustainable outcomes.

Economic indicators put WA at the forefront of the nation for housing, jobs, business investment and resources. On the back of a 51.2% rise in business investment, Western Australia's domestic economy grew at 14 per cent in the June quarter 2006, compared with the same period a year earlier - higher than China's growth rate of 11.3 per cent and the fastest in the nation.⁶ While this is certainly a worthy achievement, WACOSS would welcome equal achievements on indicators of social performance.

In this context, WACOSS makes the following recommendations to the Western Australian State Government, firstly on, Developing a Plan for Social Well-being and then on Social Reporting for Western Australia.

⁴ Gavin Dufty, "Poor households bear greater cost burden" media release, St Vincent de Paul Society, National Council of Australia Inc. Social Policy Issues Paper 2: *Winners and Losers: the story of costs.*

⁵ Treasurer Eric Ripper *State Budget 2006-2007: Building on the Boom, Taking care of all Western Australians.* Media Release 11 May 2006.

⁶ WA Treasurer Eric Ripper, *Western Australia is Growing Faster than China* Media Release 6 Sept 2006.

Developing a Plan for Social Wellbeing

Recommendation:

Immediately begin the development of a plan to improve the wellbeing of all Western Australians and address disadvantage. The plan should be supported with adequate resources to ensure it is fully implemented.

Rationale:



The State Government needs a clear and overarching vision for social wellbeing for the community of Western Australia. While there are several existing strategies which aim to achieve better social outcomes within and across several Government departments, such as the Policy on Substantive Equality, the Homelessness Strategy, Children First, and the Sustainability Strategy, they are not sufficient to articulate a comprehensive social vision for the community or a plan to get there. Given Western Australia's strong economic position, it is time to measure our success as a State by how well our society is faring.

The State Government should take immediate action to develop and implement a Plan for Social Wellbeing to:

- Address the widening gap between the disadvantaged and the wealthy;⁷
- Provide leadership and develop partnerships across all levels and portfolios of government, working with a range of social partners to solve complex social problems;⁸ and
- Plan action and allocate resources to social goals and objectives which enhance the social wellbeing of the State.

The Plan would build upon the groundwork in existing strategies and the research of previous taskforces, particularly the International Year for the Eradication of Poverty (1996) Taskforce, the Homelessness Taskforce, the Children First Strategy, the Sustainability Strategy, and any other relevant research, paying particular heed to lessons learned in the implementation of anti-poverty strategies in the EU, including Ireland.⁹

A Plan for Social Wellbeing might mirror Ireland's strategy by being structured on five key components:

- scoping trends and challenges;
- outlining a strategic approach;

⁷ Official ABS data shows the ratio of top incomes to low incomes has consistently worsened since 1996/1997.

⁸ Lin Hatfield Dodds, National Director, UnitingCare Australia. *Investigating national, regional and local strategies to combat poverty, including the Irish model: and issues associated with the delivery, organisation and funding of faith based social and welfare services*. The Winston Churchill Memorial Trust of Australia. June 2004

⁹ Implementation and Update Report on Ireland's National Action Plan against Poverty and Social Exclusion 2003-2005. Office for Social Inclusion. Ireland June 2005. <http://www.socialinclusion.ie>

- specifying main objectives and key targets;
- the development of policy measures and the institutional arrangements required to deliver on them; and
- identifying good practice.

The Plan would acknowledge that some relevant policies, such as social security, are the responsibility of the Commonwealth Government. Similarly outside the Plan's scope are factors like global economic impacts (rising oil prices and resulting increased transportation costs), wars and other international conflicts can influence social wellbeing. However, there remains a significant role for State Government in health, housing, education, essential services, transport planning and community development. The Plan would address any areas in which the State Government can improve social wellbeing and provide an agenda for government, non-government organisations, business and the community.

Adopting a Plan for Social Wellbeing is an important step in developing a healthy society but there must be a commitment to follow through with action, resources, and assessment using social indicators.

Social Reporting for Western Australia

Recommendation:

Develop a system of regular social reporting against established benchmarks and indicators, which are closely linked to the targets of the proposed Plan for Social Wellbeing.

Rationale:

Over the last decade, there has been a surge of interest in new and innovative ways of measuring 'progress'. National (e.g. the United Kingdom), State (e.g. Tasmania, Oregon) and Local Governments (e.g. City of Melbourne) around the world are developing sets of indicators to accurately measure 'progress' in their communities. The Australian Bureau of Statistics now regularly publishes a report *Measuring Australia's Progress* which measures key indicators in the social, environmental and economic domains.

Indicators of economic growth have become de facto measurements of our overall progress as a society. Western Australia would benefit from a comprehensive set of social indicators to measure our overall progress as a society – not only our financial position.

Trying to run a complex society on a single indicator like the Gross National product is like trying to fly a 747 with only one gauge on the instrument panel ... imagine if your doctor, when giving you a checkup, did no more than check your blood pressure.

Hazel Henderson, *Paradigms of Progress*

During the last election, the State Government committed to developing sustainability indicators¹⁰ as part of the implementation of the State Sustainability Strategy. Reporting on sustainability indicators requires economic, environmental and social dimensions to be reported on. While State Government regularly reports on **economic** indicators, and occasionally on **environmental** indicators through the State of the Environment reporting process, there is no equivalent established system for reporting against **social** goals in Western Australia.

The NSW Council of Social Service (NCOSS) undertook an extensive research project to develop a framework for social reporting in NSW. The result of the project is a set of "robust

¹⁰ See <http://www.betterfuture.com.au/dl/electionpolicy/plantoprotectouruniqueenvironment.pdf>

indicators that measure the institutional performance of Government against standards of social well being that are reported against annually, with the results made public".¹¹

The Western Australian Government has a number of existing projects that have begun to measure social indicators; however, they have not been tied closely to the measurement of progress towards an overall social vision for Western Australia. For example, the *Indicators of Regional Development in Western Australia* measures a range of social, environmental and economic indicators for the 8 major regions in Western Australia.¹² While this is a very useful collection of data, it is a snapshot, useful for comparison between regions. It does not measure social indicators over time, nor measure against stated social goals and objectives of the State Government.

The NCOSS Report highlights the importance for social performance reporting to make allowances for the different experiences of population groups. Indicators measured across the whole State will not tell the whole story, and any social indicator should be measured separately for a number of population groups – Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, people from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Communities and people with disability. In addition, spatial dimensions of data are, and indicators should be measured at state, regional, local government area and postcode level.¹³

¹¹ NSW Council of Social Service (2005) *Measuring Up: A Framework for Government Social Performance Reporting in NSW*, Sydney

¹² Department of Local Government and Regional Development (2003) *Indicators of Regional Development in Western Australia*, Government of Western Australia

¹³ NCOSS (2005)

Strengthening Community Services

The community sector in Western Australia plays a vital role in providing support and resources to vulnerable families and individuals, strengthening communities and building social networks. The role of the community sector as an efficient and effective deliverer of services is well established, and the benefits of this partnership to the State Government are evident by the increasing proportion of community services that are delivered by the not-for-profit sector.

However, the benefits of this arrangement are not only financial. As the Productivity Commission observed in its 1995 *Report into Charitable Organisations*, the community services and welfare sector helps to promote a heightened sense of community and social responsibility which magnifies the contribution it makes to the wider welfare of Australian society beyond its service role.

The community sector's role in society, then, is much more significant than just a service-delivery arm of Government or as a not-for-profit version of the corporate sector. The community sector serves a broader, social, economic and political role in the community. This role is one of civic engagement, the development of social capital and the creation of strong cohesive communities.

Strong partnerships between government and the community sector work to the advantage of both, and to the benefit of citizens. Therefore, it is entirely appropriate that Government promotes and supports a healthy, vocal and diverse civil society, where the diverse voices from the community are seen as complementary and enhancing of the representative role of government.

The community services sector is a significant industry in its own right, and it continues to grow. There are over 600 non-government agencies delivering human services in communities across Western Australia, turning over more than ½ billion dollars each year, making them vital contributors to the economies within cities and regions. Non-government agencies comprise nearly 2/3 of the total agencies delivering human services across WA.

Non-government organisations (NGOs) serve as essential intermediaries between community and government, conveying important information about the needs and preferences of a wide range of groups in the community to governments that would otherwise remain remote and uninformed. NGOs provide a voice for marginalised groups and the means and opportunities for citizens to make claims on government between elections. NGOs are therefore an essential component of a healthy and robust democracy.

Maddison, Dennis, Hamilton 2004

However, there are a number of areas where the sector requires assistance and support from Government in order to provide the best possible outcomes for disadvantaged people in Western Australia. There is a long tradition of Government support for historically important industries, such as agriculture or forestry, or emerging important industries, such as Information, Communication and Technology.

The recommendations in this section of the Pre-Budget Submission are based on a number of assumptions. Firstly, that both State Government and the Community Services Sector are committed to delivering the best service possible to people in need. It is also

based on the assumption that the failure or closure of a service will have the worst and most significant impact on the clients of that service. The interest of the Community Services Sector is in creating a sustainable service to meet the rising demand from Western Australians, rather than the maintenance of an organisation for its own sake.

Quality, Value & Improvement of the Sector

Recommendation:

State Government commit to working with the sector to determine:

- The total value of the programs currently delivered (beyond service delivery);
- The value of quality improvement initiatives currently being undertaken by the sector;
- The total cost of delivering services including an accurate costing of current and future overheads; and
- Appropriate pricing principles for government funding to enable Full Cost Recovery for the sector.

Rationale:

The increasing proportion of social services delivered by the community sector demonstrates the cost-effectiveness for Government to deliver social services through this partnership. The community sector however, is facing a range of pressures which are now impacting on the services delivered to those in need. Some of the key needs of the sector to address these pressures have been identified in the Industry Plan.¹⁴

WACOSS is calling on the Government to work with the sector to address the growing and critical needs of the sector to ensure its viability into the future. This work should be conducted by a Taskforce, which could be formed under the umbrella of the Industry Council proposed under phase two of the Industry Plan, and made up of Government and Sector representatives.¹⁵ This would be a positive step forward in achieving the shared objectives of Government and the sector.

The full range of pressures faced by the sector are clearly identified in a growing body of research, such as:

- Mapping of Financial Information for the SAAP V project by Department for Community Development which found that in real terms, funding provided to services is not increasing at the same rate as rising costs. Increasing costs are impacting on the ability of agencies to maintain SAAP services¹⁶;
- Review of workforce planning in the disability services area, prepared by CCI WA for ACROD WA which found that the funding formula used in the allocation of funds to non-government organisations does not include the real costs of doing business¹⁷;
- ACIL Tasman Research, October 2005 – which found that a number of agencies are being subsidised by a parent organisation. Without this ongoing subsidisation, such

¹⁴ Department of Premier and Cabinet (2004) *Industry Plan for the Non-Government Human Services Sector* Prepared by the Industry Plan for the Non-Government Human Services Sector Working Party

¹⁵ Department of Premier and Cabinet (2005) *Industry Plan for the Non-Government Human Services Sector Discussion Paper 5 Building the Organisational Capacity of Non-Government Organisations: Supporting Sector Reform and Development* Prepared by the Sector Reform and Development Working Party

¹⁶ Department for Community Development (2006) *Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP V Project): Mapping of Financial Information and Review of Progress Reports and Service Reviews 1999-2004*, Government of Western Australia

¹⁷ Chamber of Commerce and Industry (2006) *Workforce Planning for Support Workers in the Disability Services Sector*, A report commissioned by ACROD WA

agencies would need to close some services as cut-backs would simply leave the service in a non-sustainable situation.¹⁸

In order to ensure the best outcomes for the services delivered in partnership by the State Government and the Community Services Sector, further investigation of the full cost of delivering services is required. Continued inaccurate costing of services impacts on the abilities of an organisation to meet the cost of staffing, proportionate operational costs and future planning. Ongoing subsidising of service delivery by Community Service Organisations will ultimately result in funders getting poor value for money as providers will eventually be forced to either cut service capacity or compromise quality.

The community services sector is proactively addressing sustainability by focussing on efficiency in resource management and quality service delivery. Some examples of these efficiency initiatives include:

- Sharing office space to save on administration costs;
- Working with other organisations to maximise the benefits to clients;
- Larger organisations 'auspicing' smaller organisations and supporting their growth; and
- Smaller organisations reengineering into business clusters with greater purchasing and organisational power.

The Community Services Sector recognises that a substantial body of work remains to be done by the sector, in order to engage in an effective conversation with Government about the sustainability of the sector. For example:

- The range of ways in which the sector is responding to current pressures needs to be clearly identified;
- The benefits of the efficiency initiatives already being undertaken by the sector need to be accurately quantified; and
- The full costs of delivering services by non-government organisations need to be accurately identified.

The sector is ready to progress this work but recognises that the best chance of achieving sustainability of the community services sector will be through working in partnership with the State Government. Therefore, the Community Services Sector looks forward to engaging with the expertise within Government, and working together to 'examine sectoral or program specific approaches relating to cost pressures on Non-Government organisations based on evidenced needs', as outlined in the election commitment of 2005.



¹⁸ ACIL Tasman (2005) *WACOSS Budget Submission: Supporting arguments for WACOSS to use in its pre-budget submission*, October

Workforce Planning & Development

Recommendation:

A comprehensive workforce plan for the Community Services sector should be completed. This workforce plan would be overseen by a Human Services Industry Taskforce made up of Government and Sector representatives.

Rationale:

One of the major implications of the cost pressures on the community services sector is in the area of workforce planning and development. The current economic boom conditions in Western Australia find many industries facing difficulties in filling vacant positions and retaining staff, and the community (human) services sector is no exception.

The need for comprehensive workforce planning and development is reflected in Section Four of the Industry Plan which identifies “Human Resource Management and Development” as one of the “key areas of sector capacity which require supporting and enhancing.”¹⁹

Again, a growing body of research highlights the challenges for the community sector in the area of workforce planning and development:

- The Australian Community Sector Survey, an annual survey of non-government human services organisations, has found that in WA the staff turnover rate in the sector is currently 18% per annum compared with the Australian industry average of between 10% and 12%. This may well be because the sector increasingly relies on unpaid work by staff. In looking at the capacity of agencies to meet excess demand, many try to squeeze more out of their existing resources, which includes the use of increased volunteer and unpaid staff labour. 74% of agencies agreed that the unfunded work by staff and volunteers had increased between 2003-4 and 2004-5.²⁰
- The research undertaken by ACIL Tasman for WACOSS in 2005 found that there is increasing competition between the government, the private and the not-for-profit sectors for skilled and experienced personnel. The not-for-profit sector is disadvantaged in this competition because it cannot match the employment conditions offered by the government sector. There is evidence of a drift of skilled and experienced workers from the not-for-profit sector to the government sector.²¹



- The review of the SAAP program featured comments from SAAP services, who reported that salary levels are not conducive to the attraction and retention of staff; funding is inadequate to meet training needs, and the service is increasingly reliant on the good will of staff. Overall the report found that in an effort to reduce costs, some organisations have modified their service to reduce expenditure²².

¹⁹ Department of Premier and Cabinet (2004) *Industry Plan for the Non-Government Human Services Sector* Prepared by the Industry Plan for the Non-Government Human Services Sector Working Party p23

²⁰ Australian Council of Social Service (2006) *Australian Community Sector Survey 2006: Western Australia*, available

²¹ ACIL Tasman (2005)

²² Department for Community Development (2006)

- A report for ACROD WA by the WA Chamber of Commerce and Industry, on Workforce Planning for Support Workers in the Disability Services Sector, found pay and conditions to be relatively low in the disability services sector. This has obvious impacts on employees' future career intentions in the disability services sector. Although a large proportion of respondents are willing to remain in the sector over the short term, fewer are willing to continue over the longer term.²³

If this situation continues, then neither State Government nor those in need of the service are getting the best outcome for the investment. A joint commitment from State Government and the Community sector to undertake comprehensive workforce planning is required.

Such a workforce plan would:

- Identify staffing problems;
- Identify future changes to the workforce and population age demographic;
- Develop workforce skills;
- Develop workforce recruitment and retention strategies; and
- Ensure adequate service delivery in the future.

A Minister for the Community Services Sector

Recommendation:

Create a new Ministerial portfolio dedicated to the Community Services Sector, supported by an Office for the Community Services Sector.

Rationale:

This recommendation was a resolution that was supported by over 300 delegates at the March 2006 WACOSS Conference.

The community services sector is a key partner with government in the delivery of Government's social priorities and social services. In addition, the Community Sector is an increasingly important industry and employer in its own right. And finally, the Community Sector plays a crucial role in civil society more broadly. The existence of the voluntary community sector promotes a heightened sense of community and social responsibility, which in turn enhances civic engagement, develops social capital and assists in the creation of strong cohesive communities.

Given the importance of the sector in these three different areas, it is appropriate that the sector be assisted by a dedicated Ministerial portfolio.

²³ Chamber of Commerce and Industry (2006)

There are numerous precedents of specific industries having advocates in Cabinet, such as the portfolios of Agriculture, Tourism or Small Business.

This proposed portfolio is different to the existing Community Development portfolio in that it would:

- Demonstrate a commitment to a thriving not-for-profit community sector in its own right;
- Demonstrate the need for a new approach that reflects the diverse needs and priorities of the sector;
- Advocate on behalf of the sector within government;
- Provide a central coordinating point for government initiatives that relate to the sector;
- Support capacity building within the sector; and
- Breaks down barriers between government and community sector.

The United Kingdom and New Zealand Governments have both established Ministerial portfolios that are concerned specifically with the not-for-profit sector. The UK Government has demonstrated their recognition of and commitment to the Third sector with the announcement of a new Office of the Third Sector and a new Minister for the Third Sector in May 2006.

The New Zealand Government has also created a similar Community and Voluntary Sector Minister, which is supported by two agencies, the Office for the Community and Voluntary Sector within the Ministry of Social Development and the Department of Internal Affairs. Together they work to respond to overarching policy issues affecting the community and voluntary sector and raise the profile of community, voluntary and Māori organisations within government.

Recovering costs in rural, regional and remote areas

Recommendation:

As part of the investigations into full cost recovery, provision should be made for regional differences in costs, and service agreements increased accordingly.

Rationale:

Community service sector organisations in rural, regional and remote areas of Western Australia face particular challenges in meeting the full costs of delivering services.

Operational costs are often significantly higher in regional, rural and remote areas. For example, petrol is regularly between 5c and 25c higher in country areas. This further inflates the cost of providing emergency food and crisis relief, as well as the obvious implications for outreach services.

Community service organisations in rural, regional and remote areas also face additional challenges in recruiting and retaining workers, and very often cannot compete with other industries operating in these areas of Western Australia. Cost of rental properties in some regional areas of Western Australia is a particular problem in the attraction and retention of staff, as it can be impossible for families to live and work there without subsidised rental

accommodation. Providing access to Government Employees' Housing Authority (GEHA) accommodation for non-Government human service workers is one way to address this issue.

Current funding agreements do not address these differences in operating costs or geographically specific challenges. As a result, regional, rural and remote service providers are forced to reduce service delivery to their local communities through restricting the number of clients, cancelling outreach services, or closing some services all together. Ultimately this results in even less services being delivered to those communities who face other disadvantages due to their distance from a major centre.

Community Impact Case Study:

Domestic and Family Violence Services in Rural and Remote WA

Ongoing consultations with Women's Refuge Services and Safe Houses in rural and remote regions have raised consistent themes in the difficulties faced by the services.

Working with women and children who are in crisis and present with complex needs is a highly professional area of work. Without the appropriate funding for Women's Refuges and Safe Houses in rural and remote WA, the ability to attract and retain professional staff is undermined, which ultimately impacts on the safety of women and children in these areas.

For any service, reliable staff with specific expertise, knowledge and good work practices are the most valuable asset. With just a relatively small investment by State Government, domestic and family violence services in rural and remote regions of WA will have the potential to attract and retain good staff.

As the Rural Women's Report - A Research and Consultation Project on Family and Domestic Violence in Rural Western Australia found, a lack of funding has implications for the wellbeing of victims, perpetrators and children and staff working in this field, as it impacts on the hours of service availability, the frequency of service, the number of clients seen, the variety of services available and the geographic area covered.

SECTION TWO: Delivering a Fair Go for Western Australians

Housing

A crisis in housing affordability in Western Australia has focussed a spotlight on the need for State Government action. The crisis, which has long affected vulnerable groups and people on low incomes, has now worsened to impact all first home buyers and renters.²⁴ Part of the solution to this crisis is a long overdue increase in public housing stock. In addition, innovations are needed to assist low income people into private tenancies and home purchases. Also, more State-supported accommodation is needed for people in crisis or needing support in the short or long term. Solving our housing affordability crisis requires an integrated approach.

Housing is a basic human need. It plays a crucial role in determining whether or not people live in poverty and in a society's ability to realise broader social outcomes. It affects people's ability to participate in employment, education and training, as well as the social life of the community and to maintain good health and well-being.

In Western Australia, the amount of well located, affordable housing available for people on low incomes, including the working poor, is decreasing rapidly. The consequences of this are far reaching. In most countries, housing is a key indicator of social exclusion. Housing access and affordability is acutely linked to employment opportunities²⁵.

The problems are not just cyclical and are worse than in many other developed countries. The likelihood of further interest rate rises emphasises their gravity and the need for vigorous corrective action. Failure to act will severely affect economic development and competitiveness, urban development and transport, fertility rates and family cohesion, retirement security and intergenerational equity, and the economic and social strength of local communities.

*- National Affordable Housing Forum
Background paper 1. July 2006*

State Government policies and processes influence availability, affordability and adequacy of shelter in many ways. It oversees an urban planning system that determines residential density, neighbourhood amenities and where housing may be located. Through state taxes and charges it provides financial incentives and disincentives for developments and private ownership. It provides infrastructure and essential services like roads, electricity and water. It regulates building standards and through a system of consumer protection it regulates tenancies and contracts. It also funds public housing and crisis accommodation for the disadvantaged and vulnerable groups.

This Government has demonstrated an active commitment to housing through such initiatives as the *State Homelessness Strategy* and the *Housing Strategy WA*. It has increased funding to SAAP services and supported effective homelessness strategies. However, there remain areas of need which have not been adequately addressed and further action is urgently needed. The Government has a responsibility to act now to address the lack of affordable housing, thereby stemming the growth of problems associated with lack of housing, particularly homelessness and social exclusion.

The economic consequences of these recent trends are worth noting. As affordable housing retreats further from centres of employment growth, commuting time and costs rise for those

²⁴ Shelter WA. *Submission to the Review of the First Home Owner Grant Act 2000* Karel Eringa February 2006

²⁵ ACOSS, (2003) *The Bare Necessities: Poverty and Deprivation in Australia Today* Submission to the Senate Enquiry into Poverty and Financial Hardship, ACOSS, Sydney.

whose housing opportunities are constrained by low incomes. Low wage job vacancies in employment centres become harder to fill, wage premiums must be paid and labour markets function less efficiently²⁶. WACOSS welcomes the increasing focus on opportunities to locate affordable housing in transit oriented development as outlined in the Network City Strategy.

Expand State Homelessness Strategy Services

Recommendation:

Continue the State Homelessness Strategy initiatives and expand these programs.

Rationale:

The Government's State Homelessness Strategy (SHS) was a welcome initiative aimed at addressing homelessness and its causes. Funding for the SHS initiatives was provided for four years from 1 July 2002 to 30 June 2006 - a total of \$32 million. While the SHS achieved some important outcomes, the problem of homelessness in WA persists. As the Government acknowledges, homelessness is a complex problem that cannot be solved in a short time frame. WACOSS urges the Government to consolidate its significant work in this area by continuing to fund and expand SHS initiatives.

The Evaluation of the Impact and Effectiveness of the Western Australian State Homelessness Strategy, January 2006 confirmed that all programs were achieving results. While ongoing Government funding was confirmed, WACOSS support the recommendations of the report that almost all initiatives be expanded.

The social and economic costs of homelessness are significant. Correspondingly, the cost benefit of providing housing for homeless people is also considerable. Research by the RMIT-NATSEM Research Centre, indicates that providing stable housing for homeless people generated cost savings in a range of support services areas.²⁷ In some cases the savings paid for most if not all of the housing expenditure, while in others, the gains exceeded the cost. Particular findings included:

- The total cost of youth homelessness in Australia (in net present value terms) to be \$574 million and the net benefit of successfully intervening to be \$474 million- a benefit/cost ratio in excess of 5.
- Housing the homeless significantly increases the likelihood of employment and, hence, increased income. Individual and society benefit through increased income (productive output) and reduced government expenditure on unemployment benefits.
- Positive savings on mental health, substance use, criminal justice and other services when housing is provided to the homeless.

²⁶ Gavin Woods (2004) 11th Annual F. Oswald Barnett Oration: 9 November 2004, What Is Happening in Australian Housing Markets? Why Policy Makers Should be Concerned. Downloaded: <http://www.sisr.net/events/docs/obo11.pdf>

²⁷ RMIT-NATSEM Research Centre, (2003) *Counting the Cost of Homelessness: A Systematic Review of Cost Effectiveness and Cost Benefit Studies of Homelessness*, AHURI, Canberra.

Increase Funding for Existing Supported Accommodation Assistance Program Services

Recommendation:

Increase funding for existing agencies already funded through the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program Five (SAAP 5) to meet the identified shortfall.

Rationale:

The SAAP Sector in Western Australia is made up of 125 different community agencies spread throughout the State.²⁸ These community agencies provide assistance to homeless young people, single men, single women, families and women escaping domestic violence among others.

Recent research found that one in every 130 Australians used a SAAP service in 2003-2004 and the largest single reason for clients seeking assistance was to escape domestic violence²⁹. Worryingly, it is estimated that up to 2,300 requests for SAAP services in WA could not be met during 2002-2003³⁰.

Establishing a new refuge in the northern suburbs and providing a one-off 10% increase in state funding under SAAP V was welcomed in the State Budget 2006. However, this will not ensure that services continue to be provided where they are needed, which is estimated to require a 25% increase in funding.

The State Government has a responsibility to do something about the high rates of homelessness in WA. It is not acceptable that we have a booming economy but that we have over 11,000 homeless people in our community³¹. Homelessness is one of the most visible indicators of shortcomings in social and economic policy. Homeless people are exposed to the most extreme risks of ill health, violence, and barriers to social participation. Only 1 in 7 homeless Australians will find a bed in the homeless services system. This is grossly inadequate and the Government must act now.

Recently, the Queensland State Government allocated \$235.52 million over four years to addressing homelessness. With just under half the number of homeless people in Queensland, WACOSS urges the State Government to direct a commensurate amount towards responding to homelessness in WA.

²⁸ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2005). *Homeless people in SAAP – SAAP NDCA Report Series 9 – Western Australia supplementary tables.*

²⁹ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2005). *Homeless people in SAAP – SAAP NDCA Report Series 9 – Western Australia supplementary tables.*

³⁰ www.afho.org.au/7_facts/stats/2002_2003_wa.htm

³¹ *ibid*

Increase Public Housing

Recommendation:

Funding to public housing should be increased by an extra \$122 million per year in order to meet the current demand as indicated by the waiting list to 2025.

Rationale:

Increasing public housing stock is critical to addressing the high rate of homelessness, housing stress and housing related poverty currently experienced in WA.

The total number of public housing dwellings owned by the Department of Housing and Works has been declining slowly over the last ten years, in 1995 it was 36,492 dwellings and by 2005 it had fallen to 34,955. Public housing as a proportion of total housing stock is 4.16% while nationally it is around 5% of housing stock.

This chart shows that the waiting list has remained relatively static for the past ten years. In 1995 the number of households waiting for public housing was 13 337 and in 2005 it is 13 198 households. No significant inroads have been made into reducing the waiting list.

In order to meet the current demand for public housing by 2025, 660 additional dwellings per year must be constructed. This is in addition to the current public housing construction program which is not producing net stock increases. Shelter WA estimates that building 660 extra dwellings per year would require an additional \$122 million per year.



Source: DHW Annual Reports 1995-2005

This strategy would eliminate housing need as indicated by the waiting list and increase the public housing stock from 34 955 to 48 153 units by 2025.

Increase Housing Appropriate for Priority Groups

Recommendation:

Increase the amount of appropriate social, community and crisis housing available to particularly disadvantaged groups (identified below).

- **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples**
- **Children and young people**
- **CaLDB Large Families**
- **Women**
- **People with disabilities (under the Independent Living Program)**
- **People with mental illnesses**
- **People released from prison**

Rationale:

Every Western Australian, regardless of his/her social, economic, racial or religious background deserves the right to affordable and appropriate accommodation.

The Government must ensure that there is an adequate supply of public housing, both long term and transitional, for groups in the community that face particular disadvantage. In particular, there is a lack of accommodation for those leaving SAAP services, leading to a cyclical demand for services due to homelessness. Access to appropriate and stable housing is a key element to addressing the many other problems facing these groups.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people comprise around half of all homeless people in WA³². Just below 20% of Indigenous households live in overcrowded situations, compared to 2% of non-Indigenous households³³. Many Aboriginal households include extended families and so housing therefore needs to accommodate this in order to prevent overcrowding. Culturally appropriate housing is urgently needed for Aboriginal singles, couples and families both in rural and urban areas.

Children and young people make up more than half the homeless population in WA³⁴. Feedback from service providers indicates that youth homelessness is on the increase. This group urgently requires appropriate public housing to stop the problems associated with youth homelessness such as substance use, prostitution and crime. In addition, the State Government should remove age based criteria that prevent young people accessing public housing. Currently, applicants will not receive housing until they turn 18 years of age, unless they have supporting parents who request special consideration. By virtue of their homelessness, often young people do not have supporting parents- many of them homeless because of family violence.

Household composition has a major impact on housing affordability with single income households the most likely to experience affordability problems. In WA, 88% of all single

³² Williams, S. & Eringa, K. (2005) *Final Report- Pre Election Housing Forum* Tuesday 18 January 2005, Shelter WA, Perth.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Williams, S. & Eringa, K. (2005) *Final Report- Pre Election Housing Forum* Tuesday 18 January 2005, Shelter WA, Perth.

parent households are headed by women.³⁵ Many low income single mothers do not have access to a car due to the costs associated with running one and therefore often rely on public transport. Especially, with very young children to care for, it can be difficult to access public transport and subsequently be able to reach essential services and to run errands.

Public housing should be located “in areas where specific services are available (e.g., schools for children, services for people with mental health issues, torture and trauma counseling services, migrant resource centres for refugees and asylum seekers)... community support can be particularly important for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, migrant and refugees.”³⁶

There are only 60 properties state-wide allocated to the Independent Living Program under Homeswest’s Community Disability Housing Program. This is insufficient to meet demand as indicated by long waiting lists.

Currently, agencies assist only 10% of people seeking accommodation assistance on exiting the prison system. Approximately 1,650 ex-offenders are unable to receive accommodation with support.³⁷ Released prisoners face financial barriers to accessing housing. The release payment of \$180 is inadequate and results in people becoming homeless, particularly finite sentence recipients. Lack of access to housing also increases the risk of re-offending.

A greater range of housing styles is necessary to accommodate the needs of priority groups, such as, larger sized families³⁸, single parents with children, people with disabilities and their carers.

The current immigration pattern indicates that the proportion of large families (5 people and more) being settled in Australia has increased from 27% in 2002-2003 to 30% in 2003-04, while the proportion of small families (2 persons and singles) has decreased. This increase in large families is linked to the changing source regions for humanitarian migrants from Europe to Africa and the Middle East, a trend that is predicted to continue in the next few years.

- Department of Immigration and Indigenous Affairs *Australia’s Support for Humanitarian Entrants, 2003-2004*

³⁵ Tenants Advice Service & Shelter WA, (2004) *Women and Adequate Housing*, TAS & Shelter WA, Perth.

³⁶ United Nations Special Rapporteur on adequate housing, Miloon Kothari *Mission to Australia Preliminary observations*. 15 August 2006.

³⁷ Community Housing Coalition of WA *Recommendations for Inclusion in the WACOSS Pre Budget Submission* September 2006.

³⁸ ShelterWA has proposed that 4-7 bedroom homes are required. The Ethnic Communities Council proposes that duplexes might be used to house migrant families.

Provide Supported Accommodation for Young People with Mental Health Problems

Recommendation:

That the State Government provide appropriate housing (i.e. group units) for young people under 18 years old with mental health problems. Funding should be provided to support residents with experienced staff and independent living skills programs.

Rationale

There is a lack of medium to long term supported accommodation options for young people under 18 years old with mental illness. Crisis accommodation provides only limited support.

Feedback from the SAAP sector indicates a large number of people are unable to access SAAP services because they have a mental illness. This is reported as particularly the case with many young people. There are no specific community based supported housing options for homeless young people with a mental illness. A number of supported housing models for people with a mental illness, especially young people, should be funded. These models need to range from 24-hour long term support through to semi and independent housing options.

Expand and Support Community Housing

Recommendation:

Allocate an additional \$10 million to community housing for four years from July 2007 with 25% of this directed towards the development of affordable housing options and fund training for staff and volunteers in community housing organisations.

Rationale:

Community housing is recognised as an efficient method of providing housing. It is also recognised as highly effective, particularly for those people in need of other support services and assistance (e.g. employment, training, treatment). Those individuals who can benefit from other support are able to access this due to the capacity of many non-government services to integrate housing provision with support services.

The viability of the community housing sector and hence the capacity of the sector organisations in delivering a range of services is dependent upon stock growth and adequate funding. Despite the proven efficiency and effectiveness, however, allocation of funding from the Department of Housing and Works has remained relatively static since 1997. Additional funding is vital in order to achieve a strong and vibrant sector.

There is also a recognised and increasing need for the development of affordable housing options for the 7% of Western Australians households who spend more than 50% of their income on rent³⁹. The development of more affordable housing has the potential to return a

³⁹ Productivity Commission (2003) *Report of Government Services 2003* Table 16A.49 AGPS, Canberra

higher level of rental income to community housing providers, thus improving viability and efficiency of the sector. The eligibility for affordable housing should extend to households in the middle income bracket but not exclude those who are eligible for social housing.

Release Funds for the Community Housing Key Provider Strategy

Recommendation:

Release the \$25 million in funding promised under the Key Provider Strategy.

Rationale:

The community housing sector is currently well placed to expand its delivery of affordable housing provision with the creation of two key providers: Foundation Housing and Access Housing. These organisations have significant knowledge and experience and now have the capacity for an expanded function in the delivery of social and affordable housing if appropriately funded.

Support Boarding and Lodging Houses

Recommendations:

Increase the supply of and support existing boarding and lodging houses in WA as outlined in the *Response to the Department of Housing and Works Housing Strategy WA Draft Discussion Paper* from the 'Where Will They Live' Campaign stakeholders.

Rationale:

The boarding house sector in Western Australia is currently in a dire situation. Two critical issues have emerged in recent years. Firstly, rising land prices and increasing costs have made operating boarding houses an increasingly unviable operation. As a result, the number of boarding and lodging houses has dwindled: roughly two thirds of the sector has been lost over the last two decades. It would appear that a third of what remains may disappear over the next 18 months. At the same time there is a complete absence of any form of consumer protection for boarders and lodgers in WA. They are not covered under the Residential Tenancies Act. As boarding and lodging houses play a critical role in housing some of our community's most multidisadvantaged citizens, there is an urgent need to increase consumer protection for this group.

To some extent these issues are different sides of the same coin. Certainly, it is not possible to address one issue without simultaneously addressing the other. In terms of supply, a strategy needs to be developed to attract private investment into the sector. Such a strategy would likely include financial incentives and planning incentives. With regard to consumer protection, different options need to be investigated to ensure some level of protection for these vulnerable consumers.

Boarding houses are vital in the provision of accommodation for people with a mental illness. At least one in four residents in boarding houses has a mental health problem. Providing accommodation for those with a mental illness reduces hospital admissions which cost the government \$584 per patient per day in a psychiatric hospital (www.pc.gov.au).

The diminishing supply of boarding houses means increased pressure on crisis accommodation services. In 2001-02, 88.5 per cent of people with a mental illness seeking crisis accommodation received no assistance. People with a mental illness that are homeless are 40 times more likely to be arrested and 20 times more likely to be imprisoned (Not for Service Report 2005).

Methods of retaining and increasing supply include:

- building boarding and lodging houses;
- purchasing housing stock for conversion to boarding/lodging accommodation; and
- establishing grants and concessions to existing and new boarding/lodging house operators, including for the purposes of repairs and upgrades.

That in view of the prevalence of identified ageing lodging house stock, DHW, FESA and local government act to minimise the closure of lodging houses because of fire and safety and health compliance issues, by implementing a series of strategies, including providing grants for fire and safety and broader maintenance upgrades.

Providing low cost rental accommodation reduces homelessness and unnecessary hospital admissions and imprisonment which will reduce government expenditure.⁴⁰

Increase Affordable Country Housing

Recommendation:

Increase the supply of affordable and appropriate accommodation in regional areas, including options for home purchasing, private rental and social housing.

Rationale:

The housing market in many regional centres of WA has problems with 'key worker housing'. This occurs when 'key workers' whether they be cleaners, child care workers or teachers earn too much to qualify for public housing but too little to afford to buy a home themselves⁴¹.

In a number of regional centres, Government Regional Officers' Housing (GROH) leases rather than builds or purchases its housing stock. In view of the pronounced economic cycles experienced by a number of regional centres, WACOSS is concerned that leasing stock creates additional pressure on the private rental market at the top of the cycle. As a more appropriate alternative, a GROH building program could be used to stimulate the economy in these centres at the bottom of the economic cycle. This could occur particularly in regional centres such as Port Hedland, where rents rise to extraordinarily high levels at the top of the economic cycle. In such cases, building rather than leasing GROH housing stock could be achieved at relatively low cost. To enable this, funds from the Central Revenue Fund would need to be transferred to GROH.

Rapidly escalating median rents and housing prices in regions where resources are rich threaten to impact GROH stock leased from the large resource companies. are a major An impact of the resources boom is.

⁴⁰ *Response to the Department of Housing and Works Housing Strategy WA Draft Discussion Paper from the 'Where Will They Live' Campaign stakeholders Community Housing Coalition of WA, Northern Suburbs Community Legal Centre, St Patrick's Community Support Centre, St Vincent de Paul, Shelter WA, Tenants Advice Service, Wesley Mission Perth, Western Australian Association for Mental Health, Western Australian Council of Social Service, March 2006.*

⁴¹ Weaver, The Guardian 25/5/04

Increase Social and Affordable Housing in New Developments

Recommendation:

Increase the amount of social and affordable housing using a range of initiatives across State and Local Governments.

Rationale

The Department of Planning and Infrastructure (DPI) requires that all redevelopment includes 10% social and affordable housing. The Community Housing Coalition of WA has recommended that this portion be increased to 15%. To help address the crisis in housing affordability, WACOSS ask the Government to review their current policy and examine the potential impact of increasing the portion of social and affordable housing and increase the amount accordingly.

The DPI policy should be expanded to apply to development on all Crown land.

Other recommended methods of increasing social and affordable housing should be investigated and implemented where suitable, including the following suggestions:

1. local government zoning density bonuses in return for building affordable housing
2. a review of restrictive covenants
3. tax incentives
4. financial incentives for the provision of key worker housing in rural and regional areas
5. removing stamp duty on affordable housing for eligible buyers

Develop a Co-ordinated Crisis Response Strategy

Recommendation:

The Premier and Cabinet examine and resolve national and state government policy issues to support service providers to work in a more integrated way to address the complex needs of their clients. An essential component of a coordinated initiative is an integrated crisis response to assist people with both mental health and drug and alcohol issues with measures to prevent homelessness.

Rationale

There is a lack of program and funding coordination between the Department of Housing and Works, the Department for Community Development, the Health Department and the Disability Services Commission which contributes to the difficulty of successfully tenanted available accommodation.

Unresolved issues between national and state government policies impact on holistic service delivery to community housing tenants.⁴²

⁴² Community Housing Coalition of WA *Recommendations for Inclusion in the WACOSS Pre Budget Submission* September 2006.

The United Nations Special Rapporteur on adequate housing put it like this in his report following his visit in August 2006:

“Throughout his meetings with officials and civil society, while there are occasional positive initiatives, it has become clear that Australia lacks a clear consistent, long-term and holistic housing strategy, which has been described as a silo approach by some. The numerous government programs and sources of funding don’t seem to address the structural problems and therefore, the responses tend to be inefficient, partial and non-sustainable. Moreover, a large bureaucracy with the different layers of governments seems to hamper an efficient allocation and use of these funds.”⁴³

⁴³ Ibid.

Care and Support

Children

While most children living in Australia are faring well there are a significant number that are being failed by our society. The Australian Institute on Health and Welfare reports that:

There can be no keener revelation of a society's soul than the way in which it treats its children.

Nelson Mandela

Infants from the least advantaged socioeconomic areas are twice as likely as those from the least disadvantaged areas to die before they reach their first birthday.⁴⁴ For Aboriginal infants, the average mortality rate in 02-03 was three times the corresponding rate for other Australian infants.

In general 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.

It is estimated that the percentage of children living in poverty in Australia is between 13% and 17% - a significant proportion of the population. There are serious short term 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 have 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.”⁴⁵

Children's wellbeing should be high on everyone's agenda. The State Government is ideally placed to take a leadership role in promoting that the interests of children should be considered by all sections of the community. The following recommendations are important steps towards this vision.

⁴⁴ Australian Institute of Health & Welfare (2005) *A Picture of Australia's Children*, AIHW, Canberra

⁴⁵ 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

Whole of Community Approach to Child Protection and Wellbeing

Recommendation:

Fund a strategic “whole of community” approach to children’s and young people’s wellbeing, which is based on the 2004 Caring Well Protecting Well Report⁴⁶. An implementation framework, based on this important work, should be developed in partnership with industry and the community sector.

Rationale:

There are a number of factors negatively impacting on child and family wellbeing. Of particular concern is that:

- Child and family wellbeing is not obviously on the broad government agenda, with their interests routinely being perceived at a State level to be a matter for Department of Community Development and secondarily for the Departments Health, Education and Justice.
- Vulnerable families coming to the attention of the Department for Community Development are increasingly experiencing highly investigative and procedural responses which:
 - Are more preoccupied with administrative process and service specifications rather than with responding to children’s and families’ needs;
 - Exist within an environment of tightening regulation and less responsive flexibility; and
 - In an effort to reduce risk, favour *routine* rather than *individualised* responses, resulting in the loss of training and learning opportunities for people working in this area..
- As non-government agencies have had their activities (and budgets) brought into line with government agendas, so have the most marginalised children and families experienced greater exclusion.

Research from such authorities as Dr Frazer Mustard, Professor Fiona Stanley and Dr Clyde Hertzman has underlined the importance of a whole of community approach to child wellbeing. Dr Nigel Parton and Professor Dorothy Scott have highlighted the negative consequences of an investigative approach to child protection where emphasis is placed on dealing with child abuse once it has occurred rather than preventing it in the first place.

Some of the many benefits of a broad community response include:

- Catching the larger number, albeit smaller percentage, of children with vulnerabilities who exist outside the high-risk low socio-economic group;
- Reducing the increasingly negative consequences for the whole community. Research is increasingly showing that income and education are insufficient to protect children and families from community, neighbourhood and larger social environmental events; and

⁴⁶ Harries, M., Harris, T., Diamond, S. and Mackenzie, G. (2004) *Caring Well – Protecting Well: Investing in systemic responses to protect children in WA*, The Ministerial Advisory Council on Child Protection Western Australia, Perth

- Recognising that child protection intervention will be costly and ineffective if the most vulnerable children and families do not have access to holistic support addressing their diverse needs and circumstances; and if families requiring support receive investigation instead.



These findings reinforce the necessity of addressing all of the environments in which children and families develop and grow, as well as the legal, administrative and service environments in which this happens.

What is required is a strategic “whole of community” approach to children’s and young people’s wellbeing, which is based on the 2004 Caring Well Protecting Well Report¹, commissioned by the Ministerial Advisory Council on Child Protection, which details a conceptual framework for the long term provision of a “whole of community” approach to the protection and care of WA’s children. It is time for the Government to build on this important work by developing an implementation framework in partnership with industry and the community sector.

To enhance the wellbeing of children the proposed strategic approach should feature the Non Government and the Government sectors working together to develop state-wide indicators for Western Australia in social development and well being. These indicators will provide baseline measures of the well being of children and focus community attention on strategies to improve our performance on all measures.

In addition, the Non Government Sector and the State Government should immediately focus on improving the linkages between government and community sector service delivery in the field of child protection so that there are clear and transparent processes and clarity in communication between the sector and government.

An important component of Government and the Community Sector working together is that community agencies are adequately resourced. At a time when the Government is investing large amounts of funds into the Department for Community Development, a similar commitment (including for the provision of training) should be made to community agencies who also play a significant part in the protection of vulnerable children and whose resources are stretched beyond their limits. This is vital if the Government is serious about engaging community agencies in the development of an implementation framework.

The recommendations outlined aim to place Western Australia in a position where all children can be assured that governments, organisations and practitioners will work to the highest standards of practice to ensure the risk of harm is reduced to a minimum level.

Maintenance of 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:

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.⁴⁷ 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.⁴⁸

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*. Further, WACOSS has received consistent feedback from the sector about the critical need for maintenance upgrades for Family Centres and Child Care Centres.

Support for Grandparents

Recommendation:

Fund a range of appropriate support services for grandparents who are caring for their grandchildren.

Rationale:

Grandparents often take on the care of grandchildren in sudden and unforeseen circumstances, potentially placing strain and stress upon the grandparent. 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. The ongoing costs of raising children may not have been planned for and can seriously affect the financial security and sustainability of the grandparent's retirement.

⁴⁷ 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.

⁴⁸ Productivity Commission (2005) *Report on Government Services: Children Services Section* Australian Government, Canberra. Part 14.33

Financial support is only part of the needs of grandparents who are caring for their grandchildren. A full range of support services is required to meet the needs of grandparents caring full time for their grandchildren.

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

- An Emergency Relief Fund for grandparents rearing grandchildren, which should be re-established;
- Provision of Independent Advocates for children being raised by grandparents;
- Accessible legal services for grandparents raising grandchildren and a relief fund to assist with legal costs;
- 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; and
- Parenting education programs to meet the specific needs of grandparents raising grandchildren.

Disability Services

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. And 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.⁴⁹

For the 2007/08 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:

Take urgent, immediate steps to ensure that all people with disabilities, who are in critical need of assistance, are able to access the following services:

- accommodation support;
- individual and family support;
- an alternative to employment option (some may not want this);
- full access to therapy required to develop skills, maximise independence and maintain health; and
- that all eligible young children with a disability have access to a properly resourced and effective early intervention programme.

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.⁵⁰ 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 disabled people, such as: accommodation support; individual and family support and full access to therapy required to develop skills, maximise independence and maintain health, will need to be developed through a plan, informed by sound data, and include a commitment to the funding required. There also needs to be a plan to meet the current identified unmet need in support services.

⁴⁹ See <http://www.abs.gov.au/Ausstats/abs@.nsf/Lookup/A6D8D7EEC1F1A5BECA25703C007C7B35>

⁵⁰ Chamber of Commerce and Industry (2006) *Workforce Planning in the Disability Services Sector*, A report commissioned by ACROD WA

Supporting advocacy for people with disabilities

Recommendation:

Allocate additional recurrent funding to organisations currently funded to provide individual advocacy for people with disabilities. Allocate additional funding to organisations providing systemic advocacy for people with disabilities.

Rationale:

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.



Existing advocacy services are under-funded and over-stretched, and greater investment is required to assist the many people with a disability who require assistance to effectively exercise their rights.

There are two types of advocacy that help to enhance the quality of life for disabled people. **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. Systemic advocacy on behalf of people with a disability is not well supported or funded in Western Australia, with only the Ethnic Disability Advocacy Centre receiving a small amount of Commonwealth funding to undertake systemic advocacy on issues relating to the Commonwealth.

Aged Care

The significance of the aged care sector will continue to grow in line with the demographic shift expected in Western Australia and other developed nations. Whilst the influence of active ageing strategies will have a positive impact on the traditional utilisation of health and aged care services there will nevertheless still be an increasing demand on services to match the increased population growth in this age demographic.

Transition Care for Elderly People

Recommendation:

Fund the non-government sector to deliver transition care programs for elderly people.

Rationale:

The State Government has recently introduced a number of strategies to manage the pre and post acute care of elderly people in Western Australia. These strategies are aimed at reducing the burden of costs of rehabilitation and restorative care rather than the more positive driver of maximising independence and well-being.

This change in policy has seen the proliferation of 'transition care' models and programs, driven primarily by the acute health sector. However, there are opportunities for community services sector to deliver pre and post acute care programs - where the organisations have the necessary skills, experience and infrastructure - in a partnership with the public sector.

Community Aids and Equipment

Recommendation:

Ensure that eligibility for the Community Aids and Equipment scheme is again made available to people in receipt of Commonwealth Aged Care funding.

Rationale:

The recently amended Disability Services Commission guidelines for the Community Aids and Equipment Program (CAEP) have now excluded some people in need of the program, and this needs to be redressed as a matter of priority.

The new guidelines prevent clients in Australian Government funded residential and community care programs (excluding Home and Community Care) from applying for aids and equipment under the CAEP. In short, aids and equipment from the CAEP Imprest List will not be funded by CAEP for people in receipt of Commonwealth Government Aged Care funding, including clients who are:

- Resident in a high care facility;
- Resident in a low care facility; or
- In receipt of any Commonwealth Aged Care Packages eg. Extended Aged Care at Home [EACH], Flexible Care, and Community Aged Care Packages [CACP].

The implications of the new guidelines means the only way a new CACP/EACH client can access equipment such as grab rails, shower chairs, walking frames, hoists etc funded is if they apply prior to commencement on a program or upon exit from a program.

Since the introduction of CAEP in 1996 aids and equipment have been available to clients on Commonwealth Aged Care Packages. Since then and up to now, CACP clients have been eligible for aids/equipment under CAEP. The CACP was neither intended to, nor capable of replacing the CAEP and ought to be made accessible to people who have been recently excluded.

Community Impact Case Study:

Disability Services Sector

ACROD WA commissioned the Chamber of Commerce and Industry (WA) to undertake a review of the disability services sector in Western Australia as a result of the critical workforce planning issues that were emerging in the sector.

The total proportion of the population of Western Australia with a disability has increased from 19.5% in 1998 to 20.6% in 2003, and it is estimated by 2021 the total number of people with disabilities will increase to 23% of total population.

There are a number of features of the disability services workforce in Australia which make it unique:

- It is growing rapidly (26.8% between 1996 and 2001 compared to 8.7% for the whole Australian workforce);
- It is predominantly female (85% in 2001 compared to 44% for the whole workforce) and older (over 75% are over 35 years); and
- Income levels are relatively low (with around 73% of disability workers and 94% of aged and disability care workers earning less than \$41,600 pa in 2001, and 30% of disability workers and 54% of aged and disability care workers earned less than \$20,800).

With improved health care and an ageing population, it is expected that additional demands will be placed on the health and community services sector, with a large number of jobs to be filled, which may be a significant challenge for the disability services sector. The pay and conditions in the sector is already having a negative impact on the workforce, with the survey undertaken by CCI finding that:

- Many employees believe that their remuneration is not reflective of the quality and quantity of the work they do;
- There is a trade-off between personal reward and financial resource, which is reflected in employees' future intentions about their careers in the sector. Although a large proportion of respondents are willing to remain in the sector over the short term, fewer are willing to continue over the long term.

It is clear that the issues with pay and conditions in the sector may have an adverse impact on the increasing numbers of people seeking disability services.

The Workforce Planning in the Disability Services Sector features a number of key recommendations, some of which are outlined below:

1. The WA Government coordinate a Workforce Development Strategy for the disability sector.
2. The non-government sector be adequately resourced to deliver a more effective and coordinated system to support the training needs of the sector.
3. An immediate 'catch up' pay increase be provided to support workers in Government funded disability services to bring pay rates in the sector in line with those in the health and community services sector.
4. A marketing strategy be developed that builds on previous work undertaken and which aims to lift the profile of the disability services sector within the community.

Essential Services

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 UK, fuel poverty has long been understood as a key determinant of poor health and social exclusion.⁵¹ However, there is very little data available in Western Australia to monitor trends in this area. For example, there is no data on the number of households who regularly face disconnections to power and water due to inability to pay.



What we do know is that for low income and disadvantaged Western Australians the cost of accessing essential services consumes a disproportionately high percentage of their income.

The cost of living is rising rapidly (due to increased petrol costs, a reasonably high inflation rate and increased costs of housing in Western Australia) and in this context low income households can often find paying utility bills difficult. The result of unpaid bills is restricted supply or disconnection, which in turn can lead to a deterioration in health, a poor diet

and exclusion from society.

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.⁵²

⁵¹ NCOSS (2005) *Measuring Up: A Framework for Government Social Performance Reporting in NSW*, NCOSS Discussion Paper

⁵² WACOSS (2003) *Would you like a bit of Heat with that trickle of Water?*.

Utilities Assistance Scheme

Recommendation:

Implement a Utilities Assistance Scheme to provide one-off financial assistance to Concession Card Holders and low-income families to cover the cost of utility bills when facing temporary financial difficulties.

Rationale:

Low income households can easily face temporary financial difficulties which prevent them from paying utility bills on time. Sustained access to essential services is a requisite for an acceptable standard of living, and therefore, being disconnected from utilities can put families under extreme hardship. A Utilities Assistance Scheme that can provide emergency funds to cover basic essential service costs for people experiencing temporary financial difficulties can prevent this hardship to Western Australia's most disadvantaged households.

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

A number of other States in Australia have established similar schemes, for example, the Energy Accounts Payment Assistance (EAPA) is a financial assistance scheme for emergency energy bill payments from the New South Wales Department of Energy, Utilities and Sustainability, and they also offer a similar scheme for water. The Utility Relief Grant Scheme is a financial assistance scheme for one off crisis payment from the Victorian Department of Human Services.

The Western Australian Utilities Assistance 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 and restriction of services.

Retrofit Programs

Recommendation:

Develop and fund a comprehensive state-wide energy and water efficiency retrofitting programs, particularly for all Department of Housing and Works properties. This should be accompanied by a widespread community education and awareness program on energy and water efficiency.

Rationale:

While the State Government has signalled its intention to implement sustainability guidelines for new homes through the introduction of the BASIX system, this will only affect a very small proportion of homes in Western Australia.

Retrofitting the homes of low-income households can reduce the consumption costs for consumers, as well as deliver on other environmental and economic priorities of State Government.

Research undertaken in South Australia suggests that energy conservation is vital to the reduction of unmanageable electricity bills for many low-income households.⁵³ Efficiency programs have also been proven to have substantial effects on the number of uncollectible and bad debt write-offs.⁵⁴

Case study: 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.

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

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.⁵⁵

The community association, Environment House, is running a program jointly funded by Lotterywest and the Sustainable Energy Development Office, called Saving Water and Power (\$WAP)⁵⁶, which focuses on providing information and minor trade services to reduce household water and energy consumption. The Lotterywest funding - until August 2007 - will enable these services to be provided free of charge to healthcare cardholders and pensioners anywhere in metropolitan Perth. The grant includes a translation/interpretation budget which is

being used for newly arrived refugee families. SEDO funding helped the group to buy and fit out the '\$WaP Van', a mobile eco-hardware display and sales van. Ongoing funding is required to meet demand across the Perth metropolitan area.

⁷ Ibid

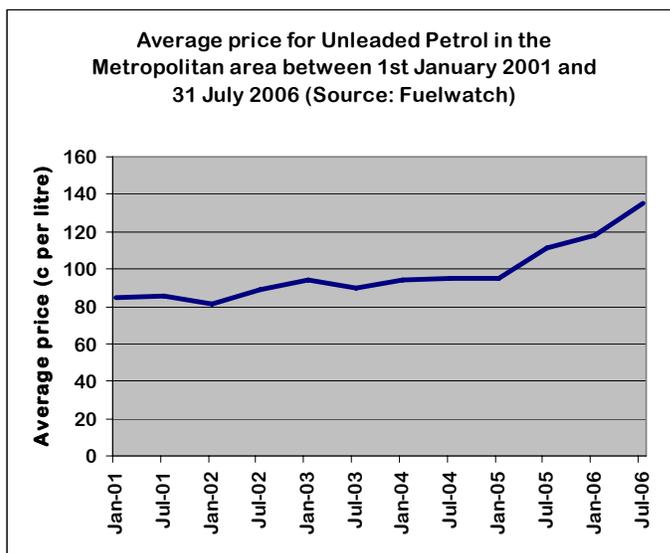
⁵⁴ Committee for Melbourne. (2004) Utility Debt Spiral Project.

⁵⁵ Lawrence, J (2002) *Electricity its just essential*, low income electricity consumer project, Final Report. South Australian Council of Social Service, Adelaide

⁵⁶ See <http://www.environmenthouse.org.au/pages/news/news-two.html>

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 transport⁵⁷. 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 income⁵⁸. And of course, petrol prices are now at an all time high,

and will continue to rise as global oil production reaches its peak⁵⁹, which makes 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.⁶⁰ 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. In a comparison of major Australian cities, Perth was found to have a significant number of people who are 'mortgage and oil vulnerable'.⁶¹

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.

⁵⁷ Charter, Keck, Cramer (2001) *Cars – Where Are They Taking Us?* Research insight

⁵⁸ Ibid

⁵⁹ Dodson, J. and Sipe, N. (2006) *Shocking the Suburbs: Urban Location, Housing Debt and Oil Vulnerability in the Australian City*, Brisbane, Urban Research Program, Griffith University

⁶⁰ Ibid

⁶¹ Ibid

Expand public transport

Recommendation:

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

Rationale:

Public transport is essential for the many people in Western Australia who have no access to cars, such as households without vehicles, those under 18 or over 80, or those people with a disability that makes driving impossible.

Add the rising cost of petrol, and demand for alternatives to transport by the private car is increasing. Train boardings have increased significantly, rising 4.5 percent in 2005-06 and are filled to capacity during peak periods⁶² Anecdotal evidence suggests that the usage of Perth's public transport system is rising more quickly than usual and, as seen in the table below, at times when fuel prices peak public transport patronage also increases.

Transperth patronage and average fuel price						
	Patronage (million) *			Fuel price (cents) #		
	2004	2005	2006	2004	2005	2006
January	4.530	4.730	4.950	93.8	94.6	117.7
February	5.377	5.799	5.986	90.6	98.7	117.9
March	6.166	6.158	6.882	93.2	104.7	120.6
April	5.084	5.720	5.457	93.0	107.9	128.6
May	5.762	6.275	6.773	97.8	103.2	135.6
June	5.379	5.576	6.062	98.4	104.3	135.5
July	5.425	5.552	5.725	94.6	110.9	135.0
August	5.978	6.322		101.0	117.1	
September	5.861	5.950		102.0	130.2	
October	5.673	6.088		104.5	124.4	
November	5.823	6.031		103.7	115.6	
December	5.159	5.142		97.8	112.7	

* System-wide fare-paying boardings and free travel on CAT and FTZ.
Average price of unleaded petrol in Metropolitan Perth (from Fuel Watch)

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Access to public transport is patchy throughout the Perth metropolitan area, and many suburbs are particularly disadvantaged, which 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,

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

⁶² Carpenter/MacTiernan Media Statement 25?09?06

<http://www.mediastatements.wa.gov.au/media/media.nsf/news/9834F3E5763E51454>

⁶³ Transperth Patronage and Average Fuel Price. Transperth Education

and investment is required to ensure that the public transport services in these suburbs are adequate.

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

- 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 Joondalup, 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;
- Increasing the number of fully accessible buses in the transport fleet to allow easier access by disabled people, elderly people and prams;
- Freeze concessions fees for public transport to ensure affordable access to public transport for those under the most financial strain; and
- Extend concessions to university students to encourage more students to make use of available public transport to university campuses.

Encourage alternatives to cars

Recommendation:

Increase investment in safe, secure and accessible, dedicated walking and cycling routes in the suburbs of Perth.

Rationale:

In a car-dependent city such as Perth, where three-quarters of all trips are made by car⁶⁴, 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.



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.

The State Government will have to support these measures through the budget, rather than removing funding for programs like the Bike Path network, as happened in the 2006-07 budget.

⁶⁴ Department of Planning and Infrastructure (2000) Travelsmart, http://www.dpi.wa.gov.au/mediaFiles/tsmart_highlights.pdf, accessed on 30 August 2006

Community Impact Case Study:

Emergency Relief Providers of Utilities Assistance

Emergency Relief services often 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 numbers of people requesting assistance.

An increasing number of clients seeking financial assistance to help pay utility bills, such as power and water are also being turned away, risking people being disconnected from essential services.

Agencies also report an increase in the number of people attending that are angry and frustrated. Clients with a mental illness or that are homeless, are among other issues agencies state they increasingly deal with.

A training needs analysis undertaken by WACOSS demonstrated that the demand on services come not only from clients but also from the increasing expectation from community and funding bodies that all organisations (ER inclusive) provide quality services to clients as well as complying with good management and governance practices, including adhering to relevant regulations for the protection of paid and unpaid staff.

For the Emergency Relief sector to meet these requirements and to maintain a high standard and consistent approach to service delivery across the state, it requires support and resourcing of all services and a well-targeted and equitable training program. In addition, agencies need to be able to access a central coordinated fund to assist people to meet the costs of their basic essential services, such as a government funded Utility Relief Grant Scheme.

Health

Improved Dental Services

Recommendation:

Commit additional resources to assist low income families and elderly people to access high quality dental care including early intervention and on-going monitoring of oral health.

Rationale:

A lack of access to public dental services and long delays for treatment are still features of Dental Services in Western Australia in 2006. The Strategic Vision that has encouraged and informed health reform in Western Australia has so far completely overlooked dental care.



Some of the particular challenges for low income families and elderly people 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:

- Develop a dental workforce plan for next 10 – 15 years;
- 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 million a year of sustained funding would provide optimal investment and improve primary health care for people in Western Australia. It would reduce waiting lists for dental care to between 4-6 months.

Expand Patients Assistance Transport Scheme (PATS)

Recommendation:

Fund the Country Health Service to expand the Patients Assistance Transport Scheme and to develop a Strategic Plan for the scheme.

Rationale:

The provision of adequate support for people in rural, regional and remote areas of Western Australia to access high quality health services continues to be of concern. For example, currently PATS does not provide funding for a support person to accompany patients during their travel and treatment. This results in less than optimal treatment outcomes for many patients with more severe illnesses.

Some of the guidelines for accessing PATS should also be reviewed. For example, currently any trip over 15 hours road travel time is eligible for air travel. Any trip under 15 hours is eligible for bus travel. This is obviously a long way for a sick person to travel by bus, and further analysis of the cost of this change should be undertaken to examine the possibility of reducing the eligibility.

The Strategic Plan for PATS should consider:

- An expansion of the scheme to cover the travel costs of a support person for patients;
- An increase in the PATS subsidy in recognition of higher petrol costs;
- Changing the guidelines to cover air travel for trips over 10 hours, rather than over 15 hours; and
- Greater promotion of PATS in regional, rural and remote areas;

Implement Community/ Consumer Engagement Framework

Recommendation:

Fund the implementation of the Community/ Consumer Engagement Framework in the Department of Health

Rationale:

The Department of Health has developed a draft policy framework that formally recognises the importance and usefulness of Consumer and Community Engagement in all parts of the Health system, including hospitals, health services, policy, planning, research and service delivery. The draft framework is about to be released for consultation with health providers.

To ensure that the Consumer and Community Engagement Framework is appropriately implemented, some funding should be dedicated to supporting this process.

Men's Health Strategy

Recommendation:

Fund the Department of Health to develop strategic plan for improving Men's Health.

Rationale:

Men's health in Australia is getting an increasing amount of attention as the male mortality rate continues to be considerably higher than that for women for all leading causes of death, and the life expectancy for men continues to be about seven years less than for women.

Wellness of men is not just a critical health issue, but is also an important economic issue. Recent studies have revealed that every male in the Australian workforce with an untreated chronic illness, such as depression, costs an average of \$9,960 to their employer every year in lost productivity and time off.

Jeff Kennett, How to Create a Positive Workplace, Address to AIMWA, 2005

ABS reports show that death rate for men is substantially higher in a number of the leading causes of death, for example, from malignant tumours (237.8 males to 146.7 females per 100,000 deaths); heart disease (190 males to 119.9 females); accidents (35.6 males to 17.7 females); motor vehicle traffic accidents (13.1 males to 5.5 females) and suicide (21.9 males compared to 5.5 females).⁶⁵

The poor health status of men is complicated by a number of issues:

- men are more likely than women to shy away from medical treatment of any kind or to seek help in general;
- lack of general health awareness amongst men;
- less willingness to adopt a healthier lifestyle or take other preventative measures;
- more alcohol and other drug problems;
- men and boys engaging in more risk taking; and
- even worse health outcomes for men from rural and regional areas.⁶⁶

The incidence of depression in men is a particular cause for concern, with statistics indicating that one out of every six Australian men suffers from depression at any given time.⁶⁷

Most men's and boy's health problems are preventable. What is required is an effective government policy and a new approach to health interventions and health promotion which delivers messages to males that their health is important and encourages them to access health services. Men typically resist accessing medical, allied health or welfare services when their health or wellbeing is at risk. Accordingly, health services need to be mindful of men's attitudes to health and how it impacts on men's and boy's health status, health risk behaviour and the utilisation of health services.

⁶⁵ Australian Bureau of Statistics (200) *Mortality Atlas Australia*

⁶⁶ National Health Strategy's Research Paper (1992)

⁶⁷ Mental Health Council of Australia (2005) *Not for Service*

Complex health needs in young people

Recommendation:

Develop a strategic approach to addressing complex health needs (or co-morbidity) in young people. Fund workforce development and capacity building in alcohol and other drug sector, mental health sector and youth sector to address these issues.

“My son is 19 and he has chronic schizophrenia and a drug abuse problem... My son can't even get supported accommodation..... These kids with comorbid problems like my son are becoming the new generation of homeless people.”

(Carer, Mother, Western Australia, West Perth Forum #31)

Rationale:

The WA Network of Alcohol and other Drug Agencies (WANADA), the WA Association for Mental Health (WAAMH) and the Youth Affairs Council of WA (YACWA) have jointly identified the need to address co-morbidity⁶⁸ in young people, bringing together the areas of alcohol and other drug, mental health, Aboriginal health, women's health, youth, housing, education, justice, GP and other sectors.

Given the potential impact on health and social services of young people with complex health needs, it is important that a strategy be developed to address multiple issues (such as alcohol and other drug, mental health, housing, education and so on) in a coordinated way. A coordinated, preventative approach has the potential to deliver significant cost savings for services and the community in the short and long term.

This strategic approach should be a coordinated workforce development and capacity building process (including training) in all of the sectors mentioned above, focusing on:

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

Mobile Health Units for Aboriginal People

Recommendation:

Fund mobile health units to work specifically with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people throughout metropolitan and regional areas, staffed by culturally aware community health workers.

Rationale:

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in WA continue to experience extremely poor health, suffering from markedly higher rates of potentially preventable chronic health conditions than the rest of the population.⁶⁹

⁶⁸ Co-morbidity refers to the presence of one or more disorders (or diseases) in addition to a primary disease or disorder, and the effect of such additional disorders or diseases.

⁶⁹ Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision, (2005) *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage: Key Indicators 2005 Report* Productivity Commission, Canberra.

Currently, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are not accessing mainstream health services at the rate of the general population – for example Aboriginal children in WA have significantly lower rates of contact with health professionals, 49% when compared to the general population - 59%.⁷⁰ For many Aboriginal people, poor health is closely related to a lack of access to health services.⁷¹

Developing mobile health units is one way of addressing the current lack of access to health services faced by many Aboriginal people. These mobile units can visit patients in their homes and in their communities, which can address access problems for people without reliable or affordable transport. Such a program may also be a more culturally appropriate way of delivering health services, where outreach health workers would be able to build rapport with communities.

There are currently mobile health units targeted at homeless people that are operating successfully in Fremantle and Midland, however there are some significant gaps in other areas of the Perth Metropolitan area, such as the northern suburbs (Clarkson, Joondalup and Quinns Rock) where many young families are living, as well as the Peel region (Mandurah and Pinjarra).

Expanding alcohol & drug services in regional areas

Recommendation:

Fund specific alcohol and other drug services in regional areas, focused on the needs of Aboriginal people to develop prevention and early intervention resources specific to individual communities and provide continued care in the local communities.

Rationale:

Providers of alcohol and other drug services and Aboriginal health services throughout Western Australia have clearly identified a gap in locally specific prevention campaigns that are linked with intervention. Metropolitan approaches to prevention can rarely be effectively transferred to apply to regional social and community situations. For example, effective campaigns and interventions need to be delivered in the appropriate language in specific areas.

In the past, minimal resources have been dedicated towards supporting local and regional approaches to alcohol and other drug prevention and intervention resources. However, where local campaigns have been developed, they have proven to be very successful (such as the new cannabis law education campaigns). Drug trends continually change and adequate resources are needed for locally identified issues to be targeted.

⁷⁰ Telethon Institute for Child Health Research, (2005) *The Health of Aboriginal Children and Young People* Telethon Institute, Perth.

⁷¹ Best Practice in Alcohol and Other Drug Interventions Working Group (2000) *Evidence Based Practice Indicators for Alcohol and Other Drug Interventions Literature Review*. Drug and Alcohol Office, Western Australia

Locally specific approaches are also important in the provision of continued care – it has been demonstrated that better outcomes for clients are possible when the family and community area involved in treatment and support wherever possible.⁷²

Specialist Mental Health Services

Recommendation:

Fund specialist mental health services for seniors, people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds (CaLD), Aboriginal people and for regional and remote areas.

Rationale:

The State Government should commit to improve mental health services for seniors and people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds by:

- Ensuring that people from a CaLD background and Seniors are targeted through a State Mental Health Strategy;
- Providing specific and meaningful services and activities for those suffering from Depression or Mental Health issues, who are being cared for in the community
- Developing partnership between the government mental health service providers and CaLD community organisations in order to facilitate the delivery of culturally appropriate health services;
- Ensuring Practitioners and Mental Health staff undertake cross cultural awareness training; and
- Establishing a culturally appropriate mental health service for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is a matter of urgency.



The lack of specific mental health services for people from a CaLD background and for seniors continues to be of concern. There is a lack of specific services for people from a CaLD background, which results in a potential lack of access for these people.

For seniors, mental health conditions are often undiagnosed, or incorrectly attributed to age or dementia. Hence, seniors are incorrectly recorded as having the lowest levels of mental illness in the community.⁹

There is an increasing need for a culturally appropriate mental health service for Aboriginal people in WA, for rural and urban areas. Since the closure of a service in 2003, one study found that there was a 110% increase in hospitalisations of former clients in the year following cessation of Aboriginal focussed mental health services when compared to the previous year⁷³.

⁷² Evidence Based Practice Indicators for Alcohol and Other Drug Interventions: Literature Review, 2000

⁷³ Office of Mental Health, (2005) *WA Aboriginal Social and Emotional Well Being and Mental Health Strategy*, Department of Health, Perth.

In addition, mental health services in the regions are extremely under-resourced. There has been little real progress to date with mental health services in rural and remote areas continuing to struggle to provide much needed services.

Hepatitis C prevention, education and support

Recommendation:

Fund an education program in response to increased incidence of hepatitis C, with a particular focus on expansion and diversification of services to enhance prevention of people at risk from contracting hepatitis C; and to support those living with hepatitis C, including in regional and rural areas.

Rationale:

People who inject drugs are at the greatest risk of contracting hepatitis C. Nationally approximately 80% of current infections and 90% of new infections are estimated to be due to unsafe injecting practices. Western Australia has a high prevalence of people using injected drugs: the 2004 National Drug Strategy Household Survey showed that WA had the largest proportion of the population aged 14 years and over using injected drugs of any state (0.9%), and more than twice the national average of 0.4%.⁷⁴

Regional areas of Western Australia indicate alarming rates per capita of hepatitis C notifications and increasing rates of hepatitis C amongst Aboriginal people in Western Australia. (Western Australian Hepatitis C Action Plan 2006-2008, pp7-10)

However, prevention programs in the past have been effective, for example:

“By the year 2000, approximately 21,000 hepatitis C virus (HCV) infections are estimated to have been prevented among injecting drug users since the introduction of Needle and Syringe Programs (NSPs) in 1988, (of which approximately 16,000 would have developed chronic HCV... The analysis indicates that there have been significant financial savings accruing to government from the investment in NSPs to date, and that these savings will continue to accrue into the future.”⁷⁵

State Government can build on this success by expanding prevention and education programs aimed at people at risk of contracting hepatitis C, including prison populations and youth. Given the correlation between hepatitis C and drug use, these programs should be delivered in collaboration with alcohol and other drug services.

To support people living with hepatitis C, treatment services need to be accessible and acceptable to all clients including people who inject drugs. Treatment and support services require resources to ensure collaboration with liver clinics, alcohol and other drug services, mental health services and prisons.

⁷⁴ Australian Institute of Health and Wellbeing, cited in Department of Health (2006) *Western Australian Hepatitis C Action Plan 2006-2008*. Government of Western Australia, p. 8

⁷⁵ Department of Health and Ageing (2002) *Return on Investment in Needle & Syringe Programs In Australia*, Commonwealth Government of Australia

Support for Neurological conditions

Recommendations:

Expand the range of services provided to people suffering from a neurological condition by providing additional funds for services in the home and community, such as community based social workers to provide for people with neurological conditions, or a funded centralised information/education resource centre for people with neurological conditions.

Rationale:

An estimated one in eight people suffers from a neurological condition at some stage in their lives. Many of these conditions are severe, chronic and degenerative. The social impact can be significant, and there are often enormous demands and stresses on families and carers, social stigma and isolation, financial hardship, reduced life expectancy, grief and loss for the whole family.

In the wider context, there is an overall lack of a streamlined, co-ordinated, continuum of care for people with neurological conditions. There are inadequate and inequitable resources allocated to the community component of care for these people. There is also a major deficit of resources for the provision of regional, remote and community services most particularly, and as with other aspects of Indigenous health, a lack of resources to tackle what appears to be a disproportionately larger representation of Aboriginal people with neurological conditions.

Some of the key areas that require further support are:

- Funding community based social workers to provide for people with neurological conditions, to:
 - Undertake one stop assessments and case management;
 - Work through the complex and difficult maze of services available for people with neurological conditions; and
 - To ensure a continuum of care for people discharged from hospitals, or with degenerative conditions who need variations or new supports.
- Providing additional funds for services in the home and community:
 - Respite care, particularly facilities suitable for younger people;
 - Personal care, such as bathing, medication assistance;
 - Social support;
 - Domestic assistance; and
 - Education packages to train support workers in the complexities of neurological conditions and care needs.
- A funded centralised information/education resource centre for people with neurological conditions.
 - Many people who on receipt of a neurological diagnosis are left to their own resources to find out about their condition, its prognosis and services available. This is particularly problematical for people in regional and remote areas.

Community Impact Case Study:

The alcohol and other drug service sector

Alcohol and other drug services in Western Australia regularly report that annual increases in funding due to indexation is inadequate to meet the range of rising costs. Operating costs are increasing in many areas, such as: salaries, insurance, travel (including petrol costs particularly to cover the areas covered by regional services) and utilities.⁷⁶

While recognising the appeal for funding bodies in establishing new initiatives, alcohol and drug agencies firstly require further resources to meet the rising costs of delivering established services.

For example, the demands that the justice system places on alcohol and other drug services, is a particular challenge. The WA Network of Alcohol and Other Drug Agencies (WANADA) has undertaken research into the number of clients referred through the justice system, and how this reduces the capacity for organisations to provide services for voluntary clients.⁷⁷ Demand for alcohol and other drug services continues to rise, yet most of the established services are already operating at full capacity.

Research continues to show that treatment and support through alcohol and other drug services can be extremely cost efficient in terms of overall cost savings to the community.⁷⁸ With adequate funding to alcohol and other drug services, significant change can be achieved, and significant cost savings made.

As reported by many other sectors, funding is the key factor in ensuring a sustainable workforce, particularly in regional areas. A sustainable workforce will ultimately result in the best outcomes for clients accessing the services.

⁷⁶ WA Network of Alcohol and Other Drug Agencies (2005) *Collation of Regional Alcohol And Other Drug Community Drug Service Teams Concerns 2005*. Unpublished

⁷⁷ WA Network of Alcohol and Other Drug Agencies (2005) *Alcohol and Other Drug Service Sector Delivery of Services to Justice Clients Report*. Unpublished

⁷⁸ Australian National Council on Drugs (2006) *Perth AOD Agency Forum report: Perth Consultation on Drug & Alcohol Issues*. Australian National Council on Drugs

Financial Wellbeing

Review of State Government Concessions

Recommendation:

As recommended in the State Taxation Review, undertake a comprehensive review of State concessions to examine the accessibility, equity and adequacy of state concessions. In addition, the review 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.

Rationale:

Concessions are an integral part of the range of support needed by disadvantaged individuals and families. At present, the existing system of concessions is in urgent need of review – the variations existing between States and Territories and also the variations in the subsidies available to holders of different types of concession cards are unacceptable. The State Government has committed to undertaking such a review in its current term, which was confirmed by the Interim Report of the State Taxation Review released in June 2006.⁷⁹



In addition, 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.⁸⁰ Community service obligation payments are intended to benefit all disadvantaged members of the community, not just customers of the Government enterprises providing essential services.

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, and ensure that all future taxes and charges be kept at or below the Cost of Living Index.

Rationale:

The state government reliance on the Consumer Price Index (CPI) as an indicator of the cost of living is flawed. The Australian Bureau of Statistics has explicitly stated that “A true cost-

⁷⁹ Department of Treasury and Finance (2006) *State Taxation Review: Interim Report*, Government of Western Australia

⁸⁰ Economic Regulatory Authority (2006) *Inquiry on Country Water and Wastewater Pricing in Western Australia*, Final Report, Government of Western Australia

of-living index, among other things, would need to be concerned with changes in standards of living and with the substitutions that consumers make in order to maintain their standard of living when faced with changing market conditions.”⁸¹

A number of limitations of the CPI have been recently summarised by the Australian Greens, including it

- ignores interest expenditure
- ignores cost of land and established houses
- ignores regional Australia
- describes average prices, not the price of necessities.⁸²

Household fees and charges such as Transperth fares, electricity tariffs, Water Corporation charges, sewerage and drainage; motor vehicle registrations; compulsory third party insurance; and drivers licence fees make a significant impact on family budgets.

While most charges were not increased in last year’s budget, there were increases in water tariffs and most Transperth fares, which according the WACOSS household model assessment, push the total impact of fees and charges above the CPI for many families. WACOSS calls on the government to freeze fees and charges in line with its 2004 commitment, and develop a more comprehensive Cost of Living Index (CLI) for future reference.

Assessing Revenue Proposals

Recommendation:

Subject all State Revenue Proposals to a Social Impact Assessment to ensure that they do not unfairly impact on low-income families and individuals.

It is vital that the State subject all revenue proposals to a social impact assessment to ascertain whether separately or cumulatively they impact unfairly on low income families and individuals. Criteria ought to be developed to measure such impact and proposals should be modified if it is shown that they would disadvantage groups in the community. A Cost of Living Index would be a useful reference for conducting a social impact assessment.

WACOSS are committed to ensuring that a drive for an equitable tax system is high on the public agenda. We are pleased that the government is currently undertaking a review of State Taxes and we will be putting forward a submission as part of this process. At this stage however, it is important to recognize that low income earners often bear the highest cost of any across the board increases to state taxes and charges in terms of the representation that these costs have in comparison to the income of these individuals and families.

⁸¹ 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

⁸² Denniss, Richard *Let them eat cake: How low income earners are disadvantaged by the consumer price index* prepared for the Australian Greens, September 2006.

Extending Concessions to Carers

Recommendation:

Extend the range of concessions currently granted to Seniors to the approximately 18,400 family carers under the age of 60 who are in receipt of carer allowance and the 115,800 people who are severely or profoundly disabled.

Rationale:

Caring responsibilities can not only restrict a carer's earning capacity, but also incur extra costs for the household such as extra electricity, phone or transport costs, medications, continence products and special equipment. Rebates and concessions given to seniors in our community should be extended to carers to assist them in meeting the demands and pressures of their role.

Community Impact Case Study:

Financial Counselling Services

Financial Counsellors offer long-term solutions to people in crisis and financial hardship by building on individual capacity in managing financial affairs. Financial Counsellors report helping people with housing, utility bills, creditors, bankruptcy, Centrelink and budgeting skills.

The Financial Counsellors Association recently surveyed their members, and combined with anecdotal evidence, the following trends are evident:

- Client demands for services are increasing, yet resources to deliver the services have not been increasing;
- There is a lack of social services providing financial counselling, especially in regional areas and new suburbs of Perth;
- Individual financial counsellors generally only work part-time, for a low salary, and feel unable to meet the demand from clients.

The outcome of the increased demand for services is waiting periods of an average of 11 days, or as long as 3 weeks, before individuals can access the services of a financial counsellor. It also means that services are turning away an average of 13 people per week.

Given the fact that the majority of individuals that access financial counselling do so in a time of crisis, long waiting periods before appointments only worsens financial problems. The time spent waiting can make a huge difference to people being able to address financial problems they are experiencing and can lead to outcomes such as: eviction from their home, repossession of vehicles, legal action being taken against them, as well as further entrenchment into poverty and financial hardship.

Safety

Supporting the Needs of Accompanying Children

Recommendation:

Enable the employment of Children's Domestic Violence Specialist Workers (or equivalent) in Women's Refuge and Domestic Violence Services to reduce the impact of domestic and family violence on the lives of children.

Rationale:

The National SAAP Data Collection Report 2003-04 states that there 5,900 accompanying children in SAAP Services in WA.



The short and long term impact for children who are victims of physical, psychological, verbal, emotional and or sexual abuse is far reaching. Witnessing their mother being trapped in a cycle of abuse and controlling behaviour also have a huge impact on children's emotional and psychological well-being and performance at school. It is in the best interest of children to ensure they receive the necessary support when they accompanying their mother to a Refuge Service. When children come to refuges there is a critical 'window of opportunity'

for Child Support Workers to deal with disclosures of abuse and also engage children specific programs.

The majority of Refuges are only able to provide a half time Child Support Worker due to funding constraints. All Refuge Services who work with children should receive additional funding to employ dedicated Child Support workers, to meet the needs of the majority of clients, who are children.

Refuge-Based Outreach Services

Recommendation:

Expand the Refuge based Outreach Model to locations where Women's Refuge and Safe Houses exist to ensure a state-wide network of domestic and family violence outreach services are available to support women and children exiting the Refuge and/or living in violent relationship.

Rationale:

It is evident that where Refuge Services are funded to provide a Domestic Violence Outreach Service, many women and children benefit from these specialist services. They are a vital component to the overall success the intervention and prevention of escalating violence within relationships.

A number of Domestic Violence Advocacy and Referral Services have been operating as successful models in various regions in WA. DV Outreach Services assist women and children who are exiting the Refuge and/or living in the community, with a range of specialist services such as Family Court matters; counselling; advocacy and safety planning for 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 recommend the establishment of additional DV Outreach Services.

Specialist domestic violence services

Recommendation:

Fund the establishment of specialist domestic violence services in a range of areas, in particular, a refuge for young women, a specialist counselling service for men who are victims of violence, and a specialist service for CaLD communities who are experiencing domestic and family violence.

Rationale:

Young women

Young women under the age of 18 and who are fleeing family and domestic violence are currently unable to access women's refuge accommodation. In addition, if they have children, they are also unable to access any crisis accommodation, forcing them to return to their abuser and placing them in unacceptable danger.

Youth Hostels are mixed gender and unable to effectively deal with the complexity of Domestic and Family Violence; being housed with young people of the opposite sex often leads to young woman going from one bad relationship straight into another. Young women with children are unable to access youth crisis hostels due to the inability of hostels to provide facilities for children. Refuges will only accept them if they agree to Department of Community Development (DCD) intervention and support; a criterion that is not required of other women accessing refuges. DCD are unable to support these young women as their stated priority focus is children 0 - 5 yrs.

Men

While the victims of domestic violence are primarily women, men can also be victims of domestic violence, either from their female partners or same sex partners. There is currently no specialist counselling service for men who are victims of violence, and a specialist counselling service in this area should be developed.

The Family and Domestic Violence Unit of the Department for Community Development undertook a Men's Project in 2005, which should be released shortly. It is anticipated that this report will address the issue of men as victims of violence, amongst a range of other issues.

CaLD Communities

The Family and Domestic Violence Unit has recently recognised the importance of culturally appropriate programs to deal with domestic and family violence in CaLD communities, and has a program focused on African communities. However, there is a lack of empirical evidence about domestic violence across all CaLD communities, and new and emerging communities may also be experiencing serious domestic violence issues. Further research should be undertaken by the Family and Domestic Violence Unit to investigate this issue.

Alcohol diversion programs

Recommendation:

Fund an alcohol diversion program in conjunction with police and the justice system.

Rationale:

The commonwealth government has invested considerable funds in recent years to support police and court diversion programs for illicit drug use.⁸³ However, there remains a significant gap in diversion services for people with alcohol related problems who come in contact with police and the court systems.

The majority of alcohol and other drug treatment and support services report that alcohol is the principal drug of concern for their clients. This is particularly the case for services operating in regional and remote locations of Western Australia. Regional services report that court presentations are over represented by alcohol induced charges, including drink driving, violence and injury.

⁸³ The primary objective of the Drug Diversion program is to increase incentives for drug users to identify and treat their illicit drug use early. It also aims to decrease the social impact of illicit drug use within the community and to prevent a new generation of drug users committing drug-related crime from emerging in Australia.

(See: <http://www.health.gov.au/internet/wcms/publishing.nsf/Content/health-pubhlth-strateg-drugs-illicit-diversion-about.htm>)

Community Impact Case Study:

Role of NGOs in diverting young people from crime

In 2005 WACOSS undertook a research project investigating the role of NGOs in diverting young people from crime.

The research was based on a number of assumptions. Firstly that criminal activity is a symptom of social exclusion: a shorthand term for what can happen when people or areas suffer from a combination of linked problems such as unemployment, poor skills, low incomes, poor housing, high crime, bad health and family breakdown. The second assumption is that one of the most important and effective ways of preventing crime is work at grass-roots level, since this is the level that is most familiar with the problem and in the best position to find appropriate solutions.

The research program examined the large number of non-government organisations not specifically funded to play a crime prevention role. The research found that even though many NGOs were not running specific programs aimed at diverting young people from crime, they were in fact having this impact, due to a wide range of programs and services being run. The research confirmed the importance of early intervention, and the importance of building positive, trusting relationships between the young people and the youth workers. However, to be effective, many of the services did not want to be associated with, or known as, crime preventions based agencies.

Some of the key recommendations of the report include:

- Wider recognition of NGO's in crime prevention;
- Importance of basic goods and services such as accommodation and emergency relief;
- The need to deliver culturally appropriate services;
- Positives of mentoring programs and the importance of positive relationships between young people accessing services and youth workers; and
- Collaborations with schools and other stakeholders.

This research demonstrates the potential for community service organisations who are delivering services on the ground to have positive, and yet unintended benefits in diverting young people from crime. Given that these agencies are already established and are engaging with young people who are at risk of offending, providing funding and support to them is likely to substantially enhance their crime prevention function.

The research and literature search demonstrates that to be effective, services to these young people must be able to build up a high level of trust and rapport with the client. Funding is an essential element of services ability to do this.

WACOSS (2005) *The Role of Non-Government Organisations in Diverting Young People from Crime*, Research and Development Fund of the Office of Crime Prevention, Department of the Premier and Cabinet, Western Australia, available at:

http://wacoss.org.au/images/assets/publications_reports/crime_prevention_nov2005.pdf

Education

Educational Support

Recommendations:

Develop a range of strategies to encourage young people from CaLD and Aboriginal backgrounds to stay at school longer including:

- Early intervention approaches to work with Aboriginal and CaLD students at risk;
- Specially designed services and support to children of refugees and asylum seekers in primary and high schools;
- Pre-traineeship courses for Aboriginal and CaLD young people requiring additional support;
- Flexible learning program to meet the specific needs of the Aboriginal and CaLD young people identified as having limited schooling with inadequate literacy and numeracy skills;
- Provide funding for staff development programs, especially cross-cultural awareness.

Rationale:

The importance of education in an individual's quality of life cannot be understated. The low rates of retention of young people from Aboriginal and CaLD backgrounds in formal education is therefore a significant problem.⁸⁴ Nationally in 2004, Aboriginal students were half as likely to continue to year 12 as non-Aboriginal students.⁸⁵ Western Australia has the lowest total retention rate of Aboriginal students from year 10 to 12 of all the states in Australia.⁸⁶

For students with a CaLD background, there are similar problems. One in five students are either newly arrived in Australia and from a language background other than English or born in Australia but entering school with little or no English.⁸⁷ Young people from CaLD backgrounds have relatively low participation rates in apprenticeships and traineeships locally and nationally, which may lead to less employment opportunities in some areas.⁸⁸

In addition, children who have arrived in Australia either as asylum seekers or as refugees have a unique set of social and emotional needs, and require support through the formal education system.

The Government must increase funding for services to meet the needs of Indigenous and CaLD young people to help them attain a level of education that is equitable with the mainstream community.

⁸⁴ <http://www.fecca.org.au/POLICY/Education.html#context>

⁸⁵ Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision, (2005) *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage: Key Indicators 2005 Report* Productivity Commission, Canberra.

⁸⁶ Productivity Commission (2005) *Report on Government Services 2005*, Productivity Commission, Canberra.

⁸⁷ <http://www.eddept.wa.edu.au/giftal/inclusivity/diverse.htm>

⁸⁸ Jupp, J (ed) (2001), *The Australian people: An encyclopaedia of the nation, its people and their origins*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

Alternative education programs for young mothers

Recommendation:

Fund programs targeted at young mothers to keep them in the formal education system.

Rationale:

Teenage women whose secondary education is interrupted by pregnancy and parenting need to be able to continue their education in a supportive environment that includes on-site care for their children (0 - 2 years).



It is widely recognised that the higher the education level of the mother, the better education and social outcomes for the child. Teenage mothers are at risk of becoming socially isolated, developing mental health problems or at risk of being caught in a poverty trap through lack of education and training for employment. The 'flow on' effects of this predicament to their children is acute.

Social Participation

State Based Interpreting Service

Recommendation:

Establish an independent State Interpreting and Translation Unit, as recommended by the Office of Multicultural Interests *Needs Analysis*.

Rationale:

Around 11 per cent of Western Australians speak a language other than English at home, with as many 170 different languages spoken.⁸⁹ There is a growing demand for interpreting services to support the needs of CALD clients accessing Government services. There is also a lack of interpreting services for Aboriginal people⁹⁰, despite the high numbers of Aboriginal people who use the legal and health system.

For people accessing the legal system or receiving health care, it is obviously critical that they are able to communicate effectively. The State Government has a responsibility to ensure that all Government and community agencies are able to meet their access and equity obligations to non-English speaking Australians by providing a state based interpreting service.

An independent State Interpreting and Translation Unit should:

- Provide cost free interpreting and translation services to all clients seeking to access State services and State funded services operated by community agencies;
- Undertake Translating and Interpreting in migrant languages as well as Indigenous community languages⁹¹ particularly in health and legal contexts; and
- Develop a bank of translated material, in particular of standard government and agency forms, but of information relating to health, legal, welfare and industrial matters as well.

Support for Volunteers

Recommendations:

Explore potential barriers to volunteering such as the impact of the cost of Volunteer Personal Accident Premiums on service delivery; the cost/benefit of increasing the standard reimbursements for volunteers; and cost/benefit of reducing the cost (financially and time-wise) of police and Working With Children checks for volunteers.

Rationale:

In 2000, almost 429,000 people in Western Australia or one-third of our population were volunteers. Current estimates value volunteer contribution at just over \$19 per hour. ABS statistics indicate that individual volunteers contribute between 4-6 hours per week, an average of 240 hours per year. This equals \$4,560.00 worth of contribution per year.

⁸⁹ <http://www.omi.wa.gov.au/WAPeople/>

⁹⁰ Office of Multicultural Interests (OMI), (2004) *Analysis of the Need for Interpreter and Translation Services within the Western Australian Government Sector*, OMI, Perth.

⁹¹ Should also include Interpreting Services for the Deaf.

Based on the formula above, plus adding standard economic multipliers, the annual contribution by all volunteers in Western Australia is worth at the very minimum \$5,868,720.00 to the economy.

Even more importantly, volunteering results in the building and strengthening of social ties and the fostering an ethos of community engagement. By resourcing initiatives and programs which enhance and enable volunteering in WA, the Government would be increasing the contribution made by volunteers to our community and economy.

The above recommendations address issues which discourage people from becoming volunteers and discourage organisations from using volunteers. It is important to remove barriers to volunteering as these activities clearly make an invaluable contribution to the community and especially to the work of the non-government human services sector.

Services for Young People

Recommendations:

Commit funding in the long term to increase funding for the provision of services for young people.

Rationale:

The recent injection of \$50 million by the State government to employ more child protection workers is a welcome contribution to protecting the health and wellbeing of young people in Western Australia. However, this does not completely cover the funding shortfalls in the youth services area. In general, current funding levels within the youth sector are not adequate to meet the existing and ongoing responsibilities and costs of youth services.

A number of recommendations relating to young people have been included in other sections of this submission (for example: housing and education). The specific recommendations contained in this section are those that are specific to young people and / or stretch across different portfolios.

In particular the State Government should commit funding to:

- Community engagement opportunities for recently arrived refugee and migrant youth, who, through not engaging with the broader community, are delaying opportunities to socialise and develop leadership qualities. Access to sport, recreation and cultural activities can be offered to these young people via Intensive English Centres.
- The development of legal public youth art spaces.
- The development of youth friendly spaces to address the lack of safe, interesting and engaging 'hang out' or 'chill out' venues for young people to form community and develop mutual peer support networks. The lack of adequate facilities is forcing young people to use private spaces (such as shopping centres and fast food outlets), which increases the chances of young people coming into contact with policing authorities and security guards.
- Regional youth 'transition' services to support young people to make successful transitions through adolescence. This problem is especially acute in regional Western Australia where it is difficult to access health services outside of the hospital or GP; housing and affordable rentals; accessing mental health services and, simply 'getting around' as there is little public transport.

Community Impact Case Study:

Community, Neighbourhood and Learning Centres

There is a strong network of over 70 Community, Neighbourhood and Learning Centres in Western Australia, with approximately 35 funded by the Department for Community Development under their Family Support or Family Centre Programme.

These Centres are community-based and managed; rely heavily on volunteers; offer programmes and activities and events for members of their local community; provide crèche and other children's services; and provide adult community education opportunities. Several of these Centres also offer emergency relief, financial counselling, family counselling and information & referral services.

There is the potential for the usage of these Centres to be maximised, by running more Family Support or Early Childhood programmes through them. Centres provide a range of services and facilities and often families access Centres for more than one service. The number of programmes can be increased at Centres, including community based child care centres, using the existing infrastructure.

The Centres also provide an ideal opportunity for different parts of government to collaborate in a community. For example, the Department of Health and the Department for Community Development can form partnerships with local government to provide services for communities in a cost-effective and responsive way.

With the ever increasing number of new suburbs in Perth, there is a need to expand these Community Centres and their programs into new urban areas. Increasingly, commercial housing developers are employing community development workers. When the development is completed, there is great potential for Government (both State and local) to continue the work. Ongoing funding is needed for programs, management and coordination; providing a building is not enough.

Appendix 1

List of Organisations consulted in the preparation of the 2007/08 Pre-Budget Submission

ACROD WA
Aged & Community Services WA (ACSWA)
Carers WA
Children, Youth and Family Agencies Association (CYFAA)
Community Housing Coalition
Council on the Ageing WA (COTA)
Developmental Disability Council of WA (DDC)
Derbarl Yerrigan
Ethnic Communities Council (WA)
Financial Counsellors Association
Health Consumers Council
Learning Centre Link
Men's Advisory Network
Neurological Council of WA
People with Disabilities WA
Shelter WA
Sustainable Transport Coalition WA
Volunteering WA
WA Association of Mental Health
Women's Council for Domestic & Family Violence Services (WA)
WA Network of Alcohol and other Drug Agencies
Western Institute of Self Help
Youth Affairs Council WA
Anglicare WA (WACOSS Board Representative)
FPWA (WACOSS Board Representative)
Geraldton Resource Centre (WACOSS Board Representative)
Mission Australia (WACOSS Board Representative)
Ngala Family Resource Centre (WACOSS Board Representative)
Outcare (WACOSS Board Representative)
UnitingCare West (WACOSS Board Representative)