

## Less Budget pain for households but few gains for communities

The Western Australian Council of Social Service acknowledged efforts in today's WA Budget to keep rises in household fees and charges low, but considers more action is needed to provide direct support for low-income households to wind-back high rates of financial hardship in WA.

"The Treasurer's third budget continues the steady path back to surplus and makes a start on paying down the debt mountain," said Louise Giolitto, WACOSS CEO. "Keeping rises in household charges to CPI levels means this budget isn't adding too much pain to those already struggling – but it also contains little targeted support to help them out."

"We'd like to see a rebalancing of prices and concessions for electricity and water for those on low and fixed incomes who still haven't caught up to the last two years of price hikes."

At a time when increasing numbers of West Australians are experiencing poverty, the State Government has missed the opportunity provided by a better than expected financial position to invest in improving the wellbeing of vulnerable families and disadvantaged West Australians.

'Investment today in early intervention and prevention strategies could have made a big impact on the quality of life for many people currently doing it tough, but it would also pay off in terms of reducing the cost to Government in the long term,' according to Louise Giolitto, CEO of the WA Council of Social Service.

WACOSS welcomed the commitment of \$420,000 over 3 years for consumer research and representation, together with a dedicated advisor on consumer issues in the Public Utilities Office, as an opportunity to collaboratively and systematically address this problem with researchers and consumer advocates.

"Linking the Energy Assistance Payment to residential electricity tariff increases is a small, but important step in improving the adequacy of our concession system going forward."

"The focus on Aboriginal wellbeing, particularly addressing the overrepresentation of Aboriginal people in the justice system, is very positive and represents an important shift in how we as a State approach creating safer communities."

"Diverting people away from the justice system and into culturally appropriate services is crucial for improving outcomes for individuals and communities."

"We are pleased to see \$12 million being dedicated to providing additional legal representation for prisoners on remand and to introduce a bail support program."

WACOSS also welcomes the announcement of \$11.6 million for solar PV and batteries in remote Aboriginal communities.

"Providing sustainable energy options in WA's remote communities will assist with both addressing climate resilience and keeping power bills low for their residents."

"Now the State Government has the Budget back into surplus, we expect that this money will be invested into the community."

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