

# WA COMMUNITY RECOVERY PLAN

## STAGE ONE

*Putting in place the systems and supports for an inclusive and effective recovery that leaves no-one behind.*

June 2020



wa council of  
social service

# The Path to Recovery

The COVID-19 crisis forced us to put aside business as usual and focus on what counts in order to respond quickly and effectively. As our community recovers from the pandemic, we have a unique opportunity to reflect on how well previous institutions and policies have served us, and be ambitious about what we want for our future. We have the opportunity to reset our systems, practices and assumptions, and the relationships that underpin them.

For many, 'business as usual' was not working and we do not want a return to it. Instead, we need to chart a course forward through a more inclusive and caring economy that leaves no-one behind. We want to see place-based approaches and an emphasis on communities setting their own priorities.

For others returning to business as usual is not an option as they face unemployment and financial hardship for the first time in their lives. What we do now matters intensely for them and for the future we all share.

## Learning from the Past

In shifting from disaster response to recovery, we must move from the command and control model needed in the immediate crisis, to a local grassroots community development approach – consistent with national and international recovery principles.<sup>1</sup> This has been a crisis like no other, with economic activity shut down for a protracted period and ongoing social distancing measures required to contain the risk of a second outbreak. We put at risk the effectiveness of our recovery if too narrow an understanding of 'the economy' means we miss the lessons learnt about the role of the social in community resilience.

We also need to learn from the responses to the Global Financial Crisis (GFC). Young workers in particular experienced long-term career scarring and diminished lifetime earnings. The jobs lost during that crisis were eventually replaced by ones that were much more precarious and with worse conditions. Then, as now, young and female workers were more likely to be the first let go. Rising insecurity has also meant they have been excluded from the support offered under the JobKeeper Package. For older workers now facing unemployment there is a very real risk if they do not secure ongoing work in the next 18 months they may never return to the workforce.

The growth of casual and insecure work may have provided some cash benefits to industry in the short-term, but the end result has been a less resilient workforce. The fact that JobKeeper is now only supporting 3.5 million workers, rather than the 6 million originally estimated, should be a sign of how badly the balance has tipped the wrong way. If we want to build back better and smarter we should create quality jobs that generate longer term skills and productivity.

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<sup>1</sup> See [Koliou et.al. \(2018\)](#) for a recent review of the international community resilience and recovery literature

## Why Families are at the Heart of Economic Recovery

One of the first things the COVID-19 pandemic highlighted was that children and families are at the heart of a functioning and resilient workforce and economy. Shutting down the schools effectively shut down the economy, as many working families had to reorganise around their core priorities. When it came time to kick-start economic recovery, public debate focused on if and when it was safe to restart schools to enable parents to return to work. The early failure of our childcare funding model highlighted how broken that system was, as it quickly became apparent that without access to safe and affordable childcare we would lose around a quarter of the frontline workforce we needed in this crisis. Removing access to JobKeeper for early childhood educators is a disaster – both for this predominately female workforce and the working mums who will be forced out of the labour market by their caring responsibilities. Early childhood education needs to be recognised as a universal right and an essential service that is **the** fundamental building block of our public education system.

Children and families have been missing from the crisis response in WA. The lack of coordination and responsibility has meant that families in crisis have not received clear advice about where to go for help. Reports from frontline services indicate high levels of family stress that will translate into much greater demand on crisis services if we do not address them in recovery. If WA truly wants to build a strong sense of cohesion and commitment, as we work together through hard times to create a better future, then we should **put children and families at the centre of recovery** and commit to leave no-child or family behind.

## Western Australia's Advantages

An effective response to this crisis requires focussing our efforts on our capabilities and natural advantages to build on existing analyses like the *Diversify WA* strategy<sup>2</sup> and the *Future Proofing the WA Economy* report.<sup>3</sup> This enables us to **target our job creation and stimulus efforts** during the global recession on those areas where we want to be ahead of the pack for emerging opportunities and new industries as the global economy recovers.

Success requires collaboration across sectors, including the different levels of government, industry, unions and social services, for which the newly established [State Recovery Advisory Group](#) is well-positioned.

**The social wellbeing and mental health of our workforce is a critical component of their resilience** – their ability to respond to a crisis, to work creatively and cooperatively, and to find new ways of working in a rapidly changing world. Leading industries have recognised that a stressed and distracted workforce is neither safe nor efficient, and investing in their health and happiness provides a return in productivity and loyalty that also translates into effective peer support. While we need to ensure what we are doing now will help workers and families respond if there is a second outbreak, we also need to 'expect the unexpected' and ensure we have the capability and skills to respond to the next crisis or opportunity.

Putting together the pieces of an effective response strategy means deciding with workers, industry and government what balance of commitment, subsidy and other incentives will work to enable us to pull together

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<sup>2</sup> Department of Premier and Cabinet (2019) [Diversify WA](#)

<sup>3</sup> Bankwest Curtin Economics Centre (2019) [Future Proofing the WA Economy](#)

targeted traineeships and create new roles. The outcome needs to be supported work experience and ongoing skills training in emerging areas that would see industry prepared to take on young workers during the recovery period as an investment in the future. They might be working part-time to gain invaluable work experience while undertaking extra training in supported skills areas to ensure we have the future focused skilled workforce ready for the global economic recovery. It is crucial that this is coupled with serious public investment strategies targeting job-intensive industries, like health, education and community services, to ensure genuine employment opportunities are available.

## This Submission

This submission sets out how we can reframe our institutions, policies and relationships to make WA communities stronger post-COVID-19, and ensure no-one is left behind.

We have taken a modular approach which means that what you are currently reading may or may not incorporate all of our priorities in detail. These are outlined in the table below:

If you are interested in receiving further information about any of our priorities please do not hesitate to let us know.

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## Economy & Infrastructure

<b>The Care Economy</b>	Targeted transitional investment in job creation and training in areas of unmet and growing need where there is a clear pathway to ongoing jobs (e.g. aged care, disability services, early childhood education, ACCO services).
	Partner to analyse and report the return on investment of stimulus through the care economy.
	Traineeships for jobless workers with social skills in hospitality and tourism industries during their downturns that provide future career options while servicing unmet and COVID-related need.
	Develop longer term analytics and policy to assess community need, service coverage and outcomes and determine appropriate (primary, secondary and tertiary) service levels
Social Housing is Infrastructure	Establish a sustained pipeline of social housing investment
	Partner with the Federal Government to deliver a four-year Social Housing Acceleration and Renovation Program
Energy Efficiency for Low Income Households	Undertake energy audits for all social housing properties in WA, followed by appropriate energy productivity upgrades.
	Introduce a new Hardship Efficiency Program to support low-income households.
Transport	Free public transport for all concession-card holders, including those experiencing unemployment or with refugee status.
	Transition the Transperth bus fleet to be fully electric.
The Digital Divide	Recognise digital access is now an essential service and put in place governance arrangements including concessions and hardship policies to ensure affordable access.
	Support and expand public access infrastructure including free wifi and terminals at public libraries, community resource and neighbourhood centres, and community-based support to enable access to public services online.
	Build on education and community based initiatives during the crisis to ensure excluded children and young people have ongoing access to technology at home for remote learning and personal development.

## Industry

Jobs and Training	<b>Working with WA</b> – a job search and creation scheme connecting employers & skilled workers with a one-stop shop for recruitment and training.
	Implement a <b>WA Youth Jobs Plan</b> to give young workers bright career paths.
	Provide fee-free VET courses in priority areas for future growth
Community Sector as an Industry	Strategic, coordinated public reporting of data and a commitment to share data and analysis across sectors.
	A comprehensive and reliable map of WA community services, via <i>WA Connect</i> with connection and information flow to sector-specific directories.
	Investment into an Independent Centre for Applied NFP Research, as a cross-sectoral, cross-institutional holder of this resource.
	A shared framework to understand disadvantage and inequality, ensuring we hold a shared picture of community need, service coverage and outcomes.
<b>Aboriginal human services industry development</b>	Commit to a generational Aboriginal human services employment strategy with long term service commissioning and employment targets.
	Partner with Aboriginal communities, existing ACCOs and ACCHOs to ensure local services are developed and delivered in priority locations and service areas within 5 years.
Social Enterprises and Cooperatives	Support direct investment of social enterprises and cooperatives.
	Implement a social procurement strategy (both in terms of government spend, and preference in tenders for businesses that sub-contract to social enterprises/cooperatives/Aboriginal enterprises).

## Social

Connecting the <b>new jobless</b>	A public <b>education and outreach</b> campaign to all WA households on what to expect, how to manage recovery and where to go for local support.
	Employ local <b>community connectors</b> based in existing local service centres with access to brokerage funds to provide immediate advice and quickly connect people to the right services.
Children and Families	A WA Child Wellbeing Strategy grounded in child impact statements and development of a wellbeing budget model.
	Create a Minister and an Office for Children to coordinate children and family policy and services across government.
	Negotiate sustainable funding for the inclusion of early childhood education in state public education systems via National Cabinet.
	Whole of system reform of child protection and out of home care services.
Family Violence	Implement and resource the 10-year Family and Domestic Violence Plan.
People on Temporary Visas	Establish a financial relief package to support temporary visa holders.
Supporting at-risk youth	Implement a State-wide Embedded Youth Outreach Program
Transparency and cooperation in the justice system	The COVID-19 Justice Working Group between the Department of Justice and NGOs working in the justice sector be formalised, resourced and continued.
	Re-establish an Aboriginal Justice Advisory Council in WA as a key oversight, advisory, and leadership body.

## Health

Digital access to health services	Maintain access to, and continue to promote, telehealth
	Ensure choice for consumers through ensuring digital access to broader community health services rather than focussing only on telehealth
Food relief	Develop and resource <b>CORE</b>
	Provide additional support for community relief and resilience services in areas of emerging COVID related hardship
	Develop charity food nutrition guidelines
Mental health	Increase preventative and community support investment to reach the targets in the Mental Health, Alcohol and Other Drugs Services Plan.
Alcohol and other drugs	Immediate implementation of population based prevention initiatives with community engagement at local levels to increase local community awareness of AOD issues
	A planned approach to meeting the identified AOD service expansion needs as per the 10 year plan and development of future workforce.

## The Regions

<b>A Place Based response</b>	Implement place-based integrated local services through District Leadership Groups (DLGs)
	Mandate inclusion of appropriate community services and leaders in <b>DLGs</b>
	Invest in building the capacity of <b>regional community sector networks</b> .
Regional and remote housing	Provide ongoing investment to maintain and develop housing in regional and remote areas.
	Procure building and maintenance services from local Aboriginal businesses and tradespeople.
Regional jobs and <b>community wealth building</b>	Take a community-wealth building approach to build regional economies.
	Ensure appropriately skilled local workers in regional and remote communities.
Justice reinvestment	Invest in place based, community co-designed, justice reinvestment initiatives in other remote and regional communities.
Community sector climate change readiness	Implement a short-term stimulus program to train young people for future climate readiness roles and employ them to improve the disaster preparedness, recovery planning and energy efficiency of community services in WA.

# Economy and Infrastructure

## The Care Economy

While they have always been important aspects of our lives, the COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated just how integral health and care work is for the wellbeing and functioning of our society. From doctors and nurses to allied health, social workers and counsellors, disability carers and early childhood educators -- the importance of frontline care workers and their central role in our community has never been so readily apparent.

**Care work now has a crucial part to play in Western Australia’s social and economic recovery.** An investment into the care economy is an investment into quality public and community sector jobs. It is also an investment in the capability and resilience of our most precious asset - our people. If areas like care work are not included as part of WA’s economic recovery efforts, the very real risk is run that we will inadvertently extend or further entrench that wage gap and fail to address growing need that will ultimately undermine our productivity and social cohesion and increase demand on limited and expensive crisis services.

While we often think of mining and construction as the pillars of our state’s economy, health care and social assistance is **the largest employing industry in Western Australia**, and is projected to grow faster than any other area of the economy over the next five years.<sup>4</sup>

**A focus on public investment that will best support employment for women is crucial in the recovery phase of our state.** Payroll data indicates that working women and young workers experienced a much greater drop in wages in the first weeks of the COVID impacts than that of men. The fall for younger women under 20 is particularly alarming (an 18% drop – compared to around 7% for young men). This trend is consistent across Australia and WA.<sup>5</sup>

It is also integral in addressing WA’s significant gender wage gap. Our state continues to have the highest gender wage gap in the country, at 22.1 per cent compared to 13.9 per cent nationally.<sup>6</sup> Women working full-time in WA can expect on average to earn \$440 less per week than men working full-time.<sup>7</sup>

**Caring is the most effective economic stimulus.**

Research into economic stimulus commissioned by the International Trade Union Confederation found that, if Australia invested 2 per cent of its GDP in the care industry, it would directly create 356,812 new jobs and raise the employment rate by 2.3 per cent.<sup>8</sup> When the indirect effects through the supply chain and the induced

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<sup>4</sup> State Training Board (2019) *Social Assistance and Allied Health Workforce Strategy*

<sup>5</sup> Alison Preston (2020) [The WA Labour Market in 2019/2020](#)

<sup>6</sup> Workplace Gender Equality Agency (2020) [Australia’s Gender Pay Gap Statistics](#)

<sup>7</sup> Department of Communities and Bankwest Curtin Economics Centre (2019) [Women’s Report Card](#)

<sup>8</sup> Jerome De Henau, Susan Himmelweit, Zofia Tapniewska & Diane Perrons (2016) *Investing in the Care Economy: A gender analysis of employment stimulus in seven OECD countries*, UK Women’s Budget Group, International Trade Union Confederation. Jerome De Henau & Susan Himmelweit (2020) *The gendered employment gains of investing in social vs.*

effects from increased demand within the economy are added, this sees the creation of 613,597 new jobs and a rise in the employment rate of 4 per cent.

In comparison, the same level of investment in construction would only directly increase employment by 0.5 per cent, and by 2.5 per cent when indirect and induced effects are taken into account.

Investing in the care economy also has a profound impact on closing the gender employment gap, with the modelling showing that 79 per cent of the new jobs created by this level of investment would be taken by women, increasing the employment rate for women by 3.7 per cent and decreasing the gender gap by 2.6 per cent. This far outpaces what would be seen in the construction industry, where only 11 per cent of the jobs would be taken by women and their employment rate would rise by just 0.1 per cent.

#### **Recommendations:**

- Targeted transitional investment in job creation and training in areas of unmet and growing need where there is a clear pathway to ongoing jobs (eg. Aged care, disability services, early childhood education, ACCO services).
- Partner to analyse and report the return on investment of stimulus through the care economy.
- Traineeships for jobless workers with social skills in hospitality and tourism industries during their downturns that provide future career options while servicing unmet and COVID-related need.
- Develop longer term analytics and policy to assess community need, service coverage and outcomes and determine appropriate (primary, secondary and tertiary) service levels

## **Social Housing is Infrastructure**

Social housing is an essential form of community infrastructure. It is not only integral in addressing market failure, homelessness, mental and physical health,<sup>9</sup> but investing in its construction creates employment and much needed economic activity. **Direct public investment is the single most cost-effective way to scale up the number of social housing dwellings, boosting jobs and income.**<sup>10</sup> Every dollar invested into social housing boosts GDP by an estimated \$1.30.<sup>11</sup>

In recognition of the importance that social housing can play as an economic stimulus, the McGowan Government recently announced that it would bring forward the funding of its housing investment package, which includes provision for 500 social and affordable homes.<sup>12</sup> This has been followed by the announcement of a further \$319 million for social housing to build and purchase 250 new dwellings, refurbish 1,500 and deliver a

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*physical infrastructure: evidence from simulations across seven OECD countries.* IKD Working Paper 84, The Open University, UK. [www.open.ac.uk/ikd/publications/working-papers](http://www.open.ac.uk/ikd/publications/working-papers)

<sup>9</sup> Lisa Wood et al (2016) 'What are the health, social and economic benefits of providing public housing support to formerly homeless people?', AHURI Final Report No 265, Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute

<sup>10</sup> Julie Lawson, Hal Pawson, Laurence Troy, Ryan van den Nouweland, Carrie Hamilton (2018) Social housing as infrastructure: an investment pathway, AUHRI Final Report No 306, Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute

<sup>11</sup> KPMG (2012) [Social Housing Investment Review](#)

<sup>12</sup> Hon Peter Tinley (2020) ['McGowan Government brings forward housing funds to support jobs in building industry'](#), *Media Statements*, Government of Western Australia

regional maintenance program to 3,800 homes as part of a Social Housing Economic Recovery Package.<sup>13</sup> These stimulus measures need to form the beginning of a sustained pipeline of work to meet the demand for social housing in our state.

Whilst these are welcome first steps, the evidence tells us much more is required. The Department of Communities' *Demand Model* estimated that there was an unmet need for social and affordable housing in Western Australia in 2017 for approximately 61,000 very low, low, and moderate income households—consisting of over 28,000 very low income households and over 33,000 low or moderate income households.<sup>14</sup> Further, of the families involved in the *100 Families WA* research project, 31.3 per cent reported that they could not pay their rent or mortgage on time in the past year. 18.5 per cent said they did not have and could not afford a decent and secure home. 16.3 per cent could not afford a home with doors and windows that are secure, and 5.9 per cent could not afford a separate bed for each child.<sup>15</sup>

The Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute has specifically highlighted the success of the WA Affordable Housing Strategy as a response to the 2008-09 Global Financial Crisis in maximising public investment outcomes and delivering a large volume of new supply.<sup>16</sup>

Key lessons from the implementation of this strategy were revealed in the Department of Communities' recent consultation for the 2020-2030 WA Housing Strategy, in particular the need for a much greater focus on social housing.<sup>17</sup> It is clear that our state has the industry knowledge and public sector expertise to be able to quickly deliver a much greater supply of social housing.

In combination with the State Government's social housing investment package, investment is also needed for a four-year Social Housing Acceleration and Renovation Program to maximise social and economic outcomes. Modelling has demonstrated that this proposal would triple the jobs created by the original investment package, while delivering over 1,000 new social housing dwellings in WA.<sup>18</sup>

## Recommendations

- Establish a sustained pipeline of social housing investment,
- Partner with the Federal Government to deliver a four-year Social Housing Acceleration and Renovation Program.

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<sup>13</sup> Hon Mark McGowan and Hon Peter Tinley (2020) '[Housing stimulus protects jobs and charts path to economic recovery](#)', *Media Statements*, Government of Western Australia

<sup>14</sup> Julie Considine and Sarah Mewett (2017) Estimating unmet housing demand and priority areas for public and affordable housing at the Local Government Area level – a housing practitioner's approach, WA Department of Communities. Noting 'affordable' is defined as spending up to 30% of income for those in the bottom 40% of incomes.

<sup>15</sup> Ami Seivwright and Paul Flatau (2019) [The 100 Families WA Baseline Report](#)

<sup>16</sup> Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute (2020) '[Why building housing infrastructure after the pandemic can benefit Australia](#)', *AHURI Brief*

<sup>17</sup> Department of Communities (2020) [WA Housing Strategy 2020-2030](#)

<sup>18</sup> Shelter WA (2020) [SHARP investment in Social Housing will create on thousand jobs](#)

## Energy Efficiency for Low Income Households

Public investment into energy efficiency for low income households can stimulate employment and activity across manufacturing, logistics, retail and the community services.

A national coalition of community organisations, including WACOSS, has developed a **low income energy productivity program** to create economic stimulus, while supporting households to reduce their bills, carbon emissions and load on the electricity grid.<sup>19</sup>

The proposal calls for energy audits to be undertaken for social housing properties to determine the appropriateness of the dwelling for an energy productivity upgrade or, alternatively, advise whether a new build is required. The energy audits will also contribute to the aims of COAG's *Trajectory for Low Energy Buildings* to test rating tools and build a database of the energy performance of Australian housing stock. Based on the outcomes of the energy audits, social housing properties would install energy productivity measures that would include (but not be limited to) reverse cycle air conditioners for heating and cooling, more efficient hot water (heat pumps), draught sealing, ceiling fans, efficient thermal building envelope, lighting and solar PV. The announced refurbishment of 1,500 social housing dwellings offers a prime opportunity to include greater energy efficiency measures for those households.

As the temporary energy support measures for households during the pandemic come to an end, it is essential that longer-term action is taken to prevent low-income households accumulating energy debts and facing disconnection. Comprehensive retrofits for low-income homes would not only reduce energy demand and bills, but would also generate employment.<sup>20</sup>

Providing low-income households, both in social housing and the private rental market, with the resources to be more energy efficient through home audits and appliance upgrades can have a significant impact. There are currently a number of programs in other jurisdictions that improve household energy efficiency for those on low incomes. These include the Tasmanian Energy Efficiency Loan Scheme, the Victorian Energy Upgrades program and the Healthy Homes program, and the NSW Climate Change Fund. Western Australia has not had a similar scheme in place since the axing of the Hardship Efficiency Program (HEP) in 2012. A revamped HEP should be introduced to support low income households to access energy efficiency measures based on the evidence of best practice.

### Recommendations:

- Undertake energy audits for all social housing properties in WA, followed by appropriate energy productivity upgrades.
- Introduce a new Hardship Efficiency Program to support low-income households.

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<sup>19</sup> Healthy and Affordable Homes Coalition (2020) [Joint Proposal for Economic Stimulus: national low-income energy productivity program](#)

<sup>20</sup> Nichola Willand et al (2020) [‘Stimulus that retrofits housing can reduce energy bills and inequity too’](#), *The Conversation*

## Transport

The provision of public transport has rightly been a fundamental component of the McGowan Government's vision for Western Australia. With the lifting of restrictions around travel, we need to both encourage people to return to using public transport for commuting, as well as ensuring that it is accessible for everyone in our community.

A lack of affordable, accessible transport was reported as a barrier to gaining employment by 17 per cent of the participants in the *100 Families WA* study.<sup>21</sup> Free travel for those on lower incomes should be investigated.

Currently, seniors card-holders are currently able to travel for free on public transport during off-peak times. This arrangement should be expanded to other people in our community with the greatest need for free travel, such as those experiencing unemployment and those eligible for the recently established Asylum Seeker Hub concession.

Western Australia also needs to start transitioning its public bus fleet to be fully electric. Electric buses have lower emissions than diesel and natural gas buses, even where charged on grids that rely on coal or natural gas.<sup>22</sup> This transition could provide an opportunity to reduce carbon emissions in the short term, while WA transitions towards a decarbonised electricity supply. Electric buses have already been deployed in China and a number of American cities, with California having set a target of operating an entirely emissions free bus fleet by 2040.

### Recommendations:

- Free public transport for all concession-card holders, including those experiencing unemployment or with refugee status.
- Transition the Transperth bus fleet to be fully electric.

## The Digital Divide

For many of us, being able to communicate and work online during the crisis has been essential to maintaining business activity and social connection. Access to digital technology is increasingly essential to access government services and to participate in and contribute to our community. For children and young people in the midst of the COVID shutdown, having access to online learning and a safe place to study could make all the difference between surviving and thriving or increasing educational disadvantage. While the crisis has seen a welcome boost to telehealth services and online consultations, we also need to recognise limited access by some of our most vulnerable health users.

It is time we recognised that digital access has become an essential service within our society (like electricity and water) - and treat it as such.

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<sup>21</sup> 100 Families WA Baseline Report

<sup>22</sup> Union of Concerned Scientists (2018) '[Study Finds Electric Buses are Cleaner in All Parts of Country](#),' Press Release

**Digital access is not shared equally**, and the cost of connectivity is out of reach for some within our community. One in four Western Australian households in the lowest income quintile do not access the internet, compared to almost universal access for the highest quintile.<sup>23</sup> 33.3 per cent of *100 Families WA* family members reported that they did not have and could not afford access to the internet at home.<sup>24</sup> After housing costs, families in the lowest income quintile are typically committing around 3.7 per cent of their total expenditure to digital goods and services, while the third income quintile is committing around 3 per cent and the highest quintile around 2.5 per cent. **Significantly, one in ten families in the lowest income quintile, are committing 10 per cent or more of their total expenditure towards digital products and services.**<sup>25</sup> The Bankwest Curtin Economics Centre (BCEC) has identified this as ‘digital stress’.

Using this measure, BCEC determined that digital stress is most pronounced among single parents and single women, particularly those in rental accommodation. Around 17.4 per cent of single non-elderly female renters are in digital stress, along with 12.3 per cent of elderly single women and 12.2 per cent of single parents in rental housing.

As stated by the BCEC researchers, “WA’s distance from other states, and levels of remoteness within WA make internet access a greater necessity for those living in WA, independent of income level.” The cost of internet connection, however, means that only 74 per cent of those in the lowest income quintile and 78.6 per cent in the second quintile access the internet in WA. This compares to 99.2 per cent in the highest quintile. 91.8 per cent of the third and 93.6 per cent of the fourth quintile in Western Australia access the internet, demonstrating a clear income divide.

#### **Recommendations:**

- Recognise digital access is now an essential service and put in place governance arrangements including concessions and hardship policies to ensure affordable access.
- Support and expand public access infrastructure including free wifi and terminals at public libraries, community resource and neighbourhood centres, and community-based support to enable access to public services online.
- Build on education and community based initiatives during the crisis to ensure excluded children and young people have ongoing access to technology at home for remote learning and personal development.

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<sup>23</sup> Steven Bond-Smith, Alan Duncan, Daniel Kiely, and Silvia Salaza (2018) [Falling Through the Net: The Digital Divide in Western Australia](#), Bankwest Curtin Economics Centre, Focus on Western Australia Report Series, No. 11

<sup>24</sup> 100 Families WA Baseline Report

<sup>25</sup> BCEC (2018) *Falling Through the Net*

# Industry

## Working with WA - Jobs and Training

Western Australia has been fortunate and has managed the impacts of the pandemic well – which means we have faced fewer deaths, less disruption, trauma and cost. We have also been buffered from greater economic and trade impacts by the strength of our resource-based economy. This means that we are better placed to mitigate the impacts on our workforce and community, and to invest in job creation that specifically targets our natural advantages in knowledge, skills, resources and global position.

We should be taking the opportunity now to **diversify and future-proof our economy**<sup>26</sup> so that we are positioned to grasp emerging opportunities. When the global recovery gathers momentum, WA can be on the front foot.

We face an immediate challenge to provide targeted and timely advice and support to newly jobless workers who are most at risk of longer term unemployment and financial crisis. While some sectors, activities and roles are more at risk<sup>27</sup>, in practice job losses are appearing across our community, based on business viability and resilience.

Workers and households who have never before faced joblessness or financial difficulties need quick and effective advice and support to prevent stress and hardship compounding. The quicker we can either get people into work or at least stabilize their finances – the better. A reduced income and loss of hope and purpose can quickly translate into insurmountable debt, relationship stress, and poor physical and mental health. A failure to provide timely advice about the risks ahead and the road to recovery can lead families into longer term crises that ultimately cost us much more as a community. Most have not accessed social services before, do not understand what services are available or how to navigate the system and may be held back by stigma from getting the help they need quickly enough to make a difference.

We face a difficult moral calculus as we seek to triage and stage our response for different at-risk groups. In the first instance, the more people we can easily get back into work, the stronger our economic recovery and hence the better our capacity as a society to resource further investment in recovery and job creation. However, we need to remain mindful that targeting support to the least disadvantaged in the short-term is neither fair nor just – many of those who are worse affected by the crisis are at greater risk precisely *because* they were already disadvantaged. We should at all costs avoid falling into blaming the victims and erroneously differentiating between the ‘deserving’ COVID-related jobless and the ‘undeserving’ people who were unemployed or homeless before the crisis.

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<sup>26</sup> Department of Premier and Cabinet (2019) [Diversify WA](#), Bankwest Curtin Economics Centre (2019) [Future Proofing the WA Economy](#)

<sup>27</sup> Bankwest Curtin Economics Centre (2020) [Potential Job Losses in the COVID-19 Pandemic](#)

Many Western Australians are now realising how easily they could have or did lose their jobs and livelihoods due to forces beyond their control – we should build on the palpable sense of crisis solidarity to create a more just and inclusive community. Hence as we seek the most effective path back to recovery we should also commit to leave no-one behind, support those in adversely-affected sectors to learn new skills in future focused industries in the medium term, and commit to long-term assistance and job creation for those already disadvantaged.

Through a clear strategy that creates jobs for young Western Australians, we can ensure that our state remains an attractive place to live and work, builds our future resilience, diversifies our economy, addresses poverty and creates a more equal society.

Inspired by the *Working for Victoria* scheme,<sup>28</sup> **Working with WA** would help jobseekers find work and provide employers (including community services) with access to:

- A labour pool for new jobs,
- Recruitment services including job and skills matching,
- Assistance to create new roles in priority areas that respond to COVID and support recovery,
- Free or subsidized vocational training in priority areas.

Employers get access to free advertising for eligible jobs (to be paid at award rate or higher and for a minimum of three months) and supported access to a labour pool of skilled workers. Working with WA recruitment services would include jobs and skills matching and initial screening of applicants to will help organisations find the right person for the job. Assistance could be provided through our existing Skills Centres.

*Working with WA* will also provide supplementary funding and training support for new roles in priority areas that address unmet needs arising from the pandemic, or in identified areas that contribute to our economic and social recovery. This includes future-focused industries and services identified by the Diversify WA Strategy and those assessed and agreed by the State Recovery Advisory Group. These priority areas could include Aboriginal health and social services, community outreach, family and domestic violence support, relationship services, financial counselling, home-based care, public health, seasonal agricultural work, deliveries, maintenance and cleaning.

#### **Recommendations:**

- Develop and implement **Working with WA** – a job search and job creation scheme that connects employers with a pool of skilled workers, gives access to a one-stop shop for recruitment and training, and provides free training and access to job creation support in priority economic and social recovery areas.
- Publicly commit to working towards full employment, containing and reducing long-term unemployment.
- Provide fee-free VET courses in priority areas.

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<sup>28</sup> Victorian Government (2020) [Working for Victoria](#)

## Community Sector as an Industry

Not-for-profit (or 'for purpose') organisations play a unique role in our society, as they are established to pursue a purpose or a mission, not for the pecuniary benefit of their members or individuals. The profit generated by the organisations is retained to support its' mission and beneficiaries, rather than be distributed to shareholders or owners. The community service sector is primarily made up of charitable and not-for-profit organisations, who also provide services in health, education and other areas. Mission-driven and community-based service providers provide much of the front-line delivery of human services in Western Australia.

In Australia, community services are largely publicly funded, reflecting our social contract and commitment to a fair go. This means, however, that the reliability of government revenue and its capacity to balance investment across the economic cycle is critical to sustained and effective community outcomes. Unlike health and education, funding is generally not demand-based and access is not guaranteed.

The most current data from the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission reveals that the charitable sector in Western Australia represents a significant proportion of the State's economy, totalling **\$13.57 billion** in total revenue, and employing over **119,000 workers**.<sup>29</sup>

Before the crisis hit, community services were already reporting that the levels of poverty and disadvantage among the people who used their services increased or increased significantly in 2019. Further, 80 per cent of the staff of these organisations reported that the complexity of need has either increased or increased significantly.<sup>30</sup>

These pressures have only been exacerbated during the pandemic with the economic downturn and job losses triggering the most dramatic increase in community need we have seen in decades. At the same time, the role of frontline community services as the first point of contact for workers and families in crisis has never been more critical. Not only can they provide early assistance and referral to help them bounce back, but they can play a key role helping us to profile who is in crisis and understand what their support needs are.

Employment services, financial counselling with an added focus on small business, mental health, family and relationship services in particular will be in increasing demand during the recovery phase. If they are provided the right advice and support, they are well positioned to provide timely and critical assistance to those experiencing hardship for the first time and flatten the curve of growing hardship.

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<sup>29</sup> Gilchrist, D. J., P. A. Knight & T. Emery (2020) *Understanding the Economic Value of the Charitable Human Services Sector in Western Australia: An Initial Review of the 2018 ACNC Dataset & Other Data Sources*, A Report of Not-for-profits UWA, Perth, Australia

<sup>30</sup> Social Ventures Australia and the Centre for Social Impact (2020) 'Will Australian charities be COVID-19 casualties or partners in recovery? A financial health check'

## Data and Information

The impact of COVID-19 has accelerated the impact of several institutional challenges to community and public sector collaboration present before the pandemic. The public and community sector(s) both required data during this pandemic – and the systems and structures required to collect it effectively and efficiently simply did not exist. This is not an issue which is specific to the COVID-10 pandemic.

There is a disconnect between the collection of data, for what purpose data is collected, and then what is practically done with/to that data. Government agencies have a particular use for reporting of data; but that is not always useful for the sector to engage with in order to improve services and respond to key areas of need. We need to spend a significant amount of time unpacking questions of ‘purpose’ in order to understand what a broader data strategy is for the sector, for the partnership with government, and for the community at large.

### Recommendations:

- Strategic, coordinated public reporting of data and a commitment to share data and analysis across sectors.
- A comprehensive and reliable map of WA community services via *WA Connect* with information flow to sector-specific directories.
- Investment into an Independent Centre for Applied NFP Research, as a cross-sectoral, cross-institutional holder of this resource.
- A shared framework to understand disadvantage and inequality, ensuring we hold a shared picture of community need, service coverage and outcomes.

## Aboriginal Community Controlled Industry Development

In moving to restart and rebuild economic activity in WA, we must pursue an approach that prioritises the self-determination and empowerment of Aboriginal communities, ensures cultural safety and strengthens the Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations sector.

The McGowan Government came to power with a strong commitment to building economic opportunities for Aboriginal people and for closing the gaps on social, economic and health outcomes and life opportunities. As we move to stimulate economic activity in WA, there is an opportunity to lead by investing in our Aboriginal human services capability, with more community owned local services providing direct support and assistance that more effectively increases health, education and life outcomes.

The State Government’s Aboriginal Procurement Policy has quickly and significantly surpassed its mandated targets,<sup>31</sup> providing a strong basis to be more ambitious and expand beyond its original focus. There is untapped potential for delivering employment outcomes, improved service quality, trust and impact to be delivered by focusing on the Aboriginal human services workforce.

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<sup>31</sup> Hon Ben Wyatt (2020) [‘Government’s Aboriginal procurement exceeding expectations’](#), *Media Statements*, Government of Western Australia

The Department of Communities ACCO Strategy<sup>32</sup> has identified since 2017 that procurement of services from ACCOs should be prioritised where there is over-representation of Aboriginal people in service need, significant under-use of services or much poorer outcomes. To put this into practice a plan and resources are needed to build local capability and demonstrate progress against development targets.

Aboriginal community-controlled services already deliver a larger and increasing proportion of community services in other jurisdictions, particularly in service areas where there are a significant proportion of Aboriginal service users. This includes child safety and intensive family support; out of home care and family reunification; justice diversion and youth at risk services; mental health, alcohol and other drug services; health, education and aged care.

There is a strong and well-established Aboriginal community-controlled health sector in WA that has the capacity, the community reputation and trust, and the local governance structures to play a critical role in establishing or supporting new local community services. With support they could establish local Aboriginal community services quickly and sustainably, leveraging established local infrastructure and their experience in training and supporting an Aboriginal workforce. Mainstream community services have also committed to work in partnership with emerging ACCOs, and to step back and allow them to take responsibility and control.<sup>33</sup>

A critical aspect is the development of local place-based services that are responsive to local community needs; service procurement and commissioning mechanisms that are culturally safe and secure; contracting pathways that enable transfer of control over time to community-based providers; and investment into enabling Aboriginal services and workers to engage in service evaluation and contribute to regional service system planning and design.

Further, WACOSS supports the message from the Department of Communities Aboriginal Cultural Council, with its focus on regional and remote housing, education and employment, and building the capacity of Prescribed Bodies Corporate.

**Recommendations:**

- Commit to a generational Aboriginal human services employment strategy with long term service commissioning and employment targets.
- Partner with Aboriginal communities, existing ACCOs and ACCHOs to ensure local services are developed and delivered in priority locations and service areas within 5 years.

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<sup>32</sup> Department of Communities, [Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation Strategy to 2020](#)

<sup>33</sup> WACOSS and the Noongar Family Safety and Wellbeing Council (2019) [Partnering with Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations to deliver trusted services with stronger outcomes for Aboriginal people](#)

## Social Enterprise & Cooperatives

There are jobs; and then there are jobs: creating jobs through the development of social enterprise (organisations that trade to fulfil a mission) has a dual impact. Social enterprise not only supports the growth of employment opportunities **but at the same time**, contributes to critical social impact outcomes. Social enterprises also offer meaningful opportunities for disadvantaged and vulnerable job-seekers, which provides an additional layer of benefit for Government and for the community. However, supporting social enterprise development and establishing a social procurement strategy are critical to create this dual impact.<sup>34</sup> Social Traders estimated in 2018 that for every \$100,000 dollars spent on social procurement (i.e. preferencing businesses who used social/disability/Aboriginal enterprises in their tenders for government contracts) 1.5 jobs are created for vulnerable and disadvantaged job-seekers in Victoria.<sup>35</sup>

To truly diversify and build a resilient economy, we need to reinstate and publicly support existing and new local manufacturing capacity and skills, and recognise the premium and benefit of localised, regional production through appropriate government support to support re-localisation. Worker-owned cooperatives are a critical part of this picture, creating quality, empowering jobs for community members, keeping profits remaining and circulating within the community, allowing employees to accumulate wealth through an ownership stake, and developing democratic, grassroots decision-making skills.<sup>36</sup> The community wealth building approach, successfully implemented in places such as Cleveland and the Preston City Council area provide a clear model for how community-shared ownership can create inclusive and sustainable economies.<sup>37</sup>

Where a business has failed due to financial problems exacerbated by the crisis, but there is demonstrable viability in the product or service they deliver, then Government should support workers to buy it and keep it running. They already know the business, the customers, and the suppliers. This also encourages entrepreneurship and accelerated recovery, and contributes to keeping the benefits of recovery localised.

### Recommendations:

- Support direct investment of social enterprises and cooperatives.
- Implement a social procurement strategy (both in terms of government spend, and preference in tenders for businesses that sub-contract to social enterprises/cooperatives/Aboriginal enterprises).

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<sup>34</sup> Impact Seed (2019), [The Role of Impact Investment in Achieving Our Priorities](#)

<sup>35</sup> Pro Bono Australia (2018), [Victoria Launches Australian-First Social Procurement Framework](#)

<sup>36</sup> Democracy Collaborative, 'Worker Cooperatives', [community-wealth.org/content/worker-cooperatives](https://community-wealth.org/content/worker-cooperatives)

<sup>37</sup> Marjorie Kelly and Sarah McKinley, 'Cities Building Community Wealth' [democracycollaborative.org/content/cities-building-community-wealth-executive-summary](https://democracycollaborative.org/content/cities-building-community-wealth-executive-summary)

# Social

## Children and Family Services

Our last State Budget Submission, *A Thriving Community: Hope, Inclusion and Trust*, highlighted that Western Australia could easily aspire to be the best place to be a child, but too many children are still growing up in poverty and without the opportunities they deserve to thrive.

In 2018, we recommended a *WA Child Poverty and Wellbeing Strategy*, a call matched by the Commissioner for Children and Young People, who has continued to develop their Wellbeing Monitoring Framework<sup>38</sup> and to capture and share the voices of children and young people across our community.<sup>39</sup> This year the Supporting Communities Forum undertook to focus on Child Wellbeing, and the Department of Communities will soon begin consultations on a Child Wellbeing Plan.

Since then, COVID-19 has impacted on children and families in WA in unprecedented ways that have highlighted the gaps in family and children services and the lack of responsibility, coordination and outreach to Western Australian families. There has not been clear and consistent communication and advice provided to all WA families about the stresses the pandemic and lost income will create for finances and relationships, and where they can go locally for help. We are missing the opportunity to provide simple and timely advice and support before things get out of hand, and risking much greater costs for crisis services and worse outcomes for the community in the future. Responsibility falls between the Departments of Education, Health and Communities, with early childhood education and care also falling in the cracks between state and federal responsibilities. **A Minister for Children and an Office for Children** could provide this coordination and enable us to take a public health approach to prevention and early intervention for children and families.

Children and young people have been a missing voice in this crisis. The stresses of shutdown and job loss on families has impacted their educational and emotional development, and emerging child poverty is now a significant concern. Financial and relationship stresses have dramatically increased the risk of child harm. We are very concerned by reports of increased rates of physical and sexual abuse by frontline services, with around three quarters of new reports sitting outside of the child protection system and the scope of community service funding.

**It is not too late to put children and families at the centre of social and economic recovery.**

We are calling on the Western Australian Government to undertake a public education campaign about community recovery that reaches out to households and offers them simple and practical support. We want them to publicly engage with the community over the next six months to highlight our success in facing this

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<sup>38</sup> Commissioner for Children and Young People (2020) [Wellbeing Monitoring Framework](#)

<sup>39</sup> Including [Speaking Out Survey 2019](#), Digi Me Voices project and [Children & young people's views of COVID-19](#)

crisis together, acknowledge our shared challenges in the face of a significant economic downturn<sup>40</sup> and let households who are doing it tough know where to go nearby when they need help.

We can learn from the successes of the New Zealand approach to child poverty that show that focusing resources on children's wellbeing delivers the best community outcomes, and garners strong public commitment. If we start by offering families in hardship a voucher for children's clothes, shoes or educational supplies and a food parcel, we may reach many more quickly who would otherwise let the stigma society has created around social assistance prevent them from accessing the help that can make the most difference.

We can then offer some simple advice on what to expect and where to go for help, so if you have lost your job or income and are struggling to pay the bills you should be able to reach out to your local community centre for immediate support and to connect to financial advice, personal and relationship counselling and job search assistance. Community connectors can then offer some simple advice on what to expect and where to go for help, access brokerage funds to provide immediate assistance and provide some navigational support.

### **Recommendations:**

- Negotiate sustainable funding for the inclusion of early childhood education in state public education systems via National Cabinet.
- A public education and outreach campaign to all WA families on how to manage recovery and where to go for local support.
- Employ local community connectors based in existing local service centres with access to brokerage funds to provide immediate advice and quickly connect people to the right services.
- Create a Minister and an Office for Children to coordinate children and family policy and services across government.
- A WA Child Wellbeing Strategy grounded in child impact statements and development of a wellbeing budget model.
- Whole of system reform of child protection and out of home care services.

## **Family and Domestic Violence**

With the appointment of WA's first Minister for the Prevention of Family and Domestic Violence, the McGowan Government has demonstrated that it takes the issue seriously, with legislative reform undertaken and a 10-year strategy in development.

Tragically, reports indicate that during the COVID-19 pandemic, domestic violence increased by at least five per cent.<sup>41</sup> Isolation from friends, extended family and social networks is a common mode of controlling behaviour used by an abusive partner in family violence. Increased time at home, the need to maintain a distance from

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<sup>40</sup> Noting that Federal Treasury predicted a 10% recession, hence why a \$130 billion stimulus package was originally proposed. By comparison the GFC was a 1.5% recession (See [Richard Denniss](#) TAI).

<sup>41</sup> Briana Shepherd (2020) '[Coronavirus pressures see extra focus placed on family and domestic violence](#)', *ABC News*

others and the separation from social supports has provided perpetrators with more opportunities to inflict this and other forms of abuse.<sup>42</sup>

Even before COVID-19, family and domestic violence was harming many in our community. The 100 Families WA research project found that 78 per cent of participants had experienced family and domestic violence in their lives. This included witnessing it in their home while growing up, having violence committed against them by a partner, or being violent towards their partner.

Compounding women's experiences of violence are its long-term consequences that further entrench their social disadvantage through poverty and financial hardship, limiting employment and education opportunities. This can lead to housing insecurity and/or homelessness and contributes to poorer health outcomes.

Lived experience plays a critical role in co-designing more effective responses, so we need to ensure the proactive inclusion of victim survivor voices to ensure service systems are designed to be welcoming, supportive and responsive to the differing needs of survivors of family violence. Effective victim support also requires increased support for regional and remote teams, who often miss professional capacity building opportunities.

Communities play a crucial role in assisting individuals and families to address issues such as family and domestic violence. This is why we need place-based approaches, which can expose the underlying causes of problems sooner, that empower communities to develop solutions that deliver meaningful outcomes to local issues.

Finally, holding perpetrators accountable is essential to promoting the safety of women and children and to delivering long-term change. Implementing and supporting behaviour change programs with a focus on accountability must form a key part of our approach.

**Recommendation:**

- Implement and resource the 10-year Family and Domestic Violence Plan.

## **People on Temporary Visas**

The community services sector is increasingly concerned that people on temporary visas are not able to access the necessary support during this time, particularly due to the eligibility criteria around both JobSeeker and the JobKeeper programs. Many emergency relief services, and organisations working with migrant and refugee communities are reporting exponentially increased requests for support that far outstrip their current resources. This includes people on visitor visas, working holiday visas, studying and training visas, family and partner visas, working and skilled visas, refugee and Temporary Protection Visas and Safe Haven Enterprise visa, bridging and repealed visas.

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<sup>42</sup> Break the Silence (2019) 'Isolation and Domestic Violence,' [www.breakthesilencedv.org/isolation-and-domestic-violence/](http://www.breakthesilencedv.org/isolation-and-domestic-violence/)

Temporary visa workers who have lost employment due to COVID are still expected to pay rent and bills while having very little savings and, for many reasons, are unable to return to their home country. While ER funds are available to support temporary visa holders who have been laid off, these unanticipated demands on regional and remote ER programs will quickly deplete available funds.

While some federal funding has been granted to the Australian Red Cross to support the needs of temporary visa holders, these funds are insufficient to support the needs of this cohort through the crisis.

Funds have also been made available by StudyPerth to support international students, but the sector remains concerned that the package can only provide up to two weeks' support at a time and up to a limit of \$1,000 per applicant. It should also be noted that university hardship programs do not include students studying at private institutions.

In recognition of the gaps in Federal support, the Victorian, Tasmanian, Northern Territory and ACT governments have each released COVID-19 relief packages targeting temporary visa holders.

**Recommendation:**

- Establish a financial relief package to support temporary visa holders.

## **Supporting At-Risk Youth**

The pandemic has unquestionably taken a toll on the wellbeing of young people in our community, with the impact on those who were already vulnerable made even greater. This has been compounded by the effects of COVID-19 on the delivery of youth services, with many that would have been the first point of engagement (including Aboriginal community groups, youth drop-in centres and outreach services) having had their capacity to provide face-to-face support significantly reduced. As a result, crucial early-intervention and street-based supports for at-risk young people have been substantially reduced during this crisis.

Youth services have reported troubling increases in client exposure to, and inability to exit unsafe situations, such as households with family and domestic violence. Young people forced into homelessness will often congregate in public spaces because they are unable to isolate and have nowhere else to go. This potentially exposes them to a punitive response that further reduces their ability to access support.

Services also report that young people are presenting with more complex mental health and alcohol/other drug related issues; decreased desire to attend education institutes; and difficulty in adapting to social distancing restrictions. Further, rising levels of unemployment and economic hardship have substantially negative impacts on their general health and wellbeing.

Many street-present young people and others in unsafe situations do not possess the technology, knowledge, funds or resources to access online services or have no safe place to do so. This further exacerbates the issues caused by reduced face-to-face services.

To better support at-risk youth in recovery, we need to resource and implement a State-wide Embedded Youth Outreach Program. This would formalise a partnership between the State Government, Western Australia Police Force, key government agencies, community leaders, Aboriginal Elders, community groups and youth services across the state to effectively engage street present and at-risk young people and address existing gaps in service delivery.

Dedicated Youth Workers would be recruited and deployed to key WA Police Force districts in the Perth metropolitan area and across regional and remote Western Australia to provide responsive outreach and case management for young people at-risk, including approximately 171 young people identified as high priority.

**Recommendation:**

- Implement a State-wide Embedded Youth Outreach Program

## **Transparency and Cooperation in the Justice System**

With no existing peak body solely for community sector organisations working in the justice system, throughout the pandemic, Social Reinvestment WA stepped into a coordinating role to give these organisations a unified voice,<sup>43</sup> and to work collaboratively with the Department of Justice, creating a sector and government partnership to inform their COVID-19 response.

**A clear gap remains in relation to the oversight of the justice system by WA’s Aboriginal communities.**

The Australian Law Reform Commission’s *Pathway to Justice inquiry into the Incarceration of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People* recommended the establishment of Aboriginal Justice Agreements for this purpose, as “an important means by which partnerships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples can be developed or strengthened, as well as an opportunity to ensure that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are centrally involved in policy development affecting them.”

The Western Australian Aboriginal Justice Agreement expired in 2009, and the non-government State Justice Plan developed under the AJA expired in 2014. The Kimberley Community Legal Services has argued that “without an AJA, efforts to minimise the overrepresentation of Aboriginal people in WA’s criminal justice system will continue to be diminished by the lack of coordination between WA justice programs.”<sup>44</sup>

**Recommendations:**

- The COVID-19 Justice Working Group between the Department of Justice and NGOs working in the justice sector be formalised, resourced and continued.
- Re-establish an Aboriginal Justice Advisory Council in WA as a key oversight, advisory and leadership body.

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<sup>43</sup> SRWA is an existing coalition of 26 community service organisations, including WACOSS, who have a vision for an effective and connected approach to justice in WA.

<sup>44</sup> Australian Law Reform Commission (2018) ‘Aboriginal Justice Agreements’, [Pathways to Justice: Inquiry into the Incarceration Rate of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples](#)

# Health

There is growing recognition of how health is intertwined with and shaped by a range of social, economic, cultural, and environmental factors. Our education, employment, and social support operate to either strengthen or undermine the health of communities. The connection between poverty and wellbeing is clear, with people living in higher socio-economic areas experiencing better morbidity and mortality rates than those from disadvantaged communities.

A deeper understanding of the social determinants of health requires a more nuanced approach to ensuring improved health outcomes, beyond biology, physiology and traditional medical models. Ensuring healthy lives and promoting wellbeing for people of all ages is crucial to creating inclusive communities. Elevated community health and resilience has far-reaching benefits for wider populations.

The recommendations of the State Government's ***Sustainable Health Review*** continue to provide the opportunity to shift our focus towards person-centred, community-based health services where people's health needs are responded to in the context of their whole lives. The *SHR* also has a heavy emphasis on **prevention**, which is supported by the community services sector. The Review's Final Report sets out directions for the WA health system that would see integrated systems delivering truly connected and consumer-centric care, with an emphasis on prevention and community care keeping people healthy. There are significant opportunities to deliver better health outcomes by strengthening the linkages and referral pathways between health services and other social services.

The review recommends introducing a community development approach that links people accessing primary care into their local community, based on the *Compassionate Frome Project* in the UK. The success of that project came about through supported connections that ensured that community services and community engagement opportunities were available and accessible to those in need.

## Digital Access to Health Services

Social distancing requirements during the pandemic dramatically increased demand for digital access to health support. One of the key *SHR* recommendations which WACOSS supports was to require all metropolitan Health Service Providers to progressively provide telehealth consultations for 65 per cent of outpatient services for country patients by July 2022. We can capitalise on these benefits for improved access for some, but must also do more to address those missing out due to limited access and capability.

We support the position of the Aboriginal Health Council of WA that increased use of telehealth is critical, especially for regional and remote areas of WA, and must continue into recovery. However, progressing telehealth is just a subset of enabling digital access for health support for people in communities. We would also echo the position of the Health Consumers Council that the important element is choice: people being offered face to face, phone or video and being given a chance to choose; and emphasise that digital access (*see the Digital Divide on page 9*) needs to be enhanced to support increased efficiency overall – not just with respect to telehealth.

**Recommendations:**

- Maintain access to, and continue to promote, telehealth
- Ensure choice for consumers through ensuring digital access to broader community health services rather than focussing only on telehealth

**Food Relief**

Responding to the economic crisis that emerged during the early days of the COVID-19 shutdown, the community relief and resilience sector (CRR), comprised of emergency relief and charity food providers, pivoted services virtually overnight. This was a critical achievement considering the vast majority of this support is undertaken by a volunteer workforce with less resourcing than other sectors. The CRR sector remobilised and coordinated to meet the changing circumstance of social distancing and health concerns, panic buying and hoarding to ensure that WA community members facing financial crisis and limited mobility continued to access emergency relief and charity food.

Now this sector is preparing for what is to come, when moratoriums on evictions and utility disconnections are wound back and increased income support payments through the JobSeeker and JobKeeper programs cease or are reduced. Preparation focuses on ensuring systems and referrals pathways are in place to meet the anticipated demand for services when we come to 'the cliff' in September, particularly in non-traditional hardship areas like the aspirational mortgage belt.

Another key achievement during the COVID-19 crisis response was the establishment of the Food Relief Clearinghouse whose members represented WA's biggest charity food distributors, including OzHarvest, Foodbank WA, Second Bite, St Vincent de Paul and the Salvation Army. The purpose of the clearinghouse was to coordinate logistics and distribution of charity food to regional locations, where it was in short supply. What this work highlighted was the need for an online platform where indirect and direct providers can coordinate the resources required to see the efficient distribution of charity food across the state. WA is recognised as leading the nation in food relief coordination and logistics.

The *Community Organised Resource Exchange* (CORE) is a proposed online platform designed to facilitate the efficient and effective distribution of surplus material goods and resources – bulk food, warehouse storage, transport options, cool rooms – between corporate and charity organisations. It is designed to meet the charity sector's needs across hardship and disaster response, which makes it ideal in COVID-19 response and recovery. Resources will be tagged when they are uploaded in the system. Organisations and emergency responders can subscribe to various tags (by location) and receive notifications with real time availability.. The web based CORE portal is under preliminary development by the WACOSS DropIN Solutions team as part of the Food Relief Framework, following pressure from the sector to have access to a platform as soon as possible.

Another critical issue faced by both the community relief sector and the people who rely on these services is the quantity nutritious food available. The health impacts of unhealthy food are well known, as are the costs that

result on state health systems. Development of the Food Relief Framework,<sup>45</sup> makes clear the challenges faced by the sector who receive food donations of both excellent and poor nutritional quality and seek to provide a balanced diet. The tension is evident as charities fear saying no to donations of pallets of soft drinks and sweets could result in them not also being offered donations of healthy essential food items in the future. Establishing agreed **charity food nutrition guidelines** that apply throughout the charity food system from donations through to distribution could ensure that people made vulnerable to food stress are also protected from the health impacts of a substandard diet, further saving our health system from additional disease burden.

#### **Recommendations:**

- Develop and resource CORE – the Community Organised Resource Exchange
- Provide additional support for community relief and resilience services in areas of emerging COVID related hardship
- Develop charity food nutrition guidelines
- Fund the *Food Costs and Access Survey* and the *Food Insecurity and Social Vulnerability Survey* to regularly provide information on emerging need and supply.

## **Mental Health**

The COVID crisis, the threat to our families and loved ones, the challenges of social distancing and lock-down, the need to do things differently in the workplace and the uncertainty about income and employment, all dramatically increased our stress levels and uncertainty. The way that closing schools closed down our economy highlighted our personal priorities about family, safety and care.

Smart businesses are learning the lessons of COVID and recognising that they need a resilience and adaptable workforce to be able to respond to future uncertainty and change. They have realised that investing in the mental health and personal wellbeing of their workers delivers a strong return through a flexible, safe, productive and loyal workforce. Those industries with high rates of casualization have been hit harder because of the lack of access to JobKeeper, but sometimes also because workers had nothing to gain by hanging around to try and find new ways of working.

It is imperative that mental health issues are considered as part of the economic recovery efforts, both to support people returning to work or facing unemployment and uncertainty, and as a means of job creation itself. The peer workforce in particular can generate new opportunities for people, some of whom have been otherwise excluded from employment. The Sustainable Health Review makes it very clear that mental health is critical to our ability to improve health, wellbeing and sustainability outcomes, acknowledging that our whole system requires sustained, holistic and transformational reform.

The WA Government's 10-year Mental Health, Alcohol and Other Drugs Plan, based on modelled demand, indicates that the greatest increases must occur for **community support and prevention**. By investing in prevention and community support services, demand on the hospital system can be avoided, the social

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<sup>45</sup> WACOSS (2019) [Food Relief Framework Report](#), Lotterywest

determinants of health can be better addressed, and earlier support can more easily be provided in those regional areas where clinical services are harder to deliver.

According to the WA Association of Mental Health (WAAMH), adaptive actions by WA's community mental health services have meant that people experiencing mental health issues have been cared for in their own homes, and stayed away from emergency departments. This reduced demand on critical services during the crisis, but meant demand for community-based services has soared, as new clients reach out for support due to increased anxiety and uncertainty due to the pandemic.<sup>46</sup>

WA's mental health system continues to direct the majority of spending to hospital beds and inpatient services, reinforcing old and expensive structures. We need a dramatic shift to prevent mental health issues from developing or worsening, and **provide equitable access to holistic, recovery-focussed community support which keeps people living well in their own homes and jobs**, connected to loved ones in the community (resulting in less admissions to hospitals).<sup>47</sup>

**Recommendation:**

- Increase preventative and community support investment to reach the targets in the Mental Health, Alcohol and Other Drugs Services Plan.

## Alcohol and Other Drugs

Though the State Government structure combines mental health and alcohol and other drugs sectors into one department, it is important to acknowledge that they separate sectors with differing expertise, priorities and needs.

According to the Western Australian Network of Alcohol and Other Drug Agencies (WANADA), the impacts of COVID-19 on alcohol and other drug related harms, and therefore the demand for services, are likely to be felt for more than fifteen years unless effective population-based measures are adopted immediately. They report that there has been an increased complexity of co-occurring issues experienced by people presenting to alcohol and other drug services since the COVID-19 pandemic began.

AOD treatment services quickly developed plans to support COVID isolation strategies and modified their service capacity to support infection control requirements, with the sector anticipating that this will have to be their approach longer term. At the same time, however, there was already not enough services available to meet demand, with an estimated 20,000 to 50,000 people per year in WA unable to access needed services prior to COVID-19.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> WAAMH (2020) [Crucial role of WA's mental health community support in spotlight as part of new campaign](#)

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Data provided by WANADA (2020).

## **Recommendations**

- Immediate implementation of population based prevention initiatives with community engagement at local levels to increase local community awareness of AOD issues
- A planned approach to meeting the identified AOD service expansion needs as per the 10 year plan and development of future workforce.

# The Regions

## A Place-Based Response

Social and economic recovery in regional Western Australia should be driven by community-based programs and initiatives that are created and sustained locally. The international literature on disaster recovery clearly and consistently shows that local ownership of recovery programs based on a community development model is best practice.<sup>49</sup> Place-based solutions, particularly in regional and remote areas, are better able to develop effective and comprehensive responses to complex issues.

Around the state, *District Leadership Groups* have begun developing a more collaborative approach to regional service delivery. Where they are made up of representatives from State, Federal and local government, community services sector, Aboriginal community-controlled organisations and industry, they have been responsible for developing and leading effective on-the-ground responses to achieve local outcomes. Participation of local community services and leaders should be mandated in all DLGs.

When inclusive, these groups create the possibility for a more responsive and joined-up approach to regional social planning, together with greater coordination of service system design to create more integrated and appropriate regional services that deliver stronger, more sustainable outcomes.

When backed by clear direction and endorsement at high levels within the State Government and public service, inclusive DLGs can create a mechanism for place-based decision making. Local governments, Regional Development Commissions and Commonwealth funding agencies also perform crucial roles that need to be aligned and coordinated for collective impact.

There is also a need to build and maintain local and regional community service sector network capacity to ensure the connection, coordination and local knowledge needed for on-the-ground success. Proactive networking is critical in regional Western Australia, where small communities can be separated by huge distances, program coverage is patchy and service providers frequently work in isolation.

With the support of Lotterywest, WACOSS has been undertaking a regional capacity-building project in the Pilbara that demonstrates how additional network and policy capability can leverage greater collective impact. The WACOSS Pilbara Regional Manager role has provided an independent catalyst for change across the region. The capacity of individual service providers has been increased through training, advice and consultancy, while network capacity is enhanced through opportunities for like-minded people to learn and collaborate. The capacity of both government and the community sector to engage effectively in partnership has improved through information sharing and regional cross sector forums, and the capacity of local services to have their voice heard in state-wide and regional decision-making forums is increased.

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<sup>49</sup> See Koliou et.al. (2018) for a review.

## Recommendation:

- Implement place-based integrated services for local communities through District Leadership Groups,
- Mandate inclusion of appropriate community services and leaders in DLGs,
- Invest in building the capacity of regional community sector networks.

## Regional Employment and Community Wealth Building

The need for local, sustainable employment opportunities in regional towns and communities has been exacerbated by the economic impacts of the COVID-19 crisis. Coupled with the impacts of recent severe weather events and decreased demand, some towns report the very real prospect of having no available work in a matter of weeks. This has been particularly noticeable in areas with a high reliance on backpacker labour, who are attempting to find local ways to support that workforce to stay in these towns. Our agricultural sector in particular face a crisis if sufficient workers for picking and harvesting are not available come September.

The pandemic has made apparent how stretched the capacity of existing services including refuges and accommodation supports are in regional WA. There is a clear opportunity to invest in growing the community sector in these areas of unmet need.

The care economy can strongly contribute to building prosperous and resilient regional communities by providing long-term employment opportunities that are less susceptible to seasonal variations and tourist numbers. This in turn supports and encourages people to stay in regional communities, as well as diversifying the local economy. Further, in order to support and sustain the prosperity of our regions, we should also look to adapting approaches like community wealth building, which have been successfully implemented in Cleveland, USA and the Preston City Council in the United Kingdom. Their success has seen a number of other communities and local governments adapting these models to suit their local circumstances.

“Community wealth building is a systems approach to economic development that creates an inclusive, sustainable economy built on locally rooted and broadly held ownership.”<sup>50</sup> By placing community-shared ownership at its core, community wealth building seeks to provide low- and moderate-income communities with the tools necessary to build their own wealth.<sup>51</sup>

The approach places a large emphasis on the procurement activities of ‘anchor institutions’ – organisations which employ a significant number of local people, spend a lot of money on local procurement, and are unlikely to leave as they are rooted in the local area.<sup>52</sup> These anchor institutions include local government authorities,

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<sup>50</sup> Marjorie Kelly and Sarah McKinley, ‘Cities Building Community Wealth’

<https://democracycollaborative.org/content/cities-building-community-wealth-executive-summary>

<sup>51</sup> Ted Howard ‘Owning Your Own Job is a Beautiful Thing: Community Wealth Building in Cleveland, Ohio’

<https://community-wealth.org/sites/clone.community-wealth.org/files/downloads/article-howard12.pdf>

<sup>52</sup> Centre for Local Economic Strategies (2017) ‘Community Wealth Building through Anchor Institutions’

[https://cles.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/Community-Wealth-Building-through-Anchor-Institutions\\_01\\_02\\_17.pdf](https://cles.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/Community-Wealth-Building-through-Anchor-Institutions_01_02_17.pdf)

hospitals, schools and universities. Wherever possible, anchor institutions are encouraged to shift external spending towards local procurement.

The impact of this community wealth building in Preston has been clear. By 2016, three years after the project began, spending by six anchor institutions had risen from 5 per cent in Preston and 39 per cent in Lancashire more generally, to 19 per cent in Preston and 81 per cent in Lancashire. The benefits have not only been economic, with a sense of community and belonging being created.<sup>53</sup>

#### **Recommendations:**

- Ensure appropriately skilled local workers in regional and remote communities.
- Take a community-wealth building approach to build regional economies.

## **Regional and Remote Housing**

Living in severely crowded dwellings is the main type of homelessness experienced by Aboriginal people in this state (and confirmed in Western Australia's *10 Year Strategy on Homelessness*) with overcrowding most prevalent in regional and remote areas.

As a result, meeting the COVID-19 social distancing requirements simply proved impossible for some regional and remote communities, with overcrowded housing meaning residents had little or no ability to self-isolate or quarantine.

Regional areas, particularly in WA's northwest, face a severe lack of affordable housing. The WACOSS *2019 Cost of Living Report* revealed the Pilbara and the Kimberley to be the two most expensive regions for low income affordable rentals, with significantly higher rents than the Perth metropolitan region.<sup>54</sup> The *2020 Anglicare Rental Affordability Snapshot* found that in the North West, only one per cent of properties were affordable and appropriate for someone on the minimum wage, with just 0.8 per cent for those relying on the temporary doubling of the JobSeeker payment. Without the COVID-19 supplement, none of the properties were appropriate and affordable.<sup>55</sup>

At the same time, remote communities are under pressure from an underinvestment in housing and population growth. As a result of Martu population growth and inadequate investment in Parnngurr housing, it has been estimated that the WA Government will need to procure 73 houses by 2028 in Newman alone to accommodate an additional 365 Martu people.<sup>56</sup>

The State Coroner's findings in the inquest into the deaths of thirteen children and young persons in the Kimberley region last year specifically highlighted their housing conditions, noting that "a number of them were

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<sup>53</sup> Lisa Schaefer (2018), The Next System Project (2018) [thenextsystem.org/learn/stories/infographic-preston-model](https://thenextsystem.org/learn/stories/infographic-preston-model)

<sup>54</sup> WACOSS (2019) [Cost of Living Report](#)

<sup>55</sup> Anglicare WA (2020) [Rental Affordability Snapshot – Western Australia](#)

<sup>56</sup> Social Ventures Australia (2018) *A Cost Benefit Analysis of Investment in Very Remote Aboriginal Communities*, Discussion Paper – Implications for Housing

transient between different Aboriginal communities, living in overcrowded and/or inadequate housing arrangements.”<sup>57</sup> The findings report the acknowledgement by the Department of Communities that there “continues to be a shortage of social housing in the Kimberley Region, with demand being disproportionately high.” The State Coroner makes the point that children need to be living in adequate housing in order to thrive and gain an education.

Infrastructure Australia has also identified the serious need to relieve overcrowding and improve the quality of housing in remote areas.<sup>58</sup> As they state, “ongoing investment is necessary to ensure the gap continues to close, thereby reducing the high associated social and economic costs.”

According to Infrastructure Australia, improving remote housing will likely require:

- addressing maintenance and utility deficiencies for existing housing stock
- renewing life-expired housing stock
- developing new housing stock.

The findings of the Federal Government’s review into remote housing reveals the need for Western Australia to take more action in building new housing in remote communities. The review found that WA was the only jurisdiction to not have met or exceed its original COAG target for new builds, falling 17 per cent short. The review also noted that construction quality in WA was consistently poor, with repairs taking too long. Further, community engagement and employment opportunities in building and maintenance were very limited and short term.<sup>59</sup>

While there are complications arising from the partnership with the Federal Government in this space and the high costs of construction in regional areas, these challenges are long-term and well-known and cannot be an excuse for inaction. The regional maintenance program, announced as part of the WA Government’s *Social Housing Recovery Package*, is a significant and welcome measure that should establish an ongoing pipeline of work.<sup>60</sup>

There is a clear need for a sustained investment by the State Government in the ongoing construction and maintenance of housing supply in remote Aboriginal communities that exceeds current levels. Without it, improving outcomes for people living in these communities and closing the gap will prove impossible. When combined with effective implementation of the WA Government’s Aboriginal procurement strategy and investment to develop the capability of local Aboriginal Community-Controlled organisations to deliver more effective social services in these communities (rather than intermittent fly-in or drive-in services – together they form the basis for more viable local economies).<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> State Coroner R V C Fogliani (2019) *Inquest into the 13 Deaths of Children and Young Persons in the Kimberley Region*, Coroner’s Court of Western Australia

<sup>58</sup> Infrastructure Australia (2019) [Remote housing overcrowding](#)

<sup>59</sup> Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet (2017) *Remote Housing Review: A review of the National Partnership Agreement on Remote Indigenous Housing and the Remote Housing Strategy (2008-2018)*, Commonwealth of Australia

<sup>60</sup> Hon Mark McGowan and Hon Peter Tinley (2020) [‘Housing stimulus protects jobs and charts path to economic recovery’](#), *Media Statements*, Government of Western Australia

<sup>61</sup> Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy & Research (2020) CAEPR, ANU.

**Recommendation:**

- Provide ongoing investment to maintain and develop housing in regional and remote areas.
- Procure building and maintenance services from local Aboriginal businesses and tradespeople.

## Justice Reinvestment

This pandemic has once again **demonstrated the value and importance of organisations by Aboriginal people for Aboriginal people**. The Olabud Doogethu Project, located in Halls Creek, is Social Reinvestment WA first Justice Reinvestment trial site. This Project has provided a place based, community-owned framework, which has proved to be the perfect platform for providing additional support during the COVID-19 crisis.

Halls Creek has faced high rates of crime and significant community concern about the future of their youth. In response, Olabud Doogethu was formed - heeding to the knowledge and ideas of 11 Aboriginal communities (Balgo, Billiluna, Mulan, Nicholson Block, Red Hill, Ringer Soak, Warmun, Yardgee, Yiyili, Mardiwah Loop and Halls Creek). This initiative aims to build community capacity and leadership by reducing juvenile offences and supporting families, achieving a brighter future for the next generation in Halls Creek. It is backed by Social Reinvestment WA, Department of Youth and Community Development and the Halls Creek Shire. Olabud Doogethu is an organisation designed by and employing Aboriginal people.

As part of this need to reduce juvenile offences, Olabud Doogethu introduced the Youth Engagement Night Officers (YENOs) to help to get young people off the streets, going out during the night and early hours of the morning. Taking down the names of these kids, they follow up during the day to support the parents. They aim to encourage these kids to go home and do the right thing, but not to take a punitive approach. The YENOs remained operational throughout the entirety of the COVID-19 pandemic. The stability and reliability of this framework can be credited with the success of the Halls Creek response.

The YENO strategy has seen a substantial reduction in offences, as well as an overall decrease in kids out and about at night. Crime has more than halved in Halls Creek between December (152 offences) and February (only 73 offences).<sup>62</sup> These results demonstrate the validity of the justice reinvestment philosophy behind Olabud Doogethu and Social Reinvestment WA.

**Recommendation:**

- Invest in place based, community co-designed, justice reinvestment initiatives in other remote and regional communities.

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<sup>62</sup> WA Police Force (2020) [Crime Statistics](#)

## Community Sector Climate Change Readiness

Regional communities in WA are particularly exposed to the impacts of climate change. It is essential that we support the local communities and services to be able to effectively adapt and respond. Local and regional community-based services are often called upon to play a critical role in disaster response, particularly during the recovery phase. For this response to be effective, it is crucial that they have the necessary knowledge, capacity and networks, and are connected with the formal disaster response plans and authorities. Research undertaken by the ACOSS and Climate Risk Pty. Ltd in 2013, found that community service organisations in WA and NSW were less likely to have engaged in risk management, mitigation and transfer practices and were therefore less resilient to climate change and extreme weather impacts than organisations in other states.<sup>63</sup>

From 2017 to 2018, the WACOSS Natural Disaster Resilience Program provided training for organisations to use the Resilient Community Organisations Toolkit as developed by ACOSS.<sup>64</sup> 45 per cent of those organisations reported that their organisation's board and management were either not aware or not very aware of the likely consequences of climate change on the frequency and severity of natural disasters in the future. Only 16 per cent reported that they had thorough plans in place to prepare for recovery, while 38 per cent stated they had no recovery plans in place. 48 per cent reported that they had some, but not all of the relevant policies and procedures for disasters and emergencies they potentially face, with 19 per cent reporting that they had significant gaps. This is critical, as these local services are the backbone of recovery.

Previously, the *Climate Change Readiness for Community Services* program sought to address the climate resilience and energy use of community services and infrastructure in Western Australia.<sup>65</sup> From 2009 to 2012, WACOSS was funded by the Federal Government Jobs Fund scheme (later evaluated as the most jobs-rich component of the Rudd Government's GFC stimulus) to run the project. The program trained local young people struggling to find employment in the GFC to conduct free energy efficiency audits for participating community service organisations. 726 audits were conducted, with 400 organisations receiving \$1,000 minor retrofit grants and four \$25,000 major retrofit grants as a result. At the time there was an expectation of ongoing jobs in this sector linked to carbon abatement policy, which was unfortunately scapped after a change of government. The program increased the energy efficiency and climate resilience of community sector organisations, and providing training and employment opportunities for young people experiencing unemployment during the GFC.

### Recommendation:

- Implement a short-term stimulus program to train young people for future climate readiness roles and employ them to improve the disaster preparedness, recovery planning and energy efficiency of community services in WA.

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<sup>63</sup> Karl Mallon, Emily Hamilton, Manu Black, Betsi Beem and Julius Abs (2013) [Adapting the community sector for climate extremes: Extreme weather, climate change & the community sector –Risks and adaptations](#), National Climate Change Adaptation Research Facility

<sup>64</sup> ACOSS (2015) *Resilient Community Organisations*, <https://resilience.acoss.org.au/benchmark>

<sup>65</sup> WACOSS (2010) *Climate Change Readiness for Community Services: Information for community services*, <http://www.churcheswa.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2010/03/Information-for-Community-Services.pdf>