



State Election Priorities 2021

We're All In This Together

The COVID-19 crisis has hit many in our community hard. Unemployment and financial hardship has become a reality for the first time in some peoples' lives. Frontline health and social services have seen these impacts and been stretched by growing and changing demand.

At the same time, WA was fortunate to dodge the worst impacts of the pandemic, with the strong public health response and economic intervention by government providing a buffer.

As the Federal Government begins to wind back financial support and we approach the end of rental eviction and utility disconnection moratoriums, we are worried that more needs to be done *now* to provide an early and effective support to the newly jobless and those struggling with financial stress and social isolation. If we do not, our support services face the significant risk that they will be overwhelmed for years to come.

The crisis we have faced together has led to a profound change in attitudes across our community. We have faced this crisis together and seen it impact the jobs and wellbeing of our friends and loved ones. As a community we care and want to help. We desire a just and sustainable recovery that creates a brighter and more inclusive future. Western Australians truly believe 'we are all this together,' that we should *build back better and leave no-one behind*.

Our community's priorities are taking action to end poverty, creating quality jobs, increasing social housing and providing mental health services.

A Course Forward

On Saturday, 13 March 2021, Western Australia goes to the polls to elect the forty-first Parliament of Western Australia. Every election provides an opportunity to set a path forward for our state, but this election takes place in truly historic circumstances, as we tackle a global pandemic and a once-in-a-generation recession. Our community needs those putting themselves forward to be our leaders to have the vision and drive for the task at hand.

That task is so much more than returning to business as usual. It is very clear community concerns and priorities have shifted, that a message blaming the unemployed for their poverty, and calls to be 'tough on crime' and cruel to those in need no longer work. We have seen governments can be bold, decisive and spend public resources on tackling big problems, helping those in crisis and investing in a better future. Voters now want to see policies and actions that reflect their priorities, that tackle the big issues and create a better and fairer world.

Commitments Sought

We are calling on all political parties to commit to:

Invest in Caring

- Create 25,000 quality jobs in the care economy by 2025 to support those most in need
- Establish independent, Aboriginal-led oversight of our justice system to end the disproportionate imprisonment of Indigenous people

Support Family Wellbeing

- Target help to the 20% of children and their families growing up in poverty who are falling behind on early development
- Increase social housing stock by 2,500 new dwellings a year to tackle WA's affordable housing crisis

Grow Community Connection

- Provide fast and effective support through community connectors for people seeking to access services, local opportunities and jobs
- Increase mental health community support by five-fold, and grow prevention spending to 5% of the total mental health spend

Invest in Caring

Our communities have come together to support each other through this pandemic. They truly care – and we need to honour and build on that commitment. Care work has a crucial role in our economic and social recovery. Investing in care creates jobs that make life better for everyone, giving us a much bigger return on our public investment.

The COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated just how integral health and care work is to the wellbeing 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 in our community has never been so clear.

The crisis increased the pressure on homelessness, mental health and family and domestic violence services. We know more hardship is still to come, so let's put in place the jobs and services to help those most in need.

The COVID crisis triggered a 'pink recession', as women suffered the greatest loss of jobs, hours and income. A focus on public investment is needed that will best support employment for women and young people, in our community creating meaningful and valuable work that open up rewarding careers and build a better future. While we tend to think of mining and construction as the pillars of our state's economy, health care and social assistance actually employs many more people in Western Australia, and is projected to grow faster than any other area of the economy over the next five years.

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.

A Western Australia that truly cares must address the overrepresentation of Aboriginal people in our justice system. This necessitates a transparent and accountable approach to justice in our state, with Aboriginal people given a direct voice on how the system operates.

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Support Family Wellbeing

We need a positive vision of a brighter future for Western Australian children. One that supports them through their early years and beyond. The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted existing gaps in support for children and families, and made our efforts to address them more critical. The crisis forced us to re-evaluate existing measures and focus on what really matters.

The challenge we face is how to maintain our focus on and support for those children and families most in need, while shifting our efforts to intervene earlier and more effectively before those problems become too complex, entrenched and expensive to resolve.

Child poverty remains the biggest single factor affecting early childhood development. Western Australia is one of the wealthiest societies on our planet, and yet child poverty is entrenched here and continues to grow.

Greater investment in the early years will help, but there is also much more that can be achieved by better aligning and coordinating our efforts. Child and family services are fragmented across health, education and social service sectors, and across a range of federal, state and local programs. We need to recognise where there is expertise and leadership, where there are gaps and overlaps, so we can provide joined-up and effective support to children and families in need. Doing so in a timely fashion will help us shift the dial on early intervention, reduce the growing cost of the out of home care crisis services and take effective action to close the gap.

Children and families need a roof over their head in order to thrive. Prior to COVID, WA was already in the grip of an affordable housing crisis, with that worsening as people moved back to their residences in our state. As the next wave of job losses and mortgage defaults hit, many families will be looking to shift into affordable rental housing – only to find there isn't any. An ambitious and sustained investment to provide social housing for those who need it is absolutely necessary to ensure everyone in our community has a place to call home.

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The COVID recession means many more people will require help from services for the first time. They need help to find jobs, advice to avoid financial hardship, and support to tackle these stresses to avoid poor mental health outcomes and relationships breaking down. The sooner they get useful advice on what to expect or where to go for help, the less likely it is they will fall into long term hardship.

While some are able to rely on their natural networks and mutual aid (and just need to know it is OK to ask for help), others struggle to navigate what can be complex support systems. The community connector model addresses this problem – providing a responsive, flexible and localised response that assists to connect people with opportunities in their own community and the services that they need for support. A number of community service organisations are currently trialling community connectors, but support is needed to enable the model to be adopted state-wide. Backbone support is also needed to appropriately coordinate, develop resources for and connect the connectors.

This complements the recommendation by the *Sustainable Health Review* to introduce community-based and online approaches to better link people to support.

People's mental health has suffered during this pandemic, with prevention and support services already unable to meet community demand. The Prevent Support Heal campaign has set out the investment in mental health prevention and community support that is necessary to meet the best service mix as set out in the *Better Choices. Better Lives: Western Australian Mental Health, Alcohol and Other Drug Services Plan 2015-2025*. It is critical that we are able to respond early and effectively before people find themselves in a crisis.

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