

# MAKE waa FAIR



A campaign by



# LEAVING NO ONE BEHIND

STATE ELECTION 2025

# FOREWORD

As we stand on the precipice of the next State Election, the challenges we face as a community are more acute than ever. Cost of living pressures have skyrocketed, with the cost of housing and other basic items reaching unprecedented heights. Now more than ever, it is imperative that the State Government's primary focus be the wellbeing of its citizens. This is not just a matter of policy; it is a matter of principle. It is about sharing the State's undisputed wealth, making Western Australia fair for all its citizens and ensuring that no one is left behind.

The rising cost of living affects every aspect of our daily lives, from the food we put on our tables to the energy we use to cool our homes. Alarming, the number of people needing help to get by continues to grow, and the most marginalised among us are often the hardest hit. Persistently elevated demand is overwhelming the community services sector, which is stretched beyond its limits.

After three years of unsustainably high costs and low wage growth, Western Australians on lower incomes have been left without financial reserves and are missing out on essentials; regular and nutritious meals are becoming a luxury for a growing number of households, safe and affordable housing has become unattainable for many, children are missing out on the fundamentals needed to thrive and far too many parents have very real concerns for their children's future.

The impact is widespread, visible in both the metro and regional areas of Western Australia. If you haven't experienced these crises firsthand, you likely know someone who has.

We've seen some reprieve through efforts made by the State Government over the past 12 months, including the introduction of the rent relief program, electricity credits, the school assistance program and capping public transport fares at two zones.

However, these short term sugar hits can only go so far. What we need moving forward is targeted and genuine long-term solutions. With fairer and better targeting, we could ensure help is concentrated on families and individuals who need it the most.

Recent headlines paint a grim picture – families with dual incomes living in tents, employed Western Australians unable to cover the cost of basics, and the availability of affordable properties at startlingly low levels.

This is why WACOSS is campaigning to Make WA Fair in the lead-up to the 2025 State Election. We have always sought to advocate on behalf of those in our community who are doing it toughest and right now that group of people is growing at an alarming rate.

Tackling the big challenges Western Australia is facing won't be easy. Our leaders will need to display ambition and bravery to rise above politics and make real, impactful policy changes.

We have a vision for Western Australia where the government helps its citizens, where the needs of communities are above politics, where everyone has access to a safe, secure and healthy home, where children are given the best start to life, where people can access services when and where they need them, and where no-one is left behind.

Making WA Fair means creating a society where everyone has the opportunity to thrive. It means prioritising policies that address inequality, supporting those doing it tough, and creating pathways where everyone has the chance to succeed. This election, let us commit to a vision of Western Australia where the wellbeing of every citizen is at the heart of our government's agenda.

All of these things are achievable. It's a matter of choices.

Western Australia is a great state, let's make it a fair one too.



**Louise Giolitto**  
Chief Executive Officer  
WACOSS



**Mark Glasson**  
President  
WACOSS

# COST OF LIVING RELIEF

We are seeking immediate and longstanding cost of living relief through:

Programs that deliver fairer and better targeted relief to Western Australians that need it the most, such as existing concession cardholders.

Targeted cost of living reform would ensure that Western Australians doing it tough have improved access to fair and equitable financial assistance.

As the cost of living continues to rise all Western Australians are feeling significant pressure on their household budgets. Many are also facing financial crisis. Increased cost of living is particularly impacting those on the lowest incomes, with families working hard to stretch their wage to cover increasing costs. But, when the cost of basics is more than your weekly pay packet there is only so much you can scrimp before you go without.

After three years of high costs and low wage growth, Western Australians on low incomes have been left without financial reserves and are now missing out – missing out on nutritious and regular meals, missing out on safe and affordable housing, and missing out on the opportunity to plan for the future.

At July 2024, the median rent for a unit in Perth accounts for a shocking 65.3<sup>1</sup> per cent of the State Minimum Wage. Assuming a single person on full time State Minimum Wage pays tax and rents a median priced unit, they have less than \$204 per week to cover the cost of food, utilities, healthcare, transport, and any other items<sup>2</sup>.

At the end of 2023, 37 per cent of WA families said they were not food secure, and reported skipping meals or changing their shopping to cover costs. Of these households 60 per cent had at least one person in paid employment, and 77 per cent experienced food insecurity for the first time within the last year.

Prior to the pandemic, the primary causes of financial hardship were unemployment, debt or health issues. Now, we are seeing financial stress directly resulting from cost of living increases and inadequate income. Resultantly, there has been a significant and unexpected increase in the number of employed families seeking support. For example, the Emergency Relief and Food Access Service has reported that an increasing proportion of clients are employed; with employment being the main source of income for four per cent of clients in 2021, eight per cent in 2022, and 12 per cent in 2023. The Financial Wellbeing Collective has also reported that for clients seeking financial counselling, the number of homeowners with mortgages has overtaken the number of private renters<sup>3</sup>.

We recognise that this Government has a challenging task ahead – meeting community need while managing inflation – and has already provided cost of living relief through measures such as the energy credits and school assistance payment. However, these initiatives have not been targeted to those who need it the most, and has meant that many Western Australians are continuing be left behind.

1 Median rental data taken from [REIWA.com](https://www.reiwa.com.au) at 29/07/2024.

2 Calculated using the Australian Government simple tax calculator and REIWA median unit rent data.

3 Cost of Living Trends; Financial Wellbeing Collective.



WACOSS agrees with the State Government that any measures introduced should:

- Consider the current capacity of a Government or community service to deliver the support.
- Keep the cost to administer as low as possible, therefore working within current structures and systems if possible, or expanding the current systems to be inclusive.
- Offer financial relief to all households struggling, including those on a Commonwealth income support payments and households that are working but can't make ends meet.

## Recommendations for cost of living relief

In line with this, we are seeking investment into more targeted cost of living relief for those Western Australians that need it the most. This could include:

- Develop a Cost-of-Living Package that offers financial assistance to people unable to cover the cost of basics, such as housing, utilities, food, transport, and car registration.
- Increase funding for emergency relief and individual financial counselling services.
- Reinstate the WA small business financial counselling program.
- Extend the WA Rent Relief Program beyond June 2025.
- Increase investment in the Hardship Utility Grant Scheme (HUGS) to support scheme expansion, including increasing grant limits and allowing grants to cover all outstanding debt.
- Expansion of HUGS eligibility to social housing tenants for water.
- Extend free public transport to University and TAFE students.
- Extend transport concessions available to Age Pension recipients to all Centrelink Health Care Card holders (including free travel periods on public transport, driver's licence and car registration fee discounts).
- Expansion and uplift of the Patient Assisted Travel Scheme (PATS).
- Expansion of breakfast and lunch programs to all WA schools, with schools in regional, remote, and low socio-economic areas being prioritised.



# RENT REFORM

We are seeking immediate and longstanding cost of living relief through:

Giving more Western Australians access to secure housing by abolishing no reason evictions and implementing rent stabilisation.

WA renters are being subjected to excessive and unsustainable rent increases, and unfair evictions. This is causing pain and hardship, displacing people from their homes and communities and putting more Western Australians at risk of homelessness.

In WA, tenants can be evicted without any reason or cause at any point during a periodic tenancy with just 60 days notice, and at the end of any fixed-term tenancy with just 30 days' notice. No reason eviction is a persistent threat, preventing tenants from advocating for their rights and basic needs. A Make Renting Fair WA survey conducted in August 2023 found that three in five participants had been threatened with eviction in the previous 12 months, 63 per cent were too scared to ask for maintenance or necessary repairs in case that led to an eviction and 32 per cent had been evicted from their homes with no grounds. Moving house is a stressful, expensive and disruptive experience. In the context of soaring rents and limited rental availability, for some, the consequence of eviction is homelessness.

Over the past 12 months, median advertised rent in Perth increased by more than 13 per cent for houses and by 20.2 per cent for units. This upsurge has placed the median asking price in Perth for a rental house at \$650 per week and for a rental unit at \$600 per week. These massive rises mean that entering a new tenancy is unachievable for many Western Australians, particularly those on Jobseeker or minimum wage<sup>1</sup>. Prices in existing tenancies have gone up too. Perth Rent CPI (which reflects the rent paid in new and existing tenancies) increased by 9.9 per cent in the 12 months up to March 2024. The 2023 Make Renting Fair WA survey found that 85 per cent of respondents would find it difficult or very difficult financially if rents were to increase by 10 per cent. For those respondents and many more, that scenario is now a reality. Financial counsellors and emergency relief providers tell WACOSS they are experiencing an increase in demand for assistance and that in trying to avoid arrears and eviction, people are forgoing food and entering utility arrears.

Action is needed to ensure WA renters have secure access to affordable homes.

<sup>1</sup> According to the Anglicare Rental Affordability Snapshot, in March this year no rentals available in WA were affordable (less than 30% of income) to a single person on Jobseeker and just 1% were affordable to a single person earning minimum wage.



Despite the introduction of the first tranche of rental reforms in July this year, WA remains behind the pack when it comes to ensuring renting is fair for both tenants and landlords. Most States and Territories are now moving to require genuine reasonable grounds for evictions in line with the National Cabinet Better Deal for Renters. Without similar commitment from the WA Government, WA renters will have fewer rental rights than in any other state.

Currently there are seven grounds for eviction in WA, in addition to no reason evictions. These include tenant breaches such as not paying rent or being a nuisance to neighbours, tenant causing serious damage to the property, if the property is sold and more.

No reason evictions should be abolished and replaced with a list of prescribed reasonable grounds for eviction, which would provide landlords with adequate rights and protections. In order to also provide adequate protections for renters, it is crucial that this list is exhaustive and not too broad in scope. The legislation must recognise that a tenant's basic right to shelter and security takes precedence over a landlord's discretion to terminate a lease.

Abolishing no reason evictions is fundamental to creating a more equitable rental framework.

### Recommendation for secure homes

- 💡 **Commit to amending the Residential Tenancies Act to abolish no reason evictions and require genuine reasonable grounds for evictions in line with the National Cabinet Better Deal for Renters.**

While the first tranche of rental reforms will limit the frequency of rent increases from twice a year to once a year, it does not limit the amount rents can be increased by.

WACOSS proposes the introduction of second-generation rent stabilisation measures that limit rental increases, for example to no more than the All Groups CPI. Linking rent increases to CPI maintains the real value of the landlord's investment while protecting renters from bearing the brunt of the market. In the 12 months up to March 2024, Perth All Groups CPI grew by 3.4 per cent. Capping rent increases to All Groups CPI would make a demonstrable change to rental cost growth and give WA renters security in their home's affordability into the future.

Rent stabilisation measures should also be applied between the end of one tenancy and the start of another. This is necessary to avoid incentivising landlords to terminate tenancies in order to charge higher rents.

WACOSS recognises there may be limited circumstances where it is reasonable for the rents to increase by more than CPI, such as when substantial improvements have been made to the property. In those circumstances, however, any proposed increase above CPI should have to be justified by the landlord to the State Administrative Tribunal.

### Recommendation for affordable homes

- 💡 **Commit to give more Western Australians access to secure housing by introducing rent stabilisation measures that limit rent increases.**

## CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

We are seeking immediate and longstanding cost of living relief through:

The expansion of universal access to early years education

Better access to community family health and support services through consolidation and expansion of Integrated Child and Family Hubs.

We want all children to have the best possible start in life – to have what they need to grow and thrive. That is what universal access to quality early education and care is all about. Universal means all children have an entitlement to Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) services, including all children from 0 to 5 years old (not just 3-year-olds). It also means extra support is provided to children who need more help or are at risk of missing out, such as those in regional and remote areas, from disadvantaged backgrounds and those who are developmentally vulnerable.

The best way to deliver universal ECEC in WA will depend to an extent on national policy and funding announcements due by the end of the year. Our offer is to be ready to consult with the Minister and her advisers when the national model is announced, and to quickly convene early childhood services and experts to consult on, or co-design, a response.

Meanwhile there are a number of actions clearly within WA's jurisdiction that can be acted on.





## Recommendations for improving access to quality ECEC services in WA

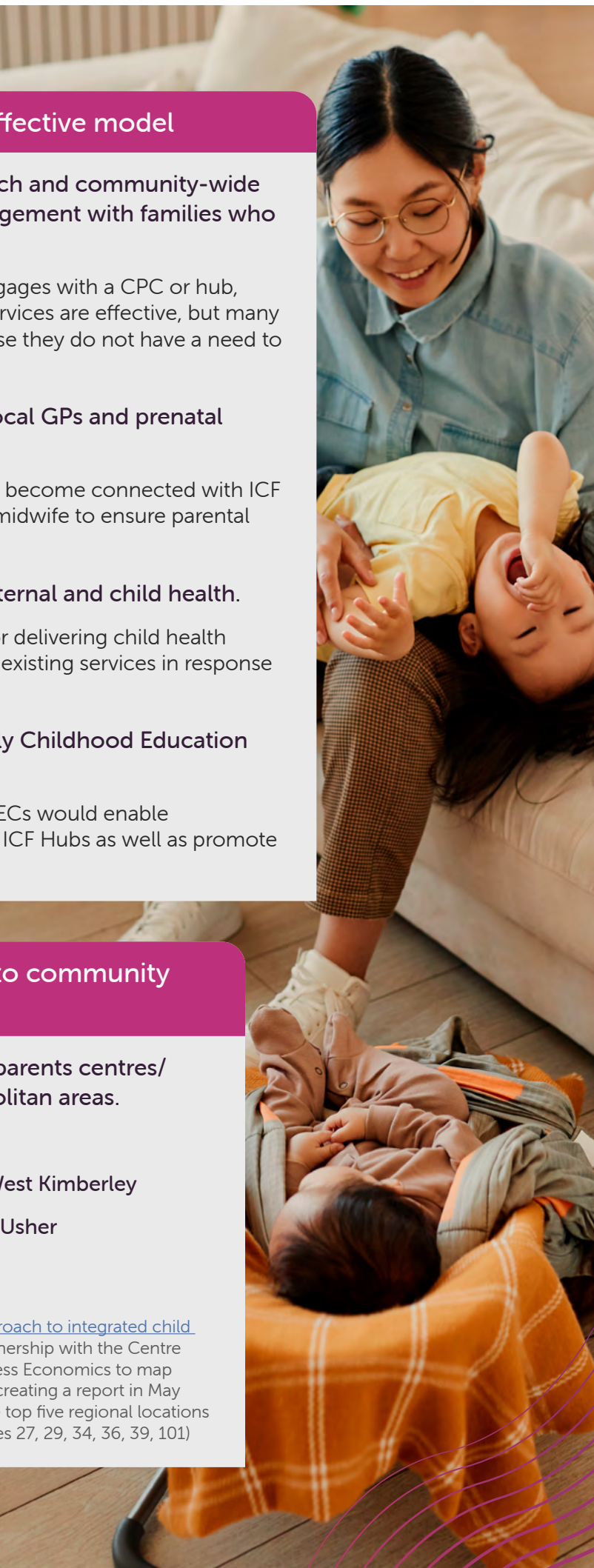
- 💡 Create and resource an Office of Early Childhood, with clear powers and responsibilities for ECEC, assisted by a cross-sector partnership forum and peak body (SBS 2023).
- 💡 Progress WA Labor policy to deliver high-quality not-for-profit ECEC on all new school sites and consider how this could be enabled on existing sites.
- 💡 Reduce 'fragmented care' for children in their preschool years – moving across multiple care settings has negative impacts for children and parents.
- 💡 Adapt best practice from other states to assist families on low income and those facing marginalisation to ensure they can access affordable and appropriate care. Provide per-capita grants and targeted subsidies to community-based early education and care services to fill the gaps in access to affordable care. This may evolve once the new national model is finalised.
- 💡 Create a WA Early Childhood Workforce Development Fund (SBS 2023) and expand workforce pipeline initiatives in WA.
- 💡 Adapt best practice from other states in service planning and approvals – to avoid over-supply in profitable areas and to help establish care services and infrastructure in un-serviced or underserviced areas. This requires the WA Planning Commission to finalise the Position Statement on Childcare Premises.
- 💡 WA addresses the problems across our health and education systems with early diagnosis of developmental vulnerability, and in the provision of timely advice and support to families.

There are currently 22 Child and Parent Centres (CPCs) across Western Australia that operate at or near local primary schools. CPCs are an early version of the Integrated Child and Family Hub (ICF Hub) model that deliver essential services for the community they serve and have proven to be popular. Integrated hubs are one of the most cost-effective ways of delivering services to the children and families that need them most. But, some families are missing out either due to a lack of operational resourcing for existing CPCs or because they don't have a hub nearby. There is a need to increase the number of hubs throughout WA, targeting areas most in need.

ICF Hubs are an excellent example of how to break down silos, offer free, universal access across education and allied health, and provide place-based, community-led wraparound supports. Support is also needed to assist existing CPCs to improve integration of services and supports to reduce fragmentation and become effective hubs. New services should follow the hub model of service delivery and be integrated with GPs, ECEC services, schools and allied health services at the local level. This means, for example pregnant women can develop relationships with their local hub after a referral from their GP or midwife to ensure they are ready for when their baby arrives. A true "one-stop shop" hub model would reduce cost and confusion and enhance children's health and development outcomes.

Improved outreach programs will assist in increased access - enabling engagement with families who could benefit but are missing out. We wish to build on these successes.





## Recommendations for building an effective model

**💡 Provide resourcing to promote outreach and community-wide awareness of ICF Hubs, enabling engagement with families who could benefit but, are missing out.**

Our consultation reveals that once a parent engages with a CPC or hub, they will return for subsequent children. The services are effective, but many families are not aware that services exist because they do not have a need to visit a school or playgroup.

**💡 Ensuring consistent integration with local GPs and prenatal health supports.**

This approach may enable pregnant women to become connected with ICF Hubs after a referral from a GP, obstetrician or midwife to ensure parental readiness for when their baby arrives.

**💡 Ensure consistent integration with maternal and child health.**

Maternal and child health nurses responsible for delivering child health checks, would support families to benefit from existing services in response to issues identified during health checks.

**💡 Ensure consistent integration with Early Childhood Education Centres.**

A framework that includes integration with ECECs would enable coordination for outreach between ECECs and ICF Hubs as well as promote community-wide awareness.

## Recommendation for better access to community health and support services

**💡 We are seeking an expansion of child parents centres/ hubs in both the regional and metropolitan areas.**

Future locations could include<sup>1</sup>:

- | Halls Creek
- | Meekatharra
- | Leinster-Leonora
- | Derby-West Kimberley
- | Withers-Usher

<sup>1</sup> [Exploring need and funding models for a national approach to integrated child and family centres](#) (2023) Social Ventures Australia in partnership with the Centre for Community Child Health commissioned Deloitte Access Economics to map community need for integrated child and family centres, creating a report in May 2023 that identifies priority regions for new ICF Hubs. The top five regional locations were identified consistently as national priorities (see pages 27, 29, 34, 36, 39, 101)

# SUSTAINABLE FUNDING

We are seeking immediate and longstanding cost of living relief through sustainable funding for community services:

We are seeking sustainable funding and a one-off catch-up injection, reflecting the historically significant demands on the sector to help Western Australians in need.

The Community Service Sector is buckling under demand, whilst trying to maintain current services. Demand has grown for many reasons. We have seen a huge spike in population and the dual housing and cost of living crises are placing increased pressure on the community. This in turn has increased the need for mental health services, drug and alcohol services, financial counsellors and food and emergency relief providers.

For years the Community Service Sector has been told that the real cost to deliver services would be resolved when services were recommissioned under the State Government's Commissioning Plan.

In addition, WA Department of Treasury released Financial Guidelines for Government Agencies Commissioning Community Services. A key purpose of the guidelines is to provide guidance to Government Agencies on the costing and benchmarking of Community Services and support sustainable funding.

For various reasons there have been delays in rolling out the Agencies' Commissioning Plans. This resulted in most State Government community service's contracts being extended for two to three years. Many of these contracts are already over seven years old, some are over 14 years old.

Over the past two years, WACOSS has surveyed our members. Our surveys have reported 73 per cent of services are looking at cutting staffing hours and services in the next 12 months and 40 per cent have already had to reduce operations in order to survive. This means services are getting cut in a time of increased demand. Regional service providers are being hit even harder.





93 per cent of organisations said they have not observed any material improvement to contracting arrangements since the implementation of the Western Australian State Commissioning Strategy and implementation plan. The reason is simple, services are not being re-commissioned and are facing multi year delays.

With the exception of 2024/25, the State Indexation policy has not covered the cost of award wages for the previous 11 years. We estimate contracts have a shortfall of 12.75 per cent. This is just to keep the current level of services; it does not include the growing demand.

In the 2024/25 State Budget the State Government provided uplifts of between 10 per cent to 30 per cent in funding to homelessness services. The percentage increase varied depending on the age of the contract. WACOSS strongly supports this and would like to see it applied across the sector.

WACOSS recognises the Treasurer's commitment to re-commission the contracts as they come up. We appreciate the acknowledgment of the issue at hand. For services, however, the need is more urgent. With one to three years remaining on contracts without uplift, service delivery will continue to be eroded and Western Australians in desperate need, now more than ever, will be left behind. Without long-term certainty of funding and contracts, the Community Services Sector will continue to churn through frontline workers, incurring additional recruitment and training costs and impacting the quality of service delivered to clients.

## Recommendation for a sustainable future

- 💡 We are seeking a commitment from State Government to sustainable funding and a one-off catch-up injection, reflecting the historical underfunding and the significant demands on the sector and to help Western Australians in need.



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