

It's time to build

COMMUNITY

WA STATE BUDGET
SUBMISSION 2025-26

LEAVING NO ONE BEHIND

About WACOSS

The Western Australian Council of Social Service is the peak body for the community services sector in Western Australia and works to create an inclusive, just and equitable society. We advocate for social and economic change to improve the wellbeing of Western Australians, and to strengthen the community services sector that supports them. WACOSS is part of a network consisting of National, State and Territory Councils of Social Service, who advance the interests of people on low incomes and those made vulnerable by the systems that have been put in place.

Acknowledgment of Country

WACOSS respectfully acknowledges the Traditional Owners of Country throughout Western Australia and recognises their continuing connection to land, waters and community. We pay our respects to them, their cultures, and to elders both past and present. We acknowledge the land on which we live and work is, and always will be, Aboriginal land. Sovereignty was never ceded.

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Foreword

We all want the best for our families, neighbours and community. However, this is a difficult period for many Western Australians. The financial pressures on average and lower income households are acute. Three years of persistently high living costs, coupled with restrained wage growth, mean that many families have run down their reserves and are running out of options.

Housing costs are the largest weekly expense and the biggest concern. Record high rents and record low vacancy rates¹ mean financial stress is locked in for some time – with nowhere cheaper to move to and little protection against further price rises or no-grounds evictions. The high cost of housing is forcing people to cut back on food, utilities, transport, and health care. The number of people experiencing food insecurity in WA is growing faster than in any other State, as 37 per cent of families say they struggle to put food on the table.² Many families can't afford the medications they need or visits to the doctor, leading to overuse of emergency services and higher rates of chronic disease.

Our population has boomed, and our demographics have changed. Western Australia has grown rapidly over the last decade – growing 17 per cent in the decade to 2021 to reach 2.95 million in 2024. We are projected to grow 21 per cent more to 3.57 million by 2046. Our population is also ageing rapidly, with those aged over 65 to grow from 16 per cent in 2022 up to 19.5 per cent in 2026.³ After a decade of limited spending on social services our community infrastructure is simply not ready to sustain such growth.

The lag between social investment and community need is most evident in high growth areas. New families and migrant workers have been encouraged to settle on our urban fringe and in regional centres. But we have not invested in the social infrastructure to support them or to ensure their children can thrive. Many of our senior citizens are ageing in large family homes that they struggle to maintain, but we haven't supported them to downsize, nor ensured they have enough support to stay healthy and connected.

Population growth and rising living costs have driven unprecedented levels of social need. Community services across our state report growing demand from clients facing complex challenges. Meanwhile, unstable and insufficient funding leaves them unable to do regional outreach, provide their staff with job security, or reduce waitlists. Too many of the people who dedicate their working lives to helping others now feel stretched and burnt out.

The decisions we make now are critical for the resilience of our economy and the wellbeing of our community for years to come. This is why our political priorities now need to focus on restoring our social safety net, investing in social infrastructure, building human capital, and diversifying our economy to be inclusive, adaptive and future-focused. **It is time to build community.**

Western Australians share a vision for the future where everyone has access to a safe, secure and healthy home, where our children have the best start in life, and our young people are given the backing they need to build our future. It is a vision where everyone can access social services that are timely and enabling, where all of us have the chance to live our best lives. WA is a great state – let's make it a fair one too.



Mark Glasson
President



Louise Giolitto
Chief Executive Officer

1 Median Perth rental \$630 pw, September 2024 [REIWA](#). Vacancy rate 0.8% July 2024 [Property Update](#).

2 [Foodbank Hunger Report 2023](#).

3 WA Government (2024) [WA Tomorrow Population Report No.12](#)

Making WA Fair



Western Australians believe in a fair go – meaning everybody has the opportunity to contribute, has support from responsive and equitable systems, and has access to the basics they need to flourish. However, for many Western Australians, this vision is out of reach. 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.⁴ 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.⁵ Each month this year the Emergency Relief and Food Access Service received between 2,100 and 3,000 calls from over a 1,000 people seeking assistance.⁶ This year, a significant amount of the relief provided was used to cover the cost of transport and food items.

In this time of crisis Western Australians are looking to their state government for help. In the short-term they want targeted cost of living relief, that recognises and relieves pressure on household budgets by reducing the cost of essentials such as housing, food, utilities and transport. They want some recognition that things have become hard in a way that feels unfair and unequal, and a commitment to put things right and restore the balance within our community and economy.

Beyond immediate relief, Western Australians are looking to government for a credible longer-term plan that addresses the underlying causes of the hardship experienced by many Western Australians. A plan that supports an equitable, sustainable, and resilient WA where everybody can thrive.

Over two decades our population has boomed, while WA's public expenditure in the areas that support equity and community wellbeing – for example, education, housing, and social services, has remained largely fixed and is not meeting demand or community expectations. We have reached a tipping point where some critical social systems are failing. For example, a lack of affordable housing means many crisis services – from emergency departments and hospital wards through to women's shelters – have nowhere to safely transition people other than into homelessness. Inadequate funding has hollowed out many essential supports, while access to others increasingly depends on individuals' ability to pay. The cohort of people who cannot afford support is growing, with more Western Australians being left behind.

The *2023 Purpose of Government Pulse Report* shows contemporary community expectations around the role of government are clear – we expect our government to ensure the entire population can maintain a decent standard of living, make sure that there is fair and equal treatment for all, and put community wellbeing at the centre of decision making.⁷ A recent survey of the WA community found 87 per cent of citizens felt the state government had a primary role to play in supporting community members access the basics.⁸

Our shared task is to create a fairer and more effective system that ensures all Western Australians have access to decent food, safe and secure housing, the opportunity to participate in our community and feel like they belong and are valued.

It is time to rise to community expectations and create a more equitable system, where all Western Australians can access the goods and services they need.

Prioritising our people

Western Australians want to live in communities that are healthy, engaged, culturally rich and socially connected. We want opportunities to build our capability to be productive members of our community. We want our families and friends to be safe from harm or illness. We want robust care and support networks that enhance our resilience against disruptive challenges and disasters.

Delivering on this vision for WA requires a significant investment in social infrastructure.

4 Foodbank (2023). Foodbank Hunger Report 2023. Available at reports.foodbank.org.au/foodbank-hunger-report-2023.

5 Foodbank (2023). Foodbank Hunger Report 2023. Available at reports.foodbank.org.au/foodbank-hunger-report-2023.

6 Free Call ERFAS on 1800 979 777.

7 CPD (2024). [The 2023 Purpose of Government Pulse report](#).

8 Talbot Mills Research (2024). [Cost of Living Survey Report](#).

Social infrastructure is the organisations, services, systems, places and spaces that foster connection, health, inclusion and cohesion. It includes physical community spaces as well as intangible systems such as prevention and early intervention initiatives, navigator mechanisms and community education programs, for example, programs that eliminate racism or violence against women and children. Critical to social infrastructure is the focus on people, and the types of community environments we are creating. Strong communities are ones in which people can flourish, live up to their potential, and connect.

Social infrastructure investment builds on the assets, networks and strengths of community. For this reason, social infrastructure works best when it is designed and led by communities. This is particularly so for regional, remote and Aboriginal communities who are often denied self-determination or provided services designed out of Perth. Empowering local communities to collectively identify need, then plan and implement solutions, further strengthens community interconnectedness and resilience. Local communities feel a strong sense of ownership for services they help design – they trust and value them more.

Governments have narrowly viewed community services as a budgetary burden and have undervalued and underinvested in the sector, not appreciating the sector's role in enabling economic participation, supporting health and wellbeing, and reducing demand on crisis services. Community services are a key partner in delivering government's social policy agenda, they are quick to respond to community need and do so cost effectively. The sector also delivers significant benefits to the Western Australian economy by enabling workforce participation, particularly for women, boosting productivity and building capability.

Reform is needed to deliver better whole of government responses to complex cross-cutting problems and to reduce the growing cost of crisis and acute care; however, the solutions and the costs often do not easily fall within a single portfolio or agency remit.

Looking to the future, as our population ages and we progressively shift investment into preventative and enabling services, we need to ensure we are training and supporting young people to find rewarding careers delivering care services that meet the needs of a growing and thriving state.⁹

Measuring what matters most

Broad economic measures like GDP can be useful. However, when used in isolation, there is a risk we focus our decision making on and prioritise economic activity over community outcomes such as living standards. As a result, we position a strong economy as the end goal, rather than a tool for supporting strong communities.

Our current system is not set up to measure the impact of investment on living standards or wellbeing. Many of the most difficult challenges we face are complex issues that do not fall within a single portfolio or agency's remit. Often the solutions to reduce the growing cost in one area are best addressed by earlier investment in another area. However, absence of common metrics across government portfolios mean it is near impossible to assess the impact of investment on whole-of-government outcomes.

Other governments across Australia are beginning to grapple with this issue by refocusing decision making on measures that reflect *how people are doing* in relation to both the strengths that enable them and the barriers that constrain them. Recent investments by the Commonwealth to implement the *Measuring what Matters Framework* have enabled improvements in the evidence base for policy decision making and cross-program evaluation. Indications from recent national announcements and the 2024 *Wellbeing in Policy and Action Conference* suggest that national programs and grants will increasingly use the Treasury *Measuring What Matters Framework* to direct investment and assess outcomes.¹⁰

9 PM&C (2023) [National Care and Support Economy Strategy](#). WACOSS (2023) [Work and Care Submission](#). Nous Group (2024) [Leaving no-one behind: the economic imperative to invest in WA community sector workforce](#). Jobs & Skills Aust. (2024) [Early childhood education and care capacity study](#).

10 University of Canberra (2024) [Building Wellbeing into Policy and Action conference](#)

Philanthropic foundations are also engaging with the wellbeing agenda to drive greater social impact. As the only state not actively engaging with the wellbeing budget agenda, we risk missing out. While at a state level the shift towards outcomes-based contracting is a useful first step, governments have failed to recognise, and adequately measure, the enabling and productivity enhancing impacts of social and educational services. Consequently, these investments continue to be seen as a budgetary cost rather than an economic multiplier.

The holistic decision making needed to tackle the complex problems facing our community requires joined-up decision making across multiple portfolios. To achieve this, we face two key challenges:

1. Measuring the impact of *second round fiscal effects*. Proposals for early intervention and other social infrastructure are often deprioritised by budget process operational rules that restrict consideration of 'second round fiscal effects' – the downstream outcomes that increase or reduce expenditure in another area.¹¹ For example, a community-based program for active seniors may reduce demand for hospital beds due to fall-related injuries. Excluding second round fiscal effects limits our ability to take account of costs or savings for government due to changing demand for government services. Wellbeing budgeting frameworks enable us to better-measure, and incorporate, second round fiscal effects into policy costings. Shifting our understanding of impact in this way incentivises upstream and cross-portfolio investments.
2. Undertaking measurement and policy costings that support long-term outcomes. Delivering positive long-term outcomes and savings is currently impeded by the limited timeframes used in costing policy proposals. Restricting initiatives to a four-year budget horizon or a five-year contract period significantly limits measurement of outcomes – and misses the longer-term changes in community wellbeing.

A call to action

It is the WA Government's responsibility to make sure all our citizens can access the basics. To achieve this, and rise to communities' expectations, we are calling on the WA Government to change their investment priorities. Our State Budget Submission provides a plan for investment that seizes the opportunity to rebalance the service system and shift the focus towards what matters most - meeting the needs of people and creating a community where everybody can flourish.



How to build: A Fair WA Housing System



THE PROBLEM

Since the 1980s, Australian Governments' housing policy has offered financial incentives and tax breaks for speculative investment, while reducing investment in social and affordable housing supply. This approach has distorted the housing market – driving up housing prices to the detriment of people trying to find a secure place to live.¹² Additional demand-side financial supports such as first home buyer grants have also contributed to higher housing prices.¹³

The lack of meaningful legal protection for tenants in WA exacerbates the problem. Landlords in WA can evict tenants with no reason and, once a year, landlords can still make an unlimited rent increase. Minimum standards for rental houses in WA only consider basic safety issues and do not extend to energy efficiency, disability access, or tenant health. In practice the lack of legal protection means tenants cannot raise maintenance problems that threaten their health and safety without risking eviction.

Social housing (public and community housing) is treated as a last resort. Stock has declined in both quantity and quality and is increasingly stigmatised.¹⁴ Recent investment by the WA State Government into social housing is welcome, but only addresses a fraction of unmet need.

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- 12 Kohler A (2023), [The Great Divide – Australia's housing mess and how to fix it](#). Quarterly essay.
Jericho, G (2024) [The awful truth at the heart of Australian housing policy](#). The Guardian 14 February 2024.
- 13 Anderson L (2023), [First-home buyers grants – 20 years of failed attempts to improve housing affordability](#).
- 14 AHURI (2022) [What is the right level of social housing for Australia?](#)

THE CONSEQUENCES

Governments' market-centred approach to housing has left Western Australians on low and middle incomes experiencing housing stress and risking homelessness. High housing costs force many to sacrifice other essential items – including food, medication, and transport. This has profound impacts on physical, mental and emotional wellbeing, exacerbates inequities, and increases pressure on public systems.¹⁵

UNAFFORDABLE AND INACCESSIBLE

- Homelessness in WA has grown by 8 per cent since 2016, outpacing the national increase.¹⁶
- Social housing is largely inaccessible. As of July 2024, there were 20,194 household applications on the joint social housing waitlist.¹⁷
- The lower quartile of income earners is experiencing housing stress, paying more than 30 per cent of their income in rent.¹⁸ Over 85 per cent of WA renters are in “extreme rental pain.”¹⁹ WA rental vacancy rates are extremely low, with Perth’s rate below 1 per cent since 2022.²⁰
- Renters experience insecure tenancies and increased health and energy costs due to poor quality housing.

INEQUITABLE IMPACTS

- Marginalised communities are disproportionately affected by our housing system – including people on low incomes, young people, women, Aboriginal people, and people with disabilities.
- Owner-occupiers, while faring better than renters, are not necessarily better off as gains are offset by repurchasing in the inflated market and by surging mortgage interest payments.
- Wealth concentration within families who already own property is reinforced, increasing financial exclusion of those without home equity.
- Property investors are the primary winners as they benefit from capital gains in a booming market. Just 1 per cent of Australian taxpayers own almost 25 per cent of property investments.²¹

15 Nygaard (2022) [Cost of Inaction: Social and economic losses due to the social and affordable housing shortage](#).

16 BCEC (2023) [Housing Affordability in Australia](#).

17 WA Parliament (2024) [Legislative Council Hansard](#).

18 BCEC (2023) [Housing Affordability in Australia](#).

19 Suburb Trends (2024) [Rent Pain Index April 2024](#).

20 REIWA (2024) [Perth’s vacancy rate rises slightly](#).

21 Rachwani & Issa (2023) [A quarter of Australia’s property investments held by 1% of taxpayers](#).

See also Kohler (2023) and Jericho (2024) op.cit.

THE SOLUTIONS

Government cannot continue to rely on the private market or demand-side financial supports. Instead, housing must be recognised as a human right that enables a healthy and productive society, and hence governments must take responsibility for ensuring every Western Australian can find a safe and secure home.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING IN THE RENTAL MARKET

The WA Government has a range of levers to increase supply and availability of affordable private rentals. A new mechanism is needed to build affordable rentals at scale and in perpetuity that replaces, and learns from, the National Rental Affordability Scheme.²² Developing mixed-use apartment buildings with a range of price-points, as well as setting targets for social and affordable housing in new developments are strong starting points. So too is exploring mechanisms to transfer short-term rentals and vacant properties²³ to the long-term rental market.²⁴ Demand-side financial supports that drive up housing prices should be reconsidered.

SOCIAL HOUSING

A social housing approach that goes beyond a safety net is a crucial piece of the reform needed to fix the affordable housing crisis and would contribute to broad areas of social and economic development.²⁵ Recent WA State Government social housing investment provides a solid foundation to expand our social housing program and make social housing available to a range of groups, including low-income earners, government employees, and essential workers. We should aim to increase the proportion of social housing through continued effort to increase social housing builds and acquisitions, with a long-term goal of increasing social housing stock to 10 per cent.²⁶

RENTAL PROTECTION

Strengthening tenancy rights is crucial to a fair and well-functioning housing sector. Urgent reform areas include no reason evictions, rent stabilisation and minimum standards for rental properties. Rental policy and regulation should recognise that rental houses are an essential service, and as such, require appropriate levels of safeguarding.

HOMELESSNESS

Homelessness services, including Aboriginal Community-Controlled Organisations are critical social infrastructure. The 2024 State Budget delivered welcomed funding uplifts to homelessness services and funding for Housing First programs. These workforces and programs must continue to receive State Government support. Into the future, the lack of affordable housing to transition into, will continue to limit the ability of homelessness services, women's refuges, and step-up step-down services to deliver sustained outcomes.

22 The National Rental Affordability Scheme expires in 2026.

23 H McNeill (2023) *The Perth suburbs where one in every five homes sits empty*.

24 So far, the STRA incentive scheme has delivered 276 properties and the vacant property incentive scheme has returned 36 rental homes with a minimum 12-month lease (Hansard Legislative Council 13.08.2024. [QwN 839](#)).

25 Everybody's Home (2024) *Voices of the Crisis: Final Report from the People's Commission into Australia's Housing Crisis*.

26 Shelter WA (2024) *Social Housing*. OECD (2020) *Social Housing: A key part of past and future housing policy*.



A plan for
investment

Investing in the building blocks for a good life

Access to material basics – such as food, housing, utilities, transport, and essential services – is critical to good health and wellbeing.²⁷ Across WA, people living on the lowest incomes are increasingly unable to afford the basics.²⁸ For children who grow up in these environments the story is dire, with no guarantee of improving their circumstances and a lifelong risk of poor health and mental health outcomes.²⁹ Over the past 20 years empirical evidence has made it clear that high rates of inequity lead to lower economic growth, decreased social cohesion and increased service costs.³⁰

The sharp increase in the cost of living has placed significant financial stress on WA households. As the costs of living increase, we are seeing a growing cohort of people experiencing in-work poverty. This is evidenced by the rapid increase in the number of families seeking support.

Current circumstances show that access to the basics is best achieved when our policy making considers the needs of all. We urge the Government to invest in universal access to the basics of life, signalling a clear commitment to building a fair WA where all citizens are nourished, powered, healthy, protected, engaged, supported and connected.



Nourished

RECOMMENDATION: Expand universal breakfast and lunch programs to all WA schools.

School breakfast and lunch programs are an effective way to reduce the pressure on household budgets, while making sure children are nourished and ready to learn. School food programs work best as shared social events where every child eats together so no child is embarrassed or excluded. School breakfast and lunch programs meaningfully reduce living costs for WA families.

RECOMMENDATION: Increase emergency relief and financial counselling funding to meet increasing demand and support individuals out of hardship.

Financial pressures have seen a spike in demand for emergency relief and financial counselling. Funding gaps mean providers are struggling to meet demand and have limited capacity to provide services to people in need before they are in crisis. Timely help can turn around lives and prevent entrenched hardship.

RECOMMENDATION: Commission a study into a freight subsidy scheme for remote areas.

High transport and logistic costs coupled with monopoly service provision has led to high prices for goods in regional and remote WA. As a result, food is simply unaffordable for many people and families are going hungry. A freight equalisation study that considers the potential impact of government funded freight subsidies and freight coordinators on regional food access will inform how we can provide healthy and affordable food in the regions.

27 Goldfeld et al. (2023). [Having material basics is basic](#). The Medical Journal of Australia.

28 Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2016). [Australia's Health](#).

29 Productivity Commission (2024). [Fairly Equal: Economic Mobility](#).

30 Productivity Commission (2024). [A snapshot of inequality in Australia](#).

Spotlight on the Regions: Providing the basics for a good life

Across regional WA many community members are struggling to access the services and supports they need to thrive. This story is not new, but its message is becoming increasingly urgent – if our governments do not invest in a universal approach, people living in regional WA will fall behind.

Food

The number of households across regional and remote WA experiencing food insecurity is increasing. While food insecurity can impact all communities, households in remote areas are 30 per cent more likely to experience food insecurity than those in capital cities.³¹ The 2023 WA Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development Regional Price Index indicates that food prices in most regions are significantly more expensive than Perth with the highest prices in the Kimberley, where food costs 7.3 per cent more than in Perth.³² Households experiencing food insecurity in regional areas also have less access to supports. Through our consultation process, WACOSS heard of the challenges providing food relief into regional communities, including challenges in food access, logistics, storage and distribution. This was a significant issue in many regional areas and was particularly pronounced in the Kimberley.

Transport

With rising cost of living, more and more households are unable to afford expenses associated with owning a car. In regional areas a lack of affordable public transport alternatives means many people don't have a way to access the services they need, particularly services only available in larger regional centres, or move around their community.

Healthcare

Patients in regional areas cannot adequately access specialist care, and the Patient Assisted Travel Scheme (PATS) is not meeting user need. During our consultations we heard that PATS covers a small proportion of out-of-pocket expenses, and that patients must wait long periods for reimbursement – with some people waiting up to 8 months. It is not acceptable that regional patients' financial situation may stop them from accessing appropriate medical care.

Service Outreach

Years of inadequate funding has left many community services without the resources to deliver regional outreach – with many outreach programs now being scaled back. For those living in regional areas on low income, it is nearly impossible to access larger hubs for service provision – with the journey requiring time off work and presenting significant cost. As such, communities in regional WA are being left without access to community support services, community legal services, specialist sexual assault services, or family and domestic violence counselling. It is critical to note that community service organisations do not want to roll back outreach services and understand the significant negative impacts of doing so. Instead, this change has been driven by funding bodies who are not providing adequate funding.

31 Landrigan, T., Kerr, D., Dhaliwal, S., & Pollard, C. (2018) [Protocol for the Development of a Food Stress Index to Identify Households Most at Risk of Food Insecurity in Western Australia](#).

32 Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development, [Regional Price Index 2023](#) (Report, 2024).



Empowered

RECOMMENDATION: Expand eligibility for HUGS to include public housing tenants in water hardship and households with pre-payment electricity meters.

As costs of living increase, more people are unable to cover their utility bills and are accessing the Hardship Utility Grant Scheme (HUGS); however, some remain shut out from accessing this relief. The current exclusion of pre-paid meter customers from HUGS is profoundly unfair, as is the exclusion of public housing tenants from help with water bills. Both these groups experience high levels of financial hardship.

RECOMMENDATION: Increase funding for HUGS, increase grant limits and allow grant to cover all outstanding debt.

People accessing HUGS need more support. The average debt of people accessing HUGS is rising, with participants having an average debt of \$1728 over the 23/24 financial year. This is up \$200 from the 22/23 financial year. Increasing investment in HUGS to both increase grant limits and allow grants to cover all outstanding debt would be a useful step towards supporting grant participants to get on top of their utility bills.

RECOMMENDATION: Invest in a 'Knock to Stay Connected' Pilot to prevent electricity disconnections.

Knock to Stay Connected is an initiative introduced across Australia, where people at risk of disconnection receive a knock on their door and information about supports available and how to access them. This strategy has shown that up to 80 per cent of disconnections can be avoided through a human-centred approach.³³ WA is yet to adopt this approach and resultantly, many West Australians are unnecessarily disconnected from electricity each year.

Spotlight on Youth Justice:

Supporting kids to thrive

So far in 2024, WA has incarcerated 608 children – 36 of whom were placed in Unit 18, a child wing of a maximum-security adult prison.³⁴ An overwhelming majority of these children were Aboriginal, and over half of them will return to detention within two years of release. In under a year, two children have died in youth detention while in the Government's care. It is clear WA's youth justice system is not working, with our current approach failing young people, their families, and their communities.

“Proportionally, we are the most incarcerated people on the planet. We are not an innately criminal people. Our children are alienated from their families at unprecedented rates. This cannot be because we have no love for them. And our youth languish in detention in obscene numbers. They should be our hope for the future.”

- ULURU STATEMENT FROM THE HEART

All evidence shows that many kids in prison are let down well before they spend time behind bars. The vast majority experience poverty, marginalisation and disadvantage, and are known to multiple government systems – often which failed to provide effective supports and ensure their basic needs were being met. For example, a 2020 Report from the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare found more than 50 per cent of children in youth justice supervision had also received child protective services. The same report found young people who had received child protection services were 9 times as likely as the general population to have also been under youth justice supervision.³⁵

For years the WA Government's policy approach has failed to address key issues relating to youth justice; instead prioritising and perpetuating youth detention.

With the right support, many children in detention would never need to be there at all. We can create a safer Western Australia and improve outcome for children and young people if we take a smarter approach to justice and respond to the underlying socio-economic drivers of offending.

It is time for the WA Government to invest in a youth justice system that keeps everyone in our community safe, that seeks to prevent and reduce youth offending, and that provides children and young people with the opportunity to change their behaviour and enjoy bright futures as responsible members of our community. While this must include closing Unit 18 as a priority, WA also needs a vision to address the systems that have failed children before they enter detention.

³⁴ WA Department of Justice (2023) [Annual Report 2022/23](#)

³⁵ AIHW (2020) [Young People in Child Protection and Under Youth Justice Supervision](#)



Protected

RECOMMENDATION: Commit to a total overhaul and reform of the youth justice system – from community to detention – with a strategy and vision for generational change.

Announce a commitment to reforming the youth justice system, including the development of a whole-of-government reform strategy. The reform should put in place an evidence-based and trauma-informed approach to youth justice that includes strategies to intervene earlier and change life outcomes. Social Reinvestment WA's [The Blueprint for a Better Future: Paving the Way to Youth Justice Reform in WA](#), sets out a clear vision for reform. Developed in partnerships with experts in child wellbeing, lawyers, community services, Aboriginal leaders, and more, the Blueprint details relevant solutions to reform the youth justice system. The reform strategy must include:

- A commitment to preventing children from entering detention.
- Development of a whole-of-government mechanism that enables key agencies to work collaborative to solve key issues.
- Publication of youth justice targets and data to restore transparency.
- A timeline to close Unit 18 and remove WA children from adult prison.
- Increased support for community-based programs and services.
- Investment in local, community-led, approaches such as Justice Reinvestment.



Healthy

RECOMMENDATION: Review the Patient Assisted Travel Scheme to better meet user needs and improve program effectiveness.

The Patient Assisted Travel Scheme (PATS) was established to help regional residents with health travel costs. However, the level of support offered has not kept pace with the rising costs. Concerns have been raised with the design of the scheme and its administration, which does not allow patients to attend regional hubs for treatment or cover the full cost of travel. In its current form the scheme is burdensome, inefficient and not meeting user need.

RECOMMENDATION: Expand access to developmental diagnosis and ensure families can receive early intervention treatment and support.

Currently there are significant waitlists for clinical services that diagnose developmental delays, difference in neurotype, and foetal alcohol spectrum disorder. A lack of timely support means children fall further behind in their education and development and may never catch up. To solve this problem, WA needs to provide timely advice and support to families without them needing to obtain a diagnosis and to expand availability of public diagnosis and treatment services.

RECOMMENDATION: Increase funding to mental health services, including youth services, services for the missing middle and step-up step-down services.

Rising financial and social pressure is taking an increasing toll on the mental wellbeing of our community. When people seek support, long wait times, gap fees and limited capacity mean services are often inaccessible. There are often no services available for the missing middle, those whose mental health is moderate but not at crisis. Increasing investment in early intervention and community-based psychosocial services (including step-up step-down models and safe havens) will help people to stay healthy and reduce growing demand and service costs.

RECOMMENDATION: Invest in alcohol and other drug services, including regional detox facilities and sobering up centres.

Alcohol and other drug services are struggling to meet demand. Inadequate funding across the care continuum has resulted in system bottlenecks that inhibit service delivery. For example, through-care to residential alcohol and drug treatment services are dependent on participants accessing withdrawal services. However, restricted availability of withdrawal services limits the number of people who can access residential services. Many regional areas have little or no access to services and lack detox facilities or sobering up centres.



Engaged

RECOMMENDATION: Implement the recommendations of the Facing the Facts report.

The 2023 Independent Review of Public Education in WA highlighted the growing divide within our schools, the pressure on teachers, increasing challenges supporting disadvantaged students, managing complex needs and challenging behaviours. Greater investment is needed in public education to improve outcomes and lift morale.³⁶

RECOMMENDATION: Invest in alternate education options for children disengaging with mainstream services.

Adequate levels of local support are needed in the face of growing student disadvantage and complexity across our public schools. Support services need to be more accessible and responsive to the needs of young people with trauma and in managing aggressive behaviours.

RECOMMENDATION: Invest in traineeships and further study options that enable people to stay in regional and remote communities.

Communities across regional and remote WA report a lack of training and job opportunities stops them from staying in their community. Building on the WA Governments successful Fee Free TAFE initiative, it is now time to focus on creating local opportunities, with on-the-job training, in regional and remote WA. For example, community-led maintenance of social housing stock builds local skills, delivers more timely and affordable outcomes, and ensures safe and healthy homes.³⁷

RECOMMENDATION: Targeted participation support funding for students from families in financial hardship.

Help students engage fully in their education by ensuring they have the basics to participate, such as books, devices, uniforms, inclusion in excursions and sports. The recent Student Assistance Payment taught us some lessons on how financial assistance can better be delivered through the public-school system to ensure low-income families get easy access.

RECOMMENDATION: Invest in supports and services that enable a smooth transition between school and employment for young people living with a disability.

The evidence shows that the transition from school to work is critical for all our young people, but doubly so for those facing additional challenges. Career planning needs to be realistic; person-centred and start in year 9, with meaningful work experience and a supported transition to working life.³⁸

36 Lawrence et.al. (2023) [Facing the Facts: A review of Public Education in Western Australia](#). SSTU WA

37 ATLAS Geraldton [public housing renovation program](#).

38 BCEC (2024) [Employment and Disability in Australia: Improving employment outcomes](#).

Spotlight on Digital Exclusion:

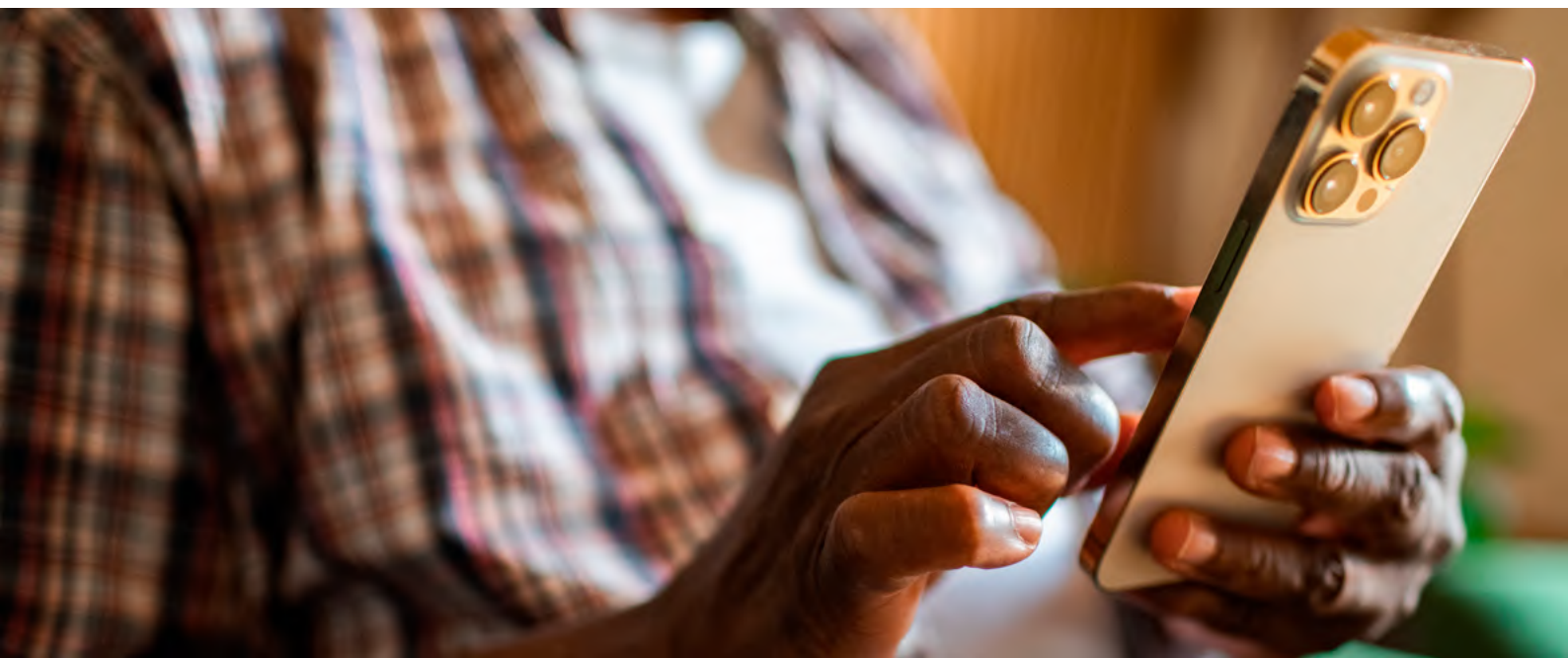
Leaving no one behind

As essential services including banking, healthcare, and government services move online, digital inclusion is becoming increasingly critical. Most state and federal government services are now structured so that online is the first and major point of contact, with a growing proportion online only. Yet not everyone has the same level of digital access and literacy, and some people face significant barriers to accessing digital technologies. Most of us also know someone who has been scammed.

The Australian Digital Inclusion Index shows that 9.4 per cent of our population are highly excluded. Digital exclusion occurs for a number of reasons, including a lack of access to reliable connections or quality devices, the high cost of products and services, cultural or linguistic barriers, as well as challenges with digital skills, confidence and security.

Digital exclusion has significant impacts on the community – increasing feelings of isolation, reducing access to services, and on educational and employment outcomes. During our consultation we heard about families forgoing meals so they could afford an internet connection to access essential services. Poor connectivity limits access to services in regional and remote areas, making online services simply not a viable option. Inability to access emergency services can put lives at risk. The upcoming 3G network shutdowns will exacerbate digital exclusion for people with limited resources.

The WA Digital Inclusion Blueprint has been developed in partnership with government, industry and community and prioritises connectivity, affordability and digital skills, alongside good design. It has yet to be funded comprehensively or at scale across regions, communities and portfolios. The WA Digital Inclusion Project has been able to connect participants, facilitate access to an affordable device, and build their confidence and skills to use them safely. The Project offers insights into how best to implement the Blueprint to reduce digital exclusion in WA. Holistic support is needed that addresses all three barriers to digital inclusion – digital ability, access and affordability together at the same time. The next step is to fund implementation of the Blueprint at scale across regions, communities and portfolios so that all citizens can confidently access the public services they need.





Connected

RECOMMENDATION: Extend transport concessions and discounts to all Centrelink Health Care Card holders and students.

The State Government has greatly improved the affordability of public transport by capping fares at the cost of a two-zone journey and making travel free for school students. However, families on low-income still struggle with transport costs. The concessions available to Age Pensioners should be extended to all Centrelink Health Care Card holders and tertiary students, including discounted and free travel options.

RECOMMENDATION: Extend car registration concessions to those on low incomes, including all Centrelink Health Care Card holders.

Families across WA are struggling to cover the cost of running a car. Without a car, many families in areas with limited public transport are unable to easily buy food at the shops, drop their kids to school, or go to work. For some cohorts, WA's current scheme provides substantial discounts on driver's licenses, car registration, and WA Photo Cards. Eligibility to this scheme is currently limited and is not available to most people living on low income.

RECOMMENDATION: Invest in regional transport systems and networks.

Limited regional public transport options restrict people's ability to access the basics. Our consultations highlighted many places where people were unable to get into regional centres to access groceries, health and social services, or get to school. We heard of people being stuck in urban centres and unable to return to Country. With reduced service outreach due to limited funding, the lack of local transport options means people living in regional communities are missing out on essential public services.





RECOMMENDATION: Implement the Digital Inclusion Blueprint by investing in person-centred and culturally appropriate digital inclusion initiatives to holistically address barriers across digital ability, access and affordability.

Digital technology has become increasingly necessary for people to access government services and participate in community. Despite this, people are experiencing high rates of digital exclusion. Key drivers of exclusion include access, affordability, and digital ability, with the problem closely linked to age, income and remoteness. Aboriginal people, and people with migrant and refugee backgrounds, are also disproportionately impacted.

Digital Inclusion strategies include:

- Free public WIFI and connectivity hubs, particularly in regional and remote areas.
- Provision of low cost or no cost devices to those in financial hardship.
- Upskilling and ongoing support such as training and other community-led initiatives that build knowledge, confidence, and capacity.

RECOMMENDATION: Subsidise and facilitate reliable internet connection for all social housing residents.

Affordability, outdated physical infrastructure, and complicated set up procedures are barriers to connectivity for most people living in social housing. We should invest in connectivity infrastructure and provide free or subsidised connection for all social housing tenants, including by sufficiently resourcing Community Housing Organisations and Aboriginal Community Controlled Housing Organisations to do so.



Supported

RECOMMENDATION: Commit to sustainable funding of community services and a one-off catch-up injection to make up for shortfalls arising from historical underfunding.

For years WA community services have been buckling under the pressure of increasing demand and limited funding. Delays in the roll out of Agency Commissioning Plans has meant that system rebalancing has not yet occurred, with most contracts being extended. Most of these contracts are over seven years old, with some nearly 14 years old. Delays in recommissioning are having significant impacts on service sustainability, including impacts on the sector's capacity to recruit and maintain a highly skilled workforce. We need an immediate uplift for all extended contracts to keep the doors open while services are recommissioned. A recent sector survey report WACOSS conducted demonstrates that services are being cut, and they do not have the capacity to respond to growing community need.³⁹

RECOMMENDATION: Undertake a state-wide review of social service gaps, including in workforce availability and pipelines, and develop a state-wide social service plan.

The WA community is changing – with rapid population growth, changing demographics and increasing financial hardship. However, there is no process or plan to create or expand services in growth areas. Similarly, there is no workforce strategy to ensure new services have access to an adequate pipeline of highly skilled staff. A recent mapping project in the Peel Region found a 40 per cent funding increase was needed to respond to recent population growth.⁴⁰ We need a coordinated data set on demand and need, service distribution maps, and workforce, to inform policy and planning to meet changing and increasing demand in a growing State.

39 WACOSS & The University of Western Australia (2024). [Western Australia's 2024 Sustainable Funding Survey](#)

40 Hatch Consultancy (2024). [Peel Community and Health Services Mapping report](#).

Investing in safe and secure homes

Western Australians want access to safe and secure affordable homes. Across WA, people are struggling to keep a roof over their head – facing limited affordable housing availability and soaring prices.

The WA State Government has a critical responsibility to explore and invest in initiatives to improve access to affordable homes, while continuing to build its social housing stock. We need to maintain the Government's clear focus on increasing social housing stock and build on this momentum to create a housing system that treats housing as a human right and ensures everybody has access to a home.

Spotlight on the Regions:

Housing

Supply deficits and high housing costs impact regional and remote communities more severely than metro areas. Over the five years prior to 2023, rents increased in Karratha by 82 per cent, and in Port Hedland by 93 per cent, compared to between 28 and 43 per cent in Perth metro.⁴¹ Homelessness and housing stress levels are higher in regional and remote communities and essential service delivery is diminished by lack of housing for staff.⁴² WACOSS was advised in community consultations that community service workers can only afford a private rental in the Pilbara if partnered with somebody working in the mines.

Public housing (housing owned by State Government) in remote communities is insufficiently funded or maintained and consequently, often of inhumane quality. Aboriginal tenants in remote communities across WA report collapsed ceilings, termites, crumbling walls and no front doors.⁴³ In some cases, tenants have been forced to rely on bottled water for drinking and cooking because the water from the tap is contaminated.⁴⁴ Despite reporting these issues over several years, the properties have not been repaired nor the tenants rehoused.⁴⁵ Such poor housing quality contributes to poor health and social outcomes experienced by Aboriginal people.

Regional and remote communities must be prioritised for increased social and affordable housing investment, including housing for essential workers. Aboriginal Community-Controlled Housing Organisations are best placed to deliver social housing in Aboriginal communities. Place-based, community-led and culturally-safe housing leads to better outcomes for Aboriginal people and communities. This is critical, not just for addressing the housing crisis, but also for closing the gap, working towards equity and self-determination for Aboriginal people.

41 BCEC (2023) [Housing Affordability in Western Australia 2023: Building for the future.](#)

42 BCEC (2023) [Housing Affordability in Western Australia 2023: Building for the future.](#)

43 Gock & Maloney (2024) [These Australians have waited years for the public housing to be repaired. A class action has now been filed.](#)

44 National Indigenous Times (2024) [Slater and Gorden file WA class action for thousands of Aboriginal tenants in substandard public housing.](#)

45 Gock & Maloney (2024)



Affordable

RECOMMENDATION: Implement second-generation rent stabilisation measures to protect renters from unsustainable and unreasonable increases in rent prices.

Renters are currently subject to yearly unreasonable and unsustainable rent increases, which cause stress, financial hardship and housing instability. For example, a rent stabilisation mechanism linked to CPI would maintain the value of the landlord's investment while providing renters certainty as to the affordability of their home into the future.

RECOMMENDATION: Identify unused Government Regional Officer Housing stock and allocate to community service sector workers.

Lack of affordable housing is impacting community service delivery in regional communities as services cannot attract staff if there is no housing available.

RECOMMENDATION: Develop a State rental affordability scheme to replace the National Rental Affordability Scheme upon its expiry in 2026.

Affordable housing in the private market is critical to addressing our housing crisis. If the National Rental Affordability Scheme is allowed to expire without a suitable replacement, affordable housing stock will decline.





Accessible

RECOMMENDATION: Increase social housing (public and community housing) to 10 per cent of all housing through investment for new builds and acquisitions.

A broad-based social housing program accessible to a range of demographics, including low-income earners and essential workers is the most effective way to address our housing crisis and would deliver wide ranging social, health and economic benefits.

RECOMMENDATION: Transfer management of more public housing stock to Community Housing Organisations (CHOs), including Aboriginal Community Controlled Housing Organisations (ACCHOs) and increase investment to grow capacity.

CHOs and ACCHOs are efficient and provide effective tenant support in tune with community need. Transferring management of new builds or spot purchases, which are yet to become part of public housing stock to these organisations, will boost capacity and support social housing supply growth.

RECOMMENDATION: Invest in safe accommodation pathways for family violence victim-survivors.

In WA, people experiencing family violence experience insecure housing. Many victim survivors are faced with the decision to stay and experience violence or leave and face homelessness. WA needs increased investment in crisis accommodation and transitional housing options.

RECOMMENDATION: Invest in the delivery of rapid, innovative and diverse accommodation options.

Despite welcome recent investment, our social housing builds are taking time. Investment in rapid and innovative options, including conversion of underutilised properties, prefabricated or tiny homes on vacant lots, 2-by-2 or 1-by-1 units, or granny flats, will help stem homelessness. Builds need to suit the diverse needs of our population, including separated and multi-generational families.

RECOMMENDATION: Increase investment in Housing First programs and Common Grounds facilities.

The Housing First approach is widely considered best practice, providing people with complex health needs a secure place to live where they can safely access support at their own pace.

RECOMMENDATION: Invest in visitor accommodation in urban and regional centres.

Short stay visitor accommodation provides safe and affordable accommodation for people visiting urban and regional centres for health and cultural reasons, who may otherwise face sleeping rough. Culturally-safe services are critical where Aboriginal people are significant users of services.



Secure and Safe

RECOMMENDATION: Invest in basic facilities for people sleeping rough, including running water, a safe place to camp, public showers, and lockers.

People sleeping rough deserve dignity and safety.

RECOMMENDATION: Abolish no reason evictions in the *Residential Tenancies Act*.

No reason eviction is a persistent threat, stopping tenants from advocating for their basic rights for fear of retaliatory eviction.

RECOMMENDATION: Develop and implement Minimum Standards for rental properties that protect health, ensure energy efficiency and allow disability access, and start by signing up to the Liveable Housing Design Standard of the National Construction Code.

The National Cabinet's Better Deal for Renters includes phasing in minimum standards. Energy efficiency standards reduce costs for renters, improve health outcomes and support the State's equitable journey to renewable energy. Minimum disability standards ensure people with disability are not excluded from accessing suitable housing.

Investing in communities

WA's population has grown dramatically, however social infrastructure investment has not kept pace. Our population is ageing, people are experiencing more complex social and health challenges, and social cohesion is weakening. Racism is on the rise, particularly toward Aboriginal people. Communities report increasing political divide and lack of trust in government and institutions is growing, particularly among young people.

The WA community believes it is government's responsibility to address these issues by improving equity and investing in community infrastructure. Western Australians want to live in connected, supportive, safe and healthy communities, that value diversity and inclusion. Community investment, not just physical infrastructure projects, is the way to achieve this. This is supportive and enabling investment – it creates a happy and healthy population that is more productive and reduces strain on acute and tertiary services.

Support

RECOMMENDATION: Create and resource an Office of Early Childhood.

An Office provides support to the Minister and coordinates policy, decision making and resources across Departments. It should have clear powers and responsibilities for early education and care and be supported by a cross-sector partnership forum and peak body.

RECOMMENDATION: Universal access to quality early education and care.

Actively engage with the new national funding model when announced and work with the sector to codesign solutions to meet WA's unique challenges.⁴⁶ Implement Labor's policy to deliver high quality early childhood education and care services on new school sites, better support community-based care and actively reduce fragmented care.

RECOMMENDATION: Increase the Grandcare Support Scheme payment and provide more active support to Grandparent carers.

Growing numbers of children are informally cared for by their grandparents fulltime, with little or no financial support, leading to hardship and poverty.

RECOMMENDATION: Invest in navigator models that improve community connectivity and service coordination.

System navigators with the right knowledge, skills and networks connect individuals with the health and community services, peer supports and social groups that meet their needs and help achieve their goals. They offer an innovative approach to reducing the burden on social and health services while improving outcomes for community members.

RECOMMENDATION: Increase the availability and accessibility of respite care.

Carers supporting seniors, people with disability, chronic illness, mental illness, fragility, or drug dependency, all increasingly face physical and emotional exhaustion. Without their care the public costs of providing support will be significant. Respite care is critical for the wellbeing of carers and the sustainability of care arrangements.

Spotlight on the Regions: Community Infrastructure

With fewer people and bound together by their distance from major urban centres, regional and remote communities tend to have strong interpersonal networks, connection and community mindedness. They also receive less formal social infrastructure investment – fewer designated places for people to gather and less program investment. There are huge gaps in services, forcing community members to travel significant distances to access the support they need. This can make it difficult to live in regional and remote communities. No access to childcare in particular is a significant barrier to regional and remote employment. Lack of designated gathering spaces increases the risk of social isolation, particularly for young LGBTQIA+ people. Regional social infrastructure investment tends to be designed out of Perth, without knowledge of the community strengths, assets and networks, and as such does not reflect community needs.

Social infrastructure in regional and remote WA should be driven by community-based programs and initiatives that are created and sustained locally. Place-based solutions are better able to develop comprehensive and effective responses to complex issues and innovate for community wellbeing and connection. Empowered local leadership and effective community engagement creates the possibility for a more inclusive approach to regional and remote social planning to deliver stronger, more sustainable outcomes.



Spaces

RECOMMENDATION: Expand delivery of integrated child and family hubs to reach children and families most in need.

Integrated hubs are one of the most cost-effective ways of delivering services to the children and families that need them most. Build on the success of the 22 existing Child and Parent Centres on or near primary schools in WA to deliver integrated early support services to communities where child health and development are at most risk.⁴⁷

RECOMMENDATION: Invest in Third Spaces as critical community infrastructure.

Third Spaces are places outside the home, workplace or school where people can connect with others in their community. They support social cohesion and community wellbeing and can be critically important for marginalised groups, such as LGBTQIA+ young people and Aboriginal people, to gather, support each other, and affirm their identity.

Creating safe third spaces online is a safe alternative for young people under 14 years who are targeted by harmful content and actors on commercial social media platforms.

47

Deloitte Economics (2023) [Exploring need and funding models for a national approach to integrated child and family hubs](#). WACOSS (2024) [Make WA Fair – Leaving no-one behind](#).



Safe

RECOMMENDATION: Ensure the needs of children and young people are included in responses to family violence.

Children and young people who experience or are exposed to family violence are victims in their own right, and need support tailored to their needs. Too often family violence responses do not adequately consider child trauma and the inter-generational impact of violence. Crisis services are often unable to offer refuge to young men aged over 14, leaving them home alone to face their father's violence.

RECOMMENDATION: Increase investment in sexual violence services, including Child Sexual Abuse Therapeutic Services and Indigenous Healing Services.

With a national campaign encouraging victims to come forward, we need to ensure that all sexual violence victim-survivors have access to the services that they need. Current funding levels are forcing services to reduce staff and operating hours, while waitlists grow. Lack of access to counselling significant lifelong impacts on the health and wellbeing of victim survivors.

RECOMMENDATION: Expand counselling and support services for young people experiencing harmful sexual behaviours, and support teachers and schools to respond.

WA has been leading the way in responding to growing rates of peer-on-peer abuse with the development of a Harmful Sexual Behaviours framework and pilot program that needs to be rolled out state-wide.⁴⁸ Meanwhile, teachers and school staff have become mandatory reporters, but need training and support to understand the difference between developmentally appropriate exploration, harmful activities, and acting-out that may indicate a history of child abuse and trauma.

RECOMMENDATION: Increase investment in programs and services that engage with men who are using, or at risk of using family violence, to provide accountability, promote behaviour change, and support victim-survivor safety.

To ensure women and children are safe from violence long term, work must be done with men using or at risk of using violence. This includes:

- Investment in behaviour change programs, such as at early intervention stages, and counselling services that are culturally appropriate and responsive; and
- Investment in specialist accommodation for men using violence to enable monitoring, assist engagement with behaviour change programs and support victim-survivor safety.⁴⁹

48 Communities (2022) [HSB Framework](#). Allambee (2024) [Specialised sexual violence counselling](#).

49 AHURI (2022) [Housing male perpetrators of family violence](#). Note also that there is currently no crisis accommodation available for adult male victim survivors. Specialised accommodation services for this cohort are needed.

Make it Right

RECOMMENDATION: Implement the recommendations of the Parliamentary inquiry into improving options for survivors of child sexual abuse.

Restitution and support are still needed for the victims of past abuse and greater steps need to encourage victims of abuse to seek support and address their trauma sooner.⁵⁰

RECOMMENDATION: Establish a redress scheme for those directly affected by past forced adoption in WA.

Historical forced adoption policies in WA have caused unimaginable and continuing pain. The redress scheme should include compensation, counselling and psychological support, and a direct personal response from the institutions involved. WA should provide legal advice for those affected by past forced adoption.⁵¹

RECOMMENDATION: Establish a WA Stolen Generations Reparations Scheme

WA had the highest proportion of children removed of any state, and now lags behind most other states and territories in establishing this scheme. A dedicated Stolen Generations Reparations Scheme is necessary to acknowledge significant and ongoing harm and as part of the much-needed truth telling identified in the [Implementation Plan for Closing the Gap](#).⁵²

50 WA Legislative Assembly, Community Development and Justice Standing Committee (2024) [Seeking Justice: Improving options for survivors of institutional child abuse](#).

51 WA Legislative Council, Environment and Public Affairs Committee (2023) [Inquiry into past forced adoptive policies and practices](#).

52 As recommended in the HREOC (1997) [Bringing Them Home](#) report.





Healthy Environments

RECOMMENDATION: Implement immediate advertising ban for unhealthy products on State-owned assets.

Unhealthy food and drink, gambling, and gas are products that are harmful for the community. Advertising promotes their consumption and increases their negative impact. WA should not condone and promote activities that harm our children and citizens and cost the public purse. Banning advertising-harmful industries on state assets helps build a WA where all people are supported to make healthy and safe choices.

RECOMMENDATION: Ban gas connection in new homes and develop a roadmap to transition to all-electric households.

Low-income households and renters face significant barriers to electrify their homes and risk paying increasing prices in a declining gas network. Analysis shows that the cheapest option for new homes is to avoid gas connection altogether. For established homes with gas, it is often cheaper in the long run to switch to electric, if you can afford it.⁵³ Gas stovetops have been found to contribute to childhood asthma, with impact comparable to household smoking.⁵⁴

RECOMMENDATION: Fund the implementation of the Community Disaster Resilience Strategy.

A changing climate has altered the nature and severity of the hazards we face. People experiencing poverty disproportionately bear the brunt. Implementing the Strategy will build a healthy, connected and resilient WA in the face of climate change.

53 Renew, Affordable energy choices for WA households (Report, 2021).

54 <https://www.climatecouncil.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/Kicking-the-Gas-Habit-How-Gas-is-Harming-our-Health.pdf>

Investing in equity and good process

Our current processes are not equipped to shift the system towards early intervention and prevention models, to improve equity in WA, or tackle complex social problems. For example, implementation of the 2024 school assistance payment, where parents could claim the payment regardless of their caring responsibilities, demonstrated that our policy processes do not consider gender dynamics or gender inequity. Similarly, blanket electricity credits demonstrate our processes do not account for differing levels of need. Inequitable policy approaches have impacts on our service system. When we overlook the unique needs of marginalised cohorts and fail to take a life course approach, we miss valuable opportunities to provide early supports and appropriate safety nets that prevent people from entering crisis. Resultantly, our service system becomes overwhelmed with acute demand. To achieve change, rebalance our service systems and increase equity in WA, we need to update our processes and ensure they are well placed to deliver the outcomes we are seeking. This includes changing the way we spend public money and the way we collect and share data.

Case Study:

Victorian Early Intervention and Investment Fund

The Victorian Early Intervention Investment Framework⁵⁵ is currently the best Australian example of a whole-of-government mechanism to target complex problems. The framework enables Victorian agencies to build evidence of the return on investment of early intervention programs. Analysis using the [Victorian Social Investment Integrated Data Resource](#) supports budget bids which estimate avoided costs, analyse program outcomes and track return on investment.

The Victorian model circumvents key challenges faced by individual agencies seeking to develop early intervention programs. Department of Treasury and Finance oversee the shared data resource and use their in-house analytical capability to work with agencies to cost proposals and evaluate programs. The model prioritises cross-agency bids, circumnavigating the problem of savings in one portfolio requiring investment in another. Success of the model has seen increased investment on early intervention ramping up in Victoria, approaching \$1 billion spent over the two last state budgets.⁵⁶

The features of successful early intervention systems are that funding enables collective early intervention across the system and they source shared evidence on 'what works.' Central guidance and capacity to implement 'what works' is provided, along with practical support to de-implement what does not work. They take person-centred approaches that drive service innovation. They use integrated cross-government data systems to drive investment and embed data systems into programs and services that enable quality outcome measurement and evaluation.⁵⁷

55 Department of Treasury and Finance Victoria (2022) [Early Intervention Investment Framework](#). See also ANZOG (2022) [CEI Global](#) (2022) [CPD](#) (2024).

56 Department of Treasury and Finance, Government of Victoria (2024). [2021-22 and 2022-23 Early Intervention Initiatives](#).

57 Rose, V. & Mildon, R. (2022). [Measuring early intervention effectiveness: principles, methods and examples](#). Centre for Evidence and Implementation (CEI). ANZSOG (2022). [Implementing the Early Intervention Investment Framework](#). A report to the Victorian Department of Treasury and Finance.



Equitable

RECOMMENDATION: Introduce a *WA Gender Equality Act* that requires defined entities to take positive action towards workplace gender equity and a Gender Equality Commissioner.

With the highest gender pay gap of all states, it is time for WA to make a commitment to gender equity. An Act helps increase the pace of change by providing a useful lever to ensure business is taking positive action and reporting on workplace gender equity.

RECOMMENDATION: Invest in a Gender Responsive Budgeting Unit with WA Treasury.

Too often we are blind to the gendered impacts of public spending and inadvertently use public money to perpetuate inequitable outcomes. Gender Responsive Budgeting enables us to monitor progress towards gender equity and better utilise public resources to address gender gaps to ensure that the WA economy is benefiting all.

RECOMMENDATION: Create a WA child, youth and family wellbeing framework.

WA has a history of leadership in research into child development and should use our expertise to lead assessment of wellbeing across our service system.⁵⁸

RECOMMENDATION: Create a WA Early Intervention Investment Fund.

A central fund overseen by the Cabinet Expenditure Review Committee, who assess cross-government proposals, and convert successful initiatives into ongoing programs.

RECOMMENDATION: Resource an early intervention analytics unit within Treasury.

The unit can support development of collaborative proposals, ensure high evidence standards, model returns on investment and evaluate project outcomes.

RECOMMENDATION: Reform budget process operating rules to include second round fiscal effects.

Treasury robustly analyses and tracks changes in demand for crisis and acute services, then conservatively banks 50 per cent of the benefits to fund future investments.

RECOMMENDATION: Adapt regulation and oversight of the *People WA* linked dataset to streamline access and build capability for cross-government impact assessment.

Data linkage is critical to delivering better cross-government outcomes, but the current system is not fit for purpose for collaborative service evaluation.



Balanced

Acknowledgements

WACOSS held community conversations in Albany, Broome, Bunbury, Geraldton, Kalgoorlie, Esperance (online), Karratha, Mandurah, Margaret River, Metropolitan Perth (north, south and east), Newman, Northam and Port Hedland. In addition, meetings were held with a number of peak bodies. The community conversations were held from June to August 2024.

We thank and acknowledge everyone who participated in the community conversations, provided data, advice and research. Organisations consulted included:

Aboriginal Health Council WA	Consumer Credit legal Service	Jacaranda Community Centre
Advocare Newman	Consumers of Mental Health WA	Joondalup Health Campus
Albany Youth Support Association	Council of Aboriginal Services WA	Just Home Margaret River Inc
Allambee	Department of Communities	JSW Training and Community Services
Amity Health	Economics with Heart	KEYS
Anglicare Broome	Empowering People in Communities	Kiind
Anglicare Joondalup	ERFAS	Kimberley Community Legal Services
Anglicare Karratha	Escare	Koya Aboriginal Corporation
Anglicare Mandurah	Fair Food WA	Lived Experience Advisors
Anglicare WA	Financial Counselling Association WA	Margaret River Community Centre
Augusta Margaret River Shire	Financial Wellbeing Collective	Margaret River Community Pantry
Bethanie	Foodbank WA	Men's Health Broome
Broome Circle	Goldfields Aboriginal Language Centre	Men's Shed Bunbury
Canarvon Family Support Service	Goldfields Women's Healthcare Centre	Mindful Margaret River
Centrecare	Goodstart Early Learning WA	Mission Australia Pilbara
Centrecare Cannington	Great Southern Community Legal Centre	Mission Australia Wattle House
Centrecare Geraldton	Headspace	Money Mentors
Centrecare Kalgoorlie	Headspace Geraldton	Neami National
Centre for Women's Safety and Wellbeing	Headspace Karratha	Neurological Council of WA
Child and Family Alliance WA	Health Consumer's Council WA	Palmerston Albany
Child Australia	Hedland Well Women's Centre	Parkerville Children and Youth Care
Chorus	Hedland Women's Refuge	PCYC Northam
Circle Green	Holyoake	Peel Community Development Group
City of Joondalup	Hope Community Services	Peel Connect
City of Wanneroo	Indigo Junction	People Who Care
Community Employers WA		Phoenix Rising Psychology

Pilbara Community Services
Prisoners Review Board
Regional Development Australia Pilbara
Relationships Australia
Richmond Wellbeing
RISE
Rocky Bay
Ruah Community Services
Salvation Army Karratha
SCHCS
Share and Care Community Services
Shelter WA
Social Reinvestment WA
South West Community Legal Centre
Spiers Centre
Square Peg Community Supports
St Patrick's Community Support Centre
St Vincent de Paul Society - Albany
St Vincent de Paul Society - Bunbury
St Vincent de Paul Society WA
Valuing Children Initiative
WAAC
WA Network of Alcohol & other Drugs
Agencies
Wanslea Albany
Wanslea Joondalup
Wansela Northam
West Pilbara Communities for Children
Women's Legal Services WA
Yaandina Community Services
Youth Affairs Council of WA
Youth Involvement Council
Youth Focus Albany
Youth Futures

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WACOSS advocates for an inclusive, just and equitable society.

We drive social change to improve the wellbeing
of Western Australians and to strengthen the
community services sector that supports them.

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