



Annual
Report

2023
2024

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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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Copies of this annual report are available from the address above.

Our work discusses women and women's issues. It does so through an understanding of the historical impact that a patriarchal society has imposed. It is written with an understanding of the marginalisation and disadvantage traditional and binary gender stereotypes has.

When we refer to women in this publication, and in all of our policy works, our work represents:

- ⦿ cisgender women,
- ⦿ people who identify as women,
- ⦿ non-binary and gender diverse people who may work, live, or feel most comfortable in women-dominated spaces.

Our intent is to be inclusive and accessible. We acknowledge the disadvantage and marginalisation that comes through any or all of these intersectionalities.

 **WACouncilofSocialService**

 **WACOSS**

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About WACOSS

The Western Australian Council of Social Service (WACOSS) is the peak body for the community services sector and works to create an inclusive, just and equitable society. We are committed to genuine engagement, authentic collaboration, and building trusted relationships with members, communities and governments.

We represent more than

240 & 500

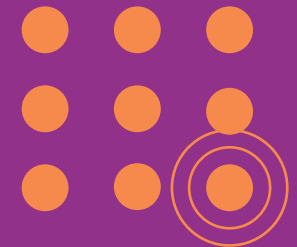
community
service
organisations

organisations
involved in the
provision of
community services
to the people of
Western Australia.

As one of nine peak councils of
social service across Australia,
we collaborate and collectivise on
campaigns of national significance.



We tackle difficult issues,
systems, behaviours and
attitudes that contribute to
inequality and exclusion.



Our Vision, Purpose and Values

Our Vision

Inclusive, just and equitable society.

Our Purpose

We drive social change with communities, through collective action and policy formulation, strengthening community services and influencing decision makers to ensure justice and equity.

Our Values



Heart

Our work is grounded in care and compassion for a fairer world



Curiosity

We seek bold and empowering ideas and solutions to issues our communities face



Integrity

Our approaches reflect and respect human rights and our practices are ethical and inclusive



Tenacity

We have the courage to persevere for transformative and positive change

Our 'Why'

We know that communities flourish where people are given the opportunity to contribute and create. We are committed to enabling and leading change that supports healthy, active and inclusive communities.

We need people to care about one another, and understand that poverty is a systemic issue that is not the fault of the individual. Fundamentally, we need to foster mutual empathy and work with communities to build their capability and vitality. It is essential that WACOSS remains grounded in community and holds a membership base that aligns with our vision and purpose.

To create equitable and empowered communities, there must be a strong peak body voice that works with its members to advocate with and on behalf of those who are the furthest from levers of power and influence, to amplify their concerns, seek justice, and create a society that genuinely works for the benefit of all.

How We Drive Change

To build an inclusive, just and equitable society we need to make change, and to do that we listen deeply, strengthen existing partnerships and facilitate new ones, engage, broker, collectivise, and collaborate.

We need to convince, represent and speak with a united voice, and amplify the perspectives of people experiencing vulnerability and disadvantage, and to challenge and change.

We create and problem solve, co-create pathways, pursue systemic change, and provide alternate solutions.

We must be bold in our ambition, challenge belief structures and cultural norms, and build community empathy.



A message from the President and CEO

Dear Friends of WACOSS,

We are pleased to present the Annual Report for the Western Australian Council of Social Service (WACOSS) for the 2023-24 financial year. The report highlights both the successes we have achieved this year and the challenges we faced.

The continuing lack of affordable and available housing, combined with persistently higher cost of living, has left many people across Western Australia in despair. This is not fair in a State as rich as ours. WACOSS is steadfast in its resolve to stand with those who are not reaping the benefits of our economic prosperity.

The second half of 2023 brought us deep disappointment, when the Voice to Parliament Referendum failed in all states, and in the Northern Territory. As part of our months-long campaign, we are grateful to the 23 community service organisations who generously donated funds to raise the voices of Aboriginal people on commercial radio, and in their commitment to the Referendum. Wildlings Creative donated their creative and production expertise, and we are grateful for their support and creativity. It was wonderful to come together on an issue that we both cared so deeply about – even if we didn't get the outcome we hoped for.

In the wake of the shocking loss, we reaffirmed our strong commitment to Aboriginal communities and people, in their ongoing fight for recognition, justice and self-determination. While the Referendum was distressing for so



many Aboriginal people, it has only deepened our solidarity with Aboriginal peoples in the vital work ahead.

We have put our support behind the newly established peak body, the Council of Aboriginal Services Western Australia, and we are committed to walking alongside and supporting its vital work. Aboriginal peoples and communities have always held the solutions within their communities, and it's because of that, we intend to listen, learn, and lean in to the wealth of knowledge of Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations and community leaders.

Every year our staff travel around Western Australia to meet with incredible community service members and talk about their work on the ground and the contribution they're making to our communities.

In 2023-24, we have heard how member organisations are supporting people affected by the state-wide housing shortage and cost-of-living crisis. How frontline staff are working with clients impacted by increasing climate disasters. How so many Western Australians are accessing the support of the community sector for the very first time.

The last year has shown how tenacious and resilient the sector is, and it's been very humbling to collaborate with, and advocate for the organisations who are there for people doing it the toughest.

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 childrens' futures.

The impact of the cost-of-living and housing crises are widespread; visible in both the metro, regional and remote regions of Western Australia. If you haven't experienced these crises firsthand, you likely know someone who has.

There has been some reprieve through efforts made by the State Government over the past 12 months to ease the worsening crisis. We successfully advocated with Shelter WA and our respective members to design the rent relief program, which is the most generous and flexible program in Australia. We look forward to continuing to meet with Ministers and advocating for genuine long-term solutions. With fairer and better targeting, we want to ensure help is concentrated on families and individuals who need it the most.

While most of our advocacy centres around the needs of the community, there's been a growing gap in the funding for those that provide these vital services. We continue to work with Community Employers WA, our



members and the State Government to ensure indexation of contracts reflects the increasing costs of delivering services. Throughout the year we have seen the inclusion of the superannuation guarantee in the indexation policy, a 15 per cent uplift in Child Sexual Abuse Therapeutic Services funding, uplifts in FDV funding and a \$90 million funding boost for the homelessness sector. We are still working on a one-off catch-up injection for services, which will be one of our campaign asks in the lead up to the WA State Election in March 2025.

Our public profile has grown consistently throughout the year. We have responded to media requests seeking our position on key issues, data, case studies, and solutions for some of the biggest challenges we face. In one of our biggest years in media coverage, WACOSS appeared in more than 697 media stories across print, online, radio and television.

Our work this year has had a particular focus on women's equity and economic security, as our sector is both a workforce that predominantly attracts women, and as frontline services we work closely with many women who experience disadvantage and marginalisation. We have been working closely with the State Government, calling for gender responsive budgeting in Western Australia. After successfully advocating for this commitment to be included in the WA Women's Strategy, this year we saw the practice applied in the State Budget process for the very first time.

Looking forward, we will continue to lean in to the services who work on the frontline, drawing on their knowledge and understanding, so that we may continue to advocate for equality, opportunity and wellbeing for all Western Australians. We will campaign for housing, rental reforms and for housing to be treated as a universal right. We want all children to have the best possible start in life, so they have what they need to grow and thrive, and for children to be kept out of prisons.

Our thanks goes to the team at WACOSS for the passion, skill, expertise and dedication they bring to their work. Their achievements far outweigh their numbers, which you will see in this report. Thank you to the people with lived experience of the issues on which we advocate who shared their stories and called for change.

As always, thank you to our member organisations and partners; when our sector collaborates, we are powerful. The incredible work you do is a source of inspiration and hope for a fairer, more equal Western Australian, where no one is left behind.

Finally, thank you to our Board Members, who give their time and expertise to guide the organisation through the challenges we face. Tackling the big issues of our time is not easy. It requires ambition and bravery to rise above politics and make real, impactful changes.

Sincerely,



Louise Giolitto
Chief Executive Officer



Mark Glasson
President



Our Board



Mark Glasson
President
CEO Anglicare WA



Emma Jarvis
Vice President
CEO Palmerston

Ordinary Board Members



Jo Sadler
CEO Wanslea



Leanne Strommen
from October 2023
General Manager Centrecare



Justine Colyer
CEO Rise Network



Michael Piu
until October 2023
CEO St Patrick's Community Support Centre Limited



David Cain
Executive Director
Operations Communicare



Kianna Barker
from April 2024
CEO Hedland Well Women's Centre



Renna Gayde
Cultural Engagement
Coordinator, Foundation
for Indigenous Health



Gordon Trewern
until October 2023
Group CEO PeopleKind Group



Kim Brooklyn
from October 2023
CEO Parkerville



Vicki-Tree Stephens
CEO Youth Involvement
Council



Jenny Sala
from October 2023 until
February 2024
Public Officer and Executive
Manager Business Development
Aboriginal Health Council of WA



Laurel Sellers
until October 2023
CEO Yorgum Healing
Services



Lyn-Lee Teh
HR Lead Avivo, Board
Trainee

WACOSS Elders

Aunty Millie Penny

Aunty Charmaine Pell



Finance Committee members

Emma Jarvis

Chair

Kim Brooklyn

from October 2023

Jo Sadler

from October 2023

Leanne Strommen

from October 2023

Vicki-Tree Stephens

until October 2023

David Cain

until October 2023

Allison Leonard

Additional Member

until October 2023

Graham Donnelly

Additional Member

until June 2024

Justin Clarke

Additional Member

David Gilchrist

Additional Member

from May 2024

Governance and Risk Committee members

David Cain

Chair

from October 2023

Gordon Trewern

until October 2023

Jenny Sala

from October 2023 until February 2024

Jo Sadler

until October 2023

Justine Colyer

Kianna Barker

from April 2024

Michael Piu

Chair

until October 2023

Renna Gayde

Vicki Tree Stephens

from October 2023

Our Team

Louise Giolitto

Chief Executive Officer

Rachel Siewert

Deputy Chief Executive Officer

Alenka Jeram

Corporate Services Executive Manager

Chris Twomey

Research and Policy Development Lead

Jackie Bosen

Executive Assistant and Office Coordinator

Ashleigh Gregory

Community Relief and Resilience Coordinator

Carole Green

Heat Vulnerability Project Manager
from September 2023

Celeste Stephens

Pilbara Senior Manager

Dawn Fenton

Office and Administration Support

Dylan Green

Community Training and Engagement Officer, WA Digital Inclusion Project

Elien Dauwe

DropIN Project Officer and Designer
from April 2024

Elliot Sawers

Senior Training and Project Officer, WA Digital Inclusion Project
from January 2024

Emma Hardy Rosa

Project Officer, WA Digital Inclusion Project

Emily Hull

Senior Policy and Projects Officer

Fernanda Monteiro

Graphic Design Coordinator

Fiona Costello

Child Safe Manager
from July 2023

Fraser Beattie

Media Officer, WACOSS, Communications and Stakeholder Engagement, WA Digital Inclusion Project
from August 2023

Graham Hansen

Senior Policy Officer
until April 2024

Jacob West

Heat Vulnerability Project and Communications Officer
from April 2024

Jaime Castilla Riasco

DropIn Project Officer
until March 2024

Kim Robinson

Program Support Officer

Kris Harris

Training Specialist, WA Digital
Inclusion Project
until November 2023

Lakshmi Kuppa

Technologies Officer
from February 2024

Laurene Coller

Communications Officer

Leela James

National Disaster Risk Reduction
Manager
until July 2023

Lily Newbury-Freeman

Capability and Sustainability Lead,
WA Digital Inclusion Project

Lucy Morrison

Advocacy Lead

Milan Vojnovic

Capability and Sustainability Lead,
WA Digital Inclusion Project
until July 2023

Philippa Jahn

Senior Regional Engagement Officer,
WA Digital Inclusion Project
from May 2024

Richard Hayes

Executive Manager, WA Digital
Inclusion Project
until October 2023

Rose Barton

Senior Policy Officer, Pilbara

Salil Koonja

Finance Coordinator

Shelby Robinson

National Disaster Risk Reduction and
Community Resilience Projects Officer
until February 2024

Sophie Hantz

Senior Policy Officer
from April 2024

Tim Oliver

Media Officer, WACOSS,
Communications and Stakeholder
Engagement, WA Digital Inclusion
Project
until August 2023

Victoria Rosales

Program Support Officer and
Executive Assistant
from April 2024

Vikas Kumar Singh

Online Technologies Coordinator
until March 2024

Zeina Jamaledine

Executive Manager, WA Digital
Inclusion Project
from August 2023





Media Statements

During the year WACOSS had more than 697 media stories across print, online, radio and television.

RBA Interest Rate Decision: Pause gives no relief to struggling households	Response to the Voice to Parliament Referendum outcome	New report reveals profound strengths and challenges among disadvantaged Aboriginal families	WACOSS welcomes mid-year budget review allocations	Communities sector at breaking point as underfunding cripples capacity
Amended indexation rate welcomed by community services sector	WACOSS, Shelter WA welcome \$24m Rent Relief Program	WACOSS welcomes carers relief package	WACOSS welcomes State Govt's \$47.6m funding package	Communities sector welcomes 2024-25 state budget
WACOSS launches Understanding My Voice Campaign	Community peaks welcome short-term rental reforms	Cost of living a clear and persistent threat to WA livelihoods	Community sector welcomes massive boost for housing and homelessness	State wage increase to deliver much needed relief

Events

During the year WACOSS hosted 19 events and webinars.

Emerging Issues Forum Webinar 2023	The Voice Information Session with COTA WA	State Budget Submission Launch	Looking through an Aboriginal Lens: Results of the Ngalang Moort Wangkiny Project (100 Families WA) Report Launch	Feeling the Heat: Stories and Strategies for WA's Rising Temperatures
Voice to Parliament Information Session	State Budget Submission Consultations	In Conversation with Dr Richard Denniss	New Year Sector Breakfast	Utility Support Forum

Webinars



Supporting Young Women to Thrive Webinar	Webinar: Communities will have conflict. How can we lessen the pain?	Webinar: What Matters in the Regions: In Conversation with Dr Richard Denniss	Emerging Issues Forum Webinar 2024	State Budget Briefing Webinar
Women's Economic Security Webinar	Disaster Ready Fund - Applying for Funding to Reduce Disaster Risk and Prepare for Disasters in WA Webinar	Advocacy Toolkit Webinar	Responsive Budgeting: In conversation with Emeritus Professor Siobhan Austen and Micaela Driberg Webinar	



Reports and Publications

During the year WACOSS wrote 5 large scale reports and wrote 22 submissions (see page 40 for details).

Sustainable
Funding
Survey Report
2024

State Budget
Submission
2024-2025

Cost of Living
Report 2023

Looking through
an Aboriginal
Lens: Results of
the Ngalang Moort
Wangkiny Project
(100 Families
Western Australia)

Lived Experience
Framework –
Principles and
Practices for
Lived Experience
Partnerships
(revised for 2024)



WACOSS proudly supports
the Voice to Parliament



Voice to Parliament



In late 2022, it became apparent that the Voice to Parliament would be presented to the Australian public through a Referendum later in 2023.

The decision to put our support behind the Voice to Parliament was unanimous, and as an organisation we made it our purpose throughout the campaign to listen to the voices of Aboriginal people that the Referendum directly impacted.

For too long the struggles of Aboriginal peoples has been silenced by successive governments, and representative bodies would be introduced, only to then be de-funded following a change of government.

It was an incredible feat that the Voice to Parliament came about, only after extensive co-design with communities from across Australia. Aboriginal people first came together seven years ago to endorse the Uluru Statement from the Heart, and the Voice to Parliament was a path to treaty and truth-telling.

In the lead up to the referendum, WACOSS joined the chorus of individuals and organisations campaigning for Yes, amplifying Aboriginal voices, bolstering the work of Aboriginal communities and sharing the public events and activities throughout the state.

WACOSS developed a series of videos featuring staff, Board members, and our Cultural Aunties, sharing their insights on why they support the premise of a Voice in the Constitution.

Across social media, we shared uplifting stories of Aboriginal peoples and the important meaning of being recognised in the Constitution. We shared resources in various languages, reached out to other peak bodies, and held events in collaboration for different areas of our communities.

We developed a newsletter and shared it with our members and supporters, promoting interesting news articles and support from across the globe.

WACOSS and Anglicare WA were approached by Wildlings Creative in August 2023 to develop a creative campaign to share stories of Aboriginal people in language and broadcast them across commercial radio and online. Within five days we raised \$61,000 from 21 community service organisations for the campaign. We are incredibly grateful to Wildlings for leading the initiative, donating their time and the community services that contributed to the campaign. The radio commercials were one-of-a-kind, Aboriginal people speaking in language explaining why voting Yes was the right thing to do for all Australians.

At the WACOSS office we opened the doors to tenants in our building to learn more about the Voice to Parliament and to hear from Jesse Fleay, a Constitutional Scholar and Noongar person based in Boorloo, who was a signatory co-author to the Uluru Statement.

Staff were supported and encouraged to attend out-of-work activities such as phone banking, doorknocking, and wobble boarding at events for the Yes campaign, and on voting day.

Despite our best efforts, and the best efforts of Aboriginal people and allied organisations across Australia, the Referendum failed.

We played our role in being a voice to counter unchecked misinformation, acting to sow division in our communities, and now more than ever, it's critical we come together, continue the work, and unite in solidarity with Aboriginal people.

WACOSS has always fought for equity and justice, and the Voice to Parliament was the opportunity to recognise more than 60,000 years of continuing rich culture, and embrace all that Aboriginal people bring to this country.

Aboriginal Elders and community leaders demonstrated unwavering strength and generosity in extending the Uluru Statement of the Heart invitation for non-Indigenous Australians to join them on this journey.

The outcome of the referendum was devastating, and it only deepens our solidarity with Aboriginal people in the vital work ahead. Our commitment to Aboriginal communities in their ongoing fight for sovereignty and self-determination is as strong as ever.

The situation remains the same as it was before 14 October 2023. There is still an unacceptable chasm in living standards and health outcomes between Aboriginal peoples and non-Indigenous people.

Institutionalised racism still sees police locking up Aboriginal people in disproportionately greater numbers than their non-Indigenous counterparts.

Families and communities are still being separated, despite the findings of the Bringing Them Home report more than 25 years ago.

The referendum was a moment of reckoning for many who had never before been asked to confront the ongoing impacts of colonisation. More than 6.2 million people rose to the occasion and took the first step towards Treaty and Truth-telling in writing Yes.

It is profoundly significant that Aboriginal people, whose lives would have been directly affected by the Referendum, overwhelmingly voted Yes.

We urge Governments to respond Aboriginal peoples' calls for action to Close the Gap, and to deliver on Voice, Treaty, Truth.

We know there is a better future for our Aboriginal friends and colleagues, and we will walk beside them every step of the way.

Collaborating with communities and people with lived experience

Strategic Catalyst **1**

Children's Policy Advisory Council (CPAC)

The Children's Policy Advisory Council brings together members of WACOSS who support children, young people, and families to ensure a cohesive whole-of-sector response to the development of children's policy. CPAC advances and supports child and family services that are effective and responsive so that all young people in WA have what they need to thrive.

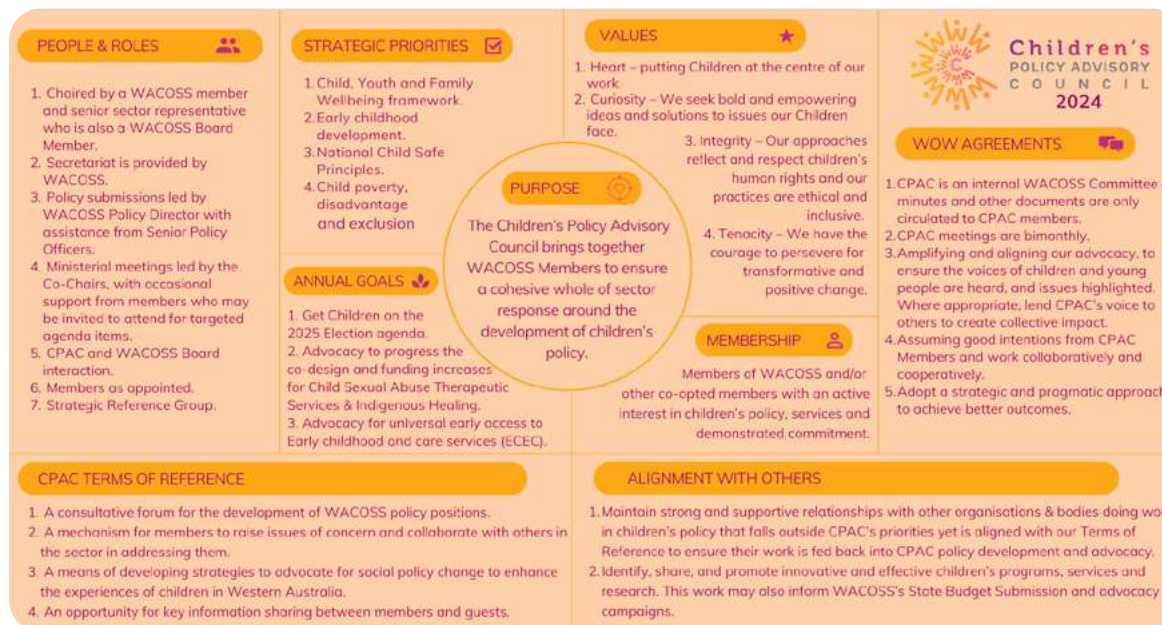
Members of the Advisory Council are actively engaged in collective advocacy, seeking to make a real difference to children and families. Bi-monthly meetings are guided by the Independent Chair, Kim Brooklyn, CEO of Parkerville and include updates from government agencies and guest speakers on emerging issues.

CPAC has developed a Ways of Working agreement that reflects the commitment to enacting the shared values, to collectively achieve shared strategic priorities. The objective in 2024 is to get children on the 2025 WA Election agenda; advance access to universal affordable quality early education and care for all children in WA; and to progress codesign and sustainable funding for child sexual abuse therapeutic services and Indigenous healing services.

CPAC continues to focus on the critical issues of child poverty, disadvantage and exclusion, advocating for the implementation of a child youth and family wellbeing framework in WA to drive joined-up investment across sectors and portfolios. Regular meetings between the Minister for Early Childhood Education, the Honourable Sabine Winton MLA and her team, ensure advocacy for the creation of an Office of Early Childhood is front and

centre for this Government. A dedicated Office of Early Childhood is a platform that encourages coordinated government-wide policy, investment and decision making on issues that impact children and young people.

The Youth Affairs Council of Western Australia (YACWA) continues to be a strong ally in this space, and we work together advocating for youth services, and with Social Reinvestment WA to support their work on juvenile justice reform.



Over the last 12 months CPAC made a number of joint submissions around the issues of investment, justice for victims of child sexual abuse, and early childhood care workforce.

CPAC co-hosted a roundtable with HumanAbility, the national jobs and skills council representing the human services sector on workforce capability, attraction and retention issues to early childhood education and care.

CPAC plays an integral role in providing an ongoing guidance and oversight for the Child Safe Project, which assists community organisations to implement the national child safe principles into policy and practice, to keep our children safe and implement the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Institutional responses to Child Sexual Abuse. We continue to partner with the Department of Communities and are currently exploring opportunities to extend this work with the Council of Aboriginal Services WA to frontline Aboriginal Community-Controlled Organisations, with support from Lotterywest.

Longer term the Advisory Council will advocate for children's issues on the 2025 state election agenda, to ensure Western Australia is the best place in the world for all children to grow up.



WA Digital Inclusion Project

The WA Digital Inclusion Project (WADIP) has achieved a lot across its seven initiatives since transitioning into the implementation phase last year.

The Lotterywest-funded Project was officially launched in 2022. It has recruited more than 40 organisations as project partners who are actively engaged in providing feedback, to ensure it remains flexible and

responsive to needs within the sector, among digitally excluded people and communities, as well as the ever-changing (and growing) global digital and digital inclusion landscape.

During the reporting period, the Digital Inclusion Project subsidised up to 500 refurbished laptop devices, together with more than 300 one-year NBN internet plans to participants as part of the Access and Affordability Pilot, delivered through digital partner WorkVentures.

The initiative sought to equip people in the WA community experiencing digital exclusion with access to these basic tools to enable them to engage with and use digital technologies for work, learning, and life.

The digital upskilling initiatives continue to gain momentum, with regular training sessions held across metropolitan and regional areas of WA. Training has been tailored to the needs of individual partner organisations, with shorter and more targeted sessions being developed and delivered.

Shorter sessions focus on supporting community members to be safe using their devices and then where to go for additional digital upskilling in community settings. These sessions have been delivered online and face-to-face, and feedback received to-date has been positive, with previously trained organisations seeking new and further training opportunities.

As a result of digital upskilling, gaps analysis and feedback, the Community Champions Program has been developed, piloted and is now in successful ongoing rollout. The program is a peer-to-peer facilitation program where community members run digital upskilling sessions with their networks, supporting them to maintain safety in online spaces, and to find and access existing and sustainable digital upskilling in different community settings.



The Scholarship Program has been a tremendous success, with several full classes held at North Metro TAFE in Leederville in 2024. We are pleased to report that the Digital Inclusion team have already received success stories from some of these cohorts, and we look forward to seeing and hearing more of these as they come to hand.

Finally, the Digital Inclusion Project website, launched in May 2023, continues to be refined and optimised following feedback and results from user testing sessions.

The website offers a complete suite of free resources, tools and learning modules to help educate users across the State and provide them with

direct pathways to access online services such as Medicare, online banking and job applications.

As we close in on the final 12 months of this Project, WACOSS, along with the Project partners, are extremely grateful for Lotterywest's contribution of \$3.9 million over 3 years as the major supporter of this Project, and for the in-kind support from all of our digital partners and community service project partners. We look forward to maximising its impact and outcomes for digitally excluded people in WA as much as possible during the final year of the Project.





Pilbara Connection and Representation

The WACOSS Pilbara team continues to work with the local community sector to improve systems and ways of working for a more equitable society. The Pilbara Family and Domestic Violence Network is a cornerstone piece of work to the project, bringing together diverse stakeholders to collaboratively address the epidemic of violence being faced by the Pilbara community and families. The Network aims to improve sector connection, collaboration and capability through the delivery of an annual family domestic violence conference as well as various sector networking and professional development opportunities. The Network aims to address the root causes of family violence with innovative, place-solutions, and facilitate community education and awareness as primary prevention. This year the Network has begun establishing themselves as an advocacy campaigning body, seeking to influence how family and domestic violence is combatted in the Pilbara.

The Pilbara project elevates the needs of social services within the region to platforms of influence, highlighting chronic issues of unsustainable funding, crisis response demand, retention of skilled staff and an inaccessible housing market. For clients in the Pilbara, many have complex, intersecting needs, and system wide reforms are needed to support people out of cycles of poverty. The Pilbara project contributes to forums and initiatives working across housing, food security, family violence, health and more. This year the Pilbara team has continued the development of a framework to guide a new way of working across the region. Informed by stakeholders across the community sector and State and Local Government, the framework prioritises strategic investment in evidence-based outcomes across the early years period, ensuring children grow up in nurturing care environments.



Collaboration with Peaks

WACOSS convenes and supports the WA Peaks Forum, a platform for community sector peak body leaders to share information, provide updates, and to discuss and coordinate advocacy on critical and emerging issues.

Peaks work collaboratively between meetings to advise and collegially support each other through challenges, develop collaborative submissions, provide feedback on relationships across government and to recognise each other's success.

The cost-of-living crisis and increasing demand for services has been a key focus for the Peaks Forum this year, especially housing issues, the Housing Rent Relief Scheme, tenancy reforms, and Make Renting Fair campaign.

The State Commissioning Strategy Implementation Plan and agency commissioning plans have continued as a major focus for the Forum, as many agencies are yet to produce their Commissioning Plan and there has been little consultation with the sector as to when and how this may occur.

Discussions around sector sustainability, indexation and delays in commissioning of services have featured heavily in Peaks meetings this year, and increased demand for services is an area of growing concern for Forum members.

Through the Peaks Forum we continue to collaboratively administer the \$20,000 Peaks Capacity Building Grants, and our thanks goes to the members of the forum who assess each application. During the year, eight projects were approved:

- ⦿ Lifting the Voices – YES Referendum
- ⦿ Lived Experience Participation Project
- ⦿ Tenants' Rights and Voices
- ⦿ Clarity for Lived Experience Engagement
- ⦿ Pilbara Housing Investment Strategy
- ⦿ True Project Cost – Case Studies
- ⦿ Cost of Living
- ⦿ Preventing Violence Together – Men and Masculinities

The Forum is a consultative group for State Government departments, and regularly receive briefings from the Departments of Communities, Finance, Premier and Cabinet, and Training and Workforce Development, as well as Lotterywest.

Influential Research and Policy

Strategic Catalyst **2**



Sustainable Health Review (SHR)

The Department of Health continues to value and welcome our support on the Sustainable Health Review, an initiative to prioritise the delivery of patient-centred, high-quality and financially sustainable healthcare across Western Australia. Our role is integral in providing connections, bringing key players to the table for valuable feedback, and developing integrated policy advice that looks beyond the health system. We will continue work on the SHR, having successfully negotiated a five-year service agreement with the Sustainable Health Implementation Unit.

The SHR program is progressing six focus recommendations we are actively working on to ensure the needs of people experiencing hardship or who are marginalised, are embedded in this work. Specifically, the SHR Program is working to: improve equity in health and mental health outcomes; improve access to outpatient services; implement models of care in the community for people with complex conditions; implement new funding models; digitise WA health; create a workforce culture of innovation and accountability; and build workforce capability.

We have actively supported engagement between the SHR and the community service sector over the past financial year through the Outcomes Measures Workshops, the First 1000 Days Symposium, and the Community Services Strategy Workshop, as well as directly connecting relevant services or organisations with SHR Recommendation leads. We also provide regular updates on the progress of the SHR to the Peaks Forum.

We have worked to strengthen the SHR Partnership Group – an advisory body comprising consumers, community service representatives, health service representatives, and the Department of Health – supporting the group to design new ways of working. This has included resetting the partnership’s Strategic Direction and implementing supports for seeking advice from Partnership Group members. These connections have been a success, with several recommendation leads noting the group’s advice has supported their work to be more impactful and inclusive.



Child Safe Organisations

The Child Safe Project started at the beginning of the financial year to support the implementation of the National Principles for Child Safe Organisations in small and medium community service providers across Western Australia.

The project's key function is to promote and support the adaptation and the use of child-safe resources into organisational policies and practices, so that all services can actively demonstrate their commitment to keeping children safe.

Throughout the year, 13 individual workshops were delivered across regional and metropolitan areas of Western Australia, with more than 307 attendees and engagement from 147 community service organisations.

Post-workshop evaluation showed overwhelmingly positive feedback from participants, and the first few workshops' feedback was used to refine and enhance subsequent sessions.

The project has reached additional audiences through online webinars and discussions, presented face-to-face sessions with several service organisations and provided advisory support to 15 organisations.

WACOSS worked closely with representatives from the Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care (SNAICC) and the Aboriginal Health Council of Western Australia (AHCWA), to ensure our resources were accessible, culturally appropriate and practical for use by our audience.

We worked with the Department of Communities, Department of Health, and Department of Local Government, Sport and Cultural Industries, as well as Valuing Children Initiative, WA Local Government Association (WALGA) and WA Child Safety Services to develop a Child Safe Connect Community of Practice, which provides a consistent approach in bridging gaps from policy to practice across various sectors in WA.

The project was funded by the Department of Communities for one year, and has subsequently been extended, however due to overwhelming need we are seeking additional funding to complement the Department of Communities' funding, in partnership with the Council of Aboriginal Services Western Australia.

Emergency Relief and Food Policy

Community Relief and Resilience Program (CRR)

Through the Community Relief and Resilience Program, we provide state-wide policy representation and sector support to Western Australia's emergency relief sector. Emergency relief (ER) services deliver material and financial assistance to people experiencing financial hardship, as well as referrals and information about other relevant supports and services.

Emergency Relief, Capacity Building and Development

The CRR Program provides resources and hosts events to build the collective capacity of the sector. The focus of these activities is supporting the capability of workers and volunteers to deliver accessible and efficient services that address whole-of-life needs. In May, the CRR Program facilitated a Utility Support Forum, which included valuable presentations from electricity, gas and water retailers about customer hardship, to build the sectors' understanding of supports available for people experiencing payment difficulty. This is extremely important with the current cost-of-living crisis and an increasing number of people seeking financial support in this area.

Fair Food WA (FFWA)

Fair Food WA works to address food insecurity in Western Australia. This cross-sector committee is convened by WACOSS and brings together government, universities and not-for-profits to secure healthy food for all people in the community. In the 2023-24 Financial Year, FFWA endorsed a three-year strategic plan aligned with the purpose of advocating for improvements to food policy and systems, whilst ensuring the coordination of charity food to meet the need for food relief.

This year, FFWA progressed work on the strategic priorities. The group have established a shared definition of food insecurity and related concepts

to determine a clear scope for advocacy. FFWA is now focused on collecting evidence of the scale and impact of food insecurity across the state, with the intention of building a consensus on the investment and responses needed to address this issue.

Through FFWA, WACOSS supports several food security initiatives which strengthen the sector's collective impact. FFWA remains committed to providing policy advice to government on food system issues, ensuring that outcomes for people experiencing food insecurity are at the forefront of policy making.



Community Relief and Resilience Forum

The monthly CRR Forum is a space for frontline workers and volunteers to network and share information. Each forum includes a guest presentation and service roundtable where attendees are given time to share details about the services they provide. Guest presentations have covered a range of topics, from peak bodies, specialist services, and government departments. About 75 participants have attended the monthly forum during this time, which has been described as a space that 'raises awareness and promotes understanding and collaboration'.

State Emergency Relief Committee

The State Emergency Relief Committee is focused on emergency relief policy and system reform, and is chaired by WACOSS. Members of the committee include place-based and state-wide emergency relief providers who lead policy, advocacy and strategy on behalf of the sector. The purpose of SERC is to share important data, trends and current issues to inform policy, and ultimately improve outcomes for people experiencing poverty and financial hardship.

The cost-of-living crisis continues to dominate the work of SERC, with providers reporting a significant increase in demand and unmet need.

SERC has convened around several issues during the reporting period, such as improvements to utility hardship programs, reporting requirements, improved concessions for car registration, Centrelink and tax, Buy Now Pay Later schemes, access to the WA Student Assistance Payment and increased demand for emergency relief assistance.

WA Connect

WA Connect is a free online directory of community services in Western Australia. The platform assists community members and sector workers to find services by their location across the state.

When users search for assistance, WA Connect will generate a list of services matching the user's needs. This includes the location, opening hours, contact information and any eligibility

requirements. This financial year we have expanded the type and number of services listed on WA Connect, made several enhancements to the website, and continued to promote and integrate WA Connect within the community.

During the year there were 409,158 searches on WA Connect. The services with the highest number of searches during this period fall within the following categories:

- 🕒 Food related assistance (29.9% of all searches, including foodbanks) - ~ 117,310 searches
- 🕒 Bills, including overdue bills assistance, financial services (5.63% of all searches) - ~ 23,023 searches
- 🕒 Accommodation/rent assistance /housing (5.39% of all searches) - ~ 22, 080 searches



Disaster Resilience and Heat Vulnerability

The National Disaster Risk Reduction (NDRR) Heat Vulnerability Project is working in collaboration with the Department of Communities and the Department of Health, to better understand and address high heat in Western Australia.

The project has two overarching components. The first seeks to understand where communities are most vulnerable to heat. This component uses heat vulnerability mapping efforts, and existing research and analysis to create an interactive map highlighting communities' exposure, sensitivity, and adaptive capacity to high heat. The map will inform decision-makers, planners, advocates and local communities when planning community activities. Development on this commenced in 2023, in collaboration with the Department of Communities and Department of Health, and will be made publicly and freely available when completed.

The second part of the project works to identify risks from high heat and find heat interventions that can help make a difference to heat-vulnerable populations. The Heat Vulnerability team began engagement with communities and local governments across three pilot sites in the local government areas of Bridgetown-Greenbushes, Port Hedland, and Rockingham. At each pilot site the team has engaged with community stakeholders to gain insight on the best interventions, while working with the local governments to implement the selected suite of interventions. Current interventions being investigated include activating cool spaces, setting up water fountains, engaging in community education around heat, and greening efforts, among others. All interventions will be piloted by the end of summer 2024-25.

The project commenced in 2023 and has already seen significant engagement from across the sector, which reflects the critical need for

further disaster preparedness for high heat. We will continue to advocate for the needs of communities, especially those impacted by growing climate disasters.

The project has been invited to provide feedback and insights on government policy, including:

- ◉ State Emergency Management Committee's Sector Adaptation Plan
- ◉ Department of Health's Sector Adaptation Plan
- ◉ Water Corporation's Thriving Perth Mapping Tool
- ◉ WALGA Urban Greening Grant Program
- ◉ Monash University's Green-Blue Asset Workshop



Cost of Living Report

In December, we released our annual Cost of Living Report, which coincided with the State Government announcing their mid-year budget review. The Report showed continued acceleration of financial crisis for modelled low-income households since 2021. While economic conditions for low-income households improved because of COVID-19 support payments in 2020 and 2021, economic conditions have since sharply declined to levels poorer than pre-COVID. Living costs have continued to increase in most categories, particularly housing, while wage growth has not kept up.

For an unemployed single person in 2023, basic weekly living costs were \$29.49 more than their weekly income. This is almost double the deficit compared to 2019. For a two-parent, two-child family with both parents in paid employment, the change has been even more dramatic. In 2019, after covering basic living costs, this family finished the week with \$210.66 left over. In 2023, at the end of the week, this family was left with just \$48.54. While banks and supermarkets reported record profits, low-income households were finding it more difficult than ever to keep a roof over their head and food on the table.

In the Cost of Living Report, we analysed data of 1,675 financial counselling clients provided by the Financial Wellbeing Collective. These were clients who accessed their services between January to November 2023. This data provided insight to the real-life living cost pressures being faced by households across the Perth metropolitan region who are experiencing financial hardship and stress. Many clients had substantial fortnightly debt repayments, taking up a considerable proportion of their income. Many households are at risk of being trapped in an ever-growing debt cycle, with people resorting to cash or payday loans to cover their everyday expenses, debts and other loans.



The data picture reflects the experiences and stories that we continue to hear from member organisations. Households on low incomes are faced daily with difficult questions about which expenses they can cover. Often these household budgets are consumed by the cost of housing, leaving them unable to pay for bills, medication, or incidentals. Unexpected costs, such as healthcare crisis, car failure or a fine, can thrust them into a downward financial spiral.

The State Government continues to record significant surpluses, while evidence-based research demonstrates that an alarming number of people are falling below the poverty line and unable to afford the basic life essentials. The release of the Cost of Living Report, and the timing of the government's review resulted in a significant number of media interviews, all focused on the growing financial pressure people are experiencing.

State Budget Analysis

The 2024-25 State Budget was handed down on 9 May. Premier Roger Cook and Treasurer Rita Saffioti framed their first budget around five pillars: cost of living support, housing, health, infrastructure and economic growth. This budget marked the sixth budget in a row that would deliver a surplus – anticipated to be \$3.2 billion.

We welcomed the sizable initiatives for people in the community doing it tough, with a strong housing and homelessness package and investment in addressing Family and Domestic Violence.

There is a growing gap between rising prices and wages, which means people are going backwards, as the wages are no longer keeping up with the cost of inflation. Western Australian households received an energy credit to the value of \$400, which was welcome, but was not targeted to people on the lowest incomes, and it was concerning that the State Government failed to address the commissioning of services, during a period where wages have fallen behind and demand for services is rising.



We shared a win with Community Employers WA, with the inclusion of the superannuation guarantee being embedded into the community services sector indexation policy, alongside significant uplifts for homelessness and child sexual abuse therapeutic services.

However, the impact of ongoing under-indexation and lack of commissioning is profound and undermines the integrity of the sector. Services are forced to reduce staff, cross-subsidise, deplete their reserves, sacrifice workforce development, and ultimately they struggle to deliver quality services for people doing it tough. These pressures are compounded by recent significant demand-side increases for services.

Despite this, the 2024-25 State Budget was one of the best budgets we have seen in many years, in terms of funding announcements for the community sector, however we would still like to see more investment in the commissioning of services so that community services can provide adequate support to people in need.

Additionally, we would like to see more gender responsive budgeting, and a strong commitment to systemically addressing barriers to women's economic and social participation.

We collaborated with the Youth Affairs Council of Western Australia (YACWA) and Social Reinvestment WA (SRWA) on budget evening, working together to produce a series of fact sheets for the community sector. Within 24 hours we presented a very well-attended budget briefing for the community sector, with guests from the Department of Treasury who provided a summary presentation of the budget areas relevant to the sector, followed by a question and answer session.

Feedback repeatedly shows that this collaborative work late into the evening to develop our analysis and fact sheets quickly and timely, is valued and well-received by our members.

Powerful Movement for Social and Economic Justice

Strategic Catalyst **3**

Social Reinvestment WA

WACOSS is a proud founding member of Social Reinvestment WA (SRWA) coalition, which was established nearly 10 years ago. The SRWA team are co-located in the WACOSS office, and the synergies between our advocacy and policy work are beneficial for both organisations. We use our connections, social media, and influence to showcase the work of Social Reinvestment WA, and they provide a consultative mechanism, and in-depth policy that supports our position on social justice.

It has been a challenging and difficult year for anyone working in the youth justice space, with the first ever child death in a WA prison of 16-year-old Cleveland Dodd, in Unit 18 in October.

The SRWA team has been incredibly busy continuing strong advocacy for the human rights of children within youth detention, including coordinating major advocacy around the reform needs from community all the way to detention, and helping to provide supports for the family of Cleveland Dodd and amplify calls for change during the coronial inquest process.

Throughout the year there have been hundreds of signatories to open letters, from CEOs, experts and key figures across the state, sent to the WA Government, as well as thousands of emails direct from the community, public demonstrations, countless presentations, government and Ministerial meetings, and media articles and opinion editorials in support of major transformation in the youth justice system, guided by SRWA's Blueprint for a Better Future.

In December 2023, WACOSS CEO Louise Giolitto joined the team to hand over the Raise the Age petition to Attorney General, the Honourable John Quigley, with the signatures of more than 15,000 Western Australians supporting the case for raising the age of criminal responsibility from 10 to 14. The Government is yet to make a formal commitment to this, despite it being the recommendation of a report at the federal level between the Standing Council of Attorneys General.



The State Government has committed to close Unit 18, a converted block in the Casuarina maximum-security adult prison currently incarcerating children, however they have provided no timeline for the closure, as they intend to wait until a smaller facility is built beside Banksia Hill, which may take years to achieve.

We have seen a change of leadership in the Department of Justice with the Director General and the former Commissioner for Corrective Services both moving on. The very first Deputy Commissioner for Youth Justice has recently been instated, and SRWA look forward to meeting with them in coming weeks.

While there has been some limited progress, including improvement in reductions in rolling solitary confinement due to lockdown orders, and additional services and programs in the children's prisons, there is still a long way to go until the safety and rights of children within that state's prisons are upheld.

In positive news, justice reinvestment is rapidly growing around the state, with at least 10 communities in various stages of working on place-based, self-determined, community-led justice reinvestment sites.

SRWA held a state-wide justice reinvestment summit which welcomed more than 100

attendees from 48 organisations and 23 communities. There is significant hope in community-led, place-based solutions to improve justice and socio-economic outcomes for the most disadvantaged and crime affected WA communities, and particularly for better outcomes for Aboriginal children caught up in the justice system.

SRWA continues to support a significant number of communities and are working to do so in a fair and equitable manner, acting as a peak body role for Justice Reinvestment sites across the states. We have been significantly involved in contributing and shaping discussions at the national level on the Federal Attorney Generals establishment of a national JR unit and funding processes and representation of WA community interests, and have been integral in supporting the establishment of the Justice Reinvestment Network of Australia as an ACCO.

The SRWA coalition has experienced an extraordinary period of growth over the last few years, and having previously been generously auspiced by Wungening Aboriginal Corporation, SRWA members voted unanimously in June, in support of a new Constitution and in favour of becoming an incorporated association, also appointing its first interim board, which includes WACOSS CEO Louise Giolitto.



It is an exciting time in SRWA's journey as an organisation, as they transition to a fully independent member-based organisation. We are extremely proud to be an active member of SRWA, as they re-position and confirm their role as a leader for systemic change for justice in this WA.



Campaigns We Support

- ◉ Alcohol Fuels Many Harms
- ◉ Anti-Poverty Week
- ◉ Everybody's Home
- ◉ Home Time Youth Homelessness
- ◉ Make Renting Fair WA
- ◉ Make WA Fair
- ◉ Raise the Age, National Campaign
- ◉ Raise the Rate
- ◉ Social Reinvestment WA
- ◉ Uluru Statement from the Heart
- ◉ Valuing Children Initiative
- ◉ WA for a Human Rights Act
- ◉ Yes 23

Submissions

During the year we wrote 22 submissions to various Government committees, hearings and reviews, representing members' needs and priorities across a range of policy positions.

- ◉ Adopting Artificial Intelligence
- ◉ Access Arrangement for the Mid-West and South-West Gas Distribution System
- ◉ A Stronger More Diverse Community Sector
- ◉ Compendium of Gas Customer Licence Obligations
- ◉ Department of Training and Workforce Development's new Strategic Plan
- ◉ Early Years Strategy Discussion Paper
- ◉ Evidence Bill 2024 (WA), Exposure Draft
- ◉ Feasibility study on options to limit unhealthy food marketing to children: Policy options for public consultation
- ◉ Firearms Act Reform (WA)
- ◉ Independent Review of Commonwealth Disaster Funding
- ◉ Inquiry into the Worsening Rental Crisis in Australia
- ◉ National Care and Support Economy Strategy 2023
- ◉ National Women's Health Advisory Council End Gender Bias Survey
- ◉ Options available to survivors of institutional child sexual abuse in Western Australia who are seeking justice
- ◉ Perth and Peel Urban Greening Strategy
- ◉ Provision of and Access to Dental Services in Australia
- ◉ Response to the Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability
- ◉ Supermarket Prices
- ◉ WA Emergency Management Sector Adaptation Plan
- ◉ WA Health Sector Adaptation Plans
- ◉ WA State Wage Case
- ◉ Waste Avoidance and Resource Recovery Strategy 2023





State Budget Submission

Our 2024-25 State Budget Submission *A Brighter Future: Stronger Communities Across a Vast State* was focussed on the many Western Australians who are facing hard times, finding it difficult to meet basic needs, living in poverty, are homeless, experiencing poor mental health and at risk of family violence.

We consulted widely around the state from Kununurra to Kalgoorlie and throughout metropolitan Perth, speaking to more than 140 organisations to understand the impact of an increased cost of living, the housing crisis, workforce shortages, rising demand for support and the increasing complexities that intersect with each of these across different cohorts.

The report made 55 recommendations addressing Affordability of Life's Basics; Children, Youth and Families; Healthy and Connect Communities; Safety and Resilience; Thriving in Our Regions and Services for a Growing State.

Among the recommendations was the establishment of a two-year state-wide rent relief program, improving renters rights, increased emergency relief funding, increased investment in homelessness services, creating an Office of Early Childhood, uplifting existing child sexual abuse therapeutic services and Indigenous Healing services, creating a universal school lunch program, a child, youth and family wellbeing strategy, a gender-responsive budgeting unit, comprehensive investment in family and domestic violence, a vision and strategy to improve youth justice outcomes, establishing a community services accord, transport concessions, addressing the care and social service workforce crisis, and addressing sector sustainability.

It is pleasing to see that a number of the recommendations in the submission have been implemented or partly implemented by Government, such as the rent relief scheme, funding for homelessness services, funding for FDV services, school children travelling free on public transport, an uplift to child sexual assault therapeutic services, and a pilot program giving access to the Hardship Utility Grant Scheme for water bills for social housing tenants in the north metro region.

Elevating the Community Sector's Value in Western Australia

Strategic Catalyst **4**

Sustainable Funding and Indexation

Sustainable funding and indexation remained a key priority area throughout the year, and we continued to advocate in partnership with Community Employers Western Australia, with support from community sector Peaks, the Australian Services Union and Unions WA.

The impact of ongoing under-indexation is profound. It undermines the integrity of the sector, forces organisations to reduce staffing hours, cross subsidise, deplete reserves, forgo training and workforce development and ultimately, struggle to deliver the quality of services that people experiencing disadvantage and hardship rely so heavily on. These pressures are compounded by significant increases in demand, which we have seen in recent years due to cost of living pressures, housing crisis and significant increase in WA population growth.

Resolving this issue has many benefits. It will reduce the downward pressure on wages in an already under-paid workforce predominantly staffed by women and maintain the integrity of service model costing through commissioning exercises, leaving organisations with human services contracts to focus on delivering the best possible services and outcomes for people experiencing vulnerability in our society.

We took an evidence-based approach in our proposal for an alternative indexation formula, analysing organisational-level data from a broad cross section of the sector, to identify the breakdown of cost drivers within organisations. We then identified publicly available indicators that would provide a 'best fit' formula, and sought feedback from the sector as a whole on our findings.

With overwhelmingly positive feedback from the sector, we proposed a revised formula for consideration and adoption in the 2024-25 State Budget.

The Government made the decision not to conduct a mid-year review as previously promised, because this year's indexation rate will broadly cover cost increases incurred by organisations.

Despite this, we will continue to forge ahead with our advocacy, presenting evidence for our proposed indexation formula to be adopted in the future, as a more accurate analogue for cost increases over time.

The Fair Work Commission is currently undertaking a priority review of the Social, Community, Home Care and Disability Services (SCHADS) Industry Award due to potential

gender undervaluation, and will look forward to the results of that review, which is due to be released in 2025. A likely outcome will be award-specific pay increases which, while welcome, will not be picked up by the current indexation formula, creating future sustainability concerns for services.

Additionally, we are taking a lead role working with ACOSS to seek a consistent approach across all judications - including federal contracts - to adopt the above-indexation policy.

In September we had a breakthrough with the Cook Government, who agreed to increase the 2023-24 indexation rate, considering legislated Superannuation Guarantee increases, and the commitment to fund future increases through additional indexation in 2024-25 and 2025-26.

Late in 2023 we welcomed an uplift for child sexual abuse and therapeutic services of 15 per cent, and through our advocacy with Shelter WA, welcomed a 30 per cent uplift for homelessness services.

We continue to advocate for a commitment from State Government for 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.

Sustainable Funding Survey

To underpin our advocacy for sustainable funding we conducted a survey of all community service organisations, receiving more than 180 responses – double the response rate from the previous year's survey.

David Gilchrist from the University of Western Australia's Centre for Public Value partnered with us again to provide independent analysis of the data collected.

The survey found underfunding was the primary reported challenge to sustainability for community service organisations.

Consequently, this has severe adverse impacts on the ongoing provision of vital services and supports to people most in need in our communities. It flows through to workforce failure, chronic under-investment and very real threats to organisational survival.

The survey highlighted that underfunding is most severe in regional areas where organisations operate, with additional costs putting current contracts and operations in jeopardy.

At a time when there is a persistent dual cost-of-living and rental crisis, the community services sector needs adequate baseline funding so people are able to access services when and where they need.

The survey results provide undisputable evidence that we need to continue our advocacy to ensure our sector is valued and services are maintained through sustainable funding to the sector.

We would like to acknowledge Community Employers Western Australia (CEWA) and community sector Peaks, who partnered with us on this research and shared the survey far and wide. We also acknowledge the valuable work of Professor Gilchrist, without whom it would not have been possible to collect this valuable data.



Advocacy Wins

Rent Relief Program

After longstanding advocacy and the growing need the State Government announced the Rent Relief Program to support tenants in rental arrears. The \$24.4 million initiative was a collaboration between WACOSS, Shelter WA, Anglicare WA, Vinnies, Red Cross, and the State Government. Jointly delivered by Anglicare WA and Vinnies WA, tenants in rental stress and arrears can now access funding support up to \$5,000. This can be in the form of payments for arrears and/or payments for up to 50 per cent of three months' rent into the future. The Rent Relief Program has helped more than 1,000 renters to remain in their homes. It is a critical support at a time when rents are sky rocketing, wage growth is slow, and households are experiencing a dramatic increase in financial crisis.

Short Term Rental Reform

The State Government introduced short-term accommodation reforms designed to significantly and immediately increase the supply of long-term private rentals for Western Australians. These reforms include:

- Development application requirements for rental bookings that exceed 90 nights in a 12-month period
- Incentives for short-term accommodation property owners, who return or enter the private rental market for at least 12 months, and rent the property for under \$800 per week in the metro area, or \$650 in the South West.

Prior to this reform there were approximately three short-term rentals for every one private rental listed as available.

These reforms form part of a long-term advocacy strategy led by Shelter WA, and will hopefully reduce the demand and boost the supply of affordable houses for families and individuals on low incomes.



Funding Uplift to Child Sexual Abuse Therapeutic Services and Indigenous Healing Services

One of the key recommendations in our 2024-25 State Budget Submission was for an immediate funding uplift for existing child sexual abuse therapeutic services and Indigenous healing services.

After historical underfunding and with growing community need, we worked with Community Employers WA and with CSATS providers for a much-needed funding boost.

Our advocacy involved meetings with Treasurer Rita Saffioti MLA, Minister Sabine Winton MLA, and the Minister at the time, the Honourable Simone McGurk MLA, to highlight the growing demand for services, complexity of need, and the State Government's commitments to the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse. CSATS and Indigenous Healing Services were added as a fourth priority area for the Department of Communities Agency Commissioning Plan.

The number of children, young people, and adult victim-survivors of child sexual abuse seeking trauma counselling and support is expected to increase, in light of the expansion of mandatory reporting requirements, the development of the WA Sexual Violence Prevention and Response Strategy, and a recent media campaign from the National Office of Child Safety.

With increased community awareness and concern, there is an expectation that those coming forward will be able to access supports in a timely and appropriate manner, and for some, the life-long trauma of sexual abuse means that responses for victim survivors must be quick and effective, which is only possible through appropriate funding.





Funding Boost to Housing and Homelessness Services

The second half of this financial year saw several significant announcements of investment into housing and homelessness services. \$133.8 million was committed to increase the baseline funding for homelessness services across WA – resulting in an average uplift of 26 per cent for services. After years of underfunding, this will enable these critical and lifesaving services to remain operating.

A further \$400 million was contributed to the Social and Affordable Housing Investment Fund to support the delivery and refurbishment of social housing stock and support development of affordable housing projects. Additional funding was committed to provide maintenance uplift to ensure adequate living standards of social housing, expand the No Wrong Door program and expand Housing First Support Services.

Support services have seen their funding and ability to support people in need eroded over

a long period of time. Advocating alongside Shelter WA on this issue for many years, we are extraordinarily pleased to see State Government recognition of the issue and this level of investment, which will help boost supply, and improve living standards for social housing.

We also acknowledge that community services across WA have been operating for years without funding uplift which has eroded their service delivery capacity. We continue to advocate for immediate funding uplift and sustainable funding into the future, for the entire community services sector.

Tranche One of Reforms to the Residential Tenancies Act implemented

The campaign on renters' rights continued to take on a larger focus for WACOSS this past year, as a foundational member of the Make Renting Fair alliance. The campaign met with Ministers and members of Parliament and engaged a strong social media and media campaign on the importance of implementing the Tenancy Ten in full. The Tenancy Ten is a list of ten reforms Make Renting Fair would like to see made to the Residential Tenancies Act (1987).

On 17 April the State Government passed its first of two tranches of reforms to the Residential

Tenancies Act. The reforms included limiting rent increases to once a year, enabling tenants to have pets, and allowing minor modifications to the property. This announcement is a win for the campaign; however, the sector was disappointed to see that no reason evictions remain in the Act. Credit to this win is shared with Anglicare WA, Shelter WA, Circle Green and all members of the alliance.

The campaign will continue to advocate for the remainder of the Tenancy Ten to be included in tranche two, including the removal of no reason evictions.

Carer's Relief Package

In December we welcomed the State Government's announcement of a \$3.6 million cost-of-living relief program for foster carers, grandcarers, family carers and special guardian carers. Under the package, carers received a one-off \$500 payment for the first child in their care and \$250 for each additional child. This program provided financial relief to around 5,600 households across WA over the summer holidays, which can often be an expensive time for carers.

State Wage Case

In June we successfully argued for a significant increase to the State Minimum Wage before

the Western Australian Industrial Relations Commission. The Commission awarded an increase of 6.3 per cent to the State Minimum Wage and 4 per cent for award-based pay. Workers on State Minimum Wage are now taking home an additional \$54 per week, providing sorely needed relief at a time of widespread and persistent cost of living pressures.

Credit for this win is shared with Unions WA who collaborated with, and stood alongside WACOSS in arguing for the needs of low paid workers to be recognised.

Abolishment of the Gender Reassignment Board

We welcomed the abolishment of the Gender Reassignment Board in April, an invasive process imposed upon transgender people. The reforms removed the requirement for trans people to undertake gender affirming medical treatment and seek approval from the Board before updating their identity documents. These changes come on the back of significant advocacy from Transfolk WA, Rainbow Futures WA, LGBTQIA+ organisations and community members. While a significant step forward, these changes have not gone far enough. There remains work to be done to bring WA in line with the best practice approach that we see in other jurisdictions, such as Victoria.

Water Services Code of Conduct

We have been involved in significant reforms to the Electricity Code of Conduct, ensuring better protections for all consumers, and particularly those in financial stress or hardship. Building on this work, through submissions and advocacy with the Economic Regulation Authority, the Water Services Code of Conduct was reformed to align with the Electricity Code of Conduct. All water customers can now access an interest and fee-free payment plan and 'vulnerable customers' can no longer be charged for paper billing. We continue to actively engage with the Economic Regulation Authority and utility retailers to achieve best-practice consumer protections.

Social Prescribing Project

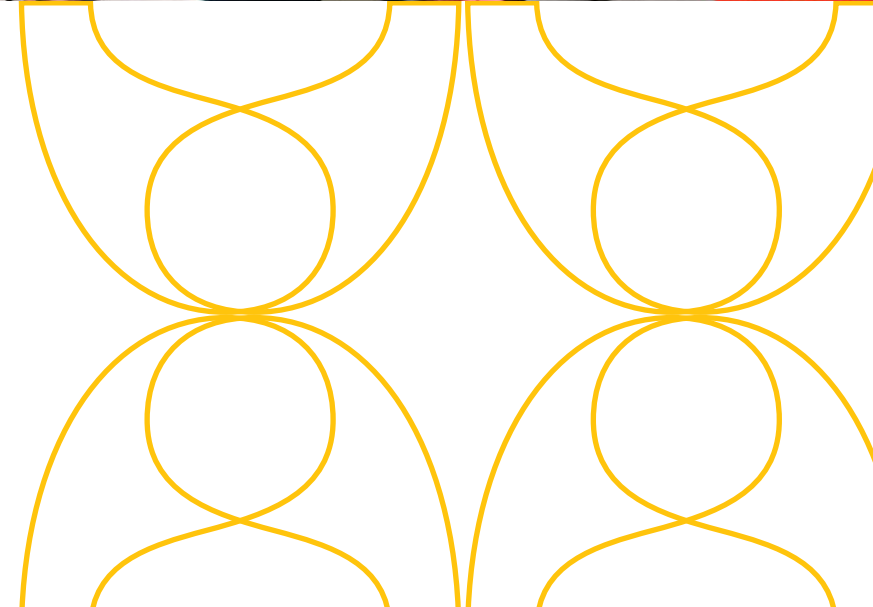
We worked closely with our member Amity Health, as well as the Health Consumers Council, Linkwest and ConnectGroups to design a social prescribing model. The purpose of this model is to support people who regularly utilise the health system to navigate and access the social supports they need to be happy, safe and well. Amity Health was awarded a \$1.5 million grant through Round 5 of the Australian Government Innovative Models of Care (IMOC) Program to deliver this project over the next four years.



Advocacy Toolkit Workshops

During the year we reviewed and updated the Advocacy Toolkit, a resource to enable and empower anyone to be an advocate for change.

The new toolkit was supported by a webinar, and a small program of workshops to activate community and build advocacy skills needed to drive change. As part of this program, we delivered advocacy training to more than 85 people connected with member organisations. Feedback has been positive, with participants already using their new-found advocacy skills to advocate on issues such as regional and remote healthcare access, and policies that exclude children with a disability from participating in sport.





State Wage Case

In June we successfully argued for a 7.359 per cent increase to the State Minimum Wage before the Western Australian Industrial Relations Commission. Our written and oral submissions centred around the experiences of low waged workers in the context of significant inflation and stagnated wage growth. We drew attention to the inequitable impact of low minimum wage rates on women and young people, who disproportionately work in industries covered by the State Minimum Wage.

Our human-centred advocacy saw success, with the Commission determining to increase the State Minimum Wage by 6.3 per cent, resulting in an additional \$54 per week for minimum wage workers.



Member and Stakeholder Feedback

We conduct an annual members and stakeholders survey, which opened on 23 November for three weeks, and received 80 responses from a diverse group of respondents.

The data provides valuable observations of our work, and qualitative comments provide rich and insightful feedback on what we do well, and what could be done better, to continue strengthening engagement with our stakeholders.

Sixty-four per cent of responses came from the Perth metropolitan region, and the rest were a representation from across the state, however no responses were received from the Peel, Gascoyne and the Kimberley regions. The highest regional responses were from the South West.

Most (71 per cent) identified as workers in the NFP sector, followed by state government. All areas of community services sector were represented. The

majority of respondents identified as working in senior positions (CEO, executive, manager or board member), followed by advocates. Over half are current members (59 per cent), 16 per cent were unsure, and 24 per cent were not members.

Of those who are members, the top reasons cited for being a member included:

- ◉ Solidarity, advocacy and action and being part of advocacy campaigns
- ◉ Appreciation for the work undertaken on behalf of the sector
- ◉ Provision of valuable information
- ◉ Networking, connection and sector engagement
- ◉ Events
- ◉ Sector support

When asked what else WACOSS could do to enhance their membership experience, the answers varied. From more regional engagement, localised network collaboration, social events and mentoring. Only 4 per cent of respondents felt that membership was not value for money.

Ninety per cent engage with WACOSS through sector news and special bulletins and more than half attend events. About 45 per cent follow or engage with us on social media and 57 per cent contribute at WACOSS forums or collaborate on policy development and research.

Sixty-five per cent find our events informative, engaging and inspiring, 35 per cent have not attended one, and 73 per cent have applied learnings received from at a WACOSS event.

Overall, respondents would like to see WACOSS organising more collaborative forums, webinars and policy briefings, followed by more campaign work and conferences. 88 per cent either strongly agree or agree that they trust us to advocate on behalf of the sector and 84 per cent stated that WACOSS's work has enhanced their organisation's understanding of

important sector issues. When asked if WACOSS research provides high-quality and evidence-based policy advice to stakeholders, 85 per cent strongly agreed or agreed. There was a strong support for our role as a collaborator and provider of policy insight (82 per cent) and overwhelmingly respondents believe that we maintain a high profile and respond effectively to media (90 per cent).

There is strong support that we have influence on public policy (90 per cent), we identify and respond to emerging issues in the sector (82 per cent) and that our work is reliant on a strong and diverse membership base.

The number one issue impacting the sector was identified to be inadequate funding, followed by sector sustainability - particularly for small and medium organisations - and lack of Government investment.

Overall, the survey findings are overwhelmingly positive. We will continue to work at strengthening engagement with regional organisations, collaboration with smaller organisations, and offer more local collaboration opportunities.



DropIN Solutions

The DropIN Solutions team has established itself as the agency of choice for sector organisations in Western Australia and beyond. Throughout the year the team were consistently busy with various projects, such as new logo and branding designs, dozens of annual reports, large-scale website developments, and online directories.

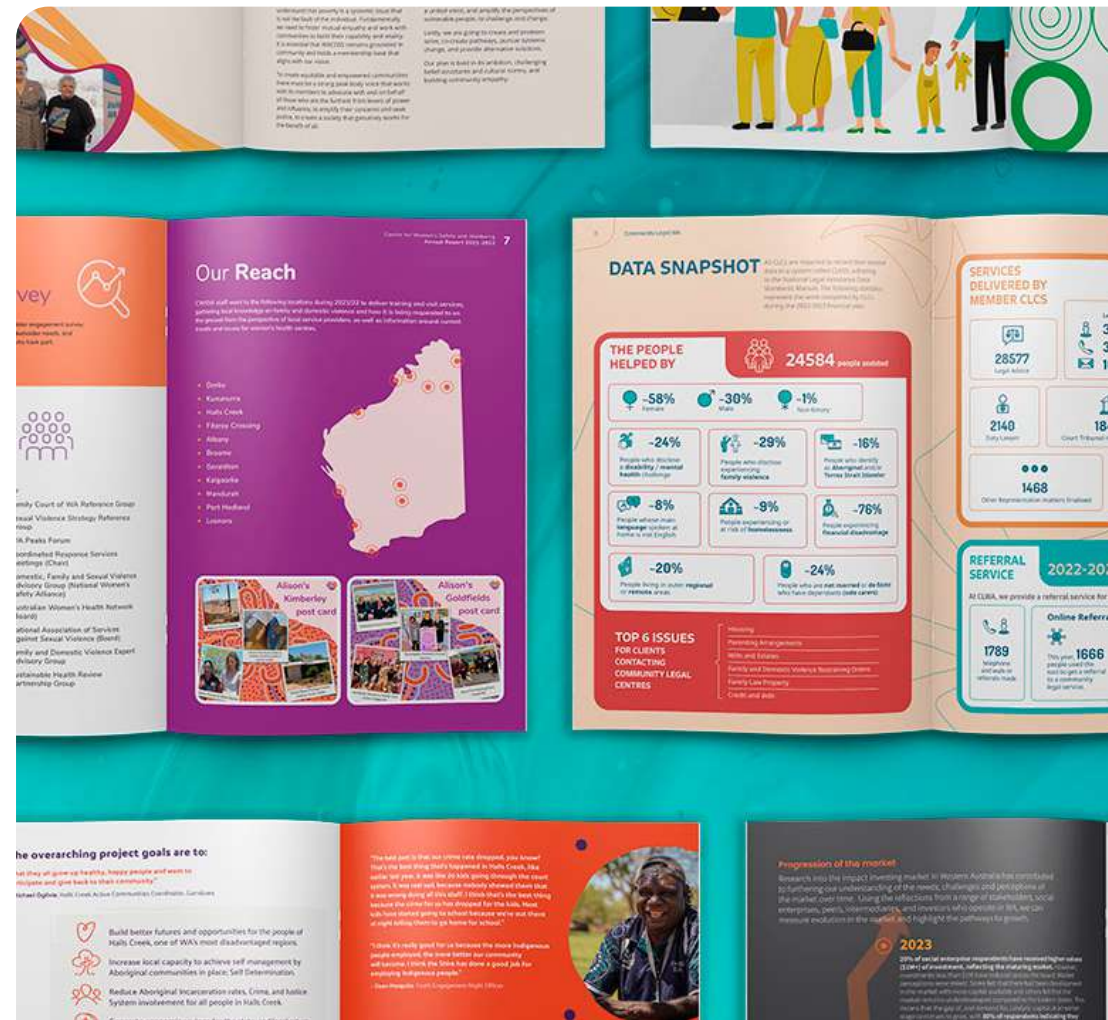
It has been a year of significant change for the team, with two of its long-term members leaving for new career opportunities. The new team has been working hard to implement new processes, support established and new clients, and support the growing IT needs of WACOSS.

Most importantly, the team implemented tighter security processes for WACOSS and over 40 hosted websites by:

- ⦿ Providing continuous monitoring to websites and databases to protect data and ensure quick recovery if any issues arise
- ⦿ Providing website and database backups
- ⦿ Updates to WordPress installations with latest features and security enhancements
- ⦿ Plugin/Theme updates to maintain compatibility and security
- ⦿ Regular malware scans
- ⦿ Visual and functional inspections
- ⦿ Comprehensive scans to identify and address any security vulnerabilities and performance issues
- ⦿ Continuous server monitoring to ensure optimal performance and quick resolution of issues.

Despite the changes and challenges, the team finished the financial year on a very positive note, further increasing their revenue compared to the previous year.

In the coming financial year, the team has some exciting new projects in the pipeline for both WACOSS and their external clients.



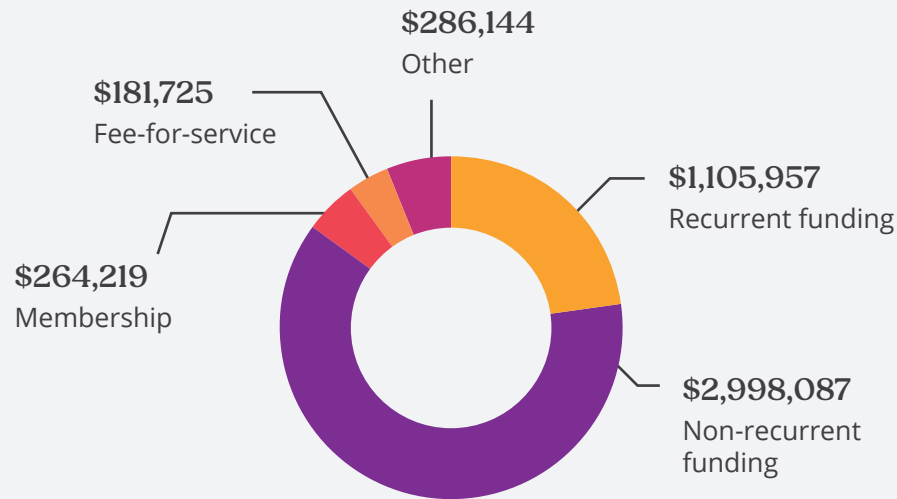


Financial Report

The financial position of WACOSS remains stable with net assets of \$2,141,254, an increase of \$220,559 on the previous financial year.

Income

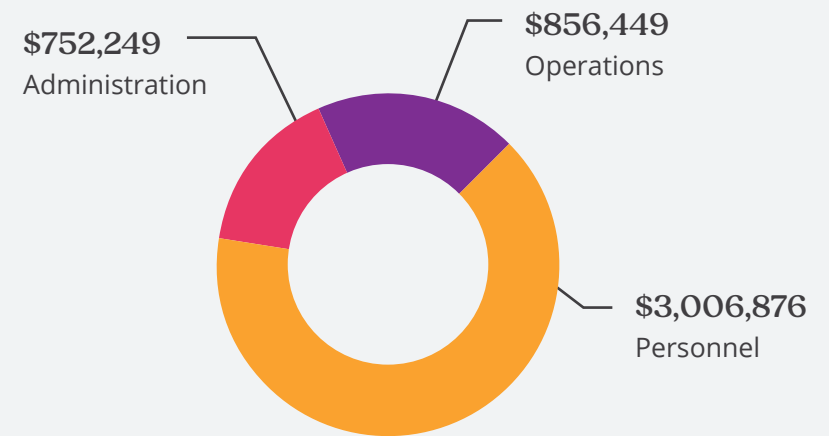
Graphic 1: Income by type



Total income for the financial year was **\$4,836,133**. Government and other funding remains the primary source of revenue (85%), together with membership fees (5%) and fee-for-service (4%).

Expenditure

Graphic 2: Expenditure by type



Total expenditure for the financial year was **\$4,615,574**. Personnel remained the largest expense (65%), followed by Administration (16%) and Operations (19%).

Sub note: It should be recognised that the nature of our activities are such that individual projects and major events have the capacity to materially alter specific areas of income and expenditure year-on-year.

Funders

- Australian Government National Recovery and Resilience Agency
- BHP
- Department of Communities
- Department of Health
- Department of the Premier and Cabinet
- Lotterywest
- NBN Network
- Rio Tinto
- State Library of WA
- Water Corporation



Our members

Honorary Life Members

- Anne Sinclair
- Brenda Harper-Nelson
- Moira Rainer
- Peter Sirr
- Sue Ash

Associate Individuals

- Alexander Macaulay
- Alia Abdi
- Allan Connolly
- Carina Becker
- Carol Wakely
- Chanelle Clark
- Chrissie Fearon
- Dave Kelly
- David Gilchrist
- Dennis Dicioco
- Fabiola Pinheiro
- Gabi Pattiaratchi
- George Davies
- Janine Freeman
- Janine Gerard
- Jonathan Seth
- Karen Price
- Liesel Ashworth
- Linda Savage
- Lisa Baker
- Maria Tsovleas
- Mariska Button
- Nandita R Naroth
- Nicole Philippi
- Stephen Dawson
- Stuart Reid
- Sue Lines
- Susan Chapman
- Thais Toledo Gomes Carrascoza
- Tony Keane
- Wendy Morris
- Yvonne Kallane

Social Service Individuals

- Angie Paskevicius
- Ann White
- Anna Presser
- Belinda James
- Brodie Lewis
- Carissa Gautam
- Clare Mullen
- Damian Tapley
- Donna Quinn
- Francis Lynch
- Gai Walker
- Helen Creed
- Helen Liedel
- James Paxman
- Jennie Gray
- Jennifer Monaghan
- Jodie Wilde
- Joe Calleja
- Katie Norwell
- Kulbir Ahlawat
- Kylie Hansen
- Lorraine Keane
- Louise Lamont
- Maria Harries
- Maria Miceli
- Marleen Roch
- Michael Berry
- Michelle MacKenzie
- Nancy Mah
- Noel Harding
- Philippa Boldy
- Renna Gayde
- Rochelle Brown
- Rosemaree Magro
- Stephanie Boyd
- Tricia Murray
- Vida Corbett
- Wendy Simpson

Associate Organisations

- City of Nedland
- DART Group
- UWA – Division of Social Work and Policy

Social Service Organisation Members

- 54 Reasons
- 55 Central Inc
- Aboriginal Health Council of WA
- AccordWest
- Adoption Research and Counselling Service Inc
- Allambee Counselling
- Amity Health
- Anglicare WA
- Auspire
- Australian Association of Social Workers WA Branch
- Australian Red Cross
- Bloodwood Tree Association
- Blue Dot Army
- Brave Foundation
- Broome C.I.R.C.L.E. Inc
- Cancer Council Western Australia
- Carnarvon Family Support Service WA Ltd.
- Catholic Outreach
- Centacare Family Services Geraldton
- Centacare Kimberley Association Inc
- Central Agcare Inc
- Centre for Asylum Seekers, Refugees and Detainees
- Centre for Women's Safety and Wellbeing
- Centrecare Inc
- CEOs for Gender Equity
- Child Australia
- Circle Green Community Legal
- Citizens Advice Bureau of WA Inc
- CoMHWA
- Communicare Inc
- Community Employers WA
- Community Legal WA
- ConnectGroups - Support Groups Association WA Inc
- Consumer Credit Legal Service WA
- Coolabaroo (t/a Moorditch Gurlongga Assoc. Inc.)
- Desert Blue Connect
- Doubleview House
- EON Foundation Inc
- Escare Inc
- Esperance Care Services
- Facilitatrix
- Family Inclusion Network of Western Australia Inc
- Financial Counsellors Association WA Inc
- Foodbank WA
- Frank Konecny Community Centre
- Fremantle Women's Health Centre
- Goldfields Women Health Care Centre

- Goodstart Early Learning
- GRAI
- Great Southern Community Legal Services
- Haemophilia Foundation WA Inc
- Harvey Community Resource Centre Inc
- Hedland Well Women Centre Inc.
- Hedland Women's Refuge
- HelpingMinds
- Hope Community Services Inc
- Housing Choices - previously Access Housing Limited
- In Town Centre Inc
- Indigo Junction
- Injury Matters
- Innovation Unit
- Investing in Our Youth
- Invisible Illnesses Inc. (Fibro and Us)
- Joondalup Family Centre
- Just Home Margaret River Inc
- Justice, Ecology and Development Office, Catholic Archdiocese
- Katanning Regional Emergency Accommodation Centre Inc
- Key Assets
- KEYS
- Kidsafe WA Inc
- KIIND
- Kilfinan Australia
- Koya Aboriginal Corporation
- Lamp Incorporated
- Langford Aboriginal Association
- Life Without Barriers
- Linkwest Inc
- Living Proud Inc
- MacKillop Family Services
- Margaret River Community Pantry Inc.
- Margaret River Community Resource Centre Inc
- Marninwarntikura Women's Resource Centre
- Marra Worra Worra Aboriginal Corporation
- Men's Health and Wellbeing WA Inc
- Mens Outreach Service Aboriginal Corporation
- Men's Shed of WA
- Mercy Community Services Ltd
- Milligan Community Learning and Resource Centre Inc
- Mission Australia
- Moorditjabiny Aboriginal Corporation
- Multicultural Futures
- Neami National
- Newman Women's Shelter
- Ngala Community Services
- Ngarliyarndu Bindirri Aboriginal

- Corporation
- No Limits Perth
- Orana House Inc
- OVIS Community Service (Pat Thomas House Inc)
- Palmerston Association Inc
- Parkerville Children and Youth Care Inc
- Pathways Southwest
- Peel Community Development Group
- Peel Youth Services Inc
- People with Disabilities WA Inc
- PeopleKind Group
- Perth Asian Community Centre
- Perth Inner City Youth Service
- Pivot Support Services
- Playgroup WA Inc
- Police and Community Youth Centres Inc.
- Reconciliation WA
- Regional Alliance West Inc
- Relationships Australia Western Australia Inc
- Rise Network Inc
- Roman Catholic Archbishop of Perth – Catholic Social Services WA
- Ruah Community Services
- Sandalwood Family Centre
- SECCA
- Sexual Health Quarters – The Family Planning Association of WA Inc
- Shelter WA
- Social Ventures Australia Ltd
- South Coastal Health and Community Services
- South Lake Ottey Family and Neighbourhood Centre Inc
- South Perth Senior Citizens Centre
- South West Counselling Inc
- South West Refuge Inc
- Southcare Inc
- St Bartholomew’s House Inc
- St John of God Outreach Services
- St Patrick’s Community Support Centre
- St. Vincent de Paul Society WA Inc
- Starick
- Sussex Street Community Law Service Inc
- Swan City Youth Service Inc.
- Tender Funerals Perth
- The Claddagh Association of Western Australia
- The People Place Busselton Inc
- The Salvation Army WA
- The Shopfront
- The Spiers Centre Inc
- Tom Price Youth Support Association Inc
- Tuart Place

- Umbrellas and Footprints
- Uniting Church
- Valued Lives
- Volunteering WA
- WA AIDS Council
- WA Network of Alcohol and Other Drug Agencies
- Wanslea Family Services
- Waratah Support Centre SW Inc
- Waroona Community Resource Centre Inc
- Western Urban Associates (WA) Inc (Street Chaplains)
- Wheatbelt Agcare Community Support Services Inc
- Womens Health and Family Services (also known as LUMA)
- Women's Legal Service WA
- World Vision Australia
- Wungening Aboriginal Corporation
- Yaandina Family Centre Limited
- YMCA WA
- Yorganop Association Incorporated
- Yorgum Healing Services Aboriginal Corporation
- Youth Affairs Council of Western Australia
- Youth Focus
- Youth Futures WA Inc
- Youth Involvement Council Inc
- Zonta House Refuge Association Inc

DropIN
solutions

WACOSS Social Enterprise

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get **10%** discount

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meets Community

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dropinsolutions.org.au

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WACOSS strives for an inclusive, just and equitable society.

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



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