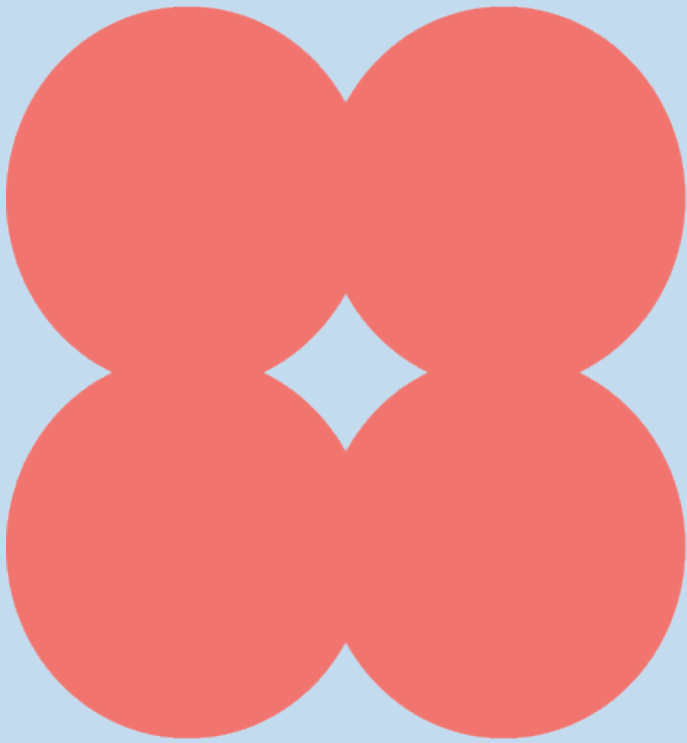


# 2024-2025 PRE-BUDGET SUBMISSION

Youth Affairs Council  
of Western Australia



## **Acknowledgment of Country**

The Youth Affairs Council of Western Australia acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the traditional custodians of the lands, waterways and plains on which we live, work and play on.

We extend our respect to Elders, both from the past and those who guide us today, and we embrace this connection with all young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who we work alongside of. This land has always been, and will always be, Aboriginal land.



# Our Vision

We believe in a Western Australia in which all young people are valued and supported to reach their greatest potential. The 16 recommendations in this submission outline a pathway towards this vision based on the current needs of young people and the youth sector in WA.

Our sector and members call on Government to resource pathways towards healthy and fulfilling futures for all young people in WA, prioritising support for the most vulnerable. Government must address the systemic marginalisation of young people through meaningful change and intentional resourcing based on the solutions provided by the sector. With an expected operating surplus of \$3.3 billion this financial year, the Cook Government is in a strong position to achieve this in its 2024-25 State Budget.

# Our focus

Four interconnected themes emerged in our consultation process with members and young people this year:

## Safety, Support, Access & Approach

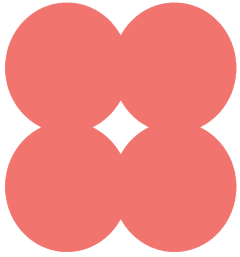
We hold a vision of a Western Australia in which:

- 1.** All young people in WA experience emotional, physical and cultural **safety**;
- 2.** All young people experience consistent **support** from a network of connections including parents and/or carers, schools, employers, service providers and all levels of government;
- 3.** All young people have **access** to the relationships, resources, spaces and opportunities that they need to live a fulfilling life; and
- 4.** The **approach** of Government is adapted to create better outcomes for young people in Western Australia.

*The key issues currently impacting young people in Western Australia that Government must address in the 2024-25 Budget are:*

- **Family and domestic violence**
- **Housing and homelessness**
- **Mental health**
- **Youth Justice**
- **Lack of regional services/ supports for young people**
- **Climate Change**

*We urge government to implement the following recommendations:*



## Theme 1: Safety

**Recommendation 1:** Invest urgently in addressing the impact of family and domestic violence on young people in Western Australia.

**Recommendation 2:** Commit to rolling out the Housing First for Youth model to support young people at risk of homelessness in WA.

**Recommendation 3:** Resource the establishment of a prevention-focussed service based on the Ruby's model in WA to support young people at risk of homelessness.

**Recommendation 4:** Create more housing options for young people by increasing WA's community housing stock in line with Shelter WA's Social Housing Policy Position.

**Recommendation 5:** Invest in creating safety for all LGBTIQ+ young people living in WA through a whole-of-government LGBTIQ+ inclusion strategy.



## Theme 2: Support

**Recommendation 6:** Address the impacts of climate change on youth mental health.

**Recommendation 7:** Introduce evidence-based climate change legislation in WA that prioritises the futures of young people.

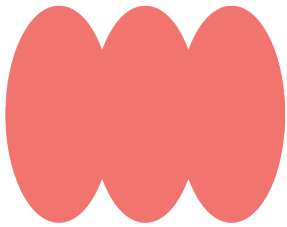
**Recommendation 8:** Improve mental health services for young people living in regional WA, with an emphasis on preventative care and early intervention.

**Recommendation 9:** Resource the prevention of youth suicide across WA.

**Recommendation 10:** Create transformational, life saving youth justice reform by implementing all 17 recommendations within SRWA's Blueprint for a Better Future: Paving the Way for Youth Justice Reform in WA report.

**Recommendation 11:** Commit to supporting the wellbeing of all young Aboriginal people living in WA through community-led, co-designed support.

*We urge government to implement the following recommendations:*



## Theme 3: Access

**Recommendation 12:** Increase support for young people with disability in WA.

**Recommendation 13:** Provide cost-of-living relief for young people in WA.

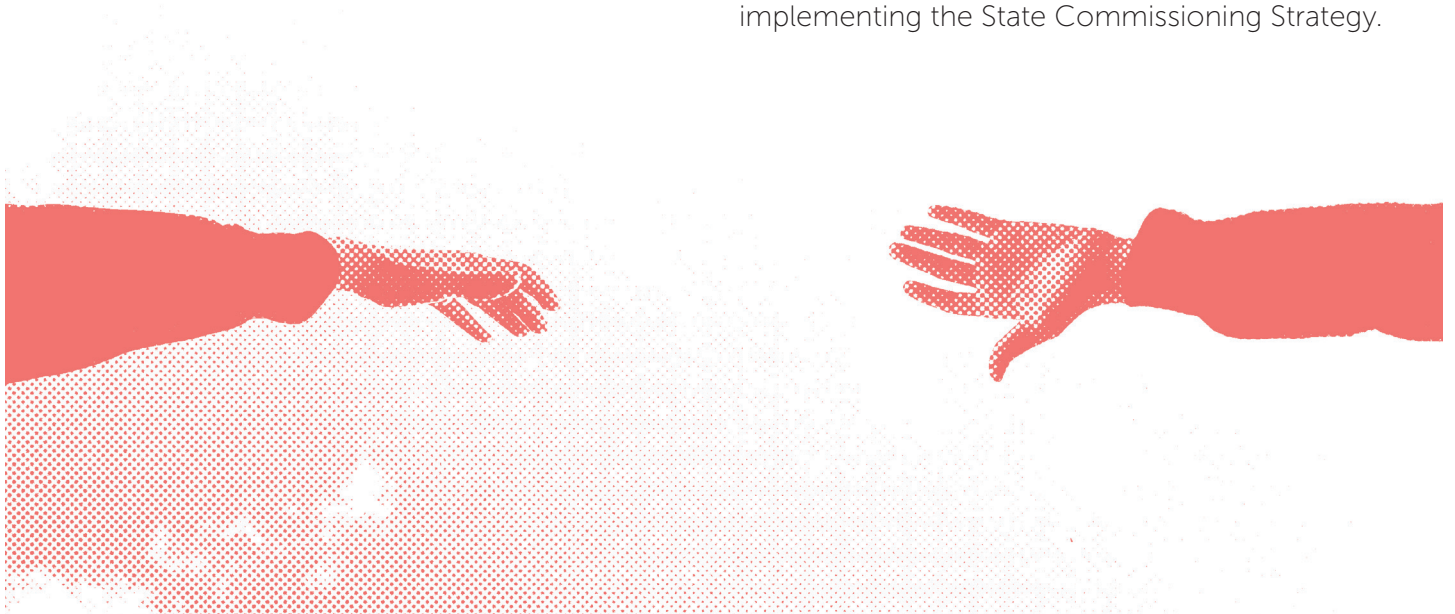
**Recommendation 14:** Invest in Western Australia's care economy.



## Theme 4: Approach

**Recommendation 15:** Transition to whole-of-government approaches to supporting young people to ensure that no young person is left behind.

**Recommendation 16:** Provide structural support to a world-class youth sector in WA by addressing the chronic under-indexation of community services and implementing the State Commissioning Strategy.



# Theme 1: Safety

## Family and domestic violence is impacting young people across Western Australia.

### Solutions

The sector calls for the implementation of the following measures to address the youth-specific impacts of family and domestic violence (FDV) in the 2024-25 State Budget:

- Increase targeted funding to support young people experiencing FDV across WA through programs like OpenSpace,<sup>2</sup>
- Establish and support prevention-oriented FDV services, family counselling supports and homelessness services through family-oriented models like Ruby's<sup>3</sup> and Ishar's Free from Family and Domestic Violence Program;<sup>4</sup>
- Upskill staff currently working with young people in healthcare, justice, education and housing to strengthen the sector's capacity to support young people experiencing FDV;
- Increase funding towards youth-specific FDV data collection, to capture the scale of FDV in WA and ensure resources are allocated effectively.

### Recommendation 1: Invest urgently in addressing the impact of family and domestic violence on young people in Western Australia.

### Impact

Our recommendations align with the *Path to Safety: Western Australia's Strategy to Reduce Family and Domestic Violence 2020-2030*, specifically focus areas 2 and 3:

- "Act now to keep people safe and hold perpetrators to account", and
- "Grow primary prevention to stop family and domestic violence".<sup>5</sup>

Our recommendation provides a practical guarantee of the inclusion of young people in the delivery of this strategy in alignment with the multi-generational approach designed by Government.

### Evidence

Our consultations with members working with young people across a range of services and regions in Western Australia reported high rates of family and domestic violence (FDV) across the state. Service providers and youth workers repeatedly highlighted a strong and rapidly emerging correlation between family and domestic violence and their service delivery areas including mental health, housing and homelessness, alcohol and other drugs, sexual healthcare and family counselling. YACWA's advisory panel of young people with lived experiences of homelessness unanimously report related experiences of family and domestic violence.

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<sup>2</sup> Government of Western Australia. 'New family and domestic violence youth counselling service in Rockingham' (21 March 2023). Retrieved: <<https://www.wa.gov.au/government/announcements/new-family-and-domestic-violence-youth-counselling-service-rockingham>>.

<sup>3</sup> Uniting Communities. 'Ruby's Reunification Program' (2023). Retrieved: <<https://www.unitingcommunities.org/service/rubys-reunification-program>>.

<sup>4</sup> Ishar Multicultural Women's Health Services. 'Family and domestic violence support' (2023). Retrieved: <<https://www.ishar.org.au/family-domestic-violence>>.

<sup>5</sup> Government of Western Australia, Department of Communities. *Path to Safety: Western Australia's Strategy to reduce family and domestic violence 2020-2030* (2020).

### Case study: Derby

"Many young people in Derby are couch-surfing or utilising public spaces at night due to unsafe conditions at home, usually caused by family conflict and/or AOD. There are no safe and accessible places where young people can seek refuge when they feel unsafe at home, so they often stay on the streets and run into trouble. Local police run a night patrol until 3am which provides young people with a meal and a ride home, but this is not enough support for young people if home is not a safe place for them to return to. The programs run at the youth centre provide a fun, active and safe refuge for young people who need them. However, due to the lack of resources these services close at 10.30pm each night, leaving young people in the region nowhere safe to stay overnight. Investment into an all-hours accessible youth centre will help to keep the young people of Derby safe."

YACWA staff reflection, Derby youth sector consultation, June 2023

## **Many young people are experiencing, or at risk of experiencing, homelessness in Western Australia.**

### Solutions

Our members and sector call for urgent and meaningful investment into a variety of housing supports for young people. We recommend the immediate resourcing of the following models in WA:

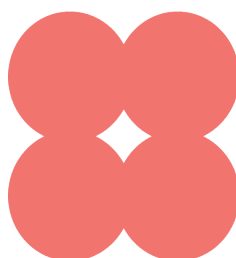
Housing First for Youth (HF4Y)

Housing First for Youth is a social housing model based on the philosophy that 'a successful transition out of homelessness and into recovery and independent living is contingent on the provision of safe and adequate housing with the right supports before all else'.<sup>6</sup>

Core principles underpinning this model include:

- an unconditional right to housing,
- the self-determination of young people,
- a focus on wellness and social inclusion, and
- individualised supports.

The model has been adapted specifically for young people in WA through YACWA's *Housing First for Youth* Project Report,<sup>7</sup> which outlines a roadmap for the application of this model in a Western Australian context. We urge Government to implement all recommendations from this report to increase the safe, secure housing options available to young people.



<sup>6</sup> Gaetz, S. et al. *THIS is Housing First for Youth* (2021). Toronto: Canadian Observatory on Homelessness Press, p 7. Retrieved: <<https://www.homelesshub.ca/sites/default/files/HF4Y-Program-Guide-Jul-15.pdf>>.

<sup>7</sup> Youth Affairs Council of Western Australia. *Housing First for Youth (HF4Y) Project Report* (February 2023). Retrieved: < <https://www.yacwa.org.au/research/housing-first-youth-project-report/>>.

## Ruby's

The Ruby's youth and family service model provides support for 12 to 17 year olds at risk of homelessness through two service delivery components:

1. A safe place to stay, and
2. Whole-of-family counselling.<sup>8</sup>

Ruby's aims to provide young people with a safe and supported pathway to return home. The model has operated successfully in South Australia for 30 years and recently launched in the Australian Capital Territory, consistently reporting strong positive outcomes for young people.<sup>9</sup>

**Recommendation 2: Commit to rolling out the Housing First for Youth model in WA to reduce youth homelessness.**

**Recommendation 3: Resource the establishment of a prevention-focussed service based on the Ruby's model in WA to support young people at risk of homelessness.**

## Impact

Investing in low barrier and early-intervention housing support for young people is one way in which Government can choose to support safe and healthy futures for young people.

Prevention works, as the success of the Ruby's model demonstrates:

**"An analysis of the long-term outcomes of young people who engaged with Ruby's over a 4 year period indicated 89.8% of this cohort did not then present as a client of a homelessness service in South Australia. In 2018-19, over 80% of young people who stayed at Ruby's returned home."**<sup>10</sup>

The implementation of both the HF4Y and Ruby's models in WA would create solutions for young people which align directly with Outcome 3 from the All Paths Lead to a Home: *Western Australia's 10 Year Strategy on Homelessness*: "Young people at risk are identified early and connected with appropriate supports".<sup>11</sup>

## Evidence

*"There is no clear pathway out of homelessness for young people in WA."*

YACWA member with 30 years' experience working in youth homelessness in WA.

Our members and lived-experience advisors call for significant investment into an array of supports for young people experiencing, or at risk of experiencing, homelessness. The State Government's focus on reducing rough sleeping is a welcome step towards ending homelessness in WA, however we know that this approach leaves many young people unsupported and invisible to the system as young people are more likely to experience forms of homelessness other than rough sleeping, such as couchsurfing.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> See Footnote 3.

<sup>9</sup> Youth Coalition of the ACT. 'Ruby's Reunification to Prevent Youth Homelessness' (2023). Retrieved: <<https://www.youthcoalition.net/rubys/>>.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Government of Western Australia, Department of Communities. *All Paths Lead to a Home: Western Australia's 10-Year Strategy on Homelessness 2020-2030* (2020), p 7.

<sup>12</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics. 'Estimating Homelessness: Census' (2021), p6. Retrieved: <<https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/housing/estimating-homelessness-census/2021#youth-experiencing-homelessness>>.

Long waitlists and capacity limits are impacting the functionality of youth homelessness support services, and as a result many young people are forced into contact with adult-oriented services which are not designed to meet the unique needs of young people. Common Ground,<sup>13</sup> for example, will not be accessible to young people who are under 18 and will not be appropriate for many young people over 18 due to its adult focus. The investment of \$3.4 million into the Youth Futures crisis accommodation<sup>14</sup> service in 2021 demonstrates a much-needed injection of funding towards youth homelessness in WA, and we welcome ongoing and substantial investment in this area.

The youth sector describe the effects of chronic underinvestment into youth homelessness as:

- Chronic invisibility and lack of supports for young people who are experiencing or at risk of experiencing homelessness;
- Contact with adult support services being the only available option, despite these environments being inappropriate for young people;
- Many young people do not know that they are experiencing homelessness and report lack of information on available services as a major barrier to accessing support;
- Unaddressed intersectional vulnerabilities and consequential missed opportunities to provide wrap-around support for young people experiencing:
  - Mental health conditions;
  - Complex trauma;
  - Family and domestic violence;
  - Gender and/or sexuality based discrimination.

Additionally, the combined impact of the cost-of-living crisis, a competitive rental market and lack of community housing options were highlighted repeatedly by our members as factors contributing to youth homelessness in WA this year. The Cook Government's investment of \$2.4 billion over 4 years is not enough to maintain social housing at the required proportion of total stock,<sup>15</sup> and we have not seen the implementation of inclusionary zoning provisions for social housing for under 25 year olds recommended by YACWA last year.<sup>16</sup>

### **Case study: Karatha**

*"There is a very short supply of affordable housing for youth in Karratha. The Salvation Army have a limited number of beds for a very short-term stay, but it is difficult to find housing after accessing these services. Rental opportunities are limited by a number of factors—the General Regional Officer Housing Program (GRO) takes up over a third of housing stock, and people buying houses are homeowners and not investors. This lack of accommodation functions as a huge barrier to getting young people housed and getting staff into vacant (much-needed) roles in the area."*

YACWA staff reflection, Karratha youth sector consultation, June 2023

### **Recommendation 4: Create more housing options for young people by increasing WA's community housing stock in line with Shelter WA's Social Housing Policy Position.**

<sup>13</sup> Government of Western Australia, Department of Communities. 'Common Ground' (2022). Retrieved: <<https://www.wa.gov.au/organisation/departments-of-communities/common-ground>>.

<sup>14</sup> Government of Western Australia. *Western Australia State Budget 2021-22: Budget Paper No. 1* (2021), p 6. Retrieved: <<https://www.ourstatebudget.wa.gov.au/2021-22/budget-papers/2021-22-wa-state-budget-bp1.pdf?>>.

<sup>15</sup> Buckland, A et al. *Housing Affordability in Western Australia 2023: Building for the future* (May 2023). Perth: Bankwest Curtin Economics Centre Focus on Western Australia Report Series 17. Retrieved: <<https://bcec.edu.au/assets/2023/05/BCEC-Housing-Affordability-in-Western-Australia-2023-WEB-version.pdf>>.

<sup>16</sup> Youth Affairs Council of WA. *Pre-Budget Submission 2023-24* (2022), p 3.



## Young LGBTIQ+ people are marginalised in WA.

### Solutions

Government must resource a variety of supports for young LGBTIQ+ people with an immediate focus on priority areas such as healthcare, mental health, education and accommodation services. Our members call for support to be coordinated through a whole-of-government approach, including the establishment of an LGBTIQ+ portfolio and/or coordinated interagency strategy for LGBTIQ+ inclusion. The Premier's landmark meeting with queer community groups in October 2023 will represent a new and vibrant chapter in LGBTIQ+ policy in WA if followed by meaningful investment into community-recommended supports.

### **Recommendation 5: Invest in creating safety for all LGBTIQ+ young people living in WA through a whole-of-government LGBTIQ+ inclusion strategy.**

The following recommendations provide examples of how Government should invest in supporting young LGBTIQ+ people across a variety of areas:

From the Youth Pride Network's State of Play:<sup>17</sup>

- Develop safe methods of data collection on LGBTIQ+ young people,<sup>18</sup>
- Integrate LGBTIQ+ inclusion into tendering processes and reporting,<sup>19</sup>
- Ensure staff across government are trained in LGBTIQ+ inclusion,<sup>20</sup> and
- Integrate LGBTIQ+ inclusion into government strategy.<sup>21</sup>

From the Youth Pride Network's State of Play II:<sup>22</sup>

- The Department of Education should make explicit the obligations of teachers and schools to create safe environments for LGBTIQ+ students,<sup>23</sup>
- Provide guidance on how to support students who are transitioning and/or affirming their gender,<sup>24</sup> and
- Ensure strategies in education include LGBTIQ+ students.<sup>25</sup>

From the Commissioner for Children and Young People's *"I just want to feel equal to others": Hearing from trans and gender diverse children and young people in WA*<sup>26</sup> report:

- Policy recognition: recognise the specific needs, rights and experiences of trans and gender diverse individuals, including children and young people, in public policies and government strategies,<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Glance, C et al. *State of Play Report: LGBTIQ+ Young Peoples's Experiences of the Youth Accommodation System* (2021) Perth: Youth Pride Network.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, p 3.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Glance, C and Cheyanne Henderson-Watkins. *State of Play II: Young people's Experiences of High School* (2023) Perth: Youth Pride Network.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid, p 7.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Commissioner for Children and Young People Western Australia. *"I just want to feel equal to others": Hearing from trans and gender diverse children and young people in WA* (2023). Retrieved: <<https://www.cyp.wa.gov.au/our-work/projects/the-wellbeing-of-trans-and-gender-diverse-youth/>>.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid, p 58.

- Education on rights: ensure that trans children and young people are educated and informed about their rights,<sup>28</sup> and
- Priority population: recognise trans and gender diverse children and young people as a priority population for service provision in areas such as health, mental health, housing, homelessness, and education.<sup>29</sup>

## Impact

By choosing to invest in community-driven strategies to support young LGBTIQ+ people in WA, Government can drive an array of positive outcomes for young queer and gender diverse people and those who love them.

Importantly:

- Investment in LGBTIQ+ healthcare and social supports would reduce youth suicide in alignment with the Western Australian *Suicide Prevention Framework 2021-2025*;
- State Government would safe-guard human rights and improve quality of life for young LGBTIQ+ people living in WA, and;
- By protecting and uplifting young queer, gender diverse and trans people, WA would shift further into alignment with progressive interstate and international leaders in queer and trans policy.

## Evidence

*We know that...*

Young LGBTIQ+ people are at higher risk of discrimination-based mental health challenges and suicidality than their cisgender and heterosexual peers.<sup>30</sup>

Young LGBTIQ+ people are chronically over-represented in youth homelessness statistics. Experiences of discrimination are overwhelmingly frequent for young LGBTIQ+ people accessing accommodation support services, as a report<sup>31</sup> based on responses from 166 young people in WA demonstrates:

- 60% of respondents cited having to hide their LGBTIQ+ identity as their most common negative experience when accessing housing support services, and;
- Around 50% of respondents cited homophobia, transphobia, queerphobia and misgendering as negative experiences, and;
- 20% of respondents experienced violence because of their identity.<sup>32</sup>

Our members in regions reported concerns around lack of awareness and supports for young LGBTIQ+ people living regionally, describing higher rates of homelessness and AOD challenges for young people in this demographic. Experiences of “bullying, discrimination and fear of violence due to their gender identity”<sup>33</sup> were reported by the trans and gender diverse young people who participated in the Commissioner for Children and Young People’s youth study this year.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Strauss, P et al. *Suicide Prevention Guidelines for LGBTQ+ Young People* (2022) Telethon Kids Institute. Retrieved: < <https://www.telethonkids.org.au/projects/suicide-prevention-guidelines-lgbtqa-young-people/>>.

<sup>31</sup> See Footnote 17.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid, p 9.

<sup>33</sup> See Footnote 26, p 11.

# Theme 2: Support

**Inaction on climate change is impacting the wellbeing of young people.**

## Solutions

**Recommendation 6: Address the impacts of climate change on youth mental health.**

**Recommendation 7: Introduce evidence-based climate change legislation in WA that prioritises the futures of young people.**

Centring the voices and needs of young people in Western Australian climate action strategies, including the implementation of Western Australia's *Climate Adaptation Strategy: Building WA's climate resilient future*<sup>34</sup> and proposed climate change legislation, will support the mental, emotional, social and physical wellbeing of young people today and into the future.

## Evidence

Climate-change related distress, worry, anxiety and depression are increasingly rising for young people across Australia, who cite Government inaction as the most significant contributor to their climate-related mental health challenges.<sup>36</sup>

Our consultation and research process repeatedly confirmed that young people want to see the introduction of robust climate legislation in WA that is aligned with limiting global warming to 1.5 degrees.

### • Issue

**Suicide remains the leading cause of death for young people in Western Australia.**<sup>37</sup>

## Solutions

**Recommendation 8: Improve mental health services for young people living in regional WA, with an emphasis on preventative care and early intervention.**

**Recommendation 9: Resource the prevention of youth suicide across WA.**

Improve mental health outcomes for young people living regionally by implementing Action Priorities 1-4 recommended by the Western Australian Association for Mental Health's *Going the Distance*<sup>38</sup> report:

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<sup>34</sup> Government of Western Australia. *Climate Adaptation Strategy: Building WA's climate resilient future* (2023).

<sup>35</sup> Fava, N et al. *Climate of Distress: Responding to the Youth Mental Health Impacts of Climate Change* (2023) Melbourne: Orygen.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid, p 18.

<sup>37</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics. 'Causes of Death, Western Australia, 2022' (2023) (Table 6.3). Retrieved < <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/health/causes-death/causes-death-australia/latest-release#data-downloads>>.

<sup>38</sup> Kalveld, L, Emma Crane and Yasmine Hooper. *Going the Distance: Making mental health support work better for regional communities* (2023) Perth: Centre for Social Impact, University of Western Australia.

The priorities:

1. "Address the high levels of distress and low wellbeing by understanding social determinants as a key driver of poor mental health;
2. Resource regional communities to promote mental health literacy and help-seeking behaviour locally;
3. Improve the accessibility of clinical supports and provide more options beyond clinical care;
4. Engage local leadership in decision making to ensure that supports are relevant, effective and sustained."<sup>39</sup>

The implementation of these priorities should foreground the needs of young people.

Our members also want to see existing regional services supported through adequate indexation adjustments, investment into the recommissioning of contracts, and embedded contractual flexibility to enable services to meet fluctuating community needs.

Our sector and members across the regions reported declining local trust in service providers due to the rapid establishment and withdrawal of pilot programs and short-term services. To mitigate declining trust, Government should fund services that are already established and functioning while providing flexible pathways within contracts to allow for adapted approaches to service delivery as needed.

## **Evidence**

We met with youth sector service providers in the following regions this year:

- Kimberley,
- Pilbara,
- Goldfields-Esperance,
- Great Southern,
- South-West,
- Peel,
- Perth Metropolitan, and
- Mid-West.

Across the regions, we heard that resources are needed urgently to support young people experiencing mental health challenges and/or suicidality. While recent funding has been allocated to increase the State's overall mental health sector spending, essential early intervention programs have seen no funding increases despite the sector's ongoing emphasis on their necessity. Many young people are left with often-inaccessible metropolitan support services as their only option.

Low availability of mental health services for young people has been linked to high rates of youth suicide in the Kimberley and other regions of WA.<sup>40</sup> We call on Government to resource youth mental health, particularly in regional areas, through prevention and early-intervention approaches.

### **Case study: Manjimup**

*"In Manjimup, young people are having trouble accessing mental health services. There is no mainstream mental health service in the region. Many young people with autism in the region are experiencing isolation. Functional assessment appointments are inaccessible due to long waitlists, so many individuals go undiagnosed and without support. Other young people with disabilities struggle to access employment or placement without support, and local social workers are resultingly being required to assist, which is beyond the scope of their role. Accessibility is necessary for support."*

YACWA staff reflection, Manjimup consultations, June 2023

### **Case study: Northam**

*"Northam has an absence of support systems in place for a number of vulnerable groups who require unique support from informed support providers, namely: queer and trans youth, young people experiencing FDV or homelessness, young people between the ages of ten and twelve years old. Individuals are relying on Centrelink, as there are no other readily available social support systems in place. The size of the region and geographic uniqueness creates challenges for support provision, due to the diffuse population, lack of service outreach, and a lack of public transport in the area. It is necessary to invest in centralised services in the Wheatbelt, in order to address these gaps in support."*

YACWA staff reflection, Northam consultations, June 2023

## **Western Australia's youth justice system is causing serious harm to young people.**

### **Solutions**

**Recommendation 10: Create transformational, life saving youth justice reform by implementing all 17 recommendations within Social Reinvestment WA's *Blueprint for a Better Future* report.**

Our members and sector call for the establishment of a genuinely therapeutic, harm-preventative and culturally-safe youth justice system in Western Australia.

To achieve this, Government should implement all 17 recommendations detailed in SRWA's *Blueprint for a Better Future*<sup>41</sup> report. The Cook government is in an incredibly strong position to support transformative change in the Western Australian youth justice system through the 2024-25 State Budget: Government is in surplus, the Justice Reinvestment framework has been designed in detail for implementation in a Western Australian context, and community support to take action on youth justice reform has never been stronger than it is moving into 2024.

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<sup>40</sup> Hill, N et al. 'Association between mental health workforce supply and clusters of high and low rates of youth suicide: An Australian study using suicide mortality data from 2016 to 2020' *Australian & New Zealand Journal of Psychiatry* (2023) 57(11).

<sup>41</sup> Rothwell et al. *Blueprint for a Better Future: Paving the Way for Youth Justice Reform in Western Australia* (2022) West Leederville: Social Reinvestment WA.

Government must:

- Raise the age of criminal responsibility from 10 to 14;
- Close Unit 18 immediately and permanently;
- End the ongoing human rights violations occurring at Banksia Hill Detention Centre, and,
- Invest in place-based, community-led diversion and rehabilitation programs to minimise young people's contact with the justice system.



### **Supporting the wellbeing of young Aboriginal people in WA**

Victoria's *Wirkara Kulpa* Aboriginal Youth Justice Strategy is an example of strong, co-designed Government action on youth justice and Aboriginal youth wellbeing in an Australian context. Western Australia should refer to this strategy and its co-design process when developing policies that impact the lives of young Aboriginal people in WA.

**Recommendation 11: Commit to supporting the wellbeing of all young Aboriginal people living in WA through community-led, co-designed support.**

## **Impact**

The implementation of these recommendations will ensure WA's justice system operates in alignment with international humanitarian law and end ongoing harm to children and young people. The impact of implementing these recommendations will be life saving: this system has caused a child death in custody and sky-high rates of self-harm in the past year alone. Government has an opportunity to safeguard the rights of children and young people and ensure that these tragedies never happen again by taking steps towards transformative change in youth justice.

Recommendations 10 and 11 align with the Western Australian *Commitment to Aboriginal Youth Wellbeing*,<sup>43</sup> the *National Agreement on Closing the Gap*,<sup>44</sup> and program outcome 1.4 from the *Outcomes Framework for Aboriginal Health 2020-2030*.<sup>45</sup>

## **Evidence**

The solutions provided in Social Reinvestment WA's Blueprint are based on the advice of medical and legal experts, community leaders, and young people impacted by the justice system.

<sup>42</sup> See, for example: Professor Pat Dudgeon. 'Locking up kids has serious mental health impacts and contributes to further reoffending' (18 November 2022) Perth: University of Western Australia News. Retrieved: < <https://www.uwa.edu.au/news/Article/2022/November/Locking-up-kids-has-serious-mental-health-impacts-and-contributes-to-further-reoffending>>.

<sup>43</sup> Government of Western Australia. *Commitment to Aboriginal Youth Wellbeing* (2020).

<sup>44</sup> *National Agreement on Closing the Gap* (2020). Retrieved: <<https://www.closingthegap.gov.au/national-agreement/national-agreement-closing-the-gap>>.

<sup>45</sup> Government of Western Australia, Department of Health. *Outcomes Framework for Aboriginal Health 2020-2030* (2019).

# Theme 3: Access

**Resources for a strong and upskilled youth sector are needed to meet the needs of young people with disability in WA.**

## Solutions

Government must resource a strong sector of highly-skilled staff and services to ensure that the needs of young people with disabilities are met across WA.

**Recommendation 12: Increase support for young people with disability in WA.**

## Evidence

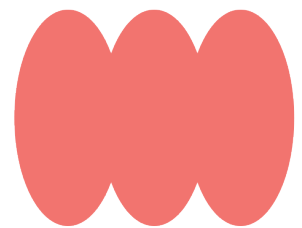
*We know that ...*

- Young people with disability have lower rates of education attainment and labour force participation than able-bodied and/or neurotypical peers across Australia.<sup>46</sup>
- Long waitlists and high cost were repeatedly cited during YACWA's consultation process this year as the most significant barriers for young people across WA requiring diagnosis and treatment for neurodevelopmental conditions such as ADHD and autism, and
- Young people with disability are disproportionately represented in WA's justice system.<sup>47</sup>

Staff working across WA's education, justice and healthcare systems must be continuously upskilled to understand and work with young people with disabilities to ensure that young people are not placed at risk of harm and/or social exclusion.

### Case study: Disability in the youth justice system

The Telethon Kids Institute's *Banksia Hill Project*<sup>48</sup> found nine out of ten of the young people being held at time of publication had at least one form of neurodisability.<sup>49</sup> The 2023 Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability found that the practices and facilities in place at Banksia Hill exacerbate the vulnerability of young people with disabilities instead of providing therapeutic support and trauma-informed care.<sup>50</sup> Solitary confinement practices, for example, are used by the Western Australian Department of Justice in blatant contravention of the United Nations' *Convention on the Rights of the Child*.<sup>51</sup> Experts tell us that:



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<sup>46</sup> Commonwealth of Australia. *Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability, Executive Summary: Our vision for an inclusive Australia and Recommendations* (2023), p 97. Retrieved: <<https://disability.royalcommission.gov.au/publications/final-report-executive-summary-our-vision-inclusive-australia-and-recommendations>>.

<sup>47</sup> See Footnote 48, p 127 – 129.

<sup>48</sup> Bower, C et al. *Fetal alcohol spectrum disorder and youth justice: a prevalence study among young people sentenced to detention in Western Australia* (2018) Perth: Telethon Kids Institute. Retrieved: <<https://bmjopen.bmj.com/content/8/2/e019605>>.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> See Footnote 49.

<sup>51</sup> *Convention on the rights of the child* (1989) Treaty no. 27531. United Nations Treaty Series, 1577, Art 37. Retrieved: <[https://treaties.un.org/doc/Treaties/1990/09/19900902%2003-14%20AM/Ch\\_IV\\_11p.pdf](https://treaties.un.org/doc/Treaties/1990/09/19900902%2003-14%20AM/Ch_IV_11p.pdf)>.

“Solitary confinement can have severe, long-term and irreversible effects on a child’s health and wellbeing, including their physical and psychological health and social and educational development. Solitary confinement exacerbates the difficulties experienced by children in detention who have cognitive impairment and brain injuries.”<sup>52</sup>

Solitary confinement practices utilised at Banksia Hill Detention Centre should be prohibited by State Government immediately and permanently.

## Young people are experiencing pressure due to the rising cost-of-living.

### Solutions

We urge Government to invest in implementing all recommendations within WACOSS’ *Cost of Living*<sup>53</sup> report to create relief and stability for young people through the 2024-25 State Budget.

The following recommendations should be implemented in collaboration with the youth sector:

- “Re-introduce a residential rent relief grant scheme;
- Expand eligibility for the free travel periods on public transport to all concession card holders;
- Implement inclusionary zoning with social and affordable housing targets;
- Reform the Residential Tenancies Act to improve renter’s rights by abolishing no grounds terminations, regulating size and frequency of rental increases; and
- Use State procurement policies and contracting practices to guarantee services are delivered by people employed in decently paid, unionised and more secure roles.”<sup>54</sup>

Government should advocate on a national level for a whole-of-government approach to addressing the social and economic pressures that young people are experiencing due to the rising cost-of-living.

### **Recommendation 13: Provide cost-of-living relief for young people in WA.**

### Impact

Government has an opportunity to prioritise economic stability for young people in the 2024-25 State Budget. Economic stability supported through income, job security and/or access to affordable services are social determinants of strong health<sup>55</sup> and education<sup>56</sup> outcomes for young people.

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<sup>52</sup> See Footnote 49.

<sup>53</sup> Western Australian Council of Social Services. *Cost of Living* (2022). Retrieved: <<https://www.wacoss.org.au/news/2022-cost-of-living-report/>>.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid, p 36.

<sup>55</sup> Commonwealth of Australia, Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. ‘Social determinants of health’ (July 2022). Retrieved: <<https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/australias-health/social-determinants-of-health>>.

<sup>56</sup> Lamb, S et al. *Educational opportunity in Australia 2020: who succeeds and who misses out* (2020) Melbourne: Centre for International Research on Education Systems, Victoria University, for the Mitchell Institute.



## **Evidence**

No young person in WA should lack access to necessities such as food, medical care, and stable housing – yet we know that many young people in WA are currently unable to meet their basic needs.<sup>57</sup> Headspace reports that the cost-of-living is the single biggest concern for young people in Australia in 2023, followed by housing affordability.<sup>58</sup> The pressure is increasing rapidly: during the June 2023 quarter the cost of food nationally increased by 7.5% overall, insurance prices increased by 14.2%, and utility prices rose between 12 and 14%<sup>59</sup>. The rental market is in crisis—vacancy rates have been below 1% since September 2020, and rental prices have risen dramatically since 2019; the rates of new dwelling supply over the next two years in WA are expected to be well below average.<sup>60</sup> Private rentals are unaffordable for those on income support,<sup>61</sup> and individuals are resorting to measures such as restricting energy use, cutting back on groceries, and many are struggling to afford medical care and medication in order to survive.<sup>62</sup>

Despite these increases in the cost of living, services such as Youth Allowance, Austudy and Jobseeker remain seriously inadequate, causing harm to those reliant on them. Young people need solutions now.

## **Investment in WA's care economy as a multi-faceted solution for young people**

Investment in WA's care economy ensures an array of positive outcomes for young people in WA. By improving resourcing and support for staff and services in health, education and community service sectors, strong and sustainable service delivery will ensure high quality support and care for all young people and communities.

A strong care economy also creates meaningful, rewarding and sustainable career pathways for young people who are transitioning into adulthood and want to become skilled and employed in health, education and/or community service jobs.

The positive social and economic outcomes of resourcing these sectors are evident in data:

“Every 1 million dollars the Government spends on education would create 10.6 direct jobs for women and 4.3 direct jobs for men, compared to every \$1m spent on construction which creates around 0.2 jobs for women and 1 job for a man.”\*

## **Recommendation 14: Invest in Western Australia's care economy.**

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<sup>57</sup> See, for example: Rachwani, Mostafa. 'Young Australians forgoing necessities as cost-of-living crisis deepens wealth divide' (3 September 2023) *The Guardian*. Retrieved: <<https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2023/sep/03/cost-of-living-crisis-price-rises-increases>>.

<sup>58</sup> Headspace. 'Cost-of-living pressures for young Australians aged 18-25' (April 2023). Retrieved: <<https://headspace.org.au/our-impact/evaluation-research-reports/youth-mental-health-statistics/>>.

<sup>59</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics. *Consumer Price Index, Australia* (June Quarter 2023).

<sup>60</sup> See Footnote 15.

<sup>61</sup> Australian Council of Social Services. 'It's not enough: why more is needed to lift people out of poverty' (September 2023). Retrieved: <<https://www.acoss.org.au/acoss-reports-submissions/>>.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

# Theme 4: Approach

**Government must adapt to meet the needs of young people living in WA and the youth sector that supports them.**

## Solutions

Our members call for the Departments of Premier and Cabinet and Treasury to lead and resource interagency approaches toward support for youth mental health, justice and housing and homelessness.

We know that the intersectional nature of supports needed for young people is incompatible with rigid, siloed approaches to community service support.

We applaud the interagency approach embedded in the development of the *At-Risk Youth Strategy (2022 – 2027)* and urge Government to continue to invest in the shift towards whole-of-government approaches.

**Recommendation 15: Transition to whole-of-government approaches to supporting young people to ensure that no young person is left behind.**

## Impact

Our members and sector call loud and clear for rapidly increased interagency collaboration within Government to address the intersectional nature of challenges faced by young people such as family and domestic violence, mental health, housing, education and healthcare. Collaboration within Government will ensure that no young person or cohort of young people is left without support due to complexity or intersectionality of needs that do not fit into one specific portfolio.

**Services are struggling to deliver support for young people due to chronic underfunding and dysfunctional commissioning practices.**

## Solution

We absolutely welcome the Cook Government's consideration of the community sector's preferred indexation formula and new commissioning approaches for community services in the 2024-25 State Budget. We urge Government to develop the implementation of the State Commissioning Strategy and break the cycle of under-indexation of community services in Western Australia to ensure that the needs of communities are met.

**Recommendation 16: Provide structural support to a world-class youth sector in WA by implementing recommendations by addressing the chronic under-indexation of community services and implementing the State Commissioning Strategy.**

## Impact

Recommissioned and adequately indexed services will form the backbone of a functional and sustainable youth support sector in WA. The stakes are too high not to invest in structural support for the sector in the 2024-25 State Budget: young people in WA rely on and deserve a strong sector that meets their needs and empowers them to thrive.

## Evidence

The Western Australian Council of Social Services' 2022 *Sustainable Funding Survey* found inadequate funding "across all government funded contract service areas".<sup>63</sup> YACWA members reported significant concerns regarding service delivery sustainability due to under-indexation and chronic delays impacting the recommissioning of contracts. Along with resourcing and sustainability concerns, our members called for increased flexibility in the design of their contracts to operate through a collective impact approach and meet the needs of young people who may require flexible and complex support. Rigid funding models are limited in their ability to support the sector in this way.

"...The current and previous iterations of the (indexation) formula have resulted in under-indexation of community services contracts of around 1.5% per year. When combined with the fact that many contracts have not been substantially recommissioned for five, ten or even fifteen years, this indexation gap has resulted in a significant risk to the integrity of those contracts, and the ability for organisations to deliver appropriate services through them."<sup>64</sup>

Community Employers WA State Budget  
Submission 2024-25.



<sup>63</sup> Gilchrist, D and Clare Feenan. '2022 Sustainable Funding Survey' (February 2023) Perth: Centre for Social Value, University of Western Australia, p 4.

<sup>64</sup> Community Employers Western Australia. 2024-25 State Budget Submission (2023), p 2.

## ABOUT YACWA

The Youth Affairs Council of Western Australia (YACWA) is the peak body for young people and the youth sector that supports them in Western Australia. YACWA operates primarily as a human rights organisation that seeks to address the exclusion of young people in a rapidly changing society. YACWA represents around 60 youth sector organisations and 418 individual members, including both young people and compassionate community members

## OUR CONSULTATION PROCESS

1 x Member workshop

1 x Member survey

12 Consultations with individual organisations

Regional travel

## PRODUCED BY

The authors sincerely thank the youth sector and our members for their invaluable time and input into this submission.

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