

# 2026—27 PRE-BUDGET SUBMISSION

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF ASKS

## OUR VISION

We believe in a Western Australia in which all young people are respected, valued, and supported to reach their greatest potential. The 21 recommendations in this submission outline a pathway towards this vision based on the current needs of young people and the youth sector.

### HOUSING AND HOMELESSNESS

1. Invest in essential accommodation models to support young people across the stages of homelessness.
2. Strengthen prevention and early intervention initiatives.
3. Increase the capacity of the homelessness sector by funding a Youth Advance to Zero project.

### FAMILY AND INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE (FIPV)

4. Establish a youth-specific family and domestic violence One Stop Hub.
5. Commit to ongoing funding for peer-led sexual health and respectful relationship programs.
6. Build a FIPV-ready workforce to support children and young people.
7. Fund an educational engagement support program for young people impacted by FIPV.

### MENTAL HEALTH

8. Establish a 24/7 youth mental health urgent care centre.
9. Expand schools' psychosocial support frameworks to integrate youth workers in all WA schools.
10. Invest in a peer-led harm-reduction school program.

### YOUTH JUSTICE

11. Implement Social Reinvestment WA's Blueprint for a Better Future.
12. Expand the On Track to Thrive program.
13. Commit to ongoing funding for the In-Roads therapeutic court program.
14. Establish a youth co-responder team.

### COMMUNITY AND ADVOCACY

15. Commit to ongoing funding for intersectional youth-led advocacy programs.
16. Co-design a grants program to help children and young people connect offline.
17. Strengthen WA's Inclusion Strategy with targeted early intervention initiatives to protect and support LGBTQIA+ young people.

### REGIONAL AND REMOTE COMMUNITIES

18. Establish a WA Regional Advisory Board.
19. Fund high-tier community-based mental health supports for young people.
20. Expand investment in community-based and culturally secure sentencing alternatives for young people.
21. Ensure adequate and targeted funding for services supporting vulnerable young people.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

The Youth Affairs Council of Western Australia acknowledges the Traditional Owners of Country throughout Western Australia and acknowledges their continuing connection to the land, waters and communities in which we live, work and play. We pay our respects to the people, the cultures, and the Elders past and present. As WA's peak body for youth, we embrace connection with all First Nations young people, who we work alongside of, and are committed to supporting in their leadership and self-determination.

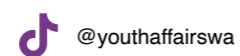
## ABOUT YACWA

We are the peak non-government youth organisation in Western Australia. We operate primarily as a human rights organisation that seeks to address the exclusion of young people in a rapidly changing society. Our continued vision for Western Australia is one that celebrates and engages young people in all aspects of the community. Our role is to strengthen the trust, cooperation, collaboration, professionalism and voice of the non-government youth service sector to better serve the young people of Western Australia.

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# HOUSING AND HOMELESSNESS



Support vulnerable young people by investing in youth-specific housing and homelessness interventions.

## WHAT WE'RE SEEING

- On average, **69 young people** were competing for just 1.8 available crisis beds in total (including adult beds)<sup>1</sup>
- **75% of people** who are homeless as adults were first homeless before the age of 25<sup>2</sup>
- **63% of young people** do not request rental repairs or maintenance in fear of eviction<sup>3</sup>

## COMMUNITY IMPACT

*"I don't want to do any more of these referrals. I can't deal with the feeling of rejection. I get my hopes up for nothing and left feeling not good enough."*

— Young person

*"I feel powerless to provide adequate intervention when a young person is in desperate need of help and I can foresee significant risks of further harm if I'm not able to provide an immediate accommodation option."*

— Frontline youth homelessness worker

## RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Invest in essential accommodation models to support young people across the stages of homelessness, including:
  - Co-design a High Fidelity Housing First for Youth model (HF4Y) for young people experiencing homelessness and complex challenges.
  - Develop a Tom Fisher for Youth respite service to meet the urgent demand for youth-specific crisis beds.
  - Commit to a pipeline of three more Youth Foyers (Albany, Bayswater and Broome), unlocking positive housing, employment and education outcomes for more than 1800 young people, including up to 900 First Nations young people, over the next decade.
  - Reform WA's social housing investments to adopt Shelter WA's evidence-based housing reforms to reach 5000 new social and affordable homes per year.

*Aligns with All Paths Lead to a Home WA 10 Year Homelessness Strategy Outcome 2; At Risk Youth Strategy 2022-2027 Focus Area 2; WA Youth Action Plan 2024-2027 4.2; WA Government Closing the Gap Implementation Plan 2023-2025 Outcome 9.*

2. Strengthen prevention and early intervention initiatives.

- Fund overnight Safe Space services to support young people to avoid system engagement.
- Resource further reforms to abolish no grounds evictions under the Residential Tenancies Act 1987 (WA) through the Department of Local Government, Industry Regulation and Safety, enabling all young people to have stable and secure tenancies. (Aligns with WA Youth Action Plan 2024-2027 4.3)

*Aligns with All Paths Lead to a Home WA 10 Year Homelessness Strategy Outcome 3; At Risk Youth Strategy 2022-2027 Focus Area 2.*

3. Increase the capacity of the youth homelessness sector by funding a Youth Zero Project through the WA Alliance to End Homelessness, providing backbone support to synchronise the sector's advocacy efforts and address young people's underrepresentation in WA's homelessness data.

*Aligns with All Paths Lead to a Home WA 10 Year Homelessness Strategy Outcome 4.*

# FAMILY AND INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE



Ensure young people are safe and supported by investing in targeted, youth-specific responses to family and intimate partner violence (FIPV).

## WHAT WE'RE SEEING

- **40.2% of young Australians** (16-24) have experienced abuse. Of these, over 25% have experienced more than three types of abuse<sup>4</sup>
- Roughly **70% of young people** didn't have an informative or positive sexual health education experience in school<sup>5</sup>
- Young people impacted by FIPV were **twice as likely** to have poor school attendance and/or be suspended from school than peers not impacted<sup>6</sup>

## COMMUNITY IMPACT

*"One of the hardest things to do in school was talking to a trusted adult."*

— Young person

*"We've seen a huge increase of young people at our services impacted by FDV, but as a sector we're not very well equipped to support young people with FDV."*

— Sector worker

*"When I was experiencing it, they put me in a lower class [...] it makes you feel segregated and punished for what I was going through, which is awful when school is your escape."*

— Young person

## RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Establish a youth-specific One Stop Hub, providing counselling, advocacy and tailored support for children and young people impacted by FIPV.

*Aligns with At Risk Youth Strategy 2022-2027 Focus Area 3; WA Government Closing the Gap Implementation Plan 2023-2025 Outcome 13.*

2. Commit to ongoing funding for the Youth Educating Peers (YEP) and All It Takes (AIT) programs to deliver trusted, peer-led education in sexual health, emotional wellbeing, and respectful relationships.

*Aligns with Path to Safety: Western Australia's Strategy to Reduce Family and Domestic Violence 2020-2030 Focus Area 3; WA Government Closing the Gap Implementation Plan 2023-2025 Outcome 17.*

3. Invest in upskilling frontline workers to recognise and respond to the needs of children and young people impacted by FIPV using trauma-informed practices.

*Aligns with Path to Safety: Western Australia's Strategy to Reduce Family and Domestic Violence 2020-2030 Focus Area 2, Focus Area 4.*

4. Fund an educational engagement support program to help young people impacted by FIPV to thrive in learning environments and prevent the long-term educational disadvantages caused by trauma.

*Aligns with Path to Safety: Western Australia's Strategy to Reduce Family and Domestic Violence 2020-2030 Focus Area 2; WA Government Closing the Gap Implementation Plan 2023-2025 Outcome 7.*

# MENTAL HEALTH



Support the wellbeing of all young people by investing in trauma-informed mental health responses and crisis prevention.

## WHAT WE'RE SEEING

- Suicide is the leading cause of death for young people in Western Australia, representing **36.5% of total deaths** for this age group<sup>7</sup>
- Despite making up 25% of the WA population, only **8% of all mental health** funding goes to services for infants, children and adolescents<sup>8</sup>
- **25-50% of adult mental ill-health** could be prevented with effective interventions during youth<sup>9</sup>
- Young people aged 16-24 years had the **highest rates of 12-month substance use disorders** (8%) compared with other age groups<sup>10</sup>

## COMMUNITY IMPACT

*"[What would've been the most helpful for my mental health was] just someone to talk to who would listen, because nobody was listening. My family weren't listening."*

— Young person

*"We've had young people who are told to wait 10 hours in wait rooms when suicidal, so they just left."*

— Young worker

*"When you're fighting addiction while learning about it at school, they should teach you about what help is available and that you're not a burden, because I was just thinking 'what if I'm already in it?'"*

— Young person

## RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Establish a 24/7 youth mental health urgent care centre to assist young people experiencing mental health crisis, supporting a faster recovery with a safe, inclusive and welcoming environment.

*Aligns with proposed Mental Health and Alcohol and Other Drugs Strategy 2025-2030 Priority 1 Focus Area 3, Priority 3 Focus Area 9; Community Treatment, Support, and Emergency Response Project Report Reform Direction 3; WA Government Closing the Gap Implementation Plan 2023-2025 Outcome 14; proposed Western Australian Suicide Prevention Framework 2026-2031 Table 10.*

2. Expand schools' psychosocial support frameworks by funding youth workers in every school to provide wraparound support for young people and their families.

*Aligns with proposed Mental Health and Alcohol and Other Drugs Strategy 2025-2030 Priority 1 Focus Area 2, Priority 2 Focus Area 5; Better and Fairer Schools Agreement; WA Government Closing the Gap Implementation Plan 2023-2025 Outcome 14.*

3. Introduce peer-led harm reduction programs in schools to support young people who are navigating alcohol and other drugs.

*Aligns with proposed Mental Health and Alcohol and Other Drugs Strategy 2025-2030 Priority 1 Focus Area 1; WA Government Closing the Gap Implementation Plan 2023-2025 Outcome 14.*

# YOUTH JUSTICE



Enable all young people to thrive in their communities by reforming the WA's youth justice system.

## WHAT WE'RE SEEING

- WA has the **second highest proportion** of young people aged 10-17 in youth detention facilities, compared to the rest of Australia's states and territories<sup>11</sup>
- **59.7% of young people** in detention in WA were unsentenced<sup>12</sup>
- The return rate of children to **detention in 2024-25 was 59.4%**, increasing by 12% from the previous year<sup>13</sup>
- A **majority (65%) of Australians** believe public money spent on incarcerating children would be better spent on social services<sup>14</sup>

## COMMUNITY IMPACT

*"For most people I know, they want the age raised. It's a really big issue and nothing is being done."*

— Young person

*"It's time for the youth justice system to be reformed. It is abhorrent that children and young people are being locked up when there are likely underlying issues that the government needs to address."*

— Sector worker

*"I know someone in Unit 18 at the moment, and they're doing it pretty tough. Self harm and suicide rates are high, there's not enough staff, everything's just stacking up. It's just smart to shut it."*

— Young person

## RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Transform WA's youth justice system by implementing Social Reinvestment WA's Blueprint for a Better Future to ensure all children and young people are thriving in their communities, including:

- Immediately close Unit 18 and invest in place-based community initiatives;
- Fully implement the promised therapeutic model of care to meet young people's social, emotional, and cultural needs; and
- Reform the Young Offenders Act (1994) so no children in WA end up in prison.

*Aligns with At Risk Youth Strategy 2022-2027 Focus Area 2 Priority Action 1; WA Government Closing the Gap Implementation Plan 2023-2025 Outcome 11.*

2. Expand On Track to Thrive by partnering with local community organisations to implement additional sites and extend eligibility to young people aged 10-14, enabling earlier intervention for those at risk of justice system involvement.

*Aligns with At Risk Youth Strategy 2022-2027 Focus Area 2 Priority Action 1.*

3. Secure permanent funding for the In-Roads therapeutic court program to provide vulnerable children with safe, tailored support that reduces reoffending and keeps them out of prison.

*Aligns with Corrective Services Strategic Plan 2025-2030 Priority 2 Focus 1.*

4. Establish a Youth Co-Responder Team by integrating youth workers with frontline police to provide rapid, developmentally appropriate support and divert at-risk young people from the justice system.

*Aligns with At Risk Youth Strategy 2022-2027 Focus Area 2 Priority Action 1.*

# COMMUNITY AND ADVOCACY



Create a safe and inclusive WA for all young people.

## YOUNG PEOPLE'S INTERSECTIONAL EXPERIENCES

### WHAT WE'RE SEEING

- Only **17% of young people** in Western Australia felt they had the opportunity to give insight into their local council or electorate<sup>15</sup>
- Only **one third of LGBTQIA+ students** felt their school environment was fully safe or inclusive<sup>16</sup>
- **56.8% of students** from years 7 to 12 who identified outside of the gender binary reported significantly lower life satisfaction than their peers<sup>17</sup>

### COMMUNITY IMPACT

*"I wish we had more power. And the government would take us more seriously. My biggest hope for the future of YHAC would be that we aren't forgotten; all the impacts we've made isn't lost."*

— Young person, UWA YHAC evaluation

*"I did not feel comfortable being out in high school, and the bullying culture actively discouraged students from exploring their identity."*

— Young person, State of Play II Report

### RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Commit to sustainable funding for youth-led advocacy groups, including the Youth Pride Network, the Youth Homelessness Advisory Council, and the Multicultural Youth Advocacy Network of WA, to ensure young people's diverse voices and experiences shape government policy and systemic reform.

*Aligns with WA Youth Action Plan 2024-2027 1.2, 1.6, 1.10, 1.12; WA Government Closing the Gap Implementation Plan 2023-2025 Strategic Element 2.*

2. Strengthen WA's LGBTQIA+ Inclusion Strategy with targeted early intervention initiatives for young people vulnerable to discrimination, including:

- Expanding peer support programs to foster belonging and reduce social isolation;
- Developing gender-affirming healthcare training for medical professionals across WA; and
- Resourcing the Department of Education to implement enforceable anti-discrimination and wellbeing policies that explicitly protect LGBTQIA+ young people.

*WA Youth Action Plan 2024-2027 6.5, 6.8; WA Government Closing the Gap Implementation Plan 2023-2025 Outcome 14.*

## E-SAFETY AND CONNECTION

### WHAT WE'RE SEEING

- **93% of children and young people** use the internet to chat with friends<sup>18</sup>
- **9 in 10 teens** sought to build positive relationships online<sup>19</sup>
- **73% of young people** use social media for mental health support<sup>20</sup>

### COMMUNITY IMPACT

*"So many of our supports young people access are through social media. Our peer groups, etc."*

— Regional sector worker

*Young people are emphatically and immensely against the social media ban. Australia is trying to be considerate with it's ban, but their goal is still ineffective."*

— Young person

### RECOMMENDATIONS

3. Develop a co-designed grants program to help youth services engage young people - especially those most impacted by the social media ban, such as regional and LGBTQIA+ young people - by fostering connection and access to trusted support networks.

*Aligns with WA Youth Action Plan 2024-2027 5.10, 5.11, 6.10, 6.14; WA Government Closing the Gap Implementation Plan 2023-2025 Outcome 17.*

# REGIONAL AND REMOTE COMMUNITIES



Empower regional young people and their communities by investing in place-based social supports and incorporating their voices in decision making.

Young people living in regional and remote communities face unique barriers in comparison to their peers, and require dedicated investments and supports.

### WHAT WE'RE SEEING

- **48.7% of homelessness service clients** are from regional WA, despite representing only 20.6% of the population<sup>21</sup>
- Almost a quarter (24%), or **156,000 children and young people**, live in regional and remote areas<sup>22</sup>
- On an average day, young people aged 10-17 from remote areas were **six times more likely** to be in detention than young people from metropolitan areas<sup>23</sup>

### COMMUNITY IMPACT

*"This is something nobody hears about. Children are suffering, they are being bounced around the limited services we have."*

— Sector worker

*"It does all feel very much like the energy to improve the regions just isn't there, and that we are treated as a resource extraction site."*

— Young person

### RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Establish a WA Regional Advisory Board to embed the voices of children, young people and their communities in WA's regional development, reporting to the Minister for Regional Development to ensure a whole-of-government response.

*Aligns with WA Youth Action Plan 2024-2027 1.6, 1.10, 1.12; WA Government Closing the Gap Implementation Plan 2023-2025 Strategic Element 2.*

2. Fund accessible, place-based mental health services for young people in regional and remote communities to address complex needs and reduce the strain on crisis services.

*Aligns with proposed Mental Health and Alcohol and Other Drugs Strategy 2025-2030 Priority 1 Focus Area 3, Priority 2 Focus Area 5, Priority 3 Focus Area 9, Priority 4 Focus Area 17; WA Government Closing the Gap Implementation Plan 2023-2025 Outcome 14.*

3. Expand investment in community-based and culturally secure sentencing alternatives, including On-Country Camps, alternative education, and AOD treatment, to provide developmentally appropriate supports for young people in regional communities.

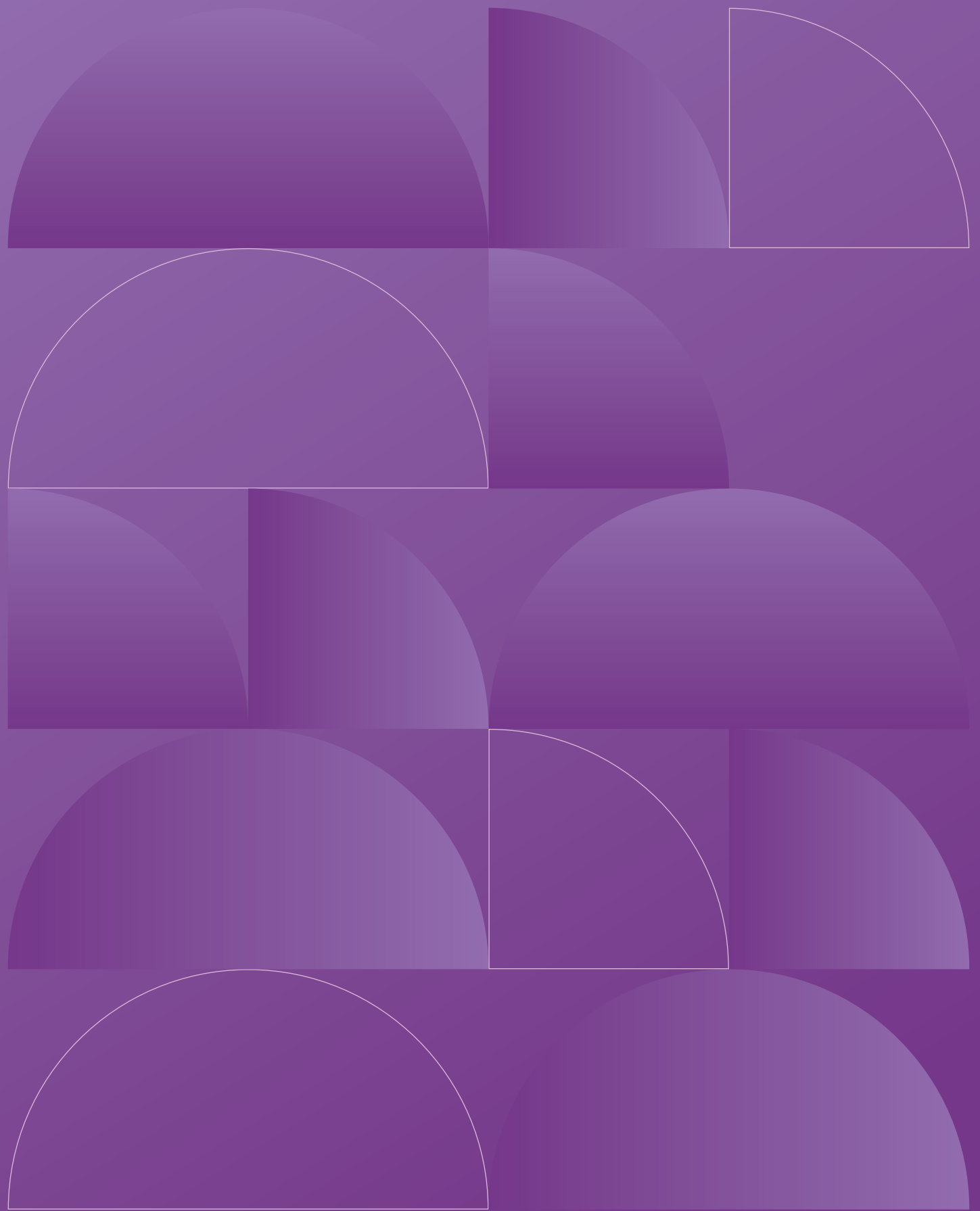
*Aligns with At Risk Youth Strategy 2022-2027 Focus Area 2 Priority Action 1; Corrective Services Strategic Plan 2025-2030 Priority 2 Focus 1, Focus 2; WA Government Closing the Gap Implementation Plan 2023-2025 Outcome 11.*

4. Ensure the At Risk Youth recommissioning process includes adequate funding to support the delivery of safe, culturally inclusive services for vulnerable young people, with targeted investment towards addressing the higher delivery costs in regional areas.

*Aligns with State Commissioning Strategy for Community Services Implementation Plan 2024-26 Priority 4, Priority 6.*

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