



# THE STATE OF THE YOUTH SECTOR FORUM

2019 Summary Report | YACWA



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YACWA acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as the Traditional Custodians of this land and its waters. We wish to pay our respect to Elders past and present and extend this to all Aboriginal people seeing this message.





# THE STATE OF THE YOUTH SECTOR

The State of the Youth Sector Forum is an annual event held by the Youth Affairs Council of Western Australia (YACWA). This State of the Youth Sector Forum was held on 1 August 2019 and gathered over 140 youth sector representatives from across Western Australia.

Western Australia's youth sector is built, primarily, on individuals. Despite persistent resource and funding scarcity, this sector has retained the critical asset of a motivated and passionate workforce of people wanting to see positive outcomes for Western Australia's young people.

Together, we aimed to develop a collective agenda for advocacy to support better outcomes for young people in our vast State.

**Photographer Acknowledgement:**

Susie Blatchford, Pixel Poetry

Sincerest thanks to Susie for her photography at the State of the Youth Sector Forum, and her continued support of YACWA and young people across Western Australia.

## WHO ATTENDED IN 2019?

Over 140 individuals attended the State of the Youth Sector Forum, representing over 70 service provider organisations. Attendees were a diverse mix of frontline service delivery workers, executive level managers and leaders, community service students as well as young people themselves.

A full list of organisations in attendance is provided in **Appendix A**.

## WHAT DID WE TALK ABOUT?

The event was structured around tackling the most urgent and impactful problems facing young West Australians today. Informed by YACWA's 2019 Member's Survey and national youth affairs research we covered a total of eight topics affecting the youth sector. These were:

EDUCATION

CHILD PROTECTION

EMPLOYMENT

YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

MENTAL HEALTH

YOUTH JUSTICE

ALCOHOL & OTHER DRUGS

HOUSING & HOMELESSNESS\*

*\*For analysis of the Housing & Homelessness discussion, please refer to the Youth Homelessness Action Plan by the WA Alliance to End Homelessness.*

## WHAT IS THE AIM OF THIS REPORT?

This report is intended as a companion piece to YACWA's annual Pre-Budget Submission document. Where the Pre-Budget Submission focuses closely on State Government levers to improve outcomes for young people, and the youth sector (i.e. government's financial and strategic decisions), this report aims to provide capacity-building and direction to the youth sector.

This report does not aim to provide an empirical or quantitative overview of the environment for young people, but instead aims to provide a snapshot of the dominant feelings, trends and perceptions of the WA youth sector.

While the feedback we received on the day has been supported with empirical evidence wherever possible, this report is less concerned with evidence and more concerned with a point-in-time representation of prevailing attitudes, feelings, and perceptions of the youth sector. By providing a space for these attitudes and expertise to be examined and heard, it is our intent to paint a clearer path forward to improving the capacity and connectivity of the youth sector.



# EDUCATION

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## OUR MANIFESTO

We believe education is not one-size-fits-all. Education is successful when it responds to the needs of the student, not the convenience of the system.

We value individualised learning system that reward engagement and wellbeing over educational attainment, and affording young people a voice in their education.

We're working to challenge standardised curriculum and testing, championing Aboriginal knowledge and science, advocating for youth work as a fundamental of wellbeing in healthy schools.

## AN EDUCATION SYSTEM THAT WORKS FOR ALL YOUNG PEOPLE

## STATE BUDGET IMPACTS

Overall, our State Government will invest \$22.1 billion into education between 2019–20 and 2022–23 (WA State Government, 2019). While much of this has gone to supporting business-as-usual, extra investment has focused on supporting enrolment growth and allowing our schools to manage our growing population, \$452.8 million was invested as part of this to support the construction of new schools and maintain existing ones.

Important developments in education investment relevant to the youth sector from the 2019/20 State Budget included:

- \$152.8 million over 2019-20 to 2020-21 to build nine new primary schools (in the Metropolitan region)
- \$77.4 million for secondary school redevelopment works
- \$38.3 million for infrastructure in regional schools
- \$40 million of additional funds to support students living with a disability in public schools
- \$3 million to install science labs in 51 primary schools across Western Australia
- \$1.9 million to support Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) opportunities for students.

Source: *Our State Budget 2019–20*

## WHAT WE ALREADY KNOW

Educational disadvantage is a national problem—many young Western Australians experience fewer access to quality schools, support services and overall lower academic achievement than the general student population<sup>v</sup>.

In 2018-19, 28.2 per cent of students across the public education system were at some level of attendance risk<sup>iv</sup>. For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, this statistic rose to 63.5%. Those at particular risk of educational disadvantage include regional and remote young people, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people, and young people from low socio-economic backgrounds<sup>v</sup>.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people are also disproportionately affected by educational disadvantage, with many regional areas having higher Aboriginal populations. Only 40 per cent of children in the most disadvantaged areas attended preschool for 15 or more hours a week, compared to a national average of 70 per cent. 46.7 per cent of children in disadvantaged areas did not have internet access at home. Remote areas such as Meekatharra, Roebuck and Halls Creek, all of which have high Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander populations, were among the most educationally disadvantaged communities in the State<sup>vi</sup>.

According to the latest Closing the Gap Progress Report, Australia is not on track to close the school attendance gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students. Western Australia in particular is not on track to meet two out of its three educational targets, with significant progress still to be made in improving school attendance and improving reading, writing and numeracy<sup>vii</sup>.

## WHAT WE HEARD FROM THE SECTOR

The sector felt that Western Australia's education system is not working for children and young people in our state. The prevailing approach to education is 'one-size-fits-all'—young people are expected to adapt to the rigid structures, inflexible learning styles and expectations of standardised testing that our education system is built around.

Key issues raised by the sector included:

- **Educational disengagement is rife, with schools unable to identify risk factors and respond to them.** Many young people fall through the cracks in our school system. Trauma, individual and family circumstances, and disadvantage are not appropriately addressed for many young people, and result in educational disengagement.
- **Teachers are a critical resource that are overburdened and underresourced.** Current class sizes, workloads and expectations are unreasonable, and make individualised education supports impossible to provide. Overburdened educators are a tension point on the system.
- **The education curriculum is not responsive to the desired skills of young people and our changing workforce.** Skills such as financial literacy, applying for jobs, and managing a changing work force are not embedded equally across educational institutions. Young people are exiting our schools lacking critical skills to foster their independence.
- **Young people are disempowered through a lack of opportunities to engage in decision-making around their education.** Attendees felt allowing young people to talk about, and prioritise, outcomes that mattered to them (such



as developing financial literacy) were important to ensuring young people left statutory education empowered to live their lives.

- **Support systems in schools are not accessed by young people and are not trusted.** While many schools do engage support workers, many of these (such as Chaplains) are not required to align with the Youth Work Code of Ethics, which prioritises the confidentiality and wellbeing of the young person as the primary client<sup>viii</sup>. The sector desired a more robust, youth-centred support system in schools, beginning with youth workers.

- **Engaging teachers, school staff and community members as partners in young people's education without placing strain on individuals.** We know the factors that can act as barriers to young people engaging in education: financial insecurity, poor nutrition, trauma, and disadvantage. The sector felt schools were, on the whole, open to partnering with community organisations to address these issues, but are often hampered by limited resources, standardised testing requirements, and difficulty retaining staff in order to engage with them long-term and make a lasting impact.

- **Improving the transition points of our education system.** Young people are at increased risk of disengagement at times of transition, including the move between school systems, into work, or higher education. The sector wanted to see educational supports strengthened at these junctions to ensure young people are being provided the supports they need to successfully re-engage.

#### **Including wellbeing and resilience within school environments and outcomes.**

- Fostering wellbeing and resilience in schools was considered a strong predictor of educational engagement. By investing in mindfulness, social connections and creativity, we may see broader educational outcomes.

## **SOLUTIONS FROM THE SECTOR**

The sector proposed many solutions to foster an education system that supported all young people. In order to achieve this, they wanted to see the following:

- **Research the essential skills required by the future of work for young people.** The sector felt that a shifting landscape will require new skills, but were unsure of which skills need to be priorities to meet this new landscape. Confusion around balancing technological and STEM skills with softer skills, such as critical thinking and analysis was noted.
- **Support earlier identification of educational disengagement for more effective solutions.** Discussions around early intervention highlighted the need for more effective ways of identifying educational disengagement before it becomes entrenched.
- **Reduce tension on teachers and educators.** The sector felt that many solutions proposed required increasing demands and responsibilities on already overburdened staff. They felt there was a need to ensure teachers can be leveraged to support better education outcomes without further contributing to this stress.



- **Increase investment in community programs to support families and improve the circumstances that affect educational engagement.** Our education system was seen as part of a larger system of inequality. While education is an enabler of lifelong outcomes, similar social determinants can thwart engagement, particularly financial instability. The sector suggested that educational programs alone cannot improve outcomes for vulnerable populations, and must be coupled with support for families to improve their security and capacity to support their children. This included:
  - Financial literacy, financial counselling and financial supports
  - Increasing access to social support payments
  - Food security and nutrition support
- **Increase supports for young people at transition points in the education system.** To prevent young people from disengaging at junctions between years, schooling systems and higher education. The sector suggested greater investment in wellbeing supports, with a focus on resilience and goal-setting. By providing young people with mentorship and motivation to re-engage, they felt these junctions could turn into points of strength.
- **Explore opportunities and innovative mechanisms for greater partnerships between service providers and schools.** Schools and service providers each possess unique strengths and resources that can lead to incredible outcomes if they are utilised. Partnerships with schools may support greater in-reach and out-reach services for students, as well as build the capacity of school staff to provide appropriate supports and referrals.
- **Undertake strategic planning between communities, youth service providers, and schools to address barriers to educational engagement.** This should:
  - Financial literacy, financial counselling and financial supports
  - Increasing access to social support payments
  - Food security and nutrition support
- **Increase supports for young people at transition points in the education system.** To prevent young people from disengaging at junctions between years, schooling systems and higher education. The sector suggested greater investment in wellbeing supports, with a focus on resilience and goal-setting. By providing young people with mentorship and motivation to re-engage, they felt these junctions could turn into points of strength.
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- **Undertake strategic planning between communities, youth service providers, and schools to address barriers to educational engagement.** This should:
  - Ensure the burdens of coordination and implementation are not placed on already strained education staff or not-for-profit organisations
  - Focus on community-level barriers that can be addressed through local coordination
  - Take advantage of community strengths and resources (e.g. through assets-based community development).

# EMPLOYMENT

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## OUR MANIFESTO

We believe that as a society we have the tools needed to end youth unemployment. We are calling for public, private, and community sector unity to provide those most vulnerable with the support and resources they need to gain stable and secure employment.

This means raising Youth Allowance, making education and vocational training more accessible, and providing direct pathways into paid employment. Together we can break down societal and institutional barriers to ensure every young person has the opportunity and support needed to gain employment and pursue their dreams.

## A UNITED APPROACH TO ENDING UNEMPLOYMENT

## STATE BUDGET IMPACTS

The 2019-20 State Budget contained little targeted investment in supporting youth employment. While many investment announcements focused on the creation of jobs, few of these related to young people who are often struggling with finding access to entry-level jobs that are relevant to their education. We also noted no targeted investment in employment supports (historically left to the Federal Government through initiatives such as the Youth Jobs PaTH program)<sup>x</sup>.

However, when discussing employment, the rising cost of living must be noted. Increases in essential service costs are creating pressure on those experiencing unemployment, in low-income jobs, or receiving social support payments (such as Newstart or Youth Allowance)<sup>x</sup>.

The 2019-20 State Budget saw a 2 per cent increase to the cost of living—the smallest increase in 13 years — amounting to an extra \$127.77 in expenses for the average household. However, between 2012 and 2018, the cost of living increased an average of 5.53 per cent, with little relief in the recent budget to address the ongoing impacts of these prior increases<sup>xi</sup>.

Increases in 2019-20 were:



1.75 per cent increase in electricity bills



2.5 per cent increase in water-related tariffs and charges



2 per cent increase in public transport fares



2.6 per cent increase in vehicle licence charges



2.7 per cent increase in the Emergency Services Levy

The State Government has also committed \$420,000 over three years to fund consumer research and representation activities, alongside engaging a dedicated advisor on consumer issues in the Public Utilities Office. The impacts of these remain to be seen.

Source: *Our State Budget 2019–20*

## WHAT WE ALREADY KNOW

Young people aged 15–24 make up 14.3 per cent of Western Australia's workforce of 1.4 million people. However, youth unemployment is persistently higher than the rest of the population. Currently, 14.5 per cent of young people are experiencing unemployment—a rate more than double that of the general population (6.3 per cent)<sup>xii</sup>.

The increases to cost of living expenses have been part of the State Government's plan to increase revenue and control expenditure, meaning low-income and disadvantaged families and young people have shouldered much of the economic burden of the State's poor financial situation.

Many of those hit hardest by rises in the cost of living are those receiving social support payments such as Newstart and Youth Allowance. Unfortunately, these payments have not seen an increase in real terms in over 25 years and are now wildly out-of-line with decades of cost of living increases<sup>xi</sup>.

The maximum fortnightly payment for an unemployed, single individual with no children on Youth Allowance is \$455.20 ("Youth Allowance for job seekers - How much you can get", n.d.). Modelling by WACOSS in their 2018 Cost of Living Report found an unemployed, single individual had unavoidable expenses \$13.27 higher than income from social payments like Youth Allowance and Newstart<sup>xiii</sup>.

This means young people receiving these payments are often struggling to make ends meet and are forced to sacrifice essentials just to pay rent. In fact, in March 2019 only three rental properties or share houses in the nation were considered to be affordable for a young person on Newstart or Youth Allowance<sup>xiv</sup>.

Efforts from the Federal Government to examine unemployment have been limited. Most notable developments are the continuation of the Youth Jobs PaTH Program, commitment to not raising social support payments such as Newstart and Youth Allowance, and a 2018 Federal Inquiry into the Future of Work and Workers<sup>xv</sup>.

In 2019, the Hon Bill Johnston MLA announced an Inquiry into Wage Theft in Western Australia. The Inquiry will examine the systematic and deliberate underpayment of wages or entitlements of workers in Western Australia, as well as potential legislative changes to address wage theft<sup>xvi</sup>.

## WHAT WE HEARD FROM THE SECTOR

The sector was clear that our employment system is outdated and has failed to adapt to modern workforce trends.

It was noted many of the levers required to shift employment outcomes long-term are held by the private sector and Federal Government relations. The role of the WA Youth Sector was suggested instead to focus on shifting local service frameworks and design to align with best practice and youth work, while maintaining robust advocacy at a state level. Key issues raised included:

- **Income insecurity and underemployment are being exacerbated by workforce trends towards casualisation.** Many young people struggle to find permanency in positions. Similarly, casualisation of the workforce is reducing young people's ability to take sick leave, paid holidays, and save through superannuation contributions—creating issues further down the line.



- **Employment services and supports are often out-of-step with current workforce trends.** The sector pointed towards online applications and relationships-based employment as critical elements of job seeking that young people are not being adequately skilled in through job services that fail to adapt to modernity.
- **Employment services with compliance frameworks are thwarting opportunities for young people to be matched with appropriate employment.** Many young people are required to meet strict requirements to continue to receive support — such as attending numerous appointments with case workers or completing a minimum number of job searches. The sector noted that young people can struggle to meet these requirements or otherwise fail to find value in their approach. These result in significant challenges in retaining young people and occur at the expense of matching young people with opportunities and skill development based on their needs and identified goals.
- **Social support payments are inadequate, and difficult for young people to obtain and maintain.** The current rate of Newstart and Youth Allowance is below the poverty line, resulting in significant hardship for those receiving them. Many young people have identified that the inadequacy of these payments creates barriers to stable employment — through health, mental health and transport difficulties. Requirements for a minimum number of job applications to continue receiving payments were also perceived as demeaning and counterproductive to young people already struggling below the poverty line.
- **Difficulty shifting the employment landscape.** The sector felt that there was strong understanding of what works to solve individual young people's employment troubles within the community sector, but limited knowledge of how the sector themselves can shift or advocate around the employment landscape at large. Availability of entry-level jobs, skill requirements of positions, and matching education to employability were areas cited as requiring greater capability and understanding within the sector to shift.
- **Unclear and/or harmful expectations held by employers and employees.** When discussing matching young people with employment opportunities, many attendees spoke of differences between the expectations of both young people and employers. Oftentimes, high expectations of employers around young people's skills, work hours, and availability created difficulties where young people felt these were unreasonable. Similarly, some spoke of young people who had limited understandings of expectations of professionalism and availability that made it difficult for them to maintain employment.
- **Uncertainty regarding the essential skills required by the changing work order.** The sector felt that a shifting landscape will require new skills—especially as young people navigate increasing casualisation of the workforce and the 'gig economy'—but were unsure of which skills need to be priorities to meet this new landscape. Confusion around balancing technological and STEM skills with softer skills, such as critical thinking and analysis was noted. *[NB: Duplicate from Education discussion.]*

## SOLUTIONS FROM THE SECTOR

To support all young people to maintain stable employment and financial security, the sector proposed the following solutions:

- **Develop clear guidance and direction for youth services to meet employment outcomes.** The sector has an appetite to collaborate with existing employment services and make an impact in employment outcomes, however many expressed they did not know what successful partnerships in this space might look like. The sector felt guidance on effective partnerships, data-sharing, and models of service would be beneficial to support a more joined-up approach between sectors. This should include consideration of:
  - Resourcing for youth services to meet and support employment outcomes
  - Resourcing for youth services to upskill and embed knowledge and referral pathways into employment services.
  - Requirements of service agreement deliverables and timeframes to undertake this collaboration.
- **Resource services outside of the realm traditionally considered ‘employment’ services to operate in this space.** The sector felt that many mental health and engagement services will yield employment outcomes if they are provided the time, resources and flexibility to make an impact. By supporting young people to identify goals, meet individual needs, and increase their capacity, many youth services can have strong impacts on young people’s employment status. The sector wanted to see this appropriately resourced and expanded, instead of acknowledged as simply a ‘flow-on’ effect of their service provision.
- **Embed person-centred, strengths-based approaches within employment services models.** It is critical that employment services are working to increase the capacity and wellbeing of young people by leveraging their strengths, in order to see results. The sector wanted person-centred approaches embedded within all employment services, and existing compliance frameworks shelved.
- **Improve data-sharing and linkage between employment services and relevant service providers to improve responses in local areas.** There is a wealth of data regarding employment opportunities, young people’s needs, and resources available. However currently this data is not widely shared between sectors or collated. By improving data sharing, we can support place-based responses to support young people’s employability. An example is tailoring skill workshops and training for young people in response to current job vacancies and skill deficiencies.
- **Examine the attitudes and expectations of young job-seekers and entrylevel employers to inform service design and employment service referrals.** This research should:
  - Be locally-relevant;
  - Focus on barriers and enablers of positive work placements;
  - Potentially contribute to resources for young people and/or potential employers to ease transitions into employment for young people;
  - Be informed by employee/employer rights and entitlements;
  - Determine common understandings between employers and young job-seekers, with a focus on supporting employment placements. Be locally-relevant;
  - Focus on barriers and enablers of positive work placements;
  - Potentially contribute to resources for young people and/or potential employers to ease transitions into employment for young people;
  - Be informed by employee/employer rights and entitlements;
  - Determine common understandings between employers and young job-seekers, with a focus on supporting employment placements.
- **Youth advocacy organisations and peaks—such as YACWA—advocate for significant change within Federal employment initiatives.** This should:
  - Specifically advocate for changes within the JobActive and Youth Jobs PaTH programs to move away from compliance frameworks and adopt person-centred, strengths-based approaches to build their capacity.
  - Draw on the needs, attitudes and aspirations of young people (such as through the above recommended research).

# MENTAL HEALTH



## OUR MANIFESTO

We believe that when we invest in connection, community, and spirit, we invest in mental health. We're working to transform our siloed mental health system and create society that looks beyond the symptoms and the human being.

We stand united in championing equality, collaboration, and reconciliation as cornerstone of wellbeing and suicide prevention. Our goals are greater investment in prevention and community supports, ensuring interventions that are trauma-informed, and balancing our system economically and morally.

## YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH BROADER THAN ONE SECTOR

## STATE BUDGET IMPACTS

Mental health investment remains stable year-to-year, receiving an overall investment of \$942 million in 2019-20 (an increase of \$23.7 million or 2.6%). As a result, new spending is fairly limited.

Important developments in mental health investment relevant to the youth sector from the 2019/20 State Budget included:

- \$22.4 million over two years to establish four new Step Up Step Down services
- \$15.6 million to establish a 20-bed adult mental health unit at Fremantle Hospital
- \$8.1 million for the continuation of the state-wide suicide prevention strategy,
- Suicide Prevention 2020: Together we can save lives \$4.9 million to establish a mental health emergency centre at St John of God Midland Hospital

- \$3.5 million for the establishment of Recovery Colleges
- \$3 million additional funding for the decommissioning of the Graylands Hospital site

Other key elements relevant to mental health in the 2019/2020 budget included:

- A 38% cut to prevention spending through to 2022-23
- No new investment to support priority populations at greater risk of mental illness, trauma, and suicide
- Acknowledgement of significant strategic planning underway within the Mental Health Commission, including:
  - o The Draft Accommodation and Support Strategy
  - o The Mental Health, Alcohol and Other Drug Workforce Strategic Framework 2019-2025
  - o A new suicide prevention strategy to replace the current Suicide Prevention 2020

Source: *Our State Budget 2019-20*

## WHAT WE ALREADY KNOW

We know mental health is an issue of great concern for young people. For the first time in its 16-year history, Mission Australia's 2018 Annual Youth Survey found mental health was the number one issue of concern across all States and Territories<sup>i</sup>.

Mental health investment in Western Australia is driven by the Western Australian Mental Health, Alcohol and Other Drug Services Plan 2015-2025 (the Plan). Developed through sophisticated modelling and community consultation, the Plan provided an investment road map for the mental health and alcohol and other drug sectors to meet current and future needs of the WA population<sup>xvii</sup>.

The Plan strongly recommended a greater investment in prevention and early intervention services to help people stay healthy and well before needing costlier crisis-end services. Recent years have seen rising concerns that the Plan's investment recommendations are not being adhered to by the State Government ("Mental health budget 2019", 2019; Western Australian Council of Social Service, 2019).

The Mental Health Commission is also guided in policy and funding decisions by Suicide Prevention 2020: Together we can save lives<sup>xviii</sup>. Released in 2015, funding for this document was due to expire in 2019, but received continuation funding while a new Suicide Prevention 2025 Action Plan is developed. This new Action Plan is currently under development<sup>xix</sup>.

## WHAT WE HEARD FROM THE SECTOR

Youth mental health is an emotive topic in Western Australia. High suicide rates, particularly among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, often lead to passionate and difficult discussions around how to respond and heal communities.

The sector acknowledged, in the face of these discouraging facts regarding mental health and suicide, that Western Australia has seen some successes in mental health in recent years.

Mental health stigma reduction efforts have made in-roads, investment continues to remain steady and community conversations regarding mental health have become commonplace. Young people, in particular, are accessing mental health supports with greater frequency and less shame than in the past.

Key issues raised by the sector included:

- **Many mainstream mental health services struggle to provide culturally responsive services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people.** Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people face disproportionately high rates of mental illness and suicide. Many mainstream services such as headspace face difficulty providing culturally appropriate services within their existing service frameworks and service agreements. Common service elements such as reception desks, waiting lists and rigid diagnostic criteria were cited as barriers to Aboriginal young people's engagement. The sector wanted to see greater flexibility in service design, and ongoing partnership with Aboriginal young people, communities and elders to build trust and shape services to be appropriate.



- **Young people are presenting with increasing frequency and severity of mental health problems.** The sector felt young people experiencing chronic suicidality and severe mental health issues are presenting to youth services with increasing frequency<sup>1</sup>. In particular, the sector noted this was disproportionately impacting:

  - o Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people
  - o Young people from diverse backgrounds
  - o LGBTQIA+ young people, particularly those in regional areas
  - o Young people living with a disability
  - o Younger people under 18
- **Insufficient funding for mental health prevention and early intervention services is creating pressure on other services.** Despite a clear roadmap for funding and service balance, the lack of investment from the State Government is directly impacting young people. Without appropriate prevention and early intervention services, the sector felt young people are entering into crisis-end services at higher rates, and with issues that could have been supported and managed at earlier points.
- **Regional young people lack local service provision.** Many young people in regional areas — such as the Pilbara, South West and Goldfields—lack appropriate mental health support. Those that are able to receive it, often do so only by travelling significant distances to regional hubs. In these cases, many young people are then removed from their support networks critical to their recovery and wellbeing.
- **Many young people are experiencing trauma from crisis services.** Young people experiencing suicidal ideation are often directed to present at emergency departments for support and to guarantee their safety. However, many young people are reporting their experiences at emergency departments as traumatising, harmful and discouraging future help-seeking. There is a need to ensure these services provide a therapeutic environment that aids recovery and does not discourage future engagement.
- **The efficacy of current mental health awareness and stigma reduction efforts for young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds is not well understood.** The sector raised that young people from these backgrounds are often forgotten, or their voices not appropriately considered in the development of mental health services and information campaigns. The sector questioned what effect broad population campaigns such as Think Mental Health have had on young people from multicultural backgrounds and their families, and how they can be improved.
- **The impact of Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) on mental health and service presentation.** The sector felt the true impact of FASD on mental health is still under-researched. We need to understand how many young people are presenting to mental health services with undiagnosed FASD, how existing services can integrate FASD-appropriate support to the mental health sector through appropriate training and skills to identify and support needed by young people with FASD.
- **Intersections with the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS).** The continued roll-out of the NDIS is still yet to be understood. The intersection between disability and mental health is well-known, however the practical implications for how the NDIS can be used to leverage access to mental health supports and services remains to be seen. Similarly, referral pathways are continuing to be established and streamlined.



## SOLUTIONS FROM THE SECTOR

Mental health was seen as needing to shift its focus radically from mental illness to wellbeing and strength. In order to guide us to a strengths-based, person-centred approach, the sector wanted to see the following:

- **Guide future investment to meet the established prevention funding targets of the Mental Health, Alcohol and Other Drugs (MHAOD) Services Plan.** Advocacy was a critical component of this and was argued must be a priority for organisations in the coming years.
- **Increase training for professionals and para-professionals working with young people.** This included particular note of workers in emergency departments and educational settings.
- **Incorporate mental health into the school curriculum** — from awareness and identification, to early intervention and self-care.
- **United advocacy from the youth sector to the State Government** to support funding changes necessary to make an impact in persistent problems.  
This should include:
  - o ensuring funding aligns to the MHAOD Services Plan and prioritises increases towards prevention and early intervention services
  - o appropriate evaluation resourcing and timelines built into service agreements
  - o appropriate resourcing for mainstream mental health services to meaningfully engage and partner with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to ensure they are culturally appropriate
- **Improved dissemination of mental health training courses with positive reception from young people**, including SafeTALK, Strong Spirit Strong Mind, ASIST, Red Dust Healing and Deadly Thinking.
- **Appropriate mental health training to be provided to staff at critical intersections where young people are currently falling through the gaps.**  
Key workers and sectors to target are:
  - o Education staff
  - o Emergency department staff
  - o General Practitioners
  - o Community para-professionals
- **Increased focus from service providers on providing young people input into service design and delivery.** Youth participation models are critical to designing services that are relevant and effective, especially in mental health where many invisible and culturally-relevant barriers can be established unchallenged. Resourcing service providers to engage young people meaningfully and empower them in the process, including:
  - o Identification of service barriers and opportunities to overcome them
  - o Promotion of mental health and wellbeing over the absence of mental illness
  - o Opportunities for framing wellbeing and mental health in creative and ‘fun’ ways.

# ALCOHOL & OTHER DRUGS



## OUR MANIFESTO

We believe that addressing alcohol and other drug harm is about addressing hurt disconnection and trauma. We believe in not punishing people for their relationship with alcohol and drugs and connecting them with supports they need to recover.

We champion trauma-informed, community focused practice that tears down barriers for support and wellbeing.

We are working together for a Western Australia that has ended drug-related harm.

## SUPPORT AND CONNECTION ARE AT THE HEART OF SUCCESS

## STATE BUDGET IMPACTS

Alcohol and Other Drug (AOD) investment in this budget was a big focus, with a large investment put towards tackling methamphetamine usage and harm. Important developments in AOD investment relevant to the youth sector from the 2019/20 State Budget included:

- An additional \$42.5 million for actions under the Methamphetamine Action Plan, bringing investment to a total of \$244.8 million. Major activities included:
  - o \$20.1 million towards the North West Drug and Alcohol Support Program
  - o \$9.2 million towards a youth alcohol and other drug service in the Kimberley
  - o \$7.1 million to establish withdrawal crisis centres and beds in Midland and the Kimberley
  - o \$1.05 million for alcohol and other drug education programs in schools
  - o \$631,000 to expand the Transitional Housing and Support Program
- o \$614,000 towards training for alcohol and other drug frontline workers (including psychologists, social workers and counsellors)
- o \$457,000 for a Meth Peer Education Program focusing on harm reduction
- o \$200,000 to plan for the expansion of the Mental Health Police Co-Response program into regional areas
- \$6.5 million in statewide funding for the Aboriginal Community Connectors program, aiming to improve community safety and reduce community consequences of Alcohol and Other Drugs.
- 12 Aboriginal residential rehabilitation beds and three low medical withdrawal beds in the South West.
- \$3.5 million for the establishment of Recovery Colleges.

Source: *Our State Budget 2019-20*

## WHAT WE ALREADY KNOW

Alcohol and other drug use service investment is closely related to mental health spending in Western Australia. Recognising the high comorbidity and interrelation between the sectors in 2014, the Mental Health Commission amalgamated with the former Drug and Alcohol Office, bringing investment and activity under the same agency<sup>xx</sup>.

Between 1997 and 2017, Western Australian students reporting the use of at least one illicit drug in their lifetime declined 40.7%, averaging at less than one-in-five students<sup>xxi</sup>. The number of students who reported use of an illicit drug within the past 12 months correspondingly dropped from 36.6% of students aged 12 to 17 years to 16.1% of students. Despite this, we know AOD use is still causing massive harm in Western Australia, with more than 19,400 hospitalisations attributable to alcohol in 2014<sup>xxii</sup>.

Recent media reporting and State Government policy has focused on the use and impact of methamphetamines ('ice') in Western Australia. Despite a slight reduction in methamphetamine usage in Western Australia between 2007 (4.2% of the population) and 2016 (2.7% of the population), the rate of usage remains higher than the national average at 2.7% of the population<sup>xxiii</sup>.

In previous budgets, methamphetamine investment has focused on law enforcement and supply reduction, of which YACWA has urged caution to ensure that individuals are not unfairly entering into the justice system.

In 2017, the State Government committed to developing an integrated Methamphetamine Action Plan (MAP), guided by the advice of an independent Methamphetamine Action Plan Taskforce. The Taskforce noted strong links between

family environments and future drug misuse among young people<sup>xxiii</sup>.

The State Government released their response to the Taskforce's recommendations in 2019. The response primarily focuses on education programs, community support, and harm reduction initiatives, with many of these noted in the State Budget Impacts section above<sup>xxiv</sup>.

## WHAT WE HEARD FROM THE SECTOR

The sector was clear that we are in the midst of a vicious cycle, with effective services and lasting outcomes stymied by the broader environment they are operating in. Rising inequality and the cycle of trauma are influencing more young people to use alcohol and other drugs, or otherwise make changes to their lifestyle to maintain rehabilitation.

The sector was clear that a holistic response is required to achieve long-term outcomes. Support for young people with alcohol and other drug issues cannot occur within AOD services alone, but requires broader change within other systems and spheres where young people live, work and play.

Key issues raised by the sector included:

- **Limited investment in prevention services and strategy.** Despite a clear roadmap for funding and service balance, the lack of investment from the State Government is directly impacting young people. Without appropriate prevention and early intervention services, the sector felt young people are entering into crisis-end services at higher rates, and with issues that could have been supported and managed at earlier points.



- **Young people face significant barriers to accessing community supports.** The sector has seen many young people struggle to meet the access requirements of services they need. Requirements for drug testing, sobriety, and referral barriers often make it difficult for those with the most severe issues to engage with services.
- **Young people are presenting with increasing complexity of AOD issues.** The sector felt there was a general trend of increasing complexity from young people and the supports they required to achieve positive outcomes. Complex referral pathways and intersections with trauma, homelessness and mental health are creating additional pressure on our services.
- **Insufficient youth AOD services in regional and remote areas.** The AOD sector is considered to be highly metropolitan-focused. Young people in regional and rural areas are often forced to travel long distances away from family and friends to receive support. A particular need for increased AOD services was noted in Hedland and the Pilbara.
- **Limited culturally appropriate support for Aboriginal young people.** Ensuring culturally appropriate support is available for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people, including access to indigenous staff was noted. The sector is hearing from many young Aboriginal people that they want support from other Aboriginal people, with strong understandings of culture and their experiences.
- **Collaboration with the mental health sector to improve supports and pathways between services.** The sector felt there is a need to investigate links with mental health services and improve responses for individuals experiencing comorbid mental health and AOD issues. Exploring improved co-located services and referral processes, as well as innovation in service design are priorities.
- **Improved responses and training for staff within emergency departments.** The sector is seeing young people reluctant to engage with emergency departments in times of crisis for AOD issues, citing experiences of stigma, discrimination, and poor assistance. Discussing with young people and emergency services staff their experiences and knowledge is a priority in order to ensure this critical avenue of support is available and effective for young people.



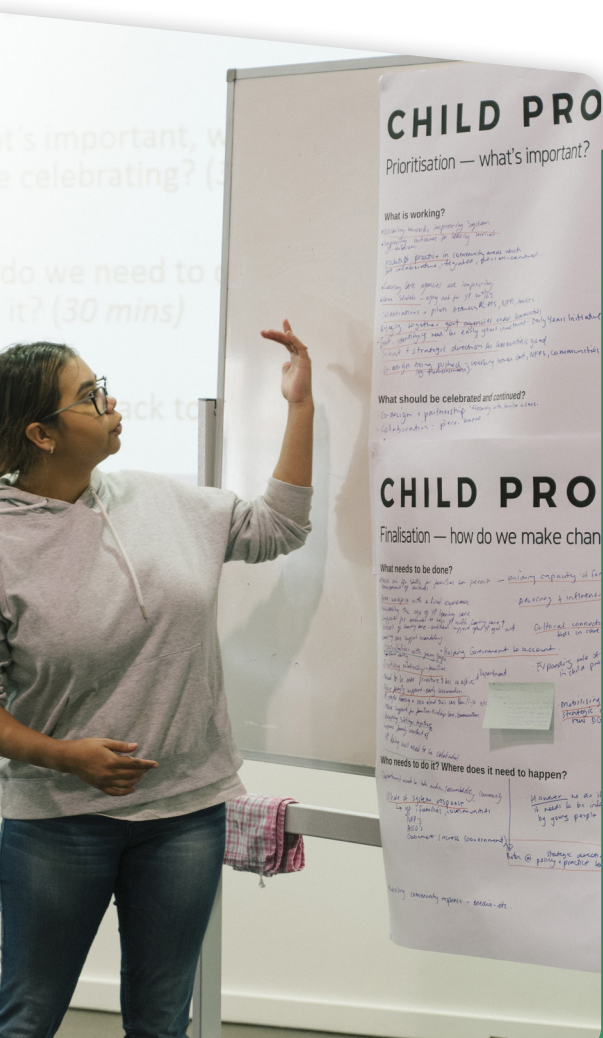
## SOLUTIONS FROM THE SECTOR

The sector proposed the following solutions in order to ensure young people are receiving the support they need:

- **Increase support for young people transitioning from intensive support to community.** This was considered a critical transition point for young people with experience of AOD usage and harm. Social connections and engagement in regular activities were considered paramount to successful transition and community reintegration.
- **Improve transparency and communication of waiting lists and requirements for young people to access services.** Young people attending the forum expressed how demoralising it had been to seek support, only to be faced with long waiting lists and little communication around the reasons for the delays. They hoped services could improve their communication, and build trust with young people through this.
- **Value peer support in the AOD sector.** The youth sector is hearing from young people that they value the advice and experiences of their peers. The sector wants to see peer support enshrined within services and supports, and co-designed with young service users.
- **Establish dedicated youth wings within all-age AOD services.** Many of the young people present indicated that their experiences being co-located with adults in AOD services had been distressing. The sector considered young people and adults to have different needs in AOD rehabilitative services, and noted that the same model used for adults will not always translate to a youth population. They wanted to ensure all youth services are fit-for-purpose.
- **Increase focus within advocacy on ensuring State Government funding decisions align with the Mental Health Alcohol and Other Drugs Services Plan.** The sector wanted to see the directions of these documents adhered to, and felt the best tool available was strong advocacy from its peak body. They urged that this should occur in partnership with mental health and alcohol and other drug peaks, and not occur in isolation.



# CHILD PROTECTION



## OUR MANIFESTO

We believe in the right of every young person to live safely and have a home.

We know that if we invest in early intervention, family mediation, and in providing young people with a strong and nurturing support network well into adulthood, we can ensure more young people have safe and happy lives.

We are working to ensure connections to family and culture are maintained without exception, to support young people to achieve whatever their life goals are, and to address the factors that lead many to enter the Child Protection System.

**SUPPORT AND CONNECTION ARE AT THE HEART OF SUCCESS**

## STATE BUDGET IMPACTS

Important developments in child protection investment relevant to the youth sector from the 2019/20 State Budget included:

- A significant increase in investment for Care Arrangements and Support Services for children in care— from \$401m in 2019/20 to \$448m in 2022/23.
- No significant increase or growth planning for the Earlier Intervention and Family Support Services. This item is receiving increases of only \$2.9 million going from \$81.3m in 2018/19 to \$84.2m in 2022/23.
- Limited detail about investment towards addressing the high number of Aboriginal children in the out-of-home-care system.

## WHAT WE ALREADY KNOW

Children and young people in our care system require many of the same supports and services that all young people need—love, affection, stability, and security. However, our care system is often failing to provide young people with these basic needs. Further, experiences of trauma and harm mean that young people in care often require more intensive transitional support and wrap-around services.

As at 30 June 2019, 5,379 young people were in the Western Australian care system, 54.69% of whom were Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander children<sup>xxv</sup>.

The number and proportion of Aboriginal children in care continues to increase at a higher rate than the available placement options with Aboriginal carers or relatives. The Department of Child Protection and Family Support's 2016-2019 Strategic Plan outlines their priorities to reduce

the over-representation, and better meet the needs of Aboriginal children and families in the child protection system.

In May 2019, the Department of Communities began the process to develop and implement of a targeted 'Home Stretch' trial to provide enhanced support to vulnerable young people between the ages of 18 and 21 who are transitioning from out-of-home care however this was planned with a very small cohort of young people raising concerns it may not be a representative sample of the impact that raising the leaving care age could have on the wider care population<sup>xxvi</sup>.

Many young people leaving State care are more likely to be impacted by unemployment, homelessness and low educational outcomes, therefore responding to these challenges through assisting young people to develop their independent living skills is critical to ensure that they are able to reach their potential<sup>xxvii</sup>.





## WHAT WE HEARD FROM THE SECTOR

Key issues raised by the sector included:

- **Young people in care are disempowered by a lack of choice in their care arrangements and planning.** Our care system is not engaging young people in their planning meaningfully, often leading to feelings of disempowerment. The sector is hearing more and more of young people's stories of how their lack of agency has negatively affected their mental health and future engagement with supports.
- **Significant overrepresentation of Aboriginal children and young people.** Aboriginal young people continue to be significantly overrepresented in our care system, and require culturally appropriate supports and pathways through care. The sector was clear that reconciliation is a pathway towards addressing the overrepresentation of Aboriginal young people in care. Only by removing the structural drivers of trauma and disconnection can this be remedied.
- **Young people in the care system are exiting into new systems, and not into communities.** Difficulties with our state's leaving care process are causing young people to exit care without sufficient supports and readiness. As a result, many young people are entering into homelessness services, mental health services, alcohol and other drugs support programs and the justice system.
- **Policy direction and intention is not translating into consistent practice.** The sector supported the State Government's Leaving Care Policy<sup>xxviii</sup>, but are rarely seeing it adhered to, resulting in young people leaving care without the overburdened case workers and limited resourcing, rather than cultural problems within the Department of Communities.
- **The impact of the current child protection system on trauma among young people is unclear.** It is clear that our child protection system is not working for every young person. The sector wanted to understand the longterm impacts of this trauma in order to improve ongoing supports.
- **Young people leaving care without connections to supports or leaving care services.** The sector noted that many young people leave care without supports, and often fall into crisis services. The sector wanted to ensure that every young person who leaves care is connected with the services they are entitled to, and to see research into how many young people presenting existing youth services were formerly in care.



## SOLUTIONS FROM THE SECTOR

The sector proposed the following solutions to prevent young people from entering the Child Protection system, and better support those currently within it:

- **Support Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs) to have an ongoing and valued role within the child protection system.** The sector is clear that ACCOs provide valuable services within the child protection system and peripheral supports. Moving forward, continued partnership with ACCOs and an intentional expansion of their resourcing is needed to ensure Aboriginal young people in care are receiving expert, culturally secure supports.
- **Build capacity of Department of Communities and service provider staff in trauma-informed care.** Providing capacity building support and services for community organisations within the sector is vital. Understanding of trauma and trauma-informed care, complex family units and systems, as well as collaboration were all cited as areas in which the community sector required sustained upskilling and support.

- **Clarify responsibility and increase accountability for young people's wellbeing within the child protection system.** The Child Protection system is a complex beast, with multiple moving parts throughout the Department of Communities and contracted service providers. To prevent young people from being 'handballed', the sector wished to see accountability and responsibilities clearly outlined in a guiding document for the system.
- **Improved information for young people on their rights, pathways and available services.** Many young people with a care experience feel they have little understanding of their entitlements or available options and pathways. The sector wanted to see resources and supports for young people in the child protection system be co-designed with young people to ensure they are utilising the supports available to them.



# YOUTH JUSTICE

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## OUR MANIFESTO

We believe in a society with justice unmotivated by class, race, or prejudice. That we can't talk about justice without truth as our starting point and reconciliation as our finish line. A system of justice that goes beyond managing crime, and creates communities where crime is a thing of the past — that's our goal. Our ways of working are collaborative, culturally-informed, and non punitive.

By devolving power to communities, investing in relationships, and dismantling systems that unfairly punish those doing it tough, we're creating a society where prisons will be a thing of the past.

**EVERYONE HAS THE RIGHT TO BE  
HAPPY, VALUE AND SAFE**

## STATE BUDGET IMPACTS

Justice investment has focused closely on increased supports and resources for prisons and police. While there has been some investment in engagement and prevention, we're yet to see the significant shift in approach to smart justice approaches the sector has been advocating for.

Important developments in youth justice investment relevant to the youth sector from the 2019/20 State Budget included:

- \$900,000 to develop a Kimberley Juvenile Justice Strategy in partnership with the Kimberley Aboriginal Law and Cultural Centre

- \$24.5 million for 'Digital Policing' grants,
- \$7 million to support the sustainability of regional Police and Community Youth Centres (PCYCs)
- \$4 million in sustainability funding for PCYCs, including a new Kununurra PCYC
- Limited investment in community co-designed place-based solutions and ACCOs.
- No mention of Banksia Hill Detention Centre.

## WHAT WE ALREADY KNOW

Youth justice in Western Australia has made little progress in recent years, despite repeated calls from YACWA for significant overhaul to this broken system.

In 2017–18, an average of 787 young people each day were under youth justice supervision. The majority of young people (81%) were under community management, as opposed to being held in detention. In this same period, each day an average of 51% of young people in detention had yet to receive a sentence. This was either because they had been found guilty and were awaiting sentencing or because they were awaiting the outcome of an ongoing court process<sup>xxxix</sup>.

It must be noted that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people face vastly worse outcomes in youth justice in comparison to the general youth population. In 2017–18, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people were 27 times more likely than non-indigenous young people to be under supervision orders, and 38 times more likely to be held in detention<sup>xxxix</sup>. At 30 June 2019, 75.6% of young people held in detention were Aboriginal<sup>xxxix</sup>. WA has the highest rates of disproportionate incarceration in the nation. It is clear that these statistics are driven by the historical and yet ongoing issues of dispossession, racism and trauma associated with colonisation.

WA has only one youth detention centre, Banksia Hill, located in the Perth Metropolitan area. Banksia Hill has been plagued with problems in recent history. Allegations of human rights abuses and degrading treatment of young people have

arisen<sup>xxxi</sup>. In response, the Office of the Inspector of Custodial Services (OICS) has undertaken a number of reviews into Banksia Hill.

The most recent of these reviews, published in August 2018, found the Centre provided poor quality education services, limited access to programs, services and counselling, and required significant improvements. However, other allegations of human rights abuses were found to be unsubstantiated<sup>xxxii</sup>. Behaviour management practices at Banksia Hill were further found to be inconsistent and ineffective, resulting from failures to implement trauma-informed care. Conflicts between staff practice and management decisions, limitations of the single detention centre system, and low staff morale were all cited as contributing factors<sup>xxxiii</sup>.

In 2018, research found nine out of 10 young people in detention had a severe form of neurodevelopmental impairment, and more than one in three were assessed to have foetal alcohol spectrum disorder (FASD)<sup>xxxiv</sup>. Despite contact with multiple government agencies and services, the majority of these young people were undiagnosed.

The State Government has set reducing youth reoffending as one of its key priorities, aiming to ensure no more than 50% of young people return to detention within two years of release<sup>xxxv</sup>. In 2017/18, 58.7% of young people leaving detention in Western Australia returned within two years. These current levels of re-incarceration incur unsustainable costs on the State. In 2018/19, the average cost of keeping just one detainee in custody was \$1,019 per day—compared to just \$83 per day for young people managed through community supervision<sup>xxxvi</sup>.



## WHAT WE HEARD FROM THE SECTOR

Youth justice is plagued by stigma, with media reporting often demonising this vulnerable cohort of young people. Stories of human rights abuses, unfair systems, and racism are common threads heard by the sector.

Key issues raised by the sector included:

- **Untenable over-representation of Aboriginal young people within our justice system and detention services.** The sector noted the inherent racism of our justice system, with Aboriginal young people receiving unduly harsh sentences. They also noted the lack of an Aboriginal voice within our justice system, and wanted to see greater involvement of Aboriginal communities in offender management.
- **Stigmatisation of young people and young offenders within the community.** Like all of us, young people require connections and compassion in order to thrive. However, these connections are thwarted by a predominant narrative that young people in the justice system are immoral and armful.
- **Lack of political courage to embrace community-based approaches.** The sector felt our justice system needs a new approach, such as that spearheaded by Social Reinvestment WA. However, they noted that the greatest barrier towards community-investment is political, with a fear of being seen as soft on crime or compromising community safety.



## SOLUTIONS FROM THE SECTOR

To address these issues, the sector suggested the following solutions:

- **Shift the focus of offender management to quality of service and rehabilitation.** The sector feels funding is currently determining the schedules and quality of support provided to young people. The sector wanted to focus on ensuring young people's individual needs are what determines their supports, with funding appropriately matched to this.
- **Ensure Aboriginal people and communities have a powerful voice into improving our justice system.** In order to ensure we are supporting Aboriginal young people, we must ensure Aboriginal communities are afforded power and authority in improving our approaches. This voice cannot be tokenistic, and must be authorised to make meaningful change.
- **Strengthen ongoing supports for young people after they leave detention or community-based management.** The sector wished to see young people set up to succeed following detention or community management. The importance of providing ongoing supports, establishing positive relationships within the community, and working with young people to set goals were emphasised. The sector wished to see these funded and implemented in partnership with Banksia Hill Detention Centre staff and existing youth services.
- **Youth justice that builds therapeutic and supportive relationships.** The sector wanted to see, especially within youth detention at Banksia Hill, relationships enshrined within its service model. Relationships with youth workers, mentors, and community organisations were viewed as critical for young people to feel supported and achieve lasting outcomes.
- **Greater valuing of peer supports.** Young people and youth workers alike felt that with the right supports and training, young people with lived experience could be critical navigators and supports.
- **Equality between adult and youth justice services** Transitional supports back to the community, such as day-release, were noted to be inadequate within the youth justice system. The sector wanted to see these transitions and ongoing supports strengthened.



# YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

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## OUR MANIFESTO

We believe in the value of young people now—not in the future. We believe young people should be involved in every strategy we develop, every youth centre we build, and every service model we prototype.

We value young people's contributions and expertise by relinquishing control, compensating their time, and meeting them on their terms. We're working together to ensure that any program or services designed for young people is done so by properly engaging those who will be accessing them.

We're working towards a society that truly values the voices, experiences, and ideas of young people.

## WHAT WE ALREADY KNOW

Western Australia's environment of youth engagement is developing at a rapid pace. Increasingly, we're seeing decision-makers recognise the value of young people's expertise when it comes to their own affairs.

In December 1990, Australia ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child stating that young people have a right to be meaningfully involved in the decisions that affect them<sup>xxxvii</sup>. However beyond fulfilling our human rights obligations, we know that young people's involvement in youth programs and relevant policy makes the programs and policies stronger and more effective.

The language of co-design is also well-embedded within our policy landscape. Several highlevel documents from the State Government—such as the WA Youth Health Policy 2018–2023—have embedded youth voices in their design<sup>xxxviii</sup>. In 2016, the then Department of Local Government and Communities published a Youth Participation Kit to guide young people and organisations in youth participation processes<sup>xxxix</sup>.

Since 2017, the Department of Communities has been leading the development of Western Australia's first state-wide youth strategy. To support its development, YACWA hosted a state-wide youth summit in December 2017, hearing the voices and ideas of more than 100 young people, as well as a dedicated State of the Youth Sector Forum mid-2018 to provide comment on the Better Choices: Youth in WA discussion paper<sup>xl</sup>.

The WA Youth Strategy will fill a critical gap in State Government policy direction. Portfolios impacting young people are currently managed by multiple departments, with no clear strategic or policy directive for these Departments to collaborate and communicate on their relevant youth activities.

Similar jurisdictions—such as Queensland—have published whole-of-government youth strategies, tying together disparate portfolios such as health, education, housing and

employment, under one document. Initial feedback suggests this has provided significant direction to youth services and activities and authorised increased collaboration and engagement between departments<sup>xli</sup>.

YACWA has continually advocated for the WA Youth Strategy strategy to take a similar approach to the Queensland Strategy, and for it to enshrine youth-led engagement processes within all relevant portfolios<sup>xlii</sup>. 2019 saw significant success with the establishment of a cross-government Youth Strategy Design Team, with representatives from education, mental health, justice, and other portfolios supporting the Department of Communities.

## WHAT WE HEARD FROM THE SECTOR

Key issues raised by the sector included:

- **Youth consultation is frequently branded as co-design.** The youth sector is often seeing traditional consultative methods of youth engagement outwardly branded as co-design, despite not adhering to its methodology. The sector wanted to see co-design more accurately represented as a process, and the resource and timeframes it requires openly acknowledged and discussed by stakeholders.
- **Meaningful youth engagement is not resourced appropriately.** The youth sector felt there is a misperception regarding the resourcing required by codesign. To effectively divest power to young people, co-design requires reasonable resourcing, flexibility in process, and appropriate timeframes. Where these limitations are set by services themselves, this requires communication to leadership and their buy-in to the process. Where they are set by government (such as through service agreements), it is often difficult to negotiate.





- **Engaging diverse young people is difficult without resorting to tokenistic practices.** Engagement practices often target the same populations of young people, limiting the diversity of experiences and advice services receive. When trying to target less engaged populations of young people, the sector felt they had difficulty avoiding tokenistic practices that did not truly value and empower the young people they sought to engage.
- **Those most in need of support are often the hardest to engage.** Many young people who are experiencing extreme hardship, such as substance abuse and homelessness, can face difficulty in accessing services that can help them. High service thresholds and eligibility criteria—such as requirements to abstain from drug use or accept counselling—can prevent these individuals from receiving services that could support them to build their capacity to make lasting changes in their lives. The sector wanted to ensure these individuals could fulfill their basic needs and develop relationships with service providers, rather than remain disengaged.

## SOLUTIONS FROM THE SECTOR

The sector proposed the following solutions to embed meaningful youth engagement in their affairs:

- **Upskill stakeholders in youth engagement and dispel myths around codesign.** With youth consultation often branded as co-design, the sector suggested targeted advocacy promoting the realities and benefits of codesign and

empowerment models of youth engagement. They raised the need to promote organisational flexibility in funding and timeframes as critical, as willing staff members with unwilling executives often results in rushed or unsuccessful engagement processes.

- **Embed youth engagement within funding and service agreements.** The sector views youth engagement as a critical and non-negotiable element of service design and continuous improvement that must be acknowledged in all procurement processes for youth services and activities. This was seen as a step towards a cultural shift where meaningful youth engagement is a standard among youth services and no longer considered a luxury.
- **Utilise the stability of Local Government Associations (LGAs).** The continuity of LGAs in service provision is an asset to be utilised in an oft-tenuous sector. LGAs have the ability to build long-term relationships and recognition among young people, and could provide links between and youth services seeking to promote the availability of their services or otherwise engage young people in meaningful activities.
- **Improve communication of outcomes to young people.** Many young people who are involved in consultation or co-design processes are often closely involved in the project until their presence is no longer needed. The sector wanted to see ongoing communication to young people of how their contributions had made an impact. They saw this as inherent to the ethos of the youth sector, as well as a pathway to recurrent engagement.



# APPENDIX A

## Organisational Attendee List

- AISWA Future Footprints
- Anglicare WA
- AWA
- Carers WA
- Centrecare Inc
- City of Bunbury
- City of Canning
- City of Cockburn
- City of Fremantle
- City of Rockingham
- City of Stirling
- City of Swan
- City of Vincent
- Commissioner for Children and Young People
- Community Uplift
- Crossroads West
- Department of Communities Dismantle
- Edmund Rice Centre WA
- Fogarty Foundation
- Foodbank WA
- Foyer Oxford
- Fusion Student Household Service
- headspace Joondalup
- headspace Midland
- HOPE Community Services
- Independent Living Centre
- Indigo Junction
- John XXIII College
- Mercycare
- Mission Australia
- Musica Viva
- Ngala (Mid-West & Gascoyne)
- Ngangk Yira Centre for Research in Aboriginal Health and Social Equity
- NOFASD Australia
- North Metropolitan TAFE
- Peel Youth Services
- Perth Inner City Youth Service
- Public Transport Authority
- Rise Network
- Save the Children
- Scouts WA
- Shire of Harvey
- Sexual Health Quarters
- St John of God WA
- St Vincent De Paul WA
- The Salvation Army — Crossroads West
- The Underground Collaborative
- Town of Cambridge
- Town of Victoria Park
- UnitingCare West
- University of Western Australia
- Volunteering WA
- WA Council of Social Services
- WA Local Government Association
- Wanslea Family Services
- Westin Perth
- World Vision
- Young Australia League
- YMCA WA
- Youth Action Kalamunda
- Youth Futures
- Youth Homelessness Advisory Council (formerly Homeless Youth Advisory Council)
- Youth Involvement Council
- Youth Mental Health — North
- Metropolitan Health Service
- Youth Pride Network
- zero2hero









## Today's Agenda



Feelings & Perceptions

1.30pm - 2.00pm



Topic Speed

2.00pm - 2.30pm



Issue Deep Dive - Explore

Finalisation

3.00pm - 4.00pm

BREAK

