



Youth mental health a winner in the WA State Budget, but the youth homelessness crisis has been left out

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The Youth Affairs Council of Western Australia has welcomed investment into youth mental health, youth engagement and grants for COVID-19 youth recovery, but the lack of action to address the youth housing and homelessness crisis has been sharply criticised.

The Government has delivered a positive \$47.3 million investment to expand the mental health workforce, such as additional resourcing for frontline staff in Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services, establishing peer support workers and enabling increased use of telehealth for at-risk children. These offer much-needed relief to a strained and burnt-out workforce.

YACWA has also welcomed the focus on community-based initiatives and culturally appropriate solutions in the \$40.4 million investment package in including the expansion of the preventative Target 120 program, the Kimberley Community Action Fund that supports youth engagement initiatives and on-country rehabilitative programs in the state's northernmost regions are steps in the right direction to provide children with help, not harm.

However, YACWA has noted a sharp increase in youth homelessness in recent years, tied to rising inflation and the impact of COVID-19 on young people and the rental market. Urgent targeted investment is needed to relieve the burden on young people to ensure that they are not locked in insecure housing indefinitely and at increased risk of homelessness, and to support underfunded youth homelessness services.

YACWA CEO Sandy McKiernan said that whilst the State Budget contains some positives for young Western Australians, including significant investments in mental health, youth justice and youth engagement, it fails to provide targeted investment in the areas that will truly break the cycle of disadvantage for many young people in WA.

“We welcome the culturally responsive youth justice initiatives in the Kimberley, in particular the expansion of the Target 120 program and on-country residential facility, as important supports for young people who engage with the justice system.”

“Community-led diversionary programs are extremely effective at reducing the rate of re-offending for at-risk young people, and the evidence-base for this work is growing.”

“But while Western Australia continues to boast one of the strongest economies in the country, investment in other areas is sorely lacking for a generation experiencing a disproportionate impact from both COVID-19 and inflation on their basic needs and safety.”

“Youth homelessness is at crisis point in Western Australia, with the number of young people in need of support skyrocketing due to the COVID-19 pandemic and rising rental prices.”

“With existing youth homelessness services at breaking point, many young people will continue to be locked out of the market and pushed further into financial and housing stress.”

“We cannot keep relying on crisis-based interventions – young people need approaches that prevent harm and keep them well. Young people and the community services sector have long talked about the need to fund dedicated youth housing-first models which recognise the unique causes and drivers of youth homelessness and intervene before they are entrenched.”

“Investment in supporting our young people is paramount. It saves taxpayers money, it saves the government money, and it supports people at the first point of difficulty, before the problems become too big to manage.”