

YACWA PRE-BUDGET SUBMISSION 2022-23

Youth Affairs Council of Western Australia



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Acknowledgement of Country

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 and Torres Strait Islander people seeing this message.

About YACWA

The Youth Affairs Council of Western Australia (YACWA) is the peak body for young people and the youth sector that supports them in Western Australia. YACWA operates primarily as a human rights organisation that seeks to address the exclusion of young people in a rapidly changing society.

YACWA represents over 100 youth service provider organisations, and many more individual members, including both young people and compassionate community members.

About this Document

This document has been developed in anticipation of the Western Australia 2022-23 State Budget. We wish for this document to provide guidance to the State Government in using its enviable economic position to truly improve the lives of vulnerable young Western Australians, and create a sustainable system of care.

We wish to thank the following groups for their support and generous sharing of their time and knowledge to inform this submission:

- The Youth Pride Network
- The Multicultural Youth Advocacy Network
- The Youth Educating Peers Project
- YACWA Regional Staff
- All attendees of YACWA's Metropolitan and Mid West State of the Youth Sector Forums

This document was developed between October and November 2021. To develop this document, YACWA has spoken with hundreds of young people, youth sector workers, and relevant stakeholders to listen to their needs, their ideas for change, and their views.

Thank you

We wish to thank every young person who has generously given their time to YACWA to inform this document and to inform these messages. It is your expertise and your passion for a better Western Australia that drives our communities forward to a kinder future.

Graphic design by Hannah Sorenson.

Recommended citation:

Rothwell, M. & Bruce-Truglio, S. (2021). YACWA Pre-Budget Submission 2022-23. Youth Affairs Council of Western Australia: Perth, Australia.

Message from the CEO

The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic continues to be the defining event of the social and economic worlds, restricting what we can do and driving how we care for each other in our community. The nature of the pandemic continues to change almost daily, as health advice, government directives, and new variants emerge and shape the way we live our lives.

While every individual in Western Australia has been impacted by the pandemic, young people are arguably among those most affected by this immense social disruption.

Recognising this, last year in August 2020 YACWA published our Framework for Young People's Recovery from COVID-19 in Western Australia. This Framework highlighted the social, educational, cultural and economic impacts we were seeing COVID-19 create among young people, and laid out a path towards sustainable recovery.

Despite the incredible hardships COVID-19 created, we saw an incredible collaboration between the youth services sector, local government associations, and State Government agencies to realise outcomes and swift action. YACWA co-chaired the COVID-19 Youth Taskforce alongside the Department of Communities, while local frontline workers and public servants supported coordination efforts in a changing service delivery landscape.

And now despite the impact of COVID-19 continuing to be felt around the world in the second year of the pandemic, Western Australia is in a position that is the envy of many who are still struggling with ongoing lockdowns, high rates of infections and severe economic impacts.

At the time of writing, Western Australia is enjoying incredible freedoms. We currently have zero community spread of COVID-19 and a strong economic forecast that is driving major infrastructure investments. Western Australia recently recorded a \$4.4 billion surplus at the September 2021 Quarterly Financial Results (1), and in October 2021 reported a youth unemployment rate at the lowest of all states and territories (2).

However, young people continue to face challenges ahead for their wellbeing and futures. The results of the Commissioner for Children and Young People's Speaking Out Survey have shown continued mental health concerns for young people, fear for their futures, and sustained impacts of COVID-19 (3).

It is clear there is much work to be done for young people in Western Australia. Both to support their social and economic recovery from COVID-19, as well as to address lasting inequities within our State. With an economic position as strong as Western Australia's is right now, there has been no better time to invest in sustainable futures for young people and build a legacy of a community that allows young people to thrive.

As a community, we have a responsibility to care for each other.



Sandy McKiernan
Chief Executive Officer

[1] Government of Western Australia (2021). Quarterly Financial Results Report - September 2021. Prepared by the Department of Treasury. Retrieved from: <https://www.wa.gov.au/government/document-collections/quarterly-financial-results-report>

[2] Australian Bureau of Statistics (2021). Labour Force, Australia, October 2021. Retrieved from: <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/labour/employment-and-unemployment/labour-force-australia/latest-release>

[3] Commissioner for Children and Young People (2021). Speaking Out Survey 2021: The Views of WA Children and Young People on their Wellbeing - A Summary Report. Retrieved from: <https://www.ccp.wa.gov.au>

Summary of Recommendations

Addressing the Financial Sustainability of the Youth Sector

1. Review existing service agreements and ensure financial sustainability. This should:
 - Examine current and true operating costs in line with the Equal Remuneration Order.
 - Ensure there is no downscaling of service provision due to pricing increases.
 - Provide avenues for funded services to renegotiate service delivery terms in current contexts.

Strengthening Community Partnerships

1. Create frameworks to support joint-funding approaches from State Government departments and agencies, supporting appropriate investment in prevention and early intervention approaches.
2. Invest in collective impact approaches to supporting vulnerable young people in areas of need, such as the Youth Partnership Project in the East Metropolitan corridor.
3. Invest in co-design with young people and communities across youth services commissioning approaches, supporting young people's views to be heard prior to tendering processes. Lessons learned from the Mental Health Commission's Young People's Priorities for Action Youth Summits should be taken and applied across commissioning processes.

Supporting LGBTIQ+ Young People through a Human Rights Approach

1. Fund LGBTIQ+ inclusive education policy such as through refunding the Inclusive Education WA initiative.
2. Invest in dedicated LGBTIQ+ health initiatives across Western Australia, with a particular focus on the needs of trans and gender diverse young people. This should include greater resourcing for:
 - The Gender Diversity Service
 - Inclusive GP workforce training
 - Community awareness and inclusion campaigns
 - Peer support networks and grassroots funding for community organisations
3. Ban conversion practices across Western Australia in all forms and in all settings, including religious, medical, and community organisations and implement supports for survivors in line with the recommendations outlined in the Sexual Orientation & Gender Identity Change Efforts (SOGICE) Survivor Statement
4. Implement the recommendations outlined in the Youth Pride Network's State of Play Report in regards to a specific focus on addressing the needs of LGBTIQ+ young people experiencing homelessness.

Improving Services for Young People on Christmas Island

1. Renegotiate existing Service Delivery Agreements with the Federal Government in partnership with the local community to include allocations for funding to address service gaps for young people on the Island including:
 - Youth specific mental health services on the Island that are culturally competent and informed by young people.
 - Maternal and early-childhood services.
 - A Youth Drop-in Centre where young people can connect with their peers.
2. Explore options for the Western Australian Government to reduce the 'democracy deficit' by playing a more active role in directly engaging with young people on the island, and investing in programs, services and infrastructure that supports them.

Supporting Refugee and Migrant Young People in Our Communities

1. Invest in dedicated pathways to improve representation of multicultural communities among the community services workforce. This should include culturally appropriate recruitment drives and processes, as well as dedicated positions for multicultural individuals.
2. Develop youth-friendly information to support young people to participate in Local Government election processes, including both voting and running for public positions. This should include information to support multicultural young people to apply and be developed alongside the establishment of refugee and/or migrant advisory groups to understand the needs of multicultural communities and guide the effectiveness of resources.
3. Invest in multicultural community cultural competency training for education and community services workers under the WA Mental Health Promotion, Mental Illness, Alcohol and Other Drug Prevention Plan 2018-2025 as well as in school curriculums.

Improving the Sustainability of Youth Homelessness Services

1. Pilot the implementation of the service system alignment roadmap with a specific focus on building the capacity of services to address youth homelessness.
2. Implement a co-design process with young people and youth services to develop a Western Australian Housing First for Youth model that provides young people with no barrier housing combined with intensive support to address complex issues.

Turning Youth Justice Responses into Health and Wellbeing Responses

1. Raise the minimum age of criminal responsibility from 10 years old to a minimum of 14 years old, with no carve-outs or exceptions.
2. Amend the Youth Offenders Act to set 16 years old as the minimum age of detention, with detention as the option of last resort. Amendments to the Act should work to ensure we prioritise diversion and non-punitive, community-based supports for all young people.
3. Invest in an Embedded Youth Outreach Program; supporting youth workers to act as primary responders to youth offending behaviours and at-risk young people, in lieu of WA Police intervention.
4. Develop a Youth Justice Reform Strategy, reshaping the nature of Western Australia's approach to youth justice through a whole-of-government approach.

This should include:

- Overhaul of Banksia Hill Detention Centre, supporting a therapeutic, educational environment that allows for individualised care. Punitive measures should be entirely revoked, and solitary confinement entirely abolished.
- Investment in place-based initiatives that work with communities to address the underlying causes of offending.
- A system-stewardship approach that invests in communities with high needs and service gaps to support a sustainable approach to youth justice that prioritises individualised care and diversion approaches.
- Increased investment in community-based therapeutic solutions such as Olabud Doogethu in Halls Creek.

Transforming Leaving Care Support to Ensure Stable Independent Living

1. Resource recommendations from the Home Stretch Trial Report, with particular consideration for recommendations around capacity building between government and non-government organisations across the broader out-of-home care service system.
2. Ensure commissioning processes are committed to proportionally funding Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations to deliver out-of-home care and Home Stretch (leaving care) supports for Aboriginal young people.
3. Develop a simple and clear outcomes measurement framework for the Leaving Care Continuum to provide a unified system for services to monitor program and individual progress.

Creating Collaboration Across Sexual Health and Youth Services

1. Increase funding to the youth sexual health services sector to meet increased demand under the syphilis outbreak.
2. Fund healthy relationships and consent youth peer education programs with a specific focus on older young people transitioning into adult services.
3. Fund place-based regional sexual health campaigns that are co-designed with local communities and service providers, particularly focusing on supporting Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations and Health Services in the Kimberley, Pilbara, and Goldfields regions experiencing syphilis outbreaks.
4. Further invest in workforce development for paraprofessionals involved in sexual health, including:
 - Education for community services workers in the sexual health needs of diverse young people (including LGBTIQ+ young people, Aboriginal young people, and Culturally and Linguistically Diverse young people).
 - A dedicated workforce training program for GPs and primary health care providers to reduce stigma and support appropriate referral of young people to services.
 - Embedding sex-positive, inclusive and harm reduction focused sexual health and healthy relationships education within the high school curriculum. This content should be mandatory as it is often omitted.

Supporting Young People to Stay Well Through Prevention

1. Increase investment in mental health prevention as both a gross figure and proportion of overall spend, in line with the Mental Health, Alcohol and Other Drug Services Plan 2015-2025.
2. Invest in services to support families and young people to stay connected and avoid entering out-of-home care, such as through the EIFS program.
3. Increase investment and support for Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations to support community-based care for Aboriginal young people in line with amendments to the Children and Community Services Act.

Addressing the Affordability and Accessibility of the Housing Market for Young People

1. Identify young people as a priority cohort in all current and future investments in social and affordable housing.
2. Adopt inclusionary zoning in all new social housing development with a portion of the housing to be allocated specifically for young people under 25.
3. Provide an update on the current progress of the Residential Tenancies Act Review and fast track reforms guided by the Make Renting Fair Alliance's Tenancy Ten, including ending unfair 'no grounds' evictions, stabilising rent increases and allowing reasonable modifications and pets.

Ensuring Jobs are Accessible, Sustainable and Secure for Western Australian Young People

1. Develop a ten-year Western Australian Youth Jobs Strategy with the end goal of full youth employment in Western Australia. This should be complemented by robust investment to grow industries and employment opportunities in the medium and long-term as well as financial incentives and support frameworks for local businesses and young workers to facilitate meaningful employment.
2. Initiate a Secure Work Pilot Scheme which provides up to five days of sick and carer's paid leave matched to existing salary for casual or insecure workers in priority industries such as retail and hospitality.

Investing in our Regional Futures

1. Embed youth and family mental health support within emergency response planning and disaster resilience strategies.
2. Create employment opportunities for young people in regional areas through:
 - Ensuring life skills education for young people is integrated into employment supports, such as assistance with getting identification, accessing software and apps i.e., MyGov, accessing transport and support for obtaining a driver's licence
 - Supporting young people to access TAFE with minimal barriers while still at school, without requiring them to first disengage from education
3. Improve access to specialist supports for regional young people in need:
 - Fund alcohol and other drug education and awareness within schools, with a focus on peer education and links with existing services.
 - Invest in a dedicated youth alcohol and other drug rehabilitation support service in the Mid West, supporting young people to remain in the region.
 - Appropriate education supports in schools for young people who are neuro-diverse and/or have learning difficulties and social-emotional learning opportunities for young people.
 - Creating a dedicated youth residential alcohol and other drug service in the Great Southern.

Young People in Western Australia

Our Pillars of Change

Each year, YACWA publishes a Pre-Budget Submission to the State Government. The purpose of these submissions is to collect the views and needs of young people across the State into a single document, and provide guidance to the public service on where investment is needed to address harm and promote wellbeing.

In our Pre-Budget Submission for the 2022-23 State Budget, we have organised our recommendations into three key pillars, building on those of our COVID Recovery Framework published last year.

We have named these 'pillars' to emphasise their importance as simultaneous areas of investment. Missing one risks the others falling - but when taken as a collective, they provide stable and steady support for all young people.

These pillars are:

Pillar One: Building Community Capacity for Care

Communities are the experts in their own affairs, understanding what will and will not work intimately and intuitively. When we support communities to develop and lead their own solutions, we create communities that are strong, stable, and healthy.

We must invest in supports for young people that are informed, delivered, and owned by the young people and communities they affect.

Pillar Two: Reimagining our Core Institutions

Investing in community services is a positive and necessary element of supporting wellbeing, however we must address the drivers and systems that create disadvantage and harm wellbeing.

Here, we recommend broad reforms to address underlying causes of harm across youth justice, homelessness, and mental health, to keep young people well, and ease the burden on the services that support young people in need.

Pillar Three: Creating Infrastructure for a Sustainable Future

Hope is foundational to wellbeing. As human beings, we must always have hope for a better future, even when we face adversity. For many young people however, there is increasing pessimism around the future, and on how their voices are being heard.

In this pillar, we recommend infrastructure to create sustainable and hopeful futures, across climate change, housing, and regional development.

Pillar One - Building Community Capacity for Care

Address the Financial Sustainability of the Youth Sector

Higher operating costs, coupled with years of short-term contract roll-overs have left many critical community services in precarious financial situations. In order to ensure young people have access to the services they need, we must take steps to review contracting arrangements with critical services.

The youth services sector is a vital component of our recovery, supporting young people to remain well, to be connected with our communities, and to contribute to the workforce and economy — the economy of care. The value of these frontline services is high-incalculable near the prevention end of the service spectrum, creating broad outcomes on economic, social, and cultural bases.

However, we are hearing from youth service providers across the state that we are in an increasingly unsustainable position of youth service delivery. Continued contract roll-overs have had detrimental effects on financial sustainability and service design, with many providers operating on 5+ year old contracts that no longer reflect true operating costs or community needs. A review of the service agreements for homelessness services found that many agreements were developed in 2009 and 2010, and continue to this day under repeated short-term variations, meaning many are up to ten years old (4).

These contract roll-overs have removed opportunities to renegotiate contract terms in contemporary contexts, and external reforms such as the Equal Remuneration Order (5) have significantly increased the required operating costs of staff - often with no change to required performance indicators and contracted outputs.

As a result, many services are operating with a significant shortfall between budgeted resources and the real operating cost of service delivery. Years of cost-cutting measures have seen some success, according to member organisations, however many are at the limits of what expenditure can be trimmed without compromising service quality, safety, and adherence to best practice. Some service providers in the first half of 2021 reported to YACWA they were struggling to budget for appropriate ratios of staff to vulnerable clients, following years of contract rollovers.

The youth services sector is a significant contributor to the economy-of-care, the service system that enables greater economic participation of vulnerable community members through improving their wellbeing. Our strong surplus can be grown further by investing now in sustainable service structures that care for young people and afford them access to economic freedom, while reducing reliance on more costly services such as emergency departments down the line.

Recommendations

1. Review existing service agreements and ensure financial sustainability. This should:
 - a. Examine current and true operating costs in line with the Equal Remuneration Order.
 - b. Ensure there is no downscaling of service provision due to pricing increases.
 - c. Provide avenues for funded services to renegotiate service delivery terms in current contexts.

(4) Collective IQ (2021). Homelessness Service System Alignment Analysis and Road Map. Prepared for the Department of Communities.

(5) Fair Work (2021). Social and Community Services Industry Pay Rates. Accessed on: 30 November 2021. Retrieved from: <https://www.fairwork.gov.au/pay-and-wages/minimum-wages/social-and-community-services-industry-pay-rates>

Supporting Community Partnerships

Community involvement in service design improves our responses, making them more effective, more efficient, and able to leverage local strengths. Community partnership approaches are seeing success in WA, but we lack frameworks to support them sustainably. We must resource community partnership approaches through policy and procurement, which can then allow local solutions to thrive.

The State Commissioning Strategy, currently underway from the Department of Finance, aims to take a long-term approach to commissioning and embed partnerships across community services. (6) This Strategy provides an opportunity to shift the traditional commissioning model towards a partnership approach that can create meaningful community outcomes.

Services must meet the needs of local communities in order to be truly effective and sustainable approaches. Thinking on procurement of service provision has shifted slowly over years to place greater value on the voices of consumers in informing what is procured and how. However, Western Australia is still a far way off from true 'place-based' approaches, lacking a clear strategy and framework to guide this work within the State Government, as seen in Victoria (7).

Currently, place-based approaches are seeing astounding success within Australia and should be supported within Western Australia to create lasting impact that integrates with existing supports. The Youth Partnership Project (YPP) in Armadale, a collective impact approach, has for many years been facilitating partnerships with key local service providers and government agencies such as WA Police, to support more effective support for young people. Similarly, approaches such as Olabud Doogethu in Halls Creek and the Woombooriny Amboon Angarriya Partnership Initiative (WAAPI) in the Dampier Peninsula have created strong community partnerships, including employing local community members, to ensure services truly meet local needs. In the case of Olabud Doogethu, it has seen a more than 50% reduction in burglaries since its inception, delivering incredible value for many (8).

However, many of these true place-based approaches are resourced through time-limited investment and philanthropic funding. For many, there is a risk that entire service models will collapse if even a single funder pulls away. Anecdotal feedback has indicated that, despite meeting outcomes that are the remit of multiple government agencies, collective impact approaches have struggled to find sustainable core funding and there is no solid framework to support multi-agency funding approaches.

We wish to see Western Australia truly empower local communities by supporting and resourcing them to design and implement their own solutions that meet their needs. To do this, we must ensure we have sustainable funding mechanisms that value the voices of communities, support local employment and determination of approaches, and evaluate appropriately when outcomes sit across the remit of multiple departments.

Recommendations

1. Create frameworks to support joint-funding approaches from State Government departments and agencies, supporting appropriate investment in prevention and early intervention approaches.
2. Invest in collective impact approaches to supporting vulnerable young people in areas of need, such as the Youth Partnership Project in the East Metropolitan corridor.
3. Invest in co-design with young people and communities across youth services commissioning approaches, supporting young people's views to be heard prior to tendering processes. Lessons learned from the Mental Health Commission's Young People's Priorities for Action Youth Summits should be taken and applied across commissioning processes.

[6] Government of Western Australia (2021). State Commissioning Strategy: Discussion Paper. Prepared by: Department of Finance. Retrieved from: <https://www.wa.gov.au/government/publications/state-commissioning-strategy-discussion-paper>

[7] Victorian Government (2020). A Framework for Place-Based Approaches: The start of a conversation about working differently for better outcomes.

[8] Olabud Doogethu (2020). Olabud Doogethu: Smart Justice in the Heart of the Kimberley. Olabud Doogethu: Shire of Halls Creek. Retrieved from: https://olabuddoogethu.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/prospectus-booklet-olabud_WEB.pdf

Supporting LGBTIQ+ Young People through a Human Rights Approach

LGBTIQ+ young people are subject to a number of harmful and discriminatory laws, policies, and practices in Western Australia. By investing in a human rights approach that reduces discrimination, we can create community change and ease minority stress for LGBTIQ+ young people, supporting better outcomes across a range of domains of wellbeing.

Background

LGBTIQ+ young people are a cohort that are significantly overrepresented in multiple areas of vulnerability; from higher frequencies of mental health issues and suicidality (9), to high rates of homelessness (10). These statistics are directly influenced by experiences of stigma, prejudice, discrimination and abuse at both a systemic and individual level (11, 12, 13). Despite this, there is currently no whole-of-government strategy for LGBTIQ+ Inclusion, no specific ministerial or departmental portfolio and no Commissioner for Gender and Sexuality.

Current legislation leaves LGBTIQ+ young people incredibly vulnerable to discrimination; they are able to be expelled from their schools, fired from their jobs, and rejected from support services. It is also still legal for LGBTIQ+ young people to be subjected to harmful conversion practices, lagging behind jurisdictions such as Queensland, Victoria, and ACT who have outlawed this dangerous and abusive practice. The Victorian Change or Suppression (Conversion) Practices Prohibition Bill in particular has been described as “world leading” is a good example for WA to follow.

The need for a whole-of-government strategy is highlighted in the current lack of specialised and inclusive homelessness services and crisis accommodation for LGBTIQ+ young people. They are a demographic that are increasingly prevalent in homelessness statistics in the Western Australian community. National statistics show that they are twice as likely to experience homelessness as non-LGBTIQ+ young people (14). Despite this, there has been very little action addressing LGBTIQ+ homelessness included in the State Homelessness Strategy.

The Youth Pride Network’s recently released ‘State of Play Report: LGBTIQ+ Young People’s Experiences of the Youth Accommodation System’ delivered an extensive insight into the experiences of LGBTIQ+ young people within the homelessness system, including barriers they face to entry, discrimination they experience within the service, structural issues that make services inaccessible and characteristics of LGBTIQ+ affirming service practice.

The key findings from the report included (16):

- A significant proportion of LGBTIQ+ young people who have experienced homelessness have never accessed an accommodation service.
- LGBTIQ+ young people accessing accommodation services are regularly experiencing discrimination, violence and rejection.
- Many systemic barriers exist in the youth homelessness system that prevent LGBTIQ+ young people from accessing accommodation and other services.
- In some cases, services are conducting abusive practices such as conversion practices within their services on LGBTIQ+ young people.
- The impacts of these experiences of discrimination include a worsening of trauma and mental ill health, as well as a longer time spent homeless.
- When in affirming services, LGBTIQ+ young people are able to thrive and affirm their identity and these services were a protective factor from other experiences of discrimination (15)

These findings clearly demonstrated that exclusion of LGBTIQ+ people occurs at all levels, from policy and contracting to day to day service delivery. In order to rectify this the State Government must prioritise a deliberate cross-agency approach to inclusion of LGBTIQ+ young people in systemic strategies, particularly in regards to addressing homelessness. Without this, LGBTIQ+ young people will continue to fall through service gaps and face significant barriers to accessing support and/or accommodation.

Recommendations

1. Fund LGBTIQ+ inclusive education policy such as through refunding the Inclusive Education WA initiative.
2. Invest in dedicated LGBTIQ+ health initiatives across Western Australia, with a particular focus on the needs of trans and gender diverse young people. This should include greater resourcing for:
 - a. The Gender Diversity Service
 - b. Inclusive GP workforce training
 - c. Community awareness and inclusion campaigns
 - d. Peer support networks and grassroots funding for community organisations
3. Ban conversion practices across Western Australia in all forms and in all settings, including religious, medical, and community organisations and implement supports for survivors in line with the recommendations outlined in the Sexual Orientation & Gender Identity Change Efforts (SOGICE) Survivor Statement
4. Implement the recommendations outlined in the Youth Pride Network's State of Play Report in regards to a specific focus on addressing the needs of LGBTIQ+ young people experiencing homelessness.

- [9] Strauss, P., Cook, A., Winter, S., Watson, V., Wright Toussaint, D., Lin, A. (2017). Trans Pathways: the mental health experiences and care pathways of trans young people. Summary of results. Telethon Kids Institute. Retrieved from: <https://www.telethonkids.org.au/globalassets/media/documents/brain-behaviour/trans-pathwayreportweb.pdf>
- [10] Dempsey, D., Parkinson, S., Andrews, C., & McNair, R. (2020). Family relationships and LGB first homelessness in Australia: What do we know and where should we go?. *Journal Of Sociology*, 56(4), 516-534. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1177/1440783320927087>
- [11] LGBTIQ+ Health Australia. (2021). Snapshot of Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Statistics for LGBTIQ+ People. Retrieved from https://d3n8a8pro7vnm.cloudfront.net/lgbthealth/pages/549/attachments/original/1620871703/2021_Snapshot_of_Mental_Health2.pdf?1620871703
- [12] Fraser, B., Piers, N., Chisholm, E., Cook, H. (2019). 'LGBTIQ+ Homelessness: A Review of the Literature', *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*. Retrieved from <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6695950/>
- [13] Higa, D et al. (2014). 'Negative and Positive Factors Associated with the Well-Being of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, and Questioning (LGBTQ) Youth. Retrieved from <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4337813/>
- [14] Blakkarly, J. (2021). 'The Victorian parliament has passed a bill banning gay conversion therapy'. SBS. Retrieved from <https://www.sbs.com.au/news/the-victorian-parliament-has-passed-a-bill-banning-gay-conversion-therapy/75e57baa-c054-4b0f-8197-84e6e237eb7c> Retrieved from <https://www.lmcf.org.au/getmedia/edadb1a8-dff0-43e3-9410-24dcaa41ea89/LGBTI-Homelessness-Stage-1-Report.pdf.aspx>
- [15] Andrews, C., Dempsey, D., Parkinson, S., McNair, R. (2017). GALFA LGBTI Homelessness Research Project Stage 1 Report LGBTI Homelessness: Preliminary findings on risks, service needs and use. Retrieved from <https://www.lmcf.org.au/getmedia/edadb1a8-dff0-43e3-9410-24dcaa41ea89/LGBTI-Homelessness-Stage-1-Report.pdf.aspx>
- [16] The Youth Pride Network (2021). State of Play Report: LGBTIQ+ Young People's Experiences of the Youth Accommodation System.

Improving Services for Young People on Christmas Island

Despite being subject to Western Australian laws and services, Christmas Island has no vote in our Parliament, and young people suffer as a result. They have no youth centre, no youth-friendly culturally appropriate mental health services, expensive goods and services and no voice. Young Christmas Islanders deserve more, it's time for WA to reduce the democratic deficit and ongoing neglect by working with the Federal Government to improve services on the Island.

Although young people make a significant contribution to Australia's economy and social and cultural identity, they are often afforded less opportunities to be engaged in the political process and have their voices heard than older generations, who comprise the large majority of decision makers across the country. This is especially so for young people on Christmas Island (the Island), as the Island itself has limited democratic representation in the Australian political landscape, and little influence on the decisions made on behalf of them by the Federal Government.

Young people on the Island are both proud Islanders, and an important part of the social and cultural fabric of Australia. Despite this, they have very little opportunities to have their voice heard on the issues that affect them, and the decisions that are made for them. As a non-self-governing overseas territory of Australia, the Island is managed through a complex governance model that sees the Federal Government set the direction of the island whilst simultaneously delegating significant amounts of its legislative responsibility to the Western Australian State Government, which administers most key public services on the Island through Service Delivery Agreements.

Despite having no vote in Western Australian state elections, residents of the Island are subject to their laws and oversight, which can scrutinise and override local decision making. This is despite the Island having no electoral voice and representation in the WA State Parliament, meaning that there currently is a 'democratic deficit' for the Island. Compounding this, the sole Australian political representative of the Island is the Federal seat of Lingiari in the Northern Territory, a position which has very little connection to the Island or sway in Federal decision making.

YACWA visited Christmas Island to run a Youth Summit in November 2020, and many young people told us that they feel forgotten by the Western Australian and Federal Governments, as the Island has very little adequate representation in Parliament to remain accountable to their needs. Similarly, they feel that service delivery is under-resourced comparative to the unmet needs in the community, who lack supports such as a youth centre, cultural and youth appropriate mental health services and adequate medical facilities for childbirth (17).

We feel there is an important opportunity for the State Government to renegotiate its service delivery agreements with the Federal Government to include increased funding to address the significant gaps in service delivery for young people on the Island.

Given the extent of the neglect young people on the Island told us they felt, it is imperative that the State Government takes a stronger role in encouraging more Federal Government investment in the Island, as well as taking initiative to provide more opportunities for engagement with young people on the Island so they feel empowered and heard by decision makers.

Recommendations

1. Renegotiate existing Service Delivery Agreements with the Federal Government to include allocations for funding to address service gaps for young people on the Island including:
 - a. Opening headspace or other youth specific mental health services on the Island that is culturally competent and informed by young people.
 - b. Maternal and early-childhood services.
 - c. A Youth Drop-in Centre where young people can connect with their peers.
2. Explore options for the Western Australian Government to reduce the 'democracy deficit' by playing a more active role in directly engaging with young people on the island, and investing in programs, services and infrastructure that supports them.

[17] The Youth Affairs Council of WA. (2021). 2020 Christmas Island 'Youth Taking Charge' Youth Summit: Solutions for our Future. Retrieved from: <https://www.yacwa.org.au/wp-content/uploads/The-2020-Christmas-Island-Youth-Summit-Report-FINAL-.pdf>

Supporting Refugee and Migrant Young People in Our Communities

Multicultural young people are reporting high rates of mental health concerns, feelings of isolation, and experiences of discrimination. Cultural competency training for community services and local government to understand and respond adequately to the unique experiences of multicultural young people can support enhanced wellbeing and service access.

Background

In spite of the 'fair go' narrative that has come to dominate discussions on Australia's nationhood and social contracts, the fair go has not been extended to young people from refugee, migrant, or multicultural backgrounds. While acknowledging the strengths and resilience of multicultural communities, it is known that inequality, experience of discrimination, and reduced access to supports have impacted multicultural communities for many years (18).

COVID-19 exacerbated these already persistent barriers. Research from 2020 found multicultural young people experienced increased instances of racism and discrimination in their community, greater losses of employment, and difficulty accessing culturally-appropriate health information during the pandemic (19, 20). With higher barriers to stable employment prior to the pandemic, the nature and design of welfare payments such as JobKeeper excluded many Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CaLD) young people, creating financial difficulties and exacerbating hardship (21).

In September 2021, the Multicultural Youth Advocacy Network of WA (MYANWA) brought together almost 30 multicultural young people and community leaders' at the Catalyst Youth Summit to talk about the issues facing their communities, and their ideas for solutions using their cultural expertise.

The Catalyst Report identified four main issues faced by multicultural young people:

- A lack of culturally appropriate mental health support;
- Experiences of discrimination within workplaces and the media;
- Greater barriers to education and employment than the general population; and
- Difficulties finding a sense of belonging within their communities.

Attendees felt there was limited representation of CaLD individuals within the community services workforce. Young people felt there were few practitioners able to understand their cultural perspectives and experiences. This was particularly important for mental health concerns, which some CaLD young people felt was stigmatised within their communities, preventing them from seeking help from peers.

Multicultural young people wanted to see individuals from similar backgrounds to them within the services that were there to care for them. They felt this was important to create trust, and for them to feel confident their cultural background would be understood and valued by workers. Further, multicultural young people wished to see their insights and perspectives used to inform services to become more culturally-appropriate in their design and delivery. They sought more visible representation within community services workforces and decision-making processes, hoping to help them meet the needs of their communities.

Multicultural young people, their families, and their communities deserve a 'fair go' as much as any West Australian. Western Australia must drive an interventionist and community-led approach to support greater access to opportunities and address disadvantage before it is further entrenched. For refugee and migrant communities specifically, they must be front and centre of the design and delivery of these programs, as their expertise is critical to ensuring success and preventing policy missteps of the past.

Recommendations

1. Invest in dedicated pathways to improve representation of multicultural communities among the community services workforce. This should include culturally appropriate recruitment drives and processes, as well as dedicated positions for multicultural individuals.
2. Develop youth-friendly information to support young people to participate in Local Government election processes, including both voting and running for public positions. This should include information to support multicultural young people to apply, and be developed alongside the establishment of refugee and/or migrant advisory groups to understand the needs of multicultural communities and guide the effectiveness of resources.
3. Invest in multicultural community cultural competency training for education and community services workers under the WA Mental Health Promotion, Mental Illness, Alcohol and Other Drug Prevention Plan 2018-2025 as well as in school curriculums.

[18] Beadle, S (2014), Facilitating the transition to employment for refugee young people, Carlton, Centre for Multicultural Youth.

[19] Youth Affairs Council of Western Australia (2020), Experiences of COVID-19: Migrant, Refugee, and Multicultural Young People. Retrieved from: https://www.yacwa.org.au/wp-content/uploads/YACWA_PositionPaper_Multicultural_OCT20_PROOF4.pdf

[20] Centre for Multicultural Youth (2020), Locked down and locked out? The impact of COVID-19 on employment for young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds in Victoria, Melbourne, CMY

[21] Multicultural Youth Advocacy Network Australia (2021). Submission to the Senate Select Committee on Job Security. MYAN Australia: New South Wales.

Improving the Sustainability of Youth Homelessness Services

COVID-19 has brought on unprecedented levels of unemployment, reduced income, increased housing stress and mental health difficulties among young people. Western Australia has both a moral imperative to spare young people the trauma of homelessness, and an economic one, given the high cost of homelessness to the State. If we intervene early, we can end the cycle of vulnerable young people becoming chronic rough sleepers as they move into adulthood.

In recent years Western Australia has seen a strong coordinated strategic focus on homelessness, with significant collaborative action between the State Government and Community Sector to take steps towards ending chronic rough sleeping. Although COVID-19 disrupted progress in order to implement rapid response to the immediate impacts of the pandemic, there has still been an important decisive shift in approach from simply managing homelessness to ending it.

Despite this good work, there has been a distinct lack of focus on young people in WA's plan for reform so far. Key commitments from the State Government's 10 Year Strategy on Homelessness, such as the Housing First Homelessness Initiative and Common Ground Model, whilst welcome, have been designated as comprehensive services for all clients, whilst largely being managed and delivered by adult-focused homelessness services, with limited support by youth specialist services. This is despite international evidence and past experience showing that efforts to incorporate young people into mainstream policy design and service delivery are mostly ineffective, and as such they require a targeted approach.

While these priority areas are well-regarded as ambitious areas of systemic reform, in order to ensure their success in intervening early to prevent entrenched chronic homelessness, they must be adapted to the unique needs of young people and tailored to address the distinct and complex pathways that lead to youth homelessness.

Housing First is a good example where a specific approach for young people is required. Housing First for Youth (HF4Y) is an approach defined by the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness as a distinct adaptation of the general Housing First approach by tailoring the model to address the unique causes and conditions of youth homelessness (22).

There is a growing body of international evidence which demonstrates that young people receive fewer positive outcomes from traditional Housing First models as opposed to adults. What sets HF4Y apart as a specialist model, is that its goal is not simply to provide an individual with housing stability, but instead to support a young person with the holistic support required to assist them to achieve their goals and facilitate a healthy transition into adulthood (23). Rather than focusing on entrenched rough sleepers, it is an early-intervention model where rapid intervention points are identified and young people are housed before they become chronically homeless.

It is important to note that the State Government's recently released Homeless Service System Alignment Analysis and Road Map provides a welcome clear intent to shift ways of working away from a siloed and catch-all approach to a whole-of-system shift that takes into account the nuances of regional and cohort specific needs (24). This Road Map provides a good opportunity for the State Government to pilot a focus on homelessness reform that re-establishes a focus on young people experiencing homelessness.

Recommendations

1. Pilot the implementation of the service system alignment roadmap with a specific focus on building the capacity of services to address youth homelessness.
2. Implement a co-design process with young people and youth services to develop a Western Australian Housing First for Youth model that provides young people with no barrier housing combined with intensive support to address complex issues.

[22] McRae, L (2021). 'Housing First For Youth Vs. Housing First: What's the Difference?', Canadian Observatory on Homelessness. Retrieved from https://www.homelesshub.ca/blog/housing-first-youth-vs-housing-first-whats-difference?fbclid=IwAR1tokYXuxUBiUG076pTHMgLweU-itBwXLeYBBldmso_KW3vf17B3SvAlBw

[23] Gaetz S, Walter H and Story C 2021. THIS is Housing First for Youth. Part 1 – Program Model Guide, Canadian Observatory on Homelessness Press, Toronto, p.90.

[24] Collective IQ. (2021). Homelessness Service System Alignment and Road Map. Prepared for the Department of Communities. Retrieved from <https://www.wa.gov.au/system/files/2021-10/Homelessness-Roadmap.pdf>

Pillar Two - Reimagining Our Core Institutions

Turning Youth Justice Responses into Health and Wellbeing Responses

Current investment in youth justice is unsustainable and is not creating long-term positive outcomes for young people or communities. Banksia Hill Detention Centre is also experiencing major instability, coming at the cost of vulnerable young people's wellbeing. A strategic focus on addressing the underlying causes of crime and supporting community connection can improve community safety and keep young people out of prison.

Background

Western Australia's youth justice system is not working.

With more than 50 per cent of young people who enter Banksia Hill Detention Centre returning within two years it is clear that punitive detention is not creating meaningful change for these young people, nor is it serving to increase community safety(25). It is also far more costly to keep young people in Banksia Hill, costing nearly ten times that of community supervision(26).

For those who are within Banksia Hill, around 90 per cent have some form of neurological or cognitive impairment (27) - we must ask, is this really the best environment for providing individualised and specialist care for these young people?

Our conversations with young people and youth service providers have painted a picture of a system that punishes young people and families for disadvantage:

- There are too few diversion programs that intervene early and support young people within their communities.
- Community-based supervision orders are onerous to comply with, setting young people up to fail without support.
- Detention in the Perth Metropolitan area separates regional young people from their families and community support systems, entrenching isolation.
- There is no through-care planning once young people leave detention, meaning the limited supports established in Banksia Hill fall away upon release.

We need to invest now in a system that works. A system that supports communities who understand their own needs, and prioritises addressing the underlying causes of offending. For too long, our approach has been punitive in nature, focused on severing connections and supports for young people, rather than strengthening them.

Youth workers are a readily available workforce, with understanding of local service landscapes and the ability to provide therapeutic and trusted support to young people. With the recent WA Labor motion to embed a raised the age of criminal responsibility in the party platform, now is the time to be diverting funding from costly crisis services and into the supports we see working.

Recommendations

1. Raise the minimum age of criminal responsibility from 10 years old to a minimum of 14 years old, with no carve-outs or exceptions.
2. Amend the Youth Offenders Act to set 16 years old as the minimum age of detention, with detention as the option of last resort. Amendments to the Act should work to ensure we prioritise diversion and non-punitive, community-based supports for all young people.
3. Invest in an Embedded Youth Outreach Program; supporting youth workers to act as primary responders to youth offending behaviours and at-risk young people, in lieu of WA Police intervention.
4. Develop a Youth Justice Reform Strategy, reshaping the nature of Western Australia's approach to youth justice through a whole-of-government approach. This should include:
 - a. Overhaul of Banksia Hill Detention Centre, supporting a therapeutic, educational environment that allows for individualised care. Punitive measures should be entirely revoked, and solitary confinement entirely abolished.
 - b. Investment in place-based initiatives that work with communities to address the underlying causes of offending.
 - c. A system-stewardship approach that invests in communities with high needs and service gaps to support a sustainable approach to youth justice that prioritises individualised care and diversion approaches.
 - d. Increased investment in community-based therapeutic solutions such as Olabud Doogethu in Halls Creek.

[25] Productivity Commission (2021). Report on Government Services 2021, Part F, Section 17. Retrieved from: <https://www.pc.gov.au/research/ongoing/report-on-government-services/2021/community-services/youth-justice/rogs-2021-partf-section17-youth-justice-services.pdf>

[26] Government of Western Australia (2021). 2021-22 Budget Statements. Budget Paper No. 2 - Volume 2. Retrieved from: www.ourstatebudget.wa.gov.au.

[27] Telethon Kids Institute (2018). Nine out of ten young people in detention found to have severe neuro-disability [Media Release]. Retrieved from: <https://www.telethonkids.org.au/news--events/news-and-events-nav/2018/february/young-people-in-detention-neuro-disability/>

Transforming Leaving Care Support to Ensure Stable Independent Living

Young people in the Child Protection system are supposed to be supported to live healthy, stable and safe lives as they transition into adulthood. Historically however many young people's care experiences have been anything but like this, with neglect in both care and leaving care planning leading to poor outcomes later in life. The success of the Home Stretch trial has shown that we can do better, providing a solid platform for reform to improve the experiences of young people in care.

Multiple systemic failures have meant that entrance into Child Protection is often an indicator for negative outcomes for a young person later in life, with high rates of homelessness and interactions with both tertiary healthcare and the justice system commonplace amongst young people who have left care. Additionally, due to the ongoing effects of intergenerational trauma and systemic discrimination there continues to be a high proportion (56.1%) of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young children and young people in care (28). Many young people leaving care have not historically had the support required to transition into stable independent living;

- The Auditor General's Report 2018 into Young People Leaving Care found 65% of young people eligible for leaving care support did not get it early enough or at all putting them at higher risk of being homeless, unemployed, missing out on education and training, and not getting the physical and mental health care they need[29].
- 47% of young people in youth justice supervision during 2018-19 had received a child protection service in the five years prior[30].

In response to this trend and repeated calls for reform in the Child Protection System, the State Government has been busy introducing a number of processes and initiatives including amendments to the Children and Community Services Act 2004, implementing the Aboriginal Family Led Decision Making Pilot and Child Safe Standards as well as the permanent extension of Home Stretch leaving care supports across the State.

Led by Anglicare WA in partnership with Yorganup Aboriginal Corporation and the Department of Communities, the Home Stretch WA Trial intended co-designed and tested an enhanced support system for young people as an extension of care, providing them with a continuation of support and access to resources from 18 years to when they turn 21 years of age. Its permanent expansion is an important milestone for improvement of the out of home care experience for young people and this good work must now be effectively translated into a whole-of-system framework for transitioning to adulthood for young people leaving care that is led by Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations in order to influence a reshape of the entire landscape of care and leaving care support.

Recommendations

1. Resource recommendations from the Home Stretch Trial Report, with particular consideration for recommendations around capacity building between government and non-government organisations.
2. Ensure commissioning processes are committed to proportionally funding Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations to deliver out-of-home care and Home Stretch (leaving care) supports for Aboriginal young people.
3. Develop a simple and clear outcomes measurement framework for the Leaving Care Continuum to provide a unified system for services to monitor program and individual progress.

[28] Department of Communities. (2021). Annual Report 2021-21. Retrieved from <https://www.wa.gov.au/system/files/2021-10/Department-of-Communities-Annual-Report-2020-21.pdf>

[29] Office of the Auditor General. (2018). Western Australian Auditor General's Report: Young People Leaving Care. Retrieved from https://audit.wa.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/report2018_02-YoungPeopleCare.pdf

[30] Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2020). Young People Under Youth Justice Supervision and in Child Protection 2018-2019. Retrieved from <https://www.aihw.gov.au/getmedia/8442b61a-f3b9-4741-a5d7-75023cb0cd19/aihw-csi-28.pdf.aspx?inline=true>

Creating Collaboration Across Sexual Health and Youth Services

Western Australia is currently experiencing a major syphilis outbreak, and increased awareness of sexual health is placing additional burdens on an underfunded sector. Smart investment in supporting links between the youth and sexual health sectors can support young people to engage in healthier sexual behaviours, engage in respectful relationships, and access early testing and treatment services.

Background

Sexual health is an important topic for young people's personal development, their ability to create and maintain healthy relationships, and manage their own health and wellbeing. Young people often require support to navigate sexual health and relationships throughout their development, and have a right to appropriate and inclusive education and health care (31). Young people also represent a high proportion of sexually transmitted infections (STI) notifications, attributed to lack of education, limited access to prevention and testing, and financial barriers to accessing sexual health supports (32).

There is no obligation for WA young people to receive sex ed in schools, universities, Tafes or in community. Often this is on the back-burner and is often not discussed due to community sector and educational professionals own stigma and shame and/or lack of professional knowledge. In Western Australia, when sexual health information is provided for young people is delivered in inconsistent contexts. Ideally sexual health education should be provided in partnership between health professionals, youth workers, educators, peers and community liaisons. This education should be responsive to young people's unique needs, being culturally competent, understanding of intersectional sexual practices and relationship dynamics (such as for LGBTIQ+ young people), and appropriate to developmental stages of young people (29). Young people have repeatedly told YACWA that the education they had received did not meet their needs and/or they did not receive sexual health education.

Government investments in awareness raising (such as the Healthysexual campaign) has been welcome, however investment in service provision has not matched the demand on services these campaigns have created. Feedback from YACWA members and youth sexual health service providers has highlighted the following issues:

- Youth sexual health education services are vastly oversubscribed, with one provider confirming their services had been fully booked for the year as early as May. Services have reported limiting advertising of services to maintain appropriate service provision.
- Information on healthy relationships and consent is in high-demand, and limited investment to provide this has resulted in some sexual health services capturing this unmet need.
- Young people living in regional and remote areas have unique needs around sexual health, including cultural stigma, shame, lack of access to appropriate testing methods, and few counselling services.
- Many young people are refused and/or not offered STI and/or BBV testing opportunities by local practitioners due to stigma by GPs and/or lack of professional knowledge, despite best practice recommendations in line with the 'Silver Book' encouraging young people to engage in regular and opportunistic testing.

Currently, Western Australia is experiencing a significant outbreak of syphilis across the state, which has exacerbated these issues and placed additional demand on the sector (34). Despite the convening of a WA Syphilis Outbreak Response Group, at March 2021 the outbreak showed no signs of slowing, with increased case numbers compared to last quarter (35). Regional engagement of the YEP Project has found particular need in the Goldfields, Pilbara, and Kimberley regions.

There is an urgent need for coordination and advocacy within the sexual health and youth sectors to identify current service gaps and needs, develop referral pathways, and communicate needs back to funding bodies to ensure responses are evidence-based and strategic. Currently, any coordination work for sexual health is conducted by the Department of Health, but has limited involvement of frontline workers and community/peer advocates.

Recommendations

1. Increase funding to the youth sexual health services sector to meet increased demand under the syphilis outbreak.
2. Fund healthy relationships and consent youth peer education programs with a specific focus on older young people transitioning into adult services.
3. Fund place-based regional sexual health campaigns that are co-designed with local communities and service providers, particularly focusing on supporting Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations and Health Services in the Kimberley, Pilbara, and Goldfields regions experiencing syphilis outbreaks.
4. Further invest in workforce development for paraprofessionals involved in sexual health, including:
 - a. Education for community services workers in the sexual health needs of diverse young people (including LGBTIQ+ young people, Aboriginal young people, and Culturally and Linguistically Diverse young people).
 - b. A dedicated workforce training program for GPs and primary health care providers to reduce stigma and support appropriate referral of young people to services.
 - c. Embedding sex-positive, inclusive and harm reduction focused sexual health and healthy relationships education within the high school curriculum. This content should be mandatory as it is often omitted.

[31] The Royal Australasian College of Physicians (2015). Position Statement: Sexual and Reproductive Health Care for Young People. Retrieved from: https://www.racp.edu.au/docs/default-source/policy-and-adv/achshm/sexual-and-reproductive-health-care-for-young-people-position-statement.pdf?sfvrsn=f0d0331a_2

[32] Government of Western Australia (2019). Western Australian Sexually Transmissible Infections (STI) Strategy. Department of Health: Western Australia. Retrieved from <https://ww2.health.wa.gov.au/-/media/Files/Corporate/general%20documents/Sexual%20Health/PDF/Strategy/2019-2023/STI-strategy.pdf>

[33] Ibid.

[34] Government of Western Australia (2020). WA Syphilis Outbreak Response Action Plan. Department of Health: Western Australia. Retrieved from <https://ww2.health.wa.gov.au/-/media/Files/Corporate/general-documents/Sexual-Health/PDF/SORG/SORG-Action-plan.pdf>

[35] Department of Health (2021). Communique Report - March 2021. Syphilis Outbreak Response Group: Western Australia. Retrieved from <https://ww2.health.wa.gov.au/-/media/Corp/Documents/Health-for/Sexual-health/SORG/WA-SORG-Communique-March-2021.pdf>

Supporting Young People to Stay Well Through Prevention

Our current support systems for young people are too heavily focused on crisis and intervention, a costly approach that also means many young people must become severely unwell before receiving the help they need. Investment in prevention is both a financially sustainable solution, as well as required for our future population needs.

Background

Prevention services are those that work to prevent individuals from becoming unwell, to remain healthy and happy. Early intervention, while similar, works to divert individuals upon early signs that they need support, and assist them while their concerns are mild. Prevention and early intervention supports are an important mix of any service system, as they enrich quality-of-life for all, and are associated with more positive outcomes than when individuals only receive support once they are more seriously unwell.

The need to rebalance our systems of support to focus on prevention and community support is in no way a new idea, and was enshrined closely in government thinking with the launch of the Western Australian Mental Health, Alcohol and Other Drugs Services Plan 2015-2025 (the Plan) (36).

Upon release, the Plan found that Western Australia's mental health system was profoundly unbalanced, both for our current and for our projected future populations. It also found that crisis funding for supports such as hospital beds was far more costly than community-based services and prevention programs. Importantly, the Plan identified a roadmap forward for investment to more appropriately balance investment.

Sadly, government spending has not aligned with this vision. Spending on prevention continues to be outpaced by increased investment on crisis services, with prevention actually falling as a proportion of overall spend in the 2022-23 State Budget (37). The State Budget also reported the average daily cost of a bed in specialist mental health services to be \$1,590 in 2020-21 — compared to just \$477 for non-admitted care.

Similarly, the Department of Communities' Earlier Intervention and Family Support Services (EIFS) programs has seen incredible success. The State Budget reported 91% of Aboriginal young people supported through the Aboriginal In-Home Support Service and 86% of young people supported through the Intensive Family Support Service were still not in out-of-home care 12 months later (38). Sadly, EIFS funding in the State Budget has languished, while spending on assessments and investigations continues to rise in the forward estimates.

With strong investment in youth mental health in the last State Budget, and existing programs delivering good outcomes in the prevention space, now is the time to begin balancing our system. Prevention approaches should be supported to expand and link with existing local services.

Recommendations

1. Increase investment in mental health prevention as both a gross figure and proportion of overall spend, in line with the Mental Health, Alcohol and Other Drug Services Plan 2015-2025.
2. Invest in services to support families and young people to stay connected and avoid entering out-of-home care, such as through the EIFS program.
3. Increase investment and support for Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations to support community-based care for Aboriginal young people in line with amendments to the Children and Community Services Act.

[36] Mental Health Commission (2015). Better Choices, Better Lives: Western Australian Mental Health, Alcohol and Other Drug Services Plan 2015-2025. Retrieved from <https://www.mhc.wa.gov.au/media/1834/0581-mental-health-planprintv16acc-updated20170316.pdf>

[37] WA Association for Mental Health (2021). WAAMH Response to State Budget: mental health. Accessed on: 2 December 2021. Retrieved from: <https://waamh.org.au/news/waamh-response-to-state-budget-mental-health>

[38] Government of Western Australia (2021). 2021-22 Budget Statements. Budget Paper No. 2 - Volume 2. Retrieved from <https://www.ourstatebudget.wa.gov.au/2021-22/budget-papers/bp2/2021-22-wa-state-budget-bp2-vol2.pdf>

Pillar Three - Creating Infrastructure for a Sustainable Future

Addressing the Affordability and Accessibility of the Housing Market for Young People

Across Australia, housing is becoming further out-of-reach for many young Australians. Prices continue to skyrocket in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic and ongoing policies that continue to entrench wealth inequality between those who own houses and those who do not. WA has suffered a chronic shortage of social housing and affordable rentals, as well as restrictive laws that benefit landlords over renters. To enable young people to one day realise the dream of owning their own home, we must take an interventionist approach which resets the playing field and makes home owning affordable again for young people.

In her opening remarks in Anglicare's Rental Affordability Snapshot, Anglicare Australia's Executive Director Kasy Chambers summarised the Report's findings by stating that Australians are dealing with a rental market that has "never been less affordable" (39). This has been brought into sharp focus in Western Australia, with average weekly rent increasing by 21.6% in the 12 months leading up to June 2021, the highest increase of any capital city across the country (40). As has been the case over the last few years, there are still no affordable houses available in Western Australia for a young person on youth allowance (41).

It is often thought that Western Australia's housing market is comparatively affordable due to a high average wage and relatively lower average rental costs compared to other states. However the Rental Affordability Index has decreased by 14% in the Perth Metropolitan Area over the past 12 months, the lowest point since 2016 and meaning that Perth is now less affordable than Melbourne and Sydney (42). This also masks the reality for lower income households, with housing largely unaffordable for those on JobSeeker, and those in part-time or insecure jobs such as hospitality workers. For example, for single people receiving JobSeeker, rental costs are on average 110% of their total income (43). This has made apparent the fact that housing affordability and availability is increasingly affecting those with stable employment and living conditions, not just those more vulnerable and at-risk of homelessness (44).

There has been an ongoing and acute shortage of social housing stock in Western Australia, with around 17,000 households, including roughly 34,000 individuals on the waitlist as of May 2021 (45). This is having a significant effect on young people; While young people make up 26% of the homeless population in Australia, only 3.1% of social housing is leased to young people across Australia (46, 47).

The State Government announced an \$875 million investment into social housing as part of the 2021/22 State Budget. There is a need to upscale this activity and leverage the capacity of the private sector by implementing inclusionary zoning which mandates the development of social and affordable housing in all new substantial residential builds, of which young people should be allocated a percentage share.

[39] Anglicare Australia. (2021). Rental Affordability Snapshot: National Report / April 2021. Retrieved from <https://www.anglicare.asn.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/rental-affordability-snapshot-national-report.pdf>

[40] Domain Real Estate. (2021). June 2021 Rental Report. Retrieved from <https://www.domain.com.au/research/rental-report/june-2021/>

[41] Anglicare WA. (2021). Rental Affordability Snapshot 2021 Western Australia. Retrieved from https://www.anglicarewa.org.au/docs/default-source/advocacy/anglicare-wa---rental-affordability-snapshot-2021.pdf?sfvrsn=dba8e99b_6

[42] SGS Economics and Planning (2021). Rental Affordability Index: November 2021 Key Findings. Retrieved from <https://www.shelterwa.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Rental-Affordability-Index-2021.pdf>

[43] Ibid.

[44] Anglicare Australia. (2021). Rental Affordability Snapshot: National Report / April 2021. Retrieved from <https://www.anglicare.asn.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/rental-affordability-snapshot-national-report.pdf>

[45] Shelter WA. (2021). Social Housing Trends. Retrieved from <https://www.shelterwa.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/2021-Fact-Sheets-SWA-social-housing-1.pdf>

[46] Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2016). Census of Population and Housing: Estimating Homelessness. Retrieved from https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/housing/censuspopulation-and-housing-estimating-homelessness/2016/20490do002_2016.xls

[47] Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. (2019). Housing assistance in Australia. Retrieved from <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/housing-assistance/housing-assistance-in-australia2019/contents/social-housing-dwellings>

Addressing Power Imbalances in the Rental Market for Young People

With the review of the Residential Tenancies Act (the Act) ongoing since 2019 there are a number of important reforms that are in limbo despite being crucial to improving renting conditions for low-income and vulnerable young people.

The Act as it currently exists gives landlords significant power to evict tenants without reason, increase rent unreasonably and prevent renters to make small modifications to the property or own pets. Those in public housing also have fewer protections than those in private rental, despite being some of the most vulnerable people in the community. A national study from 2017 found that over 55% of people under 35 report being discriminated against whilst renting, 14% more likely than those over 35 and 22% said that the discrimination was because of their age (48).

The impact of COVID-19 and the end of the evictions and rent increase moratorium has caused a significant reduction in the amount of rental vacancies whilst simultaneously increasing the average cost of renting, leading to a high demand for private rentals. This has made the power imbalance between landlords and renters even greater, further reinforcing the crucial need for reform to the Act.

Recommendations

1. Identify young people as a priority cohort in all current and future investments in social and affordable housing.
2. Adopt inclusionary zoning in all new social housing development with a portion of the housing to be allocated specifically for young people under 25.
3. Provide an update on the current progress of the Residential Tenancies Act Review and fast track reforms guided by the Make Renting Fair Alliance's Tenancy Ten (49), including ending unfair 'no grounds' evictions, stabilising rent increases and allowing reasonable modifications and pets.

[48] Choice, National Shelter, National Association of Tenant Organisations. (2017). Unsettled: Life in Australia's Private Rental Market. Retrieved from <https://www.choice.com.au/money/property/renting/articles/choice-rental-market-report>

[49] The Make Renting Fair Alliance, 'The Tenancy Ten'. Retrieved from <https://www.shelterwa.org.au/our-work/advocacy/rental-reform/make-renting-fair/>

Ensuring Jobs are Accessible, Sustainable and Secure for Western Australian Young People

Whilst Western Australia experiences a comparably milder economic shock from COVID-19, the impact of lockdowns and other restrictions hit hardest on casual and insecure workers, of whom young people make up a large portion. Across Australia casual workers were 8 times more likely to lose work in the 2021 lockdowns than permanent staff and their wages were also 26% lower (50), despite popular beliefs to the contrary. Many casual workers have been on the frontline in supporting the community to cope with the pandemic, it's time we give them the improved protections and benefits they deserve.

Background

Despite a string of successful investments from the WA State Government to address youth unemployment, and a stronger than expected recovery in the jobs market in Western Australia, young people still dominate casual and insecure work in industries that are often on the frontline of the pandemic such as retail and hospitality. Whilst we have the lowest youth unemployment rate amongst the States (10.2%), this number is still more than double the general rate of unemployment, which sits at 4.2% (51).

Given the strong state Western Australia's finances are currently in, we now have a good opportunity to build a local workforce and labour market can accomplish full youth employment for decades to come. This can be done through aligning investment with young people's needs and focusing on the creation of entry-level employment with long-term career pathways. For example, investing in employment and training opportunities in the renewable energy workforce would align to the overwhelming need to reduce the reliance Western Australia's economy on fossil fuels in the face of climate change whilst simultaneously responding to our workforce needs.

Additionally, whilst the employment rate is improving this does not account for levels of youth underemployment, which currently sits at 20% nationally (52). Young people in Australia have experienced decades of rising insecure work and underemployment, stagnating wages and disproportional levels of unemployment compared to the mainstream Australian population. Statistics make it clear that the extent and nature of insecure or precarious employment in Australia disproportionately impacts young people.

More than half of workers aged 15-24 are now employed through casual contracts, while in 2018 almost 40% of workers aged 25-34 were in a casual, fixed term or part-time jobs (53). These casual contracts mean that they are not permitted sick leave and therefore often are unable to refuse work if they are struggling to pay the bills. This issue was particularly prominent throughout the pandemic, when a severe burden was placed on the workers in these industries as they provided vital services to others whilst the State was in lockdown, exposing them to risk of infection to COVID-19 with very little extra remuneration provided.

The WA State Government should follow in the footsteps of the Victorian State Government and invest in a Secure Work Pilot Scheme, which will provide up to five days' paid leave per year at the minimum wage for casual and other insecure workers in priority industries, however this should go one step further and match the existing salary of individual staff. With targeted actions that support a long-term vision for sustainable employment opportunities for young, it is entirely achievable for this State Government to achieve full youth employment within its time in office, which would provide a strong basis for a healthy economy for generations to come.

Recommendations

1. Develop a ten-year Western Australian Youth Jobs Strategy with the end goal of full youth employment in Western Australia. This should be complemented by robust investment to grow industries and employment opportunities in the medium and long-term as well as financial incentives and support frameworks for local businesses and young workers to facilitate meaningful employment.
2. Initiate a Secure Work Pilot Scheme which provides up to five days of sick and carer's paid leave matched to existing salary for casual or insecure workers in priority industries such as retail and hospitality.

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Investing In Our Regional Futures

Regional areas of Western Australia do not have equal access to support and specialist services, often requiring vulnerable young people and families to travel to the Metropolitan area. Addressing this inequality requires investment in community-led approaches to link existing services and identify future needs. Investing in regional areas of Western Australia can enhance liveability, supporting industries and communities to thrive.

Background

In the last months, we have been listening deeply with communities — in the Mid West and Great Southern regions — to understand regional issues, local strengths, and service gaps that YACWA can advocate for and elevate regional voices on.

Since establishing a regional YACWA presence, we have heard in detail about the unique experiences of regional young people, and the incredible resilience and expertise held by regional youth services and communities. There are incredible partnerships and collaborations forming that utilise shared assets and form strong referral pathways for young people in need. However, we are hearing three consistent challenges regional areas face:

- No funded coordination identifying gaps and local strengths
- Difficulty retaining and attracting skilled workers
- Lack of specialist supports requiring travel to the Metropolitan area

Currently, organisations are rarely resourced to coordinate local activity between services, and there is limited ability in already stretched workforces to identify missing service gaps. As a result, services lack a cohesive voice to decision makers on what is needed, and young people fall through the cracks. Following Cyclone Seroja, many services saw an increase in young people seeking mental health support - something which was not resourced in disaster relief planning.

Regional workforces also face unique issues. Retaining skilled staff on short-term contracts is challenging in the Metropolitan area, however regional organisations also must contend with a lack of housing and recreation opportunities providing additional challenges to attract and retain workers. Currently it is difficult for staff to relocate to the regions for work as there are no rentals, exacerbated by state border controls. Longer-term contracts are needed to retain staff and provide continuity of care as well as build trusted relationships with young people.

Many regional areas lack specialist support — particularly around alcohol and other drug use and neurodiversity. This forces young people and their families to travel to Perth to access these specialist supports, a costly and disruptive exercise for families in need. In addition to this, ensuring adequate specialised supports in schools to assist these students to achieve positive learning outcomes is needed.

With Western Australia's borders closed for the near future, and a greater focus on local tourism, we can strengthen our communities by supporting existing organisations to build on their assets and identify missing areas of service provision. Contracts need to make sense for each region, with effective and realistic funding models priced appropriately for each region based on practical costs. Service plans and projects need to be specific for regions, which operate differently to the Perth Metropolitan area.

Recommendations

1. Embed youth and family mental health support within emergency response planning and disaster resilience strategies.
2. Create employment opportunities for young people in regional areas through:
 - a. Ensuring life skills education for young people is integrated into employment supports, such as assistance with getting identification, accessing software and apps i.e. MyGov, accessing transport and support for obtaining a driver's licence
 - b. Supporting young people to access TAFE with minimal barriers while still at school, without requiring them to first disengage from education
3. Improve access to specialist supports for regional young people in need:
 - a. Fund alcohol and other drug education and awareness within schools, with a focus on peer education and links with existing services.
 - b. Invest in a dedicated youth alcohol and other drug rehabilitation support service in the Mid West, supporting young people to remain in the region.
 - c. Appropriate education supports in schools for young people who are neuro-diverse and/or have learning difficulties and social-emotional learning opportunities for young people.
 - d. Creating a dedicated youth residential alcohol and other drug service in the Great Southern.

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