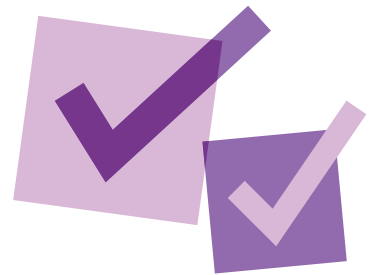


YACWA POLICY PRIORITIES

As a peak body, YACWA strives to be a bold and trusted go-to advocacy and systems shaping body for young people, the sector, and communities that support them. During conversations we have had with young people and the sector, **five key priorities have emerged.**

**1**

Provide cost of living and housing support to young people.

2

Prioritise prevention and early intervention for young people.

3

Create a strong and sustainable youth sector.

4

Commit to a total overhaul and reformation of WA's youth justice system, from community to detention.

5

Embed and amplify the voices of young people with lived experience in government decision making and service delivery.

1 Provide cost of living and housing support to young people



Young people are disproportionately burdened by the rising cost of living and face financial stress. This is exacerbated by unstable housing, excessive rent increases, unfair evictions, and leads to uncertainty about the future. These challenges seriously impact young people's mental health and well-being, forcing them into vicious cycles where stability and security are out of reach.



RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. Introduce **rent stabilisation measures** that limit rent increases.
 2. Amend the Residential Tenancies Act to **abolish no reason evictions** and to require genuine reasonable grounds for evictions.
- Financial stress and instability are primary drivers of homelessness.** Young people in WA urgently need tailored, youth-specific, individualised, and holistic support to transition from homelessness and into recovery and independent living.
3. Commit to implementing a **WA Housing First for Youth model**.
 4. **Establish more Youth Foyers**, prioritising regional areas such as Broome, Albany, and Bunbury.

2 Prioritise prevention and early intervention for young people



Prevention and early intervention services are vital to stop youth issues from escalating into crises and to reduce pressure on overstretched mental health, homelessness, family and domestic violence, and other crisis and health services. With adequate investment, young people can receive support before reaching crisis points.



RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. **Increase investment in prevention and early intervention** place-based community services and programs for young people, both as a gross figure and a proportion of overall spending. Especially invest in services and programs that focus on:
 - Youth mental health and community building, especially in regional areas.
 - Young people at risk of entering the youth justice system.
 - Young people at risk of perpetrating family and/or domestic violence.
 - Helping young people gain skills, work, training, and other support to be independent adults.
2. Create an interdepartmental and sustainable method of **funding early intervention programs**.

3 Create a strong and sustainable youth sector



The community service sector is under extraordinary pressure to sustain its services within existing funding due to the rising demand for support. This increase is due to the housing, cost of living, and mental health crises, alongside increasing operational costs. In the 2024/2025 State Budget, the State Government provided catch-up funding to homelessness services of 10 to 30 percent. YACWA urges this support be provided to the broader community services sector, especially youth services.



RECOMMENDATIONS:

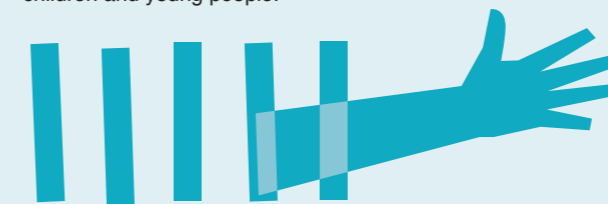
1. Commit to **sustainable funding and a one-off catch-up injection** into the community service sector, reflecting historical underfunding and the significant demands on the sector.

Youth workers in schools are essential. They provide tailored support to keep young people engaged and connect them with vital resources while easing teachers' workloads. Youth workers are often hired as Student Support Officers (SSO) or Student Support Coordinators (SSC), positions that do not require a formal qualification, do not have centralised support, and do not recognise the youth work duties people often do in these positions. To improve outcomes for students and teachers, investment in recognising and supporting youth workers is crucial.
2. Collaborate with the Department of Education and the Youth Workers in Schools network to **fund additional youth worker positions in schools**, and to provide better support. Implement a centralised strategy to coordinate and resource youth work positions in schools, including a comprehensive review of current student service roles and best practice models. This should include:
 - Providing **centralised support** for SSOs and SSCs.
 - Requiring **minimum qualifications** for SSO/SSC positions including eligibility for relevant professional association.
 - **Reviewing SSO and SSC job descriptions**, titles, and duties to better reflect the roles and recognise the roles of youth workers in schools.
 - **Increasing funding for and incentivising schools** to hire additional youth workers in schools.

4 Commit to a total overhaul and reformation of WA's youth justice system, from community to detention



WA's youth justice system is harming children and young people. By collaborating with experts, organisations, and communities offering practical solutions, we can build a more supportive and effective system. An approach that prioritises prevention, diversion, and rehabilitation will lead to better outcomes and safer communities, without causing harm to children and young people.



RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. Implement all recommendations from Social Reinvestment WA's *Blueprint for a Better Future: Paving the Way for Youth Justice Reform in WA*, which outlines how to **transform the youth justice system**.
2. **Close Unit 18 immediately**.

5

Embed and amplify the voices of young people with lived experience in government decision making and service delivery



Young people's unique lived experiences and circumstances require specific consideration to address their needs. Policies, plans, and services designed without incorporating the perspectives of young people often fail to produce positive outcomes and result in poor return on investment. This extends to policies that aren't youth-specific, as young people are impacted by policies directed at the broader community. Developing youth-focused solutions that acknowledge the distinct causes of the issues they face is crucial.



RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 1. Co-design policies, plans, and services with young people** and sector workers. Particularly include young people in initiatives focusing on:
 - Family and domestic violence
 - Mental health
 - Housing and homelessness
- 2. Support local governments**, particularly in regional WA, **to develop youth plans and strategies** and engage directly with young people.

NOTE: YACWA was pleased to see a commitment to funding and resourcing Youth Advisory Councils and Youth Action Plans in the recently released *Koorlangka Bidi - WA Youth Action Plan 2024-2027*. We look forward to working with the State Government and seeing the outcomes of this action.

