

A person is seen from behind, sitting on a ledge and looking towards a large, textured stone wall. The scene is bathed in the warm, golden light of a sunset or sunrise, with the sun low on the horizon to the right. The person is wearing a dark grey hoodie. The overall mood is contemplative and serene.

YACWA'S STATE BUDGET ANALYSIS AND RECOMMENDATIONS 2018-19

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YACWA ACKNOWLEDGES
ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT
ISLANDER PEOPLE AS THE
TRADITIONAL CUSTODIANS OF
THIS LAND AND ITS WATERS.
WE WISH TO PAY OUR
RESPECTS TO ELDERS PAST AND
PRESENT AND EXTEND THIS TO
ALL ABORIGINAL PEOPLE SEEING
THIS MESSAGE.



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Message from the CEO

The 2018-19 State Budget marks the new Labor government's second budget since the March 2017 election. In this short period of time, Western Australia has seen significant change with political, financial and social upheavals changing the landscape of the community sector and what it means to be a young person in this state.

This budget has arrived with few surprises, continuing the new State Government's steadfast approach to budget repair measures. On track to return the budget to surplus by 2020-21, this year's state budget is focused on controlling expenditure and maximising revenue.

The main notes include:

- A huge \$22.2 billion investment in our education system, including a strong focus on building new schools and redeveloping existing infrastructure;
- Investment into the METRONET public transport vision, extending current train lines and beginning construction of new routes;
- Investment into a Social and Affordable Housing and Jobs Package, wisely centred around METRONET developments to create hubs;
- Investment into community-based mental health, alcohol and other drug facilities; and
- Investment into the Target 120 program to reduce youth reoffending and support young people to stay out of the justice system.

However, not all investment in this budget is positive. The State Government's continued focus on expenditure efficiencies and controlling spending has come at the cost to the wellbeing of some of the most at-risk groups in Western Australia.

Investment in education, while welcome, is countered by the abolition of a significant number of administrative support positions to Aboriginal education, which received little media attention. The significant investment into community bed-based facilities for mental health, alcohol and other drugs comes with significant 41% cut in prevention based funding to keep people well before they need this level of support. Not to mention, the Social and Affordable Housing and Jobs Package is not ambitious enough to truly address the state of the housing crisis and unemployment rates, especially for young people, in our State.

YACWA is concerned that the burden of the State's economic recovery has been placed not onto those who can afford it, such as the corporate sector, but rather onto disadvantaged young people and their families.

Right now, we have a key opportunity to invest more wisely into addressing systemic disadvantage. The State Government has shown a willingness to do things differently - shaking up government operations, tackling expenditure efficiencies and amalgamating a number of government departments into the Department of Communities with responsibility for a broad range of key youth issues including child protection, family support, disabilities, housing and youth justice.

Whilst this has created a great deal of uncertainty amongst much of the youth sector, we believe that as a sector, we have been given a great opportunity to re-envision government procurement and state-funded services to ensure they have the greatest impact across our communities. Not only that, but we have the opportunity to use the tightened fiscal outlook to direct funding into areas where it can have the greatest impact - helping WA's most disadvantaged young people. Sustainable state finances and progressive investment into tackling inequality can go hand-in-hand.

We believe this new dawn in Western Australia brings a fresh start and a great opportunity for long term systemic change. In this analysis of the State Budget, we call on the Government to have a brighter vision of the future, to think past election cycles and one or two cornerstone programs to define a term of office, and instead to create a legacy of lasting, positive outcomes for young people in the community and focus on strong early-intervention practices, programs and outcomes across the sector.

YACWA, on behalf of its members, youth workers, and young people across the State, are calling on the government to shift its focus towards supporting young people through prevention and early intervention strategies. We believe strongly that if you support marginalised young people in the transitional stages of their lives, they will become more independent and vibrant contributors to our economy in their futures and effectively break the cycle of disadvantage.

With that in mind, on behalf of the YACWA Board, YACWA staff, and of course our members, we are pleased to present this report to you with the hope that it will provide you with some insight into what we believe will create long term systemic change for the future.

Yours sincerely,



Ross Wortham
Chief Executive Officer
Youth Affairs Council of Western Australia

About the Youth Affairs Council of WA

The Youth Affairs Council of Western Australia (YACWA) is the peak non-government body representing young people and the youth sector in Western Australia. With over 500 members statewide, YACWA's work reflects the views of its members, as well as young people, youth services, and youth workers from across the State. In doing so, YACWA acts primarily as a human rights organisation that seeks to address the exclusion of young people in a rapidly changing society. Our work is governed by four guiding principles: respect, equity, integrity and the celebration of diversity.

By acting as a united, independent, and active advocate for the youth sector, YACWA aims to influence policy affecting the lives of young people in a beneficial way. Accordingly, YACWA, its members, and member services are representative of young people and the youth sector in Western Australia.

A Snapshot of Priority Issues Facing Young People and the Youth Sector

“**Transitions** between all of the systems are a problem for young people. Moving from the justice system back to education, or leaving out of home care, in and out of housing, or even from primary to high school are vulnerable points for young people, and critical to their overall wellbeing.”

“There is an ongoing issue for **young people leaving the out of home care system** and the lack of support provided to young people once they leave government care.”

“The **mental health system** is difficult to navigate, particularly in regards to the provision of crisis mental health services to [young people]”

“If we don’t invest in early intervention, we will **never break the cycle.**”

The State of the Economy

On Thursday the 10th of May, the State Government released its budget outlining confirmed spending over the last 12 months, and its plan for both spending and raising money over the future financial year. This section provides a snapshot of some important economic indicators.

The State Government has focused closely on returning our budget to surplus in this State Budget. They're accomplishing this by tightly controlling spending (or 'expenditure'), while growing its revenue.

According to the 2018-19 State Budget, the State Government will spend approximately \$30.5 billion in the next financial year, while receiving \$29.6 billion in revenue.

This puts the State Government at a deficit of about \$0.9 billion, meaning the State's total debt is forecast to grow slightly to \$39.1 billion by 30 June 2019.

While this means we're not yet paying down our State's debt, it does represent the lowest growth of expense growth in over 20 years. The State Government expects revenue to outpace expenditure in 2020-21, returning the budget to surplus.

Where is the State Government's money coming from, and where is it being spent?



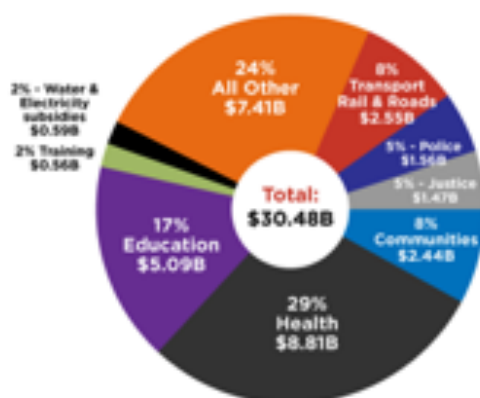
WA STATE BUDGET 2018-19

Where the money comes from & where it goes

2018-19 REVENUE GENERAL GOVERNMENT SECTOR



2018-19 EXPENDITURE GENERAL GOVERNMENT SECTOR



To realign spending and revenue, the State Government has largely done so in two ways: reducing operating costs and implementing measures to increase revenue.

REDUCING OPERATING COSTS

A major area of the State Government's savings is in the public service. 2018-19 will continue its new wages policy, which ensures a fixed annual increase in wages, rather than a percentage increase, and is expected to reduce spending by \$700 million over five years.

To complement this, the number of senior executive positions are being reduced, and 2,000 further redundancies are planned through the Voluntary Targeted Separation Scheme which offers voluntary severance to public servants.

INCREASING REVENUE

To improve the revenue the State Government receives, some measures have been put in place affecting taxpayers.

The most pressing measure here is a substantial rise in the cost of living. Increases to fees and charges mean the average household is expected to pay an extra \$292 in the coming year (a rise of 4.8% from last year).

This comes from increases in electricity and water bills, a rise to the emergency services levy public transport fares and licencing and vehicle registration fees.

Other measures will target businesses as well, with a new temporary progressive payroll tax scale for large employers being implemented until 2023. This scheme means larger employers are subject to higher rates of payroll tax dependent on the total size of their wages.

Key Spending

Spending has been tightly controlled in this State Budget while revenue catches up. As a result, there are little surprise investments and much of it is business-as-usual. That said, there are considerable investments in public transport and education, as well as some small measures to address ongoing disadvantage for young people.

The State Government's METRONET public transport program has been allocated an additional \$3.6 billion over three years. This investment will go towards developing a Morley-Ellenbrook line and extending the Armadale line to Byford.

Education is also a big focus, with \$22.2 billion allocated over four years. This investment is focused on our infrastructure, building new schools and upgrading existing ones to be current and contemporary.

The State is also contributing to a Social and Affordable Housing and Jobs package, which has a total investment of \$394 million. This package will deliver 1,324 homes, including up to 320 new social housing dwellings, at least 400 affordable homes, and eight high-density housing developments based around METRONET.

Spending is also focused on health, with \$655 million allocated for health infrastructure over four years. \$20.5 million has also been allocated to facilitate transition to the NDIS, and \$14.5 million to support the workforce to transition to the NDIA.

The main targeted investments for young people are \$21.5 million over four years for the Regional Youth Justice Services program in the Kimberley and the Pilbara, and \$20.5 million for the new Target 120 initiative, which aims to prevent young people from re-offending and improve community safety.

YACWA's Response

YACWA commends the Government's attempts to improve the State's financial position and we are pleased that the target to bring the budget back to surplus by 2020-21 is on track. We also welcome the number of investment initiatives outlined in the budget, particularly including those surrounding METRONET, housing, health and education.

Despite these commendable initiatives, we feel the need to reiterate our position of concern about the significant increases

to the cost of living, which we believe are putting a substantial, heavy burden on low-income young people (including those on Newstart and Youth Allowance) and families who already suffer high rates of housing stress. The additional household fees and charges will disproportionately put the most vulnerable young people and families in society at increased danger of falling below the poverty line.

Returning the budget to surplus cannot come at the cost of the wellbeing of those most disadvantaged in Western Australia.

Cost of Living

As has been the case with last few budget years, the Government has announced a raft of increases to the cost of living, meaning many unavoidable expenses are going to become more costly.

Total annual costs for the 'representative household' have increased by \$292 (4.8%). These increases include:

- \$120.57 (7%) annual increase in electricity bills;
- 6% increase in the majority of Water Corporation Services;
- 3% increase for standard fixed water service charges;
- 40% increase for high usage metropolitan residential water customers and a 15% increase for high usage regional customers ;
- \$28 (10.1%) increase in Emergency Services Levy;
- Total overall increase of \$31.66 (3.8%) in motor vehicle charges;

- 1.5% increase in public transport fares; and
- Concession fare increase from 41% to 42%

CONTEXT

Over the last few years increases to the cost of living have meant disadvantaged and low income young people and families have been made to shoulder more and more of the economic burden of poor state finances.

These increases mark the fourth year of consistent growth to household charges passed onto consumers:

- In 2014, an increase of \$324.18, or 6.6% was applied;
- In 2015, an increase of \$198.54 or 3.81% was applied;
- In 2016, an increase of \$257 or 4.76% was applied; and
- In 2017, an increase of \$439 or 7.7% was applied.

This increase means many young people who are studying full time need to work multiple jobs in order to afford the basic costs of living. A national Student Housing Survey by Anglicare Australia discovered that students in Western Australia found their economic position impacted on their study with 78% of students reporting difficulty funding essential study items, 74% of students reporting the amount of time they spend at work hurts their studies, and 56% don't believe that Centrelink provides them with enough money to live and study.

Whilst Newstart and Youth Allowances must be increased by the Federal Government, the State Government needs to address rising utility costs for young people to mitigate increasing rates of severe housing stress. With rent alone already an unaffordable cost for young people in Western Australia, young people will be among those most significantly impacted by increasing utility costs.

YACWA's Response:

Whilst it is understandable that the State Government needs to increase its revenue base in order to fix the budget situation, we believe that the State Government must do more to support the most vulnerable young people in our community. The impacts of cost-of-living increases will be worn by young people who are currently struggling with high levels of unemployment, underemployment, and housing stress and may be at-risk of homelessness. It is unconscionable that budget repair measures would come at the expense of the wellbeing of at-risk community members.

We call on the government to -

- Commit additional **resources in forward estimates to concessions and support for young people who spend a greater proportion of their income on their basic living costs and those who are at risk of falling into homelessness.**
- Hold an **independent review of the adequacy and targeting of the increases to household expenditure** and determine where the burden of these costs could be better placed elsewhere or shifted to those more able to afford them.

Education & Training

Education has received a an investment of \$22.2 billion over four years investment in the 2018-19 State Budget. While large, this is an increase of only 1.1 per cent and hasn't matched inflation – meaning education has effectively received a moderate funding decrease. This investment includes:

- \$1.2 billion to build and improve WA schools in metropolitan and regional areas;
- \$153.6 million to build four new primary schools in Baldivis, Banksia Grove, Byford and Caversham;
- \$73.5 million to support increasing numbers of students at public schools;
- \$11.2 million to cover the freeze on Vocational Education and Training fees from 2019-2021 to address affordability concerns for prospective students & employers;
- \$10.3 million for preventative maintenance;
- \$3.3 million to help prepare our workforce for future jobs under a Science, Technology, Engineer and Mathematics (STEM) strategy;
- Employing 200 education assistants in WA schools between 2018 and 2020;
- Continuing previous election commitments, including increased Aboriginal and Islander Education Officers between 2018 and 2019;
- Establishment of five new specialist programs to assist students with autism and learning differences in public schools;
- Converting 100 primary school classrooms into science labs in 2018 and 2019;
- Employing additional teachers to support mental health programs in schools; and

- Employing Independent Learning Coordinators at 10 regional schools to support year 11 and 12 students studying through the School of Isolated and Distance Education.

CONTEXT

Western Australian children and young people are some of the hardest hit by regional and remote disadvantage. Only 40% of children in the most regionally disadvantaged areas of Western Australia attend 15 hours of preschool a week, compared to 70% nationally. In a similar vein, only 46.7% of households in disadvantaged areas have access to the Internetⁱ. This is why it is absolutely critical that funding for regional and remote education is maintained to provide sufficient support networks and resources for regional schools.

Western Australia's education system has been the subject of controversy in recent months. In December 2017, \$64 million in cuts to education were announced by the State Government, prompting a strong public outcry. In response, the State Government announced some reversals, bringing the total loss of funding down to \$41 millionⁱⁱ.

In late 2017, a significant number of administrative positions within the Department of Education were abolished as part of reforms to the state's approach to Aboriginal Educationⁱⁱⁱ. These positions, which were decentralised roles, utilised the long-term development of informal protocols, networks, and resources to increase Aboriginal children and young people's engagement in the education system. Without these positions, Aboriginal young people and their families across the state will face increased barriers to school attendance.

These cuts mean that the positive impact of last year's budget increases to school based education staff will be substantially diminished if they do not have effective administrative support. The burden of

education cannot be placed solely on teachers; they must have effective systemic support in order to meaningfully assist disadvantaged and at-risk children and young people.

YACWA's response

YACWA will always support investment in our education system and believes that it should always be spared from budget repair measures. Our young people cannot be made to wear the cost of the State's finances, and education is critical to addressing inequality in our society. For some of our most disadvantaged young people, access to quality education can provide pathways out of poverty and long-term health and wellbeing.

YACWA is disappointed to see no additional commitments in the budget to support Aboriginal Education outcomes. The abolition of a significant number of administrative Aboriginal Education positions will severely affect Western Australia's ability to meet Closing the Gap targets on education, in many of which we currently rank second-last.

Some measures, such as the continued freeze on VET fees, are positive steps but unfortunately not ambitious enough to truly address the ongoing issue of education affordability for many low-income young people.

Education services at Banksia Hill Detention Centre are currently the responsibility of the Department of Justice. In a recent report from the Office of the Inspector of Custodial Services into Banksia Hill, education had been deemed as severely inadequate at the Centre, and if no improvements were seen in future years, the Department of Justice

would consider transferring the responsibility of these services to the Department of Education^{iv}. YACWA notes that no funding has been set aside for the Department of Education to support services at Banksia Hill.

We call on the government to -

- Urgently take steps to **preserve the knowledge and resources developed by the abolished Aboriginal Education positions, and to embed these into its new approach in the coming years.**
- **Provide increased funding in the forward estimates for school-based and administrative support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Officer Roles** to reduce remote disadvantage.
- Carefully consider the impact of any future **budget cuts to dedicated Aboriginal-identified positions** upon the State's ability to meet Closing the Gap education targets, in many of which **Western Australia currently performs second last.**
- Transfer responsibility of **Education services at Banksia Hill to the Department of Education and ensure that these services are adequately funded.**

Further Information:

Budget Paper No. 2 – Budget Statements: Volume 1
Investing in our children's education – Budget Paper Fact Sheet

Health

The State Budget 2018-19 provides a total investment of \$8.8 billion into Western Australia's healthcare system. Key investments revolve around ensuring our infrastructure remains current and fit-for-purpose, with a focus on regional health centres and continuing to provide key services. This includes:

- \$6.5 billion for hospital services in 2018-19, with average growth of 3.3% per annum over the forward estimates;
- A \$6.1 billion investment in health care assets and facilities, including:
 - \$73.3 million to develop the Geraldton Health Campus, including an upgrade to its emergency and critical care services;
 - \$5 million for redevelopment of the Tom Price Hospital; and
 - \$4.4 million for development of the Peel Health Campus.
- \$182.3 million to the Patient Assisted Transport Scheme;
- \$67.8 million in additional recurrent funding towards non-hospital services supporting prevention and promotion, palliative care, patient transport and Aboriginal health services; and
- \$24.9 million to redevelop the Osborne Park Hospital.

CONTEXT

The State Government is currently undertaking a Sustainable Health Review to examine how high-quality, patient-centred healthcare can be provided in a financially sustainable manner in Western Australia. The Sustainable Health Review has released its interim report for feedback and is expected to deliver its final report later in 2018^v.

The other major investment in health for young people is the development of the \$1.2 billion Perth Children's Hospital (PCH). PCH has been an ongoing development project experiencing significant delays following health concerns and the presence of lead in water pipes. PCH finally opened in May 2018 and is expected to assume full operations in June alongside the closure of Princess Margaret Hospital^{vi}.

The Commonwealth Government is expected to provide an increase in hospitals funding to States and Territories through a Heads of Agreement. This funding increase will apply over the life of the agreement which applies from 1 July 2020 to 30 June 2025^{vii}.

YACWA's response

YACWA welcomes the State Government's investment in our health care facilities, and the commitment to ensuring they are fit-for-purpose and contemporary. This is a positive step forward, especially with the focus on regional facilities and ensuring all Western Australians can receive adequate healthcare.

However, the lack of targeted investment in health promotion and illness prevention activities for young people is disappointing, as is the reduction in funding for Public and Community Health Services over 2019-2021 and may create strain on hospital and bed-based services as more people become unwell. For young people, early prevention and promotion activities can be greatly successful and influence them to lead healthy lives – before they become unwell. We hope to see this rectified following the finalisation of the Sustainable Health Review.

We call on the government to -

- **Reconsider prevention investment in future, especially in light of reductions in funding to Public and Community Health Services over the next two years.** The final report of the Sustainable Health Review should heavily influence the direction of health care investment reforms in future budgets.

Further Information:

*Budget Paper No. 2 – Budget Statements:
Volume 1*

*Putting Patients First – Budget Paper Fact
Sheet*

Sustainable Health Review

Mental Health

Mental health has received a reasonable investment in the 2018-19 State Budget, but it comes with no surprises. The coming investment seems to be business as usual for the State Government, with just a small increase from last year's investment.

Investment in this coming year is strongly focused on increasing access to bed-based services and investment in community treatment. However, concerningly, this is countered by a 41% decrease in prevention funding over the next two years for both mental health and alcohol and other drugs.

The key points of investment include:

- \$3.8 billion over the next four years for the Mental Health Commission to continue to deliver its priorities;
- \$18.2 million over four years for the State-wide Specialist Aboriginal Mental Health Service;
- \$11.8 million for the establishment of a Mental Health Observation Area Plus Unit at Royal Perth Hospital;
- \$10.5 million to construct a Karratha Step Up Step Down facility;
- \$10.2 million over five years to construct and operate a community mental health step up / step down service in the Mid West; and
- \$1.6 million towards Regional Men's Health to improve men's health and wellbeing in regional areas of WA.

CONTEXT

In 2015, the Mental Health Commission released the Western Australian Mental Health, Alcohol and Other Drug Services Plan 2015-2025 (the Plan). The Plan mapped the current mix of service provision and investment in Western Australia and examined it against our current and projected future populations to guide investment and meet need. It strongly recommended a greater investment in prevention and early intervention services (which are usually less expensive than crisis services) to help people stay well and prevent illness^{viii}. This was an ambitious vision of evidence-based reforms and was welcomed by YACWA and the sector as an important step to address gaps in our service system and ensure it is fit to support Western Australia as it grows.

The Mental Health Commission is also guided in funding by the state-wide suicide prevention strategy, Suicide Prevention 2020: Together We Can Save Lives, which aims to halve the number of suicides in Western Australia by 2025^{ix}.

A broader prevention plan is also in development for release later in 2018, aiming to promote optimal mental health and reduce drug use and harm^x. A draft of this prevention plan was released for consultation earlier in 2018.

YACWA's response

The Plan has set a required target of 5% allocation for mental health prevention services in the budget by 2025. Successive budgets have not moved towards this target, and this budget has been no better. The 41% decrease in prevention program investment for mental health and alcohol and other drugs is extremely concerning. The reductions were first outlined in last year's budget, and the State Government has missed a significant opportunity to spend wisely by reversing these. The reduction in prevention funding is broadly out of alignment with the approach of the Plan.

Also concerning to YACWA is the minimal acknowledgement of the Plan in the State Budget. The Plan outlined the need to shift our investment towards prevention activities, rather than more costly intervention and crisis services. This important document presented an ambitious & comprehensive approach to ensure our mental health, alcohol and other drugs sector is equipped to meet the needs of the Western Australian community.

YACWA is concerned the significant amount of work surrounding the Plan has been abandoned and we seek clarity over whether the Plan is still informing future investment and the current approach to reforming our mental health, alcohol and other drugs services sector. Additionally we are concerned that existing service provision may be affected by this reduction.

The additional spend on community supports and the State-wide Specialist Aboriginal Mental Health Service (SSAMHS) over the coming years is welcome, however YACWA questions how the reduced prevention funding will impact the efficacy of these programs and their long-term ability to produce sustainable positive outcomes without the support of a healthy prevention spend.

We call on the government to -

- Re-align the Mental Health Commission funding back to the principles of the Mental Health, Alcohol and Other Drug Services Plan 2015-2025 by **prioritising early-intervention programs whilst being supported by acute and crisis services.**
- Ensure that **no existing preventative services are interrupted or discontinued due to reduced funding** and clarify whether this **funding is still being driven by the principles of the Services Plan.**
- **Increase the percentage allocation for prevention services in future forward estimates in order to meet the 5% quota by 2025** as set out Services Plan, with specific funding for further youth suicide prevention activity.
- **Increase targeted funding for community-based specialist mental health support services for young people.**

Further Information:

Budget Paper No. 2 – Budget Statements: Volume 1

Putting Patients First – Budget Paper Fact Sheet

Western Australian Mental Health, Alcohol and Other Drugs Services Plan 2015-2025
Suicide Prevention 2020: Together we can save lives

Alcohol & Other Drugs

Closely related to mental health spend, Alcohol and Other Drugs (AOD) received a reasonable investment focused on meeting election commitments with no big surprises.

However, concerning this is countered by a 41% decrease in prevention funding over the next two years for both mental health and alcohol and other drugs.

The key points of investment include:

- \$16 million over the next four years for early intervention and support for individuals with severe drug dependence;
- \$12.8 million for the Northwest Drug and Alcohol Support Program;
- \$9.3 million to fast-track 33 alcohol and other drug rehabilitation beds in the South West region;
- Continued funding of \$5.4 million to establish a female AOD rehabilitation prison at Wandoo Facility, which will include targeted AOD programs to help reduce reoffending;
- \$4.5 million to support the AOD workforce until 2022; and
- Investment in additional accommodation units at Casuarina Prison, which will facilitate delivery of a male AOD facility.

CONTEXT

Drug use in Western Australia has been a point of concern for successive State Governments, with higher than average use of methamphetamine and ongoing harm from alcohol usage. Since 2014, responsibility for alcohol and other drugs services and supports has been with the Mental Health Commission, which amalgamated with the former Drug and Alcohol Office in 2014.

Across all Australian states and territories, methamphetamine is the most commonly used illicit drug. The 2016 National Drug Strategy Household Survey found rates of methamphetamine use to be twice as high in remote or very remote areas in comparison to those in major cities or regional areas. Young people aged 18-24 years in these areas are twice as likely to report recent use compared to city-dwelling or regional young people^{xi}.

The State Government has asserted that their Methamphetamine Action Plan (MAP) is focused on 'three equal pillars of prevention, protection and prosecution'^{xii}. However two key funding differences from last year's budget call into question their commitment to this approach, with an ongoing focus on punitive measures. Last year's State Budget saw a significant investment into a number of initiatives to counter methamphetamine use, including the development of a MAP and the WA Police Meth Border Force. We are concerned that from this investment we will see a greater number of young people struggling with substance abuse, caught up in the justice system. This approach will only further the 'war on drugs' mentality that has existed for decades and been proven ineffective, without having a strong focus on preventative measures.

YACWA's response

YACWA welcomes the State Government's continued commitment to establish new treatment and rehabilitation facilities across the State. However, as in last year's budget, concerns remain regarding the lack of dedicated facilities for the specialised treatment of young people suffering from substance addiction. Young people have unique needs and barriers to access that may not be appropriately met by an all-ages facilities. Clarification is needed to determine how these announced facilities will provide appropriate, evidence-based support to young patients. Further, the social determinants that influence alcohol and other drug use in young people can vary significantly compared to the general population, necessitating a mix of mainstream and dedicated youth services.

YACWA's concern continues to be at the minimal investment in early intervention and rehabilitation services, especially following considerable investment previously into punitive measures and the Meth Border Force. Investment to support young people should focus heavily on prevention activities, such as the successful Drug Aware campaign. Punitive measures resulting in contact with the justice system may potential worsen cycles of addiction and disadvantage, as well as be detrimental to longer-term positive outcomes. YACWA strongly urges the government to re-evaluate its funding priorities to produce positive, long-term and sustainable outcomes.

We call on the government to -

- Ensure that in future **funding for prevention services increases to meet the targets required in the Mental Health, Alcohol and Other Drugs Services Plan**, and to live up to the 'three equal pillars' of the MAP.
- Plan for, and develop, more **facilities, especially regionally based facilities, allocated solely for the specialised treatment of young people experiencing substance addiction rather than utilising a blanket approach.**

Further Information:

*Budget Paper No. 2 – Budget Statements:
Volume 1*

*Putting Patients First – Budget Paper Fact
Sheet*

*Western Australian Methamphetamine
Action Plan*

Family & Domestic Violence

The measures regarding family & domestic violence (FDV) in the State Budget include:

- \$4.3 million to implement a National Domestic Violence Order Scheme to enable family violence restraining orders and police orders to be automatically recognised and enforced across all Australian jurisdictions;
- \$2.6 million in improved funding for Communicare's 'Breathing Space Program' - specialised residential behaviour change for perpetrators of FDV – from 2019/20 to 2021/22;
- \$570,000 for general crisis and transitional accommodation in Collie;
- \$1.1 million for the Kimberley Family Violence Service;
- \$5.8 million ongoing allocation over the forward estimates for a new women's refuge in the Peel region;
- Mention of the introduction of a Respectful Relationships program into schools and a pet referral program however there is no funding attached; and
- \$8.6 million towards financial counselling services for at-risk families.

CONTEXT

FDV in WA is reaching crisis point, as we have some of the highest rates of FDV in the country. In 2016, 64% of all reported assaults in WA were related to FDV^{xiii}. The Government has outlined its attempts to address these “unacceptable levels of family and domestic violence throughout Australia” through a “coordinated program of initiatives involving multiple agencies and designed to achieve both immediate and long-term outcomes.”^{xiv}

YACWA's response

YACWA is broadly supportive of the measures announced in the 2018/19 budget regarding FDV, in particular improved funding for the 'Breathing Space' Program, funding for financial counselling services, implementation of the National Domestic Violence Order Scheme and an increase in FDV support services and believe they will all have positive impacts. Despite these improvements in funding, YACWA is disappointed to see a lack of clarity around whether any of the newly announced services will contain any targeted support or counselling for children and young people who have experienced FDV. Young people and children are particularly at risk of experiencing or witnessing domestic violence^{xv} and as a result there needs to be a concerted focus to support these at-risk children and young people, something which is absent in this budget.

We call on the government to -

- Clarify whether funding increases to FDV services will develop or improve services specialised in **targeted support or counselling for children and young people**.
- Provide **dedicated funding for the development of FDV services that are responsive to diversity among the Western Australian community**, in particular for culturally and linguistically diverse communities, Aboriginal communities, and LGBTQIA+ communities.

Further Information:

*Budget Paper No.2 – Budget Statements
Volume 2
Building Safer Communities – Budget Fact
Sheet*

Housing and Homelessness

The measures regarding housing and homelessness in the State Budget include:

- \$184 million as the State's contribution to a \$394 million Social and Affordable Housing and Jobs Package, with the balance funded through private sector investment.
 - This package aims to provide 1,390 new homes, including up to 320 new social housing dwellings and at least 400 affordable homes, and eight high density METRONET oriented developments
- A significant reduction in Homelessness and other Support Services, from \$87.4 million in 2017/18 to \$63.1 million in 2018/19
- There will be no commitment to building or supporting new houses in remote Aboriginal communities. However existing housing in remote communities will continue to be supported.
- There is no concrete commitment to 'new housing options' for Aboriginal families through the North-West for building and supporting new houses in remote Aboriginal communities due to a 'funding shortfall'.

CONTEXT

The Western Australian crisis accommodation system is chronically under-resourced. As a result many young people experiencing homelessness lack the support required to break the cycle of living on the street. Uncertainty around the future of funding for crisis housing for homeless young people has once again continued into the new budget. This means that large portions of Western Australia's youth homelessness initiatives are at risk of closure or serious reductions in service delivery.

The *Transitional National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness* (NPAH) was announced by the Commonwealth Government to ensure funding continuity for youth homelessness and domestic violence services until the *National Housing and Homelessness Agreement* (NHaHA) comes into effect. The NPAH provides support to approximately 96,000 people at risk of, or currently experiencing, homelessness, as well as more than 700 vital community services.

The Transitional NPAH is due to expire on 30 June 2018. Unfortunately, with the referral of the *Treasury Laws Amendment (National Housing and Homelessness Agreement) Bill 2017* to the Senate Economics Committee, the NHaHA is likely to be delayed. Whilst these are Federal partnerships, we believe that the Government can, and should, provide support and funding to state-wide crisis accommodation, as well as advocate for a more stable long-term national agreement.

One significant contributor to the over-demand for crisis accommodation is the lack of affordable long-term social housing in the state, combined with rising costs of living. Anglicare's Rental Affordability Snapshot 2018 showed that there are zero affordable houses available for young people on Newstart or Youth Allowance in Western Australia^{xvi}. This has led to many young people being turned away from crisis accommodation or languishing in social housing waitlists.

The *Affordable Housing Strategy 2010-2020: Opening Doors to Affordable Housing* has set a target of 30,000 affordable homes by 2020. Whilst this Strategy is commendable, it must be more ambitious in order to reduce the substantial waitlist for

social housing and to shoulder more of the burden placed on crisis accommodation. The WA Housing Authority's 2016/17 Annual Report noted that 16,516 households are on the public housing waitlist, with 1,590 of those being on the priority list^{xvii}. Given the waitlist for applicants is 139 weeks^{xviii}, crisis accommodation clearly struggles

to provide for those needing immediate accommodation and this gap must be filled by a dramatic increase in social and affordable housing.

YACWA's response

YACWA is disappointed that there has been a decrease in funding over the forward estimates for Homelessness and Other Support Services. The Government has put this down to the reduction in funding for the NPAH, however we believe this is not a sufficient enough reason for why this reduction is required. This funding uncertainty further stretches the capacity of our already overburdened crisis accommodation system and ever increasing waitlist for social housing.

Whilst YACWA commends the government's approach to building affordable housing around Metronet projects, we believe the target of 320 new social houses and 400 new affordable homes is not enough to meet WA's demand for social housing and to fully support young people experiencing homelessness. The long-term social and economic benefits of a housing first policy are well documented and thus we urge the government to adopt a far more ambitious target.

YACWA holds significant concern over the defunding of the National Partnership on Remote Housing after 30 June 2018. It is absolutely crucial that this funding continues to adhere to the principles of Closing the Gap and to prevent worsening outcomes for Aboriginal young people and their families in remote communities in WA.

We call on the government to -

- **Clarify the reasoning behind the reduction in funding for Homelessness and Other Support Services and ensure that they are sufficiently funded in future forward estimates** to prevent worsening outcomes for homeless young people.
- Commit state government funds to **match any shortfall in funding from NPAH and NHaHA to maintain consistency in crisis service support for homeless young people.**
- Act with urgency to **negotiate a new National Partnership on Remote Housing with the Federal Government and cover the funding shortfall in the meantime.**
- Redefine a new State Affordable Housing Strategy to **drastically improve ambitions in social housing targets.**
- Ensure that any development of a long-term strategy to address homelessness in WA **takes into account the specific needs of at-risk young people and creates strategies to address these.**

Further information:

*Budget Paper No.2 – Budget Statements
Volume 2*

End Homelessness WA – Strategy to End Homelessness

Child Protection

The measures regarding child protection in the State Budget include:

- A slight increase in the forward estimates in funding of earlier intervention and family support services – from \$79.9m in 2017/18 to \$86.3m in 2021/22
- However most of the funds in child protection continue to be flooded towards the crisis end of care – costs for care arrangement and support services increase by \$22m to \$418m by 2021/22.
- A lack of detail about leaving care services and a continued non-commitment to raising the leaving care age from 18 to 21.

CONTEXT

Our out-of-home care system in Western Australia currently faces a number of critical issues which show no sign of abating. The Department for Child Protection and Family Support's 2016-2017 Annual Report noted that children are 'entering care earlier, staying longer and exhibiting increasingly complex behaviours'^{xix}. These complex needs mean that children and young people need to have more intensive transitional support and wrap-around services and these types of services should extend to young people leaving state care. As a result of the increase in children and young people in out of home care, it is understandable that funds are ever increasing however this is a direct result of the lack of attention given to early intervention and support services as an effective method to reduce the amount of children and young people entering the care system.

Another clear issue is the lack of transitional services for young people leaving care. Last year's budget showed little detail regarding Leaving Care and Transition to Adulthood Services and reforms in this space. The youth sector has consistently advised us that transitions between systems remain an ongoing systemic weakness. Many young people exiting State care are at a higher risk of facing unemployment, becoming homeless, achieving low educational attainment, and may have little or no support to respond to these challenges. In order to meaningfully address this strategic priority, consistent and intensive leaving care plans and support services are needed for every young person leaving care, as is an extension of the leaving care age for young people who require longer stays in care.

YACWA's response

It is welcome that there is no decrease in funding for this service compared to last budget however it is disappointing that earlier intervention continues to be neglected as an effective method of reducing costs in child protection; instead money continues to be flooded towards crisis services. Evidence clearly suggests that increases of funding and focus on early intervention and diversion will create long term reductions in cost of the out of home care system and improved outcomes for children and young people due to a decrease of young people in the care system.

There is also a continued absence in the budget about ongoing Leaving Care and Transition to Adulthood Services and reforms as well as raising the leaving care age to 21. YACWA is disappointed that this is yet again the case however we will continue to monitor this space and work with our partners to ensure the best outcomes are achieved for young people exiting care.

We call on the government to -

- Significantly **increase funding for earlier intervention and family support services in future forward estimates** in order to reduce the strain on the child protection system.
- Provide **increased funding for Leaving Care and Transition to Adulthood Services** in future forward estimates.
- **Co-design an intensive transitional support service framework for young people leaving State care** who have complex needs and are at risk of homelessness.
- Commit to changing the Children and Community Services Act 2004 to **extend the leaving care age option to 21 years of age**, on an individual, as needs basis, **by no later than 2020**.

Further Information:

*Budget Paper No.2 – Budget Statements
Volume 2*

Youth Justice

The measures regarding Youth Justice in the State Budget include:

- \$21.5 million over four years to continue the Regional Youth Justice Services in the Kimberley and Pilbara to enable diversion and prevention services
- \$20.5 million for the new Target 120 initiative – an early intervention program to reduce juvenile reoffending in WA – this will be beginning in October 2018 with Bunbury the first trial site.
- Minor decreases in funding for youth justice over the forward estimates – from \$100.9m in 2017/18 to \$98.7m in 2021/22
- The Minister for Corrective Services will conduct a special inquiry into the allegations of abuse at Banksia Hill however there are no other details about any funding changes to the centre.

CONTEXT

The Western Australian Youth Justice System and in particular Banksia Hill Detention Centre are at a crisis point. Recent allegations of human rights abuses and degrading treatment of incarcerated young people have only served to throw fresh doubt onto the viability and effectiveness of Western Australia's only youth detention centre. Not only has the Centre received national and international condemnation, its own internal statistics clearly show its failures. In 2016/17, the Department for Corrective Services, on average, managed 142 young people in detention, a 6.5% increase on 2015/16. Of those 142, 105 were Aboriginal young people, a 7.3% increase from the previous year.^{xx}

The Office of the Inspector into Custodial Services (OICS) released a Report on Banksia Hill Detention Centre (Banksia Hill) on 17 April 2018. Since early 2016, Banksia Hill has seen an increased number of incidents involving assaults, misconduct and restraint^{xxi}. Such incidents form part of a long history of instability, poor conditions and allegations of misconduct at the Centre. New research released early in 2018 has also found that nine out of 10 people in youth detention are severely impaired in at least one area of cognitive function, and one in three were assessed to have foetal alcohol syndrome disorder (FASD)^{xxii}, which suggests significant on the part of the Centre to accurately assess and support the young people in its care.

Banksia Hill traditionally has shown to have limited therapeutic, trauma-informed and restorative approaches to rehabilitation. As a result, 55% of young people leaving detention return within two years^{xxiii}. These current levels of re-incarceration incur unsustainable costs on the State. In 2015-2016, the average cost of keeping just one detainee in custody was close to \$1,000 per day, or \$360,000 per year for each young person^{xxiv}. With better planning and support for young people leaving detention in Banksia and an increase in early intervention, prevention and rehabilitation services, outcomes will improve for both young people in the Justice System and for the Government's budget repair.

YACWA's response

It is welcome to see the Government make a concerted effort in this budget to dedicate funds to targeted programs focusing on early intervention, diversion and reducing rates of reoffending, in comparison to previous budgets. YACWA is supportive of investment in both Target 120 program and Regional Youth Justice Services; we will monitor the effectiveness of these programs and hope that they create long term reductions into the number of young people at risk within the youth justice system.

The Government has stated that there are projects in the works to reduce the amount of Aboriginal people in custody as a result of driver's license offences or unpaid fines. There is however no targeted program to reduce the overrepresentation of Aboriginal young people in the juvenile justice system. We hope targeted projects will be developed in conjunction with the Target 120 program in the future to address this.

We note that the budget has said that the Minister for Corrective Services will conduct a special inquiry into the allegations of abuse at Banksia Hill however we are disappointed that there is still no funding commitment to improve the conditions at Banksia, and to shift the focus of youth justice onto rehabilitation rather than punishment. This inquiry is welcome and has the potential to create long term change, however given the evidence already revealed from the OICS Report into the centre, it is clear that the Government should have no choice but to make drastic and immediate change to the management and nature of the centre.

YACWA has consistently called for the centre to be made more trauma-informed and purpose built for young people if Western Australia want to effectively rehabilitate young people and break the cycle of

detention. Not only does the centre need to be repurposed, but other specialised facilities need to be built in order for young people in the justice system to have more options for rehabilitative detention. YACWA will continue to monitor this space and call for urgent action to fix the current crisis of youth detention in Western Australia.

We call on the government to -

- Hasten the **transition of management of the youth justice portfolio from Department of Justice over to the Department of Communities.**
- Reverse the shift towards the increasingly punitive focus of the centre and adopt the Inspector of Custodial Service's recommendations by **financing therapeutic, trauma-informed and restorative approaches to rehabilitation at Banksia Hill Detention** centre in order to reduce rates of recidivism.
- Lessen the burden on Banksia Hill and the West Australian Youth Justice System by **funding increasing specialised facilities to deal with crisis care, intensive management, individualised rehabilitation and the diverse complexity of West Australian young people.**
- **Develop and fund Target 120 aligned early intervention projects in future budgets** in order to focus on reducing the overrepresentation of Aboriginal young people in the youth justice system.

Further Information:

*Budget Paper No.2 – Budget Statements
Volume 2*

*Building Safer Communities – Budget Fact
Sheet*

What Wasn't in the Budget?



OTHER PRIORITY AREAS

Supporting Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs) to Close the Gap

What is currently happening

Closing the Gap began as an initiative to help achieve life-expectancy equality for Aboriginal and Torres Strait people within 25 years. The latest edition of the Closing the Gap Report shows that this goal of equality is nowhere near to being achieved and the current status quo is insufficient.

Currently Australia has had a lack of progress in closing the gap in four out of the seven key areas:

Life expectancy: There is currently a 10 year gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people.

Employment: A national fall in employment rates for both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people since 2008.

Reading and writing: Out of all eight areas measured in the latest data (reading and numeracy for Years 3,5,7 and 9), only one (Year 9 numeracy) is on track.

School attendance: 83.4% attendance rate for Aboriginal young people compared to 93.1% for non-Aboriginal young people.^{xxv}

Clearly we all must be doing more to challenge the status quo and close the gap.

“It is woefully inadequate that, despite having enjoyed over two decades of economic growth, Australia has not been able to improve the social disadvantage of its Indigenous population. The existing measures are clearly insufficient as evidenced by the lack of progress in achieving the “Close the Gap” targets.”^{xxvi}

– UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples

What we've heard:

The problems outlined in the Closing the Gap Strategy are incredibly diverse, complex and require a nuanced approach. We have heard consistently across our consultations that we cannot implement a top-down, blanket approach and expect results. We must instead implement place-based and culturally appropriate solutions by empowering Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs) through adequate funding and support mechanisms.^{xxvii}

ACCOs must be at the forefront of delivering services and support in their own communities. This is a key element in building the capacity of Aboriginal young people and supporting their family and community, as well as recognising the expertise ACCOs possess. Good programs cannot exist in isolation and require systemic support in order to flourish and create effective change in closing the gap.

We call on the government to -

- Ensure that funding is allocated to the Department of Finance, Funding and Contracting Services unit through the Delivering Community Services in Partnership Policy review to **provide support for ACCOs with administrative functions such as applying for grants and tenders.**
- Make a whole of government commitment to **increasing the role of ACCOs as service providers for Aboriginal communities in WA.**
- Commit to funding **place-based strategies** to close the gap by ensuring that at least **30% of procurement for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth services goes to ACCOs.**

‘Breaking the Election Cycle’ – Creating Long Term Outcomes for Young People Through Early Intervention

What is currently happening

Youth service funding in Western Australia has historically been regarded as fragmented and short term^{xxviii}, with one-off grants and short-term rolling contracts taking precedence over long-term outcomes-based contracts together with a clearly defined vision. This has been largely detrimental to outcomes for early intervention services, with funding restrictions sometimes used to justify underfunding or neglect of early intervention.

The recent Machinery-of-Government changes to reduce the number of agencies funding youth services has been a positive step to reduce fragmentation across services funding. However a systemic culture change is needed across government in order to place early intervention at the forefront of importance for service delivery.

‘If we intervene early, not only are there significant savings in expenditure on tertiary services, but more importantly, young people will thrive in their communities.’^{xxix}

– The Youth Partnership Project

What we’ve heard:

The costs of tertiary and acute services are growing, and our state’s youth services are struggling to cope with the demand. This often results in the general neglect of early-intervention services, and fosters a perpetuating cycle of crisis. A significant example of this is in Youth Justice, where \$50.6 million was spent on detaining young people in 2015-16 and yet 55% of young people returned to detention in the same year.^{xxx} Clearly the punitive focus of the Banksia Hill Detention Centre has not had a positive impact on rates of recidivism and rehabilitation at the centre.

Early-intervention programs often take a longer time to produce substantial outcomes and these outcomes are generally more difficult to measure when compared to tertiary and acute services^{xxxi}. As a result, when these programs lose funding due to a lack of measurable outcomes at the cessation of their short-term contracts, young people targeted by these programs may slip into crisis and add to the growing cost of acute and tertiary services in Western Australia. In order for early-intervention programs to be successful, a long-term mindset must be adopted in order to reduce instances of recidivism in many areas.

During our consultations, YACWA received almost unanimous backing to strongly

advocate for increased state-wide funding and longer-term contracts for earlier intervention services. Many organisations considered this vital to create long-term systemic change and deliver positive outcomes for young people. The Government's vision must be longer than election cycles and cornerstone programs defining their term of office, but instead must place a priority on creating a legacy of lasting positive outcomes for young people in the community and strong early-intervention practices, programs and outcomes for the sector.

If we want to truly demonstrate the importance and effectiveness of early-intervention programs we need a strong evidence base, a clear definition of 'at-risk', and comprehensive data sharing between both government and the youth sector. How do we accurately depict how much savings we can make using early-intervention programs if they prevent a young person from needing acute and crisis services? This is a key challenge and often the inability to answer this question leads to the aforementioned neglect of early-intervention.^{xxxiii}

The Youth Partnership Project (YPP) is a good example of an initiative that has been provided dedicated funding to take a long-term focus on early-intervention outcomes. An independent report by KPMG evaluating the YPP shows that while the project outcomes 'may not be seen for some years', its activities were seen as having great potential to make 'meaningful systemic improvement in the future'^{xxxiv}.

These include:

- 'A shift from delivering projects to young people 'at risk', to deliberately identifying and targeting a group of young people with the most complex needs, and delivering intensive, long-term, and individualised help to them and their families.'

- 'A reduction in siloed program delivery and a greater focus on the individual young person.'

The effectiveness of long term early-intervention strategies, practices and programs such as the YPP can be a model for success, but first they must be further researched and evaluated in order to fully quantify the effects on targeting at-risk young people. Understanding the impacts of early-intervention in real terms in Western Australia allows for the creation of long-term positive outcomes that decrease the demand and costs needed for acute and crisis services.^{xxxv} By 'breaking the election cycle' and the short-term thinking that comes with it, we have a better chance of utilising early-intervention to break young people out of cycles of disadvantage, poverty and crisis.

We call on the government to -

- Commit **to increasing funds in forward estimates for services that provide early intervention and prevention programs** in areas such as mental health, alcohol and other drugs, child protection, and out-of-home care.
- **Include provisions in the budget for longer-term contracts for service provides carrying out early-intervention services**, in order to create long-term vision lasting over various terms of office.
- Develop a research project that will **quantify, compare and contrast the effectiveness of current early-intervention strategies practices and programs** in order to more effectively target at-risk young people and to reduce the cost and demand of tertiary and acute services.
- Explore the possibility of **developing a co-designed shared risk matrix, which is used across government and the sector to define and help identify at-risk young people.**

Ensuring Effective Consultation with Disadvantaged Young People

What is currently happening

In last year's pre-budget submission we identified meaningfully engaging young people in decision-making processes as a priority issue for the State Government to address. Whilst this is still incredibly important, our consultations this year have identified that we cannot think of consultation with young people as a generalised process. At-risk, in-crisis and disadvantaged young people must be properly consulted when services and strategies are being developed that directly affect their wellbeing.

What we've heard:

One of the key points from our consultation that we need to ensure that a **diversity** of young people are engaged in consultation, including **young people in crisis and at risk**, and not just young people in the 'mainstream' system. The sector generally felt that government has historically been less effective at reaching out to these demographics, with targeted consultation generally left up to the sector who often have limited capacity and funding for this purpose.^{xxxvi}

The formation of the Ministerial Youth Advisory Council (MYAC) in November 2017 reflects the State Government's commitment to systemic advocacy. The MYAC provides a select group of young people from across Western Australia a direct voice into government policy direction and outcomes. These young people have been given the chance to have direct input into consultations for key policies for young people such as the WA Youth Health Policy. YACWA commends the formation of the MYAC as a laudable example of systemic advocacy in action.

The Youth Disability Advocacy Network (YDAN) is a prime example of a systemic advocacy body that has had increased success when adequately funded. The YDAN exists because both young people with a disability are chronically underrepresented in the youth

and disability sector. In 2017, inaugural funding from the Disability Services Commission, delivered through ViSability, enabled the YDAN to greatly expand the scope of its advocacy, undertake regional engagement and deliver services to strengthen the community sector's ability to provide services for people with disability. Sadly, with this funding almost at its cessation point, YDAN will lose the significant expertise, resources and momentum it built up in 2017, resulting in the ability of young people with a disability to influence decision-making processes being severely reduced.^{xxxvii}

The success of the MYAC and other youth-led systemic advocacy bodies such as YDAN shows that these processes should be replicated and expanded. Disadvantaged, at-risk and in-crisis young people cannot be represented by a generalised group of young people and need targeted peer-led advocacy bodies who are committed to advocating for their peers at all levels of society.^{xxxviii}

We call on the Government to -

- **Provide ongoing funding in forward estimates allocated specifically to independent systemic advocacy groups for young people from disadvantaged backgrounds.**
- **Ensure MYAC's long-term future by establishing it as a permanent long-term systemic advocate for young people.**
 - Expand MYAC to create **sub-committees centering around targeted systemic advocacy for disadvantaged young people.**



Hearing and Responding to the Experiences of Children in Care

What is currently happening

The Advocate for Children in Care is Western Australia's only official advocacy position for children and young people in care. Unfortunately, this advocate is not independent and sits within the Department of Communities. The placement of this position has potential to create caution or even fear amongst young people seeking help given the connection to the statutory child protection system. The Advocate for Children in Care is also not widely known amongst children in care, with 65% of young people not aware that the role exists. ^{xxxix}

"Some things I keep to myself because they don't quite understand what I'm trying to say and they don't really believe it's true." ^{xl}

– Young Person, Residential Care

What we've heard:

Systemic and independent advocacy is critical to ensuring disadvantaged and at-risk young people have a voice in the decisions that affect them. Systemic advocates are able to target specific issues affecting young people that generalised advocacy and consultation cannot.

^{xli} Children and young people in care have a particular need for a systemic independent advocacy body to ensure their rights are upheld. In our last Pre-Budget Submission, we highlighted the importance of children and young people having a diverse number of ways to raise their concerns – including online avenues, mentors and independent people and agencies. These are important elements for young people to feel confident and able to speak out about their care.

In the former Department for Child Protection and Family Support's 2016/17 Annual Report, 4% of children reported they did not feel safe in their current care arrangement, and a further 17% said they did not feel supported in their placement. Additionally, only 38% of children living in non-family care arrangements completed the survey^{xlii},

which is designed to provide feedback about their care experience and concerns about their care arrangement. Clearly current methods of feedback and advocacy for young people in care are insufficient. An independent child advocate that sits outside of State Government would be an important mechanism to protect young people in out of home care in addressing their complaints and abuse.

We call on the Government to -

- Fund the development of an **independent Western Australian Child Protection Advocacy Service**, similar in operation to the Mental Health Advocacy Service, with **genuine consultation, co- design and direct involvement of young people in care, ACCOs and the not-for-profit sector.**
- Investigate current internal feedback processes for young people in care and put in place **strategies to ensure that all complaints mechanisms and advocacy services are well known and understood by young people in care.**

Providing Funding to Match Wage Increases – Addressing the Equal Remuneration Order (ERO)

What is currently happening

‘YACWA reiterates its concern that without funding to match wage increases for not-for-profit organisations, many service providers may be forced to either dramatically reduce services or close their doors entirely when faced with the increasing pressure of the ERO.

What we’ve heard:

The ERO was handed down by the Fair Work Commission to gradually increase wages for the Social, Community, Home Care and Disability Services (SCHADS) Award over an eight-year period from December 2012 to December 2020. YACWA and the sector generally support the aims of the ERO, however, without the State Government’s support through increased funding to the community sector to meet increased costs, these positive aims turn into burdens for many organisations that already struggle with limited funding to match capacity.^{xlv}

In June 2017 WA Council of Social Services (WACOSS) and Community Employers WA (CEWA) carried out a study on the impact of the ERO on 19 significant service organisations in Western Australia. This study showed that of the 282 programs operated by these organisations, 65% were negatively impacted by the ERO and had a significant impact on organisational sustainability^{xlvi}. The organisations involved in the study reported that as a result of the ERO they were likely to “reduce output, reduce quality, reduce quantity, stop providing services and/or fund

the extra expense from existing assets”. In another study by WACOSS and CEWA in June 2016, all 12 organisations with a combined total of 1,800 employees surveyed indicated they are either ‘extremely concerned’ or ‘very concerned’ about meeting future employment costs under the ERO.^{xlvii}

YACWA is extremely concerned about the significant impacts this could have on the community services sector’s financial sustainability. Without increased investments from the State Government to offset the ERO, organisations will be forced to either reduce staffing or shut programs entirely – greatly reducing the support young people experience.

We call on the government to -

- **Ensure the cost of the ERO wage obligations are met in State Government contracting and budget forward estimates,** so that existing service delivery levels of community services are maintained across the sector.

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