



BREAK- ING THE CYCLE

YACWA'S PRE-BUDGET SUBMISSION **2019-2020**

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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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FOREWORD

The 2019-2020 State Budget will mark the McGowan Labor government's third budget since the March 2017 election. In this short period of time, Western Australia has seen significant political, financial and social changes, dramatically altering the landscape of the community services sector and what it means to be a young person in this state.

This budget is a critical opportunity for the McGowan Government to invest more wisely into addressing systemic disadvantage, whilst also preparing the foundations for a prosperous future for all young people in Western Australia.

Over its first two years, the WA State Government has shown a willingness to do things differently - shaking up government operations, tackling expenditure and amalgamating a number of government departments. However these changes have been slow and come at a cost to a focus on future planning. Without concerted effort on long-term thinking – we won't be able to break the cycle of poverty and disadvantage.

We believe that times of austerity and tightened fiscal environments can be the incubator for innovation and creative problem solving; if we have the political courage to take action. In such an environment, we believe we have the opportunity to re-envision and redirect funding into areas where it can have the greatest impact - helping WA's most disadvantaged young people whilst saving money at the same time.

We believe sustainable state finances and progressive investment in tackling inequality can go hand-in-hand – and we know investing in early intervention will save the state money in the long-term. We just need to break the cycle.



We believe this Government has the opportunity to break the cycle of habitual short-term thinking that often comes with governments across Australia and the world leaving a bold legacy of early-intervention investment that creates long-term positive outcomes for the current and future generations.

For these reasons we have titled our submission **‘Breaking the Cycle’**, calling on the Government to look beyond the looming 2021 election and instead put the best interests of young people and the community at the core of long-term thinking.

As such, we have presented our recommendations around the following priority areas we believe government needs to take action on in this budget and beyond:

- **Preventing recurrent disadvantage**
- **Providing urgently needed services**
- **Supporting early intervention**
- **Valuing young people’s experience**
- **Creating a strong youth sector**

These recommendations are based upon consultation with our members, including the youth sector and young people themselves.

On behalf of the Youth Affairs Council of WA, our staff, board and members, we are pleased to present this Pre-Budget Submission for the 2019-2020 State Budget, and hope that it will encourage you to think about how you can help Break the Cycle.

Yours faithfully,

Ross Wortham
Chief Executive Officer
Youth Affairs Council of Western Australia

Penny Webb
Chairperson, YACWA Board
Youth Affairs Council of Western Australia

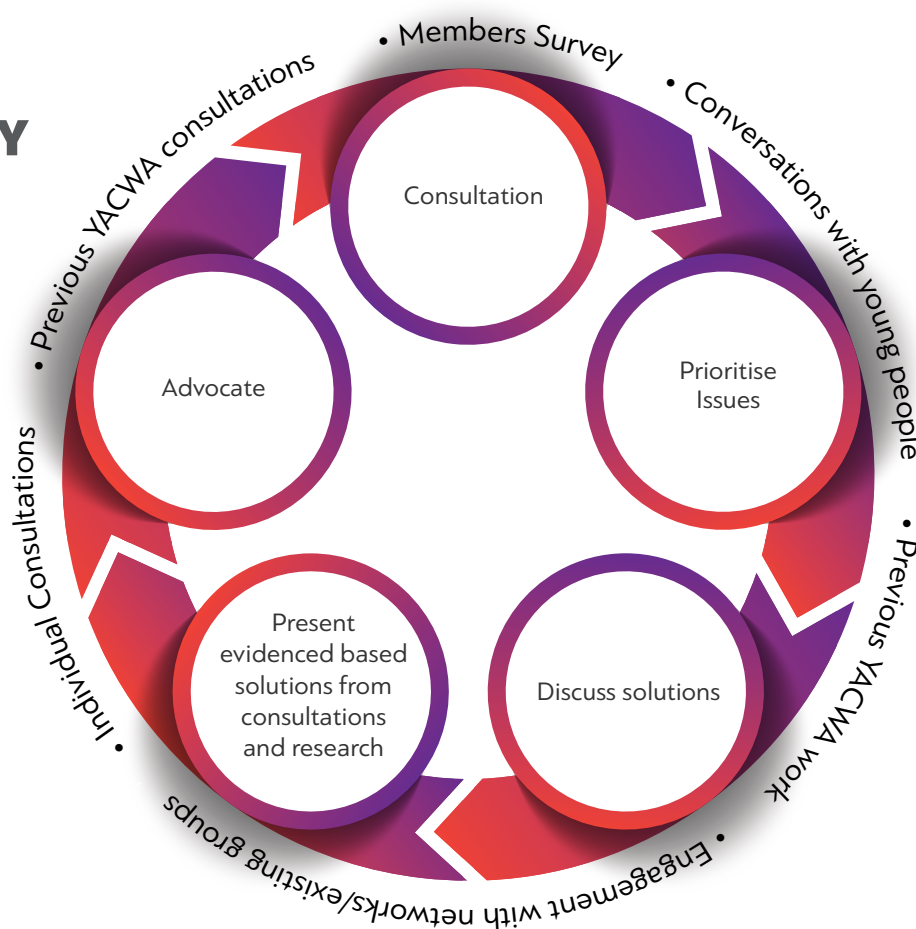
ABOUT THE YOUTH AFFAIRS COUNCIL OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

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.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

YACWA would like to thank all people and organisations that contributed to this submission, and pay special thanks to both our members and all young people who participated. We would also like to thank our friends at Loaded Communications for preparing the design.

SUBMISSION METHODOLOGY



CONSULTATION SUMMARY

Extensive consultation guided the formation of the issues and recommendations outlined in this submission. This included group and individual consultations, forums and our recent youth conference, which was attended by the youth sector & young people from both metropolitan and regional areas. In addition, we have drawn on YACWA's previous work and consultations, recognising that many of these insights remain relevant to the context of this pre-budget submission.

Youth Workers through network meetings/group discussions

Metropolitan:

245

Regional:

85

Young people

(individuals, groups, forums, networks)

190

Sector leaders through individual consultations

29

KEY ANECDOTAL MESSAGES WE HAVE HEARD:

“YOUNG PEOPLE SHOULD HAVE AN INTERLACE OF SERVICES THAT WILL SUPPORT THEM, WHERE THE SKILLS AND EXPERTISE OF ALL THE SERVICES ARE RECOGNISED AND ENCOURAGED TO ENSURE A HOLISTIC RESPONSE”

“A ROBUST AND FULLY FUNDED PREVENTATIVE AND EARLY INTERVENTION ARM OF YOUTH JUSTICE MUST BE GIVEN INCREASED PRIORITY”

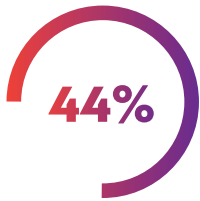
“WE NEED TO FUND THE DEVELOPMENT OF A HOLISTIC EDUCATION SYSTEM THAT IS FLEXIBLE, INTEREST BASED, SUPPORTIVE AND MEETS THE INDIVIDUAL NEEDS OF ALL STUDENTS”

“WE NEED TO PROVIDE BETTER AND MORE INFLUENTIAL PLATFORMS FOR YOUNG PEOPLE WITH LIVED EXPERIENCE”

“THERE ARE TOO MANY INSTANCES OF DISCRIMINATION AND NOT ENOUGH SPECIALISED SERVICES IN OUR HOMELESSNESS SYSTEM”



EVIDENCE THAT THE STATUS QUO IS INSUFFICIENT



KEY STATISTIC - 1

The common cause of death for young people aged 13-17 in the last decade was suicide **(44%)**

Reference *WA Ombudsman's Annual Report - 2017/18*



KEY STATISTIC - 2

Young people who have left the care system are **19x more likely** to have contact with the youth justice system nationally

Reference *Department of Communities - 2017/18 Annual Report*



KEY STATISTIC - 3

55 per cent of all young people in out of home care are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander

Reference *Create Youth Justice Report - 2018*



KEY STATISTIC - 4

The percentage of young people who returned to detention increased from **55 per cent** to **59 per cent** in 2017/18

Reference *WA Ombudsman's Annual Report - 2017/18*



KEY STATISTIC - 5

2,340 young people aged 12-25 were experiencing homelessness on census night in 2016

Reference *Australian Bureau of Statistics - Census 2016*



KEY STATISTIC - 6

Nine out of 10 young people incarcerated in Banksia Hill Detention Centre have some form of neurodevelopmental impairment

Reference *Telethon Kids Institute - Banksia Hill Project 2018*



KEY STATISTIC - 7

Around **65 per cent of young people** eligible for leaving care support do not get it early enough or at all

Reference *Office of the Auditor General – Young People Leaving Care Report 2018*

STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATIONS

PRIORITY AREA ONE: PREVENTING RECURRING DISADVANTAGE

- 1

WHAT

Action and implement all the changes to the leaving care process, as outlined by the Auditor General.

LEAD AGENCY

DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNITIES
- 2

WHAT

Revise the Children and Community Services Act 2004, to include an optional leaving care age of up to 21 years.

LEAD AGENCY

DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNITIES
- 3

WHAT

Ensure genuine representation and input of Aboriginal young people with a care experience on all government advisory bodies relevant to improving the care system.

LEAD AGENCY

DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNITIES
- 4

WHAT

Transfer overall management of Banksia Hill Youth Detention Centre from the Department of Justice to the Department of Communities.

LEAD AGENCY

DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE: YOUTH JUSTICE
- 5

WHAT

Further to the OICS recommendation to implement a strategic plan for education services at Banksia Hill, we recommend that there be a full transfer responsibility of education services at the centre to the Department of Education.

LEAD AGENCY

DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE: YOUTH JUSTICE
- 6

WHAT

Commit to the legislative reform recommended by the OICS to amend the Young Offenders Act 1994 and the Young Offenders Regulations 1995 and bring them in line with international law and standards.

LEAD AGENCY

DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE: YOUTH JUSTICE

STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATIONS

PRIORITY AREA TWO: PROVIDING URGENTLY NEEDED SERVICES

1

WHAT

Urgently develop a specific Aboriginal youth suicide prevention strategy that engenders a whole of government approach and a clear focus on supporting Aboriginal community-led services.

LEAD AGENCY

DEPARTMENT OF PREMIER
AND CABINET; MENTAL HEALTH
COMMISSION

2

WHAT

Commit to developing a Youth Homelessness Action Plan that sits underneath the State Government's 10 Year Strategy on Homelessness and aligns with social housing targets in the Affordable Housing Strategy.

LEAD AGENCY

DEPARTMENT OF
COMMUNITIES

PRIORITY AREA THREE: SUPPORTING EARLY INTERVENTION

1

WHAT

Conduct an independent review and evaluation of the WA Curriculum and Standards to assess their positive (or negative) impact on young people's education, including the; Western Australian Certificate of Education (WACE), Western Australian Statement of Student Achievement (WASSA), Online Literacy and Numeracy Assessment (OLNA) and National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN).

LEAD AGENCY

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

2

WHAT

Create a comprehensive, standardised and mandatory curriculum of sexual health for all public schools, which is youth-led and informed by the feedback and needs of young people.

LEAD AGENCY

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

3

WHAT

Ensure young people with high and complex mental health needs are considered when developing the At-Risk Youth Action Plan.

LEAD AGENCY

DEPARTMENT OF
COMMUNITIES; MENTAL
HEALTH COMMISSION

STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATIONS

4

WHAT

Urgently transfer all youth justice diversion, through-care and bail house services from the Department of Justice to the Department of Communities

LEAD AGENCY

DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE
AND DEPARTMENT OF
COMMUNITIES

5

WHAT

Co-design a whole of government FASD strategy that develops trauma-informed training and resources for specialised staff in the health, education and juvenile justice systems to better identify and support young people with FASD to prevent them from entering the justice system.

LEAD AGENCY

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

6

WHAT

Reform the *Criminal Law (Mentally Impaired Accused) Act 1996* by ending indefinite detention of mentally impaired accused and instead prioritise community-based diversionary alternatives for young people.

LEAD AGENCY

DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE:
YOUTH JUSTICE

PRIORITY AREA FOUR: VALUING YOUNG PEOPLE'S EXPERIENCE

1

WHAT

Through the WA Youth Strategy, we recommend that the Premier of Western Australia and the WA Youth Minister make a whole-of-Government commitment to incorporating ongoing and long-term youth-led engagement mechanisms in all portfolios affecting young people.

LEAD AGENCY

WHOLE OF GOVERNMENT

2

WHAT

Prior to the development of the Independent Western Australian Child Advocate, ensure existing feedback processes for young people in care are well known and understood by all young people in care.

LEAD AGENCY

DEPARTMENT OF
COMMUNITIES

STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATIONS

PRIORITY AREA FIVE: CREATING A STRONG YOUTH SECTOR

1

WHAT

YACWA believes a Youth Strategy should:

LEAD AGENCY

DEPARTMENT OF
COMMUNITIES

- Set out a statewide, whole of government vision and clear objectives that the WA Labor government has for young people across the state for the next 10 years.
- Have strong cross-departmental and ministerial support
- Align with the current and future outputs, outcomes and indicators in cross-department streams across whole-of-government's policy and strategy relevant to young people
- Align with existing government frameworks, including the Building a Better Future: Out of Home Care in Western Australia, Building Safe and Strong Families: Earlier Intervention and Family Support Strategy, Target 120, WA Justice Pipeline, amongst many others
- Take a systems approach to improving youth outcomes, by recognising the complex and interconnected systems that support and influence young Western Australians
- Direct activity to stakeholders across the government, private and non-government sectors responsible for improving outcomes for young people
- Address social determinants of health and well-being among young people
- Have a specific focus on vulnerable and disadvantaged young people
- Acknowledge and support the diversity of young people, their needs, and their communities
- Inform and guide future Machinery of Government changes and work across the whole of government.



STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATIONS

2

WHAT

Develop a research project that will quantify, compare 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.

LEAD AGENCY
DEPARTMENT OF
COMMUNITIES

3

WHAT

Develop a co-designed, shared risk-matrix to be used across government and the sector to identify at-risk young people and coordinate early intervention across multiple agencies.

LEAD AGENCY
DEPARTMENT OF
COMMUNITIES

4

WHAT

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.

LEAD AGENCY
DEPARTMENT OF
COMMUNITIES

5

WHAT

Revise the NGHSS Indexation Policy, ensuring the wage growth and costs of service provision are more accurately aligned to government funding.

LEAD AGENCY
DEPARTMENT OF FINANCE



EXPENDITURE RECOMMENDATIONS

PRIORITY AREA ONE: PREVENTING RECURRING DISADVANTAGE

- 1

WHAT

Commit additional funding to expand existing Transitional Support Services for young people leaving care.

LEAD AGENCY

DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNITIES
- 2

WHAT

Further expand resourcing for Aboriginal community controlled and run services that deliver intensive support for Aboriginal families to prevent removal of children.

LEAD AGENCY

DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNITIES
- 3

WHAT

Fund an Aboriginal specialist intensive family support service specifically targeted at supporting families' post-initial removal of children, to increase chances of early reunification.

LEAD AGENCY

DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNITIES
- 4

WHAT

Finance additional services for young people in Banksia Hill to ensure priority is placed on nurturing positive development of every young person incarcerated; such as skills-based programs, therapeutic and trauma-informed youth development programs, and additional counselling services.

LEAD AGENCY

DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE: YOUTH JUSTICE

EXPENDITURE RECOMMENDATIONS

PRIORITY AREA TWO: PROVIDING URGENTLY NEEDED SERVICES

- 1

WHAT

At a minimum commit to continued funding for existing services under the Suicide Prevention 2020 Strategy to ensure continuity of service until a new strategy is established.

LEAD AGENCY

MENTAL HEALTH COMMISSION
- 2

WHAT

Fund the development of youth-specific, culturally informed mental health community bed-based services to support young people with high and complex mental health needs.

LEAD AGENCY

MENTAL HEALTH COMMISSION
- 3

WHAT

Expand funding for a collective impact initiative such as the 50 Lives 50 Homes Project to provide increased specialised support for young people experiencing homelessness.

LEAD AGENCY

DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNITIES
- 4

WHAT

Fund specialised accommodation and outreach services to meet the needs of specific groups, such as:

 - Young people aged 10-15;
 - Transgender young people; and
 - Young women escaping Family and Domestic Violence

LEAD AGENCY

DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNITIES
- 5

WHAT

Commit state government funds to match the shortfall in funding from the NHaHA to rectify the significant burden on the crisis accommodation system.

LEAD AGENCY

DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNITIES

EXPENDITURE RECOMMENDATIONS

PRIORITY AREA THREE: SUPPORTING EARLY INTERVENTION

1

WHAT

Expand the 'Big Picture Education' school model to at least two new schools by 2020, in areas of low-socioeconomic status and high levels of disengagement.

LEAD AGENCY

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

2

WHAT

In consultation with young people, fund the development or expansion of a peer-led education program to provide integrated sexual health education in the public school system.

LEAD AGENCY

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

3

WHAT

Fully fund and expand Inclusive Education WA to all public schools across Western Australia

LEAD AGENCY

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

4

WHAT

Formalise a commitment to the Western Australian Mental Health, Alcohol and Other Drug Services Plan 2015-2025 by increasing the percentage allocation for prevention services to 4% in order to meet the 2020 target, and to 5% for 2025, with specific funding for prevention initiatives targeting young people.

LEAD AGENCY

MENTAL HEALTH COMMISSION

5

WHAT

Ensure the two Target 120 trial sites, Armadale and Bunbury, are adequately supported by whole-of-government services, and the communities are provided with sufficient funds to broker out intensive support to young people at risk of entering the justice system.

LEAD AGENCY

DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE:
YOUTH JUSTICE

6

WHAT

Building on the success of the Yiriman Project, identify targeted funds for place-based diversionary projects which support children with FASD and their families, especially those delivered by Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations

LEAD AGENCY

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

EXPENDITURE RECOMMENDATIONS

PRIORITY AREA FOUR: VALUING YOUNG PEOPLE'S EXPERIENCE

1

WHAT

Provide long term funding in forward estimates to independent systemic advocacy for young people from key vulnerable demographics, such as:

- Young people identifying as LGBTIQ+
- Young people with a disability
- Young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds
- Young people from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds
- Young people with experience in residential care and juvenile detention
- Young women
- Young carers

LEAD AGENCY

WHOLE OF GOVERNMENT

2

WHAT

Adequately fund an Independent Western Australian Child Advocate; similar to Queensland's Office of the Public Guardian, that is able to provide support to all young people in out-of-home care. Consider hosting this within the Commissioner for Children and Young People's office.

LEAD AGENCY

DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNITIES

PRIORITY AREA FIVE: CREATING A STRONG YOUTH SECTOR

1

WHAT

Prioritise early-intervention programs within the funding streams outlined in the At-Risk Action Plan.

LEAD AGENCY

WHOLE OF GOVERNMENT

2

WHAT

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 can be maintained across the sector.

LEAD AGENCY

DEPARTMENT OF FINANCE





Priority Area One

PREVENTING
RECURRENT
DISADVANTAGE

ISSUE

Supporting young people transitioning from care

WHAT WE'RE WORRIED ABOUT

A recent report by the Office of the Auditor General showed that 65% of young people leaving care do not get support early enough or at all ⁱ. This lack of support upon leaving care puts young people at a higher risk of homelessness, chronic unemployment, missing out on education and training and poorer health and wellbeing outcomes ⁱⁱ.

WHAT WE KNOW

Transitioning from the Out of Home Care System to independence is a key period of vulnerability for many young people. In consultations with young people with care experiences, YACWA continues to hear that support to transition from care is not adequately structured or resourced, especially for young people with more complex needs. It is essential that the State Government focuses on ensuring positive outcomes for young people after leaving care by providing a sense of security, stability and continuity of support ⁱⁱⁱ.

Young people who have left the care system are 19 times more likely to have contact with the youth justice system nationally ^{iv}, and these young people experience a consistent lack of support from care workers during judicial processes. Examples like these show that there is often a clear lack of communication between government departments, leaving care providers and other agencies, which impacts on the ability of young people leaving care to receive priority access to services such as housing or health support ^v.

Young people with high and complex needs must have more intensive transitional support and wrap-around services, and these must extend to young people after they have left state care. **Too often, Leaving Care Plans are not completed and do not identify those high-risk young people and subsequently fail to match them to further support** ^{vi}.

We welcome the recent State Government announcement to trial raising the leaving care age to 21 in designated districts. However, it is essential that proper leaving care plans, intensive support and communication post-care are systematised and rigorously maintained, especially for young people with high and complex needs. Ensuring access to workers providing tailored support to young people to find housing, employment and education, as the Victorian State Government has done, would be a positive addition to this strategy ^{vii}.

While leaving care programs are often resource intensive, they have shown to have extremely positive outcomes. The Living Independently for the First Time (LIFT) Program gave young people access to 24/7 support and intensive case management. Progress reports showed that 80% of young people had made gains across key domains of independent living skills, money management and tenancy skills ^{viii}.

Additionally, a 2016 Deloitte Access Economics study found that in Western Australia, extending the leaving care age to 21 would result in an expected return of \$2.17 in either savings or increased income from every dollar invested in such a reform ^{ix}. All young people in WA's child protection system must have the option to remain in care until 21, and have to access post-care intensive support.

WHAT WE RECOMMEND

- **Strategic**
 - Action and implement all the changes to the leaving care process, as outlined by the Auditor General.
 - Revise the Children and Community Services Act 2004, to include an optional leaving care age of up to 21 years.
- **Expenditure**
 - Commit additional funding to expand existing Transitional Support Services for young people leaving care.

ISSUE

Reducing Aboriginal Children and Young People in Care

WHAT WE'RE WORRIED ABOUT

Aboriginal children and young people are significantly overrepresented in out-of-home care system in WA (55% of those in out of home care ^x, despite being only 5% of the population ^{xi}). This is the highest rate of Aboriginal children in care throughout Australia, but WA has the lowest investment in evidence-based strategies to prevent these children and young people from entering state care.

As the Family Matters Report 2017 put it, the “Western Australian community and taxpayers must be appalled at the repeated wastage of investment into non-effective child protection responses to our most vulnerable Aboriginal children and young people. ^{xii}”

WHAT WE KNOW

Aboriginal young people continue to be overrepresented in out of home care. This is a problem that has only worsened despite repeated calls for change from the community services sector.

Traditionally, the WA government has invested in a reactionary way; focusing funds at the crisis end rather than prioritising early intervention ^{xiii}. As a result the Department of Communities is clearly struggling to deal with the influx of Aboriginal children entering care, with only 64% of Aboriginal children placed in accordance with to the Aboriginal Child Placement Principles. This represents a 0% increase on 2016/17 levels despite a departmental target to reach 80% compliance with the Principles ^{xiv}. It is clear that this reactionary approach cannot be maintained.

YACWA recognises that the Department of Communities is carrying out significant work in this space to try and build the capacity of Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs) to reduce the amount of young people in care. The newly announced Aboriginal Advisory Panel for the Minister for Child Protection, the \$20million for the Aboriginal in Home Support Service pilot and the formation of the Noongar Child Protection Council are all welcome measures and significant steps taken by the Government to reduce the amount of young people in care.

YACWA hopes that these ensure meaningful engagement with Aboriginal young people with experience in care. This participation must extend beyond consultation to ensure that participation mechanisms for Aboriginal young people and their families are enshrined in law, policy, programs and practice ^{xv}.

While leaving care programs are often resource intensive, they have shown to have extremely positive outcomes. The Living Independently for the First Time (LIFT) Program gave young people access to 24/7 support and intensive case management. Progress reports showed that 80% of young people had made gains across key domains of independent living skills, money management and tenancy skills .

Additionally, a 2016 Deloitte Access Economics study found that in Western Australia, extending the leaving care age to 21 would result in an expected return of \$2.17 in either savings or increased income from every dollar invested in such a reform . All young people in WA's child protection system must have the option to remain in care until 21, and have to access post-care intensive support.

WHAT WE RECOMMEND

- **Strategic**
 - Ensure genuine representation and input of Aboriginal young people with a care experience on all government advisory bodies relevant to improving the care system.
- **Expenditure**
 - Further expand resourcing for Aboriginal community controlled and run services that deliver intensive support for Aboriginal families to prevent removal of children.
 - Fund an Aboriginal specialist intensive family support service specifically targeted at supporting families post-initial removal of children, to increase chances of early reunification.

ISSUE

Preventing Recidivism through Rehabilitation

WHAT WE'RE WORRIED ABOUT

There is an urgent need for reform in Western Australia's youth justice system according to recent reports of the Inspector for Custodial Services (OICS). Despite the OICS finding little evidence to substantiate many of the allegations of mistreatment made by Amnesty International, it remains that other elements of Banksia Hill Detention Centre are not fit-for-purpose and fail our State's duty of care for young people.

This failure is evident in the fact that 59% of young people who served a sentence at Banksia Hill Detention Centre in the last financial year returned to detention within two years ^{xvi}.

WHAT WE KNOW

Various OICS reports in recent years have highlighted critical problems with the Western Australian Youth Justice System, including that:

- **Western Australian legislation fails to protect young people in custody** from unfairly severe regimes. The inconsistent and obsolete nature of the *Young Offenders Act 1994* and the *Young Offenders Regulations 1995* allow young people to be held in confinement in violation of the Act and international human rights conventions, based on technicalities. ^{xvii}
- **Education services at Banksia Hill Detention Centre are sub-standard** and have been so for several years. Education services provided are low-quality, and access is often insufficient, despite the higher needs of the young people in the Centre. ^{xviii}
- **Facilities at Banksia Hill Detention Centre to care for young people with acute mental health concerns remains inadequate**, with no progress made on this issue in almost five years. ^{xix}
- **Banksia Hill Detention Centre has been in a cycle of crisis and recovery for many years**, with periods of relative stability followed by significant decline in functioning. ^{xx}

It is essential that young people receive high quality, trauma-informed, therapeutic services for effective rehabilitation. This is in the interests of the State and tax payers, as reducing WA's exceptionally high recidivism rate will reduce the costs of crime to community and expenditure on costly youth detention services. More importantly however, young people will be better equipped to transition out of detention into stable independent living.

With better planning and support for young people leaving detention 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. **Now is a critical time for the State Government to act and ensure youth justice is fit-for-purpose in Western Australia and supports young people in its care.**

WHAT WE RECOMMEND

- Strategic
 - Transfer overall management of Banksia Hill Youth Detention Centre from the Department of Justice to the Department of Communities.
 - Further to the OICS recommendation to implement a strategic plan for education services at Banksia Hill, we recommend that there be a full transfer responsibility of education services at the centre to the Department of Education.
 - Commit to the legislative reform recommended by the OICS to amend the Young Offenders Act 1994 and the Young Offenders Regulations 1995 and bring them in line with international law and standards.
- Expenditure
 - Finance additional services for young people in Banksia Hill to ensure priority is placed on nurturing positive development of every young person incarcerated; such as skills-based programs, therapeutic and trauma-informed youth development programs, and additional counselling services.





Priority Area Two

PROVIDING
URGENTLY NEEDED
SERVICES

ISSUE

Preventing self-harm and suicide.

WHAT WE'RE WORRIED ABOUT

Intentional self-harm and suicide are the leading cause of death for West Australian young people. Despite this worrying statistic, community mental health services for at-risk young people are consistently underfunded and underprovided across WA ^{xxi}.

WHAT WE KNOW

Mental health is a critical concern for young people in Australia. This year, for the first time in its 16-year history, the Mission Australia Youth Survey identified Mental Health as the top issue facing young people in Australia ^{xxii}.

The Western Australian Mental Health, Alcohol and Other Drug Services Plan 2015-2025 (the Plan) identified significant shortfalls in all specialised youth mental health community services. ^{xxiii} Since the commencement of the Plan, the Mental Health Commission has made a significant effort to strengthen youth mental health community services. However, the majority of these services are focused on targeting young people with lower complexity rather than those at 'extreme risk' ^{xxiv}.

Aboriginal young people, particularly those in rural and remote areas, are one such group that are significantly overrepresented in youth suicide rates. **Aboriginal suicide rates are at crisis point in Western Australia, with around one quarter of suicide deaths among Aboriginal people in Australia occurring in WA, despite WA only accounting for 14%**

of the nation's Aboriginal population ^{xxv}.

The current allocation of resources to Aboriginal youth suicide prevention strategies is insufficient, inconsistent and not tailored to the complex and interrelated needs of this population. Ongoing consultation with Aboriginal young people and communities must be a priority to ensure their needs are met. Given there is currently no single strategy that specifically and comprehensively addresses Aboriginal youth suicide ^{xxvi}, long term investment must be a priority to allow a collaborative approach to build momentum and create change for Aboriginal young people ^{xxvii}.

Whilst acute hospital-based services are required, evidence shows that community bed-based care is often more effective in treating young people with complex mental health issues ^{xxviii}. The fact that there are currently no plans to develop any youth specific mental health community bed-based services in WA means that young people with high and complex needs will suffer negative outcomes due to a gap in services.

WHAT WE RECOMMEND

- Strategic
 - Urgently develop a specific Aboriginal youth suicide prevention strategy that engenders a whole of government approach and a clear focus on supporting Aboriginal community-led services.
- Expenditure
 - At a minimum commit to continued funding for existing services under the Suicide Prevention 2020 Strategy to ensure continuity of service until a new strategy is established.
 - Fund the development of youth-specific, culturally informed mental health community bed-based services to support young people with high and complex mental health needs.

ISSUE

Providing stability to homeless young people through affordable housing.

WHAT WE'RE WORRIED ABOUT

There are zero affordable houses available to young people on Newstart or Youth Allowance in WA, and only three available nationally according to Anglicare's Rental Affordability Snapshot for 2018. Given this, it is no surprise that around 14,000 people currently languish on the public housing waitlist and crisis accommodation struggles to meet demand. ^{xxx}

WHAT WE KNOW

Secure, affordable and appropriate housing is both a basic human right and essential to provide a stable basis for young people. Cross-collaboration between the Affordable Housing Strategy and the 10-Year Strategy on Homelessness is key if Western Australia is to properly address the issue of homelessness.

Young people need a Housing First approach aligned with targeted wraparound supports in order to be fully assisted to transition out of homelessness. The 50 Lives 50 Homes project has demonstrated considerable success in coupling housing with long term, individually tailored support for homeless young people ^{xxxi}. This approach is clearly effective in both improving outcomes for young people and future budget savings, although a critical aspect of its success is ensuring that young people have a voice in addressing their housing needs ^{xxxi}.

It is estimated by the Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute that the Government saves \$16.4 million – or \$4,846 per person per year – following a homeless individual's

entry into social housing, due to reduced use of health services. ^{xxxi} Western Australia must recognise the role that affordable housing can play in early intervention and reduce the burden on more expensive crisis accommodation and health services.

WHAT WE RECOMMEND

- Strategic
 - Commit to developing a Youth Homelessness Action Plan that sits underneath the State Government's 10 Year Strategy on Homelessness and aligns with social housing targets in the Affordable Housing Strategy.
- Expenditure
 - Expand funding for a collective impact initiative such as the 50 Lives 50 Homes Project to provide increased specialised support for young people experiencing homelessness.



ISSUE

Closing Gaps in WA's Crisis Accommodation System.

WHAT WE'RE WORRIED ABOUT

The Western Australian crisis accommodation system is chronically under-resourced and many young people face significant barriers when trying to find a place to stay when crisis hits. There has been a 4.6% rise in homelessness in Australia since 2011, with approximately 2,340 young people aged 12-25 experiencing homelessness on census night in 2016.

WHAT WE KNOW

Despite the guarantee of long-term funding through the National Housing and Homelessness Agreement (NHHA), crisis accommodation services remain significantly underfunded. There has been no measurable increase in funding for these services in recent years, which means services are still forced to turn young people away at alarming rates.

Statistics from the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare in 2011 showed the average turn-away rate for individuals seeking immediate accommodation was as high as 48.6% . In 2017-2018, Youth Futures had to turn away 65% of the young people approaching them for support with crisis accommodation and homelessness support. These are prime examples of the levels of under-resourcing for crisis accommodation ^{xxxv}.

Given the lack of adequate funding in the crisis accommodation system, it is not surprising that gaps currently exist for vulnerable cohorts, including:

- **Young people aged 10-15**

There has been an increase in the need for services to support young people aged 10-15. However, in Western Australia most youth crisis accommodation services are funded to cater only for those aged 15 years or older, and others are unable to provide the flexible support which is required. Providing funding for services to young people of this demographic is a critical element of early intervention, allowing young people to make positive changes in their life before issues become further entrenched.

- **Transgender young people**

Despite making up a small percentage of the population, LGBTIQ+ people are twice as likely to experience homelessness at a younger age. Many crisis accommodation services are not fully accommodating of transgender young people and this results in their rejection or discrimination whilst accessing the service. The few services that do fully accommodate transgender young people have significant waitlists ^{xxxvi}.

- **Young women escaping Family and Domestic Violence**

Kira House is the only specialised 24-hour crisis accommodation in WA for young women aged 14-18 years and their children. Despite supporting 60 young women and 9 babies in the 2016-17 financial year its outreach service was recently defunded^{xxxvii}.

Clearly, significant gaps exist in the current service funding, failing to meet the needs of particularly vulnerable cohorts of young people in Western Australia. Whilst we are aware that

significant funding for crisis accommodation is federally provided through the NHHA, we believe that the State Government should step forward where this funding falls short and resource gaps in service provision that negatively affects vulnerable young people. Although early intervention must be a priority in both policy and resourcing, crisis accommodation cannot be neglected as a service as it can be an integral first step to break the cycle of homelessness for young people.

WHAT WE RECOMMEND

- Expenditure
 - Fund specialised accommodation and outreach services to meet the needs of specific groups, such as:
 - Young people aged 10-15;
 - Transgender young people; and
 - Young women escaping Family and Domestic Violence
 - Commit state government funds to match the shortfall in funding from the NHaHA to rectify the significant burden on the crisis accommodation system.





Priority Area Three

SUPPORTING EARLY
INTERVENTION

ISSUE

Engaging marginalised young people through individualised education.

WHAT WE'RE WORRIED ABOUT

Our Education system is the most important systemic structure for early intervention and prevention of negative life outcomes. Unfortunately not all young people experience the same level of educational opportunities, experience and quality, and this particularly affects young people in areas of low socioeconomic status (SES) ^{xxxviii}. The top 10 most educationally disadvantaged areas in Western Australia are located in regional and remote communities. ^{xxxix}

WHAT WE KNOW

Rather than blaming the victims of entrenched educational disadvantage, the focus must be on making “the very system which too often contributes to these problems more accountable and more responsive to the needs of such challenged, and often marginalised, individuals and families” ^{xl}. To reverse poor outcomes created by regional disadvantage, we must look to innovative solutions. The Big Picture Education Model is a national framework that looks to depart from traditional ‘appointment learning’ by working with schools, education departments and curriculum authorities to transform outcomes for young Australians through personalised, passion-based learning. This particular program was independently evaluated, showing evidenced-based success at engaging marginalised young people compared to traditional schooling models. Through a study of three regional public schools in WA, Murdoch University determined that the model has played a pivotal role in achieving enhanced levels of student engagement in learning, as well as teacher development. ^{xli}

We welcome the announcement of the Full Service Schools pilot, which seeks to provide extra support to children and families beyond the classroom curriculum. This model embraces the opportunity to use schools as a youth and community hub, providing early intervention support for young people and their families. ^{xlii} We look forward to the outcomes of this pilot, and if it is successful, we hope to see it expanded to other metro, regional and remote schools.

WHAT WE RECOMMEND

- Strategic
 - Conduct an independent review and evaluation of the WA Curriculum and Standards to assess their positive (or negative) impact on young people’s education, including the; Western Australian Certificate of Education (WACE), Western Australian Statement of Student Achievement (WASSA), Online Literacy and Numeracy Assessment (OLNA) and National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN).
- Expenditure
 - Expand the ‘Big Picture Education’ school model to at least two new schools by 2020, in areas of low-socioeconomic status and high levels of disengagement.



ISSUE

Modernising the Sexual Health Education System.

WHAT WE'RE WORRIED ABOUT

Relevant, inclusive and accessible sex education is important for young people. Yet sexual health education in secondary schools is inconsistent and fails to address the needs of same-sex attracted and gender questioning young people ^{xliii}.

Research indicates that young people's knowledge about STIs remains inadequate, and that STIs among young people are on the rise, with chlamydia up by 43% and gonorrhoea rates doubling from 2006 to 2015. ^{xliv}

WHAT WE KNOW

Young people and their sexual health educators are calling for a change to the way Australia teaches sexual health ^{xlv}. Young people have expressed dissatisfaction with the amount and level of sexual education they are currently receiving in school. A national study by La Trobe University found that 50% of young people surveyed expressed significant dissatisfaction with sex education at school, citing irrelevance to their real experiences, lack of relationship advice and lack of discussion of same-sex issues.

Sexual education in Western Australian schools is mostly either faith-based (which hinges on religious values and practices), or teacher- and school-dependent, with no official guidelines and no guarantee that students are being provided an inclusive and individualised education experience. A 2014 study found that the least taught topics in school included Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs) and HIV/AIDS, birth control, the impact of media on sexual identity and sexual orientation ^{xlvi}. It is clear that a change in the delivery of sex education needs to happen to meet the current needs and issues faced by young people in WA.

YACWA believes peer-led education programs covering the above topics is the best approach to sex education in schools and other education settings. In the 2012 Let's Talk About Sex survey, 68% of young people indicated they preferred sexual health peer educators to compliment sex education received in schools ^{xlvii}. Evidence from YACWA's own Youth Educating Peers (YEP) Project's 2017 youth survey indicated that the majority of respondents preferred to get their information from those that are their peers.

Such an approach involves both investing in external programs with appropriately trained sexual health educators who provide up-to-date and relevant sex education, and supporting schools to engage with these programs. It would also involve consultation with young people about what they want from sexual health education, as research has shown that listening to the needs of young people helps improve their sexual health and wellbeing ^{xlviii}.

WHAT WE RECOMMEND

- Strategic
 - Create a comprehensive, standardised and mandatory curriculum of sexual health for all public schools, which is youth-led and informed by the feedback and needs of young people.
- Expenditure
 - In consultation with young people, fund the development or expansion of a peer-led education program to provide integrated sexual health education in the public school system.
 - Fully fund and expand Inclusive Education WA to all public schools across Western Australia

ISSUE

Adequately resourcing early intervention and prevention mental health services.

WHAT WE'RE WORRIED ABOUT

Investment in mental health early intervention and prevention support has suffered from significant cuts in successive budgets, despite opposition from both the sector and government departments. This critical component of service delivery provides the opportunity to improve outcomes for young people in Western Australia.

WHAT WE KNOW

In 2015, the Mental Health Commission released the Western Australian Mental Health, Alcohol and Other Drug Services Plan 2015-2025 (the Plan). The Plan strongly recommended a greater investment in prevention and early intervention services and was strongly endorsed by YACWA and the sector. However, only 1.1% of the budget was spent on prevention in 2017/18, representing a 14.7% cut from the previous year.

Given there is another planned cut of 43.3% to mental health early intervention services from 2019-20, YACWA is concerned a significant amount of work surrounding the Plan has been abandoned. We seek clarity over whether the Plan is still informing future investment. Whilst this coincides with the end of the Suicide Prevention 2020 Strategy and subsequent review, YACWA has heard many services are concerned that existing intervention service provision may be affected by this reduction.

Too often evidence-based strategic reforms are developed with a Whole of Government approach and support from the sector, however these reforms are not effectively implemented or funded due to the Government's limited fiscal capacity. This short-

sighted outlook is not cost effective in the long run. Early intervention and prevention services supporting young people to be mentally healthy are not only less costly, but they lead to better outcomes for young people early in their lives. These early interventions also have long-term budgetary savings due to a decrease in the number of people accessing acute mental health services.ⁱⁱ

WHAT WE RECOMMEND

- **Strategic**
 - Ensure young people with high and complex mental health needs are considered when developing the At-Risk Youth Action Plan.
- **Expenditure**
 - Formalise a commitment to the Western Australian Mental Health, Alcohol and Other Drug Services Plan 2015-2025 by increasing the percentage allocation for prevention services to 4% in order to meet the 2020 target, and to 5% for 2025, with specific funding for prevention initiatives targeting young people.



ISSUE

Preventing young people coming into contact with the youth justice system.

WHAT WE'RE WORRIED ABOUT

“Australia currently lags behind other countries in recognising the prevalence of Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) and the impact on the individual as well as social and economic impact on families and society. It is clear that urgent measures must be taken to reduce the incidence of FASD and to better manage those diagnosed.” ^{lii}

WHAT WE KNOW

Young people who end up in the youth justice system have complex needs, and in most cases, have had contact with other secondary and tertiary services such as child protection. There is increasing recognition that it is possible to identify these young people early in order to provide intensive support to prevent their first or further engagement in the justice system.

There are promising examples of early intervention approaches beginning to be implemented in Western Australia, including Target 120 and the Youth Partnership Project. It is important that these approaches continue to be funded at a level which allows intensive, relationship-based support to be provided to young people who are identified as being at-risk.

Another focus area needs to be FASD. Early this year, Telethon Kids Institute found that one third of detainees in Banksia Hill Youth Detention Centre had FASD and the majority of these young people had not been previously diagnosed ^{liii}. Education, Child Protection,

Health, Police and Juvenile Justice systems must all be trained to recognise signs and symptoms of FASD and ensure there is a system for referrals and proper diagnosis to prevent young people from entering the justice system. Tailored management plans for the individual as well as support for the family must become a requirement for every young person with FASD in order to reduce the risk of them disengaging with education and coming into contact with the juvenile justice system.

In New Zealand, it is a statutory requirement for a young person's family to be fully engaged in the decision making around a young person with FASD facing juvenile justice charges and this often results in community based rehabilitation alternatives to entering the justice system. This is wholly applicable to the Western Australian context and best practice culturally based community diversion programs currently exist; The Yiriman Project in Fitzroy Crossing take young people at risk of offending on-country and supports them

to undertake culturally based activities. It has demonstrated evidence in both improving the health outcomes of Aboriginal young people with FASD^{liv} as well as helping to prevent their involvement in the juvenile justice system^{lv}.

In addition to the high rates of FASD, the results of the Telethon Kids Institute study showed 90% of young people in youth detention had significant neurodevelopmental impairments. This has implications under the *Criminal Law (Mentally Impaired Accused)*

Act 1996 (WA) which states that any person deemed unfit to stand trial can be held under indefinite detention in a custodial setting. This Act does not contain any special exemptions for persons 17 years and younger. Current legislation is clearly not equipped to properly support and prevent vulnerable young people, such as those with FASD, from entering the Justice system and clearly needs reform.

WHAT WE RECOMMEND

- Strategic
 - Urgently transfer all youth justice diversion, through-care and bail house services from the Department of Justice to the Department of Communities
 - Co-design a whole of government FASD strategy that develops trauma-informed training and resources for specialised staff in the health, education and juvenile justice systems to better identify and support young people with FASD to prevent them from entering the justice system.
 - Reform the *Criminal Law (Mentally Impaired Accused) Act 1996* by ending indefinite detention of mentally impaired accused and instead prioritise community-based diversionary alternatives for young people.
- Expenditure
 - Ensure the two Target 120 trial sites, Armadale and Bunbury, are adequately supported by whole-of-government services, and the communities are provided with sufficient funds to broker out intensive support to young people at risk of entering the justice system.
 - Building on the success of the Yiriman Project, identify targeted funds for place-based diversionary projects which support children with FASD and their families, especially those delivered by Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations





Priority Area Four

VALUING YOUNG
PEOPLE'S EXPERIENCE

ISSUE

Empowering young people through youth-led advocacy.

WHAT WE'RE WORRIED ABOUT

Young people tell us that they often feel left out of decision making that affects them, both at a federal and state level. Often engagement with young people is tokenistic and confined to specific issues that do not challenge the political power of policy makers on important issues. Peer-led systemic advocacy is a critical medium to empower young people whose voice is often ignored in the political discourse which shapes decisions affecting both young people and society as a whole.

WHAT WE KNOW

Given the lack of national platforms for youth engagement, as the Australian Youth Affairs Coalition and the Federal Minister for Youth have been disbanded over recent years, the State Government has a real opportunity to lead the way in providing meaningful avenues for youth participation in governance.

The State Government has demonstrated commitment to youth engagement through its creation of the Ministerial Youth Advisory Council and consultation with young people throughout the development of various ongoing systemic strategies.

Advocacy in particular is an important process that helps young people be empowered and have input in the decisions that affect them.

Whilst YACWA is a critical medium for youth engagement with decision-making, we cannot be the only State Government funded and supported pathway for youth-advocacy. Unfortunately the importance of peer-led advocacy is not always sufficiently valued; young people who are systemic advocates

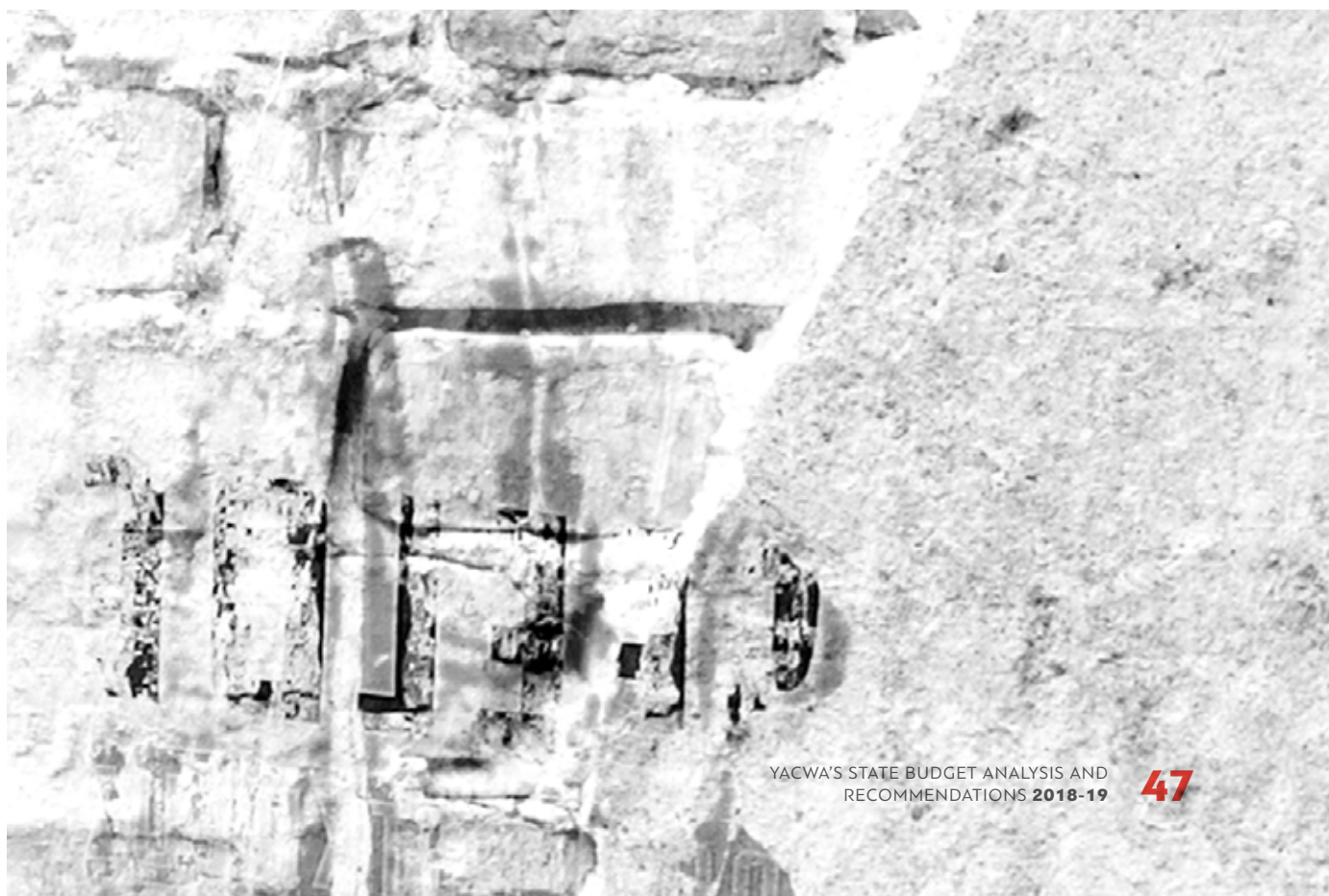
usually act in a volunteer capacity, balancing paid work, education and social lives with sustaining an effective systemic advocacy, which is often time-consuming and resource intensive.

It is YACWA's strong opinion that peer-led advocacy is the best possible method for young people of all backgrounds to have a direct say in shaping key decisions that affect them. Young people are the experts in their own lives and experiences. The Government must empower them to feel their opinions are not only important, but are desired and genuinely informing policy development.

This is especially relevant for policies targeting specific vulnerable demographics, and it must be young people with relevant experiences leading such advocacy. Only young people themselves can understand the particular nuance to their own experiences and, as such, are vital to effective discourse.^{lviii}

WHAT WE RECOMMEND

- Strategic
 - Through the WA Youth Strategy, we recommend that the Premier of Western Australia and the WA Youth Minister make a whole-of-Government commitment to incorporating ongoing and long-term youth-led engagement mechanisms in all portfolios affecting young people.
- Expenditure
 - Provide long term funding in forward estimates to independent systemic advocacy for young people from key vulnerable demographics, such as:
 - Young people identifying as LGBTIQ+
 - Young people with a disability
 - Young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds
 - Young people from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds
 - Young people with experience in residential care and juvenile detention
 - Young women
 - Young carers



ISSUE

Hearing and Responding to the Experiences of Children in Care.

WHAT WE'RE WORRIED ABOUT

The lack of independent oversight of Western Australia's out of home care system is grossly inadequate. Young people are exceptionally vulnerable to abuse in residential settings^{lix}, so an independent advocate is essential to support young people especially in addressing issues of abuse.

WHAT WE KNOW

"The unique vulnerability of children and young people in care, and the absence of effective parental advocacy, renders this an indispensable form of oversight. The lack of a regular, systematic visiting program by an independent advocacy mechanism not only undermines children and young people's right to participate in the making of decisions that affect their lives, but also weakens the efficacy of complaint handling bodies"^{lx}.

Only one Child Advocate position exists for all children and young people in care across WA, and monitoring of care systems has been largely reactive rather than preventative. Given the fact that this role is not-independent but connected to the Department of Communities, young people are often unwilling to seek it out. The findings of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse highlighted the critical need for ongoing, independent monitoring and advocacy to ensure that young people are listened to and supported to respond to abuse^{lxi}. This is an ongoing issue that YACWA and other peak bodies have consistently advocated for, but we hope that given recent evidence this call is heeded as a matter of urgency.

Queensland's Office of the Public Guardian (OPG) is a good example of an existing independent statutory body that advocates for the rights of children and young people in care, based on the principles outlined in *United Nations Conventions on the Rights of the Child*. Its Community Visitor Program has statutory responsibility to visit children or young people in foster homes, homes of kinship carers, residential care facilities, youth detention or adult correctional centres, disability services and mental health facilities. This program is built on the premise that effective advocacy "builds trust and relationships through empowering and engaging children and young people to speak out, knowing that when they do, they will be listened to, taken seriously, and action will be taken"^{lxii}. As result this role has demonstrated success is preventing or protecting young people from abuse in care.

WHAT WE RECOMMEND

- Strategic
 - Prior to the development of the Independent Western Australian Child Advocate, ensure existing feedback processes for young people in care are well known and understood by all young people in care.
- Expenditure
 - Adequately fund an Independent Western Australian Child Advocate; similar to Queensland's Office of the Public Guardian, that is able to provide support to all young people in out-of-home care. Consider hosting this within the Commissioner for Children and Young People's office.







Priority Area Five

CREATING A STRONG
YOUTH SECTOR

ISSUE

Creating a Robust and Systemic Youth Strategy.

WHAT WE'RE WORRIED ABOUT

YACWA is strongly supportive of the State Government's efforts to bring together an inaugural WA Youth Strategy that coordinates direct action to improve outcomes for young people in Western Australia. We are concerned however, that without effective input from the youth sector and young people along with a concrete commitment from Government to resource the Strategy, that it's effectiveness will be diluted. As such we reiterate our belief that it should provide a clear framework for cross-ministerial and multi-agency alignment to effectively improve outcomes for young people.

WHAT WE KNOW

The Minister for Youth is currently developing a *Youth Directions 2020 Action Plan*, which will aim to provide the enabling environment in which the whole of Government can work together to provide a coordinated approach to governance of the Youth Sector, with the view to creating a long-term strategy.

We believe that Youth Directions can be the medium through which the State Government can achieve these principles. To do this it must explicitly demonstrate a commitment to cross-ministerial portfolios and resourcing streams, extensive consultation with young people and the sector, and a robust evaluation of existing strategies, service pathways and funding alignment.

There is evidence from other jurisdictions in Australia that the development of a robust, whole of government Youth Strategy is achievable through this process. In May 2017 the Queensland Labor Government released a Youth Strategy that tied the streams of activity embedded in existing government services such as health, education, housing and employment into a single document with multiple departments directly responsible for different actions. This strategy was built through consultation with over 1200 young people. YACWA believes there is an opportunity for this Labor Government to develop an impactful strategy in a similar vein by creating an effective enabling environment through Youth Directions 2020.

WHAT WE RECOMMEND

STRATEGIC

YACWA recommends that the WA Youth Strategy become the umbrella strategy for all young people in Western Australia and should guide all subsequent governmental strategies in relation to young people, including strategies developed by government departments.

The development of the Strategy should provide an opportunity for young people, youth services, non-government providers and government departments to identify the strategic vision for all young people in Western Australia over the next ten years. It should be accountable to achieving outcomes for young people and should be regularly referenced by all government departments who work with young people. The potential of the Strategy to provide a common language and unifying voice across the diverse portfolios of services that affect young people should not be underestimated.

YACWA BELIEVES THE WA YOUTH STRATEGY SHOULD:

- Set out a statewide, whole of government vision and clear objectives that the WA Government has for young people across the state for the next 10 years;
- Have strong cross-departmental and ministerial support;
- Align with the current and future outputs, outcomes and indicators in cross-department streams across whole-of-government's policy and strategy relevant to young people;
- Align with existing government frameworks, including the Building a Better Future: Out of Home Care in Western Australia, Building Safe and Strong Families: Earlier Intervention and Family Support Strategy, Target 120, and WA Justice Pipeline, amongst many others;
- Take a systems approach to improving youth outcomes, by recognising the complex and interconnected systems that support and influence young Western Australians;
- Direct activity to stakeholders across the government, private and non-government sectors responsible for improving outcomes for young people;
- Address social determinants of health and well-being among young people;
- Have a specific focus on vulnerable and disadvantaged young people;
- Acknowledge and support the diversity of young people, their needs, and their communities; and
- Inform and guide future Machinery of Government changes and work across the whole of government.

ISSUE

Strengthening the Sustainability of Early Intervention Youth Services.

WHAT WE'RE WORRIED ABOUT

Despite significant evidence extolling the benefits of investing in early intervention for young people (including the long-term budget savings), cuts and/or negligible increases to early intervention funding has largely continued to occur in areas such as mental health, alcohol and other drugs and child protection.

WHAT WE KNOW

Growing costs in tertiary and acute services has put a considerable burden on our state's youth services. Whilst we understand the need for savings in the current fiscal environment, early intervention is the most effective method of creating long term savings.

Banksia Hill Detention Centre managed, on average, 148 people per day in 2017/18 a 5% increase on 2016/17 . This cost an average of \$935 per young person per day and yet, despite discourse around punishment as a deterrent for future reoffending, 59% of young people who served a youth detention sentence are returning to youth detention within two years . Similarly, in the child protection system, Out of Home Care services are struggling to cope with the influx of Aboriginal young people, resulting in a lack of culturally safe placement options and poor leaving care planning that often leads young people on a pathway to Banksia Hill Detention Centre .

The sector continues to give YACWA a mandate to prioritise the need for increased statewide funding for early intervention services with long-term contracts. Many organisations consider this to be the most essential step to creating long-term systemic change and deliver positive outcomes for young people.

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. This will address a key challenge of ensuring we can accurately depict the savings we make by using early-intervention programs, which prevent young people from needing acute and crisis services . With this information, Government will be able to better justify the allocation of resources to early intervention, helping to secure sustainable funding.

The Youth Partnership Project (YPP) is a good example of an initiative that has been provided funding to turn it's focus to early-intervention outcomes. An independent report by KPMG showed that while the YPP's outcomes 'may not be seen for some years', it's activities were seen as having great potential to make 'meaningful systemic improvement in the future '. However, even this well-known program is at risk of closure due to short-term funding

Long term early-intervention strategies, such as the YPP, can be a model for success, but must have funding for evaluation, so effects

on young people and the service system can be fully quantified. This then provides the opportunity for the relevant government departments to contribute funding based on the relative benefit towards their objectives.

Early-intervention allows the creation of long-term positive outcomes that decrease the demand and costs needed for acute and crisis services . 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.

WHAT WE RECOMMEND

- Strategic
 - Develop a research project that will quantify, compare 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.
 - Develop a co-designed shared risk-matrix, to be used across government and the sector to identify at-risk young people and coordinate early intervention across multiple agencies.
- Expenditure
 - Prioritise early-intervention programs within the funding streams outlined in the At-Risk Action Plan.

ISSUE

Transitioning to Equal Pay for Community Service Workers.

WHAT WE'RE WORRIED ABOUT

Wage increases required by the Equal Remuneration Order are coming into effect, however most funding across the sector has not been increased to account for these costs. The increasing financial hardship created by funding not increasing in line with the ERO is leading to overburdened workloads and significant stress for service providers^{lxix}. This is leading to services winding back their support and staff not being replaced.

WHAT WE KNOW

YACWA, and the sector generally, support the aims of the ERO. However we cannot support the increase in wages without increased funding from the State Government to the community sector to meet increased costs of service.

Consultations have shown us that staff salaries are taking up increasing percentages of organisations' total budgets, leaving other components of service delivery not considered part of core funding, wound back or discontinued. Despite this, in 2015 the previous Government removed wage growth as a factor in calculations of the Non-Government Human Services Sector (NGHSS) Indexation Formula. We have heard that as a result of these changes and the ERO, some essential but resource intensive service components, are becoming unsustainable, including 24/7 support and regional outreach. Such components are essential to providing effective, holistic support to some of the most vulnerable young people in our State.

It is worth noting that a study from the WA Council of Social Services (WACOSS) and Community Employers WA (CEWA) showed 65% of the programs run by organisations surveyed were negatively impacted by the ERO by 10% or more, and that this resulted

in a significant threat to service delivery and organisational sustainability^{lxx}. It is clear to see that this impact on service delivery will also have a significant impact on service users.

Several other State governments, such as Victoria, have specifically allocated funding to cover the additional costs of the ERO with the direct aim of ensuring the sector can maintain services to clients^{lxxi}. YACWA believes the Government has an obligation to follow their lead, as without this match in funding many services will be forced to "reduce output, reduce quality, reduce quantity, stop providing services and/or fund the extra expense from existing assets"^{lxxii}.

WHAT WE RECOMMEND

- Strategic
 - Revise the NGHSS Indexation Policy, ensuring the wage growth and costs of service provision are more accurately aligned to government funding.
- Expenditure
 - 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 can be maintained across the sector.

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