



West Australian State Budget Priorities

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Who we are

The Australian Association of Social Workers (AASW) is the professional body representing more than 11,000 social workers throughout Australia. We set the benchmark for professional education and practice in social work and advocate on matters of social inclusion, social justice, human rights and issues that impact upon the quality of life of all Australians.

The AASW Western Australia (AASW WA) Branch has over 1,000 members spread across Western Australia. We have over 140 Accredited Mental Health Social Workers working in urban, regional and remote areas of Western Australia.

Social work is a tertiary-qualified profession recognised nationally and internationally that supports individuals, families, groups and communities to improve their wellbeing. The profession upholds the principles of social justice, human rights, collective responsibility and respect for diversity are central to the profession and are underpinned by theories of social work, social sciences, humanities and Indigenous knowledge.

Social workers consider the relationship between biological, psychological, social and cultural factors and how they impact on a person's (physical, psychological and mental) health, wellbeing and development. Accordingly, social workers maintain a dual focus in both assisting with and improving human wellbeing and identifying and addressing any external issues (known as systemic or structural issues) that may have a negative impact, such as inequality, injustice and discrimination.

Submission

Executive Summary

The AASW understands the ongoing challenges facing the Government with regard to budget repair and acknowledges that, in the two budgets delivered to date, there does appear to have been a genuine attempt to balance the competing needs for both fiscal restraint and the allocation of resources to achieve just social outcomes for the Western Australian community. However, there remains a number of key social justice issues that require attention in the coming budget in order to allow fairness and equity of opportunity, and the support and protection of the most vulnerable in our society.

We reiterate our position put forward in previous years' submissions that those who are the most vulnerable and disadvantaged in our community must not be the ones to bear the brunt of budget repair. AASW WA maintains that the Government's highest priority for the allocation of the resources at its disposal should be for the funding of services, programs and initiatives that are targeted towards the needs of the most disadvantaged and vulnerable, and the creation of a fairer and more just society.

The AASW WA is aware of many areas of need, including housing, domestic violence and refugees. The AASW's policy position papers and previous policy work can be found on the [AASW website](#) detailing our previous recommendations. The WA Branch of the AASW have identified five areas that require particular priority in the forthcoming budget. These are:

1. Aboriginal Children in Care
2. Youth Justice
3. People with Disability

4. Wellbeing and Safety of Older Persons
5. Violence, Abuse and Recovery from Childhood Trauma
6. Mental Health, Alcohol and Other Drugs and Suicide Prevention

Our detailed submissions with respect to each are outlined in the following sections. A summary of recommendations is listed below.

Recommendations

Aboriginal Children in Care

1.1 AASW recommends that:

- the Government increase funding to support more consortia of Aboriginal- controlled agencies to provide Aboriginal in-home support services

1.2 AASW recommends that:

- the Government provides funding to develop and trial a practice model of early intervention based on the 'family finding' process of Kinship Connections

1.3 AASW recommends that:

- the Government appoint an Indigenous Children's Commissioner to give greater prominence to the issues facing Aboriginal children in this State

1.4 AASW recommends that:

- the Department of Communities be provided with additional funding to undertake or commission a comprehensive analysis of the statistics regarding the regions and districts of Department of Communities that are experiencing the highest number of Aboriginal children entering foster care

Youth Justice

2.1 AASW recommends that:

- the Government commits to a more integrated approach across Government agencies to the issue of youth offending, with a particular priority on those young people who are engaged in both the child protection and youth justice systems

2.2 AASW recommends that:

- all youth justice services, including custodial services, return to the Community Services portfolio
- the Government implements the recommendations of the Inspector of Custodial Services in relation to behaviour management practices at Banksia Hill Detention Centre
- funding be allocated to build additional appropriate facilities to minimise potential risks and harm from older age groups, and for children and young people from more geographically remote communities

2.3 AASW recommends that:

- increased resources be devoted to building more culturally competent community-based services that address systemic disadvantage factors of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people

People with Disability

3.1 AASW recommends that the Government:

- continues the commitment to fully fund to the National Disability Strategy (NDS)
- reassesses and reinvigorates current State initiatives to achieve the stated outcomes under the Strategy, including an evaluation of the effectiveness of those initiatives to date
- positions and resources the Disability Services portfolio within Government to enable it to provide effective stewardship of the Strategy and the capacity to influence other State agencies and the broader community
- sets measurable targets for the achievement of the outcomes under the Strategy across all State Government agencies, and the mechanisms to monitor the achievement of those targets
- adequately resources strategies to achieve NDS outcomes
- actively engages at a National level to develop a robust national strategy to replace the current one when it expires in 2020

3.2 AASW recommends that:

- the Government increases its investment in accessible and affordable social housing appropriate to the needs of people with disability.

3.3 AASW recommends that:

- the design and development of Metronet hubs (and the surrounding areas); prioritise access and inclusion for people with disability
- the government facilitate the location of affordable, accessible housing near the Metronet hubs as part of the planning process

3.4 AASW recommends that:

- the Government increases the resources available to support students with disability and remove any barriers or disincentives for schools to take up the available resources
- the Government looks to fund Social Workers in schools to ensure the welfare and continued engagement of children in the school system

3.5 AASW recommends that:

- the Government substantially increases the number of people with disability employed in the public sector

3.6 AASW recommends that:

- the WA government's programs towards the "Closing the Gap" targets for Aboriginal people include specific strategies relating to Aboriginal people with disability

3.7 AASW recommends that:

- the Government expands the role of, rebrands and resources CAIT to take evidence from all "special witnesses" including people with disability; and creates the protocols within Police for their routine referral to this service

3.8 AASW recommends that:

- the Government initiates urgent action to identify the extent of abuse of and/or discrimination against prisoners with disability and resources strategies to address these issues

3.9 AASW recommends that:

- the State Government continues funding of advocacy on behalf of people with disability

Wellbeing and Safety of Older Persons

4.1 AASW recommends that:

- an Elder Abuse prevention strategy be developed following consideration of the recently released report of The Select Committee into Elder Abuse. This strategy should guide funding priorities for the state budget

4.2 AASW recommends that:

- the State Budget prioritise allocation of resources to established, expert services that can appropriately respond to the safety and well-being concerns of older people
- resources be allocated for a campaign about Elder Abuse and where to seek help
- culturally safe services and information for older Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people be included in this strategy

4.3 AASW recommends that:

- the State Budget prioritise increased investment for a Seniors Housing Strategy to increase the stock of accessible and affordable social housing appropriate to the needs of older people

4.4 AASW recommends that:

- the State Budget places a funding priority on the wellbeing and safety of older Western Australians, with particular regard to addressing the barriers to mature age employment

4.5 AASW recommends that:

- the State Budget increases the funding for services and projects that enable older people to live safely, enjoy good health and stay involved in their communities through an Age Friendly Communities strategy

Violence, Abuse and Recovery from Childhood Trauma

5. AASW recommends that:

- the Government provide both leadership and funding to increase the availability and effectiveness of service responses that support recovery from the destructive effects of trauma, particularly in children involved in the child protection and juvenile justice systems

Mental Health, Alcohol and Other Drugs and Suicide Prevention

6. AASW recommends that:

- the State budget increase funding for the delivery of services in the community sector to rebalance the current emphasis on acute services
- the State budget fund the implementation of community-based recovery services such as the Recovery College promised in the 2017 Labor Platform and ensure these are accessible in regional areas
- the State budget provide for resources to increase engagement of consumers and families in the co-design of services
- the State budget provides funding to examine the development of a Trauma Recovery Centre drawing on the model developed by Trauma Recovery Centre in San Francisco

1. Aboriginal Children in Care

There are multiple drivers contributing to the ongoing increase in the numbers of children entering State care in WA; in particular the disproportionate number of Aboriginal children entering care (approximately 55% of children in care, yet Aboriginal children represent around 4.5% of the total child population in WA). To address this problem there would need to be a multi-dimensional approach. We propose that the following areas need funding to contribute positively to reducing the flow of children and specifically Aboriginal children into care.

We wish to acknowledge our colleagues in the Noongar Child Protection Council in their support and consultation. We endorse the calls by many Aboriginal organisations for Aboriginal community control and self-determination.

Support for Aboriginal-Controlled Agencies

Aboriginal families that are vulnerable to the loss of children into care are more likely to engage with staff from Aboriginal-controlled agencies than with the Department of

Communities (DoC) or agencies controlled by non-Aboriginal people¹. The recently funded consortium in Perth is a positive response by the WA Government to requests from the Aboriginal community for culturally competent organisations to provide service provision to vulnerable Aboriginal families². Linked to this is the need for ongoing capacity-building and workforce development of such agencies.

1.1 AASW recommends that:

- **the Government increase funding to support more consortia of Aboriginal-controlled agencies to provide Aboriginal in-home support services.**

Refer to Kinship Connections for Family Support Services

Family dislocation resulting in the loss of important kinship connections has been a devastating result of past Government policies and interventions for many Aboriginal people and families. This continues to flow through to younger generations and is a continuing factor in poor health, education and social outcomes for many Aboriginal children³.

The Government is therefore urged to provide funding to develop and trial a practice model of early intervention based on the 'family finding' process of Kinship Connections Connection Western Australia – with a decision-making framework based on the established model of Family Group Conferencing. The practice response should include the preparation of a Family History Book and family-finding to establish an enhanced contemporary genogram (<http://www.kinshipconnections.wa.com/>).

It is also important to enable Aboriginal professional community involvement in decision-making – with the Department of Communities case manager and the Kinship Connections (or any other Aboriginal agency) practitioner as a statutory (control) and the non-government (care) advisors to the Aboriginal practice leader as chair of the Family Group Conference meetings.

1.2 AASW recommends that:

- **the Government provides funding to develop and trial a practice model of early intervention based on the 'family finding' process of Kinship Connections.**

Appoint an Indigenous Children's Commissioner

Given the number of Aboriginal children and young people in care and in the justice system we endorse calls by key Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations for the Government to appoint an Indigenous Children's Commissioner, to give greater prominence to the issues facing Aboriginal children in this State. We also believe that the government should provide support for an Indigenous Peak Body for Aboriginal children, young people and families informed by learning from the recent establishment of the Western Australian Noongar Child Protection Council. In Victoria there is an Indigenous Children's

¹ Child Family Community Australia Practice Sheet – March 2011 -Working with Indigenous children, families and communities: Lessons from practice.

² Dept of Communities Media Announcement 2 February 2018.

³ Clare M. and Oakley A. 2017, *Who's My Mob? Proactive Searching for the Extended Families of Aboriginal Children in Care in Communities, Children and Families Australia*, Volume 11 (1), pages 43-58

Commissioner who has proven to be a strong advocate for Aboriginal children in care in that State⁴. The Noongar Child Protection Council has shown it can provide “*on the ground*” information that can ensure submissions to government have cultural legitimacy and reflect the voice of Aboriginal communities in relation to Aboriginal children⁵.

1.3 AASW recommends that:

- **the Government appoint an Indigenous Children's Commissioner to give greater prominence to the issues facing Aboriginal children in this State.**

Better Targeted Regional and District Planning

An examination of the Department of Communities Annual Report from 2015-16 shows the East Kimberley region had 158 children placed in care (all of whom were Aboriginal) yet the overall population of the region is around 7000 (with Aboriginal people totaling approximately 2240), whereas the Goldfields region had 126 children placed in care (107 were Aboriginal) but the population of that region is 60,000 of which 10% are of Aboriginal.

The AASW WA Branch believes that all data concerning the placement of children into out of home care would benefit from in-depth analysis, leading to policy and practice initiatives. It may be easier to implement preventative interventions on a smaller regional population. However, there needs to be a forensic analysis of the specific causal reasons of children entering foster care (once in the child protection system) to be able to consider what particular targeted interventions for the region/district would be needed.

1.4 AASW recommends that:

- **the Department of Communities be provided with additional funding to undertake or commission a comprehensive analysis of the statistics regarding the regions and districts of Department of Communities that are experiencing the highest number of Aboriginal children entering foster care.**

2. Youth Justice

Youth justice concerns have become a significant social issue in Western Australia in recent years. In particular, recent studies and reports completed such as the ‘Behaviour management practices at Banksia Hill detention centre’ in 2017⁶ highlighted some of these concerns including the use of physical restraint, isolation as well as the risk factors that impact on overall probability of successful re-entry and participation in to mainstream community.

⁴ The Guardian 2 January 2018

⁵ April 2017 Family Matters, SNAIC and Western Australian Aboriginal Child Protection Council Submission for Review of the Children and Community Services Act 2004 (WA)

⁶ Office of the Inspector of Custodial Services, “Behaviour management practices at Banksia Hill Detention Centre”, Government of Western Australia, June, 2017.

Some specific recommendations that we propose is that the State Government considers (within the) 2019/2020 Budget are detailed below.

Integrated service delivery

Youth justice services would benefit from a more integrated approach, to include collaboration between the Department of Communities (Child Protection and Family Services, Disability services) and Department of Education, which identifies early risk factors to offending behaviours such as lack of school attendance/engagement, illicit substance use, and a negligent or abusive home environment.

This should not only include the current plans with regard to community based juvenile justice services but also the transfer of detention centre services to the Department of Communities. This is discussed more fully below.

One area requiring particular collaboration between key Government agencies is in relation to young people who are engaged with both the child protection and criminal justice systems. These young people are particularly vulnerable to poor life outcomes at considerable cost to both themselves and the community as a whole.

Providing an integrated service response across all services for vulnerable young people would promote a far better long-term outcome for the children and young people involved and should include working in partnership between the relevant agencies to prepare young people for independent living before and after they exit youth detention.

The Government is also urged to provide ongoing funding for afterschool, weekend and culturally appropriate school holiday recreation programs for children in remote and regional towns. It has been identified that if the children/young people have positive activities to engage in and associate with positive role models, they are less likely to get caught up in negative behaviour leading to crime or removal from family⁷.

2.1 AASW recommends that:

- **the Government commits to a more integrated approach across Government agencies to the issue of youth offending, with a particular priority being placed on those young people who are engaged in both the child protection and youth justice systems.**

Youth justice detention centres

The Australia-wide trend a couple of decades ago to move youth justice services from agencies whose core business is dealing with distress and disadvantage in children, young people and families, to those agencies responsible for adult corrections has been remarkably unsuccessful in addressing identified needs and risky behaviour, while perhaps

⁷ (a) NITV/SBS 7 October 2016 Youth off the streets. A Solution to WA Crime; (b)2016 Commissioner for Children & Youth. Kununurra Empowering Youth; (c) Media Statement Minister for Police & Road Safety 3 July 2018

meeting political objectives of appearing to be tough on crime. Recent well publicised events in the Northern Territory have provided the starkest example of this.

In Western Australia, there has been a significant loss of policy and strategic focus on the problem of youth offending since youth justice services have become an appendage to the much larger adult corrections system; this is a significant social issue requiring multi-faceted responses ranging from prevention, through diversionary and community-based strategies, to detention as a last resort. Instead it has been relegated to a side issue in an agency primarily focussed on adult corrections and has not received the attention that it deserves.

Whilst welcoming the transfer of some community-based services from the Corrections portfolio, we would argue that in order to achieve a fully integrated system to effectively tackle the problem of youth offending, it is important that all youth justice services, including custodial services, return to the Community Services portfolio.

It is also recommended that the Government implement the recommendations of the Inspector of Custodial Services in relation to behaviour management practices at Banksia Hill Detention Centre, in particular a move to a more supportive model of practice that eliminates punitive behavioural management.

Furthermore, the reliance on one single detention facility compromises the State's ability to adequately respond to the diverse needs of different sub-populations, with particular regard to age and geographical location. It is recommended that funding be allocated to build additional appropriate facilities to minimise potential risks and harm from older age groups, and for children and young people from more geographically remote communities.

2.2 AASW recommends that:

- **all youth justice services, including custodial services, return to the Community Services portfolio**
- **the Government implements the recommendations of the Inspector of Custodial Services in relation to behaviour management practices at Banksia Hill Detention Centre**
- **funding be allocated to build additional appropriate facilities to minimise potential risks and harm from older age groups, and for children and young people from more geographically remote communities.**

Over representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people in the youth justice system

Increased resources are required to build more culturally competent, community-based services that address systemic disadvantage facing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people. This disadvantage leads to high levels of substance abuse, poor levels of mental health, and lack of engagement with school or other community supports. This is particularly relevant for children and young people residing in regional and remote areas. Ongoing funding is required for programs that re-engage Aboriginal young people in education, as well as afterschool, weekend and school holiday recreation programs (such as PCYC) for children/youth in these areas.

2.3 AASW recommends that:

- **increased resources be devoted to building more culturally competent community-based services that address systemic disadvantage factors of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people.**

Appoint an Indigenous Children's Commissioner

Given the number of Aboriginal children and young people in care and in the justice system we believe that the Government should appoint an Indigenous Children's Commissioner to give greater prominence to the issues facing Aboriginal children in this State. The recommendation in the previous section is equally applicable here.

3. People with Disability

The proposals in this section have been developed in consultation with workers with experience in the disability field, and engagement with key disability advocacy groups, National Disability Services WA and People With Disability.

Continuing State Government commitment to disability

With the transfer of personal support services to the Commonwealth there is a risk that the focus on promoting and safeguarding the rights of people with disability will reduce as a priority for the State Government. The AASW is concerned the impacts on the quality of life for people with disability, as the State Government still has an important role in supporting the wellbeing of people with disability and their families.

The State Government's current commitment to the National Disability Strategy is through the Count Me In strategy which has been very positive in its focus on inclusion of people with disability in all aspects of community life. We welcome the recent announcement that the State Government will develop a State Disability Plan as part of a strategy to build a more inclusive and accessible community for all West Australians with a disability.

It is critical to the wellbeing of people with disability in this State, that this remains a priority and that services which promote the inclusion of people with a disability are adequately funded

3.1 AASW recommends that the Government:

- **continues the commitment to fully fund to the National Disability Strategy (NDS)**
- **reassesses and reinvigorates current State initiatives to achieve the stated outcomes under the Strategy, including an evaluation of the effectiveness of those initiatives to date**
- **positions and resources the Disability Services portfolio within Government to enable it to provide effective stewardship of the Strategy, and the capacity to influence other State agencies and the broader community**

- **sets measurable targets for the achievement of the outcomes under the Strategy across all State Government agencies, and the mechanisms to monitor the achievement of those targets**
- **adequately resources strategies to achieve NDS outcomes**
- **actively engages at a National level to develop a robust national strategy to replace the current one when it expires in 2020.**

Affordable and accessible housing

An ability to access affordable and accessible housing is a major issue of fundamental importance in the lives of many people with disability. The State Government is therefore urged to increase its investment in accessible and affordable social housing appropriate to the needs of people with disability.

In particular we support the recommendations in the National Disability Services (NDS) pre-budget submission for the development and implementation of a Disability Housing Strategy.⁸

3.2 AASW recommends that:

- **the Government increases its investment in accessible and affordable social housing appropriate to the needs of people with disability.**

Metronet hubs

As the State Government rolls out its Metronet transport plan there is the opportunity to build within its design some of the prerequisites for access and inclusion by people with disability. This should incorporate continuous accessible paths of travel and full accessibility within the Metronet system itself and include a safe, planned environment around the hubs. The government can further promote inclusion for people with a disability by ensuring that the affordable and accessible social housing identified above, is located around the Metronet hubs.

3.3 AASW recommends that:

- **a priority for the design and development of Metronet hubs, and the surrounding areas, be access and inclusion by people with disability**
- **the government facilitate the location of affordable, accessible housing near the Metronet hubs as part of the planning process for the Metronet hubs.**

Education

Increased funding is needed to support teachers and schools in responding adequately to the educational needs of students with disability. While the AASW recognises that there is some specialist support is available under the School Special Education Needs – Disability

⁸ Pre-Budget Submission 2019-2020 – NDS WA State Budget Priorities

program; the uptake of this is not universal and greater resourcing is needed to assure equal access based on the needs of students.

The AASW recommends a minimum ratio of one school social worker per 500 students.⁹ School social workers are at the forefront of helping schools, individuals and families address complex social issues and have the specialist knowledge and skills necessary to make sure that students are connected and engaged in their learning.

3.4 AASW recommends that:

- **the Government increases the resources available for support of students with disability and remove any barriers or disincentives for schools to take up the available resources**
- **that the Government looks to fund Social Workers in schools to ensure the welfare and continued engagement of children in the school system.**

Employment

Having a job is for most people is a key prerequisite to a fulfilling and comfortable life in the community, however the rate of unemployment for people with disability is over twice that for the rest of the community. The Western Australian State Government is currently showing very poor leadership on this issue with people with disability comprising only 1.9% of its employees. By comparison the Victorian Government has a target of 6% by 2020 and 12% by 2025.

It is time for the WA State Government to show genuine leadership to other sectors in this area by substantially increasing the number of people with disability that it employs. This can only realistically occur through the setting of State-wide targets for employment of people with disability in the public sector; robust strategies to ensure that those targets are achieved; targets for individual agencies; and annual reporting on the strategies undertaken to achieve those targets and the results achieved. A strong alliance between the State Government and disability employment agencies, through their peak body, National Disability Services, will be important to achieving these results.

3.5 AASW recommends that:

- **The Government substantially increases the number of people with disability employed in the public sector.**

Aboriginal people with disability

The very slow rate of success of “Closing the Gap” strategies for Aboriginal people is exacerbated for Aboriginal people with disability, who are doubly disadvantaged in terms of access and inclusion. A robust targeted and funded strategy for the achievement of the National Disability Strategy (NDS) outcomes for Aboriginal people with disability is required.

⁹ <https://www.aasw.asn.au/document/item/8308>

It is recommended that WA Government's programs to achieve the "Closing the Gap" targets for Aboriginal people include specific strategies relating to Aboriginal people with disability and that these form a key part of the State Government response to the National Disability Strategy.

3.6 AASW recommends that:

- **the WA government's programs towards the "Closing the Gap" targets for Aboriginal people include specific strategies relating to Aboriginal people with disability.**

Access to Justice

Inadequate provisions for taking evidence from people with disability, as victims or witnesses of crime, are an ongoing concern. The result is that physical or sexual assaults, particularly of people with cognitive or intellectual impairment or those with severely impaired communication, often do not get to trial because the normal interviewing processes are not successful in obtaining sufficient evidence to gain a conviction.

This is in spite of relatively recent provisions in the Evidence Act creating a category of "special witness" that allows more flexible approaches to taking evidence, including video recording of evidence by specialist interviewers. However, the only facility capable of providing this service is ChildFIRST Assessment and Interview Team (CAIT), a unit within the Department of Communities, created as a specialist interviewing service for child victims and witnesses within the context of child protection. We understand that evidence is sometimes taken from adults with disability by the (CAIT) but that this is not routine and is not part of the formal brief of this unit.

This totally unsatisfactory situation both denies justice to people with disability and places them at continuing risk of physical and sexual assault, because of the reduced risk of prosecution to the perpetrators.

It is suggested that this issue could be simply addressed by expanding the brief and branding of (CAIT) as an interviewing service for all special witnesses and resourcing it accordingly. It would also be necessary for Police procedures to change to make the referral of all categories of special witnesses to this unit as routine as it currently is with child witnesses. We are aware that National Disability Services, the peak disability sector body, has continually advocated for this to occur over several years in successive pre-budget submissions including their current submission for 2019-20, and find it difficult to understand why no action has yet eventuated.

3.7 AASW recommends that:

- **the Government expands the role of, rebrands and resources CAIT to take evidence from all "special witnesses" including people with disability; and creates the protocols within Police for their routine referral to this service.**

Abuse & Neglect of Prisoners with Disabilities

The February 2018 Report by Human Rights Watch “I Needed Help, Instead I was Punished”¹⁰ describes widespread abuse and discrimination of prisoners with disability in Australia, including Western Australia. An urgent State Government response to the issues raised in this report is needed, including additional funding where required.

3.8 AASW recommends that:

- **the Government initiates urgent action to identify the extent of abuse of and/or discrimination against prisoners with disability and resources strategies to address these issues.**

State Funding of Advocacy Services

With the transfer of personal support services and advocacy services in relation to those services to the Commonwealth it is still critical that the State Government continue to fund advocacy services to allow continuing advocacy on behalf of people with disability in relation to the full range of State services and responsibilities. We welcome the recent announcement of \$1.2 million for the continued funding of advocacy services and strongly urge that this continue to receive high priority.

3.9 AASW recommends that:

- **the State Government continues funding of advocacy on behalf of people with disability.**

4. Wellbeing and Safety of Older Persons

The AASW WA Branch welcomes the current focus by government on developing and improving services to safeguard and enhancing the wellbeing and safety of older people. In addition, the AASW WA Branch makes recommendations for improved services to address threats to the safety and wellbeing of older persons. We wish to acknowledge Advocare and Council of Ageing for the advice provided in the development of this section.

Overall services and programs used and valued by older West Australians should be protected and improved in the State budget with a focus on the following: elder abuse; senior housing strategy; mature age employment; and age friendly communities.

Elder Abuse

The AASW WA Branch welcomes the findings of the report of the Western Australian Legislative Council Final Report of the Select Committee into Elder Abuse: ‘I Never Thought It Would Happen To Me’: When trust is broken.’ (2018). A rights-based collaborative strategy for preventing and responding to elder abuse is required to: address abuse and harm to

¹⁰ “I Needed Help, Instead I was Punished”, Abuse and Neglect of Prisoners with Disabilities in Australia, Human Rights Watch, 2018.

vulnerable older people; investigate and respond to allegations of abuse; and also to respond to people at risk of self-neglect.¹¹

Consideration of the literature¹² indicates that Elder Abuse needs to be understood in the context of positive aging, addressing an ageist culture and on improving services across the board for older Western Australians. The AASW believes that it is a human rights issue that requires a comprehensive set of strategies, and the cooperation of multiple individuals and groups. Preventative strategies informed by human rights principles need to be the foundation of the response to elder abuse in the private and the public lives of older people, whether it be in the spheres of health, finance, education, care and support services, or recreation.

4.1 AASW recommends that:

- **an Elder Abuse prevention strategy be developed following consideration of the recently released report of The Select Committee into Elder Abuse. This strategy should guide funding priorities for the state budget.**¹³

Improve capacity of expert services

Provision should be made in the budget to increase and secure the budget of those few expert government and community services that currently respond to concerns about the safety and wellbeing of older persons. These include Advocare, The Office of the Public Advocate and the Older People's Rights Service.

These services are already stretched as identified throughout the report of the Select Committee. For example, it is understood that Advocare has only six advocates to staff its helpline and provide information and education. Resourcing is also not secure so that long term planning is not feasible.

¹¹ <https://www.aasw.asn.au/document/item/9008>

¹² Clare M, Blundell B and Clare J, *Examination of the Extent of Elder Abuse in Western Australia: A Qualitative and Quantitative Investigation for Existing Agency Policy and Recorded Data*, Crime Research Centre, The University of Western Australia Joint Initiative with Advocare Inc, April 2011. <https://seniorsrights.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/wa-elder-abuse-research-report-2011.pdf>

APEA: WA Alliance for the Prevention of Elder Abuse, *Elder Abuse Protocol: Guidelines for Action*: Western Australia, December 2017.

Joosten M, Vrantsidis F and Dow B, *Understanding Elder Abuse – A Scoping Study*, National Ageing Research Institute Ltd, June 2007. https://socialequity.unimelb.edu.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0011/2777924/Elder-Abuse-A-Scoping-Study.pdf

Elder Abuse- A National Legal Response, Final Report, Australian Law Reform Commission ALRC Report 131, Sydney, May 2017.

The National Plan to address Elder Abuse, due to report to the Attorney General later in 2018, a key recommendation of the 2017 Australian Law Reform Commission's Report.

¹³ 'I Never Thought It Would Happen To Me': When Trust Is Broken Final report of The Select Committee into Elder Abuse, September 2018 [http://www.parliament.wa.gov.au/parliament/commit.nsf/\(Report+Lookup+by+Com+ID\)/5D4DB8F8EB0A444848258307000F6874/\\$file/el.eld.180830.rpf.000.xx.web.pdf](http://www.parliament.wa.gov.au/parliament/commit.nsf/(Report+Lookup+by+Com+ID)/5D4DB8F8EB0A444848258307000F6874/$file/el.eld.180830.rpf.000.xx.web.pdf)

Differentiate between forensic and support services

The further development of effective services should consider key learnings from child protection. In particular to recognise that focussing on identification, investigation and statutory action alone is inadequate, in that it conflates harm that requires a forensic/legal response with concerns about individual and family wellbeing that require support, education and resources.

- Forensic services should be targeted where there is significant harm, illegal treatment and exploitation of older persons. Financial abuse appears to be the most prevalent exploitation and requires particular attention.
- Other important concerns about the wellbeing of older persons, their families and carers require improved services such as appropriate housing, home support, safety in the home, mediation, respite and counselling.

If there is not a balance between support and forensic responses, older persons, their families and carers (who are already struggling) may be unnecessarily subject to stressful and costly investigation and legal proceedings without any improvement to their circumstances.

Implement an Information and Awareness raising campaign

Provision should be made in the budget for a campaign that provides information about elder abuse and how/where to seek help. This should not occur without providing information about where older persons experiencing relationship difficulties or poor living circumstances, carers who are stressed and similar can receive assistance.

Such a campaign should be accompanied by resources to improve the capacity of existing services to respond to inevitable increased demand. These services require sufficiently skilled staff to respond to the complex needs of older persons and their families. This includes responding to the needs of Aboriginal and culturally diverse people throughout the state.

4.2 AASW recommends that:

- **the State Budget prioritise allocation of resources to established, expert services that can appropriately respond to the safety and well-being concerns of older people**
- **resources for be allocated for a campaign about Elder Abuse and where to seek help**
- **culturally safe services and information for older Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people be included in this strategy.**

Seniors Housing Strategy

Housing insecurity and homelessness remain a key issue for many people across our State and it is becoming increasingly a concern for older Western Australians. The 2016 Census¹⁴ estimates that of 9,000 Western Australians who were homeless on census night, 1,508 were over the age of 55 (16.8%). The 2016 Census also noted that across Australia the number of homeless persons aged 55 and above has steadily increased (a 28% increase between 2011 and 2016). The 2018 Anglicare Rental Affordability Snapshot¹⁵ found that on 24 March only 1% of rentals in Perth were affordable to a single person on an aged pension and 4.5% of rentals were affordable to a couple on an aged pension.

An investment in housing will result in better health outcomes for older Western Australians experiencing homelessness or insecure housing options. The 2017 Labour Platform¹⁶ undertook to 'increase the number of new homes specifically for seniors' and to provide for 'more supported accommodation and services to help seniors stay in their homes longer'.

To deliver on these undertakings there needs to be a budget strategy to invest in social and affordable housing. Shelter WA (2017)¹⁷ suggests that at a minimum WA requires 60,000 more social housing dwellings over the next 10 years. Underutilised government land in association with the rollout of Metronet provides an opportunity to provide for new social and affordable housing. A commensurate proportion of new housing stock must be allocated to persons aged 55 and over.

4.3 AASW recommends that:

- **the State Budget prioritise increased investment for a Seniors Housing Strategy to increase the stock of accessible and affordable social housing appropriate to the needs of older people.**

Mature Age Employment

Despite a considerable consensus for the need for a longer working life there are numerous well documented barriers and biases that operate against mature aged persons (defined as

¹⁴ Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Media Release: Census reveals a rise in homelessness in Australia* March 2018. <http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/lookup/2049.0Media%20Release12016>

¹⁵ Anglicare, *2018 Rental Affordability* Anglicare Australia Inc, Ainslie Act 2018. <http://www.anglicare.asn.au/our-work/research-reports/the-rental-affordability-snapshot>

¹⁶ Gorman P, *2017 WA Labour Platform*, Perth WA, 2017. <https://walabor.org.au/platform>

¹⁷ Shelter WA, *Pre-budget Submission 2018/19: Housing an opportunity for systemic reform*, November 2017. https://d3n8a8pro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/shelterwa/pages/43/attachments/original/1511761580/Pre-Budget_Submission_2018-2019_FINAL_Designed.pdf?1511761580

50 years of age and over) from gaining employment¹⁸. Older job seekers find it most difficult to gain employment once they have been unemployed or made redundant.

The forthcoming budget needs to provide for programs that work towards removing barriers to and providing support for participation of older workers in paid employment. In line with 2017 WA Labour Platform such programs require an integrated approach between the three tiers of government and the private sector as well as key stakeholders including unions, private sector employers and community sector organisations. Such programs could complement the Australian Government Career Transition Assistance Program being trailed in the Perth north metropolitan region.

4.4 AASW recommends that:

- **the State Budget places a funding priority to the wellbeing and safety of older Western Australians, with particular regard to addressing the barriers to mature age employment.**

Age-Friendly Communities

Age-friendly communities are places where older people live safely, enjoy good health and maintain active engagement in community affairs. Supporting communities to become age-friendly is one of the most effective strategies to promote active ageing and wellbeing. Policies to create age-friendly communities benefit everyone by creating a culture of inclusion enjoyed by all ages.

As the proportion of the Western Australian population aged 65 years and increases (from 2011: 14% of WA population to 2016: 16% of WA population) greater provision should be made in the State Budget to support local community projects such as health and exercise programs; home maintenance support; digital literacy education; transport initiatives; social engagement and intergenerational projects. At a minimum the \$100,000 grant pool made available to local government should be doubled and then indexed for inflation and population growth.

4.5 AASW recommends that:

- **the State Budget increases the funding for services and projects that enable older people to live safely, enjoy good health and stay involved in their communities through an Age Friendly Communities strategy.**

¹⁸ Australian Human Rights Commission, *Issues Paper: Employment discrimination against older Australians*, 2015. <https://www.humanrights.gov.au/publications/issues-paper-employment-discrimination-against-older-australians/3-recent-work-barriers>

5. Violence, Abuse and Recovery from Childhood Trauma

“There is an urgent need for the sector to respond to the physical, psychological and emotional needs of children and youth who have experienced trauma. Research indicates that adopting a trauma-informed approach to service delivery supports healing and empowers our young people”¹⁹

Vulnerable families in the contexts of economic and social disadvantage are at most risk to be severely affected by multiple stressors. These result in complex, systemic, multi-layered, inter-related problems that include domestic violence, child abuse, poor mental and physical health, inadequate parenting, poor educational attainments and generally overall poor life outcomes.

Australian families face a number of stressful issues that impact adversely on their functioning. At the extreme, are the levels of violence towards women in the context of domestic violence and random attacks in the community, violence fuelled by drug and alcohol abuse, suicide rates, unaddressed mental health issues, homelessness and poverty.

In alignment with the AASW position statement we renew our call for greater resourcing of family violence support services and review of service models. The AASW takes the view that family violence is a gendered crime and human rights abuse that is highly prevalent but preventable. Violence against women is recognised as the most pervasive, yet poorly recognised, human rights abuse in the world. The AASW understands that while family violence affects many members of society, it is a gendered crime most commonly perpetrated by men against women and children. For more information about the AASW’s position and previous work visit: <https://www.aasw.asn.au/social-policy-advocacy/position-papers-and-statements>

Children exposed to complex trauma are particularly affected. Trauma impacts adversely on personality development, healthy brain development, psychological and emotional well-being. *This risks lifelong problems*: children’s exposure to complex trauma results in *a loss of core capacities for self-regulation and interpersonal relatedness*. Children’s exposure to maltreatment and other traumatic experiences that include emotional abuse, neglect, sexual abuse, family and domestic violence often result in psychiatric and addictive disorders, chronic mental illness, legal, vocational and family problems.

With the development of insight into how stress impacts children, individuals and groups, there is a growing movement in the child welfare/child protection professional sector, in its attempts to alleviate these complex and multilayered problems, with trauma informed practice. Trauma informed practice is innovative and relatively recent. It requires constant creativity, and non-punitive interventions that promote well-being and produce prosocial behaviour.

Trauma informed practice interventions need to target two levels:

prevention: responding to need (stress reduction) and

¹⁹ WA Trauma-informed Practice Symposium, Perth, 4 May 2018.

restorative: healing and capacity building.

Any response must meet both these challenges. We look to the leadership of Government to support the service providers with policies and the funding that supports best practice with these challenges.

Failure to do so risks entrapment in generational trauma cycles where those in our communities who have suffered trauma remain stuck in lifelong problems that risk additional trauma exposure and cumulative impairments.

Without the needed support, policies and funding, service delivery risks being stuck in crisis driven responses that at best offer short term amelioration or are not effective at all.

5 AASW recommends that:

- **the Government provide both leadership and funding to increase the availability and effectiveness of service responses that support recovery from the destructive effects of trauma, particularly in children involved in the child protection and juvenile justice systems.**

6. Mental Health, Alcohol and Other Drugs and Suicide Prevention

The Western Australian Mental Health and Alcohol and Other Drugs Plan 2015 – 2025 and the Western Australian Suicide Prevention 2020 Plan: Together We Can Save Lives, are plans which have enormous potential to benefit the health and well-being of the community but are yet to be implemented in any real sense. These plans align with the 2017 Labor Platform to focus on ‘health promotion, primary prevention and early intervention and rehabilitation’ in the areas of mental health and alcohol and other drug abuse.

The AASW WA Branch urges the Government to include these plans as priority areas of funding, in particular investing in services in the community sector, so that people can access the support they need in the right place, at the right time, and with the right kind of support. In the long term this will bring both savings to the health system and contribute to a person living a purposeful life in the community.

Western Australia is likely to fall behind the rest of Australia to meet the goals of the Australian Government 5th Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Plan (2017) if it does not carry out its own state-based strategies. This plan has flagged the need for the suicide prevention and mental health sectors to work more closely together. Western Australia has the benefit of having a Minister who has both the Health and Mental Health portfolios hence the capacity to demonstrate how our State can best achieve the integration of strategies between the mental health, alcohol and other drugs and suicide prevention sectors.

6. The AASW WA Branch recommends that:

- **the State budget increase funding for the delivery of services in the community sector to rebalance the current emphasis on acute services**
- **the State budget fund the implementation of community-based recovery services such as the Recovery College promised in the 2017 Labor Platform and ensure these are accessible in regional areas**

- the State budget provide for resources to increase engagement of consumers and families in the co-production of services
- the State budget provides funding to examine the development of a Trauma Recovery Centre drawing on the model developed by the Trauma Recovery Centre San Francisco.²⁰

Conclusion

We look forward to a 2019/20 State budget that reflects our shared values of social justice and human rights, by placing high priority on the funding of services that support the most vulnerable and disadvantaged in our community, whilst at the same time restoring State finances to sustainable health.

²⁰ Trauma Recovery Centre, University of California San Francisco <http://traumarecoverycenter.org/>