



CHILDRENS' BUDGET

**State Budget Submission
2023**



Valuing Children
— INITIATIVE —

Acknowledgement of Country

The Valuing Children Initiative acknowledges and gives respect to all Traditional Custodians across this vast nation, their Elders past and present. We honour Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's unique cultural and spiritual relationships to the land, water and seas, and their rich contribution to society. We commit to supporting the children of today who will be the Elders of tomorrow.

Acknowledgement of Children

The Valuing Children Initiative wishes to acknowledge the rights of all koolingkas (children) and endorse the United Nations Conventions of the Rights of the Child. We want to say to all children, everywhere, that you matter, and you are valued.



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Noongar Nunga girl from Western Australia and Valuing Children Initiative Ambassador Indigo Ellis

FOCUS ON CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

In the vast and diverse landscapes of Western Australia, a significant number of children and young people grapple with various forms of hardship. From the bustling city of Perth to remote outback communities, these individuals face unique challenges that span economic disparities, access to education, and the impact of social and cultural factors.

The Valuing Children Initiative aims to change both individual and collective perspectives, making it a customary and everyday practice for adults to acknowledge and appreciate the worth of children.

CALL TO ACTION

CHILDREN'S MINISTER

Appointing a Children's Minister is a significant step in many countries that underscores the importance of children's welfare, development, and rights. Whilst a Minister of Youth was established to provide a whole-of-government approach to youth issues, the United Nations define youth as persons between the ages of 10 and 25 meaning children below the age of 10 do not have a dedicated minister in Western Australia. The Victorian Labor Government recently appointed their first Minister for Children in October 2023. A Children's Minister is responsible for developing and implementing policies with the dedicated Children's Budget to fund programs focusing on children's needs and will ensure that regular monitoring and evaluation of the policies and programs are meeting goals.

STATE WELLBEING CHILD STATEMENT

Currently, there is no State Wellbeing Child Statement established to outline Western Australia's commitment and approach to promoting the wellbeing and welfare of children. We urgently call on the WA State Government to adopt a Child Wellbeing Statement to address the rights of children on their healthcare, food security, education, housing and wellbeing.

CHILD AND YOUTH IMPACT ASSESSMENT TOOLS

A Child and Youth Impact Assessment Tool (CYIAT) is a voluntary process that enables governments and organisations to identify, analyse and assess the impacts of any proposed law or policy on the rights and wellbeing of children and young people.

Similar to environmental impact assessments, CYIATs provide a step-by-step process for policymakers to systematically consider the effects of a proposed policy on children and to incorporate the results into their decision-making.

CHILD POVERTY REDUCTION ACT

The Child Poverty Reduction Act aims to assess, inform and openly disclose data on child poverty. This collective effort enables us to respond effectively as a community, directing services to children when and where children require support. Reporting to Parliament every year, governments are annually held accountable to measures and targets, set at three and ten years, while providing transparency to the community about the extent of child poverty. Governments of all levels would then be required to give greater focus to the wellbeing of children in Australia.

YOUTH JUSTICE

Children by their nature are learning from their mistakes and how to navigate the world. Many children who end up in the WA justice system come from a trauma or poverty background and deserve our support and nurturing not punishment and further trauma. We must immediately close Unit 18, raise the age of criminal responsibility to 14 years old and invest in youth diversion programs in the city and on country for children at risk of offending.





CHILD SAFETY

Child Safety is everyone's responsibility, yet year after year we see alarming rates of children being harmed. The groundbreaking Australian Child Maltreatment Study found only 37 per cent of children feel safe in their community all the time, but a substantial 28 per cent do not feel safe at all times, while 22 per cent sometimes feel secure, and 11 per cent rarely experience a sense of safety. These figures underscore the pressing need for proactive measures to create a safe and nurturing environment for our children and youth. The emotional and psychological wellbeing of our children is closely tied to their perception of safety, and addressing these disparities is pivotal in shaping a brighter and more secure future for the young generations of Western Australia.

The National Principles for Child Safe Organisations were established from the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse and endorsed by Australia's Children's Commissioners and Guardians and the 2005 National Framework for Creating Safe Environments for Children.

The second principles states that: 'Children and young people are informed about their rights, participate in decisions affecting them and are taken seriously'.

A child-safe organisation fosters a culture, employs strategies, and implements measures to safeguard the well-being of children and young people. It prioritises genuine engagement with and the appreciation of children, strives to minimise the risk of harm, enhances the probability of detecting harm, and promptly addresses concerns, disclosures, allegations, or suspicions.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- A Parliamentary Inquiry into the prevalence, impact and support for children who witness or are victims of family and domestic violence on children.
- Coordinated efforts and funding to implement all ten of the National Principles for Child Safe Organisations and funding support for organisations to conducting child and youth advisory workshops;
- Establishing Child and Youth Impact Assessment Tools across all government departments and in Cabinet to evaluate the effects of proposed policies and laws on the rights and wellbeing of children and young people, promoting their welfare and keeping them safe.

POVERTY

In Western Australia, the stark reality of child poverty is evident, with an estimated 16.6 per cent of the young population, equivalent to 105,000 children and adolescents aged 0-18, grappling with life below the poverty line. These statistics underscore the pressing need for comprehensive efforts to address this issue and ensure that every child in WA has a fair opportunity to thrive and access a brighter future.

The negative impact of poverty on a child's development and life outcomes is significant and well documented and can last a lifetime. Poverty affects a child's health, mental health and wellbeing and many children experience missing out on essential items like food, clothing, a safe place to sleep and often friendships. Children who grow up in poverty are 3.3 times more likely to experience poverty in adulthood than those who grew up in a household that wasn't experiencing poverty, creating intergenerational deprivation of wealth.

Poor children are significantly more likely to suffer from nervousness or feel unhappy with their lives for up to 10 years after leaving home.

Cost of living, inflation, and soaring interest rates have created a tinder box for families already experiencing poverty and children have no choice in their circumstances. This is despite having parents doing absolutely everything they can their best.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- The Western Australian Government pass legislation for a Child Poverty Reduction Act would measure, inform, and transparently reports statistics about child poverty so that we as a whole community can take action and target services where and when children need them.
- Expand and properly resource the Child and Parents Centre programs to more community across Western Australia
- Universal screening on school site for all children born during the pandemic 2020- 2023 and beyond.



HEALTH & WELLBEING

The health and wellbeing of children and youth has never been so urgent. Research shows increases in the need for psychological interventions (AIHW, 2023), increased rates in poverty (ABS, 2023) and high rates of child abuse (Matthews, 2023). Children now experience the longest waitlist times in history and our young people are not receiving the support and early interventions they require in a timely manner. With our young people experiencing increases in anxiety, depression, suicidal thoughts (AIHS, 2023), experts refer to this time as a mental health crisis.

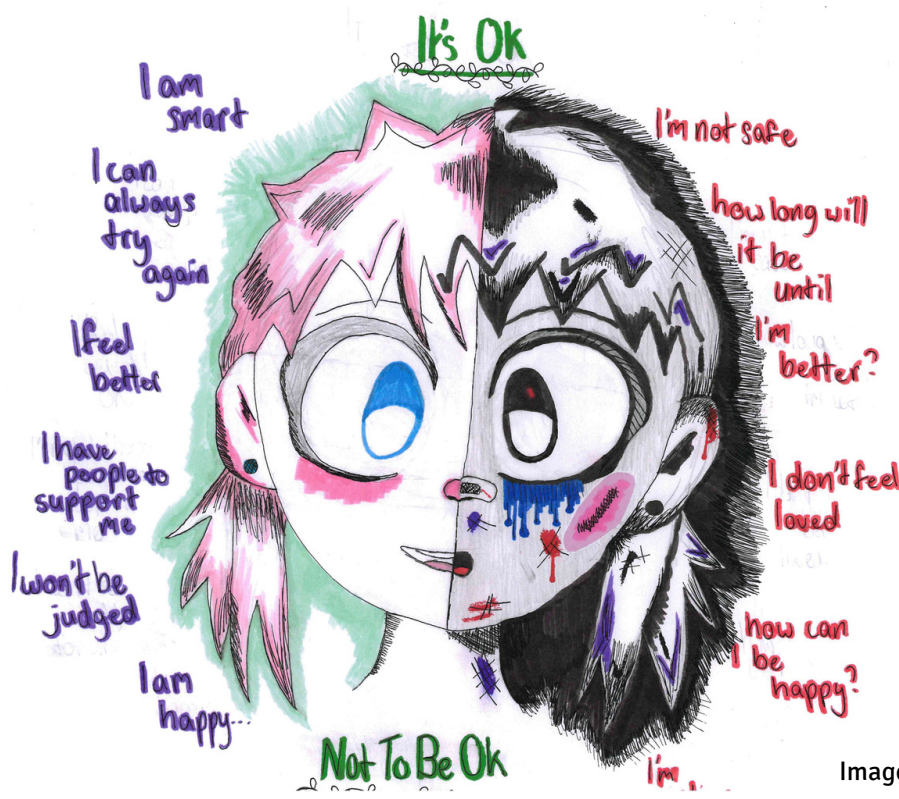
Research shows that children who have experienced domestic violence are twice as likely to be diagnosed with a substance use disorder, 1.6 times as likely to self-harm and 1.5 times as likely to have an anxiety disorder.

The CCYP Speaking Out Survey (2021) and the WAAMH's Increasing and Improving Community Mental Health Supports in WA report (2020) asked young people what they needed to thrive. Children want to independently access mental health supports, that were either digitally or locally accessible. They want to connect with peers experiencing similar challenges. It is imperative to ask young people their opinion and what they think as they are the experts on their own needs.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Implement outreach and specific services to aid young people in our communities. These examples include school and home visits, group education programs, parenting resources, mentoring support and behavioural initiatives. In utilising spaces where young people are, enables participation.
- Expand and properly resource the Child Parent Centres (CPC) across the state, improved use of the CPC model allows services, education and support to bring families together to better meet the needs of children.
- Ensure quality, community based, universal and free Child Development Services no matter where a child or young person lives or their financial circumstances.
- Research and resourcing into the mental health and health impacts of children who experience family and domestic violence and poverty.

These recommendations must be extended to rural and regional areas with culturally appropriate information and communications must be developed to respectfully and successfully to engage all young people.





FOOD SECURITY

Food insecurity disproportionately impacts vulnerable communities, creating obstacles for them to obtain food that is nutritionally adequate, safe, culturally suitable, and affordable.

The repercussions of food insecurity extend to both mental and physical health, affecting 208,000 WA households and 116,000 children live in severely food insecure households.

Additionally, food insecurity also hinders employment prospects and educational opportunities, particularly among children.

Western Australian saw the greatest decline in food security of all states between 2022 and 2023, from 70% to 63%.

On average 77% food insecure households in 2023 experienced this for the first time within the last 12 months.

Foodbank's Hunger Report found that 80,000 more WA households struggled to meet their food needs this year and 250,000 WA household experience severe food insecurity.

School breakfast and lunch programs that are universally available reduce stigma for children experiencing food insecurity.

The WA Joint Standing Committee on the Commissioner for Children and Young People Report, 'Hungry for Change, Addressing Food Insecurity for Children and Young People Affected by Poverty', found a parental co-payment system is commonly accepted, without this the cost of a school lunch program for all government school students on all school days is estimated at \$400 million to \$600 million per year.

RECOMMENDATION

- The State Government fully fund the Department of Education review of the School Breakfast Program to ensure every child who needs breakfast has access to food.
- The State Government ensures that a school lunch program is negotiated in the National School Reform Agreement discussions

HOUSING

The Western Australian government has evicted thousands of children into homelessness from public housing. The Stop Evicting Children campaign found that 3070 children had been evicted from public housing between 2016 - 2022 and has called for an immediate moratorium on children being evicted from public housing and greater supports for families to maintain their housing.

The WA Department of Communities is responsible for both child protection and public housing and it is unacceptable that we still see children evicted to homelessness from public housing.

The issue of child homelessness remains a pressing concern, as evidenced by the 6,802 children and young people, along with their families, who sought assistance from WA specialist homelessness services in the 2021-22.

Of this vulnerable population, a significant majority, totalling 4,117, were children under the age of 10, underscoring the urgent need for comprehensive support and intervention to address the unique challenges faced by these young individuals and their families.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- End use of without grounds terminations
- Target of zero children evicted to homelessness from public housing
- Immediate review of the Thrive program in relation to its original purpose
- Early intervention and prevention service to support tenants maintain their homes within social housing and community housing.
- A new specialist support program needed to sustain Aboriginal public housing tenancies that are co-designed, culturally appropriate, ACCO delivered, lived experience and resourced.



VALUING CHILDREN

The Valuing Children Initiative, in partnership with the University of Western Australia, Edith Cowan University and Curtin University, released The Exploring Australian Adults' Attitudes Towards Children for a Better Future 2023.

The report surveyed 1008 adults across Australia on their attitudes towards children and compared results from the same study conducted in 2016. In 2023, children are now considered 'fortunate', 'tech savvy' and 'honest'.

Australian adults also believe that governments give 'too little' consideration to children when making decisions while 75 per cent of adults agreed the best interests of children should be considered in all decision making and 67 per cent thought children's opinions had the same value as adults. Mental health issues ranked the highest issue children faced, followed by family, education and drug and alcohol issues, while parents found financial pressure was their greatest issues when raising or caring for children.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Amplifying Children's Voices:** Creating inclusive mechanisms such as Child and Youth Impact Assessment Tools to enable children to actively engage in decision-making, including shaping policies that systematically prioritise their interests across various sectors.
- **Supporting Parents and Families:** Enhanced support for parents through programs and initiatives that offer parenting education, guidance, and resources to promote healthier family dynamics and facilitate children's development.
- **Increased Provision of Education Programs:** Schools should introduce programs that empower children with skills to address modern challenges, including online safety, mental health awareness, and critical thinking.
- **Accessible Mental Health Support:** Ensuring children have access to mental health support which is tailored to their individual needs. Including increasing youth mental health services both within educational settings and the broader community.
- **Increased Advocacy:** Increasing advocacy to protect children's rights and ensure that the issues affecting children, such as climate change, remain at the forefront of public discourse.
- **Future Research:** Ongoing research is vital to understand evolving issues impacting children and shape adaptive policies. Future studies, extending beyond surveys, will involve in-depth interviews to explore different contexts and track evolving attitudes towards children over time.





Valuing Children

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valuingchildreninitiative.com.au

info@valuingchildreninitiative.com.au



@valuingchildreninitiative



@VCIAus

Links

Child and Youth Impact Assessment Tool

<https://valuingchildreninitiative.com.au/child-and-youth-impact-assessment-tool/>

Child Poverty Reduction Act

<https://valuingchildreninitiative.com.au/child-poverty-reduction-act/>

Attitude Survey

<https://valuingchildreninitiative.com.au/the-valuing-children-initiative-survey-2023/>

References

Child Safety

https://childsafesite.humanrights.gov.au/sites/default/files/2019-02/National_Principles_for_Child_Safe_Organisations2019.pdf

Health and Wellbeing

<https://assets.csi.edu.au/assets/research/Final-report-Increasing-and-Improving-Community-Mental-Health-Supports-in-Western-Australia.pdf>

<https://www.cyp.wa.gov.au/our-work/speaking-out-survey/>

<https://www.acms.au/resources/the-prevalence-and-impact-of-child-maltreatment-in-australia-findings-from-the-australian-child-maltreatment-study-2023-brief-report/>

Family and Domestic Violence

<https://anrowsdev.wpenginepowered.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Links-children-MH-DFV-Resource-RP.20.05.pdf>

Food Security

<https://reports.foodbank.org.au/foodbank-hunger-report-2023/>

[https://parliament.wa.gov.au/publications/tabledpapers.nsf/displaypaper/4112328c3e40e68e40f5b7a3482589d70027ab44/\\$file/hungry+for+change+-+jsccyp+report+6.pdf](https://parliament.wa.gov.au/publications/tabledpapers.nsf/displaypaper/4112328c3e40e68e40f5b7a3482589d70027ab44/$file/hungry+for+change+-+jsccyp+report+6.pdf)

Housing

<https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/homelessness-services/specialist-homelessness-services-annual-report/contents/young-people-presenting-alone>

<https://www.cyp.wa.gov.au/media/5030/children-and-young-people-profile-report-2023-artwork-web.pdf>

In response to Questions on Notice, and in media reports.

Poverty

<https://bcec.edu.au/assets/2022/03/BCEC-Poverty-and-Disadvantage-Report-March-2022-FINAL-WEB.pdf>

<https://valuingchildreninitiative.com.au/early-years-strategy-submission/>

<https://povertyandinequality.acoss.org.au/poverty-in-australia-2023-who-is-affected/>

This Children's Budget was prepared by the team at the Valuing Children Initiative, credit to Michelle Woodcock, Lauren Valentine, Vicky Absalom-Hornby and Sarah Quinton.