



Valuing Children  
— INITIATIVE —

# STATE ELECTION PRIORITIES 2021

THE VALUING CHILDREN INITIATIVE





[1] Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2021)  
Child protection in the time of COVID-19

### Acknowledgement to country

The Valuing Children Initiative acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as the Traditional Custodians of this land and its waters. We pay our deep respect to Elders past, present and future, and extend this to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

### FOCUS ON CHILDREN

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a profound impact on countries, communities and individuals across the world. In Western Australia, decisive leadership with a focus on public health and a fair measure of good fortune has meant that we have avoided the worst impacts of the pandemic.

However, despite our relatively favourable position, there is no doubt that our community has been challenged by the pandemic with financial hardship, unemployment, underemployment, soaring rental prices, domestic violence, mental health, child protection and homelessness all emerging as prominent issues for the West Australian community.

At a federal level, the JobKeeper and Coronavirus Supplement payments have had a protective impact on families by reducing poverty compared with pre-COVID-19 levels. In particular, the poverty rate for single-parent families more than halved from 20% to 8% [1]. Unfortunately, this support has now been significantly decreased and is likely to cease entirely in the coming months. The result will be a return to poverty for many families.

Arguably, one outcome of the pandemic is that community attitudes in relation to social issues like poverty and unemployment have softened. Many West Australians have faced unemployment, financial hardship and housing instability for the first time. Consequently, the narrative around these issues has also shifted; there is now a more sophisticated and nuanced discussion with less blame and judgement attached.

Recognising the crisis, and the need for intervention, state and federal governments have been quick to respond. To protect our entire community, and to support people in need, governments have been proactive and creative in finding solutions; increased government spending has been an important part of the response in Western Australia and nationally. This response has been broadly welcomed by Australian society suggesting that many Australians **want** their governments to resolve complex social issues by spending money on solutions.

In the midst of a rapidly changing world, we mustn't lose sight of our children. All children deserve a safe, healthy and happy childhood but this is not the reality for many children. Children have no choice about the circumstances of their birth, or their childhood, and we know that childhood experiences shape adulthood. Therefore it's important that we take collective responsibility for the wellbeing of all children.

**The Valuing Children Initiative calls upon political parties in Western Australia to prioritise children:**

**APPOINT A MINISTER FOR CHILDREN**

**LEGISLATE THE USE OF MANDATORY CHILD IMPACT STATEMENTS**

**END CHILD POVERTY IN WESTERN AUSTRALIA**

**INCREASE SPENDING ON PREVENTION AND EARLY INTERVENTION**



## APPOINT A MINISTER FOR CHILDREN

### Why this is important

Government policies and decisions directly affect children and young people and it essential that their voices and needs are represented at the highest level. Ministerial portfolios and the relative seniority of ministers is a reflection of government priorities. The fact that Western Australia does **not** have a Minister for Children sends a clear signal that the wellbeing of children isn't a high priority.

Currently, there is no single minister who considers the needs and wellbeing of all children. We have a Minister for Child Protection, Minister for Education and Training and Minister for Youth; all of these ministers consider the needs and wellbeing of *some* children but their consideration is confined to the limits of their respective portfolios. At a ministerial level who advocates for and with **all** children and young people?

The appointment of a Minister for Children is an acknowledgement that children are important and that their needs and wellbeing are a priority for the West Australian government.

### Policy recommendation

- Create a *senior* ministerial portfolio with the title 'Minister for Children' or 'Minister for Children and Youth'

## LEGISLATE THE USE OF MANDATORY CHILD IMPACT STATEMENTS

### Why this is important

Currently, there is no requirement to consider the impact that government decisions and policies

will have on children, and there is no standard way of measuring and recording how prior decisions and policies have impacted children. The introduction of a standardised and mandatory Child Impact Statement process will ensure that the needs and wellbeing of children have been considered, and the impact on children is recorded. Additionally, the adoption of a mandatory Child Impact Statement process will ensure that the views and voices of children and young people are sought and considered when important decisions are made.

It's critical to note that Child Impact Statements are important even when there is **not** an obvious impact on children; in fact, government can use a standardised Child Impact Statement process, to identify and record how children could, or would, be impacted (negatively and positively).

A Minister for Children would be ideally placed to progress and oversee the use of Child Impact Statements within government.

### Policy recommendation

- Introduce a mandatory, legislated requirement to use Child Impact Statements when making decisions or writing policies that directly and indirectly impact children.

## END CHILD POVERTY IN WA

### Why this is important

Child poverty remains the single biggest factor affecting early childhood development; we know that children who grow up in poverty are adversely affected not only in childhood and adolescence but into adulthood. An estimated **94,000 West Australian children live in poverty**.

Children in the most disadvantaged areas in WA have high rates of developmental vulnerabilities, with 1 in 3 children assessed as developmentally vulnerable in one domain and 1 in 5 developmentally vulnerable in two or more domains [2].

In WA currently, around 9000 people are homeless each night. This includes 1200 children under the age of 12. Two out three requests for accommodation via homelessness services go unmet. Securing rental accommodation is a problem for many; an estimated 98% of rental properties in the current market are not affordable for people on the minimum wage. For low-income households who do have a rental home some 48% are experiencing rental stress [3]. The WA government can level the playing field for children in low income families by ensuring affordable housing and by making it easier to access opportunities that will help them to thrive.

Children have no control over the circumstances of their birth, or their childhood, and **it is morally indefensible to leave children to grow up in poverty**. With a healthy economy and significant budget surplus, the WA government can significantly reduce, or even eliminate, child poverty in our state. By actively seeking to reduce and eliminate child poverty at a local level, WA can lead the way nationally and raise the bar for all Australian children.

### Policy recommendations

- Targeted support for the 94,000 children (and their families) in Western Australia growing up in poverty.
- Increase social housing stock by at least 2500 new dwellings per year for the next five years.
- Implement private rental assistance packages for low-income families.
- Expand KidSport eligibility criteria to include *any* family experiencing financial hardship.
- Increase funding to homelessness support services so that more accommodation requests can be met.
- Increase financial support to low-income families with school aged children to assist with educational expenses: include funding for extracurricular tutoring and music lessons.



[2] *The Early Years- Investing in our Future Report (2020)*

[3] *Shelter WA Fact Sheet*

## INCREASE SPENDING ON PREVENTION AND EARLY INTERVENTION

### Why this is important

A shift from reactive, problem-based spending to proactive, solution-focused spending is required to improve child wellbeing.

A child should not have to demonstrate that he or she has a significant problem before services are offered *if it is possible to pre-empt and prevent that problem from occurring in the first place*. By supporting children and families early we can increase wellbeing across the lifespan.

For example, with rates of childhood obesity continuing to rise we must protect our children from harmful advertising: 74% of outdoor food advertising within 500 metres of Perth schools is for unhealthy food and drink. Targeting children with advertisements for unhealthy food and drink is clearly not in their best interests. Protecting children from this type of advertising will have a positive impact on the health of children now and is likely to reduce the burden on the health system in the future. When considering the wellbeing of **all** children, focusing on prevention and early intervention is common sense. It also makes good long-term economic sense.

The WA government can support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children by increasing investment in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander service design, and delivery, by community-controlled organisations, in line with self-determination and the aspirations of communities. In WA, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are **16.7 times** more likely to enter out-of-home care than non-Indigenous children. This is the **highest rate of over-representation in the country** yet we spend the **least** of any state or territory on early intervention and family support (5.3%) [4]. Increased funding for Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCO's) providing out-of-home care and family support services will help to shift these statistics.

### Policy recommendations

- Mental health: Increase prevention spend from 1% to 5% of total mental health spend.
- Health: Increase investment in health prevention to at least 5% of the total health budget.
- Child protection: Increase spending on prevention and early intervention from just under 5.3% to 10% of total child protection budget. Prioritise funding for ACCO's providing out-of-home care and family support services.
- Prioritise and increase investment in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander service design; fund community-controlled organisations to deliver services.
- Prioritise funding for evidence-based prevention and early intervention services and supports for children and families.
- Ban advertising for unhealthy food and drink on all State-owned assets and within 500 metres of schools.

[4] Family Matters Report 2020

For more information on The Valuing Children Initiative

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**The Valuing Children Initiative acknowledges and supports:**

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[State Election Priorities](#)

**WA Association of Mental Health**

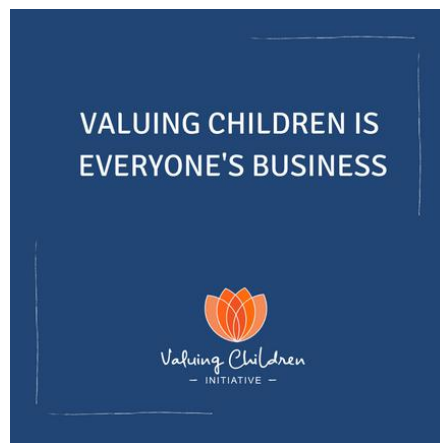
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