



WA State Budget 2022-23: What does it mean for women?

The Centre for Women's Safety and Wellbeing (CWSW) team have been reviewing the McGowan Government's State Budget 2022-23 since it was released last Thursday. As with the recent Federal Budget, the State Budget Papers provide an insight into the McGowan Government's priorities and commitment to women's safety and wellbeing, and its vision for the path to gender equality. With Western Australia in the enviable position of a significant budget surplus, now is the time for significant strategic investment to prevent gender-based violence, promote health and advance gender equality.

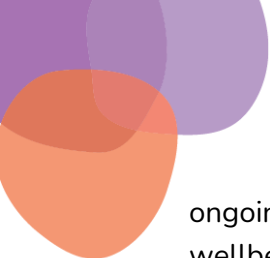
As the peak body for women's specialist domestic and family violence, community-based women's health and sexual assault services in WA, our analysis of the State Budget aims to highlight the potential impact of funding allocation on the services we represent, and women and their children. Our small CWSW team have focused our analysis on key budget initiatives and new announcements. While our analysis does not cover every budget line related to women's health, domestic, family and sexual violence and gender equality, we have detailed the underpinning principles and system-wide approaches needed to ensure women have the right to equal access and outcomes for safety, health and wellbeing.

We welcome the McGowan Government's \$34.4 million investment to tackle family and domestic violence and build safer communities for women and children and the record investment in the WA public health system, health and mental health. The Budget includes funding for promising new initiatives like the Armadale Family and Domestic Violence Hub and Aboriginal Midwifery Group Practice, and continuation of funding for initiatives including the Derby Family Violence Services, Change Em Ways Kimberley Project and Preventing FASD Project. However, there continues to be a lack of significant coordinated investment for prevention initiatives – preventive and public health and primary prevention of gender-based violence. Prevention must be a priority if substantial and sustainable improvements are to be made to women's safety, health and wellbeing.

Specialist domestic and family violence, community-based women's health and sexual assault services throughout the State have seen increased demand during the pandemic, with demand continuing to grow in the context of the current cost of living pressures. Increased demand, coupled with increasing service delivery costs, is leaving many services in precarious situations, where programs or services may struggle to continue. While we welcome newly-funded initiatives and the ongoing work around the Department of Communities Commissioning Plan, it is urgent that service funding is sufficient and reflects the true cost of service delivery to ensure services can continue to operate and provide vital community services in the current high demand, high-cost environment.

We are concerned to see many of the community-based COVID-19 funding initiatives ending. The pandemic continues to impact the lives of Western Australians, with women continuing to be disproportionately negatively impacted by COVID-19. Strategic and





ongoing investment is needed to address the impacts of COVID-19 on health and wellbeing, safety and gender equality.

There is a disappointing and distinct lack of gender analysis within the 2022-23 State Budget. There is little to no detail on how much of the health funding will improve the health and wellbeing of West Australian women, or address gender and health inequity. CWSW call on the McGowan Government to release an accompanying Women's Budget Statement, in line with that of the Federal Government. We also call for the State Government to implement gender responsive budgeting - an integral part in ensuring women have the right to equal access and outcomes for safety, health and wellbeing, addressing the gendered drivers of violence against women, and achieving gender equality.

Domestic and Family Violence

CWSW welcomes the McGowan Government's \$34.4 million investment in the 2022-23 State Budget to tackle family and domestic violence and build safer communities for women and children. The State Government will spend:

- \$14.7 million to establish and run the Armadale Family and Domestic Violence Hub
- \$7.7 million to enhance the Family and Domestic Violence Response Teams, which rapidly respond with early, co-ordinated intervention following FDV incidents
- \$4.5 million will help address family and domestic violence in the Kimberley

This is further supported by Western Australia signing on to the Commonwealth's National Partnership on Family, Domestic and Sexual Violence Responses which has provided another \$7.5 million to fund a range of initiatives in the family, domestic and sexual violence sector.

The one-stop Family and Domestic Violence Hub in Armadale will consist of a main space for women experiencing family and domestic violence, where they can seek help and support, which may include legal, financial and housing assistance, as well as counselling and alcohol and other drug services. It is important that the staff recruited for the Hub have specialist knowledge and experience to allow them to work with victim-survivors to create safety plans which build on their strengths and provide practical support to help them continue to stay safe.

There will be a smaller off-site area for male perpetrators and a specific youth service, which aims to address problematic behaviours early. Working directly with perpetrators will help stop the cycle of abuse by challenging and supporting men to change their abusive behaviour.

The announcement for additional funding for the Family and Domestic Violence Response Teams (FDVRT) represents a significant step forward in enhancing the overall operation of the FDVRT model. The funding is broken down into three main initiatives, which are as follows:

- Establishment of a Central Support and Coordination Team.
- Workforce development.



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- e-design of the Triage Application.

A metropolitan based Central Support and Co-ordination team will be established to bolster the capacity of local teams to respond to incidents faster, and to better understand perpetrators' behaviour. An enhanced database will also be established to assist with risk assessment, sharing of information and case management. The CWSW hopes to see more funding come through to support the no-government Coordinated Responses Services that are the backbone of the FDVRTs.

CWSW was pleased with the announcement that two programs aimed at addressing family violence in the Kimberley will be extended for a further four years. In the Kimberley there is a strong preference for locally designed and led approaches and services that understand, acknowledge, value and respect culture. Consistent across many reviews and reports about family violence interventions is the preference for Aboriginal frameworks and pathways to collective and family healing, rather than criminal justice interventions.

Whilst the Budget investment is extremely important, a considered and strategic approach to the way we are tackling family and domestic violence continues to be critical.


Existing specialist family and domestic violence services are experts in meeting the needs of women and children escaping from perpetrators of family and domestic violence and supporting them on the road to recovery and freedom. Put simply, they have saved countless lives and changed the lives of many more. New family and domestic violence hubs are a welcome addition to the service landscape and we need new approaches to meet unmet need. However, family and domestic violence hubs do not ameliorate the historic and ongoing underfunding of the specialist family and domestic violence sector.

Too many victim-survivors are not able to access the support and safety they need at the time they need it. Increases in community awareness and entry points into the system have further increased demand on services, creating rising pressure as services struggle to keep up with an ever-growing client base, and an unprecedented number of high-risk and complex cases that require more time and resources. The current outdated and inflexible costing model is a significant barrier to the appropriate allocation of resources, meaning services are unable to effectively respond to demand pressures.

Furthermore, gaps within the current service system, including access to crisis accommodation and long-term housing, are critical and require immediate attention. The availability of flexible crisis, transitional and long-term housing is integral to managing complex risk and keeping victim survivors safe from perpetrators.

Many women who leave their homes following family and domestic violence struggle to find suitable accommodation. Over 90 per cent of first requests by family and domestic violence clients to Specialist Homelessness Services for long-term accommodation are unable to be met. The problems are compounded for women in regional and remote areas. In the Kimberley region there are very few safe and affordable housing options for women





in the area. Women often live in highly disadvantaged circumstances and are not able to save money. This, plus a lack of private transport, can make securing alternative long-term accommodation very difficult.

Sitting alongside this concern is an understanding that the complexity of family and domestic violence work means it is vital the sector develops and maintains a high-quality, specialist function. This includes the recruitment and retention of a highly skilled workforce, the embedding of lived experience across all system responses, and peak body support and coordination to support workforce development, access and inclusion, and data capabilities.

Funding and structural limitations and a lack of consistent practice guidance means the system is struggling to provide tailored, specialist responses to victim-survivors. The capacity and ability of services to respond as effectively and holistically as possible is about funding but also structural and service system limitations. The latter cannot be achieved immediately.

A contemporary, fit for purpose family and domestic violence service system requires sustainable funding. We expect this to occur through the important commissioning work being undertaken by the Department of Communities. Through this work it will be necessary to consider both unmet demand and unmet need and how we can better support services and the family and domestic violence workforce to deliver the services that victim-survivors need to live free from violence and re-build their lives.

Family and domestic violence creates complex economic, social and housing issues for women and their children and disrupts their lives over the short and long term. Efforts to prevent and mitigate the effects of family and domestic violence on victim-survivors are central to promoting women's and children's safety and social inclusion.

Family and domestic violence undermines women's financial circumstances, and, in turn, poverty affects their efforts to gain safety. It is important that we investigate strategies that support positive economic, social and housing outcomes for women; and develop and promote the implementation of these strategies to support women's financial and housing security and pathways to safety.

Financial and housing security does not only support women and children's efforts towards freedom from abuse, but it also helps them in their recovery and capacity to repair their lives. This financial and housing security involves not only being able to meet daily and future needs, but ultimately, it represents empowerment and is critical to women's ability to heal from abuse and move on with their lives.





Women's Health and Wellbeing

We welcome the significant investment in the WA public health system, including a total of \$1.3 billion for mental health and alcohol and other drug services. Funding a robust public health system is an important element in improving the health of our community. While we welcome the investment in health and mental health, much of the spending continues to focus on treatment and tertiary healthcare, and there is a lack of detail about health spending in non-hospital settings. There is little to no real spending on preventative health, and there are significant gaps and missed opportunities that could focus on health equity. Without simultaneous long-term, genuine investment in tertiary care and preventive and public health measures that prioritise health equity, we are limiting the improvements that can be made to the health and wellbeing of the WA community.


This Budget is a missed opportunity to prioritise addressing health inequity and the application of a gender lens, for example there are no initiatives to increase provision of and access to contraception, particularly long-acting reversible contraceptive methods, or termination of pregnancy services; there is also no detail regarding gender and trauma informed mental health and alcohol and other drug service funding. We welcome the significant funding for reproductive health, pregnancy and maternal health infrastructure and initiatives, however there must also be investment in other areas of women's health where inequity is experienced. Women's health is more than pregnancy and reproduction.

The Budget does not include any funding for initiatives linked clearly to the Western Australian Women's Health and Wellbeing Policy (the Policy). While the Policy identifies four priority areas for action, which are aligned with the priorities in the National Women's Health Strategy 2020-2030 and other State Government policies and strategies, there are currently no action plans attached to the Policy. The development of Policy Action Plans would guide investment in women's health and wellbeing, create accountability and create clear initiatives to genuinely address gender and health inequality.

Key women's health announcements:

- The new Women and Babies Hospital Project is the most significant infrastructure investment in women's health. The \$1.8 billion project is an important investment to ensure WA women and babies have ongoing access to high quality tertiary health care and improved experiences when accessing the health system.
- We welcome the \$7 million investment to implement an Aboriginal Midwifery Group Practice model at King Edward Memorial Hospital and re-establish the Strong Links program. Culturally secure obstetric care and increased uptake of antenatal care for Aboriginal women must remain a priority in order to improve maternal and newborn health outcomes.
- \$3.7 million of additional funding for the initial implementation and evaluation of the Aboriginal Health Practitioners (AHP) profession in WA. The increased employment of AHPs across the health system is an important measure to improve health system





access, increase culturally secure health care and support improved health outcomes for Aboriginal communities.

- As part of Sustainable Health Review Initiatives, \$7 million to expand the Syphilis Outbreak Response program is an important investment addressing the ongoing syphilis epidemic in WA that disproportionately impacts marginalized women in metropolitan and regional areas.
- The additional \$6.1 million that will be spent over the forward estimates period to continue Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) prevention strategies is an important investment. However, it is important that the prevention strategies, including a State-wide public education campaign to increase awareness of the risks of alcohol use during pregnancy, recognise the underlying drivers of alcohol use during pregnancy and are strengths based in their approach.
- \$250,000 over 2022-23 and 2023-24 to continue the Rural, Regional and Remote Network for women in WA, is a welcomed recognition of the importance of investment in regional women.

