Dear Treasurer...

CENTRE FOR
Women's Safety
and Wellbeing

We believe in change. All women and girls in Western Australia have the right to live lives that are free from fear, violence, discrimination and inequity. Safety and security are the bedrock on which all opportunities in our lives are built. Women's safety is fundamental to women's equality. The State Government has a responsibility to provide the resources that are necessary to drive real change. The safety, health and wellbeing of women and children depends on it.

The prevalence of domestic, family and sexual violence is devastatingly high in Western Australia. With the upcoming 2026-27 State Budget, we are calling on you to **prioritise the safety, health and wellbeing of women and children.** We are a wealthy State with seven consecutive budget surpluses. We can afford to provide fundamental safety to women and children who need it in WA. Women and children have a right to live free from fear and violence and to thrive.

With more resources we can do so much more and quickly.
Women and children experiencing violence cannot afford to wait.

WA has had the **second highest rate** of family and domestic violence in the nation for more than a **decade**.

Reported incidents of family and domestic violence offences **increased 18% in 2024-2025** and police respond to 100 family and domestic violence assaults every day.

Recorded victims of sexual assault in WA are at a **thirty-two year high** – with nearly half of all victims aged between 10 and 17 years.

The Centre for Women's Safety and Wellbeing calls on the **Western Australian Government** to prioritise the following critical areas in the 2026-27 State Budget:

1 Meet the demand on existing services

- Increase baseline funding for all family and domestic violence refuges
- Increase mobile outreach programs and Safe at Home brokerage levels
- Prioritise an immediate funding uplift for the Sexual Assault Support Services

2 Ensure equitable access for all

- Fund a dedicated children and young people's specialist in every refuge
- Increase access to forensic medical examinations for victim-survivors of sexual assault in regional areas
- Increase the availability of transitional housing properties for victim-survivors of domestic and family violence
- Commit funding to provide women on temporary visas access to essential support and enact reform to enable access to public housing and financial support
- Commit funding to provide victim-survivors of domestic and family violence from migrant and refugee backgrounds with culturally and religiously appropriate support

3 Build safe and sustainable systems

- Commit to and resource the full implementation of the Family and Domestic Violence System Reform Plan, including:
  - Embedding the Common Risk Assessment and Risk Management Framework in policy and legislation (requiring prescribed organisations to progressively align their policies, procedures, practice and tools with the framework)
  - Resource frontline specialist family and domestic violence services to improve access to risk assessment and intake, case management, and post-crisis responses
- Fund an uplift for family and domestic violence, sexual assault support and women's community health services specifically aimed at improved pay and conditions and worker wellbeing
- Establish a Women's Health Advisory Council
- Establish sufficient and sustainable funding for CWSW to work with the government, the sector, victim-survivors and the community to strengthen domestic, family and sexual violence prevention and response and women's community health responses across the State
- Sustainable funding for the primary prevention of violence across the State

find out more

Urgent support is needed now for domestic, family and sexual violence victim-survivors in WA. While the Family Violence System Reform Plan has the potential to reshape how our system responds to family and domestic violence in future, we know that there is an urgent need for **support right now**, as specialist services strain under the demand for help.

WE ARE CALLING ON THE WA GOVERNMENT TO ADDRESS CURRENT SIGNIFICANT DEMAND AND UNMET NEED

1 Meet the demand on existing services

Increase baseline funding for all family and domestic violence refuges

Refuges are central to safety in crisis, providing life-saving shelter and support to women and children in the darkest of times. Exacerbated by a severe housing crisis, average stay length in refuge has increased from weeks to months, along with new requests for support and the severity of violence being experienced. As demand increases, the capacity of these services is being stretched to the limit, with too many women and children being turned away or not able to be adequately supported.

While the State Government has committed funds to build several new refuges across regional WA, existing services require urgent support to manage current levels of demand. This includes not just the physical infrastructure, but the specialist staff who provide lifesaving support. Refuge staff provide a variety of critical supports, such as safety planning, advocacy, outreach, referral support and the safety required to begin to heal from violence. But they are overloaded, exhausted and undersupported. An immediate investment in this critical part of the system has been long called for and never needed more than right now.

If we do not invest immediately in this critical part of the system, these services will struggle to implement System Reform.

Increase to funding for mobile outreach programs and Safe at Home brokerage

The path to safety is unique to each victim-survivor. While escape to refuge is necessary for some, victim-survivors should have the choice to stay in their home and be supported to do so safely. The Safe at Home and mobile outreach programs have provided invaluable support to women and children to stay safe and well and to reestablish themselves in their communities, in education and employment.

CWSW is pleased that the importance of Safe at Home was recognised with the State Government committing to expand the program into previously unserviced areas. However, current Safe at Home brokerage funding levels ($500 per package) are wholly inadequate to provide the protection the program promises. The high and increasing cost of security measures such as lock changes, security camera installation and electronic device sweeps dramatically outstrips the funding levels, leaving services to make up the difference, putting additional strain on small budgets, or requiring women to choose which 'piece' of safety she can access.

We seek an urgent increase in brokerage levels to $1500, with regional loading applied. We note that the recent Royal Commission into Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence in South Australia recommended raising Safe at Home brokerage levels from South Australia's current level of $1500.

Services that provide in-home support and outreach are a lifeline to those living with or escaping violence, providing more lengthy support than that of a short stay refuge service. It is this work, safety planning, ensuring appropriate service referrals and achieving physical safety, that is required to take victim-survivors beyond crisis and into recovery. Exacerbated by the housing crisis, more and more victim-survivors are being forced to remain in homes with their abuser, or face homelessness. Those women and children must have access to mobile outreach services.

Immediate funding uplift for the Sexual Assault Support Services

Sexual violence is at crisis levels in Western Australia. There has been a more than 40% increase in reports of recent sexual assaults to WA Police since 2017, and yet we know this is the tip of the iceberg with less than 10% of victims reporting to police. Despite this, specialist sexual assault and child sexual abuse support services are under untenable strain and are significantly underfunded to provide timely responses to victim-survivors who are reaching out to them for support.

An immediate injection of funding support for the Sexual Assault Support Services is required to ensure viability and access to victims of sexual assault. The five regional services currently share just $2 million in annual funding equating to 12 FTE staff for all of regional WA.

To meet estimated needs of sexual violence services in WA, around $27 million would be required annually. This means current investment is resulting in a 42% underfunding of the sector.

The soon to be released Sexual Violence Prevention and Response Strategy will not be worthwhile without a strong specialist sexual violence sector to support adults and children across WA. Any action plan that does not immediately address the specialist sector viability will pose a significant risk to the reception of the strategy by victim-survivors and stakeholders in WA.

2 Ensure equitable access for all

Fund a dedicated children and young people's specialists in every refuge

Alarmingly, **around 70% of refuge users are children**. Both the state and national governments have acknowledged that children and young people are victim-survivors in their own right, and deserve specialist, dedicated and timely support to heal and break the cycle of violence.

Children and young people in crisis are most in need of this support. Currently, access to this specialist support in refuge is inconsistent, with too many children left without the specialist support they deserve. Where there is support it is limited as small numbers of staff attempt to support a large cohort of children and young people.

Children and young people are victim-survivors in their own right and they must be assured the right support is available when and where they need it.

Increase access to forensic medical examinations for victim-survivors of sexual assault in regional areas

Access to forensic medical examinations in WA is extremely limited particularly in the regions. Where someone lives should not dictate access to vital forensic medical examinations. Currently many victim-survivors are forced to travel hours in the clothes they were wearing when they were assaulted without showering in order to access justice. It is critical that forensic capacity is scaled up across the state to better meet the needs of victim-survivors, particularly outside the inner metropolitan area.

Increase the availability of transitional housing properties for victim-survivors of domestic and family violence

Implement the recommendations from the 2023 Transition Housing Project Report. Expansion of transitional housing stock is desperately needed and the urgency to act has been exacerbated by the current housing crisis.

Commit funding to provide women on temporary visas access to essential support and enact reform to enable access to public housing and financial support

The refuge and crisis sector has long noted the increase in women and children of refugee and migrant backgrounds on temporary visas accessing crisis accommodation due to family and domestic violence. Due to their often highly limited financial capacity, lack of social support and inability to benefit from social safety nets such as Centrelink or subsidised childcare, these families spend far longer in refuge that other women and children. This not only limits the availability of accommodation for others, but is a huge resourcing concern for refuges, as these women and children are reliant on the refuge for their every daily need, such as funds for clothing, schooling and medical expenses, transport and other essentials.

These women and children deserve the same safety and security as anyone in our community. By ensuring women on temporary visas can access public housing and supports, not only will refuge capacity increase, but women and children escaping violence will be afforded the support to heal and thrive.

Commit funding to provide victim-survivors of domestic and family violence from migrant and refugee backgrounds with culturally and religiously appropriate support

In line with recommendations from the 2024 Spotlight Report on Family and Domestic Violence in Refugee and Migrant Communities, commit to adequately fund 'By and For' family and domestic violence prevention and response services for refugee and migrant women and children.

3 Build safe and sustainable systems

Commit to and resource the full implementation of the Family and Domestic Violence System Reform Plan including:

- Embedding the Common Risk Assessment and Risk Management Framework (CRARMF) in policy and legislation (requiring prescribed organisations to progressively align their policies, procedures, practice and tools with the framework)
- Resourcing frontline specialist family and domestic violence services to improve access to risk assessment and intake, case management, and post-crisis responses

The CRARMF will need to be a core enabler of the family and domestic violence reforms. It is a system-wide family and domestic violence response that will establish the architecture for shared responsibility and accountability mechanisms for responding to family and domestic violence risk across multiple workforces. **In order to support a cohesive and consistent system-wide response to family and domestic violence, a legislative instrument is required.** The establishment of a robust legislated risk assessment and management framework will provide unprecedented clarity and consistency for responding to family and domestic violence risk, across a range of service systems and associated workforces.

Sufficient and sustainable funding for the Centre for Women's Safety and Wellbeing

The current funding level for CWSW is not sustainable and does not allow for optimal delivery as a peak body, particularly with increasing violence, growing community and political awareness, and investment and significant system reform in responses to family and domestic violence over the last seven years. CWSW as the peak body is rightly expected to lead, champion and provide expert advice to government partners and other stakeholders, including into the significant system reform work that is currently underway. This cannot be sustained by a funding level that has not changed in a decade and that does not reflect the WA Government's current commitment to ending family and domestic violence.

Sufficient and sustainable funding is required for CWSW to work with the government, the sector, victim-survivors and the community to strengthen domestic, family and sexual violence prevention and response and women's community health responses across the State.

Many would be rightly shocked that our current funding levels only provide 2.3 FTE from our core family and domestic violence peaks funding. This is to represent, support, develop and advocate for specialist family and domestic violence services across the entire State. Despite having the second highest rates of violence in the nation, **WA receives the lowest funding out of all the established domestic and family violence peak bodies nationwide**. To ensure sustainability, reach and impact a significant funding increase is essential.

Funding uplift for family and domestic violence, sexual assault support and women's community health services specifically aimed at improved pay and conditions and worker wellbeing

For the specialist family and domestic violence, women's community health and sexual violence sectors, the workforce pipeline is impacted by continued inconsistencies between roles, functions and remuneration that does not reflect the skills required and work undertaken, alongside funding models that are not fit-for-purpose. These issues compound to affect staff wellbeing, recruitment and retention. For the sector to grow and reach its full capability, these underlying issues must be addressed.

At any given time there is also a significant proportion of staff that are new to the sector delivering client facing support to an increasingly complex client cohort. It is critical staff have access to sufficient wellbeing supports such as quality training, supervision, peer support and professional development to prevent future burnout and attrition from the sector.

Sustainable funding for the primary prevention of violence across the State

Preventing Violence Together, an initiative of CWSW and Stopping Family Violence, holds a central role in practice leadership and the development of a specialised primary prevention workforce. Significant and ongoing investment is needed to achieve the long-term goals of primary prevention. Current funding for Preventing Violence Together runs out in June 2026. Unless resourcing is assured to stop violence before it starts, to support healthy conversations between men and boys and make sure everyone in the community understands how violent attitudes can be addressed, we will never fully end violence against women and girls.

Establishment of a Women's Health Advisory Council

Women's health outcomes are shaped by complex social determinants, service accessibility, and policy environments. There is currently no formal mechanism for women's lived experience and sector expertise to inform statewide health policy, planning, and funding decisions. The establishment and funding of a Women's Health Advisory Council will provide independent, evidence-informed advice to government, ensuring women's voices are embedded in decision-making and policy advice and recommendations on women's health priorities, service delivery gaps, and system improvements.

The Council should be appropriately funded to support the inclusion of a diverse membership representing women's lived experience, including Aboriginal and CALD communities, women with disability, women from low socio-economic backgrounds and sector leaders. Ongoing, annual funding for the establishment and operation of the Council will ensure government policies and programs that better reflect the needs of all women, particularly priority groups, strengthened system-wide accountability for gender equity in health, and evidence-informed planning and commissioning for women's health.

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