



WALGA

WORKING FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT

2018-19 State Budget Submission

WALGA is committed to advancing the vision for Local Government in Western Australia where:

- Local Governments will be built on good governance, autonomy, local leadership, democracy, community engagement and diversity.
- Local Governments will have the capacity to provide economically, socially and environmentally sustainable services and infrastructure that meets the needs of their communities.



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Introduction

The Western Australian Local Government Association (WALGA or ‘the Association’) is the peak organisation for Local Government in Western Australia. The Association is an independent, membership-based group representing and supporting the work and interests of 136 mainland Local Governments in Western Australia, plus the Indian Ocean Territories of Christmas Island and Cocos (Keeling) Islands.

The Association provides an essential voice for more than 1,200 Elected Members, approximately 14,500 Local Government employees, and the 2.4 million constituents that they serve and represent. The Association also provides professional advice and offers services that provide financial benefits to the Local Governments.

WALGA is grateful for the opportunity to provide a submission in advance of the 2018-19 State Budget.

The State is facing significant financial challenges, and the Association recognises that there is an urgent need to implement measures to repair the budget position and ensure that spending is directed to priority areas.

The Local Government sector also faces significant financial constraints, and is reliant on funding from other levels of Government to deliver important infrastructure and services to the community. It is critical that essential funding for the sector is maintained in spite of the State’s challenging budget position.

In pursuing the State’s fiscal recovery, the Government should ensure that funding is directed to strategic priorities for the Western Australian community. WALGA’s submission targets the key directions for Government spending in 2018-19 as defined by Local Governments and their communities, and identifies programs that should be retained and improved, together with key commitments that require new funding to be allocated.

WALGA looks forward to working in partnership with the State Government to support the growth of the economy and the delivery of sustained improvements in the quality of life for all Western Australians.



Summary of Recommendations

Budget Repair

- Spending cuts are necessary to ensure the State's finances are sustainable over the long term. These should first be targeted at removing waste and inefficiencies from the public sector, and then focussed on moving service delivery to a sustainable base.
- Any efforts to address excessive levels of State Government spending must deliver genuine savings, and not merely shift costs on to Local Government, the not-for-profit or private sectors.
- In ensuring that taxpayer dollars are directed to priority areas, consultation with all affected stakeholders will be critical to ensure that scarce funds are directed to essential services that will deliver the greatest benefits to local communities. Appropriate consultation will also identify any unintended consequences of proposed spending cuts.
- Given the constraints on Local Government's ability to raise own sourced revenue, it is essential that the sector retains access to predictable, long term funding support from the State Government to assist with the provision of key services for the community. The priority areas of ongoing funding support that must be maintained are:
 - State Road Funds to Local Government Agreement.
 - Road Trauma Trust Account support for the RoadWise Program.
 - Community Sport and Recreation Facilities Fund.
 - The Local Government Grants Scheme component of the Emergency Services Levy.
 - Public libraries funding.
- Funding should continue for programs that have been identified as community priorities, which deliver value for money. WALGA members have identified a number of programs that are delivering benefits in their local communities, which should be retained at existing levels, or additional funding provided to ensure the service continues going forward. These are as follows.
 - Community Safety Crime Prevention Initiatives, including Neighbourhood Watch, the Graffiti Taskforce and Crime Stoppers.
 - Crime Prevention Grants.
 - Community Pools Revitalisation Plan.
 - Funding support for mental health.
 - Ageing in place.
 - Southern Inland Health Initiative.
 - Run off road crashes.
 - Perth Bicycle Network and Regional Bicycle Network Grants programs.
- At a time where the budget is under pressure, it is critical that spending delivers value for money for taxpayers. Some areas of spending are directed towards important priorities for the community, however funding could be targeted or allocated in a different way to deliver improved outcomes.
 - The LGGS should be expanded to allow for expenditure on prevention and mitigation activities.
 - Training for Volunteer Firefighters should be aligned to their responsibilities and accessible to regional communities.
 - Funding for Bushfire Risk Management Plans should be allocated directly to Local Governments for the employment of staff at the local level.
 - Revenues collected from the Waste Avoidance and Resource Recovery Levy should be directed into strategic waste management activities.
 - The State CCTV Strategy and investment should be reviewed to consider other options for alignment to improve services, transparency, governance, delivery, consistency, commonality, savings, efficiencies and reform.
 - The funding model for Child Health Clinics needs to be reviewed to ensure it is equitable and delivering outcomes.

Funding Existing Commitments

- The Department of Local Government, Sport and Cultural Activities and the State Solicitor's Office should be allocated adequate funding in the 2018-19 budget to progress the review of the Local Government Act 1995 and enable a Bill to be introduced by 2019 in line with the timeframes articulated.
- While a container deposit scheme is expected to be self-funding over the longer term, there will be some costs associated with its initial establishment that should be funded in the 2018-19 Budget. The Association considers that this should be funded through the Waste Avoidance and Resource Recovery Levy, which exists to support waste management programs.
- Funding is needed to support Local Governments to develop Public Health plans, which are used to plan for the health and wellbeing of a local community and establish health priorities and strategies for a three year period. Funding is also needed to assist with any additional costs related to workforce changes needed to deliver on the requirements of state health plan.
- An infrastructure plan for the State is needed to identify and prioritise projects based on a thorough and transparent cost benefit analysis, to ensure funding is directed to projects which will deliver the greatest benefits to the WA community.

A priority reform for the sector is the deregulation of Local Government fees and charges.

Strategic Priorities

- In an environment where economic conditions are difficult and the budget is under pressure, the State Government should also look at broader reforms which will deliver benefits from reducing unnecessary regulation and compliance, enhancing efficiencies and generating savings which can be re-invested into community services and infrastructure.
- A priority reform for the sector is the deregulation of Local Government fees and charges. In light of current budget pressures, the Association is requesting that the McGowan Government re-examine this issue, and that the Treasurer should task the Economic Regulation Authority with undertaking this review.
- The State Government should invest in strengthening the Integrated Planning and Reporting Framework to enable greater alignment between Local Government measurement and reporting, and legislated responsibilities that inform national agreements. Consideration of an Indicator Framework to measure and report on outcomes achieved by Local Governments in their communities is a next step to be strongly considered.
- The Government should finalise and implement the Perth and Peel Green Growth Plan to facilitate future development and provide a long term framework for the protection of the environment.
- An evidence-based, outcome-focused approach is needed to assist State Government to identify and develop measurable wellbeing outcomes for Western Australia. Such metrics would encourage the development of new and innovative ways to improve health and wellbeing outcomes for Western Australians, and provide Local Governments with a clear measurement framework to inform Council strategic and business planning processes.
- The Government should lead the development of a whole of Government approach to Crime Prevention through Environmental Design.

Economic and Fiscal Context

WA Economic Snapshot

Western Australia continues to suffer from the ongoing effects of the mining downturn. The State's economy recently recorded its slowest rate of economic growth in almost 30 years, with Gross State Product falling by 2.7% in 2016-17.

The contraction in the WA economy has occurred as conditions in the domestic economy have weakened. The domestic economy is firmly entrenched in recession, and has contracted for the past three years. In 2016-17 the domestic economy, as measured by state final demand, declined by 7.2%, following decreases of 11.6% and 13.7% respectively in the prior two years.

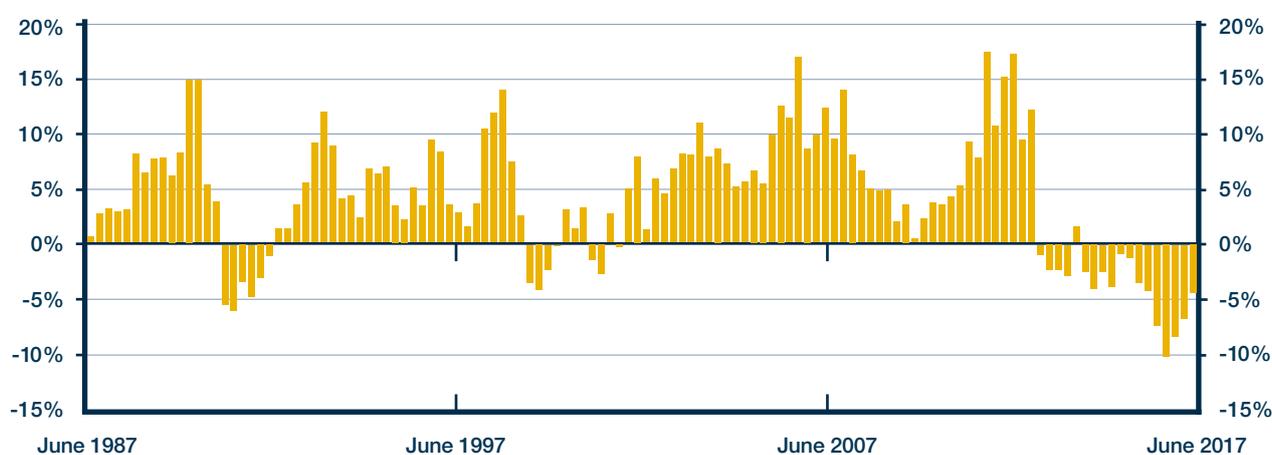
With the domestic economy in recession, the main driver of growth has been exports, which increased by 6.7% over the past year. This is due to the completion of major mining investment projects in recent years that have expanded export capacity. Exports have grown on average by 6.5% per annum over the past five years.

The state's labour market has also suffered as a result of the downturn, with WA's unemployment rate well above the levels experienced throughout 2006 to 2008 during the height of the resources boom. Most recently, the unemployment rate hit a high of 6.8% in November 2016, well above the low of 2.3% recorded in October 2008.

However, there are signs that the labour market is beginning to stabilise. The unemployment rate has been declining in recent months, and now stands at 5.9% in October 2017. Employment has also increased, with 33,270 jobs created over the past year. Most notably, full time employment has started to increase, with 29,700 full time positions created in the past year.

While conditions have been difficult for a number of years now, the downturn is expected to bottom out in 2016-17. A modest improvement in growth is then expected in the following years as the domestic economy begins to recover, and as net exports continue to grow strongly. Treasury estimates that the WA economy will grow by 3% in 2017-18, 3.25% in 2018-19, and 3% in 2019-20 and 2020-21. Although the economy is expected to recover, growth will still remain below the long run average of 4.7% per annum.

FIGURE 1
State Final Demand, WA, Annual % Change



Impact on the State Budget

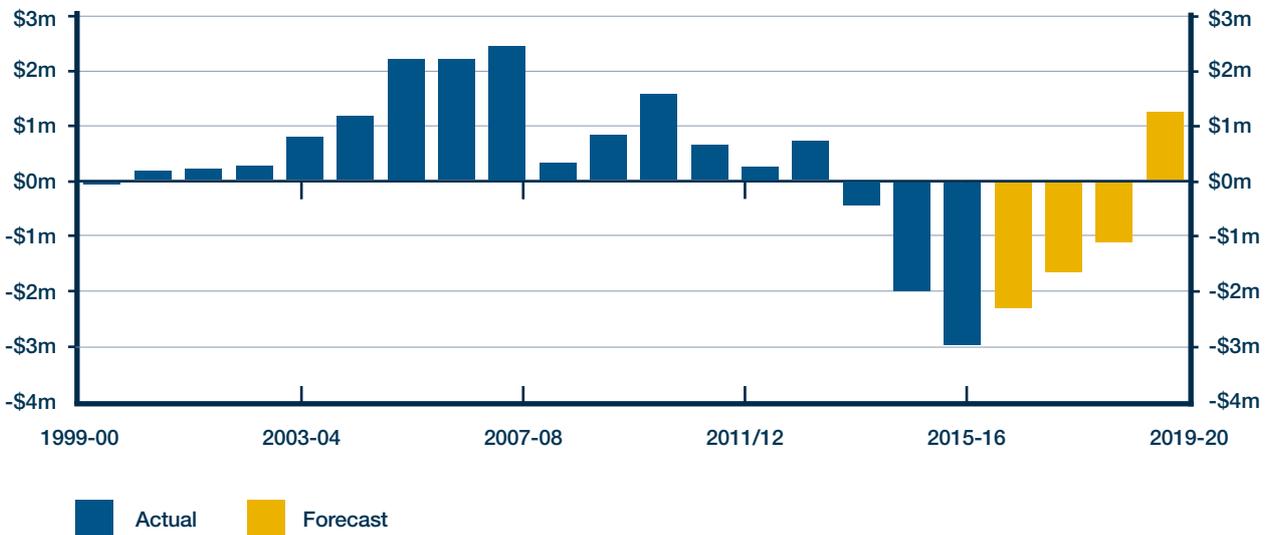
Although the economy is set to gather pace, the State’s financial position will remain a challenge for a number of years to come.

The latest projections contained in the 2017-18 Budget show that WA is on track to record a net operating deficit of more than \$3 billion in 2016-17, and \$2.3 billion in 2017-18. The budget is expected to remain in deficit for a number of years, before returning to a \$1.2 billion surplus in 2020-21. The return to surplus will depend on the Government achieving the significant savings and revenue gains that it has outlined through its budget repair program.

The State’s balance sheet has also deteriorated significantly, with total public sector net debt expected to hit a record \$37.8 billion in 2017-18. Net debt is forecast to peak at \$43.7 billion in 2019-20. The ability to pay down debt thereafter will depend on the Government achieving its projected budget surplus in 2020-21. A large proportion of this debt is held by the general government sector (59%), which means that there is a significant opportunity cost arising from the associated interest payments, which must be funded by revenues that would otherwise be available for service delivery.

Addressing WA’s debt challenge must be a key focus of the budget as part of a broader plan to repair the State’s financial position.

FIGURE 2
WA Net Operating Balance



Local Government Context

The Local Government sector has also faced a more difficult financial environment in recent times. The sector's financial position has come under pressure as a result of the weaker economy and policy decisions at other levels of government which have reduced funding to Local Government.

Some examples of the pressures the sector has faced are outlined below.

- Reductions in road grant funding from the State Government:** Funding provided to the sector through the *State Road Funds to Local Government Agreement* has been reduced from 27% of vehicle licence revenue to approximately 20%. The combination of these progressive funding cuts and conservative forward estimates of vehicle licence fees (VLF) have resulted in total allocated funding of \$791 million over the term of the Agreement, or 22.6% of total VLF revenue. This is \$155 million less than initially established under the Agreement.
 - Freeze in Financial Assistance Grants (FAGs):** In the 2014-15 Budget, the Commonwealth Government announced that the indexation of FAGs payments to Local Government would be frozen until 2017-18. This has come at a significant cost to the sector (estimated to be in the order of \$72 million in WA), and has permanently reduced the level of funding provided to the sector under this arrangement.
 - Rising operating costs:** Although the economic downturn has provided some relief from the strong cost increases that were experienced at the height of the resources boom, Local Government continues to face rising charges, particularly for utilities such as water and electricity (including street lighting) where there is limited or no scope to change provider.
 - Cost shifting from State Government:** Local Government has increasingly taken on services that were provided by the State Government, without access to an additional revenue source to fund them (see Page 18 for examples).
 - Growing demand for services:** The economic downturn has created stronger demand for some of the services provided by Local Government. For example, the sector has reported greater demand for public library services, as people use these facilities for activities such as education and training, job search resources, and Internet access for applying for jobs and social services.
- There are also a number of additional cost imposts for the sector that will come into effect in coming years.
- Reduction in direct grants component of State funding for local roads:** The previous Government announced in the 2016-17 Budget that vehicle licence and stamp duty concessions currently provided to WA Local Governments will be discontinued from 2016-17. While the Legislative Council passed a disallowance motion which means that Local Governments will retain an exemption from vehicle licence fees and stamp duty, this will be funded from a 40% reduction to the direct grant component of State funding for Local Roads.
 - Increase in the Landfill Levy:** From 1 July 2018, the State's Landfill Levy will increase from \$65 per tonne to \$70 per tonne for putrescible waste. This will be the third consecutive annual increase since 2015/16, when the levy stood at \$55 per tonne. The continued increase in the levy creates an additional cost burden for Local Government in relation to waste disposal.
 - Metropolitan library courier services:** As part of the Agency Expenditure Review process, the Library Van program, which transported books between libraries, was cut. This has required Local Governments to fund this important service for the community. However, the additional cost impost that the sector has been required to absorb has meant that the level of service could not be maintained at the same levels, with the delivery frequency reduced from daily, to twice per week.
 - Capping the Senior's Card concessions for Local Government rates:** As part of a suite of measures aimed to address the State's financial challenges, the State Government recently announced changes for the Senior's Card concession for Local Government rates, that will see the rebate capped at \$750 for holders of Commonwealth Seniors Cards, and capped at \$100 for holders of WA Seniors Cards. This decision will impact the local community, as well as the Local Government sector through the administration costs associated with delivering this change through their corporate computer systems.

- **Introduction of the Public Health Act:** While Local Government is supportive of the *Public Health Act*, the requirement to introduce Public Health Plans will generate an additional cost burden to ensure this is integrated into the operations of the sector. There may also be additional costs related to workforce changes needed to deliver on the requirements of the state health plan.
- **Introduction of the National Disability Insurance Scheme:** Changes to the disability services provision as a result of the introduction of the NDIS are likely to create additional costs for Local Government. As a key provider of information and advice for people with disability, a key issue is whether Local Government will be able to access Information, Linkage and Capacity Building (ILC) grant funding under the scheme. At present, Local Governments will not be able to access this source of funding under a state-administered model. Further, the introduction of the NDIS is likely to see an increase in demand for recreational infrastructure provided by Local Government as more people with disability engage in community activities.
- **Community services:** Funding has been partially or fully cut from a number of community programs which will likely require Local Government to fill this void in coming years to meet community needs. Some examples of programs that have been partially or fully de-funded include the Youth Homelessness and Outreach Program; Parenting WA; Stronger Families; Community Legal; and National Youth Week.

It is recognised that it is the sector's responsibility to manage its finances in a prudent manner, and to adapt its budget to the changing economic and fiscal environment. However, the ability to do this is limited by restrictions that are imposed by the State Government on the sector's revenue raising capacity; ability to engage in structures that will allow more efficient resource and asset management; and the growing expectations of the community.

The only source of taxation revenue that is available to the sector at its own discretion is rates, which must be used to fund the myriad of services expected by the community. However, the ability to raise rates to fund services is constrained by the community's capacity to pay, which has been limited in recent times as a result of the economic downturn in the state.

The sector's ability to generate revenue from rates is also limited by exemptions to the rates base. While there are some exemptions which are justified by a sound rationale and are generally well supported by the community, others do not have the same rationale. These include exemptions for independent living units, State Government Trading Entities, and *State Agreement Act* projects.

Local Government also generates income through fees and charges, however these may be set or capped by regulation and not increased over time. This represents a significant revenue leakage for the sector to the extent that many fees and charges are not cost reflective. A recent example of restrictions on Local Government fees and charges is the State Government imposed freeze on the indexation of Local Government planning fees since 2013.

In addition to the restrictions on revenue, the sector is also prevented from establishing structures that will enable the more efficient use and management of resources. For example, the sector is prevented from establishing Local Government owned commercial organisations, which are likely to deliver significant efficiencies in terms of managing assets or delivering services.

All of these factors create significant challenges for the sector in managing changing economic and fiscal conditions, and mean that Local Government is reliant on funding from other levels of government to provide the services and infrastructure that are demanded by the community.

It is therefore critical that the Local Government sector can continue to access reliable, long term funding from the State Government to support the provision of important services and infrastructure for the community, despite the State's budget challenges.

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2018-19 State Budget Priorities

Budget Repair

Although the economy is expected to improve going forward, WA needs to adjust to a new economic reality. The exceptional rates of economic growth recorded in the decade leading up to 2012 are not likely to be repeated in the near future.

Government spending must also adjust to current conditions to ensure the state's finances are sustainable over the long term.

Repairing the budget has been an important focus for the McGowan Government since the election, and one that WALGA supports. The Association recognises that efforts to restore the budget are critical to the long term best interests of all Western Australians. Prudent financial management means that there is less pressure to increase taxes and charges on households and businesses. It also means that funds are managed with an eye to the future service and infrastructure needs of the community.

In examining ways to reduce spending and ensure taxpayers get value for money, the Association considers that the following issues should be taken into consideration.

Maintain critical areas of funding

Addressing the structural issues facing the budget will ultimately require reductions to spending. These should first be targeted at removing waste and inefficiencies from the public sector, and then focussed on moving service delivery to a sustainable base.

While spending cuts are necessary, funding must still be made available for priority services for the community. In determining spending cuts and ensuring that taxpayer dollars are directed to priority areas, consultation with all affected stakeholders will be critical to ensure that scarce funds are directed to essential services that will deliver the greatest benefits to local communities, and to identify any unintended consequences of proposed spending cuts.

Local Governments are an important and willing partner in this process. Local Governments are part of their communities, and are best placed to understand their unique needs. Working with Local Governments can help ensure that the State's scarce resources are targeted to priority areas, and ensure vibrant, well planned and inclusive communities.

While there are many and competing priorities for State Government funding, from the Local Government sector's perspective, there are a number of areas that must be

maintained. As outlined earlier, Local Government faces significant constraints on its ability to generate own source revenue and to recover costs from fees and charges for activities that are prescribed by the State Government. In this regard, the sector is reliant on funding from other levels of government in order to continue to provide important community services and infrastructure.

Ongoing funding support

It is essential that the sector retains access to predictable, long term funding support from the State Government to assist with the provision of key services and infrastructure for the community. The sector considers that the following areas of funding support to Local Government are critical to the state's future prosperity and community wellbeing, and must be maintained in spite of the state's fiscal challenges.

- State Road Funds to Local Government Agreement:** Local roads are critical infrastructure, and will be important to future economic and productivity growth in the state. However, Local Governments alone do not have the financial capacity to appropriately maintain existing infrastructure and invest in new roads - particularly in regional areas of the state. The high level of usage and rising maintenance costs in recent years have meant that funding is already unable to keep pace to ensure the condition of the asset doesn't deteriorate, and has recently been cut further in order to fund the retention of the vehicle licence concession for Local Governments. The Local Government sector has already contributed to budget repair both historically through the reduction in the proportion of vehicle licence fees allocated to the agreement, and more recently through the reduction in the direct grants component of the agreement. It is critical that funding provided under the next phase of the agreement does not decline further.
- RoadWise:** WALGA's RoadWise program works with communities to take action to reduce road trauma. The program currently receives approximately \$1.7 million per year from the Road Trauma Trust Account to deliver the program across Western Australia. This would be even more effective if an officer was able to be focussed on delivery in each region. To do this would require an increase in funding to approximately \$2.1 million per year.

- Community Sport and Recreation Facilities Fund (CSRFF):** Sporting and recreation facilities deliver numerous benefits, ranging from preventative health and wellbeing of the community to the ability to attract and retain a suitable workforce to support industry. The financial assistance provided to Local Government through the CSRFF enables facilities to be developed in a timely manner to meet community demand. WALGA considers that this represents value for the State as its investment is typically matched by Local Government spending on the applicable projects. On average, each dollar of CSRFF spending is matched by more than four dollars of investment by Local Governments and others. Given that the fund is oversubscribed each year, returning funding to \$20 million per annum must be a priority once capacity becomes available.
- DFES Local Government Grants Scheme (LGGS):** Local Governments receive funding through the LGGS to support capital and operational costs associated with Bushfire Brigades and the State Emergency Services Units. These funds, which are generated from the Emergency Services Levy (ESL), are critical to support the sector's response capacity. Reforms should also be made to deliver improved outcomes and better value for money for taxpayers (see better targeting of funding).
- Public Libraries:** As part of the recent Agency Expenditure Review process, decisions were made that directly impact on Local Government public library services including the 5% reduction in capital library materials funding between 2016-17 and 2018-19, with 10% savings foreshadowed thereafter. Given the importance of public libraries to local communities, particularly during difficult economic conditions and changing diversity in our communities, maintaining this funding at current levels is critical. WALGA considers that broader review of Public Libraries in WA is needed, and should be driven by a Public Libraries Taskforce. The review process for the Public Library capital library materials funding and the Library Act 1955 should be established as matter of priority.

Retain key programs for local communities

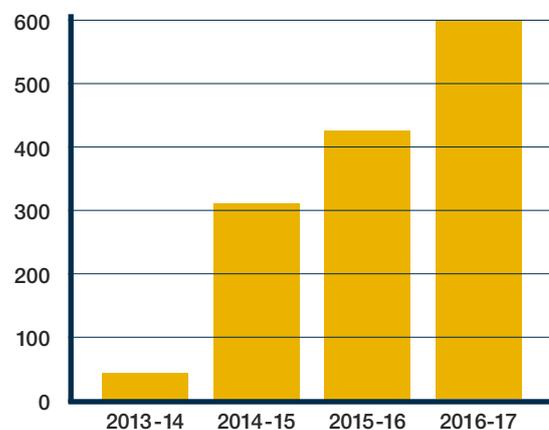
Funding should continue for programs that have been identified as community priorities. WALGA members have identified a number of programs that are delivering benefits in their local communities, and should be retained at existing levels, or additional funding provided to ensure they can continue going forward.

- Country Local Government Fund (CLGF)** – The CLGF is highly valued by communities in country Western Australia. The Capacity Building component of the CLGF has delivered significant benefits in terms of assisting the sector's capacity to manage their ever increasing business.

In particular, the CLGF funded training for Elected Members and officers is a critical program to provide the essential skill set required for good governance of their districts. In the four years that the program has been running, more than 150 courses have been delivered to more than 1,360 Elected Members.

The program successfully reached more regional Elected Members and officials over the four year period with the number of attendees rising from 41 in 2013-14 to 595 in 2016-17; and the 80 Councils participating in 2016-17 compared to just 10 in 2013-14. There are now also 22 regional attendees undertaking a Diploma qualification, compared to none just four years earlier. The growing demand for the program reinforces that it should continue going forward to ensure the sector is equipped with the appropriate skill set to deliver economic, business and social development in their districts.

**FIGURE 3
Elected Member Attendees, CLGF Training**



- Exploration Incentive Scheme (EIS):** The EIS aims to encourage exploration in the WA resources sector, and research by ACIL Allen in early 2015 shows that the program delivers significant benefit to the state. The report showed that the long run cumulative effect of \$1 million of EIS spending was an increase in exploration expenditure of \$19.8 million. It is pleasing that the Government has recently committed to the continuation of the EIS, as it provides significant benefits for local communities by way of the increased economic activity and local job opportunities, and should be funded at current levels going forward. It is important that this funding is maintained going forward.
- Community Resource Centres (CRCs):** The Western Australian Community Resource Network consists of over 100 rural remote and regional Community Resource Centres (CRCs). They are independently owned and operated by their local communities. The CRC provides a range of information and community based services to local people, local business and visitors in WA. CRCs play an important role in supporting economic development and capacity building in local communities, by providing vital access to Government and community services and helping to facilitate employment and training opportunities. CRCs provide support to a range of local organisations such as community newspapers, chambers of commerce, sporting and cultural clubs, and tourism organisations. Recently, the Government announced that it is reviewing the current arrangements and in the 2017-18 Budget, funding was reduced to \$8 million per annum from 2019-20. To support the achievement of their community and economic development outcomes, the level of funding should be returned to \$13 million per annum.
- Regional Visitor Centre Sustainability Grant Program:** Investment in visitor centres delivers benefits to local economies, with research commissioned by Tourism Research Australia and Tourism WA, and carried out by Metrix Consulting, revealing that Visitor Centres encourage visitors to spend \$104 extra per trip. The value of visitor centres has been recognised by the Minister for Tourism, who stated that ‘the importance of visitor centres cannot be understated as they inject \$117 million into the State’s economy and generate more than 900 jobs.’ The Regional Visitor Centre Sustainability Grant Program provided important funding to assist regional visitor centres with their sustainability, but is only funded until 2017-18. WALGA is seeking funding for this program to continue in 2018-19 and beyond. The program delivered value for money for taxpayers, with applicants required to contribute a cash or in kind contribution of between 20% and 50% of the total project cost, depending on the size of the grant. The program funded important activities that will assist to diversify the economy and improve productivity, including developing new business plans; technology and equipment; and certification and training.
- Regional telecommunications infrastructure:** Whilst significant work has been undertaken to reduce the number of “black spots” with respect to mobile phone coverage, there still remains issues with coverage for communities across the state. It is understood that work to establish any new mobile phone towers (excluding those committed to following the Esperance bushfires) is now on hold. Mobile phone coverage is a basic service for all communities and funding should be reinstated to ensure this infrastructure progresses in a timely manner.



Boya Community Centre



Artists impression of the soon to be completed Mundaring Arena



City of Gosnells, Mills Fit Month at Mills Park



Wickepin Winter Weekend in June 2017

- Mental health:** Mental health is a community issue that requires a whole of government and community response. The prevalence of mental health issues and the associated cost to community wellbeing are significant and growing. WALGA supports the continued work of the Mental Health Commission, and believes the Local Government sector can play an important role in addressing mental health in the community, particularly in regional areas of the state. Local Governments provide many community services and infrastructure that can contribute positively to mental health and family outcomes such as: outreach services, child health early years and literacy programs, parenting programs, public open space and street trees and sport and recreation facilities. Continued support is needed for the services that lie outside hospitals and other public health services, such as recreation centres, public libraries and community centres.
- Ageing in place:** Local Government is uniquely positioned to have a positive impact on the ageing population. The sector ensures the physical, social and economic environment of the local community is conducive to the overall wellbeing of older people; provides services and programs that are flexible and locally appropriate to the needs of older people. Given the majority of older people wish to remain within their own homes and the local community, the focus for Local Government is to encourage greater diversity in the housing stock, and in particular, increase the supply of smaller homes.

WA is on the cusp of experiencing a dramatic demographic change with a significant ageing of the population. The Association is concerned that to date, a State wide policy response to this issue has yet to be adopted. The recent Seniors Housing Strategy: Discussion Paper failed to provide any detail and offer any assurance that the issue is being seriously considered. The Association has undertaken a number of studies and prepared guidance for Local Government concerning aged and housing issues and would welcome the opportunity to work in partnership with the State to address this.

- Southern Inland Health Initiative (SIHI):** The SIHI has made significant improvements to health service access and safety for many country communities. A program evaluation of the SIHI indicated that it had achieved significant benefits in terms of the number of doctors; improved technology and facilities; greater range of services; and broader economic benefits to the local economy. Local Government was pleased that the 2017-18 Budget contained funding for the program to continue and it is imperative that this program is maintained into the future given the significant outcomes and improvements experienced by southern regional WA.

- **Community Safety Crime Prevention Initiatives:**

There are a number of long standing well regarded community safety programs between the WA Police, industry, Local Government and the local community including Neighbourhood Watch, the Graffiti Taskforce and Crime Stoppers. WALGA understands the importance of these programs to improving the safety and wellbeing of the community. These are programs that have demonstrated their intrinsic value to the community and should be maintained at current levels.

- **Community Pools Revitalisation Program (CPRP):**

The Community Pools Revitalisation Program provides assistance to Local Governments to maintain and upgrade aquatic facilities. Funding for existing projects committed under this program should be retained (i.e. the third instalment of funding due in 2017-18) to enable projects that are already in-train to be completed.

- **Crime Prevention Grants:** The Community Crime Prevention Fund is a competitive annual grants program (up to \$25k) which supports local community crime prevention initiatives, involving or supported by the police and the community working together on projects to address identified crime prevention priorities. Local Government work closely with WA Police to develop Community Safety and Crime prevention plans. This fund is used to implement the crime prevention initiatives in the community by Local Government and the Not for Profit sector. The grants enable local communities to take a preventative approach to safety and should be maintained at current levels.

- **Run off road crashes:** In the regional and remote areas of WA, run off road crashes account for 45% of all people killed or seriously injured and have therefore been identified as a priority crash type in *Towards Zero*.

Specific programs to improve State and National highways are underway and appear to be delivering good outcomes in reducing run-off road crashes. While typically lower traffic volume, there are many roads under the control of Local Governments where treatments would be cost effective either on their own, or in conjunction with other road improvement works. The 2018-19 Budget should include funding from the Road Trauma Trust account to deliver cost effective improvements that will reduce run-off road crashes on the local road network.

- **Cycling:** Local Governments currently provide nearly 5,000 km of dual use paths, a network that grew nearly 5% per year over the past five years. There is strong community desire to constantly expand and upgrade this infrastructure to make our communities more attractive places to live and to provide a real and safe alternative to private cars for transport. The Perth Bicycle Network and Regional Bicycle Network Grants programs provide grants of up to 50% of the cost of projects to improve and expand the bicycle network. The Government has committed to provide \$14.66 million over four years to continue this program. These projects leverage Council funding, delivering jobs in the short term and long-lived infrastructure that provides a safe option to access schools, shops, employment and the wider public transport network as well as great recreational opportunities. Effective delivery of these projects depends on sound planning and Local Governments are very keen to ensure that this funding commitment is at least maintained in 2018-19 and beyond.

The \$3 million per year Bicycle Boulevards program is funded through the State Road Funds to Local Government Agreement. This initiative is in its pilot phase. Participating Local Governments will work with the Department of Transport to evaluate the effectiveness of these projects to determine the viability of this approach.



Let's Glow Riding, a first time event for the City of Melville

Better targeting of funding

At a time where the budget is under pressure, it is critical that spending delivers value for money for taxpayers. The Association considers that there are a number of areas of State Government spending that should be maintained, but could be better targeted to deliver improved outcomes.

- Emergency Services Levy:** The LGGS should be expanded to allow for expenditure on prevention and mitigation activities, which would require legislative change. Once this change is made, the recently announced 3.35% increase in the Emergency Services Levy should be used to fund prevention and mitigation activities at the local level. The current level of funds provided by the ESL are not sufficient to cover all critical bushfire related activities undertaken by the sector, with research by WALGA showing that Local Governments contributed a further \$6.6 million towards emergency management activities in 2015-16, with a significant proportion of this directed towards prevention and preparedness activities.
- Bushfire risk management plans:** Local Governments are supportive of the program and have seen many tangible benefits of the planning and mitigation process. However, funding to date has been allocated on an annual basis which has been difficult for the program to build momentum and deliver timely outcomes with partners across all land tenures. WALGA propose that future funding be allocated directly to Local Governments for the employment of staff at the local level, creating local employment opportunities that will facilitate tailored outcomes for local communities. It is feasible for these officers to have reporting protocols to a centralised agency, such as the Office of Bushfire Risk Management.
- Volunteer bushfire training:** Emergency services volunteers are critical to protecting communities from disaster; providing over 95% of the emergency services response personnel. 77% of emergency services volunteers fall under the authority of Local Governments in Western Australia. In practice, volunteers undertake many tasks, including fighting fires, conducting searches, providing firefighters with transport, managing radio communications, and catering. Training of these volunteers to ensure they are fit for purpose to protect their communities, across the vast landscape in WA would be a sound investment given the value in dollar terms they provide.

WALGA members have longstanding concerns with the training pathways currently available for volunteer firefighters. Training pathways are not aligned to the responsibilities of volunteer firefighters, and are not accessible in regional areas. The Association would like to see an investment in more appropriate volunteer training to increase the capacity and capability of the State's volunteer emergency workforce to protect their communities.
- Waste Avoidance and Resource Recovery Levy:** Only 25% of the amount raised by the Levy is hypothecated into the Waste Avoidance and Resource Recovery account for strategic waste management activities. Further, this is also used to fund the operational costs of the waste branch within the Department of Water and Environment Regulation. Increased investment is required to assist WA to meet the targets in the State Waste Strategy, increase employment opportunities and assist Local Government and the private sector to increase operational efficiencies. This is highlighted in both the Recycling Activity in Western Australia 2015-16 report and the 2015-16 Census of Local Government Waste and Recycling Services, which found that despite Local Governments in Western Australia spending \$288 million in collecting 1.5 million tonnes of domestic waste in 2015-16, the recycling rate in the municipal waste sector fell to 36% in the Perth metropolitan region in 2015-16, well below the State's target of 50%. WALGA considers that better outcomes would be achieved by directing all funds collected from the Waste Avoidance and Resource Recovery Levy into strategic waste management activities.
- NDIS:** Stress from NDIS and community service delivery is ongoing. As outlined earlier, Local Governments are a key provider of information and advice for people with disability. However, a key issue is whether Local Government will be able to access Information, Linkage and Capacity Building (ILC) grant funding under the scheme. Funding should be directed towards providing information, education and delivery of services to the disability community of WA in both the establishment and transition of a new NDIS system. This would also align with the upcoming review of the Disability Services Act in 2018.
- State CCTV Strategy:** The State CCTV Strategy and investment (\$5 million) for the provision and betterment of CCTV infrastructure has been welcomed by Local Government. The Strategy recognises the need for a more coordinated effort regarding the purchase, implementation and management of CCTV in Western Australia. The program continues to be very successful in realising strong economies of scale through smarter procurement processes and commitment to a network solution to ensure an integrated CCTV vision and framework for WA. Currently the State Strategy sits with WA Police and WALGA recommends that a review be undertaken to consider other options for alignment to improve services, transparency, governance, delivery, consistency, commonality, savings, efficiencies and reform. One example of strong alignment would be with the Office of the Government Chief Information Officer.



The Claremont Art Award and Exhibition, September 2017



The City of Kalgoorlie-Boulder, 2017 Art Prize and Exhibition

- **Child Health Clinics:** A long standing WALGA advocacy position is the need to establish equitable arrangements for the provision of child health clinics across WA. The Auditor General's Report into Universal Child Health Checks (2010) found that the Department of Health could do more to pro-actively plan new centres, and that "responsibility for the condition of the centres is blurred and Health has no budget for their maintenance and repairs". Furthermore, the Report estimates that "up to \$8.7 million would be required to ensure that all facilities across the State are safe and fit for purpose." Further WALGA undertook extensive research in 2012 which called for the State Government to improve the long term strategic planning and infrastructure investment for the provision of child health clinics in Western Australia.

The Association considers that a full review of the current model is needed to ensure it is delivering improved outcomes. Such a review should be based on evidence and consider utilisation for immunisation and access to parenting information in comparison to the local GP clinics; the location of existing centres based on current and projected population; the development of a framework to determine need for new services; and the financial arrangements for the service between State and Local Government.

- **Arts funding:** Arts and cultural activities play an important role in adding to the vibrancy and social fabric of local communities. While Local Governments support arts and culture in their communities, through the provision of infrastructure (such as galleries, libraries, art, and museums) events, festivals, public installations and preservation of local history and stories, funding from State Government is also necessary to support these activities in local communities. Certainty around funding of existing is a key issue, to ensure existing activities can continue (for example, the Goldfields Arts Centre). The Government should examine options to provide greater certainty around arts and cultural activities, particularly in regional areas. One option may be to investigate the establishment of a regional theatre trust to ensure the management and operation of arts venues in regional areas.

Avoid cost shifting to other sectors

It is critical that any efforts to address excessive levels of State Government spending deliver genuine savings, and do not merely shift costs onto Local Government, the not-for-profit or private sectors.

Cost shifting occurs where the responsibility for, or the costs of, providing a service, concession, asset or regulatory function are transferred from a higher level of government on to a lower level of government without access to additional revenue to fund the activity. There are a number of different ways in which cost shifting can occur.

- Other spheres of Government (Commonwealth or State) impose responsibility for providing a service, asset or regulatory functions upon Local Government, without corresponding funding, compensation or revenue raising capacity.
- Responsibility for funding services is transferred to Local Government, where responsibility for the funding lies with other spheres of government.
- Local Government agrees to provide a service/function on behalf of another sphere of government but funding is subsequently reduced or stopped, and the sector is unable to withdraw from service provision.
- Another sphere of government ceases or provides insufficient levels of a service/function and Local Government steps in because of high community demand.
- Another sphere of government imposes restrictions on Local Government's ability to set fees and charges at an appropriate level to recover costs for service delivery.

The Local Government sector has come under growing pressure in recent times, as it has taken on a greater role in the delivery of services that were previously undertaken by other levels of Government. It has been estimated that cost shifting is costing the sector nationally in the order of \$500 million to \$1 billion per annum. Funding these additional activities is a challenge given that the sector has only one source of its own tax revenue (rates) and it is not feasible for most Councils to provide a sufficient level of services from rates revenue alone.

WALGA members have reported that cost shifting is becoming a growing issue, and is placing pressure on their operations. In response to a survey distributed by WALGA, a number of areas of cost shifting have been identified that affect Local Governments across the state.

- **Administration of the Emergency Services Levy (ESL):** For many Local Governments, the cost of collecting the ESL on behalf of the State Government outweighs the administration fee they receive. One Council reported that the shortfall is costing them more than \$41,000 per annum. Another Council indicated that they employ a part time staff member at a cost of \$50,000 per annum to collect ESL debts, with only \$27,000 received from the State Government to cover this cost.
- **Bushfire activities:** Local Governments receive ESL funding through the Local Government Grants Scheme, however, this often does not meet the cost of all bushfire activities undertaken by the sector. According to the respondents to WALGA's survey, the shortfall for a Council can range from less than \$5,000, to as high as \$1.1 million per annum. Councils are spending additional funds on bushfire prevention activities, issuing pre-burning permits, and administration support for bushfire brigades.
- **Animal Management:** Prescribed fees for animal management under the Dog Act 1976 and Cat Act 2011 are not sufficient to cover costs for many Local Governments. For those where fees are not set at cost recovery, Councils have identified that the net cost of this to their budget ranged from \$10,000 per annum, up to \$400,000 per annum. One respondent reported that this was a fast growing service for their Local Government, and that costs had doubled in the 2015-16 financial year.
- **Biosecurity Management:** Local Governments undertake a range of biosecurity management and enforcement activities that were previously undertaken by the Department of Agriculture and Food under the Biosecurity Agriculture Management Act 2007. The costs to individual respondents ranged from \$3,000 per annum up to more than \$100,000 per annum, and relate to the capture and destruction of feral animals (e.g. foxes, rabbits, pigs and wild dogs) and the identification and declaration of plants and weeds.
- **Metropolitan Library Delivery Service:** The previous State Government's decision to cancel this service as part of the Agency Expenditure Review process has shifted the cost onto Local Government, and reduced service levels. The reported cost to individuals ranges from \$5,000 per annum up to \$83,000 per annum. One respondent noted that this service has now been reduced to two days per week, when previously it was available for five days per week.

- **Community sport programs:** Local Government incurs a cost from administering State Government sports programs such as Kidsport and Silversport. The reported impact to individual Councils ranges from \$2,000 per annum, up to \$60,000 per annum. A further example provided by one respondent was the removal of funding for Club Development Officers from the end of 2017-18, which is expected to cost the Local Government in the order of \$18,000 in order to provide ongoing support to sporting groups.
- **Housing:** In regional areas of WA, Local Governments often provide housing for State or Commonwealth Government employees in order to ensure the availability of a service to their local community. The recurrent costs of this have been estimated to range from \$5,000 per annum up to \$35,000 per annum. WALGA members have reported providing housing for nurses, teachers and police officers.
- **Education services:** Local Governments contribute significant funding to meet gaps in the delivery of State Government education services. While this differs between Local Government areas, WALGA members have reported costs as high as \$45,000 per annum. The types of programs supported include school chaplaincy programs and support for playgroups.
- **Crime Prevention and Community Safety:** Local Government undertakes crime prevention activities in public spaces, due to insufficient services by the State Government. This has been reported to cost individual Local Governments in the order of \$5,000 up to \$1.5 million per annum. Funding is directed to activities such as security patrols, graffiti management and removal, crime prevention teams and CCTV.
- **Community and Human Services:** Local Government support a range of activities that were initially funded by the State Government, but funding has since been withdrawn or is now inadequate. Local Governments have reported that this can cost them from \$12,000 up to \$1 million per annum. Some of the programs that the sector is supporting relate to aged care and disability services; Aboriginal Health; Domestic Violence; and public and preventative health such as mosquito control, smoking in venues and programs to encourage physical activity.
- **Planning:** The shortfall in cost recovery for functions under the Planning and Development Act 2005 is adding to financial pressures for Local Government, and is costing individual Councils between \$5,000 per annum up to \$1.8 million. The freeze on planning fees and charges since 2013 has been a key issue that has exacerbated this problem. Planning functions can be particularly resource intensive for small rural shires.
- **Waste Avoidance and Resource Recovery Levy:** Local Governments collect the Waste Avoidance and Resource Recovery Levy on behalf of the State Government under the Waste Avoidance and Resource Recovery Levy Act 2007. The sector doesn't receive any funding from the State Government to cover these costs. Feedback from WALGA members suggests that this can cost between \$15,000 and \$35,000 per annum.

With Local Governments' coming under growing financial pressure, the sector simply cannot absorb additional spending responsibilities from the State Government without access to an appropriate funding source. It is critical that the Government finds genuine savings as part of the 2018-19 Budget process, rather than shifting costs onto other sectors.



The new Edge Skatepark in Kwinana

Fund Existing Commitments

Sufficient funding must be provided to progress key election and other commitments that the State Government has made. The priority commitments from the Local Government sector's perspective that must be funded in the 2018-19 Budget are as follows.

Review of the Local Government Act 1995.

The Minister for Local Government has commenced a process to review the Local Government Act 1995. This will involve a two stage process, focussed around modernising Local Government, and delivering for the community.

While the process commenced in 2017, the second phase of the Review will occur throughout 2018-19. This will comprise policy development and consultation related to improving behaviour and relationships, increasing community participation, enabling Local Government enterprises, improving financial management, and reducing red tape.

Appropriate resources will need to be allocated to the Department of Local Government, Sport and Cultural Activities and the State Solicitor's Office in the 2018-19 budget to progress the Review and enable a Bill to be introduced by 2019 in line with the timeframes articulated.

Introduction of a Container Deposit Scheme.

The State Government has committed to introduce a container deposit scheme, to commence in early 2019. Under the scheme, consumers will be able to return eligible drink containers for recycling and claim a 10 cent refund for each container.

While a container deposit scheme is expected to be self-funding over the longer term, there will be some costs associated with its initial establishment that should be funded in the 2018-19 Budget. The Association considers that this should be funded through the Waste Avoidance and Resource Recovery Levy, which exists to support waste management programs. The Waste Avoidance and Resource Recovery Act 2007 includes the head of power for the State Government to introduce a Container Deposit Scheme via regulation.

Public Health Act 2016

The Public Health Act 2016 commenced in Western Australia on July 25, 2016, replacing the Health Act 1911 and is a major public health initiative and regulatory reform undertaking for Western Australia.

The Act is being introduced in a staged approach, with four stages over the course of five years. This staged approach recognises the significant amount of work required to develop subsidiary legislation that will replace the 47 sets of regulations that currently sit under the Health Act 1911.

The focus of the Act on minimising risk gives the opportunity to address lifestyle issues as well as environmental health and communicable diseases. The Act acknowledges that Local Government needs effective and flexible mechanisms that fit into existing planning frameworks for the sector to undertake its role and to respond to community health and wellbeing needs. It recognises the involvement of Local Government is more likely to ensure sustainable change within communities and the creation of supportive environments, particularly if combined with the introduction of "healthy" public policies.

One new requirement for Local Governments is the development of local health plans which reflect the aspirations of the State Public Health Plan. These plans will then support Local Governments to plan for, and be responsive to, health priorities and ensure the health and wellbeing of the community is included in the overall planning framework. The interim State Public Health Plan was released on 17 July 2017 for consultation with Local Government.

While the introduction of the Public Health Act is welcome, comprehensive systemic and strategic planning is required across Government and service providers to support better public health planning in WA. Critical to this is a health workforce that reflects the contemporary needs of the new legislation and the diverse communities across the State. WALGA has undertaken initial research which highlights the Local Government workforce needs support to build their capacity and skill sets in order to meet health priorities, particularly the burdens of chronic disease.

The State Government should undertake a full analysis, including cost implications for all stakeholders, of all policy recommendations or initiatives in consultation with local governments, and in accordance with the Regulatory Impact Assessment Guidelines prior to adoption and implementation.

It is also essential that the State Government continue to resource the implementation of the Public Health Act 2016 and provide funding to build the capacity of the Local Government workforce and support the development of local health plans.



City of Rockingham's new Baldivis South Sporting Pavilion

State Infrastructure Plan

While repairing the State Budget is a priority, it is important that the Government does not lose sight of the need to continue to invest in productivity enhancing infrastructure that will deliver considerable benefits for the state over the longer term.

The Government committed to the development of a State Infrastructure Plan as part of its election policy platform. WALGA considers that this is an important priority that should be progressed in the 2018-19 Budget to identify key strategic infrastructure projects for the WA.

Projects should be prioritised based on a thorough and transparent cost benefit analysis, and be used to make sure funding is directed to projects which will deliver the greatest benefits for WA. This should not only relate to economic infrastructure, but should also take into consideration important social infrastructure needs. The plan should also consider infrastructure projects that fall within Local Government jurisdiction, rather than just those that would typically receive State or Commonwealth Government funding.

It is important that the Government does not lose sight of the need to continue to invest in productivity enhancing infrastructure that will deliver considerable benefits for the state over the longer term.

Strategic Priorities

Review of Local Government Fees and Charges

In an environment where economic conditions are difficult and the budget is under pressure, the State Government should also look at broader reforms which will deliver benefits from reducing unnecessary regulation and compliance, enhancing efficiencies and generating savings which can be re-invested into community services and infrastructure.

For the Local Government sector, a priority reform is the deregulation of Local Government fees and charges. As discussed earlier, while Local Governments can impose fees and charges on users of specific, often incidental, services, a number of fees and charges are prescribed and restricted by legislation.

Fees determined by State Government legislation are of particular concern to Local Governments and represent significant revenue leakage because of:

- lack of indexation;
- lack of regular review (fees may remain at the same nominal levels for many years); and
- lack of transparent methodology in setting the fees (fees do not appear to be set with regard to appropriate costs recovery levels).

Since Local Governments do not have direct control over the determination of fees set by legislation, this revenue leakage is recovered from rate revenue. This leads to unfair community outcomes in that all ratepayers subsidise services that are only used by few. It also limits the capacity of individual Local Governments to adjust their budget to the changing economic and fiscal environment, and increases the sectors' reliance on other levels of Government for funding support.

The Association considers that it is appropriate that Local Governments have the freedom to set the level of their fees and charges. In the few cases where legislative restrictions are deemed necessary, they should be justified by a clear and logical rationale. Furthermore, those fees and charges that are prescribed by legislation should be reviewed and indexed on an annual basis to ensure they are set at appropriate cost recovery levels.

The Association has written to the previous Treasurer requesting that the ERA be tasked with conducting a review into Local Government Fees and Charges. The Association considers that an independent review of these issues and potential solutions is an important way to identify specific reform opportunities across the fee and charge setting regime.

While this was initially supported, it was not deemed to be a priority at that particular point in time. The topic still remains on the list of potential inquiries for the ERA's future work program. In light of current budget pressures, the Association is requesting that the McGowan Government re-examine this issue, and that the Treasurer should task the ERA with undertaking this review.

Perth and Peel Green Growth Plan

The finalisation and implementation of the Perth and Peel Green Growth Plan is a priority for the long term interests of the community. The Perth and Peel regions are expected to grow to 3.5 million people by 2050, an increase of almost 70% on the current population.

Finalising the plan, including the provision of adequate funding for its long term implementation will, by reducing red tape, facilitate future development and provide a long term framework for the protection of the environment.

Community Wellbeing Outcomes Framework

All spheres of Government face a number of challenges in supporting their communities' access to health care services, and these challenges differ greatly across the State. This is being compounded by the ageing population and an unprecedented level of immigration to WA. According to the Western Australian Planning Commission's WA Tomorrow forecasts, almost 1 in 5 Western Australians will be aged 65 years and over by 2026.

Community development and community services activities in WA are funded and delivered by an increasingly complex array of government and non-government organisations. Too often many funded programs do not translate to a common understanding or have applicability for the organisations that need it most. For WA, these challenges are compounded by the geographical size of the State and logistics for service delivery.

The Association believes there is a need to adopt an evidence-based outcome-focused approach, to assist State Government to identify and develop measurable wellbeing outcomes for WA. Such metrics and investment in research would encourage the development of new and innovative ways to improve health and wellbeing outcomes for Western Australians and where possible contribute to the national agenda. Such metrics would also allow Local Government to demonstrate outcomes being sought by Government and provide a clear measurement framework to inform Council strategic and business planning processes. Consideration of an Indicator Framework to measure and report on outcomes achieved by Local Governments in their communities is a next step to be strongly considered.

The Victorian State Government recently developed a whole of government framework to measure the intrinsic benefit of many programs that foster positive behaviour changes. The Association further suggests this could be an excellent priority project for Healthway in accordance with their legislated responsibilities.

We need to build the capacity of the State's 'big thinkers' to undertake bold research and analysis which may lead to new policy ideas and ways of engaging with the disengaged and fostering positive behaviour change.

Supporting Volunteers

WALGA acknowledges the significant contribution that volunteers make to the WA economy, the social fabric and criticality to developing resilient communities, particularly in regional communities, Neighbourhood Watch, Country Ambulances, Patient Transfers, Men's Sheds, Bush Fire Brigades, Home Care services, sporting clubs and community programs to name a few.

The business of Local Government depends on the support of our volunteering community. Robust planning and future investment is critical to support the increased demand for volunteers working in growing sectors such as disability, mental health and aged care.

There are opportunities to improve the management and engagement of volunteers across WA, particularly opportunities to reduce red tape and the establishment of a Ministers Volunteering Reference Group to provide advice on matters relating to volunteerism. The State Government should look to develop a State Volunteering Strategy and implementation plan to build the capacity of the Volunteer workforce for WA, and establish a Ministerial Volunteering Reference Group to provide advice on matters relating to volunteerism.

WALGA acknowledges the significant contribution that volunteers make to the WA economy, the social fabric and criticality to developing resilient communities.

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