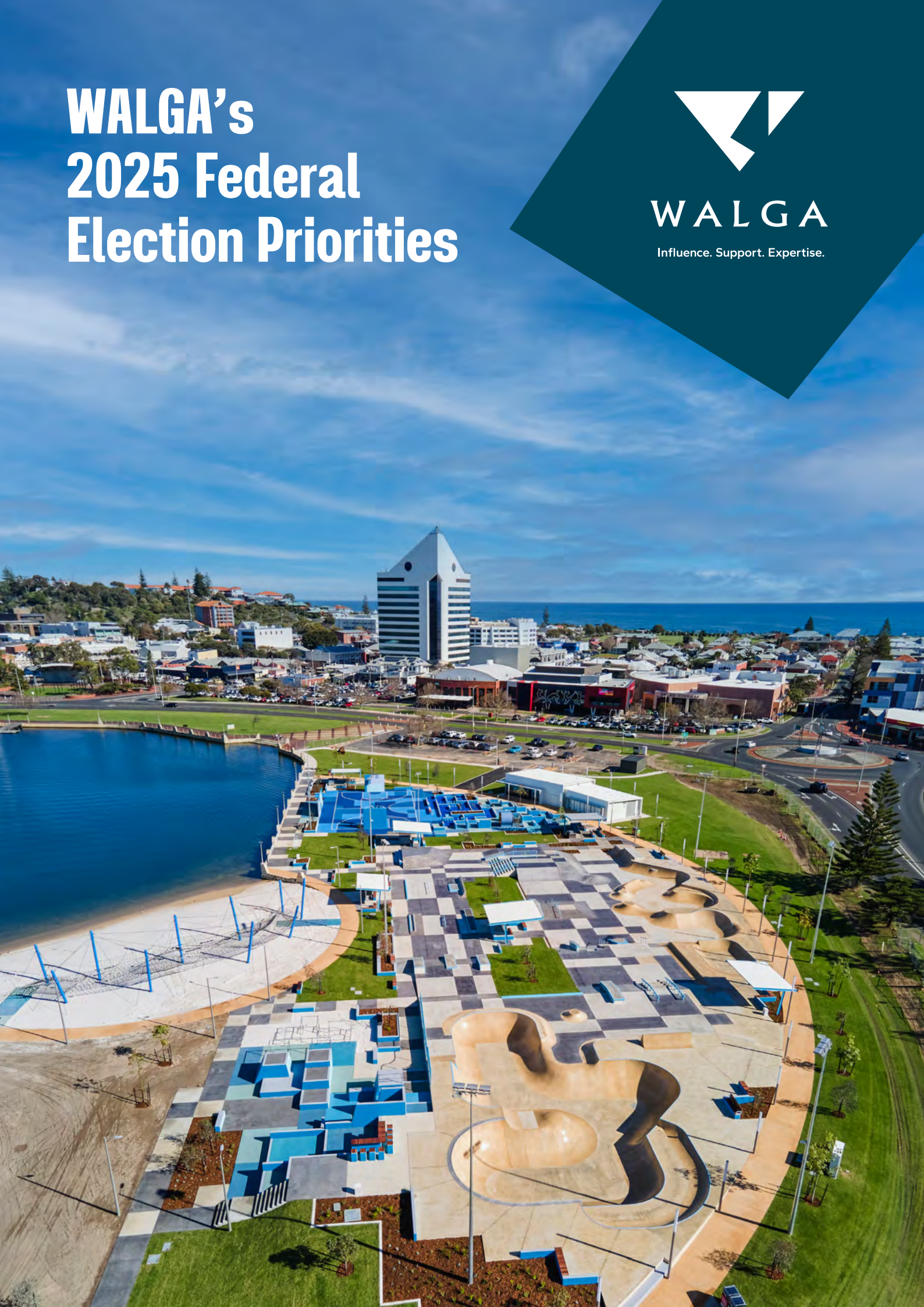


WALGA's 2025 Federal Election Priorities



WALGA

Influence. Support. Expertise.



ABOUT WALGA

The Western Australian Local Government Association (WALGA) is an independent, member-based, not for profit organisation representing and supporting the WA Local Government sector.

Our membership includes all 139 Local Governments in the State. WALGA uses its influence, support and expertise to deliver better outcomes for WA Local Governments and their communities.

We do this through effective advocacy to all levels of Government on behalf of our Members, and by the provision of expert advice, services and support to Local Governments.

WALGA's vision is to be the authoritative voice and trusted partner for Western Australian Local Government.

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INTRODUCTION

As the 2025 Federal election approaches, communities across Australia are facing a range of challenges.

The cost-of-living crisis, more frequent natural disasters and extreme weather events, a shifting demographic profile and the transition to a low-carbon economy are placing strain on families and our most vulnerable.

Building community resilience is a crucial strategy to address these pressing issues. Resilient communities are better equipped to respond to, recover from, and adapt to challenges. They foster inclusivity, sustainability, and local economic development, creating a robust foundation to overcome any obstacles.

This election presents an important opportunity for the incoming government to prioritise building community resilience, ensuring a brighter future for communities across the nation.

WALGA's *2025 Federal Election Priorities*, presents a plan to build community resilience through strategic investments and policy reforms in critical areas such as community infrastructure, coastal management, emergency management, regional health, road safety, and telecommunications.

As a trusted partner of the Australian Government, WA Local Governments are ready and committed to work with the incoming Australian Government to address these critical areas to support stronger, more resilient communities across Western Australia and the nation.



LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN WA



139
Councils



1,136
Elected Members



24,600
employees

*WALGA Salary and Workforce Survey



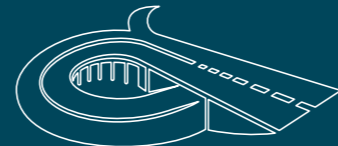
\$4.5bn
expenditure per annum

*Australian Bureau of Statistics



\$49bn
of assets

*Australian Bureau of Statistics



87%
of all public roads managed

*WALGA Road Asset and Expenditure report

100%
of all WA local Councils
are Members of WALGA

WESTERN AUSTRALIAN LOCAL GOVERNMENTS ARE DIVERSE IN:



Land size:
ranging from
less than
1.1² km to over
372,000² km



**Number of
staff employed:**
from **13** to
over **1,200**
per council



Populations:
range from
89 to more
than **224,000**
people



**Revenue
received:** which
in 2022-23,
ranged from
\$3 million
to just over
\$294 million



COMMUNITY INFRASTRUCTURE

Action Required:

- ▶ Provide additional ongoing, formula-based targeted funding streams for Local Governments to provide certainty and enable effective planning for community needs.
 - Housing and community infrastructure: \$1.1 billion per year for housing infrastructure and \$500 million per year for community infrastructure.
 - Emergency management mitigation, resilience, and capacity: \$900 million per year.
 - Climate adaptation: \$400 million per year initially, increasing to \$800 million per year after five years.



Local Governments face significant challenges in raising the necessary revenue to meet the growing needs of their communities. As community needs evolve and the scope of Local Government services expands, these challenges become even more pronounced.

Rates are a key source of revenue for the Local Government sector. However, structural differences across Local Governments mean that regional Councils with relatively smaller populations often have a lower capacity to generate rate revenue and are more dependent on grants from other levels of government. For instance, rate income can range from as low as 2% in remote areas to as high as 87% of total revenue in inner urban areas. These constraints mean that many Local Governments are reliant on external funding to fulfill their responsibilities.

Financial Assistance (FA) Grants play a crucial role in the financial sustainability of Local Governments, particularly for those in rural and remote areas with limited revenue-raising capacity. Untied funding allows Local Governments to allocate resources according to local conditions and community preferences and has

lower administrative costs for both Local Government and the Australian Government.

Maintaining untied direct funding under FA Grants is essential, but there is also a need for additional ongoing, formula-based targeted funding to provide certainty and enable effective planning for community needs.

A proven model of efficient and effective funding is the Local Roads and Community Infrastructure Program (LRCIP). The LRCIP aligns with key principles such as:

- Funding allocation based on policy objectives, ensuring equitable service levels across all communities.
- Autonomy for Local Governments to identify and prioritise local needs.
- A non-competitive program structure.
- Low administrative costs.

Western Australian Local Governments delivered around 2,000 local priority projects through the first three phases of the LRCIP. These projects reflect the diverse needs of each community and include:

- Energy efficiency upgrades to community buildings.
- Access and inclusion improvements.
- Upgrades to lighting and change facilities to enhance the use of sporting facilities.
- Renewal of sports playing surfaces.
- Repurposing underutilised facilities to meet current demands.
- Construction of youth precincts and skate parks.
- Development of paths to encourage active travel, including walking, cycling, and scooting.
- A wide range of other community-focused projects.

To build on this success, the Australian Government should look to create dedicated funding streams linked to specific national outcomes, ensuring a guaranteed, council-only funding pool.

By adopting additional untied funding streams, we can ensure that Local Governments have the resources they need to continue delivering essential services and infrastructure, fostering resilient and vibrant communities across the nation.

FUNDING BETTER FUTURES - RATE INCOME IS AS LOW AS 2% OF TOTAL REVENUE IN REMOTE AREAS MAKING SMALLER LOCAL GOVERNMENTS RELIANT ON EXTERNAL FUNDING.

COASTAL MANAGEMENT

Action Required:

- ▶ **Develop a National Coastal Hazards Adaptation Strategy and fund a dedicated Coastal Hazard Adaptation program.**

Climate change-induced sea level rise, increasing storm intensities and changes to wave and wind patterns are increasing the risk of coastal erosion and inundation around Australia.

Most of Australia's population live in coastal areas. 80% of WA's population lives within 10km of the coast. Coastal areas are critical to the State's environment and economy, providing locations for essential infrastructure such as ports, road and rail, energy and telecommunications, as well as commercial, industrial and residential development, recreation and tourism.

In 2011, the Department of Climate Change and Energy Efficiency estimated that more than \$226 billion of public and private assets across Australia will potentially be exposed to coastal hazards within the next 80 years. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change has estimated that more than 200,000 commercial, light industrial and residential buildings, and 27,000km of road and rail assets will be impacted by coastal erosion or inundation across Australia under sea level rise projections of 1.1 metres. In WA, between 18,700 and 28,900 residential buildings may be at risk.

In 2019, the WA Government identified 55 coastal erosion hotspots — 15 in metropolitan areas and 40 in regional areas — where coastal erosion is expected to impact on public and private physical assets and require management and adaptation action within the next 25 years, with an additional 31 locations likely to be threatened in the longer-term. The cost of managing these hotspots is estimated at \$110 million over 5 years, with more funding needed over the longer term. Additional coastal inundation hotspots

are currently being mapped which will require further management and adaptation action. While Local Governments are largely responsible for managing coastal hazards, they do not have sufficient financial capacity to do so at the scale required.

This is a national issue involving complex strategic planning that requires a coordinated response across Local, State and the Australian Government.

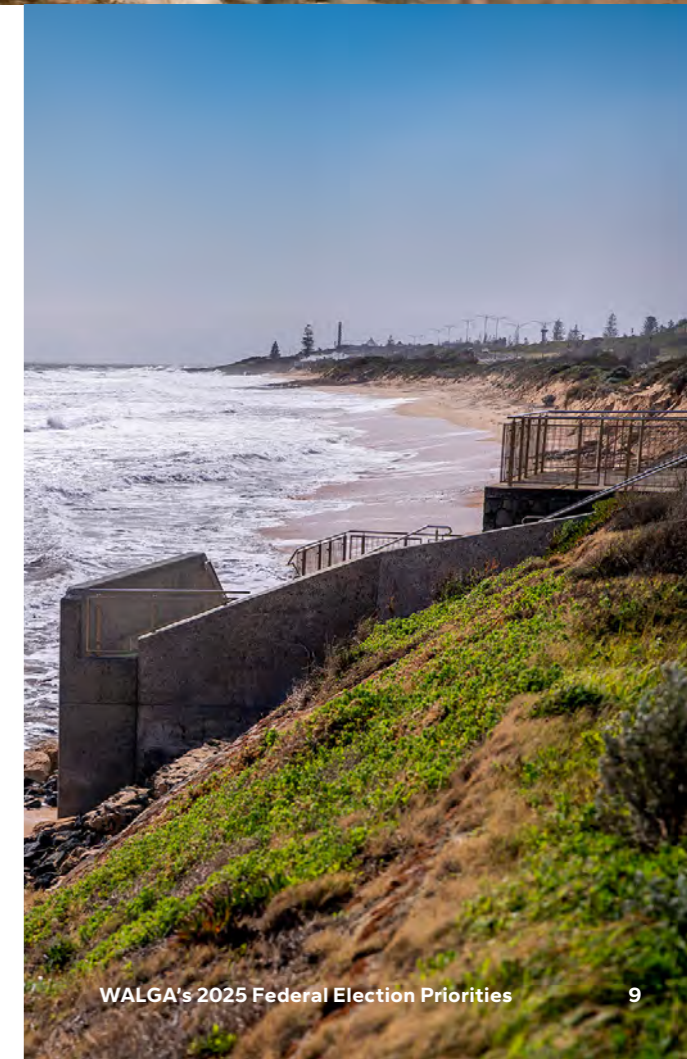
WALGA considers that the development of a National Coastal Hazards Adaptation Strategy should be progressed as a priority in the next term of Government.

Identified by Infrastructure Australia as a priority initiative in 2020 and recommended by the Intergovernmental Coastal Hazards Working Group in 2023, WALGA believes this National Strategy should be informed by an updated climate change coastal risk assessment and form the basis of coordinated action to address and manage coastal hazards over the next 15 years.

Building on the Disaster Ready Fund, implementation of the Strategy should be accompanied with an additional dedicated Coastal Hazard Adaptation funding program to support Local Governments' efforts to plan and implement significant and more complex adaptation projects.



**PROTECTING OUR
COASTLINES AND ASSETS
FOR GENERATIONS TO
COME - 55 COASTAL
EROSION HOTSPOTS HAVE
BEEN IDENTIFIED TO
REQUIRE ACTION WITHIN
THE NEXT 25 YEARS.**



EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT

Action Required:

- ▶ **Implement the findings of the Colvin Review to invest in Local Government Emergency Management by providing additional untied funding streams, allocating dedicated Emergency Management resources and support officers, and enhancing training programs.**
- ▶ **Reform the Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements to ensure they are consistent, equitable, and streamlined, reducing the administrative burden on Local Government.**
- ▶ **Incorporate betterment into all reconstruction activities as a core component of the Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements.**
- ▶ **Enhanced training and exercise opportunities for Local Governments to build capability and provide structured learning pathways and nationally recognised qualifications for Local Government Emergency Management practitioners.**

Australia is experiencing more frequent and severe disasters driven by climate change. Since 2020, WA has faced 42 declared disasters, creating significant challenges for 80 Local Governments across the State.

Local Governments, alongside the Australian and State Governments, play a critical role in emergency management through preparedness, response, and recovery activities.

WA is the only jurisdiction where Local Governments manage Volunteer Bush Fire Brigades. In WA, 111 Local Governments oversee 563 Volunteer Bush Fire Brigades, comprising approximately 20,000 Volunteers who are the first responders to fires across 91.8% of the State's geographical area.

However, Local Governments in WA have varying levels of emergency management capacity and capability. A 2023 survey by WALGA highlighted that community preparedness and the ability of Local Governments to respond to and recover from major emergencies are critical issues for most councils. Currently, when disasters significantly impact essential public assets in WA, there is no funding available for reconstruction to be more

resilient leaving infrastructure vulnerable to repeated damage.

To improve the capacity of communities to withstand, adapt and positively recover from future events it is critical that there is increased emphasis and investment in reducing risk, enhancing Local Government emergency management capabilities and reducing the vulnerability of essential public infrastructure through dedicated betterment funding.

This approach will not only reduce the impact of natural hazards but will reduce the cost of recovery when the next event occurs.

A strategic shift towards disaster risk reduction and resilience is supported by the recommendations of the reviews of Commonwealth Disaster Funding and National Natural Disaster Governance. The Colvin Review advocates for a significant capacity uplift for Local Government, an enhanced national training and exercise regime to build Local Government capacity, and reforms to Commonwealth disaster funding. These measures aim to create a disaster management system that is scalable, sustainable, effective, equitable, transparent, and accessible.



STRONG COMMUNITIES READY FOR ANY DISASTER – SINCE 2020, WA HAS EXPERIENCED 42 DECLARED DISASTERS, AFFECTING 80 LOCAL GOVERNMENTS ACROSS THE STATE.

REGIONAL HEALTH

Action Required:

- ▶ **Address the systemic failures in regional primary healthcare provision through the development of adequate and appropriate funding models for rural primary healthcare services.**

All Australians, regardless of where they live, deserve equitable access to primary healthcare services. However, the current system is failing to provide adequate healthcare for many of the 7 million Australians and over 500,000 Western Australians who live in rural, regional and remote areas.

These individuals experience poorer health outcomes and are more likely to die at a younger age from disease than people living elsewhere in Australia, with poorer access to primary healthcare services contributing to higher rates of hospitalisations, deaths, and injuries (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2022, 2024). The burden of disease from many preventable, chronic illnesses is higher and the prevalence of people living with two or more long-term health conditions is highest in regional areas. Despite this inequitable distribution of disease, GP availability is lower in rural and remote areas.

The Australian Government is responsible for developing national health policy and the funding and regulation of primary healthcare through Medicare and for the funding of public hospital services in conjunction with State Governments. The collective, systemic failure of the health system to deliver adequate primary healthcare services in many parts of rural Western Australia, in particular general practitioners, is forcing Local Governments to step in to secure these services for their communities, including funding for accommodation, vehicles, medical centre operations, as well as competing in the open market for healthcare professionals.

According to WALGA's Local Government Primary Healthcare Services Survey, in 2021-22, 69 Local

Governments spent \$6.8 million to support the provision of primary healthcare services in their communities and 92% of respondent Local Governments with populations between 1,000 and 5,000 provided financial or in-kind support for general practice services.

The need for Local Governments to fund this essential service for their communities is placing significant pressure on Local Governments' already stretched budgets, diverting funds away from the provision of other essential community services and infrastructure. Local Governments should not, and cannot, continue to bear this cost.

According to the National Rural Health Alliance (NRHA), there is a national rural health spending deficit of \$6.5 billion. The incoming Government must take action to close this gap and implement system wide, long-term reforms that support and incentivise the equitable provision of general practice and primary healthcare for regional, rural and remote communities, including adequate and appropriate funding models and workforce training, recruitment and retention strategies.



HEALTHCARE WITH NO AUSTRALIAN LEFT BEHIND – THE BURDEN OF DISEASE FROM MANY PREVENTABLE CHRONIC ILLNESSES IS HIGHER IN REGIONAL AREAS.

SAFER ROADS

Action Required:

- ▶ **\$276 million over four years for the Australian Government's contribution to applying proven road safety countermeasures on 439 WA Local Government roads, totalling 8,208 km.**

Reducing fatalities and serious injuries on Local Government roads is essential to meeting the National Road Safety Strategy target of a 50% reduction in fatalities and a 30% reduction in serious injuries from road trauma by 2030.

Between 2017 and 2021, more than 500 people lost their lives and over 2,900 were seriously injured on regional roads in WA. Alarmingly, half of these crashes happened on Local Government roads. In 2022, the fatality rate in regional WA was 18.7 per 100,000 people, compared to just 2.84 per 100,000 in the Perth metropolitan area.

Over 70 % of fatal and serious injury crashes in regional WA are due to run-off-road or head-on collisions. Improving safety on these roads is challenging because of their extensive and remote nature.

The \$855.7 million Regional Road Safety Program is delivering significant improvements in road safety on National and State Highways. Analysis across 163 Regional Road Safety Program projects over the last two years shows positive outcomes. Compared to the previous five years, a 50% reduction in fatalities and 35% reduction in serious injuries has been observed.

Significant benefits can be achieved by extending this approach to high-speed regional local roads.

A business case led by the RAC in partnership with WALGA and Main Roads WA, prepared by the Australian Road Research Board (ARRB), proposes a program to reduce the disproportionately high rate of fatal and serious injury crashes on high-speed Local Government roads in regional and peri-urban areas. This Business Case prioritises

439 high-speed Local Government roads covering 8,208 km - approximately one-third of WA's sealed rural road network - and provides a process for selecting appropriate, proven, cost-effective countermeasures, a safety assessment and a return-on-investment analysis.

To support the implementation of this business case, co-funding from the Australian Government and State Government is required to a total \$552 million.

To evaluate the program's effectiveness, assessments were conducted that included before-and-after comparisons of star safety ratings and estimates of KSI (Killed and Seriously Injured) reductions. The analysis shows significant road safety benefits:

- ▶ **A reduction of 138 fatalities and 489 serious injuries over the 30-year lifespan of the countermeasures.**
- ▶ **An average Star Rating Score improvement from 38.4 to 29.1 after implementing the countermeasures.**
- ▶ **A 23.6% improvement in the Star Rating Score, indicating a relative risk safety improvement.**

The program aligns with both National and State road safety goals, particularly in WA's Road Safety Framework, focusing on "building safer roads and road systems" and emphasising the importance of regional roads in the Driving Change, Road Safety Strategy for WA 2020 – 2030.



SAVING LIVES AND REDUCING INJURY ON HIGH-SPEED LOCAL ROADS – BETWEEN 2017 AND 2021, MORE THAN 500 PEOPLE LOST THEIR LIVES AND OVER 2,900 WERE SERIOUSLY INJURED ON REGIONAL ROADS IN WA.



TELECOMMUNICATIONS

Action Required:

- ▶ **Implement measures that require telecommunications carriers to identify the most vulnerable parts of their mobile and broadband networks and implement programs to greatly increase resilience against power failures and other impacts.**
- ▶ **Examine opportunities for new technologies such as satellite services to achieve cost effective, resilient, equitable access to telecommunications services for people outside major cities, and to ensure reliable communication during emergencies.**

Reliable telecommunications are essential for Local Governments to fulfill their emergency management responsibilities, economic development objectives, and community aspirations for safe, attractive, and liveable places.

However, Local Governments in peri-urban, rural, regional and remote areas are concerned about the adequacy of telecommunications services, specifically:

- **Reliability and resilience of telecommunications services** - Power outages, which are more frequent and prolonged in rural areas, heavily impact telecommunications services. During emergencies such as bushfires and storms, the lack of reliable telecommunications hampers effective response and communication.
- **Inequitable access to mobile service coverage** - Many areas lack adequate service, and the current mobile coverage maps are often inaccurate, failing to reflect the true service availability at a local level. Feedback indicates that the shutdown of 3G networks in November 2024 resulted in coverage not being provided where it previously was.
- **Poor mobile and internet performance** - Performance is a key concern during peak tourist seasons or increased mining activities. The telecommunications infrastructure often cannot handle the increased demand during these periods, affecting businesses and residents.

- **Limited choice of service providers** - Outside urban areas, Telstra is often the only viable mobile service provider, limiting consumer choice and leading to higher costs.

The 2021 Regional Telecommunications Review provides recommendations to address these challenges, which have not been implemented. These issues are being further considered in the 2024 Regional Telecommunications Review, which is due to report to the Australian Government by 31 December 2024. Implementing the recommendations of the review should be a priority.

A key recommendation of the 2021 Review was to redefine the Universal Service Obligation to focus on service levels, cost, reliability, and resilience, allowing for flexible technology solutions. This remains a priority. Specific service standards for mobile and broadband services in regional Australia should also be included.



FORGING EQUAL ACCESS FOR ALL WEST AUSTRALIANS – MANY AREAS LACK ADEQUATE SERVICE, AND THE CURRENT MOBILE COVERAGE MAPS ARE OFTEN INACCURATE, FAILING TO REFLECT THE TRUE SERVICE AVAILABILITY AT A LOCAL LEVEL.



Other priorities include:

- ▶ A thorough audit of mobile coverage to identify service levels at each location and ensure that mobile service coverage does not diminish with the transition from 3G to 4G and 5G.
- ▶ Continued co-investment with the telecommunications industry to expand mobile service coverage.
- ▶ Requiring carriers to monitor and report broadband and mobile service levels, adjusting capacity to meet peak demand.

- ▶ Refining the Mobile Black Spot Program to provide effective coverage without requiring multiple SIMs and mobile plans.
- ▶ Identifying and addressing the parts of the network most vulnerable to power failures and developing standalone power supply systems.

A critical part of any response should be to consider the role for new technologies such as satellite services to achieve cost effective, resilient, equitable access to telecommunications services for those living and working outside Australia's major urban centres and to provide resilience during emergencies.



Further information

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