

Submission to the Education and Health Standing Committee Inquiry into Community Use of WA Public School Facilities

October 2025

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 advocate to all levels of Government on behalf of our Members, and provide expert advice, services and support to Local Governments. WALGA's vision is for agile and inclusive Local Governments enhancing community wellbeing and enabling economic prosperity.

Acknowledgement of Country

WALGA acknowledges the continuing connection of Aboriginal people to Country, culture and community. We embrace the vast Aboriginal cultural diversity throughout Western Australia, including Boorloo (Perth), on the land of the Whadjuk Nyoongar People, where WALGA is located and we acknowledge and pay respect to Elders past and present.

Introduction

WALGA appreciates the opportunity to provide a submission to the [Education and Health Standing Committee Inquiry into Inquiry into the Community Use](#) (the Inquiry) on behalf of the Western Australian Local Government sector.

The Local Government sector in WA is diverse. There are 139 Local Governments across metropolitan and regional WA, varying in geographical size and population base. As a result, there is a significant diversity in the range of functions and services provided by Local Government, depending on the size and location of the Local Government.

This Submission aligns to the following [WALGA advocacy position](#):

3.7.1 Community Infrastructure

Local Governments own, lease, and maintain vital community infrastructure across Western Australia that delivers essential benefits to local communities. Local Governments face significant funding pressures to ensure this infrastructure is effectively planned, developed, maintained, and enhanced to meet evolving community needs and population growth.

- 1. WALGA calls on the Australian Government to provide \$500 million per annum for community infrastructure through a national formula based, targeted Local Government funding program.*

2. WALGA calls on the State Government to:
- a. Provide \$60 million per annum for the Community Sporting and Recreation Facilities Fund, separate to the PlayOn WA: 2030 by 2030 funding commitments
 - b. Provide \$60 million per annum for community arts and cultural infrastructure,
 - c. Provide funding for retrofitting accessible design features to community infrastructure,
 - d. Align all community infrastructure funding with existing State co-contribution of at least two-thirds.

September 2025

Context

WALGA has considered the questions outlined in the Inquiry terms of reference as they relate to Local Government. The Submission has been informed by WALGA Members and should be considered in conjunction with any feedback provided directly by Local Governments.

Local Governments are key providers and operators of community facilities, managing \$52 billion worth of assets across the State. This includes performing arts centres, sports fields, swimming pools and recreation centres.

As the State's population grows by an [average rate of 1.8%](#), and urban infill continues, the demand for high quality community facilities will continue to increase, compounding pressure on Local Governments.

The [ALGA National State of Assets Report](#) highlights the significant need for replacement of Local Government buildings and facilities due to poor condition, function, and capacity. This need is also evidenced in WA Local Government strategies and planning documents across the State. While there are some existing funding mechanisms to support the development and maintenance of community infrastructure available to Local Governments such as the Community Sports and Recreational Facilities Fund (CSRFF), they are typically oversubscribed, focused on sports facilities and not sufficient to meet demand.

Alongside this, the State Government is investing [\\$1.7 billion over the next four years to deliver new public schools and improved infrastructure](#). This includes contemporary and multi-functional facilities that are underutilised outside of core school business.

Benefits of Community Use of Public School Facilities

Access to high quality community facilities makes communities more vibrant, cohesive and healthier. They provide a place where people of all ages, skills, abilities and backgrounds can enjoy the benefits of social connection.

Community facilities and services also deliver broader community benefits such as improved health, lower crime rates and economic activity. Investing in a strategic and sustainable approach to community use of public school facilities has significant potential

to support communities sporting, recreational and creative needs. It would also support a wide range of State Government priorities including, but not limited to:

- [State Public Health Plan](#) and associated Local Public Health Plans
- [State Disability Strategy 2020-2030](#)
- [Disability Access and Inclusion Plans](#)
- [PlayOn WA: 2023 by 2030](#)
- [Western Australian Cultural Infrastructure Framework 2030+](#)
- [WA Youth Action Plan 2024-2027](#)
- [State Seniors Strategy](#)
- [State Infrastructure Strategy](#)
- [Diversify WA](#)
- [WA Regional Development Framework](#)
- [Closing the Gap - WA Implementation Plan](#)
- [Perth and Peel @ 3.5 Million](#)
- [Climate Adaptation Strategy](#)

For Local Governments, enabling community access of public school facilities would provide much needed additional capacity for local sports and creative activities. Local Governments across WA report that community demand for sport facilities is growing significantly beyond the capacity of existing infrastructure. For example, waitlists for community club use of basketball and netball courts are currently a significant issue for the sector.

The pressure on community infrastructure varies across the State, reflective of WAs population distribution. In high-growth areas such as inner metropolitan Perth, where land is constrained, green spaces are diminishing and demand for community infrastructure is increasing beyond capacity, community use of public school facilities offers a practical and cost-effective solution. In areas of significant growth with less space restrictions, such as the Perth metropolitan corridor, wider community use of public school facilities could provide return on State Government investment as well as foster community cohesion in growing and diverse communities. In smaller communities where population levels do not necessitate multiple recreational centres or performing arts centres, centralising State Government investment into one high quality and well-equipped facility based on broader community need would provide significant investment savings and avoid duplication, ensuring that high quality infrastructure is still available to communities.

WALGA strongly encourages the State Government to consider the full range of public school facilities that could be suitable for community use. Typically, shared use agreements between Local Governments and the Department of Education focus on Local Government managed public open spaces such as sports fields and ovals. While these agreements are supported and encouraged, real community benefits would be achieved through community use of infrastructure that includes specialist equipment and facilities such as performing arts centres, auditoriums and indoor sport courts.

As providers of a wide range of facilities and services, Local Governments are well placed to identify local community need across the State. Local Governments have access to data on population demographics and future projections. Coupled with information on local level

facility usage and demand, their knowledge of existing community facilities need, and community engagement, Local Governments are perfectly placed to inform decisions on high demand facilities - such as full-length cricket pitches in multicultural communities.

Activating community use of school facilities should be viewed as one of a suite of investment mechanisms to respond to unmet community facilities demand.

Recommendation 1: That the Local Government sector be included as a key stakeholder in the development and delivery of community use of public school facilities initiatives.

Risk of Community Use of Public School Facilities

There are inherent risks associated with opening public school facilities for community use, however these can be mitigated through appropriate planning, implementation frameworks and policies, and genuine collaboration and partnerships.

WALGA notes that whilst the argument can be made that opening public school facilities to community use could increase the risk of anti-social behaviours and vandalism, the converse should be considered. Community access to public school facilities would further establish them as key institutions within the community, fostering a sense of ownership and responsibility. It could also provide a safe space and social connection for otherwise disengaged young people. The broader community benefits of enabled community use of public school facilities must be given due consideration.

There is currently a lack of policy and guidance for community use of public school facilities. This creates a default and limited scope position in which the Department of Education approaches Local Governments to seek shared use agreements. Typically, these agreements see the Department of Education provide a contribution to maintenance costs in return for school time access to sports fields or ovals.

There are instances of Department of Education owned facilities managed by Local Governments notably in the Pilbara region. These examples can provide useful learnings for the Inquiry, particularly around the need for clearly defined roles and responsibilities. Furthermore, these existing shared use agreements should be reviewed to align with any new policies and practices developed.

The recent consultation on the National Sport and Infrastructure Action Plan identified the lack of guidance and restrictive policies as a barrier to shared use agreements. Local Governments report that current Department of Education policies place decision-making authority with individual school principals, resulting in inconsistent approaches to access and short-term agreements. A lack of clear policy frameworks and roles and responsibilities creates an increased risk profile and ultimately reduces appetite to engage.

Recommendation 2: That the State Government prioritises the development of policy frameworks and clarifies roles and responsibilities in consultation with all involved parties to address the identified barriers to community use agreements.

Schools often lack the infrastructure and administrative capacity to support community usage. Where Local Governments may be able to manage these additional functions, they should be funded for the additional cost of doing so. WALGA considers that shared use

agreements must not place additional maintenance or resource costs on Local Governments without commensurate additional funding.

WALGA notes that Local Governments are ineligible for the [Community Use of School Sporting Facilities Program](#), and the expressions of interest process for sports lighting infrastructure. This is despite Local Governments ability to identify priority community needs, capacity and experience in grant applications, delivery and acquittal and community infrastructure management.

Sustainable funding for both the capital investment and ongoing maintenance and upgrades will be critical to the success of increasing community use of public school facilities. Local Governments do not have the resources or capacity to manage ongoing costs without a commensurate increase in funding. Full consideration to the costs of planning, building, managing, maintaining and decommissioning must be undertaken in partnership with all relevant stakeholders and must not place an additional cost impost on Local Governments.

Recommendation 3: That State Government provide Local Governments with additional funding for administrative or maintenance costs associated with community use of public school facilities.

Conclusion

Public schools play an important role in the community. This could be further enhanced through increasing community use of their facilities and would provide a cost effective way of assisting to meet increasing demand and need. While there are clear benefits to the community in increasing access to public school facilities the development of appropriate frameworks and supporting policies, as well as ongoing funding to support these arrangements will be essential to ensure successful implementation.

Local Governments, with their knowledge of community need and well-established relationships with grassroot organisations, should be key stakeholders in the development and implementation of policy and implementation of expanded community use of public school facilities.

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