

Health, mental health and COVID-19 response

An unprecedented boost to hospital, health and mental health services in the 2021-22 State Budget illustrates a significant commitment from the State Government to improve the State's stretched health system.

WALGA welcomes the significant funding announcement for health in the 2021-22 Budget. WALGA has long advocated for adequate resourcing of health services, particularly in regional areas, and supports improving health outcomes for Western Australians, recognising the important role that Local Government plays in improving, promoting and protecting the health of communities.

Key announcements include:

- \$3.1 billion allocation to expand the health system, with \$1.3 billion over the next 4 years into improving health infrastructure, major hospital redevelopments and expansions across metropolitan and regional WA;
- \$960 million increase to the WA Health budget to deliver more services;
- \$487 million for COVID-19 response and preparedness, including hotel quarantine and vaccination;
- \$495 million record boost to the Mental Health Commission for mental health investments;
- \$311 million increase for contemporary community accommodation and supports;
- 99 additional staff positions for Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service;
- Additional investment in mental health, alcohol and other drug services;
- Budget to deliver on commitments to improve mental health services in regional WA;
- 332 new hospital beds (223 general beds, 109 mental health beds) opening and supported by 100 new doctors and 500 new nurses;
- \$100 million emergency department support package which includes a multi-pronged health workforce attraction and retention strategy;
- Significant investment to recruit more doctors and nurses and a new recruitment drive; and
- \$1.8 billion set aside to build the new Women and Babies Hospital.

Health Infrastructure investment

The State Government will invest \$1.3 billion over the next four years in health infrastructure, including redevelopment and expansion of a number of hospitals and health services across the State. Major health infrastructure projects include the New Womens and Babies Hospital (\$1.8 billion), Joondalup Health Campus (\$256.7 million), Fremantle Hospital (creation of specialist mental health hub with 100 bed inpatient capacity and refurbishment and redevelopment of hospital buildings), and works at hospitals and health campuses in Meekatharra, Bunbury, Peel, Geraldton, Laverton Hospital, Tom Price and Newman.

Emergency Department Support Package

A targeted \$100 million Emergency Department Support Package will be implemented. This includes \$61.6 million for mental health emergency department supports and at least 50 additional full-time equivalent staff.

Health initiatives to support vulnerable patients and young people

The Budget includes a number of initiatives to support vulnerable patients and young people including an Early Childhood Dental Program, \$10 million towards a partnership project with Sister Kate's for a new 80-bed culturally appropriate health and aged care facility for Aboriginal people, and \$5 million to support implementation of the Sustainable Health Review.

Strengthening health initiatives in the regions

Regional WA communities will benefit from a range of initiatives funded in the State Budget. WALGA has long advocated for additional resourcing for regional health services, and although the focus in the State Budget on additional support for the regional healthcare system is welcome, current workforce constraints that impact the ability to recruit and retain healthcare workers in the regions require further attention.

Initiatives include:

- \$19.7 million to increase the Patient Assisted Travel Scheme subsidy;
- \$10.9 million for the Royal Flying Doctor Service;
- \$4.4 million to the WA Country Health Service, following the transition to the Commonwealth Home Support Program;
- Funding for women's community health services in the Kimberley and Peel regions;
- \$2 million for the WA Country Health Service to continue Regional Renal Support Teams; and
- \$6.9 million towards Pilbara Health Initiatives.

Delivering more mental health support

The record \$495 million additional investment in the Budget results in more than \$1.114 billion allocated in 2021-22 to the Mental Health Commission to boost mental health, alcohol and other drug services. The Budget includes an additional \$311 million for community supported accommodation and supports across Western Australia, including \$135.7 million for delivering outpatient treatment services. The funding boost also includes \$129.9 million towards youth mental health services and initiatives, including 99 additional staff positions for Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service, and a new youth mental health long-term housing and support program in the Perth metropolitan area.

Strengthening mental health initiatives in the regions

The Budget also includes new mental health services for people living in regional communities across the State, including:

- \$17.6 million towards social and emotional well-being services for Aboriginal people in the regions,
- \$14.8 million for a South Hedland Step Up-Step Down facility to provide a community mental health service and short-term residential support;
- \$8.6 million to fund regional Methamphetamine Action Plan initiatives;
- \$9.2 million to extend the Strong Spirit Strong Mind public education program; and
- Extending the Mental Health/Police co-response program into regional areas.

COVID-19 Response and Recovery

The State Government has committed \$9 billion to the COVID-19 response and recovery. Investment includes \$1 billion of additional support provided in the 2021-22 Budget. More than \$1 billion has been spent to date on frontline services including hotel quarantine, COVID-19 testing, medical equipment, the vaccine roll-out and border controls. The Budget includes:

- \$605 million for delivering the COVID-19 vaccine roll-out and to equip frontline police and health services and community health and safety initiatives such as enhanced school cleaning and public transport;
- \$219 million in support to businesses including small business grants and industry assistance; and
- \$182 million in economic recovery and other initiatives.

In 2021-22, an additional \$328 million has already been allocated to fund frontline services in the coming Budget, with a further \$800 million set aside for unforeseen costs, including \$240 million specifically for WA Health. The COVID-19 response to date includes \$2.7 billion committed to support WA businesses and households.