

## Regional WA

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The 2021-22 Budget contained a mixed bag of spending across a range of programs and initiatives in regional WA.

The headline figures included \$4.2 billion in spending under the Royalties for Regions program, and a record \$9.1 billion investment in regional infrastructure (a portion of which will be funded through Royalties for Regions).

The focus was on delivering election commitments and creating jobs in the regions, with many of the announcements related to priority areas such as health, transport, economic development and education.

The investment in regional mental health services and infrastructure is welcome news, given that access to these services has been difficult for many regional communities. Some of the key initiatives contained in the Budget included:

- \$17.6 million towards social and emotional well-being services for Aboriginal people in the Kimberley, Pilbara, Goldfields, Mid-West and South West 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, including expanding Community Alcohol and Other Drug services in the Peel region;
- \$9.2 million to extend the Strong Spirit Strong Mind public education program;
- \$1.7 million for Active Recovery Teams in the Wheatbelt and Mid-West, supporting people in their recovery journey to stay well in the community following a hospital stay; and
- Extending the Mental Health/Police co-response program into regional areas

New funding (\$200 million) was also provided in the Budget to improve the State's agricultural supply chain in the Wheatbelt, Mid-West, Great Southern, and Goldfields Esperance regions.

This funding is important for the efficient movement of freight; however it is not clear whether this will be directed towards road or rail projects. WALGA will be seeking clarification on this issue in coming weeks.

Other initiatives funded in the 2021-22 Budget that will benefit regional communities include:

- \$4.5 billion for road projects and programs in regional WA, including \$194 million for the Regional Road Safety Improvement Program;
- \$19.7 million to enhance the Patient Assisted Travel Scheme, by increasing the accommodation subsidy to \$100 per night and expanding scheme eligibility;
- \$53.7 million for regional school infrastructure;
- \$97.2 million for Government Regional Officers Housing (GROH) stock over 2021-22 to 2024-25;
- Additional \$45 million for the Aboriginal Ranger Program;
- \$20 million for social housing projects in Geraldton, Bunbury and Albany;
- \$12.9 million for regional arts;
- \$5.3 million for Local Governments to improve regional trail infrastructure and support tourism at multiple trails, including the Albany Trails, the Peel Regional Trails and the Harvey Trail Precinct;
- \$8.3 million contribution in 2021-22 for the Commonwealth's Regional Connectivity Program for telecommunications infrastructure for regional communities;
- \$19.8 million to cap the maximum one-way airfare for regional residents flying to Perth at either \$199 or \$299.

The State Government has recognised the need to invest in key services and infrastructure for regional communities, particularly in priority areas such as health and transport. It is pleasing that the Government has followed through on many of its election commitments, and has now committed funding in the Budget.

However, there remains a need for ongoing funding to ensure that regional communities have access to essential services and infrastructure.

WALGA will continue to work with the State Government to ensure that funding is directed to priority areas such as health, housing, transport and telecommunications.