



At Risk Youth Strategy

2022–2027





Acknowledgement of the Traditional Custodians of Western Australia

The Western Australian Government acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of this Country and recognises their continuing connection to their lands, waters, families and communities. We pay our respects to Aboriginal¹ cultures, and to Elders past and present.

We also acknowledge the young and emerging leaders in their communities and support their journeys to becoming role models within their families and communities.

¹ In Western Australia, the term Aboriginal is used in preference to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, in recognition that Aboriginal people are the original inhabitants of Western Australia. Use of the term Aboriginal within this document refers to both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, cultures, children and families.



Minister's Foreword



The McGowan State Government is committed to the vision of all young people in Western Australia (WA) having the support and opportunities to live their lives to their full potential. All young people, regardless of the difficulties they face, have unique strengths and abilities that they can build on to improve their futures.

As part of this commitment, the State Government will deliver a \$58.6 million package to additionally support at risk young people. This includes significant investment in the Home Stretch program for young people who leave State care when they turn 18 years, to maintain support up to the age of 21 years. Also included in the package is support for a new crisis accommodation facility for teenagers experiencing homelessness or who are unable to stay in their family home.

Further to this, the State Government's Beyond 2020 WA Youth Action Plan 2020–2022 (Youth Action Plan) contains initiatives across several portfolios, including mental health and education, to address the priority needs of young people in WA and is linked to work under the Western Australian Recovery Plan.

The At Risk Youth Strategy 2022–2027 (the Strategy) builds on the work of the Youth Action Plan by focusing on the needs of young people with complex problems and multiple vulnerabilities who require extra support to achieve positive life outcomes.

The Strategy aims to strengthen collaboration, partnerships and integration between government agencies and the non-government sector and in this way builds on the positive working relationships formed during the time of the State Government's COVID-19 Youth Taskforce in 2020.

I would like to acknowledge the work of the Department of Communities, the Youth Affairs Council of Western Australia, and the young people involved in the consultations. The State Government is committed to continuously improving long-term, sustainable outcomes for at risk young people through the implementation of this Strategy.

Simone McGurk MLA

Minister for Child Protection; Women's Interests; Prevention of Family and Domestic Violence; Community Services

Director General's Foreword

The Department of Communities (Communities) has a key role in responding to the needs of highly vulnerable young people with multiple and complex problems who are at risk of not transitioning positively into adulthood.

Since its establishment in 2017, Communities has embarked on the development and delivery of a range of targeted initiatives to effect sustainable change and improvement in life outcomes for at risk young people and their families in Western Australia.

The development of the At Risk Youth Strategy 2022–2027 (the Strategy) is one of those targeted initiatives. It seeks to provide long-term, sustainable outcomes for young people who are most at risk of requiring intervention at the tertiary and statutory level, including the child protection, justice, police and acute mental health systems.

The Strategy also defines how Communities and its partner agencies will work together with young people, their families and communities and the community services sector to effect change and improve life outcomes for at risk youth.

The Strategy has been developed from a 'ground up' approach and its development has been strongly informed by extensive consultations with at risk youth, the community services sector, Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations, regional offices, government agencies and peak bodies.

I wish to acknowledge the Youth Affairs Council of Western Australia for engaging and consulting with representatives from services working with at risk youth, and the young people who participated in the consultations. Their lived experiences, ideas and views have been key in informing the development of the Strategy.

The Strategy guides and focusses effort on the planning, delivery and implementation of initiatives, partnerships, services and activities to better respond to the needs of at risk young people and their families.

I am committed to this work and the overall objective of improving life outcomes for all young people.

Mike Rowe
Director General
Department of Communities





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1

Introduction

The Department of Communities (Communities) promotes the safety and wellbeing of all young people in Western Australia (WA) and provides support to vulnerable individuals, families and communities across a number of portfolios including child protection, housing and homelessness, family and domestic violence, youth services, disability and community services.

There are approximately 610,000 children and young people under 18 years old living in WA who make up 23 per cent of the State's population². While most young people are thriving, there are many who face multiple and complex problems in their daily lives. Managing these challenges in addition to the daily life stressors and responsibilities of becoming a young adult, may put them at greater risk of not being able to transition positively into adulthood.

Responding to the diverse needs of at risk young people and their families cannot be achieved by any single government agency or organisation. It requires all levels of government, the community services sector, Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs), peak bodies and

non-government organisations working together to improve their life outcomes.

The At Risk Youth Strategy 2022–2027 (the Strategy) aims to build on the achievements of the At Risk Youth Strategy 2015–2018, through its strengthened partnership approach to drive greater coordination across government and the community services sector to deliver the services and supports that vulnerable young people most need.

The Strategy aligns with key initiatives occurring across government to better support and improve the lives of at risk young people, including the Young People's Mental Health and Alcohol and Other Drug Use: Priorities for Action 2020–2025, the State Disability Strategy 2020–2030, All Paths Lead to a Home: Western Australia's 10-Year Strategy on Homelessness 2020–2030 and the National Agreement on Closing the Gap 2020.

² This statistic refers to the number of children and young people aged 0-17 years in Profile of Children and Young People in WA, March 2021, Western Australian Commissioner for Children and Young People, p4. See <https://www.ccp.wa.gov.au/media/4578/profile-of-children-and-young-people-in-wa-2021-report-final-web-version-february-2021.pdf>





At Risk Youth Strategy 2022–2027

The Strategy responds to the needs of young people aged 10 to 24 years with multiple and complex problems who are at risk of harm and have increased vulnerability of experiencing poor life outcomes. This includes at risk young people with repeated contact with the child protection and youth justice systems, vulnerable Aboriginal young people, young people in out-of-home care (care), care leavers, young parents and young people experiencing homelessness.

The Strategy includes children from the age of 10 years in recognition that early intervention can positively impact on a young person's development and help them to build the life skills they most need. This includes feeling confident to tackle

challenges and developing a strong sense of identity and self-worth. A young person who feels positive about their life and future is more likely to seek help when they need it and be able to build meaningful connections with their family, friends and a sense of belonging within their communities.

There is no universally agreed definition of 'youth' and the age criteria for programs and support for at risk young people can be different across agencies and support services. Developing a more consistent approach to responding to the needs of young people with multiple and complex problems in a cohesive and joined up way is a focus of the Strategy.





3 Key issues for vulnerable young people

The young people who are the focus of this Strategy face factors and challenges that put them at risk of harm and can lead to them experiencing negative life outcomes.

These challenges include issues associated with family dysfunction, child protection concerns, mental health and social and emotional wellbeing concerns, disability and neurodevelopmental issues, parental offending, inadequate housing or homelessness, economic and social disadvantage.

For Aboriginal young people and their families there may be additional challenges associated with living in regional and remote settings, intergenerational trauma and experiencing significant disadvantage across many health and wellbeing indicators.

Issues for at risk young people often co-occur with other complex problems including a young person's alcohol and

drug use, aggressive and anti-social behaviours, offending and risk taking behaviours, self harm, emotional regulation concerns, truancy, disengagement from support services and care arrangement challenges.

Many at risk young people have been exposed to violence, including family and domestic violence and sexual violence. It is estimated that 1 in 6 (1.6 million) Australian women have experienced physical and/or sexual violence by a cohabitating partner since the age of 15 years.³ Additionally, as much as 56 per cent of youth homelessness is linked to family and domestic violence.⁴ There is also emerging research linking adverse experiences in childhood, including exposure to family and domestic violence, physical abuse and exposure to pornography as factors that may contribute to a child or young person engaging in harmful sexual behaviours.⁵

3 Family, domestic and sexual violence in Australia: continuing the national story 2019, Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, Canberra, 2019, quoted in Path to Safety. Western Australia's strategy to reduce family and domestic violence 2020–2030, Department of Communities, p15. <https://www.wa.gov.au/government/publications/western-australias-strategy-reduce-family-and-domestic-violence>

4 Path to Safety. Western Australia's strategy to reduce family and domestic violence 2020–2030, Department of Communities, p17. <https://www.wa.gov.au/system/files/2021-04/fdv-strategy-2020-2030.pdf>

5 The Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, Final Report, Volume 10, 2017, p62. <https://www.childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au/final-report>





To address the urgent need for responding to family and domestic violence, the State Government's Path to Safety: Western Australia's strategy to reduce family and domestic violence 2020–2030 is aimed at targeting the root causes of violence, changing violent behaviours and violence-supporting attitudes in the community with a view to creating long-term safety and healing. This includes improving prevention and early intervention for young people impacted by family and domestic violence and the development of a dedicated Aboriginal Family Safety Strategy.

It is important to recognise the significant and cumulative effect of trauma on a young person from multiple experiences of harm occurring over time. In 2021, Communities completed an At-Risk Youth

Cohort review, which identified that out of all investigable child deaths, 50 per cent of these deaths involved at risk young people. The Ombudsman Western Australia has consistently identified in child death reviews and in the report, Preventing suicide by children and young people 2020, the importance of recognising wellbeing concerns and the assessment of indicators of abuse and neglect and harm arising from cumulative harm for a young person, including young people who have a history of self-harm.

This Strategy seeks to raise awareness of the complexity of trauma and the need for a cross-agency, integrated approach to identify, assess and appropriately respond to young people experiencing indicators of harm which can have an increasing and detrimental impact on their life trajectory.



4 Improving outcomes for at risk young people

All young people, regardless of the difficulties they face, have unique strengths and abilities that they can build on to improve their futures. The Strategy takes a human-centred approach, promoting responses and supports tailored to a young person's diverse and individual needs.

The Strategy provides a high-level framework to support Communities and its partner agencies to work together in a coordinated approach across the key areas of:

- prevention;
- early intervention, targeted support; and
- strong partnerships and better integration between government agencies and the community services sector to improve outcomes for at risk young people.

The Strategy contains four interrelated focus areas with priority outcomes and actions that provide the direction for improving outcomes for at risk young people.

For an overview of the Strategy, see Figure 1. Framework for improving outcomes for at risk young people.

4.1. Communities support for at risk young people and their families

Communities provides an integrated response to the diverse needs of at risk young people across its portfolios of housing, child protection, community services, prevention of family and domestic violence and disability services. It has a statutory responsibility under the *Children and Community Services*





Act 2004 to investigate and assess safety and protection needs for a young person under the age of 18 years who may have experienced abuse or neglect. This includes considering any risk of harm that may have occurred to other family and household members.

Communities delivers services and programs to support and strengthen family functioning, which has a positive impact on the lives of young people, along with services targeted to the needs of at risk young people. The State Government's, *Building Safe and Strong Families, Earlier Intervention and Family Support Strategy 2016*, represents an important step in the way support for vulnerable children, young people and families are designed and delivered in WA. It emphasises earlier intervention, intensive case-

management and coordinated support services to strengthen family capacity to prevent the need for children to enter care arrangements. It prioritises working with individuals and families at greatest risk of a statutory response and the need for co-design approaches when designing new programs and initiatives.

Building on this approach, Communities has embarked on a range of innovative and targeted initiatives to address key identified needs of at risk young people, including support for transitioning from care, youth homelessness and early intervention to divert young people from the youth justice system.



Figure 1. Framework for improving outcomes for at risk young people

Partnerships / Early Intervention / Targeted Initiatives / Services S

Implementat

A multi-agency, partnership approach including government agencies, with lived experience in the development and implementation of effective

Focus Area One:

Partnerships, collaboration and integrated responses

Priority outcome 1

At risk young people with multiple and intersecting issues are identified and responded to through an integrated, cross-agency approach

Priority Actions

- Develop an agreed definition of 'youth' to promote more consistent and integrated approaches to agency responses and supports.
- Review and align existing multi-agency mechanisms to strengthen responses for at risk young people with multiple vulnerabilities.
- Contribute to national approaches to improve outcomes for at risk young people, including the Safe and Supported: The National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2021-2031.
- Identify further opportunities for the earlier identification and assessment of young people at risk of harm and cumulative harm and strengthen responses across agencies to appropriate and timely supports.
- With the intent of Rapid Response legislated, agencies that endorsed the cross-government framework will continue to work together to better respond to the needs of children in care and care leavers. This will include identifying and responding to issues that impact on the timely delivery of services to these children and young people.

Focus Area Two:

Targeted initiatives to improve long term outcomes

Priority outcome 2

At risk young people can access early, timely and targeted interventions to address their priority needs and transition positively into adulthood

Priority Actions

- Develop and implement targeted, culturally and trauma-informed responses to meet the priority needs of at risk young people, including diversion from the youth justice system, homelessness, family safety concerns, and support to transition from care to independent adulthood.
- Implement the expansion of the Home Stretch WA model.
- Contribute to other government agency and sector initiatives to strengthen culturally and trauma-informed responses for at risk young people, including targeted initiatives to address health, mental health and education needs and training and employment pathways.
- Evaluate and monitor initiatives for continuous improvement and the flexibility to respond to new and emerging issues.



Strategic Approach

Support the community services sector, peak bodies, ACCOs and young people to achieve positive outcomes, solutions and improvements for at risk young people.

Focus Area Three:

Strengthening the services system for at risk young people

Priority outcome 3

At risk young people can access trauma-informed, effective services that have capacity to respond to their diverse needs

Priority Actions

- In partnership with young people, identify ways to reduce barriers to seeking help or staying engaged with support services.
- Communities will undertake a phased approach to strengthen its targeted services for at risk young people including reviewing the service mix, service consistency, sector capacity and best practice across the service types, cultural responsiveness and agility to respond to emerging areas of service need. The views of young people with lived experience will inform this work.

Focus Area Four:

Services and supports for Aboriginal young people

Priority outcome 4

Aboriginal at risk young people have access to culturally responsive, place-based supports that are culturally safe and secure

Priority Actions

- Support Aboriginal young people, ACCOs, Elders and communities to identify responses to improve outcomes for at risk young people and to lead the co-design of local supports and services.
- Work in partnership with ACCOs and, in line with the National Agreement on Closing the Gap 2020, identify opportunities to strengthen the role of ACCOs in delivering at risk youth services.
- Support Aboriginal youth engagement and decision making e.g. the Kimberley Empowered Youth Network, which facilitates Aboriginal young people's input into government and non-government supports and services. Learnings from the Network will inform improved engagement with young people in other regions of WA.





5 Focus Areas

To achieve improved outcomes for at risk young people, work will be developed and progressed across four interrelated focus areas. The priority actions in each focus area provide high-level guidance for the future development of actions, activities and deliverables over the duration of the Strategy.

The development of the focus areas and priority actions was informed by consultations with key stakeholders, including the views and ideas of young people with lived experience of at risk youth issues.

Focus area one: Partnerships, collaboration and integrated responses

Priority Outcome 1 - At risk young people with multiple and intersecting issues are identified and responded to through an integrated, cross-agency approach.

During the consultations, young people spoke of their frustrations at trying to navigate a complex system of supports across a range of agencies, often with different eligibility criteria, and having to retell their stories multiple times. A fragmented, siloed approach to providing services and supports increases the risk

of young people with critical needs falling through the cracks and not getting the help they most need.

Most at risk young people will have contact with multiple agencies, services and organisations over their lifespan. It is critical that all levels of government, non-government agencies and peak bodies work together to build a more young person focused, sustainable and agile system of responses and supports; that are easy to navigate and can adapt to multiple, changing and emerging needs. The development of a more integrated approach to support at risk young people with multiple and intersecting issues must be informed by young people with lived experience.





What we have done

- **Strengthened information sharing** provisions in the *Children and Community Services Act 2004* to facilitate better integrated agency work.
- Built mechanisms and approaches to achieve effective cross-sector work. This includes the **COVID-19 Youth Taskforce**, which provided a coordinated response to the health, mental health, accommodation and other needs of at risk young people during the pandemic.
- Supported the CREATE Foundation to rework the **Charter of Rights for Children and Young People in Care**, led by the CREATE Young Consultants group.
- **Established a co-located Senior Child Protection Worker at Banksia Hill Detention Centre** to improve service delivery, information sharing and planning for young people in detention.
- **Legislated Rapid Response** through amendments to Section 22 of the *Children and Community Services Act 2004*. Rapid Response is a cross-government framework that supports children in care, children on a special guardianship order and children who have left care who qualify for assistance to be provided with the services they need until they turn 25 years of age.

Priority actions going forward

- Develop an agreed definition of 'youth' to promote more consistent and integrated approaches to agency responses and supports.
- Review and align existing multi-agency mechanisms to strengthen responses for at risk young people with multiple vulnerabilities.
- Contribute to national approaches to improve outcomes for at risk young people, including Safe and Supported: The National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2021–2031.
- Identify further opportunities for the earlier identification and assessment of young people at risk of harm and cumulative harm and strengthen responses across agencies to appropriate and timely supports.
- With the intent of Rapid Response legislated, agencies that endorsed the cross-government framework will continue to work together to better respond to the needs of children in care and care leavers. This will include identifying and responding to issues that impact on the timely delivery of services to these children and young people.





Focus area two: Targeted initiatives to improve long term outcomes

Priority Outcome 2 - At risk young people can access early, timely and targeted interventions to address their priority needs and transition positively into adulthood.

What we have done

- Implemented **Target 120** which provides holistic and coordinated supports for young people and their families with complex needs at risk of entering the justice system.
- **The Home Stretch WA trial** supports young people in care up to 21 years who are at risk of homelessness and includes enhanced supports for positive transitioning from care.
- The **Volunteer Mentor Program** which provides children and young people 9–17 years in care with an adult role model who engages them in recreational activities, goal setting, emotional support and development of life skills.
- **Youth Supported Accommodation Assistance Program** which provides crisis and transitional accommodation for young people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.
- **Young People with Exceptionally Complex Needs** program that coordinates services for young people with complex, multiple needs, including mental health, acquired brain injury, intellectual disability/autism, alcohol and other drug usage.
- **Regional Intensive Support Coordination Team** supports staff working with people in complex and critical situations, including facilitating connections to long-term support structures and programs.

The consultations highlighted the need for coordinated, targeted responses to support vulnerable young people at risk of more acute experiences of harm. Targeted initiatives and programs provide holistic, intensive and early intervention responses for specific cohorts of young people to address their complex needs and prevent the development of entrenched issues such as adult homelessness, long term unemployment, intergenerational child protection concerns and involvement with the adult justice system.

Priority actions going forward

- Develop and implement targeted, culturally and trauma-informed responses to meet the priority needs of at risk young people, including diversion from the youth justice system, homelessness, family safety concerns and support to transition from care to independent adulthood.
- Implement the expansion of the Home Stretch WA model.
- Contribute to other government agency and sector initiatives to strengthen culturally and trauma-informed responses for at risk young people, including targeted initiatives to address health, mental health and education needs and training and employment pathways.
- Evaluate and monitor initiatives for continuous improvement and the flexibility to respond to new and emerging issues.





Focus area three:

Strengthening the services system for at risk young people

Priority Outcome 3 - At risk young people can access trauma-informed, effective services that have capacity to respond to their diverse needs.

At risk young people, their carers and families, commonly access services and supports across multiple agencies and levels of government from universal to secondary and tertiary services, including income support, education, health, child protection and mental health services.

The consultations highlighted that services and supports must be trauma-informed, understand issues impacting at risk young people and have capacity to respond to the diversity of their needs, including young people with disability and young people who identify as LGBTIQ+ and be culturally responsive for Aboriginal young people and young people from a culturally and linguistically diverse background.

Communities, in partnership with the community services sector, deliver a range of services that at risk young people and their families access for support, including Child Sexual Abuse Therapeutic Services, Indigenous Healing Services, housing and homelessness services, family and domestic violence supports, parenting support and Aboriginal In-Home Support Services.

Communities in partnership with the community services sector, ACCOs and local government authorities deliver services in metropolitan and regional areas that are targeted to the needs of at risk young people. The services can be broadly described as providing prevention and diversion through recreation activities via centre-based and outreach approaches, Night Patrols in the Kimberley, youth counselling and a service to address the safety of unsupervised young people in the inner-City of Perth on Friday and Saturday nights.

Critical to providing effective services for at risk young people is responding to the issues raised by young people in the consultations including, what they value in the services they use and addressing any barriers to service engagement, such as feelings of shame or stigma associated with accessing support.

What we have done

- **Consulted with young people and representatives from at risk youth services** to contribute to the development of the Strategy. This also provides rich information to guide future work to strengthen the services system for at risk young people.
- **Deliver support services**
Communities, in partnership with the community services sector, deliver a range of support services that at risk young people and their families can access to respond to their diverse needs and improve their life outcomes.
- **Deliver targeted support services**
Communities, in partnership with the community services sector, ACCOs and local government authorities, deliver services specifically targeted to the needs of at risk young people and their families.

Priority actions going forward

- In partnership with young people, identify ways to reduce barriers to seeking help or staying engaged with support services.
- Communities will undertake a phased approach to strengthening its targeted services for at risk young people including reviewing the service mix, service consistency, sector capacity and best practice across the service types, cultural responsiveness and agility to respond to emerging areas of service need. The views of young people with lived experience will inform this work.

Focus area four: Services and supports for Aboriginal young people

Priority Outcome 4 - Aboriginal at risk young people have access to culturally responsive, place-based supports that are culturally safe and secure.

The consultations highlighted the need for place-based, culturally responsive and secure services tailored to the diverse needs of vulnerable Aboriginal young people. Stakeholders highlighted the importance of culture as a protective factor and raised concerns about the impact on Aboriginal young people of having to move from their Country and communities to Perth or other major service centres when

local services and programs were not available. Removing young people from Country can significantly compound existing intergenerational trauma and increase the risk of them becoming disconnected from their community, culture and identity.

Aboriginal leadership and self-determination is critical in the design and ongoing implementation of locally-based supports and services to effectively meet the diverse needs of Aboriginal at risk young people in a culturally responsive, safe and secure way.

This includes Aboriginal expertise and leadership in identifying structural and other barriers to Aboriginal young people's engagement with mainstream services and working together to improve and strengthen cultural competency.

What we have done

- Extended the **Aboriginal Community Connectors Program** in 2021–2022 across 13 WA communities to assist local responses to strengthen personal and community safety.
- State Government has committed \$1.3 million to the **Aboriginal Representative Organisations Pilot** to support Aboriginal children in care establish strong connections to family, culture, community and Country.
- Communities is finalising a **10 year ACCO Strategy**, which will focus on three key pillars: cultural safety and governance; respectful partnerships; and economic opportunities. It is anticipated the ACCO Strategy and Implementation Plan One will be released in 2022.
- Commenced the **Aboriginal Family Led Decision Making Pilot** which supports the right to self-determination by Aboriginal families on decisions to keep their children and young people safe and connected to their communities.
- Commenced development of the **Aboriginal Family Safety Strategy** which is aimed at reducing violence and abuse against Aboriginal women and children.
- Commenced development of the **10-Year Roadmap to Reduce the Number of Aboriginal Children in Care** to identify, develop and apply culturally appropriate and long-term solutions focused on keeping Aboriginal children safe and well with their families.
- Implemented the **Thrive program** to provide holistic support for Aboriginal housing and public housing clients.
- Implemented the **Aboriginal In-home Support Service** program which is an intensive in-home intervention to keep Aboriginal children and young people safely at home with family and connected to Country, culture and community.

Priority actions going forward

- Support Aboriginal young people, ACCOs, Elders and communities to identify responses to improve outcomes for at risk young people and to lead the co-design of local supports and services.
- Work in partnership with ACCOs and, in line with the National Agreement on Closing the Gap 2020, identify opportunities to strengthen the role of ACCOs in delivering at risk youth services.
- Support Aboriginal youth engagement and decision making e.g. the Kimberley Empowered Youth Network, which facilitates Aboriginal young people's input into government and non-government supports and services. Learnings from the Network will inform improved engagement with young people in other regions of WA.





6 Development of the Strategy

The Strategy was developed using an evidence-based approach that included lessons learnt from related initiatives and stakeholder engagement, data analysis, literature scans of research reports, academic papers and government publications, comparative analysis of other jurisdiction's service systems and evaluations of programs for at risk young people.

The Strategy is underpinned by a public health approach to respond to the needs of at risk young people and their families across prevention, earlier intervention and the provision of effective supports to improve long-term and sustainable outcomes. Key to improving life outcomes for at risk young people and their families is access to the right supports at the right time for as long as support is needed.

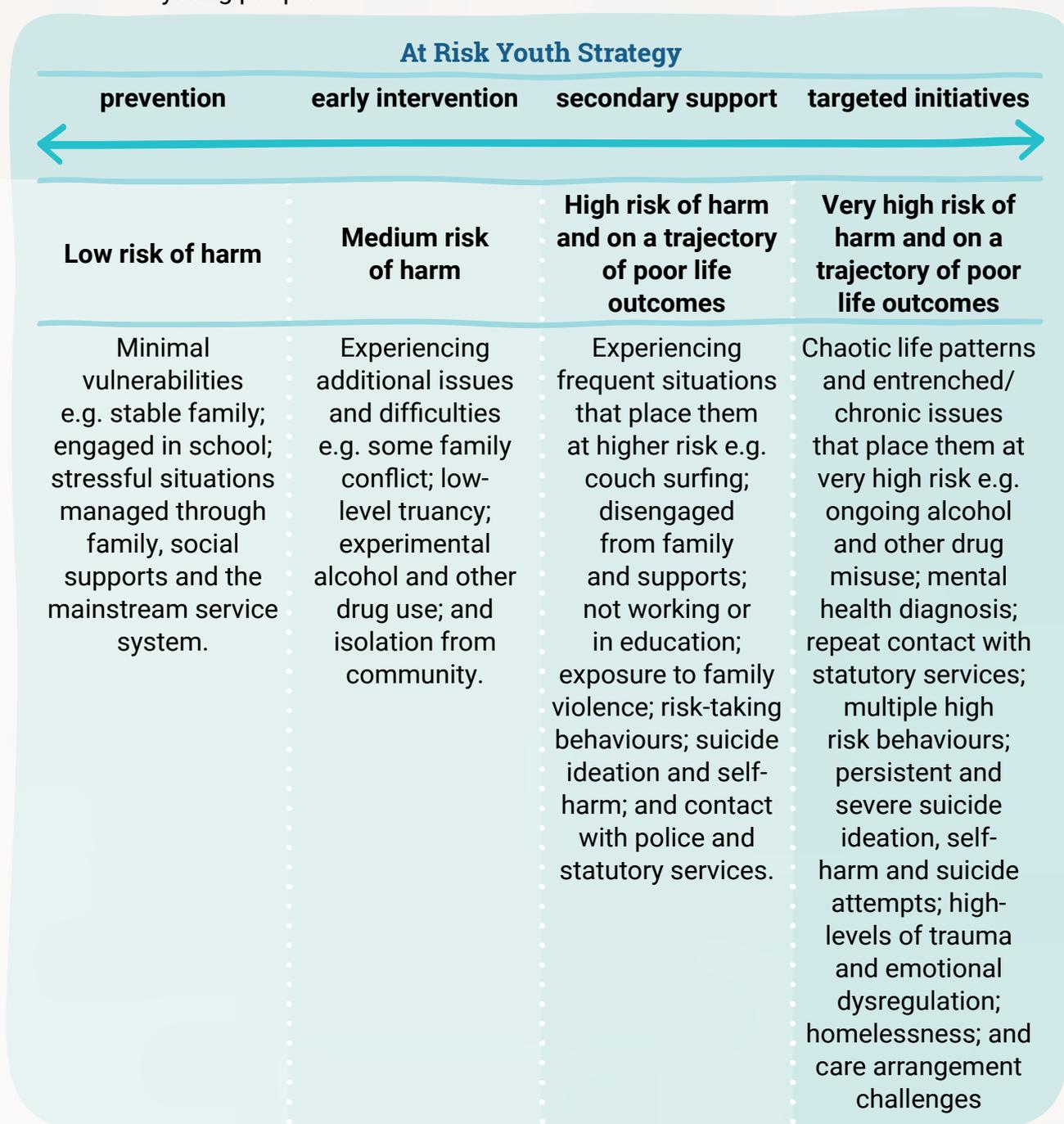
6.1 The right supports at the right time

The Strategy focusses on providing earlier identification and supports for young people whose problems and behaviours can best be described as being at medium to very high risk of harm (see Figure 2). These young people may have an increased risk of suicide and self-harm or engaging in high-risk behaviours that could lead to serious or permanent injury or death.

In describing a staged or continuum approach, it is understood that at risk young people's problems and behaviours do not fit neatly into any one box. Young people's circumstances can change and they may move between medium and very high risk in a short space of time where they will need more intensive, coordinated responses for a longer time. In addition, young people can experience crisis at any time across the continuum. Those in crisis and at very high risk are more likely to require a statutory or tertiary response.



Figure 2. The Strategy’s alignment with a continuum approach to risk of harm for young people⁶



⁶ Risk can be viewed as a fluid and changing continuum, see Working with Vulnerable Youth: Key Concepts and Principles, 2011, Government of South Australia and Development of a policy framework for Victoria’s vulnerable young people, 2008, Victorian Government.



6.2 Consultations

Stakeholder consultations occurred over a 10-month period with at risk young people, the community services sector, ACCOs, the Commissioner for Children and Young People, government agencies and peak bodies. A background paper with consultation questions was developed to guide the discussions and support the consistent capture of qualitative data across the consultations.

The Youth Affairs Council of Western Australia (YACWA), as the peak non-government youth organisation in WA, was engaged by Communities to consult with young people with lived experience of the services system from metropolitan and regional locations and to run workshops with the at risk youth services sector.⁷

Approximately 100 community service organisations and 70 groups including State Government agencies were consulted as part of the development of the Strategy.

The ideas, views, information and first-hand experiences of young people and representatives from the youth services sector has provided an essential evidence layer to inform the development of the Strategy.

6.3 What young people told us

Overall, young people said that what they need is a less crisis driven, reactive service system focused on short-term solutions. They want activities and education, employment and training pathways that engage and empower them to reach their full potential.

Young people spoke about what they most needed in the services they used including:

Relationships

Genuine, long-term relationships with youth workers made them feel valued and increased the likelihood of them remaining engaged with the service.

Decision making

Young people are best placed to describe their own situation and needs. They want to be heard and actively involved in the planning decisions that affect them.

Flexibility

Flexible service approaches that are able to meet basic needs such as food and showers help a young person to become service-ready and are more likely to result in positive engagement.

⁷ In December 2018, YACWA reported on the findings from consultations with 40 at risk young people aged between 10 and 24 years old and organisational representatives from the youth services sector. The young people who participated had lived experience of the services system and were identified by service providers who they had an enduring relationship with which provided security and support for the consultation process. In 2021, a review of the consultation findings found that the issues identified in the discussions remained relevant and critical to improving outcomes for at risk young people.

Reduce Stigma

Some young people spoke of feelings of shame at having to access services and felt judged by the wider community who did not understand the complex and difficult situations they faced in their lives.

Inclusion

Young people valued services that could respond effectively and sensitively to diversity, both in age and specific populations. Some young people felt there was a lack of LGBTIQ+ friendly services, especially in supported accommodation and that they did not always feel safe using mainstream services.

6.4 What we heard from at risk youth services

The services highlighted the importance of adequate capacity to enable them to build a service system that responds to the diverse and complex needs of at risk young people. They also raised professional development needs, training,

specific tools and more sustainable and flexible funding arrangements that promote adaptive, human-centred service delivery. They supported the development of a shared set of service standards to promote quality, consistency and clear expectations of service delivery across at risk youth services.

Other suggestions included:

- Greater collaboration and use of information sharing between agencies and organisations, including hospitals, police, and mental health services to improve responses for at risk young people and prevent re-traumatisation from having to re-tell their stories.
- The need for outcome measures to be embedded in service contracts to provide an accurate picture of the work being done and the progress/change being made by a young person engaged with a service.





Responding to the needs of Aboriginal young people

The Strategy aims to improve outcomes for vulnerable Aboriginal young people with complex problems impacting on their health, mental health and wellbeing. For many Aboriginal young people, their families and communities are coping with disproportionate levels of social, economic, and health disadvantages along with the continuing impacts of colonisation, grief and intergenerational trauma related to experiences of government legislation, policies and practices.

The over-representation of Aboriginal young people in the child protection and youth justice system is a key driver for strengthening collaboration across sectors, with priority focus required to develop formal partnerships and shared decision making with Aboriginal people and communities. This will support the delivery of culturally secure, targeted interventions and responses to improve whole-of-life outcomes for at risk Aboriginal young people.

Responding to the needs of Aboriginal young people and their families requires a holistic approach and an understanding of social and emotional wellbeing for Aboriginal people and communities. The term social and emotional wellbeing is used by many

Aboriginal people to describe mental, physical and spiritual health, and recognises the importance of young people's connection to land, culture, family, community, spirituality and ancestry.⁸

7.1 National Agreement on Closing the Gap 2020

On the 27 July 2020, the National Agreement on Closing the Gap 2020 (the Agreement) was announced to 'overcome the entrenched inequality faced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people so that their life outcomes are equal to all Australians.'⁹

Communities has a responsibility across the four Priority Reform Areas in the Agreement as the lead, co-lead or support agency for a number of socio-economic targets. These include targets to increase safety for Aboriginal families and households and to reduce the over-representation of Aboriginal children in the criminal justice and out-of-home care systems.

The Agreement aims to strengthen the early childhood education and care, housing, disability and health community sectors to deliver services by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations, particularly community-controlled organisations.

8 National Strategic Framework for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People's Mental Health and Social and Emotional Wellbeing, 2017–2023, Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, Canberra, 2017, https://www.niaa.gov.au/sites/default/files/publications/mhsewb-framework_0.pdf

9 The National Agreement on Closing the Gap 2020, <https://www.closingthegap.gov.au/national-agreement-closing-the-gap>



8 A whole of community approach

Identifying and responding to the needs of at risk young people across their life span requires all levels of government, the community services sector, non-government bodies and organisations to understand the experiences of at risk young people, the underlying trauma that can drive behaviours and the need to work together to develop a consistent and shared approach to improve life outcomes.

Along with government agencies that deliver services and responses for at risk young people, such as health, mental health, education, alcohol and substance use and suicide prevention, valuable work is undertaken by the non-government sector, bodies and organisations. This includes the Western Australian Council of Social Services, YACWA, CREATE Foundation, the Commissioner for Children and Young People, the Ombudsman Western Australia, Telethon Kids Institute and the Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care.

The Strategy has been developed to align and support the intersecting work of

National and State agencies responding to the needs of at risk young people, their families and communities, including the following:

National

National Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Child Sexual Abuse (2021–2030), Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet

National Agreement on Closing the Gap 2020, Coalition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Organisations and the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet

Safe and Supported: The National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2021–2031, Commonwealth of Australia (Department of Social Services)

National Framework for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People's Mental Health and Social and Emotional Wellbeing, 2017–2023, Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet

State

Aboriginal Empowerment Strategy
2021–2029, Department of the Premier
and Cabinet

Closing the Gap Jurisdictional
Implementation Plan, Western Australia,
Department of the Premier and Cabinet

Young People’s Mental Health and Alcohol
and Other Drug Use: Priorities for Action
2020–2025, Mental Health Commission

Kimberley Juvenile Justice Strategy,
Department of Justice, Western Australia

Path to Safety. Western Australia’s strategy
to reduce family and domestic violence
2020–2030, Department of Communities

All Paths Lead to a Home: Western
Australia’s 10-Year Strategy on
Homelessness 2020–2030, Department
of Communities

The State Disability Strategy 2020–2030,
Department of Communities

Western Australian Suicide Prevention
Framework and Action Plan 2021–2025,
Mental Health Commission

Beyond 2020 WA Youth Action Plan
2020–22, Department of Communities

Independent Commissions

Ombudsman WA Own Motion Investigation
into Youth Suicide 2020

WA State Coroner’s Inquest into the deaths
of 13 children and young persons in the
Kimberley Regions of Western Australia,
WA State Coroner

Learnings from the message stick: the
report of the Inquiry into Aboriginal youth
suicide in remote areas, 2016, Education
and Health Standing Committee

Commissioner for Children and Young
People wellbeing indicators

2017 Royal Commission into Institutional
Responses to Child Sexual Abuse,
Final Report

Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse,
Neglect and Exploitation of People with
Disability, established 2019 (currently
in progress)

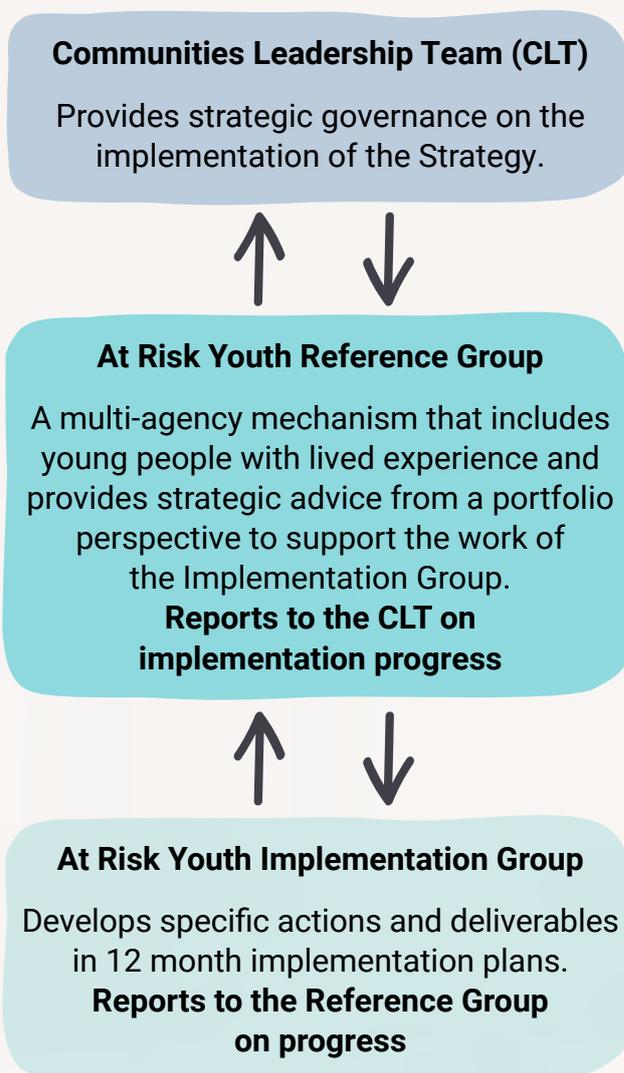


9 Governance

Achieving the vision and objectives of the Strategy requires strong governance and effective, well-planned and coordinated implementation.

Governance on the implementation of the Strategy will be provided by Communities Leadership Team, comprised of Senior Executive members with portfolio responsibilities across the department, including; child protection, community services, disability services, homelessness, youth and the prevention of family and domestic violence.

Figure 3. Strategy governance and implementation mechanisms





10

Implementation

The implementation of the Strategy will adopt a:

- human-centred approach ensuring inclusion of at risk young people in the design and development of outcomes, solutions and improvements;
- partnership approach to ensuring relevant stakeholders are included and have a voice and guide the implementation together;
- gradual and iterative approach to ensure continuous learning, responsiveness and improvement; and
- evaluative approach to ensure effectiveness, relevance and quality of outcomes and responses, and insights for future directions.

10.1 Implementation mechanisms

The implementation of the Strategy will be led by a multi-agency At Risk Youth Reference Group and an At Risk Youth Implementation Group (Implementation Group), whose membership will include young people representatives. The inclusion of young people with lived experience of the issues impacting at risk young people will ensure the actions, activities and deliverables under the Strategy best meet the needs of vulnerable young people.



11

How will we know if the Strategy is working?

An important part of the Implementation Group's work will be developing an Evaluation Framework to measure if the actions they develop under the Strategy are achieving real and sustained improvements for at risk young people.

To assist with this work, the Implementation Group will consider existing tools such as the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child and Family Services Evaluation Readiness Toolkit¹⁰ and the Outcomes Measurement Framework WA 2019¹¹, along with other relevant tools developed by the community services or government sector.



10 The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child and Family Services Evaluation Readiness Toolkit, Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care, 2019, https://www.snaicc.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/1070_SNAICC-7-Steps-Evaluation-Toolkit-2019.pdf?mc_cid=4a39d4ed62&mc_eid=ad2702ff40

11 Outcomes Measurement Framework WA 2019, Western Australian Council of Social Services, <https://wacoss.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/OMFW-illustrative-framework-FINAL.pdf>

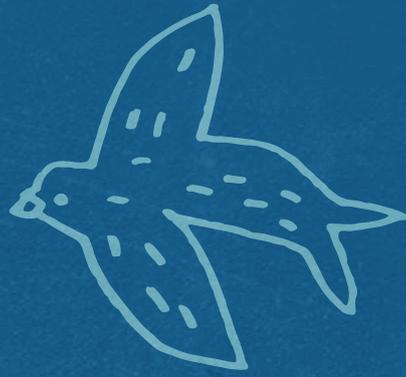


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What happens next?

Communities, working with its partner agencies, will establish the At Risk Youth Reference Group and the At Risk Youth Implementation Group to lead and progress work under the Strategy, including the development of phased Action Plans.







Department of Communities

5 Newman Court, Fremantle 6160
PO Address: Locked Bag 5000, Fremantle 6959

Telephone: 08 6217 6888

Country callers: 1800 176 888

Email: enquiries@communities.wa.gov.au

Website: www.communities.wa.gov.au

Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS)

Telephone: 13 14 50

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