

IMPROVING THE ODDS

FOR WA'S VULNERABLE CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE



Commissioner for Children and Young People
Western Australia



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Our Vision

That all children and young people are heard, are healthy and safe, reach their potential and are welcomed as valued members of the community and in doing so we build a brighter future for the whole community



UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

Article 3: The best interests of children must be taken into account in all decisions that affect them.

Article 12: Children have the right to have their opinions heard, and should be supported to give their views in a way that is best for them.

Article 26: Children have the right to assistance from government

The Act

Children and young people are entitled to live in a caring and nurturing environment and to be protected from harm and exploitation

The contributions made by children and young people to the community should be recognised for their value and merit

The views of children and young people on all matters affecting them should be given serious consideration and taken into account

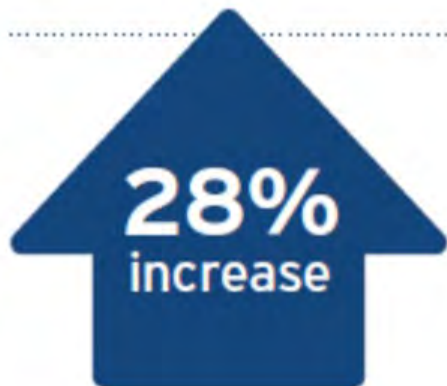
Parents, families and communities have the primary role in safeguarding and promoting the wellbeing of their children and young people and should be supported in carrying out their role.





Approximately
593,000

children and young people live in Western Australia and make up **23 per cent** of the state's population.



In the last 10 years, there has been a 28 per cent increase in the number of children aged 0 to 5 years living in WA.

Poverty line



Around
44,000

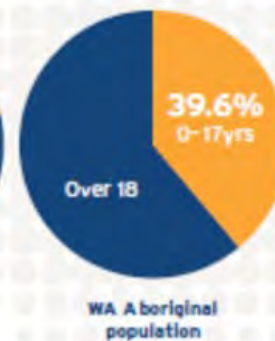
children and young people are living below the poverty line in WA.

Aboriginal children and young people

There are about **40,000** Aboriginal children and young people aged under 18 years living in WA. Children and young people aged under 18 years make up **39.6 per cent** of the total WA Aboriginal population.



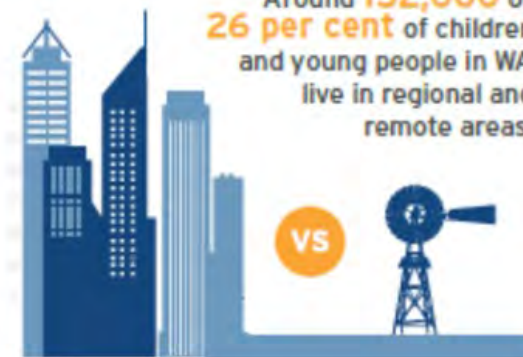
WA non-Aboriginal population



WA Aboriginal population



There were **34,768** births registered in WA during 2017.



Around **152,000** or **26 per cent** of children and young people in WA live in regional and remote areas.

VS

The number of WA children and young people is projected to increase by **91 per cent** to over **1.2 million** by 2058.



WAS VULNERABLE CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

Children with **disability** are
THREE TIMES
more likely to experience
maltreatment than children
without disability

1/5 of children are
developmentally
vulnerable
at the start of their first
year of full-time school

7% of children and
young people are
living in
poverty

732
children and young
people are under youth
justice supervision
(community and detention)
on an average day

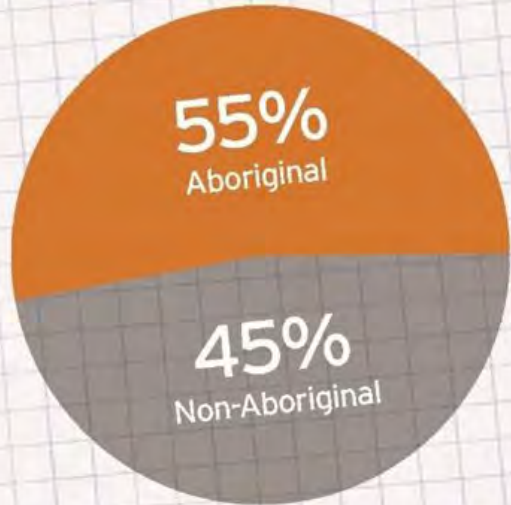


1 IN 5
STUDENTS IS
DISENGAGED
from school at
some level



5,029

children and young people are in
out-of-home care



Over 600

young people (15 to 24 years)
presented to **homelessness**
agencies in 2015-16



SUICIDE IS THE LEADING CAUSE OF DEATH

for children and young people aged
between 13 and 17 years

LGBTI young
people are
SIX TIMES
more likely to
attempt suicide
than their peers of
a similar age

Aboriginal children and
young people are almost
TEN TIMES
more likely to die
by suicide than
non-Aboriginal children
and young people



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“

It's like a big trap...we end up getting in trouble by the law and then we just go to prison, and we just get trapped, it's like a big circle trap. That's how it's been in my life personally. I think it's like that for hundreds of kids out there... It's never going to change unless they do something about it.

”



Poverty

Poverty experienced in first 5 years of life is especially harmful to development

Intervention in early years essential to break the cycle

Even at a young age, children appear to be aware of poverty and the stigma of being 'poor' – many express frustration, anger and worry.



7% of children and young people are **living in poverty**

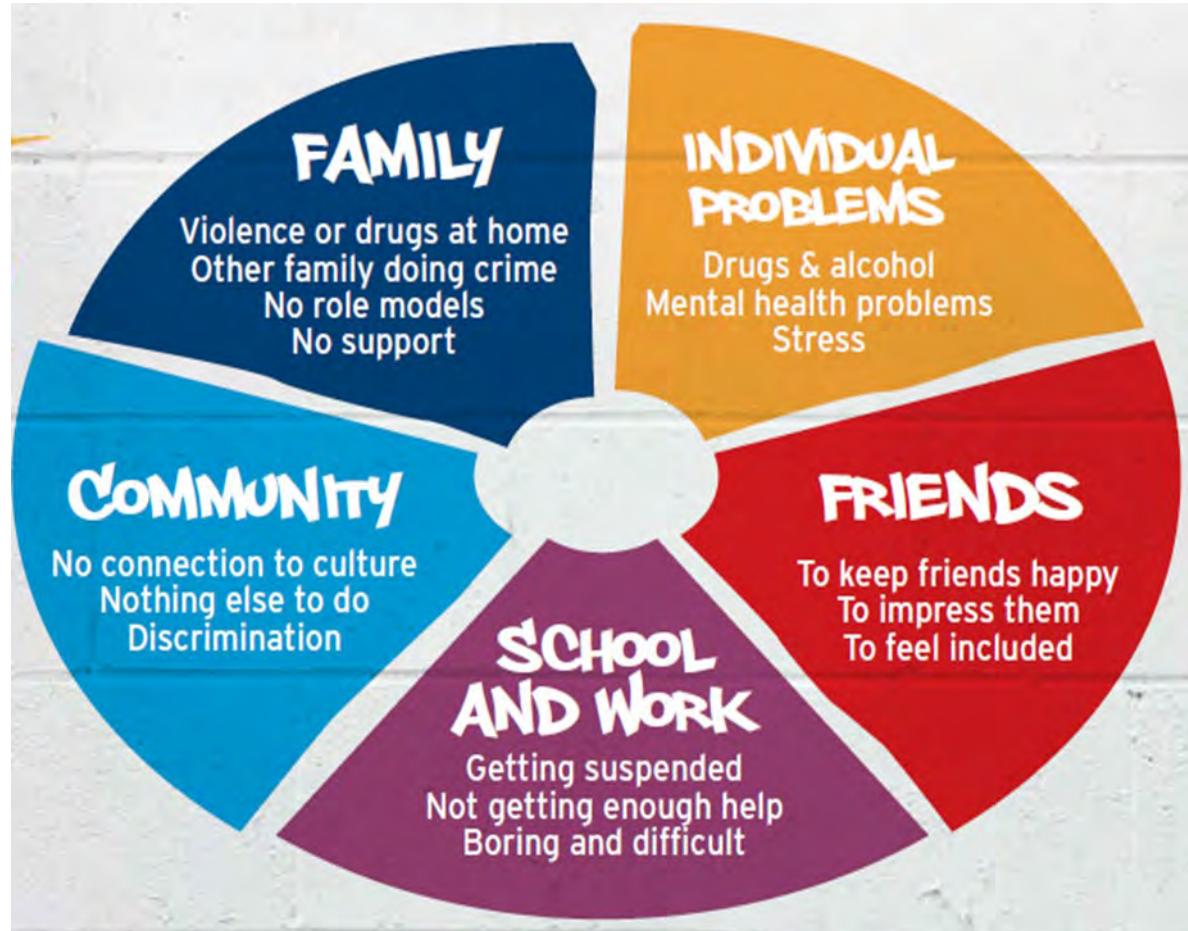
Youth justice



732

children and young people are under youth justice supervision (community and detention) on an average day





Youth justice

“I want a life for myself and I want a job when I get out of {Banksia Hill} cos I’m sick of it.”

Like, this life we live is not sustainable, if you get what I mean. Like, we can’t keep going the way we go. You keep on doing crime, cos this is the way we end up, in here.”



1/5

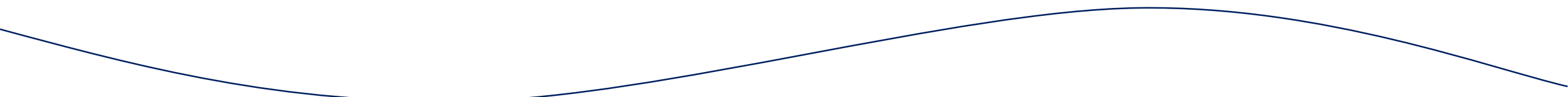
**of children are
developmentally
vulnerable**

at the start of their first
year of full-time school

Areas of concern:

Children experiencing
disadvantage are less likely
to attend formal care

More than 20 per cent of
children are developmentally
vulnerable when they
start school



Key factors

Having friends and positive relationships with other students.

Families that are involved and interested.

Teachers who have a genuine interest in student wellbeing and future.



Over 600

young people (15 to 24 years)
presented to **homelessness**
agencies in 2015-16



Pathways to homelessness:

Breakdown in family or care placements

Being in unsafe situation

Family having no stable accommodation

Loss of parent/s

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Our Children Can't Wait

Inquiry in 2011, review 2015

Significant gaps remain

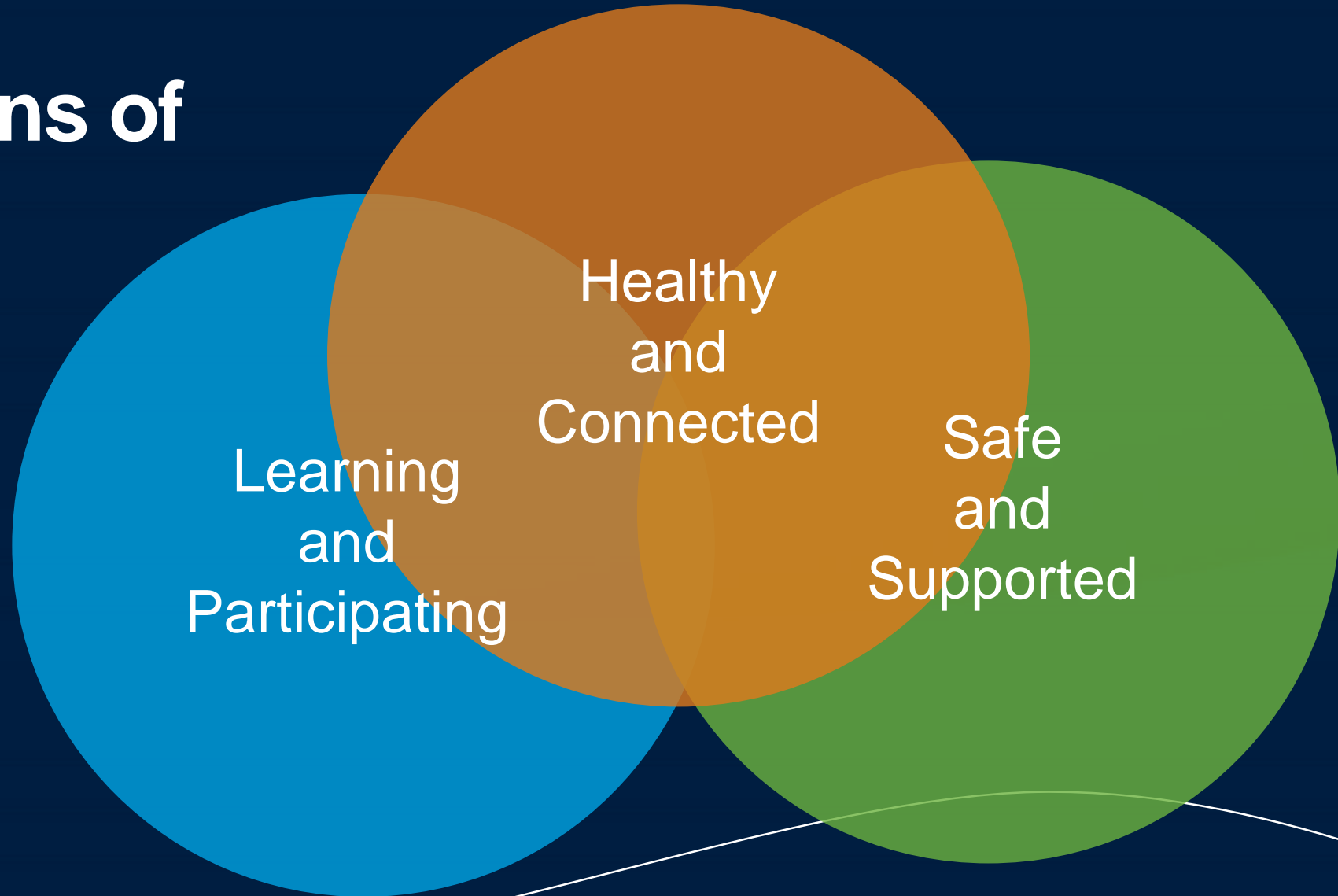
Reluctance to acknowledge that very young children can & do experience mental health issues

Resourcing initiatives of the *Mental Health, Alcohol & Other Drug Services Plan 2015-2015*



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Foundations of wellbeing





Learning and Participating

- ✓ Reading and play
- ✓ Access to education
- ✓ High school attendance
- ✓ Learning support
- ✓ Developing independence
- ✓ Sense of belonging

Healthy
and
Connected

Safe
and
Supported



Learning and Participating

- ✓ Reading and play
- ✓ Access to education
- ✓ High school attendance
- ✓ Learning support
- ✓ Developing independence
- ✓ Sense of belonging

Healthy and Connected

Safe and Supported

- ✓ Safe relationships
- ✓ Adequate and stable housing
- ✓ Sufficient food and clothing
- ✓ Safe in the home
- ✓ Safe in the community
- ✓ Safe behaviours



Learning and Participating

- ✓ Reading and play
- ✓ Access to education
- ✓ High school attendance
- ✓ Learning support
- ✓ Developing independence
- ✓ Sense of belonging

Healthy and Connected

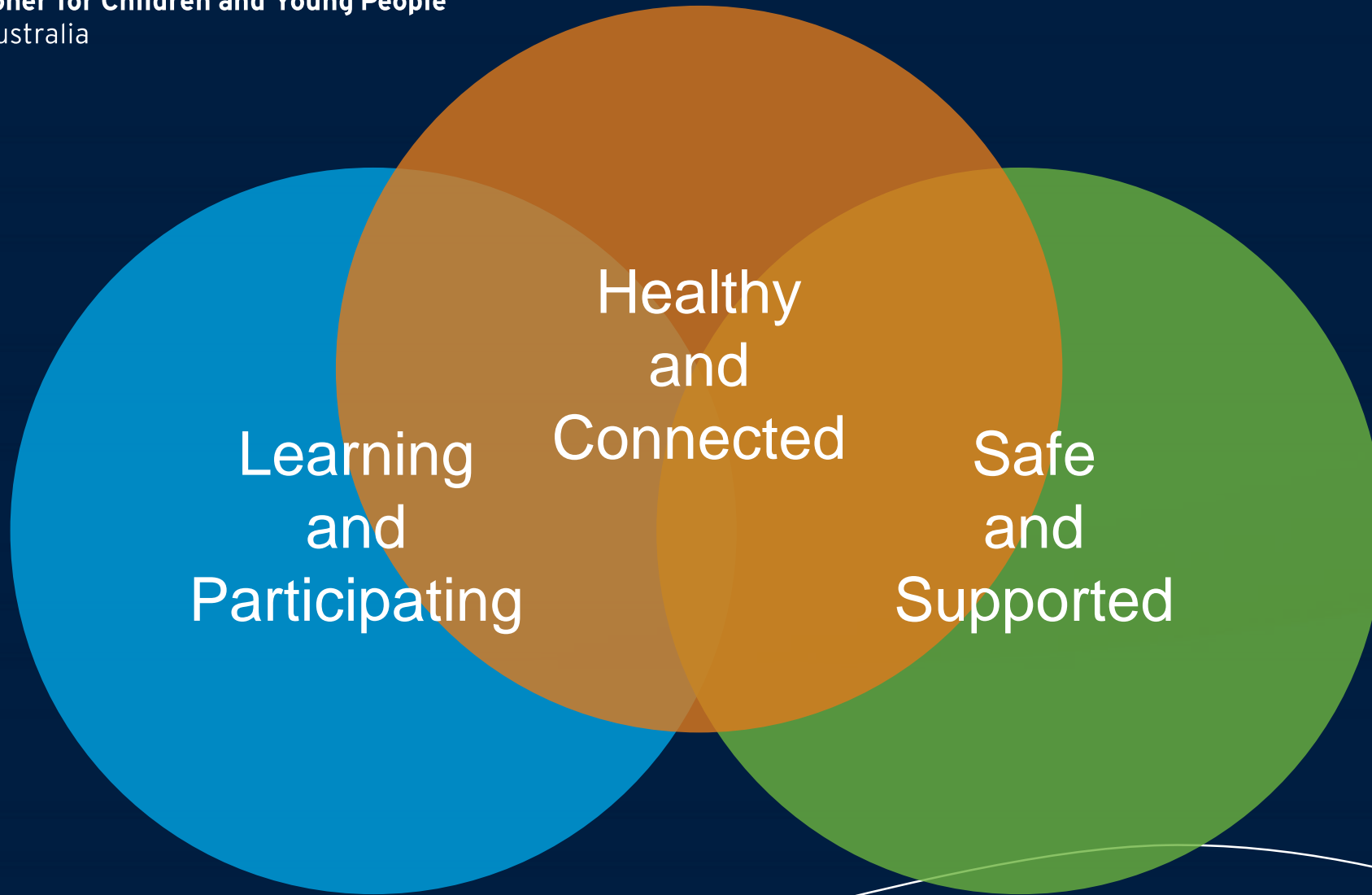
- ✓ Healthy pregnancy
- ✓ Early identifications of issues
- ✓ Adequate exercise and diet
- ✓ Connection to the community
- ✓ Good mental health
- ✓ Healthy behaviours

Safe and Supported

- ✓ Safe relationships
- ✓ Adequate and stable housing
- ✓ Sufficient food and clothing
- ✓ Safe in the home
- ✓ Safe in the community
- ✓ Safe behaviours



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“

For me to be healthy I have to be happy, feel safe, feel comfortable, enjoy the people that I'm around... to be healthy is not only not to be sick.

”



Developmental drivers for childhood wellbeing

- Biology
- Expectations
- Opportunities





Biology

Genes play a significant role, but they do not determine development and future pathways.

Children's environments, relationships and experiences influence wellbeing.

Expectations

Development is prompted by carer's expectations of children to achieve well and take responsibility.

Expectations also come from teachers, peers and extended family.





Opportunities

Engaging with responsive caregivers and to participate in stimulating activities prompts socio-emotional and brain development.

Opportunities to live in a safe and loving environment and have access to education, health care and employment are fundamental.

Vulnerability

Key speakers and roundtables. Policy and service delivery discussion:

- Prioritising children
- Poverty
- Trauma
- Aboriginal disadvantage
- Early intervention



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VULNERABILITY
SERIES

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Recommendation 1

Establish a whole-of-government Child Wellbeing Strategy.

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Recommendation 2

Develop and implement
Child Impact Assessment
tool.

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Recommendation 3

Independent oversight of services that provide support to children and young people.

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Recommendation 4

Enable Aboriginal-led solutions.

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Recommendation 5

Investigate, resource and evaluate models to build community capacity to support children's wellbeing.

“

I do think that I was vulnerable. And in a certain sense I do think I'm still vulnerable...I was out there by myself and I was naked to the world.

I was desperately searching for things to grapple onto and slipping. I just needed someone to scoop me up and be like 'I'm going this way, down here, this is where you're supposed to go'.

”



Speaking Out Survey

Years 4-12 across WA by randomised sampling

Questions cover:

- safety
- mental and physical health
- connection to community
- sources of support.

Over 4,800 students have been sampled in Term 2, surveying finishes in early Term 3.





What children tell us is important

Family

Friends / community

School

Connection to culture for
Aboriginal CYP

Children need to be prioritised at the forefront of all considerations and decision-making to ensure their rights and best interests are upheld at all times.





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Thank you

Please keep in touch...
@CCYPWA

