



Gordon Trewern  
Chief Executive Officer  
Nulsen Group

### **Stretched community services look for Christmas miracle**

With the festive season upon us, it would be easy to say all the McGowan Government's Christmases have come at once, with this week's Mid-Year Budget Review exceeding all forecasts to reveal a \$2.6 billion surplus. Yet rather than show some seasonal generosity, the Premier seems to have seen fit to pick and choose who will be the beneficiaries of his government's good will – and good fiscal management. And it's not what you would think.

While Mark McGowan plays Santa to the resources, business and property sectors in anticipation that they will add to their pre-election war chest in 2020-21, the Premier has turned Scrooge for WA's community services; the same organisations who are currently supporting more than half a million Western Australians – and counting - who have been left behind by the current economic rebound.

When Western Australia's community services came together earlier this month to launch "Your Help WA", it was a moment months - in fact, years - in the making; the sector had finally reached its tipping point. Not-for-profit organisations, from Anglicare WA, Ruah, Rise, Uniting Care West, Nulsen Group, Richmond Wellbeing, Ngala – I could go on and on, are in crisis and struggling to meet current demand whilst waiting lists for our support get longer.

It's not greed, nor is it poor financial management, nor employees defrauding their employer; we're struggling to make ends meet due to increasing demand and a reduction in the real value of our contracts with Government. It really is that simple. As you'd be aware, successive State Governments have increasingly outsourced services addressing complex social issues such as homelessness, family and domestic violence, mental ill-health, drug and alcohol addiction and disability to not-for-profit organisations. They do this because we do it well and we do it more economically.

Many funding arrangements have been rolled over multiple times, and in some cases for over 10 years, without any changes to funding or service levels. However, the devil has been in the detail. In 2012, the Fair Work Commission introduced the Equal Remuneration Order – which mandated a decade of pay increases for staff in social and community services. We don't dispute having to pay our staff appropriately for the services they deliver – it is well deserved – however, to be able to afford the increases that were required by Government, we had to find the money by trimming other services or doing more for less.

Earlier this week, WACOSS released its latest Cost of Living Report which revealed living costs increased across the board in WA over the last 12 months. Increases for rent, food,

utilities and transport hit people experiencing unemployment and single parent families particularly hard.

Community service providers have now done all they can to absorb these unfunded increases. Enough is enough.

The community services sector employs more than 96,000 people, 80% of whom are women, and many of those jobs, and the services they provide are in jeopardy if the sector is not adequately funded - this directly contravenes the State Government priority to increase employment.

And while no one is disputing the economic and logistical benefits of good fiscal management, and investment in big picture projects for immediate job creation, it cannot be at the expense of social needs requiring immediate attention. To illustrate, while MetroNet might give WA a bigger public transport system and all the benefits this will create over time; commuters will be the first to complain about on-board anti-social behaviour which can be a by-product of the social and mental health issues which community services respond to every single day.

Everyone in the community services sector and every single Western Australian who relies on social services will be hoping for a Christmas miracle: a change of heart by Premier McGowan to urgently, and adequately, share WA's newly reported wealth with the people who need it most. As a caring, compassionate and prosperous State, we can and must do better.

To support the community services sector's fight for adequate funding visit [www.yourhelpWA.com.au](http://www.yourhelpWA.com.au)