

Tragedy to ignore the poor

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The McGowan Government is entering its next four-year term, but it does so with no simple, clear-cut solutions to end the substantial social issues now endemic to WA.

Many families living in hardship today have been caught in that cycle for generations and carry a trauma experience both complex and deeply entrenched.

If the government-elect is to begin to effect change, it needs to simultaneously start to address issues requiring immediate action, whilst putting in place long-term, innovative programs to help families thrive.

Despite its overwhelming majority, change will require bipartisan commitment, bringing together State and local governments, the services sector and the broader community. Above all, we need to actually listen to the voices of those living in hardship every day.

With Mark McGowan having announced his new ministry, as they settle into their roles — some new, it's critical amid the sound bites and photo ops they take the time to thoroughly consider these pressing social issues, and begin to forge change.

Affordable, safe and suitable housing

This is the right of every West Australian and their families. Housing is the fundamental building block on which personal wellbeing is built.

Ending homelessness must be a key priority for the next decade. To reduce the social housing waitlist, we need 2500 new homes a year until 2025.

Along with the necessary support services, this will bring significant economic and social benefits to the WA community.

Long-term unemployment

Let's forget the rhetoric around so-called "dole bludgers", they are actually very rare.



A temporary tent city in Fremantle put the growing issue of homelessness in the spotlight. Picture: Daniel Wilkins

Poverty significantly reduces the chance of both getting and maintaining a job.

The reality is long-term unemployment has tragic outcomes for individuals and families.

We need new and innovative approaches to eliminate it, driven by an integrated strategy of training, mental health support and mentoring. Poverty significantly reduces the chance of both getting and maintaining a job.

Family and domestic violence

This issue is so complex and pervasive — and sadly at record levels — a "whole of government strategy" is required, focused on both short-term immediate care and crucially some longer-term attitudinal change strategies.

Without this, family and domestic violence will only increase.

We need to listen to the women attending

March4Justice rallies across the country.

Mental health

The number of people experiencing mental health issues increases daily. This is not just a health issue. We need a better understanding of the underlying causes of our community's increasing mental distress, and we need to support families by effectively using researchers and community agencies, as well as clinicians, to undertake this complex work. We need more community-based mental health programs across WA, which are culturally appropriate and linked to local communities.

Closing the Gap

Addressing Indigenous disadvantage must be a priority of the new McGowan

Government. Continuing high rates of Aboriginal suicide, incarceration, homelessness, poverty and family and domestic violence all need urgent attention. Underpinning it all is the need for genuine reconciliation and recognition of the importance of connections to country and culture for Indigenous peoples — connections which have existed for tens of thousands of years.

Child wellbeing

Essential to a thriving community is the wellbeing of its children.

About 100,000 WA children live in poverty, many have mental health difficulties while far too many are abused or maltreated. There is a collective and parental responsibility for the welfare of all children. The McGowan Government must articulate a clear and positive vision for our children and commit itself to achieve it.

Tackle poverty

Poverty is growing across Australia and is now having significant intergenerational

impacts. Too many people are finding it too difficult to break the poverty cycle, trapping their families and children in that cycle through lack of income and education. While the Federal Government must increase JobSeeker, the new State Government needs to convene a Poverty Commission to examine how poverty can be reduced in WA.

Thousands of West Australians cannot be left to struggle along, with little or no hope for their future.

These are all major agendas, and they will require new ways of working. We have seen through the WA Government's tackling of COVID-19 that amazing things can be achieved. A similar attitude and a whole of community commitment is needed — right now — to resolve these endemic social issues.

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