

Overview

CONTEXT

Federal

The past two Federal Budgets have been deeply unfair in their impact on low income Australians; with a continuing policy of making cuts to address budget deficits rather than seeking fairer revenue streams.

Areas particularly affected by Federal cuts include housing and homelessness, emergency relief funding, preventative health, and health and education funding to the States.

The State received a significant increase in GST allocation from the Federal Government – \$130m per year over the forward estimates.

State

The previous State Budget focused on delivering election promises, as well as on achieving economic goals through deep cuts:

- to the public sector (with the loss of 820 public sector jobs in 2014 and a further 340 still to go); and
- to government department budgets (\$744m over four years, including \$150m in Education, \$200m in Health and Human Services, \$70m in State Growth).

The full impact of these cuts, particularly on the lives of low income and vulnerable Tasmanians is unknown, because it has not been researched. While it is the Government's role to understand this impact, no interest has been shown in doing so.

There are various reform and review processes currently underway in the State, including One Health System reform; Rethink Mental Health review; Affordable Housing Strategy development; and Joined up Human Services reform.

TasCOSS and the sector have expressed concern about such reviews and reforms resulting in stress or even damage for services and clients if the reviews are not followed by appropriate investment in recommendations that arise.

At a community level there is considerable public discussion about the challenges Tasmania faces in health, employment, education, and domestic violence.

While there is an appetite to see improvements in these areas, there has not yet been sufficient recognition of the fundamental links across these areas and their relationship to poverty and disadvantage in this State.

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Analysis

This Budget paints a picture of improving State finances - predicting a net operating deficit of \$58.5m in 2015-16 which is considerably less than indicated in the forward estimates from last budget (\$125.2m). In addition, a surplus budget is forecast in 2016-17.

The unemployment rate is projected to level out at 6.75% - only 0.25% below the current unemployment rate. This is a very small decrease given the Government's focus on jobs and its obvious reliance on large infrastructure investment to provide jobs. The economic growth rate is projected to be 2.5%; and the Government has not introduced any new taxation or other significant revenue raising measures.

In terms of social policy, this Budget is notable for its re-announcements of initiatives from the last Budget, although there is some new funding for several organisations. It contains considerable spending on infrastructure – even in the areas of social policy, any new spending is largely on infrastructure. Disappointingly, this doesn't include significant funding for affordable housing projects.

TasCOSS is concerned that there appears to be a trend in this Budget away from funding for early years programs, especially for pre-school years and early intervention programs.

Although the State Government is portraying this Budget as safe and responsible, the Tasmanian community will continue to feel the effects of the past two Federal Budgets and of last year's State Budget savings initiatives.

While the Government might insist that the 'heavy lifting has been done', we know that many of those who are already experiencing hardship will continue to do so and will find no relief from this Budget.

TasCOSS suggests that this Budget has insufficient investment in housing, preventative health, early years, support for disengaged students, or cost of living support.

TasCOSS will continue to make the case for an overarching vision for Tasmania in relation to our social goals – and the need for a whole of community conversation about strategic and cohesive ways to achieve that vision.

If you have any feedback or queries related to this Overview or other TasCOSS Budget Analysis, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Many thanks to the TasCOSS Members and other sector experts who assisted in producing this analysis.

Community Sector

OVERVIEW

The good news in this Budget is that there are no significant cuts to the community sector.

The bad news is that, given increasing demand on services and the impact of Federal cuts in many parts of the sector, there is very little additional or new money committed to the sector in this Budget. Most announcements were reiterations of initiatives or funding from last year's Budget, with a handful of modest initiatives with new spending.

INITIATIVES

Equal Remuneration Order (ERO)

ERO funding is in line with last year's forward estimates. The State Government has continued to meet its election commitment to fully fund the wage increases for sector workers under the ERO.

Indexation

The indexation rate for DHHS grants has been set as 2.25% for the fifth consecutive year – a level that is inadequate for organisations to meet all of the cost increases they face in delivering services.

The State Government has continued the indexation supplementation for DHHS community sector grant funding promised in last year's Budget (\$9m over four years). \$2m will be dispersed in 2015-16. While this provides welcome assistance, it does not give the sector the longer-term security that would come with an indexation rate linked to the full costs of delivering services.

Joined up Human Services reform

This project is referred to in the Budget Papers as the 'One Door' project. \$1.2m has been committed over two years to implement Phase 2 which includes five trial initiatives: Person Based Initiative; Service Improvement Initiative; Place Based Initiative; Systems Based Initiative; and Privacy Legislation Scan.

Volunteering Tasmania – peak body funding

After many years of lobbying, Volunteering Tasmania received recurrent peak body funding in this Budget of \$250k per annum.

NHT funding

An additional \$1.7m over two years is being provided to Neighbourhood Houses. This equates to \$25k per annum for two years for each of the 33 funded Houses. The funding is provided to promote social inclusion and facilitate links to other vital services.

A further \$1.66m over the next three years will be spent on building a new facility to replace the Northern Suburbs Community Centre in Launceston.

No cut to 'non-direct' services

After strong lobbying from the sector, the cut to 'non-direct' services that was flagged in the last State Budget to make savings of \$4.5m did not eventuate in this Budget.

TasCOSS COMMENT

TasCOSS is concerned by the lack of a strategic approach driving social policy and social investment in this Budget, reflective of the State Government's lack of strong vision in this area overall.

Rather than making solid investments to rectify our state's growing social and economic inequities this Budget merely rides on the coat-tails of the election commitments met in last year's Budget.

The Government's ambitious and welcome social goals in health and education, will require a solid investment into the foundations of good health, education and well-being – housing, preventative health, support for families and early years, cost of living – and support for the community sector which delivers services in these areas.

While supportive of a more 'joined-up' approach to delivering human services in Tasmania, TasCOSS stresses the need for a 'no-wrong-door' model and will continue to be involved in the reform process as the trial projects begin. We look forward to future State Budgets providing appropriate investment as a new joined up model is implemented.

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Cost of Living

OVERVIEW

This is a Budget area that covers policies and programs associated with costs of basic necessities such as household energy supply, water and sewerage services, and food, as well as measures that assist with access to these necessities, including emergency relief provision, assistance with energy efficiency measures and concessions.

There are very few initiatives in this Budget to assist low income Tasmanians with cost of living pressures. Rather a number re-announcements of programs from previous years were made in the Budget papers and related media releases.

INITIATIVES

Emergency food relief distribution

\$1.2m over four years has been allocated to emergency food distribution 'to ensure food security for vulnerable Tasmanians continues'. (Budget Paper 2,v1 p 163)

The Budget provides for \$300k each year for four years. We understand that each year statewide distributors Foodbank and SecondBite will receive \$200k and \$75k respectively, while North West Coast distributor, Produce to the People will receive \$25k a year.

All of these services have been funded by the Tasmanian Government in recent years through various programs including the Food for All Tasmanian Program (2012-13) and Healthy Hampers project (2013-14). These programs had ceased by the end of 2013-14 and all three services received 'top-up' funding from DPAC totaling \$87k to meet operating expenses until December 2014. It appears that no funding to the services was provided in the second half of 2014-15.

The funding commitment made in the 2015-16 Budget results from a review into the operations of these organisations carried out by DPAC.

Energy affordability programs

As a result of a decision made by the Minister for Energy, Aurora Energy will retain \$2m over two years from funds that would otherwise have been paid to the Tasmanian Government as dividends. This money will be used to further assist Aurora customers experiencing financial hardship. Aurora hopes to use these funds to increase its Your Energy Support (YES) Program reach from its current 1,300 customers to 2,500.

This initiative apparently emanates from the recently released Tasmanian Energy Strategy which states 'Aurora Energy will strengthen the YES program through the provision of additional options to assist vulnerable customers to reduce their energy consumption' (Tas Energy Strategy, p. 14)

The details of how these funds will be spent are as yet undecided and Aurora will take advice from its Vulnerable Customer Stakeholder Group that comprises representatives from community sector organisations, including those that provide financial counselling and emergency relief.

GAPS

Emergency relief funding

Funding for emergency relief in the form of the provision of ear-marked cash and voucher assistance to those in crisis situations has largely been the province of the Federal Government. However, the Australian Department of Social Services has recently made significant cuts to funding for emergency relief (ER) provision across Australia. TasCOSS estimates that ER funding to Tasmanian providers has been cut by around 30% in the last year.

TasCOSS COMMENT

While TasCOSS welcomes the two cost of living initiatives announced in the Budget, we expected more assistance to be provided for Tasmanians in need.

We are particularly disappointed that funding for programs to assist low-income households to improve the energy efficiency of their homes was not provided in the Budget in spite of it being an action item in the Tasmanian Energy Strategy and one that is timetabled to occur in 2015-16.

Energy efficiency programs funded by the previous Government and carried out by Sustainable Living Tasmania proved to be very successful in reducing the energy use, and therefore costs for participating households. The Government's own Energy Strategy highlights the value and importance of energy efficiency, yet the Government has not chosen to allocate funding for programs in this Budget.

TasCOSS would like to have seen the State Government use a small portion of its recent GST windfall to make a contribution to general ER in this Budget to assist those Tasmanians who are experiencing severe financial crises. While the State Government provides funds to assist those having difficulty paying electricity bills (through the Electricity Hardship Fund) and to emergency food relief distribution, it provides no funding for emergency cash relief provision in the State.



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Kath's focus at TasCOSS includes policy analysis and research in areas including energy & water, cost of living, concessions, employment & human rights. Kath has worked in policy and research for many years, including as a TAFE teacher, in academia - briefly, and for the past 11 years at TasCOSS.

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Early Years

OVERVIEW

Conventionally, the term 'early years' refers to the period from pre-birth to 6 years of age, and covers policy and programs that support parents and communities to give children the best possible start in life.

In Tasmania, the State Government initiatives to improve opportunities for children, especially those who are born into social and financial disadvantage, have been enacted through the establishment of the Tasmanian Early Years Foundation (by DPAC, DHHS and then DoE), the Launch into Learning program (DoE) and the Child and Family Centres (DoE).

INITIATIVES

Literacy and numeracy

\$17.75m has been provided over four years for a new schools-based literacy and numeracy initiative (LIFT). The focus is on Kindergarten to Year 2 students and parents, in 80 school communities where literacy and numeracy support is most needed.

Launch into Learning and Child and Family Centres

Launch into Learning, and Child and Family Centres continue to receive funding, and both are included in the DoE budget forward estimates. See Education section.

GAPS

Tasmanian Early Years Foundation

Despite announcing the Tasmanian Early Years Foundation (TEYF) would continue and be assisted to transition to an independent non-government organisation by 2016, no funding has been allocated in this Budget to enable this. In addition, the \$500k grant round previously administered by the TEYF has been discontinued.

This represents a significant disinvestment in the early years, and is not picked up in the health or human services budgets.

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TasCOSS COMMENT

The Department of Education Output Group previously named the 'early years' has been renamed 'early learning' and is indicative of the shift away from providing investment in pre-birth to 6 years and towards school-based 'learning' initiatives.

The Government 'Early Learning' outcome area focusses on approving and regulating education and care services in line with national legislation, as well as on Child and Family Centres.

This is a limited scope, and continues a worrying trend away from holistic intervention for newborns, children and parents. There is overwhelming evidence that investment in the early years is vital to address social and economic disadvantage. Depleted investment in the pre-school years is a false economy, and will only result in the need for more resources to enable children to 'catch-up' later in life.



Dr Pauline Marsh
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Pauline's focus at TasCOSS includes policy analysis & research in health and early years. She is also responsible for the Bottom Line Blog, direct stories from Tasmanians experiencing disadvantage. Pauline has worked in community nursing and health care, social policy, research & consumer consultation.

Education

OVERVIEW

The Department of Education's (DoE's) overall budget this year is \$1.3 billion – an increase not only on last year's spending, but also on the forward estimate for this year presented in last year's Budget (\$1.27b). Due to restructuring of output groups, it is sometimes difficult to compare allocation levels between this and last year's Budget. However, in-school education, school support services, and early learning all rise from the revised figures in last year's Budget and across forward estimates.

In-school education (delivery of education from Kindergarten to Senior Secondary) rises from \$784m last year to \$841.5m this year, and is projected to keep rising across forward estimates. School support services will receive around \$11m per year this year and across the forward estimates.

INITIATIVES

Students First

A total of \$77.7m will be provided in 2015-16 towards the Students First reforms (previously known as Gonski) – although it is not clear what percentage of this is State funding, and what percentage is Federal funding. State funding will come out of last year's promised \$134m of additional funding over six years to deliver on Students First commitments. In 2016, according to the Government's Education Budget factsheet, all State schools will receive a minimum 5% increase in the Fairer Funding component of their School Resource Package.

Literacy and numeracy

The Government will devote \$17.75m of Students First money over four years to a Learning in Families Together (LIFT) program, targeting literacy and numeracy in the Kindergarten-to-Year-2 cohort (4-8 year olds) in areas with greatest need. This is described as 'a new early years program'. The allocation in 2015-16 is \$5m, dropping to \$4.25m per annum over the forward estimates.

This year \$2m will be provided for literacy and numeracy specialists focusing on working with students in years 7-10. The number of such specialists currently stands at 25; it is not clear if or by how much numbers will increase.

Early childhood education

Early learning – which includes services delivered through Child and Family Centres and also approval, regulation, and advice to education and care services (long day care, outside school hours care and family day care) – rises by \$1.4m from last year to \$5.8m this year, rising slowly across the forward estimates to \$6m in 2018-19. It is not clear where Tasmania's 2015-16 contribution of \$6.1m to the National Partnership on Early Childhood Education comes from.

Adult learning

The LINC's information services and community learning is at \$30.7m this year, rising to \$31.8m in 2018-19. Unfortunately there is no separate line item for the 26TEN adult literacy and numeracy program.

Extensions to Year 12

Six new schools will begin the extension to Year 12 in 2016: Tasman, Campbell Town, New Norfolk in partnership with Glenora, Mountain Heights and Roseberry.

\$7m has been allocated in 2015-16 for the operating costs of the first two rounds of expansion, and \$2.9m for capital improvements.

Autism

This year \$170k is allocated to support the operation of an autism-specific unit being piloted at Lindisfarne North Primary School. This appears to be in addition to the \$250k this year and next year, and \$300k in 2017-18 for the Autism Continuum of Care.

School support staff

\$1.1m is provided in 2015-16 in continued funding for additional teacher assistants; this figure is projected to remain steady across the forward estimates. Teaching assistants will also have the opportunity to apply for training towards a Diploma of Education Support through the Developing Our Workforce Strategy, a \$4.2m project funded from the Federal-State Better Schools Tasmania Agreement. Ten School Health Nurses will begin work in July, and twenty more positions will be added by 2017; \$995k has been allotted this year, increasing to \$1.7m in 2017-18.

Infrastructure

Additional infrastructure funding of \$56.3m has been allocated over four years for 10 high schools and the Burnie LINC. In 2015-16, the expenditure for these new commitments plus existing infrastructure commitments to 12 schools will total \$31.592m.

GAPS

Staff Cuts

The Department of Education has already experienced heavy staff cuts in the name of implementing savings measures: as of 31 March 2015, 287 FTE positions had gone. However, the Government has said that the Education Department has already achieved \$129.7m of savings against its target of \$139.2m over four years, leaving only \$9.5m to be saved over the next three years--\$2.7m this year, \$6.4m in 2016-17 and \$0.4m in 2017-18. Nevertheless, the Premier emphasised that there will be no further cuts to teacher numbers.

TasCOSS COMMENT

TasCOSS is concerned at a possible shift in emphasis from a holistic understanding of early years development (spanning 0-6) to a focus on 'early learning' (i.e. an education-focused approach). While the latter is certainly important, the former is also crucial.

We remain concerned that the shift from the Guaranteeing Futures program has not been adequately thought through. In particular, we wonder where students are receiving the personalised advice previously offered by Pathway Planners, and the logistical support provided by Youth Learning and Youth Transition officers, and what the long term effects of this will be.

Given the importance of boosting adult literacy in the State, TasCOSS would like to see a line item in the Budget for the 26TEN program to facilitate tracking of expenditure over time.

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Wynne's focus at TasCOSS includes policy analysis and research in areas including housing & homelessness, education, transport, gambling & spatial planning.

Wynne has worked in social policy and research for many years, including as an international consultant.



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Employment

OVERVIEW

The Government has repeatedly stated that its 'number one priority is jobs', and announced a '\$315 million jobs package' in this Budget.

INITIATIVES

Jobs package

The 'jobs package' largely comprises allocation for infrastructure projects of various kinds across the State, to the tourism industry for marketing and regional tourism support, and to support a variety of sporting, regional and business events.

GAPS

There appears to be no new funding to assist Tasmanian job-seekers into employment, rather a heavy reliance on 'the market' to provide jobs.

TasCOSS COMMENT

TasCOSS is concerned that there is no guarantee from this funding that any of the jobs created will be long-term or will go to unemployed Tasmanians.

The Tasmanian Treasury forecasts employment growth of 3.25% between 2014-15 and 2015-16 (Peter Gutwein, Media Release '\$315 million jobs package to deliver 8,000 new jobs', 28 June 2015), yet Treasury also estimates that the unemployment rate will level out at 6.75% in 2015-16 and remain at that rate for the next three years. (Budget Papers 1, Table 2.1, p 26).

It therefore appears that the increase in jobs will not have a significant impact on Tasmania's unemployment rate.

TasCOSS is concerned that there is no Government strategy to ensure that the jobs created will go to Tasmanians. It is quite likely that interstate firms will win contracts for at least some of the infrastructure projects, and it is equally likely that these firms will provide their own workforce on a fly-in-fly-out basis.

TasCOSS believes that the Tasmanian Government needs to provide much more support to unemployed Tasmanians – young, older and long-term unemployed in particular – to get into and stay in jobs.



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Health

OVERVIEW

The health budget this year is largely influenced by the current major health reforms – One State, One Health System, Better Outcomes). The final white paper detailing the reform measures has been released (in late June 2015). The bulk of the reforms will be in the form of changes to the acute care system, and this is reflected in this State Budget’s major health announcements, with the exception of funding for transport (see below).

Savings of \$21m were flagged in last year’s Budget, anticipated through the creation of a single Tasmanian Health Service (replacing the three regional Health Organisations) in July 2015. As well, additional savings are anticipated through the streamlining of services as part of the broad reforms.

There is a notable absence of investment in primary health measures; the trend continues from last year to withhold investment in health prevention, early intervention, and health promotion. The burden of this decision will be great, and amplified by the impacts of the abolition of programs and activities previous funded under the Federal Government’s National Partnership Agreement in Preventative Health (NPAPH, abolished by the Federal Government in 2014).

INITIATIVES

Frontline services

\$100m over four years in additional funding in “new investment” has been allocated for public hospitals, particularly elective and emergency surgery.

Patient transport

\$24m over four years is provided for improving patient transport, for the purpose of supporting the One Health System reforms. \$10m of this is in transport infrastructure and equipment and \$14m (previously announced) over four years in operational funding.

Alcohol, tobacco and other drugs

\$4.8m over four years has been allocated for a range of measures to improve services in the North West: 12 residential beds, two new ADS workers, transport to southern services. As well as these initiatives, the money will be allocated to improving the data collection and information systems in the sector. These are welcome announcements, particularly as they are not limited to crystal methamphetamine treatment alone, although the Budget papers label this an “Ice and Other Drugs Strategy”.

Mental health

A welcome \$2.4m over four years for Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS).

These are Government services that provide a range of intervention, education and counselling services and have been chronically under-funded in recent years.

GAPS

Preventative health/Primary health care

The most significant gaps in this year's health budget are in the areas of primary health, in particular in preventative health initiatives and services.

Public Health Services' (formerly Population Health) budget is projected to steadily decrease, from \$40m in 2014-15 to less than \$26m in 2017-18. The past two Budgets have seen the capacity of primary health care services to deliver wellness measures greatly diminished.

All 'new investment' in the health budget is in the acute care sector, with the exception of the CAMHS above.

TasCOSS COMMENT

Announcements of new money for frontline services must be read in context of the severe cuts to health in the 2014-15 Budget, and projected over the following four Budgets. Martyn Goddard's analysis demonstrates a shortfall of funding of between \$25-28m per year over the next four years. (Goddard, M (2015) "The mean little God of small government" Tasmanian Times 1 June.)

These cuts manifest in both cessation of programs and fewer staff. Re-announcements (patient transport, suicide prevention) and announcements about Commonwealth funded programs (additional breast screening in the State), make it difficult to discern the State Government's new investment in health.

While TasCOSS welcomes the Government's vision to 'strive to have the healthiest population in Australia by 2025', our capacity as a State to attain this status will be hampered by an unwillingness to invest in primary health measures, particularly those that actively address the health inequities in our state.

The State Government's attitude towards preventative health mirrors that of the Federal Government. While the decrease in the Public Health Services' budget is attributed in part to the movement of Cancer Screening Services to the THS and the abolition of the NPAPH, these are not reason enough for this decline to continue. It reflects an unwillingness of the current Government to accept what is soundly proven, that investment in measures that keep people well are highly beneficial – economically and socially. The Australian Health Care Reform Alliance calls for a 5% share of the total health budget to be invested in preventative measures – an increase from the current 1.7%. This would be a fantastic goal for the State Government health budget also.

It is an encouraging sign that a Healthy Tasmania Committee was established earlier this year with a brief to produce a Preventative Health Strategic Plan for the State. Unfortunately, neither consumers nor the community sector (which is active in much primary health and preventative health delivery) are represented on this committee. However, the Committee will consider recommendations from the earlier Health and Wellbeing Advisory Council, and TasCOSS hopes this will result in additional investment.



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Housing

OVERVIEW

This year's housing budget continues the established trend of shifting management of not-for-profit affordable rental housing (and over time its provision as well) from Housing Tasmania to the community sector. While Housing Tasmania has been allocated funds for construction of new properties, for instance a new youth housing facility in the northwest, it appears that these will be managed by the community sector for the most part.

INITIATIVES

Housing Tasmania

With the Better Housing Futures stock transfers complete for now, expenditure on Housing Tasmania's housing services will more than halve, from \$261m in 2014-15 to \$127m in 2015-16 (\$1.25m less than given in the forward estimates last year). The appropriation for housing services also has dropped slightly from last year's Budget, to \$38m.

\$4.7m is allocated for new stock purchases, including land and existing dwellings, and \$300k for the construction of adaptable buildings in Lindisfarne.

Youth housing

\$6m will be spent over two years for the development of a North West Youth Accommodation and Training Facility in Devonport (land purchase funded last year).

A final \$3.333m is allocated for the completion of the Church St (Trinity Hill) Youth Accommodation and Training Project.

Housing Fund

\$1.554m will be spent from the Housing Fund for continued development of National Rental Affordability Scheme (NRAS) Stage 4 properties (\$1.1m) and acquisition of suitable land for the development of affordable housing sites (\$465k). Following this expenditure, there will be \$3.671m left in the fund, which will be fully exhausted by 2018-19.

NRAS/affordable rental supply

As noted above, the Budget Papers earmark \$1.1m from the Housing Fund for continued development of "up to 1400" NRAS Stage 4 properties. Confusingly, the "Housing Services" handout puts the NRAS figure at \$0.9m; it also gives the number of new affordable homes to be built under NRAS in 2015-16 at 550.

\$1.7m is earmarked for the redevelopment (creation of residential lots) of Somerset Primary School. It is not clear whether these lots will be retained by Housing Tasmania, sold to community housing providers, sold under the Streets Ahead program, or sold to the general public.

The Budget appears to contain no specific allocation for Private Rental Assistance.

Homelessness services

The 'Housing Services' factsheet says that \$24.3m per year is allocated for Specialist Homelessness Services—although where these funds are allocated in the Budget is not clear. This figure represents a sharp increase from last year's funding of \$5.4m, raising questions about accounting methods.

Private ownership sector

The funding allocated for Government equity purchases under HomeShare drops from \$3m last year to \$2.4m this year. There appears to be no specific allocation for Streets Ahead.

The First Home Builder Boost is extended at \$20k until 31 December 2015, at which point it will drop to \$10k.

UNKNOWNNS

While a figure of \$1.8m has been mentioned as specifically allocated to initial implementation of the Affordable Housing Strategy, details have not been finalised.

TasCOSS COMMENT

TasCOSS notes that the performance measures in the Budget Papers do not project any decrease in Housing Tasmania's target occupancy rate (98.% in both 2014-15 and 2015-16) or target waiting times (41.5 weeks in both years, or 20 weeks for Category 1 applicants) or increase in the target for number of applicants housed (1,000 in both years).

Given both the increases in waiting lists and the fact that clients expected to be diverted directly to NDIS are not included in these targets, the failure to raise the target for number of applicants housed in particular points clearly to the public/social housing sector's inability to meet existing high demand for affordable housing.

Given the focus of the Affordable Housing Strategy on non-public housing solutions to the affordable housing crisis, we are dismayed to see that the target for Private Rental Assistance drops this year to 4,000, despite the fact that the actual number of households assisted in in 2013-14 was 4,100 (already down from 4,128 in 2012-13 and 4,162 in 2011-12).

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Wynne's focus at TasCOSS includes policy analysis and research in areas including housing & homelessness, education, transport, gambling & spatial planning.

Wynne has worked in social policy and research for many years, including as an international consultant.



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Justice

OVERVIEW

The justice portfolio covers areas including courts, tribunals, Legal Aid, Corrections, monetary penalties and various regulatory services. It also covers the planning system.

There are a number of Budget allocations in the Justice portfolio of particular interest to TasCOSS and its members.

INITIATIVES

Mental Health Tribunal

The Mental Health Tribunal has been granted an additional \$500k per year for the next four years (total \$2m) to cover a 'significant increase in costs' and 'increased demand pressures' resulting from requirements of the Mental Health Act 2013 (which commenced in February 2014). (Budget Papers 2, v1, p 104)

Family violence

\$800k in additional funding has been provided as a 'down payment' to 'improve the effectiveness of the response to family violence'.

\$720k over four years has been allocated to bolster the Safe at Home program through the Department of Justice (Budget Papers 2, v1, p 104) – 'to support victims of family violence and ... assist with the delivery of preventative and support programs'.

\$88k has been allocated to enable Tasmania to sign up to the national Our Watch Foundation for four years (at \$22k per year paid via DPAC). Our Watch was established 'to drive nationwide change in the culture, behaviour and attitudes that lead to violence against women and children'.

(All quotes from Will Hodgman, Media Release, Family Violence, 28 May 2015)

Victims support service

Additional funding of \$100k per year for four years (total \$400k) has been made available to the Victims Support Service.

The Tasmanian Planning Commission

The Tasmanian Planning Commission receives a boost this year of \$1.45m, bringing total annual funding to \$6.215m, in order to progress the single statewide planning system and pursue planning system reform. This figure drops by nearly \$1m next year and decreases slightly over the forward estimates after that.

TasCOSS COMMENT

In the 2013-14 State Budget the Mental Health Tribunal was granted additional funding of \$500k per year over the forward estimates to 2016-17. However, the sector warned that this would not be adequate to meet the increased load and complexity of the work of the Tribunal under the new Act.

Both the Mental Health Council of Tasmania and TasCOSS called for additional funding for the Mental Health Tribunal in the 2014-15 State Budget.

The incoming Government chose not to provide additional funding for the Tribunal in its 2014-15 Budget but has belatedly done so in this Budget. Notwithstanding the tardiness in making adequate provision for the Tribunal, TasCOSS and its members welcome the increase in funding.

We note that there is no performance information presented in the Budget papers regarding the work of the Mental Health Tribunal and it is therefore difficult to ascertain whether the additional funding allocation will be adequate.

TasCOSS is very pleased that combating family violence appears to be high on the Government's agenda and while we welcome additional funding, no money has been made available to strengthen the capacity of under-funded existing community sector services.

TasCOSS welcomes the Government's interest in planning system reform and increased support for the Planning Commission to move the reform agenda forward. We are concerned, however, that funding to the Planning Commission drops after the major push towards a statewide planning scheme, given that in our opinion the real opportunity for reform will come in subsequent years with the development of new planning mechanisms to enshrine social inclusion principles in the planning system.

TasCOSS remains concerned that both the planned removal of suspended sentences as a judicial option and the imposition of mandatory sentences for certain crimes remain on the Government's policy agenda. TasCOSS will watch future debates on these issues with interest.

We were also disappointed to see the increase in penalty units (fines) passed by the Tasmanian Parliament this year. TasCOSS has argued that increasing the level of fines as a means to augment Government revenue is a form of regressive taxation which disproportionately impacts on low income earners.



Kath McLean

Senior Policy & Research Officer

Kath's focus at TasCOSS includes policy analysis and research in areas including energy & water, cost of living, concessions, employment & human rights. Kath has worked in policy and research for many years, including as a TAFE teacher, in academia - briefly, and for the past 11 years at TasCOSS.

Many thanks to the TasCOSS Members and other sector experts who assisted in producing this analysis.

Older Tasmanians

OVERVIEW

There is very little in this Budget specifically targeting the needs of older Tasmanians.

INITIATIVES

Elder Abuse Strategy

The Budget papers re-announce funding provided for three years in last year's Budget (2014-15) for the Elder Abuse Strategy (Budget Paper 2, v1, p 69).

Breast Screening

A media release from the Minister for Health announced Federal funding for additional breast screening for women aged 70-74. (Michael Ferguson, "Tasmania secures additional funding for 1000 more breast screens" 28 June 2015).

GAPS

Preventative health

In its Budget submission the Council on the Ageing Tasmania (COTA Tas) called for more focus on preventative health for older Tasmanians, including funding for Falls Prevention Peer Education programs.

Information support

COTA Tas also focused on the need to design, support and fund information programs to ensure that information is provided in an accessible way to older Tasmanians.

Housing

COTA Tas has identified housing for older Tasmanians as another area that requires further funding, both for research and the provision of affordable housing options for older people.

TasCOSS COMMENT

TasCOSS concurs with the views of COTA Tas and in particular supports COTA's call for the commitment of further funding for the Elder Abuse Helpline beyond 2016-17.



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Senior Policy & Research Officer

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Transport

OVERVIEW

Spending on public transport remains low by national standards.

INITIATIVES

Metropolitan general access services

Metropolitan General Access Services, which include Metro Tasmania, MerseyLink, and Manion's Coaches, will receive \$41.057m in 2015-16, a slight increase on last year and in keeping with last year's forward estimates. This figure rises slowly across the forward estimates. Metro Tasmania is to receive an additional \$3.3m per annum outside their contract, reportedly through 2018-19, to pursue purchase of new low-emissions accessible busses, improve off-bus infrastructure on major corridors, and undertake research and marketing initiatives.

Passenger transport

Passenger Transport receives \$3.175m in 2015-16, down from \$3.4m in 2014-15. This figure rises and falls across the forward estimates, but still ends up lower in 2018-19 than the 2014-15 figure in absolute terms, let alone allowing for inflation. However, there is reference to funding being provided 'to complete a detailed review of all current services and service optimisation, (including services provided by Metro Tasmania Pty Ltd) to ensure that the most efficient and cost effective network of services is procured and opportunities for efficiencies identified.' TasCOSS understands this figure to be in the area of \$1.15m over four years.

Rural and special needs school buses (\$23.029m) and the Transport Access Scheme \$4.547m) both receive slightly more than last year.

GAPS

Non-metropolitan general access services funding is down slightly from last year (\$7.626m).

TasCOSS COMMENT

TasCOSS is concerned by the lack of funding for finalising the Transport Access Strategy, or for the Strategy's implementation.

Dr Wynne Russell

Social Policy & Research Officer

Wynne's focus at TasCOSS includes policy analysis and research in areas including housing & homelessness, education, transport, gambling & spatial planning. Wynne has worked in social policy and research for many years, including as an international consultant.



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Young Tasmanians

INITIATIVES

Funding in this Budget for young Tasmanians is covered in specific portfolio / issue areas, including:

- within the Health (DHHS) budget, \$600k per annum over four years has been allocated to supplement funding to the Children & Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS);
- within the Human Services / Housing (DHHS) budget, \$6m has been allocated over two years for construction of a supported accommodation facility for young people in the North-West (Devonport Youth Accommodation Project), and
- within the Education portfolio – various allocations for schools were made for capital works and some education programs.

See specific portfolio areas for details.

TasCOSS COMMENT

This Budget provides nothing for disengaged students or to support students at risk of disengagement. Nor does it provide specific support to address the high rate of youth unemployment in Tasmania.

Both the Beacon Foundation and Whitelion were funded in last year's Budget to provide employment services to young people for three years at \$225k and \$100k per year respectively. While these organisations provide valuable assistance to the unemployed young people they reach, TasCOSS believes that much more investment is needed in order to make a significant impact on youth unemployment in Tasmania and to effectively support young people into work.



Kath McLean

Senior Policy & Research Officer

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