



Commissioner for Children and Young People
Western Australia

Work Plan 2020–2021

The Commissioner’s legislated role is to act in the best interests of all Western Australian children and young people and to advocate on their behalf.

The Commissioner has revised his 2020 Work Plan in light of the COVID-19 pandemic; refocusing planned activities to best monitor and advocate for the wellbeing needs of Western Australian children and young people at this time.

While maintaining his independent oversight role, the Commissioner will support the State Government priorities to respond to COVID-19, prioritise and support frontline services and contribute to the economic and social recovery in Western Australia.

With any significant and historical change, areas such as trauma and related mental health issues, domestic violence, abuse and poverty have a greater impact and influence on the wellbeing and development of children and young people.

While research will continue to underpin much of the Commissioner’s work, the following three areas will be the priorities for the year ahead:

- 1. Collating a collective voice of Western Australian children and young people and ensuring this is heard.**
- 2. Monitoring children and young people’s wellbeing, with an emphasis on strengthened oversight and advocacy.**
- 3. Prioritising the needs of vulnerable groups of children and young people.**

The Commissioner and his team have moved to establish renewed work priorities, placed some planned activities on hold until current social and economic restrictions are lifted, and will maintain key ongoing functions and projects to ensure children and young people are included as a significant part of the recovery process.

Priority projects	
<p>Children and young people's experiences of COVID-19 pandemic</p>	<p>Consulting children and young people on how they are being impacted by the pandemic and what supports are helping them. This includes proactive activities to allow children to provide their views to the Commissioner through online, written and other formats across WA.</p> <p>Specific activities will be developed for vulnerable cohorts, such as children in remote communities, Aboriginal children and young people and those in the out-of-home care and justice systems.</p> <p>A literature review of best practice responses for children experiencing trauma is underway.</p>
<p>Using Speaking Out Survey 2019 responses to shape COVID-19 response</p>	<p>The four key themes from the 4,912 Year 4-12 student responses from SOS19 that have been heightened by COVID-19 include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • concerns regarding safety (particularly in the home) • perceptions of females about their worth and standing • mental health concerns • health and wellbeing of Aboriginal children and young people. <p>Further analysis work will be undertaken in these areas to assist government and non-government services and supports for children and young people.</p>
<p>Speaking Out Survey 2021</p>	<p>The second Speaking Out Survey planned for 2022 will be moved forward to 2021, given the vital information provided by SOS19 and the opportunity to measure changes in wellbeing during this historic time.</p> <p>SOS21 will provide unique comparable information of what impact COVID-19 has had on WA children and young people and assist government and its agencies in responding.</p>

Child Safe Organisations	The importance of progressing the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse at this time is critical for assisting government to meet its stated obligations, support agencies to continue their implementation, and provide safe environments for all WA children and young people.
Monitoring of complaints by children and young people	The Commissioner has an ongoing role in monitoring the volume and types of complaints made by children and young people about government organisations. The Commissioner’s office will increase oversight in this area in 2020.
Oversight of vulnerable children and young people	<p><i>Out of Home Care:</i> The Commissioner is planning a trial at the Kath French Centre to develop oversight of children in residential care.</p> <p><i>Justice:</i> Work with the WA Children’s Court, WA Police and the Department of Justice to investigate the changes implemented within these areas in responding to young people’s wellbeing and COVID-19, and what learnings have resulted that can be used to improve youth justice post COVID-19.</p> <p><i>Mental health:</i> Based on a review of progress on recommendations from the Our Children Can’t Wait report, work with agencies to identify gaps in responses and the likely increase on demand for mental health supports as a result of COVID-19.</p> <p><i>Disengaged students:</i> Monitor the re-entry into education and develop support information for educators based on student wellbeing survey and SOS.</p>
Children’s Week 2020	The Commissioner will look to expand planned Children’s Week 2020 activities in light of the COVID-19 experience. The Commissioner’s current Children’s Week planned activity at Government House focused on the living environment, however, an additional celebration of the experiences of children in 2020 will be considered.

Maintenance projects	
Wellbeing Monitoring Framework	<p>Continue to update Indicators data and develop policy and strategy response section of the framework, however, in recognition of the current focus on COVID-19 response in many agencies, data will only be updated as publically available rather than custom data requests until the COVID-19 recovery phase.</p> <p>The Commissioner will develop a brief annual 'state of the state' report based on high level information on a number of indicators to be tabled in Parliament in early 2021.</p>
Student wellbeing in schools	<p>The Commissioner has surveyed schools on student wellbeing to follow up on the issues raised in his School and Learning consultation, current policies and practices within the education sector and opportunities to improve responses for students requiring support. This work will also inform the COVID-19 response.</p>
Action on Vulnerability Speakers Series recommendations	<p>Further develop child impact statement resources to support government and non-government organisations in post-COVID-19 environment.</p> <p>Continue to advocate for changes as outlined in the Aboriginal forum conducted as part of this Series.</p>
Strategic Plan 2021–2026	<p>The development of the Strategic Plan will be delayed until late 2020 in light of the revised projects as outlined above.</p>

Delayed projects	
Facilitation of Harmful Sexual Behaviours national conference	Conference has been postponed until 2021.
Living environments art project	Due to the disruption to schooling, this planned consultation with Year 6 students will be held over until post COVID-19.
Advisory Committees	<p>Due to the disruption to schooling, the two 2020 committees will be put on hold for their intended purposes until schools resume full operations, however, opportunities will be pursued to incorporate their views into the Commissioner's COVID-19 response work where possible.</p> <p>It is anticipated that the 2020 committees be extended into 2021 to complete their intended work on the impact of the living environment on wellbeing.</p>