JUNE 15, 2023

State Budget Analysis

2023-24

SOUTH AUSTRALIAN COUNCIL OF SOCIAL SERVICE

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Overview

The South Australian Council of Social Service (SACOSS) is the peak body for the non-government health and community services sector in our state. We have prepared this analysis of the 2023-24 South Australian state budget for the benefit of our members and other community organisations, as well as to help advance broader understanding and discourse around various budget measures, and their impacts for vulnerable and disadvantaged South Australians. It also provides some commentary on where measures need to go further, or which other actions are needed.

The first section of our state budget analysis provides the broad political-economic context of the budget, followed by sections summarising key budget initiatives in areas of concern to SACOSS, providing readers with a quick reference to new budget measures. Further detail on all these initiatives is available in Budget Paper No. 5. Cost figures are for four years, unless otherwise referenced.

The final section of this analysis examines the finances and programs of key government departments as set out in the Budget Paper No. 4 Agency Statements. There is in-depth analysis of the departments most relevant to the work of our sector: Human Services, Health and Wellbeing, and Child Protection.

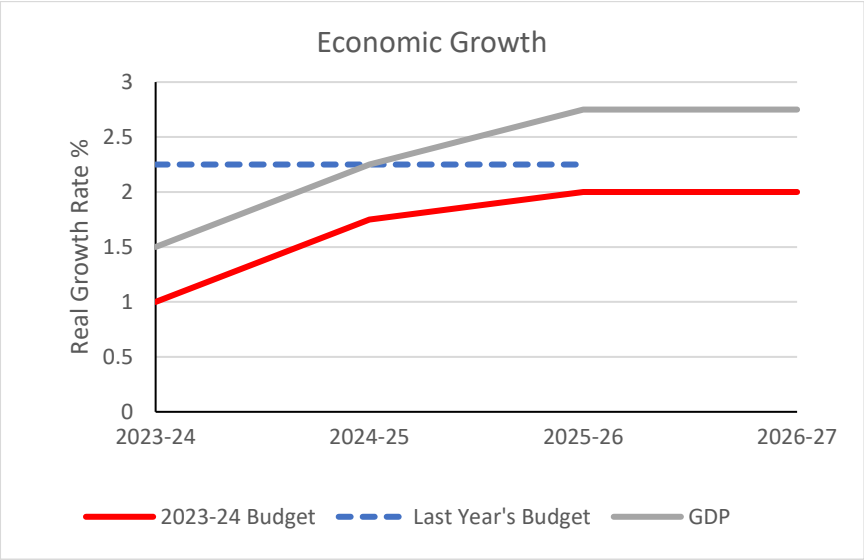
A. Economic Context and Budget Outcomes

This budget comes against a background very different to the previous few state budgets. The immediate economic impacts of COVID-19 are largely behind us and the primary macroeconomic imperative is no longer economic growth and employment, but inflation.

Inflation is predicted to peak at 7.75% this year (2022-23) – which is significantly higher than the 5% predictions made a year ago. For the next two years inflation is predicted to be higher than previously thought, and also above the Reserve Bank's 2-3% target zone. With the exception of rent increases (where the state government has the power to cap price increases), the causes of inflation are largely out of control of the South Australian government. However, the fact that inflation has not been brought down as quickly or as much as anticipated has significant impacts on the budget. There is more detail below, but in summary: high inflation increases budget revenue, but adds to government operating costs (particularly if wages also go up) and to the cost of interest on state debt. And perhaps most importantly, inflation impacts hard on households and so increases the demands on government to assist those in most need of support.

The result of Reserve Bank efforts to control inflation via monetary policy (increasing interest rates) is that forecasts for economic growth and employment growth over the next few years have been revised down in this year's budget. The graph below shows that state economic growth (the red line) is projected to be 1% for the budget year 2023-24, significantly below the projection in last year's budget (the dotted blue line). Most significantly, South Australia's economic growth rate is expected to be below the national growth rate (GDP = the grey line) for the next four years. As SACOSS pointed out in our State Budget Submission, this means that the South Australian share of the national economy is shrinking and we are falling behind the rest of the country. It was for this reason that SACOSS was calling for a boldly interventionist and developmental budget.

Figure 1: Economic and Employment Growth



The state budget itself saw significant revisions, and the forecast surplus for this year (2022-23) will not eventuate. As the table below shows, there is still a predicted surplus next year and into the forward estimates. Despite this, net government debt will continue to rise, both in dollars and in relation to government income. In 2022-23 the general government debt is equivalent to 72.4% of revenue, but will be equivalent to 97.8% of revenue by 2026-27.

Table 1: 2023-24 Budget Debt and Deficit Projections

	2022-23 $m	**2023-24 $m**	**2024-25 $m**	**2025-26 $m**	**2026-27 $m**
Operating Balance (i.e. surplus)	-249	250	512	552	639
Net Debt[1]	17,859	20,293	22,488	25,433	28,579

Of themselves, deficits and debt are not a problem – and may represent important stimulus or long-term investment. Further, this level of debt is not unsustainable – think of the debt-to-income ratio of the average mortgagee household! However, at a time of high interest rates it does increasingly impact on government spending options. The table below shows the expected increase in interest payments on the state debt, with the bottom line showing that the budget needs to find an extra $1bn in four years as a result of increasing interest payments. As we noted in our budget night snapshot, the interest payments in the 2023-24 budget year are projected to be more than the operational budget of the Department of Human Services (DHS). DHS is a primary provider of support to vulnerable and disadvantaged South Australians, so the community services sector is right to be concerned when we are spending more money on servicing debt than the supports that DHS offers.

Table 2: Interest Expenses - General Government Sector

	2022-23 $m	**2023-24 $m**	**2024-25 $m**	**2025-26 $m**	**2026-27 $m**
Last year's budget	780	988	1129	1219	n.a.
This year's budget	988	1254	1335	1489	1684
Difference	208	266	206	270	n.a.

Overall, while the economic context for this budget is not alarming, there are short-term challenges with inflation and debt servicing, and long-term problems of low economic growth. The former requires another look at revenue-raising initiatives, while the latter requires thinking and investment at a scale not evident in this budget.

[1] General government debt, not including the debt of government-owned businesses or financial corporations.

Revenue

The collection of government revenue is the means by which governments fund the goods and services we need as a community. Vulnerable and disadvantaged people are particularly reliant on government services as they have fewer private and market options available to them. Accordingly, SACOSS seeks to ensure that governments always have sufficient and reliable revenue to properly fund these vital services.

The budget statement shows that general government revenue is expected to rise by 7.9% from this year to the 2023-24 budget year, and averaging 4.3% growth over the budget and forward estimates. However, these figures are not adjusted for inflation. The real figures are significantly lower. As the table below shows, the real value of SA government revenue drops in 2024-25 and only averages growth of just over 1%p.a. for the four-year period. This is important because with population growth (around 1% a year) we would hope revenue would rise to cover increasing costs.

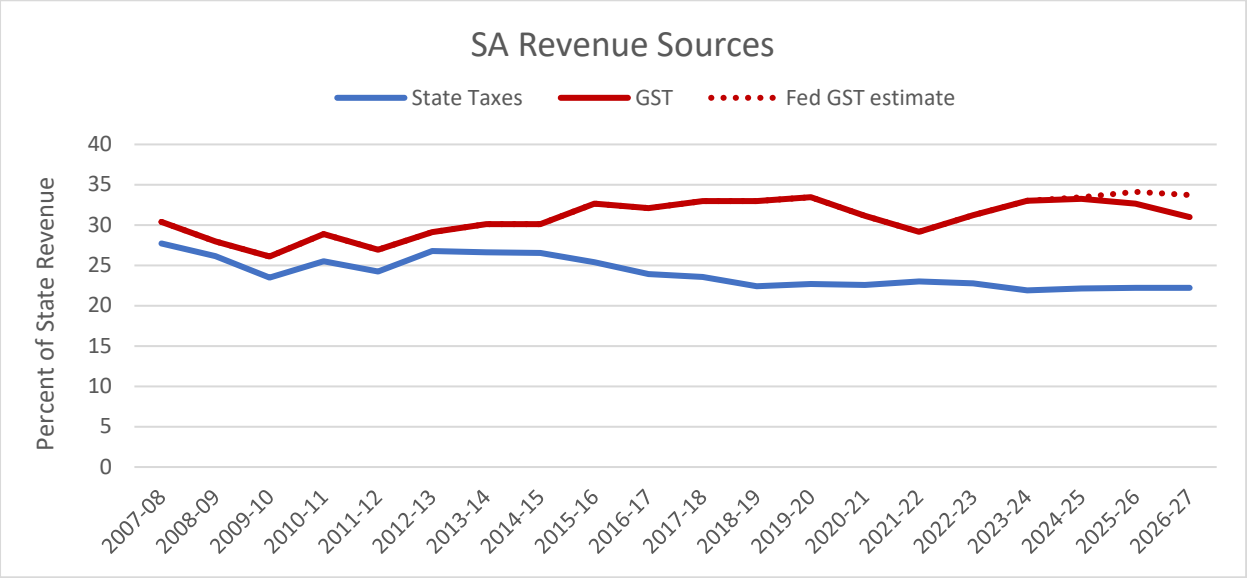
Table 3: Revenue Growth

	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25	2025-26	2026-27
Revenue (nominal) $m	24,658	26,603	27,147	28,056	29,226
Real Revenue Growth	-3.5%	4.0%	-1.2%	0.6%	1.6%

Further, this modest revenue growth hides a long-term problem in the South Australian state budget, namely the diminishing contribution of the state's own tax base and an increasing reliance on GST revenue to underpin the budget. The state's own tax revenue is expected to increase by an average of just 0.6% over the four-year period, which is below the total revenue growth and adds to the long-term trend evident in the graph below.

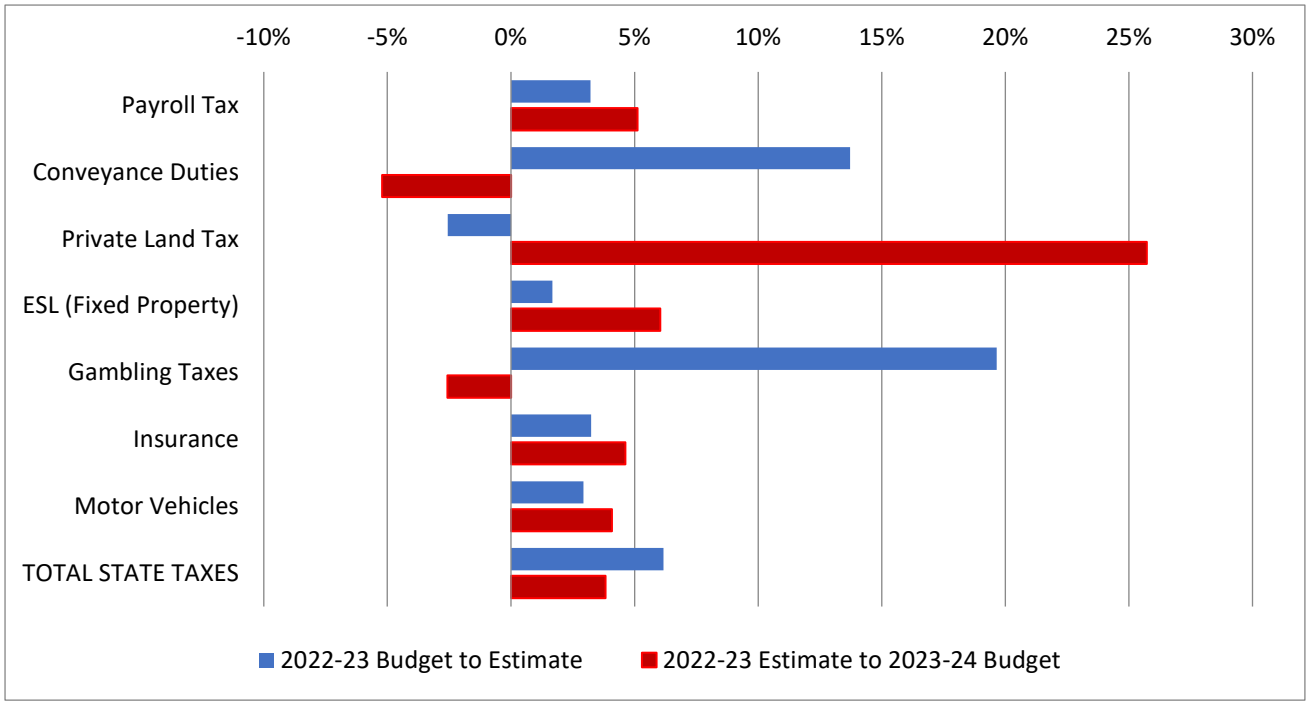
The graph also shows the increased reliance on GST, albeit with some volatility. The increased reliance on GST is problematic both because it is a regressive tax and because the SA government does not control the amount collected (or the SA share of the national GST pool). As we have seen this year where the government said that a decrease in GST funding contributed to the transformation of a surplus budget into deficit, movements in GST receipts can significantly change budget outcomes. The dotted line in the graph is because there is a discrepancy between the amount of GST the state budget says will come into SA over the forward estimates (the solid red line) and the amounts in the Federal budget papers from just a month earlier. SACOSS does not know why there is a discrepancy, but it does underline the issues of volatility and of SA not being in control of the revenue stream.

Figure 2: State Taxes and GST as a Proportion of State Revenue



There is also volatility in some state taxes. The graph below shows changes in the amount of various state taxes in the last two years. The blue bars show the difference in what was budgeted and what was collected (estimated) in 2022-23, while the red bars show the difference between this year's revenue and what is budgeted for 2023-24. This figure is not adjusted for inflation, so we would expect an increase, and indeed the tax take for most taxes increases in both years reflecting the generally inflationary environment.

Figure 3: State Tax Collection Changes



This graph shows the impact of a boom in the property market with the increase of conveyance duties in one year (2022-23) flowing through to increases of private land tax in future years as land

is revalued (the budget estimates residential land values increasing by 22% and non-residential land by 27%).

The other obvious significant increase in state tax take evident in the graph is in gambling taxes. This was largely driven by increases in poker machine revenue and in the compliance/payment of the betting operations tax (which is curious in the light of the changes announced in the betting operations tax – see discussion in Budget Measures). However, the increases are not expected to continue next year.

Finally, in considering tax revenue, it is important to remember that South Australia remains a relatively low-taxing jurisdiction by Australian standards (and Australia is a low-taxing country in comparison with most of the OECD countries). The Budget Papers show that the state tax effort and taxes per capita in South Australia are lower than most Australian states (except Tasmania).

Again, with the economic growth, wages, employment, population, and productivity and investment challenges highlighted in the SACOSS Budget Submission, serious investment in our state's future is required and this will inevitably mean addressing the adequacy of the state tax base.

Expenditure

Government expenditure is the means by which the government provides the public infrastructure and services that the community needs. While individual expenditure measures will be dealt with under their respective policy areas in the next section of this analysis, overall there are $875m in new operating expenditures and $119m in investment expenditures for 2023-24. Balanced with other initiatives (including 1% departmental cuts announced in previous budgets), this new expenditure results in a 5.8% increase in total operating expenses from this year to the 2023-24 budget year. However, as the table below shows, this is only a 2% increase in real terms, which is reversed in the following year. Over the four years of the budget and forward estimates, real growth in expenditure averages only about one-half of one percent per annum.

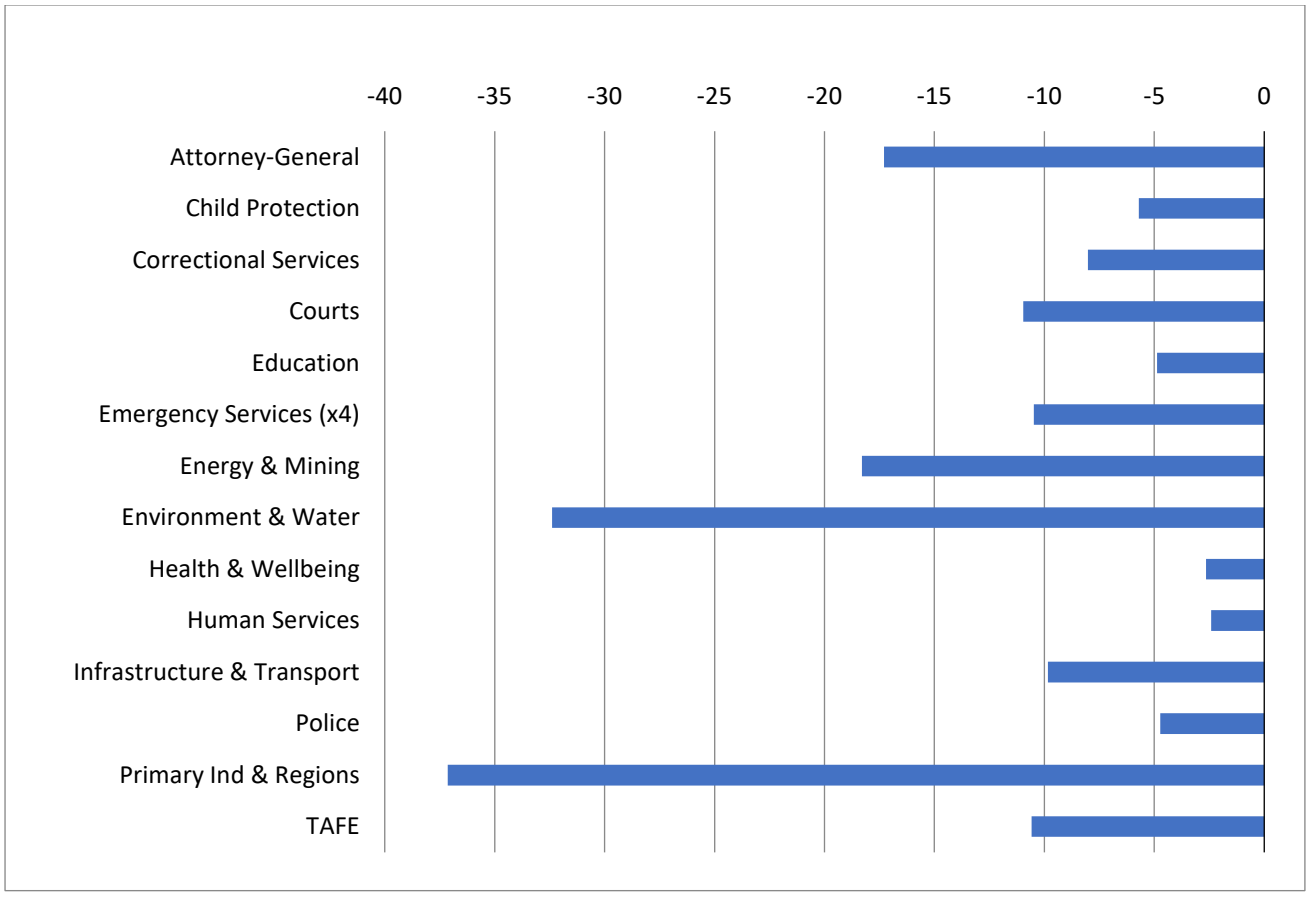
Table 4: Expenditure Growth

	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25	2025-26	2026-27
Expenditure (nominal) $m	24,907	26,353	26,635	27,504	28,587
Real Expenditure Growth	-5.8%	2.0%	-2.1%	0.5%	1.4%

It is important to note that this modest growth in real expenditure does not necessarily translate into growth in expenditure on public services. Firstly, this is because the projected expenditure growth is less than population growth, so there will be less spent per capita on services in 2026-27 than in the current budget year. Secondly, as noted earlier, a significant component of expenditure

increases over the next 4 years is higher interest payments – which is money not being spent on providing services to South Australians. This point is underlined in the following graph which shows that the operating expenditures of key public service departments will decrease in real terms from 2023-24 to 2026-27 – despite the increase in state government operating expenditure overall.

Figure 4: Real Operating Expenditure: Percent Change from 2023-24 to 2026-27



Source: SACOSS calculations using expenditure and CPI projections in the Budget Statement.

Some caution is needed with this graph in that some departments had significantly increased funding in 2022-23, so the base year expenditure may be significantly higher than was projected even in last year's budget. Nonetheless, the projections of declining expenditure over the budget and forward estimates is real, and it is important to keep this in mind when interpreting the budget, as the list of new budget initiatives can create an impression of expanding expenditure on key areas which may not be the full picture.

B. Policy Areas

1. Liveable Income

The "tax and transfer" system is an important part of the role of any government. As evident in the analysis above, taxation underpins the ability to provide public services (supplemented in some cases by user fees and charges). "Transfers" are the direct payments to people on low incomes to enable them to access basic goods and services. At the state government level, one of the major transfers are concessions on essential services, as well as the generic cost of living concession payment. However, SACOSS has argued that the concession system has a number of built-in poverty premiums and barriers to low-income people accessing concessions in our state. We are currently working with the government on a review of the concessions system and we hope to see changes in the next budget to:

- Extend all concessions available to age pension recipients to other Centrelink recipients receiving lower payments.
- Implement an additional low-income eligibility criteria for all concessions which is not based on receipt of Centrelink benefits.

Budget Commentary

The headline initiative in this area was the Energy Bill Relief plan, which is a joint initiative with the Commonwealth. Beyond this, with the concessions review still in progress, there were few new income support ("transfers") initiatives. However, there were a few things which, while not listed as new measures, will also assist households dealing with cost of living pressures as the government has increased concessions to match inflation, but not increased its own charges to the same extent. The main tax measure (exempting first-home buyers from stamp duty – see detail in Housing section) comes at a cost to the budget, and there are no significant new revenue raising measures.

Budget Measures

Govt Dept/Agency	Item/Costing	Description of Budget Measure	SACOSS comments
Human Services	Energy Bill Relief Plan *$127.2m (over 2 years)*	Provides a rebate of $500 off energy bills for eligible households, with a matching contribution from the Commonwealth	While providing welcome relief for many households, the package is poorly targeted. SACOSS estimates around $30m will go to households who may not be in energy stress, while the plan provides no assistance to many households struggling with energy bills but who are outside the Centrelink system.
Across Government	Indexation of Concessions	Funding to index concessions by 8.64% in line with Adelaide	This is in line with existing policy to index concessions to the inflation rate, but at a

	$44m (over 5 years)	CPI (Budget Statement,p.5).	time of high inflation it is a significant increase to keep pace with rising prices.
Across Government	4.8% Increase to most government fees and charges	The annual indexation for increases to fees and charges like public transport fares, vehicle registrations and drivers' licence renewals (Budget Statement,p.53).	While any increase in fees and charges will impact on those struggling to make ends meet, SACOSS acknowledges that these increases are well below the general inflation rate.

2. Rental Affordability and Housing

Introduction

Housing is a fundamental human right. Rising rent payments, particularly for those on low incomes, constitute not just the largest single expenditure for South Australian households but one which impacts on peoples' quality of life and their ability to afford all other goods and services. Rental affordability (and availability) is one of the most critical social policy issues facing South Australians, where the inability to keep up with increasing prices can result in eviction and potentially homelessness. South Australians on low incomes are paying disproportionately more for housing that is often inadequate, and as the cost of living and housing crises continue in our state renters in particular are in urgent need of assistance.

SACOSS' submission to the recent SA parliament Economic and Finance Committee Inquiry into housing availability proposes a range of tax, supply and regulatory measures to increase rental availability, affordability and security. Most importantly, SACOSS has been calling on the government to invest in public housing, both to provide rental accommodation to those most marginalised in the market, but also to add to housing supply and put downward pressure on rent prices across the market.

Commentary

This budget contains the funding to deliver the government's A Better Housing Future plan, which was announced in February this year. While this plan delivers some investment in public housing, and a number of rental reforms (limiting rent bidding, protecting tenants' information, and increasing the threshold for six-week bonds) they have as yet not tackled the core issues of capping rent prices, the energy efficiency of properties or securing tenants' rights in relation to pet ownership and security of tenure. While some of these may be addressed in reforms promised later this year, the budget itself does little to provide the urgent relief needed for South Australian renters – either through access to concessions or other forms of rent relief.

Budget Measures

Govt Dept/Agency	Item/Costing	Description of Budget Measure	SACOSS comments
Across government	A better housing future *$325m (over 5 years)*	To support a package of measures, including additional social and affordable housing, $72m for public housing maintenance; increased private rental assistance, changes to Homestart	SACOSS welcomes measures that make housing more affordable and accessible, but despite the significant expenditure detailed the amount of new social housing promised will not keep up with population growth – let alone begin to rebuild the public housing estate. Similarly, while the rental assistance changes will assist some renters in particular need, they will have

		and some minor tax changes. (p. 5 - 8)	little impact on lack of affordability across the market.
Taxation measure	Abolition of stamp duty for first home buyers *$128.8m*	No stamp duty will be payable for eligible first home buyers building or buying a new home valued up to $650,000 or land valued up to $400,000. (p. 5)	This is a significant benefit (up to $29,850), but SACOSS is normally sceptical of first-home buyer assistance as it often inflates home prices and has little impact on affordability. However, given this measure is limited to new homes, these impacts will be more limited and it may also stimulate new home building to increase supply.
Human Services	Support for crisis accommodation – domestic violence *$3.9m*	Continuation of crisis accommodation support program that provides intensive case management and support services for victim-survivors of domestic violence. This funding also goes towards the domestic violence perpetrator response program. (p.49)	SACOSS welcomes the continuation of funding for these programs.
South Australian Housing Authority	Extension of Aspire homelessness program *$1.7m*	To extend intake for program for a further 12 months assisting a further 88 people (p.75)	SACOSS welcomes this measure, but would also like to see more done for homelessness prevention and for people experiencing or at risk of homelessness.

3. Essential Services

Introduction

All South Australians should have equitable and affordable access to essential services such as energy and water, regardless of where they live, their circumstances, or their capacity to pay. SACOSS' research shows that the cost of necessities like energy and water impacts greatly and disproportionately on people on low incomes and those living with disadvantage. In the context of a rapidly growing energy affordability crisis, it is crucial that government support is well targeted and durable, to protect South Australians against volatile energy costs for the long-term.

Commentary

SACOSS was disappointed by the lack of measures in the budget to safeguard households against current and future utilities price shocks. The announced energy relief fund (see Section 1 A Liveable Income), while welcome, only provides short-term relief, but as the energy market continues its rapid transformation, greater access to demand side opportunities such as energy efficiency are needed to permanently help reduce energy usage and total demand at the household level.

While the Energy Bill Relief funding was the only new budget measure, SACOSS notes from the Agency Statements that the budget for energy policy and programs has reduced by $2.6m to $21.12m for 2023-24, down from $23.8m in 2022-23. The government has previously provided significant funding ($593m) to support the hydrogen industry, and we noted that there was an unbudgeted increase in hydrogen-related spending of nearly 50% in 2022-23, from $4m (budgeted) to an estimated $7.8m, due to additional resourcing needed to meet 'key deliverables'. While it remains to be seen whether this will deliver long-term benefits for South Australian households struggling with energy costs, the costs of the project need to be monitored closely.

SACOSS welcomes the government's ongoing work to integrate renewable energy supplies in remote South Australia and we hope to see the benefits flow through to households in reduced tariffs. We also welcome the government's plan to upgrade all Remote Area Energy Supply systems to support distributed energy resources and electric vehicle charging. Removing barriers to accessing solar in remote areas is essential to securing long-term energy sustainability, eliminating disconnections and reducing energy costs for residents in those communities.

Finally, we note that there is no state funding allocated to match the National Water Grid Fund to deliver safe and reliable water for First Nations communities living in remote and regional South Australia. Access to the recently expanded fund requires a state government co-contribution of at least 50% for capital costs. This should build on the Department for Environment and Water (DEW)'s water security assessment for self-supplied remote communities.

Budget Measures

No new measures of note relevant to the sector.

4. Health and Wellbeing

Introduction

The health and wellbeing sector is critical in ensuring all South Australians can live healthy lives. SACOSS seeks to ensure the sector is accessible, equitable, and focuses on health promotion and disease prevention, alongside curative services.

While SACOSS acknowledges the importance of improving hospital capacity and efficiency, we believe that investment in preventative health will decrease demand on tertiary care. Similarly investment in tertiary health workforce should be matched by comparable investment in the primary and preventative health workforce to ensure that health expenditure has maximal impact.

Commentary

Health expenditure is a centrepiece of the 2023-2024 budget, and there has been a significant increase in health funding with the budget papers pointing to new expenditure of "$1.8bn over five years from 2022-23 to support SA Health in meeting increased activity and to ensure our health system is adequately resourced to deliver the necessary services". The largest increase in expenditure was in 2022-23 (accounted for in the mid-year budget review), but the result is that Department of Health and Wellbeing expenditure actually drops in 2023-24 from its high of the previous year, although the forward expenditure is still significantly higher than the original 2022-23 budgeted expenditure.

It is also important to note that the lion's share of new funding has once again been directed towards tertiary care, infrastructure and clinical workforce.

The health budget also directs considerable resources ($567m) to the transition towards a 'living with COVID framework', seeing the pandemic response emphasis pivot from prevention to mitigation. We are hopeful that this shift will maintain a focus on preventing the ongoing disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on disadvantaged communities. Social and economic inequities continue to be associated with more severe outcomes and death due to COVID-19, suggesting that addressing health inequities must be central to a post-pandemic response.

Budget Measures

Govt Dept/Agency	Item/Costing	Description of Budget Measure	SACOSS comments
Health and Wellbeing	Living with COVID *$278m*	Additional resources for the transition from pandemic response to a 'living with COVID' framework (p. 43)	SACOSS supports this measure, but more information is needed as to how this approach will meet the needs of vulnerable individuals, those living with chronic disease, and those facing the challenge of long COVID.

Health and Wellbeing	Cheaper car parking and free transport *$56.4m (foregone revenue over 5 years)*	Funding to deliver cheaper car parking and free public transport for metro hospital workers. (p.44).	SACOSS acknowledges the need to support workforce conditions for health workers.
Defence	Veteran Wellbeing *$2m (indexed) over 4 years*	A Veteran and Families Growth Support Program and a Comprehensive Outreach Program to improve the wellbeing of the veteran community (p. 45).	SACOSS welcomes this preventative mental health and wellbeing initiative.

Support for tertiary care and infrastructure

There are a range of measures relating to infrastructure spend and/or tertiary care which while important are not the main focus of SACOSS' health policy and advocacy agenda. These measures include:

- Additional hospital activity - $1.1bn to support 528 FTE to help meet activity demand pressures (p. 43)
- Naracoorte health services planning - Once-off $1m funding to support a planning study for the delivery of health services in the Naracoorte region (p. 45)
- $23.2m (over two years) to expand the electronic medical record program across all regional Local Health Network hospitals (p. 44)
- $141 million over three years for health infrastructure projects including the new Mount Barker Hospital, the upgrade of the Paediatric Intensive Care unit at WCH, and for new or upgraded ambulance stations (pp. 44-46).
- A range of measures to reduce ambulance ramping including:
    - increased weekend staffing in metropolitan hospitals ($5.4m in 2023-24 increasing to $8.5m per annum (indexed) by 2026-27)
    - establishment of the State Health Control Centre ($31.5m over the forward estimates)
    - Adult Virtual Care Service ($1.1m in 2022-23 increasing to $17.2m per annum (indexed) by 2026-27)
    - Child and Adolescent Virtual Urgent Care Service ($7.4m per annum (indexed) from 2023-24 to permanently extend this service)
    - Supported discharge of long-stay patients ($17.6m over five years)

- Regency Green ($3.5m in 2022-23 increasing to $4.8m per annum (indexed) by 2026-27) to continue providing transitional accommodation (24 beds) for NDIS patients, supporting earlier discharge
- Establish emergency department avoidance hubs in western and northern suburbs ($2.1m) (p. 45)

5. Digital Inclusion

Introduction

Access to the digital world has never been so essential. Critical government and commercial services have been moving online, a trend that sped up during COVID, including banking, education, employment, health, housing, and welfare services. Community members who do not have the confidence and skill to effectively or safely navigate the online world, or who do not have the funds to access the devices and data they need to go online, are likely to be left behind. This means not only missing out on key social and economic opportunities, but also being more at-risk of online harm and scams.

SACOSS has long advocated for a dedicated digital inclusion strategy from the state government that funds permanent digital skills training and drop-in support, rolled-out through libraries and community centres, and measures to improve access and affordability, particularly across regional SA, where there are some of the highest levels of digital exclusion in the country.

Commentary

Like the previous state government's Digital Restart Fund, which aimed to improve government information technology platforms, this budget also prioritises government digital infrastructure over the need to invest in access and skills in the community. While investing in government infrastructure is important, and will hopefully flow through to easier to use systems and improved services for the community members, this will not benefit those most digitally disadvantaged if they don't have the access or skills to access government online. A matching commitment is required to build digital inclusion in the community so that all South Australians can reap the benefits of this investment.

Budget Measures

Govt Dept/Agency	Item/Costing	Description of Budget Measure	SACOSS comments
Across Government	The Digital Investment Fund *$200m*	Provide upgrades to government ICT infrastructure (p. 9)	As above.

6. Climate Change

Introduction

Our climate is changing, and it impacts on all of our lives in many ways. Those who already live with poverty and disadvantage are being, and will continue to be, hardest hit . Governments have an obligation to address climate change: its causes; its impacts on the natural environment; and its impacts on people, animals and infrastructure.

Commentary

SACOSS was disappointed to see that preparing for and preventing climate change was largely ignored in this budget. No measures addressing 'climate' were included in Budget Paper 5.

Instead the government's spending responds to the impacts of climate change, often focused on expensive infrastructure or equipment spending. In this budget there is expenditure on aircraft for increased aerial fire-fighting capacity ($26.5m), coastal and estuarine risk mitigation ($6.7m, and flood barriers ($1.2m). These are necessary measures that respond to the disasters (such as bushfire and flood) that are becoming more frequent and intense because of climate change. However, there are many missed opportunities to address the causes of climate change and to grow the climate and disaster resilience of people and communities beyond investments in assets and infrastructure. The following measures are the new community-based measures in the emergency services departments.

Budget Measures

Govt Dept/Agency	Item/Costing	Description of Budget Measure	SACOSS comments
SAFECOM	Additional mental health support for Volunteer emergency services *$1.8m*	Improved mental health services for 15,000 emergency service responders, including volunteer and paid workforce and their families. (p. 32)	SACOSS supports this measure which will be funded through the emergency services levy.
Across Government	River Murray flood event — support, assistance and response *$28.7m (over two years)*	Support and relief measures in response to the River Murray flood that occurred in 2022-23.	SACOSS supports this initiative, acknowledging that recovery occurs over years, not months.

7. First Nations Solidarity

Introduction

The budget comes in the context of the critical importance of building reconciliation and advancing the Uluru Statement from the Heart, as well as implementing the South Australian Voice to Parliament and actively supporting the current national referendum for a First Nations Voice to Parliament. It is essential that these initiatives are supported and that augmented funding and attention is also directed to the range of material conditions that affect the lives of First Nations peoples.

Aligned with the targets set in the National Closing the Gap Agreement, SACOSS has long been calling for positive movement on reaching these targets, and in particular, for concrete action to be taken to reduce the incarceration and criminalisation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and adults (Targets 10 and 11). To this end, we continue to look forward to South Australia's age of criminal responsibility being raised from 10 to at least 14 years.

Commentary

This budget contains initiatives which focus on Aboriginal reconciliation and recognition which are welcomed and long-overdue (details below). There are also a number of measures such as the increased support for family group conferencing with the provision of targeted support for Aboriginal children and young people which are dealt with elsewhere in this document (Children's Interests Section 8). However, we are concerned that a number of justice measures have received only limited funding support including the Child Diversion Program for young Aboriginal children and the plan to develop an 'Aboriginal Justice Agreement'. While we welcome the collaborative approach between government and Aboriginal communities, also evident in the commitment to reduce Aboriginal incarceration rates, we remain concerned that initiatives such as the Remote Aboriginal Visitors initiative may profile particular groups of people in our society

Budget Measures

Govt Dept/Agency	Item/Costing	Description of Budget Measure	SACOSS comments
Human Services	Child diversion program *$1.1m (over two years)*	Continuing the program which diverts Aboriginal children aged 10-13 charged minor offences away from a custodial environment and provides supports (p. 48)	SACOSS and other organisations continue to call for the age of criminal responsibility to be raised to at least 14. Diversionary measures are a positive contribution to keeping children out of the youth justice system.

Human Services	Remote Aboriginal visitors – community safety and wellbeing response *$11.2m*	To support remote Aboriginal visitors in Adelaide and regional South Australia with, assistance to return to community and access appropriate healthcare (p. 49)	While we tentatively support this initiative, we would like additional information about the purpose and nature of this funding.
Attorney-General	Aboriginal Justice Agreement *$737,000 (over two years)*	To enable a collaborative approach to improving justice outcomes and Closing the Gap targets (p.12).	SACOSS welcomes this funding because of its collaborative approach and the aim to reduce the incarceration of Aboriginal peoples and reach the Closing the Gap targets.
Attorney-General	First Nations Voice to Parliament *$6.1m*	To establish and support the ongoing operations of the First Nations Voice to SA Parliament (p. 13).	SACOSS welcomes this funding to make the SA Voice functional and increase opportunities for First Nations and community-led voices to be heard.
Electoral Commission	First Nations Voice to Parliament — election costs *$4.2m (over two years)*	This funding is to conduct the first two elections for members of the Voice, with funding to be provided for future elections. (p. 30)	SACOSS welcomes this funding as the operationalising and participation in the Voice is reliant on elections being held.
Attorney-General	Closing the Gap — increased resourcing *$5.1m*	Includes resourcing to the SA Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation Network (SAACCON) and Aboriginal Affairs and Reconciliation (p.13)	This measure is supported because, to date, resourcing has not adequately enabled the active implementation of the Closing the Gap targets under the National Partnership Agreement.
Education	Supporting Tauondi Aboriginal Community College	To support Tauondi's sustainability and growth as a community hub and training organisation (p.29).	This is a welcome measure. The College plays an important role in providing a community space and culturally safe training opportunities.

	$5.6m		
Attorney-General	Repatriation and exhumation of Aboriginal Remains *$1.5m*	To support the reburial, exhumation and reinterment of Aboriginal ancestral remains if they have not been buried in a culturally appropriate manner (p.13).	SACOSS supports this measure as it recognises cultural significance and contributes to reconciliation and righting the wrongs of the past.
Child Protection	Peak body for Aboriginal children and young people *$3.2m*	To establish a peak body which, amongst other responsibilities, will aim to reduce the over-representation of Aboriginal children in the child protection system (p.18).	SACOSS, alongside the Commissioner for Aboriginal Children and Young People, has advocated for such a peak body for many years. We support Aboriginal-led decision-making processes.
Energy and Mining	Remediation of Mintabie Township *$7.7m (over one year)*	To clean up the consequences of former mining activity in the Mintabie Township leased from the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Lands (p.37).	This is a long overdue and welcome measure. It is hoped that the remediation is comprehensive and properly engages with the community.
Correctional Services	Yalakiana Tappa — reducing Aboriginal incarceration *$11.1m*	For an Aboriginal community-led initiative to reduce incarceration rates by assisting people transitioning from remand to bail (p. 21)	We support this measure as evidence is clear that, in the absence of appropriate supports for people leaving prison or moving from remand to bail arrangements, the recidivism rate does not decrease. Critical to this measure is the provision of adequate housing and social security payments.

8. Children's Interests

Introduction

One in three children in South Australia have encountered the child protection system by the time they are ten years old. Children as young as ten years of age are detained by the youth justice system, and one in four children in this state experience significant levels of poverty. Census data suggests that 2,339 South Australian children aged under 12 years were homeless in 2021. These levels of poverty and housing insecurity are a significant contributory factor in children and young people becoming involved in the youth justice and child protection systems.

It is therefore critical that every effort is made to support children and their families and to ensure that preventative and early intervention measures are put in place to keep children out of both the youth justice and child protection systems. This calls for a comprehensive response that reaches well beyond a focus primarily on removing children or placing them under supervision or in detention.

Commentary

Many of the budget measures relating to the interests of children are directed towards the tertiary end of child support and protection services and the increasing expenditure on out of home care. Year on year, we are seeing considerable increases in allocations to provide care for children who have been removed from their families, as well as to provide for the associated costs of employing a care workforce, maintaining residential care facilities, and the ancillary support services such as youth courts and re-unification programs.

While remedies and support services are essential for children who are removed by the child protection system and placed in care, it is critical that expenditure is also directed towards early intervention and preventative initiatives. For this reason, we welcome the funding being directed towards intensive and targeted family support services and the measures to support first-time parents to be the best parents they can be and, where possible, keep families together.

Budget Measures

NOTE: A number of measures which relate to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children's interests are captured under the First Nations Solidarity measures.

Govt Dept/Agency	Item/Costing	Description of Budget Measure	SACOSS comments
Human Services	Targeted Intensive Family Support Services *$35.5m*	Support services for vulnerable families, prioritising those living in the northern	SACOSS has long called for early intervention and prevention to keep children at home and families and communities together. We welcome this measure to provide intensive and targeted family support services.

		metropolitan region (p. 50)	
Human Services	Stronger Start Program *$6.1m*	Family support services for at-risk first-time parents, including connections to critical services (p. 49)	We welcome funding for family support services. We are pleased to see measures that can support first-time parents to be the best parents they can be and, where possible, keep families together.
Child Protection	Out of home care — additional resources *$68.5m over four years*.	This initiative provides funding to reflect the increasing number of children and young people in non-family-based care placements (p. 18).	While this increased funding for out of home care may be necessary, as noted above, it is the result of a lack of focus on prevention and early intervention.
Child Protection	Increase carer payments *$32m*	This initiative increases carer payments for family-based carers by $50 per child per fortnight (plus indexation) from 1 July 2023 (p. 17)	The increase in payment and indexation of payments is welcomed. However, given current cost of living pressures, carer payments remain inadequate in real terms and do not meet the day-to-day costs of caring for a child or young person.
Child Protection	Additional kinship care assessments *$4m*	To intensify efforts on assessing and recruiting extended family members to care for children and young people in a family-based setting (p.16).	While every effort needs to be made to keep children in their immediate family, we support efforts to involve extended family members to care for children. Where Aboriginal children are involved, it is important that the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principles (ATSICPP) are applied.
Child Protection	Family reunification services *$2m*	This initiative aims to increase the availability of reunification services to children and young people in care and their families (p.17).	SACOSS supports children being able to remain with their family in the first instance. If children are removed from their family, safe and planned reunification is supported – this process needs to include supporting and working with a child or young person's family to improve parenting ability and family functioning.
Child Protection	Across-government child	To establish a model where, in the event of a death of a child,	Early intervention and prevention will make a significant contribution to avoiding the death of a child. However, a rapid-response

	death review model *$1.2m*	relevant agencies will be required to conduct a real-time clinical review of service provision and response (p.15).	mechanism will be an important contribution to providing a degree of relief for affected families and communities.
Child Protection	Annual investing program *$2m*	To establish an annual investment to maintain the department's assets, including residential care facilities and other leased properties (p. 16).	It is evident that the current residential care facilities are inadequate in terms of both quality and availability. Additional funding to improve the environments of children and young people in care is welcomed, but in the longer-term, we need to reduce the number of children in care and therefore the number of residential facilities required.
Courts Administration Authority	Additional Magistrate — Youth Court *$2.9m*	This initiative provides an additional Magistrate and associated support staff in the Youth Court to address increased workloads (p. 22).	This measure is welcomed and it is hoped that this will reduce the backlog and waiting periods for children and young people who encounter the care and youth justice systems.
Child Protection	Family group conferences *$12.3m*	To increase family group conferencing services to support Aboriginal children and their families to determine care arrangements (p.17).	This measure has been called for by SACOSS and is supported as it enables Aboriginal families to participate and make decisions about the care of children.
Education	Materials and service charge subsidy *$12m (over one year)*	To provide a $100 subsidy for materials and service charge for students in government schools	This measure is welcomed.
Education	Expanded school breakfast program *$6.5m*	This funding will expand the free breakfast program currently offered by Foodbank and KickStart for Kids in government schools (p.26)	This measure is welcomed. However, while it is important that children are not hungry and that their learning outcomes are not compromised as a result, the need for this program points to the high level of poverty and cost of living pressures experienced by families.

Education	Grant – The Smith Family *$4.1m*	Grant to support an additional 700 students in the Learning for Life program to support success at school (p.26)	This measure goes some way to supporting children experiencing disadvantage.

9. Sector Support

Introduction

The non-government health and community services sector in South Australia includes over 1,000 organisations with a combined revenue of $4.7bn per annum and employing more than 50,000 South Australians. The sector provides vital services to build community and to support vulnerable and disadvantaged people, and is funded by a combination of state and commonwealth government funding, private donations, fundraising and business income.

Commentary

The South Australian government has never provided the sort of sector-specific funding for workforce and sector development that is available in some other states, and this budget contains few sector specific initiatives. However, the relatively modest measures detailed below do come against the background of a $13.7m per annum (indexed) increase in funding announced in the Mid-Year Budget Review to assist the sector meet costs associated with inflation and increased award wages. These cost pressures have continued, and we are pleased that this has been recognised by the government in this budget with funding additional to the increases announced in the MYBR.

Budget Measures

Govt Dept/Agency	Item/Costing	Description of Budget Measure	SACOSS comments
Across Government	Indexation Supplementation *$57.2m*	Additional money for sector organisations to assist with increasing wage and other costs (p. 10).	This welcome boost in funding is in addition to similar increases announced in the Mid-Year Budget Review and will greatly assist in the provision of vital community services.
Human Services	Support for food charities and financial counselling *$5m*	Additional money for sector organisations to support response to cost of living pressures (p. 49)	This is a welcome though modest support and the support for financial counselling is limited to only two years.

Portable Long Service Leave

While not a new budget measure, and there is no new funding, we note that Attorney-General's Department Agency Statement (p. 45) highlights research and consultation on the development of a portable long service leave scheme long advocated for by SACOSS, and we look forward to further progress over the next year.

10. Other Basics:

Disability/Aged Care

Govt Dept/Agency	Item/Costing	Description of Budget Measure	SACOSS comments
Health and Wellbeing	Adult Safeguarding Unit *$8.8m*	Funding to establish a unit to recognise and respond to abuse of vulnerable adults (p.43)	This is an important initiative with the potential to support some of the most vulnerable South Australians.
Premier and Cabinet	Autism support *$4m*	Initiatives coordinated by the Office for Autism to help make SA autism inclusive. (p. 64)	SACOSS welcomes this initiative.
Human Services	Changing Places *$300,000 per year*	Partnering with the Commonwealth and local councils to provide accessible toilet and changing facilities across South Australia (p. 47).	This is a very welcome measure to ensure that there are more accessible toilets and changing facilities for people with disability and high support needs. Everyone deserves the dignity of suitable, safe and private bathroom facilities.
Human Services	Disability access and inclusion *$1.7m (over two years)*	Funding for strategic leadership, management and expert advice to inform the national disability agenda (p. 48).	SACOSS welcomes ongoing funding and support that enables South Australia's continued engagement with the national disability agenda.

Regional support

Govt Dept/Agency	Item/Costing	Description of Budget Measure	SACOSS comments
Infrastructure and Transport	Regional bus services *$23.5m*	$5.5m per annum (indexed) to continue supporting regional bus services, including compliance with public transport disability standards (p.56).	SACOSS welcomes ongoing support to improve transport access in regional communities, which has been a longstanding issue, particularly for those living with disability. Further detail would be welcome on the intended reach and scope of services.
Infrastructure and Transport	Outback Futures *$6m*	For improving facilities and community services in outback communities and removing asset	SACOSS welcomes investment in outback communities, and the removal of a levy which, on its face, was an unfair user-pays imposition on communities who already

		sustainability levy payable by outback residents (p. 58)	don't get the benefit of many public services.
TAFE SA	Regional Skills Development Fund *$10.5m*	To assist TAFE SA in offering more courses in rural and regional South Australia (p. 69).	While this funding is welcome, it comes against a background of declining government funding of TAFE which may undermine this regional goal.

Justice

Note: There are also a number of justice measures listed in Section 7 First Nations Solidarity.

Govt Dept/Agency	**Item/Costing**	**Description of Budget Measure**	**SACOSS comments**
Correctional services	Port Augusta Community Corrections Centre *$4.6m*	To secure and fit out a new Port Augusta Community Corrections Centre, which will support culturally appropriate rehabilitation and reintegration programs for Aboriginal offenders (p. 20).	While SACOSS supports the provision of culturally appropriate rehabilitation programs, rather than establishing of additional prisons, every effort needs to be made to reduce the incarceration rate, especially for First Nations peoples, and to put in place preventative measures to keep people out of prison.
Correctional services	Port Augusta Prison upgrades — Bluebush and Greenbush high security units *$30m (over 3 years)*	To upgrade prisoner accommodation and staff facilities in two high security units at the Port Augusta Prison (p. 20).	As indicated above, while we support the provision of decent facilities, these are not the answer to justice and correctional issues.
South Australia Police	Additional sworn police security officers — district support section *$81.8m*	This initiative provides for the recruitment of additional police security officers to undertake security operations currently done by regular police. (p. 60).	While there may be arguments for freeing police of routine security operations, there needs to assurances about the role, quality and training of these new police security officers, and how these security officers fit with community-based approaches to policing and safety.
South Australia Police	Accelerated police recruitment	This initiative accelerates the recruitment of police, and improving training	As indicated above, increased measures need to be in place to support prevention and early intervention, and to address the social determinants of crime and anti-social behaviour. Only when this is done

	$12.2m (over 3 years)	and vocational pathways (p. 60).	can we properly assess the appropriate level of policing required for community safety.
South Australia Police	APY Lands accommodation project — Indulkana *$2.7 million (over 1 year)*	This funding is for the construction of the Indulkana police post (p. 61).	SACOSS understands that communities have expressed the need for increased community protection and a police presence, but this needs to be managed as part of an integrated approach to poverty and other social concerns which are the drivers of community disruption.
South Australia Police	Prescribed interview rooms – supporting vulnerable witnesses *$1.7m over two years, plus ongoing operating expenditure*	For maintenance and upgrade of interview rooms supporting victims and witnesses subject to alleged child sexual offences (p.62)	These upgrades are required for compliance with new legal requirements to support vulnerable witnesses and victims, and SACOSS welcomes these changes and expenditures.

Miscellaneous

Govt Dept/Agency	**Item/Costing**	**Description of Budget Measure**	**SACOSS comments**
Premier and Cabinet	Strategic Policy Capability and Delivery *$17m*	Investment to increase the capacity of the public service to deliver policy advice and coordination services rather than outsourcing policy advice. (p. 64)	After decades of cutting public service policy expertise, and in light of current national scandals around the behaviour and conflicts of interest of major private consultants, this investment is both welcome and overdue.
Department of Infrastructure and Transport	Return of Rail Services to Public Hands *$28.9m, plus $10.2m investing expenditure*	Funding required for legal support, recruitment and training of staff, and purchase of assets for the transition of metro rail services back to government.	In the light of SACOSS' recent conference on the ownership and operation of essential services, SACOSS welcomes the re-assertion of public ownership of this monopoly. While these transition expenses are disappointing, it should serve as a further warning of the problems of privatisation.

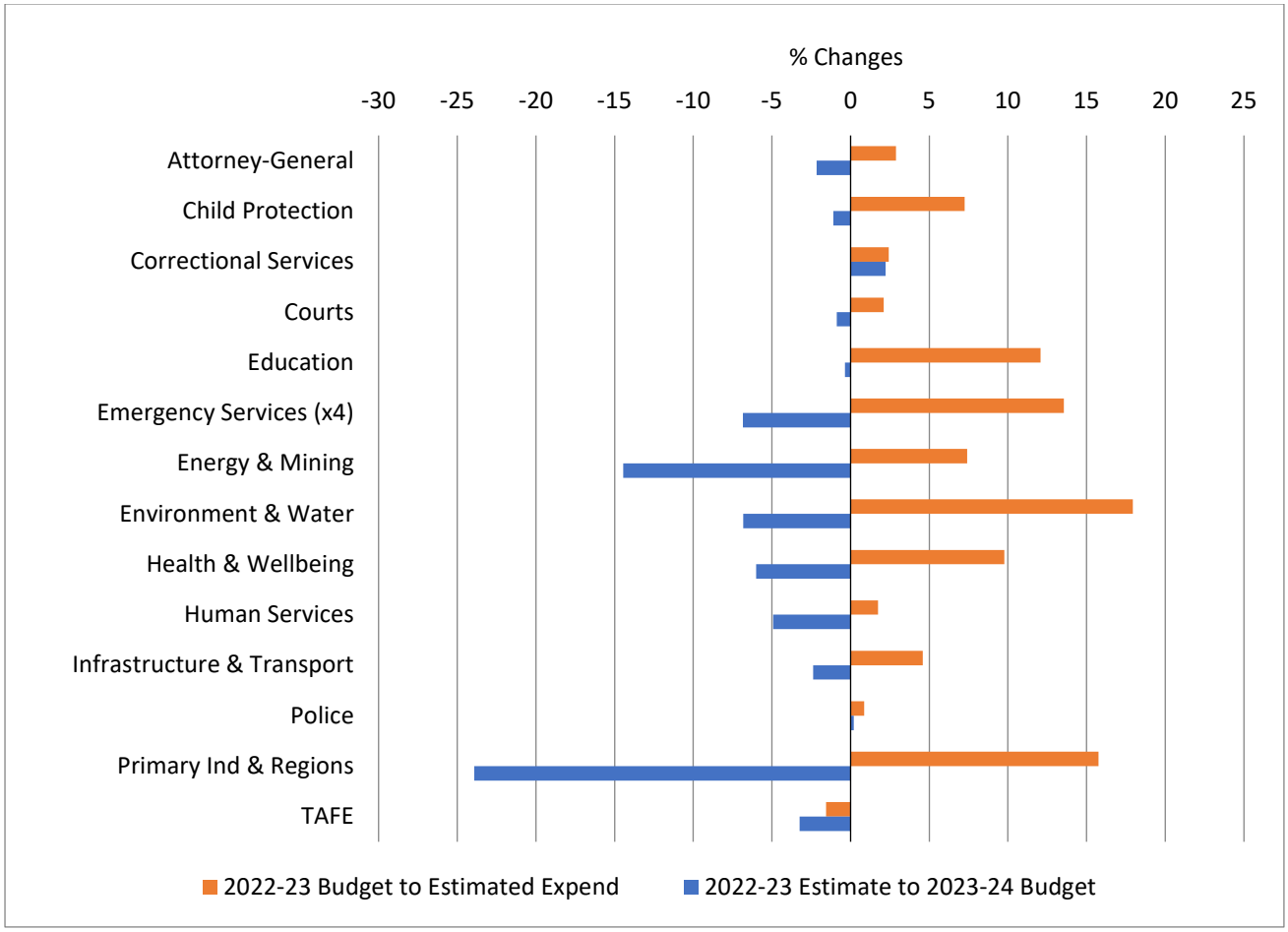
C. Government Agency Data

The following pages detail aspects of the ongoing funding and operations of three departments of crucial relevance to SACOSS' concerns for vulnerable and disadvantaged people:

- Department of Health and Wellbeing
- Department of Human Service
- Department of Child Protection

The five-year agency expenditure data at the top of the following sections is drawn from the Budget Statement. Overall that data shows that funding for all three departments increased through the current year (2022-23), but the budget for the Department and Health and Wellbeing and for the Department of Human Service fell back again in nominal terms in the 2023-24 budget year. When inflation is taken into account, the budget for the Department of Child Protection also declined in 2023-24 from the current year high. As the graph below shows, these patterns are replicated across to a greater or lesser degree across the government.

Figure 5: Changes in Departments' Real Operating Expenditure



Unless otherwise stated, all other data in the following pages is drawn from the Agency Statements which make up part of Volume 4 of the Budget Papers.

1. Department of Health and Wellbeing

Department and Program Funding

Health represents the largest area of expenditure in the state budget and is divided into a variety of programs and sub-programs, with service delivery primarily via geographic Local Health Networks (LHNs). As noted in earlier commentary, the budget announces new health expenditure of "$1.8bn over five years from 2022-23". The table below shows this funding in the Department of Health and Wellbeing budget, with the significant increase in expenditure in 2022-23, but dropping thereafter - although the forward expenditure is still significantly higher than the original 2022-23 budgeted expenditure.

Table 5: Department of Health and Wellbeing Expenditure ($m)

	2022-23 Budget	2022-23 Estimate	2023-24	2024-25	2025-26	2026-27
Expenditure (nominal) $m	7,715	8,469	8,279	8,350	8,574	8,871

This pattern is also reflected in the health program data contained in the budget's Agency Statement. This data is based on the net costs of services – that is, the net cost to the state taxpayer after accounting for Commonwealth and other revenue, so the program total in the table below differs from the whole of department expenditure above. However, overall we see a 13.1% increase in expenditure this year, followed by an 8.4% decrease (in real terms) for the 2023-24 budget year.

This overall pattern flows through to many of the sub-programs. For instance, seven of eleven Local Health Networks received an increase in their 2023-2024 budget compared to their 2022-2023 budget, but a decrease in their 2023-2024 budget in real terms compared to actual 2022-2023 expenditure.

Only the Women's and Children's Hospital Network and the Northern Adelaide Local Health Network received a higher 2023-2034 budget than their 2022-2023 expenditure. For the WCHN, this reflects variations in Commonwealth revenue associated with the COVID-19 response and National Health Reform Agreement, and a $6m increase in expenses relating to the Nursing and Midwifery Enterprise Agreement. This Agreement also increased expenses for the Northern Adelaide LHN, but these were partially offset by increased expenditure in 2022-23 to support hospital demand and capacity measures. However, even with these changes, when inflation (increased costs of services) is taken into account, both these LHNs (like all the other LHNs) have lower expenditure budgeted for 2023-24 than their actual expenditure this year.

The Limestone Coast Local Health Network received a decrease on both their 2022-2023 budget and actual expenditure, an outcome attributed to increased revenue ($9m) associated with their takeover of provision of the Keith and Districts Healthcare service from July 2023.

Elsewhere, there were significant changes in expenditure related to the COVID response. Expenditure in sub-program 1.5: Commissioning and Performance is expected to decrease by $10.2 million decrease in the 2023-24 budget year from the estimated expenditure this year, owing to the transition from COVID-19 pandemic management to a 'Living with COVID' framework. Likewise, the Public Health program has a $19.3 million decrease in expenditure between the 2023-24 Budget and 2022-23 result owing to reduced spending on immediate pandemic response measures and the COVID-19 vaccination program.

The largest expenditure changes in the table below are in fact simply a result of program restructuring. There is a $61.8m decrease in expenditure between the 2023-2024 budget and 2022-2023 result was for Wellbeing SA, but this largely reflects the transfer from 1 July 2023 of integrated care systems functions ($44.5 million) from Wellbeing SA to sub-program 1.4 Clinical System Support, as well as $13.8 million of hospital demand and capacity measures expended across 2022-23.

Table 6 (on the next page) includes the first three columns summarising the expenditure data in nominal dollars (i.e. not adjusted for inflation). The last three columns are percentage changes, calculated (as in the rest of this document) on expenditures adjusted for a 4% inflation/increased cost of services. Because of the expenditure pattern of significant increased spending this year and decreases next year, three sets of change data are presented. The first change column is the increase in expenditure within this year (2022-23), the second change column is the decreases budgeted for next year by comparison to the actual (estimated) expenditure this year, and the final column is the change measured from the budget last year – which removes some of the big ups and downs of the actual expenditure changes.

Table 6: Health Expenditure by Sub-program

Program	22-23 Budget	2022-2023 Estimated Expend	2023-2024 Budget	Change: 2022-23 Budget to Actual Expend (real)	Change: 2022-23 Actual to 2023-24 Budget (real)	Change: 2022-23 Budget to 2023-24 Budget (real)
	($000)	($000)	($000)	%	%	%
1. Policy, Clinical, Systems & Admin	**761,358**	**852,532**	**787,815**	**12.0**	**-11.1**	**-0.5**
1.1 Public Health	80820	81604	69940	1.0	-17.6	-17.5
1.2 Chief Psychiatrist & Mental Health Strategy	18366	16510	17957	-10.1	4.6	-6.2
1.3 Strategy and Governance	58800	66010	60012	12.3	-12.6	-1.9
1.4 Clinical System Support and Improvement	40828	44706	93586	9.5	101.3	125.2
1.5 Commissioning and Performance	123432	124523	114053	0.9	-11.9	-11.6
1.6 Corporate Services & Digital Health SA	439112	519179	432267	18.2	-19.9	-5.6
2. Health Services	**3,688,695**	**4,169,399**	**4,052,272**	**13.0**	**-6.5**	**5.9**
2.1 Central Adelaide LHN	1396460	1633785	1585837	17.0	-6.7	9.6
2.2 Nth Adelaide LHN	516266	527582	531137	2.2	-3.2	-1.1
2.3 Sth Adelaide LHN	672381	729683	728215	8.5	-4.0	4.3
2.4 Women's & Children's LHN	324901	338475	342364	4.2	-2.7	1.4
2.5 Barossa Hills Fleurieu LHN	183407	209379	180395	14.2	-17.2	-5.6
2.6 Eyre & Far North LHN	34665	47533	45770	37.1	-7.4	28.0
2.7 Flinders LHN	84717	84138	84144	-0.7	-3.8	-4.7
2.8 Riverland Mallee C'rong LHN	88372	98208	96508	11.1	-5.5	5.2
2.9 Limestone Coast LHN	86447	93203	84876	7.8	-12.4	-5.8
2.10 Yorke & Nth LHN	87362	97787	97372	11.9	-4.3	7.5
2.11 SA Ambulance Service	213717	309626	275654	44.9	-14.4	25.0
3. System Enhancement	**75,027**	**95,923**	**34,865**	**27.9**	**-65.1**	**-57.5**
3.1 CEIH	6049	8235	8981	36.1	4.9	44.5
3.2 Wellbeing SA	68978	87688	25884	27.1	-71.6	-66.5
Total	**4,525,080**	**5,117,854**	**4,874,952**	**13.1**	**-8.4**	**3.7**

Dollar values are nominal, changes are in real terms, adjusted for 4% inflation – based on an increased cost of service calculated with 75% costs being wages (indexed by the Wage Price Index) and the remainder indexed to CPI.

Overall, the Department of Health and Wellbeing is set to employ 37,070 Full-time Equivalent employees in 2023-2024, which is a 1.2% decrease on the 2022-2023 budget (37,537 FTE) and on actual FTE in 2022-2023 (37,519). This suggests an overall reduction of 449 FTE will occur next financial year. The biggest workforce reductions will be in the Central Adelaide Local Health Network (322 FTE), Health Service Program (239 FTE) and Corporate Services and Digital Health Program (195 FTE).

Departmental Targets

The health portfolio contains 102 targets over three program areas, with 65 of the targets in the Health Services program. These Health Service targets focus largely on efforts to improve hospital patient flow and ambulance ramping, and improvements to clinical care. However, there are some targets that focus on priority populations, community participation, and prevention and health promotion, discussed below.

Targets related to priority populations:

Aboriginal Health – General and Metropolitan

- Monitor and evaluate the Aboriginal Health Care Framework 2019-2024. (Sub-Program 1.3: Strategy and Governance)
- Expand the Kanggawodli Dialysis Project to include an additional dialysis chair in conjunction with the Central Adelaide Local Health Network renal unit. (Sub-Program 2.2: Northern Adelaide Local Health Network)
- Develop and publish the next iteration of the Aboriginal Health Plan for the Women's and Children's Health Network. (Sub-Program 2.4: Women's and Children's Hospital Network)
- Progress phase three of the dual-language signage project to incorporate spaces in community sites and develop a plan for other community regional sites. (Sub-Program 2.4: Women's and Children's Hospital Network)
- Complete the next iteration of the Women's and Children's Health Network Reconciliation Action Plan for endorsement by Reconciliation Australia. (Sub-Program 2.4: Women's and Children's Hospital Network)

Aboriginal Health – Rural and Remote

- Continue implementation of the cross-government 'APY Lands Tuberculosis Outbreak Response' through collaborative partnerships with APY lands communities. (Sub-program 1.1 Public Health)
- Strengthen Aboriginal cultural awareness and competency within the Limestone Coast Local Health Network with the continued rollout of cultural competency and cultural immersion training. (Sub-Program 2.9: Limestone Coast Local Health Network)
- Pilot the 'SA Health Aboriginal Child and Maternal Health Continuity of Care Protocols' and 'Chronic Disease Continuity of Care Pathways' to improve Aboriginal health outcomes. (Sub-Program 2.9: Limestone Coast Local Health Network)

- Continue to implement recruitment strategies to increase the Aboriginal health workforce within the Flinders and Upper North Local Health Network. (Sub-Program 2.7: Flinders and Upper North Local Health Network)
- Complete the development of a Riverland Mallee Coorong Local Health Network Aboriginal Health Strategy. (Sub-Program 2.8: Riverland Mallee Coorong Local Health Network)

Mental Health

- Commence work to implement mental health and sub-acute services to create additional beds to deliver on the government's election commitments (Sub-Program 1.2: Chief Psychiatrist and Mental Health Strategy)

Rural Health - General

- Continue to build self-sufficiency in regional areas to ensure patients can access high quality services. (Sub-Program 1.5: Commissioning and Performance)
- Complete the successful activation of the Sunrise Electronic Medical Records and Patient Administration System across the Limestone Coast Local Health Network, Flinders and Upper North Local Health Network, Barossa Hills Fleurieu Local Health Network, and Riverland Mallee Coorong Local Health Network. (Sub-Program 1.6: Corporate Services and Digital Health SA)
- Commence activation activities of the Sunrise Electronic Medical Records and Patient Administration System at York and Northern Local Health Network, and Eyre and Far North Local Health Network. (Sub-Program 1.6: Corporate Services and Digital Health SA)
- Implement the Eyre and Far North Local Health Network Recruitment and Retention Plan to address workforce shortages. (Sub- Program 2.6 Eyre and Far North Local Health Network)
- Implement the Barossa Hills Fleurieu Local Health Network Clinician and Workforce Engagement Strategy. (Sub-Program 2.5: Barrossa Hills Fleurieu Local Health Network)
- Continue business planning for the Flinders and Upper North Local Health Network Aged Care Strategy. (Sub-Program 2.7: Flinders and Upper North Local Health Network)
- Continue to support communities across the Riverland Mallee Coorong Local Health Network through the provision of medical support services to respond to the River Murray flood recovery. (Sub-Program 2.8: Riverland Mallee Coorong Local Health Network)
- Further develop the Riverland Academy of Clinical Excellence, including expanding available training opportunities for the clinical workforce and contributing to research and innovation in rural health. (Sub-Program 2.8: Riverland Mallee Coorong Local Health Network)
- Implement strategies to improve Riverland Mallee Coorong Local Health Network's environmental responsibility performance. (Sub-Program 2.8: Riverland Mallee Coorong Local Health Network)
- Deliver the Allied Health Pipeline project to support a sustainable rural allied health workforce in the Yorke and Northern Local Health Network. (Sub-Program 2.10: Yorke and Northern Local Health Network)

Aged Care - General

- Complete implementation of structured Residential Aged Care Facilities Virtual Emergency support model. (Sub-Program 1.4: Clinical System Support and Improvement)

Aged Care – Rural and Remote

- Develop a detailed implementation plan from the Eyre and Far North Local Health Network Aged Care Business Plan for both residential and community-based services. (Sub- Program 2.6 Eyre and Far North Local Health Network)
- Commence work to prepare the Riverland Mallee Coorong Local Health Network for the transition to the new commonwealth in-home aged care program. (Sub-Program 2.8: Riverland Mallee Coorong Local Health Network)

Children and Young People in Out of Home Care

- Deliver a joint plan of action with the Department for Child Protection to improve health and wellbeing services to children and young people in out of home care. (Sub-Program 1.3: Strategy and Governance)

Alcohol and Other Drugs

- Facilitate the commissioning of 22 additional alcohol and other drug residential rehabilitation beds, to further deliver on the government's election commitments. (Sub-Program 1.3: Strategy and Governance)

Commentary: SACOSS welcomes strategies that support responsive, high-quality care for communities experiencing disadvantage and who continue to bear the brunt of healthcare inequality. We are pleased to see a broad range of strategies addressing Aboriginal health and reconciliation, including those focused upon disease prevention, maternal health, workforce sustainability, staff cultural awareness and competency, dialysis offerings, and dual signage projects. Likewise, we welcome collaboration with the Department for Child Protection to improve health outcomes for young people in out of home care.

SACOSS also notes a strong focus on rural health initiatives. While significant expenditure will be focused upon a rural rollout of electronic administration infrastructure, additional targets around aged care, flood recovery and workforce engagement and sustainability are particularly welcome. In light of increasing disparities between urban and rural health outcomes, SACOSS welcomes the target aimed at building self-sufficiency in regional areas to ensure patients can access high quality services. We are hopeful that relevant initiatives will be informed by community consultation, and adequately resourced and supported.

Targets related to community participation:

- Implement stage one of the Patient Reported Measures program and progress subsequent implementations to embed the measurement of patient experience and outcomes to drive

improved safety and quality of care. (Sub-Program 3.1: Commission on Excellence and Innovation in Health)

- Deliver a renewed Consumer Engagement Strategy. (Sub-Program 2.1: Central Adelaide Local Health Network)
- Implement a Consumer and Carer Engagement Strategy. (Sub-Program 2.3 Southern Adelaide Local Health Network)
- Co-design and roll out consumer-facing Safety and Quality Boards across the Women's and Children's Hospital. (Sub-Program 2.4: Women's and Children's Hospital Network)

Commentary: These targets show willingness of the health system to include and respond to patient experience with a view to improving healthcare safety and quality. SACOSS welcomes LHN-level implementation and renewal of Consumer Engagement Strategies, but encourages a state-wide approach to best-practice engagement. We also encourage efforts to ensure the inclusion of disadvantaged communities in health participation opportunities to ensure that the health system is responsive to the needs of all South Australians.

Targets related to prevention and health promotion:

- Implement mitigation measures for the rapidly emerging public health risk associated with vaping products. (Sub-program 1.1 Public Health)
- Strengthen flavivirus monitoring and response to address the public health risk associated with mosquitos resulting from climate change impacts. (Sub-program 1.1 Public Health)
- Continue to implement the Wellbeing SA Strategic Plan 2020-2025. (Sub-Program 3.2: Wellbeing SA)
- Implement Anti-racism Strategy deliverables for Wellbeing SA, including monitoring, evaluation, training and education modules. (Sub-Program 3.2: Wellbeing SA)
- Deliver the Strengthening Our Culture Grants Program 2023-2024. (Sub-Program 3.2: Wellbeing SA)
- Launch the SA Healthy Food Environments Hub to support seeing specific healthy food policies across the public sector. (Sub-Program 3.2: Wellbeing SA)
- Deliver grants to culturally and linguistically diverse communities to support the mental wellbeing of young people. (Sub-Program 3.2: Wellbeing SA)
- Deliver the new South Australian Health and Medical Research Strategy, designed to strengthen how innovative research can be used to support improved community health, wellbeing, social and economic outcomes. (Sub-Program 1.3: Strategy and Governance)
- Release the South Australian Alcohol and Other Drug Strategy 2023-2030 that aims to prevent and reduce the harms caused by alcohol and other drugs in the South Australian community. (Sub-Program 1.3: Strategy and Governance)
- Amend the Retirement Villages Act 2016 and Ageing and Adult Safeguarding Act 1995 to implement the legislative reform recommendations identified by the independent review of these Acts. (Sub-Program 1.3: Strategy and Governance)

- Leverage the capability of the Vulnerable Families Information Management System, in partnership with relevant government agencies, to identify at risk vulnerable children and families. (Sub-Program 1.3: Strategy and Governance)
- Continue to implement the Aboriginal Health Promotion Action Plan 2022-2026. (Sub-Program 3.2: Wellbeing SA)

Commentary: These targets reflect a shift from the previous year's focus on preventative COVID-19 responses, in line with the $567m budgeted over the forward estimates to support transition to a 'living with COVID framework'. We are hopeful that this change in orientation will nonetheless maintain a focus on preventing the disproportionate impact COVID-19 continues to have on disadvantaged communities. Social and economic inequities – associated with higher prevalence of chronic disease and other risk factors – continue to be associated with more severe outcomes and death due to COVID-19, suggesting that addressing health inequities must be central to a post-pandemic response.

SACOSS welcomes targets associated with harm reduction initiatives around alcohol and other drugs (and the particular focus on mitigating the public health risks of vaping), as well as those addressing Aboriginal health promotion and anti-racism. Grants programs supporting community initiatives around the mental health of young people in culturally and linguistically diverse communities, and those supporting 'Strengthening our Culture' initiatives, stand to enhance important areas of community health prevention activity.

In particular, SACOSS welcomes the new South Australian Health and Medical Research Strategy, designed to strengthen how innovative research can be used to support improved community health, wellbeing, social and economic outcomes. We hope that the wellbeing focus of this strategy, and upfront commitment to research foregrounding the social determinants of health, will be appropriately resourced and ultimately give rise to innovations that demonstrably improve health equity in South Australia.

2. Department of Human Services

Department and Program Funding

The Department of Human Services provides funding and services to strengthen communities and to support vulnerable and disadvantaged South Australians. The table below shows the Departmental funding for the current year, the budget year 2023-24 and the forward estimates. Like the Department of Health, there has been a significant increase in expenditure in 2022-23, but (unlike Health) the expenditure is budgeted to drop back to previous levels thereafter. When these figures are adjusted for inflation (again, based on 4% change in cost of services over the last year), the 2023-24 expenditure is 4.9% below estimated expenditure this year, with the decline continuing over the future years so that by 2026-27 real expenditure will be more than 10% less than current levels.

Table 7: Department of Human Services Expenditure ($m)

	2022-23 Budget	**2022-23 Estimate**	**2023-24**	**2024-25**	**2025-26**	**2026-27**
Expenditure (nominal) $m	1,141	1,161	1,148	1174	1,200	1,233

The Department's funding is directed to four key programs – Women, Equality and Domestic Violence Prevention; Communities and Families; Youth Justice; and Disability. The funding of new measures in Human Services was discussed in the previous section, but the table below shows the changes in expenditure and staffing in these four programs. As with the Department of Health data in the previous section, this sub-program data is the net cost of services to the state taxpayer after accounting for Commonwealth and other revenue, so the program total differs from the whole of department expenditure above.

However, the program data also shows a cut in overall expenditure in the 2023-24. The data is confused by huge differences in the program for Women, Equality, and Domestic Violence prevention – however, the seemingly large percentage change between 2023-24 and 2022-23 is impacted by Commonwealth funding and reflects differences in the timing of income and expenditure related to the National Partnership on Family, Domestic and Sexual Violence Responses.

The Department's Workforce Summary indicates little overall change in the number of full-time equivalent staff (FTEs) in the Department overall. While there are cuts in the Women, Equality, and Domestic Violence Prevention program and the Youth Justice program, SACOSS welcomes the increase of staffing in the Communities and Families program – particularly given in previous years and budgets we have been concerned by the significant cuts in this area.

Table 5: Human Services Expenditure by Sub-program

Program	2022-23 Budget ($000)	2022-23 Actual ($000)	2023-24 Budget ($000)	% Change 2023-24 vs 2022-23 Estimated Expend	2022-23 FTE Staff	2023-24 FTE Staff	% Change
1. Women, Equality, and Domestic Violence Prevention	13,389	4,299	15,725	251.7	32.9	27.6	-16.1
2. Communities and Families	125,319	133,295	142,873	3.1	717.8	772.2	7.6
3. Youth Justice	49,900	51,760	48,978	-9	329.5	316.8	-3.9
4. Disability	785,328	791,047	763,102	-7.2	1675.9	1666.2	-0.6
Total	**973,963**	**980,401**	**970,679**	**-4.8**	**2,757.1**	**2,783.8**	**1.0**

Dollar values are nominal, expenditure changes are in real terms, adjusted for 4% inflation – based on an increased cost of service calculated with 75% costs being wages (indexed by the Wage Price Index) and the remainder indexed to CPI.

Departmental Targets

1. Women, Equality, and Domestic Violence Prevention

- Launch a new state strategy to respond to family, domestic and sexual violence in South Australia, in partnership with government agencies and the non-government sector.
- Work with the finance and real estate sectors to identify how the government can ensure women do not bear the brunt of mortgages, loans and rent that go unpaid as a result of family, domestic and sexual violence.
- Introduce an equality bill into Parliament to encourage public and private sector organisations to work towards achieving gender equality.
- Support the Gender Pay Gap Taskforce to develop a report of preliminary recommendations for the government's consideration.
- Finalise the establishment of domestic violence prevention and recovery hubs in northern and southern Adelaide to undertake work to support and empower women and raise community awareness.
- Introduce legislation to criminalise coercive control.

Commentary: SACOSS welcomes the budget measures and targets that focus on continuing or creating new programs and initiatives that support women who are experiencing or at risk of domestic violence, regardless of where they live. We look forward to the introduction of legislation to criminalise coercive control, and to encourage public and private sector organisations to achieve gender equality.

2. Communities and Families

- Complete the review of concessions in consultation with other government agencies and key stakeholders.
- Support the delivery of the energy bill relief plan, which will provide up to $500 to approximately 400,000 households and up to $650 for approximately 86,000 small businesses.

- Complete the upgrade of existing Personal AlertSA devices to operate on the 4G network.
- Implement a national worker screening check in the aged care sector.
- Throughout the South Australian Partnership Agreement on Closing the Gap, explore new models for commissioning of Aboriginal services to achieve better outcomes through investment.
- Implement the new Financial Wellbeing Program to streamline access to services and provide a 'one-stop shop' for services for financially vulnerable people.
- Implement the new Community and Neighbourhood Development Program which increases funding for community centres and redistributes it across South Australia based on population and need.
- Partner with amateur sporting clubs as part of the Here for the Game program to create safer gambling environments.
- Expand and strengthen family support services to provide additional earlier and targeted assistance for child safety and wellbeing outcomes.
- Deliver a report on the review of the *Carers Recognition Act 2005* to strengthen carer rights and recognition.
- Deliver a new youth action plan for South Australia, to drive improved responses to young people experiencing disadvantage and marginalisation across government and the broader community.

Commentary:
Concessions: SACOSS looks forward to the completion of the review of concessions and hope the review delivers fundamental changes to eligibility criteria to remove poverty premiums and increase funding to those currently not accessing support. The flaws in the current concessions system are reflected in the Energy Relief Plan which builds on the concessions database (see commentary in the budget measures section), but the scale of the energy plan will also test the departmental systems and resources.

Financial Wellbeing Program: we are pleased to see that the government seeks to create a 'one-stop-shop' to provide support and services for financially vulnerable. We know that people currently are missing out on the support they need and deserve because they either can't find how to access it or don't know it exists, and we are hopeful that this program goes some way towards addressing that issue.

Community and Neighbourhood Development Program: it is good to see a target for community centres across South Australia, particularly in areas of most need. Years of community cuts/underfunding, in addition to community isolation experienced as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, has weighed heavily on communities and people are feeling lonely and disconnected.

Expanding and strengthening family support services: SACOSS welcomes the new funding and programs for family support services, with the particular focus on early intervention. We have long

called for early intervention and prevention programs to keep children at home and families and communities together where possible.

3. Youth Justice

- Complete the construction of new facilities to permanently consolidate the provision of youth custodial services to one campus at the Kurlana Tapa Youth Justice Centre.
- Launch the new 12-bed accommodation unit as an enhanced support unit, with a service model that aims to improve responses to children and young people at the Kurlana Tapa Youth Justice Centre, including those with complex and disability related needs.
- Develop and implement a practice framework to support consistent and holistic practice across youth justice services.
- Continue to strengthen partnerships with Aboriginal people, communities, and organisations to support culturally responsive services to Aboriginal children and young people in the youth justice system.

Commentary: The Program 3 – Youth Justice budget for 2023-24 has decreased, from $51.7m in 2022-23 to $48.9 million in 2023-24 with a decrease of 12.7 FTE in its workforce allocation, yet there is a projected increase in service use in some areas. For instance, both the number of youth justice clients who had one or more supervised orders and one or more youth training centre admissions are projected to increase from current numbers. This, plus the fact that much of this year's budget is directed towards capital expenditure and infrastructure – such as the construction of new facilities and accommodation at Kurlana Tapa Youth Justice Centre, suggests that there is insufficient resourcing for preventive programs to reduce recidivism and support young people to make positive life choices, or reduce the over-representation of Aboriginal children and young people in the youth justice system, and better support the complex needs of children and their families.

SACOSS is also disappointed by the lack of a target to raise the age of criminal responsibility. Raising the age from 10 to 14 years old would be a significant step towards reducing the number of children and young people in the Youth Justice system, and enable better supports to be put in place where needed.

4. Disability

4.1 Disability Services

- Progress a review of the regulatory framework for supported residential facilities to identify options to ensure regulation is efficient and effective, including options for alignment with other legislation.
- Develop a new state disability inclusion plan in consultation with people living with disability, the Disability Minister's Advisory Council, and other government agencies and key stakeholders.
- Develop and launch a state autism charter with all departments required to sign up to the charter.

- Finalise a state autism strategy that aligns with the state disability inclusion plan.
- Continue to reform DHS disability services to operate effectively under the NDIS following transition from in-kind funding.
- Continue to work with SA Health and the NDIA to minimise the number of NDIS participants in hospital for longer than they need to be.

4.2 National Disability Insurance Scheme

- Participate in activities of the national disability reform agenda, including leading South Australia's engagement and input into the review of the NDIS

Commentary: SACOSS welcomes the budget measures and targets that will progress a review of the regulatory framework for supported residential facilities and will create a new state disability inclusion plan. We are also pleased to see that there is continuing funding to ensure South Australia engages in an informed and strategic manner with the national disability reform agenda, and in particular participating in the review of the NDIS.

3. Department of Child Protection

Department and Program Funding

The table below shows the Departmental funding for the current year, budget year 2023-24 and the forward estimates. Funding increased in 2022-23 and again in the 2023-24 budget year, but the increases are very modest after that and fail to keep pace with inflation. Indeed, even the 2023-24 increase represents a 1.1% decrease in real terms from the estimated 2022-23 expenditure. If this decrease in expenditure was a result of better outcomes for children and diminishing numbers within the child protection system, this would be a good outcome. Unfortunately though, the budget papers predict an increase in the number of children and young people in out-of-home care in South Australia: from 4,865 this year, to 4,997 in 2023-24.

Table 6: Department of Child Protection Expenditure ($m)

	2022-23 Budget	2022-23 Estimate	2023-24	2024-25	2025-26	2026-27
Expenditure (nominal) $m	717	769	791	795	807	821

Funding for the Department of Child Protection is directed to one program, *Care and Protection*. Again, the numbers in the table below reflect the net cost of services to state taxpayers and so are different from the total expenditures above. However, we again see an increase in the dollar value expenditure from this year to the 2023-24 budget year that translatesinto a net decrease when inflation/increased cost of services is taken into account.

Table 7: Child Protection Expenditure by Sub-program

Program	2022-23 Budget ($000)	2022-23 Actual ($000)	2023-24 Budget ($000)	% Change 2023-24 vs 2022-23 Estimated Expend (real terms)	2022-23 FTE Staff	2023-24 FTE Staff	% Change
1. Care and Protection	**714 576**	**763 832**	**787 896**	**-0.8**	**2 428.0**	**2 523.0**	**4.6**

Dollar values are nominal, changes are in real terms, adjusted for 4% inflation – based on an increased cost of service calculated with 75% costs being wages (indexed by the Wage Price Index) and the remainder indexed to CPI.

The table also shows an increase of 95 FTE staff in the department, equating to a 4.6 per cent change. This is a smaller increase than the 134 FTE recorded in the 2022-23 budget, but staff numbers are also impacted by outsourcing of service provision through, for example, social impact bond initiatives, and service delivery by non-government organisations. However, increasing staffing numbers is important as SACOSS remains concerned about the recurring reports of carer shortages, more especially in state-run residential child care homes.

2022-23 Performance

The budget papers report a range of departmental operational highlights including increasing the capacity of the care system through the procurement of additional general residential care placements from non-government organisations; recommissioning post-care services with additional funding targeted to support young people transitioning from care, additional resources for family group conferencing services, prioritising support for Aboriginal families; and increased funding to support care leavers to access secure housing, study and employment, and to give young people a voice. In addition, the Department has provided grant or funding allocations to support the operations of the Carer Council, and Grandcarers SA to amplify the voices of carers.

The budget papers also contain Departmental Performance Indicators. The estimated results for the majority of performance indicators for the 2022-23 have remained similar to the previous year, but sometimes these were below the target. For instance, from 2021-22 to 2022-23 the percentage of placements of Aboriginal children in accordance with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle fell from 61.2% to 60.2%, but was below the target of 65%. Similarly, the Department's response time to notifications was also below the target of 75% of responses within 7 days of notification, with only 61.2% of responses within the time frame. It is noted that the target for 2023-24 is again 75%.

The main exception to these performance indicators was a small but welcome decrease in the proportion of children and young people who were the subject of a substantiation during the previous year who were also the subject of a subsequent substantiation within twelve months (where the estimated result of 16% was better than the 2022-23 target of 20%).

Activity Indicators

The Department's Activity Indicators outline the projected figures for 2023-24 regarding notifications of child abuse or neglect, substantiations, the number of children and young people under guardianship and in out-of-home care, and the number of young people over 18 years of age in out-of-home care who are financially supported by the Department. With the exception of the projected number of children and young people under the guardianship of the Chief Executive for a period of up to 12 months (which has remained the same), all other projected activity indicators have increased negatively, including (as noted above) the projected increase in the numbers of children and young people in out-of-home care.

Targets for 2023-24

The Department's targets for 2023-24 include the following:

- Establish the Social Workers Registration Scheme.
- Increase carer payments to assist with the costs of caring for a child or young person in care.
- Convene a national child protection summit in partnership with the Child Protection Expert Group.

- Incorporate the newly formed stakeholder forums into the broader system governance and engagement mechanisms to guide ongoing reform.
- Establish the peak body for Aboriginal children and young people in South Australia.
- Introduce amendments to support changes to the *Children and Young People (Safety) Act 2017.*
- Develop a sector-wide child protection workforce strategy.
- Launch a refreshed *Statement of Commitment* to foster and kinship carers.
- Trial flexible respite-like arrangements to support foster and kinship carers.
- Improve mechanisms to support sibling contact in consultation with CREATE and youth advisory bodies.
- Empower Aboriginal families and communities through the peak body, legislative change, Aboriginal Community-Controlled Organisations and family group conferencing.

Commentary on Targets

Prior to commenting on this financial year's targets, brief consideration is given to progress on the previous year's listed targets. The 2023-24 Agency Statement indicates that a number of the targets set in the 2022-23 Agency Statement have been commenced or implemented. This positive progress is welcomed, but some items are unclear. For instance, the workforce development strategy target in 2022-23 was framed as '*begin* work on a workforce strategy' and the 2023-24 target is to '*develop* a sector-wide child protection workforce strategy', so the actual progress is not clear. Similarly, there is no report on the outcome of the 2022-23 target to establish the Child and Young Person's Visitor Scheme for residential care (noting that the initiative's name may have been changed or that this target may have been incorporated into another initiative).

Many of the Department's highlights for 2022-23 are also reflected in its targets for 2023-24, indicating a continuity and an intention to build on positive outcomes. These highlights emphasise the formation of a number of expert groups and structures, as well as policy and legislative reform, including consultations for the legislative review of the *Children and Young People (Safety) Act 2017;* the establishment of the Child Protection Expert Group, Carer Council, Direct Experience Group and Chief Executive Governance Group to advise on reform; the initial work on establishing the community-led model for South Australia's first peak body for Aboriginal children and young people; and, importantly, establishing structured mechanisms to hear from children and young people in care, in partnership with the CREATE Foundation.

With reference to specific targets in the 2023-24 Agency Statement, having engaged in the legislative review of the *Children and Young People (Safety) Act 2017* over many years, SACOSS looks forward to the introduction of amendments to support changes under the Act, and that these will advance the best interests of children and young people and ensure an increased focus on prevention and early intervention, and keeping children with their families.

We welcome the inclusion of targets relating to a more active focus and engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and children through the development of an

Aboriginal peak body for children and young people; legislative reform which, we trust, includes the application of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle; and additional support and prioritisation of family group conferencing.

The inclusion of a focus on foster and kinship carers is positive and we welcome the attention being given to launching a refreshed *Statement of Commitment* to foster and kinship carers, and to trialling flexible respite-like arrangements to support foster and kinship carers.

We are interested to learn more about the convening of a national child protection summit in partnership with the Child Protection Expert Group, and hope that this will contribute to a comprehensive reframing of both our state and national approaches to child protection and the issues which determine the purpose and focus of the child protection system and its impact on the lives of children and families.

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