



# *Painting a Brighter Future*

ConnectGroups 2020/2021  
Pre-Budget Submission



**ConnectGroups**  
helping support groups & individuals

## Acknowledgement of Country

CONNECTGROUPS ACKNOWLEDGES ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER PEOPLE AS THE TRADITIONAL CARERS OF COUNTRY THROUGHOUT WESTERN AUSTRALIA AND RECOGNISES THEIR CONTINUING CONNECTION TO LAND, WATERS AND COMMUNITY. WE PAY OUR RESPECT TO THEM AND THEIR CULTURES; AND TO ELDERS PAST, PRESENT, AND EMERGING.

## contents

4

ABOUT CONNECTGROUPS

5

FOREWORD

6

THE SUPPORT GROUP SECTOR

8

CONSULTATION PROCESS

14

STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATIONS

## ABOUT CONNECTGROUPS

ConnectGroups is the Peak body for Support Groups in Western Australia, empowering and sustaining community-based Support Groups and the wider community for 35 years through sector development activities, capacity-building, resourcing, and advocacy. A strong Support Group sector ensures that Home, People and Place are accessible concepts which every member of the community can be empowered to achieve. ConnectGroups' program delivery and advocacy advance the competencies and wellbeing of individuals, families and carers who are actively engaged with Support Groups and their services. Support Groups provide support on a broad range of issues including chronic and genetic conditions, trauma, mental distress, and social isolation. Groups play a key role in the promotion of health and wellbeing, community inclusion, the reduction of stigma, and contribute to the healing value of lived experience. ConnectGroups is a not-for-profit which responds effectively to identified needs through collaborative practice and innovative service delivery. ConnectGroups is committed to building connected, thriving communities by advocating for an effective and sustainable Support Group sector.

*"Until recently we were completely on our own. We had no State support of any description. Since we now have limited Federal support, our group has grown stronger and we are able to concentrate on the support aspect rather than just the survival aspect."*

## FOREWORD

ConnectGroups is pleased to deliver its inaugural Pre-Budget Submission (PBS) to government in 2019 for the 2020-21 State budget. The PBS is informed by member consultation and engagement and founded on strengths-based practice and asset-based community development principles which drive organisational service provision.

ConnectGroups advocates for the voice of its sector to government across a range of priority areas contributing to the informed and effective allocation of resources, funding, and reform direction. Committed to a prosperous and purposeful future for all Western Australians, ConnectGroups has meaningfully applied knowledge to government direction through the WA Women's Strategy, the WA Men's Health and Wellbeing Policy, the WA LGBTI Health Strategy, the WA Recovery College model of service, the WA Chronic Conditions Self-Management Framework, the WA Workforce Development Strategy, the WA Mental Health and AOD Strategy, and the WA Sustainable Health Review.

It has been encouraging to witness the WA State Government's highlighting, through the Premier's priorities, better outcomes for all Western Australians by enabling fuller participation in WA's social and economic life, a commitment to building stronger and safer communities, and to leveraging effective regional partnerships. These priorities provide the opportunity to target funding and resources through an evidence-based approach to directly impact WA's most vulnerable people. ConnectGroups presents its strategic recommendations to reflect the priorities needed to build a thriving Support Group sector. Further, the PBS will contribute to and inform future machinery of government changes, ensuring that the voice of this largely volunteer-operated and growing sector is represented. On behalf of its staff, Board of Management, and members, ConnectGroups is pleased to present this Pre-Budget Submission for the 2020-21 State budget.

Antonella Segre  
Chief Executive Officer  
ConnectGroups Support Groups Association WA Inc.

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## THE SUPPORT GROUP SECTOR

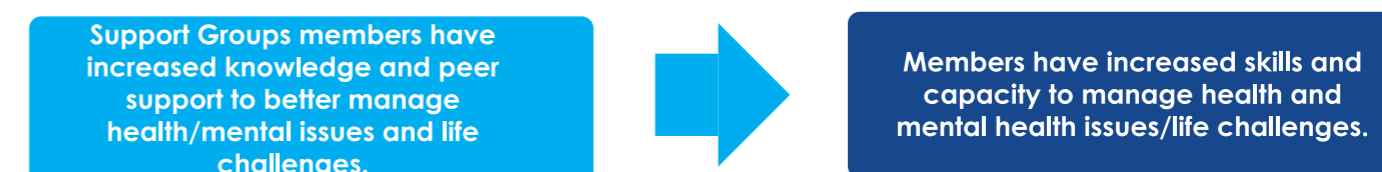
Support Groups emerge when individuals and families experience isolation by their condition or experience, find that their needs are not met, or that no service, or not enough services exist for their condition or situation. Often, emotional support is lacking in the response to their trauma, illness or experience.

Research demonstrates that when individuals or families extend their support to others, a chain of support is developed, leading to the emergence of a Support Group. This chain increases people's engagement in the community as a result of their involvement in a Group. ConnectGroups supports these Groups to further their knowledge and community support provision by creating opportunities to build on their experiences and link to other community support networks and resources. As a result of belonging to a Support Group, individuals, families, and carers build on their knowledge, confidence and skills and learn to effectively manage their lives and wellbeing.

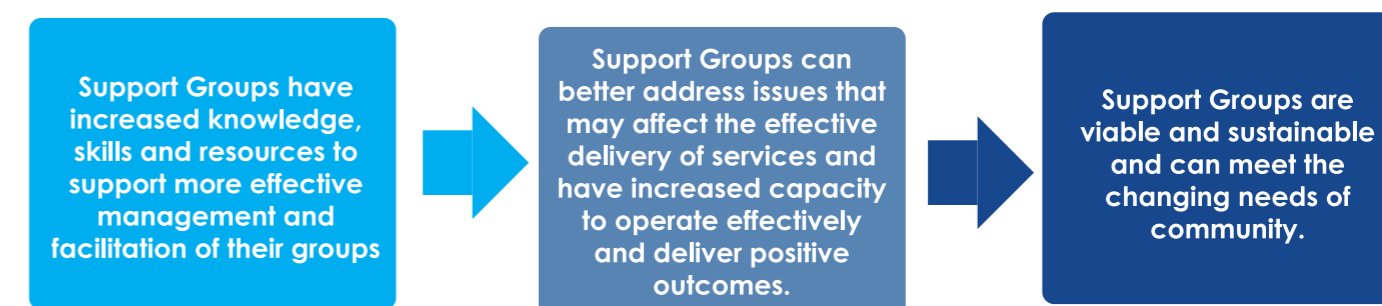
Support Groups have the following attributes:

- Support Group members share a life condition, situation or circumstance that gives rise to shared needs. These common concerns or life conditions contribute to some form of disadvantage typically because specific needs are not adequately met or fulfilled.
- Support Groups are led and managed by group members who are personally affected by a particular issue of concern and these members determine their needs and how their needs can best be met through the mutual benefit provided by the group.
- Mutual support is an essential function of the group.
- Support Groups provide emotional support and practical help. Group participation supports members to feel less isolated, empowered, and provided with practical coping skills, with positive effects on quality of life for themselves and members of their family.
- Support Groups are largely volunteer-operated.

### Outcomes For Individuals (Support Group Members)



### Outcomes For Support Groups (Service)



### Outcomes For System



## CONSULTATION PROCESS

ConnectGroups' PBS is informed by two (2) years of data collection and on-going advocacy to discern issues impacting the sector in order to best advocate and represent Support Groups. In September 2019, ConnectGroups conducted a sector-wide consultation to further target the key challenges faced by Support Groups in Western Australia for inclusion in the PBS. The PBS has also been informed by regional consultations conducted between September 2017 and July 2019.





*"Peer group facilitators, support group coordinators are often willing individuals with no training or support. Yet the role is complex and can be challenging. We would benefit hugely from investment in our development and more support. It is currently very challenging for any group who isn't not-for-profit to gain any funding. Auspice or collaboration can work well or can lead to other challenges and a dilution in the support provided."*

## STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Raising Community Awareness of the Support Group Sector through Multiple Channels
2. Improved Resourcing of the Sector to Sustain Group Members (Leaders/Facilitators)
3. Leveraging Existing Networks to Raise Awareness of the Sector
4. Better Engagement with Health Professionals
5. Regional Sector Support

## STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATION ONE

### Raising Community Awareness of the Support Group Sector through Multiple Channels

*“Many people in the wider community may not be aware that there is an organisation or Support Group able to meet their needs. More marketing and advertising about what people can access for their health and wellbeing is vital and perhaps something that can be supported by the WA Government”*

The Support Group sector is largely invisible and not fully recognised by the Health and Allied Health sectors as complementary to the medical model. Research has identified the essential role that Support Groups play in bringing the community together, supporting individuals and families within the groups to build agency. *“The very essence of Support Groups tackles the issues associated with a disintegrating sense of community which can potentially improve health promotion in terms of socialising and being actively involved in the community.”*<sup>1</sup> ConnectGroups 2018/2019 annual demographic data survey revealed that 97.1% of the respondents (n=268) articulated that they had received a direct benefit from attending the Support Group.

Raising awareness of cause builds public recognition around the positive impact of community-based Support Groups in improving health and mental health and wellbeing, and quality of life.

#### WE RECOMMEND

- 1.1 Partnership in co-designed public service campaigns to demonstrate the benefit and value of participation in a Support Group.
- 1.2 Stories sharing around consumer journeys and experiences with Support Groups. Digital stories as a health promotion initiative across the WA network of Support Groups from consumers. Possible partnerships with Healthways.
- 1.3 Collaborate for collective impact: support for developing purposeful partnerships with Universities and tertiary institutions as part of course curriculum to provide pro bono creative support to Support Groups, offering professional opportunities for students enrolled in marketing, graphic design, media, video, and sound production.

<sup>1</sup> Literature Review: Effectiveness of Self Help and Support Groups in Health Promotion 2015

## STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATION TWO

### Improved Resourcing of the Sector to Sustain Group Members (Leaders/Facilitators)

*“Formal national accreditation for facilitation of Support Groups. This may give more confidence to medical and allied health and improve referrals. The expectation that the majority of this sector who are volunteers, usually suffering with the condition they are promoting, should somehow be able to navigate governance and fulfil all administrative challenges without any funding, assistance, or skills contributes to burnout”.*

Driving continuous improvement within the sector is an essential component of ConnectGroups sector development activities. ConnectGroups’ co-designed framework addressing good practice around Support Group establishment supports Groups to implement minimum standards of good governance practices, group safety, professional conduct, and effective and quality service delivery in order to encourage viability and sustainability. However, as the majority of Support Groups are volunteer-operated, Groups struggle to find the time and resources to successfully address all the requirements associated with complex governance and the administrative burden in addition to providing services to their members.

#### WE RECOMMEND

- 2.1 Resourcing a backbone organisation to provide oversight, application of good governance principles and provide the administrative support to small community-based Support Groups relieving this burden which contributes to Group attrition and volunteer (Leaders/ Group Facilitators burnout.)
- 2.2 Provide an accessible Employee Assistance Program (EAP) service to Support Groups for volunteer facilitators including debriefing and mental health support.
- 2.3 Provide opportunity for small Support Groups to access collective public liability insurance cover either through no or low-cost partnership with CRCs, Family and Neighbourhood Centres, or through a government-sponsored insurance scheme.
- 2.4 Harmonise the administrative burden, process, reporting, and audit requirements for achieving Deductible Gift Recipient (DGR) status between the WA Department of Mines, Industry Regulation and Safety (State Charitable License), and the Australian Charities and Not-for-Profits Commission (ACNC).

## STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATION THREE

### Leveraging Existing Networks to Raise Awareness of the Sector

*“Distributing and sharing about local Support Groups and their value. Encouraging information to be shared in the regions and improve liaison with the Shires and to gain funding from them. There is little help and support from Shires (in my experience) unless groups are NFP”*

ConnectGroups must continue to build the capacity and capability of the Support Group sector through development of robust partnerships with a range of government and non-government organisations where within their own remits there is an inherent crossover including Hospitals, Health Clinics, Community Resource Centres (CRC), and Family and Neighbourhood Centres.

Social Prescribing is a concept where health professionals, local councils, and community organisations link individuals, families and carers into community-based services. It is non-medical prescribing or community referrals and is an effective tool to move beyond the medical model particularly in addressing the broader social determinants of health and mental health, the cause of many health inequalities.<sup>2</sup> For example, depending on an individual’s needs, a General Practitioner (GP) can prescribe a range of person-centred social interventions to positively impact the non-medical factors impacting a person’s wellbeing including housing, financial stress, health or mental health literacy, loneliness, and social exclusion. Social Prescribing provides meaningful benefit and value to health care planning, as evidence indicates that up to 20% of GP visits are for social issues primarily. Referrals into a Support Group is a social prescription.

*“Obviously our dream would be to see grandparent carers treated the same as foster carers with the same amount of support”*

<sup>2</sup> Black Dog Institute Social prescribing: linking patients with non-medical support, published 28 February 2019.

## WE RECOMMEND

- 3.1 Implementation of scalable Community Link Booths (the model as trialled at Fiona Stanley Hospital) across the primary health sector to build linkages to community support and empower individuals to self-manage their wellbeing.
- 3.2 Recognition of the health benefit of Social Prescribing, and promotion of Social Prescribing and Support Groups through Government health promotion activities, and population health portfolios.
- 3.3 Recognition that community assets have a role to play in encouraging the sustainability of volunteer-operated Support Groups. CRCs and Family and Neighbourhood Centres should provide no or low-cost meeting venues and extend public liability cover to Support Groups needing meeting space.
- 3.4 Collaborate for collective impact: pathways for thought leaders in social media and leadership roles to assist community-based Support Groups with tailored social media support and leadership mentoring, investing in not-for-profit communities that serve our isolated, vulnerable and disadvantaged.

*“Raising community awareness through multiple channels. More content on social media as well as regional tv stations. Engagement with health professionals. More regular visits from health professionals to regional areas or better accessibility to video conference facilities for the community Support Groups to get more help for their communities”*

## STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATION FOUR

### Better Engagement with Health Professionals

*“Engaging with professional health workers – for them to have a better understanding of what many of the not-for-profit Support Groups offer, eg. support for loss, grief, loneliness, health and wellbeing”*

The concept of Social Prescribing also is reflected in this strategic recommendation. In 2019, ConnectGroups launched the Community Link Booth (CLB) Social Prescribing model at Fiona Stanley Hospital. The initiative is a direct response to the 2019 Sustainable Health Review which recognises that increasing levels of chronic conditions are leading to persistent inequity in health and mental health outcomes. The model sits within the Social Prescribing philosophy where individuals are provided with the tools to better self-manage their wellbeing journey, and further responds to the Review’s reference that consumers and carers want to be involved in their own health, clinical care, and broader planning.

The scalable CLB model is designed to reduce GP and Emergency Department re-presentations, and hospital re-admissions by connecting patients, families, and carers at the hospital discharge point with referral pathways to Support Groups, community services, in-home services, and other supports specific to their needs.

The modern not-for-profit and charitable sector are diverse, economically significant and complex. The increasing quantum of demand, growing complexity and need for resources, along with the changing expectations of service users are challenging this sector to be more innovative, focused, responsive and able to demonstrate their capacity and successes.<sup>3</sup> Social impact or social outcomes measurement is essential to understand if organisations and their programs are effective and if scarce resources are being allocated to achieve the greatest social impact.<sup>4</sup> It is an essential basis for learning within the organisation about what works, what does not work and how service delivery affects the lives of people.<sup>5</sup>

However, because of its complexity and subject expertise, social impact measurement is outside of the resourcing and available budgets of most community-based not-for-profits. It is in the sector's interest to build its value proposition through the implementation of social impact assessment.

<sup>3</sup> National Outcomes Measurement Research Agenda Working Paper No.1, p- 5

<sup>4</sup> Bankwest Foundation, Measuring Outcomes for Impact in the Community Sector in Western Australia, Social Impact Series Issue #1, 2015

<sup>5</sup> Bankwest Foundation, Measuring Outcomes for Impact in the Community Sector in Western Australia, Social Impact Series Issue #3, 2015

## WE RECOMMEND

- 4.1 Implementation of scalable Community Link Booths (the model as trialled at Fiona Stanley Hospital) across the primary health sector to build linkages to community support and empower individuals to self-manage their wellbeing.
- 4.2 Real partnership between the primary and allied Health sectors and the Community Link Booth within their respective settings to increase the referral pathways into community support.
- 4.3 Resource the Support Group sector to develop an effective tool for measuring and evaluating the social impact of WA-based Support Groups, and to conduct an evidence-based study. This could either be in the form of mentoring from an organisation such as Social Ventures Australia, or as a discrete project.
- 4.4 Commission, recognition and formal adoption of ConnectGroups’ evidence-based, best practice quality framework for WA-based Support Groups. This framework will assist Groups state-wide to better navigate government systems. Formal recognition of the framework will encourage the health sector to refer patients into the Support Group sector.

*“Convince the medical profession that we need support  
– overcome fears that we may give bad advice”*

## STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATION FIVE

### Regional Sector Support

*“My region would benefit from local government mental health workers providing mentoring and reaching out to small self-help groups to provide encouragement and support instead of just closed doors. I think the gap between the highly-paid clinician and the volunteer could be breached on a local level. I will not wait for the government to respond in 10 years and another 10 suicides later. I will work towards getting that happening here now”*

Following extensive consultation with regional members in the last two (2) years, it has been demonstrated that the regions have unique requirements and are impacted by a lack of cohesive service delivery, limited resources, geographical distance, and limited opportunity for skills development and real capacity-building.

Local engagement must include building local capacity in order to result in sustainable service provision in the regions. Further, financial independence from government is reported as resulting in the most sustainable services to community. Government can provide the environment to allow community-based Support Groups, networks and services to thrive, and drive local capacity-building and leadership. It is imperative to reverse deskilling if real outcomes are to be achieved.

Key success levers towards peer Support Group sustainability in the regions is achieving partnership with the relevant Shire or City/Local Government Area authority. Regional partnerships provide insight into existing, new, and emerging Support Groups, networks, and services. These Groups address unmet community need across a myriad of contexts and issues unique to place.

### WE RECOMMEND

- 5.1 Upskill local regional community leaders in suicide prevention strategies, mental health, and Alcohol and Other Drugs (AOD) issues. Building local capacity will help address these issues within the community.
- 5.2 Support an environment for Support Groups to engage in inter-agency cooperation via regional networks, partnerships, or alliances to encourage referral pathways into Groups.
- 5.3 Provide resourcing to encourage regional partnerships between Shire/City/Local Government Area authorities and the Peak body for Support Groups to extend its service provision as far as possible.
- 5.4 Recognition that regional community assets have a role to play in encouraging the sustainability of volunteer-operated Support Groups. CRCs and Family and Neighbourhood Centres should provide no or low-cost meeting venues and extend public liability cover to regional Support Groups needing meeting space.

[connectgroups.org.au](http://connectgroups.org.au)

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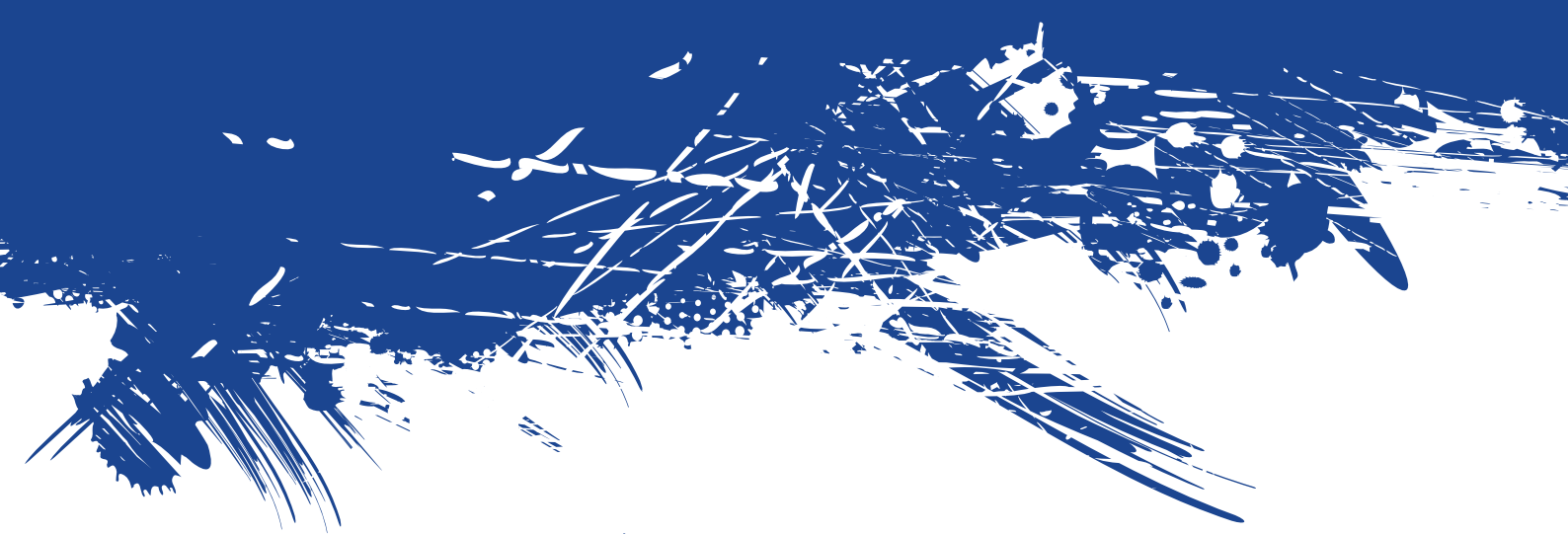
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