

40TH PARLIAMENT



Education and Health Standing Committee

Report 10

ANNUAL REPORT 2019–20

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Presented by  
Ms J.M. Freeman, MLA

September 2020

## *Committee Members*

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Chair	Ms J.M. Freeman, MLA Member for Mirrabooka
Deputy Chair	Mr Z.R.F. Kirkup, MLA Member for Dawesville (from 28 November 2019)
	Mr W.R. Marmion, MLA Member for Nedlands (until 28 November 2019)
Members	Ms J. Farrer, MLA Member for Kimberley
	Mr R.S. Love, MLA Member for Moore
	Ms S.E. Winton, MLA Member for Wanneroo

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# Education and Health Standing Committee

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## Annual Report 2019–2020

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Report No. 10

Presented by

**Ms J.M. Freeman, MLA**

Laid on the Table of the Legislative Assembly on 10 September 2020



## Chair's Foreword

**T**HERE is never enough time with committee work to cover all the health and education issues that confront the community and we are often instructed by the good work of other agencies and organisations.

Being briefed on the audit by the Auditor General's office into the Mental Health Commission and subsequently meeting with the Acting Mental Health Commissioner highlighted a need to address mental health services in our community through a system-wide implementation plan.

In particular, in both briefings the need to focus and deliver comprehensive and timely mental health services to young people, especially aged 16 to 24, was evident. In addition to this is what we know from the current COVID-19 challenge: our capacity to meet mental health needs must be a part of our overall recovery strategy for the health of WA residents.

An inquiry report and an issues paper delivered by the Committee this financial year have the future wellbeing of our community, particularly children in our schools or born in our hospitals, as the central consideration.

The Digital Innovation in Secondary Schools report is a concise summary of the issues that confront schooling in a digital age. While the Committee welcomed that the recommendations were overwhelmingly supported, it did feel a sense of unease at the lack of vision and strategy in the public education system, particularly in addressing the 'digital divide'. This decentralised and relatively unmonitored approach relies on teachers and school leaders' enthusiasm, capacity and capability.

There also remains the Committee's ongoing concern that the health community fails to address the need for action, hope and outcomes for those diagnosed and living with Type 2 diabetes. The continual denial by many Australian health professionals, despite acceptance in other comparable jurisdictions such as the UK, that effective dietary intervention can result in this debilitating and costly condition going into remission is in my view not only sad but unconscionable.

In presenting the 2019–2020 Annual Report, I note it will be the final annual report in the 40th Parliament for the Committee. I want to thank the members and the staff. The strength of a parliamentary committee is in its bi-partisanship and capacity to delve into an issue of public importance with a view to highlighting a policy solution that is achievable.

I wish to thank the Member for Nedlands for his contribution up until November last year. The capacity of the Hon. Bill Marmion as Deputy Chair to work alongside me as the Chair, collaboratively and with a charming collegiality, was much valued.

His replacement, the Member for Dawesville, is a welcomed addition. His faith in my judgement as Chair and capacity for insightful contribution despite his many other demanding roles is appreciated.

While the Member for Moore is for the purposes of this annual report still a Member, his recent departure from our considerations for the remainder of the parliamentary term will be missed. Mr Love's analytical zeal tinged with healthy scepticism was only bettered by his appreciation of expertise and the need to act decisively to achieve beneficial change.

I would like to thank the Member for Wanneroo for her commitment and work on this Committee. Her knowledge in education and her willingness to investigate health issues has ensured our committee reports have resulted positive changes in our schools and health system.

I would like to pay a special tribute to the Member for the Kimberley. Her ability to broaden the Committee's perspective on every issue has continually reminded us all that our work needs to be relevant to those most in need of effective delivery of services by our government agencies.

My full appreciation and thanks to the staff, Dr Sarah Palmer and Jovita Hogan. I am very proud of the work that we undertook as outlined in this annual report and I thank them for their assistance, advice, expertise, wise counsel and patience.



MS J.M. FREEMAN, MLA  
CHAIR

# Contents

Chair's Foreword	iii
<b>1</b> Committee activities	<b>1</b>
<hr/>	
Introduction	1
Portfolios	1
Public Hearings	1
Briefings	1
Investigative travel	4
Reports tabled	4
<i>A Better Connected Future: Opportunities for digital innovation in secondary education</i>	4
Other Activities	5
<i>Briefing on access to adult mental health services</i>	5
<i>Briefing on nitrate and uranium levels in drinking water</i>	6
<i>Response to type 2 diabetes report, and follow-up hearing with Diabetes WA</i>	6
<b>2</b> Financial Statement	<b>9</b>
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# Chapter 1

## Committee activities

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### Introduction

During the course of this reporting period the Committee's main activities were focussed on conducting an inquiry into digital innovation in secondary education, and producing an issues paper on prenatal methamphetamine exposure.

**Table 1.1: Summary of the activities of the Committee, 1 July 2019–30 June 2020**

Description	Activity
Reports tabled	3
Deliberative meetings	21
Public hearings	8
Briefings	15
Witnesses appearing	56

### Portfolios

The three portfolio areas of the Committee as determined by the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly are:

- Education and Training
- Health
- Mental Health

### Public Hearings

Pursuant to Assembly Standing Order 264, the Committee has power to send for persons, papers and records. During the period 1 July 2019–30 June 2020, the Committee conducted 8 public hearings, taking evidence from 15 witnesses to assist with its investigations (Table 1.2).

### Briefings

In addition to the formal hearings, the Committee held a number of briefings to gather information for its inquiry, as well for the issues paper on prenatal methamphetamine exposure (Table 1.3).

**Table 1.2: Public hearings of the Committee, 1 July 2019–30 June 2020**

Date	Witness	Position	Organisation
14 August 2019	Associate Professor Erica Southgate	Associate Professor School of Education	University of Newcastle
4 September 2019	Mr David Linke	Managing Director	EduGrowth
4 September 2019	Mr Rhett Loban	Academic	Macquarie University
18 September 2019	Ms Jane McNamara	Head of nbn local WA	NBN Co
	Mr Simon Lawton	Industry Consultant – Business Segment	
25 September 2019	Mr Michael King	President	Educational Computing Association of WA
	Ms Shaloni Naik	Secondary school coordinator	
25 September 2019	Ms Saani Bennetts	Committee member	Home Education WA
	Ms Christina Kardol	Committee member	
25 September 2019	Ms Lisa Rodgers	Director General	Department of Education
	Mr Martin Clery	Assistant Executive Director, Statewide Services	
	Mr David Dans	Chief Information Officer	
	Mr Jeff Stone	Principal, School of Special Educational Needs: Behaviour and Engagement	
	Mr Caleb Jones	Principal, School of Special Educational Needs: Medical & Mental Health	
24 June 2020	Ms Sophie McGough	Senior Manager Strategy & Business Development	Diabetes WA

**Table 1.3: Briefings provided to the Committee, 1 July 2019–30 June 2020**

Date	Name	Position	Organisation
7 August 2019	Mr Noel Chamberlain	Principal	School of Isolated and Distance Education
	Mr Ross Manson	Head of Online Teaching and Learning	
12 September 2019	Mr Albert Huts	Principal	Merredin College
	Mr David O'Neill	Deputy Principal	
	Ms Lynne Herbert	Deputy Principal, Primary	
	Ms Robyn Harrod	Digital technology teacher	
	Ms Natalie Pirovich	Head of learning area (Arts)	
	Mr Sam Dawson	Humanities and social sciences teacher	
13 September 2019	Mr Bruce Fraser	Principal	Corrigin District High School
	Ms Isabella Carlse	Secondary science and English teacher	

Committee activities

16 September 2019	Ms Stella Jinman	Principal	Cecil Andrews College
	Mr Stuart Jones	Deputy Principal	
	Mr Nathan Morton	Deputy Principal	
	Ms Amanda Lean	STEM teacher	
16 September 2019	Ms Donna McDonald	Principal	Thornlie Senior High School
	Mr David De Meo	Deputy Principal	
	Mr David Donnelly	Teacher in charge, digital technology	
	Mr Chee Liew	Mathematics teacher	
	Ms Lisa Knight	Humanities and social sciences teacher	
	Ms Michelle Manolas	P&C president, robotics club coordinator	
	Ms Tracey Nelson	P&C vice president, robotics club coordinator	
	9 students		
16 October 2019	Ms Caroline Spencer	Auditor General	Office of the Auditor General
	Mr Jason Beeley	Assistant Auditor General, Performance Audit	
30 October 2019	Dr Richard Lugg	Environmental Health Consultant	Department of Health
11 March 2020	Ms Jennifer McGrath	Acting Mental Health Commissioner	Mental Health Commission
	Mr David Axworthy	Assistant Commissioner	
	Mr Gary Kirby	Director	
	Ms Carly Dolinski	Director	
18 March 2020	Ms Megan Burley	Acting Director, Health Networks	Department of Health
	Ms Marie Deverell	Senior Development Officer, Health Networks	
	Ms Heather Jones	Senior Manager, FASD Projects	Australia Centre of Research Excellence Telethon Kids Institute
	Professor Carol Bower	Senior Principal Research Fellow, Alcohol and Pregnancy & FASD Research	
18 March 2020	Ms Angela O'Connor	Clinical Midwifery Consultant	Women and Newborn Drug and Alcohol Service, King Edward Memorial Hospital

## Investigative travel

The Committee visited four secondary schools to gather information in relation to the inquiry into digital innovation in secondary education. Two of these schools were in regional Western Australia (see cost at Table 1.4) and two in the metropolitan area (no associated costs).

Expenditure on the visit to regional schools was necessary for the Committee to fulfil its goal of gathering firsthand perspectives from a range of schools. The visit provided two contrasting snapshots – one of a school that was a leader in using digital technology, and one that was quite disadvantaged in terms of access to digital technology resources. School tours, chats with students and teachers and meetings with school leaders enabled the members to see and hear for themselves the successes and challenges of integrating digital technology into everyday school life. They were then able to compare these experiences with what they saw at two metropolitan public schools.

**Table 1.4: Summary of Committee travel, 1 July 2019–30 June 2020**

Date	Description	Attendees	Cost
12–13 September 2019	Overnight trip (by road) to visit schools in Merredin and Corrigin as part of the inquiry into digital innovation in secondary education.	3 committee members 2 staff members	\$1246

## Reports tabled

The Committee tabled three reports during the period 1 July 2019–30 June 2020:

- Annual report 2018–19
- A Better Connected Future: Opportunities for digital innovation in secondary education
- Issues Paper: Prenatal Methamphetamine Exposure – Time to wake up to another hidden harm

### ***A Better Connected Future: Opportunities for digital innovation in secondary education***

The report of the inquiry into digital innovation in secondary education noted encouraging examples of how digital technology is being used to assist with engagement, inclusion and equity in secondary schools; however, digital resources and teacher capability across schools was variable. Some students were also much more likely to have access to digital devices and internet access than others.

Digital technology had been wholeheartedly embraced in some schools, while others were not making the most of what it can offer. Leadership within the school and from the Department of Education was seen as a critical factor.

The Committee recommended that the Department of Education clearly define in its ICT Vision Statement (three years overdue at the time) how digital technology is to be integrated into the curriculum, as well as how it will provide more support to secondary teachers in the form of software, online resources and professional development.

The government response, received in February, supported 7 of the 11 recommendations in principle and one outright. Two others were to be taken into consideration and one was noted. The new *ICT Strategy* and *ICT Vision for Teaching and Learning in Public Schools* were attached to the response.

At the end of June, given the recent focus on technology as schools switched to remote learning due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Committee resolved to conduct follow-up hearings to the inquiry.

The purpose of the follow-up is to look at what has been learnt in WA and other jurisdictions in regard to delivering education during the COVID-19 pandemic, and to consider how this may inform future approaches.

***Issues Paper: Prenatal Methamphetamine Exposure – Time to wake up to another hidden harm***

With the State in lockdown due to the coronavirus at the end of March, the Committee decided against conducting another inquiry and resolved to produce an issues paper informed by several briefings conducted earlier in March.

The briefings explored the largely hidden issue of prenatal methamphetamine exposure and whether lessons learnt from tackling Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) could be applied to this growing health problem.

The Committee identified five key messages from its research:

- There has not been enough research conducted into the prevalence of prenatal methamphetamine exposure, or into its long-term effects
- More targeted prevention measures and services would assist women to stop using methamphetamine before and during pregnancy
- There is a lack of investment in screening, diagnosis and treatment services for babies exposed to methamphetamine in utero
- Early intervention is vital to negate or minimise adverse impacts on a child's learning and behaviour
- Lessons learnt from responding to FASD can inform the approach to prenatal methamphetamine exposure
- The tabling of the issues paper in June raised the profile of the potential challenges facing children who have been prenatally exposed to methamphetamine, and will hopefully raise awareness of the need for screening, early diagnosis and support for affected pregnant women.

## **Other Activities**

***Briefing on access to adult mental health services***

Auditor General Caroline Spencer and Assistant Auditor General (Performance Audit) Jason Beeley briefed the Committee on the contents of the Auditor General's 2019 report, *Access to State-Managed Mental Health Services*. The audit assessed whether people can access

adult State-managed mental health services and whether the service mix outlined in the Mental Health Commission's *Better Choices. Better Lives: Western Australian Mental Health, Alcohol and Other Drug Services Plan 2015-2025* was being delivered efficiently and effectively.

The audit found that there was no system-wide implementation plan to support the aim of reducing the proportion of funds spent on hospital beds and expanding community mental health services. The Committee was impressed with the methodology which the audit office developed to help it understand where and how services were being used. The Committee would like to see a similar audit of youth mental health services conducted.

### ***Briefing on nitrate and uranium levels in drinking water***

The Committee invited Dr Richard Lugg, Environmental Health Consultant for the Department of Health, to a briefing to discuss the appropriateness of drinking water guidelines for nitrate and uranium levels, and the possible link between high nitrate levels and chronic kidney disease and/or type 2 diabetes. The Committee queried whether the measures taken by the Department of Health in relation to the safe supply of drinking water in remote communities were adequate.

Dr Lugg subsequently provided test result records of nitrate and uranium levels in water for particular remote communities, as requested by the Committee. For the period January 2017 to December 2019, of the communities tested for uranium, none had higher levels than the safe drinking water guideline value. Nitrate levels were compliant with the safe level for adults, but there were still around a dozen communities where compliance with the safe level for infants was consistently not met. This information has been published on the committee's web page.

### ***Response to type 2 diabetes report, and follow-up hearing with Diabetes WA***

The Committee tabled the report of its inquiry into the role of diet in type 2 diabetes prevention and management in April 2019 and received the government response in February.

While many of the 36 inquiry recommendations were supported (albeit mostly with dependencies), the Committee was disappointed to find that several of the recommendations that were central to the inquiry were not supported. One of these (Recommendation 3) was that the Department of Health ensure that guidelines for the management of type 2 diabetes reflect the success of dietary interventions – such as the very low calorie diet and the low carbohydrate diet – in treating the disease, and that these approaches be formally offered as management options. The detailed exploration of the success of these options both here and overseas was the basis of the inquiry and the recommendation was made following convincing evidence of their value.

The response stated that the Department of Health is required to ensure new research investigating management of diabetes is evidence based. On this basis, best practice guidelines provided by the Department of Health and the Health Service Providers to people

with type 2 diabetes did not support very low calorie or low carbohydrate diets in treating the condition.

Recommendation 2 was that the Department of Health and Diabetes WA provide consistent advice in regard to the Australian Dietary Guidelines – that advice being that they are not suitable for people with type 2 diabetes. This was rejected on the basis that the Australian Dietary Guidelines ‘provide a generic starting point for people with diabetes prior to an individualised approach using medical nutrition therapy, where other approaches are introduced’.

The Committee followed up with a letter to the Department of Health expressing its ongoing concern that part of the Australian Dietary Guidelines (which inform the Australian Guide to Healthy Eating) are promoted on the websites of Diabetes Australia and Diabetes WA; and in June the Committee invited Sophie McGough from Diabetes WA to a hearing to discuss dietary guidelines for type 2 diabetics and support for the notion that type 2 diabetes can be controlled with diet rather than pharmacologically in some cases. The transcript of the hearing is on the committee website.

The third recommendation which was not supported (Recommendation 12) relates to the amendment of the Planning and Development Act 2005 to enable health and wellbeing to be a relevant consideration in fast food restaurant planning applications. The response said this would be problematic as it would require planners to assess and make recommendations on matters that were within the professional expertise of environmental health officers and other professionals operating under different legislation. This would add ‘complexity and red tape and may reach beyond the scope/intent of planning powers with no tangible benefit’. This is despite the Department of Health’s submission noting that the need for such regulatory action was raised at the department-run WA Preventive Health Summit in 2018. The complete government response is posted on the committee website.





## Chapter 2

### Financial Statement

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The Committee does not have its own formal budget and is funded out of the budget of the Legislative Assembly. Approval for major expenditures is required on a case-by-case basis and is entirely at the discretion of the Speaker.

The Committee's expenditure for the financial year 1 July 2019 – 30 June 2020 (in accordance with Standing Order 276) is detailed below:

**Table 2.1: Expenditure items of the Committee, 1 July 2019 – 30 June 2020**

Expenditure Item	Amount (\$)
Advertising	1600
Meals	300
Travel	1200
Printing	700
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>3800</b>

Notes:

- Figures rounded to nearest \$100.
- Salaries of committee staff are not included.
- Costs of shared administrative expenses, including lease costs for committee accommodation, not included.



MS J.M. FREEMAN, MLA  
CHAIR







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