

SACOSS 2011-2012 State Budget Snapshot

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Overview

SACOSS has prepared this snapshot of the 2011-2012 South Australian State Budget for the benefit of its members. It is divided into areas of interest to the SACOSS membership, not into specific portfolios, and is underpinned by the SACOSS *Blueprint to Eradicate Poverty in South Australia*.

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Each of these areas is assigned a table that summarises the Budget initiatives in the relevant area, providing SACOSS members with a quick reference with which to frame responses to the State Budget. Not all areas are covered in this Snapshot due to both time restrictions and availability of detail in the Budget Papers.

Cost figures are for four years unless otherwise referenced.

1. Economic Data

This Budget comes against a backdrop of revenue restraints driven particularly by decreased GST revenue. Last year's budget predicted a return to surplus this year, but the budget is in fact a deficit budget.

The budget is predicted to return to surplus next year. SACOSS believes that the long term predictions for economic growth and revenue are sound and the economic basics remain strong. Given this, the budget deficit is not a problem and far preferable to further cutting services.

The headline economic data for South Australia is as follows:

Item	2011-12 Budget	2010-11 Estimate	2010-11 Budget
Gross State Product - growth	2.75%	3.25%	2.75%
Net debt	\$3,825m	\$3,217m	\$3,335m
Net financial liabilities to revenue ratio	95.6%	94.4%	100.1%
Employment Growth	1.5%	1.75%	1.25%
SA Wages Growth		3.6%	
Unemployment Rate		5.5%	
Gross State Revenue	\$15,727m	\$15,087m	\$15,086m
Gross State Expenditure	\$15,990m	\$15,514m	\$15,475m
State Budget Deficit	\$263m	\$427m	\$389m

2. Poverty

Poverty remains a persistent feature of South Australian society and is "multi-dimensional". It effects different groups of people in different and multiple ways. National data (HILDA report) suggests that the percentage of people living in relative poverty (ie. less than 50% of median household income) has increased over the last decade. Given that average household income in SA is lower than the Australian average, poverty is likely to be a particular problem in this state.

Families SA has made a policy decision to focus services on their own clients – i.e. those already engaged with the child protection system. In effect this closes their doors to the general public and means that critical early intervention opportunities are missed.

Item	Description	SACOSS Comments
Anti-Poverty Services	Last year's budget saw cuts to anti-poverty services, including <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 23% cut to Family and Community Development Program • 44 FTE cut from DFC anti-poverty services program 	The cuts to the program were not reversed which will see a loss of services in crucial early intervention areas.
Anti-Poverty Services	Performance Indicator targets for 2011-12 for emergency assistance and financial support services are not available because anti-poverty services are currently under review with final recommendations yet to be released.	Falling outcomes have been recorded by Families SA in this area, and cuts of 44 FTEs may reduce outcomes further. There is concern that Families SA is already redirecting clients to NGOs, but NGOs are struggling to meet demand.

SACOSS awaits the new South Australian Strategic Plan for an explicit objective to reduce poverty to renew anti-poverty programs.

SACOSS' 2011-12 Budget Submission proposals in relation to poverty alleviation were:

- Development of a SASP target and a comprehensive anti-poverty plan.
- Restoring and expanding financial and rural counselling.

3. Sector Development

The community sector provides a huge range of support and services for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged South Australians. To provide high standard, professional services requires support and investment in the organisations and people who provide those services.

Item	Description	SACOSS Comments
Funding Community Sector Pay Equity	On the 8 June 2011 the State Government announced a commitment to fund its share of the increased costs that result from the Fair Work Australia equal remuneration decision.	This commitment is un-costed pending the FWA decision, but SACOSS welcomes the clear commitment to fund pay equity.
Sector development for business COST: \$1m over two years	\$1 million in funding over the next two years to Business SA to support small and medium sized enterprises.	This additional funding for the business sector's peak body is greater than SACOSS' total annual budget. Community services need similar investment in sector development.

While the promised funding for the outcomes of the pay equity case is welcome, a major review of the funding model for the sector is required as short-term service contracts undermine organisational planning, sustainability, and staff attraction and retention.

SACOSS' 2011-12 Budget Submission proposals in relation to poverty alleviation were:

- Commit to and plan for the funding the outcomes of the pay equity case.
- Move to longer term funding models for community service organisations.
- Examine the feasibility of a portable long service leave scheme for the sector.

4. Child Safety and Wellbeing

SACOSS continues to argue for instituting a public health model for the child protection system in South Australia that directs resources towards prevention and early intervention, rather than the current crisis model that directs funds and services towards the tertiary end.

This Budget contains headline spending on child protection which is welcome. However, it is largely focussed on children already in state care rather than broader early intervention initiatives.

The Budget initiatives are not likely to deliver a reduction in the number of child abuse cases which are reported but not investigated.

Item	Description	SACOSS Comments
<p>Alternative care additional support</p> <p>Cost: \$50.2 million</p>	<p>This initiative provides:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • \$13.4 million per annum by 2014–15 • Over \$2 million per annum to build six new residential care homes. 	<p>SACOSS welcomes support being given to reducing the numbers of children in inappropriate accommodation.</p> <p>Much of this money is recognising existing demand; there is little money for new expansion of services.</p> <p>SACOSS continues to believe that residential care homes are not the best answer for children under State care.</p>
<p>Alternative care reunification services</p> <p>Cost: \$19 million</p>	<p>This initiative provides \$4.7 million per annum (indexed) for services to increase the level of reunification of children in state care with their families.</p>	<p>SACOSS supports the government investing in family reunification, however we would welcome a similar new investment in intensive family support services as an early intervention measure.</p>

SACOSS' 2011-12 Budget Submission proposals in relation to child safety and wellbeing were:

Increased funding for family support and early intervention programs including:

- A 30% increase in base funding through the Family and Community Development program.
- New funding to regional areas where there are current gaps in services.
- \$530,000 to fill the funding from the loss of the special Family Support Grants provided over the past three years by Community Benefit SA.
- Seed funding for the trialing of new service models in the family support and early intervention areas.

5. Disability

This Budget offers some modest assistance for families and people with disabilities to access long awaited services and supports, but still will be subject to social isolation, exclusion from community and lack of appropriate participation as equal citizens in the community.

While these Budget initiatives recognise an area of crucial need, SACOSS notes that overall funding to disability is inadequate to meet current unmet demand.

Item	Description	SACOSS Comments
<p>Additional support for Disability SA</p> <p>COST \$37.5m</p>	<p>This initiative provides for an additional \$37.5m over four years (starting with only \$3.5m in 2011-12) to provide additional resourcing for people with disabilities and their carers.</p> <p>This additional support will assist disability clients requiring accommodation support, community support, community access and respite services for carers.</p>	<p>The new funding is welcome but modest. It will not address immediate demand or current lack of resources.</p>
<p>Additional equipment for disability services</p> <p>COST \$10.8m</p>	<p>This initiative provides \$2.6 million per annum for the ongoing provision of disability equipment and to reduce waiting lists.</p>	<p>This initiative delivers further on previous commitments, to begin to address long waiting lists of people requiring re-fitting and assessing for equipment.</p>
<p>Strathmont Centre transition</p> <p>COST: \$7.7m</p>	<p>This initiative provides for \$1.8m (indexed) along with transition costs in 2011/12 to enable 32 residents in Strathmont to move into community.</p>	<p>Given growing community concern about quality of accommodation at the Strathmont Centre SACOSS welcomes this initiative.</p>

6. Employment, Education and Training

Education and training are vital for a strong economy and vibrant society. South Australia has historically had lower levels of educational attainment and workforce participation than other states and territories. It is important that these issues are addressed as the economy shifts away from the traditional manufacturing base.

Education in particular is one of the most important determinants of health and wellbeing throughout the lifecycle, beginning in early childhood. State and Commonwealth funding for public schools and programs for 0-5 year olds is a first step in promoting health and wellbeing through education, and must be followed up with programs that ensure lifelong learning opportunities are available for workers to gain the skills required to compete in a competitive job market and in new and emerging industries.

It is also in the interests of all in society to ensure that the long term unemployed and those from at-risk groups are not left behind by employment, education and training programs.

Item	Description	SACOSS Comments
National early childhood education quality standards COST: \$9.5m	This initiative supports the establishment of an independent authority tasked with implementing a national early childhood education program.	This initiative, whilst not a discretionary spend, is an important contribution to ensuring quality across early childhood education.
Expansion of children's centres COST: \$14.4m	This initiative provides \$14.4m to relocate stand-alone preschools to new integrated facilities at primary schools.	This is welcomed by SACOSS.
Support for rising electricity costs COST: \$16.6m over five years	This initiative is designed to help offset rising electricity costs for schools	This is an important initiative to ensure that school budgets are spent on education, rather than rising energy bills.
Support for disadvantaged schools COST: \$41.3m (including carryover from 2010-11)	This initiative provides school retention incentives for vulnerable students, incentives to attract quality teachers to disadvantaged schools, and learning tailored to individual students' needs.	SACOSS supports this focus on disadvantaged schools as part of the Commonwealth's Low Socioeconomic Status Schools initiative.

There appears to be little in the Budget in relation to training and employment initiatives.

SACOSS' 2011-12 Budget Submission proposal in relation to employment, education and training was:

- Significant investment of funds to support new industries for Murray River communities.

7. Health

The continued investment in health services is welcome as is the much needed improvements to health facilities and infrastructure, especially regional. However, much of the focus is on tertiary care facilities, and the investment in primary and preventative health care is insufficient for sustainability over the medium and long term.

Item	Description	SACOSS Comments
<p>Additional resources for health services</p> <p>COST: \$133.3m</p>	<p>This will fund in excess of 19,700 extra patient admissions.</p>	<p>There is insufficient detail on exactly where this is to be spent, although SACOSS notes its focus on hospitals and other tertiary care, rather than preventative, primary health care initiatives.</p>
<p>Capital Projects</p> <p>COST: \$498m</p>	<p>In 2011-12 capital expenditure for SA Health will be \$497m spread across a variety of facilities around the state. This is being presented as a record capital expenditure budget for SA Health.</p>	<p>Capital expenditure is welcome as many facilities need to be upgraded and their capacity increased.</p> <p>However, infrastructure is only part of the solution. There needs to be complimentary investment in people.</p>
<p>GP Plus programs</p>	<p>Continue to support the development and consolidation of out of hospital services through the GP Plus programs, helping to keep people out of hospitals and Emergency Departments.</p>	<p>Investment in primary health care is welcome and is critical to the sustainability of our health care system.</p>

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<p>Regional health services</p> <p>COST: \$62.7m</p>	<p>Including development or upgrades of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mount Gambier, Port Lincoln, Berri Hospitals • A new five chair dental clinic at the Wallaroo Hospital • A new purpose built ambulance station in Mount Gambier • Ceduna Health Service 	<p>Investment in regional services is very welcome and appropriate. Access to high quality and specialist medical care in regional SA is an important issue and a basic health right.</p>
<p>BreastScreen SA digital mammography equipment</p> <p>COST: \$17.4m over three years</p>	<p>This initiative provides \$17.4 million over three years to purchase digital mammography equipment to replace the current analogue technology.</p>	<p>Very welcome and overdue.</p>
<p>Regional cancer services</p> <p>COST: \$69.8m</p>	<p>This initiative provides \$15.6m per annum for the Whyalla Regional Cancer Centre development.</p>	<p>Very welcome initiative for country consumers, reducing the need to travel for cancer services. This is important for ensuring patient centred care, minimising discomfort and promoting recovery, as well as reducing the financial burden on country consumers.</p>

SACOSS' 2011-12 Budget Submission proposal in relation to Health and Wellbeing was:

- Review health spending to adjust the balance between primary and tertiary health spending, to aim for a 2% change in favour of primary health spending for each year of the forward estimates from 2012-13.

8. Housing and homelessness

Over the past twelve months new housing has been delivered across the state as a result of the Australian Government’s Nation Building Economic Stimulus package and NRAS, and after many years of stock reduction in public housing, it has been a critical injection of new stock.

Rent increases in the private sector cause housing insecurity and continue to place pressure on the poorest households. For those on low incomes sustaining their housing is harder as household costs increase, and they are unlikely to cope with further increases, but increases in concessions are welcome.

However, the number of people at risk of homelessness has not reduced, and while there has been a welcome increase in housing stock targeted to high need people, there is no evidence that this has impacted on the number who are homeless.

Item	Description	SACOSS Comments
First Home Bonus Grant SAVING: \$21.3m	This grant applied to first home buyers for a newly purchased or constructed home. From 1 July 2012 it will be halved to \$4,000 and fully abolished from 1 July 2013.	SACOSS agrees with the government’s analysis that this scheme tended to increase housing prices. However, it is not clear that the abolition will reduce prices, and the government needs to look at other forms of assistance to tackle housing affordability.
Housing Need	No. of people targeted for assistance by the SAHT will increase as follows: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People experiencing housing stress by 907 • People with high needs by 64 • Rough sleepers by 15 (only includes those assisted to long term housing through Street to Home) • Aboriginal customers by 200 	Aims to increase how many people in need receiving assistance from the SAHT are welcome, however the targets are inadequate in the face of the extent of existing need. In the context of continued sales of stock, affordable housing and homelessness targets in South Australia’s Strategic Plan are still unlikely to be met.

SACOSS’ 2011-12 Budget Submission proposal in relation to Housing was:

- State Government post-stimulus funding for the building of new houses for people on low incomes to meet demand.

9. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander South Australians are significantly more likely to live on a lower income than the wider population, and have a much lower life expectancy.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are also more likely to be incarcerated in the overstretched and under-resourced prison system. There is an urgent need to address the societal contributors to poverty and disadvantage within this community and to improve their standards of environmental health, housing and essential services to ensure a fairer and more equitable South Australia.

Item	Description	SACOSS Comments
Ceduna Koonibba Aboriginal and Pika Wiya health services — transfer of control	This initiative reflects the transfer of control, budgets, assets and liabilities of the Ceduna Koonibba Aboriginal Health Service and Pika Wiya Health Service to the Aboriginal community from 1 July 2011. These health services are currently part of Country Health SA.	SACOSS advocates Aboriginal community control principles and therefore welcomes this transfer.
Remote Aboriginal communities essential services COST \$12m over five years	This initiative provides funding of \$12m over five years for the provision of essential service infrastructure upgrades and to meet increased maintenance costs in remote Aboriginal communities. The initiative also includes the development of an electricity and water retail reform initiative for Aboriginal households and commercial and government owned premises.	SACOSS welcomes the acknowledgement that many Aboriginal people living in rural and remote areas in SA experience a limited, difficult to access or less reliable service than in metropolitan areas.

10. Justice

The focus of this budget is spending on capital works rather than crime prevention, early intervention and access to justice.

Item	Description	Comments
Public Integrity Office COST: \$11.4m	Proposal to establish a new anti-corruption body from 2012-13	SACOSS welcomes the proposed establishment of a Public Integrity Office. We note the government is still considering community views.
Improvement to Courts Infrastructure COST: \$6.4m	Upgrading court facilities and security systems	Whilst this proposal is a capital works expenditure, any measure which improves the capacity to reduce delay in criminal trials is welcomed.
Prison Upgrade COST: \$3.8m	Capital works including \$1.8m on biometric identification systems.	SACOSS is opposed to the biometric identification system for prison visitors.
Offender Rehabilitation Program COST: \$1.6m	Following a successful trial continuation of rehabilitation program to prepare and help offenders reintegrate into life outside prison	This amount is smaller than the investment in the invasive surveillance system described above (biometric identification).

11. Taxes, Fees, Concessions & Charges

Government fees and charges are set to rise an average of 2.9% in this year's Budget. Increases in the price of public transport, as well as the increase in fees and registration for car owners, will have the greatest impact on low income households.

While SACOSS recognises the necessity of fees and charges in South Australia, the State Government must recognise the need for equity in setting these charges, and ameliorate the impact on those most vulnerable.

Item	Description	SACOSS Comments
Medical heating and cooling concession COST: \$1.8m	This initiative provides \$0.4m per annum (indexed), for the creation of a concession of up to \$316 a year on energy costs, for people on low incomes who for medical purposes require the regulation of temperature in order to control the symptoms of their disease.	SACOSS called for a medical cooling concession in its State Budget Submission 2011-12 for those people who have a medical need for greater energy use.
Increased Water Concession COST: \$22.1m	An increase of the water concession to up to 25% of the water bill for eligible consumers., effective from 1 July 2011. This is up from 20% of the bill.	The substantial increases in water prices, particularly supply charges, make the increase in water concession desperately needed. It is a welcome step but is far outweighed by already announced increases in water prices.
Motor registration fees, public transport fares	Metroticket price rise from \$4.60 to \$4.70 and multitrip from \$30.00 to \$30.90. Registration fee price rises of \$4.00, \$9.00, and \$12.00 for 4, 5-6, and 7+ cylinder cars	These increases are in line with standard indexation, and are not as significant as the rises in essential utilities such as water and power.

SACOSS' 2011-12 Budget Submission proposal in relation to Concessions (under the Income heading) was:

- Doubling and then indexing utilities concessions for low income earners
- Extending concession eligibility for medical cooling needs

12. Transport and Infrastructure

Transport infrastructure is vital, not just for the economy, but for society. People rely on our transport system as a whole to connect them with employment, education and training opportunities, health and community services, and for social participation. Given that many South Australians do not own a car, public transport is even more vital for the low income and disadvantaged, and recent State and Commonwealth funding for public transport infrastructure is welcome.

The investment in public transport over the last decade is paying off with use of public transport steadily increasing from 44.1 million 'boardings' in 2001-02 to 52.3 million in 2009-10. Additionally, infrastructure itself is vital for economic growth, as well as acting as a stimulus for skills formation and job creation.

Item	Description	SACOSS Comments
Improving Public Transport accessibility COST: \$8m	Improving access to public transport services, in line with the Public Transport Disability Access Plan. The money will be spent on upgrading paths, platforms, shelters and information displays	Improving transport access for people with disabilities is strongly supported by SACOSS
Repair of damaged roads COST: \$9.6m, over 2 years	Further road repair, particularly for roads damaged by flooding, mainly in the north of the state	Maintaining rural roads is crucial for remote communities
Deferred capital expenditure SAVING: \$396.4m	Deferred spending of major capital expenditure, including transport infrastructure, by about a year	Given the budget constraints, spreading out major capital expenditure over an extra year or so is responsible.

13. Utilities

Utilities such as water, electricity and gas represent basic human rights, as well as important prerequisites for health and wellbeing.

However, at least 15% of South Australian households struggle to pay utility bills because they are on very low incomes, paying significantly more for electricity, gas and water as a percentage of income than higher income households, despite using less.

This Budget is delivering a previous commitment to a 5% increase energy concessions, and delivers a 5% increase to water concessions.

The water supply charge will increase by 64.7%. The water use charge increases by 50.8% or \$0.65 per kilolitre for the first 120 kilolitres per year, \$0.27 for 120 – 520 kilolitres, with no increase for use over 520 kilolitres per year.

The net impact is a 40.3% increase in the average household water bill. The concession increase on an average water bill has only gone up 34%.

SACOSS is deeply concerned by the drastic increase in water costs for households already struggling to pay for essential services. Increasing the supply charge and the price per kilolitre for the first 120 litres are highly regressive measures, impacting disproportionately on low and modest income households.

The average electricity customer will experience a bill rise of an extra \$157.56 a year. The total value of the energy concession is \$157.50.

14. Young people

Though we welcome the more conciliatory approach taken in this year's Budget, we are disappointed to note that, in common with the 2010-11 Budget, there are relatively few initiatives that directly target young people. The only new initiatives in the budget that clearly and specifically targets young people who are not in crisis or in State care is the upgrade of the BMX track at Mt Gambier. This reflects a lack of priority given to serious and meaningful engagement with young people through the Budget process.

Having said this, we welcome the additional spending for the child protection system, though we note that the emphasis remains on alternative care rather than early intervention and prevention programs.

15. Other Measures

Item	Description	SACOSS Comments
Licensing of SA Lotteries to private operator No budget impact 2001-12	The SA Government will license SA Lotteries to a private provider, to take effect during 2012-13. While the SA Government will retain ownership of SA Lotteries, it means that the State will no longer provide any gambling activities, consolidating its role as regulator, not operator.	SACOSS is concerned that this initiative may lead to a dilution of regulation in this area, which may be harmful to vulnerable groups. SACOSS will seek guarantees that the tax revenue is indexed and that there will be no concessions given that could lead to increasing gambling harm associated with lottery activities.

16. Summary of SACOSS 2011 - 2012 Budget Proposals

SACOSS Proposal	Outcome
Sustaining Health and Community Services	
Commit to and plan for the funding the outcomes of the pay equity case.	Un-costed pending FWA decision, but clear promise from Government to fund their share of outcome.
Move to longer term funding models for community service organisations.	Not adopted
Examine the feasibility of a portable long service leave scheme for the sector.	Not adopted
Income	
Development of a SASP target and a comprehensive anti-poverty plan.	Not adopted.
Restoring and expanding financial and rural counselling.	Not adopted.
Doubling and then indexing utilities concessions for low income earners;	Concessions have been increased but not to the extent asked for or required.
Extending concession eligibility for medical cooling needs	Adopted. Up to \$316.00 per year
Employment, Education and Training	
Significant investment of funds to support new industries for Murray River communities.	Not adopted.
Health and Wellbeing	
Review health spending to adjust the balance between primary and tertiary health spending, to aim for a 2% change in favour of primary health spending for each year of the forward estimates from 2012-13.	Not adopted. Some significant primary health spending, but most health initiatives are tertiary based.

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Housing	
State Government post-stimulus funding for the building of new houses for people on low incomes to meet demand.	Not adopted
Social Participation	
Increased funding for family support and early intervention programs, including:	Some funding for families in crisis, but little focus on early intervention.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A 30% increase in base funding through the Family and Community Development program. 	Not adopted. No reversal of 23% cut last year.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> New funding to regional areas where there are current gaps in services. 	Not adopted
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> \$530,000 to fill the funding from the loss of the special Family Support Grants provided over the past three years by Community Benefit SA. 	Not adopted
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Seed funding for the trialing of new service models in the family support and early intervention areas. 	Not adopted
Gambling	
Funding consumer advocacy on changes in gambling.	Not adopted
Indexing the portion of gambling taxes that are used in community based programs.	Not adopted