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Audit of COVID-19 stimulus initiatives recommends application requirements be proportionate to the value of available relief

The Auditor General today tabled in Parliament a report on the [Roll-out of State COVID-19 Stimulus Initiatives: July 2020 – March 2021](#).

This report summarises how well 19 State government entities rolled out a mix of 30 financial relief and stimulus funding initiatives, with a total budget of \$2.144 billion. Initiatives included financial relief targeted to support citizens, community groups and businesses that were economically impacted as well as stimulus funding intended to generate new or additional economic activity and support jobs.

Auditor General Ms Caroline Spencer said it is a credit to the responsible entities that in unique and somewhat difficult circumstances all 30 initiatives we examined were rolled out, at least in part, and entities had a strong focus on maintaining sound governance and risk management frameworks.

'In total, 61% of the total budget was delivered through the 30 initiatives, which also means a total of approximately \$800 million remains unspent,' Ms Spencer said.

'Of particular concern are the Department of Communities' social housing initiatives, with only \$6.42 million (2%) of the \$319 million budget spent at 31 March 2021.

'Although planned to be rolled-out over 2 years, these initiatives are now competing for resources in a building and construction boom in WA that's been driven by other pandemic-induced stimulus measures (including federal and state building grants) aimed at the private housing sector. It is relevant to also recognise that the economy is now larger than it was pre-COVID-19.

'When deciding on future stimulus funding and relief measures, State government entities should consider predictable events in their planning such as market limitations including reduced contractor and builder availability.

'It's also important entities improve their planning and coordination when initiatives are competing with one another, as is the case with social housing, to ensure all initiatives reach the relevant beneficiaries.

'This audit also reinforces a key message from my recent Local Government COVID-19 Financial Hardship Support report – the importance of entities applying a common sense and balanced approach to probity,' Ms Spencer said.

Both reports are a timely reminder for both State and local government entities that an overarching principle in emergency and stimulus responses should be to provide prompt relief and reduce the burden on eligible applicants at their time of need.

This report provides valuable insights into some of the factors that slowed progress of select initiatives and provides useful lessons for State government entities for future emergency and program planning to ensure they are well placed to best assist the Western Australian public they serve.

Report resources:

- [PDF version](#)
- [summary video](#)