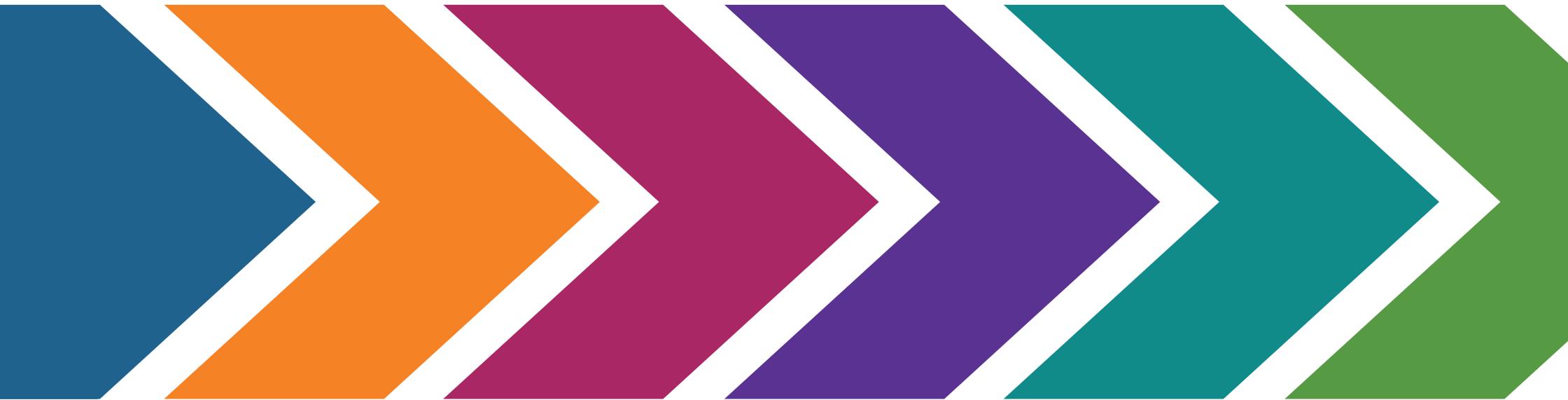# Building a **Resilient** Sector

2022-24 Peer Support Group Sector Plan

ConnectGroups
helping support groups & individuals

Acknowledgement

ConnectGroups acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as the traditional custodians of country throughout Western Australia, and recognises their continuing connection to land, waters and community. We pay our respects to them and their cultures; and to their Elders past, present, and emerging.

About ConnectGroups

ConnectGroups is the Peak body for Peer Support in Western Australia, empowering and sustaining community-based Peer Support Groups and the wider community for over 39 years through sector development activities, capacity-building, resourcing, and advocacy.

Peer Support Groups provide support on a broad range of issues including chronic and genetic conditions, trauma, mental distress, and social isolation. Peer Support Groups play a key role in the promotion of health and wellbeing, community inclusion, and the value of lived experience. ConnectGroups provides Peer Support Groups with the funding, training and information required to deliver quality community-led peer supports, referral networks and resources to their members. As a result of belonging to a Support Group, individuals, families, and carers build the knowledge, confidence, and skills to manage their wellbeing and recovery.

ConnectGroups is a not-for-profit with a strong track record of responding to identified needs with collaborative practice and innovative service delivery. ConnectGroups is committed to building connected, thriving communities by advocating for an effective and sustainable Peer Support Group Sector.

Introduction

The 2022-24 Peer Support Group Sector Plan was informed by a series of Sector consultations held in 2021. The consultations explored the challenges faced by Peer Support Groups, their immediate and long-term priorities, and resourcing requirements to ensure a sustainable Peer Support Group Sector.

The Sector Consultations have shed light on the increasing challenges of Peer Support Groups, and the need for long-term strategies to aid Group continuation and growth. With Peer Support Groups currently operating at an average membership capacity of 68% and an average support frequency capacity of 93%, there is currently little room for growth of reach and engagement, and the Sector reports feeling overburdened and overworked. There is a need for additional services and resources to support leaders and Facilitators within their roles and to prevent burn-out which poses a high risk to Group sustainability.

Despite being made up of over 700 Peer Support Groups supporting over 150,000 individuals across the state, the Sector continues to be under-recognised and undervalued for its work, with Peer Support Groups reporting lack of referral pathways, lack of interest in collaboration from medical professionals, and lack of funding towards Group operation.

There is a need for increased awareness of the Sector, evidence-based research on the value of Peer Support, promotion of the Sector as a reliable source of support, and strategic allocation of funding and resources to enable a sustainable and thriving Peer Support Group Sector.

On behalf of the Board of Management, staff, and members, ConnectGroups is pleased to present its 2022-24 Peer Support Group Sector Plan (the Plan). The Plan articulates key priority areas, activities, and funding recommendations over a two-year period to address the needs of the Sector. It aims to contribute to and inform government decision-making by ensuring that the voice of the Peer Support Group Sector is represented, ensuring a strong Sector and, in turn, connected, thriving communities.

Consultation Focus Areas
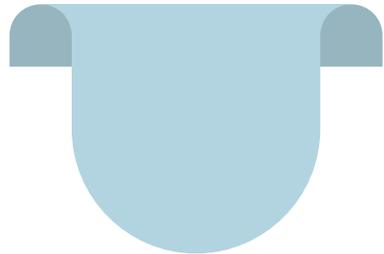
SUPPORT GROUP CAPACITY

- Ability to increase number of members
- Ability to increase number of services
- Ability to increase frequency of support
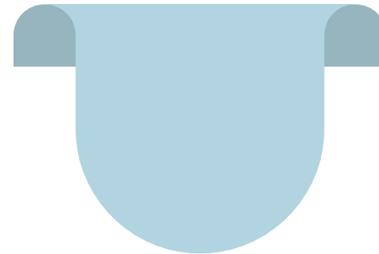
SUPPORT GROUP CAPABILITY

- Ability to deliver high quality services and support to members
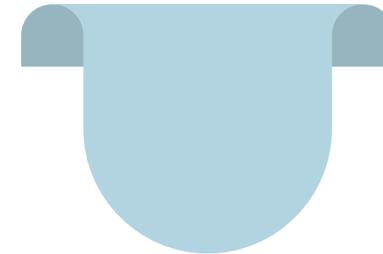
SUPPORT GROUP SUSTAINABILITY

- Ability to sustain service delivery
- Ability to remain active in the immediate and long-term future

Current State of the Sector
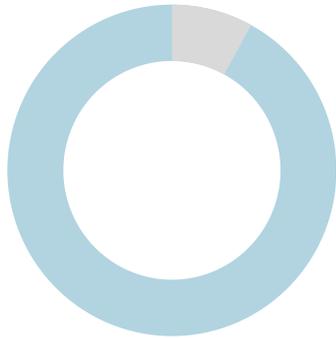
92%

would like to offer more services and support
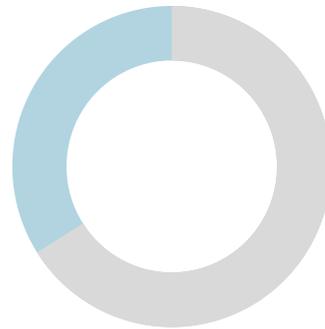
34%

are unable to increase the number of people they support with current funding, training, and resources
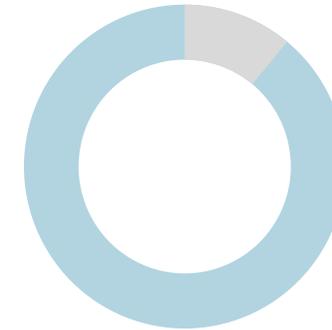
89%

are unable to increase their frequency of support for members with current funding, training, and resources

Groups are operating at an average membership capacity of

68%

Groups are operating at an average contact frequency capacity of

93%

Key Issues Faced by the Sector

Lack of Awareness and Recognition of Peer Support

There is limited visibility of and a lack of understanding of the benefits of Peer Support. The Sector feels overwhelmingly undervalued and underappreciated, despite providing a unique level of support to community members that positively impacts health and mental health. A lack of Sector recognition limits opportunity for referral pathways and partnerships, reduces the chance of securing resources, and can adversely impact retention rates of Facilitators and volunteers.

Staff, Facilitator, and Volunteer Limitations

Peer Support Group Facilitators, Management Committee members, and volunteers are overworked, overcommitted, time-poor, and at risk of burn-out. Due to workload and skills requirements, governance and leadership positions are difficult to allocate and, as a result, Peer Support Groups struggle with volunteer recruitment and succession planning, which poses a high risk to Groups' sustainability.

Knowledge Limitations

Peer Support Groups are lacking key knowledge and skills that would assist in building their Group's capacity and their ability to deliver higher quality services. Professional development opportunities not only increase the confidence and capability of Peer Support Groups, but also reinforce the Sector's position as a reputable source of support, improving referral pathways and ensuring better health and mental health outcomes for community members.

Resource Limitations

Consultation outcomes indicate an overworked and under-resourced Sector. Barriers to increasing capacity include lack of affordable suitable meeting venues and facilities, lack of equipment, overcommitted Facilitators, Management Committee members, and volunteers, and lack of funding to cover administration and operational costs.

What the Sector Asked For

- Recognition
- Workforce Development
- Professional Development
- Operational Resources
- Expansion in the Regions
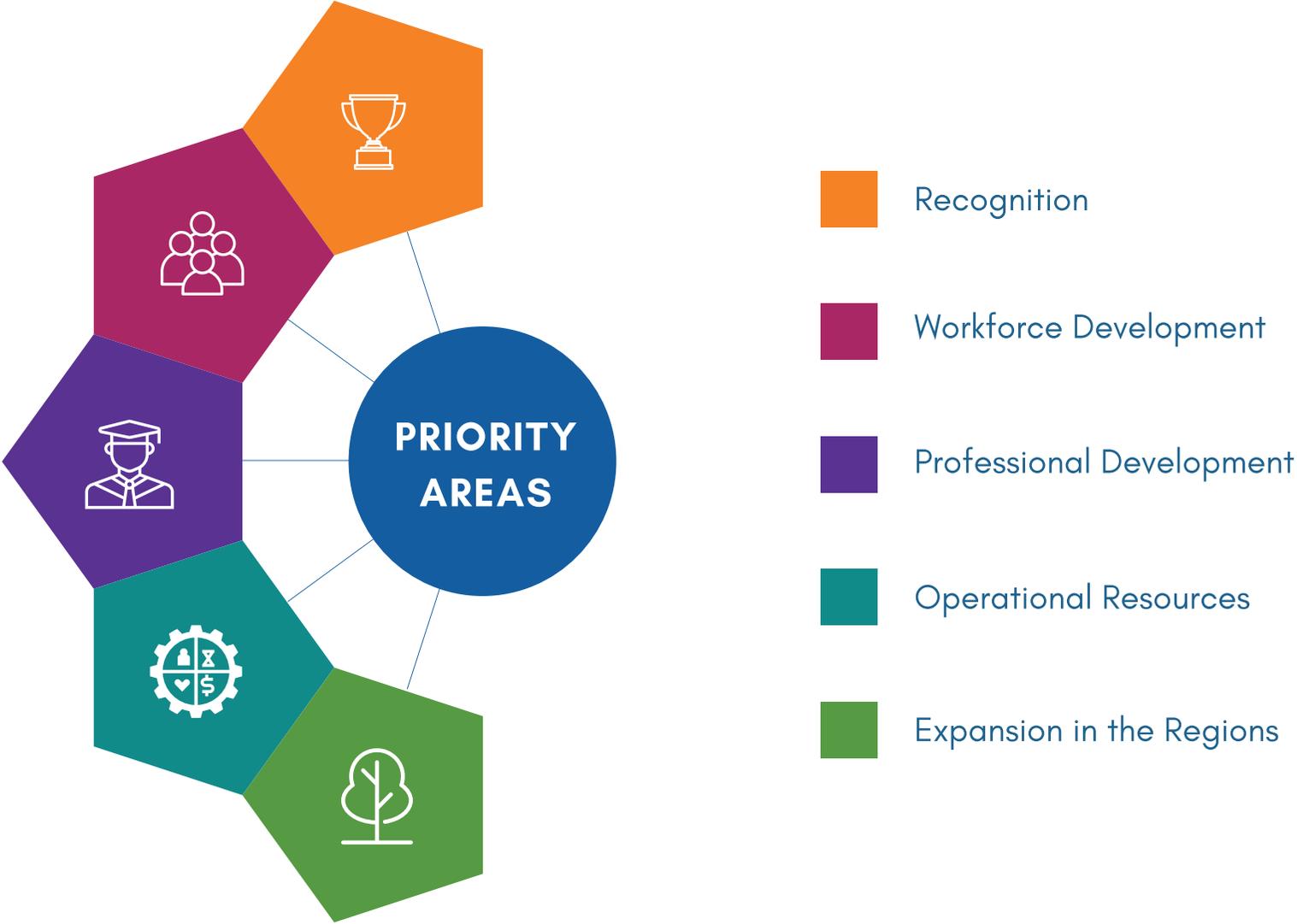
PRIORITY AREAS

Priority Area 1: Recognition

Recommendations

RESEARCH
Conduct research on Peer Support social return on investment.

AWARENESS
Deliver a Sector-wide awareness campaign that promotes the existence, purpose, and benefits of Peer Support Groups.

RECOGNITION EVENT
Deliver a recognition event to acknowledge the work of Peer Support Groups.

ADVOCACY
Establish a Sector advocacy network consisting of Peer Support Group representatives to strengthen advocacy efforts and better harness the voice of lived experience.

PARTNERSHIPS
Build strong partnerships with local government, non-government organisations, and peak bodies to foster new referral pathways for Peer Support Groups.

REFERRAL PATHWAYS
Re-establish the Community Link Booth social prescribing model for referral pathways through General Practitioners and health professionals.

Priority Area 1: Recognition

How Government can Contribute

RESOURCING RESEARCH	PROMOTIONAL SUPPORT	RESOURCING RECOGNITION EVENT	RESOURCING COMMUNITY LINK BOOTH
Resourcing research on Peer Support social return on investment.	Involvement in and promotion of annual Peer Support Group awareness campaigns.	Allocating $35,000 to support the delivery of a Sector recognition event.	Allocating $250,000 over two (2) years to relaunch the Community Link Booth model at Fiona Stanley Hospital.

Priority Area 1: Recognition

Timeline of Activities

ACTIVITY	2022	2023	2024
Engagement with LGAs, NGOs, and Peaks to foster referral pathways	████████████████████████████████████		
Advocate to Government the need for research on Peer Support social return on investment	██████████		
Advocate to Government the need for a Sector recognition event	██████████		
Advocate to Government the need for the re-launch of Community Link Booth at Fiona Stanley Hospital	██████████		
Identify champions for Sector Advocacy Network and provide training	██		
Develop Sector awareness campaigns	███	███	███
Launch of Sector Advocacy Network	██		
Distribute Sector awareness campaign messaging to members, Peaks, and Government	██	██	██
Launch of Sector awareness campaigns	█	█	█
Launch and two-year delivery of Community Link Booth (funding dependent)		████████████████████	
Delivery of recognition event (funding dependent)		█	

Priority Area 2: Workforce Development

Recommendations

FACILITATOR PAYMENTS

Provide supplementary payments to Peer Support Group Facilitators.

DEBRIEFING

Establish a Mobile Debriefing Service accessible from Peer Support Groups' premises that Facilitators can utilise to alleviate stress and prevent burn-out.

STUDENT PLACEMENTS

Engage students to conduct work placements and/or internships within Peer Support Groups to fill volunteer vacancies.

TRAINED VOLUNTEERS

Create a pool of trained volunteers which Peer Support Groups can utilise to fill volunteer vacancies, and provide resources to support the Sector with volunteer management and retention.

Priority Area 2: Workforce Development

How Government can Contribute

**RESOURCING
FACILITATOR PAYMENTS**

**RESOURCING
MOBILE DEBRIEFING**

Resourcing through the Mental Health Commission and Department of Communities for supplementary funding for consumer payments (Facilitators).

Resourcing the establishment and ongoing delivery of a metro Mobile Debriefing Service.

Priority Area 2: Workforce Development

Timeline of Activities

ACTIVITY	2022	2023	2024
Engagement with Volunteering WA to establish a pool of trained volunteers for Peer Support Groups	████████	████████	██████
Advocate to Government the need for consumer payments for Facilitators	████		
Advocate to Government the need for a Mobile Debriefing Service	████		
Engagement with universities to identify student placement/internship opportunities	█		
Develop resources to support Peer Support Groups with volunteer management and retention	█		
Deliver forums to inform Peer Support Groups of processes/best practice in hosting student interns	▪	▪	▪
Launch and two-year distribution of consumer payments for Facilitators (funding dependent)		████████	████
Launch and two-year delivery of Mobile Debriefing Service (funding dependent)		████████	████

Priority Area 3: Professional Development

Recommendations

MOBILE SECTOR DEVELOPMENT

Deliver mobile Sector Development activities accessible from Peer Support Groups' premises.

MENTAL HEALTH TRAINING

Provide mental health training for non-mental health focused Peer Support Groups.

QUALIFICATIONS

Continue to upskill the Sector through expansion of scholarships to enable Peer Support Group Facilitators to obtain nationally recognised qualifications.

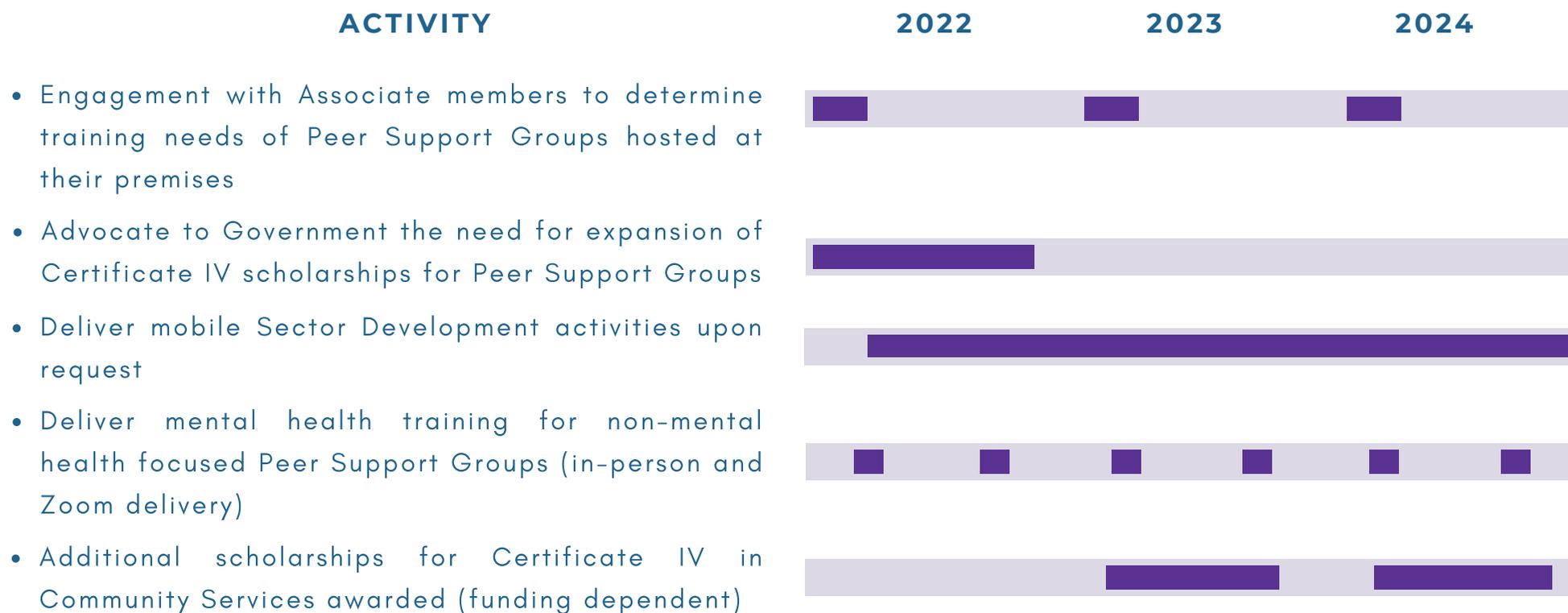# Priority Area 3: Professional Development

How Government can Contribute

**RESOURCING
SCHOLARSHIPS**

$40,000 over two (2) years to fund 20 additional scholarships for Peer Support Group representatives to complete a Certificate IV in Community Services.

Priority Area 3: Professional Development

Timeline of Activities

ACTIVITY	2022	2023	2024
Engagement with Associate members to determine training needs of Peer Support Groups hosted at their premises	▮	▮	▮
Advocate to Government the need for expansion of Certificate IV scholarships for Peer Support Groups	▬▬▬		
Deliver mobile Sector Development activities upon request	▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬		
Deliver mental health training for non-mental health focused Peer Support Groups (in-person and Zoom delivery)	▮ ▮	▮ ▮	▮ ▮
Additional scholarships for Certificate IV in Community Services awarded (funding dependent)		▬▬▬	▬▬▬

Priority Area 4: Operational Resources

Recommendations

FREE/AFFORDABLE VENUES

Engage with Local Government Areas and Community Resource Centres to secure free or affordable venues for Peer Support Groups

OFFICE SPACE

Invest in a central office space to be utilised by Peer Support Groups as a shared workspace model, providing essential resources to support with Group operation and administration.

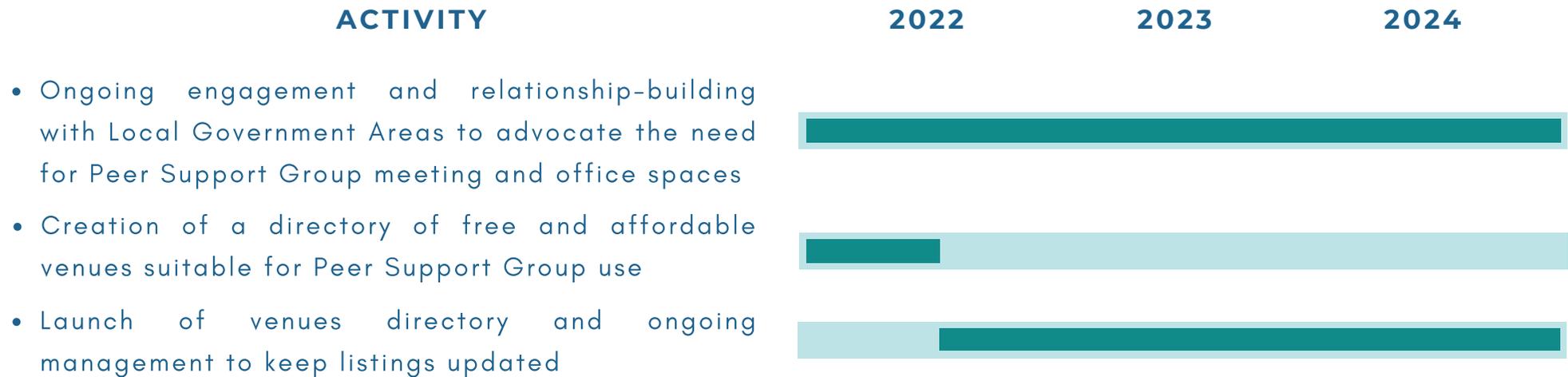# Priority Area 4: Operational Resources

How Government can Contribute

**PROVIDING UNDERUTILISED
SPACES**

Local Government Areas to provide underutilised spaces pro bono for Peer Support
Groups to utilise for Group meeting venues and office space.

Priority Area 4: Operational Resources

Timeline of Activities

ACTIVITY	2022	2023	2024
• Ongoing engagement and relationship-building with Local Government Areas to advocate the need for Peer Support Group meeting and office spaces	███████████████████████████████		
• Creation of a directory of free and affordable venues suitable for Peer Support Group use	██████		
• Launch of venues directory and ongoing management to keep listings updated		███████████████████████	

Priority Area 5: Expansion in the Regions

Recommendations

PARTNERED REGIONAL VISITS

ConnectGroups to partner with metro-based Peer Support Groups on regional visits to support the expansion of Groups within the regions.

REGIONAL HUBS

Invest in regional hubs to provide a one-stop-shop for regional Peer Support Groups that will support with Group development, management, and long-term sustainability.
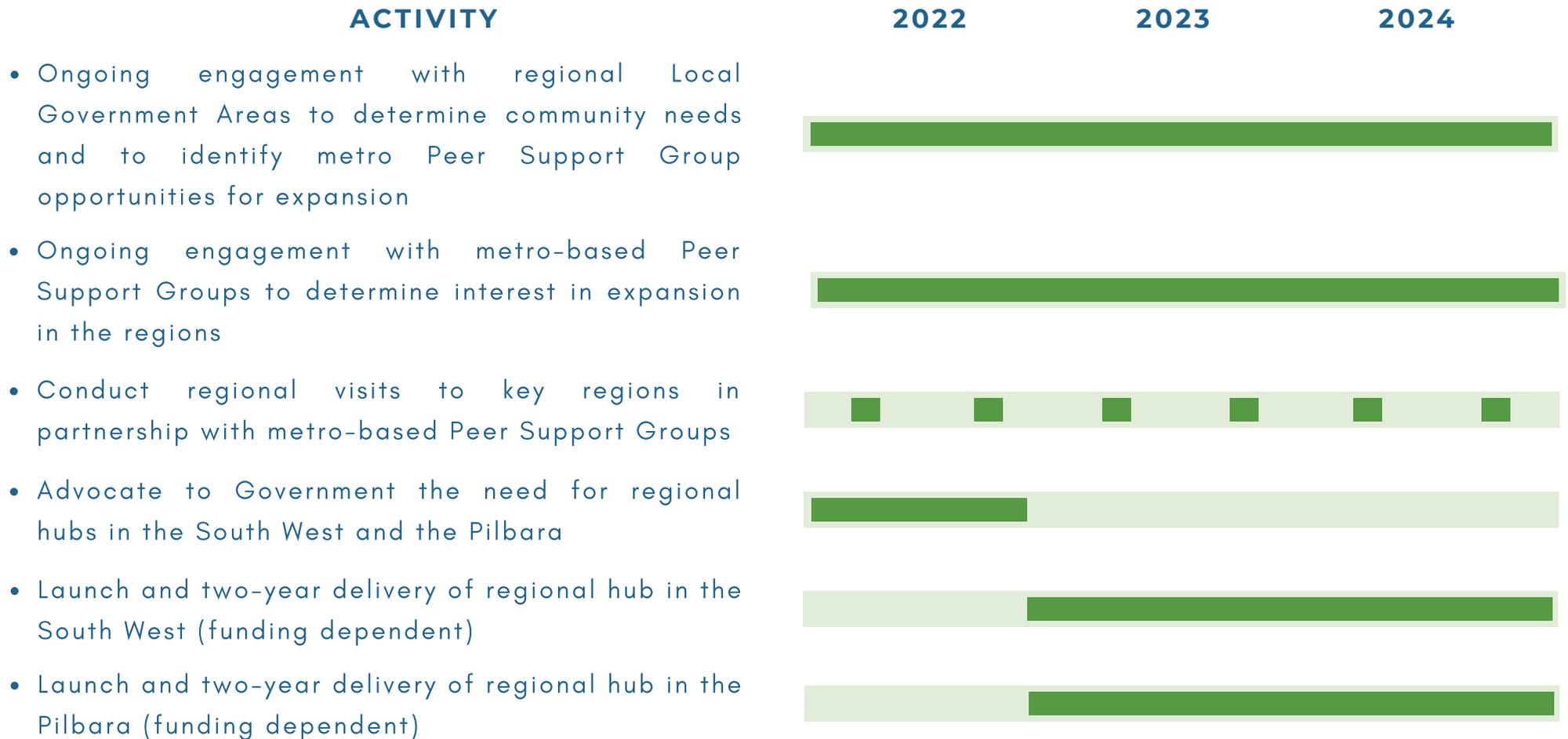
Priority Area 5: Expansion in the Regions

How Government can Contribute

**RESOURCING
REGIONAL HUBS**

$1M over two (2) years to fund two (2) regional hubs in the South West and the Pilbara to support regional Peer Support Groups with Group development, management, and long-term sustainability.

# Priority Area 5: Expansion in the Regions

Timeline of Activities

ACTIVITY	2022	2023	2024
Ongoing engagement with regional Local Government Areas to determine community needs and to identify metro Peer Support Group opportunities for expansion	███████████████████████████		
Ongoing engagement with metro-based Peer Support Groups to determine interest in expansion in the regions	███████████████████████████		
Conduct regional visits to key regions in partnership with metro-based Peer Support Groups	▪ ▪	▪ ▪	▪ ▪
Advocate to Government the need for regional hubs in the South West and the Pilbara	████████		
Launch and two-year delivery of regional hub in the South West (funding dependent)		████████████████	
Launch and two-year delivery of regional hub in the Pilbara (funding dependent)		████████████████	

THE SECTOR

702 Peer Support Groups

Supporting over 146,585 Western Australians

Across mental health, chronic and genetic health conditions, disability, isolation, and other life adversities.
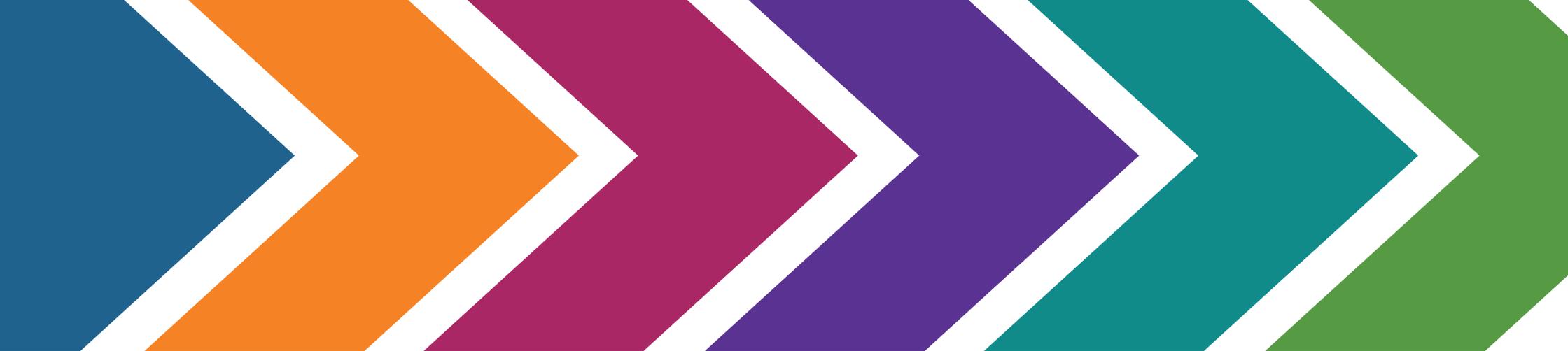
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