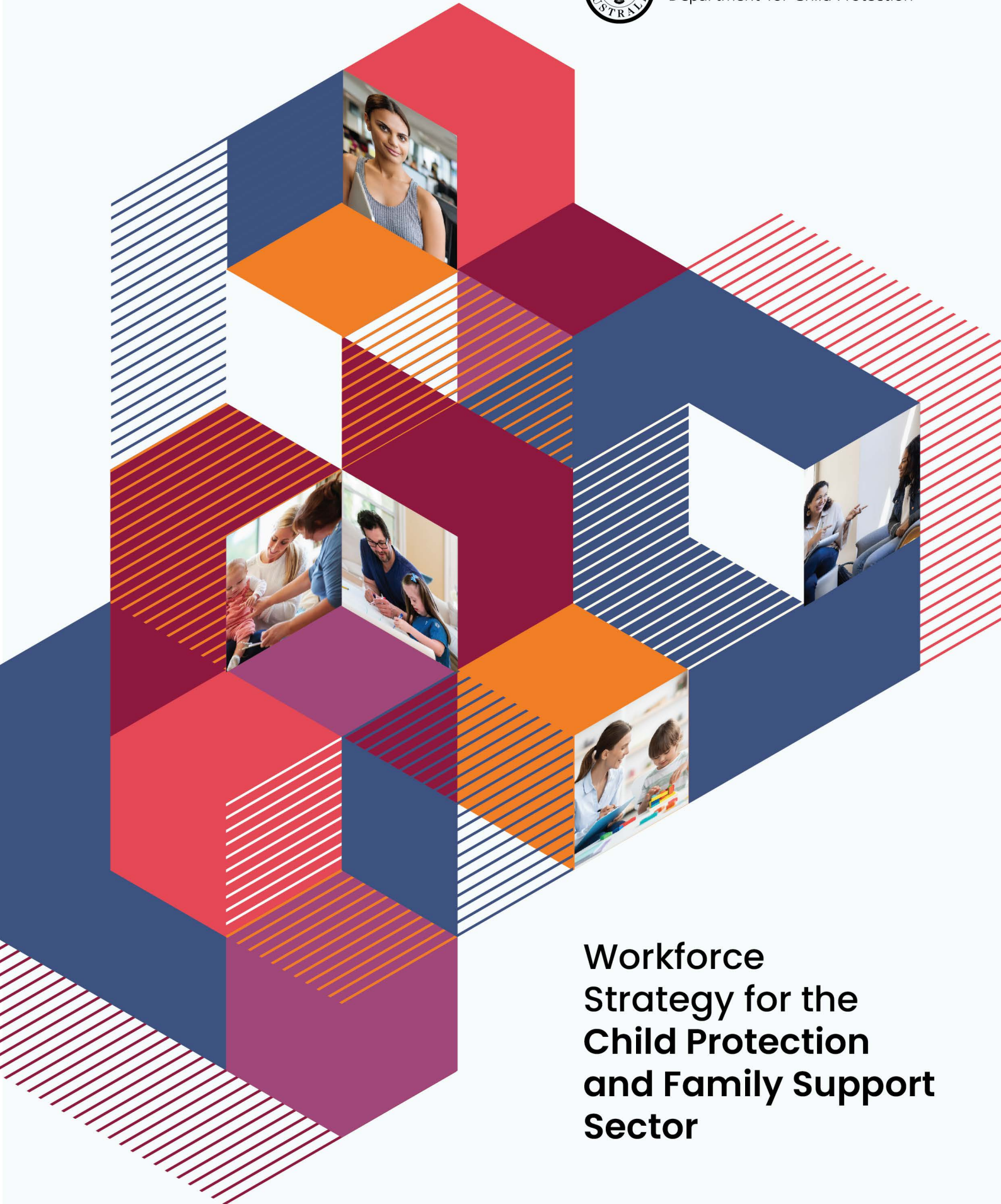




**Government of South Australia**  
Department for Child Protection



# **Workforce Strategy for the Child Protection and Family Support Sector**

*We acknowledge and respect Aboriginal people as the state's first people and Nations, and recognise Aboriginal people as the traditional custodians of South Australian land and waters.*

*We recognise that Aboriginal children and young people have the right to grow up in a safe and nurturing environment where their connections to family, community, language, culture and country are supported, respected and celebrated.*



# Minister's foreword

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Child protection and family support workers make decisions that can change a child's life. Their work is crucial, risky and demanding, and on a daily basis workers respond with compassion, professionalism and dedication to protect, nurture and empower children and young people who together with their families, are facing complex challenges. To meet these challenges, whole of government, whole of sector aligned effort is required and the work needs to be broadly understood, valued and supported.

We are steadfastly committed to strengthening families and meeting community need for support and determined to build a sustainable workforce for the future. We face critical challenges including an increasing number of children and families in contact with the system, and difficulties in attracting and retaining staff as many sectors grapple with workforce shortages.

The child protection and family support sector is so important. Delivering lasting and improved outcomes with and for children and families relies on a skilled, sustainable and well supported workforce.

This first whole-of-sector workforce strategy will chart the future direction to grow and develop the workforce. It has been developed with support and input from a range of stakeholders. There has been engagement with Aboriginal partners, recognising the need to privilege Aboriginal voices and leadership across the sector if we are to begin to close the gap for Aboriginal children and their families. In every conversation it is evident that there is a shared commitment to deliver better outcomes with and for children, young people, their families, carers and communities, and agreement that this requires a skilled, sustainable workforce for the future.

Our workforce is part of both the backbone and frontline of the child protection and family support system. I wholeheartedly thank all workers for their remarkable dedication and look forward to continuing to work in partnership as we improve outcomes with and for children and young people and help enable them to live their best lives.



**Katrine Hildyard MP**

Minister for Child Protection

Minister for Women and the Prevention of Domestic and Family Violence

Minister for Recreation, Sport and Racing

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Workforce Strategy for the Child Protection and Family Support Sector – released July 2024

Readers are asked to note that references in this report to Aboriginal children, families and communities refer to people who identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander.

# SA's Child Protection & Family Support Sector

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## Who we are

The child protection and family support workforce is fundamental to keeping the most vulnerable children in our society safe, nurtured and cared for. Our workforce holds specialised expertise across a diverse range of fields, provides essential frontline and support services to children and families across the state, and works tirelessly on a daily basis to achieve life-changing positive outcomes.

Across the system we invest in shared programs, all delivered by our remarkable workers, providing critical services spanning from supporting at-risk families, through to statutory child protection functions, to transitioning and supporting young people in their post-care lives.

We work in an interconnected system, recognising that no single organisation can do this important work alone. We rely on a strong partnership approach between government, non-government organisations (NGOs) and Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs).

Our workforce is connected through the families and communities we support, and through shared passion to make a difference with children and young people at the centre of all that we do.



Hon Katrine Hildyard MP addressing the sector at the South Australian Child Protection Awards 2023.

## **The case for change**

All child protection and family support sectors across Australia, and even internationally, share similar workforce challenges. While these are not new, we must take action now to grow a strong and sustainable workforce, equipped to deliver critical services to improve outcomes for vulnerable children and families.

### **Growing demand, increasing complexity**

Pressure on our system is felt each day due to the growing demand for services. Whilst growth in the number of children and young people in care has significantly slowed, the number of child protection notifications are projected to continue on an upwards trend, stretching our finite resources. This is compounded by the increasing interconnected complexities that families who come into contact with the child protection and family support system face. Achieving commitments under Closing the Gap requires a dedicated, deliberate and sustained approach to transforming the child protection and family support sector.

### **High competition for a qualified workforce**

The nature of child protection and family support work requires a professional, dedicated and highly skilled workforce. As a sector, we rely on social workers and other allied health professionals to lead clinical decision making to keep children safe and support them to thrive. National projections indicate there will be a significant gap between the number of graduates and the demand for these highly skilled professionals. By 2050 it is projected there will be a critical shortage of over 286,000 care workers across health care and social assistance sectors nationally.

### **Ongoing need for the right type of skills**

In addition to technical qualifications, the importance of 'soft skills' cannot be overstated.

No family wishes to be involved with the child protection and family support system, however the public holds high expectations that the sector will intervene when children are at risk of abuse and neglect.

To be successful in their role, staff need to be empathetic, have excellent communication skills and an ability to build rapport with a diverse range of clients. It is also critical that families, children and young people feel they have a strong ongoing relationship with staff, which requires a stable workforce, achieved by strengthening the numbers of staff employed on a secure and long-term basis.

### **High turnover, insecure employment**

High turnover rates are common within community service sectors such as health, aged care, human services and child protection and family support. National data illustrates the trend of staff with 12 months or less experience representing a key cohort who exit our sector. We need to change our practice from continually recruiting new staff to a focus on improving job stability and retaining experienced staff.

High vacancy rates are typically attributed to demanding frontline roles and working in what can be an emotionally taxing environment. To assist with staff retention, we need to increase opportunities for secure employment, and ensure staff feel valued and supported.

### **Future workforce changes**

In South Australia we face a unique challenge as we pave the way towards a registration scheme for our social work profession. While this will ultimately assist in raising the status of the profession, we need to strengthen the community perception of child protection and family support work as providing essential frontline services, of equal importance as nurses and paramedics.

## Competing pressures



### A changing workforce landscape

Australia's health care and social assistance sector has more than **doubled in size** over the past 20 years. Projections show that by 2050, there will be a **critical shortage of over 286,000 care workers** across Australia.

With an **aging population**, a significant proportion of our older workforce will soon retire, resulting in less experienced workers required to provide services to children and families.



### Scarcity of skills, growing demand for services

In SA, child protection notifications **increased by over 40%** since 2016/17. Over the same period, whilst growth has significantly slowed, the number of **children in care increased by 39%**. Without a corresponding increase in the workforce, this **influx of demand** can lead to stretched workloads and high staff turnover.

There is **strong competition** for university graduates in social work and psychology degrees, compounded by a **decline in domestic and international enrolments**. In addition, the number of Aboriginal students enrolled in relevant degrees is currently not projected to meet future demand.



### Importance of advancing Aboriginal self-determination

Nationally in 2022, the **rate of Aboriginal children in out of home care was 56.8** per 1000 children in the population. In comparison, the rate of non-Aboriginal children in out of home care was 4.8 per 1000 children in the population.

In addition to growing our ACCO footprint and increasing the number of Aboriginal staff in the sector, there is a need to support Aboriginal staff as future leaders. Currently, **higher proportions of Aboriginal workers occupy lower skilled positions** within Australia's child protection and family support workforce.



### Modernising how we work

Nationally, all child protection and family support sectors are facing the same long-standing issue of **workforce turnover and retention**. There is a need to **increase secure employment** to retain relationships, knowledge and consistency.

To be an attractive employer of choice and meet the **modern expectations of staff** we are required to increase opportunities for both security and flexibility in how we work.

## Sector strengths

Our sector offers the ability to make true generational impact to help transform children and young people's lives. This draws highly dedicated staff to the child protection and family support sector, staff who are motivated to make a positive difference. They approach their work every day with compassion, empathy and commitment, and advocate for every child. They are the major strength of our system.

The sector is filled with many staff who enjoy the complex nature of the work and experience the immeasurable reward when strong partnerships with children, young people and families lead to true improvements in their day-to-day lives. Long-standing staff gain experience across diverse organisations within the child protection and family support sector, while sharing their knowledge and wisdom to help build the expertise of less experienced staff.

Across the child protection and family support sector, we hold a deep commitment to bring about change in supporting Aboriginal families and to privileging Aboriginal voices in decision making and fully embedding the Aboriginal Child Placement Principle. We are committed to developing a strong Aboriginal workforce which is central to improving outcomes for Aboriginal children and families and achieving commitments under Closing the Gap to build the Aboriginal and community controlled sector and transform mainstream services so they work better for Aboriginal people.

Importantly, there is a strong appetite to collaborate amongst organisations. This is particularly evident in country locations with joint training and support networks already in place. In addition, there is clear commitment to continuing to work in partnership with NGOs and their peak body Child and Family Focus SA (CAFFSA), as well as unions representing the sector workforce. This collaboration will be key to the strategy's success.



# Sector Snapshot

## Sector Staff

- Child and youth workers, social workers, psychologists, specialist allied health professionals, care and support roles
- Corporate, administrative and operational roles, as well as management and leadership positions
- Over 80% of the sector workforce is female, with an average age of 42 years, and an average tenure of 6.2 years
- Staff located in metropolitan Adelaide and across regional South Australia, supported by a Fly In Fly Out model to service remote communities

## Sector Partnerships

- DCP partners with 31 service providers across the NGO sector
- 9.25% procurement from Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations
- Connection with 3 Registered Training Organisations for subsidised training
- Established relationships with 2 South Australian and 12 interstate universities for social work placements
- Oversight, peak and professional bodies/unions representing child protection and family support staff and/or advocating for the communities we serve
- Interface with the introduction of the Social Work Registration Scheme

## Sector Services

- Investigation and assessment
- Intervention
- Family preservation and support and reunification
- Family Group Conferencing
- Guardianship case management
- Family based carer assessment and support
- Residential care, placement and support packages
- Supported independent living and transition from care
- Advocacy and support
- Administrative and operational services



## The Community the Sector Supports

- 1 in 3 children come to the attention of our system
- Over 90,000 notifications received per annum
- Over 4,800 children in care
- 37% of children in care are Aboriginal
- 30% of children in care have a disability or significant developmental delay
- Over 2,700 foster and kinship carers with a placement
- Families living in metropolitan Adelaide as well as across rural and remote South Australia



## Sector Strengths

- A skilled and dedicated workforce, with many long-standing staff working effectively in the sector for years
- Values-driven staff, demonstrating strong advocacy for children and young people
- Strong partnership approach between DCP/NGOs/ACCOs
- Existing local level workforce initiatives already in place
- Highly rewarding work



## Sector Challenges

- Continuing increase in volume of reports and rise in complexity of families that interact with the sector
- Staff turnover rates in an environment that can be emotionally taxing
- Public misunderstanding of the essential nature of child protection and family support work
- High competition with other sectors for skills
- Diversity of workforce not commensurate with diversity of children
- Differing pay and conditions across organisations in the sector
- Insecure work patterns



# Strategy Development

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## Why a sector workforce strategy?

To ensure workers can continue to be there for children and families, we need a sustainable workforce for the future. Implementing a public health approach to child protection and family support requires a holistic sector-wide approach to addressing workforce challenges.

The strategy delivers sector-wide mechanisms to better gain, train and retain the workforce. Three key challenges the strategy will address are:

- 1. Limited staff available to meet the growing demand for services:** This will be addressed through promoting awareness of the benefits of working in the highly rewarding field of child protection and family support, and strengthening pipelines into the sector with a focus on allied health professions and Aboriginal students. There will also be concentrated effort to ensure industrial settings attract skilled candidates.
- 2. High turnover across entry level positions:** This will be addressed by working closer with the higher education sector and Registered Training Organisations to tailor curriculum to child protection, and establishing structured support programs to ensure early career professionals are set up for success.
- 3. Loss of knowledge and experience as skilled staff leave the sector:** This will be addressed through a focus on retention strategies including improving the sector's approach to professional development, and to expand career pathways for the Aboriginal workforce.

A sustainable workforce is one of the keys to providing the best possible support for children in our community. While achieving lasting reform across the sector is a formidable task, we're not starting from scratch.

Rather this strategy builds on local level initiatives already in place, shares best practice from other jurisdictions, and importantly unlocks opportunities to accelerate our progress in developing a skilled and sustainable workforce.

All stakeholders have a role to play and addressing our shared challenges requires a multi-faceted and collaborative approach. It is critical agencies in the child protection and family support sector work in partnership with CAFFSA, representing NGOs, and unions, representing their membership, to successfully implement this workforce strategy.

## How the strategy was developed

This strategy is the first of its kind for our sector. Development commenced with a Workforce Summit to discuss opportunities to elevate the sector as a career of choice and to grow the capabilities needed now and into the future.

Discussions at the Summit emphasised stakeholders' willingness to collaborate and develop a sector-wide approach to training, and it also cemented recognition of the importance of growing the Aboriginal workforce and cultural capability.

The outcomes of the Summit were then closely analysed through targeted discussions with a range of stakeholders including NGO and ACCO executives, universities, skills and training organisations, peak sector bodies and unions and staff representatives.

The strategy was also shaped via a literature review of contemporary workforce trends, alongside data analysis including Child and Family Focus SA's 2023 Out of Home Care Workforce Mapping Project and surveys of sector staff.

The draft strategy was then released for public consultation with feedback received from industry leaders, sector stakeholders and staff, as well as members of the public. Overall, the child protection and family support sector supported the first whole of sector strategy, providing valuable feedback, and importantly, expressing a strong willingness to collaborate and emphasising the importance for a wide range of sector voices to be involved in the implementation of the actions.

## Connection with other reform

The development of the strategy is set against the backdrop of a range of system reform, at both the state and national levels. Key frameworks which have helped guide the development of the strategy include:

- Safe and Supported: the National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children: 2021 – 2031, including the significant reform required to embed both First Action Plans;
- National Agreement on Closing the Gap, including to strengthen partnerships and shared decision-making and focus on building the capacity of ACCOs;
- Review of the *Children and Young People (Safety) Act 2017* which guides legislative reform;
- Learnings and recommendations from a number of external reviews which consider sector workforce challenges, principally The Life They Deserve: the Child Protection Systems Royal Commission Report, and Kate Alexander's Trust in Culture report; and
- Impacts and opportunities which will be created through the introduction of SA's Social Worker Registration Scheme.

While the primary focus of this strategy relates to the workforce funded by the Department for Child Protection, it is important to consider the opportunities to align approaches with other community service-based sectors given the similar workforce challenges.

In addition, it is recognised that the strategy and our workforce will need to be responsive to future reform. Addressing the current and projected workforce challenges requires a flexible and adaptive approach, but most importantly relies on a unified system working together.

## Strategy Development & Engagement

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Workforce Summit  
90 expert & sector leaders



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### Sector Insights

Enhance the professional profile of the child protection and family support workforce | Advocate for changes in tertiary curriculum to better reflect child protection and family support work | Strengthen pathways and cultural support for Aboriginal workforce | Encourage collaborative training approaches across the sector | Develop career pathways to retain knowledge and expertise within the sector



### Targeted Discussions

- 59 Sector stakeholders
- 14 Industry experts
- 15 Interstate & comparable sectors
- 5 months of valuable discussions with stakeholders



Literature Review



Best Practice Scan

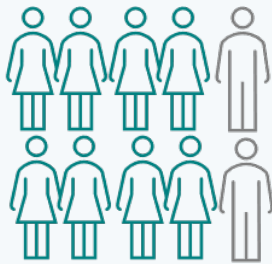


Data Analysis



Open Consultation

## Research Analysis



80+%  
Female  
workforce

### 1 – 1.5 years

Average tenure for entry level statutory positions. However, if individuals remain past 2 years, the turnover rate dramatically decreases.



The statutory workforce tends to be relatively younger and hold higher level qualifications than NGO staff.

However, many of these individuals leave statutory roles within the first few years and transition to NGOs/ACCOs within the sector



70% – 80%

Staff wish to stay long-term &/or have no immediate or short-term plans to leave the sector



Staff are drawn to child protection and family support work because they see the work as

*"Noble"*

*"Important"*

*"Rewarding"*

*"An honour"*

### Resilience Factors

- ✓ Commitment to and satisfaction with the work
- ✓ Having self-efficacy and agency
- ✓ Commitment to positive child, young person and family outcomes
- ✓ Use of reflective practice
- ✓ Supervisory, peer, managerial and child, young person and family relationships



Lack of career development is a top factor for wanting to leave.

Research recommends child protection and family support organisations establish secondment opportunities and career pathways to retain staff within the sector

# Strategy at a glance

## OUR VISION

A child protection and family support workforce that is the appropriate size, holds the necessary skills, and displays the required values to help improve outcomes with and for vulnerable children and families. A cohesive sector that gains, trains and retains expertise, values cultural experience, and effectively partners together to improve outcomes for the community it serves.

## OUR PRIORITIES



## SHARED RESPONSIBILITY

Department for Child Protection | NGOs | ACCOs | Education and Training Providers  
Peak and Professional Bodies | Department of Human Services  
Department of Health and Wellbeing | Staff | Unions

### SHARED OUTCOMES







Gain

# Gain

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## **Priority area #1 – Position the child protection and family support sector as an attractive and rewarding career**

Attracting the best candidates is critical to the future of our system. Staff that are drawn to child protection and family support work hold high social values and a mission to make a difference. To attract more dedicated staff, we will raise the profile of our sector in the community and highlight the fulfilling and diverse careers available.

### **To achieve this we will:**

- Launch a professional recruitment campaign promoting the benefits of working in the sector. This will be pivotal in positioning child protection and family support as an attractive career and supporting employers to attract their workforce
- Target a broad range of potential applicants holding diverse experience and cultural backgrounds, from school aged students, mid-career changers as well as expert practitioners
- Celebrate the importance of child protection and family support, helping existing staff feel valued and recognised for the important work they do
- Establish a one-stop-shop recruitment portal promoting all jobs available within the sector
- Provide clear, consistent and positive messages about working in the sector, promoting entry points, career paths and pay and conditions.

## **Priority area #2 – Establish new and diverse pipelines into the sector**

With the demand for talent increasing Australia-wide, identifying and creating new recruitment pools are critical to success. Early exposure to the child protection and family support sector is a strong indicator for pursuit of a career in the system, therefore we will broaden student pipelines to the sector.

### **To achieve this we will:**

- Establish a paid 3 month Progression to Practitioner Program for university students undertaking relevant allied health or human services degrees, offering additional entry pathways and ensuring new entrants have a supported introduction to the sector
- Establish a paid 12 month internship model, employing social work students on a part time basis, providing an ‘earn while you learn’ mechanism
- Offer scholarships/financial support with a focus on encouraging student placements in regional locations, to entice metropolitan and country students to gain experience in the child protection and family support sector
- Explore sector-wide initiatives which strengthen the workforce in regional communities, providing opportunities to attract and train locally based workers.

### Priority area #3 – Targeted recruitment of Aboriginal staff

Cultural knowledge is invaluable as we continually build the capacity to support Aboriginal families in contact with the child protection and family support system. Dedicated recruitment strategies that attract and grow the Aboriginal workforce are central to commitments under Closing the Gap to transform mainstream services to improve outcomes for Aboriginal children and families.

#### To achieve this we will:

- Partner with Aboriginal-led recruitment agencies to create meaningful internships for Aboriginal students, building skills, knowledge and connection for early career staff
- Include a dedicated focus within the recruitment campaign to attract Aboriginal staff, acknowledging the impact community perceptions may have on Aboriginal staff working in the child protection and family support sector
- Work in partnership with other national jurisdictions to develop strategies which support ACCOs to attract staff to match current and future workforce needs.



#### Best Practice in Spotlight

##### **Centacare Country**

Successfully partners with the University of South Australia in offering scholarships for country-based university students. Social work students are incentivised to undertake their student placement in regional communities, are supported by Centacare, and gain exposure to the child protection and family support system.



# Impact



## Sector

A strengthened supply line, attracting motivated and qualified entrants to the sector. Positive messaging about the diverse career opportunities available within the sector will raise the sector's profile, reduce negative media perceptions and increase community awareness of the importance of child protection and family support work.



## Staff

A range of diverse entry points will be established for new staff to join the sector, with reduced barriers for students and new graduates through 'earn while you learn' pathways. The existing workforce will benefit from additional skilled staff members joining the team, sharing the workload to make a positive difference together.



## Aboriginal Communities

Mechanisms specifically targeting Aboriginal students will help promote the child protection and family support sector to the next generation of future leaders. Growing the Aboriginal child protection and family support workforce will also help build the capability of the non-Aboriginal workforce, leading to better outcomes for Aboriginal families.



## Children and Young People

Children and young people who interact with our sector will experience timely support and services due to an increase in the number of dedicated staff joining the workforce. An increase in the number of Aboriginal staff working with Aboriginal children and young people will assist in building understanding and connection.



**Train**

# Train

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## Priority area #4 – Strengthen the job readiness of new entrants

Feedback across the sector emphasised the importance of increasing graduates' job preparedness for the unique complexities of child protection and family support work. Holding a qualification is an important foundation for many roles, and to ensure new entrants are set up for success we will partner with stakeholders to better equip those joining our sector.

### To achieve this we will:

- Work in closer partnership with the higher education sector and Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) through the establishment of a Tertiary Advisory Committee
- Utilise sector-wide expertise to inform the curriculum thereby helping to ensure contemporary and tailored child protection and family support content
- Establish a sector Social Work Graduate Program, providing structured support for early career professionals to transition from student to practitioner
- Develop a Residential Care Foundations Program, increasing access to tailored on the job induction for new NGO staff to gain practical experience in supporting the children and young people in our care.

## Priority area #5 – Maximise development pathways for Aboriginal staff

Aboriginal people must lead service delivery if the sector is to improve outcomes for Aboriginal children and families. We are committed to providing development opportunities for our Aboriginal workforce to support them in their journey as future leaders.

### To achieve this we will:

- Expand pathways for Aboriginal staff to enter leadership roles, including through a Career Advancement Program to support the successful transition into senior leadership
- Develop a network of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people to sponsor and mentor Aboriginal staff
- Work in partnership with other Australian child protection and family support jurisdictions to develop vocational training pathways and access to subsidised tertiary education for our Aboriginal workforce
- Build the cultural capability of managers to supervise Aboriginal staff, acknowledge the cultural load often carried on a day-to-day basis, and ensure respectful and culturally safe work environments.

## Priority area #6 – Reform the sector’s approach to training and development

The inherent nature of child protection and family support work requires professional, skilled and empathetic staff. We have a multi-disciplinary workforce, with a diverse mix of professions, qualifications and skill levels. As a 24/7 service, we must balance offering staff development while providing responsive services, which can be a challenge within a rostered working environment. Upskilling such a broad cohort of workers is not an easy task, but a critical one.

### To achieve this we will:

- Tender for the development of a suite of training modules and micro-credentials, tailored for the child protection and family support sector
- Ensure specialist trauma training is available across the sector, to ensure staff responses are trauma informed
- Establish mechanisms to enable staff to learn from individuals with direct experience of the child protection and family support sector, ensuring first-hand knowledge and wisdom influences their day-to-day practice
- Create an online Learning Hub to increase accessibility of high-quality professional development resources to all sector staff
- Unlock the sector’s potential by broadening opportunities to implement joint training, shared resources and communities of practice, promoting consistency in skills across organisations
- Advance structured learning pathways, enabling individuals to specialise and provide clear pathways to develop from new entrant, to practitioner, to expert

- Build the capability of managers to ensure they are able to identify and address signs of burnout in team members
- Contribute to the national workforce development plan, sharing successful best practice approaches to supporting capacity building across the sector
- Work in partnership with RTOs and universities to map and promote articulation pathways, enabling staff to fast-track attainment of formal qualifications through recognition of prior learning
- Harness opportunities provided by the soon to be introduced Social Work Registration Scheme, enabling structured learning and continuous professional development for the social work profession.



### Best Practice in Spotlight

#### KWY & Junction Australia’s Cultural Partnership

On a part-time basis, Junction Australia engages an Aboriginal staff member substantively employed by KWY. This mutually beneficial arrangement shares expertise across organisations and amplifies Aboriginal perspective and influence in Junction’s internal leadership and policy discussions.

# Impact



## Sector

An efficient and consistent approach to train the sector's workforce, ensuring all children and families receive support from highly skilled practitioners, irrespective of which component of the sector they interact with. New entrants to the sector will commence with a solid understanding of the child protection and family support environment and be supported to successfully turn theoretical knowledge into practical capabilities.



## Staff

Staff will have access to contemporary training and development resources, specifically tailored to child protection and family support, equipping them with the skills and confidence to deliver the highest quality services. Structured learning pathways will also enable individuals to develop into recognised experts across specialist topics.



## Aboriginal Communities

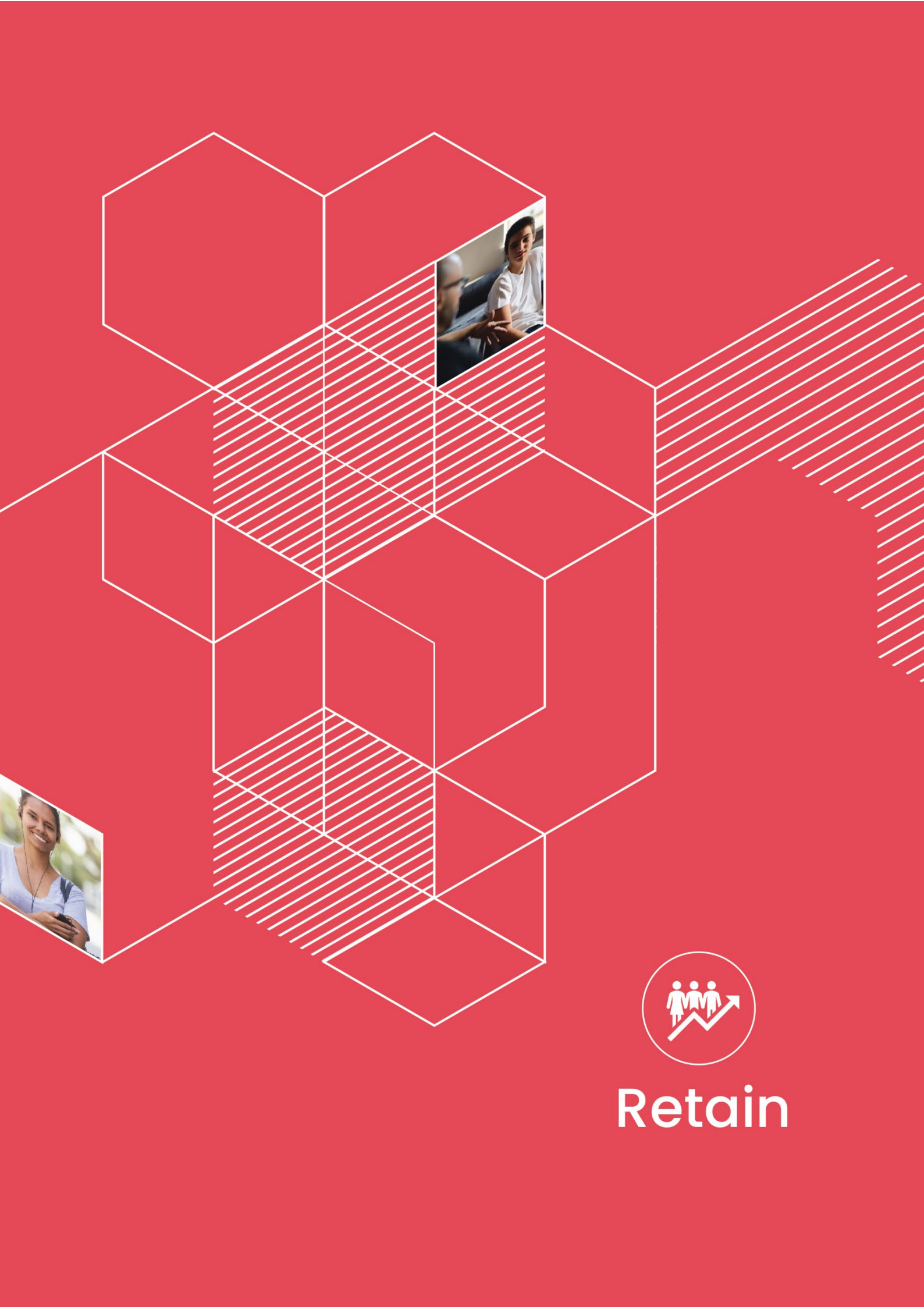
There will be expanded pathways to fast-track career progression as well as support emerging Aboriginal leaders across all professions. The non-Aboriginal workforce will be supported to build capability to help deliver effective and safe services to Aboriginal people alongside Aboriginal leaders.



## Children and Young People

Children and young people will experience day-to-day care and support which is consistent and knowledgeable, irrespective of which organisation their carer is employed by. Strengthening capabilities in trauma and implementing learnings from individuals with direct experience, will contribute to improved decision making for all children and young people.





Retain

# Retain

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## Priority area #7 – Promote transferrable skills and pathways across the sector

A common trend across Australian child protection and family support sectors is the movement of staff from frontline roles in statutory/government agencies, to roles within NGOs. The importance of retaining expertise and skill within our sector is crucial.

Promoting and broadening the opportunities for mobility will assist staff retention and ultimately support individuals to create rewarding lifelong careers within the sector.

### To achieve this we will:

- Promote the diverse career paths available in the sector, highlighting opportunities for both current and prospective staff
- Implement mechanisms to support transfer across the sector, such as facilitating secondment arrangements
- Develop a workforce capability framework, implementing a sector-wide approach to identifying common capabilities and transferrable skills
- Identify opportunities to improve retention of staff by increasing stability and longevity of employment
- Promote the progression of the portable long service leave scheme for community sector organisations
- Implement a Career Advancement Program, targeted at mid-career professionals, enabling formal mentoring, coaching and development opportunities.

## Priority area #8 – Embed culturally safe and supported workplaces

Child protection and family support staff frequently work in environments that can be emotionally demanding, impacting on staff wellbeing. This can be particularly challenging for Aboriginal employees given the experience of intergenerational trauma due to successive government policies and the over-representation of Aboriginal children in the sector.

Across Australian child protection and family support jurisdictions, direct and vicarious trauma is commonly cited as a risk. Ensuring working environments where staff feel respected, supported and valued is key to maintaining a resilient workforce able to adapt to challenges.

### To achieve this we will:

- Establish a Wellbeing Support Program and facilitate access to 'bite-sized' wellbeing modules and self-care resources specifically tailored to child protection
- Work in partnership with peak bodies and ACCOs to develop strategies to eliminate practices that contribute to systemic racism
- Develop tailored resources targeting non-Aboriginal staff to increase understanding of the importance of Aboriginal cultural safety and cultural connections
- Develop non-negotiable standards of behaviour, outlining sector expectations that all staff contribute to a culture of respectful interactions
- Progress reform of the Care Concern process, ensuring principles of natural justice for staff are embedded to assist with staff wellbeing.

## Priority area #9 – Set foundations for long-term workforce reform

In addition to progressing immediate actions to strengthen the workforce, we will also look to future sustainability. Enhancing collection and analysis of data will help create the foundation on which the design and delivery of future actions will be based.

### To achieve this we will:

- > Advocate for a national voice to help modernise the industrial framework for the child protection and family support workforce
- > Build an evidence base of critical information about our workforce profile in order to plan, project and respond from a sector-wide perspective
- > Consider opportunities to gain regular and continuous workforce information to ensure the data remains contemporary and focused on key areas of reform
- > Improve organisational access to sector wide information, thereby supporting the development of local level strategies
- > Establish a sector governance structure to drive the implementation of workforce strategies.



### Best Practice in Spotlight

#### Uniting Country SA 'non-negotiables'

A clear set of easy to understand behavioural standards outlining expectations for staff to interact with each other and clients, build on the foundations of respect and understanding the true value of relationships.



# Impact



## Sector

Retain a stable workforce across all parts of the sector, securing the skills and capabilities needed now and in the future. Workforce planning will be undertaken at the sector level, positioning all service providers with data to make informed decisions for future workforce needs.



## Staff

Staff are able to pursue lifelong careers within the sector, recognising the opportunities for non-linear career pathways. Each individual will contribute to a desirable and rewarding workplace culture, where staff feel supported, valued and equipped to manage daily challenges.



## Aboriginal Communities

Aboriginal staff feel their identity and culture is valued and celebrated, and the importance of cultural connections is recognised and supported by the non-Aboriginal workforce. This will contribute to child protection and family support solidifying its reputation as a sector of choice for the Aboriginal workforce, helping to attract new and retain existing Aboriginal staff.



## Children and Young People

A stable, consistent workforce enables long-term relationships to be maintained between children and young people and their social workers, carers, and other staff. Decisions which impact children and young people are made by experienced, long-standing professionals in the child protection and family support sector.



# Delivering the Strategy

# Delivering the strategy

The actions outlined in this strategy will ultimately contribute to each organisation in the child protection and family support sector being able to better gain, train and retain the workforce needed for the future.

This strategy is also intended to be a roadmap for ongoing engagement between sector stakeholders. Essential to the strategy's success is government, service providers and industry stakeholders continuing to partner in an innovative and coordinated way.

Implementation will be across three phases, with immediate steps to be taken within 12 months. This first set of actions will set the foundations to enable the development of future actions, which will be staged over five years.

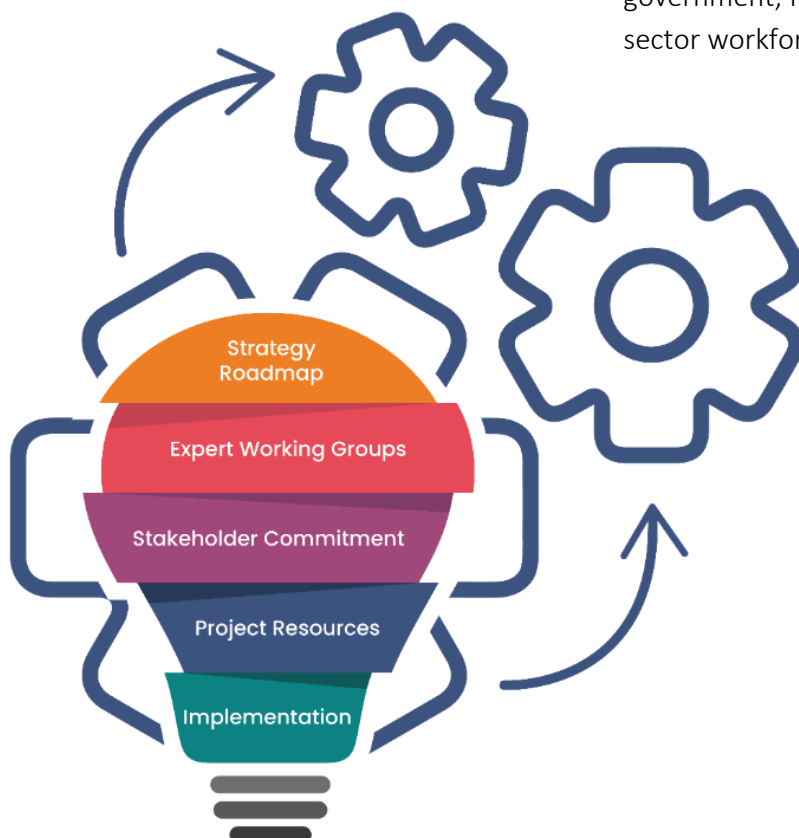
To help drive implementation, administrative and project resources from the department will initially be used to progress matters that cut across organisations.

## Shared governance

It is acknowledged that effective and sustainable change will come via collective effort from multiple stakeholders and an ongoing commitment to advance change.

To further shape and implement the initiatives, three sector-wide governance groups will be established to oversee and monitor implementation of the strategic themes of gain, train and retain. Stakeholders across the sector will be invited to participate in expert working groups, providing input and guidance as we implement the breadth of reform activities.

The cultural expertise and wisdom of ACCO partners is highly valued and recognised as critical to develop and implement Aboriginal specific initiatives. The principles of shared-decision making will be applied for these specific actions, ensuring a strong partnership between government, NGOs and ACCOs to help build the sector workforce.



## How we will implement the strategy

There are four key principles which underpin the strategy:



### Partnerships & collaboration

Achieving workforce reform will require sector and individual efforts. As it is in all of our interests to work towards a connected and cohesive system, this strategy has a focus on shared input with shared governance to oversee lasting change.



### No one size fits all solution

Given the diversity amongst our organisations, it is clear that some challenges are best addressed through locally-led solutions. This strategy enables organisations to 'opt-in' to joint initiatives, while providing flexibility for individual initiatives to be progressed in parallel.



### Building on existing initiatives

While this is our first workforce strategy to consider the sector as a whole, there are already a multitude of best practice initiatives in place across our organisations which we will leverage and build upon.



### Value & respect

Most importantly, we value and respect the existing and future child protection and family support workforce. We understand the complexity of the work and acknowledge the dedication of staff. We also recognise the importance of cultural knowledge to deliver the best possible outcomes with children, families, and carers.

# Timeline for action

\* The timeline outlines the anticipated commencement period for each action

< 12 months

## Short-term actions

- |               |  |
|---------------|--|
| <b>Gain</b>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Launch a professional recruitment campaign to help position the sector as an attractive career with a dedicated focus on Aboriginal communities</li><li>• Partner with Aboriginal-led recruitment agencies to establish Aboriginal internships</li><li>• Create a sector-wide job portal highlighting the diverse careers available across the sector</li><li>• Offer scholarships encouraging student placements in regional locations</li><li>• Create a Tertiary Advisory Committee to work in partnership with universities and RTOs to influence curriculum</li></ul> |
| <b>Train</b>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Establish mechanisms to enable staff to learn from individuals with direct experience</li><li>• Create a network of sponsors and mentors for Aboriginal staff</li><li>• Tender for the development of a Skills and Training Package, creating a suite of tailored learning modules and micro-credentials</li><li>• Ensure specialist trauma training is readily available to staff across the sector</li><li>• Map articulation pathways to fast-track formal qualifications through recognition of prior learning</li></ul>   |
| <b>Retain</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Establish a Career Advancement Program, incorporating sector-wide mentoring opportunities</li><li>• Develop tailored resources relating to Aboriginal cultural safety</li><li>• Establish baseline workforce demographics across the sector</li><li>• Implement mechanisms to encourage mobility across the sector</li></ul>   |

< 2 years

## Medium-term actions

- |               |  |
|---------------|--|
| <b>Gain</b>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Establish a Progression to Practitioner Program for soon to graduate professionals</li><li>• Develop strategies which support ACCOs to attract staff to match current and future workforce needs</li><li>• Explore sector-wide initiatives which strengthen the workforce in regional communities</li></ul>  |
| <b>Train</b>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Create an online sector-wide Learning Hub to share high-quality bespoke training resources</li><li>• Establish a sector wide Social Work Graduate Program incorporating support for early career practitioners</li></ul>   |
| <b>Retain</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Establish a Wellbeing Support Program with access to modules and self-care resources</li><li>• Develop tailored courses designed to address vicarious trauma specifically for child protection and family support staff</li><li>• Develop strategies to eliminate practices that contribute to systemic racism</li><li>• Develop non-negotiable standards of behaviour</li></ul> |

< 5 years

## Long-term actions

- |               |   |
|---------------|---|
| <b>Gain</b>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Promote entry pipelines and opportunities for diverse career pathways across the sector</li><li>• Establish a paid Internship Program for Social Work students</li></ul>  |
| <b>Train</b>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Develop structured learning pathways, enabling ability to specialise and develop from beginner, to practitioner, to expert</li><li>• Work in partnership with other Australian jurisdictions to develop vocational training pathways and access to subsidised tertiary education for the Aboriginal workforce</li></ul> |
| <b>Retain</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Implement mechanisms to obtain up-to-date information about the sector workforce to ensure the data remains contemporary and focused on key areas of reform</li><li>• Develop a sector-wide workforce capability framework</li></ul>  |



## Driving success

The importance of our sector's success is crucial. As we are an interrelated system which provides support to the same children and families, true success will be measured not by one organisation, but through achieving improved outcomes across all parts of the system.

As this sector strategy will be implemented in parallel with local level initiatives pursued by individual organisations, improved data will become more readily available to measure success. The sector-wide strategy will need to continue to adapt and respond to changes in the operating environment.

Ultimately to be successful and ensure effective supports and services are offered to children and families across the system, each organisation in our sector must be able to successfully attract and retain reliable and skilled workers.

### We will know we are successful when:

- ✓ There are diverse pipelines of job ready new entrants, including increased pathways for Aboriginal students
- ✓ Early career professionals feel confident in their skills and supported in their roles, resulting in increased longevity within the sector
- ✓ There is an efficient approach to sector-wide training, with tailored resources and clearly identified career pathways
- ✓ There is an increase in the number of Aboriginal staff who feel supported, valued and empowered
- ✓ Children and young people form long-term relationships with their care team as staff have long-term careers in the sector
- ✓ We are able to undertake sector-level workforce planning based on contemporary data
- ✓ The sector holds a reputation as an employer of choice



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