



# Consultation Feedback

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.*

*- Artwork by Gabriel Stengle -*



# Our consultation approach

The Workforce Strategy for the Child Protection and Family Support Sector is our first whole of sector strategy. It sets out a range of initiatives to *gain, train* and *retain* a skilled and well supported workforce to keep our most vulnerable children safe, cared for and nurtured.

To seek feedback, the draft strategy was released for public consultation on 13 March 2024 and closed on 19 April 2024. Consultation took place via:

- Presentation to members of the Heads of Industry forum comprising DCP-funded Non-Government Organisations (NGOs) and Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs)
- Targeted emails to all attendees of the Workforce Summit held in April 2023 including industry leaders and sector partners such as universities and registered training organisations, peak bodies, carers, unions and other public sector agencies
- Distribution via staff newsletters, consultation mechanisms and promotion via internal communication and social media
- Publication on the government 'YourSAy' website for community-wide consultation.

## Distribution



**35 243** YourSAy emails

**70+** Workforce Summit attendees

**36+** Heads of Industry

## Promotion



**2** presentation forums

**2** consultation platforms

**1** staff newsletter

## Responses



**25** formal submissions

**477** YourSAy feedback responses

## Who we heard from

We received responses from individuals and organisations representing the following areas:

- NGOs
- ACCOs
- universities
- unions
- DCP staff
- skills and training organisations
- peak sector bodies
- sector oversight bodies
- public sector agencies
- members of the public



# What you told us

In the feedback we received, you were keen to accurately represent the complexity of the context in which we operate. What you said:

- The sector's over-riding purpose is to improve the outcomes of the children, young people and families we work with – the connection of this to workforce can be strengthened
- It is important to recognise the significant reforms to the child protection and family support sector that are required to achieve this purpose
- Supporting and developing the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workforce is critical to improving outcomes for Aboriginal children, young people and families, and this requires a dedicated focus across mainstream agencies and ACCOs
- Many of you welcomed the emphasis on measures to grow and support the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child protection and family support workforce. There was an alternative view that a separate stand-alone Aboriginal workforce strategy is required.

Overall, what we heard from the feedback you gave us is that:

***A whole of sector workforce strategy is welcomed, and the three focus areas – gain, train and retain – are supported***



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

There was **broad support for a dedicated campaign to attract a diverse range of entrants** to the sector.

What you said:

- People are drawn to the sector to make a difference in the lives of children and families. Recruitment needs to consider motivation, identity and personal qualities, not just skills and experience
- Be clear about the diversity of roles on offer – there are more roles than that of social worker
- Be realistic about the nature of the work – new entrants can be unprepared for the high-risk nature of the role, exposure to trauma and the level of scrutiny and media attention
- Recruitment campaigns need to be honest in recognising the need for systems reform and future directions for the sector.

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

In general, **‘earn as you learn’ initiatives are strongly supported** by those who responded.

What you said:

- Measures such as paid internships and scholarships will make a significant difference to encouraging new entrants, but you wanted to know who would fund the strategies
- Regional areas need extra assistance to support new entrants with suggested models such as Skills SA ‘Skills Centres’
- Extend programs such as internships and traineeships across the sector to both DCP and NGO workplaces to build relationships across the sector
- As well as higher education pathways, ensure there are approaches to support employees entering the child protection work through vocational education

- There was some concern expressed that ‘fast tracking’ can lead to the appointment of inexperienced and unskilled staff who are ill-equipped to deal with difficult situations.

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

The focus on **specific strategies and pathways for recruiting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff** was seen as critical.

What you said:

- Targeted recruitment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff needs to be designed with shared responsibility with Aboriginal and Torres Strait leaders
- Consider how a lived experience pathway into the sector might provide ways of engaging more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workers.
- Recognising the commitment to place based services for Aboriginal families, focus on local responses to increase local workers.

There was a general view that **ensuring cultural safety is essential for attracting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff**.

What you said:

- It is crucial to prioritise the creation of culturally safe workplaces specifically tailored to the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff
- Cultural safety, acknowledgement of cultural skills and responsibilities, and tailored wellbeing strategies should be standard components of employment conditions for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff.

*“No one is perfectly ‘job ready’ from undertaking a course of study, no matter how intensive or workplace based. The responsibility for specific job readiness lies with the employer through necessary on-the-job training and mentoring”*



# Train

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

Overall, there was agreement to **enhancing the preparedness of new entrants to the field.**

What you said:

- A dedicated focus on improving induction and on-the job training for new residential care workers is seen as valuable and is best undertaken through collaboration between government and NGO residential care providers
- Stakeholders expressed interest in the role of the Tertiary Advisory Committee and how it might work
- Respondents welcomed the intention to develop a specific focus on child protection and family support in social work curriculums. It was recommended that the AASW be involved in discussions about curriculum changes.

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

There was a common view that **developing pathways for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff starts with valuing their existing skills and expertise.**

What you said:

- Recognition of prior learning can offer an important avenue for developing pathways for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff to gaining higher level positions or qualifications
- A comprehensive wellbeing and support program is needed for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to help them progress through study, placement and into job opportunities.

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

Overall, you agreed that **new and diverse pathways into the sector are imperative** and there were many ideas for how to do this.

What you said:

- There is strong support for micro-credentialling and other modules of training that can be accessed on the job
- Micro-credentialling can also meet the gap that exists for staff to have practical skills in specific areas such domestic violence, mental health, substance abuse and inter-generational trauma
- Greater use and development of Recognition of Prior Learning pathways is supported
- Consider providing articulated pathways with structured learning to transition from vocational to degree qualifications
- Access to high-quality training and professional development resources such as an online Learning Hub will provide an opportunity to lift skills and standards across both government and non-government workforces
- Communities of practice are another avenue for learning and development
- As well as focussing on practical skills, training and development opportunities need to occur in a supportive learning environment.

*“We need to invest in the relational aspects of learning for front line staff – mentoring, peer discussion, appreciative inquiry, feedback, and ongoing supervision are all core aspects of practice change and growth”*



# Retain

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

There was **strong interest in reforms to enable greater mobility between government and NGOs**, with a recognition that this is currently limited by a wide range of factors.

What you said:

- Mobility and pathways across the sector could be enhanced by establishing a foundational framework of capabilities for the sector
- While employees will benefit from progressing portability of Long Service Leave across NGOs, it would be great to see this extended to portability between government and NGOs as well
- The funding level of NGOs and ACCOs impacts their ability to offer attractive wages and conditions to staff and an increase in baseline funding for NGOs would enhance their ability to attract and retain workforce
- Reform of the Social, Community, Home Care and Disability Services (SCHADS) Award is to create parity of conditions and pay across government, NGOs and ACCOs.

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

What you said:

- Cultural safety in child protection and family support workplaces is a priority and should be embraced across the sector
- Providing leadership and training in cultural awareness of non-Aboriginal staff is a must
- To enable cultural safety and support in workplaces, we need to specifically recognise the racism and discrimination that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff can experience.

- Attention needs to be paid to the ‘cultural load’ carried by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff that contributes to burnout and vicarious trauma
- Addressing employee pay and conditions is an important aspect of preventing staff burnout and dissatisfaction
- Succession planning is important and older, more experienced staff have an important role to play as mentors to help develop the upcoming workforce.

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

There is support for **ongoing sector collaboration as the best way forward for governance of the strategy and to develop its initiatives.**

What you said:

- There is strong interest and willingness from a range of parties to be involved in further developing key initiatives in the strategy
- There is a preference for governance of the strategy to represent the sector and include both government and non-government bodies
- Any strategies targeted at Aboriginal staff must be designed and implemented through shared decision-making with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

*“There is much to be gained by fostering a culture of collaboration and respect across the sector, built on shared standards and expectations”*



# Delivering the strategy

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You were keen to know more about how the strategy will be delivered. There were suggestions for further communication with staff, advocacy bodies, and children and young people who are ultimately impacted by the ability of the workforce to help and support them.

It was clear through the feedback that the child protection and family support sector is engaged and open to collaborate on our shared workforce challenges. We received many responses from across the sector expressing willingness to continue to be involved and help drive the strategy's implementation.

## **Next steps**

We thank you for your involvement and feedback. Your feedback has informed the final Workforce Strategy which has been considered by the Minister for Child Protection.

Clear arrangements to establish a collaborative governance approach will be developed and communicated to the sector. Particular consideration will be given to the best way to reflect the recommendation that strategies which directly impact the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workforce should be undertaken in partnership through shared decision-making with Aboriginal people. Ultimately, the final governance arrangements will ensure a wide range of sector voices are captured in the next stages of design and implementation.

Where the comments received related to one agency or organisation only rather than across the sector (eg DCP specific feedback), these comments have been passed on to the relevant organisation for their consideration and to help inform their local strategy development.

We look forward to your continued involvement and support for building a strong and sustainable child protection and family support sector.