

## Summary of headline findings from current (2023/2024) SWRB Workforce, Education and Employers Reports

More information is available from the Social Worker Register, but these are the findings from our most recent surveys and reports.

- **Social workers are an aging, female dominated workforce with an average age of 49 years old and around a quarter identify as Māori**
  - Most social workers register through the New Zealand qualification pathway, Overseas Qualified social workers represent about 10% and only a small proportion (2%) registered through the Section 13 Experience Pathway.
  - Thirteen percent of survey participants plan to leave the profession in the next five years, which would equate to a loss of close to **1,100** practising social workers across New Zealand.
  - Retirement is the main reason for social workers leaving the profession and the number indicating intention to retire has also increased by **13%** since 2023.
- **The employment landscape is changing, with higher salaries, more part-time working and a greater number of social workers working in health settings**
  - Non-Government Organisations (NGOs) are the biggest employer type, followed by the health sector. Oranga Tamariki, once the biggest single employer has seen a decline in the number of social workers it employs to 22% of the overall workforce.
  - This is the first year that mental health has been the most common field of practice reported.
  - A higher proportion identified the increasing reliance on an unregulated support workforce as a challenge for the profession (**30%** in 2024, compared to 18% in 2023), particularly social workers employed by iwi-based organisations.
- **Few employers have recruitment strategies specifically for social workers**
  - Attraction and recruitment activities were described as offering work-based placements to ākonga and working with tertiary education providers and at promotional events, such as Career Expos.
  - Employers described barriers to overseas recruitment including widespread perception of difficulties overseas qualified social workers may have with understanding the wider New Zealand context for social work practice, understanding of Te Tiriti and working with tangata whenua. As well as concerns about potential lengthy delays with immigration processes.
  - New entrant to practice pathways appear to be limited to informal buddy based) peer supervision which may incorporate the Te ao Māori concept of Teina-Tuakana.
  - Activities to support retention, career progression and succession planning were also described in similar ways, e.g. supervision and CPD are supported.
- **Most employers indicate awareness of their responsibilities and obligations in relation to protection of social worker title, provision of CPD and supervision**
  - In all categories however, less were confident about their ability to meet these requirements.

- Levels of awareness and confidence were indicated lowest in relation to reporting to the SWRB if there are concerns about any of your social workers in regard to serious misconduct, or health issues, or competence.
- **Most employers are aware of SWRB as the occupational regulator of social workers but to a lesser extent the role of Lead Agency for Workforce planning,** the categories respondents indicated needing more information on were:
  - process guidelines and information about social worker registration
  - evidence and information about workforce planning and sustainability.
- **Social work ākonga (student) numbers continue to fall**
  - In 2023 the enrolment figure is the lowest since 2013, 7% lower than the previous academic year.
  - Over the last two academic years we have seen a **13%** decline in enrolments.
  - SWRB estimates an attrition rate for undergraduate social work programmes as high as **45%**.
  - Most TEOs report that the highest attrition occurs in between the first and second year of undergraduate programmes.
  - Field education (work-based) placements remain challenging. NGOs offer far more placements than the government agencies. Employers note the benefits of offering placements but also describe issues of capacity and lack of financial support as barriers to supporting placements.
  - The rate of course completion is steady. **470** ākonga completed social work qualifications in 2023, consistent with previous years.