

## **Introducing *Sustainable Social Work Pathways: Tauwhiro Ararau***

### **Draft Social Worker Workforce Strategy and Action Plan 2025-2030**

The Social Workers Registration Board (SWRB) is developing the first ever five-year Social Worker Workforce Strategy and Action Plan; we are doing this work on behalf of the Minister for Social Development and Employment. The Strategy and Action Plan are being designed to address the known sustainability challenges facing the social worker workforce.

#### **Sustainable Social Work Pathways: Tauwhiro Ararau**

In today's dynamic social landscape, we have named our approach Tauwhiro Ararau which embodies the essence of Kaitiakitanga and Manaakitanga. It reminds us that social work is both a sacred duty and a profound privilege, walking alongside whānau while they chart their own futures. Honouring the many pathways whānau may travel, we are committed to building a sustainable, culturally grounded workforce, one that can consistently support whānau aspirations, offers steady support through life's challenges, and helps restore wellbeing and vitality across our communities.

As the SWRB, we recognise the Crown-Māori commitment as Te Tiriti o Waitangi partners and are committed to improving services and outcomes for Māori, strengthening the Crown's relationship with Māori, and developing our Māori capability.

We've heard from you about the issues in the workplace, through the annual social worker workforce survey, through our educators surveys and our employers survey.

Consistently these themes rise to the top:

- **Recruitment and retention** are the biggest challenges facing the profession now and into the future
- **Retirement and burn out** are noted reasons for leaving the profession
- **Balancing work and personal life, financial barriers and the complex nature of social work practice** prevent entry and re-entry to the profession
- **Social work roles are being replaced** by other registered professionals and unregulated workers.

#### **Sustainable Social Work Pathways: Tauwhiro Ararau - the Draft Social Worker Workforce Strategy and Action Plan**

is a new approach and a first for our profession. It demonstrates that the government recognises the critical contribution social workers make to the wellbeing of all New Zealanders and acknowledges our concerns about the challenges being faced.

#### **Social workers are a critical workforce under pressure:**

- We don't have enough social workers to meet growing demand for social work services
- The workforce is aging, and experienced social workers are leaving to retirement
- We are not attracting the numbers needed into the social work profession
- Social work ākonga are finding it difficult to complete the four-year social work degree
- Not all graduates go on to become registered social workers and enter the workforce
- Newly qualified social workers need more support in their first years of practice.

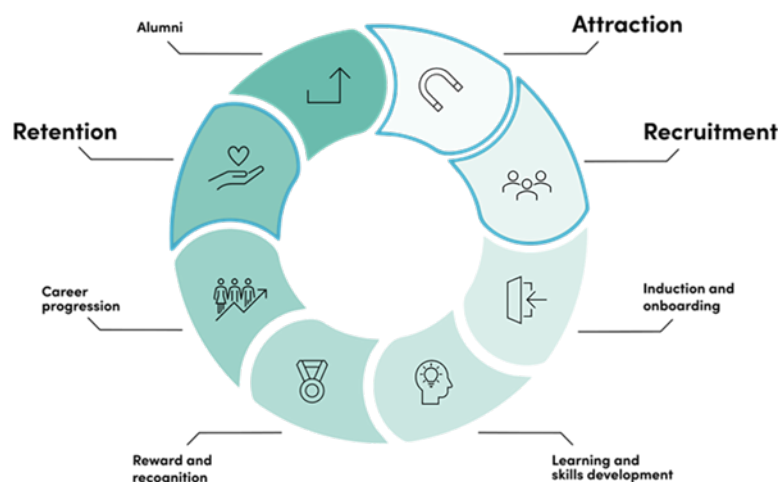
There are many things that need attention that no single organisation or agency can do alone. We all have a part to play.

This Strategy and Action Plan are about working together - the profession, employers, educators and the government sector, to find solutions to shared challenges and ensure that those solutions are owned and implemented. Finding solutions requires collective and coordinated action.

We want to bring people together to work towards the same goals making sure we are moving in the same direction. The hope is this collaborative approach will bring long lasting change.

Developing a cross-agency workforce strategy in this way hasn't been done before in Aotearoa New Zealand. It has taken time to seek agreement to work across government and with the wider social work sector. This first Strategy and Action Plan is not going to answer all the problems, but it is movement in the right direction.

**Sustainable Social Work Pathways: Tauwhiro Ararau - Social Worker Workforce Strategy and Action Plan is designed to look across all parts of the Workforce Lifecycle.**



This approach looks at what's happening at each part of the social worker journey from attraction into the profession, entering the workforce, professional development and career progression through to exiting the workforce.

We know there is work to do across all areas of the workforce lifecycle but in particular we need to focus on:

- attracting and recruiting more social workers into the profession
- retaining and supporting our experienced kaimahi.

Making sure we have enough social workers is so important.

**Our Goal** is to support a sustainable, competent and safe, culturally responsive social worker workforce to deliver high-quality social work services to those New Zealanders that need them most.

There are a lot of areas where action is needed, and we know what some of the actions are.

**The Action Plan** is being used to identify specific areas for improvement, activities and action owners with responsibility for getting things done. The first plan will be used to complete a stocktake of what we've heard so far that organisations are currently doing or have planned to do, which highlight, where the gaps are and what else needs to be considered.

### **How we'll do this - Implementing the Strategy and Action Plan**

We recognise this is new for the sector, and we haven't reached out in this way before.

We want to hear from you, to help shape the content of the Strategy and Action Plan and the advice provided to Ministers. This includes social work educators, employers and social workers themselves.

We'll continue to work with organisations across the sector to gather insights through our surveys and engagement activities.

We anticipate the Strategy will be launched in October this year. It will be overseen by the Minister for Social Development and Employment and progress will be monitored by a Ministerial Steering Group of the Child and Youth Ministers and those with associated portfolios of interest.

The SWRB's role will be to monitor the Action Plan and publish an annual report to on progress.

### **How you can be involved**

The Strategy and Action Plan are still in draft. The final document will be shaped and influenced by the feedback received.

### **Social Work Voices Matter:**

There are a range of ways you can engage and be involved including:

- Webinars where you can ask questions directly
- Online surveys for your feedback
- Email – [workforce@swrb.govt.nz](mailto:workforce@swrb.govt.nz)
- Ongoing consultation as the plan develops
- Discussions within your own organisations and professional networks.

Participate in upcoming engagement sessions – a great way to hear first-hand about Sustainable Social Work Pathways: Tauwhiro Ararau, hear other Social Workers thoughts and ask any pātai/questions you have.

Subscribe to the SWRB Onboard Newsletter – monthly updates delivered to your inbox

Follow SWRB social media platforms – <https://www.facebook.com/TheSWRB/>

Check the Social Workers Registration Board website for updates - <https://swrb.govt.nz/>

**What you've shared so far has been invaluable and contributed to the development of Sustainable Social Work Pathways: Tauwhiro Ararau - Social Worker Workforce Strategy and Action Plan.**

**We would like to show appreciation to those who have already shared their feedback with us and look forward to hearing from others.**

**Ngā mihi maioha ki a koutou katoa**

**Thank you.**