



**Social Workers
Registration Board**
Kāhui Whakamana Tauwhiro

Social Worker Workforce
Insights Report 2024

Background

The Social Workers Registration Board is the Lead Agency for workforce planning for all social workers

1. The Social Workers Registration Board (SWRB) was designated by Cabinet (SWC-20-MIN-0111 refers) the lead agency role for workforce planning for all social workers. The role is to provide and support workforce planning, with an emphasis on building evidence and sector intelligence on workforce pressures and building relationships across the sector. As the lead agency, we are also responsible for developing an overall workforce strategy and action plan that can be monitored and reported on.
2. The SWRB vision for its lead agency function is to support the health and social care system to have the right social workers with the right skills, knowledge, and competencies in the right place, at the right time to support and enhance the wellbeing of New Zealanders. This has been the approach underpinning our work: We work together and in collaboration with employers, sector organisations, government agencies, funders, education and training providers, taking a cross sectoral, strategic and collaborative approach, whilst acknowledging that responsibility and authority continues to lie with individual employers relating to their employees who are social workers.
3. Our regulatory functions, complement the lead agency role and support our overall understanding of the end-to-end workforce life cycle, including entry pathways, retention and overall workforce sustainability. As a result of holding the social worker register, our ongoing evidence building and growing relationships across the system, this allows us to identify priority areas for action across the system.

Our focus has been to grow our capability, develop a sound evidence base and build relationships

4. To date our focus has been on 'knowing' our workforce and 'growing' the evidence base, tracking trends over time to understand more about social worker workforce pressures as prior to the establishment of the role, little detail was known about the workforce. Mandatory registration has allowed us to have far greater visibility, supported by the mandate to undertake the work.
5. We are now supplementing this data and insights work to include what we know to support workforce sustainability and to inform and influence key stakeholders. This is resulting in a solid evidence base from which to grow relationships, build influence with major employers and decision makers, resulting in tangible actions, for example in education funding changes, encouraging innovative thinking by education institutes, and tangible and visible inclusion of social work in the Health Workforce Plan 2024/2025.
6. Given our size and resources, we have taken a measured approach to 'knowing and growing' our evidence base to date. Our 'developing' relationship building activity has leveraged off opportunities as they arise, with a focus on building collaborative relationships where there has been openness and willingness to engage.
7. Our focus is now moving to more concerted activity to further develop collaborative relationships across the system which would we believe, result in more concerted and focused actions (acknowledging resource constraints). SWRB will explore whether potential 'in-kind' resource and support from larger agencies is available, [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] We know this approach can be successful. Our lead workforce advisor was initially on secondment from Health New Zealand/Te Whatu Ora. Such subject

matter expertise has fostered strong relationships and the understanding of the different employment settings (e.g. clinical and community health, emergency response).

Other agencies have a key role in addressing social worker workforce challenges and we need their support to develop a workforce strategy and action plan

8. Social workers are essential frontline professionals who work with some of New Zealand's most vulnerable individuals, families, whānau, and communities and are employed across the full range of health and social services. Social work is in a unique position as a regulated profession within a largely unregulated social services sector.
9. There are approximately 600 NGOs and around 80 public sector agencies that employ social workers. As at 30 June 2024 there were over 9,000 registered social workers holding a practicing certificate (noting that this is lower than the total number on the Register, approximately 12,500). Around 28% of social workers work for non-government organisations, 27% work for Oranga Tamariki and 23% work in Health, including mental health and addictions services and primary care. There are also a small number (around 200) of registered social workers who are self-employed.
10. Around a quarter of those on the Register are not practising. We are currently undertaking a review of the Register to better understand the reasons behind this figure and ensure that the Register reflects those who identify with the profession.¹
11. SWRB is a connection point across agencies, both government and non-government stakeholders/organisations. Appendix One illustrates the system connections.
12. Key stakeholders include:
 - MSD: has a stewardship role (along with SWRB) as administrator and lead policy agency for the Social Workers Registration Act 2003 (SWR Act 2003).
 - Oranga Tamariki: is the single biggest employer of social workers with over a quarter of the workforce (27%).
 - Ministry of Health: 23% of the social worker workforce work in health and make a significant contribution to the delivery of allied health and mental health services in hospitals, community based and primary care settings. Unlike other health professions, social work is not subject to the Health Practitioners Competence Assurance Act and is regulated under the SWR Act 2003. Social workers work closely with the wider social sector workforce to deliver health services.
 - Ministry of Education: The SWRB has two roles in social work education:
 - to prescribe social work qualifications that meet our Education Standards
 - to work with providers and the bodies that set standards for social work education and training in New Zealand, to promote and set standards, including the New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA) and the Tertiary Education Commission (TEC).
 - As the primary pathway for social worker registration is via qualification attainment, the social worker registration system is closely linked to the training and education systems. The Ministry of Education (MoE) and TEC therefore play a key role in ensuring a sustainable pipeline of people are and continue to enter the social worker workforce via qualification attainment.

¹ Some practitioners are overseas, on parental leave, or deceased. However through better understanding the drivers we believe that there is potential to encourage some practitioners to return to practise.

- Workforce Development Council: contributing to Toitū te Waiora (Community, Health, Education, and Social Services Workforce Development Council) working group explores pathways into social work programmes at the sub-degree level.
13. As a regulator, the SWRB has a focus on the management of risk and potential for harm, as per the purpose of the SWR Act 2003, to protect the safety of members of the public through a competent and accountable social work workforce. Combined with our insights through our workforce planning role we can combine evidence with frontline insights to support the delivery of better outcomes.
 14. Through our work across the sector at a system level, we see opportunities for further work to support a more cohesive and consistent approach to developing the social worker workforce.
 15. Our understanding of the barriers and opportunities is quite well established and aligns with feedback from key stakeholders. However, we do want to confirm the perspectives from employers are up to date, which we intend to do through our upcoming survey of employers. We want to bring the sector and key stakeholders along with us as we express that. The challenge we are alert to is creating an action plan that is pragmatic, achievable, affordable and one that works with realistic timeframes across the range of settings that social workers are active in.
 16. One of the challenges will be for the profession to take ownership of those areas where professional leadership is required from the sector. Noting that the professional bodies Aotearoa New Zealand Association of Social Workers (ANZASW) and the Tangata Whenua Association of Social Workers (TWASW) do not represent the entire profession. This is where Oranga Tamariki and Te Whatu Ora will be influential because they represent a significant proportion of social workers (collectively over 50% of the workforce) that may or may not be represented at a professional body level.

We are stepping up engagement to support collaboration and buy-in to collectively consider workforce challenges

17. There is growing impetus across the sector to address workforce pressures and increase numbers coming into the social work profession. We believe, the issues are well understood. However, there is fragmentation across the sector, and a diverse range of government and non-government employers who are not necessarily joined up and working together to tackle challenges with workforce. There is not a universal understanding of the levers available, nor the varied responsibilities across government, funders and the profession in terms of responding.
18. To date, we have largely engaged with individual employers and agencies across the sector to explore issues and support opportunities where there has been a willingness to engage. We are aware that we have limited influence over decisions by employers or agencies.
19. Our work with Health New Zealand – Te Whatu Ora is a good example of where we have engaged to positively influence outcomes. We have been able to bring in-house sector expertise to the workforce planning function. With enhanced understanding of the health system and existing relationships, we have gained further traction in our engagement with the Health Workforce Planning Team. Sharing data and intelligence to positive effect, we have managed to raise the profile of social workers in the health workforce and created a focus on the profession in the draft Health Workforce Plan (2024-2027). Through our ongoing work (built over the last three

years) with their data analytics team, social work is now included in their forward modelling of the health workforce.² This has not been the case previously.

20. We provided your Office with our submission to the Draft Health Workforce Plan on areas we identified for investment. [REDACTED] We are happy to provide you with any supporting information you may require.
21. We also work with the Social Work Alliance (the Alliance)³ which includes sector representatives, professional bodies and some employers. The Alliance met recently to discuss falling student numbers and workforce issues. While there is goodwill and expertise on the Alliance there are limitations to its reach and level of decision making. It should be noted that the Alliance itself is reviewing its terms of reference as to its membership and role. While the SWRB is currently a member of the Alliance this may change depending on their future direction.
22. We are also connected with the TEC, MoE, Toitū te Waiora (Workforce Development Council) and work towards finding solutions.
23. Oranga Tamariki recently shared a draft workforce strategy which is still being developed. There is an opportunity for us to add greater value to ensure future demand for social workers is accounted for (similarly to our work with Te Whatu Ora where social workers are now included in future planning) and is joined up and aligned with other parts of the social worker sector. [REDACTED]
24. As we work towards developing a collectively owned social worker workforce strategy and action plan, we will need increased collaboration across the sector, including buy-in and commitment from agencies and decision makers to achieve meaningful change. Noting the challenges we have to effect change due to our limited authority and resource. [REDACTED]
25. We intend to build on a successful cross agency hui we held in March 2023 which illustrated the value of being joined-up and understanding our collective levers to meet joint objectives. It also highlighted the breadth of work, connections, and goodwill across agencies. At the hui there were presentations from:

² Hauora Haumi Allied Health Report May 2024

<https://view.officeapps.live.com/op/view.aspx?src=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.health.govt.nz%2Fsystem%2Ffiles%2Fdocuments%2Fpublications%2Fallied-health-report-2024.docx&wdOrigin=BROWSELINK>

³ Alliance members currently include: Aotearoa New Zealand Association of Social Workers; Tangata Whenua Social Workers Association; Council of Social Work Education in Aotearoa New Zealand; Te Whatu Ora – Health Social Workers Council; SWRB; Oranga Tamariki; Social Services Providers Aotearoa; Toitū te Waiora – Workforce Development Council; Public Service Association.

- The Ministry of Business, Innovation, and Employment on the changes to the Visa policy settings in relation to the skilled migrant category and the addition of social work to the Green List
- Oranga Tamariki on their practise model and work to develop their workforce strategy
- The Ministry of Health on regulation across the wider health workforces
- MSD on proposed work to explore the wider social services workforce
- The Public Service Commission on the pay equity settlement for social workers in community and iwi organisations (including those in social worker-like roles).

Key workforce insights from our surveys, research and published reports drawn from across the social worker sector will inform strategy priorities and actions

The Annual Social Worker Workforce survey and published report collected information from over 4,400 social workers

26. You launched our 2023 Annual Social Workers Workforce Survey to mark World Social Work Day in March this year. It included responses from 4,411 social workers, which was a response rate of 51% of social workers renewing their practising certificates. This survey is our main mechanism for seeking information from individual social workers and covers a range of domains including workforce composition, workforce sustainability, knowledge and skill development, and employer support. An additional fifth domain 'standing of the profession' was added in 2022, and for 2023 a sixth domain covering safety and conduct was also included. Tailoring these extra domains each year allows for a deeper understanding of topical issues at the time of the survey and enables us to discuss social workers current concerns with key sector agencies and with their employers.

27. The full report can be found here <https://swrb.govt.nz/about-us/news-and-publications/publications/#workforce-surveys>

28. Key findings from the social worker workforce survey show that:

- The proportion of Māori social workers is increasing
 - The proportion of Māori, and Pacific Peoples in the social work profession is growing but the number of males in the workforce is low (14%) and male social workers tend to work in criminal justice (29% male) and mental health (21% male).
- The social work profession is qualified and experienced
 - Social workers work in a range of settings, and most hold a qualification.
 - 58% of survey participants describe themselves as 'experienced practitioners' while 11% describe themselves as 'beginning practitioners'.
- The profession is ageing
 - The average age of survey participants was 49 years old, with over a quarter in the peak age group 50-59 years. The practising register data show that one in five social workers are aged 60 or above.
- Recruitment and retention are significant challenges for the profession
 - Retirement and burnout/high workloads continue as key challenges the workforce, with more social workers leaving the profession than entering.
 - 16% of survey participants plan to leave the profession in the next five years, which is a loss of over 700 social workers. If this proportion is extrapolated out to the full practising workforce at the time of the survey, it would indicate a loss of close to 1,400 social workers across New Zealand.

- There are barriers to entering or re-entering the workforce
 - The costs of being a regulated professional were a barrier to entering or re-entering the social work profession, especially for non-government and iwi organisations (50%). The survey also showed however that employers meet the costs of registration and annual practising certificate renewal for over 80% of social workers.
 - Salary (42%) and balancing work and personal life (41%) are also reported as barriers to entering or re-entering the workforce.

This year we carried out 'deep dive' analysis of the responses from Crown Funded social workers employed directly by government in Oranga Tamariki, Te Whatu Ora and in health and non-government providers (NGOs) through government funded contracts

29. This work resulted in three Spotlight Reports covering social workers employed in the three biggest Crown Funded employer types.

- NGO sector employers – employ 28% of social workers
- Oranga Tamariki – employs 27% of social workers
- Health providers (including Te Whatu Ora) – employ 23% of social workers.

30. Whilst not the first time we have conducted deep dive analysis into these different slices of the social worker workforce, it is the first time that we have been able to publish 'Spotlight Reports' of this kind.

31. We are working with your Office on the release of these reports. These will be shared with the sector including on our website.

This additional deep dive analysis has highlighted:

For the Non-Government Organisation (NGO) sector:

- 60% of social workers employed by NGOs have been registered with SWRB for less than 5 years. The workforce also tends to be slightly younger (peak age range 40-49 years) with slightly less experience.
- The NGO sector is by far the biggest provider of fieldwork education placements for social work students (69%), suggesting the NGO sector provides a significant entry pathway for beginning practitioners.

For health providers:

- Health employs the highest number of overseas qualified social workers (15%), but offers less than 15% of fieldwork education placements for domestic social work training programmes.
- Social workers employed in health were more likely than those employed by other organisations to intend to leave due to burnout, high workload, and lack of career progression.

For Oranga Tamariki:

- The Oranga Tamariki social worker workforce is experienced with less than 10% identifying as beginners and a peak age group is 50-59 years (with less than 7% aged 29 year or under) signalling attrition of experience social workers to retirement soon.
- Poor workplace morale is noted as higher amongst Oranga Tamariki social workers than the full workforce survey.

- Some participants were less confident in how safety and conduct issues are being addressed, with a perception that staffing shortages are leading to issues being 'swept under the carpet', and policies being interpreted differently across teams.

Later this year we will be adding to our suite of evidence through an Employers Survey

32. The aim of this inaugural Employers Survey is to add to our overall knowledge of the challenges being faced by the social worker sector and to learn more about the responses being actioned by employers. We want to understand what barriers they are facing to recruitment and retention, work readiness of graduates and overseas practitioners, their understanding of their responsibilities as employers of social workers, and areas where they would like to see us being more active.

We also collect information from tertiary education providers through the Annual Social Work Education Report

33. We produce an 'Annual Social Work Education Report' with information collected from tertiary education providers who deliver SWRB-prescribed social work qualifications.
34. The majority (86%) of social workers enter the profession through the New Zealand qualification pathway, this information allows us to understand the primary pipeline into the profession. By comparison 12% of the workforce are overseas qualified and two percent (2%) come through the experience (section 13) pathway.
35. Our Annual Social Work Education Report includes summary information about social work ākonga/student enrolments, field education placements ('work-based learning') and student completion rates.
36. Social work ākonga/student enrolments continue to fall. Key findings for the 2022 academic year include:
- The attrition rate from social work courses is almost 50% (which is higher than most other courses leading into a registered profession, such as nursing which has a rate of 25%)
 - The number of students completing their qualification has remained constant over the last two years at approximately 460 per year. From 2016 onwards we have seen a gradual but consistent overall reduction in student enrolments and subsequent course completions. For example, in 2015 there were 3,885 students enrolled, 3,337 in 2016 and 2,793 in 2022.
 - This decline in student numbers is more pronounced for Māori where the percentage of Māori students has dropped from 48% in 2018 to 27% in 2022.
 - The proportion of Pasifika students has increased from 22% in 2018 to 31% in 2022.
 - Of those who do complete their qualification, 18% (which equates to 83 students) do not immediately register with us and do not enter the social worker workforce.
 - The declining student completion rates coupled with the numbers of social workers signalling they will be leaving the profession in the next five years points towards a net loss in numbers overall.
37. We work closely with education providers through engagement, regular reviews and site visits to ensure their students meet regulatory requirements including being able to demonstrate the ten core competences⁴ and be fit to practise once they have completed their qualification.

⁴ <https://swrb.govt.nz/practice/core-competence-standards/>

38. We are currently developing the next iteration of the Annual Education Provider Survey with refreshed questions around key challenges in the training pathway for New Zealand Qualification in social work. This will include domains covering attraction into social work training, recruitment and retention on programmes. It will also cover plans to develop different pathways such as staircasing from certificate to degree level and conversion pathways.
39. In the next survey we are seeking to understand more about barriers to completing qualification (leading to the high attrition rate) and why some (18%) qualify but do not go on to enter the workforce as a registered social worker. We are also keen to learn how education providers work with the sector and employers to understand and cater for current and future demand for skills.
40. Findings from the Education Provider Survey alongside learning from the inaugural Employer Survey will inform the workforce strategy.

There has been additional work with NZQA, TEC, and Te Pūkenga on the unified social work degree Te Ata Māhina over the last two years

41. The SWRB's role is to prescribe social work programmes for the purpose of registration so that graduates are competent and safe to practise. As a regulator, ensuring the workforce is safe and competent is our focus.
42. Over recent years we have engaged with Te Pūkenga on the development of Te Ata Māhina, a unified Bachelor of Social Work. The intent was to bring together the best of social work practises from across the country and internationally into one curriculum to ensure that social worker education enhanced the profession and their ability to think flexibly and responsively.
43. We know that a high proportion of students leave the current four-year degree programme due to hardship. There was the potential (and still is) for tertiary education providers to develop a three-year qualification which could alleviate many of the hardship issues students face, with a fourth year of for example guided internship, an earn-as-you-learn or apprenticeship model.
44. A number of the features (such as being able to move between institutions, if necessary, without losing credits) may have made the course more attractive to students.
45. While we understand that work on the unified degree is currently on hold, we hope that tertiary education organisations will still benefit from the considerable work and investment that has gone into curriculum development, including work with key stakeholders e.g. employers. We believe there would be benefits to tertiary education institutes and the Council for Social Work Education in Aotearoa New Zealand (CSWEANZ) considering how this work could be used to attract more students into social work and reduce student attrition rates from social work programmes – currently at 50% [REDACTED]

Social work courses are funded at a lower rate than comparable professional degree programmes

46. There are system barriers to increasing the number of social workers. For example, social work courses receive TEC priority funding meaning that it will fund as many social work student places on courses as there is demand for. However, there is less incentive for education providers to market their social work programmes, to attract and enrol more students, as social work is EFTS-

funded⁵ at a much lower rate than comparable courses such as nursing. In simple terms this means that tertiary institutes receive less funding to run social work courses than those of equal professional equivalence, and importance to New Zealanders.

47. The demographic profile of social work students is quite different to that of students enrolled on other courses leading to regulated professions, such as nursing, teaching and midwifery. They tend to be older with more lived experience. The 'typical' school leavers (under 24 years) make up 30% of students and then there is a large proportion (46%) of students aged between 25 and 39 years who will often enter social work programmes as a second career and because of lived experiences.
48. This 'lived experience' cohort typically have family/whānau responsibilities, study and work part-time and juggle a range of competing priorities. Financially, the lack of student funding or paid placements/practicums can negatively impact this cohort more than other students and often results in attrition from courses. In addition, and in comparison, to other students, social work students may require more support throughout their studies, for example, through counselling and financial support.
49. There are no clear pre-degree 'feeder programmes' that provide a pathway into formal social work courses. This is different to health where there are a considerable number of programmes at levels 2-6 which provide a staircase into nursing. This is an impediment to getting more social workers on the Register and bridging the workforce shortage gap.
50. Additionally, there are no conversion or fast track pathways for those qualified with other degrees e.g. psychology, criminology, other than a two-year Master of Social Work. Whereas for teaching, if you already have a degree, there is a one-year fast track programme that is professionally tailored to becoming teacher.
51. There is growing awareness of this gap, particularly in the health sector where international recruitment efforts are attracting expressions of interest from skilled overseas workers who are unable to fill vacancies as they do not have the necessary social work qualification. Many have qualifications and experience in related fields such as counselling and psychology, but there is no bridging pathway available and the requirement to do further degree-based study to achieve the necessary social work qualification is a barrier.
52. While there are actions we can take as a regulator these need to be in concert with policy and funding and require a cross-government approach. We see this as an area where SWRB can support a joined-up system, but where working with our MSD colleagues would be of assistance, especially when working with larger agencies.

In addition to building a solid evidence base we communicate, connect and collaborate across the health and social services systems

We use our evidence to shine a light on areas of concern and use influence to suggest areas for action

53. This influencing activity involves connecting and collaborating across the health and social services systems to:

⁵ EFTS (Equivalent Full-time Student) is a measurement used to work out a student's study workload. Credits convert to an EFTS value. For example, 120 credits convert to 1 EFTS (or one-year full-time study).

- **Share insights** from our surveys, research and published reports, for example the Annual Social Worker Workforce Report, the Annual Education Report and a growing series of Spotlight Reports that provide deep dive insights into key parts of the sector such as Health providers and Oranga Tamariki.
- **Identify gaps and challenges**, for example the lack of sufficient work-based placements for social work students, the limited support from employers for new entrants to practise, and the lack of career progression, which we have identified as being key contributors to attrition from the profession.
- **Highlight and share notable practise** across key employers, for example work to increase the numbers of students who are being encouraged to enter specific fields of practise such as care and protection and health, and examples of initiatives to attract social workers from trusted jurisdictions overseas.
- **Provide cross sector support** to inform stakeholders what is needed for a safe, sustainable social worker workforce, for example working with the social work Alliance, the Council for Social Work Educators (CSWEANZ), and funders social work degree programmes.

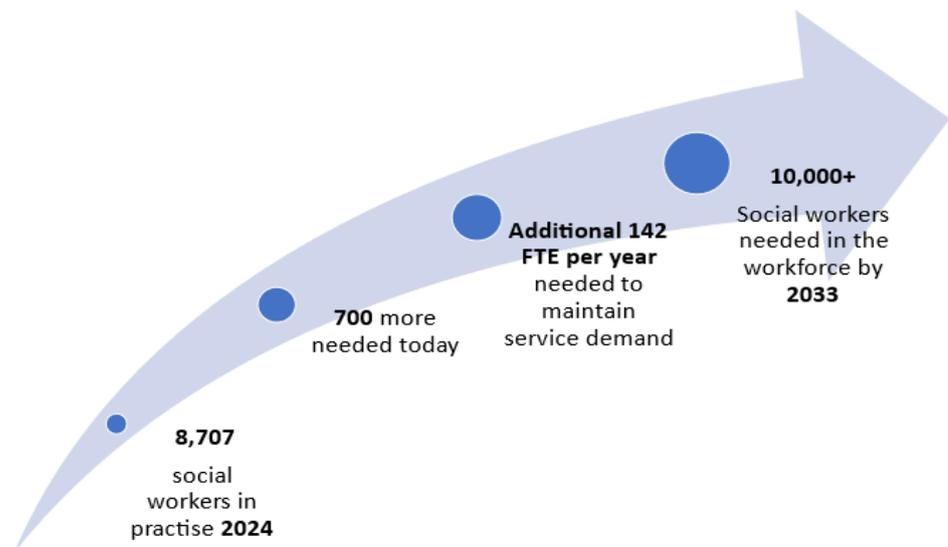
54. In this way, we aim to support other agencies in work relating to social workers and workforce shortages. Agencies include: the Ministry of Social Development, the Ministry of Health, Te Whatu Ora/Health NZ, Oranga Tamariki, Te Aka Whai Ora, TEC, NZQA, Toitū te Waiora (Workforce Development Council), CSWEANZ, the Professional Associations (ANZASW and TWSWA) and Social Service Providers Te Pai Ora o Aotearoa.

Overall, the picture is one of increasing workforce sustainability challenges across all components of the workforce life cycle, but particularly in attraction (pipeline) and retention

55. The evidence we gather and the insights we develop from our work directly with social workers, educators, and employers alongside information gathered from wider engagement, is indicating that the sustainability of the social worker workforce is at risk. There are challenges across all components of the workforce life cycle, but in particular in attracting people into the social worker workforce and retaining them within the workforce once they have entered.

56. In recent years this has also been exacerbated by an increase in demand for social workers and social work services, due to the ongoing impacts of COVID-19 and Cyclone Gabrielle and a reduction in the pipeline of students studying social work.

57. The diagram below illustrates the projected number of social workers estimated to be needed in the coming years to maintain current service demand across all services.



58. It is difficult to accurately measure future demand for the services for a particular workforce and social work is no different. We have previously calculated advertised social work vacancies (at a point in time), indicating 700 social workers are needed today, to simply fill the vacant social work positions across Aotearoa. We also carried out a 'Demand for Social Work Services Survey' to determine the estimated unmet need for social work services and the consequent number of social workers required to fill this gap.

59. The 'Demand for Social Workers Survey Report 2022' can be found here:

swrb.govt.nz/download/demand-for-social-work-services-report/?tmstv=1719277648

60. Results from this survey show that:

- it took around three and half months to fill a social work role on average, but some vacancies were open for more than a year
- the most common barrier to employing a social worker was finding suitable applicants suggesting that there are not enough social workers to meet the demand
- some organisations were no longer employing social workers to do social work due to recruitment difficulties, instead employing other health professionals or changing the job title to "youth worker" or "support worker"
- a shortage of social workers led to work related stress, high workloads and a reduction in the services available to clients.

61. Current estimates show that there are 700 unfilled social work vacancies across the sector at any one time, and that an additional 142 FTE social workers are required annually simply to meet current demand for social work services. This does not consider growing demand for social work services from changes to service delivery models or from increases due to the ageing population. Our work with Te Whatu Ora (the Health New Zealand Analytics and Forecasting team), suggests an additional forecasted 10% shortfall of social workers over the next 10 years across the health sector. Oranga Tamariki report that for the last 12 months they have a social worker vacancy rate of between 120 to 150 each month with some hard to hire sites taking months to fill.

62. These shortages put pressure on the existing social worker workforce, leading to high workload, and the potential for negative impacts on practice and attrition through burn out. Understaffing in key services impacts service delivery resulting in unmet need for vulnerable individuals, whānau and communities and increasing risks to public safety.

We have identified some possible actions across the key components of the Workforce Planning Life Cycle to address workforce sustainability

63. We have considered some of the challenges for the social work profession and where we see potential for sector wide action to find solutions. Examples of potential actions across the key components of the workforce planning life cycle are set out below:

- **Attraction:** includes attracting and broadening the potential pool of students into social work programmes and the potential pool of workers who could be social workers into employment.
- **Recruitment:** addressing barriers to enrolment in social work training programmes and expanding pathways to qualification and registration.
- **Induction and Onboarding:** improving support for new entrants to practise including new to New Zealand practise via specific entry level programmes, such as the New Entrant to Specialist Programme in Health.
- **Learning and Skills Development:** improving opportunities for skill development and additional learning opportunities.
- **Reward and Recognition:** addressing salary distribution and pay parity issues that are noted currently as barriers.
- **Career Progression:** providing career pathways (other than moving into management positions) for social workers with significant experience and expertise, e.g. specialist roles/scopes of practice.
- **Retention:** addressing workload pressures to prevent attrition due to burn out and creating incentives to remain through strengthening support for professional requirements such as supervision and continued professional development.
- **Alumni outreach/Re-entering the workforce:** maximise the potential of enabling experienced social workers who have left, to re-enter the workforce and provide support and mentoring to developing practitioners. Examples from overseas include Retire to Return programmes which may have merit in exploring further.

ATTRACTION: SECTOR / EDUCATION PROVIDER LED
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social work and social worker roles are poorly understood and there is negative public perception of social work as a career. • Marketing is needed to promote, attract and increase student enrolment into training. • There is a minimum of 120 days of work-based learning required spread across two unpaid placements (years 3 and 4 of Bachelor of Social Work, or years 1 and 2 of Master of Social Work. Many students are older and have whānau/caring responsibilities. • 18% of those students who qualify don't register. The cost of registration and professional fees are noted as a barrier.
RECRUITMENT: SECTOR / EDUCATION PROVIDERS / EDUCATION FUNDERS LED
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New Zealand pathways to qualification are limited, e.g. there are no tailored 'feeder programmes, and the attrition rate from training is high partly due to financial hardship.

- Local academic pathways are not producing enough social workers to meet demand. Overseas recruitment is relied on to fill gaps, particularly in the health sector.
- Two percent (2%) of the workforce are registered through the section 13 Experience Pathway.
- We need to address barriers and increase retention in degree training and expand entry pathways, including staircasing into alternatives pathways, Recognition of Prior Learning and other prescribed qualifications for those with other professional qualifications such as nursing and teaching.

INDUCTION/ONBOARDING: EMPLOYER / SECTOR LED

- Support for new entrants to practise needs improvement, including new to New Zealand practise for overseas qualified social workers.
- Newly qualified social workers, with least experience are being mostly employed in the NGO/community sector with less than 15% working in government services.
- Onboarding across organisations, roles and fields of practice needs attention to attract, retain and grow talent and prevent attrition to burn out.
- International models for assisting and supporting new entrants need to be explored.

LEARNING AND SKILLS DEVELOPMENT: EMPLOYERS / EDUCATION PROVIDERS / SECTOR LED

- Career progression options are limited and attrition through lack of career advancement is noted as an issue.
- Development pathways for advancement, including micro-credentials, enhanced scopes of practise and capability frameworks are needed.

REWARD AND RECOGNITION: EMPLOYERS / UNION / SECTOR LED

- Pay parity is noted as a barrier across the sector along with attrition due to salary and conditions.
- Salary distribution needs attention, including addressing challenges of implementing pay settlements.

CAREER PROGRESSION:

- Social work as a profession tends to be flat with a lack of career progression. This has been highlighted as an issue by social workers, particularly those working in the health sector.
- Lack of pathways to progress is noted as a reason to leave the role and at the other end of the scale there are limited assistant social worker roles (especially in the government sector) so it is difficult to visualise a pathway from assistant level to registered practitioner.

RETENTION: EMPLOYER / SECTOR LED

- Workload pressures need attention to prevent attrition to burn out.
- Loss of experience and capability is signalled with an ageing workforce.

ALUMNI OUTREACH /RE-ENTERING THE WORKFORCE:

- Stronger succession pathways are needed to maximise the potential of experienced workers to mentor developing practitioners.
- Almost 30% of social workers on the SWRB register are recorded as 'non-practising'. We will be carrying out work to understand why this is the case. Further work is also required to understand the levers other sectors use to encourage entry to practise, e.g.

in nursing there are financial incentives, and overseas there are 'Retire to Return' programmes.

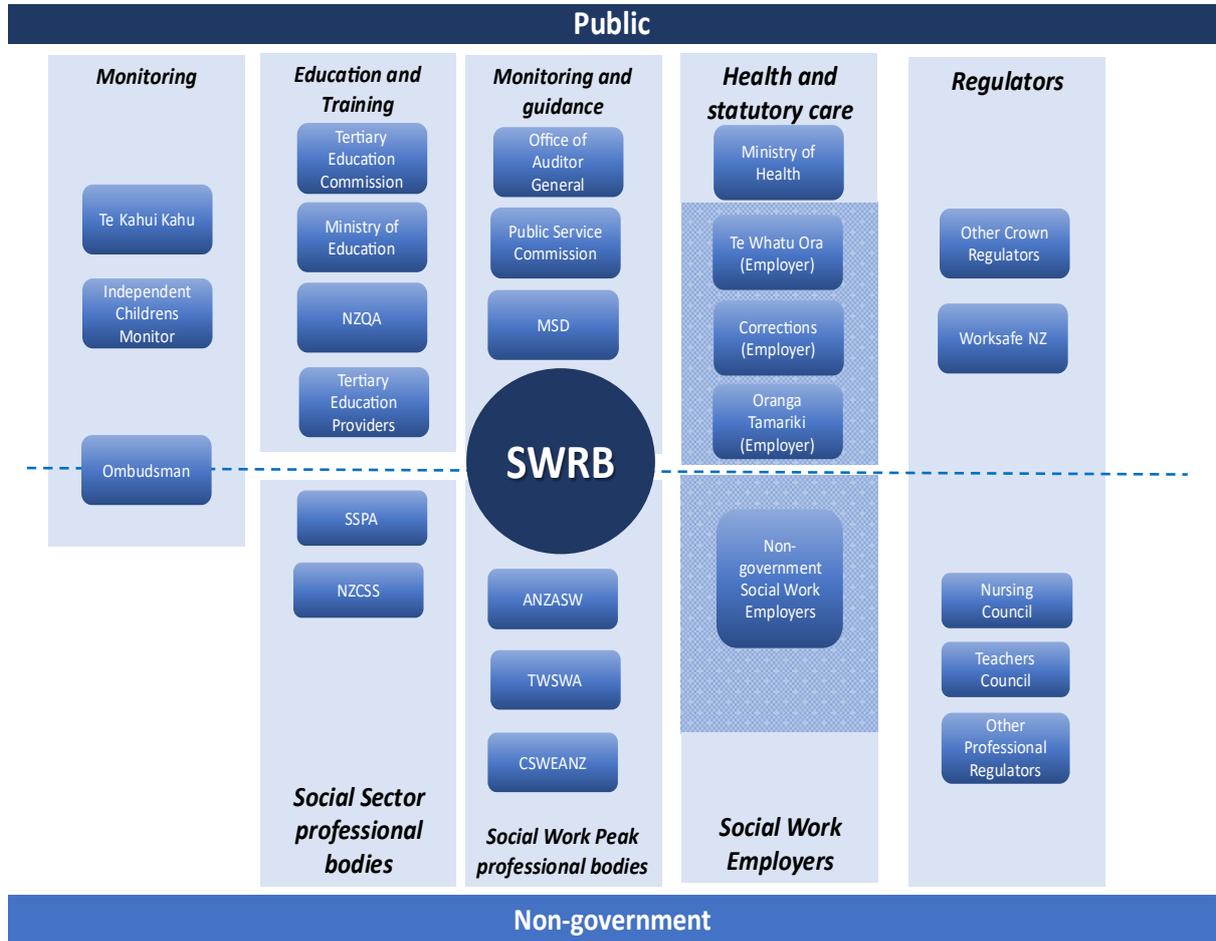
64. Identifying these pressure points across the workforce planning lifecycle will help us to collectively consider and prioritise action where it is most needed and will make the biggest difference. For example, potential actions to increase supply might include:
- considering more accessible pathways for social worker training, where cost is less of a barrier
 - expanding pathways including recognition of prior learning and conversion from similar public sector regulated professions, like nursing or teaching
 - maximising opportunities arising out of the extension of the Experience Pathway
 - exploring opportunities arising out of the Category 3 Pay Equity extension
 - targeted overseas recruitment.
65. Likewise actions to increase retention might include work with key employers on:
- initiatives to relieve workload pressures, preventing loss to burn out, including exploring ways of supporting registered workforce by delegating some tasks to unregulated support worker workforce
 - improving career pathways for advancement and development opportunities
 - improving professional support, including CPD training, supervision and payment of professional fees
 - attention to pay and conditions, including flexible working arrangements to better support work-life balance enabling workers to manage whānau responsibilities and remain in the workforce.
66. There is general consensus across the sector about the challenges impacting the social worker workforce. We now need to consider potential interventions to increase the supply into the workforce pipeline to create a more sustainable workforce, and reduce workforce pressures, particularly those impacting retention. As part of our work to develop a workforce strategy we propose to work with officials from MSD, MoH, and MoE and others to identify options for tangible interventions that could be reflected in the strategy and considered for inclusion in an action plan.

Proposed next steps

67. We are now considering how to build on our work to date with key stakeholders to best utilise our evidence base to inform a cross-system strategy and action plan that can be monitored and publicly reported on.
68. As noted in this report, there is general consensus across the sector about the nature of the challenges the workforce is facing. We have developed a solid evidence base and disseminated that information widely. The issues are understood. We now need to consider potential interventions and solutions to:
- increase the supply into the workforce pipeline
 - create a more sustainable workforce
 - reduce workforce pressures, particularly those impacting retention.

69. Whilst we have a key role in bringing together key stakeholders, we do not have the authority or levers to take decisions on behalf of employers, educators, or other agencies. We propose to work with colleagues at MSD, MoH and MoE and others to explore meaningful opportunities to raise the profile of the work and to identify tangible interventions that could be included in a strategy and action plan. For example, MSD has identified the Labour Market Deputy Chief Executives group as a cross-agency platform to socialise this work.
70. Given that there is a shared understanding of the issues and high-level priorities, we believe the overall workforce strategy will come together relatively quickly. Our collective challenge will be to create an action plan that is pragmatic, achievable, timely and affordable and that works across the range of settings that social workers are active in.
71. [REDACTED]
72. In December, we will [REDACTED] report on our progress to develop a cross-sector workforce strategy.
73. We would welcome your feedback on this report and are available to discuss your preferences for developing a workforce strategy that has cross agency buy-in and is achievable.

Appendix One: System diagram



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Kāhui Whakamana Tauwhiro