



## **Te Pai Ora SSPA Feedback - Sustainable Social Work Pathways | Tauwhiro Ararau**

Te Pai Ora SSPA acknowledges your receptiveness to feedback from stakeholders, including the Social Work Alliance, on this work to date. As a member of the alliance, we support the actions recommended in its paper *Strategic Priorities for Social Work Workforce Planning and Development in Aotearoa New Zealand*.

Te Pai Ora SSPA broadly agrees with the two areas of focus you've identified in the action plan. Like SWRB, we have heard from providers that attraction/recruitment and retention are enduring issues for the social worker workforce and addressing these will be imperative for the future of the sector. These themes were reiterated by attendees at the workshop you led at Whakamanawa.

More funding will need to be allocated to frontline workers to meaningfully address these issues. A cross-system plan that does not include this will be unable to support a sustainable, competent and safe, culturally responsive social worker workforce. However, as it stands, areas incurring additional costs have been identified as out of scope for the Action Plan and Strategy. This is despite recent increases to SWRB revenue following the changes to fees and levies last year and greater levels of Crown funding in Budget 2025.

Across the sector, we are seeing additional strain being put on existing resources. In a May 2025 survey of Te Pai Ora SSPA members, 57% of social work organisations reported a decrease in overall funding. When asked to identify the three biggest organisational challenges they were facing, the vast majority of social work organisations (81%) identified *Financial and/or funding uncertainty*.

This strain is exacerbating enduring inequities in the system. For a profession comprising a greater proportion of women, Māori and Pacific Peoples than the wider population, pay gaps persist. The 2022 NGO social worker pay equity settlement was a landmark achievement for improving social worker pay. However, as mentioned in [our submission](#) to the People's Select Committee on Pay Equity and reiterated by attendees at Whakamanawa, pay-gaps are already starting to re-emerge.

The Alliance's paper outlines the substantial costs borne by social workers, including those incurred when training. The level of investment of time and money required for the four-year social work degree creates a significant hurdle for attracting new social workers. We are heartened by the fact that SWRB has identified the need to address financial barriers for students and the current proposal to change education fees does not directly impact social workers. But this support should be one part of a broader suite of steps taken to ensure social workers can afford to join (and remain in) the profession, including (but not limited to) scholarships and hardship funds.

We support any steps taken to achieve equitable outcomes for Māori and Pacific social workers. Social worker workforce planning and development will only be possible by centring the communities who comprise the client base of the profession. We would like to reiterate that the actions recommended by the Alliance paper to ensure equitable workforce outcomes for Māori and Pacific social workers are imperative. Given the inequities in the sector, financial investment would be necessary to do these steps justice.

In combination, these factors are contributing to a system where it is too expensive for many people to become social workers or for existing social workers to stay in the sector. Without a concerted effort to address remuneration, issues around attraction, recruitment and retention are likely to endure.

Te Pai Ora SSPA recommends that SWRB:

- amends the Strategy and Action Plan to include funding for frontline workers and address pay inequities in the social work sector funded by recent increases in SWRB revenue and/or additional funding in Budget 2026.
- incorporate the recommendations of the Social Work Alliance's Workforce Position Paper into the action plan, especially those intended to "ensure equitable workforce outcomes for Māori and Pacific social workers".

- continue to engage with Te Pai Ora SSPA, the Alliance and the social worker workforce as the Strategy evolves.