



**Social Workers  
Registration Board**

Kāhui Whakamana Tauwhiro

## **Workforce Planning – Insights Report on the challenges facing the social worker workforce**

***He ara pūkenga, he ara tauwhiro, hei whakamana mātā waka***

The many pathways of knowledge, the many pathways of social work,  
upholding the dignity of all

# What is the purpose and goal of workforce planning?

The purpose of workforce planning is to enable the health and social care system to:

- have enough social workers, with the right skills, knowledge and competencies in the right place, at the right time and at the right cost to support New Zealanders to lead happier, healthier and more productive lives.

A fundamental goal is to:

- improve data and knowledge on trends, to support decision makers to ensure there is a sustainable, competent and safe, culturally responsive social worker workforce that delivers high-quality social work services to those New Zealanders that need them most.



# Why was the Lead Agency role for workforce planning established and why SWRB?

- When mandatory registration was introduced, many in the sector said better planning for the future of the social work workforce was needed
- As the major employer and funder of social workers, it's important for the government that there is a sustainable workforce
- MSD looked at options for which agency could take on the role. SWRB was seen as the best placed of the government agencies
- SWRB receives direct funding from Government for this work.



# What does the Lead Agency role involve?

The role complements SWRB regulatory functions under the Social Workers Registration Act (2003).

It involves building:

- evidence on workforce pressures and supply issues
- relationships across the sector.

Overall:

- growing intelligence of what is required across the system to address workforce sustainability challenges.

As part of the public sector, we are politically neutral, provide free and frank advice to Ministers, and support stewardship of the system.



# Where do we find our information?

## **SWRB Data and Evidence**

- Annual Social Worker Workforce Surveys and Reports
- Annual Social Work Education Surveys and Reports
- Spotlight Reports
- Inaugural Employers Survey and Report
- Public Register of Social Workers

## **Relationships**

- SWRB sector collaboration and engagement
- Working with government agencies

## **Research and Reports from across the sector**



# What does the Insights Report include?

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It highlights:

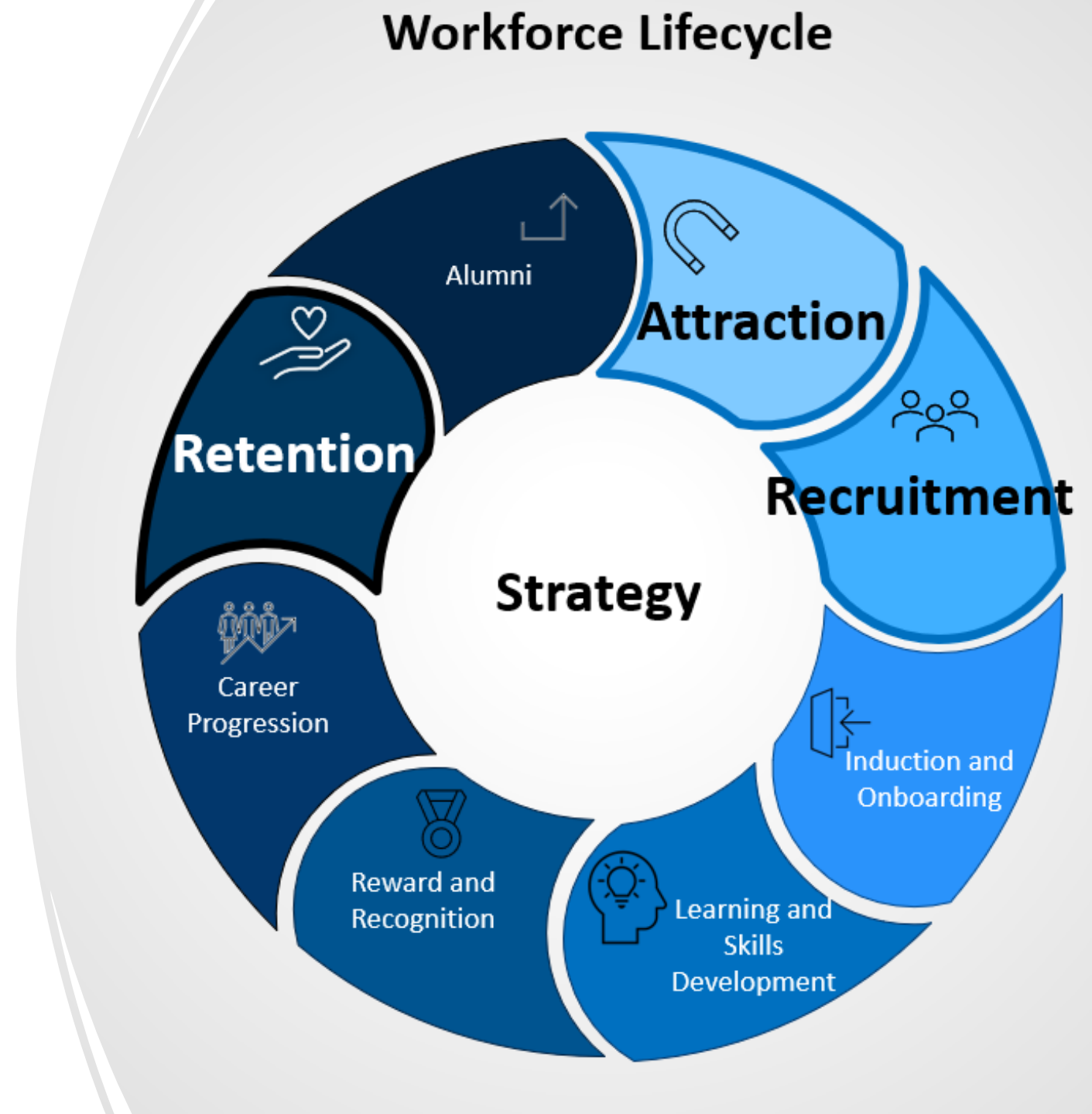
- challenges with the sustainability of the social worker workforce.

It uses:

- the Workforce Lifecycle to frame our thinking.

It shows:

- action is required across all parts of the workforce lifecycle, with attracting and recruiting (pipeline) more social workers a priority and retaining those we have.



# Workforce Sustainability - issues we've identified

## Pipeline (Attraction and Recruitment)

- There are fewer people studying and completing social work degrees: student numbers in social work training programmes are the lowest since 2013, and a high proportion of students do not complete training
- Not all of those completing social work qualifications enter the workforce as registered social workers.

## Retention

We have an ageing workforce: 1 in 5 social workers (20%) are aged 60 or above

- Retirement is the main reason for social workers leaving the profession, with the number indicating intention to retire increasing by 13% since 2023.

**Overall, we are seeing more social workers leaving the profession than entering.**



# What we are working on

- Further advice to Ministers on the issues we have identified
- Continue sharing workforce intelligence with sector and employers
- Working with key stakeholders (two-way information flow)
- Using our sector intelligence in drafting a cross-system social worker workforce strategy
- Developing a pragmatic action plan
- Sharing the strategy and action plan with the sector.





# Next steps

- Engagement with sector on draft strategy and action plan
- Release results from our first Employers Survey
- Continue growing our evidence base e.g. planning for our 2025 Workforce Survey
- Refresh workforce planning section on SWRB website to encourage greater access to information.





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