



# Report

**Date:** 4 June 2020

**Security Level:** BUDGET SENSITIVE

**To:** Hon Carmel Sepuloni, Minister for Social Development

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## **Workforce planning for social workers: recommendations**

### **Purpose of the report**

- 1 This report recommends that the Social Workers Registration Board be designated as the lead agency to provide workforce planning for all social workers. If you agree, it is proposed that you seek Cabinet agreement to designating the Social Workers Registration Board with an additional function to provide workforce planning for all social workers and to confirm the scope and expectation of the new function.

### **Executive summary**

- 2 Social workers are an essential, frontline profession who work with some of the most vulnerable individuals, families, and whānau. The impact of COVID-19 has increased the demand on social workers and is putting strain on an already pressured workforce. Support is needed to ensure the workforce is able to sustain the capacity and capability of supply and contribute to the provision of social services, particularly through the recovery period.
- 3 Workforce planning uses data and evidence about environmental forces affecting a workforce to inform actions and bring about change in relation to supply and demand. The health and sustainability of a workforce depends on the ongoing supply of workers, who have the right skills and are deployed in the right places to meet demand. Professional workforces need to keep up with developments in practice, respond to changes in population needs, and adapt to public policy reforms.
- 4 Compared with some allied health professionals, there is no mechanism to provide workforce planning across the whole social worker workforce. Instead, social workers are fragmented across the community in silos defined by their employer, funding stream, and/or the sector they work within.
- 5 As a profession, social workers are trained to take a holistic approach to assessing the needs of individuals, families, and whānau in a given situation. They take a systems view across services and support that might be available, and organise resources to promote safety and increased wellbeing. Social workers should similarly be treated as one workforce with shared professional interests and a common base of practice.
- 6 A lead agency is proposed to develop workforce planning for all social workers, and contribute to overcoming the fragmentation of, and dispersed responsibilities in relation to, social workers. It would provide cross-sectoral leadership in working together with the large number of employers and funders of social services to identify actions and monitor progress. It would build expertise and capacity in workforce planning to complement the work of government agencies and contribute to enhancing the professionalism of the social worker workforce as a whole.
- 7 Having considered four options, we recommend that you seek Cabinet agreement to designate the Social Workers Registration Board as the lead agency to provide

workforce planning for all social workers (including confirming the scope and expectation). Implementation will be dependent on additional funding being secured.

## Recommended actions

It is recommended that you:

- 1 **note** that four state sector agencies have been considered as options for a lead agency to provide workforce planning for all social workers
- 2 **agree** that the Social Workers Registration Board should be designated as the lead agency to provide workforce planning for all social workers, but that implementation will require additional funding  
**Agree / Disagree**
- 3 **agree** to seek Cabinet agreement confirming the scope and expectations of the Social Workers Registration Board as the lead agency to provide workforce planning for all social workers  
**Agree / Disagree**
- 4 **direct** the Ministry of Social Development to work with the Social Workers Registration Board to seek additional funding to meet anticipated costs involved in setting up and maintaining workforce planning for all social workers as a new function  
**Agree / Disagree**
- 5 **agree** to forward a copy of this report to the Associate Minister of Education/Minister for Children (Hon Tracey Martin), and the Minister of Health (Hon David Clark).  
**Agree / Disagree**

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Policy Manager, Social Sector  
Social Development, Child and Youth Policy

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Date

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Hon Carmel Sepuloni  
Minister for Social Development

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Date

## **Legislative changes have strengthened the professionalism of social workers**

- 8 Since 2003, there has been a voluntary system of registration for social workers. This will change from 27 February 2021, when mandatory registration for anyone practising as a social worker will commence. After then, anyone who says that they are a social worker or claim that other people are a social worker, where the social worker in question is not registered and/or does not have a practising certificate, will be liable to committing an offence.<sup>1</sup> The Ministry of Social Development will have an accompanying new statutory role to investigate and prosecute alleged breaches.<sup>2</sup>
- 9 The move to mandatory registration, along with many other changes, was introduced through the Social Workers Registration Legislation Act 2019 that passed in February 2019. The legislation seeks to increase public safety and ensure greater competence in the practise of social work. An underpinning approach was achieving greater alignment with the Health Practitioner Competence Assurance Act 2003, which regulates several allied health professionals (for example, occupational therapists, psychotherapists, and psychologists).
- 10 In October 2019, we reported to you on options to establish leadership of workforce planning for social workers [REP/19/10/1018 refers], as a consequential action following the legislative changes. Four government agencies were identified as having a close relationship and/or responsibility for social workers, and which could in principle provide a workforce planning function: Ministry of Social Development, Ministry of Health, Oranga Tamariki, and the Social Workers Registration Board (SWRB).
- 11 You agreed that the Ministry of Social Development would report back with recommendations for establishing the leadership function, after consultation with relevant government agencies and the Social Work Alliance.<sup>3</sup>

## **Social workers are an essential workforce responding to COVID-19**

- 12 Social workers are an essential profession, who work at the frontline directly with individuals, families, and whānau who may be in vulnerable situations and face complex social issues that they need help with resolving. As qualified professionals, social workers bring their education, training, and intentional practice to tackle complex problems by taking people's whole lives into account. Social workers have a critical role in helping families and individuals navigate through the range of support that is available.
- 13 We understand from the sector that the impact of COVID-19 has caused an increase in the number of individuals and whānau needing assistance, often with complex needs. This has meant the capacity and at times capability of many community

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<sup>1</sup> Section 148 of the Social Workers Registration Act 2003 sets out various grounds where a person is liable to committing an offence. Amendments to the range of offences made by the Social Workers Registration Legislation Act 2019 will commence on 27 February 2021, including that it is an offence to practise as a social worker without being registered.

<sup>2</sup> This new statutory power for the Ministry of Social Development will be in section 147A of the Social Workers Registration Act 2003, which is one amendment passed in the Social Workers Registration Legislation Act 2019. This amendment commences on 27 February 2021.

<sup>3</sup> The Social Work Alliance is a collective of organisations representing a range of perspectives in relation to social workers, which came together to express common views to government. It comprises: Aotearoa New Zealand Association of Social Workers, Tangata Whenua Social Workers Association, Careerforce, Council for Social Work Education Aotearoa New Zealand, Social Service Providers Aotearoa, New Zealand Council of Christian Social Services, District Health Boards' Health Social Work Leaders' Councils, Oranga Tamariki, Social Workers Registration Board, and the New Zealand Public Service Association.

providers, iwi, and NGOs have been adversely affected due to the increase in demand.

- 14 Social workers will continue to be important in the recovery period. If there are longer term economic impacts and higher levels of unemployment, then there will be more demand for social workers as the effects of increased stress move throughout the community contributing to mental health problems, family violence and exacerbating health-related conditions.
- 15 Learning from special events to inform professional practice, such as the response to COVID-19, is something that would be used in workforce planning.

## **There is no coordinated approach to risks and challenges affecting social worker supply and demand**

### *Social workers are a diverse workforce*

- 16 On 30 April 2020, there were 8,561 registered social workers<sup>4</sup> working in a range of sectors and across diverse employers. This reflects the nature of their occupation, education and training. The SWRB's 2019 survey of registered social workers identified the following people and situations that social workers worked with:
  - drug or alcohol addictions
  - mental health services
  - family violence
  - corrections
  - children in care or needing protection
  - youth
  - older people
  - disabled people
  - Pacific people
  - Māori
  - social work students
  - other social workers
  - other services, for example defence, government agencies, education services.

### *There is strength from a multidisciplinary and team approach*

- 17 Social workers often work with allied professionals and other paraprofessionals/skilled workers<sup>5</sup> as part of a multidisciplinary approach to improve people's wellbeing and ensure their safety. A key competency that social workers bring is applying a whole person or systems view to a situation, which is guided by their social work education, training and practice. Social workers can act in a lead role amongst a team in critical or emergency situations, including those that arose in relation to COVID-19.

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<sup>4</sup> In addition, the SWRB estimates there may be around 3,000 people practising as a social worker that should be registered, most of whom are assumed to be employed by NGOs. The Ministry of Social Development is not able to verify this figure, but agrees with the SWRB's assumptions that there is likely to be a sizable group of people practising as a social worker that are not yet registered.

<sup>5</sup> In health and social services, there are a range of roles, including professionals (that is roles requiring formal qualification, registration and ongoing practising certification), paraprofessionals (that is roles where there can be formal education and training but where they are not recognised as practising independently from a related professional), and skilled workers (that is roles where people may have built up important skills and experiences, and training, but do not have any formal qualifications or required education).

- 18 The absence of workforce planning for all social workers means there is a risk that they will not develop over time and be informed by changes in practice by other professionals and paraprofessionals/skilled workers. This could potentially create difficulties in maintaining the multidisciplinary approach, due to divergences in practices.<sup>6</sup>

*There are risks to the sustainability of the social worker workforce*

- 19 We have identified challenges to the sustainability of the social worker workforce, which has been under increasing pressure in recent years (previously reported to you in REP/19/10/1018).<sup>7</sup> If left unsupported, the effectiveness of the workforce may diminish both in numbers and expertise available to the community.
- 20 Some factors affecting the supply of social workers now or anticipated in the future include:
- uncertainties in how the demand for social work services and the type of people needing support may change in the future
  - uncertainties facing education and training providers, especially with the changes in the polytechnic sector from the Review of Vocational Education (RoVE)
  - competition from other professions for people with a social work qualification
  - changing models of care and support, and the impact of an ageing population
  - an ageing social worker workforce
  - the ability to recruit from overseas.
- 21 A further challenge lies in the increasing ethnic and cultural diversity of the population. The social worker workforce needs to reflect the increasing ethnic diversity of communities, in order to provide support that is culturally responsive and situated in their community.

*There are existing challenges with recruitment and retention*

- 22 There has been consistent feedback from across the sector on the increasing difficulty in recruiting qualified social workers.<sup>8</sup>
- 23 NGO employers say that their recruitment problems are in part contributed to by their funding which does not allow them to match salaries of state sector agencies, particularly Oranga Tamariki and District Health Boards. Increases in cost pressure funding through recent Budgets have helped but have not resolved the problem.
- 24 Salaries are not the only challenge to recruitment, however, with District Health Boards reporting similar problems, particularly in provincial areas. Also, despite increased salaries, Oranga Tamariki has also been experiencing ongoing difficulty in attracting and retaining experienced social workers.

*There is no direction in priority setting for social work education*

- 25 There is no strategic oversight of what is happening to the public investment in the education and training of social workers. A key element of workforce planning is

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<sup>6</sup> Similarly, implementing workforce planning for social workers could result in spill over benefits for those who work closely with social workers (particularly paraprofessionals and skilled workers), for example shared training, greater role clarity, better practice development opportunities, and support to gain qualifications.

<sup>7</sup> Ministry of Social Development, *Workforce planning for social workers: next steps*, October 2019, REP/19/10/1018.

<sup>8</sup> Feedback has included: the low numbers of suitable applicants; some positions not being filled; having to consider other skills in recruiting for the advertised position, although social work is preferred; and a continued movement of social workers out of the NGO sector.



addition, state sector workforce planning<sup>11</sup> is meant to ensure that the Government's intended outcomes for a sector are achieved by:

- enabling effective strategic and operational decision making by government and sector agencies, including education, training and service delivery, at central and local levels
- planning for the future to keep up with demand and changing type of demand from people needing support, changes in machinery of government, policy shifts, and new service models
- analysing the workforce to monitor changing demographics, and the changing nature of workforce expectations
- matching funding for education and training with capacity of providers.

### **NGO employers would also benefit from workforce planning**

- 33 Most employers of social workers (around 88%) are NGO service providers.<sup>12</sup> NGO employers would particularly benefit from workforce planning for all social workers. There is no mechanism for workforce planning in the NGO sector, because no funding is allocated for this purpose and no organisation has the mandate to deliver it.
- 34 NGO peak bodies have raised the importance of cross-sector workforce planning, including but not limited to the issues arising from the wages differential that makes recruitment and retention challenging. The benefit to the sector and to the quality of its service delivery is well understood within the NGO sector. Any workforce planning mechanism will need to recognise the vital role the NGO sector plays in developing and employing social workers.
- 35 NGOs also are a significant contributor to workforce practices. For example, in the area of student work placements, the NGO sector accepts more placements than other sectors. Social workers are engaged in continued training, and NGO employers participate in many social work educators' advisory groups.

### **We have tested four options for a lead agency**

- 36 Implementing cross-sectoral workforce planning needs a driving focus or lead agency to promote coordination, maintain a centre of expertise on data and information as well as ongoing monitoring, and develop strategic objectives.

#### *Four government agencies were considered as options for a lead agency*

- 37 In our October 2019 report,<sup>13</sup> we identified four government agencies that have close relationships with social workers and/or have some responsibility for social workers:
- Ministry of Social Development
  - Ministry of Health
  - Oranga Tamariki
  - Social Workers Registration Board.

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<sup>11</sup> Appendix One provides more information on workforce planning.

<sup>12</sup> Based on the SWRB's registration data at 22 April 2020, there were 599 NGO employers (including iwi organisations), which employed around 28% of registered social workers. Most NGOs only employed a few social workers each. In comparison, a small number of state sector organisations (82) employ the majority of social workers. Most were employed by Oranga Tamariki (around 21%) or District Health Boards (around 18%)

<sup>13</sup> Ministry of Social Development, *Workforce planning for social workers: next steps*, October 2019, REP/19/10/1018.

- 38 We do not consider there are any other state sector agencies or NGOs that have a similar level of relationship with, and/or responsibility for, social workers or an ability to leverage off existing capacity and capability.
- 39 In our view, social worker professional bodies, such as the Aotearoa New Zealand Association of Social Workers (ANZASW), will be more effective in providing independent advocacy for the profession if they are not encumbered with formal functions. Also, as NGOs, they will have fewer resources to call upon or leverage as they operate outside of government.
- 40 A summary of the analysis is set out in Table 1 below.

**Table 1: Analysis summary of options for providing workforce planning for social workers**

		Ministry of Social Development	Ministry of Health	Oranga Tamariki	Social Workers Registration Board
Assessment criteria	Impact	Medium	Low/Medium	Low	High
	Compatibility	Medium	Low/Medium	High	High
	Engagement	Medium/High	Low	High	High
	Priorities	Low	Low	Low/Medium	High
	Uniqueness	High	High	High	High
<b>Overall rating as a preferred option:</b>		Not preferred, as workforce planning for social workers does not have any strong connection to nor match with its business-as-usual.	Not preferred, but could do workforce planning for social workers with some disruption and additional resourcing, though will be at a disadvantage compared with business-as-usual priorities in the health and disability sector.	Second: Could do workforce planning for social workers with some disruption, but likely to be disadvantaged with its business-as-usual focus on child protection or youth justice, or other child focussed social work.	First: Preferred option, subject to additional funding and mandate confirmation.

### **Our analysis has identified the SWRB as the preferred option**

- 41 Our preferred option is that the SWRB take up leadership for workforce planning for social workers. This option has rated the highest against the criteria, with the exception that additional funding will be necessary for implementation.<sup>14</sup>
- 42 We consider that workforce planning is a function that is strongly aligned and compatible with existing provisions in the Social Workers Registration Act 2003. Therefore, we do not consider that any legislative change would be necessary to enable the SWRB to provide workforce planning for all social workers.
- 43 Some key activities that could be expected from the SWRB implementing workforce planning include:
- recruiting specialist staff

<sup>14</sup> See more on the options analysis in Appendix Two.



- expanding the registration database to include a wider set of data on social workers and their employers
  - identifying data analytics and scenario development needs (whether inhouse and/or leverage external organisations' existing capabilities)
  - creating engagement mechanisms with employers, sector organisations, and government agencies to maintain ongoing communications and intelligence gathering, in addition to mechanisms with social workers
  - making connections with aligned workforces
  - aligning activities in social work education
  - capturing baseline data on the current state of the workforce, and set up regular monitoring processes and reporting on trends
  - developing a workforce strategy and actions for implementation, and evaluation measures
  - developing the capability to provide advice on matters impacting the social worker workforce.
- 44 A much wider set of data and analytical expertise will be needed by the SWRB to successfully carry out a workforce planning role.<sup>15</sup> For example, it will need to connect with supply data from tertiary education institutions and demand data from the sector. The SWRB would be able to do this through leveraging its existing role in social work education and relationships with the education sector, as well as having dedicated expertise to develop internal capability and capacity so long as additional funding is provided.
- 45 In addition, the SWRB has the advantage of having a single focus on social workers as a whole, which reduces the risk that workforce planning for social workers will be diminished or marginalised over time due to institutional pressures reinforcing business-as-usual.
- 46 The impact of COVID-19 means that the three government agencies will need to prioritise their response and contribution to the recovery. This is particularly the case for the Ministry of Social Development (for example, in employment promotion and responding to the surge in unemployment) and the Ministry of Health (for example, in maintaining the supply of COVID-19 clinical professions).
- 47 The SWRB would likely be regarded as a more neutral provider of workforce planning, have closer ties to the workforce, and have fewer potential conflicts of interest than government agencies may have. It would also find it easier to take a cross-sectoral view. As a small organisation, the SWRB is better able to adapt and respond to emerging issues.
- 48 The SWRB's Board consists mostly of social workers, which would help it retain fidelity with social workers' practice and how the profession sees itself (rather than how others see it). There is also representation from employers to help it maintain a sector-wide perspective, as well as statutory requirements to have mechanisms for engagement with Māori, Pacific people and other ethnic communities where needed.

### **Additional funding would be required for the SWRB to implement workforce planning**

- 49 Implementation of workforce planning by the SWRB will require additional funding for it to build the necessary capability and capacity. Most of the SWRB's funding comes

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<sup>15</sup> The SWRB is already improving its technological capacity. In 2020, the SWRB is procuring a new database as a key infrastructure upgrade to support the transition to a mandatory registration environment with funding from Budget 2019.

from fees and levies paid by registered social workers. Reprioritisation of, or accommodation within, the SWRB's current baseline cannot support the additional costs anticipated, including extra staff and operational expenses.

- 50 While it may be possible, we do not recommend that additional funding be raised through increases in fees paid by social workers or the creation of a new levy. There is existing tension in relation to the level of pay and other support available to social workers, particularly those employed by NGOs, which does not reflect their critical role as an essential service. The recovery from the impact of COVID-19 is placing increased pressure on social services, including those involving social workers and provided by NGOs.
- 51 We do not consider it would be fair to impose an extra financial burden on social workers, even a relatively small one, where the Government has a strong interest and most to gain from workforce planning. The SWRB does not support requiring social workers to fully or partially fund implementation of workforce planning.

#### *New Crown funding is recommended*

- 52 We recommend that implementation of workforce planning for all social workers is conditional on new Crown funding being provided to the SWRB.<sup>16</sup> As a public policy objective, it is also fairer that the Government directly provides funding for its execution.
- 53 We have had an initial conversation with the SWRB on what the new function could look like and cost. The first year of operation would look different to outyears because it would need to focus on setting up the function, particularly with information systems and building sector relationships.
- 54 One initial start-up scenario comprised 4 to 5 FTEs to provide leadership across the sector, advice, administration support, overheads and management, external engagement activities and support for an advisory group. It was estimated to cost around \$1m to \$1.5m per year.
- 55 If you agree, the Ministry of Social Development will work with the SWRB to identify its capacity and capability requirements to implement a workforce planning function, and options for additional funding for implementation from the Budget 2021 process. This will include briefing SWRB Board members to seek their feedback.
- 56 We have discussed with the SWRB that if a Budget 2021 bid was successful, then it could aim to setup the workforce planning function from July 2021.

#### *We are exploring additional funding being available earlier*

- 57 At the agency meeting on 2 June 2020, you indicated your support for work to be undertaken on the details of what a budget bid might comprise, so that it could be considered for inclusion as part of the Wave 3 – Reset and Rebuild COVID budget process if the funding bid meets the relevant criteria.
- 58 If successful, this would mean that additional funding would be available to the SWRB later in 2020, and that it could advance setup of workforce planning.
- 59 We have discussed this scenario with the SWRB secretariat. Subject to final details, it is confident that it could manage completing its preparations for mandatory registration alongside starting up workforce planning, recognising that there are likely

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<sup>16</sup> There is precedent with Crown funding being provided to the SWRB in response to Government policy objectives:

- In 2019, Budget 2019 increased funding for the SWRB over two years to assist it prepare and implement legislative changes, particularly for the introduction of mandatory registration. Outyears funding of around \$100,000 per year from 2021/22 is allocated to supporting its obligations as a Crown agent.
- In 2003, Crown funding was initially provided to assist in the SWRB's establishment.

to be extra costs with the provision of external expertise (such as contractors) to facilitate the shorter timeframe.

- 60 The Ministry of Social Development can work with the SWRB to manage any issues arising to prioritise a smooth transition to mandatory registration within the funding available.

### **Cabinet can designate the SWRB as the lead agency to provide workforce planning for all social workers**

- 61 We recommend that you seek Cabinet agreement to designating the SWRB with an additional function to provide workforce planning for all social workers.
- 62 A Cabinet decision would usefully clarify Government policy in relation to workforce planning for all social workers. It would also provide clear direction to state sector agencies and NGOs on the need to work together to strengthen the workforce. This would also include confirming the scope and expectation of the SWRB's mandate for workforce planning and its relationships with other organisations in the sector.
- 63 At this time, we recommend that the role of the SWRB should be to provide leadership through influencing change and promoting coordination across employers and other relevant organisations, rather than requiring it. For example, it could be expected that the SWRB must work collaboratively with state sector agencies, employers, and the sector in developing a workforce strategy for all social workers, and that the SWRB would not diminish the ability of an employer to develop its own workforce.
- 64 As a Crown agent, the SWRB is expected to carry out Government policy. If Cabinet agrees to designate the SWRB as the lead agency for workforce planning for all social workers, then that decision could provide a sufficient mandate. This could be communicated through your regular meetings with the SWRB and/or through a letter.
- 65 Additionally, if you agree that the SWRB implement workforce planning only if new Crown funding is provided, then the appropriation in due course would provide an extra mechanism to provide direction. The new function could be monitored through its Statement of Performance Expectations and its annual report, and be reinforced by the Ministry of Social Development through its monitor role.

### **There are risks to designating the SWRB to lead workforce planning, but on balance these are manageable**

- 66 One risk in establishing a dedicated workforce planning function in the SWRB is its small scale and relatively high costs compared to a larger workforce function that covers a wider range of workforces. A small function is also more vulnerable to professional isolation compared to its larger peers. A key mitigation is that the SWRB would be expected to maintain and enhance its relationships across the sector, and grow relationships with other workforces. For example, it has existing connections with some health practitioner regulators.
- 67 Another risk is that workforce planning is an entirely new area of work for the SWRB, and it does not have the capability or capacity to implement it, particularly around data analytics for reporting and scenarios monitoring. Mitigating this risk is in part achieved by recognising that new Crown funding is required to setup the necessary capability and capacity. The SWRB may also be able to leverage off existing workforce planning expertise in some government agencies.

### **We have consulted on our proposal**

- 68 We have consulted with the Social Work Alliance, Oranga Tamariki, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Education, State Services Commission, New Zealand Qualifications Authority, and the Tertiary Education Commission.
- 69 There is broad support for designating the SWRB as the lead agency to provide workforce planning for all social workers. Some feedback focused on the need for more detail on the proposed new function, the adequacy of resourcing required, and

whether the scope of the function should extend to cover the wider social services sector. There was a particular focus in feedback on the importance of social workers as an essential workforce during the COVID-19 lockdown and contributing to support communities and whānau through the recovery period.

### *SWRB comment*

- 70 The SWRB considers workforce planning across the social work sector to be an area of need and currently one with little data or coordination between the different stakeholder groups. Data to inform development is captured by various interest groups for their own needs and there is little understanding of the overall system, for example: the impact of an ageing social work workforce, barriers to new social workers qualifying and going on to practise social work, the pipeline for people entering the profession, and employer risks and needs. The COVID-19 crisis, and responses to it by social workers, employers, agencies, educators and the SWRB have highlighted a number of issues, opportunities, and innovations in the sector.
- 71 Current fragmentation at the system level means that learnings from this crisis may be lost. The social and economic impact of COVID-19 on communities will be felt for several years, and the demand for social workers is likely to be higher as a result in the longer term. It is important that the sector is able to coordinate and maximise the potential for social workers entering and being retained in the workforce.
- 72 The SWRB sees synergies between the current work programme and the workforce planning function and activities outlined in this paper. The current SWRB work programme includes developing and reviewing regulatory tools to ensure they are fit for purpose and support best practice in a mandatory registration environment. The Education Framework review is currently being scoped, and this work will inform the workforce planning function. The SWRB is also developing the reporting functions of their new database. There is the possibility of incorporating workforce planning-specific data capture and reporting into this new system.
- 73 The SWRB states that additional Crown funding is required for it to implement workforce planning, and as noted it does not support using fees or levies on social workers or employers to raise funding.

### **Next steps**

- 74 If you agree, we will prepare a Cabinet paper seeking agreement to the SWRB being designated the lead agency to provide workforce planning for all social workers. This paper will include consideration of the scope and expectations of the new function. We will also work with the SWRB on seeking additional funding required for it to implement the new function.

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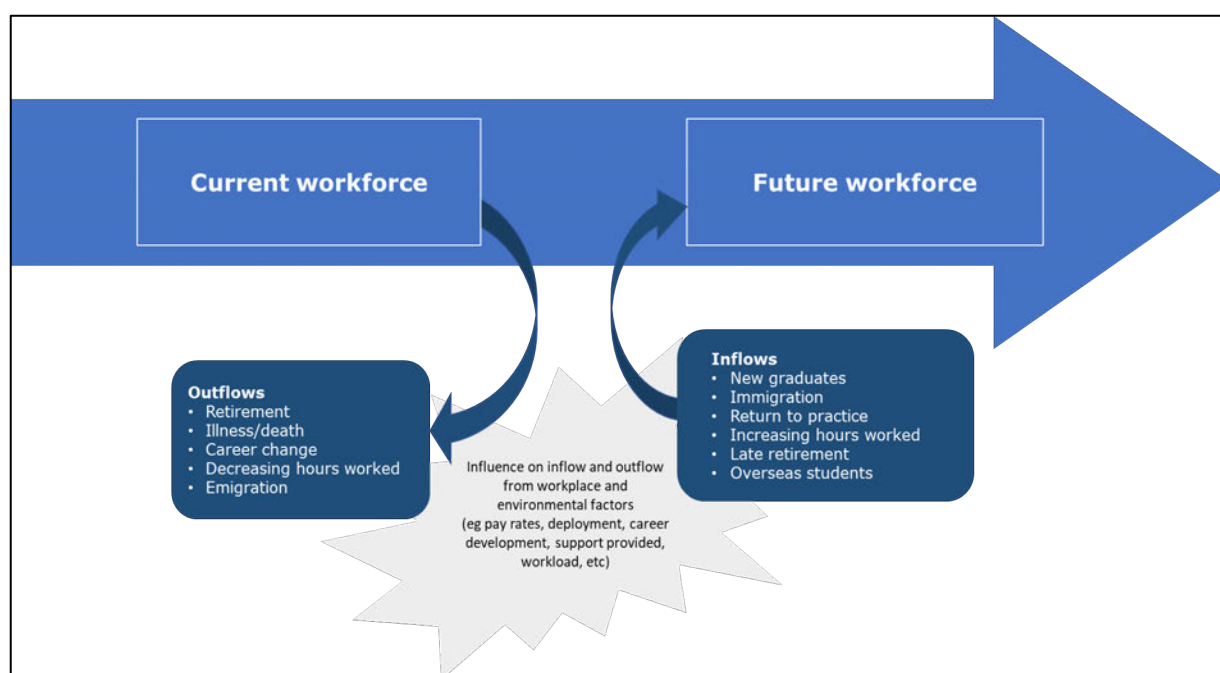
## Appendix One: What is workforce planning?

*Workforce planning involves strategically acting to manage supply and demand over time*

Generally, state sector workforce planning is meant to ensure that the Government's intended outcomes for a sector are achieved by:

- enabling effective strategic and operational decision making by government and sector agencies, including education, training and service delivery, at central and local levels
- planning for the future to keep up with demand and changing type of demand from people needing support, changes in machinery of government, policy shifts, and new service models
- analysing the workforce to monitor changing demographics, and the changing nature of workforce expectations
- matching funding for education and training with capacity of providers.

Any workforce exists in a dynamic environment of people coming into and leaving it (see Figure 1). People's behaviour may reflect their age and life stage (for example, going overseas, or having children). It may also reflect mobility across professions. For example, professional social workers may well have a greater range of transferable skills compared with more specialist professions (such as pharmacists). Detailed information from various sources is required to build a good picture of the components of inflows and outflows.



*Figure 1: Simplified labour market view of dynamic inflows and outflows for workforce supply*

This figure is adapted from Crettenden et al. 'How evidence-based workforce planning in Australia is informing policy development in the retention and distribution of the health workforce.' *Human Resources for Health*, 2014 12:7.

A healthy equilibrium between supply and demand for social workers will support a stable and "healthy" workforce. This will be in the interests of all stakeholders of the sector: government agencies, NGOs, social workers and, most importantly, people who are supported by social work services.

Aligning information that we have, or can reasonably estimate, with the possible types of inflows and outflows will identify the most effective ways to strengthen the workforce. Important questions facing the sector that workforce planning could help address include:

- What are the demographics of the workforce - does its age profile, gender mix, and cultural background, match the needs of current and future client groups?

- Is education and training matching the expected skill needs?

For example, increasing the number of students entering study for a social work qualification is an obvious but lengthy way to increase the workforce. The base qualification takes four years to complete, and then several more years to build experience before a social worker is considered fully competent to work independently. However, if we can see that a substantial number of graduates do not become social workers, it may be more immediately effective to find out why, and address that (for example, prioritising access to the social work qualification for people intending to become practitioners, and creating alternatives for those students who want to learn about social work).

### *Workforce planning underpins the ability to achieve Government goals*

The State Services Commission says that the value of workforce planning is to ensure workforces have the capabilities and capacity to support achieving government goals. Workforce planning is not something done in isolation or separate to an organisation's or sector's strategic direction. Its guidance to government agencies for workforce planning<sup>17</sup> describes the purpose as:

A Workforce Strategy is a core component of an agency's business strategy and change agenda. The purpose is to assist agencies to plan for the workforce needed to deliver better results, now and in the future, for New Zealanders and the government of the day. There is an expectation that agencies will produce a Workforce Strategy that shows alignment between business priorities, projected results and a planned approach to managing the people aspects of their business in the medium-long term.

The guidance provides the following principles to inform workforce planning, which can equally apply to a sector workforce with multiple employers and other actors:

1. Business strategies, priorities and operating models should drive and shape the Workforce Strategy
2. The Workforce Strategy should reflect and inform an agency's planned approach to change including business and workforce innovation, productivity and initiatives around workforce flexibility
3. Workforce Strategies should take into account the whole organisation; its overall business strategy and its total environment
4. Strategies should take into account relevant wider Government settings including the Government's economic and fiscal strategy and change initiatives
5. Workforce Strategies should support sustainable public services and reflect best practice public management e.g. best sourcing strategies; flexible workforce etc
6. Workforce Strategy timeframes may vary across agencies but should be for a minimum of four years
7. The Workforce Strategy should complement and not repeat work that agencies have already done
8. Development of Workforce Strategies should be an agency-wide conversation led by senior leaders, and involving key managers and staff supported by strategic planning and human resource functions.

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<sup>17</sup> State Services Commission. (2011). *Agency / Sector Workforce Strategy Guidance, October 2011.*

## Appendix Two: Considering options for a lead agency

*Criteria for considering options are based on relational closeness and sustainability*

We have developed the following criteria to consider each option for a lead agency. These criteria have been informed by previous engagement with the social work sector (see below) and our experiences with government processes:

- **Impact:** What would be the impact on the organisation's capability, the level of investment, and support needed to develop to take on the function of workforce planning for social workers? This includes looking at the skills and expertise available, resources (such as baseline funding), and its wider capacity to accommodate new or expanded functions.
- **Compatibility:** How much of a natural fit would workforce planning for social workers be with the organisation's current responsibilities and mandate? What leverage does the organisation already have in relation to social workers, which would be enhanced?
- **Engagement:** How well placed is the organisation to grow and maintain relationships with the social worker sector in a way that respects and supports the sector's voice and diversity? This includes working collaboratively with the social worker sector, recognising the value in connecting across the diverse perspectives of social workers, and having the ability to operate effectively across all sectors where social workers are employed.
- **Priorities:** What ongoing priority would the organisation place on enhancing the professionalism of social workers as a whole, and in relation to allied professionals and other skilled workers/paraprofessionals? How might the new function be sustained into the future amongst other business-as-usual priorities?
- **Uniqueness:** What commitment would the organisation have to maintain a New Zealand grown profession, which reflects the diversity of our population and cultures, and importantly that respects the Treaty of Waitangi?

*The other options were not assessed to be as effective as the SWRB*

Our options analysis suggests that any of the three government agencies could provide workforce planning for social workers but would be less effective. There would be higher risks, particularly in relation to how the workforce planning function would be sustained over time.

Another factor against choosing the government agencies is that the sector might perceive that the workforce planning function would not be faithful to the diversity of social work perspectives and approaches. It could be perceived that workforce planning would become aligned with the direction of the host government agency (such as child protection for Oranga Tamariki) at the disadvantage of those social workers who work in other sectors (such as working in the older people or mental health sectors).

Oranga Tamariki was assessed as having a closer and wider connection with social workers than the Ministry of Health. This reflects the fact that Oranga Tamariki both employs social workers directly and contracts with NGOs for the provision of social services, including through social workers. Oranga Tamariki also covers a range of social work roles within the child welfare sector. While many are focused on child protection, there are other roles focussed on youth justice, and international and adoptions. Oranga Tamariki also works with wider sector groups through NGO contracts, for example Social Workers in Schools.

The Ministry of Social Development would have the greatest relative impact and requirement for additional funding, because it would need to build capacity and capability for workforce planning of an external workforce.

### *Most occupational regulators in other countries do not seem to directly provide workforce planning*

The experiences of comparable countries with providing workforce planning for social workers can inform choices for implementation in New Zealand. Based on a brief survey<sup>18</sup> of information available online, most social worker occupational regulators are not directly involved with workforce planning. However, some are involved by contributing to the work of another agency that provides it.

Most examples of workforce planning that were identified focus on health services. In some places social workers are considered as part of the wider social services and/or health services and therefore may be included in wider workforce planning. For smaller regulators, it may be possible that workforce planning is not externally visible amongst its activities.

### *Workforce planning and regulation for social workers is combined in Scotland*

One exception is in Scotland, where the Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC) has within its responsibilities being the “national lead for workforce development and planning for social services in Scotland”.<sup>19</sup> The SSSC is the occupational regulator for the social services,<sup>20</sup> which includes social workers. It is a non-departmental government agency.

The SSSC describes its activities<sup>21</sup> as:

- providing official statistics on the social service workforce in Scotland to help organisations use the data to plan their workforce
- setting standards for practice, conduct, training and qualifications and supporting professional development
- providing information on career pathways which show the diverse range of career opportunities available and highlights the potential for a long term social service career
- publishing resources, like the right values, right people toolkit to support employers and workers to adopt values-based approaches to recruitment.

It considers that workforce planning and development is essential to make sure social services deliver high quality outcomes for the people who use them and having a skilled, confident and flexible workforce is a key part of delivering improved outcomes and performance in services.

The SSSC example provides some assurance that an occupational regulator of social workers can undertake workforce planning. It also indicates that there is merit in future exploration on complementary approaches with wider social service workers.

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<sup>18</sup> The following countries have been considered: United Kingdom, Australia, Canada, Ireland.

<sup>19</sup> Scottish Social Services Council. (2017). *Scottish Social Services Council Strategic Plan 2017 – 2020*. p3.

<sup>20</sup> Social services “includes social care workers, social workers, social work students and early years workers in a range of care services, in residential and day centres, community facilities and in people’s homes”, <https://www.sssc.uk.com/the-scottish-social-services-council/about-the-sssc/>, accessed on 30 March 2020.

<sup>21</sup> <https://www.sssc.uk.com/supporting-the-workforce/workforce-planning/>, accessed on 30 March 2020.



## *Initial views of the Social Work Alliance on a lead agency*

On 16 April 2019, the Ministry of Social Development and the Social Work Alliance met to discuss options for workforce planning of social workers. The following are some key points discussed.

Preserving the diversity across the social worker sector:

- There is a risk that the views and voices of big employers of social workers (for example, Oranga Tamariki or District Health Boards) will become dominant at the expense of other employers and sectors that do not have access to similar levels of resourcing.
- Diverse approaches and pathways are needed to get the best support to families and people needing help. People can become hardened to government services, particularly if there have been failures to deliver or follow up, and trust is lost. Often it can take time and commitment to build relationships before support can be provided and be effective in changing a situation.
- Some of the hardest to get to families in need of support are Māori and Pacific people. This fact should influence how support is provided, and how workforces like social workers develop.
- The Social Workers Registration Board says that a significant proportion of new applicants for registration are Māori:
  - In July 2018 to June 2019, 15 percent of all new applicants were Māori.
  - Newly qualified students made up 19.8% of all new applicants for registration in July 2018 to June 2019. In 2018, 48 percent of students who graduated in 2018 were Māori.

The changing status of social workers:

- Social workers as a whole workforce is a work in progress. Ongoing work is needed to overcome historic siloed views (based on individual sectors) on what is best for social workers, which does not take a whole profession view (for example, prioritising educational qualifications to deliver graduates suited to one sector but not others).
- Social workers should be recognised as a regulated profession with similar status to other regulated professions, such as health practitioners. There is a perception that social workers have not been treated on the same basis as fully regulated professionals.

Disparities in resourcing across the sector:

- A lack of resources limits the ability of NGOs to actively contribute to workforce planning. This reality also has an effect on social workers developing together as a workforce, for example government agencies can pay more for social workers they employ (and associated training and development opportunities) than NGOs employers.
- Challenges in recruiting and retaining social workers may cause NGOs to rely more on unregulated skilled workers/paraprofessionals to provide services. This comes with the risk of concerns at competency and public safety, where safeguards for social workers do not apply.
- The wider NGO employed workforce includes unpaid volunteers and carers, who are often forgotten about when considering investment and support for social workers and the wider social services sector. The ability of the NGO employed workforce to adapt to change relies on maintaining the support and good will of unpaid volunteers and carers.

Social workers operate across communities and with other professions:

- Social workers work in an environment with other workforces, who may be regulated or unregulated. In a multidisciplinary approach, particularly for complicated situations, the contribution of many people may be needed. Also, what works best for one person or family may be different to what is best for others (for example, a family may prefer a social services worker rather than a health practitioner or social worker to be their contact point for support, particularly if they have had a negative experience with professionals from government agencies).
- Social workers need to continue to operate across sectors and not find that their practice narrows. Having a broad view builds experience and an agility to relate to a diverse population of people needing support. This diversity of experience should be encouraged particularly in light of the growth of multidisciplinary teams and be recognised as an important capability. It will also support the evolution of social work as new areas of practice emerge over time.
- It is noted that in the mental health inquiry, there is a new entity proposed which will have an impact on the mental health sector workforce (including social workers). There is value in joining up across sectors, given that the focus in models of care is moving towards a greater focus on outcomes and individuals rather than on particular services being provided or professions.
- There is potentially a wider set of stakeholders who may need to be engaged in the development of the next phase of options for workforce planning for social workers, such as employers and organisations in allied professions.
- A lead role on workforce planning does not necessarily need to do everything. It could be a facilitator of a collaborative mechanism and join different parts of the sector together.

Challenges for strengthening the workforce

- Employers have a primary role in training and developing newly graduated social workers in a way that builds on their base knowledge and experience provided through obtaining a tertiary qualification. It can take time for newly qualified social workers to develop specialist knowledge in a specific sector and be competent to operate independently as a social worker. This investment by employers should be recognised as expected and necessary in a wider approach to growing the social worker workforce.
- There may be opportunities to attract qualified New Zealand social workers who are working overseas back into the local profession. As well, there is a body of non-practising but qualified social workers who could be attracted to return to the profession with support provided.
- The impact of the ageing population will be significant. It will impact on the type of people needing support (generally becoming older) and the situations experienced (more intense support might be needed for more people). It may also shift sectors where social workers will more often operate and move the profession's emphasis from child protection towards health and disability.