

Advocacy Summary:

Workforce sustainability

Why this matters

A sustainable, highly skilled and supported specialist family violence workforce is critical in meeting the demand for specialist family violence services and delivering a client centered family violence service system. This means a skilled, capable and diverse workforce that is remunerated appropriately, is valued, and has access to upskilling opportunities, career pathways and wellbeing supports. Ultimately, we want a strengthened specialist family violence sector, trusted to provide expert leadership and service delivery.

Workforce issues are prevalent and enduring across all of social services and have grown since the release of the Royal Commission into Family Violence (RCFV). Many sectors are contending with workforce pipeline issues, particularly since the COVID 19 pandemic, and are often competing for the same pool of recruits. Workforce specialisation continues to be a contested area and increased competition for the same pool of individuals across community service sectors is making building and maintaining a specialised workforce more difficult.

For the specialist family violence sector inconsistencies continue between roles, functions and remuneration in line with skills and work undertaken including funding models that are not fit for purpose.

What we know

The RCFV found there has never been a comprehensive assessment of the workforce required for the specialist family violence system and the implications for workforces in intersecting systems. It made numerous recommendations relating to workforce, including the need for the government to develop and implement a 10-year industry plan to address ongoing shortcomings. Considered workforce planning was to be central to the family violence reform to ensure workforce needs could be met over the next decade¹.

The government's strategy for developing the workforce for the family violence system is primarily articulated through the 10-year Industry Plan and the associated *Strengthening the Foundations: First Rolling Action Plan 2019–22 (Strengthening the D*, which contains the following seven focus areas to support achievement of the long-term vision²:

1. Building workforce capability
2. Enhancing training architecture
3. Recruiting and retaining specialist workforces
4. Strengthening leadership in the specialist sectors
5. Prioritising health, safety and wellbeing
6. Building sector and organisational capability
7. Working in a connected and cohesive system

In 2020, the Family Violence Implementation Monitor noted key workforce issues that still required addressing³:

- Planning and monitoring processes need strengthening; this includes strong workforce data and modelling
- Greater funding certainty could improve workforce retention and reform implementation
- Workforce health, safety, wellbeing and retention

Feedback from our member services corroborates the findings from the Family Violence Implementation Monitor. Despite the positive effects of industry planning, fundamental workforce issues persist. These include low levels of pay compared to the qualifications and skills required to do this specialised work; government “drip funding” and the resulting prevalence of short-term contracts which offer no job security; high pressure working conditions; and limited career development and progression opportunities. All these factors contribute to high workforce turnover and attrition from the sector and limit the effectiveness of recruitment initiatives.

To address these fundamental workforce issues, the workforce needs to:

- be larger to meet service need
- have more career development opportunities to increase retention in the sector
- respond to high demand for services and a large amount of reform
- grow through supported pathways for workers from other industry sectors
- have a clear roadmap to access professional development appropriate to roles
- hold a high-level skill set to support increasingly complex life circumstances for the people they support while also responding to dynamic family violence risk
- be commensurately remunerated in line with their job role

Investment in capacity building and industry planning, through Strengthening the Foundations has built significant momentum. As a sector, we are at a turning point where we can build on a range of key workforce initiatives. Strategic directions will need to be carefully considered in the context of decreasing available funding post the RCFV. Improving working conditions, expanding development opportunities, and cultivating a healthy sector are key aspects required to recruit, retain, support and motivate the specialist family violence workforce.

Safe and Equal’s position on this issue: recommendations and asks

Map and increase pathways into specialist family violence workforce

We need to ensure there are diversified pathways into the family violence workforce to strengthen workforce recruitment and retention. We also must ensure that the specialist family violence workforce that is needed to embed reforms and respond to future demand is put in place before reforms take effect and the demand occurs

Priority Actions

- Utilise the policy impact review for RCFV Recommendation 209 to shift to a workforce principle approach to ensure a high standard of workforce skills is maintained without creating barriers to entering the workforce.
- Maintain diversified pathways into the family violence workforce developed under Recommendation 209, including the Diploma of Community Services, to continue building workforce diversity
- Continued investment in workforce pipeline initiatives, workforce data and forecasting models. This should include a focus on earn and learn models and data that supports effective workforce planning in addition to prioritising data integrity. To this end, government should consider Safe and Equal's role in ongoing data collection and fund a data function as part of Safe and Equal's core work.

Improve pay and conditions for family violence workforce to attract and retain staff

Initiatives to recruit new workers into the family violence sector will be ineffective if those workers can not be retained. Pay incommensurate with the high stress nature of family violence work, lack of wellbeing support, unclear career progression pathways and insecure work due to short term contracts are all factors that result in workers leaving the sector. These issues are exacerbated in targeted services which often have less resources compared to the level of complexity they hold. These conditions must be changed to retain staff.

Priority Actions

- Undertake benchmarking to provide adequate remuneration and working conditions for the Victorian specialist family violence workforce.
- Longer-term funding commitments that put an end to 'drip funding' services and programs, to enable long-term employment contracts and decrease workforce turnover and attrition
- Continuation of funding for initiatives focused on improving health and wellbeing for specialist prevention and response workforces as a priority including implementation of the supervision framework
- Fund targeted recruitment, professional development, and worker wellbeing initiatives for Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations to support them to recruit, develop, and retain staff.
- Fund targeted recruitment, professional development and worker wellbeing initiatives to targeted family violence services to support them to recruit, develop, and retain staff.

Sustain and build the peak body's ability to build capacity in the specialist family violence workforce

Safe and Equal currently provides a range of statewide sector development activities including training; communities of practice; statewide coordination; practice leadership; tools and resources; cross sector

capability development; leadership programs; mentoring/coaching; technical advice; sector connections and networks; workforce planning. Maintaining this function is critical to improving workforce capability, strengthening sector leadership and safeguarding the long-term viability of the specialist sector.

Priority Actions

- Recognise the impact and benefit of Safe and Equal's expanded functions in practice leadership, workforce and professional development by:
 - Funding the continuation of Safe and Equal's leadership suite (Fast Track, Lead and Adapt and Leadership Network) through a sustainable subsidized model
 - Resourcing Safe and Equal to continue to support implementation of key initiatives for the second rolling action plan of the 10-Year Industry Plan including progressing workforce taxonomies and related resources for prevention and response
 - Continued funding for Safe and Equal to provide its statewide workforce development programs across prevention and response (training, communities of practice, networks and resources) with a three-year funding commitment