

Committee Secretary
House of Representatives Select Committee on Workforce Australia Employment Services
PO Box 6021
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600
waes.reps@aph.gov.au

20 December 2022

Submission to the Inquiry into Workforce Australia Employment Services

Re: Consideration of broader Workforce Australia employment services system, including complementary programs

Dear Committee Secretary,

We would like to submit this response to the Inquiry Workforce Australia Employment Services on behalf of myself and the following academics and researchers:

- Dr Louise Morley, Lecturer in Social Work, School of Health, University of New England
- Mark Driver, Research Assistant, School of Health, University of New England
- Adjunct Professor Bob Lonne, School of Public Health and Social Work, Queensland University of Technology
- Associate Professor Maria Harries, Population and Public Health, The University of Western Australia; Adjunct Professor, Curtin University

In our recent publication [Trends and needs in the Australian child welfare workforce](#)¹ we found that while the demand for child welfare support has grown, the workforce is under-resourced and under-trained, and training has not kept up with the complex challenges of child welfare services.

We provide a detailed analysis of findings and recommendations that are pertinent to this inquiry. One of our major recommendations is the need for greater collaboration between higher education providers and the sector to plan for growing future demand. See page 2 of this letter for a summary of the findings in infographic format.

We invite you to read our report in full: [Trends and needs in the Australian child welfare workforce](#).

Yours sincerely,

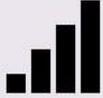
Professor Daryl Higgins
Director
Institute of Child Protection Studies
[Australian Catholic University](#)

Dr Erica Russ
Senior Lecturer & Director of Field Education
Social Work and Community Welfare
Faculty of Health
[Southern Cross University](#)

¹ Russ, E., Morley, L., Driver, M., Lonne, B., Harries, M., & Higgins, D. (2022). Trends and needs in the Australian child welfare workforce: An exploratory study. Canberra: ACU Institute of Child Protection Studies.
<https://doi.org/10.24268/acu.8x396>

Key findings

Trends and needs in the Australian child welfare workforce

	Demand for support in primary, secondary and tertiary child welfare services is high and growing.
	Tertiary level child protection statutory services have seen particularly high growth in the size of workforces.
	Staff in primary prevention services – early childhood education, schools and health – need more support.
	Workforce casualisation has a negative impact on overall workforce development, service quality and consistency.
	Most resources are narrowly focused on statutory agencies within the tertiary tier.
	Many staff are underqualified to recognise and assess the risk of harm of child abuse and neglect.
	Workers do not have opportunities to develop skills to provide consistent high-quality professional support.
	High levels of staff turnover diminish the quality and consistency of prevention and support services.
	Number of graduates of social work and psychology too low to meet the needs of child welfare sector.
	Indigenous children, children with disability, and children of parents with disability are over-represented.
	Workers who are Indigenous, are from culturally diverse backgrounds, or have disability are in lower skilled jobs.
	Older experienced workers leaving jobs means that the needs of child welfare services are harder to meet.