


Child protection workforce strategy 2017–2020

A professional portrait of Santhosh, a man with dark hair and a serious expression, wearing a dark pinstriped suit jacket over a light-colored button-down shirt. He is standing against a background of a blue sky with light clouds and a body of water at the bottom. The top of the image features a decorative graphic of overlapping orange and yellow circles.

Santhosh,
Child Protection
Practice Leader



Lena, Advanced Child Protection Practitioner

Angela, Child Protection Practice Leader

To receive this publication in an accessible format phone
9096 3207, using the National Relay Service 13 36 77 if required,
or email childprotectionjobs@dhhs.vic.gov.au

Authorised and published by the Victorian Government, 1 Treasury Place, Melbourne.

© State of Victoria, Department of Health and Human Services, January 2018

Where the term 'Aboriginal' is used it refers to both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

ISBN 978-1-76069-204-9 (Print)

ISBN 978-1-76069-205-6 (pdf/online)

Available at childprotectionjobs.dhs.vic.gov.au

Printed by Impact Digital, Brunswick (1711005)

Foreword

I am pleased to present the three-year *Child protection workforce strategy*.

This strategy is designed to help build and sustain the expertise, wellbeing and professional identity of our child protection workforce.

I know that the work is challenging, but it is vital to the wellbeing of some of the most vulnerable people in our community. That is why we must remain focused on the wellbeing and development of you – our child protection workforce.

To achieve this, we are putting in place measures to care for the workforce and to recruit, retain and develop our people.

The strategy has five major priorities:

- attracting and recruiting the best people
- building a professional identity for the workforce that recognises child protection as a valued profession of the highest integrity and competence
- growing and developing our people
- engaging and retaining our people
- the wellbeing of our workforce – our goal is to ensure immediate and responsive mental health support and to develop innovative approaches to the health, safety and wellbeing of our workforce.

The government is also boosting the capacity of the workforce. An extra 452.6 child protection workers will help manage the current workload to meet increasing demand. There are now more than 1,600 child protection practitioners working across our department.

And, in a time of significant reform and opportunity, the Victorian Government is investing further to maximise recruitment, retention and support strategies for child protection.

This workforce strategy adds to our focus on delivering the Victorian Government's *Roadmap for reform: strong families, safe children agenda* and to build a unified and connected Child and Family Services system. The roadmap outlined a shared commitment to building a better future for children, young people and families.

The Victorian Government committed to implementing all 227 recommendations from the March 2016 Royal Commission into Family Violence, with a primary focus on delivering

better identification, assessment and responses to family violence for women and children. Seventeen Support and Safety Hubs will be established across the state, as well as more family violence services, additional investment in the workforce and mechanisms to ensure better information sharing.

Together, the *Roadmap for reform* and family violence reform initiatives gives us the opportunity to deliver wide-ranging reform in the way we support vulnerable children, young people and families.

We will do this by:

- building the capabilities of families to care for their children and to provide them with an opportunity to be healthy and safe, and to thrive
- providing families with the supports they need to address concerns early on, before they become more serious and entrenched
- working more actively to preserve and to reunify families, and to support our carers
- striving for every child to have a stable, nurturing home, even when they cannot remain with their birth family.

Our reform agenda will positively change lives.

We are embedding child protection as a critical component of performing statutory functions within a whole-of-system response.

The core goal of these reforms is to better support vulnerable children, young people and families, but we also want to improve your experience as practitioners.

The workforce strategy recognises that we must provide our child protection practitioners with the tools and support you need to carry out this vital work.

The workforce strategy is aimed at delivering these outcomes, from recruiting your colleagues of the future to providing you support in the job right now and giving you the tools to progress your career.

Importantly, together we will deliver a better future for vulnerable children and young people.



Kym Peake
Secretary, Department of Health
and Human Services

Contents

Foreword	1
1. Introduction	4
Our consultation approach for this workforce strategy	5
2. Workforce strategy framework and strategic aim	7
Our strategic aim	7
Our workforce strategy framework	8
Attracting and recruiting the best people	8
Building a professional identity	9
Growing and developing our people	9
Engaging and retaining our people	9
Health, safety and wellbeing	9
3. Child protection workforce profile and analysis	10
Workforce demographic profile	10
Our Aboriginal workforce	13
Our key workforce challenges	14
Comparison with other jurisdictions	23
4. Workforce strategy priorities	25
Priority 1: Attracting and recruiting the best people	26
Priority 2: Building a professional identity	28
Priority 3: Growing and developing our people	30
Priority 4: Engaging and retaining our people	32
Priority 5: Health, safety and wellbeing	34
5. Reviewing and reporting on our efforts	36
6. Implementation plan	36

Appendix 1: List of stakeholders consulted to inform the workforce strategy	38
Internal	38
External	38
Appendix 2: Child protection capability framework	39
Introduction and overview	39
Child protection capability framework	44
Applying the capability framework	52
Appendix 3: Child protection psychological support program	55
Our vision	55
What is a mentally healthy workplace?	55
About the psychological support program	55
About the psychological support program model	56
Foundational elements of the psychological support program	57
Psychological support program model on a page	59
Psychological support program action plan	60
References and further reading	68

1. Introduction

The *Child protection workforce strategy 2017–2020* provides a single and consistent vision for the growth and development of the workforce to meet the Department of Health and Human Services' strategic vision. The strategy defines the activities that will be delivered across five priority areas:

- 1. Attracting and recruiting the best people:** Strengthening our ability to attract and recruit a workforce that can meet statewide and local requirements across all practitioner levels, supported by tailored attraction strategies and candidate care.
- 2. Building a professional identity:** Creating a strong professional identity for child protection practitioners that raises our standing in the community, supports the important work that our people do, and attracts and retains high-calibre candidates.
- 3. Growing and developing our people:** Providing practitioners with a holistic and contemporary approach to their learning and development that enables them to grow and develop the capabilities they need over their career in child protection.
- 4. Engaging and retaining our people:** Creating the right environment that enables our people to deliver high-quality services with the right leadership, supportive culture and ways of working to improve engagement and retention.
- 5. Health, safety and wellbeing:** Investing in the psychological safety and workplace wellbeing of our workforce so they can be effective and engaged in their roles.

Our consultation approach for this workforce strategy

The *Child protection workforce strategy* aligns with the department's *Strategic plan 2017–2018* and *People strategy 2020*. It draws on a broad range of data and insight resulting from extensive consultation with the child protection workforce, analysis of workforce data, the assessment of risks and challenges, and an in-depth process of co-design and development with child protection leaders, the Child Protection Workforce Strategy Steering Committee and the department's Executive Board.

The consultation and analysis included focus groups with child protection practitioners, former practitioners, current candidates, child protection stakeholder interviews, the Community and Public Sector Union, analysis of People Matter survey data, staff exit survey data, program reviews and a detailed analysis of workforce data. This workforce strategy has also included key input from other external stakeholders (see Appendix 2 for a full list of the external stakeholders consulted). The consultation and analysis conducted has provided clear insight into: our workforce demographic profile; attraction and recruitment practices; professional development and workforce engagement practices; the current focus on the health, safety and wellbeing of our workforce; and the professional identity of child protection in Victoria.

The consultation approach and analysis of data has provided the evidence base for our strategic aim for the child protection workforce, as well as underpinning the *Child protection workforce strategy framework*.

This strategy flags the department's intent to deliberately invest in building a child protection workforce that is best placed to deliver on the reform agenda and to meet the future needs of the community head on.



2. Workforce strategy framework and strategic aim

Our strategic aim

This *Child protection workforce strategy* represents our ongoing investment in delivering a sustainable child protection workforce and our commitment to meet the workforce challenges that we currently face.

Through the workforce strategy our aim is:

To build a professional and engaged workforce that practitioners are proud to be part of, and that promotes the professional standing and identity of child protection. We will prioritise the wellbeing of practitioners, build the right capabilities and enhance the leadership skills of the workforce. We will establish an engaging, safe and sustainable working environment for our practitioners. In achieving this vision, we will focus on delivering the best outcomes for Victorian children, young people and their families.

Our workforce strategy framework

The *Child protection workforce strategy framework* depicted in Figure 1 shows the five priority areas for our workforce and the important interconnected nature of these workforce elements.

Figure 1: *Child protection workforce strategy framework*



This framework has been developed through an extensive consultation process, as detailed in the introduction. It outlines the critical elements we will need to deliver in order to achieve the workforce vision and strategic aims outlined in this workforce strategy. The critical workforce elements outlined in this strategy framework are outlined below.

Attracting and recruiting the best people

We will continue to recruit passionate child protection practitioners who have a strong understanding of the challenges associated with working in child protection. We will deliver new attraction campaigns and strategies, redesign our recruitment process, and develop new and innovative pathways into child protection to meet the changing capacity and capability needs of the sector. These initiatives will be underpinned by a strong workforce planning model to ensure we are meeting both statewide and local talent needs.

Building a professional identity

We will build a professional model for child protection that will guide practitioners throughout their careers. Our professional model will define the qualification, capability, performance and continuing professional development requirements of child protection professionals. In doing this, we will clearly articulate to the community the standards and expectations of the profession, and raise the professional standing of child protection within the community.

Growing and developing our people

We will embed a learning culture that promotes and enables professional development throughout each practitioner's career. Our learning and development practice will be formalised through a structured continuing professional development (CPD) model. We will provide our workforce with contemporary, accessible development opportunities that are tailored to their level and are aligned to our capability framework and operating model. We will provide practitioners with clear learning pathways to support them in progressing their careers in the child protection profession.

Engaging and retaining our people

We will provide a positive, fulfilling and supportive work environment that is underpinned by good supervision, support and learning and development opportunities. We will investigate contemporary working practices and patterns that will work for our child protection profession in Victoria, and the supporting tools needed to embed these practices. We will ensure our managers and leaders provide the right support to practitioners. We will strengthen engagement and retention throughout the child protection profession.

Health, safety and wellbeing

We will drive a proactive culture of workplace safety and wellbeing that equips our managers to actively support their people and delivers the right policy settings and resources. We will establish and resource a holistic health, safety and wellbeing framework for child protection practitioners. Our workplace safety and wellbeing practices will be underpinned by a 'just culture' framework that drives proactive incident reporting and continuous improvement.

The evidence base underpinning each of these priority areas, including a detailed overview of our current workforce challenges, data and consultation findings, is outlined in the following section.

3. Child protection workforce profile and analysis

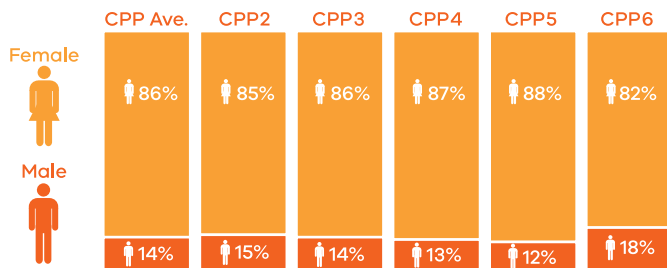
Workforce demographic profile

The child protection workforce is a specialist, expert workforce that requires an equally specialised approach to its support and development. There are more than 1,600 child protection practitioners across the department. These practitioners are predominantly full-time, ongoing employees, with a higher proportion of female practitioners (86 per cent) and a younger age profile (average age of 40 years) than the rest of the department (68 per cent female; average age of 47 years). A summary of the department's child protection workforce profile can be found in Figure 2.

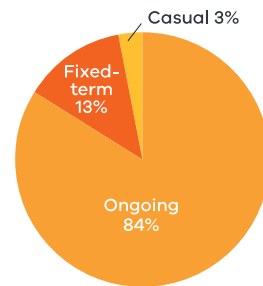


Figure 2: Child protection workforce demographic analysis

Child protection workforce gender distribution



Employment type

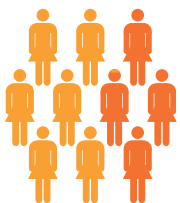


Employee demographics

40 years old
Average age of child protection employee with an age range of 20 to 78 years for ongoing staff
– seven years lower than the average for DHHS

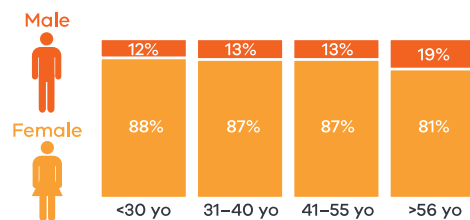


6%
of CPP employees are under 25 years of age
– 4% higher than the average for DHHS



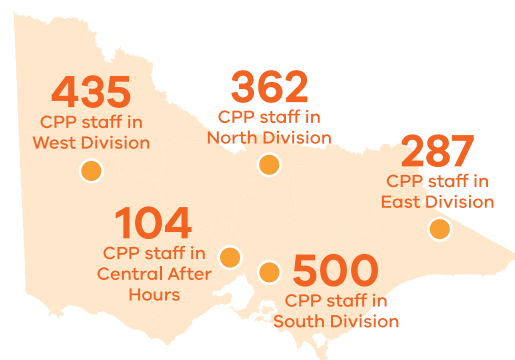
39%
of CPP employees are between 25 and 34 years of age
– 22% higher than the average for DHHS

Gender composition by age group



Staff per division

Data from June 2017



Source: HR Master Data

Our Aboriginal workforce

The department's *Aboriginal Employment Strategy 2016-2021* outlines the department's commitment to:

- provide a dynamic and diverse workforce that delivers inclusive policy development and service delivery to our communities
- provide cultural safety for Aboriginal communities and employees in Victoria
- empower our workforce to work differently and to embrace innovative practices that enables us to reach our Aboriginal employment target.

As part of the *Aboriginal employment strategy*, the department has set a two per cent workforce target to increase the numbers of Aboriginal employees by 2021. It aims to significantly increase Aboriginal staff in senior roles and it progresses the department's commitment to be a diverse, inclusive and culturally safe employer of choice for Aboriginal people.¹

Child protection currently employs 35 Aboriginal staff. This represents 16.8 per cent of all of Aboriginal staff currently employed by the department and 1.9 per cent of all staff currently employed in our child protection workforce. To ensure our Aboriginal practitioners are supported, and that we continue to attract and recruit Aboriginal practitioners, we have developed the *Aboriginal child protection workforce engagement strategy* (ACPWES).

The ACPWES aims to set specific divisional targets that ensure a stronger focus on employing Aboriginal people into the child protection profession.² The outcome of this focus is earlier intervention and local solutions that ensure children remain connected to families, communities and their Aboriginal culture. The current campaign is specifically designed to attract and recruit new graduates as well as more senior practitioners with senior level skills, practice and experience. To deliver on our strategic aim outlined in our ACPWES, the department's Diversity and Inclusion Unit and Recruitment, Strategy and Engagement team are working closely to attract and recruit Aboriginal child protection practitioners.

We are implementing the ACPWES within child protection, with the aim of attracting, recruiting and retaining as many Aboriginal practitioners as possible. The ACPWES outlines five key strategy areas. Our Aboriginal cultural supports and partnerships strategies define how we can best support practitioners in developing their child protection skills. Through this, we will build practitioner skills to not only navigate the complex work of child protection but to do so specifically within Victoria's Aboriginal communities. Our Aboriginal child protection strategies provide initiatives

1. Department of Health and Human Services, *Aboriginal employment strategy 2016–2021*

2. Department of Health and Human Services, *Aboriginal child protection workforce engagement strategy*

that are central to supporting our Aboriginal workforce in a broader sense, including partnerships with tertiary education providers and scholarships. Strategies that support the retention of existing Aboriginal practitioners include an Aboriginal professional network that links all Aboriginal employees with each other across the state. Also, the new candidate care support cycle strategies define the recommended support for Aboriginal candidates when they begin their role and the specific care new recruits are provided in their first months in child protection.

The department is currently delivering on a number of key activities outlined in the ACPWES. We have funded an Aboriginal-specific child protection recruitment campaign, which includes monthly advertising in the *Koori Mail*, Victorian regional papers and the *Sydney Morning Herald*. We provide individualised one-on-one candidate care for all Aboriginal candidates. The Aboriginal Graduate Program, Career Trackers Internship program, VAC program and the INTRAIN Tertiary Scholarship Program have all received funding to help increase the number of Aboriginal practitioners that we can attract and recruit to the child protection workforce. The Aboriginal Graduate Program and INTRAIN Tertiary Scholarship Program are both currently supporting Aboriginal students. We have also established a partnership with Career Trackers, which supports Aboriginal tertiary students to complete a 12-week internship in child protection. Four students have completed an internship to date. A further five will be starting internships over summer 2018.

We will continue to actively look to attract and recruit Aboriginal practitioners to our child protection workforce to build on the progress made to date, as well as strengthening the cultural safety and development opportunities for Aboriginal child protection practitioners. It is important that our workforce reflects the diverse demographic profile of our client base to provide a culturally appropriate service to the community.

Our key workforce challenges

The complex nature of child protection work, along with the demographic profile, means the workforce faces a number of challenges. These include meeting growth targets and improving the experience and retention of current practitioners. Both of these will be assisted by progressing the professionalisation of the workforce in Victoria.

Attracting and recruiting

Child protection programs worldwide face challenges in attracting and recruiting practitioners. The department faces the specific challenge of recruiting to the additional 452.6 positions resulting from the government's investment in growing and developing the child protection workforce in 2017–18. In addition to meeting workforce growth targets, the department is also recruiting to fill current vacancies in the Child Protection Operating Model arising through attrition. At 16.5 per cent in 2016–17, natural attrition

among the child protection workforce is currently higher than across the broader department (10.1 per cent).³ A high volume of staff performing higher duties (140.6 FTE) and fixed-term staff backfilling ongoing roles further impacts on the total number of vacancies and ability to recruit (Figure 3).

Child protection currently has a strong pipeline of students and graduates from social work and psychology streams to meet CPP3 recruitment requirements. However, there is a limited external pipeline of experienced practitioners, and the department currently relies heavily on internal progression for CPP4–6 roles. There are not enough alternative entry pathways for experienced recruits – for example, mature workers from similar work backgrounds or from other professions – and there is an opportunity to strengthen the diversity and breadth of supply of graduates and experienced workers from other vocational pathways. To meet future workforce requirements, the department will need to rapidly grow the workforce through effective attraction and recruitment of a broader range of candidates, and improve retention.

The department manages a range of attraction activities including marketing through media and job seeking sites, and collaboration with higher education and vocational institutions to attract students and graduates. Recruitment is currently managed at both the central and divisional levels and is supplemented by outsourced activity. This results in variability of process, time to recruit and candidate experience across CPP classifications and divisions. Analysis of the recruitment process indicates that the time to hire varies between classifications from 36 to 45 days (on average).⁴ Current recruitment activity delivers on average 20 external appointments per month. The rate and volume of recruitment will need to more than double to meet workforce requirements for this financial year.

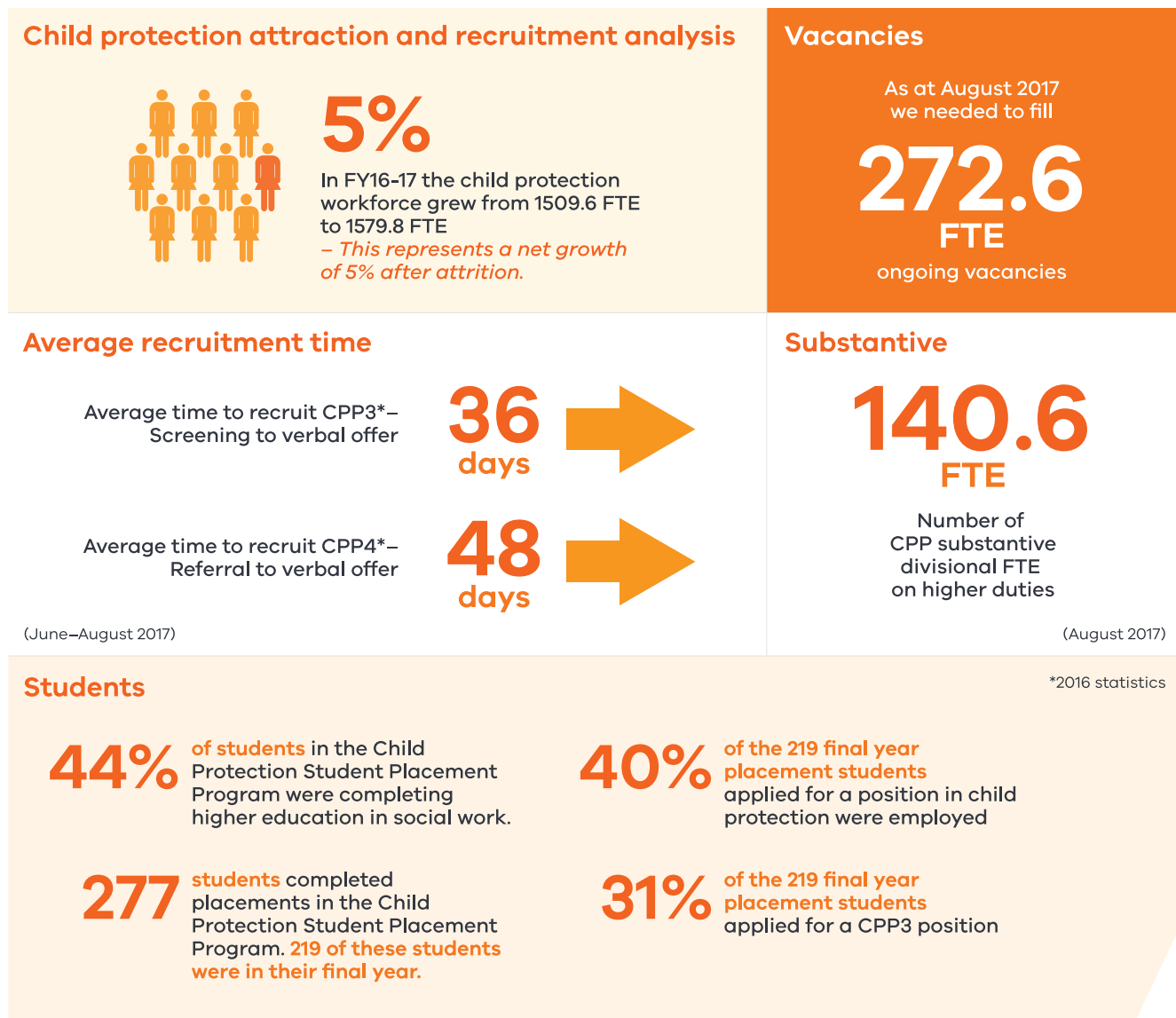
Child protection attraction and recruitment initiatives are also not currently informed by a workforce planning model. Our attraction campaigns must successfully target a broader range of candidates and promote a consistent employer brand for child protection while being better tailored to reflect each region's local needs. We also need to improve our recruitment process so we can: effectively process the required volume of candidates across all CPP levels; cater for statewide and local requirements; deliver a consistent candidate experience; and ultimately increase our rate of attraction and conversion. Underpinning our success will be the ability to forecast our workforce needs with a workforce planning model so that we are able to forward plan recruitment activity.

Through the workforce strategy we will deliver new attraction campaigns and strategies and redesign our recruitment model and process. This will ensure we are attracting and recruiting the right candidates to our profession, and that our attraction and recruitment initiatives provide a consistent employer brand and candidate experience, yet are tailored to local workforce needs.

3. Analysis of child protection workforce data

4. *Child protection recruitment pipeline report*

Figure 3: Analysis of data on child protection attraction and recruitment



Building the professional standing of child protection

There is a strong sense of unity and professionalism within the child protection workforce. Local teams in particular report a strong sense of pride in their work and are committed to achieving outcomes for children and families. Through surveys and consultation with our workforce, we know that practitioners find their role interesting and rewarding. Despite the strength of the internal professional identity, this is not matched by the public's perception. Media portrayals and community perceptions reflect a negative stigma associated with child protection practice. Surveys of our practitioners also indicate poor perceptions among family and friends, with common views including that it is a hard, demanding and stressful job (49 per cent), that they couldn't do it themselves (20 per cent) and that it was negatively perceived due to commonly removing children from parental care (19 per cent).⁵ This highlights the need to establish a clear professional identity for the child protection workforce that accurately conveys the role and expertise of the workforce, and the true value they contribute to the Victorian community.

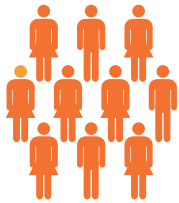
The child protection workforce in Victoria has had a strong foundation in the social work discipline, yet in recent years, qualification requirements have broadened to include psychology and like vocational qualifications resulting in growing workforce diversity. While the vast majority of the workforce (80 per cent) remains social work and psychology trained, an increasing proportion have prior experience across a breadth of occupations and disciplines (Figure 4). To create a strong and consistent sense of identity within the profession and to be able to convey this externally, we need to clearly define what it means to be a child protection practitioner, including the professional standards we uphold and the qualifications and capabilities required of practitioners, and effectively communicate these to the community and prospective candidates.

In delivering this workforce strategy, we will establish and promote a formalised professional model for the child protection profession that reflects the standards and qualifications that child protection practitioners must meet. This professional model will provide the overarching framework to guide practitioners throughout their career, and define the capability, performance and CPD requirements for practitioners of the child protection profession. It will also provide a framework for the processes that support a professional workforce including professional recognition, ongoing and formalised professional development, and clear professional standards to guide our practice. Having a clear professional identity will have a positive 'downstream' effect including attracting and recruiting practitioners into the profession.

5. Three's A Crowd – Employee Value Proposition Workshop

Figure 4: Analysis of data on the child protection professional identity

Child protection professional identity analysis



98%

of CPP employees who completed the People Matter Survey believe the work they do is **important**



79%

of CPP employees who completed the People Matter Survey are **proud** to work in the VPS

Around **80%**

of staff have an education background (degree or higher) in social work or psychology

EVP Survey 2017

Perception

For practitioners who completed the EVP survey:

When asked how practitioner's friends and family perceived child protection:

49%

believe it is a hard job that is demanding, and stressful

20%

believed it takes a 'certain type' of person to do the job of a child protection practitioner, and that they couldn't do it

19%

had a negative perception of the profession, including that removing children from parental care is common

Growing and developing our people

Growing our workforce is one half of the equation. The other is to actively engage and develop the current workforce through a holistic approach to career and professional development, and to embrace a culture that prioritises learning and development as critical to effective service delivery. This requires clarity of capability and performance requirements and a consistent and pragmatic statewide approach to development that supports practitioners to meet these.

Feedback from staff has identified opportunities to improve capability criteria, and the frequency of feedback provided. While we have a strong Beginning Practice course for new practitioners, we have an opportunity to improve the level of guidance and training on commencement. We also need to provide ongoing development opportunities over the course of a practitioner's career that align with evidence-based and leading practice. Currently, there is no method for monitoring and reporting on practitioner participation in training and development activities, nor the impact of training and development on practice.⁶ There are limited formal development opportunities for case practice support workers (CPP2) in particular. The nature of child protection work often makes it difficult for practitioners to attend face-to-face or classroom-based training, so we need to identify modes of delivery that enable practical access and best target learning and development curriculum and events to our workforce.⁷

In delivering the workforce strategy we will strengthen our learning program and establish a learning culture that promotes CPD. We will launch our refreshed *Child protection capability framework* to clearly define the capability requirements for all staff from CPP2 to CPP6. The *Child protection capability framework* informs all learning, development and career progression initiatives. We will provide our people with the opportunities to grow and develop professional and technical capabilities over the life of their career in child protection.

Engaging and retaining our people

Engagement and retention of our workforce are key measures of workforce effectiveness; they affect the experience of our practitioners and our ability to deliver an effective service to the community. Our rate of attrition is currently significantly higher than the broader department workforce (16.5 per cent compared with 10.1 per cent), particularly at the CPP3 level (19.9 per cent).⁸ We know from staff exit surveys that workload, level of support from managers and leaders, as well as the individual's understanding of the role before joining are all key factors contributing to attrition.⁹

6. Review into child protection learning and development practices

7. *ibid.*

8. Analysis of child protection workforce data

9. DHHS child protection staff exit survey data, 2016–17

While the average tenure of our workforce is 6.1 years, for staff who exited in 2016–17, average tenure was significantly lower (2.9 years), with a majority of CPP3 exits occurring within 12–18 months (Figure 5).¹⁰ Improving retention will deliver significant benefits to the child protection workforce and to the community we serve, increasing the stability of service provision and the workforce overall and reducing additional pressure currently placed on recruitment and learning and development.

Our workforce operates in an environment of increasing demand from at-risk children and families. While caseload and/or workload varies slightly across divisions, many practitioners report that current workloads are excessive. There has been a significant increase in reported overtime since 2012.¹¹ This is further evidenced by exit survey data highlighting a direct link between workload and turnover. The additional 452.6 positions will assist to relieve volume-related pressure on the workforce. Through the workforce strategy we can identify ways to effectively distribute the workload of our practitioners, with the goal of reducing our turnover rate through engaging and retaining more practitioners.

It is essential that the demanding workload and confronting nature of child protection work is balanced with times of personal decompression and reflection. We want our workforce to be supported by managers and leaders, to be able to effectively control their workload, to feel empowered to manage themselves and their work-life balance, and have an improved experience of working in child protection. Through delivering this workforce strategy we will put in place intensive support for new practitioners for the first 12–18 months of their career, implement a new approach to workforce communications and engagement, clarify the role of managers, and improve the capability of our managers to engage and retain staff.

10. Analysis of child protection workforce data

11. Child Protection overtime reports

Figure 5: Analysis of current child protection workforce engagement and retention data

Child protection engagement and retention analysis



Average tenure of active employees

Active as at August 2017



Average tenure of exit employees

Exit FY2016–17



50%

of CPP employees who completed the People Matter Survey plan to **continue to work** in their child protection workgroup over the next two years

People Matter Survey 2017

The health, safety and wellbeing of our people

The child protection workforce is exposed to unique psychological health, safety and wellbeing risks. An in-depth analysis of the current state of health and wellbeing indicates that our workforce has limited capacity to ensure their own health and wellbeing standards are met with the support available. In 2016–17, 49 per cent of all WorkCover cases related to mental health. This provides a strong argument for ensuring that our workforce has the right structures and supports in place to manage their health, safety and wellbeing.

We currently face some challenges in providing our workforce with the right health, safety and wellbeing support. First, there is a need for a holistic and consistently applied health, safety and wellbeing framework specific to child protection that provides a guiding structure for proactively managing the health, safety and wellbeing of the workforce. Second, the nature of child protection work means that health, safety and wellbeing is not consistently prioritised. Managers need better tools and the capability to anticipate and respond to staff wellbeing needs. We also need to review our approaches to managing overtime worked to reduce the risk of burnout and fatigue in the workforce. By taking steps to address the root causes of these impacts on the health, safety and wellbeing of our practitioners, we can provide a better experience for our staff, better supporting and retaining our workforce.

This current state analysis highlights the challenges we face in meeting workforce growth targets, developing and engaging, and retaining our current workforce, and making practitioner health, safety and wellbeing a clear priority. The recent state government investment provides the catalyst and opportunity to develop an evidence-based and prioritised plan to meet these workforce challenges over the next three years.

Through this workforce strategy we will ensure the health, safety and wellbeing of our practitioners is a top priority. This requires a proactive approach that creates the right culture, equips our managers to actively support the health safety and wellbeing of their people and delivers the right policy settings and resources. There will also be times when we must respond in a timely and effective way to ensure the right support is delivered to practitioners – for example, in response to traumatic incidents. To do this, we will establish and resource a holistic psychological support model for child protection practitioners, a framework of self-care and prevention, and develop the capability of our managers so they consistently and proactively manage the health, safety and wellbeing of their people, and themselves.

Comparison with other jurisdictions

Analyses of the national child protection workforce have identified similar workforce trends in the attraction, recruitment and retention of child protection practitioners.¹² Broadly, across Australia:¹³

- There are challenges attracting and recruiting appropriately qualified child protection practitioners. This is partly driven by the limited number of graduates around Australia considering child protection as a career. There are also issues in recruiting qualified Aboriginal practitioners across Australia.
- Recruitment practices are often ineffective, with new recruits either not staying in child protection for long or staying in child protection but becoming ineffective in their work.
- Retaining child protection practitioners is a common issue. Four key retention strategies have been identified to address this: developing new incentive packages; professional development strategies; developing a constructive workplace culture and working environment; and job redesign.
- The majority of child protection practitioners are female (84–89 per cent), and child protection practitioners are generally young, with 25–50 per cent under the age of 35.

The 2012 national analysis of the child protection workforce was broadly consistent with the workforce risks and challenges identified as part of this strategy.

A lack of comparable data was noted as ‘not being conducive to the building a national picture’.¹⁴ The research recommended that states and territories work together on a national data development project that agrees on variables and counting rules to help evaluate recruitment, retention and workforce development strategies, and to enable systematic and evidence-based workforce planning.

We will engage with the Department of Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs to support a nationwide consistent approach to data collection.

12. McArthur M, Thomson L 2012, *National analysis of the workforce trends in statutory child protection*

13. *ibid.*

14. McArthur M, Thomson L 2012, *National analysis of the workforce trends in statutory child protection*



4. Workforce strategy priorities

Priority 1: Attracting and recruiting the best people

Priority 2: Building a professional identity

Priority 3: Growing and developing our people

Priority 4: Engaging and retaining our people

Priority 5: Health, safety and wellbeing

Priority 1: Attracting and recruiting the best people

Outcome: Our attraction and recruitment practices enable us to recruit the best child protection practitioners to meet the capability and capacity needs of the sector. To do this, we will create new, innovative entry pathways to the profession, deliver more strategic and targeted attraction initiatives, and undertake more efficient and effective recruitment of child protection practitioners.

Attracting the right candidates to child protection will be the most important contributor to meeting our workforce growth targets. To fill the 452.6 additional positions in child protection in 2017–18, we will increase the supply of candidates through attraction campaigns and initiatives targeting a broader range of potential candidates. We will continue to build on our strong relationships with education providers to promote the profession and to increase the number of graduates who consider child protection as a career. We will also work with education providers to explore how we can develop additional pathways into child protection – for example, making child protection a discrete discipline within undergraduate courses and bridging programs for other professionals.

As we grow our workforce, we need to ensure we are able to forecast our workforce needs and target recruitment accordingly. Attraction activities and recruitment strategies will be informed by a strong workforce planning model. This workforce planning model will enable visibility of statewide (including local) workforce requirements. We will underpin our workforce planning model with a workforce planning management dashboard to monitor and manage our recruitment needs. Strong workforce planning will inform better targeting and management of candidate pools and enable the right capability to be deployed across the state as required. Strategic workforce planning will also support us to tailor our marketing and attraction campaigns based on local talent needs.

'I moved to Australia in 2012. It was new to me when coming to Bendigo. There's nobody I knew. But I had great support from my colleagues. Building relationships is easy in a rural setting.'

— Santhosh, Child Protection Practice Leader

To cater for the increasing supply of child protection candidates and to better deliver on our workforce growth targets, it will be important to refine our recruitment process and provide a great candidate experience. We will redesign our recruitment ecosystem to provide recruiting managers with a more efficient process that reduces time to recruit and provides candidates with a consistent experience. We will implement new e-recruitment tools under the Human Capital Management system to provide high-quality candidate care in the form of regular communications and real-time information on progress and next steps. This refreshed approach will help attract suitable candidates and will reflect better candidate assessment.

What we will do

- **Refresh child protection marketing collateral and attraction campaign strategies** to reflect our capability framework and include pre-employment information. This strategy will enable a clear and accurate portrayal of child protection practitioners and assist in attracting the right candidates to child protection.
- **Develop and promote a child protection employee value proposition** to promote, attract and retain people to the profession.
- **Run targeted, evidence-based recruitment campaigns** that target rural and hard-to-recruit metropolitan, interstate and overseas locations, and that drive diversity of the workforce including specialist Aboriginal practitioners.
- **Review and revise incentive packages for the workforce** to help attract staff in hard-to-recruit areas of the state.
- **Develop a workforce planning model and management dashboard** to inform statewide (including local) recruitment strategies for child protection.
- **Refresh our e-recruitment platform** to ensure our candidates are experiencing the best recruitment process possible, with the right support throughout the application process.
- **Re-design the child protection recruitment ecosystem** to build a flexible and sustainable recruitment model for child protection that can be readily expanded to meet demand. The recruitment model will deliver an efficient process and provide an excellent candidate experience, including better support for Aboriginal candidates.
- **Engage in joint recruitment initiatives of Aboriginal candidates with Aboriginal community-controlled organisations.**
- **Use special measures to attract Aboriginal candidates to child protection roles.**
- **Work with the higher education and vocational sectors to develop a child protection discipline** to expand the entry pathways into the child protection profession. This child protection discipline will help to embed child protection as a destination profession that graduates and experienced candidates aspire to be a part of.
- **Continue to build on the existing strong local and central relationships with universities and TAFE organisations** to increase the number of students who consider child protection as a valuable and rewarding career while ensuring a protected learning environment.
- **Create alternative entry pathways** into child protection to increase the supply of entry-level and experienced talent. This will include developing alternative pathways through tertiary disciplines, cadetships, other professions and similar work backgrounds within the department.

Priority 2: Building a professional identity

Outcome: Our professional model provides a strong professional identity for child protection and raises the standing of the profession. Our professional model recognises and promotes the integrity of the profession, as well as the specialist and fundamental role of a child protection practitioner, to the community.

Establishing our professional identity is fundamental to achieving our workforce vision. We have clearly outlined the minimum qualifications and professional standards that practitioners must meet to work in our profession and already have a strong foundation across our current workforce. Our challenge is to ensure communities across Victoria understand these standards. By formally establishing a child protection profession we have the opportunity to build on our strong foundation, promoting the high expectations our profession meets, to improve the professional standing of child protection.

Clearly defining the value of our profession to the public is important for our practitioners, their friends and their families. We will build a professional identity that resonates with practitioners and makes them proud to be a child protection professional. In doing this, we will continually grow and align the public's understanding of our work. This will play an important role in helping to increase the supply of new and returning practitioners to our profession, and to attracting the best and the most suitable talent to our workforce.

'What has changed is the way we work with the community. Because the community is more conscious of children at risk, they are willing to make reports and, should that child actually come in, we've got the specialised staff there to meet their needs...To be a good child protection practitioner is knowing that the child is your client first and foremost and you are there to serve and protect them.'

— Angela, Child Protection Practice Leader

We will develop and implement a formal professional model that will provide a stronger structure and framework for our professional identity. As well as promoting our professional expectations to raise our standing in the community, our professional model will be a critical enabler for the growth and development of our people. This model will be aligned with our capability framework and will define the minimum qualifications, professional development requirements and career pathways for child protection. The model will guide the way we develop our people through a rigorous and structured approach to professional development and will inform the formalisation of learning and development through a CPD model for child protection (see Priority 3).

What we will do

- **Design and implement a professional model for the child protection workforce** to achieve our vision of building a professional identity. This professional model will set the benchmark for our child protection practice in Victoria and will advance child protection practice as a discipline and profession of the highest integrity and standards. The model will be aligned with our capability framework and operating model to provide a formalised and structured approach to professional development and career progression. The model will define:
 - the mandatory qualifications required to become a child protection practitioner
 - the professional standards of child protection, and how practitioners comply with these standards
 - the entry pathways into the child protection profession
 - a formalised learning and development program (CPD program)
 - the professional development requirements for practitioners, and how practitioners comply with these requirements.
- **As part of the professional model, we will define the child protection career pathways that the profession offer** and communicate these to the Victorian public and internally within the department.
- **To bring our professional model to life, we will develop a child protection mobile application** that is the central point of information, communication and career management for the child protection workforce. The functionality of this mobile application will include (but is not limited to) housing critical information for practitioners (for example, our capability framework), interaction with career pathway maps, and enabling individuals to plan for upcoming development opportunities (including housing a learning and development calendar).
- **Develop a positive and compelling child protection public relations strategy** that proactively supports our practitioners in the public domain and advocates for the discipline and profession.

Priority 3: Growing and developing our people

Outcome: Our learning culture provides practitioners with the deep technical and specialist skills required for their roles. Embedded through our professional model, our learning culture supports practitioners to continue to grow and develop throughout their career.

The statutory environment of child protection requires child protection professionals to maintain contemporary and evidence-based practice at all times. To provide the best outcomes for our clients, our practitioners must be continually improving and updating their practice.

To build on the foundations of our current learning and development program, we will investigate the feasibility of a structured CPD model to formalise the learning of child protection professionals. This CPD model would be aligned with our professional model, the newly launched capability framework and the Child Protection Operating Model. It will incorporate workplace learning, a learning and development curriculum and extracurricular development in an integrated learning model. Our learning practice and CPD model would be underpinned by a Human Capital Management system, which will enable us to monitor, evaluate and report on development of our workforce and inform the future program development.

For our workforce to meet expected practice standards, we will provide them with contemporary development opportunities in line with the capability framework. These development opportunities will be delivered in an accessible way that enables our workforce to manage the varying demands of our profession and to ensure positive outcomes for vulnerable children and families. We will do this by delivering learning and development opportunities through different modes of delivery and accessibility.

We will also provide new development opportunities that support the implementation of our professional model. This will include providing a learning and development program for experienced practitioners, practitioners joining the workforce from other jurisdictions, and ex-practitioners returning to our workforce. This approach will welcome them to our profession and provide them with the skills and tools they need for child protection in Victoria.

'Being that voice for children and young people is so important that you really can't get bored in this field ... It's important to have conversations with your team manager during supervision about where you want to go and what areas interest you as there are always secondments available in a range of different teams.'

— Lena, Advanced Child Protection Practitioner

All of these initiatives will contribute to building a strong learning culture that supports our practitioners to develop their technical and specialist skills. We will provide practitioners with rich learning experiences in all aspects of their role throughout their careers. We will develop and improve the capability of our leaders and drive a learning culture that recognises the experience that our practitioners gain out of every case through a formalised and focused learning culture.

What we will do

- **Implement recommendations from the revised *Child protection capability framework*** to ensure the revised framework guides learning and development initiatives and is embedded in every practitioner’s personal development.
- **Implement recommendations from the *Child Protection Learning and Development review*** to support our people throughout their careers.
- **Develop and implement a child protection learning and development strategy** to guide the annual learning and development program for child protection. This strategy will outline the strategic objectives of the child protection learning and development program and how these objectives will be achieved and measured.
- **Investigate the feasibility and design of a formal CPD model within the workforce** to help structure program learning and on-the-job learning. This CPD program would be structured against the *Child protection capability framework 2017* and aligned to the professional model. This CPD program will feature clear learning pathways mapped against career milestones that outline to practitioners the skills and knowledge they will need to progress to the next stage of their career.
- **Improve our learning management system (LMS) utilisation and functionality** to enable a system of measuring, monitoring and reporting against clear key performance indicators that is supported by robust learning and development and practice governance. Improved LMS utilisation and functionality will also allow us to proactively monitor practitioners’ progress against key learning requirements.
- **Design and implement a statewide learning and development program for our child protection case practice support workers (CPP2)** to provide in-house, formal development opportunities and milestones, enabling CPP2 staff to develop and progress their careers in child protection. This program will be informed by the outcomes of the Supervised Contact and Training Trial and will support CPP2s to provide critical services to Victoria’s vulnerable children.
- **Develop and implement tailored programs for:**
 - former practitioners
 - practitioners returning to work (from extended leave)
 - experienced hires from other jurisdictions
 - other allied professions.
- **Implement a consistent statewide 12-month induction program** for newly recruited child protection practitioners tailored to each classification to provide them the required support, information and training they need when starting their new role.
- **Develop a leadership and management coaching program** for child protection leaders and managers (CPP5–CPP6) to help them develop and progress their individual leadership and management styles. This will include outreach support to Aboriginal recruits and managers, assessed on a case-by-case basis.
- **Embed a learning culture that acknowledges the importance of learning and development** in delivering effective services and provides a consistent environment of professional development and personal achievement.

Priority 4: Engaging and retaining our people

Outcome: Our positive and engaging work culture is underpinned by a sustainable workload model and supportive supervision, mentoring and practice leadership. We will create a contemporary working environment for the child protection workforce and enable practitioners to achieve work-life balance while delivering the best outcomes for Victorian children and families.

We want to provide child protection practitioners with a positive, fulfilling and supportive working environment. The child protection ecosystem needs to provide each practitioner with the right development opportunities, support from management, a sustainable workload, and enable practitioners to continually excel in their roles. This will in turn enable us to improve retention across the workforce.

Supporting practitioners to achieve an optimal workload will be important as the demand for our services continues. This will require us to better apply our current case allocation and workload management systems and practices. We will continue to strengthen our systems for allocating cases and distributing work to our practitioners.

We will help to better balance staff and client needs through contemporary working practices and working arrangements. Through this workforce strategy we are committing to a full review and investigation of formal flexible working practices, patterns of work and the essential tools to support implementation.

A practitioner's relationship with their direct manager and with child protection leadership continues to be a key driver of engagement. It is critical that these roles are providing our workforce with the right supports and strong leadership guidance and advice. Consistent and effective application of our supervision model is important in providing practitioners with practice and people development support. We will invest in developing our frontline managers and child protection leadership capabilities. Our leaders will be accountable for supporting and developing their teams.

We will use new technology and modes of delivery to communicate with and support our mobile workforce. Importantly, we need to be able to communicate weekly statutory updates to a workforce who are on the move. We need to improve the way our communication supports teams and leadership to build connections and to maintain a sense of identity. Our communications will be targeted and provide a clear call to action.

Our positive and engaging culture will be the reason practitioners stay with our profession. By providing a more positive, fulfilling and supportive working environment, our practitioners will be able to focus on their clients and achieve their career objectives in our child protection profession.

What we will do

- **Investigate the feasibility of contemporary working models for Victoria’s child protection workforce** to enable practitioners to achieve an optimal work-life balance. As part of this initiative, we will explore the viability of alternate work models and alternate patterns of work.
- **Monitor and support compliance with applying our workload management and case allocation systems** and explore opportunities to better align and assign cases to available resources. This will include consideration of the cultural requirements of each case.
- **Investigate allied workforce models for non-core child protection practitioner functions** to support workload management and more flexible working arrangements for child protection.
- **Reinforce our supervision model, identify barriers to supervision and explore alternative models** to support the application of our supervision model by leaders, managers and staff. This will include implementing, monitoring and reporting on key performance indicators for leaders, managers and staff to help embed a supportive and accountable supervision model within our workforce.
- **Continue to build our strong pipeline for the Vacation Employment Program and student placement programs** to increase the number of university placement students who become child protection practitioners.
- **Look for more opportunities to promote and recognise the role and achievements of child protection practitioners** within the department and in the Victorian community.
- **Investigate the feasibility of formal ‘career break opportunities’** to enable practitioners to take a break from child protection where needed without having to leave the profession. These formal career break opportunities will include breaks for development opportunities including interstate and overseas practitioner exchange programs and career breaks to suit our practitioners.
- **Enhance and develop the people management capability** of child protection people leaders and managers to develop and embed a positive workplace culture.
- **Enhance the approach to internal and external communications** that promote the valuable and important work that child protection practitioners do to the Victorian public and potential candidates, as well as clients and their families.

Priority 5: Health, safety and wellbeing

Outcome: We foster and maintain a culture of workplace safety and wellbeing that supports staff to manage their workload and achieve an optimal work-life balance. Our leaders establish and role model clear expectations for the health, safety and wellbeing of our profession.

The health, safety and wellbeing of the child protection workforce is a top priority. Given the unique working environment of our practitioners, it is of paramount importance that we foster and maintain a culture and practice of workplace safety and wellbeing. To establish this culture and practice, we need to improve in a number of areas.

We will establish a holistic and proactive health, safety and wellbeing framework that incorporates a psychological support model tailored to child protection. Our framework will outline specific preventative, early intervention and longer term initiatives to support practitioners throughout their careers in child protection. Embedding this framework within our workforce will have a significant positive impact on the way we enhance the wellbeing of our practitioners in their work and create a more stable workforce.

Our managers and leaders will support practitioners to understand their personal wellbeing priorities, to actively reflect on and manage their wellbeing, and to encourage early help-seeking. We will reduce mental health stigma and endeavour to ensure any staff with mental health issues feel well supported. We will promote and embed the framework in our practice through an ongoing campaign that will keep health, safety and wellbeing front of mind.

A key component in providing our workforce with improved wellbeing outcomes is through reducing the need for staff to work overtime. We will explore the opportunity to create alternate working patterns that enable our workforce to better manage the unpredictable nature and pressures of working in child protection. We will explore how shift work may be implemented to reduce overtime and reduce the risk of fatigue and burnout. This will be coupled with a focus on embedding our overtime and time-in-lieu (TIL) processes in consistent practice.

Our leaders will role-model our health, safety and wellbeing culture. Establishing and maintaining this culture will be something that all professionals drive, with our leaders setting the expectation and being accountable. This cultural change will take time and require significant investment of energy from all levels within the department.

What we will do

- **Strengthen, educate and embed clear health, safety and wellbeing requirements and accountability controls for the child protection workforce** to ensure health, safety and wellbeing policies are being followed.
- **Embed a psychological support model that is tailored to the child protection workforce** across the lifecycle of their career in child protection, combined with compulsory training, communications and development of supportive leadership capability to help foster more engaging and positive team environments. We will also develop the skills of our managers to conduct regular wellbeing check-ins and refer staff for further wellbeing reviews if any issues are identified.
- **Embed and promote early intervention and self-care mechanisms from the psychological support model within the child protection workforce** to ensure they are accessible to practitioners throughout their careers.
- **Review and update post-incident support services from the psychological support model within the child protection workforce** to ensure child protection practitioners have appropriate access to support and follow-up.
- **Monitor and support compliance with timesheet, overtime, TIL and leave reporting controls and mechanisms** to support practitioners to achieve a better work-life balance, manage fatigue and reduce risks to health, safety and wellbeing.
- **Develop and embed a 'just culture' within child protection** that encourages proactive incident reporting and continuous improvement in response to issues raised.
- **Undertake a statewide audit of safety and security controls at each workplace** and, where necessary, implement appropriate risk control measures in a timely manner.
- **Undertake a review of office accommodation and workspace** to support staff to work effectively and considers their confidentiality requirements.
- **Review the Workload Management Monitoring and Review Panels description and operating guidelines** to improve the consistency and effectiveness of the panels.
- **Incorporate the Aboriginal support plan into the psychological support model** to improve access to appropriate cultural supports, specialised training and cultural supervision for Aboriginal practitioners.
- **Implement a cultural safety framework to support Aboriginal culture and inclusion in child protection**, strengthening awareness of cultural safety and building cultural capability across all child protection managers and staff consistently across the sector.
- **Link Aboriginal practitioners with the Aboriginal Staff Support Network** to strengthen morale, engagement, cultural health, safety and overall wellbeing.
- **Review and improve how information about child protection practitioner mental health data is collected and managed** to maintain compliance with the *Mental health and wellbeing charter for the Victorian public sector*.

See Appendix 4: Child protection psychological support program for further information.

5. Reviewing and reporting on our efforts

The *Child protection workforce strategy* will be underpinned by a detailed implementation plan that outlines our approach to delivering the outcomes and associated activities that form the strategy. The *Child protection implementation plan* sets out the activities, timescales, ownership and measures of success so we can proactively monitor our progress against the outcomes for delivering the workforce strategy over the next three years.

Critical to the success of this strategy is a dynamic and agile approach to reviewing and adapting our workforce strategy.

A set of core workforce measures will be defined in the supporting implementation plan, reported on a quarterly basis, and proactively monitored by the Child Protection Executive Group. Monitoring and reporting on these measures will support the review and reporting on our efforts in delivering on the *Child protection workforce strategy*.

The Child Protection Executive Group has overall accountability for implementing the strategy and achieving its outcomes.

The Child Protection Executive Group will undertake the following:

- Determine targets for the key measures in the workforce strategy, which we will work towards achieving on an annual basis.
- Determine the prioritisation of activities and resources to be implemented (cost, time and people).
- Develop an evaluation method for the workforce strategy.
- Monitor and report on the workforce strategy's implementation progress on a quarterly and annual basis.
- Undertake an annual review of the *Child protection implementation plan* and establish the future goals and activities for the following years (to coincide with the department's business planning cycle).
- Report on progress to employees annually.

6. Implementation plan

A detailed three-year implementation plan is an internal document that has been developed to support the workforce strategy, in consultation with the *Child protection workforce strategy* Project Steering Committee. The implementation plan outlines the activities, timeframes, accountabilities and measures required to activate the strategy and deliver our strategic aim for the child protection workforce.

The following diagram illustrates the implementation plan roadmap, reflecting the sequencing and prioritisation of all strategies over year one (2017–18), year two (2018–19) and year three (2019–20).

Figure 6: Child protection workforce strategy overview



Appendix 1: List of stakeholders consulted to inform the workforce strategy

Internal

Deputy Secretary, Children, Families Disability and Operations
Deputy Secretary Corporate Services
Service, Implementation and Support branch
Office of Professional Practice
Health and Human Services Workforce branch
Communications branch
Industrial Relations branch
People and Culture branch
Child Protection branch – North Division
Child Protection branch – South Division
Child Protection branch – East Division
Child Protection branch – West Division
Corporate Services – North Division
Corporate Services – South Division
Corporate Services – East Division
Corporate Services – West Division

External

Ernst and Young
Community and Public Sector Union Victoria
Dentsu Mitchell – Media and Digital Communications Group
Dr Peter Cotton
McArthur Recruitment
Parenting Research Centre
Three's A Crowd Creative Group
Victorian Auditor-General's Office
Zenith Optimedia

Appendix 2: Child protection capability framework

Introduction and overview

Introduction and purpose

The *Child protection capability framework* is a critical tool to help child protection practitioners and workers develop and manage their careers within the Victorian child protection system.

The work of a child protection practitioner is challenging, complex and rewarding. The practitioner needs to have specialist child welfare knowledge and the ability to engage children, young people and their families. They also need to work in a statutory environment where they are required to exercise legal delegations and functions pursuant to the *Children, Youth and Families Act 2005*.

The *Child protection capability framework (2017–2020)* describes in detail the capabilities, personal qualities and knowledge and skills that child protection practitioners and workers are required to demonstrate in their day-to-day work. As practitioners gain more experience, move into new roles and advance to higher levels, different levels of capability and depth of knowledge and skill is expected. This progression is outlined as part of this capability framework.

The purpose of the *Child protection capability framework* is to:

- articulate the capabilities required across all child protection classifications, as well as the personal attributes, knowledge and skills that are important to child protection practice
- establish a common platform upon which workforce development activities – such as learning and performance plans, professional development and training programs, recruitment, performance management, succession planning and curriculum development for higher education – can be built
- align the capabilities of the workforce with the requirements and objectives of the *Children, Youth and Families Act*
- underpin and guide career development, provide a basis for effective Performance and Development Process (PDP) and career conversations, as well as support the creation of future career development tools and guidelines.

Background to the framework

The capability framework was co-designed by child protection subject matter experts specifically for the Victorian child protection workforce.

Child protection practice in Victoria is experiencing a period of rapid change. The outcomes of the Royal Commission into Family Violence, Senate Inquiry into Out-of-Home Care, Royal Commission to Investigate Institutional Responses to Child Sex Abuse, and the *National framework for protecting Australia's children 2009–2020* have outlined clear actions that need to be taken in Australia and Victoria to provide children with the services they need. These reviews have also set the scene for major reforms within Victoria, and the department has outlined its *Roadmap to reform*.

This capability framework refreshes the 2012 capability framework to outline the critical capabilities needed for the future child protection workforce and to underpin future workforce development across all CPP classifications. The framework was co-developed by a number of stakeholder groups within the department:

- child protection practitioners
- child protection leaders
- the Office of Professional Practice
- the Specialist Intervention Unit.

Design principles

The capability framework has been developed based on four design principles:

- **simple structure** – the structure of the framework should be simple and include the necessary detail required to discriminate between CPP levels
- **practical** – the framework should be easy for frontline practitioners to access, understand and navigate, and should support them in achieving their career goals and progression
- **evidence-based** – as well as outlining capabilities, it should outline the professional/technical knowledge and skills that research and practice have identified are required to be a sound child protection practitioner
- **aligned with the VPSC capability dictionary** – where relevant, the capability framework should align with the VPSC capability dictionary.

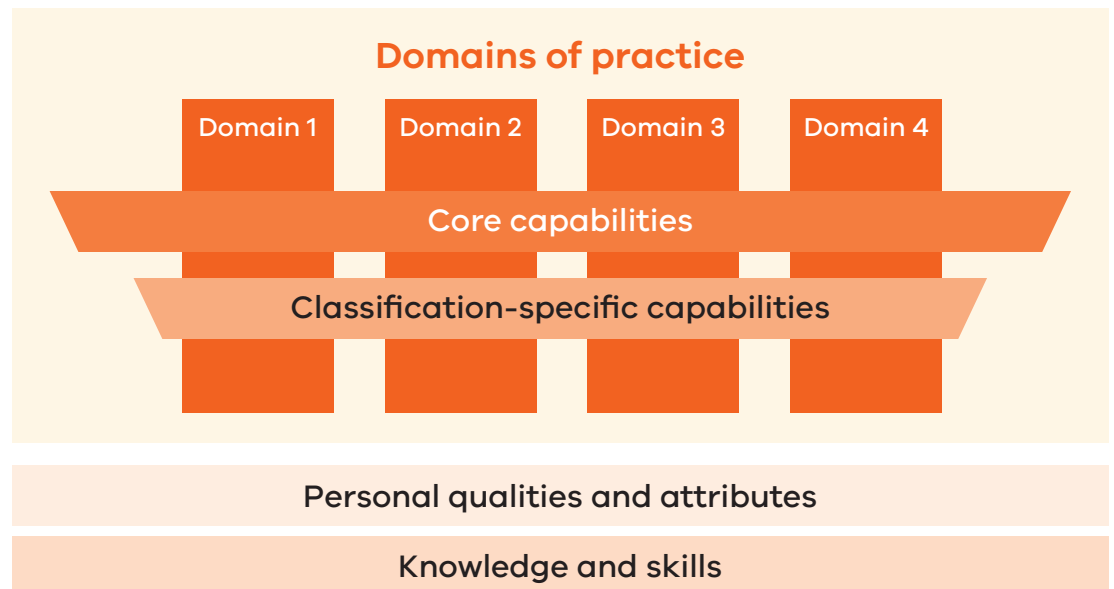
Structure of the capability framework

The capability framework comprises five core elements required in child protection practice and work:

- **domains of practice** describing key areas of capability for child protection
- **core capabilities** outlining capabilities that all staff are expected to demonstrate consistently for CPP2 and CPP3–CPP6 levels (these are aligned to the domains of practice)
- **classification-specific capabilities** outlining capabilities that CPP3–CPP6 practitioners demonstrate to the level expected of their CPP classification (these are aligned to the domains of practice)
- **personal qualities and attributes** outlining the six personal qualities and attributes considered important for child protection practice
- **knowledge and skills** outlining the 10 knowledge and skills considered important for child protection practice.

The structure of the capability framework is illustrated in Figure 7.

Figure 7: Structure of the *Child protection capability framework*



Domains of practice

The capability framework comprises four domains of practice that describe key areas of capability for child protection.

The **core capabilities and classification-specific capabilities** are grouped under one of the four domains of practice. Descriptions of the four domains of practice follow.

Domain 1: Critical assessment and reflection

The Critical assessment and reflection domain requires child protection practitioners to think clearly and systematically using self-awareness and several analytical techniques to solve complex problems. It requires child protection practitioners to apply a strong forensic lens to their analysis of each case, and to take the time to reflect on each case.

Domain 2: Engaging others

The Engaging others domain requires child protection practitioners to engage with children, families, carers, the community, service providers and colleagues. Working with these stakeholders is central to child protection practice and requires collaboration and partnering with a range of stakeholders and services, as well as critically sharing knowledge and information around the child protection systems, to help achieve the best outcomes.

Domain 3: Delivering results

The Delivering results domain requires child protection practitioners to work in a highly effective way that focuses on the best interests of the child and achieves positive, long-lasting outcomes for children and families.

Domain 4: Leading and inspiring

The Leading and inspiring domain requires child protection practitioners to lead and inspire others, to help them strengthen their professional ability to deliver the best outcomes for each child. All employees in the child protection profession are able to lead and inspire in their work, whether it be with colleagues, clients or other external stakeholders.

Core capabilities

All staff are expected to demonstrate the core capabilities consistently. The capability framework outlines core capabilities for CPP2 workers and core capabilities for CPP3–CPP6 workers.

The core capabilities outlined in the capability framework are the fundamental capabilities that child protection practitioners are expected to demonstrate consistently. CPP3–CPP6 practitioners are expected to demonstrate seven core capabilities, while CPP2 case practice support workers are expected to demonstrate five core capabilities specific to their role.

Each of the core capabilities is clearly defined to describe what child protection practitioners or case practice support workers are expected to demonstrate in their day-to-day work. There is a consistent expectation of how each capability is demonstrated for each CPP classification. Figure 8 provides an example of the core capabilities within the Critical assessment and reflection domain.

Figure 8: Example core capabilities and definitions from the *Critical assessment and reflection* domain

Core capabilities	
Domain 1 Critical assessment and reflection	1.1 Risk assessment and analysis Gathers information through a variety of sources and technologies in order to identify, articulate and plan for the risks relating to each situation. Applies a strong forensic lens and professional judgement to analyse the available evidence.
	1.2 Case planning review and case management Draws insights from assessment and analysis to formulate a meaningful and effective case plan, and reviews case progress and outcomes. Coordinates and leads the planning, review and management of case work within the department and across other agencies and services.

Classification-specific capabilities

Child protection practitioners are expected to demonstrate the classification-specific capabilities in line with their classification and level of practice.

The *classification-specific capabilities* are required in child protection practice from CPP3 to CPP6 levels. Child protection practitioners are expected to display the classification-specific capabilities in line with their classification and level of practice. A description of the expectation at each level follows.

Beginning practice – CPP3

- Is developing and building their practical experience in this area and can demonstrate this capability in their work
- Demonstrates application of this capability in some settings and situations

Advanced practice – CPP4

- Has significant practical experience in this area and demonstrates this capability consistently in all settings and situations
- Supports, advises and guides other colleagues on the application of this capability in their work

Leading practice – CPP5

- Developing a reputation as an expert in this capability and has consistently demonstrated this capability in all settings and situations
- Actively coaches colleagues in the application, theory and practice relating to this capability. Engages and leads both colleagues and clients in this capability

Expert practice – CPP6

- Has significant and deep experience in applying this capability and is recognised around the state as an expert in applying this capability with both colleagues and external stakeholders
- Strategically plans for how colleagues and staff can continue to develop in this area and successfully operationalises these plans

Child protection capability framework

Outline of the *Child protection capability framework*

This section outlines the *Child protection capability framework* for the child protection workforce – from CPP2 to CPP6 classifications.

The capability framework has three sections that are relevant to different segments of the child protection workforce in Victoria.

Capability framework for CPP3–CPP6

The CPP3–CPP6 *Child protection capability framework* is outlined first, detailing the seven core capabilities and 10 classification-specific capabilities that should be demonstrated by practitioners in their child practitioner practice and statutory role.

Capability framework for CPP2

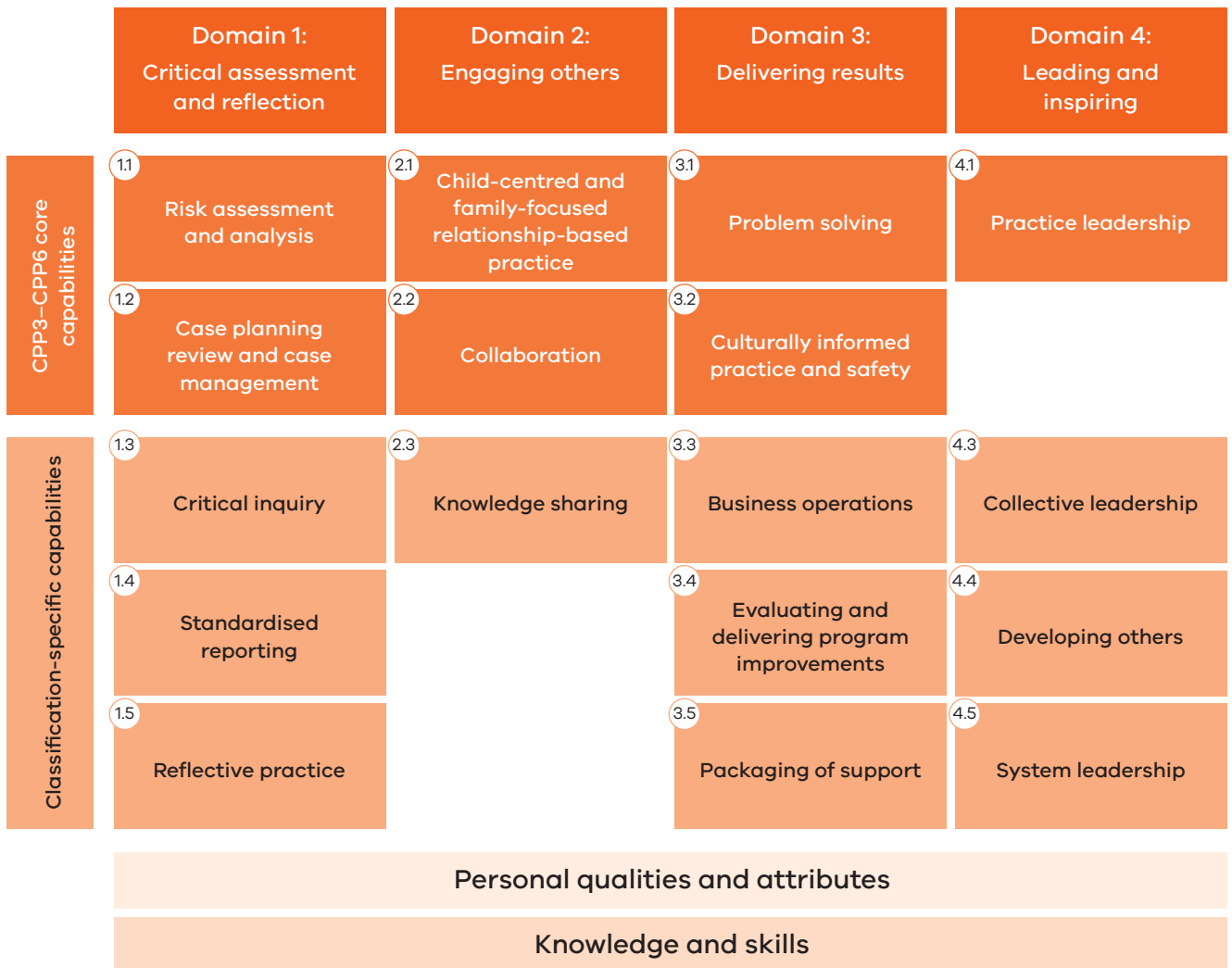
The CPP2 *Child protection capability framework* is for case practice support workers only. It outlines the five core capabilities that should be demonstrated in CPP2 case support work. The capability framework does not include classification-specific capabilities due to the nature of the CPP2 role.

Personal qualities and attributes, knowledge and skills

Both frameworks are underpinned by six personal qualities and attributes and 10 knowledge and skills that are important for all child protection staff in Victoria.

Capability framework for CPP3–CPP6

Figure 9: Capability framework for CPP3–CPP6



Core capabilities

Domain 1: Critical assessment and reflection

Capability	Description
1.1 Risk assessment and analysis	Gathers information through a variety of sources and technologies in order to identify, articulate and plan for the risks relating to each situation. Applies a strong forensic lens and professional judgement to analyse the available evidence.
1.2 Case planning review and case management	Draws insights from assessment and analysis to formulate a meaningful and effective case plan, and reviews case progress and outcomes. Coordinates and leads the planning, review and management of casework within the department and across other agencies and services.

Domain 2: Engaging others

Capability	Description
2.1 Child-centred and family-focused relationship-based practice	Focuses on the child and incorporates the family and social network to deliver timely and proactive solutions.
2.2 Collaboration	Engages, consults and co-designs solutions with children and their families, other practitioners and teams, agencies, services and the community in order to deliver the best outcomes for children and their families.

Domain 3: Delivering results

Capability	Description
3.1 Problem solving	Integrates knowledge and internal insight with leading practice and research to address problems.
3.2 Culturally informed practice and safety	Understands and applies culturally informed practice that is focused on the child in the context of their family in a way that considers situations, activities, decisions and outcomes from the perspective of each stakeholder's cultural background.

Domain 4: Leading and inspiring

Capability	Description
4.1 Practice leadership	Leads children, families and stakeholders through child protection assessment and decision making in an open, informed, proactive and assertive manner.

Classification-specific capabilities**Domain 1: Critical assessment and reflection**

Capability	Description
1.3 Critical Inquiry	Uses evidence-based frameworks to investigate issues and is able to understand the root cause of each issue as well as the potential implications.
1.4 Standardised reporting	Uses standardised reporting frameworks when recording case data and when documenting care solutions provided.
1.5 Reflective practice	Critically reflects on what they are doing in their role and uses this reflection to influence their practice.

Domain 2: Engaging others

Capability	Description
2.3 Knowledge sharing	Exchanges critical information across the system, both internally and externally, to ensure shared understanding and timely and appropriate action for clients.

Domain 3: Delivering results

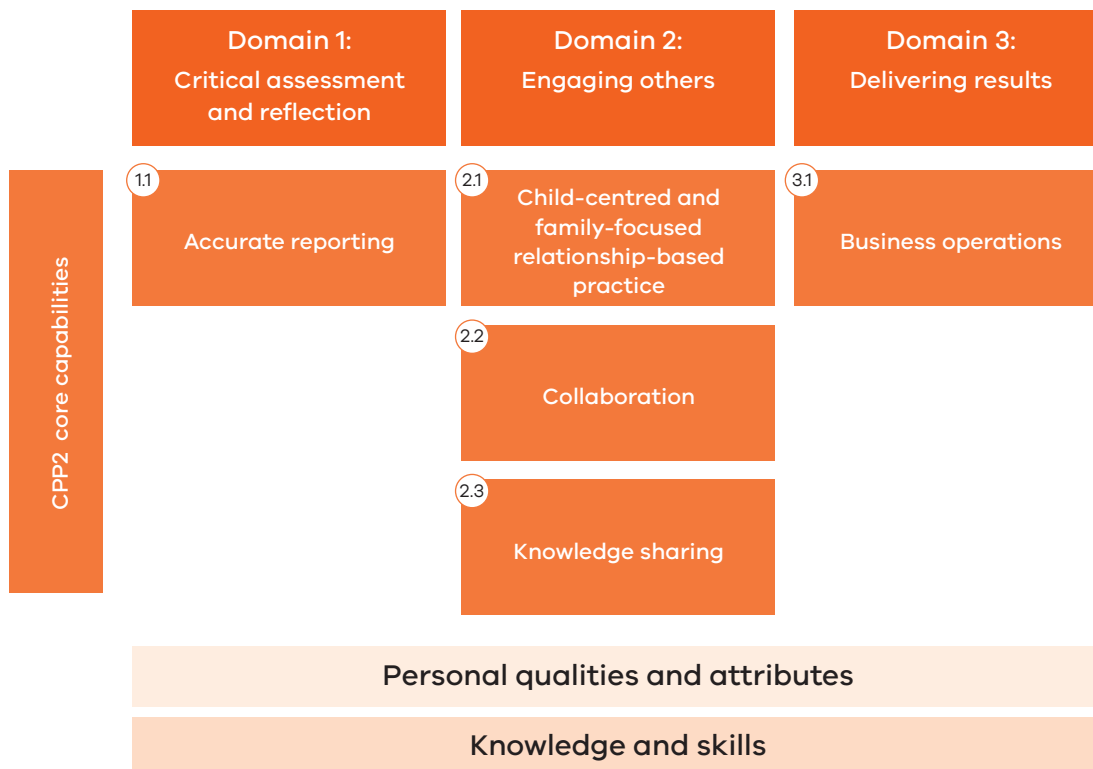
Capability	Description
3.3 Business operations	Effectively uses business technology, systems, procedures and financial and political nous to achieve the best outcomes for clients.
3.4 Evaluating and delivering program improvements	Works with colleagues and key stakeholder to evaluate programs, identify opportunities, develop solutions and identify and overcome barriers to continuously improve program outcomes.
3.5 Packaging of support	Is able to effectively plan for the purchasing of services, managing budgets and allocating finances to achieve the best outcomes.

Domain 4: Leading and inspiring

Capability	Description
4.2 Collective leadership	Demonstrates how to team with colleagues in order to provide staff with a deeper meaning and value, as well as a strong leadership team.
4.3 Developing others	Coaches, guides and shares knowledge with colleagues to encourage learning and reflection.
4.4 System leadership	Drives relationships and effective working within the department and across other systems to create a shared purpose, to improve standards and to challenge the status quo.

Capability framework for CPP2

Figure 10: Capability framework for CPP2



Core capabilities

Domain 1: Critical assessment and reflection

Capability	Description
1.1 Accurate reporting	Maintains accurate and complete records of all work activities in accordance with legislative, departmental, information security and privacy policies.

Domain 2: Engaging others

Capability	Description
2.1 Child-centred and family-focused relationship-based practice	Facilitates supervision, access visits and family contact sessions in line with best practice principles and legislative requirements.
2.2 Collaboration	Engages well with children and their families, other practitioners and teams, agencies, services and the community. Establishes and maintains strong relationships with service providers and case managers.
2.3 Knowledge sharing	Records case notes on family observations and assessments of contact sessions and ensures they are shared with the necessary team members and stakeholders.

Domain 3: Delivering results

Capability	Description
3.1 Business operations	Records information using the Client Relationship Information System. Uses IT and web-based applications as required, and in accordance with departmental guidelines and privacy principles.

Personal qualities and attributes

Victorian public sector job descriptions, including child protection practitioner job descriptions, use a selection of personal qualities to help attract and recruit the candidates most suited to the profession.

The capability framework is underpinned by the six priority personal qualities and attributes required in child protection that can be developed throughout an individual child protection career. This list is not exhaustive, but instead represents the personal qualities and attributes that are considered important to child protection practice. These personal qualities and attributes should be incorporated in child protection position descriptions and developed through targeted learning and support.

Adaptable	Is flexible and adaptable to change and accepts and integrates new information as a matter of course.
Decisive	Makes rational and sound decisions based on consideration of the facts and alternatives.
Emotionally regulated	Regulates emotions in the face of distressing and alarming circumstances to ensure the best outcomes are achieved for clients.
Resilient	Responds thoughtfully and reflectively to distressing information, appropriately seeks guidance and support and communicates effectively with others to undertake child-centred work in the face of challenging situations.
Open and curious	Adopts an open and curious approach to child protection work.
Takes initiative	Works proactively in creating solutions and solving problems.

Knowledge and skills

Victorian public sector job descriptions, including child protection practitioner job descriptions, use a number of knowledge and skills to describe the attributes needed by the individuals doing the job.

This list of 10 knowledge and skill components is not exhaustive, but instead represents the knowledge and skills that have been identified as critical to child protection practice. These knowledge and skills should form the basis knowledge and skill requirements in child protection position descriptions and be supported by learning and development.

Understands child development	Identifies normal developmental stages within a child's life and understands attachment and trauma theories as they relate to child protection practice.
Identifies risks to children	Identifies factors that place a child at risk of abuse or neglect and articulates this risk verbally and in writing to a range of stakeholders including parents, children and other professionals.
Understands the legislative and statutory framework	Understands and embeds the Child, Youth and Families Act in practice, including the core responsibilities and principles of the Act.
Works confidently with families affected by drug or alcohol abuse	Demonstrates an understanding of the legislative, policy and practice requirements relating to families affected by drug or alcohol abuse, and is able to apply these skills in practice.
Works confidently with families affected by family violence	Demonstrates an understanding of the legislative, policy and practice requirements relating to family violence, and is able to apply these skills in practice.
Works confidently with Aboriginal children and families	Demonstrates an understanding of the legislative, policy and practice requirements relating to Aboriginal children, families and communities, and the ability to apply case practice and decision making.
Operates effectively in a fast-paced and changing environment	Routinely prioritises workload and activities, negotiates and suggests alternative (workable) approaches/strategies, summarises actions taken and future tasks, and regularly checks in with key stakeholders to deliver high-quality outcomes for children and families.
Confidently prepares for court	Demonstrates competence as a protective intervener in all jurisdictions and functions (courts, tribunals, oversight bodies, inquiries, interstate and interdivisional counterparts). Carefully considers consequences for potential courses of action to achieve safety for children. Consults appropriately with supervisors, legal practitioners, etc. Uses an evidence-informed, methodical approach to preparing for, presenting at and initiating proceedings.
Communicates risk and risk-related concepts verbally	Confidently conveys relevant ideas, information and assessments in a clear and articulate way. Understands and meets the needs of target audiences (delivers the right information to the right people at the right time). Welcomes alternative views. Sees things from others' points of view and confirms understanding.
Writes professionally and convincingly	Prepares complex briefs, letters, emails and reports using clear, concise and grammatically correct language. Edits written communications to ensure they contain the information necessary to achieve their purpose and meet audience needs. Ensures appropriate style and formats are used.

Applying the capability framework

Child protection practitioners and managers

The capability framework will help child protection practitioners and managers provide Victorian children with the best services and care possible.

Application of the capability framework for child protection practitioners

For child protection practitioners, the framework can provide:

- a guide to the capabilities required for effective child protection practice
- a guide to the six core personal attributes that assist child protection practitioners in their day-to-day job (these core personal attributes are generally developed over time as child protection practitioners continue to gain experience in the profession and develop their professional career)
- information on any capability gap areas they may have, and therefore highlight any capabilities that may need to be further developed
- a focus for discussions with managers about learning, development and career needs
- consistent information on the requirements of a role when applying for a position.

Application of the capability framework for child protection managers

For child protection practitioners, the framework:

- defines the capabilities required of staff in each classification
- assists in outlining the selection criteria at each classification
- assists managers in selecting the right people for each role
- targets the development needs of staff throughout the year, and particularly during their performance development discussions
- assists in identifying and managing performance issues
- strengthens engagement of staff with their roles, helping to improve retention
- assists succession planning by helping to identify staff who demonstrate potential.

Departmental and external use of the framework

The capability framework will inform initiatives both within the department and in the education and training sector.

Application of the capability framework for the department

For the department, the framework can assist to:

- identify the capabilities required for the current and future workforce
- align learning and development programs to the capabilities required to achieve the department's business plan
- identify changing priorities and gaps in learning and development programs
- establish a clear basis for workforce and succession planning
- ensure applicants for positions in child protection clearly understand the capabilities required for positions they apply for
- improve selection criteria and merit selection processes
- ensure consistency across roles
- ensure the progression performance and development program better supports individuals and organisational performance by focusing on capability
- develop a clearer understanding of career progression.

Application of the capability framework in the education and training sector

For external providers, the framework can assist to align:

- curriculum design and development for relevant higher education and similar welfare and behavioural related degrees
- curriculum design and development for relevant community services courses delivered in the vocational education and training sector
- training, research and evaluation of learning and development activities provided by external providers for the child protection workforce.

Integration with other public sector capability frameworks

The capability framework is not designed to be a stand-alone framework, and child protection practitioners will also use other VPS capability frameworks to help develop and progress their professional careers.

The *Child protection capability framework* integrates with the following VPS capability frameworks. Child protection practitioners should consult these capability frameworks to understand a wider range of capabilities, skills, knowledge, personal attributes and mindsets required to work in the VPS.

Victorian Leadership Academy – Leadership framework

The Victorian Leadership Academy (VLA) was established in 2016 to help develop high-performing, diverse and collaborative leaders who deliver high-quality services and outcomes for our community.

The VLA aims to equip VPS leaders with the required skills and capabilities to operate in an increasingly complex and changeable environment, and to deliver on the government's priorities for Victoria.



Victorian Public Sector Commission – Capability dictionary

The Victorian Public Sector Commission (VPSC) has developed a capability dictionary that outlines the capabilities, personal qualities, mindsets, contextual knowledge, practical knowledge and skills that VPS employees need to work effectively.

The VPSC has built an interactive capability dictionary online, which VPS employees can use to structure their own personal learning and development goals.



Department of Health and Human Services – People management capability set

The *People management capability set* was developed to provide a clear description of the responsibilities, behaviours and capabilities required of departmental managers. It aims to help managers understand the full scope of their people management role, and initially to provide a framework under which people management development can be delivered.



Appendix 3: Child protection psychological support program

Our vision

The mental health and wellbeing of our child protection practitioners is enhanced, protected and maintained in a supportive environment to ensure ongoing quality service delivery to the community while keeping our people psychologically safe.

What is a mentally healthy workplace?

A mentally healthy workplace is one that actively minimises risks to mental health, promotes positive mental health and wellbeing, is free of stigma and discrimination and supports the recovery of workers with mental health conditions, for the benefit of the individual, organisation and community.¹⁵

About the psychological support program

A critical and all-encompassing component of the *Child protection workforce strategy* is the health, safety and wellbeing of the workforce. To support this we will establish a holistic and proactive health, safety and wellbeing framework that incorporates a psychological support model in the form of a psychological support program (PSP). The PSP will reduce psychological risks associated with child protection work roles and promote the wellbeing of our workforce. It will address mental health stigma, increase resilience at the individual and team levels, and facilitate early help-seeking and access to appropriate care. The psychological health and safety of our workforce is a top priority and is critical to enhancing the existing service to the community while keeping our people psychologically safe.

The PSP is aligned with and supports the department's commitment to implement the *Mental health and wellbeing charter for the Victorian public sector*. The PSP is a contemporary approach to support child protection practitioners throughout their career using a combination of preventative, early intervention and longer term initiatives. This approach is consistent with current practices in place for other frontline community services in Victoria, such as paramedics and police. We recognise that the child protection workforce is exposed to unique psychological health, safety and wellbeing risks. Accordingly, the PSP is customised to suit the specific needs and issues relevant to that workforce.

15. beyondblue 2016, *Good practice framework for mental health and wellbeing in first responder organisations*

About the psychological support program model

Our PSP is structured around the three pillars that underpin the *Mental health and wellbeing charter for the Victorian public sector* (see also Figure 11).

1. Promote

Promoting positive mental health and wellbeing through enhancing people-focused leadership capability and fostering engaging and supportive team environments, and building team resilience.

2. Protect

Protecting against psychological harm through actively addressing risk factors and fostering a 'just culture' – that is, encouraging early health and safety incident reporting to inform strategies to address systemic and any underlying issues.

3. Provide

Providing support to staff with mental health issues and encouraging early help-seeking behaviours to access appropriate care and recovery, and to minimise disruption to wellbeing and work.

Figure 11: Integration of the psychological support program within *child protection workforce strategy* framework



Foundational elements of the psychological support program

A critical success factor for the PSP is building supportive leadership capability. Supportive leadership focuses on building effective work relationships, fostering collegiality, providing support, conducting effective team meetings, monitoring team member wellbeing, ensuring regular access to professional supervision, and creating engaging and supportive team environments. These factors increase team-level resilience and increase staff engagement and retention.¹⁶

Supportive leadership is also associated with increased levels of team member wellbeing.¹⁷ Moreover, supportive leadership styles increase the effectiveness of other psychological support initiatives and, in that sense, are foundational. Supportive leadership also effectively develops a 'secure base' that reduces anxiety and enables team members to engage with the world, consider the internal world of others (empathy) and remain resilient when life is stressful.¹⁸

Ongoing child protection work pressures tend to accentuate 'task-focused' leadership that narrowly emphasise key performance indicators, administration and achieving volume throughputs. All too often professional supervision is diverted to checking caseload allocation and administrative matters. Good-quality professional supervision is a mental health and wellbeing protective factor. A particular downside of task-focused leadership is that it can neglect to proactively address workplace behavioural issues. Hence, excessive task-focused leadership is associated with higher levels of workplace incivility and bullying behaviours.¹⁹

16. Eisenberger R, Stinglhamber F 2011, *Perceived organisational support*, American Psychological Association, Washington DC.

17. Bass, BM 1998, *Transformational leadership: industry, military and educational impact*, Lawrence Erlbaum, London.

Hart PM, Cotton P, Scollay CE 2015, *Flourishing at work: improving wellbeing and engagement*. In: RJ Burke, KM Page, CL Cooper (eds) *Flourishing in life, work and careers*, Edgar Elgar, Cheltenham.

Page KM et al. 2015, The leaders guide to work-related stress. In: RJ Burke, KM Page, CL Cooper (eds), *Flourishing in life, work and careers*, Edgar Elgar, Cheltenham.

18. Biggart L Ward E, Cook L, Schofield G 2017, 'The team as a secure base: promoting resilience and competence in child and family social work', *Children and Youth Services Review* 83: 119–130.

19. Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission 2015, *Independent review into sexual discrimination and sexual harassment in Victoria Police*, VEOHRC.

Victoria Police Mental Health Review 2016, *An independent review into the mental health and wellbeing of Victoria Police employees*, The State of Victoria: Victoria Police, Melbourne.

- We will support and develop our leaders to build people-focused leadership capability and foster supportive and engaging team environments, as well as undertake regular informal 'wellbeing check-ins' with team members. We will provide relevant resource materials and facilitate pathways to more in-depth wellbeing checks where there are any concerns.
- We will achieve this by progressively accentuating a 'learning element' in our culture and by introducing new modes of learning across all levels of leadership, including accentuating innovative e-learning modules. We will also provide coaching support for individual leaders.
- To help develop resilient teams we will also introduce at least twice-yearly 'group wellbeing checks' (conducted in a group format). These sessions will be conducted by senior child protection workers or suitably skilled Employee Assistance Program (EAP) providers. The group format helps to foster collegial support, increase team connectedness and provide a forum for sharing problem-solving and coping strategies.
- As a necessary condition for the effectiveness of other PSP initiatives, these leadership initiatives will begin in early 2018 and be ongoing. We will shift our culture to emphasise ongoing learning, promote the health and safety of child protection workers and build workplace protective factors.
- Success will be measured by a demonstrated leadership culture shift year on year. Success will be monitored via feedback sought from child protection workers and longitudinal changes in various survey indicators.

Reducing mental health stigma is the second key foundational element for the success of the PSP. Improving mental health literacy and reducing stigma increases engagement with other support initiatives such as the EAP and encourages other forms of early help-seeking. A nuance in the child protection workforce is what is often referred to as 'self-stigma' – that is, 'a sense of shame that I should need help' or that 'I will be letting down the team'.

- We will reduce mental health stigma by assisting our leaders to role-model appropriate supportive behaviours and promote wellbeing as a critical component in the way we operate, provide mental health literacy training and introduce on-site access to the EAP in each division on a monthly basis. This has been trialled and found to increase access to the EAP.
- Providers will also offer 'toolbox talks' on relevant topics to local team members to further increase mental health literacy and promote wellbeing.
- Success will be monitored via reviewing quarterly EAP statistical data and adding questions to existing surveys on stigma and willingness to seek help.

Psychological support program model on a page

The three pillars of the PSP (promote/protect/provide) will guide the actions and initiatives to support child protection practitioners using a combination of preventative, early intervention and longer term initiatives.

Leadership

- Enhance people manager capabilities/skill set
- Wellbeing check-ins/supervision
- Build a supportive team environment
- People-focused leadership
- Promote early help-seeking

Support

- Apps (wellbeing/emoji check-in)
- e-mental health/treatment options
- Peer support
- Building team resilience
- EAP onsite assistance/coaching
- Toolbox talks

Systems

- Workload management
- Health, safety and wellbeing management system alignment
- Incident reporting and response

Training/learning

- Self-care content
- Cultural safety refresher
- Ongoing learning in practice

Psychological support program action plan

1. Promote

Promoting positive mental health and wellbeing through enhancing people-focused leadership capability and fostering engaging and supportive team environments, and building team resilience.

What we will do	Baseline	Indicators	Outcomes
1.1 Implement priority foundational leadership initiatives. 1.2 Review and update self-care and resilience training content and resources. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Individual resilience training will be regularly available. The self-care content in all programs, including Beginning Practice, will be reviewed and updated to ensure consistency with contemporary evidence-based practice. EAP providers will offer sessions on enhancing personal resilience. 	Participant feedback on existing programs Review of quarterly EAP reports	Take-up as indicated by Emoji and Pulse surveys Attendance levels	Appropriate self-care viewed as part of business-as-usual child protection operational practices Increased levels of personal resilience Reduced risk for the onset of mental health issues

2. Protect

Protecting mental health and wellbeing by reducing work-related risk factors (such as job design, workload management; policy and procedures to prevent and address workplace bullying).²⁰

What we will do	Baseline	Indicators	Outcomes
2.1 Develop and embed a 'just culture' within child protection. Encourage and increase occupational health and safety incident early reporting. Develop a 'just culture' framework that defines the positive behaviours, reporting requirements, accountabilities and actions that will promote a continuous improvement culture.	Current incident reporting data	Psychological health and safety incident reporting data Reporting of bullying behaviours Worksafe psychological injury claim data	Our workforce experiencing increased mental health protective factors including a reduction in the incidence of workplace behavioural issues that will help to buffer them against the onset of mental health issues

²⁰. Definition for 'Protect From Mental Injury & Illness' in the *Mental health and wellbeing charter for the Victorian public sector*.

What we will do	Baseline	Indicators	Outcomes
<p>2.2 Strengthen, educate and embed clear health, safety and wellbeing requirements and accountability controls for the child protection workforce.</p> <p>Align the departmental health, safety and wellbeing management system to the child protection workforce by identifying the physical and psychological health and safety risks particular to child protection.</p> <p>Identify appropriate prevention and support mechanisms.</p> <p>Educate the child protection workforce about the department's health and safety accountability framework.</p> <p>Ensure all serious incidents and near-misses are monitored, reported and investigated within the terms of the just culture framework.</p> <p>Staff and leader training will promote civility in all work relationships and a sense of fairness that all staff will be empowered to promote.</p> <p>Increase capability of leaders to develop more engaging and supportive team environments through supporting and training leaders to focus on the 'team levers' that increase team engagement and support.</p> <p>Promote and encourage self-reporting and general incident reporting, and reward instances where this occurs.</p> <p>Conduct six-monthly 'team wellbeing check-in meetings' to help promote a 'looking out for one another' culture, collegiality and team connectedness through sharing challenges, problem-solving strategies and personal strategies 'for staying on top of your game'.</p> <p>Introduce initiatives to reduce mental health stigma and encourage early help-seeking including on-site EAP service sessions with the same provider on a fortnightly to monthly basis. The provider will help reduce stigma and promote the importance of early help-seeking by offering occasional talks on relevant topics such as 'early warning signs', 'improving sleep' and 'compassion fatigue'.</p>	<p>Survey-based feedback such as via the People Matters survey and Emoji Work issues and Wellbeing App survey</p>	<p>OH&S incident reporting data</p> <p>Emoji work issues survey data</p> <p>People Matters survey data</p> <p>Leadership and mental health and wellbeing program participation</p> <p>Levels of participation in initiatives to reduce mental health stigma and encourage early help-seeking</p>	<p>Psychological health and safety is viewed as an integral element of day-to-day operational practice</p> <p>Systems of work are adjusted and updated in response to incident reporting data</p> <p>Increased understanding and decreased stigma attached to mental health across all levels of the organisation</p> <p>Mental health and wellbeing is a workplace priority</p>

What we will do	Baseline	Indicators	Outcomes
<p>2.3 Embed a psychological support model tailored to the child protection workforce.</p> <p>Reinforce the role of professional supervision as a mental health protective factor by ensuring the existing supervision policy is consistently implemented and develop relevant accountabilities to support this. The reasonable expectation of access to regular professional supervision will be clearly communicated to staff.</p> <p>Develop a communication plan that focuses on psychological support and includes: key health and safety messaging for leaders, managers and staff; appropriate channels of communication including the use of the child protection mobile app; and information for child protection practitioners about accessing mental, physical, social and emotional wellbeing supports.</p> <p>Strengthen the processes for supporting leaders and managers to attend the needs and wellbeing of their staff following critical or traumatic incidents.</p>	<p>Current regular access to professional supervision</p> <p>Employee support data on critical or traumatic incident responses</p>	<p>Practitioner feedback regarding access to regular supervision</p> <p>Reviews of incident report data</p>	<p>Workplace mental health protective factors are created</p> <p>Early help-seeking behaviour is increased</p> <p>Rates of mental health issues and psychological injury are reduced</p> <p>There is a consistent incident response driven by a sector-wide triage approach</p>

What we will do	Baseline	Indicators	Outcomes
<p>2.4 Embed and promote early intervention and self-care mechanisms from the psychological support model within child protection.</p> <p>Develop a comprehensive e-mental health offering including a child protection mobile phone app that includes relevant mental health and wellbeing content and prompts, mood trackers, and information on resources including key e-mental health sites.</p> <p>Quarterly to six-monthly Work Issue and Wellbeing Emoji check-ins via the child protection mobile phone app will expand to all divisions to become part of business as usual. Aggregate results will be shared with all staff at divisional meetings, as well as the management response and action plan to address identified issues. Outcomes from previous check-ins will also be reviewed at these meetings.</p> <p>Child protection workers will collectively spend at least one half day each week in the office, preferably around the middle of the week. This protective measure is designed to provide a break from the regular family and child face-to-face exposure that workers undertake and to create opportunities for team-based activities that form part of the child protection PSP.</p> <p>Increase the availability of trained peer supporters in all child protection workplaces.</p>	<p>New initiative – baseline to be determined</p> <p>Implementation data</p> <p>New initiative – baseline to be determined</p>	<p>Indicators in the People Matters survey</p> <p>Monitoring the time spent each week in the office</p> <p>Peer support utilisation report data</p>	<p>Staff access to relevant care and support resources is increased</p> <p>Staff engagement is increased</p> <p>Workplace mental health protective factors are created</p> <p>Increased early intervention and a reduction in the incidence of mental health issues</p>

What we will do	Baseline	Indicators	Outcomes
<p>2.5 Monitor and support compliance with timesheet, overtime, TIL and leave reporting controls.</p> <p>Embed existing timesheet, overtime, TIL and leave reporting mechanisms to achieve compliance through: commencement of to staff and managers; refresher training; reinforcement of managers' expectations; and improved use of data and analysis to assess the performance of the current systems and controls.</p> <p>Monitor and review compliance with controls and mechanisms to ensure they support practitioners to achieve optimal work-life balance.</p>	<p>Current compliance data</p>	<p>Audits of compliance</p>	<p>Reduction of mental health risk</p>
<p>2.6 Incorporate the Aboriginal support plan into the psychological support model.</p> <p>Ensure the psychological support model provides culturally appropriate resources for Aboriginal staff and reflects the broader departmental Aboriginal support plan, ensuring the avenues for cultural support available to Aboriginal staff are effectively and regularly communicated.</p>	<p>New initiative – baseline to be established</p>	<p>Feedback from Aboriginal staff</p>	<p>Increased engagement and job satisfaction</p>
<p>2.7 Implement a cultural safety framework to support Aboriginal culture and inclusion in child protection, strengthening awareness of cultural safety and building cultural capability across all child protection managers and staff consistently across the sector.</p>	<p>New initiative – baseline to be established</p>	<p>Feedback from Aboriginal staff</p>	<p>Increased engagement and job satisfaction</p>

What we will do	Baseline	Indicators	Outcomes
<p>2.8 Link Aboriginal practitioners with the Aboriginal Staff Support Network.</p> <p>Emphasise morale, engagement, cultural health, safety and the overall wellbeing of all Aboriginal child protection staff.</p> <p>Initiate Yarning Circles for Aboriginal staff and their supervisors. Facilitated by an Elder or Aboriginal clinician, yarning circles will provide Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander child protection staff with a safe, confidential space to debrief about the work that they do. As the department focuses on increasing the Aboriginal staff across child protection, we will ensure we are providing a culturally safe workplace. Yarning Circles will be used to debrief and provide self-care strategies for our child protection workers facing cultural pressures due to past policies and community expectations. They will also work towards addressing issues of child protection stigma and historical policies.</p>	<p>New initiative – baseline to be determined</p>	<p>Feedback from staff Participation in Yarning Circles</p>	<p>Reduced mental health risk</p>
<p>2.9 Review the Workload Management Monitoring and Review Panels description and operating guidelines.</p> <p>Review the guidelines to assess how the operation and effectiveness of the panels can be improved and made more consistent to provide the intended support to divisions and individual managers and staff to manage workload pressures.</p>	<p>New initiative</p>		<p>Psychological health and safety being front and centre in our work and improvement occurring in the management of workload and case allocation – this will contribute towards reducing mental health risk and disruption to work and wellbeing associated with mental health issues</p>

3. Provide

Support for mental health injury or illness through facilitating early access to appropriate care and treatment and promoting recovery and return to work.²¹

What we will do	Baseline	Indicators	Outcomes
<p>3.1 Review and update post-incident support services to ensure consistency with current evidence-based practice.</p> <p>Provide regular on-site EAP.</p> <p>Update the current incident support services and implement a consistent approach to triaging incidents and response.</p> <p>Create the expectation that local leaders will have a post-incident presence as a people leader and not as quasi-counsellors (consistent with contemporary psychological first aid practice).</p> <p>Fund access to Indigenous counsellors for Aboriginal staff.</p> <p>Support access to specialist care using a model similar to the Victoria Police specialist provider network.</p> <p>Implement exit mental health screening for staff leaving child protection work to help identify any mental health treatment needs.</p>	<p>New initiatives – baselines to be established</p>	<p>EAP access data</p> <p>Staff post-incident exposure feedback on workplace support</p> <p>Number of screenings conducted with exiting staff</p>	<p>Increased early help-seeking and access to appropriate services</p> <p>Reduced disruption to individual wellbeing and work (such as time off work) due to mental health issues</p> <p>Improved mental health outcomes for exiting staff</p>

21. Based on the definition for 'Addressing Mental Injury & Illness' in the *Mental health and wellbeing charter for the Victorian public sector*.

What we will do	Baseline	Indicators	Outcomes
<p>3.2 Undertake a statewide audit of safety and security controls at each workplace.</p> <p>Develop a remediation plan (using whole-of-government resources to mitigate occupational violence and aggression risk through the built environment including a self-assessment checklist, public/waiting area design guidelines and a resource guide for architects and designers around mitigating occupational violence and aggression through the built environment) to rectify risks and gaps identified in the audit.</p> <p>Implement clear requirements and processes for reporting defects and a regular audit cycle to review and maintain safety and security controls.</p>	<p>New initiative – baseline to be determined</p>		<p>Improved health and safety outcomes</p>
<p>3.3 Review and improve how information about child protection practitioner mental health data is collected and managed.</p> <p>Ensure compliance with the reporting measures and processes specified in the <i>Mental health and wellbeing charter for the Victorian public sector</i>, which underpins the child protection PSP.</p>	<p>New initiative – baseline to be determined</p>	<p>Audit of compliance</p>	<p>Improved workplace management of mental health issues</p>
<p>3.4 Review and update tip sheets and related support resources on mental health and wellbeing topics.</p>			<p>More consistent and appropriately targeted post-incident responses and increased early help-seeking behaviour by staff, accessing appropriate care as early as is practically possible. This will also be expected to reduce the risk of cumulative traumatic stress responses</p>

References and further reading

Title	Author
<i>Strategic plan 2017–2018</i>	Department of Health and Human Services
<i>Roadmap to Reform</i>	Department of Health and Human Services
<i>People strategy 2020</i>	Department of Health and Human Services
<i>National framework for protecting Australia's children 2009–2020</i>	Department of Social Services
<i>Royal Commission into Family Violence Report</i>	Royal Commission into Family Violence
<i>Senate Inquiry into Out-of-Home Care</i>	Community Affairs References Committee
<i>Royal Commission to Investigate Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse</i>	Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse
<i>Canadian High Fidelity Wraparound Model</i>	Wrap Canada
<i>UK Resourceful Leader Child Practitioners</i>	National College of Leadership Schools and Children's Services
<i>UK Munro Review of Child Protection</i>	Department for Education, UK
<i>A better way to protect all children</i>	UNICEF
<i>Competence framework for child and adolescent mental health services</i>	NHS Education for Scotland
<i>Children's workforce: professional capabilities framework</i>	Families First – North East Lincolnshire
<i>National analysis of trends in statutory child protection</i>	Institute of Child Protection Studies, Australian Catholic University
<i>2020 child and young people's workforce strategy</i>	Department of Children, Schools and Families, UK
<i>Every child matters: children's workforce strategy</i>	Department for Education and Skills, UK
<i>Children's workforce: workforce development</i>	Ministry of Social Development, New Zealand
<i>Resourceful leadership: How directors of children's services improve outcomes for children</i>	National College for Leadership of Schools and Children's Services
<i>Children's social care workforce strategy 2014–2017</i>	Slough Borough Council
<i>Australian Association of Social Workers: practice standards</i>	Australian Association of Social Workers
<i>Family violence, sexual violence and violence within Whanau: workforce capability framework</i>	Ministry of Social Development, New Zealand





