



Specialist Homelessness Sector Workforce Development Strategy

2020–2025

Acknowledgements

Thank you to the many people who contributed their ideas and expertise to the development of this strategy. We acknowledge all those who participated in the consultation processes and would particularly like to acknowledge the contributions of Specialist Homelessness Sector leaders and the following groups supporting the implementation of the [*Specialist Homelessness Sector Transition Plan \(2018-2022\)*](#):

- Executive Advisory Group
- Organisational Capacity and Readiness Working Group
- Building Workforce Capacity and Readiness Working Group.

CEO's foreword

The diversity of the Specialist Homelessness Sector (SHS) is one of its strengths. The SHS includes large and complex organisations involved in all aspects of community services delivery across the state and beyond. It also includes small, local organisations with a sole focus on homelessness. It is vital that every SHS organisation has the staff, sufficient funding and infrastructure to support those staff, to provide high-quality and effective services to people who are or who have been without a home.

The Council to Homeless Persons has always worked to support the growth, capability and capacity of our sector's workforce. People without secure housing need skilled and high-performing workers to assist them to navigate the SHS and human services systems and to give them every chance of the best outcomes. The *Specialist Homelessness Sector Workforce Development Strategy 2020–2025* provides a path for the SHS to travel to attract and retain vibrant and talented people in our sector.

The strategy is a key goal of the *Specialist Homelessness Sector Transition Plan (2018–2022)*. It will support a suite of goals, that when enacted collectively will build on our sector's capacity.

As our sector engages in implementing this strategy, we will require engagement with those with lived experience of being without a home, with governments, the broader human services sector and education industries and — importantly — the SHS's clients. We will need to continue to work together collaboratively and to build on our strong and effective partnerships.

The Council to Homeless Persons looks forward to working with you to strengthen the SHS workforce.



Jenny Smith

CEO

Council to Homeless Persons

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Summary

The Victorian *Specialist Homelessness Sector Workforce Development Strategy 2020–2025* — the *SHS Workforce Development Strategy* — sets out the goals and actions needed to provide the SHS with enough skilled people to work effectively with people who are or who have been without a home.

The SHS workforce

The Victorian Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) funds about 130 SHS organisations to employ some 2,000 effective full-time positions. While there is little current, sector-specific data about the SHS workforce, the Family Safety Victoria [*Census of Workforces that Intersect with Family Violence in 2017*](#) indicated that:

- 73% of the workforce is female
- 19% is aged 55 years or over, and 9% is aged 60 or over
- 30% is aged between 25 and 35
- more than half the workforce has been with their current employer for less than four years
- over 60% have a bachelor's degree or higher qualification
- 41% of workers have full-time, ongoing employment
- 6% have full-time contracts
- more than 50% are employed on a part-time, casual or sessional basis.

Given this profile, consideration should be given to:

- the risk that a significant proportion of the workforce might be expected to leave the sector for retirement or other reasons in the next five years
- retention (the available data on duration of service suggests that turnover is high)
- costs associated with recruiting, selecting, orienting and training new staff
- whether casual work is attractive to prospective employees, although ongoing part-time work might also be considered family-friendly.

Effective workforce planning relies on reliable data, particularly over time, so that trends can be monitored. Reliable data is needed from:

- SHS employers about the numbers of people employed in their organisations, the positions in which people work, pay scales, the length of employment and people's qualifications
- SHS staff about the diversity of their backgrounds, levels of satisfaction with their work, intention to stay in the sector, and what kinds of support would enable them to be more effective.

Workforce challenges and opportunities

The human services industry is projected to grow. The Victorian Council of Social Service's [*10-year Community Services Industry Plan*](#) projected that there will be an increase in demand of more than 19% for community services workers between 2015 and 2022. There will likely be an increase in demand for SHS services in the future and increased competition for skilled community services workers.

Attracting and keeping people in the sector

Recruitment and selection present challenges for many organisations: attracting sufficient candidates with the skills and experience to match job requirements can be difficult. There is a perception that work in the SHS may not have the same appeal as work in some other community services sectors and that SHS work is not well-understood.

Students on field education placements can provide a pipeline of new workers, but supervising these students is time-consuming, and the related compliance processes need streamlining.

People with lived experience of being without a home can bring important expertise to specific roles in the sector.

Smaller organisations can find recruitment activities (such as job design and managing recruitment and selection processes) particularly onerous.

There was feedback in sector consultations that the SHS does not attract staff from other parts of the community sector because it is low-profile and because it pays less than other, better-funded sectors. However, data is not available at present to test these propositions.

Developing capability and improving practice

Welfare and social work courses in the vocational education and training (VET) and higher education sectors generally do not include curriculum that provides sufficient grounding for working in the SHS. Many new graduates require intensive orientation and considerable time in their roles to become effective workers.

Training is the main form of professional development for the sector, and current offerings appear to provide good foundations for newer workers. However, experienced workers want more in-depth professional development and more sophistication in learning modalities.

Mentoring, coaching, shadowing and job rotation schemes could provide opportunities for richer learning, especially for management and leadership development.

A diverse and healthy workforce

The nature of the work in the SHS can lead to stress: staff work with clients with complex/multiple issues, and the lack of affordable housing stock presents considerable challenges. While some organisations have well-developed methods for supporting staff, there are differences in the levels of supervision provided by services and in how that supervision is delivered.

There is a similar paucity of reliable data about the cultural and ethnic composition of the SHS workforce. Participants in consultations for the development of this strategy suggested that most staff have Anglo-Celtic or European backgrounds.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are overrepresented in the SHS’s client population, and more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workers are needed. More diversity — more men, more Asian and African people and more lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer/questioning and asexual (LGBTIQ+) people — in the workforce would mean that staff have better knowledge about, and experience of, the people to whom they provide services.

Representatives of regional services who participated in consultations for the development of this strategy reported that services can struggle to attract skilled workers and to achieve the diversity they would like to have in their workforce.

Human resource management

In addition to recruitment and selection, more-consistent practices to support human resource (HR) functions (such as learning and development planning, performance reviews and succession planning) are needed across the SHS. Regardless of the size of the organisation, this work usually falls to busy managers: they need HR guidance and practical tools to support their HR processes, to save them time and to ensure their workforce is professionally managed and supported.

A vision for the SHS workforce

Victoria has a dynamic and highly skilled SHS workforce, actively engaged in ending homelessness by supporting people to access and maintain safe, secure housing.

Figure 1 shows the underpinnings of the vision statement:

- the principles that guide the sector’s work and the way we support our workforce
- the strategy’s goals.

Figure 1: Principles and goals





Table 1 shows the strategies for each goal to achieve the vision statement. Deliverables for each strategy are listed in the *Action plan* chapter.

Table 1: Goals and strategies

Goal	Strategy
Goal 1: Talented people are attracted to the sector and stay in the sector	Attract new graduates to the SHS and promote the sector as offering careers that make a real difference
	Attract skilled and experienced community sector workers
	Improve the quality of and systems and processes for student work placements
	Strengthen recruitment and selection
	Develop specific roles and an employment pathway for people with lived experience of not having a home
Goal 2: People have the capabilities to work effectively and opportunities to enhance their practice	Support talent retention and succession planning
	Strengthen SHS connections with the VET and higher education sectors
	Strengthen professional development for the sector
	Foster innovative learning models
	Support leadership development

Goal 3: There is a sound knowledge base about our workforce	Profile the workforce
	Measure workforce satisfaction
	Foster workforce research and collaboration
Goal 4: Our workforce is connected, healthy, diverse and thriving	Foster diversity and increase the numbers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and culturally and linguistically diverse people working in the sector
	Support supervision practice
	Promote person-centred practice
	Support regional services' workforce development
	Support services to strengthen the workforce
Goal 5: There is an established architecture for workforce development	Establish an SHS HR network
	Embed the <i>SHS Workforce Capability Framework</i>

[What benefits will the SHS Workforce Development Strategy deliver?](#)

Each strategy has actions and deliverables for the next five years to help achieve the SHS workforce vision statement.

The *SHS Workforce Development Strategy* intends to provide a range of benefits for:

- people who are or who have been without a home: there will be access to skilled and responsive workers across the state
- individual workers: there will be better options for training, skill development and career pathways and better-articulated frameworks to guide practice
- organisations: there will be more candidates and more diversity in applicants for advertised positions; better support for attracting and retaining workers and developing the capability of leaders; and tools to support HR practice
- the SHS: it will have a higher profile, more research and educational partnerships, a sound knowledge base about the workforce and more connectedness around workforce issues.

1. Background

The *SHS Workforce Development Strategy* identifies the work to be done over the next five years to enable Victoria’s SHS to have enough people with the right skill sets to support people who are or who have been without a home to access and maintain secure housing.

Ultimately, the SHS aims to have a workforce for a ‘future homelessness service system through which homelessness is a rare, brief and one-time experience’¹.

[Specialist Homelessness Sector Transition Plan \(2018-2022\)](#)

Delivering a workforce development strategy is a goal of the [Specialist Homelessness Sector Transition Plan \(2018-2022\)](#) — the *SHS Transition Plan*. The plan:

- was developed through an extensive consultation process
- leverages the good practice occurring across the SHS and addresses the challenges identified in a strategic, systematic way
- aims to help SHS organisations and the SHS workforce to build on their strengths, to deliver a contemporary suite of services required to meet growing demand and to achieve effective outcomes
- recognises the important role played collectively by governments, allied sectors and the broader community in ending homelessness.

Table 2 shows the plan’s fifteen goals.

Table 2: *SHS Transition Plan* goals

High-level goals: Organisational and industry readiness

1. Embed person-centred models of practice
2. Build sector capacity in relation to outcomes
3. Promote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander self-determination
4. Build service capacity to deliver the contemporary suite of services to gain and sustain housing
5. Develop a consumer participation strategy
6. Strengthen consumer service pathways
7. Improve local service coordination
8. Build data provision and sharing protocols
9. Make effective use of new technologies
10. Develop SHS research priorities and complete research

¹ [Specialist Homelessness Sector Transition Plan \(2018-2022\)](#) p. 25 and Gaetz S, Gulliver T and Richter R (2014). *The state of homelessness in Canada*. The Homeless Hub Press, Toronto.

High-level goals - Workforce capacity building

11. Build a SHS workforce development strategy

12. Develop workforce pathways

13. Develop a SHS workforce capability framework

14. Provide training and development to the SHS

15. Share and use data to inform SHS practice

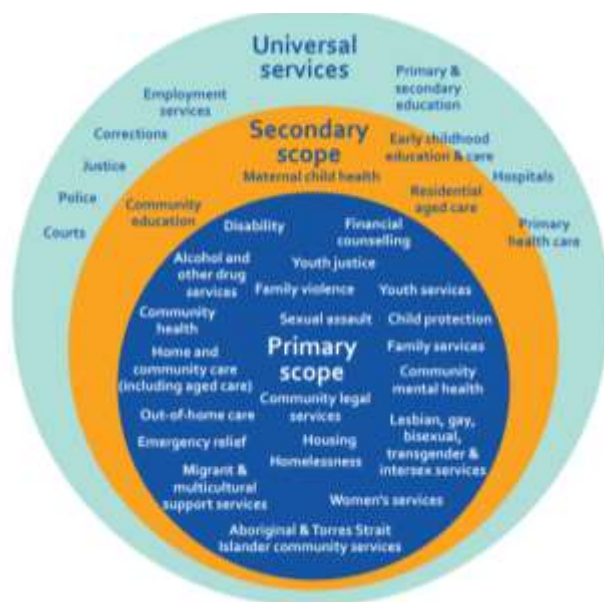
The *Build a SHS workforce development strategy*, *Develop workforce pathways* and *Develop a SHS workforce capability framework* goals are all interrelated, with the latter two being important elements of any workforce development strategy.

The *Develop a SHS workforce capability framework* goal has been completed, with the [SHS Workforce Capability Framework](#) delivered to the sector in June 2019. The framework provides a coherent, sequenced hierarchy of the skills and behaviours that are demonstrated through effective SHS practice. It supports a range of HR functions (such as conducting learning needs analyses, performance reviews and recruitment and selection). It is also available to support SHS workers to self-assess, to review skills gaps and to plan for career progression.

This *SHS Workforce Development Strategy* will support the achievement of the goals related to building workforce capacity, and it will provide a framework to tackle the workforce-related challenges the SHS currently faces.

Community services industry planning

Figure 2: Community services industry in Victoria



The [10-Year Community Services Industry Plan](#) was developed in 2018 as a joint initiative of DHHS, the Victorian Council of Social Service and the Human Services and Health Partnership Implementation Committee. It recognises the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead for the broader community services industry.

The plan recognises the interactions and layers within the sector and uses a model of 'primary scope', 'secondary scope' and 'universal services'. The SHS is located within the primary scope of the community services industry.

Figure 2 (from the plan's [discussion paper](#)) illustrates the industry context of

the SHS workforce. SHS workers interact regularly with other community sectors that offer alternative prospects for their employment.

Considerations about career prospects, remuneration, job design and stress associated with work roles will influence whether workers choose to enter and stay in the SHS.

The plan provides a shared platform for governments and community services to articulate and respond to opportunities and challenges facing the industry over the longer term.

The second theme of the plan is *Strengthening the capacity of the community services industry* including *Ensuring we have the workforce of the future* and *Strengthening governance, leadership and organisations.*

The *SHS Transition Plan* and the goal to develop this *SHS Workforce Development Strategy*

strengthen the capacity of the SHS, and in so doing contribute to achieving the objectives of the *10-Year Community Services Industry Plan*.

A FRONTLINE WORKER SAYS ...

'Workers can become disenfranchised doing the same role with limited opportunities for growth. And the lack of housing stock and other exit solutions impact on staff morale, particularly those in front-line, crisis-type roles such as IAP. Job rotation might provide opportunities for workers to develop new skills, stay positive and achieve greater job satisfaction.'

Developing the *SHS Workforce Development Strategy*

The Building a SHS Workforce Development Strategy Project had four phases: research leading to the development of a discussion paper, consultation on the discussion paper and the development of a draft strategy, validation of the draft and finalisation of the strategy.

The research phase provided an opportunity to review existing data and literature about the SHS workforce and HR management issues. The discussion paper that followed presented questions about the sector's workforce priorities and areas to address.

Following the response to this paper, draft goals and actions were validated through consultation. In addition to the feedback to the discussion paper, input was provided through:

- the SHS Transition Plan's Executive Advisory Group, Organisational Capacity and Readiness Working Group and Building Workforce Capacity and Readiness Working Group
- sector consultation sessions held in the Melbourne Central Business District, which included HR managers and learning and development managers
- sector consultations in north-west metropolitan Melbourne, south-east metropolitan Melbourne, and around Victoria.

COVID-19 pandemic restrictions necessitated different approaches to facilitating engagement and seeking feedback from the sector.

The validation phase enabled the sector to see the draft strategy with the changes that had been made following consultation and to check that it provides a practical plan to strengthen the workforce.

2. The SHS context

The SHS has a proud history of supporting Victorians at risk of being, now are or have been without a home. The sector is recognised as a vital part of the safety net for people in our community experiencing the greatest disadvantage. Homelessness services in Victoria work to provide:

- access to safe, secure and affordable housing
- the support needed to help people overcome the barriers to keeping their homes
- connections to the physical, personal and community resources that foster a sense of belonging².

Safe and secure housing is fundamental to health and wellbeing. It is foundational to people's capacity to participate in work and community activities, and it underpins the care of dependent children.

From the advent of the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program in 1985, the SHS has been funded to provide crisis and transitional housing and support responses. National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness funding from 2009 has provided the opportunity for parts of the SHS to trial and demonstrate the effectiveness of the range of contemporary best practice including housing first, rapid rehousing and early intervention to prevent tenancy loss.

The capacity to implement contemporary service models has been augmented by Victorian Government investments. The SHS is made up of some 131 organisations, and the Council to Homeless Persons (CHP) estimates that DHHS funds about 2,000 effective full-time positions³.

The operating environment



All industries are affected by changing conditions: political factors, economic fluctuations, social change, technology and government policy are some of the influences on homelessness and the service system that supports people who are or who have been without a home.

Social and economic factors currently affecting the SHS include:

- Victoria's population is growing and ageing, which increases the demand for human services
- more people are living alone and in smaller family groups, which increases the demand for dwellings
- wages for lower-paid jobs have not kept pace with the wages of the professional workforce, so people on lower salaries and unemployed people pay proportionately more for their housing

² Council to Homeless Persons (2016). [Council to Homeless Persons – Productivity Commission Reforms to Human Services Issues Paper](#).

³ Department of Health and Human Services (2018). [Victoria's homelessness and rough sleeping action plan](#).

- housing costs have increased steeply, and consequently, rental costs have increased.

The shortage of affordable rental housing, in turn, places pressure on social housing waiting lists⁴. As a result of these combined factors, there are increasing numbers of people seeking housing and support.

Government policy context

Victoria's SHS operates largely in a policy vacuum. In 2010, DHHS released [A Better Place: Victorian Homelessness 2020 Strategy](#). The strategy includes an action plan which refers to various workforce issues including:

- the need for additional professional development resources and training opportunities to align workforce skills with the strategy's directions
- the importance of relationships with the higher education sector
- the challenges of recruitment and retention.

The most-recent formal policy underpinning Victoria's delivery of SHS services is *Victoria's homelessness and rough sleeping action plan*. The plan identifies as a future direction, 'supporting the development of a workforce transition strategy to ensure staff and agencies are empowered with knowledge and support'.⁵

Homelessness in Victoria

On any given night, nearly 25,000 Victorians experience homelessness, including over 1,100 people sleeping rough — without any form of shelter or accommodation⁶. Over 44% of presentations to homeless services are the result of family violence, and over one-third of the homeless population are people under 25. Nearly one in five people at a homelessness service will be a child under 15.⁷

Another 143,000 Victorians are experiencing housing stress, which is spending more than 30% of their low household income on housing⁸. In June 2020, there were 51,891 households on the social housing waiting list⁹.

⁴ Department of Human Services (2012). Cited in Victorian Council of Social Services (2017). [Community Services Industry Plan Discussion Paper](#) p. 10.

⁵ Department of Health and Human Services (2018). [Victoria's homelessness and rough sleeping action plan](#) p. 28.

⁶ Australian Bureau of Statistics (2016). [Census of Population and Housing: Estimating homelessness, 2016](#).

⁷ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2019). [Specialist homelessness services annual report 2018-19](#) data tables.

⁸ Australian Bureau of Statistics (2017). [Housing Occupancy and Costs 2015-16](#), data cube: additional tables – low income rental households, Cat No. 4130, 2017.

⁹ Victorian Housing Register and transfer list by local area, March 2020.

These numbers have been steadily growing, with an average increase of 3% in demand for homelessness support services each year for the past five years¹⁰.

Who presents to homelessness services?

In 2018—19, the three most-reported reasons for people seeking assistance from homelessness services in Victoria were family (domestic) violence (44%), financial difficulties (44%) and housing crisis (37%)¹¹.

Some segments of our community present to SHS disproportionately, including:

- young people (10–24-year-olds), who made up almost a quarter of presentations to homelessness support services in 2018–19¹²
- families and children, with over 22,000 children (0–14-year-olds) accompanying their families to homelessness support services in Victoria in 2018–19¹³
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, who comprise 9% of homelessness service presentations while making up only 0.8% of the Victorian population¹⁴.

People aged 55 and older are also significantly more likely to experience homelessness, making up 13% of the Victorian homeless population in the 2016 census, with older women being the fastest-growing group¹⁵.

SHS services responses

Some 113,000 people accessed homelessness services in Victoria in 2018–19, 39% of whom were homeless when they presented to a homelessness service for support¹⁶.

During 2018–19, Victorian homelessness services provided almost 234,000 support periods, including providing 51% of those presenting with some form of accommodation¹⁷. However, there were also on average 105 requests for assistance which went unmet each day¹⁸.

¹⁰ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2019, Specialist homelessness services historical data tables 2011-12 to 2018-19, Australian Government, Canberra.

¹¹ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2019). Specialist homelessness services 2018-19 data tables via [Specialist homelessness services annual report 2018-19](#).

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2019). Specialist homelessness services 2018-19 data tables via [Specialist homelessness services annual report 2018-19](#).

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

3. The SHS workforce

Snapshot

Data about the SHS workforce is scant, but the most-recent data about the approximately 2,000 people employed in SHS services indicates that:

- 73% are female
- 19% are 55 or older, and 9% are 60 or older
- 30% are between 25 and 35
- more than half have been with their current employer for less than four years, suggesting turnover is significant
- over 60% have a bachelor's degree or higher qualification
- 41% of workers have full-time, ongoing employment and 6% have full-time contracts
- more than 50% are employed on a casual or part-time basis: 34% have ongoing, part-time work, 6% are on fixed-term, part-time contracts and 13% are employed on a casual or sessional basis.

We also know that:

- there has been a 3% per annum increase in demand for SHS services for the last five years¹⁹
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples make up 10% of the SHS client population
- about one-third of the homeless population is under 25.

The implications of this include:

- more than 10% of the workforce will probably retire in the next five years, and more will be lost through other forms of attrition; at the same time, demand for services will increase
- recruiting, selecting, orienting and training new staff costs SHS organisations
- the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people working in the sector should increase
- the sector needs people with the skills to work with young people
- staff turnover represents a loss of skills and expertise, to services and the sector.

¹⁹ [SHS Transition Plan](#) p 14.

Work roles

Official documentation indicates the SHS's workforce is funded to provide three key functions:

- initial assessment and planning (IAP), which is triaging people who present for support and providing them with immediate assistance (5% of the workforce)
- support, which is ongoing assistance for people to identify and access housing and other support and resources (90% of the workforce)
- tenancy management, which is property maintenance and rent collection activities (5% of the workforce).

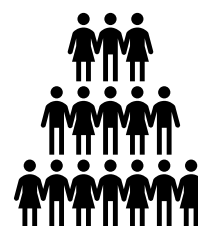
However, official documentation precedes a range of contemporary roles funded through the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness and *Victoria's homelessness and rough sleeping action plan*.

SHS workers routinely support families, parents, children, young people, older people, couples and singles. They support people who have experienced or are experiencing multiple complex challenges (such as rough sleeping, family violence, mental health issues and misuse of alcohol and other drugs).

This diversity of client groups has led to the development of a range of programmatic responses and models (such as crisis case management, transitional support, youth refuges and family violence responses). More-recent innovations reflecting contemporary best practice include housing first, rapid rehousing, assertive outreach, private rental engagement, post-homelessness support, resettlement and early intervention.

In addition to the direct service workforce, staff provide the vital infrastructure to facilitate service delivery and work in:

- leadership and executive support
- management and supervision
- reception and administration
- HR management
- research and policy
- information technology
- finance.



The diversity of people accessing SHS services and the wide range of program and service delivery models demands a workforce with a wide range of skills, knowledge and specialist expertise.

The data

Effective workforce planning relies on good data, and there is little that is current and specific to the SHS workforce. A reliable data set about the SHS workforce would include data about:

- age
- role (the capability framework tiers could provide the structure for this)
- length of service/retention figures
- length of time in the industry
- cultural background, ethnicity and diversity
- qualifications
- training needs
- remuneration
- supervision and support
- confidence in the role
- intention to stay in the sector
- employee satisfaction
- equal opportunity, bullying and harassment
- the quality of management and supervision
- workplace health and safety and wellness
- the use of volunteers.

A standardised process that draws from HR records and employee surveys would enable trends to be monitored over time. Survey processes can be resource-intensive, and biennial data collection would likely provide the required information.

Developing partnerships with organisations such as the Future Social Service Institute, The University of Melbourne’s Centre for Workplace Leadership and the Centre for Workforce Excellence may help to build a more-complete picture of the workforce. Participating in workforce research also promotes awareness of the sector and its work and builds the evidence base for decision-making.

The latest available, reliable data about the SHS workforce can be drawn from Family Safety Victoria’s [*Census of Workforces that Intersect with Family Violence in 2017*](#). A follow-up of that census is being conducted in 2020. The census had 724 ‘homeless service’ respondents — about 36% of the SHS workforce — but respondents could self-select the sector with which they identified, and it is unclear how many of the homeless service respondents were from SHS organisations. Several multi-sector employers participated in the census, and this may have led to conflated data. The data has limitations for SHS workforce planning purposes, but it is the most up-to-date, relevant information available.

In addition to surveying workers, the census drew on payroll records of 1,327 people identified as working in homelessness services.

The census focussed on training needs and the skills needed to respond to family violence, an important aspect of many SHS roles. However, it provides an incomplete picture of the skill needs of the SHS workforce.

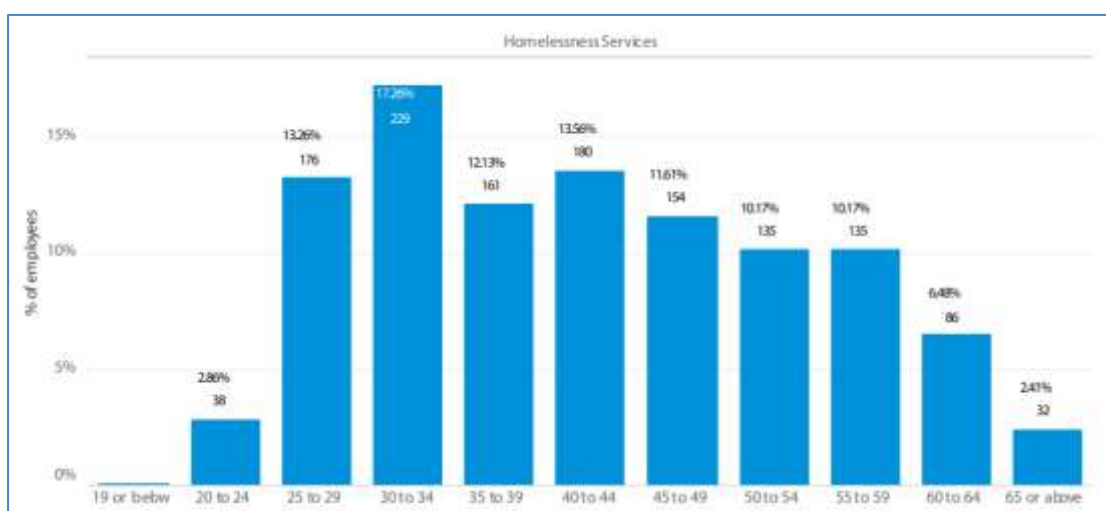
Gender

The census payroll data indicates that 73% of employees in homelessness services are female and 27% are male. This is comparable with the gender ratios in other community services workforces. Women comprise 47% of all employed people in Australia²⁰.

Age

Figure 3 shows census payroll data indicating 30% of the homelessness services workforce is between 25 and 35 and that about 29% is 50 or over. As 19% is over 55 and 9% is over 60, significant numbers will probably retire in the next five years.

Figure 3: SHS workforce age profile

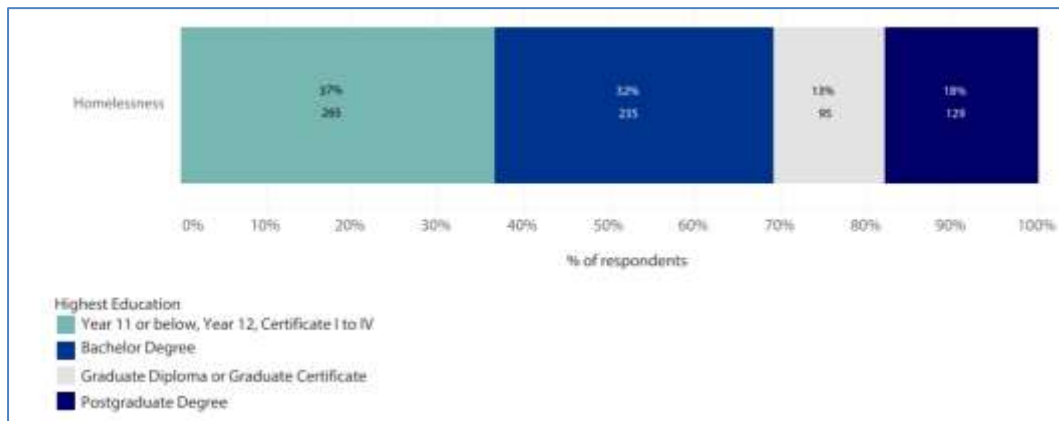


Qualifications

Figure 4 shows census survey data indicating 63% of people who work in homelessness services report their highest level of education is a **bachelor's** degree or higher. Year 11 or below, Year 12 or a certificate I to IV were the highest level of qualification for 37% of the workforce. Note that these aggregated data do not distinguish between VET and secondary school qualifications: while some of this cohort will hold welfare qualifications, how many do so cannot be determined from the data.

²⁰ [Gender workplace statistics at a glance 2020](#)

Figure 4: SHS workforce, highest level of qualification



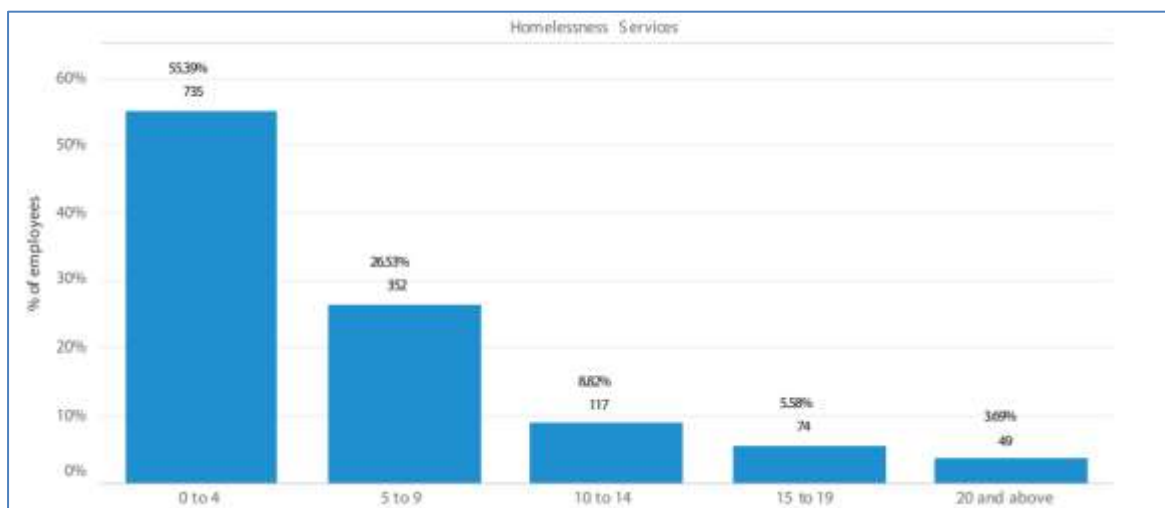
Employment status

Census payroll data indicates that 53% of homelessness services workers are employed on a part-time, casual or sessional basis. 41% of workers have full-time, ongoing employment and 6% have full-time contracts. In a female-dominated workforce, part-time work might be considered family-friendly and so attractive to many employees. Casual work may or may not appeal to prospective employees.

Tenure at current organisation

Figure 5 shows census payroll data indicating 55% of employees who work in homelessness services had worked at their current organisation for four years or less. This raises the question of services' retention rates, which might be low. However, it is not known how frequently workers move between SHS services: that is, whether workers come from or move to jobs within the sector, or other sectors or industries.

Figure 5: SHS workforce, tenure at current organisation



The average annual turnover for the workforce, in general, has grown over recent years, and in 2018 it was about 18%²¹. This is an average for the private sector, public sector, ASX companies and not-for-profit organisations. Anecdotal evidence suggests that turnover is higher in the community sector.

Staff turnover is expensive because of the downtime to appoint and the effort required to induct and train new appointments.

Barriers to training

The census survey data indicate that 51% of survey respondents who work in homelessness services across all tiers cite lack of time as a barrier to accessing training. 45% also listed the cost of training as a major barrier. Respondents could choose more than one barrier.

Clinical supervision

The census survey results indicate that 11% of survey respondents who work in homelessness services report that they do not receive any clinical supervision in their role.

The census payroll results indicated that 30% of survey respondents who work in homelessness services consider the quality of the clinical supervision they receive is excellent, 43% consider it good, 20% consider it average and 7% consider it poor or very poor. Note that supervision was defined in the survey 'as supervision aimed at developing a practitioner's clinical awareness and skills in recognising and managing personal responses, value clashes and ethical dilemmas'.

Organisational policies and procedures on vicarious trauma

The census survey results indicate that 64% of respondents who work in homelessness services report their organisation has processes or policies and procedures to recognise and manage vicarious trauma.

Survey results indicate that 47% of survey respondents who work in homelessness services report that their organisations' processes or policies and procedures to recognise and manage vicarious trauma are very effective or extremely effective.

Volunteers

The census survey data described above is for the paid workforce, but many SHS organisations also use volunteers in a range of roles. The [10-year Community Services Industry Plan](#) presents data showing that 87% of all community services organisations use volunteers. However, it is unknown what percentage of SHS organisations utilise volunteers or the extent and range of volunteer support arrangements in place. Future workforce data collection should include the unpaid workforce.

²¹ Australian HR Institute (2018). [Turnover and Retention Research Report](#).

Demand for workers

There is strong competition for skilled workers, and changes in policy focus and related initiatives can increase that contest. Competition has been heightened for example by the advent of:

- the National Disability Insurance Scheme
- the response to the Royal Commission into Family Violence
- the anticipated response to the Royal Commission into Mental Health
- bushfire relief.

SHS workers delivering services to clients need to respond to a range of complexities their clients experience, including family violence, mental illness, alcohol and drug misuse, disability and legal problems. To provide effective support, workers need a broad skill set and an understanding of the community services system. The skills people acquire working in the SHS make them desirable employees elsewhere in the community services industry.

Qualifications

Minimum qualifications are not required for entry-level employment in the SHS, although individual services may set mandatory qualification requirements for certain positions. National and NSW data suggest that workers in the SHS come mainly from a broad range of social science and community services backgrounds. In a review of workforce training in the homelessness sector Spinney identified that:

- while the SHS workforce did hold qualifications, they were not always the right ones to allow people to effectively carry out current and future roles
- the qualifications required do not currently exist, and qualifications need to be developed at different educational levels and with specialist input for the homelessness sector
- courses about homelessness must be adaptable to changing workforce needs.²²

There is limited data specifically about the Victorian SHS's training and development needs and priorities for development. CHP has completed periodic SHS training needs analyses and regional network coordinators collect data about training needs in their regions. However, the *SHS Workforce Capability Framework* offers the potential for a more-structured, consistent approach to learning and development across the sector.

Higher education

Universities or higher education institutions can self-accredit their courses or have them approved by the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency. Social work degrees must all meet the requirements of the Australian Qualifications Framework, but there is no formal requirement for these courses to cover specific subject areas (such as housing or homelessness). This means that social work students may receive little or no education in

²² Spinney, A (2013). [Workforce Training for the Homelessness Sector](#). Swinburne University of Technology.

the structural factors underpinning homelessness, how to work with SHS clients or the sector's service system.

Vocational education and training

The vocational education and training (VET) sector offers a suite of qualifications relevant to the SHS workforce:

- [CHC32015- Certificate III in Community Services](#)
- [CHC42115- Certificate IV in Community Development](#)
- [CHC42215- Certificate IV in Social Housing](#)
- [CHC52115- Diploma of Community Development](#)
- [CHC52015- Diploma of Community Services.](#)

VET qualifications are national, and they are regularly reviewed and updated. None of the qualifications above was developed specifically for the SHS, but most have flexible packaging rules allowing for a wide range of electives. The courses can be contextualised to meet specific needs, but this requires a partnership with a responsive training provider with skilled trainers and assessors.

4. Challenges and opportunities

SHS workers are talented people who are dedicated to their work and want to see their clients safely and securely housed. Yet there are challenges to providing great service.

Attracting and keeping people in the sector

Recruitment and selection

Attracting appropriate candidates for vacancies is a challenge for many SHS organisations. There can be a lack of applicants and issues with the quality of those applicants.

Recruitment can be time-consuming and, according to SHS representatives who participated in the consultations, some organisations would like to be able to weight selection of staff more towards the values fit that is essential to SHS work.

A CEO SAYS ...

'Recruiting the right person for all our roles is a never-ending challenge. There are shortages of appropriate candidates for most vacant positions.'

As noted earlier, available training and qualifications do not focus on homelessness. Further, the SHS is a comparatively small sector in community services, so may not be considered by new graduates or workers from other sectors who are looking to advance their careers. The sector needs a stronger profile and promotion of its career opportunities.

Providing quality services hinges on having the right people in the right jobs, and people will be more attracted to the sector if:

- it is better represented in formal training courses
- it has a stronger profile
- career options and pathways are better articulated and promoted
- the opportunity to develop knowledge and understanding of the community service sector and related systems is promoted
- the opportunity to develop transferable skills and strong professional networks is promoted
- there is greater awareness of the tangible and intangible benefits of working in the sector.

Talent retention and turnover

Employers want to retain good people, and the sector needs talented individuals to provide leadership: leaders who can champion the sector, provide positive role models and build a proactive belief in the sector's intrinsic worth.

Experienced SHS workers routinely support families, parents, children, young people, older people, couples and singles. They support people who have experienced or are experiencing multiple, complex challenges (such as rough sleeping, family violence, mental

health issues and misuse of alcohol and other drugs). This diversity of experience means SHS workers develop a wide range of skills and knowledge, an understanding of cross-sector service systems and valuable networks.

A CEO SAYS ...

'The evidence is clear that key to positive consumer-worker relationships is trust, and time and high rates of staff turnover make developing positive, person-centred relationships very hard.'

'We need to recruit the right people with the right skills, and we need to keep them in our sector.'

- time spent by staff developing and implementing selection processes
- loss of productivity while the position is covered by other staff
- training and inducting recruits
- loss of productivity in the early stages of employment
- damage to the brand or reputation of the service.

Undergraduates

Field education placements are a vital learning opportunity for students who are building knowledge and skills, allowing them to make more-informed choices about their future careers. They are also a useful avenue for organisations to source high-potential workers. However, student placements require considerable effort by busy workers.

SHS organisations seek recruits who can step into their roles and with appropriate support quickly begin to perform well. Qualifications provide a foundation for employers, making it more likely that recruits are equipped with the base-level skills and knowledge needed to work with the sector's clients.

Educational institutions have different approaches to structuring field education placements, usually with significant administrative and supervisory requirements of services. Some health and allied disciplines use [Placeright](#). Placeright is a secure, web-based information system that provides a standard, consistent and secure mechanism for managing student placements between placement providers and their education provider partners. DHHS funds it, and it was developed in close consultation with stakeholders.

Originally developed for nursing student placements, Placeright is now used by many disciplines and sectors including the disability sector. There are typically no associated costs for organisations or educational institutions using Placeright.

Web-based information systems such as Placeright typically offer:

- secure customisable individual logins
- encrypted sharing of student information

The broad skill sets developed through SHS work experience make SHS workers attractive to employers in other sectors of the community services industry.

High turnover is expensive for organisations, with direct and indirect costs to them due to:

- administration of payouts for termination
- advertising

- streamlined communication through a shared record of placement negotiations and forums
- common access to accurate and reportable data
- automated generation of rosters for students and staff
- visual planners to view bookings and availability at a glance
- historical records of activity to support planning and executive reporting.

People with lived experience

People with lived experience bring valuable insights and an understanding of the experience of homelessness.

Peer support work is an increasingly important discipline in other community services sectors, particularly in the mental health sector. Through external evaluations of their peer work programs by La Trobe and Melbourne universities²³, Wellways, one of Australia's leading mental health organisations, has demonstrated that peer support is highly effective, improves wellbeing, increases social contact, reduces costs to government, reduces stigma, reduces depression and anxiety and improves self-management.

The SHS should look to increase employment opportunities for peer support workers being employed in specific roles across existing program areas and provide employment opportunities in new programs being developed.

The Peer Support Resettlement Program, recently successfully trialled by CHP with support from the Lord Mayor's Charitable Foundation and the City of Melbourne, offers a model and framework as a reference for SHS organisations considering implementing a peer worker model.

Consumer participation volunteer programs (such as CHP's Peer Education Support Program) can provide a pathway for some, from participation to peer work roles.

Challenges for the sector

- The effort it takes to recruit
- A lack of confidence in selection processes, particularly in relation to selecting for values fit
- Sourcing new graduates and other workers with a real and informed readiness for homelessness work
- The time and administrative requirements associated with student placements
- Competition for experienced workers from other sectors within the community services environment
- Attracting experienced workers from other sectors and retaining skilled and experienced people

²³ [Presentation](#) by Wellways at 2017 Victorian Homelessness Conference.

Opportunities for the sector

- A higher profile for the SHS
- Stronger and better links with universities and the VET system, to inform and develop curriculum that will improve graduates' understanding of and preparedness for SHS work
- Streamlined systems, protocols and tools to support student placements (such as the Placeright software)
- More entry programs and specific roles for people with lived experience of being without a home
- Articulated employment pathways, so candidates see their opportunities to advance

Developing capability and improving practice

A PROGRAM MANAGER SAYS ...

'Attending workshops is often the only form of learning and development, and people sometimes attend training that reflects their current knowledge or interests rather than areas in which they need to improve.'

'We need to develop a culture of learning that challenges the participant. And there need to be opportunities for participants to be in workshops to reflect on and integrate their learning, for example follow-up sessions or communities of practice.'

The SHS is passionate about workforce development. People want to develop their skills and hone their craft.

The education and training system

According to those consulted, social work degrees are preferred as a base-level qualification by many SHS employers. However, the curriculum provided by local universities provides limited content on homelessness (such

as the structural factors that lead to homelessness and the impact of homelessness). The VET sector's qualifications outcomes could also better reflect work in the SHS.

Stronger connections with the Future Social Service Institute, the VET Development Centre, the Department of Education and Training, local universities and the VET sector may support the development of curriculum that better prepares graduates to work in the sector. They would also build a network of educational organisations that provide or fund targeted professional development for the existing workforce.

Training and learning models

At present, training is the main form of professional development for the SHS. Subsidised training funded by DHHS is run as a calendar, and SHS staff nominate to attend. The calendar of training predominantly provides a good foundation for staff in the early stages of their careers.

The sector would benefit from more specialised and sophisticated forms of professional development, with a stronger emphasis on experiential learning, coaching, and mentoring.

Currently, there are limited opportunities for learning over time with structured workplace learning, followed up with reflection and connection with other learners.

There is an appetite in the sector for more innovative learning programs. Shadowing and job rotation schemes may also provide different and potentially richer learning opportunities. New learning programs should be aligned with the three proficiency levels and five domains of the *SHS Workforce Capability Framework*.

Communities of practice provide opportunities for workers to share learning and experience and to support workers' reflective practice. These could be face-to-face or virtual, but they need structure and leadership to foster real learning. Training needs analyses could inform decisions about topics to be addressed by communities of practice, as could ongoing advice from the Building Workforce Capacity and Readiness Working Group.

Quality in learning and development

The *SHS Workforce Capability Framework* provides a structure for future workforce development, and it should be supported with a learning and development framework, with quality indicators, and a learning and development plan.

The sector's training should be delivered with reference to:

- data from training needs analyses
- evaluation outcomes from previous programs
- emerging priorities
- alignment with the Australian Qualifications Framework
- opportunities to include workplace learning.

Management and leadership development

Management and executive development programs will help retain talent and improve supervision and leadership in the sector.

High-potential people need to see that they have career paths and learning opportunities to assist them to progress their careers. Improving management and supervision skills will strengthen the sector and support high performance across the board.

Responding to sector feedback, CHP partnered with Women Working Wonders, which developed a three-day leadership program for SHS team leaders. Four programs have now been delivered on a pro-bono basis in 2019 and 2020. The programs have been enormously popular and well-subscribed.

CHP has subsequently received feedback from the Executive Advisory Group and Workforce Working Group that training for management level above team leaders is also a priority. As a result of this feedback, CHP has been discussing with Women Working Wonders the development of a tailored leadership program for SHS program managers.

Continuation of the leadership program for team leaders, and programs supporting experienced manager and executive development and leadership pathways, will assist with retention in the sector.

Learning needs

Planning for the ongoing development of workers needs to be strengthened across the sector so that the right people take up the development opportunities that align with their development requirements and skill gaps. The *SHS Capability Framework* articulates the behaviours and skills demonstrated when people work competently at different levels of direct service practice.

There is the opportunity for organisations and the sector more broadly to use the framework to inform the structuring of performance reviews and development plans.

Technology and digital learning

Digital literacy is an increasing requirement of many SHS roles. IT platforms, apps, digital technologies and portals are being developed to centralise data collection, enable better information-sharing and change the way clients interact with services. Record-keeping, report-writing and accessing professional communications are basic to working effectively. In future, these processes will require even better digital skills, as communication and management practices become increasingly reliant on technology. The SHS has a mature workforce, which needs digital skills development to keep pace with the changing demands of the work environment.

The COVID-19 pandemic has pushed services to find new ways to connect and work remotely. Digital literacy has become a critical skill, as staff have had to use technology to participate in online meetings and find new ways to communicate with clients, colleagues, other services and stakeholders.

Technology also offers opportunities to provide more-flexible learning. Virtual learning using mobile technologies offers opportunities for people to participate in professional development, without the inconvenience and costs of travel for face-to-face learning. Online learning has its own pedagogy, and it provides opportunities and advantages that are still being realised.

Human resource information systems

Feedback from the consultations indicates that many smaller SHS organisations do not have the HR information systems that many of their bigger counterparts use. HR information systems support processes including the maintenance of staff records, payroll, performance review and performance management, professional development and training records and compliance.

While some HR information systems include separate modules for tracking attendance at training, some large organisations have chosen to purchase a dedicated learning management system, which provides more-detailed data to inform the analysis of staff learning and development needs.

Challenges for the sector

- The absence of undergraduate curricula that prepares students for work in the SHS
- Making available affordable, engaging, quality professional development opportunities that are experiential and support staff to practise what they have learned over time

- Leadership development, particularly for managers and executives
- Developing digital literacy and providing flexible learning to the sector
- The absence of good systems and processes to identify individuals' professional development needs and record professional development undertaken

Opportunities for the sector

- Foster the development of curricula that prepares trainees for work in the SHS by further building relationships with the Future Social Service Institute, the VET Development Centre, the Department of Education and Training, universities and the VET sector
- Develop better systems for prioritising and producing content for professional development, through training needs analyses
- Develop a learning and development plan for the sector
- Promote innovation in learning design — action learning sets / cooperative learning, online learning, mentoring and coaching —with a focus on leadership development
- Encourage flexible delivery and online learning
- Improve data collection about professional development

A diverse and healthy workforce

Diversity and workforce composition

People from all backgrounds access SHS services, and the workforce should reflect the broad cross-section of our state's population.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians are overrepresented in the homelessness system across Australia and Victoria. In Australia, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people seek help from SHS in disproportionate rates to their non-Aboriginal counterparts. In Victoria, 17% (8,077) of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population sought help from homelessness services in 2015–16, the highest rate of any state or territory²⁴. Having more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people employed in the SHS is highly desirable.

Cultural and linguistic diversity

Victoria is a multicultural society. Our citizens come from more than 200 countries, speak 260 languages and follow 135 faiths²⁵. All cultures have their own beliefs and values and (particularly in times of crisis) the SHS's clients need workers who understand their priorities and are sensitive to their individual needs.

²⁴ Council to Homeless Persons (undated). *Fact Sheet: Aboriginal Australians and homelessness*.

²⁵ <https://proud.vic.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/Victorian-And-Proud-of-it-MPS-180207.pdf>

Young people

26% of people without a home in Victoria are aged between 12 and 24, and on any given night at least 6,000 young Victorians are homeless²⁶. Family violence is highly associated with youth homelessness. The SHS workforce needs people who can connect with young people and support them to move into secure living situations where they can work towards their life goals, continue their education, achieve their vocational aspirations and secure and maintain employment.

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer/questioning and asexual (LGBTIQ+) people

Research shows that LGBTIQ+ people are significantly overrepresented in homelessness data, that they are twice as likely as heterosexual people to be homeless, and that they could be better supported by the service system²⁷.

A workforce that reflects the dimensions of the diversity of Victorian society and the clients accessing the system will break down barriers to cultural understanding.

Cultural competency is a skill that will enhance the sector's capability and responsiveness, and future training needs assessments should review for these skills.

Supervision

Working with people who are without a home and in crisis is intrinsically stressful, and the lack of housing that is available and affordable to people on the lowest incomes adds pressure to this work. Supportive and regular supervision is an important means to enable staff to understand and manage the complexities of their work.

High-quality supervision and regular feedback help staff to work more effectively and manage the emotional burden of their work. High-quality supervision can also reduce the costs of burnout and staff turnover.

While not specifically a form of supervision, reflective practice offers individuals or teams the opportunity to routinely take time to think about their role, including what is going well, what is difficult, how they are feeling and how they make others feel²⁸. Leadership that commits an organisation to reflective practice aims to foster insight into how work is performed and to develop authentic and productive ways of working.

Person-centred

Delivering safe, effective, connected and person-centred services and care is one of DHHS' four key strategic directions²⁹, and the objective of DHHS' 2018 Community Services Quality Governance Framework is 'safe, effective, connected and person-centred

²⁶ Youth Affairs Council Victoria (undated). [Ending Youth Homelessness Solutions from Young People](#).

²⁷ Council to Homeless Persons. [Why LGBTQ Victorians are twice as likely to face homelessness](#).

²⁸ Homeless Link (2014). [Reflective practice in homelessness services: an introduction](#).

²⁹ Department of Health and Human Services (undated). [Department of Health and Human Services strategic plan](#).

community services for everybody, every time'. It defines person-centred as 'people's values, beliefs and situations guide how services are designed and delivered. People are enabled to meaningfully participate in decisions and to form partnerships with their service providers'.³⁰

Person-centred practice is foundational to the work of the SHS, and the SHS Transition Plan reflects this by setting as a goal to *Embed person-centred models of practice* across the SHS.

CHP is working to define what person-centred practice means for the SHS and to progress the goal to embed it across the SHS.

It is that important workforce development strategies support and help drive person-centred practice.

Regional and metropolitan differences

Despite the many benefits of living and working in regional Victoria, many regional and rural SHS services report that they have:

- more difficulty in attracting suitably skilled and qualified workers
- fewer student placements
- less access to training and development and external supervision
- fewer opportunities to make their workforce more diverse
- fewer opportunities to participate in professional development
- issues with online connections for learning and communications.

Consultations with people working in regional and rural organisations indicate that they have fewer options for progression and variety in their work, that staff turnover is typically lower and that there are fewer service providers as potential employers. Consequently, there are fewer opportunities for promotion within their employing organisations or at other organisations in the region. Job rotation schemes may provide workable development and job enrichment opportunities.

Despite these challenges, working in regional and rural settings has many benefits. For example, working in such settings can offer people a wider scope of practice and stronger connections with local community services and community organisations.

A TEAM LEADER SAYS ...

'It would be great to promote some of the benefits of working in a country town to graduates and workers in the city. Housing is cheaper, you are part of a community and you develop really good collaboration skills and networks.'

Programs to attract more students on placement and graduate recruitment and to foster diversity in this regional workforce, particularly where there are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, would lead to a wider talent pool and more-tailored support for service

³⁰ Department of Health and Human Services. [Community Services Quality Governance Framework](#).

users. Rural and regional champions could promote the benefits of working in regional and rural services to metropolitan SHS workers and beyond the sector.

Organisational culture

Each organisation has its own unique culture and values. Organisations that provide environments where staff enjoy their work and realise their potential will have an advantage in terms of recruitment and retention of staff.

Employee engagement, health and wellbeing lead to decreased absenteeism, and they are essential for a stable, connected workforce. Workers need to foster optimism in their clients, and this is more-achievable when they are working in a healthy, positive organisation.

Few SHS organisations routinely benchmark themselves against like organisations. For example, the Victorian Public Sector Commission's annual public sector employee survey — the People Matter survey — provides data about the workforce and monitors trends about employee numbers, numbers of part-time staff, age profiles, work locations, gender equality and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' employment. Survey data is available from 2007, so trends can be analysed. Services that are part of the public health system (such as mental health and alcohol and drug services) provide and have access to this information about their workforce.

Challenges for the sector

- Creating a diverse workforce with greater proportions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, CALD (culturally and linguistically diverse) and LGBTIQ+ workers
- Fostering cultural competency
- Routinely providing effective supervision
- Enabling regional, remote and rural services to attract and develop high-potential workers
- Having data and systems for SHS organisations to review and benchmark their culture and levels of employee engagement

Opportunities for the sector

- Increase diversity and the awareness of diversity in the workforce
- Embed person-centred practice in all organisations
- Develop and promote a model for supervision
- Promote reflective practice to foster insight into how work is performed and to develop authentic, productive ways of working
- Foster regional initiatives to develop capacity and capability through targeted graduate placement and recruitment schemes and job rotation programs
- Encourage and build on employee engagement

Human resource management

Larger organisations have dedicated HR management professionals. Frontline managers value the skills these HR practitioners bring and the role they perform, yet HR practitioners often do not have teams to support them, or with whom they can share ideas and learnings.

A connected HR network would provide valuable information about the workforce. It could also assist with research and the implementation of workforce initiatives. Issues such as the impact of casualisation, the use of volunteers or the establishment of a job rotation scheme could all be explored through an HR network.

The *SHS Workforce Capability Framework* is a resource that supports a range of HR practices (such as recruitment and selection, performance management, and conducting training needs analyses and professional development planning). More tools to assist with the implementation of the framework would support busy managers to streamline and improve these practices.

Challenges for the sector

- The absence of HR infrastructure and resources in many smaller organisations
- The lack of connections between HR workforce professionals in the sector

Opportunities for the sector

- Promote and embed the *SHS Workforce Capability Framework* across the sector
- Facilitate connectedness between HR managers.

A CEO SAYS ...

'Employing people with the right values and attitudes is so important, but it can be hard to tease that out in the recruitment process. It is much easier to check for technical expertise such as qualifications and experience. Some resources, such as best practice guides that provide advice and strategies about how to assess for values, would really be helpful.'

5. A framework for change

A vision for the SHS workforce

Victoria has a dynamic and highly skilled SHS workforce, actively engaged in ending homelessness by supporting people to access and maintain safe, secure housing.

Principles and goals

Workforce development strategies routinely set out principles that recognise that their work is underpinned by core attitudes and values. For example, [Victoria's specialist mental health workforce framework Strategic directions 2014–24](#) includes principles such as recovery-oriented, rights-based and trauma-informed.

This strategy's vision statement is underpinned by the following principles that guide the sector's work and the way we support our workforce. The principles were developed, tested and refined through the consultation process that informed the development of this strategy.

Figure 6 shows:

- the principles that guide the sector's work and the way we support our workforce
- the strategy's goals.

Figure 6: Principles and goals



Principles that guide our work

Person-centred

- We deliver person-centred services.
- People’s values, beliefs and situations guide how services are designed and delivered.
- Clients are supported to meaningfully participate in decisions and to form partnerships with their service providers.

Outcomes-focussed

- Our work is outcomes-focussed.

- We are committed to helping the SHS’s clients achieve the outcomes in the domains that matter to people who are or who have been without a home: housing, safety, stability, health, empowerment, participation, financial and material wellbeing, legal and justice, independence and connection³¹.

Collaborative

- We work collaboratively with other SHS organisations, with the community services industry and with governments and the community.
- We recognise the value of the work of others and want to contribute to a body of knowledge about people experiencing social disadvantage.
- We aim to support our clients to navigate complex service systems and to work in an integrated way with our colleagues within the broader sector and the community services industry to get the best outcomes for our clients.

Evidence-informed

- Our work is underpinned by evidence, data and contemporary research. We have established ways of working that are based on a substantive body of knowledge, which is constantly evolving.
- We will make conscious, informed decisions to design our programs and provide services.

Client-driven

- People who are or who have been without a home play an important role in decision-making to shape our sector, our services and our service delivery.
- Increasingly, we will look to the principles of co-production and co-design to build partnerships between our clients and SHS professionals, to work together on service design and delivery.
- People with lived experience bring valuable insights and the experience of homelessness. We will create and promote opportunities for them to work in the sector.

Rights-based

- Being without a home should never mean people lose rights that other citizens have (such as security and privacy; opportunities to obtain stable employment and to access education; connections to community, family and friends: and the right to vote).
- International human rights law recognises that every person has the right to an adequate standard of living. This right includes the right to adequate housing.

‘Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and wellbeing of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and

³¹ Council to Homeless Persons (2019). [Consultation Report – Getting Outcome Measurement Right for the Specialist Homelessness Sector](#).

necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control.'

– Article 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights

- Our workforce is committed to every Victorian having adequate and safe housing.
- The human rights of people should always be protected, and we will always aim to uphold these basic rights.
- We treat our clients with dignity and respect.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' self-determination

- We recognise that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' sovereignty has never been ceded and that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have the right to self-determination.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples experience disproportionately high levels of homelessness. We will work to reduce the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples without a home and to increase the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people working in the SHS.

Principles about how we support our workforce

Supportive

- We acknowledge the impact of working with trauma and the intrinsic stresses that come with working in the sector: vicarious trauma is an occupational hazard for our workforce.
- Our organisations will support people to manage their stress, to do their best work and to maintain their health and wellbeing.

Inclusive

- Our workplaces will be culturally safe; we will be open-minded and flexible in our attitudes towards people from cultures other than our own.
- We value trust and open, clear communication.
- Our organisational leaders will be culturally sensitive and recognise that our workforce will be stronger and more diverse.
- We believe we will work more effectively if we improve cultural insights and recognise the values, traditions and abilities of others.

Effective

- We will focus on responding to areas of greatest demand for services and on working to have enough people with the right skill mix, in the right job roles, to meet demand.
- We will take a planned approach, so those in our workforce can utilise their capabilities and work effectively.

Accountable

- People at all levels take responsibility for their own performance and work outcomes.
- We are clear about our responsibilities and expect everyone to strive to do their best work.

Lifelong learning

- We value ongoing learning and professional development, for people working at all levels.
- We recognise that people learn in many ways and that the best work is underpinned by knowledge, positive interactions with others and opportunities to learn and practice in the workplace.
- We value formal training and qualifications, in addition to ongoing professional development that addresses individual skill gaps; equips the sector with new information about policy, theory and contemporary best practice; deepens expertise; and fosters opportunities for people to grow and advance their careers.
- We will contribute to building a body of knowledge about our sector and continue to learn to improve our practice and profession.

Integrity

- We will demonstrate integrity in all our actions.

Action plan

Goal 1: Talented people are attracted to the sector and stay in the sector	
<i>Strategy</i>	<i>Actions and deliverables</i>
Attract new graduates to the SHS and promote the sector as offering careers that make a real difference	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop stronger relationships with universities offering social work courses and VET providers of community services qualifications to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ effectively influence undergraduate curricula, so there is more emphasis on homelessness ➤ develop curricula where required ➤ provide speakers about homelessness, to enhance students' learning experiences ➤ foster partnerships about the workforce with Future Social Service Institute, Victorian Council of Social Service and other bodies, to promote the SHS workforce and its career opportunities • Participate in careers expos and other relevant community sector forums
Attract skilled and experienced community sector workers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote the SHS as a sector within the health and community services industry that offers rewarding work and opportunities for career advancement • Use social media and draw on workers' own experiences to promote the sector
Improve the quality of and systems and processes for student work placements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research the suitability of online systems (such as Placeright) for service providers and education providers to plan and administer student placements and streamline record-keeping • Develop a best practice framework for fieldwork education placements, so education providers, SHS organisations, students and people with the experience of being without a home can identify their roles in a quality student placement and manage fieldwork education placements more efficiently • Develop tools and resources to support fieldwork education placements, with links to recruitment opportunities

Goal 1: Talented people are attracted to the sector and stay in the sector

<i>Strategy</i>	<i>Actions and deliverables</i>
Strengthen recruitment and selection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research best practice approaches to recruitment and selection, especially in relation to values and attitudes • Draw on the <i>SHS Workforce Capability Framework</i> to develop a practical, user-friendly recruitment and selection kit, which includes a suite of recruitment tools and related behavioural interviewing questions • Explore options for accessing existing community sector online jobs portals, or developing an online jobs board, to promote vacancies in the sector
Develop specific roles and an employment pathway for people with the lived experience of not having a home	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clarify specialist work roles in the SHS for people with the lived experience of not having a home • Design a learning program including work readiness training to equip people with lived experience to work in the sector • Encourage services to employ more people with lived experience • Develop peer worker networks to support people with lived experience working in the SHS • Develop case studies to demonstrate success in providing people with lived experience with a pathway to employment, and promote peer work as a discipline
Support talent retention and succession planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use the <i>SHS Workforce Capability Framework</i> to support an articulated career pathway that shows the career pathways and diversity of roles in the sector • Develop a succession planning kit based on the capability framework to help organisations identify key roles, the capabilities to support those roles and options for how to develop capabilities for those roles in high-potential employees • Create an emerging leaders program for the sector, which provides training and communities of practice for high-potential staff • Consider learning models that draw on experience and expertise from across the sector and offer mentoring and structured job rotation

Goal 2: People have the capabilities to work effectively and opportunities to enhance their practice

Strategy	Actions and deliverables
Strengthen SHS connections with the VET and higher education sectors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop an evidence base about qualifications in the sector (see goal 3), develop a VET and higher education engagement plan and: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ connect with the VET Development Centre and the Victorian Department of Education to consider how state government funding and support can be obtained for professional development for the existing workforce ➤ remain engaged with Skills IQ (the skills service organisation for the sector’s VET qualifications) and the relevant industry reference committee to influence the design and content of relevant VET qualifications ➤ engage with the Australian Association of Social Workers and other relevant professional and industrial bodies about continuing professional development in the sector ➤ establish an SHS higher education advisory committee to influence curricula for social work and other relevant qualifications universities offer • Investigate opportunities to partner with educational institutions to further professional development in the sector • Investigate opportunities to partner with educational institutions to offer internships (and similar work experience models) in the SHS to students to help build early work experience
Strengthen professional development for the sector	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a learning and development framework, which aligns with the <i>SHS Workforce Capability Framework</i> and which includes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ quality principles and indicators for training and other forms of professional development ➤ an emphasis on building the sector’s capability to collaborate and partner effectively ➤ an emphasis on building the sector’s capability to work effectively in multidisciplinary teams ➤ reference to the 70:20:10 rule, referencing the importance of workplace learning ➤ reference to accredited and non-accredited training and the Australian Qualifications Framework

Goal 2: People have the capabilities to work effectively and opportunities to enhance their practice

<i>Strategy</i>	<i>Actions and deliverables</i>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ principles and standardised tools for evaluation • Redevelop the SHS training offer considering: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ the alignment with the learning and development framework ➤ the content, relevance, currency and suitability of learning methodologies ➤ attendance figures and data about attendance ➤ evaluation data ➤ feedback about training providers • Conduct an annual training needs analysis • Develop a three-year professional development plan, which shows alignments to different levels and job roles • Develop, revise and deliver professional development programs
Foster innovative learning models	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a model for establishing communities of practice on topics prioritised by the Building Workforce Capacity and Readiness Working Group (for example, working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, CALD people, LGBTIQ+ people and young people delivering Housing First) • Draw on recognised sector leaders to provide mentoring and coaching to communities of practice • Pilot the model that draws together experienced personnel to share and deepen learnings • Utilise the outcomes of the pilot to develop and progress innovation in learning
Support leadership development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote the uptake of available scholarships (such as through Leadership Victoria, universities, Fulbright Australia, the Churchill Trust and the Australia and New Zealand School of Government) • Assist leaders to innovate, encourage new ways of working, advocate for the sector and drive change • Establish a leadership mentoring and coaching team drawing from recognised leaders from within and outside the sector to mentor and coach emerging leaders

Goal 3: There is a sound knowledge base about our workforce

<i>Strategy</i>	<i>Actions and deliverables</i>
Profile the workforce	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Liaise with Future Social Service Institute, Victorian Council of Social Services and other stakeholders about workforce surveys and opportunities to collaborate on workforce data and data collection • Develop a tool and process that can be replicated every two years to collect data about: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ numbers of people employed in the sector: full-time, part-time and casual ➤ numbers of people in designated roles ➤ demographics (such as age, gender, place of birth, language, disability, Aboriginality and intersectionality) ➤ qualifications ➤ length of time working in the sector ➤ occupational risks • Collect and analyse workforce data • Task the Workforce Working Group with reviewing this data, disseminating the findings and developing responses to emerging trends • Consider geographic staffing profiles and their match with data about where people are without homes
Measure workforce satisfaction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a tool and process for collecting data about workforce satisfaction that can be replicated every two years • Engage with organisations to publicise the survey and encourage all their employees to participate • Task the Workforce Working Group with reviewing this data, disseminating the findings and developing responses to emerging trends • Provide feedback to organisations about their employees' satisfaction, so they can benchmark themselves against like organisations
Foster workforce research and collaboration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with peak and other bodies (such as the Future Social Service Institute, the Victorian Council of Social Services, the Centre for Workplace Leadership, the Centre for Workplace Excellence and the Centre for Future Work) to participate in workforce research and skills initiatives

Goal 4: Our workforce is connected, healthy, diverse and thriving

<i>Strategy</i>	<i>Actions and deliverables</i>
<p>Foster diversity and increase the numbers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and culturally and linguistically diverse people working in the sector</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop partnerships with Aboriginal community-controlled organisations to create a program to attract, train and develop Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workers for the sector • Encourage services to actively increase diversity, so the workforce more closely represents the wider community's dimensions of diversity. Promote the value of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples ➤ more CALD people ➤ people with valuable life experience and relevant education who are looking for a career change ➤ more men ➤ more people with disabilities ➤ more LGBTIQ+ people ➤ more young people ➤ people with different religions • Promote and foster the cultural competency of leaders and managers
<p>Support supervision practice</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a framework for effective supervision • Promote the framework for effective supervision to enable supervisors to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ assist workers to reflect on and improve their practice ➤ support workers experiencing vicarious trauma or work-related stress ➤ build confidence in workers and encourage their ability to self-manage their work • Encourage the use of available tools and resources, so supervisors can check their practice and identify areas for development • Work with other disciplines and community services sectors and with national bodies to improve supervision

Goal 4: Our workforce is connected, healthy, diverse and thriving

<i>Strategy</i>	<i>Actions and deliverables</i>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote reflective practice to foster insight into how work is performed and to support authentic, productive ways of working • Review training offerings on reflective practice and identify available high-quality resources to support this approach
Promote person-centred practice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop an agreed definition of person-centred practice for the SHS and promote it to the sector • Review training offerings on person-centred practice, and identify available or develop new high-quality resources to support this approach • Use champions to promote person-centred practice as it applies to the SHS
Support regional services' workforce development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a program to attract new workers to regional, rural and remote services. Consider models where: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ regional homelessness network coordinators can inform the design and implementation of models ➤ either students or new graduates are rotated around different types of services ➤ links between universities and training organisations and rural, regional and remote services are strengthened • Develop case studies and champions to showcase the achievements of rural and regional services and the benefits of working in these environments • Explore opportunities for rural and regional SHS workers to access mentoring and development opportunities
Support services to strengthen the workforce	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support organisations to develop policies and procedures that address staff health and wellbeing, diversity and cultural safety • Promote indicators against which organisations can check their workplace culture • Encourage the use of data from sectoral employee satisfaction surveys for benchmarking and review • Support services to identify and manage risks associated with staff health and wellbeing

Goal 5: There is an established architecture for workforce development

<i>Strategy</i>	<i>Actions and deliverables</i>
Establish an SHS HR network	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Connect HR practitioners in the sector to regularly: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ share their information and expertise ➤ build a body of knowledge about the workforce ➤ advise tools, products and activities to improve HR management in the sector ➤ collaborate for workforce research and planning
Embed the <i>SHS Workforce Capability Framework</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Utilise the <i>SHS Workforce Capability Framework</i> to develop tools to support HR management functions such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ recruitment and selection including developing behavioural interviewing questions ➤ structuring training and conducting training needs analysis ➤ self-assessment and development planning ➤ succession planning • Assist organisations to implement the capability framework and its supporting tools by drawing on HR experts to champion it at sector forums and by offering training.

Specialist Homelessness Sector Workforce Development Strategy 2020–2025

Acknowledgements

We respectfully
acknowledge the
traditional owners of this
land. We pay our
respects to elders past
and present.

We appreciate and
celebrate diversity in all
its forms and believe
diversity of all kinds
makes communities
stronger and more
effective.



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