



Specialist Homelessness Services in Victoria:

2022 Workforce Survey Results



The Workforce Innovation and Development Institute (WIDI)

The Workforce Innovation and Development Institute (WIDI) provides a blueprint for collaboration

WIDI was established in 2016 at RMIT University in partnership with the community sector, and funded by the Victorian state government, to address critical workforce challenges faced by the sector.

WIDI has made a significant contribution to the growth, quality and adaptation of the social service workforce including:

- co-designing new curriculum
- piloting and evaluating new educational models and pathways
- building leadership capability and
- developing evidence, data and insights to inform workforce development approaches



Project Background

The Council to Homeless Persons (CHP) is the peak body representing organisations and individuals in Victoria with a commitment to ending homelessness.

CHP has led the development of the Transition Plan (2018-2022) for Specialist Homelessness Services in Victoria, in partnership with the sector and the Victorian Government Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (DFFH)

As part of this Plan's implementation, an SHS Workforce Development Strategy was also produced. The Workforce Development Strategy (2020-2025) articulates the dearth of current data about the Victorian SHS Workforce, and sets the goal of 'developing a sound knowledge base about our workforce', and stresses the fundamental importance of being able to profile the workforce in an ongoing way.

WIDI's role:

The Workforce Innovation and Development Institute (WIDI) was engaged by CHP in 2021 to assist CHP complete several pieces of work to support the design and implementation of these strategies, including:

- ✓ A comprehensive discussion paper - based on review and consultations of workforce intelligence examples,
- ✓ Developing and testing a new data linkage system – linking existing government big data sets with the ABS,
- ✓ Designing and coordinating a SHS workforce survey, and
- ✓ Providing a final report – Including a summary of the process and recommendations for a pathway forward.

SHS Workforce Survey Overview

Purpose:

WIDI conducted the SHS workforce survey to provide critical insights for key sector decisions while designing and testing a longer-term strategy to collect workforce information throughout 2022 with CHP.

The survey sought to understand key workforce indicators for the sector to aid strategic planning, including:

- Region/s that organisations operate,
- Headcount and FTE of SHS organisations and the SHS workforce (headcount and FTE),
- Setting/s of SHS workforce (based on categories supplied by DFFH)
- Vacancies and turnover,
- Workforce attraction, recruitment, and retention,
- Funding source/s.

Approach:

- The survey instrument was designed in collaboration with CHP and DFFH,
- Ethics approval was gained from RMIT University,
- A link to the survey was emailed to the DFFH key contact in all organisations who received SHS funding in 2020-21 from the Victorian Government Department of Families, Fairness and Housing over a six (6) week period across August and September 2022,
- A copy of the Participant Information Form and Frequently Asked Questions was provided to all recipients,
- Responses were included only if the respondent had approval from the CEO or a nominated delegate,
- All survey data has been aggregated and no data related to organisations or individuals will be shared or presented in any published material.

SHS Workforce Survey Snapshot: Overall Response

Overall

Organisations contacted	124
Organisations responded	62
Validated responses (CEO approval) ¹	59
Response rate: Validated SHS Organisations ¹	47.58%

Note – Overall:

1. Responses were excluded only where they were incomplete, responded 'no' to CEO or nominated delegate approval, or responded '0' for SHS workforce headcount and/or FTE

Cross-section responses

Statewide ²	20
Metropolitan Melbourne ²	15
Regional and rural Victoria ²	24
Sub-total: Location	59
Small organisations ³	24
Medium organisations ³	17
Large organisations ³	16
Sub-total: Organisation size	57 ⁴

Notes – Cross-section responses:

2. See analysis method on slides 14-16 for detailed definition
3. Based on OECD definition of size of organisation – see method
4. Two responses did not include total organisation size

Responses suggest the Victorian SHS workforce often works alongside others

	Total headcount			Total FTE		
	Total workforce in responding organisations ¹	Total SHS workforce in responding organisations ²	SHS workforce as % of responding organisations	Total workforce in responding organisations ¹	Total SHS workforce in responding organisations ²	SHS workforce as % of responding organisations
Overall	10,908	1,943	17.8%	6,289.31	1,439.97	22.9%
Statewide	3,253	954	29.3%	1,922.83	669.42	34.8%
Metropolitan Melbourne	1,787	686	38.4%	1,004.30	560.90	55.8%
Regional and rural Victoria	5,868	303	5.2%	3,362.18	209.65	6.2%
Small organisations	492	233	47.4%	356.68	180.98	50.7%
Medium organisations	1,931	497	25.7%	1,062.33	393.29	37.0%
Large organisations	8,485	1,209	14.2%	4,870.30	861.90	17.7%

Note:

1. Includes SHS workers and all other workers employed by the organisation (for example, other service delivery roles in mental health, AOD, disability, aged care, and others, as well as administrative roles)
2. Includes only workers employed by SHS funding from the Victorian Government Department of Families, Fairness and Housing.

Case managers, intake, on-site accommodation settings most common

What setting/s do your workers deliver Specialist Homelessness Services?

	Intake and Access ¹	Case Management/ Client Support ¹	Transitional Housing ¹	Brokerage Programs ¹	On-site Staffed Accommodation Programs ¹	Material Aid/ Community Connections/ Day programs ¹	Other ²
Overall	15.1%	41.9%	3.9%	2.9%	20.3%	3.5%	12.4%
Statewide	19.5%	35.9%	3.8%	4.7%	21.0%	3.9%	11.3%
Metropolitan Melbourne	12.2%	36.4%	4.8%	1.0%	25.7%	2.7%	17.1%
Regional and rural Victoria	6.9%	75.3%	2.5%	1.4%	5.1%	3.7%	5.2%
Small organisations	12.1%	53.8%	4.0%	3.5%	15.0%	4.1%	7.5%
Medium organisations	21.7%	52.7%	5.5%	6.5%	5.4%	2.8%	5.3%
Large organisations	12.8%	35.2%	3.3%	1.4%	27.4%	3.6%	16.3%

Notes:

1. These categories were provided by DFFH following recent re-mapping of cost centres related to SHS funding.
2. See slides 14-16 for further discussion on analysis method and commentary on 'Other' and brief discussion of limitations of this question.

Staff turnover was high, vacancies varied significantly by organisation size

How many current vacancies do you have? Including all advertised and non-advertised, not including staff on all forms of paid leave.

	Total vacancies	Total vacancy rate ¹	SHS vacancies	SHS vacancy rate ²	SHS vacancies as a share of total in responding organisations	SHS turnover last 12 months ^{3,4}
Overall	635	5.8%	149	7.7%	23.5%	25.5%
Statewide	307	9.4%	94	9.9%	30.6%	31.4%
Metropolitan Melbourne	69	3.9%	38	5.5%	55.1%	22.2%
Regional and rural Victoria	259	4.4%	17	5.6%	6.6%	14.5%
Small organisations	54	11.0%	29	12.4%	53.7%	30.0%
Medium organisations	133	6.9%	29	5.8%	21.8%	19.7%
Large organisations	396	4.7%	91	7.5%	23.0%	27.1%

Notes:

1. Equals total vacancies divided by total headcount.
2. Equals total SHS vacancies divided by total SHS headcount.
3. Equals total SHS workers left in the last 12 months divided by total SHS headcount (figures taken from response to question 16, 'How many Specialist Homelessness Services (SHS) workers have left their role as an SHS worker in the last 12 months? (Including internal movements)')
4. In the year ending February 2022, 9.5% of all employed people in Australia changed jobs, with the highest category being professionals (22%). The survey results suggest turnover is high in SHS workforce compared to other areas. Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS): Job mobility, See: <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/labour/jobs/job-mobility/latest-release>

Workers have a mix of previous SHS experience

How often do you employ people who haven't worked in Specialist Homelessness Service before?

	Never	Rarely	Often	Always
Overall	3.4%	34.5%	60.3%	1.7%
Statewide	5.0%	35.0%	60.0%	0.0%
Metropolitan Melbourne	0.0%	35.7%	64.3%	0.0%
Regional and rural Victoria	4.2%	33.3%	58.3%	4.2%
Small organisations	8.3%	29.2%	58.3%	4.2%
Medium organisations	0.0%	35.3%	64.7%	0.0%
Large organisations	0.0%	40.0%	60.0%	0.0%

Short term contracts, lower pay, and training are challenges to the workforce pipeline

Attraction¹

Responses indicated key challenges were:

- Pressure on human resource functions detracting from ability to recruit
- Shortage of suitable applicants for roles
- Wages and conditions offered

'[W]e struggle to match wages to local employment competitors such as Orange Doors and large funded orgs...' - Executive, Statewide

'The main issue currently from a workforce perspective is the lack of applicants applying' - Executive, Metropolitan Melbourne

'[F]ixed term funding provides no security for staff and the roles are less appealing' - Team leader, Regional/Rural Victoria

Note:

1. Analysis based on responses to Q19. 'What are your organisation's main workforce attraction and recruitment challenge/s for Specialist Homelessness Services?'. Survey respondents were asked to drag and drop to rank the order they experienced challenges. This method was challenging to analyse and could be adjusted in any future survey/s.

Exploring training needs is a challenge to developing the workforce pipeline

Preparation¹

Responses indicated worker preparedness would be improved by:

- Specific training, with CHP's training being singled out on several occasions.

Many responses that mentioned training require further investigation to assist understanding. For example, it was unclear if some responses were asking for more training or endorsing training already being delivered.

'Raising the profile of SHS work within the sector and within tertiary education sector...it can often be seen as a stepping stone to employment in other sectors rather than a destination role' - Team leader, Regional / Rural Victoria

'[M]ore easily accessible, reasonably priced, training and development for workers starting in this sector' - Manager, Regional/Rural Victoria

'The new workforce training via CHP portal has been extremely beneficial to staff new to the sector' - CEO, Metropolitan Melbourne

'SHS training on what to expect (like the courses CHP training has)' – Support Worker, Regional/Rural Victoria

'We do the training and prep work of new staff internally and we are happy with this approach' - Executive, Metropolitan Melbourne

Note:

1. Analysis based on responses to Q18. 'What changes would improve Specialist Homelessness Services worker's preparedness for the role?'

Retaining a strong SHS workforce is challenged by myriad factors and compounded by a lack of housing solutions

Retention¹

Responses indicated key challenges were:

- High pressure work environment
- Burnout and / or fatigue - work related
- Burnout and / or fatigue - non-work related
- Workers feeling undervalued
- Wages and conditions offered
- Inability to provide adequate supervision
- Workers are insufficiently trained

'It is beyond challenging to work in specialist homelessness support when there are almost no adequate housing options, particularly long term' - Manager, Statewide

'Funding in SHS has not increased for many years which adds to the pressure on staff contributing to burnout and fatigue' - Team Leader, Regional/Rural Victoria

'[T]hey work with clients with complex needs and often this work can bare heavily upon workers' - Manager, Regional/Rural Victoria

Additional comments by respondents suggests that retention is impacted by SHS workers being unable to secure housing solutions for their clients.

'The current pressure on workers in SHS services is compounded by the severe shortage of affordable housing options...Positive outcomes for clients are harder to achieve as there is little to no secure and sustainable accommodation in the private rental market, especially in [Regional/Rural Victoria], ...[t]he lack of social housing options means...workers provide case management for longer periods to achieve case-plan goals and objectives...therefore stress and burnout are increasing amongst the SHS workforce.' - Manager, Regional / Rural Victoria

Note:

1. Analysis based on responses to Q20. 'What are your organisation's main workforce retention challenge/s for Specialist Homelessness Services?'. Survey respondents were asked to drag and drop to rank the order they experienced challenges. This method was challenging to analyse and could be adjusted in any future survey/s.

Homes Victoria / DFFH was the primary funder of SHS among all respondents

Please estimate what percentage (%) of your specialist homelessness services are funded by:

	Homes Victoria / Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (DFFH)	Other Victorian Government	Federal Government	Philanthropy	Other
Overall	83.3%	5.9%	4.9%	2.7%	3.3%
Statewide	72.7%	13.9%	6.4%	4.3%	2.8%
Metropolitan Melbourne	87.5%	2.2%	4.3%	4.7%	1.3%
Regional and rural Victoria	89.5%	1.4%	4.1%	0.2%	4.8%
Small organisations	81.8%	6.9%	5.6%	4.5%	1.3%
Medium organisations	79.7%	7.5%	3.3%	0.5%	8.9%
Large organisations	92.4%	0.8%	3.9%	2.6%	0.3%

Considerations, limitations and survey context

Response rate

- The response rate (47.58%) was slightly higher than similar surveys. Weekly analysis suggests response rates increased significantly following separate reminder emails from the CEO of CHP and Director of WIDI, who held extensive networks, suggesting name recognition is a critical factor in achieving a representative sample.

Self-reported

- Results are based on self-reported figures from a variety of employees within organisations. It is not known if definitions and key terms in many questions are understood or applied in the same manner.

Point-in-time data

- The data represents a point-in-time figure at the end of August and September 2022. Headcount and vacancy numbers within organisations can fluctuate significantly over the course of the year, which is not able to be reflected in the data.

Agency workers

- Many organisations are increasingly relying on private agency workers to plug gaps in rosters and schedules in order to maintain service delivery, this data does not capture data on the contribution and impact of agency-employed staff

Non-participating organisations

- No survey data was collected on organisations that did not participate. Exploring ways to understand the size and characteristics of all organisations that receive SHS funding is recommended.

Next steps

Short term:

Share survey results with all respondents and the sector

Long term:

Consider survey results in the context of the SHS workforce intelligence report and pathway and seek investment in the development of an ongoing, sophisticated approach to continually improve workforce insights and analysis that will support the whole sector's growth and needs over the long term.

Explore job role design and position descriptions to improve understanding of job roles in the sector and aid comparisons with similar social and community services roles

Analysis method

The research team outlined many assumptions and definitions in the ethics application and participant information form sent to each recipient.

As per the ethical guidelines, participation in the survey and each question was voluntary. Where organisations did not respond to a particular question, the response for that question only was removed from analysis for that question only. This is noted in the analysis write up wherever it occurred.

In line with ethics, any organisation that submitted multiple entries as contacted to confirm the final result. Some organisations submitted multiple entries and each was contacted to clarify the accurate response.

Post-survey methodological considerations

In addition to the above listed in the ethics application, the following key definitions were applied to ensure relevant and ethical analysis.

Organisation size

- Organisation size was defined by the sum of total headcount plus total vacancies.
- Organisations were defined as small, medium, large using the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) definition of organisation/enterprise size:
 - Small = Micro (fewer than 10) + small (10-49 employees)
 - Medium = 50-249 employees
 - Large = 250 or more people
- See: OECD (2022), Enterprises by business size (indicator). doi: 10.1787/31d5eeaf-en (accessed on 07 November 2022)

Duplicate responses

- In line with ethics, any organisation that submitted multiple entries as contacted to confirm the final result. Some organisations submitted multiple entries and each was contacted to clarify the accurate response.
- The research team was unable to confirm duplicate entries for one organisation only. In this case, the team selected the most senior participant's response, which was also more complete. Any free text comments that were included in the removed response was added to that organisation's response that remained for analysis to provide greater detail and insight. All questions with quantifiable data (e.g. headcount, FTE, vacancies, etc.) were removed from the less senior entry to ensure each organisation's figures were only counted once.

Analysis method

Post-survey methodological considerations (continued)

Regions

- Question 8 asked, 'In which region/s do you operate Specialist Homelessness Services?' Where re-identification of an organisation was possible for example due to a small number of responses, the results were masked or grouped into larger categories. This includes region/location, with responses in some regions attracting fewer than five (5) responses on several occasions. These have been instead grouped as regional and rural Victoria to ensure confidentiality and adherence to privacy principles. Changes were as follows:
- Original regions:
 - State-wide, North Western Victoria Region, North Eastern Victoria Region, South Eastern Victoria Region, South Western Victoria Region, Metropolitan Melbourne Region
- Adjusted categories:
 - Statewide
 - Metropolitan Melbourne
 - Regional and Rural Victoria (incl. North Eastern Victoria Region, South Eastern Victoria Region, South Western Victoria Region)
- Organisations that operated in Melbourne and at least one other region were categorised as state-wide to ensure all data could be analysed without revealing any identifying characteristics of any organisation due to lower response rates in some regions outside of Melbourne
- Organisations that operated in two (2) or more non-metropolitan regions, but not metropolitan-Melbourne or statewide, were categorised as regional and rural Victoria.

Analysis method

Post-survey methodological considerations (continued)

Survey question assumptions

- Q15 – ‘How many of these vacancies provide services supported by Specialist Homelessness Services funding?’
 - All responses with ‘N/A’ were recorded as ‘0’ where response to Q14 (total vacancies) was ‘0’
 - All free text responses were transformed into an equivalent number that was accurate at the point in time of the response as described in the free text.
- Q16 – ‘How many Specialist Homelessness Services (SHS) workers have left their role as an SHS worker in the last 12 months? (Including internal movements)’
 - Free text responses were transformed into an equivalent number that was accurate at the point in time of the response as described in the free text.
 - Where the text response did not indicate a number, these responses were removed (for example, ‘Don’t know’)
- Q21 – ‘Please estimate what percentage (%) of your specialist homelessness services are funded by:’
 - All responses with no response (i.e. ‘0’ across all options) were excluded from analysis for this question
 - All responses that did not sum to ‘100%’ were excluded from analysis (for example, among those excluded the lowest entry summed to 1%, the next 6%, and the highest was 80%)
- Q22 – ‘Is there anything else you would like to add?’
 - Removed any responses that did not add anything of note, including ‘N/a’, ‘No’, and equivalent.
 - Kept brief comments that indicated feeling towards being surveyed (e.g. ‘Thank you’, ‘no thanks’)
 - After adjusting for the assumptions above, this indicated the total number of responses received for this question

Other considerations

- Question 13 ‘What setting/s do your workers deliver Specialist Homelessness Services? (Estimate the FTE for each)’ was based on recent categories supplied by DFFH.
 - The sum total of responses to question 13 often did not equal the response for question 12: ‘How many full time equivalent (FTE) are employed by Specialist Homelessness Services funding?’. All responses to these questions that met other considerations discussed above were included for analysis.
 - Exploration of setting/s and job roles with the sector is recommended, including a comprehensive mapping exercise to understand how these compare to similar workforces.



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