Who is the Specialist Homelessness Services (SHS) Workforce in Victoria?

A pathway to reliable and reproducible SHS workforce data and analysis

Council to Homeless Persons

January 2023

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

In the spirit of reconciliation Council to Homeless Persons acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of country throughout Australia and their connections to land, sea and community. We pay our respect to their Elders past and present and extend that respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples today.

CONTENTS

Executive Summary

The Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (DFFH) funded the Council to Homeless Persons (CHP) to lead the development and implementation of a Transition Plan (2018-2022) for the Specialist Homelessness Services (SHS) in Victoria. As part of the Plan's implementation, an SHS Workforce Development Strategy was produced.

The Workforce Development Strategy (2020-2025) articulates the dearth of current data about the Victorian SHS Workforce, 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.

The Workforce Innovation and Development Institute (WIDI) at RMIT University was engaged by CHP to identify the best ongoing approach for routinely collecting and analysing SHS workforce data. Through research and consultation, WIDI identified four primary systems commonly used to obtain key workforce data for planning and development. The four primary systems are:

1. Surveys
2. Software tools
3. Workforce regulators
4. Existing data sets and data linkage

Each of these systems has its own benefits and limitations in relation to reliability, accuracy, timeliness, effort required and whether or not it can be realistically achieved. Each system is explored in this paper, leading to WIDI proposing a two-pronged approach to the initial collection of data about the SHS workforce for analysis.

Firstly, accessing the Australian Bureau of Statistics' (ABS's) Multi Agency Data Integration Project (MADIP) shows promise, as it allows authorised users to link data from more than 30 million individual records drawn from a growing number of more than 20 national data sets. These data sets include those of the Australian Tax Office, ABS Census, Department of Health (including the Medicare and Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme), Department of Education, Skills and Employment, Department of Social Services, Services Australia, and many more.[1] In this way, data linking is used to create new, richer data sets.

MADIP has the capability to link externally provided data to its available records. This would allow refinement of the data set over time. While MADIP is a relatively new approach to data sharing and linkage at the ABS (and indeed in Australia), it is a pathway worth pursuing given its significant potential for current and future development.

At this stage of development, MADIP will need to be supplemented with brief workforce survey tools to fill data gaps. When combined and tested with the sector, these two approaches to data collection aim to minimise requests on the sector and the reliance on self-reporting while building capacity to provide greater workforce insights and make relevant comparisons with other workforces. In partnership with CHP and with the support of DFFH and the SHS, WIDI is in the process of trialling both data collection approaches.

There is also significant potential to apply this approach to the Victorian social and community services sector more broadly as well as with other jurisdictions with similar workforces. The potential for MADIP to tap into existing government data is worth pursuing, as it utilises existing resources while minimising the effort required by any single part of the sector, government and the workforce. The initial data collection fields from both MADIP and the survey are summarised in the diagram presented on pages 6–7 of this document.

Implementing and sustaining this data collection and analysis over time will require initial and ongoing investment. Critical to the success of this work is the building of a collaborative partnership of stakeholders who will all benefit from the information this data can provide including government, peak bodies, researchers and policy makers and sector organisations. Cycles of feedback and improvement will be important to ensure data and analysis is timely, and relevant for decision making.

The workforce data gap within Specialist Homelessness Services

It is critical to ensure service providers have enough staff able to work effectively with people who are or who are at risk of being without a home.

Supporting the recruitment and training of additional workers to meet the projected increases in demand for services requires careful planning. SHS, and the social services sector more broadly, lack consistent and timely workforce data. This absence of data includes information about key factors such as the size, capability, and outlook of the workforce. This makes it extremely challenging to undertake informed workforce planning – we need to know the characteristics of the workforce now in order to plan for the future.

The most recent point-in-time surveys in the past 15 years, found that the SHS workforce in Victoria is approximately 2,000 strong, across 130 organisations, working in three main job areas: initial planning and assessment, support, and in tenancy management.[2] Consistent with other parts of the social services sector, underlying demand for homelessness services continues to rise. However, the supply and retention of adequately skilled and experienced workers has been a significant challenge for some time, and this problem has been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. The pool of workers able to provide skilled support to people without a home and with complexity in their lives, is not keeping pace with the level of demand.

As the peak body representing organisations and individuals in Victoria with a commitment to ending homelessness, CHP is acutely aware of the workforce challenges facing the sector. CHP led extensive sector consultations to inform the development of a Workforce Development Strategy (2020-2025) to meet current and future needs. CHP, its member organisations and government recognise that data is needed to inform measures to address these challenges and to accurately track progress.

Previous ad hoc surveys have explored aspects of the workforce; however, they are dated, have not necessarily captured the entire sector, and have utilised differing terminology, definitions, classifications and methodologies. This variation makes the data hard to use to identify trends, including in relation to recruitment and retention. In addition, these surveys can often take up a great deal of the valuable time of the workforce, drawing people away from providing critical services.

To undertake this work, CHP commissioned the Workforce Innovation and Development Institute (WIDI) at RMIT University, with support from Homes Victoria through the funding of the implementation of the SHS Transition Plan (2018-2022). This project aimed to propose and trial a reliable, ongoing system of workforce data collection that allows analysis to inform sector decision makers, including:

1. Who is the SHS workforce?
2. What are some of the key recruitment and retention issues facing organisations and workers?
3. How is the workforce changing over time?

This report outlines a two-pronged approach to collecting, analysing and sharing workforce data, to create a meaningful understanding of the SHS workforce. This approach could also be adopted by other areas within the social services sector that seek a better understanding of their workforces. Such sharing would enable wider comparison and understanding of how the social services sector workforce is changing over time. Given the interdependencies and dynamic relationships between the various parts of the social services workforce, developing this broader, detailed picture could be of enormous value to the entire social service sector.

What information do we need for workforce planning and development?

In the first phase of the project, WIDI reviewed relevant published social services sector workforce surveys and analyses and undertook interviews with 14 key stakeholder groups in Victoria as well as nationally and internationally.[4] This work informed the design of a workforce data set to provide a deeper understanding of the SHS workforce.

Within published literature and among the key stakeholders that were consulted, there was broad agreement in support of the development of a clear, consistent workforce data set to inform workforce planning. The Victorian Family Violence workforce census, which surveyed many SHS workers, provides the most recent SHS workforce snapshot. It is also a useful guide to the primary inclusions for meaningful workforce intelligence.[5] The primary inclusions in similar workforce data sets, are summarised neatly by the Victorian Public Sector Commission as follows:

- **Skills** – or capabilities required for the future
- **Size** – of the future workforce
- **Site** – or location of the future workforce
- **Shape** – or structure of the future workforce
- **Source** – of the skills or roles[6].

At the Commonwealth level, Royal Commissions have recommended significant social services sector workforce reform with particular attention given to disability and aged care services. These recommendations include the establishment of cross-jurisdictional data sharing and national data assets that would include significant information about service delivery organisations, the workforce, and service users'.[7,8] WIDI also identified several parallel and related social services workforce strategies being pursued in Victoria, including those in community housing, mental health and family violence'.[9] While all these strategies acknowledge the need for workforce data as an area for action, how to develop these data sets is yet to be clearly defined. Strategies for ongoing workforce intelligence are not cited, with the exception of gathering data via traditional survey-based approaches.[10]

There is a general understanding of workforce data to be collected and analysed. However, work is yet to be done to identify how a standardised approach to data collection could be implemented, as well as how to establish a new data system capable of capturing the diversity of the entire service delivery system and its workforce.

WIDI's consultations and review of published social services surveys and analyses, found many variations of workforce data indicators. While these provide insights into the primary purposes outlined above, they apply varying definitions to workforce data.

WIDI has developed a refined set of domains that encompass the key areas of information that should be sought across both the SHS and the broader social services sector. These have been designed to meet the needs of SHS employers, government and employees as well as of other areas of the social services sector. The proposed data set has six domains:
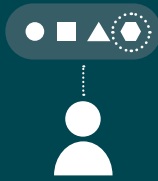
- **Organisational data** – The characteristics of employers
- **Workforce demographics** – The characteristics of the workforce
- **Qualifications, training and education** – The knowledge and skills of the workforce

- **Job role and conditions** – The types of jobs and the conditions of the workforce
- **Worker wellbeing and outlook** – The wellbeing and perceptions of the workforce
- **Experience, career pathways and job history** – The work experience of the workforce

Regular, up-to-date collection of this data would provide significant intelligence about the current state of the SHS workforce, trends over time, and provide critical insights for workforce planning and development. Further detail about the data points being collected within these domains is presented later in this report.

WORKFORCE DATA SET: SIX DOMAINS

Organisational data

The characteristics of employers

Workforce demographics

The characteristics of the workforce

Qualifications, training and education

The knowledge and skills of the workforce

Job role and conditions

The types of jobs and the conditions of the workforce

Worker wellbeing and outlook

The wellbeing and perceptions of the workforce

Experience, career pathways and job history

The work experience of the workforce
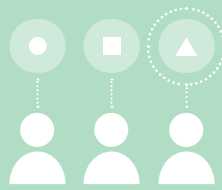
DOMAIN 1: Organisational	DOMAIN 2: Workforce demographics	DOMAIN 3: Qualifications, training and education

EXAMPLE DATA AND ANALYSIS

What is the size of the workforce and where are they located? What are the characteristics of organisations delivering SHS?	*What are the demographics of the SHS workforce and how do they compare to the community?*	*What qualifications, training and education does the workforce have and how is this changing over time?*

MADIP DATA LINKAGE (CORE)

• Total employees • Organisation turnover • Staff retention • Staff turnover • Location/s of organisation	• Age • Gender • Location • Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander status • LGBTIQA+ identification • Country of birth • Language spoken at home • Migrant status (1st, 2nd, 3rd gen) • Sexual orientation • Person with disability • Person with mental illness • Citizenship / visa status	• Qualifications

SUPPLEMENTARY DATA
(INCLUSIVE OF SURVEYS AND OTHER AVAILABLE DATA SOURCES, SUCH AS THE VICTORIAN FAMILY VIOLENCE WORKFORCE CENSUS)

• Sector/s of operation • Setting/s • Use of volunteers • Location/s of services • Vacancies	• Other demographics identified by the sector and/or government	• Training needs • Digital literacy • Knowledge and skills-related information identified by the sector and government

DOMAIN 4:
Job role and conditions

DOMAIN 5:
Worker wellbeing

DOMAIN 6:
Experience, career pathways and job history

What are the income levels of the workforce?

What is the health and wellbeing of the workforce? What are the career intentions of the workforce?

What are the career pathways and job histories of the workforce?

- Role
- Length of service/ retention and length of time in the industry
- Remuneration
- Annual income before tax
- Working arrangements (full time, part time, casual)

- Employee wellbeing proxy indicators – to be identified in co-design process. This will also include consideration of what is available in health care, family and care arrangements, and other key areas

- Length of service at organisation
- Length of time working in the industry
- Occupation before first job in sector
- First job in sector
- Previous position in industry
- Number of current employers

- Other job role and job condition information identified by the sector and/or government

- Intention to stay in the sector
- Employee satisfaction
- Workplace health and safety and wellness
- Equal opportunity, bullying and harassment
- The quality of management and supervision

- Other job role and job condition information identified by the sector and/or government

Designing a system capable of collecting SHS workforce data and analysis

There are four primary systems commonly used to obtain key workforce data for planning and development, each with its own benefits and limitations in relation to reliability, accuracy, timeliness and effort required:

1. Surveys
2. Software tools
3. Workforce regulators
4. Existing data sets and data linkage

Surveys

Surveys – of the workforce and/or employers – remain the most common method of workforce data collection utilised in the Australian social services sector. WIDI's review of past homelessness and similar workforce surveys, found that while surveys remain the most common method of data collection, response rates are low and significant resources are required to drive higher response rates than 30–40 per cent.[11] Low response rates indicate that survey results and data are neither likely to adequately represent the entire workforce, nor help to identify aspects unique to social services specialist – workforces such as the SHS, including organisation size, service users and geographic locations. In the surveys that WIDI reviewed, data point definitions changed considerably, even within the same workforce. This significantly reduces comparability and the capacity for trend analysis. Survey response rates may reduce further with ever increasing demands for information inherent in changes to the work environment. These demands include a greater use of technology and online systems, and 'survey fatigue' experienced by workers in caring and support roles associated with the complex and evolving challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic.[12]

Software tools

Software tools for the collection of social services workforce data have been developed overseas. These tools require the software to be installed at each site (including ongoing technical support, maintenance and upgrades) as well as a data sharing mechanism that can be received by a central data warehouse to store and manage data securely for analysis. They necessarily require a significant number of skilled people and resources from end to end. Bespoke software tools offer a high degree of sector autonomy, including the ability to produce significant ongoing and ad hoc analysis.

The strategic workforce development and planning body for social care in England, UK Skills for Care, was consulted during key stakeholder interviews. They have developed a sophisticated software-based system, that collects workforce information to support its objective to ensure the social services sector in England has the right people, skills and support to deliver the highest quality care and support now and in the future.[13] UK Skills for Care lead the development and implementation of a sophisticated data set capable of making sector (and sub-sector) comparisons, benchmarking, modelling and many other strategic functions. This data set is the leading source of adult social services sector workforce information in England. It took more than 15 years to design and implement this approach, with significant upfront investment from government.

Once established, the system continues to require a high level of government funding to support a highly skilled team of more than 20 development, analyst and support staff

who maintain, update and refine the system as technology, software and hardware changes disrupt compatibility at each organisation. An additional 40 staff work locally with social service organisations throughout England to use the software and train staff to use and maintain the software for their organisation.

Consistent with the Australian social services sector, England does not regulate all social services sector workers. This is associated with a lack of standardisation that increases the challenge of data collection and analysis. The UK Skills for Care team nonetheless has been able to work with the sector and government to use the data that is available, to develop meaningful workforce data and analysis. Bespoke software solutions such as this required all or most organisations to support the process as well as to install, maintain and update software. Significant government financial support for up-front and ongoing system design, implementation and change management is also a critical factor. The resources needed to implement this approach in Victoria would likely need to be in addition to existing Human Resources and other related systems and requirements.

Workforce regulators

WIDI consulted with social services sector workforce regulators in Australia, Scotland, Northern Ireland, and Wales. This provided examples of workforce data sets that are accurate and able to inform workforce planning as well as being able to support ongoing skill development through mandated professional development.[14] Each of these bodies is responsible for regulating services and the workforce through common standards and safeguards. They maintain a current register of all workers in all or most of the social services sector and ensure professional development requirements are met.

There are many challenges to establishing a new workforce regulator, not least the widespread support needed from the sector and government to make the change, over a long period of time. In Australia, social services sector workforce regulation is further complicated by the division of responsibilities and funding between the Federal and State and Territory governments. Recent Victorian Government legislation introduced in 2021 will provide for a new regulatory framework for social services to commence in 2024, including homelessness support services.[15] Once the regulatory framework is established, it will likely provide some information about the homelessness workforce. However, consultations in relation to this new regulatory framework are still underway.

WIDI's research revealed that similar and more advanced overseas-based social service regulators can provide sophisticated information for workforce planning and development that is all-encompassing of the social services sector. However, they have required significant time and investment from government over approximately 20 years to establish this broad scope of work.

Existing data sets and data linkage

Linking data can be used to bring together information from different sources in order to create a new, richer and deidentified dataset.[16] Evidence from consultations and a review of published literature also found significant potential in linking existing government data sets. Using existing data sources seeks to apply the principle of 'collect once, use many times', acknowledging the regular and numerous demands on the sector and workers for information. However, data linkage is not currently being used in an ongoing way for the Australian social services sector workforce.

WIDI reviewed existing data sets that could provide data and analysis for the SHS workforce to understand what data is already collected and how it could help inform this work. WIDI identified a broad range of existing data sets, ranging from service delivery administrative data (such as workforce user profiles within the Infoxchange SHS client and case management data system) to government and government agency held data sources, including the Australian Tax Office, Census and other Australian Bureau of Statistics surveys as well as linked data sets such as the Business Longitudinal Analysis Data Environment (BLADE) and the Multi-Agency Data Integration Project (MADIP). These data sets include regularly collected information with valuable data and analysis related to the SHS workforce. However, in isolation they are much less useful.

Significantly, technology and evolving legislative changes that permit data sharing now provide the opportunity to link multiple data sets that can build a more comprehensive and accurate picture without asking the sector for any additional data. Linked data sets could deliver a range of accurate and meaningful information about the SHS workforce without imposing a burden on SHS organisations.

In order to link data sets, the data needs to be reasonably detailed and granular. To link data sets effectively and accurately, a shared logic, terminology and definition of key data points is necessary. This critical process requires sector and government engagement to carefully test for accuracy. Bringing together the necessary team of skilled staff capable of understanding how to link these data sets for analysis is a key challenge whenever a new system of data linkage is established. Finally, careful consideration of the design and publication of any linked data sets is paramount. Higher quality and more detailed data also creates the potential to identify and re-identify individuals and therefore requires strong privacy and confidentiality protocols and a highly secure environment to protect sensitive information.

Using data linkage through the Multi-Agency Data Integration Project to understand the SHS workforce

WIDI identified that the Australian Bureau of Statistics' (ABS's) Multi Agency Data Integration Project (MADIP) was potentially available to use to understand the Specialist Homelessness Services workforce.

Exploration with the ABS led to the opportunity to explore the breadth of MADIP's capability for SHS workforce data collection and analysis.

The MADIP data linkage system requires projects to be in the public interest. It allows access and linkage of data from more than 30 million individual records drawn from a growing number of more than 20 national data sets. All public sector data sets linking to MADIP are controlled by their respective data custodians who must also approve MADIP project requests.

Data custodians that currently link to MADIP include the Australian Tax Office, Department of Health (Medicare and Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme), Department of Education, Skills and Employment, Department of Social Services, Services Australia, the ABS Census, and many more[17].

Many linked MADIP data sets extend back to 2010 and are updated periodically.

MADIP is also capable of linking externally provided data to its available records, presenting the potential to increase refinements of workforce analysis over time. The ability to link external data sets inherently increases security and privacy concerns, particularly related to identification or re-identification of individuals and organisations. However, the ABS has numerous well recognised controls in place

reducing this risk. All projects must go through a rigorous assessment and approval process, and only authorised researchers can access the deidentified data once approved by the ABS and all data custodians. The ABS assesses projects under the Five Safes Framework and requires all to be in line with all relevant legislation by each contributing data custodian (such as those listed above and in the proposed MADIP workforce data and analysis system diagram on page 13).[18] Several workforce-related projects are underway using MADIP, led by the Commonwealth Government Department of Premier and Cabinet, Australian Treasury, the Reserve Bank of Australia, and the Victorian Government Department of Premier and Cabinet among others.[19]

MADIP is relatively new and requires partnership with an accredited body to access and interrogate the data (see pages 6–7 for initial data collection fields). WIDI has been working with the ABS since 2021 during the design of this project and is a participant in several ongoing national MADIP working groups, including groups focussed on education and economics.

WIDI has confirmed the availability of data in MADIP to allow analysis across the proposed workforce data domains identified earlier in this report (listed on pages 6–7).

With the support of CHP, WIDI submitted and has been approved to access data through MADIP for SHS workforce analysis, and also gained ethics approval through RMIT University. WIDI has successfully linked data sets within MADIP to identify all employees working for organisations that receive SHS funding in Victoria, which enables future analysis across all domains listed in the proposed workforce data set on pages 6–7 of this document. The use of MADIP presents a significant opportunity to
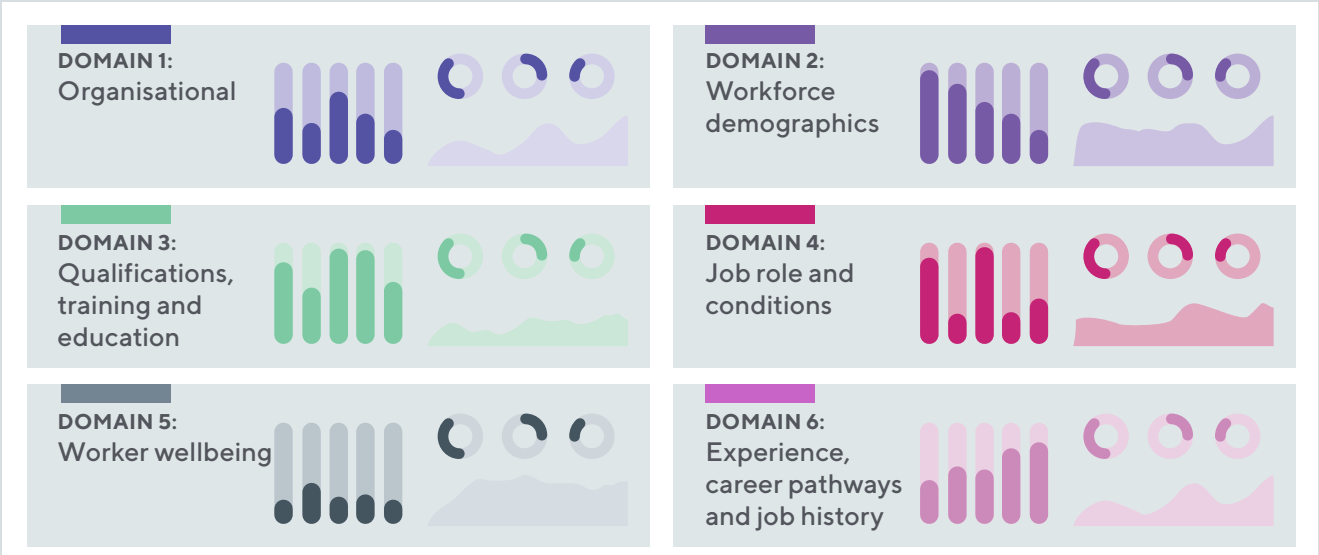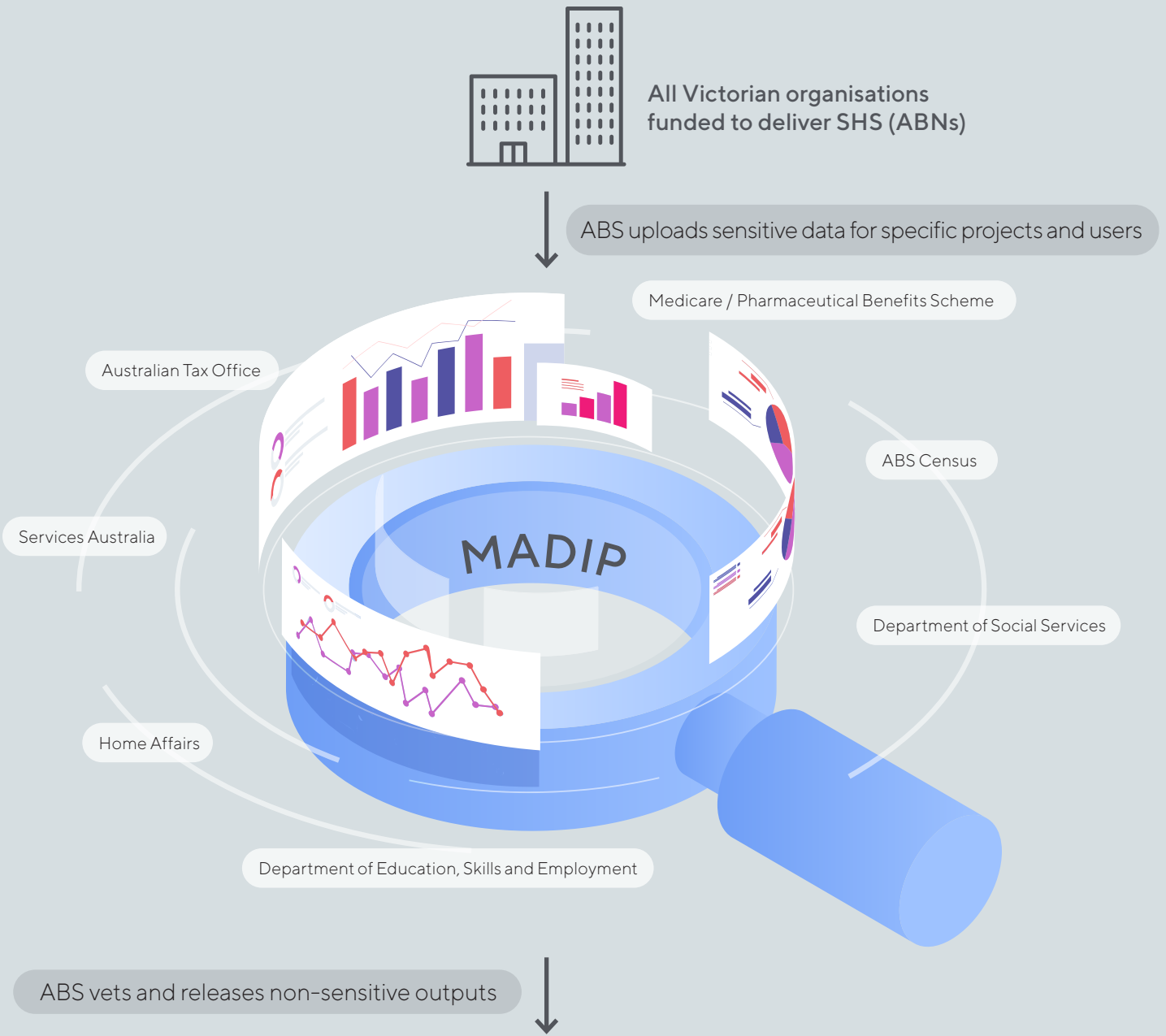
develop a leading capability in understanding the SHS workforce. However, developing this capability and extending the capacity of MADIP for the sector will require an ongoing investment of time and resources by project partners over time.

The most significant challenge to developing a linked data set is defining the workforce. This will require several assumptions, most importantly inclusions and exclusions of people in the workforce data set. Based on advice from the ABS and key stakeholders, WIDI is conducting limited testing and analysis by defining the SHS workforce as employees within organisations funded to deliver SHS in Victoria. The Australian Business Numbers (ABNs) of these organisations, have been supplied to the ABS with agreement from Homes Victoria. Via Australian Tax Office records, WIDI has linked all ABNs supplied to all employees (de-identified) that work or have worked in each organisation – see MADIP concept diagram on page 13. This includes all organisations that deliver SHS and are funded by the Victorian Government Department of Families, Fairness, and Housing (DFFH). However, as the collection is agency based, it includes all employees of that service provider and hence, for many organisations this will also include employees that do not deliver SHS. WIDI is initially testing analysis using the Australian and New Zealand Standard Classification of Occupations (ANZSCO) codes to identify occupations within the existing linked data sets to achieve a more accurate fit to the SHS workforce. Further refinement to improve the accuracy of the analysis may be achieved by linking additional data items from data sets approved by data custodians such as the ATO and the ABS. Initial testing will explore income bands, demographics, qualifications, and organisation characteristics. Additional data

points could be requested following validating findings with CHP, the sector and government. As the MADIP data sets develop over time, more data points are likely to be available providing greater accuracy and relevance.

The Australian and New Zealand Standard Classification of Occupations (ANZSCO) provides a basis for the standardised collection, analysis and dissemination of occupation data for Australia and New Zealand and is revised semi-regularly.[20] This makes comparisons within and across sectors and jurisdictions possible, however like many methods of categorisation, ANZSCO has limitations. ANZSCO's most significant limitation when applied to the social services workforce is the absence of granular detail about job roles. For example, a worker can be categorised as a Social Worker, but not as an Intake and Assessment worker. This limitation can be mitigated or overcome by drawing on other data available through MADIP or working with the sector and government to supply additional external data sources. Over time, WIDI recommends working with the sector and government to develop and refine a taxonomy of job roles that map to existing occupation and industry categories. WIDI has undertaken similar work with other social services workforces in collaboration with the sector, government and trade unions. The work involved the mapping of job roles to inform the development of a specialist jobs taxonomy. The taxonomy identifies job families and groups and provides the basis for the classification of core functions and comprehensive descriptions of the roles required to deliver services. This work needs to be done in relation to the SHS and this will significantly enhance the capacity for data linkage and relevant comparisons with similar workforces.

PROPOSED MADIP WORKFORCE DATA AND ANALYSIS SYSTEM

All Victorian organisations funded to deliver SHS (ABNs)

ABS uploads sensitive data for specific projects and users

Medicare / Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme

Australian Tax Office

ABS Census

Services Australia

MADIP

Department of Social Services

Home Affairs

Department of Education, Skills and Employment

ABS vets and releases non-sensitive outputs

DOMAIN 1:
Organisational

DOMAIN 2:
Workforce demographics

DOMAIN 3:
Qualifications, training and education

DOMAIN 4:
Job role and conditions

DOMAIN 5:
Worker wellbeing

DOMAIN 6:
Experience, career pathways and job history

Workforce occupation and industry data definitions in the social and community service workforce

One of the key challenges of building the SHS workforce data set, is the current inconsistency in the way job roles are described in the sector. Mapping roles in the sector to job families, and ideally, widely used industry and occupation categories (for example ANZSCO and its companion industry categorisation system, the Australian and New Zealand Standard Industrial Classification or ANZSIC) is needed to support improved analysis including trends and comparative analysis by job role and function.

In seeking to achieve this outcome, workforce regulators are very helpful. Bodies such as the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (AHPRA) and overseas-based social services sector regulators such as the Northern Ireland Social Care Council (NISCC), have the ability to consistently and accurately identify the size and characteristics of the workforce in its entirety or by sub-sections at any point in time. We have several parallel workforce development and workforce data strategies being developed in Victoria and Australia (e.g. homelessness, family violence, community housing, mental health, aged care, disability). This should provide significant opportunity to design a workforce data set capable of providing similar consistent data for the SHS and broader social services sector workforce. A combined approach could examine the complex interplay between sub-sectors, and also provide a cost-effective solution to a common problem in the resource-poor social services system.

Designing a system that can collect and analyse workforce data across the whole social services sector in Victoria while clearly identifying the SHS workforce would be both a cost effective and powerful approach to the collection of the proposed SHS workforce data and analysis. Common definitions of worker roles across sector workforces will need to be developed to allow this information to be useful. The result would lead to a significant capability that would allow analysis to inform planning and key decisions not only in relation to the SHS, but also across the entire social services system.

The resources required to design, analyse, maintain and update both the underlying system and workforce data in an ongoing capacity are significant. In examples reviewed by WIDI, the lead organisation responsible for workforce surveys varied widely and included government departments, unions, university researchers, and consulting firms. This variety makes access to data for consistent and accurate analysis even more challenging. However, the bodies utilising software tools, and existing data sets and data

linkage have been established and continue to operate as specialised, non-government, workforce-focused entities that engage with the sector and government.

Examples of sophisticated analyses can be seen in the work of the UK Skills for Care Workforce Intelligence among those consulted,[21] or in the expert labour market advice provided by the Australian-based National Skills Commission (NSC) that allows workforce insights and forecasting in many areas of the Australian economy.[22] Unfortunately, the NSC's recent work has been limited to the 'care workforce' and due to occupation category limitations described above, this work has not conducted in-depth analysis of SHS work roles or similar areas in the detail required.[23]

WIDI engaged with the NSC during the MADIP application process. WIDI recommends maintaining contact with the NSC following the testing period to ensure future SHS workforce analysis can be compared with relevant areas published by the NSC. Workforce-focused entities such as the NSC and UK Skills for Care have developed more sophisticated outputs, analysis and support than provided by historically ad-hoc approaches to SHS workforce data collection. They also have the advantage of access to data that can be compared and analysed accurately over time (or at any point in time). Victorian SHS and community services need a similar approach. A workforce-focussed lead agency is needed with the resources and capability to develop and maintain specialised teams that work closely with the sector and government, to develop sophisticated, practical and relevant SHS workforce data collection and analysis.

A pathway to reliable and reproducible SHS workforce data and analysis

An initial two-pronged approach is underway, collecting data about the SHS workforce. The approach seeks to establish a system of workforce data collection and analysis that draws from:

- Linking existing federal government big data sets through MADIP
- Surveying employers about the workforce

An ongoing commitment will be needed from all stakeholders to test and refine the workforce data set and analysis. Workforce analysis will draw on information available from both methods to meet the sector's needs, providing insights across the six workforce domains on pages 6-7.

The two-pronged approach seeks to minimise the effort required by service providers and the workforce by drawing as much as possible on data linkage sources, and only supplementing necessary information from other sources to address gaps as the data linkage approach is developed and resourced.

WIDI began limited testing and validating data in MADIP in November 2022 to inform early stages of SHS workforce analysis. WIDI's initial data analysis is focused on identifying the most accurate and fit-for-purpose data sources within MADIP, as well as identifying gaps in the data and the usefulness of analysis. The linked data set will need to be implemented in stages, with each stage driven by the degree of difficulty of analysing and interpreting data points.

Feedback from the sector and government will help to identify areas for future development. Amendments to the approved MADIP application are possible and simpler to complete than establishing a new project, which offers flexibility into the future. As described earlier on pages 10-11, with additional investment it is possible for additional data sets to be linked and included in future MADIP workforce data analysis. This could include information from any external source, including the sector or the Victorian Government, as long as relevant data sharing protocols are followed by all relevant parties. MADIP's ability to adapt in this way, could lead to the development of increasingly effective models validated through use and allowing ever more sophisticated analysis relevant to the evolving key priorities and challenges of the SHS and government.

Analysis of data sets accessed through MADIP will allow appropriate statistical models to be built and approved for release, following relevant ABS protocols. All of this will take time to develop and validate. As WIDI finalises initial stages of development and testing, workforce information is being supplemented by a traditional workforce survey of employers to provide a snapshot of the sector. With appropriate resources, WIDI can

further test and refine the proposed model in collaboration with CHP and the sector. These results will provide a useful source of validation to the development and testing of MADIP analysis.

A pathway for developing meaningful SHS workforce data and analysis system is outlined across pages 14–15.

For greatest utility, this approach could be applied consistently across the social services sector beyond SHS. It makes sense to develop a whole-of-social-services view where the SHS workforce, and other sub-sectors, can be seen within the context of the complex and dynamic systems that comprise the social services workforce.

Implementing and sustaining this data collection and analysis over time will require significant initial and ongoing investment. Critical to the success of this work is the building of a collaborative partnership, drawing on cycles of feedback and improvement among those who will use and benefit from the information this workforce analysis can provide: government, peak bodies, researchers and policy makers and sector organisations.

2023

LATE 2022 – EARLY 2023
Survey - Develop and conduct interim workforce survey – Key, high level information to inform sector planning and to support validation of the new MADIP data linkage system accuracy with recent workforce information

EARLY - MID 2023
MADIP – Explore and test initial data linkage analysis and communicate early findings to CHP and government

MID 2023 – ONGOING
MADIP – Explore opportunities to test, refine and expand MADIP data linkage system for relevance with the sector and government, and identify key gaps and opportunities

MID 2023 – LATE 2024
MADIP – Explore opportunities to work with the sector and government to build a job family / taxonomy of job roles and map roles to occupation codes used in government data sets

MID 2023 – ONGOING
Explore options to establish publicly accessible analysis and related resources

LATE 2023 – ONGOING
MADIP – Explore opportunities to work with multiple social service sub-sector workforces to understand how the SHS workforce compares and interacts with the entire social services workforce

LATE 2023 – ONGOING
MADIP – Establish workforce research projects that work with the sector to develop more sophisticated models that increase accuracy and relevance to support improved decision making

2024

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