

Area child protection workload review and monitoring panels

Description and operational guidelines 2019

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Introduction

Context

The statutory Child Protection program in Victoria has a legislative mandate to investigate and intervene in cases where a child or young person is assessed to be at risk of significant harm as a result of child abuse or neglect. The program's actions and decisions are governed by principles outlined in the *Children, Youth and Families Act 2005* (CYFA).

The program receives reports of child abuse and neglect, assesses reports, and determines whether an investigation is necessary to directly assess the child's safety and wellbeing, or whether the provision of advice or a referral is sufficient. If, following investigation, protective concerns are substantiated, Child Protection may work with the family by agreement to address the risks to the child where sufficient safety can be established, or apply to the Children's Court for an order to protect the child. Supervising and managing court orders is a function of the program, supported by an out-of-home care system for children and young people who cannot safely be in parental care.

The program is delivered from 17 areas in 4 divisions across Victoria. The capacity and workload of the program are monitored through various reporting mechanisms and key performance indicators. Child Protection intervention moves through phases to the extent required to protect a child:

- Intake (receipt and assessment of reports)
- Investigation (direct investigation of reports)
- Protective intervention (action to address protective concerns through engagement with families by agreement, or application to the Children's Court, including under interim orders)
- Protection order (management and supervision of Children's Court protection orders, including contracted case management).

The volume of work in the Child Protection program is considerable and variable, and many of the drivers of demand are outside the control of the program. Areas can experience fluctuations in workload demand. The program is required to manage the workload in a way that maximises compliance with the CYFA, policies, and occupational health and safety legislation.

Workload review monitoring panels

Area child protection workload review and monitoring panels (WRMP) were first introduced in 2005 as part of the Department of Health and Human Services' system for collaboratively monitoring and managing program demand and practitioner workload.

The department recognises its obligation to provide an effective system for providing a safe system of work for child protection practitioners including consideration of worker health and safety when determining individual staff workloads.

The WRMP are a proactive mechanism to significantly assist the program to identify the drivers and levers to manage workload and prevent or intervene quickly to address workload pressures detected through regular monitoring of the distribution of workload in areas.

The area child protection WRMP are an adjunct to existing internal dispute resolution processes and grievance mechanisms. The panels are an additional mechanism to assist managers and child protection practitioners to understand, analyse, and collaboratively develop processes that may effectively monitor and manage workload.

Purpose

The WRMP's purpose is to:

- monitor, review and report on the demand and distribution of child protection work across the area
- monitor, review and report on factors that influence area capacity to meet workload requirements, for example vacancies, and staff availability
- recommend strategies to respond to significant changes or issues concerning area workload and capacity as identified or anticipated
- assist with area planning for child protection resource management.

Membership

The WRMP is to be convened and chaired by the Area Executive Director or Child Protection Director for Divisional services. The panel membership is to include:

- (a) Child Protection Area Operations Manager
- (b) an employee representative from each work unit in the area that includes a range of classifications (CPP2-6)
- (c) at least one health and safety representative (HSR) employed in a CPP2-6 position
- (d) two Community and Public Sector Union (CPSU) delegates, nominated by the CPSU Melbourne), however one is sufficient where two are not available
- (e) a representative from People and Culture

Employee representation on panels should be broadly representative of the different types of child protection work units and levels within the area. That is, child protection employee membership on panels should include a mix of practitioners and managers nominated and selected to represent the various units and sites in the area.

Panels generally require a minimum of five representatives including management; however, subject to area capacity to support greater numbers, actual panel membership may exceed this to adequately represent all interested parties.

Convenor

The WRMP will meet monthly and will be convened and chaired by the Area Executive Director or Child Protection Director. The chair will be responsible for overseeing all secretariat functions, including the preparation of reports and minutes.

Nomination and selection of employees, occupational health and safety, and Community and Public Sector Union representatives

The panel convenor instigates the process for recruiting panel members. In the first instance, employees should be invited to self-nominate or to nominate colleagues. Where more than one nomination is received for a particular site or unit type and the employees are unable to decide on a preferred nominee, a ballot may be held.

Where insufficient interest is received from a particular site, unit or level of the child protection program in the area, the convenor should engage relevant management representatives to seek assistance in securing the desired employee involvement.

The convenor is to seek nominations of a health and safety representative (HSR) employed in a CPP2-6 position, for the panel.

The convenor is to invite the Child Protection Community and Public Sector Union delegates as nominated by the CPSU (Melbourne metro areas) for the panel. Support time allowance is to be included as per clause 68 of Victorian Public Service Agreement 2016.

No particular period of tenure is recommended for panel members; however, reconsideration of panel membership is recommended as part of an annual self-evaluation by each panel of their activities and processes.

Time allowance for employees and Community and Public Sector Union delegates participation

Participation of employees and the Child Protection CPSU delegates on the panel will be recognised and compensated for by its inclusion as one of the factors considered when reviewing the workload of those employees, in the same way other influencing factors are considered when determining current workload capacity through the standard fortnightly supervision process.

Frequency of meetings

The panel will meet:

- monthly as a minimum, to fulfil general monitoring and reporting purposes. In the event a meeting is cancelled the requirement is to reschedule within the same month
- in response to requests or reviews of specific workload issues affecting a team, unit, and area.

Monitoring general workload

The range of information considered for comprehensive area monitoring, review and reporting of general workload issues will include:

- non-identifying information related to case allocation and awaiting data information by area, unit, and team
- a summary of issues impacting workload for each area, unit, and team and mitigating strategies
- demand pressures and numbers of cases in each phase
- number of cases being monitored or awaiting allocation, and effectiveness of current systems
- leave patterns, including recreation leave, long service leave, maternity/paternity leave, carer leave and sick leave
- non-identifying reports on the OurSafety system
- reports on time-in-lieu and overtime accrual and use
- workforce trends, including employee turnover, vacancies and growth or reduction in employee numbers
- employee retention data
- supervision compliance data
- employee experience levels (including average length of service) and professional development activities undertaken
- area People Matters Survey data
- employee rosters for Rural After-Hours Services if relevant
- other information identified as relevant by area panels (e.g. emoji data).

People Matters Survey

WRMP's are required to consider survey data and periodically review local processes used to allocate and monitor workloads, employee health and safety, and issues affecting employees' ability to perform at optimum levels.

Data

All data presented to the WMRP will be treated as confidential to support the objective of the panel. The Area Executive Director or Child Protection Director will establish and maintain processes to facilitate the regular and timely flow of data and information to panels. Refer to Attachment 1 for the report template. Panels are encouraged to identify local data options that will assist in monitoring workload patterns and influences.

The panels will provide their confidential monthly data report and minutes to the operational divisional deputy secretary. Written reports and data provided in the course of the meeting will not be retained by meeting participants but instead returned to the secretariat.

Data is to be non-identifying. If data sets are too small and could lead to identification of employees, this data should not be used.

Evaluating panel operation

It is recommended area panels undertake an annual self-evaluation, reflecting on their activities and processes as well as outcomes. An evaluation guide and template to assist area panels to undertake evaluations is available, refer to Attachment 2.

Options for resolving team workload issues

Example solutions:

- review task allocation within the team
- review work processes
- conduct skills analysis and relevant training
- review complexity and size of caseloads
- reprioritisation of services
- monitor number of new clients and review workloads as required
- consider spreading out employee start and finish times to cover peak periods
- consider flexible work arrangements, e.g. compressed working hours
- review processes to identify efficiencies
- cross train employees in the critical skills that have the most impact on producing outcomes
- engage People and Culture to determine strategies to make the area more attractive to potential employees, e.g. job redesign, offer flexible work arrangements, etc.
- consult with employees and CPSU to determine impacts of new systems, organisational change, and new policies on work demands prior to implementation.

Individual requests for workload review

The supervision process is considered the primary forum for a practitioner to raise and discuss any difficulties they are experiencing regarding their workload. The practitioner's supervisor should assess the source of the difficulties and develop, in conjunction with the practitioner, a plan to remedy identified issues. The Deputy Area Operations Manager, Child Protection and the Team Manager monitor and review Senior child protection practitioner workloads.

Where the practitioner and their supervisor are unable to resolve an individual workload concern, at the first opportunity the supervisor should refer the matter to the Team Manager or Deputy Area Operations Manager, Child Protection for consideration and attempted resolution. Matters may be further escalated to executive officer level if resolution cannot be achieved within the CPP management line. Where necessary Workforce Services may be approached by any party for support and advice regarding additional resolution processes; the practitioner may also invite the HSR, employed in a CPP2-6 position, where required.

The departmental workplace issues resolution procedures (including Clause 13 and the Positive and Fair Workplace policy and Review of Actions policy) are also available in the event a workload review request cannot be resolved through line management processes. Workload concerns by the practitioner and supervisor should be escalated when attempts to resolve the concern are unsuccessful.

Related documents

Supervision in Child Protection practice – Operational practice guide

Supervision and principles of work allocation for child protection practitioners - guidelines

Individual workload monitoring process guidelines

Positive and Fair Workplace policy and Review of Actions policy

Clause 13: Workload, Victorian Public Service Enterprise Agreement 2016

Attachment 1 – WRMP report template

Draft in development – use existing reporting in the interim.

Attachment 2 - WRMP evaluation guide and template

Draft in development.