

Regional Child Protection workload management monitoring and review panels

Description and operating guidelines

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Introduction

The statutory Child Protection program in Victoria has a legislative mandate to investigate and intervene in cases in which a child or young person is at risk of significant harm of child abuse or neglect. The program receives notifications of child abuse or neglect, makes an initial investigation of the concerns raised in that notification, and determines whether a direct investigation is necessary to ensure the child’s safety and wellbeing. It also provides case management for up to three months if protective concerns are substantiated. Child Protection takes matters before the Children’s Court and can seek a range of orders. Supervising and managing these orders is a function of the program, as is establishing and maintaining an out-of-home care system for children and young people unable to reside within their family.

The Child Protection program in Victoria is delivered in eight regions and operates a system to respond to and organise workload, which is monitored through key performance indicators, and defined by principles outlined in child protection legislation. The work is divided into phases:

- receipt of notifications (intake)
- the initial investigation and response to notifications to be directly investigated (initial investigation or response teams)
- work with families once the notification is substantiated (protective intervention).

For those children and young people placed on court orders, their order is managed by a statutory case management team or contracted to a community service organisation.

The workload volume in the Child Protection program is considerable and variable, with regions experiencing fluctuations in workload demand. The Child Protection system in Victoria is required to manage the workload in a way that maximises adherence to the principles set out in child protection legislation and occupational health and safety legislation.

The concept of **regional Child Protection workload management monitoring and review panels** was introduced as part of the Department of Human Services’ system for monitoring and managing Child Protection workload demand and staff workloads.

The department has strategies to ensure the safety of its employees. In line with this aim, the department recognises its obligation to provide an effective system for managing the allocation of work to Child Protection staff, which demonstrates adequate consideration of worker health and safety when determining individual staff workloads.

The panels are a proactive mechanism which significantly enhances the Child Protection program’s capacity to understand and pre-empt workload pressures through regular monitoring of regional workload distribution and influencing factors.

The regional Child Protection workload management monitoring and review panels are an adjunct to existing internal issue resolution processes and grievance mechanisms. The panels are an additional mechanism which will assist regions to monitor and manage issues about the general Child Protection workload demand and issues about the allocation of work to individual staff members.

Purpose

The panels' purpose is to:

1. monitor, review and report on the demand and distribution of work across the regional Child Protection workforce
2. monitor, review and report on factors that influence regional capacity to meet workload requirements
3. recommend strategies to respond to significant changes in regional workload capacity as identified or anticipated
4. assist with regional planning for Child Protection resources
5. monitor the incidence and broad outcomes of requests from individual staff seeking a review of their workload in cases where program and regional line management structures and processes have been unable to resolve the staff member's concerns.

Membership

Panel membership should be based on the following:

- For metropolitan regions with multiple Child Protection sites, membership should comprise:
 - one staff representative from each regional Child Protection site, with consideration to ensuring representation from a range of work unit types
 - a regional occupational health and safety (WorkHealth) team representative
 - a regional Child Protection Community and Public Sector Union representative
 - the regional Child Protection Manager or Child and Family Care Manager (or regional equivalent).
- For rural regions with multiple Child Protection sites, membership should comprise:
 - two to three staff representatives from different sub-regional locations
 - a regional occupational health and safety (WorkHealth) team representative
 - a regional Child Protection Community and Public Sector Union representative
 - the regional Child Protection Manager or Child and Family Care Manager (or regional equivalent).

- For metropolitan regions with a single Child Protection site, membership should comprise:
 - a total of two to three staff representatives from across different unit types within the local Child Protection system
 - a regional occupational health and safety (WorkHealth) team representative
 - a regional Child Protection Community and Public Sector Union representative
 - the regional Child Protection Manager or Child and Family Care Manager (or regional equivalent).

Overall, sufficient effort should be made to ensure staff representation on panels is broadly representative of the different types of Child Protection units and levels within the regional Child Protection structure. That is, Child Protection membership on panels should include a mix of casework practitioners and management (team leader and unit manager) representatives nominated and selected from across the various regional units or sites.

It is anticipated that panels will require a minimum of between five and seven representatives including management; however, subject to regional capacity to support greater numbers, actual panel membership might be greater than this to accommodate regional variations.

Convenor and chair

The most senior participant in the regional panel, presumed to be either the regional Child and Family Care Manager (or equivalent) or the Child Protection Manager, will convene all meetings of the panel, whether regular or requested by staff for review purposes. Chairing arrangements for panels are at the discretion of regions and panel members.

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

The panel convenor should instigate the process for recruiting panel members. In the first instance, staff 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 staff are unable to decide on a preferred nominee, a ballot can be held.

Where insufficient interest is received from a particular site, unit or level of the Child Protection regional structure, the convenor should pursue the relevant management representatives to seek assistance in securing the desired staff involvement.

The convenor should formally make a request via memorandum to the manager of the regional WorkHealth team for the nomination of a WorkHealth team occupational health and safety representative for the panel.

The convenor should invite the regional Child Protection Community and Public Sector Union delegates to nominate the Child Protection Community and Public Sector Union representative for the panel. These delegates can self-nominate.

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

Time allowance for staff and Community and Public Sector Union representatives' participation

Participation of staff and the Child Protection CPSU representative on the panel will be recognised and compensated for by its inclusion as one of the factors considered when reviewing the workload of those staff members, 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
- as required, in response to requests from individual staff for a review of their workload, following unsuccessful resolution of concerns through program and regional line management structures and processes.

Monitoring general workload

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

- non-identifying case allocation information by region, site, and team
- number and outcomes of individual workload reviews requested by Child Protection staff in the region
- notifications, substantiations and case closures
- number of cases being monitored or awaiting allocation, and effectiveness of current systems
- leave patterns, including recreation leave, long service leave, maternity/paternity leave, and sick leave
- reports on Workcover claims and DINMA reports
- reports on time-in-lieu and overtime accrual and use
- workforce changes, including staff turnover, vacancies and growth or reduction in staff numbers
- staff level of experience (including average length of service) and competence (including professional development activities)
- incident reports related to Child Protection work
- regional Child Protection Organisational Climate Index data
- (for rural regions) staff rosters for Rural After Hours Child Protection Services
- other regional information identified as relevant by regional panels.

Staff surveys

In addition to Organisational Climate Index data, regional panels are required to manage or support the administering and analysis of regular (bi-annual or annual) surveys of regional Child Protection staff. The surveys are to ascertain current staff satisfaction levels and views on processes being used to allocate and monitor workload, current workloads, worker health and safety, and issues affecting worker ability to perform at optimum levels.

Data

The central Child Protection program area will support the panels' operation by regularly providing relevant data and reports. The Manager, Child Protection, will ensure processes are put in place and maintained to facilitate the regular and timely flow of information to panels. Panels seeking non-standard reports that require central involvement can make their requests for such reports to the Manager, Child Protection. Panels are also encouraged to identify local data options that will assist in monitoring workload patterns and influences.

Reporting

The panels will provide a written monthly report to the regional director. The panel convenor will prepare the reports and, preferably, panel members will endorse them, but the reports will acknowledge any individual panel member's dissent.

The reports should:

- summarise observations about current workload
- raise any issues of current or foreseeable concern; for example, increased levels of unallocated cases, or the impact of staff turnover or new staff on capacity to allocate cases
- where considered necessary, recommend actions to compensate for or to overcome identified or anticipated changes in regional workload capacity that are considered likely to impact adversely on the health and safety of regional Child Protection staff as a result of increased workload pressures.

Regional panel activity, findings and reports will be discussed at the regular statewide meetings of Child Protection managers.

Evaluating panel operation

It is recommended regional panels undertake an annual self-evaluation of their activities and processes. The central Child Protection program area will develop an evaluation guide and template to assist regional panels to undertake evaluations.

Staff members' requests for workload review

The supervision process is considered the primary forum for the staff member or the team leader to raise and discuss any difficulties they are experiencing in managing their workload; however, they can raise issues at any time. The team leader should assess the source of the difficulties and develop, in conjunction with the staff member, a plan to remedy them.

The unit manager is the appropriate person to monitor and review team leader's workload.

Where the staff member and the supervisor are unable to resolve a review of individual workload, at the first opportunity the supervisor should refer the matter to the unit manager for consideration and attempted resolution. At the time their involvement is requested, the unit manager will alert the regional Child Protection manager and the regional Human Resources manager to the workload review request and they in turn will monitor progress towards resolution and, if necessary, attempt to facilitate additional resolution processes.

Workload review requests must be resolved within five working days of the request. The Child Protection manager or the Human Resources manager will provide regular reports to the panel about the outcomes of workload reviews for the panel to consider as part of their overall workload management monitoring and review function.

The departmental grievance procedures are also available in the event a workload review request cannot be resolved through line management processes or alternative local processes instigated by the Child Protection manager or the Human Resources manager.

Allocation of the case or cases that have led to the request for a workload review will be deferred, or those cases will be allocated elsewhere, pending the outcome of the review.

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