



**FUTURE  
SOCIAL  
SERVICE  
INSTITUTE**

# **Building Australia's future social service workforce**

**Submission to the  
Senate Select Committee on the Future of Work  
and Workers inquiry**

**30 January 2018**



Listen Learn Lead

### About the Future Social Service Institute

The Future Social Service Institute (FSSI) is a collaboration between the Victorian Council of Social Service and RMIT University, funded by the Victorian Government.

FSSI supports the social service workforce to be service-delivery leaders **at a time of major growth and disruption. We:**

- **CO-DESIGN** world-best workforce education programs
- **HELP TRAIN** the workforce of the future
- **RESEARCH** emerging trends and opportunities, and
- **EMPOWER** not-for-profit organisations to reorient to a global market.



**Future Social Service Institute**  
e [info@futuresocial.org](mailto:info@futuresocial.org)  
p (03) 9925 4619  
w [www.futuresocial.org](http://www.futuresocial.org)  
t @FutureSocialIAU  
f /FutureSocialIAU

**The Future Social Service Institute acknowledges the Traditional Owners of country and pays our respects to Elders past and present.**



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## Recommendations

To build a diverse social service workforce accessible to all and to remove barriers to labour force participation for Australians who provide informal, unpaid care for others, the Future Social Service Institute urges the Committee to consider the following recommendations:

- Recommendation 1:** Invest in **developing new types of integrated qualifications** that combine practical vocational skills with higher education knowledge and culturally appropriate practice, which are accessible in metropolitan, regional and rural areas.
- Recommendation 2:** Support a diverse range of people to pursue careers in the social service sector through **scholarship programs for individuals and grant programs for organisations**, including programs that target regional and rural areas.
- Recommendation 3:** Institute **higher rates of pay for social service workers** that are commensurate with their skills and the value of the services they provide – to the community, to society and to the economy.
- Recommendation 4:** **Recognise and promote the social service sector** as a vital contributor to Australia’s future growth and prosperity.
- Recommendation 5:** Encourage and support government departments, bodies and agencies to **model best practice in flexible work arrangements** for all employees, particularly employees who provide support for others.
- Recommendation 6:** **Provide leadership, guidance and support to employers** to institute flexible work arrangements for all entitled employees, particularly employees who provide support for others.

## Background

The Future Social Service Institute (FSSI) welcomes the opportunity to provide input to this inquiry.

FSSI supports the not-for-profit social service workforce to be service-delivery leaders at a time of major growth and disruption. We hold a vision of a strong Victoria supported by a responsive and innovative social sector, and work towards this by co-producing leading training, education, information and research to support a highly skilled paid and unpaid social sector workforce.

FSSI is a collaboration between the Victorian Council of Social Service and RMIT University, supported by the Victorian Government.

## Introduction

There is a temptation when thinking about the future to focus on technological innovations and the innumerable and incredible ways in which they will change the way we work and live. Self-driving cars, clean energy, crypto-currency and new frontiers in Artificial Intelligence are much talked about in terms of what the future holds for us all.<sup>1</sup> While these are genuinely exciting innovations and both

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<sup>1</sup> See for example Kalia Colbin “[Electric cars will change the way we move - and how we make a living](#)”, Sydney Morning Herald, 24 January 2018; “[Competitor or Co-Worker: How technology is changing the modern](#)

the product of and stimulus for advancements in our quality of life, the reality is that technology alone will not be able to meet all the needs of our future society. The fact remains that millions of people in both current and future generations will continue to need specialist services and support during their lives, and these services will need to be provided by other people.

The future of work and workers must be viewed in the context of rapidly growing demand for formal and informal care across many fronts. The rollout of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) is one. This commitment to ensuring people with disability have greater choice and control in the support they access means Australia will face increased and diversified demand for services for the foreseeable future. There is also the Victorian Government's commendable and comprehensive commitment to tackling family violence – which serves as an exemplar for other states, territories and the Commonwealth<sup>2</sup> – as well as the support required by our massively growing and rapidly aging population<sup>3</sup>. These three areas of community need alone mean more and more Australians will be accessing social services and support every year. This ever increasing demand for care will have a profound impact on the future of work and workers, both in terms of the sheer number of trained professionals required to provide formal services, and the labour force participation of those with informal care responsibilities.

At the same time, society's structure continues to fundamentally shift in ways that profoundly change the way support services are provided. While historically, much social care was provided in an informal and unpaid capacity, by women and by volunteers, this is changing. Increasing women's labour force participation is a political priority<sup>4</sup> and women are now in the paid workforce in greater numbers and proportion than ever before.<sup>5</sup> Labour force participation rates among older women are high.<sup>6</sup> For many, this means that they are less available to support others – most often family members – in an informal and unpaid capacity. Those who do provide informal, unpaid care face obstacles to entering the labour force, which must be addressed and broken down.

Australia's overall workforce structure is also shifting. As traditional sources of blue-collar work areas such as manufacturing decline, the need for social services grows.

These shifts in labour demand and supply mean the social service workforce has become, and will continue to remain, Australia's fastest growing workforce sector. We now have a unique window of opportunity for policy interventions to shape a whole new approach to social and community

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[workplace](#)", The Australia; Chris Dixon's article "[11 reasons to be excited about the future of technology](#)" in Business Insider Australia, 19 August 2016.

<sup>2</sup> Kate Fitz-Gibbon; JaneMaree Maher; Jude McCulloch and Sandra Walklate "[Victoria leads the way on family violence, but Canberra needs to lift its game](#)" in *The Conversation*, 30 March 2017.

<sup>3</sup> The [Australian Institute of Health and Welfare](#) estimates that the number of people aged 65 and over are projected to more than double by 2057.

<sup>4</sup> See for example [Towards 2025: An Australian Government Strategy to Boost Women's Workforce Participation](#)

<sup>5</sup> Alexandra Heron noted that "[i]n February 1978, women's participation was 43.4%. It reached 59.4% in December 2015". "[More women than ever are in the workforce but progress has been glacial](#)" in *The Conversation*, 16 March 2016.

<sup>6</sup> "In the decade between 2006-07 and 2016-17, the participation rate for women aged 60-64 increased from 34% to 50%" – see ABS [Gender Indicators, Australia, Sep 2017](#).

services; one that meets Australia’s growing demand, while also offering people a lifetime opportunity to upskill, reskill, become mobile and be productively employed in the social service workforce.

## The social service workforce

It has become common to talk of coding and other high-order technological skills as fundamental for the future workforce.<sup>7</sup> Questioning the ubiquity of programming work, critics argue that while digital literacy is an essential – though by no means universally accessible – competency for all, there is also enormous demand for “people-focused skills such as active listening, empathy and teamwork”.<sup>8</sup> While technology is changing the ways in which social services are delivered and managed, social service occupations are among the most resilient because they “involve building complex relationships with people”<sup>9</sup>, and these nurturing relationships cannot be replicated or replaced by technological solutions.

We need many, many more trained professionals who can provide high quality services and support to a diverse range of people, many with complex needs, and many in harder to reach areas. The numbers speak for themselves.

### Unprecedented demand for social service workers

**60,000 - 90,000 (FTE)**

Estimated number of **additional workers** required to support the rollout of the NDIS<sup>10</sup>

**1,137,184 - 1,705,776  
(Headcount)**

Estimated number of **additional workers** required to support the rollout of the NDIS<sup>11</sup> (taking into account a split of full-time, part-time and casual work)

**Nearly 1 in 20**

Proportion of all **new jobs** created to May 2022 in “Other Social Assistance Services”, which includes disability care<sup>12</sup>

In some regional areas of Australia the disability workforce will need to more than double to meet demand in the next few years. For example modelling based on the NDIS Market Position Statement for Victoria suggests the disability workforce in the Outer Gippsland region will need to increase by

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<sup>7</sup> See for example Burning Glass Technologies “[Beyond Point and Click: The Expanding Demand for Coding Skills](#)” June 2016; Foundation for Young Australians “[The new work order Ensuring young Australians have skills and experience for the jobs of the future, not the past](#)” 2015.

<sup>8</sup> Claire Mason, Andrew Reeson, Todd Sanderson “[Demand for people skills is growing faster than demand for STEM skills](#)” in The Conversation, 14 November 2017.

<sup>9</sup> Arwa Madhawi. “[What jobs will still be around in 20 years? Read this to prepare your future](#)” in The Guardian, 26 June 2017.

<sup>10</sup> [Productivity Commission - Report on Inquiry into NDIS Costs](#), page 223.

<sup>11</sup> Based on Productivity Commission estimates – [Productivity Commission - Report on Inquiry into NDIS Costs](#), page 223 – and [Workplace Gender Equality Agency data on employee type](#) for “Other Social Assistance”.

<sup>12</sup> [Department of Employment - 2017 Employment Projections](#)

up to 216.67% by mid-2019, an increase of 650 FTE or 1,269 employees (factoring in the current distribution of Full-Time, Part-Time and Casual employees).

The figures above are specific to disability support, however based on Department of Employment projections, 2,505,000 out of 9,484,000 overall additional workers required by 2022 will be in the Health Care and Social Assistance sector.<sup>13</sup> This is equivalent to 26.42% or over 1 in 4 new jobs across Australia. We need millions more people to join the social service workforce.

### Issues with workforce diversity

**72.3%**

Percentage of **female workers** in disability support<sup>14</sup>

**47 years**

**Average age** of people employed in disability and aged care<sup>15</sup>

**22%**

Percentage of workers **aged over 55 years** in disability support<sup>16</sup>

People accessing social services in Australia are diverse and therefore the workforce providing these services – much like the teaching workforce<sup>17</sup> – should reflect the diversity of the broader community. Early reports have raised concerns about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) peoples' access to NDIS funding and supports.<sup>18</sup> While large numbers of migrants are employed in the social service sector and there are reports that more men are entering the field,<sup>19</sup> issues regarding the diversity of this workforce persist.<sup>20</sup>

The social service workforce is also aging, more rapidly than some other sectors, and many employed in this workforce today will themselves require services and support in the not too distant future. The diversity issues within the social service workforce need to be addressed, or else the choices of people who access services will be constrained, which could in turn profoundly compromise their outcomes.

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<sup>13</sup> [Department of Employment - 2017 Employment Projections](#)

<sup>14</sup> [Workplace Gender Equality Agency data > Health Care and Social Assistance > Social Assistance Services > Social Assistance Services Sub-Division](#)

<sup>15</sup> [Productivity Commission - Report on Inquiry into NDIS Costs](#), page 320

<sup>16</sup> [Productivity Commission - Report on Inquiry into NDIS Costs](#), page 320

<sup>17</sup> Kevin F. McGrath "[We need to rethink recruitment for men in primary schools](#)" in *The Conversation*, 17 October 2016.

<sup>18</sup> See for example [Productivity Commission - Report on Inquiry into NDIS Costs](#), Chapter 5 – Scheme Supports

<sup>19</sup> Verity Edwards. "[Aged and disability care sector: men who care are on the rise](#)" in *The Australian*, 8 July 2017.

<sup>20</sup> In the Health Care and Social Assistance sector the gender imbalance remains striking with 80.2% female workers - [Workplace Gender Equality Agency data](#)

## Chronic undervaluation of social service work

**\$756 - \$1,762**

**Weekly salary** for disability support workers<sup>21</sup>

**22.17**

**Average job vacancy rate** in Health Care and Social Assistance (2017)<sup>22</sup>

Caring for others is hard work – physically, mentally and emotionally. The dedicated and highly skilled people who perform this valuable work are rarely, if ever, adequately remunerated<sup>23</sup> and so it is hardly surprising that employers have difficulty filling positions in this sector to meet demand.

While lack of wage growth is an issue for Australians generally, social service workers and other workers in feminised industries are doubly disadvantaged due to long-standing beliefs that their low pay can be explained, rationalised or dismissed on the basis of the intrinsic motivations and rewards often reported by workers themselves. We need to urgently address the undervaluation of the “care economy” and ensure social service workers are recognised and rewarded.

## Removing labour force obstacles for informal carers

A large proportion of the current and future overall workforce is or will at some time provide support for others, particularly for older people and/or people with a disability. According to the most recent figures, nearly 2.7 million Australians are informal carers, which equates to 11.6% of the Australian population.<sup>24</sup> These 2.7 million Australians provide a wide range of supports, including cognitive and emotional support, assistance with transport, household chores, health care, meal preparation, reading and writing and property maintenance.<sup>25</sup>

Those Australians who provide support and assistance to others face obstacles to labour force participation; their labour force participation rates – at 56.3% for primary carers and 77.2% for other carers – are lower than non-carers (80.3%).<sup>26</sup> Only 60.8% of female carers aged 15-64 years were employed, compared with 73% of male carers.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Fair Work Ombudsman [Pay Guide Social, Community, Home Care and Disability Services Industry Award 2010 \[MA000100\] and Social and Community Services Award \[AN150140\] - Rates of pay - effective 1 December 2017 Social and community services employee - Full-time & part-time](#), pages 6-7.

<sup>22</sup> [Productivity Commission - Report on Inquiry into NDIS Costs](#), page 322

<sup>23</sup> The [Fair Work Ombudsman Minimum Wage Fact Sheet \(July 2017\)](#) states that the national minimum wage is \$694.90 per 38 hour week (before tax). There are a number of awards that apply to workers in Health Care and Social Assistance including the Health Professionals and Support Services Award 2010. The [Pay Guide - Health Professionals and Support Services Award 2010](#) provides a weekly pay rate range of \$738 to \$1,955. It is important to bear in mind that, according to [Workplace Gender Equality Agency data](#), only 26.3% of workers employed in “Health Care and Social Assistance” work full time.

<sup>24</sup> [2015 Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers \(SDAC\) – Results for Carers](#)

<sup>25</sup> [2015 Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers \(SDAC\) – Results for Carers](#)

<sup>26</sup> [2015 Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers \(SDAC\) – Results for Carers](#)

<sup>27</sup> [2015 Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers \(SDAC\) – Results for Carers](#)

Women are more likely to be carers (68.1% of primary carers, 55.5% of all carers) and are more likely to be the carer for their child (88%).<sup>28</sup> Add to this the fact that women undertake the lion's share of unpaid housework<sup>29</sup> and it is hardly surprising – although no less exasperating – that Australia's national gender pay gap is 15.3%<sup>30</sup> or that women's average superannuation balance is 60.71% of men's.<sup>31</sup>

Under the *Carer Recognition Act 2010* employees who are carers can request flexible working arrangements, however in practice workplaces vary widely in the level of recognition, flexibility and support they provide for people who support family members or friends. While many workplaces are receptive to or – in some cases – instigators of positive conversations about flexibility, most commonly for new parents, many carers' requests for flexible working arrangements are denied.<sup>32</sup>

For our communities, society and economy to thrive, this needs to change, and fast. Workplaces have for some time been exploring and experimenting with new work models, however it is imperative we design work models, philosophies and structures that are flexible and inclusive, and provide meaningful and rewarding opportunities for the millions of people who are juggling work and caring responsibilities.

Any discussion of the future of work and workers must acknowledge and critique the various forms of structural disadvantage that limit – in both overt and subtle ways – overall labour force participation and give rise to gender segregation in industry. This means challenging the positioning of “emotional labour” outside or on the periphery of the “productive economy” and rejecting narrow and conflicting constructions of masculinity and femininity and the characterisation of the skills and qualities required to perform social service work (paid or unpaid) as intrinsically “feminine”. Countering entrenched beliefs and patterns about women's work and men's work is an essential step in addressing the gender segregation in the workforce and improving wage equality.

Our future workforce must be empowered to provide critical support for others while fulfilling their broader aspirations in terms of paid employment, community engagement, entrepreneurship and lifelong learning. Employers must be equipped to support employees who are balancing paid work with informal care responsibilities. Employers should be encouraged and incentivised to embrace flexibility for all employees<sup>33</sup> – not just parents – and to ensure that in choosing flexibility, employees are not foregoing opportunities for progression and development.

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<sup>28</sup> [2015 Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers \(SDAC\) – Results for Carers](#)

<sup>29</sup> See for example Leah Ruppner “[Census 2016: Women are still disadvantaged by the amount of unpaid housework they do](#)”, *The Conversation*, April 11, 2017.

<sup>30</sup> Workplace Gender Equality Agency “[Australia's gender pay gap statistics](#)” August 2017.

<sup>31</sup> Andrew Robertson, “[Women's superannuation not so super: The \\$120,000 gender gap](#)”, *ABC News*, 27 October 2017.

<sup>32</sup> According to a recent ACTU study almost 40% of Australian workers requested reduced hours for caring and almost one quarter of these were denied. Employers were 50% more likely to reject a request for reduced hours from a male employee. See - [Australia is a nation of working carers, new study finds](#). See also Sue Yeandle. “[Flexible working is great but carers should have rights too](#)” in *The Conversation*, 31 October 2013.

<sup>33</sup> NCOSS “[Gender segregation in the workplace and its impact on women's economic equality - NCOSS's Submission to the Finance and Public Administration References Committee Inquiry](#)”, 3 March 2017.