

Workforce Research survey: Defining our sector

Social
Service
Providers

Te Pai
Ora o
Aotearoa



Share your thoughts

The social services workforce plays a vital role in supporting the wellbeing of individuals, whānau, families and communities across Aotearoa. However, unlike some other sectors, there is no single agreed definition of who makes up this workforce and no comprehensive data collection system to monitor its size, composition or capacity over time.

Te Pai Ora SSPA is developing a workforce survey to help us understand the size, roles and conditions of our sector. We currently lack this evidence base which is needed to plan education and training pathways, identify gaps and pressures, support recruitment and retention, and to plan for future workforce needs and funding.

We are seeking input from the sector to help us build this. As a first step we need your thoughts on how we define the social sector workforce. We have outlined a proposed definition and would be keen to hear your feedback. We want to know if the definition is clear, practical, inclusive and useful for workforce measurement and planning in Aotearoa New Zealand.

The proposed definition

The social services workforce in Aotearoa New Zealand comprises paid and unpaid workers in government, non-government, iwi, hapū, Māori, and Pacific organisations whose primary role involves:

- providing direct support, care, protection, advocacy, or empowerment to individuals, whānau, families, and communities experiencing social, economic, or personal challenges
- facilitating access to services and resources that promote wellbeing, safety, and social inclusion
- preventing and responding to harm, abuse, exploitation, neglect, or family separation
- building individual, whānau, family, and community capacity and resilience by removing structural barriers that limit participation in economic, social and civic life
- promoting social justice, human rights, and equity.

This includes:

- kaiawhina, care and support workers
- community support, community development and whānau support workers
- youth workers, rangatahi workers, and youth development roles
- kaimahi using tikanga-based frameworks
- family violence and sexual violence specialist workers
- health professionals working in Social Service settings
- homelessness and housing support, and navigation roles
- Iwi and Māori social services kaimahi
- Pacific social services workers
- peer support workers and lived-experience roles
- education, training and work brokers working in wraparound services
- registered social workers

The definition is intentionally broad so that it reflects the diversity of the sector and does not leave out important or emerging roles.

It encompasses roles informed by Western social sciences, mātauranga Māori, Pacific knowledges, lived experience, peer support workers and volunteers.

Te Pai Ora SSPA has prepared a longer paper on the definition and the occupations that are included within it. [You can access it here.](#)

Workforce groups on the boundaries

Other groups work within the social services sector, but do not fit standard workforce definitions. We are interested in your opinion as to whether we should include these groups as part of the social services workforce. They include:

- Volunteers in structured social service roles
- Managers and supervisors whose main role is leading or supporting frontline social service workers
- Organisational support staff, such as administration, finance, HR, IT, facilities, and similar roles

Our questions

We are interested in your answers to the questions below. You can provide your answers by completing [this online survey](#) or by emailing office@sspa.org.nz.

You can answer as an individual, or as an organisation. The survey will take about 10 minutes to complete.

1. Is the proposed definition clear and does it fit the reality of the social services workforce?
2. Have any occupations been missed out from the proposed definition or have any occupations been included that shouldn't have been?
3. How well does the framework recognise iwi and Māori social service roles?
4. Are there other social services roles being performed within specific cultural contexts that should be included?
5. Are there newly emerging roles that we should consider including?
6. Should the definition include:
 - volunteers
 - people managing and supervising those directly delivering social services
 - people in organisational support roles (such as finance, IT, admin and HR staff)?

Please provide your responses by 31 August 2026.

