

**A•S•U**  
Australian Services Union

**A  
NATIONAL PLAN  
TO ADDRESS  
THE WORKFORCE CRISIS  
IN THE  
SOCIAL, COMMUNITY  
AND DISABILITY  
SERVICES INDUSTRY  
2009**



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## INTRODUCTION

The social and community services industry is facing a workforce crisis. According to an ASU survey conducted in 2007, 52% of workers in the sector do not see themselves remaining in the sector in 5 years time. Recent research suggests that our industry is characterised by complex funding arrangements, low levels of funding and low wages. The same research reveals workforce instability, a devaluation of care work, a lack of professional structure for employees, fractured approaches to training and education, and work intensification.<sup>1</sup>

The Global Financial Crisis will intensify the nature of work in the industry – not just in the level of service provision needed to assist more unemployed people but also in the complexity of work undertaken. Australia will need a larger and highly skilled workforce to meet the demands of the Crisis.

Unless immediate action is taken, the industry will not have the workforce needed to deliver the services required to ensure that the most disadvantaged or marginalised can fully participate in society. Short term or quick fix solutions will not work. A national plan is needed that sets out long term strategies to address this crisis and that will turn the industry around. The ASU has developed such a plan.

*1. Buchanan, J. Identifying paths to Skill growth or skill recession: A literature review on workforce development in the community services and health sectors. April 2008.*

## The Crisis

The social, community and disability services industry is experiencing a sustained workforce crisis.

- Care work, including social, community and disability service work, has historically been devalued.
- Governments continue to underfund services and consequently promote low pay regimes.
- There has been limited investment by government in education and training. This problem is compounded by the high levels of part-time and casual staff where access to education and training is historically more elusive.
- Work intensification brings with it work overload, workplace injury and stress, loss of incentive or capacity to engage in workplace learning and disenchantment.
- Social, community and disability service work lacks professional identity and recognition.
- It is almost impossible for services to attract and retain staff.
- Almost half of the staff currently employed have degrees and yet the majority of pay points in all social and community services awards are significantly below average weekly earnings.
- On average, wages are 25 – 30% below equivalent wages in the public sector for identical work.

A workforce development strategy is needed now.

This paper sets out the view of the ASU on how to proceed to address this crisis.



## The Solution

The ASU 2007 “Building Social Inclusion in Australia – Priorities for the Non Government Community Sector Workforce” report set out a series of recommendations that plot a course to assist in arresting this crisis.

**In line to what was previously recommended, a number of strategies must be immediately implemented to address the workforce development crisis.**

**The ASU proposes eight strategies.**

1. New career structures that deliver significantly improved wages which will align with these education pathways and provide an incentive to ongoing learning and skill development.
2. New education pathways that ensure the development of a highly skilled workforce.
3. Increased levels of funding to support quality service provision and an end to competitive tendering and short term funding cycles.
4. The establishment of an industry certification and accreditation body that brings us into line with other professions and that comprises representatives of employers, employees, educators and clients.
5. The accreditation of all services as part of a long term commitment to quality service delivery, better quality assurance and a lesser regulatory burden.
6. The certification and registration of all staff.
7. Improved conditions of employment at the workplace level that bring our industry into line with other professions.
8. New staffing arrangements that introduce staff client ratios which ensure safe staffing levels.



## Strategy One.

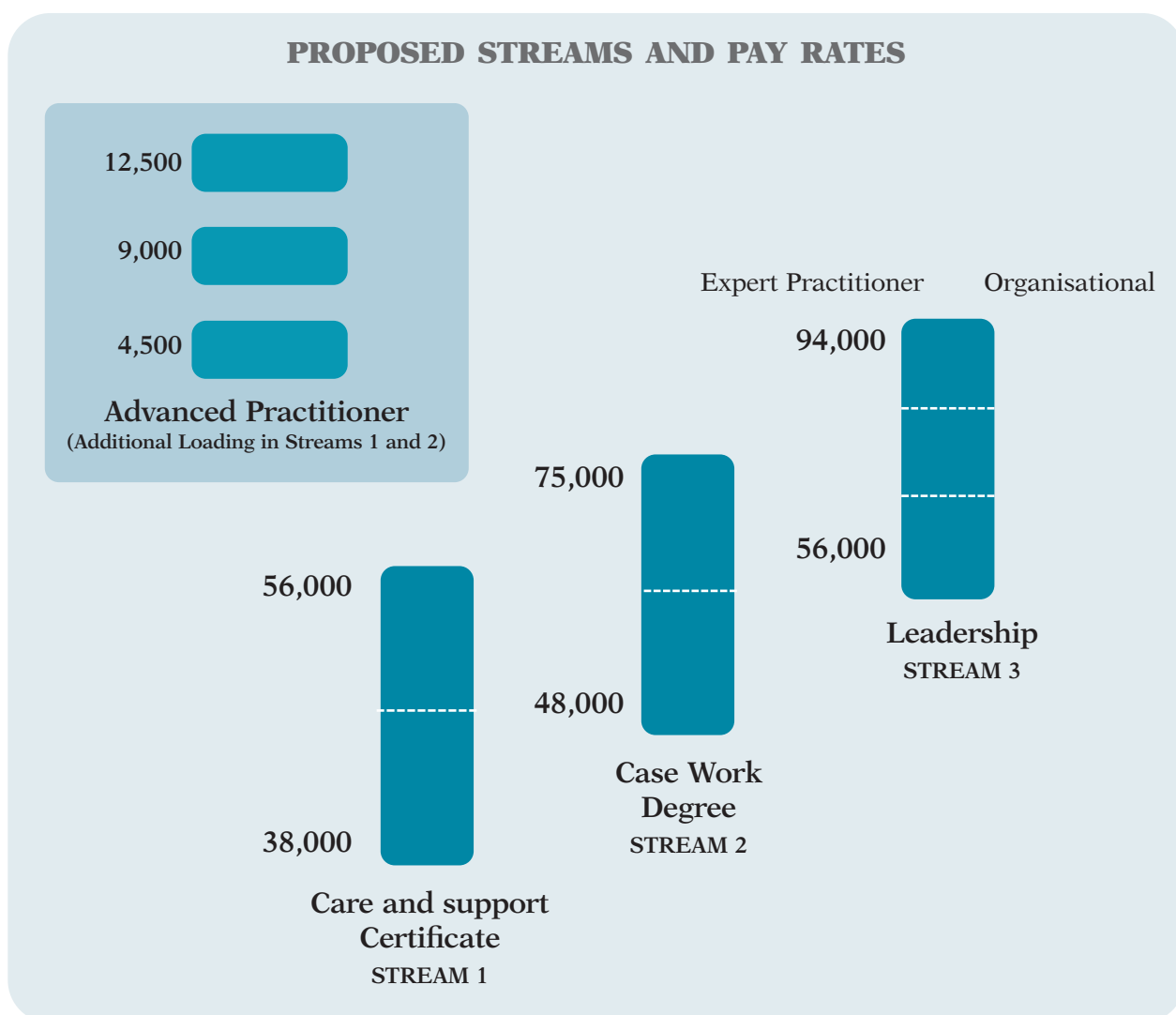
### Career Structures

To develop a highly skilled workforce and provide incentive to ongoing learning and skills development, new career structures and education pathways must be developed that deliver significantly improved wages and align education pathways to new career development opportunities.

**A new three stream career structure with progression within each stream and possible translation between streams should be established.**

- **STREAM ONE:** administration, care and support
- **STREAM TWO:** case work, community development, policy, advocacy and specialist areas of work
- **STREAM THREE:** leadership — administrative & organisational leadership and expert practitioners.

In addition, staff in streams one and two of the career structure would be able to obtain higher rates of pay by being classified as an Advanced Practitioner.



## Strategy Two.

### Education Pathways

- i. Access to the first stream of the career structure – administration, care and support – would require, where appropriate, Certificate, Diploma or Advanced Diploma level training or RPL. The point of entry within the career structure would depend on whether the entrant either has or is assessed as having (RPL) Certificate Level III or Certificate Level IV or Diploma or Advanced Diploma training and depending on years of experience — **the education pathway.**
- ii. Access to the second stream of the career structure, for case work, community development, advocacy, policy work and specialist areas of work would require the acquisition of degree level education or RPL. Employees would enter the scale either at the entry point, or depending on experience, at another more relevant point in the structure. This part of the structure would also contain what are referred to as ‘soft barriers’. These are barriers that an employee can pass through dependent on a number of criteria including further qualifications, increased levels of responsibility or the use of higher level skills in the performance of work — **progressing along the education pathway.**
- iii. Access to the third stream of the career structure would be by appointment to a role that is either administrative, organisational or as an expert practitioner. This stream should be constructed so as to equally reward administrative/organisational leadership and outstanding leadership by expert practitioners. Employee classification in stream three would be based on a number of criteria including size and composition of the workforce, complexity of programs and/or staff managed, years of experience, degree or expertise, role as a mentor and ability to provide best practice.

In addition to the three streams of the career structure an employee would be able to attain high levels of pay within the first two streams by a combination of increased responsibility and the acquisition of an additional qualification that demonstrates advanced skills — **advanced practitioner.** In this part of the career structure an allowance would be paid in addition to the base salary derived from either career pathway one or two.

In each education pathway, careful attention must be paid to the articulation of the core values, skills and competencies of care work. Care work must be revalued.

There must be the provision of a designated number of funded VET places each year for 5 years from 2009.

In addition there is the need to create HECS-free places in Australia’s universities and new degree and post graduate courses that will deliver the skilled workforce required for the future. For all existing employees robust forms of RPL must be established and part-time positions created in universities and other places of further education.

All of these training and education programs must be certified by the new staff certification body referred to in the following pages.

## Strategy Three.

### Increased Levels of Funding

**Funding must increase to deliver on new career structures, improved wages and education pathways and to put an end to competitive tendering and short term funding.**

There must be a significant and sustained increase in funding to deliver on these new career and education pathways. In addition funding must be linked to a mean point on the new career pathways to allow for local flexibility in determining the staffing mix both in terms of qualifications and experience.

It is imperative that governments provide a significant number of training places over the coming years to allow a translation to the new career and education pathways.

Finally, competitive tendering and short term funding must end. These are inappropriate funding models for the delivery of social community services. These models of funding undermine the attraction and retention of quality staff and frustrate sustained effort in addressing disadvantage and marginalisation. Quality rather than lowest cost must underpin the provision of services.

## Strategy Four.

### Industry Accreditation and Staff Certification

An industry accreditation and staff certification body that comprises representatives of employers, employees, educators and clients must be established to accredit service providers and certify all staff.

The regulation of the social and community services industry must be managed by the industry itself. Experience shows that self regulation within a legislative framework is the best form of regulation bringing with it ownership and responsibility of those directly involved.

Accreditation of services will improve quality assurance; reduce the regulatory burden and free services to focus on clients rather than government red tape and unnecessary compliance.

**A Social and Community Services Industry Accreditation and Staff Certification Board should be established. It would be comprised of industry representatives (employer bodies, Unions, and bodies representing clients and educators).**

The Board will have responsibility for the establishment of:

- Standards and mechanisms for the accreditation of service.
- Codes of conduct for employers and employees.
- Standards and mechanisms for the certification of staff. The establishment of standards for certification of staff shall be via formal certification of the courses of study that provide access to the profession.

The body will have two distinct divisions –

- Accreditation of Services.
- Certification of Staff.



## Strategy Five.

### Accreditation of services

All services must be accredited as part of a long term commitment to quality service delivery. Competitive tendering and short term funding must end.

Competitive tendering and short term funding are significant impediments to addressing the workforce crisis in our industry. They are inappropriate funding models for the delivery of social and community services. They undermine the attraction and retention of quality staff and frustrate sustained efforts in addressing disadvantage and marginalisation.

If competitive tendering is about reducing cost to government then it is also about reducing quality service delivery and driving down wages. In both cases, competitive tendering is counter productive.

Governments often contend that competitive tendering is a de-facto quality control mechanism that allows them access to the capacity of services to deliver on government initiatives. Such an approach to quality control is inefficient, wasteful of both service and government resources and imposes unnecessary government regulation that is repetitive and unhelpful.

One of the functions of the new Social and Community Services Board is the establishment of standards and mechanisms for the accreditation of all services. We need an end to the regulatory burden that currently exists and that does little if anything to improve quality service delivery.

The government should provide services, where necessary, with funding to bring them to accreditation standard.

Accreditation should be for a period of five years.

As a consequence governments will be able to abolish competitive tendering and short term funding.

## Strategy Six.

### Certification of all Staff aligned with new Career and Education Pathways

Social and community services staff are dedicated and highly skilled practitioners and collectively form a third of the caring professions.

Within the 'Certification of Staff' division of the Social and Community Services Board, members of the profession establish standards for the certification of all staff engaged in the industry. These standards will be established progressively over time.

The primary mechanism for certification will be by the Board certifying the courses that will be aligned with the education pathways referred to above. In essence, the attainment of an accredited qualification will act as the certification, subject to necessary police checks and any other mechanisms deemed appropriate by the Board for certification.

Certification will be for an initial period of five years.

## Strategy Seven.

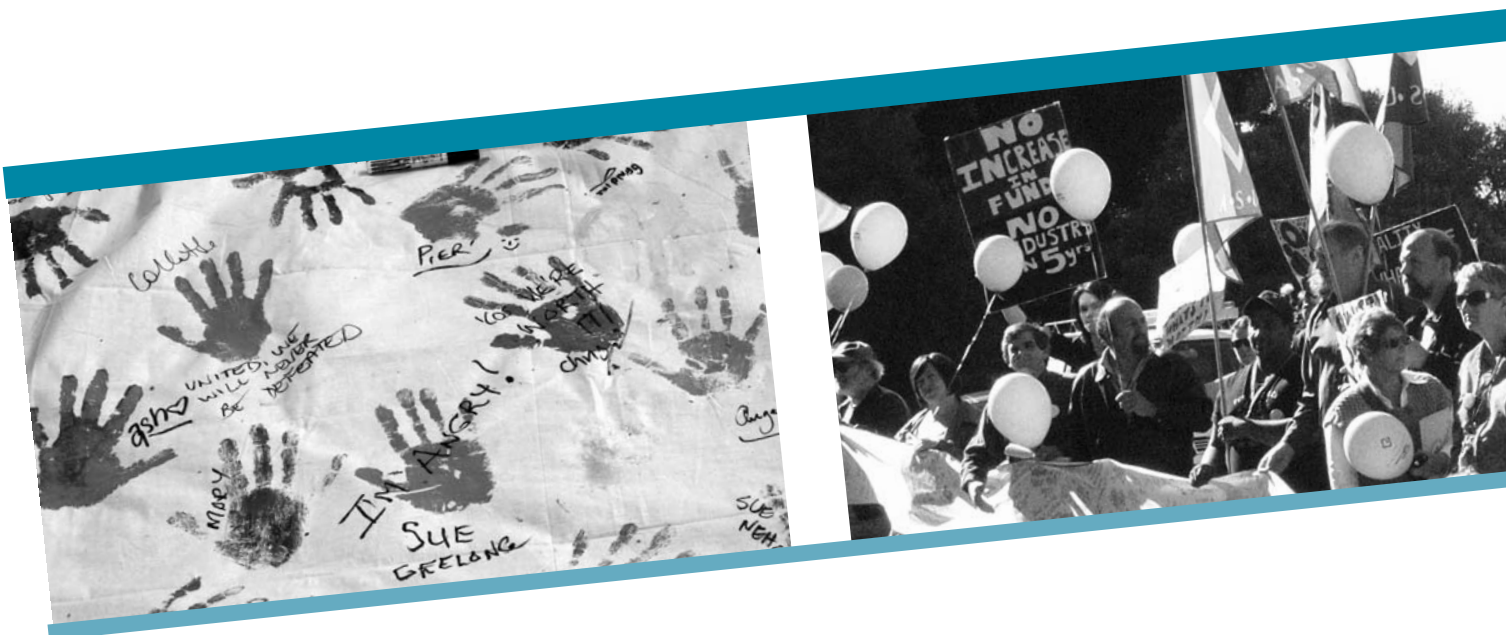
### Improved Employment Conditions

**Conditions must improve at an industry level to bring the profession into line with other professions.**

If we are to arrest the crisis that confronts the industry then we need to take some bold new initiatives in terms of the conditions that are offered to employees across the industry.

Government must provide the funds to ensure the following improvements in conditions of employment for social and community services staff:

- Improved access to long service leave
- Portability of long service leave across the industry
- Paid maternity leave
- Funding for ongoing education and training for all staff, including in the area of training for OHS Reps and Committees
- Career Break schemes
- Paid handover time
- Abolition of so called 'sleep over' shifts
- 6 weeks annual leave for shift workers
- Provision of professional supervision for staff



## Strategy Eight.

### Adequate Staffing Arrangements

**New staffing arrangements must be implemented to improve staff client ratios, ensure safe staffing levels and reduce the number of casual and agency staff.**

We need a new approach to funding services that ensures that we have the staff to deliver the services required by clients. Currently staff are stretched to the limit. Inadequate staffing is a direct threat to quality service delivery and workforce safety. Work intensification brings higher levels of workplace stress and greater risk in terms of OHS.

Indicative client staff ratios suitable to each service type must be established. There must be an end to the practice of workers working alone in workplaces where there has been no adequate risk assessment undertaken.





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