

ASU Submission

Community Services Australia Survey – 2008-09

5th May 2008

The Australian Services Union welcomes the opportunity to provide input into the development of the Australian Bureau of Statistics' survey *Community Services Australia*.

As the largest union working in the social and community services sector – a sector that employs hundreds of thousands of Australians – our organisation has a keen interest in ensuring data collection on staff and services is effective and relevant to policy and planning around service provision.

To this aim, in early 2007, the Australian Services Union released a paper *Building Social Inclusion in Australia: priorities for the social and community services sector workforce*. This paper covers a broad spectrum of concerns relevant to ensuring workforce supply in the future such as workforce conditions, size, scope and impact on social inclusion in Australia. It details further many of the issues raised in this submission to the Australian Bureau of Statistics.

The social and community services workforce has grown over the past 20 years while expenditure on services in Australia has remained average compared to the OECD. This growth has led to considerable workforce shortfalls and pressures for many social and community services. Government, non-profit and for-profit organisations all are significant service providers covering a broad range of services such as housing, aged care, child care, Indigenous community services, disability services, employment assistance, counselling, financial support and other assistance. Service provision is also shared responsibilities of state, local and national governments.

A number of these developments are reflected in the current survey *Community Services Australia* such as the distinction between non profit and for profit providers, information collected on age and diversity of the workforce and provision of information by State and Territory. However, greater consistency and comparability of data would significantly enhance workforce development to achieve whole-of-government and Commonwealth-State agendas and to prepare for future developments such as ageing of the population, skill shortages and service shortfalls.

The Australian Services Union suggests the following 'Identified Needs' could be addressed by the Australian Bureau of Statistics in future data collection:

- 1) *Identified need: comparability of definitions and estimates of scope of social and community services.***

While community services are generally defined as human services other than health and education, there are cases where common staff, funding and other assets make

such distinctions difficult such as in the case of early childhood education. Different definitions and data collection in census and ABS surveys in particular complicate estimates of the size of the sector. As many services intersect (e.g. a client may receive financial assistance, counselling and youth services) it is important to collect information on services such as counselling, training and other support that may not be recorded in surveys that focus on care, housing and financial and material assistance only.

The significant numbers of workers employed by service providers that may not have direct client contact also need to be taken into account in definitions and estimates of this sector. Similarly, because of the instability of employment and low pay in some services (such as child care) many people working in the social and community services sector have second jobs which are not recorded in statistical collections.¹

The definition of social and community services workforce needs to record administration and other support, encompass the broad range of services provided and the full scope of the workforce including those who have more than one employment position.

2) Identified need: information on hours worked per person and type of employment contract in social and community services

Reported high rates of part time and casual work in social and community services are currently only captured in average weekly hours data. This information would be ideally broken down by skill and income level (as is done with health professionals) to further explain this trend.²

Data collection to provide an accurate reflection of what proportion of the workforce is full time, part time, casual or contract workers would be useful as although research by the University of South Australia and surveys of community service staff have confirmed this trend as a cause of job insecurity and mobility, statistical evidence is incomplete.³ Type of employment contract is also relevant in explaining skills shortages and high vacancy rates where they exist.

3) Identified need: information on type of work formed by volunteers

As outlined in *Building Social Inclusion*,⁴ the high rate of volunteerism reflects broad community support for the social and community services sector but also has inherent risks if organisations become over reliant on unpaid labour. The growing trend in volunteerism is well documented currently, but what is less well known is what type of work these volunteers are doing? Is it direct service provision, administration, fundraising etc? This information would be valuable for sectoral planning over managing risks in high rates of volunteerism. Another element for Indigenous organisations and those taking on long term unemployed volunteers is what if any proportion of volunteers are part of a broader government program such as the Community Development Employment Projects, Work for the Dole etc? The

¹ Dr Graham Vaughn/AIHW, *AIHW Working Paper: Information relating to the community services workforce*, February 2006, p. 10.

² See Australian Services Union, *Building Social Inclusion in Australia*, p. 29.

³ See Australian Services Union, *Building Social Inclusion in Australia*, p. 28-30.

⁴ See p. 20-22.

lines between volunteers and unemployed are often unclear in these cases and data collection could better reflect these developments when relevant.

4) Identified need: information on income of workers in social and community services

While anecdotally and in state-based surveys, organisations providing services report significant differences in income for community workers working in for-profit, not-for-profit and government organisations, there is no consistent national and state data on this, which has tended to be compiled by relevant unions.⁵ Better data collection on income could again assist in understanding of labour force mobility, shortages and other issues to assist longer term planning.

5) Identified need: information on qualifications of workers in social and community services

There is evidence of both increased enrolments in service related training and education and de-skilling in some services (such as care services)⁶ however it would be advantageous to monitor this over time to accurately reflect what is occurring on a State/Territory and national basis. This would ideally include type of education provider (including employer-based training), education level (diploma, postgraduate etc) and type of service the education or training was relevant to.

6) Identified need: information on vacancy rates and turnover rates of workers in social and community services

As with nurses and health professionals, significant vacancy rates are found in services such as drug and alcohol services, child care and others. Labour force survey data on vacancy rates could significantly help in the planning and allocation of workforce development initiatives for organisations and governments alike. This is of particular relevance for rural, regional and remote areas which consistently report high vacancy rates but have few data collection mechanisms to document this trend.⁷

Similarly, the Community Services and Health Industry Skills Council previously identified turnover rates for staff in many services were high (such as child care) and this needed statistical monitoring to point to services particularly under strain.⁸

7) Identified need: information on maternity/paternity leave and family friendly conditions

Given the high proportion of the services workforce which is women, it is suggested that maternity leave and family friendly conditions could have significant impact on labour force mobility however currently there is no data collection to assess this.⁹

⁵ See Australian Services Union, *Building Social Inclusion in Australia*, p. 30-32.

⁶ See Australian Services Union, *Building Social Inclusion in Australia*, p. 35-40.

⁷ See Australian Services Union, *Building Social Inclusion in Australia*, p. 15-16.

⁸ Community Services and Health Industry Skills Council Ltd, *Industry Skills Report*, May 2005, p. 54.

⁹ Australian Services Union, *Building Social Inclusion in Australia*, p. 34.