

**ISSUE:** *Maintaining Community Services frontline staffing at the fully funded level, maximising utilisation and publically reporting on FACS and NGO frontline workers*

**CONTEXT:**

- In the past, inadequate administrative apparatus and accountability has been in place to fully and properly oversee caseworker numbers.
- As a consequence, readily available, unambiguous data to confirm how many caseworkers were in place state-wide, or in particular locations, and whether caseworker resources were being fully utilised has been difficult to source.
- While workforce numbers naturally fluctuate from month to month, it became clear in March 2013, that there had been an overall decline in Community Services caseworker numbers.
- A new Executive Director, Frontline Resource Management position was created, responsible for maintaining and maximising caseworker resources and further developing and delivering against an action plan.
- Ernst and Young were engaged to review caseworker data and define reporting guidelines to enable robust reporting on CS caseworker levels and capacity. The report is currently at its finalisation stage and a template has been developed for ongoing CS use for regular reporting of caseworker numbers.
- There has been ongoing industrial action and stop work meetings at CSCs across the state since August 2012.
- Urgent recruitment action to return to funded casework strength has since been undertaken. Community Services, like other government and non-government agencies continues to face challenges in recruiting to regional and remote locations.
- The Minister has continued to emphasise that maintaining adequate levels of caseworker numbers is a key priority for the Government.
- The Minister publically committed to publishing caseworker numbers for the whole child protection system – Government and non-government organisations by the end of the year together with demand and performance data.
- Maximising caseworker utilisation is another key issue under consideration by the Frontline Resource Management unit. In 2011/12 around 27 percent of children and young people subject to a ROSH report received a face to face assessment. This was an improvement from 21% in 2010/11.
- The key obstacles to increasing productivity include administrative burdens faced by caseworkers, limited capacity of Managers Casework to allocate new work to Caseworkers and manage competing priorities and a variety of limitations in processes and systems to facilitate streamlined operations within CSCs.
- These issues, amongst others, were identified in an operational review undertaken by Ernst and Young in 2011. In the final report Ernst & Young estimated the combined potential impact of 73 'improvement opportunities' would be on average a savings of five hours per week per caseworker.
- Over the past two years or so considerable effort has been invested in reform activities to improve caseworker productivity.
- The Child Protection Capacity Improvement Strategy was developed in response to Ernst and Young's review. Actions to address a range of the improvement opportunities recommended by Ernst & Young have been progressed.
- The Practice First initiative is intended to free up caseworkers from administration and procedural compliance – helping them become less reliant on their computers as risk management tools by replacing that reliance with the support of a professional team. This initiative has been rolled out to about 16 CSCs.
- Caseworker productivity, together with other performance measures is monitored regularly through the Quarterly Business Review process

