

APPENDIX D

DFFH's attestations on its progress in addressing our 2018 audit recommendations

Our 2018 audit *Maintaining of Mental Health of Child Protection Practitioners* examined the then DHHS and made 7 recommendations. DHHS accepted all 7 recommendations.

In February 2021, the government established DFFH. DFFH took responsibility for the child protection system, as well as the work required to implement these recommendations.

Figure D1 shows:

- our recommendations
- DFFH's latest updated actions, as provided in its yearly attestations about progress made against these recommendations.

FIGURE D1: **VAGO recommendations and DFFH's responses**

Recommendation #1: Advising government about risks and resources needed

Advise government of:

- the current level of risk to the mental health of the CPP workforce due to unreasonable workload.
- the resources required to fully address current and future demand, based on accurate time and resource modelling.

DFFH's attestation and self-assessment

Complete. (December 2018)

Initial advice has been provided to government on the resources required to meet demand for child protection services. DHHS, with DTF and DPC, is further developing modelling and forecasting tools to further enhance advice to government of resourcing requirements into the future.

Recommendation #2: Improving demand forecasting

Develop and implement modelling tools to support demand forecasting.

DFFH's attestation and self-assessment

Complete (December 2018)

The first version of the CP demand model, set at agreed performance targets, was used to inform the 2019–20 budget proposal.

Recommendation #3: Monitoring CPP mental health more holistically

Establish a holistic view of child protection practitioners' mental health through the use of consolidated mental health data sources; and use this view to monitor CPP mental health, and identify trends and areas requiring focus or further investigation.

DFFH's attestation and self-assessment

Complete. (July 2019)

Findings from a review of CP mental health data were used to inform the development of a consolidated CP mental health dashboard report in a purpose-built online CP portal. The reporting tool will continue to be refined.

Recommendation #4: Assessing the effectiveness of current support tools

Determine the effectiveness of current mental health support tools for child protection practitioners.

DFFH's attestation and self-assessment

Complete. (December 2018)

The survey results provided valuable information about the level of awareness of CPPs about the support available. The survey data also informed the continued development of CPP specific support through the Child Protection Wellbeing Program as well as the requirement for continued promotion through a variety of different channels, of the mental health and wellbeing support available to CPPs.

Recommendation #5: Delivering specialised support services

Establish and consistently provide specialist mental health support services for child protection.

DFFH's attestation and self-assessment

Complete. (March 2019)

Provision of specialist support including onsite support as required (incorporating post-incident support). The support now available to CPPs includes a CP Wellbeing Program comprising an additional 6 counselling sessions through the CP Health Program, resilience training and an in-house specialist support program; and an Employee Wellbeing and Support Program (EWSP) that offers 13 discreet support services including critical incident support. An induction module was developed and presented to the providers of the department's EWSP to provide program counsellors with a better understanding of the specific challenges relevant to the CP work environment. Training for managers includes psychological first aid, vicarious trauma and mental health awareness training in line with the VPS Mental Health and Wellbeing Charter.

Recommendation #6: Promoting awareness of available support services and processes for raising mental health concerns

Ensure that child protection practitioners are sufficiently aware of the available mental health support services and the correct processes for raising mental health concerns.

DFFH's attestation and self-assessment

Complete. (October 2019)

The communications plan supports ongoing communications using a variety of channels (face-to-face and online) to promote the mental health and wellbeing support available to CPPs.

Recommendation #7: Improving CPP's experiences in the court environment

Establish and implement a plan to improve CPPs' experiences in the court environment, in consultation with the courts, the Department of Justice and Regulation, and Victoria Legal Aid.

DFFH's attestation and self-assessment

In progress. (originally due for completion December 2020)

The work to fully acquit this recommendation has been impacted by COVID-19 in 2020, 2021 and 2022. The work that has been achieved however, includes:

1. DFFH have republished the "Complaints about inappropriate behaviour of legal practitioners" in the *Child Protection Manual* in July 2020.
 2. In 2021 DFFH Office of Professional Practice (OPP) established the Court Practice Advice Service (CPAS) to assist Child Protection Practitioners (CPP) in preparing matters for the court. CPAS assists CPPs to access resources to build confidence in court practice,
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offer case consultation, and will receive complaints from CPPs where they have issues related to unprofessional conduct in court. CPAS has built a strong relationship with Court Services Victoria via the President's Strategic Advisor.

3. The CPAS internal website has a direct link to support Child Protection Practitioners to report on inappropriate conduct or other issues arising in their experiences of the Children's Court.

4. In a meeting between the Deputy Secretary Children, Families, Communities and Disability and the President of the Children's Court (on 29 July 2021) DFFH was advised the Code of Conduct would not be pursued as CPP and VLA staff are subject to the *Code of Conduct for Public Service Employees*.

5. Consultation between the Department, VLA and Court Services Victoria, have continued during this time in relation to strategies to improve the experiences of CPPs in the court environment.

6. The President engages with the Chief Practitioner and Executive Director OPP as necessary and on a regular basis. The President also meets with the Senior Deputy Secretary (CSOD), Deputy Secretary CFCD, and Director CPLO on a regular basis. A monthly interface meeting occurs between the department, VLA, Jurisdictional Partnerships, and CPLO.

Source: VAGO, based on DFFH's attestations.