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services



Protecting children, changing lives

A new way of working

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Due to privacy considerations, images in this document show models, and do not necessarily depict actual recipients of services.

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Ministerial foreword

The protection and safety of vulnerable children and young people is everyone's responsibility – government, service providers, the broader community and individuals.

For its part, the Victorian Government is undertaking a major overhaul of the child protection system that includes workforce reform, innovative policies, culture change, legislation and new or expanded programs.

A key component of this change is a large-scale restructure of the Victorian statutory child protection workforce – the most significant workforce reform in more than three decades.

The new child protection operating model is one of three cornerstone projects, along with the Department of Human Services Organisational Restructure and Services Connect, which will transform the Department of Human Services, in order to provide more targeted and joined up services to vulnerable Victorians.

The new operating model puts greater focus on delivering services at the frontline, and will ensure services for vulnerable Victorians are both effective and sustainable into the future.

When first elected, the Coalition Government asked child protection practitioners what needed to change in order for them to better support vulnerable children, young people and families.

Hundreds of former and current child protection staff told us what needed to be done and this is documented in *Child protection workforce: the case for change* (June 2011).

Many practitioners talked about the difficulties of working in a system that was overly bureaucratic, unsupportive, involved heavy workloads and lacked career and learning opportunities.

The case for change was indeed overwhelming. We acted on this strong body of evidence and devised a plan to transform the child protection workforce.

In *Protecting children, changing lives* (July 2011) we proposed a new operating model that emphasised the fundamental importance of case practice and aimed to increase the number of frontline staff and improve supervision, support and co-working, particularly for new recruits.

More than 500 child protection practitioners provided feedback on the proposed operating model. At the same time, a revised career and pay structure for practitioners was considered as part of the Victorian Public Service (VPS) Enterprise Agreement.

We have listened and now we are acting. *Protecting children, changing lives: A new way of working* outlines the details of the new operating model for the Victorian child protection workforce.

The new model, which takes effect immediately, targets four key areas for action:

1. Valuing the work, developing the professional
2. More support for, and supervision of frontline practitioners
3. More practitioners, with more experience, working directly with children and families
4. Reducing the statutory and administrative burden.

The details of the changes are outlined in the following pages, but essentially it will increase the percentage of the workforce who are directly involved with children and young people from 63 per cent to 75 per cent.

It gives greater recognition to the specialist work of a professional child protection practitioner and provides a clear career pathway for experienced practitioners who stay in the practice stream.

A new team structure will give practitioners more support and more opportunities for reflective supervision, mentoring and professional development.

The new operating model seeks to change the workplace culture to one where the views of all practitioners, regardless of status and position, are listened to and valued. Frontline practitioners will have greater decision-making authority, freeing up time for managers to improve the quality of practice.

More opportunities for training and learning and clear career pathways will help to build the skills capacity of the workforce and improve recruitment and retention rates.

We know that a skilled and well-supported workforce is best placed to respond quickly and effectively to the complex needs of vulnerable children and young people.

I am pleased to present this new operating model for the Victorian child protection workforce, and look forward to working with you to improve the safety and wellbeing of Victoria's most vulnerable children and young people.

The case for change was indeed overwhelming. We acted on this strong body of evidence and devised a plan to transform the child protection workforce.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mary Wooldridge".

Hon Mary Wooldridge MP
Minister for Community Services

Background

In June 2011, the Victorian Government released a document articulating a case for change in the statutory child protection workforce.

The content of the document was informed by the views of hundreds of former and current child protection practitioners, and outlined the systemic problems that made it difficult for practitioners to consistently provide quality services.

“It was clear that the operating model that had evolved over three decades needed significant reform.”

At that time, one in four new practitioners was leaving the profession every year, and it was clear that the operating model that had evolved over three decades needed significant reform.

Protecting children, changing lives: supporting the child protection workforce was subsequently released in July 2011, and outlined a comprehensive plan for a new and significantly transformed child protection operating model.

The plan included overhauling roles, duties, decision-making authority and delegations.

It advocated a renewed focus on the fundamental importance of case practice; increased staff working directly with children; and better support for practitioners.

The *Protecting children, changing lives* blueprint formed the basis for negotiations with staff and their representatives as part of the Victorian Public Service (VPS) enterprise agreement process.

In July 2012, the enterprise agreement was formally ratified with the introduction of the new child protection operating model in November 2012.



Valuing the work, developing the professional

The new child protection operating model is designed to give practitioners the support and flexibility needed to deliver better outcomes for vulnerable children and young people.

The new model gives greater recognition to the specialist work of a professional child protection practitioner and provides a clear career pathway for experienced practitioners who wish to stay in practice.

It aims to change the workplace culture, valuing the contribution of all professional staff regardless of status and position. A more consultative approach to decision-making - where fresh eyes are brought in at critical points - will enhance the quality of those decisions.

The daily pressures of the job will be eased with more opportunities for debriefing and more co-working, mentoring and supervision provided by experienced practitioners.

The revised career structure provides more leadership roles and opportunities for continued learning and development. This will help build the experience within the workforce while maintaining a strong focus on delivering best practice.

New Victorian Public Service (VPS) Enterprise Bargaining Agreement

The new operating model for the child protection workforce was agreed as part of the VPS Enterprise Bargaining Agreement formally ratified in July 2012.

The operating model is based upon a new classification structure for Children, Youth and Family staff. The existing Child Protection Worker (CPW 1-6) classification has been replaced by a new Child Protection Practitioner (CPP 2-6) classification.

Most existing child protection staff directly transitioned to these new classifications.

A number of new positions have been created including senior child protection practitioners (supervisory and non-supervisory, community-based and court officer), team manager, practice leader, area manager and deputy area manager.



“Clearly the knowledge and skills of experienced frontline workers, who feel supported and valued and who have an ongoing commitment to their work, are (or would be) assets of immeasurable value in child protection.”

The key activities of the new positions are:

Senior child protection practitioner

– generally reports to the team manager and undertakes casework and provides mentoring and formal supervision of up to two practitioners, including supporting new practitioners through the induction program (CPP 5.1).

Team manager – reports to the area manager or deputy area manager and is responsible for managing a team of about seven practitioners, including advanced practitioners and a senior practitioner. They are also responsible for monitoring team performance, exercising key case planning delegations and the allocation of cases and tasks (CPP 5).

Practice leader – reports to the area manager, undertakes complex casework, provides practice leadership and supervises one or more senior child protection practitioners (CPP 5.2).

Area manager – reports to the child protection manager and provides strategic leadership for the child protection area, including service planning, case planning, reviews, briefings and liaison with Child and Family Information Referral and Support Teams (Child FIRST) and other service organisations (CPP 6.1).

Principal practitioner – reports to the children, youth and families manager and undertakes casework, mentoring and support to practitioners. This is not a new position but under the new operating model there will be eight principal practitioners (CPP 6) and three statewide principal practitioners.

In addition to these new positions, there are eight 12-month high risk infant positions that will work closely with staff to build skills and knowledge on working with high risk infants.

Most staff transitioned to these new positions via an Expression of Interest process.

The new classification aligns child protection staff with the VPS Grades and related salary structure. The starting salary for graduates has increased to \$57,508 up from \$49,873 and practitioners have an additional one-week annual leave and improved conditions.

Some further change to senior staff reporting arrangements will occur when the new Department of Human Services organisational structure takes effect.

New practice stream

Critical to the success of the new operating model is the new team structure and practice stream.

Child protection will continue to operate on a team basis that puts case practice at the centre of work with children, young people and families. The practice stream comprises child protection practitioners, advanced child protection practitioners, senior child protection practitioners, practice leaders and principal practitioners.

Senior child protection practitioners, practice leaders and principal practitioners provide practice guidance, co-working and strengthened support to new or less experienced practitioners. All practice positions include a direct case-carrying component. The practitioners operating in the practice stream will help build a learning culture and a shared approach to complex case decisions.

Developing the professional

The new child protection operating model will ensure that the professionalism of child protection practitioners is formally recognised through a series of new learning and development opportunities and the provision of resources promoting best practice.

All child protection practitioners receive professional development training to help them transition to the new operating model.

Beginning Practice

All practitioners new to the Victorian child protection program undertake extensive professional development in the first six months of practice, including the 17 day Beginning Practice child protection program.

Leadership development

Child protection practitioners and their managers play a vital leadership role in creating and maintaining cultural change within the child protection workforce.

Good supervision and leadership supports practitioners to make good decisions in a complex environment and contributes to a stable, more confident and competent workforce.

Under the new operating model there will be an increase in the number of practitioners who take on leadership roles and who have supervisory and decision-making responsibilities.

Transitional training has been designed for those more senior practitioners taking on new roles along with refresher training in case planning and recording, sexual abuse forensic interviewing and providing effective supervision.

The *Child Protection Leadership Development Strategy* will be further developed to improve the supervisory, leadership skills and decision-making of managers as they transition from experienced practitioners to new supervisors.

As part of the strategy, more than 150 child protection managers have successfully undertaken ten hours of professional coaching with programs set to continue in 2013.

The operating model will also provide managers with more opportunities for debriefing, learning and development of staff at all levels.

Child Protection Leadership Program

Senior child protection practitioners, team managers and practice leaders will participate in a new Child Protection Leadership Program beginning in 2013.

Entitled *Leading practice, managing people*, the program will build capacity in supervisory and leadership skills, business acumen and decision-making, as experienced practitioners become senior practitioners and team managers.

With its emphasis on collaboration and joint decision-making, the leadership program will equip managers to focus on improving the quality of business and practice support available to staff.

The 2009 leading practice guide has been re-written to support the new operating model and the second edition will be published in late 2012.

“The link between the leadership literature, working with emotions and supervision practice is explored in an extremely useful guide for frontline and middle managers produced in Australia by the Victorian Government Department of Human Services¹ ...”

(Source: Jane Wonnacott *Mastering Social Work Supervision* (UK, 2012, p31))

1. *Leading practice A resource guide for Child Protection frontline and middle managers* (Gibbs, J, Dwyer, J and Vivekananda, K, Victorian Department of Human Services, 2009).

New minimum qualifications

To further increase the skills base of the child protection workforce, new minimum qualifications have been set out for entry-level practitioners.

The requirements are designed to ensure that practitioners starting out have a thorough, specialist knowledge of child welfare and the ability to exercise legal delegations under the Children, Youth and Families Act (2005).

Implemented in August 2011, all new practitioners need to have completed an approved course in either social work or another relevant qualification, including psychology courses accredited by the Australian Psychology Accreditation Council.

The list of approved qualifications is reviewed annually to maintain quality assurance standards and to continue building a highly skilled, professional workforce.

Child Protection Student Placement Program

Student work placements play an important role in encouraging and preparing the next generation of child protection practitioners.

In partnership with education providers, the Child Protection Student Placement Program has been enhanced to attract and recruit more students into the profession.

As the minimum qualifications include psychology graduates, student placements for psychology students will be piloted in 2013.

The placement program educates and prepares students interested in a career in child protection.

Specialist practice resources

Three additional resources based on the Best Interests Case Practice Model have been designed to promote a common language around risk assessment. The new resources are the Child and Family Snapshot, Family Snapshot and Analysis and Risk Assessment Snapshot.

These resources will enable practitioners to work collaboratively and transparently with children and families as well as guide discussions with supervisors.

Recruitment

The recruitment of quality child protection practitioners is a critical factor in determining case outcomes.

A targeted, evidence-based and engaging marketing campaign has been designed to attract new recruits and encourage experienced child protection practitioners who may have left the system back into the workforce.

The campaign, *Rewrite tomorrow, one child at a time*, uses search engine marketing and social media, as well as online and more traditional forms of advertising. It also uses direct marketing to students studying to acquire eligible qualifications.

A dedicated child protection recruitment website provides a one-stop shop for those interested in a career in child protection. A short video depicts the day in the life of a child protection practitioner.

A streamlined recruitment process has also been designed to filter candidates who are best suited for the important role of protecting vulnerable children and young people in Victoria.

Valuing practice

Public affirmation of the importance of the work carried out by child protection practitioners can have a positive impact on staff retention and morale. It can also foster a better understanding of the work and raise the issue of child protection more broadly. In Victoria, good practice in child protection and child and family services is celebrated in a variety of ways.

Each year the department publishes *Good practice* – a statewide snapshot with contributions from practitioners, academics, carers and young people. This inspiring publication tells of the courage and despair of vulnerable children and the difference that frontline practitioners can make to their lives.

Dear Heidi,

I want to thank you for everything you have done for me. Things in my new place are going great. I'm up to date with all my bills and rent. I'm still doing TAFE and I have applied for a job at Safeway. Mum and I aren't talking and I think that it has got to the point that me and Mum are never going to get along. I've finally finished my YJ [Youth Justice] order and I haven't offended since. Megan finishes with me in 2 weeks and it's been hard to let go and move into the world on my own. I've found it so hard without you. I sit on the couch at night and wish that I could just call you. You have been a very big part in my life. I felt like you were a mother to me even though I know you were my worker. If it wasn't for you I wouldn't be where I am today. Adrian and I are living together now. He helps out with food and bills. We have been together for almost 4 months now. I remember when you used to always find me wherever I went. To be honest if it wasn't for you I wouldn't be alive right now. I was in the area a while ago and I went into the DHS office to say hi to you, but I don't think you were there.

I wasn't sure if I could call you or write to you, and then Megan said that I could send cards and letters to you. We didn't get to say goodbye properly on my birthday. My hair is now blonde and purple. I miss you heaps Heidi. It's been so hard. I've felt like everything came around far too quickly. I just wish that it didn't go so fast. I will always remember all the fun, crazy and stressful times we had. All the times when I hung up on you and you would just call back straight away on either my phone or my mate's phone and I would say, 'How the fuck did you get this number'.

I remember when I first met you at the train station and we went to Maccas to wait and find out where I was staying, then 3 years later I end up staying at the same place as the first time I met you. Anyway, enough about me. How have you been? How is work going? What are you up to this Easter? I don't know if you are allowed to call me. This is my number. Anyway I thought I would write to you and let you know how everything is going. I hope to hear from you soon.

Lots of love,

Cathleen oxoxoxo

P.S. Happy Mother's Day

Recognising excellence

The Department of Human Services hosts two annual award ceremonies to celebrate the work of the child protection workforce and the child, youth and family service sector.

The Robin Clark Memorial Awards, held each year in Child Protection Week, recognise excellence in service provision and leadership in the child and family sector. The awards are named after Robin Dennis Clark (1936–2001), a widely respected, inspirational leader in the field of child, youth and family welfare.

The Protecting Children Awards are also held during Child Protection Week and recognise child protection practitioners who have shown outstanding leadership in engaging families, supporting new practitioners, supervising students and excellence in case practice.



Cameron Reid from Hume Region at the 2012 Protecting Children Awards.

Improving understanding of the court system

Working with Victoria's court system can be a complex and time consuming part of a child protection practitioner's work.

A number of reforms to improve the operation of the Children's Court and the way practitioners work with each other and the legal professional in a court setting are currently underway. These form a key component of the Victorian Government's response to the *Protecting Victoria's Vulnerable Children Inquiry* report.

Additionally, several joint training opportunities have been held between child protection practitioners and the legal profession, including the Children's Court Magistrates and staff, Victoria Legal Aid and private legal practitioners.

A recent two-day conference attended by 250 people provided an opportunity for information sharing, skill development and relationship building between the professions. There has also been a forum on child development and trauma, a workshop on court skills and a series of 15 one-day workshops centred on the child protection best interests model.

These events not only increase understanding of court procedures but also promote good relations and more collaboration between those who carry out work for the department and families in the Children's Court.

More support for, and supervision of frontline practitioners

Strengthening support and supervision

The new child protection operating model will consolidate a more supportive environment for child protection practitioners so they can concentrate on their important work with vulnerable children, young people and families.

Senior child protection practitioners, practice leaders and principal practitioners will provide more practice leadership and expert guidance for new or less experienced staff.

Senior case carrying practitioners will model best practice in building a child-focussed, family-centred practice culture that integrates evidence from research and critical reflection.

Senior child protection practitioners will provide more supervision of beginning practitioners, as well as facilitating regular opportunities to debrief and seek direction on the best way forward.

The new model will help shape the practice culture to encourage more constructive feedback and continual learning opportunities for team members.

Surveys of staff have highlighted the importance of being able to have professional conversations without fearing their own expertise was being called into question.

Senior practitioners will actively encourage fresh ideas, different views and opinions to improve critical case planning and decision-making processes.

This ethos has been embedded throughout the new operating model.

Inducting new practitioners

New child protection practitioners require specific training and support in the initial stages of working with vulnerable children and young people.

A consistent, thorough and effective induction process, tailored to meet the needs of new recruits, has been gradually strengthened and improved over the past few years.

The Beginning Practice program has been designed to provide foundation learning for practitioners new to the child protection workforce at every level.

It will give staff beginning their practice a better understanding of the nature of the work and the new operating environment.

The program involves structured activities to assist new practitioners develop the necessary skills and knowledge as well as opportunities to work alongside more experienced practitioners.

“Increased use of reflective practice, supervision, ongoing and collaborative peer support may be useful in promoting resilience in child protection staff, by strengthening workers’ sense of control, fostering their commitment through valuing client-related work and helping them to manage more successfully.”

(Source: Russ, Erica, Lonne, Bob, & Darlington, Yvonne (2009) Using resilience to reconceptualise child protection workforce capacity. *Australian Social Work: The Journal of the Association of Social Workers*, 62(3), pp. 324-338.)

Supporting evidence informed practice

Under the new operating model, the *Best Interests* principles of the Children, Youth and Families Act 2005, are applied to promote positive outcomes for vulnerable children, young people and families.

The principles require practitioners to protect children and young people from harm while respecting their rights and promoting their learning and development and cultural identity.

The principles recognise the central importance of a child’s family context and the difference that practitioners, extended families and communities can make to children and young people’s lives.

These principles have informed the development of more detailed child protection policies, practice guidelines and procedures.

More guidance for practitioners heading to court

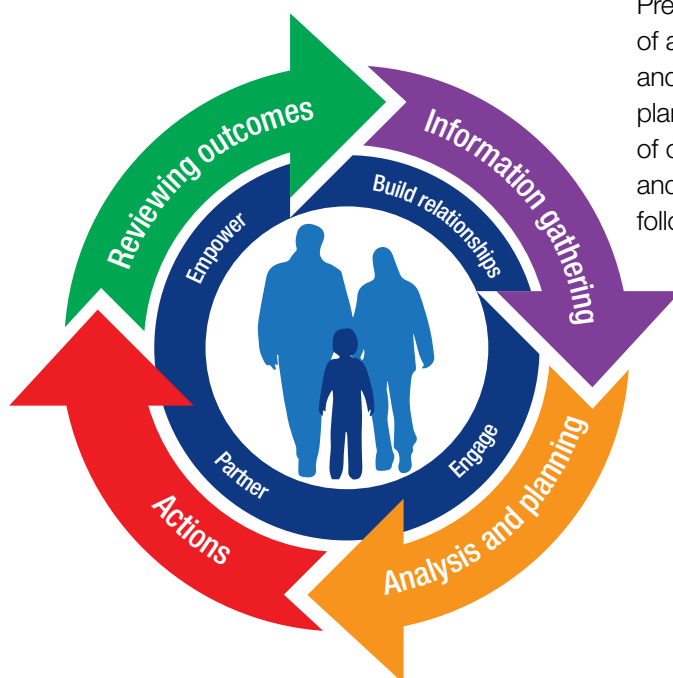
Practitioners preparing cases for the Children’s Court need to be able to present evidence that shows the effects of harm on children and young people and future risks to their safety, stability and development.

The court will also want to know the rationale for professional judgments and decision-making, what assistance has been provided to the family and the outcomes of previous interventions, all supported by evidence.

A *Court Kit* to assist Victorian child protection practitioners with the processes, procedures and legal and practice requirements associated with applications to the Children’s Court and related jurisdictions is currently being updated and will be available in late 2012. The *Court Kit* has been designed to act as a checklist that child protection practitioners utilise to assist in the preparation of applications to the Children’s Court and related higher jurisdictions.

Preparation for court increases the likelihood of a timely final outcome that benefits children and young people in securing their future planning. It may also increase the chances of consensus being reached with the family and help maintain a good working relationship following court action.

Fig 1. Best Interests Case Practice Model



More practitioners, with more experience, working directly with children and families

Case practice career pathway

For the first time, the new operating model introduces a clear career pathway for staff that may want to stay in child protection case practice. One of the major benefits of the new career pathway will be an increase in the number of experienced case carrying staff working directly with families.

The new case practice career pathway will result in a substantial increase in the number of experienced practitioners who stay in critical case practice roles. Under the new case practice career pathway, the number of experienced case carrying staff working directly with children and families will increase from 63 to 75 per cent.

Many of these staff have extensive experience and will provide an immediate boost to the level of experience among the frontline workforce.

New investment in frontline staff

Investing in the recruitment of more frontline child protection practitioners is a key priority of the new child protection operating model.

Since 2011, an additional 89 child protection positions have been funded, including 42 child protection staff in the 2012-13 budget, to help meet growing service demands.

The new positions are being allocated to meet the areas of highest need.

Practice guidance

To further support frontline practitioners, eight new principal practitioners, with extensive experience in child protection work, have been funded to work across Victoria.

A principal practitioner will provide practice leadership and support practitioners dealing with highly complex and challenging cases. They will work closely with teams to provide specific case advice and share their knowledge throughout the team.

Case practice capabilities will be increased through the involvement of principal practitioners in case practice guidance, case planning, mentoring and supervision.

As a result, more highly experienced staff will be able to stay in the field and retain their primary focus on developing child protection practitioner expertise.

Multidisciplinary centres

Children and young people who have experienced sexual assault will receive more targeted support with the establishment of three more multidisciplinary centres in Bendigo, the Latrobe Valley and the south-east corridor of Melbourne. These are in addition to the existing centres – in Frankston, Geelong and Mildura.

Multidisciplinary centres co-locate specialist police investigators, child protection practitioners and sexual assault counsellors in order to provide an integrated response to victims of sexual assault from a single location.

“Relationships are central to good practice – relationships that engage people in change, build on strengths and creatively look for solutions in partnership with families, and that are characterised by respectful communication and wise use of authority.”

They offer a holistic response to victims of sexual assault, child abuse and their families in an effort to minimise further trauma.

The multidisciplinary centres aim to:

- improve and integrate the investigation of sexual offences and child abuse
- improve the quality of evidence in sexual offences and child abuse cases
- improve support for victims
- increase the reporting of sexual offences and reduce attrition
- improve the capacity of agencies to work collaboratively.

Family Group Conferences and Aboriginal Family Decision Making

Evidence shows that involving families and extended families in the protection of children can reduce incidents of abuse or neglect.

In recent years, Family Group Conferences (FGC) and Aboriginal Family Decision Making (AFDM) have proven effective in delivering better outcomes for children and young people.

In particular, they have been shown to improve information gathering, strengthen the child protection response and minimise the re-reporting of cases to authorities.

Previously convened at varying phases of child protection involvement additional funding for both AFDM and FGC has been provided to ensure a conference is held for all children and young people following substantiation of abuse. In addition an AFDM will be held to develop and review the case plan for all Aboriginal children subject to a statutory order.

The conferences involve specially trained departmental and Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCO) convenors and child protection practitioners meeting with family members to discuss their concerns about

the child and assisting them to make decisions that will support the child’s safety and wellbeing.

The expanded use of family conferences aims to strengthen planning, divert families from court where appropriate and promote more inclusive case planning practice with families. The revised AFDM program is funded to commence from January 2013 while FGC will commence in July 2013.

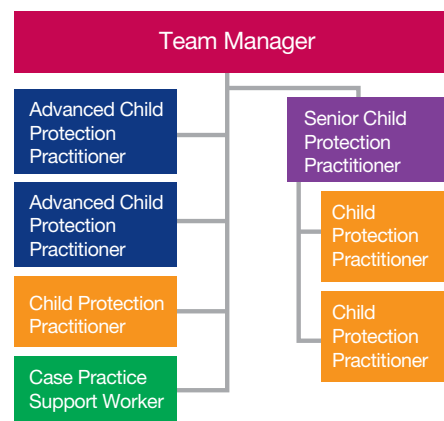
New child protection workforce structure

The restructure of the child protection workforce is designed to position senior management and decision-making as close to vulnerable children, young people and families as possible. The new operating model also provides frontline practitioners with better support so they can spend more time directly supporting children and young people.

Under the new model, the child protection workforce will continue to operate on a team basis; each team will comprise a team manager, one or more senior child protection practitioners, advanced child protection practitioners and child protection practitioners.

Team composition and reporting requirements have been streamlined and will be consistent across the state. Case practice support workers will be based in either distinct teams or within area based teams, depending on the needs of the local community.

Figure 2. The new generic team structure



Area based service delivery

The new operating model will be delivered on an area basis to strengthen links with local communities and existing services. Child protection services will operate in 21 areas across Victoria aligning the delivery of services to the local Child and Family Information Referral and Support Teams (Child FIRST) catchments.

The service delivery areas will also align with the planned new local areas for the Department of Human Services. Having the area manager as a member of the local departmental management structure will further strengthen links between services. Each area will be led by an area manager who will develop close links with the local Child and Family Services Alliance to ensure services are well integrated. A practice leader will also be based in each area to work alongside, mentor and supervise all practitioners.

Under the new case practice career pathway, the number of experienced case carrying staff working directly with children and families will increase from 63 to 75 per cent.



Reducing the statutory and administrative burden

The new child protection operating model aims to reduce the statutory and administrative burden for child protection practitioners so they can spend less time on paperwork and more time supporting children and young people.

Under the new model, decision-making processes have been streamlined to cut red tape and reduce the number of sign-off points. This 'flatter' structure will be implemented on a statewide basis to ensure a consistent delivery of services.

Child Protection Case Practice Manual

Recent inquiries into the child protection system found there was a need to consolidate and simplify practice instructions and rules. As a result, the Child Protection Case Practice Manual has been revised to improve clarity and simplify.

The number of practice standards, guidelines and rules in the manual has been replaced by a more straightforward set of standards mainly focusing on areas of high risk for clients and sensitive policy areas. This has resulted in the number of practice standards being reduced from 300 to around 60.

Further redevelopment of the manual will continue in 2013 to provide increased clarity about the relationship between case practice procedures, legal requirements and decision-making support. This will support practitioners to have a clear set of rules for each phase and stage of intervention while also being able to access specialist practice resources, emerging research and best practice procedures.

Client Relationship Information System (CRIS)

Under the new model, the Client Relationship Information System (CRIS) has been enhanced so practitioners will have their role and corresponding responsibilities more clearly defined. Information relevant to a practitioner's role will be consistent for that position across all locations. All document approval delegations have been reviewed and made more relevant to frontline practitioners.

Changes to CRIS will give practitioners greater flexibility in making leave arrangements and undertaking higher duties at a local level. Information about CRIS will be incorporated into all training materials and ongoing training programs will also be offered through specialist CRIS courses and the Beginning Practice program.

"Building good relationships with children, young people, their families, community members and other services, enables a more informed assessment to occur and provides the cornerstone for effective case work..."

(Source: Best interests case practice model Summary Guide, 2012)

How will the new operating model be evaluated?

We are committed to monitoring the progress and evaluation of the outcomes of the new child protection operating model.

An evaluation of the new operating model will be commissioned and commence in early 2013.

The evaluation will focus on the new operating model and other reforms that impact on the four areas of action:

- Valuing the work, developing the professional
- More support for, and supervision of frontline practitioners
- More practitioners with more experience working directly with families
- Reducing the statutory and administrative burden.



Victoria's Vulnerable Children: Our Shared Responsibility

On 2 May 2012, the Government released *Victoria's Vulnerable Children – Our Shared Responsibility*. The directions paper outlined the first phase of the Government's response to the *Protecting Victoria's Vulnerable Children Inquiry*.

The directions paper articulates a combination of first year initiatives, longer-term commitments and consideration of other areas for reform. It will form the basis of a formal vulnerable children and families strategy, to be released in 2013.

The basic premise is that protecting children from abuse or neglect is a shared responsibility. That is why a whole-of-government approach is necessary with responsibility for protecting children shared across child protection, the courts, schools, hospitals, early childhood and specialist services such as mental health, drug and alcohol programs and out-of-home care.

The five action areas are:

- Building effective and connected services
- Enhancing education and building capacity
- Making a child friendly legal system
- Providing safe, stable and supportive out-of-home care
- Introducing accountability and transparency.

In the 2012-13 State Budget, the Government committed a funding package of \$336 million over four years. This was in addition to the \$98 million in new funding provided in 2011-12.



