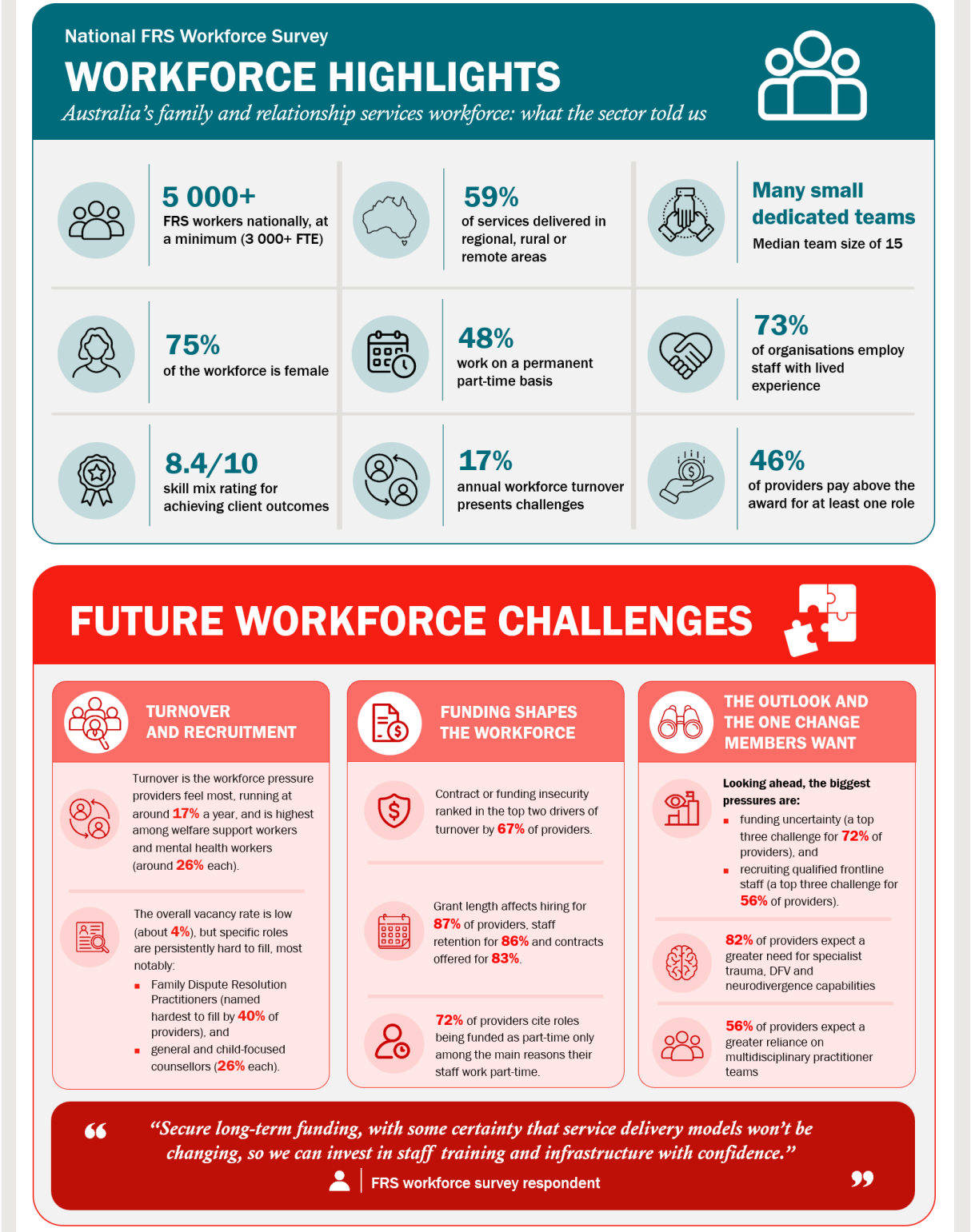
Interim Findings: Australia's FRS Workforce Now and into the Future



Data source: CIE.

This document highlights interim findings for the FRSA Study: *Australia's Family and Relationship Services (FRS) Workforce Now and into the Future*. It is based on 121 responses to a national survey of providers funded under the Department of Social Services Families and Children Activity and the Attorney-General's Department Family Relationships Services Program, and insights from new data collections generated from LinkedIn and job advertisements. This study covers the Commonwealth-funded FRS workforce, meaning the services and staff funded under these programs.

Key insights

- **A committed, highly skilled workforce** — the sector is overwhelmingly female and part-time, and providers rate the skill mix across their workforce 8.4 out of 10 for achieving client outcomes
- **But structurally fragile.** Short-term, uncertain funding is the single biggest challenge. It drives mid-career exits, limits the contracts providers can offer and constrains hiring, particularly in regional and remote areas
- **Rising client complexity requires new skills.** Providers expect more skills in specialist trauma, domestic and family violence and neurodivergence capability and for multidisciplinary teams.

A national, multi-service sector

Analysis of GrantConnect data reveals that FRS providers operate across every state and territory, led by New South Wales (28 per cent of FRS funding), Victoria (21 per cent), Queensland (17 per cent), Western Australia (12 per cent), South Australia (8 per cent), the Northern Territory (6 per cent), the Australian Capital Territory (4 per cent) and Tasmania (3 per cent). Services are spread across metropolitan (41 per cent), regional (39 per cent), rural (10 per cent) and remote (9 per cent) areas. The workforce is highly integrated with complementary services, with 92 per cent of providers also delivering state/territory/other-funded:

- parenting and family support (69 per cent)
- youth services (60 per cent)
- domestic and family violence services (55 per cent), and
- mental health services (54 per cent).

Workforce size and profile

We estimate a total FRS workforce of at least 5 000 staff, with a median team size of 15. Part-time work dominates (48 per cent of staff are permanent part time), and full-time equivalent staffing is 61 per cent of headcount. Seventy-three per cent of organisations employ staff with lived experience, with 7 per cent of staff with lived experience in designated lived experience roles.

The largest occupational groups are:

- counsellors, who provide counselling and support to individuals, couples and families facing relationship, wellbeing and behavioural challenges, including family and relationship counsellors, drug and alcohol counsellors and rehabilitation counsellors (21 per cent of the workforce)
- social workers, who help people address complex social and practical issues by coordinating services, making referrals and maintaining case support (10 per cent)

- welfare support workers, who conduct basic assessments, coordinate programs and link vulnerable families and individuals to community resources, including family support workers, youth outreach workers and intake and referral officers (8 per cent), and
- health and welfare services managers, who lead and manage health, welfare and community service programs, including staffing, policies and service delivery standards (7 per cent).

The workforce is approximately:

- 75 per cent female
- 6 per cent Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander
- 14 per cent culturally and linguistically diverse, and
- 6 per cent living with disability.

Skills and development

The highest priorities for further staff training are:

- domestic, family and sexual violence (55 per cent)
- neurodivergence (45 per cent)
- trauma (44 per cent)
- mental health (31 per cent), and
- people who use violent behaviour (30 per cent).

Turnover and recruitment

Turnover is the workforce pressure providers feel most, running at 17 per cent a year, and is highest among welfare support workers and mental health workers (around 26 per cent each). Fifty-three per cent of providers report typical average staff tenure of 3 to 5 years, and 37 per cent report more than 5 years. This is consistent with analysis of LinkedIn data, which found a median tenure of 2 years (excluding current roles). Recruitment into FRS roles is most commonly from outside the FRS sector.

The overall vacancy rate is low (about 4 per cent), but specific roles are persistently hard to fill, most notably Family Dispute Resolution Practitioners (named hardest to fill by 40 per cent of providers), and general and child-focused counsellors (26 per cent each).

Fifty-four per cent of job postings for FRS roles require tertiary degrees, most commonly for social work or community services, welfare and youth work. Demand for labour is strongest for those with experience in specific practice areas, and more complex client cohorts.

Funding shapes the workforce

Contract or funding insecurity ranked in the top two drivers of turnover by 67 per cent of providers.

Grant length (or short-term funding) directly affects workforce decisions: 87 per cent of providers said it affects hiring, 86 per cent said it affects staff retention and 83 per cent said it affects the types of contracts they can offer. Funding uncertainty also affects hiring, for 88 per cent of providers.

Seventy-two per cent of organisations report part-time roles that are funded as part time only.