

# Video transcript: Follow-up of Maintaining the Mental Health of Child Protection Practitioners

## What we followed up on

Child protection practitioners work with and support some of the most vulnerable children and families in Victoria.

The Department of Families, Fairness and Housing, or DFFH, oversees these practitioners.

In our 2018 audit, we found that unreasonable workloads and inadequate support were compromising the mental health of child protection practitioners.

## Why it matters

This undermined the effectiveness of their crucial and challenging frontline work.

## Review objective

Four years later, we've followed up with DFFH to check its progress on the recommendations we made to address these issues.

## What we concluded

We found that while DFFH has made some progress on our 2018 recommendations, child protection practitioners remain under-resourced, under supervised, and under pressure.

## Background

In 2020-21, Victorians made around 120,000 reports to child protection because of concerns of child abuse or neglect.

DFFH employs over 2,000 child protection practitioners to assess and investigate these reports, and support the safety and wellbeing of children.

## Issue 1: Workloads need to be more manageable

Our 2018 audit found that unreasonable workloads were the key driver of work-related stress and mental health injuries in child protection practitioners.

Four years later workload stress remains high.

It's not clear how DFFH decides how many child protection practitioners Victoria needs, or if this number is enough.

Families' situations can change quickly, which means some child protection cases require much more work than others.

DFFH doesn't consider this complexity enough when it plans practitioners' workloads.

On top of this, DFFH is unable to recruit and retain the number of practitioners it says it needs.

Vacant positions have more than doubled over the last year. This further increases the pressure on current practitioners.

## **Issue 2: Support has improved, but more supervision is needed**

Since 2018, DFFH has improved the way it monitors and understands child protection practitioner's mental health.

It has also developed better services, training and resources to support their wellbeing.

However, an important support practitioners need is formal supervision.

Right now, DFFH is not meeting its minimum mandatory supervision targets.

This is a missed opportunity to monitor the workload and wellbeing of child protection practitioners.

## **Issue 3: DFFH is working to improve court experiences**

Our 2018 audit found that child protection practitioners were concerned about a lack of professional respect shown to them in court. These difficult experiences were a cause of further stress.

DFFH has since set up a team called Court Practice Advice Support to help practitioners prepare for court.

It's also introduced new ways to receive and resolve child protection practitioner's complaints against legal professionals.

DFFH has made progress on this issue. But its influence over the culture of court is limited, and it still has work to do with other court stakeholders.

## **More Information**

To find out more, or read our full report, please go to [audit.vic.gov.au](http://audit.vic.gov.au)

To access the complete video, please go to <https://youtu.be/lwPW15cVxts>