

Thriving Kids Inquiry Public Hearing - 07/11/2025

AASW Response to Question on Notice

School Social Workers in Rural/Remote Areas and Local Health Districts

Question:

“In rural and remote areas, are the social workers in schools there through the local health district as well?”

Response:

The Australian Association of Social Workers (AASW) has limited data regarding member employment or engagement within school settings across rural and remote areas, and preliminary outreach (over the past week) to ascertain member insights regarding this has not provided a complete picture. However, based on 2024–2025 government and policy documentation, current evidence indicates that school-based social workers in rural and remote Australia are predominantly employed through state and territory Departments of Education, not through Local Health Districts (LHDs) or equivalent regional health services.^{1 2 3}

This does not mean that existing frameworks could not support more integrated or shared employment models, but rather that these frameworks are not presently utilised for this form of service delivery. Australian States often employ education-led wellbeing and counselling workforces, with dedicated rural and remote deployment structures such as regional teams, remoteness weightings, and talent pools.^{4 5}

While local exceptions may exist, such as short-term secondments, joint-funded pilots, or co-located roles, these are not reflected as standard policy in 2024–2025 public documentation. At present, health–education integration occurs primarily through partnerships, referral pathways, and co-located programs, rather than through LHD employment lines.^{6 7} There is no consistent national evidence of social workers in schools being employed by Local Health Districts. Where collaboration occurs, it is typically through shared service or full-service school pilots under place-based wellbeing models (for example, the Better and Fairer Schools Agreement 2025–2034), which seek to integrate education, community, and health supports while maintaining departmental employment separation.^{8 9}

¹ Queensland Department of Education (2025). *Student Wellbeing Workforce – Social Worker Roles*. Retrieved from <https://alt-ged.qed.qld.gov.au/working-with-us/wellbeing-workforce/social-worker-student-wellbeing>

² NSW Department of Education (2025). *School Counselling Service – Allocation Methodology*. Retrieved from <https://education.nsw.gov.au/schooling/school-community/school-counselling-service/counselling-allocation>

³ Victorian Department of Education (2025). *Mental Health in Primary Schools and Mental Health Practitioners*. Retrieved from <https://www.schools.vic.gov.au/mental-health-primary-schools>

⁴ NSW Department of Education (2024). *Rural and Remote Education Implementation Plan 2024–2025*. Retrieved from <https://education.nsw.gov.au/about-us/strategies-and-reports/rural-and-remote-implementation-plan>

⁵ Queensland Government (2024). *Regional Talent Pools for Student Wellbeing Workforce*. Retrieved from <https://smartjobs.qld.gov.au/jobs/QLD-CQR646378-25T>

⁶ Australian Government (2025). *Better and Fairer Schools Agreement 2025–2034*. Retrieved from <https://federalfinancialrelations.gov.au/agreements/better-and-fairer-schools-agreement>

⁷ Western Australian Council of Social Service (2025). *WA Regional Education Strategy – Full-Service School Models*. Retrieved from <https://www.wacoss.org.au/library/wa-regional-education-strategy-2024/>

⁸ BMC Public Health (2025). *School-Based Integrated Care in Regional Australia: Emerging Models*. Retrieved from <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC11997809/>

⁹ Independent Expert Panel for School Reform (2024). *Improving Outcomes for All – Final Report*. Retrieved from <https://www.ieu.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/Improving-Outcomes-for-All-Summary-Report-FINAL.pdf>