Survey of the workforce — 2021
Summary of findings

Purpose

We surveyed **763** government and non-government frontline workers in the child protection and family support sector in Queensland. We undertook similar surveys in 2018, 2019 and 2020.

This factsheet summarises the key findings from our 2021 workforce survey in terms of what's working well and what could be better. Where possible, we make comparisons with results from the previous (2019 and 2020) surveys. We also note any variations across sub-groups of respondents.

Our findings are described in the following sections:

- Role and organisation
- Working with clients
- Cultural capability
- Barriers to accessing services
- Working collaboratively
- Learning and development
- System performance
- Children's rights
- The biggest issues for vulnerable children and young people in Queensland.

Method

An online survey link was sent to government agencies, non-government organisations and peak bodies from the child protection and family support sector who forwarded it on to their frontline staff. We also sent the link to previous survey respondents who shared their email addresses with us. The survey was open between 5 and 24 May 2021. We asked 81 questions with a mixture of rating style and free text responses.

About the survey

The Queensland Family and Child Commission (QFCC) collects data from a variety of sources to inform our programs of work.

The QFCC intends to conduct a workforce survey annually to gather evidence to contribute to our evaluation and oversight activities.

Sample

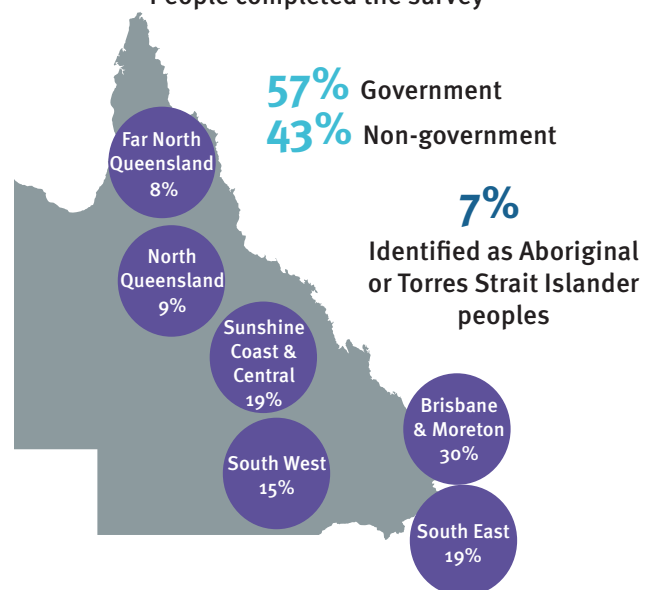Responses were received from frontline workers throughout Queensland.

763
People completed the survey

57% Government
43% Non-government

7%
Identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander peoples

Far North Queensland 8%

North Queensland 9%

Sunshine Coast & Central 19%

South West 15%

Brisbane & Moreton 30%

South East 19%

On average, respondents had worked in the child protection and family support sector for **10.93** years.

4 in 10 (43%) respondents agreed they would recommend working in the child protection and family support sector, which is a statistically significant decrease from the results in 2020 (55 per cent) and 2019 (54 per cent).

1 in 10 (10%) respondents agreed they intended to leave the child protection and family support sector within the next 12 months.

Overall findings

Survey respondents' perceptions were generally less positive in this survey than in previous years. Similar to our previous surveys:

- respondents were generally more positive about their role and organisations than the broader child protection and family support system.
- respondents working for non-government organisations were often more positive than those from government agencies.

Queensland
Family & Child
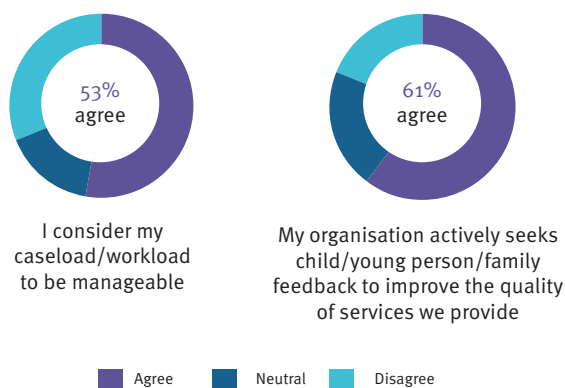Commission

Queensland
Government

Findings

What's working well?

Statements with the highest proportion of agreement include:

I have a clear understanding of my role and responsibilities

93%	4%

3%

I am confident in my knowledge of reporting thresholds when deciding whether to report concerns about a child or young person's safety

87%	9%

4%

I am confident in my ability to use assessment tools to identify concerns about a child or young person's safety

85%	12%

4%

My organisation regularly assesses its own performance

75%	15%	11%

I am confident that I know where to refer families for specialist services

74%	15%	12%

In my organisation, children, young people and families have the opportunity to participate in decisions affecting their lives

74%	15%	11%

In my organisation, the policies and practices are closely aligned

73%	14%	13%

■ Agree   ■ Neutral   ■ Disagree

What could be better?

Statements with the lowest proportion of agreement include:

53% agree — I consider my caseload/workload to be manageable

61% agree — My organisation actively seeks child/young person/family feedback to improve the quality of services we provide

■ Agree   ■ Neutral   ■ Disagree

Trends

The level of agreement with the statements below changed across the last three surveys.

Question	2019	2020	2021
I consider my caseload/ workload to be manageable	47%	65% ↑	53% ↓
I am confident that I know where to refer families for specialist services	73%	80% ↑	74% ↓
My organisation regularly assesses its own performance	70%	81% ↑	75% ↓
My organisation tailors services to meet the needs of children, young people and families	69%	78% ↑	69% ↓

↑↓   indicates a significant increase or decrease from the previous wave

Variation across sub-group responses

Respondents from non-government organisations were more likely than respondents from government agencies to agree with the following statements:

NGO		Govt
96%	I have a clear understanding of my role and responsibilities	90%
61%	I consider my caseload/workload to be manageable	47%

Factors influencing decision making

We asked a new question this year—'What factors influence your decisions about risk of harm to children and young people?' Respondents answered in their own words, and the most commonly cited factors included:

- 12% Family history/dynamics
- 10% Immediate/physical safety /health of the child
- 10% Capacity/willingness of parent/carer to provide care
- 8% Availability of community support
- 8% Presence of family and domestic violence
- 7% Drug and alcohol abuse issues

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What's working well?

Statements with the highest proportion of agreement include:

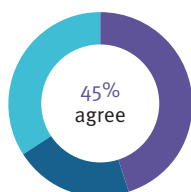I have a clear understanding of the information I can share with other organisations

81%	12%	7%

I am confident that I know where to refer families for specialist services

74%	15%	12%

■ Agree ■ Neutral ■ Disagree

What could be better?

Statements with the lowest proportion of agreement include:

45% agree

I am able to spend enough time with children, young people and families to do my job well
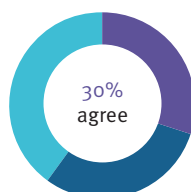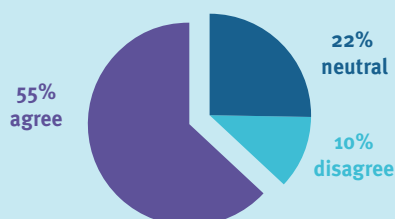
30% agree

When I refer families to other services, I receive feedback about whether the service has engaged with the family

■ Agree ■ Neutral ■ Disagree

The impact of COVID-19

This year we asked about the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on system demand, with the majority of respondents agreeing that the pandemic had increased demand on the system.

55% agree
22% neutral
10% disagree

Trends

The level of agreement with the statements below changed across the last three surveys.

Question	2019	2020	2021
I am able to spend enough time with children, young people and families to do my job well	36%	48% ↑	45% ↓
I have a clear understanding of the information I can share with other organisations	88%	86%	81% ↓
I am confident that I know where to refer families for specialist services	73%	80% ↑	74% ↓
I have sound knowledge of the services available in my area	75%	81% ↑	71% ↓
I am usually aware of other services working with my clients	76%	69% ↓	62% ↓

↑↓ indicates a significant increase or decrease from the previous wave

Variation across sub-group responses

Respondents from non-government organisations were more likely than respondents from government agencies to agree with the following statements:

NGO		Govt
89%	I use evidence from literature, research and evaluation findings	79%
89%	I receive support from my colleagues/peers to do my job well	78%
88%	I have a clear understanding of the information I can share with other organisations/service providers	75%
56%	I am able to spend enough time with children, young people and families to do my job well	36%
76%	I am usually aware of the other services working with my clients	50%

Findings

Cultural capability

What's working well?

Statements with the highest proportion of agreement include:

I am confident in my ability to engage Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people and families with the services my organisation delivers

75%	15%	10%

My organisation partners with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations to support the delivery of services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people, families and communities

71%	19%	10%

My organisation has provided cultural training for staff to support their work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people and families
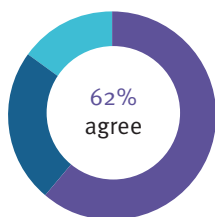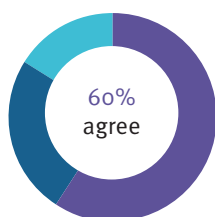
71%	15%	15%

■ Agree ■ Neutral ■ Disagree

Trends

The level of agreement with the statements below changed across the last three surveys.

Question	2019	2020	2021
I am confident in my ability to engage Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people and families with the services my organisation delivers	79%	82%	75% ↓
I feel competent to meet the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people and families	73%	71%	62% ↓
I understand how the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle applies to my role	74%	69% ↑	59% ↓

↑↓   indicates a significant increase or decrease from the previous wave

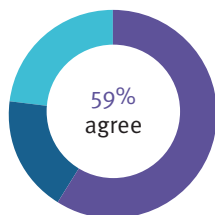### What could be better?

Statements with the lowest proportion of agreement include:


62% agree

I feel competent to meet the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people and families

60% agree

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and communities are empowered to participate in decision making that affects their children

59% agree

I understand how the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle applies to my role

57% agree
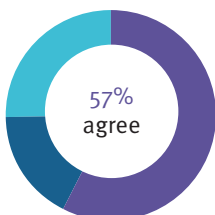
I am aware of the changes to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle

■ Agree ■ Neutral ■ Disagree

Variation across sub-group responses

Respondents from non-government organisations were more likely than respondents from government agencies to agree with the following statements:

NGO		Govt
83%	I am confident in my ability to engage Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people and families with the services my organisation delivers	69%
77%	My organisation has provided cultural training for staff to support their work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people and families	66%
69%	I feel competent to meet the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people and families	56%
73%	I understand how the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle applies to my role	48%

Barriers to accessing services

We asked—'Are there any barriers for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people, and families to access family support services?'.

Respondents answered in their own words, and the most commonly cited factors included:

13% Cultural capability of services and workers

6% Limited capacity of services

5% Barriers accessing services (including transport, eligibility critera)

5% Limited confidence and trust in services

5% Personal barriers

4% Gaps in services

4% Historical factors

Six per cent of respondents provided a response of 'no barriers', while 60 per cent of respondents did not provide a response (either 'no response', 'don't know' or 'no opinion').

Trends

The barriers cited by respondents have been consistent across the last three surveys.

Barriers	2019	2020	2021
Cultural capability of services and workers	8%	11%	13%
Limited capacity of services	5%	6%	6%
Barriers accessing services (including transport, eligibility critera)	4%	5%	5%
Personal barriers	3%	3%	5%
Gaps in services	2%	4%	4%
Historical factors	2%	3%	4%

A small numbers of barriers cited by respondents have changed across the last three surveys.

Barriers	2019	2020	2021
Limited confidence and trust in services	0%	5% ↑	5%
Poor service coordination and collaboration	3%	4%	2% ↓
Confidentiality concerns	1%	3%	1% ↓

↑↓   indicates a significant increase or decrease from the previous wave

What's working well?

Statements with the highest proportion of agreement include:

My workplace has a culture that supports collaboration with other organisations to achieve client outcomes

| 85% | 9% | 6% |

Information sharing between my organisation and other organisations supports better responses for children, young people and families

| 84% | 11% | 5% |

My workplace encourages multi-disciplinary responses to meet clients' needs (if needed)

| 81% | 13% | 5% |

Where appropriate, information sharing occurs regularly between my organisation and other organisations

| 70% | 16% | 15% |

I have a clear understanding of the information I can share with other organisations
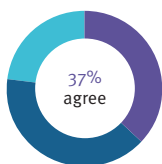
| 81% | 12% | 7% |

I have a sound knowledge of the services available in my area
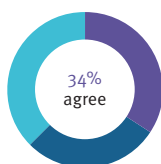
| 71% | 17% | 12% |

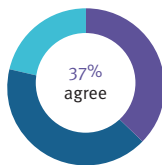■ Agree ■ Neutral ■ Disagree

What could be better?

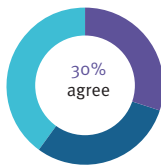Statements with the lowest proportion of agreement include:

37% agree
Local committees (for example Local Level Alliances) or networks have played an important role in facilitating effective working relationships

34% agree
Competition for resources and/or clients affect working relationships between my organisation and others

37% agree
Local committees (for example Local Level Alliances) or networks have played an important role in identifying gaps in support services that respond to local community needs

30% agree
When I refer families to other services, I receive feedback about whether the service has engaged with the family

■ Agree ■ Neutral ■ Disagree

Trends

The level of agreement with the statements below changed across the last three surveys.

Question	2019	2020	2021
Information sharing between my organisation and other organisations supports better responses for children, young people and families	91%	89%	84% ↓
Competition for resources and /or clients affects working relationships between my organisation and others	30%	28%	34% ↑

↑↓   indicates a significant increase or decrease from the previous wave

Variation across sub-group responses

Respondents from non-government organisations were more likely than respondents from government agencies to agree with the following statements:

NGO		Govt
94%	My workplace has a culture that supports collaboration with other organisations to achieve client outcomes	78%
87%	My workplace encourages multi-disciplinary responses to meet clients' needs (if needed)	77%
76%	Where appropriate, information sharing occurs regularly between my organisation and other organisations	64%
45%	Local committees (for example Local Level Alliances) or networks have played an important role in identifying gaps in support services that respond to local community needs	31%
45%	Local committees (for example Local Level Alliances) or networks have played an important role in facilitating effective working relationships	32%

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What's working well?

Statements with the highest proportion of agreement include:

I use evidence from literature, research and evaluation findings to inform my professional practice

| 83% | 12% | 5% |

I receive support from my colleagues/peers to do my job well

| 83% | 10% | 8% |

My organisation actively supports training and other learning opportunities for staff

| 75% | 12% | 12% |

The training and other learning opportunities I have received have been of high quality

| 75% | 17% | 8% |

I have been provided with enough training and other learning opportunities to undertake my role well

| 71% | 16% | 13% |

I receive the right amount of supervision to do my job well

| 67% | 15% | 18% |

■ Agree   ■ Neutral   ■ Disagree

What could be better?

Statements with the lowest proportion of agreement include:

57% agree

I have received information and/or training regarding changes to child protection legislation in the past 12 months

■ Agree   ■ Neutral   ■ Disagree

Trends

The level of agreement with the statements below changed across the last three surveys.

Question	2019	2020	2021
My organisation actively supports training and other learning opportunities for staff	67%	77% ↑	75%
The training and other learning opportunities I have received have been of high quality	69%	76% ↑	75%
I have received information and/or training regarding changes to child protection legislation in the past 12 months	85%	65% ↓	57% ↓

↑↓   indicates a significant increase or decrease from the previous wave

Variation across sub-group responses

Respondents from non-government organisations were more likely than respondents from government agencies to agree with the following statements:

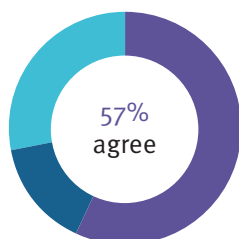| NGO		Govt
87%	My organisation actively supports training and other learning opportunities for staff	66%
87%	The training and other learning opportunities I have received have been of high quality	66%
81%	I have been provided with enough training and other learning opportunities to undertake my role well	63%

Learning and development priorities

We asked—'In your opinion, what are the highest learning and development priorities for the child protection and family support workforce?'. Respondents answered in their own words, and the most commonly cited factors included:
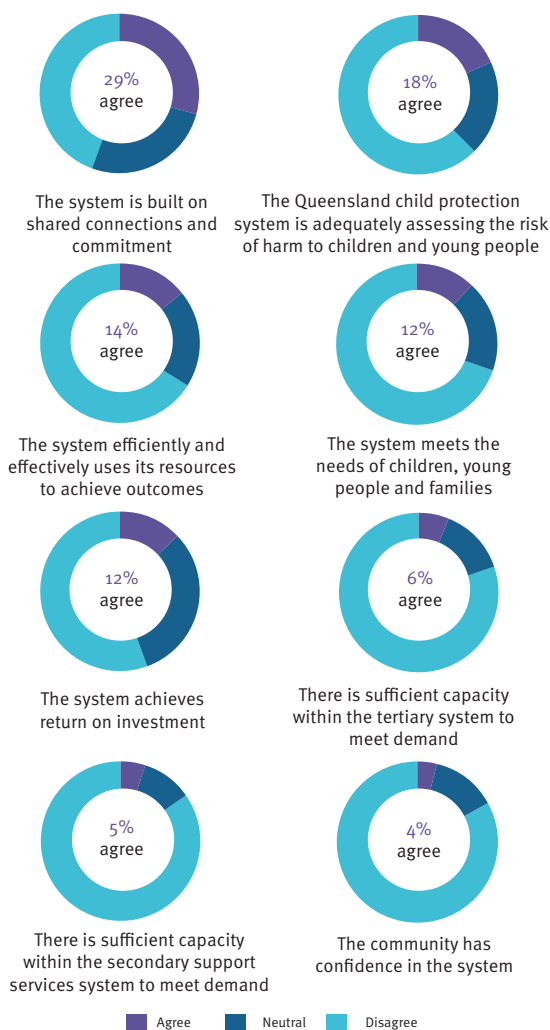
31% Specialist training (including domestic and family violence, trauma-informed practice, alcohol and drug use, mental health)

11% Identifying and assessing risk/structured decision making

11% Building workforce capacity and resources (including reduced caseloads, more staff)

What could be better?

Statements with the lowest proportion of agreement include:

29% agree
The system is built on shared connections and commitment

18% agree
The Queensland child protection system is adequately assessing the risk of harm to children and young people

14% agree
The system efficiently and effectively uses its resources to achieve outcomes

12% agree
The system meets the needs of children, young people and families

12% agree
The system achieves return on investment

6% agree
There is sufficient capacity within the tertiary system to meet demand

5% agree
There is sufficient capacity within the secondary support services system to meet demand

4% agree
The community has confidence in the system

■ Agree ■ Neutral ■ Disagree

Trends

The level of agreement with the statements below changed across the last three surveys.

Question	2019	2020	2021
The system is built on shared connections and commitment	33%	42% ↑	29% ↓
The system efficiently and effectively uses its resources to achieve outcomes	23%	30% ↑	14% ↓
The system meets the needs of children, young people and families	19%	26% ↑	12% ↓
The system achieves return on investment	13%	21% ↑	12% ↓
The community has confidence in the system	8%	14% ↑	4% ↓

↑↓   indicates a significant increase or decrease from the previous wave

Variation across sub-group responses

Respondents who have worked in the sector for more than ten years were more likely than respondents with less than ten years of experience to **disagree** with the following statements:

10 years +	Disagree that:	< 10 years
70%	The system efficiently and effectively uses its resources to achieve outcomes	58%
82%	There is sufficient capacity within the tertiary system to meet demand	71%
68%	The Queensland child protection system is adequately assessing the risk of harm to children and young people	53%

Priorities to improve the system

The priorities cited by respondents changed across the last two surveys (we didn't ask this question in 2019).

2020		2021
44%	Greater support for the workforce (including capacity and capability)	51% ↑
14%	Additional support to meet service gaps	30% ↑
26%	Greater information sharing and collaboration	17% ↓
39%	Improve service responses	11% ↓
3%	More community and family education	9% ↑

Improving the system

We asked—'In your opinion, what could be done to improve the child protection and family support system?'. Respondents answered in their own words, and the most commonly cited factors included:

51% Greater support for the workforce (including capacity and capability)

30% Additional support to meet service gaps

17% Greater information sharing and collaboration

16% Increased early intervention and prevention

11% Improve service responses

9% More community and family education

5% Increased cultural capability

8

What's working well?

Our survey asked the workforce about child focused organisations and children's rights. The statement with the highest proportion of agreement is:

My organisation is a child safe organisation (including creates a culture, adopts strategies and takes action to promote child wellbeing and prevent harm to children and young people)

81%	12%	7%

Through our Strategic Plan 2021–25 Bringing children's rights to life, the QFCC will lead the development of a comprehensive children's rights agenda to give practical effect to the United Nations' Convention on the Rights of the Child for all children and young people growing up in Queensland.

For the first time in our workforce survey, we asked about child rights. Most respondents agreed their organisations were upholding children's rights' principles.

My organisation upholds the:
Right to life, survival and development principle

90%	8%

2%

Non-discrimination principle

89%	8%

3%

Best interests of the child principle

86%	10%

4%

Respect for the views of the child principle

83%	12%

4%
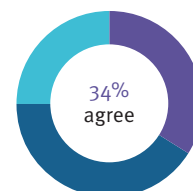
◼ Agree   ◼ Neutral   ◼ Disagree

What could be better?

Statements with the lowest proportion of agreement include:

34% agree

Complaints processes in my organisation are child friendly

◼ Agree   ◼ Neutral   ◼ Disagree

Variation across sub-group responses

Respondents from non-government organisations were more likely than respondents from government agencies to agree with the following statements:

NGO		Govt
87%	My organisation is a child safe organisation	73%
45%	Complaints processes in my organisation are child friendly	26%
93%	My organisation upholds the right to life, survival and development principle	87%
94%	My organisation upholds the non-discrimination principle	85%
92%	My organisation upholds the best interests of the child principle	81%
92%	My organisation upholds the respect for the views of the child principle	77%

We asked—'In your opinion, what are the biggest issues facing vulnerable children and young people in Queensland today? List up to three'. Respondents answered in their own words, and the most commonly cited factors included:

Lack of intervention (including not removing children from danger soon enough)
Domestic and family violence
Support services workload
Foster care/adoption waiting list
Lack of educational opportunities
Safety (including harm in care)
Health/lack of healthcare
Drug/alcohol abuse
Personal finances and poverty
Government funding/resourcing/services
Mental health
Lack of trauma-informed decison making
Homelessness/lack of housing
Bureaucratic issues (including red tape)
Ineffectiveness of Child Protective Services
Family/parental issues