

Schools need social workers: AASW welcomes call for improved wellbeing in schools

The AASW welcomes the interim report on mental health by the Productivity Commission, and its emphasis on schools as places where young people's mental health concerns can be addressed early and effectively. AASW National President Christine Craik said the call by the Commission to have 'wellbeing teams' in schools aligns with the Association's long-term advocacy for social workers in all schools. "Social workers in schools is a well-established specialist area of social work practice and an example of the unique contribution that social work can make to the mental wellbeing of young people. We agree with the Productivity Commission's conclusion that schools are an ideal place to provide services for young people because they can be as general or as specialised as the students require. "Social workers specialise in mental health as it is a core part of their professional training. "For example, they provide early intervention measures which identify and deal with risk factors and deliver early support and treatment. And they also provide specialist, targeted counselling and support for students with ongoing mental health issues." Ms Craik said that services located in schools are sufficiently unobtrusive to enable young people to approach them with confidence. She said, "Many young people are reluctant to use services within a mainstream service, or may not have the independence necessary to access these. Alongside issues facing young people in their homes and communities, school social workers can focus on the school's culture and environment to remove barriers or inequities, and to develop safe and inclusive school communities. Ms Craik said, "We recommend a minimum of one school social worker per 500 students." Speaking about the other points made in AASW's submission to the Productivity Commission, Ms Craik said, "One of the reasons that stigma persists for people living with mental health issues is that we, as a society, don't do enough to acknowledge and address the role that poverty, family violence, lack of affordable housing, and a lack of resourcing in education, that enables the conditions for mental health issues to arise in the first place. "These factors greatly influence a person's sense of belonging and stability and are known as the 'social determinants of health'. People need to be confident that their basic needs for nutrition, shelter, safety and security are met before they can attain the state of overall wellbeing, as outlined by the World Health Organization in its definition of health. In our rush to treat the symptoms, we often forget the causes. Paying attention to and dealing with the enablers, is the great strength of social work in the mental health arena." The AASW looks forward to working in and with all sections of the service system to implement the improvements recommended by this inquiry and thanks the Productivity Commission for this opportunity.

Contacts

Angela Yin
03 9320 1005
mailto: media@asw.asn.au