

# Primary Welfare Officer Initiative

## Frequently Asked Questions

October 2013

### What is the Primary Welfare Officer Initiative?

The Primary Welfare Officer Initiative provides eligible schools with additional resources to improve whole school approaches to health and wellbeing to improve the likelihood of students remaining in school and achieving their educational potential.

### What is the role of the Primary Welfare Officer?

Broadly, Primary Welfare Officers undertake the following roles, depending on the needs of the school and identified target areas of need:

- promoting the development and implementation of wellbeing strategies in schools
- developing whole school approaches to student attendance, engagement and participation to support learning outcomes
- supporting case coordination strategies for student support
- facilitating the delivery of intervention programs for students and families
- coordinating access and timely service delivery to students and families
- participating in student wellbeing professional networks
- fostering relationships with community-based service providers.

Primary Welfare Officers also have key responsibilities to help schools address key government priorities in relation to bullying, behaviour, mental health and welfare issues.

### Who can schools employ to be a Primary Welfare Officer?

Schools can use Primary Welfare Officer funding in a variety of ways to meet their needs. Some examples include:

- providing time release for an existing staff member with health and wellbeing experience to undertake the PWO role
- employing a new staff member with appropriate skills and experience to be a PWO
- establishing a partnership with a community service agency to provide PWO services.

Schools receive funding for the Primary Welfare Officer Initiative as part of the Student Resource Package. This funding must be used to secure a dedicated person, or time fraction of a dedicated person, to undertake the role. Primary Welfare Officer funding should not be directed to other programs within the school, even if they are related to the Primary Welfare Officer's work.

### What qualifications should a Primary Welfare Officer have?

Schools are encouraged to consider using Primary Welfare Officer funding to engage staff with skills and experience to fulfil the roles above. Consideration can be given to employing staff with a range of skills and experience including teaching, social work, youth work, counselling, welfare, mental health, or psychology etc.

### What are the desired outcomes of the initiative?

The desired outcomes for the initiative are focused on supporting schools to create a positive and engaging school environment that promotes the health, wellbeing and learning outcomes of students through improving resilience, coping skills, personal engagement, a sense of belonging and life skills.

This is achieved through:

- the creation of positive school cultures and enhanced capacity of schools to support students who are at-risk of disengagement and not achieving their educational potential
- improved likelihood of students remaining in school and achieving their educational potential, with students:
  - learning more effectively
  - demonstrating improvement in engagement and attendance
  - feeling healthy, safe and happy
  - developing positive attitudes and behaviours.

Schools can develop tailored outcomes that are specific to the strengths and needs of their school community.

## How do Primary Welfare Officers undertake their work?

The role of the Primary Welfare Officer is a flexible one that can be tailored to meet the needs of the school.

Primary Welfare Officers are active members of a school's student wellbeing team, working in collaboration with a wide range of school-based and external professionals to develop and implement strategies that are integrated, holistic, culturally and linguistically appropriate, and which are focused on achieving student outcomes.

There are four commonly recognised domains of service delivery that provide a staged response to addressing the needs of students within the school environment: primary prevention, early intervention, interventions requiring complex responses and restoring wellbeing (postvention).

These levels of service delivery span the continuum of care provision and to some extent overlap, from the support needed by all children and young people, to the additional support needed in crisis situations.

For example, to improve student attendance, a Primary Welfare Officer may work in early intervention, to address a student's recent, unexplained absence from school, and to address the multiple risk factors presented by a student requiring a complex response.

Primary Welfare Officers should work in partnership with school professionals, community based services and early childhood providers to ensure holistic and seamless service provision across and through these domains as required.

The escalation of students through these service domains should follow a staged response that is informed by a comprehensive assessment of need conducted by all available and relevant professionals, such as teachers, leadership staff, student support services, Primary Welfare Officers and community based services.

## How is funding allocated?

Schools do not have to apply for funding.

PWO funding is provided at the campus level provided the 2011 Student Family Occupation density for the campus exceeds the benchmark funding level.

Where school campus enrolments increase, additional per student funding will be provided. However, where enrolments decline no adjustment will be made. No adjustments are made for changes to Student Family Occupation density.

For further information about PWO funding, see the SRP Guide (reference 50) at:

<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/principals/finance/Pages/srpref050.aspx>.

## How long does Primary Welfare Officer funding last?

Funding for Primary Welfare Officers was announced as part of the 2011-12 State Budget and will be phased-in over 2012, 2013 and 2014 to cover about two in three government primary, P-12 and special schools with the greatest need in Victoria.

Funding for Primary Welfare Officers is provided to December 2014.

## What support is available?

Guidance materials to support schools in the implementation and management of the Primary Welfare Officer Initiative are available online at:

<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/principals/health/Pages/welfareofficers.aspx>.

## Who can I contact for assistance?

For assistance, please contact:

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General information about the Primary Welfare Officer Initiative is available at:

<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/principals/health/Pages/welfareofficers.aspx>.