EVALUATION OF THE NATIONAL SCHOOL CHAPLAINCY PROGRAM

FINAL REPORT

November 2022

Table of Contents

FINAL REPORT 1

Table of Contents 2

Glossary 4

Executive summary 5

A growing need to support schools in delivering student wellbeing services 5

The role of the National School Chaplaincy Program (NSCP) 5

An overview of this evaluation 6

Evaluation findings and shorter-term recommendations 9

1 There is a growing need to help schools deliver wellbeing services 20

1.1 Children and young people are increasingly facing wellbeing challenges 20

1.2 Access to support is increasingly limited as services struggle to meet demand 21

1.3 This is creating a growing need to support schools in delivering wellbeing services 23

2 The NSCP plays a valuable role in supporting student wellbeing and attracts high levels of public interest 26

2.1 The NSCP is a well established and widely used student support program 26

2.2 The NSCP's scope has changed under different governments, and continues to change 27

2.3 It is a timely opportunity for an evaluation 28

2.4 There has been an overwhelming response to the evaluation 31

2.5 Our response as evaluators is to consider this evaluation at two levels 32

3 Chaplains play a valuable role in supporting student wellbeing and school communities 34

3.1 Chaplains deliver a diverse range of direct supports 34

3.2 Chaplains are providing a range of supports not only to students, but also their school communities 42

3.3 Chaplains are also contributing to the broader wellbeing of local communities 46

4 The flexible and generalised nature of the program offers benefits, but also comes with risks 48

4.1 The NSCP provides a holistic approach to student wellbeing, enabling tailored supports to individual students and families 48

4.2 It allows the program to be tailored depending on the needs of each school and the skill set of individual Chaplains 50

4.3 It alleviates pressure on other school staff, including other wellbeing staff 51

4.4 Chaplains may be 'spread too thin' across a range of different activities 53

4.5 Chaplains may also be delivering services that go beyond their qualifications or skill set 54

4.6 There is a lack of consistent understanding of what constitutes 'proselytising' 56

5 The current approach to program administration enables tailoring to jurisdictional context, but creates inconsistency and accountability challenges 58

5.1 States and territories administer the program under the Project Agreement, which leads to significant variation in its delivery across jurisdictions 58

5.2 This means the program can be tailored to the local context, but can hinder program oversight and accountability 60

5.3 There is confusion relating to the role of the Chaplain in relation to working with other student wellbeing staff 63

6 The religious affiliation of the Chaplain role is the most contested and unique aspect of the program 66

6.1 The religious affiliation of the Chaplain role is the most contested and unique aspect of the program 66

6.2 There are a range of other qualities and characteristics Chaplains possess that are valuable, if not unique 68

7 dandolo endorses the proposal to open the program in 2023 and considers it a timely opportunity to revisit aspects of the program as it shifts to focusing on a function rather than a professional group 71

7.1 There are good reasons to open the program to other professional groups, alongside Chaplains 71

7.2 This provides timely opportunity to change other aspects of the program to reflect the shift to focusing on a function 72

7.3 Employment and funding models for the current program may hinder its effectiveness 79

Appendix A: Program objective and design principles 86

Appendix B: Overview of respondents 87

Overview of respondents to online consultation platform 87

Appendix C: Analysis methodology 90

Managing disproportionate response rates 90

Appendix D: Key trends impacting student wellbeing 92

Glossary

Acronym / term	Definition for the purposes of this report
Chaplaincy provider	Agencies that act as Chaplain service providers. Chaplaincy providers and their role / responsibility vary across jurisdictions; however in Victoria Chaplaincy providers recruit, employ, train, supervise and support chaplains appointed to schools.[1]
NSCP	National School Chaplaincy Program.
NAPLAN	National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy.
Pastoral Care Worker	In South Australia Chaplains are called Pastoral Care Workers.
Project Agreement	The Australian Government's agreement with state and territory governments that outlines its expectations and requirements for the delivery of the NSCP.
School-based stakeholders	Includes all individuals that provided a submission to dandolo as part of this evaluation that have (or have had) direct involvement in a school. This includes teachers and other school staff, principals, students and Chaplains (current and former).
Social determinants of health	The non-medical factors that influence health outcomes. They are the conditions in which people are born, grow, work, live, and age, and the wider set of forces and systems shaping the conditions of daily life.[2]
Stakeholders	Includes all individuals and organisations that provided a submission to dandolo as part of this evaluation – either via the online consultation platform or formal written submission.
Wellbeing	For the purposes of this report, wellbeing refers to any factor that may impact on the health or happiness / satisfaction of a student. This is broader than just mental or physical health, and includes factors such as those that are social, intellectual, behavioural, spiritual, environmental and economic. While mental health is a key contributor and indicator of wellbeing, and is therefore commonly referenced in this report, it is not the sole factor.

[1] Department of Education and Training Victoria, 2022, National School Chaplaincy Program Chaplaincy Providers, accessed 1 November https://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/health/mentalhealth/Pages/nscpchaplaincy.aspx.
[2] World Health Organisation (WHO), 2022, 'Social Determinants of Health', accessed 30 September: https://www.who.int/health-topics/social-determinants-of-health#tab=tab_1.

Executive summary

A growing need to support schools in delivering student wellbeing services

Rising wellbeing challenges and unmet demand for services

Australia's children and young people are increasingly facing wellbeing challenges. In the context of increasing large-scale disruptions such as the 2019-20 bushfire season, COVID-19 and the 2022 flooding, young people are increasingly concerned for their futures.[3] Across the country social cohesion is at risk as inequality is rising and rates of participation in community organisations and associations (for example, scouts or guides, sporting clubs and churches) are declining.[4] This is likely contributing to increasing rates of social isolation and loneliness[5] and rising mental health and wellbeing challenges in children and young people.[6]

As wellbeing challenges rise, so does unmet demand for community services.[7] This is particularly an issue for mental health and wellbeing services, with children and young people often missing out on support or experiencing significant waitlists and gaps between appointments.[8]

A growing need to support schools in delivering student wellbeing services

In this context, schools are increasingly playing a role in supporting student wellbeing. In recognition of the growing need to support student wellbeing, in recent years state and territory governments have introduced a series of programs and initiatives to assist schools. For example, the introduction of mental health practitioners in Victoria and South Australia. However, schools continue to feel the pressure of rising wellbeing challenges and unmet demand for services.

The role of the National School Chaplaincy Program (NSCP)

In this context, the Australian Government's NSCP plays a valuable role in supporting the wellbeing of students and the school community.

[3] Australian Institute for Disaster Resilience, 2020, 'Our World Our Say, National survey of Children and Young People on Climate Change and Disaster Risk', accessed 30 September: https://www.aidr.org.au/media/7946/ourworldoursay-youth-survey-report-2020.pdf.
[4] Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2019, 'General Social Survey: Summary Results, Australia', accessed 3 October: https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/people-and-communities/general-social-survey-summary-results-australia/2019.
[5] Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System, 2020, 'Witness Statement of Alan Rob Moodie', accessed 3 October: http://rcvmhs.archive.royalcommission.vic.gov.au/Moodie_Rob.pdf.
[6] Brennan, N., Beames, J. R, Kos, A., Reily, N., Connell, C., Hall, S., Yip, D., Hudson, J., O'Dea, B., Di Nicola, K., & Christie, R., 2021, 'Psychological Distress in Young People in Australia Fifth Biennial Youth Mental Health Report: 2012-202' Mission Australia: Sydney, NSW, page 6.
[7] Australian Council of Social Service, 2019, 'The Profile and Pulse of the Sector: Findings From the 2019 Australian Community Sector Survey', accessed 3 October: https://www.acoss.org.au/the-profile-and-pulse-of-the-sector-findings-from-the-2019-australian-community-sector-survey/.
[8] Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System, 2021, 'Final Report: Volume 2', pp.173-174; McDonnell, D., Vasiliou, VS., Lonergan, E., Moore, P., 2022, 'Psychologists' Experience Who Managed Waitlists in Mental-Health Services During the COVID-19 Lockdown' accessed 3 October: https://econtent.hogrefe.com/doi/10.1024/2673-8627/a000024 ; Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System, 2021, 'Summary and Recommendations', accessed 3 October: https://finalreport.rcvmhs.vic.gov.au/download-report/.

The NSCP is:[9]

- A program that aims to 'support the wellbeing of students and school communities through pastoral care services and student support strategies.' It does this through providing schools with the option to engage a Chaplain.
- Currently supporting over 3,000 school communities each year.
- Delivered through a Project Agreement with state and territory governments. While the Australian Government funds the program, it gives state and territory governments responsibility for the program's delivery and management.

Since its establishment in 2006, the program has undergone significant change. Successive governments have altered the delivery of the program. For example, in 2010-11 the Rudd Government gave schools the option to engage a secular Student Welfare Worker as an alternative to Chaplains, and in 2014 the Abbott Government removed this choice. In June this year, the Federal Minister for Education announced that from 2023 schools will again be given the choice between engaging a Chaplain or secular Student Wellbeing Officer.

The Project Agreement is set to expire in 2023 and required an independent evaluation by 2022.

An overview of this evaluation

The Australian Government engaged dandolopartners (dandolo) to undertake an independent evaluation on 25 July 2022. The evaluation scope was broad in remit and characterised by tight timeframes and limited sources of data and information.

Evaluation scope

The Australian Government identified the scope of this evaluation to assess:

- **The delivery of the program.** This includes:
  - Who the program supports.
  - What types of services Chaplains provide in schools.
  - How the program is organised and managed.

[9] Australian Government Department of Education, 2022, 'National School Chaplaincy Program (NSP)', accessed 3 October https://www.education.gov.au/national-school-chaplaincy-program-nscp

- **The effectiveness of the program.** This includes:
    - Whether it effectively supports the wellbeing of students and school communities.
    - The effectiveness of the e-Safety training provided to Chaplains.
    - The impact of COVID-19 and natural disasters on the delivery of the program.
- **The place of the program** – how it fits alongside other, more recent, investments by state and territory governments aimed at supporting the wellbeing of students and school communities.
- **Any possible evidence-based improvements** to the program for the Australian Government's consideration, in addition to the changes already announced by the federal Minister for Education in mid-2022.

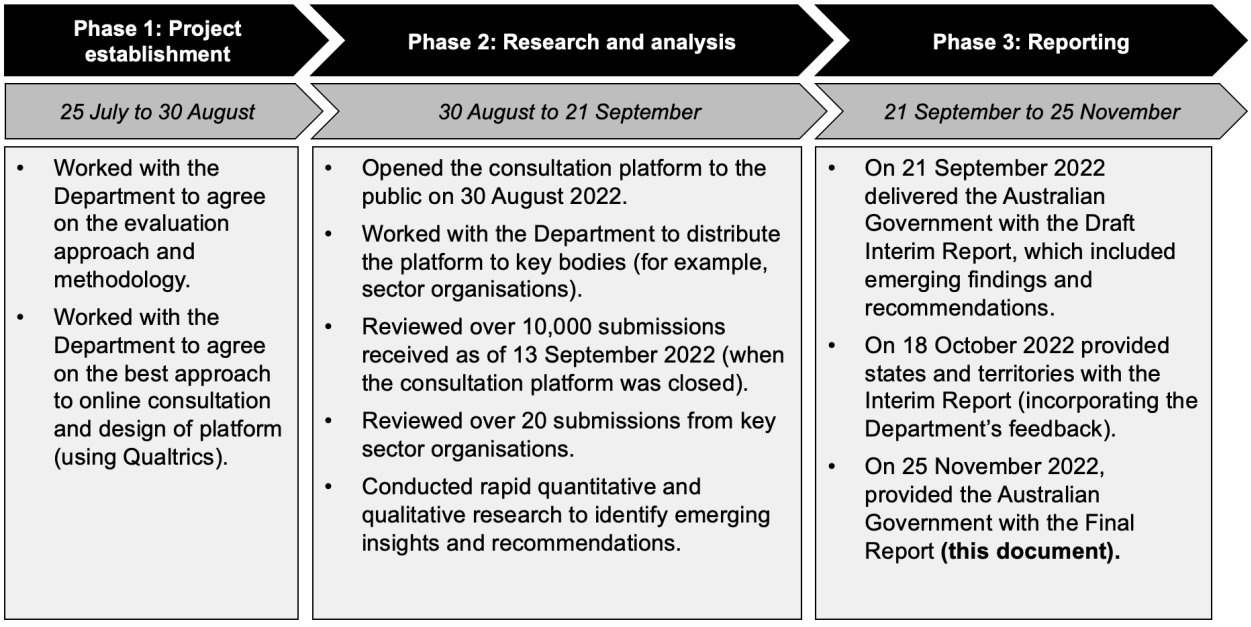
To assist with defining the term 'effectiveness', dandolo worked with the Department to agree an assumed objective and set of design principles. In assessing the effectiveness of the program, dandolo considered how aligned the program was to this objective and set of design principles. **Refer Appendix A.**

Evaluation timeframes and data / information

The primary source of information and data for this evaluation was a public consultation platform. Where possible, dandolo supplemented this with desktop research.

An overview of the evaluation approach and key timeframes is provided below.

FIGURE 1: EVALUATION METHODOLOGY



Alternative text: Figure 1 presents the three phases of the project's evaluation methodology. Phase 1: Project establishment (25 July to 30 August) involved working with the Department to agree on the evaluation approach and methodology, and working with the Department to agree on the best approach to online consultation and design of platform (using Qualtrics). Phase 2: Research and analysis (30 August to 21 September) involved opening the consultation platform to the public on 30 August 2022, working with the Department to distribute the platform to key bodies (for example, sector organisations), reviewing over 10,000 submissions received as of 13 September 2022 (when the consultation platform was closed), reviewing over 20 submissions from key sector organisations, and conducting rapid quantitative and qualitative research to identify emerging insights and recommendations. Phase 3: Reporting (21 September to 25 November) involved delivering the Australian Government the Draft Interim Report on 21 September 2022 (which included emerging findings and recommendations), proving states and territories with the Interim Report on 18 October 2022 (incorporating the Department's feedback), and lastly providing the Australian Government with the Final Report on 25 November 2022 (this document).

Response to the evaluation

There was an overwhelming response to the evaluation. dandolo received over 10,000 submissions in 10 days from a wide range of community members. There were also strong reactions on media platforms and evidence of mobilisation among community groups. This indicates the strong views held among the public, and high levels of interest and engagement in the program. A wide range of stakeholders responded, with a high proportion of respondents being parents and guardians (25 per cent), other members of the public (14 per cent) and teachers (14 per cent). There was an uneven distribution of responses. For example, 43 per cent of all respondents were based in Queensland, and 74 per cent of these were non-school based stakeholders.

Given the uneven distribution of stakeholder responses, dandolo did not give equal weighting to all submissions. Instead, dandolo considered:

- Stakeholders' direct program experience (for example, placing additional weighting to those who had direct experience with the program, such as students or teachers).
- The evidence presented about the program's effectiveness and appropriateness (for example, the arguments made and evidence presented in submissions).

For more detail on the responses received refer **Appendix B,** and the evaluation methodology refer **Appendix C.**

Our recommendations

dandolo considered two levels of recommendations relating to the program:

- Shorter term – as the NSCP continues, explore opportunities to better achieve Australian Government objectives.
- Medium to longer term – recommend a comprehensive review of the NSCP that considers its role in supporting student wellbeing as part of the broader operating environment.

dandolo took this approach because of:

- The level of change that has occurred since the NSCP's establishment – both in relation to the evolving student wellbeing landscape and the delivery of the program, and
- The limited data and information available to inform this evaluation.

Recommendation 1
1. dandolo recommends the Australian Government undertake a comprehensive review of the NSCP's role in the medium to longer term. This review should consider: 1.1. The evolution of the program over time in relation to the changing role of schools in supporting student wellbeing. 1.2. The role of the program in relation to other existing investments in student wellbeing, and the most effective and efficient way for the program to support student wellbeing. Note: As part of this review, we also recommend that the Australian Government examine the current funding model – see Recommendation 5.

Evaluation findings and shorter-term recommendations

Chaplains play a valuable role in supporting student wellbeing and school communities

Chaplains provide a wide range of different services to a diverse range of students, including:

- **Direct support for students**: this includes services delivered directly to students. For example, structured programs delivered to students (such as breakfast clubs) and informal support provided to students (such as checking in with students during lunchtime).
- **Indirect support for students and direct support for the school community**: this includes services delivered to the school community, which indirectly support or contribute to student wellbeing. For example, supporting teachers and other school staff and providing support to parents and families.
- **Support for the community more broadly, which contributes to student wellbeing on a macro scale**: this includes services delivered that contribute to the broader wellbeing of the local community, which in turn indirectly contributes to the wellbeing of students. For example,

promoting social connection and cohesion through attending and promoting community events and programs.

The types of services delivered varies across schools and jurisdictions, largely determined by the schools' need (influenced by factors such as location, sociodemographic, resourcing, etc.) and the Chaplains' capability and capacity (for example, skills / experience and FTE status).

We found that:

- direct supports for students are the most consistently delivered across schools,
- informal supports were considered most effective or valuable.
- Chaplains simply 'being present' is critical because they can:
    - Create a more safe and supportive school environment.
    - Identify and respond to wellbeing issues early (for example, identifying behavioural or social issues and helping students with strategies).
    - Empower students by providing them with encouragement, advice and strategies.
    - Build relationships with students and provide a stable, consistent adult figure or role model.
    - Be available for students, acting as an approachable 'go-to' person that is viewed as separate from other school staff.

For example, as some students expressed:

> *"A Chaplaincy staff saw during school that I was looking unhappy and distant from my friends and asked if I wanted to discuss it." – Student, NSW*
>
> *"I like coming to school because the Chaplain is there to check on me." – Student, Vic*
>
> *"My friends and I were being bullied. She talked to us about some strategies." – Student, SA*

The flexible and generalised nature of the role offers benefits, but also comes with risks

The flexible and generalised nature of the Chaplain role provides benefits because it:

- Allows a holistic approach to wellbeing, which means Chaplains can work alongside students and other services to identify and respond to different wellbeing needs. This means Chaplains can identify and respond to all wellbeing needs: mental, physical, social, spiritual, intellectual, economic

and environmental. For example, providing one student with breakfast before school and connecting another student with a mental health practitioner.

- Enables the school and Chaplain to work together to tailor and adapt the program. Several stakeholders, particularly school principals, identified the flexibility of the program as a key strength as it means they can work with Chaplains to agree the supports and services that will be most appropriate to meet the school's needs.

- Alleviates pressure on other school staff. Several school-based stakeholders, particularly teachers and other student wellbeing staff, expressed the value of Chaplains being available to support them in managing their workload and competing pressures. For example, teachers described how Chaplains supporting in classrooms enables them to focus on educational outcomes, and wellbeing staff outlined how Chaplains can support in addressing the wellbeing needs of students with less complex issues (freeing them up to focus on students with more complex needs).

However, the flexible and generalised nature also presents risks:

- Chaplains may be 'spread too thin', trying to do too much in the limited time they have available. By trying to be all things to all people (students, their families and other school staff), they may be compromising their ability to focus on delivering activities that directly support student wellbeing. Most stakeholders agreed that helping other school staff and the needs of parents and families should be secondary to the needs of students.

- Chaplains may be delivering services that go beyond their qualifications or skill set. In the context of rising wellbeing needs and unmet demand for services, some stakeholders reported that Chaplains are increasingly having to support the needs of students with more challenging or complex wellbeing needs. This poses the risk that Chaplains are delivering supports and services that go beyond their qualifications or skill set.

- There is a lack of consistent understanding of what constitutes 'proselytising'. While the Project Agreement specifies that Chaplains 'must not proselytise' it provides no definition or further guidance. While some state and territory governments expand on this in their own guidelines, there is a lack of consistency across jurisdictions and schools. Some stakeholders expressed concern regarding activities that could be considered proselytising.

Recommendation 2

2. dandolo recommends the Australian Government in the short term:

   2.1. Provide states and territories with clearly documented and defined activities that are out of scope for the program to manage the risk of Chaplains delivering services that go beyond their scope and ensure they are focusing on delivering services that will directly support student wellbeing. These activities should be included in the Project Agreement, and may include, for example:

      a) Proselytising (recognising this is already included).

      b) Providing counselling or other mental health services.

      c) Teaching classes or providing any type of administrative / educational support that is not directly supporting student wellbeing.

   2.2. In the Project Agreement, specifically define 'proselytising' with a principle-based definition. Provide further guidance on proselytising and examples of appropriate and inappropriate practice.

   2.3. Provide states and territories with guidance regarding the key activities that are in scope of the program, based on 'better practice' (or evidence-based) services. This may accompany the Project Agreement and should support states and territories in administering the program in a way that achieves the Australian Government's objectives.

   2.4. In addition to the above, work with states and territories to provide schools with:

      a) Guidance material for Principals and other school leaders on the Chaplain role, the services available and how they are expected to work with other wellbeing staff.

      b) A plan template to help school leaders define the role of the Chaplain in their specific context (in collaboration with the Chaplain and provider, if relevant).

The current approach to program administration enables tailoring by jurisdictional context, but also creates inconsistency and accountability challenges

The current approach to program administration gives state and territory governments significant autonomy and flexibility, which enables them to tailor the program to their unique policy context. This approach means

there is significant variation across jurisdictions in relation to how the program is delivered. For example, some of the key points of difference include:

- Funding – some jurisdictions provide funding directly to schools, while others provide it to Chaplaincy providers.
- Consent – some jurisdictions require a more robust consent process than others for students to participate in the program, for example, some take an 'opt-in' approach while others take an 'opt-out' approach.
- Oversight – in some jurisdictions responsibility for overseeing Chaplain performance sits with the school, while in others more responsibility sits with Chaplaincy providers.
- Complaints process – across jurisdictions there are both different levels of guidance set around complaints processes, and different approaches specified.
- Confidentiality – different jurisdictions provide different levels of guidance regarding the confidentiality of student information, some refer to school sector policy and others refer to the individual school policy.
- Professional development – while it is mandatory for all Chaplains to undertake the eSafety training (as per the Project Agreement), some jurisdictions provide additional professional development requirements.

This level of devolution and variation across jurisdictions and schools can mean:

- Blurred lines of accountability, with confusion around who is ultimately accountable for overseeing and managing Chaplains (for example, defining their scope of practice and managing performance).
- Hindered program visibility. The lack of consistency in the delivery arrangements across the country make it challenging for the Australian Government to oversee or monitor the program. Further, there is a lack of sufficient data or information to support visibility or inform the Australian Government in assessing effectiveness of the program.
- A lack of clarity regarding how Chaplains are expected to work with other student wellbeing staff (where relevant). For schools that have other student wellbeing staff, it is not always clear how Chaplains are meant to work with these other staff members – for example, information sharing and governance / supervision.

Recommendation 3

3. As the funder of the program, dandolo recommends the Australian Government in the short term:

   3.1. Manage risk by ensuring that the following key accountability and oversight mechanisms are established in each jurisdiction:

      a) A framework that outlines clear roles and responsibilities in relation to Chaplain oversight and performance monitoring (for example, role of the Principal, Chaplaincy provider and / or student wellbeing team).

      b) A code of conduct – consistent with the scope of practice and definition of proselytising – that outlines the general behavioural and ethical expectations of the role.

      c) A complaints mechanism that provides opportunities for community members to report concerns regarding the behaviour or performance of Chaplains.

      d) A consent mechanism that is based on an 'opt in' approach, to ensure consistency with the principle that participation in the program is voluntary.

      e) A confidentiality framework that gives students confidence that their confidentiality will be maintained and any breaches of confidentiality appropriately investigated.

   3.2. Work with states and territories to ensure more effective data collection and reporting. This should support increased visibility, more rigorous evaluation and continuous improvement. In setting data and reporting requirements, the Australian Government should work with states and territories to balance the need for increased visibility with the impost of data collection, linking in with existing jurisdiction practice wherever possible. For example, data and reporting may include information on:

      a) Chaplains participating in the program, and their characteristics (e.g. qualifications)

      b) Schools participating in the program, and their characteristics (e.g. school sector, ICSEA score)

      c) Types of services and supports delivered

      d) Complaints received and actioned.

The religious affiliation of the Chaplain role is the most contested and unique aspect of the program

Community responses – both to this evaluation and the online consultation platform – suggest that the religious affiliation of the Chaplain role is the most contested part of the program. The less emphasis placed on the religious affiliation of Chaplains, however, the more aligned community views.

The more focus placed on Chaplains' spiritual influence or religious affiliation, the more polarised community views:

- Some stakeholders hold a particularly strong view that funding Chaplains in schools is inappropriate. This is generally because these stakeholders believe the Australian Government should only fund secular activities, and / or because they are opposed to religious influence in schools.
- Others hold a particularly strong view that funding Chaplains in schools is important. This is generally because these stakeholders believe that their religious affiliation or spiritual influence is important for supporting student wellbeing.

There is a risk that the religious affiliation is preventing some schools and students from receiving support. For example, because of the religious affiliation of the Chaplain role:

- Some schools have chosen not to participate, including all public schools in the Australian Capital Territory.
- Some students have expressed hesitation or concern around engaging with the program. There is a risk some students may feel unable to approach Chaplains – for example, because of their gender identity or sexual orientation.

However, the less focus given to the religious affiliation, the more aligned community views. Most stakeholders agree the program is necessary and valuable, particularly those with direct experience of or interaction with the program.

In practical terms most stakeholders agreed Chaplains are well placed to support student wellbeing because:

- They are often well connected within their communities (for example, having relationships with churches and local volunteer groups). This enables them to link students and families up to relevant supports and community organisations, and means they are well placed to bring volunteers into the school or promote local community events.

- They generally possess a set of qualities and characteristics that are critical for the role, including: being good listeners, compassionate and caring, empathetic and trustworthy.

- They are relatively affordable when compared with more specialised roles, and thus provide a cost-effective program. It is acknowledged, however, that several stakeholders highlighted a lack of sufficient remuneration as an issue (as discussed below).

Dandolo endorses the proposal to open the program in 2023 and considers it timely opportunity to revisit aspects of the program as it shifts to focusing on a function rather than a professional group

As part of the change in 2023, the Australian Government should consider re-naming the NSCP to ensure it aligns with the focus on the function of supporting student wellbeing (rather than Chaplains as a professional group). A changed program name may not only reduce the polarisation of community views, but also create a more inclusive program.

State and territory governments will need to consider how schools engage Chaplains and / or Student Wellbeing Officers. In the current model, some jurisdictions require schools to engage Chaplains through a panel, while other schools can engage Chaplains directly. With the proposed change in 2023, where schools are required to engage Chaplains through a panel, they may not be able to access Student Wellbeing Officers through the current panel of providers.

The Australian Government should consider expanding the existing qualification requirements to recognise other relevant fields of work such as social work, mental health and counselling. Under the current model, Chaplains are required to have a Certificate IV in youth work, pastoral care or an equivalent qualification. Most stakeholders agreed this level of qualification is appropriate for the scope of the Chaplain role, however recognised the importance of qualifications in other relevant fields.

Several stakeholders also expressed the importance of professional development and learning in areas such as trauma, suicide prevention, mental health and domestic violence. The current Project Agreement includes mandatory eSafety training, which Chaplains and other school-based stakeholders considered extremely effective. However, several stakeholders identified a need for additional training in other areas relevant to the role, and noted concerns around having to complete training and professional development on top of existing workloads.

Recommendation 4

4. As part of the opening up of the program in 2023, dandolo recommends the Australian Government:

   4.1. Formally announce its decision to 'open up' the program to provide schools with the choice to employ either Chaplains or Student Wellbeing Officers.

   4.2. Clarify with stakeholders as soon as practicable the definition of a 'Student Wellbeing Officer' and how it differs from the Chaplain role, to assist stakeholders in preparing for implementation.

   4.3. Support states and territories to manage the workforce implications of its decision, particularly for jurisdictions who currently require schools to engage Chaplains through a panel of Chaplain-specific providers. This may include providing flexibility for schools to engage Chaplains or Student Wellbeing Officers directly or from an expanded panel; the development of a workforce strategy; or a portal for Chaplains and Student Wellbeing Officers to register their interest and availability.

   4.4. Re-name the program to ensure it is representative of the program's function and inclusive of other professional groups, alongside Chaplains. For example, the 'National School Wellbeing Program'.

   4.5. In relation to the qualification / accreditation of Chaplains, the Australian Government should work with states and territories to:

      a) Expand the scope of Certificate IV qualifications to explicitly include other fields relating to wellbeing, such as mental health, counselling, and social work.

      b) Consider whether there are special circumstances in which exemptions to the minimum qualification's standard should be provided in favour of equivalent skills and experience (e.g. for local community members in remote and very remote communities) and – if so – how to provide flexibility while ensuring these Chaplains operate within an appropriate scope of practice.

      c) Ensure that recruitment processes consider other personal qualities that are critical to the Chaplain role (e.g. being a good listener, caring and empathetic nature, ability to build and maintain relationships, connections with the broader community).

   4.6. In relation to professional development, the Australian Government should:

a) Continue the mandatory e-Safety training and consider introducing targeted trainings in areas relevant to the role such as: trauma, grief and loss, family violence.

b) Consider working with states and territories to establish a community of practice, or equivalent opportunities for Chaplains to share their knowledge and learnings with other Chaplains to improve the services they deliver as part of their professional learning and development.

Current employment and funding models may hinder the program's effectiveness

The current funding and employment model is exacerbating challenges attracting and retaining Chaplains. This is largely due to:

- The part-time nature of the role (most Chaplains are only funded for 1-2 days per week).
- The lack of job security / ongoing roles (most Chaplains are only on short-term contracts).
- Low remuneration that has not kept pace with the increased cost of living.
- The emotionally demanding nature of the role, and the lack of recognition or value.

These issues are compounded in rural and regional areas, where the availability of Chaplains is even more limited.

This poses a risk to the ability of the program to deliver value, as the nature of the Chaplain role requires time. Several stakeholders described how:

- Chaplain longevity is required to build relationships and trust in the community and with students.
- Chaplains need to be available to students throughout the week to respond to issues as they arise.

Recommendation 5

5. dandolo recommends that as part of the broader review of the NSCP (refer Recommendation 1), the Australian Government consider the most appropriate funding and employment models for any given investment in student wellbeing, including:

   a) Overall funding period

   b) Notice period for confirmation of the next funding agreement

c) Overall quantum of funding

d) Funding per jurisdiction

e) Funding per school

f) Funding per resource and associated implications for employment status and minimum hours

g) Funding adjustments for CPI and other cost increases

h) Additional funding for schools in regional and remote locations, and additional funding considerations for any other student or school demographic groups

i) Interactions with other sources of government and non-government funding and in-kind resourcing contributions.

Recommendation 6

6. As part of the shift to open up the program in 2023 and potential re-naming of the program, dandolo recommends the Australian Government use this opportunity to recognise and promote the significant value Chaplains and Student Wellbeing Officers provide to students and school communities (for example, in associated announcements, media and marketing and publications) to support attraction, recruitment and retention.

1 There is a growing need to help schools deliver wellbeing services

Australia's children and young people are increasingly facing wellbeing challenges and struggling to receive support. This is placing increasing pressure on schools to support student wellbeing and governments to support schools in delivering wellbeing services. This section explores these trends in more detail.

1.1 Children and young people are increasingly facing wellbeing challenges

The relationship between an individual's health and home environment – or the conditions in which they are born, grow, work, live and age – is well established. Social determinants (such as income and social protection, education, food insecurity, housing, social inclusion and access to health services) play an important role in influencing health and wellbeing outcomes. Evidence suggests social determinants can be more important than healthcare or lifestyle choices in influencing health and contribute for between 30-55% of health outcomes.[10]

In recognition of this relationship, some of the key societal trends that are likely impacting the health and wellbeing of Australian children and young people are identified below. For more detail on these trends, refer **Appendix D.**

TABLE 1: KEY TRENDS IMPACTING STUDENT WELLBEING

Key trend	Description
In an increasingly unstable world, young people are increasingly concerned for the future	• In recent years, Australia's young people have experienced a series of large-scale disruptions, such as bushfires, floods and COVID-19. • Natural disasters like those experienced in recent years are likely to become increasingly common due to climate change. • Research indicates that young people are increasingly experiencing 'climate anxiety' and concerned for their futures. [11]

[10] Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2022, 'Social Determinants of Health', accessed 30 September: https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/australias-health/social-determinants-of-health; World Health Organisation (WHO), 2022, 'Social Determinants of Health', accessed 30 September: https://www.who.int/health-topics/social-determinants-of-health#tab=tab_1.
[11] Headspace, 2021, 'Supporting Your Young Person Experiencing Anxiety About Climate Change', accessed 30 September: https://headspace.org.au/explore-topics/supporting-a-young-person/anxiety-about-climate-change/#:~:text=Anxiety%20about%20climate%20change%3A%20common,done%20to%20create%20positive%20change.

Australian communities are becoming increasingly fragmented, with rising rates of inequality and declining participation in community associations	• Inequality is rising in Australia,[12] which poses a risk to social cohesion and connectedness, which also impacts health and wellbeing outcomes.[13] • Rates of participation in community organisations and associations are declining.[14]
Declining participation in community associations may be contributing to rising rates of social isolation and loneliness among young people	• Declining participation in community organisations and sporting clubs may be contributing to increased rates of social isolation and loneliness.[15] • Rates of loneliness are rising among young people and have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.[16]
An increasing proportion of young people are experiencing mental health and wellbeing challenges	• An increasing proportion of children and young people are experiencing mental health challenges. Since 2012 the proportion of young people experiencing psychological distress has risen from one in every five to one in every four.[17]

1.2 Access to support is increasingly limited as services struggle to meet demand

1.2.1 As wellbeing challenges rise, so does unmet demand for support services

Services are increasingly unable to provide support to those who need it. The 2019 Australian Community Sector Survey found significant and increasing rates of unmet demand for community services – including services for those experiencing disadvantage or crisis such as homelessness, domestic violence and mental health challenges.[18]

[12] Productivity Commission, 2018, 'Rising Inequality? A stocktake of the evidence', accessed 3 October: https://www.pc.gov.au/research/completed/rising-inequality/rising-inequality-highlights.pdf.
[13] Khambule, I., Siswana, B., 2020, 'How Inequalities Undermine Social Cohesion: A Case Study of South Africa', accessed 3 October: https://www.g20-insights.org/policy_briefs/inequalities-undermine-social-cohesion-case-study-south-africa/#:~:text=Recent%20studies%20have%20shown%20that,Rothstein%20and%20Uslaner%2C%202005.
[14] Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2019, 'General Social Survey: Summary Results, Australia', accessed 3 October: https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/people-and-communities/general-social-survey-summary-results-australia/2019.
[15] Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2021, 'Social Isolation and Loneliness', accessed 3 October: https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/australias-welfare/social-isolation-and-loneliness-covid-pandemic.
[16] Headspace, 2020, 'Loneliness Over Time', accessed 3 October: https://headspace.org.au/assets/HSP10869-Loneliness-Report_FA01.pdf.
[17] Brennan, N., Beames, J. R, Kos, A., Reily, N., Connell, C., Hall, S., Yip, D., Hudson, J., O'Dea, B., Di Nicola, K., & Christie, R., 2021, 'Psychological Distress in Young People in Australia Fifth Biennial Youth Mental Health Report: 2012-202' Mission Australia: Sydney, NSW, page 6.
[18] Australian Council of Social Service, 2019, 'The Profile and Pulse of the Sector: Findings From the 2019 Australian Community Sector Survey', accessed 3 October: https://www.acoss.org.au/the-profile-and-pulse-of-the-sector-findings-from-the-2019-australian-community-sector-survey/.

Access to children and young people's mental health services is a particular concern, with many unable to receive support and others experiencing long waitlists. As the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System found, due to a 'stark under-supply' of services, in 2019-20 over 15,800 infants and children needed and did not receive specialist mental health services.[19] A 2018 headspace survey found that young people were waiting an average of 10.5 days for an intake session and 25.5 days for their first therapy session.[20] In recent years and in the context of COVID-19, waitlists have increased and access to mental health services has become increasingly limited.[21]

This trend is particularly prevalent in rural, regional and remote communities where access to community services is particularly limited, and people often go without appropriate support due to a lack of locally available services.[22]

1.2.2 This means students are not receiving appropriate support and schools are feeling the pressure

Due to unmet demand for wellbeing services, children and young people are not receiving the support they need when they need it. As the Australian Council of Social Service reported in 2019 young people are:

- Waiting longer to receive support (experiencing extensive waitlists and gaps between appointments);[23]
- Being referred to services that may not be best placed to meet their needs; and/or
- Missing out on support entirely. [24]

In this context, schools are increasingly feeling the pressure. Teachers, principals and other school staff described an increasing need to support student wellbeing:

> *"I feel as a teacher. I spend more time as the years go on supporting students wellbeing." – Teacher, WA*

> *"We need a lot more support than we used too. The high level of mental health [challenges] in primary school is very worrisome." – Principal or Assistant Principal, SA*

[19] Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System, 2021, 'Final Report: Volume 2', pp.173-174.
[20] Headspace, 2019, 'Increasing Demand for Youth Mental Health', accessed 3 October: https://headspace.org.au/assets/Uploads/Increasing-demand-in-youth-mentalh-a-rising-tide-of-need.pdf.
[21] McDonnell, D., Vasiliou, VS., Lonergan, E., Moore, P., 2022, 'Psychologists' Experience Who Managed Waitlists in Mental-Helath Services During the COVID-19 Lockdown' accessed 3 October: https://econtent.hogrefe.com/doi/10.1024/2673-8627/a000024 ; Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System, 2021, 'Summary and Recommendations', accessed 3 October: https://finalreport.rcvmhs.vic.gov.au/download-report/.
[22] Australian Council of Social Service, 2019, 'The Profile and Pulse of the Sector: Findings From the 2019 Australian Community Sector Survey', accessed 3 October: https://www.acoss.org.au/the-profile-and-pulse-of-the-sector-findings-from-the-2019-australian-community-sector-survey/.
[23] Headspace, 2019, 'Increasing Demand for Youth Mental Health', accessed 3 October: https://headspace.org.au/assets/Uploads/Increasing-demand-in-youth-mentalh-a-rising-tide-of-need.pdf.
[24] Australian Council of Social Service, 2019, 'The Profile and Pulse of the Sector: Findings From the 2019 Australian Community Sector Survey', accessed 3 October: https://www.acoss.org.au/the-profile-and-pulse-of-the-sector-findings-from-the-2019-australian-community-sector-survey/.

"Too many children of school age experience little or no home support. The responsibility of care rests more heavily than ever on the schools." – Other community member, NSW

"With increasing demand and a growing list for mental health and wellbeing support in the private and public sectors, it is important that schools provide a platform where young persons can access support." – Wellbeing or mental health sector professional, WA

1.3 This is creating a growing need to support schools in delivering wellbeing services

Schools have always had an interest in supporting wellbeing due to its relationship with educational outcomes, but there is increasing pressure on schools to support wellbeing outcomes as an end in and of itself.

1.3.1 Schools have always had an interest in supporting student wellbeing due to its relationship with educational outcomes

Due to the link between student wellbeing and educational outcomes, schools have always played a role in supporting student wellbeing.

It is widely established that improved outcomes in student wellbeing are positively associated with improved school performance.[25] Learners with higher life satisfaction at school have significantly more positive academic experiences, while learners with lower wellbeing are at greater risk of school drop-out and behavioural difficulties.[26] One study found that year nine students who experienced feelings of depression scored seven per cent worse than similar students in NAPLAN for literacy and numeracy.[27]

1.3.2 In recent years, however, the focus has shifted to supporting wellbeing outcomes as an end in and of itself

In recent years, however, there has been growing pressure on schools to support wellbeing as an end in and of itself. Some jurisdictions have taken this directly on board, for example Victoria's new framework for improving student outcomes places student health and wellbeing alongside educational outcomes as a central focus.

[25] Durlak, JA., Weissberg, RP., Dymnicki, AB., Taylor, RD., & Schellinger, KB., 2011, 'The Impact of Enhancing Students' Social and Emotional Learning: a meta-analysis of school-based universal interventions: social and emotional learning', *Child Development*, 82(1) pp 405-432.
[26] Clarke, T., 2020 'Children's Wellbeing and Their Academic Achievement: The Dangerous Discourse of "Trade-offs' in Education', *Theory and Research in Education,* 18(3) pp 263-294.
[27] Productivity Commission, 2022, 'Review of the National School Reform Agreement' page 20, accessed 4 October: https://www.pc.gov.au/inquiries/current/school-agreement/interim/school-agreement-interim.pdf.

Key sector organisations are calling for schools to take an increased role in supporting student wellbeing:

- The Productivity Commission's 2022 Interim Report recognised poor student wellbeing can be exacerbated by school staff's lack of awareness, and therefore calls for student wellbeing to be a priority in any future National School Reform Agreements.[28]

- The Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System (2021) identified education settings, including schools, as important places for improving mental health outcomes (for example, by presenting opportunities for mental health promotion and identifying mental health and wellbeing challenges).[29] It recommended that the Victorian Government fund evidence-informed initiatives (such as anti-stigma and anti-bullying campaigns) to '…assist schools in supporting students' mental health and wellbeing.'[30]

Community members also recognise the need to assist schools in delivering student wellbeing services:

> *"…It is essential that schools support mental health for the students… as they are in their care for a large period of time each school day." – Parent or guardian, QLD*

> *"Schools are critical, especially in regional areas, with even what would have been considered basic friendship skills which now seem to be often lacking. Anxiety is on the increase and there is not enough time in a school day for teachers to specifically address these issues with students who need extra help." – Teacher, NSW*

> *"Student wellbeing is greatly understaffed in schools. Teachers are expected to be all and do all to students." – Teacher, SA*

> *"School is the only institution common to almost all kids, so is best placed to offer a consistent, controlled approach to mental health and well-being." – Other community member, QLD*

In response, state and territory governments are increasingly supporting schools to deliver wellbeing services. This is evidenced through the recent introduction of initiatives and programs such as those outlined below.

- In 2020, the Victorian Government introduced mental health practitioners in secondary schools to increase student access to mental health support. The program provides short term intervention for

[28] Productivity Commission, 2022, 'Review of the National School Reform Agreement' page 21, accessed 4 October: https://www.pc.gov.au/inquiries/current/school-agreement/interim/school-agreement-interim.pdf.
[29] Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System, 2021, 'Final Report, Volume 2' page 13, accessed 4 October: https://finalreport.rcvmhs.vic.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/RCVMHS_FinalReport_Vol2_Accessible.pdf.
[30] Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System, 202, 'Summary and Recommendations' Recommendation 17, accessed 4 October: https://finalreport.rcvmhs.vic.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/RCVMHS_FinalReport_ExecSummary_Accessible.pdf.

students with mild to moderate mental health needs alongside contributing to whole-school approaches to mental health prevention and promotion.[31]

- Similarly, the South Australian Government is implementing an early intervention mental health service and will provide mental health practitioners based in schools. The service is being piloted in select schools from Term 3, 2022.[32]

- The Queensland Government is rolling out the 'Student Wellbeing Package' that will deliver:

    - Wellbeing professionals in every primary and secondary public school.
    - A pilot program where General Practitioners (GP) will be located in 50 secondary public schools to enable students free access to a GP one day per week.[33]

[31] Victorian State Government, 2021, 'Media Release: Statewide Mental Health Support for Secondary Schools', accessed 4 October: https://www.premier.vic.gov.au/statewide-mental-health-support-secondary-schools#.
[32] South Australia Department of Education, 2022, 'School Mental Health Service', accessed 5 October: https://www.education.sa.gov.au/parents-and-families/safety-and-wellbeing/mental-health/school-mental-health-service.
[33] Queensland Government Department of Education, 2021, 'Student Wellbeing Package', accessed 5 October: https://education.qld.gov.au/students/student-health-safety-wellbeing/student-wellbeing-package.

2 The NSCP plays a valuable role in supporting student wellbeing and attracts high levels of public interest

The Australian Government's NSCP plays a significant role in supporting student wellbeing. The program, and its operating context, has experienced significant change since its establishment in 2006.

This section introduces the NSCP and this evaluation.

2.1 The NSCP is a well established and widely used student support program

The Australian Government's NSCP was established in 2006 to support the wellbeing of students and school communities through pastoral care services and student support strategies. Between 2019 and 2022, approximately 3,000 schools engaged the services of a chaplain each year.[34]

2.1.1 The program is funded by the Australian Government and delivered by state and territory governments

Under the NSCP, the Australian Government provides funding to state and territory governments. Each jurisdiction is then responsible for the delivery and management of the program. Under the current Project Agreement, the Australian Government provides an estimated total financial contribution to the states and territories of $245.7 million (GST exclusive).

The Project Agreement is the Australian Government's agreement with state and territory governments that outlines how the NSCP will be delivered. It sets out a series of conditions and requirements that must be met for jurisdictions to receive funding. At the highest level, it outlines that:

- The role of the Australian Government is to monitor and assess achievement of program milestones and provide funding to jurisdictions.
- The role of state and territory governments is to deliver the program, select schools to fund and 'put in place appropriate processes to ensure that':
    - Participation by schools and students is voluntary.

[34] Australian Department of Education, 2022, 'NSCP Project History', provided 9 November.

- Chaplains may be from any faith.
- Chaplains must:
    - Not proselytise
    - Respect, accept and be sensitive to other people's views, values and beliefs
    - Comply with state and territory laws and policies in relation to child protection matters
    - Meet the NSCP's minimum qualification requirements.

For more detail on the current administrative arrangements, including minimum qualification requirements, refer section 5.

2.2 The NSCP's scope has changed under different governments, and continues to change

While the program has consistently focused on improving student wellbeing, its scope has changed over time. Successive governments have altered the approach to delivery, with some placing stronger emphasis on spiritual wellbeing than others.

2.2.1 The establishment of the NSCP

In 2006, the Howard Government introduced the NSCP. Under this initial arrangement:[35]

- The Australian Government provided funding directly to schools and providers, rather than through state and territory governments.
- Chaplains were to be recognised through formal ordination or endorsement by a religious institution or state/territory government approved Chaplaincy service.
- There were no minimum qualification requirements for Chaplains.

In 2008, the Australian Government approved changes to allow schools to recruit a secular pastoral care worker only if they were unable to recruit a suitable ordained Chaplain.[36]

[35] Australian Department of Education, 2022, 'NSCP Project History', provided 9 November.
[36] Ibid.

2.2.2 The evolution of the NSCP over time

Since its establishment, the Australian Government has made a series of changes to the program's scope and delivery.

In 2010 – 2011, the Rudd Government:[37]

- Provided schools the option of engaging secular Student Welfare Workers as an alternative to Chaplains.
- Introduced requirements for Chaplains and Student Welfare Workers to have a certificate in Youth Work, a Certificate IV in Pastoral Work or equivalent.

In 2014, the Abbott Government removed the choice to engage a Student Welfare Workers.[38]

In June 2014 the High Court of Australia found that the Australian Government's payments made under the program were beyond constitutional authority.[39] New arrangements were made to fund the scheme via a Project Agreement with the states and territories.[40] 2015 was the first year that the NSCP was delivered through a Project Agreement with jurisdictions.

In June 2022, the Federal Minister for Education announced that from 2023 schools will be able to choose between a Chaplain or secular Student Wellbeing Officer.[41]

Given the level of change that has occurred – and continues to occur – since the program's establishment, both in relation to the delivery of the program itself and its operating environment, dandolo developed an assumed objective and set of design principles to inform this evaluation. **Refer Appendix A.**

2.3 It is a timely opportunity for an evaluation

The Project Agreement is set to expire in 2023 and required an independent evaluation by 2022. This presents a timely opportunity for an evaluation that considers community views on the program.

[37] Ibid.
[38] Ibid.
[39] Chordia, S., Lynch, A., Williams, G., 2015, '*Williams v Commonwealth [No 2]* – Commonwealth Executive Power and Spending after *Williams [No 2]*' *Melbourne University Law Review* 39(1), pp 306-330, accessed 5 October https://law.unimelb.edu.au/mulr/issues/previous-issues/2015-16-volume-39.
[40] Ibid.
[41] Australian Department of Education, 2022, 'NSCP Project History', provided 9 November.

2.3.1 The Australian Government engaged dandolo to undertake an independent evaluation of the program

The Australian Government engaged dandolo to deliver this evaluation on 25 July 2022. The evaluation scope was broad in remit and characterised by tight timeframes and limited sources of data and information.

2.3.2 Evaluation scope

The Australian Government identified the scope of this evaluation to assess:

- **The delivery of the program.** This includes:
    - Who the program supports.
    - What types of services Chaplains provide in schools.
    - How the program is organised and managed.
- **The effectiveness of the program.** This includes:
    - Whether it effectively supports the wellbeing of students and school communities.
    - The effectiveness of the e-Safety training provided to Chaplains.
    - The impact of COVID-19 and natural disasters on the delivery of the program.
- **The place of the program** – how it fits alongside other, more recent, investments by state and territory governments aimed at supporting the wellbeing of students and school communities.
- **Any possible evidence-based improvements** to the program for the Australian Government's consideration, in addition to the changes already announced by the federal Minister for Education in mid-2022.

Note: to assist with defining the term 'effectiveness', dandolo worked with the Department to agree an assumed objective and set of design principles. In assessing the effectiveness of the program, dandolo considered how aligned the program was to this objective and set of design principles. **Refer Appendix A.**

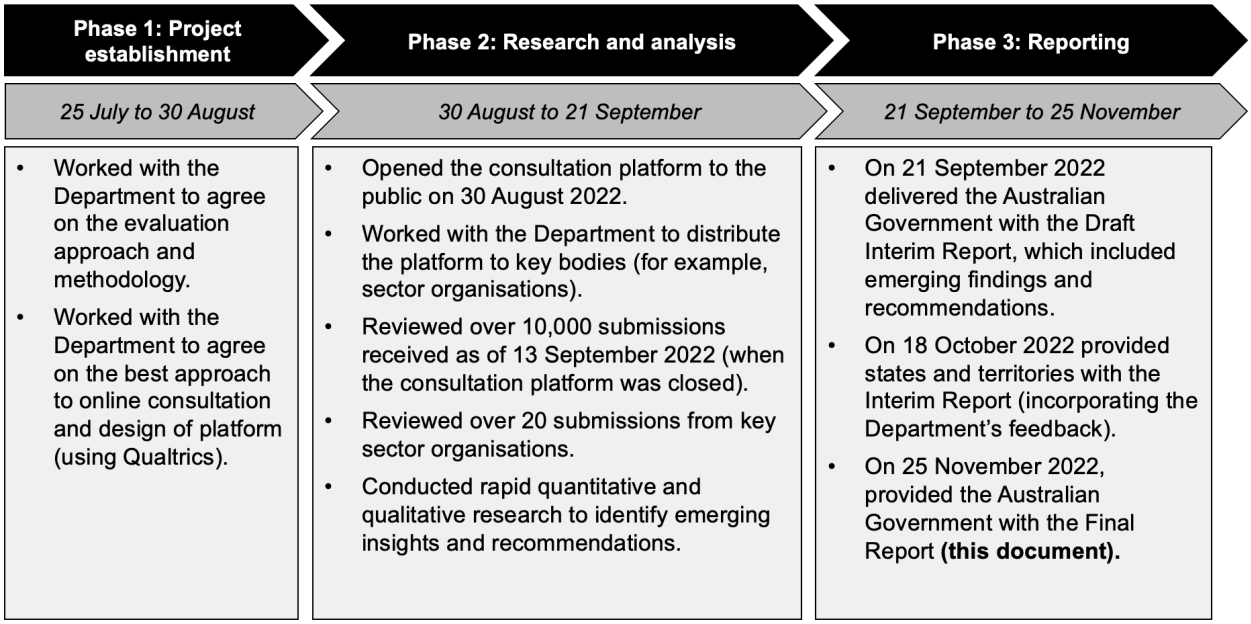
2.3.3 Evaluation methodology

As shown in Figure 2 and described below, dandolo delivered this evaluation through three key phases. For further information relating to the stakeholders that responded refer **Appendix B**, and for more detail on dandolo's analysis methodology, refer **Appendix C.**

- **Phase 1: Project establishment**
    - Worked with the Australian Government to agree the evaluation scope and methodology.
    - Worked with the Australian Government to design the online consultation platform.
- **Phase 2: Research and analysis**
    - Reviewed over 10,000 submissions received as of 13 September 2022 (when the online consultation platform was closed). Various community members provided submissions, such as: students, Chaplains (past and present), parents / guardians and family members, teachers and other school staff, etc.
    - Reviewed over 20 submissions received as of 20 September 2022 from key sector organisations, such as: state and territory education departments, Catholic and independent sector organisations and wellbeing organisations.
    - Conducted rapid quantitative and qualitative analysis, supplemented with desktop research where possible, to identify emerging insights and recommendations.
- **Phase 3: Reporting**
    - Delivered an Interim Report to the Australian Government on 21 September 2022, which documented emerging insights and interim recommendations.
    - Worked with the Australian Government to refine and provided the Interim Report to state and territory governments for feedback.

      Built on emerging findings and recommendations, incorporating feedback, to create this document – the Final Report.

FIGURE 2: EVALUATION METHODOLOGY



Alternative text: Figure 1 presents the three phases of the project's evaluation methodology. Phase 1: Project establishment (25 July to 30 August) involved working with the Department to agree on the evaluation approach and methodology, and working with the Department to agree on the best approach to online consultation and design of platform (using Qualtrics). Phase 2: Research and analysis (30 August to 21 September) involved opening the consultation platform to the public on 30 August 2022, working with the Department to distribute the platform to key bodies (for example, sector organisations), reviewing over 10,000 submissions received as of 13 September 2022 (when the consultation platform was closed), reviewing over 20 submissions from key sector organisations, and conducting rapid quantitative and qualitative research to identify emerging insights and recommendations. Phase 3: Reporting (21 September to 25 November) involved delivering the Australian Government the Draft Interim Report on 21 September 2022 (which included emerging findings and recommendations), proving states and territories with the Interim Report on 18 October 2022 (incorporating the Department's feedback), and lastly providing the Australian Government with the Final Report on 25 November 2022 (this document).

2.4 There has been an overwhelming response to the evaluation

There has been an overwhelming response to the evaluation. Dandolo received over 10,000 submissions in 10 days from a wide range of community members. There were also strong reactions on media platforms and evidence of mobilisation among community groups. This indicates the strong views held among the public, and high levels of interest and engagement in the program.

In total, 11,963 people responded to the online consultation platform in the 10 days it was open. A wide range of stakeholders responded, with a high proportion of respondents being parents and guardians (25 per cent), other members of the public (14 per cent) and teachers (14 per cent). For a more detailed breakdown of the respondents, refer **Appendix B.**

There were also strong public reactions and mobilisation of the online consultation platform by community groups with specific interests. For example, there was a Facebook group named 'End the National School Chaplaincy Program'[42] and a radio campaign called 'Save our School Chaplains.'[43]

The mobilisation of community groups with specific interests was evident when looking at stakeholder responses. For example, 43 per cent of all respondents were based in Queensland, and 74 per cent of these were non-school based stakeholders. For an overview of respondents by jurisdiction, refer **Appendix B.**

Given the uneven distribution of stakeholder responses, dandolo did not give equal weighting to all submissions. Instead, dandolo considered:

- Stakeholders' direct program experience (for example, placing additional weighting to those who had direct experience with the program, such as students or teachers).
- The evidence presented about the program's effectiveness and appropriateness (for example, the arguments made and evidence presented in submissions).

[42] 'Stop the National School Chaplaincy Program' Facebook group: https://www.facebook.com/groups/stopnscp/?mibextid=HsNCOg.
[43] 'Save our School Chaplain's' Radio Campaign: https://www.96three.com.au/save-our-school-chaplains-urgent-action-needed-by-13th-september/.

It is important to note, despite these efforts, stakeholder responses may not be wholly representative of community perspectives on the program.

For more detail on the evaluation methodology refer **Appendix C.**

2.5 Our response as evaluators is to consider this evaluation at two levels

dandolo is considering two levels of recommendations relating to the program:

- Short term – as the NSCP continues, explore opportunities to better achieve Australian Government objectives.
- Medium to long term – recommend a comprehensive review of the NSCP that considers its role in supporting student wellbeing as part of the broader operating environment.

States and territories have primary responsibility for school education policy and delivery, including operating schools and regulating school staff. The Australian Government has influenced this sphere through a range of different levers. These levers include the National School Reform Agreement and the funding of initiatives through third party organisations.

As outlined above, the NSCP is a long-standing legacy program that has changed significantly under different governments in the context of an evolving student wellbeing landscape.

In this context, some stakeholders indicated that there may be merit in 'topping up' existing state and territory student wellbeing initiatives and / or funding other workforces beyond Chaplains and Student Wellbeing Officers. Some key stakeholders suggested that this would be a more effective and efficient way of improving student wellbeing outcomes.

> *"I would really prefer to allow all public schools to have the ability to directly staff secular student wellbeing officers and/or youth workers with funding from within their existing Wellbeing/Learning Support Team. This is as opposed to the tangential support offered through a religious organisation that does not always meet the needs nor align with the school and its community/student population's broader ethos." – Principal, NSW*

> *"The wellbeing of children and young people is an important part of enabling access to learning and [jurisdiction] will continue to prioritise ongoing investment this area... We welcome an opportunity to discuss further support for the engagement of student welfare*

officers in addition to secular workers in schools as part of a reformed NSCP." – Education department

Given the limited data and timeframes available to inform this evaluation, dandolo has deliberately refrained from making direct recommendations relating to the role of the NSCP in future (for example, making comment on whether the program should continue or be significantly altered). Instead, recognising the level of change that has occurred over time, dandolo considers a more comprehensive review is required to assess the role of the program in the current landscape.

Recommendation 1

This evaluation found the NSCP provides significant value in supporting not only the wellbeing of students but also school communities.

It also found, however, that there has been significant change since the program's establishment – both in relation to the program itself and its operating environment.

Given this evaluation was bound by limited timeframes and data, dandolo has not been able to make comment on the broader role of the program in relation to its operating environment.

1. dandolo recommends the Australian Government undertake a comprehensive review of the NSCP's role in the medium to longer term. This review should consider:

    1.1. The evolution of the program over time in relation to the changing role of schools in supporting student wellbeing.

    1.2. The role of the program in relation to other existing investments in student wellbeing, and the most effective and efficient way for the program to support student wellbeing.

Note: As part of this review, we also recommend that the Australian Government examine the current funding model – see Recommendation 5.

3 Chaplains play a valuable role in supporting student wellbeing and school communities

Chaplains provide a wide range of different services to a diverse range of students. Broadly, the types of supports and services provided can be categorised as:

- **Direct support for students**: this includes services delivered directly to students. For example, structured programs delivered to students (such as breakfast clubs) and informal support provided to students (such as checking in with students during lunchtime).
- **Indirect support for students and direct support for the school community**: this includes services delivered to the school community, which indirectly support or contribute to student wellbeing. For example, supporting teachers and other school staff, and providing support to parents and families.
- **Support for the community more broadly, which contributes to student wellbeing on a macro scale**: this includes services delivered that contribute to the broader wellbeing of the local community, which in turn indirectly contributes to the wellbeing of students. For example, promoting social connection and cohesion through attending and promoting community events and programs.

These services are described in more detail throughout this section.

3.1 Chaplains deliver a diverse range of direct supports

Chaplains deliver a wide range of direct supports for students. The types of services provided vary across schools and are influenced by a range of factors, in particular the needs of the school community and the Chaplain's skills and experience.

3.1.1 An overview of the services provided

Direct supports can be broadly categorised as structured supports and informal supports. The most commonly delivered structured supports are:

- Breakfast clubs
- Lunchtime activities

- Mentoring programs
- Wellbeing or spiritual presentations to cohorts or the whole school
- Organising of services during crises.

Analysis also found some of the most commonly delivered informal supports include activities such as:

- Casual engagements with students during recess and lunch
- Facilitation of safe spaces / 'chill out zones'
- Checking in with students
- 'Open door policies', or encouraging students to engage with the Chaplain whenever they feel comfortable
- Offering ad-hoc guidance and spiritual advice.

3.1.2 Variation in services delivered and their perceived value

The variation in services delivered across schools is primarily influenced by:

- The school's local context and need.
- The capacity and capability of the Chaplain.

Stakeholders identified a series of factors that shape the school's local context and need:

- The school's location or geography (for example, if the school is in a metropolitan, regional or remote area).
- Student demographic (for example, socioeconomic status, culturally and linguistically diverse).
- The school's size and resourcing (for example, if the school has other student wellbeing staff).

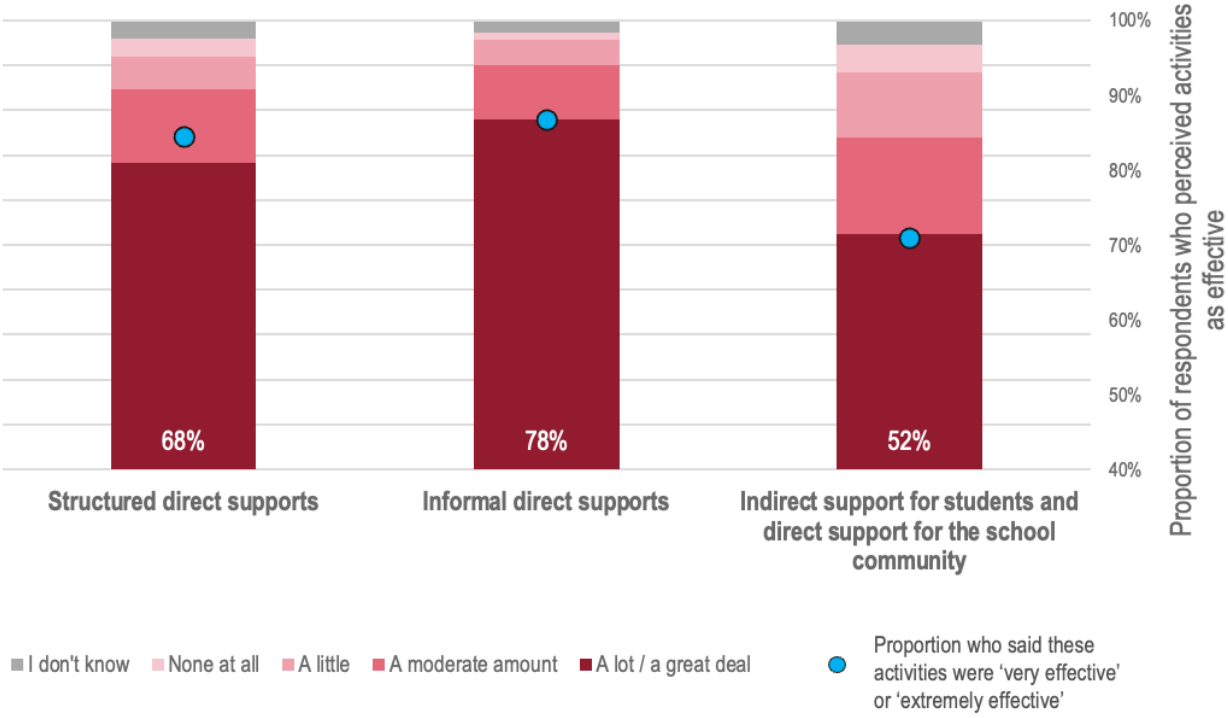
Stakeholders also identified the following as relevant to the Chaplain's capacity and capability:

- Their Full-time Equivalent Status (i.e. how many days / hours they are employed to work at the school).

- Their unique background, experience and skillset (for example, some may be skilled in arts and drama while others are gifted at sports).

As Figure 3 below shows, direct supports for students – structured and informal – are the most consistently delivered services across schools. It also shows that informal direct supports are considered most effective. Indirect support for students and direct support for the school community was less commonly delivered and considered slightly less effective. More discussion on this below.

FIGURE 3 FREQUENCY OF ACTIVITIES DELIVERED BY CHAPLAINS ACCORDING TO SCHOOL-BASED RESPONDENTS



Informal supports were considered most effective

Across all types of services and supports that Chaplains deliver, informal supports were identified as most effective. Respondents identified Chaplains simply 'being present' as critical because they can:

- Create a more safe and supportive school environment.
- Identify and respond to wellbeing issues early (for example, identifying behavioural or social issues and helping students with strategies).
- Empower students by providing them with encouragement, advice and strategies.
- Build relationships with students and provide a stable, consistent adult figure or role model.

- Be available for students, acting as an approachable 'go-to' person that is viewed as separate from other school staff.

This is illustrated, for example, through some of the comments received from students:

> *"A Chaplaincy staff saw during school that I was looking unhappy and distant from my friends and asked if I wanted to discuss it." – Student, NSW*
>
> *"I like coming to school because the Chaplain is there to check on me." – Student, Vic*
>
> *"My friends and I were being bullied. She talked to us about some strategies." – Student, SA*

In relation to structured supports, breakfast clubs and lunchtime activities were identified as particularly important

Several stakeholders identified breakfast clubs as being particularly valuable, and even more important in lower socio-economic schools. This was because:

- They provide food to students who need it most and who would likely otherwise go hungry.
- Teachers report higher attendance and engagement on days that they run.
- It provides an opportunity for the Chaplain to connect and provide informal support for students who feel uncomfortable requesting a more formal discussion.

Some stakeholders also identified lunchtime activities – such as programs that involve food and/or activities such as sports, boardgames or dance – as valuable. This was particularly the case for:

- Activities involving physical movement and exercise, which provide physical and mental health benefits.
- Students in rural and regional areas, where access to recreational programs outside of school is more limited.

3.1.3 Chaplains provide support to students with a wide range of differing needs

The NSCP supports students with varying levels of need. For the purposes of this report, dandolo categorised students as:

- Higher need – those requiring specialist supports or interventions. This includes students who need professional support outside the scope of the Chaplain role, for example a social worker.

- Lower need – those who need lower-level supports, which are within the scope of the Chaplain role. For example, students who may be lonely and experiencing issues with friendships.

In the context of unmet demand for services, Chaplains are increasingly supporting students with higher needs

As health services have increasingly struggled to meet demand, Chaplains have increasingly 'filled the gap'. Several stakeholders identified that Chaplains are increasingly providing support to students who may be unable to access services or those who are experiencing long waitlists or times between appointments. This issue is likely exacerbated in rural and regional areas, where access to specialist services is further limited.

As some stakeholders described:

> *"Due to the nature of school staff and support services being so stretched, Chaplains can be used to check in and provide regular follow up to students while a counsellor or other services provide the more specific and professional support." – Chaplaincy provider, NSW*

> *"Due to the tyranny of distance and lack of healthcare professionals in rural and remote areas, Guidance Officers and other support services are not easily accessible for rural and remote schools and their students. The National School Chaplaincy Program has proven invaluable as an adjunct to meeting the needs of geographically isolated students where other services are not readily accessible." – Isolated Children's Parents Association of Australia Inc.*

While several stakeholders identified this as a key strength of the NSCP, others expressed concern about Chaplains lacking the skills or experience necessary to support students with higher needs. This issue is explored in more detail in section 4.5.

The NSCP is particularly valuable in support students with general wellbeing challenges, unstable home environments and/or behavioural difficulties

Community members generally identified students with lower needs as being most suited to the program. Marginally more school-based stakeholders who responded to the survey (50 per cent) consider the NSCP as being 'extremely effective' for those with 'no identified need or vulnerability' or 'some need or vulnerability', than those with 'high need or vulnerability' (46 per cent). Several stakeholders expressed concern, however, about the program supporting students with higher needs and consider those with lower needs a more appropriate target cohort.

Stakeholders generally identified the following students as being most suited to the NSCP:

- Students with lower need or more general wellbeing challenges, such as those experiencing issues with friendships.
- Students with an unstable home environment, such as those living in out-of-home care.
- Students with behavioural and neurodevelopmental challenges, such as attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD).

Most stakeholders agreed that the generalised nature of the Chaplain role lends itself to supporting students with general wellbeing challenges, which do not (yet) require a specialist skill set. For example, students struggling with friendships or feelings of loneliness. This is because Chaplains are well positioned to:

- Identify and address issues early, before they become a more serious issue (for example, addressing social challenges before they negatively impact mental health).
- Provide support to students who may otherwise be overlooked, because of the lower level of need.
- Take a holistic approach to wellbeing:
    - Identifying the different needs of a student and their connection or relationship (for example, a lack of physical activity or social connection leading to mental health challenges).
    - Working with the student and – if required – their family and / or other services to address wellbeing challenges (for example, connecting the student to a mental health practitioner).

As some school-based stakeholders described:

> *"The Chaplain acts as a low-level intervention to assist these students in building relationships with peers, and establishing trust with an adult, as the Chaplain is fully on their side, without a therapeutic agenda, or the responsibility for education the student." – Teacher, NSW*

> *"Many of the issues that our students present with are low-level and require a friendly ear and a sense of being heard. A chaplain is uniquely placed to do this, because it is their main role, thus they aren't rushed in interactions like school professionals (teachers, admin) are." – Assistant Principal, WA*

Some stakeholders also identified students who may be living in out-of-home care or with an unstable home environment as particularly benefiting from the program. This is because Chaplains can:

- Provide a stable and trusted adult figure, when other school staff – such as teachers – change each year.

- Give practical and wide-ranging supports, ranging from a listening ear through to attending court hearings and delivering food packages.

While these students also require specialist services that are outside the scope of the NSCP, Chaplains are well positioned to provide accompanying supports to this cohort. As some stakeholders described:

> *"Students in out of home care and their carers get supported by the program with regular check in that don't happen through child protection. Families involved with child protection get supported by NSCP with regular check in and support which could look like food packages, support in court or just someone to talk to." – Other school wellbeing staff member, Vic*

> *"[Chaplains] are also vital in child protection as they are a trusted person in the school community and children often confide in them." – Teacher, NSW*

> *"I find it easier to talk to [my Chaplain] because I know her better than my teachers because I have known her since the start of school and my teachers change*." *– Student, SA*

The program may also be particularly valuable for students with behavioural and neurodevelopmental challenges, such as ADHD. Similarly to those in out-of-home care, while these stakeholders also require specialist services, Chaplains are well placed to provide support alongside other services.

Stakeholders noted that Chaplains are well placed to:

- Identify behavioural challenges and link students and families up with relevant support services (for example, behavioural specialists).

- Empower and support these students in relating to others (for example, providing advice or suggestions to help with friendships).

- Assist these students throughout schooling, either in the classroom or engaging in alternative activities.

As several stakeholders articulated:

"In our experience we have only managed behavioural issues… These tend to be social issues due to ASD so a wellbeing officer was used out in the playground to support social interaction." – Principal, Vic

"...My daughter has dysfunctional mood dysregulation disorder, our NSCP was imperative when she had melt downs. She was only too aware of teachers, psychologists, medical staff etc." – Parent or guardian, Vic

"[The Chaplain] gives another support for them other than teachers or the student support officer or counsellor - one that can come to classes with them to help them, withdraw them for leather work or garden work to help them feel heard and supported." – Principal, NSW

There may be some students who miss out on support due to Chaplains' religious affiliation or spiritual connection

Whilst the NSCP is voluntary and available to all students, there may be some students who miss out due to the religious affiliation of the Chaplain role.

As described in section 5, under the Project Agreement participation by schools and students is voluntary and Chaplains may be of any faith. Chaplains must not proselytise and must respect, accept and be sensitive to other people's views, values and beliefs. This evaluation found there was insufficient evidence to suggest that Chaplains are proselytising or not being respectful of other views, values and beliefs.

However, given the idea of the 'Chaplain' role indicates a religious affiliation, there are some students that likely miss out on support. Some schools have chosen not to participate in the program due to its religious affiliation, for example, public schools in the Australian Capital Territory (ACT):

"ACT public schools did not apply for funding through the NSCP from 2019. The transition of ACT public schools out of the program in 2020 was in recognition of the incompatible nature of the program with the non-sectarian, secular environment of ACT public schools and likely inconsistency with the Education Act 2004 (ACT)."[44]

Even where schools participate in the program, some students may feel unable to approach Chaplains. Some students expressed concern around Chaplains' religious affiliation, and pushing an agenda with students:

[44] ACT Education Directorate, 2022, Submission to the National School Chaplaincy Program evaluation.

"…the Chaplain takes it upon themself to inset a sense of religion-based morality into a situation where it may not be helpful nor welcome." – Student, WA

"There shouldn't be chaplains in state schools as they are not religious and they make kids uncomfortable because they want to push their religion." – Student, Qld

"I have had a chaplain attempt to discuss religion with me, which I understand can be very helpful for some students, but made me somewhat uncomfortable." – Student, WA

Stakeholders also identified that this may be an issue for students who are culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD), Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and those who identify as LGBTIQ+. As some stakeholders articulated:

"Religious affiliation of a Student Wellbeing Officer has the unintended consequence of creating barriers for some children seeking support, particularly those who belong to communities, which are over-represented amongst those with mental ill-health, for example LGBTI, culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities." – Mental Health Australia

"I am bisexual and there is no way I would want to talk to our Chaplain about these issues as she is a Christian and I do not trust her to give me good advice..." – Student, Qld

"...I am very concerned about Chaplains dealing with issues regarding sex, identity, and sexuality. There are core beliefs of the churches (except potentially the most liberal Anglicans for example) that directly contradict best practice when it comes to advice in these areas, and Chaplains will often be bound by their faith to exclude certain options to present to kids." – Parent or guardian, WA

3.2 Chaplains are providing a range of supports not only to students, but also their school communities

Chaplains play a critical role not only in supporting students, but also their broader school community. There is evidence of Chaplains providing a range of supports directly targeted to:

- Parents and other family members.
- Teachers and other school staff.

3.2.1 Chaplains provide a range of supports for school parents and families

Chaplains provide support to parents and families in a range of ways, such as:

- Acting as a ‘go-to’ person for advice or support.
- Providing care and support for parents and families in times of difficulty.
- Connecting parents and families with other services and supports (for example, mental health services).
- Delivering formal or structured programs to connect parents and families or raise awareness on particular topics.

Some parents and families see Chaplains as a 'go-to' person for support. In some instances, stakeholders reported that Chaplains can act as a bridge or communication point in times of disconnect or conflict between schools, families and students. This is likely due to the generalised nature of the Chaplain role, where Chaplains are seen as being separate from other school staff.

> *“Many parents like the option of an independent, school-based support person who they can confide in on issues related to their child.” – Wellbeing or mental health sector professional, Vic*

> *“Chaplains can act as a safe resource and referral point for parents that are connected yet separate to the wider school. They occupy a space that is at the juncture between school and home, fostering connection that is hard to replicate in other spaces.” – Parent or guardian, Qld*

Several stakeholders also recognised the significant role Chaplains play in providing support and assistance in times of difficulty. For example, food drops for families that are struggling financially or going through loss and hardship.

> *“I have seen how a Chaplain came alongside a parent/family of a student whose older brother was killed in an accident. They were able to help them arrange the funeral and organise meals for them.” – Teacher, Qld*

> *“I found it very helpful when my family was going through a difficult time, and the Chaplain regularly called in to check in on how our wider family were doing.” – Parent or guardian, NSW*

Chaplains also play a useful role in connecting parents and families with other supports and services. Stakeholders described the way that Chaplains are well placed to identify wellbeing challenges and help families in connecting with relevant services (either through making referrals, more informal suggestions or providing families with resources and information around where to go for help).

"Our Chaplain has supported a variety of parents through many issues and made outside referrals pertaining to welfare, safety, children and anxiety." – Teacher, NSW

"Often our school chaplain is out connecting with families as they drop off and pick up their children. I personally know that support has been given to families through the provision of 'a listening ear', referral to outside services and resourcing their needs (e.g. food, petrol etc...)." – Parent or guardian, Qld

Stakeholder responses also indicate that, while less common, there are instances of Chaplains delivering more structured programs for parents and families. Some Chaplains have established forums such as regular coffee catchups to build social connection and community among school parents and families. This was articulated by some parents and Chaplains, for example:

"There is a coffee morning each Wednesday that is well attended by parents and the Chaplain is always there as a 'friendly face' and a 'listening ear'." – Parent or guardian, WA

"The student cafe that the Chaplain set up gave us an opportunity to hangout together, share life's problems, support each other and gave us a safe space to be ourselves." – Parent or Guardian, SA

"Parents and Carers are able to connect with myself in a number of ways including formal conversation, informal conversation, gate duty, parent coffee and chat mornings." – Chaplain, NSW

Some Chaplains deliver targeted workshops for parents and families, which aim to raise awareness and share information on topics. These may include providing parents and families with information on particular wellbeing challenges (for example, social isolation or loneliness) to help them with identifying and responding to these issues with their children, including knowing where to go to get help (i.e. external services). As some stakeholders described, for example:

"I have been part of programs supported by Chaplaincy that facilitate leadership and wellbeing seminars for the whole school cohort. These provided for specific needs of students as well as contributing to the culture of emotional safety within the school environment." – Parent or Guardian, Qld

"Our Chaplain hosts Parent Place meetings on a regular basis to encourage parents to meet, mingle and learn about the school, their children and the curriculum. He also invites guest speakers to come and talk at the sessions." – Teacher, Qld

"I used to run a parent and carers group. We met up every two weeks for a coffee. They were parents of students who had various diagnosis such as autism, ADHD." – Chaplain or former Chaplain, Vic

3.2.2 Chaplains also provide a range of supports to teachers and other school staff

In addition to students and families, teachers and other school staff also reach out to Chaplains for emotional support and advice. Responses indicate that teachers and others school staff – including wellbeing staff – are increasingly reaching out to Chaplains for support as their jobs become increasingly challenging. This is likely due to workforce challenges and increased workloads resulting from COVID-19, as well as rising wellbeing challenges in students. As some school-based stakeholders described, for example:

"The NSCP helps the staff at schools, as well as the students. Especially during Covid, the Chaplains were a great support to many teachers and staff suffering with difficult workloads and emotional stress." – Teacher, Qld

"Our school Chaplain has been an absolute asset to our wellbeing team. […] She provides not only support to students but to me as a professional." – Other school wellbeing staff member, Vic

"The Chaplain was a great support for one of our teachers who suffered from mental health issues. They can be an avenue of support for those who wish to reach out – and this support has been welcomed." – Principal, NSW

Chaplains also assist school staff by providing 'an extra pair of hands'. School-based stakeholders identified the way that Chaplains sometimes play a role in:

- The classroom, supporting students that require more attention and freeing up teachers to focus on the rest of the class.
- Filling resourcing gaps and assisting school staff in a range of other ad-hoc ways, such as attending school camps and assisting with curriculum planning.

Chaplains appear to be increasingly playing a role in supporting resourcing gaps, particularly in the face of workforce challenges and resourcing gaps as a legacy of COVID-19. While this can provide Chaplains with an opportunity to connect and build relationships with students, there is also a risk that this prevents Chaplains from being able to deliver other activities that more directly support student wellbeing. Refer section 4.4 for more detail.

3.3 Chaplains are also contributing to the broader wellbeing of local communities

As outlined in section 1, Australian communities are increasingly experiencing issues such as income inequality, declining participation in community organisations, and increasing social isolation and loneliness. In this context, Chaplains play an increasingly important role in connecting people and building social cohesion.

As Chaplains connect families and students with external services, they are not only supporting the wellbeing of the student and family but also the community more broadly. Chaplains often attend community events and are generally well connected within their communities. As Chaplains link families and students with local community organisations (for example, volunteer programs or events, sporting associations) this benefits both the student / family and the community organisation.

> *"Our [Chaplains] provide a link between the community and the school. Being outside of the school employment program, they can bring to the school ideas and assistance that the school may not have already been aware of. They're also highly involved in community events such as craft groups and fairs. In doing so, they can educate the community on how they can help schools get involved." – Parent or guardian, SA*

> *"Our [Chaplain] builds links between our school and the wider community through involvement in church activities, sport clubs, and other community events." – Teacher, SA*

> *"The Chaplain provides an important link between school and the community. This includes services and referrals outside of school. They can also advocate on behalf of the child or family where appropriate. We have a community centre on site, and our Chaplain works seamlessly with this program to enhance community relations and connections." – Principal, NSW*

Chaplains are also likely playing a role in combatting issues such as rising isolation and loneliness, by creating opportunities for connection. Chaplains promote opportunities for meaningful, face-to-face engagement and connection. For example, bringing students together via breakfast clubs, and the wider community together via parent's coffee catchups. By bringing people together, Chaplains are likely contributing to the broader wellbeing of community.

> *"Being able to communicate and meet other parents through events helps us grow a community of mutual support." – Parent or guardian, WA*

"I have seen [Chaplains] provide breakfast programs to children, coffees and chats with parents, support and encouragement to staff, morning teas for the community, fundraising events for the school and wider community." – Other community member, SA[45]

"Chaplains encourage community members to get involved in various school programs which helps develop greater connections." – Teacher, SA

[45] In South Australia, Chaplains are called Pastoral Care Workers.

4 The flexible and generalised nature of the program offers benefits, but also comes with risks

Most stakeholders identified the generalised and flexible nature of the NSCP a key strength, as it enables a holistic approach to wellbeing and tailoring to the school's local context. However, it also poses the risk that Chaplains may be 'spread too thin' and / or delivering services that are outside the scope of their role (and therefore their skills and qualifications). This section discusses these issues, identifying both the key benefits and risks associated with the flexible and generalised nature of the Chaplain role.

4.1 The NSCP provides a holistic approach to student wellbeing, enabling tailored supports to individual students and families

The flexible and generalised nature of the program means that Chaplains can take a holistic approach to student wellbeing, supporting students across all areas of their lives: mental, physical, social, spiritual, intellectual, economic and environmental. It enables Chaplains to:

- Build relationships with students and identify their most pressing wellbeing needs. For example, breakfast before school or physical exercise to burn excess energy and improve concentration.
- Work with students, their teachers and families to address wellbeing needs. For example, inviting the child to breakfast club or lunchtime basketball program.
- Connect students with relevant supports and services, and work alongside other services to support student wellbeing. For example, working with mental health practitioners in schools to identify and respond to mental health and wellbeing challenges in students.

As several stakeholders described, Chaplains tailor their services to meet the differing needs of students and families – ranging from checking in with students through to dropping off food hampers:

> *"…she also brought packs during COVID time and left them at our mailboxes." – Student, Vic*

> *"Our Chaplain provides tailored and timely support as required and at a point of need. Our Chaplain is able to deliver these [support] because she is effective and flexible in her level of support for our school." – Principal, NSW*

"A [Chaplain] has flexibility to be available and adaptable to their school community needs. They are not a counsellor or an SSO or a speech therapist – their role is so broad and in that way is so unique and able to be tailored to the needs of the students, staff and parents in their community." – Chaplain or former Chaplain, SA

The flexible and adaptable nature of the program also means that Chaplains are well placed to support students and families as crises and unanticipated events occur. For example, supporting families who may have been impacted by natural disasters (floods, bushfires) or experiencing grief and hardship. As some stakeholders noted:

"There is no predicting when any student may experience a personal crisis and a Chaplain who is known and trusted can be the obvious person to turn to. For example, I know of Chaplains who have been asked to take funerals, because they are the person the family knows and feels comfortable with." – Chaplaincy provider, WA

"Chaplains have supported students and the school communities by being present at evacuation centres, providing food hampers and other services […] this is beyond their 'normal' role of being present in the classroom […] their wellbeing role has been more firmly consolidated in the school due to natural disasters and Covid." – Chaplaincy provider, NSW

"My Chaplain has supported parents dealing with the loss of a loved one for example. My Chaplain was amazing support for parents and the wider community during COVID lockdowns as more and more people were feeling anxious and were struggling. He had wellbeing programs in place and made himself available for people if they needed him." – Principal or Assistant Principal, NSW

The generalised nature of the role also means that Chaplains can work alongside other mental health and wellbeing staff in schools. Chaplains often act as the first point of contact for students and can then link students with relevant supports and services (internal and external to the school). As several stakeholders described, Chaplains are well placed to work alongside and complement other services:

"It is different with teachers who are always busy. It is different to those head shrinks […] A Chappy is a friend, a support." – Student, Qld

"The young person will often make deeper connections to the Chaplain, rather than referral partners. They can be the link to support engagement with referral services." – Other school wellbeing staff member, Vic

"… It is amazing and so critical to have access to a Chaplain… It provides an amazing first line of contact for students who are struggling and they often thrive just having one-on-one attention and being listened to." – Teacher, NSW

Some stakeholders also identified Chaplains as being well placed to promote events and other programs that may support different aspects of student wellbeing. Chaplains can take a holistic, overarching view of wellbeing and promote different initiatives or strategies to support student wellbeing in various ways – ranging from physical to mental health. For example, as the Tasmanian Department for Education, Children and Young People articulated:

"Chaplains regularly promote community or health initiatives such as Mental Health Day, anti-bullying, Love Bites (relationship program) or work with external programs such as MATES (student/adult mentoring program), Inside Out 4 Kids (trauma program) or working with local radio stations or Mens/Community Sheds."[46]

4.2 It allows the program to be tailored depending on the needs of each school and the skill set of individual Chaplains

Most stakeholders agree the flexibility of the program was a key strength, as it enables schools to work with Chaplains to tailor services to meet the needs of local school communities.

As described in section 3.1, the needs of each individual school vary. School needs may be influenced by a range of factors such as location (for example, if the school is in a rural or regional area), the socioeconomic status and demographics of the local community, the size of the school and existing resourcing (in particular, existing wellbeing teams).

Several stakeholders felt that given this, schools are best placed to determine the scope of the Chaplain's role and the specific services provided. The looseness of role definition enables the Principal to work with the Chaplain to tailor services and supports based on the local school's needs. Some stakeholders expressed concern about any further narrowing of the role:

"… part of the beauty of the role is the flexibility of the position. Each school can work out the responsibilities of the chaplain based on the needs of the school and the particular abilities of the Chaplain." – Chaplain or Former Chaplain, SA

[46] Tasmanian Department for Education, Children and Young People, 2022, National School Chaplaincy Program 2022 Evaluation Submission.

"The last thing needed here is an overly bureaucratic approach to the wide-ranging duties of hard working and caring Chaplains." – Other community member, Qld

"I am happy that it is not too defined… Independent schools like mine would resent any further narrowing of the role." – Principal, WA

Stakeholders also recognised that the flexible nature of the program enables Chaplains to work with schools to deliver services and supports that align with their own skills or experience. For example, some Chaplains may run yoga and meditation classes at lunchtime while others may run basketball programs. This was identified as a benefit of the program's flexibility, as Chaplains can bring their own passion and experience to the services delivered. For example:

"As a former chef and basketballer, I have the skills to coach and train teams, run a breakfast club, help with the Kitchen/Garden program and cooking clubs." – Chaplain or former Chaplain, WA

"Every school has a unique system of how Chaplaincy runs, which is what the individual Chaplain brings to their role. Some Chaplains run bike groups, anxiety groups, hairdressing groups... Others draw and encourage art, some have knitting groups, lunch time groups, card making to origami and painting." – Parent or guardian, Tas

"Our current Pastoral Care Worker is a dancer and offers support with drama/dance clubs at lunch." – Wellbeing or mental health sector professional, SA

4.3 It alleviates pressure on other school staff, including other wellbeing staff

The general and adaptable nature of the Chaplain role means they often play a role in relieving pressure on other school staff. For example, supporting teachers in the classroom or helping other wellbeing staff to focus on students with more complex needs. This is both a strength of the program, and a risk.

School-based stakeholders identified instances where Chaplains play a role in the classroom, supporting teachers in reducing workload pressures and enabling teachers to focus on educational outcomes. Teachers identified Chaplains as extremely helpful in working with students to address behavioural issues, while they focus on competing classroom demands. This has reportedly become increasingly common in recent years as workforce challenges post-COVID have meant teachers are feeling the pressure. As some stakeholders expressed:

"An extra helping hand to work through social issues is so very helpful." – Teacher, SA

"I have often been asked to sit with a student for one or two periods. We're able to step in and help if there is an urgent need for support due to staff shortages. I have also provided classroom support for students with severe anxiety who was too anxious to sit in the class without a person." – Chaplain or former Chaplain, Vic

"As a teacher I have so many other students and logistical demands (running classes for a start) that it's been hugely valuable to have a caring, wise person available to give individual attention at the time of most need when often no one else is available. It's also ongoing and so often preventative." – Teacher, NSW

Other student wellbeing staff also identified Chaplains as being helpful to reduce workload and pressures. These stakeholders identified Chaplains as being able to address less complex student wellbeing challenges, enabling them (other wellbeing staff) to focus on students with more complex wellbeing challenges. One wellbeing staff member gave this example:

"Having our Chaplain support our students with some needs & vulnerability frees up the rest of our Wellbeing Team to work with the higher scale student needs." – Other school wellbeing staff member, Vic

There were different views around the value of Chaplains providing this extra resourcing and classroom support. While 'being present' in the classroom can be important to build student relationships and help teachers focus on the educational outcomes for the rest of the class, there is a risk it may impede Chaplains' ability to focus on activities that more directly support student wellbeing. Some stakeholders see a Chaplain's role in the classroom as being within scope of providing pastoral care, others see it as inappropriate and outside of their skillset.

"Chaplains are not generally best employed as classroom assistants. However, their availability to take a disruptive, troubled student aside is of great benefit to the classroom. Chaplains often follow up on school avoidance issues and help to improve the attendance of these students." – Teacher, Vic

"Learning support is not really the role of our pastoral care worker. It's more about providing pastoral care, and how these have positive flow on effects for the classroom." – Assistant Principal, NSW

Overall, school-based stakeholders agreed that Chaplains supporting in these ways is valuable, but that providing classroom and other resourcing support (for example, attending school camps) should be secondary to focusing on the wellbeing of students:

"I believe that the Chaplain can and should support teachers to better understand the needs of the children in the teachers classes, but I don't feel that it is their main role." – Teacher, NSW

"I see this [supporting school staff] as a lower priority than direct pastoral care. The Chaplain's main role should be to build rapport with students and have a rapport building function." – Other school staff member, WA

"My first commitment is to the students and being present for them. Being involved in school activities and school staff should be viewed as an optional extra." – Chaplain or former Chaplain, WA

"While Chaplains are effective in this role, I do not believe it is best practice to have a Chaplain in what is primarily a teacher's aide job." – Wellbeing or mental health sector professional, QLD

4.4 Chaplains may be 'spread too thin' across a range of different activities

There is a risk that, due to the general and flexible nature of the role, Chaplains are 'spread too thin' and / or being drawn into delivering supports that are not directly improving student wellbeing. This may be impacting Chaplains' ability to focus on student wellbeing and contributing to burnout and exhaustion across the workforce.

As described in previous sections, Chaplains are:

- Delivering a wide range of supports and services to students with varying wellbeing needs.
- Providing support to students, their parents and families, as well as the school community more broadly (including teachers and other school staff).
- Increasingly being pulled in different directions to address resourcing challenges (for example, supporting teachers in the classroom).

Some stakeholders expressed concern that this may be contributing to Chaplains being 'spread too thin' or trying to do too much in the time they have available. Where Chaplains are supporting other staff in addressing resourcing challenges, this may be taking valuable time away from Chaplains to focus on supports that are more directly focused on student wellbeing.

This is also likely contributing to burnout and exhaustion, as Chaplains struggle to keep up with the various demands placed on their role. Several stakeholders expressed concern over Chaplains' workload and the multiple competing demands they are experiencing. This may also be contributing to workforce attraction and retention challenges, as discussed in more detail in section 7.3.

"Chaplains I know seem to attempt to respond to all the needs across all cohorts, but their ability to do so adequately is limited by the available NSCP resources." – Parent or guardian, Qld

"NSCPs try and address as many needs as is practically possible within the time constraints that they have." – Government or education sector official, SA

"I think the nature of the work, like other wellbeing based professions, can be exhausting for Chaplains and result in them leaving the role. For others, the amount of funding and part-time nature become difficult and so they move on to other work." – Chaplain or former Chaplain, NSW

4.5 Chaplains may also be delivering services that go beyond their qualifications or skill set

There is a risk that, in the context of resourcing pressures and unmet demand for other services, Chaplains may be delivering services that go beyond their qualifications or skill set. This is particularly concerning when Chaplains are working with students who may have complex or severe mental health challenges.

The scope of activities that Chaplains are required, or allowed, to deliver varies significantly across jurisdictions. While most states and territories have some form of scope of practice, the level of detail and content included is inconsistent. For example, Victoria's scope of practice describes a range of activities that Chaplains *could* engage in, followed by a list of things that Chaplains *shouldn't* do. Chaplain activities are focused around assisting the wellbeing team, improving student engagement, and generally creating a safe and positive schooling environment. The Northern Territory's guidelines are similarly detailed but emphasise the Chaplain's role around providing spiritual advice. It appears New South Wales, Tasmania and Western Australia do not have an explicit scope of practice.

This level of variation across jurisdictions in relation to the Chaplain's scope of practice – both in terms of the activities that are in and out of scope, and the level of detail or guidance provided to schools – poses a risk that Chaplains may be delivering services that do not align with the Australian Government's program objectives or guidelines. It also poses challenges to the Australian Government's ability to oversee and monitor the program, which is discussed in more detail in section 5.

In the context of rising mental health and wellbeing challenges and unmet demand for services (as described section 1), Chaplains are increasingly 'filling the gap.' Some stakeholders identified Chaplains as increasingly supporting students with higher need in the context of high service thresholds and long waitlists. For example, as some Chaplains highlighted:

"Ideally school counsellors would be the first port of call, however this is not always the case as school counsellors are swamped with waiting lists and assessments. School Chaplains end up being more directly on the ground." – Chaplain or former Chaplain, NSW

"Outside services are largely unavailable due to wait times and costs for many of those most in need. Chaplain is the only support for highly at risk children in many schools." – Chaplain or former Chaplain, Vic

This poses a risk that Chaplains may be delivering services that are outside the scope of their role or qualifications. Some stakeholders expressed concern around Chaplains delivering services that extend beyond their skillset or experience:

"Dedicated mental health support is required. Far too many of the problems faced by our students are beyond the skillset possessed by Chaplains." – Principal, WA

"Chaplaincy is not healthcare. At the moment it is moving in the direction of being a cheaper counsellor or psychologist. This was not the original intention of the post." – Religious official, WA

"Although they are able to work with students with mild or minor concerns, they do not have the expertise or knowledge to work with students with more complex or moderate needs as well as experience developing programs etc." – Wellbeing or Mental health sector professional, Vic

There are concerns that as Chaplains are being required to increasingly support the needs of students with higher or more complex wellbeing needs (for example, mental health challenges), students with more general wellbeing needs may miss out (for example, friendship challenges). This is not only problematic as it means that Chaplains are potentially acting outside the scope of their role, but also because it means the students who may benefit most from the program are overlooked. As some stakeholders described, students with higher wellbeing needs can draw attention away from those with lower needs:

"Most Chaplains I've observed spend the majority of their time working with high needs/moderate needs clients, which is vital but limiting to the time they can invest in prevention." – Parent or guardian, WA

"In my experience the Chaplains that I have had at school engage and encourage everyone, but the same with normal school teachers, the students with increased need often need more attention to help them compared to those with none." – Student, NSW

4.6 There is a lack of consistent understanding of what constitutes 'proselytising'

There may be some confusion around what constitutes 'proselytising', likely due to the level of flexibility in the current program and lack of consistent guidance provided across jurisdictions.

The existing Project Agreement states that 'Chaplains must not proselytise' but does not define or elaborate on the term. Some state and territory governments have included a definition or elaboration in their guidelines, but this varies across jurisdictions. For example:

- The Northern Territory defines proselytising as 'to solicit a decision to change a belief system'.
- Tasmanian guidelines state that Chaplains must not 'initiate faith discussions with a view to coercing or manipulating students to a particular view or spiritual belief' or 'proselytise, evangelise, advocate for a particular religious view or belief, or attempt to convert students to a religion or set of beliefs'.
- New South Wales provides no description or definition.

While this evaluation did not find, nor seek to find, concrete evidence of whether Chaplains are proselytising; we appreciate that there is significant community concern about proselytising. For example:

> *"From my experience of more than 6 Chaplains the majority have tried to convert students to their religion. There have been 2 who have left their faith at the door and focused on the job." – Assistant Principal, Qld*

> *"In my experience the Chaplains do not provide effective support for children. They are… promoting their off-site religious camps by having pamphlets at schools which is against the proselytising rules and fundraising for their role by holding pancake stalls. I have not seen Chaplains do anything of value at my son's school." – Parent or guardian, Qld*

> *"They also do pancake breakfasts but at the last one they handed out invitations to Jesus camps which is not right. Our school is a state school. I feel that they are using this opportunity to push religion which is not right. Hungry kids may feel they should take these invites. They shouldn't be allowed to do this." – Student, Qld*

Recommendation 2

This evaluation found that the flexibility of the NSCP is one of its key strengths, as it enables the program to be adapted to local context. It also found, however, that the flexible nature of the program means that Chaplains may be drawn into activities that are not aligned with 'better practice' or delivering value.

It is critical the Australian Government's NSCP is delivered in a way that is safe, effective and aligned with its objectives.

2. dandolo recommends the Australian Government in the short term:

   2.1. Provide states and territories with clearly documented and defined activities that are out of scope for the program to manage the risk of Chaplains delivering services that go beyond their scope and ensure they are focusing on delivering services that will directly support student wellbeing. These activities should be included in the Project Agreement, and may include, for example:

      a) Proselytising (recognising this is already included).

      b) Providing counselling or other mental health services.

      c) Teaching classes or providing any type of administrative / educational support that is not directly supporting student wellbeing.

   2.2. In the Project Agreement, specifically define 'proselytising' with a principle-based definition. Provide further guidance on proselytising and examples of appropriate and inappropriate practice.

   2.3. Provide states and territories with guidance regarding the key activities that are in scope of the program, based on 'better practice' (or evidence-based) services. This may accompany the Project Agreement and should support states and territories in administering the program in a way that achieves the Australian Government's objectives.

   2.4. In addition to the above, work with states and territories to provide schools with:

      a) Guidance material for Principals and other school leaders on the Chaplain role, the services available and how they are expected to work with other wellbeing staff.

      b) A plan template to help school leaders define the role of the Chaplain in their specific context (in collaboration with the Chaplain and provider, if relevant).

5 The current approach to program administration enables tailoring to jurisdictional context, but creates inconsistency and accountability challenges

The current approach to program administration is devolved in nature, with the Australian Government providing states and territory governments with significant autonomy and control over its delivery. While this enables the program to be tailored to each jurisdiction's policy context, it also poses challenges to the Australian Government's ability to oversee and monitor the program. This section explores these issues in more detail.

5.1 States and territories administer the program under the Project Agreement, which leads to significant variation in its delivery across jurisdictions

5.1.1 The Project Agreement gives jurisdictions significant flexibility and autonomy

The existing Project Agreement provides jurisdictions with significant flexibility and autonomy in relation to the delivery of the program. As outlined in section 2, the Project Agreement specifies that jurisdictions are responsible for 'putting in place appropriate processes' to ensure that:

- Participation by schools and students is voluntary.
- Chaplains may be from any faith.
- Chaplains must:
    - Not proselytise.
    - Respect, accept and be sensitive to other people's views, values and beliefs.
    - Comply with state and territory laws and policies in relation to child protection matters.
    - Meet the NSCP's minimum qualification requirements.

It also outlines that states and territories are responsible for 'publishing their guidelines' that outlines the specific funding arrangements and process for complaints handling.

Each state and territory government sets its own guidelines for program delivery, including how they prioritise schools for funding. This means that funding arrangements and accountability mechanisms vary significantly between jurisdictions.

5.1.2 This leads to significant variation in arrangements across jurisdictions

This approach to program delivery creates significant variation across jurisdictions. Further, the difference in approach is compounded by school type. Most jurisdictions enable Catholic and Independent school sector organisations with the freedom to apply their own accountability mechanisms to Chaplains operating within their schools.

An overview of the key points of difference relating to program administration and delivery across jurisdictions is provided below. It should be noted that one of the primary points of difference is the level of detailed guidance different state and territory governments provide. While some jurisdiction guidelines are prescriptive and detailed, others are limited and provide schools with much more freedom or autonomy. Some of the other key points of difference include:[47]

- **Funding –** Some states and territories, such as South Australia, provide program funding to Chaplaincy providers for the engagement of Chaplains on behalf of schools. Others states, such as the Northern Territory, provide funding to schools to directly engage individual Chaplains.

- **Consent –** Some jurisdictions have a more robust consent processes whereby schools must obtain written consent from parents / guardians prior to the provision of Chaplain services. Other jurisdictions have less robust processes, for example where parents can withdraw their child from participation in services by advising the Principal (an 'opt out' process).

- **Oversight –** In some jurisdictions such as the Northern Territory, responsibility for oversight of Chaplains sits with schools, where Principals are responsible for the day-to-day management of Chaplains in line with outlined responsibilities and accountability structures. In other jurisdictions such as Victoria, more responsibility sits with Chaplaincy providers, who are responsible for overseeing Chaplain performance.

- **Complaints process –** The approach to complaints, and guidance or requirements jurisdictions set, varies greatly between jurisdictions. Most guidelines encourage issues to be resolved at the school level where possible, or with the Chaplaincy provider. Some refer to an established departmental body that handles these along with other non-NSCP related complaints. For example, issues can be

[47] Note: all information in this section was taken from state and territory guidelines found online. dandolo undertook a jurisdictional analysis using publicly available information online.

escalated to the 'Customer Feedback Team' in South Australia, or the 'State Schools – Operations' in Queensland. Other jurisdictions, such as Tasmania, provide little guidance and state that schools should follow existing, established school procedures.

- **Confidentiality** – Guidelines in most jurisdictions refer to either school sector policy or individual school policy. Victoria has a dedicated 'Chaplaincy Information Records and Reporting Policy' that dictates how consent is collected, and how information is stored and shared. Victoria also has a separate complaints process for issues of breached confidentiality.

- **Professional development** – While all Chaplains are required to complete the mandatory eSafety training (as specified in the Project Agreement), some jurisdictions provide additional requirements and opportunities for Chaplains. For example, Western Australia requires Chaplains to undertake a Child Protection and Abuse Prevention professional learning course.

5.2 This means the program can be tailored to the local context, but can hinder program oversight and accountability

While this devolved administration approach means that state and territory governments can adapt and tailor the program to align with local need, it also poses challenges for the Australian Government's ability to oversee the program.

5.2.1 The devolved approach to program governance enables tailoring to the local context

Enabling states and territories to deliver the program under the Project Agreement means that they can administer the program in a way that aligns with their education system (including how schools are governed) and policy context (including an individual jurisdiction's approach to student wellbeing and mental health). For example:

- South Australia refers to Chaplains as Pastoral Care Workers, with the role focused on supporting student wellbeing, fostering positive relationships and developing connections to the community. There is no mention of spirituality or religion in the description of the role. Note: this is a title change permitted within the Project Agreement.

- In Queensland, the NSCP and the State Government Chaplaincy/Student Welfare Funding Program are aligned. Schools have some freedom in using their allocated funding across both programs to 'top up' the hours of each Chaplain.

It also means that individual schools can work with Chaplains to determine the scope of the role and services delivered. As described in section 4.2, stakeholders identified this as one of the program's strengths.

5.2.2 However, it also blurs lines of accountability

The devolved approach to administration, and significant variation between jurisdictions and schools, blurs lines of accountability and limits the Australian Government's oversight and visibility of the program. There is no consistent or clear approach to determining the scope of the Chaplain's role or overseeing and managing performance.

Confusion around Chaplain oversight and management

In most jurisdictions, Principals are responsible for working with the Chaplain to define the scope of their role and managing their performance (ensuring they operate within the confines of their scope and deliver services effectively). In some instances, however, Chaplaincy providers and other school wellbeing staff and education departments also play a role. The lack of a clear or consistent approach to overseeing Chaplain performance poses the following risks:

- Chaplains may not have clarity on the scope of their role, or the services they can and cannot provide.
- Chaplains may not be held accountable if they are acting outside the scope of their role.
- The Australian Government, and possibly also state and territory governments, lack the information and oversight required to know if Chaplains are effectively operating within the scope of their role.

Some stakeholders reported confusion and concern around determining the scope of the Chaplain's role, and oversight and accountability mechanisms. For example:

> *"The guidelines outlining what chaplains do is very vague and chaplains can often apply for a role not knowing exactly what is involved. Schools must provide clear structure and oversight of the chaplain and enable them to be able to engage with the school community in a wellbeing capacity rather than being used in a teachers aide capacity." – Chaplain or former Chaplain, NSW*

> *"The role can be quite blurred, as the school requests and the chaplain expertise need to be considered in how the role looks in each setting. Depending on the presenting students, this can be quite varied and sometimes falls outside the definition of the role." – Principal, NSW*

"[How well a Chaplain's role is defined] is dependent on the school they are working in and the clarity of communication between the organisations. It is often not made clear enough and that is where the blurring of competency and scope of practice can become a significant issue and potential for harm." – Other school staff member, ACT

Some stakeholders also expressed concerns that, where Chaplains report directly to Principals, this may not provide sufficient oversight and management. This was due to Principals' competing demands and the need for Chaplains to be better supported in their roles. For example, as one school staff member described:

"From my observations, I feel Chaplains should have access to 'supervision'. In the same way that counsellors are accountable to a supervisor and for every so many hours of counselling they have an hour of supervision, so I believe Chaplains should have the same. I believe Chaplains report to the Principal, who often doesn't have the time to discuss the Chaplain's personal wellbeing and I feel this should be either made mandatory or encouraged." – Other school staff member, WA

Challenges around program oversight and visibility

The current arrangements also mean that the Australian Government has limited visibility, posing a risk to its ability to effectively oversee the program.

The variation in funding arrangements between jurisdictions makes it difficult for the Australian Government to collect consistent data in relation to Chaplain performance and the program's efficacy. Currently the Project Agreement does not require states and territories to report on any outputs or outcomes beyond confirmation that states and territories have delivered on their broad responsibilities under the agreement, and provided a list of schools receiving funding for Chaplains.[48]

The variable scope of the role between jurisdictions means vague supervision and data collection at all levels. This has implications for how Chaplains are kept accountable to their roles at the school and jurisdiction level, and has broader implications for how the Australian Government ensures sufficient accountability as the program funder.

[48] Note: it is acknowledged that the Australian Government does require state and territory governments to provide a case study as part of annual reporting.

5.3 There is confusion relating to the role of the Chaplain in relation to working with other student wellbeing staff

The significant variation in arrangements between schools and jurisdictions means that Chaplains work in a variety of different contexts at the school level. Some Chaplains may work as the sole wellbeing officer in a school, while others may work as part of a broader student wellbeing team.

Where Chaplains are working in schools with other student wellbeing staff, there is a lack of clarity around their respective roles and ways of working. Across all jurisdictions, even those with more comprehensive guidelines, there is little guidance regarding how Chaplains should work within or alongside other school wellbeing staff. Some stakeholders reported confusion regarding respective roles and ways of working – in particular around issues such as governance and information sharing. For example:

> *"I think there is a strength to having the role quite broad to help both a school and Chaplain to shape it to their own strengths, skill set and school context. However, it can be difficult for some schools to work out where the boundaries are and where the Chaplain fits as part of their wellbeing team." – Chaplaincy provider, NSW*

> *"[Chaplains need] …Better established clear job roles that are available to the school's wellbeing team and coordinators so that they can all work effectively together." – Wellbeing or mental health sector professional, Vic*

> *"Our Chaplain has a broad role and we do not target particular groups with them … The Chaplain works on whole school programs and then closely with our student support officer. These two are within the wellbeing team. Everything comes through the team so that everyone knows who is doing what and new kids can be flagged collectively." – Principal, NSW*

There is a need to clarify how Chaplains should work with other wellbeing staff within schools. This should include expectations around supervision and governance, information sharing and more general ways of working (for example, shared team meetings). As some stakeholders described, for example:

> *"There could be more information / training provided to the school and wellbeing team in how best a Chaplain can fit into the team. It would be good to describe the responsibilities of the Chaplain to the counsellor, SSO, and teachers and provide examples of how they can work together." – Chaplain or former Chaplain, Vic*

> *"I think the lines can get easily blurred between as chaplain and an SSO and while there are guidelines for what a chaplain expressly 'can't do' I think sometimes schools and chaplains are unsure what they*

'can' do. This may come through clearer communication with the wellbeing and school leaders." – Teacher, SA

Recommendation 3

This evaluation found that the current approach to program delivery, which involves states and territories administering the program through the Project Agreement, limits the Australian Government's ability to manage risk and evaluate performance.

3. As the funder of the program, dandolo recommends the Australian Government in the short term:

    3.1. Manage risk by ensuring that the following key accountability and oversight mechanisms are established in each jurisdiction:

        a) A framework that outlines clear roles and responsibilities in relation to Chaplain oversight and performance monitoring (for example, role of the Principal, Chaplaincy provider and / or student wellbeing team).

        b) A code of conduct – consistent with the scope of practice and definition of proselytising – that outlines the general behavioural and ethical expectations of the role.

        c) A complaints mechanism that provides opportunities for community members to report concerns regarding the behaviour or performance of Chaplains.

        d) A consent mechanism that is based on an 'opt in' approach, to ensure consistency with the principle that participation in the program is voluntary.

        e) A confidentiality framework that gives students confidence that their confidentiality will be maintained and any breaches of confidentiality appropriately investigated.

    3.2. Work with states and territories to ensure more effective data collection and reporting. This should support increased visibility, more rigorous evaluation and continuous improvement. In setting data and reporting requirements, the Australian Government should work with states and territories to balance the need for increased visibility with the impost of data collection, linking in with existing jurisdiction practice wherever possible. For example, data and reporting may include information on:

a) Chaplains participating in the program, and their characteristics (e.g. qualifications)

b) Schools participating in the program, and their characteristics (e.g. school sector, ICSEA score)

c) Types of services and supports delivered

d) Complaints received and actioned.

6 The religious affiliation of the Chaplain role is the most contested and unique aspect of the program

The religious affiliation of the Chaplain role is the most contested part of the program. The more focus placed on Chaplains' spiritual influence or religious affiliation, the more polarised community views. On the contrary, the less focus given to the religious affiliation, the more aligned community views. Most stakeholders agree the program is necessary and valuable, particularly those with direct experience of or interaction with the program. This section discusses these findings in more detail.

6.1 The religious affiliation of the Chaplain role is the most contested and unique aspect of the program

6.1.1 The more focus placed on the religious affiliation of Chaplains, the more polarised community views

Stakeholder feedback indicated that the primary source of contention around the program's effectiveness is in relation to the religious affiliation of Chaplains.

Some stakeholders hold a particularly strong view that funding Chaplains in schools is inappropriate. This was generally due to the role's religious affiliations rather than their effectiveness in practice. These stakeholders often consider the very name of the program inappropriate, due to the religious affiliations associated with the term 'Chaplain'. Some also expressed concern around the relevance of the program for those who are not Christian.

> *"Cancel the program… schools do not need an identified staff member based on religion." – Principal, NSW*

> *"People employed in the roles of wellbeing and pastoral care workers should be appointed based on appropriate qualifications, skills and experience, and not religious affiliation or religious credentials." – Secular advocacy group*

> *"The role is a great idea. Just make it secular." – Parent or guardian, Qld*

> *"Many of the students at our school are not Christian, so this background is irrelevant for them. I believe anyone who meets the criteria should be able to do the job." – Teacher, Qld*

For these stakeholders, the opposition to the program was generally due to the religious affiliation of Chaplains rather than the program in practice. As the National School Chaplaincy Association described, opposition to the role of Chaplains was generally based on an ideological view or belief rather than direct experience with the program or an understanding of its effectiveness:

> *"We find those who oppose Chaplaincy generally do so from a purely ideological perspective - and usually from a 'closed secularism' perspective, not based on the actual practice or experience of Chaplaincy in the school yard, and unsupported by evidence of actual practice."*[49]

Other stakeholders are strongly supportive of the program because of the idea that Chaplains can provide spiritual support. Stakeholder responses indicate that some community members consider this important for supporting student wellbeing. This was also identified as being a key part of what makes this program unique. For example, as some stakeholders described:

> *"Secular versions, in my experience, do not seem to be as successful." – Principal, Qld*

> *"…Supporting the spiritual and pastoral needs of students is a unique characteristic of the Chaplaincy program and should be distinguished from other forms of emotional, professional and psychological support that may also entail beneficial wellbeing effects." – Religious education advocacy group*

> *"Many students need to be introduced to the role of Chaplains in order to identify their need for spiritual counselling." – Other community member, WA*

> *"A Chaplain who is providing spiritual input on a regular basis can be giving a foundation for unforeseen need or crises." – Other community member, NSW*

The public response to the evaluation, and mobilisation of the online consultation platform, also speak to the strong and polarised views of different community groups. For example, the Facebook group named 'End the National School Chaplaincy Program'[50] and radio campaign called 'Save our School Chaplains.'[51]

The approach different governments and schools have taken to program delivery also illustrate the polarised reactions to the program. For example, the Northern Territory guidelines explicitly state that the role of a Chaplain is to provide '…general spiritual and personal advice'[52] while some schools choose not to participate in the program due to the spiritual or religious affiliation – for example, public schools in the ACT.[53]

[49] The National School Chaplaincy Association, 2022, Submission to the National School Chaplaincy Program evaluation.
[50] 'Stop the National School Chaplaincy Program' Facebook group: https://www.facebook.com/groups/stopnscp/?mibextid=HsNCOg.
[51] 'Save our School Chaplain's' Radio Campaign: https://www.96three.com.au/save-our-school-chaplains-urgent-action-needed-by-13th-september/.
[52] Northern Territory Department of education, 2019, 'National School Chaplaincy program Northern Territory handbook 2019-2022'.
[53] ACT Education Directorate, 2022, Submission to the National School Chaplaincy Program evaluation.

As described in section 3.1.3 , the religious affiliation of the Chaplain role may also be preventing some students from accessing support.

> *"… Because they are link[ed] with a religious organisation students can automatically choose to not engage with the service." – Principal, Qld*

6.1.2 The less emphasis placed on the spiritual role of Chaplains, the less contested the program is

The less emphasis placed on the religious affiliation of Chaplains, the less contested the program is. As described in section 1.3, community members agreed that schools should be supported to deliver wellbeing services.

Further, most stakeholders that had direct experience or interaction with the NSCP (for example, parents with students that had participated in the program or school staff) agreed that the program is effective and valuable.

> *"At my School, our Chaplain is always prioritising the health of the student. No matter the situation a Chaplain is always there to help and often better at doing so than other staff members." – Student, NSW*

> *"The chaplains I know are highly qualified, have much experience, work hard for their school communities, keep appropriate levels of confidence with sensitive information, and are caring and sensitive pastoral workers." – Chaplain or former Chaplain, Vic*

> *"The chaplains I have worked with have all been exemplary humans doing an amazing job in difficult circumstances." – Teacher, Qld*

6.2 There are a range of other qualities and characteristics Chaplains possess that are valuable, if not unique

Aside from the religious affiliation of Chaplains, stakeholder responses indicate there are other characteristics that make this professional group well suited to supporting student wellbeing.

6.2.1 Connections to community organisations

Most Chaplains are generally well connected within their communities, which provides several benefits. Firstly, as discussed throughout this report, it enables Chaplains to connect students and families with relevant services and supports.

Secondly, it means the school and NSCP program is benefiting from the support and backing of community organisations. In some instances, churches are providing additional funding to supplement the program and extend the Chaplain's funded hours in schools. As one Chaplain identified, for example:

> *"It must be noted… the school community does not just benefit from my activity – it benefits too from the inter-church councils in the background… With government funding – I have one day [of a Chaplain's time] in my school. With the extra church support – little old ladies selling loads of lemon butter raising funds – I am in my school for four days." – Chaplain or former Chaplain, SA*

The Chaplain's relationship with local churches also means they can source volunteers to support with wellbeing activities within the school such as breakfast clubs. As some stakeholders described:

> *"[Chaplains provide] different experiences using networks outside the usual school channels, [this] proves engaging and positive for the whole school community." – Principal, NSW*

> *"Chaplains serve a role that others cannot do… [they] know how to refer people to other supports. Chaplains have great support networks and links in their local community. Chaplains are also affordable." – Principal, WA*

It is important to note that, where local churches and volunteer groups are getting involved (either by contributing to funding Chaplains' time or supporting with running activities in schools), this complicates program oversight and accountability. It makes it more challenging to determine who is ultimately accountable for Chaplains – both in relation to setting their scope of practice and managing performance.

6.2.2 Personal characteristics and attributes

Chaplains also generally possess positive personal characteristics and attributes that are critical for the role. Most stakeholders described Chaplains as being good listeners, caring, empathetic and trustworthy. These qualities are critical for building relationships with students and within school communities, and positioning Chaplains as a safe 'go to' person. As some stakeholders articulated:

> *"[Our Chaplain] compassionately interacts with parents and staff members who may need to discuss their children, or their own wellbeing issues. We are so fortunate to have such an accomplished and empathetic NSCP and could not cope so effectively be without her at our primary school." – Teacher, SA*

"The four chaplains with whom I have been professionally associated over time have all been wise and compassionate human beings and, thus, effective healers, helpers, carers." – Other school staff member, WA

"The chaplains our school has had in my time here have been of high quality. They are dedicated team members, bring a range of skills, are driven to achieve quality outcomes for students and are caring, calm and compassionate members of our school community." – Other school staff member, NSW

6.2.3 Cost effective

There may also be value in the cost-effective nature of the program and relative affordability of Chaplains when compared with more specialised roles. Schools in particular identified Chaplains as a low-cost way to support student wellbeing.

Chaplain salaries demand less than other, more specialised wellbeing roles, such as a mental health nurse or a psychologist. As one stakeholder expressed:

"To be very blunt, they're cheaper and in our school system that counts for a lot. A specialist social worker or psychologist or counsellor (maybe even a sports/recreation specialist) would be more when costed out. The services of a Chaplain are much broader than any of the above, so I think the school uses the services because Chaplains have a pretty flexible job description in terms of meeting the needs of the school." – Teacher, WA

Further, the contribution churches are making likely supports the affordability of the program, as identified above.

It is important to recognise, however, that stakeholders agreed the remuneration Chaplains receive under the program is insufficient. Refer section 7 for more detail.

7 dandolo endorses the proposal to open the program in 2023 and considers it a timely opportunity to revisit aspects of the program as it shifts to focusing on a function rather than a professional group

dandolo endorses the proposal to open the program in 2023 to other professional groups, and considers this a timely opportunity to revisit other aspects of the program as it shifts to focusing on a function (supporting student wellbeing) rather than a professional group (Chaplains). This section provides an overview of the key elements of the program dandolo has identified as requiring review or change, including:

- The program name
- Models for engaging Chaplains or Student Wellbeing Officers
- Qualifications and accreditation requirements
- Ongoing professional development and training.

7.1 There are good reasons to open the program to other professional groups, alongside Chaplains

The characteristics and qualities identified in section 6.2 are not entirely unique to Chaplains and other professional groups – for example, youth workers – may also be well suited to the role.

It is also likely that this shift will provide more opportunity for schools and students to participate in the NSCP, who may otherwise have missed out due to concerns around the spiritual elements of the program (as described in section 3.1.3).

Further, it is likely that the proposed change in 2023 will contribute to increased availability of appropriately skilled and qualified staff to fill roles. There are currently challenges filling Chaplain roles - particularly in rural, regional and remote areas. In some instances, there are no applicants for roles, or no applicants with the suitable skills and qualifications. This is discussed in section 7.3 in more detail. Opening the program to other professional groups should support improved availability of Chaplains, as schools are not limited to Chaplains as a single professional group.

7.2 This provides timely opportunity to change other aspects of the program to reflect the shift to focusing on a function

The proposed change in 2023 presents opportunity to revise other elements of the program. To ensure the NSCP effectively focuses on a function rather than a professional group, there are a series other changes that should be made, as described below.

Note: dandolo recognises it may not be feasible for the Australian Government and state and territory governments to implement all these changes by 2023.

7.2.1 Program name

As part of the change in 2023, the Australian Government should consider re-naming the NSCP to ensure it aligns with the focus on the function of supporting student wellbeing (rather than Chaplains as a professional group).

As described previously in this report, some stakeholders consider the very name of the program inappropriate due to the religious affiliations associated with the term 'Chaplaincy'. Based on submissions, not all stakeholders who support the spiritual element of the program necessarily endorse the current naming. For example, Catholic School Parents Australia stated:

> *"The name offers opportunity for misguided perceptions of the program's intent and there would be benefit for the terminology to focus on 'wellbeing'. There is a belief that the use of the word 'Chaplaincy' can instil a misrepresentation of the program's broader objectives."*[54]

A changed program name may not only reduce the polarisation of community views, but also create a more inclusive program.

7.2.2 Engagement model

State and territory governments will need to consider how schools engage Chaplains and / or Student Wellbeing Officers.

There is significant variation between states and territories in relation to how schools currently engage Chaplains. Some jurisdictions such as the Northern Territory require schools to engage Chaplains by applying through their jurisdiction's NSCP panel, which is managed by their respective education department,

[54]Catholic School Parents Australia, 2022, 'Catholic School Parents Australia Submission'.

while other jurisdictions offer the choice to engage Chaplains through a panel or direct employment. In some cases, jurisdictions enable Catholic and independent sectors to take their own approaches.

There are strengths and weaknesses associated with both models:

- The panel approach provides education departments with a useful mechanism to regulate Chaplains, including ensuring they meet screening, qualification and other requirements. It can also help schools to oversee Chaplains and monitor their performance.
- Direct employment provides schools with more flexibility to engage Chaplains who may be more suited to their needs (for example, local community members who may not be involved with a provider). Some school-based stakeholders considered they would benefit from more control over the engagement process.

In the context of the Australian Government's intention to open the program to give schools the choice to engage either a Chaplain or Student Wellbeing Officer, state and territory governments will need to consider the implications for how schools engage Chaplains or Student Wellbeing Officers. Where schools are required to engage Chaplains through a panel, they may not be able to access Student Wellbeing Officers through the current panel of providers.

7.2.3 Qualifications and accreditation

While stakeholders generally consider the existing level Certificate IV qualification requirements to be appropriate for the role Chaplains are undertaking, there is general agreement that other relevant qualification types and personal attributes should be recognised.

Under the current Project Agreement, Chaplains must meet one of the following minimum qualification requirements:

- Certificate IV in Youth Work
- Certificate IV in Pastoral Care
- Certificate IV in Chaplaincy and Pastoral Care
- An equivalent qualification (as determined by the jurisdiction) that must include competencies in 'mental health' and 'making appropriate referrals'.

Most stakeholders generally consider the existing Certificate IV level to be appropriate for the role and identified a need to expand the existing qualification types. 95 per cent of all school-based respondents considered the existing qualifications and accreditation standards to be appropriate for the services delivered.

Stakeholder responses indicated that, while this level of qualification is appropriate, there is a need to recognise other relevant fields of work such as social work, mental health and counselling. For example, as some stakeholders described:

> *"Chaplains should have a minimum of a certificate IV in a relevant work field, i.e. childcare, education support, youth work or mental health." – Chaplain or former Chaplain, NSW*

> *"Schools should be employing youth workers or social work professionals in the roles of supporting all students." – Teacher, VIC*

Many Chaplains often have qualifications well above the minimum requirements. 40 per cent of Chaplains and 44 per cent of Chaplaincy providers responding to our evaluation identified Chaplains as, in their experience, having 'postgraduate qualifications with competencies in mental health and responding to student needs.'

> *"…Chaplains are often overqualified for the work they do." – Chaplain or former Chaplain, Vic*

> *"The chaplains I have worked with have had above the minimum qualifications…" – Teacher, WA*

Most stakeholders agreed that qualifications alone do not cover the totality of skills required to be an effective Chaplain. Several stakeholders identified that personal attributes, such as strong interpersonal skills, were more important than qualifications or experience. The following qualities were identified as being critical: being a good listener, empathetic, trustworthy, caring and supportive.

> *"…More importantly, they have had the right skills and personality traits for the role such as compassion, kindness, good listening skills, empathy, dedications, etc." – Teacher, WA*

> *"…the success of the individual comes down to personal abilities beyond what can be gained through study." – Teacher, Qld*

> *"The character of the person is far more important than an academic qualification." – Chaplain or former Chaplain, Qld*

In the context of challenges attracting and retaining Chaplains, there is a risk that setting qualification requirements too high may make it more difficult for schools to find suitable candidates. Several stakeholders expressed challenges finding Chaplains with the appropriate experience and skills to fill roles. This is a particular challenge in rural and remote areas.

> *"There are not enough chaplains to fill the need." – Chaplain or former Chaplain, NSW*

> *"Being in a rural area, it is difficult to attract and retain chaplains…" – Principal, Qld*

> *"I've been in schools where no chaplain was provided due to staffing shortages." – Other school staff member, Qld*

The Northern Territory Department of Education also cautioned against setting the qualification standard too high, citing examples where the current standard has excluded local Aboriginal community members from holding Chaplain positions despite being otherwise well-suited to the role.

7.2.4 Ongoing professional development and training

Under the current Project Agreement, Chaplains must 'undertake professional learning in responding to and preventing bullying and cyberbullying training with the Office of the eSafety Commissioner'. Stakeholder responses indicate that some jurisdictions and Chaplaincy providers also set their own additional professional development and training requirements.

Stakeholders consider the mandatory eSafety training to be highly valuable. 86 per cent of Chaplains and 82 per cent of Chaplaincy providers rated the training either 'very effective' or 'extremely effective'. Stakeholders expressed that the training exceeded expectations and provided Chaplains with skills and strategies to help them keep pace with the changing online environment. As some Chaplains expressed:

> *"This package is extremely helpful not just in supporting students but in the support of fellow colleagues and parents who lack the time or ability to stay up to date with the ever changing world of social media/tech." – Chaplain or former Chaplain, WA*

> *"I learned far more than I expected to." – Chaplain or former Chaplain, Qld*

> *"This is a great program – it should remain mandatory training for all school Chaplains." – Chaplain or former Chaplain, NT*

Outside of the mandatory eSafety training, other professional development and training requirements and opportunities vary across jurisdictions, schools and Chaplaincy providers. Some Chaplains reported receiving

significant professional development opportunities, including online training and annual conferences. Other Chaplains, however, identified limited professional development opportunities. This variation is highlighted by some of the responses from Chaplains, where some described significant professional development and training while others expressed a desire for more. Note two of the stakeholder responses below from Queensland, illustrating the variation within a single jurisdiction.

> *"In my organisation we have a full induction on commencement of our role, a senior [Chaplain] mentor assigned to us for the first 6 months, a full day of offline peer training relevant to our roles each term, an annual 4 day chaplaincy conference, an extra week of self-directed PD during the school term, a peer training afternoon each term, as well as face to face individual meetings with our Field Development Manager and once a term 1 hour individual Professional Supervision meetings with a qualified counsellor." – Chaplain or former Chaplain, Qld*

> *"Other than esafety, not much training is offered. I am Chaplain to a Junior School. The e-safety is relevant but so are many, many other things that would be helpful to get more training in." – Chaplain or former Chaplain, Qld*

> *"This depends on the Chaplain and who they are employed by. There needs to be more specific training provided from NSCP for Chaplains who may not receive appropriate training and support from their employee." – Chaplain or former Chaplain, NSW*

> *"I would appreciate more professional learning opportunities provided by the government like the e-safety modules." – Chaplain or former Chaplain, NSW*

Chaplains expressed concern around the lack of time they have available to undertake professional development activities. Several Chaplains described having to participate in professional learning and training outside of work hours, without any compensation or remuneration. Chaplains expressed a need to provide more funded professional development.

> *"The professional learning of PCW's various from School to school depending on the role the PCW plays in each school. I'm in 3 schools and have a variety of roles across these schools. For the most part I have been easily able to access training although occasionally funding for these professional development opportunities can be a hinderance." – Chaplain or former Chaplain, SA*

> *"To expect chaplains to do all their professional learning outside of school hours, during school holidays is not fair..." – Chaplain or former Chaplain, WA*

"We are required to undertake professional development by SMG and DECD. This is time consuming and eats into our few paid hours." – Chaplain or former Chaplain, SA

"More [professional development] should be provided via the Dept of Ed as required in the schools. To ask chaplain to self fund these is not ok." – Chaplain or former Chaplain, WA

Community members and Chaplains agreed that there is a need for targeted training opportunities for Chaplains in areas relevant to the role such as: trauma, grief, suicide prevention, mental health, domestic violence, behavioural disorders and special needs. This was identified as particularly important in the context of rising mental health and wellbeing challenges in students.

"There needs to be ongoing training in specific areas of trauma, intergenerational trauma, behavioural disorder supports." – Chaplain or former Chaplain, NSW

"Ongoing PD opportunities in many areas would be beneficial such as grief and loss, coping with parental separation, mental health and resilience building." – Chaplain or former Chaplain, Vic

"More professional development for Chaplains around connections with students with trauma would be useful." – Assistant Principal, Qld

Some Chaplains also shared the view that they would like access to a network of Chaplains where they can meet regularly to hear examples from other schools on how they use the program, generate ideas, and collaborate on initiatives together.

"It would be great if we can collaborate with other Chaplains to hear examples from other schools to see how they use the program to generate ideas and learn from one another." – Chaplain or former Chaplain, Vic

Recommendation 4

dandolo endorses the proposal to open up the program in 2023 and considers it a timely opportunity to revisit aspects of the program as it shifts to focusing on a function rather than a professional group.

4. As part of the opening up of the program in 2023, dandolo recommends the Australian Government:

    4.1. Formally announce its decision to 'open up' the program to provide schools with the choice to employ either Chaplains or Student Wellbeing Officers.

4.2. Clarify with stakeholders as soon as practicable the definition of a 'Student Wellbeing Officer' and how it differs from the Chaplain role, to assist stakeholders in preparing for implementation.

4.3. Support states and territories to manage the workforce implications of its decision, particularly for jurisdictions who currently require schools to engage Chaplains through a panel of Chaplain-specific providers. This may include providing flexibility for schools to engage Chaplains or Student Wellbeing Officers directly or from an expanded panel; the development of a workforce strategy; or a portal for Chaplains and Student Wellbeing Officers to register their interest and availability.

4.4. Re-name the program to ensure it is representative of the program's function and inclusive of other professional groups, alongside Chaplains. For example, the 'National School Wellbeing Program'.

4.5. In relation to the qualification / accreditation of Chaplains, the Australian Government should work with states and territories to:

a) Expand the scope of Certificate IV qualifications to explicitly include other fields relating to wellbeing, such as mental health, counselling, and social work.

b) Consider whether there are special circumstances in which exemptions to the minimum qualification's standard should be provided in favour of equivalent skills and experience (e.g. for local community members in remote and very remote communities) and – if so – how to provide flexibility while ensuring these Chaplains operate within an appropriate scope of practice.

c) Ensure that recruitment processes consider other personal qualities that are critical to the Chaplain role (e.g. being a good listener, caring and empathetic nature, ability to build and maintain relationships, connections with the broader community).

4.6. In relation to professional development, the Australian Government should:

a) Continue the mandatory e-Safety training and consider introducing targeted trainings in areas relevant to the role such as: trauma, grief and loss, family violence.

b) Consider working with states and territories to establish a community of practice, or equivalent opportunities for Chaplains to share their knowledge and learnings with other

Chaplains to improve the services they deliver as part of their professional learning and development.

7.3 Employment and funding models for the current program may hinder its effectiveness

There are significant challenges associated with attracting and retaining Chaplains, which may be limiting the efficacy of the program. Several stakeholders, particularly Principals, reported challenges finding Chaplains with the appropriate skills and qualifications, as well as challenges keeping Chaplains in the role longer-term. Due to the nature of the Chaplain role, which requires an investment over time to build relationships and trust in the community, this poses a risk to the program's success.

7.3.1 The current model is contributing to challenges attracting and retaining Chaplains, and potentially hindering the effectiveness of the role

The current funding and employment model is exacerbating challenges attracting and retaining Chaplains. This is largely due to:

- The part-time nature of the role.
- The lack of job security / ongoing roles.
- Low remuneration that has not kept pace with the increased cost of living.
- The emotionally demanding nature of the role, and the lack of recognition or value.

The part-time nature of the role

Stakeholders described that the current funding arrangement only enables a Chaplain to be employed for approximately 1-2 days per week, which poses several challenges.

Firstly, it limits the role to those who can work 1-2 days per week. This requires people to either juggle another job, or excludes those who require full time work.

Secondly, it means that Chaplains have limited time to deliver services and build relationships with students and the school community. As described previously in this report, simply 'being present' is a valuable part of the Chaplain role, and this is made difficult when working such limited hours.

> *"1.7 days at a school (particularly a larger school) is not do-able. Very little community and support can be built in that time, so more funded [hours] are needed. Chaplains are having to raise [funds] to*

employ themselves [which] is so sad… it is a hard thing to maintain." – Chaplain or former Chaplain, Qld

"The nature of the part time role and the low pay makes it difficult for Chaplains to stay in the role for more than a few years." – Chaplaincy provider, NSW

"Increasing hours and pay would go a long way towards Chaplains staying on in a long-term role and viewing their role as a career, rather than a part-time/temporary type of position." – Chaplain or former Chaplain, Qld

Lack of job security

Stakeholder responses indicated that under the current funding model, most Chaplains are engaged on short-term contracts rather than ongoing roles. Stakeholders described challenges finding people who are willing to accept short-term contracts, further exacerbating attraction issues. Stakeholders also identified how the lack of job security or stability can impact Chaplains and make it challenging to keep people in these roles.

"The funding issue is a big problem for younger chaplains who cannot wait until the second last week of the last term to find out whether they have employment the following year or not. If there was more job security then a retention rate would be much higher." – Chaplain or former Chaplain, NSW

"The lack of notice and therefore lack of job security can undermine the retention of quality chaplains." – Wellbeing or mental health sector professional, NSW

Low remuneration and a lack of recognition

Stakeholders generally agreed that Chaplains do not receive sufficient remuneration or recognition. Several stakeholders highlighted that Chaplains do not receive sufficient funding, and that funding has not kept pace with rising costs of living over time. Some stakeholders noted that, as Chaplains often have above the minimum qualification requirements, they could be getting paid better in other roles.

"It is difficult to keep Chaplains when the grant has only increased by $278 over the past 16 years." – Chaplaincy provider, Vic

"It's a tough job, undervalued and many people working in this area could be earning a lot more money if they were in different position." – Chaplain or former Chaplain, Qld

"I believe higher rates of pay would help with retention and availability of quality chaplains." – Principal, SA

Stakeholders also expressed that it is an emotionally challenging and demanding job, and that Chaplains are not sufficiently valued or recognised.

"Most Chaplains I know are exhausted but still keep going." – Chaplain or former Chaplain, WA

"…Chaplains are highly undervalued and under resourced in these hard times." – Education sector official, Qld

"It is a very demanding job and can become overwhelming - hence often short-term appointments. The pay is not high so others can't afford to stay as their situations change." – Principal, NSW

These issues are compounded in rural and regional areas, where the availability of Chaplains is even more limited. For example,

- The Northern Territory has only two NSCP providers that are predominantly focused on metropolitan areas and the Katherine region.
- In Tasmania the *Department for Education, Children and Young People* has said that there may only be one or two qualified Chaplains in a region.

As some stakeholders reported:

"Rural and remote areas have very few applicants - sometimes there are none." – Assistant Principal, Qld

"We have had extreme difficulty recruiting chaplains as it is a part time job which excludes many and in small country towns people with the qualifications required are employed full time by other services." – Principal, NSW

Stakeholders also described that, similar to other workforces, COVID-19 has further compounded issues attracting and retaining Chaplains. Some stakeholders considered this the greatest impact COVID-19 has had on the program, as one stakeholder articulated for example:

"The greatest impact from Covid has been the difficulty in retaining and recruiting suitable Chaplains…" – Principal, Vic

7.3.2 This poses a risk to the program's efficacy

Challenges retaining Chaplains poses a risk to the ability of the program to deliver value, as the nature of the Chaplain role requires time. Stakeholders agreed that Chaplain longevity is required to build relationships and trust in the community and with students. As one stakeholder articulated:

> *"…Relationships are built over time. Students take time to build their trust in a staff member and staff need to also have a positive and ongoing relationship with the Chaplain…" – Chaplain or former Chaplain, Tas*

> *"We have had a number of Chaplains over recent years. It seems a shame that all the work in developing relationships of trust with students [is lost when] the chaplain moves on and we start the process again." – Assistant Principal, SA*

> *"It seems that a Chaplain comes along and [leaves after] a short period of time, barely long enough for the children to get to know and trust, and then they are gone." – Other community member, Qld*

Problems relating to the availability of the Chaplain (for example, through the part-time nature of the role) undermines the benefit of the role. Stakeholders reported that students often have issues that arise throughout the week (for example, a family crisis) and for the Chaplain to be the 'go-to' person they must be present and available to respond to students when they seek help.

> *"It is hard to provide informal support for groups of students when you don't have enough time in the day to do all the different aspects of your role because you are only part-time and there are so many needs. The staff and students really value this service by chaplains and would like more." – Chaplaincy provider, Qld*

> *"[Chaplains] most likely need more hours per school so that they are onsite on more days to provide that consistent care for the students." – Chaplain or former Chaplain, SA*

7.3.3 Stakeholders highlighted the need to review the fundamental elements of the overall funding model

The Australian Government has broadly committed to the continued delivery of the program through a Project Agreement with the states and territories. However, key system stakeholders highlighted the need to review different elements of the current funding model for the overall program. These include:

- **Overall funding period and notice period for confirmation of the next funding agreement** – Stakeholders expressed that they need certainty of funding to effectively deliver the program, in particular to ensure that they can attract and retain Chaplains in schools.

- **Overall quantum of funding and funding per jurisdiction and school, including funding adjustments for CPI and other cost increases** – Many stakeholders described that the overall quantum of funding per school is not enough to fund:

    - All schools that require the services of a Chaplain
    - Individual Chaplains for a sufficient period of time in a given week to meet demand.

- **Additional funding for schools in regional and remote locations** – Stakeholders expressed that the current 'top up' amount for schools in regional, remote and very remote locations does not adequately account for increased delivery costs, the difficulty of attracting and retaining Chaplains, and the disproportionate demand for wellbeing services in those locations.

- **Provision of funding for administrative expenses** – One education department noted that the provision of up to three per cent of overall funding for administrative expenses disadvantages smaller jurisdictions with less opportunity to leverage scales of economy.

- **Funding adjustments for CPI and other cost increases** – Stakeholders feel that funding adjustments have not kept pace with real cost increases associated with the program, which is increasingly eroding the real funding base.

As discussed earlier, the evaluation highlighted that Chaplains may be funded from various government and non-government sources (for example, local churches). This could lead to issues where there are inconsistencies between conditions or requirements imposed under different sources of funding and should be explored in more detail.

Some stakeholders described that Chaplains and / or schools raise additional funds or engage community volunteers to supplement the resourcing they receive under the NSCP. This enables them to provide more services compared to what they could provide with base funding. Whilst it is acknowledged that it is commonplace for schools to fundraise and engage community volunteers for various activities, stakeholders raised two key concerns.

Firstly, the fact that Chaplains and / or schools are compelled to fundraise and engage community volunteers may indicate that the program is currently underfunded.

And secondly, fundraising and engaging volunteers from outside the immediate school community may exert undue influence on Chaplain activities. For example, we heard several accounts of how Chaplains engage volunteers from local religious groups to assist with activities. There was no direct suggestion that these volunteers had engaged in inappropriate behaviour contrary to the Project Agreement and relevant state and territory guidelines, but the account highlights a potential risk associated with cross-subsidisation from unregulated sources.

> *"As Chaplains have access to local church groups, they often build a group of volunteers from the local community to assist them in providing programs for students like breakfast clubs. So when a Chaplain works in a school you don't just get the efforts of one person, you also get the bonus of all the volunteers they can recruit to assist in programs within the school." – Parent or guardian, ACT*

Recommendation 5

5. dandolo recommends that as part of the broader review of the NSCP (refer Recommendation 1), the Australian Government consider the most appropriate funding and employment models for any given investment in student wellbeing, including:

    a) Overall funding period

    b) Notice period for confirmation of the next funding agreement

    c) Overall quantum of funding

    d) Funding per jurisdiction

    e) Funding per school

    f) Funding per resource and associated implications for employment status and minimum hours

    g) Funding adjustments for CPI and other cost increases

    h) Additional funding for schools in regional and remote locations, and additional funding considerations for any other student or school demographic groups

    i) Interactions with other sources of government and non-government funding and in-kind resourcing contributions.

Recommendation 6
6. As part of the shift to open up the program in 2023 and potential re-naming of the program, dandolo recommends the Australian Government use this opportunity to recognise and promote the significant value Chaplains and Student Wellbeing Officers provide to students and school communities (for example, in associated announcements, media and marketing and publications) to support attraction, recruitment and retention.

Appendix A: Program objective and design principles

To help inform the evaluation, dandolopartners developed a program objective and set of design principles:

Program objective

1. To support the wellbeing of students through:
    a. pastoral care services; and
    b. strategies that support the wellbeing of the broader school community.

Design principles

2. In a way that:
    a. aligns with evidence-based, better practice approaches to student wellbeing;
    b. is inclusive and safe (for example, is voluntary, respectful of different personal values and beliefs, complies with child protection requirements, etc.);
    c. is applicable and flexible across different contexts and communities (for example, different school need and locations);
    d. integrated effectively and efficiently by providing a complementary service to other existing supports and services (for example, mental health practitioners in secondary schools)
    e. utilises a capable, effective, and dedicated workforce; and
    f. provides value for money.

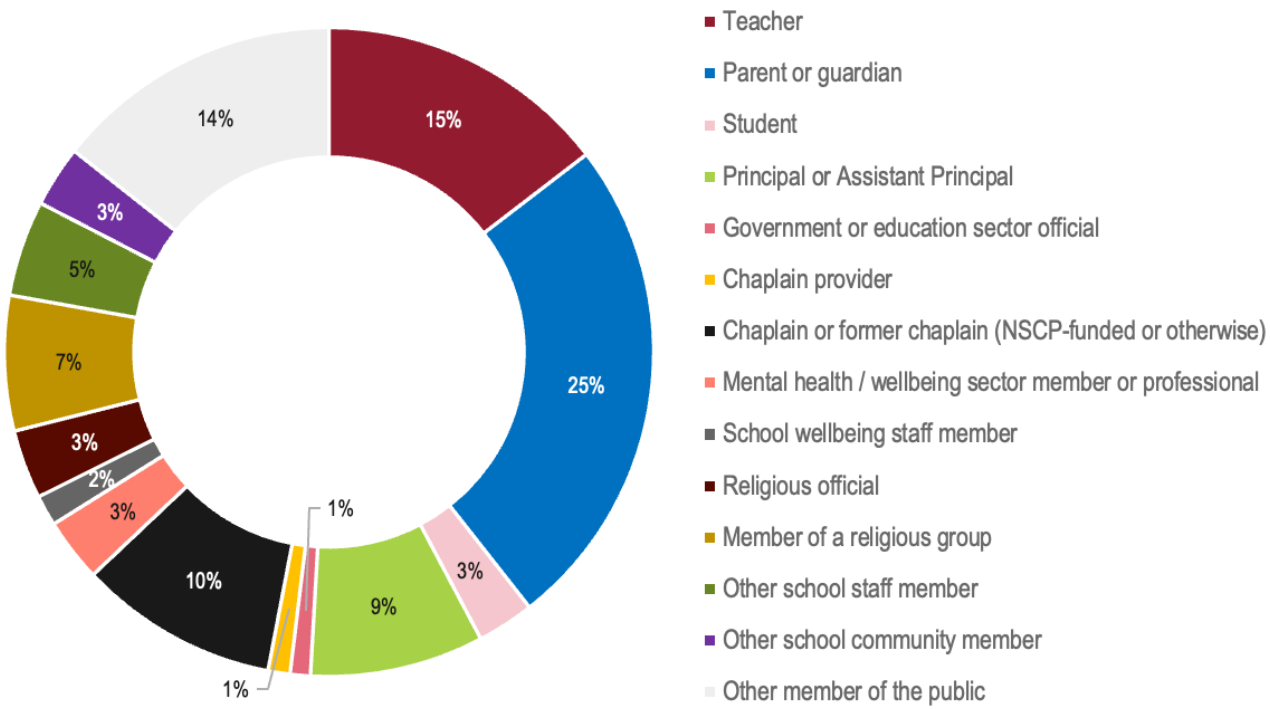
Appendix B: Overview of respondents

Overview of respondents to online consultation platform

In total, there were 11,963 submissions as of 13 September 2022 when the online consultation platform was closed. This section provides an overview of the responses by stakeholder group and jurisdiction.

For a breakdown of the different stakeholder groups that responded refer Figure 4 below.

FIGURE 4: BREAKDOWN OF RESPONDENTS BY STAKEHOLDER GROUP

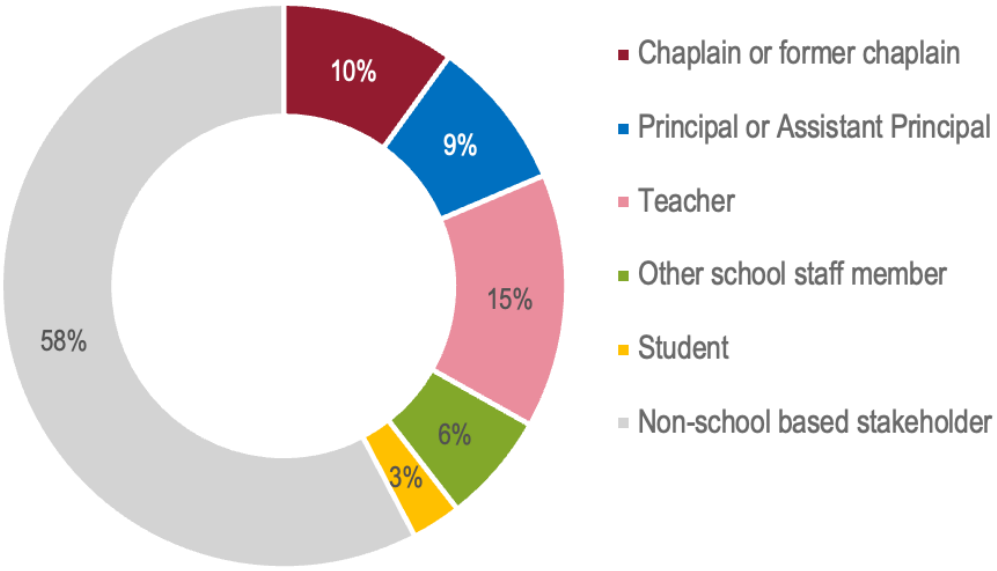


Stakeholder	Teacher	Parent or guardian	Student	Principal or assistant principal	Government or education sector official	Chaplain provider	Chaplain or former chaplain (NSCP or otherwise)
Percent of total responses	15%	25%	3%	9%	1%	1%	10%

Stakeholder	Mental health Wellbeing sector member or professional	School wellbeing staff member	Religious official	Member of a religious group	Other school staff member	Other school community member	Other member of the public
Percent of total responses	3%	2%	3%	7%	5%	3%	14%

dandolo broadly categorised stakeholders according to two groups: school-based stakeholders and the rest of the community. School-based stakeholders included any individual that works at, or has worked at, a school (refer breakdown below). As shown in Figure 5 below, almost 60 per cent of respondents were not school-based stakeholders.

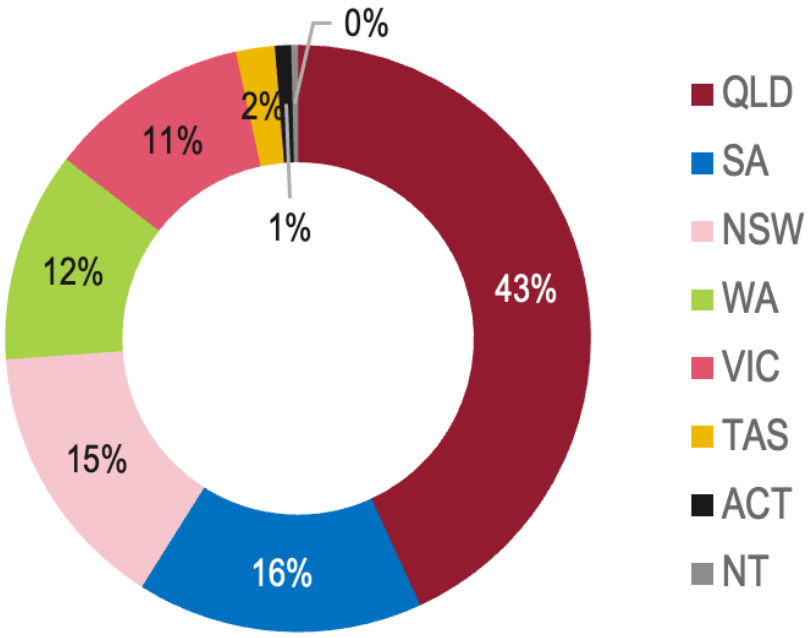
FIGURE 5: SCHOOL-BASED STAKEHOLDERS



School-based stakeholder	Chaplain or former chaplain	Principal or Assistant Principal	Teacher	Other school staff member	Student	Non-school based stakeholder
Percent of total responses	10%	9%	15%	6%	3%	58%

For a breakdown of the different respondents by jurisdiction, refer Figure 6. As shown below, there was a disproportionately large response rate from stakeholders in Queensland. For more information regarding how dandolo analysed responses and managed the disproportionate response rates, refer **Appendix C.**

FIGURE 6: BREAKDOWN OF ALL RESPONDANTS BY JURISDICTION



Jurisdiction	QLD	SA	NSW	WA	VIC	TAS	ACT	NT
Percent of total responses	43%	16%	15%	12%	11%	2%	1%	0%

Appendix C: Analysis methodology

It is important to note that dandolo was undertaking analysis in limited timeframes, with the Interim Report due 10 business days after the online consultation platform was closed.

With 11,963 responses to the online consultation platform and over 20 submissions received, to rapidly identify emerging insights and recommendations, the dandolo team:

- Reviewed all written responses to the online consultation platform questions.
- Conducted rapid analysis of quantitative data.
- Reviewed all written submissions from key sector organisations.

While analysis informed the findings and recommendations included in the Interim Report, given the limited delivery timeframes, the Interim Report did not include all the evidence that has been brought into this Final Report.

Managing disproportionate response rates

As identified in this evaluation report, there were disproportionate response rates, for example:

- Queensland had a significantly higher response rate that other jurisdictions, with 43 per cent of total responses (almost three times that of the second highest jurisdiction, New South Wales).
- Non-school based stakeholders comprised many respondents with 58 per cent of total responses (for example, parents and other general members of the community).

Non-school based stakeholders had the most polarised views relating to the program, and school-based stakeholders generally provided more balanced and aligned views.

In an effort to minimise the impact of disproportionate response rates, dandolo:

- Controlled for jurisdiction and stakeholder group when analysing all quantitative data. For example, dandolo analysed responses from all jurisdictions with the exception of Queensland, and then analysed Queensland responses to check for alignment or difference.
- Where relevant, gave more weighting to different stakeholder groups. For example:

- Where questions related to the existing qualifications and accreditations of Chaplains, dandolo relied on responses from Chaplains and Chaplaincy providers (which were more aligned than the responses of parents or other school staff).

- Where questions related to the availability of Chaplains, dandolo relied more heavily on responses from Principals and Chaplaincy providers than other stakeholder groups.

Appendix D: Key trends impacting student wellbeing

This section expands on section 1 of the Final Report, exploring in more detail some of the key societal trends likely impacting the wellbeing of Australia's children and young people.

In an increasingly unstable world, and in the context of climate change, young people are increasingly concerned for the future

In recent years, Australians have experienced a series of large-scale disruptions, such as:

- The 2019-20 bushfire season, which was considered Australia's most destructive fire season on record.[55]
- The COVID-19 pandemic.
- The 2022 floods, which caused widespread destruction across southern Queensland and northern New South Wales.

Due to climate change, extreme weather-related events such as these are likely to become increasingly common and severe.

This is a reality that young people are particularly attune to. The Australian Institute for Disaster Resilience and World Vision conducted a survey of over 1,440 young Australians (aged 10-24 years) in 2020, which found that:

> *"…young people are deeply concerned about climate change. They are concerned about how climate change will impact their own lives and even more concerned about impacts that are far-reaching and universal."*[56]

There is growing evidence that young people are increasingly experiencing 'climate anxiety', feeling concerned and stressed about the future as their generation and future generations will be most affected by climate change.[57]

[55] Filkov, A.I., Ngo, T., Matthews, S.,Telfer,S. & Penman, T.D., 2022, 'Impact of Australia's Catastrophic 2019/20 Bushfire Season on Communities and Environment. Retrospective analysis and current trends', accessed 30 September: https://minerva-access.unimelb.edu.au/items/be47b59f-56c5-5703-8aaa-95f8a6962538.
[56] Australian Institute for Disaster Resilience, 2020, 'Our World Our Say, National survey of Children and Young People on Climate Change and Disaster Risk', accessed 30 September: https://www.aidr.org.au/media/7946/ourworldoursay-youth-survey-report-2020.pdf.
[57] Headspace, 2021, 'Supporting Your Young Person Experiencing Anxiety About Climate Change', accessed 30 September: https://headspace.org.au/explore-topics/supporting-a-young-person/anxiety-about-climate-change/#:~:text=Anxiety%20about%20climate%20change%3A%20common,done%20to%20create%20positive%20change.

Australian communities are becoming increasingly fragmented, with rising rates of inequality and declining participation in community associations

Rising inequality

Inequality is rising in Australia. A 2018 Productivity Commission report found that over the past 30 years income inequality has risen.[58] As the University of New South Wales and Australian Council of Social Services describe in their 2020 report, while average wealth in Australia is generally high, it is unevenly distributed:

> *"Prior to COVID-19, inequality in Australia in terms of income and wealth was extensive. Those in the highest 20% by household income had six times the incomes of those in the lowest 20%. Whilst average wealth in Australia was relatively high, it was distributed extremely unequally – those with the highest 20% of wealth had 90 times the wealth of those with the lowest 20%."* [59]

The longer-term impacts of COVID-19 on this trend are yet to be understood. While early evidence suggests wealth inequality decreased slightly throughout the pandemic, it is estimated the pandemic may further the gap between rich and poor over the longer term.[60]

There is growing evidence that the distribution of wealth is a key determinant of population health and wellbeing outcomes.[61] As health and wellbeing is shaped by the environments in which people live, those who experience increased poverty and/or disadvantage are more likely to experience poor health outcomes.[62]

Inequality poses a risk to social cohesion and connectedness, which also impacts health and wellbeing outcomes.[63] Social cohesion or social capital, which refers to societal trust and participation in associations, is another important driver of population health outcomes.[64]

Declining participation in community associations

In Australia, rates of participation in community organisations and associations are declining. ABS data shows that since 2010 there has been a general decrease in the proportion of people who are involved in

[58] Productivity Commission, 2018, 'Rising Inequality? A stocktake of the evidence', accessed 3 October: https://www.pc.gov.au/research/completed/rising-inequality/rising-inequality-highlights.pdf.
[59] Australian Council of Social Services and the University of New South Wales Sydney, 2020, 'Inequality in Australia 2020', p9, accessed 3 October: https://povertyandinequality.acoss.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Inequality-in-Australia-2020-Part-1_FINAL.pdf.
[60] Davidson, P., & Bradbury, B., 2022, 'The Wealth Inequality Pandemic: COVID and Wealth Inequality ACOSS/UNSW Sydney Poverty and Inequality' accessed 30 September: https://povertyandinequality.acoss.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/The-wealth-inequality-pandemic_COVID-and-wealth-inequality_screen.pdf ; Sheil, C., 'Widening Fault Lines: Covid-19's Effect on Wealth Inequality', accessed 3 October: https://www.internationalaffairs.org.au/australianoutlook/widening-fault-lines-covid-19s-effect-on-wealth-inequality/.
[61] Kawachi, I., Kennedy, B., 1997, 'Health and Social Cohesion: Why Care About Income Inequality?', accessed 30 October: https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2126438/ ; Khambule, I., Siswana, B., 2020, 'How Inequalities Undermine Social Cohesion: A Case Study of South Africa', accessed 3 October: https://www.g20-insights.org/policy_briefs/inequalities-undermine-social-cohesion-case-study-south-africa/#:~:text=Recent%20studies%20have%20shown%20that,Rothstein%20and%20Uslaner%2C%202005.
[62] Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2022, 'Social Determinants of Health', accessed 2 October: https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/australias-health/social-determinants-of-health.
[63] Khambule, I., Siswana, B., 2020, 'How Inequalities Undermine Social Cohesion: A Case Study of South Africa', accessed 3 October: https://www.g20-insights.org/policy_briefs/inequalities-undermine-social-cohesion-case-study-south-africa/#:~:text=Recent%20studies%20have%20shown%20that,Rothstein%20and%20Uslaner%2C%202005.
[64] Chuang, YC., Chuang, KY., Yang, TH., 2013, 'Social Cohesion Matters in Health' accessed 3 October: https://equityhealthj.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/1475-9276-12-87.

social groups, community support groups and civic and political groups (for example, scouts or guides, sporting clubs and churches). Rates of volunteering have also decreased.[65] This is considered likely due to a lack of time people have outside of work and home commitments, as well as the rise in technology.[66]

This is leading to increased rates of social isolation and loneliness, and negatively impacting health and wellbeing.[67]

> *"All the health indicators say that the more we connect to people… the better the quality of our life and the more physically and mentally healthy we are..."* [68]

Declining participation in community associations may be contributing to rising rates of social isolation and loneliness among young people

Loneliness is an emerging public health issue, which may be linked to the decline of participation in community associations.

Social isolation and loneliness are public health problems which are particularly common among young people.[69] Loneliness is defined as a subjective feeling of social isolation (related more to the perceived quality rather than quantity of relationships).[70] It has been linked to poorer physical and mental health outcomes, and "sustained decreases in feelings of wellbeing."[71] Young adults are one of the groups most prone to social isolation and loneliness.[72]

Rates of loneliness are rising among young people and have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. A 2021 headspace survey found that more than one in two young people (54%) feel a sense of loneliness, an increase from 2018 (49%). The rise in loneliness was particularly significant in those aged 12-14 years, rising from 41% in 2018 to 53% in 2020.[73]

It is possible that the rise in loneliness may be linked to the decline in participation in community associations. The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare recognises that:

> *"Engaging in volunteer work and maintaining active memberships of sporting or community organisations are… associated with reduced social isolation."*[74]

[65] Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2019, 'General Social Survey: Summary Results, Australia', accessed 3 October: https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/people-and-communities/general-social-survey-summary-results-australia/2019.
[66] CreatingCommmunities, 2018, 'The Decline of Our Community Clubs', accessed 3 October: https://www.creatingcommunities.com.au/commonfutures/articles/the-decline-of-our-community-clubs.
[67] Ibid.
[68] Ibid.
[69] Lim, MH., Eres, R., Peck, C., 2019, 'The Young Australian Loneliness Survey, Understanding Loneliness in Adolescence and Young Adulthood', accessed 3 October: https://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/-/media/ResourceCentre/PublicationsandResources/Social-connection/The-young-Australian-loneliness-survey-Report.pdf?la=en&hash=94F3B075524F419C67901C4E5741F2DF9D29BF2A.
[70] Ibid.
[71] Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2021, 'Social Isolation and Loneliness', accessed 3 October: https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/australias-welfare/social-isolation-and-loneliness-covid-pandemic.
[72] Ibid.
[73] Headspace, 2020, 'Loneliness Over Time', accessed 3 October: https://headspace.org.au/assets/HSP10869-Loneliness-Report_FA01.pdf.
[74] Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2021, 'Social Isolation and Loneliness', accessed 3 October: https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/australias-welfare/social-isolation-and-loneliness-covid-pandemic.

The Professor of Public Health at the University of Melbourne's School of Population and Global Health articulates how the declining role of community associations may be contributing to social isolation and loneliness:

> *"One of the key ways for people to support their mental health is their capacity to be a part of a group or collective, which promotes a sense of identity, inclusion and belonging. Historically, there were relatively stronger community-based organisations and large associations—such as the Returned and Services League, Scouts and Guides, and Country Women's Association—that promoted and supported social connectedness... As the strength and membership of these social institutions and associations have started to decline, so too have people's feelings of belonging and community. With the increasing atomisation of our society over the coming decades, people may find it increasingly difficult to achieve a feeling of belonging."* [75]

Mental health and wellbeing challenges are becoming increasingly common in children and young people

An increasing proportion of children and young people are experiencing mental health challenges. A 2020 Mission Australia and Black Dog Institute survey, which involved 25,800 responses from young people aged 15 to 19 years found that since 2012 the proportion of young people experiencing psychological distress has risen from one in every five to one in every four.[76] The Australian Institute of Health and Wellbeing (AIHW) also reported that between 2010 and 2019, among young people aged 15-24 the rate of death by suicide increased from 10 per 100,000 young people to 14 per 100,000.[77]

[75] Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System, 2020, 'Witness Statement of Alan Rob Moodie', accessed 3 October: http://rcvmhs.archive.royalcommission.vic.gov.au/Moodie_Rob.pdf.
[76] Brennan, N., Beames, J. R, Kos, A., Reily, N., Connell, C., Hall, S., Yip, D., Hudson, J., O'Dea, B., Di Nicola, K., & Christie, R., 2021, 'Psychological Distress in Young People in Australia Fifth Biennial Youth Mental Health Report: 2012-202' Mission Australia: Sydney, NSW, page 6.
[77] Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2021, 'Australia's Youth: Mental Illness', accessed 4 October: https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/children-youth/mental-illness.