

MEDIA RELEASE

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For immediate release

Social workers missing from the National Health Professional Registration and Accreditation Scheme

Social workers have welcomed the extension of the National Registration and Accreditation Scheme (NRAS) to include four health professions and are today announcing the launch of a campaign to see social work included in the scheme.

The AASW is baffled about why social workers who make up the largest allied health profession in Australia's hospitals and community health centres, have never been considered for national registration. There are approximately 20,000 social workers in Australia, and only 1 in 3 of these is a member of their professional association, the Australian Association of Social Workers (AASW).

AASW National President Professor Karen Healy said, "The social work profession has been self-regulated through the AASW for sixty-five years however at most, only one third of social workers practicing are regulated through the AASW. Legally we cannot account for nor can we sanction the two thirds who are not members."

Social workers work with the most vulnerable and marginalised members of our communities. These most at risk citizens are currently the least protected, as social workers remain unregistered despite considerable evidence provided to governments about the harm done by poor practitioners.

AASW CEO Glenys Wilkinson said, "The AASW and its members will campaign in the coming weeks to have social workers included in scheme. The profession successfully campaigned against its exclusion from the Better Access to Mental Health care program in 2010 and will work hard to ensure social work clients receive the same safeguard and protections as clients of physiotherapy, psychology, occupational therapy and other health professions."

AASW Spokesperson on registration, Kandie Allen-Kelly cautioned, "The omission of social workers from the NRAS leaves thousands of Australians unprotected from poor and negligent practice by social workers. There are countless examples of the harm that poor social work practice, from sexual misconduct to practicing without being appropriately skilled and supervised, can cause to a vulnerable person's mental health. Today we ask Australian Governments to rectify this by voting to extend the national registration and accreditation scheme at their next meeting."

From July 1, 2012 Occupational Therapists, Medical Radiation Practitioners, Chinese Medicine Practitioners and Aboriginal Health Workers have joined the existing ten professions in the national registration scheme.

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