



**AASW**

**Australian Association  
of Social Workers**

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## *Federal Election 2019 Policy Platform*

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## Who we are

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The Australian Association of Social Workers (AASW) is the professional body representing more than 11,000 social workers throughout Australia. We set the benchmark for professional education and practice in social work, and advocate on matters of human rights, discrimination, and matters that influence people's quality of life.

## The social work profession

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Social work is a tertiary-qualified profession recognised internationally that pursues social justice and human rights. Social workers aim to enhance the quality of life of every member of society and empower them to develop their full potential. Principles of social justice, human rights, collective responsibility and respect for diversity are central to the profession, and are underpinned by theories of social work, social sciences, humanities and Indigenous knowledges. Professional social workers consider the relationship between biological, psychological, social and cultural factors and how they influence a person's health, wellbeing and development. Social workers work with individuals, families, groups and communities. They maintain a dual focus on improving human wellbeing; and identifying and addressing any external issues (known as systemic or structural issues) that detract from wellbeing, such as inequality, injustice and discrimination.

## **Federal Election 2019: Key social work professional issues**

### **Guarantee of workforce quality**

Australia is the only English-speaking country which does not require social workers to be registered to ensure public protection. The AASW has been advocating for the statutory regulation of social workers. This will protect the public by ensuring that people working as social workers have completed an accredited social work degree, that they have the required competencies and that they maintain their level of skill. The AASW has welcomed the legislation that was introduced into the South Australian Legislative Council last year by the Hon Tammy Franks MLC; and is continuing to advocate for federal statutory registration to strengthen professional accountability and protect the public.

### **Platform**

- That the next government introduce legislation providing for the regulation of social work in Australia.

### **References**

[AASW Position Paper: Child wellbeing and protection - November 2013](#)

[AASW Media Release: AASW calls for registration of all social workers, leading up to SA state election - 28 February 2018](#)

### **Medicare, mental health and social workers' role**

The Mental Health Reference Group of the Medicare Benefits Schedule Review Taskforce was formed in June 2018. The AASW supports Better Access as a mechanism to meet the mental health needs of many people. Following consultation with AASW members in private practice and providing services under Medicare, the AASW has made a number of submissions to the Review Taskforce, and has recommended that:

- people have access to more sessions under Better Access
- all residents in residential aged care facilities be able to access appropriate Mental Health services with a referral from a General Practitioner
- any government communication or publication about Better Access refers to AMHSWs specifically, alongside the other professional groups who also deliver the Better Access program
- there be parity in the rate of Medicare rebate paid to psychologists and social workers
- the removal of the 3-tier rebate schedule.

The AASW endorses the recommendation of the Mental Health Reference Group, that Better Access be Extended to include people who are 'at risk'.

### **Platform**

- That the next government accept and implement these recommendations by the Mental Health Reference Group.

### **References**

[AASW Position Paper: Social work and mental health position paper - September 2012](#)

[AASW Submission to Medicare Benefits Schedule Review Re: Mental Health Items - July 2018](#)

[AASW Media Release: AMHSWs are experts in complexity, new report published today says - 19 March 2019](#)

## Our vision for a just society

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The AASW's vision is for a cohesive, inclusive and just society in which it is possible for everyone to thrive, flourish and develop their full potential. Such a society enhances the wellbeing of every member, respects diversity, enables people to address life's challenges and promotes human rights. It is the role of government to create and maintain the environmental, social and economic foundations which enable all of us to pursue those goals, paying attention to the most vulnerable members of society. The election is the primary opportunity for candidates and parties to describe their proposals for doing this.

Every day, social workers observe how decisions of government effect the quality of life of vulnerable people including, but not limited to: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, children and young people, older Australians, people living with a disability or illness, people seeking asylum, people without secure housing, people on low incomes and those experiencing unemployment. Therefore, the AASW will judge the success of the positions adopted by candidates and parties according to how they will effect the wellbeing and the human rights of the people with whom we work. The AASW calls on the next Australian government to address:

- Reconciliation
- Refugees and people seeking asylum
- Mental health
- People living with disability and the NDIS
- Income support and employment programs
- Housing
- Aged care
- Family violence
- Redress
- Sustainability and the Sustainable Development Goals

## Reconciliation

### Self-determination

The Uluru Statement from the Heart represents the results of a year of consultations and discussion conducted by the referendum council at the request of the then Prime Minister. On this basis, it presented a unanimous recommendation for a formal advisory body. At the time the AASW condemned the instant dismissal of the proposal by the then Prime Minister. The AASW CEO Ms Cindy Smith said: "This was not a radical suggestion. On the contrary, it was a necessary step in shaping a just and inclusive society." The AASW maintains that this is still the case, and calls on the next government to return to the Uluru Statement with a view to implementing it.

### Closing the Gap

The latest Close the Gap progress report demonstrates that staggering levels of inequality persist across many areas including health, education and employment outcomes. The AASW welcomes last year's review of the Close the Gap campaign and the COAG Statement on Closing the Gap Refresh<sup>1</sup>. The AASW has consistently argued that governments need to work with Indigenous communities in partnership and collaboration, at every step in the Close the Gap strategy, drawing upon their knowledge and expertise<sup>2</sup>. The statement commits the Commonwealth to co-design an action plan for each target. Central to these action plans will be the Implementation principles, which have also been endorsed by COAG. These are: shared decision making, place-based responses, evidence and accountability, targeted investment, and integrated systems. The AASW shares the view in the COAG Statement the previous Closing the Gap strategy perpetuated a deficit-based view of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples instead of promoting the strength and agency within Indigenous communities.

### Children's right to culture

Currently, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are 9.8 times more likely to be removed from their family than other children. This significant injustice has profound consequences which extend beyond the trauma it causes for children and their families. It often results in breaking the connection between the child and their community, their country and their culture. It furthers entrenches the intergenerational trauma experienced by many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Although the AASW welcomes the creation of a new Closing the Gap target to decrease the rate of removal, we recognise that progress will take time. Aboriginal children should be placed with Aboriginal families. This is the central idea of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle in all states and territories.

### Platform

- That the next government establish a Voice to Parliament as described in the Uluru Statement from The Heart
- That the next federal government immediately start work on the action plans required under Closing the Gap Refresh, detailing how they conform with the implementation principles
- That the next federal government initiate measures through COAG to make states accountable for their achievements against the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle.

### References

[AASW Statement: 'Recognise'](#) - March 2015

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.coag.gov.au/sites/default/files/communique/coag-statement-closing-the-gap-refresh.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> [https://closingthegaprefresh.pmc.gov.au/sites/default/files/submissions/association\\_of\\_social\\_workers.pdf](https://closingthegaprefresh.pmc.gov.au/sites/default/files/submissions/association_of_social_workers.pdf)

[AASW Media Release: Close the Gap Day 2018: AASW renews its call for a greater focus on social justice and reconciliation](#) - 15 March 2018

[AASW Media Release: International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples 2018](#) - 9 August 2018

[AASW Podcast: International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples](#) - 9 August 2018

[AASW Media Release: Local adoption report published: A time to recommit to the best interests and cultural rights of Indigenous children](#) - 27 November 2018

## Refugees and people seeking asylum

### Seeking asylum is a human right

Australia has obligations to protect the human rights of refugees and people seeking asylum, regardless of how and where in Australia they arrive and whether or not they arrive with a visa. Whether or not people are subsequently found to meet the definition of a refugee, Australia has obligations under the Refugee Convention, to neither return people nor to send them to countries where they would face a real risk of a breach of their human rights<sup>3</sup>.

### Platform

- That the next government introduce procedures and services for people seeking asylum and refugees which meet our international obligations on human rights, protect and promote the human rights of people seeking asylum and refugees; and which ensure humane, effective care while they await a decision.

### References

[AASW Position Paper: Asylum Seekers and Refugees - February 2012](#)

[AASW Media Release: AASW calls on Government to end its human rights abuses in Australia, as it takes its seat on the UN Human Rights Council](#) - 1 March 2018

[AASW Media Release: Treatment of asylum seekers must be an election issue, says AASW](#) - 19 June 2018

## Mental health

### Interface with other sectors

The experience of social workers is that the introduction of the NDIS has opened significant gaps for people who were previously deemed eligible for services from organisations with a broad remit but who have been deemed ineligible for services under the NDIS. A clear example concerns the distinction between mental health and psycho-social disability. Social workers have observed inconsistencies in the way services distinguish between mental health and psycho-social disability. This causes protracted disputes between different segments of the service system and exacerbates the poor quality of life for many vulnerable people. The AASW calls on the next government to address the interface between the NDIS and the mental health sector and to ensure that people have immediate access to the services they need.

### Primary Health Network (PHN) reform

The AASW welcomes the recent announcement of funding stability for PHNs for the next three years, allowing for the continuation of services that are already established and operating successfully<sup>4</sup>. Nevertheless, there are still elements of their operation which need to be refined, if PHNs are to effectively fulfil their role of identifying and addressing needs. This is particularly the case with respect to mental health. The recent review of PHN's ability to address mental health identified that they need to be

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.humanrights.gov.au/our-work/asylum-seekers-and-refugees/asylum-seekers-and-refugees-guide>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.greghunt.com.au/1-45-billion-to-strengthen-mental-health-services-and-support-job-security/>

able to commission services that address the social determinants of mental health, and to interact more effectively with drug and alcohol services.<sup>5</sup>

### **Prevention and early intervention**

The current Productivity Commission inquiry into The Social and Economic Benefits of Improving Mental health will build on previous reviews of weaknesses in the current health service system and the effectiveness of the current model of stepped care. The AASW submission draws on the important contribution that social workers make to prevention of and early intervention into mental ill-health, by enhancing the people's strengths and advocating for services, regardless of the setting in which they are working. The AASW endorses the vision expressed in the Fifth National Mental Health Plan (NMHP) and its vision of 'stepped care' as the basis for services. The experience of social workers is that services in sectors other than health actually function as platforms for prevention of and early intervention into mental ill-health. Therefore, the AASW calls for greater recognition of the importance of prevention and early intervention role of the whole service sector in future mental health planning.

### **Services in rural and remote locations**

The recent Senate Inquiry into Accessibility and Quality of Mental Health Services in Rural and Remote Australia heard evidence concerning a wide range of challenges that these communities experience in gaining access to appropriate mental health services. The AASW welcomes the introduction of telehealth as a platform for mental health services. Social workers are amongst the many allied health professions who are concerned that this response is entirely dependent on the quality of the available internet connections.

### **So-called conversion therapy**

The AASW supports and promotes the rights of same-sex attracted, intersex and gender diverse people wherever they live. As part of addressing discrimination and homophobia, the AASW has denounced practices that fall under title of conversion therapy. The only evidence base relating to any of these activities is that they do harm to people who may already be experiencing condemnation or discrimination.

### **Platform**

- That the next government commit to implementing the recommendations of the PHN Advisory Panel on Mental Health, with a focus on the social determinants of mental health
- That the next government commit to implementing the recommendations of the current Productivity inquiry into The Social and Economic Benefits of Improving Mental Health without interfering with other reforms which are currently underway
- That the next government set a priority to guarantee reliable telephone and internet connections to all rural and remote communities to facilitate mental health service delivery
- That the next government legislate to ban so-called 'conversion therapy'.

### **References**

[AASW Position Paper: Social work and mental health - August 2012](#)

[AASW Submission to Medicare Benefits Schedule Review Re: Mental Health Items - July 2018](#)

[AASW Media Release: AMHSWs are experts in complexity, new report published today says](#) - 19 March 2019

[AASW Media Release: Social workers urge Australians to challenge assumptions and stereotypes on World Mental Health Day](#) - 10 October 2018

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<sup>5</sup> Report of the PHN Advisory Panel on Mental Health

## **People living with disability and the NDIS**

### **Workforce capacity**

The AASW welcomes the NDIS as a rights-based approach that supports the independence and the social and economic participation of people with a permanent impairment or condition resulting in disability. Social workers' observation that participants are not always achieving their goals because of a lack of capacity in key roles in the system has been confirmed by the figures in the Federal Budget that the NDIS has not spent all the money that was allocated to it. This is not the result of lower levels of need, but a direct indication that the system does not have the capacity to formulate and implement appropriate plans and services for participants.

The AASW notes that the government has recently released a workforce strategy: Growing the NDIS Market and Workforce. This document contains few new measures beyond publishing data on the workforce. It does not address the underlying issues that contribute to creating and maintaining a workforce of qualified, and skilled people. This need is particularly acute with respect to the key areas of need amongst vulnerable groups: people whose first language is not English, people in remote locations and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

### **Interface with other sectors**

Social workers have observed many instances where services have been withdrawn by non-NDIS providers in the mistaken assumption that the NDIS would supply them, this has been particularly concerning in domains where there are definitional issues. For instance, the distinction between poor mental health, and psycho-social disability has proven to be difficult to define. Protracted disputes between different segments of the service system are exacerbating the poor quality of life for many vulnerable people. The AASW calls on the next government to attend to the interface between the NDIS and the mental health sector and to ensure that people have immediate access to the services they need.

### **Royal Commission into Violence, Neglect and Abuse of people in the Disability Care Sector**

The AASW welcomes the announcement of this Royal Commission and the allocation of a budget for it. As an opportunity for people who live with a disability and their carers to tell their story, it will show the weaknesses of the previous and current care systems and provide important guidance on system reform.

### **Platform**

- That the next government commit to a national strategy to address long-term workforce capacity issues in the NDIS
- That the next government address the system interface issues faced by people with psycho-social disability and the mental health system, the drug and alcohol service sector
- That the next government commit to implementing the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Violence, Neglect and Abuse of People in the Disability Care Sector.



## References

[AASW Submission to the Productivity Commission Re: National Disability Insurance Scheme \(NDIS\) Costs - March 2017](https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Joint/National_Disability_Insurance_Scheme/MarketReadiness/Submissions)  
[https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary\\_Business/Committees/Joint/National\\_Disability\\_Insurance\\_Scheme/MarketReadiness/Submissions](https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Joint/National_Disability_Insurance_Scheme/MarketReadiness/Submissions)

## Income Support

### The right to a minimum standard of living

The Social Policy Research Centre (SPRC) has calculated the amount of money that is required to provide a minimally adequate standard of living: the Minimum Income for Healthy Living (MIHL). For a single adult with no children, the level of the MIHL is \$433 and for a couple with two children, it is \$814 each week<sup>6</sup>.

It is obvious that the current levels of Newstart and Youth Allowance falls far short of these levels. Even when the amounts of family payments and rent assistance (and \$4/week energy supplement) are added, the combined income from allowances is significantly below the amount required for an adequate minimum standard of living.

This shortfall has serious consequences for every aspect of the lives of people forced to rely on government income support. Recent data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) confirms that low income households cannot currently afford necessities such as rent, food, energy, transport and health.<sup>7</sup>

There is a broad consensus that lifting the level of Newstart would have flow-on benefits for the economy and for the wellbeing of the community.<sup>8</sup> Our own research into student poverty found that 27 per cent of social work students indicated that the low level of financial study support from the government increased the likelihood of dropping out of the course; this percentage grew to 45 per cent for the full-time students who were experiencing ongoing financial difficulty<sup>9</sup>.

### The right to self-determination

Contrary to the government's assertion, there is no reliable evidence that compulsory income management is effective in reducing social harm<sup>10</sup>. The Australian National Audit Office has concluded that the evaluation commissioned by the Department of Social Services was inadequate. The card has been introduced without any consultation with the people who will be subjected to it; and these people have now provided evidence to the Senate of the harm that it has caused them and their chances of finding work. Indeed, the people who have been forced onto the card have experienced that it is a source of indirect discrimination against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

### Inadequacy of current employment programs

The employment programs of the current government are ineffective, punitive and unjust. The government's own report into the Community Development program demonstrates that it is widening the gap in outcomes for people in remote communities. Similarly, ParentsNext is problematic on every level. Despite ostensibly being employment services, they are based on prejudiced assumptions about groups who are vulnerable and they assume that these people must be controlled. Their operations lack transparency and create bureaucratic tangles, with harsh, unfair real-life effects. ParentsNext has also been condemned in the Senate report which investigated it.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Australian Council of Social Service, *The cost of living a decent life: New report highlights the inadequacies of income support for low paid and unemployed Australians*, Media release, 23 August 2017

<sup>7</sup> Australian Council of Social Service, *New figures are a wakeup call to government*, Media Release, 14 September 2017

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.acoss.org.au/raisetherate/>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.aasw.asn.au/document/item/8772>

<sup>10</sup> [https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary\\_Business/Committees/Senate/Community\\_Affairs/CDCTrialExpansion/Report/d02](https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Senate/Community_Affairs/CDCTrialExpansion/Report/d02)

<sup>11</sup> [https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary\\_Business/Committees/Senate/Community\\_Affairs/ParentsNext/Report](https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Senate/Community_Affairs/ParentsNext/Report)

In response, the government has recently announced a New Employment Services program which overturns some of the worst elements of the current regime. Nevertheless, it falls short of the complete overhaul that is required to assist vulnerable people acquire skills and to create meaningful jobs in accessible locations. Its reliance on digital platforms risks excluding people who do not have access to the internet, or who are not comfortable using digital technology. More importantly, the new services continue the automated penalties for non-compliance which are often applied in error and without any human intervention. As we have seen in the Automated Debt recovery process and ParentsNext, this frequently results in harsh and unjust results for people who are already surviving on extremely low incomes and resources.

### **Platform**

- That the next government immediately increase the rate at which allowances for people of working age are paid to equal the amounts specified in the Minimum Income for Healthy Living
- That the next government abolish compulsory income management and replace it with voluntary drug and alcohol services, services for people with gambling addictions and community-based investment incentive instruments
- That the next government scrap the system of automated digital compliance in the new model and base the assistance for people to get new skills and find a job on a humane, respectful, strengths-based service.
- That the new government abolish the Community Development Program and ParentsNext and instigate respectful strengths-based job search assistance and effective job creation programs.

### **References**

[JCU and AASW: National Study of Social Work Students: Briefing Paper - Important emerging findings - June 2016](#)

[AASW Media Release: Tuesday night's Budget prioritised hip pocket savings over real help for Australia's most disadvantaged](#) - 11 May 2018

[AASW Media Release: Increasing income support would have made a better Budget than tax cuts, say Australian social workers](#) - 3 April 2019

## **Housing**

### **The right to housing**

The serious shortfall of affordable housing continues to affect the health, educational, employment, and emotional wellbeing of individuals, families and communities. Declining housing affordability is directly associated with increased numbers of people experiencing or at risk of homelessness. Social workers directly assist vulnerable people to locate and maintain safe, secure and affordable housing but are experiencing increasing difficulties in achieving these outcomes. For women and children escaping family violence, people without stable employment and for older single women without secure income, the severe lack of affordable housing has serious consequences for physical safety and mental health.<sup>12</sup>.

### **Platform**

- That the next government implements a plan to end homelessness, paying particular attention to women and children needing to escape from family violence, and older single women.
- That the next government reforms laws around rent rises and evictions to increase security for renters.
- That the next government increases Commonwealth rent assistance to low income people.

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<sup>12</sup> <https://everybodyshome.com.au/>

## References

[AASW Media Release: Australian social workers recognise National Homelessness Week 2018 - 6 August 2018](#)

[AASW Media Release: Immediate action needed to address increasing homelessness, says AASW on World Homeless Day - 10 October 2018](#)

[AASW Position Statement: Housing Affordability - August 2015](#)

[AASW Position Statement: Homelessness - October 2008](#)

## Aged care

### The quality of aged care services

Social workers are integral to services that cater for the health and wellbeing of older Australians in all settings across the aged care continuum including government, non-government organisations, hospitals, health settings and private practice. Social workers are skilled in recognising people's strengths as the first step in building capacity and creating opportunities for change, in people and in organisations. While social work has a long tradition of working in aged care, the push for aged care facilities to make a profit means that social work, alongside many other trained professions, has been marginalised in these settings. Having submitted to multiple inquiries into the quality and safety aged care during 2018, the AASW welcomes the commencement of the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety<sup>13</sup>. The AASW anticipates that implementing the recommendations will require a significant commitment which should be factored in to the government's planning.

### Mental health support to people in residential aged care

The Better Access initiative aims to improve treatment and management of mental illness within the community. It was introduced to assist people living with mild to moderate conditions such as depression or anxiety. However, residents of aged care facilities are not eligible for services under Better Access, despite there being no evidence that they experience these conditions at a lower rate than any other group in the community. People living in residential aged care may find it difficult to access external supports due to financial, physical and cognitive constraints.

### Elder abuse

The AASW has repeatedly called for a national strategy against elder abuse and welcomed last year's announcement of the government's intention to develop a national action plan to prevent it. The AASW said that the plan needs to encompass physical, emotional and financial abuse. The AASW National President, Ms Christine Craik said: "As with child abuse and family violence, elder abuse is primarily about power and control and it needs to be acknowledged that it can be perpetrated within quite different types of 'relationships of trust', including family members or friends, paid service providers/care workers."<sup>14</sup>

### Platform

- That the next government create and implement a national strategy to prevent elder abuse
- That the next government commit to implementing the forthcoming Recommendations from the Royal Commission into the Aged Care quality and Safety
- That the next government introduce a budget measure and policy change to ensure equitable access to mental health services for residents of aged care facilities.

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<sup>13</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2019/jan/18/aged-care-royal-commission-begins-with-emphasis-on-rising-torrent-of-concern>

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.aasw.asn.au/news-media/media-releases-2018/elder-abuse-takes-many-forms-and-requires-a-community-response-says-aasw-on-world-elder-abuse-awareness-day>

## References

[AASW Position Paper: Ageing in Australia - April 2013](#)

[AASW Media Release: Australian social workers welcome the Royal Commission into aged care](#) - 19 September 2018

[AASW Media Release: AASW strongly supports national strategy to stop elder abuse](#) - 22 February 2018

[AASW Media Release: Elder abuse takes many forms and requires a community response, says AASW on World Elder Abuse Awareness Day](#) - 15 June 2018

## Redress

The National Redress Scheme for Survivors of Institutional Child Sexual Abuse falls far short of the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse. Although there has been much attention on the amount of compensation payable, each of the three components of redress contains shortcomings. At the time the legislation was introduced, the AASW submitted that the third element of the scheme should be extended to families. The AASW continues to maintain that that the personal meeting and apology should be available to the families of people who were abused, especially in instances where the abused person has subsequently died. Social workers observe that the guilt and distress caused by child sexual abuse reverberate across families and through generations; and that the family members also deserve redress from the institutions who protected abusers.

### Platform

- That the next government commit to reform the Redress Scheme so that it conforms with the recommendations of the Royal Commission
- That the next government legislate to extend the availability of the personal statement and apology to family members, regardless of whether the person who was abused is still alive.

## References

[AASW Media Release: AASW urges a strengthening of the proposed redress scheme for survivors of institutional sexual abuse](#) - 15 February 2018

[AASW Media Release: Child Protection Week 2018: AASW renews its call for greater investment in early intervention and workforce regulation](#) - 31 August 2018

## Family violence

Family violence is a gendered crime: it is most commonly perpetrated by men, against women, it also deeply affects children. The causes of family violence are complex, and include factors that operate at the individual level as well as across the whole of society. Factors such as community attitudes towards women and gender inequality are experienced across all aspects of a woman's life, even if she is not directly subjected to violence against herself. Governments can address gender inequality by adequately funding primary, secondary and tertiary programs across a range of settings so that the work of preventing violence against women and supporting women who have experienced family violence is integrated into all levels of society. A comprehensive guide to the reforms that are needed across the service system is contained in the recommendations of the Victorian Royal Commission into Family Violence.

### Platform

- That the next federal government commit to implementing the recommendations of the Senate report on: "A Better Family Law System to Support and Protect Those Affected by Family Violence", and the Australian Law Reform Commission's First Comprehensive Review of the Family Law Act

- That the next government commit to using the recommendations of the Victorian Royal Commission into Family Violence as a blueprint for national systemic reforms.

## References

[AASW Position Paper: Domestic and Family Violence - July 2011](#)

[AASW Submission to Parliamentary inquiry into a better family law system to support and protect those affected by family violence - May 2017](#)

## Sustainability

### Implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) provide an important mechanism through which the Australian government can address some of the biggest challenges currently facing Australia, and the world, with a particular focus on human rights and social justice. The implementation of the SDGs seeks to provide meaningful and sustainable solutions to addressing the major challenges we are facing at a local and global level. For example, the SDGs that focus on poverty, inequality and climate change would have numerous benefits to domestic social, environmental and economic issues. The Senate's report on the Sustainable Development cites the AASW's submission which highlighted the importance of a whole-of-government approach and calls for greater accountability <sup>15</sup>.

### Climate change and social justice

The responsibility of government to create the conditions under which everyone can flourish and thrive encompasses the natural environment as well as the social and economic conditions. The changes confronting Australia's environment as a result of global warming are already profound and extensive, making climate policy an urgent responsibility of the next government. Social workers observe that although the consequences of climate change are affecting the entire population, the economic and social burden is falling most heavily on already vulnerable people. A clear example is that low income households spend a larger proportion of their budget on energy: the heating and cooling required to cope with the increasingly extreme weather. Despite this, the subsidies and benefits to improve energy efficiency target homeowners, with limited availability to people who pay rent. For social workers, climate change is a social justice issue.

### Platform

- That the next government provide regular indicator-based assessments to parliament tracking Australia's performance against the Sustainable Development Goals
- That the next government adopt a climate change policy which ensures that the costs associated with a changing climate are distributed equitably.

## References

[https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary\\_Business/Committees/Senate/Foreign\\_Affairs\\_Defence\\_and\\_Trade/SDGs/Submissions](https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Senate/Foreign_Affairs_Defence_and_Trade/SDGs/Submissions)

## Conclusion

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Social workers work with many of the vulnerable people whose quality of life will be affected by measures that are within the control of the next government. The AASW calls on the next Federal government to start work on these measures as their highest priority, the day after the election result is announced; and looks forward to working with the next government to implement them.

Submitted by and on behalf of the Australian Association of Social Workers.

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<sup>15</sup>[https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary\\_Business/Committees/Senate/Foreign\\_Affairs\\_Defence\\_and\\_Trade/SDGs/Report/b01](https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Senate/Foreign_Affairs_Defence_and_Trade/SDGs/Report/b01)



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