

Tasmania election statement 2021

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AASW

.....
Australian Association
of Social Workers

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The Australian Association of Social Workers

The Australian Association of Social Workers (AASW) is the professional body representing more than 14,000 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

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.

Our vision for a just society

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 enjoy those rights along with all the other rights enshrined in documents ratified by the Commonwealth government, paying attention to the most vulnerable members of society.

Every day, social workers observe how decisions of government affect the quality of life of vulnerable people including, but not limited to: Aboriginal and/or 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 positions adopted by candidates and parties according to how they will impact the wellbeing and the human rights of the people with whom we work.

The AASW calls on the next Tasmanian government to address:

1. Social Work Registration
2. Child Safety Services
3. Health and Well-being of Children and Young People
4. Homelessness
5. Domestic and Family Violence (DFV)
6. Reconciliation
7. Climate Action

Social Work Registration

Australia is the only English-speaking country which does not require social workers to be registered to ensure public protection. The AASW has been strongly advocating for the statutory regulation of social workers and will continue to do so in all Australian states and territories.

As social workers, we are on the front lines of child and family support and see the daily reality of an inequitably regulated sector and the devastating impacts this can have. An immediate measure that all governments can take is to improve the training and skills of the child protection workforce.

Families come into the child protection system due to a complex set of circumstances and it is vital that they receive supports from highly trained and skilled professionals. Unfortunately, as several Coroner's reports from across Australia, including reports on the tragic deaths of Mason Jet Lee and Chloe Valentine, continue to highlight, this is not the case.

The registration of the social work profession 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 welcomes the legislation that was introduced into the South Australian parliament by the Hon. Tammy Franks, Member of the South Australian Legislative Council for the Australian Greens. This Bill is now before the South Australian parliament for the statutory registration of social workers that would assure public safety, professional quality and accountability of the child protection workforce.

We refer the next Tasmanian government to the report by the South Australian Parliamentary Committee on Social Work Registration Bill 2018 (SA) which details a potential model for the incoming Tasmanian government to legislate for a registration scheme for the social work profession. We are continuing to advocate for statutory registration to strengthen professional accountability and protect all members of the Tasmanian community.

AASW platform

- That the incoming Tasmanian government commit to legislate for a registration scheme for the profession of Social Work in Tasmania.

Child Safety Services

With our commitment to the best interests of children, social workers respond to the critical issues of ensuring the safety and wellbeing of children and young people, and in particular, the most vulnerable children and young people in our community.

The AASW agrees with the Commissioner for Children and Young People, Tasmania, that the human services systems remain largely geared towards 'later, tertiary, and crisis-driven intervention'. Our members advise us that there is a severe shortage of resources in the family support and child protection systems, from early intervention to intake, assessment, and for foster care and residential care placements. They are concerned that this is undermining the ability of these systems to improve the health and life outcomes of vulnerable children and families.

AASW members have reported that the Child Safety Services are so severely underfunded that Child Safety Officers manage an unacceptably high number of cases, many of which are highly complex. In these circumstances, the considerable time and concerted effort that professional staff need to ensure effective family support or therapeutic services for children, are not available. As a result, there has been a 37 per cent increase in the number of children and young people in out-of-home care in Tasmania since 2011.¹

Our members have reported that some children and young people with complex needs resulting from severe trauma have been rejected from out of home care services because of their ongoing behavioural and emotional challenges, contributing to their eventual homelessness. This has been further supported by the evidence that 47.9% of unassisted requests to specialist homelessness services are related to children and young people under 18 years old. While we welcome the enshrinement of the child's best interest in the *Children, Young Persons and their Families Act 1997* (TAS), the legislation does not include the provision of housing as one of the elements of a child or young person's best interests, meaning that many children and young people with high level complex needs become homeless as a consequence of being taken into state care. This piece of legislation needs to be expanded to include safe housing as a matter of urgency. The AASW recommends that the Act should introduce a 'right to housing' approach to prevent children and young people from becoming homeless after leaving the child protection system.

In addition, our pre-budget submission 2021-22 listed other areas of the social service system that need to be adequately funded in order to ensure that children in out-of-home care are not further traumatised by the system. These areas include; the lack of therapeutic and trauma-informed support for vulnerable children, the inadequacy of trauma-informed training and financial supports for foster care providers, the lack of transition programs for young people leaving care; and the lack of flexibility for out-of-home-care service providers to deliver diverse housing options for young people leaving care. Overall, the AASW concludes that the Tasmanian child protection and out of

¹ <https://www.childcomm.tas.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/Investing-in-the-Wellbeing-of-Tasmanias-Children-and-Young-People.pdf>. p. 4

home care systems need a wholesale overhaul to institute a trauma- informed approach to protecting children and young people.

AASW Platform

- That the next Tasmanian government provide sustained and adequate funding to the professional development of the Child Safety workforce and address the ongoing staffing issues.
- That the next Tasmanian government provide additional funding to comprehensive, holistic and sustained early intervention services to support vulnerable families.
- That the next Tasmanian government commit to provide appropriate level of resources to Child Safety Service.
- That the next Tasmanian government review the current funding agreements with community services and fund new services to ensure that OOHC options can meet the needs of young people and children in care who are at risk of homelessness.
- That the next Tasmanian government expand the *Children, Young Persons and their Families Act 1997* (TAS) to enshrine the right to housing for children and young people.

Relevant AASW position

- AASW position papers and statements: '*Child wellbeing and protection position paper*'

<https://www.aasw.asn.au/document/item/2215>

- Media release

<https://www.aasw.asn.au/news-media/media-releases-2018/child-protection-week-2018-aasw-renews-its-call-for-greater-investment-in-early-intervention-and-workforce-regulation>

- AASW submissions

Refer to link below for more submissions around children, families and young people

<https://www.aasw.asn.au/social-policy-advocacy/by-issue/children-families-and-young-people>

Health and Well-being of Children and Young People

The AASW subscribes to the belief that the safety and development of children and young people are the shared responsibility of the entire community. Social workers feature strongly in the services which are responsible for the health and wellbeing of children and young people, including schools, youth mental health, family supports and other government and non-government health services.

The AASW is concerned that the percentage of children and young people (0 to 24-year olds) who report having a mental or behavioural condition has increased from 10.6 per cent in 2012 to 18.8 per cent in 2018. School-age students have reported that they frequently worry about things at home and at school (with 38 per cent of students in year 10 having reported that they frequently worry about things), and 19 per cent of senior students (Years 10 to 12) having negative feelings about the

future.² The poor mental health of young people is often connected to many social vulnerabilities, including homelessness, family violence, child protection and exposure to the youth justice system.

AASW members' advise that that current mental health services for young Tasmanians are inadequate to meet the level of demand. There are long waiting lists, limited services, and significant costs for people with conditions such as autism spectrum disorders, sensory impairments, Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders, cognitive disorders or Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, which means that young people are often undiagnosed and therefore not effectively supported. Although the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service offers support to young people with significant mental health needs, its funding is limited, the criteria for eligibility to service support is tight; and the waiting lists are long. Mainstream therapeutic services that offer bulk billing or are low cost are rarely specialist or flexible, due to their funding agreements. In addition, there are limited specialist therapeutic services such as Play Therapy, Bush & Adventure Therapy programs and other emerging styles of therapy that treat childhood trauma and mental health. This has caused frustration for many children, young people and their families throughout the community.

Approaches to youth mental health should respond to the individualised, diverse needs of children young people and their families. In this context, schools play a significant role in providing mental health services to young people. These range from school wide mental health promotion, early intervention in emerging mental health issues, and individualised supports for young people with more serious mental health needs. In many cases, school staff have been the first to identify and respond to emotional or behavioural problems in young people. The flexibility of schools as service settings enables them to provide a range of services to young people without them having to self identify as either serious, critical or chronic: labels that many young people reject. The Productivity Commission's Report on the Social and Economic Benefits of Improving Mental Health recommends that every school with a student population over 500 be funded to employ a qualified social worker. The AASW supports this recommendation, specifying that the wellbeing team should include at least one qualified school social worker, who is both employed and remunerated under that title.

The AASW recognises that not all school communities have the required knowledge and skills to support young people experiencing childhood trauma and related behaviours, unfortunately some vulnerable children do not thrive in mainstream schools. The AASW calls on the next Tasmanian government to recognise the significant role social workers play in schools by furthering the investment for school social work.

AASW platform

- That the next Tasmanian government continue and strengthen its funding to Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS).

² <https://www.childcomm.tas.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/The-Health-and-Wellbeing-of-Tasmanias-Children-and-Young-People-Report-2018.pdf>, p.4

- That the next Tasmanian government fund a state-wide wellbeing program in schools to ensure that there is a minimum of one qualified social worker in each school with a student population over 500.
- That the next Tasmanian government increase funding to specialist youth mental health services to meet the diverse needs of young Tasmanians.
- That the next Tasmanian government increase availability of funding for specialist therapeutic supports for children and youth suffering childhood trauma and complex behaviours.

Relevant AASW position

- AASW media release on school social work

<https://www.aasw.asn.au/news-media/2019-2/schools-need-social-workers-aasw-welcomes-call-for-improved-wellbeing-in-schools>

Homelessness

Safe and secure housing is a human right and being deprived of this right severely undermines a person's wellbeing. By contrast, 'homelessness' is the experience or situation of not being able to access safe, secure, affordable or accessible housing. This definition identifies three levels of homelessness: street homelessness where people are sleeping in the open or in cars or squats; temporarily living in other peoples' homes; and rooming houses-which are frequently unhygienic, overcrowded and unsafe. It is of critical importance for the next Tasmanian government to address the current housing crisis to ensure that every Tasmanian has a place to call home.

The 2020 Anglicare Rental Affordability Snapshot found that out of 1,201 private rentals, none were affordable for a person on the Disability Support Pension, JobSeeker, Youth Allowance, or Parenting Payment Single without the coronavirus supplement.³ The decline in investment by Governments across Australia in public and social housing has continued for nearly 25 years. This has led to very long waiting lists and the targeting of social and affordable housing to highly disadvantaged tenants with complex needs. In Tasmania, the projected short fall is 11,000 social housing dwellings.⁴ Therefore, the AASW submits that it is an urgent task for the next Tasmanian government to address the shortage of affordable housing and invest in sustainable solutions to homelessness.

While we appreciate the transference of 4000 properties to the community sector under the Better Futures Program, the target set in Tasmania's Affordable Housing Action Plan 2019-2023 is far from

³ <https://www.anglicare.asn.au/docs/default-source/default-document-library/rental-affordability-snapshot-2020.pdf?sfvrsn=4>

⁴ Julie Lawson, Hal Pawson, Laurence Troy, Ryan van den Nouwelant and Carrie Hamilton 2018, Social housing as infrastructure: an investment pathway, AHURI Final Report No. 306, Melbourne, <https://www.ahuri.edu.au/research/final-reports/306>, doi:10.18408/ahuri-5314301, accessed 4 March 2020

adequate. Therefore, additional funding should also be provided to housing options that meet the diverse needs of all Tasmanians, in particular, vulnerable children and families.

The AASW also encourages the next Tasmanian government to provide adequate funding to a diverse range of housing schemes that meet the diverse needs of people. Our members report that a significant number of people seeking assistance from homelessness agencies are women and children escaping family violence, children and young people in care, and children with parents who are alcohol and drug dependent. We are astounded by the evidence that 34.9 per cent of clients of Tasmania's specialist homelessness services were children and young people aged 0-17 years and 47.9 per cent of unassisted requests related to children and young people aged 0 to 17 years.⁵ In some cases, those are the children and young people who have already been in the child protection system. Better access to housing and supports can help address this issue but so can a greater focus on diversifying the funding to housing services provided for children and families with high and complex needs. The decline in government investment has meant homelessness for some. For many others it has meant being trapped in violence from which there is little hope of escape.

The AASW holds the position that planning for housing is also a public health issue, as it effects both the physical and mental wellbeing of individuals and families. Shortages in affordable housing directly affect the health, educational, employment, and emotional wellbeing of individuals, families and communities.

AASW Platform

- That the next Tasmanian government make substantial and continued investment into building and renewing public and social housing.
- That the next Tasmanian government invest in infrastructure to ensure that residents of new and renewed social and public housing have easy access to established amenities and services.
- That the next Tasmanian government invest in housing schemes for diverse needs of people, in particular women and children escaping family violence, children and young people in care, and children with parents who are alcohol and drug dependent.
- That the next Tasmanian government invest in more emergency housing options for women and children escaping from family violence, and children and young people with complex needs.

Relevant AASW position

- AASW position on housing affordability

⁵ <https://www.childcomm.tas.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/The-Health-and-Wellbeing-of-Tasmanias-Children-and-Young-People-Report-2018.pdf>, p. 61

Domestic and Family Violence

Domestic and family violence is a gendered crime: It is most commonly perpetrated by men, against women. It also deeply traumatises children and in some horrifying events, children are murdered. 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. The next Tasmanian government 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.

The AASW recognises that the social and economic consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic have had a devastating impact on women and children who experience family violence, prompting either the onset or escalation of violence. We commend the Tasmanian government's funding of \$2.3 million into family violence services. We support Engender Equality's position that the immediate goals of this increased investment in family violence responses should be to provide greater support to individuals and families experiencing family violence; and to reach greater numbers of people needing family violence supports. For example, more counselling and service hours will enable more victim-survivors to engage or re-engage with services and extend their options for leaving violent relationships. In addition, the current service system is limited to services for women and families in crisis. Social workers in this field report that there is a need to develop services for women who are not yet at crisis point, to enable them to plan for their long-term safety. Expanded outreach services can engage with women and children in regional and remote Tasmania.

Social workers who work in family violence services have observed that to adequately respond to the needs of women and children experiencing family violence requires reforms across the entire human services sector. An example of the comprehensive nature of the reforms that are needed is contained in the recommendations of the Victorian Royal Commission into Family Violence, with its emphasis on whole of government responses and a skilled and qualified workforce, this document also serves as general framework for long term reform to the service system.

AASW platform

- That the next Tasmanian government continue and strengthen its investment to community and government family violence services during the COVID-19 recovery.
- That the next Tasmanian government invest in the expansion of family and domestic violence outreach and early intervention programs.
- That the next Tasmanian government adopt the workforce-oriented recommendations of the Victorian Royal Commission into Family Violence as a blueprint for systemic reforms.

Relevant AASW position

- AASW's position statement: Family Violence

<https://www.aasw.asn.au/document/item/8625>

Reconciliation

Social workers are committed to advocating on matters of social inclusion, social justice and human rights. Through our collective actions, including our Reconciliation Action Plan, the AASW demonstrates our commitment to our core values and objectives as they apply to addressing past and continuing disadvantages imposed on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. The AASW acknowledges the unique knowledges, skills and practices that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities hold regarding how to live well in the unique country that Australia is. This is driven by a focus on learning from the past and building meaningful relationships in order to work together for a more just Australia.

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 the next Tasmanian government budgetary commitment to allocate \$1.2 million for Closing the Gap annually. The AASW has consistently argued that governments need to work with Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander communities in partnership and collaboration, at every step in the Close the Gap Strategy, drawing upon their knowledge and expertise. The Closing the Gap 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 that 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 4.7 times more likely to be removed from their family than are other children in Tasmania.⁶ 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 the intergenerational trauma experienced by many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

⁶ <https://www.familymatters.org.au/map-of-australia/tasmania/#:~:text=Aboriginal%20children%20in%20Tasmania%20are,%2Dhome%20care%20over%2Drepresentation>

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. The AASW supports the Family Matters Report 2020 and encourages the next Tasmanian government to implement their recommendations.

AASW Platform

- That the next Tasmanian government fund a dedicated commissioner or peak body for Aboriginal children or formal system leadership roles for independent Aboriginal representatives.
- That the next Tasmanian government continue their commitment to Closing the Gap.
- That the next Tasmanian government commit to fund preventative health programs for Aboriginal people, including prediabetic health support.
- That the next Tasmanian government commit to fund pregnancy support programs for mothers alongside Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islanders and community-controlled organisations.
- That the next Tasmanian government commit to fund mentoring and training programs in which every vulnerable child has a Mentor who will be an Aboriginal elder wherever possible.

Relevant AASW position and statement:

- AASW Acknowledgement Statement to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People

<https://www.aasw.asn.au/document/item/618>

- AASW Indigenous Health Position Paper

<https://www.aasw.asn.au/document/item/2219>

Climate Action

The changes confronting Australia's environment as a result of global warming are already profound and extensive, making climate policy an urgent responsibility of this 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. The AASW is part of the Climate and Health Alliance recognising that policies to reduce greenhouse gas emissions have the potential to bring important public health benefits. Actions to reduce greenhouse gas emissions can not only

reduce the health risks associated with climate change and environmental harm, but can also improve health outcomes, and reduce costs through increases in physical activity, improved air quality, and improved diet. There are also strong economic, environmental, social and health benefits for countries that reduce emissions.

The next Tasmanian government must take immediate action in line with our international commitments, including resourcing and planning for the implantation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The 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. Australia continues to decline in the global rankings while we are continuing to see the devastating impacts that increasing extreme weather events are having on the Australian population. Government must show leadership and act to ensure we have a healthy, clean and sustainable environment as without this a surplus or balanced budget is meaningless.

Recommendations

- That the next Tasmanian government immediately invest and act to achieve strong emissions reductions to reduce the current and future health impacts and risks associated with increasing global temperature, sea level rise, and food and water insecurity.
- That the next Tasmanian government recognise that an urgent transition from fossil fuels to clean renewable energy is needed to achieve a zero emissions stationary energy supply,
- That the next Tasmanian government develop and fund effective and sustainable adaptation responses by communities to the full range of health impacts linked to climate change.
- That the next Tasmanian government fund and adopt a climate change policy which ensures that the costs associated with a changing climate are distributed equitably.
- That the next Tasmanian government adopt a coordinated, whole of government approach towards achieving the SDGs.

Relevant AASW position and statement:

- AASW & Climate and Health Alliance Declaration on Climate Change

<https://www.aasw.asn.au/document/item/12336>

Conclusion

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 Tasmanian government. The AASW calls on the incoming government of Tasmania to commit to improving their health, standard of living and well-

being through these recommendations. The AASW looks forward to working with the incoming Tasmanian Government to implement these recommendations.



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