



## Unregistered psychotherapists are a risk to vulnerable Australians

The AASW has warmly welcomed the Federal Minister for Health's response to ABC TV's 4 Corners program on unlicensed and unregistered psychotherapists.

Lack of regulation of counsellors and psychotherapists by any Government (State / Territory or Federal) means there is little that can currently be done to prevent substandard or even unethical professionals continuing to 'treat' clients. The only recourse is legal action by a victim, and even where this occurs, the offender can re-open their business elsewhere under a new trading name, with impunity. Thousands of vulnerable Australians pay for services from unregistered counsellors every year.

"Last Night's 4 Corners program highlights the very real and lasting harm that counsellors can cause to their clients. The AASW is pleased that the Federal Minister for health has responded quickly and calls for registration of the sector to protect Australians from harm," said AASW CEO, Kandie Allen-Kelly.

"There is no law to prevent anyone hanging up their shingle, calling themselves a social worker or counsellor and seeing clients the next day, even if their qualifications are shaky and their motives are to do harm," said AASW Acting President, Joe Calleja.

All Governments need to take steps to better protect vulnerable Australians when they seek professional assistance. The AASW is calling for a national registration scheme for social workers (modeled on the current national Registration and Accreditation scheme for health professionals). This would include:

- The creation of a board of registration with which all practitioners would be required to register;
- Protection of title for social work (identifying what qualifications and expertise is required in order to call yourself a social worker);
- A complaints resolution process that is transparent and supports clients, with sanctions (ultimately) to remove the right of a professional to practice anywhere in Australia;
- Mandatory Continuing Professional Education for all practitioners to ensure they stay up to date (currently there is no obligation for a counsellor or psychotherapist to ever update their skills).

Governments have acted to register and regulate plumbers and mechanics. All Governments need to show that they are as concerned for the wellbeing of vulnerable Australians as they are for Australian drains and cars.