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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Most vulnerable at risk without regulation

The Australian Association of Social Workers (AASW) is again calling for social workers to be regulated through the National Registration and Accreditation Scheme, after recent research revealed practitioners such as psychologists and doctors are engaging in serious misconduct.*

Currently, social workers are not regulated under the scheme and therefore are not accountable to the Australian Health Practitioners Regulation Agency (AHPRA) for their professional standards or ethical conduct. Importantly, the scheme's mandatory reporting laws mean that incidents of serious misconduct by registered health practitioners which cause harm or put patients at risk, must be reported to AHPRA.

AASW National President Karen Healy says social workers often work with extremely vulnerable people, and without registration, these people could be at risk.

"Social workers and psychologists often practice their professions in similar settings which involve the establishment of long-term trust relationships with vulnerable people," Professor Healy says.

"Given the established equivalence in the work and practice settings of psychologists and social workers, it logically follows that the levels of risk and harm to our similarly vulnerable client groups are equivalent."

The AASW is also concerned that Australian social workers can choose to practice outside any form of regulation or accountability.

"This leaves little public protection from malpractice of social work practitioners," Professor Healy says.

"Australia is out of step internationally. In all comparable countries, such as the UK, USA, Canada and New Zealand, social work is a registered profession, and as such, the public is assured that their government has taken responsibility for ensuring minimum professional standards as well as safeguarding the public against malpractice".

A review of the National Registration and Accreditation Scheme for health professions is currently underway. Professor Healy says the AASW is hopeful that the review will recognise this regulatory failure and ensure provision is made for social work to be regulated under the National Registration and Accreditation Scheme.

*As reported in *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 11 September 2014: [Health practitioners face tougher scrutiny](#)

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