

## Who sets the standards of social work practice?

The AASW is the professional body for Australian social workers. It sets the ethical and supervision standards for the profession and for practice in particular settings. The AASW also sets the standards for social work education programs at universities. These standards are set out in the following documents which can be found on the AASW website, [www.aasw.asn.au](http://www.aasw.asn.au)

### Code of Ethics

The social work profession in Australia has an internationally regarded *Code of Ethics* that is seen as the core document informing and guiding the ethical practice of social workers.

### Practice Standards

The AASW's *Practice Standards* outline the practice expectations required of all social workers.

### Practice Standards for Supervision

These standards outline the recommended supervision requirements for social workers and their social work supervisors.

### Practice standards for specific fields

The AASW has specialised sets of practice standards for social workers working in mental health and schools.

### Australian Social Work Education and Accreditation Standards (ASWEAS)

The ASWEAS set out the principles, standards and graduate attributes for social work education in Australia. Graduates from accredited social work programs are eligible for membership with the AASW.

## How can I become a social worker?

In order to become a qualified professional social worker in Australia and be eligible for membership of the AASW, you must have completed one of the following:

- **Bachelor of Social Work (BSW)** from an accredited university program in Australia. A BSW is a four-year course.
- **Masters of Social Work – qualifying (MSW)** from an accredited university program in Australia. An MSW is a two-year course and is open to students who have completed a relevant three-year undergraduate degree such as a Bachelor of Social Science.

A list of accredited social work programs in Australia is available on the AASW website.

The AASW can also assess people who have completed a social work qualification outside Australia for membership eligibility or migration purposes.

## Where can I find out more about social work?

If you have any additional questions about social work in Australia, please contact the AASW.

### Australian Association of Social Workers

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**AASW**

Australian Association  
of Social Workers

Questions about  
*social work*

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## What is social work?

Social work is a profession that supports individuals, families, groups and communities to improve their wellbeing. Social workers are committed to social justice, self-determination and human rights. They celebrate difference and assist people who are overcoming personal difficulties and structural barriers to be included in society and to realise their strengths and potential.

Social work is a university-qualified profession that is recognised nationally and internationally. Students complete a minimum of four years of tertiary study. Their education focuses on developing the knowledge and skills necessary to better understand and support people, promote community participation and advocate for social change.

## What do social workers do?

Social workers build on the strengths and resources of people in the context of their physical, social and cultural environments. Sometimes this means supporting people as they discover, develop or remember their strengths and resources and, at other times, helping them develop or access resources. Social workers also advocate for resources that have been denied.

Members of the profession work with individuals, families, groups and communities. They also work in social policy, management, leadership, administration, government, education and research. Common among social workers is a commitment to human rights and social justice.



In all contexts, social workers maintain a dual focus: assist human functioning and identify and address the systemic and structural issues that create inequality, injustice and discrimination.

Some of the more common issues for which social workers provide support are:

- child and family welfare
- homelessness
- mental and physical health issues
- substance abuse
- poverty
- unemployment
- disability
- family violence
- trauma
- refugees
- offending behaviour

Social work professionals often work in roles where the job title is not necessarily 'social worker':

- In a family support program, a social worker may be employed as a 'case worker'
- In a private practice specialising in family work, a social worker might be called a 'family therapist'
- A social worker advising an agency on best practice principles, policies and procedures may be called a 'consultant'
- Within a mental health team, a social worker may be employed as an 'allied health clinician'
- In a statutory child protection agency, a social worker may be employed as a 'child protection practitioner' or 'child safety officer'

## Where do social workers practice?

Social workers practice in a diverse range of settings. These include:

- hospitals
- community health services
- state and federal government departments, such as the Department of Human Services or state-based statutory agencies such as child protection services
- local councils
- non-government organisations such as not-for-profit welfare agencies, advocacy and peak bodies
- private practice/self-employment where social workers provide services such as individual counselling, family therapy, consultancy, supervision and management
- educational institutions such as universities where social workers teach social work or other human services courses and undertake research
- educational institutions such as schools where social workers may work as counsellors or welfare officers
- international aid and advocacy bodies