

**Minutes of the Annual General Meeting of members
held on Thursday, 7 November 2024 between 4:00pm and 5:20pm AEDT
by virtual meeting technology**

Directors in attendance on-line: Brooke Kooymans (National President, Chair of the Board and of the meeting), Muriel Wymarra (National Vice President) Susan Green, Ashton Hayes, Fotina Hardy, Jessica Russ-Smith, Julianne Whyte

Management in attendance on-line in Melbourne: Cindy Smith (CEO), Geoff Bennett (Company Secretary), Nathan Watts (Chief Financial Officer), Alene McGowan (Executive Assistant to the CEO)

Members in attendance on-line: As per the attendance register, including the 2024 AGM Zoom attendance list

The Chair opened the meeting with an *Acknowledgement of Country*.

Attendance, apologies and proxies

The Chair advised that 143 members were in attendance on-line and that a quorum was present. No formal apologies had been received. No proxies were received, as no matters were on the Agenda that required a vote from Members.

The Agenda was taken as read and proceedings were outlined.

Resignation of former National President, Linda Ford

The Chair noted with regret the resignation of former National President, Linda Ford, two days earlier.

The Chair noted that Linda had first been appointed to the AASW Board in May 2017 and had been the first Aboriginal President of the Association. Linda's journey within the AASW had included notable roles such as past president of the Association's North Queensland Branch and Chair of the Association's Reconciliation Action Plan Working Group.

Throughout her tenure, Linda demonstrated strong leadership, a deep commitment to social work, and fostering inclusivity within the profession. She had been - and remained - dedicated to elevating the profile of the social work profession and was passionate about advancing national registration. Linda's contributions had been recognised nationally and internationally. Until her resignation earlier in the week, Linda had been Australia's representative for the International Federation of Social Work Indigenous Commission.

Linda's reasons for resigning as National President had been shared with the Board, and the Chair declined to share those reasons at the AGM.

On behalf of fellow Directors and Members, the Chair thanked Linda for her contribution to the Board and wished her every success and fulfillment.

Resignation of Elisha Ebdon

The Chair advised that last month, former Director Elisha Ebdon resigned from the Board. On behalf of the Board, the Chair expressed heartfelt gratitude for Elisha's dedicated service over the previous three years. Her skills, insights, and thoughtful contributions had been invaluable to the Board's work, and her presence on the Board would be greatly missed. The Chair wished her every success and fulfillment in her future endeavours.

Introductions

The Chair introduced the Board of Directors and the newly elected Directors, Professor Bindi Bennett and Christine Hannan. The Chair noted that Professor Bennett and Ms. Hannan would take their place on the Board at the conclusion of the AGM.

Agenda item 1 – National President’s Report

The Chair took the National President’s Report included in the Annual Report as read, noting that the Association was in a good place with strong membership growth and significant achievements. The Chair provided broader comments about the current direction and challenges ahead.

In 2024, the Board approved the Strategic Plan for 2024–2027. The Board collaborated on the Plan and collectively developed it to guide the Association's work over the next three years in striving to achieve the AASW vision of wellbeing and social justice in Australia. The Strategic Plan outlined three strategic priorities and five operational priorities that were deemed crucial to supporting members. These priorities encompassed amplifying the unique value of social work, elevating the social work profession nationally, and evolving the profession for the future. Members were encouraged by the Chair to visit the website to learn more about the priorities and the Strategic Plan that shaped the AASW team’s work and the Association’s focus.

At the end of the financial year, the AASW represented 17,674 social workers. The Chair highlighted the Association’s dedication to recognising and responding to the needs of members, supporting their professional growth, and fostering a dynamic, interconnected community. During a year when most members felt the impact of the increasing cost of living, the Association acted by freezing membership fees, focusing on operational efficiency and improving user experience, and boosting the value of membership by providing \$1,000 worth of free Continuing Professional Development (CPD) to each member.

AASW’s Registered Charity status

Following a six-year process, in February 2024, the AASW gained registered charity status with the Australian Charities and Not-for-Profits Commission. This achievement testified to the Association’s positive impact on members and the broader community. Being recognized as a charity allowed the Association to save hundreds of thousands of dollars with suppliers and presented new opportunities for partnerships and grant funding. These opportunities were expected to help elevate the unique work of social work into the future.

Reconciliation Action Plan

Throughout the year, the Association’s work was guided by the fourth Innovate Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP). The Plan detailed the commitment to elevating and amplifying the voices, cultures, and knowledge of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and organisations. Members were encouraged to view the RAP on the website.

Upholding Industry Standards

The Chair provided remarks about the revised Australian Social Work Education and Accreditation Standards (ASWEAS), which had been endorsed by the Board in the previous month. ASWEAS had shifted to an outcome-based approach for the delivery and accreditation of social work education. This change aligned with the AASW's strategic commitment to professionalisation and positioned social work alongside other regulated professions using outcome-based approaches. The revisions better aligned the profession with allied health professionals and supported advocacy for national registration.

The revision was informed by feedback from industry, employer groups, placement providers, students, graduates, members, and academics. Input from outcome-based higher education experts supported the changes as essential for preparing “job-ready” graduates.

The outcome-based ASWEAS emphasized graduate capabilities that met current job demands, including critical thinking, case formation, and interprofessional competencies. This approach ensured that social work education evolved in line with broader health and social care reforms, equipping graduates with the skills and flexibility needed for multidisciplinary, collaborative work settings.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the Chair expressed gratitude to many individuals, including the Board, CEO Cindy Smith, and the Executive Leadership Team, for their outstanding contributions.

The Chair reiterated the Board’s confidence in Cindy Smith and her Management team’s ability to deliver on the Strategic Plan over the next three years.

The Chair then handed over to Cindy Smith to provide her report on Operations.

Agenda item 2 – CEO’s report on operations

Reflecting on the past year, the CEO expressed immense pride in what had been achieved together. She noted that the 2023–24 financial year was truly transformative. Achieving charity status had been a major milestone, reaffirming the Association’s commitment to AASW’s vision and the communities it served. This status opened doors to cost savings and funding opportunities, strengthening advocacy and public education work. Importantly, this did not mean the AASW was seeking donations from members or the public. Instead, the AASW sought this status to engage in advocacy and public education more effectively, especially on issues aligned with its vision and purpose, underscoring a commitment to the public good.

One of the year's most remarkable developments had been the growth in membership. In less than a decade, AASW membership had doubled, which spoke volumes about the strength of the profession and a shared dedication to social work values.

The 2024 Member Needs and Satisfaction Survey had provided clear insights into what members cared about most. Advocacy for professional registration, pay parity with allied health professionals, ongoing professional development, and raising workforce standards had emerged as top priorities. The AASW remained committed to these areas and continued to push forward. In November 2023, the CEO had been thrilled to present the 2023 AASW National Excellence Awards at the AASW Online Health Symposium. The AASW Online Health Symposium 2023: *Practice Innovations, Challenges and Leadership in Social Work Health Care* had been an informative and compelling event, and the awards were a fantastic way to conclude it.

Special mention was made of the winners:

- Morgan Shepherd, Social Work Student of the Year, a Master's student, whose award showcased her leadership and dedication to social justice.
- Dr. Gerard Jefferies, Social Work Researcher of the Year, who demonstrated innovation in his work on simulation training for students.
- Rowena Lawrie, awarded Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Social Worker of the Year, who led crucial initiatives in decolonizing social work through her work with Yamurrah, advocating for First Nations clients and policy reform.
- Karen Green, Social Worker of the Year, who made significant contributions to suicide prevention within military communities.

These awards highlighted social workers, researchers, and students who embodied the best of the profession's values and achievements. Meeting the award recipients in person in January 2024 had been an inspiring experience. The CEO emphasized that these awards were essential in fostering professional pride, shaping social workers' professional identities, and nurturing future leaders in the field. Members were encouraged to read more about the inspiring stories on the website.

The year had also seen the launch of the first public education campaign, *Don't Wait*, featuring AASW members. The campaign showcased the critical role of social workers and had resonated strongly, achieving over 2.2 million interactions and more than 213,000 video views. Members were urged to visit the website to see why the campaign had struck such a chord.

The journal *Australian Social Work* had also made a significant impact. Over the past year, it reached a global audience with more than 347,000 downloads and views. This was an incredible testament to the knowledge and research the profession contributed worldwide. Members could access the journal for free through *MyAASW* and the website.

Advocacy for national registration and pay parity had remained central to the work of the AASW. During the year, the CEO had met with private health organisations and government officials, successfully securing recognition of Accredited Mental Health Social Workers (AMHSWs) in HICAPS. The AASW had worked hard for a long time to achieve this, marking an important win for the profession.

Looking forward, the Association remained deeply committed to advocating for the profession, providing valuable resources and events, fostering an inclusive and supportive community, and empowering members to make a difference through their work.

The CEO concluded by thanking every AASW member, as well as the dedicated staff and Board, for their support, dedication, and commitment to the organisation and to social work.

Agenda Item 3 – Directors’ report, financial statements, and auditor’s report

The next item on the agenda was the consideration of the Directors’ Report, Financial Statements, and Auditor’s Report. The external auditor, Eric Hummer from the auditing firm Bentleys ACT, had sent his apologies for not being able to attend the meeting. For any questions related to the preparation or content of the auditor’s report, members were asked to direct their questions through the Chair, who would relay them to Mr. Hummer via email and provide responses after the AGM.

The Association’s financial statements, directors’ reports, and external audit report had been provided to members the previous month and were available on the Association’s website via the Annual Report.

To summarize: the Association remained in a good financial position. Although a deficit had been recorded for the year, members’ equity exceeded \$1.6 million, and the Association had no debt. The financial result had been affected by the cost-of-living issues experienced by members, which had led to fewer membership renewals and acquisitions throughout the year. Revenue from online and in-person events had also been impacted. Despite rising costs, the Association had chosen to maintain membership fees and event prices at the previous year’s levels. Additionally, the Association had continued investing in its systems and processes, particularly the Customer Relationship Management system and enhancing member experiences.

The Chair addressed misinformation circulating on certain social media accounts regarding the Association’s finances and membership numbers. The Chair provided the following clarifications:

- The Association anticipated a return to a financial surplus for the financial year ending 30 June 2025. Confidence in this prediction stemmed from strong results in the first quarter of the financial year, coupled with disciplined expenditure control tied to income-producing strategies.
- Membership numbers had not experienced a precipitous drop when compared on a like-for-like basis. The CFO had informed the Board that membership numbers at the end of the previous month stood at 15,133, compared to 15,135 on 31 October 2023—a nearly identical statistic.

In membership-based associations, fluctuations in membership numbers due to seasonal trends in renewals were common. Membership numbers were counted throughout the financial year, up to 30 June 2025.

As reported, membership as of 30 June 2024 stood at 17,674, reflecting the peak renewal period, often aligning with the end of the financial year when many members renewed their subscriptions for tax or employment alignment reasons. Following the renewal deadline, member numbers

typically decreased due to lapsed renewals and non-renewing members. This pattern was normal, as some members delayed renewal, reconsidered membership, or left for personal or financial reasons.

Despite the early financial year dip, associations like AASW engaged in renewal outreach, new member recruitment campaigns, and re-engagement strategies to rebuild numbers. By the end of the financial year in 2025, the Association projected membership to recover and reach—or exceed—the levels recorded at the end of the 2024 financial year. This reflected ongoing efforts to onboard new members and retain existing ones.

The Chief Financial Officer (CFO) provided those in attendance at the AGM with an analysis of membership growth and trends. He highlighted sustained growth over the last 10 years, with the Association recording an average annual membership growth rate of 11.86%, highlighting its strength and appeal.

Further: an analysis of membership trends from June 2023 to October 2024 showed significant growth in the full membership category.

The CFO advised that over 2,000 members were contacted during the July–August renewal period. The primary reason for non-renewal was the cost-of-living pressures. Many members indicated an intention to rejoin when financially able.

The CFO then provided members with an overview of financial performance for the last ten years. The overview showed the Association experienced three years of deficits, following three years of surpluses. He stated that the Association is projected to return to a surplus for the 2024–2025 fiscal year, with results for the first quarter of the financial year indicating progress toward achieving this goal.

The CFO also highlighted to members the cost of self-regulation. The Association benchmarks itself against peers, including Speech Pathology Australia and Dietitians Australia (both self-regulated allied health professions) and regulated professions like the APS, APA, and OTA. Being self-regulated incurs higher operational costs compared to regulated professions.

Agenda item 4 – Appointment of Life Members

The National President announced Dr June Allen as a Life Member of the Association and outlined the significant contribution Dr Allen made to both the Association and the profession.

Agenda item 5 - Questions from Members

At this point, the National President fielded questions from Members, including those submitted in advance of the meeting. The Chair advised that

- she would not address questions submitted anonymously on-line;
- several questions submitted in advance or on-line with respect to AWEAS, membership numbers and trends or the Association’s finances had been addressed either in her prepared remarks or at Agenda items 1 and 2.

On support for mental health social workers who come from culturally and linguistically diverse (or “CALD”) backgrounds

The Chair advised that the Association offers a comprehensive range of resources designed to support AMHSWs in building, managing, and growing their private practices in the Private Practice suite on “Resources” tab in the members area. This includes practical tools such as marketing plans, fee calculators, invoice templates, and guidance on alternative funding sources. In addition, AASW’s member area includes numerous materials specifically focused on mental health practice and culturally responsive care for CALD clients.

While resources tailored explicitly to the experiences of CALD AMHSWs in leadership and private practice are limited, AASW is always updating and adding to the resources.

On the Association’s response to the situation in Palestine

The Association’s position on Palestine is clear.

Social work values emphasise the centrality of the dignity and worth of all people. The escalation of violence following the attacks on 7 October 2023 has led to a preventable humanitarian crisis of unprecedented scale, with tens of thousands of innocent civilians, mostly women and children, orphaned, killed, injured or permanently disabled, and more than three-quarters of the population displaced, facing life-threatening shortages of food, water, sanitation, and healthcare.

AASW is a member of the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW), which is committed to advocating for these rights and supporting efforts to provide immediate relief and work towards a lasting peace in the region.

Actions the Association has taken include:

- Former National President, Vittorio Cintio, writing to the Prime Minister, calling for a ceasefire within four weeks of the October 2023 attacks
- The Association consulting with members and leadership
- The Association responding to comments, emails, written letters, and phone calls
- Sharing the IFSW material publicly through AASW’s social media channels

On getting English language skills assessed under the International English Language Testing System (IELTS)

The Chair advised that enquiring member will be required to submit a successful IELTS Academic Test to meet the AASW’s English Language Policy requirements. All applicants seeking assessment of their social work qualifications for migration and/or employment purposes must demonstrate English language proficiency.

On the matter of how AASW is advocating the interests of psychoanalytic practitioners to government

The Chair recognised the valuable contributions that psychoanalytic approaches have made to social work in Australia. The Chair was pleased to note that AASW is moving forward in integrating this perspective into its professional development offerings. AASW is in the process

of identifying subject matter experts to guide the development of this content, with the aim of offering introductory webinars and workshops in the near future. This is an important step as the Association broadens its educational scope to better represent the diverse practices and therapeutic approaches within social work.

Regarding advocacy: AASW actively collaborates with federal, state, and territory governments on a wide range of social work issues. Through this ongoing engagement, AASW continues to represent the profession and promote the valuable contributions of social workers across various areas of practice, including psychoanalytics.

Questions related to the Australian Social Work Education and Accreditation Standards (“ASWEAS” or the “Standards”)

Consultation undertaken

The Chair reiterated that the next iteration of ASWEAS had been approved by the Board last month. She advised that there will be “soft launch” of ASWEAS in January 2025 and be fully effective 1 January 2026. The Chair reiterated that the Association consulted a wide range of stakeholders over a period of almost two years and the Standards approved by the Board last month achieve the right balance for all stakeholders. The CEO circulated an email to members on 6 November 2024 which provided an update on ASWEAS, which the Chair recommended members to read.

Support for social work education, given the changes in ASWEAS that will affect higher education providers

Board member Jessica Russ Smith noted that she had been actively involved in education and curriculum development for the past two years and observed significant and commendable advancements in social work curriculum design.

However, it was necessary to address pressing changes in the field to ensure they are reflected in social work education. Feedback from stakeholders—including students, service providers, and particularly those who supervise placements—has consistently highlighted concerns about graduates lacking core social work skills. This gap, coupled with alarming themes in coroner's reports related to child deaths and incarceration deaths, where basic social work skills, values, and ethics were found lacking, has driven the shift toward an outcomes-focused curriculum under the new ASWEAS standards.

Director Russ-Smith noted that the revised Standards emphasize integrating theory into practice and equipping graduates with the skills necessary to navigate complex real-world situations effectively. To achieve this, the Association is committed to collaborating closely with higher education providers. This includes working alongside the Heads of School Council, Deans, and school leaders across various faculties, whether they are based in allied health, education, or social sciences.

Director Russ-Smith reiterated that it was important to consider the broader educational context. The university sector has recently undergone a significant review—the University Accord—leading to major changes, including recommendations from TEQSA, the national accreditation body for universities. These changes emphasize ensuring high-quality curricula that positively impact communities and that educators in social work programs are appropriately qualified. The

Association views education as part of an ongoing learning journey for social workers, prioritising the communities and individuals that its members serve. AASW's goal is to support higher education providers in delivering programs that meet the highest standards, equipping graduates to address both current and future challenges effectively.

Allegations that the Association was moving social work education courses out of universities into technical and further education bodies (TAFEs)

Both the Chair and the CEO stated that the claim that AASW is in consultation with TAFEs to move social work education degrees out of universities, is categorically untrue.

The Association's commitment is to ensure that it cultivates highly skilled social workers through rigorous and robust educational programs offered by higher education providers, which are predominantly universities. There are currently 37 providers of social work education across Australia, including a mix of traditional universities, regional universities, private providers, and members of the *Group of Eight*. This diversity in offerings reflects the range of pathways already available for students pursuing social work education.

While TAFEs can deliver AQF Level 7 degrees under certain conditions - and one TAFE has expressed interest in offering a social work degree - there is no active application under consideration. If a TAFE were to meet all accreditation criteria, gain TEQSA authorisation, and successfully apply to become a provider, it could potentially deliver a social work degree. However, this would not represent a shift away from universities but rather the addition of another provider to the existing framework.

The CEO and Chair reiterated that the Association remains firmly committed to supporting social work education within higher education providers, and there are no plans to move degrees out of universities, to TAFEs.

On Membership mix, growth and numbers of AMHSW social workers, and credentialled social workers

AASW publishes membership numbers in its Annual Reports and 2024 was no exception. The Chair noted that members who are AMHSWs or members providing NDIS services are members that are reflected in AASW's overall membership already. For reference there were 3,440 AMHSW social workers as at 30 June 2024, representing growth of 10.5% from FY2023. There are 3,586 credential holders in total at 30 June 2024.

The Chair highlighted that the accredited mental health credential - in place for approximately twelve years - stands as the Association's most established credential. In contrast, other credentials are more recent, still under development, and are being shaped in alignment with relevant government policies and frameworks. For instance, the AASW is currently prioritizing the development of the supervision credential, reflecting the growing recognition of supervision as a vital aspect of social work practice.

Strengthening the supervision credential and associated training will be a key priority for the coming year. While the Association is also working to elevate the profile of the Association's other credentials, it's a longer-term effort to ensure they meet the same level of recognition and integration as AASW's accredited mental health credential.

On the Membership survey and changes made to the Association's operations, based on member feedback

The Chair confirmed that the Association conducted a membership survey in 2024, such surveys being conducted every two years. While not all survey details are directly shared with members, the Association provides insights and key findings in the Association's annual reports. The Chair urged members to go to Page 14 of the 2024 Annual Report. This articulates members' top priorities - such as professional development, pay parity, and the push for national registration. Survey findings are reported to the Board, helping guide governance and strategic direction.

The Chair advised that member feedback has driven several significant initiatives this year.

The Association launched its first national marketing and communications campaign to boost referrals to social workers and raise public awareness of the profession. Advocating for national registration remains central to the Association's efforts, reflecting member priorities for professional recognition and workforce standards.

AASW renewed its commitment to professional development, resulting in award-winning online courses and programs. The Association elevated its emphasis on professional standards, values, and ethics to support workplace quality.

The Association has invested \$2 million in technology upgrades to improve its listening and responding to members, enhancing service and support.

The Chair noted that the above changes and other initiatives reflect the Association's commitment to creating a supportive and responsive Association, guided by the needs of its members.

On the generosity of industry professionals and volunteers giving their time and expertise to run career and practice forums.

The Chair noted that AASW offers both Category 2 and Category 3 CPD to members. These are managed and treated differently. Category 2 CPD (Skills and Knowledge) is higher-level professional training and workshops utilising vetted and paid presenters. Category 3 CPD (Professional Identity) at times utilises paid presenters but also relies on the generosity of AASW members to share their knowledge and experience with their peers. Therefore, Category 3 is the most likely scenario for a presentation to be provided at no cost to the AASW, including through Practice Groups and Branch events. Whenever possible, AASW-run Category 3 events are recorded and added to the AASW Resource library and linked to relevant Practice and Career suites to benefit Association members as part of their membership, at no additional cost. It is rare for a Practice Group or Branch event to be recorded and provided for this purpose.

The Association records and charges a fee on-demand to view presentations from Symposiums and Conferences to encourage initial attendance and assist in recouping some of the cost of these significant events. Category 2 presentations are also more likely to have an on-demand access charge, although some of these presentations are also complimentary (free) to members.

As to the matter of whether students are able to demonstrate that they have completed a program of supervised professional practice placements of at least 1,000 hours

The 1,000-hour supervised professional practice placement was carefully considered during consultation process of ASWEAS. Stakeholder feedback, including from students, highlighted the importance of retaining this standard. The Chair noted that as of July 1, 2025, eligible students will receive a means-tested payment during their placement periods.

On the matter of strategies that the Association is pursuing to bring social workers in line with other allied health professionals

The Chair reiterated that the Association had taken significant steps to align its education and practice standards with those of psychology (which is often seen as AASW's closest comparator) and other regulated professions. This alignment ensures that AASW's programs and professional benchmarks are comparable to theirs. By proactively adopting these standards, the Association is laying the groundwork to demonstrate that social work is operating at the same level as other regulated allied health professions. This positions AASW well for future efforts to achieve formal registration as a profession, ensuring consistency and credibility within the health sector.

On the matter of (1) what revenue streams that the regulated profession is accessing that AASW is not; and (2) what strategy is being pursued to contain expenditure

The CEO noted that a new revenue stream that AASW can now access as a registered charity is through grants that are exclusively available to organisations registered with the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission (ACNC). The CEO advised that both she and the CFO analysed the revenue structures of other ACNC-registered organisations by reviewing their annual reports. It was evident that a substantial portion of their income came from these grants.

This insight led AASW to embark on a journey to achieve ACNC registration for our Association. Beyond unlocking access to these grants, being registered as a charity provides additional benefits, such as cost reductions in software and services specifically offered to ACNC-registered entities. This dual advantage not only diversifies AASW's revenue streams but also helps us reduce operational expenses, ensuring greater financial sustainability for the Association.

To address expense growth: AASW has implemented several measures to streamline internal operations. One key initiative has been the introduction of advanced technology solutions, which are now two years into their implementation. These systems are helping to optimise the Association's processes, with the Association already beginning to see tangible benefits. As we approach our third renewal cycle with this software, we anticipate even greater efficiency gains and cost reductions over the coming years.

However, as a self-regulating profession, AASW faces unique challenges that contribute to its cost base. Unlike registered professions such as psychology, which rely on external bodies to develop codes of ethics, practice standards, and education standards, AASW must shoulder these responsibilities ourselves. Additionally, tasks such as migration assessments and ethics and complaints management further increase the cost of self-regulation.

One of the most impactful ways to reduce these costs in the long term is to achieve registration as a profession. This would allow us to shift some of these regulatory responsibilities externally, similar to other registered professions. As such, pursuing registration remains a key strategic focus for our organisation.

As to whether the Association’s membership had reduced in real terms

The CEO noted the Association had not seen a halt in membership growth. While it is true that growth has slowed over the past year, this trend is consistent with what we’re observing across other associations in similar sectors. Importantly, AASW’s membership numbers have continued to increase—albeit modestly—with two more members than we had at this time last year.

The Association aspires to accelerate this growth, but it’s important to acknowledge that the Association’s growth rate is influenced by the broader environment in which we operate. The Association, the Chair continued, remains committed to strategies that support sustained membership growth and enhance the value it provides to members.

On the matter of registration of the social work profession and steps taken to obtain Registration

The CEO advised that registration of social workers in South Australia is set to commence on 1 July 2025, which is a significant milestone. Historically, no allied health profession has achieved national registration without first establishing state-based registration. South Australia’s progress is an important step toward the profession’s ultimate goal of achieving national registration for social workers. The only exception to this process has been audiology, which is currently under review for registration.

The CEO advised that at the Federal level, the government has initiated the National Regulatory Complexity Review, which is currently underway. This review examines the potential registration of 23 professions, including social work. The review is evaluating various pathways, such as registration under the existing Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (AHPRA) framework or alternative multi-tiered registration models. The Association has submitted detailed contributions to the review and participated in consultations. The final paper, originally expected by the end of this year, is now due in March next year.

The CEO noted that the Review’s terms of reference include critical areas relevant to social work, such as the criteria for AHPRA registration, the operational functionality of AHPRA, and the inclusion of additional allied health professions under its framework. These discussions are directly tied to AASW’s advocacy efforts, as they align with the Association’s goal of ensuring that social work is recognised and registered alongside other allied health professions.

The CEO noted that achieving registration, however, is rarely straightforward. From AASW’s extensive review of other professions that have obtained registration, it’s clear that the process is often influenced by politics, external events, ministerial interest, and sustained advocacy—sometimes all at once. While the timing remains uncertain, the Association remains optimistic given the progress we’ve made.

The CEO noted that just last financial year, she personally held 76 meetings across the country to advocate for registration, and the Association is preparing for another year of similarly intensive efforts.

As to the matter of whether there is a plan for all social worker accreditations to be compulsory in all government and non-government agencies to protect the social work profession

The Chair advised that at this point in time, accreditation is not mandatory for employment in most sectors. For example, government departments like health typically require employees to hold qualifications that meet the eligibility criteria for AASW membership, but they do not currently mandate accreditation.

The CEO added that to make accreditation compulsory, a national registration scheme would likely be necessary. For instance, South Australia's Social Workers Registration Board is currently reviewing their approach to defining certain functions or activities that could be exclusively reserved for registered social workers. While they've moved away from a strictly function-based model, they are working on processes to define and regulate social work activities. Once defined, these could become mandatory under their regulations.

The CEO expressed the view that at the national level, accreditation could only become compulsory through mechanisms like a national registration scheme, with protected title status for social workers. This approach would mean only those who meet specific accreditation standards could legally use the title 'social worker.' There are also existing frameworks where specific credentials are recognized, such as within the NDIS or accredited mental health social work, where funding items or roles are tied to credentialed members. Ultimately, the path to making accreditation compulsory would involve significant government action, either through a registration scheme or tied funding mechanisms. As of today's AGM, the CEO was not aware of other means by which such a mandate could be achieved.

As to the benefits realised of the Association's investment in technology

The CFO outlined the tangible benefits from the Association's investments in technology.

He highlighted the Association's migration assessment process, which the Association transitioned from being fully manual to 100% online this September. The results have been remarkable. Previously, with the manual system, it would take between 10 to 15 weeks to process an application. With the Association's new online system, that timeframe has been reduced to just 10 days. Additionally, the investment in technology has significantly increased output in this area, noting that processing capacity has improved by 2.5 times compared to the manual approach. The migration assessment process highlights the efficiency, speed, and scalability that our recent technology investments are delivering.

On the matter as to whether social workers soon be subjected to Registration under South Australian legislation that will also incur a forced cost.

The CEO informed members that social workers residing in South Australia will be required to register under the new legislation from July 1, 2025. The CEO noted that as far as she was aware:

the exact cost of registration in South Australia has not yet been determined or announced. The authorities are still in the process of reviewing and setting those fees.

The CEO noted that for context: when the Association examined registration models for other professions regulated under AHPRA - costs vary significantly. Fees typically range from around \$170 to \$700 annually, depending on the perceived risk level of the profession, as registration systems often operate on a user-pays basis. While South Australia has confirmed there will be a cost associated with registration, the specific amount will depend on the outcomes of their ongoing review.

On the matter of advocacy for social workers in NDIS

The Chair advised that she had attended a meeting with AASW policy and advocacy staff earlier in the day, with the Association scheduled to meet with the office of the Minister for NDIS on 8 November 2024.

This meeting represents a significant step in advocating for the recognition and inclusion of AASW social workers as service providers within the NDIS framework. AASW's primary focus is to highlight the critical role social workers play in the NDIS and to advocate for greater opportunities in this space. Additionally, the AASW is working closely with a dedicated group of social workers who specialize in NDIS-related roles. This working party is providing input in the hope that it will inform the latest operational guidelines for the NDIS, ensuring that social work is well-recognised, and its contributions clearly understood within the scheme.

To address broader recognition, particularly in specialist areas like Positive Behaviour Support (PBS), the advocacy extends beyond therapeutic social work to include vocational, early childhood, and support coordination roles. The working party is actively developing a framework of social work practice that articulates the unique skills and value social workers bring to each of these NDIS funding areas.

This work will culminate in the development of comprehensive resources aimed at both social workers and the NDIS. These materials will clearly outline the expertise social workers provide as recognized clinicians and allied health professionals, further solidifying their presence and impact within the scheme.

As to why employee expenses have doubled over the last five years

The CFO provided context about employment expenses doubling over the last five years. He acknowledged that employment expenses have increased but further noted that AASW's revenue has also doubled during the same period. This indicates that the additional investment in staff has been matched by a corresponding increase in financial returns, demonstrating that the Association is achieving a strong return on this investment.

To illustrate this further: in 2017, AASW had only one part-time staff member working in Continuing Professional Development (CPD). Today, AASW has nearly 12 team members in that area. This growth has enabled AASW to develop award-winning education and training programs and deliver supervision training nationwide, significantly expanding our impact and services. Moreover, AASW's membership numbers have also doubled over this period, along with staffing and revenue, which has allowed us to scale our operations and outputs accordingly. These increases are interlinked and reflect the growth and success of the Association.

Closing remarks

The National President closed the Annual General Meeting and urged those in attendance to register for the International Social Work Conference on Health and Mental Health, to be held later in the month. The National President noted that in excess of 1,000 delegates had registered already, making it the largest social work conference to be hosted by AASW in its history.

There being no further business, the National President closed the meeting at 5:20pm AEDT.

Minutes of the 2024 Annual General Meeting of Members

Final Audit Report

2024-12-17

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