

South Australian social workers the first state in Australia to be registered

The Social Workers Registration Bill 2021 passed South Australia's lower house, the House of Assembly late Tuesday 30 November. It will go to the upper house today for final approval, and come into effect after it is given Royal Assent by the Governor of South Australia, Her Excellency the Honourable Frances Adamson AC.

AASW CEO Cindy Smith said the Association has been lobbying for the professional registration of social work for more than 50 years and Australia is the only comparable jurisdiction internationally without registration.

Ms Smith said, "Tragically, it took the preventable death of Chloe Valentine in 2012 to create the impetus for the registration of social work in South Australia. This legislation is the step in the right direction towards preventing such horrific deaths from happening in the future.

"This legislation is all about public protection and professional accountability. Social workers need to be held to the same high standards as other health practitioners. Nothing is more important than the safety of children and the protection of vulnerable people."

Now that professional registration has been achieved in South Australia, the AASW will monitor its implementation, with a view to achieving registration of the profession across Australia.

Ms Smith said, "It is going to be difficult for federal and state governments to explain how social work can be registered in South Australia, but not in the rest of the country. We have been calling for registration for decades and all vulnerable people, particularly children, across the country require equal protection, no matter where they live. The public should be able to expect the same standards of professional practice everywhere in Australia.

"I would like to thank The Hon. Tammy Franks MLC, who has been an ongoing champion for social work registration and for introducing the Bill in the upper house in October. Thank you also to Hon. Clare Michele Scriven ALP and the Hon. Connie Bonaros from SA-Best who spoke in favour of the Bill in the upper house and Nat Cook MP Shadow Minister for Human Services, who took carriage of the Bill and introduced it in the lower house yesterday.

"It was a nerve-wracking wait to see the Bill pass through the lower house yesterday with bipartisan support but I am so glad and relieved we have come this far," Ms Smith said.

"We commend South Australia for being the pioneers and leading the country. We will continue to advocate for national registration, citing the anticipated success of the South Australian regime."

Cindy Smith is a qualified social worker with more than 20 years of experience, a Bachelor of Social Work, a Master of Health Administration, a Fellow of the Australian College of Health Management and a graduate with the Australian Institute Company Directors.

She has led the AASW since 2016.

To interview Cindy Smith, please contact Angela Yin on 03 9320 1005